



House of Commons  
Committee of Public Accounts

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# Sure Start Children's Centres

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2006–07**

*Report, together with formal minutes, oral and  
written evidence*

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## The Committee of Public Accounts

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## Summary

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Sure Start children's centres are multi-purpose centres that bring together childcare, early education, health and family support services. They are designed for use by families, parents and carers of children under five and may be based in schools, health centres, community centres or in their own building. Public, private and voluntary organisations work together in children's centres to provide a wide range of services from childcare to health visiting, employment advice, parenting advice and toy libraries, for all young families, but with a particular emphasis on improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged children.

The Department for Education and Skills (the Department) spent £2.1 billion on Sure Start local programmes and children's centres and related programmes up to 2006. It funded some centres directly until March 2006, but from April 2006 local authorities took over planning and managing the children's centre programme in their areas, and the Department will be allocating £1.8 billion to local authorities for children's centres from 2006 to 2008. There were around 1,000 centres in September 2006, and local authorities are responsible for raising this to 3,500 centres by 2010.

Local authorities allocate funds to children's centres in their area and manage the children's centre programme, which involves establishing new centres, and either running existing centres directly or supervising their running by other public, private or voluntary providers. Managers of children's centres work with very different organisations (providing services in their centres as wide ranging as family support, public health, childcare and employment advice) which have widely differing working practices and need to work together in a way they have not done before. Some partnerships, for example to provide children's centre-based health services through Primary Care Trusts and employment advice through Jobcentre Plus, have been slow to develop. Staff at children's centres must also be aware of all the services not provided from their centre that could potentially benefit local families and be able to advise or refer them accordingly.

Local authorities reached the target for establishing the first phase of children's centres late, and setting up further centres by 2010 will stretch their capacity further. The Department has provided additional funds for training early years' professionals, but there is a risk that the 2,000 people undergoing training as Early Years Professionals and 800 as centre leaders will not be sufficient for the centres required in second and third phases of the programme.

Many centres need more support in financial management. There are considerable differences between the sums that different centres spend for each family using key services—for example averages of £7 to £20 for each family seen by healthcare staff—and a lack of understanding of what the unit costs of activities should be. There is limited evidence that spending is applied where it is most needed. The Department was slow to produce guidance on performance measurement and monitoring. Under Local Area Agreements, which can give more local freedom to move resources between services, it is important to have robust local systems to measure performance that should underpin assessments of cost-effectiveness.

While most of the early centres are in relatively disadvantaged areas, only one third of those visited by the National Audit Office were proactively seeking out the most disadvantaged families in their areas. Parents are generally happy with the services that are provided, but smaller ethnic minority communities, single fathers and children with special needs are less well served. Families with children with disabilities in particular need better information on what services are available for them, and advice on accessing services not provided from the children's centre.

On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG),<sup>1</sup> the Committee took evidence from the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health about the progress of the children's centre programme and whether it is on track to achieve its aims.

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1 C&AG's Report, *Sure Start Children's Centres*, HC (Session 2006–07) 104

## Conclusions and recommendations

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- 1. Although most Phase 1 centres were based on existing Sure Start or other programmes, only three-quarters of the target number in the sample examined by the National Audit Office were in operation by March 2006.** The Phase 2 target is especially challenging because most centres are starting from scratch, and local authorities have continuing responsibility for the centres established under Phase 1. The Department should ask each local authority involved in Phase 1, 2 or both to assess and report on its capability to meet its target for establishing new centres, while also improving their management and delivery of services in existing centres. Where a local authority has gaps in capability that may jeopardise its management of the children's centre programme, the Department should consider mitigating actions, such as re-profiling the area's programme to give the authority time to develop capability and consolidate existing centres before new centres are created.
- 2. The rapid increase in children's centres creates a risk that the focus on improving services for disadvantaged families will be lost.** While the earliest centres were based in deprived areas, the guarantee of a centre for every community means that resources will have to be spread more thinly. Local authorities should distribute resources so that disadvantaged families continue to be a priority.
- 3. Only a third of the 134 staff working children's centres whom the National Audit Office interviewed felt well qualified to perform their roles.** There is a risk that the number of people being trained under the Department's early years professional scheme will not meet the demand for planned new centres over the next 2 to 3 years, especially given the requirements of the range of other organisations in the early years sector in which newly trained staff can also choose to work. The Department should ask local authorities to evidence their commitments to the development of existing staff and, through the Learning and Skills Council, it should assess the requirement for new training places for potential childcare workers.
- 4. Disadvantaged families often rely on services provided by a range of different providers, and these can be more accessible and effective if available through a single children's centre.** Getting people from different organisations to collaborate effectively is a major challenge for centre managers and they need practical advice. Good collaborative practices include using early contacts by health staff to help identify families who need most support, and outreach to break down barriers for hard to reach groups. The Department should facilitate dissemination of such practices, for example through a web-based tool for sharing experiences.
- 5. Most children's centres are not doing enough to reach the most disadvantaged families.** Only one third of the centres visited by the National Audit Office had proactively sought out hard to reach families. Parents felt centres were less good at meeting the needs of groups such as fathers and some minority ethnic communities, while some did not use centres because of preconceptions about who the types of people they were intended to serve. Centres should adopt the kinds of strategies outlined in the National Audit Office's report to identify disadvantaged families and communities, develop effective outreach with community and voluntary

organisations, and provide a welcoming environment in the centre and services to support their children's development that users will value and want to use. Centres should seek help from national and local voluntary groups that have expertise in reaching disadvantaged families and gaining their trust.

6. **Running a children's centre requires a wide range of skills, including business management, financial management and skills in managing diverse relationships.** Many children's centre managers would benefit from having more support; for example, except in some centres based on former Sure Start Local Programmes, centre managers received little financial management support. Local authorities should facilitate centres in collaborating to buy in expertise or use existing shared services. Local authorities also should provide earlier indicative budgets so that centres can produce timely financial plans for the coming year.
7. **Neither children's centres nor local authorities have good information on what individual children's centre services should cost, leading to a risk that funds are not being deployed cost-effectively or to areas of greatest need.** Neither the Department's evaluation of Sure Start nor the local monitoring done to date gives enough evidence on whether the £2.1 billion spent from April 1997 to March 2006 has been cost-effective. Indeed, the Accounting Officer could not provide this expenditure figure at the Committee's hearing. We expect Accounting Officer's to have such basic information readily available when they appear before us. As more funding becomes available for new children's centres, the scope to reallocate funds will increase, but the cost data to underpin effective re-allocation does not yet exist. Local authorities should assess the unit costs of the main children's centre services. They should develop indicative benchmarks, along the lines of those illustrated in the National Audit Office's report, to inform the budget setting for their centres and to provide a baseline for identifying and investigating services where costs are relatively high.
8. **Lack of clarity over the cost-effectiveness of the children's centre programme could increase further in future unless expenditure, outputs and outcomes are properly monitored.** Under Local Area Agreements, local authorities will have more freedom to move resources between services. This flexibility could lead to better value for money, but only if the agreement specifies clearly what is to be achieved and it is possible to demonstrate achievement. The Department and local authorities should develop a form of monitoring of Local Area Agreements that makes clear the services to be delivered, the outcomes to be achieved and how cost-effectiveness will be assessed, drawing on the model for measurement in the National Audit Office report as appropriate. The Department could also use longitudinal data from the National Evaluation of Sure Start to assess whether the programme has been benefiting some groups more than others.
9. **Uncertainty about future funding has increased the difficulty of managing some centres.** Centres need to know their funding allocations in good time to plan services, but when the National Audit Office visited them in spring 2006, a third did not know their budgets for the forthcoming year. The Department's guidance on the next phase of children's centre roll out should encourage local authorities and

centres to have early discussions about budgets, to allow allocations to be planned well in advance of the new financial year.

- 10. Partnerships with Primary Care Trusts have been slow to develop.** Involving health closely in children's centres has a double benefit by providing a service most families need, and bringing more families into a centre, but pressures at Primary Care Trusts have contributed to difficulties in achieving more commitment from the health sector. All Trusts should establish agreements with local authorities to provide child and family health services through children's centres.
- 11. Families with children with disabilities need better information on what services they can expect to be provided in children's centres and help with referral to services that the centre cannot provide itself.** For some disabled children, children's centres can play an important part, for example by providing early help for children with speech and language difficulties, which can potentially reduce the need for more expensive support as a child gets older. Centres should communicate clearly which of these services they can provide directly. Children with severe disabilities will require specialist support beyond what can be delivered in centres, and centres should help families to review the available options and access the most appropriate services.



# 1 Departmental and local authority management of the Sure Start children's centres programme

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1. Sure Start is the Government programme to improve services for children by bringing together early education, childcare, health and family support. International evidence<sup>2</sup> shows that participating in a programme that combines these services improves the life chances of children, particularly if they are from deprived backgrounds. Sure Start children's centres offer the opportunity for many different services to be provided together in convenient community settings.<sup>3</sup>

2. The new centres will have to be built and opened very quickly if the Department for Education and Skills is to achieve its target of 3,500 centres by 2010. Since March 2006, local authorities have taken over the responsibility for creating and managing the new centres. There were around 1,000 open by September 2006, with a further 1,500 planned by March 2008. Although most centres in Phase 1 of the programme have been developed from facilities formed from earlier initiatives, only three quarters of the target number of Phase 1 centres in the sample examined by the National Audit Office were in operation by March 2006. The centres in Phase 2 (to 2008) and Phase 3 (to 2010) will mainly be new centres. The Department recognises that the programme is ambitious, and has engaged a consortium, Together for Children,<sup>4</sup> to help keep local authorities on track.<sup>5</sup>

3. Local authorities are responsible for managing local service levels, though they are bound by a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department. The Memorandum sets out what the Government requires in return for the General Sure Start Grant, which the Department allocates to authorities for children's centre funding using formulae for each of the first two phases of the children's centre programme. The rapid increase in children's centres creates a risk that services will be diluted. While the earliest centres were based in deprived areas, the new approach of guaranteeing a centre for every community means that resources will have to be spread more thinly. There is a risk that effective services for the whole community could come at a cost of reduced services for the most disadvantaged families.<sup>6</sup>

4. It will take several years for the full impact of children's centres to become clear. The Department expects to complete a five-year evaluation of the centres in 2008–09, at which point it considers that it would be possible to assess some of the benefits to young children and families.<sup>7</sup> Medium and long-term impacts, for example on academic performance and

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2 C&AG's Report, Appendix 4

3 C&AG's Report, paras 1.1–1.8

4 The consortium is led by Serco and includes CareandHealth, ContinYou, 4Children and PA Consulting. It works with relevant partners including Government Offices, the Training and Development Agency, the Department's architectural consultants and Ofsted.

5 C&AG's Report, paras 1.2–1.6, 1.15; Qq 1, 3, 12–13, 19

6 C&AG's Report, para 2.3, Appendix 2; Qq 9, 42–43, 61–64, 110

7 Qq 55–58

on health, will take some time. Early evaluations have only shown marginal impacts, but both positive and negative effects were relatively small, as would be expected at an early stage of the programme.<sup>8</sup> The Department considers that it would be difficult to assess wider public support for the programme, although the users of centres the National Audit Office consulted were generally satisfied.<sup>9</sup>

5. The Department is not evaluating whether people who have used Sure Start centres fare better than those who do not. Instead, the Department's evaluation of Sure Start Local Programmes is focusing on what impact the programme has made on all families with young children in the areas they serve. It is therefore difficult to tell whether the centres are providing value for money services that could not have been achieved by other means.<sup>10</sup> The National Audit Office report showed that centres were less good at meeting the needs of some groups, such as fathers and some minority ethnic communities, than others such as lone parents. The report also found that many non-users had strong preconceptions about the types of people whom the centres are meant to serve.<sup>11</sup>

6. The Sure Start programme represents a major investment in public services. Not enough is being done to monitor how effectively funds are spent. The Accounting Officer was unable to provide information at the Committee's hearing on how much had been spent on Sure Start since 1998. Subsequently it confirmed that from April 1997 up to March 2006, it has spent some £4.8 billion on early years' initiatives, of which £2.1 billion has been spent on Sure Start Local Programmes and children's centres (**Figure 1**). A further £1.8 billion is to be spent by 2008.<sup>12</sup> However, most of the local authorities interviewed by the National Audit Office did not have a good understanding of how much services should cost, and more than half of them have not been monitoring performance. There is therefore no clear evidence that funds are being spent in the areas where they are needed most. The Department accepts that local authorities need to improve the way they administer and monitor spending on children's centres, and in November 2006 issued guidance to local authorities on performance measurement and monitoring. The Department believes that the Together for Children partnership, as well as Ofsted-led joint area reviews, will help in monitoring the efficacy of children's centres.<sup>13</sup>

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8 C&AG's Report para 4.5, Box 19; Qq 37–38, 101

9 C&AG's Report, para 3.14; Q59

10 C&AG's Report Box 19; Qq 34–36, 104

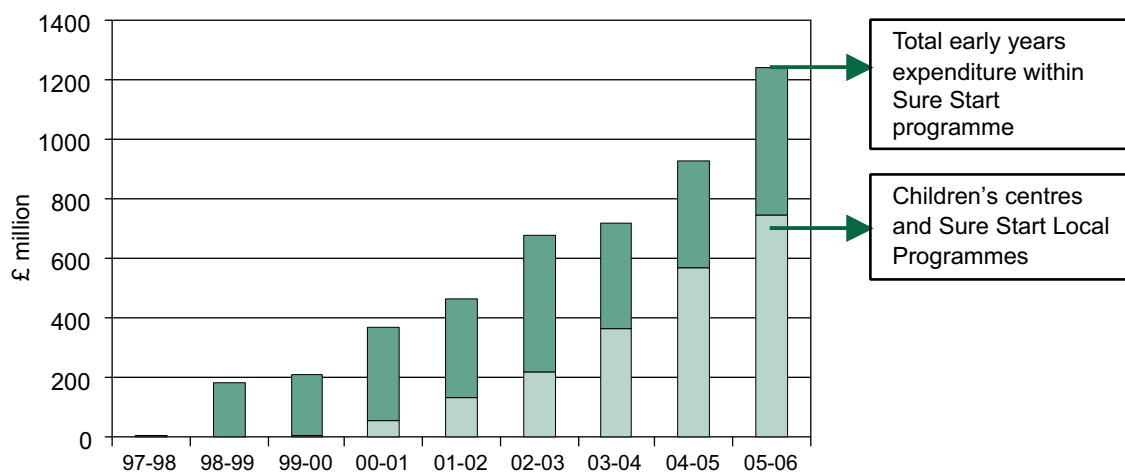
11 C&AG's Report, paras 3.24–3.26

12 Qq 51–54, 79–88, 114; Ev 17

13 C&AG's Report para 2.22; Qq 9–10, 15–17, 91, 111

**Figure 1: Department for Education and Skills' expenditure on Sure Start programmes 1997–98 to 2005–06**

The Department has spent £4.8 billion on Sure Start programmes since April 1997, of which £2.1 billion was spent on Sure Start local programmes and children's centres.



*Note: The figure for children's centres and Sure Start Local Programmes for 2005–06 is provisional.*  
*Source: Department for Education and Skills*

7. A third of the children's centres that the National Audit Office visited in the fourth quarter of 2005–06 could not provide a financial forecast for 2006–07 as they did not have an agreed budget with their local authority. Where centres are uncertain about the funding that they will receive in future, they can find it hard to plan services and retain staff. They may also be obliged to devote resources to fundraising, when the resources could be used more profitably in providing services. Added uncertainty may in future arise in local authorities which operate Local Area Agreements. They can include children's centre funding in their Agreement, which sets out the area's priorities as agreed between central government, the local authority and other local partners. These authorities have wider discretion about how to use the funds that they receive from central government, though centres must provide a common core of services and the Memorandum of Understanding between local authorities and the Department sets out expectations. To make the best use of funding, local authorities will need to take account of local factors such as rurality and changes in demand for childcare when allocating budgets between centres.<sup>14</sup>

## 2 Improving local management and governance of children's centres

8. The earlier Sure Start Local Programmes were run by a variety of bodies including community and parents' groups. They were set up to be experimental. Though local authorities now have overall responsibility for children's centres, some continue to be managed by a mixture of voluntary organisations such as NCH and Barnados, Primary Care Trusts, private sector organisations and schools, but as at January 2007, three-quarters of children's centres were managed directly by local authorities (**Figure 2**).<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 2: Who manages children's centres?**

Local authorities are responsible for the children's centre programme and in most cases they manage the centres directly.

Region	Local Authority	Primary Care Trust	Voluntary Organisation	Private sector	Other
London	134	2	20	5	4
South East	77	2	11	2	13
South West	72	1	15	3	1
West Midlands	66	3	33	3	18
East Midlands	66	11	8	0	3
Eastern	18	12	21	0	23
North East	111	0	5	0	0
North West	156	10	17	0	8
Yorkshire & Humber	98	12	17	0	17
<b>TOTAL (1098)</b>	<b>798</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>% OF ALL</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>

Source: Department for Education and Skills

9. The rapid expansion of the children's centres will only provide high quality services for children and families if there are sufficient well trained childcare professionals available to staff the centres. Our predecessors' report *Early years: progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*<sup>16</sup> identified a risk that the number of skilled and qualified early years staff may not grow fast enough to meet the needs of the expanding sector. There is also a need for better training for staff in existing children's centres, especially on working in a multi-disciplinary setting. Only a third of the 134 staff working children's centres whom the National Audit Office interviewed felt well qualified to perform their roles.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Qq 20, 107; Ev 16

<sup>16</sup> Thirty-fifth report of Session 2003–04, HC 444, 7 September 2004

<sup>17</sup> C&AG's Report, para 2.15, Qq 4, 109

10. The Department is working alongside local authorities and the Children's Workforce Development Council<sup>18</sup> to provide staff with the right training, but sees training as a local authority responsibility. Local authorities are being encouraged to use the General Sure Start Grant to develop the workforce as well as to provide revenue funding for centres. The Department estimates that local authorities spent £74 million (15% of their Sure Start revenue budgets) on early years' workforce development in 2005–06. A further £250 million has been ring-fenced for raising the quality of the workforce in 2006–08. This additional funding will be targeted at the private, voluntary and independent childcare sectors, where the Department considers that the quality of provision is weakest and the workforce is least well qualified.<sup>19</sup>

11. The Children's Workforce Development Council has developed an Early Years Professional status; staff who achieve this status will have graduate-level skills, knowledge and practice in childcare. The Department plans that by 2010, graduate Early Years Professionals will be based in all children's centres that offer childcare. The first 400 candidates have achieved Early Years Professional status, while a further 2,000 started their training in January 2007. They will work in a range of settings in the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors.<sup>20</sup>

12. The Childcare Act 2006 requires local authorities to provide childcare places only if no other provider is willing to do so, or if special circumstances make it appropriate for the local authority to provide places, for example where existing provision is not of a satisfactory quality. Value for money can be compromised if children's centres provide childcare places that are not justified by local demand. Less than half of local authorities interviewed by the National Audit Office had consulted with private sector providers on childcare provision in their area. Private nurseries are concerned that they may be forced out of business if children's centres offer childcare places in areas where there is already a sufficient supply of places. In addition, the funding that some children's centres receive may make it hard for private sector providers to compete. The Department has urged local authorities to consult more with the private sector.<sup>21</sup>

13. There is a broad range in the scale of expenditure managed by individual centres, reflecting their history and different circumstances (**Figure 3**). For example, the centres that the National Audit Office visited included:

- centres arising from a range of previous initiatives, providing different services with different levels of funding;
- former Sure Start Local Programmes, some of which had been established for some years, and provided a wide range of services beyond children's centre core services;

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18 The Children, Young People and Families Workforce Development Council supports training, qualifications and advice for people working with children. As one of five bodies forming the UK Skills For Care and Development Sector Skills Council, it is led by employers through a board of 25 representatives from a range of organisations.

19 Qq 5, 39, 99, 108; Ev [DfES note]

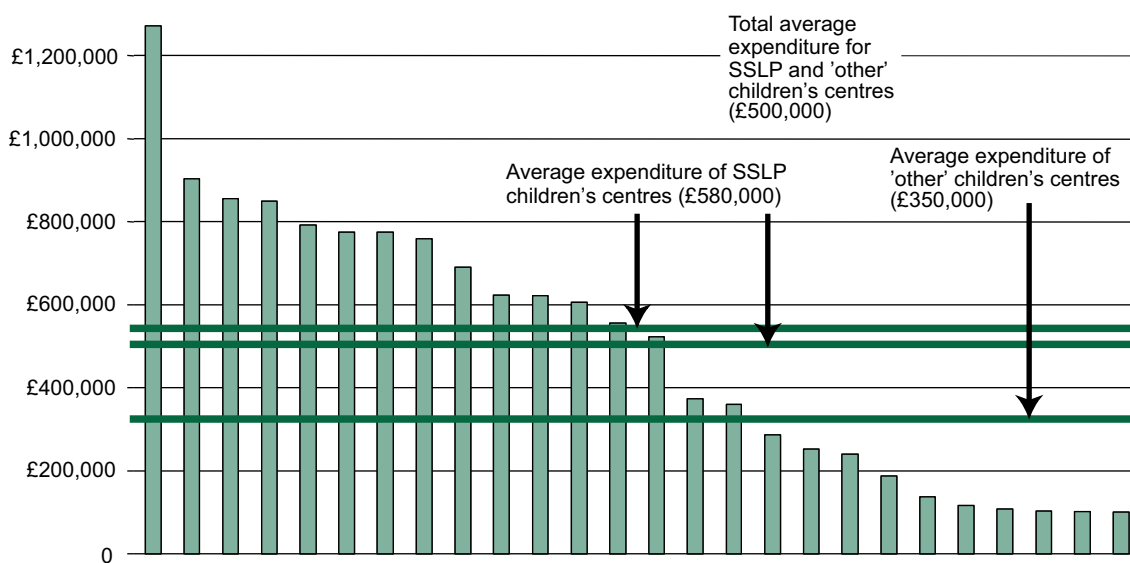
20 C&AG's Report, para 2.16; Q 108; Ev 17

21 C&AG's Report paras 2.11, 3.6; Qq 17, 20, 24–25, 74–75

- some covering areas with small numbers of children, such as a rural mini-Sure Start covering 150 children of 0–5 years;
- some centres with low expenditure where most services were provided by partner organisations; and
- centres funded to cater for a range of catchment areas.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 3: Expenditure managed by children’s centres, 2005–06**

The expenditure directly managed by the centres visited by the National Audit Office varied widely, reflecting their history and the number of families in their catchment areas.



Source: National Audit Office visits to 26 children’s centres. Based on 2005–06 financial data, in some cases using costs in the third quarter to estimate the cost for the full year. For four of the 30 centres visited, information on expenditure was incomplete or missing and is not shown above.

Notes: ‘Other’ children’s centres incorporate centres that have developed from Early Excellence centres, Neighbourhood Nursery Initiatives and Maintained Nursery schools.

14. The full impact of children’s centres will not be apparent for some time, but there is a lot that centre managers can do in the meantime to take a disciplined approach to financial and performance management. When the number of children receiving services is taken into account, there are still wide variations in unit cost. Neither centres nor most local authorities have a good understanding of how much centres’ services should cost.<sup>23</sup>

15. Half of the centres visited by the National Audit Office that have not developed from Sure Start Local Programmes wanted more financial training. The National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership, developed by the National College for School Leadership for centre managers, includes training on financial management. To date, 800 centre managers have taken or are taking the course.<sup>24</sup>

22 C&AG’s Report, para 2.5 and Figure 9

23 C&AG’s Report, paras 2.2–2.6; Qq 9, 15–16

24 C&AG’s Report, para 2.7; Qq 11, 94, 108; Ev 16

16. The expansion of the children's centre programme, together with the relative inexperience of many staff in working in a multi-disciplinary setting, makes it all the more important that a strong system of management and accountability is operating. Local authorities are ultimately responsible for centre performance, but the number of centres they will need to oversee once all centres have been established will place a large burden on them. Reflecting the responsibility of local authorities, the Department expects there to be advisory boards, but these would not have the same degree of statutory responsibility as school governors. The Department had not yet provided guidance on the options for centres' accountability and management, though a training programme began in January 2007. It planned to issue detailed guidance in April 2007. By this time, more than 1,000 centres will have been operational without fully trained board members. Only a third of centres the National Audit Office visited had people overseeing them who centre managers considered understood the key issues involved in running a children's centre.<sup>25</sup>

## 3 Reaching the most disadvantaged families

17. The children's centre programme will not achieve its overall aim of providing the best start in life for all children if it does not take adequate steps to reach the most disadvantaged families. To date, centres have been poor at reaching out to the families that require the most help. Only one third of the centres visited by the National Audit Office had proactively sought out hard to reach families (**Figure 4**). There are examples of good practice, however, including the use of informal activities to get parents involved in children's centre services.<sup>26</sup>

**Figure 4: Number of centres targeting disadvantaged and hard to reach groups**

About one third of children's centres visited were pro-actively targeting hard to reach groups

<b>Directly:</b> Centre is pro-active in identifying and targeting disadvantaged groups and has a strategy /action plan in place. Centre develops strong links with existing community groups and health organisations to maximise outreach potential.	<b>9</b>
<b>Indirectly:</b> Centre is engaging disadvantaged groups through being located in one of the most deprived areas. However, it is not pro-actively targeting hard to reach groups, may not be providing much outreach beyond the centre site and is not aware of groups who are currently not using the centre.	<b>5</b>
<b>Some outreach:</b> Centre has some outreach activities for their services which target disadvantaged groups, but may be limited.	<b>9</b>
<b>None:</b> Centre is located in a relatively less deprived area and does not specifically target disadvantaged or hard to reach groups due to lack of either outreach workers or funds.	<b>5</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>

Source: Analysis of results of National Audit Office visits to 30 children's centres. For two centres the National Audit Office was unable to draw a clear conclusion.

18. So far there has been only mixed success in achieving against Public Service Agreement targets to which children's centres contribute. For example, the proportion of young children with satisfactory speech and language development at two years has increased, but the target of a 12% reduction in the proportion of young children living in households where no one is working has not yet been achieved. The Department recognises that it is difficult to reach the most disadvantaged families, and some groups have not been reached.<sup>27</sup>

19. In November 2006 the Department issued good practice advice that features case examples of successful outreach. Its performance monitoring guidance stressed the need to measure success by the level of outreach to disadvantaged families and the outcomes for

26 C&AG's Report para 3.2, Figure 15; Qq 8, 105

27 C&AG's Report, para 1.16, Figure 7; Qq 6, 18, 30, 60



children. Centres are being encouraged to develop measures that are meaningful for them rather than ones that are imposed without due regard for local condition and needs.<sup>28</sup>

20. It will also be necessary to work more closely with voluntary groups who are closer to disadvantaged families. The Committee's report on *Working with the Voluntary Sector* found that voluntary groups were especially good at serving the hard to reach<sup>29</sup>. The earlier Sure Start Local Programmes were run by bodies including community and parents' groups, and the Department expects close parental involvement to continue, but that under the new arrangements centres will focus on activities that have been shown to make an impact. It is important that as Sure Start Local Programmes are superseded by children's centres, involvement of voluntary groups who may have participated in the earlier programme does not diminish.<sup>30</sup>

21. Children's centres are not able generally to meet the needs of children with severe physical, sensory or behavioural disabilities but they can have an important role in directing them to specialist services. Parents report that centres are inconsistent in referring such children on to specialist agencies, as staff awareness of the needs of disabled children is low.<sup>31</sup> There are some good examples of centres offering respite for parents, and the Department is working with the national charity Contact a Family in order to reach out more to disabled children and their families. However, more needs to be done to meet specific needs such as speech and language therapy to provide the early intervention that is critical to child development.<sup>32</sup>

22. Children's centres are most effective when there is close co-operation between the different agencies offering services. In particular, evaluation of the Sure Start Local Programmes suggested that centres managed by the health sector were particularly effective. The Childcare Act 2006, together with the Children's Act 2004, places a responsibility on local authorities, Primary Care Trusts and other partners such as Jobcentre Plus to work together to provide effective multi-agency services to improve the well being of under fives. However, there are sharp variations across England in the degree to which Primary Care Trusts and local authorities are coordinating their services for young children. Very few areas have established a joint strategy. The Department of Health cannot provide precise information on the areas where Primary Care Trusts are coordinating most effectively, but it estimates that in 16 children's centres as at November 2005, Primary Care Trusts were not using the centre either as a main base for early years' services or for outreach. The restructuring of Primary Care Trusts from October 2005 offered a good opportunity to improve joint working with local authorities, as they and Primary Care Trusts are now more likely to cover the same geographical areas, with those having the same boundaries increasing from 44 to 70%.<sup>33</sup>

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28 Qq 7, 18, 22, 30–33, 106

29 Committee of Public Accounts, Thirty-second Report of Session 2005–06, *Working with the Voluntary Sector*, HC 717, 15 February 2006; found that voluntary sector organisations may be best placed to deliver a service, particularly to people who are difficult to reach or distrustful of state agencies.

30 Q 107

31 C&AG's Report, paras 3.27–3.28

32 Qq 71–73

33 C&AG's Report, paras 3.18–3.20, Figure 19; Qq 21, 27–28, 44–50; Ev 18

23. Close working with the health sector is especially important as health visitors are a very important contact with hard to reach families. In many areas, health visitors visit all families after the birth of a child, allowing them to assess the needs of the family and to provide information about the services on offer. Children's centres report that a shortage of health visitors and funding pressures at Primary Care Trusts have contributed to the difficulties in achieving more commitment from the health sector. The history of partnership working locally has also had an influence. The shortage of health visitors could become even more problematic as the number of centres grows to 3,500 by 2010. The Department of Health reports some success in recruiting more health visitors; as at March 2006, reported vacancies were at their lowest point since 1997. Recognising the important role played by health visitors, the Secretary of State for Health initiated a review of health visiting which reported in June 2007.<sup>34</sup>

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34 C&AG's Report, para 3.21; Qq 44, 47-48, 67-70; *Facing the Future: A review of the role of health visitors*, Chair: Rosalynde Lowe, Queen's Nursing Institute, June 2007

# Formal minutes

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**Wednesday 27 June 2007**

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon  
Mr David Curry  
Mr Ian Davidson  
Mr Philip Dunne

Dr John Pugh  
Mr Alan Williams  
Mr Iain Wright

## **Draft Report**

Draft Report (Sure Start Children's Centres), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 23 read and agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Thirty-eighth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned until Monday 9 July at 4.30 pm.]

## Witnesses

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### Monday 22 January 2007

**David Bell**, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and Skills,  
**Sheila Scales**, Director, Sure Start, Extended Schools and Childcare Group,  
Department for Education and Skills and **Hilary Samson-Barry**, Programme  
Director, Partnerships for Children, Families and Maternity, Department of  
Health

Ev 1

## List of written evidence

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1. Department for Education and Skills
2. Department of Health

Ev 16  
Ev 18

## List of Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts 2006–07

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First Report	Tsunami: Provision of support for humanitarian assistance	HC 25 (Cm 7018)
Second Report	Improving literacy and numeracy in schools (Northern Ireland)	HC 108 (Cm 7035)
Third Report	Collections Management in the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland	HC 109 (Cm 7035)
Fourth Report	Gas distribution networks: Ofgem's role in their sale, restructuring and future regulation	HC 110 (Cm 7019)
Fifth Report	Postcomm and the quality of mail services	HC 111 (Cm 7018)
Sixth Report	Gaining and retaining a job: the Department for Work and Pensions support for disabled people	HC 112 (Cm 7019)
Seventh Report	Department for Work and Pensions: Using leaflets to communicate with the public about services and entitlements	HC 133 (Cm 7020)
Eighth Report	Tackling Child Obesity—First Steps	HC 157 (Cm 7020)
Ninth Report	The Paddington Health Campus Scheme	HC 244 (Cm 7076)
Tenth Report	Fines Collection	HC 245 (Cm 7020)
Eleventh Report	Supporting Small Business	HC 262 (Cm 7076)
Twelfth Report	Excess Votes 2005–06	HC 346
Thirteenth Report	Smarter Food Procurement in the Public Sector	HC 357 (Cm 7077)
Fourteenth Report	Ministry of Defence: Delivering digital tactical communications through the Bowman CIP Programme	HC 358 (Cm 7077)
Fifteenth Report	The termination of the PFI contract for the National Physical Laboratory	HC 359 (Cm 7077)
Sixteenth Report	The Provision of Out-of-Hours Care in England	HC 360 (Cm 7077)
Seventeenth Report	Financial Management of the NHS	HC 361 (Cm 7077)
Eighteenth Report	DFID: Working with Non-Governmental and other Civil Society Organisations to promote development	HC 64 (Cm 7077)
Nineteenth Report	A Foot on the Ladder: Low Cost Home Ownership Assistance	HC 134 (Cm 7077)
Twentieth Report	Department of Health: The National Programme for IT in the NHS	HC 390
Twenty-first Report	Progress in Combat Identification	HC 486
Twenty-second Report	Tax credits	HC 487
Twenty-third Report	The office accommodation of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its sponsored bodies	HC 488
Twenty-fourth Report	Ofwat: Meeting the demand for water	HC 286
Twenty-fifth Report	Update on PFI debt refinancing and the PFI equity market	HC 158
Twenty-sixth Report	Department for Work and Pensions: Progress in tackling pensioner poverty—encouraging take-up of entitlements	HC 169
Twenty-seventh Report	Delivering successful IT-enabled business change	HC 113
Twenty-eighth Report	ASPIRE—the re-competition of outsourced IT services	HC 179
Twenty-ninth Report	Department of Health: Improving the use of temporary nursing staff in NHS acute and foundation trusts	HC 142
Thirtieth Report	The Modernisation of the West Coast Main Line	HC 189
Thirty-first Report	Central government's use of consultants	HC 309
Thirty-second Report	The right of access to open countryside	HC 91
Thirty-third Report	Assessing the value for money of OGCBuying.solutions	HC 275
Thirty-fourth Report	Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces	HC 43
Thirty-fifth Report	BBC outsourcing: the contract between the BBC and Siemens Business Service	HC 118
Thirty-sixth Report	Reserve Forces	HC 729

Thirty-seventh Report	Child Support Agency: Implementation of the Child Support Reforms	HC 812
Thirty-eighth Report	Sure Start Children's Centres	HC 261

The reference number of the Treasury Minute to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number

# Oral evidence

## Taken before the Committee of Public Accounts

on Monday 22 January 2007

Members present:

Mr Don Touhig, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon  
Annette Brooke  
Mr Philip Dunne

Mr Sadiq Khan  
Mr Austin Mitchell  
Mr Iain Wright

**Tim Burr**, Deputy Comptroller and Auditor General, **Michael Whitehouse**, Director and **Angela Hands**, Assistant Auditor General, National Audit Office, were in attendance.

**Ms Paula Diggle**, Treasury Officer of Accounts, gave evidence.

### REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

#### SURE START CHILDREN'S CENTRES (HC 104 2006–07)

*Witnesses:* **David Bell**, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and Skills, **Sheila Scales**, Director, Sure Start, Extended Schools and Childcare Group, Department for Education and Skills and **Hilary Samson-Barry**, Programme Director, Partnerships for Children, Families and Maternity, Department of Health, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chairman:** Good afternoon, everybody. Today we are considering the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report, *Sure Start Children's Centres*. We welcome David Bell and Sheila Scales from the Department for Education and Skills and Hilary Samson-Barry from the Department of Health. I also welcome the chair, vice-chair and staff of the Committee of Budget and Finance of the Portuguese Parliament and the delegation from the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

May I start with Mr Bell? I am president of a Home Start scheme in my constituency, and the biggest complaint that I get is that the funding period is three years. We MPs give ourselves at least five years employment between elections. Why is the funding period just three years?

**David Bell:** We have obviously committed the funding until the end of the spending review period. Of course, there are Government commitments to roll out the Sure Start children's centres to 3,500 by 2010. Obviously, consideration will be given as part of the comprehensive spending review to funding beyond that time. It is also worth noting the commitment to children's centres; the predecessor organisations have been running since 1998. We have a clear indication that the Government attach great priority to early intervention and children's centres.

**Q2 Chairman:** I accept that, but the people who work in the centres often become fundraisers part-way through their existence because three years is just insufficient.

**David Bell:** The bulk of the funding for children's centres will come from central Government. As I mentioned, that can be confirmed to the end of the spending review period. I cannot make any

commitments, as I am sure that you will understand, into the next comprehensive spending review period—

**Q3 Chairman:** It will stop? What do you mean by that?

**David Bell:** The Government's commitment to early intervention and children's centres has been evident from 1998 onwards.

**Q4 Chairman:** Research shows that, for children to get the best value, they need high-quality services at children's centres. How will you maintain that quality while local authorities drive to increase the numbers by 1,500? Is that not a rapid expansion of the service?

**David Bell:** It is fair to say that it is an ambitious expansion. The Government believe strongly that intervention in the earliest years can have the longest term benefits. There is an important investment in the training of staff for children's centres. In the period 2004 to 2006, about £130 million within the general Sure Start grant has been assumed for training. At the same time, there is a substantial investment in the training of centre leaders, with a new national qualification for those running children's centres that recognises the particular expertise and specialism required. Yes, it is a rapid expansion, but there is a strong commitment to ensuring that staff are trained effectively to deal with what, for many, will be a new way of working.

**Q5 Chairman:** I accept that there is a commitment, but I am not quite clear how you can ensure that the training is available.

**David Bell:** It is for local authorities to determine the nature of the training with individual centres, in consultation with the Children's Workforce Development Council, which is the national body looking at the training and development of all staff working in those settings. There is a variety of ways in which that can be done. It can be done through local authorities or private providers organising the training and so on. The evidence is that a lot of the money is being used to train staff appropriately. We can say that on the basis of our understanding of what centres are actually spending their money on. We are giving a clear signal that training and development are important.

**Q6 Chairman:** Paragraph 3.2 on page 25 shows that only 9% of centres proactively target special groups—perhaps the most disadvantaged groups. I talked today to the organisers of the centres in my area, and they tell me that they do not proactively seek clients as such; it is referral by neighbours or self-referral. How will you tackle that?

**David Bell:** The Report highlights an important bit of business that needs to be done, and that is to target those that by definition are hardest to reach. Some of the good practice examples cited in the document demonstrate that you cannot sit in a children's centre and wait for the most hard to reach people to turn up. You have to go out and look for them. Some of the best centres have outreach workers going out and dealing with particular communities in order to find out what might meet their particular needs.

**Q7 Chairman:** Are you piloting any of that to discover whether it works effectively?

**David Bell:** Yes, and the guidance that we published in November 2006 highlights examples of good practice. We have also commissioned a national body that deals with families with children with disabilities, to help us to think about how we might target most effectively those who find it difficult to access services for one reason or another. However, from what the Report suggests, through its case studies—and we know that a number of centres are doing this—it is clear that we have to take the initiative, go out there and find out which are the hardest to reach groups in the community.

**Q8 Chairman:** Spending time, as I have, in some of the children's centres in my constituency, I find that the informal social activities that the parents are engaged in—generally mothers, and often young mothers, talking over a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit about getting help, getting the right food and about finding support and so forth—are most important. Do you see it as an important tool in expanding child care provision?

**David Bell:** One of the successes so far of the move to children's centres is to bring parents, particularly mothers, into the centres to allow them to have that kind of informal discussion. At the same time, on the back of informal discussion, many of the services that children's centres offer, whether related to health or education, can be offered to those parents.

Equally, however, the Report highlights the need to ensure that work is targeted towards those dads who might need or want support. The Report highlights the good example of a centre that is doing that, but as part of that harder to reach category that you described. We emphasise that we want to see more activity with dads; they obviously want to be involved in the care of their children.

**Q9 Chairman:** If you turn to page 21 and figure 11, you will see three examples that show quite a disparity in expenditure on centres. Is there a danger, as responsibility for funding is passed to local authorities, that there will not be a proper audit? We need to ensure a uniform spend, so that the standard is fairly consistent across the country.

**David Bell:** The first point is that the Report helpfully highlights some of the explanation for that variation. Interestingly, what is likely to happen as we move to a more consistent expectation of what children's centres should be offering is that you will probably see a coming together of that spend. By the same token, this is precisely not a programme that tries to specify in every detail at the national level exactly what each centre should offer. So, we should expect some variation, but also some degree of convergence.

As far as auditing is concerned, local authorities have responsibilities to audit. We can also ensure, through our memorandum of understanding, that we know how local authorities are doing. Also, our inspection regime, through the joint area reviews, can look at the outcomes that children's centres are achieving, alongside other services for children and young people. We must get the balance right between ensuring that we know how the programme is doing and not over-regulating or trying to micro-manage a programme that is intended to be locally driven.

**Q10 Chairman:** I understand that fully. I understand the devolution of power, responsibility and funding to local authorities, but my concern is that we shall not have a uniformly good standard throughout the country unless we audit. When the ring-fencing for the funding ends—as it will end—the pressures on local authorities will be such that one area will receive money for its children's centres while others will not, and there will be a postcode lottery.

**David Bell:** The programme of expansion of children's centres requires each local authority to describe what it is doing and what services it will offer. In fact, in the guidance that was issued at the tail end of last year, we gave more ideas about the kind of performance management arrangements that we would expect to see at local authority level, in working with children's centres. As I indicated a few moments ago, the inspection system, which looks at the provision of children's services across an area, will look at the extent to which children's centres contribute to priorities identified by local authorities and individual centres.



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**Q11 Chairman:** One final point—in my experience, I have found that there is often a lack of financial awareness among those who run the centres. Will you make it a requirement of local government to ensure that it trains the people who operate these centres in understanding their financial responsibilities and duties, just as it trains school governors these days?

**David Bell:** The point is fairly made in the Report that many of the people who have leadership positions in children's centres might not have had the kind of experience and training that you have described. We have developed a new style qualification through the National College for School Leadership for people who run children's centres, to provide precisely that kind of expertise. At the same time, of course, local authorities have a role in ensuring that children's centres have robust arrangements in place for management and governance.

We are offering training opportunities at national level to ensure that the people who lead these centres are well qualified, at the same time as recognising that local authorities have a major responsibility to provide such training locally. We have also been consulting recently on the governance arrangements for children's centres, which in some ways are a rather interesting new model of organisation. I hope that we will publish some more guidance on governance arrangements in April or May this year, when that consultation is completed.

**Q12 Mr Wright:** May I clarify something on page 7, which says: "Local authorities are rapidly expanding the number of centres—from 350 in September 2005 to 1,000 by September 2006"? That is a big jump in a year. Is there any particular reason September was chosen as the start date? Is there any special relevance in that?

**Sheila Scales:** Only that an increasing number of centres are co-located with schools. Starting with September is probably about bringing together the opening of some centres with the new school term.

**Q13 Mr Wright:** Is that a sensible approach, given that the transfer of responsibilities from the Department to local authorities took place at the end of March?

**Sheila Scales:** We have been monitoring on a regular basis. We had an interim target of 800 for 1 April, which we also met. We know what the trajectory should be month by month, so that we can monitor it.

**Q14 Mr Wright:** May I pick up on something that the Chairman talked about, which was governance? The Report seems fairly damning, saying people in children's centres did not find that there was enough challenge there from support groups. In terms of parental involvement in running centres, particularly in places such as my constituency, a disadvantaged area in which there might not be any skills in this respect, I find it very difficult to see where anybody in authority has provided parents

with the ability to get governance skills. You mentioned rapid expansion and it says somewhere in the Report that the Department will provide governance training in early 2007. That is far too late, is it not?

**David Bell:** It is important to remember that children's centres have grown out of a number of initiatives, from very small-scale programmes in some cases through to slightly larger programmes. They have also involved a variety of governance models. There were a few in the early days—of course, there are now more and more—that were co-located with primary schools, where the governance is more secure. There are also those where community groups have been working with professionals to govern and oversee what is happening. The point is well made in the Report that we need to ensure that we get more consistent standards of governance.

I would make the point, however, that we are not just waiting until 2007 to do the training. A lot of training has happened up till now but, as the Report points out, we need to ensure that, across all the centres, there is greater awareness of what responsibilities fall to you if you are leading or managing a centre. Centre managers have a role to play, but also local authorities properly have a role to play in holding centres to account for what they are doing in a local area.

**Q15 Mr Wright:** Taking another tack, away from governance, although it is linked, let us consider cost and, in particular, pages 18 and 19. Paragraph 2.3 terrified the life out of me, frankly. It states, "Most local authorities have not yet developed a firm basis for allocating funds to centres. Just over half that we interviewed . . . had not identified the cost of core centre services, but relied on cost information . . . Only five had done some detailed work to identify costs." Paragraph 2.8 on page 19 states that "one third of the centres had not agreed their 2006–07 budget, or been allocated their budget by the local authority" despite the fact that the visits took place in the fourth quarter of the previous year. People do not know how much the services cost, do they?

**David Bell:** The first thing to say is that the Report and the field work were undertaken at an important point of transition as the local authorities took on the responsibility from March 2006 as the funding conduit, so to some extent it is fair and it understandable that they did not know all the detail of what was going on there. However, the point is made, and we would accept it, that you need to understand what the costs of different services are in a particular centre, so that you can understand whether you are getting value for money and how it compares with other services and other centres in different parts of the country. Part of the support that we and local authorities need to give to centres is to enable them to work out how well they are doing against other bodies. In fact, part of what we have issued recently is precisely about that kind of benchmarking and detail to enable centres to check their costs against others.

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**Q16 Mr Wright:** But from reading the Report, I do not get any sense that that is taking place at all. I refer to “Cost Effectiveness of Implementing SSLPs: An Interim Report” from February—SSLPs are Sure Start local programmes. That report states, “There is some evidence to suggest that the high resource levels available to Sure Start local programmes means that some services continue even though they are not always well used, and some resources are spent in ways that outside observers, sometimes including parents, believe are not always justified.” We are just throwing money at services that are not actually tied in to need, are we not?

**David Bell:** I do not think that is fair, because the Report points out at the beginning and throughout that in a number of cases parents are very positive about the kinds of services that are being offered. I think in trying to offer services in a slightly different way from what has been done previously, there may well be occasions on which you conclude that a particular service is not worth continuing, but the spirit of the Report, and what we pick up, is that parents broadly are very appreciative not just of the services being provided, but of the attempt to ensure that the services are offered in the same place. One of the criticisms traditionally has been that services are offered in all sorts of different places and parents are not able to access them in a way that suits them and is most convenient to them.

**Q17 Mr Wright:** Taking the example of my constituency, which is a deprived area in the north-east of England, Sure Start has been a huge success, but even so there are surpluses of child care places and there does not seem to have been a marrying up of resources, costs and actual needs. On page 38, above paragraph 4.6, the Report states, “Centres are uncertain about how to measure their performance.” From reading the Report, I think that there is a sort of vague realisation that “We intervene early and it is a long-term thing, so we do not need to be precise about performance objectives.” Is that not the case?

**David Bell:** No, it is not. For any expenditure, particularly expenditure of this magnitude, it is important that we get a clear idea of what we are trying to achieve. We have to help local authorities—and, through them, centres—to have at their disposal the best information to make those comparisons. Do not forget either that through the joint area review of local services, we are able to understand what improvements we are getting from the outcomes—in other words, whether children are healthier, safer and so on as a result of the programme.

You touched on child care. The other thing to say about that is that under the Childcare Act 2006, the local authority has the role of ensuring that there is a sufficient supply of places getting the right kind of mix. You are right; in some places—you cited your own area—there is sometimes an excess of places against what is required. But part of the local authority’s responsibility is to keep that under review, although not to provide all the places—in fact, it must very much ensure that private and

independent providers provide places. However, it must keep that supply and demand under consideration.

**Q18 Mr Wright:** My final point is aimed at pulling things together. I did not get any reassurance at all from the report on the issues of providing guidance to allow people to run the centres, having rigorous costs analysis and evaluating performance. Despite Ministers having provided a clear political steer and the resources—£2.2 billion in revenue over four years, £1.2 billion in capital—there are still hard-to-reach disadvantaged areas in my constituency that we have not reached. We have wasted a huge amount of public money, have we not?

**David Bell:** Certainly not, for reasons that are highlighted in the Report about the services that previously were not offered in many places “for parental satisfaction”, as it is expressed.

Equally, you are right that some hard-to-reach groups have not yet been reached and we accept that challenge fairly and squarely. In relation to the future, we now have in place a performance management system. Guidance has gone out to local authorities and there is recognition and realisation on the part of children’s centres that they have to be able to demonstrate that all the expenditure that you cited is providing the best value for money.

Of course, we are talking about a long-term investment and the report points out that trying to measure the impact of the programmes in the short to medium term is probably not possible, as by investing in the early years, you are looking for a long-term gain and benefit.

**Q19 Mr Dunne:** Mr Bell, everyone will agree with the intent behind the Sure Start programme, which is clearly meant to do a great deal of good to improve children’s early starts, particularly in disadvantaged areas. The challenge for you at the centre is seeking to impose a one size fits all solution. I should like to ask you about how that works in practice.

From reading the Report, my understanding is that there have been good and less good aspects. If my understanding is correct, you are seeking to do something extremely ambitious: according to paragraph 1.4 on page 12, you have to move from 800 children’s centres in March this year, to 2,500 in only 15 months’ time, to 3,500 by 2010. How are you faring with that programme? We heard that you had got to about 1,000 by September last year, but you have to more than double that in the next 15 months.

**David Bell:** You are absolutely right to say that the programme is ambitious. We have a new provider to help work with local authorities to ensure that the programme is kept on track and that we get the right kind of advice on building centres and the right kind of guidance and support on how they put them together.

To go back to your first comment about trying to direct from the centre, in a sense that is not what we are trying to do. There is a clear Government target for the number of children’s centres to be achieved by 2010. There are also some high-level expectations about the kinds of services that we would expect to

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see in children's centres, but it is very much up to local authorities, based on the analysis that they do in their own areas, to work out exactly what the organisation of services should be. One of the virtues of the programme is that it has not attempted to try to impose a national blueprint in every area. We need to get the balance right between clear national expectations of what should be provided and lots of local discretion to ensure that that is provided in a way that best meets the needs of local areas.

**Q20 Mr Dunne:** What analysis have you done of the numbers of children's centres provided by local authorities, public sector bodies, voluntary groups and charities?

**Sheila Scales:** It is a moving picture at the moment. I can let you have the figures for the current position, but local authorities clearly now have the statutory responsibility for ensuring that the centres are up and running. We encourage them to work with local partners and the private, voluntary and independent sectors in running the child care in the centres, in particular, but we also encourage them to work with someone else to manage the centres. It is very much a moving picture.<sup>1</sup>

**Q21 Mr Dunne:** Have you been able to assess which group of providers deliver best?

**Sheila Scales:** The Sure Start local programme evaluation, which relates to the predecessor body, suggested that those based in primary care trusts and run by the health service were particularly effective.

**Q22 Mr Dunne:** How do you measure success?

**Sheila Scales:** In terms of reach to disadvantaged groups and outcomes for children. In setting up a new performance management framework for the new Sure Start children's centre, we are being very clear that we need an outcome-based focus because we are not attempting a one-size-fits-all approach. It is mainly about outcomes, but it is also about having a clear requirement to measure the percentage of the various disadvantaged groups that are being targeted. Success will be measured by outcomes for children and access for the disadvantaged.

**Q23 Mr Dunne:** I am pleased to hear that because if you look at page 17, table 7, which shows performance against the public service agreement targets, it does not look as though you are achieving those targets very well.

**David Bell:** Some of those are ambitious targets—there is no getting away from that. However, they are the right kind of targets to focus on, for example ensuring that we have children achieving an appropriate standard by the age of five, closing the disadvantage gaps, and so on. There is no getting away from the fact that those are difficult targets and that there is an awful lot to do.

The other aspect of evaluating the success of the programme is to assess what is happening now in terms of the criteria that Sheila identified, as well as to look over the longer term at the success achieved.

For that reason the Sure Start evaluation is trying to take a longitudinal approach and to understand over a longer period of time whether the gains acquired in the earliest years are sustained as children get older and move on. That would be consistent with the international research that has tried to understand the outcomes of early intervention.

**Q24 Mr Dunne:** Do you regard it as a success or not that the number of neighbourhood nurseries joining the programme has fallen from 1,300 to 400? Some have obviously converted, but you are closing one neighbourhood nursery for every two Sure Start facilities that you open up.

**David Bell:** A lot of the work of neighbourhood nurseries has, of course, been subsumed into the children's centre approach. One of the interesting characteristics of the programme is that a variety of different models are now being drawn together in the children's centre programme. The big task for us is to ensure that we allow local flexibility and discretion, but at the same time have a more consistent set of expectations for all children's centres in future.

**Q25 Mr Dunne:** Do you see that consistency applying to funding as well? As we have already heard, one of the problems is the short-term nature and variability of the funding, which may particularly affect private sector nurseries.

**David Bell:** May I draw your attention to the table that has already been referred to on page 20? As well as the table being of interest, the caveats at the top of the table are quite important because they indicate at the one end of the table, on the left-hand side, that there have been some very well funded programmes, while the other side of the table indicates some small-scale programmes. What we will be doing through the children's centre programme is to have a more consistent set of expectations. As I said in an answer to the Chairman, I think we will see over a period of time a convergence of the average expenditure in centres. That is bound to happen. Of course, many of the centres have started from very different baselines.

**Q26 Mr Dunne:** I am pleased to hear that. One of the problems in an area such as mine, which is very rural but still has areas of high deprivation, is the demographics. In our area and the Welsh marches we see declining birth rates and school rolls. We are at the cusp: one or two children coming in or not coming in each year threatens the viability of the entire centre. Have you steps in place to address such problems?

**David Bell:** That is where the local priority setting is important. It is for local authorities to determine and decide where best to put the centres and, at the same time, to take account of the factors that you have described. In any funding system for any organisation, we cannot necessarily account for every single change in circumstances. That is not something that we can prescribe nationally.

<sup>1</sup> Ev 16

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Deciding how to deal with variations such as those that you have described has to be done at a local level.

**Q27 Mr Dunne:** Do you think that the increasing regionalisation—if I can use that word—of some of the partner agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus and primary care trusts, which are now being given responsibility for much larger areas, will make that job easier or more difficult?

**David Bell:** It should not make it more difficult because there are statutory obligations on Jobcentre Plus, the health system and so on to work to provide most effectively for children's services. I do not think that the configuration of those other services should matter. In fact, as the paper points out and as we can highlight, there are lots of extremely good examples of Jobcentre Plus and the health system working to provide services in children's centres.

**Q28 Mr Dunne:** That is fine if they are there, but if they are down the end of a telephone line 100 miles away it makes it a lot more difficult, does it not, to identify those people who are not already in touch with them? How will they do that?

**David Bell:** Absolutely. I do not think that we would suggest that providing services at very local level is just about picking up a telephone and calling a call centre, for example. I know that the children's centre that I visited recently in London had Jobcentre Plus staff there occasionally. Importantly, Jobcentre Plus staff were helping to provide the children's centre staff with the information, facts and figures to help the parents who were coming in. However public services are organised at a macro level—if I can put it that way—this is about ensuring that the people who need to be there are as far as possible there to help the people who use and attend children's centres.

**Q29 Mr Dunne:** For my last question, can I take you to page 24, paragraph 2.27, which has to do with governors? There is an alarming sentence at the end of the paragraph, which states that the majority of managers of centres “felt that governors either had difficulty understanding the key issues or did not understand them at all.” If that is an endemic problem in the present governance structures, you have to sort that out, do you not?

**David Bell:** Yes. I think it is probably worth clarifying the use of the term “governors”. If a children's centre is attached to a mainstream school, the school governors will obviously have responsibility. It is a fair assumption that school governors, given their previous experience, will be more secure about what their responsibilities are. When you talk about other centres that are not based in schools, you are not talking about governance in the school governance sense but about advisory bodies and boards. However, the point still stands. We need to ensure that whoever is involved in helping to oversee children's centres at the most local level is well aware of their responsibilities. An obvious point to make is that for those centres that are not on school sites and are therefore not under the control of school governing

bodies, the local authority is essentially responsible for their governance. It is the local authority's responsibility to ensure that their governance is secure.

**Q30 Mr Mitchell:** I start by saying that I am an undiluted enthusiast for Sure Start children's centres, so you will not hear any carping accountant's criticisms from me on the matter. However, there are one or two problems that we should explore.

Let us accept that Sure Start, which has been a great success in Grimsby—its achievement is brilliant, so all praise to it—is undertaking a task that has been difficult for every other organisation involved. That task is reaching out to what you might call the underclass—the deprived, the people who are disadvantaged and who are really not part of organised society. No other groups can do it—the parties cannot do it, the Churches cannot do it—so why the hell should we expect such brilliant results straight away from Sure Start?

**David Bell:** I think that I agree with you, if I am allowed to do that. You are absolutely right. Many of the difficulties in getting to those groups are not new to children's centres. Having said that, I think that children's centres have created conditions that have not previously existed. We often hear that one of the reasons why hard to reach groups find things so difficult is that services are often so dispersed that you cannot get them all in one place. One of the virtues of the children's centres approach is that it has brought together a lot of services that were previously separate. That at least creates the right conditions, but as I said earlier in response to the Chairman, you cannot assume that if you just sit there in a children's centre, everyone will come to you.

**Q31 Mr Mitchell:** Okay, we agree on that, but why did you not give the centres clearer, firmer guidelines on how to do that or suggest a pattern of outreach, which seems to be used in only a small proportion of centres, but is clearly the way to go? Why did the Government or the Department not plan the centres' futures for them better, by telling them how best to approach the issue?

**David Bell:** Part of the underpinning philosophy, certainly in the early programmes, was to allow those sorts of decisions about how best to reach people in the local area to be determined locally.

**Q32 Mr Mitchell:** But folk don't know—they can be told and they can be helped, but it is difficult if you say, “Do as inspiration strikes you”.

**David Bell:** But on the point about allowing local discretion, as the report points out, some bodies have been very successful. We have consolidated that good practice advice in examples, and the guidance that was issued in November last year provides a lot of detail.

**Q33 Mr Mitchell:** So do you now circulate best practice?

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**David Bell:** That guidance went out at the end of last year. There probably was an expectation that more of these centres and their predecessor bodies would have had success, but the task has proved to be harder than we all expected. But as you said, this is a problem that public bodies, private providers and so on have always found difficult.

**Q34 Mr Mitchell:** I turn to the evaluation of performance. I do not want to carp, but, to be frank, I do not care that the amount spent per child varies from £350 to £2,500, as long as that £2,500 is spent in Grimsby. Is the evaluation done by Birkbeck College of the University of London—it is in box 19, on page 38, paragraph 2—a user/non-user evaluation, comparing the outcomes of the two groups?

**David Bell:** The evaluation is largely focused on those children who are in Sure Start areas.

**Q35 Mr Mitchell:** But how can you evaluate them unless you compare them with groups that are not in Sure Start?

**Sheila Scales:** What is being evaluated is the impact on the local areas, rather than those who use the services.

**Q36 Mr Mitchell:** So it is not one class of kids as against another class of kids?

**Sheila Scales:** No, that study was an attempt to evaluate the Sure Start local programmes, which were well funded to be very experimental, because they were trying to develop the answers to those problems.

**Q37 Mr Mitchell:** I see a point in that, but less point than in comparing the withs and the withouts. In that connection, one finding about the early impact of the programme seems inconceivable. Children of teenage mothers scored lower on verbal ability and social competence—you would expect that—but the Report also says that: “children from the most deprived families were being adversely affected.” That seems inconceivable.

**Sheila Scales:** That was one of the findings of the evaluation. All the early evaluation evidence was of relatively marginal shifts—

**Q38 Mr Mitchell:** But on a priori grounds, is that result not insane?

**Sheila Scales:** It seems hard to explain, other than because the attention of that local area was now spread across a wider group of disadvantaged children and families, so there was less intensive support for that particular group.

**David Bell:** May I supplement that, Mr Mitchell? Box 19 at the bottom of the left-hand column says that the positive and negative effects identified were all relatively small, as would be expected at this early stage. We need to be careful not to over-interpret those findings at this stage, which in a sense is what the evaluation said. These are very early days.

**Q39 Mr Mitchell:** We are dealing with a national movement, and in a sense previous years have been partly a process of trial and error—finding out what is right and what is wrong. Instead of emphasising local authority training, why not have national training. So that people can be plugged in to best practice more effectively and can compare notes over the country?

**David Bell:** We would argue that we are doing both. There are nationally run programmes—for example, to do with centre leadership. Some programmes are organised out of the National College for School Leadership with a particular focus on centre leadership. At the same time, an awful lot of local training is going on. In the recent publication of good practice guidance we tried to draw together the best of what we found out nationally, so local areas can choose what is best. It is quite a good combination of national training programmes and local choice. The body that I described earlier—the Together for Children group, which is assisting local authorities as they expand the programme—is also advising local authorities and centres on the best and most appropriate kind of training.

**Q40 Mr Mitchell:** I have to say that the move to local authorities worries me a little, in that there are party political differences on whether or not they should spend the money. Local authorities are always subject to cuts, sudden panics and political pressure about this, that or the other. Will not the funding be less reliable and less consistent if it is run by local authorities rather than nationally, as it has been?

**David Bell:** Again, it is a difficult balance to strike. You want a programme like this, which is locally focused, to be under the control and direction of local authorities because, arguably, they know their areas better. At the same time, the Government have to give a clear direction about the sorts of things they want to be achieved. The programme gets that balance right by saying that there are certain non-negotiables about what services it should provide, but it is for local areas to decide.

**Q41 Mr Mitchell:** But I want a programme that is locally focused, particularly on those areas of greatest need—those output areas that are most deprived. I wonder whether the shift to children’s centres has a wider purpose. The fact that there are to be 3,500 might mean that the programme is spread too thin on the ground, diluting the purposes and undermining the success of the original ones, which were in super-poor output areas.

**Sheila Scales:** In rolling the programme out, we made it clear that the nature of the children’s centres would be different in different areas, and that the level of investment and the number of services you would expect to see in centres in the most advantaged areas would not be the same as those that you would expect to see in the most disadvantaged areas.

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**Q42 Mr Mitchell:** But Sure Start told you what it was all about. Mothers can go there and learn life skills. The achievement has been wonderful—in Grimsby, it has been brilliant. But children’s centres are another thing—another image—that makes it less attractive.

**Sheila Scales:** A universal offer of children’s centres, as part of universal provision and expectation, is non-stigmatised. They are therefore not seen, as some Sure Start local programmes were, as places that you went to because you had problems, but as part of the mainstream.

**Q43 Mr Mitchell:** But they will have less money, so their purposes will be diluted.

**Sheila Scales:** They may have slightly less money than some of the more experimental programmes, but it is a significant investment in additional services in the area that will bring together the statutory services, rather like a one-stop shop, so that there is much easier access to those services that are available, and they are funded in a variety of ways.

**Q44 Mr Mitchell:** I have a question for Hilary Samson-Barry, who has been sitting like a silent witness throughout our proceedings. How good is the co-ordination? There is evidence in the Report that co-ordination with primary care trusts and even with Department for Work and Pensions agencies is failing, but all those bodies need to be providing services by the centres so that mothers can access them. Is there a failure of co-ordination?

**Hilary Samson-Barry:** I do not think there is a failure of co-ordination with the health sector. Certainly, the report was undertaken at the time when there was not only the transition to Sure Start children’s centres, to, but change in the health service with the new primary care trust structures, which provide a far firmer base going forward in terms of the partnership between the local authority and the PCT because of the far greater coterminosity that we now have.

We have some evidence of the level of desire and commitment on health. We have recently asked for expressions of interest in doing health-led parenting demonstration sites, which are referred to in the NAO Report. We had 63 expressions of interest, from more than 40% of the PCTs in England. They demonstrated very strong joint working, at the practitioner level in terms of health visitors and midwives in the centres, in the management groups of children’s centres and at the planning level through the local authorities and the PCTs. I have every reason to believe that that is really strengthening.

**Q45 Mr Mitchell:** I am delighted at that answer and grateful for the information. Co-ordination is certainly working well in Grimsby with the primary care trust involved. Can you give us some figures on the kind of areas in which that co-ordination is working well and any areas where there are problems? Can you give us some national indication of how successful it is?

**Hilary Samson-Barry:** Certainly the vast majority of the 63 bids that I referred to show very strong co-ordination. There is very strong co-ordination where health has been involved in Sure Start—

**Q46 Mr Mitchell:** Just give us some figures on where you are satisfied with the co-ordination and where you are worried about it.

**Hilary Samson-Barry:** I could not give you precise figures on each local area.

**Q47 Mr Mitchell:** You could tell us about areas where things are working okay and areas that you are worried about.

**Hilary Samson-Barry:** Rather than areas where things are working well, I would say that there are areas at different stages of development.

**Q48 Mr Mitchell:** If that is your way of putting it, give us that. Give us something that allows us to make the comparison.

**Hilary Samson-Barry:** In areas where there has not been a history of strong partnership—

**Q49 Mr Mitchell:** Right. Which areas are those?

**Hilary Samson-Barry:** I am better able—

**Mr Mitchell:** That is all we want to know.

**Hilary Samson-Barry:** I will have to come back to you.<sup>2</sup>

**Mr Mitchell:** Do not start covering up, just give us the information. Okay? Thanks.

**Q50 Chairman:** Perhaps you could write to us on that.

**Hilary Samson-Barry:** Yes, I shall do that—we can send you a note.

**Chairman:** Mr Mitchell is quite persistent.

**Q51 Mr Khan:** He is a lot more persistent in private. Mr Bell, we see from the Report that this Government will spend £3.2 billion between 2004 and 2008 on children’s centres. What figure was spent before 2004 on Sure Start and all the rest of it?

**David Bell:** I can give you the numbers; we certainly have them to hand.<sup>3</sup>

**Q52 Mr Khan:** You can round up to the nearest million.

**David Bell:** I am sorry; I have the numbers here somewhere. I think that they are even in the Report itself—in the key facts at the beginning.

**Mr Khan:** I may have missed that.

**David Bell:** I am sorry; I should have the figure here, but perhaps I can let you know. The figure is substantial.

**Q53 Mr Khan:** Is it more or less than £3.2 billion?

**David Bell:** I do not actually have the figure from all the way back to 1997, but I have the figures from 2004 and projected figures. We can let you have those earlier figures.

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<sup>2</sup> Ev 18–19

<sup>3</sup> Ev 17

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**Q54 Mr Khan:** Could you let the Committee have the figures on the money spent from 1997 until 2004? The figures from 2004–08 are in the NAO Report. Let us assume that in 2008, 2009 or 2010 there is a new Secretary of State—maybe, dare I say it, even a new Government. They say to you, “Listen, Permanent Secretary, we don’t like spending all this money and are going to make some cuts.” How would you justify the sums that you have spent in the past few years?

**David Bell:** In making the case for maintaining expenditure?

**Mr Khan:** Yes.

**David Bell:** Well, to some extent, I would echo some of the comments that we have made until now. We have access to families that previously we were not able to access. We have parental satisfaction in relation to the services on offer. We have been able to provide services in a way that meets people’s needs and does not just follow institutional boundaries. I hope, by the time that we are carrying on with the evaluation, we will see even more evidence of success—in other words, children improving their performance at the age of five and the benefits being accrued into the medium term. I therefore think there is a strong case to be made now and I hope a strong case will continue to be made in the future. Of course, I cannot make a prediction; it is a hypothetical question as to what decisions I might be asked to consider in the future.

**Q55 Mr Khan:** How soon could you do a cost-benefit analysis of the project?

**David Bell:** That is partly related to how you measure the performance. International evaluation suggests that you can look for short-term benefits in relation to the sorts of groups that you are reaching. There is some evidence of that already. I think you cannot really judge how effective such a programme has been unless you are looking over, say, a five-year-plus period. In fact, the Sure Start evaluation assumes that we are trying to track children from the age of zero through to five to see whether there are benefits.

**Q56 Mr Khan:** How soon can you do that?

**David Bell:** We will probably be able to do it by 2008–09, when the first five-year evaluation of the programme is due.

**Q57 Mr Khan:** So when criticism is made that you cannot tell of the value added between those who use the services and those who do not, the answer is that it is too soon to tell; wait until 2009.

**David Bell:** Benefits are already accruing to those who use the services. We know that from a variety of measures. We know from this report and other evidence that parents value the services on offer to them, so we have some measures of success to date. I think, however, we would focus in the medium and long term on improvements in children’s educational attainment, health and so on. I do not think you can measure those just in the short term.

**Q58 Mr Khan:** Have you heard concern expressed by colleagues and experts in this area that Ministers and others are not articulating the benefits that you have referred to—that you already have evidence of so far?

**David Bell:** I have not heard that criticism—in fact, perhaps the opposite. Ministers will often refer to the positive benefits of Sure Start and children’s centres and will see those themselves when they visit local areas, so I do not think I have heard the criticism that you have identified.

**Q59 Mr Khan:** So you think that the general public have bought in to the idea of the massive investment in products and services from which benefits will not be seen for many, many years to come.

**David Bell:** It is very difficult to know what the general public think. In some ways, we are largely going on the benefits as seen by those who are using the services.

**Q60 Mr Khan:** Let me deal with that. How do you deal with the criticism made by the most disadvantaged families, whom you may not have been able to reach, that all you are doing is providing a subsidy to the middle-class articulate lot, who already knew where to go to get the services, and that you simply subsidise things for them?

**David Bell:** I think the Report makes clear, as does the Sure Start evaluation to date, that this programme is reaching disadvantaged groups. It may not be reaching all the hardest to reach and the most disadvantaged, but as the report properly says, just saying you are not reaching the hardest to reach and the most disadvantaged does not mean to say that you are reaching only the advantaged. This programme has done much to reach disadvantaged families and children, but we recognise and accept entirely that there is more to be done to reach those who are hardest to reach.

**Q61 Mr Khan:** The Chairman referred to a concern about ring-fencing. The Report tells us that £700 million in 2006–07 will be devolved down to local authorities to allocate on children’s centres. How do you know that money will not be spent elsewhere?

**David Bell:** Part of the agreement, if you are referring to what has gone into the local area agreements pot, has been a memorandum of understanding that has been agreed between central Government and local government to be clear about what is expected. However, within that there is room for discretion broadly across the children’s services area, because that is part of the reason for putting it into the local area agreement.

**Q62 Mr Khan:** So a local authority could have been spending, for argument’s sake, £200 million on “children’s things”. Let us use the smaller figure of £5 million to be spent on children’s facilities. Local government have now received £15 million from central Government to spend on “children’s things”. That means that they can stop spending the

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£5 million they were already spending and use it to do whatever they like while using your £15 million to cover that gap.

**David Bell:** As far as the money that has been allocated via the local area agreements, local authorities should use that according to the conditions that are expressed in the memorandum of understanding. We cannot prescribe what local authorities spend in addition to what has come via the local area agreement. Local authorities should make the decision about how and where they spend.

**Q63 Mr Khan:** So how will local people know whether the value added has come from central Government investment or from a local council?

**David Bell:** To be frank, that is virtually impossible to tell. That would not just apply to this set of services, but right across the piece.

**Q64 Mr Khan:** Just going down a further stage, if a mainstream school has been given additional money to provide a children's centre, how will we know that that school is not using the money to subsidise facilities in the mainstream school?

**David Bell:** There is a requirement in relation to the outcomes that we expect from children's centres that I specified earlier. There are certain requirements on all children's centres that mean that any school has to be able to demonstrate that it is doing what it is expected to do under the children's centre programme. That is not something that they can say that they will only do a very small part of. Certain conditions that apply to being a children's centre will be specified.

**Q65 Mr Khan:** My final question as my time is up is: if a mainstream school is failing and there are issues about what has happened to that school but there is a children's centre attached to it that is doing very well, what will happen?

**David Bell:** In those circumstances, the school governors will still have responsibility and accountability for the children's centre provision and they will carry on with that.

**Q66 Mr Khan:** Say one of the problems and one of the reasons for that failing school was poor governorship?

**David Bell:** That would be a decision for the local authority in relation to how to deal and intervene with a failing school. Actually, if in the example that you cite the children's centre was doing well, one would hope that some of the best practice in the children's centre would be better applied across the rest of the school.

**Q67 Annette Brooke:** Would you agree that the local health visitor is likely to be an important point of contact in terms of identifying disadvantaged families?

**David Bell:** Yes.

**Q68 Annette Brooke:** Can we just return to the health question that we had earlier? The Report raises issues, notwithstanding the previous answer—

for example it states, "Most centres we visited were working with health via referrals but two-thirds of centres we visited had difficulties working with health organisations."

**Chairman:** Can you tell us what page?

**Annette Brooke:** I am sorry; that is on page 30. On page 32, the Report states: "Centres considered that shortages of health visitors and funding pressures within Primary Care Trusts had contributed to difficulties in gaining commitment from health organisations to prioritise the work". I add to that a parliamentary answer that I had a short time ago that told me that the number of health visitors actually fell between 2004–05 and was certainly much lower than in 2001. Can we really be assured that there is good working at both national and local level between health and education?

**David Bell:** Perhaps I can begin the answer and then ask my colleague to supplement it. On the national level, I can give one or two very clear examples of working together. As I indicated earlier, there is a new statutory requirement on involvement and engagement of health services and Jobcentre Plus in the provision of children's services. There is a joint programme board that involves colleagues from various Government Departments. We have worked closely in providing advice and guidance and recently sent information out to all PCTs identifying the benefits of working together. We will be supplementing that next year with more guidance. In actual fact there is a strong commitment centrally. At a local level, there are many very good examples of health services working with those who work in children's centres. In many cases, health service staff are actually co-located in the children's centre. As Hilary mentioned earlier, some programmes are planned for next year whereby we can develop further the health engagement and involvement.

Having said all that, I would not pretend that everything in every situation will be perfect. It would be foolish to do so. There is still a strong commitment on the part of health professionals nationally and locally to make the system work. Health colleagues recognise that if you can provide those services locally alongside other services, families are most likely to benefit.

**Q69 Annette Brooke:** I think the facts are that PCTs are not putting the money in or providing the health visitors. As we roll out to the bigger programme, there are problems. I accept that one of the great strengths of the original Sure Start programmes is that most have a strong buy-in from health visitors, but I do not think that that is happening in the expansion because of the financial pressures on the PCTs.

**Hilary Samson-Barry:** If I can pick that up, in a lot of places we are seeing the PCTs reviewing their early-years and health visiting services. In County Durham and Somerset, they have reorganised the health visiting services into geographical teams, so that they can work as part of the early-years teams in the children's centres and can reach out through the children's centres at the same time.



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**Q70 Annette Brooke:** But there are fewer of them.

**Hilary Samson-Barry:** The number of health visitors fell nationally in 2004–05, but that is still significantly higher than it was in 1997. The number of health visitor vacancies in March 2006 was the lowest that it had been for the previous six years. Recognising the importance of health visitors, the Secretary of State for Health has asked the chief nursing officer to initiate a review of health visiting, which is led by Ros Lowe. It is taking place and will report in April to the Secretary of State. We have a national programme, too, of regional roadshows called “Let’s talk about health visiting”. We are finding, through those roadshows, examples of good practice and are hearing a commitment from health visitors to work with and through children’s centres.

**Q71 Annette Brooke:** I am pleased that more work is going on in that direction.

Can we touch briefly on the subject of children with disabilities, which does not take up a big proportion of the report but is nevertheless important, particularly following on from the Childcare Act 2006? How much more do you think needs to be done if we are genuinely to provide those specialist services for disabled children that are patently not available across the country as we speak?

**David Bell:** We have been working with a national charity called Contact A Family, which provides specialist support to families with disabilities. It has launched a service to support children’s centres and how they might reach out to families with disabled children. We also know some good, practical examples of centres that provide respite care for parents with children with disabilities and provide on-site physiotherapy and other kinds of services and support. A lot can still be done and it is one of the hard-to-reach groups that we have identified that need greater attention, hence the work with Contact A Family to try to roll that out.

**Q72 Annette Brooke:** May I specifically mention one disability in which I am interested? Page 17 of the Report shows that the Government have to date struggled to measure speech and language difficulties and that targets have not been met. Clearly that is of vital importance when we hear that 50% of children enter school with insufficient listening and speaking skills. What priority is being given to give greater support and to ensure that qualified speech therapists are employed?

**Sheila Scales** The advice and guidance that we give on working with disabled children covers both that vital early engagement with families on things such as speech and language difficulties, which can cause long-term problems unless tackled early, as well as the longer-term and more intense support that a family with a child with severe disabilities needs. We hope to improve that, and we are working with the Council for Disabled Children on improving that element of our good practice guidance. We are trying to balance both those types of support, but we have also made it clear in the good practice guidance that such early support—particularly in speech and language—can be vital, working with the health

service to ensure that help is available and can solve problems that can otherwise be very expensive to deal with later.

**Q73 Annette Brooke:** Will that mean more resources in the future?

**Sheila Scales:** The push towards investing in things that make a real difference will move things in that direction. The development of children at age five is one of the key performance indicators for these centres. Children’s speech and language development at age five will be critically dependent on that sort of help.

**Q74 Annette Brooke:** Thank you. I am running out of time, but there is one other issue that I would really like to touch upon and that Mr Dunne has already touched on, and that is working with private providers. In my area, there is good partnership working, although I had probably underestimated the strength of the National Day Nursery Association’s submissions about an uneven playing field. The report says on page 26: “Well over half of the local authorities had also consulted voluntary organisations, but fewer . . . had consulted existing private providers, who reported that they had not been consulted enough”. The National Day Nursery Association mentioned that aspect. The association says that it feels that its members have been knocked out of business sometimes, when children’s centres have provided child care and there has not been enough communication between the providers. There is also the fact that the children’s centres obviously have the extra money from Sure Start, on top of the fees from those using the child care. Given that evidence, would you say that there is indeed an uneven playing field?

**David Bell:** The picture is mixed but, just to be clear, the Childcare Act 2006 is absolutely to the point in saying that the role of the local authority is to commission child care services, with the expectation that the services will be provided by the private and voluntary sectors, and that it should provide such services only where there is no other provision.

**Q75 Annette Brooke:** I am running out of time. I know what the Childcare Act says and I have always gone along with that, but I was quite shocked with this statistic, because it seems to underpin some of the submissions that are made to us. Is sufficient account being taken of the submissions from such bodies as the National Day Nursery Association?

**David Bell:** I know that the Minister for Children and Families wrote to local authorities last year, again emphasising the need to ensure proper consultation with all providers, including private and independent providers. The point is emphasised all the time to local authorities that they have to ensure that they consult widely.

**Q76 Sheila Scales:** The performance management guidance that we put out has quite an explicit contestability checklist to ensure that local authorities actually go through proper procedures to

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consult private and voluntary providers, which, according to our latest survey, provide the majority of child care in children's centres.

**Q77 Mr Bacon:** Mr Bell, can you just remind the Committee when the Sure Start programme started?

**David Bell:** The original programme began in 1998.

**Q78 Mr Bacon:** With the name Sure Start?

**David Bell:** Yes.

**Q79 Mr Bacon:** So it has now been running for eight and a bit years. How much money has been spent so far?

**David Bell:** As I indicated to Mr Khan, I shall submit a letter outlining the total expenditure from 1998 to the current time.<sup>4</sup>

**Q80 Mr Bacon:** So you do not know how much money has been spent so far.

**David Bell:** I do not have that figure in my head, no.

**Q81 Mr Bacon:** Can you give me a rough idea?

**David Bell:** I am sorry, I cannot.

**Q82 Mr Bacon:** I find that pretty surprising. This Report by the National Audit Office is about a programme called Sure Start. You come to this Committee to give evidence on it, but you do not have a figure for even roughly how much money has been spent. This goes to a fear that I have—that the programme is so self-evidently a good thing that there has been a lot of sloppiness. Who could be against a Sure Start for children? Who is going to stand on a public platform and say that it is a bad thing? No one. I heard the figure of £3.2 billion mentioned somewhere. Does that ring a bell? Is that money spent so far or money allocated?

**David Bell:** That is money allocated ahead for the next couple of years.

**Q83 Mr Bacon:** But obviously that is for a larger number of centres.

**Paula Diggle:** Let me help. My briefing says that the Government have spent more than £20 billion on early years and child care services since 1997.

**Q84 Mr Bacon:** How much of that £20 billion goes into primary schools?

**Paula Diggle:** That is not purely Sure Start.

**Q85 Mr Bacon:** I would have been surprised if it had been, because £20 billion is quite a lot of money. Mr Bell, roughly how much of that do you think has gone into Sure Start, going back to 1998?

**David Bell:** I do not have that information to hand because the focus of the Report, and its title, is on children's centres and I have come with the data relating to the programme of children's centres.

**Q86 Mr Bacon:** The title of the Report is *Sure Start Children's Centres*.

**David Bell:** But the actual children's centres programme essentially rolls from 2004, so I have come with that data. I will certainly provide the other data—

**Q87 Mr Bacon:** How much has been spent since 2004 on children's centres?

**David Bell:** The amount of expenditure planned for the next couple of years—from 2004–08—is about £3.2 billion.

**Q88 Mr Bacon:** How much of that has been spent between 2004 and now?

**David Bell:** Again, I shall just—

**Q89 Mr Bacon:** This is staggering. I go back to my point about sloppiness.

Can you explain why a programme that has been going for some years, on which a significant amount of money has already been spent and for which several thousand million pounds of spending is planned, still does not have clear governance principles that local people at centres can read and understand? Why has it taken so long to provide guidance? Paragraph 2.26 states that the Department “intends to issue guidance early in 2007 on possible models of governance”. When will that be issued?

**David Bell:** As I indicated, the children's centres come from a variety of different programmes—

**Q90 Mr Bacon:** I know that; paragraph 2.26 states: “There are many different models of governance . . . because they have developed structures to suit their local priorities, so can be based on partnership boards, steering groups, school governing bodies” and so on. But when is the Department planning to issue guidance on the governance and management of the children's centres themselves?

**David Bell:** By April 2007. We are consulting on that guidance at the moment.

**Q91 Mr Bacon:** No guidance is available for the centres at the moment. As a consequence, as Mr Wright said earlier, the majority of managers feel that the governors had difficulty understanding the key issues or did not understand them at all. Not only that, but local authorities are uncertain about how they should measure performance: more than half the local authorities that the NAO examined were not carrying out any active performance monitoring at all. Furthermore, paragraph 2.3 states: “Most local authorities have not yet developed a firm basis for allocating funds to centres.” Paragraph 2 on page 8 states: “Centres and local authorities need to establish the costs of centres' various activities and how well they are being used, so that they can take informed decisions to move resources on the basis of priority and cost-effectiveness.” That would be applied to any Government programme, but not only, apparently, has that not yet happened in this case, but local authorities are not doing performance monitoring. They do not know how to allocate the funds and do not have a clear model to follow. The people who are

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supposed to do the governance in the centres do not have clear guidance on the governance principles that they are supposed to be following. It sounds as though there are such an awful lot of good intentions, because it is such a good idea, that no one has bothered. How could you start a big programme that involves spending a lot of money and not issue strong governance principles beforehand?

**David Bell:** There are a number of points to make. The first thing to say about local authorities is that from the beginning of April 2006 they have taken on the responsibilities. As I said earlier, the report and fieldwork was done at that transitional point, when they took over the lead responsibility for the children's centre programme. As we said, we recently—in November—published guidance outlining the performance management framework and, as I said, we are also consulting on the governance arrangements.

**Q92 Mr Bacon:** Hang on a second. You mentioned that earlier in answer to Annette Brooke. You mentioned primary care trusts as an example of one of the recipients of the guidance. The guidance that you are talking about is guidance to local authorities, is it?

**David Bell:** The local authorities, but also local authorities in acting with other partners to provide appropriate guidance.

**Q93 Mr Bacon:** You are issuing guidance on how to provide guidance.

**David Bell:** No, I am not. I am saying that we are providing guidance on the kind of governance arrangements that people would want to think about locally. We are not prescribing a single model of governance to every centre.

**Q94 Mr Bacon:** I do not suggest that you should do so, nor does the Report. The Report states that "The Department is discussing key issues relating to the governance and management of children's centres with centres themselves, local authorities, schools and other stakeholders. It intends to issue guidance early in 2007 on possible models"—plural—"of governance and management that children's centres may adopt."

It is extraordinary that you should have gone this far down the road—the programme has been going for several years—spent so much money and still have not promulgated guidance to the centres so that the managers and those running the centres, who look to their governors or the governing body to do a good job, will know that they are equipped with the information on how to do so. Again, the same applies to the financial management. At paragraph 2.7, the report says that half the administrative staff wanted more training in financial management.

**David Bell:** And we have responded to those concerns. We are not responding to them only now; programmes of financial management training have been running for some years. We have been providing advice and guidance, and local authorities and the other bodies leading children's centres or Sure Start programmes before that were also doing

so. It is fair to say that many of the people who are running the programmes at local level are not used to doing it, and we accept that. It is also fair to say that managing a range of services in a single institution is relatively new territory. We are having to respond to training needs that are emerging as people take on new and different responsibilities, and all those programmes are now rolling out.

**Q95 Mr Bacon:** The people who are taking on those roles are presumably the same types of people who would become school governors.

**David Bell:** Not necessarily. In some cases they are, but you may have other people who want a place. The school governance model may be appropriate for schools; they have a list of statutory responsibilities and the governors are responsible for running the school. An advisory body working with a children's centre does not have the same power in statute as the school governing body, so the local authority is ultimately responsible.

**Q96 Mr Bacon:** I am really talking about the governors of the children's centres. You said that the people in question are not used to doing this—that they do not necessarily have the background that would automatically give them such skills. That is what you are saying, is it not?

**David Bell:** Some of those people would be parents and others who provide local community services, some of whom may have been school governors before.

**Q97 Mr Bacon:** Does not that add weight to the notion that they must have the right kind of training? The report says that only nine of the 30 centres that the NAO visited "considered that their governors or steering group members understood the key issues. Only five of the centres' steering bodies had received training on governance specific to their role." That is only 16% of those that the NAO visited; 84% had not received training on governance specific to their role.

**David Bell:** It is important to draw a distinction between the governance responsibilities of those who are in schools, where you have statutory responsibilities—

**Q98 Mr Bacon:** Hang on. We are not talk about schools; we are talking about children's centres.

**David Bell:** I am saying that we should draw a distinction between that kind of governance and the advisory bodies that support children's centres not attached to schools, because the governance responsibilities will in the end sit with the local authorities; they will be the responsible bodies. Advisory bodies are usually made up of those who have a particular interest—parents and others who provide services. Although they have responsibilities, they do not have the governance responsibilities in the sense that school governors would have if they had a children's centre on their site.

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**Q99 Mr Bacon:** Given that a lot of growth is planned and that you will have many more centres, how will you keep up the supply of skilled people to take on those supervisory roles?

**David Bell:** We have a national qualification on centre leadership, which has been devised in consultation with the National College for School Leadership, and about 800 people have either got the qualification or are currently going through the course for it, and many others of course as the programmes go forward into schools. Head teachers and the like will already have had that training and development. At the same time, we are also looking at training programmes for the Children's Workforce Development Council staff who are working in these centres, in order to give them the sorts of skills that they will require. Earlier, I mentioned the Together for Children group, the umbrella body that has been commissioned to help take the expansion forward. That body also has a role in working with all those involved to provide appropriate training and development.

**Q100 Mr Bacon:** Chairman, I have run out of time. May I just say this? Given that we are an accounts Committee, not a policy Committee, it is pretty important that witnesses appearing before us understand that we need to know, and they should be able to tell us, how much money they have spent that has been voted for by Parliament on the project that we are considering.

**Q101 Helen Goodman:** I am sorry I was not here at the beginning. I was in another Committee, so I hope that the Chairman will stop me if I repeat questions. Mr Bell, when Ho Chi Minh was asked what he thought of the French revolution, he said, "It's too soon to tell." Are you really saying that about Sure Start?

**David Bell:** I hope it will not take 250-plus years or whatever to make that judgment. I am trying to draw a distinction between the aspects of the programme that you can perhaps judge quite quickly—for example, whether you are reaching groups that you have not previously reached—and the aspects of the programme that will take longer to determine, such as whether children have improved their school attainment as a result of investment in early years. In some ways, we are having to look at the longer-term consequences of programmes such as this to come to a final conclusion.

**Q102 Helen Goodman:** Figure 2 sets out the benefits, challenges and concerns. What would you say was more important—the impact on children and families, or the evaluation and monitoring?

**David Bell:** Can you refer me to the page?

**Helen Goodman:** Pages 10 and 11. There is a big chart showing all sorts of things that are going well and that are not going so well. Of these two—impact on children and families, and evaluation and monitoring—which do you think is more important?

**David Bell:** The impact on children and families.

**Q103 Helen Goodman:** So, in so far as we can tell, what is happening now in the programme is going quite well.

**David Bell:** Yes, and as I suggested earlier, the programme is about trying to put in place the conditions for success to reach some very disadvantaged families. It seems to me that one aspect of those conditions is getting partnership working. In the end, however, professionals and others can work as well as they like with each other, but the only real impact of the programme is felt if children and families benefit as a result of it.

**Q104 Helen Goodman:** In one of the appendices, the study done by Birkbeck is described—on page 38, box 19, but you will know this; you do not need to look. One of its criticisms involved the apparent impact on children who had not gone to centres. Do you think it is wholly reasonable to measure the impact of a programme in terms of the impact on people who do not avail themselves of the service?

**David Bell:** As Sheila said, the evaluation programme is principally concerned with the effects of the programmes in the areas where the centres are based. It is probably quite difficult to speculate on what might have happened or what has not happened in areas where the services have not been offered. The principle underpinning the evaluation programme is: what impact has the programme made in the areas where Sure Start centres and children's centres have been established?

**Q105 Helen Goodman:** I have six from phase 1 in my constituency and two in phase 2. Mrs. Scales, obviously everyone is concerned that children's centres should make provision for the most hard to reach families, but is not one of the criticisms of the scheme—that middle-class people are keen to get their children into it—in fact a positive, because it shows that the service is not stigmatised, but is community-based and it is seen as of a high quality?

**Sheila Scales:** Certainly the notion that it is a universal service and that there should be no barriers to entry is very important. It is also important to remember, as David Bell said, that although the most disadvantaged may not have been reached in the proportions that we would have liked, some very, very disadvantaged people have been helped by the centres and there are examples, as you see when you go to centres, of people whose lives have been changed as a result.

**Q106 Helen Goodman:** One of the things about measurement—this comes out of the Report, but we also see it more generally—is that when it is seen as a way of checking and controlling, local centre managers are often resistant to taking part in it, whereas if measurement involves measures that are chosen by the people in the community because they have particular aims and objectives and they want to improve their services to particular groups of children in certain ways, people tend to run with the measurement in a much more proactive way. What input on measurement has there been from the work on the ground?

**Sheila Scales:** We consulted on the performance management framework, which we put out in its final form in November. We talked to people a lot of centres and solicited contributions about whether people

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thought we were picking the right set of indicators. We have gone for a set of indicators which are mainly about outcomes, but which also cover reach, and they confirm what a lot of people told us. We have deliberately left space and encouraged people to think about what local indicators they might want to add. We also designed a self-evaluation form so that people can clearly see that this is to help them do their job as opposed to an imposition from us.

**Q107 Helen Goodman:** I did not know about that; that is interesting. May I just ask you about figure 10 on page 20, which looks at the centres developed from Sure Start local programmes and the other centres? My understanding—please correct me if I am wrong—is that the early Sure Start local programmes were more strongly built up in partnership with local parents groups and the voluntary sector. My first question is: is that right? My second question is: why is there a difference in emphasis between the early programmes and the later ones?

**Sheila Scales:** The earlier programmes were run and managed by a variety of different bodies including community and parent's groups, but the principle of close involvement with community groups and parents is carried through into the new arrangements for which local authorities will have overall responsibility. The change has happened because the local programmes were deliberately set up to be experimental—they were to try new things and tackle problems that clearly had not been solved before. We hope that as we move forward, develop good practice from those programmes and share it more widely, we will converge on a set of measures that are the most cost-effective in making a real impact.

**Q108 Helen Goodman:** Colleagues have asked you questions about the training and have focused on the management training and the difficulty of different professions. However, my recollection is that when this began six or seven years' ago there was a severe shortage of people with early-years professional qualifications. To go back to the Chinese analogy, you needed to recruit red army-scale numbers of people. Where are you on training people in early years skills now?

**Sheila Scales:** We have a major investment programme of £250 million over two years in a transformation fund that is designed to help upskill the early-years work force. We are just starting on that programme and it is designed to train graduate leaders for early years and make sure that we have more people at NVQ level 3 in the work force. The numbers at that level have been increasing—I do not have the figures at my fingertips, but we can let you have a note on it. There is a lot more to do in general for the early-years work force and for those working in children's centres.<sup>5</sup>

**Q109 Helen Goodman:** The fact that people find it difficult to cross boundaries raises a question about the content of the courses and whether they are sufficiently cross-boundary in the early-years sector.

**Sheila Scales:** The Department produced some general training modules in April last year about integrated working, working across boundaries and working with the Children's Workforce Development Council in order to ensure that we have a whole suite of support for that training from management level to front line. As you say, the most difficult thing to do is to break down the cultural and professional barriers that have existed for so long.

**Chairman:** Austin Mitchell has a supplementary question.

**Q110 Mr Mitchell:** I think it is clear that a number of us are concerned that the transfer to local authorities could mean a dilution of all of the achievements of Sure Start. What guarantees can you give us that the impetus, ethos and achievement behind the first 1,000, which I think, although perhaps lawyers do not, have been an outstanding success, will be maintained and not diluted and that money will not be transferred to the broader purposes of the 3,500 centres that we will establish that will serve a lower—or perhaps smaller—set of purposes?

**David Bell:** In relation to the Sure Start grant, we require each local authority to sign and agree to the terms of a memorandum of grant that, among other things, actually lays out the purposes of the grant and what it must be spent on. We have a measure of control that way. Equally, as we have emphasised throughout this afternoon, the aim is not to specify in precise detail from the centre exactly how every children's centre should be organised. As far as the general conditions of the grant are concerned—

**Q111 Mr Mitchell:** If it has been a success, we want that success to go on, do we not? To be frank, I am worried about local authorities' involvement.

**David Bell:** I think that there are two dimensions to that. The formal part is grant conditions and the like, and the informal part relates to sharing best practice. We need to work on the assumption that every local authority involved in the programme wants to make it work and to make it work well and will therefore be keen to access the best information about what is working. Together for Children, the body that is working with us on this, will keep its eye on and work with local authorities to see what is working, whether there are gaps in provision, what needs to be improved and so on. Of course, our inspection programme on the joint area review gives us that kind of information about how well children's centres contribute to outcomes.

**Q112 Mr Mitchell:** But if local authorities start to dilute the programme and do not fulfil the purposes, have you any reserve powers?

**David Bell:** Under the conditions of grant we can indicate what the grant is to be spent on. The other point to make is that through the arrangements with Together for Children and working with local authorities, we will have a clear picture of what is happening from place to place. We will not necessarily know every last detail about what is happening in

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every children's centre, but we will know if local authorities have remained consistent with the principles that underpin the programme.

**Q113 Mr Mitchell:** Just one further point. Last week, when we raised the issue of anti-social behaviour, the way in which the Home Office deals with it and Louise Casey's work in that area, we heard that there is going to be an attempt to deal with problem families. It will not involve only parenting orders but a whole series of interventions to try to help problem families so that the kids do not develop into problem adults. Will the children's centres play any part in that?

**David Bell:** I think that they do already. If you look at the range of services outlined in the Report that are provided, many are designed to help parents that might be struggling with their children, who might have concerns about their children's behaviour or who might be concerned about health or diet.

**Q114 Mr Mitchell:** I was talking about a kind of disciplinary approach, and the Sure Starts are a more voluntary approach.

**David Bell:** Yes. People are not compelled to come to Sure Start children's centres, and nor should they be, but equally, as the Report has highlighted, there are groups that do not naturally make use of such services,

so the responsibility on each of the children's centres is to encourage those who would not usually come in to come. The approach of children's centres is intended to be much more positive in the sense that it is not seen to be a punishment to bring your child to a children's centre, but rather an opportunity to do things that you might not otherwise have done.

**Chairman:** Mr Bell, your predecessor went on to the Home Office. Come the next reshuffle of jobs, there may not be a Home Office to go to. We will have to wait and see.

**Mr Mitchell:** There will be two posts.

**Chairman:** You may have a choice, Mr Bell.

I thank you all for your attendance and for answering our questions, although I have no doubt that the Committee shares Mr Bacon's surprise at not being able to get answers to his questions about how much the whole project has cost. Mr Bell, you are the Accounting Officer for the Department and we would expect you to have that information. If you did not have it to hand I would have thought that your colleagues behind you would have been able to assist you. We will require you to write to us to give us those details. Thank you for your attendance.

The Committee will now go into private session to consider the Chairman's draft report. Our visitors from Portugal and India are welcome to stay if they so wish.

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 Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Department for Education and Skills
 

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*Question 20 (Mr Philip Dunne): What analysis have you done of the numbers of children's centres provided by local authorities, public sector bodies, voluntary groups and charities?*

The following table has been compiled from information obtained from local authorities during the week commencing 29 January 2007 and relates to centres that are up and running. The total number of open centres increases every week and the management arrangements for some centres are in transition, so the picture is constantly changing.

<i>Region</i>	<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>Primary Care Trust</i>	<i>Voluntary Organisation</i>	<i>Private sector</i>	<i>Other</i>
London	134	2	20	5	4
South East	77	2	11	2	13
South West	72	1	15	3	1
West Midlands	66	3	33	3	18
East Midlands	66	11	8	0	3
Eastern	18	12	21	0	23
North East	111	0	5	0	0
North West	156	10	17	0	8
Yorks & Humber	98	12	17	0	17
<b>TOTAL (1098)</b>	<b>798</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>% OF ALL</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>8%</b>

*Notes:*

- Voluntary Organisations include large national voluntary bodies such as NCH, Barnardos, the Family Welfare Association, 4Children, Ormiston Trust and some smaller local organisations.
- "Other" includes centres managed jointly eg by a Local Authority and Primary Care Trust, or a Local Authority and a Voluntary Organisation; centres run by schools; and ex-Sure Start local programme partnerships that have incorporated as companies limited by guarantee.

*Questions 51–54 (Mr Khan) and Questions 79–88 (Mr Bacon): Expenditure since 1997 on Sure Start.*

Sure Start expenditure for the period from 1997–98 to 2005–06 is shown in the table. Total expenditure includes Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs), childcare and some nursery education funding. From 2003–04, expenditure figures also include funding for Sure Start Children’s Centres.

	<i>£ million</i>									
	97–98	98–99	99–2000	2000–01	01–02	02–03	03–04	04–05	05–06	Total
Total Sure Start current and capital expenditure	*4	179	213	367	467	680	720	928	1,240	<b>4,798</b>
Of which: SSLPs/ Children’s Centres	0	0	7	56	134	216	365	568	**746	<b>2,092</b>

*Notes:*

\*1997–98 saw the withdrawal of the nursery education voucher and a move towards universal nursery education funding for all four year olds. Free early education provision for all three year olds came in from 2004.

\*\*Provisional figure.

*Sources:*

Totals for 1998–99 to 1999–2000 from Departmental Report 2004 (Cm 6202).

Totals for 2000–01 to 2004–05 from Departmental Report 2006 (Cm 6812).

Total for 2005–06 from Departmental Resource Accounts 2005–06 (HC 1355).

*Question 108 (Helen Goodman): Where are you on training people in early years skills now?*

We are making good progress on developing the early years workforce and have activity on a number of fronts:

- We have always encouraged local authorities to use the General Sure Start Grant to support the development of the workforce. While it is for local authorities to determine their own priorities, the guidance highlights the sort of training and development activities the grant can be used for.
- Based on the unaudited returns for 2005–06, local authorities spent nearly £74 million—15% of the overall revenue budget—on early years workforce development.
- For 2006–08, we have significantly boosted the funding available for workforce development with the introduction of the Transformation Fund. This is a ringfenced grant of £250 million specifically intended to raise the quality of the early years workforce without impacting on affordability.
- The Transformation Fund is targeted at the private, voluntary and independent sectors where evidence suggests that the quality of provision is weakest and that the workforce is least well qualified. The Transformation Fund through incentives and premiums supports the Government aim of having an Early Years Professional in every full daycare setting by 2015. The fund is also helping to raise the qualification levels of the sector to level three and higher as well as training the workforce to be able to work with children with additional needs.
- The Children’s Workforce Development Council in partnership with key stakeholders has developed a set of Standards for the skills, knowledge and practice experience required for the Early Years Professional role. Those meeting these Standards will be conferred Early Years Professional Status.
- The first 400 or so EYP candidates have now achieved Early Years Professional Status and a further 2,000 or so candidates began their Early Years Professional training from January 2007. They will work in a range of settings in the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors.
- We asked the National College of School Leadership to develop The National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL). The NPQICL is a national programme and recognised qualification designed to address the needs of leaders working in multi-agency and multi-disciplinary environments across education, health and social services.
- The NPQICL is in its third year. Priority has been given to children’s centre managers and over 800 have taken, or are on, the course. We expect all centre managers to undertake this training over time although this is not a mandatory requirement before posts can be taken up.

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**Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Department of Health**

*Question 49 (Mr Austin Mitchell): Co-ordination between children's centres and Primary Care Trusts*

In drawing together a response, we have examined:

- information collected from November 2005–March 2006 as part of the Department of Health's and Durham University's first year of the *National Child Health and Maternity Services Mapping* project—specifically the data in to questions on the number of early years' services provided by PCT; whether the main base of the service was in a children's centre; and/or whether a children's centre was used for outreach services;
- DfES information on the number of designated children's centres in each local authority area in November 2005; and
- NAO summaries of its interviews at children's centres and local authorities about partnership issues.

At annex A we have set out a list of those PCTs who informed the Mapping project that they were not using children's centres either as a main base or for outreach early years' services when it is evident from the DfES list that there was a designated children's centre on their patch. This could be taken as an indicator that partnership working was not well developed. However, caution is needed as the mapping does not identify circumstances where the children's centre is funding health services directly.

We have also listed the PCTs who informed the Mapping project that they were using the children's centre as their main base for early years' services. We suggest that this is an indicator of good partnership working

There are some obvious cautionary notes about the interpretation of this information that I am sure the Committee will understand.

The NAO's summary of its interviews indicates that at the time of its visits a number of LAs and children's centres were experiencing difficulties in developing partnerships with PCTs because PCTs were merging or restructuring. These changes have now been completed. Coterminosity between PCTs' and LAs' boundaries has increased from 44% to 70% and we would expect this shift to have assisted the development of partnership working

While we were very encouraged by the level of support demonstrated generally by PCTs and NHS providers in contributing data to the first year of the Mapping project, not all PCTs submitted a return and the information wasn't complete for each PCT in every respect. Much effort has been focused on improving the mapping data in the last year.

*Hilary Samson-Barry*  
Programme Director, Children, Families & Maternity

#### Annex A

PCTs who informed the mapping project in November 2005–March 2006 that they were not using a children's centre either as a main base for early years services or for outreach where there appears to have been a children's centre in the locality.

**PCT**

Blackpool	5 children's centres in Blackpool
Bradford City Teaching Bradford South and West Airedale North Bradford	6 children's centres in Bradford and Keighley

**(note** in the mapping exercise N Bradford responded that it was making use of a children's centre for outreach. In 2006 the four PCTs merged to form one PCT—Bradford and Airedale PCT).

North Birmingham East Birmingham	2 children's centres
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**(note** these two PCTs have now merged into Birmingham East and North PCT).

Newcastle under Lyme	1 children's centre
Telford and Wrekin	2 children's centres



PCTs who informed the mapping project in November 2005–March 2006 that they were using a children’s centre as a main base for early years services.

Amber Valley	Heart of Birmingham
Ashfield	Herefordshire
Ashford	Hounslow
Bedford	Huddersfield
Bedfordshire Heartlands	Isle of Wight
Bournemouth Teaching	Kensington & Chelsea
Bristol N	Kingston
Bristol S & W	Langbaugh
Broxtowe and Hucknall	Leeds W
Calderdale	Leicester City W
Canterbury and Coastal	Lewisham
Central Cheshire	Lincolnshire SW
Central Derby	Luton
Central Suffolk	Medway
Cheltenham & Tewkesbury	Middlesborough
Chorley & S Ribble	Morecambe Bay
City & Hackney	Newcastle
Coventry Teaching	N Devon
Croydon	NE Lincolnshire
Dartford Gravesham & Swanley	N Hertfordshire & Stevenage
Derwentside	N Liverpool
Doncaster E	N Norfolk
Dudley S	N Tyneside
Durham & Chester le Street	Northants Heartland
Ealing	Northumberland
Easington	Norwich
E Hampshire	Nottingham City
E Kent Coastal	Oldham
E Leeds	Preston
E Lincolnshire	Redbridge
E Yorkshire	Redditch & Bromsgrove
E Hull	Rotherham
E Leicester	Scarborough, Whitby & Ryedale
Ellesmere Port & Neston	Slough
Enfield	Solihull
Epping Forest	S Birmingham
Exeter	S E Hertfordshire
Fareham & Gosport	S Somerset
Gateshead	S Tyneside
Great Yarmouth	S Warwickshire
Greater Derby	S Worcestershire
Halton	Southampton City
Hammersmith & Fulham	Southend on Sea
Hartlepool	S Norfolk
Southport & Formby	Wednesbury & Bromwich
St Albans	W Lancashire
Sunderland Teaching	W Lincolnshire
Sussex Downs & Weald	West of Cornwall
Swindon	Westminster
Tower Hamlets	Wokingham
Wakefield West	Wolverhampton City
Walsall Teaching	Wycombe
Waltham Forest	