Main Findings

- There has continued to be a year on year increase in the numbers of places for children and parents. In 2003/04 there were 15,400 places for children and 9,600 places for parents across the 27 local authorities returning data.

- The qualitative evidence provided through telephone interviews suggests that flexibility of service provision, along with an integrated and holistic approach, was a hallmark of Sure Start Scotland across local authorities. Many Sure Start Contact Officers described integrated packages of care to support vulnerable families with very young children.

- Sure Start Scotland continues to provide a range of services with intensive, group and resource-based provision. Data were obtained from 246 services; 56% of these had been set up after 2001. Centre-based provision was the main type of service provided with data being returned from 71; these provide a range of services including day care, visiting sessions, playgroups and crèches.

- Many local authorities highlighted staff and parent training as areas that had been developed considerably since 2001. 137 services reported providing parenting training.

- Sure Start Contact Officers reported impacts of Sure Start Scotland on children and families through case examples and other evidence. Impacts related to improved child behaviour and development, increased self-esteem amongst parents and prevention of more intensive statutory involvement.

- There was some concern expressed about demand outstripping supply, how best to meet the needs of the most vulnerable families in a preventive way and also about continuity of support beyond age three.

- Most local authorities reported that there had been significant changes to the planning process for early years services generally, and Sure Start in particular, with a change in organisational culture as well as structure supporting joint planning and delivery.

- It was felt improvements could be made in the following areas: involving men more in early years services, as both carers and providers; evaluation and monitoring; developing preventive services and developing services for the most marginalised and vulnerable families.
Aims and Objectives

The objectives of Sure Start Scotland are to:

■ improve children’s social and emotional development
■ improve children’s health
■ improve children’s ability to learn
■ strengthen families and communities.

The aims of this mapping exercise were to provide:

■ An update on the quantitative data obtained from local authorities in 2001
■ A description of the planning processes within local authorities
■ An assessment of the impact of Sure Start Scotland services and funding on children and their families.

Methods

This second Sure Start Mapping Exercise was carried out across Scotland between November 2004 and April 2005 and involved both quantitative and qualitative components:

■ Quantitative data templates collected information on Sure Start Scotland services within each local authority. Twenty-seven local authorities responded, reporting on 246 services.

■ Self-completed, semi-structured questionnaires collected information on the views of Sure Start Contact Officers. Thirty questionnaires were completed.

■ Telephone interviews, using a semi-structured format, followed up on the questionnaire data. Thirty-one interviews were completed.

■ Telephone interviews, using a semi-structured format, were conducted with a key planner. Thirty interviews were completed.

■ Two case study areas, Aberdeen City and West Lothian, were the focus of more in-depth study with additional telephone interviews being conducted with four planners, seven service providers and four service users.

As not all local authorities were able to provide the quantitative evidence required, the numbers reported (services and their use) are underestimates of overall provision, representing a limitation to the study. Impact has been assessed using qualitative evidence about perceived benefits to children and families.

Findings

The range and use of Sure Start Scotland services

There has continued to be a year on year increase in the numbers of places for children and parents from the baseline figure of 3,387 children supported in 1999/00 to the 2003/04 figure of 15,400 places for children and 9,600 for parents. The figures for 2001/02 comprised 8,563 places for children and 4,277 for parents; for 2002/03, 12,413 for children and 6,016 for parents.

Although it was not possible to obtain data on the number of integrated packages of care from across all local authorities, a figure of 5,075 children receiving integrated packages of care was derived from returns from 7 local authorities. The qualitative evidence provided through the telephone interviews suggests that flexibility of service provision enabling integration and a holistic approach was a hallmark of Sure Start Scotland across local authorities.

Sure Start Scotland services were reaching children across the 0-3 age range and increasingly including pre-birth services. One hundred and twenty-six services reported providing intensive support; 166 group support and 43 resource-based support. One service may well offer more than one type of provision. Centre-based provision was the main type of service provided with templates being returned from 71 centres (25% of all services for which data were available). Centres provide a range of services including day care, visiting sessions, play groups, and crèches. In a few local authorities such provision was not well developed either because of a lack of premises or because such provision was inappropriate for rural areas.

Other types of services provided included: playgroups, outreach support, parent and toddler/baby groups, other day care or nursery, crèches, learning support to child or parent, resources and staff training. Outreach services accounted for 20% of reported provision.

The development and delivery of Sure Start Scotland services

The mapping exercise found that 56% of services where data were available were set up after 2001, suggesting a considerable increase in overall provision across Scotland. Sure Start Contact Officers described how local authorities were trying to mainstream services. Provision was being extended and enhanced rather than replaced by new services. Local authorities were also reported as mixing funding streams, with 71% of services being funded from more than one funding stream.

New or innovative practices include the development of new posts, especially those committed to joint working, linking
health with other sectors. Other forms of innovation related to the development of new forms of needs assessment and in some areas, new family support or similar teams.

Sure Start Contact Officers reported considerable developments in integrated working across sectors, although many said that further improvements could be made in integrating with health. Nonetheless there was evidence of joint working with health at both planning and delivery levels. Additionally, visiting sessions within centre-based provision often involved health care staff, such as health visitors, providing specific input, with 90 services reporting health visitor input.

Specific groups are also being targeted within Sure Start Scotland, although the overall ethos is one of non-stigmatised support for vulnerable groups within the context of more universal provision.

Many local authorities highlighted staff and parent training as areas that had developed considerably since 2001. 137 services reported providing parenting training.

**The perceived impact of Sure Start Scotland**

Most Sure Start Contact Officers concurred that impacts are hard to measure and are not reflected in a ‘number of places’ approach, but that the impacts of Sure Start Scotland are visible and tangible. Some services were oversubscribed and those services aiming to serve the hardest to reach groups were reporting success.

The Sure Start Contact Officers provided evidence from case examples as well as evidence drawn from local evaluation and monitoring to illustrate the value of Sure Start Scotland. Impacts related to improved child behaviour and development, increased self-esteem of the parent, the prevention of more intensive social work involvement as well as improvement in health. Some examples demonstrated wider community level effects such as involvement of parents in service related committees on in training for childcare work. Evidence from case examples showed the impact of single, short term interventions as well as longer term, integrated interventions.

**The planning process**

Most local authorities reported that there had been significant changes in the ways in which decisions and planning for early years services were conducted. Sure Start is becoming embedded within overall integrated planning and delivery. A change in organisational culture as well as the structures supporting joint planning is leading to a more holistic approach. However, integrated planning was reported as being time consuming. Some local authorities had put in place radical change in their planning structures; for others change was more incremental. The development of new committee and group structures facilitates joint planning and decision-making and local authorities were reported as working towards integration although some still had some way to go.

Different partners seemed to be increasingly involved in planning at both the top and bottom ends of the process, including the voluntary sector and in some cases the private sector. Nonetheless, there were factors that hindered integrated planning and joint working. With respect to health, this included local authority and health board boundaries not being coterminous, different planning structures and internal reorganisation.

**An overall assessment of Sure Start Scotland**

Throughout the mapping exercise the positive aspects of Sure Start Scotland were keenly expressed by those participating in the research. The expansion of services to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and the move towards joint working were both cited as achievements. Specific areas where improvements could be made included: involving men as fathers caring for young children and as childcare workers providing services; evaluation and monitoring; developing preventive services and developing services for the most marginalised and vulnerable children and families. Other issues included the need to look flexibly at the Sure Start criteria to support transitions for parents and children, the need to fully involve health, continued mainstreaming, the need to reach rural areas and the need for even more integration. Sure Start Contact Officers suggested that future developments might be enhanced by the sharing of good practice, the use of a centrally funded pot for capital builds, further integration of funding streams, guidance on integrated working and shared budget management, longer term planning, greater involvement of parents and further development of partnership working.

**Recommendations**

This mapping exercise demonstrated a considerable increase in activity across local authorities regarding Sure Start Scotland. Although local authorities have developed different structures and approaches to the planning and delivery of services, all support the integrated approach of Sure Start and are working towards meeting its core objectives by supporting vulnerable families in flexible and non-stigmatising ways.

Drawing on the evidence of the mapping exercise the following recommendations are made:

- Sure Start Scotland’s flexibility and responsiveness should be regarded as strengths; any move towards increased targeting should be carefully managed to maintain a non-stigmatised approach.
Flexibility should be supported across age ranges so that services do not stop at age three.

Flexibility should be supported through formal and informal integration so that families are supported to meet their needs in holistic and unobtrusive ways.

The persistence of unmet need suggests that Sure Start needs to develop and expand further if all vulnerable families are to be supported adequately.

Sure Start will take a long time to have significant effects as it is introducing new ways of working and embedding itself into early years policies; there should be little expectation of rapid transformation in terms of impact and outcome.

Although intensive support may be costly, it is preventive and may save more costly interventions later on. There needs to be some assessment of longer term impacts, perhaps by focussing on key transitions, for example into nursery or primary school.

There is a need for a review of monitoring and evaluation within and across local authorities.

Local authorities would value the sharing of good practice and plans should be developed to support this through seminars and other methods.

Consideration should be given to capital spend in those local authorities in need of additional premises.

Issues of rurality may need to be addressed, especially in terms of additional transport needs and the reach of services.

Wider workforce issues need to be addressed as recruitment and retention were reported as concerns. There is a need for men to be more involved as both carers and workers.

Given that Sure Start funding is not ring-fenced, mechanisms should be in place to ensure adequate spend in all local authorities on early years services including Sure Start Scotland.

The web only full report accompanying this Research Finding was published on 22 December 2005 on the Scottish Executive website. 
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/12/21153916/39170
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