



## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**12 FEBRUARY 2008**

### **FINAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL: EARLY YEARS LEARNING OUTCOMES AND SURE START**

#### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To present the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its investigation of "Early Years Learning Outcomes and Sure Start" in Middlesbrough.

#### **BACKGROUND/AIMS OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION**

2. Early childhood is crucial in terms of children's development and well-being. Growth is rapid and a significantly high proportion of learning takes place from birth to six years old. It is therefore a time when children particularly need high quality learning and development experiences.
3. Given the importance of early years development, the scrutiny panel sought to investigate service provision in Middlesbrough, with a particular emphasis on learning outcomes and the role of Sure Start.

#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION**

4. The terms of reference of the scrutiny investigation were as follows:
  - To examine early years service provision in Middlesbrough.
  - To investigate the role of the School Improvement Service in early years service provision.
  - To examine performance indicators associated with early years achievement and Sure Start learning outcomes.
  - To assess levels of take up for Sure Start services, including work done to involve hard to reach groups.
  - To identify the extent of, and requirement for, staff training at Sure Start centres.
  - To examine an example of a Sure Start scheme and to speak to staff and service users about their experiences.

- To compare Early Years Foundation Stage Profiles in Middlesbrough to those of other areas.
  - To assess the impact of key plans and strategies and national guidance on early years learning outcomes and service provision.
5. The Scrutiny Panel undertook an in-depth investigation and met formally on six occasions between 8 August 2007 and 5 December 2007 to consider evidence relating to this topic. Information was submitted by Council officers, a representative of Middlesbrough Children's Trust and a researcher from the University of Durham. In addition, panel members visited two Middlesbrough Sure Start schemes and a local primary school.
  6. A Scrutiny Support Officer from Performance and Policy co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the review. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer from Legal and Democratic Services.
  7. A detailed record of the topics discussed at Panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Council's Committee Management System (COMMIS), which can be accessed via the Council's website at [www.middlesbrough.gov.uk](http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk).
  8. A summary of the methods of investigation is outlined below:
    - (a) Detailed officer presentations, supplemented by oral evidence and relevant documentation.
    - (b) Visits to two local Sure Start schemes to speak to parents, children and staff.
    - (c) A visit to Abingdon Road Primary School to speak to the head teacher.
    - (d) A visit to East West Children's Centre (the private day nursery at Abingdon Sure Start) to speak to staff and view its operation.
    - (e) The submission of written and oral evidence from The University of Durham and from Middlesbrough Children's Trust.
    - (f) Consideration of relevant documentation in respect of Government policy, national guidance etc.
  9. This report has been compiled on the basis of evidence gathered at scrutiny panel meetings and from site visits as above. Background information has been obtained from the documents listed at the end of the report.

## **MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL**

10. The membership of the Scrutiny Panel was as follows:

Councillors Bishop (Chair), Williams (Vice-Chair); and Councillors Davison, McPartland, Mrs H Pearson OBE, Rostron, Taylor and J Walker; plus co-optees: Father G Holland, E Orr and M White.

## THE PANEL'S FINDINGS

11. The scrutiny panel's findings in respect of each of the terms of reference investigated are set out below.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “To examine early years service provision in Middlesbrough”**

**AND;**

**“To investigate the role of the School Improvement Service in early years service provision” AND;**

**“To assess the impact of key plans and strategies and national guidance on early years learning outcomes and service provision”**

12. As the above terms of reference were found to contain areas of overlap, they are dealt with together in the following sections of the report. Evidence and information was considered by the scrutiny panel in relation to the following:

- Background Information on Sure Start/Sure Start Children's Centres.
- Links between Sure Start, the School Improvement Service and general early years provision.
- Statutory Background plus key plans and strategies influencing early years provision.
- A National Audit Office report “Sure Start Children's Centres.”
- Examples of Sure Start services.
- An evaluation of the impact of Government early years policies undertaken by the University of Durham.

**Background Information on Sure Start/Sure Start Children's Centres**

13. Sure Start is a Government programme which was introduced with the aims of achieving better outcomes for children, parents and communities, initially in disadvantaged areas, by:

- increasing the availability of childcare for all children
- improving health, education and emotional development for young children
- supporting parents in general and in their aspirations towards employment

14. This was to be achieved by helping services develop alongside financial help for parents to afford childcare, and by rolling out the principles driving the Sure Start approach to all services for children and parents. The Sure Start Local Programme approach was altered as a result of the “Every Child Matters” programme introduced by the Government in 2003. This included an expectation that local Sure Start schemes would be converted to Children's Centres, which would combine early education and childcare, family support, employment advice and health services.

15. Sure Start schemes, and more recently children's centres, are operated and managed by local authorities. Although there are differences between the original Sure Start schemes and children's centres, in Middlesbrough the term “Sure Start” has been used to cover both types of provision, which are an integral and important part of local early years services.

16. To date, the Council's Sure Start Services have developed children's centres at eight locations in Middlesbrough, as follows:
  - North Ormesby Children's Centre
  - Park End Sure Start Centre
  - Sure Start Abingdon
  - Sure Start Breckon Hill
  - Sure Start Hemlington
  - Sure Start Martonside
  - Sure Start Thorntree
  - Sure Start West Middlesbrough
17. The first phase of Sure Start development was targeted at the most disadvantaged areas and also included targets for the further expansion of childcare places. In simple terms, children's centres replace any existing Sure Start local programmes and are expected to be the delivery point of a number of mainstream services.
18. For facilities to be designated as a children's centre, they must fulfil certain criteria. In the most disadvantaged areas, they should offer:
  - Integrated early learning & childcare for babies & children until they are 5 years old.
  - Childcare suitable for working parents, available 10 hours a day, 5 days a week, 48 weeks a year.
  - Support for childminders
  - Early identification of children with special needs and disabilities
  - Links with schools
  - Visits to all children in the catchment area within two months of a child's birth
  - Information about family support and locally available activities
  - Support & advice on parenting
  - Access to specialist / targeted services
  - Activities to increase parents' understanding of their child's development
  - Antenatal advice & support
  - Child health promotion programmes
  - Guidance on breastfeeding, hygiene, nutrition and safety
  - Promoting positive mental health and emotional well-being
  - Speech & language and other specialist support
  - Support for healthy lifestyles
  - Smoking cessation
  - Links with Jobcentre Plus to support and encourage people into employment
19. A further four children's centres are scheduled to be developed in Middlesbrough. These will be operational by the end of March 2008. At the time of writing (late 2007), it is anticipated that, nationally, there will be a third phase of children's centres after March 2008.
20. Because the newer centres which have been developed are not targeted at the most disadvantaged areas, there is some flexibility on the core offer that can be made available, especially in relation to the provision of integrated childcare & education.

## Links between Sure Start, the School Improvement Service and general early years provision

21. The scrutiny panel examined how the work of Sure Start is linked to general early years service provision. It was found that Sure Start services cut across and link with all aspects of early years services. This includes local authority provision as well as those provided by partner agencies. Details of all Sure Start programmes and initiatives, including those that are delivered jointly with other agencies, were considered by the scrutiny panel when it examined examples of service provision (see paragraph 40 onwards). Specific work has been undertaken with health visitors and family support workers in identifying families and children who would benefit from Sure Start's services.
22. In terms of links between Sure Start and the School Improvement Service, the panel heard that joint working has been developed in a number of areas, as follows:
  - Joint training - this covers all sectors of early years provision, including private, voluntary and independent sectors, as well as school practitioners.
  - Half termly cluster meetings.
  - Team meetings involving early years managers.
  - Primary strategy meetings.
  - Termly visits by the Regional Advisor for the Foundation Stage
  - Development of a learning platform
  - Joint visits to other local authorities to identify good practice.
  - Information and communication technology (ICT) support for practitioners to help to develop their own skills.
  - Cross-Tees Valley conferences and network meetings.
  - Development of foundation stage resources
  - The development of the "Durham Flying Start 2" assessment programme for use in all settings registered for Nursery Education Grant.
23. The panel also heard information on work involving Sure Start that has been undertaken by **Middlesbrough Children's Trust**. It was explained that the establishment of such trusts was a statutory requirement of the Every Child Matters framework and that Middlesbrough Children's Trust is a local governance body which is a partnership of organisations and agencies working with young people aged 0-19 across Middlesbrough.
24. The Children's Trust undertook an audit of young people's involvement and participation in decision making and service provision in January 2007. The audit resulted in the development of an Early Years Action Plan, which is being led by Sure Start in partnership with key partners across the Children's Trust. The action plan has received external funding from the Children's Workforce Development Council, with the aim of promoting workforce development and training. The aim of the Early Years Involvement Action Plan is to raise the standard of involvement practice with early years children by bringing the best of national research and practice to Middlesbrough.
25. The Project Manager from Middlesbrough Children's Trust and the Manager of Hemlington Sure Start advised the panel on the development and implementation of the action plan, which is principally aimed at creating a culture which actively promotes the involvement of early years' children in decision-making.

26. Sure Start is to act as the lead agency in building the capacity of practitioners to enable the involvement of early years children in decision-making and in developing a network to support practitioners in developing best practice methods.
27. Nationally, Middlesbrough is one of only 18 local authorities which has joined the National Children's Bureau Early Years Voices Network. This is a national network of local authorities undertaking research into best practice and new duty from the Childcare Act. Middlesbrough is the only local authority to take a Children's Trust approach to the Network.
28. In terms of implementing the Early years Action Plan, the Panel was advised that good progress has been made since September 2007. There are now participation champions in every Children's Centre and also in other areas of service including schools, Family Services, the local Primary Care Trust, Acute Trust, MIMA, libraries and leisure and various child care and nurseries across Middlesbrough. Creative methods are being introduced to engage with children and information is gathered to evaluate the service and record and evidence practice.
29. Creative methods are being introduced to engage with children and a central focus of the work is to promote the recording of information and the creation of links between early years children and key decision-makers.

#### **Statutory Background Plus Key Plans and Strategies Influencing Early Years Provision**

30. The scrutiny panel was advised that, since 1996, there have been numerous national developments that have shaped current Sure Start and early years services.
31. The panel examined information in relation to:
  - Each of the national initiatives and legislative developments that have affected early years services since 1996.
  - Examples of service developments that have come about as a result of the above.
32. The scrutiny panel also referred to a National Audit Office (NAO) Report - "Sure Start Children's Centres."
33. Following the establishment of Early Years Development Partnerships in 1996 and the launch of the government's National 10 Year Childcare Strategy in 1998, a number of initiatives were implemented prior to the launch of the Sure Start Local programme in 1999. Following the establishment of the programme, various Government guidance documents were issued. These were aimed at providing advice on how centres should be established and run and also on what outcomes were expected. For example, a 2005 document "Sure Start Children's Centres: Practice Guidance" set out a vision for the centres and indicated that the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) expected to see services delivered that made a real impact on children's outcomes.
34. Details of all relevant initiatives and statutory developments since 1996 were submitted to the scrutiny panel. A list of these is shown at **Appendix 1** of this report ("Key National Strategies that have Shaped Sure Start Services 1996 - 2008").

35. Officers identified the following as being of specific relevance to the development of Sure Start and Children's Centres:
- (i) the 10-year National Childcare Strategy launched in 1998. This was aimed at providing accessible, affordable and quality childcare for children aged 0 – 14 years in every neighbourhood;
  - (ii) The Pathfinder for Extended Schools programme launched in 1999. This piloted extended schools (i.e. schools with facilities for community usage) in Easterside, St Thomas More and Holmwood Schools;
  - (iii) The Sure Start Local Programme - launched in 1999 with phased developments in 2000, 2002 and 2003. This was initially targeted at disadvantaged areas and brought together childcare, early education, health and family support for the benefit of young children under the age of 4 years and also their parents;
  - (iv) The National Day Care Standards - launched in 2000. This required local authority registration and inspections functions to be taken over by OFSTED with authorities retaining the duty to provide information and guidance to childcare providers;
  - (v) The Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative (NNI) launched in 2001 - designed to narrow the gap in childcare provision between the most disadvantaged areas of the country and more affluent communities;
  - (vi) The Early Support service - launched in 2004 to offer access to a range of services for disabled children, young people, their families and communities, including outside school hours;
  - (vii) Locality based working - launched in 2005-6, whereby health visitors from GPs moved to locality managed bases, along with Sure Start services and Social Work teams.
  - (viii) Children's Centres - initially launched in 2005-2006. These were initially aimed at disadvantaged areas with 800-plus children in each area, then spread out to less disadvantaged areas.
  - (ix) The Every Child Matters programme - launched in 2005. This specifies five key outcomes and introduced Children and Young People's Plans, a common assessment framework and the role of a lead professional to act as a single point of contact. This now underpins the main roles of Children Families and Learning services and has brought about changes in practice and the blurring of roles and responsibilities.
36. Most recently, the Childcare Act 2006 sets out specific duties on Local Authorities, in partnership with others. These provisions will come into effect in 2008 and will:
- Require local authorities and their NHS and Jobcentre Plus partners to work together to improve outcomes for all children up to 5 and to reduce inequalities between them. This is to be done by ensuring that early childhood services are integrated to maximise access and benefits to families and underpins the development of a Sure Start Children's Centre for every community.

- Require local authorities to assess the local childcare market and to secure sufficient childcare for working parents. Childcare will only be deemed sufficient if it meets the needs of the community in general and in particular those families on lower incomes and those with disabled children. Local authorities take the strategic lead in their local childcare market, planning, supporting and commissioning childcare. Authorities are not expected to provide childcare directly but to work with local private, voluntary and independent sector providers to meet local need.
- Extend the existing duty to provide information to parents. This is to ensure that parents and prospective parents can access the full range of information they may need for their children right through to their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. Local authorities will be required to ensure that this service is available to all parents and that it is pro-active in reaching those parents who might otherwise have difficulty accessing the information service.
- Introduce the Early Years Foundation Stage which will build on and bring together the existing Birth to Three Matters, Foundation Stage and national standards for day care and childminding. This new framework will support providers in delivering quality integrated early education and care for children from birth to age five.
- Reform and simplify the framework for the regulation of childcare and early education to reduce bureaucracy and focus on raising quality and standards. All providers caring for children up to age five will be required to register on the Early Years register and deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (unless exceptionally exempted). Childcare settings providing for school age children will be judged against a streamlined set of OFSTED Childcare Register standards. (The above criteria will be compulsory for all settings caring for children under eight. Other providers may join the register on a voluntary basis.)
- Allow for the collection of information about young children to inform funding decisions and support the local authority duties under the act.

37. The numerous changes that have been required in early years/Sure Start services have meant that the service can be almost continually implementing changed arrangements or interpreting guidance. This can be time consuming, particularly when complex or very detailed guidance is issued, but is imperative to keep the service up to date.

#### **National Audit Office Report - “Sure Start Children’s Centres”**

38. This report was published in December 2006. The National Audit Office (NAO) is the Government-appointed body, which scrutinises public spending on behalf of Parliament. Representatives of NAO visited Sure Start Thorntree as part of its information gathering on Sure Start. The very detailed report which was produced by the NAO covered some areas which were relevant to the scrutiny panel’s terms of reference, as follows:

- Whether centres will make an impact: It was found that although there had been some evaluation undertaken, the full effectiveness of Sure Start will only be measurable in the long term.



- Whether centres provide a good service for children and families: This section of the report relates to reaching the most disadvantaged families and is covered in detail under the relevant term of reference from paragraph 111 onwards.
- Whether resources are used effectively: Specific reference was made to staff training and whether this would ensure that staff could adapt to new ways of working. This aspect of the NAO report is covered in more detail under the relevant term of reference from paragraph 65 onwards.

39. The National Audit Office made a number of conclusions and recommendations. These included:

- The need to do more to identify families with the greatest need for Sure Start services.
- The need to establish the cost of centres' various activities and how well they are used, so that they can make informed decisions on best use of resources.
- The need to support centre managers and staff in the new ways of working that are required, particularly in training.
- A recognition of the benefits of joint working balanced against the need to ensure that the responsibilities of partners are clear. This is to avoid confusion or disenchantment with service provision.
- The need for local authorities to be able to provide information to illustrate that it is delivering value for money for funds expended.

### **Examples of Sure Start Schemes and Projects**

40. Over the course of its investigation, the scrutiny panel heard detailed information in respect of a number Sure Start schemes and initiatives. There are currently around 60 schemes or initiatives being delivered directly by Sure Start, or through links with Council services such as leisure and community protection or via links with external bodies such as Job Centre Plus and the fire and youth offender services. Details of all of these schemes are shown at **Appendix 2** of this report ("Sure Start and Parenting Services - A Snapshot").

41. These services have been developed by Middlesbrough Sure Start specifically to meet local needs, or are targeted at specific groups such as pregnant women and new born children; children aged 0-5 years; children aged 3-5 years; children aged 5 upwards; parents of children aged 0-16; and childcare and nursery education providers.

42. The scrutiny panel considered information on some specific examples of early years services delivered by Sure Start. These are:

- Parents as Partners in Early Learning
- SPARC and Baby SPARC
- ICAN
- Free for 2s pilot scheme

### **Parents as Partners in Early Learning:**

43. This programme is focussed on the Sure Start East locality, where children are in the lowest achieving 10% nationally. A grant of £200,000 was received to run this programme.

44. The programme is linked to the 2006 Foundation Stage profile results (see also paragraph 78 onwards) and aims to improve the results in relation to the two categories of personal, social and emotional development (PSED) and communication, language and literacy development (CLLD). In these two areas, only 15.6% of the bottom 30% of children reached the national average target score against a target of 31.7%.
45. It has been found that, in some cases:
- Parental understanding of the importance of early years learning is limited.
  - Some families have been unemployed for two generations and consequently have very limited aspirations for their children.
  - Parents' own experiences of education were often discouraging, leading to a lack of confidence in relationships with schools.
  - Parents' own limited abilities can make them anxious about becoming involved in their child's learning.
46. The programme aims to promote an understanding of the importance of early years learning and involve parents, grandchildren and carers in their child's learning and development. This is achieved through a number of activities and projects which encourage parental involvement and participation.
47. It is hoped that the Parents as Partners in Early Learning initiative will lead to a higher percentage of children working at age related expectations, particularly in PSED and CLLD and allow them to reach their full potential at every stage of development. It is envisaged that parents will have a greater understanding of their child's progress, will become more confident in approaching practitioners as equal partners and will contribute to planning next steps for their child with practitioners.

#### **SPARC and Baby SPARC:**

48. The SPARC programme, which is based on principles of early intervention, was developed by staff from Middlesbrough Council's Children, Families and Learning Department, three local teachers and a wide range of representatives of relevant local agencies. **SPARC**, which stands for "Supporting Positive Attention and Reciprocal Communication" aims to promote the social, emotional and physical development of infants and young children aged 0-6 years and came about as a response to several local factors, including the following:
- A large percentage of children start nursery education at age 3 unable to communicate at sentence level and lacking basic social skills such as taking turns, sharing and listening.
  - There is a growing problem in mental and emotional health among children and a consequent strain on professional resources.
  - There are variable standards of early years childcare, with more children spending their important early years away from their parents.
49. SPARC was developed in response to concerns relating to these issues. The aims and objectives of the programme are to:

- Promote social and emotional development as a continuous process in children aged 0 to 6 years old.
  - Promote the inclusion of all children.
  - Facilitate partnership working in developing the Every Child Matters strategy.
  - Build the confidence and skills of local people.
  - Facilitate the appropriate flow of information between parents, carers, individual early years settings and schools.
50. SPARC was launched at the end of 2005. An evaluation of its operation was undertaken by the University of Teesside in 2006. The evaluation found that the project links well with national initiatives such as Every Child Matters, the Foundation Stage Curriculum and Birth to Three Matters and that SPARC helps parents to be more attuned to their child's emotional cues. This, in turn, allows parents to respond to their child's specific needs.
51. The scrutiny panel was advised that there is compelling evidence that positive early experiences maximise learning potential and that babies with effective physical, social and emotional skills are likely to achieve well in all areas of their development. **Baby SPARC** was developed following discussions with teenage parents and is a programme that is aimed at supporting babies aged 0-6 months as active learners. The programme aims to:
- help parents to understand their baby's needs.
  - establish firm foundations for later skill development
  - promote the social, emotional and physical development of infants to prevent the onset of unusual development.
52. Baby SPARC operates by providing materials such as activity cards, which are used to provide guidance to parents in developing interactions with their baby.

### **ICAN**

53. ICAN (which is not an acronym but is the project name) is a programme which focuses on developing skills for the workforce and monitoring standards. This is undertaken at three levels, namely Supportive, Enhanced and Specialist levels. The scheme has established accredited core standards across Children's Centres with the principal aim of raising levels of communication, language and learning for children up to the age of 5 years. The scheme also aims to improve social and emotional literacy and to increase the resilience of children.

### **Free for 2s Pilot Scheme**

54. This is an 80 place Government-funded pilot scheme for early years education. The panel heard information on its operation at Thorntree Sure start, though the scheme is available across the whole of Middlesbrough. The Sure Start east locality has been allocated 46 places on the scheme, which entitles two-year-olds to 7.5 hours of early years education per week in a local setting. All settings must be registered with OFSTED and must offer parents the opportunity to access the nursery education grant for children who do not enter state nursery at three.

55. Thorntree Sure start facilitates 26 places of the pilot scheme, with health visitors, social workers and speech and language and Sure Start staff being involved in allocating places. Specific details of the scheme were provided as follows:
- 55 children have accessed Free for 2s across the Sure Start east locality.
  - Children are observed and, within the first half term, assessed using the Pathways assessment.
  - Base line and transition assessments are kept as part of the evaluation process to record a child's progress and highlight areas for development.
  - As children move into nursery school the assessment information moves with them to inform practitioners of their development.

### **Durham University Research Project on Early Years Outcomes**

56. During its investigation the scrutiny panel learned of news reports in relation to research that had been undertaken by Durham University into the effect of Government policies aimed at boosting pre-school children's educational achievement in England.
57. The results of the research, which had covered such policies as the expansion of free part-time nursery places, the introduction of the Every Child Matters policy and the roll-out of Sure Start children's centres, suggested that pre-school policies had had little effect.
58. Dr Christine Merrell, a Durham University researcher who had been involved in the research project, attended a meeting of the scrutiny panel to present further information on these findings and to answer members' questions.
59. The panel heard that the research, by Durham University's Curriculum, Evaluation and Management (CEM) Centre, had involved a study of approximately 35,000 children in total. A series of tests had been used to evaluate children's vocabulary skills and their ability to do simple maths like suggesting which object is taller than another. They looked at how about 6,000 four and five-year-olds in 124 primary schools performed in the tests (known as Pips - performance indicators in primary school) in each of the six years of the study. The children were asked to complete a series of fun activities by their teachers who were prompted by a computer programme.
60. Dr Merrell advised that the study aimed to assess the profiles of children starting school in England "during a time of rapid change". Taking in factors like the number of children with English as a second language and those on free school meals, it found that there was no change in the children's performance in the tests over the period 2001 to 2006.
61. The research had shown that children's vocabulary, ability to count and name shapes when they start school was no better than six years ago. This is despite early years education being a government priority, with £21 billion invested since 1997.
62. While the Pips assessments used in the study did not measure how many children were involved in national initiatives, it might have been expected that major government programmes would have resulted in some measurable changes in a sample of almost 35,000 children.

63. The scrutiny panel was advised that interpreting why such policies appeared to have no impact was beyond the scope of the research, though it was suggested that policies ought to have been better thought through and more closely monitored. It was also indicated that initiatives should be based on high-quality evidence and introduced in ways that allow for continuous scientific monitoring and adjustment in the light of evidence. Only then can the Government measure what does and does not work in education.
64. Examination of these terms of reference highlighted the extremely wide range of services provided by Sure Start and its partner agencies, together with the significant level of regulations and guidance that have shaped the development of local programmes.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “*To identify the extent of, or requirement for, staff training at Sure Start Centres.*”**

65. The scrutiny panel identified staff training and levels of qualification as an important aspect of Sure Start service provision and sought to investigate whether there are any requirements in this area.
66. It was found that, in terms of childcare qualifications and training, requirements are based on NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) standards, which range from Level 1 up to level 4. Managers are required to hold a minimum Level 3 qualification, as are room leaders. In childcare settings, 50% of staff must be qualified to Level 2 and 50% of staff may be unqualified. In terms of childminders, there is no current requirement to undertake any training other than the Council’s training prior to registration. Childminders are also required to be knowledgeable on the Early Years Foundation Stage (see paragraph 77 onwards).
67. The panel was advised that Middlesbrough’s childcare settings far surpass the basic training/qualification requirements. Details were submitted of the current position locally in terms of childcare staff.

**Childcare Managers/Deputies:**

68. Thirty childcare managers and deputy managers are currently enrolled on undertaking the Level 4 NVQ qualification.

**Early Years Professional Status:**

69. The Government’s aim is to have an Early Years Professional in every children’s centre offering early years provision by 2010 and in every full day care setting by 2015. To become an Early Years Professional, staff will need to gain Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), a new status which recognises their role as a practitioner and a professional leader. EYPS is awarded to people who can demonstrate that they meet a set of national graduate-level EYP Standards when working with children from birth to five.
70. The current position in Middlesbrough is as follows:
- 2 staff currently undertaking the course hold BA Honours degrees and will qualify for EYPS in the next 3-6 months.

- 7 staff have completed the Early Years Foundation Degree and started BA Honours courses in September 2007.
- 14 staff are in the first year and 13 staff are in the second year of the Early Years Foundation Degree.

### **Workers in day Care Settings**

71. Over 50% of staff working in day care settings hold the Level 3 qualification. Of the remainder, 45% are either undertaking Level 3 or already hold Level 2. The 5% of staff who are unqualified are not required to undertake any qualifications, although this is encouraged.

### **Childminders**

72. There are currently 143 childminders registered in Middlesbrough. As indicated earlier, no qualifications or training are mandatory. However, of this number:

- 35 are qualified to NVQ Level 3
- 20 are currently undertaking Level 3 training
- 10 are currently undertaking Level 2 training
- all childminders and sessional workers from playgroups etc (170 people) are to attend Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) briefings, following which all will progress to a series of 12 workshops to cover the first two principles of the EYFS. The programme is to be extended to cover the four remaining principles prior to September 2007 - when this will become a requirement for all childcare staff working with under 5s.

73. In terms of the national position, the National Audit Office (NAO) report referred to earlier (paragraph 38) referred to the wide demands placed on Sure Start staff and questioned whether training arrangements would ensure that staff could adapt to new ways of working. An NAO report on early years had identified a risk that the number of skilled and qualified early years staff would not grow fast enough for the planned expansion of the sector. The risk is highly relevant to children's centres given the large planned expansion to 3,500 by 2010. Staff recruitment and retention issues were also considered. As a relatively new and developing form of provision, career paths within children's centres are not obvious and managers need to take an interest in staff development so that they are trained for their new roles. A majority of staff interviewed by the national Audit Office were positive about employment and future career prospects, though some raised concerns about the short-term nature of budgets and the implications for continuity of posts.

74. Examination of this term of reference illustrates the importance which is placed on staff training and qualifications in Middlesbrough.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: "To examine performance indicators associated with early years achievement and Sure Start learning outcomes" AND "To compare Early Years Foundation Stage Profiles in Middlesbrough to other areas."**

75. As the above terms of reference were found to overlap and inter-link, they are dealt with together in the following sections of the report. The scrutiny panel considered information in relation to the following:

- The legal duties of local authorities in relation to early years outcomes.
- Foundation Stage Profile (FSP) background and results in Middlesbrough.
- Performance indicators used to measure early years achievement.

76. Under the Children Act 2006, local authorities have a duty to improve the outcomes of all children from birth to beyond the age of five and to reduce inequalities between them through integrated service provision. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has produced specific performance indicators (PIs) in relation to early years outcomes and overall success for local authorities will be measured through statutory early years targets, which are based on Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results.
77. The Foundation Stage is the first stage of the National Curriculum. It focuses on the distinct needs of children aged three until the end of the reception year of primary school and aims is to deliver a broad, balanced and purposeful curriculum through planned play activities. This is to help ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential and experience the best possible start to their education.
78. The Foundation Stage Profile (FSP) is a national, statutory assessment that is used to sum up a child's progress and learning at the end of the Foundation Stage. The panel sought to investigate what is measured by the FSP and how results in Middlesbrough compare with other areas. It was found that the FSP is used as a measure of progress made by children across the following six areas of learning:
- personal, social and emotional development
  - communication, language and literacy
  - mathematical development
  - knowledge and understanding of the world
  - physical development
  - creative development
79. Each of these learning areas has Early Learning Goals which set out the skills, understanding, knowledge and attitudes it is hoped that children will reach or exceed by the end of the Foundation Stage. Children will be at different stages of progress towards these goals depending on their age and stage of development.
80. The six areas of learning are arranged in 13 aspects, each of which has a maximum 9 point score:
- Scores of 1-3 on each scale are below the expected level.
  - Scores of 4-8 are within expectations but a score of six is considered good.
  - Scores of 9 mean a child is working beyond the expected level.
  - A maximum score of 117 is possible, though 78 points scored consistently across the whole profile is regarded as good.
  - A good score of 78 is generally taken to mean a score of roughly 6 points in each area, rather than very low scores in some areas and very high scores in others.
81. All registered early years providers and schools will be required to use the Early Years Foundation Stage from September 2008.

82. There are two main targets in relation to the Foundation Stage Profile. Although these will become statutory in April 2008, local authorities have been expected to set targets for the two year period prior to that. The two targets are:

- Percentage of children who achieve a total of at least 78 points across the Foundation Stage Profile with at least 6 points scored in each of the Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) and Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) scales.
- To narrow the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the median of the cohort.

83. The following table shows the information that was submitted to the scrutiny panel in relation to Middlesbrough's Foundation Stage targets and results:

<b>FSP Targets</b>	<b>2005 Actual</b>	<b>2006 Actual</b>	<b>2007 Target</b>	<b>2007 Actual</b>	<b>2008 Target</b>
(a).% scoring 6 or more in all Personal, Social & Emotional Development Scale	63.6	57.8	61.4	61.9	63.9
(b).% scoring 6 or more in all CLL scales	27.7	26.3	28.3	32.0	30.1
(c).% achieving (a) and (b)	26.4	23.7	26.8	29.1	31.7
(d).% with total 78 points or more	54.0	50.0	52.0	53.0	54.0
(e).% of all children achieving (c) and (d)	26.4	23.7	26.8	29.0	31.7
(f).% gap between lowest 20% and median of the cohort	46.8	45.5	41.3	42.3	36.5

84. The panel heard that Middlesbrough's targets are regarded as ambitious and that officers consider that good progress is being made against achieving these, with the table above showing that five targets have been exceeded for 2007. The drop in performance between 2005 and 2006 is thought to have related to poor moderation and weakened confidence following the introduction of a new scheme.

85. Officers do recognise, however, that there are particular issues in Middlesbrough in relation to communication, language and literacy. These are believed to relate to low levels of personal and social skills at the outset and not to poor teaching. There is also still more work to be done to narrow the gap between the lowest 20% of children and the median of the cohort.



86. At a local level, steps have been taken across the Tees Valley to develop further exemplification of FSP scales in order to make the judgement process more secure. As the FS Profile is now in its fourth year, practitioners are also more confident in using it. This means that the data that is produced is also more secure. In addition, although schools are not informed of targets, they are made aware of the results. Local schools have agreed to data sharing so that comparisons can be made with the results of other schools across the local authority area. Based on the FSP results, individual schools are targeted with appropriate support from the local authority.
87. Comparative information was considered by the scrutiny panel in relation to FSP results from other local authorities. These were from authorities which are the Council's "statistical neighbours" for audit purposes - i.e. authorities which are similar in size or have similar social characteristics to Middlesbrough. The local authorities which are Middlesbrough's statistical neighbours are Hartlepool, South Tyneside, Halton, Knowsley, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside and Stoke-on-Trent.
88. There are difficulties when comparing results with statistical neighbours because the data is not always comparing like with like. For example it is not possible to compare the percentage of children scoring 6 or more (a good level of attainment) across all strands of the Foundation Stage Profile.
89. Overall, when comparing percentages of children scoring at the higher levels, Middlesbrough is not doing as well as its statistical neighbours. The majority of Middlesbrough's children score in the 4-7 range. Middlesbrough has, however, made good progress against Early Years Outcomes Duty targets in 2007 and has exceeded some 2008 targets. Targets are presently being set for 2009.
90. The panel was advised that the Council's main priority is to have a greater percentage of children scoring 6 or more across all strands of the Foundation Stage Profile. Moderation and training are now in place to ensure that all practitioners are aware of the targets and are tracking pupil progress effectively.
91. Examination of this term of reference highlighted the importance which is being placed on measuring early years outcomes, particularly through the use of the Foundation Stage Profile.

### **Performance Indicators (PIs) Associated with Early Years**

92. The Panel was advised that, as part of the changes to PIs across local government, new PIs will be introduced for children's services from April 2008. These will apply borough-wide and not just in Sure Start areas.
93. Targets are to be set for the Council to achieve certain percentages in respect of the following:-
- Children who achieved a total of at least 78 points across the Foundation Stage profile, with at least 6 points scored in each of the Personal, Social and Emotional Development and Communication, Language and Literacy scales. This was seen as a key issue.
  - children in reception year who are obese.
  - mothers initiating breastfeeding.

- children aged 0 - 4 living in households dependent on workless benefits.
- teenage mothers aged 16 - 19 in Education, Employment or Training.
- members of the following groups in the children's centre reach area, with whom the children's centre establishes contact:
  - teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers.
  - lone parents.
  - children in workless households.
  - children in black and minority ethnic groups.
  - children with disabilities and children of parents with disabilities.
  - other groups which are priority vulnerable groups in the children's centre area.
- parents in the children's centre area satisfied with services.

94. Examination of these terms of reference highlighted the requirement to monitor some aspects of Sure Start service provision and some outcomes, together with the importance of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: *"To examine an example of a Sure Start scheme and to speak to staff and service users about their experiences"*.**

95. Arrangements were made for scrutiny panel members to visit two Middlesbrough Sure Start schemes, namely Abingdon and Thorntree. During the visit to Abingdon, panel members also visited the associated private day nursery (East West Children's Centre) and Abingdon Primary School.
96. The visits provided the scrutiny panel with an opportunity to meet staff and parents/service users first hand and to hear their views. Members spoke to staff and service users on both a one to one basis and also as a group. Members had the opportunity to present their findings to a following panel meeting. Views expressed during the visits included the following:
97. **Staff views (as reported by panel Members):**
- Sure Start provides children with very varied experiences - which is clearly beneficial to learning.
  - It is vital to engage with parents and to encourage them to actively participate in their child's learning development - some parents have a perception that they are not involved in this and that a nursery or school will "sort everything out."
  - Staff have been pleased to see the difference that Sure Start has made both for children and for parents. It has been particularly pleasing to assist in "skilling" parents.
  - Teaching staff express the view that they can tell which children have attended Sure Start - both educationally and in terms of social development.
  - Staff consider that Sure Start is making a difference.
  - Sure Start has much broader goals than purely educational attainment - the importance of socialising and sharing skills was emphasised.
  - Staff may be prone to "getting hung up" on targets.

- There was a view expressed that there are too many initiatives.
- One staff member indicated that there is a lack of stable teams at nursery day care.

98. **Members' views and comments:**

- One councillor (also a school governor) is certain that a Sure Start scheme in his ward has assisted in improving on a very bad OFSTED report for a local primary school.
- A head teacher expressed the view to a Member that Sure Start children start school "ready to learn".
- Staff seem satisfied that existing training opportunities provided for career development. However, senior staff have a concern about ongoing funding beyond the 10 year programme and the effect on morale of the ending of contracts.
- There were no suggestions for improvement and nobody has any ideas for any changes in emphasis.
- There was a lot of evidence that Sure Start provides learning opportunities, although one staff member in the day nursery could not give an educational opportunity in a tray of model insects.
- Staff are convinced that Sure Start will make a difference in the long term but could not explain the current concerns about poor Key Stage 1 results.

99. **Parents views (as reported by panel Members):**

- Two parents had started bringing their child to Abingdon two days earlier and had very favourable impressions of the centre. They indicated that it was "just what we'd been looking for".
- One parent (who is also a NVQ3 qualified Childminder) has recently moved to the area and had experience of Sure Start elsewhere in the country. She indicated that Abingdon compared "very favourably" with the centre she had previously attended and was of the view that Sure Start "is definitely working". She identified three main areas where she believes that children are learning - i.e. motor skills, personal development and interaction with peers.
- Both parents and children enjoy the Sure Start facilities very much. One lady was full of praise for Sure Start as it had helped her a great deal with equipment, training etc. Specific reference was made to Sure Start Plus and the toy library.

100. Scrutiny panel Members also met Mr R Eastwood, the head teacher from Abingdon Primary school, who was asked for his views on the local Sure Start scheme. He advised that he is convinced that Sure Start is bringing positive results and that there is a discernable difference between those children who have attended Sure Start and those who have not, both at entry and at key stage 1. He confirmed that there is no tracking of Sure Start children to monitor subsequent school progress. While indicating that he would like all Year 1 intake to have passed through Sure Start and childcare, it is recognised that there is currently insufficient physical space for any significant increase in numbers.

101. In terms of other aspects of Sure Start, Mr Eastwood commented that the private day care/playgroup is too expensive for local people and that places are taken up by people from outside the area arriving by car.

## **Thorntree Sure Start**

102. Having viewed the Abingdon Sure Start scheme, the scrutiny panel also visited Thorntree Sure Start. This was so that the panel could see the operation of two distinct Sure Start centres.
103. The Abingdon scheme was the first to be established in Middlesbrough and runs all facilities from one site. The Thorntree scheme operates in a different way in that it runs from different sites, each with different facilities. These include Thorntree Primary School, Thorntree Youth and Community Centre, The TAD Centre and Brambles Farm Primary School. Full child day care is provided by the Bright Stars Day Care service. Sure Start is required to involve a private day care provider where this is deemed commercially viable by the private sector. As it had not been possible to obtain a private provider for Thorntree/Brambles Farm the fee-paying day care facility is run by Sure Start.
104. The panel heard details of the "Free for 2s" pilot scheme which has recently been established in the area. This scheme has been summarised at paragraph 54 earlier. In addition, Members were informed of other services provided by Thorntree Sure Start, such as the 'portage' service, which is a home visiting service for children with special needs, and of links which have been established with many agencies. These include Care to Learn, local Job Centres, Refugee Services, Middlesbrough College and the Probation Service.
105. Marketing of available services is always ongoing to encourage registration and take-up, with leaflet drops every six weeks and adverts in the Yellow Pages, etc.
106. Sure Start staff advised that local primary schools are very supportive of early years provision and recognise its importance, especially as the baseline level for children entering school in Thorntree is often lower than in other areas. Pre-school is regarded as essential to a child's learning and development. The staff consider that Foundation Stage results will be a good measurement of the impact which Sure Start has on a child's development. However, as the Thorntree scheme has only been operational since 2004, it is envisaged that it would take at least two years for any impact to be measured. The view was also expressed that it is difficult to monitor very young children as they can vary considerably from day to day.
107. Members were advised that school staff have expressed the view that they could tell whether a child had been through a Sure Start scheme, particularly in terms of behaviour, listening skills and being used to paying attention. Any difference in academic achievement is, as yet however, more difficult to ascertain.
108. There are currently over 800 children in approximately 700 families in the Thorntree Sure Start area. The target is to achieve 20% attendance from 100% family registration. In 2006/07, 171 children used the facilities, although there was a constant turnover. Staff work closely with health and social workers, which helps them to make contact with parents and encourage them to participate in Sure Start programmes. This outreach aspect of the service is considered vital as, without it, parents would not bother to become involved.
109. When questioned about improving the outcomes of Sure Start and raising Key Stage 1 standards, the staff said that consistency in the form of job security and continuity of work would help in this area. The recently agreed three year funding programme was helpful in this regard.

110. Examination of this term of reference highlighted the value of speaking to service users and practitioners and in seeing first hand the service that is being examined.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “To assess levels of take-up for Sure Start services, including work done to involve hard to reach groups”.**

111. The national Sure Start Webster ([www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)) includes seven guiding principles of best practice, including three which relate to the need to ensure that services are accessible to all, as follows:
- Working with parents and children - Every family should get access to a range of services that will deliver better outcomes for both children and parents, meeting their needs and stretching their aspirations.
  - Services for everyone - But not the same service for everyone. Families have distinctly different needs, both between different families, in different locations and across time in the same family. Services should recognise and respond to these varying needs.
  - Flexible at point of delivery - All services should be designed to encourage access. For example, opening hours, location, transport issues and care for other children in the family need to be considered. Where possible, families should be able to get the health and family support services they need through a single point of contact.
112. In Phase 1 of Sure Start, centres were developed to serve families living in the 20% most disadvantaged wards. In Phase 2 (2006-08) it has been the intention that all families living in the 30% most deprived areas will have access to children’s centre services. Phase 3 centres will complete the national rollout by providing access to services to families from less disadvantaged and more affluent areas within which; however, there may be pockets of disadvantage.
113. A National Audit Office (NAO) report (“Sure Start Children’s Centres” - December 2006 - see also paragraph 38 onwards) found that Sure Start exceeded its Phase 1 target of reaching 650 000 children. Under Phase 1 (2004-06), local authorities were responsible for determining how many centres would be needed and where.
114. In Phase2 (2206-08), authorities were given targets for the numbers of centres to create and the number of children to reach. As a guide, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) suggested one centre per 800 children. Nationally, as a result of Phase 1 provision targets being exceeded, Sure Start is on track to deliver 2500 centres by the end of Phase 2 in 2008. 2010 plan 3500 centres.
115. The NAO report examined the following issues relating to service take up:
- Whether centres need to do more to reach the most disadvantaged families: It was found that services must be pro-active in order to engage with hard to reach groups. The most disadvantaged groups are those that are often hardest to persuade to use services established for their benefit. A further issue that was identified was the need to identify and meet the needs of groups at risk of being overlooked.

- Identifying priority groups and services: It was found that all local agencies should be involved in sharing data to identify the characteristics of hard to reach groups and an understanding of the issues that they need to address. However, NAO found that most centres were not tracking which excluded groups were using centres and had not finalised arrangements for performance monitoring.
  - Commitment to targeting the most disadvantaged: It was found that most centres had a business plan but had not thought through how they would target different groups with different strategies. The centres which were most pro-actively targeting excluded groups were found to be those with managers who viewed work with the disadvantaged as the core element of the centre's role.
  - Making centres accessible: This was found to be a key element of service provision. This can be achieved by a good choice of location (e.g. in a routinely visited place such as a health centre), by providing outreach services such as home visits or transport, or providing services or information in a familiar language.
116. OFSTED's annual report for 2006/07 made reference to the fifth anniversary of publication of the Every Child Matters programme and suggested that evidence shows that, nationally, the system is still failing the most disadvantaged children. The report highlights a key correlation - that the lower the socio-economic group, the higher the risk of poor outcomes for a child. It is against this background that the important role of programmes such as Sure Start can be seen.
117. The scrutiny panel sought to investigate levels of take up of Sure Start services in Middlesbrough and examined Sure Start Reach Data, which is produced by Children, Families and Learning, for the periods 2003 to 2006 and January to October 2007. Comprehensive data is recorded in relation to:
- New families seen
  - Existing families seen
  - Total number of families seen
  - Total parents seen
  - New children seen
  - Existing children seen
  - Total children seen
  - Total Children under the ages of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 years of age.
118. The submitted information showed that between 2003 and 2006:
- 50,997 families were seen by Sure Start.
  - 51,520 children were seen by Sure Start, of which:
    - 15,829 were under 1
    - 10,573 were between 1 and 2
    - 11,793 were between 2 and 3
    - 9,654 were between 3 and 4
    - 3,365 were between 4 and 5

119. Information was also submitted on Sure Start children as a proportion of Social Work referrals between November 2005 and October 2006 and of new cases of children 0-8 years of age by locality. Further information related to details of 'hard to reach' groups (as defined by the Department of Children, Schools and Families) divided into the Children's Centres' catchment areas.
120. Between 2003 and 2005 Sure Start Local programmes were provided with a target of reaching 80% of the parents and children in a catchment area. This was achieved by all five of the Sure Start programmes at that time. There is, however, currently no target for reaching a given level of the local population.
121. The panel was advised that, although detailed records are kept (as indicated earlier), determining exact levels of take up of Sure Start services by the population of a given area is difficult. This relates to a number of factors - such as transient and constantly changing populations and the fact that not all areas of Middlesbrough have Sure Start Children's Centres - families are free to use any centres and, depending on facilities, may not always use their local scheme.
122. The scrutiny panel heard directly from the manager of the Hemlington Sure Start scheme who was able to advise on particular problems facing the centres in engaging with some families. Reference was made to the fact that, in Hemlington, 70% of local children are registered with Sure Start. While recognising that there is a need to reach as many families as possible, the panel acknowledges that participation in any centre's programmes is entirely at the discretion of each parent or family and that they have a right to choose whether or not to become involved.
123. Taking the former target of reaching 80% of families, it is clear that this meant that, at that time, the remaining 20% were "missing" in terms of accessing Sure Start services. Although the target no longer applies this shows that there will always be a proportion of a local population that is difficult to engage with. By definition, establishing contact with this group of "hard to reach" families is difficult, although every effort is made to provide outreach services and to contact all families that become known to Sure Start. Despite the work that is undertaken in this area, there will always be some parents who choose not to use Sure Start services or those who refuse to engage with local authorities or any other agencies.
124. The National Audit Office referred to earlier (paragraph 38) indicated that the most disadvantaged families have the greatest need for Sure Start services but are likely to be the families who are least aware of what assistance is available. There is a need to ensure that these families are identified and that there are effective outreach strategies provided for them. This may be particularly applicable to excluded groups such as ethnic minorities, people who are unemployed, people with disabilities, teenage and lone parents and asylum seekers.
125. Staff work closely with partner agencies in health (e.g. health visitors and midwives) and social care to share information and to try, as an absolute minimum, to make contact with all families. There is a particular emphasis on attempting to identify and engage with the families who would benefit most from Sure Start's services. Links have also been established with Middlesbrough Registrar's Office. As a result, it is hoped that Sure Start can be informed of all newly registered births as the basis of contacting all families.

126. Examination of this term of reference highlighted the work that is being done by Sure Start to engage with families and the importance of continuing efforts to involve “hard to reach” groups.

## CONCLUSIONS

127. Based on the evidence gathered throughout the scrutiny investigation the panel concluded that:
1. Examination of this topic has highlighted the very wide range of early years services and interventions provided by the Council/Sure Start in conjunction with partner agencies in the public sector and private sector day nurseries. The important role of these services, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas has also been highlighted.
  2. While originally targeted at disadvantaged areas, the planned expansion of Children’s Centres means that their benefits will be felt across most areas of Middlesbrough. Although there are currently gaps in service provision (e.g. the Marton/Nunthorpe areas) these will be filled by the Phase 3 development of Children’s Centres.
  3. Evidence illustrates that early years and Sure Start services are about much more than providing early years learning opportunities - for example they are beneficial in children’s health, personal development and in developing social skills. There does, however, need to be a recognition of the importance of Sure Start as a learning environment, particularly given its potential to contributing towards improving Key Stage 1 results.
  4. To date there has been no quantifiable means of measuring whether Sure Start has had any impact on learning outcomes. However, changes in the way that information is now gathered mean that this will be possible in the future. Although the scrutiny panel had difficulty in ascertaining whether Sure Start is affecting learning outcomes, information from teaching staff suggest that children who have attended Sure Start - or any other pre-school facility - do benefit in terms of learning outcomes. Independent research (from the University of Durham) has shown that, nationally, early years initiatives and programmes have lacked impact in terms of measurable learning outcomes. A monitoring system would enable comparisons to be made between different Sure Start programmes in terms of determining which programmes are most effective, as well as providing a means of assessing the impact of Sure Start on learning outcomes. The scrutiny panel acknowledges that the effectiveness of such a monitoring system will only be achievable in the longer term.
  5. The very large number of initiatives undertaken by Sure Start has led to a dilution of emphasis on learning outcomes. While all initiatives have been developed as they have been considered to be beneficial to children and families, this has led to learning outcomes assuming a lower priority. There should be clearer strategies, with an emphasis on learning outcomes, and - if necessary - a smaller number of initiatives.
  6. Levels of training and qualifications for Sure Start and children’s day care staff in Middlesbrough are well in excess of those required. This is welcomed by the scrutiny panel.



7. In terms of increasing levels of take up of Sure Start services, there is a need to ensure that they are accessible and attractive to potential users, especially “hard to reach” groups. It is recognised, however, that participation is voluntary and that a key element of take up relates to parental culture, which can cause difficulties in some cases. It is therefore important to target services towards parents as much as children.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

128. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel’s recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny board and the Executive are as follows:
  1. That learning outcomes should be identified by Sure Start as a priority and services should be more focused on that objective. Each centre should be clear about how its activities contribute to learning and, if necessary, the number of initiatives undertaken should be reduced to enable a greater focus on improving learning outcomes.
  2. That an assessment is made of all Sure Start activities to determine what works best in terms of improving learning outcomes.
  3. That a monitoring or tracking system is developed - for example using Foundation Stage Profile Data - to assess the impact that Sure Start is having on early years learning outcomes. If possible, the achievement levels of children who have been involved in Sure Start programmes should be assessed against those who have not. This would enable services to be developed that are aimed at improving learning outcomes.
  4. That work to maximise the take up of Sure Start services is continued, including developing the service to cover areas of Middlesbrough where there are gaps in provision.
  5. That the work done to date to encourage day care staff to undertake relevant training and qualifications is continued and that increased training is provided for private children’s day care providers in relation to the long-term benefits of early years learning.
  6. That the Children and Learning scrutiny panel is kept informed of the future development and roll out of Sure Start Children’s Centres. Monitoring reports should be submitted to the panel, at least annually, in respect of the planned expansion of services.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

129. The scrutiny panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of this investigation, and who have assisted in its work. Special mention should be made of Heather McNeill, Sure Start Services Manager, who was the main contributor from Children, Families and Learning and who co-ordinated submission of the main evidence and the attendance of relevant officers.

130. The panel would also like to place on record its thanks for the willingness and co-operation of the following:

Councillor B Thompson - Executive Member for Children, Families and Learning.  
G Rollings - Executive Director of Children, Families and Learning, Middlesbrough Council.

Dr C. Merrell - Curriculum, Evaluation and Management Centre - University of Durham.

Plus the following officers from Children, Families and Learning, Middlesbrough Council:

- L. Blagg
- M.Cadman
- J.Callaghan
- A. Downing
- L. Lang
- H. McNeill
- J. Philpott
- D. Pollitt
- P. Smith
- J. Tickle
- L. Brett - Middlesbrough Children's Trust
- R Eastwood - Headteacher, Abingdon Primary School

Plus staff, parents and carers from:

- Sure Start Abingdon
- Sure Start Thorntree
- East West Children's Centre (i.e. day nursery) at Sure Start Abingdon
- Bright Stars Day Care at Sure Start Thorntree

**COUNCILLOR TONY BISHOP  
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1 February 2008

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following background papers were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Minutes of Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel Meetings: 8 August, 22 August, 12 September, 17 October, 14 November and 5 December 2007.
- DfES Publication (November 2005) - "Sure Start Children's Centres."
- Report from University of Durham Curriculum Evaluation and Management Centre: "Changes in Children's Cognitive Development at the Start of School in England 2000-2006."

- Report from Middlesbrough Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership - "Audit of Children and Young People's Participation and Involvement in Decision Making."
- Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) Report - "Sure Start Children's Centres: Phase 3 Planning and Delivery."
- National Audit Office Report - "Sure Start Children's Centres."

**Key National Strategies That Have Shaped Sure Start Services**  
**1996 - 2007**

c. 1996	Early Years Development	Implementation of nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds Set up Early Years Development Partnerships
Launched 1997	Early Excellence Centres (EEC) programme	To develop models of good practice in integrating services for young children and families. Middlesbrough achieved designation as EEC at Whinney Banks
Launched in 1997	Early Excellence Centres programme	to develop models of good practice in integrating services for young children and families
c.1998	Childcare Information Services	Middlesbrough developed Childcare Plus
launched in 1998	National 10 year Childcare Strategy	Accessible, affordable and quality childcare for children aged 0 to 14 (and to 16 for those with special educational needs or disabilities) in every neighbourhood Set up Early Years Development & Childcare Partnerships
c. 1999	Pathfinder for Extended Schools	Piloting extended schools. Easterside, St Thomas More and Holmwood Schools
c. 1999	Business support for the Childcare Sector	Business Support Officer to work in each of the 150 local authorities. National Programme, Business Success for Childcare, which delivering business training and support to childcare providers
Launched in 1999 Then: 2000 2002 2003	Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP)	To bring together early education, childcare, health and family support for the benefit of young children (under the age of 4) living in disadvantaged areas and their parents. Targeted at disadvantaged areas with c 750 children in catchment area Phased implementation over 6 phases, nationally; 5 SSLPs set up in Middlesbrough.
c. 2000	National Day Care Standards	Local Authorities Registration & Inspection functions moved in to Ofsted. LAs retain duty to provide information and guidance to childcare providers.
Launched in 2001	Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative (NN)	To narrow the gap in childcare provision between the most disadvantaged areas of the country and their more affluent communities' counterparts. 8 NNs established in Middlesbrough.
c. 2004	Early Support	is the central government mechanism for achieving better coordinated family-focused services for very young disabled children and their families. Piloted in Middlesbrough and then mainstreamed.
c. 2004	Extended schools	To offer access to a range of services for children, young people, their families and communities often beyond the school day.
c. 2004	Bookstart	To give a free pack of books to babies with guidance materials for parents and carers. Expanded to include Treasure Boxes.
Published 2004	National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services	It sets out a ten-year programme for sustained improvement in children's health and wellbeing by setting national standards for children's health and social services (and the interface with education), from before birth through to adulthood.
2005-06	Locality based working (local strategy)	Health Visitors from GPs to locality managed bases Sure start service restructures to locality bases Social Work teams move to locality bases

2005-06 2006-08	Children's Centres	Initially targeted at disadvantaged areas with c 800 children in catchment area Spreading out to less disadvantaged and advantaged areas Phased implementation over 3 phases nationally. Phase 1 complete – 8 designated children's centres in Middlesbrough. Phase 2 for completion by end March 2008, 4 new children's to be designated centres in Middlesbrough. Sure Start Children's Centres are places where children under 5 years old and their families can receive seamless integrated services and information, and where they can access help from multi-disciplinary teams of professionals. SSLPs had to apply for designation as children's centres
c.2005	Every child Matters	Five Outcomes Children and Young People's Plans Common Assessment Framework a national, common process for initial assessment. Role of lead professional to act as a single point of contact
c. 2006	Children's Workforce Development	It aims to ensure that all workers have appropriate skills and qualifications and is working to increase recruitment into the children's workforce and improve the retention of high quality employees.
2006	National Qualification for Children's Centre Managers	On level with qualification for Headteachers, 1 year training & qualification
Launched 2006-07	Transformation Fund	Increasing the level of qualification within childcare and graduate level managers
Implement ation 2008	Childcare Act 2006	LA duties to: Improve the five Every Child Matters outcomes for all pre-school children and reduce inequalities in these outcomes Secure sufficient childcare for working parents Provide a better parental information service Reforms early years regulation and inspection arrangements, providing for a new integrated education and care quality framework for pre-school children and also for the new Ofsted Childcare Register.
Launched Autumn 2007	Early Years Funding Reform	From 2009-10 all LA will be required to introduce consistent pupil counting between the maintained and PVI sectors. By 2010-11, LAs will be required to develop and introduce a single local formula for funding early years provision in the maintained and PVI sectors. Schools Management Forum membership to include representatives of the early years Private & Voluntary sector
Launched 2007	National Academy for Parenting Practitioners	To support the training of a range of professionals working with parents
Sept 2006	Parent Support Advisers Pilot	Parent Support Advisers in schools. 51 schools in Middlesbrough with PSA
2007	Early Years Foundation Stage	New framework for care and development of 0 to 5s in childcare and early learning settings Statutory implementation in September 2008

**APPENDIX 2**

**Sure Start & Parenting Services – A Snapshot**

<b>Customer</b>	<b>Services delivered by Sure Start</b>	<b>Linked Services</b>
Pregnant women and new born children	Baby SPARC Breast Feeding Support Drop-ins Information about available services New Mums Groups Teenage Pregnancy Support	Health Visiting Midwifery Life skills courses - DISC
Children aged 0 – 5 years	Babies’ books and mMusic Bookstart Childcare in Bright Stars and Stainsby Nurseries Crèches Early start Early Support ((children with additional needs) Free childcare for 2 yr olds (national pilot) Parents as Partners in Early Learning Play sessions Portage (children with additional needs) Safety Scheme SPARC Toddler Groups Toy Library	Crèches, playgroups, childminders, day nurseries Family Learning Leisure services activities Library activities Paediatric Physiotherapy School nurseries Speech & Language
Children aged 3 – 5 years	3 & 4 yr old nursery education in childcare settings BLAST Fit Tots Inclusion support for children with special needs Make the Difference Treasure Boxes	School nurseries Cleveland Unit Speech & Language
Children aged 5 upwards	Childcare – Breakfast & Out of School Clubs Extended schools Holiday Playschemes Junior Groups – development & support Pavilion Children’s Play Centre Toy Library	Community Protection Connexions Leisure Services Libraries Schools Youth Offender Service
Parents of children aged 0 – 16	Childcare information Daddy Care Dads Journal Dads work Family support Fire Safety in the Home Home safety Mobile crèche to support parents accessing services Outreach to HMP Holme House Parent Networks Parent Support Advisors Parenting interventions for parents of young people with anti-social behaviour Parenting Puzzle Programmes Parents as Partners in Early Learning Programmes for Parents on Parenting Orders Recruitment & training opportunities in childcare Triple P parenting programmes Venues for Contact Visits and Supervised Contacts Volunteer training and placements	Adult Education classes Community Protection Connexions Family learning Family Planning clinics Fire Service Health Visitors: Weight management, smoking cessation JobsCentre Plus: Recruitment & training opportunities Leisure Services Libraries Paediatric Physiotherapy Schools Speech & Language development support Youth Offender Service

Childcare and nursery education providers	Business Support Foundation Stage Training ICAN communication techniques Implementation of Early Years Foundation Stage Pre-registration and inspection support Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators Support & challenge to private & voluntary childcare settings
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