

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 28 January 2026
3rd Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

PE2107: Use more money recovered from the proceeds of crime to support community-based charities that train animals to assist in the detection of drugs

Introduction

Petitioner Kevin Craigens on behalf of The Shetland Times Ltd

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to direct more public funding, recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act, to support charities, such as Dogs Against Drugs, which are vital to their communities and play an integral part in the seizure of drugs and criminal assets.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2107>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 18 June 2025.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
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 a new written submission from the Scottish Government, which is 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 28 August 2024.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 21 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
January 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2107: Use more money recovered from the proceeds of crime to support community-based charities that train animals to assist in the detection of drugs

Petitioner

Kevin Craigens on behalf of The Shetland Times Ltd

Date Lodged

19 June 2024

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to direct more public funding, recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act, to support charities, such as Dogs Against Drugs, which are vital to their communities and play an integral part in the seizure of drugs and criminal assets.

Background information

Dogs Against Drugs has played an integral part in the seizure of drugs and cash which was destined for Shetland. Other organisations like Orkney Drugs Dogs could also benefit from expanded funding which come from the proceeds of crime.

Information from the Police Scotland Divisional Commander revealed that Dogs Against Drugs had a direct involvement in the seizure of £360,414 of drugs and £14,638 of cash in 2023 across 160 operations. In the previous year, £332,391 of drugs and £28,858 in cash were seized.

As well as detecting illegal and deadly drugs, the charity's dog handlers visit schools across the isles to teach children about the dangers of drugs.

Dogs Against Drugs are now facing financial difficulty having fallen short of its annual £120,000 running costs by around a quarter. It has let go of one of its three handlers to save costs, meaning fewer opportunities to detect harmful drugs.

Distributing the proceeds of crime more fairly could help reduce these financial pressures.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2107 on 18 June 2025

The Convener: Because I see that our MSP colleague Beatrice Wishart has joined us, I will switch to the petition with which she is concerned, which is PE2107, on using more money that is recovered from the proceeds of crime to support community-based charities that train animals to assist in the detection of drugs. The petition, which was lodged by Kevin Craigens on behalf of *The Shetland Times*, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to direct more public funding that is recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to support charities such as Dogs Against Drugs, which are vital to their communities and play an integral part in the seizure of drugs and criminal assets.

We are joined by Beatrice Wishart—good morning, Ms Wishart. Of course, we also have our man in Crufts on the committee, Mr Golden.

We last considered the petition on 9 October 2024, when we agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs. The committee sought further detail on the work undertaken to consider longer-term options for funding charities that play a vital role in the seizure of drugs and criminal assets.

In her response on 11 November, the cabinet secretary reiterated the Scottish Government's commitment to progress a fairer funding approach for the third sector and stated that her officials continue to work across Government to identify potential long-term funding solutions for charities similar to Dogs Against Drugs. However, the response highlighted challenges in delivering long-term funding in the current economic context, as any commitments would reduce flexibility in future budgets. The cabinet secretary made reference to some work in progress that is aimed at improving the clarity and consistency of grant-making practices across Government, including developing a consistent baseline for third-sector funding.

Before the committee considers any options that it might have, I ask Beatrice Wishart whether she would like to offer us some thoughts.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Thank you for inviting me to the committee.

I think that members all know the background of the community-led charity Dogs Against Drugs, which was started over 20 years ago. It aims to act as a deterrent and it also has an educational purpose.

I am very grateful for the engagement with the justice secretary, and the charity was grateful to receive £30,000 last year, which helped it over a financial difficulty for that year. However, year on year, the charity is struggling with funds to try to offer the service, which Police Scotland has said is very valuable. *The Shetland Times* petition was quite narrow in suggesting that cashback for communities should be extended more to the communities that have such charities, but I think that Dogs Against Drugs is a unique charity. It provides a public service that is obviously valued by Police Scotland but also by the community.

I suggest that it is long past time, given the charity's history and that we would not want to see the loss of drugs dogs in the community, that the Government found a more suitable funding model to ensure that its very valuable work continues. For example, the value of drugs seized in 2024 over 12 months was £554,000—that was all in our community, which has 23,000 people.

The Convener: That is a significant sum of money.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome *The Shetland Times* campaign. The member has highlighted the value of those seizures. One way to combat the drug issue is through the efforts of Dogs Against Drugs and the specialist training it offers. I do not know what breeds are there and whether they are beagles, short-haired pointers or German shepherds, but they are all fantastic dogs that can help to tackle the scourge of drug problems.

The committee should follow up with the Scottish Government to ask for clarity on the specific work that it has done to improve grant-making practices, including progressing the development of a consistent baseline for third sector funding, and what practical actions the Government is taking. It might be an overstretch to ring fence those funds entirely, but priority should perhaps be given to third sector organisations such as Dogs Against Drugs.

The Convener: Thank you. I see that you have paws all over the petition.

I quite liked the phrase “long past time”, which Ms Wishart used. I think that after 20 years without a sensible funding model, “long past time” is a perfectly reasonable description for the fact that we have not resolved the issue. I agree that we cannot hypothecate the funding, but I cannot imagine that a funding model would cost us more than £554,000. Clearly, proceeds are being raised and it ought to be possible.

Ms Wishart, is there anything further that you would like to say to the committee?

Beatrice Wishart: The latest figures that I have show that it costs around £130,000 to operate Dogs Against Drugs each year. The charity is not asking for £130,000 but for some kind of sustainable model going forward. It raises funds through its corporate work. It has bingo evenings and raffles and so on, which I am not sure is a sensible way to continue. Although it is well supported by the community, that is not a sensible way to support the police with deterrence and the prevention of drugs coming into the island.

The Convener: I would not like to think that the nation's security relied on a bingo drive. We could make some of those representations and incorporate them into what we send to the Scottish Government. The charity is obviously a very successful one that is doing great and good work. It is looking for a model—as we have said, it is long past time for that, as it has sought and been assured that something might be done. I think that we would like to see something actually being done.

Do members agree to keep the petition open on that basis?

Members indicated agreement.

Annexe C: Written submission

Scottish Government written submission, 28 July 2025

PE2107/E: Use more money recovered from the proceeds of crime to support community-based charities that train animals to assist in the detection of drugs

Money recovered through proceeds of crime legislation is paid into the Scottish Consolidated Fund and decisions on how this is disbursed is a matter for the Scottish Ministers. Currently, funds are committed to fund the CashBack for Communities programme. POCA receipts are, by their very nature, unpredictable and it is not possible to forecast the level of receipts that may be recovered in any given year.

We greatly value the strategic role the third sector plays in enabling the transformation and delivery of services. We recognise that the Sector needs clarity and stability to secure its resilience and to grow its capacity.

As part of the [Programme for Government 2025-26](#), we have committed to delivering a Fairer Funding pilot that provides multi-year funding to third sector organisations, prioritising those that deliver frontline services and tackle child poverty.

The pilot consists of government grants to third sector organisations totalling over £130m over 2025-26 and 2026-27. Eligibility for inclusion in the pilot was judged against agreed criteria across all government portfolios. It was not possible for third sector organisations to apply to take part in the pilot.

The organisations were selected in Autumn 2024 to receive two-year funding, based on them meeting either one or both of the following objectives in the Programme for Government: National organisation providing essential, ongoing, frontline support to communities across Scotland; and organisations which directly deliver against the Scottish Government's priority of eradicating child poverty.

The pilot will support projects in areas including health, education, justice, poverty and culture, and is the first step towards mainstreaming multi-year funding agreements across the third sector, and balances our ambitions against the challenging financial situation. Our commitment to increasing multi-year funding has also been welcomed by participating third sector organisations and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations.

We will be undertaking a robust evaluation of the pilot, and are committed to delivering an interim assessment by May 2026. This work will help us to identify any impacts, and build the case for further multi-year funding arrangements.

The letter asks for clarity about specific work to improve grant making processes. We are continuing to improve grant-making practices and develop a consistent approach to manage grants effectively across all grant funding. At the end of 2023, a dedicated Grants Capability and Assurance team was established to drive consistency, effectiveness, and efficiency across all grant-making activity. The team has since

created a Grant Improvement Group, which brings together key stakeholders across the Scottish Government to coordinate improvements in grant policy and operations.

In line with wider efficiency reforms and to improve consistency of grant management, the introduction of system-led capabilities targeting the front end of the grant management process are currently being explored and piloted within the Scottish Government. This work is still at an early stage.

The Committee is also aware that the Scottish Government has previously provided funding to Dogs Against Drugs through the Serious Organised Crime Community Grant Scheme.

The charity was awarded £10,000 for a specific time-limited project relating to fast-parcels. The project was aimed at detecting and identifying controlled drugs sent to post offices and distribution centres within Shetland, preventing these drugs from reaching communities. The funding available through the Serious Organised Crime Community Grant Scheme has now been fully committed.

In December 2024, Dogs Against Drugs was provided with a one-off grant of £30,000 from the money ringfenced for SOC-related projects. That funding stream has now been exhausted.

I am aware that Police Scotland provides valuable support to the charity which enables it to support officers to remove illegal drugs from Shetland and raise awareness of the harm they cause. Whether additional support could be provided by Police Scotland is an operational matter and it may be that the charity could raise this issue with Police Scotland directly, if it hasn't already done so.

Organised Crime and International Justice Cooperation Unit