



“Your Job Must Be Stressful!”

Understanding the Issues and Challenges Faced By Staff at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange and Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville

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1. Introduction and Background to the Study

Sure Start has heralded a new way of working that clearly reflects a government wide commitment to joint working. This new approach has yet to be fully explored and due consideration must be given to the impact that these new models of working have on the work force. Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange together with Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville were keen to explore the issues and challenges encountered by staff working within these two fifth wave programmes. As part of the evaluation process, an independent study was commissioned to investigate the thoughts of staff and in particular to explore the issue of stress across the staff teams.

This report highlights the experiences of staff at these two local programmes and identifies key issues facing staff. The report also concentrates on the issue of stress at work and explores staff perceptions of work related stress. The report concludes by making a number of recommendations to assist the local programmes in addressing issues raised.

2. Methodology

The study was developed using a staged multi-method approach as outlined below:

Stage 1: Investigation of documented issues

Stage 2: Investigation of staff thought through a focused interview

Stage 3: Staff completion of a questionnaire addressing stress

Stage 4: Manager completion of a self-assessment tool

Stage 5: Semi-structured interview with manager

Stage 6: Staff focus group

Stage 7: Analysis of data collected

Stage 8: Verification by an independent expert

This methodology allowed the evaluators to undertake data collection that could be easily triangulated. The whole process was approached with a high degree of informality, accompanied with the option of anonymity and full assurances on confidentiality. This facilitated an open and honest approach enabling staff to air their views without fear of any repercussions.

3. Staff Interviews at Longhill and Bilton Grange

3.1 - Investigation of Staff through a focused interview

A total of nine key staff were interviewed. The staff team is exclusively female and categorised as white European which is reflective of the local population in the area.

All interviews took place at the local programme and were 45 to 60 minutes in duration.

The interviews commenced with a discussion regarding the informant's background and their motivation for seeking employment within the Sure Start programme. This was followed by an examination of how the informant's role had evolved and if it was what they perceived it would be.

Staff Backgrounds and their new roles

The majority of key staff were already established in their chosen field, with two key staff being seconded to their post within the Sure Start local programme. The Sure Start Programme Manager had effectively given all the staff a clear indication of what their role would be and had allowed them the autonomy to shape their roles to fit with their personal and professional skills. This emphasis on creativity, innovation and self direction has proved to be a prime motivator for staff to move from partner organisations to the Sure Start local programme. Initially some staff found this experience a little daunting as they began to undertake activities that are not traditionally part of their roles. However, as the local programme has grown, individual's confidences have increased and these initial fears have now subsided. All staff member see their role as constantly evolving, particularly in terms of creating the flexibility to meet the changing needs of families in the local area. Although this can be exciting for staff, a number of staff have commented that in reality they can often find themselves taking on more tasks, thus rendering themselves with little time to complete some of their core duties. Staff are therefore very conscious of the need to strike the right balance, in order to achieve a satisfying job role and more innovative and effective approach to service delivery.

Staff Achievements

During the interview the informants discussed some of their early achievements. The primary achievements related to the development of a strong team providing a professional service, where no service had previously existed. There is great sense of skill sharing, with staff members using their professional expertise to create and implement policies and strategies across the programme. There is a good sense of partnership working and a common understanding being created with partner organisations. Another major achievement is the strong links that have been formed with the community and the inclusion of parents in the steering of the service. This has resulted in a resource that is highly valued by the community.

Staff Experiences of Partnership Working

Key staff moved on to discuss the challenges that they face as part of the Sure Start local programme team. The evaluators asked staff to firstly think about the challenges in terms of joined up working. Key staff highlighted the issue of poor understanding about the role of Sure Start as a preventative service and the need to keep reminding mainstream services about the purpose of Sure Start. On several occasions staff have been referred families who require more intense support under the Social Services remit. Staff have been working closely with Social Services to ensure that there is better understanding about the local programme and what it provides. Some staff have found that partnership arrangements have caused some deal of confusion and have identified the need to increase communication between partners. This has been a particular factor when considering staff supervisory arrangements as staff can be compromised by having more than one line manager.

Overall staff are finding that partnership arrangements are working well. There have been a number of frustrations with Hull City Council as the governing body, as their systems are not conducive to the way in which Sure Start operates. It is very much a case of trying to fit an innovative and forward thinking provision into an administrative framework that is inflexible. However, Sure Start staff seem to have accepted these difficulties and work in a way that ensure the bureaucratic arrangements of the governing body do not prevent the programme from achieving its objectives.

Staff Experiences of Working in Partnership with Parents

Key staff discussed the challenges of working in a programme that has strong parental involvement. Staff acknowledged the fact that their roles were concerned with people's lives and that therefore they had a huge degree of responsibility. Issues sometimes arose when parents had particular expectations or demands and staff could not, for numerous reasons, give the parents what they desired. Several staff commented on the need to balance the requirements of their job with the needs and desires of parents. There were some concerns that the local programme has raised parental expectations and that parents do not realise the cost implications involved. For example, where a crèche is provided for activities it has become the expectation that a crèche will be provided for all events, however in many instances it is not cost effective for this to be done. The programme has addressed this by introducing a charging policy for some things and staff feel this will help to avoid the scenario where some parents become too dependent on the provision. Staff feel that although working with parents may present some challenges that these are in fact very positive. After studying other aspects of the local programme as part of the wider evaluation strategy, the evaluators feel that the way in which staff have embraced such challenges has helped to define the programme and make it a success. Staff are now aware of the challenge of maintaining parental involvement and are looking to extend participation across the programme to parents, their allies, and the wider community.

Staff and Resources

When discussing the notion of challenges, key staff were requested to consider any challenges that related to resources. Staff felt that such challenges were minimal and that planning and budgeting ensured that they had suitable equipment to help provide a quality service. Apart from the difficulties associated with ordering systems as a result of having to go through Council procedures, the majority of issues related to the lack of storage for equipment and the health and safety implications related to the moving and storing of equipment. It is anticipated that these issues will be resolved once the staff are re-located into a new building. Staff have taken an active interest in the move and had taken the opportunity to talk to the architect about some of their requirements for the new building. In the interim period, the local programme has benefited from the support of its partners in the safe storage of equipment.

Support for Staff

In terms of support, key staff reported that the programme had developed a good ethos and that the Programme Manager is highly dedicated to the staff team, advocating an 'open door' policy. Several staff also commented on the high levels of clinical support they can access and that arrangements were in place to keep up with supervision and professional development. Where staff feel that the support they need is not available within the local programme, partners organisations are encouraged to be involved. With regard to challenges in the support of staff, key staff expressed concern that there may be some issues in moving to the new building and that cross team meetings will be acquired to maintain morale. All staff feel that they have worked hard to secure the support of local parents and the community and this success now acts as a prime motivator for the staff team.

Staff Development

Staff were asked to consider their training needs. It is apparent that staff have access to a wide range of courses and that they viewed training as essential to their ability to deliver a good quality service. However, several staff had attended training courses that they felt did not have much relevance to their role. Therefore, it is advisable that staff investigate their motivations for attending various courses and that poor quality training is brought to the attention of the training provider. It may also be useful for the programme to monitor the impact that training has had on professional development and the delivery of services, particularly in light of the fact that the majority of staff have highlighted further training needs.

3.2 - A response from the Programme Manager

An interview with held with the Programme Manager from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange in order to verify and address some of the issues that had been raised during the staff interviews. The interview took place at the local programme and lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Successes of the Programme

The interview commenced with the Programme Manager reflecting on the successes of the programme to date. The main successes highlighted were as follows:

- Establishing the local programme in a short space of time – the Programme Manager had received a lot of positive feedback from partner organisations as to the speed with which the local programme had become operational
- Bridging the Parent/Professional Divide – The local programme has worked hard to forge links with the community and to empower parents. They were awarded the Longhill Award for Services to the Community in recognition of their efforts. The Programme Manager mentioned the importance that staff had attached to the need for recognising the community; the local programme does not take all the kudos for developments without acknowledging the input from the community and valuing the work of other local groups.
- Taking a Lead on Mainstreaming Issues – The local programme has made use of its partnership links to facilitate the mainstreaming of several projects. They have learnt from the experiences of other Sure Start programmes and are not leaving the issue of mainstreaming to the later stages of the programme.

The Challenges

The Programme Manager then discussed the challenges facing her role. The main challenge was:

- The Complexities of the Accountable Body – Hull City Council is the accountable body for the local programme and there is a dependency relationship on the Council concerning capital issues and finances. Unfortunately Council employees are not at liberty to devote all their time and energies to the Sure Start programme

and financial decision making becomes a long and drawn out process. This causes a significant amount of stress for the Programme Manager who fears that money may not be spent in time and thus reclaimed by Sure Start.

The professional experience and expertise of the Programme Manager enables her to view all other challenges as stimulating opportunities. The Programme Manager is able to engage all her skills and appreciates a working environment where there are still things to be learnt.

Staff Morale and Team Work

The Programme Manager moved on to discuss her feelings regarding staff morale and to give her response to the issues and suggestions raised by the staff team. The staff morale appears to be high and the team leaders appear to be happy in their role. The manager recalled that several staff had encountered some difficulty in initially adapting to the working ethos at the local programme, because it was so different to the way in which staff had been working previously. Several staff needed support to build their confidence to take on such an innovative and creative approach to their work. There is also a high degree of honesty across the staff team and members of staff are willing to notify the Programme Manager of the things they feel they can and cannot do.

The Programme Manager sees communication as fundamental to staff morale. All staff receive copies of the regular manager's report to ensure that everyone is 'in the know' and the manager has responded to requests for more team meetings by ensuring that Wednesday afternoons are kept free for all staff to come together. The Programme Manager has expectations once the programme is located at the new building. She will facilitate communication by taking up a physical presence at the sites and by also having a desk with the Community Development team.

Partnership and Joint-Working

The Programme Manager elaborated on some of the challenges of partnership and joint-working. These were:

- Issue of capacity – The local programme would like to do more joint work with Home Start and KIDS, but neither organisation has the capacity to be able to facilitate this work. This is a particular issue facing the voluntary and community sector and is consistent with the lack of long term funding that inhibits staff from engaging in more meaningful and sustainable work with the local programme. It is fundamental that the issue of capacity is tackled in order that the decision makers from these organisations are able to input into the wider preventative agenda.
- Meeting together – The local programme's staff team had suggested more meetings with partners, however the reality of this is that it is often very difficult to get everyone together at the same time. Therefore essential planning is needed to ensure that this happens.
- Ensuring an equal partnership – Some staff have encountered situations where they feel that the joint activities they are working on are being 'taken over' by staff from other Sure Start programmes. The Programme Manager's response has been to help all staff to work effectively together.

One of the main positives arising from the joint working is the development of policies. Members of the staff team identified this among their achievements and the Programme Manager identified the fact that many of these policies are now shared with other Sure Start programmes.

Budgets and Resources

The Programme Manager reiterated concerns associated with the systems of the accountable body and the frustrations of not being able to spend budgets in time. The local programme has taken a strategic approach to resources and identified the need to fund the post of Father's Worker.

Working with Parents

The views of the Programme Manager were consistent with the staff team's view that the local programme had achieved much success in working with local parents; in particular how the local programme had communicated complex information in a way that made it easy for parents to understand. The Programme Manager discussed the issue of

balancing empowerment with accountability and responsibility. She does not feel it is fair to give people a provision without also giving them the facts behind it all, as such the local programme has developed a charging policy that will help to give parents a perspective on the costs of childcare provision. It will also support the provision in securing sustainability, as the local programme wishes to strengthen the community and not create dependency on free non-sustainable services.

4. Staff Interviews at Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville

4.1 Investigation of Staff thought through a focused interview

The staff interviews at Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville followed the same format as the interviews at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange. Eight key staff were interviewed about their thoughts concerning their job roles and issues arising at the local programme.

Staff Backgrounds and their new roles

Similar to Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange, the majority of staff were already established in their chosen profession prior to joining Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville. Several staff reported that their job roles were much wider than initially anticipated, but that this was certainly positive. They felt that being able to work in a holistic way ensured that their input was more effective. A small number of staff noted that their roles were restricted because of lack of resources and uncertainty about budgets. Some staff also mentioned that working with several agencies could be politically demanding and that conflicts could arise as they were working for different employers.

Staff Achievements

During the interviews, staff were asked to recall some of their main achievements. The following examples were discussed:

- Developing a strong team
- Building positive relationships with parents
- Accessing parents who would not traditionally use services
- Developing own job roles
- Securing the involvement of parents in service delivery
- Establishing new services from scratch
- Developing and expanding existing services
- Having input into the plans for the new building
- Ensuring effective monitoring
- Developing internal systems
- Achieving specific targets such as getting parents into employment

Partnership Working

Staff moved on to talk about the positive experiences they had gained and also the challenges they face in terms of partnership working. Similarly to Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange, staff felt that communication was sometimes an issue. Team Leaders reported incidences when staff had been asked to report information back to the local programme, when it was the responsibility of a more senior member of staff from that partner organisation to have done so. Several staff highlighted the difficulties that may arise from being requested to work to more than one set of objectives and targets. They feel that partner organisations should allow Sure Start staff to work to the Sure Start targets and not have their role complicated by additional agendas. Staff commented that several partner organisation did not have a full understanding of the roles of Sure Start staff and that this is something that needs to be addressed if staff are to avoid being pulled in different directions.

Several staff members find that partnership working is not without bureaucratic complexities and one member of staff suggested that more effective use of Service Level Agreements would mean that there would be less chance of partners letting parents down by failing to deliver services that really meet the needs of parents. An example cited was the reluctance of a training course provider to put on training session in multiples of two hours, allowing for crèche to be provided. The training course provider wants parents to attend for a full day, which is totally impractical for the majority of parents.

One issue mentioned by staff was the fact that everyone has different terms and conditions of employment and this has the potential to raise frustrations across the staff team.

Working with Parents

The majority of staff had found working with parents to be a very positive experience. A number of staff felt that local parents actually had quite low expectations of the programme and were surprised at the quality time the staff could provide. A small number of staff felt that parents expectations were high, particularly regarding getting activities arranged in a short space of time. Generally, there was acknowledgement that the programme needs to

engage in more work with parents to ensure that parents can truly participate in the design and delivery of the programme.

Resources

Staff were generally happy with the level of resources available to them, however several staff mentioned the issue of budgets. There is a general feeling that key staff would benefit from having a clearer understanding of the budgets and have a budget allocated to their area of service. This will help them to better plan their service delivery and to co-ordinate the fair distribution of resources across the local programme. Staff have addressed this issue through the relevant channels, however they feel that the issue warrants further action.

Other resource issues mentioned included the complexities of having to place purchase orders through partners as this can be a lengthy process, and also the issue of staff transporting equipment to various sites due a lack of on-site storage.

Staff Morale and Support

The staff team feel that morale is high across the programme. The open plan layout of the office has helped people to work more closely together and feel part of a team. Every member of the team is working to set objectives and the targets are interlinked, so this helps staff to focus together.

With regard to staff support, the key staff interviewed all commented that they experienced good leadership and support. However, a small number of staff stated it was sometimes difficult to establish a close fit within their designated team, as their individual role is unique, and within these teams key staff sometimes did not fully understand the duties and responsibilities of all posts. This could therefore result in some staff feeling under-supported.

Key staff talked about the social aspects to the team and that staff nights out were proving to be a good way to boost morale and team spirit. The staff team were also involved in an informative induction day and several staff mentioned that this had been effective in

supporting them and boosting their morale. In addition, key staff are given freedom to work on their own ideas in a supportive environment and several staff stated that this is good for morale.

The only challenge to morale mentioned by staff was the fact that on several occasions they had had to deny support to parents who do not live within the Sure Start boundary. This is particularly demoralising when staff can see that the families really do need the support that Sure Start offers.

Training

Key staff were asked to talk about any training they had undertaken and about their training needs. All staff had engaged in training opportunities and had found the training to be of benefit to their roles. Several staff had been supported by partner agencies to undertake training. The majority of staff identified their own future training needs and many of the courses reflected staff desires to be able to introduce new activities and opportunities to parents.

4.2 - A response from the Programme Manager

An interview was held with the Programme Manager from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville in order to verify and address some of the issues that had been raised during the staff interviews. The interview took place at the local programme and lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Successes of the Programme

The interview commenced with the Programme Manager reflecting on the successes of the programme to date. The main successes highlighted were as follows:

- Effective planning enabling the programme to deliver a service as agreed
- Providing localised services to meet the needs of parents
- A strong training provision that is supporting parents into employment
- A culture of parent consultation
- A strong staff team
- Efficient streamlined administrative systems

Challenges

The manager moved on to talk about some of the challenges that the programme was facing. The main issue is the complexity of moving to a new building and ensuring that the associated plans get underway. Another challenge is the recruitment of staff and the fact that recruitment is a lengthy process, particularly where partners are involved.

Staff Morale and Team Work

The Programme Manager discussed his feelings regarding staff morale and to give his response to the issues raised by the staff team. The staff morale appears to be high and the Programme Manager is in agreement that the open plan lay out of the office has been good for team building; this will now be the plan for the new building.

The Programme Manager mentioned that he is aware that smaller teams may be forming within the larger staff team and he is keen to ensure that this does not undermine the

overall level of staff morale. He is working closely with partner agencies to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest for staff and he is also exploring the possibility of conducting joint supervision sessions for staff. The Programme Manager re-iterated how staff had been supported to gain new skills to help them in their Sure Start roles.

The Programme Manager also responded to some concerns that were flagged up by staff completing the stress questionnaires, which are discussed later in this report. This was with regard to the health and safety of staff who are left vulnerable in the outside car park, due to lack of adequate lighting. This issue has been tackled by writing to the Chief Executive of the Council to ensure the Council is aware of the situation and deals with it appropriately. In a bid to address safety, staff have accessed safety training, and the local programme can provide mobile phones and personal alarms.

Partnership and Joint-Working

The Programme Manager elaborated on some of the challenges of partnership and joint-working. Initially there had been some difficulties in ensuring a good understanding with partners as to the role of Sure Start. Over time, relationships have developed well and joint working is very positive at ground level. The Programme Manager feels that more must be invested to ensure effective joint working at a strategic level, particularly with Hull City Council.

The Programme Manager is keen to engage in joint working with other Sure Start programmes and is working together with other local programmes on a number of projects, including the joint-commissioning of evaluation work and the recruiting of crèche workers.

Budgets and Resources

The Programme Manger was able to confirm and respond to the issue raised by staff regarding the lack of understanding and control over budgets. The local programme had inherited a budget profile that was tailored to the requirements of the local Council and not Sure Start; the timescales were totally unrealistic and money was not spent in time. The local programme is now trying to draw up its own profile and adopt more efficient systems

for working with budgets. Once this has been done, the local programme will be in a better position to pass more control to key staff.

Working with Parents

The Programme Manager confirmed staff feelings that parental participation in the programme is low, despite offering parents training and information to become involved. Parents do not seem to take an active role in the management board and those parents who do attend do not appear to be actively engaging in decision making. There were a number of parents who initially worked on the plans for Sure Start but they have now taken up employment and are no longer involved in the programme. There is some participation going on in the community where parents are voicing their views on local community issues and the local programme has become involved in this. Working to ensure that parents play a more active role in the design and delivery of the service has been identified as a key area for the local programme.

5. The Focus Groups

A focus group was held with the staff team from both local programmes. The function of the group was threefold, firstly to give staff who have not been interviewed an opportunity to voice their opinions, secondly to allow staff who have been interviewed to debate the issues raised during the interview and thirdly to triangulate the data collected.

Discussing Positives

During the focus groups, staff discussed the achievements of the local programme and things that the staff team view as particularly positive. These included:

- Building relationships with families
- Working with hard to reach groups
- Working as a team
- Adopting a multi-agency approach
- Providing local services particularly where services had previously not existed
- Planning new initiatives
- Supporting parents to increase self esteem and access job opportunities
- Secured a Father's Worker
- Ensuring parents involvement
- Overseeing and contributing to child development
- Spreading information

There was an overwhelming sense of team spirit amongst staff at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange with team work being quoted by many staff as being a positive element within the local programme. Staff at Sure Start Newington and Gipsyville commented that because everyone had a different background there was always someone who could help, and this was what made their team strong.

Discussing Challenges

The staff group explored some of the challenges that the local programmes currently faced. These included:

- Having the capacity to help parents on a one-to-one level

- Working in a new area
- Constantly having to forward plan as systems are not flexible
- Multi-agency working
- Receiving mixed messages from the Sure Start unit
- The issue of mainstreaming
- Hot desking and lack of space in the building
- Lack of office space and storage

It was apparent during the focus groups that staff agreed that the positives concerning the local programmes far outweighed the challenges. Many of the challenges will be addressed and resolved with the impending moves to new buildings.

Discussing the workings of a multi-agency approach

The staff at the focus groups began a discussion concerning conflicts of interest and the experience of working in a multi-agency environment. The following points were raised:

- All of the Sure Start staff come from different backgrounds, have different experiences, and so have different expectations. This can lead to some conflicts of interest.
- The teams within the local programmes need to co-operate, but there is no actual framework or code of practice for how to move forward.
- The community midwives from both local programmes believe they are often seen as an extra pair of hands by the health authority, particularly if the community midwives are short staffed. This demonstrates the failure of the Health Authority to understand the role of a Sure Start midwife.
- The Sure Start programme needs to be in closer contact with partner organisations and there needs to be better communication between management. Staff at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange discussed the need for a more strategic approach to joint working, believing that joint working is happening well at programme level but is absent at strategic level.
- Partnership meetings have been very poorly attended and it is often the same staff from the partnership agency who are on the partnership of all seven Sure Start programmes. Initially the interest was quite high, however several members seem

to have lost interest. A number of staff at Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville were quite cynical about the usefulness of partnership meetings, feeling that the uniqueness of the various local programmes is not given due consideration by the partnership.

In addition, staff at Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville raised the some concerns regarding joint-working and the wider agenda for the provision of services for children and families. Some staff feel there is an experimental element to Sure Start and that they are merely 'testing' services for children. Several staff believe that the programme's open brief could be used as a 'get-out' clause for the government ;should things go wrong as the responsibility will rest with the local programmes and when things go well the government can claim the credit. These staff were also concerned that they had been given a wonderful opportunity to create innovative services but, due to costs, these services will not be mainstreamed and the innovation will be lost.

Teamworking

Both staff groups confirmed that team working was particularly positive at local programme level. Staff from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange also gave the following comments:

- We are all 'everyday' people, approachable and we always back each other up
- We have learned to trust each other
- We learn from each other
- We all enjoy the work that we do
- We all view each other as important

Both local programmes were generally happy with support received from all sections such as the programme management, partner agencies, parents and the community. However, a number of issues were raised, these were:

- Differing conditions, such as pay and holiday, can erode the good feelings of the team and impact on long-term loyalty
- It is difficult for staff to get together
- Prioritising work is very difficult especially as the majority of staff are free to determine their own work loads. Staff usually have high aspirations and want to

achieve more than is practically possible; this can result in staff feeling stressed or frustrated.

Health and Safety

The issue of health and safety was discussed by staff at Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville. They report that since the interviews the issue of health and safety at work has become a prime focus. The Programme Manager is still awaiting a response from the Council regarding safety in the car park, but the problem has been slightly alleviated by the season change and the lighter nights.

Transport

Staff at Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville also explored the issue of transport. They noted the following:

- Casual car users should convert to essential car users as transport is vital to their post, particularly as they are required to transport equipment to various venues, which could not be done by public transport.
- There would be various complications in having a van for staff use, such as where it would be kept at night, and the eventuality that more than one person may need to use it at any given time.
- Using West Hull Community Transport is a possibility but the flexibility and reliability of the service may be an issue.

Parental involvement

Both focus groups looked at the issue of parental involvement. Staff at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange were extremely positive about the way in which the local programme had engaged parents and felt that parents played an active part in the decision making for the local programme. A particular achievement was the fact that parents had been supported to become actively involved in the management board and that parents held the positions of both Chair and Vice-Chair. The staff group identified the need to continue developing this work by undertaking the following tasks:

- Supporting the newly appointed Fathers Worker in bringing more fathers to the programme.
- Working towards meeting the needs of disabled parents. Currently much of the building is not accessible to parents with physical disabilities, however this will be resolved by ensuring physical access in the new building. The local programme also felt they could be more active in encourage parents with learning disabilities to become really participate in the programme.
- Staff also identified a desire to offer more long term support to parents who had particular needs such as substance dependency and mental health issues and therefore wished to investigate the nature of long term needs and practical ways to support them and engage such parents in the process.

In contrast, staff from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville revealed that they had encountered significant difficulty in securing involvement of parents. They commented that:

- Parents are not sufficiently involved in decision making.
- Sometimes the people coming forward are not the most appropriate people to be involved often because they are involved in too many other things and their motivations for involvement are questionable.
- There is a core of parents who tend to be overused.
- The community is not unified and therefore parents are unable to represent the community as a whole.
- The approaches that are being used to make contact with parents are not suitable for everyone, for example some parents dislike being approached in the street/outside school.
- The links that the programme has built up with local schools are mixed with some schools more willing to promote Sure Start. The relationships with the nurseries in the local area are similarly mixed, with some of the nurseries viewing Sure Start as competition to their business. There are some nurseries that are satisfied to simply take what suits them from Sure Start in terms of money and equipment etc., but are not prepared to support the involvement of parents in the Sure Start local programme.
- There are a number of parents on the management board but their involvement is not without difficulties and their actual attendance is sometimes inconsistent. There

is one parent who wishes to be on the management board but is not on the parent's panel and this has created an awkward situation, fuelled by miscommunication.

6. A Self Assessment of the Sure Start Local Programme by the Programme Managers

The Quality Protects Quality Assurance Project Group, part of the Department of Health, has developed a tool to help Councils ensure a quality approach to their services. It is a self-assessment tool to be used by managers of children and families services, and is a good indicator of the quality of services, when moving Quality Protects projects into mainstream provision and starting or reviewing new or existing projects.

The tool is designed to self-appraise quality systems levels and it is consistent with the Comprehensive Performance Assessment used by Social Services Departments. It can be used in a variety of ways at different levels and can be adapted to fit a variety of services for children. The evaluators felt it was a highly suitable tool to provide a focused insight into the strategic approach of the two local Sure Start programmes, particularly as many of the areas covered by the tool had prompted discussion amongst the staff teams. The tool requests that the service examine the extent to which they have accomplished certain tasks under the following headings:

- Services making a positive difference to families
- Comprehensive strategic approach to quality
- Strong leadership and commitment
- Culture of learning and continuous improvement
- Empowerment of children and families
- Working effectively with partners
- Making best use of resources
- Sustaining quality

As part of the self assessment exercise the Programme Managers for Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange and Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville identified the following:

1. Making a positive difference to families

Both programmes have developed an understanding about the relationship between required outcomes for families and national performance measures and they have undertaken action across some parts of the service in order to find out how they perform against these national performance measures. Both local programmes are also in the early stages of setting local objectives and performance measures. The two programmes are undertaking activity that will help them to ensure consistency in performance and use information to inform service improvements. The managers of both programmes detailed some of the difficulties that they have in achieving and evidencing the programmes commitment to making a positive difference, these included:

- A lack of baseline data
- The need to be dependent on other services for information and data
- The lack of strategic lead from Hull City Council
- The programme is still in the early stages of development

2. A Comprehensive Strategic Approach to Quality

The two local programmes are at the early stages of developing quality but clearly promote improved outcomes for children and families. It is policy for the programmes to ask families what they need. The managers both play an active role in regular risk assessments carried out by the Sure Start Unit and this exercise helps to review the design and delivery of the local programme.

3. Strong leadership and Commitment

Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville does not have Hull City Council as its lead body and therefore describes its relationship with Councillors as more tenuous. A local councillor has been nominated to the management board, however their involvement has been quite limited. Overall the Programme Manager feels that there are opportunities for senior managers and councillors to recognise and celebrate the achievements of staff at Sure start Newington with Gipsyville but that information flow between councillors and senior managers has little influence over the local programme. This is similar to Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange, who feel that it is more the case that monitoring and evaluation

will impact on the leadership and commitment of the programme in terms of influencing the deployment of resources.

4. A Culture of Learning and Continuous Improvement

Both programmes have included all staff in the communication process, however the Programme Manager and Longhill and Bilton Grange feels that this sometimes only extends to part of the service. This is probably due to the nature of the service provision not allowing staff to all meet together at once. This issue is being addressed by ensuring that one afternoon a week is made available for staff to meet together. Both Programme Managers feel that the local programmes offer a wide range of development opportunities for staff. In terms of supervision and appraisal, both Programme Managers feel that they offer a strategic approach. Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville feel that systems have been implemented that incorporate the following:

- Recognition for staff achievements
- Management of shortfalls in performance
- Involvement of staff in planning, reviewing and evaluating
- Evaluation of the outcomes of staff development activities

Although Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange has a comprehensive strategy for induction, supervision and training, the Programme Manager feels that there is still a significant amount of work to be done in order to achieve these factors. Several staff receive professional supervision depending on their employing agency, however one example cited by the Programme Manager highlighted the fact that employing agencies have not supported staff through appraisal and development interviews. In addition, both programmes have work to do in order to link staff appraisals to the overall service objectives.

5. Empowerment of Families

Both local programmes have a comprehensive approach to the empowerment of local families and all staff see this as fundamental to their role within Sure Start. This is an area that can be heavily evidenced through evaluation work and all staff are encouraged to develop a sound understanding of the evaluation process. Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville have reported that across some parts of the service parents are involved in staff

recruitment and development activities. Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange have developed many opportunities for the participation of families in the local programme and staff have actively supported parents to acquire the skills needed to ensure meaningful involvement. With regard to involvement in staff development and recruitment, this is something that is the development stages.

6. Working Effectively with Partners

Both local programmes acknowledge that there is still some work to be done in order to ensure the smooth and effective relationships with partner agencies. Early indications show that partnership arrangements are working well. Several arrangements such as commissioning, information sharing, monitoring and evaluating, and arrangements for supporting staff require further development.

7. Making Best use of Resources

Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville feel that they are able to identify all the resources needed to support the delivery of the local programme and that staff are aware of the cost and resource implications when making resource related decisions. Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange feel that they have achieved this across parts of the service but have not fully achieved across the programme as a whole. Both local programmes have made use of IT to increase access to and improve service delivery, although staff at Longhill and Bilton Grange reported much frustration around budget systems and IT systems, again due to the complexities of being governed by Hull City Council. Some IT systems have also not been easy for staff to use and staff have encountered difficulties in being able to obtain data from these systems in order to influence service development. The manager at Sure start Longhill and Bilton Grange also identified the fact that they work closely with partner organisations to secure additional resources and that this needs to be fed back to the staff group.

8. Sustaining Quality

Both Programme Managers identified the need for a systematic approach to sustaining quality across the programmes and acknowledged that progress was still in the developmental stages.

Overall the assessment tool shows that the local programmes have made good progress. Several areas identified by the tool can be classified as having particular relevance to staff and the subject of this study. They also indicate areas that warrant attention. In essence these are:

- A strong commitment and display of leadership at programme level which is not forthcoming at higher and more influential levels.
- Good networks of support for staff but a need for more support from partner agencies particularly regarding appraisal and development.
- At programme level there is understanding of cost and budget implications, however at an individual level this appears not to be the case.

7. A Summary of the Core Issues

The following table summarises the core issues raised by each staff team.

Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange	Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Striking a workable balance between an innovative and a defined role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing own job roles • Different terms and conditions for staff is a potential concern
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong sense of team work • Good levels of support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong sense of team work • Good levels of support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in the community • Achieved good levels of parent participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in the community • Achieved good levels of consultation • Difficulties in achieving participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucracy associated with accountable body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to understand and have more control over budgets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed good level of joint working • Developed policies • Need a more strategic approach • Need to continue to build a more common understanding with partners • Taking a lead on mainstreaming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed good level of joint working • Need to develop communication • Need to use Service Level Agreements more effectively
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new building • Continue to address and resolve health and safety issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new building • Continue to address and resolve health and safety issues

8. Exploring the Issue of Stress with Staff at Sure Start

8.1 - The Concept of Stress

The concept of stress is not new, however the concept of work place stress has recently attracted more focus due to the detrimental effects that it has on employees and their organisations. It has now been recognised that staff working within social and caring professions can often over-extending themselves and reach a point known as 'burn out'. A recent NOP survey¹ also revealed that this situation may be further complicated by the tide of reform sweeping across health and social services and the fact that many staff feel that they have been left in the dark.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE)², has defined stress as:

the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them

The HSE goes on to state that :

Pressure in itself is not necessarily bad and many people thrive on it – it is when pressure is experienced as excessive by an individual that ill health can result.

The HSE's key messages on stress are:

- Work-related stress is a serious problem for organisations. Tackling it effectively can result in significant benefits for organisations.
- There are things organisations can do to prevent and control work-related stress.
- The law requires organisations to take action.

HSE commissioned research has indicated that:

- about half a million people in the UK experience work-related stress at a level they believe is making them ill;
- up to 5 million people in the UK feel very or extremely stressed by their work; and
- Work-related stress costs society about £3.7 billion every year (at 1995/6 prices).

¹ NOP WORLD, Survey of local government, NHS and Voluntary Sector Workers commissioned by The Guardian. Cited in Plus Ca Change by Kendra Inman, printed Wednesday July 10th 2002 , The Guardian
² www.hse.gov.uk/stress

Given the overwhelming evidence and the emergence of a wealth of research studies relating to organisational stress, the Programme Managers of both Sure Start local programmes felt that the evaluation process would be a good opportunity to conduct some investigation into staff experiences of stress.

8.2 - The Methodology for the Study of Stress

The evaluators undertook desk-based research to explore the main issue relating to stress at work. Particular emphasis was given to the recent work of the HSE. The HSE had employed a team of psychologists to develop a means to measure perceptions of stress. The feedback they received was that the work was totally impractical and they would have to revise their approach and they are now conducting a pilot study. The evaluators had anticipated utilising the tools from the pilot for the Sure Start study, but felt that the tools would not provide sufficient information that is unique to the local Sure Start programmes. Therefore, the evaluators finally opted for a bespoke questionnaire that draws on the issues highlighted by the HSE and is tailored to capture issues specific to Sure Start.

All key staff who were interviewed were asked to complete a stress questionnaire as part of the interview. The questionnaire was completed partly by the staff and partly with a member of the evaluation team. Confidentiality was assured and staff were given the option of additional anonymity. The questionnaire explored the following:

- Demographic details
- Exploration of the demands of individual job roles
- Perceptions of stress at work based on attitudinal statements
- Exploration of managing stress at work

8.3 - A Summary of the findings from the stress questionnaires completed by staff at Sure start Longhill and Bilton Grange and Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville

Staff Backgrounds at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange:

- The staff team (at the time of the interviews) was exclusively female, with all staff being of white European descent.
- The staff vary in age with some staff in their early twenties up to staff in their mid to late fifties.

Staff Backgrounds at Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville:

- The staff team members who completed a questionnaire were exclusively female, with the exception of the Programme Manager who is male. All staff are of white European descent.
- The staff vary in age from mid twenties to mid sixties, with the majority of staff aged between 25 to 34 years.

Staff were requested to think about their job roles and all the various demands of the job. They were then asked to consider how well they dealt with the particular demands by giving themselves a rating of 1 to 10, where 1 is the feeling of not being able to cope and 10 the feeling of being able to cope extremely well. Finally staff were asked to consider any factors that affect how they deal with the demands of their job roles. The findings from both local programmes were quite similar.

Main demands of job roles cited by staff were:

- Multi-agency working
- Supporting parents
- Ensuring targets are achieved
- Taking a strategic lead
- Forward planning
- Decision Making
- Delivering the service
- Evaluating performance
- Dealing with budgets

Areas where staff experience difficulties in coping with job role demands:

- Setting up new services for the first time
- Providing financial data
- Dealing with issues relating to the new building
- Communicating with some partner agencies

Issues that effect how demands are dealt with were:

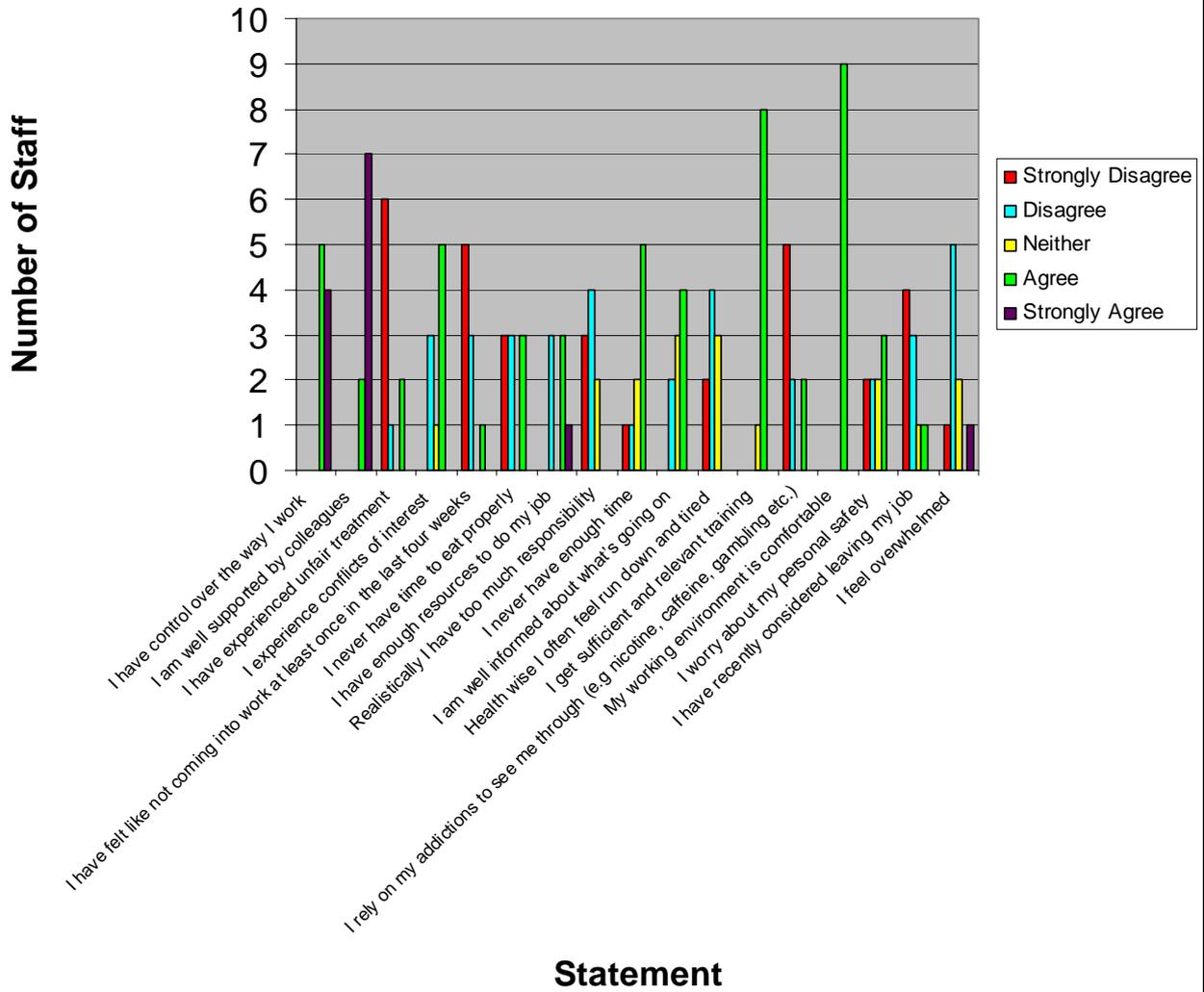
- A strong professional background

- Enjoying the challenge
- Having sufficient time
- Not being able to get any time out from the situation
- Having time consumed by paper work
- Employing good time management
- Requiring professional up-dating
- Not having the right experience for the job
- Needing specialist knowledge and training
- Not having adequate systems
- Not having the space and storage facilities
- Not having enough information about budgets
- Parents not getting involved in activities
- Being let down by partner agencies
- Understanding monitoring

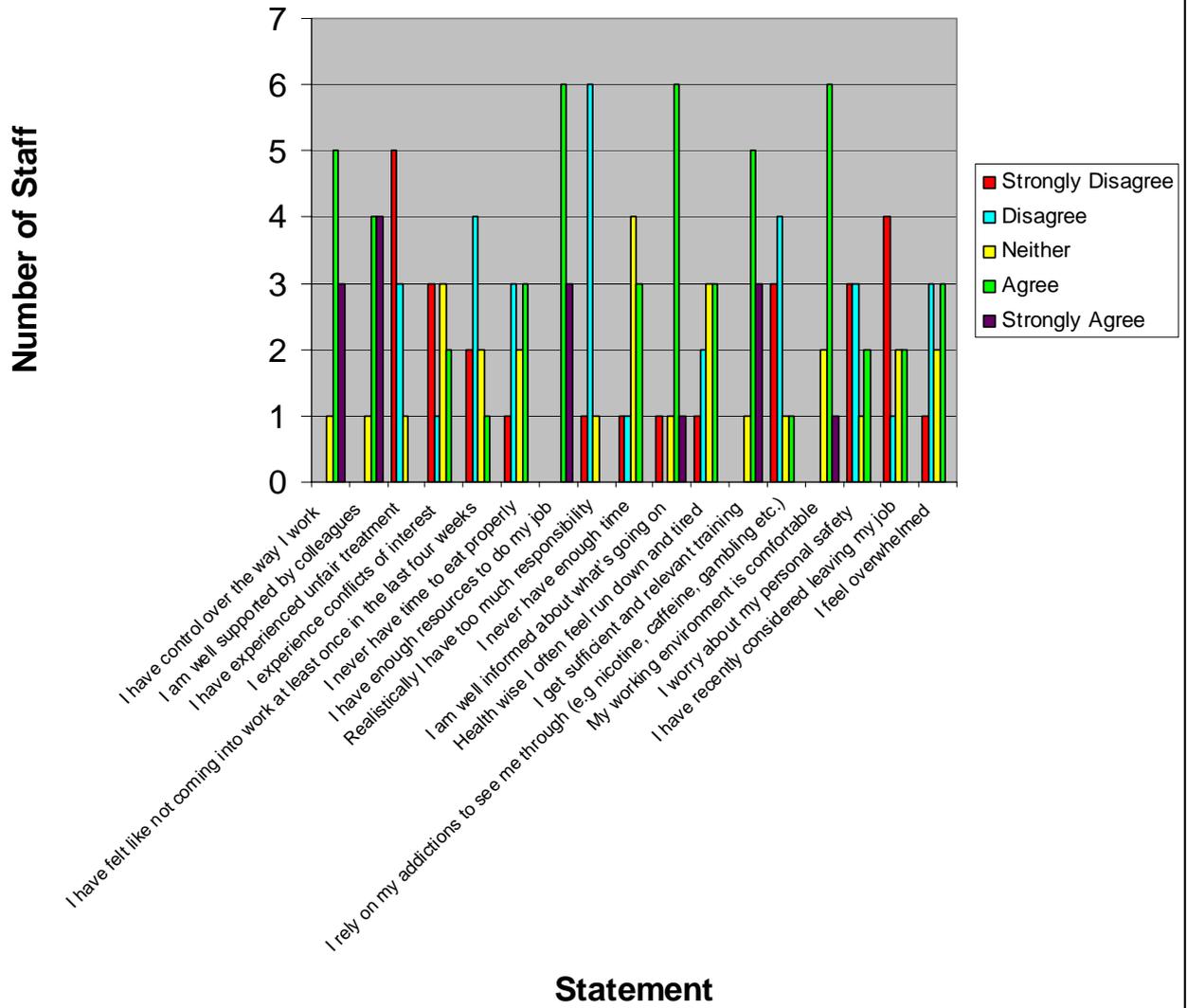
Responses to Attitudinal Statements

Staff were requested to respond to a series of statements by indicating the extent to which they either agreed or disagreed. The statements are based on factors that may indicate stress, lead to stress, or help to alleviate stress. The responses given by staff, to the statements, were very mixed and graphs overleaf allow for a comparison between the two staff groups.

Response to Attitudinal Statements - Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville



Responses to Attitudinal Statements - Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange



8.4 - Comparative Analysis of Stress Attitudinal Statements between Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville and Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange

It is important to consider a number of factors before engaging in a comparative analysis of the attitudinal statements of the two local programmes. These include:

- Different cultures at the two local programmes creating different perceptions
- Staff providing answers that reflect their loyalty to the programme
- Staff not wishing to answer questions honestly
- Staff misunderstanding the statements
- Staff not allowing sufficient time to give due consideration to statements
- Negative perceptions relating to certain issues can be transferred to other issues

It is therefore vital that the reader understand that the purpose of the analysis is merely to provide an indication of how the two programmes perceive stress and that reality may, due to the factors outlined above, be slightly different.

- Both staff groups feel that they have control over the way that they work, although more staff at Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville stated that they strongly agreed with the statement that they have control over the way they work.
- Both staff groups feel well supported by colleagues, although significantly more staff at Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville responded to the statement by indicating that they agreed strongly.
- Nobody from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange agreed with the comment that they had experienced unfair treatment while working at Sure Start. However two members of staff from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville felt that they had experienced unfair treatment at some time.
- More staff from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville believe they experience conflicts of interest than do the staff at Sure start Longhill and Bilton Grange. Interestingly three people from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange strongly disagreed that they experienced any conflicts of interest, whereas nobody from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville strongly disagreed.

- Both areas revealed very few members of staff who had felt like not coming into work in the last four weeks, although both areas did have one member each who agreed with the statement. Five members of staff from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville strongly disagreed with the statement, which may indicate that the staff are content at work, while only two members of staff at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange strongly disagreed with the statement.
- The majority of staff stated that they have time to eat properly, though two people from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange and three people from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville did not agree and the majority of staff at Sure start Longhill and Bilton Grange neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.
- Every member of staff questioned from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange agreed that they had enough resources to do their job. However three members of staff from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville thought they did not have enough resources.
- No member of staff from either area felt they had too much responsibility.
- A substantial number of staff from both local programmes believe they never have enough time. This is interesting because members of staff from both areas stated that they didn't have too much responsibility and also had enough time generally to eat properly.
- Members of staff from both areas believe they are well informed about what is going on. However two members of staff from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville disagreed and one member of staff from Sure Start Longhill and Biton Grange strongly disagreed.
- Most people did not feel run down and tired as a result of their job. No member of staff from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville agreed with the statement, but three members of staff from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange did.
- Staff from both local programmes felt they receive sufficient and relevant training, thought generally the fact that several staff from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange

indicated a strong response, as opposed to no strong responses from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville, would indicate that the staff from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange are more positive about training than staff from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville.

- Very few people from either area rely on their addictions to see them through. When members of staff did agree with this comment they indicated that caffeine or nicotine was used at work, particularly when having a break.
- Both areas felt their working environment is comfortable, though two people from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange neither agreed nor disagreed that this was so.
- Most members of staff do not worry about their personal safety while working for Sure Start, although there were four people in total who did have some concerns.
- One person from Sure Start either area has recently considered leaving their job with one member of staff at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange and two at Newington with Gipsyville neither agreeing nor disagreeing with this statement.
- Reactions to the statement of feeling overwhelmed were quite mixed. One person from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville agreed that they were very overwhelmed and two from Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange agree they feel overwhelmed. Two staff from both programmes neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. It would appear that feelings of being overwhelmed are stronger at Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange although no members of staff strongly agree with the statement. This is particularly interesting because no member of staff at either programme felt they had too much responsibility.

8.5 - Dealing with Stress

Staff used a variety of means to deal with stress and were asked to select from a list which means they used. These have been ranked in the table overleaf, in order, with the most popular means first. Where means were of equal ranking, these appear in the same box.

Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange	Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville
Talking with colleagues	Talking with line manager
Talking with line manager	Talking with colleagues Taking time out
Delegating tasks Listening to music	Delegating Tasks Listening to music Lunchtime shopping
Taking time out	Eating
Eating Using addictive substances (caffeine, nicotine)	Meditation
Homeopathic Remedies Meditation Lunchtime shopping	

Staff were also requested to think about what else they may do to relieve or manage stress at work and what else they thought Sure Start could do. Staff responses included the following:

Additional means to relieve or manage stress:

- Maintain a non-pressurising management
- Be flexible
- Be organised and prioritise work load
- Have staff nights out, have a drink, meals out
- Learn to say no without feeling bad about it
- Have a separate place where people can go to have supervision and time out
- Offer gym membership (exercise is a proven to aid stress relief)
- Alleviate the problems with the building particularly storage and ventilation
- Have more cross team meetings
- Keep a reflective diary
- Ensure that the accountable body is addresses issues
- Have team away days
- Provide a clear job description and expectations where staff feel it is required

9. Agency responses to managing stress

As part of the evaluation, it was important to understand how the various agencies involved with the delivery of Sure Start services were responding to the issue of stress in the workplace. The evaluators requested a written response from partner agencies and copies of any relevant policies. The responses received included:

Kingston-Upon-Hull City Council

Although the council does not have a policy specific to stress at work, it has in place a number of related policies such as a grievance procedure, equal opportunities policy, whistleblowers policy, sickness absence and reporting procedure, family leave policy, policies on violence at work and other general health and safety policies. The council also has an occupational health service and a confidential counselling support service (WISE).

The Pre-School Learning Alliance

The PLA have developed a draft policy on the management of stress in the workplace , although it has not yet become part of the personnel manual. The draft policy states that overall responsibility for the implementation of the policy residing with the Vice Chair of the County Executive Committee. The draft policy also includes a definition of stress and acknowledgement that the PLA has a duty of care to identify and alleviate stress at work. The policy outlines the sub-committees commitment which includes:

- Awareness about stress
- Providing training for line managers
- Conducting risk assessments
- Creating a supportive environment
- Supporting staff development
- Stress management workshops
- Monitoring return to work interviews for stress related illnesses

The draft policy also lists a number of organisations that can offer help and advice.

The PLA have also produced a useful leaflet as part of Health and safety week 2002, for staff to help them identify and tackle stress. In response to the evaluators enquiry, the PLA have alerted all staff, via the newsletter, as to the existence of this leaflet and have

requested that all line managers are made aware of the leaflet. It is being distributed to all new employees.

Hull and East Riding Community Health, NHS Trust

The trust provided a summary of the policy to manage stress at work. The summary identifies the main areas of potential occupational stress and highlights the Trusts obligation to identify risk. The policy states that individual employees should be encouraged to identify stress at an early stage with their line manager. A number of appendices accompany the main policy which includes information on the signs, symptoms and effects of stress, guidance on stress risk assessment and control and sources of support. In addition, the Trust provides an occupational health service that produce information on coping with stressful incidents at work.

Life Long Learning Unit – Kingston-Upon-Hull City Council

Written confirmation was provided detailing the support made available to staff. This includes:

- Professional supervision
- Six monthly achievement and development interviews
- Meetings with Sure Start colleagues
- Support of the Occupational Health Unit
- WISE - confidential counselling support service
- Various Council policies to support staff

10. Conclusion

The investigation of issues faced by staff at two Sure Start local programmes has highlighted a wealth of information relating to both the positive aspects and challenges of working within an innovative service. The government wide agenda to promote joint working has created a new and evolving working environment that has impacted significantly on the staff within it. The local programmes were keen to capture the thoughts of staff while they are firmly involved in the shaping of the service and therefore jointly commissioned a study that will fit within a wider strategy for evaluating the effectiveness of both Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange and Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville.

Encouragingly, the study shows that both staff teams have firmly embraced the opportunities and challenges presented to them by Sure Start. Individual staff have been encouraged to use and develop their skills thus creating increased levels of job satisfaction and creative and innovative service. Initially this approach was difficult for staff who were used to working in more formal ways, however as the local programmes have evolved, staff have learn to adapt and enjoy this new approach.

The main difficulty now for staff is that although they themselves have adapted to an innovative way of working, the systems that govern, interlink, and support the local programme do not easily accommodate such modern approaches. Basic systems such as finance and purchase ordering systems prove to be frustrating for staff because they are inflexible and do not match the needs of the local programmes.

Staff appear to be working closely together and overall have established a firm commitment to team working. There is also a firm commitment to partnership working and a desire to address shortcomings such as communication difficulties and the need for more support for staff. Both local programmes have strong internal leadership and would like to see a strong strategic lead from partners and the accountable bodies.

All staff seem very satisfied with the work they are doing with parents and Sure Start Longhill and Bilton have achieved much success in securing parental involvement in the design, delivery and management of the programme. Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville

have achieved some success in consulting with parents and staff appear disappointed that there is not a greater level of parental participation in the programme, particularly with regard to the management board.

Many of the concerns raised by staff during the interviews and focus groups will be resolved by moving to a new building and several pertinent health and safety issues have already been addressed by the local programmes.

From the study on stress it is possible to conclude that although stress is a prominent factor in the working lives of the staff at both programmes, there is a significant number of factors operating that help to ensure that stress does not overwhelm the staff teams. Certainly, there will be characteristics in the personalities of staff that help them to effectively manage stress and several staff will ultimately enjoy the degree of pressure associated with their work. It is evident that staff have control over the way they work and this will help to reduce stress levels. Support networks are good at both programmes with unfair treatment not being a common feature at either workplace. There is some evidence to suggest that some staff may be struggling with time management and may therefore be compensating by skipping meals or relying on less healthy convenience foods. There is also evidence to suggest that several staff are feeling rundown and tired and that the feeling of being overwhelmed is apparent; although this has not been associated with factors such as having too much responsibility at work. Encouragingly, there appears to be little reliance on smoking and other potentially harmful intakes as a means to relieve stress. All staff appear to have adopted useful means to manage and alleviate stress at work with the most common means being turning to the staff team for support.

11. Recommendations

As a result of the study, the evaluators would like to make a number of recommendations that may assist both local programmes in addressing the issues raised by the staff. The evaluators would also like to acknowledge the support and contributions of both Sure Start staff team in generating these recommendations. The recommendations are:

Partnership and Multi-Agency Working

- Ensure that all partner organisations have a clear understanding of Sure Start and in particular the individual job roles of key staff. Local programmes should continue to give presentations to staff teams from other agencies and could include a brief description of job roles in local programme publicity materials. The move to the new building will provide a good opportunity for 're-marketing' the local programmes and reminding partner agencies about the function of key staff.
- A firm commitment should be secured from partner agencies to support staff particularly in terms of appraisal and development. This is something that could be incorporated into a Service Level Agreement with partner agencies.
- Partnership agencies should be encouraged to contribute to the delivery of a strategic lead to local programmes. In particular this should be forthcoming from the accountable body. The management board will be required to investigate possible ways to facilitate this.
- Partnership agencies should be involved in tackling the issues described in this report. This could be facilitated by involving partner agencies in the evaluation process and securing their understanding of the Sure Start local programmes.

Managing and Reducing Stress at Work

- Partner agencies should be encouraged to ensure that they are actively supporting staff to manage and reduce stress at work. Several partners have developed policies on dealing with stress however it is important that this information is received by staff working within the Sure Start programmes. Many of the policies are not easy to read and may be of little use to staff, it is therefore important that accessible and informative leaflets are made widely available.

- Sure Start may wish to consider establishing a working group to look at the issue of stress and ensure that it remains on the agenda particularly as there is no actual policy on stress unique to Sure Start. An effective policy would help staff to identify stress before it becomes a problem thus avoiding the position where by staff simply accept stress as an unavoidable aspect of their job. The suggestions that staff have put forward in this report for managing and limiting stress could be further investigated and implemented by the working group. In addition, staff will feel more positive about identifying stress at work if they can see that there really is a firm commitment by Sure Start to tackling it. Such a commitment will help staff to understand that experiencing stress is not a sign of weakness or incompetence and that they do not need to accept undue pressures at work. Similar to the current work being undertaken by the HSE, the working group could also be responsible for devising a set of management standards to be achieved in relation to effectively dealing with work-related stress.
- Staff should make use of supervision time to identify if there are any underlying signs indicating that stress may be imminent. Issues such as managing workloads effectively should be addressed. This will help staff to feel that they can take time to eat properly during the working day. Using supervision time to look at the work/life balance may help to reduce feelings of being overwhelmed. Staff must also take responsibility for identifying the causes as to why they may be feeling run down and tired and therefore alleviate the issue at root.

Parental Involvement

As parental involvement is fundamental to the working of the Sure Start programme and a lack of parental involvement can be de-moralising for staff, the evaluators would like to make the following recommendations:

- Sure Start Longhill and Bilton Grange could support Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville by sharing their experiences of what works well in securing parental participation. This is something that could be extended across other Sure Start programmes.
- Staff from Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville should meet with various Sure Start parent panels to glean ideas.

- Sure Start programmes should consider employing, on either a paid or voluntary basis, a 'Champion'. This role would allow someone, preferably a parent, to concentrate specifically on encouraging parents to become more involved in Sure Start.
- Staff at Sure Start Newington with Gipsyville could work with parents to develop a code of practice for parents on the management board. This will help parents to understand their obligations to the local programme and ensure that the management board is more accommodating to them.
- The evaluation process can be used to evidence good practice in parent participation and is a good method by which to formally acknowledge the efforts of the staff team.

Other recommendations

- It would be worthwhile making use of annual risk assessments to identify potential areas that may give rise to stress.
- Assist staff by giving them an indication of budgets that may be available to them and thus remove any uncertainty regarding efficient deployment of resources.
- Identify ways of tackling health and safety issues as they arise as it is important not to rely on the new building to provide the solution. It may be quite some time before staff are in the new building and even the smallest of issues can erode morale. Engage staff in contributing to temporary solutions and enlist the support and resources of partner agencies.
- When developing quality strategies and systems, engage in consultation with staff in order also incorporate the issues that are important to them.
- A re-assessment of car user status may be required and the issue should be addressed with employing agencies. Where staff are unable to adequately carry out their duties without relying on their vehicle, for example to transport essential equipment, they should be classed as essential car users and awarded the relevant allowance.
- Staff should clearly investigate their motivations for choosing a particular training course and ensure that the course is relevant to their work. In cases where the training is of poor quality, this should be fed back to the training provider.

- Joint projects with other Sure Start programmes should be well planned, with each programme having a written agreement on their roles and responsibilities. This will help to ensure there is equal partnership.