

EVALUATION OF SURE START BURLEY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The programme is still at an early stage of service delivery having recently completed appointment of the staff team.
- 1.2 The programme has engaged Nick Frost, University of Leeds, as an evaluator for the programme. The model that has been adopted is that Nick will provide advice, guidance and liaison with key bodies and undertake limited direct evaluation tasks.
- 1.3 It is understood that for major evaluation tasks additional resources will have to be made available – a process which may or may not involve Nick directly.

2. Evaluation accountability

- 2.1 It is understood that the Sure Start Unit see the Programme manager as accountable for the evaluation. Monitoring of the evaluation will happen through the risk assessment process. All communication from the national Unit and the region on evaluation issues will take place through the manager.
- 2.2 The Programme has established an evaluation sub-group that has parental involvement. The evaluation sub-group reports to the management board.

3. What is a local evaluation?

- 3.1 Sure Start nationally see three evaluation processes as taking place:

The National Evaluation of Sure Start
Independent local evaluation
Project monitoring

Whilst all three are evidently related each has a distinct purpose.

- 3.2 The purpose of local evaluation is to assess ‘what we are doing and are we doing it well?’.
- 3.3 Specifically this must include:
 - a user satisfaction survey
 - a cost effectiveness study
- 3.4 Additionally Sure Start states that a local evaluation may want to examine the effectiveness of the partnership, the operation of management structures, how professionals are working together and how service delivery is operating.
- 3.5 This programme has already undertaken the first element of this – the effectiveness study of the partnership (the summary is attached as Appendix One).
- 3.6 Sure Start region have informed Sure Start Burley that as we have already undertaken a baseline survey of satisfaction as part of our planning there is no need to repeat at the moment.

- 3.7 It is suggested that it is too early to undertake a cost effectiveness study – this should take place during financial year 2004-5.
4. Evaluation of activities
 - 4.1. The project evaluator has met with all staff members to discuss their evaluation needs. Evaluation tools are being drawn up in consultation with each staff member to be implemented as soon as possible.
 - 4.2 Some activities such as Sure Start have established evaluation methods. Where these exist no further evaluation tools will be developed. Data gathered by these tools will be collated on an annual basis.
5. Targets for evaluation 2004-5
 - 5.1 To ensure all project activities are routinely evaluated.
 - 5.2 To complete the cost effectiveness study during the financial year 2004-5.
 - 5.3 To plan for user satisfaction study to be undertaken 2005-6
 - 5.4 To complete annual report on evaluation activities in January, 2006

APPENDIX ONE

SUMMARY REPORT

This survey of Sure Start Burley Board members was undertaken by Nick Frost, University of Leeds, during September and October, 2003. The survey was requested by the Sure Start Burley Evaluation sub-group and the idea approved by the Sure Start Burley Board. It should be noted that the survey was perhaps not undertaken at the best time - as this is a time, as one respondents put it when 'we are on the cusp' of delivering services. As a result some respondents were interviewed before the recent wave of staff appointments and some after this period.

Six members of the Board were interviewed using a semi-structured schedule. In addition eight completed questionnaires were received from other members of the Board. The interview schedule and the questionnaire asked similar questions. This document is a summary of the full survey report. A copy of the full report is available on request from the Sure Start office.

The main findings of the survey are as follows:

The majority of respondents felt that the Board and sub-groups were working well. Respondents were largely positive about the practical operation of the partnership – the organisation and chairing of meetings, the nature of the minutes and follow up of action points. A minority of members felt that some organisational aspects could be improved – with Board papers coming through in one package, papers not being tabled at the meetings and less jargon being used during meetings.

No substantial criticisms were made of the scope of the partnership or the ultimate aims of Sure Start Burley. The main criticisms expressed, which might be best described as frustrations, relate to the slow pace of implementation and the nature of parental involvement.

A majority of respondents expressed frustration at the slow pace of implementation. Most respondents felt that this was not always the fault of the partnership but related to national and regional requirements and the inevitably slow nature of bureaucracy in relation to issues such as staff recruitment. However, these frustrations suggest that there is now a need to ensure that service delivery progresses as quickly as possible.

Almost every respondent felt that parental involvement was a problematic issue for the Board. All agreed this had been fairly successful early in the process but had tailed off significantly since. Most felt this was connected with two factors – the loss of the parental involvement worker and the slow pace of implementation. More specific critiques were made by a few respondents who variously felt that:

- Those parents currently involved should not be seen as necessarily 'representative'
- There need to be more parents from ethnic minority backgrounds involved in Sure Start Burley
- Parental involvement can sometimes be tokenistic

All agreed that there is a need for a major emphasis on developing parental involvement over the forthcoming period.

In terms of service delivery most were happy with existing plans and targets. When asked about the needs of local families and/or the need to develop further services there was a strong emphasis on play. Professionals and parents alike spoke about the need for safe, clean, well-maintained and economic play opportunities to exist in the area. The Board may wish to have a specific discussion of this issue to ensure that it is receiving due emphasis in project plans.

Many felt that now that Sure Start Burley is moving towards service delivery the time maybe opportune for a re-launch. Some sort of event and another edition of the newsletter was suggested by some respondents.

The time for service delivery has now arrived and many felt that this was a time for Sure Start Burley to be presented as an organisation that actually delivers. Respondents felt in relation to many of the questions that local people need to see concrete service delivery as the next step and that this would act as the basis for more widespread awareness, increased parental involvement and a new stage of development.

Issues arising from this report include:

- Some of the operational issues relating to the planning and conduct of meetings should be considered
 - There is a need to move towards service delivery as quickly as possible
 - Consideration should be given to a 're-launch' of Sure Start Burley given recent service delivery developments
 - This should act as a springboard for enhanced parental involvement
- The issue of play may be worthy of particular consideration and emphasis