

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

## **Scottish Government written submission, 23 November 2025**

### **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**