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Sure Start Barrow

Local Evaluation Interim Report

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Staff Interviews **January-March 2004**

Introduction

All members of staff were asked to take part in an interview. 25 of 26 members of staff were interviewed, plus a self-employed counsellor (using Sure Start premises and working with Sure Start clients), over an eight-week period, after giving their consent. Staff members were reassured that the interview was confidential and that although pieces of what people have said might be in the final report, no information would be used that would result in any individual being identified.

The main aims of the interviews were to:

- gain an understanding of each staff member's role and position in Sure Start Barrow.
- obtain views on how staff see Sure Start developing.
- discover how staff feel they can contribute to the Sure Start programme.
- explore what opportunities or difficulties they envisage for the future development of Sure Start.

Method

The interview took the form of verbal questioning and was divided into the following sections:

1. Roles (Questions 1-20)
2. Communication (Questions 21-28)
3. Processes of service delivery (Questions 29-34)
4. Service integration (Questions 35)
5. Health, safety and security (Questions 36-37)
6. Partnership arrangements and sustainability (Questions 38-43)

Interviewees were then given the opportunity to make any additional comments on any aspect of their work.

All interviews were taped and later transcribed. At the end of the evaluation process the tapes will be destroyed.

Section 1. Roles

Section 1a: General aspects of roles

Questions 1-4 concerned individual staff member's roles, understanding of responsibilities, contact with parents, training or management responsibilities, the differences between Sure Start services and generic services (where the role is allied to a key agency) and any duality in the daily tasks or inappropriate functions of roles.

Question 1. What does your role involve?

All staff members had a clear understanding of their role within Sure Start and the duties allied to that role. A flexibility of roles was indicated, with many staff members describing broad roles that included stepping in for each other when needed. There are obvious differences in staff roles regarding levels of contact with parents and training and management responsibilities.

Question 2. If your work is allied to a key agency, how does it differ from the generic services offered by your agency outside of Sure Start Barrow?

For those concerned, work in Sure Start was seen to be different, in some ways, to generic services. Some of the main differences were around the following themes:

- Working in schools and group work
- Home visiting
- No case load as such or no waiting list
- Not time limited
- Responding to gaps in other services
- Working on a more contextual and systemic level, rather than on an individual level, working with and through parents and families
- Skills sharing, by training and utilising the skills of volunteers and community supporters to be able to help more families
- Proactive working, as opposed to reactive: for example, identifying early difficulties and addressing them before problems develop.

Question 3. Is there any overlap in your role with the role of others? And if so, how?

Although all staff had clear roles established there was a view by many that overlap in roles was part of being a Sure Start worker, with all roles touching on each other ('we have become generic Sure Start workers really'). Some staff felt their roles did not overlap with anyone else's in Sure Start. Special skills and specialisms of different roles were acknowledged, with an overall emphasis on joint working and pooling resources for the benefit of service delivery.

Question 4. Are there any tasks/duties that you do which you feel should not be part of your job?

The large majority of staff did not feel that they are doing any tasks/duties that they shouldn't be doing, although work with families was identified by some as becoming more complicated. Thus, tasks/duties involved in different roles were seen to be expanding and evolving. Roles were seen as flexible enough to incorporate anything that needed doing. This was evident in a range of examples given of work undertaken when those principally responsible were absent, a selection of which is as follows:

- 'I wouldn't feel I shouldn't be doing something...if it was within my ability to do it I would do it'.
- 'We all muck in...if somebody doesn't turn up for a group or something and if you were available you would just go and do it'.
- 'It doesn't matter what it is, as far as I am concerned what needs to be done needs to be done. Nothing is above or below me'.
- 'I'm open and adaptable. It is one of those jobs that you just have to get in and do'.
- 'I'll do anything...that is my job description'.
- 'None whatsoever, I enjoy doing all of them'.
- 'Only the odd thing...Sure Start is very "we'll get it done if it needs doing"'.

Where tasks/duties had been judged as inappropriate functions of the role matters were described as being addressed, for example by providing extra support in certain areas and role adjustments.

Section 1b: Hours worked, distance travelled and reasons for coming to work for Sure Start

Questions 5-7 concerned numbers of hours worked by different staff members, distance travelled and how and why members of staff came to be working at Sure Start.

Question 5. How many hours a week do you work?

The number of hours worked a week varied between individuals, ranging from 12 to 37.5 hours (contracted hours). 6 members of staff reported they worked more than their contracted hours (with one working up to 22 hours over their contracted time), but all indicated this was something they did not mind doing. Time off in lieu was granted for staff working more than their contracted time, which some acknowledged was useful during school holidays when their children are off school. Another member of staff indicated that, in addition to core hours, they also did bank work for Sure Start. Generally there appeared to be flexibility both in working hours and in staffs' attitudes to working hours.

Question 6. How far do you travel from to get to work?

The large majority of staff live locally, with 11 indicating they live less than 8 miles away and another 9 living in walking distance (under 15 minutes walk or

described as 'in Barrow;' or 'not very far- around the corner'). 6 members of staff indicated living between 10 and 18 miles away.

Question 7. How/why did you come to work here?

Staff had gone to work for Sure Start for a variety of reasons and some of those, as indicated by staff are as follows:

- Seconded by generic agencies
- Involved in the setting up process
- After training courses elsewhere applied to work in Sure Start.
- Saw an advert in the paper for post/heard about post through Sure Start workers.
- Saw an advert in the paper for the community support worker training and after doing the training/working as a community supporter applied for a post.
- Involved in initial consultation in the wards, completed the community support worker training and then applied for a post.
- Met/knew some people from Sure Start (either at training courses or whilst at work or through funding by Sure Start on other projects) and heard about the training, was a community supporter before applying for current post. Some had done further qualifications (funded by Sure Start) whilst working as a community supporter, which then gave them the qualifications to apply for contracted positions that came up within Sure Start.
- Met/knew some people from Sure Start (either at training courses, whilst at work or having used the services) and heard about the community support worker training. Then applied for post.
- Whilst doing other training did placement at Sure Start. After training set up own business with support from Sure Start.

Other reasons for going to work for Sure Start included:

- Liked Sure Start ethos (that of working in a preventative way).
- Scope for trying new things.
- An interest in working with children.
- Working with the parents.

Section 1c: Levels of satisfaction

Questions 8-20 were concerned with obtaining information about levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with a number of different aspects, such as the working environment, whether individuals understood how their roles fit into the Sure Start aims and objectives, strengths of Sure Start Barrow and areas for improvement.

Question 8. In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your post in Sure Start Barrow?

23 (88.5%) members of staff reported to being **very satisfied** with their post in Sure Start Barrow and **3 (11.5%)** reported to being **fairly satisfied**. No one was dissatisfied with his or her post.

Staff members were given the opportunity to make any further comments about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their post. A high level of satisfaction with the specific work involved was reflected in these comments, with a number of individuals expressing how much they 'love' their work ('I've never been so happy in my whole life', 'It's the best thing that has ever happened to me', 'It's brilliant. It's the best job I have ever had' and 'I'm so glad I answered the advert in the paper- my life has changed so much'). Satisfaction for some was also about working and making a difference in their own community. For others, the satisfaction was directed at colleagues who were described as 'special', 'enthusiastic', and 'professional'. In addition to this, a high level of dedication to Sure Start was expressed by some, with appreciation about the opportunities Sure Start had provided them with ('I was glad to get the opportunity to do it and will fulfil it as best I can' and 'It has given me chances I would never have had anywhere else'). A number of staff described feelings of inclusion within the Sure Start team and general attitudes about the team ('They are a professional team who let people, like a housewife, come into it and take their opinions on board', 'it is rewarding to work with people who value you and work with you' and 'It is a very, very positive atmosphere to work in').

A point was raised by one person about new staff sometimes feeling 'lost' and a small number of others expressed concern about a lack of guidance at times.

Question 9. In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the terms and conditions of your post in Sure Start Barrow?

19 (73.1%) members of staff reported to being **very satisfied** with the terms and conditions of their post, **4 (15.4%)** said they were **fairly satisfied** and **2 (7.7%)** said they felt **fairly dissatisfied** with the terms and conditions. No one said they were very dissatisfied. One individual (3.8%) said it was not relevant because they are not employed by Sure Start. One individual expressed a wish for more permanency in contracts. Those who weren't satisfied felt the issues were under review and in the process of being addressed.

Question 10. Do you feel you have enough time in your post to carry out the duties that are expected of you?

14 (53.8%) said **yes**, they did feel they had enough time to carry out the duties expected, whilst **12 (46.2%)** said **no**; they felt they did not have enough time. A small number of staff commented further. Some described how hours could sometimes run over contracted time as a result of activities and events being busy at certain times of the year and work arising on a day-to-day basis that needs to be done. However, some comments suggested this was not a

negative thing, e.g. 'that is the way I like it to be. I am happy with it and not complaining'. Others commented that they did not *have* to do the extra work but that it just comes with the nature of working with children. Planning of work was mentioned as something that there was not enough time for, which led to hours running over those contracted. Again, time off in lieu was mentioned as one way of balancing out hours worked. Learning to delegate and say 'no' to taking on extra work were mentioned as important skills.

Question 11. Is Sure Start a supportive place to work?

25 (96.2%) said yes, Sure Start is a supportive place to work. However, one person felt that the staff are not as supportive as they think they are. Other comments included:

- 'It affords me a great deal of growth. Weaknesses aren't frowned upon; people seek to move people on'.
- 'It's excellent'.

Question 12. Is Sure Start a friendly place to work?

All members of staff said **yes (100%)** indicating Sure Start as a friendly place to work. Comments included:

- 'The people are wonderful'.
- 'There is a really good rapport'.
- 'It is caring and warm and it's nurturing. We are all able to grow. If we see something we would like to do we are not held back. It is certainly a place where I certainly grow a lot. We are given freedom'.
- 'On the whole...yes'.
- 'Mostly...yes'.

Question 13. Do you think Sure Start Barrow has clear aims and objectives?

All members of staff said **yes (100%)**; they thought Sure Start Barrow had clear aims and objectives.

Question 14. If yes, what do you think those aims and objectives are?

A range of responses were provided and some were reflective of individuals' roles or specific to certain Sure Start objectives. A number of responses indicated the aims and objectives as improving the quality of life for pre-school age children and their families. In addition to this, a number of staff members described one of the aims and objectives as involving the community in decision-making and service delivery. The importance of taking a bottom-up approach to service delivery was emphasised by many staff. A sample of those responses is as follows:

- 'To meet the needs of pre-school children and their families through health and education'.
- 'The social and emotional development of children, the education of pre-school children. We cut down on children being admitted to Accident and Emergency'.

- 'To help and support the families of Barrow. To offer home visiting services for children with special needs'.
- 'We are strong with the no smoking cessation...reducing hospital admissions'.
- 'To provide training...to provide respite and support...at vulnerable times it is sometimes all that is needed'.
- 'To involve the community and improve life chances of young children'.
- To keep the community involved all the time and to keep the children safe and help the families'.
- 'To offer a supportive and enabling environment for people in the local community'.
- 'To work with the people from our community to enable them to choose how they want services to be delivered and what services they want delivered and to support their growth'.
- 'It's the taxpayers money, so who else but the community should have a say'.
- 'Developing or growing people, in their confidence and in their skills'.
- 'It is not about thinking we are the ones with all the answers. It is not about telling them but working together'.
- 'Listening to the community and going with what people want in the community'.
- 'Reaching those hard-to-reach families'.
- 'To offer quick support when it is needed, rather than three months down the line'.

In addition to this, Sure Start was seen by one member of staff as having a role in assisting and supporting other agencies in improving the environment to assist and support families in raising pre-school children.

A number of staff (5) also added comments about the flexible approach taken to meet the Sure Start aims and objectives, essentially fitting the aims and objectives around local needs, as identified through consultation with the community.

Question 15. Do you understand how your role fits in with the overall aims and objectives of Sure Start Barrow?

All members of staff interviewed said **yes (100%)**; they did understand how their role fitted in with the overall aims and objectives of Sure Start Barrow.

Question 16. Are you actively seeking other employment?

All 26 staff interviewed said **no (100%)**; they were not actively seeking other employment.

Question 17. How satisfied are you with the following?

a.) Salary

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
16 (61.5%)	10 (38.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

A comment about being locked into pay structures was made.

b.) Amount of Annual Leave

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
11 (42.3%)	13 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (7.7%)

More than one staff member commented that they do not often take time off because they like working so much.

c.) Flexibility of working hours

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
23 (88.5%)	1 (3.8%)	1 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.8%)

Appreciation was shown by some about being able to fit in working hours around family responsibilities and choose own working hours. For the person who was unsure this was because it was felt that it could be difficult to take time off.

d.) Own level of input into decision making within Sure Start

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
18 (69.2%)	7 (26.9%)	1 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

One staff member commented that meetings are always held to find out staff members' views when big changes are due to occur. Another described how everyone gets involved in the decision-making.

e.) Opportunity for professional development

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
16 (61.5%)	8 (30.8%)	1 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.8%)

Some staff commented upon their recent training opportunities, with specific opportunities available for developing role-related skills.

Some of those staff members who indicated they were either 'not sure' or 'fairly satisfied' with the opportunities for professional development commented that courses were sometimes inaccessible because of the geographical location of Barrow-in-Furness.

f.) Security of employment

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
10 (38.5%)	9 (34.6%)	7 (26.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Those who were either 'not sure' or 'fairly satisfied' about the security of their employment either commented upon the length of their fixed term contracts or expressed concerns about the future of Sure Start (both for them and for the community), acknowledging the time-limited budget.

g.) General guidance and managerial direction from Sure Start

Barrow

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not sure	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
18 (69.2%)	8 (30.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

The Sure Start manager was praised by some for being very supportive and letting people grow. Through trust, staff members described feeling good professionally. A need was felt by a small proportion of staff for more guidance and direction from management.

Figure 1 illustrates all the information received from question 11. As can be seen, all ratings given were 'very satisfied', 'fairly satisfied' or 'not sure'. No members of staff felt 'fairly dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' on any of the items enquired about.

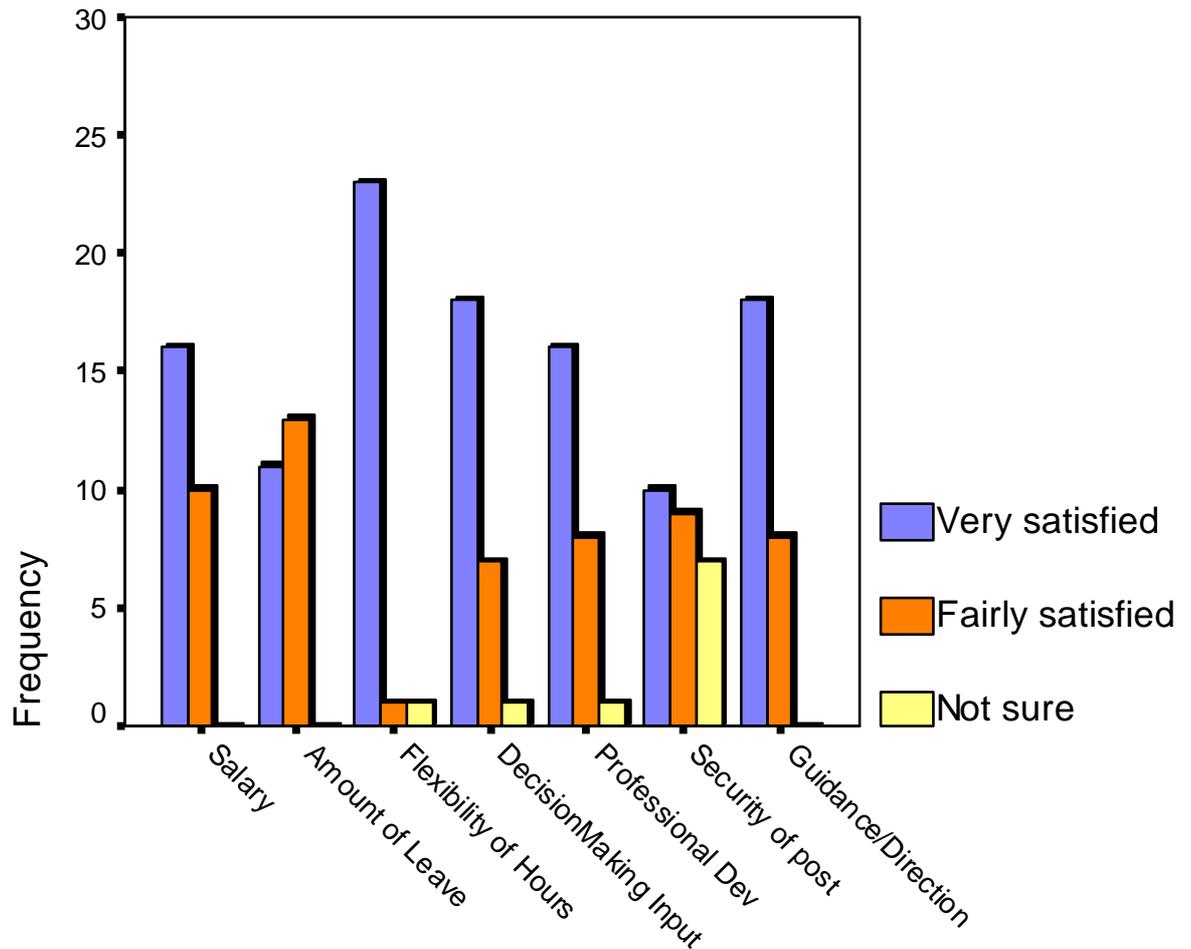


Figure 1. Staff ratings of levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with different aspects of their work

Section 1d: Open-ended questions

Questions 18-20 were open-ended, exploratory questions in that a list was not given for them to choose their answers from.

Question 18. What are the best things about working for Sure Start?

Most staff members gave more than one response. Responses were again very positive. The following categories (which are closely linked to each other) could be drawn from the responses:

The team

- Team work (5)
- Everyone getting on (2)
- The people (2)
- The positive, enthusiastic approach of the staff and people (2)
- The non-hierarchical nature that you can get elsewhere (2)
- Multi-agency working
- Diversity of the team

- Pooling of resources
- No one being protective of their role

The work

- Making and seeing the difference to the lives of local families and community- rewarding work (10)
- Enjoying the work- fun and interesting (8)
- Giving and receiving of support (4)
- Working/being involved with the community (2)
- Helping families with special needs
- Working with children

The nature of the work

- The flexibility (6)
- Resources and freedom to try new things if you have an idea and then seeing it work in practice. If it doesn't work it doesn't matter (3).
- Working on own initiative (3)
- The speed at which things get done (2)
- Things actually getting done
- Every day being different
- Rather than being guided by what has been shown to be 'best-practice', deciding yourself what constitutes best practice and exploring best practice
- The 'can do' approach, fitting goals around what people ask for
- Freedom to use all personal gifts
- How much goes on in Sure Start

The opportunities

- Training (3)
- Always learning something new
- Opportunities
- Making it easier to work when you have children

The place and working environment

- The relaxed, friendly, non-threatening and cooperative environment (4)
- Welcoming, friendly, relaxed people and place (3)
- The Centre
- The atmosphere
- It is child-friendly

The management

- Feeling valued and trusted (2)
- A manager that gives you space
- A manager that trusts that you will do the job right
- Employers who are good to work for
- They nurture you like a family- going home feeling like you have had a worthwhile day at work and feeling respected.

Question 19. What are the strengths of Sure Start Barrow?

Again, most staff members gave more than one response. There was a great deal of overlap and similarity between 'the best things about working for Sure start' (Q18) and the 'strengths of Sure Start' (Q19). The following categories (which are closely linked to each other) could also be drawn from the responses:

The team

- The team work...working together ('it is very special') ('Sure Start has become like a surrogate family') (9)
- Commitment of workers (2)
- Diversity of the team (2)
- The working relationships
- A good team of people who are parents themselves
- A lot of the workers live in the community, giving them insight in to what the community wants
- The non-hierarchy, equal status of staff, including the manager who is not behind closed doors (2)
- Staff who aren't precious about their role and are flexible about their work, letting others get involved in what they do (2)
- Information is passed on and shared (2)
- The willingness to give 100%

Listening to the community and keeping focus

- Working closely with and listening to the community about what they want rather than telling them what they need/ bottom-up approach (6)
- Not losing sight of why we are here (1)
- The ability to relate to people
- The relationship they have with the community

The community

- It works and the community have faith
- Community trust
- Enthusiasm of parents
- The people, who are historically resilient

The nature of the work

- The flexibility (2)
- Being so close to the ground
- Responsiveness
- The way it changes how people parent
- Being prepared to change
- Feeling appreciated
- The aims and objectives...because they are reachable
- Getting things done

The opportunities

- The money

The place and working environment

- Community centres offering everything in one place

Question 20. What could be improved about Sure Start Barrow?

Four members of staff could not think of anything they thought could be improved. The main responses of those who did were as follows:

- 34.6% said communication (9)
- 19.2 % said longer term funding for Sure Start (rather than it tapering down and then finishing) and more funding (5)

Other responses included:

- Organisation
- Office layout (difficult to concentrate at times)
- Someone to answer the phone
- More bureaucratic management...increase in formal management systems, including annual reviews of job descriptions
- Increasing poor uptake in certain areas, discovering what the community in those areas wants to access
- Reaching more hard-to-reach families
- More publicity about Sure Start
- Distributing support equally across all wards
- Distributing support more equally across families
- To expand to include more geographical area
- Expanding the age range, to officially include children over 4
- Other services (health, education, social services) working more proactively with Sure Start
- Bigger centre, with a hall

Many staff members who identified that communication could be improved also acknowledged that the size of the team means that it is difficult to know what everyone else is doing. It was acknowledged that sometimes information is not passed on to the relevant people and some felt this to be quite a problem at times. Others felt that everyone is aware about the problems with communication and makes efforts to try to communicate with relevant others as much as necessary. In contrast, a few staff members felt communication to be good.

Section 2. Processes of communication

Question 21-28 are concerned with finding out about:

- individual staff views about communication processes and the quality of communication, both within Sure Start, with different generic services (if relevant) and with the community as a whole
- support received from line managers
- regular sharing of information
- how informed staff members are about the processes and operations within Sure Start Barrow
- how satisfied staff members are with the level and processes of communication
- training and skill updating opportunities

Question 21. How do you communicate with the generic services, people within Sure start Barrow and the community at large?

Generic services

It was clear that some staff had more contact with generic services than others. There was evidence of effective liaison with generic agencies by specific service managers, with staff members maintaining contacts and working relationships with people from previous positions outside of Sure Start, which led to raised levels of awareness about Sure Start. Examples of joint working in general and on specific projects were provided and a feeling of 'mutual respect' was described. Some staff members attend generic service team meetings and other meetings with other generic services were in the process of being set up.

For those whose work was not allied to any key agency there was still knowledge of the role of different generic agencies and awareness of the communication processes with those agencies. Information, which is brought to smaller team meetings by specific service managers, informs other staff of information regarding outside agencies. Many staff described contacting other services when needed, essentially striving to pool knowledge and resources. Contact was mainly direct and two-way, through phone calls and face-to-face contact, but also through letters and email. Examples were provided of individuals networking and working to raise awareness (for example, visiting schools). Information packs and newsletters are also sent out to health professionals and other relevant parties.

Information sharing processes with other services, especially when children exceed the age for Sure Start services, were also evident.

Staff within Sure Start Barrow

The main method of communication was through face-to-face contact (this is facilitated for most staff due to being based in one large, open-plan office) or by phone. Weekly team meetings were also seen as a main, regular channel of communication, with most staff members in attendance. Procedures were in place for informing those who do not attend team meetings (either because

they work part-time or for other reasons) about information discussed. Some members of staff described taking turns to attend the team meetings.

It was noted by some that team meetings do not always give enough time to discuss all the relevant issues. Smaller team meetings (individual services) and meetings with individuals were also described as both regular and useful.

Other means of communication were described:

- Information Board, email, pigeon holes, message books, phone calls, supervision

A selection of comments about the communication processes are as follows:

- 'everyone is eager to listen'
- 'there are no barriers'

Away Days were valued by some as an opportunity for everyone to get together, to look into issues more in depth and for team building exercises.

The community at large

A range of different strategies are used for communicating with the Barrow community. They include the following:

- Via the nurseries and schools - information is left at local nurseries and taster sessions are held to encourage and raise awareness of available services
- Via home visiting - Community Support Team, Portage Team, Speech and Language Team, Occupational Therapy Team. Includes contact by telephone or appointment letters
- Via the centres - circulation of information including flyers and at activities and groups
- Via training
- Via promotional days and taster sessions
- Via mainstream services
- Via the partnership board meetings (some parents attend the board meetings)

Ongoing methods of communication included the use of the media, newsletters, information packs, posters and flyers. The Sure Start T-shirts are also seen as a method of communicating with the community. Communication with the community was also seen to be facilitated by the fact that many staff are local members of the community. Processes for community consultation and constant internal evaluation of activities and services were set up for ongoing service improvement to meet the needs of the community.

Although examples were given of ongoing communication with those who are already accessing Sure Start services, a need was identified by some for finding out more about the views of those families who do not access Sure Start services.

Question 22. Do you have a line manager?

All members of staff have a line manager/supervisor and know who this is.

Question 23. If YES, are they within or external to Sure Start Barrow and how often do you speak to them/report to them?

Most respondents received supervision from their line manager or program manager or both. Some staff members listed more than one source of supervision from within Sure Start, including supervision with the program manager and weekly or fortnightly meetings within services such as the Speech and Language team and the Portage team. These meetings were valued for being a time to discuss families, future training, discuss ideas and concerns. Weekly team meetings were also mentioned by some as a form of supervision, in that you can take along any concerns.

Some staff described patterns of supervision, which varied in time periods (including weekly, fortnightly, monthly, six weekly and three monthly). Many staff members described informal processes of supervision in addition to formal ones, with some describing supervision on a needs basis often facilitated by sharing an office with line managers and the program manager. On the whole, line managers/supervisors were described as very approachable and accessible.

A small number of staff members receive supervision from external sources (some in addition to internal supervision). For some this support was on a monthly basis. A concern was expressed by a small number of staff who felt that support from outside agencies (where services are linked to key agencies) was lacking somewhat.

Question 24. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the support from your line manager/supervisor with regard to your Sure Start work?

80.8% (21) were '**very satisfied**' with support received and **19.2% (5)** were '**fairly satisfied**'. No one was dissatisfied with the support received. One member of staff who felt 'fairly satisfied' with the support received from line managers/supervisors was referring to support received external to Sure Start, whilst two others were referring to support received from within Sure Start. Another two members of staff were referring to both forms of support. Generally, positive comments were received about supervision received from within Sure Start, although it was noted that sometimes the program manager could be quite difficult to get hold of and supervision could be overridden by other things. The Speech and Language Therapist was described by more than one member of staff as being extremely good to work for 'always making the time'.

Question 25. Who do you share information with on a regular basis?

Staff tended to share information with their immediate line manager or supervisor and appropriate colleagues within their specific team and outside the team (within the boundaries of confidentiality). Others, who did not form

part of a smaller team, tended to share information with anyone needed. Many staff felt (or hoped) they shared information with everybody. Information is shared with the larger generic team at the weekly team meetings. It was clear from many responses that Sure Start staff also shared information with other relevant people, external to Sure Start (for example, health visitors).

Question 26. How are you informed about the processes and operations (how things work or are planned) within Sure Start Barrow?

Team meetings were felt to be a good venue to share information and views by the majority of staff members. The general feeling was that the time spent at team meetings was time well spent. Many staff members described the importance of being kept informed and informing others. Information from team meetings is written down for staff members to read if absent. Those staff members who form smaller teams within Sure Start (for example, Portage) described the smaller team meetings as a way of finding out about how things are working or being planned.

Other ways of being informed about the processes and operations were described:

- Information Board, every day face-to-face contact, word-of-mouth, e-mail, pigeon holes, message books, phone calls, supervision, away days, memos

Question 27. In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the level and processes of communication within Sure Start Barrow?

30.8% (8) were ‘**very satisfied**’ and **61.5% (16)** were ‘**fairly satisfied**’. **7.7% (2)** were ‘**not sure**’. Although some members of staff felt ‘very satisfied’ with the level and processes of communication within Sure start Barrow, a need for better channels of communication between members of staff was expressed by some. It was felt that, although the important things are shared, everyone needs to make a personal effort to keep others up to date with the day-to-day information that some miss, especially those who work part-time or work away from the main office. Communication was described by some as being understandably difficult at times, recognised partly as resulting from the size of the team and also due to staff being busy. It was noted once that members of staff could find it difficult to communicate when angry and upset and confrontation is generally avoided. Communication was identified as an area that has improved greatly over time but it was felt by some that there is a lot of room for improvement.

Question 28. Are there ways to update or develop your skills, for example by getting relevant training?

Staff expressed enthusiasm about learning new things and felt they were encouraged to undertake relevant training, being informed about training opportunities by both the program manager and other managers. Most staff described recent training undertaken and courses they hoped to do in the future. Staff members gave examples of when their skills and knowledge were not as developed or updated as they could be with respect to certain tasks

and felt colleagues shared their knowledge and skills with them. In general, individuals felt there were many ways to update and develop their skills, with new funded opportunities (both within and external to Sure Start) arising over time: 'there is always scope for training', 'they are really good like that...whatever you are going for, they will try to help you' and 'in that respect they are brilliant, they really are'. This was felt by some to contrast their previous experience of opportunities for continuing professional development in generic services. Training was described as being arranged in response to an identified need ('I am very lucky. I only have to identify something I really need and it happens and I've never known it not'). As mentioned previously, it was noted by some that certain training opportunities have been inaccessible because of the location of Barrow, but ways of addressing the problem were being discussed.

Section 3. Processes of service delivery

This section is about the processes of service delivery within Sure Start Barrow. Five members of staff who were not involved in service delivery did not answer these questions.

Question 29. How is your service accessed? Who receives the referrals?

Families can initially access Sure Start services either because they hear about what is on offer through word-of-mouth or see advertisements or because they are encouraged to go along by other agencies.

Some services within Sure Start do not receive referrals, with groups being open to anyone living in the area with Sure Start aged children.

Referrals are sometimes received directly from generic services (for example, from Health Visitors). The various agencies within Sure Start usually receive their referrals as a result of needs being identified through the initial home visit to a family by the Family Support Co-ordinator or the Family Support Worker (which happens within 5 working days depending on urgency, following completion of the Sure Start enquiry form or request by the family on the registration form). Referrals to certain services are also received from other Sure Start workers, for example it may be identified that a child at a group may benefit from support from Portage. Databases are also used to identify families with children of appropriate age for different groups (for example, Chatterbox) and invitations are sent out. Various training opportunities are reportedly accessed by people approaching Sure Start, without any need for advertising.

Publicity, promotion and awareness-raising were identified as important and ongoing for increasing and maintaining access to services, both with the community and with generic services.

The referrals are either received by anyone in Sure Start who answers the phone in the office and then sent in the appropriate direction to a service or by key people in the different services within Sure Start.

Question 30. Do you have a process for determining whether the referral is appropriate to your service?

The Family Support Co-ordinator and the Family Support Worker have criteria to aid them in identifying needs and assessing which service would be most appropriate when they do the initial home visit. It was noted that the criteria work as a guide only and are quite open and flexible, to ensure that individuals do not 'slip through the net'. Some members of staff described how they would discuss the referral with the referrer (internal or external), which would be followed by an initial visit to see whether the service is appropriate for the family and their needs. A good level of understanding and awareness of the different services within Sure Start by outside agencies was identified, with referrals usually being appropriate. Emphasis was placed by some on the importance of families playing a large role in decision-making processes

about what would be appropriate. In addition, it was noted that parents are offered as many options as possible.

Others felt that the processes for determining whether referrals are appropriate were outside the remit of their role. Other staff members usually service co-ordinators made the decisions.

It was noted again that for some activities, such as some of the Speech and Language groups, access is for anyone living in the area with Sure Start aged children.

Question 31. How are follow-up appointments offered?

For some services (such as Portage) patterns of visiting are arranged during the initial visit depending on need. Time scales for follow-up appointments depend on the service being accessed. Also, after initial visits with some families a follow-up appointment is not appropriate or necessary (for example, if they needed safety equipment only). It was emphasised by staff that the appointments are arranged to fit around each family's schedule, with a regular, consistent time set aside. For those services where contact with a family is less frequent (for example, monthly), letters are sent out to remind families about further, follow-up appointments. In addition to this, during the assessment period, a time period is identified by some services, whereby the family knows when the input will be reflected upon and reviewed by the head of the service. It was explained that this gives the family a specific time to let the staff know how they feel about the service and whether they would like continued input. This review period was emphasised by some as being flexible, so re-assessment can be brought forward if deemed necessary by the family or by the worker. Also, support was identified by most as continuing until no longer identified as being needed, by either the family or the worker. Importance was placed on parents actively participating in the support; with some services have an ultimate aim of providing the help when it is needed and then reducing or withdrawing that help when no longer required.

Follow-up appointments were not relevant to some staff members, for example those who run groups because sessions run for a number of set weeks. It was noted by some of the staff members who facilitate groups that follow-up appointments could be arranged with particular specialists, if concerns are raised by parents during any of the group sessions. In addition, staff members facilitating groups noted that families are provided with information about a range of other activities going on within Sure Start.

Question 32. How much chance is there for opportunistic care?

Many staff described how the activities and groups are open to anyone and that people can come into the centres and ask what is going on at different times. Only a few activities and groups require the parents to pre-book.

The benefits of having an accessible multi-agency team available for a range of services, skills and support for families, when needed, were acknowledged.

Staff also felt they were equally responsive to immediate need when it was presented ('we never turn anyone away really, if they are in need'). When input is identified as being needed urgently discussions occur within the team about which service would be most appropriate. It was noted that usually, in this situation, the Community Support Team would visit the family and assess the needs, deciding which service would be most appropriate. Some staff members also identified that having short waiting lists assists in the provision of opportunistic care.

Question 33. How is your service organised? What directs or determines the strategies used for your service?

Organisation of services generally involved different members of staff within a service having different responsibilities and carrying out different roles. All staff members were clear about their roles within Sure Start (see Question 1).

Groups (and some one-to-one work) were described as usually following set, pre-organised plans and guidelines, so that services are structured and follow themes. The plans and guidelines are amended depending on feedback from parents and children and flexible enough to allow staff the scope to deviate from and adapt, if wished, (generally to suit the needs of the specific group or family). Managers or co-ordinators of services provide guidance and support to other workers, directing the strategies used in one-to-one work.

Many members of staff placed emphasis on the parents and children directing and determining the strategies used. Ongoing community-consultation was seen as key in this process, reflecting a client-centred approach to service delivery. In addition, services were described as being directed at filling gaps in service provision.

Colleagues in service organisation roles (such as the Speech and Language Therapist) were described as being very parent-led, encouraging parents to be children-led. The project manager was also praised for giving staff the freedom to determine their own strategies used for services.

Those with responsibilities for training (of staff, other professionals and parents) indicated that training was determined partly by what has been shown to be effective and efficient elsewhere and partly through local adaptation over time. Other training involved working jointly with other agencies following pre-determined training packages.

Question 34. Do you feel you experience ongoing professional and personal development required for service delivery?

Although the question referred to professional and personal development required for specific service delivery, some staff felt that they had already answered it in their responses to Question 28. All members of staff felt there were opportunities for professional and personal development. One member of staff felt that, although they could not fault what they had already received, there could be more opportunities. Another member of staff mentioned they

could do with more time to read and do research, which they felt was difficult in an office where there are many distractions. Some staff members felt it was their own responsibility to find the appropriate training for maintaining and updating their skills.

Section 4. Service integration

Question 35.

Staff members were asked about their thoughts on how they see the different agencies working together and whether they thought they all work together easily and effectively to provide a multi-agency service.

Those who did comment upon how they see different agencies working together within Sure Start felt they worked well together. This was further reflected in Question 19, with 'the team' being identified by many as one of the strengths of Sure Start. The open plan office was mentioned again as facilitating effective team working. The majority of staff members who did feel able to answer this question generally acknowledged that they have their own specific skills, but identified themselves as members of a generic Sure Start team ('we belong to Sure Start first and foremost...we just happen to have different roles. We are not precious about labels'). They referred to outside agencies and queried whether they work easily and effectively together to provide a service.

Some members of staff felt that agencies worked well together and it was acknowledged that improvements in multi-agency working had been seen. A number of staff felt this was facilitated by a number of Sure Start workers who were representatives from different agencies (for example, a health visitor and a midwife). Some agencies had begun to come into Sure Start to provide training. A number of staff felt that Sure Start has highlighted for other agencies (particularly Health) how effective professionals can be when they work together in different combinations within the community. Many staff members expressed enthusiasm for working alongside other agencies.

Others members of staff felt there were some major problems and barriers to working with other agencies, such as a lack of communication and awareness. A concern was raised about people outside Sure Start sometimes being precious about their roles and resisting the multi-agency approach to working. Some felt the problems stemmed from a management level, with staff not being given the time or support to attend meetings, with other responsibilities taking precedent. The issue of information sharing was identified as a possible problem for the future of multi-agency working.

Health

Many staff members felt that they have strong links and good working relationships with various health service workers, particularly health visitors. Work with health visitors was felt to be a model of good practice for other workers from generic services. The benefits of being based in the same building were noted. Staff members described being invited to monthly meetings and gave examples of information sharing. The community Speech Therapist was also mentioned for her openness to work alongside Sure Start staff and share ideas and information.

Social Services

Although some members of staff felt they worked well with Social Services and working relationships had become much better, others felt that a lot of work still needed to be done to develop good working relationships with Social Workers. One member of staff felt that the problems in working with Social Services were caused by the difference in ways of working. Key members of staff were commended for their hard work in building links with Social Services.

Education

Some acknowledged closer working with education with new initiatives starting up in nurseries and schools. Some schools were felt to be very open to new ways of working, seeing Sure Start as an asset to them. However a misunderstanding and mistrust of Sure Start workers by some core frontline staff was felt to be a barrier at times. Some staff members expressed how keen they were to share their ideas with people in education for the benefit of the children and the parents. Examples of active awareness-raising of Sure Start within schools and nurseries were given.

Section 5. Health, Safety and Security

Question 36. How is the safety and security of yourself, your colleagues and the service users within Sure Start Barrow maintained? Can you give examples?

In general staff felt that safety and security procedures in the office and community centres were good. The following list summarises staff responses about how the safety and security of staff members and service users is maintained:

- Health and Safety Officer (3)
- Some staff have undertaken Health and Safety, First Aid, Fire Warden and Violence and Aggression courses (7)
- Advanced training for Community Support Workers, which raises awareness of important issues and health and safety procedures for those wishing to work with families (1)
- Burglar alarm and fire alarm, with tests (2)
- Awareness by staff of fire exits (2)
- CCTV cameras outside centre (1)
- First Aid boxes in the office (1)
- Health and Safety Policies (2)
- Child Safety Policy/ Child Protection Policy, which includes anyone working with children having to have full police clearance (2)
- Risk assessments (6)
- Rape alarms for those who work late (1)
- Signing-in book (in the event of a fire) (1)
- Keeping any information about families confidential (2)
- Keeping the office and buildings secure (1)

It was emphasised, by many staff, that certain health and safety issues have been highlighted within Sure Start recently and that some policies and procedures to maintain health and safety of staff, in particular, are under review and development.

Home visits

Many of the comments received were about those who are lone workers. Responses varied greatly. On the one hand, some staff felt that policies were in place and they were followed through. Two members of staff felt that although a lone worker policy was still in the process of being developed, many of the procedures to be included are already happening. On the other hand, others mentioned the presence of a lone worker policy, whereby people phone in at the end of a visit, for example, but it was not felt that this was implemented. Others felt that no procedures were in place at all and expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of a formal system.

Some members of staff, usually those with management responsibilities, explained that initial visits are done in pairs and that staff would not be expected to go into a home for the first time alone. In other services, it was

noted that some workers do go out on initial visits alone. Others commented that, although some staff members do go on initial home visits alone, the referrer often gives details if there are any risks and in such a situation the member of staff would be encouraged to go with someone else (the lone workers confirmed this). Two members of staff reported that the amount of information on referrals has increased, which leads to a better awareness of the issues involved with each family prior to initial visits. It was noted that, if staff members express feelings of uneasiness about any aspect of a home visit or if there were any concerns about a family, then adjustments are made to the visit arrangements to accommodate this. One member of staff noted that Community Support Workers are encouraged to bring families to Sure Start activities. Four staff members reported that all lone workers have a mobile phone each (whether their own or issued one through work). Another member of staff said that everything is done to ensure that everyone working for Sure Start is in a safe and controlled environment.

Other staff, although not aware of specific safety procedures with regard to home visits, generally felt they would be informed if there were any concerns with a particular family, prior to any visit. Staff members mentioned they may verbally say where they are going and record it on the 'in' and 'out' board in the office ('to do a home visit'), but they would not actually say where (for confidentiality reasons) or what time they would be back. On discussing this in the interview, it was noted to be an area one member of staff felt they should discuss with their supervisor. Others described how names and addresses of those being visited are recorded, but they did not know who was responsible for ringing and checking whether you are safe. Two members of staff noted that, if they do a home visit towards the end of the day and go home straight afterwards, then no one knows whether they are safe or not ('you sometimes wonder whether you would be missed'). It was felt that other members of staff might ring people to check if they hadn't seen them by the end of the day, but no formal procedures were in place ('nothing is in operation at the minute'). Some members of the Speech and Language team described how through recent discussions in their team meetings they have developed clearer procedures for maintaining the safety of their co-workers, where individuals are given the responsibility for monitoring the movements of those doing home visits. This was reported as working quite well.

Many staff felt that, although changes had been made, work needed to be done in this area to improve the safety of Sure Start staff. It was explained by some that the issue has been brought up in recent team meetings and new guidelines are being discussed which may involve staff members who do home visits ringing the office when they leave a family, for example.

[Question 37. Do you have any concerns about any aspect of health and safety at Sure Start Barrow?](#)

Staff safety

Although the above comments suggest that staff are aware of some procedures for maintaining the safety of those doing home visits and that policies and guidelines are in place or under review, many staff remained

concerned about their colleagues (and in some cases themselves) doing home visits (11). Concern was particularly expressed for those who do initial home visits alone, with some staff worrying about whether other colleagues were safe. It was noted that members of staff doing home visits do not necessarily come into the office very often and, therefore, colleagues are unaware of whether they have left a home visit safely. In addition to this, some staff felt that everyone, including Community Support Workers should have mobiles provided, if needed (although it should be noted that other members of staff said this happens). One member of staff felt the lone workers should all be issued with personal alarms (it was noted by two other members of staff that this was already being considered). Those working on their own did not express the same level of concern as their colleagues. One member of staff felt a need for all staff to undergo violence and aggression training, expressing a concern particularly for Community Support Workers.

Risk Assessments

One member of staff felt that risk assessments, in all areas, needed to be more thorough.

Smoking

A concern was raised about the location of the designated smoking area in Burlington House, with staff members (non-smokers) having to inhale cigarette smoke as they enter the building. The point was also raised about staff smoking and the role Sure Start has in encouraging them to give up.

Lighting

A concern was raised about a lack of lighting at the back entrance of Burlington House (the Burlington Street entrance), with staff members having to walk in the dark to their car.

Greengate Centre

A concern was raised about the safety of service users on busy days- open days, for example- when too many people have been in the building at one time. It was noted that this issue has been discussed and meetings held.

Condition of venues for activities

It was noted that some of the venues for activities are not ideal for children (the example of a lack of cleanliness was given), with staff having to be very aware of safety issues.

Staff health

Two members of staff felt there was a lot of sickness amongst staff. It was noted that some people who are ill still continue to come to work, out of commitment. It was noted that people work so hard and give so much to the job that their own health suffers (emotional and physical). The main concern was that staff could only do so much before 'something has to give'. The example of staff eating their lunch over their desks without having a break was provided. A need was expressed for more time out for away days, providing staff with the time to 'recharge batteries' and 'cope with stresses'.

Section 6. Partnership arrangements/sustainability

Question 38. To what extent do you think the partnership board is effective?

12 members of staff either had very little knowledge about the partnership board and were not really sure of its remit or felt they had not had enough contact with the board to be able to answer this question. It was noted that the minutes are available to read, but that they are 'really long'.

Comments from those who do have an awareness and understanding of the board (9 non-board members and 5 members/attendees of board meetings) included:

- 'I think it is very good really'.
- 'It is very effective. We really can't do a lot at all without the partnership approval'.
- 'It must be because Sure Start is still running and it is running well. I think they make good decisions on where money is spent and what projects are approved'.
- 'The very fact that it has kept together shows there has been a lot of interest from organisations that Sure Start should work with'.
- 'It seems to be very supportive of what we are doing'.
- 'There are parents on the board, that represent the different wards and they have an input into the money spent in different areas'.
- 'I think it is good that different agencies and services are represented'.
- 'It is a good place to get your views across especially to other service providers'.
- 'There are many on the board who are very vocal and have apposite input and influence. They bring strengths to the board because of their knowledge and probably safeguard the programme in a lot of ways by bringing in different perspectives'.
- 'It's not very effective- we wouldn't really notice if it wasn't there'.

Question 39. Could the partnership board operate in a better way?

Only 8 members of staff felt qualified to answer this question. 2 felt that the board could not operate in a better way ('not that I'm aware of'). Many of the comments received reflected a wish for more input from parents on the board.

- 'we keep trying to get more parents on board'.
- 'I'd like to see more parents on the board'.
- 'We need more parent reps...to make sure the community is represented'.
- 'I do think it is really important to have people from the community on the board so they can have a say about where the money is spent'.

A concern was raised about the board being intimidating for parents. One member of staff added that the dialogue at meetings could be full of jargon. It was noted that training has taken place and is due to take place again for

parents attending the board meetings. The reason for the difficulties of parental involvement on the partnership board was felt by one member of staff to reflect the level of involvement they have on the ground in the programme, with parents feeling they have plenty of involvement in the running of the organisation. The tendency for parents to become very involved in Sure Start, usually doing training and then going on to do work for them, means that they are not appropriate candidates. In addition to this, it was acknowledged by the same member of staff that the partnership board understands that 'people often find it easier to express what they want and get what they want by coming directly to people who work for Sure Start'.

Other comments reflected a wish for better attendance by some agencies:

- 'How well it works depends on how many people turn up'.
- 'There is a lack of input from Social Services'.
- 'Some of the people don't go...like heads of Social Services. I think they should all be involved and turn up'.
- 'Feel particularly let down by education- they don't attend'.

Question 40. To what extent do you feel that Sure Start Barrow is meeting its aims and objectives now?

All staff felt that Sure Start Barrow was meeting its aims and objectives. It was felt that staff were all working towards the national and local targets. They generally felt that Sure Start was doing very well indeed and this was reinforced for them through the positive feedback from parents and the fact that more families are being reached. The commissioning officer was acknowledged for always keeping staff informed about the progress of the programme in relation to the aims and objectives.

Question 41. To what extent do you feel Sure Start Barrow will be able to meet its aims and objectives in the future?

Many staff felt (or hoped) that Sure Start would be able to meet its aims and objectives if they continued as they were doing. It was acknowledged by some staff that there is always room for improvement and that, by constantly identifying weak areas and remaining focussed, improvements would be seen.

It was noted that staff are very flexible in their approach to meeting the aims and objectives and that, if they continually look for new ways of meeting the targets, the service can only improve ('we are always finding new ways of reaching people and finding new ways of working. We are changing the way we work'). It was acknowledged by some staff that different ideas were always being proposed and staff members hoped the programme would expand. 3 members of staff described how the programme is always looking into how they can make things sustainable, rather than being complacent. One member of staff noted that the ability of Sure Start to meet the aims and objectives in the future would be strengthened by the manager of the trailblazer now also managing the 5th Wave programme in the area.

Two members of staff felt that the increase in the number of staff would help Sure Start meet their targets. Some staff felt it depended upon people continuing to work together as a team. The relationship of Sure Start with the community was seen, by some, as the key to meeting the aims and objectives, with an emphasis placed on being community-led ('we are part of the community and we haven't set ourselves aside from them' and 'If we continue listening to what people would actually like and support them to achieve what they want we should do alright'). One member of staff felt that working with other agencies, which have common goals, made targets more achievable. In addition, it was felt that funding would impact on whether they could meet the aims and objectives.

One member of staff said that it was difficult to measure and quantify information to show that targets are being achieved.

Question 42. How far can you contribute to ensuring that your service achieves sustainability?

The majority of staff felt that, if they continued to provide a high quality service (responding proactively to feedback from parents), they would influence whether services achieved sustainability. Other staff felt that proving the effectiveness of their particular service would strengthen the case for the service being maintained.

The majority of staff described how they were working to constantly measure and evaluate their service. Examples were provided of funding being secured for certain projects from outside agencies and emphasis was placed on supporting the development of community businesses. Others gave examples of working to integrate Sure Start workers into mainstream services, providing them with the experiences needed to hopefully go on to be employed directly by those services. It was acknowledged that more still needed to be done to show that Sure Start is an effective way of working. Children's Centres were mentioned by some as the direction in which things will be going and staff felt they were well placed for helping in this area of development. One member of staff described presenting their progress in relation to the aims and objectives at a sustainability group in Cumbria.

It was clear that some staff see themselves as having a crucial role in mainstreaming services and working towards sustainability. Other staff felt their role in sustaining services was limited, but some felt that, through training others, awareness and knowledge would be raised.

Question 43. What is your vision for the future of Sure Start Barrow?

The following list represents comments from all interviewees:

- That it carries on, going from strength to strength (16).
- Continuing to expand and reach more people (7).
- Self-sufficient and self-sustained (4).
- Supporting the community to run Sure Start (3).

- A reinvigorated, strong and healthy community, with every child having the best start in life (3).
- Main services taking on board the emphasis Sure Start places on parents and families (2).
- Mainstreaming of services (2).
- Training more parents (2).
- Working more with other agencies (1) in a proactive rather than reactive way, information sharing (1).
- Geographically organised delivery of services (1).
- Breaking the cycle of deprivation (1).
- That it becomes a charitable trust (1).

Question 44. What challenges do you think Sure Start Barrow will face in the future?

Challenges identified by staff were:

- Funding (including concerns about a change in government) (15)
- Multi-agency working (5)
- Mainstreaming and sustainability (4).
- Getting main services to listen to the people and work flexibly, accepting established best practice (3).
- Integrating the two Sure Start teams (2).
- To be better- remembering that Sure Start can always improve (2).
- Giving people the confidence to know they can run Sure Start (1).
- Guarding against becoming an institution (1).
- Tackling stigma (1).
- Developing and changing to people's needs (1).
- Coping with the expanding organisation (1).
- Getting new projects off the ground (1).
- Maintaining enthusiasm (1).
- Addressing problems currently avoided and sidelined (e.g. emotional health of staff) (1).

Question 45. Where do you see Sure Start Barrow being in 5 years time?

A range of responses was received to this question. Some staff members felt that Sure Start, as they knew it, would be 'coming to an end'. A dynamic, vibrant team was envisaged with more people on board having completed training. Some felt that in 5 years time preparations for transition and planning for the future would be underway (for the individual and for the community). Certain services were predicted as becoming separate, with their own funding, but still under the Sure Start umbrella. Some staff were concerned about some services not being able to secure funding and thus not surviving. Others mentioned community businesses and some saw Sure Start Barrow as being a Children's Trust. By proving the effectiveness of Sure Start it was hoped by one member of staff that funding would be extended.

Other staff felt that Sure Start would still be working with families and children, but with some developments:

- Bigger and better (including more staff, larger age range and geographical coverage) (10).
- More centres (2).
- More input into statutory agencies (2).
- Involved with Children's Centres (2).
- Reduced stigma (1).
- Merged in with Early Years (1).
- Parents supporting each other (1).

It was again acknowledged that funding would be a determining factor on a number of the above developments.

Additional comments

Staff members were given the opportunity to add any further comments. Ten members of staff chose to add additional comments. The majority of responses reflected high levels of satisfaction with their work:

- 'working for Sure Start has been the best thing I've ever done'
- 'It has changed my life so much'
- 'I look forward to getting up and coming to work every day and I've never had that before'
- 'It is the nicest place I have ever worked'

Many staff showed appreciation for the opportunities Sure Start had provided them with and liked the emphasis on community consultation. The forward thinking nature of Sure Start was praised.

In addition to positive comments made earlier about the programme manager, individual members of staff were commended here for their ways of working (the Speech and Language Therapist, Occupational Therapist and Early Years Specialist), particularly for sharing their specialist skills with other workers so that more of the community can benefit.

Conclusions and recommendations

The main points arising from the staff interviews are grouped below under their appropriate headings - with recommendations shown in italics.

Roles

The information obtained through these staff interviews generally indicates a high level of satisfaction. The key findings are that:

- **overlap in roles** was regarded by all staff as adding value and interest to their work.
- all staff were either 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with their **posts**
- all interviewees felt that Sure Start Barrow was a **supportive and friendly place to work** (except one was not sure)
- all staff thought Sure Start Barrow has **clear aims and objectives** and could see how their role fits into the overall aims and objectives
- no one was looking for **alternative employment**
- it is clear that staff are **person-centred and community-driven**, working in new ways to fit the Sure Start targets, aims and objectives around the community rather than the other way round
- the majority of staff were also satisfied with:
 - their salary
 - the amount of annual leave they receive
 - flexibility of working hours
 - input into decision-making
 - opportunities for professional development
 - security of employment.

In general, the staff appear to form a close, strong team of dynamic, enthusiastic and positive individuals, working to develop an integrated and seamless service.

Communication

Team meetings were seen as the main and effective channel of communication for people working at Sure Start Barrow. **The open plan office** was felt by some to facilitate communication processes. However, communication was identified as an **area in need of improvement** by a number of staff.

It is recommended that Sure Start Barrow:

- *continually monitors the day-to-day communication processes between members of staff and periodically reviews how these processes can be improved, with particular regard to part-time staff and staff working away from the main office*
- *considers arranging more regular general meetings*
- *ensures that all staff have a personal copy of the newsletter*

Management

It is clear that staff have great respect for their manager who works to be seen and acts as an equal to other staff. The majority of staff felt satisfied with the general guidance and managerial direction, although some indicated a need

for more formal management systems to be in place - with more guidance and direction, particularly for new staff.

It is recommended that:

- *a system is put in place for more formally structured and timetabled reviews, including the regular reviewing of job descriptions.*
- *Sure Start management works to identify individual staff needs with respect to guidance and direction, to ultimately increase satisfaction amongst staff.*
- *consideration be given as to how new staff members can be supported more in the first few weeks of employment. Induction procedures may need to be reviewed to be more thorough and supportive.*

Liaising with other services

Good liaison was evident with generic agencies and good partnership working.

It is recommended that Sure Start Barrow:

- *continues to strive to maintain the existing good working partnerships with generic agencies to provide an integrated and seamless service to the public.*

Health and Safety Issues

Staff Health

Although staff members did not express concerns about **their own health**, concerns were raised about **illness and stress in colleagues**, due to a high level of commitment to their Sure Start work. Nearly half of all staff interviewed said there was **not enough time** to carry out the duties that are expected of them. In addition, some staff reported to **working over contracted hours**. Although staff did not express dissatisfaction with not having enough time for all duties expected and were generally happy to work extra hours, Sure Start should be aware of this and should seek to ensure that the emotional and physical well-being of staff is maintained.

It is recommended that Sure Start Barrow:

- *reviews staffing levels in the light of pressures on current employees. This is essential to maintain the emotional and physical health of staff.*
- *considers timetabling staff to answer the phones in the office (even for just a few, set hours a day) to give the remaining staff time to concentrate on their specific duties.*
- *considers providing somewhere quiet to work, which might allow some staff the time and space they need for professional development activities and might reduce the number of staff feeling they do not have enough time in their working day.*
- *considers the possibility of more regular away days.*
- *Reviews processes regularly to ensure efficient ways of working*
- *Makes time for 'health check-ins' at the start of team meetings to allow staff to express feelings openly.*

Lone Workers

There was a wide variation in awareness and understanding of the **lone worker policy**. A number of staff remain concerned about their colleagues doing home visits. It is essential that **health and safety policies** are in place to guide practice.

It is recommended that Sure Start Barrow:

- *develops a formal system for lone working, with clear guidelines and procedures for all lone workers to follow.*
- *generates thorough and ongoing training around lone working, based on any newly developed policies, and provides this for all staff*
- *monitors the use of the system, procedures and policies.*

Other Health and Safety Issues

A number of **other concerns** around risk assessments, smoking and street lighting should be addressed, to provide staff and the community with reassurance, security and better health.

It is recommended that Sure Start Barrow:

- *reviews risk assessment procedures.*
- *reconsiders the location of the designated smoking area in Burlington House and works to promote health behaviours in staff.*
- *considers the possibility of providing lighting by the Burlington Street entrance.*

Partnership Board

Many staff interviewed were unsure of the remit of the partnership board.

It is recommended that Sure Start Barrow:

- *Considers how to address this lack of awareness - in the spirit of openness and improved communication. Possible methods are to:*
 - *circulate the minutes*
 - *summarise the main points in the newsletter*
 - *give a presentation, overview and questions at an away day*

Sustainability

Sustainability appears to be **high on the agenda** for some staff at Sure Start Barrow, with some members of staff seeing themselves as having a crucial role in working towards sustainability. Examples of ongoing internal evaluation were also provided many members of staff, which is seen as excellent practice.

It is recommended that Sure Start Barrow:

- *encourages all staff to think about the role they have to play in achieving sustainability.*

Final Conclusion

Rather than re-iterate the above points in detail, the general conclusion which stands out is that **the staff at Sure Start Barrow are happy** - which determines that **the Sure Start functions very successfully**. There are still **some points in need of attention** or which would benefit from attention, but **the future for Sure Start Barrow is clearly very promising**.

Conclusions and recommendations

The main points arising from the staff interviews are grouped below under their appropriate headings - with recommendations shown in italics.

Roles

The information obtained through these staff interviews generally indicates a high level of satisfaction. The key findings are that:

- **overlap in roles** was regarded by all staff as adding value and interest to their work.
- all staff were either 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with their **posts**
- all interviewees felt that Sure Start Barrow was a **supportive and friendly place to work** (except one was not sure)
- all staff thought Sure Start Barrow has **clear aims and objectives** and could see how their role fits into the overall aims and objectives
- no one was looking for **alternative employment**
- it is clear that staff are **person-centred and community-driven**, working in new ways to fit the Sure Start targets, aims and objectives around the community rather than the other way round
- the majority of staff were also satisfied with:
 - their salary
 - the amount of annual leave they receive
 - flexibility of working hours
 - input into decision-making
 - opportunities for professional development
 - security of employment.

In general, the staff appear to form a close, strong team of dynamic, enthusiastic and positive individuals, working to develop an integrated and seamless service.

Communication

Team meetings were seen as the main and effective channel of communication for people working at Sure Start Barrow. **The open plan office** was felt by some to facilitate communication processes. However, communication was identified as an **area in need of improvement** by a number of staff.

It is recommended that Sure Start Barrow:

- *continually monitors the day-to-day communication processes between members of staff and periodically reviews how these processes can be improved, with particular regard to part-time staff and staff working away from the main office*
- *considers arranging more regular general meetings*
- *ensures that all staff have a personal copy of the newsletter*

Management

It is clear that staff have great respect for their manager who works to be seen and acts as an equal to other staff. The majority of staff felt satisfied with the general guidance and managerial direction, although some indicated a need for more formal management systems to be in place - with more guidance and direction, particularly for new staff.

It is recommended that:

- *a system is put in place for more formally structured and timetabled reviews, including the regular reviewing of job descriptions.*
- *Sure Start management works to identify individual staff needs with respect to guidance and direction, to ultimately increase satisfaction amongst staff.*
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