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**Sure Start Halton Children's Centres
User Satisfaction Survey**

Executive Summary

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May 2008

Executive Summary

Introduction

Sure Start Children's Centres are a key component of the Government's 10 year childcare strategy, which aims to build upon the work already undertaken for 'early years' services through the Sure Start Local Programmes. Local authorities have been given strategic responsibility for the delivery of Children's Centre services. They are to plan the location and development of centres to meet the needs of local communities, in consultation with parents, the private, voluntary and independent sector and other key partner organisations. The aims of Sure Start Children's Centres are linked to the outcomes for children and young people set out in *Every Child Matters* (Department for Education and Skills).

Halton Children's Centres are the product of an amalgamation of former Runcorn and Widnes Sure Start Local Programmes. The Children's Centres in Halton have been offering universal services to all families living in the borough since September 2006. Monitoring and evaluation of Sure Start Children's Centres is a statutory requirement in order to establish whether programmes have made a difference to children and families. In particular, Children's Centres are required to establish, on an annual basis, the percentage of parents with children aged 0 to 5 years reporting that they are satisfied with the services for families with young children.

The Centre for Public Health Research (CPHR) was commissioned to undertake this survey of parent and carer satisfaction with Halton Children's Centres' services in February 2008. The survey was the first of this kind to be carried out on behalf of all Halton Children's Centres. Previous satisfaction surveys have been undertaken for individual Sure Start Local Programmes.

Study design and methodology

This study of users' satisfaction with Halton Children's Centres' services employed a survey approach. Data were collected using postal questionnaires sent to all parents registered with Halton Children's Centres. The target population for this survey was all parents and carers of children aged 0 to 5 years who were registered with Halton Children's Centres.

The questionnaire was based on previous satisfaction surveys undertaken with Sure Start services using a template developed by the CPHR. The questions included in the

questionnaire covered the following areas: socio-demographic data; awareness of services; use of services; registration with Halton Children's Centres; accessibility of services; informal drop-in and/or telephone support; and overall satisfaction with Halton Children's Centres' services. In addition, space was provided to allow respondents to add their own comments concerning Halton Children's Centres' services.

A prize draw leaflet was designed and included in each envelope with the questionnaire along with a participant information sheet.

Results

- 1,911 questionnaires were sent out to eligible families;
- 348 questionnaires were returned (18% response rate);
- 345 (99%) questionnaires were completed by females;
- 65 (19%) respondents classified themselves as being a single parent;
- 333 (96%) respondents identified themselves as being White British;
- 2 respondents (1%) indicated that they had a disability, whilst 10 (4%) parents/carers identified their child as having a disability;
- respondents ranged from 16 to 56 years old;
- parents/carers aged 30 to 34 accounted for the greatest proportion of respondents.
- 260 (75%) respondents indicated they had internet capabilities at home.

Introduction to Halton Children's Centres

- of the 348 respondents, 341 (98%) were aware that Halton Children's Centres' services operated in the area (prior to this survey);
- 217 (62%) respondents indicated that the midwife had spoken to them about the Children's Centres' services;
- 165 (47%) respondents indicated that they had been registered by the midwife.

Access to Children's Centres

- 278 (80%) respondents had accessed Halton Children's Centres' services.
- 195 (56%) respondents identified session times as a reason that might prevent access to services;
- the majority of service users indicated they could access services at school times, evenings and weekend;
- 187 (54%) respondents had accessed one Children's Centre;

- 75 (22%) respondents indicated they had accessed two Children's Centres;
- 73 (21%) respondents indicated they had not accessed a service;
- 56 (16%) respondents identified additional carers other than themselves as accessing Children's Centres with their child.

Satisfaction of service users

- 155 (45%) respondents indicated they had contacted the Children's Centres for information, help or advice;
- 151 out of 155 (98%) respondents accessing services for information, help or advice found the support available to be either 'very helpful' or 'helpful';
- 276 out of 280 (99%) respondents indicated they were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the available services.

Additional comments

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to make additional comments regarding Halton Children's Centres' services. In total, 49% (172 out of 348) of respondents made additional comments. In some cases respondents made multiple comments and/or suggestions. Seven key themes emerged from respondents comments: positive experiences; messages of thanks; difficulties in attending; information requirements; limited availability; negative experiences; and suggestions for future service delivery.

Discussion and Conclusion

This user satisfaction survey provides an indication of the use of, and satisfaction with, Halton Children's Centres. The low response rate is not surprising as previous Sure Start satisfaction surveys have yielded low response rates, ranging from 16 to 21 percent. This may be indicative of the difficulties experienced when attempting to engage some of the eligible population with local services.

Parents-to-be should be introduced and registered with Children's Centres' services through their local midwife as part of antenatal services. Although the majority of respondents were introduced to Sure Start Children's Centres by their midwife, many did not discuss them with him/her and less than half registered at this point. When coupled with the fact that 19% of respondents had not accessed any Children's Centre services, it would appear more could be done to inform parents and encourage greater levels of participation. In particular, the key role of the midwife antenatally may require emphasising.

An issue to be considered is the ongoing provision of information about services. A lack of information was perceived as preventing 33% of respondents from accessing services. This included information regarding the nature of the services and the timing of the sessions. This is an interesting finding, particularly in light of the fact that Halton Children's Centres have recently discontinued sending out session timetables routinely. Respondents considered that information available on the internet could be much improved, as the current Halton Borough Council web site was perceived as insufficient and not particularly helpful. With 75% of respondents indicating that they have internet capability in their home, improved website information and specific Children's Centres' web sites could prove a very efficient way of informing the local community about the available services.

Another issue raised by respondents was the difficulty faced by some parents who had more than one young child. It was apparent that crèche facilities were not always available in conjunction with sessions, which prevented attendance at activities targeted at specified age groups for parents who had one child within that age group and another either older or younger. By providing more crèche facilities parents would be able to leave a child fully supervised whilst they attend the age appropriate service for their other child. However, there are limits to the level of crèche facilities that can be made available by Halton Children's Centres.

Overall, this study has indicated high levels of satisfaction with Halton Children's Centres, and has provided some indication of areas where development could be considered.