

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

Petitioner written submission, 20 December 2025

Executive Summary

This submission supports the petition calling for an independent public inquiry into organised child sexual exploitation (“grooming gangs”) in Scotland. Drawing on lived experience and broader evidence, it highlights why the current system is failing children, why urgent action is required, and how Scotland can lead with survivor-centred, transparent, and effective safeguarding measures. Key points include survivors’ mistrust of services, gaps in recording and categorisation, links to drugs and criminal exploitation, long-term impacts of criminal records, support needs, intergenerational harm, and actionable recommendations.

1. Personal Perspective and Survivor Insight

I was born and grew up in Glasgow and was groomed as a child. I have witnessed the long-term impact of grooming gangs on multiple generations of children, coerced into crime, drug use, and prostitution — paths they would not have chosen if presented with alternative opportunities.

Scotland’s system has repeatedly failed vulnerable children. Safeguarding mechanisms and equality protections do not reach all areas or social classes effectively. Attempts to fix failings have repeatedly fallen short, leaving families exposed to harm over generations. The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry has highlighted systemic failings, showing ongoing vulnerability of children in care.

I recommend that an inquiry must include survivor input at all stages and seriously consider reviewing, suspending, or redesigning failing services to establish systems that genuinely protect children.

2. Survivors’ Experiences and Mistrust of Institutions

Many survivors report profound mistrust of statutory services, including policing and social work. As children, they were often ignored, disbelieved, or held responsible for their exploitation. This mistrust continues into adulthood, creating barriers to justice and recovery.

A public inquiry would provide a trauma-informed, independent process to ensure survivors are heard without relying solely on criminal proceedings or complaints.

3. Information Provided to Police and Unanswered Questions

Survivors have reported sharing names and details of alleged offenders with police. However, there is uncertainty about whether this information was assessed, shared, or acted upon effectively.

A public inquiry would examine systemic responses, institutional decision-making, and whether opportunities to protect children or disrupt exploitation were missed.

4. Recording and Categorisation of Child Sexual Exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is often not distinguished from broader child sexual abuse (CSA) in Scotland's records. This hampers recognition of patterns of organised exploitation and delays interventions.

CSE typically involves:

- Grooming over time
- Coercion and dependency
- Exchange of sex for drugs, money, or protection
- Links to organised crime

Clearer recording would improve safeguarding, data collection, and accountability.

5. Links Between Child Sexual Exploitation, Drugs, and Criminal Exploitation

CSE in Scotland is closely linked to substance misuse and criminal exploitation. Children are groomed into drug use and dependency, then further exploited sexually and criminally.

Without addressing early grooming, wider efforts to tackle addiction, organised crime, and related harms remain incomplete. Preventing child exploitation must be recognised as essential to broader public safety and health strategies.

6. Avoiding Stereotypes and Evidence-Based Approach

Exploitation occurs across all cultures, communities, and backgrounds. Responses must be evidence-based, focusing on behaviour and systemic failings rather than assumptions about race, ethnicity, or social class.

7. Learning from Inquiries Elsewhere in the UK

Previous UK inquiries have exposed institutional failings but faced criticism for limited survivor engagement, delays, and insufficient accountability. Scotland has the opportunity to lead with a survivor-centred, transparent inquiry focused on prevention, systemic improvement, and lessons learned.

8. Long-Term Impact of Criminal Records on Survivors

Children coerced into criminal activity often carry records into adulthood, creating barriers to employment, education, housing, and rehabilitation.

An inquiry could examine whether criminal justice systems adequately recognise coercion and whether records can be mitigated or expunged for survivors.

9. Support and Protective Measures for Survivors

Survivors face ongoing challenges, including health issues, social vulnerability, and risk of re-exploitation. Scotland should ensure:

- Accessible, trauma-informed support services

- Protective interventions for those at ongoing risk
- Opportunities to rebuild lives, including education, housing, and employment

An inquiry should assess how support and protection can be strengthened alongside accountability.

10. Impact on Future Generations and Urgent Action

CSE affects future generations. Exploitation in childhood impacts education, health, relationships, and parenting, creating intergenerational cycles of harm.

The prevalence and scale of exploitation show the system is insufficient. Urgent action is required to prevent further harm.

11. Scotland's Opportunity to Lead

Scotland can demonstrate leadership through a survivor-centred, transparent inquiry prioritising prevention, systemic improvement, and long-term reform. Lessons learned can inform national policy and best practice internationally.

12. Recommendations

To ensure the inquiry is effective and children are protected:

1. Include survivor input at every stage
2. Review, suspend, or redesign services failing children, replacing them with effective protective systems
3. Examine systemic failings, intergenerational harm, criminal records, addiction, and exploitation
4. Improve recording and categorisation of CSE separately from CSA
5. Focus on prevention and early intervention to protect future generations

Conclusion

This submission supports the petition not as an exercise in blame, but as a step toward prevention, accountability, and rebuilding trust. Survivors deserve recognition, accurate records, and protection. Future generations deserve systems that learn from past failures.

A well-designed inquiry would address the interconnected harms of exploitation, addiction, and criminalisation, demonstrate leadership, and ensure Scotland acts now to prevent further harm.