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Dr Sharon Menghini
Director of Children's and Young People's Services
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Floor 2, Civic Centre
Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire, ST4 1RU

Dear Dr Menghini

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, 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, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Stoke-on-Trent City Council perform adequately, as they did in 2009.

A half of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and very few are inadequate. Education and care settings for very young children are good, as they were in 2009. The five special schools are good and one of the two pupil referral units is good. However, just over a half of secondary schools and just under a half of primary schools are good or better. Two primary schools are inadequate. Most post-16 provision is adequate, though both special school sixth forms are good. The local authority adoption and fostering agencies are adequate and eight of the ten local authority children's homes are good.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found a balance of strengths and areas for development and no priority actions. The joint area review in 2009 judged services for safeguarding and looked after children to be adequate. Private fostering arrangements are good.

National performance measures show the large majority of outcomes are in line with the averages for England or for similar areas. A small number of indicators show better than average performance, including how well young children do at the end of their Reception Year at school and the reduction in numbers of children who have run away from care or home overnight. However, nearly half of education performance measures are below those in similar areas. These include children's progress between the ages of seven and 11, and their educational attainment at ages 11, 16 and 19. In addition more children are excluded from school than in similar areas. Obesity rates for five-year-olds are higher than in similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Raise standards of educational attainment at ages 11, 16 and 19.
- Increase the number of good schools and services.
- Reduce the number of permanent exclusions from school.

Outcomes for children and young people

Healthy lifestyles are supported generally well in the majority of inspected settings and services. Health outcomes are generally in line with those in similar areas or found nationally. Breast-feeding rates at six to eight weeks from birth are lower than the England average. The take-up of school lunches is better than in similar areas in primary schools and in line with similar areas in secondary schools. Obesity rates for children in the Reception Year are higher than those in similar areas. Children's level

of participation in high quality physical activity and sport has continued to rise in line with the national trend. In a recent national survey, the proportion of children and young people who said they were satisfied with local parks and play spaces was less good than in similar areas. The same survey showed that children and young people rated their emotional health as better than the rest of the country. Progress in moving towards a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service is less good than in England as a whole.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good in the large majority of settings and services. The joint area review in 2009 judged the contribution of local services to safeguarding to be adequate. The majority of indicators are in line with national performance or similar areas, with some that have improved and are now better, including: the proportion of referrals to children's social care which are then assessed by a social worker; and a reduction in the number of child protection plans that last for over two years. Capacity in front-line services has been strengthened and social workers report that they receive supportive and regular management supervision. The council is improving the arrangements for notification and monitoring of safeguarding concerns arising from incidents of domestic violence. The number of children and young people seriously injured or killed on the roads is reducing faster than in similar areas but hospital admissions for unintentional or deliberate injuries are higher than across England. In a recent survey the proportion of children and young people who reported that they had experienced bullying was in line with that found in similar parts of the country.

Overall educational provision and outcomes for children and young people in Stoke-on-Trent are lower than in similar areas. The proportion of early years settings judged good or better in inspection is generally higher than in similar areas and the proportion nationally. By the end of the Reception Year in primary school, children's achievement is better than in similar areas with the gap between the highest and lowest achieving children continuing to reduce. However, children make less good progress between the ages of seven and 11 than their peers in similar areas and do less well in national tests at ages 11 and 16. Although standards in the city have improved, this has also been the case elsewhere, so in 2008/2009 the gap between Stoke and similar authorities had not closed. The provisional GCSE results in 2010 show that standards have continued to rise. The local authority has been successful in reducing the number of inadequate schools, but too many are still only satisfactory. The local authority has identified the need for improvement in this area as a priority. The percentage of secondary schools where behaviour was judged to be good or better at their most recent inspection is in line with that in the rest of the country and in similar areas. Persistent absence rates are reducing and are in line with similar areas, though less good than across England.

Children and young people are supported well to make a positive contribution to services through consultation and participation, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In its current Children and Young People's Plan the local authority reports an increase in the active involvement of children and young people through an incentive scheme across youth service provision. Better feedback mechanisms have also allowed children to contribute to the Children and Young

People's Plan. The proportion of young people involved in sporting, cultural, recreational and volunteering activities is broadly similar to that in similar areas. Although the rate of reduction in the conception rate for those under the age of 18 is below the England average and falls short of national targets, the local authority and its partners report a faster reduction than elsewhere between 2007 and 2008. Although rates of permanent exclusions from schools reduced in previous years, they have again risen and are now higher than in similar areas and found nationally. Fewer young people in Stoke-on-Trent are recorded as breaking the law for the first time than in similar areas. However, the most recent data show that although rates of re-offending by young people in Stoke-on-Trent have reduced they are higher than in similar areas. The youth offending service has a high profile locally where partnerships with the police and other agencies, mobile outreach provision and an improved summer programme have led to a fall in anti-social behaviour.

Young people are supported well across the majority of services and settings, though less well in secondary schools, in developing the skills and attitudes required for securing work and achieving economic well-being. The quality of educational provision for 16- to 19-year-olds, while never inadequate, varies according to the institution. It is good in the five special school sixth forms, but in only one of the three secondary school sixth forms. Provision in the sixth form college is adequate, and is good in one of the two further education colleges. Targeted initiatives for 14- to 19-year-olds, including better curriculum provision and work with groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, have begun to make a difference. The proportion of young people not in education, work or training has almost halved since 2006/2007 and is now broadly in line with similar areas. The proportion of care leavers and young offenders in education, work or training is comparable to the rest of the country. However, educational standards by the age of 19 are still below those in similar areas. Too many young people leave education without the equivalent of five good GCSEs or two A levels. The proportion of young people from low-income families who progress to higher education is in line with similar areas, as is the take-up of formal childcare by low-income families.

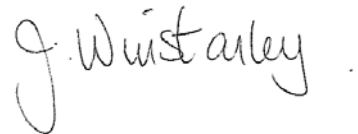
Prospects for improvement

Outcomes overall are satisfactory. However, although improving, almost all educational outcomes for children and young people in Stoke-on-Trent remain too low and have not kept pace with improvements in similar local authorities. Too much provision in settings and services for children is still only satisfactory. In its review of its Children and Young People's Plan the local authority and its partners acknowledge these weaknesses and have set ambitious targets for improvement. Although some important targets were not met in 2008/2009, there are some positive signs of progress. The gap has closed in a number of areas; for example: the improved performance of children at the end of the Reception Year, the significant reduction in the number of young people not in education, work or training, and the reduction in the number of failing schools. In addition, the provisional figures for 2010 provided by the local authority show that educational standards at age 16 have continued to improve. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found provision

of additional resources has strengthened capacity, and at its most recent inspection the capacity of the youth offending service to improve was judged to be good.

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' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment