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# Review of Department of Education Targeted Early Years Interventions

Final Report  
prepared for the Department of Education  
(DE)



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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Aims and Objectives of the Review</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>5</b>
	Key Stakeholder Interviews	5
	Surveys	5
	Analysis	6
	Value for Money	6
	Additionality	7
<b>4</b>	<b>Background to the Targeted Early Years Interventions</b>	<b>8</b>
	Sure Start	8
	The Pathway Fund	9
	Toybox	10
<b>5</b>	<b>Contextual Background</b>	<b>11</b>
	Introduction	11
	New Decade New Approach	11
	Draft Programme for Government	11
	A Fair Start	12
	Other Support Initiatives	12
<b>6</b>	<b>Primary Data Collection</b>	<b>15</b>
	Key Stakeholder Interviews	15
	Surveys	15
<b>7</b>	<b>Appropriateness and effectiveness of Sure Start oversight and administrative structures</b>	<b>19</b>
	Overview of the Chapter	19
	Summary Findings from this Review	19
	Benefits and Constraints of existing structures	24
	Value for Money Analysis	25
<b>8</b>	<b>Targeting of the Sure Start Programme</b>	<b>29</b>
	Overview of the Chapter	29
	Summary Findings from this Review	29
	Coverage of Sure Start provision across Northern Ireland	30
	Evidence relating to targeting provision	37
	Views on Targeting of Sure Start	38
	Use of additional or different statistical measures and other means to target Sure Start	47
	Options for Expansion of Sure Start in Northern Ireland	48
	Status Quo	48
	Expansion to 75% of 0-3-year-olds	49
	<b>Comparative examples from other regions</b>	<b>51</b>
	Wales: The Flying Start Programme	51

Republic of Ireland: Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) .....	52
<b>9 Contribution of the Pathway Fund and Toybox Project .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>9.1 Overview of the Chapter.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>9.2 Summary Findings from this Review .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>  Additionality and Complementarity .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>  Counterfactual Analysis .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>10 Summary of Findings and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Objective 1: The appropriateness and effectiveness of the Sure Start policy and administration roles.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Objective 2: The optimum means to target Sure Start resources to children facing greatest disadvantage.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Objective 3: The respective contribution of the Pathway Fund and Toybox Project towards achievement of PfG and DE goals and objectives.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>11 Appendix .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>11.1 Sure Start Survey.....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>11.2 The Pathway Fund Survey .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>11.3 Strategic Stakeholders Interview Guide.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>11.4 Sure Start Interview Guide .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Ipsos standards and accreditations .....</b>	<b>90</b>

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# 1 Executive Summary

Ipsos (Northern Ireland) were commissioned by the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DE) to conduct a review of their targeted Early Years Interventions, specifically, Sure Start, Toybox and the Pathway Fund. This review focused on the oversight and administrative structures governing Sure Start and the targeting methodology of Sure Start. The review also examined the complementarity and additionality across Early Years programmes such as Pathway funded projects and Toybox Project and explored to what extent there is any duplication.

Due to the essential early-learning components embedded within Sure Start, it is the recommendation from this review that Sure Start remains as a DE programme and does not revert back to Department of Health (DoH) ownership. Arrangements between the two Departments, however, are overly bureaucratic and should be simplified using mechanisms such as Technical Transfers. Most stakeholders and practitioners did not advocate for major changes to the fundamental structures that administer and oversee Sure Start. However, a number of reforms were described as necessary to reduce bureaucratic burdens, to improve streamlining, and to ensure effective use of resources. Ensuring greater mechanisms of accountability, reporting, and improved communication channels were described as essential to improving effectiveness and efficient use of resources. Tangible reforms, such as creating dual accountability for both the Minister of Education as well as the Minister of Health may improve joint-ownership of Sure Start and encourage a more proactive approach to its development and management of resources. Given the significant health impacts associated with Sure Start, the DoH should also consider how it could contribute further towards Sure Start. This would also be congruent with the Children's Services Co-operation (Northern Ireland) 2015.

The impact of the closure of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) on the oversight and administrative structures governing Sure Start remains unclear. The new Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) was described by many stakeholders as requiring clearer definition regarding their coordination roles with DE. The delay in agreeing an updated Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and documentation to structure reporting arrangements and expectations between DE, DoH and the SPPG contributed to a lack of clarity between departments in the administration and oversight of Sure Start. The use of Technical Transfers was one suggested mechanism that may reduce the financial administration and administrative duplication between the two departments.

Following examination of all available evidence, it is the recommendation from this review that Sure Start targeting continues to be based off the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM). There is broad agreement with the principles of targeting Sure Start resources to those children who are most in need. Both strategic stakeholders and Sure Start managers demonstrated high levels of agreement regarding continuing to target the programme based on measures such as NIMDM, and to target children most at risk of not meeting their development goals. Additionally, there remains agreement with applying principles of progressive universalism within Sure Start areas, ensuring that the programme is open to all in areas where it operates. There is a strong justification for the recent expansion of Sure Start, and it is a recommendation from this review that the 22 recently added areas continue to be retained within the programme.

There were high levels of agreement that Sure Start should remain open to all within targeted areas, and that the principle of Sure Start being non-stigmatising remains one of its key strengths. However, nearly all stakeholders and managers also felt there is a need to address gaps in the system and support access for those who are most in need of the service. All Sure Start managers described a context of

increased need and demand from both within and outside of their Sure Start area. Most Sure Starts are already supporting a small proportion of children from outside of their area. Greater clarity was encouraged around what degree of flexibility is permitted to help support children and families in need of support but who live outside the Sure Start area. Over half of the Sure Starts surveyed as part of this review are providing services and activities of some form to children who do not live in their Sure Start area.

It is a final recommendation from this review that all three Early Years programmes (Sure Start, the Pathway Fund, and Toybox) continue to operate and be supported. Each programme serves sufficiently different purposes and specific needs, and function together with complementarity. This review found that the Pathway Fund and Toybox are important components of holistic early years support. Given the increased need and demand experienced across the early years sector, the Pathway Fund and Toybox offer support in relation to both distinct groups, and by offering distinct services. The Pathway Fund supports children with complex need, who are at risk of harm, live in rural areas, and promotes community integration, while Toybox supports Traveller and Roma children and their parents before, during, and after pre-school.

Applications to the Pathway Fund should continue to be supported and funded given their distinct service. Funding additionally provides important resources across sectors such as the community and voluntary sector that is used to support staff retention. Loss of funding would likely create significant challenges in retaining staff and would result in project closure and impact on other projects delivered by organisations in receipt of Pathway funding. To reduce the potential for duplication Pathway funding may be targeted towards areas not covered by Sure Start. Given the lack of access to Sure Start in many areas, the Pathway Fund offers one mechanism to expand early years services. Pathway funded projects could be a venue for provision of satellite Sure Start services, however this would require further research and costing.

## 2 Aims and Objectives of the Review

Ipsos (Northern Ireland) were commissioned by the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DE) to conduct a review of their targeted Early Years Interventions, specifically, Sure Start, Toybox and the Pathway Fund. Ipsos were supported by Prof Sarah Millar and Dr Aideen Gildea from Queen's University Belfast to complete this review. The Ipsos team was led by Dr Karen Clarke and supported by Dr Chris Jenkins.

The key objective of this evaluation was to review these DE targeted Early Years programmes in order to assess effectiveness of oversight structures of Sure Start, along with optimal means of targeting the programme. Furthermore, the review evaluates the complementarity and additionality of Early Years programmes in delivering an effective service to children who most need the support. The DE targeted Early Years Programmes are:

- Sure Start;
- Toybox; and
- The Pathway Fund.

The Review needed to consider:

- The appropriateness and effectiveness of the Sure Start policy and administration roles performed by DE, DoH and the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) within DoH (formerly Health and Social Care Board (HSCB)) respectively.
- The optimum means to target Sure Start resources to children facing greatest disadvantage.
- The remit of all DE targeted Early Years interventions in collectively delivering the Programme for Government (PfG) and DE outcomes.

More specifically as set out in the specification, the focus of the review was to examine:

Area	Detail
<b>A) Sure Start: oversight and administration</b>	<p><b>Current Structures</b></p> <p>Examination of the current oversight and administration structures operating across the Sure Start programme and determination of their adequacy and effectiveness in the delivery structures and the administration of Sure Start.</p>
<b>B) Sure Start: Targeting</b>	<p><b>Targeting Methodology</b></p> <p>Examination of the current methodology employed by DE to determine if targeting of available Sure Start resource is enabling delivery of Sure Start support to children in greatest need across NI, whether gaps in provision exist and whether/how these can be addressed. The review will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– consideration of the current use of the NIMDM 2010 to target resource and the potential usefulness of other measures of disadvantage including the NIMDM 2017 and other measures of child poverty;</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Actual coverage of Sure Start in NI including geographical areas included through legacy arrangements which are not in the most disadvantaged areas per NIMDM;</li> <li>- Need for Sure Start support outside areas of greatest disadvantage and how this might be addressed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>C) The Pathway Fund and the Toybox Project</b></p>	<p><b>Contribution of the Pathway Fund and Toybox</b></p> <p>Examination of the respective contribution of the Pathway Fund and Toybox Project towards achievement of PfG and DE goals and objectives.</p> <p>This will include examination of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing linkages and complementarity with the Sure Start programme;</li> <li>• The Pathway Fund and Toybox Project Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) Scorecards;</li> <li>• Potential for displacement of existing services including Sure Start;</li> <li>• Additionality of the Pathway Fund and Toybox provision;</li> <li>• Added value of the Pathway Fund and Toybox intervention;</li> <li>• Advantages and disadvantages of the current arrangements.</li> </ul> <p><b>Complementarity and additionality of the Pathway Fund and Toybox</b></p> <p>Evaluation of the potential for streamlining DE targeted Early Years intervention with the aim of creating the most effective, efficient and economic targeting of provision to children (aged 0–4) and families in NI.</p>

During the course of this review, a number of additional themes were raised by stakeholders working across the Early Years sector. Many of these discussions were beyond the scope of this review but provided important information on the experiences and perspectives of those working across Sure Start, the Pathway Fund and Toybox regarding current challenges in delivering their projects. This information has been compiled into a separate 'Supplementary Information' document and has been provided to the Department of Education.

## 3 Methodology

A mixed methods approach was employed to assess the key objectives of this review. Through combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection we were able to assess the objectives against both a wide sample of staff involved in early years project delivery, as well as exploring in-depth themes through stakeholder interviews.

We conducted a desk review to complement this process, providing context and contributing towards development of research materials, as well as enabling an examination of national and international best practice.

Our primary research involved two phases:

1. Key Stakeholder interviews; and
2. Online and telephone surveys with those working in Early Years Programmes.

### Key Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews were conducted with chairs of Sure Start projects, individuals within wider early years non-statutory services, and key stakeholders working in the statutory sector involved in support, administration, strategic development, funding, and the oversight of programmes. A total of 30 interviews were completed, further details of which are available in Chapter 6.

### Surveys

Surveys were developed for Sure Start, the Pathway Fund and Toybox programmes. The Sure Start survey was developed by Ipsos and administered online to all 38 Sure Start managers on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2022. The Pathway survey, again developed by Ipsos, was issued online to Pathway funded projects (n=170) via Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO) on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022. The response period for surveys closed on the 15<sup>th</sup> July, after two reminder emails were sent to encourage participation. A total of (133) surveys were completed. The Toybox survey was administered via a telephone interview with Toybox project workers. This was a more efficient method of data collection due to the limited number of Toybox project workers. Having developed the survey for Toybox, a member of the Ipsos team set up and conducted the interviews. As shown in the breakdown in Chapter 6, surveys included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, allowing respondents to provide more detail on the research objectives. The following table provides an overview of themes covered in the surveys, and copies of the full Sure Start, Pathway and Toybox surveys are provided in the Appendix.

Target Population	Key themes to be covered
<b>Sure Start Project leads</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background / overview of project, partners, dates / timescales etc.;</li> <li>• Total funds / support accessed including any other sources of support accessed (for non-DE Sure Start activities);</li> <li>• Inter-action / co-operation with other early years initiatives (e.g., Toybox, Family Support Hubs, Childcare Partnerships, etc.);</li> <li>• Geographical coverage, advantages &amp; disadvantages, gaps etc.;</li> <li>• Counterfactual / Additionality, i.e., would the activities delivered have gone ahead without Sure Start (if so to what extent, in what timescales etc.);</li> <li>• Barriers and challenges in delivering the services; and</li> <li>• Examples of good / effective practice.</li> </ul>

<b>Toybox and Pathway funded project leads</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background / overview of project, including funding received, delivery partners, dates/timescales etc.;</li> <li>• Background to the activities (e.g., areas covered, target population, etc.);</li> <li>• Total funding / support accessed including any other sources of support accessed (e.g., leverage / co-funders);</li> <li>• Partnership working / liaison with other agencies or initiatives (including Sure Start);</li> <li>• Why is there a need for the services provided by Toybox / Pathway (i.e., where are the gaps in provision);</li> <li>• Any potential areas of overlap between Toybox and the Pathway Fund, e.g., is Pathway also funding support for Traveller children;</li> <li>• Application processes and administration;</li> <li>• Outcomes and impacts achieved, how they are measured;</li> <li>• Counterfactual – extent to which any of the activities could have been delivered without the DE funding; and</li> <li>• Lessons learnt / areas for further development.</li> </ul>
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## Analysis

Our data analysis involved the triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative data gathered as part of this review. Qualitative data collected from open-ended survey questions and interviews with key stakeholders was thematically analysed to identify both recurring and divergent themes. These themes were triangulated with the quantitative data collected in surveys, and with secondary data such as that sourced from Programme Management Information (e.g., number of children supported, funding drawn down, Sure Start Framework data, etc.).

We framed our analysis around the terms of reference of the review in order to explore in detail the:

- Administrative structures and reporting arrangements between DE, DoH and SPPG;
- Quantitative data on the total number of children and families supported;
- Data relating to the effectiveness of current targeting arrangements including the ‘Demographics’ of participants (e.g., ages and geographical areas included);
- Total value of DE funding, as well as total funding returned by the SPPG;
- Other funding sources and any funding leveraged; and
- Outcomes and Outputs (e.g., children meeting developmental goals, children accessing pre-school, improved language skills, enhanced parenting skills, etc).

Given the wide range of support initiatives for early years education and for children in deprived areas, one of the challenges of the analysis was to identify those impacts that are directly attributable to Sure Start, Toybox or the Pathway Fund. The triangulation processes, which synthesised findings from each stage of the data collection, was important in verifying and validating our analysis and improving the quality of recommendations generated by the review.

## Value for Money

At the final stage of the analysis, a VFM assessment of the administrative and oversight structures for Sure Start was conducted. The findings of this analysis are presented in Chapter 7. We assessed the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided:

- **Economy:** what are the total costs to administer Sure Start, within DE, DoH and SPPG? Where possible we also assessed the administrative burden placed on Sure Start projects.

- **Efficiency:** what resources have been used to administer Sure Start, how do these resources and roles and responsibilities vary across DE, DoH and SPPG? Are there any areas of overlap or, opportunities for refinement?
- **Effectiveness:** how effective are the communications across each key agency and with the Sure Start projects? Are the projects clear about what reporting is required and to whom?

## Additionality

The review also included a requirement to consider the additionality of Toybox and the Pathway Fund. In doing so key questions were considered, such as:

- Are there any areas of overlap (e.g., to what extent can families who access Sure Start also access to Toybox and the Pathway Fund – is joint access a benefit to the families / excessive?);
- Do the Sure Start projects liaise with other initiatives to co-ordinate services?;
- To what extent would the outcomes and impacts have occurred with the DE funding for all three programmes?;
- Could Sure Start deliver the activities provided by the other programmes?
- What would have happened in the absence of the funding, e.g., would the outcomes have been less significant, taken longer to emerge etc?; and
- Are other sources of funding available to support the outcomes achieved?

This part of the analysis examined evidence from a range of sources including:

- The desk-based review of statistical data relating to the targeting of the three programmes;
- The strategic context in which the programmes operate, e.g., are there other government funded initiatives with similar aims and objectives directed at the same populations;
- Feedback from Sure Start, Toybox and Pathway staff, collated via surveys and interviews and
- Feedback from key stakeholders.

## Case Studies

In order to provide more detailed and illustrative examples of the range and types of outcomes associated with the programmes in relation to their additionality and complementarity, we conducted five case studies. We worked with Sure Start Projects and EYO to identify five examples of practice specifically in relation to the key objectives within the review. For example, areas of complementarity, additionality, duplication, or specific examples in relation to targeting. Where possible we also attempted to ensure that the case studies were geographically diverse (e.g., one in each HSCT area). Project leads (e.g., Sure Start staff, Toybox staff or settings who have received Pathway funding) were interviewed on the phone or through Microsoft Teams to discuss their project/activities in more detail. Case studies were then developed and shared with project leads to ensure accuracy of content.

# 4 Background to the Targeted Early Years Interventions

In order to provide context to the review, this chapter provides an overview of the background, objectives, and impact of each programme. A number of evaluations have previously been conducted on the outcomes and impacts of the three programmes within this review. The previous evaluations focused on the impact and effectiveness of the programmes, as opposed to exploring the administrative and oversight structures, targeting, complementarity and additionality of the programmes, which is the focus of this review.

## Sure Start

Sure Start is a programme for parents and children under the age of four and is targeted towards the 25% most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland through the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM 2010). Areas outside of 25% most disadvantaged areas are also included in Sure Start due to legacy arrangements for determining the location of Sure Start provision prior to NIMDM being in place. The programme was first introduced in Northern Ireland in 2000 as part of the Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy 'Children First' (1999), by the (then) Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS).<sup>1</sup>

The desired outcomes of the Sure Start programme are to improve language skills; identify developmental delay; enhance parenting skills; improve access to services; and to effectively integrate early years services. Specifically, Sure Start aims to improve:<sup>2</sup>

- The ability to learn by encouraging stimulating play, improving language skills and the early identification and support of children with learning difficulties;
- Health by supporting parents in caring for children and promoting children's health and development; and
- Social development by supporting the development of early relationships between parents and children, good parenting skills, family functioning and early identification and support of children with emotional, learning or behavioural difficulties.

A number of evaluations and reports regarding the impact of Sure Start from both pre and post COVID-19<sup>3</sup> have noted the positive impacts that Sure Start has on children and parents. A 2019 evaluation,<sup>4</sup> indicated that Sure Start produced strong outcomes for both children and parents and highlighted that "Pre-school settings, to which the children from the Developmental Programme for 2-3-year-olds transfer, report consistently on improvements in the children's settled behaviours, attention and listening skills". Furthermore, the evaluation highlighted that almost all programmes "provide high quality, enjoyable experiences which promote children's speech, language and communication skills."

DE is the overall lead Department with responsibility for the strategic development and policy of the Sure Start Programme. DE also has financial accountability for the programme. The Strategic Planning and

<sup>1</sup> Business Case Sure Start Programme - 2020/21 to 2024/25 Early Years Intervention Programme Team. March 2020. ED1/20/71428

<sup>2</sup> DE service level agreement between Department of Education and Health and Social Care Board in respect of sure Start Services. 2021-2022

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/evaluating-short-and-medium-term-impacts-sure-start>

<sup>4</sup> ETI Second Sure Start Evaluation Report June 2019

Performance Group (SPPG) in the Department of Health (DoH) are responsible for the administration of Sure Start and oversight of the DE funding which SPPG allocates to the 38 Sure Start projects which deliver Sure Start across NI.

The SPPG's role was previously carried out by the HSCB which was required to adhere to the accountability arrangements as set out in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between DE and the HSCB. Following the closure of the HSCB and absorption of its functions into the DoH, this accountability now sits with the SPPG. The SPPG administration role is undertaken by the Childcare Partnership Managers in SPPG and includes responsibility for reviewing the performance of Sure Start Projects and supporting the development of the Sure Start programme at a local and regional level. The SPPG is a performance management and strategic service planning Group within the wider Department of Health and does not in itself hold policy responsibility. More detail and analysis on the current oversight and administrative structures are provided in Chapter 7.

## The Pathway Fund

The Pathway Fund was introduced on 1 April 2016 and focuses on the provision of early years education and learning services for children aged 0-4 years and is currently administered by the (EYO) under contract with DE. The fund is open to sessional day care providers, full day care providers and childminders, and provides a contribution towards the overall cost of a project, proposed by applicant settings. There is a wide range of different projects funded through Pathway, with each project expected to contribute towards the delivery of the following key Programme Outcomes aligned to Department of Education objectives:

- (i) Outcome 1: Improved development of children who are at risk of not reaching their full educational potential; and,
- (ii) Outcome 2: An enhanced, more sustainable Early Years sector.

Projects can apply to either Stream A (£15,001 to £30,000) or Stream B (up to £15,000). Pathway Fund applicants are assessed on their eligibility on the extent to which they are:

- Providing quality education and learning services in areas of social disadvantage to address both educational and social disadvantage;
- Ensuring children with additional needs receive quality Early Years support;
- Provision of quality services / support to children at risk of harm;
- Provision of quality early years services in rural areas and other areas where there is little or no provision;
- Improving the integration and building of community relations from an early age; and
- Enhancement of existing services through improving quality, staff development, partnerships, parental engagement, management, and governance.

Previous evaluations of the Pathway Fund have concluded that the fund has enabled DE, EYO, and providers to work together, to enhance their knowledge, skills, and capacity to deliver outcomes for young children. Evaluations have further demonstrated that providers have ensured that “all groups of

children who are at risk of not reaching their full potential have benefitted from the fund” and that “the benefits have been broad ranging from breakfast clubs, pre-preschool provision, to extended provision to home visits”. Across the Pathway Fund the impact on the children has been “significant and individual to each group of children and individual child”.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>

## Toybox

The Toybox project was introduced to meet Traveller children’s needs in 2003. It was funded by the Executive Fund until 2008, and by DE since 2008/09. The Toybox project provides support to Traveller and Roma children and their parents before, during, and after pre-school. Traveller children as a group tend to have low attendance at pre-school/school and some Traveller parents describe having a negative perception and experience of education.<sup>9</sup> The following eight objectives were identified for the Toybox project for the period 2021-2022<sup>10</sup>:

- Maximise the participation of Traveller children; (a) in the Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2–3-year-olds; and (b) in pre-school/nursery provision, and (c) to close the gap in enrolment levels between Traveller/Roma and settled children/to continue to promote pre-school enrolments and increase levels for Traveller children, with the aim to align with settled children;
- Encourage Traveller/Roma families to engage in local community groups including Parent and Toddler groups and Sure Start;
- Empower Traveller/Roma parents to become involved in the education process for their children and themselves;
- Strengthen the capacity of Traveller/Roma parents to support their children’s wellbeing and eagerness to learn, through home visits;
- Enhance the social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive development of Traveller/Roma children from birth to four years;
- Target the areas of greatest need/highest numbers of Traveller/Roma families;
- Effective Partnership working between parents, Traveller/Roma support groups, NGOs and health and education professionals with the aim of supporting the social and educational development of young Traveller/Roma children, at home and in school; and
- COVID-19 related support and advice to the Traveller/Roma Community.

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<sup>5</sup> DE BUSINESS CASE for Continuation of the Pathway Fund: 2020 – 2023. 25 March 2020

<sup>6</sup> Pathway Fund Annual Evaluation Report 2016-2017

<sup>7</sup> Pathway Fund Annual Evaluation Report 2017-2018

<sup>8</sup> Pathway Fund Annual Evaluation Report 2018-2019

<sup>9</sup> DE business case - Early Years Toybox Grant Funding 2019/20 – 2021/22. 2 April 2019

<sup>10</sup> DE Letter of allocation Toybox Project 2021-2022

# 5 Contextual Background

## Introduction

A number of different policies, reviews, and strategies are relevant to this review and provide important contextual information to frame the analysis and recommendations emerging from it. Across all strategic and high-level policy documents there is a clear focus on the importance of early years development with an emphasis on the holistic, multifaceted nature of support services that are needed. This section describes the context within which early education in Northern Ireland sits, providing an overview of the strategic priorities of the Northern Ireland Assembly as well as relevant departmental initiatives (Education and Health) and supporting activities.

## New Decade New Approach

In 2020, the New Decade New Approach deal underpinned the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive, and within it<sup>11</sup> identified a number of areas for strategic focus within education (education defined broadly as education for children and young people in early years, primary, post-primary, special education, or further education settings). The deal included commitments to establishing an external, independent review of education provision (currently ongoing), with a focus on securing greater efficiency in delivery costs, raising standards, and access to the curriculum for all pupils. The Executive also committed to delivering a new, more responsive, special educational needs framework to support early identification and assessment of children and young people with special educational needs to achieve their full potential (new regulations and a code of practice have been drafted).

Of most relevance to early years education, the Executive committed to publishing a Childcare Strategy, and identifying resources to deliver extended, affordable and high-quality provision of early education and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4. Work on this strategy was paused during Covid but is currently ongoing.

The Executive also committed to establishing an expert group to examine and propose an action plan to address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, including the long-standing issues facing working-class Protestant boys. This work was completed in 2021 and resulted in several key recommendations and action points for early years education, which are described below (under A Fair Start).

## Draft Programme for Government

The Draft Consultation Programme for Government (2021) builds on the outcomes-based approach that has defined strategic planning across the public sector since 2016, and reflects the messages contained in New Decade New Approach. It also highlights the need for “children and young people to have the best start in life”. Early Years provision is described as encompassing high quality healthcare provision for parents and infants. The Draft Programme for Government also notes two priority areas that are directly relevant to this review:

- *Access to Education Addressing resourcing pressures, taking a strategic approach to area planning i.e. ensuring all have access to fit for purpose schools and supporting our education*

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<sup>11</sup> New Decade New Approach (2020)



*sector, including integrated and shared education. (Department of Education, Department of Finance)*

- *Early Years high quality healthcare provision for parents and infants, supporting and enabling parents into work with accessible and affordable childcare, meeting the complex needs of children, addressing child poverty with appropriate welfare and support, and supporting learning and development with universal and targeted services. (Department of Health, Department for Communities, Department of Education).*

Therefore, the aims and objectives of all three DE targeted Early Years programmes are consistent with the wider government objectives for early years and education.

## A Fair Start

As a key objective of New Decade New Approach, a multi-stakeholder, expert panel on educational underachievement in Northern Ireland was established and reported its findings, 'A Fair Start', in May 2021. A Fair Start highlighted "unanimous agreement" from over 300 key stakeholders that addressing educational underachievement involved both educational and societal changes that were underpinned by equality of opportunity. The panel's proposed Action Plan prioritises targeted investment in Early Years, highlighting the need for a "seamless journey from pregnancy to pre-school, school, and beyond, where every child is provided with the appropriate level of support needed in a timely and appropriate manner in order to realise their potential".<sup>12</sup>

The report identified nine key recommendations and 13 corresponding actions to facilitate a renewed focus on Early Years. Actions included increasing funding, seamless data sharing from health and education services, reviewing the staff:child ratios across pre-school settings, continued engagement with parents and families, expansion of the SEN Inclusion Service, and reviewing staffing structures. Also building on the learning from the Sure Start programme for 2-3-year-olds, it sought to develop a NI-wide targeted developmental programme for all 2-year-olds at risk of poor educational outcomes. This targeted developmental programme should be appropriate to at-risk 2-year-old's stage of development with access to support from appropriate health professions; and that DE should standardise the length of pre-school education day to at least 4.5 hours per day, including access to free school meals for eligible children.

It is within the context of the Fair Start report recommendations that this current review seeks to better understand the landscape in which the three programmes (Sure Start, Toybox and the Pathway Fund) have been operating.

## Other Support Initiatives

In order to understand the wider context that the targeted DE programmes operate in, it is also important to consider the other universal Early Years support programmes that are available to children and families across Northern Ireland.

## Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP)

Funded by the Department of Education, the PSEP aims to provide one year of high-quality funded pre-school education in the year before compulsory education, for every child whose parents want it. The programme operates as a partnership between the statutory and voluntary/private pre-school sectors, with both following common curriculum guidelines and subject to the same education inspection

<sup>12</sup> A Fair Start (2021) – Final Report & Action Plan | Department of Education (education-ni.gov.uk)

standards. The PSEP operates in the policy context of DE's Learning to Learn - a Framework for Early Years Education and Learning (2013) which recognises the distinctive contribution early years provision has in reducing underachievement and supporting high quality services to deliver better outcomes for children and their families. The PSEP programme provides a minimum of 2.5 hours of funded pre-school education provision per day, 5 days a week, during term time. Pre-school education places are available in a variety of settings including, nursery schools, within the statutory sector and places within the voluntary and private sector. Legislation requires that settings should prioritise “children from socially disadvantaged circumstances” in their admissions criteria.

### Flexible School Starting Age

In Northern Ireland children who turn four on or before 1<sup>st</sup> July start school at the beginning of September that year. Some parents feel, however, that starting school shortly after their fourth birthday (if a child is born in April May or June) is not right for their very young child. They have concerns around social skills, emotional readiness, the longer school day, and independence in personal care. There is also evidence that the academic attainment of older children in the class tends to be higher on average than those who are younger. Driven by DE, the School Age Bill passed its final stage in early 2022, meaning that parents of pre-term or younger children born in April, May or June now have the flexibility to defer starting pre-school or primary school for one year if they feel their child is not developmentally ready to start pre-school or school.

### Early Intervention Support Service (EISS)

EISS in Northern Ireland has provided additional therapeutic and practical, short-term support to families since 2015. The programme can provide support for children aged 0-18 years and is delivered via Voluntary and Community sector organisations. Queen's University Belfast (QUB) conducted a review of EISS in 2018 to assess the effectiveness of the Early Intervention Support Service in improving family functioning; parenting stress and self-confidence; and in improving the quality of the child/parent relationship. The review found that EISS provided support in meeting needs of families, was well targeted and well received, however only two of 22 outcomes were associated with statistically significant effects of the intervention (Empathy and Play).<sup>13</sup> Support for complex cases was consistently raised as a challenge and targets and caseload numbers were reported as unattainable and unsustainable if the service were to be rolled out further.

### Family Support Hubs

A Family Support Hub is a multi-agency network of statutory, community and voluntary organisations that provide early intervention services, or work with families and children aged 0-18 years who need support. There are 29 Family Support Hubs across Northern Ireland, which provide a wide range of services and refer families to Sure Start, if appropriate, and if they live in a Sure Start area.

One of the purposes of Family Support Hubs is to improve access to EISS. Whilst not directly aimed at addressing educational outcomes, families can contact the Family Support Hub if they are concerned that their child is at risk of not meeting their developmental goals.

### Home-Start NI

Home-Start NI operates across 16 areas in Northern Ireland, it provides in-home support using trained volunteers. In Northern Ireland, Home-Start are supporting 1,456 families. The organisation provides

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<sup>13</sup> Winter, K., Neeson, L., Sweet, D. and Connolly, P. (2018) An Evaluation of the Early Intervention Support Service in Northern Ireland, Belfast: Centre for Evidence and Social Innovation, Queen's University Belfast.

peer-to-peer, relationship-based support to families, providing services such as helping families access different support services, providing free and confidential support and group support, home visiting, and support in financial management.

## RISE

RISE NI is a regional early intervention service which supports children in pre-school educational and mainstream primary school settings by working closely with parents and education staff to help children develop foundational skills for learning i.e., speech, language, communication, sensory-motor, visual perception, social, emotional and behaviour skills.

RISE NI teams are multi-disciplinary and typically consist of occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, clinical psychologists, behaviour therapists, dietitians, and therapy assistants. RISE services are available to mainstream nurseries and primary schools (up to P4); therefore, it is possible that children who have been supported via RISE will have also accessed Pathway supported projects.

## Engage Programme

The aim of the Engage Programme to limit long-term adverse impacts of COVID-19 by supporting pupils' learning and engagement on their return to school/setting through provision of high quality one to one, small group or team-teaching support in every school/setting in Northern Ireland. In 2021/2022 the Engage II Programme was expanded to include Special schools, funded pre-school education settings and EOTAS settings. The Engage Programme is universal and open to all schools and pre-schools in Northern Ireland, therefore children who have participated in Sure Start programmes or Pathway funded projects may go on to also benefit from Engage funded support.

## 6 Primary Data Collection

As highlighted within our methodology (Chapter 3) primary research involved two phases:

1. Key Stakeholder interviews; and
2. Online and telephone surveys with those working in the targeted Early Intervention Programmes.

### Key Stakeholder Interviews

A total of 30 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. Stakeholder interviews have been conducted with chairs of Sure Start projects, individuals within wider early years non-statutory services, and key stakeholders working in statutory sector involved in support, administration, strategic development, funding, and oversight of programmes.

**Table 6.1: Key Stakeholder Interviews Completed**

Stakeholder	Number of Stakeholders contacted	Interviews completed
Sure Start Chairs and Managers	10	10
Strategic Stakeholder (statutory)	18	17
Strategic Stakeholder (non-statutory)	4	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>30</b>

### Surveys

Surveys were developed by Ipsos in conjunction with DE for Sure Start, the Pathway Fund and Toybox programmes. The Sure Start survey was issued online to all 38 Sure Start managers on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2022. The Pathway survey was issued online to the Pathway funded projects via EYO on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022. The Toybox survey was administered by a telephone interview with Toybox project staff. The response period for surveys closed on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2022, after two reminder emails were sent to encourage participation. A total of 133 surveys were completed, as shown in the breakdown in the following table.

**Table 6.2: Surveys completed**

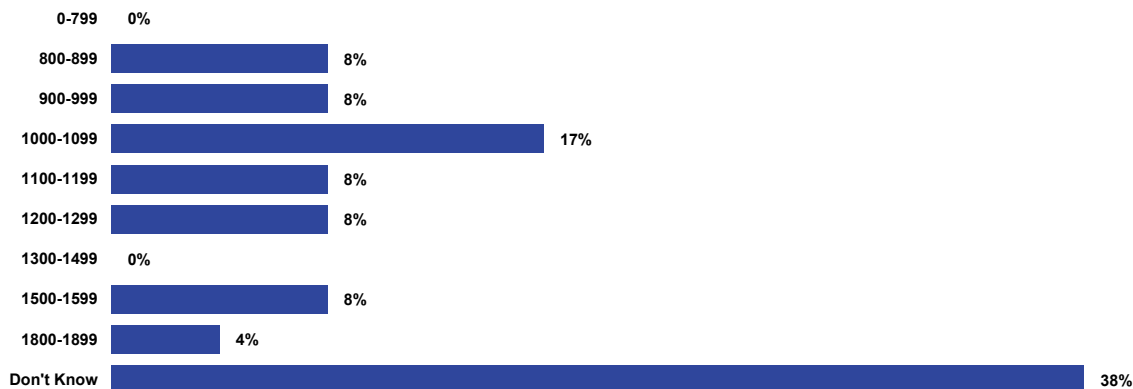
Stakeholder	Number of surveys administered	Surveys completed	Response rate
Sure Start	38	24	63%
Pathway funded projects	170	104	61%
Toybox Project	n/a	5	71%*
<b>Totals</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>133</b>	

\* Toybox have 16 settings with support activities including Parent and Toddler groups. Ipsos were provided details of 7 project workers, from which the response rate has been calculated.

Surveys were completed by Sure Start and Pathway funded projects with a wide range of intake sizes, ranging from less than 300 children attending Sure Start between 2021/22 to over 800. Figures 6.1 to 6.3

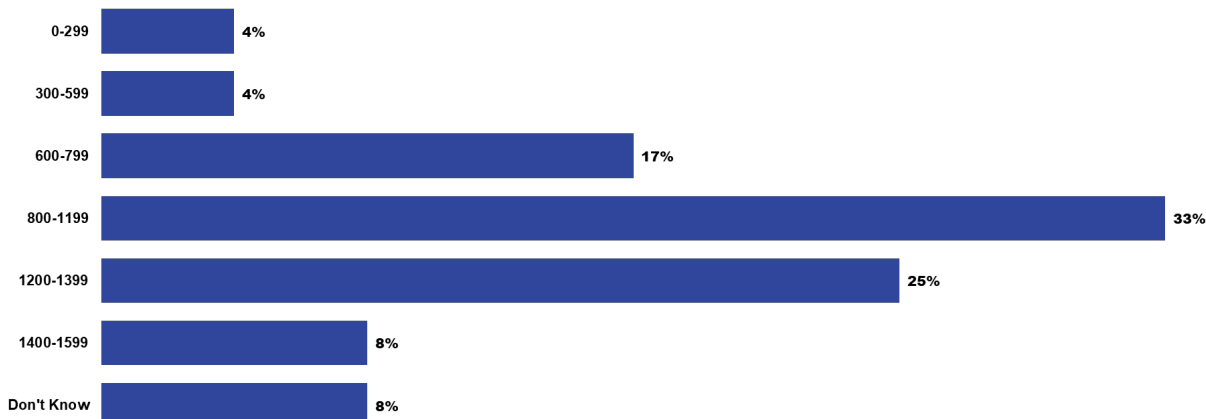
show background information on projects providing information through our surveys. It should be noted that high response rates of ‘Don’t Know’ to some questions may reflect challenges in accessing the new Sure Start database. “Sure Start GO” was developed in 2021/22 and has involved migrating previous data onto the new system. Reporting functions are still being developed on the new system.

**Figure 6.1: Approximately how many eligible children are there in your Sure Start catchment area (in the year 2021/22)?<sup>14</sup>**



Base<sup>15</sup> = 24

**Figure 6.2: How many children were registered with your Sure Start project (in 2021/22)?**

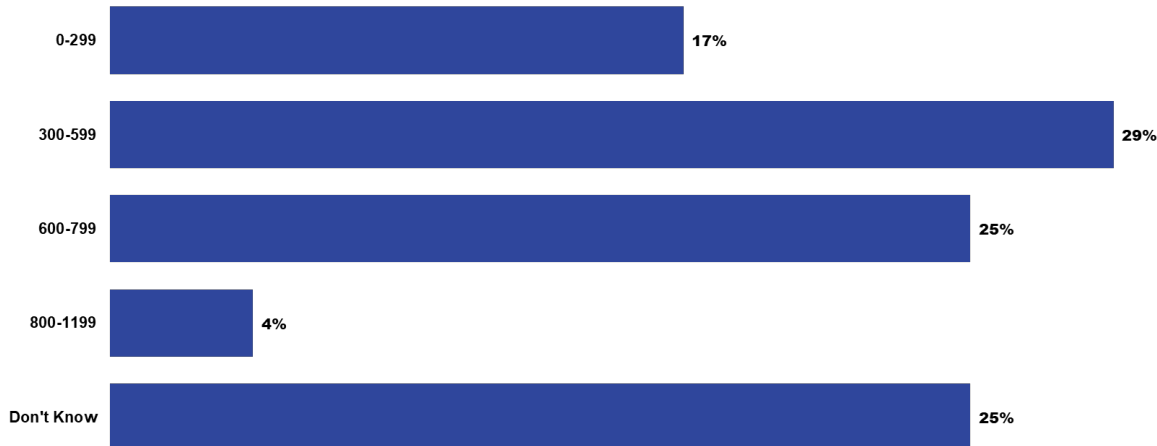


Base = 24

<sup>14</sup> Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

<sup>15</sup> Base = number of responses

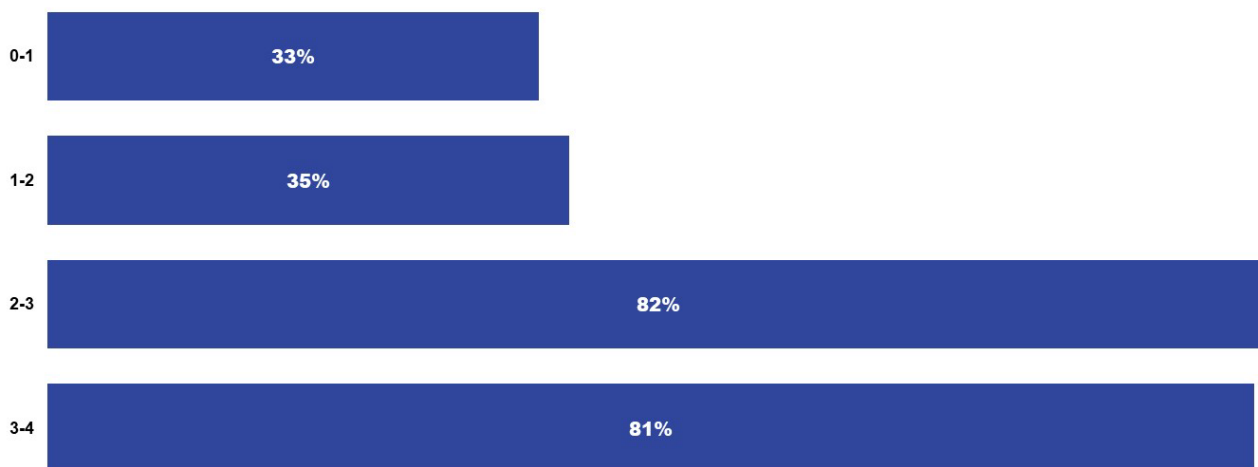
**Figure 6.3: How many children attend/participate in your Sure Start activities/services (in the year 2021/22)?**



Base = 24

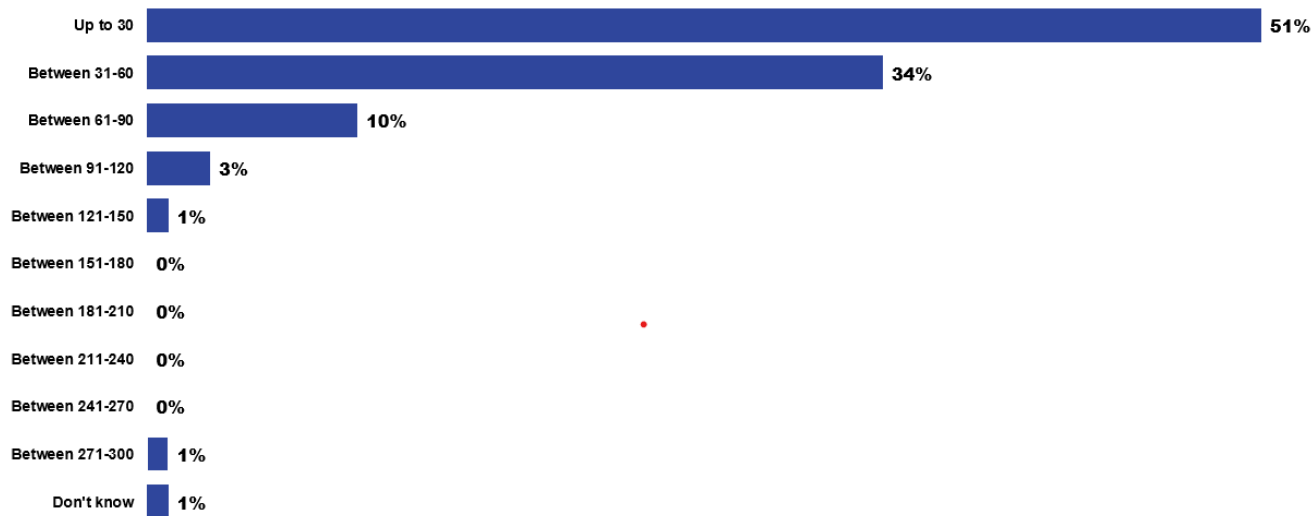
Responses to the Pathway survey showed that most projects have been in receipt of funding for the past 3 to 4 years and most are aimed towards children aged between 2 and 4 years old. Settings can support more than one age group therefore; the responses exceed 100% in the figure below. Over half of the projects responding to the survey supported less than 30 children with their Pathway funding, and over 80% of the projects were from the community and voluntary sector. 62% of projects are in a Sure Start catchment area, 30% are not in a Sure Start catchment area and 9% 'Don't Know'. This is concerning as applicants have to confirm within their application if they are in a Sure Start area, and if so, provide evidence that they have liaised with the Sure Start manager to ensure no overlap of services.

**Figure 6.4: What age group(s) of children does your Department of Education (DE), Pathway project support?**



Base = 104. Numbers presented in Table are counts, not percentages as categories are non-exclusive.

**Figure 6.5: How many of these children are supported by the Pathway Fund?**



Base = 104

The information gathered within the surveys reviewed reveals that slightly different groups of children are enrolled between Sure Start and Pathway funded projects. Sure Start tends to cater for more children than the Pathway or Toybox projects, being a universal programme within designated areas. The Pathway Fund and Toybox tends to target services mostly to children aged 2-4, whereas Sure Start is available to all children under the age of four, within their catchment areas. These differences have important implications when exploring the additionality, complementarity and duplication of each project, and will be explored throughout this review.

# 7 Appropriateness and effectiveness of Sure Start oversight and administrative structures

## Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the current oversight and administrative structures that govern Sure Start, as well as providing a breakdown of the different roles and responsibilities of DE, DoH and the SPPG. Views on the impact of the current structures from both strategic stakeholders (representing different Departments and the non-statutory sector), and views from Sure Start chairs and managers are then presented and analysed, providing an overview of the benefits and constraints of the existing structure. Views of strategic stakeholders and Sure Start chairs were gathered through depth interviews, while views from Sure Start managers were collected via an online survey. The chapter ends with a Value for Money assessment of the administrative and oversight structures for Sure Start.

## Summary Findings from this Review

Strategic stakeholders from both the statutory and non-statutory sector, and Sure Start chairs and managers were asked to reflect on the impact of the Sure Start oversight and administrative structures, and any reforms that they felt would improve the governance, effectiveness and efficiency of the programme. Following a review of all available evidence, it is our recommendation that Sure Start remains as a DE driven programme and does not revert to DoH. Most strategic stakeholders and those working in Sure Start do not advocate for major changes to the fundamental structures that administer and oversee Sure Start. However, several reforms are described as necessary to reduce bureaucratic burdens, to improve streamlining, and to ensure effective use of resources.

Stakeholders and Sure Start chairs and managers report that the administration of Sure Start is effective in that the Programme's finances are closely monitored and managed to ensure that all funding available is used effectively across the Programme. Stakeholders and Sure Start chairs and managers also highlighted, however, that the inter-departmental arrangements have contributed to administrative burdens and inefficiencies that may have in turn contributed towards significant underspends. The current funding allocations and arrangements detailed under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two Departments means that DoH have little financial accountability for Sure Start despite being responsible for its delivery. Conversely, financial administration and reporting rests with DE even though they do not have direct control over the delivery of the programme. As the SPPG are part of a government department, it would now be possible to provide DoH with Sure Start funding via a Technical Transfer. This may significantly reduce the financial administration within the DE team and potentially reduce administrative duplication between the two departments.

Broadly, the role of the SPPG since transitioning from HSCB is described by some working in Sure Start as unclear. While feedback regarding the support provided by SPPG staff is positive across Sure Start projects, and despite SPPG's role being the same as when they were the HSCB, lack of clarity, documentation and clear reporting mechanisms are described by strategic stakeholders.

A number of recommendations have been identified regarding reforms to the administrative and oversight structures. These include:



- Developing greater mechanisms of accountability and reporting and improving communication channels to ensure that the current structure functions effectively;
- Creating dual accountability for both the Minister of Education as well as the Minister for Health to improve ownership of Sure Start and encourage a more proactive approach to its development and any future expansion. Dual accountability for the programme could potentially involve both Ministers being more proactive in terms of responding to correspondence and reporting outcomes and impacts. This may involve joint statements from both Ministers as well as individual correspondence relating to either health or education aspects of the programme;
- DoH should be allocated with the Sure Start funding via a Technical Transfer to reduce financial administrative bureaucracy within the DE team. The introduction of a Technical Transfer would be a new approach to the administration of Sure Start for both DE and DoH, and as such this should remain under review to ensure that it is effective and efficient for both Departments; and
- Systems for SPPG to redeploy unspent funding should be implemented to ensure resources are maximised within the sector. DE guidance has previously been developed that includes re-deployment arrangements. The process currently in place allows re-profiling of expenditure within each individual Sure Start project. There is no process to allow re-profiling across the 38 projects i.e. SPPG identification of easements across all projects with potential to address pressures across others.

## Current Structure

The role of the DE Early Years (Intervention Programmes) Team is to support the strategic development of the Sure Start Programme. This requires regular monitoring and review, which can only be done in conjunction with the now SPPG and through the Childcare Partnership (CCP) Managers.<sup>16</sup> DE's roles include the support of strategic policy development and implementation; evaluation of the effectiveness of policies; ensuring funding for Sure Start as part of the DE budget allocation processes; and allocating funding to the SPPG in order for them to disseminate funding to Sure Start Projects. DE has policy responsibility for the Sure Start Programme, the Pathway Fund (which replaced the DE Early Years Fund from 1 April 2016), and Toybox Project.

As part of the wider transformation of Health and Social Care (HSC) services in Northern Ireland, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) closed on 31 March 2022. Responsibility for its functions transferred to the Department of Health. On 1 April 2022, HSCB staff migrated to the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) as an integral part of the Department of Health. Prior to its closure, DoH highlighted that "The vital work that the HSCB currently delivers will continue – there will be no change to key services or contacts – but the new arrangements will enhance system leadership and accountability, improve integration and make our decision-making processes more streamlined. The closure of the Board is the first step in a wider transformation which will consider how future HSC services will be planned and managed differently."<sup>17</sup>

The role of the SPPG in relation to Sure Start is to administer the programme through working with the 38 projects that deliver it, and to review all Sure Start project plans annually and provide assurances to the Department of Education that collectively the projects will effectively contribute to the achievement of Sure Start outcomes and aims. The SPPG and CCP Managers ensure that funding is awarded to Sure

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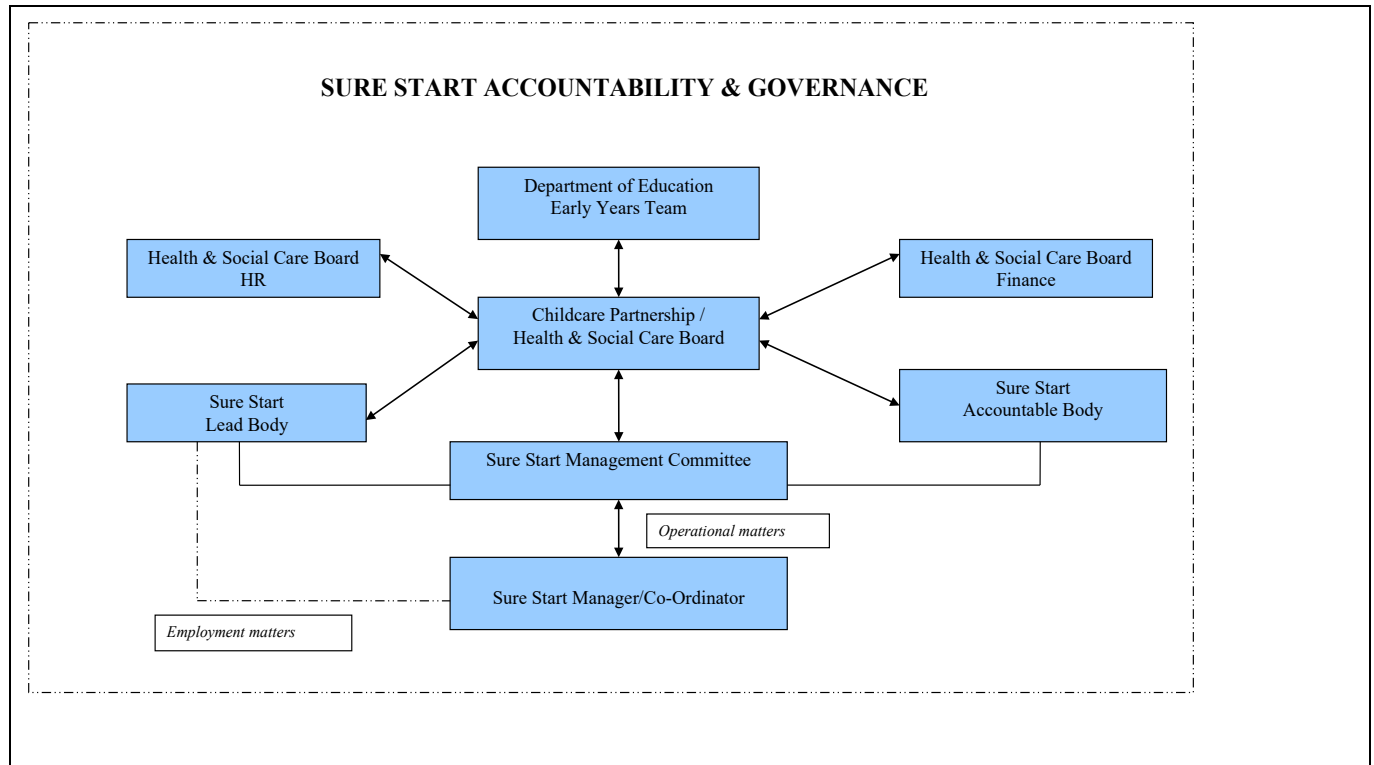
<sup>16</sup> Sure Start Governance and Accountability Guidance 2019

<sup>17</sup> [Health and Social Care Board migration to Department of Health - HSCB \(hscni.net\)](https://www.hscni.net/news/2022/03/31/hscb-closure)

Start projects within the aims of the Sure Start programme and in accordance with the principles of regularity, propriety and value for money, and to effectively manage all funding elements of the Programme.

The following flow chart outlines the current Sure Start accountability and Governance structures. The SPPG has since replaced the position of the HSCB.

**Figure 7.1: DE (2017) Sure Start Governance and Accountability**



## Structural and Administrative Analysis

### Views from Strategic Stakeholders

Several strategic stakeholders from both DE, DoH and relevant arm's length bodies and partners were consulted on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the current oversight and administrative structures. As highlighted in the Methodology in Chapter 3, in-depth interviews were conducted with Ipsos between April-June 2022. Strategic stakeholders invited to participate were identified by DE.

Many strategic stakeholders from both statutory and non-statutory sectors recognise the value in exploring whether administration and oversight may be structured differently and recognise problems and challenges within the current arrangements. The extent to which individuals want fundamental changes to the structures is, however, limited. Strategic stakeholders broadly accept the value in the Department of Education leading the programme and recognise the value in including educational development as an explicit goal of Sure Start, along with wider goals concerning children's health and social development and supporting families.

Despite limited appetite for significant structural reform, the need to reform current funding arrangements was raised by nearly all strategic stakeholders consulted within the review. Frustrations raised regard the large underspend (£1.2million) in the year 2021-2022, the lost opportunities from not maximising the funding available, as well as the possible implication on future budget allocations. Not having a system in place to re-deploy identified underspend to meet identified need across the Sure Start programme was

identified as a major problem by some stakeholders. It is suggested that a requirement to report such an underspend to the Health Minister may invoke greater accountability, ownership, and efficient use of resources. Funding arrangements are also described as complex and lacking clear reporting pathways, for example, DE funding SPPG co-ordination roles. Strategic stakeholders describe a lack of clarity on what the migration of HSCB to SPPG may mean for the future of administration of Sure Start, although some frame this change as an opportunity to revisit administrative and oversight arrangements.

*"I think there's an opportunity in here to maybe look at how we manage Sure Start given what's happened in terms of the closure of the Health and Social Care Board." (Strategic Stakeholder).*

The Sure Start programme is wholly funded by the Department of Education. The Programme's agreed policy aims are to improve children's ability to learn, health and social development. Views vary on what the 'principal' aim of Sure Start is, with stakeholders from different Departments putting more or less weight on health, developmental, and educational aspects.<sup>18</sup> Some described the fundamental aim of Sure Start as improving health by supporting parents in caring for children and promoting children's health and development. Some strategic stakeholders think that there is a risk of Sure Start losing sight of its "fundamental" aim, by being under the DE. Conversely, others think there is a risk of the educational elements of Sure Start being "lost" if it was solely or principally administered by DoH. Some are of the opinion that Sure Start may not be given the focus or priority it deserves within the DoH, given the comparatively small size of the Sure Start budget compared to the total budget of the DoH. Despite the possible benefit of having clearer accountability, there is also a concern that such a reform may lead to the long-term marginalisation of educational and child development objectives.

*"Effectively what you've got now is one government department asking another government department to look after something for it, and there's something fundamentally wrong with that I think." (Strategic stakeholder).*

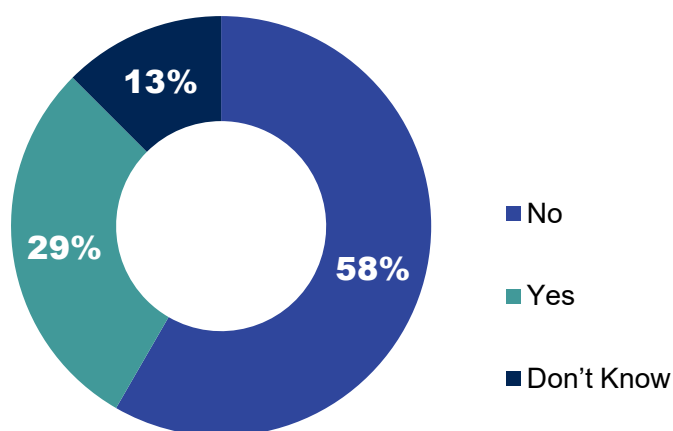
Strategic Stakeholders highlight that the current funding administrative arrangement create duplication of administration and financial management burdens that could be streamlined, especially now that the SPPG staff are no longer an arm's length body of DoH. If DE funding was issued to DoH under a technical transfer, this would significantly reduce avoidable bureaucracy and financial reporting within DE.

### Views from Sure Start managers and chairs

Sure Start managers reported a range of views regarding the impact of the dual-Departmental structures overseeing and administering the programme. Sure Start chairs were interviewed by Queen's University collaborators between April-July 2022, and Sure Start managers participated in the review by completing an online survey. Most describe limited impact of the administrative and oversight structures on their day-to-day activities. Nearly six in ten (58%) managers report that the Department of Education/Department of Health structures did not create additional administrative burden on their project. Most managers describe that they are well supported by DE and by the SPPG and did not think there is a need for a fundamental reform regarding which Department holds the lead for the programme.

<sup>18</sup> The aims of Sure Start are to improve: the ability to learn by encouraging stimulating play, improving language skills and the early identification and support of children with learning difficulties; health by supporting parents in caring for children and promoting children's health and development; social development by supporting the development of early relationships between parents and children, good parenting skills, family functioning and early identification and support of children with emotional, learning or behavioural difficulties.

**Figure 7.2: Sure Start is funded and overseen by the Department of Education and administrated by the Department of Health – does this structure create an additional administrative burden on your Sure Start project?**



BASE = 24

Some Sure Start chairs and managers think the DE/DoH model represented a good example of joined-up working and breaking down of Departmental silos. Some Sure Start chairs are concerned that any change to the relationship may create additional work and burden, as well as highlighting the important role that the DoH has played, to this point, in terms of absorbing requests for data and information from the Department of Education.

*"We are always talking about 'departmental silos' in Northern Ireland, and I don't think enough is made of the very positive 'joined up working' between health and education in relation to Sure Start." (Sure Start manager).*

Some Sure Start managers, however, note additional administrative burdens caused by the current administrative and oversight structure. Nearly three in ten (29%) report that the structures did add to their administrative tasks and responsibilities. These burdens predominately relate to a duplication of reporting requirements, for example, receiving multiple requests for data and reports, as well as inspections by different Departments.<sup>19</sup> Similar information being requested in different formats is described as causing an ineffective use of time. Systems for reporting are also described as confusing, bureaucratic and risk adverse. Some Sure Start managers describe multiple inspections from different Departments and inspectorates as contributing to feelings of distrust, and that they are consistently having to justify their impact and thus their funding.<sup>20</sup>

*"We already input all our data to Sure Start Go (previously SS Play) and do extensive quarterly returns to the CCP, with annual business plans and finance returns. Despite this we have questionnaires from DE, ETI, PHA etc asking us again for the same information." (Sure Start manager).*

<sup>19</sup> Different inspections relate to different purposes. For example, the DoH inspection, carried out by the HSC Trusts, inspects adherence to the Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care of the Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds in Sure Start. The ETI evaluation reviews the quality of provision across the whole Sure Start programme against the aims to support children's development and learning.

<sup>20</sup> DE highlights that that ETI inspection ensures a consistent, quality level of support and justifies the use of public funding and secure future levels of funding. DoH highlights that Trust inspections are a standard requirement of all registered Early Years settings so that all parents and children using the registered services can expect to receive a consistent minimum standard of care.

*"It feels as though we are continually having to justify our existence, and this has led to many staff in the projects feeling, 'undervalued' even though staff continued to work through lockdowns and restrictions when other services were not available." (Sure Start manager).*

Of the seven participants stating that the structures created additional administrative burden, one thinks these structures adds over 5 hours per week to their role, one that it added between 3-4 hours, two participants think they added 1-2 hours, and three "don't know" the extent of any additional burden. A number of Sure Start leads also describe challenges during COVID-19 regarding the administrative and oversight structures. Communication between the Departments and advice given to Sure Starts was described as, at times, contradictory and unclear. Also, the administrative burdens are described as increasing over the past couple years at a time when Sure Start services have been dealing with significant additional burdens caused by the pandemic.

*"Yes, I do think it impacted. For example, a lot of families weren't seeing their health visitor and a lot of children were slipping through the 'gap' in terms of their assessments. Also, with our services running in a limited way we were limited in our capacity to pick up children early. The knock-on effect was when expressions of interest for the 2-year-old programme came in a lot of the children hadn't had their 2-year assessment and we were identifying a number of children as more suitable for our Little Learners programme or something in between Little Learners and the 2-year-old programme" (Sure Start manager).*

Many Sure Start managers also describe the organisational structures and context as complex. Some managers feel that Sure Start is used like an extension of statutory services. The Sure Starts are described as being under undue pressure to be able to absorb additional social issues families are experiencing in their area. One manager suggests that Sure Start and the Pathway Fund is not fit for purpose in the context of not having a Governmental Childcare Strategy Framework and, the absence of a three-year budget to make and communicate plans in Northern Ireland. Another stakeholder suggests that going forward a Department of Children and Young People might help to having a more joined up approach and strategic focus.

*"In my ideal world I believe we need a Department for Children and Young People to keep a clear strategic focus on direction, informed by strong operational knowledge and skills, and that all other departments need to evidence how their decision-making impacts positively on our children and young people (short and long term) to improve outcome." (Sure Start chair).*

A lack of co-ordination between DE and DoH is described by some stakeholders. It is suggested that there should be greater strategic co-ordination and cohesion between the different Departments, and that they need to come together and address challenges. Whilst Sure Start staff work in partnership across all departments, many Sure Start chairs report that they do not see this modelled by departmental/governmental departments higher up. There is a perception from many stakeholders that there is a lack of engagement with other Departments, for example Department for Communities/Infrastructure.

## **Benefits and Constraints of existing structures**

The structures represent an example of cross-Departmental working, highlighting the need for a holistic approach to early childhood development and health, involving multiple different stakeholders with different areas of expertise. Nearly all consulted in the review see the benefit of viewing early years in this way, and that the current structure ensures that both education and health are represented within

Sure Start. The following case study provides an example for the support for the current structure from one Sure Start.

### Support for the Current Structures. Case Study: Newry Sure Start

Newry Sure Start is one of the largest projects in Northern Ireland, covering seven wards. Anne has been a project manager for 18 Years and has a wealth of experience managing the service. She has overseen the evolution of the programme and has worked with multiple different partners to deliver their services. She describes the current administrative and oversight structures as largely effective.

“I’ve seen the journey unfold over many years. I personally think we’re better off under the Department of Education. The structure is a lot sounder, we get a lot more guidance, and I think when we were with Department of Health the leadership and guidance that we needed was not there at that time. I think we do fit well with the Department of Education because we are preparing children for school: mentally, socially, physically, and developmentally. Sure Start supports children until they begin pre-school provision which also sits within the Department of Education. So, I think we sit with the Department of Education better than we do with the Department of Health. The SPPG are the go-to people, and they are a brilliant support for projects. They provide consistency, support on policies, procedures, and governance. That has made us stronger as projects. And SPPG has the overview of both DE and DoH, and they have a good local view of the specific needs in an area. They’re approachable and knowledgeable, and it’s an effective structure to support us. I would hate to lose that link. They’re very much the ‘steppingstone’ to the Department of Education.”

Despite the structure of being under the Department of Health, Anne notes that “One challenge is around transition into schools. I think all schools should engage with us much more. The level of engagement from each school can vary greatly so I think a directive around engagement from the Department of Education would be helpful. I think we should have a presence in all schools. We can give the school a full picture on a child and their needs to help them prepare for and support each child entering their school. Perhaps a Sure Start/school link worker or Sure Start being a member of their boards of management. The sharing of information and joint working would be invaluable for a strategic approach to achieve better educational outcomes for children. Also, we used to provide services up to P1, but now we only go up to the 4<sup>th</sup> birthday. We need to go up to P1 so there’s a seamless transition.”

### Value for Money Analysis

The following paragraphs consider the Value for Money (VFM) associated with the oversight and administrative structures for Sure Start.

#### Economy

The total funding allocation for Sure Start in 2022/23 is £30.6 million. This funding included core costs for each of the 38 Sure Start projects (plus an additional 22 SOAs awarded temporary funding), the support posts within SPPG, speech and language services within Sure Starts, the Sure Start Play Database and inflationary increases. The majority (84%) of this funding is allocated directly towards the Sure Start projects, with an additional 5% allocated to the provision of speech and language services within Sure Starts. Therefore, 11% of the total funding is associated with the administration of Sure Start within the SPPG and the provision of the SSP database.

These costs do not include costs associated with the staff costs for the DE Early Team whose roles and responsibilities are wider than Sure Start. SPPG/DoH have contributed staff for the administration of Sure Start over the last 20 years including time of 1 x Commissioning Lead for Early Years, 5 x CCP Managers, 2 x Information Officers, and the wider finance team.

## Efficiency

Toybox and the Pathway Fund are delivered under a grant award and Letter of Offer (LoO) by EYO on behalf of DE. Funding is provided directly to EYO from DE and EYO report back directly to DE. There is no requirement for the EYO to liaise directly with the SPPG regarding the delivery or performance of either Toybox or the Pathway Fund. Feedback from DE, EYO, and other stakeholders suggests that this is an efficient process as EYO have access to a wide range of experienced staff, are recognised as early years sector experts, and deliver a wide range of CPD training for the early years sector.

While Sure Start is funded by DE it is administered by DoH (via the SPPG) under a detailed Letter of Allocation (LoA) and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between DE and DoH. The financial allocation from DE to DoH includes the provision for six Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) support staff within SPPG, in addition to Sure Start operational staff. This includes:

- 1 WTE Business Support Manager;
- 0.5 WTE Finance Officer;
- 0.5 WTE Administration Support;
- 1 WTE Business Support post (from 2022/23); and
- 5 x 0.8 WTE Programme Support Specialists (for the Developmental Programme for 2-3-year-olds) (6 with some Admin support).

A further WTE, Band 6 post had been planned to provide support and contract monitoring however this did not progress due to budget issues.

Additional funding was also provided during 2022/23 for an additional FTE Band 6 post within SPPG. These posts are in addition to the DE administrative staff and in 2022/23 the budget allocation was c£470,000 with anticipated cost of living increases of 6% in the next two years.

The SPPG staff have a range of responsibilities including the SPPG's Childcare Partnership (CCP) managers who, amongst other activities, have a key role in the administration and co-ordination of Sure Start activities in their local area, liaise with the wider early years sector and support Sure Starts to compile annual plans.

DE staff are responsible for the financial oversight of Sure Start funding and the collation of monitoring information to demonstrate achievement of outcomes and objectives of the programme and appropriate use of public funding. This includes monthly financial reporting to DE Finance, the processing of around 70 Sure Start invoices each year, ensuring underspend is promptly reported, and securing additional resources where need is evidenced and funding available. DE monitor this closely to ensure there is no overspend and that any underspends are minimised to maximise the use of public funds. Feedback from DE staff has highlighted that financial accountability creates a significant but avoidable administrative burden on the team and creates potential duplication with SPPG administrative tasks. SPPG staff collate and provide all monitoring information on outcomes and objectives. Given that the SPPG team now sit within the DoH and are no longer an Arm's Length Body of the Department of Health, there are

opportunities to make the administration of the Programme more efficient. For example, if the funding was issued to DoH by way of a Technical Transfer financial accountability would lie with DoH, which would significantly reduce the level of additional financial bureaucracy within DE and align with operational and financial monitoring.

Feedback from key stakeholders suggests that there are areas where some overlap exists between the SPPG team and the DE team and also areas where some data is not routinely or consistently collected. This is particularly pertinent when DE receive a Freedom of Information request or an Assembly Question. Often these queries request data in a format that is not typically collated by SPPG and/or shared with DE. They are then required to work through the SPPG team to collate the data, creating additional workload in compiling a response. Staff from DE estimate that from 2017 to 2022 around 194 information requests were received regarding Sure Start. Information requests have covered a number of issues although frequently they relate to the total amount of Sure Start funding that has been provided by specific areas (e.g., Parliamentary constituency, Trust area etc.), level of registration and usage by specific areas and minority groups (e.g., Traveller/Roma community) and information regarding specific services delivered under Sure Start. DE staff noted that responding to these information requests can be time consuming and frequently require close liaison with SPPG staff, who as administrators of the Sure Start programme have oversight of the Sure Start database on which any data is stored.

Qualitative feedback from Sure Start projects provided via interviews and surveys suggests that there is a perception that the current structures do create some additional administrative burden for them. Almost one third (29%) of those who responded to the survey report additional burdens. Qualitative feedback highlights that, whilst the current structures could be regarded as a good example of cross-departmental working to provide a holistic approach to early childhood development and health and well-being, there is a need for better co-ordination between the departments.

## Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the three targeted interventions themselves is not within the scope of this review as all three programmes have been evaluated and proven to provide positive outcomes for children and their families. However, the effectiveness of the administration processes that are currently in place for Sure Start have been considered.

Due to the way in which the funding is delivered from DE to the DoH, and in which Sure Start is administered by SPPG under a MoU, DE are required to closely monitor spending and activity under the Programme. As noted above, the DE Early Years Intervention Programmes team are responsible for all the financial management arrangements and are required to report to the DE finance team on a monthly basis. This financial reporting is always done in a timely manner with the required level of information.

The Sure Start projects also develop an annual plan (with support from Child Care Partnership Managers) and provide feedback to DE (via SPPG) on the progress of this plan. Monitoring data is also provided by Sure Start projects via a common monitoring tool (Sure Start Go). However, as DE do not have direct access to Sure Start Go they are depending on SPPG staff to access monitoring data at a Programme and Project level. This monitoring tool was developed to meet DE's specific monitoring information needs. Sure Start managers and other stakeholders in the sector also reported that the level of communication and partnership working between the individual Sure Starts and the CCP Managers is also effective.

The processes and procedures put in place within the DE Early Years team ensure close financial and performance management of the Sure Start programme. Therefore, in this respect the administration of



Sure Start is effective. However, feedback from DE staff, SPPG staff and Sure Start managers suggest that there are opportunities to increase the efficiency of the oversight and administration processes. Feedback from key stakeholders suggests that in order to retain Sure Start's focus on childhood development and educational outcomes it is important that DE retain responsibility for the programme. However, now that the SPPG staff who administer the programme sit within the DoH and not an Arm's Length Body (i.e., HSCB) there are opportunities to streamline aspects of the administration including financial oversight.

# 8 Targeting of the Sure Start Programme

## Overview of the Chapter

This chapter summarises the current coverage of Sure Start provision in Northern Ireland, the current approach to targeting, as well as highlighting some of the academic evidence on targeting provision of early years services. The chapter presents views from strategic stakeholders and from Sure Start chairs and managers on the current approach to targeting, the benefits and constraints of the approach, and whether any reforms should be considered. Different statistical measures that may be considered for targeting, as well as comparatives from other regions, are then presented to contextualise the range of different options available regarding future targeting of Sure Start.

## Summary Findings from this Review

There is broad agreement with the principles of targeting Sure Start services to children who are most in need, whilst minimising any potential for stigma. Across both strategic stakeholders and Sure Start managers, there is high levels of agreement with continuing to target based on measures such as NIMDM, to target children most at risk of not meeting their development goals, and agreement with the principles of progressive universalism.

There are high levels of agreement that Sure Start should remain open to all the current targeted areas, and that the principle of Sure Start being non-stigmatising is one of its key strengths. However, nearly all stakeholders and managers also think there is a need to address gaps in the system and support access for those who are most in need of the support. All Sure Start managers describe a context of increased need and demand from both within and outside of their Sure Start area. Most Sure Starts are already supporting children from outside of their area, in line with current guidance from DE, but greater flexibility to help support children and families in need of support living outside the Sure Start area was encouraged. Some Sure Starts appear unaware that they are able to take children from outside their areas on a flexible basis.

Effective targeting of services requires knowledge of who is in need, on what basis, and a means to identify them. This relies on high quality administrative data being collected, linked with other relevant data, and being accessible to those who are making decisions about resource allocation. Currently, the data to make such decisions in early childhood is not widely available, and where it is available it exists in isolation and not linked to other data that would provide a more holistic view of child and family circumstances (for example: administrative data related to early education outcomes, housing, socio-economic status, employment or benefits).

In particular, consistent and reliable education data (e.g., key stage attainment data, absence, exclusions, alternative provision data)<sup>21</sup> is not routinely available for children before the age of 16 in Northern Ireland. This puts Northern Ireland at a significant disadvantage relative to other UK regions where these data are available through the National Pupil Database (NPD). This enables better understanding of the educational trajectories of children and young people. Without such data there is a lack of information upon which to effectively identify early need and implement appropriate preventative, or intervention measures. Recent analysis and publication of the first record linkage data in Northern

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<sup>21</sup> For more information on the NPD and the data it contains: <https://find-npd-data.education.gov.uk>

Ireland (Early, Miller, Dunne & Moriarty, 2022)<sup>22</sup> used data that combined the Census (2011), School Leavers Survey and School Census. The analysis showed that parental qualifications (particularly maternal qualifications), child gender, school type, housing tenure, and free school meal eligibility were amongst the most important predictors of educational outcomes at age 16. This is consistent with other analyses of national data which show that in the Republic of Ireland, for example, children (age nine) from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds are already doing less well in maths and reading.<sup>23</sup> However, we do not have sufficient early education data or (as yet) information on Sure Start experience/exposure, to analyse and predict what demographic, early environmental or educational experiences predict better outcomes later in life. If such data was available, this could be used to better identify those children and families who are likely to benefit the most from preventative or early intervention measures, such as Sure Start. In the absence of such data, targeting children in areas of high deprivation (a key predictor of educational underachievement) is the most effective means of identifying children who will benefit the most from interventions like Sure Start.

### Coverage of Sure Start provision across Northern Ireland

The 38 Sure Start projects are spread across each of the five Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) areas in Northern Ireland. Each project covers several target ward areas (up to 11 in some cases). Sure Start areas were originally identified based on legacy criteria and subsequently expanded to include all Super Output Areas (SOAs) in the 25% most disadvantaged areas, as indicated by the 2010 Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM). The NIMDM has since been updated (2017) and temporary expansion in 2021/22 and 2022/23 is enabling coverage to all SOAs in the 25% most disadvantaged areas per NIMDM 2017. The following description and analysis explores whether the Sure Start areas, as originally identified and conceived, are still targeting provision in the most disadvantaged and deprived communities.

### Overview of the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM)

Northern Ireland is divided into 890 areas, called Super Output Areas (SOAs). Approximately 2,100 people live in each SOA. The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) ranks each area according to deprivation from 1 (most deprived) to 890 (least deprived). The rankings are based on seven dimensions of deprivation:

1. Income Deprivation;
2. Employment Deprivation;
3. Health Deprivation & Disability;
4. Education, Skills & Training Deprivation;
5. Access to Services;
6. Living Environment; and
7. Crime & Disorder.

These are relative rankings and cannot be used to determine how absolute deprivation in a SOA has changed over time or at which point in the rankings a SOA is deemed to be disadvantaged. This report

<sup>22</sup> Early, E., Miller, S., Dunne, L., & Moriarty, J. (2022). The influence of socio-demographics and school factors on GCSE attainment: results from the first record linkage data in Northern Ireland. *Oxford Review of Education*, DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2022.2035340

<sup>23</sup> Williams, J., S. Greene, E. Doyle, E. Harris, R. Layte, S. McCoy, C. McCrory, A. Murray, E. Nixon, T. O'Dowd, M. O'Moore, A. Quail, E. Smyth, L. Swords, M. Thornton, 2009. *The Lives of 9-Year-Olds, Growing Up in Ireland/National Longitudinal Study of Children*, Report No. 1, Dublin: Stationery Office.

refers specifically to the top 25% most deprived SOAs, however, this is a relatively arbitrary cut-off and is not to say that SOAs outside of this limit are not also disadvantaged. More information on how the NIMDM was constructed and should be interpreted can be found on NISRA's website, where their reports and accompanying analyses are located.<sup>24</sup>

### Sure Start coverage in 2010

Using the 2010 NIMDM data, the 25% most deprived SOAs (n=222 out of 890) were ranked from 1 to 222, where 1 is the most deprived SOA. Out of these 222 SOAs, all are covered by a Sure Start project. In 2010 there were also several less deprived areas that fell within the Sure Start coverage, most likely because many SOAs are not homogenous in demographic character but also as a consequence of the legacy arrangements/criteria originally used to determine Sure Start project catchment areas, prior to the introduction of multiple deprivation measures. Of the 667 SOAs that are not in the top quartile for deprivation in 2010, 153 of these (23%) are in a Sure Start project area.

### Sure Start coverage in 2017

Using the 2017 NIMDM data the 25% most deprived SOAs (n=222 out of 890) are again ranked from 1 to 222, where 1 is the most deprived SOA. Out of these 222 SOAs, 220 (99%) are covered by a Sure Start project, 2 (1%) are not (West\_1 and Florence Court and Kinawley).

Thirty-six (n=36) SOAs were classified as being in the top quartile for deprivation in 2010 but in 2017 had moved out of this category and are now ranked *less deprived* than they were previously. The following table lists these areas.

**Table 8.1: The SOAs that were in the top 25% most deprived category in 2010 but are no longer in this quartile in 2017**

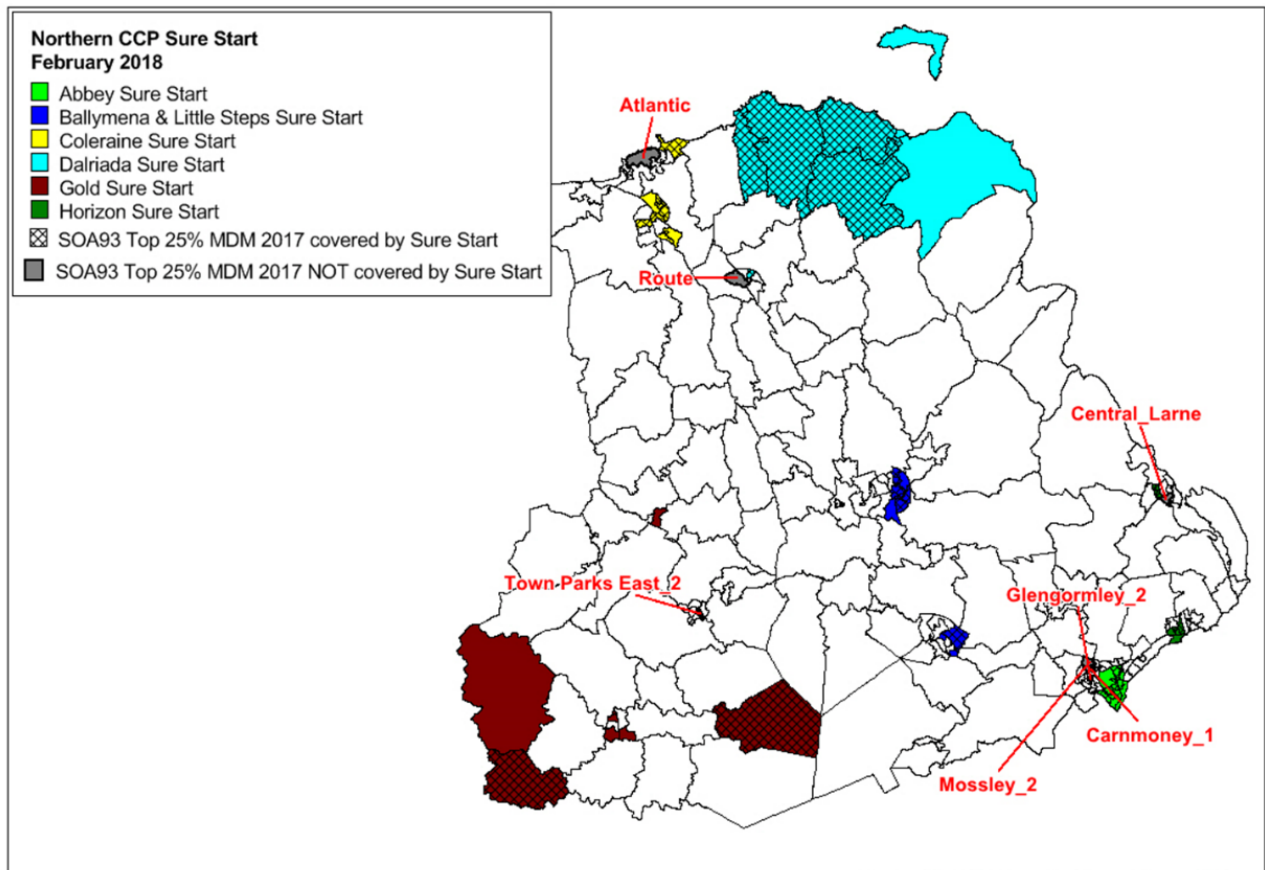
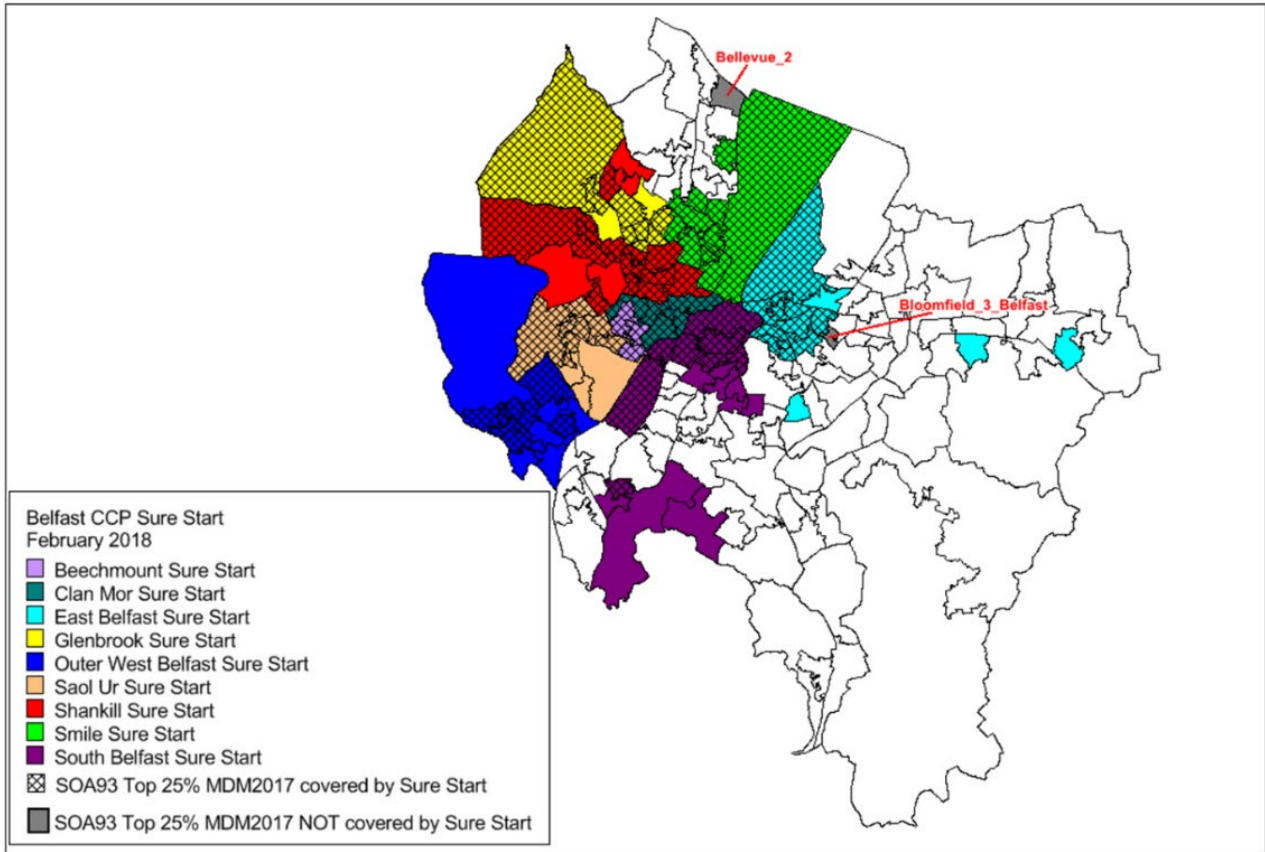
SOA Name	LGDNAM	MDM rank 2010	MDM rank 2017	Top 25% deprivation 2010	Top 25% deprivation 2017
<b>Sydenham_1</b>	Belfast	190	318	Yes	No
<b>Glen Road_2</b>	Belfast	87	267	Yes	No
<b>Sunnylands</b>	Mid and East Antrim	122	230	Yes	No
<b>Foyle Springs_2</b>	Derry City and Strabane	137	229	Yes	No
<b>Derryaghy_1</b>	Belfast	140	487	Yes	No
<b>Hillhall_1</b>	Lisburn and Castlereagh	145	277	Yes	No
<b>Falls Park_3</b>	Belfast	148	338	Yes	No
<b>Culmore_4</b>	Derry City and Strabane	149	300	Yes	No
<b>Kilkeel Central_2</b>	Newry, Mourne and Down	157	258	Yes	No
<b>Highfield_2</b>	Belfast	162	343	Yes	No
<b>Carn Hill_1</b>	Derry City and Strabane	164	226	Yes	No
<b>Minnowburn</b>	Belfast	166	293	Yes	No

<sup>24</sup> (<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/deprivation/northern-ireland-multiple-deprivation-measure-2017-nimdm2017>).

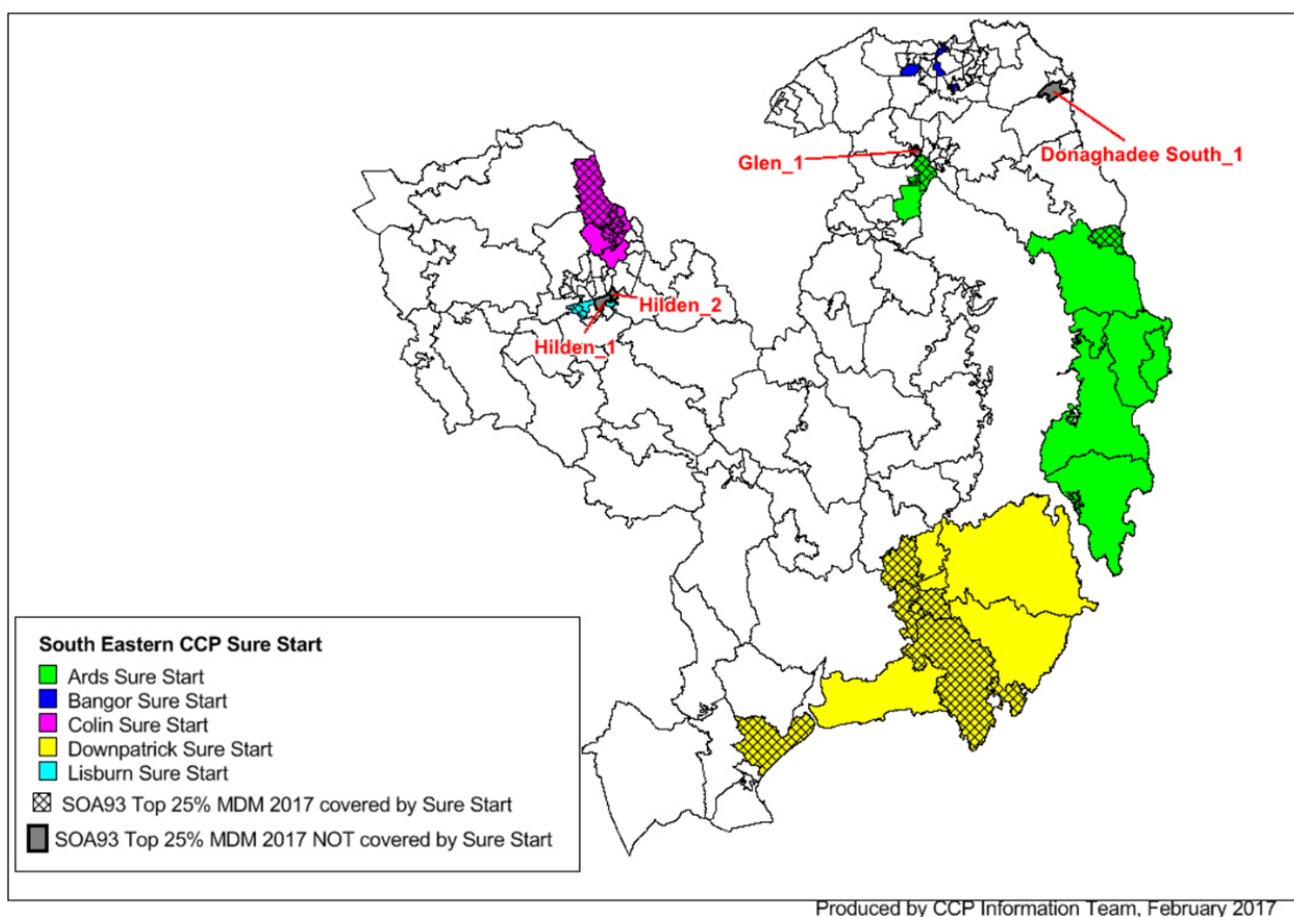
<b>Ballysaggart</b>	Mid Ulster	169	239	Yes	No
<b>Ladybrook_2</b>	Belfast	172	368	Yes	No
<b>Taghnevan</b>	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	173	332	Yes	No
<b>Coalisland North</b>	Mid Ulster	175	329	Yes	No
<b>Falls Park_1</b>	Belfast	183	297	Yes	No
<b>Ballycraigy</b>	Antrim and Newtownabbey	185	259	Yes	No
<b>Derrymore_2</b>	Newry, Mourne and Down	186	237	Yes	No
<b>Tonagh</b>	Lisburn and Castlereagh	192	282	Yes	No
<b>Tullycarnet</b>	Belfast	193	248	Yes	No
<b>Caw</b>	Derry City and Strabane	195	287	Yes	No
<b>Clare</b>	Derry City and Strabane	197	333	Yes	No
<b>Cregagh</b>	Belfast	201	241	Yes	No
<b>Edenderry</b>	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	203	224	Yes	No
<b>Scrabo_1</b>	Ards and North Down	207	231	Yes	No
<b>Steeple</b>	Antrim and Newtownabbey	208	308	Yes	No
<b>Andersonstown_3</b>	Belfast	209	320	Yes	No
<b>Dufferin</b>	Ards and North Down	211	317	Yes	No
<b>South_1</b>	Derry City and Strabane	212	236	Yes	No
<b>Ballynafeigh_3</b>	Belfast	217	270	Yes	No
<b>Drumglass</b>	Mid Ulster	218	291	Yes	No
<b>Glebe_2_Magherafelt</b>	Mid Ulster	219	227	Yes	No
<b>Drumquin</b>	Fermanagh and Omagh	220	311	Yes	No
<b>Killycrot</b>	Mid and East Antrim	221	252	Yes	No

Similar to 2010, in 2017 there were also several less deprived areas that fell within the Sure Start coverage. Of the 667 SOAs that are *not* in the top quartile for deprivation in 2017, 153 of these (23%) are in a Sure Start project area (of which the SOAs in the table above (n=35/36) are a subset).

The following maps illustrate the different Sure Starts by Trust area, highlighting which areas are within the top 25% MDM 2017 and are covered by Sure Start, which areas are within the top 25% MDM 2017 and are not currently, permanently covered by Sure Start, and which areas are not within the top 25% MDM 2017 and are covered by Sure Start. It should be noted that in 2021, the then DE Minister (Peter Weir) announced additional, temporary funding of £1.56m to cover an expansion of existing Sure Start projects into 22 relatively deprived SOAs that are not currently covered by Sure Start. Subsequently, (the then) DE Minister Michelle Mclveen has continued the funding for 2022/23 and increased it to £1.61m. These costs are included in the overall costs noted previously.



As shown above, areas experiencing relatively high levels of multiple deprivation in Belfast continue to be covered by Sure Start, including Bellevue 2 (North Belfast) and Bloomfield 3 (South Belfast), which were subsequently included in the temporary expansion of provision: both of these areas sharing a boundary with existing Sure Start areas. Population statistics indicate that there are in the region of 225 0-3-year-olds living in these SOAs.<sup>25</sup> There are now seven SOAs in the Northern CCP that are within the top 25% most deprived areas that are not permanently covered by Sure Start. Four of these areas border an existing Sure Start area. Population statistics indicate that there are around 553 children aged 0-3-years-old in the seven SOAs not currently, permanently covered by Sure Start.<sup>26</sup>

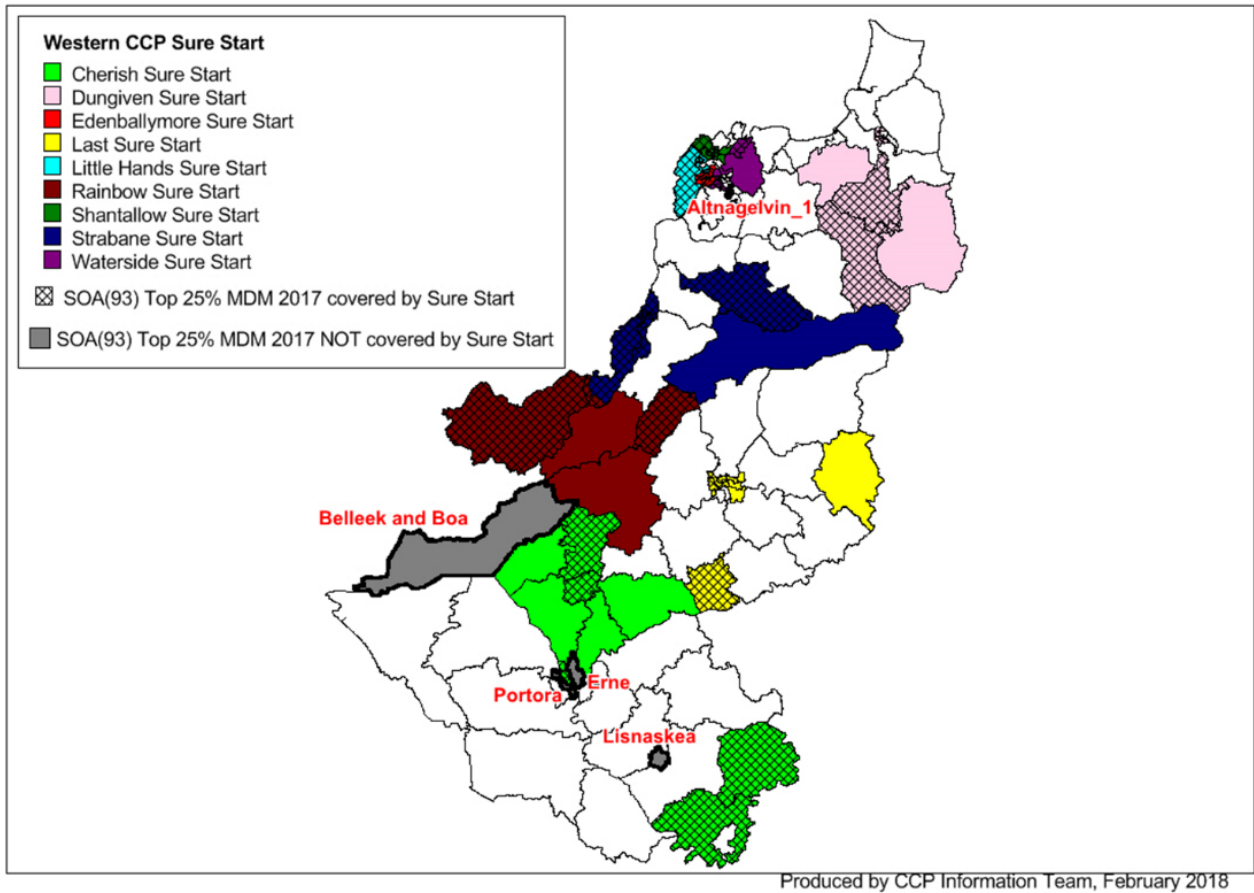
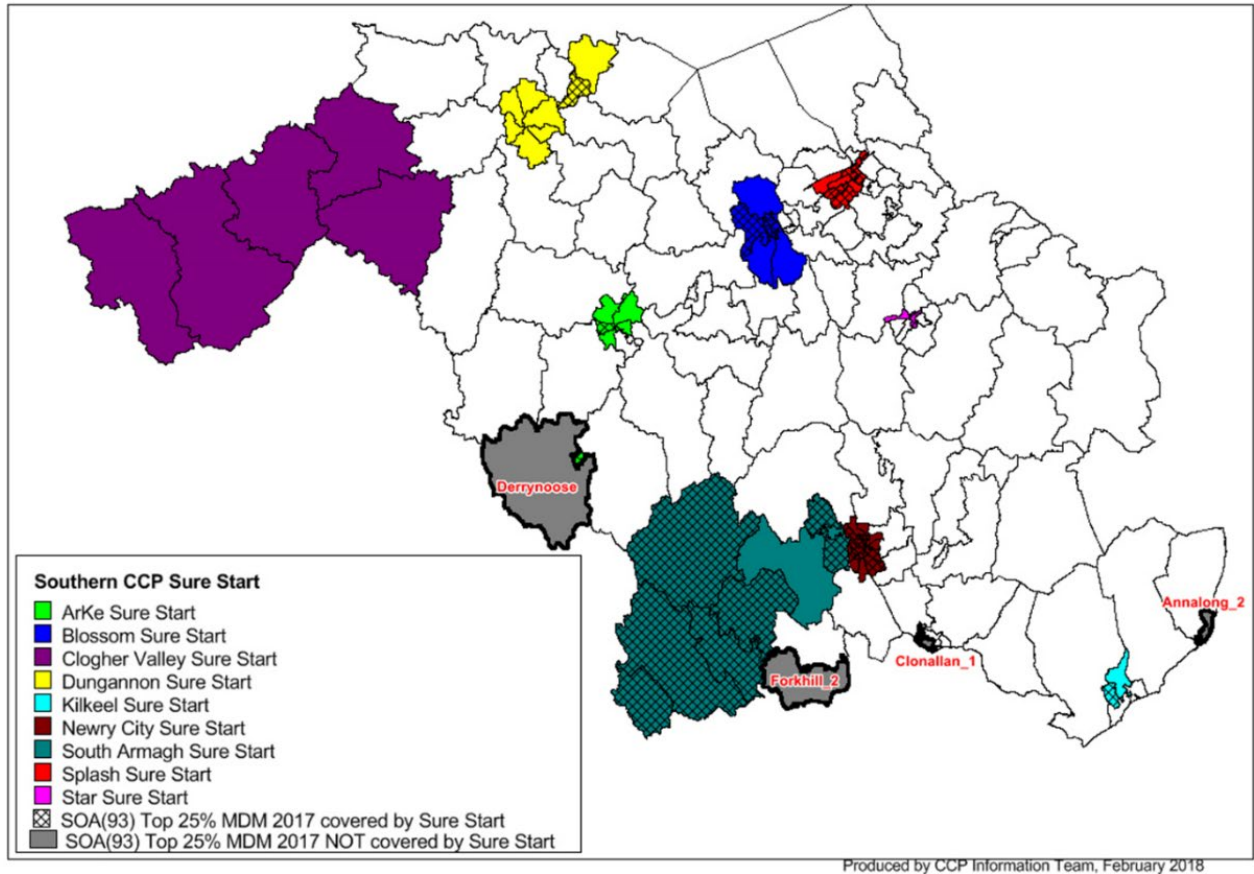


As shown above there are now four SOAs in the South Eastern CCP that are within the top 25% most deprived areas that until recently have not been covered by Sure Start. They are currently in receipt of temporary funding for this year and last year (2021-22 and 2022-23)<sup>27</sup>. Three of these areas border an existing Sure Start area. Population statistics indicate that there are around 320 children aged 0-3-years-old in the four SOAs not currently, permanently covered by Sure Start.

<sup>25</sup> Central Reference: Super Output Areas Not Covered by Sure Start but in the Top 25% Most Disadvantaged Areas - Based on NIMDM (2017)

<sup>26</sup> SOURCE NISRA population statistics here

<sup>27</sup> Temporary expansion funding was continued into 2023-24.





As shown in the charts above there are now four SOAs in the Southern CCP that are within the top 25% most deprived areas that until recently have not been covered by Sure Start (they are also now in receipt of temporary funding). Only one of these areas borders an existing Sure Start area. Population statistics indicate that there are around 651 children aged 0-3-years-old in these four SOAs. There are also now five SOAs in the South Eastern CCP that are within the top 25% most deprived areas that are not permanently covered by Sure Start (they are included under the temporary expansion referenced above). Four of these areas border an existing Sure Start area. Population statistics indicate that there are around 709 children aged 0-3-years-old in the five SOAs not permanently covered by Sure Start.

Therefore, as shown in the maps presented within this report, there are 22 SOAs that are in the top 25% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland and are not permanently covered by Sure Start. This equates to around 2,438 0-3-year-olds who would be eligible to attend Sure Start.<sup>28</sup> Whilst many of these areas will have a neighbouring Sure Start, and therefore would suggest these areas could be relatively easily absorbed into existing arrangements, some do not (e.g. Derrynoose and Annalong 2 in the Southern CCP). If Sure Start were to be permanently expanded to include these areas, logistical factors (for example staff travel, cost, time, accommodation) would have to be considered in addition to considerations regarding extra resources. Based on mid-year population projections,<sup>29</sup> Sure Start now provides coverage for around 48% of all 0-3-year-olds (including the 22 additional SOAs).

However, targeting of early intervention programmes and the usefulness of measures of relative deprivation (such as NIMDM) should be considered within the wider socio-economic context. In a recent report examining the rates and distribution of poverty in Northern Ireland over the last decade (2010 to 2020) (Graham, 2022),<sup>30</sup> it emerged that overall relative and absolute poverty rates in Northern Ireland have been demonstrating a downward trend and are currently at their lowest level in the last decade. Absolute poverty (after housing costs) has fallen from 20% in 2010/11 to 18% in 2018/19 with a further decline to 13% in 2019/20. Given the current and looming cost of living crisis, it seems unlikely that this downward trend will continue. However, this notwithstanding, the period covered maps closely to the time period being considered in relation to possible fluctuations in the composition and deprivation of Sure Start catchment areas. Whilst these datasets are unable to tell us how individual areas have changed (for better or worse) during this time, the report provides a useful overview of the general direction of travel.

In Northern Ireland over the last ten years absolute poverty rates have fallen considerably and are now lower than those in the UK. Persistent poverty rates (after housing costs) have also demonstrated a downward trajectory and have been consistently lower than the UK (23% in NI vs 31% in the UK in 2019/20). Whilst relative poverty rates for children in NI are higher than adults<sup>31</sup>, poverty rates for children (after housing costs) have also been consistently lower than those in the UK. Similarly, the rate of children in combined low income and material deprivation in NI has typically been lower than the UK and is mostly demonstrating a downward trend. Relative poverty rates for individuals living in lone parent families tend to be higher than for all individuals in any family type, and the rates in NI were generally higher than those in the UK, although this gap is narrowing.

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<sup>28</sup> Central Reference: Super Output Areas Not Covered by Sure Start but in the Top 25% Most Disadvantaged Areas - Based on NIMDM (2017)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/2020-based-interim-population-projections-northern-ireland>

<sup>30</sup> Graham, L. (2022) An examination of the rates and distribution of poverty in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

<sup>31</sup> Graham, L. (2022) notes that: "Children are generally defined as an individual aged under 16. In addition, a person will also be defined as a child if they are 16 to 19- years old and they are not married nor in a Civil Partnership nor living with a partner; are living with parents; and are in full-time non-advanced education or in unwaged government training".

## Evidence relating to targeting provision

The positive link between the quality of parent child interactions and children's mental health and development is well established (Barlow et al, 2011)<sup>32</sup> and can mitigate the negative consequences of poverty and deprivation (Marmot, 2010;<sup>33</sup> Kiernan & Mensah, 2011;<sup>34</sup> Odgers et al, 2012)<sup>35</sup>. There is considerable evidence that targeted parenting programmes are effective in improving parent and child outcomes, however there is less known about the effectiveness of universal programmes. What evidence there is tends to indicate variable gains for parents, including findings from the UK CANparent trial where parents reported high satisfaction and enjoyment of the programme but no changes in parenting stress or behaviour (Lindsay & Totsika, 2017)<sup>36</sup>. Reasons for this might include the fact that targeted programmes tend to be longer in duration, and target less than optimal parenting skills, where there is more room for growth and improvement. There is some evidence from a meta-analysis of Triple P evaluations to support a blended universal and targeted approach, with the authors suggesting that the level or intensity of the intervention is less important than ensuring sufficient families who need it can access an appropriate level of support (Sanders et al, 2014)<sup>37</sup>.

Cornelissen et al. (2018)<sup>38</sup> analysed the expansion of highly subsidised early childhood care and education provision in Germany to universal provision for 3-6 year-olds and concluded that it did not substantially increase the participation of disadvantaged groups. The study found increased participation overall, but lower rates of participation from disadvantaged groups. Relatedly, an examination of universal versus targeted approaches to preventing early education gaps in The Netherlands (Leseman & Slot, 2020)<sup>39</sup> concluded that two complementary approaches were appropriate:

1. A universal within targeted approach: in designated areas with a moderate to high representation of children who meet the criteria of the target group, universal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) of high quality is provided to all children in these areas; and
2. A targeted within universal approach: targeted incentives within a universal ECEC system facilitate organisations to reach out to disadvantaged groups and provide children from these groups with compensating high-quality education.

A direct comparison of targeting vs universal provision was undertaken by Hutchings et al (2013)<sup>40</sup> which involved two randomised controlled trials of Sure Start (SS) (targeted provision: high risk parents and children identified through screening) and Flying Start (FS) (universal provision in a FS area: no screening) in Wales. Families in the FS study, recruited without any additional screening, were

<sup>32</sup> Barlow J, Smailagic N, Bennett C, Huband N, Jones H, Coren E. Individual and group based parenting programmes for improving psychosocial outcomes for teenage parents and their children. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2011, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD002964. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD002964.pub2.

<sup>33</sup> Marmot M. Fair society, healthy lives (the marmot review). 2010 <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports>. Accessed 4 Aug 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Kiernan KE, Mensah FK. Parenting, family resources and children's early educational attainment: the mediating role of parenting. *Brit Ed Res J*. 2011;37(2):317–36.

<sup>35</sup> Odgers CL, Caspi A, Russell MA, Sampson RJ, Arseneault L, Moffit TE. Supportive parenting mediates neighbourhood socioeconomic disparities in children's antisocial behavior from ages 5-12. *Develop Psychopath*. 2012;24: 705–21. doi:10.1017/s09545-79412000326.

<sup>36</sup> Lindsay, G., Totsika, V. The effectiveness of universal parenting programmes: the CANparent trial. *BMC Psychol* 5, 35 (2017).

<sup>37</sup> Sanders MR, Kirby JN, Tellegen CL, Day JJ. The triple P – positive parenting program: a systematic review and meta-analysis of a multi-level system of parenting support. *Clin Psych Rev*. 2014;34:337–57. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2014.04.003.

<sup>38</sup> Cornelissen, T., Dustmann, C., Raute, A., & Schönberg, U. (2018). Who benefits from universal child care? Estimating marginal returns to early child care attendance (IZA Discussion Papers, No. 11688). Bonn: Institute of Labor Economics.

<sup>39</sup> Leseman, PPM., & Slot, PL. (2020). Universal versus targeted approaches to prevent early education gaps. The Netherlands as case in point. *Z Erziehungswiss*, 23, 485–507. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11618-020-00948-8>

<sup>40</sup> Hutchings, J., Griffith, N., Bywater, T., Williams, ME, & Baker-Henningham, H. (2013)

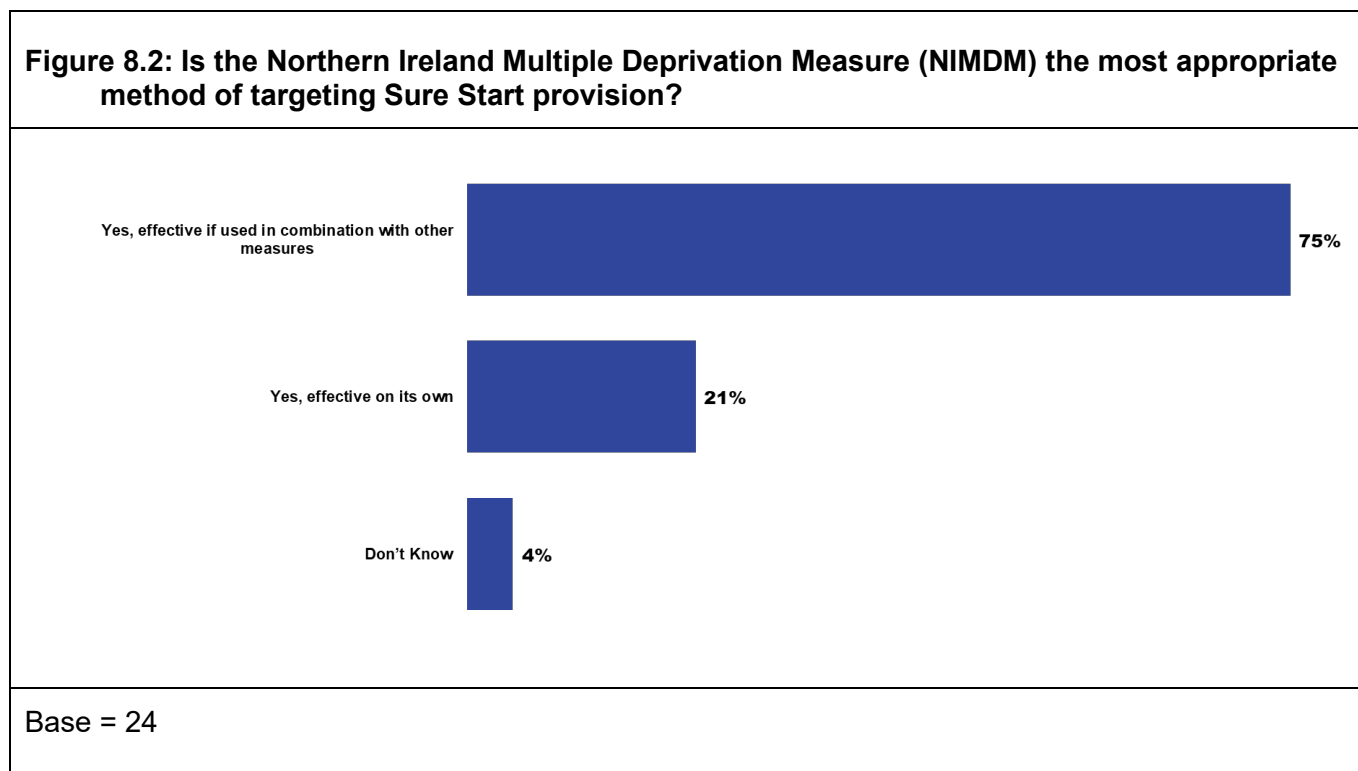
Targeted vs universal provision of support in high-risk communities: comparison of characteristics in two populations recruited to parenting interventions. *Journal of Children's Services*, 8(3), 169-182.

experiencing higher levels of socio-economic deprivation, mental health problems and parenting stress as well as other known risks to child outcomes compared to the general population. However, when compared with the individually targeted population recruited for the SS study, they were shown to be experiencing significantly lower levels of these and other risks factors for poor child outcomes than the sample recruited for the SS trial, where recruitment was based on known child risk factors. Thus, targeting by locality alone resulted in the recruitment of a lower risk sample in terms of perceived risk to negative outcomes and the problem of take-up of services by those most in need was not addressed. The comparison of data from the two samples demonstrated the benefits of using additional targeting measures, such as socio-economic disadvantage status, parental stress and, depending on the child’s age, a developmental assessment or measure of child behavioural difficulties in addition to geographical targeting.

### Views on Targeting of Sure Start

The stakeholders in this review express broad agreement with the principles of Sure Start targeting, saying that NIMDM remained the most logical way of targeting Sure Start. They cite research evidence showing that children who are born into and live in areas with high levels of multiple deprivation have worse outcomes than children who are not. Therefore, targeting areas of highest social deprivation was considered logical and appropriate. The progressive universalism model was introduced by DE in 2016 with the aim of providing support based on need to children and families in each Sure Start catchment. Many stakeholders highlight the importance of progressive universalism (that Sure Start is open to all within the target area) in ensuring that Sure Start is seen as a programme open to all within an area, and not something that is stigmatised or stigmatising.

Most Sure Start managers think that NIMDM is still the most appropriate measure, but three-quarters (75%) report that it should be used in combination with other measures. No respondents to the survey think the NIMDM is no longer a relevant method of targeting.



The majority of Sure Start managers also think that Sure Start areas that are no longer in the top 25% most deprived areas due to legacy arrangements, should remain in Sure Start. Conversely, less than

one-fifth (17%) of managers, think they should no longer be in Sure Start. Interviews with key stakeholders within the early years sector highlight that if Sure Start funding was removed from areas that were no longer within the top 25% most deprived areas this would be detrimental for the children in these areas and that progress made would be under threat and difficult to sustain.

Some evidence from England, also suggests the negative impact of divesting from Sure Start areas. Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) suggests that for every 1,000 children in Sure Start, 5,500 hospital admissions are prevented in 11-year-olds each year<sup>41</sup> and that cuts to services may reverse this trend. Other research has suggested an increased variation in quantity and quality of services provided to children in the context of funding cuts. The abolition of ring-fenced funding for Sure Start in England was regarded as a key factor in the abolition or reduction of Sure Start programmes in many local authority areas,<sup>42</sup> public health experts writing in the British Medical Journal have also suggested that austerity cuts have reduced Sure Start services being offered and thus have the potential to erode benefits gained by Sure Start children's centres.<sup>43</sup> The cost of late intervention has been well established in Northern Ireland, the Early Intervention Foundation estimated that late intervention is associated with additional costs of £204 million per year on social care, £81 million per year on health, and £54 million per year on education.<sup>44</sup> Evidence would therefore suggest that removing support from areas of need will only result in short-term savings and that disinvestment results in costs to other parts of the economy.

**Figure 8.3: Due to legacy arrangements (before the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) was in place) some current Sure Start provision is not in top 25% most disadvantaged areas. Do you think that areas not in the top 25% should remain in Sure Start?**



Base = 24

Some Sure Start managers highlight that new social housing estates have been developed in their areas, which has contributed to changes in demographics, as has the growth of the private rented sector. They believe that this demographic change is likely to increase the level of demand in their area

<sup>41</sup> <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/health-impacts-sure-start>

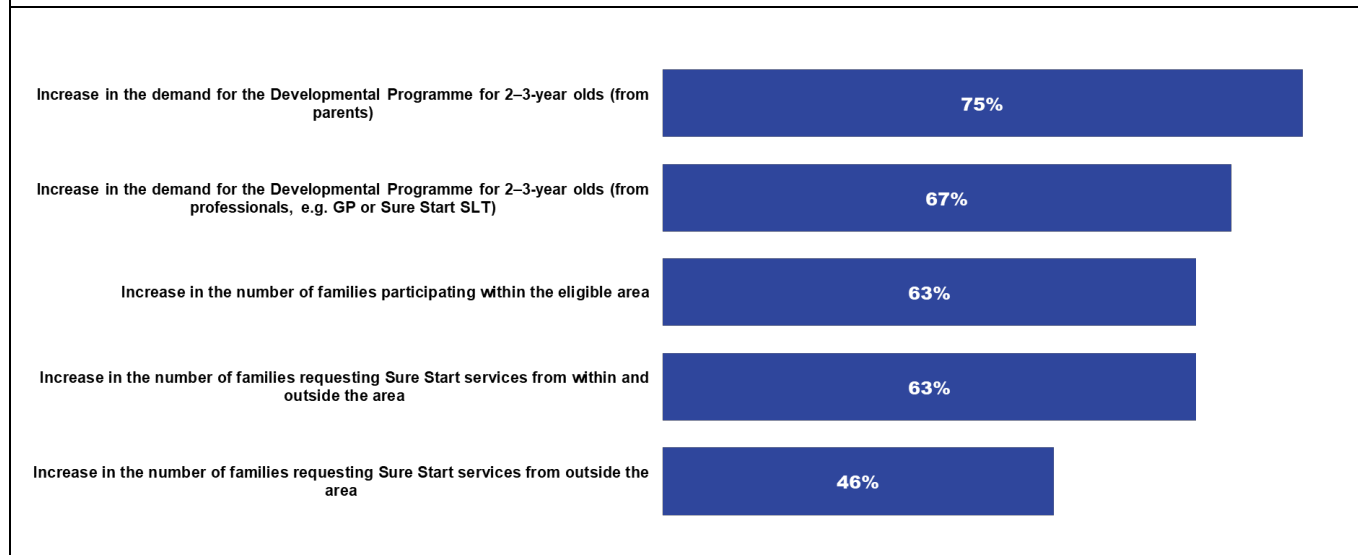
<sup>42</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/StopStart-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.bmj.com/content/352/bmj.i335>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/the-cost-of-late-intervention-in-northern-ireland>

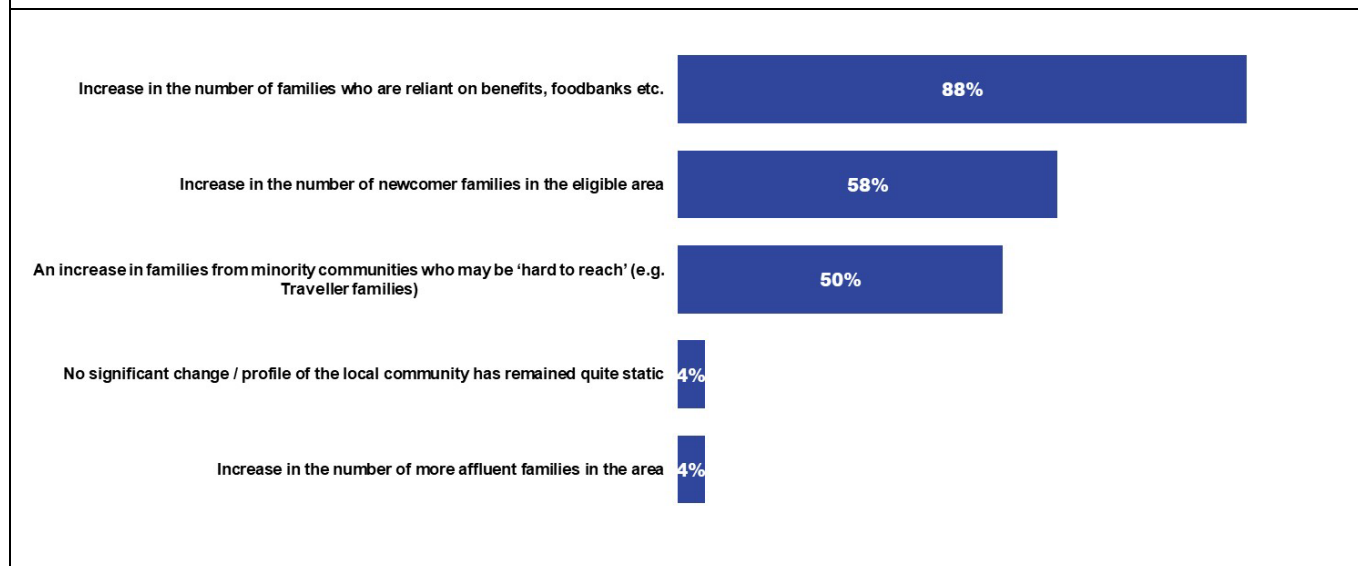
and that this may not have been considered in budget allocations.<sup>45</sup> An increase in demand for different programmes and services, and an increase in the number of families requesting services both within and outside of Sure Start areas is noted by most managers. Almost all (88%) Sure Start managers and chairs report that they have seen an increase in the number of families in their area who are reliant on benefits, and in some case reliant on foodbanks.

**Figure 8.4: Have you noted an increase in need for your Sure Start services over the last few years?**



Base = 24

**Figure 8.5: Have you noted any changes in the demographics of the families in your Sure Start area over the last few years?**



Base = 24

<sup>45</sup> While DE budget allocations are made on the basis of projected requirements advised by SPPG based on their liaison with Sure Start projects, many Sure Start managers still had concerns that levels of demand were outpacing changes to budget allocations.

A small number of Sure Start managers, as well as strategic stakeholders note that, in order to avoid duplication, other programmes like the Pathway Fund may be better focused on families in need living outside of Sure Start areas.

### Case study: Glenbrook Sure Start. The Benefits of progressive universalism.

Glenbrook Sure Start operates in North Belfast covering Cliftonville, Ligoniel, and Ardoyne wards. The project co-ordinator strongly supports the current approach to targeting Sure Start.

“I think it works. As co-ordinators, we would say we work in a targeted universal way. We work very hard to be open to all families, regardless of their circumstances. For me that’s the best way to access families that are ‘hard to reach’ because you’re not stigmatising or labelling them for using your services. That’s the very thing that puts people off. And then, because we have a mix of families, people don’t know if the family beside them is in receipt of benefits or have any other challenges. So, there’s kind of a levelling up there because everyone has the same access. If we identify that a child has additional needs, we can then steer them towards more targeted support if they need it. So, I’d be very supportive of targeted universalism because that’s how we reach the hard to reach. There’s a lot of families out there who need help who maybe don’t realise they need help, but it’s through coming to the universal services and the relationships that develop with our staff, then we can start to have those difficult conversations. It enables us to target, but in a non-threatening way. I’d be very cautious of going down a line saying you have to be on benefits, or something like that, to avail of these services. A lot of my families work, but they’re minimum wage. People have other challenges. All those things need to be acknowledged.”

Given the political and community divisions that exist in the area covered by Glenbrook Sure Start, the universal approach also helps to bridge gaps between communities. The approach allows communities to move between different areas, and for relationships between parents and children to develop which may not have developed without the Sure Start. “It is a way of helping families to take that step across a divide that has a lot of really negative history. And because Sure Start is targeted based on a Sure Start area, it’s also depoliticised. It isn’t a service for one area, it’s for multiple areas. Anyone in the Sure Start area can use the service.”

Despite many Sure Start managers valuing a progressive universalism approach, many also note significant needs and challenges are experienced by families living outside of the Sure Start postcodes. Most Sure Start managers and chairs are of the view that Sure Start has a role in supporting these families and provision outside catchment areas is supported by DE guidance. It is considered by many of the stakeholders, across all the regions, that the present system of targeting was challenging in Northern Ireland for two main reasons. Firstly, rising ‘higher level’ of needs of children living in Sure Start postcodes, and having to address these challenges with finite resources. Secondly, it is hard to track families with children with high level needs who live close by but outside the present postcode system due to social housing shortages in some Sure Start postcodes. Similar to Sure Start’s wanting to see areas that are no longer in the top 25% most deprived areas remain included in the Programme (Table 7.4), most also want to see greater flexibility in targeting to the Programme to families experiencing challenges outside of their area, specifically in relation to areas that are split by Sure Start geography (for example a street or housing estate in which only part of the area is eligible for Sure Start).

*“There’s a new social housing development just outside our catchment area. It’s all young families that have needs and we’re their nearest Sure Start, but they don’t fit the criteria of the postcode to start with”. (Sure Start manager).*

Accommodation within the Private Rented Sector is often more expensive than social housing, (placing additional pressures on household budgets), furthermore, private sector accommodation is often not within deprived areas, therefore children from economically deprived households may not have access to Sure Start services. Material deprivation may be increased by renting through the private sector and may create hidden poverty. Given the extent of the needs faced both within and outside Sure Start areas, some stakeholders strongly felt that a more targeted approach (for example targeting only families experiencing a high level of deprivation) rather than the universal approach to targeting, would be a better use of resources.

*“People are having to go to more affluent areas, for example, for private housing. Need is not just in the Sure Start area, it’s much wider. When we can, we help families outside the area, for example through our Breastfeeding group. So, we try our best. Maybe this means we should leave the universal aspect of Sure Start behind and target people with specific needs more without the consideration of geographical boundaries. We may have families who are more affluent in our programmes, and they’re mainly there for the social aspect – which is important – but we’ve got families up the road outside the area, and they’ve maybe got a child with disability, or poor health, or live in poverty. It’s difficult. My personal view is it should be targeted at people who need it, and not on a geographic basis.” (Sure Start manager).*

Sure Start chairs highlight that many children are potentially impacted by the historical transgenerational trauma of the Troubles. Issues such as mental health and domestic abuse were raised, along with wider issues relating to the lack of social housing and increasing demand on the private rented sector. Some stakeholders are of the opinion that the targeting criteria should be broadened to include parental mental health irrespective of deprivation.

*“I think mental health is a big issue with very few support services out there for families. It would be beneficial for Mummy’s who have mental health problems, to have Sure Start, no matter where they live.” (Sure Start chair).*

Therefore, whilst many noted that the geographical approach to targeting is appropriate, they also note that there were gaps in the provision of services for some children. Stakeholders note that this included families who were experiencing in work poverty and did not live within Sure Start areas or, families within rural areas who are experiencing challenges but live far away from Sure Start and other support services. Targeted approaches, such as providing satellite service provision to include families with these challenges in Sure Start, is suggested by many stakeholders, Sure Start chairs and managers.

The majority of Sure Starts (54%) state that they are already providing services for children living outside of their area (Table 7.5), and some report supporting a high number of children from outside their area. Less than one-fifth (16%) report supporting more than 70 children from outside their area, but many are not able to provide details on the number of children being supported who are from outside their area (Table 7.5). The most common reasons for supporting children from outside their Sure Start area is that the child or family has complex needs that could not be met by other providers (69%); that the child is in close proximity (31%); that the child is from a rural area and the Sure Start is their closest source of support (23%); and that the project has sufficient resources to support additional children (8%). Other reasons for supporting children outside their area included having previously engaged with the family, receiving a referral from another organisation or professional or having the capacity to meet that child’s specific needs.

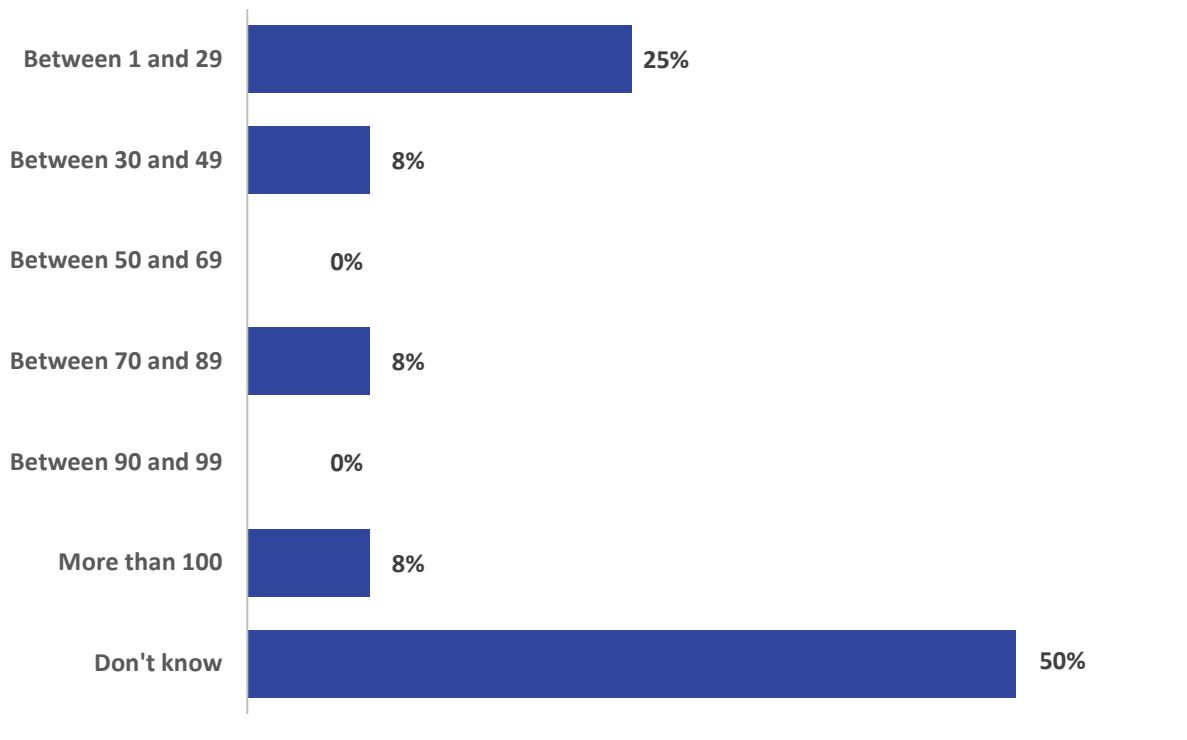


**Figure 8.6: Do you provide Sure Start activities/services for any children who do not live in your area?**



Base = 24

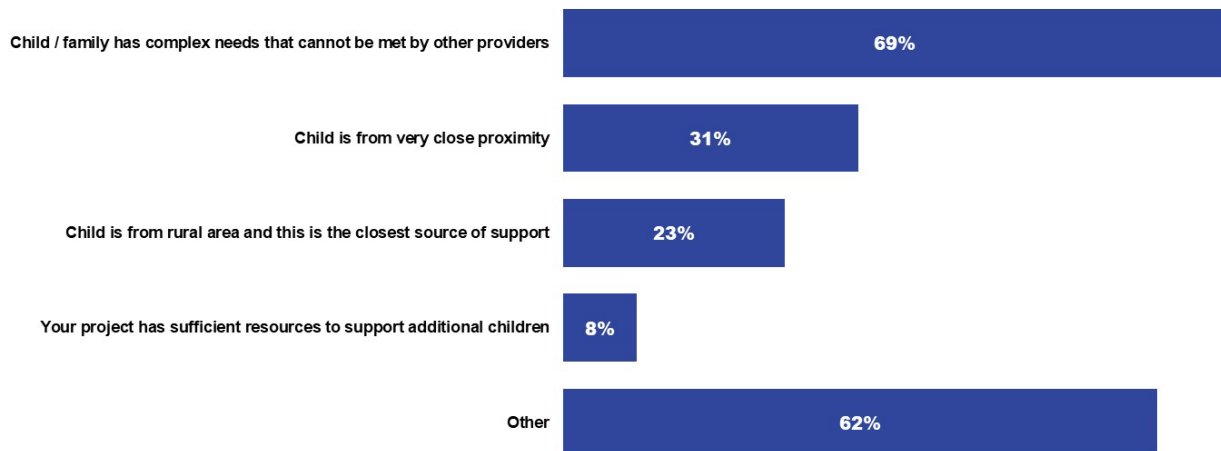
**Figure 8.7: Approximately how many children do you support from outside your area?<sup>46</sup>**



Base = 24

<sup>46</sup> May not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**Figure 8.8: Which of the following are the most common reasons for accepting children from outside of your area?**



Base = 13. Multi-code responses.

Many stakeholders and Sure Start chairs and managers are of the opinion that more flexibility around intake from outside the Sure Start area would be helpful. Some suggest that 10% of their intake could be covered by those identified as in need but living outside of the Sure Start area. Stakeholders suggest that being given the space to be more flexible, to be creative and innovative to meet the rising, complex needs of children and families would be helpful. For example, it is suggested that financial support of larger Departments, such as DoH, would help to scale up, resource and make programmes sustainable. Ring-fencing money outside of the Sure Start budget to boost this programme of work and other smaller local innovations is something that many staff suggest. Some strategic stakeholders also discuss the possibilities of satellite provision and extending such services that are already being implemented. Satellite provision would allow children access to Sure Start even if they lived a significant distance outside the geography and would allow targeting in specific areas of deprivation outside of those currently covered by Sure Start.

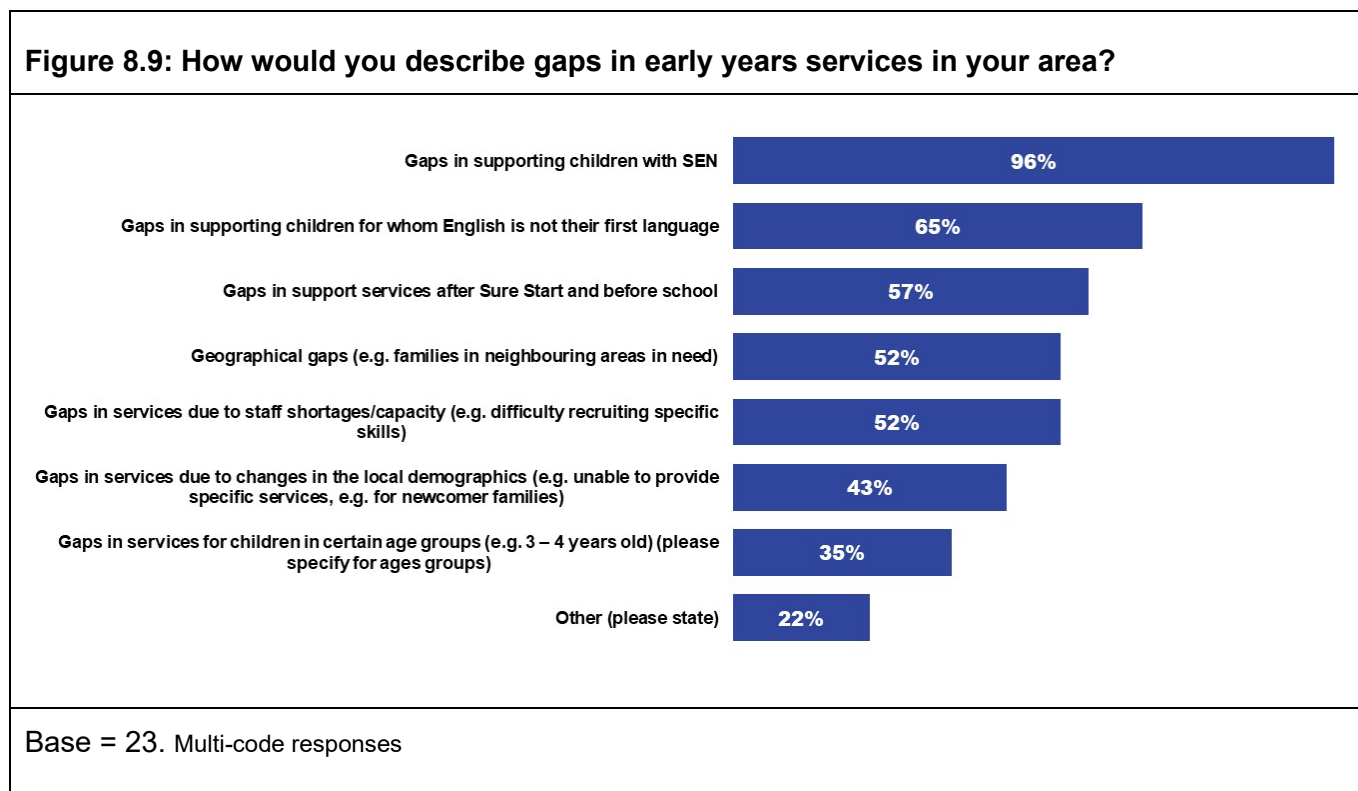
*“That maybe could be addressed by the likes of satellite provision, or it might be they have to take the service to the children because you could find a child that needs the help of Sure Start, but they might be 20-30 miles from the nearest one.” (Sure Start chair).*

Giving the Sure Starts more autonomy to make these decisions is described by some stakeholders as being important, as well as valuing local knowledge, partnerships, and an individualised approach to supporting families with specific needs.<sup>47</sup> For several stakeholders, it is strongly felt that the direction of travel should be to extend access to Sure Start, rather than constrict it.

<sup>47</sup> Under DE guidance, Sure Start projects must ensure the six core elements of Sure Start are delivered (to ensure a consistent model of support). The guidance sets out that in addition to the core elements, projects will deliver services to meet the individual needs of their locality – with agreement of SPPG the Programme administrator.

*“We should be increasing access to Sure Start rather than decreasing it. Within the geographical targeting Sure Start programmes know how to allocate services and the level of support according to need. Also, MDM is a very inexact tool. For example, we have a very large Roma community (most of whom are in absolute poverty) living in Botanic ward most of which is not in the top 25%.” (Sure Start chair).*

More broadly, almost all (96%) describe a range of gaps in early years services within their areas. Most (96%) report gaps relating to supporting children with SEN, while geographic gaps (families outside of the Sure Start area), staff and skills shortages, and gaps in supporting children for whom English is not their first language, are all mentioned consistently.



Some stakeholders think that while there may be benefits to providing Sure Start across all of Northern Ireland, this is normally disregarded as aspirational and wasn’t seen as a likely or viable option by many Sure Start managers or chairs. Others also note that universal provision is covered by pre-school for children aged 3-4-years in the year following Sure Start. Stakeholders also highlight that there will likely always be a need for specific and targeted support for some children, and that Sure Start to a large extent covers this need.

*“A geographic spread, no matter how it is captured, is not going to capture everyone. There are needs there that are not geographic in nature. So, children looked after, for example, children with a difficult home environment, be that in terms of they are not in an area of deprivation, but their household is, there may be issues of domestic abuse, things like that, are just a poor learning environment for a variety of reasons. A geographic spread's never going to pick up on all of that because it's not geographic in nature. So, there will always be gaps there. I think to be honest with you, the only way really to ensure that that doesn't happen is to have a universal programme and obviously that changes the fundamental nature of it, that's what pre-school does.” (Sure Start manager).*

*"I think the most costly, but the most fail-safe way of doing that, is to gradually increase Sure Start coverage to the whole of Northern Ireland and provide it as it is at the moment, under progressive universalism. You only give a limited amount of it to people who don't really need it very much, but you get more and more depending on need, but it's available at least at the limited level across the piece."*  
(Strategic stakeholder).

### **Use of additional or different statistical measures and other means to target Sure Start**

As previously highlighted, most Sure Start leads and managers think that NIMDM is still the most appropriate measure, but 75% are of the opinion that it should be used in combination with other measures. Analysis of qualitative comments reveals that some Sure Start leads think that strengthened partnerships with health professionals would be beneficial in targeting Sure Start provision and it would allow for more comprehensive assessment of need. Furthermore, the lack of up-to-date data on deprivation is described as a barrier to effective targeting. Health outcomes data from Child Health services (CHS) or the Public Health Agency (PHA); data from local GP practices or Health Visiting teams; data from local Dentists, Nursery Schools Child Development Clinics; Children and Young People Strategic Partnership; NISRA; the Housing Executive; Local Council i.e. Food Bank uptake etc; and data from the Department for Communities are all described as being potentially effective in helping to identify children in need of support, particularly if they come from areas currently outside of Sure Start provision. This would be possible if data were shared and linked and would allow more sensitive screening and targeting.

We have reviewed other measures for targeting Sure Start, including Free School Meals (FSMs), however no one measure is likely to be ideal or comprehensive in identifying need. Ward boundaries changed in 2014 after Sure Start had been established. This changed area names and established new wards, thus geographical boundaries were altered. In addition, Super Output Areas (SOAs) also reside within these wards. Despite being established in 2001, SOAs are not aligned with these wards, which can lead to SOAs overlapping between wards or even being identified in a new ward completely. For example, 'The Mount' ward was renamed to 'Beersbridge' with the ward lines slightly redrawn, however the SOAs within this area remain 'The Mount\_1' and 'The Mount\_2'. In addition, this ward now incorporates parts of SOAs that previously fell under the "Orangefield" ward – "Orangefield\_1" and "Orangefield\_3". Government departments and agencies present data using varying geographic and demographic data when it comes to decision making and service provision. An example of this is clear when examining FSM data, whereby the Department of Education (DE) present data at school or management type and NINIS offer a breakdown at ward level. Both of these approaches offer data that does not match Sure Start and could lead to complications surrounding the correct allocation of resources and service provision. Looking at data from 2014 Wards, it is clear that some areas have high levels of children on FSM but are not covered by Sure Start.

**Table 8.2: 2014 Wards not covered by Sure Start and Free-School Meal Entitlement**

Ward 2014	% of pupils entitled to FSM
The Maidens (Mid and East Antrim)	47
Lagan Valley (Lisburn and Castlereagh)	43
Lisnagelvin (Derry City and Strabane)	43
Ballynahinch (Newry, Mourne and Down)	42
Fortwilliam (Belfast)	40
Lambeg (Lisburn and Castlereagh)	39
Drumahoe (Derry City and Strabane)	36
Glen (Ards and North Down)	35

### Options for Expansion of Sure Start in Northern Ireland

Based on the analysis above of current Sure Start coverage and of evidence relating to targeted provision the following paragraphs provide a high-level overview of potential options for expansion with indicative costs based the cost of current provision. Based off this analysis, a staggered approach, using the latest census data (starting with areas with higher numbers of 0-3-year-olds in areas ranking higher NIMDM), to expansion should be explored. Ensuring monitoring of registration and uptake will be essential to effectively informing expansion.

#### Status Quo

Following the additional, temporary funding in 2021 and 2022, Sure Start now covers all of the 25% most deprived areas (based on the 2017, MDMs). Based on mid-term population estimates, in the region of 41,500 children are currently eligible to access Sure Start services, this equates to around 48% of all 0-3-year-olds. Based on financial data relating to the total costs to deliver Sure Start (including funding for an additional 22 SOAs), this equates to around £738 per eligible child. Although Sure Start is not funded on a per child basis, we have used this as a proxy to estimate indicative costs for expansion. The following table provides an overview of projected eligible populations within the current SOAs and associated costs going forward. For each table, costs per eligible child are based off the total eligible population, but we have also provided percentages at 70% and 50% of the total eligible population, given that not all children avail of a place in the programme.

**Table 8.3: Project population and associated costs of status quo<sup>48</sup>**

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
<b>Total 0-3 year-old population</b>	86,989	84,131	81,979	80,457	79,869	79,340
<b>Current eligible population</b>	41,458	40,383	39,350	41,459	38,337	38,083
<b>70% of eligible children registered</b>	29,021	28,268	27,545	29,021	26,836	26,658
<b>50% of registered children</b>	14,510	14,134	13,772	14,511	13,418	13,329
<b>Total cost @ 3.5% inflation</b>	<b>£30,572,000</b>	<b>£31,642,020</b>	<b>£32,749,490</b>	<b>£34,386,965</b>	<b>£35,590,509</b>	<b>£37,370,034</b>
<b>Cost per eligible child</b>	£738.00	£783.55	£832.26	£829.42	£928.36	£981.27

### Expansion to 75% of 0-3-year-olds

Should Sure Start be expanded to provide coverage for up to 75% of all 0-3-year-olds this would equate to around 65,240 children (based on 2022 population estimates) and would cost in the region of £48m to £52m (based on 2022 costs), as summarised in the following table. Projected costs are based off 100% uptake.

**Table 8.4: Population projects and associated costs at 75% coverage**

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
<b>Total 0-3-year-old population</b>	86,989	84,131	81,979	80,457	79,869	79,340
<b>75% coverage</b>	65,242	63,098	61,484	60,343	59,902	59,505
<b>70% eligible children registered</b>	45,669	44,169	43,039	42,240	41,931	41,654
<b>50% of registered children</b>	22,835	22,084	21,519	21,120	20,966	20,827
<b>Current cost @3.5% inflation</b>	<b>£30,572,000</b>	<b>£31,642,020</b>	<b>£32,749,490</b>	<b>£34,386,965</b>	<b>£35,590,509</b>	<b>£37,370,034</b>
<b>Cost per child 3.5% Inflation</b>	£738	£764	£791	£818	£847	£877
<b>Projected costs</b>	<b>£48,148,412</b>	<b>£48,196,336</b>	<b>£48,607,238</b>	<b>£49,374,477</b>	<b>£50,729,113</b>	<b>£52,156,876</b>

### Expansion to 100% of all 0-3 year olds

Based on 2022 mid-year population projections, should Sure Start expand to cover 100% of all 0-3-year-olds, this would involve coverage of 86,900 children and would involve costs in the region of £65m to £70m, as summarised below. Projected costs are based off 100% uptake.

<sup>48</sup> Figures rounded

**Table 8.5: Population projections and associated costs for 100% coverage**

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
<b>Total 0-3-year-old population</b>	86,989	84,131	81,979	80,457	79,869	79,340
<b>70% Reg</b>	60,892	58,892	57,385	56,320	55,908	55,538
<b>50% uptake</b>	30,446	29,446	28,693	28,160	27,954	27,769
<b>Current costs 3.5% @ inflation</b>	<b>£30,572,000</b>	<b>£31,642,020</b>	<b>£32,749,490</b>	<b>£34,386,965</b>	<b>£35,590,509</b>	<b>£37,370,034</b>
<b>Cost per child@ 3.5% Inflation</b>	£738.00	£763.83	£790.56	£818.23	£846.87	£876.51
<b>Projected 100% costs</b>	<b>£64,197,882</b>	<b>£64,261,782</b>	<b>£64,809,650</b>	<b>£65,832,636</b>	<b>£67,638,818</b>	<b>£69,542,501</b>

### Additional factors to consider

The above figures are indicative and are based on the current costs to deliver Sure Start per eligible child across each of the 38 projects. A detailed cost benefit analysis would be required to determine more precise costs of any Sure Start expansion. This analysis should consider a number of factors, such as:

- Further analysis is required related to registration and uptake rates across different areas. This will allow better understanding of the level of provision required to cover scaled up Sure Start services;
- Data from Sure Start projects<sup>49</sup> shows that on average around 70% of eligible children in each area register for Sure Start services and around 50% of these make use of Sure Start services. On this basis, if Sure Start was expanded to cover all 86,900 0-3-year-old children around 60,900 would register and 30,446 children would use the services;
- The population of 0-3-year-olds is projected to decline over the next ten years. By 2027, the population of 0-3-year-olds is expected to decline by 9% to 79,340. Therefore, the cost per child could increase. ;
- The Sure Start report card data also shows that on average 50% of those families who register for Sure Start make use of its services. This would suggest that, if Sure Start was extended to cover all children, by 2027 in the region of 27,700 children would make use of Sure Start;
- It is not clear if families from relatively less deprived areas would be more or less inclined to make use of Sure Start services if they were made available in their area;
- If the provision of Sure Start services was to expand significantly, it is likely that additional premises would be required, no capital costs have been considered at this time. Capital costs would vary significantly by location and size of premises required. To enable this, we would require a clearer understanding of the specific locations where new Sure Starts may be established, and available premises to understand the extent to which capital works are required. Taking an average cost per child and multiplying that by the number of children in an expanded model is likely an insufficient approach as does not factor in whether new premises are required or need expanded to meet extra demand;
- The figures noted above are high level costs based on averages. The cost to deliver each Sure Start project varies considerably depending on whether it is Trust lead or voluntary and community sector lead. This should be taken into consideration in the analysis of any potential expansion; and

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sure-start-report-card-202021>

- Annual inflation will increase Sure Start delivery costs. The HM Treasury Guidance on appraisal and evaluation (the Green Book) recommends that an inflation rate of 3.5% is applied to project programme costs. Given cost-of-living challenges, this may require review.

## Comparative examples from other regions

The following examples provide comparative examples of approaches to targeting support for children in both Wales and the Republic of Ireland. No funding programmes with similar financial and administrative structures exist in Northern Ireland. Flying Start in Wales and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in ROI are funded under grant funding models and therefore have a different structure of administration and reporting.

### Wales: The Flying Start Programme

The Flying Start programme in Wales was launched in 2006/7 and provides targeted support to children and families in some of the most disadvantaged areas to make a decisive difference to their lives. It focuses on the identification of need and on early interventions to improve children's language, cognitive, social, and emotional development and their physical health.<sup>50</sup> Key aspects of Flying Start are: free part-time childcare for 2-3-year-olds; an enhanced health visiting service (where the health visitor caseload is capped at 110 children); access to parenting support; access to speech, language, and communication support (previously described as Early Language Development).

These services are universally available to all children aged under 4-years and their families in the areas in which the programme runs. Flying Start targets the most disadvantaged areas in Wales. The programme has been targeted to areas according to measures of relative disadvantage including the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), free school meals and the proportions of children aged under 4-years living in households in receipt of income related benefits.

In relation to flexible targeting, Wales set aside 5% of the existing budget for supporting children from outside of the identified areas. "Changes to the outreach guidance were introduced in 2014 to allow local authorities some flexibility. In November 2017, following discussions with local authorities and in recognition of the need some expressed for greater flexibility, Ministers relaxed the funding limit to allow authorities to use up to 5% of their full Flying Start budget allocation on outreach with immediate effect".<sup>51</sup> There are no financial implications from this as any additional costs are drawn from existing programme budgets. In Northern Ireland, DE has also allowed flexibility to extend beyond the catchment area, but no specific percentage has been applied.

In 2022, the Welsh Government committed to 'Deliver a phased expansion of early years' provision to include all 2-year-olds'.<sup>52</sup> The commitment is set out in the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru. The Welsh Government expansion guidance has encouraged local authorities to target the expansion of Flying Start towards communities in more deprived areas that are not already part of the Flying Start programme. Currently 36,000 children under four living in some of the most deprived areas in Wales, benefit from the programme with around 9,000 2-year-olds receiving funded, high-quality, part-time childcare. Phase one aims to reach up to 2,500 additional children under 4 by increasing the Flying Start areas in every local authority in Wales. Wales is undertaking a staggered approach to expansion. Following this review of expansion options, a similar staggered approach would likely be viable to expand access to Sure Start in Northern Ireland.

<sup>50</sup> [Qualitative research with Flying Start families: Wave 3 - Summary \(gov.wales\)](#)

<sup>51</sup> [gen-ld11554-e.pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#)

<sup>52</sup> [Welsh Government - Programme for Government - Update](#)



## Republic of Ireland: Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE)

The Republic of Ireland offers a universal two-year pre-school programme. The Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) programme is available to all children within the eligible age range (children who have turned 2 years and 8 months of age before August 31st as long they won't turn 5 years and 6 months of age on or before June 30th of the programme year). The programme provides children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school. The programme is provided for three hours per day, five days per week over 38 weeks per year and the programme year runs from September to June each year.<sup>53</sup> The programme was introduced in January 2010. We have explored options for a universal programme in Northern Ireland. Improved data monitoring registration and uptake, and a staggered approach to expansion are likely required to increase access in Northern Ireland.

ECCE is complemented by a number of targeted programmes. The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Programme is a childcare programme targeted to support parents on a low income to avail of reduced childcare costs at participating community childcare services. CCS is delivered through participating community not-for-profit childcare services.

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<sup>53</sup> [gov.ie - Early Childhood Care and Education Programme \(ECCE\) \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

# 9 Contribution of the Pathway Fund and Toybox Project

## 9.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter explores the contribution of the Pathway Fund and the Toybox project to meeting DE objectives. The chapter presents views of strategic stakeholders involved in the administration and delivery of the services, as well as responses from Pathway-funded project managers and Toybox project workers gathered through online and telephone surveys. The chapter explores themes of complementarity, additionality, and duplication, and finishes with a counterfactual analysis of what would be the impact if the projects were not to receive funding from DE.

## 9.2 Summary Findings from this Review

The Pathway Fund and Toybox Project are important components of holistic early years support in Northern Ireland. Given the increased need and demand experienced across the early years sector, the Pathway Fund and Toybox offer support in relation to both distinct groups, (children who are at risk of under achieving in education and Traveller and Roma children) by offering distinct services. No obvious duplication is noted between Sure Start, the Pathway Fund and Toybox, therefore each was regarded as additional. Where there is potential for geographical overlap there is DE guidance within the Pathway Fund to address any potential displacement or duplication and staff from each programme report good levels of partnership working and liaison between the programmes.

Specific services offered by Pathway funded projects includes support for children with complex needs, those who are at risk of harm, children who live in rural areas, and the promotion of community integration. This frees up other services, such as Sure Start, removing some of the burden, and supporting parents who have been unable to secure a place in Sure Start programmes, for example the Development Programme for 2-3-year-olds. Partnership-based approaches to providing early years services in specific areas are well described by practitioners working with both the Pathway Fund, Toybox, and Sure Start.

Pathway funded projects are highly dependent on funding from DE, however, most do also secure funding from other sources. The impact they are having can likely only be sustained through continued funding. Loss of funding would likely create significant challenges in retaining staff and would result in project closure and impact on other projects delivered by organisations in receipt of Pathway funding.

### Additionality and Complementarity

This element of the review considers the additionality of Toybox and the Pathway Fund in the context of Sure Start and the extent to which there are any overlaps in service provision. Evidence on the extent to which Toybox and the Pathway Fund are additional to Sure Start has been gathered from a number of sources:

- Interviews with Sure Start chairs and managers;
- A survey of Sure Start projects;
- Interviews with Key strategic stakeholders across the early years sector; and

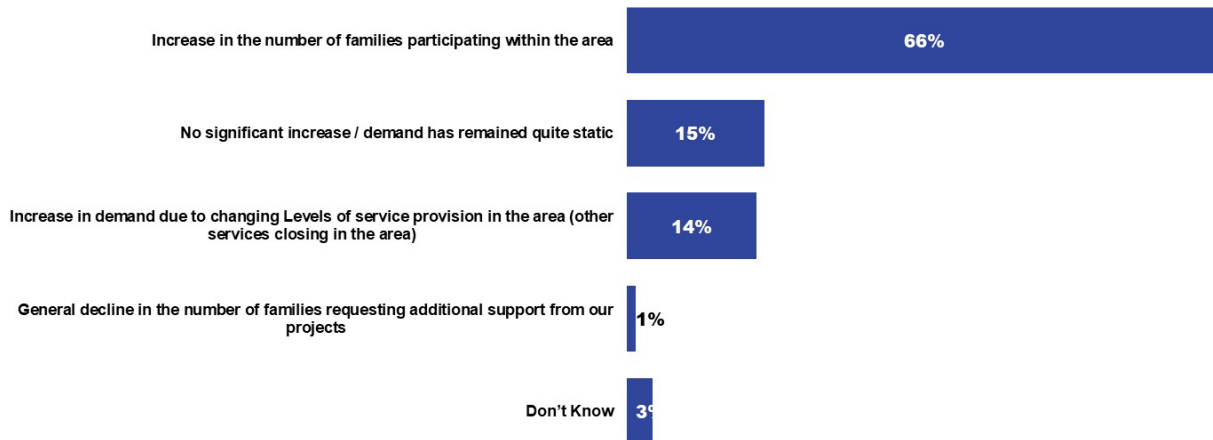
- Surveys of Pathway and Toybox staff.

Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data on the impact of Pathway funded projects suggests that they provide both distinct services, as well as support in complementing other early years services, in a sector under significant stress and experiencing increase in needs and demands. Almost two-thirds (62%) of Pathway projects are in a Sure Start catchment area (30% not in a Sure Start catchment area and 9% 'Don't know'). Of these projects, the majority (86%) think that their project is meeting an unmet need that is currently not provided for by Sure Start. Across Pathway funded projects, respondents described a context of increased need and demand for services, with needs being multifaceted and including increased children presenting with special educational needs and increases in numbers of children from newcomer families.

A review of DE programme guidance documents and interviews with key stakeholders highlighted that applicants to the Pathway Fund, who are located in Sure Start areas, have to provide evidence as to why their project is required in addition to Sure Start services and evidence of liaising with Sure Start. Therefore, procedures are in place within the Pathway Fund to minimise any potential duplication with Sure Start activities. Feedback from interviews and surveys of staff from Sure Start and Pathway funded projects also highlights that in many areas the early years sector is closely knit, frequently collaborating and liaising with each other to deliver services and develop new projects. Evidence from this review also suggests that Pathway funded projects tend to support a slightly older cohort of children than Sure Start projects, further demonstrating the distinct contribution of the project.

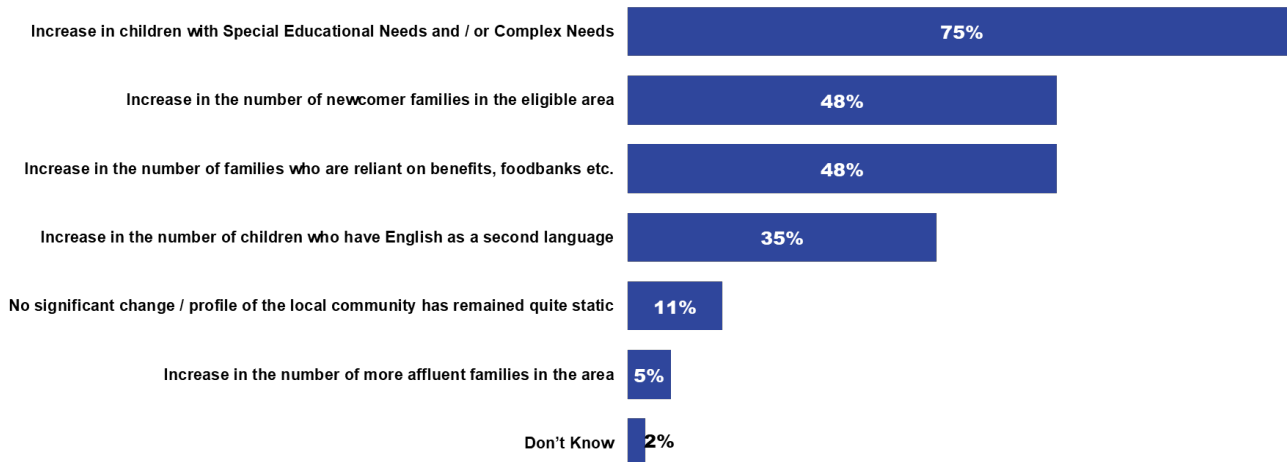
Toybox provides a distinct and additional service as it is directly targeted towards Traveller and Roma communities. These communities have specific needs, are socially isolated, and families do not usually attend projects and services that are aimed at the wider community. Traveller and Roma families experience discrimination and frequently feel unwelcome outside of their own community. This has created distrust and a reluctance to attend other types of community-based services. Toybox staff work with Traveller and Roma families and provide them with support in their own home. Often Toybox staff work with these families for months or years before they are able to persuade them to also participate in Sure Start activities. Toybox staff are all aware of the Sure Start services in their area and refer families to Sure Start, demonstrating collaborative and partnership-based working.

**Figure 9.1: Have you noted any changes in need and demand for your project over the last few years? (Pathway)**



Base = 104

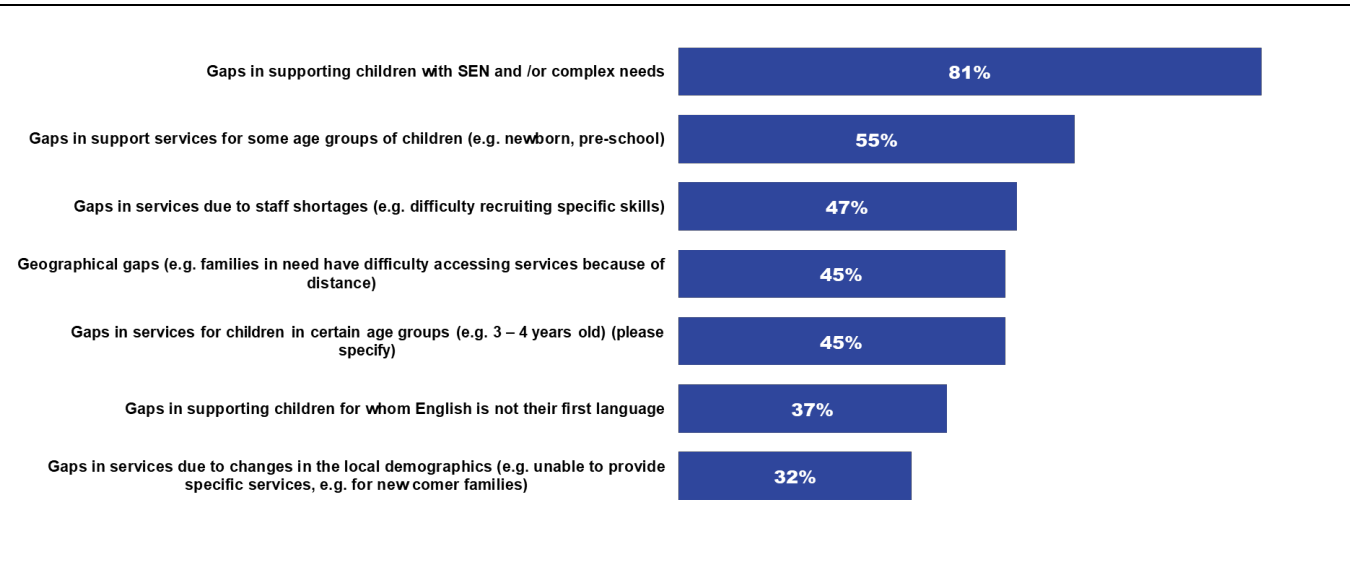
**Figure 9.2: Have you noted any changes in the demographics of the families your project supports over the last few years? (Pathway)**



Base = 104

Despite close partnership working, and a reported lack of duplication, most practitioners from both Sure Start and Pathway funded projects report that there remain gaps in early years services broadly within their areas. Three-fifths (60%) of Pathway funded staff describe being aware of gaps in early years services in the area. These most explicitly relate to supporting children with special educational needs (81%) and gaps in support services for some specific age groups of children (55%).

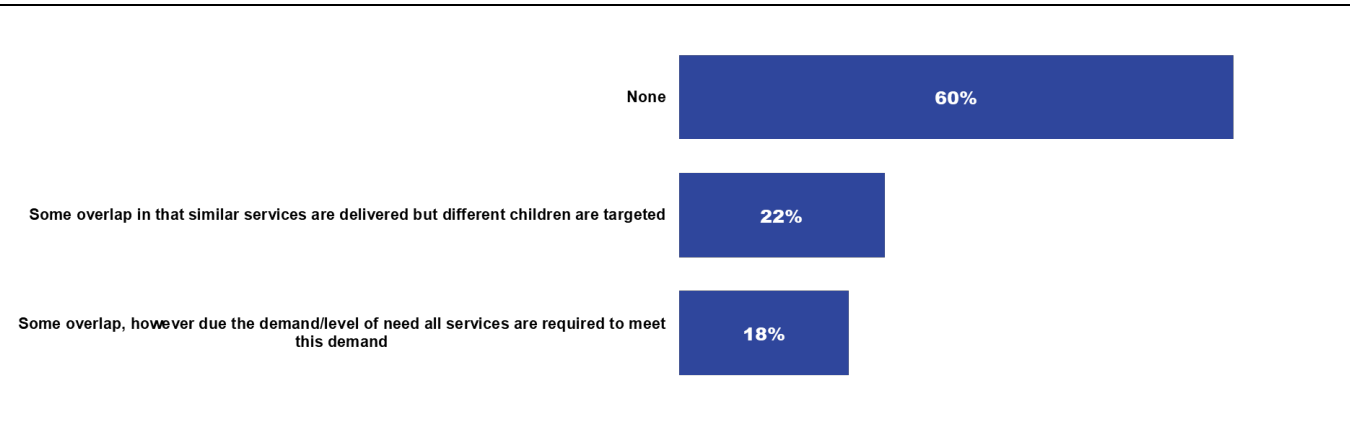
**Figure 9.3: How would you describe gaps in early years services in your area (for children aged 0-4)? (Pathway)**



Base = 62

Given the extent of challenges across the early years sector broadly, most Pathway project managers think there is no duplication between the Pathway Fund and other early years services, including Sure Start and Toybox (60%). Just over a fifth (22%) think there is some overlap in services, but that different children are targeted by the services and just under a fifth (18%) think there is some overlap but that is due to the level of demand in the area and all the services are needed.

**Figure 9.4: To what extent is there overlap/duplication in service provision of early years services in your areas? (Pathway)**



Base = 104

*"I think it works really, really well and the programmes and offers that are there are planned at a departmental level. We all work together and, if you like, swap notes on it. So, I think at the planning level, I think absolutely, they work well and there's very clear distinction between what is Sure Start, what is pre-school, etc., etc., and I think that is clear and I think it works very, very well. That I think not only are they not duplicating or interfering with each other, but that there is a progression from one to the next. I think we have a good mix in Northern Ireland, that we do have targeted interventions for those children that need it most, and then that's combined in with a universal offer, i.e. the pre-school education. I think that works very well."* (Sure Start manager).

As highlighted in Chapter 7, some Sure Start chairs and managers think that, in order to avoid duplication, other programmes like the Pathway Fund may be better focused only on families in need living outside of Sure Start areas. This is, however, a minority view from those working across the sector, with most stakeholders working across both Pathway funded projects and Sure Start emphasising that duplication is limited, that need and demand is increasing, and that programmes tend to work with complementarity and provide distinct services.

*"Obviously, there are needs in areas outside of the Sure Start remit so agencies need to work more effectively together to target that rather than duplicate services in Sure Start areas e.g., Pathway and other funding could be used to help with support in these areas if required, rather than duplication of services in Sure Start areas."* (Sure Start manager).

#### **Table 9.1: Distinct from Sure Start. Case Study: Giggles Early Years in Camlough, Armagh**

The Giggles Early Years Centre runs three Pathway funded projects, including a 2-year-old Eager and Able to learn programme focusing on social, emotional and communication skills; a school readiness programme to support transition from pre-school to Primary 1. Both programmes include evidence-based programmes to support building parental capacity; and a breakfast club for their pre-school setting to provide an option for parents to drop their children off before going to work, thus encouraging parents to remain in either education or employment. There is a strong commitment to ongoing professional development which has a positive impact on the practice in the setting. Their Pathway funded programmes are heavily oversubscribed, with over 100 applications for 12 places in the last year.

The project operates in an area of high, rural deprivation, and is based within a Sure Start area in Camlough, County Armagh. The centre has excellent relationships with the local Sure Start. Every year they meet to plan their respective intakes and to ensure there is no duplication or displacement. The Centre doesn't issue letters of offer until Sure Start has completed their initial round of offers. Francis is a Director in Giggles Early Years. Francis highlights, "It's important for us to work in partnership. We raise awareness of each other's activities and support staff development opportunities. Because of the high demand in the area, the services complement and support each other". Despite both services working effectively together, there remains a high level of unmet demand in the area particularly for free-at-the-point of service and accessible services.

The Pathway funded projects also offer a distinct service than what is offered in Sure Start. "There is a need for both. Sure Start support includes antenatal and post-natal support and access to health professionals such as mid-wives and Health Visitors. Giggles Early Years are able to offer services for

parents who work or those who are in education thus making it attractive to parents. Children who attend our programmes can progress to other programmes such as our Funded pre-school where children have established relationships with the Early Years professionals and the centre has established connections with any professionals involved thus improving continuity. We promote early intervention once the child reaches our setting. We can provide early targeted support which may mean a child can make progress without the need for referrals to Sure Start or other specialist services. This frees up services for those most in need. In addition, other children are benefiting from early identification of specific additional needs which ensure timely support is in place and thus improving outcomes for the child before they start formal education. For the first time ever this year we had a child start our pre-school with a statement of educational needs, and this was because they were part of our Pathway funded 2-year-old Eager and Able to Learn programme”.

Francis noted the importance of the continuation of the Pathway Fund, describing investment in the sector as an enabler to improve outcomes for the children and in tandem building the capacity of parents to support their child’s learning. It also promotes professional development opportunities for early years professionals and contributes towards the sustainability of the setting through providing employment. Funding the sector also recognises the value of early childhood education as a key phase in the child’s life. Francis describes the setting and sector as facing several challenges at present. Early Years professionals are being displaced to both the statutory sector as well as to retail and other sectors. In addition, Francis highlights that the sector is unable to refer children directly to the Education Authority for an assessment by the Educational Psychology Service. Given the rise in children with special educational needs, this represents a barrier to holistic and integrated working, with parents having to refer children to community paediatrics and join a waiting list, thus delaying evidence based early intervention.

Toybox offers distinct support services to Traveller and Roma families. While most Toybox services are offered in areas that are covered by Sure Start, one of the main issues identified by Toybox project staff is that many families who have very high levels of need live outside of Sure Start areas and therefore struggle to access those services.

*“In Derry and Omagh I support traveller sites and they aren’t in the Sure Start area and have discussed with Sure Start and managers and have taken it forward and have had discussions, they would have an extra 5% to families but I find it difficult that these are families that are most in need and they aren’t in a Sure Start postcode area.” (Toybox staff).*

*“Our families are very distributed and not all in Sure Start catchment areas e.g. Fermanagh, some families can’t access the Sure Start programmes because they are just out of the border.” (Toybox staff).*

However, Toybox project workers highlight that even for families who are in Sure Start areas, attendance at Sure Start is variable. In a number of areas, none of the families supported by Toybox are attending Sure Start. In other areas, as many as 50-75% of families supported by Toybox are also attending Sure Start (mainly attending baby activities and some attending the Developmental Programme for 2-3-year-olds). Importantly, for families that are attending Sure Start, all Toybox project staff within this review believe they would not be accessing other services such as Sure Start without the support provided by Toybox. Staff think Toybox offers distinct services from other early years providers because of the specific group they work with, and the need for additional support in areas.

*"I feel that we have the time to go out and support families and build the relationship, not saying Sure Start don't do that but it's having that ongoing support, we are going into the families from when they're born. Nearly 19 years and there are some families I have been with for such a long time, building trust and going into the home on a weekly basis, I don't think Sure Start can provide this up until P1 going into the home. Building relationships with the families, it takes a long time. Because we are working with solely Traveller families, it is pencilling that time in, the families who are hard to reach are the most needed to that service. It's calling back and then they will let you in, it's having the time and going back when they say to go back. It's word of mouth and they do talk about services and who is going into the home and who is not, it's very important." (Toybox Staff).*

### **Table 9.2: Toybox's role in connecting families to Sure Start in Dungannon and Coalisland**

Shirley and Siobhan have worked with Toybox in the Dungannon area for over ten years. Shirley reflects that "when the project first started, people said it would never work and that we'd never get support from families". Siobhan works with Sure Start across Dungannon and Coalisland and has seen a significant increase in the numbers of Traveller families participating in Sure Start over the past few years. "I think the thing about the Traveller community which is unique is the time it takes to develop trust and good foundational relationship. Relationships are key with all families, but particularly with the traveller community". Toybox delivers a tailored approach to service delivery meeting families at their point of need. This engagement embeds a trusting, respectful relationship and provides a foundation for other services such as Sure Start to work effectively with families.

Toybox signposts children from the Traveller community into a range of different Sure Start services and groups, but it has taken a long time for this to be achieved. Shirley discusses the importance of the process of building relationships, investing significant time in them, and encouraging conversations on education. She mentions a number of changes that have been supported by Toybox, including men from the Traveller community becoming more engaged in conversations about the children's conversation. "There's a lot of work that goes on behind all these things. You need to speak to the grandparents, speak to the parents. You have those conversations, and sometimes you might need to have them more than once".

Shirley describes that the success of Toybox comes from its collaborative approach, engaging Traveller men in their children's education, and involving parents and carers in the project. Toybox is a culturally targeted approach to families with parental and child involvement at the heart of this work. Increasingly, men are visible at Sure Start and making enquiries about Sure Start programmes such as the Developmental Programme for 2-3-year-olds. Given that traveller families often have had poor experiences of accessing services and with statutory services, developing relationships and trust is essential in encouraging engagement in universal programmes such as Sure Start. "And to breakdown those barriers that work has to start early, it has to start years before a child is going to enrol in any service".

Siobhan highlights that the vast majority of families from a traveller background who come to her Sure Start services are supported by Toybox. Without Toybox, both Siobhan and Shirley worry that children would not access important early years support. Siobhan also highlights the wider impacts that may occur, for example a loss of integration and increased segregation between traveller families and other communities in the Dungannon and Coalisland areas. Siobhan says, "I would hate to think it wouldn't



continue. I'd be fearful that engagement would be reduced in our services. In the last few years travellers have started to integrate. But it's taken so much work, and they still need that support to come through our doors. That's my big fear, that we'd go backwards. The Toybox worker supports the family, their application, and advocates on their behalf. They still need more support than other families in the area".

Shirley has similar concerns. "If Toybox ended, who would support them? We have been with them through everything. Throughout Covid we still successfully worked with families, and we see positive changes all the time. Without Toybox there would be a significant gap in service to families who are still most in need."

Building up relationships with hard-to-reach groups, developing trust that allows signposting into other services, providing language services and translation for specific groups (e.g., Roma communities), and working with children on a one-to-one basis are all described as distinct services and areas of work provided by Toybox. In this way Toybox provides clear additionality, in that it is providing services to children who are largely outside of all other services. Few other specific services exist for Traveller children and families within the early years space.<sup>54</sup>

*"Getting interpreters on board before the pandemic, had that in place before Covid hit and had that prepared. Nobody was working with Roma communities, during the pandemic Toybox was the main project for Roma messages. Calling Roma families, videos, WhatsApp's, IT systems, continuing the relationship with the families and making sure they are okay. The relationship they could talk and listen to the families, provide PPE to the families which was vital."* (Toybox Staff).

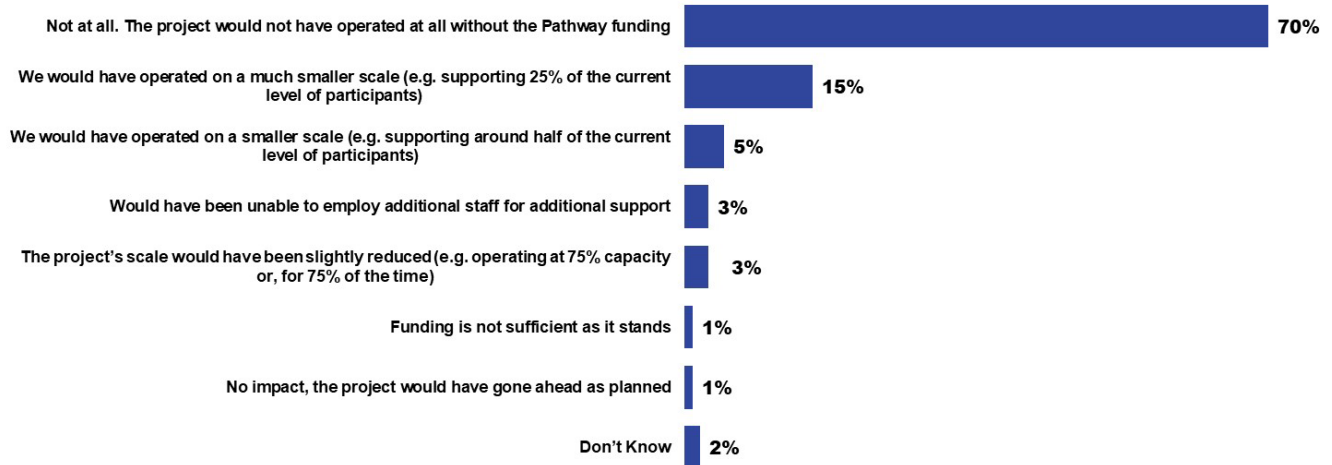
## Counterfactual Analysis

Staff from Pathway funded projects noted that the continuation of their projects is entirely dependent on being able to continue to access the Fund. Seven in ten (70%) report that the project would not have been able to operate without the funding, and a further 15% think it would only be able to continue to offer services on a much smaller scale.

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<sup>54</sup> Other services that exist include Barnardo's Traveller's Early Years Service (TEYS) <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/travellers-early-years-service>.

**Figure 9.5: To what extent would you have been able to deliver your project without the Pathway funding?**



Base = 104

Funding received through Pathway is most vital for both staff recruitment and retention, which is particularly relevant given that one of the targeted Pathway Fund outcomes is for “an enhanced, more sustainable Early Years sector”. Almost two-thirds (64%) think that Pathway funding contributed “a great deal” to workforce recruitment, and 70% think it contributed “a great deal” to workforce retention. Pathway funded project managers, similarly to Sure Start, think that there is a workforce “crisis” in which retaining staff with secure, well-paid work is increasingly challenging. Pathway funding goes some way to supporting projects in providing salaries, or partial cover for salaries.

**Table 9.3: A Pathway Fund Counterfactual. Case Study: Rainbow Child and Family Centre. Galliagh, Derry/Londonderry**

The Rainbow Child and Family Centre, in Galliagh, Derry/Londonderry, is based inside the top 10% of Northern Ireland’s most deprived areas. There are a range of challenges experienced in the area, including increased special needs as well as an increase in social, health, and mental health issues within families.

The Rainbow Child and Family Centre deliver a range of different early years services as well as youth and family programmes. This includes a 3-year-old programme and a creche funded under the Pathway Fund. In 2021/22, they received £30,000 to deliver a 3-year-old programme and a crèche for 66 children (33 places). More than 50% of the children living in the area are living in poverty (CPAG 2012). Key findings associated with the social and economic context in the area indicate a high percentage of unemployment, low self-esteem, low educational attainment, lack of suitable facilities for children who make up the highest percentage of the population and a lack of support for disadvantaged groups.

“This fund is so important to my organisation. Even with just a small amount it contributes to employing eight members of staff. It is so important to everything we do. If it covers 10 hours, then I can seek other funding to give them more hours to also work on other programmes. This means I get more

experienced staff to stay in employment at Rainbow which improves all our services. The demand for the services is well documented and we have been running these services consistently for the past eight years with full numbers and long waiting lists each year. Without this funding these services would close and children in this area would not meet their developmental miles, will repeat the cycle of disadvantage and will be more likely to experience more Adverse Childhood experiences which research states will cost more money long term to fix these issues rather than early intervention to prevent them. Without Pathway funding we simply couldn't do what we do. Pathway gives us flexibility and scope to expand services”.

Jacki is the manager at the Rainbow Child and Family Centre. She highlighted the stretched nature of Early Years services in the area. Both Sure Start programmes and the Rainbow Child and Family Centre are under significant burden to meet demand. Jackie highlights that in their Pathway funded projects they recently received 58 applications for 22 places, while their creche received 42 applications for 11 places. While the work of the Centre complements Sure Start programmes, and in some cases offers additional programmes to parents and young people, there remains huge unmet demand in the area for early years services. Jackie describes their current programmes as “inundated”.

Jacki also highlighted a number of problems around the funding and administration of Pathway funding, many of which cause challenges in operating collaboratively and in a complementary manner with other early years services. While the Rainbow Child and Family Centre works effectively with a number of organisations in the area, including Sure Start, other programmes applying for funding are sometimes seen as competition. Jacki highlights that the “Funding gets tighter and tighter. We are pitted against each other. And then we're told to collaborate”.

The short-term nature of funding, allocated on an annual basis, is described as creating insecurity, and contributes to challenges in retaining staff on low-paid fixed term contracts. This creates significant additional burden and stress. “My staff are 100% burning out. The last three years has been horrible on them”. Application and reporting processes also take significant time that could otherwise be used in more targeted ways, for example in programme delivery or in strategic development.

Within the Toybox Project, most staff are of the view that services would be reduced if funding were to cease, and this would likely have a negative impact on families they work with. One respondent believes their Toybox service would no longer continue without funding from DE, with other project workers highlighting the potential for losing gains and relationships that have been developed with families.

Both the Pathway Fund and Toybox are considered to offer distinct and important services and provide both complementarity and additionality. Duplication between the Pathway Fund and Toybox with other services is largely limited, with many stakeholders and project workers describing a context in which the sector is under significant pressure to meet increasing demands across different programmes.

# 10 Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The findings from this review are synthesised in this section, addressing the three objectives of this review. These are to examine the:

- Appropriateness and effectiveness of the Sure Start policy and administration roles;
- Optimum means to target Sure Start resources to children facing greatest disadvantage; and
- Respective contribution of the Pathway Fund and Toybox Project towards achievement of PfG and DE goals and objectives.

**Table 10.1: Summary Table**

Objective	Recommendation
<p><b>Examination of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Sure Start policy and administration roles</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sure Start policy and administration structures are largely effective and Sure Start should remain a DE programme.</li> <li>2. Bureaucratic process should be simplified, possibly by using mechanisms such as Technical Transfers.</li> <li>3. Given the significant health outcomes from Sure Start and in line with the Children's Service Co-operation Act DoH should consider how they could make further contributions to Sure Start.</li> <li>4. DoH should proactively manage available funding across all projects to avoid underspend. The process currently in place allows re-profiling of expenditure within each individual Sure Start project, however there is no process to allow re-profiling across the 38 projects.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Examination of the optimum means to target Sure Start resources to children facing greatest disadvantage.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. NIMDM remains the most appropriate mechanism to target Sure Start.</li> <li>2. There is a strong justification for the recent expansion of Sure Start. The existing 153 areas should be retained.</li> <li>3. The 22 SOAs covered by temporary expansion of Sure Start should be included on a permanent basis.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. A common-sense approach to targeting should be implemented to ensure areas are not 'split' and excluded (e.g., only half of one street being included in the Sure Start catchment).</li> <li>5. Flexible funding for each Sure Start of 5% on top of the existing budget should be used on a case-by-case basis to extend Sure Start provision to families requiring support.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Examination of the respective contribution of the Pathway Fund and Toybox Project towards achievement of PfG and DE goals and objectives.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Both the Pathway Fund and Toybox should continue to be supported, as each serves different purposes and addresses specific needs, and each programme complements Sure Start.</li> </ol>

### **Objective 1: The appropriateness and effectiveness of the Sure Start policy and administration roles**

It is the recommendation from this review that Sure Start remains a DE driven programme with policy responsibility and does not revert to DoH. However, it was also highlighted that many of the short- and medium-term impacts of Sure Start relate to the health and social care sector, with this in mind, and in line with the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland), 2015, the DoH should consider how they could make further contributions to Sure Start.

Most strategic stakeholders and practitioners involved in the management of Sure Start think the current structures of administration and oversight of the programme are appropriate and do not advocate for major changes to the fundamental structures. Whilst the aims and objectives of Sure Start are closely aligned to DE, they are also consistent with the DoH policies and objectives. Feedback from key stakeholders and previous reviews also highlight that there are a number of advantages with the programme being closely aligned to health and social care structures and as such it is appropriate that operational responsibility of Sure Start stays within DoH. However, a number of amendments are described as necessary to reduce bureaucratic burdens, to improve streamlining, and to ensure efficient use of resources.

Given the transfer of roles from HSCB into SPPG, it is an opportune time to review roles and responsibilities of the SPPG administration staff who support the Sure Start projects to ensure that their roles continue to align with the needs of Sure Start projects and the new structures within DoH. In order to generate more accountability for Sure Start within DoH, and to encourage a more pro-active approach to management, DE and DoH should consider amending the current funding arrangements, for example a Technical Transfer of funding would mean that the DE still provide the funding but would give DoH greater accountability and freedom to develop the programme further. Greater clarity on roles, reporting structures, and updating departmental documentation such as Memoranda of Understanding would likely improve clarity in roles between different partners involved in the oversight and administration of Sure Start.

## **Objective 2: The optimum means to target Sure Start resources to children facing greatest disadvantage**

There is broad agreement with the principles of Sure Start targeting, and that NIMDM remains the most appropriate mechanism for targeting Sure Start resources. Across both strategic stakeholders and Sure Start managers, there is high levels of agreement with continuing to target based on measures such as NIMDM, to target children most at risk of not meeting their development goals, and agreement with the principles of progressive universalism.

Issues associated with identifying and targeting children who are most at risk of not meeting their potential have been highlighted by the review of the measures that are currently used. Feedback from key stakeholders from across sector also highlights that the geographical approach to targeting will inevitably exclude some children who are in need of additional support. A Fair Start has recommended a NI wide targeted developmental programme for all 2-year-olds at risk of poor educational outcomes, further suggesting that DE should consider options for providing wider access to Sure Start services (including the Developmental Programme for 2-3-year-olds). For example, consideration should be given to accepting referrals to Sure Start services from outside of Sure Start areas using approaches and principles as described within this report. Options for increasing access to services could include where a relevant professional, such as a Health Visitor or, staff from a Child Development Clinic have identified a specific need that could be supported by Sure Start services, or more flexible approaches taking a common-sense approach to families living on the borders of existing Sure Start areas.

A review of Sure Start coverage highlighted that there are 22 SOAs within the top 25% of relative multiple deprivation that are not, permanently covered by Sure Start. Approximately 2,438 children live in these areas. DE has already identified these 22 areas and they are included on temporary basis in the Sure Start programme. A wide range of operational and policy stakeholders noted that there is a strong justification for retaining these areas in future service delivery, not least to ensure that these areas are not destabilised through the divestment of funding and maximise the reach of Sure Start and therefore ensure that children and families who require additional support are not unintentionally excluded because of geographical boundaries. DE should consider how best to expand access to the service on a permanent basis. Greater flexibility to target children outside these areas, and increased use of satellite services should be considered especially for children living in areas not covered by Sure Start and that do not border an area covered by Sure Start.

A full and detailed cost benefit analysis is required to understand more accurately the cost of expanding Sure Start further. This should take account of the costs associated with the different delivery methods (e.g., Trust or, voluntary and community sector lead), as well as any capital costs that may be required. Population projections have suggested that the total number of 0-3-year-olds is set to decline over the next three years, therefore, the feasibility and associated costs of delivery should be considered across each area.

## **Objective 3: The respective contribution of the Pathway Fund and Toybox Project towards achievement of PfG and DE goals and objectives. Also, to determine the complementarity and additionality of the Pathway Fund and Toybox to existing Sure Start provision.**

Analysis from this review suggests that Pathway funded projects and the Toybox Project offer complementarity and additionality within the services they deliver as they are targeted towards distinctly different groups (i.e. children who are at risk of under-achievement and Traveller and Roma children). Ipsos considers that the Pathway Fund and the Toybox Project should continue to be funded by DE.

Specific services offered by Pathway funded projects include support for children with complex needs, support for children at risk of harm, support for children living in rural areas, and promotion of community integration. This frees up other services, such as Sure Start, removing some of the burden, and supporting parents who have been unable to secure a place in Sure Start.

As such, it is the recommendation from this review that the Pathway Fund continues to be funded, in both Sure Start areas and areas outside not covered by Sure Start. Given the lack of access to Sure Start in many areas, the Pathway Funds offers one mechanism to provide early years services. Pathway funded projects could be a venue for provision of satellite Sure Start services, however this would need further research. Pathway funding also provides important resources across sectors such as the community and voluntary sector and is used to support staff retention who fulfil many roles beyond Pathway funded projects. Removing support would likely have a wide negative impact on the sector.

Toybox offers distinct services to Traveller and Roma families who otherwise receive no targeted support and encourages families to participate in other early years programmes such as Sure Start. Pathway funded project managers, Toybox staff, and Sure Start managers described a context of collaboration and partnership-working across the sector, in which organisations plan together to reduce duplication, and work together to support appropriate referral and service delivery for children.

Given the increased need and demand experienced across the early years sector, these services are important in providing holistic and wide-ranging support to children and families. Challenges exist, however, in terms of workforce recruitment and retention, which are compounded by the short-term and insecure nature of current funding arrangements.

# 11 Appendix

## 11.1 Sure Start Survey

The Sure Start survey has been administered to all Sure Start chairs or managers. The following questions were included within the survey:

Review of DE targeted Early Year Interventions in Northern Ireland.

The Department of Education have appointed Ipsos UK, along with academic partners, to undertake an independent review of their targeted Early Years Interventions. The key objectives of this review are to assess effectiveness of oversight structures, and the complementarity and additionality of the programmes in delivering an effective service to children who most need the support.

All your response will be treated with confidentiality. In line with data protection laws and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, Ipsos will not link your name or personal information with any of the information you give to us. Due to your position in relation to Early Years services, there is the possibility that your identity could be apparent to Department of Education staff or others. However, your name and position will not be reported in any outputs, and we will endeavour to ensure all outputs from the research remain anonymous as possible. Further information on how your data is handled is available in the privacy notice that you would have received when inviting you to participate in this survey.

If you have any questions regarding the survey, please get in touch as INSERT MAILBOX ADDRESS

What Sure Start project do you work with?

<b>Q1a. What is your role within your Sure Start?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Project Lead	1
Sure Start Manager or Coordinator	2
Other (please specify _____)	3
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q1b. Approximately how many eligible children are there in your Sure Start catchment area (in the year 2021/22)?</b>	
<b>WRITE IN NUMBER</b>	
Don't know	XX

<b>Q1c. How many children were registered with your Sure Start project (in the year 2021/22)?</b>	
<b>WRITE IN NUMBER</b>	
Don't know	XX

<b>Q1d. How many children attend/participate in your Sure Start activities/services (in the year 2021/22)?</b>	
<b>WRITE IN NUMBER</b>	
Don't know	XX



<b>Q2a. Do you provide Sure Start activities/services for any children who do not live in your area?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3
Prefer not to say	4

**Ask If Code 1 at Q2a.**

<b>Q2b. Approximately how many children do you support from outside your area?</b>	
<b>WRITE IN NUMBER</b>	
Don't know	3
Prefer not to say	4

**Ask If Code 1 at Q2a.**

<b>Q2c. Which of the following are the most common reasons for accepting children from outside of your area</b>	
<b>Multi-code</b>	
Child is from very close proximity	1
Child / family has complex needs that can not be met by other providers	2
Child is from rural area and this is the closest source of support	3
Your project has sufficient resources to support additional children	4
Other (write in)	5
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q3a. Have you noted an increase in need for your Sure Start services over the last few years?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
No significant increase / demand has remained quite static (exclusive)	1
Increase in the number of families participating within the eligible area	2
Increase in the number of families requesting Sure Start services from outside the area	3
Increase in the number of families requesting Sure Start services from within and outside the area	4
Increase in the demand for the Developmental Programme for 2–3-year olds (from parents)	5
Increase in the demand for the Developmental Programme for 2–3-year olds (from professionals, e.g. GP or Sure Start SLT)	6
General decline in the number of families requesting Sure Start services (exclusive)	7
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q3b. Have you noted any changes in the demographics of the families in your Sure Start area over the last few years?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
No significant change / profile of the local community has remained quite static (exclusive)	1
Increase in the number of newcomer families in the eligible area	2
Increase in the number of families who are reliant on benefits, foodbanks etc.	3
Increase in the number of more affluent families in the area	4

An increase in families from minority communities who may be 'hard to reach' (e.g. Traveller families)	
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q3c. Is the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) the most appropriate method of targeting Sure Start provision?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Yes, effective on its own	1
Yes, effective if used in combination with other measures	2
No	3
Don't know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**ASK if Codes 2 or 3 at Q3c**

<b>Q3d. What other measures could be used for targeting Sure Start provision?</b>	
<b>Open</b>	
	1
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q3e. Due to legacy arrangements (before the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) was in place) some current Sure Starts provision is not in top 25% most disadvantaged areas. Do you think that areas not in the top 25% should remain in Sure Start?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3
Prefer not to say	4

**ASK for Codes 1 or 2 at 3e.**

<b>Q3f. Please provide reasons for your answer.</b>	
<b>Open</b>	
	1
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q4a. Are you aware of gaps in early years services generally in your area (for children aged 0-4)?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	xx
Prefer not to say	xx

**If yes:**

<b>Q4b. How would you describe these gaps?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
Geographical gaps (e.g. families in neighbouring areas in need)	1
Gaps in services due to changes in the local demographics (e.g. unable to provide specific services, e.g. for newcomer families)	2
Gaps in services due to staff shortages/capacity (e.g. difficulty recruiting specific skills)	3
Gaps in support services after Sure Start and before school	4
Gaps in supporting children for whom English is not their first language	5
Gaps in supporting children with SEN	6
Gaps in services for children in certain age groups (e.g. 3 – 4 years old) (please specify for ages groups)	7
Other (please state)	8
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q5a. Do you work with any partners to deliver Sure Start services?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**Ask If Code 1 at Q5a**

<b>Q5b. If so, what partners do you typically work with?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
Local Health and Social Care Trust (e.g. SLTs, OTs, Midwives etc.)	1
Public Health Agency (e.g. Health promotion, dieticians etc.)	2
Local Council	3
Local Faith / Church Groups	4
Local Community Groups	5
Action for Children	6
Barnardo's	7
Family Support Hubs	8
La Leche League	9
Pathway funded services	10
Other (please state)	11
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**Ask if Code 1 at 5a**

<b>Q5c. Do you, experience any benefits when working co-operatively with other partners?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**If Code 1 at Q5c**

<b>Q5d. If so, what are some of the benefits you experience from working co-operatively with other partners?</b>

<b>Multi code</b>	
Reduced burden and demand on services	1
Sharing of expertise and knowledge	2
Strategic planning and joined up approaches to common problems	3
Support to staff	4
Other (please state)	5
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**If Code 1 at Q5c**

<b>Q5e. To what extent would you have been able to deliver your Sure Start services without this partnership working?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Most of the core activities would continue	1
Some of the core activities would continue	2
Only a small amount of core activities would continue	3
None of the core activities would continue	4
Other (please state)	5
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q5f. To what extent is there overlap/duplication in service provision of early years services in your areas?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
No overlap or duplication of early years services	1
Some overlap in that similar services are delivered but different children are targeted	2
Some overlap, however due the demand/level of need all services are required to meet this demand	3
A large amount of overlap and duplication in services provision of early years in my area	4
Other (please state)	5
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**ASK IF CODES 2-5 AT Q5f ONLY**

<b>Q5g. Does this duplication/overlap create challenges for you in the administration of Sure Start Services?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
No major challenges (exclusive)	1
Staffing challenges (competing with other services for staff)	2
Funding challenges	3
Difficulty in filling places on programmes	4
Other (please state)	5
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**ASK IF CODES 1 (YES) AT Q5a ONLY'**

<b>Q5h. Do you, experience any challenges when working co-operatively with other partners?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Yes	1
No	2

Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**Ask if Code 1 at Q5h**

<b>Q5i. If so, what type of challenges have you experienced?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
Complicated reporting arrangements across multiple agencies	1
Duplication of administration	2
Duplication of financial reporting	3
Financial reporting across different systems	4
Variations in reporting outcomes and impacts across multiple agencies	5
Other (please state)	6

<b>Q6a. As you know Sure Start is funded and overseen by the Department of Education and administrated by the Department of Health - does this structure create an additional administrative burden on your Sure Start project?</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't Know	98

**If yes at Q6a**

<b>Q6b. If so, approximately how many additional hours per week are spent on administrative requirements caused by these challenges ?</b>	
1 – 2 hours	1
3-4 hours	2
5+ hours	3
Don't Know	98

<b>Q6c. Please provide some detail on how, if at all, the Department of Education/Department for Health structure impacts upon your work and administrative within Sure Start?</b>	
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**ASK IF CODE 1 (YES) at Q6a ONLY**

<b>Q6d. Can you think of ways in which this administrative burden be reduced whilst maintaining robust impact reports?</b>	
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q6e. Can you list any ways in which the relationship between the Department of Education and the Department of Health could be improved from the perspective of your Sure Start?</b>	
<b>(open)</b>	
Open response	

None	
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q7. What challenges have you experienced in delivering Sure Start Services?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
Capacity challenges (meeting demand in terms of numbers)	1
Capacity challenges (meeting demand in terms of children's needs)	2
Financial challenges	3
Workforce challenges (recruitment)	4
Workforce challenges (retention)	5
No major challenges ( <b>exclusive</b> )	6
Other (please state)	7
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q8. Are you aware of any examples of good practice in relation to inter-agency co-operation in relation to the delivery of targeting interventions for early years services?</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't Know	98
If yes, please state.	

## 11.2 The Pathway Fund Survey

Review of DE targeted Early Year Interventions in Northern Ireland.

The Department of Education have appointed Ipsos UK, along with academic partners, to undertake an independent review of their targeted Early Years Interventions. The key objectives of this review are to assess effectiveness of oversight structures, and the complementarity and additionality of the programmes in delivering an effective service to children who most need the support.

All your responses will be treated with confidentiality. In line with data protection laws and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, Ipsos will not link your name or personal information with any of the information you give to us. Due to your position in relation to Early Years services, there is the possibility that your identity could be apparent to Department of Education staff or others. However, your name and position will not be reported in any outputs, and we will endeavour to ensure all outputs from the research remain anonymous as possible. Further information on how your data is handled is available in the privacy notice that you would have received when inviting you to participate in this survey.

If you have any questions regarding the survey, please get in touch as [earlyyears.pathway@ipsosresearch.com](mailto:earlyyears.pathway@ipsosresearch.com)

<b>Q1a. What is the name of (i) your setting (ii) the project in receipt of Department of Education (DE), Pathway funding.</b>	
<b>WRITE IN</b>	

<b>Q1b. In which postcode/s is your project delivered?</b>	
<b>WRITE IN</b>	1

<b>Q1c. What is your role within your project?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Leader	1
Manager	2
Committee Member (e.g. Chair or, Treasurer)	3
Other (please specify _____)	4
Prefer not to say	99

<b>Q1d. Approximately how many children attend your project/receive your services (in the year 2021/22)?</b>	
<b>WRITE IN NUMBER</b>	
Don't know	98

<b>Q1e. Approximately how many of these children supported by funding from the Pathway Fund?</b>	
<b>WRITE IN NUMBER</b>	
Don't know	98

<b>Q1f. What age group of children does your Department of Education (DE) funded project support?</b>	
<b>Multicode</b>	

<b>0-1</b>	1
<b>1-2</b>	2
<b>2-3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3-4</b>	4
Don't know	98

<b>Q1g. In what year(s) has your Pathway funded project received funding?</b>	
<b>Multicode</b>	
2016/17	1
2017/18	2
2018/19	3
2019/20	4
2020/21	5
2021/22	6
Don't know	98

<b>Q1h. Which sector best describes your organization?</b>	
Private sector	1
Community voluntary sector	2
Other sector (write in)	3
Don't know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**ASK ALL**

<b>Q2a. Is your project in a Sure Start catchment area?</b>	
<b>Yes</b>	1
<b>No</b>	2
Don't know	98

**IF YES AT 2a.**

<b>Q2b. Do any of the children who participate in your project also currently participate regularly in Sure Start activities? If so approximately how many children.</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
None	1
Less than 25%	2
Between 25 – 50%	3
Between 50 – 75%	4
Between 75 -99%	5
100%	6
Don't know	98

**If Codes 2-6 in Q2b**



<b>Q2c. Are you aware of the type of Sure Start services that the children were engaged in?</b>	
Stay and Play activities	1
Baby activities (e.g. baby yoga, baby massage etc.)	2
Nurturing Programmes	3
Child development programmes	4
Speech, Language and Communications Programmes / services	5
Developmental Programme for 2-3 yr olds	6
Other (write in)	7
Don't know	98

**IF YES AT 2a.**

<b>Q2d. Do you feel your project is meeting an unmet need, not currently provided for by Sure Start?</b>	
<b>Yes</b>	1
<b>No</b>	2
Don't know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**IF YES AT 2d.**

<b>Q2e. In what ways is your project meeting an unmet need, not currently provided by Sure Start?</b>	
<b>WRITE IN</b>	1

<b>Q3a. Have you noted any changes in need and demand for your project over the last few years?</b>	
<b>Single code only</b>	
No significant increase / demand has remained quite static	1
Increase in the number of families participating within the area	2
General decline in the number of families requesting additional support from our projects	3
Decrease in demand due to changing levels of service provision in the area (new services opening in the area)	4
Increase in demand due to changing Levels of service provision in the area (other services closing in the area)	5
Don't Know	98

<b>Q3b. Have you noted any changes in the demographics of the families your project supports over the last few years?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
No significant change / profile of the local community has remained quite static (exclusive)	1
Increase in the number of newcomer families in the eligible area	2
Increase in the number of children who have English as a second language	3

Increase in the number of families who are reliant on benefits, foodbanks etc.	4
Increase in the number of more affluent families in the area	5
Increase in children with Special Educational Needs and / or Complex Needs	6
Other (write in)	7
Don't Know	98

<b>Q4a. Are you aware of gaps in early years services your area (for children aged—0- 4)?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	98

**If yes at Q4a:**

<b>Q4b. How would you describe these gaps?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
Geographical gaps (e.g. families in need have difficulty accessing services because of distance)	1
Gaps in services due to changes in the local demographics (e.g. unable to provide specific services, e.g. for new comer families)	2
Gaps in services due to staff shortages (e.g. difficulty recruiting specific skills)	3
Gaps in support services for some age groups of children (e.g. newborn, pre-school)	4
Gaps in supporting children for whom English is not their first language	5
Gaps in services for children in certain age groups (e.g. 3 – 4 years old) (please specify	6
Gaps in supporting children with SEN and /or complex needs	7
Other (please state)	8
Don't Know	98

<b>Q5. What challenges have you experienced in delivering your project?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
Capacity challenges (meeting demand in terms of numbers of children who require support)	1
Capacity challenges (meeting demand in terms of children's needs)	2
Capacity challenges (meeting special education needs of children)	3
Financial challenges	4
Workforce challenges (recruitment)	5
Workforce challenges (retention)	6
No major challenges	7
Other (please state)	8
Don't Know	98

**ASK ALL**

<b>Q6ac. Do you engage with any other stakeholders to deliver or support your Pathway funded project?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**If Yes at Q6a**

<b>Q6b. If so, which stakeholders do you typically engage with?</b>
---

<b>Multi code</b>	
Local Health and Social Care Trust (e.g. SLTs, OTs, Health Visitors, etc.)	1
Local Health and Social Care Trust Early Years Team	
Public Health Agency (e.g. Health promotion, dieticians etc.)	2
Local Council	3
Local Faith / Church Groups	4
Local Community Groups	5
Action for Children	6
Barnardo's	7
Family Support Hubs	8
La Leche League	9
Sure Start Programmes	10
Other Pathway funded projects	11
Specialist Community & Voluntary Sector Groups (e.g. Autism NI, RNID, Guide Dogs etc.)	12
Other (please state)	13
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**If yes at Q6a**

<b>Q6c. Do you experience any challenges when co-operating with other groups or, agencies?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**If yes at 6c**

<b>Q6d. If so, what type of challenges have you experienced?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
Complicated reporting arrangements across multiple agencies	1
Duplication of administration	2
Duplication of financial reporting	3
Financial reporting across different systems	4
Variations in reporting outcomes and impacts across multiple agencies	5
Challenges in accessing/contacting these stakeholders / other agencies	6
Other (please state)	7

**ASK ALL**

<b>Q6e. Are there any barriers to working with other partners, stakeholders or external agencies?</b>	
<b>WRITE IN</b>	
Yes (write in)	1
No	2
Don't know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**If yes at Q6a**

<b>Q6f. What are some of the benefits, if any, you experience from working co-operatively with other stakeholders/partners?</b>	
<b>Multicode</b>	
Reduced burden and demand on services	1
Sharing of expertise and knowledge	2

Strategic planning and joined up approaches to common problems	3
Support to staff	4
A better service to families	5
Other (write in)	6
None	7
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**ASK ALL**

<b>Q7. To what extent would you have been able to deliver your project without this partnership working?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
Most / all of the core activities would continue	1
Some of the core activities would continue	2
Only a small amount of core activities would continue	3
Specialist or enhanced services for children who are most in need would be more difficult to deliver	4
Medical /educational inputs for children with complex needs would be more difficult to deliver	5
None of the core activities would continue	6
Other (please state)	7
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**ASK all**

<b>Q8. To what extent is there overlap/duplication in service provision of early years services in your areas?</b>	
<b>Multi code</b>	
None (exclusive)	1
Some overlap in that similar services are delivered but different children are targeted	2
Some overlap, however due the demand/level of need all services are required to meet this demand	3
A large amount of overlap and duplication in services provision of early years in my area	4
Other (please state)	8
Don't Know	98
Prefer not to say	99

**ASK ALL**

<b>Q9. To what extent would you have been able to deliver your project without the Pathway funding?</b>	
<b>Single code</b>	
Not at all. The project would not have operated at all without the Pathway funding	1
We would have operated on a much smaller scale (e.g. supporting 25% of the current level of participants or, providing the service at 25% of the time)	2
We would have operated on a smaller scale (e.g. supporting around half of the current level of participants)	3
The project's scale would have been slightly reduced (e.g. operating at 75% capacity or, for 75% of the time)	4
No impact, the project would have gone ahead as planned	6
Other (please state)	7

Don't Know	98
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<b>Q10. What do you regard as the project's greatest impact?</b>	
WRITE IN	

**ASK ALL**

<b>Q11a. To what extent, if at all, does the funding you receive as part of this project contribute to workforce recruitment?</b>	
A great deal	1
A fair amount	2
Not very much	3
None at all	4
Don't know	5

**ASK ALL**

<b>Q11b. To what extent, if at all, does the funding you receive as part of this project contribute retention of staff?</b>	
A great deal	1
A fair amount	2
Not very much	3
None at all	4
Don't know	5

<b>Q12. are there any ways in which you think your project could be improved?</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't Know	98
If yes, please state.	

<b>Q13. Can you identify any lessons learnt from your Pathway funded project that may be useful for other projects?</b> <b>Multicode</b>	
Work more closely with other service providers in my area	1
Deliver services more independently	2
Have a more targeted approach to the children who participate in the project	3

Have a more open / inclusive approach to participation in the project	4
Offer services to fewer children / families	
Offer services to more children / families	
Other, please state	
None at all	5
Don't know	5

<b>Q14. Are there any ways in which you think the Pathway funding could be improved?</b>	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't Know	98
If yes, please state.	

**Thank you for your time, and providing your feedback for this important review. Should you have any questions about the review, please contact [earlyyears.pathway@ipsosresearch.com](mailto:earlyyears.pathway@ipsosresearch.com)**

## 11.3 Strategic Stakeholders Interview Guide

1. Introduction and warm up	Timings /notes
<p><b>Purpose of the study</b></p> <p>Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview.</p> <p>Ipsos Northern Ireland have been commissioned by the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DE) to conduct a review of their targeted Early Years Interventions, specifically, Sure Start, Toybox and the Pathway Fund. The key objective of this project is to review the suite of DE targeted Early Years programmes to assess effectiveness of the Sure Start oversight structures and the targeting method, and the complementarity and additionality of the programmes in delivering an effective service to children who most need the support.</p> <p>The interview should last about 1 hour but may be a little shorter or longer depending on the detail of your responses.</p> <p><b>Ethics/ GDPR and consent</b></p> <p>Any information you provide during the interview will be handled in accordance with data protection laws and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. Ipsos will not link your name or other personal information with any of the information you give to us.</p> <p><i>Talk through privacy notice.</i></p> <p>In some instances, it may be possible for people to identify you from your comments (for example your identity may be clear to the DE because of your key position in relation to Early Years, or to a colleague due to their knowledge of your organisation's work). However, your name and job title will not be reported in any outputs and we will endeavour for all outputs to remain anonymous as far as possible. You can say if you do not wish anything you tell us to be directly quoted in the report, and you can contact us to retract anything in this interview, up to August 2022 (when the final report will be submitted).</p> <p><i>Ask if interviewee has any questions</i></p> <p><b><i>Ask if interviewee is happy for the interview to be recorded – if yes, <u>record consent after starting the recorder</u>. If no, explain that will capture their verbal consent to be interviewed on the recording for our records, and then turn off the recording and take notes for the duration of the interview.</i></b></p>	<p><b>5 mins</b></p> <p>Aim:</p> <p>Provides participant with background information about the project</p>
<p><b>2. Stakeholder role</b></p> <p><b>Role and background:</b></p> <p><b>What is your role and responsibilities in relation to Early Years (within DE/DoH)?</b></p> <p><b>What are your roles in relation to targeted and untargeted interventions (i.e. universal provision)?</b></p>	<p><b>5 mins</b></p>
<p><b>3. Context</b></p> <p><b>Can you describe some of the key challenges that exist within the early years sector?</b></p> <p><b>What has been the impact of wider context and external events?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welfare reform</li> <li>• Demographic change</li> <li>• COVID-19</li> </ul> <p><b>Has the level, or type, of demand and need changed in recent years (for all 3 programmes)?</b></p>	<p><b>10 mins</b></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If yes, how?</li> <li>• Have different external events created more demand and/or need for early years interventions/support</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Effectiveness of current process</b>	
<p><b>To what extent do the current delivery and reporting arrangements within Early Years meet the Department's (DEs) needs?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the aims and objectives of the 3 programmes consistent with the Departments policy aims?</li> <li>• Are the delivery and oversight arrangements appropriate or, should DE have a closer oversight? (e.g. do you feel you have sufficient information to know that the funding provided has made an impact/ is effective?)</li> </ul> <p><b>Are the current delivery structures (i.e. the DE/ DoH/ SPPG structure and also the Child Care Partnerships) the best way to deliver the Sure Start programme e.g.:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should DE hold the policy lead?</li> <li>• Should DoH hold the policy lead?</li> <li>• Should SPPG administer the programme?</li> <li>• What role should CCPs have in the programme – as non-statutory bodies?</li> <li>• Should DoH fund the 3 programmes?</li> </ul> <p>If yes - what would the policy implications be? E.g. a move away from child development to be more focused on health and well-being?</p> <p><b>Are the aims and objectives of the early years interventions still relevant?</b></p> <p><b>Moderator Info on Aims and Objectives of different programmes</b></p> <p><b>Sure start</b> – to improve social development by supporting the development of early relationships between parents and children, good parenting skills, family functioning and early identification and support of children with emotional, learning or behavioural difficulties.</p> <p><b>Toybox</b> - aimed at improving the long-term outcomes for Traveller children and their families. The programme uses a home visiting approach with a focus on play to support children transition into education and advocacy strategies to support young Traveller children (birth to 4 years) and their families have access to high quality early education, formal schooling and family support.</p> <p><b>Pathway Fund</b> – aims to improve the development of children who are at risk of not reaching their full educational potential; and enhance sustainability of the Early Years sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the aims and objectives are no longer relevant, why not? (e.g. changes to socio-economic context, other policy changes etc.)</li> </ul>	<p>10 mins</p>



<p><b>What are the challenges associated with the delivery of the targeted Early Years Programmes? (discuss each separate programme)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand</li> <li>• Financial</li> <li>• Coordination</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Others</li> </ul> <p><b>How well do the 3 programmes fit together/complement each other.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there areas of duplication? (e.g. could Sure Start provide the support currently delivered via the Pathway Fund and Toybox?)</li> <li>• What additionality is provided by the Pathway Funds and Toybox, given they may provide services within Sure Start catchment areas (and Sure Start is available to all 0-3 year olds in the catchment)?</li> <li>• Is there duplication with any other provision in the areas?</li> </ul> <p><b>There are a number of evaluations and ETI inspection reports of Sure Start and Toybox, that demonstrated that the programmes are effective, is there any aspect of them that worked particularly well/ was most effective?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you been able to share/apply the learning from these evaluations to other programmes or interventions?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>5 Targeting of interventions</b></p>	<p><b>10 mins</b></p>
<p><b>Given the socio-economic and demographic changes previously noted, do you believe that there are gaps in coverage of Sure Start?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographically</li> <li>• Within different social groups</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul> <p><b>Are you aware of any requests for support from Sure Start from outside of outside Sure Start areas?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the DE guidance for supporting children not residing in your area?</li> <li>• How should need be identified and addressed outside of Sure Start catchment areas?</li> </ul> <p><b>Is the way in which Sure Start has been targeted <b>still</b> appropriate?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sure Start provision is delivered in the most disadvantaged areas as defined by the NI Multiple Deprivation measure. What do you think of this method of identifying social disadvantage?</li> <li>• What other factors, if any, other than the multiple deprivation measures do you think should be considered?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>6 Organisational context</b></p>	<p><b>10 mins</b></p>

<p><b>Can you talk about the division of roles between DE, DoH, and (old) HSCB. What are the benefits and what are the challenges of having different departments involved in Sure Start delivery?</b></p> <p><b>Given, the split between policy and funding and operation Do you have sufficient data/information about programme outcomes/ how efficiently the programmes are delivered?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If not what data would you like to see?</li> </ul> <p><b>To what extent do early years programmes contribute to wider strategic priorities (e.g., those set out in the PfG or, Children’s Strategy)?</b></p> <p><b>As you may know we are also undertaking the review of Special Educational Needs in NI and there are a number of areas of overlap with the targeted early years programmes and early intervention in relation to SEN. Are Sure Start projects reporting any increase in support required for children with potential SEN?</b></p> <p><b>Is Sure Start helping to identify children who might need additional support early on?</b></p>	
<b>7 Final thoughts: overall effectiveness and looking ahead</b>	
<p><b>What lessons have you learned from your time working with early years, and what do you think are the implications of these for the future?</b></p> <p><b>Are there opportunities to simplify/improve the delivery and oversight structures for the 3 programmes?</b></p> <p><u>Closing interview</u></p> <p>Is there anything else you would like to mention?</p> <p><i>EXPLAIN NEXT STEPS:</i></p> <p><b>We will be reporting back to DE with our findings. These will be anonymised, as mentioned at the start of the interview. We may wish to re-contact you to clarify points made during this interview. Would you be happy for us to re-contact you again regarding this?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>CHECK IF ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH</i></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>**THANK PARTICIPANT AND CLOSE INTERVIEW**</i></b></p>	<p><b>5 mins</b></p>

## 11.4 Sure Start Interview Guide

5. Introduction and warm up	Timings /notes
<p><b>Purpose of the study</b></p> <p>Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview.</p> <p>Ipsos Northern Ireland have been commissioned by the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DE) to conduct a review of their targeted Early Years Interventions, specifically, Sure Start, Toybox and the Pathway Fund. The key objective of this project is to review the suite of DE targeted Early Years programmes to assess effectiveness of Sure Start oversight structures and the targeting method, the complementarity and additionality of the programmes in delivering an effective service to children who most need the support.</p> <p>The interview should last about 1 hour but may be a little shorter or longer depending on the detail of your responses.</p> <p><b>Ethics/ GDPR and consent</b></p> <p>Any information you provide during the interview will be handled in accordance with data protection laws and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. Ipsos will not link your name or other personal information with any of the information you give to us.</p> <p><i>Talk through privacy notice.</i></p> <p>In some instances, it may be possible for people to identify you from your comments (for example your identity may be clear to the DE because of your key position in relation to Early Years, or to a colleague due to their knowledge of your organisation's work). However, your name and job title will not be reported in any outputs and we will endeavour for all outputs to remain anonymous as far as possible. You can say if you do not wish anything you tell us to be directly quoted in the report, and you can contact us to retract anything in this interview, up to August 2022 (when the final report will be submitted).</p> <p><i>Ask if interviewee has any questions</i></p> <p><b><i>Ask if interviewee is happy for the interview to be recorded – if yes, <u>record consent after starting the recorder</u>. If no, explain that will capture their verbal consent to be interviewed on the recording for our records, and then turn off the recording and take notes for the duration of the interview.</i></b></p>	<p><b>5 mins</b></p> <p>Aim:</p> <p>Provides participant with background information about the project</p>
<p><b>6. Stakeholder role</b></p> <p><b>Role and background:</b></p> <p><b>What is your role and responsibilities in relation to Early Years?</b></p> <p><b>What are your roles in relation to targeted and untargeted interventions (i.e. universal provision)?</b></p>	<p><b>5 mins</b></p>
<p><b>7. Context</b></p> <p><b>Can you describe some of the key challenges that exist within the early years sector?</b></p> <p><b>What has been the impact of wider context and external events?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welfare reform</li> <li>• Demographic change</li> <li>• COVID-19</li> </ul>	<p><b>10 mins</b></p>

<p><b>Has the level, or type, of demand and need changed in recent years (for all 3 programmes)?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If yes, how?</li> <li>• Have different external events created more demand and/or need for early years interventions/support</li> </ul>	
<p><b>8. Effectiveness of current process</b></p>	<p>10 mins</p>
<p><b>To what extent do the current delivery and reporting arrangements within Early Years meet the Department's (DEs) needs?</b></p> <p><b>Are the aims and objectives for the early years sector still relevant?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If not, why not?</li> </ul> <p><b>What are the challenges associated with the delivery of the targeted Early Years Programmes?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand</li> <li>• Financial</li> <li>• Coordination</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Others</li> </ul> <p><b>There are a number of evaluations and ETI inspection reports of Sure Start and Toybox, that demonstrated that the programmes are effective, is there any aspect of them that worked particularly well/ was most effective?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you been able to share/apply the learning from these evaluations to other programmes or interventions?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>8 Targeting of interventions</b></p>	<p>10 mins</p>
<p><b>Given the socio-economic and demographic changes previously noted, do you believe that there are gaps in coverage of Early Years programmes?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographically</li> <li>• Within different social group</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul> <p><b>Have you had any requests for support outside from outside of your area?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the rules for supporting children not residing in your area?</li> </ul> <p><b>Is the way in which the programmes have been targeted appropriate?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What other factors, if any, other than the multiple deprivation measures do you think should be considered?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>9 Organisational context</b></p>	<p>10 mins</p>
<p><b>What is the relationship with other initiatives working in the sector?</b></p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you provide any examples of effective coordination?</li> <li>• Are there areas of duplication?</li> </ul> <p><b>Can you talk about the division of roles between DE, DOH, and (old) HSCB. What are the benefits and what are the challenges of having different departments involved in early years delivery?</b></p> <p><b>Given, the split between policy and funding and operation Do you have sufficient data/information about how efficiently the programmes are delivered?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If not what data would you like to see?</li> </ul> <p><b>To what extent do early years programmes contribute to wider strategic priorities (e.g., those set out in the PfG or, Children’s Strategy)?</b></p> <p><b>As you may know we are also undertaking the review of Special Educational Needs in NI and there are a number of areas of overlap with the targeted early years programmes and early intervention in relation to SEN. Are Sure Start projects reporting any increase in support required for children with potential SEN?</b></p>	
<p><b>10 Final thoughts: overall effectiveness and looking ahead</b></p>	<p><b>5 mins</b></p>
<p><b>What lessons have you learned from your time working with early years, and what do you think are the implications of these for the future?</b></p> <p><u>Closing interview</u></p> <p>Is there anything else you would like to mention?</p> <p><i>EXPLAIN NEXT STEPS:</i></p> <p><b>We will be reporting back to DE with our findings. These will be anonymised, as mentioned at the start of the interview. We may wish to re-contact you to clarify points made during this interview. Would you be happy for us to re-contact you again regarding this?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>CHECK IF ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH</i></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>**THANK PARTICIPANT AND CLOSE INTERVIEW**</i></b></p>	



# Ipsos standards and accreditations

Ipsos standards and accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a 'right first time' approach throughout our organisation.



## ISO 20252

This is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911/MRQSA and incorporates IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme). It covers the five stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.



## ISO 27001

This is the international standard for information security designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.



## ISO 9001

This is the international general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994, we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.



## Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partnership

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## Data Protection Act 2018

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