**Research Report
No 72**

Local Assessments of Childcare Need and Provision

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

E.1 PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

(1) This study was undertaken to look into whether and how local assessments of childcare demand, need and provision might be undertaken. It has five specific aims : to identify and review what work has already been undertaken in this area; to identify and review what information is actually or potentially available; to assess the feasibility of conducting local assessments of need, demand and provision for childcare and related services; if feasible, to provide material to enable the DfEE to prepare practical guidelines to local authorities on how to draw up assessments and their content; and to provide, as far as they exist, examples of good practice.

(2) Four key issues concerning whether and how local assessments of childcare might be conducted arose during the course of the study : the need to clarify the purpose(s) of conducting local childcare assessments; the need to see them in a wider context, for example the (at least) nine review or planning exercises required of local authorities which involve children's services; defining the concepts of 'need', 'demand' and 'provision'; and the need to take account of the perspectives of children and young people as well as adults.

(3) The study has four main parts: a review of existing material, including national and local sources of information; interviews with national public and private agencies; a postal questionnaire of all English local authorities; and case studies of 12 local authorities, 8 selected at random, and 4 as examples of good practice. This work was supplemented by the preparation of four background papers, which are included as Appendices.

E.2 PART TWO: PREVIOUS WORK AND EXISTING INFORMATION

(1) Childcare information needs have been neglected, but the subject is now on the public agenda for a variety of policy reasons. Several different agencies are collecting information that could contribute to local childcare assessments, but each may be unaware of what the others have to offer.

(2)   Basic information on the amount of registered provision for children under eight is fairly easily obtained and can be enhanced with additional information from Childcare Information Services. However sources of information on need and demand are much weaker and assessed in different ways by different agencies.

(3)   Gathering data is less of a problem than analysing it so as to quantify need.

(4)   Childcare needs are complex, and formulaic approaches are likely to be inadequate to assess them.

E.3   PART THREE: LOCAL AUTHORITY PRACTICE IN ASSESSING CHILDCARE NEED AND PROVISION

(1)   Registration and inspection data is not generally in a format that makes it readily accessible for assessment purposes.

(2)   A Childcare Information Service that is adequately and securely funded can provide a good database covering the supply of services. While systematic monitoring of enquiries provide indications of demand and unmet need, it cannot provide a similarly comprehensive picture of these areas.

(3)   The difficulty in achieving a representative parent view is of concern. Local forums are seen as one way forward.

(4)   Assessing parents' views on childcare is not a simple exercise. Parents can have several childcare needs that can change over a short period.

(5)   Assessments must be at a local level to take account of large local variations within local authorities. Mapping exercises which compare the number of places with the number of children may fail to give an accurate picture and may overlook the needs of specific groups.

(6)   Organisation of services and planning structures within an authority can facilitate local assessments.

(7)   Local authorities use information on childcare need and provision for a variety of reasons, for which there is little co-ordination.

E.4   PART FOUR: VIEWS OF NATIONAL AGENCIES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

(1)   The co-ordination of local data collection and assessments of childcare needs and provision should be undertaken by a single department or agency. Many respondents felt that the Chief Executive's office should take a lead role in any co-ordinating body.

(2)   Apart from information concerning current levels of childcare provision and parental perceptions of their childcare needs, effective assessment should include collection of data on local employment, housing and transport conditions, demographic characteristics of local populations, the extent of provision supplied by unregistered carers, the cost and quality of existing provision, and the views of children.

(3)   Guidelines for local authorities concerning what information to collect, rather than how to collect it, were positively endorsed by national agencies and local authorities. Guidelines should not be prescriptive. Models of good practice would be a useful component of guidelines of the type discussed.

(4)   Provision of financial resources, commitment from elected members, and effective involvement of all stakeholder groups were all identified as potential problems in conducting assessments that guidelines would need to recognise and address.

E.5   PART FIVE : CONCLUSIONS

(1)   There are four possible purposes for local assessments: for planning services; for developing services, both in terms of quantity and quality; for monitoring the impact of policies; for providing information for a variety of purposes, including funding bids.

(2)   Assessments need to be made at the local authority level, but also at more local levels if they are to be useful for planning and development purposes and given wide variations that exist between quite small districts in local authorities.

(3)   It is unlikely to prove feasible to produce precise local assessments, including accurate and reliable calculations of current and future shortfalls, and based on some standardised formula. However, it may be feasible to adopt a more informal approach to local assessments, which brings together various items of information and the application of judgement. Childcare Information Services, extended to all local

authorities and strengthened to improve their capabilities, could play a central role in this approach.

(4) Guidelines would be useful, but should not be prescriptive. They should emphasise examples of good practice and be based on pilot work.

(5) A strong case exists for placing local assessments of childcare within a co-ordinating framework concerned with all children and children's services, in particular either Early Years Development Partnerships or Children's Services Plans. If a Children's Services Plan framework was selected, there is a case for integrating Children's Services Plans, Section 19 reviews and Early Years Development Plans.

(6) Children and young people should be seen as having their own voices, perspectives and interests, which should be taken account of in any local assessments.

Recommendations

R1 Improved local data-bases on provision should be encouraged, especially through the development of Childcare Information Services.

R2 There is a case for undertaking a pilot exercise in 4 local authority areas to examine the feasibility, costs and benefits of producing local assessments in the way proposed in this report (i.e. applying judgement to a range of information sources).

R3 A set of guidelines should be prepared on the basis of this pilot exercise and wider consultations.

R4 Different Departments and parts of Departments with an interest in services for children, as well as representatives of local authorities, should discuss how best to co-ordinate and/or integrate the varied and often overlapping review and planning duties placed on local authorities.

R5 One of the large-scale national surveys conducted regularly on behalf of Government should collect consistent information on a number of key items concerning use of and expressed need for childcare; we recommend the General Household Survey.

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The remit and aims of the study

The original specification from the DfEE highlighted several key considerations for the study, in particular:

⇨   to meet the information needs of the National Childcare Strategy and to assist in developing guidelines for the provision of local assessments of childcare **need** and **provision**;

⇨   to consider the possibilities for better estimates of **demand** for childcare for **all ages** both **nationally** and **locally**, taking account of the local labour market and parents' requirements and specifications;

⇨   to focus on how shortfalls in the local availability of childcare can be assessed using existing and soon to be available local data, taking account of **Early Years Development Plans, Section 19 Reviews, and Children's Services Plans**.

Based on this remit, the study proposal set out five aims:

(1)   To review **work already undertaken** concerning the identification, collection and analysis of information required to assess (nationally and locally) need, demand and provision for childcare and related services;

(2)   To identify and review **what local information exists**, what other information is potentially available and what local assessments have been undertaken of need, demand and provision for childcare and related services;

(3)   To assess the **feasibility of conducting local assessments** of need, demand and provision for childcare and related services;

(4)   In the light of (1) to (3), to provide materials **for the production of practical guidelines** for local authorities on how to draw up assessments and their content;

(5)   To provide, as far as they exist, **examples of good practice**.

1.2 Issues affecting the study

Several important issues arose during the project, each of which has a major bearing on whether and how local assessments of childcare might be conducted. They are highlighted at the beginning of this report, to sensitise the reader so that they may read what follows with these issues in mind. We return to them in the Conclusions.

1.2.1 The purpose(s) of conducting local assessments

Although the study was commissioned explicitly in the context of the "information needs of the National Childcare Strategy", it was conducted before the Strategy was made public. It was not therefore possible to know what purposes the Strategy will determine for local assessments of childcare. Different purposes have different implications for how to undertake local assessments, including both the method and content of assessment.

Several purposes could emerge, for example: identifying current shortfalls between provision and demand, and making projections of future trends in provision and demand; identifying problems of access to existing services (e.g. about cost, location, hours etc.); assessing standards or some aspects of quality of existing provision; assessing provider needs for training, support and other inputs; planning services and supporting their development both in terms of quantity and quality; evaluating the impact of new policies, such as welfare-to-work and the National Childcare Strategy. A further issue concerns whether the purposes of local assessments are framed entirely in relation to labour supply issues or whether they are equally concerned with child welfare issues. In the former case, the focus might be more on the supply of places; in the latter case a focus on the quality of the places supplied would be appropriate.

1.2.2 Placing local assessments in a wider context

Childcare services for working parents need to be seen in wider contexts, in particular in relation to various economic and social policies (e.g. improving labour supply, gender equality, area regeneration, welfare-to-work etc.) and other children's services. It is necessary to ask how local childcare assessments relate to other policy requirements and to other assessments, reviews and plans involving children's services. From a positive point of view, doing this might ensure a range of benefits from pooling resources to co-ordinating efforts. From a negative point of view, if local childcare assessments are treated in isolation, they may fail. Failure is more likely if assessments are seen as yet another demand made on local authorities and agencies, without apparent connection to other demands being made by other parts of Government. In short, they may run into what a recent Treasury seminar on services for young children called 'planning fatigue'.

This danger becomes more evident if local assessments of childcare are viewed in relation to at least nine review or planning exercises required of local authorities that involve children's services, only one of which (Early Years Development Plans) is referred to in the study's remit:

(1)   Crime and Disorder Strategy Plans (covering adults and children) [Home Office];
(2)   Youth Justice Plans [Home Office];
(3)   Early Years Development Plans [DfEE];
(4)   Education Development Plans [DfEE];
(5)   Behaviour Support Plans [DfEE];
(6)   Children's Services Plans [DoH];
(7)   Children Act Section 19 Reviews of Day Care Services [DoH];
(8)   Health Improvement Plans [DoH]; and
(9)   Child and Adult Mental Health Plans [DoH].

Childcare services need to be contextualised in another way. First, no discreet group of services provides childcare only for children of working parents; although some types of services mainly provide in this way (e.g. private day nurseries and childminders), they can also provide 'day care for children in need' and increasingly are recognised as having an educational function. Similarly, many services that actually provide childcare for working parents do not recognise this as a function or else give it a low priority. Second, children with working parents may have other needs apart from care, for example for learning opportunities, recreation and socialisation; some may even fall within the Children Act category of 'children in need', and the number could increase if 'welfare to work' policies are successful. This raises important issues about the extent to which local assessments of childcare can or should be abstracted from wider processes of review, assessment and planning for all children and their families.

1.2.3   Concepts

The remit for the study introduces several concepts including 'need', 'demand' and 'provision'. In her background paper (see Appendix I), Sally Holtermann considers the first two concepts from an economist's perspective. She emphasises that demand (the amount purchased or used) is conditional on circumstances: on price, incomes, perceived quality, information and a range of other items. Demand will therefore vary as these circumstances do, for example in response to any changes in government policy that effect these circumstances. Consequently, an assessment of demand will only have a clear meaning if it sets out what assumptions are being made about the policy context and the other factors affecting demand.

By contrast, the term 'need' would commonly be used to indicate a situation where the use of a service (or an increase in its use or a change in quality or type) would lead to a significant increase in well-being.

In the UK, day care services for children are supplied partly by the independent sector, and partly by the public sector. The former caters largely for the children of working parents, while the services of the latter are mostly used by 'children in need' (defined as such under the terms of the 1989 Children Act). The concept of demand is relevant when assessing the market sector. The concept of need is most relevant when considering the provision for children in need. But it is also applicable when the availability, quality or affordability of services is deficient in relation to what working parents or their children would wish. The term is used in that way in much of this report.

Finally, what is the meaning of the concept 'provision'? Should it be confined to formal services, defined as those services provided by public agencies or sold by private providers in the market, i.e. provision whose supply it is possible to influence by policy, either directly or indirectly? If so defined, should provision in the context of childcare services be further confined to those forms that explicitly offer care for children while parents are at work or studying (e.g. nurseries, childminders, after-school clubs)? Alternatively, should it include services that provide care but either do not recognise this function or give it low priority (e.g. schools, various kind of play or leisure services)? Should it include day care services only or day care and 'open door' services (see Pat Petrie's paper in Appendix IV for a discussion of these terms)?

However, limiting provision only to formal services excludes a wide range and large amount of informal childcare. Surveys of childcare used by parents at work identify relatives, in particular grandparents, and friends as the most common care arrangements. In addition, many parents manage childcare between themselves by staggering their work hours. It might also be argued that parental leave, to be introduced within the next two years, should be included under provision. It represents another childcare option to parents who are employed (but may choose to take leave from their workplace).

Answers to these questions on how to define the concept of provision probably need to be sought, in the first place, through defining the purpose of local childcare assessments.

1.2.4   Different perspectives on need and demand

The childcare debate, originating as it does from an employment and gender equality perspective, can (albeit implicitly) view children as passive and dependent, whose perspective can be represented by their parents. Issues of

need and demand are therefore seen as essentially parental issues with parents viewed as the consumers of childcare services. In recent years, a new understanding of children has been emerging. Children are seen as active participants, with a place in society as well as the family, and a voice of their own to which we should be listening. In considering issues of need and demand, we have to ask some additional questions: Whose need? Whose demand? How do we ensure the child's voice is heard as well as the voices of parents and other adults? To ignore the voice of the child and young person is not only undemocratic, it may also produce poor assessments and unrealistic plans. As Pat Petrie observes in her paper (see Appendix IV).

> School age children attending a day care service are aware that doing so is not the only option....They can speak for themselves in a way that younger children cannot, with a result that attendance may become a matter of negotiation between parent and child....Over time [therefore], out-of-school arrangements become more the business of the young person than the parent.

1.3 How the study was conducted

Based on the original proposal, the study has been undertaken in four main parts.

1.3.1 Review of existing material

This initial phase consisted of three main parts. First, a review of previous work on the subject of childcare information and previous attempts to make assessments of childcare need and provision. Second, potential national sources of relevant information have been identified and reviewed for their contribution, at both national and local levels; the results of this review are summarised in Part Three of the report and included in Appendix IV. Third, potential local sources of relevant information have been identified and reviewed, in particular Section 19 reviews and Children's Services Plans.

1.3.2 Interviews with a range of national public and private agencies

Eleven national (English) agencies were selected in consultation with DfEE, representing a variety of interests and perspectives: the Association for London Government; the Audit Commission; Choices in Childcare; the Daycare Trust; the Department for Education and Employment; Kids Clubs Network; the Local Government Association; the National Childminding Association; the National Private Day Nurseries Association; the Pre-school Learning Alliance;

and the TEC National Council. In addition, Chwarae Teg (Fair Play)[1], with relevant information, volunteered to be interviewed, an offer that the study team took up.

The purpose of the interviews was twofold: as an exercise in consultation to seek the views of a range of interested parties, about information needs, undertaking local assessments and co-ordinating work across different areas; and to seek information, both about sources of information and about possible examples of good practice.

The interviews were conducted either in person or by telephone and lasted between 45 and 75 minutes (see Appendix V for the questions covered in the interview). Interviews were written up in draft and returned to respondents for comment, so they had an opportunity to make revisions.

1.3.3   Postal contact with local authorities

A short postal questionnaire was sent to Directors of Education in all English local authorities, concerning the monitoring of childcare services and the assessment of childcare need or demand (see Appendix V for a copy of the questionnaire). Replies were received from 83 local authorities, a response rate of 63%. Although it was not suggested that Directors of Education consult with Directors of Social Services, it was clear from the replies that many had done so.

1.3.4   Case studies of local authorities

Twelve local authorities were selected for visits. Eight were selected at random - two London boroughs, two new unitary authorities, two metropolitan districts and two counties. During these visits, interviews were conducted with several respondents, ranging from two to six per authority, drawn from several different departments; a modified version of the national agency interview schedule was used. The remaining four local authorities were selected as providing examples of good practice, and were identified as such mainly in the course of interviews with national agencies. Commonly, the good practice centred round Childcare Information Services, and their use in providing information both to parents and for strategic planning by the local authority: we

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[1] Chwarae Teg is an independent initiative involving a partnership of public, private and voluntary sector organisations, set up to expand the role of women in the Welsh workforce. One of its objectives is to encourage the development of affordable childcare services. To this end, it has commissioned two audits of childcare in Wales. One of the project team (SH) was involved in both audits, and another member (JS) in the second audit. A short note by SH on the experience of conducting these audits is included as Appendix II.

found no examples of local authorities who have undertaken a fully-fledged assessment of childcare need and demand in relation to provision. In these cases, interviews focused on exploring the good practice in more depth - what it was, how it worked, what lessons it had to offer. Again, all interviews were written up in draft and sent back to respondents for comment, so they had an opportunity to make revisions.

This work was mainly conducted by four members of the project team (AM, PM, TM, JS). The remaining members of the team (SH, CO, PP) prepared four background papers for the study: on the concept of need and demand and methods of assessment; on the methodology of childcare audits conducted in Wales (both by SH); on potential national sources of data (by CO); and on sources of information on childcare services for 5-16 year olds (by PP). These papers are included as Appendices I to IV.

The study had a three-month timetable, from the beginning of January to the end of March 1998. We have had to match the work to the time and resources available. In particular, we do not claim to have spoken to all relevant national organisations or to have visited all examples of good practice.

1.4 The structure of the report

The remainder of this report falls into four parts. Part Two reviews previous work on childcare information and assessments, and existing sources of information, national or local, which might make a contribution to local assessments of childcare. Part Three looks at work currently being undertaken in local authorities, concerning both collecting information and using that information strategically, including the four 'good practice' local authorities. Part Four analyses the views of respondents in national agencies and local authorities on several issues. Specific issues include who should have responsibility for collecting information, what information may be particularly important for childcare assessments, whether local authority guidelines would be useful and what problems or constraints might arise in conducting such assessments. Part Five contains our conclusions, in particular on the feasibility of conducting local assessments and our recommendations on how to proceed.

PART TWO

PREVIOUS WORK AND EXISTING INFORMATION

2.1 The Aims of this Section

This section of the report is divided into three parts:

(1)   a review of previous work on the subject of childcare information and previous attempts   to make national or local assessments of childcare need and provision;

(2)   an overview of national sources of information;

(3)   an overview of local sources of information, both of which could be drawn on to make local childcare assessments.

The overview of national and local sources is based on information gathered from the interviews with national agencies, the postal questionnaire to local authorities, an analysis of Children's Service Plans produced in 1993/4 by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI, 1995) and a review of a random sample of Day Care Reviews and Children's Services Plans produced in 1995/6.

2.2   Previous work on the subject of childcare information and previous attempts to make childcare assessments

2.2.1   Review of the literature

The little that has been written on the subject of childcare information highlights the inadequacy of existing information as a basis for either local or national planning. The Audit Commission carried out local audits of services for children under five in 111 local authorities during 1996, and analysed over 30 of these in detail. It concluded that 'few authorities had carried out detailed analysis of how current provision matched the need for services - for example through detailed geographical analyses. Even simple measures, such as the number of places per 1,000 children under five, were sometimes missing, while few authorities had compared provision with indicators of need' (Audit Commission, 1997)

A forthcoming paper (Moss, Owen and Statham, 1998) uses a range of examples from researchers working in the field of early childhood services to illustrate the limitations of the statistics that are currently available. It considers how an adequate information system might be developed, based on annual returns from individual services and regular surveys of households with children.

The information deficit is not limited to the UK. The EC Childcare Network has produced two reports on information needs with respect to early childhood services. The first (Humblet, 1994) reviewed information routinely collected in EU member states and revealed widespread weaknesses. It made recommendations for a framework of information that would enable comparable data to be collected at local level and then aggregated at regional, national and EU levels. This information would be collected through a regularly conducted sample survey of families and a standardised annual return from each individual service. The second report presented papers from a European seminar and proposed indicators to monitor the development of childcare services and use of parental leave (EC Childcare Network, 1996).

2.2.2   Previous attempts to make childcare assessments

Several recent initiatives have attempted to make broad assessments of childcare need, demand and provision. For example, a childcare audit was carried out in 1997 by the Social Analysis and Research Division of the DfEE. The audit drew together information from existing sources to provide a basic picture of the formal childcare market at a national level. It also provided an indication of where gaps might exist between the actual provision of childcare and the provision which parents might ideally want (DfEE, 1997a). This baseline study highlighted the importance of including family-friendly working arrangements in a consideration of childcare options, and noted the lack of reliable data on some kinds of services, especially those for children over five.

Two audits of childcare in Wales were carried out in 1993 and 1996, commissioned by Chwarae Teg (Hanney, Holtermann, and Stone, 1993; Statham, Holtermann, and Stone, 1996). The terms of reference for the audits included services usually used because parents are in employment (childminders, day nurseries and out-of-school schemes) but excluded nursery education, playgroups and services for children in need. Information on the supply of services was obtained from local authority Day Care Reviews or directly from registration and inspection officers where the Reviews were unavailable. Both audits attempted to find out about employer support for measures to help their workers with childcare responsibilities, but no central or local record of this was available, and collecting data from employers and other sources proved very difficult. A straw poll was carried out by telephone of a few out of school schemes. It aimed to compare the number of places offered with the number of children on the primary school rolls served by each scheme, as an aid to setting a realistic target for development.

The purpose of the audits was to compare the provision of childcare in Wales with England, and to compare counties and districts within Wales with each

other. Local authority data on women's employment and demography were also presented in the reports, but no attempt was made to estimate the absolute amount of excess or potential demand for services. It was left to local authorities to consider what the figures said about their own situation, in the light of their knowledge of local circumstances. Rather than making projections of the level of services that might be needed, based on inadequate data, the audits took the approach of setting achievable targets for the development of childcare services. They considered existing levels of provision and factors such as the impact of government funding initiatives and trends in women's employment. Further information about the Wales childcare audits is given in Appendix II.

Finally, two modelling studies are currently analysing data from the Family Resources Survey, to provide better information on childcare use that could be used to predict demand. One study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies is examining the effects of local childcare provision and costs on the employment of mothers. The main source of data for this project is the Family Resources Survey, to be merged with the annual DoH statistics on day care facilities and with other published data at local authority level on childcare provision and socio-demographic factors. The research aims to build an economic model that would estimate the effects of childcare cost and level of provision on the attitudes and employment of mothers (Giles et al., 1997). The second study, undertaken for the DfEE by the Policy Studies Institute, aims to establish links between childcare types, unmet demand and impact of childcare availability on employment behaviour.

2.3 National information sources

Existing national sources of information that could make a contribution to childcare assessments can be grouped into four types:

(1)   figures on the supply of services, often collated by government departments on the basis of local authority returns;

(2)   national surveys (both regular and one-off) which include questions asking parents about their use of childcare services;

(3)   national surveys which provide socio-economic data (labour market figures, family composition, age, ethnicity, poverty indicators etc.) which could be used to predict childcare need;

(4)   information collected by national childcare organisations from their members.

The following is a brief overview that describes the main sources of information we have identified within each of these categories. Further details, and an assessment of the potential of these national data sets to contribute to local childcare assessments, are given in Appendix III.

2.3.1 Supply statistics

Statistics on services are collected annually by the DoH (e.g. DoH, 1997) and the DfEE (e.g. DfEE, 1997b), based on forms returned by local authorities. They provide figures on the number of services and either the number of places available or the number of children using them, but little more. They are currently the most comprehensive source of national data on the supply of childcare and early education. However, they suffer from several limitations: they are not comparable and do not cover informal care or unregulated services such as nannies and au pairs (Moss, Owen and Statham, 1998).

Information on the availability of childcare for school-aged children is incomplete. The Department of Health statistics provide some information on places in out of school clubs and holiday play schemes, but only for services taking children under age eight, which are required to be registered. Pat Petrie's paper (Appendix IV) illustrates the wide range of agencies providing childcare services, both day care and 'open door', for school-aged children, some of which may not be subject to registration and therefore not included in these statistics. TECs provide regular information to the DfEE (via regional government offices) on the number of new places made available through the Out-of-School Childcare Initiative (OSCI) and any lost through closures. However, this only applies to schemes funded under the Initiative.

In addition, occasional one-off surveys provide a national picture of the availability of childcare services. An example is the Policy Studies Institute telephone survey for DfEE in 1996 of family-friendly working arrangements among 1311 employers (this represented a response rate of just over a half of employers contacted). Ninety-two per cent of employers said they operated some kind of family-friendly working practice, although only 9% offered practical assistance with childcare (Forth et al., 1997).

2.3.2 Surveys of parental use and preference for childcare

No regularly published sources of information concerning how early childhood services are used and what parents want are available. Some information is available from questions added either regularly or intermittently to government surveys: for example, the General Household Survey and the Family Resources Survey, and from the British Social Attitudes survey (Jowell et al., 1995).

However, the government are proposing to establish a baseline assessment of demand for childcare, followed by biennial audits, at a national level, of demand and supply. From time to time special one-off national surveys are commissioned, such as the OPCS survey of the use of day care services in 1990 (Meltzer, 1994); the Family and Working Lives Survey (Research Services Ltd, 1996); the PSI Maternity Rights Surveys (e.g. McRae, 1991); and the Social and Community Planning Research survey for the DfEE of parents of three and four-year-old children and their use of early years services (Stratford et al, 1997). Data from the National Child Development Study has also been analysed to examine the use of childcare by working mothers (Ward, Dale and Joshi, 1996). National surveys can provide a broad picture of who cares for children with employed parents while their parents work, and also something about costs and the type of provision parents prefer (although the latter particularly is difficult to interpret). However, none have sufficiently large samples to permit analysis at local authority level; the best that can be done is to apply the patterns suggested in these surveys to local data on families' social and economic circumstances (see Appendix III).

2.3.3   Surveys of social and economic circumstances

The national Census, last undertaken in 1991, is the main source of socio-demographic and employment data, although some of this can be updated using the Labour Force Survey. The Census can provide information at a very local level. Local authorities have used it in a variety of ways to assess the need for childcare, in particular to construct deprivation indices and ward profiles to target the development of services for children in need. The national OPCS Disability Survey (Bone and Meltzer, 1989) provided information about the prevalence of different types of disability among different age groups. It has also been used by some local authorities in their Children's Services Plan to estimate numbers of disabled children.

2.3.4   Information collected by national childcare organisations

Organisations representing the main childcare providers collect data from their members. The Pre-School Learning Alliance, for example, has information on the service offered by 18,000 members in England (this includes some day nurseries and pre-schools), and data on the numbers of children receiving subsidies in each pre-school. The National Childminding Association conducts regular surveys of a random sample of its membership (about 55%-60% of registered childminders). Similarly, the Kids Clubs Network has a national database of out-of-school childcare and after-school clubs that will shortly be available on the Internet (www.kidsclubs.com.uk). The National Private Day Nurseries Association currently has some 600 members representing around

1,000 nurseries (this is less than a fifth of those registered under the Children Act, but growing). They could potentially collect information on the numbers of families using services and the number of enquiries for places (source: interviews with national agencies).

These statistics can give a useful overview of trends in provision and regional variations (for example in average fees charged). Nevertheless, the information is limited to members and coverage varies, both across the country and by type of service.

2.4 Local information sources

The following overview of local information sources includes those identified through a review of the literature and those suggested by respondents in our interviews with national agencies and local authorities. Further information on the local childcare assessments that were actually undertaken by the twelve authorities we visited is provided in Part Three of the report.

2.4.1 Child population figures

Health authorities collect data on live births that give more accurate information on the number of children under five than do population projections based on the 1991 Census, and are usually available on a small area basis. Benefit Agency records could in principle provide current information on the number and distribution of families with children.

2.4.2 Information on registered day care services

All local authorities keep records of day care services that have to be registered and inspected under the Children Act 1989. This information is most useful for planning purposes if it is kept on a computerised database. Of the 83 authorities responding to our postal survey, 58% had a computerised database for monitoring the supply of childcare services, and another 16% had a non-computerised database. Sometimes this took the form of a Childcare Information Service (see below), and included additional information beyond that required for registration and inspection. Local authorities were much less likely to report that they used any system for assessing the need or demand for childcare to enable parents to work or study. Twelve per cent said they had a computerised system to do this, 16% a non-computerised system, and the rest (72%) had no system. These systems for assessing demand included logging enquiries about local childcare provision, using waiting lists, and comparing computerised records of take-up of services with health authority statistics on

children under five. All of these methods have limitations discussed later in the report.

2.4.3   Information on educational provision

Local Education Authorities (LEAs) have information on pupil numbers and population projections that enable them to plan the development of nursery education. Audits have recently been carried out by Early Years Development Partnerships of provision for four year olds, to ensure that a place will be available for every four-year-old child whose parents want it. Some of these Early Years Development Plans also look at provision for three year olds and the need for 'wrap-around' care. Their focus is on part-time educational provision (including the independent sector) but the information collected could contribute to the wider exercise of assessing childcare need and provision.

2.4.4   The Section 19 Day Care Review

One promising source of local childcare information may be the Day Care Review that local authorities have to produce every three years under Section 19 of the Children Act. Two have been carried out since the Act was implemented, and the third is due in 1998. These Reviews require social services and education departments to work with other agencies to review the range of provision available to children under the age of eight and to identify gaps. However research into the early implementation of the Children Act (Candappa et al., 1996; Elfer and McQuail, 1996; Statham, 1996), supplemented by an analysis for this report of a random sample of twelve Day Care Reviews produced in 1995/96, showed that reviews are very variable in how much information they provide. Most draw together and make public existing data rather than collecting new information, and rarely use this to develop specific targets. Most reviews do present information on the number and distribution of registered childcare services, and some give this information at a ward level and as a proportion of children aged under five or eight. They may also commission additional information, in particular surveys of parents' views of children's services (see below).

2.4.5   Children's Services Plans

Children's Services Plans generally focus on 'children in need', and are led by social services departments, although some also address the wider needs of all children in the area. They cover the whole age range of children, not just under eights. A Social Services Inspectorate analysis of Children's Services Plans published in 1993/4 (SSI, 1995) found that most authorities were experiencing

difficulties with mapping the extent and location of need. Thirty-six out of forty-five had tried to assess need, but this was most commonly based on the priorities of managers and practitioners rather than on empirical evidence. Although objective measurement of need is still not widespread, authorities are increasingly beginning to develop various deprivation indices to rank wards for developing services, which could prove useful for local childcare assessments. These indices are generally based on Census data such as single parent or unemployed households, rented or overcrowded housing and ethnic composition. They may also include information from social services records such as the number of children referred to social workers or on the child protection register, from the Benefits Agency on claimants of income support, and from the Health Authority on accident-related hospital admissions of young children. Some LEAs use similar ranking systems to target nursery expansion, including indices such as take-up of free school meals.

2.4.6   Children with special needs

Potential sources of information on numbers of children who may need particular kinds of childcare (or priority access to services) include local authority registers of disabled children (held by social services, health authorities or jointly) and records of children with statements of special educational needs (held by LEAs). However, these sources of data may not provide a comprehensive and comparable assessment for the following reasons: not all children with statements have disabilities which would necessitate extra care; statementing of pre-school children is not consistent; definitions of disability may vary between local authorities, affecting registers of disabled children.

2.4.7   Demographic and labour market information

A variety of agencies collect demographic and employment data on the local population that could provide information for making assessments of childcare need. They include Training and Enterprise Councils, Economic Development Agencies, local authority planning or economic development departments and consortia of agencies concerned to promote employment opportunities for women, such as Chwarae Teg in Wales and Fair Play in England. Some authorities have developed sophisticated Geographical Information Systems combining a wide range of social, economic and environmental data that could be linked to databases of childcare provision to facilitate corporate planning.

2.4.8 Parental preferences

Asking parents about the childcare services they use and would like is one way of trying to assess need and demand. Almost two thirds (65%) of the local authorities who responded to our postal questionnaire reported that they had conducted such a survey within the last three years, often for Section 19 reviews or Early Years Development Plans. Some were localised rather than authority wide. However such surveys generally have a poor response rate (Owen, 1996), and the information they provide is difficult to interpret. Part Three of this report describes attempts within the twelve case study authorities to assess the views of parents and children themselves on the services they would like to see made available.

2.4.9 Information on out of school provision

TECs are responsible for monitoring schemes set up under the Out-of-School Childcare Initiative and collect regular information to assess how far they are meeting their targets. Schemes setting up under the Initiative are required to submit business plans, which often include surveys of local demand for the service. Childcare Information Services may contain information on other out of school provision, and some local authorities require play schemes to provide information as a condition of grant aid. Appendix IV suggests other possible sources of information on out of school provision.

2.4.10 Childcare Information Services

Childcare Information Services, whether run by the local authority or contracted to another organisation, offer a potentially valuable source of information for planning childcare services. They often collect additional information on registered services. This can include, for example, the age of children catered for, opening hours and costs, staff qualifications and ability to take children with special needs. They may collect some information on other (non-registered) services and may also collate enquiries for different types of service to give an indication of demand. Around 40 local authorities now have such a service (Sheffield Children's Information Service, 1997) although they vary in the range of provision they include, and their role in providing information for planning services is frequently underdeveloped. The potential of Childcare Information Services to contribute to local childcare assessments is described through several good practice examples in Part Three of the report.

2.5 Key points

(1)   Childcare information needs have been neglected, but the subject is now on the public agenda for a variety of policy reasons. Several different agencies are collecting information that could contribute to local childcare assessments, but each may be unaware of what the others have to offer.

(2)   Basic information on the amount of registered provision for children under eight is fairly easily obtained and can be enhanced with additional information from Childcare Information Services. However sources of information on need and demand are much weaker and assessed in different ways by different agencies.

(3)   Gathering data is less of a problem than analysing it to quantify need.

(4)   Childcare needs are complex, and formulaic approaches are likely to be inadequate to assess them.

PART THREE

LOCAL AUTHORITY PRACTICE IN ASSESSING CHILDCARE NEED AND PROVISION

3.1   The Aims of this Section

This section of the report considers how local authorities managed assessments of childcare need, demand and provision, and how this information was used. Interviews were conducted with representatives from local authorities and voluntary organisations in twelve local authorities, eight of which were selected randomly and four selected as examples of good practice.   A copy of the interview schedule can be found in the Appendix V.

3.2   Is registration and inspection information in a useable format for planning purposes?

Under the Children Act, anyone providing care to children under the age of eight for more than two hours a day for payment must be registered and annually inspected by their local authority. Clearly, registration and inspection records are one source of information that local authorities could use in assessments of childcare provision.   Of the twelve authorities, five had computerised databases for information on registered provision, although the recorded data varied in detail.   Respondents said the database had been used for planning purposes.   This included identifying provision for three and four year olds for the Early Years Development Plans and for illustrating the low levels of provision in a rural area for a European Commission bid.   However, the general impression from many authorities was that registration and inspection data were not currently in a format that could be readily used in assessments of childcare need or supply.

3.3   Childcare Information Services

Seven of the twelve authorities had a Childcare Information Service (CIS). Three were operated by the local authority, either within Education or Social Services departments.   Two were independent of the local authority and run as voluntary organisations.   In these two cases, the local authority contracted the CIS to provide information for parents as a requirement of their duty under the Children Act.   The remaining two authorities had service level agreements with CISs established before local government reorganisation, when unitary authorities were established. These two CISs provided a service to more than

one authority and covered a much larger geographical area than was the case with the other five.

The cost of the CIS varied depending on the range of services offered and the size of the authority. Thus, in a London authority with a population of 215,000 and 330 registered childminders the CIS, with three full-time posts, cost approximately £90,000 per year. The CIS could update its database on childminders every month, monitor enquiries and follow-up enquirers' access to childcare. This compares with a city council with a population of 528,000 and 1,000 registered childminders where the CIS, with one full-time and two part-time staff, cost approximately £70,000. The CIS updated its database on childminders every six months, monitored enquiries (though there was a backlog on data entry), but was unable to follow-up enquiries.

Funding was not always very secure and at least two of the seven CISs were funded annually, including the city council CIS described above. This created obvious difficulties, not least of which was the severe limitation placed on long-term planning. External funding (e.g. European Regional Development Fund, ERDF; Single Regeneration Budget, SRB) contributed to the running or IT installation of three CISs.

The primary function of a CIS was to provide information on children's services (age range 0-10 or 0-12). The database included all registered provision, but could also include unregulated provision (e.g. drop-in centres and support groups), LEA, Health and Leisure provision. Between 80% and 90% of enquiries were from parents, the rest coming from providers, employers and professionals such as social workers. Most calls concerned childcare in relation to employment and training, but not all enquirers were employed or seeking work.

For local authority planning, it is important to have a CIS that can provide up-to-date information, especially about vacancies. Keeping information up-to-date, however, was a major task that clearly had resource implications. Only one CIS had resources that enabled information to be updated regularly (i.e. every month for childminders and every three months for nurseries). Besides having sufficient staff, this CIS closed one day a week to enable staff to catch up on data entry. Due to budget cuts a CIS in another authority had no administrative staff and was unable to keep up-to-date with data entry. It was considered important that the CIS undertake its own information collection and updating rather than relying on other agencies or departments. It took one CIS 18 months to update the list of registered childminders supplied by the team of day care advisers.

To streamline the collection and dissemination of information about children's services a City Council (see 3.4.2) was installing a new IT system. The new system would network all relevant agencies including the CIS and the council's Young Children's Service to a central database of all provision and relevant information. To realise the full potential of this database, however, respondents stressed that people had to know that the information was available and what could be done with. This requires investment in IT training and support. As one interviewee said "IT should be a tool not a slave", but training and support was not often included in IT budgets.

3.4   Assessments of childcare need, demand and provision

In the postal questionnaire survey to authorities, 65% had conducted a survey of need or demand for childcare services in the last three years. In the twelve case study authorities, respondents referred to a variety of means, both formal and informal, of assessing need and demand for childcare. Overall, assessments were piecemeal, often in response to government requirements or funding bids, uncoordinated and highlighted the need for more and better local information.

3.4.1   Who conducted the assessments and why?

The Section 19 Day Care Review and Early Years Development Plan were the reason for most assessments of childcare need and provision. These assessments were most often conducted by the authority, though occasionally independent consultants were commissioned for the purpose. For example, MORI was commissioned by one authority to identify the childcare needs of parents of children under 11 and to ascertain parental satisfaction with services. MORI's methodology included a market research survey in shopping centres and a postal survey. Self-complete questionnaires, public meetings and focus groups were the most usual means of local authority consultation. Audits of need and provision for Early Years Development plans (EYDPs) frequently involved looking at geographical distribution and existing provision. The audits usually highlighted the need for more accurate data for planning purposes. Commissioned research, mostly carried out by independent consultants, university departments or TECs, was usually in relation to specific funding bids.

3.4.2   Who was consulted?

Parents and providers were the principal participants in surveys and consultation exercises. However, there was a growing recognition that children and young people, who are the users or potential users of services, should be

consulted too and some authorities had attempted to include children in their consultations. Thus, in a one-off study by a Childcare Officer, children attending the council's play schemes and their parents were sent separate questionnaires asking for their views of the scheme. In another authority, a few parents and children were interviewed about services in their area. Concerns were raised in at least three authorities that focusing solely on parents' needs for childcare could lead to children's needs being overlooked. Concerns were also raised about how representative consultations and surveys were. The proportion of people returning questionnaires was often low. In one rural authority, 17,000 questionnaires were distributed and only 350 returned. The response rate for questionnaires averaged 21% across six of the twelve authorities. Owen (1996) makes the point that if local authorities are to conduct surveys, they need to consider obtaining representative samples. To do so they may require some guidance, and adequate funding.

3.4.3   Assessing need, demand and supply

Providers' waiting lists were sometimes used as an indicator of demand. However, this source of information is not very reliable. Parents may find alternative provision yet not remove their name from the waiting list. Others may not even register their name if a place is unlikely to become available soon. Neither is it possible to use this information to assess demand in areas with little provision. Council officers with a good knowledge of the local community such as community workers and early years advisers were cited as another means by which gaps in provision could be identified.

Childcare Information Services were usually able to provide data on childcare demand and supply. In a good practice authority, a well resourced and developed CIS provided information on the distribution of each type of provision by ward, enabling the authority to consider shortfalls in services. Very few CISs had sufficient resources to follow-up all enquiries and collect information on whether parents found childcare. Where enquiries were logged and the information entered onto a database, looking at the match between demand and supply was possible. Nevertheless, this method cannot provide a comprehensive picture of demand and unmet need. Not every parent contacts a CIS and only a minority of those who do, return monitoring forms.

3.4.4 Childcare decisions and arrangements are complex

Parental decisions about childcare are often complex. This fact was highlighted by a study by independent consultants looking at unmet need and ways of developing consumer-led provision in one authority. The researchers found that many parents were using informal, unregistered care at a low cost and for most

parents, particularly part-time workers, childcare arrangements were complex and insecure; 44% of parents had more than one arrangement and arrangements frequently changed, partly because of children's changing needs. One interviewee made the point that what parents say they want may not always be a good indication of what they would use in practice. A school that was setting up an out-of-school scheme had a very positive response from parents at both the initial and midway stages of development. However, when parents were told of the opening date, only two parents signed up for a place and the scheme had to be abandoned. Of course, parents may have come to use the scheme in the future. Although the immediate need may not be for all places in a scheme, future needs may mean that all places will eventually be used. One respondent pointed to the need for resources that would bridge schemes in this situation. Planning is also difficult because parents may arrange childcare in the location of their workplace that may not necessarily be the authority in which they live. In one authority, CIS data established that many requests were for childcare places in the county town because that was where parents were working.

3.4.5 The need for accurate and detailed information at a local level

The following examples illustrate the need for information at a very local level to ensure that service planning can match the needs of the local population.

A County Council set up a project to investigate low levels of day care provision in rural areas. Data from the authority's CIS was used to identify parishes with a low ratio of places to children. To establish what services were used and needed, door-to-door enquiries were made by the project team, and professionals and officers working in the parishes were consulted. The survey showed that the proportion of children using a service was in fact above, rather than below the county average. The raw data on which the ratio of children to places had been calculated did not take account of families using provision in neighbouring villages. The raw data also hid the fact that in some geographically isolated areas within parishes, a much higher proportion of families were unable to access a pre-school service. Significant changes at parish level in the age distribution of children since the 1991 Census was also revealed by the survey. The small and often fluctuating numbers of children in many rural areas make the collection of accurate information particularly important for planning purposes. Although data collection was time consuming, it is unlikely that the true picture could otherwise have emerged.

In another authority, a study looking at employment and childcare needs in one specific area was commissioned for an SRB bid. Results showed that although provision was sufficient, it was too expensive for parents to use. Although the

authority was planning to develop a new nursery for the area, a revised proposal was put forward. Instead it was suggested that existing provision should be offered cash incentives on a time limited basis. In exchange for providing low cost places, the providers would be given grants for equipment, or training. In this example, a simple mapping exercise involving a comparison of numbers of children with the number of childcare places would have been insufficient for planning purposes.

3.5   Facilitating local assessments of childcare

The following two examples, one from a good practice authority, show how particular structures or strategies within an authority could facilitate local assessments of childcare need, but also how local assessments of childcare need to be flexible enough to respond to different circumstances in different local authorities.

3.5.1   The hub and spokes' scheme

A City Council is developing a new service model in which the primary school is identified as the service 'hub' with the 'spokes' being other agencies and providers working in the school's catchment area. This approach is seen as a way to meet the different needs of local communities. For example, providing services 'within pram pushing distance' for parents who work or who want to go back to work. One of the three pilot projects involved a private day nursery based on school premises. The nursery offered affordable places to local parents and worked closely with the school's nursery class. Many children attended both services. A policy officer worked with the pilot projects. Her role included identifying parents' needs for services, through formal and informal meetings, and feeding this back into strategic planning.

The scheme was viewed by council officers as introducing a system that provided regular contact with parents and thus enabled an assessment of their needs to be made. It was their belief that this more informal approach could also improve formal methods of collecting information. Fostering good relations and making parents feel their views are important, may positively influence parents' willingness to participate in the systematic collection of data such as returning questionnaires or being interviewed in surveys.

3.5.2   Integration, partnership and area planning

One City Council has adopted a corporate strategy to facilitate the growth and development of statutory, voluntary and private sector provision. An integrated Young Children's Service (YCS) has been established, bringing together

nursery schools, young children's centres (formerly social services day nurseries) and all registration and inspection functions within Education. The Service has its own budget and shares its accommodation with six voluntary organisations concerned with childcare, including the Children's Information Service. Sharing a centre has many additional benefits. This includes the facilitation of access to information and resources. In its role as enabler and facilitator of services for young children (0-10), the YCS has entered partnership with city-wide voluntary organisations working with families and young children.

The council firmly believes that partnerships with local communities will enable it to meet effectively the needs of these communities. A planning structure has been initiated which reflects this position. The YCS has 23 planning areas each with its own planning forum that brings together, on a local basis, all with an interest in early years, including parents. The forums meet bimonthly and provide information about the experiences and needs of people living and working in the area. Information about local needs and shortfalls in provision contributes to council planning. Area planning forums provide qualitative data considered essential, not only with respect to service delivery, but also in the assessment of local need. To be effective this planning structure has to be provided with adequate resources. The YCS had secured development funding which will be allocated to area planning policy. The City Council and Health Authority have recognised the value of having common area planning structures and both were taking forward proposals to set up common area structures. This will facilitate inter-agency work, planning and information exchange.

3.6   The purposes for which childcare information is needed

Several local authority plans and reviews, some of which the local authority has a statutory duty to produce, require information from assessments of childcare need and/or provision. The Early Years Development Plan, Section 19 Day Care Review and Children's Services Plan are examples. Three authorities had already taken the step to combine these reports to avoid unnecessary duplication. In addition, some authorities had produced Anti-Poverty Strategy Plans, Economic Development Plans and a Citizens Charter, all of which included some information on childcare needs and provision.

However, bids for government and European funding were the most frequently cited reason (75% of authorities) for needing information on childcare provision and/or need. Examples of such bids included:

- Funding in Single Regeneration areas (Single Regeneration Budget)

- European funding, e.g. European Commission (DG5); European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

- DfEE Early Years Excellence Centres

- DfEE Childcare Initiative

Indeed, so many funding opportunities existed that in one authority a person was appointed within the Early Years Service to work solely on co-ordinating funding bids.

Other purposes for which information on childcare need and provision was needed included:

- internal reviews and audits addressing particular issues within the authority (e.g. considering childcare needs in the planning of work-related further education);

- strategies developed by individual authorities (e.g. a City Achievement Strategy where information on early childhood services has informed the process of target setting); planning for health and education action zones, by which childcare provision is but one of many factors addressed in tackling underachievement and health inequality in areas of multiple deprivation.

3.7 Key Points

(1)   Registration and inspection data is not generally in a format that makes it readily accessible for assessment purposes.

(2)   A Childcare Information Service that is adequately and securely funded can provide a good database covering the supply of services. While systematic monitoring of enquiries provide indications of demand and unmet need, it cannot provide a similarly comprehensive picture of these areas.

(3)   The difficulty in achieving a representative parent view is of concern. Local forums are seen as one way forward.

(4)   Assessing parents' views on childcare is not a simple exercise. Parents can have several childcare needs that can change over a short period.

(5)   Assessments must be at a local level to take account of large local variations within local authorities. Mapping exercises which compare the

number of places with the number of children may fail to give an accurate picture and may overlook the needs of specific groups.

(6)   Organisation of services and planning structures within an authority can facilitate local assessments.

(7)   Local authorities use information on childcare need and provision for a variety of reasons, for which there is little co-ordination.

PART FOUR
VIEWS OF NATIONAL AGENCIES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

4.1 The aims of this section

In part four of the report, we analyse the views of respondents in national agencies and local authorities concerning four specific questions:

(1)   Which local authority departments should be responsible for collecting information and making assessments?

(2)   What items of information are particularly important to have available if local childcare need and provision is to be assessed?

(3)   Would guidelines to local authorities on how to make assessments be useful?

(4)   What problems or constraints might arise in conducting such assessments?

Representatives from eleven national agencies were interviewed. Interviews were conducted either face to face or by telephone. A list of the agencies represented appears in section 1.2.2. of the report. Employees from twelve local authorities were interviewed face to face. Selection criteria for the twelve authorities appear in section 1.2.3. of the report. All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured schedule to ensure that respondents were asked similar questions. The views of respondents will be described under each of the four questions listed above.

4.2   Which local authority departments should be responsible for collecting   information and making assessments?

4.2.1 National agencies: Representatives of national agencies were asked the following question: *Do you think one agency or local government department should take complete or leading responsibility for the collection and co-ordination of local information?* Respondents agreed that the collection and co-ordination of local information should be undertaken by a single body. Most agreed that the identity of such a single body should be determined by the Chief Executive in each local authority. Two people specifically identified the Local Education Authority as most suitable, while others suggested the Early Years Development Partnership (EYDP) might fulfil this role. A second

question was asked: *Do you think one agency or local government department should take complete or leading responsibility for making the assessments of childcare need and provision in each local area?* All but one national agency representative felt assessments would best be made by one co-ordinating body. Some people felt that the local authority should take the lead, although many identified EYDPs as suitable.

4.2.2 Local authorities: Representatives of local authorities were asked the following question: *To avoid duplication, do you think one local authority department or other local agency should be responsible for collecting and co-ordinating local information on childcare and related issues for this range of assessment, review and planning purposes, or should different departments or agencies take the lead for different tasks? What about more specifically, for local assessments of childcare need and provision?* The majority of interviewees responded positively to the idea that a single agency should be responsible for the co-ordination of information collection. People felt that while several departments and agencies might take responsibility for collecting different kinds of information, one body should be given the job of co-ordinating the data. However, where a single co-ordinating body was given this responsibility, care would have to be taken to ensure that the interests of all participating departments and agencies were fairly represented. A subsequent question asked: *Which department or agency? Why?* All but one respondent felt that responsibility should lie with the local authority. Several local authority departments, including Education, Social Services, and Children's Services were mentioned in this context. Two respondents felt the job might best be left to an outside agency, perhaps a local university, contracted in by the local authority.

EYDPs were thought by many to be unsuited to the task, because they lack authority, a budget and an administrative function. However, many felt that EYDPs should be involved as partners with one or more Local Authority bodies such as Education or Social Services. Most common was the belief that the Chief Executive's office should take responsibility as co-ordinator of a strategy unit. In local authorities with a Children Services Department or an Under Eights Department responsible for providing childcare information services, respondents thought these departments best placed as they had established links with relevant stakeholder groups. A further question asked: *Do you think one agency or local government department should take complete or leading responsibility for making the assessments of childcare need and provision in each local area?* Responses to this question were generally consistent with answers to the previous item concerning information collection. Most people felt the job would be done most effectively by a single department or agency, linked in some way to the Chief Executive's office. Finally,

respondents were asked: *Which other agencies/organisations/departments do you think should be involved in the exercise?* Most people spoke about the need to involve all relevant groups of stakeholders. Those commonly cited included: health authorities (and specifically health visitors), social services (registration and inspection units), employment agencies, TECs, employers (Chamber of Commerce), Economic Development Units, Housing, Education, and voluntary agencies (e.g. parents' organisations and local Early Years Liaison Groups).

4.3   What items of information are particularly important to have available if local childcare need and provision is to be assessed?

4.3.1 National agencies: Respondents were asked*: What items of information do you feel it is particularly important to have available if local childcare need and provision is to be assessed effectively?* National agency representatives identified current levels of childcare supply and demand as the two most important elements in effective local needs assessments. The importance of establishing the extent of informal (unregulated) care provision was noted. Other important predictors of supply and demand were mentioned; included were demographic and economic (employment) data, information concerning the ability of different parental groups to pay for childcare, and the needs of different client groups distinguishable on grounds of ethnicity, disability or health factors. Identifying geographical factors was felt to be essential if transport needs of parents were to be met. The importance of collecting qualitative data from groups of parents was identified as crucial to establishing the variety of local parental need. Many people felt that the continuous monitoring of these data would be vital to effective needs assessment.

4.3.2 Local authorities: Representatives of local authorities were asked: *Are there any items of information that you feel it is particularly important to have available if local childcare need and provision are to be assessed effectively?* Responses show that accurate estimates of parental needs was a high priority for local authorities. Many people identified the importance of consulting parents at a local level concerning their perceived childcare needs. Estimates of need were linked closely to data concerning local employment, housing and transport. Not only was it considered necessary to collect data on current conditions, but also on projected future needs and demands. Also thought desirable was the collection of demographic data. This would enable identification of particular need, the support required for children with special needs, and additional factors including the geographical distribution of minority ethnic groups and families living in poverty. Estimates of local supply needed to tackle the issue of unregistered (unregulated) carers, and the cost and quality existing provision. These data would enable local authorities

to estimate training needs among existing and potential providers. The desirability of incorporating children's views into development plans was mentioned by more than one local authority representative.

4.4 Would guidelines to local authorities on how to make assessments be useful?

4.4.1 National agencies: Respondents were asked: *Do you think that a set of guidelines for local authorities, outlining how to make assessments of local childcare need and provision, would be useful?* National agencies were unanimous in their support for local authority guidelines. Some emphasised the need for guidelines to be developed in partnership with practitioners, prescribing what data should be collected rather than how data collection should be conducted. One great advantage to having guidelines, it was thought, would be to enable the production of comparable national data on childcare demand and provision.

4.4.2 Local authorities: The following question was asked: *Do you think that a set of guidelines for local authorities, outlining how to make assessments of local childcare need and provision, would be useful?* Local authority representatives generally thought guidelines would be useful. Guidance would not only provide consistent national data, but would also serve to legitimise local authority requests for information. At the same time they may serve to encourage necessary support from senior managers and elected members. However, several people noted that effective guidelines would need to reflect local variation, and as such not be too prescriptive. They thought guidance would be most useful where it identified what information to collect, and potential sources of that information, rather than how to collect it. Models of good practice were identified as a particularly useful component in guidelines of the type discussed.

4.5 What problems or constraints might arise in conducting such assessments?

4.5.1 National agencies: Respondents were asked: *Do you see any particular problems or constraints in conducting such assessments that would need to be recognised and addressed in such guidelines?* National agency representatives identified a wide range of potential problems to be addressed by local authority guidelines. Most common among those cited was the problem of funding any assessment exercise. People identified financial, human and IT resources as basic requirements. Guidelines would have to strike a balance between general and specific advice, recognising the diversity that exists both between and

within local authorities. Two-tier authorities may need particular guidance concerning organisational issues. Other potential problems identified concerned definitions of need, developing community-based initiatives, and arriving at accurate estimates concerning the extent of informal (unregulated) provision. Raising expectations was not seen as a particular problem. Respondents generally believed that government has a commitment to provide childcare, while parents have realistic expectations of what can be provided.

4.5.2 Local authorities: Representatives of local authorities were asked*: Do you see any particular problems or constraints in conducting such assessments that would need to be recognised and addressed in such guidelines?* Local authorities identified the availability of adequate financial resources as the most likely constraint in conducting assessments of need and provision. Elected members effectively control the extent to which childcare is seen as a local priority. Where commitment to early years services from members is lacking, resources to carry out the assessment effectively are unlikely to be available. Elected members would have to be encouraged in some way to provide adequate resources to fund the assessment exercise. For example, one person suggested offering a premium in the SSA for local authorities deemed to have undertaken effective assessments of need and provision.

Involving all stakeholder groups in the assessment exercise was also identified as a potential problem that would need to be addressed. Parents and private providers may take some convincing that their active participation is crucial. The possible impact of a comprehensive assessment exercise on parental expectations raised some concern. Guidelines would need to identify ways in which local authorities may have to deal with raised expectations among stakeholders. Issues concerning the extent to which guidelines could be prescriptive were highlighted in the context of diversity within and between local authorities. Guidelines should also recognise how childcare fits into other strategic local authority goals, such as economic regeneration. The need to keep assessment data updated, to establish meaningful links with EYDPs and other local stakeholder groups, and to recognise ethnic and cultural diversity was also highlighted.

4.6   Key points

(1)   The co-ordination of local data collection and assessments of childcare needs and provision should be undertaken by a single department or agency. Many respondents felt that the Chief Executive's office should take a lead role in any co-ordinating body.

(2)   Apart from information concerning current levels of childcare provision and parental perceptions of their childcare needs, effective assessment should include collection of data on local employment, housing and transport conditions, demographic characteristics of local populations, the extent of provision supplied by unregistered and informal carers, the cost and quality of existing provision, and the views of children.

(3)   Guidelines for local authorities concerning what information to collect, rather than how to collect it, were positively endorsed by national agencies and local authorities. Guidelines should not be prescriptive. Models of good practice would be a useful component of guidelines of the type discussed.

(4)   Provision of financial resources, commitment from elected members, and effective involvement of all stakeholder groups were all identified as potential problems in conducting assessments that guidelines would need to recognise and address.

PART FIVE
CONCLUSIONS

5.1   Key Findings

5.1.1   Information on provision

• Information on the supply of regulated services (i.e. for children up to the age of eight years) is available in registration and inspection sections of local authorities. However, variation exists in the range of information carried and its accessibility for purposes of assessment. Another source of information is Childcare Information Services (CISs), although these are not universally available and vary in the range, currency and accessibility of data. The most developed and well-resourced CISs, however, have extensive and regularly updated information on all regulated services on a computer database, and some have information on a wider range of services including those for older children.

• Little information exists on unregulated formal carers (including nannies and other carers in the child's home) or on informal carers (including relatives), who together play a major part in providing childcare for children under eight years. No systematic and uniform information collection is undertaken on services for children over eight which may have a childcare element. However, individual departments (which in this case may include leisure or recreation) may know what is available in their area, and could provide this information to CISs.

• Some local authorities have already studied variations in provision between different areas, e.g. wards, and this has enabled them to identify areas with low levels of provision.

5.1.2 Assessment of current use of childcare and of childcare need and demand

• We found no examples of local authorities who have undertaken a fully-fledged local assessment of childcare need and demand in relation to provision.

• We have found no examples of a well-designed and systematic (i.e. representative and comprehensive) survey at a local authority level of current parental childcare arrangements and demand for childcare.

Attempts made usually suffer from under resourcing, resulting in reliance on methods that produce low response rates and limited data.

- Systematically following-up the people (overwhelmingly parents) who approach CISs, to see what has subsequently happened in their search for childcare, has the potential for providing some useful information. For example, it could provide information concerning barriers to childcare. However, it must always be remembered that such exercises have only partial coverage, i.e. those parents who have approached the CIS in the first place. Effective following-up has resource implications, and only one CIS in the study had a systematic follow-up procedure.

5.1.3 Other information

- No current and available sources of reliable data exist either at a local authority level or for areas below the local authority level (e.g. wards) on issues such as family circumstances, including parental employment patterns; economic circumstances; or even numbers and ages of children. The Census covers some items, but quickly dates. The regular government surveys provide more current information, but cannot do this at a local authority or sub-local authority level. It is possible that some basic information could be supplied by the Benefit Agency (e.g. from child benefit records or records of families on income support).

5.1.4 Other findings

- Over and above reviews and planning of children's services, information on childcare is increasingly required for a variety of purposes and by a range of departments and agencies. For example information is required in relation to economic development, making bids for funding and for various planning purposes.

- Widespread agreement was found on the need for a more co-ordinated approach to information collection and assessment.

- Support for the idea of guidelines about making local assessments of childcare was widespread. However, equally common was the view that guidelines should not be prescriptive. People emphasised instead examples of good practice and a menu of ideas and suggestions that could be tailored to varying local circumstances. Several constraints were raised which would need to be addressed in any guidelines, including financial, personnel and technological resources.

- A recurrent theme was the extent and significance of diversity. Diversity exists between families with children and their circumstances. Their requirements and attitudes differ, for example, in relation to economic conditions, working hours, existing or preferred childcare arrangements, ethnicity, and social needs. Diversity also exists between localities, not only at local authority level but at smaller-scale levels. For example, differences are to be found between different wards and neighbourhoods, not only in relation to families, employers and labour markets, but also in terms of the availability and cost of childcare services.

5.2   Conclusions

5.2.1   Purposes of local assessments

Although local authorities have duties to provide childcare services (these duties are primarily for children defined as in 'need' under the Children Act), they have substantial influence on childcare services. They have a duty to regulate, and powers to support independent providers of services for children under eight (both of which have quality implications). They have a leading role in monitoring and planning (e.g. Early Years Development Plans, Section 19 Day Care Reviews, Children's Services Plans). They often play a leading part in bidding for national and European funds and in various multi-agency partnerships. Furthermore all Government statements suggest that the policy concern of the National Childcare Strategy is not only the supply of affordable and accessible provision, but provision that is of good quality. Childcare is seen as both a labour market and child welfare issue. Given the need to link any local assessments to outputs, so that people can see that they are a worthwhile and productive exercise, four possible purposes for local assessments come to mind:

- planning services, from informing independent providers about market conditions and possible duplication, to promoting provision in under-supplied areas or encouraging employer participation in childcare schemes. Service planning may also be more strategic, involving the identification of gaps in provision and drawing up plans to make them good;

- developing services both in terms of quantity and quality, for example by developing training and other forms of staff development;

- monitoring the impact of policies;

- providing information for funding bids and other work where a childcare element is needed.

5.2.2 How local should local assessments be?

If they prove feasible, assessments need to be made, in the first place, at the local authority level. However, for purposes of planning and developing services and given the wide variations between quite small districts within local authorities, it may be helpful, even necessary, to work also at a more local level than the whole local authority. Many respondents in local authorities also emphasised this point. Several possibilities were suggested for these more local level assessments: wards; neighbourhoods (defined in different ways); school catchment areas; even streets. It is only at these levels that gaining a deep understanding of the circumstances, needs and views of children and their families is possible; to relate these to existing provision and the needs of local providers (e.g. for training, support, premises and equipment, and issues of financial viability); to plan to expand that provision and improve its quality, in ways that are co-ordinated (making best use of resources), relevant and feasible; and to monitor the success in delivering an improved quality of life to children and families.

5.2.3 The feasibility of local assessments

The core of a local assessment of childcare need and demand in relation to provision would be an estimate of the current shortfall of supply in relation to need and demand. In addition, it would incorporate estimates of future supply and demand (and therefore future shortfalls) given expectations about trends and the policy framework. A local assessment might also attempt to incorporate into its shortfall estimates some assessment of quality and therefore of the shortfall in relation to acceptable or good quality provision. To be useful for planning, the assessment would probably also need to take account of diversity between families and areas, so that variations in shortfalls could be identified. Several respondents highlighted subgroups of children and families with special needs, for example children with disabilities, or subgroups who they thought might easily get overlooked. The latter may include certain minority ethnic groups, young mothers including those leaving the care system, families in rural areas, refugees and asylum seekers.

Existing data sources are limited and variable in some fields, and non-existent in others. The patchiness of existing data sources and the general dearth of information in several important areas suggests that very severe limits exist concerning what can be 'readily achieved with existing local data'. Even simply plotting the distribution of existing regulated services, the one item of information that should be potentially available everywhere, is of limited value, at least if treated in isolation. For example in one case study authority, information on regulated provision shows that the wealthiest part of the

borough has far fewer childminders and no more nurseries than the poorest part. However, how should this partial information be interpreted? Does it tell us whether shortfalls exist and if so, of what kind? A fuller picture, requiring more information, might reveal less demand for nurseries and childminders among wealthier parents who use nannies or paid-for services nearer their place of work. It may also reveal that childminders in poorer areas have many vacancies reflecting an oversupply due to this type of work being easily accessible to women with low levels of education and training.

Even with the best and broadest range of information, which would be very expensive to collect, we conclude that it is likely to prove very difficult to produce some standardised formula from which one could derive precise local assessments. The same applies to the production of accurate and reliable calculations of current and future shortfalls. We have come across no examples in current practice. Two major problems are the paucity of information on unregulated childcare and parental demand. One possibility for filling part of this information gap would be to conduct regular, well-designed surveys of parents (as happens in Sweden). However, such surveys would be very expensive, and would not necessarily provide information on smaller subgroups of families or at a small area level. Furthermore, they would not necessarily generate very valid data. For example, questions about whether parents would work if childcare was available or about parental satisfaction with existing childcare provision seem to produce predictable responses that are not always easy to interpret and may therefore provide an uncertain basis for making assessments and planning services.

Our conclusion is in line with that drawn by Sally Holtermann, who has been involved in two childcare audits in Wales:

> there is a choice between a formula based approach and a more informal approach using empirical information to inform judgement. The latter seems more appropriate, but then the difficult task is how to provide guidelines of general applicability on how to exercise judgement (Appendix I, p.7).

The real world is too diverse and complex for a standardised formula approach to work. Instead, assessments should be based on drawing together a variety of sources of information and the application of judgement. This approach might include making some very specific improvements in existing information sources, for example supporting the extension of CISs to all local authorities, increasing their accessibility and the data they collect and strengthening their follow-up work with enquirers. Such improvements would have the double benefit of helping parents and contributing to strategic planning.

Use could also be made, at both local authority and more local levels, of other, more modestly priced ways of collecting information. Several suitable data collection methods were mentioned by one or more of our respondents, so are already in operation in some parts of the country. They include focus groups, meetings of various advisory or consultative groups, in-depth interviews with small numbers from particular groups (e.g. providers, parents, children), and larger scale user questionnaires focused on particular services. Attention could also be paid to the possibility of making use of two existing sources of data held by the Benefit Agency: child benefit data; and data on benefit payments to low income families (e.g. income support, family credit). Without posing any threat to confidentiality of individual records, it might prove possible for these sources to provide information on numbers of children of different ages, both in total and in low income families, at a very localised level such as postal districts or wards.

5.2.4   Implementation issues

Support for the idea of some form of guidelines about local childcare assessments was widespread. However, equally widespread was an emphasis on them not being prescriptive, and allowing maximum scope for local interpretation. As one respondent pointed out, it is "not appropriate for DfEE to say this is how you have to do it. Authorities vary. How could it be the same for Moss Side and Cornwall". Considerable emphasis was placed on guidelines including examples of good practice, "a menu of ideas".

Guidelines need to be drawn up in consultation with the various players who will be involved in using them. Production of guidelines would also require adequate pilot work. Constraints to be addressed include adequate resourcing in terms of funding, time and adequate numbers of trained and experienced staff. Several respondents also emphasised the importance of assessments being linked to some tangible benefit, to provide an incentive for undertaking the exercise. The most obvious incentive is to make additional funding for expanding services conditional on good assessments. Others include linking effective assessments to funding for building up an information system that could contribute to a wide range of planning, monitoring and information-providing tasks.

5.2.5   Where do local assessments of childcare fit in the bigger picture?

We have already mentioned in Part One the large number of other planning, review and assessment exercises involving children and children's services (in which we would count schools). Our list does not include any work being undertaken by health authorities, for example concerning children with

disabilities. In addition, a plethora of other exercises are underway, to various degrees in different local authorities, which involve a childcare element: for example, in relation to Single Regeneration Bids, bids for EU funding, economic development (by TECs, local authorities and others), making returns to government concerning the Out-of-School Initiative (TECs again), and a variety of other local planning exercises.

We conclude that the case for placing local assessments of childcare needs within a co-ordinating framework concerned with all children and children's services is strong; to do childcare assessments in isolation reinforces fragmentation and incoherence of present services. Several reasons support this proposal:

- children with working parents have other needs (e.g. because they have disabilities, they need learning opportunities, chances to play etc.);

- children covered in other planning exercises (e.g. 'children in need') may have working parents and this may get more common if the Welfare to Work policy is successful;

- individual services (e.g. sponsored childminders who take children 'in need' placed by local Social Services) may be serving a variety of needs, and there is increasing emphasis on the educational content of 'childcare' services;

- planning which focuses on one group of services in isolation may have unintended and adverse effects on other services (e.g. the development of 'day care' services for school age children could adversely effect 'open door' play services);

- efficiency and value for money;

- 'planning fatigue';

- ensuring that 'childcare for working parents' is placed in a child-oriented context and the needs of children are constantly borne in mind;

- supporting an integrated approach to children's services, since the systems of information reflect and reproduce divisions between services.

At least two potential frameworks exist in which local assessments of childcare need and demand might be placed. The first is the *Early Years Development Partnership* (EYDP). This has the advantage that it brings childcare assessments close to a wide range of interests represented in EYDPs and close

to the planning process. The drawback is the (current) focus on younger children, and the separation from the second potential framework, *Children's Services Plans* (CSPs).

CSPs were originally intended to focus on children in need, and located in local Social Services and the Department of Health. However, many local authorities are now using CSPs to think about all children and their needs, and produce them as a multi-agency process. CSPs also cover the full age range of the National Childcare Strategy, from 0-14. A recent report from the Gulbenkian Foundation on Effective Government Structures for Children also identified the potential of these plans as a basis for planning provision for *all* children:

> The introduction of mandatory Children's Services Plans is one of the most exciting government initiatives for children since the war....(but they) have two major weaknesses at present. The first is that in England and Wales they relate only to services for 'children in need'...(and second) the duty to produce the Children's Services Plan belongs to local social services alone....It does not make any sense for different authorities within the same geographical area to embark on separate reviews or plans on inter-related subject areas...[T]he time has come for central government to seize the nettle and rationalise local planning for children, so that wherever sectoral responsibilities overlap coherent strategies are adopted by the key players. Children's Services Plans are the obvious vehicle for comprehensive, collaborative planning for children (Hodgkin and Newell, 1996, p.58-60).

Hodgkin and Newell therefore are proposing a central role for CSPs, including but no longer confined to children in need and no longer tied to one local and central government department. This seems to us to be an exciting and potentially powerful means of planning together for childcare and other children's needs.

This framework would involve a wide range of departments and agencies working in partnership to contribute to the planning process. It could (and needs to) include a well-resourced information and planning unit. Its task would be to ensure a good information base to meet the various needs of the CSP (including childcare assessments) and to support various planning processes, which would be undertaken in relation to each other rather than independently. Assessing the care needs of children with working parents would be done in the context of the broader Plan. Assessment would consider the other needs of children with working parents, and the care needs of children with non-employed parents.

A further advantage of choosing this framework is that it enhances relationships between social services, education, childcare and economic

development, both conceptually and administratively by bringing together social services, education and employment agencies locally and nationally. It avoids the possibility, inherent in locating childcare assessments within EYDPs, of Social Services, DoH and children in need being marginalised.

If a CSP framework was selected, then serious consideration should be given to the future of Section 19 reviews and Early Years Development Plans, at least as independent exercises. A case exists for integrating the three exercises, a possibility recognised by the DfEE itself:

> There is the potential for overlap between Early years Development Plans and other statutory reviews undertaken by the local authority. Plans should have regard to and complement existing reviews and plans. In the longer term there may be scope for integration (DfEE, 1997c, para.24).

Three local authorities visited for the study had already begun to move in this direction, including one that had combined all three exercises to produce one report.

5.2.6   Including children and young people

The field of childcare for working parents involves a wide range of interests and perspectives, which need to be involved in various ways in local assessments: parents (both mothers and fathers); providers and staff; employers; various agencies and organisations. What can easily get lost though is the participation of children and young people, who, as discussed in Part One, should be seen as having their own voice(s), perspective(s) and interests. Several respondents raised this issue. Examples were provided of local authorities that have already taken steps to include children's perspectives in planning and running services. Most examples concern children over eight (although this does not mean or prove that younger children cannot have a voice).

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1   Improving local information on provision

Improvements in local authority databases on provision should be encouraged, especially through the development of childcare information services covering as wide a range of children's services as possible for the 0-14 or 16 age range. They should be closely linked to local authority registration and inspection staff and other departments and agencies with information on services (e.g. leisure, TECs). Ideally, CISs should collect, incorporate and regularly update information on quality indicators, provider training and other support needs, vacancies, enquiries for information and follow-ups on the outcome for

enquirers (ideally through telephone interviews three months or so after the initial enquiry). Effective CISs, able to provide information to parents and for assessments and strategic planning require adequate resources and good IT. Saying precisely what the costs will be is not possible as the costs of current services vary according to several factors, such as the range of services covered and their updating policies. However, as a guide, the annual running costs of a CIS in a London Borough, with a population of 200,000, and which updates information on vacancies on a monthly basis, is about £90,000 per annum. This figure would need to be higher to increase response rates to follow-up work with enquirers.

The role of CISs as a source of local authority information for central government should be considered. The case is strengthened given the transfer of responsibility for day care' statistics from DoH to DfEE. This transfer represents an opportunity to review the purpose, content and quality of information required by central government.

5.3.2 Pilot studies of local assessments of childcare need, demand and provision

Given our conclusion that local assessments cannot involve the application of a standardised formula, but require judgement applied to a range of information sources, a good case exists for undertaking a pilot exercise in four authorities. The purpose of the pilot exercises would be to examine the feasibility, costs and benefits of producing local assessments in this way. The assessments would be examined in the context of value for planning, development and evaluation at local authority and more local levels. One of these sources would be CISs. Pilot authorities would already have an established CIS that can contribute to the pilot exercise. However, part of the work might entail identifying and implementing additional and improved features in each CIS (e.g. extending the range of ages and services covered, improving follow-up contacts with enquirers). If funding were available, consideration might be given to conducting parental surveys in two of the four authorities. Their purpose would be to evaluate the benefits provided by this form of information collection in relation to the high costs. This might be done, for example, by comparing the results gained by surveys with those gained by cheaper methods. Another issue to be explored would be the feasibility of locating local assessments of childcare within the framework of the Children's Services Plan; at least one pilot authority might be selected on the basis that it was prepared to work in this way.

The pilot authorities would need resourcing to cover the costs involved, both in collecting and collating information, but also to support co-ordination of the

exercise and drawing up the assessment. One aim of the pilot studies might be to consider the pros and cons of different places for locating this work of co-ordination and assessment.

5.3.3   Guidelines

On the basis of this pilot exercise and wider consultations, a set of guidelines should be prepared, offering authorities guidance and examples of how to undertake local assessments.

5.3.4   Inter-departmental co-ordination

Parts of the DfEE with an interest in childcare and early childhood services should discuss with the DoH and other departments how best to co-ordinate the varied and often overlapping review and planning duties placed on local authorities.   Particular attention should be paid to Section 19 reviews, the Children's Services Plans, Early Years Development Plans and any form of local assessments of childcare.   Discussions might point to some degree of integration (e.g. within an expanded and multi-agency Children's Services Plan) or improved co-ordination concerning the collection and processing of information.

5.3.5   National data on childcare use and need

It would be valuable to ensure that one of the large-scale national surveys conducted regularly on behalf of the Government was collecting consistent information on a number of key items. Relevant data would concern use of and expressed need for childcare (both formal and informal, regulated and unregulated) for children and young people from zero to 14 or older. Although none of these surveys can provide information at a local authority level, such national data could contribute to the sort of informed judgement approach to local assessments that we have proposed. For reasons discussed in Appendix III, we recommend that the General Household Survey would be the most appropriate survey for this purpose. However, we note that the government proposes biennial audits of demand for, and supply of, childcare services involving a large national sample of parents.

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APPENDIX I

THE NEED AND DEMAND FOR CHILDCARE - METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

A note prepared by Sally Holtermann for the Thomas Coram Research Unit

Social scientists and economists use the terms "need" and "demand" in slightly different, but essentially compatible ways. This note is intended to clarify the economic approach and to explain how it translates into the practical task of assessing local childcare need and demand.

It is important sometimes to explore conceptual matters in some depth. In the case of childcare the gain is (hopefully) a clearer understanding of what is being attempted in local assessments of childcare need and demand, and what is to be done with all the information that might be collected.

Demand

In economics the term "demand" has a precise meaning and a central place within both theoretical and applied studies.

Demand is defined as the amount of a commodity or service that an individual (or household, business or institution) would purchase at a given price (including the special case of a zero price). It is essentially a notion that has content in the context of the market exchange of goods and services. Demand is not an unalterable amount; it is conditional on circumstances, in particular price, but the amount demanded at the going price depends on incomes, preferences, quality and a host of other things.

The term "effective demand" is often used for the amount actually purchased at given price and income etc. levels. In the case of services supplied without charge, one might use the term "take-up" instead.

The term "potential demand" might be used to denote the amount that would be purchased if prices were lower or incomes higher. In the case of childcare the potential demand is expected to be significantly greater than the actual amount that parents can afford to buy at current prices and incomes, especially parents on low incomes. Effective demand is observable but potential demand is not, and one of the challenges for local assessments of childcare is to devise a workable methodology for estimating potential demand.

"Excess demand" or "unmet demand" is said to exist if, at the going price and income levels, more is demanded than is available in the market place. This situation arises in childcare from supply constraints of various kinds, for instance if nurseries and out of school schemes cannot find suitable premises.

Welfare

Before going on to discussing need, it may be useful to introduce the idea of "welfare" (or "utility" or "benefit", which are virtually synonymous).

Underlying the notion of demand is the hypothesis that the welfare or utility of each individual is affected by the consumption of goods and services (as well as a lot of other things). Generally an increase in consumption will raise welfare but in some cases, for example pollution, increased consumption will lower welfare, and something like cigarettes might raise welfare in the short run but lower it in the long run.

It is generally assumed that individuals are good judges of what affects their welfare, and act accordingly, but there are instances where it is thought that some people will underestimate the benefit to them of particular kinds of commodity and will not buy (or take up) enough of it at the going price to maximise their welfare. Examples are education, and perhaps fruit and vegetables. These commodities are called "merit goods".

Consumption is something that can be measured against an absolute yardstick (a cardinal scale), but strictly speaking welfare is not. It does not make sense to say that my welfare is 100 or 62. It does make sense to talk about welfare rising or falling (an ordinal scale), but not by how much. Similarly it is impossible to make interpersonal comparisons of welfare against either a relative or an absolute yardstick. It does not make sense to say that my welfare is 100 but Peter's is 200, nor even that Peter's is greater than mine.

Nevertheless there are many situations where for practical purposes one does make interpersonal comparisons of welfare, and one does make assessments of how one recognises a low level of welfare, or what circumstances will lead to low welfare. The acceptability of this relies on some assumptions about the things that human beings have in common, but those assumptions need constant checking combined with common-sense, and all value assumptions should be made explicit.

The welfare being talked about is usually the welfare as assessed by the individual concerned. But there are situations where the assessment of an individual's welfare is made by other parties, and may differ. So where necessary we should make it clear whose assessment of welfare we are talking

about. In the case of children the assessment is generally that of parents or parties outside the family. Children may have their own view but rarely a way of expressing it.

Need

The term "need" does not have a well-established unique meaning in economics and its use is often avoided as imprecise. However, I think economists might agree to use the term "need" to indicate a situation where the consumption of a commodity or service (or increase in consumption) would lead to a significant increase in welfare of an individual (or maybe a family). Implicit in most contexts is the additional notion that without this consumption, welfare is at a rather low level[2]. A need is an amount of consumption required to lift welfare to some level deemed acceptable (ideally acceptability would be discussed and agreed). This is a definition at individual level, and at the level of the community the term would also be used to indicate the number of people in need or perhaps the total amount of a service needed.

The measurement of need will be relative to some norm or standard, which could be a particular consumption level or a particular outcome or the probability of a particular outcome.

"Special need" might be reserved for use where the circumstances leading to need are of an uncommon nature and/or the resources required to bring welfare to a standard level are substantial.

Needs are difficult to measure directly, and indirect measurement is often approached through surveys or records that show conditions that lead to need (for instance, disability, behavioural disorder, children on child protection registers). Surveys of individuals and records are not always available or feasible. In that case various indicators measuring circumstances considered or known to be associated with need, or a high risk of need, are frequently used, for example, the number of families on income support, the number of lone parents, poor housing conditions.

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[2] This definition is very close to the definition of "children in need" in the 1989 Children Act: "A child in need is in need if a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority....; (b) his health is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or (c) he is disabled."

Needs, demand and the market

In the market economy supply is determined by independent economic agents acting in response to market demand and usually in order to make money (even if not a profit).

In a market economy individuals can satisfy many of their needs, at least to some degree, by using their income to buy goods and services in the market place. Needs lead to demand, and effective demand is then determined by prices and incomes. But if incomes are low or prices high or if there are shortages in supply, the consumption level achieved (the effective demand) may still leave them in need and with a low level of welfare. This is the case with day care for working parents.

Some commodities and services are not marketed at all, and supply is determined by administrative decision. This is the case for most health and personal social services (though charges may also be made) including day care services for "children in need" under the terms of the 1989 Children Act. The task of deciding how far needs are to be provided for then falls to administrators, who have to decide, within their limited budgets, whether to provide services (e.g. family centres), how much of them, and what type (e.g. open access or referred only family centres).

In some cases the use of services in the administered sector depends on demand from individuals. Needs lead to take up or expressed demand (see below). In some cases the use of services is decided by external agencies referring clients with or without an expressed demand having been made by the individuals. Refusal may be possible. When there is a shortage of supply in relation to demand (whether from individuals or administrators), there is unmet demand, and places are rationed through administrative allocation or by first come first served.

Comparison with EC Childcare Network guidelines

The EC Childcare Network document *Monitoring and evaluating equal opportunities policies in the area of reconciliation of employment and family life* gives definitions of need and demand slightly different from those outlined above. The EC paper defines demand as "a need that is felt and expressed, and an 'explicit' demand is one where a request has been made and 'latent' demand is one where demand has not led to a service being actively sought"(p11). Demand in this sense (and judging by the passages on page 14 on how to measure it) is closest to the economic notion of potential demand.

The paper suggests (page 14) measuring expressed demand by asking people in surveys how much they want. Expressed and potential demand will depend on various circumstances of price, location of services, quality of services etc. and I would see surveys as a way of measuring potential demand if, *and only if*, the surveys give respondents explicit instructions concerning what they should assume about how much they would have to pay and so on. Surveys rarely, if ever, make the questions as structured and comprehensive as this. But without knowing what the respondents have in mind the answers are virtually impossible to interpret and use. Even if the questions were completely unambiguous they would still be asking people about hypothetical situations and therefore might be a poor guide to what people will do in practice.

The EC paper suggests measuring need by the total number of people who could express a demand for a service. But this would only measure potential demand if everyone in the measured population had the particular need under consideration (e.g. primary school education).

The paper suggests that need can be measured either directly or by relevant indirect indicators, measuring conditions leading to or associated with need. The shortcoming of measuring need through relevant population counts is that it does not lead to an estimate of the quantity of a service needed unless each individual needs the same or a known amount. The EC paper mentions economic activity rates. The amount of childcare used by working parents (effective demand) is known (through surveys) but the additional amount that they would demand if subsidies for childcare were introduced, and the amount that would then be demanded by the economically inactive moving into employment (the potential demand), is not known and is extremely hard to estimate.

Practical methods of assessing local childcare need and demand

Day care services for children are supplied in Britain through a mixture of market provision, which is used largely by the children of working parents, and an administrative system, used largely by "children in need" under the terms of the 1989 Children Act. Because we have this dual system with differing objectives a separate approach to assessing each sector comes rather naturally. In the market sector the concepts of effective and potential demand are initially most relevant, and within the administered sector the concepts of need and potential demand will be most relevant. The two approaches can then be drawn together for an integrated assessment. People might protest about the separation of the assessments, but it seems to me realistic. It does not mean that services themselves will be segregated.

a. The market sector

A basic consideration for choosing a methodology is whether the local assessments are done with the assumption of continuation of current policies (or expected developments) or with the assumption of new policies.

If the realistic assumption when assessing local childcare needs and demand in the market sector is continuation of existing policies (unless something new is already in the pipeline). The assessment then becomes an exercise in market forecasting and identification of supply constraints.

This was the approach of the Childcare Audits of Wales. There was no expectation of radical change in government policy, but childcare was being given more attention, and there had been a number of initiatives to boost supply as well as the introduction of the childcare disregard. There were also a number of trends in employment and demography to take into account: an increasing proportion of mothers in employment, an increasing propensity of employed parents to use formal childcare services, a widening gap in wage rates between the parents using childcare and the people employed in childcare services, higher real incomes of well paid people and an increase in the number of lone parents. On the supply side we noted the expansion of services, the difficulties in maintaining viability and the limited contribution of employers. We sought (but did not find) evidence of excess demand in the form of waiting lists.

While the aim of the audits was an estimate of the future course of demand the lack of good information did not allow a rigorous or complicated statistical approach, and a good deal of judgement was used in extrapolations. The resulting figures were offered as targets rather than forecasts, as a benchmark against which to consider developments. The other feature of the audits was the comparison of Wales with England as a benchmark, and an attempt was also made to compare provision between local authority areas in relation to the total number of children in certain age groups.

If in contrast one wants to explore the implications of significant departures from current policy - perhaps a new scheme for subsidising parents or extended schemes for boosting supply - then a different exercise is required. This would attempt to estimate the impact of the policy change on supply and demand. The reports for the National Children's Bureau[3] on the costs of an education and day care service were of this kind: it was assumed that means tested subsidies were introduced and the potential demand for services with those subsidies in place

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[3] Holtermann S (1992) Investing in young children: Costing an education and day care service; Holtermann S (1995) Investing in young children: A reassessment of the cost of an education and day care service.

was estimated, largely on the basis of survey material. The work done by the Institute for Fiscal Studies[4] also had this aim, but applied a rigorous statistical methodology to GHS data.

Major policy changes within the National Childcare Strategy are emerging, in particular an additional £300 million to support the development of services and the replacement of the childcare disregard by the childcare tax credit. These will need to be taken into account in any local assessments. The approach of the Wales childcare audits will need to be supplemented by forecasts of the impact of the policy changes.

Without a formula or a statistical forecasting method to make local assessments you are in the realm of judgement, and so the DfEE's request for a methodology amounts to a request for guidance on how to exercise judgement.

b. The administered sector

The notion of need is the most relevant concept when considering the quantity of day care services in the administered sector. Social services for children are financed from local authority block grants. The block grants are distributed from central government to local authorities through the use of a formula. The formula for the children's social services block is constructed entirely from indicators associated with the risk of need: children of lone parents, children in rented accommodation, receipt of income support, homeless families, shared accommodation and non-white ethnic population (plus and indicator of local cost variations)[5]. However, the weights used in the formula come from a regression analysis of past expenditure and therefore represent what local authorities have been able to spend from constrained budgets rather than what they think is an optimal amount. Moreover, children's day care facilities account for only about 7 per cent of spending on social services for children (England 1994/95) so the block grant formula may be a crude instrument for considering the need for day care. A review of the block grant formula has recently been carried out by York University, with a new analysis using small areas statistics, but has not yet led to any changes because it would take money away from London boroughs[6].

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[4] Duncan A, Giles C and Webb S (1995) The impact of subsidising childcare. Equal Opportunities Commission.
5 Standard Spending Indicators 1997-1998. Society of County Treasurers.
6 R Carr-Hill et al, A model of the determinants of expenditure on children's personal social services. Occasional Paper December 1997, Centre for Health Economics, University of York.

The purpose of the block grant formula is not to measure the absolute level of spending needed in an LA, but to measure its relative needs for spending compared to other LAs. It is intended to allow all LAs to come up to a "standard level of service" (never defined). This might be a rather low level. A composite indicator of spending need might be devised, probably using similar indicators, but with weights designed to capture the absolute amount of spending needed to meet need.

A number of local authorities are said to have undertaken exercises using indicators at ward level to assess the local variation in need, which they can use for comparing with local provision of services and considering local allocations of spending. They have possibly constructed composite indicators that incorporate their view of the extent to which each indicator contributes to a need for services, and considered absolute need. It would be interesting to see if any have done so.

Conclusions

Thus I would suggest the economists' notion of "demand" is most useful in the context of a marketed commodity or service (like most day care services for the children of working parents) where the amount used is the choice of individuals exercising their purchasing power, while the notion of "need" is most useful in the context of social services provided with no or nominal charge and allocated through an administrative decision-making process (like day care for children in need).

What I think this means for the formulation of guidelines on how to assess local childcare demand and need is that a two pronged approach is sensible (even if not wholly desirable), one for the market sector and the other for the administered sector.

The approach to assessment in the market sector will include considerations of employment and so on, while in the administered sector indicators of need will form the basis of an assessment. Hopefully a way of linking the two assessments could then be devised. In both sectors there is a choice between a formula based approach and a more informal approach using quantitative information to inform judgement. The latter seems more appropriate, but then the difficult task is how to provide guidelines of general applicability on how to exercise judgement.

APPENDIX II

AUDITS OF CHILDCARE IN WALES - METHODOLOGY

A note prepared by Sally Holtermann for the Thomas Coram Research Unit

The purpose of this note is to describe the method used in the two audits of childcare in Wales[7] to assess current and future demand.

The terms of reference for the two audits excluded services for "children in need" in the terms of the 1989 Children Act. Nearly all services for children not in this category are provided through the market sector and are usually used because parents are in employment. The audits were therefore mainly concerned with the influences on supply and demand: a classic piece of applied economics.

An audit looks first at the current situation to identify mismatches between supply and demand. The demand concept used is that of effective demand. The audit then looks to the future and gives consideration to the factors likely to have an influence on the future course of supply and demand. It is necessary to make some assumptions (as realistic as possible) about the background factors that have to be treated as exogenous for the purpose of the audit (i.e. outside the control of the people who are doing the audit, in this case Chwarae Teg). In particular this includes national policy on finance for childcare and the regulatory environment.

The current situation

This involves looking first at the present level of provision of services in each sector (private, local authority and employer) and each type of service. In the Wales Childcare Audits we tried to examine provision at local authority level as well as Wales as a whole. And we looked at recent changes in the level of provision. The only data available on families' use of services was at GB level, but was nevertheless useful as background.

The first audit measured provision of day nurseries and childminders at both county and district level, and compared Wales with England. In the second audit we were able to compare Wales with England at two points of time (1991 and 1994) but could only disaggregate as far as county level.

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[7] Hanney M, Holtermann S and Stone M (1993) An audit of Childcare in Wales; Statham J, Holtermann S and Stone M (1996) Childcare in Wales: The 1996 audit. Chwarae Teg (Fairplay) Cardiff.

At the time of the first audit there were no centrally compiled statistics on out of school childcare. In both audits we attempted to find out about employer support, but there was no central or local record of this and collecting it from employers and other sources was desperately difficult.

In the first audit we calculated two indicators of overall service provision in relation to a relevant population: the first indicator was the total of places in day nurseries and with childminders per 100 children under five, and the second was total places per 100 working women with children under five.

Nothing more sophisticated was possible. For instance instead of the second indicator it might have been preferable to take the number of children under five with working parents, but that was not available. It might have been preferable to have put children under eight in the denominator and to have included out of school schemes, but that was not feasible at the time.

The purpose of the exercise was to compare Wales with England, and to compare counties and districts within Wales with each other, and the indicators constructed, although crude, had the advantage of being able to compare areas on a comparable footing. They were not intended to provide an estimate of the absolute amount of excess or potential demand for services. Interpretation of the resulting figures needed consideration against other facts at national and subnational level. Local authority data on employment and demography was presented but not analysed statistically. It was left to local authorities to consider what the figures said about their own situation in the light of their more detailed local knowledge, which we were not in a position to gather except by drawing on what had already been put into the reviews. The published report excluded some data put into the full report, which contained more employment data and a travel to work indicator, showing the extent to which residents work inside their own areas.

We could not measure the excess demand (i.e. the difference between what parents would have been willing and able to purchase at the going prices but were not able to because of supply shortages) because we did not have evidence (though we searched the reviews for it) of any systematic kind. Waiting lists might have been used, but there could have been no guarantee that they were drawn up on a comparable policy for managing waiting lists. We did not attempt to estimate potential demand: the amount that might be purchased at different prices.

The future

The main factors that we considered might influence the future development of supply and demand were:

Supply

The practical feasibility and momentum behind service development and growth will depend on:

-        the motivation of organisers,

-        the availability of qualified and/experienced staff,

-        the performance of the regulatory body and support from childcare advisers,

-        the availability of suitable premises,

-        the opportunities for other employment (varying over the business cycle).

The profitability, or financial viability in the case of not-for-profit enterprises, will be influenced by:

-        the income levels of families in the catchment area (and therefore what fees can be charged),

-        the availability of capital grants and revenue subsidies from outside bodies (government or employers),

-        premises costs,

-        local wage rates and any form of wage regulation,

-        the tax regime (e.g. the tax treatment of employer funding).

The out of school childcare initiative was a significant policy affecting the supply side. Local childcare assessments will now need to take account of the commitment the government has made to continuing this at an enhanced rate, and extending something similar to services for under five's.

Demand

The level of demand will depend on:

-       the characteristics of the local labour market and work force. The higher the number of local jobs in professional or managerial occupations, and the higher the levels of skills and education in the local population, the higher will be the demand;

-       lone parenthood, which has the opposite influence because although lone parents are more likely to use formal childcare services than couple families fewer of them are in employment (though the difference in the proportions working full time, and thus using most childcare, is small).

The growth in demand will be influenced by:

-       the rising trend in the employment rate of mothers with young children, which has been happening without any government policy to subsidise childcare,

-       the rise in real wage rates, especially among the well paid, and therefore the growing gap between the wages of users of childcare and childcare workers,

-       the increase in the propensity of working families to use formal, paid for childcare services, and

-       demographic changes in the number of children and the number of lone parents.

A significant policy innovation was the introduction of the childcare disregard into family credit and other means tested benefits in October 1994. A likely future development is the minimum wage, which will directly affect nurseries but not childminders. Any further local assessments will have to take account of the replacement of the childcare disregard by the more generous childcare tax credit.

If data were fully available forecasting models of supply and demand might be constructed, but these would still rely on making assumptions about some features of the future. However, the data (and the resources available for analysing it) were quite inadequate for us to do this in the audits. So something

far more informal and impressionistic was done, empirically based as far as possible.

In the first audit projections of supply of day nurseries and childminders were made for the next five years. These were sketched by hand, and were curvilinear, with a high and low scenario based on preceding trends in two different time periods, but in both cases with a continued growth declining over time. Continued growth seemed a reasonable prospect given that the factors affecting demand, listed above, were likely to continue to move it upwards, but recession was expected to moderate them, and a ceiling will some time be reached. A growth figure at the upper end of the range (plus 40 per cent) was chosen as a target because of the desire to move provision in Wales (and associated employment rates) up to the level in England.

This was presented as a "target" rather than a projection, and as provisional, so that it could be modified in the light of unfolding events. A target is a useful number to set out as a benchmark for measuring change. It can either represent an objective (as in the Health of the Nation) or as a possibility for the future when a proper projection method is not feasible - or it can do both. It needs to be realistic and sensible.

In the case of out of school schemes projections were not possible in the first audit because of the lack of historic and current data and the low level of provision at the time. So a number was plucked more or less out of the air for the target, but still we hoped realistic and sensible. The target was about double the proportion of school age children shown by the 1991 GHS to be looked after by childminders and nannies.

In the second audit the increase in supply was shown to have moved provision significantly towards these targets. It was noted that changes in regulation requirements meant that the statistics for childminders were measuring somewhat different things in the two audits. Moreover, the information on the ages of the children using services (over five's in day nurseries and with childminders and under five's in out of school schemes) suggested that it no longer made much sense to divide things up into under five's and over five's.

The targets were themselves re-examined, and given all the other changes (employment etc.) the targets for day nurseries and childminders still seemed reasonable. But the indications that out of school schemes might have difficulties in the long term in the absence of ongoing subsidy suggested that the original targets (6 places per 100 children aged 5-11) were too high, and so they were revised downwards.

In order to get an idea of where to pitch the new target, a straw poll of out of school schemes set up under the Out of School Childcare Grant Initiative was carried out by telephone, and enquired about the number of places and the number of children on the primary school rolls served by each scheme. This was found to vary widely from 3 places per 100 to 13 places per 100, and the impression gained from this very small sample (7) was that the larger the school the smaller the number of places per 100 children on roll. This could be because larger schools tend to be in cities where people are poorer and less likely to work, and it could also be because of the greater involvement of parents in smaller schools (also more middle class and more likely to be employed). The revised target for out of school schemes was put at between 3 and 4 places per 100 children aged 5-11, plus a small allowance for under 5s, and the figures were rounded and expressed as a range. The targets were placed at the lower end of the range found in actual schemes on the assumption that the early schemes set up under the initiative were more likely to be in high demand areas, and that future schemes would tend to be in areas of lower demand (and also that in some rural areas schemes would never be feasible).

Local assessments

The method used in the two audits of childcare in Wales seems reasonable in the circumstances, but it does not provide a blueprint for what local authorities might do at their level. At the local authority level local knowledge could be brought to bear, and it would be possible to go to areas smaller than the local authority. Nevertheless the approach of the audits might be a starting point for devising guidelines for use at local level.

APPENDIX III
AN EVALUATION OF NATIONAL DATA FOR LOCAL CHILDCARE PLANNING

Charlie Owen

INTRODUCTION

The are two different kinds of figures from national datasets that might be of value in the local planning of childcare services. These relate to:

- the supply of services;

- the location and the social and economic circumstances of potential users, both the children themselves and their families.

This paper will catalogue these datasets, giving some examples of the kinds of data they contain, and will evaluate their potential for use in the local planning of childcare services.

SUPPLY OF SERVICES

Data on the supply of services for children of school age (5 and over) are dealt with by Pat Petrie's paper. For children under 5 both the DH and the DfEE collect and publish data from local authorities for the services for which they are responsible. Both give data at the local authority level. These data have been analysed to investigate patterns of provision (Owen and Moss, 1989). A fuller assessment of statistics on the supply and use of childcare services is to be found in Moss, Owen and Statham (1998).

Department of Health

The DH publishes an annual volume called *Children's Day Care Facilities*. This contains figures supplied by local authorities regarding day nurseries, playgroups and childminders. The figures cover local authorities' own provision as well as registered provision. (In addition, there are some figures on services exempt from registration.) The statistics cover the number of *places* in each type of provision, but do not cover the number of children using the places (except for the local authorities' own services). It is, therefore, not possible to tell whether the places are used to capacity. For example, childminders may be registered for the maximum number of children they are allowed to take even

when they only intend to take fewer. The figures are collected on 31 March each year. (The DH had decided to cease collecting these statistics (DH, 1997), but with the transfer of responsibility for pre-school day care services from DH to DfEE it is likely that the DfEE will continue to collect and publish them.) This volume includes some information on services for children aged 5 to 7. The figures do not cover other forms of childcare which are not regulated, such as nannies or care by relatives or unregistered childminders.

Department for Education and Employment

The DfEE publishes an annual statistical bulletin, Pupils under five years of age in schools in England. This gives the number of pupils in maintained nursery schools and classes, as well as the number of children under 5 in the reception classes of maintained schools. The statistics do not cover children in independent schools. The statistics show whether pupils are full- or part-time, but do not indicate the number of places available. Therefore, like the DH statistics, it is not possible to see whether places are being used to capacity. Figures are collected on 1 January, but using ages as at the 31 August the previous year - four months before.

Clearly the statistics are not directly comparable. Information has been collected for different dates and in different ways. The DH has collected information on registered places but not on the number of children using them, whilst the DfEE has collected information on pupils attending services in schools, but not on the number of places.

Patterns of use

There are no regularly published sources of information about the use of childcare services. Neither the DH nor the DfEE statistics include any information on the children who use the services. Important data on the patterns of use of services has come from two national surveys and from occasional questions in the other surveys.

There have been two significant examples of specially commissioned surveys on day care services for children conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS, now the Office for National Statistics, ONS) for the DH (Bone, 1977; Meltzer, 1994). The more recent of these was conducted in 1990 and collected data on 5,525 children aged under 8, from 3,705 households. Although these surveys give important information on the use of services, as well as being out of date, they are clearly too small to provide data that could be used for planning purposes at a local authority level. Furthermore, they failed to ask about parental preferences: the Meltzer survey asked parents

who were using some form of childcare service if that was their preferred arrangement, but parents who were not already using a service were not asked if they would prefer to do so. No comparable data about the care of children over 7 have been collected.

The second source of information on patterns of use is when questions are added to regular Government surveys. An important example has been the General Household Survey (GHS). In 1979 and 1986 a number of questions were added to the GHS about the attendance of children under five years at various types of 'educational and childcare facility', and the results were published in the 1986 GHS reports under the heading of 'education and childcare for children under five' (OPCS, 1981 and 1989; see also Moss and Owen, 1989). In the 1991 GHS questions were again added on what was now called 'childcare' and extended to cover children up to eleven years of age (Bridgwood and Savage, 1993; chapter 7). These questions focused primarily on the costs of childcare. Questions on the costs of childcare have also been included in both the Family Resources Survey (FRS) and the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Omnibus Survey[8], but no reports on these parts of the data have been published. However, whilst such data might be useful for indicating trends, there is insufficient data for local planning. As with the two specially commissioned surveys, none of these other datasets included questions on parental preferences, so they only give information on the use of existing services.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DATA ON PARENTS AND CHILDREN

The main sources of social and economic data on parents and children are the Census and the continuous Government surveys (Owen, 1998). The sorts of data that might be useful would include:

- numbers and ages of children;

- numbers and ages of parents;

- marital status of parents;

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[8] The FRS is described in more detail below. The Omnibus Survey is a monthly, all purpose survey of individual adults. Each month interviews are conducted with around 2,000 adults in Great Britain, sample from 100 postal sectors. It includes questions on a range of topics, usually sponsored by Government departments (Rauta, 1991). From time to time the DH have included questions on the costs of childcare.

-             employment status of parents.

To be useful the data must be

-             accurate;

-             up to date; and

-             at a sufficiently local level.

The Census and survey datasets are evaluated below against these criteria.

Census

Completion of the Census is a legal requirement. Nevertheless, coverage is never complete: for the last Census it has been estimated that there was overall approximately a two per cent undercount. Released figures make some adjustments for this undercount and are generally fairly accurate (OPCS, 1993). The most recent Census was in 1991; the next Census will be in 2001. Even after the data are collected there is always a delay of more than a year in publishing the results. As we get further from the Census the data inevitably become more out of date. However, most areas have slow rates of change so that the figures continue to apply. For areas with higher rates of change, for example through migration, housing developments or large changes in employment opportunities - such as a mine closure - then the figures would not be accurate. Such a judgement would require local knowledge as to where Census data may or may not continue to be accurate. In addition, some social trends are quite rapid but general - for example, the growth in maternal employment (Brannen et al., 1997) - which would also make Census data out of date.

Data from the Census are made available as tables of counts at a very detailed local level. The smallest geographical unit is the Enumeration District, which on average contain about 200 households. Consequently they are used extensively for local planning and could be used as a basis for planning local childcare services. However, there are no direct measures of use of childcare services or of need, so these have to be extrapolated from existing data. For example, the Census will show how many children of each age live within a certain area. How many of these would use any of the services that might be made available would have to be estimated from other sources which have data on patterns of use (see above). These estimates can be refined by taking into account other demographic data on the family and household. For example patterns of service use nationally might differ depending on the age of the mother; whether it is a one or two parent family; whether the mother is

employed; the material deprivation of the area; etc. Again, the importance of these factors would have to be estimated from other sources. However, to make these estimates would require reliable data on the likely behaviour of parents within the different categories identified by the Census.

For example, from the Census it is possible to estimate the number of lone parents with children of different ages (0-4 or 5-15) who are economically inactive. (These data are available from Table 40 in the Small Area Statistics and the Local Base Statistics[9].) There are no direct data on how many of these parents would become economically active if suitable childcare were available. Survey data could be used to provide estimates if there were surveys which had asked the question. However, such data simply do not exist: no national survey has asked parents what childcare they need. Any estimate of likely parental behaviour given the availability of suitable childcare is, consequently, largely a matter of guesswork.

Moreover, there are always going to be local factors which make patterns of need and use different from the national average. These might include such factors as traditional patterns of female employment, the availability of grandparents, as well as variations in preferred type of service. Estimates derived from national trends would always need to be modified in the light of particular local circumstances.

Consequently Census data alone cannot be used to estimate likely patterns of need for childcare services at a local level, but require extrapolation using other data sources which assess need or use more directly. These extrapolations will not be able to take account of specific local factors which cause need to differ from the national patterns. Further, there are no national datasets which ask parents about unmet need for childcare.

Continuous household surveys

There are five large scale, national surveys conducted on behalf of the Government which collect data continuously (although they usually make annual reports). These are listed, together with their sample sizes and dates of origin, in table 1. Together these surveys each year conduct interviews with some 200,000 households, including data from over 400,000 adults. These surveys constitute a huge statistical resource. The Government conducts these surveys for its own purposes, but it is nevertheless possible to make alternative uses of the data. It might be possible between Censuses to use data from the

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[9] The Small Area Statistics (SAS) and the Local Base Statistics (LBS) are tables of Census counts: the SAS are available at the Enumeration District level and the LBS are aggregated to Ward level, but contain more detail.

household surveys to supply more up to date data and even to supply data not contained in the Census. In particular, where direct questions are asked about the need for or use of childcare these data can be used to estimate the behaviour of parents more generally. However, to be useful in the local planning of childcare services the data must be available at a sufficiently detailed local level.

Of the five surveys, only the General Household Survey (GHS) and the Family Resources Survey (FRS) have included questions on childcare. As noted above, the GHS has on three occasions included questions about childcare. The last occasion was in 1991. Questions were asked on childcare services used for all children up to the age of 11 but concentrated on cost. The much larger FRS regularly asks about the costs of childcare for children of all ages, but collects very few data on patterns of service use. No data are collected on parental preferences or the unmet need for childcare. The FRS does include the following question to those with childcare responsibilities: 'If some suitable form of childcare were available, would this enable you to work more hours?' The question is only asked of those currently working less than 29 hours per week (or who are unemployed but were working less than 29 hours per week in their last job within the last 12 months), so does not give any indication as to whether those not working would take a job if suitable childcare were available.

However, even the FRS is too small to provide sufficient data even to make comparisons at the local authority level, and certainly cannot provide data at a more local level. For example, of the 26,253 households interviewed for the 1993/94 FRS 18,176 (or 69.2) had no children under the age of 16. The remaining 8,077 households are not evenly spread across Britain, so that the patterns of data will not be representative within a local authority. (Although a local authority district code is indicated within the dataset, it is absent from the data that are made publicly available for analysis.) Combining several years of data would increase the effective sample size and overcome some of the problems of the uneven spread of data, but the more years that were combined the less up to date the total sample would be.

The largest of the surveys, the Labour Force Survey (LFS), may be used for updating demographic estimates between Censuses. However, the survey includes no data on the use of childcare services, so that such data would have to be extrapolated, exactly as for the Census itself. However, even the LFS sample covers less than half of one per cent of the population each year. This means that the LFS cannot possibly provide data for local levels to anything like the same extent as the Census. Apart from issues of sample size and the

uneven spread of data, there begin to be issues of the identifiability of respondents when very small numbers are involved. For this reason a version of the LFS datasets is made available for the 439 local authority districts in Great Britain, but the data include a number of restrictions. Firstly, only a subset of the data is made available in this way; only data on adults is included; there are no links between household members; there is no information on parental status. Essentially these data, which have geographical detail, do not include information that would be needed for childcare planning.

The need for data

This brief review of statistical sources has shown that the data necessary to make reliable estimates of the local need for childcare do not exist. Census data provide good demographic estimates, but these get out of date, and the rates of change will vary by area. However, to make use of Census data for predicting need for and use of childcare services requires good data on parents' views and intentions. Existing datasets are out of date and not comprehensive. The OPCS national survey (Meltzer, 1994) was conducted in 1990; it only asked about childcare for children 0-7 and did not investigate the needs of parents who were not already working and using some form of childcare. The GHS has not asked about childcare since 1991, and then questions were confined to parents of children up to the age of 11 and did not ask about the need for childcare. The FRS asks parents working less than 29 hours per week if suitable childcare would allow them to work more hours per week, but there is no questioning as to what kind of care would be suitable and questions are not asked of parents who have not worked within the last year. Consequently we really have no national data on parental need for childcare. This could easily be remedied by including a few regular questions on childcare in the GHS. Without these data it is not possible to gauge the level of unmet need for childcare. However, even with these data, local planning of childcare services could not rely on data from national trends, but would need local data from parents. At present few if any local authorities collect data from parents in any systematic way (Owen, 1996).

Key points

- Data on the provision of childcare services are patchy and inconsistent; the relatively good data on pre-school services are available at the local authority level.

- Data on the use of childcare services have been collected in a haphazard manner.

- Almost no national data are available on parents' need for childcare or on how parents would respond if childcare were available.

- The Census can provide demographic data at a local level: the need for childcare could be estimated from these data, except that there are no data on need to provide accurate weightings to the demographic factors.

- Large scale survey data cannot provide sufficient data at a detailed local level - even at the local authority level - to be useful in local planning of childcare planning.

- There is an urgent need for some regular national data on parents' need for childcare.

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Table 1: Approximate size of the samples in the continuous household surveys

	Started	Households	Individuals
Family Expenditure Survey	1957	7k	18k
Family Resources Survey	1993	25k	60k
General Household Survey	1971	10k	20k
Labour Force Survey	1973	96k	250k
National Food Survey	1940	16k	45k

APPENDIX IV

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON CHILDCARE SERVICES FOR 5-14 YEAR OLDS

Pat Petrie

1   BACKGROUND

The brief is to identify information sources on childcare for 5-14 year olds. Included here as childcare are staffed facilities where staff see their main role as interacting with children (that is that they have what has been called a *pedagogic* role). Not included are, for example, park playgrounds where a warden merely supervises children's safety, perhaps from a distance, libraries during their usual operations, or swimming pools.

Note that care for nursery and reception class children also needs to fit round school timetables and calendars, so some of the following has relevance for younger children also.

Annual returns from local authorities to the Department of Health refer only to places for children under the age of eight, provided in registered services. There have been few surveys of the out-of-school arrangements parents make for school-age children. A survey carried out on behalf of the Department of Health in 1990 (Meltzer, 1994) found that 46% of children were always looked after by their mothers, 44% were looked after by relatives, unpaid friends or neighbours. One in four of school children under the age of eight was using a formal day care service or attending an after-school club. However there has been great expansion since this survey was carried out.

The discussion and details about sources of information which follow are based mainly on research carried out on out-of-school services since 1990 at the Thomas Coram Research Unit.

Both *day care* and *open door* services (see below) are included because both, potentially, contribute to children's welfare thus affecting the parental task of *childcare* - parents' underlying responsibility for children's physical, intellectual, emotional and social welfare (see Petrie 1991 for discussion). The differential contribution of both types of services is discussed at various points in what follows, especially concerning children's changing levels of autonomy.

Day care and open door services

It is necessary to distinguish between two main types of services (see Petrie 1994):

⇨   Day care services is used for services taking responsibility for a child's welfare, on the basis of an understanding with the parent. Primarily, day care provides resources by which parents can fulfil part of their parenting obligations. The parent may be seen as the prime user of day care services - although attendance serves the child's welfare and may have been negotiated with the child. A key test of definition of day care is whether the child is at liberty to leave the service at will or only at those times and under those conditions agreed between staff and parent. For example if children may leave alone or only if accompanied by another child or adult. Day care services are one means by which parents fulfil childcare responsibilities.

⇨   Open door services These include both drop-in services, where children come and go irregularly during opening hours (e.g. some play centres and adventure play grounds) and services which offer timetabled activities (e.g. other play centres, programmes of summer outings, sports' coaching, summer schools, some homework clubs). Open door services differ from day care in one important aspect: attendance is based primarily on an understanding between staff and child, not between staff and parent. The provider sees the child as the primary user, not the parent. It is seen primarily as the child's own choice to attend. Some open door services may seem very similar to day care services. Children may have to agree to rules of membership, which may or may not include, e.g. staying to the end of sessions. An attendance register may operate. Staff certainly take responsibility for the child's welfare while they are on site. The service may seek the parents' permission for the child to attend, obtain any relevant medical details, require a contact number for the parent, and charge a fee. The essential difference with day care services is that, whatever the membership rules, the child may choose to leave when they wish - although sometimes leaving in mid session may jeopardise a child's membership. The point is that staff are not responsible to parents in this respect.

Both open door and day care services may be secure from the public with locked gates, a member of staff at the entrance scrutinising visitors and, in day care, aware of children leaving and with whom.

The use of services by parents and children

A common misunderstanding is that day care services are only used by the children of working parents and that open door services are not used by the children of working parents. (Poland and Petrie, Forthcoming,)

Non-working parents may use day care services, where available, for child-centred reasons. These reasons can include children's own wish to attend. Because of their developing autonomy, they are able to voice choices which parents facilitate (e.g. by enrolling the child and paying fees). Some non-working parents see day-care services as a form of respite for themselves, especially during long holidays. This is in the context of a general perception that streets are dangerous, physically and socially, so that many children are not allowed to find their own amusements in the neighbourhood. Parents often think that it is their duty to provide holiday activities and companionship for children which, ten or more years ago, children would have provided for themselves. For parents today, school holidays may be expensive and sometimes burdensome: using a day care service can provide an acceptable option for both parent and child (Petrie and Poland, forthcoming,).

The opposite is also true. Working parents who cannot access day care may require the child to attend an open-door service. They have an understanding with the child that she remains on site until they come back to collect her. She may be given sandwiches for the day or money to buy food on sale in the services. Staff may, tacitly or otherwise, be aware of this, although they have no formal understanding to this effect with the parent. The case for other, especially older, children is somewhat different. Again on the basis of their developing autonomy, many are allowed to use the neighbourhood for journeys - as opposed to play and socialising. For them, and for their parents, attending an open door service may be seen as one component only in their holiday or after-school activities during parents' work time (see below). But for both groups, use of open-door services may be seen as making a contribution to children's welfare by protecting them from danger and providing worthwhile experience.

Range of services

The range of services serving as childcare is wider for school age than for pre school children. This derives from two sources:

1   The greater autonomy of school age children.

First we should take note of the great disparity at the extremes of the age range (5-14) under consideration, from young childhood to young adult life. Generally, children achieve greater social, intellectual and physical competence with age and this has repercussions both for the parenting task and for the use of services. Broadly speaking the legal responsibilities of parents towards their children remain constant throughout childhood. Parents are responsible for children's welfare especially their health (including their emotional well-being) and education; in addition they are increasingly seen as responsible for children's behaviour in public and the avoidance of children's criminality. Parents ensure children's welfare by using the private and public resources available (e.g. schools, health services, housing, information). But with age, the young person becomes, increasingly, a partner in contributing to their own welfare, more capable of looking after themselves physically and socially, although sometimes failing in this.

Several aspects of this increasing competence distinguish them from pre-schoolers: their own understandings of their consent to attend and their ability to look after themselves. In the various out-of-school studies carried out at Thomas Coram Research Unit, we have found that most children seem to enjoy going to out-of-school services. But, especially with older children, some do not and saliently they can articulate this to their parents. Perhaps more so than pre-schoolers, school age children attending a day care service are aware that to do so is not the only option. For example, they may know that many of their friends go home straight after school. With this in mind they may put pressure on their parents either to cease to attend ('Because I can look after myself') or to attend less frequently. They can speak for themselves in a way that younger children cannot, with a result that attendance may become a matter of negotiation between parent and child. For example that the child attends an after- school club three nights per week, goes to a friend's on one evening while the parent comes home early on a fifth. It is not necessarily that the child or young person dislikes the club, just that attending is seen as one component in a package of arrangements agreed between parent and child. Parenting becomes more complex as children and young people develop their own ideas about what constitutes their welfare. As young people grow older and more socially and physically competent, what happens outside school hours depends more on their own decisions and less on those of their parents. Young people make more choices over where they should be, their use of time and their choice of activities. For some, use of a range of youth and play services, after school and in the holidays, is a chosen part of their leisure experience. Their parents may also value such services, partly because they provide worthwhile activities and nurturing or challenging relationships with adult staff, but also because they "keep them off the streets". The streets are often seen as physically dangerous and socially contaminating. Services (including open door services) may

therefore be seen by parents as making a contribution to the young person's upbringing and welfare (to the childcare task) and, perhaps especially for working parents, providing some peace of mind.

We should however remain aware that within the years under consideration there can be considerable variation in a young person's maturity and consequently in the autonomy which their parents see as appropriate for them. Also social identities - such as the interactions of ethnicity, gender and social class - affect the meanings of growth, biological changes and cognitive development. Social factors can cause these developments to have paradoxical effects. They may cause parents to allow greater autonomy for boys but lead others to be more protective, because more fearful about their child's vulnerability, as we have found with some girls. Perceptions about the safety of the locality also play a part. Sometimes 13 or even 14 year olds may attend after school and holiday day care. On the other hand adolescent girls in some social groups - but not boys - may be forbidden to use youth services for reasons of safety or propriety. Parents of disabled young people, may require day care after school and in the holidays to a later age.

2   Reconciling the regularities of work with the irregularities of the school year

In addition to the school - a service which arguably has some care function - parents need to call on additional services, during the holidays and after school. Some services provide for both, but these are in the minority. Also, holiday-only schemes may not cover all holidays or the whole holiday; summer holiday schemes are the most prevalent, Christmas and half terms less so. Also, the same organisation may run an after-school club and a distinct holiday scheme. That is it may open a new register, recruit additional staff and continue to use the same premises or not. Sometimes parents need holiday, rather than after-school, places. This is in part because many mothers work part time and do not need cover at the end of the school day. It may also arise because of other demands school holidays place on households (e.g. the supervision of children during the whole day, often indoors and without companions, and the expense of providing alternative activities for them within the commercial sector).

2   TYPES OF SERVICES USED FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDCARE: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The following considers sources of information about services under two main headings: provision known to the registering authority and provision not known to the registering authority. A good local day-care data base should also be able to put parents in touch with other data bases outside the immediate area. In part this is because many families live on the borders between districts but also because, perhaps more than with pre-school children, parents may be prepared to take children to holiday day care which is closer to their place of work than to their home.

1 Provision obliged to register under the Children Act

(i) Public, private and voluntary day nurseries and family centres

Nurseries are occasionally used by a few young children who previously attended as pre-schooler, returning after school or in the holiday and placed within an existing nursery group. Other establishments may combine pre-school with more distinct after school and/or holiday provision. (Public day nurseries and family centres, while not registerable, may also provide for school children in the same way.)

(ii) Childminders

Some childminders are registered to take a limited number of over five's, sometimes besides pre-schoolers. They must register if they look after any child aged under eight years.

(iii) Public and voluntary after school clubs, holiday play schemes, play centres, adventure playgrounds

Open door and day care services which open for more than two hours per day, for more than one week during the year, and take any children under the age of eight, must register with the local authority.

2 Provision not obliged to register

Public, commercial and voluntary sector provision may all fall within the category of those not obliged to register. Local authority providers include, e.g. leisure, environmental services, youth, community, housing, play, education and tourism services. Perhaps most local authority departments should be asked if they provide after school activities, clubs or holiday play schemes for children and young people, over the age of eight, during the holidays or immediately after school.

A   Public agencies as a source of information

(i) Youth services

Some local youth services run holiday, lunch time and after school activities, which may make a contribution to childcare for working parents. They may offer homework and study support, sports and holiday play schemes for children aged as young as eight years; and camping holidays linked to term time or holiday provision.

(ii) Education

Schools and special schools may provide outside-school-hours learning activities, before school, at lunch time and after school. Examples are chess clubs, study support, homework clubs, sport activities, summer literacy schemes and holiday study opportunities.

(iii)   Play services

These may be organised by local authority leisure or other departments. Relevant services include open-door play facilities open throughout the year, such as adventure playgrounds or play centres. There may also be holiday-only play schemes organised, e.g. in schools or parks.

(iv) Local authority leisure centres

Some leisure centres run after school or holiday activities, often with sports taking a dominant part. These activities may be part of the centre's individual commercial operation and not co-ordinated with, e.g. play services.

(v) Police authority youth and community services

The police provide or fund holiday activities in some areas. These often centre on sports. Sometimes they target young people 'known' to the police. In other cases they are used by a range of young people.

(vi) Local health authority

Some local health authorities provide school-age day care, perhaps based in or near a hospital.

(vi) TECs

Training and Enterprise Councils may have information about employers who have holiday schemes for their staff, which may or may not be subject to registration.

B   Funding agencies as a source of information

Voluntary services which do not take any children under the age of eight, or are open for one week only (e.g. some church-based holiday schemes) are often grant aided. Possible funders include social services, youth and community services, TECs and economic development units. Such funders are all possible sources of information about services provided by national voluntary organisations, local community-based charities and less formal groups.

C   Commercial services as a source of information

Commercial services range from small operations where the owner works directly with the children, to large scale children's residential and day camps. Camps may provide for an age range spanning pre-school children to young people aged 16 or older. If they take under eight's, camps will be known to their local registration authority but they may be used by families from a wider area. (Transport is often arranged for day camps.) It would be useful, therefore, to make enquiries about commercial services outside the immediate area. Local camps may be known to Chambers of Commerce or the local TEC. The British Activity Holiday Association, 22 Green Lane, Hersham, Walton on Thames, Surrey, KT12 5HD (BAHA) can provide information about its members, nationally.

D   Information about services for disabled children

Our research suggests that many parents are not aware of out-of-school services for their disabled children, even where they exist. Sometimes this is because children attend schools outside their own neighbourhoods and teachers are unaware of possibilities for children outside the immediate area. Social services, also, may not pass information on to parents.

The following are all possible sources of information on day care for disabled children: education, including special education advisers, (some special schools run holiday schemes); the local authority department responsible for play services - sometimes there is an officer with special responsibility for matching a disabled child with the most suitable play scheme (integrated or non integrated); they may fund extra general staffing for a mainstream service or supply a one-to-one worker to accompany a child with special needs. Specialised voluntary sector organisations also may facilitate children's attendance, e.g. by supplying a one-to-one worker and/or transport. These may

be known to local funding agencies. The national organisation for disabled children's play - HAPA, Pryor's Bank, Bishops Park, London, SW6 3LA- may be able to supply details of local developments.

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APPENDIX V

Interviews with national agencies

RECORD
NAME OF AGENCY:
NAME OF INTERVIEWEE:

POSITION OF INTERVIEWEE:

As you will have gathered from the letter we sent, we have been commissioned by the DfEE to look at how local assessments of childcare need and provision are being undertaken as part of the National Childcare Strategy. The purpose of the study is to canvass opinion concerning how local assessments should best be conducted. Because your organisation has obvious interests in childcare provision, we feel your views on this issue are important. Consequently, we have a some questions we would like to ask you. Perhaps we can begin by working through the questions we sent in our letter, and then move on to another comments you feel should be noted.

1.   What existing and generally available information sources (either in their current form or with some amendment) do you think could be used as part of local childcare needs assessments?

2.   Some of the information needed for local assessments of childcare need and provision may already have been collected by local authorities for other purposes. For example, Section 19 reviews, Children's Services Plans and Early Years Development Plans. For what other reasons do you think local information on childcare needs might have been collected?

3.   It is obviously important to try and avoid duplication. Having different organisations collecting the same information twice would not be at all efficient. Who do you think should be responsible for collecting and co-ordinating local information for assessment, review and planning purposes?

4a.   We've talked about who should be responsible for collecting and co-ordinating local information. Which agency or local government department do you think should be responsible for undertaking assessments of need and provision in each local area?

4b.   Which other agencies/organisations/departments do you think should be involved in the exercise?

5.   What elements or items do you feel it is particularly important to have included in local assessments of childcare need and provision?

6.   Suppose for the moment that we were going to produce a set of guidelines for local authorities outlining how they might conduct effective local childcare assessments. What particular problems or constraints do you think we should draw their attention to?

7.   Staying with this idea of providing guidelines for effective local assessments of childcare need and provision, it often helps to illustrate principles by provide examples of good practice. Who do you think should be held up as an example of good practice when it comes existing procedures for conducting local assessments of childcare need and provision?

8.   That covers the questions we wanted to ask you. Do you have any other points you would like to make on this issue of assessing local childcare needs and provision?

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us. If any other points occur to you over the next few days, please don't hesitate to get in touch. We will of course let you know the outcome of our study and, subject to approval from the DfEE, hopefully we will be in a position to let you have copies of our report at some stage.

Questionnaire sent to Directors of Education in all English local authorities
THOMAS CORAM RESEARCH UNIT

STUDY OF CHILDCARE NEED AND PROVISION ASSESSMENTS

1.   Does the authority use a database for monitoring the supply of childcare services? (e.g. childminders, day nurseries, after-school clubs, holiday schemes, nannies or au pairs, but not residential or foster care)

YES (computerised) ☐   YES (but not computerised) ☐   NO ☐

2.   Does the authority use a system to assess the need or demand for childcare to enable parents to work or study?

YES (computerised) ☐   YES (but not computerised) ☐   NO ☐

3.   Within the last three years, has your authority conducted a survey of need or demand for childcare services?

YES ☐   NO ☐

4.   Are you aware of other agencies in your authority (e.g. TECs) who have systems for monitoring the needs or supply of childcare?

YES ☐   NO ☐

If Yes, please provide details   (e.g. agency, contact and telephone number where known)

5. If we want to find out more about your information system(s), who should we contact?

Name:

Dept:

Tel:

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS.
PLEASE RETURN BY 30 JANUARY 1998