

# **PE2196/F: Address early sexual offending in Scotland**

## **Petitioner written submission, 16 February 2026**

### **1. Context: Rising Sexual Offences and Early Intervention**

Recent responses to this petition have emphasised overall reductions in youth offending. However, aggregate youth crime figures do not reflect the documented rise in sexual offending by under-18s. As previously highlighted, youth sexual offending increased by 8%. SPICe data shows a 36% rise in rapes and attempted rapes where the accused is under 18 between January and September 2025 compared with 2024.

While general youth offending may be decreasing, the most serious forms of sexual violence involving young people are increasing. When sexual offences are absorbed into broader crime reductions, the seriousness of this trend risks being obscured. Parents and communities may be reassured by overall figures without being aware that harmful sexual behaviour among young people is escalating.

Research referenced by organisations such as the NSPCC indicates that harmful sexual behaviour most commonly emerges in early to mid-adolescence, typically age 14. This represents a critical prevention window. If early behaviours are minimised or inconsistently addressed, escalation into more serious offending should not surprise us.

This petition therefore concerns whether existing frameworks are consistently identifying and responding to early harmful sexual behaviour before it escalates.

### **2. Lived Experience of Minimisation**

When I reported harmful sexual behaviour by a young person, my concerns were dismissed rather than addressed through safeguarding procedures. During contact with police, I was described as “snide,” reframing a safeguarding report as interpersonal conflict.

Parental responses reinforced this pattern. Rather than recognising the behaviour as harmful, it was repeatedly minimised, a known risk factor in escalation.

Our landlord confirmed there were no housing policies addressing online abuse between tenants, leaving my family living in fear given the close proximity involved. Social work similarly dismissed reports, reinforcing the message that intervention was unnecessary.

### **3. Escalation and Responsibility Shifts**

The behaviour did not stop. The young person later received another charge. Following this escalation, this person attempted to contact my child online. Given their history, she feared she had been targeted with a sexual image, causing significant distress.

She followed safeguarding guidance: she did not engage and she reported the concern. Despite this, both police and social services dismissed her fear and my safeguarding concerns. Rather than addressing attempted contact by an individual with a known history of harmful sexual behaviour, the response focused on my daughter's online presence. Police said she shouldn't be on Snapchat, despite being of an appropriate age, and should simply block the individual. This shifted responsibility onto a child who had acted appropriately rather than addressing repeated boundary violations.

This approach contradicts safeguarding guidance, which is clear that responsibility lies with managing those who pose a risk, not restricting the lives of children who report concerns.

#### **4. Institutional Non-Response**

Social services dismissed the attempted online contact and no safeguarding action followed. An MSP sought clarification as to why no action was taken and was ignored for months. Eventually, I copied the MSP into an email to Social Services and we were informed that no further action was required, without explanation.

I submitted formal complaints to my local council regarding the handling of safeguarding concerns by social services. These complaints were ignored.

My child has since lost trust in both police and social services. When she later disclosed a sexual assault by the same person at a much younger age, no follow-up or support was offered. This reflects a pattern of early harmful behaviour that was never meaningfully addressed and which has had a lasting impact.

#### **5. Public Experiences of Online Sexual Harm**

Public responses to non-contact sexual harm consistently reflect minimisation. Many individuals describe not reporting incidents due to lack of confidence in police response. Others report being dismissed or blamed. As a result, victims frequently take responsibility for their own safety by blocking perpetrators or leaving platforms entirely. These responses show how failure to address so-called "low level" sexual offences shifts the burden of safety onto victims.

#### **6. Public Narratives That Undermine Accountability**

This culture of minimisation is reinforced by public narratives that deny or downplay sexual harm. An organisation known as Justice for Innocent Men in Scotland operates publicly and provides a platform where convicted offenders and their families deny guilt and frame reports as false allegations. Women and girls are frequently portrayed as false accusers. By providing a space where convicted offenders and families can meet others convicted of serious sexual offences against women and children, deny guilt, and minimise harm, such platforms normalise denial and retraumatise survivors.

#### **7. Transparency and RSHP Education**

Following a Freedom of Information request regarding Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) provision, I received a generic response without detail on content.

Shortly afterwards, I received a text notification that my child would begin an RSHP block. Upon further enquiry, I was informed that RSHP is delivered annually.

While annual delivery confirms structured provision, serious sexual offences involving under-18s have risen significantly. Harmful sexual behaviour most commonly emerges in early adolescence. In that context, annual blocks of education, without transparent information about reinforcement throughout the year, raise reasonable questions about sufficiency.

Prevention requires clarity, consistency, and repetition proportionate to the scale of harm.

## **8. What This Petition Seeks to Address**

This petition does not call for punitive responses to children. It calls for credible, consistent, and accountable early intervention.

Rising serious sexual offences among under-18s, alongside lived evidence of minimisation and inconsistent safeguarding responses, indicate a gap between policy intention and operational reality.

Without meaningful change in how early harmful sexual behaviour is recognised and addressed, serious sexual offending among young people will continue to rise and reflect systemic as well as individual failures.