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Research into Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (CSAs)

This report offers an overview of the views stakeholders on CSAs and suggestions for their future development.

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Research into Childcare Sufficiency Assessments

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

CIW - Care Inspectorate Wales is the independent regulator of social care and

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childcare in Wales. They register, inspect and take action to improve the quality and safety of services for the well-being of the people of Wales.

Childcare Offer - Up to 30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for eligible parents/carers of three- and four-year-olds, for up to 48 weeks of the year.

CWLWM - Childcare Wales Learning & Working Mutually: A consortium of five childcare and play partners, delivering a bilingual integrated service that will ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families across Wales.

Family Information Service (FIS) - Each local authority has a Family Information Service who can advise on: Childcare; help with children and families; and support on family related issues.

Flying Start - Welsh Government programme providing support in some of Wales's most disadvantaged communities for children (0-3 years) and their families. Part of the Flying Start provision currently includes 12.5 hours of funded childcare per week, for 39 weeks, to support the development of the two- to three-year-olds eligible for support. The childcare element of this programme is currently undergoing expansion throughout Wales.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) - The National Minimum Standards outline the requirements for regulated childcare for children up to the age of 12 years old. They support providers in meeting the regulatory requirements associated with their provision.

SASS - Self-Assessment of Service Statement: All registered childminders, childcare and play providers are legally required to complete a SASS in relation to monitoring and compliance of service under the Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations 2010. The SASS is completed online.

WESP - A Welsh in Education Strategic Plan is a 10-year plan that sets out the

actions and targets to increase the Welsh language provision and skills in the education and training system in Wales

1. Introduction

1.1 Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (CSA) form part of a statutory duty placed on local authorities to assess whether there are sufficient childcare opportunities to support working families in their area. In September 2022, local authorities submitted their latest CSAs to the Welsh Government. This report offers an overview of the views of Welsh Government officials, stakeholders and local authorities on the processes involved in completing the CSAs, challenges in completing them, the perceived usefulness of the CSA documents and suggestions for their future development.

Background

1.2 Under the Childcare Act 2006 (Local Authority Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2016 (the Regulations) local authorities are required to assess the demand for and availability of childcare in their area every five years.[1] This is known as the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) and was passed under section 26 of The Childcare Act 2006. The Act clarifies the vital role local authorities play as strategic leaders in the provision of childcare locally. It places a duty on local authorities to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, provision of childcare that is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents/ carers in their area to enable them to take up, or remain, in work; or undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work.

1.3 The Act looks to ensure that local authorities work in partnership with private, voluntary, community and the maintained sector[2] to shape and secure

sufficient, sustainable and flexible childcare.

1.4 The aim of the CSA is to examine which childcare options are currently available and to identify areas that need developing by highlighting gaps within the existing provision. CSAs help local authorities meet their statutory responsibilities by assessing the supply (childcare provision) and demand for childcare places (future needs of parents/carers) in their local area so that gaps in provision can be addressed.

1.5 In fulfilling their duty to secure sufficient childcare, local authorities must meet the regulatory requirements and have regard to the Welsh Government's Childcare Statutory Guidance (2016) (hereafter referred to as the statutory guidance) which sets out the legislative framework underpinning the duty on local authorities, and the requirement to secure, and assess for, sufficient childcare in their area.[3] In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Welsh Government also issued supplementary guidance to local authorities in respect of the CSAs for 2022 (see also section 3 below for more details).[4]

[1][The Childcare Act 2006 \(Local Authority Assessment\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2016 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[2] Maintained nursery schools are local authority controlled schools for children who have not yet reached compulsory school age.

[3][Childcare: statutory guidance for local authorities \(gov.wales\)](#)

[4][Childcare sufficiency assessment 2022: supplementary guidance for local authorities | GOV.WALES](#)

2. Methodology

2.1 This section details the aims and objectives of the research and outlines the

methodology adopted.

Aims and objectives of the research

2.2 The aims and objectives of the research were as follows:

- To undertake primary research to identify how local authorities use the CSAs in their planning and delivery of support to parents and children.
- To summarise any challenges faced by local authorities in completing the CSA process, the availability and use of data to inform CSAs, and how CSAs are translated into practice including how they influence policy and decision making.
- To draw conclusions on the suitability of the current format of CSAs and identify recommendations for their future, including how local authorities can be better supported in undertaking their CSAs in future.

Overview of methodology

2.3 A qualitative approach was adopted to undertake the research which involved one to one interviews and group discussions with Welsh Government Officials, stakeholders and local authority childcare leads associated with CSAs.

Fieldwork with local authorities

2.4 A combination of individual interviews and group discussions were undertaken with local authorities to gather information and views relating to:

- How CSAs, Action Plans and progress reports are completed e.g., which data sources are utilised.
- How CSAs and Actions Plans are used by the LA to inform childcare

provision planning.

- The statutory and enhanced guidance and templates/approaches available.
- Challenges to completing CSAs and how these can be overcome.
- Whether completing the CSA could be made easier.
- Future issues and looking ahead, including completing annual progress reports.

2.5 The topic guide used during these interviews/group discussions is presented in Annex 1.

2.6 The planned approach to consulting with local authorities was to have one to one interviews with officials from seven local authorities and two group discussions made up of officials from the remaining 15 local authorities. The seven local authorities selected for one to one interviews were chosen on the basis of some being more experienced in producing CSAs, and some being less experienced. These local authorities were also located across a varied geographical area. The remaining local authorities were invited to group discussions, with the aim of having one group made up of more experienced authorities, and another made up of less experienced authorities. Categorising local authorities by CSA experience levels was based on information and guidance provided by the client (Welsh Government).

2.7 Some adjustments had to be made to these arrangements due to the availability of some local authority representatives to attend group sessions. As a result, Arad hosted three, instead of the two planned, group discussion groups, and local authority representatives attending these groups had different levels of experience of producing CSA documents. Three local authorities were also unable to attend any of the group discussions and therefore additional one to one interviews were conducted to accommodate these. As a result, ten rather than the planned seven one to one interviews were conducted. The interview process did however ensure that representatives from all 22 local authorities participated in either one to one or group discussion interviews.

Welsh Government officials

2.8 Five Welsh Government officials were interviewed to gain an understanding of current and potential future use of CSAs from a Welsh Government perspective in terms of planning and informing policy development; and any expected changes to CSA requirements in the future. The topic guide for these interviews is presented in Annex 1.

Stakeholders

2.9 A group discussion was conducted with CWLWM partners to gather their views on the following topics:

- Their involvement in CSAs e.g., data sharing and contributions.
- How and to what extent do CSAs and Actions Plans impact their work – e.g., influence their policies and planning priorities.
- To what extent CSAs influence other policy and decision making on a local and national level.
- How, if at all could the current process of producing CSAs be improved.
- Could CSAs be put to better effect to support childcare planning and if so how?

2.10 Table 2.1 presents an overview of the different strands of qualitative research undertaken. To ensure that the views of all individuals involved in the CSA process were gathered, more than one representative from some local authorities participated in the interview. This reflected the fact in some local authorities two or more members of the childcare or play team had been involved in writing the CSAs while in others the roles of individuals had changed since the writing of the CSA and therefore previous as well as existing childcare leads were interviewed. In total, 32 representatives across the 22 local authorities were interviewed.

Table 2.1. Overview of methodology

Participant	Method	Number of participants	Date of fieldwork
Welsh Government Officials	Video interviews	5	July - October 2023
Local authorities	3 video group discussions	14*	July - October 2023
Local authorities	10 one to one video interviews	18*	July - October 2023
CWLWM partners	1 group discussion	12	October 2023

*For some local authorities, more than one representative participated in consultations

3. Context

Statutory Guidance

3.1 As noted in Section 1, local authorities have a statutory duty to prepare assessments of the sufficiency of childcare provision (Childcare Sufficiency Assessment) in their area every five years and to keep these under review. The statutory duty is set by the Childcare Act 2006 (Local Authority Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2016[5] which also sets out what local authorities must cover in their CSAs. To support local authorities in their assessments, the Welsh Government issued guidance in 2016[6]. The guidance includes a list of topics

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or areas that each local authority needs to include in their assessment and report on in the CSA document in order to meet the requirements of the Regulations. These include:

- the demand for childcare for each type of childcare provision
- the supply of childcare for each type of childcare

3.2 When assessing demand and supply local authorities are required to consider a range of factors including, but not limited to:

- The number of childcare places required and available for children up to the age of 18, by age range and type.
- The number of childcare places required and available according to (amongst other things):
 - full-time and part-time provision.
 - provision that can be funded using the childcare element of working tax credit and universal credit.
 - provision for children with Additional Learning Needs (referred to as Special Education Needs within the 2016 document).
 - Welsh medium provision.
 - early years education provision.

3.3 The guidance also outlines the need for local authorities to undertake an analysis of the gap between demand and supply as well as identify barriers to childcare. Local authorities are also required to include an analysis of the geographical distribution of provision within their assessment as well as the sustainability of the childcare market including an assessment of workforce development and training needs of the childcare sector. The guidance outlines the need to assess the provision and take-up of childcare across local authority

borders as well as an overview of local population demographics including factors and trends that influence demand for childcare.

3.4 The 2016 guidance document also refers to the need for local authorities to gather contributions from a range of partners and organisations, as well as from other relevant local authority policy and delivery areas e.g., education, early years, play, planning, housing, transport and social care. The guidance also outlines data sources that the local authority should access and analyse in order to assess demand and supply for childcare in their area.

3.5 The resulting CSA documents produced by each local authority that include all the above information and analysis range from 100 page to over 300 page documents. Producing these reports requires a significant input of time and resources – see ‘Time and Resources Required,’ section below.

3.6 Local authorities are also required to produce an action plan detailing the *‘actions, priorities and milestones to maintain strengths and address shortcomings identified in the CSA’* as well as annual progress reports detailing the progress which has been made against the actions, priorities and milestones in the action plan.

3.7 Since the CSA guidance for local authorities was published in 2016, significant policy changes have been introduced including the introduction of the Childcare Offer for Wales. More recently the Welsh Government has made a commitment to expand publicly-funded childcare availability for two year olds through an expansion of the Flying Start programme. These policy changes have had a significant impact on the demand and supply of childcare provision which needs to be reflected in the CSAs. The COVID-19 pandemic also had a considerable impact on the childcare market, and this prompted the Welsh Government in 2021 to issue supplementary guidance to local authorities[7]. The supplementary guidance placed a requirement on local authorities to report on how COVID-19 has affected the supply of childcare, the demand for childcare and the sustainability of existing childcare providers, as well as how these

impacts will be addressed. The supplementary guidance also required local authorities to consider within their CSAs Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs), data capture and reporting and the Approval of Home Childcare Providers (Wales) Scheme 2021, known as the Nanny Scheme[8].

[5][The Childcare Act 2006 \(Local Authority Assessment\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2016 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[6][Childcare: statutory guidance for local authorities | GOV.WALES](#)

[7][Childcare sufficiency assessment 2022: supplementary guidance for local authorities | GOV.WALES](#)

[8][The Approval of Home Childcare Providers \(Wales\) Scheme 2021 | Care Inspectorate Wales](#)

4. Findings

4.1 This section outlines the findings from consultations with local authorities, Welsh Government officials, and stakeholders.

Views on guidance issued

4.2 Most local authorities and wider stakeholders who expressed a view on the 2016 guidance document noted that it offered a clear outline as to what was required to undertake the assessment, including the data sources that should be accessed to inform the process and how this data should be presented within the CSA document. However, although many local authorities were of the opinion that having some form of guidance was important and helpful, most also felt that the current statutory guidance document was too lengthy and overly

prescriptive, and that adhering to all aspects of it leads to the production of a very large CSA document that is not easily digested.

“ The guidance is very prescriptive and is over 50 pages long in itself – following all aspects of this guidance is bound to lead to creating a monster of a CSA document. (Local authority) ”

“ [The guidance] doesn’t need to be quite so big. It’s too broad. Too massive and never going to give the answers to the questions [Welsh Government] are trying to get answers for. (Local authority) ”

4.3 When commenting on the content of the guidance document, one local authority explained that it is an out-of-date document and to improve its usefulness in guiding local authorities to produce their CSA, the document needs to be amended so that it better reflects the current childcare policy environment.

“ It needs a total revamp. It’s out of date. So much has happened and so much has changed, so it doesn’t feel relevant at all. (Local authority) ”

4.4 In the view of almost all local authorities and wider stakeholders, the volume of information and data required to adhere to the guidance issued and the size of the CSA documents produced to present all this information is too large. The volume of data presented within each CSA document makes it difficult for anyone accessing them to easily gain an overview of whether sufficient childcare is available in any area. As a result, the findings of this research indicate that CSA documents produced to date do not get used to any great extent (see also *‘How CSAs are used’* in section 4.37).

4.5 Some local authority representatives suggested that instead of reporting in detail on all factors that influence the sufficiency of childcare in their area, CSA

documents may be of greater value or use if they focussed mainly on specific childcare sufficiency themes that are particularly relevant to the time when the CSAs are being produced. This in their view, would result in the production of a more succinct and relevant CSA document, which would be more likely to be used, for example local authorities would be more likely to use it for their ongoing childcare planning. Producing thematic CSAs of this nature would require the Welsh Government to produce revised CSA guidance in advance of each round. As noted above, supplementary guidance was issued in 2022 requiring local authorities to report on the impact of recent developments including COVID-19, WESPs and the Approval of Home Childcare Providers (Wales) Scheme 2021, known as the Nanny Scheme[9]. However, local authorities felt that these were additional themes they were required to report on as opposed to specific or standalone themes.

4.6 It should be noted that the guidance reflects the requirements of the Regulations. However, most stakeholders were of the view that the current CSA guidance should be reviewed to make it less prescriptive. There was a consensus that the guidance should include a core set of childcare sufficiency themes or factors that local authorities should be required to report on. However, it was also felt that beyond these core themes, local authorities should be allowed the flexibility to report on key areas they consider to be childcare sufficiency priorities in their area.

Assessing supply of and demand for childcare from data sources

4.7 The key processes involved in producing the CSA documents include collating and analysing data relating to supply of and demand for childcare. The following sections outline the approaches and data sources local authorities use to assess supply and demand.

Assessing supply of childcare

4.8 The main data source local authorities use to assess supply of childcare is the Self-Assessment of Service Statement (SASS) data. This is an online form that all “Registered Persons and Responsible individuals are required to complete under the Childminding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations 2010 in relation to monitor compliance of a service”.^[10] The data is collected by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) on an annual basis and local authorities are given access to this data when writing their CSAs. SASS data used by local authorities to evidence supply typically include the number of registered childcare providers across the local authority area. The data is usually presented as number of settings by type of provision (e.g. childminder, sessional daycare, full daycare, etc.) and the number of places available, on both a ward and local authority wide level.

4.9 Local authorities felt that this data is useful and enables them to gain a detailed picture of childcare supply in their areas. Several local authorities commented that this data has also improved in recent years with childcare settings providing more accurate responses to the survey, meaning more reliable data is being collected. However, most local authorities, as well as some stakeholders still questioned the reliability and validity of the SASS data for a number of reasons.

4.10 Many local authorities reported receiving incorrect SASS information, possibly due to providers either misunderstanding the questions or a lack of time to respond to them correctly. Several local authorities offered support sessions for providers to encourage or enable them to complete the SASS, but still found they received incorrect information. Some local authorities explained that they were able to identify inaccuracies in the data and make adjustments to the data based on their own knowledge or by gaining further information directly from providers in their area. However, it was noted that doing this was more difficult for local authorities where a larger number of providers were operating.

“ At the heart of the matter, the problem is that we are reliant on providers for the data. We are not getting that (data is missing, out of date, not robust, or just plain incorrect). So the quality of data impacts on the validity of the conclusions, and we do not control the quality of that data. (Local authority) ”

4.11 Local authorities and stakeholders reported that SASS data is also incomplete and does not capture information on unregistered childcare providers, which some suggested, could potentially make up a considerable proportion of the childcare sector. Consequently, the SASS data does not present a full picture of local childcare provision. Several local authorities suggested more needs to be done to encourage registered providers to complete the SASS survey, including some form of penalty for those who do not complete it.

4.12 The SASS data shared with local authorities does not include information that can identify individual providers. This, according to local authorities limits the extent to which it can be used to assess provision sufficiency on a ward or Lower Super Output Area level. It also limits their ability to identify which providers have not completed the SASS and therefore their ability to contact these providers to gain the required information directly to gain the information required to fill any gaps in the SASS data.

4.13 The SASS information shared with local authorities was also presented as raw, unanalysed data in large Excel spreadsheets. Some local authorities noted they found it difficult to interpret, understand and navigate, data presented in this way, which added to the frustration of knowing that the data included some gaps and incorrect information. It was suggested it would be helpful if the data was analysed or presented in a more user-friendly format prior to being sent to local authorities.

“ It takes too long to go through the [SASS] data, it's not presented in a nice

or friendly way. (Local authority) ”

4.14 CIW have since produced and published an interactive data visualisation tool for viewing SASS data. This was not available at the time when the 2022 CSAs were being produced.

4.15 Most local authorities and stakeholders emphasised how SASS data (as well as most other data used in CSAs) becomes out of date the moment it is published, offering what some referred to as only “*a snapshot in time.*” The profile of childcare provision often changes over time therefore referring to data from one point in time limits the degree to which the CSA documents can inform childcare support planning on an ongoing basis. Local authorities therefore referred to the need to access regularly updated data in order to accurately plan and support actions to address childcare sufficiency gaps.

4.16 Some local authorities also drew on other data sources to assess supply of childcare in their area. This is in line with statutory guidance which says that local authorities are required to draw upon numerous sources of data both primary and secondary to gain an understanding of the nature of the childcare market. Some carried out their own provider surveys or drew on local knowledge and information held within the local authority to assess the available supply. These other information and data sources were also often used to help fill any gaps in the SASS data.

Assessing demand for childcare

4.17 Assessing demand for childcare can be more challenging than assessing supply. Local authorities use various data sources to examine levels of demand for childcare in their area, including, providers’ waiting lists, population census data, local housing developments and parent surveys.

4.18 Population census data is collected once every 10 years and counts all people and households in England and Wales. This data offers demographic information by geographical areas called Output Areas which are built from postcode units and represent a cluster of households.[11] The most recent census was conducted in March 2021. However, data from this census was not available when local authorities were required to complete their most recent CSA document in 2022. Therefore, local authorities had to rely on the 2011 census data, which many noted was 10 years out of date and therefore of little use as a source of evidence to assess current demand for childcare. Many local authorities noted that the local housing development data provided them with a more useful measure of potential future demand for childcare, particularly within specific geographical areas. This is data that is usually held within local authority departments and therefore fairly easy for childcare teams responsible for undertaking the CSA to access.

4.19 The challenge of assessing demand for childcare on a local level is also noted within some academic literature. According to Langford et al. (2019) the method of using data that relies on geographical boundaries as a measure of demand for childcare is flawed as *“arbitrary administrative boundaries bear no relationship to the true behaviour of people seeking access to services.”* Langford et al. state that when seeking childcare services, people may not only consider those services which fall within the administrative boundaries where they live. Furthermore Langford et.al argued that census data *“represent only a best guess of the actual or realised demand in any particular area.”*[12] The CSA guidance which stipulates that CSAs must take account of needs of parents who use childcare outside their area as well as those who travel to the area to use childcare. The challenges associated with taking this demand into account are reflected in the feedback received from many local authorities, particularly those that border a number of other local authority areas, who noted that this is an area of the assessment they often find difficult to complete.

4.20 In terms of other population data, a small number of local authorities also mentioned that they were able to use health data (e.g. live births), however,

others said they were not able to access this data as it was held by the local health board rather than the local authority.

4.21 One local authority explained that:

“ The data that would be the most useful is not possible to collect e.g. how many are accessing wrap around; on any given day, a live update on numbers of children attending settings would be useful – Flying Start settings have an SLA and have to report this information, other settings do not – so if settings aren’t engaging with FS, then they wouldn’t have this data. (Local authority) ”

4.22 In 2022, local authorities received support from Welsh Government to capture data relating to the demand for childcare via a parent survey which the Welsh Government hosted. This was the first time the Welsh Government had provided this support reflecting their acknowledgment of the time and resources that local authorities have had to invest in capturing similar data during previous CSA rounds.

“ It’s difficult to engage parents. It’s quite resource intensive, so the parents survey was a way of helping the local authorities to do this. (Welsh Government representative) ”

4.23 Welsh Government worked with local authorities to produce this survey which contained a core set of questions. The aim was to reduce some burden on local authorities and to produce a consistent set of data across Wales. Although Welsh Government advertised the parent survey via social media, it was the responsibility of local authorities to distribute and promote the survey once it went live.

4.24 Local authorities generally welcomed the support from Welsh Government

in developing and hosting the parent survey, and many noted that the support reduced the burden on them and provided a consistent approach to the collection of parental demand data.

“ Welsh Government doing the parental survey was great. It took some of the pressure off. (Local authority) ”

4.25 Welsh Government officials commented that there was a mix of response rates to the survey across different local authorities, with some areas gaining good response rates, while lower response rates were gathered in others. This largely reflected the extent to which local authorities promoted the survey and encouraged parents in their area to complete it.

4.26 Overall, local authorities felt it was useful to have a national parents' survey that included a set of standardised questions that could be comparable across Wales. Most noted that they would welcome the opportunity to gain the same support from the Welsh Government in the future. One local authority lead noted that *“it [the parents' survey] does serve a purpose in helping us write the CSA and does give us a snapshot of demand”*.

4.27 Some local authorities however had some criticisms of the survey. Some felt that the survey was too long for parents to answer, and that it was not open for a long enough time period to enable a sufficient number of parents to complete it. Others commented that the majority of parents who decided to take the time to complete the survey did so *“because they have something to complain about”*, and so results tended to be skewed negatively. There were also cases of parents answering the survey incorrectly. For example, one local authority noted confusion by parents around questions relating to tax free support.

4.28 Most local authorities felt that the response rate of the survey was very low and therefore difficult to predict demand and base recommendations and action

plans on this source of data alone. Some local authorities outlined that parental choice of childcare is often complex, impacted by logistical challenges, such as time constraints arising from parents' working patterns. It can be difficult to capture these complexities within a survey of parents, and therefore the responses gathered often fail to provide a 'true' indication of demand. Consequently, A small number of local authorities felt that parents survey responses did not necessarily reflect their actual requirements. For example, if parents noted in their survey responses that they would like access to certain types of childcare in the area, this does not necessarily mean they would actually use these types of childcare in the future, making it difficult to form meaningful actions from the data.

4.29 Many local authorities also undertook surveys of employers in order to assess demand for childcare. However, some local authorities commented that this survey only generated a low response rate which did not prove very useful. Engagement with stakeholder and other partners is addressed in more detail in the 'Working with stakeholders and partners' section.

4.30 Overall, assessing demand is complex and challenging. Childcare is often supply led and parents' take-up the provision available, making it difficult to assess demand for particular types of childcare if that childcare is not already available. Furthermore, parents who do not work because they have no access to childcare are often overlooked when provision is supply led. The challenging nature of assessing demand raises the question as to whether further support is necessary to help local authorities address this requirement within the CSA documents.

Working with stakeholders and partners

4.31 As the CSA guidance stipulates:

“ Local authorities will be required to ensure a sufficient contribution from a range of partners and organisations, in meeting their duty to assess, plan and secure the sufficiency of childcare provision in their area. ”

4.32 This means that as well as accessing data from Welsh Government and CIW as discussed above, local authorities are required to gain the views of childcare partners, employers, schools and other organisations in their area related to childcare, as well as work with them to access data or any other useful information in completing the CSA.

4.33 It was recognised by local authorities that consultation with wider stakeholders could serve the purpose of helping to gain a fuller picture of childcare and childcare need in their area. For example, consulting with employers and jobcentres was acknowledged by some as important to gather views on whether there was enough childcare available for those accessing or looking for work or training. However, levels of engagement from these wider stakeholders were low across local authorities, with some unable to get any or very little response to employer surveys, schools surveys and other consultation methods with stakeholders. Those who did receive views from stakeholders often commented that responses were high level and lacked detailed and meaningful insight to have any impact on the CSA. It was therefore questioned by several local authorities whether this part of the CSA requirements was necessary, especially given the time-consuming nature of consultation, for very little result back. Those who acknowledged the importance of engaging with stakeholders, questioned whether there was a way in future to be able to gather more responses. One local authority suggested that surveys could be designed and hosted by Welsh Government, in a similar way to the parent’s survey, but for all partners and stakeholders e.g. employers and school who local authorities are expected to consult with as part of the CSA.

4.34 Local authorities also engage with partners such as CWLWM and Welsh in Education Planning forums as part of the CSA process. Local authorities are

required to prepare Welsh in Education Strategic Plans setting out how they propose to improve the planning and standards of Welsh in education with the local authority's area. Whilst developed by local authorities, they are informed by engaging with wider stakeholders within a forum. The Welsh in Education Planning forum stakeholders typically include education providers, Mudiad Meithrin and third sector organisations such as Mentrau Iaith, RhAG (Parents for Welsh-medium education) and the Urdd. Engagement with WESP is explored in more detail in section 4.46, 'Informing the Welsh Education Strategic Plans'. Some local authorities noted having close relationships with these partners and found this particularly helpful when completing the CSAs enabling them to gain important views and receiving helpful data. However, overall, engagement with partners was inconsistent for a number of reasons.

4.35 Several local authorities felt that support from partners was limited and did not have a significant impact on the CSA. There was criticism from some that partners were unable to provide them with certain data that would have been helpful to their CSA, or that data was not granular or detailed enough. However, it was acknowledged that partners are sometimes constrained by data protection regulations, or at least their interpretation of these regulations, in sharing all available data with local authorities. Further to this, local authorities also acknowledged that partners do not always have the local knowledge to be able to provide useful information or views relating to specific geographic areas as they operate on a Wales wide level.

4.36 From the perspective of partners, some felt that one of the main challenges they face in terms of contributing to the CSA process is that they operate across all of Wales, and therefore find it difficult to find the time and resources to contribute to all 22 CSAs. Other partners noted that they do not have representation in all areas of Wales so they do not have any data they can provide to local authorities where they do not operate. Some partners also noted that they receive requests for information and data in different formats from different local authorities. These partners noted that a consistent approach to requests for information and data would make the process of supporting

individual CSAs much easier.

4.37 In conclusion, local authorities acknowledged the benefits of both consulting with stakeholders and working with partners as part of their assessment process. However, it was recognised that a lack of response for information requests from some stakeholders, and / or the inability of some partners to provide authorities with all the information required, placed some limitations on how useful the data gathered from these sources has been to date. It was questioned by both partners and local authorities whether placing less requirement on the need to consult so widely as part of the CSA process would reduce the time and resources required and reduce the volume of the CSA document produced.

How CSAs are used

4.38 The CSAs have the potential to serve two main purposes: to enable local authorities to identify any shortfalls in childcare provision in their area; and to provide Welsh Government with an overview of childcare sufficiency across Wales. However, there were mixed perceptions amongst those interviewed as to the purpose or use of the CSA, with some doubt that the documents succeed in serving either of the two aims noted above.

4.39 Welsh Government representatives noted that CSAs help local authorities serve the duty placed on them to assess the supply and demand of childcare in individual local authority areas. This view was echoed by local authority representatives and other stakeholders interviewed who recognised the importance of having CSA documents as evidence sources to refer to in order to inform and influence the allocation of resources required to enable them to deliver the statutory childcare duty placed upon them.

4.40 Welsh Government representatives noted that evidence included in CSA documents can often help them assess whether local authorities' application for

capital funding is aligned with specific childcare gaps identified in their assessment. Local authorities also noted that CSAs have a role in identifying and informing decisions on a strategic level across local authorities. References to specific evidence included in CSAs are often made to support the case for childcare support in various local authority strategic planning documents (e.g. corporate plans) and / or as evidence to support various funding application bids. Examples were also offered of ways in which information included in the CSAs have been used to inform WESPs and to inform the Flying Start expansion.

4.41 Although the examples referred to above outline ways in which CSA documents are used to inform and influence decisions on a strategic level, very few, if any examples were offered by those interviewed as to how CSA documents are used to influence operational level decisions. Action plans developed by most local authorities as part of the CSA, are considered useful operational planning tools. However, many local authorities were of the view that they could produce these action plans without having to first produce a lengthy CSA evidence report. Overall, almost all local authorities were of the view that CSA documents were something that they had to produce for the Welsh Government, as opposed to a valuable evidence base that supported their own planning needs.

4.42 Welsh Government representatives also noted that their use of CSA documents is limited to the examples noted above and as a means of ensuring that local authorities have fulfilled their statutory obligations. Some Welsh Government representatives noted that the CSA documents have the potential to serve as a source from which officials could gain a quick overview of the childcare available within an individual local authority and where gaps or shortfalls in provision in relation to demand exist, However, as the documents are so large it is difficult to use them for this purpose. When describing what they would like a CSA document to include or offer, one Welsh Government representative offered the following response:

“ [I would like...] to be able to pick one up [a CSA document] and easily understand how many childcare settings they have, what types of settings they have, what they offer, how many different places per age group, the spread of childcare across the county, funded services being delivered (e.g. Flying Start – is there capacity for more or not?), something around rates being charged, and what support systems are in place to be more inclusive, and something around population. Just want a really quick snapshot of what the situation is. (Welsh Government representative) ”

4.43 Most of the information noted in the above quote is accessible through the SASS data. Some Welsh Government officials noted that SASS is the data source they access in order to gain up to date information on the childcare sector in Wales - not the CSA documents.

4.44 Discussions with CWLWM partners also revealed that CSA documents did not appear to be used to inform their plans or that of the organisations they represent. Some partners mentioned referring potential new providers to the CSA documents to identify if and where new provision may be required, however it was uncertain whether these providers gained the information needed from doing this.

4.45 So overall, Welsh Government and local authorities both agree that the CSA is a way of fulfilling the duty placed on local authorities to assess childcare in their areas. However, the Welsh Government considered the CSA documents produced as something that is useful to local authorities, whereas local authorities questioned its purpose and see it as something they have to do for Welsh Government. While some practical uses were identified, and the action plan was seen as a useful output, both Welsh Government and local authorities agreed that the CSA documents in their current format are not widely used by them or wider partners and stakeholders. Very few, if any examples were offered by local authorities as to how the CSA documents are used to inform or guide their childcare provision planning on an operational level.

Informing the Welsh Education Strategic Plans (WESPs)

4.46 Following the rapid review of the WESPs undertaken in 2017 a WESP Advisory Board was established in May 2018 to consider the recommendations. The Board concluded that the secondary legislation (the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh Medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013) needed to be amended and the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019 came into force on 1 January 2020. One of the provisions in the regulations is that local authorities must set out in their 10-year WESP how they will use data derived from its review of the sufficiency of childcare provision for its area (under duties set out in regulation 3 of the Childcare Act 2006 (Local Authority Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2016) to inform planning of Welsh-medium education. The regulations also place a duty on local authorities to set out in their WESP (a) how the local authority will provide parents and carers with information as to the availability and type of Welsh-medium education provision on offer; (b) how it will provide parents and carers with information stating that Welsh-medium education is an option for persons regardless of their linguistic background and (c) how it will make best use of information regarding the benefits that bilingualism and multilingualism can bring.

4.47 In response, many Welsh in Education Planning forums within local authorities formed sub-groups focussing specifically on developing their early years Welsh medium provision as part of their WESP (Outcome 1 in the WESP). In order to support WESPs to increase their focus on early years provision, the CSA supplementary guidance issued by the Welsh Government in 2022 included a requirement that local authority CSA teams work closely with local authority WESP leads to support them with information and data relating to Welsh language childcare provision in their area. In return local authority WESP teams could help inform the CSAs with regard to Welsh language provision and therefore support future planning of Welsh medium early years and childcare

provision.

4.48 Many local authority CSA team representatives noted that as a result of this supplementary guidance, they have developed closer working relationships with partner organisations within Welsh in Education Planning forums and where established, WESP early years subgroups. CSA representatives also noted that their representation on the Welsh in Education Planning forums and / or attendance at local authority WESP meetings has also expanded and that this has also had a positive impact on their ability to inform and be informed by WESP activity.

4.49 Overall, it would appear that the requirement placed on local authority CSA teams to work more closely with colleagues within the local authority leading on the WESP as well as local WESP groups has in many, but not all cases, resulted in closer working relationships, greater exchange of information and more alignment between the CSAs and WESPs. It would also appear however, that much of this information exchange takes place during conversations and meetings that have formed as a result of the CSA process, as opposed to data and information included and shared in the CSA documents produced.

Time and resources required to complete CSA

4.50 All local authorities reported producing their CSA to be a laborious and costly process, which can take up to 9 months to complete. Most local authorities completed their CSA in-house, whilst others (nearly half) commissioned external companies to undertake their CSA.

4.51 Those who produced their CSA in-house explained that the burden fell mainly on the lead officer within the local authority childcare team. Lead officers noted that during the period when they were producing CSA documents, they were drawn away from their day-to-day roles within the local authority. This in turn had knock-on effects on the workloads of colleagues who often had to pick

up the duties which the lead officer could not fulfil during this time.

4.52 In 2022, the Welsh Government offered local authorities financial support (£10,000) to cover at least some of the costs associated with producing the CSA documents. Some local authorities used this funding to commission external organisations to produce the documents on their behalf. These local authorities reported a lack of time and resources internally to undertake the CSA themselves as the main reason for doing this. However, many of the local authorities who commissioned external organisations noted that a considerable amount of their time was still required to support the process. Many noted that they still needed to provide external organisations with the data and ‘local knowledge’ required, as well as overseeing and quality assuring the report outputs produced. Therefore, many local authorities felt that commissioning external companies to complete the CSA did not necessarily save them time. As a result, some of these authorities decided not to commission an external organisation to complete their CSA during the most recent round in 2022.

“ [The local authority] spent £12k to do this [commission out] in the past and it turned out to be more work! They [the commissioned organisation] have to ask you for the data and instructions all the time - basically you compile it and then the company just writes it. No fault of the company at all, but we had to input so much time into it. (Local authority) ”

4.53 Consequently, some local authorities questioned the usefulness of using the funding for this purpose. Other local authorities reflected that the funding could be increased given the amount of work required to complete the CSA. One local authority explained that whilst they welcomed the £10,000 financial support, *“it costs £5,000 just to translate the document”*.

4.54 However, one identified advantage of using an external organisation was that some local authorities have found that childcare providers are more likely to respond positively to requests for information from external organisations than

they are from the local authority representatives.

Further CSA reporting guidance

4.55 Previous sections of this report (see for example sections 4.2 – 4.6) outline that many local authorities and wider stakeholders suggested that the CSA guidance issued to local authorities should be less prescriptive and allow local authorities more flexibility in terms of how they conduct their assessment processes. However, some local authorities also noted that they would welcome more guidance in terms of how to present and structure the CSA document, possibly through the use of a template. For example, one local authority noted that it would be helpful if a report template was available that would outline the type and level of detail of information required under each report heading. Others noted that a report structure template would be welcome, as long as it wasn't too rigid, as this would encourage more consistency across local authorities CSA documents and enable direct comparisons between them to be made.

4.56 Those who welcomed the idea of a CSA reporting template believed that the template should be produced by the Welsh Government so that local authorities produced the information that *'The Welsh Government want.'*

“ If there is anything Welsh Government would like us all to do, give us a template. (Local authority). ”

4.57 Ahead of the 2022 CSA, the Welsh Government worked with AWARE[13] and other local authority representatives to provide a report template for the 2022 CSA; the statutory guidance document also includes schedules with templates which local authorities can use or complete if they so wish. However, the fact that some local authorities continue to request a reporting template suggests that not all of them are aware that these templates exist.

4.58 In 2018, the Mayor of London issued a CSA reporting template and guidance for the London boroughs[14]. The guidance is based around similar themes to those included in CSAs in Wales i.e., demand and supply of childcare, funded early education, price of childcare places, quality of provision and the view of parents. The London borough template states that it has two main purposes – *‘to make it easier and quicker for local authorities to produce their CSAs, and to improve consistency across London’*. The London template and guidance includes sections that are categorised into ‘core’, ‘recommended’ and ‘optional’ requirements. This enables London boroughs to adopt some flexibility in the process of undertaking and reporting their CSA.

Feedback on CSA documents

4.59 A common point or concern raised by local authorities was that they do not receive any feedback from the Welsh Government relating to the CSA documents they produce. Some referred to this as *‘having to submit homework that doesn’t get marked’*. Most local authorities would therefore welcome some feedback from Welsh Government at least in terms of whether they include all the data required, that they have met their statutory obligations, and whether they have produced a *‘good CSA’*. The Welsh Government has provided feedback on the 2022 CSA produced; however, this feedback had not been acted upon when consultations with local authority representatives took place in 2023.

4.60 These views further reflect the fact that many local authorities feel that they produce the CSA documents for the Welsh Government to provide government officials with an overview of childcare sufficiency across Wales. This appears to be at odds with what Welsh Government considers to be the main purpose of CSA documents which is to inform and guide operational actions to address identified gaps in provision within individual local authority areas. As noted in sections 4.38 to 4.45 the CSA documents in their current format do not appear to be used for either of these purposes.

4.61 CWLWM partners also noted that they would welcome more feedback from local authorities relating to the CSAs – not necessarily in relation to the CSA documents themselves, but the action plans and progress reports that follow. CWLWM partners noted that they often get asked to contribute information and data to support the production of the CSA documents during each round but do not always get informed about the actions that are implemented as a result. To some degree this may reflect the apparent disconnect between the CSA documents themselves and the action plans and childcare support practices that are undertaken on an operational level.

[9][The Approval of Home Childcare Providers \(Wales\) Scheme 2021 | Care Inspectorate Wales](#)

[10][The Self-Assessment of Service Statement \(SASS\) 2023 is now live | Care Inspectorate Wales](#)

[11][Census 2021 geographies - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

[12] Langford, M., Higgs, G., & Dallimore, D. J. (2019). Investigating spatial variations in access to childcare provision using network-based Geographic Information System models. *Social Policy & Administration*, 53(5), 661-677.

[13]AWARE is the All Wales Association of Representatives of Early Years, made up of representatives of Early Years and Childcare leads in all local authorities across Wales, who collaborate on various issues around childcare planning.

[14][Childcare Sufficiency Assessment \(CSA\) template for use by London Boroughs Guidance document](#) (2018) Mayor of London.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Placing a statutory obligation on local authorities, as part of the 2006 Act, to assess and ensure that sufficient childcare is available to support families in their area is widely considered to be essential in ensuring that childcare is given the policy and funding priority it needs on a local and national level. In that respect, placing a requirement on local authorities to produce a document presenting an assessment of whether sufficient childcare is in place within each local authority is also considered essential. However, the findings of this research point to an almost unanimous agreement that the current childcare sufficiency assessment (CSA) documents, produced every five years, are not fit for purpose and that the time, effort and resources required to produce them does not constitute good value for money.

Process of producing CSAs

5.2 The findings of this research outline that, in almost all cases, producing a CSA document in its current format is a laborious and costly process, which, for many local authorities, can take up to nine months to complete.

5.3 A key, and consistent message emerging from the evidence gathered from stakeholder interviews, is that CSA documents in their current format are too large and that the costs and time resource required to produce them is too high. The suggested changes for the future offered by those consulted focussed mainly on reducing the size of CSA documents while ensuring that the CSA process provides local authorities and other stakeholders and partners with the information needed to effectively plan around addressing any identified shortfalls in provision.

5.4 Many local authorities were of the view that the amount of time and effort required to produce the document reflects what many consider to be the lengthy

and prescriptive nature of the 2016 CSA guidance and supplementary guidance (2022) (which reflects the requirements of the regulation) issued by the Welsh Government. Many local authorities questioned whether requirements included in the guidance to gather information from all the data sources and consultations with all the stakeholder groups were necessary. The evidence gathered indicates that more flexible guidance, based on recommended or optional approaches may be more appropriate, or at least more warmly welcomed by local authorities in the future. This should ensure that CSAs remain focussed and relevant while reducing the cost and effort involved.

5.5 In 2022, the Welsh Government offered local authorities financial support to cover at least some of the costs associated with producing these documents. Some local authorities used this funding to commission external organisations to produce the documents on their behalf. However, many of these local authorities noted that a considerable amount of their time is still required to oversee and support external organisations in this process. This includes providing commissioned organisations with the 'local knowledge' required to complete the reports, as well as quality assure the report outputs produced. However, some local authorities have found that childcare providers are more likely to respond positively to requests for information from external organisations than they are from the local authority representatives.

Data sources

5.6 One of the key processes involved in producing the CSA documents is to collate and analyse data relating to the supply of and demand for childcare. However, many local authorities have found aspects of this process challenging.

5.7 Support in accessing data on the type of childcare provision available (through SASS) and the level and nature of the demand for childcare places (through the national parents' survey coordinated by the Welsh Government)

has been welcomed by local authorities, and most would like to see similar data support being offered in the future. One local authority also noted that they would welcome similar support from Welsh Government to help them gather feedback from other stakeholders including employers and schools.

5.8 However, some limitations to the SASS data available have been noted by local authorities – e.g. gaps in the data and (due to data security concerns) the extent to which individual providers can be identified and therefore the extent to which local authorities can attribute the data to provision within ward or Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA). The SASS data provided in 2022 was also presented to local authorities in a raw format which many found challenging to analyse and interpret. One of the suggested ways in which local authorities could be further supported during the next CSA round, would be for the Welsh Government and CIW to share SASS data with local authorities in a more accessible format. For example, the raw data could be accompanied with tables of analysed data outlining the provision available by number and type of setting and number of places available.

5.9 The findings outline some limitations in the extent to which the data generated from the parental survey enabled local authorities to assess demand for childcare on a local level. This was often due to low response rates, and in some instances, unreliable responses to some of the survey questions. Other data sources including local population forecast figures and housing development plans have also been used to estimate future childcare demand on a local area. However, some local authorities noted that access to some of the data that would help them further to estimate future demand is not available to them. For example, ward or LSOA level live birth data, that would help local authorities to assess potential future demand for childcare, is held by local health boards and is not necessarily accessible to local authorities. Further support in accessing data of this nature would therefore be welcomed by local authorities.

5.10 As well as the type of data available, local authorities noted that in order to

inform action plans and progress reports relating to the sufficiency of childcare in their area on an ongoing basis, they also need to have access to regularly updated data. One of the criticisms aimed at the data included in the CSA documents is that it quickly becomes out of date and is therefore of limited use to inform any ongoing actions.

5.11 CIW already offers an **interactive data tool** providing regularly updated information on the number of registered childcare settings by type within each local authority area. Local authority representatives noted however, that ideally, they require this data to be presented on a ward or LSOA geographical level. The creation of a similar platform, or adapting the existing CIW interactive tool, to offer data relating to the childcare provision available on a lower geographical area, would therefore be a welcome addition to the data sources already available.

How CSAs are used

5.12 The CSA documents have the potential to identify and guide local authorities towards addressing any shortfalls in childcare provision in their area, as well as providing the Welsh Government with an overview of childcare sufficiency across Wales. However, in their current format, the CSAs do not appear to fully serve either of these two purposes.

5.13 Many local authorities viewed producing the CSA document as something they *'have to do for the Welsh Government'*, rather than a document they produce to support their own local planning. A common point raised by local authorities was that they submit their documents to the Welsh Government but do not receive any feedback from Welsh Government in return. Some local authorities referred to the process as being similar to *'having to do homework that doesn't get marked.'* However, Welsh Government provided feedback to local authorities on their latest (2022) CSAs in November 2023

5.14 The research found very few examples as to how the CSA documents produced have been used in practice as a guide to inform childcare support plans on an operational level within local authorities. Local authorities were largely of the view that their action plans could be produced without having to produce the CSA document.

5.15 The CSA documents do not appear to be widely used by CWLWM partners to inform their own plans or those of the organisations they represent. However, CWLWM partners are often expected to contribute data and information to inform the CSA process and they do support local authorities to take forward CSA action plans. Some CWLWM partners have also referred potential new childcare providers to local CSA documents as an information source to identify where new provision may be required. However, it is uncertain whether these providers gain the information they need from their review of these documents.

5.16 The CSA documents in their current format do not appear to be used to guide or inform actions or policies on a national all Wales level either.

5.17 The CSAs do have a role in identifying and informing decisions on a more strategic level across local authorities. The evidence gathered through this research indicates that references to CSAs are made to support the case for childcare in various local authority planning documents e.g. corporate plans, and / or within funding application bids e.g. capital funding application bids. The Welsh Government also noted that they often cross reference childcare funding applications against evidence of need identified in local CSAs.

5.18 The CSAs do contain data and information that is of value, however, this is often lost or difficult to find amidst the volume of other information that is also included in the documents. Furthermore, data included in the CSAs only provide a snapshot of the number and type of providers and childcare spaces available at the time when the data was gathered; this data is often out of date even before the CSAs are published.

5.19 It is current, up to date data relating to the demand and supply of childcare that local authorities mostly rely on to plan their ongoing childcare sufficiency actions. Although this data is included in the CSA documents it becomes outdated very quickly and therefore the value of CSA documents as an operational planning guide is time limited.

5.20 The policy and economic environment that influences the childcare sector can also change quickly and many times between CSA rounds. The context and backdrop against which CSA documents are produced during each round in many cases are also time limited.

Supporting Welsh language provision

5.21 Supplementary guidance issued by the Welsh Government in 2021 included a requirement that local authority CSA teams work closely with WESPs to support them with information and data relating to Welsh language childcare provision in their area. In addition, WESP guidance states that LAs must look at CSAs to inform their planning of Welsh-medium education. It appears that these requirements have resulted in some closer working arrangements and greater exchange of information between local authority childcare leads and WESP groups. However, much of the information exchange took place during conversations and meetings that formed as a result of the CSA process, as opposed to data and information included and shared in the CSA documents produced.

Recommendations relating to the format of future CSA documents.

5.22 This section outlines overarching recommendations relating to the format of future CSA documents. These are based on the findings presented in the main body of this report and the views of those consulted.

5.23 Almost all local authorities and wider stakeholders were of the view that CSA documents need to become shorter more succinct reports focussing primarily on presenting the following key areas of information:

- The number of childcare settings available, by type of setting and what they offer.
- The number of places per age group available within these settings.
- Details of the funded services being delivered.
- The current and future demand for childcare based on parents' views and population data.
- Barriers faced by parents in accessing childcare.

5.24 This data should be presented on a ward level within each local authority. Interpretation and analysis of the data should identify gaps in provision. The analysis should be accompanied by a summary of the strategic priorities that the local authority aims to pursue to address any identified gaps. Local authorities may need to gather wider information to inform their own childcare priorities. However, the decision whether or not to include this in the CSA should be left to the discretion of the local authority in question.

5.25 The production of shorter, user-friendly CSA documents will not only reduce the time, effort and resources required to produce them, but also ensure that they are more accessible to a wider audience and therefore more likely to be of greater practical value in informing operational practices and plans.

5.26 Some local authorities noted that they would welcome a reporting template around which they could structure their CSA document. The Welsh Government has already produced a report template aimed at providing support of this nature. A call for more support of this nature from some local authorities therefore suggests there may be a lack of awareness of this template and that further promotion of its existence and potential use may be required.

Recommended Action – the Welsh Government should consider reviewing the

current CSA regulations and guidance. A revised guidance should include a set of core requirements that all local authorities should include in their CSAs. These should be accompanied by 'recommended (but not essential)' as well as 'optional' requirements.

Recommended Action –Local authorities should continue to undertake thorough assessment processes that review all aspects of demand and supply for childcare in their area during future CSA rounds. However, consideration should be given to limit the information presented in the CSA documents to a summary of the sufficiency gaps identified in the CSA process and the main actions that will be implemented to address them.

Recommended Action – The Welsh Government have already introduced a report template around which local authorities present their assessment findings. However, there may be a need for Welsh Government to promote this more consistently across local authorities.

Recommendations relating to the future use and access to data.

5.27 Local authorities rely heavily on a range of data sources when undertaking their childcare assessments. Local authorities need to be further supported during future CSA rounds to ensure that they can access all the data required to accurately review demand and supply for childcare in their area.

Recommended Action – The Welsh Government should continue to coordinate and distribute a parents' survey as part of future CSA rounds. Individual local authorities need to actively promote and raise awareness of the survey to ensure they gain the response rates they require in their area to provide meaningful and robust findings.

Recommendation Action – CIW and the Welsh Government should continue to

share SASS data with local authorities during future CSA rounds. Consideration should be given to presenting this data to local authorities in a more manageable format – possibly in the form of summary tables of analysed data.

5.28 Estimating the potential future demand for childcare is a challenge for all local authorities. This challenge is further increased when local authorities do not have access to all the data sources that could inform these estimates.

Recommendation Action – The Welsh Government should consider offering local authorities further support in accessing relevant data from sources that are currently unavailable to them – e.g. live birth data held by local health boards. The Welsh Government would need to liaise with local authorities to ascertain the data they require. The Welsh Government would also need to liaise with the organisations that hold the required data to ascertain what data could be shared and how.

5.29 Local authorities require access to up to date data and information to support their sufficiency action plans. Data gathered and presented in the CSAs have a limited shelf life and therefore other data sources are required in-between CSA rounds.

Recommendation Action – CIW and the Welsh Government, working alongside local authorities should review the data currently available on the CIW Data Tool site to consider whether similar data could be presented on a lower geographical level (ward or Lower Super Output Area level).

Annex 1

Topic Guide for local authority interviews and group

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Go to <https://www.gov.wales/research-childcare-sufficiency-assessments-csas-html> for the latest version.

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discussions

The aim of the interview/focus group topics outlined below is to guide researchers during group and one to one discussions with local authority representatives responsible for producing and planning actions based on the CSA.

Introduction

[Text aimed directly at interview participants]

Arad has been commissioned to undertake research into Childcare Sufficiency Assessments in Wales. The aim of the research is to gain a better understanding of the processes involved in producing the CSA documents and how the information they include is used to guide policy and actions relating to childcare within each local authority area.

The aim of this interview/group discussion is to gather your views and experiences of producing and using your CSA. We are particularly interested in gaining further details as to what information and data is used to inform the CSA, how this is gathered, and the time and resources required to gather it. We're also interested in understanding the extent to which the information and data gathered can and is used to guide your childcare policy and practices.

The research findings gathered will be used to inform recommendations for the Welsh Government relating to how the process of developing CSAs could be approached in the future in terms of aiding Local Authorities in the completion and use of the CSAs to inform local Action Plans.

The views you express will be used to inform our report and recommendations. However, your views will be anonymised, and any points or quotes included in the report will not be attributed to any individuals or specific local authority

areas.

Do you have any questions?

Are you happy to proceed with the interview?

Questions

Background

- What is your role within your local authority?
- What is your role with regard to the CSA? For example, gathering the required data, producing the document / Action Plan – overseeing the implementation of the CSA Action Plan?

Process

- Could you give an overview of the approach taken by your LA in completing the CSA?
 - Do you use external bodies to complete or is it done in-house? What are the pros and cons to this approach?

If external contractor used:

- What informed your decision whether or not to commission a third party to write the CSA?
- Were you still able to writing the actions from the CSA even though you did not go through the process of writing it yourselves.
- Are there any reporting templates are available for you to follow?

- If yes do you use these?
- Are these helpful / fit for purpose?
- What data sources do you / can you draw on to produce your CSA?
 - What are the strengths or limitations of the data available to you?
 - e.g. incomplete data – not available on a sufficiently low geographical; level?
 - Not being able to access all the data sources e.g., data available on DEWIS?
- How helpful / useful has the availability of SASS and Parent survey data been in supporting you to produce your CSA?
 - Is there any additional / other data or information that would also be helpful?
 - Could the data be presented differently? – please notify how and how this would help.
- How do you work with partners e.g. CWLWM partners, Save the Children other orgs to help gather data or share information?
 - What data do these organisations provide?
 - Is any of the data gathered duplicated across organisations?
 - How accurately can you assess demand / how robust is this data?
 - To what extent does this data reflect actual demand for childcare?
- How do you assess demand for childcare? (Note to interviewer - probe for examples including assessing demand for Welsh Medium Education)
- How could the process of assessing demand for childcare be improved?
 - e.g data directed to one event activity / types of provision?
- What aspects of producing the CSA are most challenging?
 - E.g., gathering data, interpreting, or analysing raw data – writing the CSA report document

- Which aspect of producing the CSA are fairly straight forward?
- How much time does it take to produce the CSA?
- How much does it cost / how much resource is required to produce the CSA?
 - Is this an effective use of resource?
 - If no, any suggestions how this can be improved?

Using the CSAs

- How are CSAs used in practise / how do you use the CSAs in planning and delivery of support to parents and children?
- Does the CSA enable you to identify gaps in childcare provision? If so, are you subsequently able to address these gaps?
- Do you think the CSA reflects the geographical spread of childcare provision in your local authority area?
- Do you think the CSA reflects the experience of parents seeking childcare provision in your local authority area?
- Have you produced an Action Plan following your 2022 CSA?.
 - If no – why is this – e.g. time, resources, not enough information in the CSA to produce a plan – other reason.
 - If yes (or referring to previous Action Plans) Is / was the Action Plan directly informed by / reflect the findings presented in the CSA - or is / was it based on any other information / knowledge?
 - Could the Action Plan be produced without the CSA? – if yes what would the limitations of this be?

- How effective is the Action Plan?
 - Are relevant actions included in the plan put in place?
 - Does the Action Plan have an influence on policy and decision making?
Do you have any examples of this?
 - Do you track progress against targets / aims included in the CSA Action Plan – please provide examples.

- How do you align the CSA with your Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs)

- Are there any areas of the CSA which are **less** useful/ unnecessary?

- Do you have any suggestions of what could change to make the CSAs more implementable / useful?

Main challenges

- Overall, what are the main challenges you face when completing your CSA and / or using it to inform the delivery of childcare in your area?

- Are there any potential implications to assessing whether there is sufficient childcare available and in considering the actions required to support any gaps or shortfalls, that may emerge in light of the expansion of childcare announced as part of the Cooperation Agreement and Programme for Government?

- Do you have any other comments relating to any challenges associated with completing CSAs e.g., completing annual progress reports / future use of CSAs?

Support

- How could CSA completion be made easier?
- How helpful/useful is the statutory guidance available to LA's?
 - Any suggestions for improvement?
- What other feedback/support from Welsh Government do you receive in undertaking the CSA?
- Is it clear to you whether and if so how the Welsh Government uses the data gathered or how it influences national policy?
- What further information, feedback or support would you welcome from the Welsh Government?
- Is there any other support that would be useful to you in completing the CSAs? E.g. structured templates etc.
- Do you have any other comments?

Diolch / Thanks

Topic Guide for stakeholder group discussion – CWLWM partners.

The aim of the discussion topics outlined below is to guide researchers during interviews with stakeholders.

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Introduction

[Text aimed directly at group discussion participants]

Arad has been commissioned to undertake research into Childcare Sufficiency Assessments in Wales. The aim of the research is to gain a better understanding of the processes involved in producing the CSA documents and how the information they include is used to guide policy and actions relating to childcare on a national as well as local level.

The aim of this discussion is to gather your views and experiences of supporting / contributing to the production and use of CSAs. We are particularly interested in gaining further details on how much involvement CWLWM partners have in the development of CSAs, how well this works in practise, how useful CSAs are to partners, whether and how they influence policy and decision making, and any suggestions as to how the CSAs could be improved.

Questions

Background

- What is your role within your organisation and how does this relate to the CSAs?

Process and support

- How much involvement do you/your organisation have in supporting the development of CSAs?
- What does this involvement look like in practise? i.e...

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- Is this involvement the same across all LA's or does it vary by LA?
- Do LA's come to you for support or to request data/information?
- Does this process work well for you as an organisation?
- Do you feel you have enough input into the development of CSAs? Would you prefer more/less input?
- Do you receive any support/information from Welsh Government about your role in supporting the development of CSAs is?
 - Is this clear/helpful?

Aims and use of CSAs

- What do you understand the intended aim(s) purpose of CSAs (for individual LAs, the Welsh Government and wider stakeholders) to be?
- To what extent do you feel that the CSAs produced are able to achieve these aims / are the CSAs fit for purpose? – please explain your answer as much as possible?
 - What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the CSAs recently produced?
- How and to what extent do you review CSAs to gain insight into demand for childcare?
- How and to what extent do CSAs and Action Plans impact your work – e.g., influence policies and planning priorities?
- To what extent do CSAs influence other policy and decision making on a local and national level?

- What else (if anything) is needed to ensure that the CSAs produced achieve their intended aims and purposes - What constitutes a good CSA?
 - Do any of the recent CSAs produced represent good examples of what is needed in a CSA – what is it about these that lead you to say that?
 - Do any of the recent CSAs produced fall short of what constitutes a good CSA – why do you say that?
- Are there any areas of the CSAs which are **less** useful/ unnecessary?
- Do you have any suggestions as to what could change to make the CSAs more implementable / useful to better support childcare planning?

Overall view

- Does the CSAs produced enable LAs and other stakeholders (e.g. Welsh Government CWLWM partners) to:
 - identify gaps in childcare provision and if so
 - address these gaps?
- What (if anything) needs to change either in the process, content or presentation of CSA?
- How can LAs be supported to do this?
- Do you have any other comments?

Diolch / Thanks

Topic Guide for Welsh Government interviews.

The aim of the discussion topics outlined below is to guide researchers during

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interviews with Welsh Government representatives.

Introduction

[Text aimed directly at interview participants]

Arad has been commissioned to undertake research into Childcare Sufficiency Assessments in Wales. The aim of the research is to gain a better understanding of the processes involved in producing the CSA documents and how the information they include is used to guide policy and actions relating to childcare on a national as well as local level.

The aim of this interview is to gather your views and experiences of supporting / overseeing the production and use of CSAs. We are particularly interested in gaining further details as to the guidance and support that is offered to LAs to help them to produce CSAs; further guidance that LAs may need; how / to what extent the CSAs are used to guide local and national childcare policies and actions.

[Note to interviewer – not all of these questions will be relevant to all individuals interviewed – it may be necessary to focus on the questions that are most relevant to the role and responsibility of the interviewee]

Questions

Background

- What is your role within the Welsh Government and how does this relate to the CSAs?

Aims of CSAs

- What is / are the intended aim(s) purpose of CSAs (for individual LAs, the Welsh Government and wider stakeholders)?
- To what extent do you feel that the CSAs produced are able to achieve these aims / are the CSAs fit for purpose? – please explain your answer as much as possible?
 - What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the CSAs recently produced?
- What else (if anything) is needed to ensure that the CSAs produced achieve their intended aims and purposes - What constitutes a good CSA?
 - Do any of the recent CSAs produced represent good examples of what is needed in a CSA – what is about these that lead you to say that?
 - Do any of the recent CSAs produced fall short of what constitutes a good CSA – why do you say that?
- Do the CSAs produced by individual LAs vary in content, style, detail, focus, quality etc?
 - If yes, why is this.
 - Are variations in the content and style a concern – why do you say that?
 - How can any concerns be addressed in the future?
- To what extent do you feel that the CSA produced by LAs:
 - reflect the geographical spread of childcare provision in local authority areas?
 - reflect the experience of parents seeking childcare provision in local authority areas?

Using the CSAs

- How are CSAs used in practise?
- How / does the Welsh Government use CSAs to guide its own childcare policies – please provide examples where possible.
- How / do LAs align the CSA with their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs)
- To what extent can / do the current CSAs help the Welsh Government and local authorities inform, guide and plan to accommodate / deliver the commitment to expand publicly funded childcare availability for two year olds and a proposed expansion of the Flying Start programme?
- Are there any areas of the CSAs which are **less** useful/ unnecessary?
- Do you observe changes in local authority practice as a result of CSAs?
 - If yes, can you offer some examples?
 - If no, why do you think this is?
- Do you have any suggestions as to what could change to make the CSAs more implementable / useful?

Process and support

- What support does the Welsh Government offer LAs to enable them to produce their CSAs?
- What response / feedback have you received from LAs in relation to the support provided?

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- Have LAs sought / asked for any additional support? – please provide details where possible.
- What other support could be provided by Welsh Government in the future?
 - E.g. more / different data – presentation / content / style guides – funding / other resources?

Overall view

- Does the CSAs produced enable LAs and other stakeholders (e.g. Welsh Government CWLWM partners) to:
 - identify gaps in childcare provision and if so
 - address these gaps?
- What (if anything) needs to change either in the process, content or presentation of CSA
- How can LAs be supported to do this?
- Do you have any other comments?

Diolch / Thanks

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