

Executive Summary

The Sure Start Sheerness Sure Start Partnership is a fourth wave Sure Start programme that forms part of the Swale Regeneration Partnership and aims to address family needs within Swale Borough Council. The Partnership effectively established itself and its services during 2001/02.

The Sure Start Sheerness Partnership received the approval for its programme in 2002, planning an ambitious ten-year programme of activity that aims to address the continuum of needs of local families with very young children. Consequently, the focus of this first evaluation report has been about identifying the lessons learned from the experience of establishment at strategic and operational levels, while also establishing baselines of satisfaction with local services and to identify any other unmet needs amongst local families.

In understanding the progress of the Sure Start Sheerness Partnership since its inception, and exploring some of the key reasons for the performance outcomes, in some cases, notably as it relates to:

- ❑ Appointing a high quality programme director and programme management team and, in turn, establishing a core team with a commitment to multi-agency working where families are at the centre;
- ❑ Achieving Investors in People accreditation, the first Sure Start programme nationally to do so;
- ❑ With more than half of parents identifying that already Sure Start Sheerness is helping their child's ability to learn, their child's ability to play and their child's ability to get on better with other children
- ❑ 87% of parents indicating that Sure Start Sheerness is having a positive effect on the community.

the Partnership should feel very proud of its achievements.

In some areas, notably about addressing the capital needs of the programme, enhancing the role of parents in programme design and delivery and making improvements to outdoor play areas there is more work to occur.

However, this must be understood within the context of the process to date incorporating a significant investment in the actions of establishing

programme and partnership infrastructure, building links with local families, agencies and other mainstream organisations, and commencing delivery, especially given recruitment pressures.

The extent to which the Sure Start Sheerness programme, however, is already perceived to offer an opportunity to make a qualitative and substantial improvement to local families and their very young children and to raise aspirations is highly encouraging. No doubt, this places the Partnership in excellent stead for meeting programme targets and making a sustainable improvement to the lives and opportunities of local families.

A. Strategic dimension

1. There are some specific areas of strength for Sure Start Sheerness, as it relates to ensuring that parents are central in the design and delivery of the programme. These relate particularly to ensuring places for parents on the Board and sub-groups, ensuring a standing agenda item for a report from the parents' group at Board meetings and ensuring that training opportunities reflect the needs of local parents both as it relates to participation in committees and for their own development.
2. Ensuring that parental involvement remains central to the design and the delivery of the programme is likely to involve a multi-layered strategy that links with the *Capacity Building Strategy June 2003*.
3. The Sure Start Sheerness Management Board is well structured, enabling a sound focus on strategic issues.
4. Like many Sure Start programmes, the periods of implementation and maintenance that follow the initial delivery plan approval processes create a need for alternative governance structures. This is particularly true in terms of defining a role for the wider partnership. Sure Start Sheerness should consider processes of redefinition as well.
5. To enhance the Board's role and processes of working, Sure Start Sheerness could consider establishing an induction process for the new Board, following the upcoming elections, supported with manuals that set out roles and responsibilities and training.
6. Given the determination of Sure Start Sheerness to ensure that it delivers appropriate services to local families in the most

appropriate way, any actions that might help accelerate the capital programme of Sure Start Sheerness must be encouraged.

B. Operational Dimension

1. Sure Start Sheerness should feel very proud of the extent to which it has established a team that is committed to working co-operatively and creatively in a multi-agency multi-disciplinary context that is responsive to the needs of local families.
2. That Sure Start Sheerness is the first Sure Start programme nationally to achieve Investors in People accreditation is testimony of the extent to which the organisation values its staff.
3. While the degree of trust is high and Sure Start Sheerness is also reducing waiting times for services, and these must be maintained, there might be scope for exploring some systemisation or co-ordination of the processes of multi-disciplinary interventions. This is to ensure effective information sharing and to ensure that all families receive appropriate services that effectively address the continuum of their needs.
4. That many providers identify that there have been increases in the levels of referrals between providers is encouraging about the extent to which the providers consider themselves part of a 'programme' and that the spectrum of needs of local families are being better addressed.
5. Sure Start Sheerness should also feel very proud of its success, especially when measured comparatively with other Sure Start programmes, in engaging with young parents/carers.
6. Sure Start Sheerness should consider targeted approaches that seek to engage male parents/carers.

C. Client Dimension

1. Sure Start Sheerness should feel very proud of the extent to which, at such an early stage in the life of the programme, local families are identifying a positive impact from the programme in terms of improving quality of community life, improving their capacities as parents and improving the development of their children and babies.

2. The results identified represent baselines for measuring progress in future years. These baselines could be updated through annual external evaluation processes.
3. Sure Start Sheerness could consider setting satisfaction targets for all activities that recognise the goal of improving the levels of satisfaction with locally available services.
4. Sure Start Sheerness could also consider exploring ways of improving understanding of the component parts of satisfaction, such as 'friendliness of staff', 'opening times' and 'ease of making an appointment'. This could occur through consultation processes with local parents.

Health services

5. In terms of **health services**, 76% of local parents identify that there are sufficient levels of health services locally. As it relates to the types of additional health services sought, generally this relates to improving the accessibility of, and understanding of existing service provision.
6. The level of satisfaction with Sure Start provided health services is very high. Satisfaction levels range from 88% to 100% in all health oriented services. Particularly high levels of satisfaction exist for the health visitors and the oral health educator.
7. The most favourite health service for local parents is GPs and the least favourite service is dentistry. The satisfaction with GPs relates predominantly to issues of helpfulness and approachability, while with dentists the predominant issue relates to fear of using dentists. To this end, Sure Start Sheerness supporting an oral health educator might benefit addressing these fears.

Play and learning

8. In terms of **play and learning services**, 82% of local parents identify that there are sufficient levels of play and learning services locally. As it relates to the types of additional services sought, there is significant diversity in the types of provision requested.
9. The level of satisfaction with play and learning services exists within a range of 77% of parents indicating that they were **Satisfied** or **Very Satisfied** with Baby PALS and the crèche to 93% **Satisfied** to **Very Satisfied** with Little PALS.

10. The most favourite play and learning service is Little PALS, with parents especially pleased with the degree to which the service enables improved child development and interaction. There were too few parents willing to cite services that needed improvement as it relates to play and learning to draw meaningful inferences.

Training and education

11. In terms of training and education services, 83% of local parents identify that there are sufficient levels of training and education services locally, albeit that a number of parents are keen for crèche provision at courses to enable their attendance and parents have ideas about specific types of training that they would find especially useful.
12. The level of satisfaction with training and education services exists within a range of 78% of parents indicating that they are Satisfied to Very Satisfied with driving lessons to 93% of parents indicating that they are Satisfied to Very Satisfied first aid training.
13. The numbers of parents indicating training and education that they liked most or requiring most improvement are statistically too small to draw meaningful inferences.

Support for parents and families

14. In terms of support for parents and families, 82% of local parents identify that there are sufficient levels of support for parents and families locally. As it relates to the types of additional services sought, like health services, generally this relates to improving the accessibility of, and understanding of existing service provision.
15. The level of satisfaction within the range Satisfied to Very Satisfied constitutes 69% satisfaction with Outdoor play areas, to 95% with Exercise classes.

The most favourite service that supports families has been the paddling pool, and this is a credit to Sure Start Sheerness making a difference to the needs of local families with very young children

16. Outdoor play is the service needing most improvement, and relates particularly to concerns about the safety and quality of these opportunities locally.

