

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2190](#): Hold an inquiry into grooming gangs in Scotland, lodged by Mandy McGurk

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition calls for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent grooming gang inquiry to identify and understand the prevalence of child grooming in Scotland.

It notes that an inquiry is needed to make it clear that there are organised gangs of people in Scotland targeting children and vulnerable young adults for the purpose of criminal and sexual exploitation.

The petitioner believes that there are young people in Scotland whose childhoods are being destroyed by these gangs and that this problem needs to be acknowledged and addressed.

Background

National Inquiry: Grooming gangs (UK Government)

A national audit on group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse was commissioned by the UK Government in February 2025. The [terms of reference](#) were published on 20 February 2025 and the audit only covered England and Wales. It aimed to evaluate an understanding of the scale, nature and drivers of group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse at a national and local level.

The Audit was carried out by Baroness Casey of Blackstock DBE CB and a [final report](#) was published in June 2025.

Recommendation 2 in this report included that a national inquiry, co-ordinating a series of targeted investigations, should be launched into child sexual exploitation in England and Wales.

The [UK Government responded to the report on 20 June 2025](#) and accepted this recommendation. They stated that they would “establish a national inquiry under the Inquiries Act to co-ordinate a series of targeted local investigations”.

In [response to a question in Westminster](#) on 7 July 2025 on whether Jess Phillips MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls), had had discussions with the Scottish Government on the national inquiry into grooming gangs, she stated the following:

“As the hon. Member will be aware, child protection and policing are devolved to the Scottish Government. We regularly engage with them on a range of issues, including the national inquiry into group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse that was announced by the Government. On 26 June, officials met to discuss the Government’s approach to the national inquiry, its remit and the expectation that relevant findings and lessons learned will be shared with the devolved Administrations, and we will continue to discuss this matter with our Scottish counterparts to ensure a comprehensive UK-wide response.”

Scottish Government action

Written questions

In response to a question by Stephen Kerr MSP ([S6W-38946](#)) on 11 July 2025, Natalie Don-Innes MSP, Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise, provided the following information on the contact the Scottish Government has had with the UK Government regarding expanding the inquiry into grooming gangs in England and Wales to include Scotland:

“The UK Government has made clear that the scope of it’s inquiry into grooming gang activity is limited to England and Wales. Scottish Government officials have met with UK Government officials to discuss the UK Government’s response to Baroness Casey’s audit and underline our commitment to supporting the inquiry and engaging on any matters relevant to Scotland.

The Scottish Government continues to engage with UK Government counterparts to identify opportunities for improved collaboration to tackle harm against young people including child sexual abuse and exploitation. As part of this approach, the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise and the Minister for Community Safety and Victims will be meeting with Jess Phillips MP, UK Government Minister for Safeguarding in the coming months to discuss issues related to child sexual abuse and exploitation, violence against women and girls and online safety of children and young people.”

Scottish Parliament action

First Minister’s Question Time

During [First Minister’s Question Time](#) on 11 September 2025, Russell Findlay MSP raised the amendment lodged by Liam Kerr MSP on the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill (further detail below) and asked whether the Scottish Government would amend the Bill to enable an inquiry into grooming gangs.

The First Minister, John Swinney MSP, responded as follows:

“The Government has taken a number of significant steps in this area of policy, not least of which is the establishment of the continuing Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, led by Lady Smith, which has been sitting since 2016. That inquiry is providing the welcome and significant scrutiny that is required on the issue.

Separate work by Police Scotland and the Crown is under way to explore individual cases, some of which are the cases that Mr Findlay has just raised with me, to establish whether further detailed scrutiny is required on grooming gangs. From my reading of the information that I have seen, I am not persuaded of the necessity of that further inquiry, but work is under way in Police Scotland and the Crown Office to advise ministers on that point. We will consider that and discuss it with Parliament in due course.”

In response to this, Russell Findlay MSP noted that “the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry will not look at the grooming gangs”.

Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill

Liam Kerr MSP lodged an [amendment \(no. 31\) at Stage 3](#) of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill to insert a new section into the Bill on research on group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse, which would be carried out by the Victims Commissioner (a role established by the Bill). This included that the report produced and published under this section must include a recommendation on “whether a public inquiry is needed in relation to group-based child sexual exploitation”.

During the [debate on this amendment](#), which took place in the Chamber on 16 September 2025, Liam Kerr MSP stated:

“Baroness Casey was instructed by the Prime Minister to carry out in England an exercise of precisely the sort that is envisaged by my amendment 31. The amendment simply provides for a similar investigation to be undertaken by, or under instruction from, the new victims commissioner. Such an investigation would build a national picture of what is known about grooming gangs in Scotland. It would identify local and national trends, assess the quality of the data that is available, review police understanding of the crime and assess the demographics of victims and perpetrators. Crucially, it would require the making of recommendations about how to prevent this most vicious and heinous of practices from occurring and about whether a full public inquiry should be commissioned.”

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, Angela Constance MSP, did not support the amendment, stating:

“The [national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group](#) was established in 2024 [...] It is an expert group of key statutory, third-sector, academic and, crucially, service delivery organisations, and it is

best placed to assess and make recommendations for additional action to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation [...] The group is already working at pace to strengthen workforce identification of abuse, improve data collection and information sharing to better understand prevalence, and enhance multi-agency co-ordination to improve our collective response to this abhorrent crime [...] That group has already considered the implications of Baroness Casey's audit and is looking at each of its recommendations. It will discuss agreed actions, including the findings of Police Scotland's analysis, at a meeting next month."

The amendment was disagreed to with a vote of: For 51, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Urgent question

During the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs' response to an [urgent question on 28 October 2025 by Ash Regan MSP](#) about establishing a national task force to identify and dismantle any exploitation networks targeting children and vulnerable adults in Scotland, she stated, in response to a supplementary question by Liam Kerr MSP:

"As he well knows, the Government has always been clear that we are prepared to give every consideration to a grooming gangs inquiry if that is assessed as a necessity."

Kirsty Deacon
Senior Researcher
31 October 2025

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP