

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 9 October 2024  
15th Meeting, 2024 (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. This is a new petition that was lodged on 19 June 2024.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition can collect signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 13 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received a submission from the Scottish Government which is set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

### **Action**

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**October 2024**

## **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 Craighens 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: SPICe briefing on petition PE2107



### Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition calls 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.

The petitioner highlights the integral role the charity Dogs Against Drugs has played in seizures of drugs and cash in Shetland, as well as their role in schools teaching children about the dangers of drugs.

### Background Information

#### Proceeds of Crime Act 2002

The [Proceeds of Crime Act 2002](#) (POCA) is legislation which allows the police and other law enforcement agencies to investigate, search and seize assets obtained by people and organisations through criminal activity.

It enables the confiscation of cash and assets following a criminal conviction, as well as providing powers relating to civil recovery, cash seizure and taxation which do not require a conviction to have taken place.

In [Police Scotland's Quarterly Policing Performance Report](#) (p. 19), presented to the Scottish Police Authority's Policing Performance Committee on 11 June 2024, they reported the following figures relating to POCA for 2023/24:

Figures provided to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and Civil Recovery Unit for consideration and forfeiture – £30,695,424

- Confiscations Orders – £3,463,449
- Civil Recoveries Unit – £2,979,414.

#### Drug detection dogs

Police Scotland do not publish the numbers of dogs within their dog unit, however a [Freedom of Information request, responded to on 18 April 2023, states that they had 144 dogs across Scotland](#) and that these figures have been relatively stable for a number of years. These dogs will have various specialisms including drug detection.

In Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, local policing teams work with charities, [Dogs Against Drugs](#) and [Orkney Drugs Dog](#), to carry out detection activities, though they do not fund them. Dogs Against Drugs have dog handlers who are Special Constables, so are able to work alongside police officers, and their dogs are assessed and licensed by Police Scotland. The charity also provides drugs detection services to the corporate sector and delivers drugs education in schools and drugs awareness training to businesses and individuals.

In November 2020, [Police Scotland reported that Dogs Against Drugs had helped seize illegal substances and cash totalling £125,363](#). Orkney Drugs Dog had been involved in the seizure of drugs valued at £62,000, and almost £56,000 worth of illegal drugs had been seized in the Western Islands.

## **Scottish Government action**

### *CashBack for Communities*

The Scottish Government created [the CashBack for Communities programme](#) in 2008. It reinvests criminal assets recovered through POCA into projects delivering positive outcomes for young people. The programme is currently in Phase 6, which will finish in March 2026.

Since 2008, £130 million has been invested in community initiatives and over 2.5 million activities and opportunities have been delivered through the programme. These are specifically in relation to young people.

### *Parliamentary Question*

The [Scottish Government recently responded to a parliamentary question by Beatrice Wishart \(S6W-28835\)](#) asking what consideration they had given to providing core funding for Shetland charity, Dogs Against Drugs, in light of the submission of this petition. Angela Constance MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, answered this question on 28 August 2024 as follows:

“I met Beatrice Wishart in July 2023 to discuss the work carried out by Dogs Against Drugs (Shetland) and have corresponded with her since. Dogs Against Drugs (Shetland) receives funding from the Scottish Government-funded Shetland Alcohol and Drugs partnership and has previously received a one-off grant from the Serious Organised Crime Community Grant Scheme. I have agreed to provide a further one-off grant of £30,000 to help meet current pressures while my officials assess the longer term funding position against an extremely challenging financial climate.”

**Kirsty Deacon**  
**Senior Researcher**  
28 August 2024

<p>The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at <a href="mailto:spice@parliament.scot">spice@parliament.scot</a></p>
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Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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## **Annexe C: Written submission**

### **Scottish Government submission of 28 August 2024**

#### **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**

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**