

**Exploring Parental  
Participation in the  
Management of  
Noel Park Sure Start Local  
Programme**

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Noel Park Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) is interested in exploring the development of parent participation within the 'management' of the programme. It values the importance of reflecting on its progress as a way to continually improve parents' opportunities to participate in the running of the programme and overcome any barriers to effective participation. It asked the University of Surrey evaluation team to help with this process. The study lasted just less than a year (February 2003 until January 2004). The aim was to explore the development of parental participation, highlight positive strategies and the reasons they have been successful and explain perceived challenges in a way that will help the programme learn from its experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with eight parents who are involved in the parents' forum and the partnership board. Other parents were consulted informally where the opportunity arose and observations of meetings attended by parents were carried out. Informal interviews were also carried out with key programme staff. In addition, secondary data were analysed and opportunistic data were collected from other Round 5 Sure Start local programmes in Haringey to enable comparisons.

A structured thematic analysis was used to analyse the data which allowed seven themes and sub-themes to emerge. These themes are:

- Conceptualisation of parental participation
- Contributing to the programme: effective participation
- Parental recruitment
- Sustaining involvement
- The partnership board
- The role of the Community Development Worker
- Structure of parental participation

The findings showed that Noel Park has established a parents' forum with parents who are very enthusiastic, highly committed and have a strong sense of cohesion. They effectively participate in the programme and influence decisions as well as provide their own ideas. Pre-board meetings are proving particularly helpful with participating on the board, with the CDWs providing invaluable support.

However, the following areas require particular attention:

- Representation: parents are not representative of the Sure Start Noel Park community in terms of ethnicity or gender. More effort needs to be made to represent others' views.
- Recruitment: more effort needs to be focused on the recruitment of new parents.
- The programme needs to be sensitive to parents' training and support needs.
- Parents need to be given specific roles and responsibilities in line with their strengths and interests.
- The creche should be improved to enable effective meetings.
- Parents need to be able to participate more fully in partnership board meetings, with particular attention being paid to the language used in meetings and the items covered.
- Continuity of Community Development Workers needs to be handled carefully.

It is clear that the forum plays a crucial role in enabling participation by supporting active involvement, particularly on the partnership board. However, it is vital that the board actively facilitates parents' involvement if participation is to be truly effective.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Noel Park Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) is a Round 5 programme that was approved by the National Unit in February 2003. It is situated in the Borough of Haringey in North London, along with five other Sure Start programmes. It is a deprived area, with high unemployment rates (about two and a half times the London average<sup>1</sup>). There is a great deal of ethnic diversity, with non-white people making up nearly 40% of the population, compared to a national average of 10%<sup>2</sup>. The main ethnic groups include Turkish, Kurdish, Somali and Albanian. Approximately 10,675<sup>3</sup> people live in the area, about a third of who are under the age of 19. As of 30<sup>th</sup> August 2001<sup>4</sup>, there were 506 children under four years; the age group targeted by Sure Start services.

The Programme is interested in exploring the development of parent<sup>5</sup> participation within the ‘management’ of the programme. It values the importance of reflecting on its progress as a way to continually improve parents’ opportunities to participate in the running of the programme and overcome any barriers to effective participation. It asked the University of Surrey evaluation team to help with this process. The study lasted just less than a year (February 2003 until January 2004).

The purpose of this report is to review the development of parental participation in the last year, highlight positive strategies and the reasons they have been successful and explain perceived challenges in a way that will help the programme learn from its experiences. It is based on interviews with key Noel Park SSLP staff and parents themselves, as well as observations of meetings attended by parents. Findings relate to the themes that emerged from the data. Each theme is discussed, and practical implications are drawn out largely based on responses from the Community Development Workers (CDW) and parents. These implications are primarily for the CDW’s consideration but will also be of use to the APM, the partnership board and the parents’ forum. It is anticipated that the report will be used to help the programme sustain effective parental participation.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: ONS and GLA Claimant Count, June 2001

<sup>2</sup> Source: National Statistics, 2001 Census

<sup>3</sup> Source: National Statistics, 2001 Census

<sup>4</sup> Source: Primary Care Trusts Child Health Information Service 2001

<sup>5</sup> This includes carers of children under 4.

### 3. CONTEXT

#### 3.1 Public Participation

Public participation is central to the government's drive to modernise public services, as set out in the White Paper 'Modernising Government'. It sees public participation as a way of achieving a 'shift of power and influence away from bureau-professionals and front-line staff towards citizens and service-users' (Martin and Boaz, 2000, p. 47).

Public participation in policy making has been defined as 'the ways in which ordinary citizens can or do take part in the formulation or implementation of policy decisions' (Richardson, 1983, p.8 cited in Rowe and Shepherd, 2002, p. 278). However, exactly what constitutes 'effective participation' is unclear. In his paper assessing the effects of public participation on participants' beliefs, Halvorsen (2003) discusses three requirements of 'high quality participation'. The first is accessibility: 'local meetings that use time efficiently and are carefully scheduled, comfortable sites for discussion...on-site child care and low-cost catered meals can increase accessibility' (King, Feltey and Susel, 1998, 13 cited in Halvorson, 2003). Secondly, participants should feel satisfied if participation is to be of high quality. For some people, this can mean learning from others with similar and dissimilar views (McCool and Guthrie, 2001, 320 – 21, cited in Halvorson, 2003). Research has also shown that participants' satisfaction is increased if they believe that their comments are taken seriously and that the resulting decision reflects their considerations. The final characteristic is deliberation, i.e. 'discussion in which participants engage in reasoned discourse about what action serves the common good (Poisner, 1996, p.56 cited in Halvorson, 2003). A deliberative discussion should also be open and thorough where everyone has the opportunity to fully voice their thoughts, and respectful, whereby different viewpoints are listened to, acknowledged and valued, even if they conflict.

Halvorson also explains the positive effects that effective high quality participation can have on participants' perceptions of the organisation. King, Feltey and Susel argue that 'citizens should be more likely to believe that an agency is responsive after attending an accessible meeting where officials ask for and listen to public concerns' (cited in Halvorson, 2003, 536). 'This also may be true of citizens who see officials working hard to identify and understand the public interest during a deliberative discussion'. (Ruscio, 1996 cited in Halvorson). Furthermore, Halvorson argues that high quality participation can increase participants' trust and confidence in participation; deliberative conversations, in which different viewpoints are discussed, can help participants to 'view agency decisions as reasonable responses to complicated situations'. Moreover, it can also lead to closer relationships between citizens and decision-makers which can in turn encourage participants to give officials 'the benefit of the doubt when decisions fail to meet their every concern'.

In addition, public participation can create stronger cohesion within a community by providing its individuals with a sense of belonging and empowerment. The Achieving Better Community Development (ABCD) Model (developed by the Scottish Community Development Centre in 1996) argues that communities that actively enlist the participation of their citizens have higher levels of safety, enhanced economic growth and greater sustainability. These positive outcomes in turn provide people with a greater sense of security and involvement that they themselves have created, within a context that is culturally relevant to them.

Public participation is central to the ethos of Sure Start. It sees high quality participation of parents as key to a successful programme. It aims to facilitate their involvement by creating

committees such as partnership boards and parents' forums, though which parents are able to contribute to the programme.

### **3.2 Parent Participation in Sure Start**

There is no set model of 'ideal' parental participation within Sure Start. The only stipulation is that,

“18 months after approval, the programme will be expected to have parents and community members represented on the main decision-making body and involved in a variety of ways in its management and consultation structure” (Sure Start (2002) A guide to planning and delivering your programme: governance, p. 6)

The Sure Start Unit recommends that all programmes have a parents' forum to help with this process and in particular to:

- help ensure that the voice of parents is strong and not diluted by being one voice amongst many
- develop a cadre of parents from which representation on the management board can be drawn. A forum can support them to take a more active role in the management of Sure Start.

Participation on parents' forums may also help to reach other Sure Start targets. For example, it could lead to positive outcomes for individual parents, such as the acquisition of skills that could lead to improved employment opportunities. In addition, parents' forums are a way of increasing awareness of Sure Start, which will contribute to the Government's goal of 75% awareness within each community.

The nature, composition and organisation of a parents' forum is decided by each individual programme. However, they are generally made up of local parents who come together on a regular basis to discuss Sure Start initiatives within their individual communities. Some programmes adopt a 'grassroots' approach, whereby parents themselves are responsible for setting up and implementing a forum, with minimal help from the programme or local organisations. More commonly, however, Sure Start programmes take a larger role in creating and sustaining a forum, sometimes by recruiting an individual to develop it, such as a parent involvement worker or a community development worker.

Research conducted by Sugarman and Hinde (2002) found that although parents' forums may go by different names (e.g. committees, panels or groups) and have an informal feeling to them, they generally have a formal structure with elected chairs, a quorum, terms of reference and a budget. A community development worker or parent worker and often an executive board member of Sure Start also usually attends meetings. The forums' roles generally include administering grants, outreach work, consultation with other parents on particular issues, attending various sub-groups and feeding back to the forum and the partnership board through parent representatives. Within this basic structure the forums differ, however, in terms of the support they provide the parents and the individual Sure Start programme. In one area, the parents' forum started off with fairly structured events and then developed into more of an 'open forum,' while another consisted of a series of sub-

groups attached to the partnership board. Most forums surveyed offered some kind of training and/or accreditation.

We can therefore see why participation is important and how other programmes have approached the issue. It is clear that when exploring parental participation, key questions need to be addressed:

- How does the programme understand effective parent participation?
- How does it enable effective participation?
- How successful are these strategies?
- What are the effects of participation?
- How does the programme organise participation?

## 4. METHOD

All ten parents who are involved in the parents' forum and the partnership board on a regular basis were approached to take part in an interview. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with eight who were able to participate. This included both the chairs of the partnership board. All the parents live in the Noel Park SSLP area and have a child under 4. They had been involved with Sure Start for between four months and three years. The interviews covered their experiences of being involved so far and their views about participating in the programme (See Appendix A for the interview schedule). They took place towards the end of the study, in December 2003 and January 2004. Other parents were consulted informally where the opportunity arose, for example at the fun day and parents' meetings.

Informal interviews were also carried out with the first community development worker, her successor and APM (who is no longer employed with Noel Park SSLP). At least two interviews took place with each member of staff to obtain their reflections on the progress of parent participation. In the spirit of Action Research, feedback was provided and emerging issues were discussed during these meetings. Observations were carried out of meetings attended by parents, including two parent forum meetings, one pre-board meeting and three partnership board meetings. These observations allowed the nature and level of parents' contribution to be considered. In addition, secondary data, i.e. reports by the community development workers and minutes from parents' forum meetings were analysed. Opportunistic data were also collected from other Round 5 Sure Start programmes in Haringey (High Cross and Park Lane) to enable comparisons.

A structured thematic analysis was used to analyse the data which allowed seven themes and sub-themes to emerge. These themes are:

- Conceptualisation of parental participation
- Contributing to the programme: effective participation
- Parental recruitment
- Sustaining involvement
- The partnership board
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- Structure of parental participation

## 5. FINDINGS

### 5.1 Conceptualisation of Parental Participation

#### Goals of parental participation

The CDWs and the APM identified long-term aims of parental participation:

- for parents to feel ownership over the programme
- to build parents' skills and confidence and improve their opportunities for employment
- to strengthen the community through cohesion and empowerment
- a self sustaining group of parents that meet on quarterly basis

Although the programme has not been running long enough to assess success in meeting these goals, the findings will indicate progress towards them.

#### The emergence of a parents' forum

The programme has had a core of committed parents since its inception. Many of these were involved in the Participatory Appraisal for Sure Start West Green and Chestnuts, but lived in Noel Park<sup>6</sup>. Noel Park SSLP held a meeting in November 2002 with the aim of introducing Sure Start to the community, but this failed to reach many new parents. The first CDW was employed as a consultant on a temporary basis from January 2003 until July 2003. During the spring and summer, many of the parents in the core group took charge of organising the second Family Fun Day. The group was termed the Parents' Forum Steering Group and the CDW's original aim was that it should form the basis of the parents' forum. However, it soon became clear that event planning was extremely time consuming, and that there was not enough time to consider other issues. Therefore another group emerged, mainly to make decisions regarding the underspend<sup>7</sup>.

However, a 'group feeling' only begun to emerge in June, just before the first CDW's contract ended. Although 'things slowed down' until the current CDW started in September 2003 (who is also on a temporary contract), she has since revived the group feeling and has helped it to develop into a 'parents' forum'. There are currently approximately 10 members of the parents' forum. Most of them have attended partnership board meetings at some point, with a small number in regular attendance. Two of these have recently become co-chairs of the partnership board. This is in line with Sure Start's goals regarding participation.

All the parents live in the Noel Park SSLP area. Most have one child who is under 4 years, but a small number of older children. One was pregnant with her second child at the time of interview. Six of them are white British. Some are employed or self-employed, while others are full time mothers.

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<sup>6</sup> A community consultation was carried out in early 2002 using 'Participatory techniques'. Local parents were trained to interview other parents about their views of the community and their needs. Although this was carried out by Sure Start West Green and Chestnuts, interviews were carried out in neighbouring areas including Noel Park.

<sup>7</sup> The programme had not spent £30,000 of its first year budget towards the end of the financial year. The parents' forum spent approximately half of this.

### **Purpose of the parents' forum: staff perspectives**

The CDWs and APM aim to have a forum with between 10 and 12 members, who are a representative sample from the Noel Park SSLP community, and who accurately reflect the views and feelings of other families with children under four. They understood the purpose of the forum to be:

- **Information sharing and gathering:** providing and gathering information about Sure Start services, other services and events in the area; parents sharing information with each other: 'It should be a network that people use as they need'. Sure Start events were seen as a vital opportunity for parents 'to be given information on their terms'. Information giving should be 'much less authoritarian and more engaging'.
- **Input into decision making:** 'giving parents a voice'. 'It's a procedure to involve parents and get their views. The 'parent's forum' just happens to be the name given to this structure..... We want them to feel ownership of the programme and influence decision making and come up with their own ideas'. Sure Start activities and spending, community chest funding and planning one off events were identified as particular areas the forum should contribute to.
- **Social networking:** providing parents with the opportunity to meet other parents and form their own support networks.

### **Purpose of the parents' forum: parents' perspectives**

Parents who were interviewed mentioned similar issues. They generally said that the purpose of the forum was to feed their ideas into the programme: 'without the parents' forum we wouldn't be able to influence the partnership board'. One added that ideas should come from Sure Start families, explaining that the purpose is 'to voice needs from ground level – from what local mums and their children want'.

Other perceived roles of the forum were:

- **Involving non-users:** 'understand the community and those who aren't participating – the socially excluded' and 'build up a dialogue' with them.
- **Updating parents:** 'keeping parents informed about the [partnership] board' and decisions.
- **Event planning**
- **Social networking:** 'it's a chance to build up contacts – for parents to network with each other'.
- **Monitoring the programme:** 'to keep an eye on what Sure Start is doing – make sure the money is being used in the community'; 'making sure we are getting the things we want to see happen and affecting the community in a positive way'.

It appears that the forum is generally fulfilling its purposes: parents are sharing and gathering a great deal of new information, they are influencing decision-making and are networking within the community, as discussed below.

Parents had a similar understanding of the aims of the forum to programme staff; all the points raised by staff were also raised by parents. However, parents identified influencing decision-making as their main objective; the other roles were less important to them. Furthermore, the concept of representation did not feature highly in their responses, even though this was very important to the programme.

## Representation

When parents were asked if they represent anyone at meetings, only one interviewee responded in the affirmative. She explained that when she and the other mothers discuss issues at drop-in groups, 'I take on board what they say – information is gathered and I pass their concerns on'. On the whole, however, parents were aware that they were supposed to represent other parents: 'I'm conscious that the things that get decided will affect other families, but we don't represent them'. This is indicated by the forum's perceived responsibility to ensure that Sure Start is meeting the needs of the community (as described in 'monitoring the programme' above). It appears that although the parents understand that they have a duty to be representative, they are generally not yet fulfilling this role.

## Implications

- It is important that the all CDWs, the APM and any other relevant staff have the same fundamental aims and objectives for the forum and for parental involvement in a wider sense. Parents' views should also be considered. A meeting should be held to ensure consensus, and establish inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes. The evaluation template prepared by Mike Williams (Research Fellow at the University of Surrey, and member of the evaluation team) would be very useful (see Appendix B). This template was designed to help programmes to measure progress towards Sure Start targets as well as targets it sets itself.
- Self-evaluation is taking place on an informal level, for example discussions reflecting on parental involvement have taken place in parents' meetings, sometimes spontaneously. However, evaluation should be built into the programme in a more formal capacity, with parents' playing an active role. For example, parents could complete a survey every 6 months covering the issues raised in this report to chart progress and make any necessary changes. The aims identified above should be considered. For example, questions could include:
  - To what extent do you think the forum is fulfilling each of its roles? (refer to those identified on page 9)
  - What do you dislike about been involved with the forum?
  - What benefits have there been for you personally?The CDW could facilitate a discussion based on their responses and help to develop action points. The evaluation template would also help with this process.
- The concept and practicalities (e.g. talking to other mothers) of being a representative should be discussed at parents' forum meetings.

## 5.2 Contributing to the Programme: Effective Participation

It is clear that the aim of Sure Start programmes should be to involve parents in a way that enables them to genuinely participate in the running of the programme. Participation should not be ‘tokenistic’, but should be fostered so that ‘parents are enabled to participate fully, and their voices are heard and they play a significant role in decision making’ (Henderson, 2003). On the whole, it appears that Noel Park SSLP is achieving this level of parental participation. Some of the parents interviewed feel that they have the potential to make a difference. They talked about having an ‘influence on what’s happening in the area’ and parents feeling ‘empowered’. Many were proud that the forum had made decisions about how to use the underspend and had successfully spent half of it. Furthermore, some mentioned their own ideas and how they were being implemented, such as proposals to improve children’s experiences in a local hospital (See Box 1), arguing for a consistent creche worker at a drop-in and a ‘meet the street’ event to advertise Sure Start. They also explained how they organised the fun day as well as other events, and how this had publicised Sure Start by providing ‘targeted information for isolated people which helps them access things they need’.

In addition, parents from the forum are involved in many aspects of Sure Start. For example, there is usually a parent representative on the interview panel during the recruitment of some staff such as CDW and Area Programme Manager. This is active participation in which parents’ views have a significant impact on the programme itself. Some are also members of subgroups such as the Community Chest<sup>8</sup>, and help with evaluation. The vast majority attend all relevant meetings and are clearly highly committed.

### **Box 1. Example of a parent’s contribution**

One of the parents is leading a project to implement a set of proposals at the North Middlesex University Hospital. She drew up the proposals based on her own experiences as well as the views of other Sure Start parents. They include improving the quality of toys in the hospital, improving ante and post natal training and support, preparing children for surgery through the use of a video and providing art and complimentary therapies for children. Two meetings have been held, which were attended by a range of stakeholders including representatives from the other Sure Start programmes in Haringey, and Sure Start Edmonton. Action is currently being taken to implement the proposals.

However, it was acknowledged that although ‘we are able to achieve a lot, we’re not quite getting there yet’, and that it is a developmental process. This mother felt this was partly due to hold ups within the programme itself, which can be difficult for parents to understand. She went on to explain that,

“Sure Start is so complicated from a professional end. It’s impossible for parents to understand. They [Sure Start] can’t explain that they’re being inefficient – the direct benefits have been few and far between..... I understand the behind the scenes stuff – problems with the capital revenue etc, but how do you explain that to them? They are being tolerant, but that’s because of the relationship that’s been built up with the Sure Start staff – there is a degree of confidence in Sure Start.”

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<sup>8</sup> All Sure Start programmes in Haringey are establishing a Community Chest, which provides funding for projects that will meet the Sure Start objectives. Applications can be made by individual parents (Individual Development Grant) or an organisation. The subgroup helps to monitor and make decisions about expenditure.

According to Halvorson's model of participation (2003), this perceived confidence in Sure Start indicates high quality participation. Parents' confidence in the programme is built up through good relationships with the staff. They are encouraged to understand the Sure Start's actions and the factors that influence or impede them which builds up trust and helps parents to 'view agency decisions as reasonable responses to complicated situations' (Halvorson).

Overall, it seems that parents are participating in the programme in a genuine and effective manner. It appears that in broad terms, Sure Start falls within a 'democratic' model of participation, whereby there is a,

“developmental approach which values the process of participation in itself for broadening citizens' experiences and perspectives and empowering them to have a greater say over the pattern and delivery of services.....It [participation] is seen as a force for democratic renewal, bringing decision making closer to the people and mobilizing them to take part in local affairs”. (Rowe and Shepherd, 2002, p. 278)

As one parent put it, 'That's how Sure Start should work – it's supposed to be bottom up, coming from the parents upwards – compared to most things, to the other programmes in Haringey it is actually working that way'. However, the current CDW feels that parent representation should be stronger; on a large scale, they are still an 'unheard voice' and more needs to be done to 'pull parents together'. It is evident that although the structure and ethos is in place for effective participation, more work is needed to enable greater parental contribution.

## **Implications**

- 'Effective participation' is a vague concept and should be explored more fully within the forum. It could define participation in a way that is meaningful to them, for example does it mean running Sure Start activities or influencing the board's decisions?
- Care should be taken to clearly explain to parents the reasons why decisions cannot be implemented or are slowed down.
- Parents' successes should be celebrated. For example, their achievements could be described in a newsletter.

### 5.3 Parental Recruitment

The recruitment of new parents in the last year has been limited. The first CDW felt that this was because she focussed her efforts on sustaining and improving the involvement of parents who were already attending partnership board meetings, rather than on outreach. However, the programme needs to focus more on encouraging new parents to become involved. Interviewees were asked how they originally became involved, and what they thought were effective recruitment strategies.

#### Recruitment strategies

Parents' reasons for becoming involved with Sure Start were:

- **Making a difference to the community:** 'I was concerned about the area and its facilities', 'I'm interested in the issues...I want to help with anything that contributes to the community', 'I wanted to have an influence on what happens in the area', 'It seemed like you would get something out of it for the effort you put into it'
- **Community involvement and networking:** 'I was feeling isolated and this was something I felt passionately about – I was desperate for it. I was just pleased there was something I could get involved in and my daughter could get involved in'. 'I wanted to try and make friends – I was very lonely'
- **Had spare time**
- **Attractive to parents:** 'it seemed flexible', 'they offered a creche and sometimes it's nice to have some time away from the baby'
- **Information gathering:** 'I wanted to find out what was happening in the neighbourhood'

It is evident that parents became involved for a number of reasons. Recruitment strategies could be targeted according to individuals' motives. For example, if a mother attends a fun event to meet other mothers, the potential for networking in the community could be highlighted.

Interviewees were also asked how they became involved with Sure Start. In the vast majority of most cases, parents had attended drop-in groups (some in West Green and Chestnuts) before becoming involved in the parents' forum. The level of involvement evolved when the CDW, the drop-in facilitator or another mother invited them to a meeting. It would seem that drop-in groups are a very effective way of accessing parents. This is supported by interviewees' own Implications; there was a strong consensus that the best way to involve parents is to target them at Sure Start drop-ins or other activities that they and their children enjoy: 'sell it to the kids and you've got the parents'. These activities should be simple and fun such as 'messy play'. Once children are engaged, parents can be approached about becoming more involved.

Parents also thought that the forum should do some outreach at drop-ins by talking to other mothers, and handing out leaflets about the forum and videos from Noel Park events, which would help to raise the forum's profile. This was echoed by the first CDW, who thought that their enthusiasm and energy would be an advantage when trying to involve other parents. She also thought that the fact that they are part of the same 'peer group' (i.e. also mothers of under fours) would help. The CDW should support parents to carry out outreach work in a structured way.

National guidance recommends that programmes work through existing organisations, networks and CDWs to involve parents. The CDWs have worked with local agencies – to organise

meetings and events as well as to recruit parents. Most of their experiences have been positive, although in some cases problems did arise and trying to work with particular organisations was actually thought to hamper Sure Start work.

### **Issues to consider**

There was some concern that there is generally low awareness of Sure Start within the community. One interviewee thought that a 'culture' needs to be created whereby those related to Sure Start are established as 'Sure Start people' which would allow others to 'subscribe' to the programme. There was agreement that this would improve when the programme moves premises and obtains greater 'public face'.

Parents should be clearly informed about what to expect if they become involved, particularly around boundaries: 'tell the truth about what they can and can't do'. Similarly, it should be made clear that Sure Start is flexible and that parents decide on their own level of involvement. This should help to prevent people being 'afraid to commit themselves – they're scared they're going to get dragged into things and it will take up too much of their time'. The CDW is aware of this and, in conjunction with the parents, is creating a development plan for the forum 'so we can tell people what they are getting in to'. It is also important to build up parents' confidence and belief in their own abilities, particularly when they first get involved. A mentorship scheme has been suggested, in which experienced members of the forum support new parents.

Interviewees were aware of the 'evolving' nature of the forum due to a turnover of parents when their child reaches 5, and there was all round agreement of the 'need to keep the momentum up' and keep 'the active core replenished'. It was thought to be important to target pregnant women, who would hopefully be able to offer a long-term commitment. However, this may prove difficult. One of the mothers interviewed had been reluctant to become too involved because she wanted to prepare for the birth of her baby.

### **Recruiting a representative sample**

The majority of parents in the forum are white; it was generally acknowledged that the forum is not representative of Noel Park SSLP families. Some interviewees stressed the importance of attracting those from ethnic minorities, in particular Turkish, Kurdish and Somali communities. Suggestions for increasing involvement (in both the forum and as users of Sure Start services) included speakers of other languages doing outreach work and visiting community organisations. Efforts have been made to improve representation from the Turkish community in particular, with the plan being to build their capacity and confidence before introducing them to the forum. Contact has also recently been made with the Kurdish advice centre and plans are in place to offer parenting skills training to Turkish and Kurdish communities.

Fathers are currently not represented on the forum, although one attended a pre-board meeting. A fathers' drop-in group is currently being established which will encourage greater participation, and hopefully result in their representation on the forum. However, while it is a credit to the forum that it has created strong feelings of solidarity and consensus, there is a risk that potential new members may feel excluded. One of the CDWs was concerned that fathers 'do not feel part of it' and that this was potentially a huge barrier. In this respect, this forum is very different to the High Cross parents' forum, where members represent a number of ethnic groups and meetings are

normally attended by interpreters. It also has two fathers. Meetings are more structured, and parents generally do not meet in a social capacity. Potential problems with exclusion appear to be less likely. The Noel Park forum should be aware of this possibility so that it is able to minimise any feelings of exclusion that new members might encounter.

### **Implications:**

- Parents should visit drop-ins as a representative of the forum. This could include talking to mothers individually or perhaps doing a short presentation about their experiences of participation so far. When doing such outreach work, members of the forum should identify themselves as such, for example by wearing t-shirts or name badges.
- Individual parents' motives for involvement should inform recruitment methods.
- The forum's development plan should be updated as necessary. The plan should include specific targets including numbers, for example, having 15 members of the forum.
- Consider implementing a mentorship scheme to support new parents.

## 5.4 Sustaining Involvement

National Unit Guidance states that,

“For most programmes, it is a challenge to find more than a few parents who will agree to the commitment involved in being a member of a management board. Parental representation depends on nurturing a much wider pool of parents to be involved with the programme, as well as taking steps to minimise the burden of the role, and being careful not to overload and burn out those parents willing to become more closely involved.” (Sure Start (2002) a guide to planning and delivering your programme: Governance p.16)

### Support and training

Accredited training (i.e. training for which parents receive an accreditation by a recognised body) for parents has not been a big feature of Noel Park SSLP. The CDWs’ approach has been to wait for parents to request training, rather than impose it on them. One was concerned that offering formal training might ‘scare people off’. Instead, they aimed to provide parents with whatever they requested. For example, in response to parents’ interests, the programme arranged a face-painting course. While such a course does not directly address many of the Sure Start objectives, the CDW felt that it could help to sustain effective parental involvement by:

- helping parents to get to know each other
- consolidating a group feeling – ‘they feel like they are Sure Start parents under some sort of umbrella’.
- building parents’ confidence and skills

Only one member of the forum (a co-chair) has expressed an interest in training relating to her role. It is likely that this will take place through High Cross’ parents’ forum training programme. Although some parents’ may appreciate the programme’s responsive approach, the CDW should consider their training needs and make parents aware that training would be available if they were interested. In the short-term the forum could tap into other forums’ training programmes, but it should also consider implementing its own programme covering the basics of being a member of a committee. This could be done in a responsive way, for example offering training on different topics (e.g. presentation skills, chairing, minuting, representation) and providing it on those requested.

Similarly, the CDW should be sensitive to the on-going support needs that parents may have. Two interviewees felt inadequately supported when working on specific projects. It is evident that some parents are feeling the pressures experienced by Sure Start staff. One found it ‘quite stressful...especially if we have to do it all ourselves’, and another thought that ‘They [Sure Start] have good intentions, but they ask the impossible. Everyone is in pieces trying to do too much’. One commented that involvement ‘is a dilemma for a lot of parents – this is voluntary work – they are running around a lot like the others but others are getting paid for it’. She felt it is important that parents explore their own reasons for wanting to get involved. This is supported by other parents who, although had experienced stress, explained that ‘if you feel like you’re getting something out of it then you stick with it’.

## **Responsibility**

Interviewees felt that it is important that parents are given specific roles related to their interests and strengths which the CDW should help to define. One felt strongly that the programme needs ‘to break down the Sure Start objectives and formulate committees for each.....then the parents would have a focus and it would interest them, like something related to health or education – something close to their heart’. Another needed ‘a niche where I can contribute constructively, not just do bits here and there’. Both CDWs and the APM echoed these sentiments, explaining that ‘there is no parental accountability – they don’t have a mandate. We need to enable them to have the sense that they are making a difference and make sure they are involved in something they’re interested in’. Each parent’s interests should be identified and explored and a specific role should be created for them in response. Allowing them to do what they are interested in would result in a ‘more realistic commitment, they’d make more of a difference that way’, and would enable Sure Start to benefit from the ‘richness of the experience’.

However, the current CDW warned that parents’ willingness should be respected, explaining that,

‘there is a very fine line between harnessing their enthusiasm and exploiting their eagerness and I need to find the balance. It could end up as exploitation and harassment and we could lose people....we need to keep them at a level they feel comfortable with....we should acknowledge that they want different levels of involvement – they have different restraints in their lives in terms of time, personal interest etc and we need to be flexible.’.

Parents should be able to participate on a level they feel comfortable with, but they need guidance in ‘finding their own level’.

Despite all round agreement that this is the best way to facilitate effective involvement, it appears that parents have so far not received enough direction in finding their own level or establishing individual roles. However, there have been occasions in which this principle was put into practice. For example, parents became involved with the second Family Fun Day in a way that suited their strengths and interests. Some designed publicity materials while others ran stalls using their newly acquired face painting skills. They also wore Sure Start T-shirts which gave them a greater sense of responsibility and identity.

It would seem that the CDW should offer parents more guidance in assigning specific roles and areas of responsibility based on their strengths and interests. Personal Development Plans (PDP) are a feature of the other Round 5 programmes in Haringey, in which all parents on the forum take part in a one-on-one discussion with the CDW about their experiences, background and skills and what they want to get out of being involved with Sure Start. A personal plan is developed and progress towards it is regularly reviewed. PDPs are not mandatory for Noel Park parents, and only two (those who are applying for an Individual Development Grant through the Community Chest) have had one. Given the strong emphasis placed on identifying parents’ strengths and interests, perhaps all parents should draw up a PDP when they first show an interest.

## **Accessibility**

Childcare during meetings is a crucial determinant of accessibility, which in turn enables high quality participation. ‘This basic structure’ has to be in place in order for meetings to be effective. While two interviewees thought that the creche makes it easier to attend meetings, the majority of parents felt it hampered participation. Specifically, complaints were around the hiring of older creche

workers who don't play with the children, a lack of educational-play activities and inconsistency of creche workers. This echoes one of the Implications by a CDW, who explained that 'using the same [creche] workers helps them build relationships with the children and increases the likelihood of the creche (and therefore the meeting) running smoothly'. There have also been occasions when meetings have over run and children have to join meetings because the creche workers are only booked for a certain amount of time.

The creche has been an on-going problem which the programme is fully aware of. The proposed solution was to have a creche co-ordinator across all the Sure Start Haringey programmes, but this has not occurred to date. It was also been suggested that there should be a mobile creche with 'highly skilled creche workers who value childcare as a profession, and have a creative approach to playing with children and keeping them entertained'.

## **Parental satisfaction**

Parental satisfaction is key to sustaining their involvement; parents 'getting out what they want to get out of it'. As Halvorson explained, this means different things to different people. What is means to parents can be understood by considering how they felt Sure Start had benefited them personally in relation to what they wanted to achieve through involvement. All the interviewees identified the social aspect of participation as a major benefit. One said 'I've had depression and been very isolated.....it's nice to work with the community and make friends'. Other benefits are listed in Box 2.

### **Box 2. Parents' perceived benefits**

- Being able to make a difference: 'If I hadn't got involved I wouldn't have had the guts to try and make a difference'; 'having my ideas listened to'; 'it makes a difference...allows our voices to be heard. I feel like I'm giving something back, I have some power....in some cases'
- Increased knowledge of Sure Start
- Increased knowledge of business and management
- Greater understanding of others' needs, such as single parent families
- Improved skills: communication skills, presentation skills
- Representing in a forum
- It's fun, days out
- Meeting professionals, networking
- Information gathering: 'It keeps me informed – I know what's going on and what's available. When I'm on benefits I can't afford to pay for things – it helps me know what I can get, and I can help other children to have the same opportunities'.
- Employment, either through courses provided by the programme or through networking with other mothers.

It would seem that there is a very high level of parental satisfaction. The benefits identified by parents generally corresponded with their original reasons for becoming involved. For example, those who joined the forum because they wanted to make a difference to the community felt they were being given the opportunity to do so. Parents also identified many additional benefits such as gaining new skills and increasing their knowledge and understanding on a range of issues. The CDW should ensure that parents feel satisfied, in that they are achieved what they aim to achieve. Again, the PDPs would help to monitor this.

## **The role of the CDW in sustaining involvement**

The CDWs agreed that personal contact (preferably face to face) with individual parents is a very effective way of sustaining involvement, and one believed that ‘it contributes to parents feeling engaged and valued for their input’. This involved regular phone contact with all parents on the forum and being available ‘at any time’ for them to talk to. The current CDW felt that her predecessor was more able to commit to this level of contact, explaining that she was,

“part of the fabric. Because she was involved in organising events she had the opportunity to interact with the parents which made it easier to get to know them – she had a defined role. I’m involved in more strategic work – it’s different because I’m not necessarily engaging with the community at their level – it’s more formal communication.”

The CDWs also believed that Sure Start events such as Family Fun Days are the ideal opportunity to ‘pull people together’ and that ‘timing and keeping up the pace are crucial so parents don’t become despondent’.

## **Continual reflection and learning**

The forum has demonstrated a great willingness to reflect on and learn from its experiences. For example, attendance at two follow-up family fun day sessions was ‘disappointing’, and there was a lot of concern that Sure Start’s money was being wasted on creche workers, despite mothers confirming their attendance. However, the opportunity was used to discuss the possible reasons behind this amongst the small number of attendees. Furthermore, the second Family Fun Day event was planned bearing in mind the lessons learnt from the first event, such as improving registration procedures, providing ethnically diverse foods and the parents’ forum having a clearer role. In this respect, the forum shows an aptitude to evaluation. However, it should be built into the programme on a more formal level as previously described on page 10.

Parents should also be encouraged to reflect on and celebrate their own achievements and the way in which individuals contribute to the forum, which would help to focus their enthusiasm. Organising the fun day was seen as a particular success, for which ‘parents rolled their sleeves up and took the initiative’. There was a lot of optimism surrounding the capabilities of the group. ‘There are a lots of strong, talented people involved so we can do it’. ‘We’ve got lots of energy and we can push things forward’.

## **Implications**

- The CDW should create a PDP with each parent, and use it help to define roles and review individuals’ progress and satisfaction levels.
- The CDW should make full use of parents’ experiences and local knowledge. S/he should emphasise the value of individuals’ skills, experience and knowledge, for example speaking a language and explain how they make a unique contribution.
- The forum should be aware of developments with local parents’ forums and be willing to share resources and tap into their opportunities, e.g. training, leaflets.
- The CDW should monitor parents’ training and support needs and respond appropriately. Be careful not to over-burden them.

## 5.5 Partnership Board

National Unit Guidance states that,

“The intention is for parents to participate in, and not merely attend, meetings of the partnership. This places an obligation on the organisational partners, as the ones (probably) more used to such meetings, to see that they are easy to participate in, considering issues such as time, childcare facilities, relative informality of procedure, explanation of background and process, avoidance of jargon (especially acronyms), support for those for whom English is a second or other language” (Sure Start: a guide to planning and delivering your programme: Governance p.15)

Parents’ comments relating to their involvement in the partnership board were mixed. It appears that the way in which meetings are conducted has made it difficult for parents to fully participate. Many had struggled to follow proceedings and fully understand the content, although it was appreciated that ‘they do make an effort to explain if you put your hand up’. One mother was only able to understand meetings ‘about 50% of the time’ although she had English as a second language and suggested the use of an interpreter. A small number sometimes felt unable to contribute or ask questions in meetings because ‘I don’t want to hold up meetings’. Some explained this in relation to their own personality or previous work experience: ‘I’m not a technical person, I’m more a people person’; ‘my mind is more creative’. Parents felt that the partnership board can sometimes expect too much from them. One explained,

“ I’m willing to try and learn but I’m not a professional. Some people on the board, but not most [of them] and generally not the programme, expect me to be a professional. I have a certain level of competency but some of the others like X can get more involved, but hopefully we support each other. I do my best but my best might not be someone else’s best.”

This issues is of some concern; it appears that the degree to which parents ‘engage in reasoned discourse’ which is ‘open and thorough where everyone has the opportunity to fully voice their thoughts’ (Halvorson, 2003) is limited. However, this is recognised by the CDW who has established pre-board meetings to help parents to feel more confident in the partnership board meetings. It appears that so far this is proving to be an effective method as parents have made a number of suggestions which they felt would make the partnership board meetings more accessible, some of which have already been implemented. For example, in response to concerns they expressed at a pre-board meeting, parents now have more time to discuss specific issues with time for questions and answers on topics such as children’s centres. The CDW recognises that although they have the opportunity to discuss such issues in pre-board meetings, they gain a greater understanding when professional are able to provide an input: ‘They’re not just bowled through [the meeting]’. Furthermore, difficulties surrounding the use of jargon have been discussed and possible solutions were proposed, such as asking the person responsible for financial reporting ‘to provide clear and simple information’.

Another difficulty relates to parents’ level of interest in partnership board meetings. Although attendance has been high, it seems that enthusiasm has recently started to wane. A small number reported that they ‘start to feel sluggish’ or ‘switch off after half an hour’. This generally seemed to relate to the content of the meetings. One mother sometimes feels ‘like it is a waste of time being there....sometimes I think what am I doing here’, while another said that sometimes she has nothing

to contribute, ‘but I go because if there weren’t any parents, Sure Start might not get its money’. Parents are dissatisfied that ‘nothing that is talked about applies to us or our activities.....it’s about self-interest. However, the pre-partnership board meetings are helping to identify areas that parents want to focus on. The CDW should help to ensure that these are taken to board as appropriate. Furthermore, defining a role for each parent and providing a space for them to contribute meetings in a specific capacity, as described above should increase interest.

A small number had found attending meetings difficult due to other commitments: ‘it can be difficult because all my free time can be eaten up by meetings’. However, they appreciated the programme’s efforts to accommodate parents and its flexible approach. For example, one parent has asked about the possibility of ‘job sharing’, i.e. sharing a place on the board with another mother, while another decided to step down from the board. It seems the programme is highly aware of parents’ external commitments and aims to maintain its flexibility: ‘the forum will change as parents’ needs change’.

Another complaint related to the amount of paperwork that parents were expected to read in preparation for partnership board meetings, although it was acknowledged as ‘a necessary evil’. Some said they had not read all the papers, and that they should be more ‘targeted’. One felt ‘it helps to talk it through with someone, but even then I might not fully understand it’. The programme should carefully consider the volume of paper it sends to parents. However, it should also ensure that parents have access to all the information they feel they need, and that they are kept informed about board developments in accessible summaries; ‘sometimes I don’t get informed about things – just happens through word of mouth and it can be embarrassing when I don’t know about things’. The balance between providing too much and too little information needs to be carefully monitored.

Despite these concerns relating to the partnership board, parents were very positive about the its responsiveness. They felt that the board consults parents and tries to respond to their ideas: ‘they wouldn’t dream of not listening to us’. Consequently they felt that ‘we can influence decisions’ and that ‘we can push things on’. It would seem that the parents’ forum plays a crucial role in facilitating involvement on the board.

## **Implications**

- The programme should prioritise partnership board papers.
- Ensure that relevant documents are discussed at pre-board meetings. Time permitting, the CDW could summarise complicated documents in simple terms.
- Parents could discuss the terms and acronyms used in partnership board meetings and produce their own definitions in a way that is meaningful to them, with guidance from the CDW.
- Ensure that topics that parents want to discuss are included in board meetings.
- Allow sufficient time for parents to ask questions in meetings.
- Implement training for parents to help to narrow the knowledge gap. This should be incorporated into the PDPs.

## 5.6 The Role of the Community Development Worker

The CDW was regarded as vital by most parents. They saw the main role of the CDW as being an intermediary: 'they are there to pull the programme and the parents together....they think in a professional way, parents can be emotional about things'. Parents explained that the CDW was their link to Sure Start because 'they know how to get things done. We need someone who understands parents' needs but is also in the office and knows what's going on and can feed back'. Another said, 'they 'have the knowledge....and can pass it down in smaller bit sized pieces'. They clearly valued the ways in which CDWs' in-depth knowledge of Sure Start can aid parents' understanding and involvement. Other roles identified were:

- Facilitating meetings: 'she keep things on track'
- Being a point of contact: 'a consistent person we can turn to; 'our first port of call'
- Sustaining involvement: 'they keep the parents interested and motivated'
- Responding to parents' needs: 'they are aware of what we want'
- Recruiting new parents

Another role of the CDW, identified by the CDWs themselves is to learn from other Sure Start parents' forum in Haringey, particularly the other Round 5 programmes. They talked about using other forums as 'models' and identifying 'best practice'. Indeed one mother felt that the CDWs from the different programmes 'should work closer together, so there would be less duplication across programmes....and less beaurocracy, it would cut the red tape'.

The two CDWs were highly praised by parents, in particular the current CDW who was described as 'fantastic'; 'their work is a little bit invisible, but it makes a big difference'. However, parents were disappointed with the high turnover of CDWs and would greatly appreciate more consistency. They felt that 'things slowed down' during the gap between CDWs and were concerned that the work done by the CDWs is 'wasted' due to the high turnover. Parents were generally aware of the reasons behind the inconsistencies and were disappointed with the partnership board's approach to recruitment in the past, in particular advertising the CDW posts across all the programmes simultaneously and the expense of hiring consultants.

Having said that, the parents' forum not only maintained itself but also managed to spend the underspend during the summer when they did not have the support of a CDW. Furthermore, a 'group feeling' emerged just before the CDW's contact ended, who felt that it had been 'gradual and imperceptible.....it almost happened behind my back'. The APM suggested that this occurred because parents 'had to take on the responsibility themselves – it's a positive out of a negative'. Similarly, one mother felt that 'parents will do it if they're left to' although she added that they do benefit from support. This indicates the forum has the potential to become self-sustaining in the future.

### Implications

- The CDW should explain her role to new parents.
- The board should clearly explain to parents the difficulties behind the recruitment of CDWs.
- The programme should provide interim support, or at least a point of contact, if there are to be further periods of time in which there is no CDW.
- CDWs should learn from and work with other parents' forum when appropriate.

## 5.7 Structure of Parental Participation

### Parents' forum meetings

In Noel Park, parents' forum meetings are facilitated and chaired by the community development worker, who sets the agenda and organises the meetings. The first CDW was reluctant to hold 'formal meetings', as she believed that parents appreciated a more relaxed approach. However, the current CDW saw the need for more structure because 'they've all got so much to say... they go off on a tangent', which parents have responded positively to: she gets us through the waffling'; 'she's disciplined, there's something in her manner – it makes people sit down'; 'it's balanced because it's friendly, but she keeps things on track'. This appears to work well because the CDW understands the reasons behind parents' enthusiasm: 'They are putting in a 'tremendous investment – that's why they want to talk.....they are so relieved to find someone else.....we need to work with the chattiness'.

She tries to do this by allotting time at the beginning and end of meetings to 'social/networking time', although this has limited success because parents are often late for meetings. She also aims to formalise and use parents' spontaneous discussions in a productive way, for example by encouraging small group work around a theme such as experiences of ante natal services. Key points could then be taken to the partnership board: 'that's what they've got experience in and they want to talk about and they can help us with'. This would also help to 'make meetings more fun, rather than wading through board papers – I want parents to feel that they are getting something out of it'. Furthermore, encouraging parents to carry out and feed back from a structured discussion 'shifts the responsibility to them' and accustoms parents to the concept of a self-sustaining forum.

Although parents appreciated this greater structure, most of them thought that meetings should have 'some structure with scope for informality' which would enable 'everyone to say what they want to say'. However, it appears that parents' views about the best way to hold meetings varied according to their own background. For example, one mother, who came from 'a professional working environment' found initial Sure Start parent meetings 'rather chaotic', with 'children running around' and people being late. She would appreciate a 'fairly organised....calmer' meeting.

The importance of parents meeting 'amongst themselves, in a social situation, like at someone's house' without a CDW was emphasised by parents themselves. 'That's where our ideas were formed – it wouldn't happen in a formal meeting'. However, one explained the parents' forum enables this to process – 'we needed the parents' forum first otherwise we wouldn't have done it ourselves'. In her view, the forum allows parents to build up a relationship so that they felt comfortable meeting at each other's houses rather than a neutral venue. However, the possibility that this might create feelings of exclusion, as discussed in section 4.3, should be borne in mind.

### Structure

It seems this forum is structurally more informal compared to others that have been surveyed, for example there is no established quorum, terms of reference or election procedures. At present, parents on the forum volunteer to attend partnership board meetings. The board is open to any parent of a child under 4 in Noel Park, including those who are not members of the forum. Although the CDW aims to introduce an election procedure, parents appear to feel comfortable with the

relationship between the board and the forum. The forum is still in relatively early stages and once it is more established, elections could be introduced.

Although most parents interviewed defined themselves as being in a parents' forum, it is unclear what makes a parent a 'member' of the forum. For instance, should parents 'be able to dip in and out' or should they be encouraged to make a more formal commitment? While there appears to be no clear consensus on this issue, it would seem that obtaining a certain level of commitment would help to create sustained effective participation. It would be a useful exercise for parents to create their own terms of reference with strong support from the CDW.

### **Implications**

- Parents should create their own terms of reference.
- Parents could discuss the possibility of 'signing up' to the forum in some form. This could mean signing a form. The CDW could also provide members with a Parents' Forum pack, containing key information about Sure Start, their PDP and a summary of their roles.
- Allow parents some time to meet in a social capacity.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Noel Park SSLP recognises the value of involving parents, as the key stakeholders, in decision making processes. It has established a parents' forum, with parents who are very enthusiastic, highly committed and have a strong sense of cohesion. They effectively participate in the programme and influence decisions as well as provide their own ideas. Pre-board meetings are proving particularly helpful with participating on the board, with the CDWs providing invaluable support.

However, the following areas require particular attention:

- Representation: parents are not representative of the Noel Park SSLP community in terms of ethnicity or gender. More effort needs to be made to represent others' views.
- The programme needs to be sensitive to parents' training and support needs.
- Recruitment: more effort needs to be focused on recruitment of new parents.
- Parents need to be given specific roles and responsibilities in line with their strengths and interests.
- The creche should be improved to enable effective meetings.
- Parents need to be able to participate more fully in partnership board meetings, with particular attention being paid to the language used in meetings and the items covered.
- Continuity of CDWs needs to be handled carefully.

The programme is meeting several of its short-term targets, such as having an operating forum with at least 10 parents, who build their own networks and are on the partnership board. It is clear that the forum plays a crucial role in enabling participation by supporting active involvement, particularly on the partnership board. However, it is vital that the board actively facilitates parents' involvement during its meetings if participation is to be truly effective. It should focus particularly on two of Halvorson's three requirements for high quality participation, namely accessibility and deliberation. Nevertheless, Noel Park SSLP is a relatively new programme and has achieved a great deal in terms of parent participation in the time it has been operating. Addressing these areas will help to further develop effective participation and ultimately create a self-sustaining forum in which parents feel ownership over Noel Park SSLP.

## 7. REFERENCES

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8. How does the parents' forum feed into the partnership board – *Do you understand what you're supposed to be contributing to the meetings, able to contribute, operation, effectiveness, representation, feeding into it etc. To what extent do you affect overall decision making in Sure Start?*

9. What do you like about being involved with Noel Park SSLP?

10. What do you dislike about being involved?

11. Do you feel you know enough about Sure Start? Do you have enough support for what you do?

12. What benefits have there been for you personally so far?

13. Has anyone done anything to make it easier to attend meetings?

14. Has anything made it difficult?

15. What do you think makes a good parents' forum?

- *What should its purpose be?*
- *How should it be structured e.g. chair, minute taker etc, elections to PB*

16. Does the group need a community development worker? What do you see as their role?

17. What do you think is the best way to involve parents in Sure Start?

18. Do you represent anyone when you attend meetings? Do you think the parents' forum is representative of parents in Noel Park?

19. Parents' background:

- do you have children under 4
- do you live in the Noel Park SSLP area



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# SureStart Local Programme NOEL PARK Services

## Form

*If you need assistance with this form please contact the programme manager or an evaluation support officer.*

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### PROJECT TITLE

### Aims:

### Objectives:

**Please explain how your project objectives meet with Sure Start Objectives:**

#### Sure Start Objectives

- **Childcare**

Improving the availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of childcare.

- **Improving learning.**

In particular, by encouraging high quality environments and childcare that promotes early learning, provide stimulating and enjoyable play, improve language skills and ensure early identification and support of children with special needs.

- **Improving social and emotional development.**

In particular, by supporting the development of good relationships between parents and children, enabling early identification of difficulties, helping families to function effectively and promoting social and emotional well-being.

- **Improving children's health.**

In particular, by supporting parents in caring for their children to promote healthy development before and after birth.

- **Strengthening families and communities.**

In particular, by involving families in building the community's capacity to sustain the programme and thereby create pathways out of poverty.

Use this space to identify your outcomes, outputs and inputs. **Outcomes** are the effect your work will have on people’s lives, e.g. a decrease in smoking among fathers. **Outputs** are the material effects of your work, e.g. 100 anti-smoking posters or 70 health visits to fathers. **Inputs** are what you invest in the project to get your outputs and outcomes, e.g. a health advisor, a car for making health visits. **Explain** how your investment of inputs will result in the outcomes and outputs. What **assumptions** are you making about the wider environment in which you are working? **Targets** are **measurable** achievements. Indicate **when** you intend to achieve your targets by. Show **who will take measurements** and **how target data will be collected** – projects should provide measurements every three months. Show how targets relate to outcomes and outputs. Explain how targets relate to Sure Start Service ‘Public Service Agreements’ and ‘Service Delivery Agreements’ (see attached paper).

Inputs(s)	Output(s)	Outcomes(s)	How is this going to work?	Target(s) [include timescale]	Method of data collection	Which Sure Start Service Delivery targets will it support?

## **Sure Start Public Service Agreements**

A 12% reduction in the proportion of young children living in households where no-one is working.

An [x] per cent increase in the proportion of children having normal levels of communication, language and literacy at the end of the Foundation Stage and

a [y] per cent increase in the proportion of young children with satisfactory speech and language development at age 2 years.

An [x] per cent increase in the proportion of babies and young children aged 0-5 with normal levels of personal, social and emotional development for their age.

A 6 percentage point reduction in the proportion of mothers who continue to smoke during pregnancy.

## **Service Delivery Agreements**

### **National SDA Targets:**

1. To create 250, 000 new childcare places for at least 450, 000 children (approximately 280,000 children net of turnover).
2. To create 180,000 new childcare places in the 20% most disadvantaged wards (and smaller areas of disadvantage).
3. To create, by 2006, 95,000 new high quality out of school club childcare places for children of school age.
4. To establish Children's Centres in areas of disadvantage extending core Sure Start services to a further 300,000 children, so that by March 2006 at least 650,000 children have access to Children's Centre services.

### **Partnership Work**

5. To increase the percentage of childcare providers inspected by Ofsted rated as good or better by 2006.
6. To at least double the number of users of the Childcare Link website and local Children's Information Services.
7. 95 per cent of Foundation Stage provision inspected by Ofsted rated good or better by 2006.
8. To increase the number of children who have their needs identified in line with early years action plus of the SEN code of practice and who have either a group or individual action plan in place.

### **Local SDA Targets:**

9. To increase the use of libraries by families with young children.
10. All families with new born babies in Sure Start local programme and Children's Centre areas to be visited in first 2 months of their babies' life and given information about services and support available to them.
11. Information and guidance on breastfeeding, nutrition, hygiene and safety available to all families with young children in Sure Start local programme and Children's Centre areas.
12. Reduce by 10 percent the number of children aged 4-10 living in Sure Start local programme and Children's Centre areas admitted to hospital as an emergency with gastro-enteritis, a lower respiratory infection or a severe injury.
13. Ante-natal advice and support available to all pregnant woman and their families living in Sure Start local programme and Children's Centre areas.
14. An increase in the proportion of families with young children, reporting personal evidence of an improvement in the quality of family support services.
15. LAs, Sure Start local programmes and Children's Centre to have effective links with Jobcentre Plus, local training providers and future/higher education institutions.