

# Kicked into the long grass: the cost of public inquiries

---

Scott Simmonds

October 2020



## Introduction

Public inquiries are a way to scrutinise serious events that have occurred and hold people and organisations to account on a large range of issues. While important in certain circumstances, inquiries are sometimes seen as a way for politicians to avoid tricky issues. Public inquiries have become common in modern politics, reaching a peak in 2010 when 16 were running concurrently, with ten active five years ago.<sup>1</sup>

While public inquiries can be thorough, they are typically slow moving and take many years to complete. Some, like the Iraq Inquiry, took almost seven years to complete. Other options, such as public inquests – which typically take less than a year – could result in faster outcomes and save the taxpayer both time and money. Public inquiries should be decisive as well as thorough, and must not become the default option for politicians to kick issues into the long grass.

## Key findings

### Between April 2015 and June 2020:

- Three government departments spent a **total of £300,534,887** on public inquiries.
- The **Home Office** spent **£192,675,737** alone over the five-year period.
- The government **currently has eight ongoing public inquiries.**<sup>2</sup> Three of these have been running for more than five years.
- The inquiry that spent the largest amount was the **Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse**, spending **£143,505,910**. The inquiry is now overrunning by at least a year.<sup>3</sup>
- The three ongoing public inquiries which have been running for over five years<sup>4</sup> have **each cost over £14 million**.

---

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Government, *Number of concurrent public inquiries by month, 1990-2017, 2020*, [www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/charts/number-concurrent-public-inquiries-month-1990%E2%80%932017](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/charts/number-concurrent-public-inquiries-month-1990%E2%80%932017), (accessed 16 October 2020).

<sup>2</sup> The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, Grenfell Tower Inquiry, Infected Blood Inquiry, Undercover Policing Inquiry, Daniel Morgan Independent Panel Inquiry, The Paterson Inquiry, Brook House Inquiry, and Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Inquiry.

<sup>3</sup> BBC, *How does the inquiry into historical child sexual abuse work?*, 6 October 2020, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34965912](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34965912), (accessed 20 October 2020).

<sup>4</sup> The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, Undercover Policing Inquiry, and Daniel Morgan Independent Panel Inquiry

## Public inquiries spending

Table 1: total spend per inquiry, 2015-16 to 2019-20

Inquiry	Description	Department	Total spent (£)
Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) <sup>5</sup>	Set up in February 2015 to investigate concerns of failings to protect children from sexual abuse	Home Office	143,505,910
Grenfell Tower Inquiry	Examines the circumstances surrounding the Grenfell Tower fire of 14 June 2017	Cabinet Office	40,267,000
Infected Blood Inquiry	Established to examine the circumstances in which people treated by the NHS were given infected blood and infected blood products	Cabinet Office	35,295,000
Undercover Policing Inquiry <sup>6</sup>	Set up in 2015 to investigate undercover policing across England and Wales since 1968	Home Office	29,729,500
Gosport Independent Panel	Established to address concerns raised by families about the care and deaths of their relatives in Gosport War Memorial Hospital	Department of Health and Social Care	16,589,072
Daniel Morgan Independent Panel	Inquiry into the police handling of the Daniel Morgan murder investigation	Home Office	14,136,159
Iraq Inquiry	Known otherwise as the Chilcot Inquiry. Investigates the UK's role in the Iraq War	Cabinet Office	13,126,900
Anthony Grainger Inquiry	Investigates the events surrounding the death of Anthony Grainger	Home Office	2,637,363
Litvinenko Inquiry <sup>7</sup>	Investigates the events surrounding the death of Alexander Litvinenko	Home Office	2,381,807
Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review	Review into how the health system responds to reports from patients about harmful side effects from medicines and medical devices	Department of Health and Social Care	1,730,374
The Paterson Inquiry	Inquiry into surgeon Ian Paterson who performed inappropriate or unnecessary procedures and operations on patients	Department of Health and Social Care	850,804
Brook House Inquiry	Inquiry into the mistreatment of detainees at Brook House Immigration Removal Centre in 2017	Home Office	284,998
Magnox Inquiry	Inquiry into the award of the Magnox decommissioning contract by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) and its subsequent termination	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	Unavailable

<sup>5</sup> Spend total includes Q1 2020

<sup>6</sup> Spend total includes up to June 2020

<sup>7</sup> Total does not include costs in relation to the separate inquest, which were £2,582,249 up to 30 September 2014  
info@taxpayersalliance.com

**Table 2: total spend by department, 2015-16 to 2019-20**

Department	Total spent (£)
Home Office	192,675,737
Cabinet Office	88,688,900
Department of Health and Social Care	19,170,250
Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	Unavailable
<b>Total</b>	<b>300,534,887</b>

## Methodology

A freedom of information (FOI) request was sent to all UK governments. It requested information on the cost to each department on public inquiries from 2015-16 until present. This also included the most recent cost of any ongoing inquiries. Parliamentary questions were also used to gain additional information regarding some departments.

If an inquiry concluded between 2015-16 and the present, but began before April 2015, the total cost of that inquiry has been included. If an inquiry concluded between 2015-16 and the present, but began after April 2015, this has also been included in the total cost of that inquiry.

All government departments responded to the FOI request. Of these, four had ongoing or recently completed inquiries, or 20 per cent of respondents.

Of those departments who have ongoing inquiries, one did not have any financial data available for its only inquiry. This was the Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy's Magnox Inquiry due to only being recently set up.