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Dear Mrs Baxter

## **2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

### **Summary**

<b>Areas for judgement</b>	<b>Grade awarded<sup>1</sup></b>
The contribution of <b><i>the local authority's children's services</i></b> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	<b>4</b>
The council's overall <b><i>capacity to improve</i></b> its services for children and young people	<b>4</b>
The contribution of <b><i>the local authority's social care services</i></b> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	<b>3</b>

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<b>Grade</b>	<b>Service descriptors</b>	<b>Capacity to improve descriptors</b>
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Excellent / outstanding
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate

The leadership and management of council services for children and young people in Stockton are excellent. The council and its partners are determined that the needs of all children and young people will be met through the provision of innovative and creative interventions. Senior leaders have a strong sense of moral direction and a determination that no child or young person will be left behind. The corporate commitment to the involvement and participation of children, families and wider stakeholders in decision-making is very strong and is a characteristic of the learning culture which has been created and which is now embedded throughout the council. The contributions made by children and young people have made an impact across the five outcome areas. Last year the council was judged a coasting council in respect of its children's social care services. The council has responded very positively indeed to that judgement over the past year and has significantly improved both its services and direct outcomes for children and young people.

## **Being healthy**

The contribution of the council's children's services towards improving the health of children and young people is good.

The authority acknowledges the continued high level of teenage conceptions. The latest figures show a slight reduction in conceptions and the authority has increased the amount and intensity of resources in order to achieve further improvement.

There is considerable focus on health inequalities, especially via Sure Start and the established Children's Centres. This has resulted in improved rates of smoking cessation and breastfeeding. The authority's strategy on tackling obesity is supported by the implementation of a healthy eating strategy across a range of services.

Stockton is a 'high focus area' in relation to substance misuse and the authority is generating a number of initiatives in partnership with the Primary Care Trust to raise awareness and support young people and families. There are dedicated treatment services tailored for young people but the overall impact of these service developments has yet to be realised.

Schools are performing well in helping learners to be healthy. Although the authority is on target for the number of schools gaining the Healthy School Standard by December 2006, this is well below the rate achieved by other authorities in the region.

The range of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) continues to be developed and expanded. Waiting times for CAMHS have improved significantly over last year's levels and there has been a very substantial increase in services provided to looked-after children and children in need in recent months. CAMHS are well linked into the fostering service and independent fostering agencies.

The overall health of looked-after children is comprehensively monitored and supported. A dedicated health professional provides one-to-one support in a timely fashion.

Significantly, only one looked-after child is identified as obese and there have been no pregnancies amongst looked-after young women for the past three years.

There are innovative programmes that are successfully encouraging young people to participate in sporting and physical activity at all levels.

The authority provides comprehensive support systems to families of young children with disabilities and dedicated key workers engage very effectively with parents.

## **Staying safe**

The council's children's services makes an excellent contribution towards promoting and securing the safety of children and young people in the area.

The authority is developing preventative services based geographically on extended school clusters and Sure Start Children's Centres. Children and families have been involved in consultations with the authority to keep children safe through the Children's Participation Officer for looked-after children, and through the Corporate Parent Forum and the Parent/Professional Forum.

Referrals of children in need are well managed with many referrals being redirected to appropriate support services without the need for assessment. The authority carefully monitors referrals to ensure that responses are appropriate. There has been a significant improvement in the time taken to complete core assessments.

The new Local Safeguarding Children Board has now been established and the authority continues to have effective oversight of child protection matters. The level of registrations is reducing and cases are being well managed, resulting in fewer re-registrations, timely reviews, improved levels of de-registration and duration on register. The child protection register is monitored weekly to ensure consistency of practice and good process management. All children on the register have an allocated social worker. Action plans from serious case reviews in previous years have been implemented and lessons learned. School inspections indicate that schools are very effective in ensuring that learners stay safe.

The authority has developed initiatives to address bullying including an anti-bullying week for children. A large proportion of schools have participated in nationally recognised anti-bullying training. Significant steps have been taken to address bullying issues in residential care settings.

Good progress is being made in developing a common assessment framework (CAF) for use by all agencies, with appropriate supporting information systems. Its implementation is a high priority in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP).

The authority has prioritised the issue of placement choice and stability for looked-after children in response to last year's APA. There have been improvements in the stability of placements and this remains a focus for longer term strategic planning. The authority is succeeding in its objective of reducing the numbers of children looked-after in residential care. Reviews of looked-after children are timely and there is a focus on early intervention, appropriate support and a greater degree of choice. The majority of care leavers have pathway plans. A Children's Rights Officer visits all looked-after children, recording their views and passing them on to senior management to inform planning. The authority hosts a regional commissioning unit, which supports the appropriate use of placements for children according to their needs and choices.

There are good levels of fostering and adoption with increased numbers of children fostered by relatives or friends. The authority is actively campaigning to increase the number of black and minority ethnic foster carers. The fostering service ensures that children are safe and provides well trained, well supported and highly competent foster carers. Adoptions are generally completed in good time without undue delay.

The great majority of children with disabilities have a transition plan to support their move to adult services. The authority has identified a need to review services for children with complex needs in an effort to target services more effectively.

The authority is developing its policies for community cohesion and promoting race equality for children.

The authority is providing a safe meeting place for young women in danger of being sexually abused in conjunction with a community based project.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

The contribution of the authority's children's services to ensuring children and young people achieve at school and enjoy their education and leisure activities is excellent. The authority has further improved the provision made for pupils of all ages and this has resulted in improved attainment at all key stages, especially Key Stage 4. Schools receive very good support from the School Effectiveness Service. In the four year period, from 2002, a clear focus on the development of school leadership at all levels and on improving the quality of teaching and learning has resulted in improved attainment and a high proportion of schools being judged, by Ofsted, as good or outstanding. Only one school is currently in a category of concern.

A strong team of inspectors, most of whom are involved in the national inspection programme, provide rigorous support and challenge to schools. This has resulted in robust school self-evaluation, improved analysis and use of data and a shared commitment to raising standards across the authority. The service knows schools well and provides robust, well targeted support to meet specific needs. There is good partnership working

and a commitment to sharing good practice and rigorously evaluating the outcomes of such work. Effective action has been taken to reduce surplus places in primary schools and to improve learning environments. School, staff and user surveys identify high levels of satisfaction with the service.

Early year's provision is very good and an increasing number of children meet the early learning goals. Opportunities for training and development are offered to all providers thus ensuring that all children receive good quality provision. The Early Support Service has been identified as a national pathfinder. It provides early intervention for young children with a disability. The effective use of inspectors and consultants coupled with innovative approaches to maximising learning, including a successful pilot on early transfer from Key Stage 1 onwards, has further improved learning opportunities for pupils. As a result, pupils sustain standards which are in line with or above national averages at Key Stage 1 and 2. Evidence from school inspections confirms that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least as good progress as other pupils.

Raising standards at Key Stage 4 was, appropriately, a key priority of the CYPP. A dip in attainment at Key Stage 3 and 4, in 2004, was rigorously evaluated. The service acted promptly to put in place a number of well targeted and effective intervention strategies and, as a result, attainment rose at both key stages with results at Key Stage 4 being the most improved nationally. Added value is slightly below average at Key Stage 2 to 4, although rising, while added value Key Stage 3 and 4 was above average in 2005.

Concerns around the attainment of minority ethnic pupils in writing and the achievement of boys have been addressed. The authority and its schools have rigorous procedures by which to monitor individual progress and support is well targeted to meet individual needs. The authority has improved the speed at which statements of special educational need are produced and has reduced the overall number of statements. Support for looked-after and vulnerable pupils is a strong feature of the authority's work. The number of looked-after children attaining at least one GCSE is well above that found nationally; although the number of pupils attaining five or more GCSEs fell in 2005, this was due to the high level of special needs within the very small cohort.

The bringing together of the school effectiveness, behaviour and attendance teams has had a very positive impact. Attendance is now above national averages in all phases and a recent intervention programme improved the attendance of two hundred and fifty pupils with only five pupils showing no improvement at all. The attendance of looked-after children is much better than that found nationally. Behaviour was judged to be good or better in all recent school inspections. There were no exclusions in primary schools and the number of exclusions in secondary schools was very low. Cooperative working between secondary schools has resulted in a system of managed moves for hard to place pupils. The authority has a clear commitment to ensuring that children and young people enjoy their time at school.

The authority is taking steps to improve access to recreational activities, including the development of extended schools and the refurbishment of a local park. It provides good support to help looked-after children access facilities and acts on the outcomes of consultation designed to identify future needs. The Youth Service is well funded and the authority has identified groups not involved in sport in order to provide interesting activities to increase participation.

## **Making a positive contribution**

The council's contribution to outcomes for children and young people in this area is excellent. There is a strong corporate commitment to consultation and engagement and a well structured approach enables children and young people to contribute routinely to the planning and evaluation of services. A Participation, Involvement and Consultation (PIC) network has been established to promote the strategy of engagement with children and young people. Recent consultations with young people include working on the CYPP, the APA self-assessment, design of a website and youth cafes. The authority has a Youth Viewpoint panel of over 800 children and young people willing to be consulted on council services and this is fully integrated into the PIC network.

The authority has developed a strategy to tackle diversity and community cohesion and this is expected to benefit black and minority ethnic children and young people. Support, advice and training to assist with placements for children from minority ethnic backgrounds is well established within the fostering service.

Most schools have school councils that are being further developed and supported. Schools scored well in recent school inspections on the 'extent to which learners make a positive contribution'. Encouragement of children to be actively engaged in decision-making is also being extended to early years settings.

Re-offending rates have reduced by a very significant amount. Offending by looked-after children has risen but is still well below the levels of comparator authorities.

Looked-after children participate fully in their reviews and their carers consult them about their care and the things they do. A Children's Rights Officer visits all looked-after children, recording their views and passing them on to senior managers to inform planning.

There is proactive planning for vulnerable young people in transition from children's services to adult services, with young people playing a key part in decision-making. The number of children with a disability and their families accessing direct payments for developing their own support services has increased substantially. A high percentage of children with learning disabilities and/or statements of special educational need go on to education, employment or training. A Youth Forum for children with disabilities helps children and young people to raise issues for consideration at the Parent/Professional Forum in the hope of improving outcomes. The inspection of the residential special school found that clear planning and reviewing, reflecting young people's assessed needs, is

effective with young people and their parents being consulted and their views and opinions taken into account.

Forty young people, including people from vulnerable groups are involved in developing the 'Yo Yo' magazine for young people.

The authority is now actively working to align groups and partnerships to ensure continuity and consistency of activity. As a result, there is increasing clarity about how involvement and participation influences service planning, development and delivery. There are also well focused plans to improve the involvement of children and young people in decision-making through broadening the operation of the Youth Assembly, extending the membership of the PIC Network, and improving links between the various strategic groups and participation groups.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

The contribution of the authority's children's services to enabling children and young people to achieve economic well-being is good. There are very significant strengths in work with the most vulnerable groups and a determination that every child and young person is fully included.

The authority has continued to lead on developments for the 14–19 strategy. A number of well focused groups plan strategic direction, core provision and the operational details which will enable it to succeed. Membership of these groups includes college principals, secondary and special school headteachers and deputy headteachers and other partners. The quality of education offered by schools and colleges in recent inspections of post-16 provisions is good or better and there is a clear commitment to building on what has gone before and making it more effective.

Post-16 transitions have improved with higher than average numbers of young people attending college. Improvements have been made to the take up and retention of young people into education, employment or training. The number of young people not in education, employment or training has been further reduced this year. There is a neighbourhood renewal fund package to enable teenage parents to access EET opportunities. A high proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue into further education (FE) or training.

Sure Start provides parents with training and employment opportunities and partnerships with Connexions and FE colleges have seen an improvement in success rates for parents undertaking nationally recognised qualifications. A volunteer programme has broken-down barriers for parents who may not have worked for some time. Children's Centres are providing support for health and education in the 20% most disadvantaged wards. The youth advisory service has become part of a national pilot for the rights to access project. This service undertakes specialised housing, welfare and debt casework. It is developing

ways to make the service more young person friendly by working with partners to improve access and training young people as advisors.

There is good support for looked-after children and care leavers. The fostering service works with carers to promote educational and leisure activities and a peer mentoring worker supports care leavers living independently. As a result, the numbers of young people leaving the care system and deemed to be homeless are low. However, the authority has discovered a small, previously hidden group of vulnerable young people between the ages of 16 and 24 whose parents are unwilling or unable to accommodate them. A home visiting scheme has been initiated to try to resolve individual issues and the authority is working to develop a more effective service in this area.

### **The council's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve them further**

The leadership and management of services for children and young people are excellent. The enthusiasm and commitment of the senior leadership team inspires individuals at all levels to contribute to continuously improving outcomes. In a short time services have been harmoniously integrated in order to make real improvements to the lives of children and young people.

The authority has increased its strategic and performance capacity to achieve ambitious targets. Good use of integrated commissioning and embedded partnership working has significantly improved the effectiveness of services. The quality of strategic thinking and planning is now at a high level and reflects the authority's willingness and capacity to respond strongly to previously identified areas for improvement. The corporate performance management framework is well refined and ensures that activity is well targeted to bring about sustained improvement.

There are very effective partnerships both internally and with a wide range of external agencies and organisations. Good quality training and development programmes are in place to support improvements in provision and the authority has demonstrated its ability to act on difficult issues such as the removal of surplus places in primary schools and reducing the levels of staff absence. The integration of education and children's services has been managed very successfully and a well integrated team approach founded on shared values is evident in all aspects of its work.



## Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the health of looked-after children</li> <li>initiatives to tackle health inequalities</li> <li>action on obesity</li> <li>meals in primary schools</li> <li>the development of CAMHS.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teenage conception rate</li> <li>Healthy School Standard</li> <li>action on substance abuse.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the management of child protection cases</li> <li>timeliness of core assessments</li> <li>development of the CAF and integrated children's system</li> <li>commissioning strategy</li> <li>reduced use of residential care and development of fostering and adoption.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the impact of council policies on promoting race equality and community cohesion for children.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provision for early years</li> <li>improved attainment at all key stages and especially Key Stage 4</li> <li>strong school effectiveness team able to offer well targeted challenge and support</li> <li>effective partnership work with schools</li> <li>improved self-evaluation and data analysis</li> <li>the range of support for behaviour which has significantly reduced exclusions</li> <li>good attendance</li> <li>a reduction in the number of statements and improved completion times</li> <li>low and reducing exclusion rates</li> <li>well targeted interventions into schools of concern</li> <li>improvements made to writing, boys' achievement and the achievement of minority ethnic pupils.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>added value at Key Stage 3.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• corporate commitment to participation and involvement</li> <li>• culture of inclusion</li> <li>• rates of re-offending</li> <li>• participation and involvement of looked-after children</li> <li>• transition planning for children with disabilities.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diversity and community cohesion.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good support for families</li> <li>• achievement and standards in secondary schools and colleges</li> <li>• the development of the 14–19 strategy at strategic and operational levels</li> <li>• the numbers of young people moving into education, employment or training at age 16</li> <li>• support for care leavers and vulnerable groups.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• homelessness amongst young people.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inspiring and very effective senior leadership</li> <li>• very cohesive team working founded on strong moral principles</li> <li>• additional appointments to the leadership team which have released capacity and potential</li> <li>• well targeted interventions which have clear impact</li> <li>• the quality of strategic thinking</li> <li>• strongly embedded corporate framework for performance management</li> <li>• partnership work which improves provision and makes good use of resources.</li> </ul>	

### Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

- Homelessness of young people.
- Community cohesion.
- Improvements in added value at Key Stage 3.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



**FLO HADLEY**

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**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**

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