

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 10 December 2025
19th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE1995: Improve support for victims of spiking

Introduction

Petitioner Catherine Anne McKay

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to develop a multi-agency approach to investigating spiking incidents to ensure victims are given access to appropriate testing and incidents are investigated robustly.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1995>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 6 December 2023.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government and Police Scotland.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from Police Scotland and the Scottish Government, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 12 January 2023.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 309 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
December 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE1995: Improve support for victims of spiking

Petitioner

Catherine Anne McKay

Date Lodged

12 January 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to develop a multi-agency approach to investigating spiking incidents to ensure victims are given access to appropriate testing and incidents are investigated robustly.

Previous action

I have contacted Clare Adamson MSP.

Background information

We strongly believe a member of my family was spiked. The police officers who came to our house ruled there was insufficient evidence to investigate so therefore did not complete a urine drug test. If this had been done, we would have been able to establish with certainty if she was spiked. We pursued CCTV footage ourselves and pieced together a timeline of events. She was discovered unresponsive in the street by passers by and an ambulance was called. She was taken to the Royal Infirmary where several medical staff commented that it looked like she had been spiked but no drugs test was completed and police were not informed. She feels failed by a system that makes assumptions and judges a victim before investigating a potential crime. She would not have contacted the police if she did not believe with some certainty that she had been spiked. The police involvement or lack of made a traumatic incident worse.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1995 on 6 December 2023

The Convener: Our next continued petition is PE1995, on improved support for victims of spiking, which was lodged by Catherine Anne McKay. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to develop a multi-agency approach to investigating spiking incidents to ensure that victims are given access to appropriate testing and that incidents are investigated robustly.

We are joined for our consideration of the petition by our parliamentary colleague Clare Adamson, who joins us online—indeed, she has been faithfully with us throughout all our proceedings so far. Good morning, Clare. I will come back to you in a second.

We last considered the petition on 22 March, when we agreed to write to the Scottish Government and Police Scotland. Police Scotland has confirmed that victims who report a suspected spiking incident will always be asked to provide a urine sample. However, a sample will not be collected if such a report is made outwith the 14-day forensic window or the victim does not wish to provide a sample. Senior investigating officers have been appointed within each territorial police division to act as points of contact for all spiking-related matters and investigations.

The Scottish Government's response highlights operation precept, which is the name for a national response to spiking that includes guidance for officers and staff. It states that Police Scotland also has a spiking information toolkit, which includes guidance and information for the licensed trade. The response notes that there is no single test that can determine whether a person has been spiked, and that it is not possible to determine whether drugs found as part of any test were taken by the individual or given to them against their knowledge or will. It concludes by noting that a further round-table meeting is due to take place with operational partners.

Lastly, SPICe—the Scottish Parliament's independent information centre—has produced a summary of the round-table discussion on the topic of drink and needle spiking that was held by the Education, Children and Young People Committee in January 2022. That summary has been included in colleagues' meeting pack.

Before I invite committee members to comment on further actions that we might take in the light of the evidence that we have received, I offer Clare Adamson the opportunity to make some comments.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak on this important subject. The petition has my full support. Ms McKay previously contacted my office, and I raised her case with Police Scotland. She has my admiration for the way that she has approached the issue after such a harrowing incident for her family.

We know that there is a correlation between spiking and sexual offences, and we know the systemic barriers that people face in reporting such crimes. Those are wider cultural issues, which are typically rooted in the tacit societal acceptance of both violence and misogyny. The petition does not speak to those harmful cultural

norms, but it is those attitudes that drive the inequity that have made such incidents troublingly commonplace.

As policy makers, we must recognise the areas in which we can make an immediate and tangible difference. Other barriers will still exist to reporting those incidents, but confidence in those incidents being investigated should not be one of them. Victims should feel confident that their complaints will be treated with the utmost seriousness. They need to know that their voices will be heard and that their experiences will be compassionately handled and rigorously investigated. That is not the current position, as demonstrated by the experience of the McKay family. Too many people are hesitant to bring cases forward; our Parliament has an opportunity to change that narrative.

In cases of suspected spiking, I share the belief that appropriate testing should be standard, because we know that the hours following the incident are critical. Further, victims should be directed to holistic emotional support. People in such situations will always feel scared and isolated, and supporting their mental wellbeing is crucial. Promoting that support more widely will encourage more people to relay their experiences so that the crimes can be investigated and perpetrators will feel the full legal scrutiny for their actions. No one who commits those heinous crimes should feel safe and their actions should not go unpunished. No one who suffers because of those crimes should feel that their voice is dismissed.

I thank the committee once again for allowing me to speak and convey my appreciation for Catherine Anne McKay and for her dedicated advocacy on behalf of her family. Their work will make no difference to their experience and the outcome of it, but it may ensure that no other victim or family are left feeling that incredible injustice.

The Convener: Thank you very much for that testimony on behalf of your constituent and in support of the petition; it is much appreciated, Ms Adamson.

Colleagues, we have had an opportunity to consider various responses to the petition. Do you have any comments or suggestions as to how we might proceed?

Fergus Ewing: I thought that the responses were comprehensive, particularly that from the police. It is obvious that the police take the matter very seriously. I will not expand on it, but I thought that they offered a comprehensive reply, for which I am grateful. Nonetheless, Clare Adamson's point about testing being standard—which the police say is the approach that they take—is the correct principal approach. Therefore, there are a few questions on which I would like to establish the police's position in view of the responses that we have had.

First, the committee should write to the police to ask whether it keeps a record of instances in which a urine test was conducted, when it was refused by the victim or when it was not practically possible. The police refer to instances in which a test was not practically possible or in which it was refused. Secondly, we should ask whether the police can compare those records, if available, with the number of reported incidents of suspected spiking. Thirdly, how does it ensure that the operation precept guidance is understood and followed by police officers across Scotland, so that there is a uniform, routine approach and that testing is standard?

We could also write to the Scottish Government to ask for an update on its round-table meeting with operational partners, as noted in its submission of 1 June. In addition, we could ask how the Government is engaging with pub owners as part of its work to tackle spiking and broader safeguarding regulations for the night-time industry. Inconsistencies in approach by individual pubs due to a lack of specific regulation was raised during the committee's round-table session. Lastly, has the Scottish Government given consideration to making spiking a specific offence? That suggestion was also made during the committee's round-table discussion.

The Convener: All those suggestions are sensible and arise out of the evidence that we have received. Colleagues, do you have anything else that you wish to suggest? Are we happy to proceed on the basis of Mr Ewing's recommendations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We will keep the petition open. I thank Catherine Anne McKay and Clare Adamson for their work. We will take forward the suggestions that have been made by the committee.

Annexe C: Written submissions

Police Scotland submission of 8 January 2024

PE1995/D: Improve support for victims of spiking

I refer to your correspondence of 8 December 2023, addressed to the Parliament and Government Liaison at Police Scotland, seeking information on the above petition to improve support for victims of spiking.

I note the points raised in relation to the petition and I hope you will find the following information helpful.

- **The Committee is keen to know if Police Scotland keeps a record of instances in which a urine sample test was conducted, refused by the victim or not practically possible.**

Police Scotland monitors all occurrences of Spiking and maintains management data to identify trends and monitor the progress of investigations, including the progress of forensic examinations. This management data allows Police Scotland to identify if forensic samples have been obtained, refused or not obtained for other reasons

- **The Committee is keen to know whether Police Scotland can compare those records, if available, with the number of reported incidents of suspected spiking.**

In terms of reported incidents, recorded crimes and the number of forensic samples submitted, current management data does allow for comparative analysis.

- **The Committee is keen to know how Police Scotland ensures that Precept guidance is understood and followed by police officers across Scotland.**

Police Scotland have developed and circulated a comprehensive Investigative Strategy to provide guidance and direction to all staff responding to and investigating incidents of Spiking.

Senior Investigating Officers (SIOs) have been appointed within each territorial Police Division to act as Divisional Single Points of Contact (SPOC) for all Spiking related matters and investigations.

All Spiking investigations are reviewed or overseen by a SIO and, as with all crimes, they will ensure the quality of investigation meets the required guidance and standards, addressing any learning on an ongoing basis.

There is a monthly Operation Precept forum where SIOs attend to discuss any trends, issues or local matters of note, which assists with oversight and continuous improvement at an organisational level.

Police Scotland continues to take all reports of Spiking seriously and recognises the impact this can have on our communities. There are clear protocols in place to

ensure full and thorough investigations are carried out in all reported incidents and our recently launched Police Scotland Violence Against Women Strategy provides that we will continue to monitor occurrences of Spiking to allow early identification of trends and facilitate early intervention. The welfare of potential victims of suspected Spiking incidents is always our primary concern and we continue to work with partners to raise awareness and provide support for anyone affected by such incidents.

Scottish Government submission of 12 January 2024

PE1995/E: Improve support for victims of spiking

Thank you for your letter of 8 December in which you requested a written response from the Scottish Government to a number of points raised during the Committee's most recent consideration of Petition [PE1995: Improve support for victims of spiking](#).

Since our last response to the Committee on 1 June 2023, the Roundtable has met one further time. A meeting planned in October 2023 to discuss a potential pilot initiative being driven by The Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) within universities during the festive period was postponed due to timing issues, although a written update from members was requested and thereafter circulated to members for awareness prior to the festive period. The Roundtable is scheduled to meet again in early February 2024.

Since the last Roundtable in June 2023 a range of activity and initiatives are being progressed by the Scottish Government and operational partners including additional action required to increase vigilance during the summer/festival period, students returning to university in September and in the run up to the festive period. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Police Scotland's refreshed Bystander training to incorporate gender based violence issues including Ask for Angela Awareness, Spiking Toolkits and any other appropriate material.
- A significant amount of work has been done within the licensed trade in terms of training, protocols and provision to ensure those spaces are safeguarded.
- There is also an ongoing programme of work carried out around training, prevention, providing support, response and campaigns within Scottish universities to ensure information for students is accessible and that they understand what spiking is and how they can get help.
- Scottish Government officials met with The Night Time Industries Association (NTIA), Police Scotland and interested Scottish universities in November 2023, regarding a student pilot of anti-spiking "pods" – a compact kit containing anti-spiking products. That meeting was a positive one, and further discussions are now taking place between NTIA and institutions with a hope that pilots can run early in 2024.

In your letter you highlight the roundtable session on drink and needle spiking hosted by the Education, Children and Young People's Committee. If my understanding is correct that session took place in January 2022 and as the Committee may be aware a number of those individuals and organisations that provided evidence at that time are members of the roundtable format, where the issues of safety and awareness raising form a key part of the discussions.

The successful coordination of communication and information sharing between Roundtable members in this format enables partners to be much better placed with regard to prevention and providing guidance on how to report and support incidents of spiking. The [Safer.Scot](#) webpages are updated on a regular basis by the Roundtable membership and are used as part of all our awareness raising.

With regard to making spiking a specific offence, Spiking can already be prosecuted under the common law offence of drugging, which is a broad offence covering all types of drink spiking. There is also a more specific statutory offence contained in section 11 of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009. I can confirm that we have no plans at this time to create a specific criminal offence of spiking however we keep all laws under review.

I would also refer the Committee to the official report from First Minister's Questions prior to recess – [Meeting of the Parliament: 21/12/2023 | Scottish Parliament Website](#) – where spiking was raised.

I hope that the information set out in this letter is helpful to the Committee.

Violence Against Women and Girls Justice Unit

Scottish Government written submission, 2 December 2025

PE1995/F: Improve support for victims of spiking

Since the last [update](#) in January 2024 the Minister for Victims and Community Safety has chaired a further six Multi-Agency Roundtables on spiking (most recently in November) with partners from policing, health, victims' organisations and prosecution, as well as representatives from colleges and universities, community safety, and the night-time economy sector.

The Committee will be aware that the Roundtable's objective is to discuss and better understand the structure and prevalence of spiking in Scotland and to ensure that the response is robust and effective. Partners meet regularly to ensure that collective efforts to tackle incidents of spiking remain coordinated and effective; and that we consider what more we could and should be doing as part of our wider policy commitment. More recently we have extended membership to include officials from the Home Office to share good practice and ensure consistency in our public messaging.

NHS / Police Scotland Reporting Pathway

This year we have seen significant progress in addressing the reporting pathway between police and health professionals. We have now ensured that there is a

consistent national approach to ensure that individuals who present to A&E receive clear and uniform advice regarding the roles of health professionals and the police when they report incidents of spiking which will reassure victims about the service they will receive. This approach has been endorsed by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine.

Furthermore, from October 2025, changes have been introduced to the NHS digital system which will allow us to record those who present to A&E as potential victims of spiking. This will provide invaluable data on previous unrecorded incidents and will allow us to better understand the extent to which these lead on to formal police reporting.

We are also looking at a potential awareness raising campaign next year and how we might utilise the data that will emerge from the updated NHS system to inform future work.

More details can be found in this NHS24 [News Release](#).

UK Government Crime and Policing Bill – Spiking Proposal

Acknowledging the [spiking proposals](#) in the UK Government's Crime and Policing Bill, there are already comprehensive laws in place in Scotland that allow Police Scotland to effectively tackle perpetrators of this crime, which carries a maximum penalty of up to five years, or a fine, or both.

As Committee members will be aware, Spiking can be prosecuted under the common law offence of drugging, which is a broad offence covering all types of drink spiking, the common law offence of assault, depending on the individual facts and circumstances of the case, and also the more specific statutory offence contained in section 11 of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 called administering a substance for sexual purposes.

The Scottish Government continues to engage regularly with UK Government officials and to assess the need for a similar approach in Scotland to take account of our different criminal justice framework as the UK Bill progresses.

Awareness Raising Activity over the Festive Period

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety recently wrote to MSPs and Scottish MPs to outline a number of our most recent initiatives to raise awareness of the dangers of spiking as we approach the festive period and it may be helpful to note the below activity that is taking place.

Our focus remains on supporting and reassuring the public around reporting incidents of spiking and members of the Roundtable have planned activity over the festive period which includes universities continuing to work closely with their students' associations to provide information and resources for students – having support available to students who report a spiking incident and focussing on prevention initiatives.

Spike Aware UK have attended various universities and colleges for events to help raise awareness of spiking and will continue to do so in December. They will also be

joining British Transport Police officers on Thursday 11th December in the Glasgow area and Friday 19th December in Edinburgh to engage with members of the public travelling into the cities for festive events.

Police Scotland are working with partners in relation to prevention, response and reassurance. There are a number of plans over the festive period that include, but not limited to:

High Visibility patrols – in the night-time economy, transport hubs, queues etc. and working with street pastors in Glasgow to incorporate safety plans within their Safer City Centre plans particularly over the weekend deployments.

Licensing checks – Through connections with the licence trade, Police Scotland have conducted engagement with licensed premises across the country providing guidance to venue staff on incident response and reporting procedures. Also focussing on identifying vulnerability and supporting individuals in keeping them safe.

Bystander Training – with licensed premises particularly city centre hotspots and popular premises such as student pubs and clubs. The inputs have been adapted to specifically include messaging around spiking and best practices for venues when an incident is reported to them. Five venues in Edinburgh have already received training with other venues identified to be rolled out to during spiking intensification week (w/c 8 December) and beyond.

Clear public messaging – Police Scotland are ensuring that the focus is not only on victim behaviours but also those behaviours displayed by perpetrators and to encourage reporting of any concerns or suspicious activities by one or a group of individuals to report to police, venue, or security staff.

There is further information available on the [Student Safety Hub](#) on Police Scotland's website which gives essential advice and useful contacts/signposting on safe nights out etc.

Partners who work in the night-time economy and hospitality sector want individuals to feel safe to report any suspected incidents of spiking to venue staff and to know their report will be taken seriously and that they will be cared for by staff. We want to reassure the public that Police Scotland will handle each case sympathetically in recognition that incidents of spiking are being reported by potential victims of criminality.

Further information on where to get support and how to report can be found on our [Safer Scotland](#) webpages – which brings together resources developed by Roundtable members to inform and support the public around the subject of spiking.

Violence Against Women and Girls Justice Unit

Criminal Justice Division