

PE2196/A: Address early sexual offending in Scotland

Petitioner written submission, 28 October 2025

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. Non-contact 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.