Thank you for your letter of 2nd October. The appendix addresses the inquiry’s questions.

I can provide the following response to the specific points in your letter-

- The total sum of money spent on protecting children by local authorities, police, the courts, the health service, the Children's Hearings System, NDPBs and any other relevant bodies, and the Scottish Government's views on whether this spend is providing value for money;

Response: The Scottish Government does not collect this information.

- What projections the Scottish Government is making, in the context of its emphasis on early years and preventative spending, and changing demographics, of the future balance of care in terms of the likely number of children who will be looked after at home, in kinship care, in foster care or who are accommodated; and how these projections will inform decision making on placements;

Response: The Scottish Government does not project the expected number of looked after children (either as a whole or by placement type).

However, Scottish Government figures have shown (see below chart) that the increase in the number of looked after children since 2004 has been as a result of more children being looked after in community settings (i.e. with friends/relatives, with foster carers and at home). Also, that the number of looked after children at home has been showing signs of falling since 2008.
• Whether the Scottish Government expects the GIRFEC national practice model to be the uniform approach to protecting children and the extent to which it is intending to legislate for this;

Response: We do intend the national practice model to provide a uniform approach, and will legislate through the Children and Young People's Bill. We will put in place legislation that ensures:

• all children and young people from birth up to leaving school have access to a Named Person;
• all relevant services cooperate with the Named Person in ensuring that a child's and young person's wellbeing is at the forefront of their actions; and
• a single planning process should be in place to support those children and young people needing the involvement of a range of services, through a single Child's Plan.

• What other action the Scottish Government considers is required to improve interagency decision making in relation to protecting children - for example pooling budgets and creating a more uniform approach between and within relevant professions.

Response: The Scottish Government supports inter-agency working to protect children, and we are aware that some areas have pooled resources and share services. It is up to service providers, however, how they choose to deliver local services.

I hope this is helpful, and look forward to the committee's final report.

Yours sincerely

AILEEN CAMPBELL
ANNEX A

CALL FOR WRITTEN EVIDENCE

The remit of the inquiry is to understand-

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

The call for written evidence asked the following 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?

The Scottish Government sets out clear guidelines on the standards that are expected from child protection services in the National Child Protection Guidance. Child Protection Committees develop their child protection training based on the Scotland's Children and Young People training for protection framework. The framework is also known as version 12. The purpose of this training framework is to provide consistency in education and training across agencies and across Scotland, so that all adults who work with children in a voluntary or professional capacity have a clear and shared approach to protecting children. We are also developing a National Framework for Child Protection Learning and Development is being developed to support those who are responsible for the learning and development needs of the multi-agency workforce.

The framework establishes a set of competences/skills/ standards that everyone who has direct or indirect contact with children needs to ensure they deliver a consistently high standard of support to children and young people in Scotland. The framework will be published at the end of the year.

The scrutiny process also provides us with an understanding of the effectiveness of child protection services. The Care Inspectorate joint inspection process is the Scottish Government's assurance of the quality of child protection services nationally, and the second round of inspections showed significant improvements in local service provision overall.

The Scottish Government has undertaken to improve the proportion of positive local child protection inspection reports as part of the National Performance Framework. In September 2011, Scottish Ministers asked the Care Inspectorate to take the lead in developing a new model of Joint Inspections of Services for Children based on Getting It Right for Every Child principles.

The Care Inspectorate has responded by developing a new inspection model that takes a coordinated approach to scrutiny, which aims to:

- improve outcomes for all children and young people
- provide independent assurance about the quality of services for children, (particularly vulnerable children and young people)
- help to build capacity for improvement.
Local Authorities have statutory responsibilities which includes Care and Protection. Even where other professionals, or agencies, are involved in the decision making process, social workers are ultimately accountable for any decisions made, and the exercise of the statutory functions.

All social workers must be formally qualified, registered with the regulator, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and adhere to the SSSC's Codes of Practice to work in Scotland. Social workers have a key role in protecting vulnerable children and adults and are trained to make assessments taking account of a range of factors including identifying and balancing need, risk, to intervene, to assist and to protect either individuals or communities and work with other professionals.

Social workers must continuously improve their skills and knowledge to maintain registration. A specific condition set by SSSC is that they must demonstrate training and learning activity that focuses on working effectively with colleagues and other professionals to identify assess and manage risk to vulnerable groups. This is in order to ensure that they are assisted to meet their primary responsibility of protecting children and adults from harm.

The recently launched Common Core Skills describes the skills, knowledge, understanding, and values that everyone should have if they work with children, young people and their families. It aims to complement the skills, knowledge and understanding that all workers and professionals are required to have within their respective roles.

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?

The Scottish Government's approach to assessing consistency is based on the findings in inspections reports. The second round of inspections showed significant improvements in local service provision overall. The National Child Protection Guidance in Scotland sets out our expectation of services delivery.

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?

The National Guidance for Child Protection clearly sets out how to identify vulnerabilities and risk factors. The assessment of risk is not static and at times can be multi layered. Risk factors can reduce over time, or conversely, increase. Equally, changes in a child or family's circumstances can strengthen or limit protective factors. The process of identifying and managing risk should take into account both current circumstances and previous experiences, and the immediate impact as well as longer-term outcomes for children. Risks identified should form part of a Child Protection Plan, which builds on the information for the child's plan. The Child Protection Plan should set out in detail the perceived risks and needs, what is required to reduce these risks and meet those needs, and who is expected to take any actions forward including parents and carers (as well as the child themselves).
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?

The SCRA research into Children and Young People on Supervision Requirements for over 5 years, will be published before Christmas. This work looks at outcomes for children returned home compared to those who are adopted, fostered and in kinship care. We will be able to give the committee further information in December.

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?

The decision to remove a child is made by the relevant bodies involved. However, we would expect that any decisions made for the removal of a child are in keeping with the Getting It Right for Every Child principles.

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?

We will be carrying out work over the coming months to assess the support required for children returned home. This will begin with the children looked after at home summit in December, and this will be informed by the SCRA research into children on supervision requirements for over 5 years, which will be published before Christmas. We will be able to give the committee further information in December.

The Children and Young People bill is legislating for a named person, which will provide a systematic approach to the wellbeing of a child and monitor how services respond appropriately to meet the child's needs.

The National Parenting Strategy aims to ensure that all families get the help they need, when they need it to enable to be and do the best they can for their children. This covers information, advice and support. But it will be for local areas to determine how they meet the needs of individual families in their areas. Our £18m funding for family support recently announced by FM will help ensure that local authorities - working with others - can improve the provision of high quality, flexible and co-ordinated support to families in their areas.