| Police Scotland logo | Freedom of Information Response Our reference: FOI 25-0084  Responded to: 17 January 2025 |
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Your recent request for information is replicated below, together with our response.

**I would like to request under the Freedom of Information act, information held by you on group-based child sexual exploitation.**

**In particular, I would like to know what definition, if any, you use to identify group-based child sexual exploitation.**

The information sought is not held by Police Scotland and section 17 of the Act therefore applies.

By way of explanation, there is no official Police Scotland definition for child sexual exploitation (CSE), however, Police Scotland refer to the Scottish Government’s definition – ‘child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual of any age or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur with technology. A common feature of CSE is that the child or young person does not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and does not see themselves as a victim of exploitation.’ (Scottish Government National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 – updated 2023)

**Have you a dedicated team investigating group-based child sexual exploitation? If so, how many officers, by rank, are involved in this team?**

The information sought is not held by Police Scotland and section 17 of the Act therefore applies.

By way of explanation, Police Scotland do not have any specific units or teams that are dedicated solely to investigating group-based CSE.

Every division within Police Scotland have specialist public protection officers, some of whom are based in dedicated Child Abuse Investigation Unit. These officers are trained to investigate child protection matters including but not limited to, child protection concerns, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, child exploitation and child neglect.

These specialist officers are frequently required to work alongside statutory multi-agency partners to protection children from harm and provide the necessary safety and support mechanisms to children and their families.

In addition, within Police Scotland there are three National Child Abuse Investigation Units which were launched in April 2015 and comprise of police officers and police staff based within the East, West and North of the country. These units provide a national specialist investigative resource which can be dedicated to divisions to support complex and high-level cases of child abuse, child death and child exploitation across Scotland, in addition to proactively capturing intelligence and information on those individuals posing significant risk to children within Scotland’s communities.

Another national resource within Police Scotland is the Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (OCSAE) Unit, which works closely with the NCAIU and local police divisions. This was formed as part of Police Scotland’s response to the investigative challenges of online child sexual abuse and provides a proactive response to this issue mainly through enforcement of National Online Child Abuse Prevention Packages.

The overarching and primary consideration is the ongoing safety of children, whether that child is the victim of the perceived offending, is within the same household as the offender, or to whom the offender may have access. The OCSAE unit has dedicated resources based in the North, West and East command areas and can provide specialist assistance to divisionally based child abuse investigations, especially where online exploitation is apparent.

**If there is no dedicated team, how do you investigate allegations of group-based child sexual exploitation?**

The Child Abuse Investigation Units mentioned in point two are mainly staffed with specialised officers and would commence an investigation into any report of group-based child sexual exploitation.

Whilst there are no dedicated teams that specifically investigate group-based CSE within Police Scotland, the response to any CSE incident would be discussed at an inter-agency discussion (IRD) with statutory child protection partners from social work, health and potentially education at divisional level. The IRD is the first process of joint information sharing, assessment and decision making about a risk to a child.

Depending on the circumstances this investigation would be allocated locally to specialist officers or could be transferred to our national team.

The size and extent of a CSE incident may determine if the investigation is carried out locally by specialist officers within a policing division or if additional support would be given from one of our national child protection teams. This is assessed and decided on a case-by-case basis. Depending on the nature of the investigation, a Senior Investigating Officer may be appointed and will direct the number of officers required for the investigation.

**I would like to know how many investigations into group-based child sexual exploitation you have carried out since 2000. I would like this figure broken down by year, if possible.**

**I would also like to know the number of suspects arrested as part of these investigations and the number subsequently charged. If possible I would like a breakdown of the age, sex and ethnicity of those arrested and charged.**

Unfortunately, I estimate that it would cost well in excess of the current FOI cost threshold of £600 to process your request. I am therefore refusing to provide the information sought in terms of section 12(1) of the Act - Excessive Cost of Compliance.

By way of explanation, the crime recording systems used by Police Scotland and our legacy forces prior to the formation of Police Scotland have no facility which allows us to carry out a search of group based CSE offences.

To research, assess and extract the data required from these systems would greatly exceed the cost threshold set out within the Act.

Furthermore, there is not one specific crime for CSE therefore the true picture of offending may not be shown.

**I would also like to know the number of people convicted, again with a breakdown of the age, sex and ethnicity of those convicted.**

Police Scotland does not hold conviction information. As such, in terms of Section 17 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, this represents a notice that the information you seek is not held by Police Scotland.

You may wish to contact the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscals Service (COPFS) which holds conviction information for Scotland. A request can be submitted to COPFS via email using the following address [foi@copfs.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:foi@copfs.gsi.gov.uk)

If you require any further assistance, please contact us quoting the reference above.

You can request a review of this response within the next 40 working days by [email](mailto:foi@scotland.police.uk) or by letter (Information Management - FOI, Police Scotland, Clyde Gateway, 2 French Street, Dalmarnock, G40 4EH). Requests must include the reason for your dissatisfaction.

If you remain dissatisfied following our review response, you can appeal to the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner (OSIC) within 6 months - [online](http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/Appeal), by [email](mailto:enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info) or by letter (OSIC, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, KY16 9DS).

Following an OSIC appeal, you can appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only.

This response will be added to our [Disclosure Log](http://www.scotland.police.uk/access-to-information/freedom-of-information/disclosure-log) in seven days' time.

Every effort has been taken to ensure our response is as accessible as possible. If you require this response to be provided in an alternative format, please let us know.