

**Evaluation of
Sure Start Harlow Parnall Wood
Evaluation report
Draft**

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1. BACKGROUND AND THE EVALUATION

1.1. Sure Start in Harlow Parnall Wood

1.1.1. Sure Start Harlow Parnall Wood is a second wave programme that was given approval by the Sure Start Unit in December 2000 and has recently obtained approval for funding until March 2006. The broad objectives of the Sure Start programme in Harlow Parnall Wood are to:

- *offer high quality play and early learning experiences to pre-school children and;*
- *enhance levels of support to their families in small local areas where there are particularly high incidences of social deprivation*

1.1.2. Sure Start in Harlow Parnall Wood spread over three wards, the whole of Stewards, part of Kingsmoor and part of Latton Bush. While some landscape features are the boundaries of the catchment area (Southern Way to the North and Rye Hill Common to the South), there is no feeling from the families and from the professionals that the Sure Start catchment area forms a neighbourhood in the sense of a distinct entity. The drawing of the catchment area was finalised further to consultation with families, voluntary groups and professionals and revolves around Staple Tye shopping centre, contains a number of housing estates (Gibb Croft, Millwards and Longbanks) and includes minority groups (Chinese community and Traveller families either in Fernhill caravan site or housed). Based on the 1991 Census data the population is estimated to be around 10,400 including around 900 children under the age of four (as presented in the programme plan). The catchment area covers two clinics, Keats and Lister, and five infant schools: St. James, Milwards, Latton Green, Kingsmoor and Peterswood.

1.2. Evaluation objectives and issues

1.2.1. The Sure Start Unit Guidance on Evaluating Sure Start (August 2001) presents three objectives to the local evaluations of programmes:

- (1) to understand how well their services are performing
- (2) to keep track of progress in meeting the objectives and targets for Sure Start
- (3) to make changes to their programme as a result of evaluation findings.

1.2.2. Progress against targets and local monitoring information is collected and recorded by the local Sure Start programmes themselves. A number of programmes have chosen to keep the evaluation work internal to the programme while others have chosen to commission part of the evaluation to an external organisation. The latter option was chosen by Sure Start Harlow Parnall Wood. The programme co-ordinator collects evidence of progress towards objectives set out on the programme plan and PSA/SDA milestones and Cambridge Policy Consultants (CPC) were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the programme with the objectives to:

- evaluate the structures and operations of the programme
- evaluate the impact of the programme on the target population.

The evaluation programme has not been about analysing programme monitoring or financial information. Value for money which any programme publicly funded should seek is the responsibility of the management board.

1.2.3. The evaluation had to reflect the flexibility of Sure Start to evolve with the programme because:

- the emphasis of Sure Start is on making changes to the programme according to findings from the evaluation;
- the duration of the programme is over a number of years, implying start up issues and changes implemented as lessons are learnt;
- the flexible nature of the Sure Start programme itself which enables each Sure Start initiative the opportunity to develop its own programme of activities, allows for adaptation of activities to local needs, to evaluation findings and to parents becoming more aware about what the programme is about as well as more confident and knowledgeable about their children's development and needs.

The methodology is presented in the section below.

1.2.4. The flexibility inherent to Sure Start and the position of CPC as external evaluators meant that keeping up-dated on the changes in the programme required frequent visits and contacts with the partners and it is possible that

some of the recommendations presented in this document may have already been discussed by some partners or even acted upon. However being external to Sure Start has provided advantages such as facilitating objectivity towards the projects and the partners and allowing parents¹ to speak more freely than they may have done if the evaluation had been internally undertaken.

1.2.5. The work by CPC has extended over two years, from 2002 to 2004. An evaluation report was prepared in Spring 2003 which acts as a baseline for the process of implementing Sure Start and provided an analysis of the process which led to findings and recommendations, many of which have been implemented by the Board and management of Sure Start Harlow Parnall Wood.

1.2.6. This report uses much the same methods as was used for the first stage evaluation. However, this year, the fieldwork was undertaken partly by CPC but also by parents who expressed an interest in being involved in the evaluation processes. Six parents expressed an interest and five of them attended sessions for them to become acquainted with the evaluation methods and instruments. A number of parents commented on the questionnaire which led to improvements (the questionnaire used is attached as an annex). Four of them have undertaken telephone interviews and two of them have shadowed CPC staff when talking to frontline practitioners involved in the Sure Start programme (the topic list used is also attached as an annex). Those participating will have a letter stating that they have had the training and experience of evaluation techniques for subsequent job search. Some of those who are willing and able to continue with the evaluation work will form an internal group which will ensure ongoing evaluation of the programme with parental involvement throughout the life of the programme.

¹ In this paper, the term “parent” is used to designate parents, carers, grandparents, adult relatives.

1.3. Terminology

- 1.3.1. The report uses the term ‘professionals’ to refer the staff in specialist partner agencies such as health visitors or midwives, and the term ‘team’ to refer to the core team of Sure Start in Parnall Wood (i.e. Sure Start workers, Programme Co-ordinator, Operations Manager, Social Worker, Finance Officer and Administration Officer). This is not to say that those that are part of the Sure Start ‘team’ are not professionals as they all have professional qualifications, or that everyone in a Sure Start grant funded post is part of a unified team. This terminology is used to identify responses from those professionals from partner agencies from the professionals in the core team.

1.4. The structure of the report

- 1.4.1. The next section discusses the changes that have taken place since the last evaluation. These range from changes in national and programme policy, external operational changes and internal changes within the Harlow Parnall Wood operational framework for delivery. Some of these have directly addressed issues raised in the previous evaluation.
- 1.4.2. In the third section, we discuss the interpretation and assessment of value for money in a programme such as Sure Start, both in relation to the programme evaluation guidance and in terms of practical issues of assessment and the results of the survey of parents is presented in the fourth section. Key issues for the future are discussed in the fifth section and conclusions and recommendations are set out in the sixth and final section. An executive summary is provided at the front of the report.

2. CHANGES SINCE THE PREVIOUS EVALUATION

2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. We distinguish between changes in:

- national and programme policy;
- communications within and between the Sure Start partnership;
- changes in the nature of engagement with external organisations and professionals;
- changes in the way the programme is delivered; and,
- changes in parental involvement.

2.2. National and programme policy

2.2.1. The main change to directly affect the Sure Start operations in Harlow Parnall Wood is the advent of the Children's Centre. Sure Start is providing the core offer and the location will be the proposed new building that has now been agreed. Whilst this will allow a widening of the catchment area and include children up to their 5th birthday, it is anticipated that there will be capacity problems for delivery in integrating Sure Start with the Children's Centre. PCT records show that there are 691 children under 4yrs in the present Sure Start area and Sure Start works with around one third of these families. According to the EYDCP, there currently are about 955 children under 5 in the proposed Children Centre area. The increase in the age group is not likely to make a substantial difference since Sure Start have been pragmatic about their delivery and unofficially do not deny services to 4 year olds. For example, the Children's Occupational Therapy Team welcome the participation of 4 year olds during half term because it helps them to relearn skills and produces a better group dynamic. However, the wider area and the delivery of different services will all increase the demands on professionals – effectively, there will be competition for their time which is already quite limited and possibly also competition for clients if each have uncoordinated targets for contact. With Sure Start currently operating at near full capacity,

there will be a need to explore different ways of working, managing waiting lists, and agreeing boundaries on scale and nature of provision of a variety of services.

- 2.2.2. One advantage of the integration is that the new building is probably too large for the current state of Sure Start and the expansion into the Children's Centre with large catchment area and age group will help make better use of the building. The Neighbourhood Nursery is just around the corner which will provide lots of childcare places and there is easy access to both the Health Centre and the Library. However, the main concern appears to be the practical issues and getting them resolved before the structures for delivery are put in place about how to locate different activities to the best advantage of users.

2.3. Communications between the Sure Start partnership and parents and within the partnership

- 2.3.1. There have been improvements in communicating the variety and content of the programme activities, particularly with the Activities and Services booklet being published in Summer 2003 which included 26 different activities and contact numbers for the Sure Start team and for the professionals who contribute to the provision of services. This has helped to raise awareness of Sure Start and has proved to be a better way of getting to residents than leafleting, partly because the booklet is available in a number of places where people feel comfortable and also because it promotes word of mouth dissemination.

- 2.3.2. The three weekly drop-in sessions continues to give a way to connect to Sure Start for those people who prefer an unstructured environment in which they can make contact on their own terms. Parents' feedback from focus group and telephone survey was generally positive; it was felt reassuring by parents that they can now 'drop-in' to the Centre to discuss with professionals as well as other parents on their concerns and at the same time realise they are not on their own with the problem. However, not all are happy with that and require a more structured focused sessions through a specific activity such training.

Some parents also hoped for a more pro-active approach by Sure Start staff in making contact with parents coming to the centre, especially in relation to 'first-timers'.

2.3.3. Outreach has been a challenge since the programme started. There have been successful approaches to specific groups, in particular travellers, and less successful with groups such as the Chinese community which have their own support structures. There have also been allocations and referrals by various professionals, where health visitors have been the most pro-active and successful contributors through their health clinics, primarily because of their early and intensive contact with parents through their newborn. There perhaps needs to be more help for dads and pregnant women so that they will stay with Sure Start after the birth. However, there has been varying success in getting these parents to engage with Sure Start. For example, those with very low self-esteem may not even come at all and some families come once or twice but then do not come back.

2.3.4. Outreach has been done by the team from the start of the programme and it was soon established that it needed to be more intensive in terms of time and contacts that was expected. Now that the operations manager is in post, the intention is to link more with professionals, particularly to say what the Sure Start team can and cannot do and put boundaries around what they can do, establish policies for co-operation and develop new more appropriate practices. Part of this has to be improvements in time management and access to satellite services. This all needs a sound structure of guidelines and definitions of the limits of responsibilities.

2.3.5. There are still some internal communications issues. The communication between the programme manager and the operations manager needs to have more clarity and purpose. The programme manager is now more hands off about daily issues and has concentrated more on the strategic aspects, working with partners and other organisations, and the long term perspective for the programme, its role and its monitoring and evaluation. Whilst that has brought its own benefits, particularly for the programme manager, there is an issue of linking strategic issues to operational issues. There is a difficult balance between strategic and operational issues that could be dealt with

during Board meetings. A programme was started whereby individual members of staff made presentations about their work to the Board. The Board has however recently restructured itself to become more informed of operational issues through a series of sub-groups to which there is delegation of operational issues with reporting back to the Board. The communications between the programme manager and the operations manager are focused on operational issues, only giving information on strategic and policy matters, and do not include discussion of strategic issues and how best to deliver them, given the operational set up and day to day issues.

2.3.6. This issue was also a concern by parents that participated in the focus group. Parents felt that it was a good move to relocate Sure Start manager to the Centre, away from Kingsmoor House. This arrangement was seen as more realistic by parents as many people being actively involved with Sure Start had never met the manager. Programme manager's skill were recognised in managing the programme but it was felt that he has not been greatly involved in the operational level and parents hoped to have a more direct contact with the manager. Parents felt that approaching the Sure Start manager with queries still felt a bit awkward, 'although at least now when he is placed within the centre he can see what is going on [day-to-day]'.

2.3.7. The team now gets more daily support but there are some big gaps still to be resolved:

- time management for staff
- involving parents effectively working out from the centre
- Apart from practical guidelines, there is a need for further clarification, maybe in the form of policies and protocols about day to day work that team and other staff are involved in, in terms of their tasks and responsibilities.

2.4. Changes in the nature of engagement with external organisations and professionals

2.4.1. The professionals have now a more positive view of the Sure Start operations with a better atmosphere in the centre and much easier communications, both

between themselves and with the team. There are regular meetings between the professionals and between the professionals and the team. The professionals have now a greater presence at the Centre as they have engaged with the spirit of Sure Start and have been willing to open up to all parents, not just their pre-defined (statutory) client group. The team and the range of professionals have been/will be increased as the range of services expands, including a social worker/family liaison worker (employed by Essex County Council Social Services). The main gaps are speech and language therapy and any involvement of JobCentre Plus. Sure Start has recently lost the services of the Educational Psychologist who was active in many ways, including bringing professionals together initially, and will be sorely missed.

- 2.4.2. There has not been a Speech and Language (S&L) therapist attached to Sure Start since the first one left a year ago. There have been three rounds of recruitment to find a replacement but they have met with no success. This reflects the fact that such trained staff are in very short supply. Existing clinic caseloads allow very little time for getting involved with Sure Start. After discussions with Sure Start and S&L Therapy service and other relevant staff it was generally agreed that the range of activities and services being delivered by the Programme should contribute significantly to the development of young children's language and communication. The operations of the Sure Start should also provide more effective filters to identify children with difficulties earlier. However, it has now been agreed, that instead of appointing a dedicated Sure Start S&L Therapist, the service will be used in a consultative capacity to help then develop resources, raise awareness among staff and parents, provide training where necessary and maintain closer links to offer easier and more user-friendly access to clients. The S&L team recently ran a parents group to see if some parents would be interested in getting involved. The S&L team could liaise with the health visitors who are also based in the Health Centre and together train parents or Sure Start workers to promote good language stimulation and a sensory approach, which does not require any higher level qualifications that remedial work does.
- 2.4.3. Although JobCentre Plus are not involved, the Sure Start programme has linked up with CORNERSTONE Training to pre-employment training, careers and training advice, basic skills (reading, writing & spelling), basic IT

training, essential cookery skills, food hygiene training and one-to-one support. They also offer a drop-in facility, group training and an IT workshop. The parents who are participating in training are also able to utilise a crèche facility. Parents who participated in the training gave very positive feedback and greatly valued the possibility to learn in a positive environment.

- 2.4.4. There has been an increase in the reported cases of children with special needs in the Sure Start area. The Sure Start team and the occupational therapist network are working together in Sure Start, share ideas and due to the different ways of working (some with the parent, others with the child) have been able to transfer skills between each other. This closer cooperation has enabled Sure Start to tailor its services to children with special needs by developing a cognitive behavioural approach linked to educational parental courses (although parents have found this hard). Staff work with children using theories of sensory change, where children learn how to respond through a sensory not therapeutic approach and get them to adapt to new environments by using different groupings of children. The process needs to be understandable to parents for them to carry on with it at home.
- 2.4.5. Other joint working that has transferred skills is working together with travellers and health visitors and midwives working together on family planning and increasing referrals. However, any transfer of skills has been unstructured and informal. The professionals work differently and are more diverse with a focus on Sure Start families and so can refer more. They are keen to pass on skills to the team but it needs more formal and structured practices which draw the boundaries between what the team can do and what the professionals have to do. However, although an element of upskilling is an inevitable by-product, the intention is not to transfer professionals' skills or knowledge. For example, a Sure Start worker can add value to and supplement an Occupational Therapists practice (and vice versa) but cannot substitute for their practice.
- 2.4.6. Although it is still early days, there is a view in the primary schools that Sure Start is making a difference to their new entrants and particularly to parents. There is a much more positive parental attitude and confidence in education

and the schools see much higher levels of school readiness. This helps to build a feeling of community and helps parents and their children engage in a wider range of activities.

2.5. Changes in the way the programme is delivered

2.5.1. There have been a number of important changes in Sure Start which have had significant positive effects on internal operations. Two key changes in particular have helped the centre to run more efficiently and effectively. The first is that the programme manager has relocated from Kingsmoor House to the Sure Start centre and now has an office next to the team. This has made the role of the manager more visible to the Sure Start team, the other Sure Start workers, the professionals and the parents. It has also built confidence in the operations, both internally and externally, because by proximity he is more aware of the day to day running of the centre, levels of attendance and conditions in the centre. The new arrangements have been seen as positive and more realistic by parents in particular. Many of the parents who have been actively involved with Sure Start claimed never to have seen the manager before he moved into the centre, although even with the new arrangements some parents were still questioning his role.

2.5.2. The second is the appointment of an operations manager, who has considerable experience in community development work, has an Early Years Child Development background and had significant contact with the programme and the team prior to her appointment. Her responsibility was the day to day management of the Centre and her initial approach was to be critical and challenge existing practices, both in terms of responsibilities and management but also in terms of focus and quality. Everyone has responded well to this and there is a broad consensus that the centre has a lot more buzz, the quality of what is on offer has improved and the activities are very busy, with a lot of positive feedback from parents. There is a waiting list for the most popular activities and this needs to be managed fairly. Parents who participated in the consultation felt there has been a 'huge' difference in what is on offer by Sure Start in the last 6 to 12 months; there are now new toys for children to play with, including 'Art Zone' activities and an improved use of

space in general. It is as if it has now been accepted that the new building will not be build for a while but the existing Centre need to cater for children and their families, who are there in the meantime.

2.5.3. Time management for the team is a key issue. Some, like family work, tend to be given to those Sure Start workers who are more comfortable with that kind of work. Others prefer to work in the centre. There is also the issue about who wants to be specialised and who wants to be doing a range of tasks. At present, caseloads are informal but better understanding of the strengths among the team would allow this to be formalised. There is potential for sorting this out and getting team members to take more responsibility which will then give the operations manager more time to develop systems and practices and the Operations Manager is currently in process of consulting staff on their tasks. There are regular ½ hour meetings on a Monday morning to try to prevent everyone getting drawn too much into immediate issues – e.g. “*sorting out someone’s toothache*”- then the team will know what they need to do.

2.5.4. There has been a significant amount of Sure Start team working with professionals. This has led to both the team and some parents acquiring relevant skills, such as baby massage. However, it is becoming important to clarify what Sure Start can and cannot do, drawing up boundaries, putting policy guidelines and providing protection. There is a need to establish that Sure Start’s role is to facilitate engagement with the services professionals provide – it is their job to provide those services. Otherwise professionals might withdraw from the actual provision (substituting Sure Start provision for the mainstream provision). Parental involvement is more difficult because many are put off participation because of the requirement to undergo police checks for relatively intensive work with children, which many for personal reasons do not want to go through. This is also affecting membership of the Parents Forum.

2.5.5. Guidelines, policies, protocols and policing of the protection and exposure of workers is a major issue which is now beginning to be addressed. This is particularly true in terms of social work where workers have to act as quasi-social workers and have knowledge of child protection policies and working

guidelines around them. Up until recently, there was no backup or help on what to do in difficult and heavy cases. Sure Start currently operates under Essex county-wide policies and guidelines but is increasingly becoming drawn into the referral work and case conferences (which are very challenging because being there means having to vote on the outcome). Where a child is placed on the register, corporate plan is established on how to deliver the action plan at the case conference. Sure Start does not take on child protection cases but works alongside professionals to supplement them. It is now being written into professionals' job descriptions that they should have contact with Sure Start. Many are identified by the social worker, registered as cases only within the County Council systems. This has advantages and disadvantages – on the one hand, Sure Start workers do not have the protection of a regulatory framework but, on the other hand, several cases can be dealt with before having to go to a case conference which is reducing the proportion of children identified that are put on the register.

- 2.5.6. There has been an increase in activities of offer by Sure Start with more staff and improved use of space due to changes in the overall layout of the Centre. A new Sure Start worker is doing music makers, the toy library is more accessible after re-located by the drop-in area, with more interesting and varied toys. The relocation of the administration section and the move of the midwifery team has also greatly enhanced the use and accessibility of the space. More effort and events have been made to involve whole families, not only mothers and children but fathers and grandparents. However, the grandparents group was poorly attended and fathers still do not come regularly. There is still a problem of the volume of childminders using the centre – whilst the child's attendance is important, the commitment from the childminder and their involvement in the programme is often less than a parent would have and the vehicle for transferring skills and continuing work at home is more limited. The issue of confidentiality within the Sure Start office remains a problem, as it is sometimes difficult to draw a line between allowing parents to have open access to see workers and keep discussions private when parents come to Sure Start with a specific problem. This has historically been on a 'voluntary' basis – "please do not come into the office" - but has not worked, and workers have now put up a sign stating that parents are not allowed to enter. Some see this negatively as putting a cocoon around the team.

2.6. Changes in the Board

- 2.6.1. Initially the role of the Board drew up the Sure Start plan and appointed staff. The operations were then handed over to staff and the idea was the Board to focus on the development of Sure Start policy. However, so far the Board has not been very successful in addressing some key issues such as whether the partnership should be a loose informal grouping or a formal organisation with legal status and if so, what should this be. Essex County Council is the accountable body and Harlow district Council is the lead body. The Board has agreed some local objectives suggested by the programme manager but these have not been embedded in the partner organisations. The Board does discuss issues, sometimes in too much detail, and not just ‘rubber stamping’ the recommendations put forward by the programme manager. Some Board members feel that many of the proposals are negatively received as they can be seen as representing a personal challenge to particular individuals, even when presented in a non-confrontational manner. The voluntary sector has a different perspective from agency representatives, more readily seeing the potential for flexibility but perceived differently in the extent to whether they see their experience as adding positive value or as added baggage. Some are positive and appear more committed in participating because they can see the opportunity for deepened synergy within Sure Start – they want to work with clients, to help them to build, influence services and develop life chances for the old and the young. Mainstream representatives on the other hand rarely have the same degree of attachment and commitment.
- 2.6.2. Following the Awayday in autumn 2003, the Board is implementing a structure of Task Groups (Finance, Personnel and Resources, Evaluation, Community Development, and Children and Family Services) to provide a vehicle for drafting Board papers, bridging between strategy, policy and operations, assessing progress etc. Terms of reference for each group are currently being drawn although they are being self-defined. It is important that they should have processes for doing the groundwork on issues they want to address, not be territorial and not be too prescriptive whilst proposing evidence-based recommendations. It is a delegated process but the roles and responsibilities need to be clarified and visible to all. Accountability to the Board is paramount but so is the role of championing issues in their own

organisations and taking ownership of the Task Group a fundamental part of what they should do.

- 2.6.3. It is an interesting question as to what the Board then becomes. With some of its powers and its historical roles delegated to Task Groups, is it then a forum for driving the strategy forward and “blue skies” thinking, in which case, should it be smaller and more focused? Where would Parent’s Forum representatives sit – on the Board or in Task Groups or both?

2.7. Changes in parental involvement

- 2.7.1. The Parents Forum is still short of members but there is a greater awareness of the barriers to participation, both of a personal nature and because of formal requirements. Nevertheless, some parents have engaged with the evaluation team and participated in the evaluation fieldwork, through helping to redesign questionnaires, undertaking telephone interviews and interviewing professionals. Although six or seven showed an interest and came to training sessions, they quickly decided to specialise or drop out because the demands on their time were too great. However, there remains a core of two or three who will be able to form or join an evaluation subgroup and help in the development of the learning culture emerging among the Sure Start operational workers. One of the parents also expressed an interest to join the evaluation sub-committee.

3. VALUE FOR MONEY AND MAINSTREAMING

3.1. Value for money

3.1.1. The difficulties that the team have had with their database has precluded a detailed analysis of value for money. This means that it would only be possible to provide a comparison of overall costs with overall numbers. It has been agreed with the programme manager that this work would be deferred until the next round of external evaluation.

3.1.2. However, we are of the view that the programme has been very effective. Few of the activities would have existed without Sure Start and the benefits to both children and parents are highly net additional, with around 80-95% of survey respondents saying that the services are better and none saying they are worse.

3.2. Mainstreaming

3.2.1. There has been more inclusive interaction between the Sure Start team and the professionals, which has cascaded lessons and many of these have been taken into mainstream practices, sometimes for Sure Start delivery and sometimes broadened out across Harlow District or the professional's wider geographical area of operation. Some of the practices have included mothers' involvement in delivery, for example taking Story Sacks into homes, and others have been doing more outreach, for example taking the mobile library to the travellers' site. There is still a need to be proactive about mainstreaming in this way. It needs champions in organisations identifying good practice with evidence and rolling them out across Harlow. Some of the professionals are effectively only added capacity, such as Home Start, which will disappear from when the Sure Start funding ends. However, other things are permanent, such as the PCT's locality team which was put in place because of Sure Start and is developing linkages with other professionals,

cross working and developing process for more referrals. Health visitors have switched to locality working, partly because of their experience with Sure Start. There have also been some small changes in the operations of the Occupational Therapy unit, Home Start and Women's Aid where they are trying to do more outreach, although primarily through the Sure Start centre. Storyacks have been taken into people's homes and to the travellers' site as well as loaned out through the Toy Library. The toy library has changed its location within the centre, its membership rules, and its pricing and opening hours to accommodate more parents.

- 3.2.2. Sure Start has also reviewed its relation with specific professionals, the Speech and Language Therapy unit and the Educational Psychology unit, following staff departures. In both cases, it has been recognised that the function in Sure Start does not necessarily require fully qualified staff and that trained assistants can do what is required to identify issues and refer on to existing mainstream provision. These need to be able to identify problems early and protocols for referral.

4. SURVEY FINDINGS

4.1. Sure Start in Harlow Parnall Wood

4.1.1. This section presents the results of a survey of families and carers registered with Sure Start in Harlow Parnall Wood. The survey was carried out by telephone and face to face in the Sure Start Centre between February and April 2004. Some of the interviews were conducted by parents themselves that had been trained by the research company (see training pack in annex). Before the consultation took place a letter was sent to all registered families, for whom Sure Start administration had correct contact details, to invite them to either participate in the consultation by taking part in the telephone survey or the focus group, or to opt-out from the consultation. Findings from the focus groups with parents were integrated in the core of the report alongside findings from consultation with the parents' forum and partners. This section only presents results from the telephone survey. Where possible, the survey results have been compared with the findings from the previous survey of parents carried out in 2003 also by CPC. The full questionnaire is included in annex.

4.1.2. In total, over half of all the families registered in the Sure Start database were contacted, out of whom a third participated in the survey. One in five of the registered families could not be contacted because they had either moved away, no telephone number was provided, or the telephone number in the database was incorrect. A further 16% could not be contacted as there was no answer after a number of call-backs. The focus group event was advertised in the Sure Start notice board and in addition, parents that have been participating in the action research process were asked to bring along anyone they know uses the service. Unfortunately, in spite of our efforts to get people to attend and even recruit in the Centre on the day, only three parents were able to participate in the focus group.

Table 4.1: Families consulted

	Frequency	Percent
Interviewed by telephone	61	16
Took part in one of the focus groups	3	1
Refused to take part in consultation	18	5
No contact after at least one attempt	61	16
Wrong number	62	17
Moved away	11	3
Not contacted	163	44
TOTAL	379	100

CPC survey of parents and carers 2004

4.2. Characteristics of Respondents' Households

4.2.1. Overall, the proportion of families with one child of Sure Start age has increased slightly, whereas the proportion of families with two small children has decreased by 10 percentage points. In addition, a slightly higher proportion of respondents were looking after four or more children this year in comparison to the previous year. This could be because in the second year of the survey, as well as parents, childminders were also included in the survey. 7% of respondents were childminders, the rest being parents of the children they cared for.

Table 4.2: Number of children under 4 living in the household/cared for

	2003 %	2004 %
One Child	31	36
Two Children	51	41
Three Children	12	10
Four Children	6	10
Five Children	0	3
Total number of respondents	51	61

CPC survey of parents and carers 2003/2004

4.2.2. Respondents were asked 'how many people in total live in their household?'. The proportions this year are similar to 2003 figures, apart from slight

decrease among smaller households and a corresponding increase in five person households. In terms of the number of adults, around one quarter (28%) are one parent households. Over half of the families have more than one child, one in four having two children and one fifth have three or more children under 16. The majority of families have just one child that is Sure Start age (69%), a further one quarter have two children under four and 5% have three children under the age of four.

Table 4.3: Size of respondents' households

<i>Size of household</i>	2003%	2004%
<i>2 persons</i>	16	13
<i>3 persons</i>	29	30
<i>4 persons</i>	37	33
<i>5 persons</i>	8	15
<i>6 persons</i>	8	7
<i>7 persons</i>	2	3
<i>Total number of respondents</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>61</i>

CPC survey of parents and carers 2003/2004

Number of children by household

	2004% (under 16)	2004% (under 4)
One child	36	69
Two children	41	25
Three children	10	5
Four children	10	
<i>Total</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>61</i>

CPC survey of parents and carers 2003/2004

4.3. Place of residence

- 4.3.1. In comparison to 2003, there was a 10 percentage point increase among respondents living in homes rented from the local authority, where now four out of 10 families live in the council housing. This proportion is now the

same as the proportion for owner occupier households. Fewer respondents were living in homes rented from a housing association or private landlords. The proportion of owner occupiers remained largely the same.

Table 4.4: Type of Tenancy

	2003 %	2004 %
renting from council	29	41
renting from housing association	18	10
renting from private landlord	4	3
owner occupier, buying with mortgage	41	41
owner occupier, owning outright	6	3
caravan site	2	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>61</i>

CPC survey of parents and carers 2003/2004

- 4.3.2. It seems that the turnover of people moving in and out of the Sure Start area has slowed down and families moving into Sure Start area have stayed put. Around one third of respondents had lived in their home for less than a year in 2003, when this was just 8% in 2004. Over half of the respondents have been living in their current home over a year but less than three years in 2004, when this proportion was just one third in the previous year.

Table 4.5: Tenancy duration

	2003 %	2004 %
6 months or less	20	5
6 to 12 months	12	3
1 to 3 years	31	52
3 to 5 years	14	16
5 to 10 years	14	18
10 years and longer	10	5
<i>Total Number</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>61</i>

CPC survey of parents and carers 2003/2004

4.4. Employment Status

- 4.4.1. The proportions of respondents working and those not at work has remained the same from the previous year. However, slightly higher proportion now work either full-time, are self employed or studying part-time. All of the self-employed respondents are childminders. Like in the previous year, just over half of respondents are currently not looking for work as they are looking after their children.

Table 4.6: Employment status of the respondents and other adults

%	2003	2004
Full-time employment	4	7
Part-time employment	35	23
Self-employed		7
Studying full-time		
Studying part-time	4	5
Retired		
Look for work: receiving JSA	2	2
Look for work: not receiving JSA		
Not looking for work: carer	53	52
Not looking for work: disability		
Not looking for work: other	2	3
<i>Total number</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>61</i>

CPC survey of parents and carers 2003/2004

4.5. Satisfaction with area and need for services

4.5.1. Overall, respondents felt less satisfied with their area as a place to live and bring up their children. Whereas around two thirds (65%) of respondents rated their area as good or very good as a place to bring up children in 2003, only 39% did so in 2004. There was a substantial increase of those respondents who felt that their area was 'neither good or bad', whereas those rating their area as 'bad' or 'very bad' remained largely the same. Thus, most of the parents are still relatively satisfied with their neighbourhood.

Table 4.7: Satisfaction with area as a place to bring up children

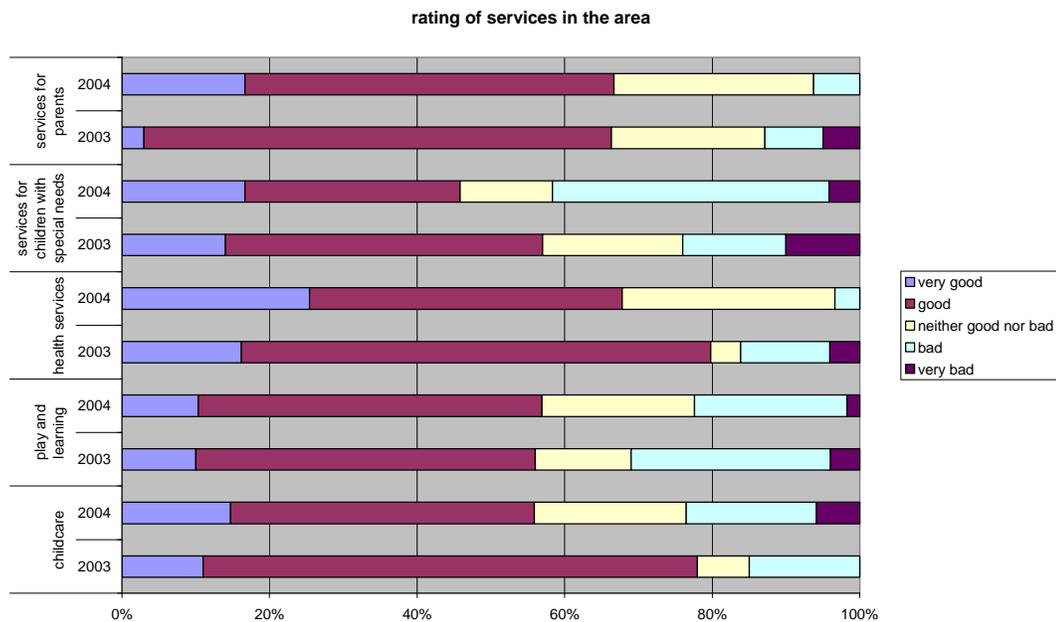
	2003 %	2004 %
very good	16	11
good	49	28
neither good or bad	20	41
bad	8	10
very bad	8	10
Total Number	<i>51</i>	<i>61</i>

CPC survey of parents and carers 2003/2004

4.5.2. Sure Start parents were also asked how they would rate some of the services provided in the area. These responses were also compared to parents' views from the previous year. Overall, higher proportion of respondents felt that services to support parents and families in the area are either good or very good than in the previous year. Respondents were also more satisfied with the services for children with special needs. A slightly lower proportion of survey participants rated health services as good, with higher proportion saying very good and only a few rated health services in their area as bad. Satisfaction with play and learning services had remained largely the same, although fewer rated these as bad or very bad.

4.5.3. In terms of childcare, we have some interesting results. A lower proportion of respondents felt that childcare services in their area were good in comparison to the previous year and higher proportion were also very dissatisfied with childcare provision in their area. Parents were asked to explain further why it was that they rated childcare services as bad. The main reason for why

respondents were not happy with the service was the fact that they felt that childcare services were too expensive or not good value for the money. Some also felt that there are simply not enough childcare places available that are close to their home (within walking distance). The poor rating was thus due to accessibility issues rather than the actual quality of existing service. It could also be the case that previously parents have simply not looked for childcare and were not aware of the issues they faced when they did.



CPC survey of parents and carers 2004

4.6. Awareness of the programme

4.6.1. Respondents were asked how they first heard about Sure Start in Harlow Parnall Wood. Over half of the respondents heard about Sure Start either from their friends through word-of-mouth (25%) or from the health visitor (36%). A higher proportion of parents had heard of Sure Start from health visitors in 2004 in comparison to the previous year (23%), which is readily explained by the rearrangements within the health visitor process within

Harlow Sure Start area. Other main sources to find out about Sure Start were notices in the public places, Spring midwifery team and leaflets through the post.

Table 4.8: Publicity of Sure Start

	2003 %	2004 %
Through word of mouth	26	25
Health visitor told you	23	36
Saw it and went in	12	5
Midwife told you about it	11	10
Received leaflet by post	8	7
Saw a notice board in a public place	6	11
One of the Sure Start workers told you about it	3	3
Received information about it via the school	3	2
Read about it in the local paper	0	2
Educational psychologist	2	0
Health clinic	2	0
Housing office/rental office	2	0
Someone giving information in the street	2	0
Through work	2	0
Women's Aid	2	0

CPC survey of parents and carers 2003/2004

4.7. Use and satisfaction of the programme

- 4.7.1. It seems that families living in Sure Start area are now more familiar with the Sure Start services and are more involved with activities offered. In terms of usage of the Sure Start Centre and other activities and services that Sure Start is involved with, the proportion of respondents that have used these services had increased across nearly all the activities. Some parents had also participated in organising activities within the centre, such as special events (Halloween Night, Jumble Sale) and helped out as volunteers running the drop ins for grandparents. There was a slight decrease among those respondents that have used the Drop-In at the Centre and the local library. Some parents commented they are not happy to use the Drop-in because they

found it difficult looking after two or more children at different ages (e.g. a baby and a three-year-old) as it was ‘difficult to be in more than one place at once’. They would have appreciated some more help from Sure Start workers in looking after children during the Drop-in sessions. Some parents also felt that the area was in general sometimes not kept very clean, so that they did not feel happy in letting their children play with ‘dirty toys’ or on the floor that was not kept clean. One parent was also concerned about the behaviour of other parents, and did not want their child to see such any anti-social behaviour.

Table 4.9: Most frequently used activities and services

	2003 %	2004 %
Drop in, Sure Start centre	82	79
Home visit by health visitor	43	56
Story sack/ story world	25	34
Day trips with sure start	22	33
Toy library	20	26
Spring Midwifery team support	16	16
Sure Start infant/baby massage	16	23
Local library	63	54
Little Music Makers	6	51
Art Zone/Messy Play area	n/a	64
Busy Bees/Bouncy Bears	10	36
home visit by Sure Start workers	14	16
Fun with Ones/Fun with Twos	n/a	16
Educational psychology support	4	13
Corner Stone training	n/a	11
Total Number	<i>51</i>	<i>61</i>

CPC survey of parents and carers 2004

- 4.7.2. Respondents were also asked which, if any, services and activities provided by Sure Start have been particularly helpful. Nearly half of the respondents found Drop-In a particularly helpful activity by Sure Start. Parents found it useful in terms of allowing their children to meet and mix with other children of a similar age. The sheer size of the area was also appreciated by parents as the Drop-In area allowed children to ‘run around’ and play with other children freely. Respondents also valued Drop-In as a place where you can

meet other adults and meet friends, especially if you are new to the area. Related to the Drop-In, many parents appreciated the ‘Art Zone’ messy play area, where a child can use different specific play equipment materials to experience and play with. Other activities mentioned specifically included little music makers, baby massage, busy bees & bouncy bears, Storysack and Cornerstone training.

4.7.3. It was also asked whether there were any activities that were not so helpful. As stated earlier in this section, some parents felt that Drop-In was not useful for them. Some were also unhappy with the timings of most activities, especially if they also had school aged children. Just one parent felt that s/he could have been given more emotional support by Sure Start.

4.7.4. A great majority of respondents felt that Sure Start has improved services for families with children under the age of four. In fact only one respondent felt it had not, and further 9% said they could not tell whether it has or not. In terms of specific aspects of services provision, a great majority of respondents again felt that service provision for families has improved in their area.

Table 4.10: How have the services for families with children under 4 changed

	Better %	The same %	Worse %
How far you need to travel to access services	71	29	0
how convenient the opening hours are	82	18	0
how affordable the services are	92	8	0
access to professionals	85	15	0
friendliness of professionals	88	13	0
quality of the building and equipment	51	43	6
quality of services and activities	96	4	0

CPC survey of parents and carers 2004

4.7.5. Nearly half of respondents felt that the quality of the Sure Start building and equipment still needs to be improved. This is mainly because parents are

aware of the plans of a new Centre and are now expecting the new purpose build building for Sure Start and family services in general to be built soon. Parents felt that the building needed refurbishment at least to make it look more attractive if construction of the new building is going to be delayed for any longer. However, it was also recognised that this is now starting to happen with new furniture and fittings within the centre as well as new equipment and toys available for children. One third of the respondents felt that there was nothing in Sure Start that need to be improved.

Table 4.11: Which features still needs to be improved

	Frequency	Percent
quality of building and equipment	26	43
accessibility in terms of opening hours	7	11
access to professionals	4	7
quality of services and activities	2	3
accessibility in terms of distance	1	2
friendliness of professionals	1	2
Nothing – it is fine as it is	20	33
Total	61	100

CPC survey of parents and carers 2004

- 4.7.6. A far higher proportion of the respondents now feel that they receive enough information about Sure Start in comparison to a year ago. In fact, less than one in ten felt they had not been informed enough about what Sure Start is about and what it offers. Thus, it seems that the newly published Activities and Services booklet with any other Sure Start publicity has greatly improved awareness of the service.

Table 4.12: Information about Sure Start

	2003 %	2004 %
You receive enough information	63	92
You don't receive enough information	35	8
Not sure	2	0
Total	51	61

CPC survey of parents and carers 2003/2004

4.7.7. Two thirds (66%) of parents surveyed felt that Sure Start had improved their family's quality of life. Sure Start now provides a place for families with young children to go and 'to get out of house', a place where children can play with others in a safe and positive environment, learn through play, and where parents can socialise, learn, meet new friends and have easy and non-intimidating access to professionals.

4.7.8. Over 40% of respondents said that Sure Start had improved the area where they live. Respondents felt that the Sure Start programme and the Centre specifically had brought the community together more, as it has provided a place to meet up and make new friends both for adults and children. Many felt that the parenting skills had improved and both children and parents have now more opportunities to participate in new activities which were not provided before. It was also felt that the overall service provision for families had improved in the area and the fact that Sure Start had taken over an old derelict building and thus prevented it being vandalised was an improvement in the physical landscape in itself.

4.8. Involvement in Sure Start

4.8.1. Only a very few respondents were a part of either Parent Forum or Sure Start Management Board. In terms of whether respondents felt that parents are involved enough in the running of Sure Start, a slightly higher proportion felt that they were in comparison to responses from a year before. Over 40% of parents and carers still felt that they were unable to comment whether parents' involvement is currently sufficient or not.

Table 4.13: Satisfaction with degree of parental involvement

	2003 %	2004 %
Parents are involved in Sure Start	35	39
Parents are not involved in Sure Start	22	16
Not sure	43	44
<i>Total number</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>61</i>

CPC survey of parents and carers 2003/2004

- 4.8.2. Respondents were asked why was it that only a few parents participate in the running of Sure Start actively. The most common reason stated by parents was a lack of time, especially if working or having more than one child and/or older children. Some felt that parents do not want to commit themselves and they are not sure whether they would be able to take on the responsibility for running any activities regularly. Further, it was felt by some that not enough was known about possible activities that parents could get involved with or that they felt that they could not get actively contribute because they had not been invited to get involved. Many of those who were able to comment also felt that some may lack in confidence and find it difficult and intimidating if they do not know any other parents who are involved already with the running of Sure Start activities.
- 4.8.3. It was also asked why was it that some parents come once but then do not come back to the centre again. Many felt that the first visit to the centre can be daunting, especially if the parent does not know anyone, and may feel not welcomed to the centre as no one is specifically welcoming them, 'showing them around' or introducing them to other parents and workers in the centre. Some parents felt that the actual physical appearance of the building can be off-putting to some and sometimes the kitchen area and bathrooms can be quite unclean. It was also suggested by a few that occasionally the behaviour of other parents or children can be inappropriate and upset others. Finally, many respondents felt that some parents simply did not have time or felt that 'it was not for them' and they simply choose not to participate in such activity.

4.9. Participation in social activities and parents' interaction with children

4.9.1. Over half of the children cared for by parents and carers that participated in the survey meet other children regularly, more than three times a week. A further 30% of children meet other children at least two times a week, and only one respondent felt that the child s/he was caring for did not regularly meet any other children.

Table 4.14: How often does your child under 4 meet other children of similar age (other than sisters and brothers)

	Frequency	Percentage
less than once a week	4	7
once a week	5	8
2-3 times a week	18	30
4-7 times a week	33	54
no, doesn't see other children	1	2
Total	61	100

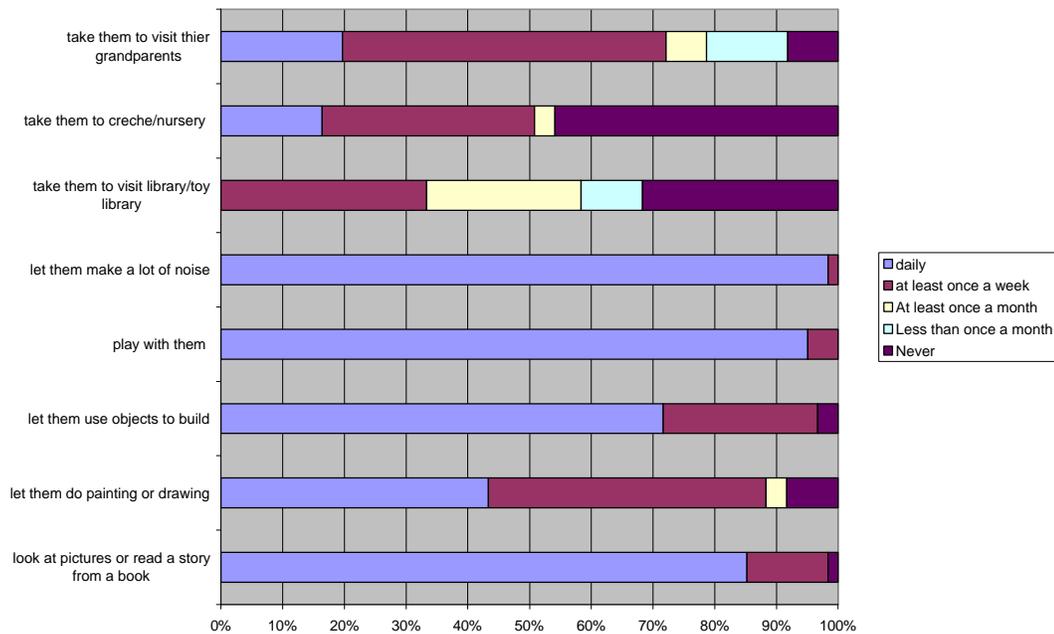
CPC survey of parents and carers 2004

4.9.2. All the parents and carers do social activities with the children they care for. A great majority of them let the children make a lot of noise, play with their children, look at pictures or read a story from a book and let them use objects to build every day. Many parents commented that they do many of these activities when in the Sure Start centre, specifically in terms of letting their children do painting and drawing. Many felt that it was great that the Sure Start 'messy play' area provided this opportunity to their children, where there was enough space and equipment with which children could experiment safely.

4.9.3. Nearly half of the respondents had never taken the child they care for to a crèche or nursery. It was often commented that there was 'no need', it is too expensive, or that they never leave their child to be looked after by anyone else. Around one third of respondents never took their children under 4 to a library or toy library. Some felt that their child is too small to understand

books, and that they have plenty of books and toys at home so that there is no need for such service for them. The majority of children also had a change to visit their grandparents regularly.

Table 4.15: Interaction carers - children



CPC survey of parents and carers 2004

4.9.4. Majority of respondents see their friends at least once a week and less than one in ten of the respondents said they never meet their friends in their house. Nearly half of parents said they meet people in a social place at least once a week, and further 23% at least one a month. However, nearly one fifth of respondents said they never meet other people in a social place. Around half go to park at least once a week, over one third at least once a month, and only 7% said they never go to park or do any other outdoors leisure activity. Just over one in five do some sporting activity at least once a week, but nearly half of the parents and carers said they never go to sport clubs, leisure centres or swimming. One third of respondents also never do any cultural activities, such as go to cinema, theatre or museum.

Table 4.16: Parents involvement in social activities %

	meet friends in their house	meet people in social place	go to park or outdoor leisure facility	go to sport club, leisure centre, swimming	go to the cinema, theatre or museum
at least once a week	62	46	49	22	0
at least once a month	20	23	36	17	26
less than once a month	10	13	8	15	41
never	8	18	7	47	33
Total	100	100	100	100	100

CPC survey of parents and carers 2004

- 4.9.5. To get a further understanding on civic activity by families in Sure Start area, parents were asked whether they vote or participate in any other social activities. One third of respondents said they never vote, but 26% vote always and further one in five vote in the elections most of the time. Just 7% of respondents participate in the local residents association or help to organise any community events. These proportions remained similar to the previous year's survey responses.

Table 4.17: Do you vote in the local or national elections?

	%
always	26
most of the time	21
sometimes	16
rarely	3
never	33
<i>Total</i>	<i>61</i>

CPC survey of parents and carers 2004

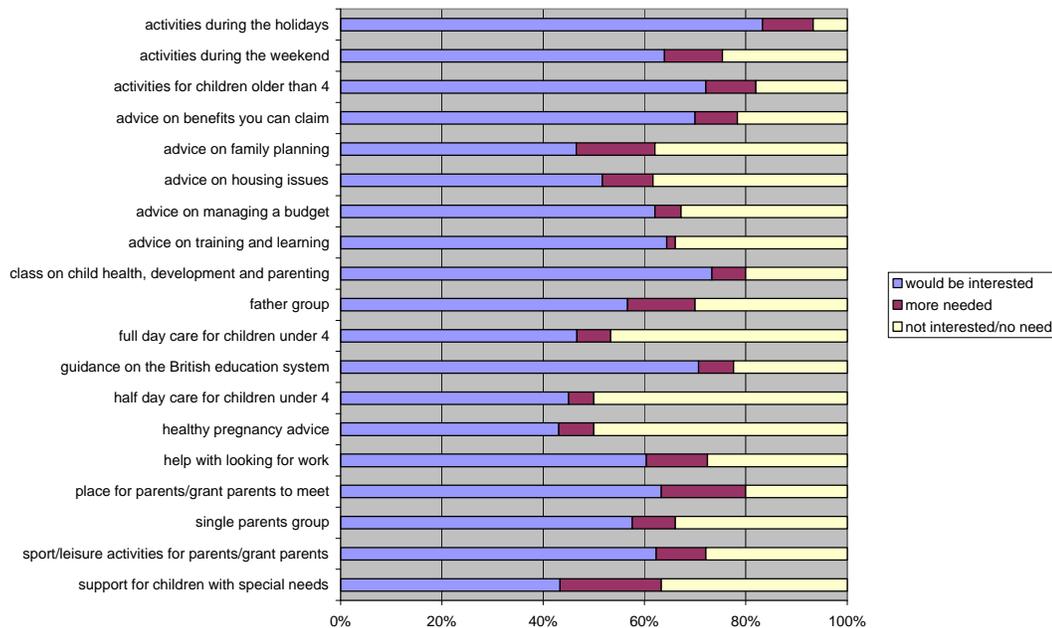
4.10. Issues for the future

4.10.1. Respondents were asked whether they had any suggestions on what would encourage more parents to participate in Sure Start activities. Nearly 40% of respondents could not think of anything that could be done. Some also felt that nothing more could be done, and that some people just do not wish to get actively involved. Responses of those who were able to comment included following suggestions:

- expand the geographical area, so that there are no artificial boundaries
- allow the older children to participate
- provide more information (posters, leaflets, informal coffee sessions) about how to get more active, what it would involve and how much time would be expected from parents to participate
- have less formal meetings so that parents don't feel too intimidated
- have a cleaner, refurbished building
- have more help with looking after children

4.10.2. Parents were read out a list of activities and services that Sure Start could provide as new services or offer more of, and asked which of these services they or their family would be interested in. The activities and services that respondents were most interested in were activities during the holidays, activities for older children, classes of child health, development and parenting, and a place for parents to meet, where 80% or more of the parents felt that Sure Start should provide these activities. Respondents were least interested in day care for children under four, be it full- or part-time, and healthy pregnancy advice, which could be because they felt that current provision is sufficient or because they were not planning to go to work/study or have any more children.

Table 4.18: Which of the following services/activities would you and your family be interested in or felt that more of such are needed?



CPC survey of parents and carers 2004

4.10.3. Other suggestions outside the list, that parents would be interested in and felt that Sure Start could provide (more of) included:

- sport activities for children
- access for older siblings during holidays; home work club for children older than 4
- activities for the whole family including dads; family days with whole family involved
- bereavement group
- clean and safe outdoor playing areas and equipment; regular maintenance of play grounds outside
- crèche available all the time; exercise classes with crèche
- learning computers
- pre-school activity/course for children and families to make them ready for school

5. ISSUES

5.1. Introduction

- 5.1.1. This section highlights issues that still need to be addressed. Many of them have been covered in the section which discusses changes that have affected Sure Start over the past months and some of the implications highlighted. The purpose of this section is to suggest actions that Sure Start might consider to address the implications.

5.2. The Children's Partnership

- 5.2.1. The new Children and Young People's Strategy Partnership (CYPSP) will both widen the area and expand the age range of eligible children to from 4/5 to 12/13. There will also be more work with schools and Connexions, whose eligible range is from 14 to 25, will also be included in the Children' Partnership. This should provide continuity of progression for children from birth to the age of 25 in terms of access to support as long as appropriate referral and communication channels are put in place. Sure Start has a vital role in this process and it will be important for the wider partnership to acknowledge and help to facilitate their involvement.
- 5.2.2. The bigger issue is the extent to which the partnership will learn from Sure Start and incorporate the networking approach of linking professionals developed in Sure Start's area and for Sure Start's client group to the wider area and client group. This needs to be planned by the partnership and is not the responsibility of Sure Start. However, it will greatly enhance the long term impact that can be gained from the foundation that children and their parents get from their participation.

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- 5.2.3. Sure Start should be lobbying the partnership to promote this integrated approach using evidence of the difference it has made to underpin the argument.

5.3. Recruitment

- 5.3.1. The only dimension of skills that has been identified as missing is community development. The difficulties experienced in recruiting a Speech and Language Therapist provide the stimulus to re-assess the requirements of this post. This has been a valuable exercise and has shown that doing so may lead to more appropriate staff and a requirement for less demanding skills to identify and then refer those children who need the services provided by the mainstream. This has already borne fruit in terms of the response to the loss of the Educational Psychologist – essentially a re-assessment of the skills required within Sure Start. However, she was also driving the thinking behind the monitoring and evaluation requirements of a learning culture inside Sure Start. This has been now been taken on by the programme manager following the delegation of the day to day running of the Centre to the operations manager. The importance of learning, the ability of Sure Start to develop and change to respond to new challenges, and its capacity to show what changes have been brought about need a strong link between programme level monitoring and evaluation and the operational level of monitoring and evaluation. That is, a high level strategy will only be as good as the operational practices that are put in place. This needs co-ordination between the programme manger and the operations manager.

- 5.3.2. The major issue is where to draw the boundary between what Sure Start needs to provide to equip children and parents to benefit from mainstream provision and the direct provision of those services within Sure Start. This should be agreed in a service level agreement between Sure Start and the host organisation of the relevant professional service that Sure Start needs to access. This should be after a joint appraisal between the two. That is, what is the appropriate balance of work for the Sure Start team as between helping parents and children to be able to benefit from mainstream services and actually delivering those services through Sure Start. It may indeed be

appropriate to provide the direct services within Sure Start to pilot what the boundary is and what can be learnt in a more flexible organisation that may be transferable to the host organisation.

5.3.3. It would be timely to re-appraise each of the relationships between Sure Start and the host organisations prior to confirming Sure Start services with the Children's Centre and wide Children's Partnership.

5.3.4. The Programme has acknowledged that the community development skills still remain a gap that needs to be filled. It would seem that this is not something that could be outsourced because the only person qualified in community development is the operations manager, who has other priorities, and those skills are essential to shape both operations and strategic thinking. There also appears to be a need for more administrative support, probably a part time post, and another full-time member of the team to cater for the growing workload. This might allow staff more time to develop relationships with parents and encourage them to be involved in the Parents Forum.

5.4. Monitoring information

5.4.1. There are still gaps in the monitoring data that conceal how the programme is engaging with parents and children. An important one is the balance of carers between parents and childminders. The anecdotal evidence suggests that childminders are a significant proportion of users. If this is so, then mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that they are able to help their children as well as parents can. This means that they should take back practices to the parents about how to stimulate children and continue development within the home which have been learnt through their own participation in Sure Start.

5.4.2. Other issues are:

- linking the characteristics of parents and families to participation numbers
- understanding how much of the participation is;

-
- just once and to which activity
 - many visits to the same activity
 - use of more than one activity
 - linking family data held by other organisations to the participation of families in Sure Start

These analyses are crucial to understanding the scale and quality of contact and the attribution of change to Sure Start participation but these have been difficult to do because of problems with the IT systems.

5.5. Childminders

5.5.1. The take-up of services through Sure Start is open to childminders of children who live in the area. The current registering system of usage does not distinguish between childminders and parents so it has not been possible to determine their relative importance. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is a significant proportion. Registered childminders are in short supply but they provide an opportunity for parents with other activities they want to pursue, such as employment and training, for their children to benefit from the programme. However the concern is that the childminders are the ones who have contact with the Sure Start activities, not the parents, and are the people who will see the practices used to help children. Where the parent is involved, they can be trained in some of these practices and can continue to work with their children at home. There is a feeling that often childminders are not engaged with the programme to the same extent and may not be able or willing to take the practices back to the parents whose children they look after.

5.5.2. Now that some of the activities are oversubscribed and there are waiting lists, childminders are taking places that would otherwise be available to parents. Childminders are not eligible to become more involved in the programme, either as helpers or as members of the Parents Forum so that the supply of parents who might be willing to become more involved in the programme is reduced.

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- 5.5.3. There is as yet no evidence of whether the children who come with childminders are benefiting less than those who come with their parents. If this were the case, then Sure Start should develop some pro-active means of making contact with the parents both to tell them of the differential benefit and to see if they want to become more involved in the programme.

5.6. The new building

- 5.6.1. This has been an issue for a long time and some, especially parents, feel that they have not been kept sufficiently informed of the reasons for the delays. The delays in the capital project are due to complex issues around the funding shortfall. Whilst every effort has been made to provide information about progress, it is difficult to carry everyone along in the process. Part of this arises from the original model is what many users of the centre see when they come into the building which has not been altered. Although the final plans have not been finally approved, some capital funding has been pledged from the Children's Centre budget to complete the work.
- 5.6.2. The Sure Start Centre will become the Children's Centre, linked to the Gateway Neighbourhood Nursery. The new building will house a nursery and some concerns have been expressed that it might be faith-based, which given the cultural diversity and the low attachment to religious groups is felt to be inappropriate. However, the nursery will not be 'faith based' per se, although run by a Christian organisation and the building eventually being expanded to include a church as well as a community centre. In addition, there is a separate proposed development of the Children's Centre in Hare Street, which will not be faith-based in any way.
- 5.6.3. Sure Start have already been developing a new way of working in the current building to pilot different approaches for working in the new building. These include a more effective use of space, themed names for rooms to make them more user friendly (using trees, such as the Oak Room, rather than the formal title of training room) and making access to and movement between different activities more appropriate to the usage and to enhance take-up. There should also be a better reception and more security and confidentiality.

5.7. Data sharing

- 5.7.1. There are two issues around data sharing. One is internal and the other external. Internally, the computer programme available to Sure Start is a database programme that has a number of facilities for analysing the data but the administration time required to maintain the database is substantial and leaves little time for developing more complex reports. In addition, faults have been discovered on the system and some information has thus not been accessible as yet. Although believed to be repairable, it will thus take a while before the software will be functioning properly. The current database also need some reviewing, as some families appear in the database more than once, and it is also currently not possible to know whether the entry is a child, parent, grandparent or childminder. Because of this, it has not been possible to assess in a systematic way how many times parents use the activities, thus identifying those who only come once or twice who might be followed up, and those who use more than one facility which might give a clearer overall picture of the pattern of usage which would be of great benefit to planning the activities and resource allocations within Sure Start. It is possible to do some of this for any individual but with over 300 records it means a manual exercise to bring them all together.
- 5.7.2. The external issue is about data sharing in more useful forms than has historically been available. For example, the Primary Care Trust can provide totals for different health related indicators for the Sure Start area, working from postcode records. Whilst this indicates the scale of the different problems in the area, it does not identify individual families and households and therefore it cannot distinguish between those families who have one member with a problem and households where there are multiple problems. Such information would be of great value to give a background for home visits and engagement with different individuals.
- 5.7.3. The barriers are generic to a number of organisations and are largely due to the restrictions in the Data Protection (Act DPA) on passing on family or individual details with regard to data sharing between agencies or the lack of such information that the agencies hold themselves rather than an unwillingness to co-operate. Now that the programme manager has been

freed from much of the day to day management of the centre with the appointment of the operations manager, perhaps there will be more opportunity to discuss with agencies whether there are acceptable ways within the DPA of getting more useful information that would enable Sure Start professionals to operate more effectively and target some of the more significant problems in the area.

5.8. The Parents Forum

5.8.1. The Parents Forum is currently not a really functioning body. It is opening doors for some individuals to become involved but there are many who find it too demanding or do not have the confidence to become involved. There have a number of parents who have committed themselves to trying to make it work but feel they have not had much support from other parents. Their focus has been on what their role is, how to participate in the Board and the way it works and how to try to engage with more parents. However, there has been no real discussion of what the barriers to participation are and how these might be addressed, not least how to involve those parents who for one reason or another do not feel able to participate in the Parents Forum. The team and the professionals have sought to work with parents and develop their self-esteem and skills to be part of the delivery, as have we in the evaluation process. Parents participating in the evaluation process were also suggesting recruiting women who are pregnant and yet to become mothers as well as their partners, to expand the time period Sure Start support would be directly relevant to them.

5.8.2. There has been recognition throughout the Sure Start operations of the need for family friendly hours that allow parents to fit their participation around their childcare and family/household needs. Some of the other barriers however are more difficult to overcome:

- parents whose children are still too young to be left
- a lack of confidence in ‘formal’ childcare or an unwillingness to leave their children in their formative years

-
- the knowledge that they will soon be forced to leave Sure Start because of the age of their children
 - the reality that Sure Start childcare fits around activities and that wider provision of childcare is expensive and often not easily accessible, which is a major barrier for those who have children well beyond the Sure Start qualifying age
 - low aspirations, confidence and self-esteem that results from a lack of social interaction
 - inevitably, there will be personal issues related to parents' experience of Sure Start and conflicts of personality.

5.8.3. The flexibility with which Sure Start has operated to allow children aged 4 to participate where necessary has helped to overcome some of these barriers for some of the people. There are also courses available for parents who want to participate to help them understand their role and improve their ability to contribute. Some of the barriers related to having children who do not qualify for Sure Start are not ones that Sure Start can alleviate but they may be mitigated by the linking up with the Neighbourhood Nursery (when it is operational) as Children's Centre partners.

5.8.4. There are some parents whose barriers cannot be removed by Sure Start and there are others who simply do not want to be involved, although they will have their children involved in Sure Start activities. There are however parents who are not aware of what a Parents Forum can do. A two stage approach might be considered:

- help them individually to see the benefits they and their children are getting from Sure Start and then tell them that they can shape what Sure Start does to give more benefit to them and to other parents
- provide evidence through some examples of where the Parents Forum has been able to make a difference so that they can see that it is worthwhile

5.8.5. We do not have examples so far of where the Parents Forum has made a difference (although there might be some that we do not know about). An attempt to engage with parents through the new sub-group structure might be a way of getting examples. But that would require that sub groups involved parents other than those in the existing Parents Forum and would involve

other people ('experts') who are not on the Board. Then parents would see that they could make a difference and some might then be prepared to join the Parents Forum in order to make their case at Board level. There is a need to find someone prepared to champion the concept of a Parents Forum and someone with leadership skills to make it work.

5.9. The Board

5.9.1. The Board has been slow to restructure and many of the issues raised in last year's evaluation report are still pertinent. However, broadly speaking, the Board has sustained its membership and recent operational changes are giving Sure Start a more dynamic image. The Board is still a loose partnership and there has been discussion about it having legal status, which would allow it to be a fund holder and an employer. But the feeling is that it is not strong enough to take on these responsibilities.

5.9.2. The Board has a number of local objectives which complement Sure Start's national objectives. These however have mainly come from partners and there needs to be a process that enables the team and parents to take ownership of them.

5.9.3. A fairly common structure these days for Local Strategic Partnerships in England and Community Planning structures in Wales is:

- A Standing Conference, open to everyone, which provides 'blues skies' thinking and reflects on policy issues
- An Executive Group which is responsible for delivery policies and reflective thinking, and to approve and oversee the joined up working of sub groups delivery plans
- A series of sub groups which are issue-focused, some standing and some short life, where experts and other stakeholders not involved or needed in the whole process can help to implement the delivery plans with the Sure Start team (broadly defined) involved where appropriate

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- 5.9.4. The difficulty with these structures is getting the trust and respect horizontally and vertically that allows decisions to be made at the appropriate level. The failure to reach this point is why many fail. Sure Start in the past year has improved its communications, particularly within its operations, but there are still issues in terms of vertical communication right up to the Board. The need is to create an environment where people feel able to ask challenging questions and expect to get a rationale ‘apolitical’ discussion. The advantage of these structures is that they do not need legal structures if partners, both statutory and voluntary organisations, are prepared to take the legal, financial and accountability responsibilities that are needed.
- 5.9.5. There is a new policy environment and a number of delivery issues that will emerge that will challenge Sure Start. Two changes that will directly affect Sure Start are the advent of the Children’s Centre and the new Young People’s Strategy Partnership. These will mean that providers are often ‘fishing in the same pond’ for both clients (children and parents) and the time of professionals.
- 5.9.6. The new sub group structure and the relationship it has with the Board and the Sure Start Team will be vital to the success of the programme. A paper was drawn up by the Chair of the Board and discussed at length at several Board meetings. The chair and the programme manager produced draft terms of reference for the sub-groups at the request of the Board and these were then ratified after further detailed discussion. It was also agreed that the subgroups could then refine or add to these terms of reference once they began working. Membership of the subgroups was discussed and agreed.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Progress in Sure Start in Harlow Parnall Wood

- 6.1.1. Operations in Sure Start have improved significantly with the introduction of an operations manager that has created a better atmosphere and reception in the Sure Start centre and enabled the Team to work together more effectively because of better communication between themselves and more constructive line management.
- 6.1.2. There is a better range of activities with some of the most popular being over-subscribed and prompting an increase in the size and scope of the Team. There are a number of posts missing from the original team due to people leaving and a shortage of qualified professionals, such as a Speech and Language Therapist and an Educational Psychologist. Both of these have encouraged the management team to rethink how the services are delivered because of a better understanding of what parents and children need. This is causing Sure Start to rethink the boundaries between what Sure Start provides, how that fits with mainstream provision and how then to make the best use of their own resources and those available from professionals.
- 6.1.3. The Sure Centre feels more inclusive of parents and their needs. Partly, this is because of increased outreach to engage with parents and development of the basis for professional referrals. This also means that more of the Team are out of the centre on a daily basis increasing pressure on resources. Confidentiality is more secure and gives more confidence to parents to open up to staff. However, that has come at a price. Because documentation is out when staff are working on them, or staff are talking on the phone, confidentiality can be impaired if parents come into the office. A voluntary scheme was put in place but it is difficult to get a balance between protecting confidentiality and alienating parents when a few parents abuse the system. The main problem is those parents who come to the Centre in an emergency needed immediate help. This has been recognised as being the root of the problem and care is now taken through reception to help those people before

they can get to the Team's office and a system that enables them to be referred to professionals who can help is being put in place.

- 6.1.4. According to the survey results, families in Sure Start area are now more familiar with Sure Start services and are more involved with activities offered. The proportion of respondents that have used services that Sure Start offers has increased across nearly all the activities. It also seems that families moving into Sure Start area are now staying and the turnover of people moving in and out of the area has slowed down, although not necessarily much to do with Sure Start. Parents are happier with what services are on offer to support parents and families in their neighbourhood, although higher proportion of respondents are now unhappy with the accessibility issues to childcare, both in terms of high cost and lack of places in comparison to results from the previous year.
- 6.1.5. The most used activity used by families was the Drop-In facility. It was appreciated by parents that there is now a place where they can go and take their children to meet and play with other children the similar age, and just as importantly parents can meet other parents and make new friends. Access to professionals through drop-in was also appreciated. However, a small proportion of respondents did not find Drop-in useful to them, especially if they had more than one child to look after.
- 6.1.7. Only a very few parents are actively involved with the running of Sure Start, most common reason stated for why not being more involved was a general lack of time. Some parents that participated in the survey were also hoping to have a more welcoming response from other parents and Sure Start workers, especially when coming to the Centre for the first time. In terms of participating in any other social activities, majority of parents see their friends regularly, either at home or in a social place. However, nearly half of parents and carers said they never do any sport activity, such as going to sport club, leisure centre or swimming, and one third never do any cultural activities, like go to the cinema, theatre or museum. One third of respondents also never vote, but around one quarter vote always and further 20% vote most of the time.

6.1.9. Operational improvements in Sure Start have progressed faster than the Board restructuring. The awayday was not as well attended as had been hoped and did not result in as many changes being discussed as had been hoped. Many are still awaiting agreement and/or implementation. There is still no active championing of Sure Start in organisations that provide professional services to Sure Start. The sub-group structure is in place and operational.

6.1.10. A key issue for the future is how Sure Start integrates with the Children's Centre and the wider Children and Young People's Strategy Partnership, particularly on such issues as seamless referrals, drawing boundaries between Sure Start and mainstream provision and links its proposed sub group structure into the workings of the other partnerships.

6.1.11. It is still not clear exactly what the Board's perceived role of sub-groups is. In particular, part of the sub-group structure will cover issues such as administrative issues, personnel, finance and capital which have occupied much of the time of the Board and can be delegated for discussion and reporting back. Some of issues should be dealt with under delegated powers rather than needing ratification at the Board. The four sub groups are:

- Community Development (working together to shape our future)
- Evaluation (keeping us on track)
- Finance, Personnel and Resources (looking after our staff and our money)
- Children's and Families' Services (play, childcare, early education, health)

6.2. Issues for the Sure Start Team

6.2.1. Some protocols have been put in place but others are still missing. The Sure Start core team are still working to the policy and guidelines set out by the accountable body, Essex County Council, which are for specialist professional staff they employ but not for the staff in the Sure Start Team. They can sometimes find themselves in situations where they do not have the training to cope in the same way that social workers have when outreaching to families in their homes. There are guidelines in the referral procedures but

becoming involved in 'heavy or difficult cases' should not be allowed to happen. This is an area of work that protocols are desperately needed to define the boundaries between what the team can do and how they should link with professionals to get the support in the difficult cases.

- 6.2.2. The operations manager is aware of the different strengths among the Team and their preferences for different ways of working. There needs to be more structure to the definition of roles and responsibilities, which may become easier to do when the team is larger.
- 6.2.3. The team would benefit from this greater clarity about how they fit into the delivery process, but they could benefit from being even more involved in the discussion and resolution of operational issues and the planning process for the future operations of Sure Start, especially when it is integrated with the Children's Centre.
- 6.2.4. The team has needed better channels of communication between them and the Board, either in the form of more direct access (which would need Board members awareness of practical issues) or less filtered channels through the line management, which have seemed to be based on judgements about 'need to know'. This has been addressed by the restructuring and the creation of sub-groups – whether it works depends on how well they are incorporated into the new processes.
- 6.2.5. Most of the community development expertise in the team is focussed on the operations manager. There is a need to get a better understanding of how these skills contribute to the development and implementation of Sure Start in the Board and in the proposed subgroups. These are how best to address issues such as building the capacity of individuals so that parents and their children can participate effectively and also raising the capacity of organisations to contribute to the aims of Sure Start.
- 6.2.6. The Team also needs to get a better understanding of the role and scale of childminders in the effectiveness of Sure Start. Essentially it is a question of how to engage parents so that they can help their children when they are not themselves involved in the activities.

6.2.7. There are both internal issues and external issues about data that, if resolved, would facilitate a better understanding of the programme's operation. Internally, this is about understanding how many use facilities once and then disappear through to how many are using a variety of activities. Ultimately, it will be necessary to know this if the effectiveness of Sure Start is to be assessed properly. Externally, there are issues around being able to link the administrative data with Sure Start's own database of clients, both to understand the incidence and complexity of problems in different households but also to track changes in their circumstances.

6.3. Recommendations

6.3.1. Sure Start should be lobbying the Children and Young People's Strategy Partnership and its partners to promote their integrated approach, combining a team with professionals, using evidence of the difference it has made to underpin the argument (para 5.2.3.)

6.3.2. It would be timely to re-appraise each of the working relationships between the Sure Start team and the professionals in the host organisations prior to confirming Sure Start services with the Children's Centre and wider Children's Partnership (para 5.3.3.).

6.3.3. There is as yet no evidence of whether the children who come with childminders are benefiting less than those who come with their parents. But if this were the case, then Sure Start should develop some pro-active means of making contact with the parents both to tell them of the differential benefit and to see if they want to become more involved in the programme (para 5.5.3.).

6.3.4. The Parents Forum is still not successfully engaging with parents and as such it is not fulfilling its potential. A two stage approach to getting more parents involved might be considered:

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- help them individually to see the benefits they and their children are getting from Sure Start and then tell them that they can shape what Sure Start does to give more benefit to them and to other parents
 - provide evidence through some examples of where the Parents Forum has been able to make a difference so that they can see that it is worthwhile

6.3.5. It should be noted that, since the fieldwork and discussions with the Sure Start team have been completed, there has been renewed interest in the Parents Forum with five new members attending a recent meeting and at least three more intending to get involved. The programme manager has already taken action with regard to the two bullet points above.

6.3.6. We do not have examples so far of where the Parents Forum has made a difference (although there might be some that we do not know about). An attempt to engage with parents through the new sub-group structure might be a way of getting examples. But that would require that sub groups involved parents other than those in the existing Parents Forum and would involve other people ('experts') who are not on the Board. Then parents would see that they could make a difference and some might then be prepared to join the Parents Forum in order to make their case at Board level. There is a need to find someone prepared to champion the concept of a Parents Forum and someone with leadership skills to make it work. (para 5.8.4.)

6.3.7. The proposed sub group structure and the relationship it has with the Board and the Sure Start Team will be vital to the success of the programme. The sub-group structure needs to be strong enough to build the bridge between the Board and the Sure Start Team to ensure effective delivery of the initiative (para 5.9.6.).

Sure Start Harlow Parnall Wood

Evaluation Group, Training Pack 26th January 2003

Dear Parent,

this manual is for you. It includes information about research methods and practical advice. We will go through the MAIN POINTS of the items listed below during the training session. If later you want to read it or certain sections of it, please feel free to scribble notes on it and to come back to us with suggestions or questions.

Items

- 1. Welcome and presentations**
- 2. Introduction to research**
- 3. Conducting an interview: some rules and tips**
- 4. Presentation of the work programme and parents choose tasks of interest**
- 5. Priorities for the evaluation: what do parents want to get out of the research?**
- 6. Design of the research tools**
- 7. Some practice that can be done in groups:**

8. Oak Training Room timetable, communication within the Evaluation Group

1. Welcome and Presentation

Cambridge Policy Consultants have been commissioned to undertake a 2 year evaluation of the Sure Start programme. Last year the study consisted in the following elements:

- telephone survey with parents
- focus groups with parents
- discussions with board members and professionals
- discussions with Sure Start team members
- analysis of monitoring information (number of participants for example).

This year, parents are offered the opportunity to have a more active part to play in the study. This project was presented to a group of 5 parents on the 12th of January 2004 and it was agreed that an evaluation group would be created to discuss ways of involving parents in the evaluation work and in the design of the evaluation tools **to ensure that parents' priorities and questions are taken into account in the evaluation process.**

The Evaluation Group is composed of parents who wish to take part and CPC team members: Roger Tarling, Sini Rinne and Morgane Lefauchaux (contact details on the front page). We will be here all along the study to provide support to the Evaluation Group.

Please contact CPC whenever you need to, whatever the question or issue you may have.

2. Introduction to research

The Evaluation of Sure Start will NOT include all of these tools. We present them to give you an overview of the type of work we do and the reasons why we have chosen the methods we are proposing for the evaluation of Sure Start.

Desk-based research

- Internet
- Books, journals, national statistics
- Information kept by projects (number of participants, money spent...).

Fieldwork

- Face-to-face survey
- Telephone survey
- Postal survey or e-mail survey
- Group discussions
- One-to-one discussions

We also have a number of options ; the choice will depend on purpose and circumstances:

- we can use either a set questionnaire or a prompt sheet;
- questions can be open-ended or not; for example –

“Are you satisfied with the choice of toys in the toy library?” YES
 NO

OR “What do you think about the choice of toys in the toy library?”.

- we can prompt answers or not

prompting means proposing a set of standard options – for example a lot a little not at all.

Analysing the results of the fieldwork

- Code all the responses in a spreadsheet, *for example an Excel or SPSS spreadsheet*:

Sure Start participants ID	q1 What is the date of birth of your youngest child?	q2 How did you hear about Sure Start?	q3 How satisfied are you with Sure Start?
Mrs. A	10/02/2001	2	1
Mr. B	09/04/2003	3	2
Ms. C	06/10/2000	2	5
Mrs. D	28/09/2002	1	2

Codes		
q2	1	word of mouth, friend, family
	2	health visitor
	3	leaflet

q3	1	very satisfied
	2	satisfied
	3	neutral
	4	not very satisfied
	5	not satisfied at all

- Analyse the responses using statistics

Q2	Number of responses	% of all responses
word of mouth, friend, family	1	25
health visitor	2	50
Leaflet	1	25
<i>Total</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>100</i>

Q3	Number of responses	% of all responses
very satisfied	1	25
Satisfied	2	50
Neutral	0	0
not very satisfied	0	0
not satisfied at all	1	25
<i>Total</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>100</i>

Reporting and disseminating

- Describe the analysis tables

For example: half the respondents (50%) heard about Sure Start through their health visitor, a quarter (25%) through word of mouth and a quarter read a leaflet.

- Draw conclusions and make recommendations

For example: Whilst 75% of respondents were satisfied, a quarter were very dissatisfied. They explained that they were dissatisfied with the health and safety aspects of the centre, we recommend that Sure Start puts locks on the doors and ensures that sharp objects are kept locked, away from children's reach.

- Tell people about the findings from the research (this is called *dissemination*): send a newsletter, distribute a summary report, publish a summary report on-line, organise a meeting to present the findings and discuss them, take part in a conference...

3. Conducting an interview – some rules and tips

There are a few rules that you need to think about before starting to work as a researcher. These rules are about the ethic of the job or about *what is morally acceptable* or not during research work. The main rules are about *objectivity* and about *confidentiality*.

Objectivity

The rules

When you conduct an interview, you are an interviewer and not a parent anymore, meaning:

- You have to be objective when you ask questions. You cannot ask a question in a way that may influence the response.

For example, if you ask “Don’t you think that opening hours of the centre are not convenient?” the response may be different than if you asked “How convenient do you think the opening hours of the centre are?”

- You have to listen to the respondent’s opinion and record it without prejudice and letting your own views distort the response.

For example, if you had a bad experience with a health visitor but someone responds “very satisfied”, you have to record this response.

Another example, if someone tells you that s/he was “not very satisfied” with music makers, ask why and don’t try to interpret the answer. As a parent, you may also be “not very satisfied” but for different reasons: the respondent may be thinking about the number of children at one session whereas you may be thinking about the lack of discipline.

- You have to record **all the respondent says but only what the respondent says**: if you forget to ask one question or if the respondent does not answer one question, do not try to invent the answer.

Some tips

- Stick to the questionnaire, read out questions as they are written.
- If you feel the respondent has not understood the question, try to rephrase it or to explain what you are trying to find out.
- Record responses as expressed by the interviewee.
- If you forget one question or the respondent does not answer, leave a blank in the first case, tick “cannot tell” in the latter.

The above are basic rules to follow. With practice you will understand them better and find them easier to follow. You will also feel more comfortable with your questionnaire and you will be able to enjoy conducting the interviews as they take more the form of a conversation than of a questionnaire.

Confidentiality

As an interviewer you will have access to people’s contact details and you will ask questions about their use of support services. People’s contact details and ALL the answers they may give must be treated in confidentiality. You have to be careful about:

- Not letting people’s contact details or questionnaire forms in a place where someone could have access to them.
- Keep the filled questionnaire forms with you until our next meeting and only hand them out to Sini or Morgane.
- Not speaking about any particular case to anyone. We will have sessions when we will talk about the interviews and what you found out, but it is important that no respondent can be identified. If you need to talk to someone to discuss an interview, contact Sini or Morgane who hopefully will be able to advise you.

When we will meet in groups to start the work, we will agree on a procedure to ensure compliance with data protection and confidentiality requirements.

If you have any doubt, do not hesitate to contact either Sini or Morgane to discuss it.

4. Work Programme and formation of the groups

The work programme we propose is as follows:

Tasks	Timetable	Parental Involvement
Design of research tools	January	`
Analysis of monitoring information	January	
Telephone Survey	February – March	`
Focus Groups on specific themes	February – March	`
Discussions with professionals	February-March	`
Discussions with board members	March	
Analysis of the survey, report writing and dissemination of findings	April	`

At the end of the initial training, we will form sub-groups according to your preferences: 1 telephone survey sub-group, 1 focus group sub-group, 1 discussion with professionals sub-group. *You can of course take part in more than one sub-group.*

At the end of the fieldwork, we will meet again to discuss findings. If you are interested, CPC can show you how the data is entered in spreadsheets and analysed.

Draft reports will be passed on to the Evaluation Group at the same time as to Sure Start management and parents will have the opportunity to comment on the document.

Finally we hope that we will be able to organise a final informal meeting:

- to discuss one another's experience,
- to discuss what we have learnt and how CPC could have supported you better,
- to give reference letters, detailing tasks and responsibilities during the evaluation,

-
- to discuss how evaluation findings may influence the programme,
 - to celebrate what we hope will be a great achievement.

5. Priorities for the Evaluation

This time is set for open discussion. We would like to encourage parents to think about:

Why they think Sure Start needs an evaluation? What is the objective?

For example: to meet the government requirements ; to look at what Sure Start has achieved in the past ; to look at where Sure Start has not been so good and how it could change ; if there are gaps in provision...?

YOUR IDEAS:

What they think parents could learn from the evaluation? What are the leading questions or issues? Are these questions going to give answers we'll be able to use?

For example: why parents do not participate in the running of the activities ; why Sure Start has not engaged with certain groups of families ; why some families come once but don't come back ; why certain activities are well attended and others not ; how efficient is the management board...?

YOUR IDEAS:

What are the issues or questions they would like to consult other parents on?

For example: how satisfied they are with services ; is there any service they would need that isn't provided ; would they like to take part in the parents forum and why don't they do so... ?

YOUR IDEAS:

If we focus on specific activities, which ones do you think we should choose?

6. Research tools

This section can be organised in sub-groups. We will start with the draft questionnaire and prompt sheet we wrote, however they should only be used as **a basis for discussion**. We hope you will help us modify and improve them. We would like to discuss:

- the content of the questions – what are your priorities? Is there any question you would like to add ; any question you think we don't need?
- the format of the questions – is there any question that does not read well, could we say it in a simpler way?
- the definitions and meaning of the questions – do we all understand the same thing, is there any term or question that is unclear?

a. Questionnaire for the Telephone Survey

Natural born interviewer? Conducting an interview with a written questionnaire is not difficult but nobody is born knowing how to do it. You need to learn it and above all to practice it. Here is what you can do to become FAMILIAR with the questionnaire:

- Read the questionnaire **several times** before you start interviewing.
- Take part in the **role plays** during the training session.
- If there is any question you are not sure about, **talk to us** about it. If you are not clear about it, some interviewees will probably not be clear about it either, and we may have to rephrase the question.

Timing: the telephone survey should not last more than 15 minutes. Note that for any interviewer, **the first few interviews are always the most difficult and tend to take longer** because the interviewer is not used to the questionnaire yet. With a little bit of practice the interviewer will find ways of asking questions that work best for him/her.

The introduction: this is a small paragraph to introduce the interviewer and the study. It is useful to tell who commissioned the study (Sure Start in this case) and to mention that all information will remain confidential. It also helps to remind people that Sure Start sent them a letter to inform them we were going to contact them.

Sometimes interviewers call at a moment that is not convenient for the person. You can propose to call later, underline it will not take long, say it would benefit children and parents.

If you feel the person is not interested, don't insist. Even when people have benefited from a programme, **it is their right to refuse to be interviewed.**

Some tricky situations – a few typical difficult respondents and how to react to them.

- **The aggressive one:** it may happen that people feel it is intrusive to call them at home or that people don't understand you are calling on behalf of Sure Start (you may need to say you are trying to sell them anything!). In these cases, they may have an aggressive reaction. If this happens, don't take any abuse but try to stay calm and polite. If your explanations don't change their mind, **just close the conversation** by saying for example *“Sorry for disturbing you, thank you for your time.”* This is the worst case scenario, **it does not happen very often and it did not happen in Sure Start last year.**
- **The selective one:** some people may want to take part in the survey but they may not want or be able to answer specific questions (for example: income), either because this is private or because they don't know the answer. This is their right. If you explain why we need the information and remind them information is treated in confidentiality they may change their mind, if not, just **skip the question** and tick the appropriate box, either refused or can't tell.
- **The friendly one:** you will have a good relationship with some respondents who will be friendly and willing to chat. The risk is they may take too much time for the chat and not leave enough time for the questions, so you will have to **stay focussed on your questionnaire despite the side-conversation.**
- **The inquisitive one :** friendly people may also ask you what you think or return the question to you. **You don't have to answer** and can find a way of escaping without offending the person (for ex. *“Sorry I am not allowed to answer”* OR *“I'd rather hear what YOU think about it”*). **Don't give any personal information** either (telephone number etc.). If you enjoy the discussion and want to answer, you are free to judge if you should or not, but don't forget you should not influence the person or get into an argument. Your objective is to record what the person thinks.
- **The emotional one:** some people may reveal some very private information and you may feel sorry, embarrassed, moved. Your reaction will depend on your personality. The only advice we can give is to remember you are a researcher and not an adviser.

PS: Most people are decent and polite. Most interviews are interesting, especially if the interviewer is interested in knowing what people think about the programme they evaluate.

The routine: this is a set of indications that guide the interviewer through the questionnaire. These indications are not read and are usually written in *italics*.

For example

Q8 “Have you used the toy library?” *IF YES, GO TO Q9, IF NO, GO TO Q10*

Q9 “How satisfied were you with the toy library?”

Q10 “Why didn’t you use the toy library?”.

If anything disturbed you or made you feel uncomfortable during an interview, don’t hesitate to contact either Sini or Morgane to talk about it. Chances are we had a similar experience or we may encounter a similar case in the future and it good to discuss it, without breaching confidentiality of course.

b. Prompt sheet for Focus Groups

A focus group will be composed of 4 to 8 parents and 2 facilitators (1 parent and 1 CPC member). CPC with the help of Sure Start will invite parents to come for 1 hour in the centre. An hour is enough to have an interesting conversation and cover a range of issues. More than an hour would be too long and people would start to become tired. Childcare will be provided during the focus group.

Introduction – one of the facilitators welcomes parents, introduces his/her team and explains the purpose of the meeting. S/he then encourages parents to introduce themselves. Facilitators highlight confidentiality: a summary of views and opinions will be written up but no name will be mentioned.

Prompt sheet – both facilitators have to prepare the meeting together and agree on how to split the work. They have a prompt sheet to remind them of the main issues they want to discuss about during the meeting. They also have to take notes of what people say, but NOT of who says it.

Facilitation – the role of the facilitator is to encourage people to talk and express their views. The facilitator should also let the parents decide on what are the important issues rather than trying to impose an agenda of its own. S/he has

to find a balance between the need to keep parents focussed on the issues (too informal the discussion could end up in a gossiping event) and not being too directive (if the facilitator intervenes too much, people may not dare speaking or they may be influenced by the agenda set by the facilitator or his/her tone).

A good workshop is:

- one where each participant has had an opportunity to have a say;
- dominant personalities have also listened to quieter people;
- participants have listened to one another and discussed when disagreeing;
- a range of issues have been discussed to a satisfying level of depth.

Closing the meeting – towards the end of the meeting, the facilitators can ask if there is any issue they would have liked to discuss. Participants are informed that they will be sent the write-ups from the meeting they attended, as long as they provide their full postal address. The facilitators thank participants for their input.

c. Prompt sheet for discussions with Professionals

Discussions with professionals are in general one-to-one meetings, unless the interviewee thinks someone else, like a manager or a frontline staff, should be present. We tend to make appointment at times that are suitable for the professional and to go to their premises, however in this case, we will be asking professionals to come to Sure Start so that childcare can be provided for the parents-interviewers.

Here is a list of the organisation we would like to contact:

Sure Start Project Workers	Storysack Project	Health Visiting
Educational Psychologist	SPRING Midwifery Team	Harlow Toy Library
Speech and Language Therapy	Children’s Occupational Therapy	Home Start
	Traveller Education Service	Women’s Aid

-
- Is there any organisation you think we should add to this list (for example local childcare providers to ask them about the impact of Sure Start on their business)?
 - Allocation of interviews amongst parents.
 - Allocations of tasks: taking notes, asking questions, writing-up interviews.

CPC will have met most professionals in the year 1 of the evaluation and they will know about the study. Some may feel intimidated (they may feel they are being judged by people who have used their services) or concerned about the presence of parents during the interview. In general we meet people in the absence of any member of staff or user of the programme, to encourage them to respond openly to our questions. So before the interview it may help if the parent would explain the purpose of the interview and emphasise the Evaluation Group rigorous approach to confidentiality and objectivity.

The parent and the CPC member will have a prompt sheet which is a set of questions and issues. It is important to refer to the prompt sheet to ensure we cover all the issues and we are not distracted too much by points of details. However it is good to be able to engage with the respondent in a conversation style rather than questionnaire style.

Some respondents are very precise, some are too detailed, others too vague. The role of the interviewer is to ask the respondent to complete his/her answer if need be by asking them for example “*do you have an example?*”, “*what do you mean?*”. If an answer is confused, don’t hesitate to ask “*I am not sure I understand... could you be more specific... do you mean...*”

7. Practice, group work

This part of the session is quite informal and will vary according to what parents want to do.

a. Questionnaire for the Telephone Survey

We propose a role play with parents interviewing CPC members or interviewing one another.

We have chosen a section of the draft questionnaire which includes different types of questions: open-ended or not, single answer or multiple answer...

At the end, we will have time to talk about your impressions.

We hope you will all take part, the best way to learn how to conduct an interview is to do it!

b. Prompt sheet for Focus Groups

We will propose to undertake 2 mini focus groups.

Focus Group 1

One of CPC members will lead this focus group about “*Hygiene, health and safety in the centre*”, with a “trainee facilitator” who will intervene whenever s/he wants. Topic list:

- Do you think that the Sure Start centre is a safe place for children? Why?
- Is there any health and safety issue in the centre? Which ones?
- Have you discussed these issues with Sure Start staff or management?
- What was their reaction? Has anything been put in place to improve the situation?
- How do you think the situation could be improved?

Focus Group 2

The second focus group about “*Parental participation in Sure Start*” will be led by a “trainee facilitator” with the support from one of CPC members. Topic list:

- Do you think parents participate enough in Sure Start? Why?

-
- Do you think they would like to participate more?
 - Are parents given an opportunity to participate?
 - How could we encourage more parents to participate?

At the end, we will take time to discuss your impressions, make observations and find ways of improving our techniques.

This is a bit challenging, but very interesting. If you hesitate, try to facilitate the second focus group to see how it goes.

8. Timetable and Communication

The telephone survey will be undertaken from the Oak Training Room. Focus groups and discussions with professionals will take place in Sure Start as well. We need to discuss:

- when you are going to be available in the next few weeks and when you would like to come to start the fieldwork;
- how we are going to keep in touch.

Our contact details are on the front page of this document. Could you please fill the blue form included at the end of this document:

- Your name
- Your full postal address (including postcode)
- Your telephone number
- Any special requirement or comment (times you would prefer, anything you have not dared saying or anything you have not had time to say, suggestions...).

Thank you for your attendance. We are looking forward to work with you,

Roger, Sini, Morgane

Sure Start Harlow Parnall Wood
Evaluation Group

SURNAME:.....

FIRST NAME:.....

ADDRESS:.....

.....

POSTCODE:.....

TELEPHONE NUMBER:.....

.....

I would like to take part in:

- telephone survey
- focus groups
- discussions with professionals
- learn about data entry and analysis

The best time for me to come:

.....

.....

Any comment, suggestion, special requirement:

.....

**ANNEX B SURE START HARLOW PARNALL WOOD –
SURVEY**

Awareness of Services and Use of Services

*My name is ***. I am a parent living in Harlow and I work with Cambridge Policy Consultants on the evaluation of Sure Start. You may have received a letter to invite you to take part either in a group discussion or in a telephone survey. This is to ask parents what they think of the programme and of service for children and families in Harlow.*

This is an independent and confidential survey. At the end of the survey a report will be written but no one's name or personal details will be mentioned. A summary of findings will be sent by post to those who participate. Can I ask you a few questions now? (If not) Would you prefer me to contact you another time?

Q40. How many children under 4 do you regularly care for? (write number)

Total number

Q41. And for each of these children are you: (read out, write number of children per row)

A parent (mother/father/step-mother/step-father)

A grand-parent (step-grand-parent)

A brother/a sister

A childminder

Can't tell / not registered / does not want to sat

Other (explain)

1
2
3
4
5

Q42. How did you first hear about Sure Start? (don't prompt, tick ALL that applies)

You received a leaflet by post

Someone was giving information about it in the street

You saw a Notice Board in a public place

The health visitor told you about it

You received information about it via the nursery school

One of the Sure Start workers told you about it

Through word of mouth (from friends and relatives)

You heard about it through your Residents Association

Midwife told you about it

You don't know about it

Other (please tick and write below)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11

SEE NOTE

NOTE: if answer “don’t know about it”, explain Sure Start and if the respondent still does not recognises it, continue the interview from Q13. Explain that you would like to continue the interview because (1) you would like to know what the needs are in Harlow and (2) it may be that the person used services funded by Sure Start by delivered by another agency (for example health visitor).

Q43. Do you think you receive enough information about Sure Start? (I tick)

Yes ¹

No ²

Can't tell ³

Comments:

Q44. I have a list of activities here, which ones have you used in the last 12 months? (*read out the list and tick all that applies*)

	Used
SERVICES FOR CHILDREN	
“Drop in” Sure Start centre	1
“Drop in” for grandparents	2
“Little Cherubs” (drop in for under 2)	3
Toy Library (with Melanie)	4
Art Zone / Messy Play	5
Story sack / story world	6
Busy Bees / Bouncy Bears	7
Fun with Ones / Fun with Twos	8
Baby Massage	9
Little music makers	10
SERVICES FOR PARENTS	
Benefit advice (Viv, Kate or Julie)	11
Home visit by a health visitor	12
Home Start support (Mandy)	13
Spring Midwifery team support (Anita)	14
Women’s Aid support (with Clare)	15
Occupational therapy information session (Jill, Diana or Janke)	16
Educational psychology support (Sara)	17
Traveller education service (Sally)	18
COURSES FOR PARENTS	19
Training on reading and writing	20
Corner Stone training	21
Smoking Cessation group	22
Other training (<i>write below</i>)	23
OTHER	
Day Trip with Sure Start	24
Home visit by Sure Start workers (Karen, Polly, Nicky, Jane, Lisa or Viv)	25
Local Library	26
Other (<i>please write below</i>)	27

Q45. Which of these services (*those from Q5*) were particularly helpful, if any? Could you explain how they helped? (*write number and comments*)

Q46. And which of these services were not very good, if any? Could you explain why?

Involvement in Sure Start

Q47. Are you currently: *(tick all that apply)*

A member of the Parents Forum?

A member of the Management Board?

Q48. Do you think that parents are involved enough in the running of Sure Start? *(tick 1)*

Yes

No

Can't tell

Q49. In your opinion, what are the reasons why only a few parents participate?

Q50. And what could encourage more parents to participate?

Q51. Some parents come once but don't come back in the centre, do you have an idea why?

Satisfaction with Area and Needs for Services

Q52. In general, how good or bad is your neighbourhood as a place to bring up your child aged under 4? (*tick 1*)

Very good	1
Good	2
Average	3
Bad	4
Very bad	5

Q53. In general how good or bad do you think the following services are in your area? (*read out rows and options from ‘very good’ to ‘very bad’, tick 1 per column*)

	Childcare	Play & learning	Health	Services for children with special needs	Services to support parents and families
Very good	1	1	1	1	1
Good	2	2	2	2	2
Average	3	3	3	3	3
Bad	4	4	4	4	4
Very bad	5	5	5	5	5
Can't tell	6	6	6	6	6

Q54. If answered ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’, could you explain why for each type of service? (*refer back to Q15, do not prompt, tick all that apply*)

	Childcare	play and learning	health	children with special needs	parents and families
Quality of the facilities is poor	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of the service is poor	1	2	3	4	5
Not enough facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Not convenient opening hours	1	2	3	4	5
People employed are not friendly and welcoming	1	2	3	4	5
Problems with other families using the services	1	2	3	4	5
Worried that confidentiality may not be kept	1	2	3	4	5
Not good value for money	1	2	3	4	5
Too far / not easy to travel to	1	2	3	4	5
Other (<i>please explain</i>)	1	2	3	4	5

Q55. Overall would you say that Sure Start has improved services for families with children under the age of 4? (*tick 1*)

Yes 1 No 2 Can't tell 3

Q56. I would like to understand how Sure Start may have changed services for families with children under 4. Are the following features now better, the same or worse: (*read out elements and tick 1 per row*)

	better	the same	worse	can't say
How far you need to travel to access services	1	2	3	4
How convenient the opening hours are	1	2	3	4
How affordable services are (cost)	1	2	3	4
Access to professionals (<i>no need to be referred by GP</i>)	1	2	3	4
Friendliness of professionals	1	2	3	4
Quality of the building and equipment	1	2	3	4
Quality of the services and activities	1	2	3	4

Q57. And which ones of these features, if any, still needs to be improved? **IF ANY**, could you explain what service? (*prompt only if required*)

	tick	what service?
Accessibility in terms of distance	1	
Accessibility in terms of opening hours	2	
Accessibility in terms of cost	3	
Access to professionals	4	
Friendliness of professionals	5	
Quality of the building and equipment	6	
Quality of the services and activities	7	
Other (<i>please explain</i>)	8	
NONE		

Q58. Has Sure Start improved your family's quality of life in any way? **IF YES**, could you explain how?

Q62. How often do you do each of these with your child? You don't need to give an exact answer, an approximation would be fine. (*tick 1 per row*)

	Daily	At least once a week	At least once a month	Less than 1/mth	Never
Look at picture or read story from a book	1	2	3	4	5
Let them do painting or drawing	1	2	3	4	5
Let them use objects to build (towers...)	1	2	3	4	5
Play with them	1	2	3	4	5
Let them make a lot of noise	1	2	3	4	5
Take them to visit library/toy library	1	2	3	4	5
Take them to crèche/nursery	1	2	3	4	5
Take them to visit their grandparents	1	2	3	4	5

Q63. How often do you take part in the following social activities? (*tick 1 per row*)

	At least once a week	At least once a month	Less than 1/mth	Never
Meet friends in their house	1	2	3	4
Meet people in a social place (community centre...)	1	2	3	4
Go to sport club, leisure centre, swimming pool...	1	2	3	4
Go to park or outdoor leisure facility	1	2	3	4
Go to the cinema, theatre or museum	1	2	3	4
Go to community events (fair, day out, bingo...)	1	2	3	4
Participate in residents association	1	2	3	4
Help organise community events	1	2	3	4
Other social activities (<i>write below</i>)	1	2	3	4

Q64. Do you vote to national or local elections...: (*read out and tick 1*)

	Tick 1
Always	1
Most of the time	2
Sometimes	3
Rarely	4
Never	5

Section A – Household and Personal

The following questions are about your house and your family. I need to ask you these questions to see if I have spoken to families in different situations to know if the study is going to represent all the families in Harlow. It is also to know if Sure Start responds to the needs of all types of families or not. I would like to assure you again that this survey is completely confidential and none of the information you may give us will be passed on.

Q65. How many people in total usually live in your household altogether?
(write number)

Total number

Q66. How many adults above the age of 16 and how many children below the age of 16? (should add up to the figure in Q26)

Number above 16	1
Number under 16	2

Q67. What is your current situation regarding employment or education?
(read out only if needed ; tick 1)

	tick
In full-time employment (at least 30h per week)	1
In part-time employment (less than 30h per week)	2
Self-Employed	3
Studying full-time	4
Studying part-time	5
Retired	6
Looking for work	7
Not looking for work: because I am a carer	8
Not looking for work: because of a disability/long-term illness	9
Not looking for work: other reason	10
Other (write below)	11

Q68. What type of home do you live in? (*read, tick 1*)

- Renting from council
- Renting from housing association
- Renting from private landlord
- Owner occupier, buying with mortgage
- Owner-occupier, owning outright
- Other (write below)

1
2
3
4
5
6

Q69. How long have you lived on your current home? (*write number of years OR months*)

Time in current home

Years	Months
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Q70. I will send by post a summary of findings from the telephone survey to all participants. Could you confirm your address to me?

- Your full name
- Street
- Full postcode
- Refused (*tick*)

<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Q71. Any other comment:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP

Interviewer name:

Date:

Respondent telephone no.

ANNEX C LIST OF PARTNERS INTERVIEWED

Andy Simpson, Sure Start Programme Co-ordinator

Jill Curtis, Sure Start Operations Manager

Sally Naylor – Peripatetic Teacher, Traveller Education Service

Jackie Sully, Executive Director, Rainbow Services

Paula Tate, Head Teacher, Peterswood Infant School

Ina Quigg, Senior Organiser, Home Start Harlow

Mandie Collins, Home Start Organiser

Helen Bickley, Speech and Language Therapist

Lynn Seward, Head of Community Services Harlow District Council, Chair of Sure Start Board

Anita Root, Health Visitor

Jill Deighton, Children’s Occupational Therapist

Melanie Powers, Toy Library

Jackie Kelly, Bookstart and Storysacks Co-ordinator

Lorraine Ellames, Women’s Aid

Patricia Carter, Service Manager, Essex Social Services, Harlow Partnership

Anna Peacock, Community Midwifery Manager, PAH NHS Trust

Jacqui Featherstone, Head of in-patient services (Women's Health), PAH NHS Trust

Wendy Matthews, Head of Midwifery and Women's Health, PAH NHS Trust

Sara Day, Educational Psychologist

Jane Ryder-Richardson, Board Member