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Convener
Criminal Justice Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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16 November 2026

Dear Convener,

1. Thank you for your letter of 30 October 2026 regarding the Criminal Justice Committee's inquiry into crime and antisocial behaviour associated with e-bikes and e-scooters. I strongly welcome the Committee's decision to undertake this inquiry. Communities across Scotland continue to raise concerns about the antisocial and criminal use of illegal e-bikes, e-scooters and other vehicles and I share those concerns. I am clear that we must do all that we can to improve the safety of our communities and to address behaviour that causes fear, alarm and distress.

2. Before addressing the specific points raised in your letter, I should stress that operational policing matters, including decisions relating to and evaluations of enforcement activity and the deployment of resources, are matters for Police Scotland. It is accountable to the Scottish Police Authority and is subject to scrutiny by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland. Respecting that framework, Ministers continue to engage closely with policing partners to ensure that emerging issues are understood and addressed appropriately.

Any available evidence on the scale and nature of crime and antisocial behaviour involving e-bikes and e-scooters

3. The evidence currently available to the Scottish Government comes from a combination of operational information provided by Police Scotland, engagement with stakeholders, academic research, and representations from communities, MSPs and local authorities. While there is no single comprehensive national dataset covering all incidents involving illegal e-bikes and e-scooters, the available evidence nevertheless points to a growing and increasingly visible issue in some communities across Scotland.

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Scale

4. It is important to recognise the limitations of the available data. In particular, it is not possible to determine what proportion of crime and antisocial behaviour incidents involving illegal e-bikes and e-scooters come to the attention of enforcement agencies. As a result, the true scale of the issue remains uncertain. Notwithstanding these limitations, a range of indicators suggest increased concern. In particular, we are aware that Police Scotland seizures have increased significantly. The number of vehicles seized in 2025 increased by over 60% compared to the previous year, with 373 e-bikes and 196 e-scooters recovered. In 2026 Police Scotland has seized more than 1,000 of these vehicles – 561 e-bikes and 441 e-scooters up to 16 October. Recent Public Health Scotland data, published on 11 November, has also provided new insight into injury patterns involving e-bikes and e-scooters. During an eight-week period, 446 injuries requiring hospital treatment were recorded across 11 of Scotland's 14 health boards, comprising 257 incidents involving e-scooters and 189 involving e-bikes. The data covered both legal and illegal e-bikes, although e-motorcycles without pedals were excluded. Children and young people were disproportionately represented within the findings. More than one-third of presentations involved those aged between 10 and 14 years, almost two-thirds of e-scooter injuries involved patients aged under 16, and males accounted for almost three-quarters of all presentations.

Nature

5. Communities report instances of riders using vehicles in ways that intimidate pedestrians, cyclists and other road users, while offenders are sometimes perceived to operate with a degree of anonymity, concealing their identities and using vehicles that can be difficult to trace. The evidence also highlights wider road safety concerns, including the risk of serious injury to riders, passengers and members of the public. Those involved range from young people engaged in nuisance, thrill-seeking or risk-taking behaviour through to individuals involved in more serious criminality. Research suggests that some electric two-wheeled vehicles may be attractive to offenders because of their silent operation, rapid acceleration, off-road capability and limited traceability. Studies have highlighted their use in connection with drug distribution, acquisitive crime and other offending. Understanding these distinctions is important, as interventions that may be effective in addressing nuisance behaviour are unlikely, on their own, to address offending linked to organised or repeat criminal activity. Indeed, the available evidence suggests that the same kind of vehicle may be used in very different contexts and for very different purposes.[1] This highlights the importance of understanding the underlying motivations and drivers of offending behaviour, rather than focusing exclusively on the vehicles themselves.

6. The available evidence indicates that illegal e-bikes and e-scooters are often better understood as an enabler of crime or antisocial behaviour rather than its root cause. As highlighted by wider evidence on crime prevention and behaviour change, understanding why offending is taking place is often as important as understanding how it is being carried out. This underlines the need for responses informed by an understanding of local

[1] See e.g. Smith, R., Coxhead, J. (2024). *Policing and Investigating Criminal Activities by Gangs Using E-Bikes, E-Scooters and E-Motorcycles in the UK*. In: Albrecht, J.F., den Heyer, G. (eds) Special Topics in Policing. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56347-8_9

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drivers, motivations and circumstances, alongside proportionate enforcement activity. In this connection stakeholder engagement has highlighted the potential role of wider social and environmental factors. For example, concerns have been raised regarding the increasing normalisation of unsafe riding practices, including the use by children and young people of vehicles that may be inappropriate for their age, level of experience or intended setting. In this context stakeholders have emphasised the importance of parental awareness and supervision, community expectations, peer influences, and broader social norms in shaping behaviour. While these factors are not readily captured in official datasets, they are relevant to understanding why problematic behaviours emerge and persist.

Any available evidence on the effectiveness of current interventions

7. Much of the operational knowledge and evidence regarding both the problem and the effectiveness of interventions is generated and held locally rather than centrally. As with the evidence on the scale and nature of the problem, there are other important limitations to the conclusions Government can make regarding the effectiveness of individual interventions. For example, independent assessment of policing effectiveness properly sits with organisations such as the Scottish Police Authority and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland rather than with Ministers. Nevertheless, the available evidence points towards a number of recurring themes. These include the value of targeted enforcement activity, effective local partnership working, prevention and diversionary approaches, and interventions which seek to address the wider factors contributing to offending rather than focusing solely on the vehicles involved.

8. Enforcement activity undertaken by Police Scotland using existing legal powers can deliver immediate and visible outcomes. Proactive enforcement activity can generate intelligence, identify repeat offenders and, in some circumstances, uncover links to wider criminality. During Operation Overlap, a national week of action targeting the illegal use of e-bikes and e-scooters, Police Scotland seized 142 illegal vehicles, including 99 e-bikes and 42 e-scooters. Police Scotland has also confirmed that seized vehicles will now be destroyed rather than returned to circulation through auction, reducing the likelihood of problematic vehicles re-entering communities. However, the available evidence does not currently allow firm conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which seizure activity alone results in sustained reductions in offending or improvements in public perceptions.

9. Evidence relating to preventative and diversionary interventions points towards the value of addressing the wider factors which contribute to offending behaviour.[2] We are aware of examples where local organisations have developed a range of approaches which seek not only to respond to incidents but to reduce the factors that can make risky or antisocial behaviour attractive in the first place. This includes diversionary activity providing positive alternatives for young people (such as the Kingdom Off-Road Motorcycle Club which was the subject of a debate in the last session of the Parliament) alongside efforts to improve public awareness and encourage responsible purchasing decisions. Evidence considered by officials also suggests that measures relating to vehicle traceability, responsible retailing, public awareness, informed purchasing decisions and product standards may have an important role alongside enforcement activity. For example, awareness-raising

[2] Scottish Government. (2014.). *What works to reduce crime: a summary of the evidence*. [online] Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/works-reduce-crime-summary-evidence/pages/1/ [Accessed 9 Nov. 2026].

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campaigns undertaken by Police Scotland have sought to improve public understanding of the legal status of certain vehicles and encourage prospective purchasers, including parents and carers, to ensure that vehicles are compliant with legal requirements and appropriate for their intended use. Similarly, the Scottish Government has previously supported Crimestoppers and the Fearless youth programme to raise awareness of the risks associated with vehicle misuse and encourage the reporting of concerns. While engagement metrics can demonstrate the reach of such campaigns, they provide only limited evidence regarding longer-term behavioural change.

10. Engagement with partners delivering diversionary and preventative activity also provides insight into the factors that can draw some young people towards vehicle-related antisocial behaviour. These partners consistently report that the attraction often extends beyond the vehicles themselves and includes the excitement, status, freedom and peer recognition associated with riding them. This suggests that, for some individuals, the vehicle may be better understood as a means through which wider behavioural and social drivers are expressed rather than the root cause of the behaviour. More fundamentally, there remains uncertainty regarding the factors that drive demand for these vehicles and the behaviours associated with their misuse. The available evidence does not provide clear conclusions regarding the extent to which factors such as parental supervision, peer influences, perceptions of status, risk-taking behaviour or wider social norms contribute to the problem, nor does it identify with confidence the most effective means of influencing these factors. Nevertheless, stakeholder engagement suggests that such considerations may be relevant in some cases, particularly where young people are accessing powerful or modified vehicles despite obvious safety risks. This points to the importance of responses that address underlying behavioural and social influences alongside legislative, regulatory and enforcement measures, and suggests that sustainable reductions in offending are likely to require a combination of enforcement, prevention and early intervention rather than reliance on any single measure in isolation.

An update on the progress made to date, including any discussions with the UK Government and any measures that have been implemented or are under consideration

11. Since taking up office, I have discussed these issues directly with Police Scotland, engaged with ministerial counterparts across the UK, and ensured that officials continue to work closely with local authorities, community safety partners and wider stakeholders. A consistent message emerging from these discussions is that there is unlikely to be a single intervention capable of resolving the issue. Rather, effective responses will require a combination of enforcement, prevention, education, local partnership working and, where appropriate, legislative reform. Reflecting that, the Scottish Government has been pursuing work across several fronts.

12. Responsibility for responding to antisocial behaviour in local areas rests with local partners, including local authorities and Police Scotland. Section 1 of the Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004 places a statutory duty on local authorities and the Chief Constable to work together to develop strategies for addressing antisocial behaviour in their communities, recognising that these issues are often best understood and addressed at a local level. The Scottish Government has an important role in ensuring that the legislative framework remains fit for purpose and supports effective local action. Within devolved competence, officials have therefore worked closely with operational partners to identify whether changes to existing legislation could strengthen

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the effectiveness of current interventions. As a result, officials are progressing consideration of two specific reforms to the Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004:

- removal of the requirement to issue a warning before a vehicle can be seized under section 126, bringing Scotland into line with arrangements elsewhere in the UK; and
- enabling recovery of disposal costs associated with unclaimed vehicles seized under that Act.

13. Alongside this work, officials are reviewing the wider operation of antisocial behaviour legislation and associated guidance to ensure that the framework remains effective in responding to emerging forms of antisocial behaviour. Separate work is also underway in relation to offender anonymity and face coverings. While no decisions have been taken, officials are examining approaches adopted elsewhere in the UK, including the use of Public Space Protection Orders, to understand whether there may be lessons for Scotland. For example, my officials are aware of action taken by Coventry City Council to use a Public Space Protection Order to prohibit the riding of e-bikes in specified locations. I am keen to ensure that all available levers continue to be actively explored, and I would welcome any views the Committee may have on potential options.

14. More broadly, officials continue to consider whether additional legislative or regulatory interventions could help reduce harm, including measures relating to the sale and responsible retailing of vehicles. However, some of these issues engage reserved responsibilities, while others raise important questions around practicality, proportionality and enforceability. This underlines the importance of cooperation across governments and agencies if lasting solutions are to be achieved. I have therefore engaged directly with the UK Government on matters which fall within reserved competence. Scottish Ministers have previously advocated consideration of improved registration, licensing or other traceability arrangements for certain off-road vehicles, recognising that greater vehicle traceability could assist enforcement activity and offender identification. I have reiterated those points in my own discussions. I am pleased by indications that the UK Government is considering whether further action may be required in relation to crime and antisocial behaviour involving these vehicles.[3] I welcome the fact that these wider issues are receiving increased attention across the UK, recognising that many of the challenges being experienced by communities are not unique to Scotland. Continued cooperation will be essential if we are to develop effective and proportionate responses. My officials are also continuing to pursue opportunities through existing UK-wide forums, including those concerned with road safety, to promote a more coordinated approach. This includes ongoing engagement regarding the legal framework governing e-scooters and micromobility.

15. At the same time, I remain conscious that legislative and regulatory measures alone are unlikely to provide a complete solution. For that reason, the Scottish Government will continue to support local partners in responding to the issues affecting their communities as I discuss below.

[3] See e.g. Hansard HC Deb vol 792 col 445WH (4 November 2026).

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Details of the further steps the Scottish Government intends to take to address criminal and antisocial behaviour involving e-bikes and e-scooters

16. The Scottish Government's role is not only to ensure that the legislative framework remains fit for purpose, but also to support local partners in discharging their responsibilities. Looking ahead, we will therefore continue to pursue a balanced programme of enforcement, prevention, partnership working and, where appropriate, legislative reform, recognising that no single intervention is likely to be sufficient on its own.

17. The evidence gathered through this work suggests that meaningful progress can often be achieved through effective use of existing powers, duties and partnerships. There are already encouraging examples of collaborative approaches being taken forward in areas such as North Lanarkshire and Fife, combining enforcement, education, community engagement and diversionary opportunities. While the evidence does not permit definitive conclusions regarding the effectiveness of any single model, these approaches provide valuable opportunities to identify promising practice, share learning and build on what is working in different local contexts. While there may be scope for targeted legislative improvements, many of the interventions currently demonstrating promise are being delivered through local collaboration between Police Scotland, local authorities, community organisations and other partners. The Scottish Government will therefore seek to resource and support local partners, informed by ongoing engagement with practitioners and by learning from areas developing innovative or promising approaches to these issues.

18. Alongside this, the Scottish Government will continue through national interventions to complement local prevention and diversionary work aimed at addressing the wider factors that can contribute to offending behaviour. As discussed earlier, the available evidence suggests that sustainable reductions in offending are most likely where enforcement is complemented by positive alternatives, early intervention and community-based support. We will therefore continue investing in preventative activity through programmes such as CashBack for Communities and wider community safety initiatives. We are developing further initiatives including the Social Impact Partnership focused on reducing offending, recognise the importance of addressing the underlying drivers of offending behaviour through earlier intervention, stronger partnership working and sustained support. While such initiatives are not directed specifically at illegal e-bikes or e-scooters, they reflect the wider evidence discussed throughout this response, namely that long-term improvements in community safety are most likely to be achieved where underlying causes are addressed alongside enforcement activity.

19. From a road safety perspective, the misuse of e-bikes and e-scooters by children and young people remains a matter of concern, particularly where vehicles are being used on roads or in environments that present a risk to riders and other road users. The Scottish Government and Road Safety Scotland will continue to work with Police Scotland, local authorities, schools and other partners to support road safety education and awareness activity, monitor emerging risks, and consider how best to respond to new and evolving transport technologies. We will also continue to explore opportunities through existing road safety structures and forums to improve awareness and coordinate activity where appropriate.

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20. Our priority will therefore be to continue working with communities, delivery partners and governments across the UK to identify practical measures that reduce harm, improve community safety and address the causes, as well as the consequences, of vehicle-related antisocial behaviour. In that context I would particularly welcome any recommendations the Committee may make regarding additional measures, whether within devolved competence or requiring engagement with the UK Government. We remain open to new evidence, ideas and approaches which could help reduce the harm caused by the criminal and antisocial use of illegal e-bikes, e-scooters and other vehicles, and I look forward to considering the Committee's findings in due course.

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