

# Evaluation of the Sure Start Shrewsbury Board

Spring 2005



Carried out by MWB Consultancy Ltd April and May 2005

MWB Consultancy Ltd

**Final Report**  
**Sure Start Shrewsbury Board Evaluation April & May 2005**

## **1. Introduction**

This review was commissioned to help inform future development and functioning of the Board. The focus of the review was on Board Members views and experiences and how these could be acted on to improve the functioning of the Board.

The Key questions to be considered are:

- How does the Board perceive its relationship to the Sure Start Programme and how effective is the Board in terms of managing the programme as a whole?
- Does the Board share a set of values which enables it to operate and make independent decisions?
- How vital is Parental representation on the Board?
- Does the Board know about the needs of local people and enable Sure Start projects to meet them?
- How does the Board perceive its relationship to the Accountable Body and do changes need to take place in order to fulfil new governance arrangements?

The review was conducted by carrying out a series of telephone interviews with Board Members using a questionnaire designed to answer the key questions noted above.

Twenty two out of a possible twenty five Board Members and the Programme Co-ordinators were interviewed by phone. The Chair and the Programme Manager were seen face to face at the end of the research process.

## **2. Summary of findings and conclusions**

In this section we outline key findings and answer the questions set out in the introduction.

### **2.1. How does the Board perceive its relationship to the Sure Start Programme and how effective is the Board in terms of managing the programme as a whole?**

**We found that there is a universal agreement from all Board members interviewed that the Board is effective due the membership of parents from the local community and representatives from partner agencies.**

**The Board's effectiveness is further enhanced by an open, transparent and informal style.**

**Board members were very positive about the work of the Programme Team, e.g. Programme Manger, Coordinators etc.**

**However:**

- **Not all Board Members are clear about the decision making process.**
- **There is a lack of clarity from Board Members, mostly parent members, around the role of the Board in providing overall direction for the programme.**
- **Parent Board members, in particular, do not feel as if they have influence over the work of the Programme Team.**
- **There is a focus amongst some board members on the oversight of projects as individual entities that may be weakening their overview of the whole programme.**
- **There is a need to review Board functions in order to remain effective as the programme ‘grows up’ and in view of changes in Governance.**

All of the people interviewed commented that the Board meetings are well structured allowing for a comfortable level of informality that helps business to be conducted. Minutes are written in accessible, jargon free language, and these are sent to members with a clearly set out agenda and colour coded reports.

Some specific ways of working were cited as contributing to effectiveness, - e.g.

- time limiting discussion
- the efficiency and skill of the chair
- parent’s group pre-meetings
- the support of the Programme Team.

Board members reported that they are aware of the roles of other members of the board, and clear introductions take place at the start of each meeting.

All members reported that they feel at ease in meetings and able to raise questions and make representation to the meeting as a whole, and that they feel their ideas and suggestions are taken seriously.

Parent members commented that the meetings are informally run and are not ‘daunting’ which contributes to their feelings of being valued and included.

Four partner Board Members reported that the clear structure of the meetings are of a huge benefit to the general functioning of the meeting which allows for the work of the Board to take place efficiently and in an informal manner.

We asked if Board Members felt they were part of the decision making process and how decisions were made. The responses to this were different for parent representatives and partner representatives.

Three parents reported that they felt the meetings were more about reporting on existing services than taking decisions about the running of the programme.

Other parent representatives said they felt part of the decision making process but were unable to give examples of decisions that had been made.

Partner representatives reported that appropriate arrangements for delegation of decision making is made and more and more work is appropriately done outside of the Board meetings.

Partner agency representatives voiced concern that the ability of the Board to make decisions will be affected by new governance arrangements.

This range of responses about decision making may go some way to explain any lack of clarity about the role of the Board in relationship to its 'whole programme' function. If decisions about activity or developments are being delegated to sub-groups of the board or to staff of the programme this may leave some board members uncertain about their function. This in turn may encourage people to have a greater focus on the individual parts of the programme, in this case the projects, because their role may feel clearer in relationship to the projects.

We asked about the Board's relationship with Commissioned Services and the Programme Management Team.

Everyone felt that they received ample information about the commissioned services and saw this as being the main work of the Board. Again this may reflect greater comfort with a more focused role 'evaluating' specific projects or activities.

Parent Members, in particular, did not appear to see their role in relation to the Sure Start Programme as a whole as that of a management role but more of a 'steering group' to individual projects. They were unclear about any 'management' relationship they might have to Programme staff or the programme as a whole.

People were very complimentary about the work of the programme team and felt confident in their abilities to deliver the Sure Start Programme. This again may have helped to make Board Members feel that they did not have to take a view on the overall performance of the Programme Team or grapple with the whole programme direction. 'It's all right because we trust the team?'

## 2.2 Does the Board share a set of values which enables it to make independent decisions?

**We conclude that the Board has shared values and operates as an independent entity at the moment. However, there is a unanimous feeling that new structures and governance arrangements will affect and dilute the autonomy of the Board.**

**Most people feel that although the Board is influenced by the policies and governance of partner agencies the Sure Start ethos allows autonomy at the moment.**

We asked several questions in order to gauge the independence of the Sure Start Board.

- We asked Board Members what their role on the Board is. Board Members were able to say why they were on the Board, parents knew which area they represented and partner agency representatives talked about the knowledge they brought to the Board.
- We asked if Board Members felt they shared a set of values with the Board as a whole. Board Members feel they share a set of values which enables the Board to be aware of the potential for a conflict of interest. The values which people talked about were about having a focus on local needs, supporting parents etc.
- We asked if people felt there is a conflict of interest caused by the dual roles of Board Members working for Partnership Agencies. They felt strongly that their multi roles were a benefit to the Sure Start programme and conflict of interest is minimal.
- Finally we asked people how independent they feel the Board is. They feel that the Board is influenced by policies and governance of partner agencies but the Sure Start ethos allows autonomy at present.

There is a general feeling among Partner Agency Board Members that *'new structures and governance will affect and dilute the autonomy of the Board.'*

Most people commented on the positives brought about by their membership of the Board which allows them to merge their roles and thus contribute to improving services both within and outside Sure Start.

### 2.3 How vital is parental representation on the Board

**We conclude that parental representation is imperative to the functioning of the Sure Start Board.**

We asked what difference parental involvement on the Board has made to the Sure Start programme. Everyone agreed that parental involvement has meant that Sure Start has its services embedded in the local community, and answers the real needs of the local community.

*'Must retain local identity and local people being involved in running their own service'.*

*'Important that parents taking responsibility continues to be embedded in the practise of the local authority'.*

When asked what works best about the Board, and what needs to be protected everyone mentioned parental involvement. They felt it is the only way of being sure that services are aimed at the right people and to the right localities.

*‘Parental involvement has meant that Sure Start has its services embedded in the local community, and answers the real needs of local people.....Services have to be creative and unique in order to meet the very particular needs voiced by parents, and services have to be set up in an open and transparent way.’*

We asked if parental involvement should remain at the same level and everyone felt that it should. Further comments on this aspect are picked up in the section on future governance below.

#### 2.4 Does the Board know about the needs of local people and enable Sure Start Projects to meet them?

**We found that due to parental involvement and partnership representation on the Board Sure Start is enabling new ideas and innovative ways of working to be developed to meet local needs.**

**However, work needs to be done to ensure that commissioned services continue to be used by people living in the local area and that their voices are heard.**

We asked a number of questions in order to come to this conclusion.

We asked if Board Members feel that local people know what the Board’s role is in terms of managing the Sure Start programme, and if there are channels that local people can use to get ideas/opinions/requests onto the Board’s agenda. The members that felt able to discuss this felt that once local people start to use services they will meet their localities Board representative. Given our earlier findings regarding overall programme management by the Board we would expect those suggestions coming from local parents to be focused on single issue or project based concerns.

People felt however, that more work needs to be done to publicise Sure Start services to the wider community. The work done to publicise projects at the outset was seen as vital and worthy of repeating in order to ensure continued take up of services.

We asked if Board members felt that the work of the Board added extra value to the work of the Sure Start programme, and if so how? Everyone responded that it did because of the potential for networking with other providers and allowing organisations to work together, as well as the input from parents.

We asked if the Board enables new ideas and innovation to be translated into new services. Board members felt that the commissioning process allowed for this as well as the strong involvements of parents which means that services are grounded in the locality. Both partner representatives and parents talked about the importance of focusing services on the basics to start with and not taking these for granted.

#### 2.5 How does the Board perceive its relationship to the Accountable Body and do changes need to take place in order to fulfil new governance arrangements?

**Our conclusion is that individual Board Members perceive the relationship to the Accountable Body in different ways, but everyone wants to protect the Board's autonomy and feels strongly that the membership of the Board should not change. For some the relationship is benign and for others it constitutes a future risk.**

**In order for the Board to continue to manage an effective programme and maintain its current funding levels some Board members felt that it will have to be more assertive in marketing its results and achievements.**

**Monitoring and providing evidence of meeting local need may need to become a greater focus of the Board's activities.**

**Without clear guidance on any future Governance arrangements it was difficult for people to respond with specific suggestions about future arrangements.**

We asked several questions in order to gauge Board Members perceptions of the Boards relationship to the Accountable Body. Overall the response was positive about the relationship, the Accountable body was seen as having left the Sure Start Team and Board to build and shape the programme in the early stages of development.

Some Partner agency Board Members voiced a concern about possible changes to governance in the wake of the move to Children's Centre status taking away the autonomy of the Board and giving more power to the Local Authority.

Others did not feel this would happen and felt the relationship would continue with the Accountable Body offering support without interference.

Parent board members felt they did not have a clear understanding of all the issues but felt strongly that decision making should remain with the Board.

We asked what works best about the Board and therefore what should be kept in any future change to arrangements. People's answers focused on:

- parental involvement
- autonomy
- partnership
- involvement of Sure Start workers in the Board's work
- shared agreement about the broad goals of the Sure Start movement.

We asked what didn't work and only one person had something to suggest which was to widen the remit of the meetings in order to incorporate information sharing about partner agencies. There is now an item on the agenda which allows for this activity to take place.

People's answers to the question about the difference that parental involvement on the Board has made to the Sure Start Programme would suggest that parental involvement must remain the same or be strengthened in the future.

People commented that it is not merely having parents represented but enabling them to be an equal part of the Board by

- supporting them through pre-meetings,
- discouraging partner representatives from using jargon and abbreviations,
- encouraging a culture of feeling able to speak up if you don't understand,
- taking seriously all suggestions made by parents (and others).

We asked if Board members felt away days were useful and if so what particular things should be focused on.

People thought they could help with encouraging and maintaining a feeling of identity and belonging; they helped with networking and many people thought they could kick start the review process and give members a chance to share an understanding of the changes ahead and develop a strategy in response.

### 3. Detailed Findings

In this section we provide the detail of people's responses to questions and draw them together to provide themes.

We heard from 7 parent Board members, and 15 partner agency Board members. (Two parents did not wish to be interviewed when contact was made. Some Board places are job shared and both people were interviewed). The interviews were conducted by telephone for everyone except 2 parents who chose to be interviewed face to face. This was carried out at Sunflower House. Everyone was asked the same questions.

#### 1. *How long have you been on the Board?*

This varied from 2 year 9 months to 3 months

#### 2. *Have you got a specific role on the Board?*

Everyone was very clear about their role on the Board – why their organisation was represented- what area they represented if a parent. They also talked about the diverse skills and qualities they brought from former roles, interests etc

#### ***Do you think you bring a particular dimension to the Board, or any unique skills and qualities?***

People talked about areas of knowledge they have from other roles which they feel adds extra value to the workings of the Board. People commented on the positives for Sure Start of doing this.

Partner representatives commented that parent representatives brought knowledge about the local area that they did not have as well as the desire to 'start at the beginning and get the foundations laid properly'.

Programme staff see their roles as being advisory and to provide information and support.

#### **About the Board and how it works –**

#### 3. *Do you know who the other Board members are and what their role or job is outside of Sure Start Shrewsbury?*

People reported that they knew peoples roles and if they did not introductions at the beginning of the meetings provided sufficient information. Parents agreed that they had enough information except one parent who was very new to the Board and had not received her introductory pack yet

*If not would you like to know more about them? Would this help the Board function better?*

Nobody felt they need to know more about anyone else, but several people commented towards the end of the interview that knowing more about each others agencies would be useful. It was suggested that informal lunch time gatherings could achieve this.

#### 4. *Are the Board **meetings** effective?*

There was a universal feeling that the Board functioned well and effectively. People commented on how well structured the meetings are and how this allows for a very comfortable level of informality which is identified as one of the main reasons why the Board has managed to effectively set up services to meet real needs in the right areas.

People liked the agenda with '*time allocation. Good time management – calm order*' People commented that the tight structure allowed for a high level of informality which meant people feel able to ask about anything they do not understand

Many people commented on how well the meetings were chaired.

Parents felt that one of the strengths is that the Chair is a parent because she attends the parent's pre- meetings and so has notice of parental concerns and ideas and can integrate these into the body of the meeting.

One parent said that '*some Officers talk in their own governmental language a bit*'.

*Would you like to change anything about how they are organised and run?*

Nobody wanted to change anything about how the meetings are run except one person who wanted Friday morning to be avoided so that she could attend

*Do you get all the information you need prior to the meeting and after it?*

Everyone confirmed that they receive minutes soon after the meeting. They get papers for forthcoming meetings at least a week in advance. Many people commented on the colour coding which they find helpful. People either commented on the accessible language used in written documents or confirmed when asked that language was understandable and free from jargon.

#### 5. *Do you think there is a shared set of values to which the Board as a whole subscribes?*

There was a slightly mixed response to this question, with all but one person feeling that there is a shared set of values.

However, voluntary agency representatives felt that some statutory agency representatives use meetings to focus on what Sure Start can do for their agency. *'Different partner agencies come with different core values'*.

Other people focused on the positives that this dual role brought as officers and project workers are able to *'wrap services round each other'*. E.g. use Sure Start play bus with the job bus.

Others commented that you have to approach this with a sense of reality – yes there is a shared ethos but equally officers are a representative of their agency and therefore they will come to meetings with a dual agenda.

Board Members who have served on the Board since conception talked about the work done on building a shared ethos. Some people commented that this probably needs revisiting. Others commented that *'history'* get in the way at times.

*Do you feel at ease in meetings and able to make suggestions, give your views and ideas and feel that these are taken seriously?*

All the parents reported that they feel at ease. They like the pre-meeting as it gives them a chance to raise questions before the big meeting and to make representation to the meeting as a whole.

One parent added that she feels at ease but not able to say much. Another said – *'yes, even though I didn't understand much, when I had something to say everyone listened and responded'*.

They all said that meetings are not daunting. However one parent commented that *'parents feel not as qualified'* – and went on to say that however much your contributions are valued you do not feel equal.

Four partner agency representatives talked about the benefits that *'professionals'* have got from having to think about what they are saying and explain ideas without using jargon', and said that this has led to people questioning assumptions.

*Do you think all Board Members feel at ease?*

Everyone responded *'Yes'* for themselves but three people thought that some parents did not feel at ease to start with but soon settled in.

*Do you feel your skills and expertise is fully appreciated and utilised?*

Most parents felt that they were taken seriously – *'I feel very respected and at ease'*. One parent felt that the Board did not know what her skills and expertise were and so this was not being fully utilised.

One Board member felt that the Sure Start team uses her well but the wider partnership *'has an arrogant view of the worth of voluntary organisations'* Other workers talked about the usefulness of listening to people reporting on past experience and using this in the development of Sure Start.

Another person said – *'It is inevitable that old rivalries between statutory and voluntary organisations will be brought into this new arena – and we have found evidence of this.'*

#### 6. *Do you feel that you take an active part in making decisions?*

One parent who has recently joined the Board felt that the meetings are about reporting on existing activities and not about planning new ones and therefore not about taking decisions.

Another parent could not remember taking any decisions.

Another said *'No, decisions are taken at the top'* – when asked what the top was she said she didn't really know but felt it was members of the meeting who got together after the meeting. She did not feel that she was part of taking decisions but said that everything parents suggested was taken on board and nothing had been forced through against parent representatives wishes.

The chair and Programme Manager both feel that the Accountable Body relates to Programme Management and not the Board, and commented that Shrewsbury County Council has a benevolent rather than an empowering approach to the Sure Start Board which affects its relationship with the Board.

Other parents felt that they were party to the decision making process.

Partner agency representatives reported that appropriate arrangements for delegation of decision making are made and more and more work is appropriately done outside of the meeting.

Six people voiced their concern that the decision making ability of the Board (and its independence) is under threat because of the Education Authorities *attitudes* to social inclusion. Others commented on the general attitude of statutory agencies and the affect this will have on the independence of the Board in the future.

#### *How are decisions made by the Board?*

Board members said that the agenda lists the business of the meeting and is time limited. Items are then discussed and agreement reached or delegated to a working party.

However one parent feels all decisions are made outside of Board meetings.

Nobody could recall a decision going to vote

7. *What do you think works best about the Board - What needs to be protected?*

1. There was a unanimous feeling that **parental involvement should be protected.** Everyone listed this as something that needs protecting.

*'Must retain local identity and local people being involved in running their own service'.*

*'Important that parents taking responsibility continues to be embedded in the practise of the local authority'.*

*'Maintaining the excitement'.*

*'Need to continue learning from parents'*

Two people talked at length about the fact that parental involvement has meant that the foundations have been correctly laid – *'services have been commissioned that local people feel will meet local need, delivered in correct places but also the minutiae has been attended to – nappy bins emptied – basic needs met rather than leaping in to more sophisticated services'.*

Four people commented that it is not merely having parents on the Board but actively involving them by providing support, an environment they can be active in, listening to them, acting on what they say, and responding (which may be to say that something can't happen but with explanation).

2. **Autonomy** of Board – partner representatives particularly want to retain the independence and autonomy of the Board

3. **Partnership** – most professionals commented on the usefulness of being able to network and work together

4. **Sure Start workers involvement** – The programme managers understanding and management of issues and situations was mentioned by several people as being extremely useful inside and outside of meetings.

5. **Broader goals of Sure Start movement** – the ethos of social inclusion and working in partnership with local communities is seen as fundamental to the success of the programme. This was summed up by the Programme Manager as a *'unity of purpose'*

8. *What works worst? How could it be changed or improved?*

One partner agency representative felt that not all meetings had to be *'sit down does'*. They felt it would be useful for each agency to have an opportunity to provide insight into the trials and tribulations of their agency. A *'section of the meeting could be about presenting information about various organisations.'* They would like part of the meeting to be open at the end to encourage a *'wider field of ownership'*.

There was a comment that some agencies are not proactive and do not take overall responsibility. The Programme Manager feels that at times he has to take a leading role.

9. *How does the Board manage problems and issues that arise? e.g. – a difference in perspective between 2 Board members?*

Everyone that had experienced a problem/issue in a meeting reported that Board members and the programme manager were skilled in managing situations and that one particular incidence was successfully dealt with outside of the meeting and affected people informed of the outcome.

10. *Can you tell me how you see the Boards relationship with the Sure Start programme? For instance what are the channels between you as a Board member and Commissioned Services and Programme management?*

Everyone reported that they feel that they have regular updates on commissioned services and are able to stay in touch with Sure Start activities through this process.

Most people at some point in the interview commented on the Sure Start Programme Management and many Board Members commented on the efficiency and skilled management style of the Programme Manager.

With the exception of the Acting Children's Centre Co-ordinator Board Members did not appear to see their role in relation to the Sure Start Programme team as that of a management role but more of a 'steering group' to their activities.

### **About the Board and its partners**

11. *Do you ever feel there is a conflict of interests caused by dual roles?*

Board members were open to the potential for conflict caused by dual roles, but only one Board member reported this to have been a problem which got in the way. Everyone else commented on the positive aspects of 'having a foot in both camps' and how this benefits the local community.

Two statutory agency representatives commented on how voluntary agency partners appeared to feel the need to '*fight their corner*' and came to the meeting more as a representative of their employing agency than a member of the Sure Start Board. They understood that this is to do with history and did not feel that it particularly hindered the work of the Board.

12. *How independent to you feel the Board is?*

Most people felt that although the Board was 'influenced' by the policies and governance of partner agencies but that the Sure Start ethos allowed autonomy. However they felt that this is under threat:

*'are the glory days over?'*  
*'Fine line – like walking a tight rope, but the Board can be independent at the moment, however the Education Dept. is knocking on the door'*

There is a general feeling among Board Members that *'new structures and governance will affect and dilute the autonomy of the Board.'*

The Chair feels that *'the Board has independence over the things that the County Council allows us, but not other matters such as finance'*

The Programme Manager commented that the County Council respects the Board and so has allowed independence but this is on the decline.

### **The Board and Programme Users**

#### **13. Do you think that Programme users know what the Boards role is in terms of managing the Sure Start Programme?**

There is a general feeling that users know who the parent representatives are.

However one Headmaster felt that the original work of speaking to parents at school gates, attending school fetes needed to be carried out again in order to keep the momentum going.

Two parents felt that more needed to be done in order to spread the word about Sure Start services

#### **14. Are there channels that programme users can use to get information/opinions/ideas to you so that you can represent them on the Board?**

Parent representatives felt that the channels via Sure Start workers and parent representatives worked for people who were using services already. However three parents felt more work needed doing on this as did one school head. Parents mentioned that the same people seem to be using services and more work needs to be done on getting new people into projects.

*If this needs improving how could it be done?*

It was felt that open meetings and more information about who the parent representatives are would be useful. Also information about Sure Start projects at school gates and fetes etc in order to spread the word to the local community.

#### **15. What difference has parental involvement on the Board made to the Sure Start Programme?**

*'Best example of parental ownership I have seen'*

*'Grounded services in the community and made them representative of community's needs and wishes.'*

*'Good for jargon busting'*

*'Parental involvement has meant that Sure Start has its services embedded in the local community, and answers the real needs of local people.....Services have to be creative and unique in order to meet the very particular needs voiced by parents, and services have to be set up in an open and transparent way.'*

Several people commented that it has meant that services are set up in the correct locations and that it has meant that services are user and parent focused and made statutory services think about being user led and not service led and encouraged partnership working between users and agencies.

More than one person said that people representing partnership agencies *'have learnt a lot about the needs of the area'*.

People commented on ownership and said that parental representation had meant that local people owned the services and not organisations. Statutory agency workers commented that it allowed for members of public to gain an understanding of the workings of their agencies which was empowering.

Most partner agency representatives commented that parental involvement has ruled out wrong assumptions being made about the needs of the community and types of services they required.

People feel that it has meant that *'little, basic things have been taken seriously by the Board – e.g. nappy changing facilities'*.

People commented that parental involvement had given the Board more power.

One person felt that members of the public *'don't know what they don't know'* and felt that some services should have been commissioned against the wishes of parent Board members in order to meet the perceived needs of the local people.

*Do you feel that parental membership should remain at the same level on the Board?*

All felt that it should.

*16. Do you think that overall the Board adds extra value to the work of the Sure Start Programme, and if so how?*

Unanimous answer – Yes!

Because - .....

*'of the potential for networking with other providers and allowing organisations to work together.'*

One service manager commented on how this allows them to work alongside other agencies and not duplicate therefore making the most of funding.

Four people said it enabled them to listen to issues coming up and react proactively.

Partner agency representatives commented on how having partners involved meant that *'clear direction'* was given to all involved.'

One manager commented on how the Board allowed for the linking up of projects and *'wrapping projects around other ones'* which made the most of funding, e.g. play bus and job bus being brought out together.'

Another service provider commented on the feeling of hope that the Board's approach via parental involvement and empowerment had achieved.

A member of the Sure Start Programme staff commented that treating everyone the same on the Board and giving them equal *'value'* has meant that this approach is felt within the Programme as a whole.

## **Development –**

### ***17. Do you think that the Board enables new ideas and innovative ways of working to be translated into new services?***

There is a general feeling that new, original, innovative services have been created but the momentum has to be kept up and the Board needs to think about how to keep the ideas relevant and new ones coming.

One person commented *'Yes, the commissioning process achieved this'*.

Another commented that innovation was achieved by *'starting at the grass roots'*, and paying attention to detail so that services are run in the right place, at the right time and meet small needs for example where to put your dirty nappy as well as the larger needs that services target.

### ***18. Do you think that the change from being a Sure Start programme to a Children's Centre is going to require the Board to work in a different manner?***

Parents felt that they had very limited understanding of this issue and its implications.

Within the Partnership agency representatives on the Board there were some people who did not seem concerned about the changes and took a pragmatic

approach that statutory agencies would not want to be taking responsibility back again.

However, most people voiced concern that the Board's autonomy would go and that the extended remit would mean the immediate locality will lose services.

Some managers emphasised the need for a new era to start. They feel that the Board will have to –

*'Be more assertive to ensure funding',*

*'Monitoring of services will have to commence in order to provide evidence of successes',*

*'Need to know what the criteria is so that we can build up evidence of meeting it, we will be fine because we have a good team.'*

People felt that retaining independence is going to be a huge amount of work *'we will have to fight our corner rather than rely on people assuming that our services are the best.'*

*'We will have to work together more and monitor, compile evidence, record in order to hang on to funding.'*

*'We need to identify what the criteria are – decide how to collect evidence, evaluate services and decide which are successful. Breadth of services may have to shrink.'*

*'There is the potential for a power struggle with Education – it is important that Board members are aware of political changes'.*

Sure Start Programme staff commented that they are going into a stage of the unknown and felt strongly that the Board should be left as it is – *'if it 'aint broke why fix it?'*

**19. Do you think that an annual Board away day would be a useful way to encourage development?**

There were mixed feelings about the usefulness of away days, with most 'professionals' saying they were good for networking and most parents liking them because you got to know people and understand what the various partnership agencies are about.

People felt that they encourage a feeling of identity and belonging. Some people thought their usefulness was limited and one person actively disliked them.

Another person thought an away day would only be useful once the multi-agency director was appointed as this person would be a key person to the day.

*If so are there any particular things you would like to focus on?*

Most people thought that focusing on **the future** would be useful.

One parent representative thought focusing on the interactions of the various partner agencies and to understand connections would be useful.

One suggestion was to use the day to review the programme so far– what has worked well, what hasn't worked – use as a monitoring tool

Ask *'why are we here, are we still the right people to be on the Board'*.

Several people commented that such a day would be a chance for Board members to share understanding of the changes in governance ahead and develop a strategy

*'opportunity for people to get clued up.'*

*'Style and focus for next chapter using outside help'*

The Home start organiser suggested a day led by parents focusing on *'what parents get right'*

Generally people thought it could be a chance to continue development and one person commented that it would give the Board an opportunity

*'for a bit of fun.'*

#### 4. Interim Conclusions and Recommendations –

The conclusions and recommendations are based on the information obtained from the twenty six interviews carried out so far. Some of the recommendations can be actioned quickly and some may be under way already. They are not listed in order of priority.

1. Parent Board Members in particular do not feel that they have a clear idea of their management responsibilities to Sure Start Programme staff and feel that they are accountable to the Programme Manager rather than round the other way.

Neither did they have an understanding of the implications of the change from a Sure Start programme to a Children's Centre and so are unable to comment on the effect these changes will have on the future to commissioned projects. Providing parents with an understanding of this should be seen as an important part of maintaining the Boards autonomy, and will ensure that parent's thoughts and feelings on the impending changes can be used when shaping the Boards response.

A work shop training session could be run for Parent Board and other members on the oversight structure and governance of Sure Start. Clarification of Board Members management responsibilities to the overall Programme should be covered as well as any likely changes to governance. This will enable Board members to make better sense of their roles and responsibilities to the whole programme.

2. An Away Day Session should be held in order to celebrate achievements, acknowledge shared values and further cement the ethos of Sure Start Shrewsbury. This will encourage networking and should help explain how agencies fit together. It will further enable the Board to place an emphasis on the value of individual's contributions.

Most Board members commented on the benefits of the dual roles that membership on the Sure Start Board gave them. We feel it would be useful to explore this and at the same time identify how represented agencies fit together. Further more an away day would enable members to explore the value of individual contributions.

Almost everybody interviewed commented on the shared values of the Board. Tying down exactly what these are would be a useful exercise.

3. The Board should consider using the findings of the research represented in this report about the importance of parental representation on the Sure Start Shrewsbury Management Board in order to influence future governance arrangements.

As everyone felt that parental representation was vital to the success of the Shrewsbury Sure Start programme the Board should attempt to influence any changes to governance by communicating what has been done to ensure community involvement in all stages of the development of the programme and

what this has brought about in terms of commissioned services and the meeting of local need.

Findings of other research carried out by MWB Consultancy Ltd and other evaluators suggests that strong parental involvement in programme management has a measurable impact on improving results for children and parents using Sure Start Services.

4. Energy should continue to be put into advertising Sure Start projects within the localities in order to ensure continued use of commissioned services by local people.

Several people commented that they felt that renewed energy needed to be directed into advertising projects and bringing people into the centre so that meeting local need continues.

5. The Board should identify a set of criteria by which to review and evaluate service provision. This should be used to facilitate a programme of monitoring in order to gather evidence on the success of projects.

In view of the change in status to a Children's Centre and the anticipated changes in governance we feel that the Board should devote a session of an away day to developing outcomes linked to national criteria in order to roll out a review and evaluation of projects which could be used to make judgements and collect evidence to ensure the maintenance of effective service provision.

The 5 outcomes for Every Child Matters (ECM) would be an excellent starting point for developing a more results based monitoring approach. A small number of Sure Start programmes are successfully using a results based approach to demonstrate their contribution to ECM outcomes.

6. The Board needs to look at how it makes decisions and formalise this so that all Board members are aware of the decision making process.

The answers to the questions about decision making led us to believe that parents perceive decision making as vague and not all Board members, particularly parents, are aware of when and how decisions are made. In view of this it would be useful for the Board to review decision making and draw up a protocol so that it is clear when a decision has been taken (and by whom if it not done in a Board meeting).

This does not need to be a lengthy process just a case of writing down clearly when decisions are taken and where. We think this will help to demonstrate the decisions that are being made by the board but that might not feel like decisions to the people making them. E.g. the decision to delegate a job for someone to carry out on your behalf.

7. New Board members should be given their introductory pack prior to attending their first meeting. Some Sure Starts have found 'buddying' or mentoring set ups very helpful for new Board members

In order for new Board members to be able to take an active part in the meeting they should if at all possible have had this pack prior to the first meeting they attend.

Our overall conclusion is that the Board of Sure Start Shrewsbury is in a pretty healthy state with some good involvement from parents, a sense of trust and mutual respect between Board Members and examples of how parents have influenced programme development.

The Board has provided added value to the programme, this may have been at its strongest in the early part of the programme during commissioning and set up phases but continues now in a focus on specific projects and in working together.

The Programme team is well respected and trusted by the Board. However there appears to be limited focus by the board on the 'whole programme' and on its role in steering the work of the Programme Team. This needs to be discussed by the Board in order to clarify whether the Board has roles and responsibilities in this area.

There are potential challenges facing the Board when and if changes to the current governance arrangements are made to deal with the shift to Children's Centre status. The sound basis of the Board, and in particular parental involvement, should provide it with the resilience and commitment to make any transition that is needed.

There are now opportunities for the Board and Programme Team to develop a more strategic role and a focus on Outcomes for the children, families and communities using the programme.

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