

SURE START ST. MATTHEW'S: THE SCOPE OF THE LOCAL EVALUATION

**REPORT ON RESULTS OF SURVEY
OF LOCAL RESIDENTS AND WORKERS 2001**

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Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Survey

1.2 Methods Used to Conduct the Survey

1.3 Prior Considerations

1.1 Aim of the Survey

1.1.1 Using an independent contractor, to access a range of professionals and parents currently involved in the establishment of the St Matthew's Sure Start programme, in order to ascertain their views about how the evaluation of SS's work should be undertaken and what the scope of the evaluation should be.

1.1.2 The aim of the Report is not to offer a design for the evaluation process itself but to *inform* the design of the evaluation.

1.2. Survey Method

1. 2.1 Two researchers from the Youth Affairs Unit, De Montfort University (Bob Payne and Anne Clarke) interviewed 23 people from the Parents' Forum and other statutory and voluntary agencies represented on the SS Partnership Board and the St. Matthews Area Forum.

1. 2.2 The interviews lasted, on average, for about 45 minutes.

1. 2.3 Where appropriate, interpreters were provided by Sure Start.

1. 2.4 Interviews took the form of semi-structured conversations and included the following questions: what principles should underpin the SS evaluation? who should be involved in the evaluation? what evaluation methods should be used? what questions should be asked and what targets should be set?

1. 2.5 A copy of the interview schedule and the list of interviewees can be found at Appendices 1 & 2.

1.3. Prior Considerations

1.3.1 In considering the design of the evaluation, Sure Start will need to take account of some prior considerations which are set out in the project's documentation and built into the arrangements before the Sure Start programme started.

1.3.2 The early common concerns which led to the programme were identified as:
Remoteness of services
Their uncoordinated nature
Language difficulties

1.3.3. The Vision Statement (2.3 in the Delivery Plan) summarises the aims of the programme.

1.3.4 The project is committed to equality and diversity (5 in the Delivery Plan).

1.3.5 The need to take into account child safety and protection arrangements will be fundamental.

1.3.6 There are two key statements from the Delivery Plan relating to evaluation of the project:

The Partnership Board will instigate a local evaluation programme that will allow early identification of examples of good practice to be promoted outside of the Sure Start area (2.4.5)

The local evaluation will be delivered by an external agency yet to be determined. There are three key expectations from this activity:

1.3.7 The evaluation will include an assessment of how far the programme has met/is meeting the national targets.

1.3.8 The form and frequency of monitoring and evaluation programmes established by individual agencies will need to be taken into account.

1.3.9 The local evaluation will need to identify the broad range of benefits to people with young families living on the estate: for example, improved mainstream service delivery; additional services provided through Sure Start and an assessment of their effectiveness; degree of parental involvement in programme development and evaluation; greater access to and take up of services by all residents (3.3.6 in the Delivery Plan)

Chapter 2: The Scope of the Evaluation - Identification of Content

2.1 Many different evaluation sites, targets and measures were identified. The professionals, familiar with the philosophy of Sure Start, and the specific content of the local Delivery Plan, identified a greater range of national and local targets for evaluation than did members of the Parents Forum.

2.2 Measuring effectiveness against quantitative targets

Most professionals identified the monitoring measures set out in the Delivery Plan at 2.6, sometimes suggesting other, additional measures of success that could be used to judge SS's effectiveness in reaching particular quantitative targets.

2.2.1 Health Outcomes

Are people healthier?

Indices of success identified in the Delivery Plan: is there less post-natal depression? is there a reduction in low birth weight? is there less smoking? is there less teenage pregnancy? is there a reduction in number of children admitted to hospital in the first year of life?

Other measures identified by the survey included: is there an improvement in children's growth due to improved diet? is there a decrease in numbers of children and parents presenting with minor illnesses at GP's surgeries?

It was envisaged that these statistics would be collected and collated by Health Visitors and other health professionals working as part of, or in collaboration with, the SS team.

2.2.2. Educational Outcomes

Are children better prepared for school?

Indices of success identified in the Delivery Plan: reduction in unauthorised absences from school; reduction in exclusions from school; increase in number of children assessed as having normal language and speech development before they start school; improved access to specialist services for those children with special educational needs.

Other measures identified by the survey: reduction in staff turnover at the local primary school; improvement in primary school attainment results.

It was envisaged that these statistics would be collected and collated by social workers, teachers and pre-school educationalists working as part of, or in collaboration with, the SS team.

2.2.3 Parenting Outcomes

Does the quality of home-based child care and education improve?

Indices of success identified in the Delivery Plan: improvement in adult literacy rate; increase in numbers of parents/grandparents/other carers reporting that they read regularly to their children; reduction in numbers of re-registrations of children on 'at risk' register.

Other measures identified by the survey: increase in number of parents with pre-school age children choosing to stay with their children during the day.

It was envisaged that these statistics would be collected and collated by social workers, play workers, health workers and others working as part of, or in collaboration with, the SS team.

2.2.4 Employment and Training Outcomes

Does the additional child care provision delivered by SS meet parents' needs in relation to their ability to take up employment and training opportunities?

Indices of success identified in the Delivery Plan: increase in numbers in economic activity or training – the Delivery Plan specifically identifies the monitoring of numbers of 16-19 year olds in economic or training activity.

Other measures identified by the survey: numbers of all adults on the estate in economic activity or training.

It was envisaged that these statistics would be collected and collated by ConneXions, the Employment Agency, the adult education/lifelong learning service and the FE colleges, working in collaboration with the SS team.

2.2.5 Parent participation

How far have local residents been actively involved in the establishment, maintenance, delivery and evaluation of SS services?

Indices of success identified in the Delivery Plan: parental representation on SS local programme board; increase in number of parents involved in local initiatives; and increase in number of community groups established.

Other measures identified by the survey: degree to which parental involvement comes from across the many different 'micro-communities' that together constitute the St. Matthew's community as a whole; service use monitoring by individual agencies, for example recording attendance of parents at meetings and the extent to which volunteers come forward to help with specific tasks to develop SS services.

It was envisaged that these statistics would be collected and collated by the SS management and/or an external agency and/or members of the local community.

2.3 The Parents' Focus

The evaluation measure that parents focused on related to 2.2.4 above: numbers of adults accessing employment and education opportunities, made possible by the provision of affordable, easily accessible, good quality play and learning provision for pre-school age children.

They did not see the provision of 'parenting classes' as a priority *for themselves*, although this is established as a primary aim in the Delivery Plan.

They were less clear than the professionals about how the quality of health and education services provided for their children could or should be measured.

2.4 Evaluating Workers' Experiences of the Project

Many of the professionals identified the importance of evaluating workers' experiences of the SS project.

Looking for evidence of a 'more open, collaborative approach' between professionals, was seen as one way of measuring the project's success in terms of providing a 'seamless, wrap-around service' delivered by community-based workers from various professional disciplines.

Looking for evidence of increased job satisfaction for professional community workers was also suggested as a measure of success.

2.5 Evaluating Impact on the Community as a Whole

The Parents who were interviewed expressed more positive attitudes towards estate life than did many of the professionals, who tended to focus more on what was 'wrong' with life/services on the estate.

2.5.1 Most people referred to the need to evaluate

'things that are of importance to the local community'

the impact of programme on the community as a whole

responsiveness of the programme to community needs

the programme's contribution to the wider community

Community capacity building is a central focus of the SS programme (the largest single budgetary item in the Delivery Plan) but professional and parents alike were unsure about how this aspect of SS's work could be formally measured and evaluated.

2.5.2 Everyone recognised that there was more to community life than could be represented by statistics.

Quantitative data about a 'post-coded' population's health, employment, education and housing status was seen as being 'relatively easy' to produce - and important for providing an insight into the economic nature of the population. But everyone agreed that numeric data alone would not tell us much about the 'real' content of community life: that is, the feelings and relationships that people have for others living on the estate.

2.5.3 It was recognised that to find out about SS's impact on this, will require a different, *qualitative* evaluation approach.

One of the methodological difficulties to overcome will be ensuring that the evaluation team has an accurate base-line picture of the community, against which to measure qualitative progress.

2.5.4 'Listening' was identified many times as the main evaluation method that SS should use

And the frequency with which service deliverers *acted* on what they heard service users saying, was also identified as a potential evaluation measure.

2.5.5 This is what some of our respondents said about the St. M's community:

It is a good place, quiet, not corrupt.

It is very neighbourly here.

There is racial harassment on the streets here.

Outsiders think of St. Matthew's as a place that's full of alcoholics and sex workers.

Children running about unsupervised on the streets is not a problem here.

You get a lot of disaffected youth hanging about causing a lot of irritating damage

There are many different communities within St. M's, many different population boundaries to manage. There is a large refugee and migrant workers population, from many different parts of the world, but the majority of residents are white

working class British and there are high numbers of single parent and elderly person households within this group. The refugee group are just glad to be here because it's a whole lot better than where they've come from, but the white 'council tenant' population is much more likely to see the estate as a 'dumping ground' and this affects their self-esteem. They're at the bottom of the housing pile. So they must be bottom-of-the-pile people. And educational facilities are not very good (here). There is no nearby secondary school, so the estate's teenagers have to be bussed out of the estate. And people fear that their children will be held back educationally at the primary school age if they are in classes where there are many non (or poor) English-speaking pupils or where there are a lot of children with emotional and behavioural problems.

There is a large Somali population here, many of whom are doctors and teachers and lawyers, a well-educated, middle class group who will want to move out of St. M's fairly quickly to gain access to 'good' schools. They are well organised as a group within the community.

People move out because they feel isolated, lonely. They move out to be 'amongst their own community'. This is especially the case for people from the Asian community within St. M's.

2.5.6 The local Vision Statement (2.3 of Delivery Plan) identifies the project's goal:

We want parents to stay on the St. Matthews estate to bring up their children because of the quality of services and radical commitment to partnership.

2.5.7 But evaluating SS's role in producing 'population stability' would be very difficult to assess without undertaking a full-scale research study, since variables affecting whether people want to stay on or leave the estate in future years, will be determined by many circumstances and factors outside the scope of SS to affect, as the above extracts from people's conversations indicates.

2.5.8 No matter how brilliant the pre-school facilities are, if there is no high-performing community secondary school within walking distance, that will act as a strong pull away the estate for many people.

2.5.9 Acting as a force in the opposite direction will be people's feelings of affection for their friends and neighbours on the estate.

2.5.10 Measuring the impact of SS on population stability or on any other aspect of community change and development would therefore be a complex process.

2.5.11 Indices of community capacity building success identified in the Delivery Plan: some evaluation measures of community capacity building were identified in the Delivery Plan, although no specific targets were set. For example, an increase in numbers participating in community groups was suggested.

Other measures identified by the survey: numbers of new friendships made and numbers 'emerging from their homes' to participate in community life; number of tenants and prospective tenants expressing a preference for a St. Matthews' tenancy.

The first two measures (friendships and participation in community life) were felt to be important indices of success but impossible (?) to monitor and evaluate accurately.

It was envisaged that statistics relating to tenants' and prospective tenants' views about the perceived desirability of a tenancy on the estate, could be collected and collated by the City Council Housing Dept..

2.5.12 Additionally, people suggested other ways of assessing 'community pride' and 'community fellowship': less litter, less vandalism, less noise nuisance, less petty theft, less graffiti.

2.5.13 Also, evidence of increasing external confidence in the area could be provided by the opening up of new shops and other business enterprises on the estate.

2.5.14 People also talked about measuring 'feelings of well-being', using a standardised questionnaire such as the one administered on a community-wide basis on the Northfields estate.

2.5.15 And some professionals expressed concern about the level of 'Big Mother' monitoring that was going to go on in particular geographical areas, possibly resulting in the stigmatisation of all (or most) parents in that area and the drawing away of resources from other areas.

Chapter 3: The Scope of the Evaluation - Identification of Evaluation Methods, Processes and Procedures

3.1 Quantitative Data

3.1.1 Most evaluation measures identified in the Delivery Plan and by the survey respondents required the collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of quantitative data, largely held on monitoring files kept by workers within all the different agencies identified above.

3.1.2 Issues relating to data protection and confidentiality rights will need to be explored.

3.1.3 It may be that this element of the evaluation programme is co-ordinated by one person skilled in the use of data base and statistical software.

3.1.4 And that capacity-building, in-house training is offered (perhaps on a one-to-one basis) to a parent or other carer interested in learning these ICT skills and willing to use those skills for the benefit of the project, as well as for her/his own personal benefit.

3.2 Action Research

3.2.1 This was the approach favoured by most respondents: rapidly feeding evaluation results back into the team and into other projects.

3.2.2 Connected to this were issues to do with the frequency and regularity with which evaluation data should be collected, collated and disseminated.

3.2.3 It was recognised that certain types of evaluation data – the quantitative data - could be processed quite rapidly but that it would take much longer to collect, collate and analyse qualitative evaluation data.

3.3 Methodological Issues: Objectivity, Participation and Representation

3.3.1 There was no clear view about who/which agency should do the on-going quantitative monitoring and the longer-term qualitative evaluation of SS's success.

3.3.2 Some thought that this function would be best handled by one person within SS – for example, on a full-time appointment.

3.3.3 Others thought that there should be a team approach, albeit co-ordinated by one person, possibly the Sure Start Manager.

3.3.4 Others thought that it should be organised and delivered by an external agency.

3.3.5 Connected with the selection of approach were considerations about the 'proximity' of the evaluators to the project. A number of views were expressed about this.

3.3.6 There was generally a desire that the evaluation 'team' should develop a good understanding of the work of the project team and the pressures on them and that it should also develop a close relationship of trust with team members.

3.3.7 Some professionals were more sceptical about the 'hard truth' that you got from evaluations carried out by people who *liked* you. – or didn't like you. And some felt that when things went wrong, there was always a lot of institutional 'passing the buck', which was likely to colour people's evaluation of their own work and the work of other projects.

3.3.8 There was a general assumption that evaluation would inevitably involve evaluation forms and evaluation discussions with recipients of services, including children.

3.3.9 The use of short, frequently-administered questionnaires was mentioned, together with use of focus groups and home visits, to collect information about people's experiences of their local health and education services.

3.3.10 It was stressed that SS needed to 'advertise itself and keep on advertising itself'. The maintenance of a *high profile* was seen as crucial to SS's success and it was suggested that use should be made of regular local radio and newspaper interviews; and that videos, directories and posters should be produced and widely distributed – for example, through the Housing Dept.

You have to maintain a high profile presence – you have to be seen outside the shops and neighbourhood centres and health centres and the school – your face and manner have to become very familiar to people, before they will think of approaching you.

3.3.11 The word '**listening**' was used many times to describe how parents and other carers' responses should be collected.

3.3.12 The use of bi-lingual support workers was identified many times as essential to this process in this community.

The use of bi-lingual support workers should therefore be evaluated during and at the end of the project.

3.3.13 Access to same-sex, home-visitor evaluators was identified as necessary if certain groups of parents were to be included in the evaluation.

3.3.14 But there was no clear agreement about who/which agency should be recruited to carry out this 'listening'.

3.3.15 Some people identified Health Visitors as the most appropriate people to talk and listen to parents in their homes about health-related issues. It was felt that parents

would be more at ease with a 'caring professional' whom they already knew, than they would be with an external evaluator or with a neighbour whom they did not know.

3.3.16 Some stressed the importance of recruiting local parents to act as bi-lingual evaluation support workers, others felt that people would not necessarily welcome neighbours' 'intrusions' into their business.

3.3.17 Some thought that a detached, objective, professional interviewer would be more effective at eliciting accurate information than either project workers or service recipients.

3.4 Participatory Evaluation: Accessing and Evaluating Training and Other Sources of Professional Support.

3.4.1. There was a clear view that local people needed to be 'centrally involved' in the evaluation process, from the start of the project.

3.4.2 But there were differences of opinion about the degree and form of that involvement and the degree of preparatory training necessary to enable local people to participate in the design and delivery of the evaluation programme.

3.4.3 Concerns relating to child protection issues and the maintenance of confidentiality were expressed, as above.

3.4.4. Concerns were expressed about the capacity of local people to deal with written material particularly where technical jargon was used.

3.4.5 The 'buddy' (resident/worker) system that currently operates for the Partnership Board meetings was identified as a system that could be extended.

3.4.6 The provision of on-going evaluation training for staff and members of the community was identified as an important element of community capacity building.

3.4.7 Several people said that they thought that this training should be carried out by an external agency.

3.4.8 An evaluation of SS should therefore include an evaluation of the effectiveness of any training delivered or purchased by it.

3.5 Representation and Equality of Opportunity

Whose voices/views represent the community?

3.5.1 Community-based workers very often see/use local community activists as if they were the representative voice of the local population, whilst simultaneously recognising that this is not 'really' the case and identifying the need to always be

widening participation beyond the small number of people already active in community development life.

3.5.2 We are not saying that issues of representation can or should be addressed by having in mind some kind of quota system, ticking off people from this group, targeting people from that group. However, if the views of people in the Parents Forum and other community groups such as the Tenants Association, the Area Forum and the Neighbourhood Centre are to be taken as 'representative' of community feeling, then the terms and limits of that representation need to be made clear.

That is, clear reasons for differing levels of participation in community groups by different sections of the community, will need to be offered in the evaluation.

3.5.3 Developing evaluation tools and methods that are culturally sensitive will not be solely about producing information in a multi-lingual format.

3.5.4 For example, particular communities have their own ways of bringing up children which are different to those which perhaps predominate in British society. Different questions might be needed in different circumstances.

3.5.5 Mutual cultural respect was mentioned whilst recognising that there was a need to 'shift people towards best practice'.

Chapter 4: Summary and Conclusions

4. The **key questions** that the Partnership Board will need to address are:

4.1 How will the local evaluation dovetail with the national evaluation to ensure that there is no duplication? What will be the 'special' focus of the local evaluation?

4.2 How will evaluations from each agency be co-ordinated to produce an overall picture of the effectiveness of SS as a whole?

4.3 What evaluation methods will be used?

4.1 How will the local evaluation dovetail with the national evaluation to ensure that there is no duplication? What will be the 'special' focus of the local evaluation?

4.1.1 Although some locally-specific quantitative targets may be set by the Partnership Board, the production of statistical data will be largely covered by the national evaluation procedures.

4.1.2 The local evaluation might therefore focus on the collection and analysis of **qualitative data**, especially relating to **community capacity building** and **inter-agency working**.

4.2 How will evaluations from each agency be co-ordinated to produce an overall picture of the effectiveness of SS as a whole?

4.2.1 Assuming that all agencies within the partnership programme will carry out evaluations of their own services – and will devise their own methods for doing so - it will be essential that they are all familiar with the purposes, scope and methods of the overall Sure Start evaluation, so that they can incorporate within their own procedures, the collection of data needed to meet the requirements of the Sure Start evaluation focus.

4.2.2 This can probably best be achieved through team training days, possibly facilitated by an external training agency/evaluation team.

4.3 What evaluation methods will be used?

4.3.1 The approach favoured by most respondents was an **Action Research** approach, exploring people's experiences and perceptions of SS services, for example focusing on the broad question 'is this a good way of doing things in this neighbourhood?'

4.3.2 The principles underpinning an Action Research approach are that:

a) Evaluators work explicitly **with** and **for** local people rather than simply producing data **about** them.

b) Participants' views are **fed back quickly** into the project(s) in order to inform the development of the work.

4.3.3 The Partnership Board will therefore need to consider **how local residents can best be involved** as active participants in the evaluation process and **how frequently** evaluation data should be collected and analysed.

4.3.3.1 For example, **should local residents be engaged to carry out individual interviews** with other local residents? And if so, **how and by whom should they be trained to do this?**

4.3.3.2 There are **ethical considerations in relation to confidentiality issues** to be addressed here and the Partnership Board may consider it more appropriate to engage external evaluators to conduct interviews with local residents.

4.3.3.3 On the other hand, **local people are already being trained as interviewers** for a local research project designed to identify parental needs and the Partnership Board might consider it appropriate for this group to form the core of an evaluation interview team.

4.3.3.4 Another way of involving local residents in the evaluation process might be to establish relatively small, specialist **community groups** to act as support groups within the community, which would also act as '**focus groups**' concerned with evaluating particular aspects of SS's work (for example, a Young Parents Group; a Breast Feeders Group).

4.3.3.5 As well as interview-based and focus-group-based evaluations, **short questionnaire surveys** might also be used in order to reach as broad and representative a section of the population as possible.

4.3.3.6 The Partnership Board would therefore need to consider **how these might be administered and by whom**. For example, it was suggested that these might be included in a **community newsletter** or administered through a '**street-based**' process, for example undertaken by local residents positioned outside the school, health centres and/or on the shopping parade.

4.3.3.7 It was generally agreed that local evaluation data should be **collected and analysed** more frequently than will be the case with the national evaluation data – for example, **on an annual basis**.

4.3.3.8 The importance of including **workers' views** in the evaluation was emphasised.

4.4 Co-ordination of the Evaluation Process

4.4.1 It was envisaged that the **SS Director would play a significant role** in the co-ordination of the evaluation process, supported by an **evaluation team**.

4.4.2 The value of engaging external evaluators to co-ordinate the process was recognised, as it was felt that this would ensure **objectivity and consistency** of approach.

4.4.3 The value of external evaluators in **collating individual agency evaluations** to produce an overall picture of the effectiveness of SS as a whole, was recognised.

4.4.4 It was also suggested that external evaluators should be engaged to undertake **evaluation training** – to be conducted jointly with both local residents and agency workers.

4.4.5 The **size and composition of an evaluation team** would therefore need to be considered by the Partnership Board. In particular, there will be a need to balance representation and management requirements i.e. to ensure that workers and residents are appropriately represented – and trained - without the team becoming unwieldy.

APPENDIX 1

Interview Schedule: Sure Start St. Matthew's, May- June 2001.

1. What is your role in the Sure Start project?

How did you become involved in the project?

Have you had any previous experience of evaluating community-based service provision?

If so, what advice about the conduct of evaluations would you want to pass on to others?

2. What principles should underpin involvement in the SS evaluation?

Who should be involved? What evaluation methods should be used?

What questions should be asked? What targets should be set?

3. Who should be involved in the evaluation?

Which agencies should be involved?

How can SS ensure that the evaluation reaches a representative sample of users?

Should representatives from the local community who are not on the Parents' Forum and who are not direct users of Sure Start services, be involved in the evaluation?

What should be the balance between local people, agency professionals and external evaluators?

4. What evaluation methods should be used?

How can users and other residents be encouraged to become involved in the SS evaluation?

How could the evaluation measure *and contribute to* community capacity building?

What are the cultural issues which might affect the way in which the evaluation is done?

How will the SS evaluation take account of the impact of other local initiatives?

How should the evaluation be co-ordinated? By one project officer? By a team of SS project workers/partners? By external evaluators?

How should this evaluation dovetail with the evaluations undertaken by the

different agencies involved?

How should this evaluation dovetail with the national evaluation?

5. What questions should be asked and what targets should be set?

How can we know that the services are reaching the people that they are supposed to be reaching?

What quantitative/qualitative information should be sought?

How could the evaluation measure the impact on the quality of individuals' lives?

How could it measure the impact on the overall community?

How can the Key Objectives be translated into easily understood words and ideas?

Should the Key Objectives be prioritised or are they all equally important?

Should professionals and local people be asked the same questions?

How can the evaluation avoid 'soft' targets?

6. Have you any further suggestions to make about the evaluation process?