Counting the cost of childcare: supporting educational training for parents in one Sure Start Programme: the experience of Crèche provision

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This report deals with:

- Comparative economic evaluation in childcare provision using a costing model and demonstrates the development of a unit cost per child for care
- Issues of maternal employment and financial government support
- Problems and surprises in unravelling the cost of service and the difficulties in ‘monetising’ benefit for families
- Explanation of future Sure Start plans based on the results of the costings developed here

1. Background

Assessing the relative cost effectiveness of a service is regarded as a positive evaluation tool encouraged by government (Meadows 2001) as a necessary part of good practice. This type of formative evaluation has been deemed as imperative in respect of Sure Start programmes (Meadows 2001). The innovative use of a high level of resource within this type of community based initiative, must be tracked in depth to demonstrate i) fiscal probity ii) effective output from the government funded financial outlay, this is often referred to as a ‘best value’ approach. Whether early intervention is worthwhile is a question that has been answered affirmatively by much research and analysis (Lazar et al 1982, Seitz et al 1985, Barnett and Escobar 1990, Schweinhart and Weikart 1993, Campbell and Ramey 1994, Reynolds et al 2001). A critical agenda remains in early childhood intervention and that is to determine the most cost effective strategies for achieving goals (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000).

Promoting the government line of encouraging communitarian principles and deploying resources that reduce the dependency culture adds to the necessity to show the evidence on efficient use of resources (Knapp and Lowin 1998). The aim of this report is to address cost effectiveness in a focused way in only one element within a Sure Start programme; the cost and usefulness of crèche childcare provision for parental support of academic achievement. The comparator to allow this to be undertaken in a cost effectiveness frame was the childcare provision of the local further education college. The college as a supportive partner with Sure Start developed community based learning packages to encourage residents to return to education.

Each Sure Start is dictated to by contextual, local elements that it has to function within. Availability of space and venue, time constraints and multiple use of the facilities is a major factor in attempting to develop flexible childcare that is community based. Sure Start Hilldene and Gooshays has attempted to run a service meeting best practice, using government guidelines on childcare practice whilst attempting to meet government Sure Start targets on cost effectiveness, smoking cessation, employability and family support, information and community involvement. This is indeed a tall order. In many respects there was never an expectation at the outset that childcare provision in Sure Start, would be cheaper than colleagues childcare service in an educational establishment. However, looking after children is the main aim in crèche provision in both services. Sure Start has the additional focus of meeting other government targets. Using another Sure Start programme as a comparator was fraught with difficulty for many reasons. Chief of these was the complexity of requesting another organisation to offer up their costings for scrutiny. As well as this there was the danger of inadvertently bringing into the equation, through evaluation work, an element of cost consciousness
competition that could be detrimental, in the long term, to the warm accord and helpfulness that exists in local Sure Start Programmes, who currently work together and assist each other. Compounding this, crèche provision and childcare is set up, even in Sure Start Programmes, in a myriad of different ways. Knowledge of all the local systems, including other Sure Start providers, and the search for a childcare provision that linked parent support with education led to the choice of the local college as a comparator. No comparison is completely exact because of the elements of local context, management and local culture that have to be taken into account but many elements within the college system allowed a good match to the particular Sure Start childcare provision being analysed.

1.1 Sure Start
Sure Start, (DFEE 1999) the programme, designed to tackle the roots of disadvantage and inequity, is part of the Labour government’s priority on inequality policy to prevent social exclusion (Roberts 2000) by focusing resources and support at the start of life. Early childhood is a unique time when the foundations are laid for behaviour, well-being and achievement in later life.

Much of the context and the aims and the targeted approach using Public Service Agreement (PSA) and Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) targets has been discussed elsewhere including the PSA and SDA framework used in the local Sure Start programme being studied (Houston 2003a, 2003b). In addressing family support it has been suggested that the emphasis should be on the relationship between needs/services/processes and outcomes (Pinkerton and Katz 2003). Certainly, this has been found to be important in relation to parental support and childcare provision in the example of this one Sure Start programme.

1.2 A New Approach to Prevention
Sure Start and its wider aims and objectives for the local area have been discussed at length elsewhere (DH 2002, Houston 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, ). However, it is worth highlighting the fact that the government also saw early focused child care and education not just in light of increasing employment opportunities to areas that were deprived but also:

- tackling and preventing crime (Audit Commission 1996)
- developing services to meet local needs, particularly those services that have been shown to be effective (Audit Commission 1999)
- early intervention (by provision of good quality childcare) as part of the impact on childhood school attainment and ultimately on later employment prospects (Lazar et al 1982, Schweinhart and Weikart 1993, Dhiri and Brand 1999)
- the effects of intervention programmes may not have any or only limited short-term effects, their impact being felt in the longer term (Dhiri and Brand 1999)

2. Economic Evaluation
Evaluation has been described elsewhere in respect of Sure Start and local programmes (Houston 2003b). Extending the idea of evaluation to incorporate economic evaluation will be the focus here in relation to Sure Start as a community initiative. Economic analysis of a programme affords criteria for measurement of efficiency addressing the most efficient alternative, however it doesn’t address the equity or fairness of the distribution. In the end professional judgement has to be brought into play regarding the
results and the future policy decisions based on those results (Barnett and Escobar 1990).

The ability to make unit cost comparisons against different services requires that there has been consistent measurement. The usefulness of breaking down cost information into single units for measurement reflects the needs of the child in relation to the service and the cost of that service (Beecham 2000).

Sculper (2001) described economic evaluation as a set of analytic tools to assess alternate ways of allocating limited resources. Economic evaluation is a comparative exercise, addressing value for money of one type of intervention compared to another. It is about comparing and evaluating options in terms of both costs and consequences seeking value for money as an outcome. It is also focused on what Sculper (2001) has called resource effects (costs) and non-resource consequences that are of value to the users. In this Sure Start example, the cost effectiveness element that was analysed addressed the cost of childcare in the form of crèche provision to allow parents to attend educational sessions. The resource effects are the supported childcare and the educational training, the non-resource consequence of this provision of childcare support and educational training, is the subsequent benefit for the parent by specifically leading to later further employment. In the field of social welfare research, there is subjectivity in evaluation decisions regarding ‘what is important, what is relevant, what is measurable and what is reliable (Hetherington 2003 p113). There has been a paucity of health and social care, economic evaluation in recent years (Knapp and Lowin 1998). In many respects setting out to complete an exercise like this with, education at the core, is complex, both in the decision-making of what aspects to evaluate and also because of the multiple sources of information that have to be researched and analysed. A comprehensive tool kit for unit cost measurement (Beecham 2000), suggests that this type of cost measurement is always likely to be an imperfect science.

‘Few providing or commissioning organisations will be enthusiastic about disclosing sensitive information of the kind required to estimate a unit cost’
Beecham 2000 p29

Linking real costs to children involves striving accurately to incorporate all expenditure categories contributing to the service being analysed. There are general principles for estimating unit costs (Beecham 2000),

- they can be made for any purpose
- they should be inclusive: staffing, power and maintenance
- they should tally with service use: one child is unlikely to use the whole team
- they should be capable of aggregation: data needs to be added together to inform decision-making
- they should reflect long run marginal opportunity costs: recognising the financial implications of expansion, ‘the opportunity cost will reflect the resource implication of opportunities forgone rather than of amounts spent’ (Beecham p14)
- the data should be up to date

2.1 Cost Effectiveness
Meadows (2001) in Sure Start guidance documents (www.ness.bbk.ac.uk) suggested that cost effectiveness,

‘is about assuring that the money we spend achieves its purpose. Sometimes in order to achieve our purpose we need to spend more money. In other cases, more money does not produce a better outcome, and we could do just as well by
spending less. But what is cost effective depends on what we are trying to
achieve’ p4

However, the challenge then is, if the new system costs more than existing practice, how
can it be assessed to discover whether the costs justify the continued new expenditure?
This is precisely the difficulty in Sure Start programmes. The Sure Start aim is to provide
high quality childcare where it has often previously not existed.
Cost-effectiveness analysis is usually employed to help in the decision-making when
choosing between two care options addressing which is best value for money, through
addressing a single effectiveness dimension (Knapp and Lowin 1998). Cost
effectiveness reflects the amount of benefit in relation to an alternative. It is not about
whether something is ‘worth’ the cost; rather it is about spending limited resource to the
highest benefit (Siegal 1998)

In the Hilldene and Gooshays Sure Start Programme much of the focus on child care
 provision was expressly to allow parents to become involved in educational activities for
example computer training (requested by parents) as a route into employment.
Therefore, in terms of cost effectiveness, the best comparator was a local further
education college who agreed to provide some statistics of their own costs to assist Sure
Start in the analysis process. There is a pressing demand within the local Sure Start
programme at Board level, for economic evidence to support the burgeoning cost of this
aspect of the provision. Childcare was never thought of as a project in its own right at the
outset and therefore was not costed in a ring-fenced manner. With the growing
popularity of supported educational programmes at community rather than college level
and other Sure Start parent activities, supported with free child care, the cost of
childcare, crèche provision rose to £35,000 per annum (this cost effectiveness analysis
covered a six month period only). Rightly, questions of efficiency, value and worth were
asked at management and board level. This analysis goes some way toward providing
answers for the Management Board.

3. Childcare Support and Employment

‘New’ labour thinking has identified strongly with the ideal of integration into the labour
market as a route out of poverty and deprivation as evidenced by the Sure Start
targeting mechanisms of which employment is stated as a Public Service Agreement
(Houston 2003a). Exclusion from work has been seen as threatening social cohesion
within communities (May-Chahal et al 2003) and this has driven policy to focus on
employment opportunity with benefit programmes such as the New Deal programme and
particularly New Deal for Lone Parents (DWP http://www.newdeal.gov.uk/). This
supports parents towards employment rather than encouraging only welfare support.
However, there is recognition that paid work alone is not the sole route out of deprivation
because in a poor area employment can involve poor rates of pay in a poor work
environment which may compound social exclusion. Alongside this, pressure can be
brought to bear on lone parents to return to the workforce, depriving them of the
satisfaction of full-time parenting. Failure on the part of parents to then take up the ‘offer’
of a government ‘new deal’ to return to work can highlight non-returnees (in a victim-
blaming way) as somehow contributing to their own exclusion in society (May-Chahal et
al 2003). A number of factors have been highlighted as important in maternal return to
work: parental stress, maternal emotional health, maternal efficacy and self esteem,
parent-child behaviour and the home environment, social networks and social support
(Boatright Wilson et al 1995) and all of these can affect the child.
Differences in provision of childcare between countries reflects policy on children and families for example in the early 90’s most Dutch children were cared for at home with only 2% of child care provision available, 31% of children were in day care in the USA and 47% in day care in Sweden. The maternal employment figures to some extent are a reflection of this gradient. With 52% working in The Netherlands, 67% in USA, 80% in Sweden in 1988. However 25% of mothers with children under one year were working more than 35 hours per week in the USA, 22% in Sweden and 4% in The Netherlands (Gustaffsson and Stafford 1995).

In keeping with the quality approach of Sure Start, the employment support pathway in Sure Start in the Hilldene and Gooshays programme was set in an educational frame. This was developed through close links with the local higher education college and many of the courses offered to community members continue to be accredited or linked to an accreditation system within a ‘skills development’ structure in the college setting, as an appropriate route into employment that will yield satisfaction for ‘returnees’.

3.1 Developing Child Care and Crèche Facilities in Sure Start

Childcare became regarded as an essential part of supporting families when it was recognised in the Children Act 1989 (DH 1989) Rising pre-school enrolment and increased use of nonparental childcare services alongside the loss of extended family support, are worldwide trends (Boocock 1995). Child care and provision of crèche facilities is an important practical aspect of supporting parents and families. It provides respite from the tasks of being a mother; it enables women to work and to take a greater part in education as well as community activities. Without child care women’s lives and the options open to them are much more restricted (Penn and Gough 2002).

In 1996, prior to the labour government taking office, out of home day care provision for pre-school children was scant in comparison to countries like Denmark where publicly funded day care was provided for 48% of the population for children under three years of age. By comparison, at that time, the United Kingdom provided only 2% of day care (Roberts 1996). It is important to note that poor quality day care has been linked to poor development outcomes for children posing the question that perhaps it is the parents who make poor choices over the day care that they use for their infants. Research into quality ratings of care (Cryer and Burchinal 1997) questioning 3,134 parents of preschool infants demonstrated that parents valued exactly the same aspects of care as that of early childhood professionals. However, parents lacked the ability to monitor critically the care that their child receives as consumers of a service. It is suggested that their perceptions as a consumer may be mediated by what they provide at home. The research suggested that the parents don’t rate the care according to their assessment of reality but instead according to their hopes and desires of what their child should receive as a much loved infant. In an extensive review of child care (parental and non-parental) these conclusions were drawn:

- single sources of vulnerability can be counterbalanced by support,
- child care that is sensitive and secure fosters cooperation, compliance and achievement
- inconsistent, unsupportive care, that is unresponsive to child needs encourages uncooperative and problematic behaviour.

(Belsky 1990)

Participation in out-of-home child care does not harm children and may yield benefits if the care is regulated and of good quality (Boocock 1995). Quality childcare can make a
contribution to delinquency prevention by providing intellectual stimulation for children in the pre-school stage (Utting et al 1993).
Out of home day care for children has been shown to have a positive impact on the cognitive development of the child as many studies have demonstrated examples of these are the Perry Pre-school Project and the Carolina Abecedarian Project (Schweinhart et al 1993, Campbell and Ramey 1994). Childcare also has an important effect on maternal employment with the least well educated parents experiencing the most benefit (Brooks-Gunn 1994). Justification of childcare investment has been defended on the grounds of equal opportunity for women (Utting et al 1993). However of importance to note here is the quality of provision of early childcare establishments, they should be staffed by well trained personnel who are well paid; poor quality of care increases family stress (Belsky 1990). Stress and social support are ecological influences that impact on parenting and child development particularly in high risk populations.

4. Multi-Agency Working
In June 1992, Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding from government, initiated the ‘Skills on the Hill’ training courses within the local area. These consisted of:

- Introduction to keyboarding
- Pitman’s text production
- Pitman’s essential word processing

These courses were held at the Christian City Mission in the local area and they continued when Sure Start overlapped with the regeneration scheme, that was nearing completion as Sure Start commenced. Sure Start began in the area in 2000, by working with the SRB initiative, providing a crèche for the parents in an adjoining room while SRB funded the equipment and premises. At that time Sure Start funded the crèche staff. Alongside this activity a play session for parents and children, called ‘Little Rascals’, was also held once a week to enable parents to learn practical, positive ways of providing good quality play experiences for their children. Many areas of the country had time-limited SRB projects whose aim was to develop the local economy and reduce inequality and social exclusion in deprived areas. Many SRB projects also had as their remit the ideal of paving the way for other community regeneration initiatives. They were to begin the partnership working that would support and develop economic neighbourhood renewal. Neighbourhood renewal is a complex business where putting one new thing into the system can have a counterintuitive effect on the area by inadvertently disturbing the balance of what was there before (Garbarino and Ganzel 2000). It was regarded as positive for Sure Start to work alongside the SRB team in a sense picking up the baton sensitively for further community development.

4.1 Government Guidelines
At present, all crèches can run for a maximum of two hours. Longer provision requires the completion of an Ofsted inspection and registration. It is common practice for crèche providers to keep to the two hour rule due to the limited time that the children are in their care. However, when the refurbishment of the new premises is finished, Sure Start Hilldene and Gooshays will have larger premises within the local shopping centre. This will comprise a reception and information area, offices and meeting rooms and a childcare facility with an adjoining outside play area. This childcare facility will be
inspected by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) www.ofsted.gov.uk and registered with the local EYDCP (Early Years Development Childcare Partnership) for sessional day care (sessions up to four hours). The longer sessions will enable parents to access courses covering a wider variety of subjects at other venues.

5. Using a Costing Model to Define Cost-effectiveness

This cost effectiveness analysis used the Beecham (2000) four-step model:

A. **Describe** the ingredients of the service
B. **Identify** the activities and a unit of measurement
C. **Estimate** the cost implications of the service elements
D. **Calculate** the unit cost

The ingredients to be described are the courses, staff, venue, equipment, and tutorial support. The hidden costs could be considered to be for example the transport of the special equipment for the courses delivered by van to the centre each week and paid for by another agency. Accurate description can bring to light service elements that appear to have no cost (Beecham 2000).

Identifying activities includes the educational input for the parents and the type of supported childcare and play for the children. The cost implications must account, in this case, for both the parent aspects as well as the crèche aspects of the provision.

**A. Describe the ingredients of the service**

5.1 The aim of developing the crèche provision in Sure Start

Radical policy change had placed provision of child care services and family support initiatives to the fore. The national childcare strategy and the early education strategy made development of child care services and supportive services for parents a priority within Sure Start and other area based initiatives (Lloyd 2000). Initially the aim of crèche provision in the Sure Start local area was to support and release parents from their childcare responsibilities so that they could become involved in Sure Start activities. Involvement, by parents, at that time was participation:

- in running the Sure Start Programme (prior to office staff being employed this was on an adhoc and volunteer basis)
- attendance at partnership board meetings
- attendance at the Parents Forum

However, through the Parents Forum the parents stated their need for crèche facilities to allow them to attend community based learning opportunities and develop networks of support (Houston et al 2003). Crèche provision had to be fixed as a part of the programme so that the educational curriculum could be developed, and parents could register for the number of 10 week courses of their choice. The result of this new development was two-fold: i) Sure Start committed to long-term crèche support for parents, this meant that children in the ‘crèche’ system (many parents signed up for more than one course) had regular, high quality, play and interaction with caring adults who were not their parents. ii) parents were free of childcare responsibilities and could
pursue further educational opportunities knowing that the childcare was nearby (provided in the same facility) and that it could be relied on. The decision to commit funding to this aspect was based on an understanding of the possible positive outcomes for families particularly in regard to meeting the Sure Start Public Service Agreement target on Employment (Houston 2003).

The change in government policy is stark, from regard of parenting and childcaring as a private matter in the early 90’s (DfEE 1996) towards the Sure Start view that increased opportunity for better access to early education and play (Glass 1999), was an important area in developing tomorrow’s citizens. By the mid 90’s research cited by Fawcett (2000) showed that childcare was based on parental need rather than children’s needs and was financed privately rather than publicly leading to unregulated childcare that was limited in extent. The move towards a ‘national childcare strategy’ realised through the agency of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCP) was part of the wider government target focusing on employment and returning adults into the workforce through initiatives such as ‘New Deal for Lone Parents’. Fawcett (2000) goes on to highlight that employment policy and parental need was at the heart of developing both ‘pre-school’ care and ‘after school’ care for families.

Support for families where ‘day-care services in which education is embedded’ (David et al 1997 p138), demonstrated that modern provision was not just about looking after children but about also providing learning and development opportunities for children. This has become part of this recognised new way forward, particularly with the links between Sure Start programmes and Neighbourhood Nursery Initiatives. However, David et al (1997) also highlighted that staff in this type of high quality care provision for 0-4 year olds, need to be well trained and well paid making this type of provision a costly exercise.

**B. Identifying the activities of the service**

**5.2 Delivering the new approach through Sure Start**

By September 2002, many new projects had joined the Sure Start Local Partnership and were requesting that Sure Start organise crèches for the variety of training courses they wished to provide for the parents. Crèches were provided for many courses or parent meetings. These are described below.

**For the Parents the Crèche Allowed:**

**Educational Attainment**
- Information Technology: series of courses, accredited
- Book-keeping: series of courses, accredited
- Speakeasy: Series of courses, accredited helping parents to be more confident when talking to their children about sexual health
- P.o.W.E.R. Promotion of Women’s Emotional Resources
- Counselling: accredited
- Partnership Board training workshops

**Parent Networking and Interaction**
- Parents’ Forum
- Coffee club
Body shop demonstration
Self defence awareness

Social Committee

Parent Child Interaction Training
- Parent Pack: a Pre-School Learning Association (PSLA) course for parents to encourage practical and positive parenting
- Positive Parenting: Educational Psychology positive approach/child behaviour
- Support for siblings of children attending Special Needs sessions
- Support for siblings of children attending Speech and Language sessions

Other Sure Start Project Support
- Smoking Cessation
- The Connectedness Project: a research and evaluation project
- Partnership Board meetings
- Safe and Sound Project: a public health initiative
- Body conditioning – a 12 week fitness course

Provision of crèche facilities had become an essential part of Sure Start as an organisation. They were also needed on a monthly basis for the Parents’ Forum, an integral element of the Sure Start Partnership. At the Forum the parents could vote for the type of course provision that they would attend (Houston et al 2003). In the third year of Sure Start, the local Programme in 2003, it was realised that although crèche provision had become an important part of the enhanced services offered by Sure Start it was an expensive service to provide.

5.3 Service for the Children Involved:

PLAY
From the moment they are born, babies and children learn through play and exploration. Babies and very young children seek and enjoy each other's company but they find it hard to play together. At the beginning they play separately, or use the same things side by side. Sharing equipment provides extra stimulus for children because they got ideas from one another. Very young children find the concept of sharing difficult to grasp but will gradually learn to interact and share until they learn later to cooperate in a group setting. Play is a key way in which young children learn about the world (Henderson 1991). In playing they can be boisterous or quiet and reflective and through play they can:

- Explore in order to make sense of the world
- Practice new skills and develop understanding of new concepts
- Understand the need for rules and learn about control
- Learn about cooperation
- Be alone
- Be with others
- Take risks and make mistakes
- ‘Problem solve’ creatively and develop imagination
- Communicate with others as they investigate and problem solve
- Express fears or relive anxious experiences in a safe environment. (DfEE 2000)
5.4 Early Years Education: The Foundation Stage

The foundation stage begins when a child reaches the age of three and ends with the completion of the first year of reception into school. Children work towards six goals of learning – the Early Learning Goals (ELG’s). By the end of the foundation stage some children will have exceeded the goals. Others will be working towards some or all of the goals. In particular those children who have not had high quality early years experience, children with special needs and those children who speak English as a second language.

The goals are set out in developmental stages known as ‘Stepping Stones’ that lead to ELG’s. The ‘Stepping Stones’ identify developing knowledge, skills understanding and attitudes that children need if they are to achieve all of the ELG’s by the end of the foundation stage.

Although the ‘Stepping Stones’ are presented in a hierarchical order, for achievement by the child, not all children will follow the same developmental route (Selwyn 2000). Some may achieve the later ‘Stepping Stones’ before meeting the earlier ones.

5.5 The Early Learning Goals

- Communication Language & Literacy
  This depends on learning and being competent in a number of key skills, together with the confidence, opportunity, encouragement, support and disposition to use them. This area of learning includes communication, speaking and listening in different situations and for different purposes. Parental reading of a wide selection of books is encouraged.

- Creative development
  Creativity is essential to successful learning. Being creative enables children to make connections between one area of learning and another in order to extend their understanding. This area of learning includes art, music, dance, role-play and imaginative play,

- Knowledge and understanding of the world
  In this area of learning, children are developing the crucial knowledge, skills and understanding that help them make sense of the world. This forms the foundation for later work in science, design and technology, history, geography, and information and communication technology.

- Mathematical development
  This area of learning will provide opportunities for all children to develop their understanding of number, measurement, shape and space by providing a range of activities in which they can explore, learn, practice and talk about their discoveries.

- Personal social and emotional development
  Is critical for very young children in all aspects of their lives and gives them the best opportunity for success on all other areas of learning. This aspect is about emotional well being, developing respect for themselves and others alongside social competence.

- Physical development
  Provides opportunities for all children to develop their fine and gross motor skills and to increase their understanding of how their body works and what they need to do to be healthy and safe.

(DfEE 2000)
5.6 Pre-Foundation Stage Development – Birth to Three Matters
The government continued to develop standards and guidelines for practice by turning their attention more recently to the under three age group. A comprehensive new package designed to help carers and parents: Birth to three matters: A framework to support children in their earliest years, was rolled out through Sure Start in 2003. The launch of this Sure Start education support pack in the form of a ‘Framework to support practitioners’ coincided with the expansion in childcare with a focus on high quality provision. *Birth to three matters: a framework to support children in their earliest years* was developed through the Department of Education and Skills (2003). The pack focused on the skill and competence of babies and young children and demonstrated the interrelationship of environment, growth, learning, and development in the child’s world. The principle four aspects in the pack are: A Strong Child, A Skilful Communicator, A Competent Learner, A Healthy Child. Each of these single aspects has its own four components for example the principle - A Strong Child has the components: Me myself and I, Being acknowledged and affirmed, Developing self-assurance and a Sense of belonging. The cards in the pack, covering each principle, go on to unravel some of these separate components, again in fours. They also point practitioners in the useful direction of additional research and ideas for each area. This is a useful, very well presented, practical tool for all involved in childcare and child development and underscores current government commitment to pre-school care and education.

C. Estimate the Cost Implications
Tables 1-4 demonstrates the separate costing elements en route to the aggregation of the total cost and the development of the unit cost per child of this particular enterprise. There are a number of particular issues related to the costings displayed in Table 4. These will be broken down under the headings for which the crèche was supplied. These issues demonstrate that finance and utilisation of the crèche is not a linear process but much more fluid in terms of application and practical use of the resource. It also demonstrates that multi-agency working can lead to successful outcomes for the community as each agency must play its part, if the endeavour is to succeed. However, even joint ventures must be subject to review and change as this evaluation has shown, through changes made to both courses and venues.

5.7 Information Technology
Information technology classes were provided 3 times a week with a different level of qualification offered on each day, to enable the students to progress through the courses. Although the basic Introduction to ‘keyboarding’ was popular, the numbers of students declined as the courses progressed. The final course, which finished in June 2003, had few children attending the crèche, making it less cost effective. The unused crèche places were offered for other activities e.g. support for siblings of families attending Speech and Language Therapy.
Information Technology courses were match funded by SRB through the local College who provided the following:
Table 1. College Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Driver to deliver the laptop computers to the venue</td>
<td>£14.00 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue rental</td>
<td>£20.00 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>£36.00 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of exam</td>
<td>£16.50 per student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College diary and discs</td>
<td>£2.00 per student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College enrolment</td>
<td>£22.00 per student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam invigilator</td>
<td>£20.00 per student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.8 Bookkeeping
Bookkeeping (and the crèche provision) was provided at a different venue but with similar costs match funded as above (Table 1).

5.9 Speakeasy
This was a series of accredited courses for parents to learn how to talk to their children about sexual health. The tutoring costs for the Speakeasy course were high, resulting in a high rate per child per session for the crèche. However, the tutoring costs could be attributed to professional development, as Speakeasy is an accredited course, verified by the OCN (Open College Network). In defence of the high outlay costs for this training, it had very successful educational outcomes with 6 of the 7 students achieving a pass in one unit at Level two, with the two tutors gaining two units at Level three. This accounted for the high tutoring costs. In order to offset the high start-up costs incurred Sure Start is planning to run the course again in 2004. The second round will not incur the cost of the tutors’ training, completed in the first round, but will incur the ongoing cost of the tutors per session.

5.10 Smoking Cessation and Counselling
The cost of the crèche for these sessions was high due to the high staff ratio per child. The counselling is based on a one-to-one session (parent and counsellor) and there were only two children who needed the crèche for their parent’s smoking cessation group session. From March until June, the crèche was provided at the Christian City Mission, filling the spaces not being used for the Information Technology course. However, when the Information Technology course finished, the crèche was relocated to the Sure Start centre based in St. George’s Centre. Due to the location of the crèche room, kitchen and toilets, ‘Best Practice’ necessitated three members of staff for each session, even if only two or three children were attending. This resulted in the high crèche costs shown in the table.

D. Calculate the Unit Cost

5.11 Demonstrating the Calculation Costs
Demonstrating the calculation towards the unit cost per child, is the final stage in the costings model applied here. Crèche start-up costs were met by Sure Start local programme funding Table 2. Toys and storage were the largest components in this aspect. Storage was important because the room used for the crèche was a multi-function room and was used by other Sure Start projects. Administration costs included time spent in choosing the best suppliers in the market place of specialist educational play materials and educational toys. Administration costs also included the paperwork involved in processing, invoicing and checking the arrival of the goods. Further
administration costs are included in managing and supervising the employment of crèche workers for the facility.

**Table 2. Crèche Start – Up Costs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storage Cupboards</td>
<td>700.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Equipment</td>
<td>250.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>1,700.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and craft equipment</td>
<td>150.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>300.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Crèche Non Staff Weekly Running Costs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant toiletry requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Drinks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialised play equipment (arts &amp; crafts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.00</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Staff Costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.T.</td>
<td>3407.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>1501.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakeasy And P.o.W.E.R.</td>
<td>1896.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Parenting</td>
<td>1455.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling And Smoking Cessation</td>
<td>426.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Forum &amp; Social Committee</td>
<td>641.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.S.L.A.</td>
<td>343.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Training for Partnership</td>
<td>618.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Conditioning</td>
<td>192.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,479.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. College Nursery Placement Costs March-August 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Staff Costs</th>
<th>Tutor</th>
<th>Total costs</th>
<th>Total No. Sessions</th>
<th>Cost per Session</th>
<th>Av. No. children Per session</th>
<th>Total cost Per child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childcare course</td>
<td>1,307.00</td>
<td>1,750.00</td>
<td>3,057.00</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>87.34</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair and Beauty</td>
<td>1,307.00</td>
<td>1,750.00</td>
<td>3,057.00</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>87.34</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.12 Comparison of Childcare Provision

Comparison of the two types of childcare provision (Table 4. and Table 5.) demonstrates the difference in costs between community based educational Sure Start provision and permanent local college based childcare provision. The first thing to note is the fact that Sure Start provision differed in cost with each course that was run, because of the varying number of parents, differing venues and tutor costs. The result of this was difficulty in planning Sure Start crèche provision because of the varied numbers of children in the crèche. The college based provision, on the other hand, was very stable with costs remaining the same as popularity of the service meant that it was always full and so the unit cost per child was stable. With the college nursery places being sought after and always filled the provision determined the accessibility of the course for the parent. Parents unable to access the college nursery have to find other childcare provision in order to attend the course. Sure Start on the other hand increased the crèche provision and staff in line with the popularity of a particular course, working always to government national standards (DfES 2003). The college allocate a specific number of places available for each session and anyone on any of a number of courses can access the provision unlike Sure Start who only provided one or two courses at any one time.

Parents who had been through the Sure Start education programme with crèche support wanted to go on to do further study at college. They found the unsupported nature of the childcare costs in the college system, in comparison to the free Sure Start provision, meant that they were unable to continue their education. One parent who wrote on her Sure Start course evaluation said,

‘if the crèche [Sure Start] could be opened to help the parents who are on a college course but have no childcare facilities and a fee could be charged.’

The costs to parents for a place at the college nursery for an 8-hour day were £24.65 or £13.85 for a half day.

5.13 Problems of Offering Flexible Childcare Provision

One of the costing problems for Sure Start was the staff child ratio and the impact of lack of commitment from local parents for some of the courses. If not enough parents attend or commit to the entire course then the crèche costs increase, an example of this was the Information Technology course (Table 4). Parents particularly requested this course. However, the numbers of attendees dwindled until there were only four children in the crèche making the unit cost of the provision £24.33p per child (Table 4). At the end of the course there were more crèche staff than children. It was found that some parents
accessed the crèche for respite from their children rather than for their own course attendance benefit and then dropped out because they could not commit to the course. This caused the unit cost per child, of the Sure Start crèche provision to rise because crèche staff were already booked for the crèche on the basis of the numbers specified by the parents and inline with safety regulations of staff child ratios (DfES 2003).

A further example of this was the body conditioning course (keep fit) (Table 4) where there was a lot of interest at the outset but the numbers dwindled to 7 children in childcare making the unit cost £10.26 per child, much more expensive to run than originally thought.

Parents who valued the provision suggested that there should be some form of minimal commitment payment towards crèche costs. Currently this idea has been rejected as financially discriminatory to some parents and not in keeping with the ethos of Sure Start aims. However, a new system of registration and cancellation is now in place that has been effective in addressing staff child ratios and unit costs per child, in the crèche provision.

Reasons why Sure Start child care provision can be more expensive:

- Lack of parental commitment to the course
- Lack of space to provide more than one course at a time (more children would reduce the unit costs)
- Multi-disciplinary use of the room means extra staff set up and dismantling costs
- Crèche staff wages are higher because of the irregularity of the employment (three crèches one week and none the next)

5.14 Surprising Elements in the Analysis

Surprising elements in this analysis showed that it was very expensive to support smoking cessation and counselling £49.55p. unit cost per child. Further evaluation of those particular services would be required to demonstrate the worth of this aspect, however the local Sure Start programme maintains a strong commitment to both of these elements in spite of the costs. This analysis only serves to highlight the true cost of commitment to these aspects. A further surprise was shown to be the extremely cost effective element of supporting the Parents Forum. Sure Start Parents meet once a month in a community centre locally to have their say about Sure Start issues and services and to support each other and network locally. They have presentations on issues relevant to the local area and Sure Start in respect of the 0-4 age group. Parents attend in large numbers on a regular basis. They put forward issues to be dealt with at the management executive of Sure Start locally and they are consulted in turn on issues, through Partnership Board representation, where their views are welcomed. They have also had presentations on such things as: Neighbourhood Nursery Initiatives, Self awareness and self defence for women, and Research outcomes from the evaluation of Sure Start locally. The unit cost per child for this event is very low (Table 4 parents forum). This was because the number of parents attending the network meetings was the highest of all the crèche provision, bringing the unit cost down to only £3.16p. A number of the other aspects highlighted (Table 4) had costs that were near to those of the college (Table 5) particularly the Pre School Learning Alliance (PSLA Table 4) course that had a fixed number of sessions, 6, a committed group of attendees that meant the crèche had 8 children each week. This meant regular unit costs of £9.31p per child. This was very near to the comparator example of £9.70, the college provision (Table 5). The Positive Parenting course (Table 4) was also a good example of parents signing up and staying the course making the unit costs per child, stable at £12.90 a cost
effective delivery of parenting education similar to the PSLA example. Some educational elements were expensive for the Programme to provide and there was an understanding of this at the outset. These were bespoke training sessions and were purchased by Sure Start to provide local parents with knowledge and information needed to be involved in the front line of decision-making within the Programme. The course was expensive to run and would be suitable for a small number of parents. The Parent Training for Partnership (Table 4) with a high cost per educational session and a low staff child ratio in the crèche meant that overall the unit cost per child was £28.66p. However this training was very important to help parents to fulfil more than a token role in governance issues of programme management (Houston 2003c, Houston et al 2003).

One aspect worth highlighting in respect of working with parents in areas defined by government as deprived, is that many parents demonstrated a high level of apathy to involvement in anything when Sure Start first commenced in 2000. Using the neighbourhood as a resource is more common in a low risk area than a high risk area (Garbarino and Sherman 1980).

Developing trust and showing the community that Sure Start with its ideas on childcare support was not fly-by-night and takes a lot of time and patience on the part of crèche and management staff in Sure Start. Engaging parents is complex and difficult. It took time to develop the Parents Forum to its current engaged state. There is a suggestion that it could also take time to develop Sure Start, flexible childcare for education, to its full potential. This exercise should be seen as a snapshot on that community development road.

Four principle factors are important in developing new systems within the community: deprived areas have been highlighted as areas where there can be a deteriorating well being of young families as a group, formal helping systems and existing services fail to reach out to young families under stress and provide sustained support, informal social supports fail low income young people requiring encouragement and assistance with their children, models of practice are needed for working with families that integrate all aspects of their lives (Halpern 1990). Community-based childcare support is one aspect that crosses through a number of these factors.

6. Calculating the cost of returning to the workforce

The ‘jobcentreplus’ who work closely with the local Sure Start centre, provided worked examples of the financial implications for parents of returning to work and the incentive schemes available for local parents looking for employment opportunities (Tables 6 & 7). A small number of Sure Start parents who commenced with the supported community programmes have already progressed towards employment. The worked examples (Table 6 & 7) demonstrate the difference that the Working Tax Credit scheme can make to a family. The government have encouraged a process that shows that it is less beneficial to continue to live solely on benefit. Inclusion of childcare costs demonstrates that even accounting for this large expense clients are better off working. Whether they have satisfaction in the type of work they are able to take up is another consideration. Of course it could also be said that there is now no incentive to stay at home as a mother and offer full-time care to your own child, a position previously seen as important in society.

Sure Start crèche childcare provision is part of a high quality active learning programme that in the pre-school stage creates the framework for adult success. This was shown by a 30 year longitudinal follow-up study of the High/Scope Perry preschool study in the USA. This showed that pre-school learning affected educational performance, social responsibility, adult economic status and family formation (Schweinhart and Weikart
This finding is supported by other follow-up studies that demonstrated positive effects 10 and 15 years after the intervention (Seitz et al 1985, Reynolds et al 2001). These studies show that children attending day care experience better educational and social outcomes, stay longer in school and are less likely to become involved in crime and violence in adulthood and that it also helps families towards becoming self-supporting. Alongside this day care provision has an important effect on maternal ability to seek employment (Roberts 1996).

It is not the role of this small cost effectiveness study to examine the savings to the wider economy, of this type of intervention. Previous research indicates that savings to the public purse through early intervention provision can be substantial in the long-term. The economic value of benefits estimated for childcare, elementary and secondary education, postsecondary education, earnings and employment, crime delinquency and welfare was found to be a ‘sound economic investment’ that required a ‘long time horizon’ to fully appreciate all of the benefits (Barnett and Escobar 1990).

However, it is useful to use the ‘jobcentreplus’ examples (Table 6 &7) as a method of displaying how a family can be supported in the move from total benefit support towards employment and independence. Many of the Sure Start parents expressly wanted community based educational and childcare support to help equip them for the workplace. Parental choice of Sure Start courses consistently reflects the main issues of importance to them, family matters (child behaviour courses) and getting back to work (information technology and bookkeeping). The listed examples (Table 6 & 7) show the financial breakdown of the intermediate stage of support that families can expect from the ‘Jobcentreplus’ structure.

**Table 6.**
**Example 1. Single parent, 2 children, difference between benefit and working 36 hours per week earning £14,000 per year paying child care for both children**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Circumstances</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>New Circumstances (working)</th>
<th>Working 36 hours earning £214.31net</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONEY IN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Support</td>
<td>£120.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Tax Credit</td>
<td>£65.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Tax Credit</td>
<td>£116.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Benefit</td>
<td>£60.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Tax Benefit</td>
<td>£15.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Benefit</td>
<td>£26.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Weekly Income</td>
<td>£222.90</td>
<td>Total Weekly Income</td>
<td>£423.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONEY OUT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing costs – Rent</td>
<td>£60.00</td>
<td>Housing costs – Rent</td>
<td>£60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Tax</td>
<td>£15.50</td>
<td>Council Tax</td>
<td>£15.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Costs</td>
<td>£157.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Weekly Outgoings</td>
<td>£75.50</td>
<td>Total Weekly Outgoings</td>
<td>£233.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For many parents the cost of childcare means that a return to work for the mother leaves the family only in a break-even position. Table 6 and 7 are real anonymised Sure Start worked examples. Table 6 shows a single parent with two children in childcare. Including the accounting for childcare costs at £157.50 the family is £47.18p per week, better off,
with the parent in employment. Similarly Table 7 is a worked example of part-time employment for a single parent that included childcare costs for the youngest child. This parent, working part-time was £24.54 better off in employment than on benefit.

Table 7.
Example 2. Single parent, 2 children, difference between benefit and working 16 hours per week earning £80.00 per week paying childcare for youngest child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Circumstances</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>New Circumstances (working)</th>
<th>Working 16 hours earning £80.00 net</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONEY IN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Support</td>
<td>£120.60</td>
<td>Child Tax Credit</td>
<td>£65.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working Tax Credit</td>
<td>£127.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Benefit</td>
<td>£60.00</td>
<td>Housing Benefit</td>
<td>£38.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Tax Benefit</td>
<td>£15.50</td>
<td>Council Tax Benefit</td>
<td>£8.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Earnings</td>
<td>£80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Benefit</td>
<td>£26.80</td>
<td>Child Benefit</td>
<td>£26.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Weekly Income</td>
<td>£222.90</td>
<td>Total Weekly Income</td>
<td>£347.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONEY OUT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing costs – Rent</td>
<td>£60.00</td>
<td>Housing costs – Rent</td>
<td>£60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Tax</td>
<td>£15.50</td>
<td>Council Tax</td>
<td>£15.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Weekly Outgoings</td>
<td>£75.50</td>
<td>Total Weekly Outgoings</td>
<td>£175.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1 Sure Start Crèche Work as Local Employment
Local people have used the crèche for the educational purposes described but running the crèche has also become an important part of service provision that has impacted on career development and local employment for women.

My name is Laura. I am a nursery nurse and I have a son called Ben. I work as a crèche supervisor for Sure Start. Ben was born in February 2002 and after the birth I attended 5 weeks postnatal classes, which were run at my local health clinic by my health visitor. These were very enjoyable times and I met some good friends.

I used to work part time in a school in Hornsey, which was a very long journey for me with a young baby. In August 2002, my health visitor recommended me to Sure Start to work in the crèche, so I accepted and started working part time. In September 2002 I was able to give up my previous job in Hornsey and work more sessions for the crèche. This is lovely for me because I am able to take Ben with me to the crèche.

Within 6 months I was promoted to supervisor of the crèche, so thanks to Sure Start I am able to develop my career and still be a working mum. I have also furthered my career by attending short courses, which Sure Start have organised for me.

7. Discussion: Issues and Challenges
Counting the benefit of an early intervention such as the example of crèche provision is a difficult task. Some benefits are plain to see if for instance the intervention provides the community with new, good quality play equipment for early years children. It becomes
more complex analysing the more indirect benefit in monetary gains made of the play equipment or indeed of childcare provision.

Karoly et al (1998) highlight some of the benefits that are ‘difficult to monetize’:

- the benefits of improved behaviour for the child or others who experience the improvement
- mother’s greater satisfaction with her relationship to her child
- the value to society of the greater academic achievement of the child who has experienced early intervention support
- the child who has been part of the programme themselves becoming more successful as an adult

A further difficult to monetize benefit, in the instance of crèche use, is the increased satisfaction, felt by the parents, of furthering their own education coupled with the benefit of respite from the child caring situation. It was interesting to note that the issue of respite came up in the ‘use’ of the educational childcare support in this analysis. Direct and indirect benefits have to be considered in analysing cost. In this instance the potential, direct benefit to the parent of supported childcare was addressed allowing the parent to develop educationally towards employment. The parent also has respite from the caring role. The child benefits by having increased interaction and stimulation from another caring adult and this benefits the child’s learning and development. The parent receives the direct benefit of the educational process and the indirect benefits that result from the interactions of the child in the childcare environment. These form part of the invisible benefits to the adult under-going supported training towards work.

Karoly et al (1998) discuss the extent to which early intervention programmes generate at least four types of significant savings to government These are:

- increased tax revenue,
- decreased welfare outlay,
- reduced expenditure for education, health and other services
- lower criminal justice system costs.

In addition to this there are two other factors highlighted (Karoly et al 1998). These are i) greater income enjoyed by the participant who finds work through having experienced either parental support towards work or direct benefit to the child who develops cognitively due to the intervention and thus is more able for employment as an adult ii) savings to those who in the absence of the programme would have been crime victims. Improvements in mothers outcomes of early intervention programmes may generate savings to government that are larger than the savings generated by improvements to children and these savings can often be immediate as well as in the future (Karoly et al 1998).

7.1 The need for change

Sure Start is committed to a parent led community consultation approach in service delivery that also involves review and evaluation of the cost and the outcomes of the service provided. Due to the increase in the number of crèches required, the diversity of venues and the staffing requirements, crèche provision became more of an issue as the programme grew and developed. It was therefore necessary to review these issues and find a more viable and workable solution. Evaluation of the cost and value of the service was coupled with many practical issues that affected the smooth running of the service, these contextual issues would not be a feature of a stable permanently equipped service.
like the college, but are presented here to highlight some of the problem-solving that is required to progress from simply reviewing problems.

7.2 The issues

- On some days, crèche staff had to set up crèches in two separate venues, morning and afternoon. This meant they walked half a mile between venues, carrying varying amounts of equipment and often having no lunch break. Sometimes courses meant that two crèches were running concurrently in two venues, resulting in costly and often impossible staffing requirements.

- The Christian City Mission and the courses which were running there, although popular at the start of the SRB programme, some years earlier, had declined in popularity, particularly amongst Sure Start parents. This made the venue less cost effective and resulted in Sure Start withdrawing from provision of crèche facilities at the Christian City Mission for the SRB programme of courses.

- There was no ‘booking’ system in place for the crèche and non-attendance became a major issue, resulting in unnecessarily high staffing levels. Sure Start following evaluation, developed a ‘crèche for course’ approach that meant parents had to commit to the process by signing up for the resource and telephoning to cancel.

- Consultation with parents through the Sure Start Parents Forum on the issue of training and crèche provision demonstrated that the parents i) wanted more diverse training courses ii) were still interested in courses that led directly to employment iii) were willing to book their crèche place, to reduce wastage.

7.3 The Solutions: Plans for the future

Reorganisation of the crèche provision was undertaken in Autumn 2003. The parents booked their own crèche places as part of the new system. The parents now book their place on the appropriate course with their crèche place for the duration of the course if required, at the Sure Start office. They must also confirm weekly that they still require their child’s crèche place. Except for the monthly Parents’ Forum (held in the local Community Centre), all crèches were held in a designated ‘child friendly’ room at the St. George’s Centre, where the Sure Start Local Programme is based.

The Government is determined that all child care services, new or established, provide a secure and safe environment for children, not least so that parents can have confidence that their children are well looked after. The numbers of children attending the crèches are predetermined by room space and staff ratios as set out by the DfES in the ‘National Standards for under 8’s daycare and childminding’ (DfES 2003). There are 14 national standards representing a baseline of quality below which no provider may fall. However, they are also intended to underpin a continuous improvement in quality in all settings. With this in mind the crèche staff undergo a continuous programme of training courses and workshops to enhance their professional development and provide the best possible care for the children.
As an outcome of the booking system, some crèches have been found to have more places available than others. For this reason, a new and innovative idea has been developed. This has been called ‘The respite crèche’ and places are now available for other professionals e.g. health visitors, midwives etc., to book for their clients. Referrals can be made through Sure Start. This is an acknowledgement in part that the issue of parents needing not only educational support but just simply support and respite is also an important part of the role of Sure Start in the community setting.

8. CONCLUSION
Having an anxiety over how public money is spent and a healthy regard for review of systems is a positive element in service provision. As the bill, unexpectedly grew, for childcare in this Sure Start Programme there was a feeling that it was right to run with what seemed to be a large amount of unmet need for childcare support. Sure Start clients were hungry for help with education and support with childcare.

The data collected here as suggested by Beecham (2000) and discussed earlier should be capable of aggregation. The aggregated data brought from a number of different areas within the Sure Start local Programme for this study was ultimately shown to tally with the audit returns routinely submitted to the Sure Start Unit. As has been shown here, using a six-month snapshot period, the Sure Start childcare provision is currently different from the example of the college childcare provision, it offers very special aspects with very specific aims. The adhoc nature of the crèche provision that grew from the outset of the programme has been reviewed and changed recently towards a more cost effective model. This evolution has been assisted by the analysis presented here, by new government guidelines (DfES 2003) and by the commitment of staff towards best practice alongside cost containment.

Commitment to meeting government targets does affect the cost of provision as this comparison shows. However the evolving picture and the clarity that has developed in the childcare and crèche provision in recent times in the Sure Start provision has enabled users to understand and value the service more and staff to organise and plan better because of parental support for the continuing provision of free childcare. The Sure Start childcare service is now regarded as a project in its own right within the programme, it has enabled many parents to step on the first rung of returning to education in a supportive manner. Working closely with the local college allows parents to develop from community-based to college-based provision in a series of supportive steps.

The local Sure Start Programme management has now allowed the Childcare Project to submit a costing proposal for consideration in the next financial round of Programme funding. In line with the interim findings of this report and the cost effectiveness changes already made the Childcare Project has requested £50,000. This will support its continued development as it moves into the new Sure Start facility to take up its own space, work towards Ofsted registration and continue to develop supportive childcare initiatives.

Commitment to partnership working with the local college is an important aspect of the educational provision. Based on the success of working in this joint venture there will be joint provision of a basic Information Technology course to begin early in 2004. There will be also be new provision for students to visit the computer centre at the local college for further study. Sure Start in their new community premises, currently under
refurbishment, will provide childcare facilities for this educational aspect and with its increased funding will look to other innovative ways of supporting local parents to increase their networking, their knowledge and their ability to sustain their own local community.

Historically, until 1997 childcare hadn’t been given a high priority by government. However, Sure Start has shown the need for affordable care at a community level. This evaluation has demonstrated the efficacy, importance and need for extensive childcare provision within Sure Start local programmes. This analysis has also shown that childcare provision is a keystone of Hilldene and Gooshays local programme.

RECOMMENDATION 1.
It is recommended that Partnership Management Board and Programme Management should continue to support and develop, with additional funding, free childcare provision as a priority locally.

RECOMMENDATION 2.
In light of this analysis other Sure Start local programmes nationally should review their systems and childcare provision.
References


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