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Executive Summary

This report provides an independent appraisal of the degree to which Sure Start Orton has been able to successfully meet key local and national Sure Start objectives.

The evaluation recognises that Sure Start Orton is at a relatively early phase of its implementation and as such this report spotlights the formative experiences of establishing the programme, while also detailing baselines of engagement with local services amongst local families. More in-depth analysis and recommendations are offered on the key themes of partnership working and parental involvement.

We would recommend that succeeding evaluations build on the key findings and recommendations of this report but also that future local evaluation include analysis of output monitoring data and the extent to which key stakeholder groups have relevant, accessible and up-to-date data to underpin their assessment of progress against national and local objectives and subsequent strategic planning.

The Sure Start Orton Partnership is a sixth wave Sure Start programme having received approval in May 2003 for its ten-year programme. The programme aims to address family needs in the Peterborough City wards of Orton Malborne, Orton Goldhay and some of Orton Brimbles - providing a range of services for 4's and their families.

The Sure Start Orton Partnership should feel very proud of its achievements to date:

- Having a good mix of statutory and independent sector agency and key decision-maker representation on the Partnership Board, demonstrating a determination to assure programme attainment, while informing the reshaping of mainstream service delivery. Furthermore, there is evidence of regular review of membership to ensure strategic relevance, for example current operational links with Job Centre Plus may be consolidated by an appointment of the Childcare Partnership Manager to the Board in the near future.
- Demonstrating clear attention to managing risk as evidenced by the excellent six and twelve month risk assessments by the Sure Start Unit. This process establishes the achievement of minimum standards in key performance areas and contributes to the confidence and credibility of the programme's future delivery
- In some areas, there is more work to do but this is clearly identified by the Programme Manager and will inform future work. This includes managing the capital needs of the programme, embedding

collaborative work between services and disciplines, further developing the opportunities for skill mix in addressing workload issues (e.g. adopting innovative practice such as mid-wifery assistants), and achieving a greater involvement of parents within strategic programme management.

- ❑ A number of initiatives are in place to respond to these issues including the appointment of a Parent Development Worker, a planned team building day for Sure Start service provider staff.

The challenge for the succeeding year(s) for Sure Start Orton is to demonstrate the efficacy of the Sure Start model across a range of services, through both objective (e.g. decreased waiting times, increased referral rates) and subjective measures (e.g. increased client satisfaction, perceptions of service quality), including:

- ❑ Improved quality of services as reflected in objective measures (e.g. active information dissemination *ref* p25) and subjective measures (e.g. greater client satisfaction, perception of 'improved' services within community).
- ❑ Better access and engagement of services across the Sure Start Orton community, including greater success in engaging harder to reach groups
- ❑ Increased community awareness of services and changing perceptions of services, particularly with regards to social care services
- ❑ Increased staff satisfaction as a result of increased opportunities for professional development, shared skill sets and increased support. Whilst Sure Start Orton recognises the importance of professional development, and as such provides funding for staff training, many staff have not taken-up this opportunity indicating a lack of awareness across staff. In addition opportunities for job enlargement could be provided through increasing integrated working practice,

With the application of the Sure Start model to Children's Centres the opportunity exists for Sure Start Orton to consolidate its year one outcomes and build on the foundations of Sure Start. However a number of key challenges will clearly arise and, across these, differing levels of funding need to be taken into account. However, by employing similar principles to Sure Start, key challenges can be overcome, including:

- ❑ Sure Start Orton strikes a delicate balance within the community and caution would need to be exercised to ensure this balance is not lost. Specifically, with the statutory lead in Children's Centres,

the equality of the partnership would need to be ensured through the implementation of substantive, democratic procedures.

- The expanding role of education within the multi-disciplinary teams will need to develop in synergy with other professions, and allow for the on-going development of partnership working between health and social care services.

Introduction to Sure Start Orton

About Sure Start

Sure Start local programmes form a cornerstone of the Government's drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, based on firm evidence of what works. They are concentrated in neighbourhoods where a high proportion of children are living in poverty and where Sure Start local programmes can help them to succeed by pioneering new ways of working to improve services.

Sure Start local programmes work with parents and parents-to-be to improve children's life chances through better access to:

- Family support
- Advice on nurturing
- Health services
- Early learning

What Sure Start does is build itself around the needs of local communities, with local parents working in partnership with local statutory and voluntary sector agencies to design and deliver services for families. Not surprisingly, Sure Start programmes have the potential for considerable experimentation and are addressing similar challenges with their own diverse solutions that match their own local circumstances and aspirations.

Children's Centres

The next phase of the Government's strategy, to deliver better outcomes for young children and families, involves the development of a network of children's centres, providing integrated care and education for young children, health services, family support, and a base for childminders. They will serve children and families in disadvantaged communities, although local authorities will be encouraged to develop this integrated approach to services for all children.

The centres will bring together locally available services and integrate management and staffing structures. Local authorities will play a central role in improving the co-ordination, quantity and quality of the services. Most children's centres are likely to be developed from Sure Start local programmes and new or planned Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence Centres, with others developed from existing local provision in the maintained, voluntary and private sectors.

The programme is an important part of the Government's strategy for raising standards and integrating services for young children and families in England. It aims to develop, demonstrate and disseminate models of excellence in the delivery of centre-based integrated multi-agency services, which meet the needs of children and families, raise standards and achieve national impact. Specifically, by integrating care, education, family support and health services, Children's Centres are intended to better meet the needs of families in the 20% most disadvantaged wards in England and improve both children's life chances and their parents' access to work and training.

The Government's long-term vision is to integrate key services for children within a single organisational focus. The preferred model for achieving this integration is **Children's Trusts**. Most areas should have Trusts by 2006.

Sure Start Orton

As a sixth wave programme, which received approval in May 2003, Sure Start Orton has already developed a relatively strong presence within the local community. Sure Start Orton covers the areas of Orton Malborne, Orton Goldhay and some of Orton Brimbles - providing services for under 4's and their families.

The Sure Start Orton Programme is at a relatively young stage of its development and in accordance with the Government's recent Green Paper, *Every Child Matters*, has set up or supports local projects to work towards the objectives of *Improving children's emotional and social development; Improving health; Improving children's ability to learn; Strengthening families and communities*.

The key projects which work towards these aims in the Orton development plan include Time to Play, Young Parents' Group, Baby Massage, Toy Library, Storytime, Computer Skills, Splashdown swimming, Cook & Eat Club, Drop – in & Play sessions, Tunnel Tots, Community Cafe, Parent Craft, Day Trips, and most recently 3 new outdoor Parks have been opened.

The approach to the local evaluation

The Sure Start Orton Partnership has commissioned Cordis Bright to evaluate its progress in 2003/04.

Given that the programme received approval within 2003/04 and is largely in an establishment year, the current evaluation report spotlights the lessons learned in establishing the programme strategically and operationally, while detailing baselines of satisfaction with local services amongst local families with very young children that are capable of ongoing measurement through future evaluation processes.

Cordis Bright have adopted a *participative evaluation* approach that emphasises the involvement of all key stakeholders. As such, a fundamental tenet of the evaluation methodology has been empowering local people to work with their own communities as part of the evaluation process.

Drawing these elements together, the report is grouped broadly to reflect a client perspective, an operational perspective and a strategic perspective on the establishment of the Sure Start Orton Programme.

The Client Dimension

The extent to which people in receipt of services or in other ways benefit from services believe that their circumstances/ choices have improved. This includes very young children.

The Operational Dimension

The extent to which those that deliver services believe that this new way of working is giving them greater freedom and responsibility for meeting the full continuum of the needs of all families with under fours.

The Strategic Dimension

The extent to which the partnership-model enables partners to most effectively apply resources to addressing the full continuum of the needs of a family. This might mean, for example, networking and reconfiguring resources across agencies to provide new joint-approaches to meeting local needs. In the medium-longer term, ensuring success within this strategic dimension will prove necessary to capture the lessons learned from the Sure Start programme and ensure the sustainability of good practice.

Methodology

The evaluation comprised:

- **Consultation with the community**

A questionnaire was designed, in conjunction with the local parent surveyors and with programme management, to establish baselines of engagement and areas where the programme has started to make a difference and to identify other needs of local parents.

Interviews were then conducted with 188 carers of young children living in the Sure Start catchment area. In terms of the extent of coverage the questionnaire the National Evaluation of Sure Start recommends that consultations with the community achieve contact with a minimum of 10% of the relevant population indicating the considerable success of the survey instrument used in this evaluation.

The survey was conducted face-to-face using 9 local parents who live within the Sure Start Orton area.

- **Consultation with the Partnership Board**

A facilitated evaluation session was conducted with the Board and semi-structured interviews were conducted with five members of the Sure Start Board including the Chair and two parent representatives.

- **Consultation with Service Providers**

Two evaluation seminars were conducted with local service providers to determine baselines about the extent to which their services' objectives were aligned to those of Sure Start Orton and to determine their experience of working within the Sure Start Orton partnership, together with analysis of individual questionnaires.

- An interview of the Sure Start Orton programme manager

- Consideration of the delivery plan and the community consultation report

Strategic Dimension – Partnership Working

The successful delivery of the Sure Start Orton programme depends on an effective and committed partnership of key stakeholders being sustained over the lifetime of the programme.

A successful partnership is one that has a clear focus, where partners – particularly senior managers from the major service-delivering organisations – are committed to working together with a common purpose towards a common aim. To do this a partnership needs to develop a shared vision of what must be achieved and how this will be done, and then work towards that common goal.

There are key aspects to effective partnership working in Sure Start Orton. These include ensuring that:

- Local parents are at the centre of programme design and delivery
- The Partnership Board is empowered to work strategically
- The Partnership Board comprises an appropriate membership

Parents at the centre of the design and delivery of the Sure Start Orton programme

Partnership Board members interviewed identified the pivotal role of local parents to the Board, the sub-groups and consultation processes generally. They all noted, however, that the process of recruiting and retaining local parents, particularly within strategic management roles, was an especially difficult task. This experience accords with that of many Sure Start programmes, as identified in the results of the National Evaluation of Sure Start. Moreover, the processes of recruiting, training and supporting local parents within strategic roles, while simultaneously needing to '*get on with activities within tight deadlines*' makes these processes more difficult.

The Sure Start Orton Partnership Board demonstrates a commitment to parental involvement and members have indicated widespread support for further participation by parents. One parent Board member notes that '*Parents are made to feel welcome at the meetings*'. Service providers also indicate broad support for the principle of parental involvement.

However it is worth noting that while Board members generally perceive parent members as having significant influence on the decisions of the Board, parent members rated their level of influence significantly lower.

In interview Board members identified a number of ideas that could improve participation by all members:

- Clarifying when a decision is being made and recording who is in favour of it and who is not.

- Clarifying the roles and contribution of the different sectors
- Using more inclusive and jargon-free language

In consultation with service providers there was a similar range of perception. All service providers recognised the importance of participation, but most service providers believed that there has been no marked improvement in this area so far. However staff did feel that the opportunities for participation by parents had been significantly improved and it was slow take-up by parents that was the key issue. Examples of increased opportunities included: the Parents Forum, suggestion boxes, use of evaluation sheets, as well as day trips and training opportunities.

There was a view expressed by service providers and some Board members that participation at this stage of the programme's development was most successfully engaging parents who were already motivated towards involvement.

The community survey has involved consultations well in excess of the National Evaluation of Sure Start recommendation that consultations with the community achieve contact with at least 10% of relevant households. This incorporated the training and supporting of nine local parents to interview 188 of their peers to establish key baseline levels of engagement for the programme.

The programme manager identified that having three geographic areas also makes the processes of engaging the community and supporting local parent contributions more challenging than Sure Start programmes that operate within a single geographical area, as this requires strategic planning for operational practice to develop integration across all three areas.

Observations and opportunities

1. The Sure Start Orton Partnership has made some progress in ensuring that parents are at the centre of programme design and delivery. This has been particularly challenging within the context of a year predominantly about establishing the programme and has been even more challenging by needing to establish the programme across three neighbourhoods.
2. The Sure Start Orton Partnership could in its promotional activities make local parents aware of the opportunity to make a contribution to the Board, and ensure that this publicity makes clear that crèche, transport and translators will always be made available if required. The publicity could also indicate that training will be made available to all parents that are willing to make a contribution to the Board about roles and responsibilities and to help improve confidence.
3. To encourage parental involvement on the Board, the Sure Start Orton Board has introduced a range of incentives for involvement, such as childcare, training opportunities and CV assistance. This could be developed and more targeted to allow for more 'luxury' incentives such as subsidised nursery places or leisure

opportunities, such as free cinema or theatre tickets, for parents that attend a specific number of meetings within a period (e.g. 9 out of 12). However, incentive schemes can challenge the ethos of Sure Start, diminishing the growth of social capital and community ownership by engaging people for short term rewards.

4. Like all Sure Start programmes, the Sure Start Orton Partnership will need to develop a multi-layered strategy that seeks to promote and maintain the central role of local parents within programme design and delivery. This could incorporate:
 - Seeking to increase parental roles in delivering aspects of the programmes, such as running the playgroups and becoming trainers of courses that they had originally participated in. This is currently occurring on ad-hoc basis, with examples including the referral of parents to the childcare team for training (with the future option of providing services for Sure Start Orton), employment of two community peer surveyors in the programme and the development of parent volunteers to help in baby and toddler groups. Developing parental ownership of services may benefit from more formal procedures, such as occurred at Sure Start Aylesbury Plus and Sure Start Copenhagen.
 - Developing the Parents focus groups into a decision making body, so that, for examples:
 - The Parents focus groups might, after training, administer a small grants programme, as occurs at Sure Start Euston and Sure Start Aylesbury Plus.
 - That any decisions about new services to be supported by Sure Start Orton are discussed initially with the Parents focus groups with recommendations to the Partnership Board.
 - Developing an induction process for parents that become Partnership Board members and providing regular processes for the Partnership Board to undertake team-building activities.
 - Ongoing consultations with local parents, employing non-traditional methodologies (such as engaging parents on an on-going basis as local evaluators, training service providers in user surveying), about their needs
 - At least yearly, probably through the evaluation processes, determining the suitability of the way that the Partnership Board itself operates to ensure the centrality of parents' perspectives.

The Partnership Board is empowered to work strategically

The Partnership Board members identify that they have a reasonably good understanding of what is happening operationally. Though it is worth noting that a number of members, including parent members expressed stated they had not seen any financial information regarding the programme. However, a financial breakdown is provided to the board at the beginning of the financial year, but with the transience of some Board members (specifically parents) this may result in many Board members not having access to financial information. Recommendations include providing an

individual introduction to the financial status of the programme when parents join the Partnership Board.

It is also significant that members acknowledged the difficulties of time constraints when managing the Board agenda. This is likely to have a number of negative impacts as efficiency may take precedence over effectiveness in key areas such as participation by all members and due consideration of broader strategic issues.

With the time constraints on Board meetings, dialogue should remain focussed at the strategic level. As is often the case with a wide range of representation, often issues can dominate that are of personal importance (e.g. vandalism in the parks), and mechanisms need to be put in place to stop this happening.

A successful mechanism employed to facilitate more developed dialogue at Board level of broader issues is the use of sub-groups to develop interest and knowledge across a range of issues pertinent to the programme. There are a number of sub-groups already operating across the Sure Start Orton Board, and developing agendas and operating procedures to allow equal representation should allow for effective management across a range of issues.

Revised Terms of Reference have also been recently developed to ensure effective operational practice, tackling issues such as the variability in voting attendance of voting members.

These on-going developments place the Sure Start Orton Board in a good position to work strategically in the future, Key priority areas that Board members identify for 2003/04 include:

- ❑ Ensuring that Sure Start services are integrated within the broader mainstream service delivery of Peterborough to ensure that Sure Start Orton acts as a bridge between local families and mainstream services, while providing innovative services that address the continuum of the needs of local families
- ❑ 'As one parent Board member observes, *'if services aren't up and running soon then people will lose confidence in Sure Start and support will drop off. Sure Start needs to be 'Being seen to be delivering. Whilst Sure Start Orton recognises and responds effectively to parents needs, often the length of time it takes to deliver on needs means that parents don't associate new developments with their requests. This could be overcome by effective information dissemination to ensure that parents recognise the links between their requests and service development.*
- ❑ Increasing the levels of parental involvement both at the Board and in take-up of services
- ❑ Ensuring that minority populations, such as BME communities remain engaged with the programme (as targeted through the Community Survey).

Observations and opportunities

1. The Sure Start Orton Partnership has a sound structure that enables its Partnership Board to focus on strategic issues.
2. The degree to which the Partnership Board has established an inclusive and successful partnership is particularly impressive. More work can be undertaken to increase the regular contribution and access by parents.
3. Some of the issues are likely to be particularly challenging, such as the strategic planning to ensure service provision equally meets the needs of families across the three wards, while interconnecting the provision efficiently to mainstream provision.
4. Using the Partnership Board Business Plan for 2004/05, the Board can ensure development aligned with specified objectives, milestones, action plans and monitoring arrangements.

The Partnership Board comprises an appropriate membership

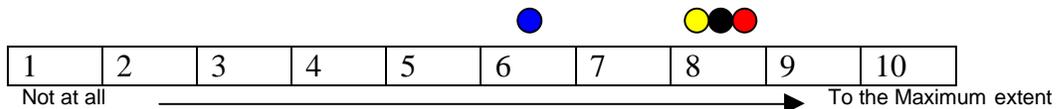
While the Partnership Board identifies a need to increase the level of parental involvement and ensuring that these parents represent the three geographical areas forming the Orton catchment area, as it relates to agency representation, most Partnership Board members consider that the agency membership mix is right.

The individuals representing organisations are also significantly influential within their own organisations and this is likely to enable Sure Start Orton to have a sufficient profile within broader planning frameworks; which will prove crucial to the mainstreaming of 'success stories' in future years.

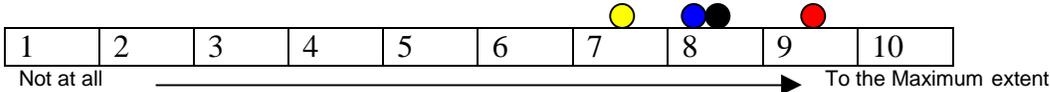
In a series of exercises to evaluate the interaction of the Board's members there were a number of areas of Board performance that representatives from the different sectors rated:

- Parent Members Programme Management
- Statutory Members Voluntary Sector Members

That the aims of the Board were generally being met



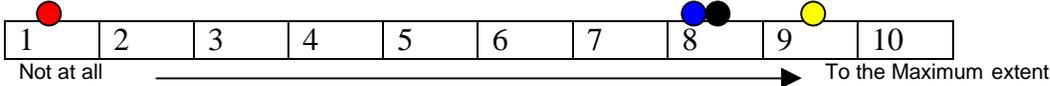
- That Board members come to meetings regularly



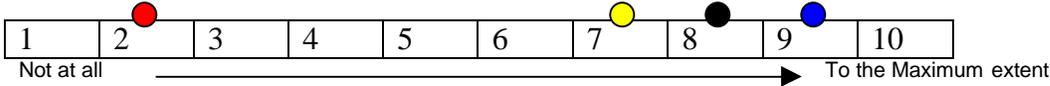
- That the Board is representative of all stakeholders in the wider partnership



- That the budget was being well managed (though it was of note that parents expressed a lack of knowledge of this area and a number of other members stated that this perception was based on trust rather than regular control).

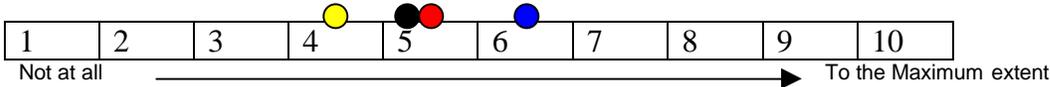


- That representatives from all sectors have sufficient influence (again it is significant that parents rated this lower than other sector representatives)

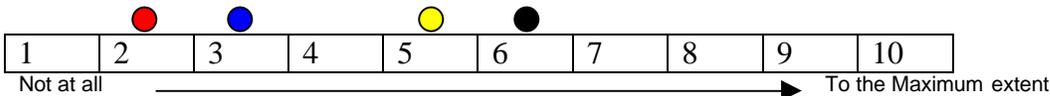


There was a greater spread of perceptions or lower general rating on the issues:

- That everyone understands the roles and responsibilities of different partners



- That information for Board meetings is understandable and useful for all members.



These ratings provide a useful baseline for the Board to measure progress in succeeding evaluations.

Observations and opportunities

1. The Sure Start Orton Partnership Board's commitment to quality augurs very well in terms of promoting good process and delivery. It is no surprise that the programme enjoys a low risk status in recent risk assessments and is a credit to the Board and programme management's commitment to quality.
2. The Sure Start Orton Partnership Board recognises the need to increase parental involvement on the Board. It may be that the Board consider further training for Parent Board members to build on their confidence in participating at Board Meetings.
3. There are broadly shared perceptions of the Board's performance in key areas such as the Board meetings its aims and objectives, ensuring regular attendance and being appropriately representative. However it is worth noting that parents rated their general levels of influence and their understanding of finance as significantly lower.
4. It is also noteworthy that all sectors expressed a view that the information presented to the Board was useful, however this utility was often reduced as the information was not always understandable..
5. These issues present a challenge to the Board than many groups face when trying to represent different sectors and communities of people. It also presents an opportunity for the Board to reflect on how it defines and models exclusivity and genuine collaborative partnership.

Operational Dimension

External providers

Through two sessions, and questionnaires, with local statutory and voluntary sector providers, we explored:

- Baselines about the degree of match between organisational objectives and those of Sure Start Orton
- An understanding from external service providers about what they perceive as the progress of Sure Start Orton to date and the specific challenges that it faces on delivering its targets.

Organisational synergy

Generally service providers felt that the development of a joint vision of service delivery was progressing though at an early stage. Examples of effective mechanisms that promoted joint working included the Family Strategy Group meeting that was establishing common referral, information sharing and provision pathways at the city-wide Sure Start conference.

It is worth also noting that a number of staff expressed a view that there was still some way to go to establish a clear Sure Start identity in all services that would lead to resource and information sharing. This issue is currently being addressed by the Sure Start programme with plans for an away day to develop and specify a shared vision.

Areas of programme strength to date

Key areas of strength identified by external providers to date are:

- Partnership working was identified predominantly as the key area of programme strength to date, with providers identifying the potential of '*greater linking up of services*'. Staff referred to staff meetings and the dissemination of information as being particularly useful in promoting linkages between services.
- Awareness of Sure Start's principles and Orton's priorities was felt to be improving again through opportunities to meet together and the communication of key shared information. Some staff did feel that parents were still unclear about the range and reach of Sure Start. This is borne out in the community survey.

Areas where programme can make some improvements

Providers identified several key issues that relate to where the programme can make improvements to enable it to most effectively use its resources, while harnessing the collective strength of local agencies.

These relate to communication, partnership development, having specific strategies for more isolated families and exploring opportunities for services that are for the 'whole family' rather than as it relates to children aged to four.

Identified as crucial is the continued regular and effective communication between the programme and providers and local parents that inform and promote what Sure Start and non-Sure Start services are on offer and those planned, while reiterating the universal nature of the provision to those families with children under the age of four living within the catchment areas.

Another area for improvement identified related to ensuring that service providers are aware of harder to reach populations, specifically those from Black and minority ethnic communities. Other groups identified included *fathers, large families, young parents and families with health needs*. It was generally acknowledged that trust and confidence with harder to reach groups would take longer to build and further resourcing of outreach services.

Examples of initiatives have been set up to increase services to the community which offer opportunities to engage with these groups. These include:

1. sensory play sessions
2. post natal support group
3. Friday drop-in support group

Key challenges for the programme in making a difference

Providers identified that the two primary challenges to delivery on targets are:

- Making service providers aware of training opportunities provided by Sure Start as there is funding for, and support, to deliver training (both for providers and parents and this includes crèche places for children). New structures are being suggested to ensure more effective information dissemination, specifically developing a core group of representatives across service areas responsible for informing other service providers.
- Being able to recruit staff to support existing service providers (especially midwifery and workers within early years settings). These supplementary staff could include, for example, nursery nurses to alleviate work-loads of service providers and develop integrated working.
- Ensuring that service quality remains high. Providers suggested that the main ways to ensure this included asking for parent feedback after they use services and staff training, while other mechanisms included involving older community members and grand-parents and undertaking more integrated multi agency working across operational practices e.g. referral processes and assessment procedures.

Observations and opportunities

1. Sure Start Orton appears to have made a very good start at involving local service providers within the delivery of its programme.

2. The degree of alignment between the priorities of service providers and those of Sure Start Orton is most encouraging in terms of developing closer and creative partnership working arrangements.
3. Links with local training providers are very good, particularly as compared with many Sure Start programmes. Sure Start Orton has links with Job Centre Plus, Connexions and the Benefits Agency , adding value in promoting maximum income support and employment opportunities.
4. That local service providers feel that the Sure Start Orton programme has succeeded at establishing effective partnership arrangements is commendable.
5. Building on this, Sure Start Orton provides a local information directory (in its Introductory Pack), newsletter holds regular monthly meetings for all providers and develops and implements 'case conferences' to co-ordinate packages of support for local families (where local families receive multi-agency interventions). Models for such approaches exist at Sure Start Ore Valley, Sure Start Holloway and Sure Start Copenhagen.

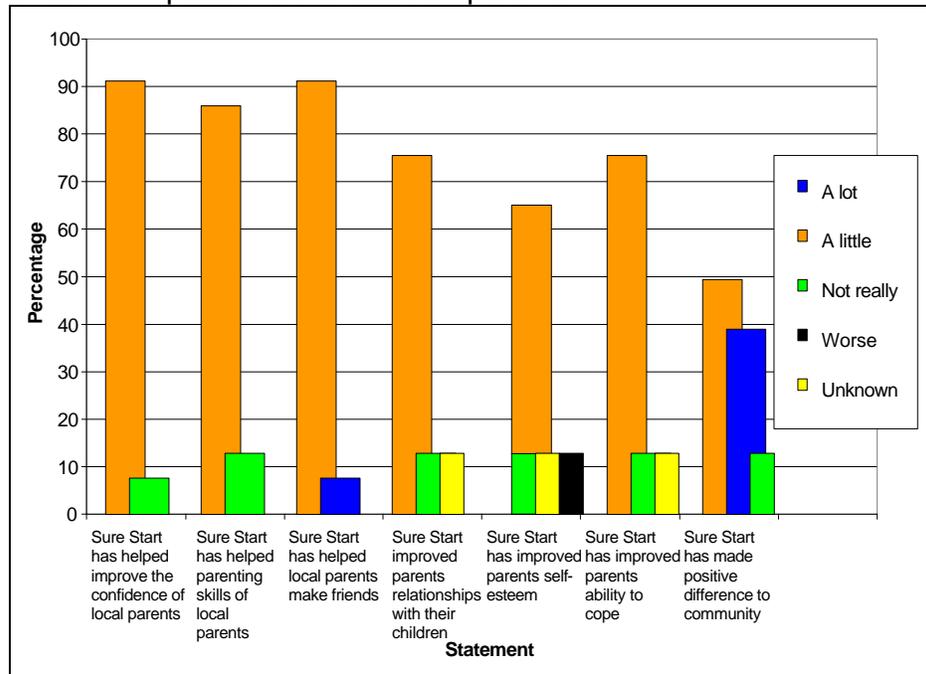
Client Dimension – Outcomes for Local Parents and Very Young Children

A. Programme impact Parents

Integral to the success of Sure Start programmes is making a direct impact in addressing the health, social, economic and other needs of local families. Future evaluations will explore the specific impact of Sure Start Orton across these specific areas, and the level of progress in addressing the programme targets.

In addition to the direct consultation with parents through the community survey we have been keen to establish baseline perspectives of local service providers about the degree to which they feel that the programme is making an impact on parents and children, to be updated through future evaluation processes.

Chart 1: Impact of Sure Start on parents

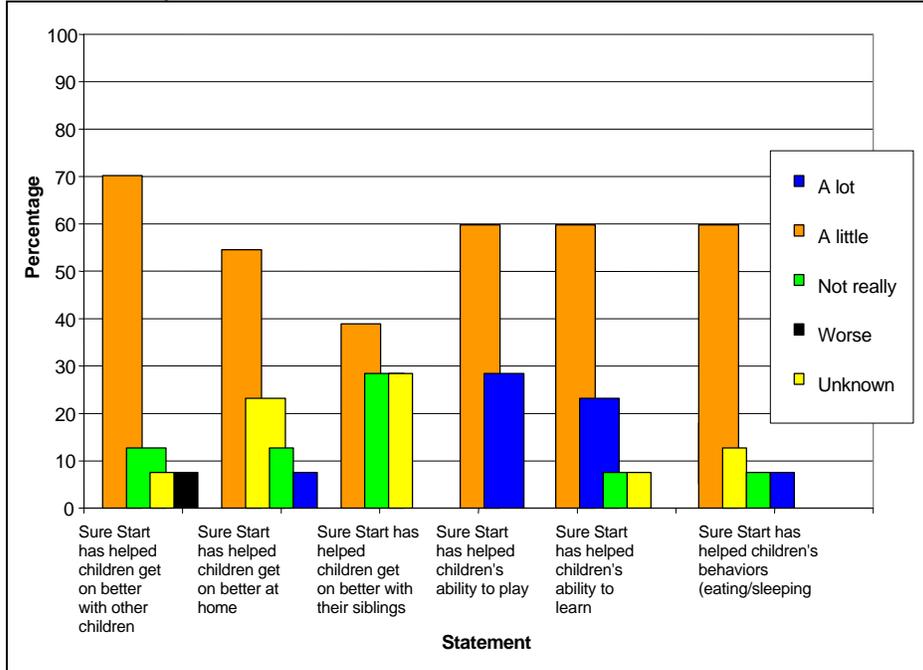


At this early stage of implementation it is noteworthy that Sure Start Orton has demonstrated progress in key impact areas in the perceptions of local service providers.

Children

For the purposes of baseline setting, parents were also asked to determine the impact, if any, that Sure Start Orton has already had on the lives of their children. See Chart Two.

Chart 2: Impact of Sure Start on children



Observations and opportunities

1. The Sure Start Orton programme can feel most pleased at the extent to which it is already making an impact locally. Service providers have rated most highly the sense of positive difference that Sure Start Orton has made to the community, helping parents to make friends and improving the parenting skills of local parents. For children the strongest impression is of helping children to get on with other children.
2. The results provide baselines of service deliverers' perspectives about the extent to which the programme is making an impact and provide useful baselines for measuring progress through annual evaluations.