SureStart Local Programme for the East Evaluation 2005
Introduction

Carla Ward
I am a local parent and I have lived in the community all my life. Through SureStart I have been on courses one of which was the CARP (Community Applied Research Programme). When I finished the course I was asked by SureStart to do an evaluation on SureStart services with two other parents that completed the course.

Pamella Johnson
I am also a local parent. I have lived in this community for nearly three years. I was on the CARP course and when I finished the course I went to university. Then I was also asked by SureStart to do an evaluation on SureStart services.

Joanne Elias
I am usually a full time mum of 2 children aged 2 and 4. We moved to Dovecot about 7 years ago, shortly before a lot of the regeneration began in the area. SureStart has been a regular part of our lives for almost 18 months and we haven't looked back. Following my training on CARP, SureStart asked me to work with two other members of the course to complete an evaluation of SureStart services.
About SureStart

SureStart is a Government programme which “aims to achieve better outcomes for children, parents and communities by:

- Increasing the availability of childcare for all children
- Improving health, education and emotional development for young children
- Supporting parents as parents and in their aspirations towards employment.

This will be achieved by:

- Helping services develop in disadvantaged areas alongside financial help for parents to afford childcares
- Rolling out the principles driving the SureStart approach to all services for children and parents.”

Source: SSULeaflet 11/12/02 SureStart ©

Sure Start Local programme for the East

SureStart is divided into local programmes covering geographical areas of disadvantage to enable their aims to be met. Sure start Local programmes focus on families with children under 4 years old, so they will have better chances in school and life and therefore, hopefully, breaking the cycle of deprivation.

Dovecot’s local programme is officially called SureStart Local Programme for the East (referred to as SureStart from here on). It largely covers the L14 area known as Dovecot. At the time it was formed the number of 15 year olds outweighed the number of people aged 60+ and there were over 1000 children under 4 years old in this catchment area. It is typically a white, working class area with very few ethnic minority families. There is also little movement of families into or out of the area. (See Appendix 1 – Map)

The levels of disadvantage of the families in this area are higher than the Liverpool and UK averages. More than half of the residents are in receipt of benefits and there is a high level of male unemployment. For those who are working, they have lower annual incomes and largely unskilled and low paid jobs. Adult levels of literacy and numeracy are, on average, low and few adults take up training and education courses. There are four primary schools in the
area and two of those are in the process of merging onto a nearly built, single site. There is no secondary school so children aged 11 and over are having to travel to get to school. Children’s achievement of Key Stage 2 Level 4 in English, Maths and Science is, on average, lower than LEA (Local Education Authority) average. There is a higher level of lone parents in Dovecot than the Liverpool average. There is a higher level of poor dental health and many children in the area have asthma. The area also has high levels of crime with young people seen to be responsible for a high level of anti social behaviour. In fact in a survey of young people over 95% responded that hanging around on street corners and open spaces as a leisure activity. There is a belief for many residents that some areas are focal points for young people’s drug abuse and anti social behaviour.

Source: SureStart Local Programme for the East Delivery Plan
Sure Start for the East
Services 2005

Health

Baby Massage
Imagine
Bumps and Babes
Weany Tots
Care at the Chemist
Baby Breathe Easy
Baby Barrow
Incredible Years
Pamper Group
Stress Busters
Infant Feeding Clinic
Aqua Natal
Antenatal Group

Family support

Dads Club
Adult Education
Employment Links
Swimming
Family Support
Home Visits
Training
Parent Craft
Community Links and
Development
Housing Links
Heath and Safety
Family Learning

Childcare and Early Learning

Stay and play
Rhyme Time
Stay and Play
Respite Childcare
Brainy Babies
Toy Library
Baby Book Crawl
Baby Connect
Crèche
Chatter Box
Gym Tots
Bookstart
Nurture Group
Nursery
Background

Community Needs
Initial consultations made in 2001 revealed a number of suggestions and concerns from parents, grandparents and carers, who were resident in the Liverpool East area.

The main concerns which emerged covered a wide range of topics, including childcare, health, education/training/employment, safe and secure play, and support for parents who either care for children with special needs or need assistance in their role as a parent.

Development
In response to these concerns, SureStart has developed a programme of services to meet the needs of families with children under the age of 4. There are three specific areas which link together and draw support from each other to provide the best available opportunities for these families.

Current Services
Many of the services offered under the heading of Health have been mainstreamed into Tots Health Club by SureStart and Central Liverpool Primary Care Trust. Services offered by the Childcare and Early Learning team are in the process of becoming mainstreamed with the building of two new Children’s Centres at Linbridge and Deysbrook. The Family Partnership team offer extensive links with agencies to deliver their services. Strong links have been forged with providers of education, training and employment.

Aim of Evaluation
The aim of this evaluation was to identify user satisfaction and elicit as many suggestions for new or existing services from parents, in order to develop future services and the Programme as a whole.
Methodology

Questionnaires were used to gather data, from parents or carers. Respondents had to be a parent or carer of a child under four. Families whose youngest child was 4 years old were included in the survey, if they had attended a service/group in the last 12 months. Our remit was to ascertain parent’s satisfaction with SureStart services. There were two questionnaires for different groups of people.

1) Registered families with eligible children who live in the SureStart East area. There were 99 respondents for this questionnaire.

2) Non-registered families with eligible children who live in the SureStart area. There were 13 respondents for this questionnaire.

3) a) Families with eligible children who did not live in the SureStart East area who had attended a service in the last twelve months.
   b) Families with eligible children who did not live in the SureStart East area who had not attended a service in the last twelve months.

There were 50 respondents in these categories. We surveyed these two groups of respondents in order to ascertain the needs of potential new members. (We were made aware that SureStart are shortly to consider expanding their area).

In total there were 162 respondents. This figure could have been higher, however, we met some obstacles towards the end of our survey. These obstacles included:

   i. Potential respondents not wanting to take part in the survey. This could have been because they did not have time, they did not know about SureStart or they had made assumptions about SureStart and felt threatened by answering questions.

   ii. School holidays – Opportunities were decreased due to schools, playschools and SureStart groups finishing for the summer.

We used a quantitative method for the survey stage because we wanted to obtain statistical data. Questionnaires were used because they are shorter and simple for respondents to follow, less time consuming and less expensive. Types of question included in the questionnaire included dichotomous questions, multiple choice questions and open ended questions in order to elicit as much information as possible.
We also wanted suggestions for improvements from parents so we arranged a focus group. We had asked respondents during the survey stage to provide us with their details for further interview. We invited all of these respondents to a coffee morning in order to initiate a discussion, with parents encouraging each other to give their ideas and honest comments. Attendance of the coffee mornings was very poor. In total five respondents attended the coffee morning. However, those respondents who did attend offered constructive suggestions for improvements and changes. These suggestions are discussed further in the Main Findings section (p8).

Secondary sources were also used during the course of this research. Sources used were internet articles relating to SureStart, previous evaluation data for background and comparison purposes. A list of postcodes was used to ascertain whether the respondents live in the SureStart area. Evaluation data and postcodes were obtained from SureStart. (See Appendix 2 – Eligible Postcodes)

An opportunity sample was used to obtain respondents. We visited schools in the SureStart East area, shopping parades, playgroups and SureStart groups and services.
Main Findings

Questionnaire 1 – Registered families with eligible children

There were a total of 99 respondents who matched our criteria.

Parents/carers were predominantly female.

Over half those surveyed were between the ages of 21 and 30 (58.41%) while 20.79% were between the ages of 31 and 40. Those over the age of 41 accounted for 4.95% of respondents. (See illustration 1)

Respondents were asked to reveal the ages of all their children and in total there were 211 children whose families were registered with SureStart. More than half of these children were aged 4 and over, indicating that many eligible children are part of larger families with older siblings. (See illustration 2)

There was a wide variety of responses when respondents were asked how they heard about SureStart. The three most significant responses were:-

1. Health visitor
2. SureStart newsletter
3. Friend
4. Word of mouth
5. Family
(See illustration 3)

This is an indication of the satisfaction of SureStart’s services as users are prepared to recommend a service to a friend or family member. Similarly, health visitors are suggesting SureStart to parents – possibly as a means of extra support for families who need it.

Comparatively few respondents had heard about SureStart through schools. This could be because by the time older siblings of eligible children are starting school, their parents have already heard about SureStart through other sources. It could also be the result of SureStart being only partially involved in some schools which are closer to the boundary. E.g. St Albert’s, St Dominic’s and St Margaret Mary’s schools (indicated on map) where some children are not eligible because of where they live. Additionally, schools may be experiencing difficulty in identifying eligible children and their families.
Similarly, few respondents had heard about SureStart through their midwife. As SureStart offer services around the antenatal period, in partnership with Liverpool Womens Hospital, this could be a surprising result. However respondents may have forgotten about their midwives talking about SureStart or if they already have children, they are likely to have heard about SureStart through other sources.

Of the services offered by the Health team, Pamper Group was the most tried (30%). Aqua natal, Weany Tots and Baby Breathe Easy were the least tried (2% each). This could be because they are relatively new groups or that groups are unable to accept large numbers of attendees for practical reasons. I.e. Health and safety, lack of space etc. (See illustration 4a)

The most tried service offered by the Family Partnership team was Adult Education (19%). However, the Swimming group followed closely (15%). It is noticeable that attendance of Family Support services was more evenly distributed (see illustration 4b).

A similar picture emerged for services offered by the Childcare and Early Years team. The use of most services was fairly evenly distributed. (See illustration 4c). Crèche was the most used service (17%) and Brainy Babies and Baby Connect were the least used (1% each).

Overall, the five most tried services were Pamper Group, Crèche, Rhyme Time, Gym Tots and Toy Library. It is worth noting that Pamper Group runs alongside a crèche (as do many other services). Rhyme time, Gym Tots and Toy Library are parent & child groups/services, where parents and children interact together.

Other services attended include Dance, Day Trips, Midwife, Messy Club (St Lukes) and Keep Fit.

Respondents did not offer any suggestions to improve groups which they had tried, but not returned to. Instead they offered reasons why they no longer attend groups/services, which could give some ideas for improvement.

Timing played a prominent part in whether respondents returned to a group, as they specified that they could not find the time. This could be because of a change in family circumstances. E.g. The main carer had returned to work or their child has begun nursery. If parents were dissatisfied with a group they would be more likely to suggest a more appropriate time for them. E.g. Afternoon rather than morning. However, as this was not the case, it could be
taken as a further indication of a change in family circumstance. Another reason for this could be that parents with more than one child have so many things to do at home etc that they just don’t have the chance to attend some groups.

When respondents were asked why they did not attend any SureStart groups/services they came up with a variety of answers which fell into three categories.

1. Children’s age – Some felt that the groups offered were aimed at babies rather than toddlers. Others commented that their older children were unable to attend (because of their age) which meant that the parent and eligible child could not attend. A small number of respondents believed that SureStart was only for babies.

2. Accessibility – Respondents had rearranged work or childcare to attend groups/services which had been cancelled and they were not informed. Care at the Chemist was also commented on, with respondents stating that the service wasn’t accessible. Unfortunately no further information was given by these respondents, so we are unable to fully identify the circumstances.

3. Confidence – Some respondents said they felt uncomfortable going alone and that they were not good at mixing.

Overall, the majority of respondents indicated that they were very satisfied (68%) or satisfied (29%) with SureStart services. A small minority felt that the services were adequate (3%). (See illustration 5).

A wide range of suggestions were offered with regards to future SureStart services. Among the most requested were:-

1. Something for older kids
2. Free/cheaper crèche
3. More varied trips.

These suggestions were not specific. E.g. Places to go on the trips or any activities for older children.

A topic which was suggested during the survey and discussed during the focus group was Mums Club run in a similar way to the already established Dads Club. Their reasoning behind this was for Mums to be able to interact with their children and enjoy new experiences together. Some expressed the view that Pamper Group was great for a rest (the children attend the crèche) however, they didn’t always want to separate themselves from their children.
Other suggestions included more exercise for adults and children (e.g. gymnastics), driving lessons, grandparents’ table tennis and family holidays.

A number of respondents asked for closer venues and more activities at St Lukes, as well as more activities during the afternoon. It was also suggested that Gym Tots could be held at a different time.

A small number of respondents were completely happy with the groups/services on offer, stating that, “they [SureStart] already have everything, with good provision”.

Other comments offered by respondents were mainly constructive and positive. E.g. “I appreciate information being updated by post”, in reference to the newsletter. Many commented on the very good service and helpful and friendly staff. Support for families who were in need was complimented several times as was Care at the Chemist. Some comments show concern regarding the long term availability and organisation of SureStart. “We need SureStart as a long term solution to the areas of the city that need it, like Dovecot”. “The age of children should be upped to the end of senior school in line with Preston where the age is 16”. “More people need to attend the services”. “A political forum to lobby parliament on regional priorities. I.e. SureStart groups and their needs”
Illustration 1 - Age of Parents/Carers

Number of respondents

Age group

15-20 21-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-45 46-50 51-55 56-60 60+ Didn't answer
Illustration 3 - Where did you hear about SureStart?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>health visitor</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>adverts</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friend</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word of mouth</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>midwife</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>home visit</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>district nurse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dads club</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>social services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newsletter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>support worker</td>
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<td>childcare links</td>
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<td>Local Press</td>
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<td>JET</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAC</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroup</td>
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<td>Party</td>
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<td>clinic</td>
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<td>popped in</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>shop</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Illustration 3a
Proportion of Respondents Who Heard About SureStart Through Health Professionals

Illustration 3b
Proportion of Respondents Who Heard About SureStart Through Educational Settings
Illustration 3c
Proportion of Respondents Who Heard About SureStart Through Support Services

- Home visit: 59%
- Social Services: 17%
- Support Worker: 8%
- Dads Club: 8%
- SureStart Staff: 8%

Illustration 3d
Proportion of Respondents who heard about SureStart Through Media

- Adverts: 28%
- Local Press: 60%
- Newsletter: 6%
Illustration 3e
Proportion of Respondents who heard about SureStart Through Word of Mouth

- Friend: 36%
- Word of Mouth: 32%
- Family: 32%

Illustration 3f
Proportion of Respondents who heard about SureStart through Chance

- Popped In: 23%
- Shop: 11%
- MAC: 11%
- JET: 11%
- Library: 22%
- Party: 22%
Illustration 4
Which services have you tried?

Number of responses

Services

- Pamper Group
- Stress Busters
- Infant Feeding Group
- Dads Club
- Rhyme Time
- Stay and Play
- Baby Nest
- Respite Childcare
- Employment Links
- Adult Education
- Antenatal Group
- Community Links & Development
- Breastfeeding Support Group
- Webster Station
- Bumps and Babies
- Swimming
- Toy Library
- Baby Book Crawl
- Baby Connect
- Baby Centre
- Web
- Family Support
- Home Visits
- Taxing
- Parentcraft
- Wannys Todds
- Chatbox
- Care at the chemist
- Gym pods
- Baby Breath Easy
- Book Start
- Nurture Group
- Nursery
- Housing Links
- Health and Safety
- Other

Series 1
Illustration 4a
Percentage of Respondents who have tried Services from the Health Team

Illustration 4b
Percentage of Respondents who have tried Services from the Family Support Team
Illustration 4c
Percentage of Respondents who have tried Services from the Childcare and Early Years Team

Illustration 5
Users Overall Satisfaction with SureStart Services
There were 13 respondents for this questionnaire. The low response rate could be an indication of the presence of “hard to reach” families in the area. It could also be an indication of families misunderstanding SureStart’s intentions. A further indication of this possible misunderstanding is a comment, made by a respondent, “I don’t like interfering busybodies” when asked why they had not become a member.

Of those surveyed the majority were female, and between the ages of 26 and 35 and had heard of SureStart. Their reasons for not registering with SureStart were that they did not have time or that no-one had asked them to register. Again, the majority gave their details for further information about SureStart.
Illustration 8
Percentage of Respondents who had heard of SureStart

92%
8%

Yes
No

Illustration 9
Percentage of Respondents who requested further information

77%
23%

Yes
No
Questionnaire 3 – Non-Registered families with eligible children who do not live in the SureStart East area

There were 50 respondents surveyed who did not live in the SureStart East area. Respondents were all female except for one male. There were a total of 113 children in the survey. Of these, 54 were aged 0-3 and 59 were four or over. This indicates that many eligible children have one or more older sibling.

Parents in this group tended to be between 26 and 40, with the highest number of parents being between 31 and 35.

There were 26 respondents who have used the services in the last 12 months. A wide variety of sources provided them with an introduction to SureStart. Word of mouth was the most often quoted source followed by playgroup, Library, newsletters and the midwife.

Stay and Play and Toy Library were the most used service, however, they were closely followed by Baby Massage, Baby Book Crawl, Crèche and Bookstart.

Family commitments and finding the time were the reasons most often given for not attending groups regularly. One respondent replied that she did not drive, indicating that groups were too far away for her to attend regularly.

Two thirds of respondents were very satisfied with SureStart services and the remaining third were satisfied.

One respondent requested a “decent play area” in the St Dominics School area. There is current provision, however it is very unpleasant as it has been severely vandalised.

There were 24 respondents who had not used SureStart services in the last 12 months. 92% of those had heard of SureStart and 77% were interested in further information from SureStart. A list of postcodes for the families who took part in the “out of area” survey is contained in appendix 3.
Illustration 10
Age of Respondent's Children

- Baby Due: 1%
- Under One: 13%
- One - Two: 8%
- Two: 12%
- Three: 14%
- Over Four: 52%

Illustration 11
Parents Age Group

- 15 - 20: 8%
- 21 - 25: 0%
- 26 - 30: 22%
- 31 - 35: 30%
- 36 - 40: 22%
- 41 - 45: 0%
- 46 - 50: 0%
- 51 - 55: 0%
- 56 - 60: 22%
- 60+: 30%
Illustration 12
Services Attended by Out of Area Families

Number of Responses

Services

- Pamper Group
- Stressbusters
- Infant Feeding Clinic
- Rhyme Time
- Stay and Play
- Aqua Natal
- Adult Education
- Antenatal Group
- Breastfeeding Support Group
- Baby Massage
- Swimming
- Toy Library
- Baby Book Crawl
- Creche
- Home Visits
- Parentcraft
- Weany Tots
- Chatterbox
- Care at the Chemist
- Gym Tots
- Bookstart
- Nursery
- Health and Safety
- Family Learning
- Other
Conclusion

On the whole, respondents were satisfied with the services currently provided by SureStart. Suggestions for improvement and development of future services were generally brought in a positive manner by local parents. A new service was requested (Mums Club), and restructuring of an existing group was suggested.

There is no doubt that those families who are using services regularly, are feeling the benefits, enjoying their experiences and broadening their horizons. Positive comments and word of mouth referrals to friends and family are a good indication of this. However, some of the respondents were extremely focused on negative aspects of services but offered no suggestions for improvement whatsoever. Volunteer group was criticised somewhat for being “the same old faces” and one or two members repeatedly “hogging the spotlight”. Regular evaluation of each group could encourage other members to put their suggestions forward, anonymously if they wish, with the aid of a suggestions box.

Some parent’s and carer’s misunderstandings and lack of knowledge about SureStart and its services are evident as a result of comments made by parents during survey. Whilst this group were in a minority, they are also part of the “hard to reach” element of eligible families. Additionally we were met with an element of disinterest among a small number of parents. This was evident from their manner during survey. Many parents felt that they were, to some degree, restricted in their opportunities if they had older children and were concerned about what would happen once their child turned four and could no longer take up the services and activities offered by SureStart, especially during the holidays. There is currently little or no provision for the age group 4-7 years old outside of the SureStart unit. This added to their reluctance to register or attend more regularly and take part in this survey.

Advertising in more alternative ways (e.g. more detail, different places etc) is needed as there are so many different types of families in this area. Not every group is suitable for every family and they may feel more encouraged to take part in groups which are suitable for them if they know what to expect. Advertising could also help dispel the assumption that SureStart are “interfering busybodies” if an introductory leaflet tells every potential new member what SureStart do. Different places to advertise could be beneficial for parents who live further away from SureStart bases (i.e. MAC, St Luke’s etc).
Recommendations

- **Establish a “Mum’s Club”** which could be organised in a similar way to the existing Dad’s Club.

- **Restructuring of Pamper Group.** It has come to our attention that some attendees are taking advantage of the provided lunches and leaving almost immediately to go to bingo. Similarly, the same people are queuing to receive massage and treatments etc each week and not giving other members of the group a chance. As this is a very well attended group, perhaps there could be a system in place, where those people who have queued for a treatment but have not been able to receive it due to time restrictions, can have their names put to the front of the queue for the following week.

- **Older children.** Investigate the possibility of more local schools becoming involved with occupying the time of older children (up to the age of 8) during half term, in conjunction with the Sure Start timetable so that they can attend day trips with their families and not have to attend groups aimed at 3 year olds. If this arrangement already exists, then increased advertising would be beneficial as parents are still complaining that there is nothing for children aged 4-7 to do, that interests them.

- **MP or Councillor Surgery.** Specific to Sure Start where parents can raise their concerns with their local councillor or MP. This could be a way of encouraging parents to press for action on areas of concern for themselves and SureStart.

- **SureStart notice boards at schools.** As local schools are a place where most parents congregate, a notice board would be beneficial to inform parents of new services or changes to current services. This could be done alongside the regular newsletter.

- **Alternative day trips.** Some suggestions for alternative places to go are:-
  - National Wildflower Centre, Court Hey Park
  - Millbrook Park Millennium Green, Old Hall Lane, Kirkby
  - Speke Hall, Speke
  - Wirral Museum, Hamilton Square
  - Merseyside Maritime Museum

  Source: [www.merseyguide.co.uk](http://www.merseyguide.co.uk)

  - Halewood Park Visitor Centre, Okell Drive
  - Stadt Moers Park, Pottery Lane, Whiston

  Source: [www.knowsley.gov.uk/leisure](http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/leisure)
• **Suggestions Box.** A suggestion box could provide opportunity for SureStart to gain more information from parents if it is anonymous.

• **Regular evaluation of services.** Each team could evaluate their services on a quarterly basis or at the end of each course, in order to gain more responses and more specific data. This could lead to quicker improvements and information from those parents who would not normally respond.

• **Welcome to SureStart Pack.** These packs could be age specific. E.g. A new member who has just given birth could receive information leaflets about services relevant to them and perhaps a free towel or bath products. Another new member who has a child aged 2 could receive relevant information and a free toddler cutlery pack. All packs should contain a general information leaflet about SureStart, which needs to indicate when a family’s eligibility ends. I.e. Up to the child's fourth birthday.

• **Specific advertising.** Some groups could be better attended if they are advertised in relevant venues. E.g. Aqua natal group could be advertised in Liverpool Womens Hospital and GP surgeries. Care would need to be taken to ensure that eligibility requirements are also included in any advert to prevent misunderstanding. E.g. “Speak to your midwife to see if you live in our area”.

• **Signage.** A Sure Start sign could be arranged outside the door of Dovecot MAC so that people can find Sure Start.

• **Group registers.** Group registers could provide organisers with contact information of attendees in case of last minute cancellations. Not everybody is receiving the messages when groups are cancelled.