Why do children become looked after?
The factors leading to children becoming looked after include poverty, chaotic family circumstances, parental drug and alcohol misuse, lack of parental support, mental health issues etc. Many of these children have experienced trauma, neglect or similar emotional damage. This in turn has seriously impacted on their self-esteem and resilience.

Children who are looked after at home are often living in very challenging circumstances with fraught family relationships. These children tend to lack emotional stability. Children in local authority units tend to lack emotional stability because of the institutional nature of their environment.

For many of these children education is not necessarily seen as a priority or a means of improving life chances. Those who frequently move from school to school or between local authority units, report the loss of self-esteem. Many have to repeatedly tell their life story and establish new relationships with unfamiliar adults and other emotionally damaged children.

What do the statistics say about looked after children?
(Using Scottish Government statistics from 2009/10)
Research tells us that good attendance at school is essential if children are to achieve their potential. School attendance for looked after children is 87.8% per 1000 as opposed to 93.2% per 1000 for all school children. These figures can be broken down to reveal that children who are looked after in their own homes have the lowest attendance rates of 78.7% whereas children who are looked after by local authority provided foster carers have an average attendance of 96.3%.

Opportunities for children to progress are often hindered by exclusion from school. 365 per 1000 for looked after children as opposed to 45 per 1000 for all other children. Children who are looked after in local authority units have the highest rates at 86.6% per 1000.

90% of looked after children who left school were aged 16 or under compared to 37% of all school leavers being this age when leaving school. Leaving school so early impacts on the tariff points looked after children achieve. The average tariff points for looked after children was 67 compared to 372 for all school leavers.

Secondary schools are very concerned about their pupil destinations. 59% of looked after children entered positive destinations as compared to 87% of all school leavers entering positive destinations.
The statistics for 2009 – 10 reveal that the most successful looked after children reside in foster care homes provided by a local authority. Many local authorities find it difficult to provide enough foster care homes within its boundaries.

**What can be done to address this?**
Statistics tell us that children who are looked after at home have the poorest life chances and attainment levels. Children who are looked after in local authority provided foster care homes have the best life chances and highest attainment levels. As not all looked after children will be in local authority provided foster care, we should revisit the support mechanisms for children who are looked after. Local authorities do prioritise looked after children but there is a need for social work and education to work more closely than they do at present. There must be good multi-agency working.

**What is the role of the social work department in relation to the family dynamics and the life chances of these children?**
- Policies and procedures need to be in place and monitored closely.
- Accountability is key and awkward questions must be asked about the quality and frequency of home visits, the use of and attendance at parenting classes as well as the type and quality of the support given to children.
- Children should not be moved from local authority unit to unit, and subsequently from school to school. This would stop looked after children from having to establish new relationships, retelling their life story or the possibility of notes being lost.

**How are schools supporting looked after children?**
- Do they have in place the recommendations from looked after children and young people: we can and must do better?
- Does at least one person in the school have a relationship with the child and be available for them to talk to if necessary?
- Are policies and procedures in place?
- Do these children have appropriate supports to overcome their barriers to learning?
- Who is monitoring their attainment and mentoring them?
- What about transitional arrangements?
- Attainment figures for looked after children have been collected by the Scottish Government, how will this be reported on?