

PE2196/E: Address early sexual offending in Scotland

Scottish Government written submission, 13 February 2026

Thank you for your letter of 29 January 2026 on behalf of the Committee, in relation to Petition 2196 Address early sexual offending in Scotland, asking for information on what the Scottish Government is doing to assess the effectiveness of the preventative measures currently in place and what more can be done to address the issues set out in the petition.

The Scottish Government is committed to addressing early sexual offending in Scotland. Please find below additional information in response to your request.

Online Safety Taskforce – The Online Safety Taskforce was established in 2025 by the Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise and the Minister for Victims and Community Safety, to provide a coordinated approach to the wide range of activity taking place across Scottish Government to tackle online harm to children and young people.

The Taskforce, which is made up of senior leaders from across Scottish Government, will be publishing their Action Plan before the election.. Senior level participation will ensure that the Taskforce is flexible and able to adapt to the ever changing nature of the online environment. The Taskforce last met in January 2026, attended by Directors and two Ministers. Recognising the need for flexibility, the Action Plan and governing documents for the Taskforce will be reviewed every six months to calibrate our response to this fast moving issue.

Bairn's Hoose – The aim of the Bairns' Hoose Pathfinder phase is to test the implementation of the Bairns' Hoose Standards and capture and share learning from a range of geographical and operating contexts which will allow us to understand and address the complexity of the required systemic change.

During this phase, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate have developed a Self-Assessment and Readiness Tool (StART), which supports local partnership improvement while providing a national baseline of progress against the Bairns' Hoose Standards. The analytical component of the programme during the Pathfinder phase brings together the analysis of two submissions of StART (in 2024 by Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) and in 2025 by Ipsos Scotland), analysis of funding reports and qualitative research with key professionals. A final research report developed by Ipsos Scotland will be published after the Scottish elections. The report will inform the development of the National Guidance. Findings from the analytical tasks have been shared regularly through our Insights series and Collaborative Learning events.

In parallel, Scottish Government analysts are working closely with partnerships and stakeholders to co-develop core Bairns' Hoose indicators which provide a national

picture of Bairns' Hoose, track progress across the programme and support a future evaluation of the incremental national roll-out phase planned from summer 2027.

Sextortion Campaign by (Fearless (part of Crimestoppers) – Crimestoppers launched their impact report in June 2025 alongside a new resource to support education professionals discuss sextortion with secondary school pupils.

Campaign Evaluation

Since its initial launch on 18th November 2024, Fearless has seen very positive engagement with the campaign, including:

- Over 8.9 million social media impressions of the youth ads targeted at young people with 61,387 swipes to the sextortion youth landing page at Fearless.org to learn more
- Over 1.3 million social media impressions of the adult ads, with 6,399 clicks to the adult focused landing page at Fearless.org to learn more
- In addition to the significant social media reach, webinars were delivered to 399 youth professionals from Health, Education and Youth Work across Scotland. More than 95% of the attendees felt the campaign increased their knowledge of sextortion, with the majority going on to share their learning with colleagues and making plans to highlight to young people.

Since the campaign stakeholders have reported that:

- 85% have shared their learning with colleagues
- 55% have spoken to a young person in their personal life about sextortion
- 37% have spoken to the young people they work with about sextortion
- 22% have shared the social media assets on the personal and/or organisations accounts
- 8% selected 'other' activities incl. including the adult sextortion video in professional training sessions

Consultation on deepfake intimate images - The Scottish Government keeps relevant laws under review and is about to launch a consultation seeking views on new offences relating to the creation of deepfake intimate images. While existing Scots law can respond to the sharing of such deepfake intimate images, we are considering whether further laws are needed to deal with those individuals who create such images in the first place. The views offered will help inform decisions for the next administration in the next session of Parliament about whether new laws are needed and how best to provide for them. While new laws are only part of a necessary approach to help respond to the challenges of early sexual and sexualised behaviour, they are important especially where technology advances and provides new tools for people, including young people, to engage in such harmful conduct.

Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA) - The Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA) published [a report](#) based on data from 2024 – 2025 in June 2025. This report tells us that there was a 9.4% decrease in the

number of children being reported to the Children's Reporter for an offence when compared to data from 2023/24. In 2024/25, 2,447 children were referred for offending.

The overall number of referrals to the Children's Reporter in respect of offending decreased by 15.1%. The most common types of alleged offences were threatening or abusive behaviour, assault and shoplifting.

Police Scotland's own figures show that the total number of serious assaults by 11- to 18-year-olds has fallen by 27% over the last 5 years.

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) – The MVP programme uses surveys as one way of assessing its impact in schools. The Impact Survey is completed annually in May. Last year's survey gathered 73 responses from MVP school leads across 19 local authorities, evaluating the impact of the MVP programme on senior mentors, younger mentees, and whole-school culture.

Staff reported in the survey that mentors and mentees show increased understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships and a clearer recognition that violence includes more than just physical acts. Mentors demonstrate a deeper understanding of gender based violence and the harmful impact of stereotypes, while mentees show improved recognition that gender stereotyping is damaging.

In addition, staff reported that mentors are more likely to act when they become aware of abusive behaviour, and mentees demonstrate greater awareness of safe ways to help when they witness concerning behaviour.

Staff gave many examples of mentors safely intervening in bullying and acting as positive role models. They reported increased help seeking in younger pupils, a greater willingness to disclose concerns, and more peers supporting friends experiencing harm, including online.

Staff also report that there is a positive impact on school ethos and culture with:

- 71% of staff reporting that younger pupils are more likely to raise concerns or seek help following MVP delivery
- 88% agree MVP has helped build more positive relationships within the school community.
- 95% agree that younger pupils view gender-based violence as unacceptable following MVP engagement.

Staff also describe improved behaviour between pupils, increased involvement in gender equality action groups, and more open discussions about GBV as a result of the programme.

Parent Club - The information on Parent Club surrounding [online safety](#), [child sexual abuse](#) and [harmful sexual behaviour](#) is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure it remains relevant and helpful to parents and carers. Since our response to the petition in November 2025, two new emails have been planned to be sent to our database of 50,000 parents on Safer Internet Day (10 February) and new information

and advice around misogyny and misogynistic content online is going live on 16 February, to coincide with a Scotland-wide campaign.

Lucy Faithfull Foundation – We fund the Lucy Faithful Foundation to provide, Increased awareness raising on the prevention of child sexual abuse, to professionals and the public and

To provide support services for:

- Families affected by the aftermath of arrest and criminal investigation of a family member for online sexual crimes involving children, and
- Children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviour

- Enhancing Scotland's approach to child sexual abuse through membership and active participation on the National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group

- Delivery of Harmful Sexual Behaviour Practitioner Forum in partnership with the Centre for Youth & Criminal Justice (CYCJ)

- Support for adults who are worried about their sexual thoughts, feelings or behaviours towards children through 1-1 sessions and groupwork programmes

Progress is monitored on an annual basis and is reported [2024/25 Year in Review](#)

I hope this further information is helpful.

Directorate for Children and Families