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Ms Nicola Bailey  
Director of Children's Services  
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Dear Ms Bailey

## Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services in Hartlepool Borough Council, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against national measures. More weight has been given to the outcomes of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory visits (Blocks A and B in the performance profile).

The annual assessment derives from a four point scale:

4	Performs excellently	An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
3	Performs well	An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements
2	Performs adequately	An organisation that meets only minimum requirements
1	Performs poorly	An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements

Within each level there will be differing standards of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, an assessment of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects. As in 2009, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, the minimum requirements for each grade outlined in the guidance do not alone define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

## Hartlepool Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Hartlepool Borough Council perform well.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Most early years and childcare settings are at least good. The very large majority of nurseries and primary schools are good or better and the two special schools are good. Of the five secondary schools, one is outstanding, two are good and two are satisfactory. Provision post-16 is consistently good in the colleges, and in the secondary school sixth form it is outstanding. Although still satisfactory, provision is less strong in the pupil referral unit, the local authority children's home and the two private and voluntary children's homes. The fostering agency is good and the adoption agency is satisfactory.

A recent full inspection of safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked after children reported that services were good. Effective action has been taken to respond to the areas for development identified in the unannounced inspection of front-line child protection arrangements.

National performance measures show that almost all outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. Low outcomes in health remain key challenges for Hartlepool. These include the slow reduction to the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant and the high number of 11-year-olds who are overweight. The above average number of young people who say that they have been drunk or taken drugs recently is also a concern. In education, children do well. They start schools with average levels of language and social development. They make good progress in their primary schools and achieve results above those of similar areas at age 11. GCSE results improved significantly in 2009 and matched those of similar areas. The local authority has successfully increased educational achievement by the age of 19 and increased the number of 16- to 18-year-olds in education, work or training.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve the quality of provision in the pupil referral unit and the three children's homes so that they are all good.
- Improve children and young people's health, in particular by reducing the number of 11-year-olds who are overweight and reducing the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant.

## Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are successful in some areas, but some deep-rooted health issues remain to be addressed. For example, schools, the local authority children's home and most childminders are good at promoting healthy living. The take-up of school lunches in primary and secondary schools is above similar areas. In the pupil referral unit, pupils develop a growing awareness of the importance of living healthier lives. Improvement is beginning to show and the number of overweight five-year-olds has reduced. However, by the age of 11, the number that are overweight is a problem and worse than in similar areas. Fewer children than nationally take part in physical education and sport and fewer are satisfied with parks and play areas. Outcomes requiring further improvement have already been identified by the local authority. The *2010–2011 Annual Departmental Plan for Child and Adult Services* clearly highlights the high priority given to tackling the impact of child poverty on health outcomes. Renewed efforts to reduce the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant include the implementation of a robust programme of sex and relationship education in schools, good staff training for nurses and youth workers, and accurate local knowledge to raise the expectations of young women in specific wards. Services for children with mental health needs are improving.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good. The inspections of early years and childcare settings, schools and colleges confirm this. Various support programmes work intensively in local hotspot areas to protect young people in the community. For example, *'Operation Stay-Safe'* provides good support for young people who are in trouble because they have a drug or alcohol problem. There are some good arrangements for ensuring that children feel safe. The *'Crucial Crew'* event provides advice to all Year 6 pupils on safety in the home, at the seaside, on road and rail, and on firework safety. The inspection judged that the overall effectiveness of safeguarding was good. Staff report that they have an up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding issues and that training for their work is of good quality. Families benefit from a wide range of local provision with good examples of different agencies working together to meet the needs of children. The inspection also reported that provision for children and young people with specific disabilities was good.

Child carers, nurseries and schools are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. The local authority's work to improve all schools is effective and none are below the minimum expected targets. There is good support to improve satisfactory schools so that they become good. For example, the colleges and the local authority work closely with the community of secondary schools sharing good practice and professional development training. The primary, secondary and special schools have contributed to the good rise in examination results, which are now above similar areas at age 11 and in line at age 16. An inspection of the pupil referral unit in 2008 judged that achievement was only satisfactory because, at that time, teaching and the monitoring of students' progress were not of sufficiently high quality. Behaviour is good in secondary schools and fewer secondary pupils are absent from school. The number of children from minority ethnic groups is too low to

make meaningful statistical comparison, but the 2009–2010 review of the Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates that the local authority provides additional support to particular groups of children who need it. Outcomes for children in care are lower than for all children, as is the case nationally, and this remains a priority for the local authority. The inspection of services for them reported that many make good progress from their starting points and care is taken to place them in good schools. Despite steady improvement, results of children and young people from low-income families are not rising as quickly as those of all children and they do not achieve as well as all pupils of the same age. Children with special educational needs do as well as similar groups.

Arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and developing local services have been in place for a long time, including training young people as "young inspectors" of services. Schools and other settings are good at involving young people in decision making. An Ofsted survey of the impact of youth support in Hartlepool reported that much of the community-based youth provision engaged young people from more disadvantaged communities well and on a regular basis. Exclusion from school is avoided as much as possible and rates of permanent exclusion are below average. A range of effective interventions are in place to ensure that young people do not offend and the number entering the youth justice system for the first time has reduced. A high proportion of young offenders are engaged in education, work or training but access to suitable accommodation is not as good as in similar areas. The number of young people misusing drugs and alcohol is no worse than in similar areas but it is still above the average for England and a concern in specific local hotspots.

The local authority has clearly stated that its medium- and long-term priorities are to tackle inequalities and improve the life chances of all young people when they leave secondary schooling. It has been successful in many aspects and all performance measures are at least as good as in similar areas. For example, more young people than in similar areas, including those from low-income families, get good qualifications by the age of 19. The number of young people who are not in work, education or training has reduced and now matches similar areas. The colleges and the school sixth form make a positive contribution to young people's future learning and work prospects. The recent inspection of services for young people in care judged that services to help those leaving care to achieve better life chances were only adequate because, although more were now in work, education or training, almost half stopped partway through their chosen route. Many young people from low-income families still struggle to access high quality professional training or gain the good qualifications necessary to progress to higher education. The Children and Young People's Plan has recognised that these issues are key priorities for improvement.

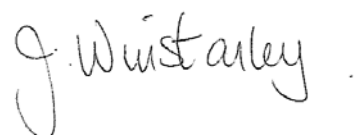
### **Prospects for improvement**

Leadership of children's services is improving most outcomes for children and young people. The local authority's accurate review of its Children and Young People's Plan and examples of energetic action to tackle weaknesses demonstrate good prospects

for improvement. For example, the inspection of the youth offending service identified the need for substantial improvement in safeguarding young people and improving the work of the services in several aspects. The subsequent safeguarding inspection noted that swift action had been taken to address these deficiencies. The same inspection rated capacity for improvement as good with managers providing effective leadership in the area, including intervention to protect young people whose circumstances have made them most vulnerable from significant harm. The Children and Young People's Plan is fully incorporated into the local authority's overall Community Strategy *Hartlepool's Ambition 2008 – 2020*. The local authority has identified the right priorities, in particular to improve children and young people's health outcomes. Good partnership working is demonstrated particularly well through the significant improvements in education.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment