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

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in April 2011 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services 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 other published data.

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of inspection outcomes including the arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against similar authorities and/or 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 2010, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

Hartlepool Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Hartlepool Borough Council perform well. Good performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011 and the majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted continue to be good or outstanding. Importantly no setting is inadequate and almost all provision helps children and young people learn well and stay safe. Areas of strength remain the same as last year. The areas identified for improvement have not changed significantly.

The latest unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection in March 2011, found no areas for priority action and only one area for development. It identified two strengths and many areas that met requirements. The five areas for development identified at the previous inspection in November 2009 have been fully addressed.

Strengths

- For children under five, the large majority of childminding provision is good or better. Of the two children's centres inspected, one is good and the other is satisfactory. Almost all nurseries are good or better. Children are well prepared for school and, over the past four years, outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage have improved faster than nationally and are above the average for similar areas. Very young children from low-income families do slightly better than such children in similar areas and their levels of development are rising.
- As in 2010, the very large majority of provision in primary schools is good or outstanding. Key Stage 2 test results at the age of 11 were not reported in 2010 but, in previous years, they matched similar areas. Provisional results for 2011 show that standards have been maintained.
- The special schools and the special school sixth form are good, as they were last year. The pupil referral unit has improved from satisfactory to good.
- All provision for learning post-16 is good or outstanding. The school sixth form is outstanding and the two colleges are good. Level 2 and level 3 results at the age of 19, including young people from low-income families, match similar areas.
- No secondary school has been inspected in 2011 and, as previously, of the five schools one is outstanding, two are good and two are satisfactory. Results at Key Stage 4 match similar areas. Young people from low-income families do as well as their counterparts in similar areas. Provisional results for 2011 show significant improvement.

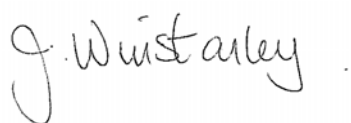
- An inspection of the youth offending service identified good performance in the key areas inspected.

Areas for further improvement

- Provision for looked after children and young people is mostly satisfactory. As reported in 2010, the fostering agency is good but the local authority adoption agency is only satisfactory. One privately-run children's home used by the local authority is also only satisfactory. The one local authority children's home was last inspected in January 2011 when there were no young people present because the home was being refurbished. The three areas inspected were judged to be satisfactory. In previous full inspections, with children present, this home has never been better than satisfactory.
- As overall results improve, the attainment gap between the majority of children and young people and specific groups of young people are not closing quickly enough. For example, results for looked after young people are very low and the proportion who achieve at least five GCSE at grades A* to C including English and mathematics remains well below similar areas. This is also the case for young people from low-income families, who, despite improvement, still attain far lower results than other young people of the same age in Hartlepool.
- The March 2011 unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found that a high number of referrals are made to children's social care services. This is often because some vulnerable children and families do not receive effective support early enough to avoid issues escalating to social care services.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment