

# Evaluation of the decision-making and staff team structures

Sure Start Wallasey  
Evaluation Report No. 2

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## **Executive Summary**

This report evaluates the functioning of Sure Start Wallasey's decision-making structures as well as the operation of the internal staff team structure. It draws from material gathered in interviews with Management Board members, interviews with the Programme Manager and various members of the staff team, meeting observation, and an analysis of meeting minutes and terms of reference.

## **Conclusions**

This evaluation has found Sure Start Wallasey to be a well managed programme with a staff team whose members largely work well together. The Management Board and other decision-making structures have generally functioned satisfactorily. Where those interviewed in the evaluation drew comparisons with other Sure Start programmes, these comparisons were almost always favourable to Sure Start Wallasey. The evaluation has identified a number of areas where improvements could be made, but any criticisms need to be tempered by the fact that the programme is still in its early stages.

## **Key findings**

1. The general view was that the Sure Start Wallasey Management Board and its sub-groups had functioned in a reasonably effective manner.
2. Most of those interviewed felt that Board proceedings were dominated by two or three people or agencies that set the agenda. There was also the view that the Board relied heavily on the Programme Manager to give them direction.
3. It was felt that the Board needed to exert a more strategic influence over the shape of the programme and needed more 'space' to reflect on matters of overall policy and strategy.
4. Where people sat on the Board as representatives of a wider constituency, such as parents, churches, the voluntary sector or schools, these representatives were (to varying degrees) consulting with these constituencies through a mixture of formal and informal channels.
5. It was generally felt that sub-groups were necessary despite the extra time commitment they placed on Board members. However, there was a feeling that the sub-group structure had become somewhat unwieldy and, in particular, that the size of some of the groups was not always conducive to effective decision-making.
6. Liverpool Hope's involvement as accountable body and lead agency was regarded largely as having been beneficial to the programme. However, it was the generally held view that the integration of Sure Start Wallasey into the Children's Centre in April 2006 marked an appropriate point for Liverpool Hope's involvement with the programme to come to an end.
7. It was generally felt that Sure Start Wallasey had worked hard at involving parents.
8. Special consultation events, social surveys and most of all, the Parents' Forum, had all been used successfully to consult and involve parents.
9. Parent representatives on the Board tended to lack confidence and at times found it difficult to voice their opinion at Board meetings. Some Board members were perceived as being unsupportive and talking down to parents.
10. More thought was felt to be needed as to how parents' views were fed into the Board. Currently feedback from the Parent Forum is mainly a descriptive account of Parent Forum

business and social activities. There was felt to be a need to feed more ideas on policy into the Board.

11. Many of the parents who have become actively involved in the programme have gained enormously from the experience, in terms of developing self-confidence, making social contacts, developing new skills and having new opportunities become available to them.
12. It was hoped that in developing structures for Children's Centres, the local authority would not adopt a 'one size fits all approach' but that each Children's Centre Board would be able to adopt the decision-making model that best fitted its own local circumstances.
13. It was generally believed that the three-coordinator structure had worked well. Having a designated person who was responsible for each of the core Sure Start objectives and meeting associated targets had helped to shape the programme and give it a clear focus.
14. However, the three coordinators were not working in as integrated a manner as they could have been. Insufficient attention was being given to strategic thinking and the joint planning of services.
15. It was felt that there were clear lines of accountability between the Programme Manager and the coordinators and between the coordinators and most front-line staff. However, the supervision arrangements for the home visiting service, whereby several of those delivering the service received supervision from the Health and Early Years Coordinators rather than the Family Support Coordinator, were causing some confusion within the team.
16. The distinction between the outreach workers and family workers did not seem to exist in practice with both sets of workers performing similar roles
17. It was generally felt that there was a good team atmosphere and that staff members worked well together and were supportive of one another.
18. Despite some practical difficulties, the secondment of certain team members from other agencies had generally worked well. It had enabled the programme to gain access to staff with required skills and it also provided job security for the seconded staff, who may well have been unwilling to resign from their previous jobs to take-up fixed term temporary posts.
19. It was widely believed that the transformation to the Children's Centre was going to be a period of great uncertainty for Sure Start Wallasey staff members. There was concern at how this was going to affect the morale and stability of the staff team.

## **Recommendations**

1. Given that the current structures are functioning reasonably well and with the programme's integration into the Children's Centre due to happen in a year's time, it is probably unnecessary to make significant changes to Sure Start Wallasey's decision-making or staff team structures at this stage.
2. Measures should be put in place to enable the Management Board better to fulfil its strategic policy making role. These might include:
  - the Management Board agenda putting more emphasis on matters of overall policy
  - having special sessions of the Board or 'awaydays' solely devoted to key policy matters or setting the overall strategy for the programme

- ensuring that all agenda items for the Board are put in writing, with reports conforming to a standard format containing, for example, an executive summary and clear recommendations and/or options for action
  - looking at ways as to how the Board can better utilise programme monitoring data to inform its deliberations
3. Capacity building training should be provided to Board members to enable the Board to function more effectively. Among other things, the capacity building could include:
    - recapping on the Sure Start objectives and targets (particularly for new members)
    - providing information on the Children's Centre and Every Child Matters Agendas
    - helping Board members to understand the roles of partner agencies such as health, social services and Jobcentre Plus and also how these link in with Sure Start
    - setting ground rules for conducting Board business to ensure, for example, that everyone has the opportunity to air their views and feels comfortable in asking questions when they are not clear about what is being discussed
  4. The Board should consider whether all the current sub-groups are necessary, whether some of the groups could be amalgamated, and whether some sub-group business could be delegated to the Programme Manager to undertake. The Board should also consider whether the numbers of people sitting on each sub-group could be reduced to help the groups function more effectively.
  5. It is appropriate for Liverpool Hope's role in the programme to end when the programme is integrated into the Children's Centre in April 2006.
  6. Some adjustments to the membership of the Board are likely to be necessary in preparation for the Children's Centre. Nevertheless, it is advisable that the overall Board membership remains at about more or less its current size so that it does not become too unwieldy or contain too many members with only a peripheral interest in the programme.
  7. The current arrangement should be continued whereby some partners such as local churches or the voluntary sector have only one representative on the Board, with that representative being responsible for consulting with a wider 'constituency'.
  8. The current requirement to have 50 per cent of the Board comprised of parent members should be rescinded in favour of parents being allocated between two and four places on the Board. More emphasis should be placed on the quality of parent representation and consultation through a variety of channels including the Parents' Forum, special consultation events and opinion surveys, rather than on the quantity of parents sitting on the Board.
  9. An element of turnover of parent representation on the Board from year to year should be encouraged to give new parents a chance to participate as Board members. Programme staff can assist this by providing capacity building training to prospective new parent Board members and by allowing those parents to attend the Board as observers for a few meetings before they take their places as voting members.
  10. The Programme should consider how the representation of parents' views to the Board might be improved. This might include:

- a closer synchronisation of Parent Forum and Board meetings with key policy matters being taken to the Parent Forum for consultation before coming to the Board
  - the report from the Parent's Forum to the Board being put in writing and focusing more on feeding back parents' views and making recommendations on policy issues. Programme staff should help to facilitate this feedback.
11. The programme should continue its valuable work of providing capacity building support to active parents whether on the Board or not. Much of this capacity building should focus on using supportive environments such as the Parent's Forum to provide parents with practical experience of activities such as chairing meetings or making presentations.
  12. As in practice outreach workers and family workers are more or less performing the same tasks, the distinction between the two posts should be removed and both should share a common job description and salary (see Evaluation Report No. 3 on Home Visiting Service)
  13. The current supervision arrangements for outreach and family workers should be retained for the time being but should be reviewed when the Sure Start staff team becomes part of the Children's Centre.
  14. Steps should be taken to enable the Programme Manager and three coordinators to have more opportunity for joint planning and strategic reflection. These might include:
    - setting a regular date for Management Team meetings
    - organising additional meetings where two or more members of the team can meet separately to discuss particular issues
    - Management Team meetings having a written agenda, with formal minutes and action points being produced
    - the Management Team making more use of programme monitoring data to inform its discussions
    - setting a requirement that all proposals for new services have to be submitted to the Management Team using a project pro-forma which will gather information on matters such as the purpose of the service, the cost and staffing implications, and the service's contribution to meeting the programme's wider objectives and targets
  15. The programme should consider how its mechanisms for internal communication can be improved, particularly in ensuring that staff members always have up to date information on the programme activities that are taking place

### **Recommendations relating directly to the Children's Centre**

While this evaluation has concentrated on assessing the Sure Start Wallasey programme, inevitably it has also covered issues that are directly relevant to the governance and structure of the Seacombe Children's Centre. A number of recommendations can be made arising from consideration of these issues:

1. Rather than have a 'one size fits all approach' to Children's Centre decision-making and staffing structures, there are advantages in allowing each Children's Centre Board to adopt structures that best meet local needs and circumstances and build on the structures that have already been developed by the existing Sure Start programmes.

2. The current Sure Start Wallasey Board, with some adjustments to its membership and more active involvement of local councillors, could form the basis of the Seacombe Children's Centre Board
3. In order to foster a multi-agency approach to providing services to the local community, it is important that the membership of the Children's Centre Board is wider than those agencies who are directly located in the building
4. There are advantages in the Board having powers to make decisions on service provision and expenditure, both for the speed of decision-making and for enabling the Children's Centre to respond to local needs. In a similar manner to how central government exercises control over Sure Start programmes currently, the local authority can exercise overall strategic control by setting the budget and by placing a requirement on the Children Centres to provide certain core services and address specified targets or objectives.
5. The Children's Centre staffing structure should take account of the need for a continued service coordination and development role in the areas of health, childcare and early learning, and family and community development.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the Board, Parent's Forum and staff team members and staff from other agencies who participated in this particular evaluation. In order to preserve the confidentiality of contributors, unfortunately they cannot be named personally. Particular thanks are due to those interviewees who contributed ideas as to how existing structures could be improved, many of which have found their way into the recommendations contained in this report.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Aims of the evaluation

This report aims to evaluate the functioning of Sure Start Wallasey's decision-making structures as well as the operation of the internal staff team structure. It addresses such questions as:

1. How well is the Management Board and sub-group structure functioning, both as a mechanism for effective decision-making and as a means of ensuring that all stakeholders in the Sure Start Wallasey partnership can have an input into decisions?
2. How successfully have the structures been in achieving meaningful parent involvement in decision-making?
3. How well has the arrangement of having Liverpool Hope as the lead partner and accountable body worked in practice?
4. How well has the programme's internal staffing structure worked, particularly the arrangement of having three co-ordinators who oversee different areas of the programme?
5. How clear are the lines of management and supervisory responsibility within the programme?
6. How well do members of the staff team communicate and collaborate in practice?
7. How well have the arrangements for seconding certain team members from other agencies worked in practice?

Underlying everything is the fact that from April 2006, Sure Start Wallasey will be integrated into the Seacombe Children's Centre. This evaluation considers the likely implications of this development for both the decision-making and staff team structures.

It is also important to keep in mind that Sure Start Wallasey, as a sixth wave programme, is still in its infancy. For any new programme it will inevitably take time to put all the appropriate structures and working arrangements in place.

## 1.2 Research methods

The evaluation has used the following methods:

- One to one interviews with five members of the Management Board including the Programme Manager and a representative of the lead agency/accountable body
- One to one interviews with the three programme co-ordinators
- A focus group with parent members of the Management Board and other members of the Parent Forum
- A focus group with members of the Sure Start Wallasey staff team.
- A one to one interview with the manager of one of the other Wirral Sure Start programmes
- An analysis of meeting minutes and terms of reference
- Observation of Board, sub-group and Parent Forum meetings

## 2. Decision-making structures

### 2.1 Description of existing decision-making structures

Sure Start Wallasey's decision-making structure is summarised in Figure 2.1 on the following page. The membership of the Management Board as set out in its terms of reference is as follows:

- Parents/carers – 50% of membership
- Health – 2 representatives
- Social services – 1 representative
- EYCDP – 1 representative
- Accountable body – 1 representative
- Lead agency – 1 representative
- Voluntary sector – 1 representative
- Education – 1 representative
- Employment – 1 representative
- Councillors – 1 representative
- Community groups – 1 representative
- Private sector – 1 representative

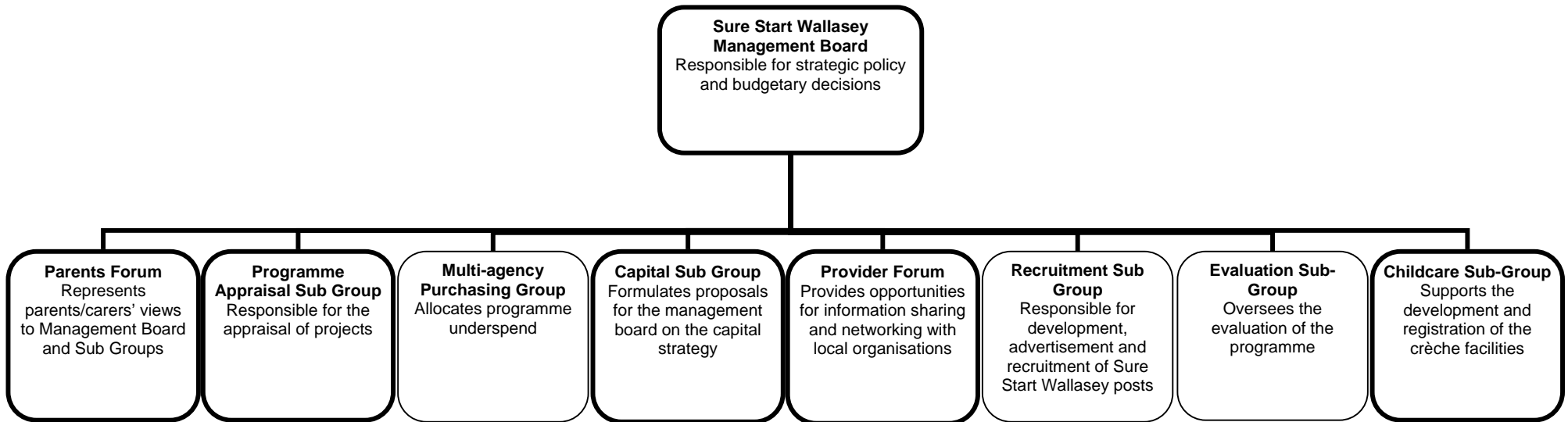
Recently the membership of the Board has been expanded to include representatives of local churches. The Programme Manager also sits on the Board but does not have voting rights.

Not all the organisations and individuals listed above are necessarily active on the Board. For example, in practice the Board currently only has three active parent members. Local councillors have not been involved in the Board for the past year.

The role of the Board includes the following:

- To make strategic decisions concerning the delivery of the programme
- To ensure that in practice policies are implemented according to the agreed delivery plan and in line with the requirements of the Wirral Strategic Sure Start Partnership, the Accountable Body and the Sure Start Unit
- To make decisions about which services should be funded and to monitor the application of funds
- To support the Programme Manager and staff team in their work
- To act as advocates for Sure Start Wallasey and to promote multi-agency working among partner agencies and to ensure partner agencies 'mainstream' successful initiatives.

Figure 2.1 – Sure Start Wallasey decision making structure



Note: The boxes outlined in bold show the groups that are currently active.

Ultimate decision-making authority resides with the Board but it may delegate some of its authority to sub-groups or the Programme Manager. For example, the Programme Appraisal Group and the Programme Manager have authority to commit expenditure up to prescribed limits. Some groups are ongoing whereas others are formed to address a specific issue and then dissolve afterwards.

The roles of the accountable body and lead agency are both performed by Liverpool Hope University which had successfully tendered for the contract for this work. In its role as accountable body Liverpool Hope:

- provides the financial systems to draw the money down from government and to pay invoices
- employs Sure Start Wallasey staff
- is the legal entity which allows the programme to sign legal documents/leases

The following are among the key elements of Liverpool Hope's lead agency role:

- the provision of strategic and management guidance to the programme
- the provision of line management and support to the Programme Manager
- assisting the programme in its integration with mainstream services and incorporation into the Children's Centre

The remaining sections of this chapter consider how well the Board and the other elements of the decision-making structure have functioned in practice.

## 2.2 The Management Board

1. Despite some respondents making critical comments about the Board, the general view was that it is functioning reasonably well. Some respondents compared the Sure Start Wallasey Board favourably to other Boards they are involved in including some other Sure Start Boards.

*I am very impressed with how the Board works. Meetings in my organisation are not as professional and focussed. (Board member)*

2. The Board was felt to have exercised real decision-making power, especially in the initial stages of developing the programme. It was recognised that the programme was operating within the parameters set down by the Sure Start Unit and this limited the Board's room for manoeuvre. Local circumstances had also served to limit the Board's power, most notably in the decision to locate the Children's Centre at Seacombe Family Centre which was not the Board's preferred option.

*We spent a lot of time deliberating on the decision. It turned out it didn't really matter what we said. Our recommendation was not taken on board. (Board member)*

3. Most of those interviewed felt that Board proceedings were dominated by two or three people or agencies who set the agenda. There was also the view that the Board relied heavily on the Programme Manager to give them direction.

*The Board lacks confidence in making decisions and is happy to defer to certain people on the Board. There are some people who never say anything. (Board member)*

4. A number of capacity building needs were identified. These included more information on the Children's Centre and Every Child Matters agendas and a need for a greater awareness of how the work of partner organisations links in with Sure Start.
5. It was felt that the Board needed to exert a more strategic influence over the shape of the programme and needed more 'space' to reflect on matters of overall policy and strategy. An 'awayday' was organised for Board members in April to provide them with the opportunity to set the priorities for the programme in the coming year. It was also recognised that this was a very fluid time for Sure Start Wallasey with it being a new programme and with the transformation into a Children's Centre imminent. In many ways it is inevitable that much of the Board's attention should be taken up with practical issues such as recruitment, finding premises and latterly the refurbishment of Seacombe Family Centre.
6. It was also argued that the Board would be enabled to perform a more strategic function if its business was conducted more formally. In particular, it would be beneficial to have more written submissions (especially when sub-groups are reporting back to the Board) with clear options and recommendations for action. On the other hand there was the danger that having too formal an approach might stifle discussion.

*The advantage is we do discuss things. We are not just rubber stamping. (Board member)*

7. Limiting the numbers of people on the Board was felt to be important for effective decision-making. At the same time it was acknowledged that the support of key local agencies for the Sure Start Wallasey programme would be more forthcoming if those agencies perceived they had a voice in the running of the programme. This was felt to be the case even where agency representatives were not necessarily contributing much to the Board.

*If people moan about the service you can say, 'You have got a representative on the Board. Why are you not feeding your views in through them?' (Board member)*

8. Some interviewees argued that some Board members were sometimes prone to pursue their own agency's agenda rather than the wider good of the programme. However, this was thought to be to some extent inevitable in a partnership body. The pursuit of self interest was thought not to have been as significant in Sure Start Wallasey as on some other Sure Start Boards where it was alleged that statutory and voluntary agencies and certain parent board members had sometimes been too focused on their own agendas.
9. Where people sat on the Board as representatives of a wider constituency, such as parents, churches, the voluntary sector and schools, these representatives were (to varying degrees) consulting with these constituencies through a mixture of formal and informal channels.
10. Formal votes at Board meetings were rare. However, the position as to which members did and did not have a vote had become rather confusing.

*There are people who don't have a vote who raise their hands. If it wasn't unanimous, they'd have to be reminded. (Board member)*

11. Those Board members interviewed were full of praise for the way that the meetings were serviced by programme staff, saying that papers invariably arrived well in advance of each meeting.

*Admin support for the Board is really excellent. I can't think of anything that has been a key decision that has been made without background information. (Board member)*

## 2.3 Sub-groups

1. It was generally felt that sub-groups were necessary despite the extra time commitment they placed on Board members. There would simply not be the time to go through the detailed business of the sub-groups at Board meetings. The sub-groups could also act as a source of support and expert advice to the Programme Manager. It was also felt that some groups, such as the Programme Appraisal Group, functioned more effectively than the Board itself. This may have been because such groups were more tightly focussed or were comprised of a smaller core of Board members representing the key partner agencies.
2. However, there was a feeling that the sub-group structure had sometimes become unwieldy and, in particular, that the size of some of the groups was not always conducive to effective decision making. This may have arisen as a result of some agencies feeling anxious not to be left out of key discussions at a time of change.

*There is a tendency to say, 'Let's have a group'. Then we say, 'Who should be on it?' To be fair we let all sorts of different Board members be involved, to the point where you are almost replicating the Board. (Board member)*

3. It was hoped that as the programme become more established and the work 'settled down' that the sub-group structure could be streamlined. This is what had happened in one of the other Sure Start programmes which had recently wound up its remaining sub-groups. It was also felt that alternative methods of consultation with stakeholder agencies such as one to one contacts between managers, in some cases could be more effective and efficient than convening meetings.

## 2.4 Role of Liverpool Hope

1. Those interviewed stated that Liverpool Hope's involvement as accountable body and lead agency had generally been beneficial to the programme.
  - It had taken on these responsibilities at a time when the local authority had limited capacity to assume them directly
  - In certain areas such as recruitment, advertising and finance it was felt to be able to deliver more quickly than the local authority
  - It was regarded as having brought a fresh 'academic' perspective to the programme and specific expertise around issues such as data, structures and legal boundaries
  - Being part of a wider institution it has been able to bring in different people to support and advise at different times
2. It was the generally held view that the integration of Sure Start Wallasey into the Children's Centre in April 2006 marked an appropriate point for Liverpool Hope's involvement in the programme to come to an end. There was seen to be little point in duplicating the role of the local authority and for an additional layer of administration costs to be incurred.

## 2.5 Parent involvement in decision-making

1. It was generally felt that Sure Start Wallasey had worked hard at involving parents. Some of those interviewed drew favourable comparisons with other programmes they had experience of.

*Parents have been brought on gradually and are briefed and are aware of their responsibilities. Some parents on other Boards are not as clear as to what the Board's role is. (Board member)*

*At Sure Start Wallasey there are more new faces on the Board, often because people have moved on and found work. At the other programmes we see the same faces at everything. (Board member)*

2. Some other Board members felt that parent members of the Board were 'quite vocal' and were 'listened to seriously'. One Board member reported how they had witnessed the confidence of parent Board members growing visibly over the time they had been on the Board. However, other Board members and parents themselves reported that parents lacked confidence and at times found it difficult to speak in meetings.

*If I said that there should not be any parents on the Board, I don't think they would argue back. They lack the confidence. (Board member)*

3. Parents were sometimes 'talked-over' at Board meetings. While generally other members of the Board were said to be very encouraging to parents, not all were perceived to be as supportive.

*There are certain members of the Board who look down on parents. It's their manner, the way they speak to you. (Parent Board member)*

4. Some parent representatives argued that there needed to be more thought given as to how parents' views were fed into the Board. Currently feedback is provided orally and is mainly a descriptive account of Parents' Forum business and social activities. There was felt to be a need to feed more ideas on policy into the Board. It was also thought that if the Forum's views were communicated in writing and in a more formal manner they might carry more weight.
5. Parent interviewees generally were of the view that the Parents' Forum was the best arena for parent consultation. Among things that parents liked about the Forum was that it was friendly, they felt free to speak, and they felt supported by one another and by programme staff. They also felt that they were being listened to and any concerns raised were taken straight back to the office by the staff.
6. Parents also spoke positively about the value of special consultation events (such as those on the design plans for the Children's Centre) and social surveys in getting feedback from a wider group of parents. The criticism was made that parents who had taken part in a survey were not always informed of the results or of how things had changed as a result of the survey.
7. Many of those on the Parents' Forum had some previous experience (albeit often limited) of participating in decision-making forums. Some parents had been involved in meetings in a work or trade union capacity. Another had participated in meetings of local community groups. One parent had participated in a presentation to MPs at Westminster.
8. Some parents had received capacity building training funded by Sure Start Wallasey. This had been beneficial in helping them to acquire new skills such as delivering a presentation.
9. Parents' Forum members generally agreed that the best way of learning new skills was to 'have a go' at something such as making a speech or chairing the Parent's Forum meeting, as long as Sure Start staff were there to offer support and encouragement.



*The best way to learn is by getting the opportunity to do something and getting encouragement to do it. That gives you a real sense of achievement. (Parent Forum member)*

10. The extent to which parent Board members and participants in the Parent Forum are representative of the wider group of parents, would seem to vary from person to person. Some parent members don't have a lot of contact with other parents. Others know a lot of parents in the area and/or are involved in a lot of Sure Start activities. The Parents' Forum is often used an arena for channelling back their own and other parents' views on these activities.

*I am stopped by people in the street because they know I do voluntary work for Sure Start Wallasey. (Parent Forum member)*

*I feel I do represent young mums. I also feel I represent Sure Start to my friends. (Parent Forum member)*

11. It is undoubtedly the case that many of the parents who have become actively involved in the programme as parent representatives have gained enormously from the experience in terms of, among other things, developing self-confidence, making social contacts, developing new skills and having new opportunities become available to them.

*It's opened new doors for me. I have gained quite a lot of confidence... I feel I have a lot to offer. It's helping me back into work. I want to help other parents. I feel needed. Now I have a focus. I feel good. (Parent Forum member)*

*It has turned my life around. (Parent Board member)*

## **2.6 Implications of the Children's Centre for decision-making structures**

1. It was generally felt that there will continue to be a need for a Board at local level to oversee the Children's Centre. It was envisaged that the Board would either act in an advisory capacity or would have power to take decisions within tightly defined limits.
2. The following were among the functions suggested for a Children's Centre Board:
  - To take decisions on what services are provided
  - To make judgements on how the budget is spent
  - To make decisions on working with local statutory and voluntary agencies
  - To facilitate community involvement
3. It was hoped that the local authority would not adopt a 'one size fits all approach' but that each Children's Centre Board would be able to adopt the decision-making model that best fitted its own local circumstances.
4. It was felt that the Sure Start Wallasey Management Board could evolve into a Children's Centre Management Board with some adjustments to the membership being made to address Children's Centre requirements.
5. There was a concern expressed that the Children' Centre Board could become too dominated by Education rather than being a genuine partnership.



6. There was also a concern that the Children's Centre structures could place a lower emphasis on community involvement and that parent participation on the Board would become tokenistic.

## 3. The staff team structure

### 3.1 Description of the staff team structure

Sure Start Wallasey's decision-making structure is summarised in Figure 3.1 on the following page. As the diagram shows the programme has a relatively flat structure with only one layer of management between the Programme Manager and front-line staff.

A key feature of the structure is the appointment of three coordinators to take strategic responsibility for developing services in each of three key programme areas of health, childcare and early learning, and family and community support.

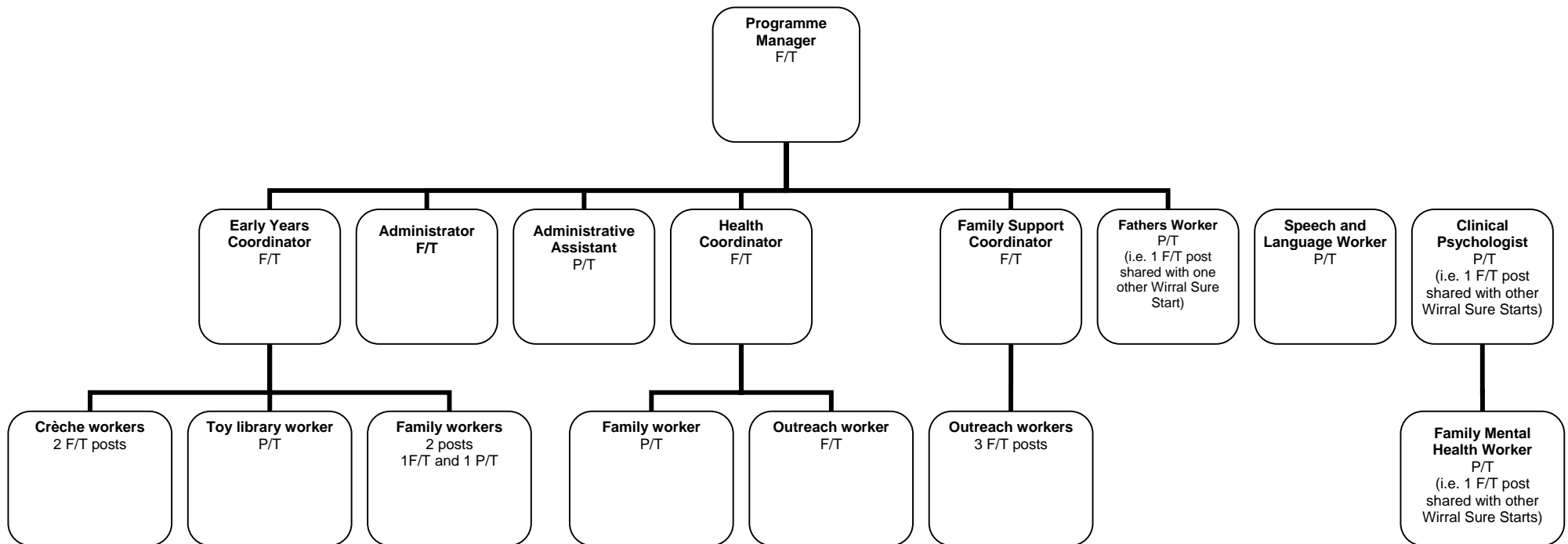
The coordinators report directly to the Programme Manager and also have management and supervisory responsibility for members of the staff team delivering services in each of the programme areas. Primarily to even out the workload between the three coordinators, some of the outreach workers and family workers who deliver the home visiting service are supervised by the Health and Early Years Coordinators rather than the Family Support Coordinator who manages this service. On top of this, all members of the home visiting team receive clinical supervision, in a group setting, from either the Family Mental Health Worker or Clinical Psychologist.

Outreach and family workers both undertake home visits and run group activities. Outreach workers are paid on a higher salary scale than family workers. Outreach workers are required to possess a qualification in childcare, social work, community work or a similar field and have a minimum of two years experience of working with families and/or children in a community setting. In order to make it easier for local community members to apply for family worker posts, this role requires no formal qualifications or direct experience working in a relevant field. According to the respective job descriptions outreach workers are expected to undertake a wider set of responsibilities than family workers, including contributing to the development of services and liaising with other agencies. In relation to the home visiting service, it was anticipated that outreach workers would generally undertake the initial assessments of families with family workers being brought in subsequently to deliver the support.

Most members of the staff team are employed by Liverpool Hope. Some, including the Health Coordinator and crèche and toy library workers are seconded from health organisations or social services. Some team members (i.e. the Fathers' Worker, the Family Mental Health Worker and the Clinical Psychologist) divide their time between Sure Start Wallasey and one or more other local Sure Start Programmes.

The remaining sections of this chapter consider how well the staff team structure has functioned in practice.

Figure 3.1 – The Sure Start Wallasey Staff Team



## 3.2 The Programme Manager

1. The influence of the manager in a small organisation such as a Sure Start programme cannot be underestimated. Sure Start Wallasey has clearly benefited from having a very capable manager who thinks strategically, has a good understanding of the range of issues affecting the programme, and has been proactive in developing links with other agencies. The Programme Manager was also described as accessible and supportive by members of her team.

*We don't have to provide an awful lot of support as the Programme Manager is so good. (Board member)*

## 3.3 The Coordinators' role

1. It was generally believed that the three-coordinator structure had worked well. Having a designated person who was responsible for each of the core Sure Start objectives and meeting associated targets had helped to shape the programme and give it a clear focus.

*There is a clear person to go to around the programme areas. Hopefully there is clarity for coordinators and staff. (Coordinator)*

2. Lack of clarity sometimes did occur when programme areas overlapped. For example, the Early Years Coordinator manages the respite service which is closely interlinked with the home visiting service which is managed the Family Support Coordinator. The effective operation of the home visiting service in turn requires the development of close links with health providers which is the province of the Health Coordinator. There had been occasions when one coordinator had been reluctant to get involved in an area of programme activity because they were concerned about impinging on another coordinator's sphere of responsibility.
3. All three coordinators felt they had a good working knowledge of each other's programme areas. However it was generally agreed that they were not working in as integrated a manner as they should be.

*The difficulty is communicating in an effective and structured way. Sometimes communication is in an ad hoc way, across the desk. (Coordinator)*

4. A particular problem that was identified was the lack of joint planning of services. There was insufficient attention given as to how the development of activities in one service area (for example, group sessions) were going to impact on another area of the service, such as the crèche provision.

*Sometimes we don't share ideas or jointly plan as much as we should do. From a planning point of view it is easy to do things in silos. (Coordinator)*

5. Once a month the three coordinators met with the Programme Manager as a Management Team. Recently this was changed to once every two weeks. Coordinators are also now being encouraged to meet more regularly among themselves. It was said that Management Team meetings were often taken up with descriptive items such as updating one another on developments. There was not enough attention being given to strategic planning or reflecting on service priorities. Ideas for new services were often raised orally rather than being set out and justified on paper. There was insufficient use of programme monitoring information. This was largely because, until recently, very little monitoring information was being produced on individual service areas. The meetings also tended to be unstructured

and over-long. No minutes or (until recently) action points were produced, which could result in a lack of clarity as to who was responsible for implementing decisions.

*We all come out with a different view of what has been agreed. (Coordinator)*

6. The coordinators are given quite a lot of freedom on how to develop their particular areas of work. Maybe some coordinators who have previously worked in a more structured environment have found this a bit daunting at times.

*The manager does give you strategic guidance about what she wants, but sometimes doesn't tell you how to go about it...I could have done with a bit more guidance when I first started in the role. (Coordinator)*

### 3.4 Management and supervision

1. While one interviewee argued that the creation of a Deputy Manager post would help relieve the pressure on the Programme Manager, most of those interviewed were happy with the current structure.

*It is quite a flat structure and we are all very accessible. I wouldn't want it to become over-bureaucratic and hierarchical. (Coordinator)*

2. It was felt that there were clear lines of accountability between the Programme Manager and the Coordinators and between the Coordinators and most front-line staff. However, the supervision arrangements for the home visiting service, whereby several of those delivering the service received supervision from the Health and Early Years Coordinators rather than the Family Support Coordinator, were causing some confusion.

*The workers may feel 'Who do I go to?' It has maybe caused more confusion for the workers than for me. (Coordinator)*

3. There also has been inconsistency between the three coordinators on how supervision has been provided. To address this inconsistency, the Family Support Coordinator has recently developed a standard framework for one to one supervision that all Coordinators are now using.
4. It was generally felt that the number of staff members currently delivering the home visiting service made it impractical for all of them to be supervised directly by the Family Support Coordinator. Some interviewees expressed interest in the idea of some staff members specialising in home visiting while others would be involved solely in group activities. The Family Support Coordinator could then concentrate on supervising the slimmed down home visiting team. One coordinator argued that she would like to see specific health, early years and home visiting staff teams. It was argued that having particular staff members specialising in narrower areas of activity would not only help to streamline the supervision structure, it would also help ensure that different programme areas received more equal emphasis. There was a feeling among some interviewees that there was insufficient attention being given to addressing health needs. Similarly, some home visitors reported that a lot of their time was being taken up by their involvement in group activities.
5. Others defended the current structure saying that it aided collaborative working between different parts of the programme. Having staff members involved in both home visiting and group activities was also regarded as being beneficial to their personal development. There was the added concern as to how any changes to staff members' areas of responsibility would impact on people's job descriptions and their subsequent employment prospects within the Children's Centre.

### 3.5 Collaboration and communication among the staff team

1. It was generally felt that there was a good team atmosphere and that staff members worked well together.

*On the whole we've got a really good team that work together and are supportive of one another. (Coordinator)*

*I love it here compared to working in my previous job. (Staff team member)*

2. Most members of staff identified themselves as being part of the Sure Start Wallasey Team, rather than by their profession or, in the case of secondees, by their parent organisation. It was felt that the process of identifying with the programme had taken longer for some seconded staff but that they were 'getting there'.
3. It was felt that the crèche workers in particular may be more isolated from the rest of the team, partly because they are seconded from another organisation but mainly because they work in a different part of the Sure Start building away from other staff members. Some staff members had volunteered to help out in the crèche partly to help develop closer links between the crèche workers and the rest of the staff team.
4. The distinction between the outreach workers and family workers did not seem to exist in practice with both sets of workers performing similar roles (see Evaluation Report No. 3 on the Home Visiting Service for more information).
5. Some staff members were unhappy about the way that information was being communicated to them by coordinators. This was particularly the case in relation to changes to activities, where home visitors were not always being told if a new activity was being organised or a group session had been cancelled. This could be embarrassing if they were being asked for information by parents and they did not know what was happening.
6. There was also a feeling among staff team members that decision-making processes, particularly on staffing and HR matters, could be improved. Decisions could take 'a long time to emerge' and were said to be often 'fuzzy' or 'inconsistent'.

*Sometimes if my manager is not around, I will go to the Programme Manager. On things like flexi-time you can get different answers depending on who you go to. (Staff team member)*

7. More than one interviewee stated that problems had arisen because minor grievances were not being aired. A recent team building day had been useful in allowing some of these problems to be brought to the surface, although some staff members stated that there did not appear to be any action taken to address the issues raised. Other interviewees said that it was important to put what they saw as relatively minor problems in perspective.

*We need to remember that we've only just been running for over a year. (Coordinator)*

### 3.6 Seconded staff

1. Secondment has proved advantageous for the programme and for seconded staff. It has enabled the programme to gain access to staff with required skills from other local agencies. It has also provided job security for the seconded staff members, who may well have been unwilling to resign from their previous job to take-up a fixed term temporary post.

*I wouldn't have gone for the post if it wasn't a secondment. (Staff team member)*

2. A prevailing theme with the seconded staff interviewed was that the level of continuing support and supervision promised by their employing organisation often did not materialise in practice.

*I am supposed to receive supervision once a month but in practice it becomes very infrequent. (Staff team member)*

3. While one secondee interviewed would have liked more joint supervision sessions involving Sure Start Wallasey and her employer, others did not mind that in practice they were supervised almost entirely by Sure Start Wallasey. This situation had the advantage that it was a less complicated arrangement. Dual supervision arrangements could be confusing.

*I was told by my employer that I was responsible to Sure Start and accountable to them. I don't know what that means. (Staff team member)*

4. Taking staff on secondment had meant that in some cases members of the staff team doing similar jobs were on different pay scales. Also, some seconded staff members were unhappy that in working with Sure Start Wallasey they were now on less advantageous terms and conditions than their colleagues who remained with their employing organisation.
5. For one member of staff the secondment had meant that her clinical practice skills were in danger of becoming out of date. In order to keep her skills up to date, she has had to volunteer to do extra paid work for her employer at weekends.
6. Some staff members seconded to Sure Start Wallasey have had to adjust to a new working culture which is often less structured and relies more on individual initiative than the culture they have been used to. Certain staff members have struggled to adjust to this new culture and have not always been happy shouldering the additional responsibilities that working for Sure Start has sometimes entailed.

### **3.7 Implications of the Children's Centre for the staff team**

1. It was strongly felt that under the Children's Centre there was a continued need for coordination roles in the areas of health, childcare and early learning, and family and community support. If anything, the Children's Centre and Every Child Matters agendas had increased the need for this coordination role.
2. There was some anxiety that, in the competition for jobs within the Children's Centre, Sure Start Wallasey staff members might be at a disadvantage to individuals who were already local authority employees.
3. The worry was also expressed that the staff for the existing four Sure Start programmes would be spread around the eleven Children's Centres thereby greatly reducing the staffing resources currently enjoyed by the existing programmes.
4. Above all it was widely perceived that the transformation to the Children's Centre was going to be a period of great uncertainty for Sure Start Wallasey staff members. There was concern at how this was going to affect the morale and stability of the staff team.

*I am worried that staff will leave and the best staff will leave first because of the uncertainty. (Board member)*