Response from Falkirk Council to the Education and Culture Committee to examine the reasons why more significant progress has not been made since devolution in improving the educational attainment of looked after children and what can be done to address this.

Falkirk council notes that there has been some progress in attainment.

The population of children that make up the Looked After Children population is complex and diverse. There are multiple causal factors as to why children are looked after, which include, child protection, care and welfare, need for school provision that can only be met by residential school and some are placed in these schools voluntarily by parents and others are placed by local authorities.

The population is also fluid and dynamic, in that children become looked after and cease to be looked after in the course of their school career. In some ways, the evidence of the children for whom there have been successful intervention is lost from the data set as there will be many of these for whom by the time the statistics are collated will be no longer looked after.

The success of a local authority’s efforts are therefore not easily captured.

This population are very difficult to capture accurate, quantifiable data due to the dynamic nature and the multiple causal factors. Notwithstanding this, there are many reasons for authorities to strive to do better. It may be helpful to distinguish in the analysis of attainment the length of time that children are looked after. This would allow a comparison on the intervention of becoming looked after and the supports, plans and interventions put in place. This would be effective in allowing a greater understanding of the true picture of whether the attainment of looked after children is progressing poorly, as, another factor that masks the picture of the effectiveness, is the inclusion of children in the statistics at national level where the decision to place children in looked after status is much closer to the end point of their school career.

The causal factors in and of themselves are significant barriers to good attainment in education for many Looked After children.

In Falkirk the attainment scores converted into SQA tariff scores indicates a rise for LAC at home of 6 points between 2007 and 2009, with LAC away from home accounting for a 5 point tariff score rise. However the comparison with the average population remains unfavourable.
The tariff scores themselves (and for that matter all educational attainment data) does not tell us anything about the richer educational experience, work experience or alternative achievements and qualifications.

However our positive post school destination statistics for LAC remain quite poor in comparison and in comparison to the average population.

The response that is required for effective intervention is multi-agency, at both the team around the child level and the strategic level. Looked After Children are a focus of our Integrated Children Services Plan, we are developing a co-ordinated service to imbed the principles of Getting it Right for Every Child. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy group oversees implementation of our Corporate Parenting Action Plan.

In terms of the national agenda, we do not need a new policy or plan. We need the capacity to deliver services in a collaborative and joined up way. This multi-agency approach is time consuming, expensive and can suffer from collaborative inertia. Inter organisational working is effective when the end results is more than the sum of its parts, but collaborative inertia can become manifest when the inter organisational working is so cumbersome and bureaucratic that workers are not able to meet, or get the joint work to happen because of competing demands and priorities.

**What can be done?**

A better national framework for analysing the statistics for looked after children would be helpful including:

- Length of time as looked after
- Those that cease to be looked after in their time in education
- Wider educational achievement and attainment
- Authority responsible for the educational attainment, as opposed to the placing authority

The assessment of needs for this population may need to be more inclusive of long term developmental factors. Dr Bruce Perry has developed an assessment approach that incorporates the neuro-developmental history for children that would better inform the therapeutic approaches needing to be incorporated into the care placement and educational contexts of the child. There is some evidence from his work in the US that we often misunderstand the impact of the early life experiences on children when trying to understand children's behaviour and development at a later stage in life. This is likely to be the case with the Looked After Children population in Scotland, although further work would be required.

It may also be helpful to use an alternative measuring framework, perhaps using the wellbeing indicators (i.e. how well they are achieving, or being nurtured). Falkirk are currently developing an outcome monitoring framework in partnership with Barnardo's and this will link to the wellbeing indicators and can measure distance travelled in achieving outcomes for individuals, groups of children and the population as a whole.