A report of the local evaluation
August 2000 – May 2002
Tameron Chappell / Jessica Schafer / Sarah Stewart Brown
fourth draft March 2003
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the parents who agreed to be interviewed for this project or kept a diary for a 2-week period. You gave us the opportunity to pass on to Sure Start your feelings about the area and what you would like to see happen in the future. Your contributions have changed, and continue to change, this Sure Start programme.

We would also like to thank the Director and the staff of Sure Start for their openness in the interviews and for welcoming us into their team. We would especially like to thank them for listening to our feedback and for incorporating this feedback into how they deliver their services. We anticipate that the success of this programme will continue due to the commitment of the staff to deliver services that are valued and useful to the community.

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of Melanie Towns and Louise Harriss to this report and to thank Kelvin Jenkins for the time he spent creating the front cover.

Finally, thank-you to all those who have provided suggestions and made comments about the evaluation project and this report, especially the members of the Research Advisory Group and the Academic Steering Group.
# Table of Contents

1. **Introduction**
   - 1.1. Sure Start – a new Government initiative 1
   - 1.2. Oxford City is invited to submit an expression of interest 3
   - 1.3. Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start: the beginnings of a trailblazer Site 4
   - 1.4. Key features of Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start 7
   - 1.5. Development of Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start 7
     - 1.5.1. The building programme 7
     - 1.5.2. Sure Start Services 8
     - 1.5.3. Risk Assessment 14
   - 1.6. SUMMARY 14

2. **The Evaluation and Methods**
   - 2.1. History 16
   - 2.2. Research questions 17
   - 2.3. Action research model 18
   - 2.4. Methods 21
     - 2.4.1. Interviews with parents 21
     - 2.4.2. Interviews with staff 22
     - 2.4.3. The feedback loop 23
     - 2.4.4. Participant Observation 24
     - 2.4.5. Field Notes 24
     - 2.4.6. Scrutiny of Records 24
     - 2.4.7. Diaries 24
     - 2.4.8. Stakeholder Questionnaires 25
     - 2.4.9. Service uptake 25
   - 2.5. Timescales 25
   - 2.6. Approach to analyses 25
   - 2.7. Strengths and Weaknesses of the approach 26
   - 2.8. SUMMARY 26

3. **Use of Sure Start Services by Children and Parents**
   - 3.1. Introduction 27
   - 3.2. Limitations of the database 27
   - 3.3. Overall service uptake and penetration 28
   - 3.4. Uptake of individual services. 29
   - 3.5. SUMMARY 34

4. **Parent Interviews and Discussion**
   - 4.1. Who was interviewed 36
   - 4.2. Feedback 37
   - 4.3. Parents’ views of the community and area 39
     - 4.3.1 Social environment 40
     - 4.3.2 Safety 43
     - 4.3.3 Physical environment 43
     - 4.3.4 Services 44
     - 4.3.5 Overall feelings about the area 45
   - 4.4. Parents’ views of Sure Start 47
     - 4.4.1 What is Sure Start trying to achieve? 47
     - 4.4.2 What is Sure Start? 48
   - 4.5. Parents’ views of Sure Start services 50
1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces Sure Start and describes the development of the local programme in the Rose Hill and Littlemore areas of Oxford City. It outlines some of the ways in which this programme differs from other Sure Start programmes and describes the services and buildings developed in the early stages of the programme from August 1999 to April 2002.

1.1. SURE START – A NEW GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

Sure Start is a national, cross-ministry initiative developed from the Government’s commitment to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. It is targeted at children aged 0-3 and their families who live in disadvantaged areas. It aims to improve physical, intellectual and social development in order that children may flourish at home and at school, and to break cycles of disadvantage for the current generation of young children. Funding for this programme was first announced in July 1998 with commitment to spend £500 million on 250 Sure Start programmes across England over the subsequent four years (see Appendix 1 for a timeline of the development of the local programme). The announcement proposed that programmes would be implemented in socially and economically deprived localities housing between 400 and 800 children. Funding for a further 250 projects to be implemented after 2002 was agreed soon after the original announcement. A considerable proportion of total funding was earmarked for capital development.

The development of Sure Start was an example of ‘joined up government’. The Treasury led the process of development, supported by the Department for Education and Skills, the Department of Health and the Home Office. The concept of partnership working was therefore very much at the core of government thinking about Sure Start, and the announcement of the new funding stream invited local partnerships of statutory, private and non-governmental organisations, in local authority districts which evidenced high levels of social deprivation, to bid for funding.

All local Sure Start projects are required to work towards meeting four objectives, (see Table 1.1). In order to monitor progress towards meeting these objectives the government developed Public Service Agreement targets. These targets were selected as markers of progress in meeting the four objectives because they were readily measurable at the time Sure Start was launched, rather than because they were representative of all the likely educational, social and health outcomes of meeting the objectives. The limitation of these targets is widely acknowledged at national level, and work is in progress to improve on them. In January 2001 the ‘health improvement’ target was changed to: To achieve by 2004 a 10 per cent reduction in mothers who smoke in pregnancy.

Local authority districts were afforded a considerable amount of freedom to determine the composition of local partnerships, to choose which locality they wanted to put forward for Sure Start funding, and to decide how they would
meet Government objectives and targets. Community involvement in planning and service delivery was however a central requirement. Different ways of working are recognised in Service Delivery Agreement targets that are unique to each programme.

Table 1.1: Objectives and Public Service Agreement targets (PSA Targets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Public Service Agreement Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving social and emotional development</td>
<td>To reduce the proportion of children aged 0-3 who are re-registered within the space of 12 months on the child protection register by 20 per cent by 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving health</td>
<td>Original target: 5 per cent reduction in proportion of low birth weight babies by 2001-2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revised target: To achieve by 2004 a 10 per cent reduction in mothers who smoke in pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving children’s ability to learn</td>
<td>To achieve by 2004 for children aged 0-3 a reduction of five percentage points in the number of children with speech and language problems requiring specialist intervention by the age of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening families and communities</td>
<td>To reduce the number of 0-3 year old children living in households where no one is working by at least 12 per cent by 2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local programmes are required to monitor the implementation of their plans, collecting and compiling data on a monthly basis to demonstrate the uptake of their services and submitting quarterly reports that capture qualitative information on the process of implementing programmes. Some of this data is being used by the national evaluation of Sure Start, which is being conducted by a research consortium based at Birkbeck College, London. The national evaluation is taking place over six years and is also collecting a large amount of data about children in selected Sure Start communities, the communities themselves, the way local projects are implemented and their cost effectiveness. The intention is that the national evaluation will be able to show what impact Sure Start is having on communities; what impact it is having on children; and which elements of Sure Start programmes contributed to these outcomes. In addition, local projects are also required to evaluate the effectiveness of their own activities. Local evaluation plays a rather different role to the national evaluation, focusing more on the process of implementation of the programmes rather than on educational, social or health outcomes. Local evaluations are important to local programmes, offering them immediate feedback on the perceived impact of new developments, enabling them to reflect on their progress at regular intervals, and to identify and to troubleshoot problems and barriers to implementation.
This report covers the local evaluation of Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start in Oxford, which was set up in 1999 as one of the ‘trailblazer’ sites.¹

1.2. OXFORD CITY IS INVITED TO SUBMIT AN EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Oxford City was one of the local authority districts invited to submit an expression of interest in the development of a Sure Start project, in the first wave of invitations (January 1999). The inclusion of Oxford, a city with a number of very wealthy areas, on the list of deprived areas was justified on the basis of the existence of pockets of deprivation. There was also interest at national level, at that time, in a unique early education project which had been developed in South Oxford by an non-governmental organisation: Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP)².

Following the invitation, people working within the early years field in Oxford including those from PEEP, the Early Years Partnership, Social Services, Health, Education and the voluntary sector began discussions about a potential Sure Start programme. The current Chair of the Early Years Partnership also chaired the meetings of this early group. There was debate at this stage about a number of issues and the discussions were described as ‘tricky’ by one member. The issues included: whether it was a good idea to target such a large budget on such a small area; which area should be targeted; and the sharing of power and control. The time allowed for development of the submission of interest (five weeks) made it very difficult to explore some of these difficult issues in a way that was helpful to the future partnership. It also did not allow time for clarification and agreement about the expectations of partner organisations. Some of the issues, which should have been resolved at this stage had there been time, did create tensions later in the project, but it is to the credit of those involved at this stage that the ambitious Oxford Sure Start got off the ground.

The PEEP programme had been developed in four neighbourhoods suitable for Sure Start in relation to the index of deprivation – Blackbird Leys, Greater Leys, Littlemore and Rose Hill (the catchment area for Peers School, where the PEEP programme was based). As a result, discussions focused on these areas in South Oxford. However, the child population of the four neighbourhoods combined exceeded the proposed limit. Although it was initially assumed that the bid would centre on Blackbird Leys, as this area was already receiving funding from the Single Regeneration Budget, the group

---

¹ This is the government’s terminology for the first group of programmes to be funded. Subsequent programmes came in ‘waves’.

² PEEP is a voluntary organisation whose aims are to bring about a significant improvement in educational achievement and school readiness of all under 5s through working with their parents and carers. PEEP works in community settings and makes home visits and provides weekly groups for parents / carers and children. Workers support parents in practical ways to engage and interact with their child to promote learning.
decided that there was a greater need for Sure Start in Rose Hill. However, the number of under 4s in Rose Hill was below the proposed lower limit for Sure Start. The area was therefore expanded to include the adjacent neighbourhood of Littlemore with similar indicators of deprivation and poverty and lacking services for under 4s.

At this time, the exact number of under 4s in this defined area was unknown. Instead, an estimate of 568 children under 4 years in the two District Council wards of Iffley and Littlemore was used in the drawing up of the submission of interest to give an indication of the numbers of under 4s in this area. The two neighbourhoods share some characteristics, but are different in other respects. According to the Delivery Plan, Littlemore had a higher than average proportion of large households (above six people), and also a higher rate of people reporting a limiting long-term illness. The Rose Hill estate had a higher proportion of non-white residents, particularly of South Asian background. Geographically, the division between the two neighbourhoods is marked by the Oxford ring road, a busy thoroughfare that makes pedestrian access between the two areas difficult. However, some streets on the City side of the ring road belong to the Littlemore area making the geographical situation even more complicated.

1.3. ROSE HILL–LITTLEMORE SURE START:
THE BEGINNINGS OF A TRAILBLAZER SITE

In February 1999, following the decision that Oxford would develop a submission of interest for a Sure Start programme in Rose Hill and Littlemore, a formal partnership, called the Sure Start Steering Group, was formed. This group comprised representatives from both statutory and non-statutory organisations, and parents in Rose Hill and Littlemore. The partners included:

- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership
- Oxford City Council
- Oxfordshire County Council Education Service
- Oxfordshire County Council Social Services
- Oxfordshire Community Health NHS Trust¹
- Parents from Rose Hill and Littlemore
- PEEP

(See Appendix 2 for more details on the role these representatives held within their respective organisations).

The partnership group was chaired jointly by the Director of PEEP and a local parent. There was further debate at this stage about the leadership role. One of the statutory services felt that they should have sole control. A compromise proposal of joint leadership between another statutory service and PEEP was

¹ Now the Oxford City Primary Care Trust.
rejected. One of the PEEP trustees put forward the proposal that responsibility for running the project should be assumed by an independent Management Board, which would be legally constituted with charitable status. This proposal was unanimously accepted, and it was agreed that PEEP would, in the early stages of the project, assume the role both of lead partner and of ‘Accountable Body’. They would also take responsibility for preparing a draft delivery plan required for submission of the expression of interest to initiate a Sure Start project.

Early on in the life of this group (February 1999) a meeting was organised with members of the community to discuss what was needed in Rose Hill and Littlemore. Twenty-two parents and 43 local workers attended this first consultation meeting. The parents were recruited from both Rose Hill and Littlemore and were invited through the Family Centre, toddler groups and other community settings in Rose Hill, or through PEEP classes. Following this initial meeting, a draft Delivery Plan was formulated by the Executive Director of PEEP and following further consultation, was submitted to the government in April 1999 with the expression of interest. It contained a detailed breakdown of the objectives of the local project including costing and strategies for delivering services, how the management partnership would be formed and its responsibilities, how independent charitable status would be gained and how the community was to be involved in the planning and delivery of services as well as background information on the proposed geographical area.

The Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start partnership was asked by the government to submit a detailed Delivery Plan for Sure Start funding. A Director was appointed in August 1999 to develop this Delivery Plan and to begin negotiating Service Agreements with partnership agencies. The contents of the Delivery Plan were similar to the expression of interest in terms of the core services proposed and the programme aims, but contained more information about baseline service provision in the area, and the proposed services in relation to each of the government’s targets. It specified a highly participatory project in which Sure Start services would be delivered by the statutory and non-statutory agencies currently working in the area. The Delivery Plan also specified the process of commissioning new services from these agencies and how the project itself was to be managed. It contained details of the proposed capital expenditure to underpin the provision of the services. It was proposed that the existing Family Centre building in Rose Hill be refurbished and a new building, the Sure Start Family Centre, built on a vacant site next door. The plan contained no details at this time of capital expenditure in Littlemore, but stated that provision in Littlemore was to be considered in more detail in the second stage of implementation after the first 9 months of the project. The detailed Delivery Plan was approved in October 1999 and a budget of £3 million was awarded for the first 3 years.

The ‘Sure Start Core Service Categories’ as laid out in the Delivery Plan were:

---

1 Legally and financially liable for the Sure Start programme.
• Outreach and home visiting
• Support to families and parents
• Support for good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children
• Primary and community health care and advice
• Support for families with special needs involving access to specialised services

In October 1999, six working groups were set up to enable the development of the infrastructure of Sure Start and to commission and manage these core services:

1. Management Development
2. Health and Home Visiting
3. Children’s Learning and Care
4. Community Involvement
5. Inclusion (formerly Equal Opportunities)
6. Buildings (separated into Rose Hill and Littlemore)

To ensure local community involvement in the governance and in the planning and delivery of services, it was agreed that numbers of local providers and parents would be balanced in each working group and that one person with a district, county or national perspective would also be represented. Parents were generally recruited to these groups through their use of services in the area. The Sure Start Director aimed to ensure that those sitting on the working groups were appointed for their expertise and not as representatives of their agency. Each working group developed a detailed specification of services needed, how much they might cost and when they were to be implemented. These proposals were taken to the Steering Group for agreement. Service specifications were put out to tender with the requirement that service providers would be local, if possible, that they had significant expertise in the area to be commissioned, and that the services were entirely new and specifically related to Sure Start’s aims.

A Health Visitor was appointed in January 2000 to begin work on the planned health provision in the area and a Parent Participation Worker was appointed soon afterwards to actively involve local parents in the processes of Sure Start. The official launch of the Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start programme took place in April 2000 at the existing Rose Hill Family Centre building. In September 2000 the project was awarded charitable status and Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start became a limited company, managed by a Board of Trustees. The first Annual General Meeting, in October 2000 celebrated the anniversary of the date that the government agreed funding. It was also announced at this meeting that membership of the Sure Start company was open to the local community, including people working but not living locally (for example, Sure Start staff).
1.4. KEY FEATURES OF ROSE HILL–LITTLEMORE SURE START

Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start is one of only 9% of current Sure Start projects that are independent legally constituted organisations in which one-third of the Board of Trustees are local parents. It is a programme in which local non-governmental organisations have had a lead role from the outset and in which community participation is accorded a very high priority. The creation of a genuine partnership with local parents and the development of effective joint working have been key goals of the programme from the start. The delivery plan was ambitious in proposing a wide range of additional services. It was unusual in that it specified that all new Sure Start services should be commissioned rather than managed by the local programme. As a result, all Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start ‘staff’, with the exception of the Director, one administrator and the financial officer, are employed through existing services. These staff therefore have dual accountability to Sure Start and the host agency. The Service Agreements between the host agency and Sure Start clearly define the roles of each in the management of their employees. (See Appendix 3 and 4 for structural chart and details of the Sure Start staff team).

The programme covers two distinct neighbourhoods with different facilities and histories separated by a busy ring road. A total of 568 children under 4 were estimated to be living in the area at the time of development of the Delivery Plan making this Sure Start a programme of below average size. Nationally the average number of children covered by Sure Start programmes is 738 with a range of 200-2000. Statistics for the area as a whole suggest a demographic profile with an ethnic minority population of average size for Sure Start programmes (10% of the population are non-white and two-thirds of these are South Asian). Twenty-four per cent of families with children under 4 living in the area had an income of less than £124 a week in 1998, and a further 22% had between £120-199.

Rose Hill–Littlemore is one of the Sure Start sites selected to be a case study in the national impact evaluation. This is an in-depth study of 26 programmes, conducted by the National Evaluation Research Consortium.

1.5. DEVELOPMENT OF ROSE HILL–LITTLEMORE SURE START

1.5.1. THE BUILDING PROGRAMME

During the first year after the Director’s appointment, the Buildings Working Group gave further consideration to the refurbishment of the Littlemore

---

1 Taken from Sure Start National Evaluation Report 01; Early Experiences of Implementing Sure Start, June 2002.
Community Centre and local parents identified the need for a drop-in play facility as well as a clinic. Plans were therefore developed and implemented to refurbish a derelict building to house a local clinic. This building was commissioned in December 2000 and was christened the POD (Parents Opening Doors – patterned on a Family Centre in another Oxford estate, Barton Open Doors). In January 2001 work began on the new Sure Start building in Rose Hill. The new Sure Start Centre opened its doors to the public at the beginning of November 2001 and was formally launched in June 2002. Refurbishment of the old Family Centre was delayed by the liquidation of the building company part way through the process, but has now been completed. Refurbishments to the Littlemore Community Centre were also delayed, following misplacement of documents and lengthy decision-making processes at national level, which led to a revised estimate by the builders having to be agreed by the Board. These refurbishments were scheduled to begin on 20 May 2002, and are scheduled to be finished by mid-November 2002.

1.5.2. SURE START SERVICES

Services were originally commissioned under the five core service categories specified in the Delivery Plan (see section 1.3), but in January 2001, following the circulation of new government targets for existing and new Sure Start projects, an implementation plan was developed in which services were grouped into the nine categories specified below:

1. Home visiting and neighbourhood networks
2. Support for families and parents – befriending and social support
3. Services to support good quality play, learning and childcare
4. Primary and community health care
5. Support for children with special needs, including support in accessing specialised services
6. Community involvement in the governance of the Sure Start programme and with the delivery of services
7. Increasing the awareness of the Sure Start programme in the local community
8. Programme management
9. Evaluation

These groupings correspond to the Sure Start Unit’s funding streams and are therefore important in terms of financial accountability. It is possible that they may in future be used as the basis of cost effectiveness analyses. It is important, however, to be aware that the categories do not map directly on to service provision as seen by parents and members of the community, nor do they map neatly on to staff job descriptions. They also do not necessarily reflect managerial groupings. So, for example, increasing the awareness of Sure Start in the local community is an aspect of everybody’s role and most of the staff funded from all nine of the categories have some aspect of home visiting in their work. However, only one member of staff is funded from the ‘Home visiting and neighbourhood networks’ budget. This is the Family Services Co-ordinator whose role is to increase co-ordination and cohesion amongst statutory and other services that visit parents at home, so that parents are not ‘swamped’ by large numbers of home visitors. Health visitors
and midwives, whose role involves home visiting, are funded out of the ‘Primary and community health care’ budget. Home-Start, a service which provides on-going practical and emotional support for families under pressure through volunteer home visiting, is funded from ‘Home visiting and neighbourhood networks’. The situation is further complicated by the fact that categories 1 and 4 are, in effect, treated as one category, with their funds pooled.

Sure Start aims to provide seamless services, and such services are difficult to fit neatly into distinct categories or budget headings. It is a programme that aims to maximise the effectiveness of established services partly by increasing co-ordination and cohesion. Some of the funded posts have been created specifically to work between established services to increase the extent to which they work in a joined up way. All this means that the names and contents of the categories do not always make intuitive sense. The categories are used below because no grouping could be perfect, and this grouping at least reflects the way Sure Start is organised.

The budgets allocated to each of these nine categories fund both posts and commissioned service. From the time the first health visitor was appointed in January 2002 there has been a gradual build-up of both. Currently staff number 50 people, the majority of whom work part-time (see Appendix 4 for details). Almost all of these staff are employed by a statutory or non-governmental organisation on funding provided by Sure Start for that post. These staff have dual accountability (as discussed in Chapter 5).

Several of the staff contribute to more than one of the nine categories of activity listed above. For example, one administrator has responsibilities in more than one category, but if classified by the category from which their posts are funded, the staff are distributed across the different categories as shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Numbers of staff contributing to key activities (47 staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY AREA</th>
<th>STAFF NUMBER (N=50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Home Visiting and Neighbourhood Networks</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Support for families and parents</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Services to support good quality play, learning and childcare</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Primary and Community Health Care</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Support for children with Special Needs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Community involvement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Increasing awareness of Sure Start programme</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Programme management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Evaluation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Initially, staff were based in a number of offices spread out over several sites. With the commissioning of the new Sure Start building in Rose Hill in November 2001, they are now mostly based in offices within the new building. The exceptions are one member of staff who is permanently based in the refurbished Parents Opening Doors (POD) building in Littlemore (running the
Lending and Recycling project, for equipment loans), and five members of staff who are based at the East and South Oxford Community Education Centre (EASOCEC) at the Peers School campus in Littlemore (involved in training and computer support). (See Figure 1.1 for the locations of the various sites within the catchment area.)

**Home visiting and neighbourhood networks**

This category funds the Family Services Co-ordinator whose role (as described above) is to co-ordinate the different services families may need to access. They are at present aiming to identify a ‘link worker’ for every family in the Sure Start area. This link worker will ensure that services are accessible, that they are delivered in a way which is coherent to the families and that they are not ‘deluged’ by different service providers.

*Figure 1.1: Map of the Sure Start catchment area showing the main buildings*
Support for families and parents
This category also funds many of the commissioned services that are delivered to families in their homes. Some of these are also delivered at local venues. It includes counselling services provided by Relate (offers advice on relationships), OXPIP (offers advice on post-natal depression and problems with attachment) and the Advice Centre based in Rose Hill (offering advice on financial matters amongst other things). It does not cover home visiting by health visitors and midwives; these are classified under Primary and Community Care. It also does not cover home visiting by Home-Start, which is funded under ‘Home visiting and neighbourhood networks’.

Most of the services provided under this category are provided by staff based at the three Sure Start centres and at EASOCEC. However, there is an outreach component to their role, as part of their remit is to encourage parents to become involved in centre-based activities. One member of staff is specifically concerned with involving fathers in activities and has developed a ‘Dad’s Drop-in’ (SaturDads) and the Parent Participation Worker encourages all parents to become involved. Building on the established networks of the Rose Hill Family Centre, a Community Café project is being developed as a community-owned, non-profit business with local volunteers trained and supported through Sure Start. Volunteers are also encouraged to assist in other services such as the Lending and Recycling service that loans children’s equipment to parents in the Sure Start catchment area.

A number of special projects are underway covering topics that were highlighted by local parents as priorities for action. These include a community response to domestic violence; work with young people (especially pregnant teenagers) and children’s rights.

Five members of these staff are employed to deliver and co-ordinate training for local parents and Sure Start workers which helps staff and parents develop skills and knowledge in a range of areas, including Health and Hygiene, First Aid, Child Protection, Keep Fit, English as a Second Language (although this already existed in the area), and Domestic Violence. Some further training is provided by the statutory agencies and by other Sure Start providers.

Support for good quality play, learning and childcare
Staff funded under this category include the Childcare Development worker who provides support to settings and individuals caring for children (e.g. childminders). The category also supports some of the facilities based in the Sure Start centres, including the drop-in centre and crèche as well as a childcare subsidy to enable access to childcare for those in financial need.

PEEP services are commissioned from this category. PEEP delivers its services through PEEP groups and PEEP Link. PEEP groups are held weekly, and involve parents and children in activities designed to support parents and carers in stimulating children’s development in the following areas: self-esteem; reading; listening; writing; learning dispositions; talking; and numeracy. ‘PEEP Link’ delivers PEEP materials to the homes of people
who do not attend the weekly groups, and supports them in using those materials. PEEP Link visits take place once a year.

**Primary and community health care**

Prior to Sure Start there were no locally-based primary health care services. Health visitors and midwives visited families in their homes when necessary, but there were no clinics. A number of local services are now offered by Sure Start health visitors, midwives and speech and language therapists. These include drop-in consultation at centres and regularly-run clinics, health education groups and a ‘Bumps to Babes’ group. The staff providing these services include two Parent Support Workers who offer short-term practical support in the home following the birth of a baby, giving advice on breast feeding and sleeping problems. Both health visitors and midwives continue to visit parents in their homes. The midwives have been involved in a pilot antenatal telemonitoring and educational service (e-mum) and they also provide smoking cessation support. Health visitors support parenting education and support groups (see below) by contributing to the facilitation of these groups.

**Support for children with special needs**

Sure Start aims to ensure equal opportunities for children with special needs and their families. Two staff provide direct support and advice in the home, and work with local childcare settings to promote inclusive practice. Free transport is offered to families of children with special needs in order for them to access specialist services outside of the locality. Parenting programmes and parenting support (provided by a family-led Special Needs Group) are also commissioned from this category. The parenting programmes accept parents who are either self-referred or referred by the statutory agencies. They are provided by two groups; the Family Nurturing Network runs the Parents and Children’s Series Programme (Webster–Stratton), a primarily behaviourist programme; and Family Links runs the Family Links Nurturing Programme based on the work of Stephen Bavolek, a programme which also covers positive discipline, but focuses on relationships and specifically, emotional literacy. These groups are open to all Sure Start families.

The Rose Hill Advice Centre is commissioned to promote the up-take of benefits specifically related to children with disabilities. An existing toy library service for children with special needs (the Opportunity Toy Box) has been re-equipped and catalogued by Sure Start and has been relocated to the Family Centre (although it is for City-wide use).

**Community involvement in the governance of the Sure Start programme**

Staff encourage parents to take part in the governance of Sure Start through parent representation on the Board and Working Groups. A small parent-run group called the Check It Out group has been set up to enable immediate feedback. Local parents set up an outreach consultation scheme called ‘Talk Back’ to gather the views of other parents in the area.

Community events and trips are funded under this category with the aim of encouraging increased participation. Three members of staff have been
specially designated to encourage participation by Asian families. With this aim, the Asian Families Liaison and Development Worker and her support team provide services to Asian families including translation, keep-fit and sewing groups. They aim to raise awareness of all Sure Start services and opportunities among Asian parents and work with other agencies to promote access and inclusiveness.

**Increasing the awareness of the Sure Start programme in the local community**

The What’s On Co-ordinator (previously called the Information Service Development Officer) and the Lending and Recycling Service are funded under this category. The latter is becoming an important way in to Sure Start services for a number of families who have moved into the area with a Sure Start-aged child and have not accessed other Sure Start services.

**Programme management**

This is provided primarily through the Director, who is supported by an administrator. Financial and accounting services and IT development services are contracted out on a consultancy basis. Five other members of staff have managerial responsibilities: the Centres Co-ordinator, the Lead Health Visitor, the Special Needs Support Worker, the Playroom/Crèche Co-ordinator, and the Asian Families Liaison and Development Worker. Individual staff members also have line management through their employing agency (a ‘dual management structure’).

**Evaluation**

There are two aspects to the evaluation: - monitoring of the use of Sure Start’s services by Sure Start children and parents, and the evaluation of the process of implementation of the programme.

All Sure Start staff and commissioned agencies are required to provide information on the numbers of Sure Start children using their services. They record this information on paper and a member of the Sure Start administrative team subsequently transfers it to an electronic database. This database (which the local programme calls the Mapping Database) is currently being developed by an external firm of IT consultants. It now holds details of all Sure Start services and all children living in the Sure Start area. The latter data come from the Community Child Health Service computer database. The Mapping Database includes information about each child such as their address, date of birth, the name and address of their primary care giver and any special circumstances of the child, which could help in understanding their needs. In order for this information to be linked with service usage data, the consent of each child’s carer is required. Initially this was achieved by asking parents of new babies to sign a simple consent form at their first home visit by a health visitor. In May 2001 a more comprehensive Collection Notice was introduced. This is now completed at the first appropriate visit to a parent. The Sure Start worker explains what type of

---

1 A Sure Start child is one that is under 4 years of age and living in the geographical catchment area.
information is to be held about them and what it will be used for. The parent
can then agree for Sure Start to hold information about them and their
child(ren) or not as they wish. Their decision is recorded on paper and held in
their child’s Personal Child Health Record\(^1\). The IT consultants have set up
the routines for a number of simple analyses to be carried out by the
administrative staff and as a result this database is now able to provide some
statistics on service usage and uptake by local families (see Chapters 3 and
5). These data have been incorporated into this report.

The second aspect of the evaluation is an independent research project
commissioned from the Oxford Health Services Research Unit in July 2000
that began data collection in the autumn of that year. The methodology of this
evaluation is described in detail in the next section.

1.5.3. RISK ASSESSMENT

In May 2002 Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start underwent a formal risk
assessment visit by the National Sure Start Unit and achieved a low risk rating
and high commendation, especially for its parent involvement and ‘hard to
reach’ programmes, as well as the newly opened Sure Start Building in Rose
Hill.

1.6. SUMMARY

The Rose Hill–Littlemore programme is a Sure Start Trailblazer that was
established in November 1999. It serves a split site community covering
roughly 550 under 4s in which deprivation levels and ethnic minority
composition are average for Sure Start programmes.

The programme is run by an independent legally-constituted organisation with
charitable status. Many local parents are members. The establishment of
genuine partnerships with parents has been a high priority from the outset and
posts have been established which fund staff to encourage and support such
participation. Some of the staff have the particular brief of encouraging
participation by Asian families. There are opportunities for parent
representation on the Board of trustees and working groups. Non-statutory
charitable organisations were prominent in the development of this
programme and continue to be very important as service providers. The
programme has also, from the outset, set a high priority on joint working
between statutory and non-statutory organisations, both at organisational
level and at practitioner level.

An ambitious programme of services was planned covering several new
buildings, home visiting, outreach and neighbourhood networks, support for
families and parents, support for good quality play, learning and childcare,
primary and community health care, and support for children with special
needs. These were all established or commissioned during the first two years
of the programmes. All Sure Start staff with the exception of the Director and

\(^1\) It is estimated by workers that 2% have declined consent at this time.
Administrator are employed by the agencies for whom they would otherwise work and have dual accountability. In a recent risk assessment by the national Sure Start Unit this Sure Start received a low risk rating and was highly commended.

The programme is being evaluated through the collection of data on service uptake and by an independent research team from the Health Services Research Unit in Oxford.
2. THE EVALUATION AND METHODS

In this chapter, we provide details about the history of the evaluation and the methods used (interviews with parents and staff, participant observation at meetings and events, field notes, scrutiny of records and questionnaires). We discuss the strengths and limitations of these methods.

2.1. HISTORY

The Delivery Plan submitted to the Sure Start Unit in September 1999 specified that financial resources would be committed to evaluation. It proposed the commissioning of an independent evaluation, based on the principles of action research, from one of a number of academics based in Oxford’s two universities. Several of these academics were, at that stage, involved in teams who were bidding for the commission to undertake the national evaluation of Sure Start. An evaluation brief was developed in January 2000 in consultation with one of the academics and discussed with the Management Development Group. The brief was circulated to all potentially interested academics in Oxford and a meeting was arranged for all recipients to attend in April 2000. At that meeting it was agreed that the commission for the local evaluation should go to the Health Services Research Unit and that other academics with an interest in Sure Start would form a Research Advisory Group. This group would meet quarterly during the course of the evaluation to discuss the progress of the research. It was also agreed that the group should have cross representation with the advisory group for research being undertaken in Rose Hill and Littlemore on the effectiveness of PEEP. In addition, agreement was reached that the group would have cross representation with the Board and that the Director and one or two local parents should be members.

The Director of the Health Services Research Unit was asked to draft and cost a research protocol, which reflected the research brief, and the budget set aside for evaluation (£70,000) over the twenty-one months from July 2000 to March 2002. The protocol was approved by the Sure Start Board and by members of the Research Advisory Group, and the project was commissioned.

In August 2000 two part-time researchers (0.7 and 0.5 time)\(^1\) were appointed by a panel which included members of the Research Advisory Group, a local parent, the Director of Sure Start and the Director of the Health Services Research Unit. An application was submitted for ethical approval to the Applied and Qualitative Research Ethics Committee (AQREC) of the local Health Authority and after further development of consent forms and clarification about who assumed responsibility for collection of quantitative data, ethical approval was finally granted on 1 December 2000. During the late summer and autumn of 2000 researchers familiarised themselves with the area, began collecting documentation and started participant observation, attending meetings and

\(^1\) Tameron Chappell and Melanie Towns, respectively. Melanie Towns resigned in December 2000 and was replaced by Jessica Schafer in March 2001. When Jessica left at the end of her contract, Louise Harriss who began work in July 2002 replaced her.
events in the area. The data reported on here were collected over the period September 2000 to January 2002.

2.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research protocol aimed to evaluate the following aspects of the Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start programme:

1. The process of developing the local Sure Start programme and the degree of participation by families in this process;
2. The nature of the Rose Hill and Littlemore communities and the way in which they change over time;
3. The models and practices of how professionals work together in the context of Sure Start, and how these are perceived to be different from previous ways of working;
4. The effectiveness of mechanisms employed to reach ‘hard to reach’ families;
5. The uptake of services and who uses them;
6. Examples of good evidence-based services elsewhere from which learning can be incorporated into the local programme;
7. Financial information in accordance with national guidance, i.e. what is funded and what continued or discontinued and why;
8. A review and expansion of the Start Point Data to provide a broader information base;
9. The feasibility of collecting comparable Start Point Data from another area in Oxford to compare trends was to be reviewed at the end of year 1.

The protocol allowed for flexibility in the evaluation, enabling it to be responsive to unforeseen developments. Thus the focus of the evaluation and the data to be collected changed somewhat over the course of the evaluation. For example the research team was not involved in the review and expansion of the Start Point Data. A bid for additional funding to collect data from a comparable area in Oxford, in order to compare trends in Sure Start with trends elsewhere, was submitted in response to the Department of Health’s call for Research into Inequalities in Health. It was turned down on the grounds that a substantial Government investment in Sure Start evaluation had already been made in commissioning the National Evaluation. The plan to collect data from another area in Oxford was therefore dropped due to lack of resources. The evaluation focused on observing the process of implementation of the programme, its perceived successes and failures, and the reactions of parents and staff to the approach to implementation and the programme itself.

Other issues that arose over the course of the research, and were incorporated into the research brief, were:
• What is the process of mainstreaming Sure Start services?
• What are the prospects for sustaining the programme in the long-term?

2.3. ACTION RESEARCH MODEL

An Action Research approach was adopted as the most appropriate for this Sure Start programme, enabling those involved in the project to be participants in the research process and ensuring the findings from the research influenced the programme as it developed. More traditional approaches to research, in which data are collected by outsiders who submit a report at the end of the funding period, limit the value of evaluation to the project. Problems that are identified can only be dealt with after the report has been received. The main features of action research are that it is cyclical in nature, involves change and encourages participation from those involved in the research. It also tends to be qualitative. That is, it uses language to evaluate something more often than it uses numbers. It has to be flexible, so when the findings emerge, they can be used to plan the next phase. The model below shows how the key stages of action research relate to each other. Planning is the first stage, followed by action, observation and then crucially, reflection. Reflection allows critical review of what happened and informs the next stage of development of the project.

*Figure 2.1: The Cyclical Process in Action Research (based on Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988)*

In this project, an action research approach was adopted using qualitative research methods such as interviewing and participant observation at meetings and events. The figure below gives more detail about how we tailored the action research model.
Fundamental to action research is the idea that the researcher is no longer the ‘expert’ investigating a system. Instead, a research partnership is formed between all those involved and the research process becomes more collaborative. Researchers need to participate in the programme to gain insight into the processes involved and to invite candid responses from other team members, but they also need to remain objective. One of the problems of action research is that researchers may become over-involved in the project and lose their objectivity.

In this project, a ‘mutual collaboration approach’ (Hart and Bond, 1995) was adopted where the researchers and Sure Start worked together to identify problems and subsequent plans to change them. However, as a consequence of discussion of these issues at an early Research Advisory Group meeting, an Academic Steering Group was formed. This group, comprised solely of academics at the two Oxford Universities, aimed to ensure that objectivity and independence were maintained in reporting the results, and would mediate in the event of conflict between the research team and the Sure Start team over publication and dissemination of findings. It was planned that the group would only meet if the need arose. To the time of publication of this report, this group has never met.

Researchers keep diaries of their impressions of events as and when they happened (field notes). This forms a record of how things were interpreted at any point in time, which can be used retrospectively when more information is available. Assuming that as the researcher gets more involved in the project, their objectivity decreases, field notes are a reminder of how things were interpreted when the researcher was more objective.
The research approach we adopted relied to some extent on triangulation. In navigational terminology, triangulation is the process by which several markers are used to pinpoint a single spot. In action research, triangulation offers the chance to view an idea from a number of different sources and methods. As the level of agreement between the different points increases, so does the likelihood that the conclusions drawn from the data will be a true representation.

In this research, the data were triangulated; that is, information with the same focus was gathered from a number of sources such as interviews with staff, notes from meetings and documentation provided by the local programme as well as from the National Sure Start Unit. Methodological triangulation was evidenced in that we used several methods of gathering data and then compared the findings. For example, we used semi-structured interviews, we observed at meetings and events and collected diaries completed by parents. By using more than one method to collect information, any biases related to one particular method can be balanced against the strengths of another method. Investigator triangulation simply refers to the number of investigators involved in a project. In this project there were three members of the research team and, consequently, three potentially different viewpoints and explanations of results. Using the evidence from all of these triangulation points to draw conclusions ensures a more robust and reliable interpretation of actual events. Triangulation over time resulted from data being gathered throughout the project as the processes of change were documented in both a longitudinal sense (interviewing the same people a number of times) and a cross-sectional sense (interviewing a number of people once only).

Triangulation ensures a balanced view of the issues and events. If we asked one member of staff a single question about, for example, their views on partnership working within Sure Start, any conclusions we could draw from their response would be far less reliable than if we asked a number of questions about partnership working. Validity would increase more if we asked them again in three months’ time, and we also asked ten other members of staff what they thought about it and attended meetings and events to see how people worked together day-to-day. Triangulation can also be used to maintain objectivity as another investigator can provide a different interpretation of events.

One of the greatest strengths of action research is that it can be tailored to meet the exact needs of the situation. This flexibility means that the findings are very specific to the programme under study. The ability to share ‘best practice’ with other Sure Start programmes depends on how much overlap exists between the two programmes. In Chapter 1 we indicated the ways in which the Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start is, in general, similar to and different from other Sure Start programmes, using data from the National Evaluation’s Implementation Study.
2.4. METHODS

The principal methods used were semi-structured interviews; participant observation; collection and monitoring of programme documents, minutes and memos; parent diaries; and a questionnaire. Prior to beginning interviews with parents, there was a lengthy process of gaining ethical approval from the Applied and Qualitative Research Ethics Committee (AQREC). This set some constraints on the research methods, as outlined below. On the other hand, the ethical guidelines also set up a valuable system of informing and obtaining consent from participants, both staff and parents. Information and consent forms are in Appendix 5.

2.4.1. INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS

The questions asked of the parents covered topics such as:

- Opinions about living in the area (e.g. physical environment, safety issues, infrastructure for children)
- Community relations
- Personal support systems (informal child care and social support)
- Use of services (both Sure Start and non-Sure Start funded services) and the value parents placed on these services
- Suggestions for service improvement (both Sure Start and non-Sure Start funded services)
- What services are missing (generally, as well as specific to Sure Start)
- Participation in service planning within Sure Start
- Hopes for the future: for the area and for Sure Start

The interview schedule appears in Appendix 6.

As would be expected from an action research approach, the questions changed over time as different themes emerged from the interviews themselves, and from other sources (for example, research schedules from other Sure Start programme evaluations). Examples of some of the additional questions asked at later interviews also appear in Appendix 6.

Interviews were recorded onto audio cassette tape and transcribed by a professional transcription service. In due course we plan to return parents' transcripts to them with details of how Sure Start is addressing their concerns.

The interview analysis package N5 was used to analyse the transcriptions.

Parents who used services were identified during participant observation, mainly at centre-based services, but also through outreach workers. They were invited to participate, at a time and place of their convenience. Parents were

---

1 QSR N5, QSR International Pty Ltd.
also approached through the Rose Hill and Littlemore playgroups, with the assistance of the playgroup leaders. Health Visitors, other outreach workers, and local non-Sure Start workers were enlisted to help in identifying non-users they might come into contact with in a non-Sure Start capacity, or who had only brief contact with Sure Start. This added a few non-users to the list. In a final attempt to identify more non-users, we sent an invitation to the occupiers of the addresses of all children of 3 years of age who it appeared from the database had not used services. Direct mailing to named parents was regarded as an unethical use of the information held on the database. The mail-out invited parents or carers to reply with their name and phone number if they were interested in having their views heard. Only one parent was identified using this approach from a mail shot of 140 invitations.

Most parents were interviewed in their own homes, but three preferred to be interviewed in Sure Start premises, in quiet secure rooms. Interviews were carried out by one researcher with the exception of one interview where the parent preferred not to have the interview recorded. A second researcher attended this interview to take notes.

2.4.2. INTERVIEWS WITH STAFF

The interviews with staff were also semi-structured. All staff were interviewed individually, and where possible, in a quiet office to ensure confidentiality. The initial interview schedule asked questions on topics overlapping with the parent questions, including their opinions about the areas as a living environment for parents. There were also some questions specific to staff, touching on the following areas:

- Professional background
- Process of recruitment into Sure Start
- Role within Sure Start
- Internal organisational processes
- Strengths and weakness of Sure Start
- Partnership working

As with the parent interviews, the questions changed over time as different themes emerged from the interviews themselves, and from other sources such as the minutes\(^1\) from meetings (an indication of the questions asked in the later interviews can be seen in Appendix 6).

Staff interviews were also recorded onto audio cassette. In four instances, due to machine malfunction or operator error, all or part of the interview was not recorded. In these instances, notes were made by the interviewer immediately afterwards, detailing the key points of the interview. These notes were also inputted into the N5 package but are not treated as direct quotes for the purpose of reports. Eight staff were also local parents, five of these were parents of at least one child under 4 years of age at the time of the interview and for these five individuals, their responses to questions asking about the

\(^{1}\) Sure Start refers to minutes as notes.
area in which they lived were analysed with the parents’ responses to the same questions.

A decision was made in March 2001 to re-interview certain staff, to follow up on issues raised in the first interviews, and to target people considered to be in ‘key roles’. Where staff were re-interviewed, a number of the questions related directly to what was said in their first interview, such as asking how an issue had been resolved or how they viewed the situation presently. When there was not sufficient time for a re-interview, transcripts were returned to the individual, with follow-on questions indicated, so that the individual could add any written comments.

The Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start Director was interviewed quarterly. The initial interview followed the same pattern as the other staff interviews. Subsequent interviews focussed on addressing current issues within the programme as identified through the other methods, and following up on previous issues. The follow-up interviews with the Director were inputted into N5 separately and formed a separate ‘project’ although the quotes appear in the report where relevant.

2.4.3. THE FEEDBACK LOOP

It is important for the process of qualitative research that all interviews are conducted in absolute confidence. This requirement, however, is in potential conflict with the requirement of action research in that problems identified during the course of the project are fed back to those running the programme to improve service delivery. A procedure for feedback that met both requirements, and was potentially empowering for interviewees, was developed by the research team and agreed with the Research Advisory Group early in the evaluation. If a problem was raised, interviewees (both parents and staff) were encouraged by the researchers to report the problem to the most appropriate person in the Sure Start team. The researcher might make suggestions as to how the interviewee might approach the problem but did not assume control unless the interviewee requested that they do so. For parent interviews, all items raised were fed back to Sure Start after allowing for a delay so that the parent could feed back the information directly if they wished, if they had not already done so. In staff interviews, issues only became potential researcher feedback items if more than one person raised a particular issue. At this stage, the second staff interviewee would be informed that they were not alone in thinking the issue a problem and encouraged to feed it back themselves. A period of time then passed (in practice, at least 3 weeks), to allow individuals to either resolve the issue themselves, or for it to be addressed through other means. In those cases where the informants might be readily identifiable, the research team discussed how to report the issue in a sensitive way. When agreeing this procedure, it was anticipated by the research team that there might be cases where an individual raised an issue of such seriousness that it was felt it needed to be acted upon immediately. In such instances, it was agreed that the research team would consult with the individual how to take the issue forward. This however did not occur.
2.4.4. PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

We attended a wide range of Sure Start meetings, training, events and services, in order to supplement our understanding of the Sure Start programme and the local areas and communities. We were treated the same as other Sure Start staff, including forming part of the Small Group structure for staff meetings at which day-to-day issues as well as strategic questions were raised and debated. We therefore had the opportunity to influence the Sure Start programme as well as to observe it. For example, we participated in planning and facilitating several team training days; worked on a Suggestions Box and Complaints Procedure; designed a template for meeting notes; gave advice on questionnaire design for a smoking habits study and review of the role of the Parent Support Workers; and gave regular input into items discussed in team meeting structures. The areas we aimed to influence explicitly as a part of the action research feedback model will be explored in the Parent and Staff Findings sections.

Another aspect of the participant observation approach was that researchers provided information about Sure Start services to parents during interviews and talked through issues such as Sure Start’s aims and objectives.

2.4.5. FIELD NOTES

The field researchers kept regular diaries within which they documented their thoughts and comments about various aspects of the Sure Start programme. For example, comments made in passing from parents and staff, discussions in meetings that would not necessarily be recorded in the meeting documentation, dates in which policy decisions were announced (by the local programme and the Sure Start Unit) as well as how things were evolving. The field notes were entered into a shared file so that each researcher could see what the other had written. To maintain objectivity, they were not altered retrospectively.

2.4.6. SCRUTINY OF RECORDS

The minutes and papers from the main Sure Start meetings (such as the Board, the six working groups, the small group meeting structure, the database meetings) were collected from October 2000 onwards. Other documents and memos of interest were also collected from this period onwards.

2.4.7. DIARIES

A Diary Study was piloted in an attempt to ‘reach’ more of the local parents than those we planned to interview. Interested parents kept a brief daily diary for a period of 2 weeks where they recorded things like what they did that day. At the end of the two weeks, they returned the diary. An audio version was also offered where the individual could record their thoughts for the day on an audio cassette using a Dictaphone. At the end of the two weeks, the researcher contacted the individual and arranged collection of the diary pages as well as thanking them for their participation. In one case, a parent said she had enjoyed the experience so much that she kept the diary for a further two-week period, which she then returned.
As this was a pilot and only two parents completed the diaries the findings are not detailed in this report. In future, if more diaries are completed these diaries will be analysed and the data presented in the next report.

2.4.8. STAKEHOLDER QUESTIONNAIRES

Members of the Board were approached to complete a questionnaire eliciting their views on partnership working within Sure Start. The questionnaire used a mixture of open-ended questions, statements with Likert scaling (where a respondent is asked to indicate their views on a scale), and yes/no responses. The questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 7.

Questions were influenced by the literature on partnership working, including Geddes (2000) and Partridge (2001), as well as items arising from interviews with the Director. As the majority of the questions were pertaining to partnership working with Sure Start and an employing agency, the parents (and Parent Participation Worker) felt the questionnaire was not appropriate for them. The questionnaires were therefore distributed to all members of the Sure Start Board except for the parents.

The findings from the stakeholder questionnaires have been used to inform our understanding of the Sure Start programme, but are not explicitly reported here. They will be discussed in the next report, in conjunction with stakeholders’ interviews planned for the next phase of the evaluation.

2.4.9. SERVICE UPTAKE

Data on usage of Sure Start services was provided by Sure Start based on analyses of the data gathered by Sure Start staff and entered on to the mapping database (see section 1.5.2).

2.5. TIMESCALES

Interviews with staff began in the late autumn of 2000 and continued throughout 2001. Three members of staff were re-interviewed and two were sent original transcripts asking whether there had been any further progress with issues they raised. Parent interviews began in June 2001 and the last interviews took place in April 2002. No parents were re-interviewed.

2.6. APPROACH TO ANALYSES

The data have been analysed thematically. The results of interviews with parents are presented first and those with staff second. Points that were made by interviewees are illustrated in the text with representative quotations. Consent has been agreed for the use of all of the quotations in the report and the quotations from staff have been approved by the interviewees themselves.
2.7. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE APPROACH

These methods can provide a rich insight into local perceptions of the Sure Start programme, aspects that were valued and those that were perceived as failing to achieve their aims or causing problems. They do however represent a series of snapshots of a programme that is growing and developing. Inevitably some of the issues raised by parents or staff interviewed in the early stages of the programme have now been resolved. We have indicated the date of interviews in the text and aimed to show how the Sure Start team responded to problems and where such data are available, what the effect was. Given the short timescale of this evaluation and the length of time issues can take to resolve, some have not as yet been resolved but this does not mean they will not be resolved in the future. Some successes and problems may not have been covered. For example, interviews began in September 2000 so there were no data collected during the development year of Sure Start.

In an action research project such as this it is important that problems and issues are clearly explained and as a result, this approach may give undue emphasis to the reporting of problems. Local people are not in a position to make comparative observations of the impact of their Sure Start programme compared to other programmes and may not therefore be aware of what is being achieved relative to what similar programmes have achieved elsewhere. Interviewees may also be unaware of the problems and timescales involved in achieving the sort of fundamental changes which Sure Start aims to tackle and may be unrealistic in their expectations. It is important that the data we present are interpreted in this light.

2.8. SUMMARY

This evaluation was based on an action research model using multiple methods of data gathering. The main source of data was confidential interviews with staff and parents undertaken in the period December 2000–January 2002. We aimed to interview almost all staff, some on more than one occasion and a purposive sample of parents (one that was designed to include users and non-users and parents of different ethnic backgrounds). Participant observation, field notes, scrutiny of records and analysis of uptake data also contributed. Whilst observing the requirement of confidentiality, a system of feedback was developed with the aim of ensuring that issues raised in interviews were brought to the attention of the Sure Start team in a way that was potentially empowering for interviewees. The strength of this approach is that it provides a rich picture of the impressions of local people and programme staff and that it contributes to the development of the programme. The weaknesses are that the picture it paints is inevitably a partial picture of an unfinished process and that it may give undue emphasis to problems.
3. USE OF SURE START SERVICES BY CHILDREN AND PARENTS

This chapter presents information about the numbers of children using Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start’s services over the time period 1st April 2001 to 31st March 2002. The data are derived from version 3 of the Mapping Database described in section 1.5.2. (Evaluation). The data are interpreted and the limitations discussed. Further discussion on the development of the database can be found in Chapter 5.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

All Sure Start services are required, as part of their contract, to provide data on the use of their services by Sure Start children and parents. Both the total number of contacts with the service and the number of children using the service is recorded. As described in section 1.5.2. (Evaluation), this data is held on a database, which also contains key information about each 0-4 year-old resident in the Sure Start area, together with information about his or her immediate families and carers. This database, known as the Mapping Database, has been set up so that it can provide printouts of the number of contacts with each service and the number of children using each service. Data can also be provided on the child’s area of residence, but there is no capacity at present to undertake more sophisticated analyses of, for example, service uptake by ethnicity.

3.2. LIMITATIONS OF THE DATABASE

The database is still under development. As this data is examined, and inconsistencies and flaws are spotted, new versions of the database are being created in which data are gathered or services coded in slightly different ways.

When Sure Start was set up, service providers had different levels of experience of service monitoring. Those in the statutory services and those offering services like PEEP, which were under independent evaluation, had experience of providing data, but this did not apply to all service providers. Few of those even in the statutory services were familiar with using this data on a regular basis to audit their service provision. Knowledge and understanding about the importance of data for service monitoring therefore varied, and whilst some providers have been able to provide accurate data from the start others have not. Providers were therefore offered training to ensure that their reporting is thorough and complete. The effects of this training will have had an impact on the latter half of the reporting period and these data are therefore likely to be more robust.

Some data are, at present, missing from the entire reporting period, for example service usage data for ‘Planned Visits’ and data on those parents that have received individual counselling around money issues. Some are
incomplete, for example numbers attending ‘Trips and Events’. Some of these data may be accurately recorded in future, but some will remain impractical to collect. For example, it is inappropriate to collect named data on all community members attending community events. Some services were only implemented part way through the year and uptake figures are only available for the quarters within which the service was operating. For example, the drop-in for Dads (SaturDads) had its first meeting just before Christmas in 2001.

The figures here can only represent those that are collected for the purposes of entering onto the database. For instance, when a member of staff makes a home visit, they record the name and date of birth of the child(ren) they visited, the name of the carer and the address they visited. What isn’t represented in the figures presented here is the amount of time they may have spent forming a relationship with that carer, the time taken to arrange the visit, the previous visit they made when there was nobody at home or the type of things that were discussed during the visit and in what way. The database is invaluable, however, in providing an indication of the reach of Sure Start within the community.

3.3. OVERALL SERVICE UPTAKE AND PENETRATION

A total of 450 children are recorded as using Sure Start’s Services at least once during the period 1st April 2001 to 31st May 2002. At the time of this report, the database suggests that there are 542 children under 4 living in the area. The figure of 450 therefore represents a very high penetration rate of 83%. It is not clear whether this figure takes into account movements of children and families into and out of the area (it does take into account movements into and out of the age range) so it is possible that the population size may have been underestimated. This figure may therefore be somewhat of an overestimate, but even allowing for such minor inaccuracy the figure is still very high.

Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1 show these numbers by quarter and for Rose Hill and Littlemore children and parents. It suggests that between 45% and 50% of local children under four use the services in each quarter. Allowing for the fact that the data for the last quarter are likely to be incomplete, the numbers are relatively stable over time and roughly equal numbers of Rose Hill and Littlemore children are using Sure Start services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Total numbers of children using the services by area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st quarter</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Littlemore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4. UPTAKE OF INDIVIDUAL SERVICES.

The data presented in Table 3.2, showing numbers of contacts and numbers of children using individual services, are presented in accordance with the way in which Sure Start monitors services i.e. using the same categories that staff use when completing monitoring information. These correspond to the nine service categories described in Chapter 1 section 1.5.2. where fuller descriptions of each service are to be found.

For presentation purposes, these services are grouped within two tables, each table containing the figures on service usage for a period spanning the year from 1st April 2001 through to 31st March 2002. In both tables, the data are organised in four columns relating to the four quarters in the time period.

Within each column the first figure (usage) is the number of contacts Sure Start children or parents have made with that service in the quarter. The second figure (area numbers – All) is the total number of Sure Start parents or children who have used that service. Dividing the first figure by the second figure provides an estimate of the number of times the average child has used that service in the quarter. The third (area numbers - LM) and fourth (area numbers - RH) figures are the number of children living in Littlemore and Rose Hill respectively who have made use of that service. The address of some users is recorded as ‘unknown’ and therefore the figures for numbers of children using services for the whole area are not always a sum of the figures referring to Littlemore and Rose Hill residents combined.

1 The 12-month period covered does not actually break down into equivalent quarters. The first ‘quarter’ actually refers to a 4-month period and the final ‘quarter’ is incomplete and only spans a period of two whole months rather than three. The research team felt that it was better to include all the data that was available at that time and for ease of reporting, the periods are referred to as quarters.
Table 3.2 Uptake of services (usage) by area over the period 1st April 2001 to 31st March 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Area numbers</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>01/04/01 to 31/07/01</td>
<td>1/8/01 to 31/10/01</td>
<td>1/11/01 to 31/1/02</td>
<td>1/2/02 to 31/03/02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>LM</td>
<td>RH</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>LM</td>
<td>RH</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACCOMPANIMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompaniment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNITY EVENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trips</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRÈCHE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELP WITH CHILDCARE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare subsidy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OXPIP</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relate</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAINING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training uptake</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRANSPORT SERVICES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of transport services</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Accompaniment refers to times when a member of Sure Start’s staff goes with a parent or child to an event. Use of the ** Crèche can either be on a drop-in basis or when the parent is attending a group of some sort (see table below for the groups that they could have been attending).

To illustrate, Table 3.2 shows that the crèche at the Family Centre [CRÈCHE – group] was used 47 times by parents attending a group in the period between the 1st April 2001 and 31st July 2001. Twelve children used this service, 2 from Littlemore, 9 from Rose Hill, and 1 child whose address was unknown. This means that on average, each child used the crèche four times over this period (divide usage by All).

The data show the wide range of services offered by Sure Start and demonstrate that many of the ambitious goals of this programme have been met. The services range from practical support for parents including help with child care, crèche provision, lending and recycling, and transport services, through services like PEEP which encourage parental support for early education, to more traditional child health clinics and midwifery services. They include services that enable parents to meet and make friends, and services that enable parents to learn new skills, both from each other and in more formal training sessions. The list includes services for children with special needs, the Sure Start link worker and speech therapy. It also includes services like OXPIP, Relate and parenting education and support groups that...
enable parents to learn new ways of relating to their children and to other people.

Table 3.2 - continued: Uptake of services (usage) by area over the period 1st April 2001 to 31st March 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>01/04/01 to 31/07/01</th>
<th>1/08/01 to 31/10/01</th>
<th>1/11/01 to 31/01/02</th>
<th>1/02/02 to 31/03/02</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area numbers</td>
<td>Area numbers</td>
<td>Area numbers</td>
<td>Area numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>usage</td>
<td>usage</td>
<td>usage</td>
<td>usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DROP-IN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Health clinic</td>
<td>121 50 23 23</td>
<td>78 39 21 9</td>
<td>100 55 24 21</td>
<td>60 40 19 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Café</td>
<td>3 3 1 1</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>8 3 1 0</td>
<td>13 6 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dads drop-in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 1 0 1</td>
<td>13 5 0 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>3 3 1 2</td>
<td>3 3 3 0</td>
<td>5 5 0 5</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lending and Recycling</td>
<td>13 9 2 7</td>
<td>2 2 0 0</td>
<td>1 1 0 1</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 2 1 1</td>
<td>3 3 1 1</td>
<td>69 17 1 12</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play room</td>
<td>143 23 6 14</td>
<td>123 15 2 9</td>
<td>232 52 14 27</td>
<td>193 43 4 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack and Play</td>
<td>46 7 6 1</td>
<td>55 7 4 3</td>
<td>10 5 4 1</td>
<td>12 4 3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROUP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bumps to Babes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 4 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café Club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 1 0 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check It Out</td>
<td>7 6 3 2</td>
<td>14 8 3 4</td>
<td>42 15 3 9</td>
<td>40 9 1 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4 4 2 2</td>
<td>9 8 3 4</td>
<td>41 16 2 12</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 1 0 1</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEEP</td>
<td>632 119 54 32</td>
<td>368 113 51 29</td>
<td>490 101 55 21</td>
<td>296 89 44 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Activity</td>
<td>2 2 0 2</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>7 2 0 2</td>
<td>1 1 1 0</td>
<td>2 1 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLANNED VISIT*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian family worker</td>
<td>7 0 5</td>
<td>3 0 2</td>
<td>9 1 6</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family centre worker</td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Services Co-ordinator</td>
<td>2 2 0</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Visitor</td>
<td>38 10 21</td>
<td>8 5 3</td>
<td>29 18 11</td>
<td>15 4 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Start</td>
<td>12 5 6</td>
<td>11 4 5</td>
<td>7 3 4</td>
<td>9 3 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lending and Recycling worker</td>
<td>38 9 26</td>
<td>52 13 33</td>
<td>29 9 14</td>
<td>19 4 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwife</td>
<td>23 11 12</td>
<td>18 7 11</td>
<td>21 12 7</td>
<td>4 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Participation worker</td>
<td>4 3 1</td>
<td>4 3 1</td>
<td>4 3 1</td>
<td>4 3 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Support worker</td>
<td>20 8 12</td>
<td>15 8 6</td>
<td>15 11 3</td>
<td>3 0 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEEP Home Link visit</td>
<td>48 15 20</td>
<td>54 27 11</td>
<td>37 16 13</td>
<td>22 9 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>4 3 1</td>
<td>5 4 1</td>
<td>10 7 3</td>
<td>8 7 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Therapist</td>
<td>12 4 7</td>
<td>13 7 5</td>
<td>12 4 7</td>
<td>11 5 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure Start Link worker</td>
<td>11 6 4</td>
<td>7 1 6</td>
<td>12 2 8</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Planned Visit refers to those made to an individual’s home. There are no usage data on the activities within this category.

There are also services to encourage parent participation both in the services offered and in the implementation of the programme, for example the Parent Participation Worker, the Check It Out group and the Asian Family worker. In some instances these statistics give an indication of the different ways these services are being offered, for example speech therapy delivered on a home visiting basis, but in other instances they do not. For example, child health clinics were not available in the area before Sure Start was established and
the drop-in clinics in both Rose Hill and Littlemore are now very popular. The health visitors and midwives involved in Sure Start now aim to work with parents in a more empowering way and this sort of detail is lost in looking at numbers alone. Nevertheless these data are very informative.

Table 3.2 shows that the most popular service in this group was crèche provision for parents to attend a group (CRÈCHE – group). Both numbers of children attending and the number of times they attended went up markedly in the latter two quarters of the reporting period after the new Sure Start centre (where these crèches are now held) was commissioned. The number of people recorded as attending events or trips is a serious underestimate. In the summer of 2001 Sure Start provided a number of trips attended by several coach loads of community members and although some of those that attended were not parents or carers of ‘Sure Start children’, the figures here are known to be unrepresentative. Data collection for these types of events was, and still is, difficult. Help with childcare, financial assistance to parents for childminding or other childcare was provided to between 12 and 28 children a quarter, with apparently increasing trends over time. OXPIP, a relatively new service providing intensive counselling and support to mothers experiencing difficulty establishing a sensitive, attuned relationship with their babies is now being provided to five or six mothers and babies a month. Training, primarily in food handling for parents working in the café and in Information Technology, reaches 10-13 parents a quarter. The data show a decline in the uptake of the free transport service over the period, being used on 37 occasions in the first quarter and only 8 in the last, by 16 and 6 users respectively.

Table 3.2 - continued shows that the most frequently used Sure Start service is PEEP- Group. PEEP is an innovative early education service that aims to make contact with all the parents of Sure Start children at birth and provide them with ongoing training and support to help them encourage their child’s cognitive and social development. This support is either through the parent and child’s attendance at a group or through home visits. PEEP was operating in this area before Sure Start was established. The groups attract around 100 parents each quarter (the majority being from Littlemore), and it appears that 20–50 parents receive a home visit each quarter. On average, each parent attends between three and five group meetings a quarter (Table 3.3).

The next most commonly used services are the child health clinic and the Family Centre playroom, both of which are provided on a drop-in basis. These services are used by up to 50 children a quarter, most of whom make multiple visits (around two for the Child Health Clinics and between five and eight for the play room). Numbers using the playroom increased significantly in the quarter following the opening of the new Sure Start centre (November 2001). Staff believe these to be parents who had not previously used the playroom. Anecdotal comments suggest that many of these new parents have not continued to make use of the playroom. If this is the case, it may be a seasonal change. Parents are more likely to use the playroom when the weather is bad. This is something that may be addressed by the recent
opening of the outdoor play areas at the Family Centre. Table 3.3 presents the frequency of usage of these three services with high attendance figures.

Table 3.3: Average numbers of visits per child to services with high attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>01/04/01 to 31/07/01</th>
<th>1/8/01 to 31/10/01</th>
<th>1/11/01 to 31/1/02</th>
<th>1/2/02 to 31/03/02</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Health clinic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playroom</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEEP Group</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the figures in Table 3.2 with those of Table 3.3, it can be seen that the pattern of attendance is different for these three services. It appears that for the Child Health Clinic, although the number of children using the service varies from quarter to quarter, the children that do attend are likely to make two visits in each quarter. For the Family Centre ‘playroom’ and the ‘PEEP groups’, the number of children using the service each quarter varies as well as the number of times each child visits. For PEEP, each child attends between three and five group meetings a quarter which is as expected given that PEEP provide weekly groups for parents to attend with their children. For the playroom, each child makes between five and eight visits per quarter on average. It must be noted however, that these are averages and ‘true’ frequency data is not available from the database at this point in time. The database will be able to provide this type of information in the future. What is clear however, is that the playroom is predominantly used by Rose Hill children, as might be expected from its geographical location.

For two services, the usage appears to have declined over the time period. Attendance at the ‘Snack and Play’ drop-in sessions held in Littlemore Community Centre appears to have been popular when the facility opened but to have then declined in both numbers attending and frequency of use. This reflects the history of this service. It was originally set up as a summer holiday play scheme but it was so well appreciated by the parents that it was made more permanent. However, due to problems with buildings and the availability of trained staff, the service has not been consistent. These problems have now been resolved. The use of the transport service also declined over the year but, as can be seen in table 3.4, the average usage of this facility is relatively stable over each quarter.

Table 3.4: Average numbers of visits to services with decreasing attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>01/04/01 to 31/07/01</th>
<th>1/8/01 to 31/10/01</th>
<th>1/11/01 to 31/1/02</th>
<th>1/2/02 to 31/03/02</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack and Play</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast there are other services where usage has clearly increased over the year. Attendance at the Check-It-Out group (a think-tank for parents) has steadily increased over the course of the year. Table 3.5 shows that this is partly because the parents who attend are now meeting more frequently and

---

1 Staff record instances where Sure Start children use a service. They also record instances where the parents of a Sure Start child use the service (even if that child does not accompany them). The rationale being that the child is benefiting from the parent’s attendance albeit indirectly.

33
partly because some new parents have joined. These newcomers are mostly from Rose Hill.

Table 3.5: Average numbers of visits per child to services with increasing attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>01/04/01 to 31/07/01</th>
<th>1/8/01 to 31/10/01</th>
<th>1/11/01 to 31/1/02</th>
<th>1/2/02 to 31/03/02</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check It Out</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OXPIP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crèche (Group)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures in Table 3.2 – continued show some peaks and troughs for some services. Both ‘DROP IN – other’ and ‘GROUP – other’ appear to have had particularly high usage in the third quarter of the year. Reviewing the figures the suggestion has been made that parents attending a Family Links parent education and support course, which involves weekly group meetings for ten weeks, and fathers attending a Saturday fathers group were incorrectly coded as ‘drop-in other’. A teenage pregnancy group (the Café Club) and two activity groups (Saheli and sewing) seem also to have been inaccurately coded in this quarter as ‘GROUP – other’.

The data on planned visits is incomplete because data on number of visits were not provided. These data therefore only show the number of parents and children who received the service in that quarter. Apart from the PEEP home visits, health visiting and midwifery were among the services visiting large numbers of children of around 20 a quarter. The lending and recycling service visited the homes of between 20 and 50 parents.

3.5. SUMMARY

A database has been established which has the capability of providing high quality data on service uptake within Sure Start. Given that many service providers had little or no experience of service monitoring when Sure Start was established, this is an important achievement. All service providers are providing monthly monitoring data and most of this data is of reasonable accuracy. However the database is still in development and inconsistencies and inaccuracies in reporting and coding continue to come to light. Further discussion of the development of issues relating to the database can be found in Chapter 5. Although these inaccuracies and inconsistencies are now being dealt with, the data presented in this chapter cannot yet be regarded as one hundred per cent accurate. They do however represent a minimum estimate and as such, show an impressive level of uptake (over 80%) of Sure Start services by under 4s and their parents in the community.

The range of services set up by Sure Start in the two years since the programme was started is witness to the ambitious nature of this programme. The figures show that the services are well used by parents and children, both in Rose Hill and Littlemore. The most popular services over the year April 2001–April 2002 were the early education service PEEP, drop-in child health clinics and childcare facilities – the crèche and the playroom. The statutory services such as health visiting and midwifery, PEEP and the lending and
recycling service carry out home visits to a substantial number of parents each quarter. Home visits for parent support, or outreach and befriending seem, from these data, to be less common. Services to help parents support their children’s emotional and social development (OXPIP, Relate and the parenting education and support groups) are being used by only a handful of parents.

As the effectiveness of implementation of Sure Start programmes will be judged on the basis of such monitoring data it is important that the data are accurate and credible to those on the ground. Although a large amount of data are being collected on the database, the analyses that the database is currently able to perform are relatively unsophisticated. To date, £6000 has been allocated to consultancy work on the database, and a half-time administrator and the input of the lead health visitor have supported this development. Improvements to the database are being implemented, but this is a time-consuming process. When the accuracy and analytical facility of the database have been strengthened, this Sure Start programme will have a powerful tool for monitoring its service provision and providing information to others about the development and use of the programme. Meanwhile, paper records continue to be collected and, following training and feedback, are now thought to be largely accurate. These can be used to supplement the database figures as well as providing more detailed descriptions of the service (see Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start’s Service Review document at June 2002).
4 PARENT INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the results of the interviews with parents carried out between June 2001 and April 2002. We give some background details of the parents we spoke to and report how they felt about the area and the local community. We report what they think about Sure Start's services, suggestions they have for how to change the services and what they would like to see in their area. Some parents had been to Sure Start meetings and we talk about how they found the experience. We also talk about how Sure Start has changed its services as a direct result of finding out what the parents said in their interviews.

4.1. WHO WAS INTERVIEWED

Eighteen interviews were carried out with parents, during the time period June 2001 to April 2002. All of the interviews were with mothers rather than fathers, although one father participated in an interview along with the mother. (See below, Table 4.1, for breakdown). The original target was 15 interviews, which increased to 20 to ensure a fuller coverage and balance with the staff interviews. We planned to interview ten service users and ten non-users, and in each group, five from Rose Hill and five from Littlemore, and to reflect the ethnic composition of the areas, one Asian parent per group. It transpired from our participant observation that some parents using services were from outside the catchment area, so we included one of these in order to gain an alternative perspective, and to look at issues of exclusion for those who do not live inside the area but may wish to access services. There were five members of Sure Start's staff who were local parents of at least one under 4 year old. The responses of these staff to the questions about the local environment are included here rather than in the staff section.

Table 4.1: Total number of parents interviewed by area (including Asian parents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rose Hill</th>
<th>Littlemore</th>
<th>Outside</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Users</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-users*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff who are local parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Self-identified non-users – see below for explanation

Table 4.2: Number of Asian parents interviewed by area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rose Hill</th>
<th>Littlemore</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Users</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-users</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff who are local parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion of interviews from each group was chosen before the database was able to tell us the true distribution of the population of under 4s, and also of users and non-users. Happily, the data are now available to show that these proportions are roughly equivalent to the actual population

---

1 One of these staff lived outside the area but had been considered a 'local parent' for the purposes of the programme because she had family and other links within the area.
distribution. Hence the sample, although not random, was reflective of the population in its geographical distribution, and in the proportion of people who use services as against those who do not. Data on ethnicity are unfortunately not available, but survey data used by the Sure Start programme suggested a 25% Asian population, so we used this figure to arrive at our target. People of other ethnic origins form a much smaller portion of the population, and were therefore not targeted specifically.

The main obstacle we encountered was in locating parents who were ‘true’ non-users, in the sense of not having been touched by any service that is in any way funded by Sure Start. Many people believed that they were not Sure Start users, but had in fact been reached by its services in one way or another. For example, some had a Home-Start volunteer, or were attending PEEP groups, both of which are independent organisations that existed in the area before Sure Start, but which are now funded from Sure Start to provide additional services within the catchment area. This made it more difficult for the evaluation to identify those people who were not being reached by services at all. The following table shows the numbers of ‘true’ non-users, as against self-identified non-users and users.

Table 4.3: Parent interviews with ‘true’ user status (including Asian parents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rose Hill</th>
<th>Littlemore</th>
<th>Outside</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Users</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True non-users</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified non-users</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Asian parent interviews with ‘true’ user status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rose Hill</th>
<th>Littlemore</th>
<th>Outside</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Users</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True non-users</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified non-users</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although we aimed to interview equal numbers of parents from Rose Hill and Littlemore, it can be seen from the tables that this was not achieved. In our attempts to contact parents, we enlisted the help of Sure Start staff and other service providers in the area to introduce us to parents or to allow us access to their services so we could approach parents directly. Although our sample was purposive, we interviewed all parents who were willing to take part, and as such, we had more offers from Rose Hill than from Littlemore parents despite our attempts to particularly target Littlemore residents.

4.2. FEEDBACK

Information on parents’ views collected during the evaluation was fed back to the Sure Start programme regularly throughout the interview period, mainly to the Director of the programme. Sure Start also organised two Away Days specifically to bring the feedback from parent interviews to the attention of the entire team, and to start a process of tackling the feedback. The team was asked to draft action plans to deal with all of the feedback items – including
the positive feedback – and the action plans were then merged into one document, which has since gone through several re-drafts. A sub-group of the management team has met several times to take the action plan forward and keep it up to date. The findings from parent interviews have also been presented to the Sure Start Board, and to an Open Meeting in the community, providing further opportunities for parents to comment. We plan, in future, to return the interview transcripts to the parents explaining what Sure Start has decided to do in response to the issues they have raised.

Prior to interview, we did not ask interviewees any questions about themselves, apart from ascertaining whether they considered themselves users or non-users of Sure Start. During the interview process, however, many people volunteered further information about themselves, which allows us to sketch a profile of the interview sample. Some of the information came without a direct question from the interviewer, which is why the total number of responses is not always equal to the total number of interviews. For clarity, we will indicate within brackets in the title of the table or figure how many interviewees it refers to. Where staff who were also parents made comments about the area their responses are included in tables and figures, and this is indicated in the title. We also included the responses of local staff where they commented about the area in which they lived. This is indicated in the table or figure title.

**Table 4.5: Number of children in 0-4 age range (21 parents, including staff)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range of children</th>
<th>No. of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One child in 0-4 range</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two children in 0-4 range</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three children in 0-4 range</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL CHILDREN IN 0-4 RANGE</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEDIAN</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 child</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.6: Total number of children (23 parents, including staff)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of children in family</th>
<th>No. of parents</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two children</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three children</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five children</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL CHILDREN</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEDIAN</strong></td>
<td><strong>3 children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the interview itself, we asked specifically about children within the Sure Start age range, and how long they had been living in the area. The 18 parents and 5 staff who were parents between them had 74 children living in the Sure Start area, 30 of whom were under 4 years of age.
4.3. PARENTS’ VIEWS OF THE COMMUNITY AND AREA

As background to parents’ views of the area, we asked parents how long they had been living in the area and where they had been living previously. Some parents also explained why they had moved to the area.

Table 4.7: How long have you lived in the area? (23 parents, including staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time lived in area</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 11 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 6 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 years +</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire life</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEDIAN</strong></td>
<td><strong>4 to 6 years</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The median number of years parents had lived in the area was four to six, not counting the people who had lived there their entire life. Thus, most people had had enough time to get to know the area by the time they spoke with us. This may also have an influence on their social support networks.

Table 4.8: Where were you living before you came to this area? (16 parents, including staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area where previously lived</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other estate in Oxford</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other neighbourhood in Oxford</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Oxfordshire</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other part of U.K.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other country</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not offered</td>
<td>4 *</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* but 3 people had been living in the area all their lives

These data suggest that most people had not moved very far from where they had previously lived, as the majority either came from another neighbourhood in Oxford City itself, or from within Oxfordshire.

Table 4.9: Reason for moving to Rose Hill–Littlemore area (13 parents, including staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s family here</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing reasons</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own family here</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner lived here</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape family problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better location</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9 suggests that many people moved into the area for family reasons, and more commonly their partner’s family than their own. Housing is the second most common reason, perhaps because there is more council housing available in these two areas than in other parts of the city. One parent said that, in her opinion, most landlords were not willing to rent to a single mother with five children, so she was forced to accept the one that did, despite not wanting to live in Rose Hill.
4.3.1 SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

We asked two questions to highlight the extent to which people feel social trust; namely, ‘Do people look out for each other, or would they take advantage of you if they had the chance?’ If they replied ‘yes’ to either question, parents were invited to give examples of each type of behaviour.

Table 4.10: Do people look out for each other?(19 parents, including staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than half of the respondents felt that people do look out for each other in Rose Hill and Littlemore. Some examples people cited were:

“I was quite surprised, my eldest son again was walking home from the shop at the bottom of the estate and one boy took his scooter off him and started threatening him and one lady actually did chase him off so […] he was quite fortunate that she was there and was able to chase him off. But I mean I think they do look after each other sort of thing.”

July 2001

“And I think one of the best things that happened when I came here, is I locked myself out of my house, and all the neighbours, you know, one tried to climb in through the windows, somebody else brought a ladder, somebody else brought my children sweets […] they were upset.”

June 2001

There was no difference between the responses of people living in the two areas. The ones who replied, “Don’t know” had either moved to the area recently (one respondent), or kept themselves apart from the community deliberately. The answers of parents who were also staff did not change the picture significantly, apart from increasing the percentage of ‘mixed’ answers by six percent.

Most of the examples cited of people looking out for each other were in relation to protection from danger: neighbourhood watch schemes, neighbours looking out for your house while you were on holiday, everyone helping to look for a lost child. But there were also examples of people giving material support, pointing to the use of informal networks rather than relying on financial institutions that may be difficult to access or charge high rates for lending:

“We all look after each other. When someone is down you pick them up and everyone helps each other. ‘Lend us a tenner until Monday’, ‘Okay and then you do the same or else ‘Have you got anything in your freezer?’ and you go ‘Yes here you go until Monday or whatever’.”

June 2001
In the community development literature, this would be referred to as ‘social capital’, or social resources, that people can call on to improve their livelihoods, and help to prevent them from falling through the social safety net. Living in communities where social capital is high is believed to have a positive impact on children’s social and emotional development.

Social capital is a broad concept though, which does not define the types and meanings of social interaction. Each community has its own definition of ‘neighbourliness’, and where the boundary lies between helping out and interfering. For example, one parent felt that people did not look out for each other when it really mattered:

“[Do people look out for each other?] Definitely not, no. Personally I’ve got a friend who has got a boyfriend who is married to somebody else […] and she is trying to get away from him but he just won’t leave her alone and quite often he goes up to her house, punches her about […] and the neighbours, she knows the neighbours are listening but no one will ever do anything. He did it out in the garden and she knows everyone is looking. She says she doesn’t want anyone to come over and interfere but to phone the police would just scare him [*******] and he wouldn’t do it again. So no, I don’t [think people look out for each other].” July 2001

Even though people did not unanimously think that others would look out for them, they were almost unanimous in stating that people would not take advantage if they had the chance. Nine out of ten who responded said no, while one person said they did not know, because they did not have many social interactions outside the home. So even for those who think that people are not looking out for each other, there is not a sense that they are all out to cheat and take advantage of people. Rather, indifference is the alternative to neighbourliness.

Parents who were also staff presented a slightly different picture, having seen that although there is a strong sense of community, there are also those who fall outside of that ‘community’, and who do not therefore have access to the same social support networks – people who are simply not quite ‘in’ with the crowd, who are transient, or who are in with one crowd and not the other. Ethnic divisions, amongst others, mean that there are several ‘communities’ within the geographical community of Rose Hill and Littlemore.

Another question that elicited responses on the social environment was “What is good about the area in which you live?” The most common responses (60%) were in relation to the social environment. Within this, six people cited the sense of community. Specifically, one person said that “it’s home”, and one cited personal privacy.

Responses referred to the friendly atmosphere, street parties and being able to talk to the neighbours over the fence. Comments on the sense of community included:
“There is, I think, quite a strong sense of community [...] we laugh and we call it Rose Hill village. So, you know, [...] although there are sort of people coming and going all the time, there’s a tendency for a lot of families to actually stay here for generations [...]. You can sort of track people back and think, oh yeah you know, that was their mum, that was their granny or whatever. [...] Quite a lot of people that you know, have known each other for years.” December 2001

Many noted the sense of community in comparison with other neighbourhoods in Oxford; one compared it with Headington (another neighbourhood in Oxford), where the houses were nicer but the community colder. Interestingly, one person said it was the fact that people were not in each other’s business that she felt made it a good area to live in, particularly in comparison with another housing estate in Oxford.

“It’s big, it’s open and people let you get on with it. You are not in everyone else’s business and no one is in our business and I like that fact. If you want to interact with people you can, [...] whereas in [X estate] you have got so many people on a small amount of area, they are in each other’s businesses without even wanting to know it, do you know what I mean? It is there in your face. If someone comes in that house everyone can see it because that is the way it is and plus there are so many people up there that you could see are like not from this planet! And I think to myself ‘Oh God’, I couldn’t live there’, no I couldn’t live there. It would stress me out.” July 2001

The main negative thing people had to say about the social environment was the racism. This was only mentioned by a few of the parents, and it was not exclusive to parents of ethnic minorities, nor was it universal amongst them. Not all of the Asian parents felt there was racism, and several of the non-Asian parents mentioned racism. Those who mentioned it described disturbing scenes of racism and told of friends and family who had left the area because of the racism. On the positive side, one person described an incident in which a school child had shouted a racist insult, and the school had dealt with it in a very sensitive and appropriate way.

What is significant for the Sure Start programme is that the sense of community and social trust prevailed in both areas, despite the very high reporting of street nuisance, vandalism, crime and other issues related to safety on the streets (see section 4.3.2 below). These findings are interesting when put together with the obstacles that people cited to using Sure Start services, however, which include a high proportion of social obstacles (see section 4.5.4 below). This disjuncture between the reported sense of community, and the social obstacles to participating in the Sure Start programme may be explained by two things: the disadvantages of close-knit communal life, and the intra-community divisions.
4.3.2 SAFETY

Safety was the most commonly cited issue (by 69% of parents) in response to the question "What is not good about living in the area?" Parents sometimes gave more than one answer to this question, so there is a degree of overlap in the responses.

Table 4.11: Safety issues in the area (11 parents, no staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety issue</th>
<th>No. of parents</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Street nuisance</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paedophilia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

Examples of street nuisance were: broken wing mirrors from children playing football in the street, fighting, throwing stones at windows, joy-riding (also counted as a crime), 'turf wars' amongst gangs of children, setting fires and breaking bottles in parks and shouting on the streets. Vandalism and crime were less commonly reported, but are more serious offences that have strong effects on people's sense of well-being and peace of mind. One person had to stop youngsters from taking cocaine on her garden wall in the daytime when her children were around, and another had a bicycle stolen while she was in the living room. One person said her friends and family would no longer come to visit her for fear their cars would be vandalised or stolen, and another said they would not buy a new car because of the same fears.

4.3.3 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

This was the second most commonly cited problem. In contrast to the predominantly positive comments about social environment, people's comments were predominantly negative in relation to the physical environment. Particularly criticised were the parks which were seen as run-down, not stimulating for children, and dangerous (used hypodermic needles were frequently found, and some parks were too enclosed and therefore seen as potential sites for paedophiles). People also felt that Rose Hill and Littlemore were not attractive, there was a lot of graffiti, children coming out of schools left litter around, broken furniture was left in front lawns, and generally, "it's really just such a mess".

Another important issue in relation to the physical environment that emerged from parent interviews was the dire housing situation, predominantly for people in council housing. The most important problem was cramped conditions, with numerous families living in houses that were too small to house the family comfortably. It was common, for example, to hear of families of seven in a two-bedroom house. Other problems cited were location, noise, and inappropriate housing situations:

"There were grannies that banged on the floor and ceiling if you dropped a rattle on the floor, it was horrible, it really was, it was a
nightmare and I got quite depressed at the time ... […]. Even though, you know, sitting down and looking at the facts then and even now, you know, it was all very innocent, […]. toddlers learn to walk and crawl and they drop things and they throw things and they make noise and they cry in the night when they’re babies. […] when I’d first moved in there I was at the end of a pregnancy and I had terrible bladder problems. And I was up in the middle of the night flushing my toilet and I actually had a council official come round and tell me off for getting up in the middle of the night and flushing my toilet ‘cos I was disturbing my neighbours.” September 2001

“What are the kids supposed to do, hang around the shops all night shouting? And sometimes they really do annoy me and I hate living here sometimes because you are trying to get kids to sleep, and they are running around until 8pm or 9pm. I mean some of them had an air horn the other day, they woke him up, they woke [other child] up, she was being naughty anyway. It took me all night to get her to sleep and I just lost it with them in the end and shouted out the window ‘You bloody kids, just shut up!’ I said, ‘Have you got no respect? There is a bloody field over there go and stand in the middle of that and make all the noise you want.’ […] I have been down to the council and they just don’t give a toss. I have even lost it when I was really ill, I was on anti-depressants at the time and I went down there and I said ‘Move [me] out of that hell-hole now!’ ” July 2001

4.3.4 SERVICES

In response to the question “What is good about the area?” 11 people said the services were good. In contrast, in response to the question “What is not good about the area?”, four people said the services were not good.

Table 4.12: Services that were good in the area (11 parents, no staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>No. of responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenient for schools</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community centre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

The convenience of schools was the most often cited positive thing, which is not a quality of services issue so much as a quality of life issue; that is, people did not value the school itself as much as being able to take the children to school easily. This is obviously of particular importance to families without transportation, and/or with many children to take to school, sometimes even to several different schools. For those who criticised the services in the area, the most common criticism was that the schools were not good quality, both academically and in their approach to discipline. Several people took their children out of the area for schooling, a practice that can increase inequalities in educational outcomes, as those who take children out of the area tend to
be the more affluent (although one single parent living on government benefits was taking her children out of the area for schooling).

4.3.5 OVERALL FEELINGS ABOUT THE AREA

One question tried to get people to summarise their attitudes towards living in the area, by asking whether they would move out if they had the option. The response is striking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only for bigger house</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not bothered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, only 26% of people said that they would move out if they had the chance but only one person felt so dissatisfied that she would like to move anywhere else. Of the other four, one would have liked to be closer to her family and one would have chosen an area that was closer to her husband’s work and had better schools but was not seriously contemplating it because she was happy with her house and had worked on it a lot, i.e. the house improvements outweighed the wish to move. The other two spoke of the influence of their family members. For one, she wished to move but her resident parents-in-law wanted to stay and for the other, her children wanted to move to be closer to their school friends.

It appears that housing issues and social networks can be in conflict when deciding on a place to live.

“I can’t really move out of […][this area] because the only person I’ve got – because I was fostered out I don’t really get on with my mum – the only person I’ve really got is my sister and she lives in […][this area] and because I don’t drive, because I have got five kids, if I felt depressed or anything – because I always get depressed and that – I’ve just got no one to talk to or nowhere to go. And my partner’s family they all live in […][this area] as well. But […][the housing authority] say that is not a good enough reason for you to still want to stay here.” July 2001

When asked how they would like to see the area change in the next 12 months, people were most likely to cite that an increase in activities for older children could improve the area. Perhaps this would ease some of the street nuisance problems mentioned in section 4.3.2. Close behind was improvements to parks, both for children’s use (in other words, playgrounds) and for their own use. Safety was third, but of course the desire for improvements to the safety situation is implicit in many of the negative statements about living in the area reported above, so this figure is deceptive. It was also quite common for people to mention a leisure centre as something they would really like to see in the area, particularly by those living in Rose
Hill. Perhaps Littlemore parents were happy with the swimming pool based on the secondary school site within Littlemore, although one parent felt that a swimming pool that belonged to the school was not adequate, and the community wanted one that was not attached to the school, as in a neighbouring estate.

Table 4.14: How would you like to see the area change in the next 12 months? (17 parents, no staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities for older children</th>
<th>Improvements to parks</th>
<th>Improved safety</th>
<th>Leisure centre</th>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Rubbish</th>
<th>Inter-community links (Rose Hill – Littlemore)</th>
<th>More community spirit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

Interestingly, comparisons between Rose Hill and other areas were predominantly favourable to Rose Hill. That is, people felt that Rose Hill was better than other areas, in a variety of respects.

Table 4.15: Comparisons between Rose Hill/Littlemore and other areas (13 parents, no staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rose Hill Residents</th>
<th>Littlemore Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compares unfavourably</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compares favourably</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

For Littlemore, comparisons were equally favourable and unfavourable. (If we exclude the responses of staff who are local parents, then the Littlemore balance is also favourable, and Rose Hill even more favourable).
The numbers of responses here were somewhat low, however, so we should interpret the figures with caution. The reason for the low response was most often that people were not sufficiently aware of how things were in other areas to feel able to comment or compare, particularly in relation to services for children, as many people had only experienced having children since moving into the area.

4.4. PARENTS’ VIEWS OF SURE START

4.4.1 WHAT IS SURE START TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

Nine parents said that they did not know what Sure Start was trying to achieve, and two parents felt unsure but hazarded a guess. The remaining seven offered a range of responses (see Table 4.16). There is a degree of overlap in that each person mentioned at least two objectives. As can be seen from the variety of responses, the question elicited no really consistent reply. We can categorise responses to this question under four main headings:

- Child-related objectives
- Parent or family-related objectives
- Community-related objectives
- Service-related objectives

Table 4.16: What do you think Sure Start is trying to achieve? (9 parents, no staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child-related</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Occupy children during summer holidays</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Give children better start in life</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activities for 0-4s</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy/education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>It is for less affluent families</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social support in the community</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Help families in need</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/family-related</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Equipment for less affluent families</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities for training</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Help people</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-related</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Community development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Linking Rose Hill &amp; Littlemore communities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-related</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Affordable services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accessible services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another interesting feature of these responses is that very few relate to the health services provided by Sure Start, despite the fact that Primary and Community Health Care is one of the key activities, employing a large number

1 The responses of staff who were also local parents are not included in this section
of staff within the Sure Start programme (see section 1.5.2, above). It is not clear why people do not mention these objectives, given the fact that people’s use of Sure Start services included a high proportion of users of health-related services (see section 4.5.1, below).

4.4.2 WHAT IS SURE START?

The responses from the five members of staff who were local parents are not included in this section. The fact that so many people self-identified as non-users (see Table 4.3) but had actually been touched by Sure Start services is an interesting finding. From parent interviews, it emerged that Sure Start’s profile in the area was initially identified more with the Family Centre than with the outreach and home visiting services, or its commissioned services. For example, the following person had a Sure Start health visitor, and also a Home-Start visitor:

“[How did you hear about Sure Start?] [My health visitor], she told me all about it. But I don’t really go up there or anything. To me it has always been the same Family Centre, a bit cliquey and stuff like that and it puts me off.” July 2001

Sure Start took a deliberate policy decision, early in the course of the programme, that it was better, in terms of future mainstreaming, to build on existing services than to develop new and separately identifiable services. In doing so, it was recognised that the programme faced an important but difficult task of overcoming the reputation of existing services such as those historically provided by the Family Centre.

These responses raise the question of whether parents need to know what Sure Start is trying to achieve, or whether it is sufficient that they are benefiting from the services that Sure Start provide. Views on what Sure Start is may have implications for parents’ willingness to participate in implementation of the programme. If they are unaware of the services that Sure Start provides, they may be less inclined to attend a meeting to discuss those services.

Despite the fact that both users and non-users were unclear about what Sure Start is trying to achieve and what the programme actually does, the majority of respondents had heard of Sure Start either one or two years (11 and 3 respondents, respectively) before being interviewed. Three had heard about it more recently, and only one interviewee professed never to have heard about Sure Start prior to interview. Responses to the question “How did you hear about Sure Start?” are presented in Table 4.17. There are some overlapping responses as a parent could have heard about Sure Start from a number of sources. Many parents heard about Sure Start through the health service and through using PEEP. Recently, it would appear the lending and recycling service has become an important place of first contact for some families, but this was not reflected in the interviews.
Table 4.17: How did you hear about Sure Start? (18 parents, no staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health service</th>
<th>5 (specifically)</th>
<th>Health visitor</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PEEP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Midwife</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family centre</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Parentcraft classes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroup</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Health centre</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open day</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home visit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian support worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

Ideas about what Sure Start is trying to achieve may be related to the way in which parents heard about Sure Start. Those who had heard about it but felt they did not know enough yet, mentioned a number of obstacles. A prime one was being distracted by their children and therefore not absorbing the message.

“Oh let me see, no, I think it was actually somebody came to the house one time. When I was expecting her I think, somebody came out and said that they were there available to use, but I mean ... she [3 year old daughter] was there that day and the wee boy, he was there that day and it just sorta (...) it never [...] sort of registered.” July 2001

Others said that leaflets were handed out, but again, they were too distracted by the children, or life was too busy for them to read and absorb the messages.

“I think the thing is you have so much information given to you. Like when you come out of playgroup your mind is sort of chugging on about what you have got to do and where you have got to go and they are handing you pieces of paper saying this is going on and that is going on and you go ‘Yes, yes, yes’ and take it all. [...] Yes I put it on the side and then find it weeks later! ‘Oh that sounds interesting I wish I could go to that’ and it has gone!” July 2001

Yet many people felt that the best way of getting information to them was through leaflets and circulars in the post, because they could read them at their leisure, and go back to them if necessary. Leaflets through the post are not, however, the best way of getting across complex messages such as Sure Start’s objectives, and the philosophy behind it. Added to this, there are inherent problems with written material for those with language and literacy problems. People expect to be enticed by leaflets, and most stated that the kind of leaflet that would get them interested was one that advertised an event or service that appealed to them. The more complex messages are perhaps better conveyed when people are actually using services – but even then, time is limited and people use services for a particular reason.

Lack of understanding of the goals of Sure Start is not surprising, given that it is such a large programme with so many aspects to it, so many key activities, objectives and targets. It is difficult to convey descriptions of complex
programmes like Sure Start to communities and as is described in the next chapter even Sure Start staff admitted to finding it difficult to grasp the concepts and remember all of the various aspects of the programme. It may simply be a matter of time before the messages about Sure Start, what it is, what it does, and why it is doing it percolate through the community and take hold in people’s consciousness.

One aspect of the ‘participant observation’ approach taken by the research team was that we provided information about Sure Start services when appropriate during the interviews themselves.

Table 4.18: Referrals during interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To Youth Project meetings</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Family Centre</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Help with childcare</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To courses</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Lending and Recycling project</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For more general information</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Check it Out group</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To trips</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Home-Start</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Taxi service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Family Services Co-ordinator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we were questioning parents about Sure Start services, they often learned about aspects of the programme they were not previously aware of, and asked us questions about the programme itself. This was not systematic: we provided information about a service if we felt the parent may benefit from knowing about that service, or if they specifically asked about a service.

4.5. PARENTS’ VIEWS OF SURE START SERVICES

4.5.1 WHAT IS GOOD ABOUT SURE START?
All but three of the respondents had used a Sure Start service at some point, but some were not using the services mentioned at the time of interview. It should be noted that the number of interviewees is relatively small, and that their responses represent the ideas of a small group of parents.

The figures in table 4.19 suggest which Sure Start services are well used and one could infer something about their relative popularity from this.

Parents had many positive things to say about Sure Start services, and what impact using services had had on their own lives. One of the strongest statements was from a woman who was suffering from post-natal depression, had attended a pre- and post-natal group (Bumps to Babes) and been referred by the Health Visitors to OXPIP (Oxford Parent Infant Project):

“For me personally, it has just been a life saver because I think I would have got even more and more depressed. I got to the point where I didn’t want [my child] at all. I wanted to like hurt myself and it is sort of
coming here that really did... [The Sure Start Health Visitor] sorted it out because she arranged for me to go and see OXPIP, she phoned up and did all that for me which was just like ‘Wow, marvellous’ that somebody that I don’t really know would do something so nice for me and that is how I felt just so ‘wow’.” June 2001

Table 4.19: Services used (18 parents, no staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PEEP</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Centre</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health services</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trips</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lending and recycling</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi service</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OXPIP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with childcare</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-Start</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack and Play*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open days</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses. *held in Littlemore

The following statement is from a long-term Rose Hill resident who became very involved in many of Sure Start’s programmes, particularly as a volunteer:

“[What does Sure Start mean to you?] At first, nothing. But now, oh God, it means a lot because […] they help people a lot. There’s more going on, like going back years ago there was nothing. There was none of the help and […] the taxi service, the cooks. There was none of it.” June 2001

Some focussed on the concrete material benefits:

“I had to go and see a solicitor and it was [another parent] that told me […] I said, ‘I’ve got to go to Summertown’, I didn’t even know where it was. I know where Summertown is but the place, she said, ‘Go and ask [Family Centre staff] for our taxi’. I said, ‘What?’, she said, ‘Go and ask [Family Centre staff] for a taxi, she’ll get you a taxi and they’ll bring you back’. I said, ‘That’ll cost me a fortune’, she said, ‘No, it’s free’. I said, ‘How come nobody knows about this?’; and she said, ‘I don’t know why nobody knows’.” July 2001

“They didn’t have a dressmaking class here when I used to come computing. I used to say, ‘I’d come more often if there was dressmaking.’ And the main reason I wanted that was because in Oxford you,… being Asian it’s very limited where you can buy Asian clothes from and the places where you can, because they have a monopoly it’s very expensive. […] And sure enough, I mentioned that quite a few times and I think within three or four months they’d found somebody actually, and they’d set up the dressmaking on a Thursday.” June 2001
Others cited the importance of inclusive practices:

“[…] there are people who don’t speak very […] good English, who come to PEEP and come to Sure Start, and I’ve spoken to them, just sort of ‘How do you feel?’ and they’re treated exactly the same and they feel exactly the same way I do. There’s a lady who lives in [other neighbourhood in Oxford] who’s moved in with […] my friend, at the moment […], and she doesn’t speak a word of English and I dragged her along to PEEP and she was very intimidated and said ‘They won’t understand me, they’re gonna think I’m stupid.’ And all sorts of things. And we dragged her along and she sat there and she comes back every week, all the way from [the other neighbourhood] now, because she really enjoys it. And nobody understands a word she says, she doesn’t understand a word, but she really enjoys … she likes it, she enjoys it. […] so I was telling her that they run English classes here, so she was ‘Oh, maybe I will come, they won’t put me down or laugh at me because I don’t understand’.” June 2001

“It was really good, my mother passed away in October, and [the Asian Families Support Workers] came and visited me. It was really nice of them, when they heard, like being an Asian family they came and visited me […].” January 2002

A few people referred specifically to the effects of Sure Start services on their children, and expressed the wish that these services had been available for their older children:

“The language therapists are actually seeing […] [my son] and me and give me some helpful tips on how to encourage his language, which I would have loved when [my other son] was his age, cos [my other son] was very behind with his speech.” July 2001

“I didn’t have it [PEEP] for the other two, so basically, […] they sent me a letter through and I thought, ‘Oh, should I?’, so they come out and visit and explained what it was about. So I thought, ‘Well, I’ll give it a go’, and … I didn’t realise how much he would actually enjoy it and it’s nice mixing with other babies and everything. So PEEP is a brilliant idea.” July 2001

“[At the Family Centre], they all said hello, and sort of explained that you just drop in and all the rest of it and the baby can play and everyone was just friendly and chatty. […] And then I went on the Family Links [parenting skills] course, which was brilliant. I was nice to my children every Monday! It wore off by Tuesday <<laughter>>.” June 2001

Interestingly, one parent cited the bustle of the baby clinic in the former Family Centre playroom as a positive thing, although this is something other people criticised:
“I do like the Sure Start clinic, actually, because it’s quite relaxed there. I think that the fact that it’s sort of in the playroom and you’ve got the kids careering around... <<laugh>> [You like that?]. Yeah, I love it. Because when [my daughter] was tiny, I used to go to the [X] Health Clinic with her, but [...] it was just that little bit much more formal, and I found it a little bit - not intimidating, that’s too strong a word - but it was more relaxing going to the Sure Start one.” July 2001

Setting up locality based health services was one of the important goals of Sure Start, arising from the consultations with the community. The parents interviewed appreciated this, in particular the refurbished building in Littlemore called the POD:

“POD has been really useful for quick advice without effort of travelling.” July 2001

Sure Start services have also changed people’s minds about some things. For example, the following parent was given safety equipment that she would not have bought herself because the rest of the people in the house did not want it. In retrospect, she thought it was a good thing, particularly as the equipment was given for free:

“They gave me [a] pushchair and two fireguards, and [a] gate, stair gate as well. Because the lady, she came, she said ‘You need a stair gate.’ I said ‘Well, everybody in the house don’t want ...’. She said ‘It’s safety for the kids.’ Then I thought, ‘Okay, I’ll take one’.” January 2002

Things like the trips, organised by parent volunteers with Sure Start support, have proven very popular and got a good report from those who attended:

“They took us to Southsea. It was really good. Because ... [...] nobody cares to go out together and this way it was really enjoyable, we had three coaches, and we went and it was really good. Yeah. I took my mother and father-in-law as well, cos they are always at home, I said ‘Let’s go, you’ll all enjoy’. ” January 2002

The question, “What does Sure Start mean to you?” was primarily relevant to people who were service users. Even for those who were involved with the programme, however, it soon became clear that this was a difficult question to answer, because people did not talk about Sure Start as a coherent programme, but about particular aspects of the programme with which they were familiar. Most of the responses tended to be pragmatic, that is, parents were reporting service usage rather than assessing the overall impact of the programme. This may be because Sure Start is still a fairly new programme, or it may be that the wording of the question did not prompt this kind of reflection. Alternatively, it could be due to parents’ confusion as to which services they attributed to Sure Start as discussed in section 4.1.

Parents gave responses ranging from social support to material assistance:
“I don’t really know, it is just somewhere to go […] and it gets me out of the house. It means I can speak to adults if I have got any problems I can speak to anyone down there. […] [So has it had a big impact on your life?] Yes. It is just knowing that people are there. In whatever capacity you need them for, they are there.” June 2001

“[In terms of the playgroup funding, how has that kind of changed your life?] Oh that helps me a lot as a single parent.” July 2001

4.5.2 PROBLEMS WITH SURE START

Parents were asked about problems they had experienced with Sure Start, about any new services they would like to see offered, and about obstacles to using Sure Start services. They were also asked whether they had any suggestions as to how Sure Start might overcome the obstacles that they discussed.

There were only a few minor criticisms of existing services from people who were using them. For example, a few people thought the baby clinic in the Family Centre was a bit rushed and hectic because there was not enough space in the playroom; one person found the midwife visits confusing because different advice was given from other health professionals; a few people felt that rooms used for PEEP groups were cramped, particularly for toddler age groups.

Criticisms focussed mainly on three issues: the Sure Start target age group, the targeted services, and the perceived differential treatment between Littlemore and Rose Hill in terms of Sure Start funding and services.

In relation to the target age group, many people felt that money would be better spent on providing activities and services for older children in order to prevent anti-social behaviour that was seen as the main source of problems on the two estates. Some people also wished that they could benefit from Sure Start services – particularly those giving material support, such as the taxi service – but were excluded because they did not have a child within the age bracket.

“Some people […] think ‘Oh, I wish I had a nought to four and then I could get some money for […] whatever. They’ve actually said that in the summer. You know ‘If I had a nought to four, I could get some Sure Start money for my disability’ or whatever.” September 2000

In an early Check It Out group meeting (March 2000) the attending parents identified a need for more services for the over 4s. Sure Start was instrumental in setting up a steering group whose aim was to identify what could be done. Some of the suggestions required funding, and a bid to the Connexions project plus funds from Communities Against Drugs has allowed employment of a full-time youth worker for the project. At the time of the interviews, consultations were taking place to discuss what the parents
wanted for young people in the area. The researchers were able to provide details of the planning meetings and the draft action plan for parents to become involved if they wished. Since then, a full-time Youth Worker has been appointed and further funds have been secured to extend her position until November 2003.

Although Sure Start aims to be universal, there are a few services targeted at specific groups. Targeted services confused people because of the complicated criteria. They also offended some people. Some felt that the cut-off line was too low, i.e. you could have a low income without being on benefits, and you would still not be eligible for support.

“I know there’s a POD, parents’ open doors thing, on St. Nicholas Road, [...] and I did go to them once, to ask for a buggy board, for my daughter [...] to attach to the back of a pram, and they said ‘Well, that’s fine.’ And I went again and they said ‘Well, you have to be on benefits to get it.’ So I didn’t get it because we’re not on benefits. And then I turned up again to ask about something else, and they said ‘Yes, we can have a meeting with you and we can discuss it, which benefits are you on?’ and I found that they’re not really for me. [...] obviously the people on benefits need to use POD but I think everybody needs to use the POD. And I think I feel a bit sort of ‘Oh, if I was a bit less well off and if I was claiming all these benefits then life would be easier for me.’ So that made me feel slightly resentful, actually, because I thought, ‘Just because I’m not on benefits, but all the money we earn goes on our expenses, therefore we have need of POD because we have very little left over.’ [...] actually quite a few of the people [...] that I know who use PEEP and my friends, [...] about 15, 16, maybe even 24 of us, actually, and most of us are not on benefits, [...] we all feel POD is totally useless. Because none of us use it and it sits there and they’re always putting leaflets through our doors, ‘Do you want to come and do this, and there’s a health visitor, there’s this, that, and the other?’ And then we go, and it’s not for us. You know. So, it’s a nice building and it was empty for a long time so it’s nice that it’s being used, but it’s not for us really, that part.” June 2001

Others felt that people on benefits were being given luxury treatment, while they themselves had to work to pay for everything and were not able to afford such top-quality services.

“Well they seem to help a lot of people out on the Social, like, cos [...] I met a friend I know down the road and her little boy goes to [X] day nursery [...] ‘Oh right’, you know, brand new, ever so expensive. I said ‘Well how do you afford that then?’ “Well, Sure Start pay 100 percent of it’. ‘Oh right, really?’ I thought, ‘God but there’s us paying, you know like out of our money. They’re getting it all paid for ‘em’. [...] And this [Family Centre worker] sent me a list of like what you can, you’ve gotta [...] have a social worker and [...] apply to get this [...] grant to get them to pay for you, you’ve gotta have [...] a problem really for them to pay for it. And then they seem to like specialise more in people that are
The most significant changes to existing services to arise out of parent feedback from interviews were to the Parents Opening Doors building and the Lending and Recycling service. This followed directly from Sure Start receiving the above quotes as feedback. An effort has been made to increase the opening hours of the building, and to make it more welcoming by putting signs on the doors, having a sandwich board on display in the street, and by painting window bars. Discussions have been held with staff involved, to determine an appropriate approach that is welcoming and within Sure Start’s policy.

The Lending and Recycling service was also criticised for being solely directed at parents on low incomes, and exclusive of others. This was particularly a problem given that the publicity for the service sent out into the community had not specified that the service would be targeted. Publicity has now been made clearer, and the service has been opened out to people who are not on low incomes, who are now able to borrow small items such as stair gates and fireguards.

However, people on state benefits did not always feel that these services were appropriate for them, either. One parent would not apply for help, for fear of being the target of gossip, and losing her right to speak up about the services she used:

“But basically, [...] they help with, if you're on low income... But then you get gossiped about. You do, cos I’ve seen it and heard it. [...] this is the attitude, ‘I don’t know what they’re moaning about, they don’t pay for it anyway.’” July 2001

Another said that although she had very little money, there were people worse off, and she would not want to get funding at the expense of others:

“[Sure Start has a fund to help people with the costs of child care. Would that be something you would want to access to support the cost of playgroup?] Well, not really, because it’s only £3.50 a session, three times a week, and I know that if I needed money one month, [my daughter’s] Dad would give it to me. Lots of nurseries do that, they have a certain number of free places, but I don’t take that either. I’d rather leave that for people who are even more skint - if that’s possible!” April 2002

The issue of parents who live outside the catchment area using Sure Start services was already under consideration by Sure Start at this time. After feedback from the parent interviews, a proposed policy was circulated to the ‘small group meetings’ in which all staff are theoretically involved (see Chapter 5 for description). The Sure Start Board adopted this policy on 2 May 2002. It clarified the reasons for keeping within the boundaries of the post-
coded area for funded services, but identified drop-in services where parents outside of the catchment area would be welcome, as well as specific services that are explicitly for people both outside and inside the area (such as antenatal parent education classes). The policy lays out the need to monitor usage of drop-in services, to ensure that the balance of users outside the catchment to those inside remains manageable. It also enjoins workers to be sensitive to these issues, to ‘minimise the sense of offering differential services to people outside the area as far as possible’, and to be prepared to signpost people on to other services outside the area where appropriate.

There is debate within Sure Start as to whether one of the objectives of the programme should be to bring Rose Hill and Littlemore communities closer together, or conversely whether services should be duplicated so that there is one of everything in each area. The issue of differential treatment of Rose Hill and Littlemore came up more often during interviews with staff who are parents and with other staff, than in interviews with non-staff parents. This is mainly because the Littlemore parents interviewed almost exclusively used PEEP. They did not feel that they were using Sure Start, so did not know enough about Sure Start to be able to judge whether it was biased towards Rose Hill. The issue also surfaced during our participant observations of Sure Start in various contexts, including during staff meetings. There are several staff in particular who are concerned about the differential treatment of Littlemore, and the Director is also aware of the issues. The main Sure Start investment in Littlemore was to be the refurbishment and extension to the Littlemore Community Centre, a project that was delayed by almost a year. The local programme cannot be held responsible for this delay, but it is unsurprising that it has resulted in a sense of neglect on the part of some Littlemore residents with respect to the Sure Start project.

Some of the parents interviewed felt that it would be a good thing to bring the areas closer together, and break down the barriers that are perceived to exist between the areas. Others felt that this should not be an objective of the programme, but that the areas should be considered as distinct, and respected as such.

“Well the main one I suppose was dividing out money between Rose Hill and Littlemore. But they kept saying, you know, telling us about this brilliant Family Centre and saying possibly there might be a couple of rented rooms in Littlemore or something. And I think people may have thought originally that the two areas had something in common, or that people from Littlemore would come up to Rose Hill but I think because both areas, you don’t really go through them to get anywhere. Because neither of them have that brilliant facilities. There is not that much reason why anyone from Littlemore would go to Rose Hill or from Rose Hill to Littlemore. Well I think there was a false perception to start with that the two areas […] would gel but people accepted that to be false. And maybe some people are still thinking that the two areas will gel but as far as I can see people have kind of accepted that. Most things are now in Rose Hill and Littlemore, like the child health clinics and things, there is going to be one in each and things like that. And, well, the
family centre are really supportive of the Snack and Play in Littlemore. So I think, you know, everyone especially [the Director] is very over willing to listen to people and they are trying very hard to change things.” September 2001

Interestingly, it was reported by an independent researcher hired to carry out consultation for the ‘neighbourhood nursery’ initiative, that both Rose Hill and Littlemore parents surveyed about potential sites for a new nursery felt that it was Littlemore’s turn for a new service, suggesting that there is some sense of links between the communities rather than rivalry.

4.5.3 WHAT NEW SERVICES PARENTS WOULD LIKE
The most frequently mentioned services parents felt were missing were for youth outside of the Sure Start age range. Fully half of the interviewees talked about the need for services and activities for youth (see table 4.20 for details).

Table 4.20: Activities for youth (11 parents, no staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure centre</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable summer scheme</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth club</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhere to go in the evenings</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After-school clubs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure playground</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in coffee sessions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes-swapping</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation activities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

For the 0-4 age range, there were two main items that surfaced repeatedly on parents’ wish lists, namely a drop-in crèche, and an indoor play area/gymnasium activity, along the lines of Tumble Tots (a physical play programme for pre-school and early years children), Energisers (a local version of Tumble Tots held in a University gymnasium with qualified staff), or even Whizz Kids (a commercially-run indoor play area).

The Children’s Learning and Care working group is looking into the possibility of affiliation with Tumble Tots, in response to the feedback from parents. The Playroom has also created a session for physical activities with young ones, called ‘wiggle, jiggle and giggle’.

Other things mentioned were for both adults and children:

- More courses, such as:
  - First Aid
  - Computers for children
  - Swimming
  - Fitness classes
- GP surgery
- Affordable and good quality child care
- Book lending service
- Coffee mornings
- Family Planning clinic
- Structured activities in the Family Centre
- Structured sessions for the Bumps to Babes and the Baby clinic, with information on particular issues such as breastfeeding
- Career advice
- More day trips

4.5.4 OBSTACLES TO USING SURE START SERVICES

When asked whether they thought that there were people who could use the services but were not accessing them, it was virtually unanimous that there are such people out there. Parents were then asked why they thought these people were not using services. Non-users, or parents who only used certain services, talked about obstacles that they themselves experienced. Parents were asked what they thought Sure Start should do to overcome the obstacles they cited. They came up with a range of interesting, and sometimes conflicting suggestions. The majority of parents were interviewed before the opening of the new Family Centre in December 2001 so the majority of comments reported here refer to the original Family Centre.

Lack of information and social obstacles stand out as the two most frequently cited barriers for parents to using Sure Start services.

“The fact that they don’t … don’t seem to communicate very well with people that don’t sort of use it. You know, people that already know about it and use it, okay, they’re bound to know through word of mouth but people that don’t, like myself, don’t use it, they need to let them know […] what’s available.” July 2001

“We don’t get no feedback from it, we don’t. […] you’re telling me they’re trying to do something for the older ones, but no one seems to know about it, cos they haven’t had any like leaflets or anything, saying, ‘We’re doing this, we’re trying to do that’.” July 2001

Lack of awareness and understanding are intertwined with lack of information in many people’s minds:

‘I think it is not knowing in your everyday routine and then somebody says we have got this thing going on but if you don’t actually know, you don’t really know what is there, do you?’ July 2001
Table 4.21: Obstacles to using Sure Start services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSTACLE</th>
<th>RESPONDENTS</th>
<th>IN DETAIL</th>
<th>RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language barriers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t feel the need</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Centre not safe for small children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have several children of different ages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uninformed about services</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Specifically:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of information</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overwhelmed by information</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Notice boards confusing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low literacy levels</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Language barriers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social obstacles</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Specifically:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shyness</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cliques</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preconceptions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Different values from other users</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t like groups</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stigma of using targeted services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bad behaviour at Family Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fear of authorities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personality clashes/personal history</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t want to take free places</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gossip at Family Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too busy/no time</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkward timing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural barriers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want to use crèche</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Because:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Child is too young still</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Crèche is not good enough</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t like to leave child with other people</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents pointed out drawbacks of different methods of disseminating information. Some felt that leaflets were an ineffective way of getting information out, because they threw leaflets away and did not absorb the information. Others did not like the idea of door-knocking, and preferred mail-outs because they could read them in their own time, rather than while the children were around and distracting them from concentrating on the information provided. It appears that opinions vary and are contradictory on the best way to deliver information. Therefore, a number of approaches are required and need to be maintained.

When talking about the Family Centre, one parent commented:
“I don’t know what’s in there, I mean I’ve walked past and I’ve seen like the toys and everything outside and like people outside sat down, but I don’t know what’s inside. […] I would try it but then ... I have to know what’s going on up there. I don’t know what’s going on up there at the moment […]. I think everyone had a leaflet, my sister had one down the road. Probably about the new building going up. But yeah, I don’t know what’s going on up there as well.” October 2001

Even those who were using services felt the information provided was not sufficient to allow them to understand and access all of the services they might want to, or for which they might be eligible.

“Um, yes... and the lady who came to talk to me about PEEP also sent me some information about [Sure Start], but I still actually find it quite hard to grasp exactly what they’re doing. I understand the principle, of helping to give children in this area a better start in life, but I find it quite hard to grasp how this actually boils down to sort of practical things. And I mean, things like, I know that they lend out things like stair gates and fireguards, which would be really useful, but I know that’s supposed to be for low income families, so I don’t know quite how you sort of qualify, or, you know... I just find it quite hard to grasp in a sort of practical way, what it means. […] The sort of practical details, you know, you can come to Sure Start if you need this, this, and this, and this, and this is how you go about it.” July 2001

Amongst the suggestions for ways to improve the information flow from Sure Start, the dominant preference was for leaflets delivered through the post. A few people thought that person-to-person communication was better, though, through health visitors or other home visitors, or word of mouth between friends. One suggested that Sure Start should communicate with people in the maternity ward, in the same way that PEEP does (although PEEP actually stopped their maternity ward visits in 1996). One person had detailed suggestions for improving the notice board system:

“I find the notice boards quite confusing, […] at work, we’ve got huge notice boards […] but they’ve got it divided up, with those sort of banners you have in the supermarket […] sticking out […] so you can sort of walk down the corridor, and you know that’s personnel, and that’s job information, and that’s charities […]. Because I sort of feel you walk into that corridor, and everything’s everywhere, and there’s tables everywhere, […] and the […] tables piled with leaflets […], and I think perhaps it could be more organised, and leaflets could be checked and old ones chucked away, you know. So you would know where to look for information […]. And also when you’ve got a little one, and your mind is always […] half not there, is it, so you need everything to be super clear, I think, and you haven’t got a lot of time, because you can’t spend a long time reading because they start chirping and […] wanting to do something else.” July 2001
This quote refers to a time before the current Family Centre was open so we do not know how this individual might view the situation in the new Family Centre.

The programme has been unfortunate in losing two information officers in succession, resulting in problems with the information system as it exists. To tackle the problems, the programme set up a ‘marketing strategy’ group, and a new person has been appointed with specific technical skills suited to the production of high quality publicity materials. This should result in a clarification of information policy and strategy, as well as improved quality and consistency of Sure Start publicity. Staff are also receiving further training on how to design publicity materials using the computer software available within Sure Start.

Another suggestion made by parents was to target childcare settings, and to try to appeal specifically to children, so the children would bring the parents along.

“I think knocking on somebody’s door and saying ‘Did you know?’ is intimidating for some people. […] But I think one way is if their children already go to a playgroup or if they already go to a nursery, pre-school, to sort of get the teacher there to say ‘This is a really good thing and you really should go.’ […] Because I know a couple of people whose children go to a pre-school from nine ‘til eleven thirty, and then for the whole day they’re indoors, or they play in the back garden, they just don’t go anywhere and they don’t do anything. One, because of the transport, and two because they think, ‘Well, it’s not for us.’ Whereas if the teacher said ‘There is this and they’re going to do this activity’ and if they enthused the child with wanting to go, maybe the child would nag the mother enough to want to come. You know, ‘cos they advertise to children nowadays for that reason, what do they call it? Children’s […] nagging power, or something like that. […]” June 2001

In second place in the list of obstacles mentioned were those referring to social obstacles. Most of these were obstacles to using the Family Centre, which most interviewees felt was the core of Sure Start – unsurprisingly, as it is the most visible aspect of the programme, and most of the staff were then based in that building.

Of the social obstacles cited, the most common was shyness, that is, an obstacle within parents themselves. Again and again, people told us of finding it difficult to go into new places, whether or not they actually felt themselves to be a ‘shy person’. They also thought that this was one of the main reasons why other parents might not be using services.

“People tend to say to you ‘Oh you’ve got to go here and you’ve got to go there’ but I tend to be quite a shy person, people don’t believe it all the time but I don’t like doing things on my own if it is a new thing unless I am confident in that, then that is fair enough. I am not one for
just walking in a room and loads of people saying ‘Hi this is my kid, go and play’ so I find things like that quite difficult.” June 2001

“I have been a couple of times but I am not one to go up to people and talk. I just felt that I didn’t fit in sort of thing.” July 2001

“And I think quite a few parents find it difficult going into a new environment, if they’ve got a new […] baby. I mean, I found it really hard the first time I went, and I think that’s quite a lot of people’s …[experience]” July 2001

Apart from shyness, most of the social obstacles related to perceptions about the programme itself, and the people using it. Many people felt that cliques dominated the Family Centre, and there were a range of preconceptions and beliefs that people held about the cliques using the Family Centre. Some people did not object to the cliques themselves, but felt excluded:

“… I know by sight to say hello to in the playground and that but a lot of them have been friends for years and they know each other and they are really pally.” July 2001

Other people did not seem to like the idea of cliques per se:

“But I don’t really go up there or anything. To me it has always been the same family centre, a bit cliquey and stuff like that and it puts me off.” July 2001

This suggests that such ‘cliqueyness’ had been a feature of the Family Centre prior to the existence of Sure Start. There seemed to be concern about gossip, and the sense that only a select group of people would be welcome at the Family Centre.

“A lot of parents round here, you notice there’s not a lot that actually use it for the amount of parents there is and that’s because they find it quite cliquey, a lot of ‘em. I used to go up there when it first opened but now they’re all like, “Oh, I ain’t going up there […]”, and that’s why a lot of people don’t use it […] A lot of them say they don’t feel welcome and .. it’s like you’re invading their space because they’ve always used it.” July 2001

For others, it was not simply a matter of feeling excluded that hindered their use of the Family Centre, but also the sense that they did not share values with the existing users and that using the centre might even have a negative effect on their children.

“I got a leaflet from the school about the activities at the Family Centre in the summertime. We went up to the Family Centre, but the children were running around and swearing, and my 7 year old was turned off immediately. He’s a shy child anyway, so as soon as he heard that kind of language, he was put off. Some of the children shouted abuse at
me, ‘drug addict’, ‘whore’, and the parents didn’t stop them or tell them off at all.” April 2002

Even though this event occurred at a time before the new family centre was opened, the parent had formed an opinion of what the family centre and its occupants were like which had discouraged her from accessing the services she had heard about since.

For some, the aversion was based on their own personal history and experience.

“But I just don’t like Rose Hill <<laughs>>. I mean, they’ve probably got quite a lot going on up there, lots of activities. But the people I grew up with up there, […] they was like troublemakers and they’re still there. You like to move on don’t you?” October 2001

One member of the Board commented that he felt there was a problem for the parents in the ‘clique’ as well as those outside it. Their anxiety about future changes to the family centre meant that they were reluctant to get involved in the new developments and were very critical of proposals made by the parents who did get involved.

There have been attempts by staff to address the perceived ‘cliqueyness’. Although the original Family Centre had started to tackle this, the opening of the new building was seen to be an ideal opportunity to make further progress. In the old Family Centre, attempts were made by moving the smoking area away from the front of the building, agreeing a code of conduct for the parents and workers to use whilst in the Family Centre and a confidentiality policy. Neither of these policies has been widely disseminated in the community, however, so some of those who have been put off by gossip and conduct issues may not yet be aware of the attempted changes.

Another social obstacle mentioned was the reluctance to ‘join in’ with activities. Specifically, several people mentioned that some parents did not like the idea of singing or making crafts in the PEEP groups, and this put them off attending. One parent who had overcome the same reluctance herself, suggested that the image of PEEP was still a bit middle class, particularly in Rose Hill (as compared with Littlemore and the other areas where PEEP runs outside of the Sure Start catchment area). One member of staff thought this image stemmed from the early days of PEEP in Rose Hill, when parents from the university accommodation were the most likely to attend and were viewed as ‘trooping through the school’ to the groups which made other people think that the group was for academics and ‘posh people’. Some felt that PEEP needed to put across the message that ‘joining in’ was optional, and that parents could attend without having to make crafts or do things that made them feel uncomfortable. PEEP have been offering a more flexible service over the last year such as running a drop-in group in the playroom which is open to anyone.
A different kind of aversion to ‘joining in’ was mentioned by one parent, who did not like the kind of ‘women’s chatter’ that goes on at mother and child gatherings, the ‘comparing stretch marks’ type of conversation.

In relation to social obstacles, most suggestions for change focussed on difficulties in accessing new services. Suggestions included providing accompaniment to services, encouraging people to go to groups with their friends, giving regular personal encouragement, having local parents disseminating information and working with people in the home until they felt confident enough to come into the centre.

Outreach workers are all making efforts to encourage people to come in, and to provide social support for this process where needed. Staff are actively encouraged to take on an outreach role, including staff in less traditional outreach roles such as playroom workers. These staff all aim to work with parents in an empowering way and to encourage them to participate. The sort of services parents seemed to be asking for here, however, would be more in line with a befriending service run by local volunteer parents which would aim to make contact with all parents. The volunteers might offer friendship, someone to chat to, local information, and a friendly face at Sure Start events and activities. They might encourage people to attend groups or meetings and accompany them on their first few visits if they feel nervous about turning up on their own but their primary purpose would not necessarily be one of recruiting parents to use Sure Start services. In most places where this has been tried volunteer parents have been offered training in listening and empowering skills and have had their expenses met.

It is less clear what can be done about the issue of preconceptions with regards to the social differences and values of service users, particularly Family Centre users. The Director is careful to aim for diverse services, in order to avoid being biased towards one way of thinking and working, or one set of values, and thereby appealing to only one type of person or social group. It may be that problems in the dissemination of information about Sure Start, and the lack of an information strategy until recently, have prevented these messages of diversity of values and services from reaching people who are not currently using services. It may also be that staff require further outreach training in order to be able to deliver these messages themselves. Some of the staff whose roles involve outreach work do not have a great deal of experience in this area, and have been provided with limited training. Indeed, staff who do have experience of outreach work may require further training, as Sure Start is about a ‘different way of working’ - the messages the programme wishes to convey may be different from those promoted by previous employers.

The third most common obstacle reported was that parents felt that their lives were too busy, that they had no time to spare to participate in Sure Start activities. For several people, this was because they had a large family. For others, it was because the children had a routine, for example going to playgroup for three mornings and PEEP for another, and the parent felt it would have been too much for her child to go out again in the afternoons.
“He goes to playgroup in the morning, it is too much to go there [to the Family Centre] in the afternoon as well.” July 2001

“Yes I think a lot of the mums know about it, [but] whether they have got the time to go… Like as I say when you have got young children, you are busy and I think they are finding it is hard for them, by the time they have gone through their daily routine of walking the dog and tidying up, I think they have got no time left or energy left at the end of the day.” July 2001

The following quote will resonate with most people who have small children, particularly if they have more than one:

“I think she’s more busy with her own three kids at home, […][the] little, one is like five years and other one is four and then one and a half, so I think she’s more busy in her own housework that she doesn’t get time to come out and do things. […] She tells me ‘I don’t get time to look [at] myself in the mirror.’ <Laughter>>.” January 2002

It is worth noting that in our sample, it was most common for a parent to have three children (although the range was from one to six children), so this point is particularly pertinent for the majority of the parents we spoke to. At present, we are unable to tell from the database what the ‘average’ family size is in Rose Hill or Littlemore. Once this information becomes available, it will be clear how relevant this comment is to the rest of the families within the catchment area.

It is possible that, for some parents who feel that their daily routine is too busy to incorporate Sure Start, the services that the programme offers may in fact ease the time pressures of family life. It is also a possibility that the services and activities that are known about may not be sufficiently appealing for them to be a priority for a busy parent, or that a parent may choose not to use the available services simply because they feel that they are ‘doing fine’ and do not need them.

For some, it was the timing of events and activities that presented an obstacle. One parent complained that it was always when she picked her older children up from school that she had time to use Sure Start, but then the Family Centre was closed at that point. Others said that their children’s sleep patterns prevented them from participating in some activities. Awkward timing was also cited in relation to attending meetings (see section 4.6, below). In relation to this point, we found that when making appointments for interviews, almost everyone preferred to be interviewed in the morning (around 10 a.m.), particularly those with children going to playgroup, nursery, or school.

The Family Centre plans to work together with other community bodies to provide after-school activities within the community and within the centre itself but it does not plan to increase its opening hours. This may address the
feedback about opening hours, as long as these activities are also welcoming for under 4s.

A few people cited obstacles related to the quality of services or the way services were structured, although all of the comments were made at a time before the current Family Centre was open. One such obstacle was that some services separate the parent and child, so that the parent has to put the child in a crèche (if they do not have other arrangements for child care) in order to access services. One person felt that the crèche was not good enough, while several were simply reluctant to hand their child over to people they did not know, or simply did not want to be separated from the child at an early age. One person felt that the Family Centre was not a safe place for babies, because older children were “rushing about” in the centre and were liable to hurt the babies if there was not careful supervision. Another person suffered through many meetings listening to her children crying in the crèche next door, a situation that contributed to making her full participation in the meetings difficult (although the parent did not say why their child was crying). A few people talked about the difficulty of attending PEEP groups with children of different ages, as PEEP is organised into 12-month age brackets. One person had actually stopped attending PEEP because she did not feel able to handle the toddler at the baby group. Most others managed to cope with this situation, but some felt that it was less than ideal, and some felt that older children disturbed groups of younger children. As with many of the issues raised during the interviews, parents expressed a range of views on the same subject.

Cultural obstacles were cited more often by staff than by parents. Specifically, there were a few cultural obstacles within the Asian and Muslim communities that made it more difficult for them to access services. For instance, some women are discouraged from going out of the house on their own, particularly if they will be going to a place where there are men around. Another was that the concept of ‘learning through play’ is not as widely accepted within the Asian community, and is therefore not seen as a sufficiently good reason for a woman to take the children out of the home. Finally, language barriers have existed. Although there are three Asian Support Workers who are available for interpretation purposes, and several Asian workers in the crèche, little of the Sure Start documentation is translated into other languages.

Only one person cited transportation between Littlemore and Rose Hill as an obstacle to using Sure Start services. However, the Littlemore parents in the interview sample either only used PEEP, which is available within Littlemore, or were non-users – therefore, it is not clear whether they might not also experience transportation problems if they did know about other Sure Start services and wanted to use them. Transportation was certainly an issue cited by staff working with the travellers at the site in Littlemore, who were isolated from services within Littlemore and unlikely to be able to access those available at Rose Hill.
One suggestion for ways of tackling obstacles to using Sure Start services included the idea of a fun day or special event as a good way of attracting people to Sure Start for the first time:

“If there was something […] maybe like a fun play area for the kiddies or something that is like ‘Oh, we will go down and see that’ and maybe when you are there, Sure Start is going on around you or whatever and maybe that would get you there.” July 2001

Both staff and parents also felt that the new building would draw people in, first through curiosity, and secondly because it would be able to provide a better environment for Sure Start activities that was more likely to attract people.

Try-out sessions was another idea; although most services are run on a drop-in basis, people might still feel more inclined to come if they did not feel that they were making a big commitment simply by attending once. Using the label ‘try-out’ conveys this message even more strongly. This could also apply to courses and groups, where the hope is that people will stay for an entire term or given length of time, but where people might be more likely to come if they did not have to make that commitment until after the first session.

In response, Sure Start is organising a series of taster sessions where parents can come and try various activities from computing to silk painting and belly dancing.

4.6. PARENT PARTICIPATION IN SERVICE PLANNING THROUGH FORMAL MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

There are five main ways parents are invited to participate in service planning within the Sure Start programme: on the management Board, the Working Groups, the Check It Out group, the Open Meetings, and at the Annual General Meeting. The Check It Out group is a forum created entirely for parents, and facilitated by the Sure Start Parent Participation Worker, that stemmed from an idea shared by the Sheffield Sure Start programme. There is a standing item on the Board for issues raised in the Check It Out group, and for parents on the Board to report or raise any issues of concern. The Annual General Meeting is open to all people in the community, and membership of Sure Start is free and open to people who work or live in the area. Only Sure Start members can vote on items arising in the meeting. Open Meetings are also a place where parents can voice their opinions.

4.6.1 BOARD MEETINGS

The programme’s intention as laid out in the Delivery Plan was to have one third of the Board composed of parent members, and two-thirds of statutory and ground level agency staff. Originally, it was felt that parent membership should be restricted to those parents with children in the 0-3 age range, but this rule was loosened to allow for membership by parents with children...
outside that age range, primarily for pragmatic reasons in that the former might find it more difficult to participate in regular meetings. The Board adopted a set of selection criteria and procedures to help them ensure that parent membership on the Board was balanced in an attempt at being representative of the community, in terms of containing both Rose Hill and Littlemore parents, parents from ethnic minority groups, and from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Table 4.22 presents the percentage of parent attendance at Sure Start Board meetings during the period April 1999 through to February 2002. The meetings are now held monthly but in the early life of Sure Start they were at times more frequent. Attendance at Board meetings began quite strongly during the first six months, followed by five months of weak attendance, and another period of fairly strong attendance from April 2000 to February 2001. It has declined steadily since then.

Note that the attendance data runs to February 2002 so does not include meetings for the remainder of that year.

The turning point in attendance appears to be when the first group of parents, who had been fairly consistent in their membership, left the Board, many to take up paid employment within Sure Start. They were required to stand down because of potential conflict of interest when they became staff members. The parent Board members who followed this first group spent shorter periods as members, and had a lower attendance record. Average attendance rate for parent Board members was at 69% for the first period, and has dropped to 45% since then. There have been 12 parents on the Board in total over the period, with a maximum of six on the books at any one time. The process changed in late 2001 when the Board agreed an ‘open door’ policy such that parents could drop in to meetings without having to become Board members officially.

Table 4.22: Parent attendance at Board meetings between April 1999 and February 2002
There are several possible explanations for this change in attendance and membership rates. One is that the first period was the most exciting time, when the services were being designed and put out to tender, and many important decisions were being made. After this period, the routine business of the Board may have seemed less interesting and engaging to parent members. A second reason is that it is much more difficult to enter a group after it has been in existence for some time, because the social networks are already formed and the newcomer can feel like an outsider. A third possible reason is that attending Board meetings was actually quite a difficult experience for parents, and those who joined at the beginning were the ones with the most commitment, whose dedication helped them to overcome the difficulties, or to tolerate them.

All three of these explanations were offered by current and former parent members of the Board, and found some echo in the voices of parents who were not attending any meetings. The quotations in this section have been taken primarily from two interviews. These two parents were particularly eloquent in expressing what other parents said, both in formal interviews and in informal discussions with the researchers, and we have therefore chosen to use their quotes.

Even some of those who were on the Board from very near the beginning felt that the important decisions were made during the initial consultations, and it was difficult to make an impact after that point – echoing comments made by staff members as well.

“In some respects I kicked myself for not being at that first meeting because I felt that I’d missed out on so much because that’s where all the ideas came from and, and the real talk about what the money was really about and who it was really for and all those sorts of things. So I’d missed out on that ... [...] I wish that I could turn back the clock in some respects and be as confident as I am now, then, because the, in some respects some of the things I have to say now are too late, you know. Because money’s been spent and implemented and, you know, all the rest of it” September 2001

The community development literature suggests that in order for community participation to be genuine, the decisions the community is called upon to participate in making must be meaningful; that is, the community must be involved in the crucial funding and planning decisions, or people will not be inspired to take part. Hence, it is quite important that parents on the Board feel that the decisions under consideration are important in their lives, and will have some effect, or they will not feel that their participation is making a difference, and they are less likely to attend. The following quote suggests that not only had important decisions been made early on during the process, but also discussions at the Board often felt to parents as though they were about professionals concerned with resource allocation, rather than about issues of interest to the community.
“No, I think [...] that the professional bodies get so engrossed in their, their bit of the pie that they don’t open [the discussion] out to everyone else, so the invitation’s never given to … anybody else in [the meetings]. And that again, it’s about their department and what’s happening with them and their bit of the pie. And not on what the pie’s gonna do for the five thousand. And if you go in, I mean I can’t say I really had the problem of, you know, things being happening [before I got there] because I was always there. I suppose for me the thing was it was always going on but I just didn’t know what the bloody hell they were on about. You know, and thinking to yourself, well, again, ‘if this is an argument or a discussion between them, why am I here, why did they bother to make me come and sit here for two hours?’ You know, it’s just between them and what they’ve got to say.” September 2001

All of the reasons for the drop in attendance rates after the first period cited above are associated with the quality of participation, and the type of structures in which people are participating. In this respect, we need to look not only at attendance rates, but also at parents’ experiences when they are at meetings – for even if the numbers look good, this is no guarantee that parents feel valued, consulted and empowered.

Only one parent spoke favourably about their participation on the Board and she felt she could recommend it to her friend as something useful to do.

“[Did people just grab you and say ‘Come to this meeting’?] Oh yeah. That’s how it did start actually. And then we just got really involved [...] It’s really interesting and it’s…you find more out.” June 2001

Parents cited a number of problems with joining Board meetings after the first period had passed. These ranged from the difficulty of getting to know people and feeling part of the group, to understanding the discussions that were on-going in order to be able to participate effectively. The Board’s procedures were initially to have everyone around the table introduce themselves at the beginning of each meeting. This was not ideal for two reasons: one, people who came in late would not know who was in the meeting, and two, the introduction procedure itself made parents feel inferior:

“ ‘This is an xyz at the end of my name and, and I’ve been working in [X service] and also I’ve done 10 years in [Y service] and, you know, I’ve got medals for this that and the other.’ And then it gets to your turn and you say ‘Parent’ and you feel like the most worthless person in the world, you know. It’s like, then somebody next to you turns round and says, you know, ‘I’m from the, the EY something or other’, you know. And you just think, shrinking violet.” September 2001

A parent who went to several meetings and then desisted cited the issue of on-going discussions:

“I’ve been to two meetings but had to leave early. They were at awkward times where I had to pick up the children. But it was, one of
them I went to it was sort of on-going business from another time where I hadn’t gone, so it wasn’t really ...interesting... [...] I thought ‘Well, maybe I was invited to it but maybe this isn’t the one I’m suppose to be at because I don’t think it’s anything to do with me.’ You know. That’s what I thought at the time.” June 2001

Interviews suggested that for some of those who had attended meetings it was a difficult experience, and some even felt disempowered by their participation.

“They were horrible. They were full of professional people that knew what they were on about and I never understood a word of it. [It was a]...situation that made you feel worthless, and [a] nothing, and [a] nobody because you didn’t understand what was being said. [...] there were so many things happening and going on that were irrelevant to us, [...] red tape issues that we couldn’t have no impact in or say [...] but you were still in there, part of it, feeling like you couldn’t do anything or wondering what the point in being there was. I mean I used to just sit there and say nothing every week, month. You know, absolutely nothing.” September 2001

The feelings of disempowerment stemmed from a number of aspects of the meeting structure and practice. One problem was the jargon used by professionals. ‘Jargon’ refers to more than simply using acronyms, and covers references to people and things that are not obvious or clear to people who do not already know them. Another source of disempowerment was the on-going discussions, which were difficult for new parents to understand and enter, and even for parents who attended regularly but were not up to date on inter-service issues.

“If I have to sit there as a lowly parent and think very hard and carefully about what I’m about to say to make it sound intelligent and worthwhile for your ears, then I think that as a professional person you should have an equal courtesy back to me, to bear in mind that I don’t work in your department and I’m not aware of, you know, what you’re doing or what the issues are. So that when you’re explaining something, that it is so that somebody that hasn’t got a clue knows what you’re on about. It’s as simple as that.” September 2001

The ‘guilt-free message’ accompanying the Board notes letting people know that they did not have to read the notes before the meeting was an attempt to make people feel that they were welcome to come to meetings even if they did not have time to read through the dense notes. However, it meant that people who came to meetings without having read the notes would be at a further disadvantage with respect to understanding what had been going on previously, making it more difficult to contribute to discussions. One Board member from the community mentioned this dilemma in a meeting in early 2001. ‘Pre-meetings’, held half an hour before the main meeting, were intended as an opportunity for parents to talk over any issues they wanted to raise, or any questions they had about the notes, with the Chair of the Board
and the Director of Sure Start. Attendance has been generally low at the pre-meetings, even lower than attendance at the full Board meetings. One parent felt that the meetings were useful, but another parent felt that they were condescending and not the answer to the problem because she didn’t want to ask questions for fear it showed she was ignorant of the issue.

Thirdly, the general atmosphere of the meetings was an obstacle to parent participation, with the solemn board table, the minutes and agendas, and the numerical dominance of professionals over parents. Both parent and non-parent members of the Board noted the ‘dry’, ‘tedious’, ‘boring’, and ‘professional’ atmosphere of the meetings – although the parent members did not raise this within the meeting, the non-parent members did occasionally do so.

Other issues made it more difficult for parents to attend and participate actively. The timing of the meetings clashing with another event proved problematic for one parent.

“[…] there was a Sure Start meeting in the community hall in Littlemore at the same time as we were having PEEP.” June 2001

There was no crèche available for a period before the crèche was registered with Social Services. There was no break in the middle for people to have a cigarette if necessary, and probably most importantly, some parents lacked confidence, which was not helped by the intimidating atmosphere of the Board meetings. Given that people said they were too shy even to use a drop-in service on their own, it is not surprising that lack of confidence would impede many from participating actively in such formal meetings as Board meetings have been in the past.

One of the parents suggested that the professional atmosphere that made parents feel ill at ease and not confident enough to speak, should be dealt with structurally by turning the balance of parents to professionals on its head:

“And it should be two-third parents and one-third professional, that’s why, how I really see it should be. I just sit back and think of the times when I knew that I had to speak and just hear my heart pounding in my head and my chest. [...] And I knew I had to speak, and I just, my face is bright red and the words were like blululuh, coming out of my mouth as I just thought ‘I don’t want to speak, I don’t want to say anything.’ [...] Your average single parent or you know, somebody that’s been divorced and left with ten kids and all the rest of it, wouldn’t stand a chance. You know, wouldn’t stand a chance because it would be impossible for her to get there and go and do it, wouldn’t stand a chance because when she was there she’d be like just … you know. It’s way over their heads. And the only way I think really to get over that is to bring the majority [of parents] up. And balance the books [between parents and professionals].” September 2001

Another suggested taking the meeting to where the parents were.
“I mean, one way maybe of getting round it is quite a lot of parents come to […] PEEP, just to sort of come maybe half an hour earlier or stay half an hour later and have that half an hour at the end or beginning – a sort of mini Sure Start meeting. So you have all the parents there […] maybe they’d be more willing, because they’re already there, they might as well sit and listen, and it might spark somebody off thinking ‘Oh, okay.’ And if this was regular and it sort of became part of the weekly routine for the parents, inadvertently, you know, sort of alright, by the back door, then maybe that would work.”
June 2001

Other suggestions included the parents and the Board members becoming more familiar with each other so that when the parent attended a meeting, they recognised the other attendants.

4.6.2 WORKING GROUPS
The Delivery Plan proposed a high proportion of parents to professional in the Working Groups – half of the group membership was to be parents.

In comparison with the Board, the Working Groups appeared to have a more welcoming atmosphere, and there were fewer complaints from parents about these groups. It is clear from what parents told us that staff in Sure Start were making an effort to encourage and support parents in making a contribution to these groups.

“When I found [the Working Group I was on], I mean […] my confidence was quite low, I suppose I must have had a certain … certain level because I mean the first time I went in […] it was a roomful of very professional people and, and I just thought ‘What have I got to contribute here?’ […] I did used to speak up, and […] I’ve got to say, that’s down to [the Director]. She was great, she was very brilliant at explaining, cos that’s the only thing with […][the Working Group I was on], so many [acronyms] and, and I just used to like look at [the Director] and go <<interviewee shows a puzzled expression>> and she always used to explain. And, and she would make a point of asking for my contribution towards things that were on the agenda, you know, she’d turn round and say ‘Well, what do you think?’ which was great.” December 2001

When asked if she had found it a positive experience she replied “Yeah I did”. She felt she had been able to contribute to discussions and in one meeting in particular, had used her knowledge of the local community to argue a point, which subsequently altered the outcome of the decision.

Participation levels remain low however, and the same parents are recruited from one meeting into another. Several parents described their participation in the groups as somewhat forced, to ‘make up the numbers’:
“So I started going to the Check It Out Group and to the [X Working Group] and that seemed to lead to more meetings because they do seem to be a little low on parents so basically if they find any...!”

November 2000

The following parent suggested that what was needed was a topic-based approach, so that parents know what is being discussed and feel that it is relevant to them.

“If [...], we had some positive attitude about it, if the people in Sure Start were saying, ‘We’re gonna have a meeting because we want to, say, we’re thinking of building something for the children like leisure centre or something’, then the majority of the parents would be up there, because they know they want to get their kids off the street, out of trouble and if that’s the way to do it they would, and they’d be supportive. But unless they can see something in it for themselves, they won’t.” July 2001

4.6.3 CHECK IT OUT GROUP

This was a forum created by Sure Start in early 2000, and facilitated by the Parent Participation Worker. The idea was to have a group entirely of parents, which might therefore get around some of the problems of professional-dominated meetings.

There has been a lot of positive feedback from parents about this group. Attendance levels, while not particularly high, are regular and an informal network exists with parents that don’t attend the meetings but contribute suggestions and ideas. The forum obviously responds to a need amongst parents to have a voice into the programme. For example, at the time of the opening of the new Family Centre in Rose Hill, the group increased the frequency of meetings, in order to allow expression for the amount of feedback from parents about the dramatic changes to the Family Centre. Generally, though, it meets once a month, on a Friday morning. There is a list of between 50 and 100 parents who receive the notes from the group, so that the circulation is higher than the actual attendance.

The Check It Out group also acts as a stepping stone into the Working Groups and Board meetings, as parents are recruited from Check It Out into the meetings, and they are also consulted about membership, particularly for the Board.

There were a few negative comments about the group, however. One parent was not confident that things she said at the Check It Out group were actually fed back into the programme, suggesting that the feedback loop is not always going full circle. That is, issues raised in the group may be fed back to the programme, but the programme does not then tell the group the programme’s response and whether the issues are being addressed. Another problem has been that not all of the members of the group are equally confident to voice their views, and some people have felt it more difficult to speak up for fear of
contradicting the most vociferous members of the group. This issue of power within groups is a common feature of group dynamics, and is therefore not unique to the Check It Out group.

4.6.4 SURE START AS A LIMITED COMPANY

Sure Start was constituted as an independent organisation with charitable status. Membership of the organisation was opened out to those living and working within the Sure Start catchment area. Members need only accept legal liability to a maximum of one pound. This structure should in theory encourage community ownership of the programme, as members are enabled to vote at the Annual General Meeting, and can accept or reject the programme’s accounts, amongst other things. We did not ask parents about their views on community ownership of Sure Start, although feedback has been positive from other community members.

4.7. PARENT PARTICIPATION IN SERVICE PLANNING THROUGH INFORMAL FEEDBACK

Formal management structures are not the only way for parents and community members to have their voices heard by the Sure Start programme. Jackson et al. (1989) suggest that instituting a listening culture within an organisation at all levels is the first and crucial step in demonstrating to the community that the organisation is truly committed to enabling their participation in the design and delivery of services. Thus, it is important to look at whether parents feel that there is a listening culture within Sure Start, and whether they are able to give feedback informally through a range of channels, whether or not they feel ready, able and willing to participate in the formal management structures.

To explore whether the local programme is perceived as responsive and open to feedback from parents, we asked whether people felt that they had had an opportunity to influence Sure Start, and whether they felt they had actually done so. It was not always appropriate to ask the question of people who were true non-users, or who considered themselves non-users, so only 12 of the 18 interviewees responded to the first question. Seven interviewees felt that they had had an opportunity to influence Sure Start, while five felt they had not.

Of the seven people who felt they had had an opportunity to influence the Sure Start programme, six responded to the question of whether they had actually done so. Three felt they had influenced Sure Start, two felt they had not, and one was not sure.

The following quote illustrates this feedback on informal influence:

“Well, I can see Littlemore, I can see the community [...] and I can see that they’re working on it, so every day there is evidence that something is happening, and that’s from a lot of people saying “We want things.” So
yeah. I do, because as I said, we wanted the tailoring class and we got that, we wanted more trips, we did say there aren’t enough day trips for people who can’t drive and take their children out, don’t have a car. And they have increased the amount of trips that they’ve got. Yeah. I think [what I want] will happen, actually. If, I think, you say enough right words in the right ears.” June 2001

The flip-side of this responsiveness, of course, is the question of representativeness. Whilst the programme should certainly consider every item of feedback carefully, its response should be weighted according to the number of people voicing the same opinion.

Informal feedback therefore needs to be fed into formal feedback channels, and considered carefully within the overall programme plans. What is important is that the programme then closes the feedback loop; by letting those who fed back issues know about the response to their feedback, and an explanation for the response. This does not mean that individuals need to be identified by the programme as the origin of each item of feedback, but that feedback needs to be logged and then some kind of public statement made on a regular basis to disseminate more widely what the feedback has been and what the response was.

A suggestions box and system of recording and reporting suggestions is in place in the Family Centre building and incorporates comments made in the suggestion box at the POD in Littlemore. The numbers of suggestions received so far have been minimal but they have been responded to and documented on the parents’ board located at the Family Centre. The suggestions box, or some such procedure, could also be used to log feedback received orally; staff could report feedback they have gathered during their daily work and allow it to be processed through the same channels. In this way the programme could ensure that it is consistent in its response to feedback gleaned through a variety of channels, and that openness and flexibility do not result in processes that are not representative of the wider community of opinion. It must ensure that action plans and other feedback literature are comprehensive yet enticing.

4.8. SURE START’S RESPONSES TO FEEDBACK ON PARENT PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING SERVICES

The comments of the parents about barriers to participation in planning and developing Sure Start services were fed back to the Director and to the Board. The Parent Participation Worker also conducted an informal survey of parents who were or had been on the Board, to find out from them what were the obstacles to their participation. These responses were consistent with the feedback from our own interviews. Together, this feedback influenced the Board in carrying out a range of changes to their practice and structures, beginning in late 2001.

The actions taken include:
Publication of meeting dates in the quarterly newsletter sent out to the community
Open door policy: anyone can drop in and out of the meetings
List of Board members, names and details at each meeting, but no round of introductions
Jargon box: individuals fined for using jargon
Changed terminology and glossary of abbreviations
Split agenda, with routine business items in the second half, after a break for smoking/eating/socialising
Food served at pre-meeting with parents
Comfortable venue, no board table, toy box
Appointment of a parent Chair of the Board

Several other actions are being contemplated, to transform the Board even further, according to parent feedback:

- New name: ‘Decisions R Us’, ‘The Circle’ – suggestions from Check It Out group and Board members
- Parents set the agenda
- Aim for 50% parent representation on the Board

A parent has now accepted the role of Chairperson of the Board, and is being trained to take over from October 2002.

4.9. EVIDENCE OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING

One of the issues the interviews with parents intended to explore was whether parents had noticed a difference in the way the different agencies worked together as a result of the Sure Start programme. The ‘new way of working’, focusing on inter-agency partnerships and ‘joined-up working’, has been one of the core objectives of Sure Start at a national and local level. We wanted to explore whether the new way of working had had an impact on parents’ own lives and interactions with the services.

As it turned out, the majority of parents interviewed did not have enough knowledge of inter-agency working practices to be able to reply to the question. Of those who did reply, however, one felt that Sure Start had made no difference to the way agencies worked together, and one felt that there was a problem with inter-agency working as a result of Sure Start’s work. Three felt that things had improved since Sure Start began, and one felt that inter-agency working was good now, although she did not have experience prior to Sure Start in order to comment on any process of change. On balance, therefore, it appears Sure Start is perceived to have changed things positively, but that more information is needed for people to understand the changes in working practice, and be able to make such a judgement – at least, within our sample. Staff, however, told us that Sure Start had made a difference for some of the parents with whom they were working, particularly by reducing the confusion caused by having many people involved in their
lives who did not communicate well together. Staff’s views of inter-agency working are explored further in Chapter 5.

4.10. SUMMARY

We interviewed 18 mothers over an 11-month period. The original target of ten parents using the services and ten parents who were not using the services was not met. The main problem was that some parents thought they were non-users, but were actually using a Sure Start service in some way. These 18 parents accounted for 74 children in total with 30 of these being under the age of 4 years.

The parents were most likely to have been resident in the area for a number of years, and only a few said that they would move out of the area if they could. More than half of the parents thought that people living in Rose Hill and Littlemore would look out for each other and gave examples of members of the community providing social resources and being good neighbours. There was no difference between the Rose Hill and the Littlemore residents on this.

When asked about their environment, parents were most concerned about safety issues such as street nuisance, children playing football in the street and breaking wing mirrors, vandalism and petty crimes. Poor housing was mentioned and it was common to hear of families housed in dwellings that were inadequate for the size of their family. Solutions offered to improve the situation focussed mainly on providing activities for school-aged children, something that is outside of the remit of Sure Start. However, Sure Start has become indirectly involved in supporting projects that are aimed at children older than 4 years of age.

Parents first encountered Sure Start in a variety of ways, the most likely being through contact with a health services worker in the area. Attending a PEEP group was also mentioned as an important route for parents to hear about Sure Start. More recently it has become clear that many parents first come in contact with Sure Start through the lending and recycling service. Few parents had a clear view of the entirety of local Sure Start programme and many were using Sure Start services without being aware of how they were being provided.

Whether or not they realised how they were being funded, parents were overwhelmingly positive about Sure Start’s services. They spoke of many aspects of the services that they found beneficial. The cultural inclusiveness, the lending and recycling service and the health clinics were particularly valued, but parents were positive about all the services they had received including PEEP, OXPIP, support for parents with children with special needs including the parenting education and support programmes, the services provided to meet the needs of Asian families and the trips and outings. Parents also valued Sure Start services, including the volunteering role, as a way of bringing them in contact with others in the community and getting them out of the house. The parents we interviewed had between them used many,
but not all, of the services provided by Sure Start. Lack of comment about particular services is likely to reflect limitations in the research methodology rather than lack of appreciation of those services.

Parents found Sure Start’s services to be relatively problem-free. Their criticisms focussed on issues with targeting, such as the restriction of Sure Start to the under 4s, the problems with targeting services per se and the perceived differences in service funding and delivery in Rose Hill as compared to that within Littlemore.

Parents who had had an opportunity to influence Sure Start reported positively on the experience. They felt that their suggestions were listened to and taken seriously. They also reported positively on the value of the ‘Check it Out Group’ a regular informal forum for parents to discuss Sure Start services and plans. The programme has provided evidence that it values the opinions of the community and is committed to community involvement. However, whilst some parents appreciated the opportunity to get involved in formal Sure Start meetings, there were clearly some who found early meetings, particularly the Board meetings, a very disempowering experience and this was reflected in attendance figures at Board meetings. The problems parents reported included the use of jargon by professionals, the relative preponderance of professionals at the meetings, difficulty with the timing of meetings and childcare. A series of changes was instituted in an attempt to resolve some of these problems, but it is too early to say whether these have had the desired effect. A high level of parental involvement in, and commitment to, implementation of programmes like Sure Start is difficult to achieve. Even with a high level of commitment to the process it takes time to achieve. This will be an important area to revisit in future evaluations.

With regard to the future, parents had several suggestions for service development. Provision of facilities for taking exercise for parents and children, and also for older children, were the most common. Parents were also very concerned about antisocial behaviour amongst older children and felt that there should more local provision for this group.
5 STAFF INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we present the results of the interviews with 31 Sure Start staff over a 17-month period. How and when staff first heard about the Sure Start project are discussed as well as individuals’ motivations for joining Sure Start and their understanding of the Sure Start approach. Staff were asked if they felt they had had opportunity to influence the development of the Sure Start programme and their responses and examples are discussed here as well as their vision for the future. The successes and challenges of Sure Start, as viewed by the staff, are discussed. The management structures and their effectiveness and the development of the database are described.

5.1. WHO WAS INTERVIEWED AND WHEN

Interviews with individual staff members began in August 2000 and spanned an 18-month period, the last interview being conducted in January 2002. Thirty-eight interviews in total were conducted with Sure Start staff members (see Table 5.1 below), 28 individuals were interviewed once only, two individuals were interviewed twice and the Director had five follow-up interviews, held on a quarterly basis making a total of 31 staff interviewed. Two staff were also given their original transcripts from their first interview to comment on and return. Quotes are used which, in the opinions of the research team, best illustrate the point being made. Two local service providers were also interviewed. The results of their interviews are not presented here but have been used to inform the views of the researchers.

Table 5.1: Number of interviews with Sure Start staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of staff interviewed once only</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of staff interviewed more than once</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of staff interviewed and transcript returned</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of staff interviewed</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The time frame on which staff were reflecting differs somewhat for each interview. For instance, a member of staff interviewed in January 2002 will not necessarily be referring to events in the same time frame as someone interviewed in May 2001. Some of the questions will have been more influenced by this than others. For example, asking about a person’s background and their motivation for joining Sure Start is less likely to be affected by time than a question asking about changes they have seen to the programme. Each quote is dated to provide a time reference and data from participant observation and minutes of meetings are used to supplement the interview data and give a chronological perspective.

Given the ways in which questions changed over time, as described in the methods section above, some questions were not asked of all interviewees,

---

1 Sure Start refers to minutes as notes.
and some were particular to an individual. The numbers of interviewees therefore differs from one set of questions to another. The number of interviewees answering the question is made clear in the title caption for each table. In some cases an interviewee could have mentioned more than one issue in their response to a question so there may be some overlap in responses. This too is indicated.

As described in Chapter 2, problems and issues which were raised in the course of interviews were fed back both to the Director and more formally through the Research Advisory Group. These instances are mentioned in the text. The way in which the feedback system was set up meant that the researchers encouraged staff to raise issues and problems themselves. Partly as a result of this process and partly as a result of spontaneous feedback, the Director was often aware of the issues before they were formally fed back.

5.2. FIRST CONTACT WITH SURE START

In order to provide a context for understanding the organisational ethos of Sure Start, and the practical implementation of the programme, we asked staff a number of questions about their professional and personal background. The majority of staff (78%) were aware of Sure Start very early in its development within the area. 60% heard about it through the first consultation meetings with the community and local providers between February and May 1999 and 15% heard about it in the few months following these meetings. The remaining staff learned of Sure Start early in 2000 (15%) or in 2001 (10%).

In response to the question “How did you first hear about Sure Start?” it was evident that the majority of Sure Start staff heard about the programme through their work, either through their employer’s publicity or from their colleagues directly. A number of the staff saw the job advertised in a newspaper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word of mouth</th>
<th>Publicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

“I initially heard about it on the grapevine really, from being involved in the area […] in the county. So that sort of information filtered through various teams and through meetings and that kind thing that there was something afoot and that PEEP were going to be a lead partner and then that was kind of confirmed I suppose by seeing those first job adverts in the paper.” November 2000
This suggests that staff became aware of Sure Start as a result of their professional background, which is not that surprising. However, the programme also has a fairly strong component of staff coming from the local community, some of whom did not hear in professional capacity as the following quote illustrates:

“[..] shortly after that ... came a phone call from [X] to say, ‘Oh there’s this wonderful thing, opportunity coming up’ and I didn’t even understand really what she was on about at the time but it was something to do with this big meeting and Sure Start and would I come. And I sort of didn’t really know what she was on about and thought, ‘Well yes, you know, she’s obviously gone to the trouble of phoning me and asking me personally’.” September 2001

Some of Sure Start’s staff lived within the catchment area itself (24%) but the majority lived outside of the area (76%). All of the local staff were parents and five of the eight had at least one child under 4 years of age (at the time of the interviews).

Local staff are likely to have a good knowledge of the area and the community. Their social networks could help in understanding the needs of the community. Conversely, living locally could be problematic in that their privacy could be compromised, they could be viewed as always available and approachable for people. Also, they could feel pressure to set a good example and to have clear boundaries.

“In any of my jobs my, my boundary has been the physical getting in my car and driving home […] ‘cos that’s the way I can do it. And I did at one point in my life, do [x] in my home area and it was [a] disaster. […] It wasn’t good for me at all ‘cos I just felt like I couldn’t go outside my door without somebody saying [something].” February 2002

“I can see potential negative points, if you do live on-site then you are set up as a role model to parents who are looking at how you parent. Do you attend the PEEP groups? Do you attend the Family Centre? So you are set up as a role model so you can fail or succeed in anyone’s eyes.” October 2000

Sure Start felt it important to employ local parents as, in the early consultation meetings with the community, one of their wishes was that those with local understanding fill certain roles. For example, the Parent Support Worker role where intensive, short-term support is offered to families during early parenting. Two local parents work in this capacity and the following quote illustrates the advantage of being a local parent. The worker discusses a situation for which she’d had some introductory training and was now facing the reality of the situation.

“And I’m actually going through it now and […], I’ve been really bogged down in a situation that I am completely unqualified to cope with and yet I’m having to cope with it because of the nature of the circumstance.
with the family, that if anybody else went in there, they wouldn’t get a look in.” September 2001

The team has been valuable in how supported she felt in this situation, and others:

“..and now I’m sort of like 10 yards down the line and, you know, I’m finding myself running to people saying ‘I don’t know how to do this’, […]. Luckily, I think the team are brilliant and there’s, […] quite a few members that I feel that I can go to and say […] ‘I actually feel quite stupid about this but I don’t know what to do’ and they’re […], welcoming me with open arms to help me.” September 2001

5.3. PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND OF STAFF

Sure Start staff came from a variety of professional backgrounds.

- Education (both pre-school and school-age children)
- Family Centre work
- Family support work
- Adult education
- Social Services
- Health Services
- Voluntary sector
- Private sector
- Unemployed
- Student

This variety provided a good mix of skills in the team. It also meant that workers could utilise their contacts in their previous field (aided by the dual management arrangement – see section 5.9). Having all of this expertise concentrated in one team can make for a creative approach to problem solving. However, varying backgrounds could also be a disadvantage in that the staff could be used to different ways of working, use different language and different decision-making structures. Working together as a multi-disciplinary team requires time and good communication and an understanding of each other’s approach. Training which raises the awareness of others’ backgrounds and working styles could be of help in this as well as providing support for those working in a way that is new to them.

Many of the staff were part-time and some had additional employment, often utilising their professional background. Some even worked in the Sure Start area in this other employment. This could be very time efficient in that the worker already had an understanding of the families’ situations and had developed a relationship with family members. Conversely, it could present problems for both the staff and the parents in distinguishing between the worker’s different roles, and the work with the family could have been a negative experience. There can also be a conflict in priorities when working
with families and the balance is likely to vary from one worker to the next as the next section shows.

5.4. REASONS FOR JOINING SURE START

The majority of staff offered more than one reason for joining Sure Start and the reasons ranged from wanting a change and looking for other employment to a love of children. Those that had either lived or worked in the area or in a similar area felt they had an empathy with the community, or just liked the features of the job.

“But it appealed to me because it was to do with people, and I have been used to talking to people, and enjoy it and like it and like meeting people, and encouraging people […] to take part in things.” September 2000

A few saw it as an opportunity to make use of training that they had undergone with that age group or with measurement tools that would be utilised by Sure Start. Others mentioned that they were looking for a change at the time, either as a move into employment or to supplement their part-time employment. A few saw the job in Sure Start as a promotion, in terms of salary and/or responsibility.

“[…] it was a chance to branch out a little bit […], and being able to work in perhaps more flexible ways, it was at the time a step up in terms of […] salary, so that was part of the attraction too, and being able to work more closely with another [X] but [also] being able to work more closely within a team.” May 2001

A number spoke about how attractive the ethos of Sure Start was and how worthwhile they felt the job was.

“I have noticed changes in […] what is being set up and what we are aiming to achieve. It is good to actually be doing a job that you can see changes even though it is not me making those changes but we are all working towards it.” November 2000

Some workers saw the job in Sure Start as an opportunity to extend the work they were already doing, or had been doing previously and wished to get back to.

“Oh, I thought it would be a really exciting job in that, as I understood the basic principles and values, it felt like it was very much back to my roots […] in terms of developing preventative services at an age at which [it] really matters, from […] a small community basis.” October 2001
For most, they saw their job in Sure Start as an opportunity to try a new way of working:

- With new client groups
- New problems to solve
- New job description
- Community work
- Bottom-up services
- More time with families
- Partnership working
- Flexibility
- New atmosphere
- Preventative work

“[…] this is a new innovative way really of getting people to come and use services but more on their grounds or their voluntary basis […], what they want out of the service rather than what we can say, or we’re just providing. ‘And this is the way it is and this is what you have to do’. It is looking at it from their point of view and what they need.”

---

December 2000

Some people were attracted into Sure Start from statutory agencies by the fact that Sure Start as a programme was well resourced, allowing people to do things they would like to do within mainstream services but were not able to. People from a number of agencies mentioned this but this quote is taken from an individual who worked for Social Services in the past:

“Working for Social Services became increasingly frustrating because we were unable to do preventative work with families […]. With increasing Central and Local government cuts to Social Services Department budgets which saw the loss of 24 social worker posts in Oxfordshire over 2 years, something had to change. The threshold criteria for Social Services involvement is consistently raised so families and their referrers are sent away because they don’t meet criteria for intervention. Broadly speaking, unless your child is on the Child Protection Register, you are unlikely to get a service or support […]. Within that culture of budget cuts, diminishing numbers of social workers and rising threshold criteria, it is almost impossible to do preventative work with families… they are already in deep crisis by the time they meet the criteria… by which time the damage may be irreversible and care proceedings are the only option. I was immediately attracted to Sure Start as I saw their huge commitment to do creative and preventative work with families, which can have both an immediate impact, and importantly, is about prevention for the future.”

---

November 2000
5.5. STAFF UNDERSTANDING OF SURE START’S APPROACH

To gain more insight into the organisation and its philosophy we asked staff members what they thought Sure Start was trying to achieve.

We can divide their understanding of Sure Start’s aims into several categories:

- Those focused on changes to services
- Those focused on outcomes
- Those focused on processes

Some answers could perhaps fit into more than one category. The aims that staff attribute to Sure Start are likely to have an impact on their approach to their work, and service design and delivery. It will also affect the way in which staff present Sure Start to the community and to other professionals.

Table 5.3: Staff’s views of Sure Start’s aims: Changes to services (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sure Start’s approach</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving services</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting families</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New way of working</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventative approach</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universality</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding reach</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilling targets from above</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

In the category of aims focused on changing services, there were seven aims cited. The majority of the staff offered an answer which contained a service-related aim (70% of the staff) and service-related aims were the most commonly reported (37% of the responses were service-related aims). Note that one respondent viewed Sure Start’s aims as meeting targets ‘offered from above’ but they also understood about the ‘bottom-up’ process of Sure Start:

“Well, I know it has set targets, handed down from above and brought up from below, but just to […] give [the parents] the services that they want on their doorstep.” May 2001

Table 5.4: Staff’s views of Sure Start’s aims: Outcome-related (N=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sure Start’s approach</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving children’s life chances</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing social disadvantage</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving educational performance</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving social and emotional well-being</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease isolation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child poverty</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy children</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving health</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses
In the outcomes category, there were eight aims cited. Fewer staff offered an outcome-related aim (61%), but outcome-related aims were almost as likely to be offered in response (33% of responses were outcome-related).

Table 5.5: Staff’s views of Sure Start’s aims: Process-related (N=18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sure Start’s approach</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community development and spirit</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New opportunities for parents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering and developing skills</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility of services</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership working</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

In the processes category, there were eight aims cited. Just over half of the staff offered a process-related description of Sure Start’s aims (55%) and a process-related aim was least likely to be offered in response (30% of responses were process-related).

The numbers do not necessarily reflect the relative importance that the staff body as a whole assigns to these items. Nonetheless, the responses to the question “What do you think Sure Start is trying to achieve?” were numerous and varied. Staff appeared to classify Sure Start’s aims into three categories: those related to the way in which Sure Start hoped to influence the area (30% of responses); those that related to the actual services being delivered, (37% of responses); and those that were related to expected changes in the community (33% of responses). In their responses, staff favoured no one category over another so it could be said that they see Sure Start as having an equally weighted three-pronged approach to improving the life chances of under 4s and their families.

5.6. STAFF OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE SURE START

Community development approaches aim to involve the community in shaping its own environment and future. For harmony to exist between the experiences of employees and those of the people with whom they interact in the community, a listening and responsive culture is required within the organisation as well as in its dealings with the outside world. A listening and responsive organisation also tends to make for happier employees, as people who feel valued are more likely to enjoy their work and convey this sense of enjoyment to everyone they come into contact with. Furthermore, it should make for a more efficient practice, as management is able to learn from the experience of those on the ground. It can be argued that if an individual is comfortable with promoting change within their own environment, they are more likely to suggest this to others as an approach. In asking this question therefore, we hoped to gain an insight into the experiences of the staff in changing their working environment as well as getting an indication of how responsive Sure Start as an organisation was to its staff. This section can be viewed in comparison with section 4.4 where we discuss the parents’
impressions of Sure Start, and in particular, their identification of obstacles and Sure Start’s subsequent responses on receiving this feedback. Comparing these sections highlights both sides of the change process: as perceived by the parents and as perceived and actioned by the staff.

Twenty-four members of staff were asked directly if they felt they had had the opportunity to influence Sure Start. The majority of these (92%) said they felt they had had an opportunity, and some felt they had influenced Sure Start a lot (29%). The scope of their influence ranged from generally passing on information to parents about Sure Start, through to starting up specific initiatives and providing advice in their area of expertise. Two staff felt they had not influenced Sure Start but thought that it was because they were relatively new to post and had not had sufficient time to make an impact.

“Um... not particularly yet, I don’t think, because we’ve more or less been trying to get to grips with what’s already been decided that we’re going to do and see how that is working, or not as the case may be. […] I don’t think we’ve actually really changed anything yet [...]”

May 2001

One member of staff had been in post for almost 6 months but due to their part-time working hours, had felt unable to do everything they wished. It seems for this individual, their influence on the programme was in whether they had created anything new as opposed to delivering a service that had already been decided.

“I think part of it’s a question of time, as in the ‘Let’s try this and then see what the outcome is of this type of intervention, whether it’s working or not’. We feel quite pressured in terms of time to actually just do what we’ve been employed to do, and I know Sure Start is kind of a policies often come from the bottom up, as well as being handed down, and we don’t have an awful lot of thinking time, really […]. It’s quite difficult, just doing […] primarily, what the initial bid was for.”

May 2001

Others viewed their sphere of influence more broadly and even though delivering what were presumably services that had already been decided, they felt they had influenced parents’ understanding of Sure Start.

It is equally likely that an individual who felt they had not influenced the programme could be happy or unhappy with this situation. More pertinent was how happy individuals were with the amount of influence they had had on the programme. Of the nine who spoke about this, two were happy with the amount of influence they’d had, five would have liked more of an opportunity to influence things and interestingly, two felt that they had perhaps had too much influence.

Of those that would have liked more influence, the majority felt that they entered the programme at a stage when the big decisions had been made already. They felt that there were some parameters they had to accept, and that there was a limit to the amount they could influence:
“Some of the ideas come from us but I think a lot of the ideas have started before we arrived so I feel like to a certain degree we have fitted in with what they thought is going to be possible. And I think being such a new job and being very much, how would you say it, structuralized before you come into a new area and it is very open and you can make it what you want but at the same time there is a remit within it. That’s been kind of hard.” November 2000

Either that or they had not been as involved with the consultation and decision making process as much as they would have liked, primarily due to family commitments.

“[…] if I did not have my own family life […] I would be able to come to evening meetings and do more. Practicalities meant I haven’t. Well, I came to a couple of those … stakeholder meetings. You only get what you want, and you only make an influence if you speak up loud. And yes, I did, the couple I went to, but I just couldn’t keep it up.” December 2002

Parents’ responses also showed that they experienced practical difficulties in participating in service design and planning (see Chapter 4). Sure Start has made a number of efforts to provide flexible meeting times. The difficulty lies in providing them at a time that is convenient for all. Probably, the best they can hope for is to provide them at a time that is convenient for the majority. Continuing to be flexible and also looking at other ways of gathering the views of both parents and staff will be a challenge.

The two individuals that mentioned they had had perhaps too much influence on Sure Start said so jokingly but this points to the fact that with influence comes responsibility. If a programme changes because of the input of one individual, how representative is that person’s views of the majority?

It may have been difficult to recall exact details of how an individual felt they had influenced the programme as it involves a level of self-reflection that they had perhaps not engaged in previous to the interview. They did feel there was a listening culture in Sure Start and that their opinions were valued.

“Yeah, I think if I’ve needed to say something, even if I felt, you know, ‘I’m quite new in this job, should I be saying this?’, I’ve never been discouraged from quite openly saying what I needed to say, to whoever, which has been good. It […] makes you feel part of a community and part of a team and not kind of on a ladder of a job […][where] you don’t speak like that to that one […] That’s, yeah, there is lots of opportunity to say what you think.” September 2001
5.7. SUCCESSES, ACCORDING TO STAFF

When faced with the question, all staff had examples of what they thought was working well and as the following response suggests, Sure Start was successful in numerous ways:

“… I’m not hesitating because I can’t think of anything, I’m hesitating because I’m still, a year on, so enthusiastic about Sure Start, so enthusiastic about how, how creative and responsive we are able to be within the team.” September 2001

Staff identified three main areas where they viewed Sure Start as successful:

- In its working environment
- In providing good services
- In the difference it was making to families

In the working environment, they spoke about the advantages of working in a multi-professional team as well as the advantage of being in close physical proximity to people from other professional backgrounds.

“[…] everybody’s working in a far more collaborative way. And because it’s all working within one bigger service, rather than thinking I’ve got to talk to them about referring to this group or that group.’ […] it’s much easier […] once you’ve got a relationship with a family to say ‘Oh you know, if you’re telling me you’re concerned about that, how about we ask [X] to come […] in next time and we can have a chat about this?’ Rather than ‘Oh, we’ll have to make a referral to this other woman that deals with […][those] needs’.” February 2002

One person valued the opportunity to be creative in devising services:

“I’d say welcome anybody on board who is enthusiastic and wants to be part of it, in whatever role, whether their focus is teenagers or whatever, everybody’s got a part to play. […] and that any idea, you know, it may seem daft to start with, but maybe part of that actually is quite sensible and will work. Because that’s what I do find here, because you may say something flippant and off the cuff, but then you think, well actually, that’s not so bad, because if you do da da da da da, [it might work].” September 2001

Staff spoke about the success of the dual-management arrangement, which Sure Start had in place between themselves and the partner organisations. They also gave good evidence of successes in partnership working with outside agencies. These will be discussed in more detail in the later sections within this chapter, specifically section 5.9 on Management and Supervision and section 5.10 on Partnership Working.

Unsurprisingly, staff thought that Sure Start was a success in the services they were providing, both in general and because of specific services.
“[…] I think with Sure Start, Littlemore/Rose Hill will have some of the best health services in Oxford really. […] I think that all the information and the services are good and it is going to have really good services.” November 2000

“[…] they are cancelling they are not doing two year checks, they have a six-nine month waiting list for speech and language therapists and we don’t have that here at all. So from a health point of view yes I think it is brilliant.” November 2000

A wide range of services was mentioned, occurring in both Littlemore and Rose Hill.

“And even one of the ladies the other day she had been to that tea and play down at Littlemore and she said it was great, there was nowhere to take her little ones when they were that little bit younger and she said it was brilliant.” November 2000

“Like one of the ladies I spoke to the other day and I just said to her that they had recruited some Parent Support workers and she said ‘That would have been great when I had my second baby because there is only a year or so between them and I could have really done with that’ and I said ‘Well they are around now and if you wanted to use one after you have your next baby it is something that we can set up for you’.” November 2000

Staff recognised the flexibility they had when offering a service and viewed this as a great success of Sure Start. A big difference for parents (especially for those with more than one child) was being able to offer health services in the area, such as the baby clinic. Previous to Sure Start, parents had to travel to access these services. Being able to provide a service in a way that was appropriate for the parent and being able to involve the parent in planning the services that they would like was viewed as a great strength.

They viewed the ability to offer a service in a parent’s home as a great advantage to meeting the needs of parents, especially in those services that were more traditionally clinic based such as Speech and Language Therapy and ante-natal care.

“They feel valued because people are wanting to give them services, you know to go home and see them to provide ante-natal care, it makes them feel valued that we are taking the time out rather than them always having to go to services when they’ve got […] a handful of children maybe four, […] and it is pouring with rain. Why can’t we go see them without them having to traipse out with four children to a clinic, wait and then get them all back and […] the wet equipment.” November 2000

Those that had worked in the local area previous to Sure Start spoke about the wonderful opportunity that Sure Start afforded in addressing need earlier.
They all recognised that the need had been there before but spoke about the
difficulty of the agencies in being able to meet the need due to staffing and
funding cuts or a gap in responsibility which allowed people to “fall through the
net”.

“And because within Sure Start we are joined up […] it’s actually giving
the opportunity to actually illustrate what those of us working in the
area have always known. But it’s been hard to get that evidence if you
like, to be able to go to [X] and say ‘Look, this is what’s happening
[…]’. Those children were already there. They’ve always been there.
We’ve known the level of need in the area, but they haven’t been being
picked up until they got to school […].” February 2002

They measured their success in the way the families and communities
changed.

“I have had these conversations recently since I have been in post at
Sure Start with those same mums to say ‘I used to know this really
negative mum who [would] sit up here with her arms folded and her
legs on the table’ and that mum, that same mum, would say ‘Yeah,
yeah I remember her but she’s different now’. So it was about
recognizing a huge potential I suppose.” November 2000

They did not attribute all the successes to themselves;

“I think that is a really good thing about Sure Start, we are starting to
see the strength of the community which in a way we were not able to
see before […], not because they weren’t there but because we weren’t
in a position to be able to make contact with the strengths rather than
the […] challenges.” December 2000

There was an awareness that they were providing services that were
additional to those already in the area and that enormous effort had gone into
uniting the services from both sides.

“It was lovely to hear [X] […] speak at the AGM when she whole-
heartedly, warm-heartedly, congratulated [Sure Start’s Director] and
was very honest […] saying ‘We were very suspicious about you or
about Sure Start and what you were aiming at because we thought
how dare you? We have got all this stuff, we’re running good things up
here’. She said ‘We were so suspicious and guarded […] and through
this last 12 months […], we haven’t always agreed but my goodness
look at you now, it’s fantastic’. She said ‘Some of my barriers have
come down and I have become much more open to allowing change’,
and that’s what it’s about I think.” November 2000

“I think it will make a lot of difference to the community […], there are
things out there for them now which is great because initially I think
they will say ‘Well Sure Start, what is that doing for us?’ but we are
starting now to get feedback that it is doing things for them, […] and
also that they are being a part of it. Lots of members of the community now are joining in to do productive things as well, which is wonderful and absolutely what you need because that feeds back and gives people the feeling that we are part of them rather than we are here and they are there and we’re going to do this for them […].” November 2000

5.8. CHALLENGES IN SURE START, ACCORDING TO STAFF

All members of staff were asked about the challenges that Sure Start faced both within Sure Start and between Sure Start and its partners. The most commonly reported challenges (reported by 74% of the staff) were those relating to internal organizational issues, conflict and disagreements and attitudes of service providers.

Table 5.6: Challenges reported by Sure Start Staff (31 staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges for Sure Start</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>As a %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal organizational challenges</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict / disagreement</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes of service providers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting versus Universality</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services and service planning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement in meetings and consultation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No problems, conflicts or disagreements</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure Start’s short-term funding</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstreaming issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents not feeling listened to</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

Table 5.7 and 5.7-continued provide more details of the internal organizational challenges as perceived by the staff. The most commonly cited was pace and volume of work. Specifically, that the programme was changing quickly and the staff were feeling overwhelmed by their work. Staff mentioned difficulties with integrating services and also meetings in general. Communication was also seen as a problem in some areas. These are dealt with more thoroughly below in sections 5.8.1 Meetings and Communication, 5.8.2 Communication Outside Meetings and 5.8.3 Pace of Work.

Table 5.7: Internal organizational problems (26 staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal organizational problems</th>
<th>26 staff</th>
<th>As a %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pace and volume of work</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of services</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings / organization</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in priorities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role responsibilities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space and resource issues</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissemination and information</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical infrastructure</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-personal issues</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training problems</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.7 continued: Internal organizational problems (26 staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal organisational problems</th>
<th>26 staff</th>
<th>As a %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervision / support</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working environment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Database and data collection</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in two sites</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paperwork</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power issues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time work</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New way of working</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary and status differentials</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy issues</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teams within teams</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

Conflict and disagreement was mentioned by 71% of staff. The most common conflicts and disagreements occurred between the two communities of Rose Hill and Littlemore. The second most common was about Sure Start taking over local services (Table 5.8)

Table 5.8: Conflicts and disagreements (22 staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflicts and disagreements</th>
<th>22 staff</th>
<th>As a %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Rose Hill and Littlemore</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure Start taking over services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-personal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-agency working</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting versus Universality</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For volunteers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure Start age group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlapping responses

Staff reported challenges with all aspects of service delivery, from the planning stage through to delivery, from the attitudes of service providers to the integration of services. Some of these had been successfully resolved.

“… it’s, it’s going pretty well. I mean there were a lot of people very worried when Sure Start came on the scene because they, they didn’t understand the whole idea of building on what was there. They thought ‘no, they’re just gonna come in and ride roughshod over us and then when their funding runs out they’ll bugger off and we’ll have to pick up the pieces’.” December 2001

With regard to targeting and universality of services, staff reported that they personally felt frustrated with the restrictions around Sure Start’s target age group and also that parents had expressed similar concerns.

“They are feeling excluded at this point yes. Many families that I have talked to they are feeling excluded saying ‘Because we have got a five year old we can’t get all the support and facilities that are on offer’.” October 2000
"Yes and that is great to have all this stuff for under 4s but under 4s weren't the problem in the first place as far as we could see, it was teenagers.” November 2000

The challenges faced as a result of space and resources focused mainly on the problems when the staff were on different sites and not based in the new family centre building as they are now. There were a few quotes that did refer to space restrictions with the new buildings though.

"Well, the POD down there, they have done it nice but I just don't think it is big enough for what we want to do with it really. I think the bit for the lending and recycling I think is probably totally inadequate really for that [...] If you had two buggies down there that would be the space taken up.” November 2000

Discussions about problems with space, particularly early on in the development of the programmes, cropped up when people were talking about challenges with meetings and pressure of work and these are dealt with in those sections.

The community involvement challenges of which staff spoke centred around the difficulties in encouraging parents to Sure Start’s meetings and concerns that they were not being consulted widely enough on decisions. Chapter 4 presents these issues in more depth and includes the parents’ views on participation so it will not be discussed here.

Staff did not speak of many challenges around mainstreaming Sure Start’s services. Mainstreaming was discussed by staff elsewhere in their interviews but not raised specifically in response to the question about challenges and areas of conflict. One member of staff said

"There's a kind of a bit of a... not very solid feeling to it, which I think the parents are picking up on. [...] [They need to be told] 'If Sure Start's not gonna be in there in a year, this'll happen, if Sure Start's intending to be there for so many years, this is what'll happen afterwards'. I think, like the children, you know, you sort of constantly update them before it happens and then it's not a big shock or a big problem.” September 2001

5.8.1 MEETINGS AND COMMUNICATION

In interviews conducted early in the course of this research, most staff spoke of problems and challenges in relation to meetings and communication and as the quotations below show, many felt very strongly about this challenge. Most of the comments focused on staff meetings but some related to the Board and working group meetings. The staff meeting structure in August 2000 was such that the whole team (then around 20 members of staff) met together once a fortnight for an hour. Each member of staff had a few minutes to say what
they’d been doing that week and to share any other information. There was also time for general business issues. As the staff numbers grew, these meetings felt more rushed and people were restricted in what they could say:

“It is something that I felt but it was reflected by several people after a meeting the other day it was like, ‘Well what was the point of that, we started late but we had to finish on time and it was like yep OK I will have to move you on, no sorry we can’t do that one now we have to move on’.” November 2000

“I think I am aware that you know, when you do attend meetings they feel like there is [a] need to be in control of them and not let them run away. But there is also giving value to what people have to offer […] given your time slot this is what you have to say when it is not always appropriate to have just five minutes. I am aware that somebody needs control but also people should still feel valued in their contributions […].” November 2000

At this stage as the above quotes suggest, staff were aware of the problems, but they still felt that there was value in the whole team meeting together. It was proposed that alternating business and information sharing meetings would allow for more discussion time. This too proved unmanageable and staff commented on how frustrated they felt and how there was still insufficient time to say as much as they wished.

“And it doesn’t seem to matter whether it is a business meeting or an information share meeting, I still don’t feel that I get opportunity to say what I want to say, or even to discuss things.” November 2000

One member of staff had, at that point in time, recently attended a training course and in order to feel that it had been value for money, she wanted to share with the group what she had learned but felt there wasn’t enough time.

Perhaps surprisingly given their frustrations with the meeting structure, staff were still likely to turn up unprepared for a meeting or to arrive late. One quote sheds light on this apparent contradiction.

“What I would like to see them being is something that we use, and I think it is telling again because people very rarely bring their minutes to meetings. I don’t, I don’t even think to bring my minutes […] because I don’t think I need them because I don’t think I am going to be participating in the meetings to actually warrant me bringing them. I don’t do it consciously, but I think ‘Right, I am here and I am going to be a passive member of this situation, and I know that before I go there so I don’t feel like I need to prepare myself or bring anything. Nobody is going to be asking anything of me!” November 2000

Such problems are not exclusive to the staff meetings as illustrated by this quote from an individual referring to one of Sure Start’s working groups:
“The usefulness of meetings? Well, I have elected not to go to [X] Working group, and that’s every time that it happens now. Because it takes two hours, [a significant proportion of my week] and when I have been, it’s been generally a talking shop. I haven’t missed anything by just reading the minutes, so that’s one I’ve just elected out of. Not officially, but I just tend to not mind organising other things at the same time.” November 2000

This same member of staff expressed her frustration at the lack of planning of an Away Day, which did not alter her view that meetings were a waste of her time.

“The well we don’t know what’s going to be in it yet, but we know it’s going to be on this date, and if you’ve got anything you’d like to include, do let us know.’ And that’s just the sort of thing that really gets on my nerves. So the idea that we were having this meeting without an identified purpose did make me cross. And I [...] just think it’s ironic that we’re going to discuss bad communication.” November 2000

These findings were fed back to the Director by the research team in November 2000, and she confirmed that she had received comments from staff in relation to this issue. Indeed, in August 2000, she had written to all staff proposing an alternative structure. The upcoming staff training day (an Away Day where the whole team meet to tackle current issues) focussed on communication issues, with an emphasis on the meeting structure. The team voiced a number of frustrations at the Away Day; for example, the notes from the meetings did not have action points so did not act as a ‘working document’. It was also suggested that it would be better to appoint a consistent note-taker for the meetings to avoid uncomfortable periods at the beginning of meetings where the group waited for someone to volunteer to take the notes for that day.

It was unanimously agreed that the entire staff could no longer meet all together and a new team meeting structure was suggested. It was proposed that groups of five or six staff would meet together on a regular basis. They would elect a representative from their group (on a rotational basis) and that representative would meet with the representatives from the other groups, plus the Director, to share ideas and information. The flow of information would be two-way, from the smaller group to the larger and vice versa. A number of individuals, including one of the research team, met after the Away Day to discuss the details of this new structure and the whole team agreed their proposals the following week. The new structure, ground rules and names of representatives from each group were formally agreed. Staff were arbitrarily assigned to their Small Group and no group had more than six members. It was planned that each Small Group meets in the first week of each month for 2½ hours. The representatives from each group would meet together with the Director in the second week of the month for a further 2½ hours to share information. The Director was not a member of the Small Group structure but she chaired the larger group (termed the Snaggers with
reference to the builder’s term for the final meeting at the end of the project where builders meet with the client to tie up all the loose ends).

The first Small Group and Snaggers meetings took place in February 2001 with an agreement to review the structure in 6 months’ time. Judging by the notes from the meetings, they have been much more successful than the previous arrangement and some members of staff, who complained previously, are now finding them useful as this quote about Away Days shows.

“I’m now a big advocate of Away Days! They tend to be good fun and I enjoy spending time with colleagues who usually flit past me once or twice a month. The formal content has been variable but I guess that’s to be expected. It’s good to be in a different environment for a change.” January 2002

The new system is, however, not entirely without problems. Some Small Groups appear to function very well and its members meet regularly but a few have found it very difficult to make the monthly meetings.

“In all the time of Small Groups, we’ve only actually had one really, really productive meeting and the rest of them nobody could either come to or there was just two of us.” September 2001

Due to the part-time working hours of many members of staff, finding a convenient time for six people to meet on a monthly basis has proved difficult for some and a few staff have moved to another group that meets at a more convenient time.

“You can’t find time to go to meeting after meeting and I think one of the issues is how many meetings should we go to? Especially part-timers because you could spend your whole time going to meetings which is […] part of a big inter-agency group which we are, […] in order to get that information across you need to talk to each other, but it’s a bit of a dilemma because you also need to be out there doing something a bit more practical.” November 2000

Even those who see the point of meetings and want to make them work are faced with difficulties;

“Yes, it is difficult, because if one comes out of any meeting feeling negative about the way it has been run, or the information or lack of, or whatever, then it’s not really going to enthuse you about going back and feeding that back to your colleagues. That’s the cycle we certainly got into, with the Small Group meeting, it was like, ‘Ah, I don’t want to do this’ […]. But the other difficulty is that everybody in my Small Group has said, ‘I cannot give you two and a half hours’, so we’ve got one and a half hours, which doesn’t give a lot of time for agenda and group supervisions, so I don’t know.” September 2001
Finding the physical space to meet has also been problematic. All of the Small Group meetings occur in the 7-10 days preceding the Snaggers meeting so all are chasing limited facilities. This has been eased by the new building as well as the move by groups to meet in a nearby hotel which most find agreeable. Some staff have struggled to see their Small Group meetings as a priority, double-booking themselves in what has been a pre-arranged time, failing to attend without passing on apologies and reducing the length of time that the meeting was intended to run for.

When the time came to choose a new representative for their Small Group to attend the Snaggers meetings, many were reluctant to volunteer, citing lack of time as a reason.

In the face of these difficulties, many staff continue to see the need for meetings and feel some responsibility for making them work.

“I was disappointed, both in myself and in the team, because we were not achieving that and that was partly a dynamics issue, but it was also hugely to do with time and prioritisation of time, and that I think it’s fair to say, [...] we weren’t recognising that that Small Group could be used as a hugely empowering [...] forum.” September 2001

“It completely fell apart prior to the summer, and we’ve lost a couple of members of the team, so I’ve just finally sent a memo [...] [to] all my colleagues within my Small Group, and said ‘We have to re-float this, and completely re-energise what we do and how we do’, [...] Maybe it’s an indicator that people were feeling [...] we need to [do] [...] this better, I had a 100% response from those team members.” September 2001

The new structure is certainly more successful than the old and the notes of the meetings indicate the quantity and breadth of issues covered. The Small Group has become a more supportive place where individuals have time to talk and can share their successes and problems as well as discussing issues of policy. The level of detail in the notes from the meetings has to be agreed by the group and can be as simple as action points arising out of discussions, so the meeting can be viewed as a safe environment to share issues. A group supervision model has been formally adopted by all of the groups for use in these meetings as a constructive and non-judgmental way of solving problems. However, when asked, most of the representatives of the groups admit to not using this tool as often as they would like because they spend the majority of the meeting time discussing and making decisions on the issues that are raised each month.

At the time of writing, there are still six small groups, each with a membership of six or seven individuals, but changes in the meeting structure continue to be considered to ensure that the meetings work for more people. Following recent discussions, the Family Centre Co-ordinator and the Lead Health Visitor have now formed a separate group with the Director to discuss managerial level issues. These three individuals had found themselves
meeting together increasingly frequently as the staff numbers and management issues increased. They no longer attend Small Group meetings. The latter has the added advantage that the Small Groups no longer include management level staff, thus allowing the group members more freedom to discuss any potential management-level problems. At the most recent Away Day (May 2002) meetings and communication were discussed again and as a result, additional monthly briefing sessions have been set up (the first took place in July 2002) to provide a very concise but informal update of events and issues for any member of staff who attends. This meeting is timed such that it occurs in the period of time between the Snaggers and the Small Group meetings and is another forum for staff to communicate ideas and remain informed of changes.

5.8.2 COMMUNICATION OUTSIDE MEETINGS

Communication has proved problematic not just in meetings but also in other ways (although the majority of these issues related to a time early in the interviewing schedule). Issues raised include emailing; resource issues; and internal documentation problems (too much of it or not receiving it). Staff were originally based in three different sites, so electronic and postal mail were important for communication.

There were however, many occasions where people received paperwork or information about events with too little notice to plan to attend the event, and occasionally the information arrived after the event had occurred. There was a lack of awareness of what individual workers were doing which, on occasion, led to a duplication of effort.

“There have been problems. [X] and I have turned up at the same house on the same day. […] That particular lady, Mondays were her day off so I guess she tried to fit everybody in on a Monday.”

November 2000

The Local Education Authority has set up an electronic mail system in the new building. There have, however, been problems and there have been many times when staff were unable to receive or send emails, or both. The technical support provided by the Education Authority has been patchy and unreliable. This has not encouraged those who lack the technical skills to send and receive emails to learn how to do so. In response to this, a post was created to start in February 2002 for an individual to provide technical support ‘in-house’. This individual offers half a day a week where they ‘trouble-shoot’ technical problems and act as a co-ordinator between Sure Start and the Local Education Authority who still provide the email service.

We heard many complaints from Staff about the volume of information they received. This was regarded as too much for them to be able to read within their working hours. Some staff were used to their line managers in their agency filtering the paperwork down to a minimum, and although they understood that Sure Start was working in a new way and that it was very important to be consulted on decisions, they felt overwhelmed by the amount
they were to read. Allocating time for reading and digesting the information was difficult too as they were often interrupted by telephones ringing, by parents and staff approaching them or what they felt was more important business.

Problems with the volume of reading were compounded by physical space problems referred to above. Sharing desk space with other workers was often necessary due to office space limitations.

“The office itself is not really conducive to working in I don’t find. You need to move out of there to really work and I think quite a few people do a bit from home because there is so many people in there some of the days and there is so much networking going on to a certain degree which is really good and we need to meet and we need to talk but at the same time you need quiet as well to actually get on and do some work.” November 2000

Staff believed that the space issues would ease when they could all be together in the new family centre building, which was under construction.

“[…]and the other little thing about office accommodation, but we know we are going to get better when the new Family Centre is built. But obviously that, as you know, can be an issue if everybody is in our office it becomes impossible to work or even sit down sometimes <<laughs>>, which has a negative affect on one’s work.” November 2000

The pressures were particularly difficult for those that were used to a different working environment in the other or previous employment where they had access to more resources.

“A lot of us are part time […] in the library office, because we are all coming and going and sharing desks, that too was, for me, quite difficult because before I’d been in a full time job and I’d had my own desk and computer and e-mail […] and could carry out my job efficiently.” September 2001

Due to various delays with the building process (see section 1.5.1 for more details), the completion of the new building and the refurbishment of the original adjacent family centre building, many staff were experiencing similar problems due to limited resources, but in a newer office.

Currently, the new family centre building and the original family centre building, which was refurbished, are both open. Although no staff have been formally interviewed since the opening, it seems that the numerous problems with space limitations have been resolved by the extra space.
5.8.3 PACE OF WORK

Time pressure was a problem raised by the vast majority of staff across various settings, in the interviews, at Away Days, and in Small Groups and at other Sure Start meetings. Many expressed the desire to reduce their workload and focus better on what they were already doing. Many appeared to want a period of consolidation to enable them to focus on the current initiatives before starting any more.

“There are things that I am supposed to be doing and I am not doing, even eight weeks into the job because there is no time to do them in. […] I do think that we need to show that we are providing good quality services that people can rely on, otherwise they won’t get used and we will all fail before we start.” November 2000

Some recognised that they could have taken more responsibility personally in managing the number of projects they became involved in:

“And with hindsight I should have been more strong and said, we need to prioritise here rather than trying to do everything and I feel that I kind of colluded in that because it was an exciting project and we wanted to do it.” November 2000

But they found this difficult to balance with the pressure they felt to succeed (both internal and external pressure) and to prove that they were succeeding.

“And you wanted to be seen to be doing well and you kind of measure yourself by [this][…]. And if you are measured by getting lots and lots of things up and running very, very quickly then you think ‘That is what I am supposed to be doing therefore I need to achieve that […].’ And then you put yourself under such tremendous stress that at the end of the day you know that it is impossible to get all this done in such a short space of time and what you needed to do was to spend time getting a couple of things running really well. There is no time to do anything well and then you just get this huge sense of failure because you are just tearing your hair out.” November 2000

One member of staff described her ‘typical’ day as a Sure Start worker:

“I arrive here. I do the [X] visits, I grab any bits of paper that have been sent to me, because I’ll find time to read them. I’ll put them into my bag […] because the briefcase is too full to put anything else in to. I then rush [to] my next job. I arrive late because I’ve had to go and buy some apples […] on the way. I get to my desk […], I eat some food. There’s five more pieces of mail come in, I open three of them. I see […] [parents] non-stop. I solve something on the telephone. Oh, it’s time to go home. I put all those pieces of paper into my bag, and I go home, and then I deal with the children, and I fall asleep because I’m so knackered.” December 2000

103
Another talked about how her working style had changed as a result of the increased workload that she faced:

“I mean there isn’t time to do things. At first I had time to read things, and talk to people and talking to people is the really important thing, but now there isn’t and I hate that […]. When I first started with Sure Start I used to walk between Rose Hill and Littlemore and now I never do that because there isn’t time […] I used to think about things and said hello to people in the street which I think is really important and I used to get to know the area and now I won’t even go on my bike I go in the car it is dreadful.” December 2000

Perhaps an inevitable consequence of the workload staff were carrying and the pressure they felt to succeed (be it pressure from themselves or from others) was that their health was likely to suffer.

“I mean I was in a [X] hour a week post and I’ve been clocking […] twice that many hours a week. And then was taught a harsh lesson by my body that I shouldn’t be doing it.” December 2001

The Director is aware of these issues as the staff are vocal in raising the pressures they feel they are under. Stress levels and workloads of Sure Start staff are currently being investigated by an external consultant through a confidential questionnaire, which has been sent to all staff. It asks questions about how an individual’s workload has changed over time and if they have had any health-related consequences of these changes. The results of the report will give an indication of the effects of working for Sure Start and will be most interesting.

At the most recent Away Day (May 2002) requests for a period of consolidation and a slowing down of work pace were still being made. It was suggested that it might be necessary to pass up opportunities of applying for additional funding.

This is clearly a challenging area and one that is not easy to resolve. Staff are all highly committed to Sure Start and want to make it work. They are also under pressure from the government to make this ‘flagship enterprise’ a success. Their colleagues in the statutory services are also often working under intense time pressures. Although generously funded compared to many initiatives, Sure Start comes with limited resources and is being funded for a limited time period. As discussed below under partnership working, additional funds are available from other sources to supplement Sure Start funding and the temptation to take advantage of these opportunities is great, but this may increase the workload. At the same time, staff who feel under great pressure are less likely to be able to offer to parents the sort of services which can really make a difference to their lives. Enabling people to change requires a lot of time and patience, and this job is hard to do under time pressure. Genuine partnership working also takes time and, as discussed below, the
development of such partnerships is also potentially threatened by time pressure.

This section shows that Sure Start is facing a range of challenges, many of which are likely to be common to programmes elsewhere. The Director, and others involved in the management of the programmes, are aware of the problems and are actively trying to address them.

5.9. MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION

Of the 50 staff currently employed by Sure Start, 47 are employed through a dual accountability model where they hold a contract of employment with Sure Start as well as with their 'parent' agency, which is also the employing authority. Sure Start has Service Agreements with each agency outlining role descriptions and conditions of employment for the dually accountable staff. In practice, this currently means an individual worker is line managed by one of six individuals in Sure Start (the Director, the Sure Start Centre Co-ordinator, the lead Health Visitor, the Special Needs Support Worker, the Asian Families Liaison and Development Worker or the Playroom/Crèche Co-ordinator) as well as an individual in their employing agency.

The advantages of this model are that the individual has two management routes to seek support, and two places to access resources such as training and personal counselling services. It provides an opportunity for an individual to maintain links with professional peers in addition to those with Sure Start staff. This is particularly useful for those staff who need to keep their skills in a practical aspect of their job for professional recognition. For example, midwives need to have a minimum number of hours spent delivering babies in order to retain their qualification.

The dual-management arrangement was viewed as successful by staff.

“Well, I mean I think it fits okay. I mean on occasions when I’ve actually said ‘I need support in helping me to sort this out’ they, both managers have come together and been very positive and very supportive. And a lot of the rest of the time, I’m left to get on with it if you like.”

February 2002

If an individual experiences problems with one manager, they still have another manager to approach for help. If one manager is difficult to access for example, an individual could chose to view this as an opportunity to work independently, as the quote below illustrates, or they could ask their other line manager for support.

“Well, I mean it’s been a boost to my confidence having to prove it to myself, in no way ever criticising [X] but because she […] is involved in so many things, […] she just physically isn’t around to give the support.[…] when she’s there she’s great but she’s not very often there,
you know, so I find I’ve just had to kind of wing it and figure it out for myself.” December 2001

Dual accountability also has potential problems associated with its structure. Workers can feel that they are ‘torn’ between the expectations and requirements of their two managers.

“Obviously my manager from [X agency] wants certain things to be achieved through my role in Sure Start which is absolutely fair enough and […] appropriate […] and if it’s something that is going to benefit the Sure Start area then […] [there’s] absolutely […] no problems with that, it’s just being very careful where the two jobs overlap.” November 2000

Also, either manager could fail to understand what the staff member’s role is when they are working for the other employer. This could be further complicated by a worker being employed in another role for one of those agencies.

“A bit of an issue was the two managers. That my manager […] I don’t think has had a true picture of what my role is [in Sure Start], so she’s seen me as a continuation of what I am [in that agency] rather than something that is different. So that has been quite hard because […], I can’t do anything in […] my Sure Start time that I would normally have done as an [X]. It’s an add-on rather than doing the same […]. What I can do is offer them more time. As [X say] I can see them once a fortnight because that’s my time allowance, that is all I can offer. Whereas I could see them weekly [in my Sure Start role] if they needed it because that would be in addition to what they would get.” November 2000

For this member of staff, there was an initial period that was “quite difficult”, but once the agency manager was clear about what could be done by the member of staff whilst they were in their Sure Start role, this resolved without any real problem.

It appears from the results of a recent survey (Howarth and Fisher, May 2002) commissioned by Sure Start, that of the 14 members of staff they interviewed, 58% did not think the management structure was clear, 21% thought it was clear and the remaining 21% were unsure. The confusion seemed to be in knowing who was accountable for solving problems, and one of the problems that things seemed to “go round in a circle”. The following quote may shed light on the confusion.

“… you get two induction packs. You get a welcome to [your parent agency] […] and an induction pack [from Sure Start] […]. Now for one, you’d have to take 2 or 3 weeks off to work through them anyway, you know, you never get the chance to read them all. But it doesn’t actually make sense who you work for, who you’re responsible [to][…], what area you’re in.” September 2001
The report recommended presenting a clear diagram of lines of management and to provide clear descriptions of work responsibilities. Sure Start is currently gathering role descriptions from staff to collate and circulate for information.

In contrast, when these same staff were asked if they knew who their line manager was, the response was unanimously affirmative and all comments made were positive, such as ‘best line manager I’ve ever had’. It is not clear from the report whether the staff were referring specifically to Sure Start or to their ‘parent’ agency’s organisational structure, but it is implied that an individual is very clear about who they are accountable to and who they are personally managed by. At the same time they feel unsure about the management arrangements for other members of staff, and where problems should be taken if they are inappropriate for their line manager to deal with. As a direct consequence of Howarth and Fisher’s report, a whistle-blowing policy has been agreed to try and clarify this for staff.

A potential problem with this model of employment is the differing pay structures and conditions of employment, such as the amount of annual leave a worker is entitled to. Differences in annual leave entitlement are particularly noticeable at recognised holiday periods where agencies have conflicting policies as to when a person is expected to attend work.

Pay differentials are always difficult to justify to workers who might feel they are doing equivalent jobs for different remuneration.

“I think there are difficulties because of the different employing authorities and […] the huge pay differences between people in Sure Start […] because of their different employment authorities. […] Just because of the nature of the jobs. […] So I am not sure that the pay people are getting reflects their roles in Sure Start and I wonder if that will be a conflict […] because some people are doing really, really good stuff and they are not getting paid very much for it. […] And then […][X job] is a lot of money isn’t it, and you wonder if that role is going to be any bigger or more influential than others. And whether that warrants double somebody else’s salary. What does that mean? Does that mean you are less worth in the project or is it just the luck of the draw about who you are employed by?” November 2000

It appears that there are many advantages to adopting dual accountability arrangement for workers: increasing access to resources, increasing lines of support. And for the agency, it may lead to an increased feeling of ‘ownership’ in the Sure Start programme. It also provides an opportunity for the new Sure Start ‘way of working’ to percolate into the agency’s working practice, which may improve the chances of leaving the working practice behind in the agencies after funding for Sure Start has ceased. Where problems can arise is when the two line managers have conflicting expectations of what the individual worker can or should deliver. The National Sure Start Unit provides no official recommendation as to how staff should be employed, and it appears from the National Evaluation of Sure Start’s summary document,
where similarities and differences between the various programmes are discussed, that this is not a feature that has been highlighted before.

On the whole, staff reported that they found their managers supportive;

“I meet with X monthly, but I think it’s pertinent to say that I do know that if I need her in the meantime, that I can access support […]. An example of that, […] is that I’ve been handling a particularly heavy child protection issue in the last […] few weeks […] and X has been fantastically supportive […].” September 2001

“No, I don’t feel I need more, because the pertinent part of that is that I know it’s available if I should need more. And also, I value the fact that there’s no kind of oppressive line management, […] I think that both my line managers value my skills and experience, […] [and] feel confident [in me]. […] They let me get on with it.” September 2001

Staff reported that in addition to their managers they also felt supported by colleagues; from giving advice ‘across the office’ on how to approach a situation through to the Group Supervision exercise introduced in early February 2001 in the Small Group structure (see section 5.8.1 Meetings and Communication). A number of support structures had been suggested by the staff during the November 2000 Away Day and many of these were implemented. For example, a ‘buddy system’ was implemented to provide a mentoring role to new staff and to make security checks when a colleague made a visit into the home of a parent. As a result of suggestions that the team needed to meet all together on a more informal basis monthly, Team Lunches were initiated where staff could take and share lunch, and spend time together with those that they would not normally meet during their workday. Team Lunches were reviewed after 6 months, and at this point it was agreed to open the invitation to firstly, the parents who were volunteers or attended Sure Start meetings, and secondly, to the ‘whole community’. The re-termed Community Lunches were slightly different in that they took place within the Sure Start Family Centre and the Family Centre volunteer cooks provided food, for a nominal charge.

When discussions were taking place about how the new Small Group and Snaggers meetings would be organised, a member of the research team suggested that the ‘buddy’ system had not been as successful as was hoped. Originally, staff working over 30 hours a week were allocated one or two of the part-time working staff as buddies. They were to keep their buddies informed of important issues that they may have missed on those occasions when they were not working. The allocations were made randomly and this was perhaps why the system was unsuccessful. A member of the research team offered to canvass the opinions of staff on how they perceived the buddy system to be working, and to make suggestions for improvement. They produced a working document in May 2001 that detailed the various aspects of the buddy’s role: making sure information gets through to part-time workers; induction for new staff; safety issues around home visits and issues surrounding covering work in case of illness. This document was discussed by
the Small Groups and then sent to a group that planned and discussed training issues (the Training Steering Group) in June 2001 for them to incorporate the suggestions into their induction training plans.

One member of staff valued the team for its openness to discussion, especially in potential areas of conflict. This was perceived to be in an open and non-confrontational way.

“For me that was a really healthy challenge ’cos I knew exactly where that other person was coming from, there was a debate and lots of people went out the door still talking about that and that’s healthy isn’t it, that’s how things grow and improve and change.” November 2000

On the whole, the staff appreciated the support they receive from their colleagues, be it sharing ideas and making suggestions about how to tackle problems in an informal way within the office or through more structured meetings.

“I actually think we work very well together and although lots of people say ‘Oh, this office has got 19 people in, it is not really big enough’, I actually find that the support offered by working so closely with other people is very beneficial in that sometimes when I haven’t known how to go about getting help for people somebody pipes up ‘Oh, I know what to do there’ and I actually find it very very useful and I feel that the support that people offer is excellent.” November 2000

For the Director, the management and supervision arrangements were different. From her appointment, the Director was accountable to the Steering Group (which became the Board of Trustees) but she had no direct line manager.

Although this was a strong model in terms of minimising the influence any Lead partner might have on the programme’s direction in terms of finances and management, it did mean that the Director had no access to the type of support structures that were in place for the rest of the staff. She was supported through the work of the Management Development Working Group and through 2-monthly meetings with an independent person who acted as a non-line management consultant, but personal support to deal with current political issues was lacking.

Initially, the management structure within Sure Start was very flat. The Director was directly responsible for managing the rest of the staff (along with the line managers from the other agencies). As staff numbers grew, it became clear that this model was not sustainable. The Sure Start Health Visitor took on some of the responsibility for staff management and the appointment of the Centre Co-ordinator in January 2001 eased things more (as discussed in the previous section, these three individuals have now formed a Management Group which formally meets to discuss managerial issues amongst other things).
Lack of support for the Director was an issue identified by the research team early in the development of the programme and at a meeting in October 2000, they recommended to the Director that she set up a formal support structure to provide a space in which to discuss current issues in confidence. At the December 2000 Board meeting it was agreed that this should be implemented and regular ‘supervisory’ meetings were arranged between the Director and a member of the Board. This arrangement appears to be working very well from the point of view of the Director:

“It’s going to be invaluable I think. [...] I’m really [...] appreciative of it for a number of reasons.” March 2001

5.10. PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Partnership working is at the core of Sure Start’s aims and goals, both nationally and locally. There is a range of expectations linked with the concept of partnership working. First and foremost is the sense that by working together, more is achieved than by each sector working separately. Partnerships are expected to achieve a range of objectives: economic, social and physical regeneration; improved efficiency of public services, reducing duplication and bureaucracy; more local input into decision-making; and bringing the business, community and voluntary sector’s expertise and advantages into the public service (Geddes 2000 and Local Strategic Partnerships: Summary, Sure Start Unit). Partnership working is important both at strategic level and amongst staff working on the ground.

Even though there was a perceived culture of inter-agency working in Oxford, Sure Start’s partnership approach was viewed as sufficiently different to feel that it was breaking entirely new ground.

“[...] Oxford - has a kind of identity of ‘We’re good at inter-agency working.’ This is very different.” September 2000

5.10.1 STRATEGIC LEVEL

The challenges of partnership working at strategic level were evident from the beginning. The Director described setting up and developing the local partnership as:

“[...] a very tortuous, politically sensitive, difficult process. Treading terribly carefully through a multitude of interests that are conflicting [...].” September 2000

There were conflicting local views about the meaning of partnership:

“It’s about working differently, challenging existing ways of working. How [...] you work across agencies, [how] you manage to work in partnership with parents and what [...] that actually means. Lovely words, [but] what [do they] [...] actually mean?” September 2000
One partner agency described a model in which a lead partner or core service provided the ‘glue’ that held all other services together. Another suggested a model in which the services were like the threads of a rope wound together, but distinct from each other. These models have different implications for working together. In the first, the core service is disproportionately important and powerful, setting the ethos of service delivery for the programme. It allows the core service to define what other services are needed. Early in the history of the programme, as the lead partner, PEEP regarded itself as a ‘glue’ service. Because PEEP felt that it was delivering services covering all four Sure Start objectives it was inclined to oppose suggestions that other services (for example speech and language or parenting education and support) were necessary. The second model, the rope, is a more egalitarian model, in which there is greater room for diversity. This model is less risky in that success is not so dependent on the performance of one agency, but it is less likely to deliver consistency of approach.

5.10.2 COMPETITION BETWEEN AGENCIES

Power and control are important issues in all partnerships and are crucial for the success of the partnership. As discussed in Chapter 1, the short time frame for submission of original bids probably meant that tensions about power and control of Sure Start were not sufficiently resolved at the outset. PEEP believed that the initial invitation to bid for a Sure Start in Oxford was sent to them directly in the expectation that they be the lead partner and accountable body. There was some resistance from others to an independent charity taking this role, and one of the statutory agencies felt instead that it should take this leadership role. A compromise proposal that another statutory agency and PEEP should share the role of lead partner was not accepted by PEEP, who felt that only one body could take such an accountable role. It felt that it was not being given appropriate recognition locally for the key role it believed was envisaged for it by those planning Sure Start at the national level. At this stage in the debate, two of these key agencies considered withdrawing from the process of developing Sure Start and there were calls for the entire local Sure Start proposal to be re-thought. As described in Chapter 1, the proposal by the PEEP trustees and others that the local programme become, after an interim period, an independent charitable body – with its own management board – proved acceptable to all parties. The Director of the programme viewed this process as difficult but ultimately successful because, by adopting independent charitable status, the Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start has avoided the kind of problems that can arise from domination by a lead partner, and that have been experienced by other programmes.

“I think being swallowed up by any partner is a problem for Sure Start programmes per se and so if your finances and your management and everything is going through a statutory body, some programmes are finding it very difficult to actually access their own […]” March 2001
In spite of these early difficulties, all the agencies involved in the initial discussions have remained involved in, and committed to, the development of Sure Start. They are all represented on the Board and actively contribute to the Management Development Group.

Issues related to power and control were also evident in deciding which agency should host staff appointed to fulfil new roles. This was evident in services for children with special needs, an area of concern to three partner agencies. Two agencies were keen to host the post and there were valid arguments in favour of either. The issue was resolved when it was proposed that a strong element of the new role should be to foster inter-agency cooperation. This was an example of competition within the partnership that was eventually resolved in a way that was advantageous to all partners.

5.10.3 TIME PRESSURES

Partnership working takes time, and the time pressure was something that was referred to as a problem, both for strategic partnerships and for those operating at ground level. The importance of time pressure and the need to reduce it has been well described above, but many staff raised this as a particular problem in relation to partnership working on the ground, which was regarded as very demanding of time. Two additional issues were raised in this respect.

The consequences of time pressures were evident during the early stages of the development of the programme. Instead of adopting a co-ordinated approach in which interested agencies met, discussed and agreed their proposals, each partner submitted independent proposals for service development and the lead partner (PEEP) produced a co-ordinated plan. Lack of discussion at the planning stage meant that serious issues did not emerge and could not be resolved at this stage and some of these resurfaced at a later date. For example, while it was agreed that PEEP would take the lead partner role initially, there does not seem to have been agreement about PEEP’s role in relation to that of other agencies, nor about what PEEP could expect from Sure Start in the way of financial support after the first funding phase. The tensions that resulted were difficult to resolve. The voluntary and community sectors are often at a disadvantage in partnership working in terms of the resources they are able to commit. For these agencies, whose funding is often insecure, time spent working on partnership is in direct competition with time spent on securing funding and this could have contributed to the tension.

A further problem arose because discrepancies between the way in which the NHS Community Health Trust calculated its costs and overheads, and the way in which other organisations calculated theirs were not identified and discussed at the time. As a result the Health Authority charged a much higher rate of overheads than other agencies. This issue was a thorny one for many months, until the dissolution of the Community Health Trust and the formation of the Primary Care Trust enabled a line to be drawn under the past, and a new agreement formed which conformed to Sure Start’s requirements for overhead cost calculations.
Service integration at the ground level took more time and resources than anyone had expected. This work was also seen as in conflict with service provision.

“I think that a lot of energy goes into building teams. And I think that some of that energy is taken from seeing patients and dealing with families.” December 2000

People spoke repeatedly of the dilemma they faced when managing their time between service delivery, which most people felt was their first duty, and participating in the development of the services and the programme as a whole.

“It wasn’t thought through enough about how much we actually have to take part in the meeting[s]. I think there was a feeling […] from [the agency’s] side, they probably felt we wouldn’t have to go to these meetings, but from the Sure Start side, obviously that’s the way they’re developing their policies, and trying things out.” May 2001

Complaints about paperwork abounded, and although some of these were issues about unnecessary paperwork, most paperwork was generated in the process of consultation. A few felt over-consulted, and questioned whether this was the best use of their time.

One way of circumventing time-consuming meetings is for large teams to split up into smaller teams. Both formal and informal ‘teams within teams’ have appeared in Sure Start. The staff of the Family Centre, partly because of the shared physical location and partly because of the history of the family centre, operated in this way. Sometimes these informal groups appeared to others as factions and those who were not part of the team felt excluded and marginalized. To address some of these problems with formal meetings, the staff proposed a Small Group structure (see 5.8.1 Meetings and Communication section above for more detail) in which six or seven people would meet to provide support, encouragement and share information. The Director aims in future to implement a cross-service planning function in which small teams meet around a common purpose or goal rather than because they share the same location or employing agency. This may ease time pressure problems but is not likely to solve the problems that can result from the inevitable formation of informal groups from which others feel excluded.

5.10.4 OTHER PARTNERSHIPS – PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

Private sector involvement in the programme was evident from the start in the participation on the Board of a local businessman, who was also a trustee of PEEP. Recently, the Co-op has become a partner in a project which is connected with, but not situated within, the Sure Start project – the Neighbourhood Nurseries initiative. This was a government initiative to increase the provision of good quality, affordable childcare in disadvantaged
areas where people have traditionally not had access to nurseries. Such a facility was thought potentially valuable to parents in the Sure Start area.

As discussed earlier, Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start has become involved in other partnership initiatives, which are important for Sure Start but not directly its concern. Parents in Sure Start expressed the need for more provision for the over 4s and as a result, the Director was instrumental in setting up another partnership which put in successful bids to Connexions and Communities Against Drugs. The Director described this process as a

“[…fascinating example of a whole range of resources and partners getting together, and at a very senior level.” August, 2001

In a recent independent evaluation of this ‘Young People’s Project’ when reporting the views of local adults and young people and agency representatives;

Sure Start was described as strategically pivotal to the project – a catalyst rather than a delivery agent.

(Dewhurst and Spafford 2002, p24)

5.10.5 GROUND LEVEL
Staff talked about many examples of successful partnership working on the ground. This ranged from simple things like recording information in a way that could be shared across agencies to the opportunity for understanding more about different people’s roles.

“[…we were all saying it the other day, it is fantastic working in the office […] because there we are with education, with speech and language, with health, […] [with the Asian support worker]. There is so much difference coming together and actually we are listening to each other saying ‘Do you know I never realized that was part of your remit as an [X] […] and how can we do that better?’.” November 2000

5.10.6 SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE
Several staff pointed to the benefits of sharing knowledge and experience with people from other service backgrounds, within the flexible and stimulating environment of Sure Start. This was an experience that few of them had in their previous work environments.

“You do one of those group exercises […] a scenario with somebody from a different background from yourself and it’s like ‘I never knew that, wow I never thought of it like that’ and it’s about how we encompass people’s needs by being able to think more broadly about what the issues are.” November 2000

This shared knowledge and experience led to co-operation and co-ordination between the different agencies, but in some instances this took a while to
achieve. A point of early tension was that both staff and parents at the existing Family Centre in Rose Hill felt that they were being ‘taken over’ and transformed by Sure Start, in ways they did not necessarily approve. As a result of time-consuming work by the Director and others this tension has now eased, and the head of the Family Centre was able to say in 2000 that:

“I think at one time I could have been a bit negative maybe […] and I often thought this is being mished up and mashed up with Sure Start when it is really Family Centres, it is something that we have always done. But now I can certainly see there is far more to it than that and the Family Centre has certainly benefited.” November 2000

5.10.7 INFORMATION SHARING

The sharing of information was an issue that demanded a lot of partnership working. Sure Start staff wanted to get away from using ‘traditional agency language’ which might put local families off, but still needed to be able to communicate clearly with other agencies (for example on child protection issues). They also needed to work in ways that protected confidentiality.

“It’s important that people own […], their recording, [and] […] in the event […] [of a] […] child protection concern, […] it’s important that we follow recording practices that are acceptable to […] other agencies […] So I’ve asked [training co-ordinator], […] if we can have a training session on recording. Because we all come from different backgrounds, and some people within the team don’t […] have [a […] background that says, ‘Oh I know how to record’, so that’s really important, and everybody’s really pleased that that’s going to happen.” September 2001

One early challenge, which was successfully surmounted, was the way in which health visitors recorded the ethnicity of the families they saw. The ethnicity categories used by local Health Visitors did not correspond directly to those used by the Sure Start Unit and collating this data involved checking through records by hand to extract the necessary information. As a result of Sure Start, the Health Authority agreed to change their ethnicity categories and this change was also implemented county-wide.

5.10.8 DEVELOPING A NEW WAY OF WORKING

One of the changes of which staff spoke was the potential that partnerships offered for developing a different way of working within Sure Start. There were several aspects to this, including a short circuiting of the referral system to get additional help for families, both those who had come to the attention of Sure Start staff and those who had come to the attention of county-wide services but happened to live in the area.

Some of this was seen as an advantage of having a dual-management arrangement where Sure Start workers were managed by their parent agency as well as by Sure Start. The role of the Family Services Co-ordinator who is
managed jointly by Home-Start and Sure Start, but keeps her links with Social Services, was important in this respect. She, for example, enabled social workers to think about contacting Sure Start to help families they encountered who lived in the Sure Start area. Attempts were made to get a system introduced which:

“As soon as that first phone call comes in from a family, from a health visitor, from a school, saying ‘I’m really concerned about this family’, or ‘Please help me, […] they would say […] ‘What’s your postcode?’, and it’s like, ‘ping!’ […] ‘That’s the Sure Start area’, and that immediately triggers […] a letter [to the family] that says, “You’re in the Sure Start area, you are in the best place in the world’, […] , and [another] immediately to let us know.” September 2001

In order to achieve this, the Family Services Co-ordinator regularly attended Social Services’ team meetings to act as a constant reminder of the existence of Sure Start and the services it could offer. This link is proving successful with Social Services now contacting Sure Start at very early stages in their involvement with some families. But it is not yet foolproof.

“They still don’t remember us for every child protection case conference”. August 2001

The Family Services Co-ordinator sets up a link worker for families in the area. At present 147 families have such a service, and the goal is one for every family. This link worker allows Sure Start to protect families in need of multi-agency support.

“We are now able to support this family, […] I can be a spokesperson, with that parent’s permission, to say, ‘She isn’t able to cope with all this’[…] Sure Start have been able to highlight that this is too much for that family, and rather than you all coming in […] (rightly because you have that area of expertise and that area of concern), […] please acknowledge that […] you’re bombarding one family […].” September 2001

Achieving changes in the way statutory agencies work has taken a lot of work and time.

“When I first came into post […] relatively few people in the team were […] going about saying, ‘Sure Start, Sure Start, Sure Start, […], this is what we can do’, and [they were] […] not even recognizing how much, and how responsive and how creatively Sure Start could respond to people’s needs. But […] word of mouth […] takes a long time, it takes a while for people to know, ‘Oh, Sure Start, oh right! Maybe we should ring Sure Start on this!’” September 2001

Achieving change in the way non-statutory sector agencies work is perhaps less demanding but can be equally important. These services too have achieved a level of joint working with both statutory and non-statutory
agencies that, as the Director pointed out, would not have happened before Sure Start.

“You wouldn’t get a male project worker going up to a Relate worker and getting a family seen straight away. You wouldn’t get a Relate worker doing a home visit with a Health Visitor.” January 2002

In offering services in this new way, it was seen as a major advantage that Sure Start was a service for all in the catchment area. Staff reported feeling that they could present services to parents in a positive light.

“It’s like, ‘Fantastic, you live in the Sure Start area’, it doesn’t matter who you are, you are entitled to all our services.” September 2001

And of course they too were aiming to work in a different way with families experiencing multiple challenges.

“Because we are not judgemental in Sure Start. It is not ‘Oh my god, this is a really complex family’ it is like our approach is ‘How can we help?’” September 2001

Sure Start staff aimed to work in a different way not just with parents, but also with children. Consideration of children’s rights was built into Sure Start plans from early on and partnership working enabled a Sure Start Children’s Rights Group to be set up. This group looked at Sure Start publicity (with a view to making it more child friendly), thought about ways of implementing a Children’s Rights Checklist in all services, and developed a ‘Children’s Choices’ book where pictures and text are collected of examples of good work. This group also looked at ways of making the Community Café at the Family Centre more child friendly and brought about the introduction of Children’s Rights training.

5.11. DATABASE

In order to show who is accessing services, the government requires all Sure Start programmes to collect monitoring information on a monthly basis. Due to the partnership-working model, it was inevitable that Sure Start would need to access data held by other agencies. Collecting and sharing information across agencies is notoriously difficult. It raises many issues related to confidentiality and to whom access is granted and requires strict boundaries on how the data will be used. Negotiations with agencies about data sharing practices were formalised in Service Delivery Agreement contracts, but formalising agreements at the strategic level does not always guarantee data sharing at the ground level. Sure Start programmes are continuously changing, and the services they offer are also changing. Databases need to be flexible to cope with these changes, as well as being substantial enough to manipulate the amount of data collected by the programme. Database development and maintenance is a substantial job and requires someone with expert knowledge and might have been efficiently carried out centrally.
It appears, however, that at national level the Sure Start Unit felt that the diversity between programmes was such that a standard system could not be recommended. This view was disputed by those working at local level who would have welcomed being able to directly compare their work on their database with the work of other Sure Start programmes:

“And I could ask more about how their database is set up, what they’re doing, because […] everybody seems to have got their own experts in to set up the database. The different prices are really varied but what they were trying to say to the government at various meetings is ‘Could we not have the bare bones of something that’s consistent across all of these and then we could tailor it?’ but [the] Sure Start Unit have said ‘No […] we want them to […] work it out themselves individually’. So it’s a bit difficult.” April 2001

The Director felt very strongly that the Sure Start Unit’s approach was the wrong one, and sent a letter to the Sure Start Unit on behalf of Regional Programme Managers requesting a central database to reduce the duplication and effort and waste of resources. The Unit refused, partly on the basis that one of the challenges for individual programmes was in improving inter-agency working. The implication being that development of a database at local level would contribute to the integration of all the involved services.

So, like all other Sure Start programmes, the local programme developed their own database – which they have termed the Mapping Database. The original version was first created by an Oxford City Council worker in 1999 as an ‘in kind contribution’ to the Sure Start programme. It contained the names and addresses of all of the children under 4 years of age living within the Sure Start catchment area (as supplied by the Health Authority from their child health system). It was planned to enter information on service usage in recognised ‘fields’ corresponding to the services that the programme offered. This did not happen initially and up until July 2000 only paper records of the services used by children were maintained.

A series of meetings were held in the autumn of 2000 to decide on the best way of organising the data on service uptake. At one of these meetings it was agreed that the database would need to undergo some major changes. A member of the research team attended this meeting and recommended that an external agency be commissioned to manage this process. A budget of £1000 had originally been allocated for information management in the Delivery Plan but this was insufficient to fund the work even when supplementary funds were identified from an underspend on staffing. A new consultancy firm was identified in September 2000 and an additional amount of £6000 was agreed by the Board to pay for changes and ongoing support to the database.

Quotes from two members of staff illustrate the feelings at this time:
“I think it was the question of not getting in the expert – I think there was a potential conflict between the idea that everybody had to be onboard with it, a lot of people needed to come to meetings to feel ownership and identifying the point at which there needed to be additional expertise brought in and I don’t think that was done right. So I think what happened was a lot of people were working on something feeling perhaps quite frustrated and not able to move on. But then that is the whole issue as to what extent you say the community and the workers develop this expertise and to what extent do you get a specialist in. But to me it felt like trying to build a building and the specialism required to do the wiring, the electricity, everybody just trying to put in their halfpennyworth and it [was] just going round and round and round and not moving on.” December 2000

“It was a meeting like the database management ones that we have early on where we kind of got together and said, ‘You can’t organise information this way for a database. A database won’t deal with it that way, it needs to be in hierarchies like a filing system, you need to make a first choice and then make choices from that one.’ So that involved a really big re-think and at that stage, the person who’d set it up was no longer providing support. They set it up and kind of handed it over. […]it was suggested that they got some database expert in to do it, and that’s where the going out to tender and the identifying [the consultancy] [came from].” April 2001

The process of developing the database was therefore complex, but gathering the data also proved problematic. The information required was, in some cases, difficult to get due to the way in which information was being gathered and organised by the agency collecting the information. For example, as mentioned above in section 5.10 Partnership Working, the National Sure Start Unit required ethnicity information on the Sure Start children and their carers but the categories that they used did not correspond to those that were currently in use by the Community Health Trust that was collecting that information. The Trust agreed to change their data collecting practices in order to provide this information. However, this meant that a locum health visitor needed to search through past records individually to try and gather the information retrospectively so it could be entered into the database. The negotiations and person hours required in this processes did not appear in the delivery plan, as they were unforeseen.

Negotiations with agencies about data sharing practices were formalised in Service Delivery Agreement contracts but formalising agreements at the strategic level did not always guarantee data sharing at the ground level.

“They know it, they know the information, but it is a fag for them to collect it for us.” November 2000

For this member of staff, they felt some of the difficulties were due to Sure Start’s commitment to partnership working. Specifically, working with staff in existing agencies rather than employing completely new staff to do the work.
“You see, other areas are just taking out [the] […] existing services and just putting their own [workers] in, […] they can do it all themselves.”
November 2000

Collecting such detailed information on service users was new to some staff and many felt uncomfortable asking for personal details on first contact:

“If I met you for the first time, I wouldn’t come up to you and say ‘What’s your surname and where do you live and your date of birth?’ you know, […] it takes weeks, months maybe. You need to get their confidence don’t you? So that means the database is never true. Cos you haven’t got those true records on.” April 2001

In fact, some workers expressed a dislike of collecting information about people per se, and issues about confidentiality were raised by those services that offered confidential advice such as counselling services. As a way of addressing some of these concerns, the programme came up with a consent process which allowed users to withdraw their permission for Sure Start to hold any information regarding themselves or their child (see section 1.5.2).

For the majority of staff, the monthly monitoring forms were seen as an additional bit of paperwork that was low on their priority list given their busy working practices:

“No I think people have seen it as ‘we give information to Sure Start’, I don’t think people have realised that it is a tool for their own evaluation of what they are doing.” December 2000

But for a few, they hoped that it could be used to improve their service delivery;

“I see that as the main purpose of having it, to assess our own practice and assess our own reach.” December 2000

Using the information gathered by staff to inform working practices was not wholly reliant on a fully functioning database. Paper records of who used services were being collected but the following quote implies that for one working group, the service uptake data was not used to inform service planning.

“I think one of the things we need to do in Sure Start is make sure that the working groups get really clear feedback about uptake for the services they set up […]. That happened today in our working group for the first time in my experience. […] We set up something, […] and we got numbers and numbers aren’t everything but I think that needs to be looked at […] After all the planning going on we need to know quite regularly how many families have used a service in order to inform our planning. […] I was surprised that nobody else had asked for those
numbers – commented on the fact that we hadn’t got a report back about how much it was being used by families.” December 2000

Another member of staff was particularly concerned that the questions they raised about the database and how the information was being collected were not being listened to. They spoke of a “standard reply” to their questions of “We’ll look into that”. The concern for this member of staff was that they would not be able to check whether they were helping to meet Sure Start’s targets and therefore prove to anyone that they were making a difference. The delays in providing accurate summaries of service usage from the database in an accessible form have led to frustrations for staff. Using anecdotal evidence of service usage or paper records to inform about the value of a service is possible but it could lead to prejudices against the database and data collection per se.

It seems that the level of funding needed for commissioning and developing the database was underestimated in the delivery plan. The amount of work required to enable the capture of accurate service usage also seems to have been underestimated and the extent of this work does not seem to have been appreciated at national level. The problems experienced with the development of the database are likely to be common to many Sure Starts but support from Sure Start at a national level could have prevented some of these.

Much has changed with regard to the local database over the last year and the current version will, in due course, be able to offer more detailed information such as service usage by individual year age groups and the frequency of service usage by children. The importance of accurate information on service usage is referred to in Chapter 3, and continued development of the database is a key area for monitoring over the next phase of the research.

5.12. VISION OF THE FUTURE

All staff were asked if they felt the Sure Start area had changed and how they saw the future. All staff felt that the area had changed. The number and range of changes staff would like to see was large, encompassing changes they’d like to see in terms of partnership working, the services Sure Start delivers and the community (both the physical environment and the members of the community). These included:

Changes within the organisation;

- Either a continuation of, or improvement in partnership working with other Sure Start team members
- Either a continuation of, or improvement in partnership working with outside agencies

Changes in the services (and infrastructure);
More of the same and some ideas for new services
More services in Littlemore specifically
Look at the services already being provided and continue those that are shown to be effective
Use the database figures more to inform the planning of services
Extend the reach of Sure Start to include those children that are 4 or older
More training and support to provide really excellent early years education
A period of consolidation
More ‘movement’ between the Rose Hill and Littlemore areas – residents going to the adjacent area to use services
To be in the new buildings (Rose Hill and Littlemore)

Changes in the community;

The community making more use of the services, especially those members that were in great need
The community becoming more involved in the development and management of Sure Start, not just using the services
Different ways of consulting with the community
Parents engaging more with their children
Members of the community more supportive of each other
Community approaching Sure Start with ideas for services they would like
More racial harmony

We asked staff if they felt that the community would welcome these changes. On the whole, they were in agreement that the community would welcome the change although some (42%) said the response was likely be mixed.

“People will welcome change if it’s positive, won’t if it’s negative.”
September 2000

Some (25%) added that it would depend on the quality of the changes.

“And I think if you can begin to demonstrate that you are meeting needs as people perceive them for themselves, then that’s when people begin to value what you are providing.” November 2000

5.14 SUMMARY

We interviewed 31 members of Sure Start staff over a 17-month period. A small number were interviewed more than once. Staff came from a wide range of professions and disciplines and most had heard about Sure Start through their workplace or professional networks. A quarter of the staff were local parents, most with children under 4 years. Staff who were parents felt that they brought to the job the advantage of local knowledge and acceptance by local parents, but also saw disadvantages in the need to maintain strict boundaries and, for some, in feeling underqualified for the role. Most staff had joined Sure Start because they liked the ethos of the programme. Those from
the statutory services were particularly enthusiastic about the opportunity to work in a preventive way. Those that spoke of this said that such opportunities were not available in the statutory services due to resource constraints.

Almost all staff felt that they had been offered the opportunity to influence Sure Start; the influence of which they spoke ranged from encouraging parental uptake of services to setting up new initiatives. Most staff talked about the listening culture within Sure Start, but a number would have liked to have more influence. Time pressures, or the feeling that decisions were taken before they were in post were the reasons offered for this. A few staff reported feeling too much influence.

Staff described a wide range of Sure Start successes and were enthusiastic in their descriptions of the value of the new services. Successes included providing good services, making a difference to families and in the working environment. The latter ranged from increased collaborative working, through to being able to meet previously unmet need and new services which families really appreciated.

The most common challenges of which staff spoke related to internal organisational issues; in handling conflict and disagreement within Sure Start, in the unsupportive attitudes amongst partner agencies and in handling problems relating to targeting. Staff were most likely to raise the issue of conflict between Rose Hill and Littlemore communities. The most common internal organisational issues mentioned were meetings and communication and the pace and volume of work. The majority of staff mentioned these issues. Time pressure in particular was described as having a negative impact on service delivery, on partnership working and on staff health and well-being. These important issues are likely to be common to other Sure Starts. The Director is well aware of them and is addressing them in an ongoing way. Changes to the organisation of meetings had a positive impact, but problems finding time for meeting continues to be an issue.

Staff also spoke of problems that had been encountered early on in the development of Sure Start when existing services expressed resentment at the feeling that they were being taken over. These problems seemed to have been resolved by the end of the time frame for the evaluation as service providers and community members, who were originally antagonistic, showed evidence of appreciating what Sure Start was doing. Another issue of concern to staff early in the project, which was resolved with the opening of new buildings, was office space.

This Sure Start’s management structure, with dual accountability between two agencies, is working well. Staff reported that their managers were supportive and the working arrangements that had been set up meant that they also felt supported by colleagues. Lack of support for the Director, an issue in the early phases of the programme, was successfully resolved with the identification of a Board member who agreed to act as ‘supervisor’.
The development of the database, which monitors usage of Sure Start services, has given rise to some problems. There were two issues – a technological solution to the handling and analyses of large amounts of relational data, and the data collection itself. There was a strong feeling that effort and resources were wasted because the National Sure Start Unit was unwilling to address the technological solution by creating a prototype database that local programmes could adapt for their own purposes. Due to a lack of sufficient resources, there was a delay developing a functional local database. Issues related to data gathering have also needed surmounting. Individual agencies have needed to change their data collection methods and issues surrounding confidentiality have had to be overcome. As shown in Chapter 3, the programme now has a functional database, which can produce reasonably accurate data, but further planned developments are necessary before the database achieves its potential.

Finally, staff have a positive vision of the future, but recognise that additional changes in the organisation, the community and the services offered could improve the programme further.
6 OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we provide an overview of the key findings of this evaluation and draw conclusions about those findings. These conclusions are framed in the context of the limitations of the methodology used. The ways in which the evaluation has contributed to the development of the programme are outlined together with the key findings in terms of parents and staff perspectives – positive and negative. Important findings related to participation in the development of Sure Start services and in partnership working are described. Aspects of this programme that have worked well are listed and possible future developments outlined.

6.1 THE METHODOLOGY AND ITS LIMITATIONS

This evaluation is based on data gathered by a variety of methods: interviews, participant observation, diaries, documentation and data on service usage. Together, these methods have enabled the gathering of a rich dataset. For the most part, the data tell a coherent story of the establishment of an exciting new programme with many successes and a small number of problem areas. However, whilst most staff were interviewed, some on more than one occasion, they were interviewed over the course of the project and responses reflect the different time periods, as well as different perspectives. In addition, the staff interview schedule did not cover every possible topic and some things, which might have been important, may have not been mentioned.

We interviewed a small number of parents relative to the number who live in Rose Hill and Littlemore. The sample was selected purposively to cover users and non-users of Sure Start services, the two geographical areas of Rose Hill and Littlemore and different ethnic groupings. This sample was large enough for us to have elicited most of the more commonly held parent views about Sure Start; however, minority views may well not have been identified and the responses cannot be said to ‘represent’ those of all parents. In particular, the proportion of parents identified as holding one view or another may be different from the proportions that might have been elicited from a representative community survey. We also interviewed parents over the course of a year and the comments that parents make about services and initiatives do not necessarily relate to current provision. In commenting on what they thought of particular services, parents could also only talk about those they had used. Services and initiatives which were not mentioned may well have been seen as very valuable by other parents. Interviews give researchers insights that are difficult to gather in other ways, and allow them to investigate issues with participants to ensure that there is mutual understanding. However, this is a labour intensive method and the number of interviews that can be carried out is necessarily limited. It is important that the data presented here are interpreted in the light of the methodology and the knowledge that the evaluation represents a snapshot that may not have complete coverage.
Although we are unable to offer more than a retrospective look at the development of Sure Start before the evaluation began, some of the gaps in the data will be covered in the next phase of the evaluation. As we reported in the methods section, we administered a questionnaire to stakeholders and analysis of this data is still in progress. Stakeholders’ views are not therefore presented in the report. However, the responses stakeholders made to the questionnaire and the comments of stakeholders at Board meetings and events have contributed to the understanding of the research team and the way in which data have been interpreted. We have not included the small number of comments we gathered in this time period about the potential for services to be mainstreamed. Stakeholders’ views are important in this respect and we will therefore deal with this topic in the next evaluation report.

We have also been unable to provide detailed comment on some of the changes that were observed during this period. Whilst parents were asked to reflect on changes they had noticed in the area, the programme was still in its early development phase and many changes would not yet have become obvious. In particular, the data collection phase for this project finished before the official opening of the new Sure Start Centre in Rose Hill in June 2002. This was an important event and one that was attended by an estimated 450-500 people, most from the local community and many of who were ‘new faces’. This opening may have marked a turning point in the development of Sure Start, but the reporting of this event will need to wait until the end of the next phase of the evaluation.

Early on in the evaluation the decision was taken not to involve the research team in the monitoring of local targets and milestones or the review of start point data. These aspects are therefore not mentioned in the report. Comparing changes in child development and community social capital in Rose Hill and Littlemore with those in another comparable part of Oxford without a Sure Start had to be abandoned because our application for additional research funding failed.

The analyses of the qualitative data we have collected have, however, been comprehensive. They have been entered into the programme N5 and every comment has been coded and analysed. Whilst the perspectives of the research team inevitably play a part in the interpretation and presentation of the results, we have endeavoured to be as objective as possible in representing what we were told and what we observed. Direct quotes were used to provide the flavour of the comments, and as evidence to support our interpretations.

The quantitative information we have presented on uptake and usage of services is based on the data provided by commissioned services that are entered onto the computerised Sure Start database (known as the Mapping Database). The database is still under development and because of this, some of the data are incomplete. They are likely to be more accurate for some services than others. The fact that those presented are likely to
represent a minimum estimate of usage make the high usage rates all the more impressive.

6.2 CONTRIBUTION OF THE EVALUATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SURE START

This report represents a synthesis of the findings of the evaluation to date, and the Sure Start team already know many of these findings. Using an action research approach, important findings, which might have an impact on the development of the programme, have already been fed back to the Sure Start team. Our attempts to combine confidential interview techniques with immediate feedback of problems in a way that was in keeping with the empowering approach of Sure Start seem to have met with success. The methods that we adopted were developed after careful reflection from many people. We maintained the essential principle (on which ethical consent for the evaluation was granted) that the data we gathered had to remain confidential unless the participants gave permission for non-confidential use. Otherwise, it would be have been difficult for participants to speak to us openly. If participants did speak of problems we encouraged them to feed them back directly to the Director or other appropriate member of staff. In many cases the process of giving voice to concerns, reflecting on them and being encouraged to act, resulted in direct spontaneous feedback in which the role of the research team might not have been obvious. In other cases, where a sensitive issue was voiced and the participant was not willing to feed it back directly, their issue was logged. If a second participant voiced the same concern it was possible for interviewers to let them know that others had voiced similar concerns. This, in some cases, provided the necessary encouragement to enable direct feedback to occur. This somewhat tortuous process was deemed necessary for issues raised by staff, many of who could easily be recognised from the content of their concerns. It was not deemed necessary for data collected in parent interviews where, because of the much larger number of parents in the community, participants could remain relatively anonymous.

As a result of these methods, the influence of the research team may not always be obvious, particularly if comments about services were also being made spontaneously. However, the added voice of the research team, or of those who were encouraged to voice their concerns directly by the research team, is likely to have added strength to the issues being given serious consideration. Using these methods, the evaluation played a role in enabling the development of more parent-friendly policies in Littlemore and in developing a more inclusive approach to the recycling and loan services. It has also supported the development of meeting structures that better met the needs of staff. It has helped Sure Start rethink the structure and process of the meetings of the Board and other working groups to meet concerns that parents who came to these meetings sometimes felt excluded and disempowered. It also provided the Director with the opportunity to reflect on her need for support in her complex but isolated role as executive director of an independent charity with powerful stakeholders, multiple providers, and a
very small administrative team. As a result, she arranged supervision and support sessions for herself with one of the stakeholder members of the Board.

In some of these instances, other forces of change have been at work, and it is often impossible to tease out the influence of the research relative to these in bringing about change. In some cases, it may have been the combination of forces that was important.

As a result of the various methods of feedback, members of the Sure Start team and parents in the community already know some results of the evaluation and thus, to this extent, the evaluation has already been successful. The findings are reported here, not for the immediate benefit of the local Sure Start, but for completeness and for the information of those from elsewhere who may be interested in the development of this Sure Start programme. In addition, in writing this report all aspects of the evaluation have been drawn together and reflected on, and further insights have been gained and conclusions drawn. These are elaborated in this overview.

6.3 PARENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON ROSE HILL, LITTLEMORE AND SURE START

The two geographical areas in which Sure Start is based provide a promising setting for a community development programme such as Sure Start. Parents reported a high level of social support for practical issues. Most parents had people they could turn to for help if they were in difficulty and many parents gave examples of people looking out for each other in the community. However, it appears this sense of support is compartmentalised; parents described cliques and groups that they felt very separate from, sometimes through personal choice because they did not like the other groups and sometimes because they felt excluded or not liked by them.

The parents who were interviewed reported a high level of commitment to the area, only a small number were keen to move, and most parents made favourable comments when comparing their neighbourhood with others in Oxford. However, parents also described the physical environment as unattractive, the housing situation as appalling, and raised safety as an important issue. They were concerned about street crime, vandalism, the state of the parks or open spaces and the antisocial behaviour of older children and adolescents. Racism was another negative aspect of the area mentioned by a number of parents and also by staff.

There were too few interviews reporting on changes for conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which parents have noticed changes in the area. However one of the three parents interviewed after the unofficial opening of the new Sure Start Centre (but before the official opening) in Rose Hill commented very favourably on the way in which it added to the neighbourhood. Data on the use of the playroom suggests that the new building did attract a new clientele, but it is not yet clear whether this will be
sustained, and whether parents who came in for a ‘look-see’ will return for regular use. The data presented here, are useful because the represent a baseline from which change can be documented in future evaluations.

Almost all the parents who had used Sure Start services were very enthusiastic about them and had very positive comments to make. One parent described one of the services as ‘life saving’ for her. Individual parents were particularly appreciative of OXPIP, speech therapy, outreach services, PEEP, the community café and their role as volunteers, the new child health clinics and the availability of drop-in advice on health issues, the lending and recycling services, Sure Start outings and trips, and the free transport services and group parenting programmes. Parents who were members of ethnic minorities reported that services were culturally inclusive. It is, however, important to note that many parents singing the praise of these services were unaware that they were Sure Start services. Interviews with parents recruited because they thought that they were not users of Sure Start services were interesting in this respect. Three out of the 18 had never been touched by Sure Start services and one was no longer using them. However, the rest of those interviewed as non-users turned out to be users.

Parents had few negative things to say about Sure Start services. The target age group of Sure Start was the most common complaint, as many people felt more concerned about older children and adolescents than about the under 4s. Others felt that they had equal or greater need than those with access to Sure Start services, but were unfairly excluded simply because their children were outside the age range.

Income-based targeting was another problem area. The recycling and lending service that was originally free only to those on benefits came in for criticism in this respect. Both the fact of targeting and the way in which they were told they were not eligible was a problem. Some parents felt discriminated against. Those parents who commented on services offering free child care to those on benefits were more divided; some feeling that it was appropriate for this service to go to those most in need, others feeling hard done by. Geographical targeting was reported as a problem for the one parent we interviewed who lived one street outside of the catchment area, and this issue was raised by a number of staff. This is an inevitable and insurmountable problem associated with targeting, and Sure Start staff are continuing to consider how best to handle it. Meanwhile access to the recycling and loan service has been widened. Advertising for the service is now more explicit in describing who can benefit and staff have been advised on how to describe availability. Perhaps this difference was due to the clear advertising of the transport service compared to the unclear advertising around the Lending and Recycling service, something that has now changed. If this is true, in future investigations one would expect a similar mix of views towards the Lending and Recycling service as there are towards the childcare service.

Other negative comments about services have related to parents in Littlemore feeling like ‘poor relatives’. Serious delays to the building programme in Littlemore, mainly attributable to delay in approval at national level, have
exacerbated this. The problem is one that some Rose Hill parents have also noticed, suggesting that it is now Littlemore’s turn.

6.4 NUMBERS OF PARENTS USING SERVICES

Figures provided by the mapping database support parent reports that Sure Start services are popular. These quantitative data suggest that over 80% of 0-3 year-olds living in the area have had at least one contact with a Sure Start service and this figure is likely to be an underestimate. For example, only seven children are recorded as having benefited from trips whereas most trips included several coach loads of children and families. Some of these families will have been non-‘Sure Start’ children but even taking this into account, the numbers on the database are clearly unrepresentative. Attendance at events is difficult to record. It is not in the spirit of a welcoming and supportive event for organisers to quiz participants about their name and address. Trips and events are likely to have attracted people who were not using other Sure Start Services.

Of the statistics that are presented, PEEP is the service that reaches the greatest number of children. PEEP is a service that was well established in the area before Sure Start was initiated and it has an outreach service in which all parents from the area are offered information about PEEP on the maternity ward of the local hospital. It is a service that was well liked by the parents we interviewed and preliminary results from an independent evaluation of this service document gains in cognitive development. Although it predates Sure Start, Sure Start funding is essential for current delivery of PEEP and without Sure Start its institutional survival might be in jeopardy.

Community child health clinics are the next most used service. There were no local clinics in Rose Hill and Littlemore before Sure Start. In Littlemore, they are now housed in a building refurbished by Sure Start. The numbers presented in the report cannot provide evidence of the added value of these new services. They do, however, show that they are well used and provide a baseline against which future service developments can be assessed.

6.5 EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND VOLUNTEERING

The database makes clear that a substantial number of parents in the area have received training of some sort or another from Sure Start. There were few comments from parents specifically about the value of training, but equally there was no specific question about this on the interview schedule. Several parents, however, commented on the benefits they had experienced by becoming a volunteer in the community café. It is also clear that Sure Start has provided a significant employment opportunity to parents in the area. A total of eight members of staff lived locally, five of who had children under 4 at the time of interview. It is still early days to comment on the extent to which
Sure Start has met its goal of increasing employability and this is an area that might be addressed in the next phase of the evaluation.

6.6 PARENTS WHO ARE NOT USING SERVICES

Whilst the statistics suggest that uptake is good, and the known inaccuracies in the database have probably resulted in underestimation, there are still a relatively small number of parents who are not using services. It's likely that these are ‘hard to reach’ families and therefore, whilst they are very important, it may be a particularly difficult task to reach them. All of the parents we interviewed reported knowing people who were non-users. Both users and non-users described similar reasons for not accessing Sure Start services. The first was lack of information. It is clear from interviews with staff and from participant observation that reaching the hard-to-reach is a major concern of the Sure Start team and each member of staff has ‘outreach’ as part of their job description. It is also clear that advertising Sure Start services is something that everyone is concerned to do. Whilst Sure Start has a What’s On Co-ordinator whose job it is to look more strategically at information dissemination, there has been a lot of staff turnover in this role and this may have contributed to the lack of knowledge about services. However, it may also be that dissemination of information is difficult and resource intensive and that it takes time. Several parents report being approached by outreach staff at a time when they were not able to assimilate information and others describe getting leaflets they did not read. Getting through to people who have busy lives may just be difficult and lack of complete coverage does not necessarily mean that Sure Start is doing anything wrong. It could just be that they need to keep doing what they are doing. Most parents thought that leaflets and posters were a good way of advertising the services, but one parent (in reference to the original Family Centre building) suggested that the notice boards could be improved, displaying information in a more orderly fashion. The three parents interviewed since the opening of the new Family Centre did not refer specifically to the notice boards.

Other barriers to usage included social anxiety and shyness. Parents mentioned that having someone accompany them to meetings would make it easier for them to attend. Sure Start proposes to offer a Link person to all local families in the future, which may help. However, the primary role of the nominated Link person is to co-ordinate the efforts of other agencies and staff rather than befriend parents. What parents proposed seemed more in line with a befriending service in which all new parents are visited by other local volunteer parents, who would offer a friendly ear, provide information about what is going on in the locality and accompany them along to services or meetings if they are anxious about going alone. The difference also being along the lines of spending time with a friend rather than with someone with a specific reason to recruit them into attending a group or service. This is the sort of service that could be provided by trained volunteers and has been shown to have worked well in other geographical areas, for example in the Community Mothers programme (Johnson et al, 1993).
The final barrier to usage reported by both the using and non-using parents was the reputation of the Rose Hill Family Centre. Many parents identified Sure Start with this building and not with the community services that Sure Start provides, and the building carries a historical reputation for helping “families with problems”. Use of the Centre was also perceived to be dominated by a group or ‘clique’ of parents who know each other well and were not welcoming to others. This problem was well known to Sure Start who had elected to establish Sure Start provision in partnership with existing services. Although it might have been easier to establish new independent services, the partnership approach was considered better from the point of view of future mainstreaming. Many people, staff and parents alike, predicted that the opening of the new Sure Start building would help to resolve many of the obstacles to service use, particularly to overcome the history and stigma attached to the old Family Centre. Early signs are that it has indeed done so. A possible problem could be that even though the actual change is made, the beliefs can take a lot longer to change. This will be an interesting area for investigation in future.

6.7 STAFF VIEWS ON SURE START

Staff were enthusiastic about Sure Start and highly committed to its success. They came from a range of professional and disciplinary backgrounds and a quarter of them lived in the area. Many reported that Sure Start offered them the opportunity to support parents and children in the way that had wanted to in the past, but had been unable to due to resource constraints in statutory services. They reported that they were providing good services, making a difference to families and meeting previously unmet need. They also reported beneficial changes to the work environment with increased collaboration and interdisciplinary support.

The concerns staff reported related to their own working practices. One of the key issues was stress and time pressure and they felt that this impacted negatively on their ability to provide the services they would like to parents, on their involvement in service development and on their health and well-being. It seemed that it was partnership working and attending meetings that suffered most. Some reported boycotting meetings early on in the project, or attending them without the relevant paper work, thinking that they were a waste of time and that there was never time to discuss things properly. Staff valued communication and consultation in theory, but saw the time involved in this as detracting from doing the job they were meant to be doing. The problem with meetings seemed to be exacerbated by the fact that there are a large number of part-time staff working in Sure Start and the ratio of meeting time to time to carry out their jobs can easily become disproportionate. Staff concerns about meetings was one of the issues that was actively addressed by the Director early on in the project. The restructuring of meetings, which took place following an Away Day, was successful, as evidenced by the contents of the minutes and comments of the staff themselves. However, the problem has not entirely gone away, as staff are still having difficulties with prioritising meetings.
6.8 PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING SURE START

Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start has, since its inception, adopted a very inclusive participative style, and the need for parental involvement at every level is well appreciated. Parents who were interviewed felt that the Sure Start team was very responsive to their suggestions and felt that they were taken seriously, particularly through informal feedback channels. The remarks of one parent, however, suggested that a feedback system that reported more clearly on changes made by Sure Start in response to parents’ observations would be favoured.

The figures show that parents are actively involved in the management and that many make a contribution. However, parents who sat on the management board and working groups early on in the development of the programme reported less positive experiences. They reported feeling disempowered and excluded at meetings in which professionals were addressing issues of which they had no knowledge, and to which they felt they could not contribute. Some described attending the meetings as, at best, a waste of time and at worst, a way to make themselves feel bad. The Sure Start team were well aware of this issue, both from feedback from the research team and through other networks, and they have implemented a number of measures to improve things, including increasing the ratio of parents to professionals on the group, appointing a parent as chairperson, reducing the use of jargon, arranging the furniture in a more inclusive way, providing toys for children and welcoming parents who want to drop in and out of the meetings. Training for parents has been offered. Parents have suggested that training in inclusivity and empowerment might be offered to the professionals on the group. This is an approach that has been found very valuable in other community development projects – for example, the Health Development Agency’s Social Action Research Project in Salford. The belief that professionals need training is very different from the belief that parents need training, and sends different messages to the community.

Enabling and empowering members of the community to play an equal role in the management and development of programmes such as Sure Start is widely recognised by those who have attempted community development to be difficult, challenging and time consuming to achieve. The difficulties are compounded for a programme such as this where community development is set in the context of a high profile national programme that is tightly controlled by the government through the setting and monitoring of targets. The development and management of such government initiatives demands a high level of expertise and experience. Meetings to discuss such initiatives often need to use technical terminology which, unless a lot of effort is put into translation, is jargon to parents and can be excluding. Translation and explanation can take a lot of time and patience, which may be in short supply amongst pressured managers of statutory services.

One barrier to participation is lack of knowledge of the aims of Sure Start and this lack was evident amongst the parents who were interviewed. Almost half
did not know what Sure Start was trying to do and most of those who offered a response had only the haziest idea of the true goals. There is a question whether this matters. If Sure Start services are reaching parents and enabling them to improve the health and well-being of 0-4 year olds, does it matter that they do not know that these services are attributable to Sure Start? It is obviously important for a parent to know who delivers a service in order for them to participate in service planning and development. But, is it better for parents to be asked about the service they use, to feel that have been heard and then to have clear feedback about any changes resulting from their comments or do they necessarily need to attend meetings in a formal way? Clearly both are important. There was also diversity in the responses of staff to the question of Sure Start’s aims and objectives, reflecting the diversity of the programme but also reflecting the confusion within the minds of the staff about the aims of this complex and multi-faceted programme.

Staff also regarded Sure Start as highly responsive, reporting that the suggestions they made were taken seriously. There was some suggestion from one member of staff that they might even have too much influence and power, that some of the suggestions might have warranted more debate, or more consultation before implementation.

6.9 PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Oxford City is a district that prides itself on inter-agency working, but the establishment and management of Sure Start has still proved a challenge. The short timescale to get the initial bid in, and the lack of adequate time to deal with areas of disagreement and expectations, compounded the challenge. It is a tribute to all those involved in the early stages of the development that this Sure Start was successfully set up, in spite of these problems. As a result, however, unresolved issues between stakeholders remained a problem. The lead partner in the development of Sure Start was a charitable organisation providing a new and innovative service to support early development. This partner played a part in the development of Sure Start at national level and took on the key role in establishing the Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start as a trailblazer site. Their belief in the approach they had pioneered led them to the view that their services were central to effective delivery of Sure Start’s objectives. They wanted to see other services developing to meet the few Sure Start objectives that they felt they did not meet. This view impacted on relationships between PEEP and some of the other organisations involved in this Sure Start. The establishment of Sure Start as a charity independent of all stakeholders was a very important step in resolving these issues, enabling conflict and tensions between agencies to be gradually resolved.
6.10 WHAT HAS WORKED IN ROSE HILL AND LITTLEMORE SURE START

**Independent status**
This Sure Start was been set up as an independent company with charitable status. The Director is clear that this model has been successful and that it has offered protection from problems experienced by Sure Starts in which a statutory agency or existing charity is the lead partner. One potential disadvantage of the model – that it leaves the Director with little managerial support – has been overcome by agreement that one member of the Board be appointed to provide regular support and act as a sounding board for confidential discussion of problems.

**Dual management structure**
Staff who are funded by Sure Start are jointly managed by Sure Start and by the agency which normally employs that group of professionals. For example, the health visitor is jointly managed with the Primary Care Trust. Staff from different disciplines and agencies work in the same office and participate in multidisciplinary Sure Start planning meetings. This arrangement has worked well, enabling staff to maintain an influence over service provision in their agency of origin at the same time as promoting interagency co-operation on the ground. Although some confusion about management structures is said to exist among staff, it does not appear to have influenced managerial relationships which staff report to be good.

**Encouraging parent participation through the Check It Out group**
Active participation by parents has been an important goal of Sure Start from the start. Establishing parent participation on formal Sure Start groups, such as the Board and the Working Groups, has not been straightforward (see above). This Sure Start has, however, established a listening culture and the Check It Out group (a parent run group which is open to all parents and meets monthly) has been successful in attracting an increasing proportion of parents. The availability of crèche support for any parent who wants to attend a Sure Start group has been important in enabling this participation.

**Valued services**
In general, all the services were popular, but some can be singled out as important in the way Sure Start has developed. For example, the establishment of a Family Services Co-ordinator has been very valuable. The current worker, who has a social work background, describes being able to protect families with complex problems from being ‘deluged’ by staff from different agencies. This member of staff has played an important role in enabling social services to involve Sure Start early in their support of families with problems.

The Asian support workers are perceived as playing a very important role in enabling Asian parents to participate in Sure Start and for the project to develop services that meet their needs.
Several staff remarked that it made a great difference being able to take services such as speech and language therapy into the homes of under 4s in the area. Previously, there had been no child health clinics operating in the area and the two drop-in clinics are now amongst the most popular services. This has proved an important facility, both for parents who volunteer to support it, and for those who use it. The café is popular; it is an important place for meeting and networking, it provides instant and affordable food to families and the staff who work there have developed skills and knowledge in food handling. The lending and recycling service is turning out to be an important point of first contact with Sure Start for the parents who have recently moved into the area and have not accessed any other Sure Start services such as PEEP.

**The Director’s persistence**

The Director has worked persistently at a number of difficult issues that have, in the end, paid off. This Sure Start chose to base some of its service provision on an existing family centre, which had an unwelcoming reputation for some members of the community. Those using the centre were seen as cliquey and there was a feeling amongst parents that only those with problems attended. Both the Family Centre staff and the parents at first resented the changes to their services as proposed by Sure Start but now, two years on, view Sure Start’s involvement as positive. The large number of parents and local community members who attended the official launch of the new Sure Start Centre in June of this year suggests that local parents’ fears of cliqueyness have also been overcome. The development of genuine partnership at strategic level is very challenging and has not proved straightforward, but the persistence of the Director is once again showing pay-offs in this area. The Director is also being persistent in trying to tackle the less successful areas of Sure Start mentioned below. The fact that some of these have not yet been successfully resolved does not mean that they will not be in future.

**6.12 FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

This evaluation provides a picture of a highly successful programme that has achieved a great deal in the first two and a half years of its existence. It is likely to meet Government targets for implementation of this important national initiative. As with all complex and challenging initiatives there are some areas where improvements could be made. We have divided these into things that parents would like, things that staff would like and things that on reflection, the research team feel could be addressed in the next phase of Sure Start.

**6.12.1 WHAT PARENTS WOULD LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN**

Parents have major concerns about the antisocial behaviour of older children and adolescents and are concerned with the lack of provision for this group in the area. They seemed particularly to be envisioning physical activities that
would keep children off the streets, entertain them and tire them out. Some of these concerns are currently being addressed by the Young People’s project.

Parents also wanted more physical activities for younger children like “Tumble Tots” and they wanted the parks to be improved so that they were safe places for children to play. Many parents wanted a leisure centre to be built in the area, like that available to people in Blackbird Leys, for increased physical activities for themselves as well as their children. The difficulty for Sure Start lies in the fact that the majority of these identified requests fall outside of the official remit of Sure Start.

Most of the parents were not themselves concerned about participation at Board level meetings and in working groups. Those that had attended such meetings were eloquent about why they did not work for them. The training of professional members of the Board in inclusivity was suggested as a useful way forward, as was the suggestion that the ratio of parents to professionals should change in favour of the parents.

6.12.2 WHAT STAFF WOULD LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN

Staff remained enthusiastic about their work in Sure Start and the opportunity this presented to them of meeting parents’ needs. Concerns related to the stresses of working in Sure Start. They would like less pressure and more time to do the jobs they think need doing. Whilst they appreciate the need for communication, and indeed are appreciative of communication when it happens, many of them felt overwhelmed by paperwork and were unenthusiastic about the work involved in consultation and meetings. Staff stress is likely to be counterproductive in the long term. It is difficult to offer sensitive supportive and empowering services under intense pressure. Communication, consultation and involvement need to be adequately resourced if they are to happen effectively, and development needs to be better paced. This is an issue that is being actively addressed at the moment. It may prove appropriate to put development on hold for a while and consolidate what has been achieved, but this would be difficult in the face of government pressure to perform.

Staff are also concerned about reaching families that don’t access services and would like to find ways of more effective outreach. They would like to see more active parent involvement and are concerned to address both of these issues.

6.12.3 OBSERVATIONS OF THE RESEARCH TEAM

In the context of an evaluation that reports great achievement and also one which identifies that many staff are overstretched in delivering what they are currently achieving, the research team could make some recommendations about possible priorities for future directions.

Services to support emotional and social development
The quantitative statistics suggest a relative underprovision of services that are likely to have a significant impact on children’s emotional and social
development. However, it is clear from talking to staff in the light of discussions about early drafts of this report that much support for emotional and social development goes unrecorded in the statistics. This support is undertaken as an approach to working with parents and children and is inherent in Sure Start’s work. All staff aim to work in a way that empowers parents and supports the development of self-esteem. Parents with stronger self-esteem are better placed to support the development of their children’s self-esteem. In their dealings with children in the crèche, in the playroom and in various groups, all staff aim to model relationships that support emotional and social development. Thus, they support development both directly and indirectly by enabling parents to watch others handle children in a positive way. Training of parents to work in the crèche and the playroom has enabled some to develop their parenting skills further and informal discussion between parents and staff in the crèche and the playroom is another source of parent development. Health visitors are also skilled in supporting parents and enabling them to learn positive discipline and behaviour management. They provide advice and support on these issues both on home visits and in the clinic. As with other staff, the amount of work they do in this respect cannot be estimated from the data that are collected.

Social and emotional development are key to the PEEP curriculum. Fundamental to the programme is the development of self-esteem for parents and children, as is parent-child relationship building through shared play and activities. As with most other parent/child groups, smacking is not permitted. There are a number of positive discipline sessions offered in their curriculum (for example, living with tantrums, managing difficult behaviours, distraction and planned ignoring) which may be discussed a number of times depending on the needs of the individual group. Other services such as OXPIP and the parenting programmes run by Family Links and the Family Nurturing Network provide more intensive support for emotional and social development. The Family Nurturing Network offers a primarily behaviourist 12 week group programme and Family Links a 10 week group programme with a greater component of emotional literacy. OXPIP aims to support parents who experience problems very early in their babies’ lives with intensive psychotherapeutic one-to-one support. OXPIP is gradually becoming more accepted in the Sure Start community, but still serves only a small minority of parents. Family Links and Family Nurturing groups have also run, but they have reached relatively few parents and although the statistics may underestimate the true numbers due to misclassification, the numbers are still small. It is felt to be difficult to attract parents to these groups.

Parents in the Sure Start area, like those in other parts of the country, will be doing their best to parent their children well, many in difficult social circumstances. The prevalence of antisocial behaviour amongst older children on the estate, however, is witness to benefits that they could experience from the development of parenting skills. There is a significant evidence base to show that group programmes are a cost-effective way to improve antisocial behaviour, and there is good evidence that programmes which enhance emotional literacy have an impact on the quality of relationships in the home (Barlow and Stewart-Brown, 2000, 2001; Barlow et al 2001; Coren et al, in
press; Patterson et al, in press). Group parenting programmes are a useful way of breaking down social barriers and enabling parents to make supportive friendships. Parenting programmes are also empowering, providing parents with the skills to exert appropriate control over school-age children and adolescents.

Sure Start presents a real opportunity to normalise parenting support and is already doing so in offering the PEEP programme to all parents. PEEP has a generalist ‘preventative’ approach. While it covers many aspects of parenting, its focus is supporting parents to promote children’s learning. There is also good evidence to suggest that parents may need to be exposed to several opportunities to develop positive approaches to discipline and emotional literacy. There is an argument to suggest that a future goal for Sure Start could be for every parent to be formally invited to attend at least one time-limited group-parenting programme in the first 3 years of his or her child’s life. A formal invitation to all parents would ameliorate any stigma attached to such programmes. The invitation would need to explain the difference between these programmes and PEEP and the differences between the various types of programmes on offer. It would need to be delivered to parents by someone they trusted. Parents, who had attended groups and found them helpful, might need to act as advocates. A recent study in another part of Oxford (Patterson et al, 2002) found that among the two-thirds of parents that said they were interested in attending a programme, around a third were likely to attend initially. As the word spreads that the groups are helpful, this number is likely to increase. The same study showed that parents were most likely to want to attend when their first child was 2-3 years old, but the earlier parents can begin establishing attuned and sensitive relationships with their child the better. Offering these types of programmes at birth, and again when the child is 2-3 years old, when the parents seem especially receptive to the ideas, could be a way of establishing and then building on the ideas of positive parenting. The parenting programmes currently on offer are open to all parents but they have a limited capacity, so limiting the number of parents that can attend. Increasing the capacity of these programmes will take resources and can only realistically happen gradually. This process could begin with the introduction of a universal invitation to parents. This could be approached systematically, to reflect the resources available. For example, inviting all of the parents of, say, 2 year olds in the first instance.

The skills of the group leader are critical to the success of these programmes and training is required for this role. Some Sure Start staff are already trained to facilitate these groups but the opportunity to train more staff, and therefore provide more groups, is one that could be explored further. Programmes could also be provided by non-governmental organisations such as the Family Nurturing Network and Family Links. All parents at risk of seriously problematic relationships with their children could be offered more intensive one-to-one support through OXPIP, or through specially trained health visitors. If parenting education and support became ‘normal’ for parents in Sure Start areas this could have a dramatic impact on emotional and social development, with concomitant decreases in antisocial behaviour in older children.
Reaching the hard to reach
The data presented in Chapter 3 suggest that there are more centre-based than outreach staff in this Sure Start. However, the statistics do not provide a complete picture because they do not show the frequency of home visits undertaken by other staff such as health visitors. However, many of the staff that currently do home visiting had no experience of outreach work when they joined Sure Start and they have identified the need for further training. A complementary approach to outreach could centre around the development of befriending services provided by volunteers to all parents, such as takes place in “Community Mothers” services. Community Mothers are trained volunteers who visit ‘just to be friendly’ and who may, once trust has been established, enable non-using parents to overcome social anxiety, make use of community services and make new friends in the community.

Monitoring uptake
The development of the monitoring database and the gathering of data has not been as simple as originally thought. There was strong feeling that this provision would have been better made centrally and efforts were made by the Director (on behalf of a number of Programme Managers) to voice these concerns to the Sure Start Unit. The resources allocated to the development of the database, as identified within the delivery plan, proved inadequate. In spite of delays, a system has been set up which can now provide a minimum estimate of service uptake, and that estimate suggests that penetration is high. However, accurate data are very important both for internal use and also because the programme will be judged externally on the basis of these data. Further resources need investing in developing the database and its analytic potential. The data also need to be fed back to, and used by, service providers on a regular basis, as only in this way is it possible to achieve accurate data. If payments to providers were to be based on the numbers registered on the database as using a service, accuracy would increase very rapidly. It appears that, following training and feedback, the monitoring information currently being recorded is of good quality. Efforts would now be best directed to providing accessible graphs and tables so providers can measure their activities and plan their future provision. Staff in charge of the data need to be skilled at manipulating data and looking at it in different ways. Providing tables such as those we present in Chapter 3, on a regular basis, enables patterns of service usage to become apparent which may previously have not been obvious. It appears from the comments gathered in response to earlier drafts of this report, that staff are concerned that the database quantifies their work and does not illustrate the essence of what they do. Ways of recording and sharing this aspect of their work could be an area for future investigation.

6.13 SUMMARY

Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start is an ambitious programme in which partnership working is well developed on the ground. It is providing a wide range of valued new services to a high proportion of under 4s and their parents.
Approaches that have proved successful in Rose Hill–Littlemore are the independent status of the Sure Start programme, the dual management structure for staff, the Check It Out group for parents, the Family Services Co-ordinator and the Asian support worker roles, home-based services, local child health clinics, the Community Café, the Lending and Recycling services and the Director’s persistence.

Areas for consideration in future include additional services to prevent the antisocial behaviour of older children and adolescents, more physical activities for children of all ages, more services to support emotional and social development, outreach services to reach the hard-to-reach, further development of the monitoring database and continuing work on parent participation in programme development.

However, these potential areas for development need to be considered in the light of current pressures on staff. Staff stress is likely to be counterproductive in the long term and it may prove appropriate to put development on hold for a while and consolidate what has been achieved to date.
Table representing the timing of key events in the history of the Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start programme and the evaluation project.

S* - represents the time over which the staff interviews were being collected  
P^ - represents the time over which the parent interviews were being collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>S*</th>
<th>P^</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>JULY - Government announces intention to fund Sure Start initiatives</td>
<td>- Invitation to submit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>JAN - First consultation with community (43 local workers + 22 parents attend meeting. Delivery Plan drawn from the results of this day)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEB</td>
<td>MAR - Submission of interest – Non-Governmental Organisation as lead partner. Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) aims to improve educational achievement for under 4 year olds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td>- Advertisement for the post of Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE</td>
<td>JULY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUG</td>
<td>JULY - Director appointed</td>
<td>- The existing Rose Hill Family Centre identified as main site for new building and architects appointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPT</td>
<td>JULY - Delivery Plan submitted</td>
<td>- Service Agreements negotiated and drawn up between Sure Start and local service providers (Health, Education, City Council and Social Services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCT</td>
<td>- Working Groups set up to ensure any commissioned services will be needs-led and evaluated as such</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOV</td>
<td>- Delivery Plan approved. £3 million awarded until March 2002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Event Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>JAN</td>
<td>- Health Visitor appointed to organise health provision in area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FEB</td>
<td>- Appointment of Parent Participation Worker (to set up meeting for parents)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|      | MAR   | - First parents' meeting (called Check-It-Out Group) identify need for activities for the over 4 year olds (amongst other things)  
- Parents identify need for drop-in and crèche and 'somewhere with a focus'. Sure Start will identify 2 sites in Littlemore instead of 1 as originally proposed | |
|      | APR   | - Official launch of Rose Hill - Littlemore Sure Start | - Meeting to discuss the protocol for the commissioned evaluation |
|      | MAY   | |
|      | JUNE  | - 2 possible sites for services identified in Littlemore (a small derelict building to be called Parents Opening Doors to deliver clinic-based health services, and Littlemore Community Centre to provide more informal 'drop-in' childcare) | |
|      | JULY  | - OPEN DAY | - Agreed the terms of reference and membership for Research Advisory Group (meets quarterly to discuss findings and processes) and the Academic Steering Group (ensures integrity and independence of research and only meets if conflict of interest arises). £70,000 awarded until March 2002. |
|      | AUG   | - Summer holiday play-scheme begins at Littlemore Community Centre | - 2 researchers appointed (0.7 and 0.5 full-time equivalent)  
- Interviews with staff begin |
|      | SEPT  | - Charitable status awarded and the Director is accountable to a Board of Trustees | - Researchers begin to keep 'field-notes'  
- 1st interview with the Director  
- 1st round of staff interviews begins |
|      | OCT   | - First Annual General Meeting. Launch of local membership. | - 1st meeting of the Research Advisory Group |
|      | NOV   | - Summer holiday play-scheme at Littlemore Community Centre becomes permanent due to local requests  
- AWAY DAY (focusing on meetings and communication) | - 2nd interview with the Director  
- Feedback to Director the meetings issue that is emerging from the staff interviews |
|      | DEC   | - New structure for team meetings suggested  
- Parents Opening Doors building officially opens | - Feedback loop process formalised |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2001 | JAN   | - New structure for meetings agreed on 6 month trial  
- Building work starts on new Family Centre building in Rose Hill  
- One of Sure Start's Public Service Agreement targets is changed |
|      | FEB   | - AWAY DAY (focusing on team-building and new meeting structure)                                 |
|      | MAR   | - Building Plans for Littlemore Community Centre submitted to Sure Start Unit for their approval  
- 3rd interview with the Director  
- Agree to re-interview the Director every 3 months  
- Analysis of staff interviews begins using 'N5' computer software |
|      | APR   |                                                                                                 |
|      | MAY   | - Collection notice introduced to gather consent from parents                                     |
|      | JUNE  | - Sure Start team consists of 39 members of staff. All posts (except Director, Administrator and Finance officer) funded within existing organisations with dual accountability to Sure Start and host organisation  
- Diaries are given to 2 local parents for them to record their thoughts about Sure Start  
- Interviews with parents begin |
|      | JULY  |                                                                                                 |
|      | AUG   |                                                                                                 |
|      | SEP   |                                                                                                 |
|      | OCT   | - Sure Start Unit agrees building plans for Littlemore Community Centre                           |
|      | NOV   | - Part of Sure Start Family Centre building open for limited services                            |
|      | DEC   | - Planned completion of whole Family Centre (delayed following liquidation of building contractors) |
|      | 2002  |                                                                                                 |
| JAN  |      | - Interviews with staff end                                                                     |
| FEB  |      |                                                                                                 |
| MAR  |      | - End of first funding period  
- Building work on whole Family Centre completed                                                   |
| APR  |      | - Second funding period begins (to end in March 2004)  
- Building work starts on Littlemore Community Centre (scheduled to be completed in November 2002)  
- Interviews with parents end |
| MAY | - Building work on Littlemore Community Centre begins  
       - Sure Start Risk Assessment is Low |
| JUNE | - Formal launch of Sure Start Family Centre |
| JUL |   |
| AUG |   |
| SEP |   |
APPENDIX 2

Membership of the original Sure Start Steering Group at the time the Delivery Plan was submitted and the roles each representative held within their partner organisation at that time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership</th>
<th>Oxford City Council</th>
<th>Oxfordshire County Council Education Service</th>
<th>Oxfordshire County Council Social Services</th>
<th>Oxfordshire Community Health NHS Trust¹</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wendy Foster</td>
<td>Clare Taylor</td>
<td>Rick Harmes, Louise Goll, Jane Creese</td>
<td>Mike Simm</td>
<td>Caro Fickling</td>
<td>Tanya English, Sam Monaghan, Nuzhat Abbas, Karen Porter</td>
<td>Rosemary Roberts, Michael O'Regan, Deidre MacFarlane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager of Oxfordshire Play Association</td>
<td>Play Development Officer</td>
<td>LEA* Officer, Principal Educational Psychologist, LEA* Head of Rose Hill Family Centre</td>
<td>Social Services Officer</td>
<td>Primary Care Development Nurse</td>
<td>Rose Hill parent, Rose Hill parent, Littlemore parent, Littlemore parent</td>
<td>Director PEEP Trustees’ representative, PEEP Recruitment and Community Co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Now the Oxford City Primary Care Trust
Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start
‘Working with families to give local children the best start in life’.

Structural Chart

Academic Steering Group
(ensuring the integrity of the local research)

Research Advisory Group
(supporting the development of the local research – meets ¼ly).

Sure Start Open Meeting
(Informing & influencing – open meeting for any interested party held twice termly)

Check it Out Group
(Parents’ Think Tank and a key part of decision-making processes – regular meetings and informal network)

Sure Start Management Team

Sure Start Director *
Office Manager (part time) *
Finance Manager (on Consultancy basis)

* employed and managed by Sure Start Board

Sure Start Board – legally constituted as a Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status
(Local Management, accountability and decision making working towards 50% representation of parents – meets approx. monthly.)

Company Membership – local people, groups, parents, workers in local community.

Sure Start Unit
(accountable to Central Government)

Sure Start Team and Service Development
Posts and services funded within existing organisations; with dual accountability to Sure Start & host organisation.

Health
– 2 fte Health Visitors; x 2 part-time Midwives; Speech and Language Therapy; Administrator, and Parent Support Workers (2 part-time)

Local Education Authority
– Childcare Development Officer
– Family Centre Development posts – Working with Dads; Sure Start Family Centre Co-ordinator; Community Café Co-ordinator; Playroom Crèche Co-ordinator & Workers; Administrator; Caretaker & Cleaner
– Parent Participation Worker
– Training Project (EASOCEC)
– Special Needs Support Worker
– What’s On Co-ordinator
– Local Computer Project (funded by New Opportunities Fund / DfEE)

Oxford City Council
– Asian Families Liaison & Development Worker & Asian Families Bilingual Support Workers
– Lending & Recycling Worker

Voluntary Sector
– PEEP Link & Development Work
– Home-Start
– Relate, OXPIP & The Ark
– Rose Hill & Donnington Advice Centre – Take Up Campaign & Money Advice
– Family Nurturing Network & Family Links

NB
This is a structural representation: there could also be lines of accountability between the Board and all other structures and not just to the Sure Start Management Team.

1/8/02
Sure Start’s staff, job title and the hours they work each week (as of 18th December, 2002). Individuals are employed through various agencies and therefore they are subject to the working hours of that agency. This means that an individual employed through one agency could be working a different number of hours in a week from an individual employed through another agency even though they are both working full-time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Hours worked per week or proportion of week worked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Ali Barrett</td>
<td>Family Centre Worker</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playworker Crèche</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Battman</td>
<td>Office Manager</td>
<td>32 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Bloss</td>
<td>Health Visitor</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah Boyte</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha Broome</td>
<td>What’s On Co-ordinator</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netta Buckett</td>
<td>Special Needs Support Worker</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghazala Butt</td>
<td>Playworker Crèche Worker</td>
<td>Full time [term time]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie Byrne</td>
<td>Community Development Worker</td>
<td>15 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Calvert</td>
<td>Health Visitor</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Charrett</td>
<td>Cleaner/Caretaker</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Jane Creese</td>
<td>Head of Family Centre</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Dollard</td>
<td>Finance Officer (Consultancy)</td>
<td>Consultancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob Elkin</td>
<td>Family Centre Worker - Working with Dads</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy Eves</td>
<td>Speech &amp; Language Therapist</td>
<td>7 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel Holt</td>
<td>Family Services Co-ordinator</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shamsia Hogue</td>
<td>Asian Families Support Worker</td>
<td>10 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise Isle</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>Job share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn Jeffs</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tan Lea</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise Liebermann</td>
<td>Senior Administration Officer</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deidre Macfarlane</td>
<td>Sure Start Link from PEEP</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona McKinlay</td>
<td>Playworker Crèche Worker</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Moon</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>Job share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ita Moore</td>
<td>Midwife ½ time</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesley Morgan</td>
<td>Speech &amp; Language Therapist</td>
<td>14 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice Morrison</td>
<td>Playroom / Crèche Co-ordinator</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine Pingree</td>
<td>Midwife ½ time</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Bernie Phipps</td>
<td>15hrs Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>15 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Porter</td>
<td>Parent Support Worker</td>
<td>7.5hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Scott</td>
<td>Sure Start Centres Co-ordinator</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noreen Singh</td>
<td>Asian Families Support Worker</td>
<td>10 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soma Singh</td>
<td>Playroom / Crèche Worker</td>
<td>25 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aziza Shafique</td>
<td>Asian Families Liaison &amp; Development Worker</td>
<td>30 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamsin Jones</td>
<td>(maternity cover) Café Co-ordinator</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masako Sparrowhawk</td>
<td>Childcare Development Officer</td>
<td>Job share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgina Newbold</td>
<td>Childcare Development Officer</td>
<td>Job share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Tomlinson</td>
<td>Health Visitor ½ time</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Tina Wasteney</td>
<td>Playworker Crèche Worker</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Rebecca Currell</td>
<td>After School Club &amp; Holiday Playscheme</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz Greenlaw</td>
<td>Lending &amp; Recycling Worker</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam Coleman</td>
<td>Training Co-ordinator</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane White</td>
<td>Assistant Training Co-ordinator</td>
<td>15 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacki Bowler</td>
<td>Learning Bridge Co-ordinator</td>
<td>18.5 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverley Barrett</td>
<td>Computer Project Co-ordinator</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Brock</td>
<td>Computer Project Co-ordinator</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technician</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue Everiss</td>
<td>Special Needs Inclusion Worker</td>
<td>0.5 [term time]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tameron Chappell</td>
<td>Researcher (.5)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise Harriss</td>
<td>Researcher (.5)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas of Work</td>
<td>Post / Role</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach services and home visiting</td>
<td>a) Co-ordinator of services to families</td>
<td>Family Services Co-ordinator <em>Isobel Holt</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Home visiting and neighbourhood networks</td>
<td>Home-Start OXPIP Relate Advice Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for families and parents, including befriending and social support such as mentoring and parenting information</td>
<td>a) Parent and worker training and support</td>
<td>Training Co-ordination Pam Coleman Learning Bridge Co-ordinator Jacki Bowler Assistant Training Co-ordinator Diane White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Family Centre development work <strong>(see end)</strong></td>
<td>Head of Family Centre and Community Support Services (fte) <em>Jane Creese</em>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Café Cook / Training Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas of Work</td>
<td>Areas of Work</td>
<td>Post / Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2  Support for families and parents, including befriending and social support such as mentoring and parenting information cont’d</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community Café Co-ordinator (.5) <strong>Shauna Smith</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parent Participation Worker (.5) <strong>Melinda Cole</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working with Dads (.5) <strong>Rob Elkin</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Playworker / Family Centre Worker (fte) <strong>Ali Barrett</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3  Services to support good quality play, learning and childcare for children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peep / Sure Start link <strong>Deidre Macfarlane</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sure Start Centres Co-ordinator <strong>Patricia Scott</strong> (fte);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas of Work</td>
<td>Areas of Work</td>
<td>Post / Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 cont’d</td>
<td>b) Quality Childcare Provision</td>
<td>Sure Start Playroom / Crèche Co-ordinator Janice Morrison (fte)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sure Start Playroom Crèche Worker Tina Wasteney (0.9); Fiona McKinley (fte) Ghazala Butt (fte); Soma Singh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Childcare Development Officer (fte) Masako Sparrowhawk / Georgina Newbould (Job Share)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Primary and community healthcare and advice about child health and development and parental health</td>
<td>a) Locality health team</td>
<td>Sure Start Health Visitor (fte) Kate Morris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sure Start Health Visitor .5 Angela Bloss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sure Start Speech &amp; Language Therapist Lesley Morgan; Wendy Eves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.5 Midwives Geraldine Pingree Ita Moore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas of Work</td>
<td>Post / Role</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 cont’d</td>
<td>a) Locality health team</td>
<td>.7 Parent Support Workers Karen Porter Stephanie Byrne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 cont’d</td>
<td>Admin Support Worker Denise Liebermann</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Support for those with special needs, including support in getting access to specialised services.</td>
<td>a) Special needs support</td>
<td>Special Needs Development Worker and services to be agreed (.5) Netta Buckett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Support for those with special needs, including support in getting access to specialised services.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusion Worker – Sue Everiss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Community involvement in the governance of the Sure Start programme and in the delivery of services.</td>
<td>a) Promotion of racial equality</td>
<td>Asian Families Liaison &amp; Development Worker (25hrs) Aziza Shafique (+5 hrs Support Worker)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Community involvement in the governance of the Sure Start programme and in the delivery of services.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Asian Families Support Workers Noreen Singh (10 hrs) Shamsia Hoque (10 hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas of Work</td>
<td>Post / Role</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7 Increasing the awareness of the Sure Start programme in the local community, including the information available</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Information services for 0-3s and their families</td>
<td>What’s On Administrator (Marketing Strategy &amp; Information) <strong>Samantha Broome</strong></td>
<td>To help Sure Start achieve its aim by setting up an Information Service for the Community and Providers in the Sure Start area in relation to the needs of under 4s and their families. To develop a marketing strategy for Sure Start Team to ensure its implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Lending and re-cycling facility</td>
<td>Lending &amp; Recycling Worker (.4) <strong>Liz Greenlaw</strong></td>
<td>To set up and develop lending and recycling facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Computer Project (Funded by New Opportunities Fund and Dept for Education and Skills, and not Sure Start)</td>
<td>Computer Co-ordinator / Technician <strong>Robert Brock</strong></td>
<td>To co-ordinate and manage the delivery of the Computer project in three locations and outreach services in Rose Hill–Littlemore Sure Start area. To work with individuals and organisations to identify barriers to taking part in learning and to make recommendations as to how these barriers may be overcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer Outreach Worker / Co-ordinator <strong>Beverley Barrett</strong></td>
<td>To develop outreach work as part of Rose Hill–Littlemore Computer Project. To undertake Outreach work with targeted groups in Rose Hill–Littlemore areas. To identify possible participants who have not taken part in learning since leaving school or within the last five years. To identify those participants who wish to gain or refresh skills for the work place. To work with individuals and organisations to identify barriers to taking part in learning and to make recommendations as to how these barriers may be overcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technician <strong>Robert Brock</strong></td>
<td>To provide technical support to Computer Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8 Programme Management</strong></td>
<td>a) Management costs</td>
<td>Director (fte) <strong>Tan Lea</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas of Work</td>
<td>Areas of Work</td>
<td>Post / Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 cont’d</td>
<td>a) Management costs</td>
<td>Sure Start Admin (32hrs) Jackie Battman; Admin Support (up to 20 hrs pcm) to be recruited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finance Manager Nick Dollard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Buildings Project Manager Nick Dollard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Sure Start Centre based support</td>
<td>Senior Admin for Sure Start Centre (fte) - Denise Liebermann acting up</td>
<td>To provide reception and admin services for Sure Start Centre and Littlemore based services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centre Based Support Bernie Phipps**(15 hrs)</td>
<td>To provide administrative support to centre based work in Sure Start area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receptionist Melissa Smith</td>
<td>To provide reception for Sure Start Centre and Littlemore Local Services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caretaker / cleaner Steve Charlett</td>
<td>To provide cleaning and caretaking services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Evaluation of programme</td>
<td>a) Evaluation and Research</td>
<td>Researchers: Tameron Chappell Louise Harriss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This document has been reformatted to correspond to new budget headings for 01/02
** These workers are not funded entirely by Sure Start

8 April 2002
Information for
Parents taking part in the Evaluation of
ROSE HILL- LITTLEMORE SURE START

The Rose Hill - Littlemore Sure Start Project has been set up to improve existing services and provide additional services to children under 4 and their families. We have been asked to evaluate the project both to ensure that the needs of the local community are being well met and to find out which services are most widely known and valued.

We would like to interview you because we are interested in your views. It is important to have the views of people who live in the area. You would be asked about living in this area and the services that have always been here. You would also be asked about the difference you think Sure Start may be making, and how you would like the services to work. There are no right or wrong answers - it is opinions that are important.

Whatever you say in an interview will be confidential and you would not be named in any report or publication. Interviews will normally be tape recorded and later transcribed so that your own words will not be lost. Any information from your interview that is used will be anonymous; your name would be changed or removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Once an issue has been raised, and time has been allowed for the issue to be voiced through forums such as the Open Meeting and Check-It-Out Meetings, the concerns will be reported to the Director of Sure Start and to the Research Advisory Group. These concerns would not be attributed to individuals, and any written reports will keep the anonymity of the persons involved. Positive feedback will also be shared with the Director of Sure Start and the Research Advisory Group and will also remain anonymous.

Information from people like you will be collected together and reported to both the local and national management of Sure Start. Being interviewed is one way that you can affect the future of this programme and others like it.

If you would like more information about the evaluation or interviews
Please contact :- Tameron Chappell or Louise Harriss
Sure Start Family Centre, Rose Hill or telephone 226948 or 226872

The way this evaluation is run has been approved by the Applied and Qualitative Research Ethics Committee, The John Radcliffe Hospital, Manor House, Headley Way, Headington, Oxford OX3 7LF. AQREC NO. A00.065
Information for  
Staff taking part in the Evaluation of  
ROSE HILL- LITTLEMORE SURE START

The Rose Hill - Littlemore Sure Start Project has been set up to improve existing services and provide additional services to children under 4 and their families. We have been asked to evaluate the project both to ensure that the needs of the local community are being well met and to find out which services are most widely known and valued.

We would like to interview you because we are interested in your views. It is important to have the views of people who are working within or alongside the Sure Start project as well as those of people who live in the area. People working within the system will have very useful information about how the project is working.

You would be asked about living and working in this area and the services that have always been here. You would also be asked about the difference you think Sure Start may be making, and how you would like the services to work. There are no right or wrong answers - it is opinions that are important.

Whatever you say in an interview will be confidential and you would not be named in any report or publication. Information from your interview, which is used, will be anonymous; your name would be changed or removed so that you cannot be recognised from it. Once an issue has been raised by several people, and time has been allowed for an individual to raise the issue themselves the concerns may be reported to the Director of Sure Start and to the Research Advisory Group. These concerns would not be attributed to individuals, and any written reports will keep the anonymity of the persons involved. Positive feedback will also be shared with the Director of Sure Start and the Research Advisory Group and will also remain anonymous.

Information from people like you will be collected together and reported to both the local and national management of Sure Start. Being interviewed is one way that you can affect the future of this programme and others like it.

If you would like more information about the evaluation or interviews  
Please contact :- Tameron Chappell or Louise Harriss  
Sure Start Family Centre, Rose Hill or telephone 226948 or 226872

The way this evaluation is run has been approved by the  
Applied and Qualitative Research Ethics Committee, The John Radcliffe Hospital, Manor House, Headley Way, Headington, Oxford OX3 7LF. AQREC NO. A00.065
Evaluation of Rose Hill –Littlemore Sure Start
Consent from participants

1 I confirm that I have read and understood the Participation Information Sheet and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions.

2 I understand that being interviewed is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without giving reasons and without any of my rights being affected.

3 Anything I say may be used as anonymous quotes in any presentation of the evaluation, whether verbal or written.

4 I agree to be interviewed and for the interview to be recorded.

Name______________________Date__________Signature______________

Researcher__________________Date__________Signature______________
Evaluation of Rose Hill – Littlemore Sure Start
Consent from participants

3 I confirm that I have read and understood the Participation Information Sheet and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions.

4 I understand that being interviewed is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without giving reasons and without any of my rights being affected.

3 Anything I say may be used as anonymous quotes in any presentation of the evaluation, whether verbal or written.

4 I agree to be interviewed and for the interview to be noted.

Name__________________________________ Date__________ Signature____________________

Researcher___________________________ Date__________ Signature____________________
Questions asked of staff and parents in the early interview;

- What date did you start working with Sure Start? (staff only)
- What was it that attracted you to the job? (staff only)
- How long have you lived in Rose Hill / Littlemore?
- Where did you live before?
- What is good about living here?
- What is not good about living here?
- If you were able to, would you like to move?
- In general do you feel most people living in the area look out for each other?
- Or do you feel that most people would take advantage of you if they got the chance?
- When did you first hear about the Rose Hill - Littlemore Sure Start project?
- How did you hear about it?
- What does Sure Start mean to you?
- What do you think the project is trying to achieve?
- How has it changed or developed since you first heard about it?
- Do you feel you’ve had an opportunity to influence Rose Hill - Littlemore Sure Start?
- Do you think you have done so?
- Can you tell me about any specific Rose Hill - Littlemore Sure Start initiatives you’ve heard about? (parents only)
- Have you been involved with them? (parents only)
- What did/do you like about them? (parents only)
- What did you think could have been better? (parents only)
- Do you feel that your life has changed at all because of your participation in sure start? (parents only)
- Are you aware of any areas of conflict or disagreement in Rose Hill - Littlemore Sure Start?
- If yes, can you tell me how these have been handled?
- What happened in the end?
- How well do you think the people delivering services to under 4s and their parents in this area work together (people from the health service, social service, education and charities?)
- Do you think Sure Start has made a difference to how these services are delivered?
- Do you think there are people in the area with children under four who don’t get involved in the initiatives or use the services, but would benefit from them?
- Why do you think they don’t get involved or use the services?
- How would you change things to make it easier for them?
- How do you think services for people with children in Rose Hill - Littlemore compared to the services offered elsewhere in Oxford before Sure Start began?
- What about after Sure Start began?
• How do you think they compare to the services offered outside of Oxford?
• What would you like Sure Start to achieve in the next 12 months?
• How would you like Rose Hill – Littlemore to be in 12 months time?
• How do you think it will be in 12 months time?
• Do you think the local community will welcome change?

Examples of additional questions asked of staff in the later interviews;

• Are there any particular training needs that you’ve identified for the staff and / or the parents?
• How do you see your role here in Sure Start?
• Has your work changed since we last spoke?
• What type of things do you do in your average working week?
• How do you see the Meeting structure working?
• What does partnership working mean for you?
• Do you see any evidence that people are changing the way they’re working as a result of Sure Start?
• Have you seen evidence of the Sure Start approach filtering into working styles outside of Sure Start?
• Do you feel the services offered by Sure Start are the right services for parents and families in this area?
• Are there any existing services that you think could be improved to make them more useful for parents in this area?

Examples of additional questions asked of parents in later interviews;

• If you needed support with childcare, where would you go? (in an emergency, and/or if you wanted to work)
• If you needed advice about your child’s behaviour, where would you go?
• Have you been invited to any Sure Start meetings?
• Have you attended any?
• If not, why not?
• If yes, how did you find the meetings?
• Would you attend again, and would you recommend to a friend that they attend?
• What could be done to make it easier/better/ideal for parents to participate in decision-making?
References


**Additional Documents:**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Steering Group</strong></td>
<td>Group of academics that were to meet if a conflict of interest arose between the research group and Sure Start. (This group never needed to meet).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountable body</strong></td>
<td>An organisation that assumes legal and financial liability for another organisation. (See PEEP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action research</strong></td>
<td>Is cyclical, involves change and encourages participation from those involved in the research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delivery plan</strong></td>
<td>A plan detailing how the Sure Start programme was to be set-up and managed as well as what was going to be done in the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dual management (dual accountability)</strong></td>
<td>Each member of staff holds a contract of employment with Sure Start as well as with their ‘parent’ agency, which is also the employing authority. In practice it means staff are managed by two line managers, one in Sure Start and one in their ‘parent’ agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (known as Early Years Partnership)</strong></td>
<td>A partnership between Early Years providers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EASOCEC - East and South Oxford Community Education Centre</strong></td>
<td>Offers various training opportunities to the local community and is involved in co-ordinating and staffing Sure Start's training for staff and parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Links</strong></td>
<td>A local charity offering 10-week structured parenting programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Nurturing Network</strong></td>
<td>A local charity offering 10-week structured parenting programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback loop</strong></td>
<td>The way in which information gathered through the research was passed-on to the Sure Start team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field Notes</strong></td>
<td>Detailed diaries that the researchers kept over the course of the evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home-Start</strong></td>
<td>A family-support organisation working in the local area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IT – Information Technology</strong></td>
<td>Term used to refer to all those aspects of computer training, support and maintenance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jargon Box</strong></td>
<td>In place to discourage people from using jargon in meetings and documentation. Any use of jargon incurred a nominal fine, which went towards the mini-bus fund.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lead partner</strong></td>
<td>The organisation that takes responsibility for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mapping Database</strong></td>
<td>The name of the electronic database that held all the information about who used what service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N5</strong></td>
<td>An analysis package used to organise the transcripts of the interviews collected by the research team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS)</strong></td>
<td>A consortium of academics responsible for evaluating the whole Sure Start programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Door policy</strong></td>
<td>Refers to the idea that parents can attend part of a meeting and do not necessarily have to stay for the whole meeting if it is inconvenient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OXPIP - Oxford Parent Infant Programme</strong></td>
<td>Offers advice on post natal depression and problems with attachment between infant and carer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Diaries</strong></td>
<td>Parents kept records of their daily lives over a 2-week period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant observation</strong></td>
<td>Where the researchers attend events and meetings to observe. They may note in their Field Diaries things that would not be recorded in the meeting documentation such as group interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PEEP – Peers Early Education Partnership</strong></td>
<td>Locally-based voluntary organisation who aims to improve educational achievement and school readiness of all under 5 year olds in their catchment area through working with their parents and carers. They were the lead partner and accountable body for the local Sure Start programme before it became independent with its own Management Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POD – Parent’s Opening Doors</strong></td>
<td>A Sure Start building in Littlemore that is the base for the Lending and Recycling service as well as some clinics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Service Agreement Targets - (PSA Targets)</strong></td>
<td>Provide a way of monitoring progress towards the Government’s objectives that all Sure Start Programmes work towards. (See Service Delivery Agreement Targets).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong></td>
<td>Term to describe research methods. Refers to methods that use language to evaluate something rather than using numbers. For example semi-structured interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantitative</strong></td>
<td>Term to describe research methods. Something that is countable or measurable in numerical terms. In this report, refers to the analysis of the service usage in Chapter 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relate</strong></td>
<td>Offers advice on relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Advisory Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scrutiny of Records</strong></td>
<td>Collection of paper and electronic documentation with a view to informing the researcher’s understanding of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semi-structured Interviews</strong></td>
<td>The interview is based on a set of predetermined questions but the interviewer is free to ask additional questions as they arise out of the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service Agreements</strong></td>
<td>The contract between Sure Start and any partner detailing how they would work together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service Delivery Agreement Targets - (SDA Targets)</strong></td>
<td>The way in which each local Sure Start programme plans to address the Public Service Agreement targets. They are likely to be unique to each local programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service Uptake</strong></td>
<td>Use of Sure Start services by children and their carers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small Group</strong></td>
<td>Meeting structure where up to 6 members of staff meet together once a month to share information and provide peer support. See <strong>Snaggers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Snaggers</strong></td>
<td>A Meeting where a representative from each of the Small Groups meets with the management team to share information and consult on issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start Point Data</strong></td>
<td>The initial information gathered to provide a picture of what services existed in the area prior to Sure Start.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trailblazer</strong></td>
<td>A Sure Start programme that was set up at the very beginning of the Sure Start initiative. There are currently 5 waves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcript</strong></td>
<td>The typewritten record of a spoken interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working Groups</strong></td>
<td>The various groups set up to manage the short and long-term delivery of Sure Start’s services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>