

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

Scottish Government written submission, 28 August 2024

The petition highlights the work done by Dogs Against Drugs, a registered Scottish charity and community-led project in Shetland. The charity works closely with Police Scotland to disrupt the illegal supply of drugs in Shetland. Its two dog handlers are trained as special constables and support Police Scotland with around 90% of drug seizures on the island.

The petition calls on the Scottish Government to direct more funding recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) to support charities such as Dogs Against Drugs. Money recovered through POCA is paid into the Scottish Consolidated Fund (SCF). These receipts are unpredictable, and it is not possible to forecast the levels of receipts that will be remitted to the SCF in any one year.

It is for Scottish Ministers to decide how best to utilise POCA receipts. Currently, the receipts are used to fund the Scottish Government's highly successful CashBack for Communities Programme.

The Dogs Against Drugs charity does not meet the criteria for funding through the CashBack for Communities programme. The current phase of CashBack focuses on delivering a range of trauma-informed and person-centred services and activities for young people between the age of 10-25 who are at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

The Scottish Government's CashBack for Communities team is currently exploring stakeholder perspectives and the potential need for a further phase of the programme. Advice on need and recommendations will be presented to Ministers for consideration in due course. It is too early at this point to comment on funding for the CashBack programme beyond the end of the current phase in 2026.

The petition mentions the Orkney Drugs Dog charity which is a similar set up to that on Shetland. Orkney Drugs Dog also supports Police Scotland with drug detection activity. In the Western Isles, there is a slightly different set up as a Police Scotland officer based in Stornoway, has a drug detection dog. This is not a full-time stand-alone post: the officer is also required to undertake a range of other police duties.

Both Dogs Against Drugs and the Orkney Drugs Dog receive some funding from the Shetland Alcohol and Drug Partnership and the Orkney Alcohol and Drug Partnership respectively.

The Scottish Government has previously provided targeted funding to Dogs Against Drugs through the Serious Organised Crime Community Grant Scheme. That scheme invited applications for a grant of up to £10,000 to fund projects that would support organisations or communities to address issues created by Serious Organised Crime (SOC). The criteria for the scheme excluded the funding of core

business and the maximum lifespan for projects was set at three years, with an expectation that the majority of projects would have a much shorter lifespan. The funding has been fully committed. Dogs Against Drugs 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.

You should also be aware that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs and her predecessors have had various correspondence with local MSPs around funding for the charity in Shetland. Most of the correspondence has been with Beatrice Wishart, Liberal Democrat MSP for Shetland.

The Cabinet Secretary first met with Ms Wishart in July 2023 to discuss funding concerns for the charity and CashBack for Communities eligibility criteria. The Cabinet Secretary informed Ms Wishart that it was too early to say whether there would be any further CashBack funding beyond the current phase but that it was primarily a programme for young people.

More recently in March 2024, Ms Wishart wrote to the Cabinet Secretary setting out funding concerns and asked again how the Scottish Government could assist in helping to support the charity. In response to Ms Wishart, the Cabinet Secretary reiterated her support for the charity and suggested that it could engage with the Shetland Islands Council for potential funding as their work links to the role of the Shetland Community Planning Partnership in developing Local Outcomes Improvement Plans and Locality Plans, or to seek support from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations who could advise on wider funding opportunities. The Cabinet Secretary also suggested that the funding positions of the Shetland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership and Police Scotland's Area Commander could be revisited.

The Cabinet Secretary has now agreed to provide a one-off grant of £30,000 to Dogs Against Drugs in Shetland from the money ringfenced for SOC related projects. This grant will relieve current pressures while officials consider the longer-term options for funding.

I trust this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,
Organised Crime Unit