

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 14 January 2026
1st Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

PE2190: Hold an inquiry into grooming gangs in Scotland

Introduction

Petitioner Mandy McGurk

Petition summary Calling on 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.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2190>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 7 October 2025.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 2,432 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received a submission from the Scottish Government, which is set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.
7. [The Scottish Government subsequently announced the first steps to be taken](#) as part of an independent inspectorate-led national review of group-based sexual harm. The Scottish Government announcement has been included in full at **Annexe D**.

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
January 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2190: Hold an inquiry into grooming gangs in Scotland

Petitioner

Mandy McGurk

Date Lodged

7 October 2025

Petition summary

Calling on 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.

Previous action

I've written to the Government before about my concerns, I've raised my concerns with police and local authorities. I now help support victims getting their lives back together.

Background information

An inquiry is needed to make clear there are organised gangs of people in this country targeting children and young vulnerable adults for the purpose of criminal and sexual exploitation. This is leading children into lives of prostitution, drugs and crime, who would otherwise not choose that path in life.

These gangs are organised and exist for this sole purpose.

The longer it's put off, the more children across our country are falling victims to these gangs. Everyday there are young people in this country having their childhoods destroyed as well as their entire lives at the hands of these organised gangs of groomers and traffickers.

This problem needs to be acknowledged and addressed in order for our drugs problem to be tackled with sincerity!

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2190



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 its 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.

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Annexe C: Written submission

Scottish Government written submission, 23 November 2025

PE2190/A: Hold an inquiry into grooming gangs in Scotland

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask of the petition to be practical or achievable?

The petition calls on Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent child grooming gang inquiry. For the purposes of this, the definition we will use for our replies, is group-based child sexual abuse, exploitation, harm and abuse, including online abuse.

The Scottish Government has placed on record that protecting children from harm is an absolute priority and we are clear that sexual abuse and exploitation are abhorrent crimes with devastating impacts on the victims and their families. We have also placed on record we are prepared to give every consideration to an inquiry, if we feel it is necessary, and work is underway by the Scottish Government, Police Scotland, the National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group, and other partners to explore cases as part of that scrutiny to inform future decision making in this area.

What, if any, action the Scottish Government is currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask of this petition?

National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group

Our recognition of this abhorrent crime is why in November 2024 we established the expert [National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group](#) which brings together key services and expert stakeholders to inform and strengthen our collective action against this horrendous form of abuse and increase cross-sectoral coordination and capability to address the risks and harms of abuse and exploitation by scrutinising existing and emerging evidence and practice to inform, prioritise and agree actions.

The Strategic Group, brings together experts from groups including police, courts, academia and third-sector organisations working with children and young people, and Professor Alexis Jay, a previous chair of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales. It is working to identify the risks and harms of child sexual abuse and exploitation by considering previous inquiries, evidence and practices across social work, education, police and healthcare to prioritise and agree further actions and recommendations for national improvement and reform. It is well paced to assess current challenges and make informed recommendations to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation so we can ensure we are doing all we can to tackle it through prevention and early intervention.

The Strategic Group met on 8 October and the minutes include the following:

Public inquiry: the Co-chairs reported on the continued calls for a public inquiry by members of the Scottish Parliament into group-based abuse, and reiterated Ministers' current position that there continues to be a lack of evidence at this time to necessitate such an inquiry in Scotland, but that there is no room for complacency on this most important issue. The Co-chairs highlighted that, with support from Professor Jay, Scottish Government officials were considering what alternative approaches might be available to scrutinise practice and approach to CSAE-based harm in Scotland, and they will engage group members and local leaders as options are developed. It was also noted that the voice and opinion of survivors should also be considered as part of any approach. It was proposed and agreed that a further extraordinary meeting of the Group should be held at the end of November to discuss any such options.

Activity to improve Data on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) are often hidden and under-reported forms of abuse. developing an effective response which prioritises prevention requires a robust understanding of scale and nature. There is currently no comprehensive national data on the prevalence of child abuse in Scotland, therefore we are working to address this issue in way that ensures data is collected in a trauma-informed manner which supports and protects child victims.

It is important to review CSAE data captured within other parts of the child protection process, particularly at Interagency Referral Discussions (IRDs, the beginning of the child protection process), Joint Investigative Interviews (the best practice model for interviewing children and young people in Scotland), medical examination and other protective processes. Through these different sources, partners can gain a fuller understanding of the number of children at risk of or experiencing CSAE, and how these children are responded to and supported. This work has shown there is CSAE-relevant data collected across Scotland's child protection processes and we are now assessing how this data can be collated, analysed and shared at a national level.

Police Scotland-led review of group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Whilst not the work of Scottish Government, Police Scotland is of course a key partner in this area of work and co-chair the Strategic Group. Police Scotland take child abuse crimes very seriously, as demonstrated by their delivering justice in a number of significant child sexual exploitation investigations.

Following instruction by the UK Government, Baroness Casey published an Audit into group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse in England and Wales in June 2025 which set out findings and recommendations on this issue which included a focus on policing on this issue.

In response, Police Scotland have taken forward a series of actions to review their own operations and response to this specific issue. They have created a timeline of action on child sexual exploitation since 2012 and reviewed actions taken including training of officers and specialist roles in investigations.

This concluded that there were no present day large-scale investigations known to Police Scotland that meet the definition of group-based abuse as outlined in Baroness Casey' audit in England and Wales. Police Scotland has also reviewed five previous relevant large-scale investigations and reported that the expected investigative standards were applied to those inquiries.

Police Scotland also reported on self-assessment activity being undertaken from both a national and local policing perspective across seven thematic areas: victims and survivors; data analysis; investigations; training and development; partnerships; disruption; and investigative resources. Police Scotland advised that work was also underway to align Police Scotland recording systems to capture ethnicity data for suspects.

Police Scotland are undertaking further action on these issues and are providing updates on progress to the National CSAE Strategic Group.

Child Protection Unit

Annexe D: Scottish Government Announcement, 17 December 2025

Actions to combat sexual abuse set out alongside next steps in national review.

Immediate action will be taken to address any harms or risks identified in the first part of an independent inspectorate-led review of responses to group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE).

Education Secretary Jenny Gilruth announced to Parliament that the first part of the independent national review will be taken forward at pace and focus on rigorous, detailed scrutiny of local councils' assessments of the threat and risk of group-based CSAE.

Further parts will follow, and Ministers plan to update Parliament more fully by the end of February.

The Education Secretary also confirmed an additional £220,000 will be invested this financial year to enhance support for victims and families impacted by sexual offending, improve access to training for professionals to respond to sexual harm, and support improvements to Police Scotland's forensics capabilities.

The Cabinet Secretaries for Education and Skills and for Justice and Home Affairs have jointly written to the Cross-Party Group on Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse to request to meet survivors in the new year.

The Education Secretary also confirmed that Ministers support mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse in principle. The National CSAE Strategic Group has agreed to consider next steps to develop options for mandatory reporting in Scotland, and will also further consider approaches to involve survivors in an appropriate and trauma-informed way.

Ms Gilruth said:

"The Scottish Government is taking determined action to establish the potential extent and scale of child sexual exploitation and abuse in Scotland's recent past.

"Those who have suffered, as victims of child sexual abuse, have been let down by a system which should have protected them. We must ensure that survivors' experience is at the heart of our considerations – their voices must be heard and be listened to.

"The National Review, Police Scotland's ongoing work, and the advice of the National Strategic Group chaired by Professor Jay, will gather evidence, help us to take action where it is needed now, and inform advice to Ministers on whether a national inquiry on group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation is required."

Stuart Allardyce, Director of Lucy Faithfull Foundation Scotland, said:

“Demand for our services to prevent child sexual abuse keeps rising. Each year, more adults concerned about their behaviour, young people who have caused sexual harm to others, and families affected by a loved one’s arrest turn to us for help.

“This funding is a lifeline that will enable additional groupwork sessions this financial year, so no one has to wait for support, and allows us to extend our helpline hours to those across Scotland who need our services. It’s a vital boost that shows the Scottish Government’s commitment to protecting children from harm.”

Background

The four Inspectorates leading the independent review of responses to group-based CSAE are independent of government and the organisations that they scrutinise. They have powers to compel public authorities to provide information they request. Ministers will be updated on progress throughout the national review to inform consideration of next steps in protecting children and young people from harm.

The Director General for Justice and Education is writing to key agencies and organisations asking them to review their document retention policies to ensure the retention of all documents that may be relevant to the National Review. This is in addition to the instruction that the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry issued when it began its work.

Since 2021, the Scottish Government has provided £20 million for the Bairns’ Hoose programme, to enhance holistic child-centred support for children who have been harmed.

Breakdown of the additional £220,000 funding announced by the Education Secretary:

- £42,000 to support a pilot for the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse ‘Practice Leads Programme’ in Scotland to further equip professionals to respond to sexual harm. The aim of the pilot is to evidence effective and scalable approaches to addressing gaps in practice and service provision in tackling CSAE in Scotland, while also developing in-house expertise and confidence in addressing these issues
- £67,991 to extend [Lucy Faithfull Foundation Scotland's](#) helpline hours, provide additional one-to-one support sessions for families affected by online offences, and additional preventative work with children, young people and adults
- £30,000 to provide free access [to online harm eLearning](#) from the Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice, developed with expert input from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation Scotland, to support practitioners working with

children to identify indicators of online sexual abuse and grooming and promote safe use of technologies

- £81,800 for technology upgrades and analytical tools which will enhance Police Scotland's digital forensics capability and ability to act on online harm evidence information.

[Child protection guidance - gov.scot](#)