

Evaluation of partnership working with other services

Sure Start Wallasey
Evaluation Report No. 6

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Executive Summary

This report evaluates the partnerships formed between Sure Start Wallasey and other agencies in order to plan and provide services for families with young children living in the programme area. Partner agencies covered by the evaluation include Wirral's Sure Start Support Team (Early Years), social services, PCTs and other health trusts, GPs, schools, childcare providers, Jobcentre Plus, adult education institutions, the library service as well as various voluntary sector agencies.

It is not the intention of this report to evaluate partnerships with specific agencies in detail. Rather, it explores general themes and issues around partnership working that are relevant to Sure Start Wallasey's links with many different agencies.

The main source of material for this evaluation was a series of face to face and telephone interviews conducted with Sure Start Wallasey's programme manager and service co-ordinators and representatives of 17 partner agencies.

Key findings

1. In the limited time it has been operational, Sure Start Wallasey has already developed partnership arrangements with many organisations, across all key areas of its programme.
2. However, there are a number of organisations and services where partnership working is not as advanced as it could be, notably:
 - health visiting
 - midwifery
 - childcare and play providers within Seacombe Family Centre
 - social services family support service
 - local schools
 - GPs
3. In the relatively short time it has been running, the programme has not always been able to devote the attention and resources needed to developing closer working relationships with all of the above organisations. The programme also felt that in some cases the management and/or staff of other organisations have not been fully engaged in the process of developing working partnerships.
4. To date, most of the funding for partnership working initiatives has come from the Sure Start Wallasey budget.
5. In the many cases where partnership arrangements have been developed, Sure Start Wallasey and partner agencies reported that these have produced a whole range of positive benefits for the organisations involved and their clients. Among the main benefits cited for partnership working are the fact that it has:
 - enabled Sure Start Wallasey and its partner agencies to reach their target client groups and, in particular, to gain access to hard to reach families.
 - helped clients of partner agencies to access Sure Start services.

- enabled Sure Start Wallasey and the families it supports to tap into specialist support and a wider network of resources.
 - helped to augment the resources available to organisations to work in the community through, for example, Sure Start Wallasey providing a venue and crèche facilities free of charge.
6. Partner agencies reported that the experience of working with Sure Start Wallasey had almost always been a good one. The programme was typically described as being proactive, approachable and flexible.
 7. There is often a large element of overlap and duplication between agencies in terms of the services they offer local families. The evaluation found little evidence of strategic planning taking place between the different partner organisations on the question of who is best placed to provide which services to which families.
 8. Where Sure Start Wallasey has commissioned other agencies to provide services on its behalf, the programme did not always believe it had received value for money. There was also a concern that some organisations had viewed Sure Start Wallasey primarily as a source of grants to meet their own funding requirements. In consequence they may have given insufficient attention to changing the way they work or the clients they serve in order to fit more closely with Sure Start Wallasey's strategic objectives.
 9. Sure Start Wallasey was concerned that the management and staff in some of the key statutory services did not appear to be fully engaged in the process of change entailed by the transformation to the Children's Centre.
 10. Sure Start Wallasey is itself a partnership organisation. The programme is represented on a number of partnership bodies both locally and Wirral-wide. It was felt that many of these bodies are not functioning as well as they could be. The numbers of people on the boards is often too large to facilitate effective decision-making. It was felt that the PASS Group in particular has never got really down to addressing the detailed issues around how children's centres should work in practice.

Recommendations

1. It is important to prepare for more integrated working under Seacombe Children's Centre by continuing to develop practical joint-working arrangements with other organisations now. Other agencies are more likely to agree to the integration of their services within the Children's Centre structure if they have already acquired practical experience of effective joint working prior to the Children's Centre being established.
2. In order to assist discussion between partner agencies both at locally and Wirral-wide, it is recommended that the Sure Start Wallasey Programme Manager (as the new Seacombe Children's Centre Manager), or another nominated individual, produces a paper or papers setting out clear proposals or options for how the Seacombe Children's Centre will operate in practice. The paper can be tabled for discussion at the Children's Centre Development Group and then presented/circulated to the Sure Start Wallasey Board, other Wirral Sure Starts, and the PASS Group as appropriate. The paper(s) could address such key questions as:
 - what services should be provided under the Children's Centre?
 - which partner agency(ies) is/are best placed to deliver particular services to particular clients?

- if, as is likely, resources will be spread more thinly under Children's Centres, which of the current services provided by Sure Start Wallasey or partner agencies are priorities for retention?
 - how should access to different Children's Centre services be determined? What account should be taken of factors such as age, geographical catchment area, referral source and need?
 - what are the implications of the Children's Centre for the current services that operate out of Seacombe Family Centre, particularly those that serve a wider catchment area or a wider age range than 0-4 years?
 - which services should be located within the Children's Centre building?
 - which staff members from different partner agencies should be located and managed within the Children's Centre team and which should work in partnership with the Children's Centre from outside the direct management structure?
 - which venues should be designated as Children's Centre satellite venues and which services should be provided from these venues?
 - which services would it be appropriate for other partner agencies to commission from their own budgets?
3. Questions as to which specific services should be provided by or in partnership with Seacombe Children's Centre and the relative roles of different partner agencies in delivering these services, need to be addressed prior to decisions being taken on the Children's Centre staffing structure and on which services should be physically located within the building.
 4. To facilitate effective decision-making, consideration should be given to the merits of having a relatively small Seacombe Children's Centre Management Board, along the lines of the current Children's Centre Development Group. While it is recognised that a much wider circle of partner agencies have a legitimate stake in the Children's Centre, there may be more appropriate ways of involving them than through full Board membership. These would include one to one meetings, email consultations, a provider forum and inviting partner agencies to particular board meetings where an agenda item is of specific concern to them.
 5. The Seacombe Children's Centre Development Group needs to liaise closely with the Phase 1 Extended Schools Group to ensure there is co-ordination between the two initiatives.
 6. In future, local partner voluntary organisations should be provided with guidance on the Children's Centre's strategic priorities in order to encourage them to seek funding for initiatives that would complement that strategy and fill gaps in local provision rather than duplicate services that already exist.
 7. To help encourage mainstream providers to commission Sure Start services from their own budgets, a continued priority for programme evaluation and monitoring should be to provide statistical evidence on the impact of the programme's services on local families.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Aims of the evaluation

This report evaluates the partnerships formed between Sure Start Wallasey and other agencies in order to plan and provide services for families with young children living in the programme area. Partner agencies covered by the evaluation include Wirral's Sure Start Support Team, social services, PCTs and other health trusts, GPs, schools, childcare providers, Jobcentre Plus, adult education institutions, the library service as well as various voluntary sector agencies. It addresses such questions as:

1. How highly do other services rate Sure Start Wallasey?
2. What are the perceived advantages of partnership working, for Sure Start Wallasey, partner agencies and the clients they serve?
3. What partnership arrangements between Sure Start Wallasey and other services exist in practice?
4. How well have these arrangements worked?
5. What, if any, are the obstacles to partnership working?
6. How can partnership working be improved in future, particularly in the context of the forthcoming integration of Sure Start Wallasey into the Seacombe Children's Centre? What are the issues that need to be addressed if improved partnership working is to be achieved?

Sure Start Wallasey has already developed links with a large number and wide variety of agencies (see below). It is not the intention of this report to evaluate partnerships with specific agencies in detail. Rather, it explores general themes and issues around partnership working that are relevant to Sure Start Wallasey's links with many different agencies.

It is important to keep in mind that Sure Start Wallasey, as a sixth wave programme, is less than two years old. For any new programme it will inevitably take time to develop good partnership arrangements with other organisations.

1.2 Research methods

This evaluation has used the following methods:

- Face to face interviews with the Sure Start Wallasey programme manager and three service co-ordinators.
- Face to face or telephone interviews with management and staff in 17 partner organisations.
- The analysis of service level agreements, evaluations and other material describing the services provided by partner agencies.
- The analysis of relevant findings on partnership working already contained within Evaluation Reports Number 2 (Evaluation of the decision-making and staff team structures) and 3 (Evaluation of the home visiting service). Issues of partnership working between Sure Start Wallasey and midwifery, health visiting and social services were covered in some

detail by the home visiting report and it was not thought necessary to interview representatives of these agencies again in the context of the current evaluation.

2. Detailed evaluation findings

2.1 Existing partnership working arrangements

Table 2.1 summarises the main partnership arrangements that have been developed by Sure Start Wallasey to date. It also includes planned future links with other agencies, where the implementation of the partnership arrangement is imminent. For clarity, the table is divided into four segments, showing partnership working in the four programme areas of:

- support for families and parents
- adult education, training and employment
- child and family health services
- early education, play and childcare

Classifying instances of partnership working under each of the categories above is a somewhat subjective exercise. While each instance of partnership working is only listed once in the table, it is possible that, in practice, some partnership arrangements may be relevant to two or more areas of the programme.

Table 2.1 reveals that even in the limited time it has been operational, Sure Start Wallasey has developed partnership arrangements with many organisations, across all key areas of its programme.

However, the programme believed there were a number of organisations where partnership working was not as advanced as it should have been, notably with:

- health visiting (there had been good examples of joint working on individual cases but a lack of more formal joint working arrangements)
- midwifery (although the successful antenatal clinic pilot was acknowledged as a big step forward)
- childcare and play providers within Seacombe Family Centre (the toy library, the pre-school and the neighbourhood nursery)
- social services family support service
- local schools (although links had been established and were developing with two or three schools)
- GPs

In the relatively short time it had been running, the programme had not always been able to devote the attention and resources needed to developing closer working relationships with all of the above organisations. However, in many instances Sure Start Wallasey had been proactive in seeking closer links. The programme felt that in some cases the management and/or staff of other organisations had not been fully engaged in the process of developing working partnerships and sometimes had been slow to recognise and embrace the changes entailed by the Children's Centre and Every Child Matters agendas.

Table 2.1a – Description of partnership arrangements with other organisations

Support for families and parents		
Service	Partner organisation(s)	Comments
Antenatal Clinics	Midwifery service GPs	SSW and midwifery hold joint clinics at GP surgeries for mums to be. Piloted at Egremont Medical Centre. Being rolled out to other clinics.
Parenting Support Groups	Parentline Plus	SSW commissions Parentline Plus to run parenting support courses and workshops.
Family Mental Health Project	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	SSW (jointly with other Sure Starts) commissions CAMS to provide support to families where there are significant concerns with children's behaviour or emotional development. The project also provides advice, training and clinical supervision to SSW staff.
Adult Mental Health Worker	Adult Mental Health Services	SSW (jointly with another Sure Start programme) is to second an Adult Mental Health Worker until March 2007. The worker's salary is being paid out of the Sure Start budget.
Pre-school Hyperactivity Course	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	A new project that has been commissioned by SSW with other Sure Starts to provide a 10 week course for parents of children aged 3-5 displaying hyperactivity.
Catholic Children's Society Family Groups	Catholic Children's Society	SSW commissions CCS to run two local groups to provide support for isolated parents.
Surviving Parenthood Course	Catholic Children's Society	Planned. SSW will probably provide the crèche and venue for CCS to run this parenting course.
Inter-agency Monitoring Form on Domestic Abuse	Wirral Family Safety Unit and partner agencies	SSW is signing up as one of the participating agencies. This arrangement promotes information sharing and a co-ordinated response to cases of domestic abuse.
CAB Advice Sessions Pilot	Wirral CAB	SSW is planning to commission the CAB's Primary Care Advice Link project to provide advice sessions to parents at the SSW building on one afternoon per week.
Child Concern Model Pilot	Various statutory and voluntary organisations	SSW participates in this pilot project which includes a common assessment framework, guidance on appropriate multi-agency responses and information sharing protocols.
Home Visiting Service	Health Visiting, Social Services and other statutory and voluntary organisations	SSW co-operates with other professionals in work with individual families through, referral, information sharing, joint visiting, participation in case meetings etc.

Table 2.1b – Description of partnership arrangements with other organisations

Adult education, training and employment		
Service	Partner organisation(s)	Comments
Action for Jobs Drop-in	Jobcentre Plus (Action Team)	Jobcentre Plus provided an advisor to work from SSW building on one half day per week to give advice to parents on job finding, benefits and tax credits. Discontinued due to low take up and capacity issues within Jobcentre Plus.
Mentoring Courses	Jobcentre Plus Education Youth Service (EYS)	Jobcentre Plus commissioned EYS to run a 4 week course for lone parents in SSW area aimed at developing people's confidence and skills in getting back into employment.
Beauty Therapy Courses	Wirral Lifelong Learning	Two ten week courses for parents. Beauty techniques are combined with written and verbal communication skills. Wirral Lifelong Learning provides and funds the tutor.
Reading Group	Wirral Lifelong Learning	Group runs on one morning per week. Wirral Lifelong Learning provides and funds the tutor.
Training	Wirral Lifelong Learning	It is planned for a SSW Outreach Worker to take the Adult Learning Support Qualification. This will enable her to provide one to one learning support to parents.
Computer Maintenance Course for Dads	Wirral Lifelong Learning	Wirral Lifelong Learning will run this course at Leasowe Early Years and Adult Education Centre for the SSW Dads Group together with dads from Leasowe.
Family Health Course	Wirral Met	In the new year it is hoped that Wirral Met will run a basic skills course for SSW parents covering health, child health and child development. SSW will host and Wirral Met will provide the tutor.

Table 2.1c – Description of partnership arrangements with other organisations

Child and family health services		
Service	Partner organisation(s)	Comments
Secondment of Health Co-ordinator	Birkenhead and Wallasey PCT	SSW's Health Co-ordinator is seconded from the PCT. Her salary is paid by SSW.
Cookpots	Wirral Healthy Communities	Wirral Health Communities ran a 6 week healthy cookery course for SSW parents at Seacombe Family Centre.
Food Education Awareness Staff Training (FEAST)	Wirral Healthy Communities	SSW have attended trainer training to enable them to deliver their own healthy cookery courses and train other organisations.
Smoking Cessation Training	Wirral Support (Wirral Smoking Cessation Service)	Wirral Support has briefed SSW staff members on providing smoking cessation support and has trained a number of the team as Intermediate Advisors.
Fruit and Vegetable Vouchers	Healthlinks	SSW distributed vouchers to parents on Healthlinks' behalf. Scheme discontinued when lottery funding ended.
Home Safety Scheme	Wirral Home Safety Scheme Health Visiting Service	SSW outreach workers do a home safety check and health visitors issue vouchers for home safety equipment at 8 month baby check.
Baby Cafe	Wirral Hospital Trust – Maternity Services	The Infant Feeding Support Worker drops in most weeks to the Baby Café, run by SSW for breastfeeding mums.

Table 2.1d – Description of partnership arrangements with other organisations

Early education, play and childcare		
Service	Partner organisation(s)	Comments
Birth to Three Matters Training	Wirral Sure Start Support Team (Early Years) Childcare Providers	The Sure Start Support Team provided this training, which SSW (in conjunction with one local childcare provider) has rolled out to other childcare providers.
Respite Service	Childcare Providers Catholic Children's Society	SSW provides families who need respite with up to 8 weeks childcare placements with local providers. Catholic Children's Society administers the scheme.
Childminder Drop-in	Wirral Sure Start Support Team	Childminder Development Workers have supported SSW to establish and run a weekly childminder drop-in.
Tot Plots	St Joseph's School Wirral Manor Trust	SSW and Wirral Manor Trust developed children's allotments at St Joseph's School. This was linked to a cookery course run by SSW for parents to prepare the vegetables.
Play and Pamper	Egremont School	It is planned for SSW to run Play and Pamper and other sessions from the school site.
Peers Early Education Programme (PEEP) Groups	Serpentine Rd. Family Church Oasis Church Centre	Serpentine Rd Family Church and the Oasis Church Centre have been commissioned by SSW to run PEEP groups.
Parent and Toddler Groups	Serpentine Rd. Family Church Oasis Church Centre Seacombe United Reform Church	SSW commissions Serpentine Rd Family Church to run a Stay and Play. SSW made a grant to the Oasis Centre to provide equipment for its Active Tots session. SSW directly runs a weekly Stay and Play from Seacombe URC.
Speech and Language Project	Speech and Language Service (Bebbington and West Wirral PCT) Schools Childcare Providers	SSW commissions the Speech and Language Service to provide therapy to children with speech and language delay either in the SSW building or in pre-school settings.
Talking Tots	Speech and Language Service Wirral Libraries	SSW commissions the Speech and Language Service to co-facilitate this group with a SSW early years worker. The group is run from Seacombe Library.
Family Friendly Area in Seacombe Library	Wirral Libraries	SSW gave a grant to Wirral Libraries to provide a family friendly area and 'butty box' scheme, to support parents to encourage reading with their younger children.

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Table 2.1d (ctd) – Description of partnership arrangements with other organisations

Early education, play and childcare (ctd.)		
Service	Partner organisation(s)	Comments
Mini Toy Library in Seacombe Library	Wirral Libraries	SSW has provided funding to release a library staff member to do a feasibility study to set up a mini toy library/story sack library.
Summer Activities	Wirral Play Council	Wirral Play Council supplied a worker free of charge (shared with another Sure Start programme) to enable SSW's summer activities to cater for children aged five and over.
Dads' Group	Wirral Play Council	SSW pays Wirral Play Council to help with childcare support for the Dads' Group.
Sure Start Wallasey Crèche	Social Services Wirral Sure Start Support Team	Two full-time crèche workers are seconded from social services. Salaries are paid by SSW. The Sure Start Support Team's Daycare Advisor assisted SSW in obtaining OFSTED registration for the crèche.
Sure Start Wallasey Toy Library	Social Services	Until May 2005 one part-time toy library worker was seconded from social services. The salary was paid by SSW. Position is vacant at present.

2.2 Benefits of partnership working

Sure Start Wallasey and partner agencies reported that working in partnership had produced a whole range of positive benefits for the parties involved and their clients.

1. Representatives of partner agencies gave an overwhelmingly positive assessment of work being done in general by Sure Start Wallasey

They are a real benefit to families. They give families much more choice and accessibility of services and offer a good standard of service.

The management are extremely professional and knowledgeable. The outreach workers are enthusiastic, dedicated and committed. They know what they are doing and enjoy what they are doing.

2. Partner agencies reported that the experience of working with Sure Start Wallasey had almost always been a good one. The programme was typically described as being proactive, approachable and flexible. A number of interviewees from partner agencies reported that they enjoyed good personal relationships with the Sure Wallasey management and staff team members.

I am quite impressed with this Sure Start programme. They are approachable. We have a friendly relationship with them and they came out to see us initially to tell us about what they did.

Sure Start Wallasey are very open and eager to work with other people.

If I had to pick a programme that we have worked with best it would be Sure Start Wallasey.

3. A stimulus to partnership working is the fact that Sure Start Wallasey and other agencies are often working to similar or at least overlapping policy priorities, objectives and targets as set out in government policy programmes such as Every Child Matters, Choosing Health, the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services and the Children's Centre agenda. For example, Sure Start shares an objective to support parents into employment with Jobcentre Plus and health promotion objectives with the Public Health Department of the PCT.

Sure Start can't meet their employment target without working with us and we can't reach our target without working with them.

4. Partnership working between Sure Start Wallasey and other organisations has also enabled both parties to reach their target client groups. This benefit has worked both ways. For example, the antenatal clinic initiative with midwifery has allowed Sure Start Wallasey to contact and register eligible families at an early stage. By the same token, organisations like Parentline Plus have been able to utilise the contacts Sure Start has already developed with local parents to identify clients for their parenting courses. In addition, most agencies are being required by the government to work more with harder to reach, socially excluded families that are disproportionately to be found in Sure Start local programme areas. Working with Sure Start Wallasey has enabled agencies like Jobcentre Plus, adult education institutions and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMS) to gain access to hard to reach families.
5. Working with Sure Start has also provided other agencies with a physical venue within the local community at which to provide services. Similarly Sure Start has used partnerships

with schools and community organisations to run services that are accessible to parents living in different parts of its catchment area. In particular, the programme has developed closer links with Oasis Church to enable it to reach more families in the most remote part of the extended Sure Start catchment area.

6. Another advantage of working in partnership with Sure Start cited by other agencies is that the links can be used to give their clients access to other services. For example, a family receiving support from the Family Mental Health Project can also be encouraged to utilise Sure Start group or play activities which may prove beneficial in reducing a parent's isolation and/or supporting better interaction between parent and child. A head teacher commented that working with Sure Start Wallasey had helped to enrich the curriculum for three and four year olds by widening their early learning experiences.
7. By working with other agencies, Sure Start Wallasey and the families it supports, have access to specialist support and a network of resources. For example, Sure Start outreach workers have been able to use the Family Mental Health worker as a source of expert advice on child and adult mental health issues. The links with CAB and Jobcentre Plus provide the programme with access to a network of skilled advisors. Commissioning Parentline Plus has enabled Sure Start Wallasey to tap into a reservoir of pre-existing parenting courses and parenting resources.
8. Partnership working had also proved useful in training staff. For example Sure Start staff members have benefited from specialist training provided by CAMS, Healthlinks and the Wirral Sure Start Support Team. In some instances, such as with FEAST and Birth to Three Matters, Sure Start workers had then gone on to train other agencies. Sure Start had also delivered Birth to Three Matters training in association with a local private childcare provider. This had the benefit that the two trainers involved could supplement each other's expert knowledge in different aspects of childcare.
9. Another benefit of partnership working is that it has helped to raise awareness between agencies as to what each agency does. In addition to all the other methods of partnership working, Sure Start Wallasey has initiated and participated in one to one meetings and skill share lunches and sessions, largely aimed at increasing mutual understanding between different groups of staff. Such arrangements are, for instance, reported to have helped improve relationships between the programme and health visitors and social workers. A manager of a voluntary agency that had met a Sure Start Co-ordinator on a one to one basis commented:

Now we both have an understanding of how we both work and we can see that there is clear potential for the future.
10. Partnership working has also helped to co-ordinate agencies' response and to encourage information sharing when working with individual families. In many cases such partnership working takes place on an ad hoc basis but initiatives such as the Child Concern Model pilot and the Interagency Monitoring Form on Domestic Abuse are helping to put some aspects of joint caseworking on to a more formal footing.
11. As a result of working in partnership with Sure Start Wallasey, agencies have been able to augment the resources available to them to work in the community. A number of interviewees, particularly in the statutory sector, commented that their own organisations' resources were stretched or facing cut backs. In these circumstances co-operation with Sure Start Wallasey was invaluable either because the service could be commissioned out of the Sure Start budget or the programme supplemented the partner agency's resources, typically by providing premises rent free, crèche facilities and, in some cases, staff assistance.

Our funding is being reduced, so any help in kind that another organisation can provide is beneficial. In such cases it becomes a true partnership, not just a one way process.

12. Partnership working has enabled Sure Start Wallasey to undertake the joint facilitation of groups and sessions with other providers. This has brought a number of benefits to both parties including bringing in extra resources, widening the mix of skills available and even widening the client group that an activity is able to serve. For example, the provision of a worker by Wirral Play Council enabled Sure Start Wallasey to offer summer activities for school aged as well as pre-school aged children. This in turn made it easier for Sure Start parents with children in both age groups to attend these activities.
13. Taking staff on secondment from other organisations has enabled the programme to gain access to staff with required skills. Moreover, in the case of the seconded Health Co-ordinator post, the return of the original post holder to Midwifery is reported to have helped improve relationships between Sure Start Wallasey and that service.
14. The programme also reported benefits in commissioning certain services or posts, such as the Family Mental Health Project, jointly with other Sure Starts. Acting in unison with other Sure Starts was felt to give the programme more sway over the provider. It had facilitated the sharing of good practice between the Sure Start programmes, with one programme sometimes piloting an innovation which was then rolled out to other programmes. It had also enabled programmes to appoint and share full-time staff, an arrangement which was often more attractive to prospective candidates than a part-time appointment. However, the programme felt that where it had commissioned services jointly with other Sure Starts, it had also benefited from having the flexibility to opt in and out of different parts of a package as judged appropriate for Sure Start Wallasey.

2.3 Issues and problems around partnership working

Despite the many reported benefits of working in partnership with other organisations, the evaluation also identified a number of issues and problems connected with partnership working.

1. One of the biggest barriers to partnership working is the sheer number of organisations that have an interest (whether direct or indirect) in services for families with children under 5 in the Sure Start Wallasey area. In the limited time it has been operational it has inevitably proved difficult for the programme to develop as close links as it would have wished with all these organisations.
2. The complexity of the organisational structures of some of the potential partner agencies, notably the PCTs and other health trusts, has sometimes made it difficult for the programme to identify the most appropriate contact person in these agencies or to obtain agencies' formal approval for specific proposals on partnership working.
3. The programme reported that, despite improvements in this area, there was still a lack of awareness among management and front line staff in some other agencies about Sure Start Wallasey's role and the services it offered. This lack of awareness was in turn inhibiting the potential for closer partnership working.
4. The successful development and implementation of partnership arrangements was also dependent on the specific individuals involved. Some managers were reported to be much more receptive to the idea of working in partnership with Sure Start Wallasey than others. Where specific partnership arrangements had been put in place, their success partly depended on the skill, commitment and enthusiasm of the staff members charged with their implementation. For example, in one organisation where the relevant manager was very committed to working more closely with Sure Start Wallasey, the implementation of several

partnership initiatives had been held up by the 'negativity and lack of confidence' of front line staff in that organisation.

5. In some cases partnership working has been adversely affected by other organisations not being able to be sufficiently flexible in terms of the services they could offer the programme. This, for example, had been an issue affecting Sure Start Wallasey's links with adult education providers. Some providers were unable to offer courses on the days and times requested or in a more informal, less academic format that the programme felt would be more relevant and attractive to Sure Start parents.
6. Despite the fact that Sure Start Wallasey and potential partner agencies are often working to similar national policies, aims and targets, there are nevertheless occasions where conflicting organisational priorities have caused problems for partnership working. For example, there have been tensions between the objective of Jobcentre Plus to get parents back into employment and the view of some Sure Starts (not necessarily Wallasey) that many of their parents are not 'job ready'. Another organisation that had hosted a Sure Start Wallasey activity reported that there had been a conflict between the programme staff's wish to cordon off a specific area of the building for health and safety reasons and that organisation's own policy of allowing open access to the premises. In another instance, Sure Start Wallasey's encouragement of different agencies to share resources had caused some problems for a private provider:

Sure Start can forget we are a stand-alone business who have got to be sustainable.

7. One of the main ways that Sure Start Wallasey has promoted partnership working has been to commission other organisations, both statutory and voluntary, to provide services. While commissioning services from others rather than providing them directly has proved advantageous to the programme (see Section 2.2), there is a concern that some organisations have viewed Sure Start Wallasey primarily as a source of grants to meet their own funding requirements. Consequently, the programme has felt that in some cases funded organisations may have given too little attention to changing the way they work or the clients they serve in order to fit more closely with Sure Start Wallasey's strategic objectives.
8. The programme has also felt that commissioned services have not always offered value for money, although this may also apply to some services that are provided in-house.
9. While the use of staff from other organisations had brought benefits to the programme (see Section 2.2), seconded staff often did not receive the level of continuing support and supervision promised by their employing organisation. Some seconded staff had also experienced difficulties in adjusting to a new working culture which was often less structured and relied more on individual initiative than the culture they had been used to. A more detailed analysis of staff secondment is contained in Evaluation Report Number 2.
10. Data protection concerns had played a part in limiting information sharing between Sure Start Wallasey and other agencies. For example, one childcare provider said they often received insufficient information on the background and reasons for referral of children being placed with them as part of a respite care package. Professionals were clearly grappling with a perceived change in culture away from the family's confidentiality being paramount, to a post Victoria Climbié Inquiry emphasis on the need for agencies to share information. The pilot of the Child Concern model may help to improve the sharing of information between agencies. A more detailed discussion of issues of information sharing and data protection is contained in Evaluation Report Number 3.

11. Partnership working entails co-operation between different sets of professionals, each with a different background, standards and professional ethos. In some cases, joint working may have been hindered by a lack of understanding, confidence and trust in each other's methods and procedures. This may have particularly been the case in relation to the programme's links with health services. However, these barriers appeared to be breaking down as levels of day to day contact between Sure Start Wallasey and other services increased. This issue is addressed further in Evaluation Report Number 3.
12. There is often a large element of overlap and duplication between various agencies in terms of the services they offer local families. For example, Evaluation Report Number 3 set out in some detail the overlap between the services provided by the Sure Start Wallasey home visiting service and those delivered by health and social services, particularly the Community Nursery Nurses, Rapid Response Nursery Nurses, and the Family Support Team. The current evaluation found little evidence of strategic planning taking place between the various partner organisations on the question of who was best placed to provide which services to which families.
13. As already mentioned in Section 2.2, a number of statutory agencies were facing cuts in their budgets and this was limiting the amount of resources they could commit to working in partnership with Sure Start Wallasey as well as, in some cases, hampering their ability to plan ahead. The voluntary sector was often reliant on time limited funding from charitable sources and generally did not appear to be in a position to commit much of its own funds into supporting partnership arrangements with Sure Start Wallasey. The result has been that to date, as Table 2.1 (above) indicates, most of the funding for partnership working initiatives has come from the Sure Start Wallasey budget.

2.4 Partnership in decision-making

1. The Sure Start Wallasey Management Board is itself a partnership body that includes representatives from Wirral's Sure Start Support Team, health, social services, Jobcentre Plus, the Neighbourhood Nursery and the voluntary sector.
2. Partner agencies are also represented on Sure Start Wallasey's sub-groups. In particular, a Children's Centre Development Group, with a smaller membership than the Board, has been established with the remit of translating the key elements of the Children's Centre core offer into reality on the ground.
3. The Provider Forum provides opportunities for the programme to network and share information with a much wider group of agencies that have a potential interest in services for families with children under 5 in the Sure Start Wallasey area.
4. At a Wirral-wide level the programme is represented, along with the other Wirral Sure Starts, on the Children's and Young Persons Strategic Partnership Board and the Planning and Strategic Support for Children's Centres (PASS) Group.
5. While the various partnership bodies had the merit of ensuring that key stakeholder organisations were being formally included in decisions affecting them, there was a feeling among a number of those interviewed that many of these bodies were not functioning as well as they could have done. The numbers of people on the boards were often too large to facilitate effective decision-making. Representatives of some partner agencies were felt not to be contributing as much to the Sure Start Wallasey Board as they might have done, perhaps because the running of the programme was not their central concern. It was also felt that the PASS Group in particular had never got really down to addressing the detailed issues around how Children's Centres should work in practice.

PASS has the key people on it but it is not being utilised to develop ideas and formulate proposals to go the Strategic Board for decision. It is not grappling with the issues.

6. A much fuller account and discussion of Sure Start Wallasey's decision-making arrangements is given in Evaluation Report Number 2.

2.5 Partnership working under the Children's Centre

The evaluation gave the organisations interviewed the opportunity to comment on what they saw as the implications of the inception of Seacombe Children's Centre for partnership working, and also to highlight the key issues that needed to be addressed.

1. The Children's Centre was welcomed as providing a multi-agency building which would enable parents to access a number of services under one roof.

When marketing our service to parents it is a great advantage to have all these other resources at our fingertips.

2. Partnerships with other agencies could also be used to provide satellite venues in buildings such as local schools and community centres that would be more convenient for parents living in some parts of the catchment area to access.
3. Many of those interviewed for this evaluation mentioned that they were still uncertain as to what their organisation's role would be in the new Seacombe Children's Centre. Sure Start Wallasey was concerned that the management and staff in some of the key statutory services did not appear to be fully engaged in the process of change entailed by the transformation to the Children's Centre. From the programme's point of view insufficient attention was being given to addressing major issues of:
 - agreeing each partner organisation's roles and responsibilities in order to avoid unnecessary duplication
 - mainstreaming Sure Start services
 - pooling budgets and the joint commissioning of services
 - the integration of staff from other agencies within the Children's Centre team
4. The Children's Centre was seen as providing the opportunity for closer and more formal working arrangements between partner agencies, with agency staff being based within the Children's Centre building or even working as part of the Children's Centre staff team. Examples of such arrangements already existed in other Sure Start programmes and Children's Centres in respect of CAB and Jobcentre Plus advisors and children's library staff.
5. Consideration needed to be given to the implications of incorporating services into the Children's Centre, such as the social services toy library and Family Support Team, which currently serve a wider age group than 0-4 years and/or a wider catchment area than the Children's Centre catchment area.
6. Another issue highlighted by the evaluation was the need to consider how under the Children's Centre the Sure Start family support team, Jobcentre plus, adult education and daycare providers could work more closely to support parents back into employment.

7. It was also felt to be important that the development of Seacombe Children's Centre was tied in closely with the development of Phase 1 of the extended schools programme.