

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0161 618 8207  
Direct F 0161 618 8514  
North\_apa@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Adrienne Simcock  
Director of Children's Services  
Hartlepool Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
Victoria Road  
Hartlepool  
TS24 8AY

Dear Mrs Simcock

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Hartlepool 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	2
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	4
Achieving economic well-being	3
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**

Hartlepool Borough Council makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. It delivers services which are above minimum requirements and has sustained strong performance in improving many outcomes for children and young people. Educational performance is good and improving year-on-year with above average standards in primary schools, and an improvement in the numbers of secondary students gaining five GCSEs at grades A\* to C. These achievements make a good contribution to the enjoyment, achievement and economic well-being of children and young people. Issues from the joint area review and the last APA have been tackled as priorities and so, for example, good progress has been made in reducing the numbers not in employment, education or training and first time entrants into the Youth Justice System. There have been some good improvements in a number of indicators in relation to child protection and social care referral and assessment services. The council makes excellent arrangements to support all children and young people, including for those who are more vulnerable, to make a positive contribution to their communities. However, whilst there are now fewer teenage conceptions compared with last year, performance has been variable over time and numbers of conceptions amongst 15- to 17-year-olds is still much higher than for similar councils and the national average.

The council demonstrates a good capacity to continue to improve its services for children and young people. It places children and young people, especially vulnerable groups and those who are looked after or who have a learning difficulty and/or disability, at the heart of its CYPP. The council takes advantage of its relatively smaller size to develop very good partnership working and an ability to respond quickly to changing priorities.

## Being healthy

**Grade 2**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council’s analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Almost all schools are now participating and two thirds have achieved the expected standards.</li> <li>▪ Some partnerships work very well together, particularly between the council and the Primary Care Trust, which has resulted in many multi-agency initiatives to improve the health of young people.</li> <li>▪ The council provides good support for those under the age of 18 who are involved in substance misuse.</li> </ul>

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- There has been a lack of sustained progress in reducing teenage conceptions. The 2006 figures show a 14.7% reduction in the number of conceptions amongst 15- to 17-year-olds from the base year of 1998, but this result is only in line with the 2004 figure and there has not been a sustained improvement over the last eight years.
- The proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding is 35.7% compared to a benchmark group average of 68.3% and an England average of 69.6%. The rate has actually fallen for each cohort since 2003/4.

## Staying safe

**Grade 3**

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

### Major Strengths

- A fall in the number of referrals to social care services and a rise in the proportion of referrals leading to initial assessments so that these figures are now close to those for similar councils; this is linked to the re-issue of agreed thresholds and the rollout of the common assessment framework.
- Good performance on completing initial assessments, core assessments and undertaking child protection conference reviews in a timely way.
- Good performance on the rate of looked after children in family placements, placed for adoption, adopted during the last year and for services for care leavers.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Despite being raised as a weakness in the last APA, the number of looked after the children per 10000 population under 18 has risen in the last year from 63.1 to 73.2, well above the rate for similar councils at 61.7.
- The percentage of referrals to social care services that are repeat referrals within 12 months rose from 8.9% in 2006/07 to 29.6% in 2007/08 and is now just above that for similar councils.

## Enjoying and achieving

**Grade 3**

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

### Major Strengths

- Attainment and progress at Key Stages 2 and 4 are good and improving faster than the national trend. Attainment at Key Stage 2 is above national and well above similar councils with a sustained trend of improvement. The percentage of learners who gain five A\* to C grades at GCSE has continued to improve and is above the national average.
- Attainment in Key Stage 3 English and mathematics, which was a priority in the last APA, has improved significantly and is well above that of similar council areas and is close to the national average.
- There are no permanent exclusions in primary or secondary schools and fewer fixed-term exclusions. This compares very well with national figures, and is well below similar councils.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Early years children are making less progress than the national average in their communication, development of language and literacy skills and in personal, social and emotional development.
- At secondary level, the percentage of learners gaining five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics is below the national average.
- Learners' performance in science at Key Stage 3 is lower than in similar councils.

## Making a positive contribution

## 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.

### Major strengths

- Excellent work to involve young people in the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel has been short-listed for a national award with evidence of impact.
- There has been a 13% decrease in numbers of first time entrants to the criminal justice system. A total of 259 young people entered this year compared to 298 last year. This good progress is due to effective work between the police service and schools.
- The overall re-offending rate has reduced year-on-year from the 2002 cohort at 39.6% to the current 2005 cohort at 28.8%. This is a 27.3% reduction over the period, much better than similar councils and the national average.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

## Achieving economic well-being

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.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good progress on the development of Diplomas with good partnership working across all providers. Plans are clear and comprehensive, based around a detailed audit of need.</li> <li>▪ A comprehensive 14–19 strategy is supporting the ability of an increasing number of young people to achieve Level 2 and Level 3 by 19: the percentage of those who do has continued to improve and is well above similar councils.</li> <li>▪ Participation rates of 17-year-olds in employment, education or training have increased and are now above national levels; and the proportion who are not engaged in employment, education or training has decreased and are lower than that for similar councils.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There has been no change in the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds whose involvement in employment, education or training is 'not known'.</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 and its management of these functions is good. There is a strong ambition to improve services, and the CYPP is clearly based on a thorough analysis of local need with a clear emphasis on those groups of children and young people who are hard to reach or vulnerable. The CYPP is clearly focused on the five outcomes of Every Child Matters with a realistic assessment and identification of what resources are needed and ensuring value for money. Strong inter-agency working is demonstrated across all five outcomes. There is a strong partnership between the voluntary and community sector in commissioning services. The council has a strong focus on providing value for money and efficiency-savings through working with partners, commissioning jointly and in re-aligning budgets to support council priorities. A good example is where work between partners has provided such good support for children and young people in mainstream schools and the families of those children in special schools that an external support base is not needed and those resources can be more effectively deployed.

The council spends a higher proportion of its budget on children's services than most which partially reflects the high level of children's needs within the council. Nevertheless, expenditure on children in foster care has declined reflecting more cost effective commissioning, investment in the family placement team and an increase in

the numbers of children placed within the council's own fostering service. The number of qualified social workers continues to rise and is above national levels. At the same time, however, there is a rise for the second year in vacancy levels for social care staff which is higher than similar councils and the national average, and also a rise in the number of vacant teaching posts.

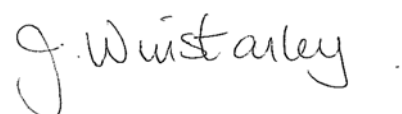
The council continues to show a good capacity to improve with a track record of sustained improvements in most outcomes for children and young people. However, the self-assessment has under-estimated the significance of some key public health indicators for being healthy and there has been insufficient improvement in measures to reduce teenage conception and improve breast-feeding rates over a number of years. Initiatives put in place following the visit of the National Teenage Pregnancy Support Team have yet to have an impact on outcomes.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The council and its partners provide effective leadership with good corporate parenting.</li> <li>▪ The council continues to provide excellent partnership working and commissioning arrangements leading to improved outcomes for children and young people. For example, the voluntary and community sector maintain a common strategy across the council to engage and involve young people.</li> <li>▪ There is a clear track record of sustained improvements for young people especially in enjoying and achieving, being enabled to achieve economic well-being and making a positive contribution.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There has been slow progress in improving some health outcomes.</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



Juliet Winstanley  
 Divisional Manager  
 Local Services Inspection