



# REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

## PORTFOLIO AREA: HEALTH & COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

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Date of Meeting: 29<sup>th</sup> September 2003

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Public

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Key Decision: Yes

Recorded in Forward Plan: No

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### Inside Policy Framework

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**Title:** SURE START CARLISLE SOUTH - ACCOUNTABLE BODY STATUS

**Report of:** HEAD OF ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

**Report reference:** ECD31/03

### Summary:

To request that the City Council assume the role of Accountable Body for the Carlisle South Sure Start Programme.

### Recommendations:

It is recommended:

- (a) That the City Council agrees in principle, to take on the role of Accountable Body for the Sure Start Carlisle South Programme subject to the production of a satisfactory risk assessment and Memorandum of Agreement.
- (b) That the details of the risk assessment and Memorandum of Agreement be agreed to the satisfaction of the Portfolio Holder for Health & Community Activities in consultation with appropriate Business Unit Heads.

**Contact Officer:** Rob Burns

**Ext:** 7352

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

## **1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS**

- 1.1 Members will know that the City Council is already the Lead Agency for the Sure Start Carlisle South Programme. This means that we are required to set the tone for constructive collaboration and active participation by all stakeholders; give energy to the programme; provide guidance, help solve problems and build ownership of the Programme at a local level.
- 1.2 To date, we have been successful in this enterprise and the programme is developing on schedule in accordance with the Delivery Plan.
- 1.3 The Programme is already subject to an external risk assessment devised by the Sure Start Unit and has just received 'low risk' status for the third time running.
- 1.4 District Audit has also undertaken a full audit of the finance functions for 2001/02 and declared all was satisfactory in term of what the money was being spent on and all the financial systems in place
- 1.5 However, one of the areas, which have been identified as not working satisfactorily, is that of the role of the Accountable Body.
- 1.6 Presently, the County Council has this role and this was agreed by the original Steering Group in an effort to try to give a balance in the partnership and the continuing commitment of both Local Authorities to the Programme.
- 1.7 In many other Sure Start Programmes, the roles of Accountable Body and the Lead Agent are taken by the same organisation.
- 1.8 However, it is clear that the split in this case is actually leading to uncertainties and inefficiencies in the administration of the Programme, particularly in the financial protocols.
- 1.9 As the Lead Agent, the City Council employs the management staff for the Programme and all the expenditure goes through our system.
- 1.10 The Sure Start Finance Manager maintains and monitors the accounts and prepares a quarterly statement for reimbursement from the County Council as the Accountable Body.

- 1.11 The County Council merely sends this statement on to the Sure Start Unit and when the money is paid, they pass it on to us.
- 1.12 Technically the role of the Accountable Body should be more than that i.e. it should; provide administrative and financial guidance and support to the Management Committee; ensure that allocated funds are spent according to the plan; ensure that systems are in place for monitoring and audit; have the powers to commission services which cover the full range of Sure Start activities.
- 1.13 The Programme Management Team, funded through the Sure Start grant, includes staff who have responsibility for all of the above, although officers of the Council, particularly from the Community Support Section, advise, give guidance and help monitor some of these issues .
- 1.14 Because the City Council has acted as the employer for the key management posts in the Programme, the roles outlined in paragraph 1.12 have automatically been assumed by us e.g. as a City Council employee, the Programme Manager cannot purchase goods through the County Council system and therefore the County cannot accept responsibility for the monitoring and audit of that expenditure.
- 1.15 The Sure Start Assessor, who carried out the last risk assessment, suggested that the City Council should be requested to take on the role of Accountable Body and the Programme's Management Committee has endorsed that request.
- 1.16 The County Council also accepts the benefits and has agreed to the transfer of the responsibility if the City Council agrees.
- 1.17 The relationship with the City Council is particularly valued by the Partnership Board and staff of the Programme and indeed, there have been many spin off benefits for the Council also.
- 1.18 Although the Programme could, for a period of up to ten years, generate an expenditure of up to £10m, it is considered that there are no significant risks or financial implications for the Council in taking on the role of Accountable Body, but considerable benefits in terms of accountability and efficiency in the delivery of the Programme.
- 1.19 A rigorous risk assessment is regularly carried out by the Government's Sure Start Inspectorate and the 3 inspections carried out to date, give confidence that the

management and operational systems adopted by the Partnership are both robust and effective.

- 1.20 Extracts from the Inspectors Risk Assessment, particularly those relating to 'Partnership and Governance' and 'Finance', are appended for Members interest and reassurance.
- 1.21 The Council is already the Accountable Body for the Raffles SRB Scheme and recently approved a request to become the AB for the Longtown Market Town Initiative.
- 1.22 The development of Partnership approaches to delivering services to our local communities offers significant benefits and the Council's role as Accountable Body and Lead Agency is often pivotal to their success.
- 1.23 This is certainly true of Sure Start and indeed we are using our connection with the Carlisle South Programme on which to base our Supporting Communities Best Value Review.

## **2. CONSULTATION**

- 2.1 Consultation to Date. The Sure Start Carlisle South Board, The Sure Start Unit and the County Council have been consulted on the proposals.
- 2.2 Consultation proposed. If the proposal is agreed, further consultation will take place with the Board concerning the Partnership Agreement

## **3. STAFFING/RESOURCES COMMENTS**

- 3.1 As the Programme has it's own Management Team, there would be no additional significant implications for City Council staff. Staff from the Community Support Section already advise, give guidance and line management support to the Partnership Board and to Programme staff. The additional level of support required from the Accountancy Section is likely to be minimal, but has not yet been quantified.

## **4. HEAD OF FINANCE'S COMMENTS**

The Head of Finance's comments are incorporated in the main report.

**5. LEGAL COMMENTS**

**6. CORPORATE COMMENTS**

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 In taking on the role of Accountable Body, the Council would become liable for receiving and accounting for the Sure Start grant on behalf of the Partnership. Much of the legwork of this process would be undertaken by the Programme Management Team, but nonetheless, the Council would carry the attendant risks. A full Risk Assessment, following the guidelines recently agreed by this Council would be carried out before final agreement.

**8. EQUALITY ISSUES**

No implications

**9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

**10. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

None

**11. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended:

- (a) That the City Council agrees in principle, to take on the role of Accountable Body for the Sure Start Carlisle South Programme subject to the production of a satisfactory risk assessment and Memorandum of Agreement.
- (b) That the details of the risk assessment and Memorandum of Agreement be agreed to the satisfaction of the Portfolio Holder for Health & Community Activities in consultation with appropriate Business Unit Heads.

**12. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

To respond to the request from the Sure Start Carlisle South Management Committee and to improve the efficient operation of the Programme's financial administration.

C Elliot

Head of Economic & Community Development Services

16<sup>th</sup> September 2003

Programme name: Carlisle south.....Name of assessor: Chris Atkins.....  
 Programme stage 18 months .....Date of assessment: 29/7/03.....

4 Finance							
	<b>Benchmark: Required standard at 18 months</b>	<b>Process benchmark At 6 months</b>	<b>Process benchmark At 12 months</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Action required by who and timescale</b>
1*	Finance staff requirements are identified by the partnership and staff with appropriate finance expertise are appointed. Clear roles and responsibilities are defined and line management arrangements are clear. Finance staffing requirements and finance staff performance are regularly reviewed. <sup>7</sup>	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 6 MONTHS</b>		Previously met.			

<sup>7</sup> The financial responsibility rests ultimately with the accountable body, however, it is fundamental that the partnership board recruit finance staff, or use accountable body finance staff to manage and report to the partnership board on certain financial aspects on their behalf. The most obvious aspects of financial control are planning and budgeting and day-to-day supervision of the financial activities such as making payments and ensuring that adequate records are retained, including the necessity for a clear audit trail.

6.

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2*	Finance policies and procedures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial procedures for use by the programme are documented and agreed by the partnership and accountable body as suitable for the programme.</li> <li>Procurement policy and procedures for use by the programme are documented and agreed by the partnership and accountable body as suitable for the programme.</li> <li>Financial delegations for use by the programme are documented and agreed by the partnership and accountable body as suitable for the programme.</li> </ul> All financial policy documents are communicated to SS staff, members of agencies and the accountable body. Processes are subject to regular review and documents updated as necessary with audience informed of changes. <sup>8</sup>	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 6 MONTHS</b>		Previously met.			Possible change of accountable body from county to city council during this year.

<sup>8</sup> Financial procedures should be clearly documented. These could be the procedures of the accountable body or a hybrid set of procedures that the accountable body and partnership have agreed are appropriate for the size and risks of the programme. These procedures should cover contracting, capital and roles and responsibilities of the partnership and accountable body in processing transactions and maintaining records, as a minimum. These policies should be communicated to all staff and agency staff involved in SS activities and members of the accountable body. The delegated authorities should be written down and relevant staff notified of their level and type of delegated authority. This should state what role they have been authorised to fulfil and sources of additional support or advice. Delegated authorities should include a list of officers who are authorised to order goods or services, to sign service contracts, to certify invoices (confirming receipt), approve invoices (expenditure) and authorise payment. Limits should be set on the amount each person is

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3	The partnership and programme management should ensure that at least three people are involved in ordering, receiving and paying for services. This <i>segregation of duties</i> is important to the smooth operation of systems. <sup>9</sup>	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 6 MONTHS</b>		Previously met.		Follow city council procedures.	

authorised to sign for and also depending on the size of the organisation; the scope of the delegated authority. It should be clear what level of decision should be reserved for the partnership board and response times for these decisions. Procedures should make clear how budgets and activities could be changed from the original budget and which decisions may be taken by programme management and which by the partnership board. Programmes should have a set procedure for procurement. This should state the approach to be taken when purchasing goods of service. Generally the higher the value of the good or service being purchased the more formal the procedure. For instance telephone quotes may be required for items over £100, written quotes over £500 and open tender for items over £3000. These amounts are indicative only and partnerships should use the experience of their partners and external auditors if they require help over setting levels.

<sup>9</sup> It is good practice that wherever possible the responsibilities for certifying and approving and actually authorising payments for goods or services received are segregated between three people. The aim is to ensure that only valid payments are made for goods or service received. The more people involved the less the risk of impropriety. Programmes should also consider who is able to order goods and services and the budgetary controls necessary to ensure funds will be available to pay for goods ordered. As well as maintaining some segregation between order approval and receipt of goods. Certification is confirmation that goods have either been received or that the service has been delivered in line with the original request. Approval is normally undertaken by the person who is responsible for that particular budget and agreement for the payment to be made. Authorisation is the person who confirms the accuracy and correctness of the payment method, (cheque or cash or BACs). An example: A health visitor may request a new piece of equipment; this order would be approved by the budget holder (separate from the health visitor). The health visitor may certify the receipt of new equipment, the Programme Manager (or as decided in the delegated authorities) should approve the payment and the Accountable Body's Finance Officer would authorise the payment method.

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4*	Partnership board and programme management receive regular reports on programme expenditure and details of original and latest budgets and forecasts. The partnerships board and programme management have the authority to commission more detailed analysis, as they feel necessary. Timetables agreed for management reports and for ad hoc requests. Style and content of reports is regularly reviewed and amended to reflect the views of the partnership board and programme management. Longer-term forecasts are also available to the Board in line with SS requirements for monitoring five-year plans. <sup>10</sup>	Information needs have identified by programme management and the partnership board. Responsibilities and timescales for the provision of this information have been agreed between the partnership, programme management, finance officers and the accountable body.	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 12 MONTHS</b>	Previously met			Annual accounts to be presented to exec as soon as finalised. Exec not quorate to receive today, computer crash last week has rendered some information irretrievable. PT

<sup>10</sup> The aim of these documents is to show that the Partnership and programme management has a good understanding and is in control of its long term and annual budget. Long-term finance plans should describe and demonstrate how resource will be used to meet the Delivery Plan and targets contained within it. They should be approved by the Partnership Board and reviewed annually to ensure they accurately reflect changes to the programme. Annual budgets are normally broken down into a monthly (or quarterly) forecast of income and expenditure. Income and expenditure should be grouped in a way that reflects how the programme operates and links to the returns requested by SSU. There should be detail such as the cost of salaries, by activity, rent, heating, lighting and ongoing running costs. The level of activity will vary throughout the year and the budget should reflect this, so not all budgets should be a straight line from April through to March. The key to the documents is they should be presented in a format that is clear and user friendly and that enables the information to be used as a management tool. A page of number s with no classification or grouping is of little use. Don't forget that budgets of nearly £1million are being managed by programmes. Documents should be prepared with a commentary explaining variances and proposing alternatives/implications.

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5	The programme maintains an asset register both for capital spend and for small items of equipment that have been purchased from revenue funds. This register is regularly updated and the existence of the assets listed checked at least once a year.	A system has been identified for recording assets purchased through capital and revenue funds and tracking the location of these assets. A security marking system has been agreed and a process for allocating responsibility for individual items.	BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 12 MONTHS			System now in place and information being collated by AM	
6*	The programme received an unqualified audit certificate from its external auditors. Finance actions plans identified by internal auditors are being addressed in line with the timescales identified.	External auditors have been identified (usually those of the accountable body) and any information requirements agreed up front at least 6 months before the first audit certificate is due. Timing of the benchmark may be flexed depending on when the first audit certificate is due. If the benchmark is not assessed at 6 months because of timing score as met.		Previously met.			
7	The partnership should ensure accountable body submit grant claims quarterly, complying with the required timetable as detailed in the Sure Start guidance.	BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 6 MONTHS		Previously met.			

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8	The programme to spend against the budget profile. With no more than 5% underspend and 0% overspend	Not assessed, treat as met.	With no more than 5% underspend.			underspent – mainly due to problems of recruitment. Spending being regularly reviewed this year to minimise underspend	
	Total benchmarks not met						
	Total benchmarks				8		
	% of benchmarks not met shown as a decimal						

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<b>5 Governance and Partnership Working</b>							
	<b>Benchmark: Required standard at 18 months</b>	<b>Process benchmark At 6 months</b>	<b>Process benchmark At 12 months</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Not met</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Action required by who and timescale</b>
1*	Partnership/management board has documented and agreed terms of reference that are subject to regular review. <sup>11</sup>	Partnership/management board has an action plan and has identified responsibilities for developing terms of reference.	Partnership/management board has documented and agreed terms of reference.	Previously met			
2*	Decision making process for partnership is documented, agreed, clear and transparent. Processes have been communicated to all SS staff and agencies involved, as appropriate. Processes are subject to regular review. <sup>12</sup>	Partnership/management board has an action plan and has identified responsibilities for developing its decision-making processes	Decision making process for the partnership has been documented and agreed by the partnership and is clear and transparent. The process has been communicated to SS staff.	Previously met			

<sup>11</sup> The partnership will have set out its management arrangements in its delivery plan. In order to implement the plan, the partnership will have to consider how it will operate-how often it will meet, the format and structure of meetings and what issues it will delegate to programme staff, how the PM is to report to them. The terms of reference may set out how partnership will address strategic and operational management of the programme and who will need to be represented at meetings.

<sup>12</sup> This may be set out in the terms of reference. All partnership members and programme staff should be clear about where decisions are made, and the delegated levels of authority to any sub groups or to programme staff etc.

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<b>5 Governance and Partnership Working</b>							
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3	Partnership ensures appropriate managerial and professional support for programme manager. <sup>13</sup>	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 6 MONTHS</b>		Previously met		Rob Burns from city council provides regular professional support.	
4	Partnership management group have reviewed meeting arrangements and ensured that they are appropriate for their needs.	Partnership/management group meets regularly (minimum every 6 weeks) and meetings are recorded with action points. Action points are followed up at the next meeting. <sup>14</sup>	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 12 MONTHS</b>	Previously met			
5	Partnership/management boards have representation from all stakeholders, and membership is regularly reviewed, with changes made as necessary. <sup>15</sup>	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 6 MONTHS</b>		Previously met		New councillors allocated to board following elections	Provider agencies not fully represented

<sup>13</sup> The programme manager is accountable to the Partnership/Management Board. The line manager is carrying out this function on their behalf. This should be explicit in the arrangements put into place, and any potential conflicts of interests reduced.

<sup>14</sup> Regional team to be circulated with minutes of partnership meetings. Look for regular meetings, attendee list and that the partnership is dealing with business.

<sup>15</sup> Look to assess the membership of the partnership-that the right people are/remain on board. Senior representation is required from provider agencies, so that decisions can be made by partnership, rather than representatives going away to seek authority. Does the partnership remain open to including community and voluntary organisations?

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6	Parents are represented on the Board and in working groups demonstrating their involvement in strategic management and decision-making. Parent representation is reviewed regularly and changes made as necessary. <sup>16</sup>	Partnership has a strategy in place to ensure parents are involved in strategic management and decision-making. The outcome and strategy is reviewed by the partnership regularly and revisions made as necessary.	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 12 MONTHS</b>	Previously met.		New parents being trained to be involved as others move on to traineeships or to other roles/responsibilities	
7	Partnership has policy and procedure for dealing with complaints that is available and easily accessible to all staff and users of SS services. Complaints are monitored and reported regular to the Board. Policy is regularly reviewed and amendments made as appropriate. <sup>17</sup>	Partnership has an action plan and has identified responsibilities for developing a policy and procedure for dealing with complaints	Partnership has documented and communicated their policy and procedure for dealing with complaints to SS staff and those in contact with SS services.			Policy written and accepted by board, who have asked for regular complaints report	

<sup>16</sup> Partnerships may have set local targets for numbers of parents involved in management. In addition, observation and discussions with parents may give an indication of their involvement.

<sup>17</sup> Partnerships may be using the complaints policies of employing agencies-how would they deal with a complaint made about the partnership itself? Require a SS policy to be included in information for community-may be relevant for Regional Manager to be named within policy.

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8	Strategic plans and processes are in place for mainstreaming and regularly reviewed and revised by the partnership. <sup>18</sup>	Not assessed at 6 months [score as met]	Partnership has an action plan and has identified responsibilities for developing strategic plans for mainstreaming			L.A Strategic planning officer identified – Paul Davies. Cumbria ss network runs regular mainstreaming meetings. Involved in Children's centres and extended schools agenda	
9*	All insurance requirements are met (Employers liability, buildings insurance and public liability etc.). <sup>19</sup>	Partnerships are able to provide evidence of insurance advice sought and action planning to remove barriers, work with partners to ensure appropriate cover is available.	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 12 MONTHS</b>	Previously met.		Via accountable body/employers	

<sup>18</sup> Partnership needs to identify how it will take forward the mainstreaming agenda. They have already completed a tapered money plan. *SSU will also be identifying how this process will be taken forward.*

<sup>19</sup> The accountable body should lead the partnership on this. Employing agencies have a responsibility to provide insurance cover for the programme staff.

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10	Agreements are in place between partnership and agency/agencies providing services on behalf of partnership. Service outcomes should contribute to Sure Start objectives and targets. Agreements are regularly reviewed against outcomes and changes in service delivery. <sup>20</sup>	Partnership have identified process for designing agreements between partnership and partners/agencies providing services on behalf of partnership	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 12 MONTHS</b>	Previously met		SLAgs in place, reviewed annually as to value for money, meeting targets and objectives.	
11	Partnership regularly reviews services delivered within programme-reviews based on feedback and consultation with parents and children. <sup>21</sup>	Partnership ensures that new services reflect consultation undertaken with parents and children.	Partnership have documented and agreed the process whereby services delivered within the programme are reviewed			Regular meetings with service providers to review and agree targets	
12	Partnership/management board makes decisions based on management information received on a regular basis (financial reports, progress reports against milestones). <sup>22</sup>	Programme has capacity to collate management information (finance, monitoring data). Action plan drawn up to implement systems.	<b>BENCHMARK IS AN ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT AT 12 MONTHS</b>	Previously met			

<sup>20</sup> The partnership has made decisions about local activities: how they are going to deliver the objectives. The process by which services were commissioned and agencies chosen to deliver should be transparent and open to review. Agreements between the partnership and agencies can be referred to as service level agreements and should contain specifications on the nature and extent of activity provided and how much this will cost. It should also make clear how this is reviewed and what will happen if the service is withdrawn, or fails to deliver. Has the partnership got a process in place for addressing conflict of interest- for example how does the partnership deal with a partner on a management board who is assessing his own organisation's performance?

<sup>21</sup> Some programmes may have a large core team delivering activities: others have a structure that 'contracts' out activities to other agencies. Review of services should be done within the context of their agreement, using local evaluation resources to inform decision making

<sup>22</sup> Partnership /board has responsibility for the stewardship of the programme, they are accountable for probity and for delivery of outcomes. Need to reinforce that to do this they need good management information to be provided by programme staff.

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	Total benchmarks not met						
	Total benchmarks				12		
	% of benchmarks not met shown as a decimal						