

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

PE2196: Address early sexual offending in Scotland

Introduction

Petitioner Leanne Kelly on behalf of Root The Rot

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to act on early sexual offending in young people and prevent future offending by:

- taking tougher action on gateway offences such as unsolicited sexual images and peer assaults
- educating young people about consent and online harms at school
- creating a culture of parental accountability
- introducing a youth monitoring register for offences committed by young people
- providing real support for victims of all sexual offences

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2196>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 16 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, 477 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 submissions from the Petitioner and the Scottish Government which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

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

Clerks to the Committee
January 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2196: Address early sexual offending in Scotland

Petitioner

Leanne Kelly on behalf of Root The Rot

Date Lodged

16 October 2025

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to act on early sexual offending in young people and prevent future offending by:

- taking tougher action on gateway offences such as unsolicited sexual images and peer assaults
- educating young people about consent and online harms at school
- creating a culture of parental accountability
- introducing a youth monitoring register for offences committed by young people
- providing real support for victims of all sexual offences

Previous action

After being victim of a non-consensual image offence by a young person, I began campaigning for change. I've contacted MSPs, including Neil Bibby MSP and Dr Pam Gosal MSP, raised safeguarding concerns with local authorities, launched Root the Rot to highlight hidden youth harms, submitted formal complaints, and developed a full policy proposal.

Background information

Non-contact sexual offences are too often minimised as "just a photo" or "low level," yet research shows they are gateways to serious abuse. Victims suffer lasting harm, silenced by dismissals that groom girls to accept harassment and boys to believe it's normal. In England & Wales, child-on-child sexual assaults rose 81% in 3 years; Scotland lacks this data. My aim is to protect victims and rehabilitate offenders before behaviour escalates. Scotland must catch sexual offending early to protect victims and prevent escalation.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2196



Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition calls for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to act on early sexual offending in young people and prevent future offending.

The petitioner believes this should be done by:

- taking tougher action on gateway offences such as unsolicited sexual images and peer assaults
- educating young people about consent and online harms at school
- creating a culture of parental accountability
- introducing a youth monitoring register for offences committed by young people
- providing real support for victims of all sexual offences.

Background

Legislation

[Section 2 of the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#) made it an offence to disclose, or threaten to disclose, an intimate photograph or film. The penalty for this offence is up to 12 months' imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £10,000 if convicted on summary procedure. If someone is convicted on indictment, they can be sentenced to a period of imprisonment up to five years and/or an unlimited fine.

The [Sexual Offences \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#) (the 2009 Act) sets out a range of sexual offences. This includes the offence of [sexual assault by penetration](#) in section 2 of the Act and [sexual assault](#) in section 3. It also includes the non-contact offence of [communicating indecently](#) in section 7.

Sections 28 to 39 of the 2009 Act relate to offences against "older children", that is a child who is older than 13 but less than 16 years of age. The person alleged to have committed these offences must be at least 16 years old. [Section 39](#) sets out the potential defences to these offences and includes, for certain offences only, where the difference between the suspect and the victim's age does not exceed two years.

[Schedule 2 of the 2009 Act](#) sets out the penalties for the various offences set out within the Act. For the non-contact offence of communicating indecently or causing a person to see or hear an indecent communication the penalty is up to 12 months' imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £10,000 if convicted on summary procedure. If

someone is convicted on indictment, they can be sentenced to a period of imprisonment up to 10 years and/or an unlimited fine.

Where these non-contact offences are against an older child, the penalty on indictment is a period of imprisonment up to five years and/or an unlimited fine.

Data

In response to written questions ([S6W-40860](#) and [S6W-41616](#)) by Pam Gosal MSP, asking the Scottish Government to publish detailed statistics regarding youth perpetrated sexual offences, the following provisional management information was provided by Police Scotland:

Table 1: Number of accused aged under 18 at the date of the offence

Crime type	No. of accused¹	
	01/01/24 – 31/12/24	01/01/25 – 30/09/25
Rape & attempted rape	240	246
Sexual assault	593	429
Causing to view sexual activity or images	207	184
Communicating indecently	96	91
Threatening to or disclosing intimate images	89	87
Indecent photos of children	158	121
Crimes associated with prostitution	0	0
Other sexual crimes	186	116
Total	1,569	1,274

Within the answer to written question [S6W-41616](#), the Scottish Government advised that “data for earlier years are not available from the single standardised national system used by Police Scotland to gather details of those involved in crime, which became fully operational from January 2024”.

Notification requirements for, and monitoring of, people convicted of sexual offences

Notification requirements for those convicted of sexual offences are set out within [Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003](#) (the 2003 Act). These requirements automatically apply where someone is convicted of certain offences. These offences are listed in [Schedule 3 of the 2003 Act](#) and include offences such as rape and sexual assault as well as non-contact offences such as communicating indecently and causing a person to see or hear an indecent communication. Where these non-

¹ The number of accused are not necessarily all unique individuals as it is possible for an accused to have committed more than one sexual crime during the period. Furthermore, the figures are not a total of sexual crimes as some crimes may have had multiple perpetrators.

contact offences are committed against an older child, the accused must be 18 or over or have been sentenced to a period of imprisonment.

It also includes any other offences that the court determines that there was “a significant sexual aspect to the offender’s behaviour in committing the offence”.

The notification requirements imposed include that someone must notify the police of details including their name, and other names used, address, date of birth and passport details.

The length of time for which the requirement applies depends on the sentence imposed. [Section 82 of the 2003 Act](#) sets out the notification periods, and that these are halved where someone is under the age of 18 years old at the date of conviction.

Those made subject to notification requirements under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 are also subject to multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) under [section 10 of the Management of Offenders etc \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#).

Children’s hearings system

Currently, the children’s hearings system mainly deals with children under the age of 16. However, some young people aged 16 and 17 are also dealt with through the hearings system. This can happen where they are still subject to supervision requirements imposed by a children’s hearing, or where their case is remitted to the hearings system for disposal following conviction by a criminal court.

Where a child is referred to the children’s hearings system, a decision on the referral is taken by the Children’s Reporter. The outcome of this decision can include:

- to take no action (this can be due to the current measures in place)
- referral to the local authority on a voluntary basis
- arranging a children’s hearing, which can result in the imposition of a compulsory supervision order.

The Reporter can also deal with referrals that are jointly reported to them and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (as set out in The [Lord Advocate’s Guidelines: Offences committed by children](#)), where the Procurator Fiscal decides that the referral is to go to the Reporter.

When the relevant sections are in force, the [Children \(Care and Justice\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) will make a number of amendments to the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 including:

- allowing all children under the age of 18 to be referred to the children’s hearings system
- additional measures that can be included within a Compulsory Supervision Order, including preventing the child entering a specific place or prohibiting the child in communicating with a specific person.

Education

The Scottish Government fund Rape Crisis Scotland to develop the [Equally Safe at School](#) (ESAS) programme through their Delivering Equally Safe fund. ESAS was co-created by Rape Crisis Scotland and the University of Glasgow and is an online intervention which supports secondary schools across Scotland to take a whole school approach to addressing gender-based violence.

Schools also provide [Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood](#) (RSHP) education. This includes elements around (un)healthy relationships (including online relationships), consent and respect, as well as a focus on online, social media, and the sending and sharing of images.

Scottish Government action

Harmful sexual behaviour by children

The Scottish Government established an expert group on preventing sexual offending involving children and young people to respond to the growth in sexual crime by young people. The group published [Harmful sexual behaviour by children and young people: Expert Group report](#) in January 2020. The report set out findings relating to the nature, causes and frequency of harmful sexual behaviour by children, highlighted existing best practice and set out 19 proposals for further action.

The National Child Protection Leadership Group set up a [Harmful Sexual Behaviour Delivery Group](#) to progress the implementation of the expert group's proposals. The delivery group concluded its work at the end of 2024.

In response to a written question ([S6W-40859](#)) by Pam Gosal MSP on 30 September 2025, on whether the Scottish Government would recognise peer-on-peer harmful sexual behaviour as a safeguarding priority, Natalie Don-Innes MSP, Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, responded that:

“The Scottish Government is committed to preventing all types of harmful sexual behaviour involving children and young people. We recognise that children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviour are a complex group with diverse needs which cannot be addressed by a ‘one size fits all’ model of service provision.

To inform our response, Scottish Government set up a Harmful Sexual Behaviour Delivery Group which carried out work to deliver on the [recommendations](#) made by the Expert Group on Preventing Sexual offending Involving Children and Young People in 2020.

As part of this work the group developed a detailed guidance document, published in 2024: [Working with children and young people who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour: Evidence based guidance for professionals working with children and young people](#), which focuses on contextual safeguarding, assessment and intervention.”

Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025

The Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 received Royal Assent on 30 October 2025. It includes provision to set up a Victims and Witnesses Commissioner. The [Policy Memorandum](#) for the Bill (para 8) stated that:

“The Commissioner will champion the rights and views of victims and witnesses and encourage policy-makers and criminal justice agencies to put their voices at the heart of justice. The Commissioner will monitor criminal justice agencies’ compliance with the Standards of Service and the Victims’ Code, and promote best practice and trauma-informed approaches.”

Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024

Where a child who has committed a sexual offence is referred to the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration, the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 (once [section 8](#) is in force) will introduce a requirement for victims of offences to be informed of their right to request information.

The Act will also extend the information that can be shared to include not only information on the decision making in terms of the referral and whether a Compulsory Supervision Order was made at a hearing, but further information around measures included in the order around communication with the victim or if a secure accommodation authorisation has been included in the order.

Section 8 would also enable the following information to be shared with a victim:

“... other information necessary to assist safety planning by or in relation to the person who made the request or, where the person is a relevant person, the child in relation to whom that person is a relevant person.”

[Section 9 of the 2024 Act](#) (once in force) will introduce a regulation-making power for Scottish Ministers to make provision for support services for these victims of offences.

Kirsty Deacon

Senior Researcher

18 November 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 submissions

Petitioner written submission, 28 October 2025

PE2196/A: Address early sexual offending in Scotland

1. Introduction

I submit this written evidence to support my petition urging the Scottish Government to Address Early Sexual Offending in Scotland. This petition tackles a critical gap in Scotland's response, where non-contact offences are minimised, interventions are delayed, and parental accountability is inconsistent. With only 10% of child-on-child sexual offences reaching formal intervention (NSPCC, 2023), unaddressed offending risks long-term mental health costs, public safety concerns, and community harm. The petition seeks to treat non-contact offences seriously, monitor youth offending, and hold parents accountable to protect victims, rehabilitate offenders, and prevent escalation.

2. The Problem: Minimisation of Non-Contact Offences

Early non-contact sexual offences, such as sending unsolicited sexual images, sexualised peer behaviour, and harassment, are often dismissed as "low-level" or "experimentation." Research from NSPCC, Barnardo's, and the Scottish Government reveals:

- Victims suffer lasting trauma, fear, and feelings of being silenced.
- Offenders miss early rehabilitation, increasing escalation risks.
- Barnardo's (2023) found 40% of non-contact offences escalate to contact offences without intervention.

Informal handling, such as school warnings or parental discussions, lacks structured follow-up, leaving victims unsupported and offenders unguided.

3. Delays in Intervention

Even when early sexual offending is recognised, interventions are delayed, leaving victims vulnerable and offenders without guidance. Under Scotland's Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) framework, early intervention is promised, yet:

- Cases can take 12–18 months to reach a Children's Panel, delaying rehabilitation.
- Children wait months for social work engagement.
- Engagement is often limited to procedural assessments, not sustained therapeutic support.
- Scotland lacks comprehensive data on child-on-child assaults, hindering trend tracking.

These delays, compounded by inconsistent GIRFEC application, allow harmful behaviours to escalate and prolong victim distress.

4. Real-World Example Demonstrating Gaps in Policy and Intervention

As a disabled person, I experienced a non-contact sexual offence, a cyber crime, by a young person with a history of harmful behaviour. Authorities dismissed my concerns, leaving me in fear and distrust. My autistic child suffered severe emotional distress from related incidents, exacerbating their conditions. A family member intimidated my child, discouraging reporting, while an officer called me "snidey," reflecting dismissive attitudes toward victims. Safeguarding concerns about the offender's environment were ignored.

Intimidation by family members continued, forcing me to live in fear without protection. My child, traumatised by the offender's actions, stayed silent about a separate concerning incident involving the same young person. This was due to fear and receiving no follow-up from authorities, reinforcing that victims are overlooked. Systemic failures, minimising non-contact crimes, ignoring complaints, and neglecting victim support, allowed harm to persist. Early intervention could have prevented escalation. This case demands:

- Recognising non-contact offences as serious.
- Structured monitoring and intervention.
- Accountability for parents enabling offending.
- Relocating offenders to protect victims.

5. Need for Parental Accountability and Youth Monitoring

Current systems assume parents address their child's offending, but this is inconsistent. Parental accountability, through mandatory education or sanctions, ensures caregivers act responsibly. No structured mechanism monitors youth offending in Scotland, unlike England's youth offending teams, which reduced recidivism by 25%. A youth monitoring register, with confidential logging and strict access controls, would track offences, enable early interventions, and ensure rehabilitation while respecting privacy.

6. Evidence of Escalation and Harm

Child-on-child sexual assaults rose 81% in England & Wales over three years; similar trends likely exist in Scotland due to underreporting and data gaps. Noncontact offences, like unsolicited images, groom girls to accept harassment and boys to normalise harmful behaviour, acting as gateway crimes. FOI evidence suggests hundreds of Scottish cases go unaddressed annually, escalating risks without intervention.

1. Recommendations

To address these gaps, I urge the Scottish Government to:

1. Take tougher action on non-contact "gateway" offences, such as unsolicited images and peer assaults.
2. Expand RSHP Scotland in schools to teach consent, online safety, and healthy behaviour, addressing curricula gaps.

3. Enforce parental accountability through mandatory education or sanctions for enabling offences.
4. Introduce a youth monitoring register with confidential logging and privacy safeguards to trigger interventions like counselling.
5. Prioritise victim safety by relocating offenders (and families complicit in intimidation) under frameworks like the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, ensuring victims remain in their homes without re-traumatisation.
6. Ensure timely social work interventions, prioritising rehabilitation and prevention over procedural compliance.

These measures, with safeguards, ensure ethical monitoring and victim-centred justice.

2. Conclusion

Scotland's frameworks fail to address early sexual offending. Non-contact offences are minimised, interventions are delayed, and victims face ongoing harm, as my family's trauma and the authorities' inaction show. Forcing victims to live in fear while offenders remain fails to protect them. By treating non-contact offences seriously, implementing a youth monitoring register, ensuring parental accountability, and relocating offenders, Scotland can protect victims and break the cycle of harm.

Scottish Government written submission, 14 November 2025

PE2196/B: Address early sexual offending in Scotland

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific asks of the petition to be practical or achievable? If not, please explain why.

The petition calls on the Scottish Government to undertake a range of actions to act on early sexual offending by young people, many of which we do, see next question. The clarity of the petition is not clear to it is hard to assess if practical or achievable eg what "tougher action" or "real support" refers to. We would also note decisions on charging and sentencing are made by independent bodies such as Police Scotland and Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

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 asks of this petition?

- 1. Taking tougher action on gateway offences such as unsolicited sexual images and peer assaults**

Scotland's Whole System Approach (WSA) provides a framework for responding to children and young people involved in offending behaviour promoting early intervention, diversion and proportionality rather than punitive measures. Through

Early and Effective Intervention (EEI) concerns about a young person's harmful or sexual behaviour are addressed promptly via multi-agency discussion to identify the most appropriate, least intrusive response.

Grounded in Getting it Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), the approach ensures that support is coordinated and centered on the child. Multi-agency collaboration between social work, education, health and police is essential to assess risk, provides support, and ensure both public protection and positive outcomes for the young person. The emphasis is on prevention, rehabilitation and capacity for change, with formal justice measures reserved for the most serious or persistent behaviours.

Equally Safe focuses on gender-based violence, primarily by men against women and girls. It challenges gender inequality and harmful norms, strengthens legal protections, and equips public sector staff to support those affected. Funded work aligns with the strategy's outcomes and priorities.

Bairns' Hoose provides a child-centred approach to delivering justice, care and recovery for children and will ensure that any child under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour may have caused serious harm or abuse, including sexual harm, will have access to trauma-informed, needs-focused support and recovery. The Bairns' Hoose provides an environment in which the context of the behaviour which caused harm can be understood and investigated. This supports victims' rights to an investigation whilst ensuring that positive interventions can be made to minimise the risk of further harmful behaviour.

2. Educating young people about consent and online harms at school

PSE (Personal and Social Education) is a taught subject which covers aspects of health and wellbeing. Through Curriculum for Excellence, health and wellbeing is spread right across the curriculum and it is one of the three core areas that are the responsibility of all staff in the school, the other two areas being literacy and numeracy. Schools are encouraged to develop the curriculum to suit their local context and meet the needs of children and young people. It is good practice for schools to consult with children and young people and respond to their views appropriately, to ensure this meets the needs of all children and young people in the school or educational setting.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring all children and young people receive high quality relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education, which is an integral part of the health and wellbeing area of the curriculum. The curriculum sets out specific learning outcomes on respect, boundaries and behaviours and what constitutes a healthy relationship both online and offline. They also include learning outcomes on consent, gender stereotypes, power dynamics in relationships and where to access support if required. To support learning and teaching, Education Scotland provides links to [RSHP lesson plans](#) that include learning about [Online abuse and exploitation](#), [Child Sexual Exploitation](#), [Identify, understand and respond appropriately to sexual behaviours in young people](#) and the importance of the principle of consent.

The Scottish Government has also published a resource for professionals to help them support young people aged 11-18 in their understanding of [Healthy relationships and consent: key messages for young people resource](#).

In addition to this, we fund Rape Crisis Scotland to help deliver programmes which aim to tackle sexual harassment and violence in our schools. Young people can find help and advice on dealing with rape or sexual harassment on the Young Scot website or from their local Rape Crisis centre.

Whilst regulation of internet and online service providers remains a reserved matter, we continue to liaise closely with the UK Government and Ofcom on the implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023. Via our Delivering Equally Safe Funding, £110,822 has been provided to the South West Grid for Learning Trust Ltd to deliver helpline advice to those who have experienced Intimate Image Abuse and improve awareness and understanding throughout Scotland. Our [Safer.Scot](#) page includes advice and information on intimate image abuse.

Sextortion has a devastating impact on young people and their families, and we know that it can be a difficult topic to discuss, or that families are unaware it even goes on. Police Scotland have information for victims and links to support services on their [website](#). Last year the Scottish Government worked with Police Scotland and Fearless, Crimestoppers' youth service, to launch a powerful social media campaign across Scotland to help protect young people from sextortion and to raise awareness for adults who work with and look after young people. In June 2025, the partnership launched a new [Sextortion educational resource](#). The resource is focused on raising awareness of sextortion amongst young people. Work continues through the establishment of a national oversight group.

We are investing in the ongoing delivery of the Mentors in Violence Prevention peer mentoring Programme in secondary schools, co-ordinated through Education Scotland (ES) as the national co-ordination delivery team. The messaging is also being directed towards primary school aged practitioners so they can become knowledgeable and confident to address gender based violence behaviour and attitudes being seen in younger aged children. MVP, through peer education, explores gender norms and how they relate to violence, particularly gender-based violence. Some of the scenarios look at issues connected to online harm.

Action Plan for the Violence Prevention Framework included an action for the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit to lead work with YouthLink Scotland and Medics Against Violence to identify opportunities to specifically target the effects of social media on violence (Action 6). Leading to the development of a campaign with resources [Quit Fighting for Likes](#) to support young people to think about and discuss attitudes, behaviours and the impact around the filming, sharing and liking of violent incidents online. It launched on 11 September 2024, and ran initially for 4 weeks. A week of Action was held on 10-14 February 2025 (to coincide with Safer Internet Day on 11 Feb) The campaign was rerun again across social media to coincide with the Easter holidays in March 2025 and will be re-run again in autumn of this year.

3. Creating a culture of parental accountability

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of preventing children and young people from being involved in harmful behaviour, including online. We are committed to promoting the wellbeing and safety of all children through a rightsbased approach, as set out in our national child protection policies and the GIRFEC framework.

Prevention is key to tackling harmful behaviour, including online and we are taking a range of actions to raise awareness about online safety with parents and carers, including providing advice and support through the Scottish Government's Parent Club website: [Online Behaviour and Safety Hub](#) and [Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Hub](#) and through Education Scotland's [Parentzone Scotland](#).

4. Introducing a youth monitoring register for offences committed by young people

We have no intention of introducing a youth monitoring register, however under 18s are still subject to the sex offenders register. Any individual convicted of a relevant offence under Schedule 3 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 is subject to the Sex Offender Notification Requirements (commonly referred to as the sex offender register). The 2003 Act also provides that any offence can lead to an individual being subject to the notification requirements if the sentencing court determines that there is "a significant sexual aspect to the offender's behaviour in committing the offence". The length of time that an individual is subject to the Sex Offender Notification Requirements is determined by the sentence received. This is for all people including those under 18.

Where a child requires ongoing compulsory measures to manage concerns about their behaviour, they can be referred to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, and may become subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order made by a Children's Hearing. The grounds of referral to a Children's Hearing include where a child has committed an offence, but can also apply where the child's conduct has had, or is likely to have, a serious adverse effect on the health, safety or development of the child or another person.

5. Providing real support for victims of all sexual offences

We are providing £32m to 23 organisations between 2025-2027 under our Victim Centred Approach Fund as part of our commitment to putting victims at the heart of the justice system. This includes funding for two Victim Navigators who have provided support ongoing victim support in this case. Funding over the two-year period includes £12m for specialist advocacy support for survivors of gender-based violence and over £8m to support victims of human trafficking and exploitation.

Through the Bairns' Hoose programme (backed by over £20 million Scottish Government investment to date), we support child victims by providing, children and young people with a safe space to access a system of holistic support comprising child protection, recovery, health and justice services.

The Scottish Government introduced the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform Bill to the Scottish Parliament in April 2023. Parliament agreed to pass the Bill on 17 September and it gained Royal Assent on 30 October, becoming the Victims,

Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act. The Act contains a package of reforms that will improve the experiences of victims of witnesses in Scotland's justice system, with a focus on sexual offences. The measures in the legislation that will particularly benefit victims of sexual offences include:

- a new national Sexual Offences Court, which will not only support the development of specialist and trauma-informed approaches to the management of sexual offences cases, but will also help to identify and resolve issues that delay cases coming to trial.
- an automatic right to independent legal representation in sexual offence cases when applications are made to lead evidence of victims' sexual history or character in sexual offence cases.
- an automatic right of lifelong anonymity for victims in sexual offence and certain other cases.
- a legal right for victims of rape and serious sexual offences cases to access their court transcripts free of charge.
- strengthened protection for victims through reforms to non-harassment orders and other protective orders.

We are currently working with stakeholders on implementation of the Act, which will be phased to ensure that reform is carefully managed and does not disrupt the operation of the system.

Is there any further information the Scottish Government wish to bring to the Committee's attention, which would assist it in considering this petition?

The Expert Group on Preventing Sexual Offending Involving Children and Young People was established in 2018 to respond to evidence relating to the occurrence of harmful sexual behaviours among children and young people and to consider proposals for further action to better prevent and respond to such behaviours. The group was wound down and published their [report](#) in 2020, detailing recommendations to prevent harmful sexual behaviour in children and young people. The Scottish Government's Child Protection Unit then set up the Harmful Sexual Behaviour Delivery Group with cross-sectoral representation, from education, social work, health, CPCScotland, Police Scotland, COPFS, COSLA, and the third sector, to implement the report's recommendations. Examples of completed work include: Guidance for staff in education and training settings, inclusion of 'Child displaying HSB' as a vulnerability factor/concern at child protection registration, within the revised Minimum Dataset for collection by Child Protection Committees and delivery of the NSPCC HSB Audit Tool pilot across three Child Protection Committees. The delivery group was wound down in 2024.

In 2024, the group also developed [guidance](#) for frontline practitioners across Scotland, providing professionals with the information and tools to identify what sexual behaviour in children and young people is harmful, steps they should take if they identify harmful behaviour, and what approaches can help to support prevention of this behaviour.

To support implementation of the guidance, Scottish Government provides funding to the Lucy Faithfull Foundation Scotland (a charity dedicated solely to the prevention

of child sexual abuse), and Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) to run a practitioner forum for staff who work with children and young people.

Harmful sexual behaviour learning and development materials have also been developed by CELCIS (Centre for excellence for children's care and protection)_ to further support practitioners to identify and intervene when children and young people display harmful sexual behaviour.

Child Protection Unit, Children's Rights, Protection and Justice