



## **Securing and expanding a service: *Stoke Speaks Out***

Ahead of local authority budget decisions in 2015, *Stoke Speaks Out* held a seminar chaired by the then MP for Stoke-on-Trent North, Joan Walley. It was designed to both celebrate the work of *Stoke Speaks Out* and discuss how it could be sustained. The event helped secure the service's future and a huge expansion in early years' speech, language and communication provision in the city.

'Giving Voice to Stoke-on-Trent' was attended by local strategic decision-makers, including the Council Leader, other councillors with relevant portfolios, strategic managers in the local authority, as well as other local stakeholders. There were speeches and presentations by the Council Leader, Tracy Jackson (Head of Citywide Locality Services, Stoke-on-Trent Council), Public Health England, and RCSLT. Ms Walley gave a key-note speech, chaired the event, and facilitated the post-speeches strategic discussion on how *Stoke Speaks Out* could be sustained. She also mentioned it in a House of Commons debate and it secured local radio coverage.

As a result of the event, various things happened locally and nationally:

- Locally, it put speech, language and communication needs on the agenda of strategic stakeholders, highlighted to them the local impact and national significance of the initiative, alerted them to the effect of cuts to the programme, and engaged partners in future decision-making. Following the event, there is to be a huge investment in early speech, language and communication. A 2 to 3 year plan is being worked on which will include extra speech and language therapists, a midwife, and reading and communication champions.
- Locally, Ms Walley involved herself with the Stoke Reads conference - giving a speech and presenting *Stoke Speaks Out* awards. She was also involved in the local Literary Festival. During her time as an MP, she was always keen to champion services for children locally and ensured they had a national voice.
- Nationally, RCSLT wrote to the early years' minister about the event and subsequently met with his officials to discuss *Stoke Speaks Out* and how speech and language therapists support children in their early years. RCSLT later met with the minister himself and briefed him on the initiative.

## Giving Voice to Stoke-on-Trent event

January 2015

