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Ms Ann Baxter  
Corporate Director, Children, Education and Social Care  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
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Stockton-on-Tees  
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Dear Ms Baxter

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local council. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. 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.

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

**Grade 4**

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council consistently delivers outstanding services for children and young people. As a result, an improving trend is being sustained and there are improved outcomes for children and young people. In an area that faces significant social and economic challenges, services are making a number of very significant contributions towards fulfilling Stockton's vision of 'no child left behind'. Strategies and actions are well targeted, particularly to address the needs of the most vulnerable. The quality of strategic thinking, high levels of reflection and analysis, and excellent use of management information are clearly evident throughout all documentation such as the children and young people's plan 2007-10 and the recent self-evaluation and review. In a letter to the council in March 2007, the Audit Commission recognised the improvement in children and young people's services, resulting in Stockton being the first council in the North East to be judged as excellent.

## Being healthy

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council has substantially invested in joint funding of senior management posts with the North Tees Primary Care Trust. As a result, relationships are strong and partnership working is embedded within strategic planning and service delivery.

Continued investment in resources and joint commissioning are leading to improved outcomes in a number of areas. For example, the number of teenage conceptions shows a sustained reduction to the same level as statistical neighbours.

The development of integrated provision through the roll-out of children's centres has similarly contributed to a significant improvement in the proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding, although this still falls below the national average. There has been a slight increase in the percentage of babies with low birth weight, although there are still fewer than the average for the country as a whole. Whilst remaining behind national figures especially for children aged five, a well-targeted oral health programme has reduced the number of decayed, filled or missing teeth.

The council has exceeded its target for the numbers of schools gaining the Healthy School Standard and its performance is among the best in the North East region. Schools make a good contribution to a range of health outcomes for children and young people. For instance, tackling obesity through increasing participation in physical education, providing a range of physical activities during school holidays, and improving school meals by introducing salad bars and removing sugary snacks and fizzy drinks.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) continue to provide services with short waiting times in most areas. The exception has been for new non-specialist cases where there was a marked decline during 2005, although more recent data indicate this has now improved. Some gaps in provision for children and young people with complex, persistent and severe behavioural and mental health needs still remain. Nevertheless, there has been good progress in moving towards a comprehensive CAMHS.

Partnership arrangements with North Tees Primary Care Trust ensure the health needs of looked after children are strong. For instance, rates for those having their teeth checked and having health assessments continue to improve. As a result, health outcomes for looked after children and young people are good.

Jointly commissioned substance misuse services have further improved over the past year, particularly in meeting target times for assessment and treatment by the Drug Action Team and the Youth Offending Service, which are now excellent. Effective collaboration between these and other services, including the voluntary and

community sector, has led to an increase in the number of young people accessing services during 2006. Whilst numbers remain below the average for the North East region, the Substance Misuse Plan 2007–2010 provides an effective framework for ensuring that resources are well targeted to the most vulnerable groups.

Emergency admission rates to hospital for children and young people aged 0–19 are significantly higher than the national average, a trend which has remained largely unrecognised to date.

### **Areas for development**

- Improve CAMHS provision for children and young people with complex, persistent and severe behavioural and mental health needs.
- Emergency admissions to hospital for children and young people aged 0–19.

## **Staying safe**

**Grade 4**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is excellent.

The council continues to develop a comprehensive range of preventative services, and the CYPP details a number of examples of effective partnership work, for instance with the Fire Service, which has resulted in an excellent performance in relation to fire related incidents. Thus, there is reported to have been a reduction in fire setting, in the numbers of accidents, and no fire deaths in the preceding 12 months.

A good example of effective partnership work, including with schools, has been a reduction in the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents. This has significantly decreased.

More effective multi-agency working and clearer understanding of the safeguarding role has been driven by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. This is now well established and fulfilling its statutory duties effectively. For example, a comprehensive programme of training ensures a culture of safeguarding is now embedded across all agencies.

There has been a continued increase in investment in locally accessible family support services. Preventative services are well targeted. This is evidenced by the reduction in the number of children in need referrals, and a low number of repeat referrals. Numbers of initial assessments arising from referrals have continued to rise, along with an overall improvement in the timeliness of initial and core assessments, producing excellent outcomes for children and young people.

Although there has been an increase in numbers on the Child Protection Register, re-registrations have decreased along with time on the register, showing that outcomes for children and young people at risk remain good.

Outcomes for looked after children and young people remain excellent, with reviews held in a timely manner, and all children and young people having allocated social workers. Further improvements have been made on decreasing the numbers of children looked after in residential care. The quality of the council's three long-stay children's homes remains good. The quality of the home providing short-term emergency care is too variable; both inadequate and satisfactory judgments having been recorded recently.

There has been a drop in the numbers of adoptions of children and young people within 12 months of being looked after by the council, although overall, numbers of children who have found permanent adopting homes has continued to increase.

### **Area for development**

- Ensure national minimum standards are consistently met in all types of residential care.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Most children make good progress throughout their early years. As a result, the proportion of children achieving 78 points or more at the end of the Foundation Stage is much higher than found nationally. The quality of child care is satisfactory overall. Six Children's Centres are in place. Regular consultation and analysis of information ensures that provision is well matched to local need.

The integrated School Effectiveness, Behaviour and Attendance service continues to maintain its strong partnership with schools; user surveys identify high levels of satisfaction. The service provides excellent support and challenge to schools. Management information is used to extremely good effect in schools and centrally. The spotlight remains firmly on sharing good practice, raising standards and improving outcomes for children and young people. Consequently, most pupils make good progress throughout their schooling and gaps in attainment continue to close. The number of schools below floor targets is reducing as is the number of schools causing concern to the council. The quality of provision in most primary, secondary and special schools is good according to recent inspections. Only one primary school is currently subject to a notice to improve.

Standards of attainment have risen year on year since 2001 and improvements are being sustained across most of the core subjects. In 2006 at both Key Stages 1 and 2 attainment was good, being mostly above that found nationally and in similar councils. Attainment at Key Stage 3 remained broadly average in 2006, although

there were clear signs that the rate of improvement was better than found in similar councils and nationally. Variations in Key Stage 3 performance between schools reduced and most pupils made satisfactory progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 as a result. Attainment at Key Stage 4 in 2006 was satisfactory overall after a period of marked improvement. The council's latest unvalidated 2007 data indicate its best ever performance at Key Stages 1 and 2 and strong performance at Key Stage 4, which suggests the gap between Stockton and national averages at this stage continues to narrow further.

Children and young people's attitudes and behaviour in schools are mostly good or better. Attendance in primary schools at 94.32% is broadly in line with that found nationally (94.25%) and in similar councils (94.51%). Attendance in secondary schools at 92.18% is also broadly in line with that found nationally (92.09%) and in similar councils (92.16%). As a result of well-targeted preventative work, the number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions remains low. There have been no permanent exclusions from Stockton primary or special schools in recent years.

Effective systems are in place to support looked after children and young people. This is reflected in good attendance, low exclusions and improving attainment. The proportion of looked after pupils achieving at least one GCSE at A\* to G is consistently good when compared to that found nationally and in similar councils. The progress of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continues to improve. It is generally good or better in both mainstream and special schools.

### **Area for development**

- Improve pupils' attainment at Key Stage 3.

## **Making a positive contribution**

**Grade 4**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is excellent. There is a strong culture of engagement with children and young people. Good structures for consultation and participation facilitate this very effectively. There are regular meetings between Children's Trust Board representatives and students' councils in secondary schools and further education colleges. Recent inspections have resulted in good grades for the ways in which schools support the social and emotional development of children and young people as well as for 'the extent to which learners make a positive contribution'. Peer support, mentoring schemes and specific activities which include parents, carers and other adults, support vulnerable children well, helping them to deal with change at key points in their development. A representative sample of 1,200 learners from over half of Stockton's schools provided positive feedback through the TellUs2 survey about the range and quality of services.

Young people are actively engaged in a range of service developments such as the play strategy and the homelessness action plan. Pupil Ambassador roles are being developed in primary schools. The council is providing training opportunities such as the Early Years Empowerment project to help staff develop the skills which will enable them to engage very young children in active participation and decision-making. The prospectus to support this project was developed by children in a local school nursery.

The Stockton Youth Assembly has an inclusive voice. Around 33% of the members are from areas where there is social and economic deprivation. Membership is very diverse. It includes young people from Black and ethnic minority groups, young carers, asylum seekers, gay and lesbian young men and women and those who are homeless. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are actively engaged through student councils and the Stockton Disability Youth Forum. This forum is a self-directed group where the young people themselves choose the issues they want to address. For example, they developed the 'MB awards' to accredit their sports and team working activities. Members have also received support and training to develop their self-confidence and enable their engagement in other forums and activities. As a result, members have so far successfully contributed to the Stockton Youth Forum, Stockton Borough Council Single Equality Scheme, staff recruitment interviews and spoken to a local MP about the key issues for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All looked after children and young people participated in their reviews last year making Stockton one of the best performing councils nationally in this respect.

The number of children and young people involved in publicly funded youth services increased between 2004–06, but as yet participation rates have not met the national target and the growth rate has not matched the pattern found nationally. Nevertheless, the council continues to improve access to recreational activities and actively encourage participation. It works well alongside children and young people to help them put in place schemes and activities such as the youth cafés and a youth bus.

The number and range of opportunities for children, young people and their families to acknowledge and celebrate success are increasing. Good examples of this include the Investing in Children event, planned and developed by young carers and resourced through the Children's Fund, the Skinner Street project and the youth empowerment team's poster campaign promoting positive images of young people throughout Stockton.

Stockton currently has the lowest crime rate in the Tees Valley and its national ranking has improved by 22 places since 2003-04. Children's Services, Connexions, the Youth Offending Service and voluntary organisations such as the Corner House project, made a strong contribution to the 6% overall reduction in crime achieved last year. This is because they work in close partnership to develop and deliver good targeted provision for children and young people which is resulting in crime reduction and prevention. In the Newtown area of Stockton for example, the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system reduced by 6% from 424 in 2005-06 to 404

in 2006-07. The Positive Activities for Young People scheme involved over 1,800 young people at risk of disengaging from education, employment and training, social exclusion and/or anti-social behaviour during the past year. Positive outcomes of the programme reported to date include 130 young people who have not been involved in any further anti-social behaviour, 88 who have improved their behaviour and 37 who have improved their attendance.

The Safer Stockton partnership working collaboratively with the Stockton Drug Action Team has implemented many strategies to tackle drug-related crime and its causes working with both children and young people and adults. For example, as a result of its actions, every school in Stockton now has a teacher who has been trained in drugs issues and 58 school governors have also received this training. The positive outcomes of these initiatives are also reflected within the local community. For instance, in a survey of those people who complained to the Safer Stockton partnership about anti-social behaviour, 96% of those who responded said that the impact of the service was good or excellent.

In contrast to this very positive overall picture for reductions in first time entrants to the youth system and anti-social behaviour, rates of re-offending increased in 2005-06, when compared to the 2002-03 baseline, and the number of looked after children and care leavers receiving final warnings/reprimands and convictions remains high. The Children and Young People's Plan 2007-2010 contains targets to reduce youth offending and anti-social behaviour because the council recognises there is a need for continuous sustained improvement in this area.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

**Grade 4**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is excellent.

The 14–19 strategy is progressing well. The council is taking an effective lead role. There is both a very strong commitment and a clear sense of collective responsibility. Relationships between agencies are extremely strong and partners feel equally valued and fully included in developments. The first five diplomas are on target for introduction in January 2008. A good range of professional development and training activities have been delivered so far; for example, to share and develop best practice in teaching and learning across phases. The on-line prospectus is in place and this currently has good technical support. Work on the common application form continues and the partners expect to meet the 2009 deadline. The integrated youth strategy continues to develop well. Administrative and technical difficulties created as a result of the changes, particularly in relation to the use and analysis of management information, have been successfully ironed out.

The 2006 performance assessment of the Neighbourhood Renewal project confirmed that activities in Stockton such as Twister Arts, Making People Matter, Fit for Employment and Children's Fund projects are having a positive impact because they

are narrowing gaps in educational achievement. The employment rate of lone parents continues to rise as does the employment rate for Black and minority ethnic groups, which is now level with the national average and well above that found in the North East.

Surestart Children's Centres provide good access for childcare practitioners in the private, voluntary and independent sectors to update their skills and practice, gain relevant qualifications and in so doing, improve the quality of provision they offer. Good support and information is also provided for parents and carers through Children's Centres. Between April 2006 and March 2007 for example, 1,076 parents and carers gained qualifications (including those in child care), 597 accessed information advice and guidance activities and 143 participated in childminding training. A further 737 parents and carers accessed family learning courses and another 24 benefited from skills coaching. The Connexions Kick Start project worked with 63 parents and carers drawn from European Social Fund priority 4 wards. Of these, 12% moved into employment, 27% achieved accredited qualifications and 21% achieved other positive outcomes as a result of this successful project.

Post-16 progression and participation in education, employment or training continues to improve in Stockton. The proportion of young people completing Year 11 who continued in learning increased by 10% between 2004 and 2006, when it was just above that found nationally and in similar councils. In 2006, 76.5% progressed to further education institutions and, overall, some 92% participated in learning. This is higher than the rates found in the Tees Valley and nationally. The proportion of learners achieving qualifications at Level 2 by age 19 rose very slightly during 2006 to 68.1% and continued to exceed national expectations. The proportion of learners achieving Level 3 by age 19 also rose over previous years taking it above that found in similar councils and just below that found nationally. The average point score of 16-18 year old learners entered for GCE/VCE and A/AS levels has remained consistently above that found nationally and in similar councils since 2002.

The NVQ success rate for work-based learners aged under 19 at the start of their programme showed a rising trend from 49.2% in 2005 to 57.7% in 2006 which was slightly higher than that found nationally. The proportion of young people completing an apprenticeship rose significantly between 2004 and 2006, bringing it in line with similar councils and just below the national average. The proportion of supervised juveniles in full-time education, training or employment is slightly above that found in similar councils and nationally. The council's 2005-06 management information shows that 92% of pupil referral unit leavers, engaged in further education, working or training, an increase of 17% over the previous period.

The proportion of school leavers not in employment, education or training fell by 5.4% in 2006, bringing it in line with that found in similar councils. A very good reduction in the number of young people aged 19 whose activity was 'not known' was achieved between 2004-05 and 2005-06 taking the proportion to well below national and similar councils.



The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities not in employment education or training reduced from 17.5 % in 2005 to 13.5 % in 2006; improving at a better rate than that found in the Tees Valley, North East and nationally. However, the proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in work-based learning remains lower than found nationally.

Looked after children and care leavers aged over 15 years all have pathway plans in place. These young people are well supported and closely tracked by Connexions. Good multi-agency services provide well for their health and well-being. The proportion of looked after children and care leavers in education and training in their seventeenth year is very good. The proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation is good overall.

Since identifying some very specific issues for a small group of previously unknown homeless young people, the council has moved swiftly to address these and tackle homelessness in general. It has also implemented good measures to reduce the use of temporary accommodation and, as a result, there is an improving picture. The multi-agency youth homelessness strategy was developed with the active participation of young people affected by homelessness. This has resulted in a robust action plan. The officers and practitioners delivering this plan are being led and driven by a group of young people who are involved in, or have experienced homelessness. This work has been recognised as a beacon of good practice and, as a result, the council has been selected as a centre for excellence in this field for the North East region.

#### **Area for development**

- Increase the number of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are engaged in work-based learning.

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

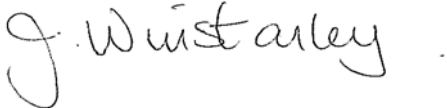
**Grade 4**

#### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The council has outstanding capacity to improve its services for children and young people. Inspiring and very effective senior leadership founded on strong moral principles results in cohesive teamwork. Strong corporate parenting ensures the well-being of looked after children and young people. Strategic and operational management is excellent and incorporates a robust corporate framework for performance management. Good governance arrangements and very strong partnerships ensure effective and efficient use of resources. Effective systems are in place for the council and its partners to work together to establish needs-based priorities, monitor progress and review and challenge performance, all of which are evaluated, reflected on and shared openly and transparently with stakeholders. For example, through the Children and Young People's Plan 2007–2010, and the recently completed self-evaluation and review.

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

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