

# Scottish Government submission of 4 August 2022

## PE1947/A: Address Scotland's culture of youth violence

Thank you for your email of 18 July 2022 on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee seeking the Scottish Government's views on the following petition, lodged by Alex O'Kane, founder of the No1seems2care group, based in Glasgow:

*“Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address the disturbing culture of youth violence in Scotland.”*

As the Committee will be aware, the Scottish Government is committed to tackling all forms of violence including youth violence, as everyone has the right to be, and feel safe in their community. We take a public health approach, working with many different partner organisations – including the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit and Medics Against Violence - to help address the underlying causes of violence. We also continue to invest in front line policing to ensure Police Scotland has the powers and resources needed to enforce the law across Scotland.

We are aware that since exiting lockdown in 2021, many young people have been travelling into Glasgow city centre and gathering in large numbers. The large majority of the young people using the City Centre have been doing so peacefully and are enjoying the environment and the opportunities to connect with other young people. We are however aware of concerns being raised about anti-social behaviour and incidents of violence. The police response to these issues has been measured and intelligence led but robust where appropriate to protect both the public and young people and to ensure businesses and the wider community feel safe.

To address the particular concerns raised, increased resources, engagement and partnership working has been taking place including local policing, Glasgow City Council, Street Pastors, British Transport Police, Barnardo's and Education Scotland, Youth Link Scotland, Medics Against Violence and with our partners at the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, which we understand from Police Scotland is having an

impact. As a result of this combined activity, Police Scotland report that there has been a notable decrease in the number of youths now frequenting the City Centre and as such an associated decrease in antisocial behaviour and violence.

In order to prevent such incidents in future, local policing division for Glasgow has supported the addition of significant numbers of high visibility police officer patrols with a core remit of engagement, in support of the city's regeneration post COVID and to enhance public confidence and reassurance, making the city a safe enjoyable place for everyone to enjoy responsibly.

Similarly, to improve public confidence, the Scottish Community Safety Network funded by the Scottish Government, champions community safety across Glasgow and all the other local authority areas in Scotland, by providing advice and support, working with various partner agencies including Neighbourhood Watch Scotland, Crime stoppers and the Scottish Business Resilience Centre, who all play a key role in offering reassurance to local communities, sharing messages on potential criminal activities, offering advice on keeping safe and encouraging communities to look out for one another.

Local authorities, in conjunction with Police Scotland have a range of options available when tackling the kind of antisocial behaviour and violence which has been experienced in Glasgow. The Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004 provides a wide range of measures for dealing with all forms of antisocial behaviour with our national approach based on prevention, early intervention and diversionary activities. With Scottish Government support, the Scottish Community Safety Network works with communities and stakeholders to gather evidence on the ways in which antisocial behaviour and acts of violence impacts on lives and the constructive action we can take to prevent such behaviour for a potentially new approach based around positive action/behaviour.

We are continuing to invest to prevent and reduce the harm caused by violence including the perceived culture of youth violence. Over and above the ongoing investment in police funding, over £10bn since the creation of Police Scotland in 2013 and over £1.3bn in each of the next four years, we have invested over £24m in violence prevention since 2008. This includes over £16m to the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, and more than £4.5m to No Knives, Better Lives. In 2022-23, we are

providing our partners with over £2m to support ongoing and innovative violence prevention activity across Scotland, including an increase of 14% to the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit's budget to support increased violence prevention activity across Glasgow and other areas across Scotland.

We fund a range of violence prevention activity which seeks to engage young people and support them to make positive choices in their lives. Some of this work includes the following and is also taking place across Glasgow:

**Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Programme** - Run nationally by Education Scotland who engage with all 32 Local Authorities, including Glasgow to deliver the MVP peer mentoring programme which gives young people an opportunity to explore and understand how they can safely support each other and challenge attitudes and assumptions that underpin gender-based violence.

**Medics Against Violence (MAV)** – Has front line medical clinicians who volunteer to go into schools across Scotland, or on a virtual basis, to talk to young people about the consequences of violence. MAV also run the national Hospital Navigator service which now operates in 9 Accident & Emergency Departments across Scotland. The Navigator service reaches out to vulnerable people facing severe and multiple disadvantage, helping them receive a person centred approach to access the support they need. We are piloting a Youth Navigator service in the Children's Hospital Emergency Departments at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, St Johns Livingston and Glasgow to help bring this support to people at an earlier age and stage of their lives.

**No Knives Better Lives (NKBL)**- Youth Link Scotland act as the national co-ordinator to deliver this youth engagement programme, which aims to prevent the incidence of violence and knife carrying amongst young people and provides resources and support to local partners working directly with young people as well as offering advice, support and guidance to young people and their parents.

**Police Scotland Youth Volunteers (PSYV)** – Police Scotland lead this programme which seeks to break down barriers between

young people and the police and to help build positive relationships and improve their respective perspectives through volunteering within their local communities.

More generally, between 2006-2007 and 2020-2021, levels of police recorded non-sexual violence have reduced by 36% and over the same time period, NHS statistics show the number of emergency hospital admissions due to assault and assault with a sharp object have both more than halved, down 65% and 63%. And whilst we welcome these reductions, no level of violence is acceptable and we need to do more to ensure these levels reduce further in the years ahead.

To help us achieve this, the Scottish Government will publish the first ever national Violence Prevention Framework for Scotland. This is an opportunity to refresh our approach to prevent violence and reduce its harm across Scotland. The Framework will identify priorities for our partners to work towards helping make Scotland's communities safer in the years ahead.

We want to keep children out of the criminal justice system as far as possible, by maximising the use of Scotland's unique children's hearings system and keeping them out of young offenders institutions where possible and appropriate. This agenda is reiterated within the Youth Justice Vision, published in June 2021. The Vision builds on the whole system approach, a national multi-agency approach to responding to those children in conflict with the law. The Vision has a strong focus on multi-agency, partnership working, of which Police Scotland are one of those partners, to deliver an early intervention and preventative approach and aims to prevent the use of custody and secure accommodation wherever possible.

Where children come into contact with care and justice services, or into conflict with the law, then Scotland must ensure that they are treated in a child friendly and rights respecting manner, and that the causes of their behaviour are addressed as well as their actions in order to help them to reintegrate, rehabilitate and desist and with the aim of preventing further harm and minimising the number of future victims.

We have seen dramatic positive changes in the youth justice sector over the years. Between 2008-09 and 2019-20, there has been an 85% reduction in the number of children and young people prosecuted in

Scotland's courts and a 93% reduction in 16- and 17-year-olds being sentenced to custody (source: Criminal Proceedings in Scotland publication). This is down to the dedication and commitment of key partners all striving together to help make a difference, improving the lives of young people, families and communities across Scotland.

The Scottish Government would encourage the reporting of any incidents of anti-social behaviour or violence to local councils and or to Police Scotland, as it is through regular reporting of instances, that patterns can be identified, and decisions made on a course of action to address the problem.

The Committee should be aware that our partners at Medics Against Violence have reached out to the petitioner Alex O'Kane to discuss how they can link in and offer support to help address his and his group's specific concerns about youth violence in Glasgow.

I hope that the information I have set out in this letter is helpful to the Committee.