

Interim Report
For the evaluation of the Sure Start
programme of

Ashington Partnership

2003 - 04

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I.0 Introduction

The aim of Sure Start:

To work with parents-to-be, parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children – particularly those who are disadvantaged – so that they can flourish at home and when they get to school, and thereby break the cycle of disadvantage for the current generation of young children.

This report evaluates the work of the Ashington Sure Start Programme between April 2003 and March 2004.

This report has been divided into the following sections:

- Service level evaluation – this section briefly summarises the Service Level Evaluations identified for dedicated input from the Evaluators this Sure Start year – Wansbeck Toy Library and the Breastfeeding initiative.
- Parental/community involvement – this section maps the work achieved so far in charting parental involvement in the Programme's activities. The information, displayed is based upon research and analysis carried out with staff during the year.
- Partnership working – this section incorporates data from a questionnaire administered to members of the Partnership Board plus analysis of secondary data.

2.0 Service level evaluation

Activities/services having a reasonably strong evidence base and/or modest funding investment may require little need for specific evaluator input beyond assistance to develop systems of monitoring, performance management and self-evaluation. In which case the main aspect of the evaluation is to assess if the activity/service is working in the context of the Programme's overall impact on children and their families in the Sure Start catchment area.

However, in the evaluation strategy, agreed for this Programme some services are identified for a systematic and dedicated input from the evaluation team. This is where an activity/service:

- represents a significant investment of resources
- the evidence base is weak or uncertain
- the work is particularly innovative or has a high profile
- the activity is one of a cluster of similar activities and therefore comparative analysis may be advantageous
- the work is to be evaluated in conjunction with other specified initiatives (within the region or nationally).

Evaluation for Sure Start year 2003 - 04

The following service level evaluations have been identified for more systematic and dedicated input are:

Wansbeck Toy library

This is an externally commissioned service using a local provider of support services to children and their families in the Wansbeck area. The service is funded by Ashington Sure Start to delivery of Learn Through Play sessions and assist in the running of the mobile unit

Breastfeeding

A comprehensive evaluation of the service as a whole incorporating a focused look at specific aspects within the service e.g. UNICEF Baby Friendly Approach to breastfeeding. (this will only be in relation to Sure Start targets as UNICEF evaluate their own programme).

Wansbeck Toy library

There is a stand alone report accompanying this evaluation. This is a summary of that report.

Wansbeck Toy Library (WTL) is an independent local provider of support services to children and their families in the Wansbeck area. The Library began operating in 2001 and over 400 families in the area are registered members.

The Sure Start Ashington Programme provides funding for WTL that contributes to the operation of the Toy Library itself, WTL's delivery of Learn Through Play sessions and the maintenance costs of its mobile unit that provides outreach services to various locations within the Wansbeck area.

In the near future the Programme is to fund Baby Play Sessions for 0-2 year olds and their parents/carers.

The Learn Through Play sessions provided play and early learning opportunities through play based activities that are designed to develop the motor skills, social skills, problem solving skills and communication skills of children. The sessions are also designed to raise awareness, of parents and carers, around the importance of play based early learning activities.

WTL provision, that is funded by Sure Start Ashington, is contributing to the ability of the Programme to reach *Objective 1 (Improving social & emotional development) and Objective 3 (Improving Learning)*.

All respondents to a satisfaction questionnaire felt that it was either easy or very easy to attend the relevant Toy Library venue. Respondents attended at least once a fortnight – some attended more than once a week.

Service users felt that WTL staff were helpful, friendly and approachable and able to offer advice about toys and the impact of their use.

All respondents felt that the opening hours of WTL were convenient.

All respondents felt that WTL provided either a wide or very wide range of activities, games and toys for loan.

Benefits of attendance at WTL (for parents/carers) included access to more information about Sure Start, a chance to meet people and socialise, respite and access to toys.

All those who completed the satisfaction questionnaire felt that their children enjoyed or very much enjoyed using the items loaned from WTL and that they were educational.

Respondents noted several outcomes as a consequence of their attendance at WTL including; playing with their children more, a greater awareness of the importance of play as a strategy to promote early learning.

Analysis of attendance levels of the Learn Through Play sessions shows that a majority of children attended more than one session. However for the period September to November 2003 data indicates that 20 per cent of those children with a place did not attend any Learn Through Play sessions. None attendance is being addressed. For example the planned Baby Play sessions are designed to attract babies and toddlers who are not accessing the Learn Through Play sessions. The Evaluation Team feel that non-attendance rates should be monitored to see if the figures are representative of the wider situation.

The Outreach Service acts as a promotional strategy for the WTL. Following experience of outreach provision, families tend to visit the main WTL site. This is positive. On the less positive side there were, on occasion, no users of outreach provision at some venues. WTL have developed strategies to combat this problem. For example outreach toys are now rotated more regularly and families can choose toys from a catalogue that are subsequently delivered. Possible action for the future could be for WTL to investigate the possibility of making its outreach provision flexible to meet the varying needs of demand between localities within Wansbeck. For example visiting some areas more than others based on demand.

For the future WTL users indicated that they would like videos and computer games to be available. This would be worth considering so long as such provision fits within WTL's focus around providing educational items that promote play and early learning.

It is important for WTL and the Programme to consider how provision can be sustained over the longer term as Programme funding declines. This would require both parties to identify funding opportunities and to develop strategies that will ensure the longer term delivery of WTL provision that is currently funded by the Sure Start Ashington Programme.

Breastfeeding

There is a stand alone report accompanying this evaluation. This is a summary of that report.

The report evaluates the provision and strategies, around breastfeeding promotion and support, that are currently being developed and delivered by Sure Start Ashington. These are assessed so that they can be evaluated in terms of:

- The successful contribution that they make to Sure Start targets and objectives.
- The extent to which these strategies and provision meet the needs of local mothers in terms of the support they provide around breastfeeding.

The following provision and strategies were evaluated:

- The Breastfeeding Workshops
- La Leche Breastfeeding Peer Support
- The Breastfeeding Support Group
- The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative
- The role of health professionals
- The Breastfeeding Steering Group

Rates of breastfeeding in the Programme area were low and therefore there was a need to have in place strategies to support breastfeeding if rates are to rise and so make a contribution to the Programme's aims and objectives.

Sure Start Ashington had reached the stage of delivering its breastfeeding support and promotion strategies. Consequently it had not been possible, by evaluating this Programme alone, to assess the success of the provision that was only now starting to be comprehensively delivered. However other Sure Start programmes were already delivering provision similar to that which the Sure Start Ashington is now beginning to deliver.

Based on an earlier evaluation of this provision, evidence indicated that the strategies being developed and delivered, by Sure Start Ashington, will assist the Programme to meet its targets and objectives. Namely *SDA 11 – Information and guidance on breastfeeding, nutrition, hygiene and safety available to all families with young children in the Sure Start and Children's Centre areas* and *SDA 13 – Ante natal advice and support available to all pregnant women and their families living in the Sure Start local Programme and Children's Centre areas.*

In turn this assists the Programme to make progress towards *Objective 2 – Improving Health*.

Evidence from Sure Start Ashington and other programmes indicated that *the provision being delivered is able to increase rates of breastfeeding in the short term and meet the needs of local women for support and information around this issue.*

The strategies being delivered were successful in terms of supporting women who are keen to breastfeed and require support and information do so. They were less effective at encouraging women who were not planning to breastfeed to do so.

The achievement of longer term increases, in breastfeeding initiation and sustainability rates, requires that strategies to promote a breastfeeding friendly culture (by changing attitudes and providing a physical environment conducive to breastfeeding) are rolled out throughout the Programme area. The evaluation found that the Programme was beginning to make successful progress here. The Programme was working with local GP practices and schools to promote a breastfeeding friendly environment for example.

The Breastfeeding Support Group, which was initially established by the Programme, could not sustain itself and was discontinued. However it is planned to re-establish this group now that a growing number of women are beginning to become interested in breastfeeding, thus creating a demand for this group. Based on evidence, from other programmes, a Breastfeeding Support Group has an important role within the wider framework of provision around breastfeeding support.

3.0 Partnership working

Why evaluate partnership working?

- Community based partnerships were the embodiment of New Labour's 'Third Way'.
- The current Labour Government places great emphasis on the importance of local partnerships and the role it wishes them to play in promoting sustainable development in the nation's poorest and 'deprived' neighbourhoods.
- A key feature of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: a framework for consultation, 2000, Cabinet Office) was an emphasis on communities needing to be consulted and listened to. The belief being that the most effective interventions are those where communities are actively involved in the design and delivery of interventions.
- The Government believes that there are benefits from having partnership working – including the ability to be more responsive and to be able to better target services than previously.
- However even as recently as 2000 it was noted that there was a lack of evidence for local partnerships having a role in improving the delivery of mainstream services in 'deprived' neighbourhoods and having a role in securing the participation of the community in the regeneration process.
- As a result the Sure Start experiment offered up an opportunity to set up partnerships as a learning experience to be subsequently evaluated.

Why evaluate partnership working this way?

- Guidance for Local Strategic Partnerships states that they will be measured against whether they are: effective, representative and capable of playing a key strategic role. In terms of being representative this relates to actively involving identified key players from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors. They will be measured against their ability to build on best practice forming successful partnerships.
- An evaluation of process is important because partnership concerns the relationship between two or more parties.
- In evaluating the partnership we look not only at the output of that relationship but the relationship itself – what different parties bring with them to the relationship, what happens between them and what effect this has.
- A focus on process is a focus on the ability of partnerships to change.
- A study of process is a study of the dynamics within the partnership which affect its effectiveness.

Therefore in writing this chapter of the report we have taken information from:

- interviews with parents and the Programme Manager
- postal questionnaires to members of the Partnership Board
- observation of Partnership Board meetings and events
- analysis of Partnership Board minutes.

What is partnership?

A definition of a Sure Start partnership is given in the 6th wave guidance as “...a coalition of parties...collectively responsible for planning and delivery of programmes and managing...government money...over a period of between seven and ten years.”

To simplify, a partnership could be defined as a network of collaborators working towards a shared purpose – and that purpose is Sure Start.

However, for this to work this partnership needs to hold not only a shared purpose, but also shared principles and values. These are incorporated into the Programme’s aims and objectives. This is called ‘Governance’, i.e. the establishment of:

- Principles
- Values
- Aims
- Objectives
- Long term direction
- Strategy

The responsibility for which will probably rest with the Partnership Board.

However, what this Programme has recognised is that to make this happen and to keep it happening requires ‘good’ management.

Yet management is not fixed, ‘governance’ develops through the life of a programme and can be determined as five broad phases.

Phase		Description
1	Start-up	Announcement to completion of delivery plan
2	Set-up	Approval, appointment of staff, establishment of programme within locality, first activities
3	Mid-term	Fully operational programme
4	Switch over	Services being picked up by mainstream or statutory agencies
5	Completion	End of Sure Start funding

A questionnaire was administered to members of the Partnership Board to gain a snap shot of the Sure Start Ashington Programme Partnership Board as interpreted by Partnership Board members. It was designed to illustrate how the Board is operating and how this operation is making a positive contribution to the Programme.

Only six responses were received back, all representatives of Partner organisations, from health, local government and voluntary sectors. Responses related to the following areas:

- structure of the Partnership
- membership and attendance
- ability to commit
- behaviour of Partnership members

- tensions within the Partnership and how these are being addressed
- factors and support to enable the Partnership to function
- ability to represent organisation
- the success of the Partnership in terms of outcomes for children and their families
- “Early Wins” that demonstrate the benefits of having a Partnership Board
- relationships beyond the Partnership Board
- learning
- benefits and limitations to Partner organisation of being represented on the Programme Partnership Board
- potential organisational changes required
- barriers to the effective operation of the Partnership Board.

Structure of Partnership

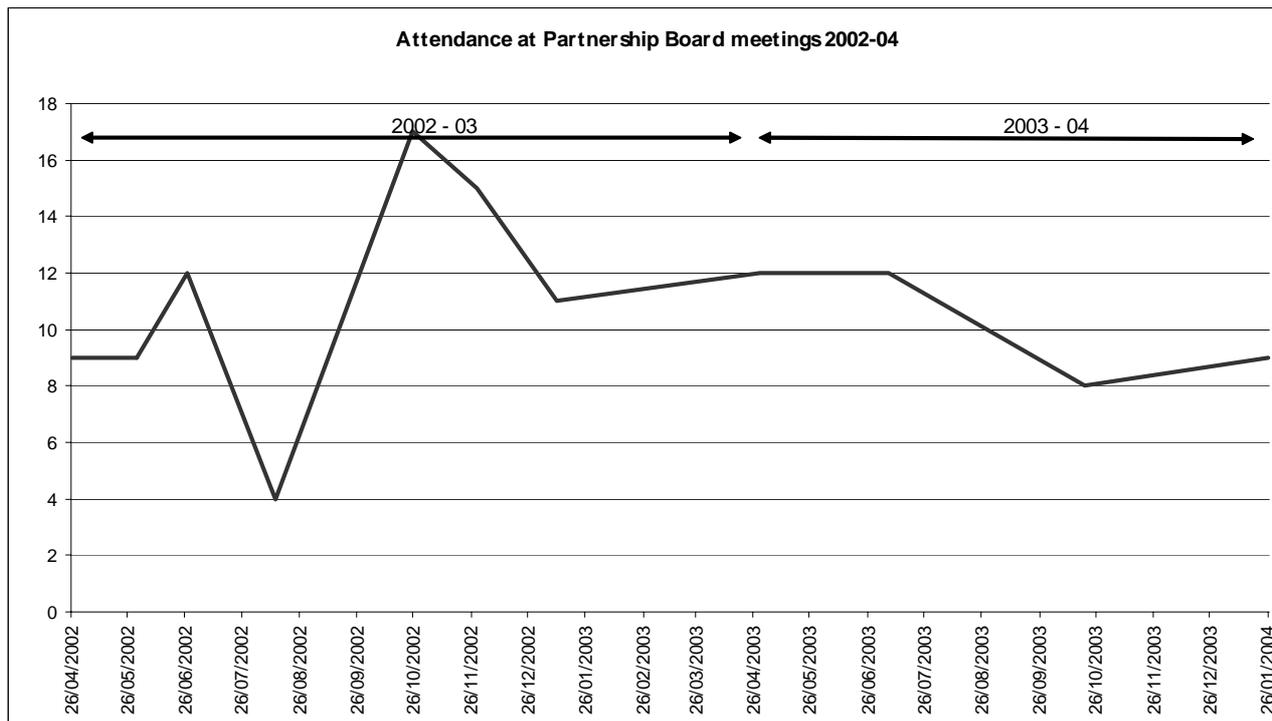
All parties felt that there was the potential to restructure the Partnership and its membership to deal with perceived problems. These problems included low attendance levels, the need for the Partnership Board to be challenged and the need to expand the knowledge base on community representation on the Board

The Chair of the Partnership Board believes he has too many roles to manage. In addition to being the Chair he also has staff supervising/supportive responsibilities, represents the lead agency and the accountable body.

Suggested changes, recommended by Partnership Board members in terms of Partnership Board structure and content, were the need to fully engage local parents and councillors as these would provide a challenge for the Board to rise to. This view was based on the respondents’ experience of sitting on other Boards where councillors and local people had provided the challenge. One organisation felt that it was important to ensure the LEA was represented on the Board.

These changes would require support to be in place to enable local parents to sit on the Partnership Board and make an effective and positive contribution. Board meetings also need to be at times convenient to parents if they are to be able to attend.

Membership and attendance



The above chart indicates the level of attendance of the past two Sure Start years to allow attendance figures for this Sure Start year to be placed in context.

The chart indicates attendance levels at Partnership Board meetings over the past two years. There is a clear and marked difference between the two years. Attendance in 2003-04 has not been as high as the previous year but in contrast attendance rates have been less erratic.

In terms of who has been attending meetings:

In the Sure Start year 2003-04 no parents attended Partnership Board meetings whilst in the previous year 2002-03 six parents attended meetings. Two of whom only attended once each but in contrast two parents did attend four Partnership Board meetings in 2002-03.

In this year 2003-04 attendance has been dominated by representation from NCH, health plus Social Services and other LA representation. Education (in the shape of a local first school was represented twice. This is a similar sector coverage as in the previous year 2002-03. Another similarity between these two Sure Start years is the high proportion of people attending who do so only once. There appears to be no pattern to this attendance other than all of those who only attended once in 2002-03 never returned in 2003-04. Therefore organisations such as Wansbeck CVS, HAZ, Sure Start Unit, Wansbeck District Council did not reappear, though Parenting Initiatives did send another representative who attended once in 2003-04.

Members of the Partnership Board felt that a number of consequences flowed from irregular attendance at Board meetings. These included a struggle to maintain a focus, a lack of cohesiveness and difficulties in being able to consider strategic issues – especially in the future. One respondent to the partnership working questionnaire felt that this was tied to a situation where primacy was given to capital arrangements. Once these had been agreed it was felt it may be easier to develop a focus.

A number of suggestions were put forward, by Partnership Board members, to help to resolve the issues around attendance described above. One organisation felt it was important to set meetings well in advance and ensure that a Programme Manager's report was sent to those who had not attended the meeting. Another organisation felt it was important to ensure that meetings took place at a time suitable for parents wherever possible.

One respondent felt that it was important that the limitations of the Partnership Board be recognised and that an awareness of other forums, where issues could be discussed, was important to keep in mind.

Ability to commit

There is a divergence of views as to how successfully members feel they are able to commit to the Partnership Board. Some felt that existing commitments made them feel that they could not commit as much time and effort to the role as was required. Others felt they could commit their present amounts of time and effort but were not able, as a result of other commitments, to be more involved. For example one respondent was able to attend and take part in training but could not envisage being able to do more than this. Another respondent stated that they could attend but were unable, due to other responsibilities, to become more involved. A respondent also stated that they would now be able to become more involved as their other responsibilities had lessened.

This indicates that other responsibilities are a key factor in determining the amount of time and effort Board members can put into their membership of the Partnership Board.

Behaviour

All respondents feel that the behaviour of all parties, on the Partnership Board, is appropriate. One respondent felt that the Board had a commitment to and a shared understanding of Sure Start Ashington.

Tensions

Evidence indicates that perceptions, around tensions within the Partnership Board, are based on individual understandings - and not on the organisation to which Board members belong. For example some members from PCTs felt that there was no apparent tension whilst others thought there was tension (but did not provide details as to what these tensions were).

Other members felt that there were tensions. Again no details were given. Those who felt that tensions did exist also felt that these were dealt with through a combination of the input from the Programme Manager and from "Governance Works" away day. These days highlighted the roles of Partnership Board members and the potential conflicts that could arise so that these could be dealt with.

Factors and support

Respondents felt the only support they had received was through the aforementioned "Governance Works" workshop. Other than this the ability of members to function, on the Partnership Board, was based on their past experience of committee membership, their previous

employment (for example in Social Services departments) and their relationships with others on the Board outside of the Board itself.

Support that Board members would like, for the future, included support to understand more about actual Programme service delivery and the opportunity to discuss the future direction of the Programme.

Ability to represent organisation

There were also diverging views of the ability of Board members to represent their organisation on the Partnership Board based on the autonomy that specific members had. Those who had the power to make decisions for their organisations at the Board felt that they were able to represent their organisation effectively. However those without delegated authority to make decisions or devolved budgets did not feel that they were senior enough to effectively represent their organisation on the Partnership Board.

Contribution of the Partnership to successful outcomes for children and their families

There are various views, within the Partnership Board, as to the contribution of the Partnership to successful outcomes for children and their families. Some members feel that the Partnership has made a successful contribution and give examples of shared working with other agencies to provide family support, support for the local Toy Library, language development in reception classes, parenting provision, support around emotional and psychological wellbeing and parental involvement in “Ourpart”.

However other members of the Partnership Board feel that it is too early to quantify the Partnership Board’s contribution to outcomes for children and their families. Other members were also unable to comment on this subject due to lack of regular attendance at Partnership Board meetings. As a consequence of this they were not in a position to know the contribution being made.

Early Wins

Partnership Board members felt that a number of “early wins” have been achieved that demonstrate the positive effect of having such a Board.

Early wins, identified by the Northumberland NHS PCT included work with “Parenting Initiatives” and the “Ourpart” research project to define local needs. NCH felt early wins, that were contributed to by the Partnership Board, were additional playgroup places, the ability to promote the idea of integrated working with other members of the Board and the development of provision around parental support (emotional and psychological).

Relationships beyond the Partnership Board

Members of the Board have professional relationships with each other outside of the Partnership Board forum. Generally members meet in other forums. One respondent noted that they had contact with the local Library Service and another noted that they managed some other members of the Board, have members of the Board use the services of their organisation and meet other members in other forums.

Learning

The majority of respondents felt that learning within the Partnership was being fed back into member organisations but many could not provide specific examples of how learning was being fed back. Those that could identified work around family support, baby friendly initiatives, Healthy Living Centres and the local Toy Library.

Benefits and limitations

Partnership Board members feel that a number of benefits have accrued as a result of being a part of the Partnership with Sure Start Ashington.

Membership has allowed organisations to formalise and build on their existing relationships. It has also provided an opportunity for local agencies to develop a shared local consensus. A representative of Northumberland Care Trust feels that a benefit has been the promotion of health development in its widest sense and the links, membership of the Board has provided, with other organisations. Another representative feels that a benefit, of Board membership, has been to focus minds on public health, the role of health visitors and school nurses.

Despite the benefits, discussed above, there have been limitations to the Partnership. One respondent noted that not all stakeholders can be on the Board and that the Board is not in a position to address structural issues that exist in statutory agencies (for example changing “health” functions).

Another respondent felt that they were unable to contribute to all areas that were discussed by the Partnership Board. A representative of the PCT felt a limitation was the fact not all staff in this organisation were “totally onboard”. A respondent also noted that Sure Start was not always a key priority for local authorities.

Potential organisational changes required

Respondents made a number of suggestions regarding potential changes that could be implemented in the future. The separation of the Chair from Programme Management was suggested as was enhanced parental involvement – the latter possibly through a parental sub-group. A respondent suggested greater local authority involvement. It was felt by one respondent that consideration needed to be given to the consequences of gaining Children’s Centre status and how this might impact on the Board.

One respondent felt that Board targets were required to provide a focus for Board activities.

It was also suggested that Partnership Board meetings might be more regular to better keep members up to date with developments.

Barriers to effective operation

External priorities were mentioned as a barrier to the effective operation of the Partnership. This results in minds being focused elsewhere (for example dealing with the threat of local school closures).

One respondent felt the lack of a building was a barrier in that it did not give parents and local agencies something.

4.0 Parental/community involvement

Community participation and the Yorkshire/Humber benchmarks

The Government stated clearly that initiatives such as Sure Start require the active participation of local communities if they are to be judged as successful. In other words the whole regeneration agenda is determined upon it being done by and **with** people, not done **to** them.

As a consequence of this, the evaluators and the Programme set out to identify a means to measure the extent to which parental and community participation has and will take place in the Sure Start area.

This Sure Start Programme is an example of what is termed a Comprehensive Community-based Initiative (CCI). This is identified in terms of the following key features:

- An aim to promote positive change in individual, family and community circumstances.
- The development of a variety of mechanisms to improve social, economic and physical circumstances, services and conditions in disadvantaged communities.
- A strong emphasis placed on community building and local based empowerment.

In many previous Comprehensive Community-based Initiatives (CCIs) communities have been consulted but rarely given the chance to actively participate.

Initial observations led us to believe that participation was taking place with parents and carers using Sure Start services, however what was required was a tool to systematically measure this.

The Programme itself actively worked with us to identify a tool to not only achieve the descriptive task of recording participation, but go beyond by being able to facilitate the setting of 'action plans' to increase the level of participation across all service and activity areas.

What resulted has been an example of service provider and evaluator working collaboratively to produce a tool fit for describing what is happening; for analysing weaknesses; for suggesting best practice; for setting a framework for identifying improvements.

The context of community participation

Sure Start is a CCI in which the local community is encouraged to play an active and where possible leading part, in the belief that:

“...community involvement enhances the effectiveness...by encouraging better decision making, fostering more effective programme delivery and helping to ensure the benefits...are sustained over the long term.”

(DETR, 1998, SRB Bidding Guidance – A guide for partnership, round 5)

Potential outcomes of community participation

Adopting a strategy for community participation begins with the principle that people have the right to be involved in changes affecting them. Indeed we can go further, by pointing out that failure to involve the community can undermine the whole CCI.

Involving the community can have tangible social and economic outcomes:

- It can enhance social cohesion – as members of the community recognise the value of working in partnership with the Sure Start provider.
- It can enhance effectiveness – as members of the community bring their knowledge, understanding and experience to the Sure Start process.
- It can add economic value – through the mobilisation of volunteers who contribute towards the delivery of their own regeneration - through skill development which enhances the opportunity for employment and ultimately an increase in community wealth.
- It can provide relevance – community members can offer insight and understanding, for the Programme, of the community's needs and thereby offer appropriate influencing priorities for action.
- It can provide sustainability – because community members have ownership of their communities and hence can develop the confidence and skills to sustain Sure Start developments once funding phases out.

Choosing the appropriate method to identify participation

The starting point in choice of method was a recognition of the heterogeneity and eclectic nature of communities.

We needed to be able to measure progress, however baseline/start points would not be fixed, they would be diverse. In addition community participation needs to be measured both in terms of outcomes and processes.

As a result, the evaluators and the Programme agreed to adapt and modify an existing tool of benchmarking community participation. This tool was developed by Yorkshire and Humber Regional Development Agency (Yorkshire and Humber RDA *Active partners: Benchmarking Community participation in regeneration*).

This tool uses a qualitative data analysis approach based upon charting changes taking place within four dimensions of community empowerment:

- Influence
 - Inclusivity
 - Communication
 - Capacity
-
- Influence – ensuring that community participation leads to 'real' not token influence over regeneration strategy and activity.
 - Inclusivity – valuing diversity and addressing inequality – to ensure inclusive and equal participation.
 - Communication – implementation of clear information processes – which are transparent, and policies and procedures are accessible.
 - Capacity – development of understanding, skills and knowledge for all partners in this Sure Start initiative and the development of organisational capacity within the community.

To chart progress within these four dimensions the Programme's activities and processes are evaluated against a series of benchmark statements. Use of these benchmarks assists the

evaluation by looking at the degree/extent/nature of participation as opposed to a simplified measurement of absolutes.

Such an approach allows an evaluation across a range of contexts, themes and start points in which the Sure Start programme of services takes place.

The Sure Start Programme can assess its baseline positions in relation to each of the four dimensions at both a Programme and individual service level. This approach allows the Programme to review progress and set future outcome-goals.

The benchmarks

The benchmark statements have been taken and developed by the Programme from the Yorkshire and Humber tool to reflect the unique nature of the Programme's strategic direction.

INFLUENCE	INCLUSIVITY	COMMUNICATION	CAPACITY
Parents and carers are recognised and valued as an equal partners at all stages of the project	The diversity of families and interests are reflected at all levels	A two-way information strategy is developed and implemented	Understanding, knowledge and skills are developed to support partnership working
There is meaningful parent' representation on all decision making groups from the start	Equal opportunities policies are in place and implemented	Programme procedures are clear and accessible	Parental are resourced to participate
All parents and carers have the opportunity to participate	Volunteers, are valued		
Parents and carers have access to and control over resources			
Evaluation of the programme includes parent and community agenda			

Action planning

Part of that strategy to improve involvement across the Programme focused on what staff identified could be realistically achieved within the service areas they were responsible for delivering.

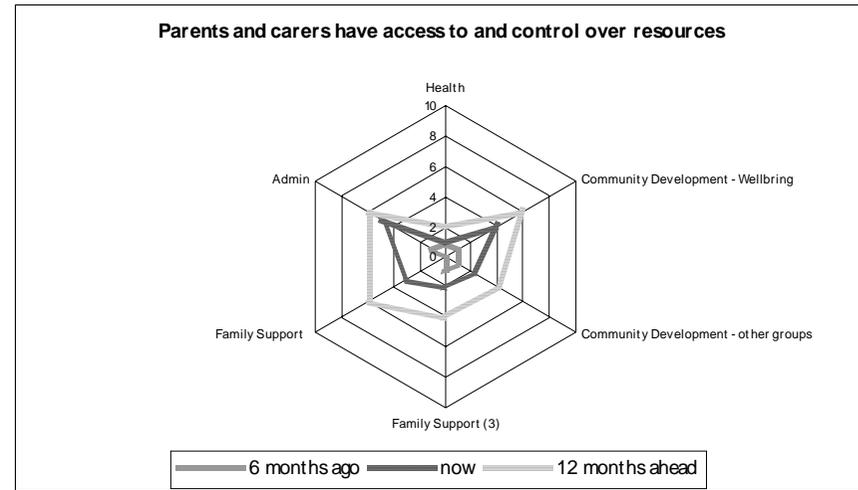
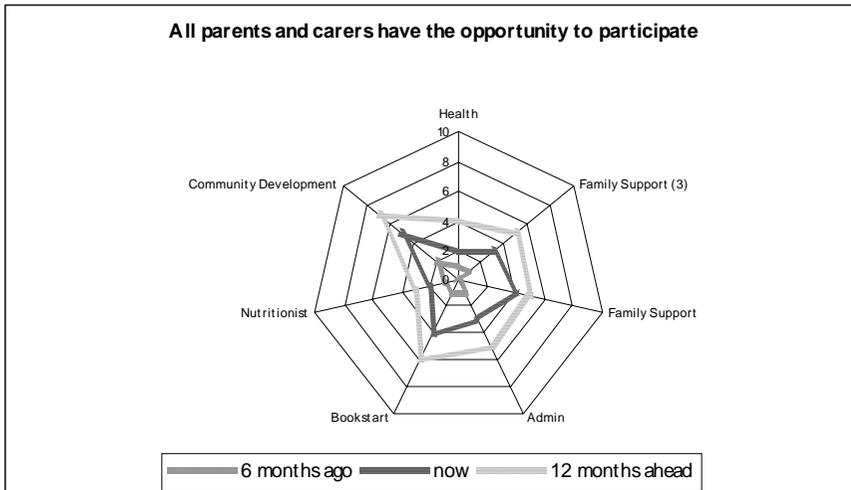
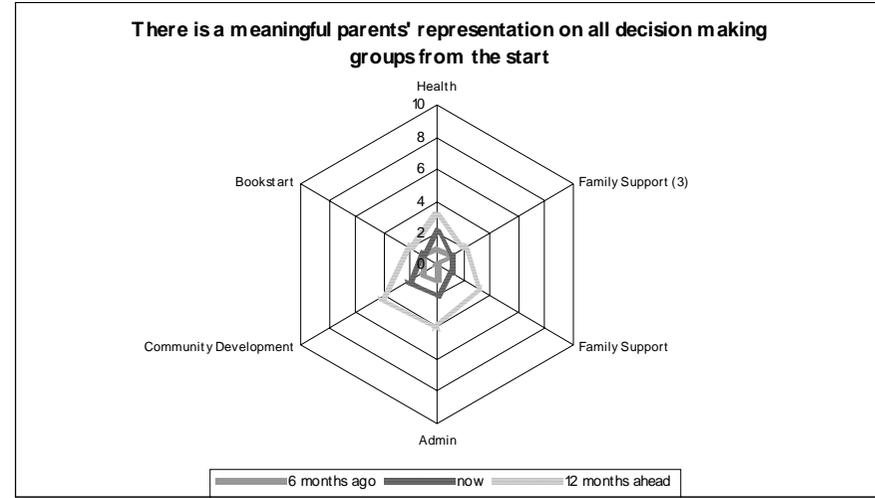
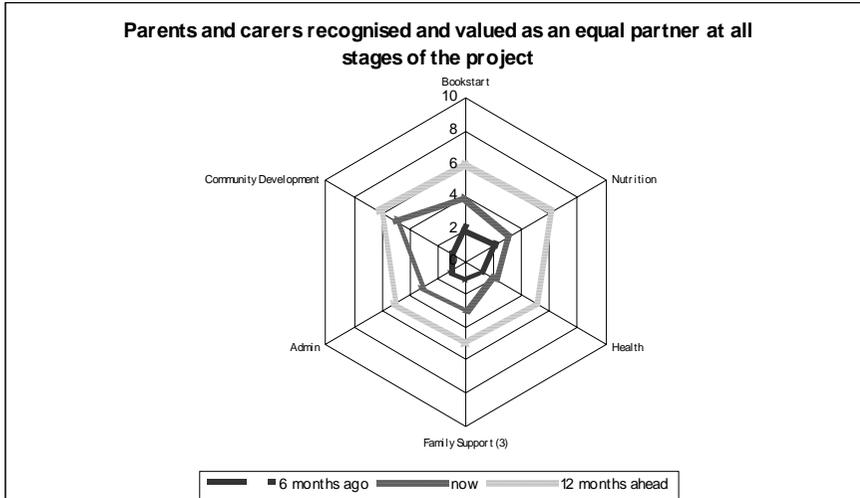
The Sure Start Programme of Ashington undertook in 2003-04 a major review and action planning exercise to identify ways in which the Programme could improve how parents get involved in all aspects of the programme.

The exercise involved all members of staff focusing upon their own service areas. It involved them identifying progress between the period of this exercise and six months previous and targets to cover the following year for each of the four dimensions and corresponding benchmarks.

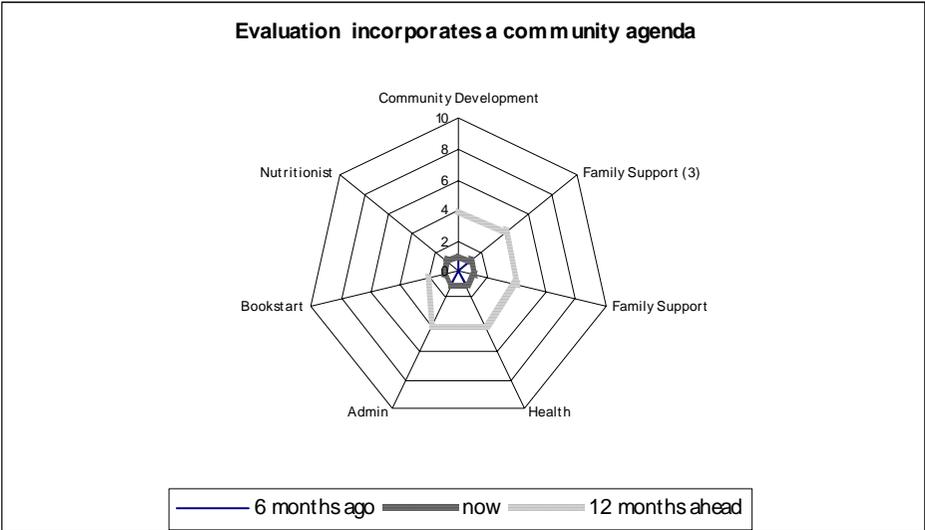
A scale was used to indicate progress or regression against each benchmark. The scale ran from 0 – 10, with 0 representing no parental involvement and 10 representing what they considered to be the best possible degree of parental involvement.

As a result of members of staff setting a target for one year ahead they were then in a position to set corresponding action points which were to be fed back into their subsequent planning for the year 2004-05.

Influence

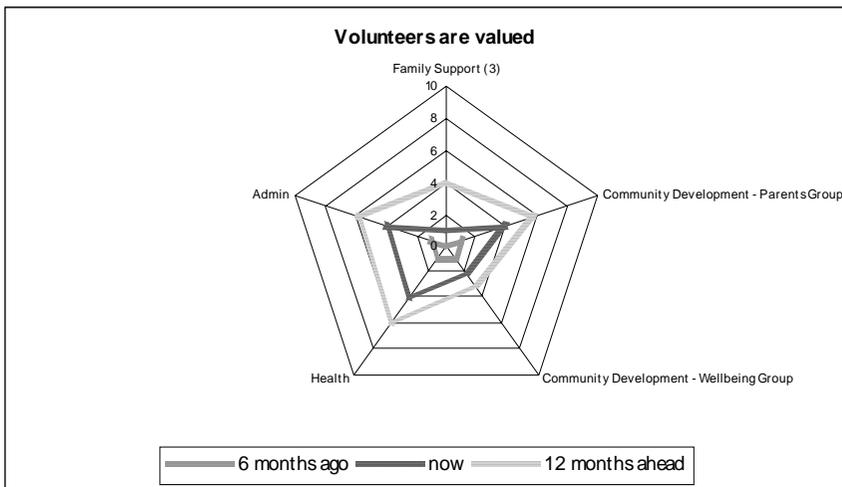
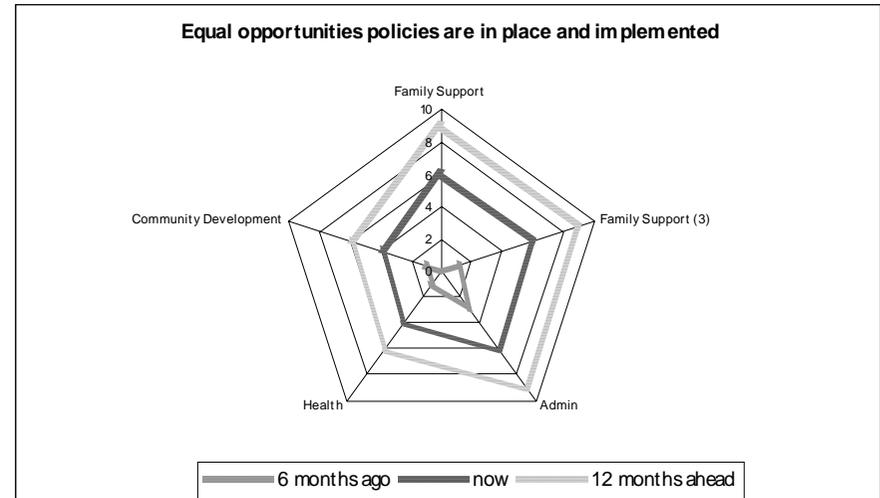
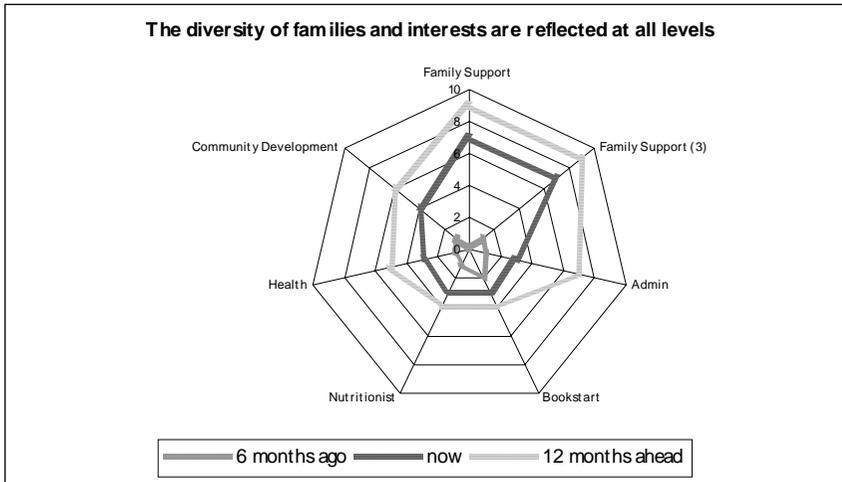


On a 0 – 10 scale staff indicated progress or regression of parental involvement for this benchmark – starting at a point 6 months in the past and projecting one year into the future.



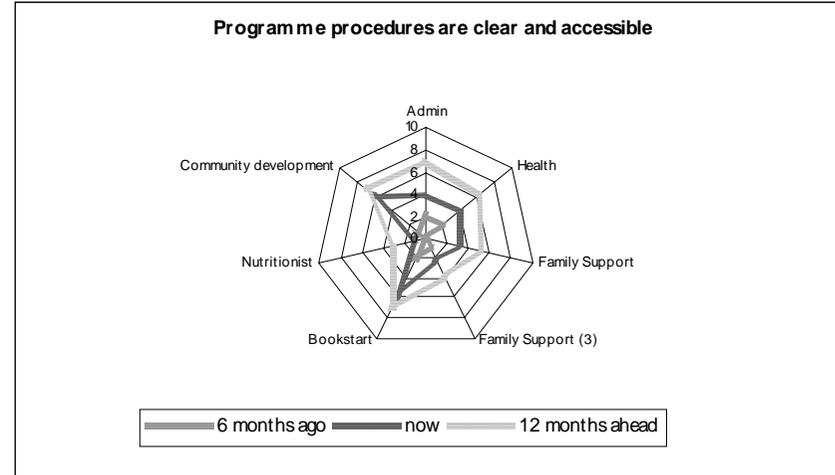
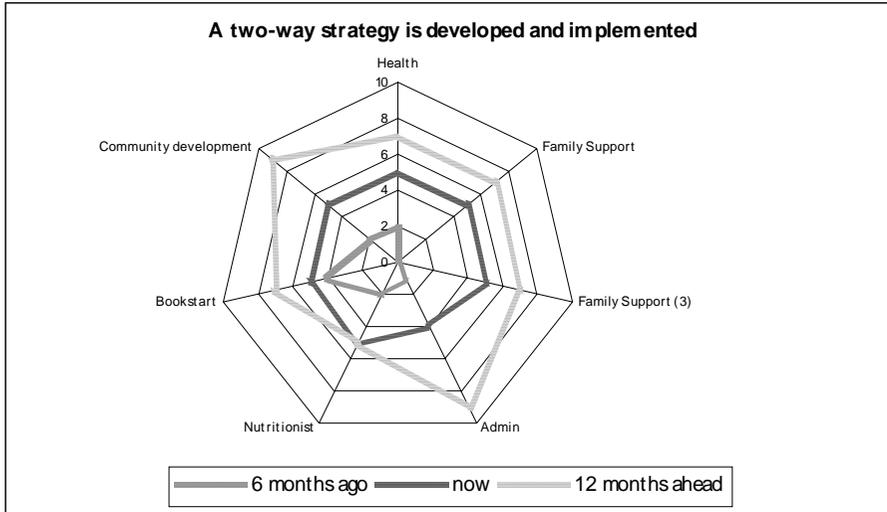
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Inclusivity

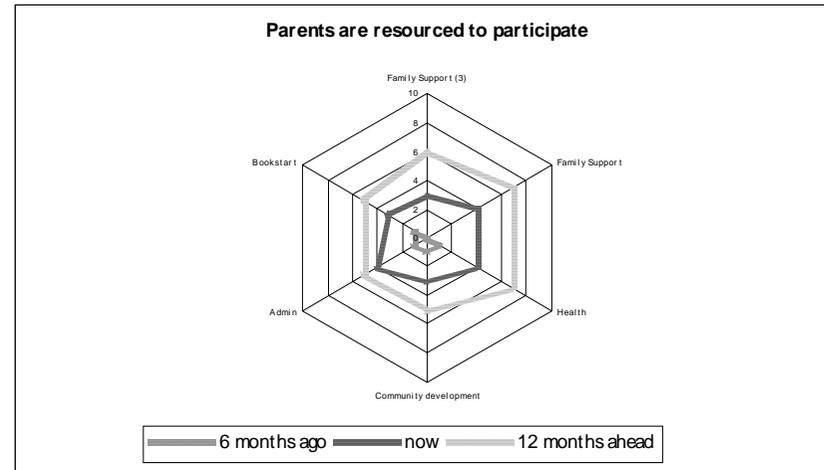
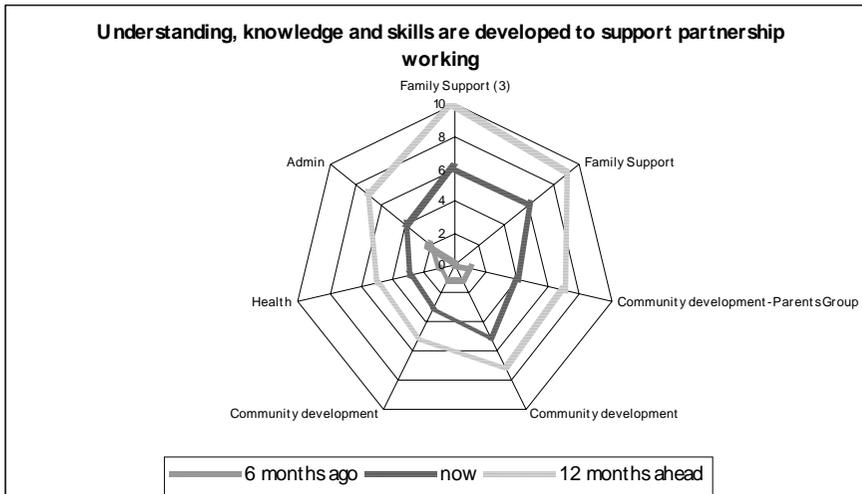


On a 0 – 10 scale staff indicated progress or regression of parental involvement for this benchmark – starting at a point 6 months in the past and projecting one year into the future

Communication



Capacity



On a 0 – 10 scale staff indicated progress or regression of parental involvement for this benchmark – starting at a point 6 months in the past and projecting one year into the future

Influence

Parents and carers recognised and valued as an equal partner at all stages of the project

To the present – there was a feeling amongst service providers that they had not addressed this in the past but the level of recognition had started to rise.

Next year – therefore having recognised a shortfall, as a result of undertaking the review/planning exercise, staff present took it upon themselves to place a higher emphasis upon this for the future.

Action – services believed that they should continue with any existing plans but build upon them. This included encouraging parents to move into other group based activities. In addition the opportunity should be explored to increase parental participation in any group based development. It was recognised that this would require a support element from the Programme staff.

There is a meaningful parents' representation on all decision making groups from the start

To the present – this had clearly not been a high priority for service providers up to the present day.

Next year – though recognising a shortfall, service providers saw little movement in this area over the next 12 months.

Action – part of the problem lay in many services being quite recent and still developing their roles. Yet service providers did identify actions that could facilitate meaningful representation in this area. This included developing parental representation on different groups e.g. PB or Young Parents Group. Another action point was to involve parents in the recruitment of staff recruitment.

All parents and carers have the opportunity to participate

To the present – it was recognised by service providers that very little had been achieved in the past, but that there had been movement over the past six months in some of the service areas running within the Programme.

Next year – it was anticipated that a slight movement towards more participation would take place over the next 12 months

Action – an important aspect of any increased involvement of parents was identified as increasing the use of feedback. The importance of monitoring data was recognised to chart the take up of services. Advertising was also seen as an important strategy to increase participation in this area, whereby information of opportunities to take part in other activities was given to parents when attending any Sure Start activity. This action indicates the importance of individual services linking in with each other.

Parents and carers have access to and control over resources

To the present – six months ago there was virtually no opportunities for parents to access or control resources. This had improved marginally over the past six months but in some areas it was still non-existent.

Next year – though recognising a clear shortfall in this area, movement over the next year was not anticipated to be great with some areas such as health seeing little change.

Action – however, little anticipated movement did not equate to a lack of will on behalf of the service providers for this Programme. It was recognised that more needed to be done, but for some service areas the solution was unclear. Yet, it was recognised that opportunities should be sought to help parents' groups to apply for funding for their groups' activities.

Evaluation incorporates a community agenda

To the present – many of the activities running are still in their infancy and therefore evaluation is still in its early days and focused primarily around assisting getting initiatives up and running.

Next year – this situation was not envisaged to change dramatically over the next 12 months

Action – the need was seen to create opportunities to be developed across all teams and through informal discussion with parents around future planning.

Inclusivity

The diversity of families and interests are reflected at all levels

To the present – this Programme is still in its developmental stages, therefore many service areas are still in their infancy. As a result six months ago there was virtually no input by service providers to look at reflecting diversity. However over the past six months some service areas are in a position to demonstrate clear movement in this area.

Next year – those service areas that had demonstrated movement over the past six months were those that indicated that they anticipated making further improvements in recognising diversity in the future.

Action – the Programme's strategy for developing further the need to reflect diversity lies in the ongoing development of services. Coupled to this is the recognition that staff training can facilitate further movement in reflecting the interests and diversity of people using and yet to use Sure Start services. Another component to this is better monitoring, to pick up demographic situations and trends existing within the Programme's catchment area.

Equal opportunities policies are in place and implemented

To the present – up to six months ago there was a general feeling amongst service providers that equal opportunities policies were either not in place or were not being adequately implemented in relation to parents using the Programme's services. This is understandable as many services are still in their infancy. This situation changed over the past six months. Improvement was identified across service areas.

Next year – the service providers believe this situation will improve further over the next 12 months.

Action – service providers believe this can be achieved through the continued development of services and by supporting staff through staff training events.

Volunteers are valued

To the present – this Programme is still developing its services, many services running at the moment are still in their development stages. As a result there has been little evidence of active involvement from volunteers.

Next year – the situation with volunteers is not envisaged to change dramatically over the next year, though service areas did recognise the importance of valuing volunteers and as such did identify actions to facilitate this happening.

Action – discussing the issue amongst staff teams with an emphasis upon collaborative working was seen as a starting point. It was believed that once the capital build was in place the situation would change and there would be more opportunities for volunteers.

Communication

A two-way strategy is developed and implemented

To the present – from a very low start point of six months ago, service providers indicated that they felt that the position had improved over the past six months.

Next year – virtually all service areas indicated that they believed the situation of two-way communication between users and providers, would improve further over the next year.

Action – actions identified included working to build relationships and community links. The newsletter was seen as one avenue to increase communication by incorporating parents' views e.g. a parents' page.

Programme procedures are clear and accessible

To the present – in many of the service areas staff felt that clear improvement had been achieved over the past six months.

Next year – all service areas recognised the importance of having clear and accessible procedures and therefore recorded a belief that the situation would improve further over the next year.

Action – to achieve this service providers believed that the best strategy lay in informal yet open dialogue between all providers (not just Sure Start) and those who used the services.

Capacity

Understanding, knowledge and skills are developed to support partnership working

To the present – over the past six months service providers indicated that they believed clear movement had been achieved in developing understanding, knowledge and skills to support partnership working.

Next year – service providers believed that this situation would continue to improve over the next 12 months, in some service areas to a very high level.

Action – for service providers the key appears to be in training across all service areas.

Parents are resourced to participate

To the present – in all service areas staff felt that improvements had been made, over the past six months, in resourcing parents to participate.

Next year – it was envisaged that this situation would improve further as services and the Programme as a whole matured into its third year.

Action – to facilitate this happening parents should be signposted to other services being run within the Programme. In addition parents should be encouraged to feedback to the service providers to allow standards to be raised further. That feedback could be either at a low level in the form of offering suggestions to higher levels such as being given the opportunity to actively participate in setting up and developing groups.