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Implementing and Managing your Sure Start Local Programme Evaluation

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October 2005

NESS

NATIONAL EVALUATION OF SURE START

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Although all Sure Start Local Programmes are required to evaluate the services that they provide throughout the life of the programme, staff and other service providers sometimes find the prospect of evaluation daunting. They may think:

- The purpose of evaluation is to be judgemental and criticise the programme.
- Evaluation will expose weakness and problems and therefore reflect badly on the programme and the participants.
- Evaluation is complicated and expensive. It is a drain on precious resources of time and money, which could be better spent on service delivery.
- Evaluation is intrusive and disruptive.
- Evaluation will not tell us anything we don't already know.

These concerns are understandable and should be acknowledged and addressed in order to gain the full participation of your staff in your local evaluation. Programme staff routinely reflect on the effectiveness of their practice, asking “Are we doing enough to reach the right people?”; “Are we giving children and families what they need?”; “How can we improve the services that we provide?” Evaluation is merely a way of formalising this reflexive process in order to make better sense of people's experiences and to capture good practice.

A more constructive way to present the role of evaluation is to emphasize that:

- Evaluation is about learning, not criticising. It reflects the programme's commitment to improvement and sustainability.
- High quality, well-designed evaluation need not be intrusive or disruptive.
- Conducting evaluation can result in a great deal of extremely valuable information that can be used to re-shape and develop services.
- Dissemination of evaluation findings can be a useful way of raising key stakeholders' awareness of the benefits of a Sure Start approach to working.
- Some aspects of evaluation work may be resource intensive but potential benefits of robust evaluation include savings in time and money.

This document is intended as a useful guide to the question of planning, implementing and managing evaluation activities for Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs). It addresses key points of evaluation planning and methodology. The primary target audience for this document is SSLP managers, evaluators and other stakeholders who may be involved in setting up and conducting local evaluation. It replaces the previous NESS guidance, *Getting Started with a Local Sure Start Programme Evaluation*. We welcome feedback on this updated version for future improvements.

Chapter 2. Understanding the 'Big Picture'

This section considers important issues that frame the context of Sure Start Local Programme local evaluation.

2.1 Evidence-based Policy and Practice

Evidence is a major driving force behind the development of policy and practice. Existing evidence on the benefits to young children of preventive, inclusive and family-based services was key in the development of the Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP) initiative. Similarly, evidence from SSLPs should help to add weight to messages that are already emerging about factors such as the effectiveness of joined up ways of delivering services or best practice developments within the services themselves. Such evidence is crucial in encouraging changes in the way that services are delivered.

Central to the Sure Start vision, of course, is the desire to develop service provision beyond traditional methods. By allocating generous funds specifically to the promotion of preventive services, SSLPs are in a position to develop new types of services and new ways of engaging with their communities. This gives tremendous scope for developing innovative approaches to improving the lives of children and families. Rigorous evaluation then, can uncover some important messages about the effectiveness of these approaches - messages that potential sponsors will want to hear. Evidence from local evaluations will be important in the process of mainstreaming.

While the range of services to be studied and the local area covered by Sure Start may evolve as Children's Centres develop, there will be the same need for rigorous evaluation. In addition, by looking at a city-wide or local authority wide picture, a number of additional interesting evaluation questions can be developed. Recent Sure Start guidance underlines the ongoing importance of Sure Start local programme evaluation during the process of them becoming Children's Centres and the funding transfer to local authorities. The following is an extract from the Sure Start Children's Centre, Phase 2 Planning Guidance (July 2005, p.21):

"Local level evaluation is crucial for service development and remains an essential element of programme improvement structures. Local authorities will need to ensure that sufficient evaluation evidence is generated on integrated children's services across their area and develop a co-ordinated approach to doing this. This evaluative activity should examine the extent to which services meet parents' and carers' needs by keeping track of what parents/carers want, whether their needs are being met and how.

Until Sure Start local programme funding formally transfers to local authorities, individual Sure Start local programmes' local evaluations will continue, with programmes working with local authorities on more authority-wide strategic evaluations. These evaluations should focus more on short-term outcomes and ensure their evaluations help to generate information that assists with the transition to, and implementation of, children's centres. This should also link with any needs assessment and evaluation of existing service provision undertaken by the children's trust."

For further information:

See DfES planning guidance: A Sure Start Children's Centre for Every Community: Phase 2 Planning Guidance (2006-08), DfES, July 2005.

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/doc/P0000457.doc>

2.2 The SSLP Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The Sure Start Unit require SSLPs to evaluate progress towards their objectives and targets, review the working practices and processes through which Sure Start is being delivered, and assess whether the services being provided achieve good value for the public money invested in them.

Key objectives of a SSLP evaluation are to:

- assist in the development of your programme;
- keep track of progress against targets and objectives;
- provide evidence to influence the delivery of mainstream services.
- aid the structuring and re-shaping of services.

In order to ensure an effective local evaluation it is important that, as early as possible, your programme has efficient systems (and staffing structures) for collecting and recording the data necessary for measuring the impact and effectiveness of Sure Start services. Primarily this refers to your monitoring systems and the data you will be collecting to assess progress towards your targets.

Time and effort invested in setting up these systems and supporting those who will be involved in collecting and dealing with the data will pay enormous dividends for the evaluation process as a whole. An effective monitoring system should be specifically tailored to the needs of your SSLP and would be:

- User friendly
- Built around effective software, compatible with other packages
- Flexible and adaptable to address changing data needs of the SSLP

It is good practice to have a dedicated post or specified person to oversee the monitoring process. Box 2.1 gives some examples of different models used by programmes in collecting and managing monitoring data.

Box 2.1: Examples of how monitoring data are managed by programmes

- ❑ Some programmes have a Monitoring Officer who is responsible for collecting and reporting back to the SSU on monitoring data. This role would often incorporate quarterly review processes through conducting visits to providers.
- ❑ In many programmes the monitoring post is a joint post, usually involving finance responsibilities or evaluation in addition to monitoring duties.
- ❑ Increasingly popular in cities, counties or London boroughs, which have a number of SSLP situated within their boundaries are centrally located Monitoring Officers, who operate across all of the SSLPs in that area. This is especially popular when the lead body is the local authority.

The PSA targets are a combination of delivery and outcome objectives.

Annex 5 of the Sure Start Unit's guidance on monitoring (Sure Start 2002) identifies potential existing data sources for the relevant outcome measures (for example maternity or child health surveillance records). In cases where information is not available, it may be necessary for the programme to collect the data while at the same time applying pressure within the local area so that it becomes part of routine systems. This is likely to be particularly relevant for data such as:

- Post-natal depression rates
- Breastfeeding initiation and maintenance rates
- Smoking cessation (during pregnancy and in 1st 2 years of the child's life)
- % low birthweight babies

And possible additional measures such as:

- % adults involved in community activity
- Statistics on juvenile/drug related crime/activity

Monitoring statistics are important on their own and will hopefully begin to tell a positive story. But when you decide to evaluate any particular service in more depth, these statistical data will play a central role, along with any supplementary qualitative or quantitative data, in helping to assess the impact and effectiveness of that service. Careful scrutiny of monitoring data should also contribute to the direction of your evaluation - helping to flag up possible areas of service delivery for your evaluation to focus on.

For further information on the collection and use of statistical data:

See:

Annex 5a, Guide to Planning and Delivering Your Programme (Sure Start Unit)
Using Existing Data in Sure Start Local Evaluations (NESS, June 2004)

<http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/GuidanceReports/395.pdf>

Chapter 3. 'Getting Started': The Planning Framework

It is advisable to get started with SSLP evaluation as early as possible in your programme's development. However, it is never too late and this chapter outlines the key stages involved in getting your evaluation up-and-running, focusing on the planning and preparation involved. The steps below are outlined with reference to setting up an overall local evaluation, but are also relevant to setting up single evaluation projects.

3.1 Evaluation Budget

The Sure Start Unit recommends that **3 – 5%** of the annual revenue budget is set aside for evaluation. If full annual funding for your programme is £700,000, that means setting aside between £21,000 –35,000 annually for your evaluation (pro rata if your funding is proportionate in years 1 and 2). Although 3-5% of your revenue budget may seem like a large chunk of money, this guideline reflects the realistic cost of conducting high-quality evaluation and underlines the importance and centrality that good evaluation should have within your programme. Even a single service evaluation can be quite time-consuming. When you consider that a programme might be carrying out a number of service-level evaluation projects over the course of a year, as well as conducting larger themed evaluation work, including cost-effectiveness analysis, it is easy to see how a figure of 3-5% might be a realistic costing.

It might however, be possible to attract funding or additional resources from partner agencies interested in the outcomes of a particular piece of evaluation work. One programme in the North West, for instance, appointed an assistant psychologist – jointly funded by the programme and the clinical psychology service – to work on evaluating a parenting programme.

Similarly, other agencies working in Sure Start communities may be interested in helping to fund or support the Sure Start local evaluation. For example, Connexions or Children's Fund may be interested in involvement in longitudinal case study evaluation, tracking children over time and using this information to evaluate the longer-term impacts of Sure Start.

3.2 Developing an Evaluation Strategy

Good planning and co-ordination is at the heart of good evaluation. It is therefore useful to have a clear, written outline of your evaluation. Such an outline, or evaluation strategy, helps programmes to structure their thinking about evaluation and to deal with the key elements of evaluation in a systematic way. A written strategy will, of course, be a 'live' document that you will regularly revisit and update during the course of your evaluation. Early on in programme development an evaluation strategy is likely to reflect plans rather than what has actually been implemented. The strategy however, will become more detailed as the programme develops, building on previous evaluation work and lessons learned.

An evaluation strategy is likely to outline:

- The aims of the programme's local evaluation

- Principles underpinning the programme's 'approach' to evaluation (e.g. parental participation or capacity building) and how the evaluation will reflect these
- Management structures for managing the evaluation (e.g. an evaluation steering group)
- Who will take the lead in conducting the evaluation
- Any systems for ensuring that evaluation findings influence practice
- Links between monitoring, internal and external evaluation
- The proposed focus of the local evaluation and planned pieces of work
- A timetable for planned evaluation work
- A consideration of ethical concerns

Chapter 4. The first decisions

4.1 Internal, external or both? Deciding on the right balance

One of the most important evaluation-related decisions that programmes must make relates to who will conduct the evaluation. This decision will vary depending on whether the programme wishes to conduct the evaluation from within the programme (internal) or to involve an external evaluator (external). Most programmes opt for one of three broad 'models':

- Internal: The evaluation is conducted entirely from 'within' the programme. This will usually involve a member of staff (usually someone for whom evaluation is the primary or key role) having responsibility for co-ordinating and overseeing the bulk of the evaluation work.
- External: An external evaluator (for example, a consultancy or university) is contracted to co-ordinate and conduct the majority of the evaluation work.
- Mixed model: Where some evaluation work is conducted internally and some by external evaluators. Responsibility for co-ordinating the evaluation usually remains within the programme.

Most programmes have already taken an initial decision on which model to choose. However, the needs of SSLPs are constantly changing and the following sections will be relevant to all programmes when making future decisions about who their evaluator(s) will be.

SSLPs have conducted successful local evaluations using 'internal', 'external' and 'mixed' models of evaluation. Any of these approaches can be successful. A key point to make however, and one that will be returned to throughout this document, is that whoever you choose to conduct your local evaluation **must have adequate and relevant skills and experience**.

It is important to note also, that whether an external or internal evaluator has the bulk of the responsibility for conducting your local evaluation, evaluation should be thought of as a programme-wide endeavour. The involvement of programme staff, parents and partner organisations is essential to ensuring a robust and useful evaluation. For example, many programmes now embed the requirement to conduct or participate in evaluation within their Service Level Agreements with providers. This is in addition to the usual requirement placed on service providers to provide programmes with monitoring data such as the numbers of children or parents using their services. Sure Start Wolverhampton East's SLAs, for example, include a requirement that a quarterly schedule of evaluation and monitoring will be agreed between the programme and the provider. It is also useful for evaluation evidence to form part of the SLA review process. Sure Start Tamworth, for example, require service providers to provide a monthly report reflecting on services delivered and outlining key actions for future service delivery. In addition, some providers will be monitoring and evaluating their own services and will have reports that can be shared with Sure Start programmes.

4.2 Emphasis on Internal Evaluator

A number of SSLPs have opted to conduct their local evaluations completely internally. Such programmes usually appoint a member of staff as the evaluator. Sometimes this staff member will be appointed solely to conduct the evaluation, for example, as an 'evaluation officer'. In other cases, evaluation will be part of a broader role. For example, many programmes appoint a 'monitoring and evaluation officer' or 'finance, monitoring and evaluation officer'.

Internal evaluation, when managed and implemented well, can have a number of potential benefits for programmes over the use of an external evaluator.

4.2.1 Potential advantages of an 'internal' evaluator

- By being part of the Sure Start programme they may already have, or will develop, thorough knowledge of the services and staff within the programme. This in-depth knowledge of the way that the programme operates may be invaluable when evaluating services.
- They may have or will develop a better understanding of the way that practitioners work. This could help in encouraging the participation of practitioners in the evaluation.
- They are likely to have a better understanding than an external evaluator of the data and information sources available within the programme.
- The presence of an internal evaluator as a member of the team can be a key indication of the centrality and importance of evaluation to the programme. An internal evaluator is well placed to encourage programme-wide, ongoing participation in the evaluation process and a feeling of 'ownership' of the evaluation.
- An internal evaluator is better placed than an external individual to provide ongoing support to programme staff with the evaluation of services.
- The evaluation process may be more easily monitored and managed when conducted by an internal evaluator.
- Internal evaluators, because of their links to the programme, may find it easier than externals to foster good relationships with services-users. They are likely to have a better understanding than externals of area-specific needs and issues.

As noted earlier, coordinating and managing a Sure Start local evaluation can be a time-consuming process. Where an internal evaluator also has an additional role or roles within the programme it is essential that he or she have enough time to devote to the evaluation activities. There will otherwise be a real danger that evaluation work will suffer due to the evaluator having a lack of time to devote to it. Evaluating a SSLP can easily be a full-time job and ideally an internal evaluator would focus on evaluation concerns on a day-to-day basis.

Similarly, where programmes decide to conduct evaluation completely internally but not to appoint or nominate a 'dedicated' evaluator, instead adding evaluation responsibilities to an existing worker's job role, evaluation work may fall behind.

Although internal evaluation can be effective when implemented and managed well, use of an internal evaluator also has a number of potential disadvantages.

4.2.2 Potential disadvantages of an 'internal' evaluator

- Friction may occur between staff and an internal evaluator where findings appear critical of a particular service. Such friction can be limited however, if staff are closely involved in the evaluation process and aware of and committed to the aims of the evaluation.
- An internal evaluator may be less inclined than an external to be critical of services for fear of upsetting staff. This may compromise the validity of results.
- Involvement of an internal evaluator in a service may mean that the evaluator finds it difficult to be objective in evaluating the service.
- An internal evaluator may not have access to all of the resources that external evaluators benefit from (for example, data analysis software such as SPSS).

4.3 Emphasis on External Evaluator

Some programmes decide to commission out the bulk of their evaluation work to an external evaluator. Both the 'external' model and the 'mixed' model of evaluation make use of external evaluators, the difference being the extent of external involvement. The external model involves an external evaluator, which may be a research consultancy, survey company, university or independent researcher, being contracted to co-ordinate and conduct the majority of the evaluation work. The mixed model on the other hand, retains the bulk of the evaluation work and the coordination role (usually by a 'dedicated' internal evaluator) within the programme, bringing in external evaluators for particular pieces of work.

Use of an external evaluator has a number of potential advantages:

4.3.1 Potential advantages of an 'external' evaluator

- The involvement of a reputable academic institution in your local evaluation may help to add weight and kudos to findings.
- Some external evaluators may have valuable experience of evaluating other Sure Start programmes that they can bring to your evaluation.

- External evaluators may be able to draw on a very broad base of expertise from within their organisation – a range of expertise that it would be unlikely a single internal evaluator would have.
- External evaluators have a smaller stake in the outcomes of the Sure Start project. They may therefore be more objective, or be perceived as more objective.
- Some of the larger private research companies have good track records in survey work and are well placed to undertake the satisfaction surveys with their own fieldworkers, if speed is of the essence.

4.3.2 Potential disadvantages of an ‘external’ evaluator

- There may be a danger that larger evaluation organisations will offer ‘off-the-shelf’ evaluations that are not specifically tailored to programmes’ needs.
- External evaluations are generally more expensive than an internal evaluator. There may, for example, be additional costs such as travel or hotel costs. Universities have to charge overheads that can significantly add to their overall costs.
- External evaluators may view the evaluation as ‘just another project’, rather than having a deep commitment to its aims.
- An external evaluator may be less easy to monitor as they are not in the office on a regular basis.
- External evaluators may be disinclined to be critical for fear of upsetting their client.
- External evaluators may be contracted to deliver a particular piece of work and therefore less flexible or able to respond to changing needs.

Whilst many programmes feel satisfied with their experience of external evaluators, there are a number of cases where programmes have felt badly let down. Programmes’ feelings of dissatisfaction often stem from either a lack of communication between programme and evaluator or a lack of effective management of the evaluation process on the part of the programme. In some cases, for example, programmes have paid external evaluators in advance and then failed to remain in regular contact with them over the course of the contract. In such circumstances it is easy for the evaluation outcomes and outputs to fail to live up to programmes’ expectations. In other cases, formal contractual arrangements were never drawn up or were inadequate, lacking basic information such as budget breakdowns, agreed milestones and outcomes, and reviewing procedures.

Effective management of external evaluators from within the programme then, is one of the most important factors in ensuring that your evaluation meets the needs of your programme. It is a good idea to disseminate a culture of shared ownership of the evaluation and to encourage and support service deliverers to build a process of review and feedback into their practice. These activities need to be understood as part of the overall evaluation of the

programme and, as such, need to be co-ordinated with the work of the external evaluators. Chapter 7 deals with the commissioning process in more depth and provides guidelines that should help you to successfully commission and manage the external evaluation process.

4.4 'Mixed' model of evaluation

The previous sections have outlined potential advantages and disadvantages of internally and externally focused evaluations. Since both approaches carry specific benefits, it is not surprising that a judicious mix of internal and external evaluation effort is becoming increasingly popular with SSLPs. A 'mixed' approach often involves an internally-appointed evaluation lead person – in many cases a 'dedicated evaluator' – managing, co-ordinating and supporting the bulk of the programme's evaluation work. In addition, external evaluators are commissioned to conduct specific pieces of work. For example, particularly resource-intensive work such as a user-satisfaction survey, potentially sensitive work such as an evaluation of partnership working, or specialised work such as cost-effectiveness evaluation may be commissioned out.

4.4.1 Potential advantages of a 'mixed' approach

- Combines many of the potential benefits of using internal and external evaluators.
- Adds flexibility to the evaluation since external expertise can be bought-in as and when needed. Evaluation work can therefore be tailored to the programme's needs.

4.4.2 Potential disadvantages of a 'mixed' approach

- Where a 'dedicated' internal evaluator is appointed and additional external evaluation work is commissioned this approach may become costly.
- May require additional coordination between 'internal' and 'external' elements of the evaluation.

4.5 Academic supervision

Some programmes find it useful to have an 'academic supervisor' for their whole evaluation or a particular part of it. Academic supervision will involve someone with relevant expertise providing guidance and supervision to the internal evaluator and programme on issues such as evaluation design, methodology, ethical issues or statistics. Academic supervisors are often employed by a university and are usually only contracted to provide a few days supervision per year - perhaps 10 days or fewer. For example, Sure Start Adswood and Bridgehall in Stockport made use of academic supervision from Salford University in conducting their local evaluation. In particular, the internal evaluator valued the methodological and statistical expertise that the academic supervision was able to provide.

4.6 Setting up a Management Structure

Regardless of your decision about how much (or little) to involve external evaluators, your evaluation needs to be effectively managed from within the programme. Management of the evaluation process can take place in a number of different ways. For example, some programmes find it useful to have an evaluation 'working group', 'advisory group' or 'sub-group' as a key mechanism for managing their evaluation. Such a group serves to discuss evaluation-related issues and reach decisions about the evaluation. These decisions are then passed on to the partnership board for further discussion and ratification. Possible topics for discussion at an evaluation sub-group meeting include:

- Key priorities for evaluation work to focus on
- The nature and extent of parental involvement in a particular piece of evaluation work
- Research design and methodological issues
- Dissemination strategies

An evaluation sub-group can be a useful management tool but to be effective, its membership needs to be broad and representative. It is good practice, where possible, to have representation from parents, staff and key partners. There should also be at least one person on the sub-group with research and evaluation experience. This might be the internal or external evaluator. It is important that the evaluation sub-group members agree on a realistic commitment to how often the group should meet. Some stakeholders may find it difficult to attend a monthly meeting for example, and this should be established as early as possible in the development of the group so that everyone is clear about the commitment required.

A number of SSLPs have decided to take a more flexible approach to the idea of an evaluation sub-group. This has involved having a few core members of the group, inviting other members to sit on the group when evaluation is focused on areas relevant to their own expertise and practice. This has the advantage of providing continuity in core membership along with some flexibility.

Some programmes choose not to have an evaluation sub-group, and in these cases need to ensure that a range of stakeholders are involved in the evaluation decision-making process. This might involve the evaluation lead consulting with stakeholders, for example by attending parents forum meetings, staff meetings and management board meetings. Regardless of the method chosen it is essential that there is broad input into this process, rather than evaluation decisions being made solely by the Programme Manager.

4.6 Parental Involvement

Involving parents and carers in the set up and management of SSLPs is key to the Sure Start philosophy of community participation, and as such, should be addressed as a key component in your evaluation. Some programmes like to prioritise this aspect of the evaluation right from the start. Others prefer to wait until the programme has developed a greater presence in the community. Either way it is important to anticipate how this element

of your evaluation is likely to fit into your overall strategy, for example whether you would like to commission external evaluators to train parents and work with them on specific projects or whether you would prefer an internal evaluation officer to work in a more consistent and developmental way with parents (the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive given sufficient resources).

Clearly there are many different ways in which parents and carers can be involved in the evaluation of your programme. Whilst a lot of programmes have involved parents and carers as peer interviewers in community survey work for example, this is not the only way in which they can participate. There may be scope for involvement as:

- Members of an evaluation sub-group
- Advisors on evaluation topics
- Advisors on questionnaire structure and content
- Disseminators of findings

Regardless of how parents and carers are involved in the evaluation there are some important considerations to take into account when deciding on how to involve them in this process:

4.6.1 What is the purpose and nature of parental involvement?

The programme needs to establish why and how parents and carers are going to be involved in the evaluation process. You will need to consider:

- What are the benefits for parents/carers and the programme?
- How will parents/carers most usefully be involved?
- How appropriate is it to involve parents/carers in different aspects of the evaluation?
- What are the resource implications for the programme?

You will also need to address a number of practical issues:

- How will parents/carers be recruited?
- How will parents/carers be managed?
- What training and support is required?
- Will any training lead to an accredited qualification?
- Will parents/carers be paid for their participation?
- How will you maintain the ongoing involvement of parents/carers in evaluation?

For further information:

See separate NESS guidance on The Involvement of Parents and Carers in Sure Start Local Evaluations at <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/GuidanceReports/171.pdf>

4.7 Core Evaluation Questions

Each Sure Start programme provides a unique range and combination of services tailored to the specific needs of the local area. Similarly, precise evaluation questions will vary from

programme to programme. The focus of the evaluation will, of course, be on developing and improving services and assessing outcomes for children and families. Different programmes will use their evaluation to ask different questions at different times, however, there are also some broad evaluation questions that will be common to all programmes. A comprehensive evaluation needs to take account of the following core questions:

1. Are the services we provide making a positive difference to service-users?
2. If yes, then what are the impacts of these services and how were they achieved?
3. Are we reaching all the people who want or need our services and who aren't we reaching and why?
4. Are we employing the best processes to deliver our services?
5. Are we delivering the best range and mix of services?
6. Are the services we are providing cost-effective and do they provide the best value for the money?

Each of these questions will need to be broken down into specific, manageable questions around which a particular piece of evaluation work can be designed. It is particularly pertinent to make sure that all evaluation attempts to capture the short-term impacts on and outcomes for children and families. This is particularly important as programmes move towards becoming Children's Centres. As the Children's Centre Phase 2 Planning Guidance (2006-08) states, Sure Start programme local evaluations should: "focus more on short-term outcomes and ensure their evaluations help to generate information that assists with the transition to, and implementation of, children's centres." (p.21)

Chapter 6 provides further guidance on framing evaluation questions. It is good practice to start thinking about specific evaluation questions as early as possible and to include details of them in Invitations to Tender or job descriptions for evaluators. **Chapter 7** provides guidance on commissioning and managing external evaluators.

For further information:

See DfES planning guidance: A Sure Start Children's Centre for Every Community: Phase 2 Planning Guidance (2006-08), DfES, July 2005.

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/doc/P0000457.doc>

Chapter 5. The Key Elements of a Sure Start Local Programme Evaluation

The following sections deal with the core elements of a Sure Start local programme evaluation, outlining the key areas that you should evaluate.

5.1 Community Satisfaction Survey

A survey of community satisfaction with services for children and families can be an important source of data for your local evaluation. Such a survey is also known as a Community Satisfaction Survey, User Satisfaction Survey or Parent Satisfaction Survey. Although the requirement to conduct a community satisfaction survey is technically a monitoring requirement (as laid out in Annex 5 of the SSU's guidance to programmes), this is one area where monitoring and evaluation can be usefully thought about together. The findings of a community satisfaction survey can be a foundation upon which you build your local evaluation. For example, it can serve as a way of identifying gaps in existing service provision.

The Sure Start Unit requires programmes to demonstrate '75% of families reporting personal evidence of an improvement in the quality of services providing family support'. Rather than being a survey of actual *users* of Sure Start services, a Sure Start community satisfaction survey should have as its sampling frame, all families that are *eligible* for Sure Start services in the Sure Start area (that is, families with children under 5 in the Sure Start area). It should be a representative sample of these families who take part in the survey. The eligible sample, therefore, consists of all main carers of children *under 5 (0-4 includes all children up to their 5th birthday)* in the Sure Start area, irrespective of whether they are using Sure Start services or not.

Measuring change in satisfaction levels over time is fundamental to understanding the changing needs of your programme population. The Sure Start Unit therefore require programmes to conduct an initial, 'baseline' satisfaction survey within the first 3 months of programme approval or, failing that, as soon as possible afterwards. This survey establishes the pre-Sure Start level of satisfaction with family support services. A follow-up survey should be conducted three years after the baseline survey. This second survey measures satisfaction levels after a period of time long enough for Sure Start services to have made an impact. This allows reported levels of satisfaction to be compared over time. An increase in satisfaction levels between the baseline survey and the follow-up, when examined in the light of other available evidence - evaluation evidence and information about other possible contributory factors – may provide a useful indication of the impact of the Sure Start programme.

A baseline and follow-up survey methodology may not, however, be feasible for all programmes. Some programmes may be unhappy with the reliability or validity of their baseline survey (for example, because of a small sample size or poor questionnaire design) or may not have undertaken a baseline survey at the appropriate time, and services may have developed too far to consider undertaking it now. Where there is no meaningful baseline measure, evaluators need to build in a retrospective focus to surveys. It will be necessary to ask direct questions about whether services have improved over time rather than relying on comparisons between surveys. Whatever position programmes are starting

from, it is important that they find a way of providing a meaningful picture of satisfaction levels with services for children and families in their area.

For further information: If you are planning to undertake a survey of community satisfaction levels, please make sure you and/or your evaluator refers to your RSO for advice. More information on conducting community satisfaction surveys can be found in the NESS guidance “Conducting User Satisfaction Surveys” (<http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/GuidanceReports/170.pdf>)

5.2 Service Level Evaluation

Evaluation of individual services is at the heart of your local evaluation programme. In order to assess whether or not your services are achieving targets and impacting positively on children and families, you need to know as much as you can about the delivery, perceived quality and cost of the services concerned. Thus, whilst your monitoring and evaluation activities are subject to separate administrative and support structures, monitoring data is central to effective service level evaluation.

Service level evaluation is concerned with assessing the effectiveness of individual services or service areas. It can potentially encompass everything from simple feedback information to specially designed, themed studies. Of course, most programmes get feedback - both verbal and from feedback forms - from providers and users on the quality and delivery of their services. The key to ensuring that this feedback forms part of an effective service-level evaluation is making sure that it is both coordinated and focused. An effective service-level evaluation should include two key elements:

- The development of a system for routine in-house feedback.
- In-depth evaluation of particular services or service areas.

The first of these elements involves the implementation of a flexible but programme-wide system for pulling together routine, on-going evaluation work. This process will generally be co-ordinated and managed by someone with designated responsibility, such as an internal evaluation officer. It is not a task that can easily be incorporated into the operational activities of service staff or the programme manager.

In-depth evaluations that look thoroughly and analytically at a particular service or group of linked services are the second key element of service-level evaluation. Feedback information is one source of data that more in-depth evaluations can put together with other evidence, such as interview and focus group data, data on service uptake, and cost information, to produce a rounded and informative picture of service effectiveness. In-depth service evaluations can be conducted in-house or commissioned out.

Your evaluation resources are unlikely to stretch to an in-depth evaluation of all your services and you will need to be selective. A number of factors may influence the decision of which services to evaluate and when. In reaching this decision, think about:

- Which services are particularly innovative?

- Which services are currently prompting the most concern?
- What service evaluations are necessary to ensure that your evaluation reflects the programme's local priorities?
- What combination of service evaluations would allow you to achieve a good spread between core services?
- Which services are the most costly?
- What services require particularly robust evaluation for mainstreaming purposes?

See section 6.1 for more details about how to develop evaluation questions.

For further information:

See NESS guidance, 'Using Existing Data in Sure Start Local Evaluations'

<http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/GuidanceReports/395.pdf>

5.3 Evaluation of Cross-cutting Issues

The SSLP initiative is distinctive particularly in its joined up mechanisms of management and service delivery, and its commitment to outreach and the involvement of all sectors of the community. It is important to evaluate the effectiveness of these aspects of the programme, not only for programme development purposes, but also to try to add contextual understanding to the relationship between the delivery of services, take up and user outcomes. In addition, the Sure Start Unit's guidance on local evaluation requires programmes to review "the working practices through which Sure Start is being delivered".

Key cross-cutting themes to consider as part of your local evaluation include:

- The analysis of reach data and the examination of barriers to access and factors enabling participation
- The programme success in engaging with 'hard to reach' groups
- The effectiveness of partnership and inter-agency working
- The effectiveness of management working practices
- The analysis of the nature and extent of parental involvement in the programme

5.4 Cost Effectiveness

Sure Start Unit guidance on local evaluation has identified cost effectiveness as a crucial part of your local evaluation. The guidance suggests that programmes begin conducting cost effectiveness evaluation as a discrete exercise at about 18-24 months after grant approval. However, as findings about effective outcomes for service users are often best understood in the context of the costs of services, it is also good practice to conduct cost effectiveness evaluation throughout the life of the programme, embedding cost effectiveness work within service-based evaluation projects. Cost effectiveness evaluation is particularly important when attempting to secure ongoing funding from external providers.

An important point to note is that, since cost-effectiveness evaluation can require a great deal of data from your programme's monitoring systems, it is good practice to anticipate this and plan well ahead. (see **Box 5.1**).

Box 5.1: One evaluation team's experience in trying to conduct a cost effectiveness analysis

The evaluators asked the programme to provide the requisite information about each activity in order to establish a unit cost for each. This involved extracting monitoring data such as the number of parents attending, number of sessions delivered etc for each activity, over the period 2002 – 3.

This proved to be a time consuming and problematic task for the programme. Several issues were highlighted during this process:

1. More activities were uncovered than had been evident from the accountable body's financial report
2. Some activities could not be attributed to a main service and therefore it was unclear which expenditure heading they came under
3. Information on usage had not been recorded for all the relevant activities
4. Expenditure headings could not be broken down to see how much had been spent on each activity

The programme was brave enough to expose itself to this exercise and has taken full account of the evaluator's following recommendations:

- Monitoring systems need to be set up to collect data required for evaluation purposes as well as for filling in the monitoring forms.
- SSLPs need to ensure that any data provided for evaluation is up to date and accurate.

Appendix 1 gives further detailed advice on data collection, as recommended by the findings of the evaluation team

For further information:

See separate NESS guidance on the Estimation of Cost-Effectiveness at a Local Level at <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/GuidanceReports/167.pdf>

Chapter 6. Implementing the Evaluation: The Operational Issues

This section offers guidance on the main operational issues that you will need to consider. They are:

- Framing the evaluation questions
- Methodologies
- Ethical considerations
- Data analysis
- Sharing evaluation findings
- Dissemination and Development

6.1 Framing the evaluation questions

As noted earlier, deciding on what to evaluate and then moving towards focused evaluation questions can be a challenging task. Some of the key factors that you will need to take into account when framing evaluation questions are:

- Specific evaluation questions need to be both appropriate for the life stage of the programme and answerable within a time span that allows the programme to make use of the results. The commencement of any evaluation contract and the timing of the programme's annual evaluation and operational reviews will be important factors to consider.
- Even a fairly straightforward evaluation project can easily become unwieldy. Make sure that your evaluation questions are as focused as possible, so that they can be answered and so the evaluation is manageable within the given timescale
- Think about consulting with potential funders about the kinds of evidence they would need to persuade them to mainstream SSLP services. This could help you to frame your questions in line with their needs
- Construct your questions with a view to measuring the impacts of services on children and families. Focus on gathering evidence that could convince stakeholders of the efficacy of the Sure Start approach.
- It is important to formulate questions in relation to specified Sure Start inputs. This will help you to tease out the 'Sure Start effect'. Make sure that the questions asked are the ones that are answered through the evaluation.

Box 6.1: Sheffield, Sure Start Foxhill & Parson Cross

Methodology for evaluating the process and outcomes of an SSLP breastfeeding project:

The 3 areas to be evaluated were:

- Breastfeeding statistics
- The activities of the workers
- The mothers' experience of breastfeeding and their views of the service.

Breastfeeding statistics were taken from the monthly audits that are collected within the Jessop Wing of the Royal Hallamshire Hospital, from the Sure Start databases and from Health Visitor records.

Questionnaires were designed to collect data on the activities of the workers, including the training of the health professionals and their views of the service, the content of the peer support training and the experiences of the trainers, as well as the views of the peer support workers six months after their training had ended.

The mothers' views of the service were collected from routine Breastfeeding Audit questionnaires given to all mothers who had had contact with the service at 3 months postnatally.

(Taken from Battersby 2002)

6.2 Methodologies

There are many different methods you may think about adopting during the course of your evaluation. However methods that could be used include:

- Questionnaires
- Structured interviews
- Semi-structured interviews
- Focus groups
- Video diaries
- Observations
- Mystery shoppers
- Reflective diaries

In deciding which methods to use consider the following:

- Mixing quantitative and qualitative data collection methods can result in data that are both statistically useful and contextually illuminating.
- The method(s) chosen need to be compatible with your evaluation questions.
- Resource considerations (time and money) will be a key factor in determining your choice of research/evaluation method(s).

In addition, standardised information tends to add authoritative value to a project, and enables comparison between research projects (which may be particularly useful for city wide issues). The use of standardised instruments should be considered where possible. Standardised measures include The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale, 12-item General Health Questionnaire, and the Sure Start Speech and Language Measure.

6.3 Ethical Considerations

All Sure Start local evaluations should be conducted in line with ethical principles. These include respecting participants' right to refuse to participate in and right to withdraw from the evaluation, and ensuring the anonymity of participants at all stages of the evaluation process. SSLPs carry the responsibility for making sure that their evaluations adhere to these principles.

In addition to this requirement, SSLPs may also need to seek approval from a Research Ethics Committee before they can proceed with particular pieces of work. This becomes relevant if information about individuals is to be accessed via their status as NHS patients. Ethical approval would be required in the following circumstances:

- If contact details about people are accessed from health records
- If the evaluation aims to involve participants who would be recruited within a health setting, (e.g. patients in a GP's waiting room)
- If healthcare professionals, in their capacity as employees of the NHS, were to participate in the evaluation

Gaining ethical approval can be a lengthy process (perhaps up to four months), although the time taken will vary from area to area. This therefore needs to be planned into your evaluation timetable. If you are uncertain about whether or not you need ethical approval for your project or need to find out the next time the committee is meeting, you should contact the Chair of your Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC). Her/his details should be available through the Research Governance section of your PCT.

For further information (on all aspects of ethical conduct in research):

See separate NESS guidance on conducting ethical research at <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/GuidanceReports/165.pdf>

Contact your RSO for advice, and help with recent developments.

6.4 -Data Analysis

Analysis, particularly of qualitative data, can be extremely time-consuming and requires specialist skills and knowledge. Qualitative data (usually tape or video-recordings) need to be transcribed and read, then re-read. This is extremely costly in terms of resources, and the analysis (if it is to be effective) requires training and experience. Detailed NESS guidance is available on a range of qualitative techniques. The most important message at the stage of planning is to understand that, while the data collection may be relatively fast (e.g. holding and recording two focus groups) the management and analysis of the information may take a

considerable amount of time. Regardless of the method of analysis chosen, you should be clear about how you will analyse your data before you begin data collection.

Factors to consider in ensuring effective data analysis include:

- Will data analysis software be needed? This software can be expensive and may also require training and expertise in order to utilise it properly.
- Your method of data analysis should be appropriate to the type of data that you have collected. For example, if you are using a survey as the data collection tool make sure the majority of the questions used are closed questions, with a limited number of defined answers. This will assist in meaningful analysis of the data.
- Think about the key comparisons that you want to make using the data (for example, service use by geographical location) and ensure that data collection takes account of this.
- How will you ensure that the outputs of the analysis are presented in a user-friendly and easily understandable manner? Think about how to present the data, and make sure that the resulting statistics or diagrams are not ambiguous or confusing in any way.

For further information on conducting qualitative research:

See separate NESS guidance on Qualitative Research Methods at <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/GuidanceReports/859.pdf>

6.5 How to share evaluation findings

The purpose of conducting local evaluation within Sure Start local programmes is to be able to learn from the findings in order to inform the development of the programme, and to ensure sustainability of the programme through providing evidence to influence providers. In other words, conducting evaluation is a practical tool to examine what works and what does not work within the programme and why. Evaluation also helps to provide evidence for mainstreaming purposes.

It is crucial that the relevant stakeholders within the programme are informed about the findings of a given piece of evaluation. The decision around how to disseminate findings, and who they should be disseminated to, should be taken at the planning stage and built into the timetable and costing for a given piece of work.

6.5.1 Who? What? When? How?

For a more in-depth look at sharing evaluation findings there is a NESS guidance document called 'Sharing Evaluation Findings, Disseminating the Evidence' <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/GuidanceReports/647.pdf> . This section covers some of the key areas to think about when considering sharing findings from evaluation. When

considering how to share findings from evaluation, you should address the following key questions:

- Who needs to know?
- What do they need to know?
- When do they need to know?
- How should we inform them?

Obviously, the 'one method fits all' approach is not necessarily suitable for disseminating to the wide and diverse range of stakeholders who may be interested in the findings of a piece of evaluation.

6.5.2 Who needs to know?

The answer to this question will depend on the area of the programme the evaluation is concerned with. For example, if the evaluation looks at the process of delivering a Speech and Language Therapy service and the impact this is having on waiting times for appointments and cost, then it would make sense that the following stakeholders know about the findings of this work:

- Speech and Language Therapists
- Relevant departments and staff within the PCT
- Health visitors
- Those who took part in the evaluation as participants
- Relevant voluntary organisations

In addition to these stakeholders, the following people should receive feedback on the findings of any piece of evaluation conducted:

- Parents
- Programme Staff
- The Partnership Board
- Sure Start Unit
- National Evaluation of Sure Start Support Team

6.5.3 What do they need to know?

When developing your ideas around dissemination methods and strategies, it is a good idea to consult with relevant stakeholders to find out what their interest and focus is, with respect to a particular piece of evaluation. This will help you when it comes to disseminating the appropriate information to this audience.

Taking the Speech and Language Therapy example mentioned above, Health Visitors are likely to require a report that encompasses how their working practices may be affected as a result of the findings. The PCT may have a keen interest in how cost effective this method of working is, whereas parents are more likely to focus on how the change in service affects them.

6.5.4 When do they need to know?

If the findings of evaluation are going to be able to influence practice, it is crucial that information reaches the relevant stakeholders at the right time.

Some points to bear in mind are:

- If the findings of an evaluation are to influence the planning and commissioning of services for the next year, you will need to know what the findings are, and how these findings are going to influence your programme before the beginning of the next financial year.
- If the findings are to be used to develop a particular project then you need to make sure that enough time is planned into the evaluation timetable to allow for this to be possible.

6.5.4 How should you inform them?

You should be aiming to create something that is meaningful to the relevant stakeholders. The most obvious form of reporting back is a formal, written report and this is likely to feature as one way in which the programme can disseminate findings.

There are, however, other more innovative methods for sharing findings, which will be discussed later. This section gives a brief overview on dissemination techniques, for further information on any of these methods, or on how to structure different types of reports, please see the NESS guidance document entitled 'Sharing Evaluation Findings, Disseminating the Evidence' at: <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/GuidanceReports/647.pdf> .

Report Writing

There are a number of different types of evaluation reports that you will produce within your programme:

Annual Evaluation Report
Three Year Report
Findings Report
Evaluation Summary

For further information on the different types of reports please refer to the 'Sharing Evaluation Findings, Disseminating the Evidence' guidance document.

Other methods of Dissemination

Of course, reports are not the only way to disseminate findings, and are not always the most appropriate method either. Below are some ideas for other methods that may be used:

- Presentations and conferences
- Posters
- Newsletters

- Story Telling
- Video
- Website

For further information:

A summary of the reporting requirements can be found in **Appendix 2**.

6.6 Progress Checklist

This checklist (see **Appendix 3**) has been developed by NESS as an evaluation management tool to help programmes chart their evaluation progress. It breaks the core elements of your local evaluation down and arranges them in the form of a scale. The scale is intended as a guide and you may not fulfil all criteria. For example, there will be programmes who feel they are strong on items that appear under 5 or 6 for example but who have not fulfilled criteria placed at the lower end of the scale.

Chapter 7. Commissioning and Managing External Evaluators

Having decided to commission external evaluators to carry out a particular piece, or a number of pieces of evaluation, it is important to consider the following key questions. This should ensure that the evaluation delivers what the programme requires within the stipulated budget and timescale.

7.1 Decisions to be made

7.1.1 Who will be responsible within the programme for managing the process?

This is a crucial question, which should ideally be asked and answered before the evaluation strategy is clearly defined. The evaluation belongs to the programme and should be useful to the programme's development. In order to ensure that this is the case, the programme needs to own the evaluation and manage the process closely. A designated role within the programme should exist to accommodate this, and the person should either have training, or ideally, training and experience in research methods and commissioning evaluative work. It is often difficult for the Programme Manager to manage this process within his/her busy schedule (see Chapter 4 for further details).

7.1.2 What should be decided before the recruitment process starts?

Before commissioning a piece of local evaluation to an external evaluator, you should have already sat down with the relevant stakeholders to decide which area of your programme you wish to focus your evaluation on and why this is the most appropriate area for evaluation at this point in time. You should also have spent time developing specific, focussed questions that you would like your local evaluation to answer

7.1.3 How long should our contract with an external evaluator be for?

Many programmes choose to contract out all, or part of a particular year's evaluation work, as discussed in Chapter 3, 'Getting Started with a Local Evaluation'. It is important though, not to lock yourself into a contract for more than about 18 months, as priorities may change for the programme over time, and this can impact on the evaluation. Evaluators who may have been the best choice for a given area of work decided upon two years ago, may not necessarily have the skills or expertise to carry out another kind of evaluation. So be mindful of the fact that local evaluation within Sure Start is a rolling process, and evaluation plans for forthcoming years can be adapted or re-drafted if the needs of the programme change. It is also important to clarify that the contract with an external evaluator should be for specific pieces of work, to be carried out over a given time period and to a clear schedule. This should all be agreed before the work begins.

There are advantages and disadvantages to contracting out evaluation work (see section 4.3), but having decided that external evaluation is currently the best route for your programme, you should turn your attention to the important issue of how to recruit a suitable evaluator.

7.1.4 How do we go about finding an external evaluator?

The Sure Start Unit does not require programmes to carry out the recruitment process in a particular way, although your lead or accountable body may require you to follow their procurement procedures. The Sure Start Unit would, however, recommend that you develop an Invitation To Tender document (ITT) in order to attract bids, or proposals of interest, with the aim of receiving at least three proposals of interest back. This process allows the programme to choose the most effective evaluator through competitive bidding. You also need to decide before writing the ITT, whether or not this will be an open ITT or a closed ITT. Again, you may be bound to carry this process out in a particular way by your lead or accountable body, and obviously cost implications may be a consideration in this decision. **Appendix 4** shows the ‘**Ten Steps**’ system developed and used by a SSLP in recruiting an external evaluator.

7.2 The Invitation to Tender (ITT)

Invitations to tender are of two main types, open to all or offered to a pre-selected group.

Open ITT - this kind of ITT is advertised to recruit suitable evaluators, a number of Sure Start Local Programmes have placed adverts in The Guardian, in addition to local papers, professional journals and on Local Authority and PCT websites. Your NESS RSO may be able to provide you with examples of advertisements for ITTs. **See Appendix 5** for an example of an advertisement used by a SSLP to recruit an external evaluator.

Closed ITT – this method of recruitment tends to be favoured by SSLPs, and involves inviting a number of identified evaluators to tender for the work. Speak to your RSO and other SSLPs to find out about appropriate external evaluators.

Clearly, there are advantages and disadvantages to each of these methods of recruiting an external evaluator. Whilst an open ITT can generate a relatively large number of evaluation proposals from interested parties, the cost of advertising, particularly in a national newspaper can be high.

Advantages of an Open ITT	Disadvantages of an Open ITT
Attracts more proposals	Advertising can be very expensive
Easier for comparisons in cost, approach etc to be made	Involves more administrative support
May attract a wider scope in evaluation approach and organisations tendering	Short-listing suitable proposals likely to be more laborious

On the other hand, if you're opting to follow the closed ITT recruitment route, it's important to do your homework first. This could involve making contact with your NESS RSO and other SSLPs to find out about evaluators who may have undertaken other SSLP evaluation work.

Advantages of a Closed ITT	Disadvantages of a Closed ITT
Can choose suitable organisations to invite to tender	Finding suitable organisations to invite to tender could be time consuming
Save money on advertising	May get a low response rate
Get feedback from other SSLPs who have used an organisation on quality of work before inviting tenders	More difficult to compare costs, styles of evaluation etc with a small number of proposals
Easier short-listing procedure	Unlikely to attract such a diversity of approaches and organisations

It has become increasingly clear, particularly in certain regions of the country, that there is an apparent skills shortage operating in the field of Sure Start local evaluations. SSLPs are generating a substantial amount of evaluative work and it is often the case that there is more work available at a given time, than there are suitable evaluators to undertake the work. In light of this, it is important to consider the following:

- Contact anyone you are thinking about inviting to tender for a piece of work before sending the ITT out. This will give you an idea of whether they are interested in the work.
- Do some research first. Whilst it is often beneficial if an evaluator has already carried out SSLP evaluations, this alone does not mean that they are the only, or most suitable organisation or individual for the job. Find out which organisations, or university departments have specialist knowledge and interest in a particular topic, and contact them to explore their interest in this kind of work.

7.3 Work to be completed before preparing an ITT

In developing an ITT for a given piece of work, it is important to refer to the evaluation strategy for the programme, and ensure that the aims, management arrangements and timescales are in keeping with this. Prior to writing the ITT it is key that the following areas are addressed:

- The evaluation questions are formulated and sufficiently focussed to address the evaluation in a given, realistic timeframe.
- In-house management structures have been set up, in order to manage each stage of the evaluation successfully, i.e. there is an evaluation sub-group, and/or a designated job role, which includes management of evaluation work.
- Frequency and approach to reporting back to the programme by the evaluators at suitable intervals has been thought through.

- Ethical approval has been sought through a Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC) if health data or health staff are to be involved (see NESS guidance 'Conducting Ethical Research'). Alternatively, if this is something the evaluators will be expected to do, this should be clearly explained in the ITT, and time allocated for this to take place during the contract period with the evaluators.
- The level and kind of parental involvement has been established and any training requirements considered.
- Relevant stakeholders have been identified, and methods and formats for disseminating findings to stakeholders have been decided upon.
- Time allocated for the tendering process has been agreed, including closing dates for submission of tender proposals and interview dates.

Once the tender document has been written, the following key points need to be addressed:

- Think about the selection criteria and who should be involved in the selection process. Stakeholders involved in the recruitment process should be able to bring their particular skills and experience to the process and contribute fully in the decision-making.
- Plan your interview panel so that at least one member has direct experience in evaluation or research. If this expertise is lacking it may be worth considering paying an 'academic advisor' to sit on the interview panel. A number of SSLPs have involved external academics on interview panels in order to ensure that the panel includes a member with research expertise. Your NESS RSO should be able to assist in identifying possible academic advisors.

7.4 What should be included in an ITT?

7.4.1 Key points to remember

- Be clear about exactly what you want from the work
- Manage the process
- Work in partnership with the external evaluators
- Own the evaluation!

7.4.2 What to ask for in a research tender document

When the above issues have been discussed and structures to meet these requirements have been put in place, it is time to begin drafting the ITT.

The following sections should be included in any ITT:

1. Introduction

This section should briefly introduce Sure Start as an initiative, including the national objectives, in order to set the context. It should also include information on the local objectives relating to your particular Sure Start programme. In addition, it's important to

mention in this section, the perceived timescale for the evaluation process and the subject of the evaluation to be completed.

2. Background

More detailed information relating to the programme and the over-arching requirements of local evaluation for SSLPs can be elaborated on here.

This section should also provide basic demographic data relating to the programme area, and any other background information that is relevant to this evaluation. For example, if the evaluation is to look at the needs of a particular ‘hard to reach’ group who are not currently using services, then it would make sense to include any statistics, or other information relating to this community.

3. Aims, purpose and specific objectives of the evaluation

It is essential that the topic to be evaluated, the specific evaluation questions you would like to answer and your reasons for choosing that particular area to evaluate are clearly defined. It is a good idea to explain why a certain area of the programme has been chosen for evaluation, to provide context for the potential evaluator.

In detailing the objectives of the evaluation, be clear about both general aims and more specific questions.

4. Evaluation Design

This section should give an indication of how you might want to go about collecting information to answer the above questions. However, in light of the fact that any potential evaluator should bring expertise in the field of evaluation design and data collection techniques, you might want to leave the exact methodology more open-ended, but highlight issues that you think tenderers might need to consider – for example:

“Tenderers are invited to outline and justify the most appropriate methodologies for answering the research questions above. Given the small sample and the level of detailed information required, the research is most likely going to be largely qualitative and case-study based. A significant proportion of the work is likely to involve interviews with [insert details]...”

You should also mention here any data already being collected that the contractors should make use of – e.g. monitoring information. This will reduce duplication of data collection.

If there are any data collection methods to be avoided, due to the nature of the community, or as a result of previous evaluative work within the area, this should also be mentioned. An example of this could be when an area has had a lot of regeneration investment previously, which has involved surveying the area on more than one occasion. In this case a community survey may be best avoided, and more innovative methods to gain the community’s views employed, in an attempt to avoid ‘evaluation fatigue’.

5. Timescales

This section should clearly state the length of the contract, when you expect to commission the work by, and when you expect to be presented with both interim and final reports. It is

important that you clearly state here that the contractor will need to produce a draft final report that will then need approval, and possibly revision, by the programme.

6. Skills and Experience of Evaluators

Included in this section should be the skills and experience required of the evaluation team. This could be requested in the form of CVs for each member of the evaluation team. The kind of skills and experience required may include:

- Post-graduate degree including research methods training essential
- X years experience in conducting research/evaluation essential
- Experience of undertaking community-focused evaluation desirable
- Experience of interviewing families with young children desirable
- Previous experience of conducting Sure Start local evaluations desirable
- Experience of working with families living in difficult circumstances e.g. due to poverty, disability, legal status in U.K. etc

It would be good practice for any proposal received to detail the previous, relevant work completed, with contact details for at least two referees. Potential evaluators should be willing to provide the programme with copies of reports produced, or, at least signpost the programme to where the report can be found.

7. Costs/Budget

All costs should be clearly broken down, detailed and justified in any proposal. The following is an example that you may wish to use:

“Tenderers should set out the costs of their proposal in detail ensuring that the costs of different options are clear (if applicable). These should be set out under the following headings: Staff (senior and junior), other fieldwork costs, IT, T&S, overheads and other costs. Staff costs should show the daily rate and grade. Full cost details of any proposed sub contracts and how these will be managed should be included. If different fieldwork options are being presented these should be broken down in detail for the each option”

You should also include information stating how you will want costs broken down after the award of the contract (e.g. on a quarterly basis, to be paid on an output basis).

8. Management of the evaluation

You should detail the in-house management structures that exist to manage the evaluation process. This should include the person the evaluator is likely to deal with on a routine basis. If the evaluators are likely to be expected to make presentations to the board, or other management groups, such as an evaluation sub-group, this should also be stated here. This information will help tenderers in working out costing for the work.

9. Outputs

The outputs required should be carefully considered by the programme, and detailed in the ITT, as the type and number of outputs required will have cost implications. It is important that if you require a report in a number of different formats, aimed at different audiences that this is made clear in this section.

Contractors outputs could include:

- Progress reports (at intervals that you think will be sufficient to keep track of progress);
- Interim reports (the number and timing to be decided based on when you might need to use and communicate progress and findings);
- A draft final report;
- A final report, revised subject to comments;
- Any other reports or outputs required by the programme – e.g. posters detailing findings, newsletters, videos etc.
- Regular meetings with relevant person within the programme

As a result, you may wish to include a statement along the lines of: *“tenderers should include an output schedule, outlining key deliverables, as part of their proposal for this work”,* and specify how you wish outputs to be submitted (e.g. in electronic format).

You might also wish to include: *“All data collected for the project/s should be provided electronically in an agreed and appropriate format at end of contract or before, if requested by X ”.*

10. Publication and dissemination of outputs

The way in which findings and recommendations from the evaluation are used and disseminated to relevant audiences should be included in this section. Clearly, the dissemination of findings is inter-linked with the production of relevant reports. However, the evaluators need to be aware of how they may be involved in the process of dissemination, for example, a programme may choose to involve parents in the process of report writing and dissemination, either through the production of reports, input into the design of posters, or through direct presentations to a parents’ forum.

It should be made clear that use and dissemination of the outputs, and the content of the outputs, is subject to approval by the programme.

11. Quality plan

Tenderers should be asked to provide details of their quality plan for the project. Within the quality plan tenderers should provide full details of the practices and procedures that will be developed to assure quality in the conduct and outputs of the project.

12. Risk factors

Tenders should clearly set out the key risk factors for the success of the project, including possible options to prevent or resolve these. For example, difficulty in obtaining a viable sample for the evaluation of a PND support group due to it being a support group for a mental

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health issue, and the small numbers who have attended. A possible way of overcoming this could be by enrolling the help of the group facilitator to contact past users, or by arranging to be available to talk to group participants at the end of a session to explain what the evaluation is about.

13. Ethical issues

Any proposed evaluation design should take into account the ethical issues relating to it. The ITT should recognise this and ask that tender documents address the relevant ethical issues. This is particularly relevant when the evaluation is likely to probe into sensitive areas, especially in interview situations.

If the evaluation is likely to require LREC approval (see section 6.3 for further guidance), particularly if the evaluators are expected to be involved in the process of gaining such approval, it is very important that this is detailed in the ITT. This should also be reflected in the proposed timescale for completion of the evaluation.

14. Ownership of data and outputs

You should include information on who will own copyright and intellectual property rights for the research. This will include all outputs from the research, as well as the data.

15. Commissioning timetable

You should state when you envisage the research to start, the deadline by which tenders should be received, and when you expect to make a decision by. If presentations/ interviews are to be held as part of the commissioning process, you should indicate when these are likely to take place.

16. Criteria for assessing tenders

You should be clear about the basis on which you will be assessing the tenders. All tenders should be assessed on best value for money, but you should also bear in mind other factors, for example:

- overall costs;
- how well the tender responds to the brief and the objectives;
- the robustness and suitability of proposed approach;
- ability to deliver high quality outputs to timescale;
- relevant skills and experience of research team;
- the adequacy and quality of proposed project management arrangements.

17. Further information

You should provide a contact name and address that potential evaluators can use for further information. You should also state the name and address of the person who the final tenders should be sent to.

Send a draft of your ITT to your NESS RSO for further feedback, making sure to allow enough time to incorporate his or her comments into the final draft before going out to tender.

7.5 How do we assess evaluation proposals and decide on a suitable evaluator?

The following is a step by step guide to the various stages in the recruitment of external evaluators, highlighting who should be involved in the recruitment process, what to look for in a good evaluation proposal, how to get the most out of the interview process and issues to be aware of in recruiting external organisations to carry out evaluations for your programme.

7.5.1 Who ought to be involved in the selection process?

Who should be part of the selection panel should ideally be decided before the programme goes out to tender for an evaluator. It is important to make sure that one of the members of the panel has knowledge and experience of evaluation. As discussed earlier (see section 7.3), if necessary this expertise can be provided by an external 'academic advisor' who may be willing to be part of the recruitment process. Obviously, a fee would have to be negotiated for this work. Your NESS RSO should be able to advise on this, however, it should be noted that s/he could not sit on the interview panel, as this would compromise the independent role of an RSO.

Box 7.1: Parent involvement in the recruitment of external evaluators – areas for consideration

- Let the parents set the times for interviews and meetings, if possible
- Arrange childcare or pay for any existing arrangements
- Arrange transport
- Have members of staff available who are known to each parent
- Arrange for the parents to visit another programme which has used the evaluators, if possible

7.5.2 Choosing a suitable evaluator – The selection process

There are a couple of stages that need to be worked through and a number of considerations to be taken into accounts to ensure that your programme recruits the most suitable external evaluator, or team of evaluators for your programme. The two key stages to consider are:

1. How to assess the quality and suitability of tender documents
2. The interview process

7.5.3 How to assess the quality and suitability of tender documents

Hopefully you will receive a sufficient number of tenders back for consideration. The SSU and NESS would recommend that programmes aim to achieve a minimum of 3 suitable tenders.

It is important that you begin the assessment process by returning to the original Invitation To Tender (ITT) document drawn up by the programme, which should include a list of criteria against which tenders will be assessed. These may include:

- Value for money
- Aims and objectives presented in ITT
- Given timescales
- Appropriateness of methodologies
- Specified 'ways of working'

Box 7.2 provides an example of a programme's experiences of involving parents in assessing tenders and recruiting external evaluators.

Box 7.2: How one programme described how they went about assessing tender documents and involving parents in the recruitment process

"We prepared a short explanation of the service specification for the parents' benefit. We then created a scoring matrix to assess the bids against. At the first panel we each shared our scores and compared notes on each bid. We made sure that the panel had at least 3 weeks to read and score the bids against the set criteria."

The most important areas of consideration when assessing the quality of any proposal are:

- How closely the proposal addresses the original brief
- Value for money and overall costs
- Proposed timescales for various stages and outputs
- Skills and experience of evaluators

Appendix 6 is a grid used by a SSLP showing the criteria against which this programme assessed the quality of the tenders received.

7.5.4 How closely the proposal addresses the original brief

There should be a clear relationship between what was requested in the ITT and how the evaluators propose to answer that particular evaluation question. This should include adherence to any desired methodologies or sampling techniques, and should lay out what the evaluators are proposing to do, and exactly how they propose to do it.

Value for money and overall costs – make sure that the total costs are clearly stated and a comprehensive breakdown of the constituent costs is included. If there are any additional, or add-on costs to be borne by the programme, these should also be included.

When comparing overall costs of different tenders be careful to consider the different approaches that may be employed, taking into consideration that one particular method may be more costly than another, due, for example, to the method of data collection being more laborious.

Proposed timescales for various stages and outputs – make sure that this is in keeping with the needs of the programme, and that it fits with the information contained in the ITT. If

this is not the case, the programme will need to decide if the proposed timescales and outputs are realistic and appropriate to the needs of the programme.

7.5.5 Skills and experience of evaluators

The proposal should detail the evaluators' relevant skills, training and experience, and would ideally give references relating to previous work, that could be taken up by the programme. It would be a good idea to find out if the evaluators have worked with other SSLPs. If so, you may want to contact those programmes and ask about their experience of working with the evaluators, regardless of whether they have been listed as referees by the evaluators.

Selection panel members should read and assess each proposal against the agreed assessment criteria. The panel should then come together and present their opinions, and agree on a shortlist for interview. Some programmes choose to use a scoring system to assist individual panel members in assessing tender documents (as described in the example in **Box 7.2**). Ideally the proposed dates for interview would have been provided on the letter that went out with the ITT, or on the advertisements calling for tenders. This minimises the possibility of the interviewees being unavailable on that particular date.

7.6 Why has the response to our ITT been so poor?

Hopefully, even if you take the 'closed ITT' approach to attracting evaluation proposals, you will receive enough responses to make comparisons and enable you to recruit the most appropriate evaluator(s). If this is not the case, and the date for submission of tenders passes and only a couple or, at worst, not one proposal has been received, a number of avenues need to be explored.

Firstly, you need to pinpoint whether the lack of response is due to the ITT itself, a lack of availability of suitable potential evaluators, the time allocated for the response, or a combination of these factors.

7.6.1 Problems with the ITT document

If you feel that the responses you have received are too vague, or not in keeping with what you hoped to achieve through the evaluation, you need to re-visit the ITT with the following questions in mind:

- Is the remit of the evaluation too big for the specified timeframe?
- Are the evaluation questions too vague, leaving a lot of scope for personal interpretation by potential evaluators?
- Is the work focused enough in order to obtain useful data for the programme?
- Is the budget realistic for the given piece of work?
- If you have stipulated desired methodologies, are they in keeping with the kind of data you wish to gather?
- Was the timescale for the submission of evaluation proposals realistic?

7.6.2 Evaluators' issues

There may be a number of reasons why potential evaluators have not submitted a proposal:

- All or any of the issues relating to the ITT (above)
- The deadline for submission was very tight
- A lack of interest or expertise in topic area, or methodology most appropriate to proposed work
- Insufficient time due to having recently taken on more work

7.6.3 How to overcome these potential problems in recruitment?

If you have received sufficient number of proposals but they are not focused enough, or don't meet the aims of the evaluation:

Re-visit ITT and look at how it can be re-worked in the form of a brief to make it more focused



Contact the potential evaluators with the new brief in mind and discuss a way forward, if appropriate



Ask potential evaluators to re-write proposal with new brief in mind to decided deadline



Interview potential evaluators and appoint

If you haven't received sufficient proposals:

Re-visit ITT and look at how it can be re-worked



Contact original organisations invited to tender and find out why they didn't respond



If related to ITT, offer to send updated version



If related to own commitments find out if now feasible



If not feasible for original evaluators, find other potential evaluators to invite to tender and begin the tendering process again

7.7 Don't forget.....

Bear in mind when assessing tender documents that some evaluators may have particular quantitative or qualitative research skills and may be reluctant to use other methods, which may be more suitable to the aims of your evaluation.

Beware of evaluation proposals that appear to have been 'cut and pasted' from previous SSLP evaluations, as they may not meet the needs of your specific evaluation.

It is also worth acknowledging that the person who prepared the tender and who may also attend an interview may not be the evaluator who is undertaking the day-to-day work. Find out if this is the case, and ask to meet with the rest of the evaluation team that you are likely to be working alongside, and who will be interacting with parents and other stakeholders. Ask what skills and experience they bring to the evaluation.

7.8 The interview process

When you have decided on the evaluators you wish to invite to interview the next stage is to develop an interview panel and interview schedule. If parents are going to sit on the interview panel they must be provided with the relevant information, and their input needs to be useful to the process. So think about the kind of skills and knowledge you require for the process to be successful. It would be beneficial to have at least one person who has a good understanding of evaluation or research methods.

It is important to ensure that you get what the programme requires from the process. Therefore, use interview questions to highlight areas that were not addressed in the proposals, and pay attention to the language used in the proposal and the interview. Is it jargon free? Could potential evaluators get their message across to everyone? Having suitably skilled parents involved in the selection process can be particularly useful in helping to answer these questions. **Box 7.3** describes one programme's opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of involving parents in the interviewing process.

Box 7.3: One programme's experience of involving parents in the interviews for potential evaluators

Advantages: the programme could get the views of parents on the suitability of the potential evaluators, it developed parents understanding and sense of ownership of evaluation, parents received training

Disadvantages: childcare had to be provided, and more time needed to be allocated to the recruitment process for evaluators

7.9 The contract

When you have decided on the most appropriate evaluator for the work, and they have agreed to carry the work out, it is important to draw up a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the programme and the evaluator. If you have followed this guidance, particularly the section about what to include in the ITT, then this stage should be straightforward. Do not forget to be specific about the agreed timescales for the evaluation and remember to have a statement in there on intellectual property, i.e. stating that the programme owns all outputs and tools used in the evaluation.

Managing an evaluation effectively is key to its success. It is therefore important to work in partnership with evaluators to ensure that the recommendations are useable, and are as relevant as possible. A suggestion to aid this process is that evaluators sit down with the Programme Manager and other relevant stakeholders to draw up recommendations in light of the findings. These can then be usefully taken forward and used in the future development of the programme.

Having read this chapter it will be clear that contracting an external evaluator to carry out your evaluation is not an easy option, and requires considerable work on the part of the programme. It is important to own the evaluation and take responsibility for it. Don't forget that your NESS RSO is available to give guidance and advice at any stage in this process.

Appendix 7 is a good practice list of things to consider when recruiting and working with external evaluators. This list was developed by participants at a NESS local evaluation workshop on issues to consider when using external evaluators in local evaluation for the London and South-East regions which took place in October 2004.

Appendix 1: Recommendations for data collection for a cost effectiveness evaluation

Ensuring Accessibility to Information

Before undertaking further work on cost effectiveness particular attention should be given to ensuring the following information can be retrieved relatively easily.

1. All activities should to be registered and coded so that it is clear which expenditure heading it should be attributed to.
2. PSA targets need to be allocated to each activity.
3. Local targets should also be allocated to activities where appropriate.
4. Activities that support other services/activities (for example crèche provision) need to be recorded as a resource for each service or activity, i.e. if an Art Start session uses crèche provision there needs to be a record of the number of children using the crèche, number of crèche workers and their salary costs, any venue costs etc.
5. Information on how the activity is used / could be used should be recorded, e.g:
 - a. Number of places available on activity
 - b. Number of attendees
 - c. Number of visits (i.e. home visits) and time of each visit
 - d. Number of children attending crèche
6. All resources used, whether free or paid for, should be recorded, e.g.
 - a. Cost of venue – if free then an estimate of the value should be recorded
 - b. Staff time and costs (consider any support staff, e.g. management supervision)
 - c. Volunteer time – with a value attributed

Creating the Right Culture

Evaluating cost effectiveness can be a daunting task and it is important that the Sure Start programme staff are able to see the benefits of such work. Where possible all staff should attend workshops or training days that will give them an insight into how evaluation can help them to improve their services. As staff are already producing some data and information about the services they provide it would be worthwhile investing some time into ensuring they are using the most effective methods and that these will give them the evidence and tools they need to instigate change or to make their case for maintaining the status quo.

Link Cost Effectiveness with other Evaluations

Sure Start programmes evaluate a number of their activities and services to gain an understanding of how well they are working and whether they are achieving their objectives. Value can be added to these evaluations by also evaluating their cost effectiveness at the same time thereby giving a much richer picture of what is being delivered. It is therefore recommended that the programme consider incorporating a cost effectiveness element to each of their future service evaluations. (This should be much simpler to do once the recommendations 3 and 4 have been completed)

Appendix 2: Letter to programmes about local evaluation requirements from Sure Start Regional Managers

This letter reminds you of some key requirements and dates around submission of reports from your local evaluation.

Local evaluation is an important part of your programme - it helps you to assess how well you are doing, where you may need to make changes, and how far you are reaching your targets and addressing the needs of your families. It will also inform mainstreaming and the development of services for young children across your area.

Local evaluation reports

You will need to produce a range of reports from your evaluation to inform and update your stakeholders on your progress and findings and to help influence mainstream service providers. A forthcoming NESS guidance report will provide further information on the different ways in which you may use and share your evaluation findings.

We will also ask for copies of some of these reports in order that we can build up an evidence base of what works, and what does not work, in terms of delivering Sure Start services, and so that we can share these findings with other programmes. You will therefore receive a number of requests for information/ documents:

- In years 1-3, your regional team will request a copy of your annual evaluation report every **January**. These documents should bring together findings from all the evaluation activity conducted to date, providing a progress report to your partnership board and stakeholders. See Annex 1 for more detail on the content of annual evaluation reports, and Annex 2 regarding the timing of reports. Your January 2004 annual evaluation report is now due and so we would be grateful if this could now be forwarded to your regional team, copied to NESS (ness-support@bbk.ac.uk; Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues, Birkbeck College, University of London, 7 Bedford Square, London. WC1 3RA).
- In **May** of each year, the Sure Start National Evaluation (NESS) team will write to you requesting further information on your evaluations. They will need a short summary of your local evaluation strategy, updated information on your progress, and any findings reports. All of these documents should be forwarded to your NESS Regional Support Officer, who, with your consent, will ensure that they are placed onto the NESS website.
- In the January after the end of the **three year** measurement point, we want you to complete a more detailed summary evaluation report. In addition to providing details of your evaluation approach and your findings, this will critically consider the achievements and progress of the programme over the first years up to the submission of this report (see Annex 2), and will help you to decide how the programme can be developed further. This report should be submitted to your Sure Start Unit regional team.

Please refer to Annex 6 of your Sixth Wave Guidance, as well as forthcoming guidance from the Sure Start Unit and the NESS Support team for more detail on these issues.

Local evaluation after 3 years

It is important that you continue to evaluate your programme and services beyond the three year measurement point and you should continue to allocate 3%-5% of your revenue budget to this. This should be treated as a 'ring fenced' amount of your overall revenue budget.

This is a useful point to re-assess and refocus your local evaluation activity. After 3 years you will have been delivering services for some time and will have already collected evaluation evidence. Your evaluation should now move towards concentrating more on the impact and outcomes from key services or themes that you identify as important, including the cost-effectiveness of services.

It will be good practice to continue to produce annual evaluation reports so that you can feed this information back to your stakeholders and further influence mainstream service providers. We won't formally ask you to submit these to the Sure Start Unit, although these will also be useful to the NESS Support Team. Further guidance on this will be issued soon, and in the meantime, your NESS Regional Support Officer will be able to advise you further.

Children's centres

Programmes that already have or are moving towards Children's Centre status will need to consider if you need to refocus your local evaluation to reflect this wider context. Future guidance will also cover this in more detail.

If you have any queries over any of the details contained in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact your regional team. **In the meantime, please regard this letter as the formal request for your January 2004 annual evaluation report.** We would therefore be grateful if you could forward this to [insert regional contact name], copied to NESS, as soon as possible.

Sure Start Unit

Annex 1: Annual evaluation reports

Purpose of annual evaluation reports

Programmes' annual evaluation reports should bring together findings from all evaluation activity conducted to date. The key audience for the report is the partnership board and stakeholders, as it would cover not only an overview of the findings, but also policy recommendations for the future development of the programme, progress on meeting targets and objectives, and recommendations regarding future evaluation. It should also aim to identify any successful approaches that could be applied more widely across the area. A copy of the report should be sent to the Sure Start Unit Regional Team every January, copied to the NESS team.

The content of annual evaluation reports

The following is a summary of the range of information that should be included in local evaluation reports.

(1) Methodological information

The report should include key methodological information, as this will indicate the strength of the evidence for a particular recommendation and conclusion. As the main body of the report is designed to focus on findings (see below), the actual detail of the methodology would be best placed in an annex. This section should cover issues such as:

- *methodologies and strategies used* - e.g. questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, case studies, observational techniques, interviews etc. If more detail is relevant – e.g. interviews relied on open questions, closed questions or were semi-structured, then this should also be included.
- *timescales for the different methodologies* – e.g. household survey conducted between August and October 2002, focus groups conducted in September 2002.
- *Participants involved and recruitment methods* – who the respondents were for the different pieces of evaluation – e.g. Sure Start users or providers etc, and how the programme went about obtaining participants for their work – e.g. by approaching potential participants through random sample selection, perhaps using health visitor lists, by using programme lists of users of Sure Start services, approaching parents at Sure Start events etc. Providing detail on this aspect will highlight how representative, or otherwise, the sample of respondents are, and so will enable readers to understand the relative importance of different pieces of evidence.
- *Numbers involved* – numbers of potential respondents and numbers who actually responded (e.g. 100 people were approached as part of the household survey, and out of these, 80 successful interviews were achieved), number of 'sessions' – e.g. 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted or 10 focus groups etc.
- *The research questions* – this will provide context for the findings section and will help to identify the scope and remit of the evaluation.
- *Methods of analysis* – a description of the ways in which the data has been analysed.
- *Ethics* – information on any ethical issues that needed to be considered and how programmes addressed these.
- *Links to further details on methodology.*

(2) Syntheses of findings

The main focus of the report should be a synthesis of findings and evidence that has been generated through the entire range of evaluation activity – including user satisfaction surveys and monitoring information. It should include an assessment of reach, progress towards targets, and other short-term impacts, as well as information on work undertaken examining processes and cost-effectiveness. At the service level it could usefully look at each of the core services in turn. The findings should be presented in a user-friendly, non-technical style, using graphs and charts where relevant.

Programmes may choose to present the different findings in various ways – e.g. by splitting the information into sections relating to the Unit’s requirements for local evaluation (short-term impact, cross-cutting processes and cost-effectiveness – see above), by various themes, or according to services evaluated. Any analysis of monitoring data should also be included here to further illuminate the issues being discussed.

There should also be clear signposting to other sources of information in the findings section. This means that other, more detailed, evaluation reports – for example on a specific service or from a specific part of the evaluation – would be produced separately from this report. These are likely to contain much more detail and technical information, and are likely to be particularly useful for the NESS team in their work on synthesising the findings from all local evaluation.

In this section, any caveats on the data also need to be made clear so that interpretation of the findings is accurate. For example, any small sample sizes need to be clearly highlighted, and there needs to be careful use of percentages in relation to these samples, as these could be misleading. Any selective use of quotations should indicate that these do not necessarily represent the views of all concerned. In presenting information, care must also be taken to ensure that no individuals can be identified.

(3) Policy recommendations

The implications of these findings for the programme should be included in the report. This will involve specifying key recommendations for the programme and outlining how the programme might be developed in the future on the basis of the evidence generated through evaluation and monitoring. Progress made towards targets and objectives should also be outlined. It would also be useful to identify points of learning for mainstream service partners for providing services to young children across the wider area.

Information on how the programme intends to use this information more widely could also be included – i.e. in feeding back into the programme and making any necessary changes, in influencing other service providers, and in reporting progress to the partnership board and stakeholders.

(4) Progress on the evaluation

The report should also briefly mention progress on the evaluation and how this is to be taken forward and developed in future.

(5) Annexes

Any information too detailed to be included in the main body of the text (in particular the methodology) should be placed here. References to other, more detailed work, and how this can be obtained should also be placed here.

The content of the three year summary evaluation report

The three year summary evaluation report should be a report that *‘critically considers the achievements and progress of the programmes over the first three years’* (Annex 6). It should therefore be in the same vein as the annual reports – i.e. a synthesis of evidence covering all evaluation activity to date along with policy recommendations – but should be

much more in-depth and should assess the achievements of the programme in the first three years of operation, and also including the period up to the January after this point (see Annex 2) in much more detail. In particular, it should outline the evidence relating to outcomes and impacts, drawing out the implications of this evidence for the programme.

The report should therefore provide the rationale for the direction that programme development is to take in the next phase of its operation. In doing so, it should give an indication of how evaluation activity will be modified in order to continue to assess progress and the type of improvements that may be needed. With the shift of emphasis of local evaluation to look more at particular services and impact at this point, the report should outline which services it considers important to evaluate and why.

The three year report will also be important in terms of feeding back progress to stakeholders, influencing mainstream service providers, and informing the wider agenda within which Sure Start Local Programmes sit. The report should therefore outline the ways in which it will use the evidence from evaluation for this, acknowledging the need to establish a model of reflective practice that continually feeds back into programme delivery and development and is used to link in with the wider agenda.

Annex 2: Outputs from Local Evaluation

Number and timing of annual evaluation reports

Programmes should submit reports at set dates, according to the calendar year in which they 'started' (defined as programme approval date), and produce their three year report in the January of the year after the end of the three year measurement point – i.e.

'Start' of programme	Submission of Year 1 annual report	Submission of Year 2 annual report	Submission of Year 3 annual report	Summary 3 Year evaluation report
1999	January 00	January 01	January 02	January 03
2000	January 01	January 02	January 03	January 04
2001	January 02	January 03	January 04	January 05
2002	January 03	January 04	January 05	January 06
2003	January 04	January 05	January 06	January 07

Your summary 3 year evaluation report will include all evaluation activity up to the January of submission – e.g. for those programmes starting in 1999, any work conducted between January 02 and January 03 should also be included.

Appendix 3: NESS Progress Towards Objectives Scale for local evaluations

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No evaluation in place No evaluator appointed There is an understanding of Sure Start requirements Appropriate monitoring systems have been established	In consultation with RSO regarding evaluation Strategy for management in place within the programme ITT or job spec written Evaluation questions have been framed		Evaluator(s) appointed, either in-house or external Methodology developed, using appropriate range of methods in response to the evaluation questions Data collection has begun Planning for cost-effectiveness evaluation is in place Where parents/carers are to be involved in the evaluation, appropriate training has been provided		Collection of data has been undertaken Sure Start requirements regarding different dimensions of evaluation have been covered Data have been analysed using appropriate methods Reports have been written and submitted on time: - at 12 months the first annual evaluation report has been written - at 24 months the second evaluation report has been written - at 36 months the final evaluation report has	

			been written Evaluation findings have been disseminated to relevant stakeholders Evaluation findings have been reflected in practice developments
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How do I complete the scale? What should my 'score' be?

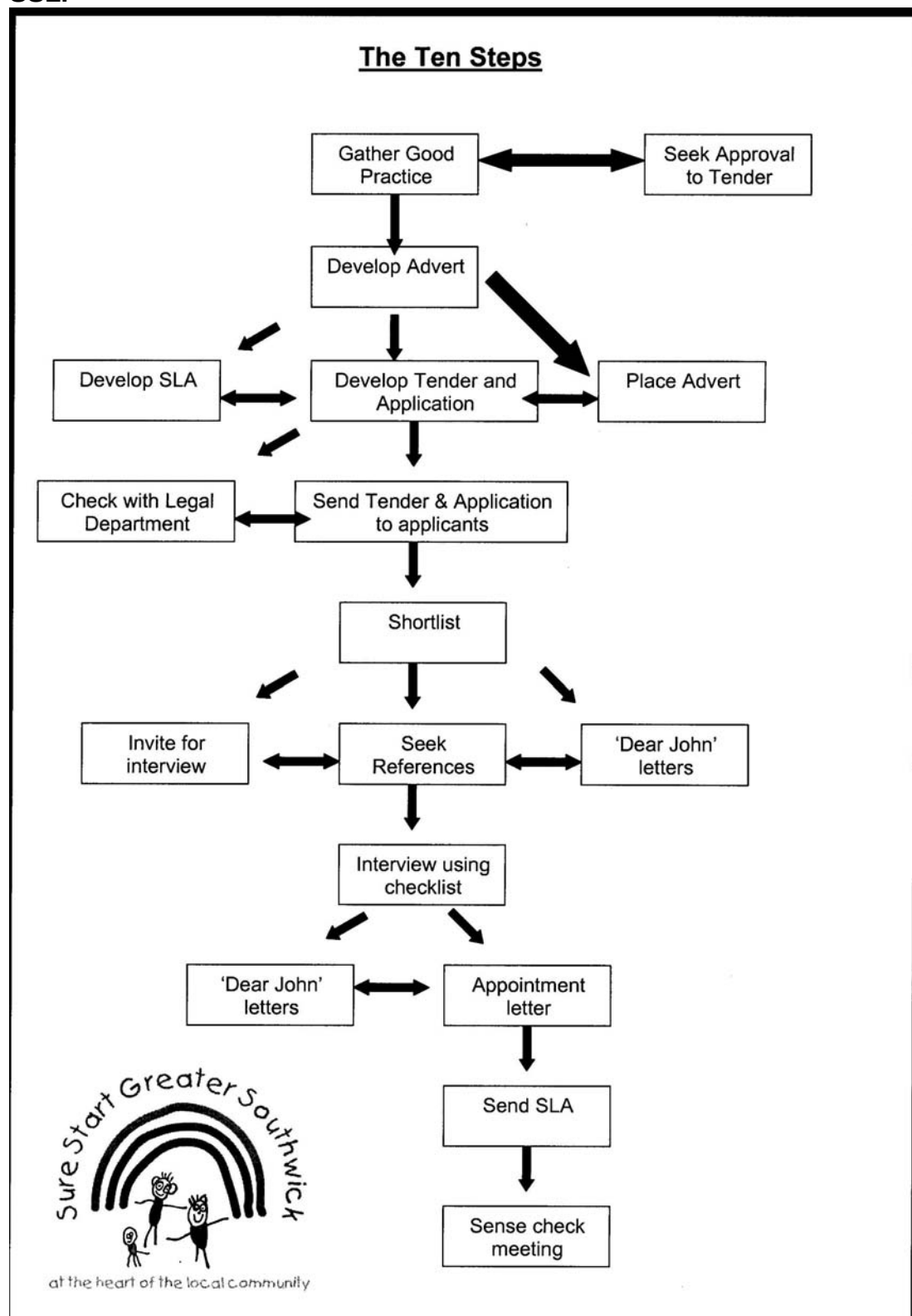
The scale has been developed to help the NESS Regional Support Officer work with SSLPs to determine their progress. A programme that is in its earliest phase of development will not be able to 'score' 6 or 7 since they have not been able to complete the relevant work. Thus it is developmental. The actual number is of less immediate importance than thinking about the progression from one column to the next.

At each of the 7 points it will be assumed that it is better practice to have completed all activities included in the previous points. However, certain elements may be developed simultaneously. For example, work may be started on writing the ITT (in the second column) while the monitoring system is being refined (column 1).

How do I deal with points 2, 4 and 6 on the scale?

The reason that these points exist is to help you determine as specifically as possible the stage you're your evaluation has reached. You will place yourself at points 2, 4 and 6 if your evaluation activity fulfils some but not all of the criteria in the relevant categories of the scale.

Appendix 4: 'Ten Steps' to Recruiting an External Evaluator - Flow Diagram from a SSLP



Appendix 5: An Example of an Advertisement Used by a SSLP to Recruit an External Evaluator

South Birmingham



Primary Care Trust

SureStart

Would you like to be at the cutting edge of research and evaluation in the emergent children's social policy environment in a diverse, vibrant and forward-thinking city?

South Birmingham Primary Care Trust has an exceptional opportunity to provide a bespoke evaluation service to 9 Sure Start Local Programmes in Birmingham, allowing a unique opportunity for cross-programme analysis, leading to improved outcomes for children.

We are seeking to recruit self-motivated individuals to form a Monitoring and Evaluation team.

Sure Start is an innovative Government programme aimed at delivering the best start in life for children. This programme aims to transform the life chances of younger children through better access to family support, advice on nurturing, health services and early education. It also aims to improve links with training and employment opportunities for parents and carers.

Monitoring and Evaluation Team Manager

£29,314 pa

With a background in research related to Social Care and Early Years, and management experience, you will take the lead in developing a strategic and co-ordinated approach to evaluation, working closely with the Sure Start City Co-ordinator and Sure Start Local Programmes. You will be educated to a degree level, have substantial research experience preferably in a field related to Social Care and Early Years.

Evaluation Officer - 3 Posts

£20,584 pa

We require dynamic graduates who have a research background, with experience in qualitative and quantitative social research methodologies and the ability to interpret data from a wide range of sources. You will have a passion for engaging with local communities to ensure services meet their needs.

Monitoring and Administration Officer - Fixed term 1 year initially subject to review

£17,289 - £20,224 pa

You will play an integral part in collecting the monitoring data for the Sure Start Local Programmes and ensuring that this information is submitted in accordance with the Sure Start Unit whilst providing administrative support to a busy team. You will have excellent communication and organisational skills plus a high standard of numeracy and analytical skills.

For an application pack please contact Linda Brown,
HR Directorate, Moseley Hall Hospital on 0121 442 3650.

Closing date: 13th April 2004.

Please note that interviews for the Monitoring and Evaluation Team Manager will be held on the 21st April 2004. Shortlisted applicants will be informed by telephone.

www.southbirminghampct.nhs.co.uk



Appendix 6: A Grid Used by a SSLP Showing the Criteria against which this Programme Assessed the Quality of the Tenders Received

Short listing Evaluator – May 2003										
Name of panel member	Date									
Organisation										
Member of relevant Professional organisations										
Previous experience • Experience of multi-agency • Experience of similar type of project • Experience of similar length and depth of evaluation										
Two referees										
Information on how they will measure baseline data										
Information on how they will measure effectiveness of separate programmes										
Information on how they will measure programme as a whole										
Information on how they will involve parents/com/children										
Appropriate evaluation methods to be used (blend of interviews, info. Trawling, questionnaires, focus groups, observation)										
Depth of experience of evaluator										
Appropriate supervision arrangements for evaluator in place										
Detailed budget within amount available										
<table border="1"> <tr> <td>2003/04</td> <td>2004/05</td> <td>2005/06</td> </tr> <tr> <td>£20,000</td> <td>£20,500</td> <td>£21,013</td> </tr> </table>	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	£20,000	£20,500	£21,013				
2003/04	2004/05	2005/06								
£20,000	£20,500	£21,013								
Agree to comply with health and safety										
Agree to comply with equal opps legislation										
Copies of accounts and annual reports for last three years										
Have Employers Liability										
Have Public Liability										
Have Professional Indemnity										
Successful track record of collection and analysis of data										
Demonstrate knowledge of the needs of young children and their families										
Demonstrate understanding of the services available for young children and their families										

Appendix 7: A Good Practice List of Things to Consider to Ensure a Quality Evaluation

This list was compiled by participants who attended a London and the South-east NESS workshop October on commissioning external evaluators in October 2004.

- Have an evaluation strategy in place from the beginning
- Be clear about what you want to evaluate
- Encourage the Partnership Board to take ownership of the evaluation
- Be clear about the timescale for the evaluation
- Consider budget and value for money
- Be realistic and focused about what you can achieve through the evaluation
- Make sure that the evaluation questions reflect what you want to find out through the evaluation
- Get the whole team involved and try to embed evaluation within the programme
- Speak to other programmes about their experiences of evaluation, especially if you are using external evaluators
- Make sure someone is managing the process in-house
- Ensure communication between evaluators and programme through ongoing feedback and interim reports
- Dedicate time to the recruitment process
- Consider the outputs you require from the evaluation