Evaluation of the Impact and Effectiveness of the Brierley Hill Sure Start Programme.

Year One Interim Report

Centre for Research in Early Childhood

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Acknowledgements

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Section 1: Background

1.1 National Background

Vulnerable children growing up in disadvantaged areas are a focal point of government policy. The Sure Start Programme is a major programme directed at improving the life chances of such children and is part of the wider set of initiatives to combat social exclusion. It originated in the consultations for the Treasury-led Cross-Departmental Review of Provision for Young Children, and was announced in 1997 as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. The aim of Sure Start is to improve the health and well-being of families and children before and after birth, so children are thriving and fully prepared when they begin school. It is major part of government strategy to counter the cumulative disadvantage that leads to social exclusion.

(From: Sure Start Evaluation Development Programme. Report to Sure Start Unit November 1999)

In 1998 a number of Sure Start Programmes were designated in areas of high deprivation and poverty across England. Their aim is to develop improved and co-ordinated local services for families, owned by the local community.

The Sure Start Programmes were given funding in return for capacity building of services for children under four and their families. These Programmes were also given clear national and local targets to work to, and required to put in place a rigorous evaluation of the functioning and outcomes of the Programme services over time.

The importance of evaluating the role and effectiveness of the Brierley Hill Sure Start Programme has been recognised by its managers. This evaluation is being conducted by the team from The Centre for Research in Early Childhood under the Directorship of Professor Christine Pascal and Dr. Tony Bertram. Elaine Dupree is the Evaluation Co-ordinator, with some help from Sue Rice, an experienced field researcher.
1.2 Local Background

Dudley is a large metropolitan borough located in the West Midlands conurbation. It lies at the heart of the Black Country, and is comprised of small townships, each having their own identity and culture. They include Dudley itself, Stourbridge, Halesowen, Brierley Hill and North Dudley. The chosen catchment area for the Brierley Hill Sure Start Programme takes in most of the Brierley Hill ward and part of Brockmoor and Pensnett, and is an area with high levels of need for support services among families. It includes nine enumeration districts spanning out from Brierley Hill High Street, which provides a common focus for shopping, library and leisure facilities. The Joint Planning Board chose Brierley Hill as the focus for the Sure Start Programme in 1999. NCH (National Children’s Homes) are both the Lead and Accountable Body for the Programme.

Family Support development was identified as a strategic priority, given the high levels of deprivation coupled with a relative dearth of resources and gaps in services available to support families with young children. The DoE Score of Urban Deprivation identified Brierley Hill as the highest scoring ward (in the borough of Dudley) with Brockmoor and Pensnett ranking sixth. (Source: Children and Families Divisional Plan 1999/2000.) Although the catchment area has a central point, in terms of shopping, on the High Street, accessed by all local families, there are at least three natural communities present. It was decided that service delivery must reflect this unique local profile in order to be effective. There were also significant factors for consideration (within housing provision) in terms of travelling families, and the possible introduction of asylum seekers into the area, both of which could affect service provision.

At the time of planning the Programme, there was a major regeneration of Brierley Hill as a new town centre being developed as part of the Unitary Development Plan. This includes new proposals for the transport network, including a new metro link, and for leisure provision, which includes the redevelopment of the Leisure Centre. The Sure Start Programme was jointly planned to complement this work, and lead Officers from Planning and Leisure and Recreation participated in the Steering Group. The location of Sure Start services around the High Street area, and particularly any capital developments, are based on a commitment to making the best use of shared resources.
to maximise facilities for local families. The Area Development Framework Consultation Draft for Brierley Hill (1998) summarised the position thus:

“Brierley Hill continues to perform a very important function as a focus for convenience shopping and a range of community facilities. The markets satisfy a particular local demand which cannot be met at Merry Hill; the market hall is a treasured feature of the High Street, being significant for both its longevity of use on site and its continuing contribution to the vitality of the retail trade.”(p38)

One of the major stakeholders in the regeneration of Brierley Hill is Chelsfield, the owners of the Merry Hill Shopping Centre and significant area of surrounding land. Merry Hill is a nationally known retail development which borders Brierley Hill and which has transformed the profile of the area over the last two decades. In designing the Sure Start Programme, it quickly became apparent that any proposed developments would need to harmonise with other significant influences over the future of the local communities, and so plans were shared at an early stage with officers from the Local Authority, and the managing director of Chelsfield and support staff. Early consultations were extremely positive and a wish to develop Sure Start in a sustainable way that complemented other plans was evident. This is a tremendous strength for the Brierley Hill Programme, as key stakeholders from private enterprise support the Programme, and have fully engaged in the planning process to ensure that Sure Start adds value to the overall regeneration of the Brierley Hill as a new town centre.

The consultation process, which included all service provider, local parents and families, identified the following gaps in service provision and desirable characteristics of service provision if it is to be effective.

Gaps

- Lack of provision for under two’s
- Lack of parent/toddler leisure activities e.g. swimming
- Inadequate transport-inaccessible buses, only main routes
- No summer activities especially for under two’s
- Nowhere for fathers to go with children
- Lack of information-Who to ask? Where to go?
Lack of outdoor play areas
No central place to go and meet
No support in an emergency for parents without neighbours or extended family
Poor services for teenage parents
Lack of crèche facilities to support courses for adults
No help with gardening

Characteristics of service provision if it is to be effective:

Child centred
Transport available/accessible
Easy access to information
On site crèche provision
Flexible
Varied
Reliable
Affordable leisure and other services
Non-stigmatising
Approved providers
Accessible to parents who don’t speak English as a first language
Non reliant on written information

This evidence resulted in the following Vision Statement:

“Over the next ten years, Sure Start in Brierley Hill aims to provide the best possible services to support all children under four and their families, through positive commitment and partnership between those working and living in the area. This means creating a gateway to affordable opportunities for safe, practical and fun services which reach all families, and which really help to realise every child's potential in ways which are identified by the local community.”

(All information taken from Sure Start Brierley Hill Delivery Plan Approved July 2000)
1.3 Partnership and Structure

The full Partnership Board meets twice a year, and the Programme Management Group meets on a 4-6 weekly basis. 3 sub-groups presently support the Programme Management Group:

- Support Group on Needs of Ethnic Minority Parents. This meets on a monthly basis to advise on the needs of minority parents.
- Capital Group. This meets on a monthly basis to manage the development of the capital programmes for Sure Start.
- Early Years Education Group. This meets on a half-termly basis to link early years education providers.

A sub-group was formed to work on the new PSA Targets, to report to the Programme Management Group. This process also included a full planning day which was well attended by Partners and other interested parties.

There is also a Parents Group that meets monthly at First Steps. There are a further 2 Parents Groups planned which will also meet monthly at Hawbush and Brockmoor.

The evaluation process has established that Partnership Board and Management Group meetings are well attended and participants are very positive regarding the ethos of the meetings and the constitution of the Board and Management Group. Most outlined that the membership is not fixed, and that others are invited to attend as and when necessary.

Team Structure

At present the team is still developing with some places remaining vacant. There have been difficulties in the recruitment of suitable candidates to fill some posts; with some posts having been advertised twice without appointments being made.

Full team meetings take place on a weekly basis with minutes kept etc. Also, an ongoing appraisal/supervision process has been established; with each team member attending a monthly supervision meeting. There are procedures in place for each member of the team to compile a monthly report on each area of their work with future objectives and targets being set. This system is ready for implementation.
1.4 Services Presently Provided by Sure Start

A brief description of services presently being provided this year will be outlined here.

**First Steps**

Sure Start is currently funding the drop-in facilities for parents and their children provided by First Steps in order to sustain this provision. When the new Family Centre is built First Steps will move into the new building.

**Speech Therapy**

The speech therapy team are in place and at present are supporting two projects both funded by Sure Start.

- Book Start: which takes place in the local library and has been extended.
- Playtalk: which takes place in 3 local schools and is aimed at helping parents to support their children’s language development through play activities.
- A Young Mums group has recently been established to support younger mothers within the area.

**Section 2. Evaluation Methodology**

**2.1 Evaluation and Approach**

The evaluation has the following aims:

1. to evaluate longitudinally the context, functioning and operational procedures of the Brierley Hill Sure Start Programme in order to identify the effectiveness of the Programme in its implementation and operation;
2. to assess the quality of the Programme services;
3. to identify the outcomes of the Brierley Hill Sure Start Programme on children, families, local care and education providers and the local community;
4. to monitor the short, medium and long term impact of the Brierley Hill Sure Start Programme on the continuity of care and quality of early experience for children and their families;
5. to provide recommendations for the future development of the Brierley Hill Sure Start Programme.
NB: The second year of the evaluation may consider the cost effectiveness of certain services, as the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) will include evaluation of this aspect and have recently produced new guidance for local programmes. There are plans to include this element of the evaluation in discussion at the moment.

The evaluation will be in two parts.

The first part will evaluate the context in which the Brierley Hill Sure Start Programme currently operates and its process of operation, it will review:

- the management, support and implementation of the Programme;
- the responsiveness of the Programme to the client group it serves;
- the effectiveness and appropriateness of the range of services developed through the Programme;
- developments in quality of service delivery within the Programme, to include the continuity of the care provided;
- progress made towards local targets (as specified in the Delivery Plan) will be monitored.

The second part of the evaluation will investigate the outcomes of the Programme in four areas:

- its impact on children,
- its impact on parents and families,
- its impact on the local area,
- its impact on other service delivery.

The evaluation design will incorporate a two-year study of the context, process and outcomes of the Programme. The evaluation will cover the development of the Programme over the two-year period with an Interim Evaluation Report provided at the end of the first year and a Final Evaluation Report provided at the end of the second year.
**2.2 Data Collection Procedures**

Four main research methods will be used to gather the evidence required:

**Research Method One: Focused Interviews.**
Focused interviews will be undertaken with key people involved in the Sure Start Programme, providers of Sure Start services and client users of these services.

**Research Method Two: Questionnaire Survey.**
A short questionnaire will be devised to ascertain the perception of parents and providers to the Programme’s responsiveness to their needs.

**Research Method Three: Documentary Analysis**
A range of documents will be analysed for content and effectiveness in the implementation of the Delivery Plan. These will include documents produced by the Sure Start Partnership, by the Dudley Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) and the Council (where these are appropriate to the evaluation).

**Research Method Four: Case Studies.**
A series of case studies of local families will be carried out to illuminate the impact of the Programme on their lives and family/work needs.

**2.3 The Evaluation Process 2001-2002**

The evaluation has begun in this first year with four main areas of investigation:

1. Structured interviews with a representative sample of Partnership members.
2. A Questionnaire survey of a number of parents using a service funded by the Sure Start Programme.
3. Documentary analysis.
4. The setting up and beginning of case studies involving children and their families using three of the services provided, or funded by the Sure Start Programme.

2.3.1 Interviews with Key People

A total of 17 people were interviewed during May and June 2001. The decision on who should be interviewed was made in consultation with Paul Watling, the Programme Director. Both the Chair of the full Partnership Board and the Chair of the Management Board were interviewed. Thirteen of the seventeen were members of the Management Board, the Partnership Board, or both. A total of 4 providers of services were interviewed, 2 of who also sit on the Management Board. Two representatives from the support group for ethnic minorities etc. were included, one who represents the needs of ethnic minorities and one who can represent the needs of travelling families. There was a good cross-section of people interviewed to represent the views of people from different sectors, as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Services</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCH</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Group</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Centre Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two interview dates were arranged in May; one full day and one half day. Those who could not attend the face-to-face interviews were interviewed by telephone. Ten
interviews took place in person; seven were undertaken by telephone. All interviewees were sent the interview schedule by post before the interview was undertaken (see Appendix 3). Confidentiality, and the understanding that not all of the questions applied to all respondents, were explained to the interviewees at the time of the interviews.

2.3.2 Parent’s Questionnaire

As many of the proposed services are either, not yet established, (due to building and staff recruitment delays) or are in their very early stages, it was decided in this first year to only survey the parents presently using the “drop-in” facilities provided by First Steps. This is a centre that was in existence prior to the establishment of the Sure Start Programme but was threatened with closure due to financial difficulties. The Sure Start Programme presently funds the salary of the co-ordinator delivering the service and the costs of the service. Funding has also been allocated for a play worker, and this position has been filled through the use of agency staff, but it has proved impossible for this help to be consistent. The service operates a drop-in facility for parents, who all stay with their child/children. The service is available for four sessions per week, with most parents choosing to attend for two sessions per week. The co-ordinator provides activities for the children and support/advice etc. for the parents, some training is offered and is based upon parental requests. (A full description of the service is provided in the Delivery Plan.)

This service was chosen for the parental survey, as it is established and fully operational. Also, it has a well-established Parent’s Group, and it is these parents who have been involved in the consultation for, and the development of the Sure Start Programme, so it was considered (by the evaluators and the Programme Director) that their views would inform the evaluation process significantly at the present time. However the limitations of this are fully appreciated, in that these parents cannot be said to be representative of parents in Brierley Hill as a whole as they all come from one particular geographical area, and, having been more fully involved in the Sure Start processes, their opinions will be affected by this involvement. It was decided that their perceptions would be valuable; both for the evaluation process itself, and also to inform the future development of parental involvement of the Sure Start Programme.
With the recognition that, in any future surveys, a wider range of parents will need to be included to obtain a complete picture.

24 questionnaires were given out by the co-ordinator; and 21 were returned, in sealed envelopes, so that confidentiality was ensured. Such a high return was entirely due to the support given by the co-ordinator, and the evaluation team are very grateful for this. The high rate of returns means that the findings of this area of the evaluation process are given extra validity. In addition, a small group interview was undertaken with parents from the Parent’s Group, but, on that occasion, only 2 parents attended. Evidence then, from this interview will not be included in the evidence presented here, as the numbers represented were too small. Further small group interviews will take place in the second year of the evaluation to inform the evaluation process.

2.3.3 Documentary Evidence

This has taken place on an on-going basis throughout the year and will be summarised in a later section. A range of documents was scrutinised (see Appendix 1). The documents were scrutinised in order to evaluate certain aspects:

- progress made towards meeting local milestones;
- evidence of Partnership and team working procedures and practices;

The capital plans, and the progress made towards meeting these plans, were also considered when evaluating the documentary evidence.

2.3.4 Case Studies

Presently case studies have been set up in three different services. They are the First Steps drop-in facility, the Local Action Centre (this is not presently funded by Sure Start but will be receiving capital funding for a new building) and with one volunteer and service user of Homestart. The families/children involved in the case studies were selected as being as representative as possible of the families using the particular service. They were selected using criteria such as: ethnicity, socio-economic factors etc. The small samples chosen will represent, as closely as possible, the parents and children using that particular service. As the services develop and new ones are
established more case studies will be undertaken. We are intending to complete case studies for all services established with a sample size of at least 5% of the users of each service. Initial interviews and observations have taken place but these will not be included in this report as this is part of the longitudinal aspect of the evaluation and will form part of the Final Report. The case studies will serve to illuminate the impact of the Programme on the lives and family/work needs of the service users.

Section 3. Evaluation of the Evidence

3.1 Introduction

The evidence generated from the three strands of investigation, interviews, parental questionnaire and the documentary analysis, (as described above), will be considered separately. At the end of each section of analysis the Summary will consider the findings in terms of the evaluation criteria considering the context, processes, and outcomes of the programme.

The overall findings from all three strands of evaluation will be summarised in Section 4, where conclusions, achievements and recommendations will be outlined.

3.2 Interviews with Key People

As set out in the interview schedule, (see Appendix 4) questions were asked of the 17 respondents in order to establish their perceptions of the Sure Start Programme according to the following key themes.

- Aims and Purposes
- Context, Mapping and Communication.
- Progress Towards National and Local Targets
- Partnership Effectiveness, Membership and Representation
- Implications of the Dual Role of NCH
- Equal Opportunities
- Monitoring and Evaluation
Achievements and Challenges

These key themes were chosen to best inform the evaluation of the context in which the Programme currently operates, the processes and outcomes (as outlined previously in Section 2.1 The Evaluation Approach). A brief description of each theme will be given prior to outlining the evidence gained from the respondents. The evidence will then be outlined under each theme heading with a summary of findings for all themes collated and presented at the end of the complete section.

Aims and Purposes
This theme is concerned with respondents’ perceptions of the key Aims and Purposes of the Sure Start Programme. Analysis has been concerned with how far these Aims and Purposes are shared by those concerned, with discussion focusing on issues around consistency.

Context, Mapping and Communication
This theme is concerned with respondents’ perceptions of how the context for the Programme was originally set, issues of mapping need and also general communication with families and the local community.

Progress towards National and Local Targets
This theme is concerned with establishing respondents’ perceptions of the progress of the Delivery Plan including progress towards both National and Local targets/milestones.

Partnership Effectiveness, Membership and Representation
This theme is concerned with respondents’ views concerning the efficiency of the Partnerships’ procedures and practices. The membership of the Partnership is also considered and how representative it is of the community as a whole and also of key services and stakeholders within the Brierley Hill area.

Implications of the Dual Role of NCH
This theme is concerned with establishing the views of those questioned on the implications of the dual role of NCH as both the Lead and Accountable Body. This theme seeks to outline whether there are advantages and/or disadvantages in this relationship and the implications of these.
Equal Opportunities
This theme is concerned with the Programme’s Equal Opportunities Policy and the effectiveness of the policy in practice. Respondents’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the policy in action were sought and the discussion focuses on those perceptions.

Monitoring and Evaluation
Monitoring is concerned with systems and methods used by the Programme to collect information on their functioning, and are based on the collection of quantitative data. Evaluation here refers to how the Partnership considers matters of self-evaluation, to reflect upon their own effectiveness. This could include both quantitative and qualitative data.

Achievements and Challenges
This theme is concerned with respondents’ perceptions of the achievements of the Programme so far and their views upon the major challenges for future development.

NB: Unless otherwise indicated, figures given refer to the number of times an issue was mentioned, not the number of people, as in any one answer a respondent may have made reference to many issues.

3.2.1 Aims and Purposes
A question was asked to ascertain the respondents’ individual perceptions regarding the key aims and objectives of the Programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims and Objectives</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social inclusion, alleviation of poverty, breaking cycle of deprivation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Localised, tailored to meet local needs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering local people</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling access to services, improving people’s aspirations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing affordable services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimed at all children in a specific area, non-stigmatising</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taken as a whole, there was general agreement between the respondents about the aims and purposes of the programme, but with changes being in emphasis and focus for individuals.

The aims which featured most prominently in responses (12) were those involving social inclusion, alleviating child poverty and breaking the cycle of deprivation. The need for programmes to be very localised and tailored to meet the needs of a specific community was also frequently mentioned (8). For many respondents the aim of Sure Start to empower local people to influence the direction of the programme was important; linked to enabling families to access local services and to take more control over their own lives.

"It is about levelling the playing field, because at reception age it is noticeable the differences between the levels of the children." (Interview 15)

"It is also about involving local parents, building capacity in the community, a way of enabling communities to help themselves. It is one of the most exciting developments at the moment, it can be a way of effecting real social change, and have a real long term impact." (Interview 13)

Another major aim for many was to improve health, education and life chances for under 4’s and their families (7). This, for some was linked to enabling parents to access work and improving children’s and adult’s aspirations and personal expectations. For a small number of respondents this was also allied to enabling parents to improve their parenting skills through appropriate training and support.

"To improve the health and education of children in the targeted areas." (Interview 1)

"...It is really about having money in your pocket, this is important in improving health and life chances. Sure Start is about giving children higher aspirations, glimpses of what the future can be, in order to get people out of the cycle of poverty, it is about improving the children’s knowledge of the possibilities, to improve their expectations, and it is also about them getting the help early enough to make the difference." (Interview 12).
“Parent’s need support in how to raise their children, in giving welfare, so that you can raise notions of what is appropriate child rearing.” (Interview 9).

“Sure Start aims to help parents to bring up their children better, to encourage good parenting skills, and to encourage parents to do more with their children to give them a better start in life.” (Interview 5)

The aim of working in real partnership was seen as important by some (4).

“It is about doing things in a different way, breaking down the barriers between services and working together.” (Interview 3)

For a small minority of people the need for opportunities to be affordable; the fact that Sure Start is aimed at all children within a specific area were important aspects (1). One person raised the issue of a tension can sometimes exist between meeting locally identified needs and also meeting the targets set centrally.

“It is also good that it is for all of the children in the area, there is no segregation, no label.” (Interview 14)

For one person the idea that the programme needed to be fun was of importance.

“…it is about making a difference, and also about doing it in a fun way, it is about working with people in ways defined by them in ways that are fun, and it needs to be fun because then it will continue.” (Interview 16)

3.2.2 Context, Mapping and Communication
Questions were asked to ascertain respondents’ perceptions of:

- their views regarding the initial mapping of services and needs; and their views regarding consultation with parents/families and the wider community;
- the kinds of services existing in the Brierley Hill area prior to the Sure Start Programme;
- their perceptions of proposed new services;

Those interviewed focused on services and issues reflecting their own personal interests and those of the sectors they represented. Taken together, these form a good picture of existing services and planned additional services. Most respondents had a good awareness of existing and proposed services. With regard to the initial consultations and mapping processes not all respondents were able to give an opinion as they had joined later in the proceedings. Gill Cooper, Chris Ballinger, Helen Kew and Chan Gordon were the people involved prior to the initial bid, in some cases, and therefore they have given the information to inform the mapping background. Jan Stoll of NCH was also seconded once the bid had been accepted to undertake the mapping exercise.

Many people identified Brierley Hill as being an area of high deprivation, and those at an authority level indicated that this was one of the main reasons that Brierley Hill had been suggested for the bid. Alongside this was the issue, for some people, that Brierley Hill had always come second to central Dudley in terms of funding and input in the past.

“*The initial mapping of services was done to look at what we were going to do. The reason Brierley Hill was chosen was because there was comparatively little there by way of family services…There was no real family support either in the form of a family centre or outreach work…There was no clear pathway through the services that people could follow, there was a need for a family centre and also well-integrated outreach work.*” (Interview 26)
“I don’t think that it was mapped as well as it could have been, I think that the services that were there were very fragmented. Mapping is really something that needs to be done by the Local Authority and the Health Authority. The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership has started in terms of mapping. Personally this is where I feel that the borough falls down, the area of strategic thinking as a whole, really big developments are bottom up developments, so that other things are not fitted into it, there isn’t the strategic view. A lot of mapping was anecdotal stuff, a lot based on networking and people knowing people etc. Everybody out there in the agencies does seem to be in their own little silos, they are very busy people and there were not the structures for joining people together, there are some networks set up by keen individuals, but real processes and structures are not there.” (Interview 17)

“The process that was followed was a good one; the consultation was good because of the amount of energy invested into it, because of all of the commitment of the people involved.” (Interview 12)

“Sure Start has enabled us to have a clearer picture of what is there and what’s going on, for all of us to sit around a table with others and to focus on the issues. It is really good networking you can put faces to names and have a better understanding of who offers which service, and then coordinating these.” (Interview 6)

The last quote is from a provider, and this illustrates that people actually working on the ground did not have knowledge of other things and services in the area prior to the Sure Start Programme.

One person, who had been involved in the consultation process, summarised the value of the consultation process:

“The consultation process highlighted the needs from the parent’s point of view, and it was very illuminating, I think that some professionals had to re-shape their own thinking. The parents were very clear on what they wanted, they wanted a family centre, but also they were clear on where they wanted it, and gave the reasons why.” (Interview 14)
The need for, and valuing of, consultation with parents, families and the wider community was recognised by all, and many highlighted the need for this to be an ongoing process.

Many individual respondents raised issues and challenges in the area of communication with families, these can be summarised as follows:

- Many people do not access the present services and need support to do so.
- Communication is an on-going challenge, it is necessary to keep people’s interest and to keep them engaged.
- Outreach workers are needed to provide support at home and to give parents the confidence to participate.
- Meetings need to become more parent-friendly, with parents having a real role to play.
- One-to one contacts and work-of-mouth are valuable.
- The need to go beyond those who are willing and able to put themselves forward to those who are more out-of-reach.
- The apparent tension between local needs and national targets.
- The parochial nature of the area with different communities having different needs.

"Yes we are on the ladder, in communicating with parents but we are only on the bottom rung, there is a lot going on like through First Steps, but a lot of people do not go to these, a lot of people do not access the services at the moment and these are the people we need to go to." (Interview 3)

However, if we really want them to become engaged in a meaningful way they will need tremendous support, i.e. in having a real say at meetings and in making meetings accessible to them. It is a question of empowering them. We must be careful not to raise false expectations in them, or unrealistic expectations that cannot be met; otherwise they will quickly get disillusioned. We are aiming for them to have a meaningful seat at the table and to achieve that it will take time. (Interview 14)
The people of Brierley Hill are very warm hearted, we must be careful not to let them down, if we raise their expectations too high, then let them down we will loose their trust, they do feel that they have been let down in the past. (Interview 16)

3.2.3 Progress Towards National and Local Targets

Questions were asked to ascertain the views of the respondents regarding the progress made by the Sure Start Programme towards the National and local targets. It is important to bear in mind when considering this evidence that the interviews were undertaken in May/June 2001, and that this evidence reflects the progress made up to that date only. (Documentary evidence will outline on-going progress in more detail in a later section). Further questions were asked to obtain respondents’ views regarding possible challenges facing the progress and development of the Programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Progress</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Progress reasonable/good</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme in early stages</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations laid</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff team coming into place</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment/enthusiasm</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careful planning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress needs to be sustainable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many (7) of the people interviewed pointed out that in real terms it is still very early days for the project. Most people (15) felt that progress had been reasonable or good; with no one making any negative comments on progress.

It is early days, the ideas and the foundations are there, and the enthusiasm, now it is a matter of putting it into action.” (Interview 3)
“It will be a long way down the road before they can become really established in the community, as yet they are not able to deliver the services until they get the venues.” (Interview 5)

It terms of what had actually been achieved some people (7) mentioned that the foundations are now laid and that process targets had been put in place and that the project was now well prepared to move forward on implementation targets, the consensus was that all of the structures are now in place ready for implementation. Some (5) linked this to the issue of getting the staff team into place and the importance of getting the right people. One person linked progress to the appointment of the Programme Director, saying that things had moved along quickly since his appointment. One person highlighted the importance of careful planning and not rushing into things:

“Yes, I do think progress towards the targets is being made, the people are in post now and they are planning what to do. I do not think that time spent in planning is ever wasted. It is tempting to rush in and do, just to say that you are doing something, but in rushing you can be doing the wrong things. So time spent to plan is time spent wisely.” (Interview 4)

Another person felt that it was important to ensure that progress made is sustainable:

“But we are getting there, and making steady progress. An important point is that the progress we are making is sustainable, we move forward in small steps but keep it sustainable.” (Interview 14)

Praise was given for the commitment, enthusiasm and hard work of everyone involved to ensure progress towards targets (4).

Other points mentioned by individuals were:

- Sure Start was generally welcomed in the local area, and that a lot had been done to raise awareness of its’ existence.
- The benefits of support for this Programme at a strategic Council and planning level.
- That all service providers were now more fully aware of what was available and going on in the area and this sort of networking was very valuable.
That the new facilities would enable more access for children with special needs.

One person felt that it had been a superb thing for leisure services, as things were moving very rapidly and it would enable them to take their services out into the community and to reach more people.

Questions were then asked to obtain respondents’ views regarding the challenges facing the development of the Programme. There views are outlined in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Challenge</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New buildings/delays</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to National targets</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging parents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing baseline data</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some people (6) viewed the difficulties with building and planning as the main challenge to the development of the project.

“One of the challenges is the capital outlay; we need to fill the gap in terms of venues for the services.” (Interview 1)

“I think people will see the difference when they see the impact of the new premises, until then it will be difficult for Sure Start to make the breakthrough.” (Interview 5)

The difficulties of meeting nationally set targets which can change over time, can be very specific and apply tight timescales, was an important issue for some (6). The associated pressures of work for managers and team members were also highlighted.
“Also in some cases the targets are so specific and concentrate on the particular where it is the broader picture and issues that need to be looked at. Like in the case of reducing child abuse, it is almost impossible to measure accurately, and we need to consider issues like deep cultural issues, and the government needs to realize that this is the case, we need to look at the general and to have the scope to be imaginative.” (Interview 4)

Some (4) saw a challenge in engaging the parents or the target group, for one person this was linked to the apathy and cynicism of the local population.

“There is a further challenge in engaging with the target group. Sure Start is already targeted in to areas with high levels of need, but the ones who come forward may not be the ones we really need to access, the challenge then is in reaching the hard-to-reach etc. and looking at what are the barriers that stop them coming forward and how can these be overcome.” (Interview 1)

Establishing the initial baselines was seen as a challenge by some (3).

“One of the main challenges has been in establishing the baselines in the first place, I know from other places that in some cases the information is just not there. So the challenge is in setting up the right information systems, a lot of it is qualitative really and this is more difficult, in things like speech therapy there is such a lot of assessing to be done in the first place. In some cases like teenage pregnancy there are such small numbers involved you can miss people just by accident, and this is also the case with smoking cessation.” (Interview 4)

“..the health authority is prevented from giving out some information due to data protection. The government needs to take this on board; the sharing of information between agencies has actually been made more difficult by recent government legislation.” (Interview 13)

Other challenges mentioned by individuals were:

- Recruitment, in terms of securing suitably qualified people to fill posts.
o Maintaining the commitment of Partnership members when faced with the pressures of their personal roles and commitments to other allied initiatives.

o The regeneration and development of the Brierley Hill area as a whole.

3.2.4 Partnership Effectiveness, Membership and Representation

Questions were asked to ascertain respondents’ perceptions regarding:

- the effectiveness of the management working and practices
- the effectiveness of communication within the Partnership
- the membership of the Partnership, and how representative it is of the Brierley Hill area as a whole.

All responses concerning management, communication and partnership working were positive; with praise given for leadership, the processes and working practices. Repeated mention was also made concerning the positive contribution made by NCH and the initial practices set in place, which provided a strong and positive model to develop upon.

“The meetings are some of the nicest meetings that I go to, we get all the business done but there is also humour, banter, friendship and also the support. When there is something to be done everyone delivers.” (Interview 3)

“Management is very effective (the Programme Director) is very motivated, he is so enthusiastic enthusiasm oozes out of his pores, and he motivates others, somehow he makes me feel better, he makes me want to put in the effort, he has that sort of effect on people.” (Interview 4).

“Yes it is all fine, but there is no room to be complacent, I hope that people would say if there was a problem. …Everyone seems to really enjoy the meetings they are fun, people are doing real things and that’s what the meetings are all about.” (Interview 16)
Other points raised by individuals were:

- The flexibility and support of the Sure Start Regional Officer.
- The need for firm management and direction if partnership working is to be effective.
- Changes in targets nationally add pressure to managers and to the team.
- Difficulties experienced by parents in accessing meetings, as although they are friendly, the procedures and formality may intimidate them.

Those who felt able to comment were quite confident that all of the people who needed to be involved had been involved in deciding the membership of the original Partnership. Positive comments were made that these initial stages were fundamental in establishing the good working processes that exist now.

"All of the major stakeholders were involved in deciding who should be there, the guidance was discussed, and the needs of the borough and Brierley Hill were discussed. In terms of the Brierley Hill Sure Start we need people who can see the wider perspective and make decisions at a strategic level, as well as having the various agencies and the local community involved." (Interview 17).

All of those who commented were positive about the issue of representation, with 4 feeling that it was good or very good. Some people raised the point that the membership of the partnership is not fixed:

"The Partnership Board has permeable barriers, we can invite others on it when necessary…. There are ways that people can be involved without them having to be there all of the time, we have been able to get everyone that we have wanted." (Interview 16)
This was also linked to the issue of size and manageability, it was felt that the management group needed to be a manageable size, but that the Partnership group could be flexible.

“I think that it is as good as it can be at the moment and it is going in the right direction, and there will be more developments and improvements in the future. We need to get the balance right, it needs to be large enough for it to include all those who are needed, but not too large so it becomes part of a rubber-stamping process, it has to be somewhere where people actually do something.” (Interview 17)

One person felt that an important point for the future was to retain active involvement:

“I believe this is the key achievement in that all of the stakeholders have been engaged, and have active involvement at the moment, it is important to retain this involvement of all the stakeholders over time in the future.” (Interview 1)

Some people interviewed (5) did discuss the involvement of parents on the partnership and management groups.

“We have a thriving parents group, but we want to set up more groups in other areas, we need to get the parents leading those groups, and then the group leaders could come to the management group feeling that they had a role when they come to the table. The parents have made an enormous contribution anyway despite the fact that they don’t attend the meetings, we need to be imaginative and look at ways of involving them.” (Interview 16)

Two people did discuss the issue of ethnic minority representation and the need to involve ethnic minorities more, though others felt that representation was there for them through the members of the support group, and the representative for racial equality. There was general agreement that there was willingness amongst everyone involved to be fully inclusive, and an awareness of the needs.
3.2.5 Implications of the Dual Role of NCH

Of those interviewed no one saw the dual role, of accountable and lead body, as being a disadvantage, although two people could see both advantages and disadvantages, but both added that there were no problems with it in this particular situation. One person was able to outline how the decision was taken, and that originally Social Services had been the accountable body.

“We debated long and hard about that, we negotiated the involvement of NCH very carefully… The two roles did start out, as being separate, during the development stages social services was the Accountable body. The idea of separating it is fine but if a small voluntary body had the lead role they often don’t have the structures in place to do the Accountable role. It was then negotiated again, and it was decided that it was not advisable to separate the two roles;” (Interview 16)

The two people who saw advantages and disadvantages outlined their reasons as below:

“I can see that if there were a problem it might be good to have the roles in different organisations. On the other hand, if it were in two organisations this could lead to politicking between them. I can see pros and cons. It has not been a problem in this case.” (Interview 4)

“It depends on how you look at it. When it is working well I can see tremendous advantages, however if there were problems I may see it differently, in those circumstances it may be better that the two roles are separate. But really if it works well why change it?” (Interview 14)

Many of the people who answered this question linked their positive comments to the quality of the operational procedures and processes of NCH. The quality of the organisation seemed to be the main reason for the advantages of having the dual role, in many people’s perceptions. Two of those interviewed also thought that it was important that the accountable body needs to have the appropriate level of financial procedures and this may be a problem if the organisation is a small voluntary body.
More important is where the lead body is a very small organization, where the financial systems are not robust. I am beginning to believe, and I think the Sure Start Unit is heading the same way, that when you look at what is involved, the expectations and the responsibilities, it is really very difficult for small organizations to take on that role, and if they do they would need a lot of support. Really it needs a larger organization to do it. It is about the management, and having in place the robust financial systems to be able to cope with the expectations and the responsibility. (Interview 1)

Of the people interviewed also saw a distinct advantage in having a “neutral” body as the lead organisation due to parents’ perceptions of institutions connected with what they see as “authority”.

“. . . from the parents point of view they see it as not one of the statutory bodies running it, not allied to what they see as authority. I think, it is positive as they are more willing to listen to others, and it may not work so well in terms of partnership where it is led by Social Services or Education”. (Interview 3)

“It is probably good that it was them from the point of view of the community, as they are not labelled or tarred with the negative stereotypes of Social Services or Education or Health, the people in the community would maybe respond better.” (Interview 17)

3.2.6 Equal Opportunities

Respondents were asked questions regarding the Programme’s policy on Equal Opportunities and how this policy is translated into action. There was general agreement across all of those interviewed that there is an Equal Opportunities Policy and that the awareness of the issues amongst partners is high. People felt that there was a commitment to the principles of equal opportunities, and also a commitment to seeing it happen in actual practice, whilst also realising that things are in the early stages and that there remains a long way to go.

“We are on the journey towards establishing this fully in practice. One of the things that was set up very early was the support group for the ethnic minorities and other groups, and the people involved in that are the right people, they have been very useful.” (Interview 17)
Many of those interviewed mentioned the support group for ethnic minorities and other minority groups as being a very positive aid to the work of the Partnership.

With regards to Equal Opportunities individuals raised the following issues:

- On-going monitoring is essential, with monitoring also of the membership of the Partnership.
- Staff training to ensure awareness and the translation of policy into practice.
- Apathy and cynicism amongst the community as a whole.
- Greater efforts needed to reach ethnic minority groups.
- Lack of will at a strategic level within Dudley to address these issues and to make the necessary financial commitment.
- The needs of children who have additional needs have yet to be addressed. Also those of parents who have special needs.
- The needs of refugees and asylum seekers.
- The needs of young mums who are placed in flats and become isolated from family and community support.
- The need to promote healthy eating and concerns regarding the cost of dental treatment.

3.2.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

Questions were asked regarding respondents’ views on the current self-evaluation processes within the Programme, and their perceptions of where the responsibility lies for on-going monitoring and evaluation. A further question was asked with regard to obtaining the views of service users. One respondent gave a very detailed picture of monitoring and evaluation, as being a 3-stage process.
"We have feedback about the milestones at each meeting. There are a number of accountabilities to be managed. Everyone has a responsibility as partners. (The Programme Director) takes the lead in pulling it altogether. But we all have the responsibility to be monitoring and to take corrective action where necessary. I think we are very clear about who is responsible for what. NCH are responsible as the Programme Director’s employer, and as the Accountable body, in theory if they disagreed on something they could overall the partnership and go directly to the Sure Start Unit. Everyone has a responsibility and that is understood. It is up to (the Programme Director) to coordinate it and present it to the management board, it is an ongoing process. The full board is there to approve the objectives, to receive reports and to make comments." (Interview 16)

This process was consistently reinforced throughout all of the interviews; there was good general agreement on this point. There was also general agreement that the Programme Director is responsible for the day-to-day monitoring and for pulling it together.

"Self evaluation really happens in three ways, (the Programme Director) is looking at things on a day to day basis, he is concerned with the delivery and the monitoring of that, then the Steering Group looks at progress towards the targets and milestones, and then the Partnership Board people all report back to this. It is formal and informal, someone would say if they felt that there was an issue." (Interview 3).

There was slight variance between people on how formal or structured the process is, but all concerned acknowledged that it was taking place, and that it is the responsibility of all concerned with the Programme Director having a day-to-day responsibility and the responsibility for pulling it all together. Difficulties were recognised in the collection of data particularly for establishing baselines, but also in collecting qualitative data. Four people raised this as an issue. Difficulties were based around; data not being there in the first place, different agencies collecting data in different ways and having different geographical boundaries thus making difficult to pull out data relevant to the Sure Start area; the difficulties of collecting data that is measurable when much of the progress concerns qualitative issues. The issue was also raised that in many cases it is not possible to compare like with like.
“The baseline has been done as best we can, but it is quite hard as some of the information is just not accessible, and some of it is not really measurable. The systems need to be developed to gather the data, and the difficulty of the fact that different agencies have different ways of collecting the data. This is one of the weak areas in Sure Start, there is a need to analyse what agencies are spending now in order to compare this with later, Sure Start requires this in detail, they are now taking a pragmatic approach.” (Interview 1)

But it is not all about the numbers, a lot of it is qualitative, it is about the improvements made in people’s self-esteem and their motivation, but how to measure that, you can see it, but how you can put it down in a way that will convince others. Reports are bought back to every meeting and shared. (Interview 13)

All of the people interviewed did agree that ongoing monitoring and evaluation should be an integral part of the process.

One person did go further in looking at the real practical, ground level issues.

“There was the original plan and now the Management Group look regularly at progress towards the targets, every time we meet there is an update on our progress towards the milestones, you know, where are we falling behind? How far have we got? We are developing evaluation with all of our partners, and to ask them for their perceptions of what is changing and is an impact being made, is progress being made on the ground towards the milestones? What does it look like in real terms?” (Interview 14)

In terms of obtaining the opinions of service users 3 of those interviewed said that they didn’t know, others pointed to the work being done through the parent’s group and they highlighted the need for these to be extended.

“We are hoping to extend the parent’s group into other areas.” (Interview 17)
Individuals raised the following issues:

- The new building is needed to provide a visible focal point for the Sure Start work.
- Each person involved has a responsibility to drive the process forward.
- Members of the Partnership have a role in feeding information into the process and in feeding back to their particular service or interest group.
- Funding for the voluntary sector comes from a variety of sources and this can lead to complications and confusion.

3.2.8 Achievements and Challenges

Respondents were asked questions to ascertain their perceptions of the main achievements of the Programme so far, the challenges facing the Programme, and their views on the future development of the programme. (Some of these have been outlined under other theme headings.)

Most of the people interviewed (10) mentioned the quality of the partnership, the member’s ability to work together and the commitment of all of those concerned as the main achievement so far. It is very notable that from speaking to those involved that many of them talk about enjoying the programme, that they find it personally a very worthwhile experience, and that because of this their personal commitment is very high.

“*The achievements have been the fact that we all talk to each other now, the networking that goes on. Also now I know where the responsibilities lie, I know which services offer what so if we don’t offer something I know where to point people in the right direction.*” (Interview 6)

“*There has been this extra pot of money and people have put aside self-interest in order to work together for the good of the community.*” (Interview 9)
“The real achievement is the bringing together of the different agencies, the joined up approach, and the commitment of all those involved. We have established a strong base from which to move on, we have a good relationship at a strategic level. It is all in place for us to move on from.” (Interview 13)

The other achievements mentioned were largely dependent on the individual’s personal perspective. Achievements/positive outcomes mentioned were:

- The recruitment of the right people to key posts.
- High levels of support at a strategic level and links to other initiatives.
- Good foundations have been laid to secure successful outcomes.
- Extra funding welcomed in an area of high deprivation.
- For some people, personal job security, and support mechanisms.
- High levels of parental and community involvement.
- The experience of working in partnership will spread into other areas and widen the benefits.
- The needs of children and their families are placed at the centre of service provision; rather than expecting them to conform to rigid service procedures and practices.

There was no clear consensus regarding the challenges, these were as varied as the number of people interviewed. They are listed here to provide an overview of challenges/issues raised.

- The development of the new building is important as a venue for services and a visible focal point for the work of Sure Start.
- The parochial nature of Brierley Hill and the differing needs of the various communities.
- Achievements need to be sustainable.
Staff development is essential, individuals’ roles are changing and developing, they may need appropriate training to fulfil the changing demands and also to ensure the commitment to working in Partnership is put into practice at all levels. To facilitate this training across services would be useful.

- Maintaining good communication and commitment as the Programme expands.
- Changes to the membership of the Partnership and changes within the different services: the Partnership needs to be proactive in establishing necessary links and thinking ahead to keep up in the changing circumstances.
- Parental involvement needs to be extended to more areas: the importance of maintaining inclusivity.

### Summary

The findings will be considered under the evaluation areas of context and process.

#### Context

- There is general agreement that firm foundations have been laid for future progress to build upon.
- The initial planning and consultation processes are seen as being instrumental in the development of the present Partnership ethos.
- The contribution made by NCH is valued, and most respondents were positive about them holding the dual role of Lead and Accountable Body.
- Support for the Programme at a strategic level within the Borough is instrumental to its success.
- The position of this Programme in relation to the general regeneration of the Brierley Hill area was regarded as an opportunity for this particular Programme.
- The tensions in meeting both national targets and the actual needs of the local parents were recognised. Also, the changes to national targets requiring re-planning were noted.
- The difficulties in establishing accurate and reliable baseline data were raised and this must then have a related effect on the ongoing monitoring of service delivery.
• There are some issues around the Sure Start boundaries, with regard to the families who are outside the area accessing the services. Also, that some areas just outside the defined area are just as in need as those within the boundaries.

• Links would be desirable with other services, such as housing, as concerns were raised regarding the housing of young mums in flats on a particular estate, with the result that these young mums then become isolated with little access to support and role models.

Process

• There are good levels of agreement concerning the Aims and Purposes of the Programme.

• High levels of commitment to the Programme are evident.

• The Partnership is functioning in the true spirit of partnership. There is real enthusiasm amongst partners, with many referring to the friendliness and openness of meetings.

• There was unreserved praise for the contributions made by both the Programme Director and the staff team.

• Monitoring and evaluation are viewed as an integral and on-going part of the development of the Programme. All understood roles and responsibilities within this process.

• There is a shared commitment to inclusivity and equality of opportunities, with agreement that the contribution of the Support Group has been effective and valuable. There is also recognition that this needs to be an on-going process throughout the development of the Programme.

• The commitment to the inclusion of parents at all levels is notable, with one group of parents now well established. This now needs to be extended to other communities within the area. This was linked to the parochial nature of the area and the division into three distinct geographical areas.

• There is a realisation that the delays encountered in the capital building programme must not be allowed to hinder the delivery of services, and that the vision for the Programme must be retained despite the difficulties.
There is a need to consider staff training, both with regards to meeting the needs of individuals whose roles have changed and expanded, and also to ensuring that the Equal Opportunities policy is implemented at the point of delivery. Training which is multi-disciplinary and goes across services would be useful in encouraging a commitment to partnership /working at all levels.

3.3 Parents Questionnaire

The parents’ questionnaire was undertaken in December 2001 with the parents presently using the First Steps drop-in centre. (As previously outlined above.) The questions were related to the quality of the service provided, their reasons for attending the service, and their knowledge of Sure Start (See Appendix 4). 23 out of 24 questionnaires were returned. The responses to each question will be summarised here with a summary of the findings presented. For ease of completion, the questionnaire contained mainly questions that were either multiple choice or tick-box type answers. For this reason the number of illustrative quotes that can be given will be limited. In this case all respondents were female, and the involvement of fathers or males in general in the Programme and as service-users may be a question that needs to be addressed in future evaluation. This particular service has had some male involvement in the past on a limited scale.

A list of backgrounds was provided and parents were asked to complete this section if they so wished. They all chose to complete the section. (The categories of ethnic background were those used for the Census.) The cultural heritage of the respondents is outlined in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base=23</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be seen from the table that the large majority of those respondents were White British, with a small minority being from ethnic minority backgrounds. This is reasonably representative of the present parents using the service, but, possibly, not representative of the area as a whole. It should be noted here that, despite efforts to include more parents from ethnic minority groups on the parents committee, the committee consists of all White British mothers. This committee also forms the Parent’s Forum for the Sure Start Programme. This is then an issue for the future development of this and future Parent’s Forums.

The majority of parents (12) had only one child in the family, with 8 having 2 children and 3 having 3 children. 16 respondents had 1 child presently attending, 6 had 2 children presently attending; 4 parents had children who attend only in the holidays. (It should be noted that siblings are also able to attend during the holidays.) 8 of the respondents had had other children attending the setting in the past, and 12 had not, with a further 3 not providing an answer to this question. Attending for 2 sessions per week was the preferred pattern for 15 of the respondents, with 6 attending 1 session per week. Only 4 of those responding used any other form of childcare, with this being equally spread between different types of provision.

When asked why they originally chose to attend the setting both “meeting other parents” and, “extra play facilities/friends” were cited as equally important to parents, with only 2 of those responding giving access to training as a reason for attending.

The main benefits of attending the setting for the child and the parents.

The parents were asked what they considered to be the main benefits in attending the setting for themselves and their child/children. A list of choices was provided with respondents being able to indicate as many areas as they wished, with space provided for them to add their own benefits if they so wished (see Appendix 4). The information gained is presented in the following tables, but it is important to note here that parents could indicate as many benefits as they wished.
Benefits for self (adult/parent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting other parents</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone to talk to</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for yourself</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to advice</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self confidence</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to training</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about childcare options</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about benefits</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Base=23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that meeting other parents and having someone to talk to were important benefits for the parents. Having time to themselves is a slightly surprising benefit as all of the parents remain in the same room as the child, but do have an area of seating where they tend to sit and be together. One parent added “able to moan” (Questionnaire 10) and another parent added more benefits:

“Giving others support and advice, learning more about other kinds of children e.g. partially deaf, Asian and milk intolerant.” (Questionnaire 9.)

The responses indicate that parents are fully aware of the benefits for themselves and are also appreciative of them. There also is an ethos of mutual support apparent with many recognising their own personal improvement in self-confidence. The need for mutual support and opportunities for creating a “network of such friends” was also highlighted in another report, “Users’ views of the health visiting service: a study of mothers with children under 5” (Perkins and Aubyn 2001) which was undertaken in the Dudley Borough. The report found that
“There was a strongly articulated wish for more help to build a network of such friends, and this was not only an issue for those new to the area or even for those with their first child.” (Executive Summary)

Services then that facilitate the building of such networks are of real value for all parents and thus, are appreciated by them.

Benefits for your child/children.

Again a list of possible benefits was provided with respondents able to indicate as many as they wished and also to add their own as necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting other children</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place to play</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To encourage more independence</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To become more confident</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn new things</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Base=23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three respondents added the additional benefit of learning to sit at a table and share at mealtimes. With one parent recognising the value of mixing with different kinds of children:

"Mixing with other kinds/race children, learning to be more patient and understanding to others." (Questionnaire 9)

As with the benefits to themselves, the benefits in terms of the children’s social development are important for the respondents. It is pleasing to see the high number of responses valuing the role of play, encouraging independence and confidence in the children, with also the appreciation that they are able to learn new things at the same time.
It is clear from the responses regarding the benefits of the centre that it provides a much needed and highly appreciated service to those using it.

Further questions were asked with regard to training provided at the setting. Short courses are provided facilitated by the co-ordinator based on parental request, with the help of local colleges etc. 12 respondents had attended some form of training, thus 11 had not. Parents had accessed the following types of training. (Here again respondents were asked to indicate training or courses and many had indicated more than one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Training/Course</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Aid</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Beauty/Make-up</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Class</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep Fit (Asian Ladies)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base=23

One person did add that there had not been any courses running since she had started attending. (Questionnaire 9.) Of those who gave an answer, 8 said that the courses had been very useful, 3 said they had been fairly useful, with only 1 finding them not very useful. So, a large majority (11) of those giving an answer found the courses fairly useful or very useful. Illustrating that access to courses is a valued service provided within the drop-in centre.

14 respondents indicated further courses that they would like to be available. Of these 8 indicated an interest in courses related to helping their child to learn, (with reading being the most frequently mentioned topic) and child development. 4 mentioned computer training ranging from basic to more advanced skills. Other topics mentioned
were: hairdressing, NVQ Training, English classes, first aid, jewellery making, Art, and learning more about children who have additional needs. As there is some evident enthusiasm and willingness amongst some parents attending to access training and courses, further investigation regarding training/courses requested by the parents may be useful to inform future planning, as would making information available about training/courses run elsewhere locally with related childcare information. (Information about Local Action Centre available etc.)

Sure Start Issues

A range of questions were asked to ascertain the respondent’s perceptions of the Sure Start Programme. It must be borne in mind here that the parents sitting on the First Steps Committee are also the Parent’s Forum for the Sure Start Programme. Therefore their views cannot be constituted as being representative of the parents/families in the whole of the Brierley Hill area, as they have been more fully involved in the Programme than others. Also, due to the parochial nature of the area, they are from a particular geographical area.

21 respondents had heard of the Sure Start Programme, and, therefore only 2 had not. 12 had signed up as members of Sure Start, and 10 had not with 1 not giving an answer. In this area there may have been some misunderstanding of the questions asked as the figures across the questions do not quite make sense. Of those who responded, 10 respondents indicated that they are affiliated members, and of these 8 indicated that Sure Start was still able to fulfil their needs. 2 respondents felt that, as affiliated members, Sure Start was not able to fulfil their needs, adding their reasons for this as being:

“*I feel left out, had no pack!*” (Questionnaire 10)

“After putting work in on the newsletter I don’t get one delivered?” (Questionnaire 18)
Another parent said:

> However, I would prefer to be a full member but my address is beyond the area.” (Questionnaire 9)

This issue of type of membership is also allied to issues relating to the Sure Start boundaries. 17 respondents felt that the boundaries do not cause any problems, 4 felt that they do, with 2 not answering this question. So, although boundary and membership issues are only important to a small percentage of people, it is an issue that is important to the people concerned as they make a contribution to Sure Start and need to feel valued for their contribution. It may be useful to undertake further discussions in this area.

A question was asked to ascertain how respondents had heard about Sure Start. The following table outlines their responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Steps/Coordinator</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of Mouth</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Centres</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters/Leaflets</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base=23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One person mentioned, “popping in” to the Sure Start offices, and another mentioned a talk given at a local school. It can clearly be seen that the majority of respondents had heard about Sure Start through their contact with First Steps.

Questions were also asked to ascertain the views of the respondents regarding the main aims and objectives of the Programme. 17 respondents did feel able to answer this question, with the majority of them focusing Sure Start from a parent’s point of view, as would be expected. They mentioned aspects such as:
o allowing parents to have a say;
o making life easier for mothers with young children;
o having access to advice and support;
o meeting other parents;
o to improve the social life of families.

Some also considered the aspects relating to children and mentioned in particular:

o providing better services and facilities for children;
o to improve the existing facilities;
o to improve children’s confidence and opportunities to play.

One person gave a general overview saying:

“To give children and families a better start in life.” (Questionnaire 10)

It is pleasing to see how many responses were concerned with parental involvement as it shows the parents awareness of this as a key feature of the Sure Start Programme, and highlights the fact that they have been involved. 13 of respondents answered that they did not known whether Sure Start was meeting its purposes, 8 felt that it is, with only 1 saying that it is not. One person linked the fact that they were not sure about this issue to the delay in starting the new building, as services and information would be housed in the new building, they were unsure what is happening without the new facilities. When asked what other things they would like Sure Start to do 16 had nothing to add, those who did mention something had the following suggestions to make:

o swimming courses for under 4’s and their parents;
o more social events for the children
o more information about health care and schooling
o Information about children with additional needs (those children who are more advanced.)
13 felt that there was enough information about Sure Start available, 3 said that there was not and 7 answered that they didn’t know. When asked how awareness of Sure Start could be improved the following suggestions were given:

- radio adverts;
- in newspapers;
- through talks at local schools;
- adverts in shops and supermarkets;
- adverts in the library;
- through maternity services i.e. bounty packs.

A small number of respondents showed an awareness of efforts already being made to raise awareness,

“Well I understand many things are already being done to “spread awareness”, like health visitors going into schools etc. but Sure Start needs to get to everyone so that they can benefit as much as us!” (Questionnaire 9)

Of those responding 8 said that they are involved in the Parent’s Forum, and they had all found this experience either good or very good, with no negative comments being made. They mentioned being involved in making the newsletter, and some mentioned being involved in the recruitment of Sure Start staff. Of those responding 2 were involved on the Partnership Board.

When considering the involvement of Sure Start with First Steps most mentioned the financial support given, and that First Steps would be located in the new Sure Start building. One person mentioned moral support and another mentioned help in recruiting new parents and children through the newsletter. Most respondents made no further comments, one commented on First Steps and another commented on Sure Start and First Steps together, again their comments illustrate how much they appreciate the service being given.

“I would like to add how much personally I appreciate all the work the Sure Start and First steps teams do to make this all possible.” (Questionnaire 9)
“Very pleasant to attend, pleasant staff welcoming atmosphere, good for the kids.” (Questionnaire 23)

NB: It is noticeable that many of the quotes used come from the same questionnaires and that there were obviously some respondents who felt more confident to comment than others. As has been said elsewhere this present group of parents cannot be said to be representative in any way. But their views and comments do constitute a valuable insight into parental involvement in the Sure Start Programme so far.

Summary
The findings will be outlined under the evaluation areas of context, process and outcomes.

Context
- A large majority of respondents are aware of the Sure Start and some of its Aims and Purposes. It is particularly significant that they are aware of the role of parents in the Programme.
- There are some issues for a small number of parents in relation to the Sure Start boundaries and the type of membership they have. This issue may need to be addressed in the future.

Process
- The present Parent’s Forum should now be used as a model for the development of Forums in the other two geographical areas; with the skills and lessons learnt being transferred and utilised in future developments.
- The commitment of the Partnership to working inclusively is real and, to some extent working throughout all processes and practices. This could be further developed in the future to include ethnic minority groups, fathers/males and parents of children with additional needs.
- Parents are playing a significant role in the Programme and efforts need to be continued to encourage them to attend meetings.
- It would be useful for parents using First Steps to have access to information on other training/courses taking place locally. Information about services across Sure Start needs to be available at all service sites.
### Outcomes

- Parental involvement in the Programme is successful and positive within one area of the Sure Start Programme.
- The present Parent’s Forum is established and functioning successfully. Parents are positive about their involvement and feel that their contributions to the Programme have been valued.
- It is obvious, from the questionnaires as a whole, that the service provided by First Steps is highly valued by the parents.
- The value of the service for the parents lies mainly in the social aspects both for themselves and their children, with the opportunities for mutual support of importance to them.
- Those who have attended training/courses have found them useful. Suggestions were made for future courses and this information may inform future planning.

### 3.4 Documentary Evidence

Throughout the evaluation period so far relevant documents have been collected and analysed in order to gain further evidence. A full list of documents scrutinised can be found in Appendix 1. Documents such as the Delivery Plan and Minutes of Management Group and Board Meetings have been used to evaluate progress made towards national and local targets set out in the Plan. A copy of these targets can be found in Appendix 2. (The analysis is based upon the original targets and not on the Revised Delivery Plan November 2001.)

The targets will be considered separately under each Objective to consider progress made towards the annual milestones for 2000-01; with a summary provided at the end of this section.

**Objective 1: Improving Social and Emotional development**

The following table shows the present status of the milestones.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Present status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disseminate information through Community Midwives and Health Visitors.</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint Community Health Worker.</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint training with Health Visitors in the 2 Trusts with the Sure Start team</td>
<td>Deferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about Sure Start to be shared with all new parents at first visit by Health Visitor</td>
<td>Partially met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for on-call system with Health Visitors to be finalised.</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop links with schools</td>
<td>Partially met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue current Child Protection strategy</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% reduction in re-registration</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect data re: Postnatal Depression</td>
<td>Partially met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt standardised definition of Postnatal Depression</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up group to investigate the needs of minority parents</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy to ensure needs of minority families included in plans</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop parenting classes to be offered in outreach venues</td>
<td>Partially met</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within this target 8 out of the 13 milestones having been completed, (to the stage where they were expected to be at this time.) A further 4 have been partially met, with 1, (the joint training with Health Visitors in 2 trusts with the Sure Start team), being deferred until the details of the Primary Care Trust have been sorted out. With the positive points being:

- The secondment of a Community Health worker, to work on all the Health related targets with other Health professionals. This coming year will see the development of services that will ensure a new approach to post-natal depression.
- The parents group have contacted all parents with children under the age of 4 in the Sure Start area within their newsletter. (3 editions.)
- Information Pack re: Sure Start services now available, plus an insert in the Parent Held Record.
- Joint work with Health Visitors in both trusts covering the area has started.
- The Support Group looking at the needs of minority parents is established and works in an advisory capacity to the Programme Management Group and to the team.
- The team have adopted NCH Equality and Diversity Procedures to ensure that services developed meet the needs of the whole community.
The Home Start programme has been established; with 9 volunteers now trained and working with referred families.

Progress towards this target is evident with firm foundations laid for on-going progress in the future. There is evidence showing that this progress can be attributed to the dedicated commitment of the Management Group, effective leadership and the hard work of the staff team.

**Objective 2: Improving Health**

The progress made towards these milestones is outlined in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Present Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduce no. of low birth weight babies by 10%</td>
<td>Unlikely to be met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify resources for the provision of CAB services</td>
<td>Partially met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide courses to include nutrition, diet, hygiene and smoking cessation</td>
<td>Partially met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin collecting accurate data</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction by 3% in the number of admissions to hospital in first year of life for gastroenteritis, respiratory infection or severe injury</td>
<td>Unable to measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint Community Health Worker</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within this target 2 out of the 6 milestones have been met, with a further 2 being partially met. One target (reduction by 3% in the number of admissions to hospital as an emergency during their first year of life with gastroenteritis, a respiratory infection, or a severe injury) could not be measured due to an inability to get up to date information. The final target concerning a 2% reduction in the number of low birth weight babies is unlikely to be met this year as support to parents has yet to be developed.

The positive points are:

- A Young Parents group has been established In the Chapel Street area.
- A Smoking Activity card is now in use by midwives.
- Courses for parents on healthy eating and cooking on a budget have been developed.
- Plans are in place for information sessions with the Citizens Advice Bureau at the Information Shop.
Progress towards the milestones has been hampered by the delays in the proposed new building plans and difficulties relating to the recruitment of staff. The progress that has been made can be attributed to the determination and commitment of all concerned.

Objective 3: Improving the ability to learn.

The progress made towards these milestones is outlined in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Present Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75% of children have normal speech and language</td>
<td>Unable to measure accurately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce relevant information in community languages</td>
<td>Partially met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Wilstraar assessment to be used at Health Visitors 7-9 months check.</td>
<td>Partially met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify resources for toy library</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within this target 1 out of the 4 milestones has been met, with a further 2 being partially met, and the final one, (75% of children have normal speech and language development) being unable to be measured accurately.

The positive points have been:

- The development of the Playtalk programme with local schools.
- Sure Start measure for speech and language now being used.
- The newsletter has been translated into community languages and put on to audiotape.
- Funding for the Toy Library has been secured, with plans for a Dudley wide project linking with both Sure Start and NCH projects.

Progress towards the milestones has been made with plans to employ an additional full-time speech and language therapist to facilitate the work of Playtalk. Both the Playtalk and toy library initiatives are exciting, and will be considered further in future evaluation.

Objective 4: Strengthening families and communities.

The annual milestone here relating to the recruitment of at least 3 parents for the Programme Management Group/Board has been partially met. It is expected that this
milestone will be fully met when the outstanding 2 parents groups are established. The present group is established and functioning effectively. All efforts need to be made now to ensure that skills and lessons learnt are taken forward for the formation of the 2 other groups.

Positive points have been:

- 160 members have been signed up since the launch in June 2001.
- One parent’s forum is established. Plans have been made to establish two more parents’ forums.

The Information Shop, to be located on the High Street, was originally to be developed in conjunction with Chelsfield (owners of Merry Hill Shopping Centre). Much time was spent in developing this partnership, but it eventually fell through. The plans for the shop have continued and a location has been decided upon, with work to be started in January 2002, with an expected opening date in late February/early March. Many links with other services are planned including Health Promotion Citizens Advice Bureau, Employment Services Dudley Brook etc.

**Capital Plans**

The original Delivery Plan included two capital proposals, the main one to build a Family Centre on, or near the High Street, and the second to provide a dedicated full day nursery for the Brierley Hill Local Action Centre. Both of these proposals are well behind schedule due to difficulties in finding an appropriate site and then lengthy delays due to planning processes. A design for the Family Centre has been drawn up and amended following very successful consultation with families and the local community. There were approximately 90 questionnaires returned during the consultation process with the 2-story option being chosen. A site has also been agreed upon and progress is now being made towards the implementation of the proposal. Notable in this process has been the involvement of parents and the community, not only in the consultation process but also in appointment of the architect.
The proposed nursery for the Local Action Centre has also met with long delays due to uncertainties surrounding proposed changes to roads as part of the regeneration of the area as a whole. Parents have again been involved in the consultation process; the building is due to begin January 2002.

The delays have been unavoidable, with everyone involved maintaining their impetus and enthusiasm despite the many setbacks. The delays have meant that proposed services have been delayed due to lack of a venue. The delays have also meant that the Programme has lacked a focal point within the community, the present offices are on the High Street but access to them is from behind the High Street. (These difficulties have also been raised in previous sections.)
The progress made by the Programme so far can be attributed to:

- the strength of the Partnership and the commitment to working in real partnership;
- effective leadership and management by the Programme Management Group and the Programme Director;
- the commitment, enthusiasm and hard work of the staff team.
Summary
The findings will be outlined under the evaluation areas of context, process and outcomes.

Context
- Demands made centrally regarding the spending of allocated funding within the first year of the Programme are unrealistic and place additional pressure and stress upon the Programme management.

Process
- Delays have also taken place due to the difficulties in the recruitment of suitable people to fill the vacant posts. All efforts have been made and recruitment in the field is a national as well as a local problem.
- The difficulties encountered in obtaining accurate baseline data may have an effect on monitoring progress in some areas.

Outcomes
- It is evident that under all objectives there has been some delay in meeting the annual milestones.
- The delays have been unavoidable. They are related to outside aspects over which the Partnership and team can have no influence. Every effort has been made by the Partnership and the team to meet the annual milestones. The delays may well have been more prolonged had the commitment of the team management and the Partnership not been as good as it has.
- Demands made centrally regarding the spending of allocated funding within the first year of the Programme are unrealistic and place additional pressure and stress upon the Programme management.
- In terms of the capital proposals, delays have been significant, but unavoidable. These delays have, to quite a large extent, had an impact on the annual milestones.
- Within each Objective area many positive steps forward have been made, and service users appreciate these.
Section 4: Findings, Achievements, Recommendations and Conclusions

4.1 Findings

This evaluation of the Brierley Hill Sure Start Programme was designed in order to consider the development of the Programme evaluating the evidence under three key areas. These are:

- the context within which the Programme operates;
- the processes of the Programme and their functioning;
- the outcomes of the Programme.

(These three areas are outlined more fully in an earlier section)

The findings of the first year of evaluation will, therefore, be summarised here under these three areas.

Context

The evidence clearly shows that the Brierley Hill Sure Start Programme has been established effectively and is now in a secure position to continue with future development. The initial consultation and planning processes are viewed very positively, and have a continuing effect on the commitment and ethos of the Partnership Board. It is clear that the quality of the initial stages does have an impact on the development of the Programme. The role and contribution of NCH as both lead and accountable body, is also recognised positively. Both of these are key roles for the successful development of the Programme and the high quality of NCH as an organisation is a notable contributory factor.

The support given to the Programme at a Borough and strategic level are also important as this enables the Programme to become an integral part of the plans for the Borough as a whole. The networks and links established with other providers of services and to other initiatives within the Borough can only be of further benefit to the people of Brierley Hill. The Sure Start Programme is an integral part of the regeneration of the Brierley Hill area as a whole.

Also significant to the development of the Programme is a shared vision, with all sharing a common view of the main aims and objectives. It is clear from the evidence gathered that all of those involved do have this shared view and, alongside this, a commitment and enthusiasm to achieve the vision. There is also a shared perception
that the Programme is still in its infancy, and that the commitment to the vision will need to be actively maintained in order for the progress to continue. There is a realisation that there is still some way to go and also of the issues and challenges facing the development of the Programme. These issues include the perceived tensions that can exist between meeting National targets whilst, at the same time, meeting the needs of local families. Included here are the difficulties faced when the National targets change and precious time has to be spent in re-drafting plans. Allied to these difficulties are those related to the spending of the allocated funding, particularly in the first year of the Programme’s development, when spending on capital projects in particular cannot take place due to the length of time the planning processes can take. This places extra pressure and stress on the Programme Management. For accurate monitoring and evaluation to be effective accurate baseline data has to be gathered early in the Programme. This is a difficulty both due to the availability of accurate data, and to issues of data protection legislation, which does not allow the sharing of data between different services. The breaking down of barriers between different services and the establishing of common formats and methods for data sharing are probably issues for all Sure Start Programmes.

For some parents living outside the Sure Start boundaries there are issues around the drawing of these boundaries and their status as affiliated members of the Programme.

Process

It is clear from the evidence gathered that the Partnership is working in the true spirit of partnership. There are high levels of commitment and enthusiasm for the Programme amongst all of those involved in the Partnership and in the staff team. This enthusiasm also extends to the parents interviewed. The Programme benefits from effective and charismatic leadership, which maintains both the momentum of development and the enthusiasm of others. There is a shared commitment to inclusivity, which is notable, and appreciated by those parents currently involved. There is also the recognition that there is still some way to go in establishing true parental involvement and in meeting the needs of minority groups. The shared commitment to on-going monitoring and development, and the realisation of the importance of these processes to development, are evident and these processes will help to ensure that the commitment to inclusivity remains high on the agenda.

Communication at all levels and between all of those involved is a real strength of the Programme. There is a real perception that the contribution of all is valued and this
facilitates the building of strong relationships and commitment. Notable is the reaction of parents currently involved, who are all positive about their involvement and feel that it has benefited them personally. There is also the realisation that parents now need to be enabled to attend meetings and have a real contribution to make. The establishing of the other 2 groups for parents remains a priority for the Programme.

Challenges lie in the delays surrounding the capital proposals resulting in a lack of a venue for services and lack of a focal point for parents to be aware of Sure Start in Brierley Hill. A further challenge lies in the parochial nature of the area; this adds importance to outreach work and the need for three Parent’s Groups.

Possibly the most significant challenge to future development are the difficulties encountered with recruitment. While all efforts have been made to fill posts this has not proved possible, and this has been a contributory factor in the delays to meeting targets. There are efforts being made both Nationally and locally by the EYDCP to aid recruitment and retention of staff in the area of childcare, so it is recognised that this is not just a local difficulty.

**Outcomes**

It is evident from the data gathered that there have been delays in meeting the annual milestones set in the Delivery Plan. These delays have been unavoidable. They are related to issues such as the delays in the capital projects and the difficulties encountered with recruitment; all efforts have been made by the management and the team to meet the milestones; the progress made is due to their determination and hard work. Delays regarding the capital proposals have been significant and are allied to difficulties with planning procedures. The involvement of parents, both in recruitment of the staff team, and their input on the capital projects is notable here. They express their appreciation of this involvement and are able to better understand the causes of any delay in service provision because they have been fully involved in the processes.

The present Parent’s Group is established and functioning effectively. Parents are positive about their involvement. They appreciate the drop-in service provided by First Steps, and the role of Sure Start in enabling the service to continue.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some team members appreciate the challenges and personal professional development they have experienced by becoming part of a multi-
agency team. Continuing staff development will remain an area that needs consideration as professionals move beyond their traditional boundaries and work in new ways in partnership with others.

4.2 Recommendations

1. Issues surrounding the availability of accurate baseline data, and the sharing of this data, remain a difficulty for the Programme. This is not only a local problem but also a national issue.

2. Delays in achieving milestones due to difficulties in proposals for new buildings and difficulties of recruitment require on going monitoring. All efforts need to continue to be made to fulfil the vision of the Programme despite the difficulties.

3. The extension of the involvement of parents to include parents in other geographical areas is important to the future development of the Programme, and this needs to remain a priority. The skills and expertise gained through the first group should be used to inform and influence the development of future groups.

4. The Programme could consider ways of involving parents to a greater extent in taking the lead in some aspects, and, with appropriate training, to equip parents to fulfil paid duties and increase their opportunities to enter employment if they so wish.

5. Continued efforts and commitment to involving parents from minority communities is necessary if the Programme to be truly inclusive.

6. The planned activities relating to children with additional needs should be undertaken as soon as possible.

7. The positive links made both at a strategic level and with other service providers need to be maintained and extended as necessary.

8. On-going staff development and training will be necessary as staff move beyond their traditional boundaries, they will need training and support to enable them to work in real partnership with others. This will be even more important as the team increases in size.
4.3 Concluding Statement

The Sure Start Brierley Hill Programme constitutes an excellent example of multi-disciplinary partnership working. The commitment and willingness of all involved to fulfil the stated vision are exemplary and could act as a model for others. Although still in its infancy, the Programme has achieved a great deal despite having been faced with real difficulties, and significant practical challenges. A great deal of this can be attributed to the working ethos, which is one of openness and a genuine commitment to inclusion. The Programme is functioning well with effective practices and procedures. Many have already felt the benefits of the Programme, and, as more services are established these benefits will be extended to more.

The Programme now faces some key challenges, in terms of new buildings, the recruitment of an expanding staff team, and the delivery of new services. It will be an exciting time for those involved: but also a time that requires strong strategic management. There is a need for the management to remain proactive and forward thinking, to develop strategies for thorough staff induction and training to ensure that the staff team is able to meet the challenges of their extending roles and new responsibilities, and to maintain the impetus of development. There will remain the challenges of maintaining the vision and the unity of the Partnership and team as the Programme grows and develops.

The foundations have been laid for a very positive future; sustained commitment will ensure that this promise is fulfilled.
References

Appendix 1

Sure Start Brierley Hill Delivery Plan Approved July 2000

Meetings of Partnership Board Meetings to date.

Minutes of Management Group Meetings to date.

All advertising/publicity materials produced by the Sure Start Team.

Other publicity materials: articles in local press etc.

Dudley EYDCP Plan 2000-2001

Brighter Futures- Dudley Children’s Services Plan 1998-2001

Audit of Childcare (Dudley) 2000-2001

Dudley Borough Community Plan

Appendix 2

A copy of the original targets from the Sure Start Delivery Plan Approved July 2000 is included here for reference.
Appendix 3

Copy of the Key people Interview Schedule.
Appendix 4

Copy of the Parents Questionnaire.