INQUIRY INTO DECISION MAKING ON WHETHER CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO CARE

The Education and Culture Committee has agreed to carry out an inquiry with the following remit:

To understand:
- the decision-making processes involved in determining whether a child should be removed from the family home and taken into care;
- whether these decision-making processes are delivering the best outcomes for children and their families.

The Committee would be grateful for your views on the inquiry remit and the key questions set out below (there is no need to answer all of the questions if you do not wish to do so), and for any other information that you consider would be useful.

Key questions

1. Are decisions made on the basis of a clear, fully developed and agreed evidence base that demonstrates what is most effective for children and their families? Do all those involved in the decision-making process share common standards of training, knowledge and practice?

2. Is there consistency in decision-making across the country? To what extent are decisions on whether to remove children influenced by resource constraints or any other barriers?

3. Can general assumptions ever be made about fitness to parent or must each situation be fully assessed on its individual circumstances? Are there any particular parental risk factors, for example drug or alcohol misuse, that would create a presumption that a child should be removed? To what extent are there differences of opinion among relevant bodies about what constitutes fitness to parent, for example, in relation to parental neglect?

4. What evidence is available to demonstrate that children who are removed from the family home, whether temporarily or permanently, enjoy better outcomes than they otherwise would have had?

5. How are decisions made on whether a child, once removed from the family home, should be returned to that home, or removed permanently? Is the speed of decision making appropriate?

6. Where a child has been returned to the family home, what type of support is most effective in ensuring that the child will enjoy greater stability and security?

Given the sensitivity of issues that are likely to be discussed during the inquiry, the Committee will undertake a limited number of informal, fact finding visits outside the Parliament in order to gather evidence. Therefore, please also provide any
suggestions for fact finding visits that you consider would help the Committee to gather evidence to answer its remit.

In submitting evidence, please ensure that you read carefully the ‘guidance on handling written evidence received in response to calls for evidence’, which contains information on how we handle personal and sensitive data. The guidance is available here.

Written evidence should be submitted in word version, be no more than six sides of A4 paper and e-mailed to ec.committee@scottish.parliament.uk by Tuesday 28 August 2012. We welcome written evidence in any language.