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Ms Jane Humphreys  
Corporate Director, Children, Education & Social Care  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
PO Box 228  
Church Road  
Stockton-on-Tees  
TS18 1XE

Dear Ms Humphreys

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council 2008**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2008 annual performance assessment (APA) for your council. The evaluations and judgements in the letter draw on a range of data and information which covers the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. As you know, the APA is not based on an inspection of your services and, therefore, can only provide a snapshot based on the evidence considered. As such, I am grateful to you for assuring the quality of the data provided.

Performance is judged on a four point scale as detailed in the handbook. I should emphasise that the grades awarded are based on an overall 'best fit' model. For instance, an outstanding judgement of Grade 4 reflects that overall most aspects, but not necessarily all, of the services in the area are working very well. We know that one of the features of outstanding provision is the drive for greater improvement and no council would suggest, and nor would Ofsted, that a judgement of outstanding indicates that everything is perfect. Similarly within a judgement of inadequate overall, Grade 1, there could be some aspects of the overall service that are adequate or even good. Judgements are made in a rounded way, balancing all of the evidence and giving due consideration to outcomes, local and national contexts, priorities and decision-making.



The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

| <b>Assessment judgement area</b>  | <b>APA grade</b> |
|---|------------------|
| Overall effectiveness of children's services  | 3                |
| Being healthy   | 3                |
| Staying safe  | 3                |
| Enjoying and achieving  | 3                |
| Making a positive contribution  | 3                |
| Achieving economic well-being   | 4                |
| Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people | 3                |

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale  
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

## **Overall effectiveness of children's services**

**Grade 3**

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. It has sustained strong performance in most of the Every Child Matters outcome areas since the last APA in 2007. As yet, the council has not had an opportunity to fully demonstrate the progress made against the areas for development highlighted in the JAR report which was published in April 2008.

Improvements in joint commissioning arrangements and increased delivery through integrated locally based multi-agency teams are strengthening services to support and improve the health of children, young people and their families. However, despite a wide range of interventions, teenage conception rates have increased. Early and accurate identification of needs, strong multi-agency working and particularly good deployment of resources ensure that children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive care and support which is outstanding. The arrangements to safeguard children and young people are good, although the JAR highlighted variability in the quality and practice with regard to records across social work teams. The Local Safeguarding Children Board provides effective strategic leadership. Services for looked after children and those leaving care are very good although too many looked after children receive final warnings or convictions. Educational attainment is good overall but outcomes for pupils of Pakistani heritage are below those of their peers. The variation in performance between secondary schools at Key Stage 3 identified at the last APA, continues to inhibit progress at this level. The council has appropriate plans in place, and actions to reduce these gaps further are ongoing. Strong partnerships with voluntary organisations and faith groups ensure extensive and influential consultation which involves most children and young people, and engages them in service planning. The youth offending service undertakes good preventative work and overall offending rates are low. Nevertheless, despite reductions, re-offending rates remain persistently high. The council and its partners continue to make an outstanding contribution to the economic well-being of young people and good progress is being made on the implementation of the 14 to 19 strategy.

Children and young people's services have good capacity to improve further and the management of these services is good. The council is very ambitious for the children and young people of Stockton and their needs are at the heart of its drive for improvement. This is reflected in well thought out priorities and strategic plans and the effective targeting and deployment of resources to drive improvement forward.

## **Being healthy**

**Grade 3**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

### Major strengths

- Excellent progress has been made on the proportion of schools achieving Healthy School Status. Most are participating and 79% have achieved Healthy Schools Status. This compares with an average in the region of 63% and the average across England of 67%.
- Almost all looked after children and young people (98%) have their health assessments and dental checks undertaken on time. This compares very well with an average of 84% in similar councils and 85% in England.
- Waiting times for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) new cases are significantly better than the England average. For example, in Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust, the proportion of the CAMHS new specialist cases with length of wait under four weeks is 100% compared with the national average of 56%. The proportion of CAMHS non-specialist cases with a length of wait under four weeks is 74% compared with the national average of 40%.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The number of teenage conceptions has increased and is significantly above that in similar councils despite the council implementing a wide range of interventions.
- Services for children and young people with complex, persistent and severe behavioural and mental health needs are performing well behind similar councils and national comparators.

## Staying safe

## Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect appears to be good. The council's self evaluation underestimates some important weaknesses and gives too much weight to the significance of improvements that have been made.

### Major Strengths

- The recent JAR judged safeguarding arrangements and services for looked after children to be good.
- The reduction in the number of referrals and increasing use of the common assessment framework demonstrates good multi-agency working and a shared clarity about thresholds.
- Looked after children are appropriately placed. Their safety and welfare are promoted by 100% allocation of qualified social workers and independent review and scrutiny of placements.
- Efficient and well-managed systems are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of children subject to child protection plans.

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| <p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Only 6.9% of children were adopted in the last year, which is fewer than the previous year when it was 14%. This is the lowest figure amongst comparable neighbours, for whom the average is 9.1%.</li> <li>▪ The quality of recording across social work teams and the Youth Offending Service is too variable.</li> <li>▪ While audits of practice are frequent, the application of findings is not clear and they are not consistently used to improve practice or develop relevant training.</li> </ul> |
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## Enjoying and achieving

**Grade 3**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

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| <p><b>Major Strengths</b></p> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Standards in the early years and primary phase are being sustained. Achievement of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is much higher than that found nationally. Attainment in national tests at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 has remained above that in similar councils and nationally for some years.</li> <li>▪ Individual looked after children and young people make good progress in their education. Attendance is above the national average for these learners and continues to improve.</li> <li>▪ Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. Well coordinated collaborative provision supports early identification of needs and ensures these are met. Individual learners are set challenging targets which they tackle in small steps and as a result they make very good progress in their education.</li> </ul> |
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| <p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Variations in performance between secondary schools at Key Stage 3 persist.</li> <li>▪ Outcomes for children and young people of Pakistani heritage remain below those of their peers.</li> </ul> |
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## Making a positive contribution

**Grade 3**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's self evaluation underestimates some important weaknesses and gives too much weight to the significance of improvements that have been made.

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| <p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consultation with young people has had real influence in helping to ensure provision is more accessible and provides wider choice.</li> <li>▪ Strong local networks which include the voluntary sector and faith groups are in place. These result in good measures to engage hard to reach and vulnerable groups and are effective in enabling children and young people and their parents to shape policy and provision.</li> <li>▪ Good preventative work by the youth offending service ensures that the overall youth offending rate has reduced when viewed as a percentage of the rate per head of the 10 to 17 population.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Despite reductions in the last two years, re-offending rates remain above similar councils.</li> </ul>   |

## Achieving economic well-being

**Grade 4**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

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| <p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good progress had been made in improving learners' achievements by the age of 19. At Level 2, these improvements place Stockton ahead of similar councils and national averages. At Level 3, achievements are now higher than similar councils but below the national average. NVQ success rates have improved at a good rate, moving ahead of the national average. Work-based learning success rates are improving at a faster rate than found nationally.</li> <li>▪ A very strong partnership is making good progress on the 14 to 19 strategy and maintaining a collaborative focus on the delivery of a broad mix of curriculum across the 14 to 19 age range.</li> <li>▪ Local services respond very effectively to the needs of vulnerable groups of young people and provide high levels of support which result in positive outcomes.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Despite a small reduction this year, the proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training is higher than in similar councils and above the national rate.</li> </ul>   |

## Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 3

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good as is its management of these services. Since the 2007 APA, strong performance and improvement trends have been sustained and are evident in most areas. As the JAR report was published in April 2008, the council has not had an opportunity fully to demonstrate progress against the areas for development which were highlighted. However, an action plan to tackle each of the JAR recommendations is being implemented.

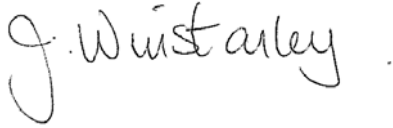
Children's services are a key priority for the council, its elected members and chief officers. The Children's Trust Board and its partners are very ambitious for children and young people. This is reflected in well thought out priorities and strategic plans and the good progress made in taking forward joint commissioning and integrated delivery of services. Resources are effectively directed to priorities with demonstrable outcomes such as a reduction in out of borough placements and outstanding provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is a strong performance management culture and a robust corporate performance monitoring framework is in place. However, work on a children's workforce development strategy is in its early stages and there is variation in the quality of measures to evaluate some targeted projects and the quality of recording in both social care and the youth offending service.

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| <p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The council demonstrates a clear commitment to, and high ambitions for, children and young people.</li> <li>▪ A comprehensive needs analysis is aligned to plans and is driving forward improvements.</li> <li>▪ The implementation of integrated area based provision is improving outcomes for children and young people.</li> </ul>          |
| <p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The workforce development strategy is not yet embedded.</li> <li>▪ Performance monitoring of improvement; for example at Key Stage 3, of offending rates of looked after children and young people; and of the consistency of the recording across social work teams and the Youth Offending service.</li> </ul> |

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager  
Local Services Inspection