

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that Professor Alexis Jay's comments on grooming gang inquiries were misrepresented during a debate on the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill.

In the Stage 3 of the Victims Witnesses and Justice Reform Bill replying to Mr Kerr's amendment that the new post of Victims Commissioner should carry out research into child sexual abuse the Justice Secretary raised awareness of the work led by Professor Alexis Jay, who now sits on our National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group.

Ms Constance noted specifically that Prof Jay had been the chair of an independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales and had put on record in the past that in regard to child sexual abuse and exploitation "people should just get on with it".

Professor Jay minuted at the Strategic Group's meeting in October, that the quote was correct, and was from January and not made in relation to the amendment or the Victims Bil.

Ms Constance did not state that Prof Jay was speaking directly about the amendment, she made a general point on Prof Jay's views on calls for inquiries and that she also wanted to get on with the work needed to protect our children.

18 Nov – Urgent question from Liam Kerr on Alexis Jay being “misrepresented”.

18 Nov – Herald speaks to Talyor who accuses Scottish Government of playing party politics and calls for an independent look at files to tell the truth.

18 Nov – Record, Herald, Express report CabSec Justice ‘mised’ MSPs ‘urged to issue public apology after ‘misrepresenting’ Alexis Jay position during Victim’s Bill debate.

14 Nov – Scottish Daily Mail reports victim Fiona Goddard (one of four survivors who resigned from the UK grooming gang inquiry in Oct over Jess Phillip’s role) claims Pakistani “grooming gangs” in England took her to Scotland to be raped. Says she “would like to meet” the FM.

14 Nov – Scottish Conservatives launch campaign on their website for a Scottish grooming gang inquiry.

13 Nov – Letter from Glasgow ‘grooming gang’ victim ‘Taylor’ to FM expressing disappointment in Police response and calling for an inquiry. The Record reports Joanie Reid saying rejecting inquiry would be “moral failure” and “SNP and SG [...] denying [...] problem in Scotland”, and Russell Finlay who calls on FM to “do right thing” and “stop making excuses” and bring forth an inquiry.

TOP LINES

Protecting children from harm is an absolute priority for me and my Government. Sexual abuse and exploitation are abhorrent crimes with devastating impacts on the victims and their families.

- It is absolutely untrue to suggest the Scottish Government doesn’t take the shocking and abhorrent abuse of children seriously. We are fully aware of the devastating impacts such abuse has on victims and their families.
- That is why we formed the expert National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group which brings together key services and expert stakeholders including Police Scotland and Professor Alexis Jay to inform and strengthen our collective action against this horrendous form of abuse.
- It is uniquely positioned to assess current challenges and make informed recommendations to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Updating MSPs

The First Minister and I will be meeting Police Scotland next week when they will brief us on their progress.

- We had planned that following that we would offer to relevant spokespeople a similar briefing and plans to arrange that are already progressing.
- In addition, the Minister for Parliamentary Business last week confirmed the Children and Young People Minister will give a statement to Parliament before recess and also noted that further engagement will be offered to MSPs such as a roundtable.

SURVIVORS - 'TAYLOR' LETTER AND FIONA GODDARD

I want to thank 'Taylor' and other victims for their bravery in coming forward and sharing their horrific experience.

- While I cannot comment on individual cases, I am clear that it is vital that anyone who has been the victim of sexual harm comes forward to report this to the Police.
- I want to assure victims that Police Scotland take these crimes very seriously, as demonstrated by their success in delivering justice in a number of significant child sexual exploitation investigations.

CALL FOR A GROOMING GANG INQUIRY – EXISTING WORK

The First Minister has been clear that the Government is prepared to give every consideration to a grooming gang inquiry in Scotland if we feel it is necessary, and work is underway by Police Scotland to explore cases as part of that scrutiny.

- The recently published minutes of the Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group in October illustrate the scale of the work being done by Police Scotland:
 - Police Scotland has created a timeline of action on child sexual exploitation since 2012, and reviewed the actions taken - including training of officers and specialist roles in investigations. This concluded that there were no present day large-scale investigations known to Police Scotland that meet the definition of group-based abuse as outlined in Baroness Casey' audit in England and Wales. But the group also make clear that **[QUOTE] “there is no room for complacency on this most important issue”**.

- Police Scotland has also reviewed five previous relevant large-scale investigations and reported that the expected investigative standards were applied to those inquiries.

STRATEGIC GROUP

The national multi-agency Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group is considering previous inquiries, evidence and practices across social work, education, police and healthcare to prioritise and agree further actions and recommendations for national improvement and reform.

- The Group last met in October, following an extraordinary meeting in July to discuss the findings of the Casey Audit, and will meet again 25 November.
- A key focus of the Group's current activity is to recommend improvements to workforce education and training to ensure professionals are better equipped to identify and respond when children are at risk or experiencing abuse.
- The group are also working to improve data collection, and give us a better understanding the prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in Scotland.
- Scottish Government officials and partners are also taking forward approaches to scrutinise practice on child sexual abuse-based harm in Scotland and will engage the Group and local leadership on this work
- The Group have also considered mandatory reporting of child abuse and together these efforts are integral to informing any future decision on whether a similar operation is required in Scotland.
- Furthermore, the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry currently taking place is one of the widest ranging ever undertaken in Scotland, and includes an extensive review of child protection policy and practice in Scotland.

CONSERVATIVE AMEND TO VWJR BILL NOT ESTABLISHING AN INQUIRY

Legislating through the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill was not the right route to address this most serious of issue.

- Liam Kerr's lodged amendment would have required the victims and witnesses commissioner - who has not yet been appointed - to undertake research to consider whether any further action was required.
- Because the commissioner is not in post, that is not something that could happen today. So it is a complete and utter distortion to say that there was a grooming gangs inquiry proposal in front of the Parliament that was not supported.
- There is already meaningful action progressing right now, through the national multi-agency Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group - which is best placed to assess and make recommendations for action to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation, rather than a Victims Commissioner.

MINUTES OF JULY MEETING SAYING "NO EVIDENCE OF ISSUES IN SCOTLAND"

The actual minute of the Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group meeting in July of this year, which Russell Findlay quoted last week at FMQs, says [QUOTE]:

- *"it was noted that while there is no current evidence that the issues identified in Casey are presenting in the same way in Scotland, **there is no room for complacency and the further work that had been discussed will provide a more comprehensive picture**".*

SURVIVOR VOICE

I recognise the vital role of survivors to inform our work to tackle Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. It is important we do this sensitively and with the utmost respect and consideration for those that have already suffered so much.

- The Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic group recognises the importance of survivor voice to inform their work, and its Chairs recently met with the Cross Party Group for Adult Survivors to ensure

the survivor voice is represented in their work with a further meeting due to take place in December.

- Survivors were represented on a working group that has identified opportunities to improve workforce skills and training on child sexual abuse and exploitation, and the group will continue to consider how the experience of survivors informs and shape our collective efforts.
- Our services also continue to support child victims and witnesses through the Bairns' Hoose programme, backed by over £20 million Scottish Government investment to date. This is key to our ambition to Keep The Promise and provides children and young people a safe space to access a system of holistic support comprising child protection, recovery, health and justice services.

Official report – FMQs 13 November 2025

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con)

Taylor was a vulnerable child in local authority care in Glasgow. She should have been protected, but she was preyed upon by grooming gangs. Last night, she wrote to John Swinney, telling him that she and her friends were plied with alcohol and drugs and were sexually abused by at least 10 Pakistani men.

Taylor and other victims say that there must be a grooming gangs inquiry in Scotland. They say that it is the only way to uncover the scale of the abuse, establish why it went unchecked and ensure that it cannot continue. Will John Swinney agree to the inquiry that is being asked for by Taylor and other victims?

The First Minister (John Swinney)

First, I confirm to Russell Findlay that I have received the letter from Taylor. I express to the Parliament my admiration of her courage to speak out on such an important and very difficult subject. I am deeply saddened to hear of any cases of sexual abuse. As the Parliament knows, I have taken significant action during my term in office as a minister to ensure that the issue has been addressed.

The Government is undertaking work already through the national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group, which is looking at previous inquiries, evidence and practices to establish what further actions and recommendations are required. Police Scotland is actively reviewing current and historical child abuse investigations to determine what issues would need to be addressed in any potential inquiry. The Government has remained open to the question of a grooming gangs inquiry, but a series of steps is being taken to explore those issues at the moment.

It is vital that any accusation of criminal conduct is drawn to the attention of the police, as Police Scotland has a duty to address such complaints by making inquiries.

Russell Findlay

Taylor's social work files allegedly show that Police Scotland failed to investigate. She said:

“It made me feel sick to my stomach. It's like they didn't even bother to ask any questions. That's the bit that gets me the most, because it could have been stopped, and it never was.”

Another grooming gang victim, Fiona Goddard, was trafficked from England to Glasgow and was raped by groups of men. She said that, as far back as 2014, police in West Yorkshire were

“well aware of links to Scotland, but clearly no one bothered to investigate further.”

Victims do not trust that what happened to them will be fully investigated by organisations that they believe turned a blind eye or even engaged in a cover-up.

Has John Swinney spoken to Police Scotland about those new allegations, and does he believe that the actions of the authorities should be independently examined?

The First Minister

In relation to Taylor's case, Police Scotland has said:

"A complaint about the police was received in September 2025. The complainer was spoken to and we confirmed information had been passed to us, but since no report was made to police in reference to any crime, this complaint did not fit the criteria as a complaint about the police. The complainer was advised she should make a report to police if she had been a victim of a crime. The complainer confirmed she was happy to have the complaint closed with this advice."

I put that on the record simply to say that it is vital that anybody who believes that they have been the victim of a sexual crime comes forward to the police and makes a complaint. My expectation as First Minister is that such a complaint would be taken deadly seriously by the police and would be investigated.

On the question of trust in how such matters are handled, we have seen examples of extensive prosecutions for sexual misconduct and childhood sexual abuse in Scotland. A range of prosecutions have been successfully taken forward by the police and the Crown, which are determined to address the very serious issues that Mr Findlay puts to me. I hope that that gives victims of such crimes confidence that, if they come forward, their concerns will be properly and fully investigated by Police Scotland, which would be my expectation as First Minister.

Russell Findlay

Any attempt to shift the blame on to victims for how and when such crimes are reported is highly questionable. Taylor was a child. The authorities knew about the crimes at the time, on the basis of social work reports.

Of course, grooming gangs are not confined to any one community. Earlier this year, a group of white men and women were jailed for the horrific abuse of children in Glasgow. Last month, a Romanian gang was convicted of abusing 10 young women in Dundee. This is not a historical problem; it is happening today. The number of reports of online child sexual abuse made to Police Scotland has more than doubled in the past year alone.

How can John Swinney hope to stop child abuse now, when he will not support a full and fearless investigation into the industrial-scale abuse of recent years?

The First Minister

First, nothing that I am saying is about shifting the blame—I say that respectfully to the Parliament. I am simply putting on the record factual information that Police Scotland has provided to me.

My parliamentary record demonstrates that I am prepared to ensure that significant efforts are made to address abusive conduct in our society. The Scottish child abuse inquiry was sponsored under my leadership as education secretary and as Deputy

First Minister for many years, and it does vital work in making sure that the voices of victims are heard loud and clear in our society.

On the question of online child abuse, I was clear in my answer to Martin Whitfield last week in the Parliament that I want to make sure that every step that the Government and other authorities in Scotland can take to tackle online child abuse is taken. The efforts that have been made at the Gartcosh crime campus, under the auspices of Police Scotland, have been lauded around the world as an example of integrated proceedings involving multiple agencies. We aim to ensure that organised crime networks in Scotland are shattered as a consequence of our efforts. I assure Mr Findlay of our determination to carry out all that activity.

As I said to Mr Whitfield last week, we are also determined to work collaboratively to ensure that a legislative approach is in place that uses the powers of the United Kingdom—powers that the Scottish Parliament does not have—to tackle the culture of online abuse, which is attacking the very fabric of childhood in Scotland today as a consequence of the lawlessness that is perpetrated by online agencies.

Russell Findlay

The First Minister talks about his parliamentary record. That record shows that, just weeks ago, he voted against my party's attempts to instigate a grooming gangs inquiry in Scotland.

In a previous answer, the First Minister said that the national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group is looking at these issues. However, victims such as Taylor are concerned because the same authorities that failed them sit on that Government group, and they fear that it is little more than another Scottish National Party talking shop.

In July, the group discussed Baroness Casey's report on grooming gangs elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The minutes of that meeting state:

“there is no current evidence that the issues identified in Casey are presenting in the same way in Scotland”.

In the light of the available evidence, that claim is patently untrue. Does John Swinney agree that grooming gangs are a problem in Scotland, not just elsewhere?

The First Minister

Mr Findlay is not setting out properly the effect of the amendment that his colleague Liam Kerr lodged to the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, because all that that amendment would have required was the victims and witnesses commissioner, who has not yet been appointed, to undertake a report to consider whether any further action was required in that respect. Therefore, that is not something that could happen today. The commissioner would have to first be appointed and then consider whether it was appropriate to take any action, so it is a complete and utter distortion to say that there was a grooming gangs inquiry proposal in front of the Parliament that was not supported—[Interruption.]

The First Minister

The reason why I cited the action that I did is that that action is happening today. The national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group is looking at these questions, and Police Scotland is actively reviewing current and historical abuse investigations. That is happening today, in Scotland, under the direction of the Scottish Government, and we will consider the group's findings.

I reiterate the fact that the Government remains open to the question of having an inquiry into grooming gangs. However, I am satisfied that the police and our judicial system will address these issues, and we will reflect on whether any further scrutiny is required in the light of those investigations.

Official report – Urgent Question – 25 October 2025

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)

To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the recent sentencing of a grooming gang in Dundee, what urgent action it will take to establish a national task force to identify and dismantle any exploitation networks targeting children and vulnerable adults in Scotland.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance)

Protecting children and vulnerable adults from harm is an absolute priority for the Scottish Government. Police Scotland is already targeting those who abuse and exploit people, and is raising awareness so that victims are identified and can get support.

The national human trafficking unit of Police Scotland works with national and international partners to take swift and robust action to ensure that perpetrators are identified, their activities are disrupted and they are prosecuted, be they individuals or organised crime groups. That co-operation occurs at an operational level and via forums such as the serious and organised crime task force and the Police Scotland-led multi-agency tasking and delivery board.

Tackling sexual exploitation of children is also a key part of the work of the national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group, which recognises links to other forms of abuse, including child criminal exploitation. In addition, the child protection committees, through contextual safeguarding, promote practitioner support to tackle extra-familial harm.

Ash Regan

The Dundee grooming gang case proves that Scotland is not immune to organised grooming gang sexual exploitation, but I agree that Police Scotland deserves real credit for bringing the perpetrators in Dundee, and in Glasgow's beastie house case, to justice. To truly protect the vulnerable, however, we must detect the patterns of organised exploitation before the harm happens.

Police Scotland's freedom of information response and the Government's response to my recent written question expose fundamental gaps in our data systems. Police Scotland confirms that it has markers for exploitation but none for group or gang-based abuse. The interim vulnerable persons database has an at-risk marker for child sexual exploitation, but it cannot flag when that abuse is organised or networked. If we cannot even identify grooming gang patterns, how can we dismantle them? Will the Government now commit to an independent data collection audit as part of the work of a national task force, in order to close those dangerous data gaps?

Angela Constance

Right now, Police Scotland is reviewing previous investigations, as well as current cases, of the nature that the member is rightly concerned about. She is correct to say that there is absolutely never any room for complacency.

One advantage of having a single police force is that it has one vulnerability database, which is able to feed into local and national child protection procedures and to make links with the national intelligence database. Police Scotland also works with the United Kingdom-wide National Crime Agency.

The member has made some specific points around data. I will raise them with Police Scotland, as well as with the Scottish Police Authority, which I will meet tomorrow morning.

Ash Regan

I thank the cabinet secretary for that commitment.

Tackling exploitation means tackling the demand that fuels it. Every grooming network and every trafficking chain exist because there is a market, and that market is sustained by the unchallenged demand to buy sex.

If Scotland is to protect our most vulnerable women and children, we cannot just accept that people are vulnerable to poverty, coercion, addiction and grooming. We must target the demand that drives the profits from their exploitation. People are not products to be traded. Victims are trapped in cycles of exploitation through organised crime, online exploitation and prostitution. We need to tackle the root cause through a clear legal deterrent that makes the purchase of sex a crime.

Will the Government commit to criminalising sex buying through my unbuyable bill, in order to reduce that demand and dismantle the market for those heinous exploitation networks across Scotland?

Angela Constance

It is important that we tackle the demand for the sexual exploitation of women and vulnerable adults. The member is correct to make the link between human trafficking and prostitution.

The member will be familiar with operation begonia. It has taken a victim-centred, trauma-informed approach that recognises women who are involved in prostitution as victims of exploitation and understands the importance of signposting them to appropriate support organisations, while also challenging and deterring men's demand.

It is important that the Government gives any member's bill full and careful consideration. I am conscious that the member's bill is at committee stage, and I will look with interest at the deliberations of committee members on it. Our focus on the bill will be informed not just by the committee but by the implementation of operation begonia.

The member might also be interested to know that the next phase of our work with Police Scotland is to focus on tackling the online aspects of commercial sexual exploitation.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP)

I, too, welcome the efforts of Police Scotland in bringing the perpetrators to justice, and the courage and fortitude of the victims during the case.

Will the cabinet secretary set out what support is offered to victims of such heinous crimes during and after criminal trials?

Angela Constance

The Scottish Government is identifying more victims and ensuring that more victims of human trafficking are getting the support that they require. I also thank all those in the justice system who have brought the case to a conclusion. I agree with Mr FitzPatrick that the victims have shown enormous bravery by coming forward.

In terms of funding, we are providing necessary assistance for victims to begin rebuilding their lives. Between 2025 and 2027, we are providing £32 million to 23 organisations through the victim-centred approach fund, including support for victims of human trafficking and exploitation.

To take another example, we have embedded two victim navigators into the national human trafficking unit to assist Police Scotland in identifying and supporting victims of trafficking and exploitation to ensure that victims are treated with fairness and compassion from the very point of identification. Those victim navigators are providing on-going support for those involved in this particular case.

Other support is of course available through the national health service and the bairns' hoose programme.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)

The cabinet secretary is aware of the five Romanian criminals serving long sentences—and rightly so—with the victims aged from as young as 16 to 30. Given what the cabinet secretary has said previously in relation to early release of prisoners and the complicated question of foreign nationals serving time in Scottish jails, can I have her assurance that those criminals will serve their full sentence in a Scottish jail, as they rightly should?

Angela Constance

I want to reassure the member on two fronts. First, Police Scotland is of course in close contact with the criminal justice system in Romania. Secondly, any early release or return of foreign nationals to their own jurisdiction is currently restricted to short-term prisoners under very specific restrictions—and there are statutory exclusions.

The member will be well aware that the return and deportation of foreign nationals is an issue for the Home Office. The Scottish Prison Service fits into that process in

that it co-operates with the Home Office, but that is in and around the transfer of prisoners. However, there is a scheme in statute to facilitate that in Scottish legislation.

As the member perhaps recalls, I will be laying a further statutory instrument in this regard to enable certain groups of foreign nationals to return earlier, perhaps, to their own country, but that is specific to those serving shorter sentences, as opposed to hefty, long-term custodial ones. Those matters relate to extradition and treaty-by-treaty arrangements country to country.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

I tried to amend the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill to set up a Scottish grooming gangs inquiry, but Scottish National Party and Green MSPs voted against that amendment, so it fell. In light of this shocking case, and having had a chance to reflect—[Interruption.]

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone)

Let us hear Mr Kerr.

Liam Kerr

In light of this shocking case, and having had a chance to reflect on the huge disappointment that was expressed by so many people after that vote, does the cabinet secretary now think that rejecting such an inquiry was a missed opportunity? To enable lessons to be learned and to prevent future abuse, will she now order a Scottish grooming gangs inquiry?

Angela Constance

It is important that we focus on the facts. As Mr Kerr knows—because I specifically wrote to him on the matter—the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill was not the right route. As he well knows, the Government has always been clear that we are prepared to give every consideration to a grooming gangs inquiry if that is assessed as a necessity.

Police Scotland is actively involved right now in reviewing investigations; right now, the child sexual abuse and exploitation national group is working with Police Scotland and people such as Professor Alexis Jay; and right now, the group is reviewing the very important work that was done by Baroness Casey in her audit.

What Mr Kerr proposed would certainly not be analogous with or the same as a national inquiry; his amendment proposed that the victims and witnesses commissioner—who is still to be established and still to be recruited—do some research at some point further down the line. If there is any reflection to be done, it should be done by Mr Kerr, who has been completely disingenuous about the integrity of the majority of members of the Parliament, has played politics with child abuse and has dangerously gaslit other members of the Parliament. That is a disgrace.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)

I, too, thank the police officers who have investigated what is an absolutely heinous crime. The offenders ruthlessly preyed on the weak, entrapping and abusing their victims, with lifelong consequences. Since the sentencing, members of the online hard right have been trying to link this incident to others involving migrants in Dundee, painting a picture of a broad criminal conspiracy tied together by race. We should all be clear that they are doing that without evidence, without concern for victims and without care for my city.

The questions posed on systematic grooming should be fully answered by the Government. What evidence has it seen? What questions is it asking of Police Scotland? How will it update the Parliament on those matters? Does the cabinet secretary recognise that tackling such crimes is all the harder in Dundee, given that the number of local front-line police officers has reduced by 71 in recent years?

Angela Constance

Let me start by agreeing whole-heartedly with the first part of Mr Marra's question. There are people in this country associated with the hard right, particularly in communities where there are vulnerable people and high levels of poverty, who are exploiting the pain of members of our society, whether they are new Scots or old Scots who were born and bred in Scotland. He is right to say that we need to stand united against that.

In relation to the need for us to probe deeply, there is no room for complacency. There is never any room for Scottish exceptionalism when it comes to the protection of vulnerable adults and our children. I point to the work that we have been able to do as a result of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015, which was passed unanimously by the Parliament. I wonder whether legislation of that nature would pass unanimously today. I am sure that many of us recall the passing of that legislation and were very proud to support it. Other legislation that is crucial in this area includes the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007.

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety will be bringing forward further measures, such as the duty to notify. Ministers have the power to place a duty on public services to report when they come across or encounter someone whom they believe to be a victim of human trafficking.

I hope that that, along with my answers to Ms Regan and other members, demonstrates that we are very serious about tackling those who seek to harm, control and exploit.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con)

At the beginning of 2025, I stood in this chamber and called on the Scottish Government to take action against grooming gangs. It is almost 2026, but we have yet to see any progress from the Government. SNP ministers refuse to even say the words "grooming gangs". [Interruption.]

The Presiding Officer

Let us hear Ms Gosal.

Pam Gosal

I would like a yes or no answer—does the cabinet secretary agree that Scotland faces a grooming gangs problem?

Angela Constance

I wonder whether Ms Gosal will answer yes or no to whether she has listened to any of the answers that I have given to other members of the Parliament at this hour.

I have always accepted that there are people in this country who seek to harm children and vulnerable adults. At the end of the day, all I want to do is maximise our resources, our will and our opportunities to detect, deter and disrupt such heinous behaviour. This week, we have seen success in our criminal justice system that has brought people to justice.

Official Report – Debate on CSAE amendments – 16 September 2025

Liam Kerr

Martin Whitfield is right that there can never be too much data on these crimes. In any event, I am calling for a one-off urgent report into a specific area by precisely the commissioner who is being set up to address victim issues. However, Martin Whitfield makes exactly the right point. How can extra collaboration between a victim's commissioner, a children's commissioner or anyone else who has expertise in this area—just as Audrey Nicoll rightly pointed out—possibly be a bad thing? It is absolutely a good thing, and that is a persuasive argument as to why members should vote for my amendments.

Angela Constance

It is important that we get the right type of data, and that work is of course under way.

Is Mr Kerr aware of the work led by Professor Alexis Jay, who was the chair of an independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales and who currently sits on our national strategic group? She shares my view and has put on the record and stated to the media that she does not support further inquiries into child sexual abuse and exploitation, given the significant time and resource already spent in the review that she led, the Casey audit and other reviews. She says that it is now time that “people should just get on with it”.

I contend that that is what the Scottish Government is doing right here, right now—we are getting on with the work that we need to do to protect children.

October 2025 Minutes of National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Group

Public inquiry: the Co-chairs reported on the continued calls for a public inquiry by members of the Scottish Parliament into group-based abuse, and reiterated Ministers' current position that there continues to be a lack of evidence at this time to necessitate such an inquiry in Scotland, but that there is no room for complacency on this most important issue. The Co-chairs highlighted that, with support from Professor Jay, Scottish Government officials were considering what alternative approaches might be available to scrutinise practice and approach to CSAE-based harm in Scotland, and they will engage group members and local leaders as options are developed. It was also noted that the voice and opinion of survivors should also be considered as part of any approach. It was proposed and agreed that a further extraordinary meeting of the Group should be held at the end of November to discuss any such options.