

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on [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](#), lodged by Kevin Craigens on behalf of The Shetland Times Ltd

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Police Scotland do not publish the numbers of dogs within their dog unit, however a [Freedom of Information request, responded to on 18 April 2023, states that they had 144 dogs across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

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 spice@parliament.scot

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