

## **Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Form 2022**

**Name of Local Authority: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council**



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol  
**MERTHYR TUDFUL**  
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County Borough Council

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## 1 Introduction and Context

Section 22 of the Childcare Act 2006 placed a duty on all Welsh local authorities, in partnership with other local (statutory, community and private sector) stakeholders, professionals and providers, to: secure sufficient, accessible and high-quality childcare for children aged 0-14 years (and up to 18 years for children with additional learning needs) in their local area, so far as is reasonably practicable for working parents, parents/carers who are studying or training for employment.

Regulations made by the Welsh Ministers under section 26 of the Act 2, also require local authorities to undertake Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (CSA) for their area. These Regulations prescribe the process and planning cycle, the consultation and publication requirements, including details of the information which must be captured in the cyclical (five yearly) assessment.

Therefore, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has a statutory duty to work with early years and childcare providers and the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors to create sustainable, accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare sufficient to meet the needs of all parents and carers. Essentially, the local authority will compare this 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment of parents' demand for childcare with information about the current and planned availability of such childcare places.

This 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) follows on from the previous 2017 Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment which can be viewed at <https://www.merthyrfis.org/childcare-sufficiency-assessment/>. Additionally, as with the 2017 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, the 2022 CSA must inform (and include) an associated Action Plan with evidence of how the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council will (work in partnership to) develop and implement a set of recommendations and address any evident gaps in provision – which is a requirement that aligns to Regulation 3 of The Childcare Act 2006. The 2016 Welsh Government Statutory Guidance directs that this 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan should be published on the local authority website and be submitted to the Welsh Government and this should highlight evidence of consultation with specific stakeholders set out in Schedule 2 of that document.

Just as importantly, the 2016 Statutory CSA Guidance outlines that Welsh local authorities are required to complete and submit a copy of three documents to Welsh Ministers (in June 2022), i.e.: i. Childcare Sufficiency Assessment document; ii. Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan, which must *'detail the actions, priorities and milestones to maintain strengths and address shortcomings identified in the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment'* and; iii. a (subsequent in 2023) annual progress report must detail the progress which has been made against the actions, priorities and milestones in the (2022) Action Plan, including any significant issues or changes which have happened over that year which might have impacted on or have influenced the childcare market in any way - for example a[nother] new housing development.

The Guidance further elaborates that: *'In particular, local authorities will need to liaise with the[ir] Family Information Services and the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CIW) to ensure there is an up to date picture of childcare supply and demand'*.

This 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment summarises the judgement of sufficiency using data about the demand for childcare - including now aligned to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic - and the amount of childcare available in Merthyr Tydfil in spring 2022 (i.e. the supply of types of formal childcare). Additionally, this 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, aligned to the 2016 Welsh Government Statutory Guidance for local authorities, also sets out how Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council will continue to have regard for: (a) the needs of parents in their area for; (b) the provision of childcare in respect of which the childcare element of working tax credit or universal credit is payable; (c) the provision of childcare in respect of which employer supported childcare or tax free childcare is payable; (d) the provision of childcare for children who have special educational needs or require specialist care due to disability; (e) the provision of childcare involving the use of the Welsh language; (f) the provision of childcare which enables them/parents to access their foundation phase early education entitlement and; (g) the provision of childcare which enables them/parents to access their entitlement for free childcare places.

Additional to the 2016 Welsh Government Statutory Guidance, in March 2021, the Welsh Government issued supplementary guidance for local authorities for their Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) 2022 process. This instructed that in their full assessment in 2022, Welsh local authorities would need to report on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the supply of childcare, the demand for childcare and the sustainability of existing childcare providers, as well as how these impacts will be addressed.

The supplementary document also (importantly) states that [the] *Welsh Government acknowledges that, given the timing of the full CSA in 2022, parents may remain uncertain, when asked, about their childcare requirements in the future and that local authorities may need to draw some conclusions based on trends in demand and on the basis of the best information available to them at the time. Local authorities have the opportunity to take stock of their Action Plan every year as part of their annual reporting on progress and it is recognised that it may be necessary to revisit some of the objectives set out in the 2022 Action Plan in light of further information and developments in respect of the virus.*

In Wales and England, a number of critical developments were observed, especially during the period April 2020-February 2022, *for example*, as evidenced by a report published by Coram and Family Childcare in July 2021. These were that:

- Demand for parent-paid hours reduced substantially, especially during the first lockdown and stayed significantly below usual levels even after restrictions changed in June 2020, due to the shift to home working and parents, carers and guardians reducing or stopping employment temporarily (on furlough) or permanently (through unemployment)
- Demand for *paid* hours declined more than demand for free entitlement hours - although some LAs also reported declines in demand for funded Flying Start programme hours for 2-3 year-olds
- Although there was evidence of relatively few permanent setting closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic <sup>1</sup>- in that time some LAs observed that it was still important to *wait and see* what the financial impacts would be once financial supports had been fully withdrawn and the longer-term impacts of the pandemic had run their course
- Concerns about the future of the out of school childcare sector were raised, both from the impact of reduced demand from parents, carers and guardians working from home and from continuing delivery challenges - i.e. reduced supply
- **Significantly, a high number of local authorities believed that there could be permanent changes in parental demand, in *formal* childcare provision, and therefore with regard to their localised early years and childcare's sustainability**

This CSA provided an opportunity to determine the extent to which COVID-19 effects have indeed been a (localised) factor in each of the Merthyr Tydfil locality's eleven wards – especially from the perspective of a reduction in demand for formal childcare (businesses), particularly for hours *paid for* by parents. A key question has been: *If this change is permanent, will the Merthyr Tydfil early years and childcare market be able to adjust to this change in demand and still be sustainable?*

This 2022 CSA has also been an opportunity to:

- Establish the views of local parents, carers and guardians on early years and childcare, particularly in relation to (their) future demand and specified need(s). This ambition incorporates: (a) the whole local authority area, taking account of trends of (localised) demand and supply and; (b) an identification of specific gaps (through structured mapping) for particular groups/families from specific circumstances, to ensure that there is sufficient childcare - for all families - across the local authority

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<sup>1</sup> This was the case for the Merthyr Tydfil locality too – aligned to setting-based childcare.

- Help ensure that local families are able to access childcare locally that meets their needs and enables them to make a real choice about work and their **employability**
- Establish the future supply and demand in relation to the Merthyr Tydfil Flying Start programme (which in 2017 supported 41% of the 0-4 population in the local authority area) - and therefore **inform relevant future childcare commissioning arrangements**
- Establish *how much, of what types, at what times, and in which Merthyr Tydfil localities* parents, carers and guardians require childcare, and determine any other specific requirements those parents have including access to the three types of funded early education places
- Determine the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic indeed affected: (a) the *supply* of early years and childcare (aligned to specific localities); (b) the demand for on-site childcare and (therefore); (c) the sustainability of existing early years and childcare providers
- Identify and action plan measures to strengthen, enhance and increase Welsh-medium childcare provision
- Establish the extent to which nannies and alternative home childcare providers are actually employed within the Merthyr Tydfil localities <sup>2</sup>
- Provide a further steer for the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to *be proactive and innovative* in exploring and securing funding to support local and national initiatives and in ensuring families are encouraged to claim the financial support available

The CSA Action Plan (see page 125) incorporates a vital acknowledgement that:

- Continued communication and partnership working between local Merthyr Tydfil partners and stakeholders will be a way forward that enables community childcare needs to be met
- COVID-19 will continue to effect the local childcare and early years sector, particularly from the perspective of sustainability
- Grant funding will continue to be a factor within the ambition to sustain existing childcare providers
- Settings should be encouraged, where appropriate and achievable, to register with Tax Free Childcare and the Childcare Offer to keep fees as affordable as possible for families resident in the Merthyr Tydfil locality, including its numerous families that are experiencing relative disadvantage

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<sup>2</sup> In 2022 there are 0 nannies operating in the Merthyr Tydfil.

Furthermore in terms of context, firstly the theme of provision for two year olds is now very much on local authorities' agenda; as in November 2021, the Welsh Government pledged to offer free childcare to all two-year-olds within the next three years and plans to boost Welsh-medium childcare <sup>3</sup>. Currently, only two-year-olds in Wales from disadvantaged backgrounds can claim 12.5 hours a week of free childcare under the Flying Start programme <sup>4</sup>, however, the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru unveiled a plan to expand its 'free childcare' offering to all two-year-olds.

Secondly and with regard to that out of school sector in Wales, in autumn 2021, Clybiau Plant Cymru published a report called: *Demand for Childcare, and the state of the out of school childcare: re-opening?* <sup>5</sup> This report - which evolved as an outcome of 2,050 interviews with parents in Wales and consultation with representatives of the out of school - recommended that

- There should be more promotion (from Local Authorities, Welsh Government, CWLWM and other professionals) about the benefits of freely chosen play and use of 'regulated' childcare
- There should continue to be accessible funding opportunities for the childcare sector during the road to the 'new normal'
- There needs to be a holistic approach to current and future policies and priorities, ensuring initiatives do not impact the sustainability of the out of school childcare sector
- Continuous enhancements of quality within the childcare sector need to be supported through continued funded training opportunities
- There should ideally be more support for more children and families to access registered childcare through continued (and extended) affordability schemes.

Finally, and as vital context, in January 2022, the Welsh Parliament published the report: *Minding the future: the childcare barrier facing working parents* <sup>6</sup>. Key recommendations of this report were that:

- The Welsh Government sets out a plan to deliver universal wrap-around care, including after-school clubs that can accommodate all those who want to benefit from them
- The Welsh Government sets out how it intends to address the eligibility criteria in the Childcare Offer to make it easier for parents employed in atypical hours, such as insecure work, shift work or on zero-hours contracts, to access provision

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<sup>3</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-11/cooperation-agreement-2021.pdf> - page 5.

<sup>4</sup> In Merthyr Tydfil this equates to 40% of 0-4 year old population eligible for the Flying Start programme.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.clybiauplantcymru.org/uploads/files/%5BENG%5D%20State%20of%20Sector%20Report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s122062/Report.pdf>

- The Welsh Government sets out how it intends to work with local authorities and health boards to improve awareness and understanding of the childcare support available to new parents. Potential approaches could include: writing to new parents or promoting the support available when parents register the birth of their child; and providing information to parents in sufficient time ahead of the end of maternity leave to help them to make informed decisions about childcare
- The Welsh Government sets out plans for addressing the gap in childcare between the end of maternity leave and eligibility for the Childcare Offer. This should include indicative timescales, and an evaluation of the financial and practical factors that would need to be taken into account in addressing this gap
- The Welsh Government sets out plans to place more Welsh-medium childcare on school sites, given that progression from Welsh-medium childcare to Welsh-medium primary education is higher when this occurs
- The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plans to work with local authorities to ensure that Family Information Services provide resources in community languages other than, and in addition to, English and Welsh
- In order to address *widespread concerns* around the lack of ethnic diversity in the sector, the Welsh Government sets out plans for their new race disparity unit to build an evidence base around the level of ethnic minority representation in the childcare workforce
- The Welsh Government sets out a plan which requires all childcare providers to undertake cultural and diversity awareness training, such as that being developed by Cwlwm, and to ensure that it becomes part of continuous professional development within the sector
- The Welsh Government sets out a plan to develop and strengthen the childcare provision for children with additional learning needs, including increasing the amount of funding available through the Childcare Offer for Wales Additional Support Grant to improve provision for children with disabilities and/or additional or complex needs
- The Welsh Government sets out how it will ensure sufficient funding is available in the expansion of the Flying Start Programme under the Co-operation Agreement to allow all two year olds to fully access provision
- The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plan to deliver a sufficient increase in the hourly payment to providers under the Childcare Offer to enable an increase in staff pay, and a timeframe by which all childcare workers will be paid the Real Living Wage, learning from the Scottish Government's incorporation of this into their childcare expansion
- The Welsh Government sets out a plan to ensure that the upcoming childcare recruitment campaign by Social Care Wales reaches and attracts groups such as ethnic minorities and Welsh speakers who are underrepresented in the childcare workforce.



It is confirmed that the draft CSA was published for a 28-day consultation period before being published on the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council website, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2022. The 28-day consultation received 23 responses which were considered and which informed this final submitted version.

## 2 Partnership Working and Consultation

As part of the production of the 2022 Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, structured qualitative and quantitative consultation was undertaken with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, partners, professionals and educators - including children and young people <sup>7</sup>, parents/carers, childcare providers, persons with interest in childcare and their representatives, local employers, and persons representing them and employer organisations, neighbouring local authorities and educational establishments, including the schools located in the borough. Further details about specific partners that were consulted in order to produce a robust and comprehensive CSA, which gathered a broad spectrum of feedback and viewpoints can be read starting page 43 of this CSA document.

In terms of feedback from the local authority and its relevant officers and professionals, consultation was undertaken with:

- Those responsible for implementing Welsh language policy and programmes
- Youth services representatives
- Those working with adults on the theme of employability and training
- Representatives of the Merthyr Tydfil Family Information Service
- Those who work with and come into contact with families that have children with additional learning needs
- School and schools place planning representatives
- Those with a responsibility for the planning of new housing developments
- Those that work with disadvantaged families, in particular in areas of the Gurnos ward and the Penydarren ward, including on themes such as the Flying Start programme, parenting and social services
- Maintained schools
- Councillors

In early 2022, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council undertook specific consultation with its key partner Cwlwm, attaining their representative feedback too on the views of its Umbrella group partners *including*:

- Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs

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<sup>7</sup> In 2022 MTCBC were also undertaking a Play Sufficiency Assessment and this project co-produced the majority of consultation with children and young people, including on the theme of out of school childcare and activities.

- Early Years Wales
- Mudiad Meithrin
- National Day Nurseries Association Cymru (NDNA Cymru)
- Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY Cymru).

Additionally this 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment requested feedback from two forums: (a) Cwm Taf Morgannwg Bwrdd Diogelu Safeguarding Board and (b) Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum.

Essentially, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is confident that it has consulted widely and with forethought, with regard to which stakeholders and partners should contribute towards producing a robust 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment - given the relative importance of the 2022-2027 Sufficiency Action Plan, i.e. particularly as the local early years and childcare sector continues to resurrect its presence and standing after the challenges presented by the 2020-2022 COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3 Welsh in Education Strategic Plans

The 2006 Childcare Act introduced a duty on local authorities in Wales to secure sufficient childcare in their area to enable parents to take up or remain in work or to undertake education and training in order to obtain work. In determining whether the provision of childcare is sufficient to meet these requirements, Welsh local authorities must have regard to: the provision of childcare involving the use of the Welsh language.

This naturally required that local authorities to have a central role in the development of Welsh medium and bilingual childcare provision in their areas, in partnership with relevant organisations.

Additionally, the Welsh Government published statutory guidance on Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) on 27 January 2021<sup>8</sup>. This guidance sets out the Welsh Government's expectations in terms of how local authorities, working with key stakeholders, will plan for continuity of Welsh medium education to support the realisation of the vision of a million Welsh speakers by 2050. Local authorities are expected to set an overarching ten year target outlining the expected increase in Year 1 children who are taught through the medium of Welsh in the local authority's area.

In doing so, local authorities should identify and plan measures to strengthen and expand Welsh-medium childcare provision in the area to ensure a seamless route to Welsh-medium education and ensure that the Family Information Service for parents/carers and prospective parents/carers provides information on the advantages of raising children bilingually and using Welsh in the family home. To support the planning process, the Welsh Government will provide local authorities with relevant data, including the numbers of Cylchoedd Meithrin within the local authority area and the number and percentage of children transferring from a Cylch Meithrin to Welsh medium primary education.

Figures published by StatsWales in September 2021 indicated that the Merthyr Tydfil locality has one of the lowest percentages of its population having an ability to speak Welsh (18%). However, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is dedicated to raising awareness of Welsh language issues in its locality. It continues to work hard to ensure that there is indeed sufficient consideration at all levels where decisions are made about Welsh medium and bilingual childcare provision funding.

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<sup>8</sup> The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 (S.I. 2020/1194 (W. 271)) ("the 2020 Regulations") which came into force on 1 December 2020 makes changes to the start date of the next WESP cycle. Local authorities are required to prepare and submit the first ten year WESP Plan to the Welsh Ministers for approval no later than 31 January 2022 and the first ten year Plan will commence on 1 September 2022 and expire on 31 August 2032. Childcare and Play leads within local authorities will want to take note of these changes; to ensure that engagement with local authority WESP leads and key stakeholders takes place at an opportune time in the planning cycle and include objectives in their 2022 CSA which are clearly linked to the local authority's plans for growth and continuity in Welsh medium education and the 10 year target in respect of Year 1 children. There is also a requirement that the WESP take account of the local authority's CSA. There will be opportunities for local authorities to update and resubmit their WESPs to the Welsh Government should any issues or opportunities be identified as part of their annual reviews and related changes can be captured in annual CSA updates.

This intention is referenced in the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) – which can be viewed at:  
<https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/resident/schools-and-learning/welsh-in-education-strategic-plan/>

Table 1 - Metrics on the incidence of the incidence of children attending Welsh-medium provisions in the Merthyr Tydfil locality

Name of local authority	Number of residents	Percentage of the population who speak Welsh	Number of FS childcare places funded in the local authority	Number of registered Cylch Meithrin settings	Number of Welsh-medium childcare places available across the LA	Percentage of children who currently access Welsh-medium childcare	Number of Welsh Medium-education schools in the local authority	Number of Welsh-medium reception places available	Percentage of children who currently attend school at age 7 years
Merthyr	60,424	18%	218 pre funded places	2 soon to be 3 (19 children)	Currently 62 (when new provision opens 81)	4.5%	2 Welsh Medium Primary Schools	116	English Medium – 668 (74.5%) Welsh Medium – 116 (12.9%) Total in school – 784 Not registered at a school – 113 (12.6%) Total number of 7 year olds - 897

Essentially, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is committed to promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language by observing the following Guiding Principles:

- Individuals have the right to deal with us in Welsh
- Welsh must be positioned to be read first (to the left or above the English)
- Language rights for staff
- The quality of service and a positive attitude are important
- We must offer Welsh language services to give language choice
- The benefits of bilingual education will be promoted

Our local authority is also mindful of the facts (and energised to act on any developments evidently required) that, in terms of the theme of childcare:

- The language of provision is viewed as an important factor by some parents and influences certain parent's **choices** – and in effect, a lack of Welsh-medium childcare options should not act as a barrier to such parents and families
- It should continue to gather information to establish and maintain a baseline of current Welsh medium and bilingual childcare provision including through data received from CSSIW, as part of the annual Self-Assessment of Service Statement process
- Our Family Information Service should continue to provide information to parents and prospective parents about the advantages of raising children bilingually and using Welsh in the family home
- Merthyr Tydfil locality resident parents and prospective parents should (proactively) be made aware of relevant initiatives which aim to encourage new parents to speak Welsh with their children or offer parents and carers an opportunity to enjoy playing with their children and socialise in an informal Welsh atmosphere.

In its current Welsh in Education Strategic Plan the local authority sets out an ambition to maintain systematic processes for measuring the demand for Welsh medium childcare and Welsh medium statutory educational provision. It also outlines a very clear commitment to investigate how any new options would address parental wishes for greater flexibility in the availability of provision, including in Welsh language and bilingual settings. The Plan naturally explains another commitment: to work in partnership with Mudiad Meithrin and Cylchoedd Meithrin to continue to offer Welsh language support in all early years and childcare settings.

It can be added that the local authority maintains an enthused approach to: promoting Welsh government Welsh language initiatives and helping families' to experience of Welsh-medium childcare and education and beyond, and answer some of the most common questions raised by parents regarding Welsh-medium education.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council intends to *continue* to monitor any increasing demand for Welsh medium and bilingual childcare provision in the future, through being observant of any:

- Rise in the numbers of young Welsh speakers
- Rise in the numbers of children currently receiving a Welsh medium education
- Changes to the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy and Welsh Language Strategy
- Any large scale economic developments
- 2022-2027 period results of surveys undertaken to assess parental demand for Welsh-medium education.

As a further way of an introduction in to the outcomes of the research that was initiated in order to inform and produce this Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, in autumn 2021, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council invited representatives of setting-based childcare providers, through a structured telephone survey, to state whether they were happy that their setting had a requisite number of staff with a fluency in the Welsh language. 63% of relevant childcare providers stated that they were happy and 37% stated that they were not happy. Of the early years childcare providers/settings (i.e. Full Day Care providers and sessional providers) who stated that they were not happy, 33% of stated that they were having problems recruiting such Welsh-speaking staff.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council also invited WESP representatives to provide their feedback as part of its consultation for the 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. Six representatives responded to an online survey and in answer to the question: *Do you think there is sufficient Welsh Medium childcare across the Merthyr Tydfil locality to meet the needs of families from all backgrounds?*

- 0 WESP representatives stated: Yes
- 4 stated: No
- 2 stated: Don't Know

Additionally, in response to the question: *please state below any changes that you think are needed to Welsh Medium childcare across the Merthyr Tydfil locality?* feedback included:

*"The creation of a fully Welsh Medium rising 2s facility".*

*"There is an increase in Welsh-medium childcare provision for 0-5 year-olds and after school. This must include private nurseries, independent childminders, Cylchoedd Meithrin, after school and holiday care, throughout the county".*

And, [in my opinion]:

*"There is not enough Welsh medium provision, be it day nurseries, within reasonable reach of some communities".*

*"There is a need for more Welsh-medium playgroups across the town to meet the growing demand for Welsh-medium education... with the opening of another school in the future" – and similarly:*

*"There is not enough provision/variety of provision and there is not enough information shared about Welsh-medium education care".*

In response to the question: *please state below any strategic priorities that you feel the Local Authority early years and childcare team should focus on – including aligned to the provision of Welsh* - feedback included:

*“I would like to see more Welsh language learning opportunities for those already working in the childcare sector, and steps taken to raise the awareness of childcare as a career for Welsh speakers”.*

*“The local authority needs to ensure that they plan carefully with partners to improve the range of Welsh medium provision available and ensure consistent marketing. ‘Health teams’ should also be more involved in the marketing of the benefits of Welsh medium care and education”.*

*“More could ideally be done to encourage more students to enrol on Welsh-medium childcare courses at Merthyr College. We could then encourage students to use their Welsh skills on Welsh-medium childcare work placements early to increase their confidence”.*

Finally, it can be noted that as part of the research for this Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, parents and carers were invited to feedback about the subject of Welsh medium-childcare through a specific e-consultation session which was facilitated in January 2022. Both Welsh speaking parents and English speaking parents gave feedback<sup>9</sup> – and examples of parental (issues-themed) feedback on the subject of Welsh medium-childcare *included*:

*“I plan to send my 2 year-old to Cylch Meithrin when I can afford it”.*

*“I want my child to attend for the social and play experiences alongside the Welsh Medium as no one at home speaks Welsh”.*

*“I hoped to send my eldest daughter to Cylch Meithrin, but due to speech development they did not want to overwhelm her with 2 languages”.*

*“It would be good to have more after school provisions, linked to play and social experiences (rather than Welsh language specific class) where they can get to use the Welsh language in an experiential way”.*

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<sup>9</sup> A total of 4 parents attended the e-session.



## 4 Overview – Childcare Types, Services and Places

- 4.1 The following section outlines fundamental metrics aligned to the supply of childcare within the Merthyr Tydfil locality – including details focusing on the number of places available/per type and the number of childcare providers situated across the locality.

Table 2 below indicates the number of places accessible in each of the locality's eleven wards – aligned to the three types of childcare, i.e.: 1. early years childcare, e.g. Full Day Care settings and Sessional Care Providers (including Cylchoedd Meithrin); 2. registered childcare; 3. out of school childcare providers. (There are 0 creches operating in the locality).

**Table 2 - Fundamental supply of registered CIW childcare places across the Merthyr Tydfil locality in May 2022 – aligned to Ward**

Source: CIW/MTCBC

Ward name	Number of Full Day Care Childcare Providers located in the ward	Number of Full Day Care Places in the ward	Number of Sessional Care Providers located in the ward	Number of Sessional Care Places located in the ward	Number of Registered Childminders located in ward	Number of Registered Childminder Places in the ward	Number of Out of School Childcare Providers located in the ward	Number of (non-school based) Out of School Childcare Places in the ward	Total CIW registered Childcare Places	Number of Full Day Care Childcare Providers located in the ward that <u>also facilitate out of school childcare</u> – including after school childcare
Bedlinog	1	24	0	0	1	6	0	0	30	0
Cyfarthfa	1	72	2	39	1	10	1	24	145	0
Dowlais	2	38	1	19	0	0	0	0	57	0
Gurnos	1	48	2	56	0	0	0	0	104	1
Merthyr Vale	1	16	0	36	0	0	1	52	104	1
Park	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Penydarren	1	19	0	0	1	6	0	0	25	0
Plymouth	4	114	1	19	3	13	0	0	146	3
Town	1	49	0	0	1	6	0	0	55	1
Treharris	3	51	0	0	1	6	1	30	87	1
Vaynor	1	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	0
Merthyr Tydfil total	<b>17</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>772</b>	<b>7</b>

Aligned to Table 2 above, it should be noted that:

- 1/CIW registration is per session and some childcare provisions are able to provide 2 sessions daily, (i.e. Serenbach is sessional and registered for 36 places, runs an am & pm session so 72 places in total).
- 2/Early years childcare settings who operate am and pm sessions are: Cylch Meithrin Twyncarmel, Toddlers @ CYD, Seren Bach & Busy Bees.
- 3/There are further provisions due to open in September 2022: (a) Building Blocks (located in the Cyfarthfa ward) is currently closed, but may re-open in September 2022 and; (b) Little Learners & Dwylo Bach (in the Dowlais ward) would have 19 places each and Bobl Bach (also in the Dowlais ward) would have 19 places. A new Cylch Meithrin is also due to open in the Gurnos ward in late June 2022.
- 4/CIW registration for Trinity Child & Family Centre is for 52 covering the three provisions in one building: 16 places for Full Day Care, 24 pre-school (am) places, and 12 places at a Cylch (pm).
- 5/In terms of previous CIW registration: Sessional Care registration for Galon/Plantbach I ceased in April 2022.
- 6/Plant Hapus are CIW registered for 19 Full Day Care places.

There has essentially been a reduction of 7.5% in terms of places with Full Day Care Providers, Sessional Care Providers and Registered Childminders since the 2017 CSA process.

It should also be noted that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is aware that a number of early years childcare settings/nurseries also facilitate an element of out of school childcare, in particular after school childcare places. These settings have a CIW designation as a full day care provider and therefore, to ensure that this CSA outlines supply aligned to a main CIW designation, such places have not been included within Table 2 on page 17 above. These settings include:

- In the Gurnos ward: Funtazia PCH nursery, which facilitates after school and holiday provision
- In the Merthyr Vale ward: Trinity Childcare and Family Centre, which facilitates after school and holiday provision
- In the Plymouth ward: Little Lambs Pentrebach, which facilitates after school and holiday provision
- In the Plymouth ward: Funtazia PCH, which facilitates after school and holiday provision
- In the Plymouth ward: Cylch Meithrin Pentrebach, which facilitates after school and holiday provision
- In the Town ward: Pili Pala Day Nursery, which facilitates after school and holiday provision
- In the Treharris ward: Little Lambs Treharris, which facilitates after school and holiday provision

Table 3 below indicates the number of places accessible in each of the locality's LSOAs – aligned to the three types of childcare, i.e.: 1. early years childcare, e.g. Full Day Care settings and Sessional Care Providers (including Cylchoedd Meithrin); 2. registered childcare; 3. out of school childcare providers.

**Table 3 - Fundamental supply of registered CIW childcare places across the Merthyr Tydfil locality in May 2022 – aligned to LSOA**

Source: CIW/MTCBC

LSOA Name	Childcare Provision (CIW Registered)	Registered Number of (CIW Registered) Places
Bedlinog 1	Bedlinog	n/a
Bedlinog 2	Trelewis Playgroup	24 CIW registration
Cyfarthfa 1	Cylch Meithrin Twyncarmel	19 CIW registration
Cyfarthfa 2	Toddlers @ Coed y Dderwen	20 CIW registration
Cyfarthfa 3	Here We Grow Day Nursery	72 CIW registration
Cyfarthfa 3	Building Blocks	19 CIW registration
Cyfarthfa 4	n/a	n/a
Dowlais 1	n/a	n/a
Dowlais 2	Bobl Bach	19 CIW registration
Dowlais 2	Little Learners	19 CIW registration
Dowlais 3	n/a	n/a
Dowlais 4	Dwylo Bach	18 CIW registration
Gurnos 1	Funtazia Day Nursery – Gurnos	48 CIW registration
Gurnos 2	Cylch Meithrin y Gurnos	n/a
Gurnos 3	Busy Bees	20 CIW registration
Merthyr Vale 1	n/a	n/a
Merthyr Vale 2	Trinity Family Centre - Pre-School	52 CIW registration
Merthyr Vale 2	Trinity Family Centre - Day Care	
Merthyr Vale 2	Trinity Family Centre - Cylch Meithrin Aberfan	
Merthyr Vale 3	n/a	n/a
Park 1	n/a	n/a
Park 2	n/a	n/a
Park 3	n/a	n/a
Penydarren 1	n/a	n/a
Penydarren 2	Plant Hapus	19 CIW registration

LSOA Name	Childcare Provision (CIW Registered)	Registered Number of (CIW Registered) Places
Penydarren 3	n/a	n/a
Penydarren 4	n/a	n/a
Plymouth (Merthyr Tydfil) 1	Little Lambs Day Nursery - Pentrebach	19 CIW registration
Plymouth (Merthyr Tydfil) 1	TEDS	19 CIW registration
Plymouth (Merthyr Tydfil) 2	n/a	n/a
Plymouth (Merthyr Tydfil) 3	Little Rascals	24 CIW registration
Plymouth (Merthyr Tydfil) 3	Cylch Meithrin Pentrebach	19 CIW registration
Plymouth (Merthyr Tydfil) 3	Funtazia Day Nursery - Pentrebach	52 CIW registration
Town 1	n/a	n/a
Town 2	Pili Pala	49 CIW registration
Town 3	n/a	n/a
Town 4	n/a	n/a
Treharris 1	n/a	n/a
Treharris 2	n/a	n/a
Treharris 3	n/a	n/a
Treharris 4	Nursery Rhymes	20 CIW registration
Treharris 4	Cylch Meithrin Treharris	12 CIW registration
Treharris 4	Little Lambs Day Nursery - Treharris	19 CIW registration
Vaynor 1	n/a	n/a
Vaynor 2	Little Acorns	19 CIW registration

It can be noted that of the Merthyr Tydfil locality's 23 early years childcare providers, there are (as per the CIW registration details) 17 Full Day Care providers and 6 Sessional Care providers. 4 of these 23 settings are active Cylch Meithrin providers. It can also be noted that there are 0 nannies evidently operating in the Merthyr Tydfil locality.

- 4.2 Table 4 below indicates the actual number of children who were subsequently accessing/attending a childcare place, aligned to the type(s) of childcare, in each ward **in autumn 2021**.

Table 4 - Number of children attending formal early years childcare provision(s) across the Merthyr Tydfil locality in autumn 2021 aligned to registered places, potential new places for 0-4 year olds that will be required aligned to the incidence of new housing developments - and the incidence of waiting lists in late 2021

Source: Merthyr Tydfil CSA 2021-2022 – structured interviews with childcare providers & SASS 2022 & Wales CIW

Ward name	Number of registered Early Years Childcare (i.e. combined Full Day Care and Sessional Care) places	Number of children evidently attending Early Years Childcare (i.e. Full Day Care and Sessional Care) places in autumn 2021	& Number of additional 0-4 year olds that New Dwellings could yield – aligned to MTCBC new housing yield formula (see 11.15)	& No. of children on a waiting list at Early Years Childcare Providers in the relevant ward
Bedlinog	24	19 (79% occupancy)	6	3
Cyfarthfa	111	111 (100% occupancy)	47	0
Dowlais	57	51 (89% occupancy)	7	0
Gurnos	104	82 (79% occupancy)	31	0
Merthyr Vale	52	28 (53% occupancy)	8	0
Park	0	n/a	0	n/a
Penydarren	19	19 (100% occupancy)	8	0
Plymouth	133	99 (70% occupancy)	91	2
Town	49	21 (43% occupancy)	41	0
Treharris	51	48 (94% occupancy)	59	3
Vaynor	19	8 (42% occupancy)	2	2
<b>Merthyr Tydfil total</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>524 (84% occupancy)</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>10</b>

- 4.3 The July 2021 SASS data indicated that across all of the Merthyr Tydfil childcare providers a total of 70 children with additional needs were attending a childcare provision.

- 100% of providers stated that they had at least one child attending their setting that had a cognition and learning disability

- 96% of providers stated that they had at least one child attending their setting that had a behaviour, emotional and social development difficulty
- 100% of providers stated that they had at least one child attending their setting that had a communication and Interaction difficulty
- 79% of providers stated that they had at least one child attending their setting that had a sensory and/or physical disability.

4.4 The July 2021 SASS Self Assessment of Service Statement also indicated that childcare providers who delivered childcare through the medium of Welsh were all Cylchoedd Meithrin.

The only two evident languages that childcare was delivered via was indeed English and/or Welsh.

Additionally, the survey undertaken with Merthyr Tydfil-based childcare providers in autumn 2021 highlighted that over the next 18 months, i.e. up to spring 2023, (only) 13% of respondents had plans in place to expand the number of Welsh-medium places that they offered.

4.5 Further details on the supply of Flying Start childcare provision - and Childcare Offer provision - can be viewed in Section 16. As an introduction to these metrics, Table 5 below shows the number of Flying Start childcare places evidently available in February 2022 aligned to each of the 11 wards and (as per the CSA Guidance), *commissioning arrangements*.

**Table 5 - number of Flying Start childcare places evidently available in October 2021**

Source: Merthyr Tydfil CBC February 2022

Ward name	Number of Flying Start pre-funded commissioned places available in ward	Number of children accessing a Flying Start funded childcare places
Bedlinog	8	16
Cyfarthfa	44	41
Dowlais	23	30
Gurnos	76	71
Merthyr Vale	15	31
Park	n/a	n/a
Penydarren	31	26
Plymouth	8	26
Town	n/a	n/a

Treharris	13	25
Vaynor	0	3

Table 5 indicates that aligned to the socio-economic demographics of that particular locality, the Gurnos ward accounted for the most frequent number of pre-funded childcare places in February 2022. It can also be noted that the Flying Start programme will spot-purchase additional places if and when additional eligible Flying Start children qualify to attend at any period of time.

Table 6, below indicates that the ward accounting for the highest number of resident 2-3 year olds is the Cyfarthfa ward, followed in frequency by the Town ward – with parents eligible for Flying Start provision, most likely to be resident in the Gurnos ward. The Table indicates how the number of 2-3 year olds could grow aligned to a forecast increase of 2.8% (see 11.2 below) and how that would be reflected in terms of accessibility rates if the availability of childcare places, for this age cohort, in the locality remains at its 2022 levels.

Table 6 - Forecast accessibility rates to childcare places of 2-3 year olds in Merthyr Tydfil wards

Ward name	Number of 2-3 year olds resident in Merthyr Tydfil in 2022 (ONS 2020)	Forecast Number of resident 2-3 year olds resident in Merthyr Tydfil in 2027-2028	Number of approximate childcare places accessible in the ward for this age cohort – in 2022	Accessibility rate to childcare in 2027 <i>assuming that the childcare supply stays static and does not change/increase</i>	Above or Below the Merthyr Tydfil average accessibility rate for 2027?	Total number of New Dwellings planned for period 2022-2031 at new housing developments – and does the ward account for an Above or Below average number?
Bedlinog	89	91	30	33/100 children	Below	Below
Cyfarthfa	214	220	121	55/100 children	Above	Above
Dowlais	166	171	57	33/100 children	Below	Below
Gurnos	154	160	104	65/100 children	Above	Above
Merthyr Vale	93	97	52	53/100 children	Above	Below
Park	88	91	0	0/100 children	Below	Below
Penydarren	136	140	25	18/100 children	Below	Below
Plymouth	105	108	146	100/100 children	Above	Above
Town	182	187	55	29/100 children	Below	Above
Treharris	152	157	57	36/100 children	Below	Above
Vaynor	74	76	19	25/100 children	Below	Below



Totals	1,453	1,500	665	44/100 children
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Source: Mid-2020 Population Estimates for 2020 Wards and 2021 LAs in England and Wales by Single Year of Age and Sex

Table 6 indicates that the two wards which can be considered a priority in terms of focus for the Local Authority are: (a) Town and; (b) Treharris, where the accessibility rate to early years childcare places is **below** the Merthyr Tydfil locality average and the number of proposed new housing yields is **above** the Merthyr Tydfil locality average.

- 4.6 In response to the July 2021 SASS Self Assessment of Service Statement, 67% of relevant childcare providers/settings, i.e. Full Day Care providers, sessional providers and childminders stated that they were registered for facilitating parents/carers to access Tax Free Childcare. Those who were not registered repeatedly stated that (words to the effect) *“we only offer Flying Start funded places”*. In terms of *promoting* Tax Free Childcare, 67% of early years childcare providers/settings (also) stated that they did actively do so. 77% of the responding Full Day Care providers and sessional providers stated that (to the best of their knowledge) the parents of the children that they care for were (in July 2021) receiving tax free childcare or using childcare vouchers.
- 4.7 The 2016 Welsh Government Statutory Guidance directs that the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment should summarise the age ranges of children able to attend the range of childcare types – and these metrics are set out in Table 7 below.

**Table 7 - Number of childcare providers that are located in the Merthyr Tydfil locality which are being accessed by specific age groups of children in early 2022**

Source: Merthyr Tydfil CSA 2021-2022 – structured interviews with childcare providers

Type of childcare provider	Number of settings that can provide formal childcare to 0-12 months and 1 year olds	Number of settings that can provide formal childcare to 2 year olds	Number of settings that can provide formal childcare to 3-4 year olds	Number of settings that can provide formal childcare to 5-18 olds
Full Day Care providers	7	7	17	17
Sessional Care	0	7	7	0
Registered Childminders	4	5	3	6
Out of School Childcare	0	0	0	3

- 4.8 The same survey, undertaken in autumn 2021, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council invited early years childcare provider to state whether they had a waiting list. (Only) 17% of early years childcare providers, i.e. Full Day Care providers and sessional providers stated that they had a waiting list and (only) 1 registered childminders stated that they had a waiting list. Additionally, relevant childcare providers were requested to state whether their waiting list size had changed in any way compared with spring 2021?

**Table 8 - Extent to which waiting lists had changed during the period March 2021 – October 2021**

Source: Merthyr Tydfil CSA 2021-2022 – structured interviews with childcare providers

Classification	Percentage of early years childcare providers/settings stating	Percentage of registered childminders stating
Yes – it has decreased in size	75%	0
Yes – it has increased size	25%	0
No – it has more or less stayed the same size	0	100%

- 4.9 In autumn 2021, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council invited each childcare provider to state whether they had vacant places.
- 75% of early years childcare providers, stated that they had vacant places
  - (A lower comparable percentage of) 30% of registered childminders stated that they had vacant places
  - 33% [i.e. 1] of out of school childcare provider, stated that they had vacant places.

For those early years childcare providers/settings that had vacant places, the average number was 7.5. For those registered childminders that had vacant places, the average number was 2.5. Table 9 shows the number of early years childcare providers that indicated they had: (a) waiting lists and; (b) vacant places per ward in autumn 2021.

Table 9 - Number of early years childcare providers that indicated they had: (a) waiting list and; (b) vacant places per ward in autumn 2021

Ward	Early Years Childcare Groups/Settings				Net position Waiting Lists versus Vacancies (autumn 2021)
	No. of settings stated had a waiting list	No. of children on a waiting list	No. of settings stated had vacant places	No. of vacant places	
Bedlinog	1	3	1	5	+2 vacant places
Cyfarthfa	0	0	3	16	+16 vacant places
Dowlais	0	0	2	4	+4 vacant places
Gurnos	0	0	3	22	+22 vacant places
Merthyr Vale	0	0	1	8	+8 vacant places
Park	n/a <sup>10</sup>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Penydarren	0	0	1	3	+3 vacant places
Plymouth	1	2	4	41	+39 vacant places
Town	0	0	1	28	+28 vacant places
Treharris	1	3	1	3	No majority
Vaynor	1	2	1	4	+2 vacant places

Table 9 indicates that, in terms of occupancy and early years childcare providers/settings, there was very much a situation of vacancies (number of vacant places) exceeding the number of children on waiting lists.

It can also be noted that the only ward where a current childminder had vacancy *or a* waiting list in late 2021 was Treharris ward.

<sup>10</sup> No relevant providers located in this ward.

- 4.10 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's autumn 2021 survey with childcare providers ascertained clarification of standard hourly rates and day rates.

For the twenty-four early years childcare providers/settings who were consulted – the average daily fee stated was £37.82 and the most frequently daily fee stated by a provider was £46.50.

For the ten registered childminders – the average hourly fee was £4.98 and the most common daily fee was £4.50.

For the three out of school childcare providers – the average hourly fee was £6.83

- 4.11 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's autumn 2021 survey with childcare providers also ascertained confirmation on opening times.

For the twenty-four early years childcare providers/settings – the average opening time was 8:40am and the most frequent opening time was 9:00am. The average finishing time was 17:45pm and the most common finishing time was 18:00pm.

For the ten registered childminders – the average start time was 7:42am and the most frequent start time was 7:00am. The average finishing time was 17:45pm and the most frequent finishing time was 18:00pm. (Only one childminder stated that they concluded beyond 18:00pm and this was 19:00pm – one hour later).

For the three out of school childcare providers/settings – the average (and the most frequent) opening time for their after school club was 15:00pm. The average finishing time for the after school club was 17:18pm and the most common finishing time (by two of the three settings) was 17:00pm.

- 4.12 Returning to the July 2021 SASS Self Assessment of Service Statement as a source, of the twenty-two early years childcare providers/settings that responded to that survey, 14% stated that (at that time) they received funding to provide part-time early years education places, with two of these providers being located in the Plymouth ward.

- 4.13 In autumn 2021, each childcare provider was invited to state whether they had witnessed or experienced any notable notable (new) trends in terms of the demand for:(a) types of places that they offered or the; (b) types of hours at their setting.  
65% of childcare providers stated that they had, and in order of frequency these were:

- Parents requested more flexibility, including aligned to shift hours
- There had been an increased incidence of parents working from home
- (More) parents were requesting full days
- There was a greater demand for morning sessions, in comparison to afternoon sessions

## 5 Needs of Parents/Carers – demand for childcare

The narrative below outlines the results of analysis of the Welsh Government parental survey which had a 5-week response window in October 2021 and early November 2021. This survey was designed by Welsh government, as was its ability to ensure coverage of some the demand-themed factors which the 2016 Welsh Government Statutory Guidance directs should be addressed within a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. In order to address some of these directed themes, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council organised and facilitated a series of e-focus group sessions in late 2021 and early 2022 and the section below combines analysis of the Welsh Government parental survey with (demand-focused) themes that were highlighted during those sessions.

5.1 The Welsh Government parent survey responses aligned to Merthyr Tydfil's eleven wards as follows.

Table 10 - Area of residence of responding parents/carers

Ward name	Number of responding parents/carers	Percentage of Total
Bedlinog	6	3%
Cyfarthfa	33	16.5%
Dowlais	15	7.5%
Gurnos	20	10%
Merthyr Vale	17	8.5%
Park	6	3%
Penydarren	19	9.5%
Plymouth	19	9.5%
Town	20	10%
Treharris	9	4.5%
Vaynor	14	7%
Ward not specified	22	11%
<b>Total – Merthyr Tydfil</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

- 5.2 In terms of the type of household(s), the most frequent response provided by responding parents/carers was that they: share responsibility for my child(ren) with someone that I live with (68.5% of respondents), followed in frequency by a parent/carers stating that I have sole responsibility for my child(ren) (20% were in fact, single parents).
- 5.3 The average number of children evidently being raised by all respondents was 1.89 (0.19 *above* the UK average) - with the Gurnos ward accounting for the highest average number of children stated (2.3) , followed in frequency by the Town ward (2.0).
- 5.4 The age cohort which responding parents/carers were evidently most frequently raising was 5-8 years, followed by 2 years [60 children]. 60% of responding parents/carers evidently had at least one child aged 0-4 years and 55% of responding parents/carers evidently had at least one child aged 5-18 years. The ward which accounted for the highest number of responses from a parent/carers with 2, 3 and/or 4 year olds was Cyfarthfa.
- 5.5 9.5% of responding carers/parents stated that they were caring for/raising at least one child with additional learning needs (ALN) or a long-term illness. 90% of such respondents stated that they had a child who required (even more) additional support with their learning. In December 2021, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council facilitated an e-consultation session with carers of children and young people with additional learning needs. Key feedback that was provided by the carers who attended this session was:
- In terms of out of school childcare, there was a notable reliance across the locality on Kidz Den After School Club
  - Challenges with childcare has an impact on carers and employability – for example, relevant feedback included:  
*“Due to two or three hourly sessions with different support services, I had to take step back in my career to fulfil my son’s appointments. I do want to be there for my son but it [childcare] does impact on everything”.*  
  
*“If I was to go back into full time work in the future, I would need to still consider his one-to-one support needs as if the setting called me, due to issue with cover, I would have to drop work”.*  
  
*“My overall initial experience of childcare has been disheartening and I feel very let down. It can be a lonely place”.*
  - The Merthyr Tydfil Family Information Service is “great”, however, it could offer “more specific support for parents/children with additional needs”.

- Challenges with childcare impacts on a carers ability to study, with feedback on this theme including:

*“As part of my PGCE study I have to do a placement on Wednesday or Thursday at University, teaching students... and then I have to be home by 2pm. Childcare is ‘slowing my study down’ as it is not easy to get all the placements hours complete and limited hours to fulfil the studies”.*

*“Studying is very difficult during holiday times as my husband comes home from work exhausted and I am exhausted too... so fitting in time to complete assignments becomes a major challenge. We have no support during the school holidays, so there is a real pressure on us as we do not have supportive [grand]parents”.*

5.6 All responding parents/carers to the Welsh Government stated what their employment status currently was.

Table 11 - Employment status of responding parents/carers

Employment Status	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers
Looking for a job – but not working yet	7%
Employed	65%
Self-employed	4%
In education or training	7%
Not working and not looking for a job	11%
Unable to work	6%



70% of responding parents/carers evidently had a partner and their employment status was described by the respondent as follows:

Table 12 - Employment status of partners

Employment Status	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers
Looking for a job – but not working yet	3.5%
Employed	55%
Self-employed	9%
In education or training	1%
Not working and not looking for a job	1%
Unable to work	1%
Not relevant (as do not have a partner)	29.5%

5.7 Table 13 indicates the incidence of responding parents/carers stating their gross household income per week (before deductions/tax).

Table 13 - Incidence of gross household income per week (before deductions/tax)

Weekly household income	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers	Most frequently stated type of <i>formal</i> childcare accessed
Up to £100	3%	School Nursery
£100 to £149	8%	School Nursery
£150 to £249	5.5%	School Nursery
£250 to £349	13%	Private Day Nursery
£350 to £500	10%	Private Day Nursery
£500 to £580	6%	Breakfast Club
£581 to £750	10%	Breakfast Club
£750 to £999	12%	Private Day Nursery
More than £1,000	8%	Breakfast Club
Prefer not to say	25.5%	School Nursery

5.8 Table 14 indicates the incidence of responding parents/carers stating specific ethnic backgrounds.

Table 14 - Ethnicity of responding parents/carers

Stated Ethnicity	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers
White	95%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	2%
Asian/Asian British	1%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	1%
Other ethnic group	1%
Did not say	0

- 5.9 68% of *all* responding parents/carers (who had at least one 3 and/or 4 year old) stated that they were *accessing* a funded early education place at school or nursery or a sessional playgroup. With regard to the Childcare Offer, responding parents/carers who had at least one 3 and/or 4 year outlined their usage as follows <sup>11</sup>

Table 15 - Uptake of the Childcare Offer by parents/carers in autumn 2021

Status aligned to the Childcare Offer	Percentage of relevant (aligned to the Childcare Offer's target age) responding parents/carers
Yes, am accessing in the Merthyr Tydfil locality	12%
Yes, am accessing (however) outside Merthyr Tydfil	1%
No, but may access soon in the future	4.5%
No, with no plans to do so	6.5%
Not sure	<1%
Not using	75%

- 5.10 19.5% of responding parents/carers who had at least one 2 and/or 3 year old stated that they were *accessing* a Flying Start (childcare) place, with the Gurnos ward – for this survey (and as would be expected, given its relative levels of socio-economic disadvantage and quantity of commissioned places) – accounting for the highest frequency of such parents/carers accessing a place.

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<sup>11</sup> As the majority of nursery children receive full-time Foundation Phase Nursery offer in the autumn term then this take up of Childcare Offer in autumn term will be less than the spring and summer terms.

- 5.11 Table 16 below indicates the frequency with which responding parents/carers stated that they used specific types of childcare **during term-times**.

Table 16 - Frequency with which responding parents/carers stated that they used specific types of childcare during **term-times**

Type of childcare registered or non-registered childcare	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers
Childminder	2.5%
Before School or Breakfast Club	16%
After School Club	13.5%
Private Day Nursery	18.5%
School-based Nursery	9.5%
Sessional Playgroup	11.5%
Cylch Meithrin	3.5%
Drop-Off Creche	0
Nanny	0
Au-Pair	0
Family/friends (paid)	1%
Family/friends (unpaid)	40.5%
Stated <i>none during term time</i>	1%

- 5.12 Correspondingly, Table 17 below indicates the frequency with which responding parents/carers stated that they used specific types of childcare **during holiday times**.

Table 17 - Frequency with which responding parents/carers stated that they used specific types of childcare during holiday-times

Type of childcare registered or non-registered childcare	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers	Difference between term-time percentages
Childminder	1.5%	-1%
Holiday Club or Playscheme	5%	n/a
Private Day Nursery	19%	+1.5%
Pre-prep Private School	0	n/a
Sessional Playgroup	4.5%	-7%
Cylch Meithrin	1%	-2.5%
Drop-Off Day Nursery	1%	+1%
Nanny/Au-Pair	0	No difference
Playscheme	2%	n/a
Family/friends (paid)	6%	+5%
Family/friends (unpaid)	40.5%	No difference
Stated <i>none during school holidays</i>	20%	n/a

- 5.13 Each responding parent/carer was invited to state how much they spent on an average week on (paid, non-funded) childcare:

The most frequently stated amount was £10.00-£49.00/week by 15% of all responding parents.

The wards which accounted for the highest frequency of parents stating: £100.00 or over per week were Plymouth and Town, both located in the central geographic locality.

It can be noted that each parent/carer was requested to state whether they received any help towards meeting the cost of their childcare and...

- 11% of responding parents/carers stated: (yes, the) childcare element of the Working Tax/Universal Credit
- 12% of responding parents/carers stated: (yes, the) Childcare vouchers/Tax Free Childcare
- <1% of responding parents/carers stated: (yes, the) Childcare Grant for Students
- 0 of responding parents/carers stated: (yes, a) Employer contribution

5.14 Each responding parent/carer was invited to state the numbers of hours they used childcare for, on average, on a typical week. Of those parents who responded to the question:

For term-time:

The average amount of hours stated by Merthyr Tydfil resident parents/carers was 3.5/week

The most frequently stated amount of hours was 0/week, followed in frequency by 15 hours/week.

The wards which accounted for the highest weekly average (stated) were: Town and Penydarren.

For holiday-times:

The average amount of hours stated by Merthyr Tydfil resident parents/carers was 2.6/week

The most frequently stated amount of hours was 0/week, followed in frequency by 20 hours/week.

The ward which accounted for the highest weekly average (stated) was: Plymouth ward.

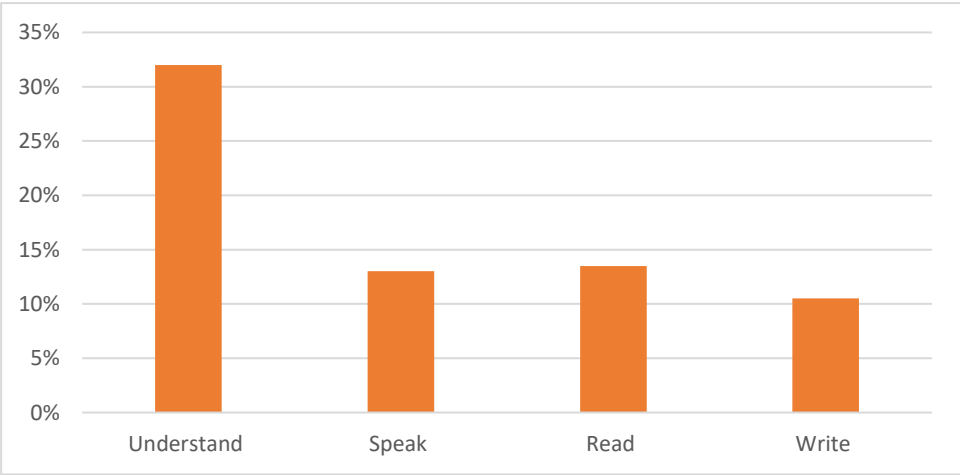
5.15 Parents/carers were invited to state how satisfied they currently were with their current childcare situation. Table 18 - Satisfaction levels

How satisfied a parent/carer was:	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers
Very Satisfied	52%
Quite Satisfied	19.5%
Quite Dissatisfied	3.5%
Very Dissatisfied	2%
(Said) Not applicable	7.5%
Did not say	12.5%

Parents/carers who stated: Quite Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied were (proportionally) most frequently resident in the Plymouth ward.

5.16 All responding parents/carers were invited to state whether they could speak, read and/or write the Welsh language.

Diagram 1 - Incidence of proficiency in Welsh language



Ultimately, 9% of responding parents/carers stated that they currently accessed childcare through the medium of Welsh, and these parents/carers were most frequently resident in the Town ward.

- 5.17 All parents/carers who stated that they were not – in autumn 2021 – using any childcare were invited to state why, including via the incidence of barriers. Further details - including qualitative feedback - on this key dynamic and factor can be read in Section 15 of this CSA.

Table 19 - Frequency of reasons stated as to why a parent/carer was not accessing/receiving support with childcare

Reasons	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers
Child is on a waiting list for a provider & we are waiting for a place to become available	2.5%
I use informal childcare such as a family member or friend	16.5%
I choose not to access any childcare	3%
I am a stay at home parent and have no need for childcare	8%
My children are old enough to look after themselves	<1%
There is no childcare with sufficient quality	1.5%
There is no suitable Welsh Language provision	1.5%
No suitable provision in our language, which is neither Welsh nor English	0
The childcare available is not flexible enough for my needs	4%
The cost of childcare is too expensive	13%
Childcare times are unsuitable	3.5%
There is no childcare available that is suitable for my child's age	2%
There is a problem with transport	2%
There is no childcare where I need it to be	2.5%
There is no childcare that can cater for my child's specific needs	3%
I only use childcare on an ad hoc basis and it is impossible to plan	4%
Other	10.5%



The Other response was most frequently: I am maternity leave. The one notably repeated response: the cost of childcare is too expensive, was most frequently stated by parents/carers resident in the Town ward.

- 5.18 All responding parents/carers were invited to state the degree to which they agreed with or (instead) disagreed with a selection of statements about childcare provision.

Table 20 - Parents general thoughts on aspects of childcare in the Merthyr Tydfil locality

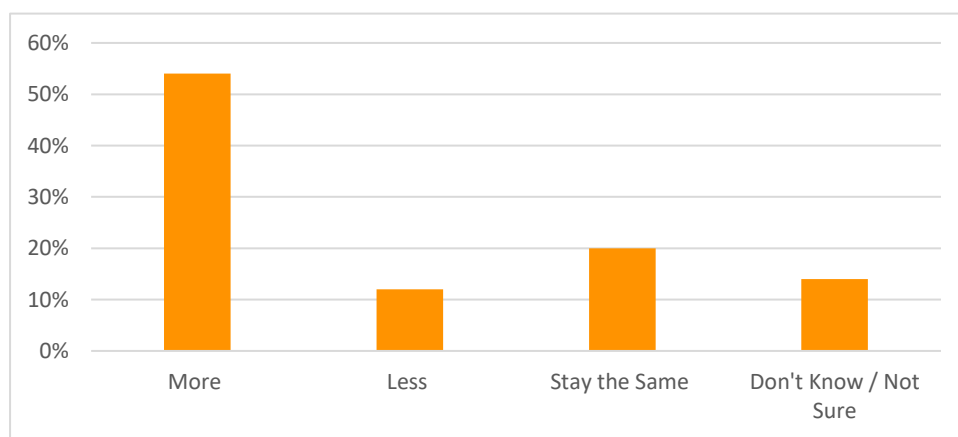
Statement	Strongly Agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable to me
I am satisfied with my childcare in term time	48%	19%	5%	4.5%	23%
I am satisfied with my childcare in school holidays	6%	14%	6.5%	39%	34.5%
The quality of childcare is high	44%	2%	3.5%	4%	46.5%
There is a good choice of childcare in my area	13%	22%	17%	22%	26%
Childcare is well located	32%	23%	11%	6.5%	27.5%
Childcare caters for my children's needs	37.5%	22%	5%	6.5%	29%
I would like my child to attend more registered childcare	21%	24%	13%	5.5%	36.5%
Childcare is too expensive	47%	18%	6.5%	1.5%	27%
I would prefer to use family/friends for childcare	17%	19%	22%	5.5%	36.5%
I have a problem with childcare arrangements that are unreliable	8%	6%	13.5%	19%	53.5%
Childcare is a barrier to me accessing employment or training	21%	12%	12%	12.5%	42.5%
I know where to find out information about childcare	26%	23%	16%	12.5%	22.5%
I know where to find information on financial assistance	16%	18%	23%	21%	22%

The response *strongly* agree: childcare is too expensive, was most frequently stated by parents/carers who were resident in the Town ward and Penydarren ward.

The response - agree: childcare is a barrier to me accessing employment or training, was most frequently stated by parents/carers who were resident in the Plymouth ward.

- 5.19 On a similar theme, parents/carers were invited to state whether in the past year, issues surrounding childcare had affected themselves or a[ny] partner: 32% stated that the issue of childcare had: caused problems at work; 12.5% stated that the issue of childcare had: prevented continuation of work; 17% stated that the issue of childcare had: stopped them from working/getting a job; 9.5% stated that the issue of childcare had: stopped them from accessing training.
- 5.20 An ultimate key response from parents/carers was to the question: *Do you anticipate you will need more or less childcare in the next couple of years?*

Diagram 2 - Consideration of whether more or less childcare will be accessed in the next 2 years



Those parents/carers who stated: More, were most frequently resident in the Gurnos ward, followed in frequency by the Cyfarthfa ward. The three types of *formal* childcare which parents stated 'More' in relation to with the highest frequency were:

1. Private Day Nursery (20% of all responding parents)
2. After School Club (17%)
3. Breakfast/Before School Club (16%)

## 6 Outcomes of Consultation with Stakeholders

The Welsh Government Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Guidance 2016 directs that Local Authorities should consult with local stakeholders and partner organisations to attain their perspective on priorities aligned to securing a sufficiency of childcare provision in their area. These stakeholders should include national umbrella organisation that make a key contribution to assisting the local authority, i.e.: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.

Therefore Section 7 of the 2022 Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment outlines feedback that was received through a series of virtual e-interviews with key stakeholders, partners and professionals during late 2021 and early 2022 including representatives of:

- Cwlwm, who provided feedback on behalf of: Mudiad Meithrin; Early Years Wales; Clybiau Plant Cymru Kid's Clubs; National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA Cymru) and PACEY Cymru
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Bwrdd Diogelu Safeguarding Board
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Employability Team
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Economic Development Team
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Children and Disabilities Team
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Youth Support Services
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Families Information Service
- Merthyr Tydfil Families First – Youth Mental Health
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council play services representatives
- Twyn Community Hub
- Merthyr Tydfil Welsh Community Hub
- Active Merthyr Tydfil
- Bridging the Gap <sup>12</sup>
- Merthyr Tydfil Health Visitor Team
- Merthyr Tydfil Jobcentre Plus.

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<sup>12</sup> See: <https://www.autism.org.uk/directory/b/bridging-the-gap>

## 6.1 Perceived strengths: childcare in the Merthyr Tydfil locality

- 6.1.1 The role of the Local Authority was consistently advocated and praised by partners, in particular their responsiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic, their role in terms of allocating sustainability themed grants and their dedicated support to their childcare partners and sector.
- 6.1.2 Three partners outlined how the implementation of the (new) Additional Learning Needs code <sup>13</sup>, which should commence in earnest in early 2022, would be a positive step for such children and families across Merthyr Tydfil, primarily as in their belief there would be more joint working , more systematic structure and more designated ALN-themed resourcing.
- 6.1.3 One partner believed that there had been progress in the Merthyr Tydfil locality whereby those working shift hours were being supported in an enhanced way through a particular type of flexible working initiative: namely that some local (and South West Wales) employers were starting to consider operating parent (or sometimes termed ‘child’) friendly shift patterns to allow school drop offs/collections. Alongside this, DWP highlighted how they had been working closely with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Newport City Council (and the local Wilko) and Welsh Government to deliver a fflecsi bus scheme<sup>14</sup> which provides transport to those requiring it to reach out of town industrial estates for early shift pattern start times.  
The scheme was introduced in July 2021 and there are evidently ongoing reviews to consider other South East Wales localities (such as Merthyr Tydfil), with the ambition being to get localities such as Merthyr Tydfil ‘in to work’ by *“tweaking how shift patterns can best be supported”*.

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<sup>13</sup> See page 6 for January 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 steps in: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2021/12/5/1639744540/implementing-additional-learning-needs-and-education-tribunal-wales-act-2018-practitioner-guide.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.newport.gov.uk/en/Council-Democracy/News/articles/2021/July-2021/New-fflecsi-bus-services-reaching-across-Newport.aspx>

## 6.2 Perceived areas for improvement: childcare in the Merthyr Tydfil locality

- 6.2.1 Two partners proposed that (in their opinion) there was a requirement for greater strategic thought on to best/better support families from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities once a child(ren) had moved out of the 3-4 years age range – both those parents/families who were resident in Flying Start (qualifying) communities and those resident outside such communities, even if this meant broadening the reach of Flying Start ear-marked funding. It can also be noted that another partner believed it was important that those families accessing the Flying Start programme (including the childcare element) should not become over-reliant on it and that it should not have a de-incentivizing effect on their ambitions and outlook, including in terms of their attitude towards potential employment.

Additionally, on the theme of the Flying Start programme – the term ‘postcode lottery’ was repeated, particularly aligned to a feeling of equity among families and frustrations with how certain families that could benefit from the programme – and its childcare element – were ‘missing out’.

- 6.2.2 There was varying feedback on how childcare has affected a key theme of employability. Certain professionals highlighted metrics demonstrating that – in their experience – the issue of childcare had not notably affected parents ability to take on training opportunities and/or employment opportunities. However, there was a more frequent incidence of professionals and partners, who also come into regular contact with families, outlining how they had known parents highlight suitable (and affordable, formal) childcare as being a barrier to them accessing employment, studying or a training opportunity. One such partner termed this as them *“receiving enquiries from parents that are struggling for work”*.

Two partners similarly highlighted how (in their opinion, words to the effect) *“minimum wage-type jobs in Merthyr Tydfil are possibly seen as unproductive to consider due to the possibility of having to pay towards childcare”*.

One partner who worked within the employment sector believed that there was a problem whereby a lack of lack of childcare outside of 8am – 6pm could be causing a ‘void’ in the local labour market that could only be countered by enhancing the profile or accessibility to provision that adopted a more flexible outlook in terms of ‘opening’ hours. Another partner who worked in the employment and training sector highlighted their organisations understanding that *“some”* childcare workforce professionals had exited that sector to work in two other particular sectors: 1. Retail sector and 2. Hospitality sector, due to the fact that they could earn a higher wage in such occupations.

One partner believed that ideally a more pronounced emphasis could be placed on encouraging young people to work in the local childcare sector itself, including when they left Merthyr Tydfil College with a relevant qualification, to prevent such aspiring young people from being distracted by the perceived attractions of others sectors.

- 6.2.3 Four partners who were consulted chose to highlight challenges aligned to suitable childcare for children with additional learning needs. One such partner outlined a perception that:

*Within Merthyr... there is a 'feeling' that there is a lack of service providers/provisions that would be suitable for children with physical disabilities. The current services available are limited, they are not flexible and will often close during the school holidays when the support is needed the most".*

Three partners believed that out of school childcare - despite the high profile role and work of one well-established provider - was an area of provision for the Merthyr Tydfil locality that could be enhanced, in view of the fact that the pandemic had had an effect on the wellbeing of some children and that children with identified ALN had during the pandemic been (in the words of one such partner) *"been getting left further behind"*.

- 6.2.4 Two partners repeated their perception that there were (in their opinion) degrees by which funded childcare places and funding for childcare was clear and evident to them and possibly families; with them broadly consider Flying Start childcare places to be a relatively clear offer, the Childcare Offer to be *fairly* clear and Tax Free Childcare to be relatively unclear.

- 6.2.5 Three partners highlighted their perception that out of school childcare in the Merthyr Tydfil locality was in actuality quite school-based (in terms of school-themed clubs) and that any development of new provisions really could adopt a focus on the secondary age cohort - in effect for further exploration of resources that could offer traditional (non-school based) out of school activities to be undertaken – aligned to an identified demand. On an associated theme, three partners also highlighted how in their (anecdotal and or frontline) opinion there should be a greater number of out of school childcare activities and (non-school based) clubs in the locality with (once again) the pre-teenage cohort being identified as being a priority for such an expanded provision. One partner made a statement which represented the views of others when saying *"school based out of school childcare appears to have 'dried up' since the pandemic"*.

- 6.2.6 There are four Welsh childcare providers operating in the Merthyr Tydfil locality. Two partners highlighted a[n anecdote] *"sense"* that childcare availability had diminished (in terms of the number of places and providers) since the previous Childcare Sufficiency Assessment in

2017. They explained that this was their “*feeling*” and that it related to the childminding profession in particular. PACEY Cymru explained how they welcomed the opportunity to continue to work with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and other partners to promote childminding as a career option, and that they would, again continue to, seek to increase the number of Welsh medium and bilingual childminding services locally. The organisation also outlined how they would welcome the opportunity to continue to work with the Local Authority to promote the Welsh language development support and training that is available for registered childminders.

Representatives of PACEY Cymru also explained how their organisation was working in partnership with Local Authorities, the Jobcentre Plus, PaCE, Careers Wales and other agencies to create interest and increase recruitment to become a childminder, which “*not only provides wider childcare options for families in their local area but supports people back into work*”...

- 6.2.7 ...Further on the theme of the childminding profession, representatives of PACEY Cymru outlined their concern about a general decline of childminding numbers across Wales and that they had an awareness - through their partnership working with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council - that there is a “*very low*” number of childminders in the locality. Their specific feedback was that “*we understand there is a need to increase the number of registered childminders, including Welsh speaking childminders within that area. PACEY Cymru have been focusing on promotion of childminding as a career choice and childcare option for families to support sustainability, childminder numbers and availability of childcare choice for parents. We have met with the local authority to discuss partnership working on this aim and welcome the opportunity to continue this partnership approach to the promotion of childminding*”.

PACEY Cymru outlined how they had supported the recruitment of Welsh medium/bilingual childminders in Merthyr Tydfil. In relation to this work, PACEY Cymru had evidently reached out to Menter Iaith and other agencies to create interest and increase recruitment to become a childminder within the Welsh speaking/learner community, with the aim of providing wider childcare options for Welsh medium families in their local area.

- 6.2.8 Merthyr Tydfil Family Information Service (see: <https://www.merthyrfis.org/>) gave feedback which demonstrated that its enquiries in 2021 tended to recurrently focus on out of school childcare, in particular the availability of breakfast club provision and after school club provision. This incidence was followed in frequency by enquiries that focused on the existence of childminders who could both drop-off at a school and also pick-up after a school day, with all of these relevant enquiries having a degree of association with wrap around care.

### 6.3 Perceived action/strategic priorities: childcare in the Merthyr Tydfil locality

- 6.3.1 Three partners highlighted what they perceived to be a priority, for the Merthyr Tydfil locality's childminding sector to be "*reinvigorated*" aligned to an understanding that a number of long-standing childminders were approaching an age and a position where they may (also) consider retiring.
- 6.3.2 Two partners outlined their perception that there could be an enhanced availability of formal childminding provision during weekends. They aligned this consideration to their belief that a lack of formal childcare options at such a period may be preventing some parents from taking up retail sector employment on Saturdays and/or Sundays – in effect, hindering employability.
- 6.3.3 One partner proposed that it could be exploratory for DWP and partner projects such as Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE) and Communities for Work (CfW) to work together with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to provide relevant training and support for people that wanted to work in the childcare sector, formulating an ongoing training course to help (re)fill in any emerging workforce gap. Another different partner suggested that there was need to introduce young people to the possibility of careers as childcare and play professionals when they were in their early teens and that should be a strategic ambition that the local authority could help give momentum.
- 6.3.4 Two partners outlined how in their experience COVID-19 had indeed had an effect on certain children's development and lifestyle(s), including in terms of them pursuing physical and sporting out of school activities. One partner believed that a pre-COVID focus on children's healthy living and wellbeing had to be re-established, in particular aligned to (a greater amount of) opportunities during the school holidays and to address the possibility of some families falling in to sedentary lifestyles. An association was indeed made between the effects of COVID-19 on childhood obesity rates and how the out of school childcare sector in the Merthyr Tydfil had a role to play to address this issue. Another partner believed that there was a possible gap in terms of physical activity themed opportunities for the "*pre-teen*" 10-12 year old age group in relation to what was available and accessible in the Merthyr Tydfil locality. As an interesting contrast, one partner believed that childcare, including out of school childcare activities, should as a sector examine the extent to which it could become "*more tech savvy*" as a way of maintaining children's interest in them accessing holiday clubs, playscheme and non-school based out of school clubs/provisions.



## 6.4 Outcomes of Consultation and Young People

In early 2022, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council commissioned both quantitative and qualitative consultation with children and young people that are resident across the county for the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and for an associated project: the production of a Play Sufficiency Assessment, which similarly to the CSA, all Welsh local authorities are directed to produce. The quantitative consultation incorporated specific questions aligned to the theme of out of school childcare and was called the Big Play Survey for Primary School pupils. A total of 454 children aged 5-17 years responded to the survey and their (relevant to this document) feedback is summarised below.

6.4.1 Table 21 below outlines the frequency with which this cohort of children and young people stated that they accessed a particular type of out of school childcare – that was not based at a school that they attended.

Table 21 - Frequency of usage of types of out of school childcare

Type of out of school childcare (not based at a local school)	Percentage accessing
After School Club	8%
Breakfast Club	3%
Holiday Club	<1%
Childminder	<1%
None of the above	88%

Table 21 indicates that when a Merthyr Tydfil-resident child aged 5-17 years stated that when they were accessing a type of formal childcare outside of their school – this was most frequently an after school club.

40% of all respondents did access a form of out of school childcare at the school that they attended: be it an after school club, a breakfast club and/or a holiday playscheme.

- 6.4.2 Participating children and young people were asked whether they ever received informal childcare from friends and family when they were not at school?

Table 22 - Frequency of usage of types of family-themed informal childcare

Type of informal childcare	Percentage of children and young people evidently receiving
Grandparent	60%
Older sibling	26.5%
Someone else in my family	33%
Friends of my parent(s)	17%
Neighbours of my parent(s)	6%

- 6.4.3 All children and young people were invited to state what kinds of activities and clubs they liked doing best when they were not at school. Although the responses to this theme tended to be play-themed, it is worth noting that the five most frequent activities stated by the responding children and young people were:
- Going outside and hanging out with friends (46%)
  - Football (28%)
  - Other sporting activities (20%)
  - Rugby (16%)
  - Playing computer games (8.5%)
- 6.4.4 Children and young people were asked how they preferred to be consulted on issues and themes such as out of school activities. 37% of children and young people stated that they would like more online consultation. 57% of children and young people stated that they would like to be consulted through researchers visiting their school, with 6% not being sure.

- 6.4.5 Finally, of relevance, children and young people were requested to state how they continued to feel about attending places and clubs, because of COVID-19.

Table 23 - Children and young people and their thought(s) on COVID-19

Statement	Percentage of children and young people stating
I am worried about it - it might make me think twice about going to clubs and activities	13%
I do think about it - but it won't stop me from going to clubs and activities	40%
I don't really think about it	47%

## 6.5 Outcomes of Consultation with Schools and Merthyr Tydfil College

The Welsh Government Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Guidance 2016 directs that Local Authorities should consult with their local stakeholders and that this should include local schools and (any) further education college – in the case for this CSA: Merthyr Tydfil College.

In the Merthyr Tydfil locality, there are <sup>15</sup>:

- 21 English-medium primary schools
- 2 Welsh-medium primary schools
- 3 English-medium secondary schools
- 1 Special School

In January 2021, all of the schools located in the Merthyr Tydfil area were invited to complete an online survey which focused on the theme of childcare and views on specific themes associated with the subject. A total of 17 schools (60%) submitted a response and their collective feedback is summarised below.

Table 24 - the schools which responded were:

School	Ward
Gwaunfarren Primary School	Penydarren
Abercanaid Community School	Plymouth
Twynyrodyn Community School	Town
Dowlais Primary School	Dowlais
Troedyrhiw Community School	Plymouth
Gellifaelog Primary School	Penydarren
Coed-Y Dderwen Primary School	Cyfarthfa
Abercanaid Community School	Plymouth
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful	Town
St Aloysius RC Primary School	Gurnos

<sup>15</sup> A planned new RC all-through (3-16 years) school is planned to open in the Gurnos during the planning cycle for the CSA.

School	Ward
Gellifaelog Primary School	Penydarren
Goetre Primary School	Gurnos
Edwardsville Primary School	Treharris
Greenfield Special School	Plymouth
St Mary's Primary School	Town

- 6.5.1 Feedback from representatives of the responding schools indicated that a free (of charge) breakfast club is the most frequent type of formal childcare that is situated at a school in the Merthyr Tydfil locality.
- 6.5.2 All representatives of (relevant) schools were invited to state whether they believed it was beneficial (for the school) to have childcare on-site: Approximately 50% of schools said that this was the case, with just one stating that they *did not* find it beneficial, and that was a reason why they had worked with local childcare providers to initiate a drop-off and pick-up service. Other specific feedback on the subject of having childcare on-site *included*:
- “It makes the ‘process’ of wraparound easier for parents... and pupils become familiar with the setting”.*
- “It just gives our parents more options and gives them convenience”.*
- “The on-site childcare helps to ‘retain catchment area pupil’s. We looked into expanding our childcare facility before the pandemic but the ‘need wasn’t there’ to make it financially viable”.*
- “It helps develop early links between families and school”.*
- 6.5.3 Only three representatives of schools (two of which were located in the Penydarren ward) stated that COVID-19 had with a significance affected the ability of their childcare to operate, and in both cases this was a breakfast club and/or an after school club. One such respondent stated that *“the breakfast club did not open for a period of time as we felt it best that its pupils did not mix”* – and another school gave a similar response when stating *“it was challenging due to pupils not being able to mix”*.

6.5.4 Returning to the theme of school drop-offs and pick-ups, Table 25 indicates the frequency with which specific providers worked with a school to action this.

Table 25 - Frequency with which specific types of formal childcare providers actioned drop-offs and or pick-ups

Type of childcare	Percentage of schools that denoted they worked with such a provider to action a drop-off or a pick-up
Childminder(s)	46%
Day Nursery(s)	53%
Playgroup/Cylch Meithrin	6%
Not Sure	6%
Other	13%

Table 26 - Incidence of pick-ups and drop-offs being operated by childcare providers

Ward name	Number of childminders that drop-off/pick-up at school(s) in this ward	Number of early years childcare providers that drop-off/pick-up at school(s) in this ward	Total incidence of Drop-off/pick-up initiated at a (number of) school(s)
Bedlinog	2	3	5
Cyfarthfa	2	5	7
Dowlais	1	2	3
Gurnos	0	3	3
Merthyr Vale	1	1	2
Park	0	0	0
Penydarren	3	3	6
Plymouth	4	5	9
Town	1	2	3
Treharris	4	4	8
Vaynor	1	3	4
<b>Total – Merthyr Tydfil</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>50</b>

- 6.5.5 All representatives of schools were invited to state whether - in their personal opinion/experience - there was need for more of specific types of childcare places in their local/immediate area. Table 27 presents their collective responses.

Table 27 - Frequency with representatives personally believed that there was a 'need' for more types of childcare in their school's local area

Type of childcare	Percentage of representatives of schools that stated Yes	Percentage of representatives of schools that stated No	Percentage of representatives of schools that stated Don't Know
After School Club	66%	0	34%
Nursery Wraparound	40%	6%	54%
Playgroup/Cylch Meithrin	33%	6%	61%
Holiday Childcare	66%	6%	28%
Free Breakfast Club	13%	60%	27%
Flying Start childcare places	27%	27%	46%

Table 27 indicates out of school-type provisions are what representatives of schools believed (in their personal) opinion there was a need for further places of. I was also noted that a response of Don't Know or No tended to recur from schools that were located in the Plymouth ward.

- 6.5.6 All representatives of schools were invited to state whether – to the best of their knowledge – their school site may have an[y] available space at which a new childcare provision could potentially be established: 33% answered that it did (with three of these schools also being located in the Plymouth ward) and qualifications to this response, *included*:

*"The space could be used as our 'nurture provision'. This is a classroom which is currently utilised on a timetabled basis for our Foundation phase pupils as an additional space. The space has access onto the Foundation Phase yard and is accessible to toilets".*

*"I would be happy for my site to be used as a venue for an after school/holiday club for children and young people with ALN".*

All of the respondents that answered in the affirmative – including the representatives of three schools situated the Plymouth ward – confirmed that they would be pleased to receive advice and support with such a potential development, including aligned to reorganisation and an avoidance of displacement.

- 6.5.7 All representatives of schools were invited to state whether they were aware of the existence of Merthyr Tydfil Family Information Service. 40% stated they were aware of Merthyr Tydfil Family Information Service - and 60% evidently were not (with each of the schools located in the Penydarren ward providing this answer).
- 6.5.8 In terms of Merthyr Tydfil College, representatives of its on-site nursery: *Here We Grow* Day Nursery confirmed how the college is registered with the Care Inspectorate Wales and is open for students, Flying Start families and all children within the community. The nursery evidently offers places at the college and fees are dependent on a family's individual circumstances. When registering for a College course, a student can then apply for a space in the nursery. Sessions are allocated to coincide with a student's timetable and where possible the nursery will also offer sessions for study time. Additionally, the nursery promotes Tax Free Childcare, Childcare Offer places , the early start scheme and enhanced support sessions.



## 6.6 Outcomes of Consultation with Employers

The Welsh Government Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Guidance 2016 directs that Local Authorities should consult with local employers, including small, medium-sized and large employers. This ambition was particularly important for the 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment given the changes to the way the labour market operated and functioned as an outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. Essentially, nationally there has been observed an increase in the incidence of employees working from home/not working in a contained work/office space. This increase in the incidence of flexible working from home has logically meant that some parents/carers have (also) been providing childcare in their home, particularly for pre-school aged children, as opposed to them using a formal childcare providers, (in particular) such as Full Day Care nursery or a childminder.

Therefore, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council focused on attaining feedback from its varied employment sector and widely publicised and promoted an online survey.

Five employers responded to this survey and they ranged in size from the local authority, which employs 2,371 people and a care home employing 12 people. All of the responding employers feedback is collectively summarised in the section below.

Further details about the labour market in the Merthyr Tydfil locality can be read in section 11 of this CSA.

According to statistics published by NOMIS in September 2021, the following metrics apply to the business sector in the Merthyr Tydfil locality <sup>16</sup>.

Enterprises	Number in Merthyr Tydfil
Micro 0-9 employees	1,175
Small 10-49 employees	125
Medium 50-249 employees	20
Large 250+ employees	5
Local Units	
Micro 0-9 employees	1,380
Small 10-49 employees	280
Medium 50-249 employees	45
Large 250+ employees	10

<sup>16</sup> The table presents analysis of businesses at both Enterprise and Local Unit level. An Enterprise is the smallest combination of legal units (generally based on VAT and/or PAYE records) which has a certain degree of autonomy within an Enterprise Group. An individual site (for example a factory or shop) in an enterprise is called a local unit.

### 6.6.1 Key logistic detail about responding employees

The average percentage of female employees in each responding organisation was 64%, (with the highest percentage being 100%.)  
The average percentage of male employees in each responding organisation was 36%, (with the highest percentage being 82%.)

Table 28 indicates the percentage of employers workforces that (to the best of their knowledge) had children aged 0-18 years.

Table 28 - Percentages of workforces who had children aged 0-18 years

Employer stated that to the best of their knowledge, this was the percentage of their workforce with children aged 0-18 years	Percentage of employers
None	0
Up to 25%	0
Up to 50%	0
Up to 75%	50%
All my employees	0
Don't Know	50%

All responding Merthyr Tydfil-locality based employers were invited to state whether they implemented/enabled specific types of irregular working hours for their employees/workforce.

Table 29 - Incidence of responding employers implementing types of flexible working arrangements

Type of flexible working arrangement	Percentage of employers offering
Weekends	75%
Shift Patterns	50%
Work evenings after 6pm	50%
Overnight	25%
Working before 8am	75%
Working bank holidays	50%
Working annualised hours	0
Annualised hours	0
Compressed hours	25%
Job Share	0
Flex-time	25%
Part-time	75%
Term-time hours	0
Voluntary reduced hours	0
Career break	25%
9-day fortnight	0
Other(s)	0

All responding Merthyr Tydfil-locality based employers were invited to state whether during the COVID-19 pandemic they had seen a change in the way that their employees access flexible working arrangements? 75% stated that they had done so – and the changes that they had seen included:

- There is more of a desire to work from home and to work flexible hours, particularly around school times – and similarly
- An increased demand for flexible working to support with childcare

#### **6.6.2 Opinions about childcare in the Merthyr Tydfil locality**

Representatives of employers were invited to state whether - in their personal opinion - there was enough formal registered childcare provision across the locality?

0 stated that they believed that there was; 50% stated that they believed there was not – and 50% stated I don't know.

Responding employers were asked: How frequently do you experience problems with employees not continuing to work in your organisation following a maternity/paternity leave?

The most frequent response was that this sometimes happens – stated by 75% of respondents.

#### **6.6.3 Effects of COVID-19**

Representatives of employers were invited to state whether they could contrast a percentage of their Merthyr Tydfil-based employees which were working from home before the pandemic and after the pandemic.

- The average percentage that were working from home before the COVID-19 pandemic was 10% and;
- The average percentage that were working from home after the COVID-19 pandemic was 60%

Responding employers were asked: To the best of your knowledge, have any of your employees who are parents **stopped using registered childcare** (such as nursery, childminder or out of school club) as an outcome of COVID-19? 25% of representatives stated that they knew that this had been the case – and 25% stated that in their experience the COVID-19 pandemic combined with childcare challenges had been *directly* responsible for one or more of their employees exiting their job.

#### 6.6.4 Financial support and childcare

50% of employers stated that they offered childcare-themed benefits to their employees, which were either:

- Childcare vouchers or;
- Financial assistance towards childcare

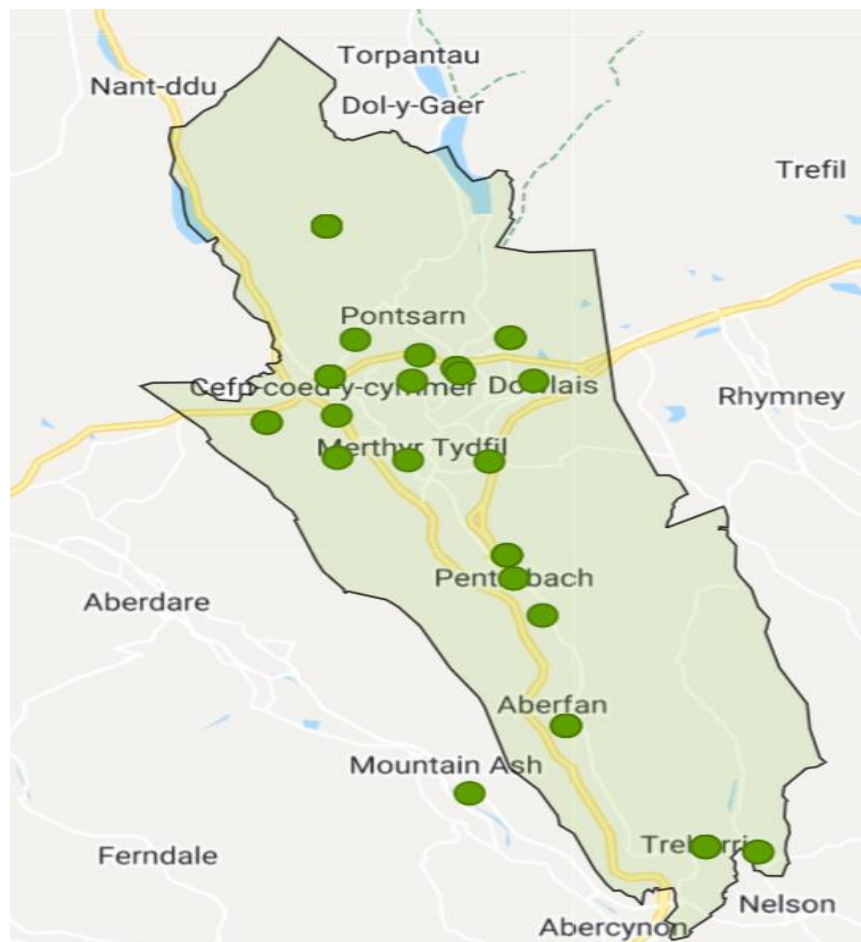
In terms of information and financial support:

- 0 employers stated that they informed their employees/workforce about the Flying Start programme/childcare places
- 50% of employers stated that they informed their employees/workforce about the Childcare Offer

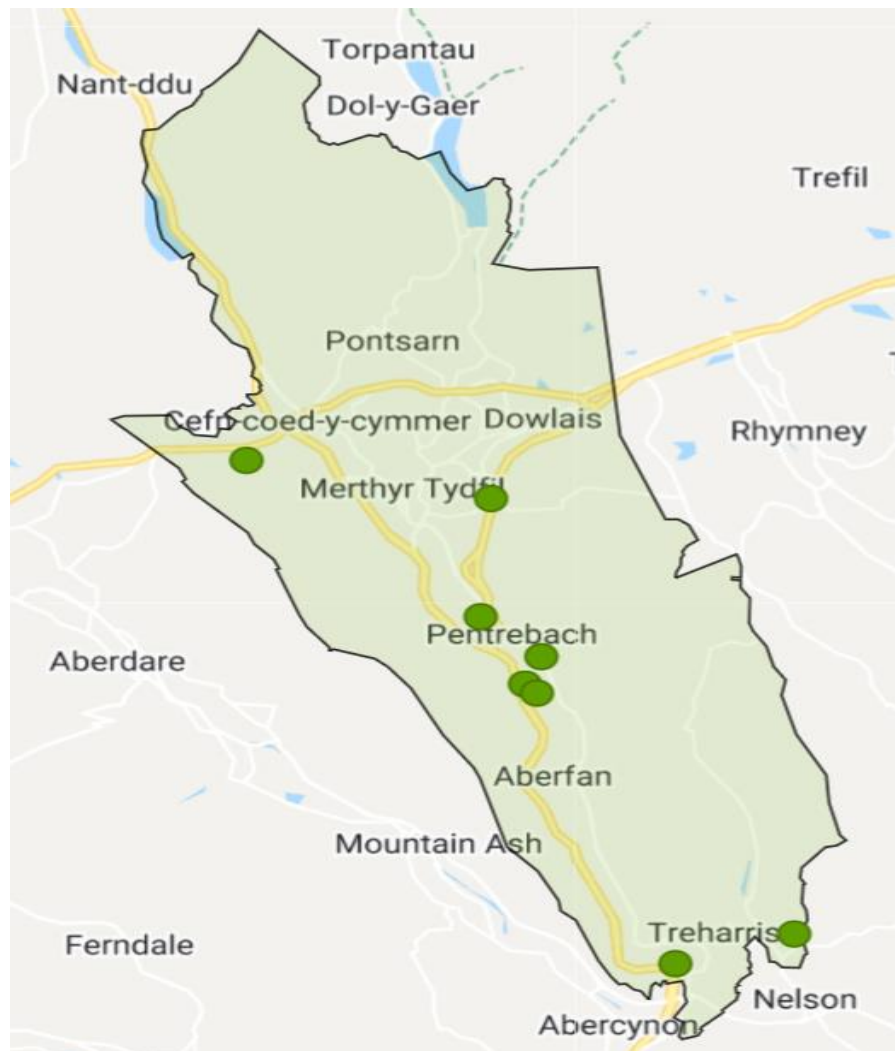
Representatives of employers were invited to state whether they were aware of the existence of Merthyr Tydfil Family Information Service. 25% stated that they were (including as would be expected the representatives of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council) – however, 75% stated that they were not.

## 7 Geographical Distribution

### 7.1 Image 1 – Location of 24 early years childcare settings/providers – i.e. Full Day Care providers, sessional daycare providers and Cylchoedd Meithrin



7.2 Image 2 – Location of the 8 registered childminders



7.3 Image 3 – Location of the 3 out of school childcare providers, including after school clubs





## 8 Sustainability

COVID-19 has had a pronounced effect on the childcare sector across Wales. The pandemic naturally led to all types of childcare providers, including those that are situated in Merthyr Tydfil, needing to regroup, evaluate and adapt their business models. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are analysed in further detail in Section 10 (pages 76-80) of this CSA.

The narrative and analysis below presents outcomes of the autumn 2021 structured survey with (37) childcare providers across the Merthyr Tydfil locality which focus on the theme of sustainability, including a review of how sustainability funding evidently supported the sector.

- 8.1 As part of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's survey with childcare providers in autumn 2021, each setting was invited to state if their business experienced (or continues to experience) issues as an outcome of COVID-19.

Diagram 3 - Incidence of issues being experienced by setting/group-based providers as an outcome of COVID-19

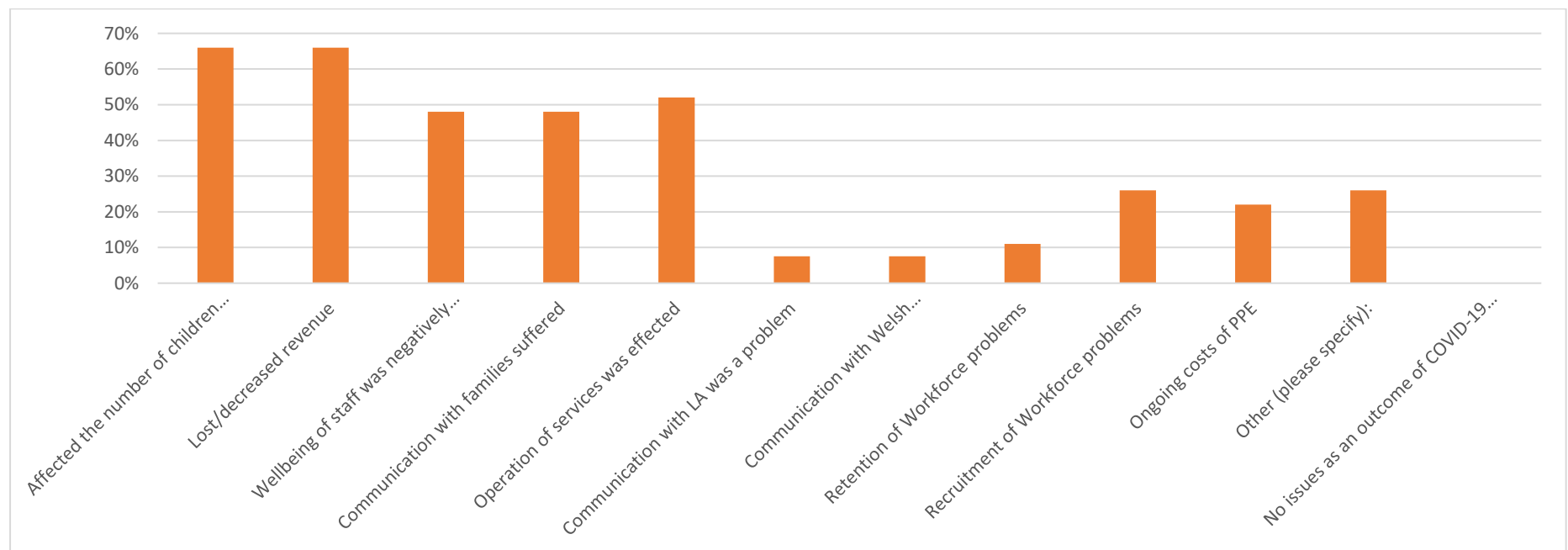
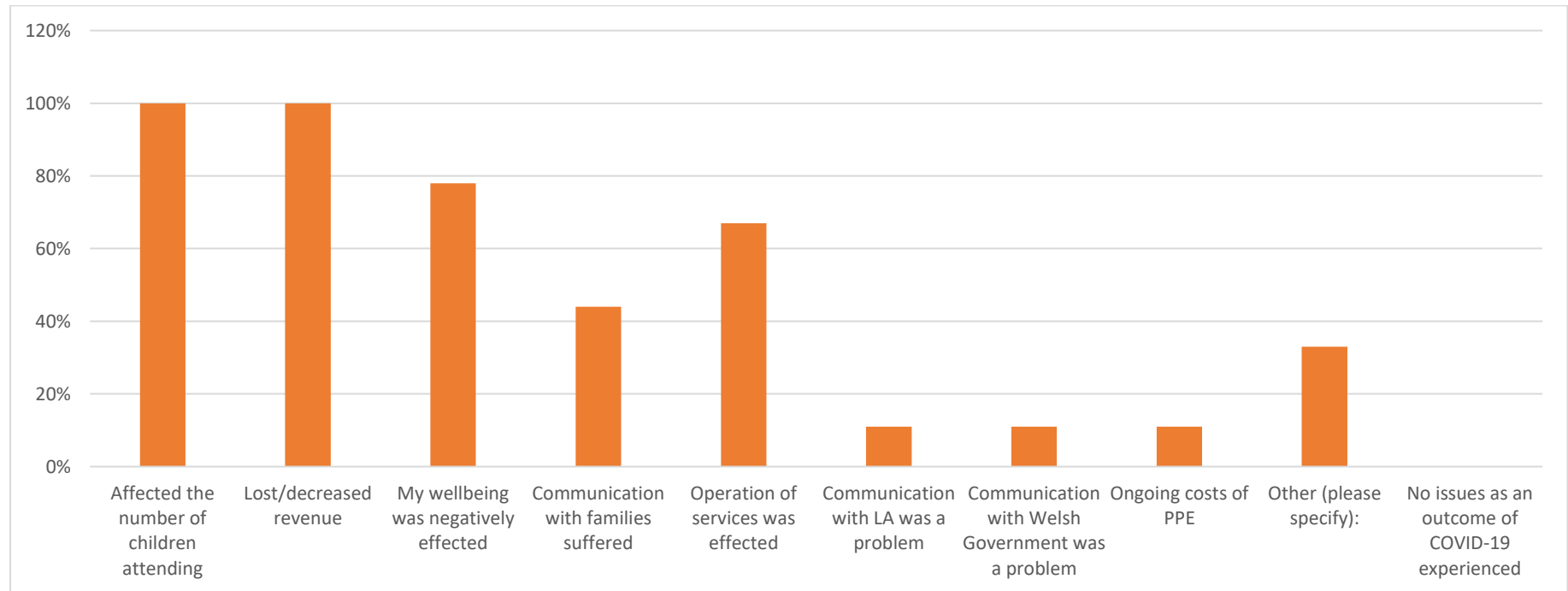


Diagram 4 shows early years childcare and out of school childcare providers/settings collective feedback about the incidence of any issues or challenges experienced as an outcome of COVID-19. The location that accounted for the highest incidence of a provider stating ‘lost/decreased revenue’ was the Plymouth ward. The location that accounted for the highest incidence of a provider stating ‘affected the number of children’ was also the Plymouth ward.

Diagram 4 - Incidence of issues being experienced by registered childminders as an outcome of COVID-19



- 8.2 All of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's formal childcare providers were also invited to state what they considered would be the *main* ongoing effects on their business and its **sustainability** due to COVID-19 over the over the forthcoming 12 months?  
The five most frequent statements were (in order of frequency):
1. Concerns about a possibly further reducing number of children accessing a provision
  2. Concerns about PPE costs (notable cleaning-associated costs) remaining a factor
  3. Concerns about recruiting staff and more frequently *losing* staff
  4. Parents generally wanting "*fewer*" hours
  5. Concerns about staff anxiety in relation to COVID-19
- 8.3 Focusing initially the largest sector in the Borough, only two of (the 24) early years childcare providers stated in autumn 2021 that they had to change their business model as an outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. In both cases their adaptation was to "*be open for fewer hours*".
- Subsequently, all of Merthyr Tydfil's childcare providers were subsequently invited to state whether they/their setting would benefit from advice, support and/or training with short and/or medium term business modelling. 35% stated that they would and:
- 27% stated that they would welcome support, training and advice with business modelling and sustainability strategies
  - 21% stated that they would welcome support, training and advice with traditional marketing
  - 24% stated that they would welcome support, training and advice with virtual marketing
- 8.4 25% of Merthyr Tydfil early years childcare providers stated that they had some type of plan(s) to continue to re-energise income generation - Repeated plans - in addition to getting back to a pre-COVID-19 occupancy levels were:
- Pursuing a more strident marketing policy
  - Changing from offering sessions to a Full Day Care model

- 8.5 Each of the Merthyr Tydfil locality's formal setting/group-based childcare providers were also asked: did they have any plans/intentions to increase their capacity/develop new provision over the forthcoming 2 years? 22% stated that they did have and collectively this totalled 47 of new places, which when aligned to ward could be categorised as follows:

Ward providers(s) located in	Number of proposed new places with early years childcare providers	Number of proposed new places with out of school childcare providers
Treharris	5	10
Vaynor	8	8
Dowlais	8	-
Gurnos	8	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>

- 8.6 In autumn 2021, 7.5% of Merthyr Tydfil's formal: (a) early years childcare providers and (b) out of school childcare providers stated that they had accessed the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Business Interruption Loan Scheme. 7.5% of Merthyr Tydfil's formal (a) early years childcare providers and (b) out of school childcare providers also stated that they had accessed the Coronavirus Bounce Back Loan Scheme. *Repeated* types of feedback on both schemes included:

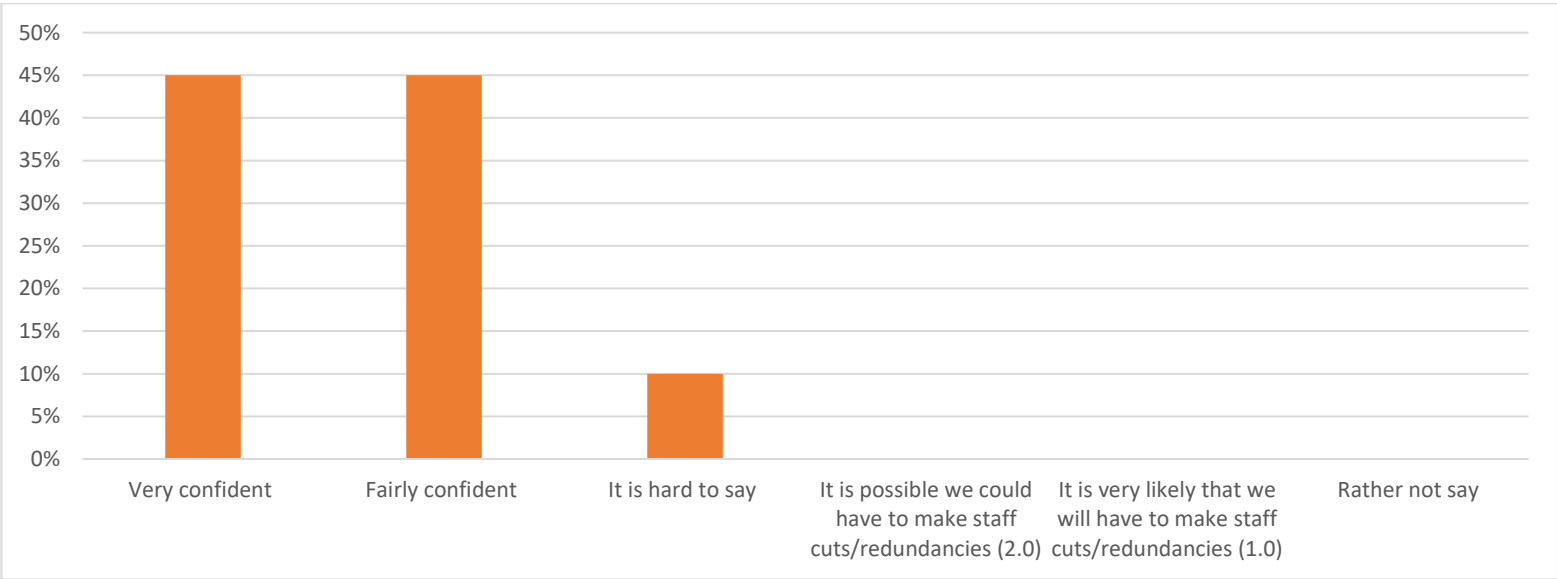
*"Both were easy to access..."*

*"... the payment was helpful in sustaining our business".*

- 8.7 However (many more) 81% of Merthyr Tydfil's registered: (a) early years childcare providers and (b) out of school childcare providers stated that they had accessed the (pivotal) Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS).

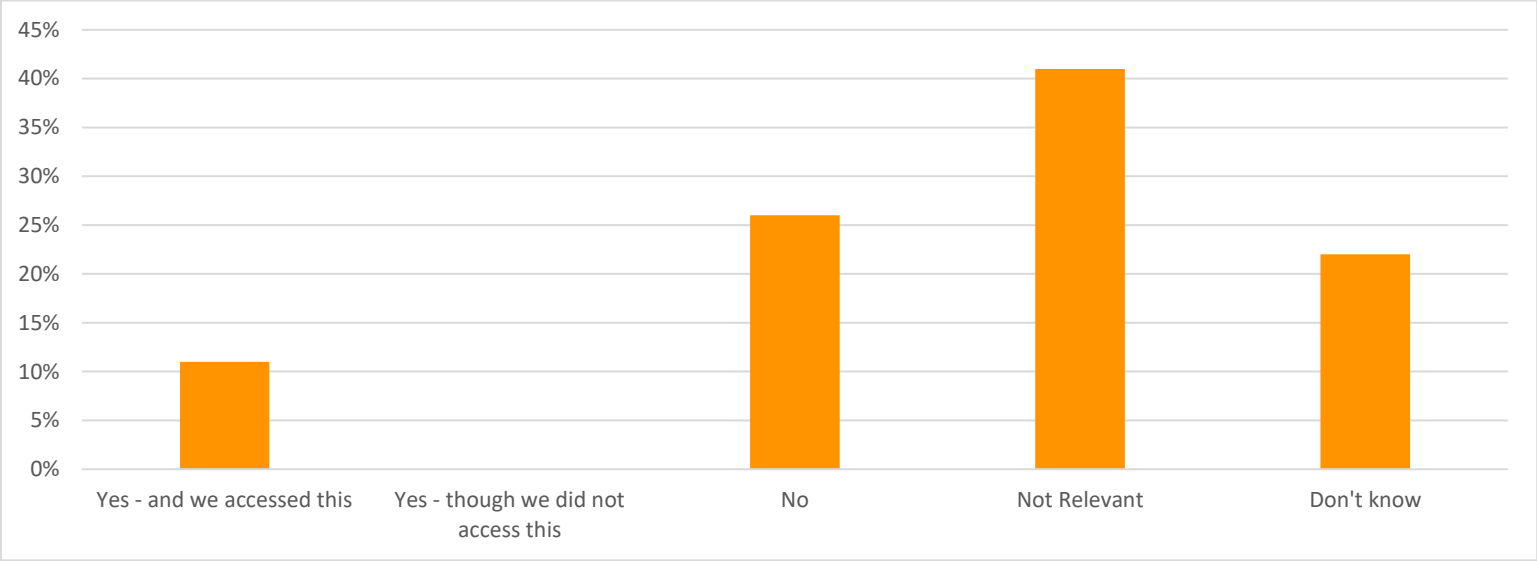
8.8 All *relevant* (see 8.7 above): a) early years childcare providers and (b) out of school childcare providers were requested to state how confident they were in autumn 2021 that they would be able to retain their current staff team as an outcome of the conclusion of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Diagram 5 - Levels of confidence in retaining staff



8.9 Subsequently, Diagram 6 below indicates responses that were received from registered: (a) early years childcare providers and (b) out of school childcare providers about eligibility for the Business Rates Relief/holiday due to COVID-19.

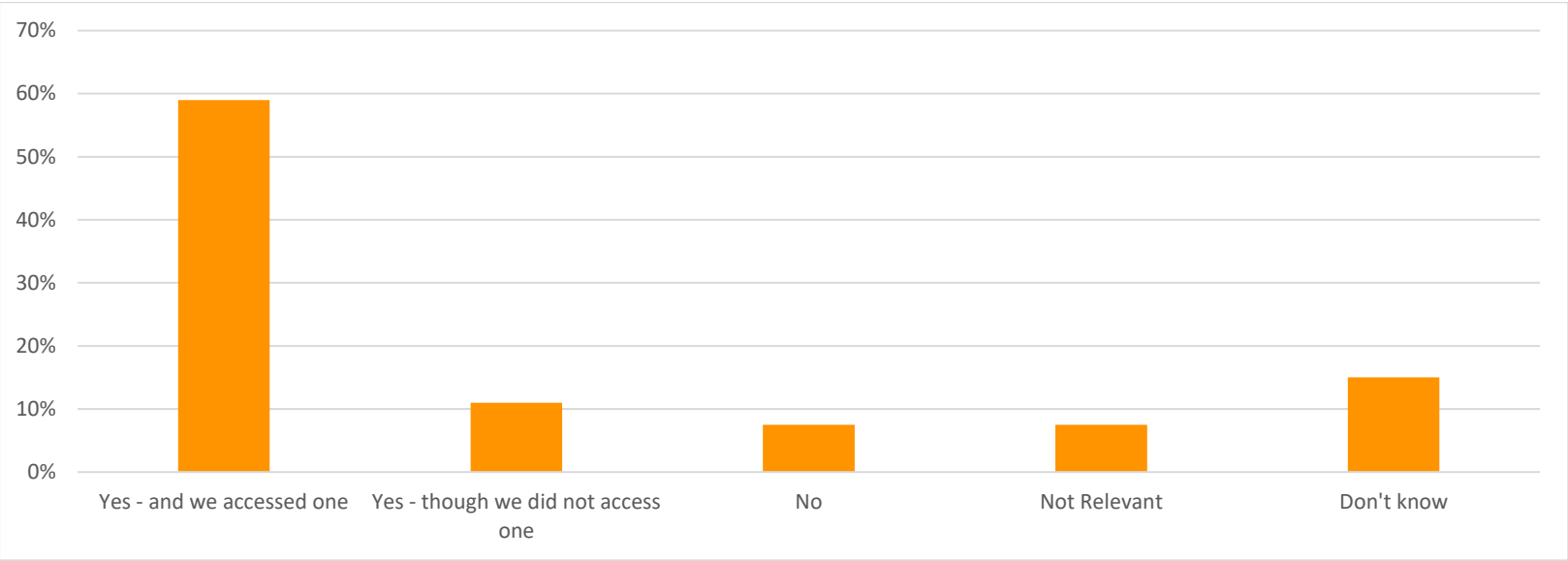
Diagram 6 - Responses from Merthyr Tydfil’s settings and groups about eligibility for the Business Rates Relief



It can be noted that only one of the twenty-four responding early years childcare providers stated that they were aware that the Business Rates Relief scheme was extended for 3 years until March 2025. The other twenty-three stated that they were not aware of this fact.

8.10 The theme of awareness of the ability to receive Welsh government and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council originating sustainability grants was highlighted with setting-based childcare providers.

Diagram 7 - Feedback on awareness eligibility for sustainability grants



Those providers that did indeed access a grant, gave feedback – including in terms of its contribution to supporting sustainability – which included:

*“There was a good system and our grant was very easy to access”.<sup>17</sup>*

*“It was vital to help sustain our business”.*

*“The payment really helped with the cost of PPE”.*

<sup>17</sup> Most frequently the provider denoted this as a ‘local authority’ grant.

8.11 In autumn 2021, all childcare providers were invited to confirm a length of time aligned to how long they expected to continue to be providing childcare:

Diagram 8 - Responses from : (a) early years childcare providers and (b) out of school childcare providers on length of time they expected to continue in business

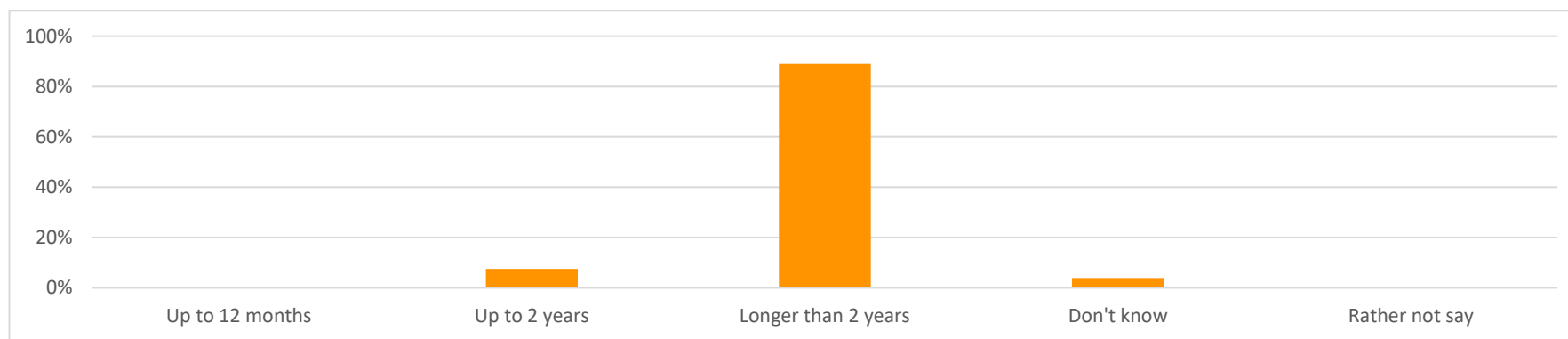
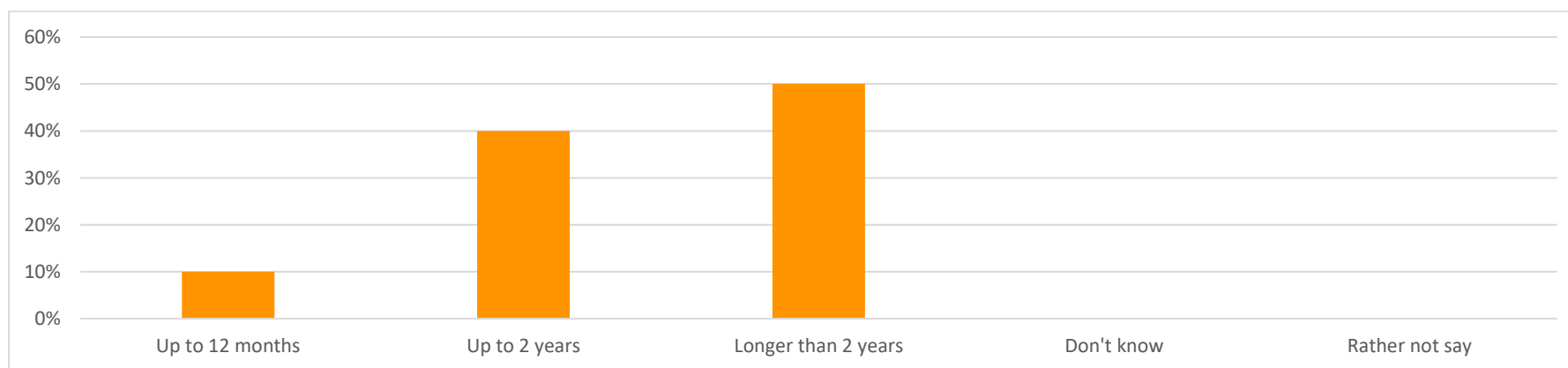


Diagram 9 - Responses from registered childminders on the length of time they expected to continue in business





- 8.12 All registered childcare providers were invited to summarise details on plans aligned to **sustainability** over the next 18 months (up to spring 2023).

Table 30 - Incidence of plans aligned to the theme of ongoing sustainability and support to families, up to spring 2023

Increase your fees for paid places/provision?		
Yes plans in place = 38%	No plans, but maybe = 33%	No plans – will not happen = 29%
It can be noted that four Plymouth ward <i>early years childcare providers</i> stated that they had plans in place.		
Further enhance provision for children with additional learning needs?		
Yes plans in place = 13%	No plans, but maybe = 46%	No plans – will not happen = 41%
It can be noted that two of the three <i>early years childcare providers</i> who stated that they had plans in place were located in the Dowlais ward.		
Extend your opening hours?		
Yes plans in place = 4%	No plans, but maybe = 17%	No plans – will not happen = 79%
It can be noted that two of the four <i>early years childcare providers</i> who stated that they had ‘no plans, but maybe, were located in the Penydarren ward.		
Expand the number of Welsh-medium places that are offered?		
Yes plans in place = 13%	No plans, but maybe = 17%	No plans – will not happen = 70%
Once again, it can be noted that two of the four <i>early years childcare providers</i> who stated that they had ‘no plans, but maybe, were located in the Penydarren ward.		
Help better meet the needs of shift workers/those who work outside typical office hours?		
Yes plans in place = 13%	No plans, but maybe = 21%	No plans – will not happen = 66%
It can be noted that two of the three <i>early years childcare providers</i> who stated that they had plans in place were located in the Plymouth/Merthyr Vale geographical axis.		

- 8.13 Essentially, all (representatives of) Merthyr Tydfil-based childcare providers were invited to state what their setting would most welcome as ***continued*** support, advice and guidance from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council over the forthcoming year 2022. The three repeated types of feedback were (in order of frequency):
1. Training including for developing forms of reporting
  2. Marketing support to help increase occupancy
  3. Keeping providers aware about (sustainability) grants
- 8.14 The July 2021 SASS Self Assessment of Service Statement also provided useful insight with regard to the theme of sustainability. For example: 58% of responding childcare providers stated that they had to close at some point in time – up to that point – as a result of COVID-19 and. The 2021 SASS Self Assessment of Service Statement invited childcare providers to respond to the following question: *Due to COVID, are you currently operating at full capacity?* 77% of childcare providers stated: Yes and 23% stated: No.
- 8.15 *Finally, with regard to theme of sustainability, it can be noted that* there were 4 childcare and play services registered in Merthyr between 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022. One of these was out of school care, the other 3 were full day care. There were 11 services cancelled between the same dates, one out of school care, 2 full day care, 3 sessional day care and 5 childminders.

## 9 Cross Border analysis

- 9.1 It should be noted that the Merthyr Tydfil Local Authority area contains the smallest population in Wales. It's bordering counties include: Powys, Rhonda Cynon Taf and Caerphilly.  
Therefore it is important to take into account the number of parents/carers living in Merthyr Tydfil locality who are accessing childcare elsewhere - and vice versa.
- 9.2 In response to the Welsh government parental survey in October 2021:  
0 parents that were evidently resident in the Merthyr Tydfil locality stated that they accessed a funded early education place in a different local authority area. Additionally, 0 parents that were evidently resident in the locality stated that they accessed a Childcare Offer in a different local authority area.
- 9.3 Merthyr Tydfil Family Information Services continues to hold details of childcare providers and service providers based within their Local Authority area and to work very closely with neighbouring FIS's and has signposted families to their counterparts in other areas.

## 10 COVID-19

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council recognises how the COVID-19 pandemic effected the local childcare and early years sector, particularly from a sustainability perspective. At the time of this CSA's production it is evident that the worst effects of the pandemic are starting to pass behind the locality's early years and childcare sector, which is testament to its resilience, standing and the effectiveness with which it worked to ensure health and safety was observed for families and children. It is also a fact that (as evidenced by childcare provider's responses to a supplementary autumn 2021 survey which has informed this document) that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council had a buoyant and visible role in helping to advise and sustain the sector. A 'hangover' remains though, with suggestion from some of the partners and stakeholders interviewed for research, which has informed this CSA, being that the Merthyr Tydfil: (a) childminding sector and; (b) out of school childcare sector has struggled to re-establish a footing that was equivalent to its pre-March 2020 visibility and contribution to the formal childcare sector.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council also believes important that this document acknowledges how COVID-19 affected the whole of the UK's childcare and early years sector. For example, a UK Parliament document published in October 2021, called the Impact of COVID-19 on early education and childcare <sup>18</sup> concluded that:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the sector in a number of ways, including temporary and permanent setting closures, reduced demand for childcare places and workforce challenges
- The finances of childcare providers were already "*weak*" in several parts of the sector before the pandemic. Despite government support to the sector during COVID-19, closures and reduced demand have increased financial pressures and 'stakeholders' have raised concerns about the pandemic's long-term impact on financial sustainability
- Prior to the pandemic, there were long-term issues recruiting and retaining staff, especially highly qualified staff. This has been exacerbated by the pandemic and some stakeholders have expressed concerns that this could compromise the quality of childcare in the long term
- Available evidence suggests that changes in access to early years childcare has impacted pre-school children in a number of ways, including social, emotional and behavioural development and mental health, physical development and school readiness.
- Negative impacts on children's development and mental health from changes in access to early years childcare are more likely for disadvantaged children (of which Merthyr Tydfil has a significant number) and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), as well as vulnerable children.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://post.parliament.uk/impact-of-covid-19-on-early-childhood-education-care/>

In terms of the childcare sector specifically in Wales, the summer 2021 report: National Conversations: with the Child Care, Play and Early Years sector in Wales made a key conclusion, which has relevance for the early years and childcare sector across Merthyr Tydfil, that: *“the situation for the early years and childcare sector feels very uncertain. It is impossible to tell whether demand for childcare will increase soon, or whether increased unemployment and continued working from home will lead to a decline in demand. This uncertainty, together with the immediate stresses of the pandemic, have influenced morale, despite the sector’s high levels of motivation and dedication to the children they work with”*. The report contained recommendations, which the responses to the research undertaken to inform the 2022 Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has to varying extents, reinforced including that:

- The early years and childcare sector would like to be seen as professionals and have parity with other parts of the wider EYCC workforce. Consideration should be given to continuing promotion and support of the Welsh Government’s ambition to develop a skilled childcare and playwork workforce, which is highly regarded as a profession and recognised for the vital role it plays in supporting children’s development.
- The Welsh Government and other key stakeholders should provide continued reassurance and encouragement to childcare professionals that their physical and mental wellbeing are important and valued.
- [The Welsh Government and other key stakeholders] should (continue to) recognise the challenges, risks and uncertainty experienced by the sector in terms of staffing and sustainability and work to offer consistent clear support
- Higher rates of pay are ideally needed to help prevent professionals from exiting the sector

This CSA narrative however, now can focus on what Merthyr Tydfil locality-based childcare providers were outlining on the theme of COVID-19 in the second half of 2021, and in some cases, into 2022:

- 10.1 Recent national research is showing that the mental health and **wellbeing** of: (a) proprietors and (b) staff at all levels within the childcare businesses is being affected by the challenges created by COVID-19. As part of the autumn 2021 survey with Merthyr Tydfil locality-based childcare providers, the local authority asked whether provisions/settings had seen any examples of COVID-19 related mental health problems, including aligned to stress and anxiety about (COVID-themed) sustainability?

32% of actual respondents representing childcare providers (typically childminders, proprietors and managers) stated that they had personally experienced mental health challenges and/or anxiety.

40% of respondents stated that there had been examples of team members experiencing mental health challenges and/or anxiety.

28% of respondents stated that there had not been any examples of team members experiencing mental health challenges and/or anxiety.

Relevant respondents provided examples of support, help or advice that they would like the Borough Council to provide to the sector with this issue, with the three most frequent being (in order of frequency):

1. (Continued) facilitation of training and course on the subject of mental health and wellbeing
2. Promotion of a mental health helpline, or sign-posting to an existing resource
3. Continuing to promote a sense of 'value' in the role of childcare professionals

- 10.2 All childcare providers were invited to state how they would broadly classify how their parents/families were feeling in terms of their child(ren) (re)attending your setting, aligned to COVID-19.

92% of respondents stated that: The majority seem to be happy now, with the other 3% stating: it is a fairly even split between those in favour, and those with continuing concerns.

10.3 All childcare providers that responded to the autumn 2021 survey were requested to state whether they made any contractual changes with any parents/carers as a result of COVID-19?

Diagram 10 - Incidence of contractual changes made by Merthyr Tydfil childcare providers aligned to COVID-19



It can be noted that the responding childcare providers who stated: yes, we have altered the fees we charge most frequently clarified this was (words to the effect): *“if the setting has to close due to COVID-19, there is 0 charge”*.

10.4 All childcare providers that responded to the autumn 2021 survey were requested to state whether they would welcome any further advice or support in terms of a COVID-19 ‘protect your setting’ policy/risk assessment, or a staff and parent policy/protocol. None stated that they would, and the inherent feeling was that all childcare providers were now adept in responding to any COVID-19 contingencies.

10.5 Additionally, the July 2021 SASS Self Assessment of Service Statement responses highlighted how:

58% of responding childcare providers stated that they had had to close at some point in time – up to that point – as a result of COVID-19.

35% of responding childcare providers stated that they had seen positive case(s) of COVID-19 before July 2019, with all except one such provider stating that they had had at least one staff member have COVID-19 (too, as well as the[ir] children).

(Only 6%) of responding childcare providers stated that COVID-19 had affected their staffing ratios and that they had lost staff – as a result of COVID-19.



## 11 Population, Demographics and Socio-Economic Profile

The following section has a vital part to play in terms of informing the 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment – particularly from a demand perspective. It analyses contemporary and relevant demographic and socio-economic data that has a direct relevance to potential forthcoming (statistical) demand for early years and childcare places and provision during the period 2022-2027.

The section is, in effect, essential in terms of providing context to the gaps analysis section (13).

- 11.1 Table 30 outlines the population of 0-14 year olds aligned to each ward in the Merthyr Tydfil locality as forecast by the Mid-2020 Population Estimates for 2020 Wards and 2021 LAs in England and Wales by Single Year of Age and Sex.

Table 30 - Population of 0-14 year olds in Merthyr Tydfil wards

Ward name	Under 2 year olds	2 year olds	3-4 year olds	5-7 year olds	8-11 year olds	12-14 year olds	Totals
Bedlinog	106	<b>39</b>	96	155	199	132	727
Cyfarthfa	161	<b>103</b>	215	341	437	290	1,547
Dowlais	159	<b>80</b>	171	226	276	226	1,138
Gurnos	148	<b>72</b>	149	276	361	243	1,249
Merthyr Vale	82	<b>50</b>	105	139	180	132	688
Park	76	<b>40</b>	99	111	171	148	645
Penydarren	134	<b>67</b>	143	273	362	225	1,204
Plymouth	84	<b>50</b>	101	207	241	174	857
Town	140	<b>101</b>	169	243	356	290	1,299
Treharris	149	<b>66</b>	157	210	274	197	1,053
Vaynor	67	<b>43</b>	72	92	140	121	535
<b>Totals</b>	1,306	<b>711</b>	1,477	2,273	2,997	2,178	10,942

Source: Mid-2020 Population Estimates for 2020 Wards and 2021 LAs in England and Wales by Single Year of Age and Sex

Table 31 below shows an alternative of aligning the population of 0-14 year olds to LSOAs.

**Table 31 - Population of 0-14 year olds in the Merthyr Tydfil locality aligned to ward**

Source: ONS 2020

LSOA	0-2 year olds	3-4 year olds	5-7 year olds	8-11 year olds	12-14 year olds	Total 0-14s
W01001289 Bedlinog 1	48	31	49	58	53	239
W01001290 Bedlinog 2	97	65	106	141	79	488
W01001291 Cyfarthfa 1	86	46	97	129	85	443
W01001292 Cyfarthfa 2	77	76	107	132	79	471
W01001293 Cyfarthfa 3	52	57	69	88	61	327
W01001294 Cyfarthfa 4	49	36	68	88	65	306
W01001295 Dowlais 1	69	51	63	53	53	289
W01001296 Dowlais 2	43	36	44	63	47	233
W01001297 Dowlais 3	71	41	53	78	66	309
W01001298 Dowlais 4	56	43	66	82	60	307
W01001299 Gurnos 1	83	55	79	114	70	401
W01001300 Gurnos 2	62	40	101	104	77	384
W01001301 Gurnos 3	75	54	96	143	96	464
W01001302 Merthyr Vale 1	53	45	47	49	41	235
W01001303 Merthyr Vale 2	41	31	38	61	48	219
W01001304 Merthyr Vale 3	38	29	54	70	43	234
W01001305 Park 1	31	18	31	55	39	174
W01001306 Park 2	45	33	45	70	54	247
W01001307 Park 3	40	48	35	46	55	224
W01001308 Penydarren 1	46	30	75	116	73	340
W01001309 Penydarren 2	43	39	99	92	64	337
W01001310 Penydarren 3	51	35	52	76	42	256
W01001311 Penydarren 4	61	39	47	78	46	271
W01001312 Plymouth (Merthyr Tydfil) 1	41	23	54	54	43	215
W01001313 Plymouth (Merthyr Tydfil) 2	33	26	61	70	43	233

LSOA	0-2 year olds	3-4 year olds	5-7 year olds	8-11 year olds	12-14 year olds	Total 0-14s
W01001314 Plymouth (Merthyr Tydfil) 3	60	52	92	117	88	409
W01001315 Town 1	65	35	39	50	55	244
W01001316 Town 2	72	49	107	165	122	515
W01001317 Town 3	44	38	46	79	70	277
W01001318 Town 4	60	47	51	62	43	263
W01001319 Treharris 1	47	46	36	58	41	228
W01001320 Treharris 2	43	15	53	55	47	213
W01001321 Treharris 3	56	47	58	89	55	305
W01001322 Treharris 4	69	49	63	72	54	307
W01001324 Vaynor 2	71	47	47	74	74	313

Table 31 confirms that the ward accounting for the highest number of resident 0-14 year olds and residents across all age categories is the Cyfarthfa ward, followed in frequency by the Town ward.

With regard to Lower Super Output Areas and a presentation of the number of resident 2-3 year olds, as means of discerning statistical demand for Flying Start childcare places – Table 32 below shows population levels in 2021 with the LSOAs which qualify to access the Flying Start programme highlighted in bold.

**Table 32 - Population of 2-3 year olds in Merthyr Tydfil LSOAs**

Source: 2021 MTCBC

<b>LSOA</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>2 years</b>	<b>3 years</b>	<b>Total by LSOA</b>	<b>Welsh IMD ranking out of 1,909 LSOAs</b>
W01001289	Bedlinog 1	18	10	28	483
<b>W01001290</b>	<b>Bedlinog 2</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>64</b>	601
<b>W01001291</b>	<b>Cyfarthfa 1</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>62</b>	1080
<b>W01001292</b>	<b>Cyfarthfa 2</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>47</b>	65
<b>W01001293</b>	<b>Cyfarthfa 3</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>28</b>	567
W01001294	Cyfarthfa 4	12	10	22	1746
<b>W01001295</b>	<b>Dowlais 1</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>44</b>	127
W01001296	Dowlais 2	19	16	35	935
W01001297	Dowlais 3	16	18	34	629
<b>W01001298</b>	<b>Dowlais 4</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>36</b>	352
<b>W01001299</b>	<b>Gurnos 1</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>55</b>	56
<b>W01001300</b>	<b>Gurnos 2</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>41</b>	106
<b>W01001301</b>	<b>Gurnos 3</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>60</b>	164
<b>W01001302</b>	<b>Merthyr Vale 1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>35</b>	385
<b>W01001303</b>	<b>Merthyr Vale 2</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>27</b>	34
W01001304	Merthyr Vale 3	14	11	25	967
W01001305	Park 1	16	7	23	731
W01001306	Park 2	18	10	28	1128
W01001307	Park 3	8	11	19	153
<b>W01001308</b>	<b>Penydarren 1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>29</b>	7
<b>W01001309</b>	<b>Penydarren 2</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>34</b>	258
W01001310	Penydarren 3	17	16	<b>33</b>	1012

LSOA	Area	2 years	3 years	Total by LSOA	Welsh IMD ranking out of 1,909 LSOAs
W01001311	Penydarren 4	19	9	28	688
<b>W01001312</b>	<b>Plymouth 1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>428</b>
W01001313	Plymouth 2	10	6	16	596
W01001314	Plymouth 3	19	14	33	706
W01001315	Town 1	13	9	22	337
W01001316	Town 2	26	23	49	1343
W01001317	Town 3	10	14	24	457
W01001318	Town 4	10	9	19	948
W01001319	Treharris 1	8	5	13	1662
W01001320	Treharris 2	13	11	24	777
<b>W01001321</b>	<b>Treharris 3</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>585</b>
W01001322	Treharris 4	31	13	44	552
W01001323	Vaynor 1	17	9	26	502
W01001324	Vaynor 2	13	11	24	1,051

Table 32 indicates that across all of the Flying Start programme eligibility LSOAs in 2021 there were 630 eligible 2 and 3 year olds.

Table 33 below indicates how Flying Start registration numbers have alternated across the Merthyr Tydfil locality, since the previous Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was published.

Table 33 - Number of Flying Start registrations for the period 2017-2022 for the Merthyr Tydfil locality

NCY	DOB	Total Number of 0-4s	Number of Flying Start eligible children
0	01/04/17 – 31/08/17	336	0
-1	01/09/17 – 31/08/18	762	207
-2	01/09/18 - 31/08/19	682	287
-3	01/09/19 – 31/08/20	528	252
-4	01/09/20 – 31/08/21	434	233
-5	01/09/21 – 31/08/22	139	71
Totals		2,881	1,050

Source: MTBCB 2022

**11.2 Essentially, The Welsh Government document: Revised 2018-2019 local authority population projections for Wales (up to 2043) outlines that population of the Merthyr Tydfil locality is forecast to *increase* by 2.8% between 2018 – 2028.**

In terms of additional population forecasts, the repository StatsWales projects (again, an increasing trend) that:

Between the period 2022-2025 the population of resident in Merthyr Tydfil will increase by 0.7% (452 residents) and;

Between the period 2022-2027 the population of resident in the Merthyr Tydfil will increase by 1.1% (694 residents).

The Welsh Government document: Local authority population projections for Wales: 2018, which was published in summer 2020 outlined how the majority of local authorities in Wales are projected to have a population of between 100,000 and 200,000 by 2028. The document stated that local authorities projected to have the smallest populations continue to be Merthyr Tydfil (around 61,700), Blaenau Gwent (around 69,200), the Isle of Anglesey (around 69,700), and Ceredigion (at around 70,600), however that during the period 2018-2028, for children and young people aged 0-15 years old it is projected that all local authorities, **other than** Newport, the Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot **and Merthyr Tydfil**, will see a decrease in the number of children and young people aged 0-15 years old.

- 11.3 In terms of birth rates for the Merthyr Tydfil locality, Table 34 below details metrics in each of the localities wards for the year 2019 – i.e., children who will now be of (or approaching) Flying Start programme age.

Table 34 – Year 2019 birth rates for the Merthyr Tydfil locality

Ward name	2019 Births of residents
Bedlinog	57
Cyfarthfa	72
Dowlais	84
Gurnos	70
Merthyr Vale	48
Park	33
Penydarren	64
Plymouth	45
Town	73
Treharris	72
Vaynor	29
Totals	647

Source: ONS 2019

Table 34 indicates that the ward with the highest number of new births pre-pandemic was Town, followed in (equal) frequency by the wards of Cyfarthfa and Treharris.

- 11.4 Table 35 shows inflow migration and outflow migration aligned to the Merthyr Tydfil locality for the period 2018-2019. The Table indicates that inflow, in particular international inflow was higher than outflow of people. Previous years had shown an identical incidence and the proportion of inflow in comparison to outflow had been increasing year-to-year. Source: ONS 2019

Mid 2018 – Mid 2020					
Merthyr Tydfil	Mid-2019 Population Estimate = 60,326	Permanent International Migration		Internal Migration from within UK	
		Inflow	Outflow	Inflow	Outflow
		129	86	1,682	1,605
	Mid-2020 Population Estimate = 60,424	Permanent International Migration		Internal Migration from within UK	
		Inflow	Outflow		Inflow
		132	63	1,406	1,336



11.5 In terms of ethnicity, Table 36 indicates that number of children who were resident in the locality in 2019 from specific backgrounds.

**Table 36 - number of children and young people resident in the Merthyr Tydfil locality in 2019 from specific ethnic backgrounds**

Source: ONS 2019

Age	White	White British	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other
0	0	640	613	7	8	1
1	1	698	668	7	9	1
2	2	712	682	7	10	1
3	3	721	690	8	10	1
4	4	783	750	8	10	1
5	5	698	668	7	9	1
6	6	725	694	8	10	1
7	7	756	723	8	10	1
8	8	736	704	7	9	1
9	9	696	663	11	9	0
10	10	731	693	15	8	0
11	11	747	716	12	10	2
12	12	688	662	15	9	0
13	13	653	628	13	9	2
14	14	610	592	13	15	0

- 11.6 In terms of the incidence of Welsh speakers in the Merthyr Tydfil locality the repository StatsWales indicates that in 2019, almost 1:5 of the Merthyr Tydfil population were able to speak Welsh – Table 37:

Source: Stats Wales: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue>

Area	All aged 3 years or over	Yes, can speak Welsh	No, cannot speak Welsh	Percentage of people who say that they can speak Welsh
Wales	3,025,400	892,500	2,131,600	29.5%
Merthyr Tydfil	57,500	10,400	47,100	18%

- 11.7 The 2017 Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment stated that in 2013, over a quarter of all children in the locality lived in poverty (as defined by the percentage of children living in low-income families). This was evidently significantly higher than the figure for Wales (20.5%). There also were *pockets of greater child poverty within Merthyr including more than 40% of the children living in poverty in the Gurnos ward*. Aligned to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019), the income domain, the local authorities with the highest proportion of areas in the most deprived 10% were Newport, **Merthyr Tydfil** and Cardiff, all at around 20%.

Blaenau Gwent had the highest percentage of Local Super Output Areas in the most deprived 50% in Wales (85.1% or 40 areas).

The next highest was the **Merthyr Tydfil** locality, with 77.8% (or 28) of its areas in the most deprived half of Wales.

Furthermore, the WIMD 2019 deprivation profile shows that Penydarren lies within the 10 most deprived areas for the Income and Education domains for Wales and that it also lies within the 10% most deprived (the top 191 areas) in terms of Employment, Health and Housing in the country. WIMD indicator data shows that 46% of people in Penydarren 1 were in income deprivation in 2016-17.

- 11.8 In terms of employment and unemployment rates across the Merthyr Tydfil locality in September 2021, 71.9% of the adult population were classified as economically active and in employment. 4.8% of the adult population were classified as unemployed and this was 0.6% higher than the average for Wales. It can be noted that the Joseph Roundtree Foundation 2020 report: Poverty in Wales highlighted how areas of Wales have very high numbers of unemployed claimants per vacancy and that Rhondda Cynon Taf (37 claimants per vacancy) and Merthyr Tydfil (35 claimants per vacancy) are the areas with greater than 30 unemployed claimants per vacancy.

Additionally, for the same period, there were 1,900 over 16 year olds classified as studying, with the applicable percentage being 10% lower than the average for Wales (which was 28.4%).

Data published by NOMIS in autumn 2021 also indicated that the five types of occupation which adults were most frequently employed in were:

1. Human Health and Social Work Activities – 8,000 employees
2. Wholesale and Retail – 3,000 employees
3. Manufacturing – 3,000 employees
4. Education – 2,000 employees
5. Accommodation and Food Services Activities – 1,250 employees

Throughout Wales there has been a growing trend with regard to the incidence of shift working. For example the Wales TUC Cymru published a report in late 2019 that highlighted how: <sup>19</sup>

- There were 17,000 more night workers in Wales than there were in 2014
- There were 165,000 people regularly working nights in Wales - 13% of the workforce.
- In the UK, care workers (432,000) accounted for the majority of night workers, followed by nurses and midwives (232,000)
- The next most common profession for night workers was road transport drivers (208,000).
- Wales has the third highest share of workers doing night work, compared with the other eleven UK regions

11.9 Data published by NOMIS in autumn 2021, indicates that the average weekly wage for a full-time employee who is resident in the Merthyr Tydfil locality is £525.10, which can be contrasted with the average for Wales which £570.60 per week.

11.10 Additionally, the 2018 Welsh Government Statistical Bulletin reported that the Merthyr Tydfil locality accounted for the highest percentage of children that were resident in workless households – at 19.8% of all households.

11.11 In 2018, the Stats Wales data repository reported that 13% of households in the Merthyr Tydfil locality were lone parent families.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/17000-more-night-workers-wales-over-last-five-years-tuc-analysis-shows>

This was the highest percentage for any Welsh local authority (and was followed by Newport, Blaenau Gwent and Neath Port Talbot, which all recorded 9.8%).

- 11.12 Table 38 indicates the incidence of children with ALN resident in the Merthyr Tydfil locality during the period 2020-2021, and there were 1,921 children with an additional learning need(s), with the most frequent types of need (reported by StatsWales) being general learning difficulties, followed in frequency by Autism and then physical disability(s).

Table 38 - Incidence of children with ALN in Merthyr Tydfil in 2020-2021 (StatsWales)

Location	Statemented	All Special Educational Needs		Total: Special Educational Needs but no Statement of SEN	All Additional Learning Needs
		Total: Special Educational Needs but no Statement of SEN			
		School Action	School Action Plus		
Wales	14,082	46,790	31,816	78,606	92,688
Merthyr Tydfil	284	904	733	1,637	1,921

- 11.13 The Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan (2016 - 2031)<sup>20</sup> outlines a forecast that 2,250 new homes will need to be constructed up to the period 2031.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/resident/planning-and-building-control/replacement-local-development-plan-2016-2031/first-replacement-local-development-plan-2016-2031/>

Image 4 - Local Development Plan – Key Diagram indicating proposed primary growth area(s)

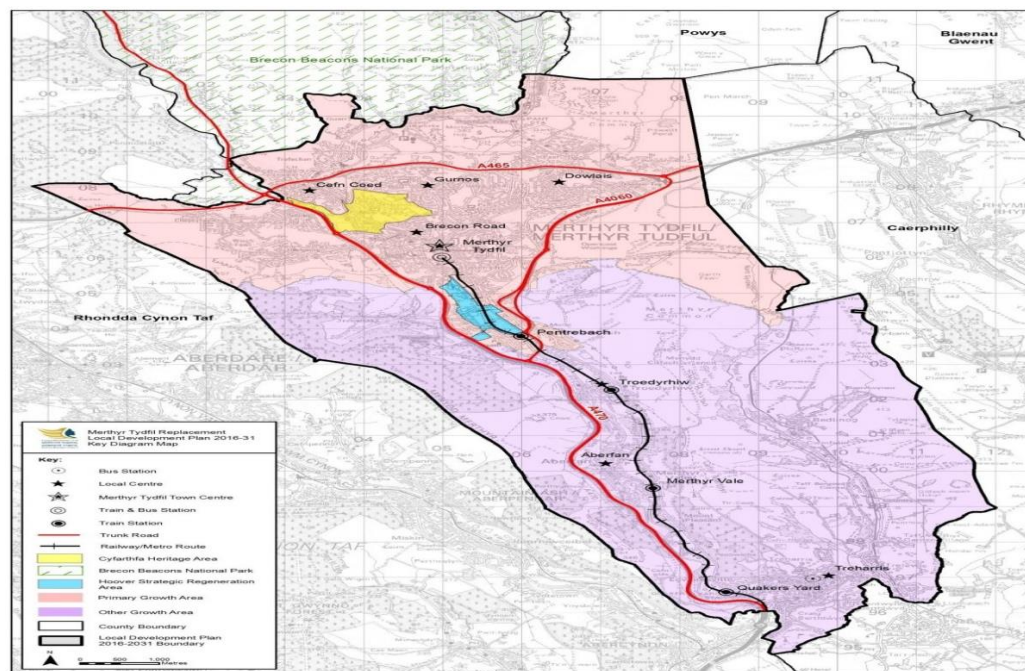


Table 39 importantly shows the proposed new housing developments that – as outlined in the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan (2016-2031) – are proposed to be constructed up to the year 2031, **from 2022-2023 onward**.

The Table indicates which ward a specific development site (of new housing yields) is going to be located in.

**Table 39 - Proposed new housing developments set to be constructed in the Merthyr Tydfil locality by 2031**

Source: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council including Replacement Local Development Plan (2016-2031)

Ward	Site Name	Proposed Number of Dwellings	Indicative Delivery Timescale
Plymouth	<b>Hoover Factory site</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>2024 -2031</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	55	2023-2024
		55	2024-2025
		55	2025-2026
		55	2026-2027
		55	2027-2028
		55	2028-2029
		55	2029-2030
		55	2030-2031
	<b>P and R Motors, Pentrebach site</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>2027-2028</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	11	2026-2027
		11	2027-2028
	<b>Total dwellings yield</b>	<b>462</b>	
Cyfarthfa	<b>Brondeg, Heolgerrig site</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2022-2024</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	10	2022-2023
		10	2023-2024
	<b>Winchfawr, Heolgerrig site</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2024-2030</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	3	2023-2024
		3	2024-2025
		3	2025-2026
		3	2026-2027
		3	2027-2028
		3	2028-2029
		2	2029-2030
Cyfarthfa Cont.	<b>South of Castle Park site</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>2026-2031</b>
		10	2025-2026

Dowlais	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	30	2026-2027
		30	2027-2028
		30	2028-2029
		30	2029-2030
		30	2030-2031
	<b>Clwydyfagwr, Swansea Road site</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2022-2024</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	20	2022-2023
		20	2023-2024
	<b>Total dwellings yield</b>	<b>240</b>	
	<b>Land South of Bryniau Road, Pant site</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>2024-2027</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	10	2024-2025
		10	2025-2026
		6	2026-2027
	<b>Land North of Ty Llwyd, Incline Top site</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2025-2026</b>
	<b>Total dwellings yield</b>	<b>37</b>	
Gurnos	Pen Y Dre Fields, Gurnos	<b>40</b>	<b>2025-2026</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	55	2024-2025
		55	2025-2026
	Goetre Primary School, Gurnos	<b>120</b>	<b>2029-2031</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	40	2028-2029
		40	2029-2030
		40	2030-2031
	<b>Total dwellings yield</b>	<b>160</b>	
Merthyr Vale	<b>Project Riverside, Merthyr Vale site</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
	<b>Total dwellings yield</b>	<b>43</b>	
Penydarren	<b>Haydn Terrace, Penydarren site</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2024-2026</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	10	2023-2024
		15	2024-2025
		15	2025-2026
	<b>Total dwellings yield</b>	<b>40</b>	

Ward	Site Name	Proposed Number of Dwellings	Indicative Delivery Timescale
Town	<b>Twynyrodyn site</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>2022-2024</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	30	2022-2023
		30	2023-2024
	<b>Bradley Gardens 2, Penyard site</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>2025-2027</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	30	2024-2025
		30	2025-2026
		30	2026-2027
	<b>Former St. Tydfils Hospital site</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2022-2024</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	20	2022-2023
		20	2023-2024
	<b>Former Miners Hall site</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
	<b>Former Ysgol Santes Tudful site</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
	<b>Total dwellings yield</b>	<b>212</b>	
Treharris	<b>Adjacent to Manor View, Trelewis site</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>2023-2030</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	38	2022-2023
		20	2026-2027
		30	2027-2028
		30	2028-2029
	<b>Stormtown, Trelewis site</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>2027-2031</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	20	2027-2028
		20	2028-2029
		20	2029-2030
		20	2030-2031
	<b>Cilhaul, Treharris site</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2023-2025</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	15	2023-2024
		15	2024-2025
	<b>Oaklands, Treharris site</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>2024-2027</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	15	2024-2025
		15	2025-2026
		20	2026-2027
	<b>Y Goedwig, Edwardsville site</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>2025-2026</b>
	<b>Total dwellings yield</b>	<b>300</b>	



Ward	Site Name	Proposed Number of Dwellings	Indicative Delivery Timescale
Bedlinog	<b>Cwmfelin site</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2026-2029</b>
	<i>Planned Phasing</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>2026-2027</i>
		<i>10</i>	<i>2027-2028</i>
		<i>10</i>	<i>2028-2029</i>
	<b>Total dwellings yield</b>	<b>30</b>	
Vaynor	<b>Ysgol Y Graig site</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
	<b>Total dwellings yield</b>	<b>10</b>	

Table 40 indicates that the wards which will account for the highest forecast new housing yields are (in order of frequency):

1. Plymouth ward – with 462 new dwelling yields by 2031 and; 231 new dwellings during the period 2022-2027
2. Treharris ward – with 300 new dwelling yields by 2031 and 160 new dwellings during the period 2022-2027
3. Cyfarthfa ward – with 240 new dwelling yields by 2031 and 112 new dwellings during the period 2022-2027

It can be noted that as an outcome of the Schools Survey which was undertaken for this 2022 CSA, representatives of six schools stated that, to the best of their knowledge, their school site may have an[y] available space at which a new childcare provision could potentially be established:

- Three of these schools were located in the Plymouth ward
- One of these schools were located in the Town ward
- One of these schools were located in the Dowlais ward

Additionally, each of the Merthyr Tydfil locality's formal setting/group-based childcare providers were also asked in autumn 2021 whether they *had any plans/intentions to increase their capacity/develop new provision over the forthcoming 2 years?* As was outlined in Section 8.5 above, 22% stated that they did have and collectively this totalled 47 of new places, which when aligned to ward could be categorised as follows:

Ward providers(s) located in	Number of proposed new places with early years childcare providers	Number of proposed new places with out of school childcare providers
<b>Treharris</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>
Vaynor	8	8
Dowlais	8	-
Gurnos	8	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>

Table 41 below shows the year-on-year new dwelling yields set to be constructed in the Merthyr Tydfil locality during the period 2022-2031. It also outlines how many new nursery places would be needed for the 2-3 years age cohort, each year, if the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough new housing yields forecast formula when making projections for numbers of new schools places was applied: (which) for primary school pupils, i.e.: nursery to year 6, the local authority applies a formula of 3.94 pupils per year group per 100 houses built.

**Table 41 - Proposed new housing trajectory in the Merthyr Tydfil locality for the period 2022-2031**

Source: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council including Replacement Local Development Plan (2016-2031)

Year	Planned Annual Dwellings Completions	New places for 2-3 year old nursery cohort (only) required applying MTCBC new builds yields formula
2022-2023	257	10
2023-2024	287	11
2024-2025	217	9
2025-2026	212	8
2026-2027	223	9
2027-2028	203	8
2028-2029	232	9
2029-2030	191	7.5
2030-2031	189	7.5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2031</b>	<b>79</b>

11.15 Table 42 below shows an estimated number of new 0-4 years childcare places that could be required as an outcome of the new housing developments, plus an approximate number of new pre-funded Flying Start places which could be required as an outcome of these completions and eventual occupations up to 2031.

Ward name	Total number of New Dwellings planned for period 2022-2031 at new housing developments	Number of additional 0-4 year olds that New Dwellings could yield – aligned to MTCBC new housing yield formula	Number of childcare provider proposing an expansion of places (in October 2021)	Incidence of a school that stated they would consider an additional childcare space within their school by means of reorganisation
Bedlinog	30	6	0	0
Cyfarthfa	240	47	0	0
Dowlais	37	7	1	1
Gurnos	160	31	1	0
Merthyr Vale	43	8	0	0
Park	0	0	0	0
Penydarren	40	8	0	0
Plymouth	462	91	0	3
Town	212	41	0	1
Treharris	300	59	1	0
Vaynor	10	2	1	0
Totals	1,534	300	4	5

Note: if Childcare providers listed within the above table expanded as per their proposal this would equate to 30 new places.

Note: School re-organisation to accommodate childcare would need further exploring, from the perspective of: ensuring no sector displacement: CIW standards and sector sustainability.

## 12 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and Local Wellbeing Plans

- 12.1 The 2016 Welsh Government Statutory Guidance for Child Sufficiency Assessment sets out how this document should draw upon the information captured by Public Services Boards in developing their Assessment of Local Well-being, as a means of ascertaining the demand for childcare provision.
- 12.2 The Merthyr Tydfil locality's live Local Wellbeing Plan: Focus on the Future 2021-2022<sup>21</sup> sets out key objectives which have a direct association to the (objectives and coverage of the) 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, including an overarching intention that *children have the best start to life and are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals* and: a commitment to achieve: children being able to live in a nurturing and stimulating home environment; **children having access to high quality pre-school and school education**; children having the ability to improve the educational outcomes; children and young people having good health and emotional well-being.

Additionally, the Local Wellbeing Plan incorporates commitments which this document echoes, for partners to: address the poor life experiences of children early on and help ensure more vulnerable families remain together; increase the number of children who are able to live safely at home (or close to home) - preventing them from becoming looked after.

Ultimately, the Local Wellbeing Plan sets out departments within Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council that contribute towards meeting its aspirations – and a number of these departments/officers and professionals will have a key role to play during the period of the 2022-2027 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Action Plan, including:

- Adult Community Learning
- Employability programmes
- School Improvement
- Youth Services
- Parks department
- Additional Learning Needs Inclusion and Well-being

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<sup>21</sup> [https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/media/6537/focus-on-the-future-2021-22\\_eng.pdf](https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/media/6537/focus-on-the-future-2021-22_eng.pdf)  
<https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/council/strategies-plans-and-policies/statement-of-well-being/>

- Children Looked After team
- Early Years School Planning and Support Resources
- Sports Development
- Safeguarding team
- NEETs team
- Welsh Language and English as an Additional Language team members

## 13 Gaps Analysis

The following, pivotal, section outlines gaps in childcare provision which the 2022 Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has evidenced and identified. Each of the gaps that have been included below align to a particular classification – i.e. one of the following:

A Gap aligned to:

- the **Types** of childcare available
  - the **Age** of children for whom childcare is available
  - the **Affordability** of childcare
  - **Times** at which childcare is available, including the need for flexible childcare that caters for irregular patterns of usage across the day, the week and the year
  - **Geographical location** of childcare in relation to population, ward and school catchment
  - the specific needs for **Welsh Medium** childcare provision
  - the specific needs for children with **ALN**
  - accessibility to **Information** about childcare
-

## Times at which childcare is available

- 1 With regard to the theme of employability: 15% of the parents/carers who responded to the Welsh Government parental survey about whether childcare acted as a barrier to them taking up employment or training stated: *Tend to Agree* and 22% of the responding parents/carers stated: *Strongly Agree*.

**This demonstrates that almost 40% of responding parents/carers believed that – to an extent – childcare had, at some point, been acting as a barrier to them accessing employment or training.**

Emphasising this feedback, in addition, 21% of responding parents/carers stated that in the last year, issues surrounding childcare had affected themselves, or a partner being able to 'get a job' - and 13% of responding parents/carers stated that in the last year, issues surrounding childcare had affected themselves or a partner being able to 'access training'.

It is therefore evident that a sufficiency gap can be concluded to exist, in terms of the extent to which challenges with suitable childcare is having on employability and training in the Merthyr Tydfil locality.

- 2 The most frequent 'trend experienced in the past two years' reported by childcare providers was parents wanting greater flexibility because they were working from a home with a greater frequency. Employers that engaged with the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment also confirmed that (in the words of one such stakeholder) *"there is more of a desire to work from home and to work flexible hours, particularly around school times"*.

The second most frequent reported 'trend...' was a higher incidence of parents requesting extended/longer opening hours – however, only 15% of responding childcare providers stated that they had plans in train/place to extend their opening hours.

It is open to question as to whether the childcare sector in the Merthyr Tydfil locality is currently geared up to meet such an increasing trend and demand for increased flexibility of provision times and policies – and whether there is an appetite to do so?

- 3 (Only) 12% of early years childcare providers stated that they had plans in place for over the next 18 months to 'better meet the needs of shift workers/those who work outside typical office hours', such as people working in the hospitality sector and the health sector. However, anecdotal evidence, in particular feedback from professionals that worked with adults in relation to employment, employability and training had a first-hand awareness that the labour market had further adapted - as an outcome of COVID-19 - to being more irregular work pattern themed - and that the incidence of a requirement for shift working was increasing.

## Types of childcare that are available

- 4 Evidence indicates that it is possible that further sustainability challenges could be forthcoming for certain childcare providers, with 75% of early years childcare providers reported vacancies in November 2021. Additionally, 25% of early years childcare providers stated that expected demand to be 'lower' or 'significantly lower' by autumn 2022. Indeed, two early years childcare providers - that were based in the Merthyr Vale locality and the Plymouth ward locality - stated that they (only) expected to be operating for up to the next 2 years.
- 5 Almost 1 : 5 of parents/carers who responded to the Welsh Government parental demand survey stated that they had at least one child with diagnosed and/or undiagnosed additional learning needs. 96% of early years childcare providers stated that COVID-19 had impacted on the early years development of children attending their provision, with half of these respondents stating that children's speech and language had been negatively affected <sup>22</sup>. However, although there is a dedication to the Additional Learning Needs Transformation Programme, only 13% of such providers stated that they had *firm* plans in place to further enhance provision for (an evidently growing incidence of) children with additional learning needs. This percentage can also be viewed aligned to the fact that carers who took part in specific qualitative e-sessions with the local authority in late 2021 and early 2022 stated that, to some extent, childcare had effected their ability to work or study.

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<sup>22</sup> During the consultation phase for the 2022 Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment one respondent (a parent/carer) stated: "During COVID-19 my daughter was only able to receive two days childcare and as a result I feel that her early years development regressed. Also, as of summer 2022, I have rang around every [childcare] setting that has a holiday club for her to [possibly] go in the 6 weeks holiday and [in my opinion] because she has ALN I was just told that 'there is no availability'. Some settings explain that they have a shortage of staff and some don't even give an explanation. It's really disheartening when my child needs help so that she don't regress and you're [in my opinion] just being turned away because of her needs".



- 6 67% (i.e. two-thirds) of early years childcare providers stated that COVID-19 had accounted for a reduction in their occupancy. The same percentage stated that they had (logically) seen a reduction in revenue. Aligning these two facts to the theme of potential ongoing sustainability, in the borough's most populated ward: Cyfarthfa (a ward which up to 2031 will also see an additional 240 new builds being constructed) – 75% of such providers stated that they had seen a reduction in occupancy (and revenue). Indeed, 20% of early years childcare providers stated that they have ongoing concerns about sustainability, with two of these settings being located in the Plymouth ward - a ward which up to 2031 will also see an additional 462 new builds being constructed.
- 7 The childminding sector in the Merthyr Tydfil locality is effectively dwindling. In 2017 there was 87 spaces with childminders found in seven wards. In comparison, in 2022 there are eight childminders found in six wards, accounting for 41 spaces. It is a particular concern due to the increasing demand for flexible hours and the increased incidence of shift working hours being undertaken by parents that are resident in Merthyr Tydfil.
- 8 One-third of setting/group-based childcare providers stated in autumn 2021 that staff had left to work elsewhere or stopped working in the sector due to COVID-19, highlighting a contemporary issue with retention, which could affect sufficiency of places, including for the planned universal childcare for 2 year olds programme. (It can be noted that 80% of early years childcare providers stated that they had no plans, in late 2021 to recruit any apprentice(s)).
- 9 (Possibility in relation to retention) two-thirds of all childcare providers stated that they had incidences of (a broad range of) staff and employees experiencing mental health problems and difficulties. The Gurnos ward accounted for one of the highest incidence of such a response. This could be construed as a workforce-related issue which needs to continue to be addressed so that ratios can be maintained and the current level of professionals working in the sector, in the Merthyr Tydfil locality, can be maintained.

## Location of childcare in relation to population, ward and school catchment

- 10 In February 2020, before the pandemic, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council announced a target of 2,250 new houses by 2031. Three wards which account for the most pronounced number of new envisaged housing yields for the period 2022-2031 are:

1. Plymouth ward – with 462 new dwelling yields expected by 2031 and; 231 new dwellings during the period 2022-2027
2. Treharris ward – with 300 new dwelling yields expected by 2031 and 160 new dwellings during the period 2022-2027
3. Cyfarthfa ward – with 240 new dwelling yields expected by 2031 and 112 new dwellings during the period 2022-2027

It can also be noted that (only) 20% of early years childcare providers stated that they had plans to increase the number of places they offered, over the next two years. Collectively this was 30 places, stated by one provider in the Dowlais ward, one provider in the Gurnos ward, **one provider in the Treharris ward** and one provider in the Vaynor ward.

- 11 The Welsh Government has outlined ambitious plans in terms of broadening the ability of parents and families who have two-year olds to access funded childcare provision. In 2022, there were approximately 525, 2 year olds that were evidently attending an early years childcare setting/provider or a childminder across the Merthyr Tydfil locality, compared to an approximate number of 711, 2 year olds being resident in the locality (a figure which is in all likelihood set to increase by 2027, including aligned to the incidence of new housing developments and a trend of inward migration into the locality). Therefore, it is possible that in order to meet the expectations for all universal 2 year olds to be able to access funded childcare, there may be a requirement to expand provision (and affirm sufficiency) for this age group.

## Age of children for whom childcare is available

- 12 Local authority population projections for Wales published in August 2020 reports that during the period 2018 – 2028, for children and young people aged 0 – 15 years old: *it is projected that the following local authorities will see an increase in the number of children and young people aged 0 –14 years old: Newport, the Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot **and Merthyr Tydfil.***

The population of the Merthyr Tydfil locality is forecast to **increase** by 2.8% between 2018 – 2028.

If this percentage is applied to the population of 0-4 year olds in 2020, this would result in 92 more resident 0-4 year olds by 2027-2028 and if this percentage is applied to the population of 5-14 year olds in 2020, this would result in 198 more resident 5-14 year olds by 2027-2028, all of whose families may require a formal childcare place.

It can also be noted that with regard to the theme of out of school childcare, when parents/carers were invited (as part of the Welsh Government parental survey) to state what type(s) of childcare they anticipated requiring 'more of' in the next two years, this was most frequently an after school club or a holiday playscheme. It can be noted that a greater proportion of the Merthyr Tydfil locality's out of school childcare provision is school-based (and only one is CIW registered) and if for any reason a school, or schools should remove any such places, this could result in localised sufficiency issues.

### **Specific needs for Welsh Medium childcare provision**

- 13 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council have an ambitious WESP Strategy which fully incorporates the locality's childcare and early years sector. However, there is a *potential* emerging gap in terms of Welsh-medium childcare provision (aligned to an evident problem with recruitment and retention), with exactly 50% of setting/group-based providers stating that, in late 2021, that they *did not* believe that they had a requisite number of staff with a fluency in the Welsh language.  
This potential gap should also be viewed in the context that during the period since the production of the previous (2017) Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, there has been an evident increase in the profile of the Welsh-language being prioritised as an ambition by families, with indicative feedback from the e-session consultations with parents including feedback such as: *"Talking to other parents Welsh Medium provision for under 2's is 'a big one' as they want their child to be spoken to in Welsh from a young age"*.

## Affordability of childcare

- 14 The most recurrent barrier to accessing formal childcare that was highlighted by parents/carers who responded to the Welsh Government parental survey was that the cost of childcare had prevented them from accessing a formal provision. The Family Information Service, therefore needs to **maintain its role in** communicating and disseminating information about existing funded childcare initiatives and forthcoming *new initiatives* such as: (a) the extension of the Childcare Offer to parents in education and training and parents who are on adoption leave and: (b) the offer of free childcare to all two-year-olds within the next three years, given how logical it is that these two initiatives will benefit specific families. The local authority should also be mindful of the fact that one-third of early years childcare providers/settings that responded to the autumn 2021 CSA survey stated that they did not take any actions to market the existence of Tax Free Childcare.

## Accessibility to Information about childcare

- 15 All representatives of schools were invited, as part of the autumn 2021 structured interview process with these stakeholders, to state whether they were aware of the existence of Merthyr Tydfil Family Information Service. 40% stated they were aware of Merthyr Tydfil Family Information Service – however, 60% evidently were not. 75% of responding employers also stated that they were not aware of the existence of the Merthyr Tydfil Family Information Service.

Additionally, approximately 50% of the parents and carers that attended consultation e-sessions in late 2021 and early 2022, also stated that they were not aware of the existence of the FIS. This does not necessarily indicate an information gap, however it does suggest a further drive to promote the work and role of the FIS.

## 14 Summary of Unmet Needs

The following narrative summarises the findings of this 2022 Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, with a particular focus on key findings and the emerging gaps that have been presented in the previous section.

It has been evident, particularly as an outcome of structured interviews that were held with representatives of Merthyr Tydfil's early years and childcare sector and with representatives of forums, partners and stakeholders that work with local families, children and young people (from a range of backgrounds) that although the sector has proved to be resilient in the face of the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, there are issues which need to be prioritised in order to maintain an ideal of sufficient access – and of sufficient options/choice.

It has become evident through structured consultation with parents and carers that their working and family routines were disrupted by COVID-19, with a foremost factor being that they worked from home to a greater (collective) extent and did not require formal childcare, during this period. This of course effected Merthyr Tydfil's childcare sector in terms of their occupancy and thus their revenues – both of which naturally have a vital influence of sustainability. However, the sector is evidently re-establishing its balance, particularly the early years childcare sector, comprising the locality's Full Day Care providers, sessional providers and the Cylchoedd Meithrin.

However, in contrast the Merthyr Tydfil locality's childminder sector has not fared as well since the publication of the last CSA. Obviously this is not a constructive development particularly in light of how important a vibrant childminding sector is as an overall cog in a localised early years childcare sector wheel, but also due to an evident growing incidence of parents working shift hours and generally outside of a traditional weekday 8am-6pm timeframe. If this incidence increases, it would logically either require quite radical changes in terms of the mindsets of Merthyr Tydfil's setting-based childcare providers, or an increase in the incidence and numbers of childminders and an expansion of the childminding sector's opening times. As part of this CSA and the research that has informed it, parents and carers have highlighted the theme of 'flexibility' (as have childcare providers themselves, in terms of them observing an increase in demand from parents and carers for such provision) and how it is something they value and in some cases simply require. It is probable that during the forthcoming 5 years, the requirement for flexibility will increase, and the Merthyr Tydfil early years and childcare sector should be prepared to meet this change in how their customers prefer to access their service.

Associated with this request for enhanced inherent flexibility is a fact that a number of parents/carers and partners/stakeholders, including representatives of DWP have described how childcare has effected the socio-economic factor of employability. A key finding as part of the research that has informed the production of the 2022 Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has been that almost 40% of resident (in the borough)parents/carers who responded to the Welsh Government childcare survey believed that – to an extent – childcare had, at some point, been

acting as a barrier to them accessing employment or training. Emphasising this feedback, in addition, 21% of responding parents/carers stated that in the last year, issues surrounding childcare had affected themselves, or a partner being able to 'get a job' - and 13% of responding parents/carers stated that in the last year, issues surrounding childcare had affected themselves or a partner being able to 'access training'.

It is therefore evident, from this feedback that employability is being affected by the family dynamic of childcare, and that the local authority should continue to communicate internally and work with external partners and projects in order to further examine and address this feedback and theme. The demographic analysis of the CSA has demonstrated that up to the period 2027, approximately 1,500 new dwellings are due to be constructed and eventually occupied throughout the Merthyr Tydfil locality, with incidence of pronounced yields of new dwellings being planned for the Plymouth ward, the Town ward and the Treharris ward.

Therefore, the local authority needs to firstly work with local providers and schools who have expressed an interest in expanding their provision – including on their current sites and also monitor diligently the ongoing sustainability of the existing providers, both in those wards and in the other eight wards, so that when new (any) families move into these dwellings there is formal provision options accessible to them. This is of particular importance too aligned to the forthcoming challenges (in terms of demand) that the expanded Flying Start (universal provision for 2 year olds) programme may create.

Another factor which Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council evidently need to consistently monitor concerns the early years and childcare workforce which, feedback from providers is demonstrating, has seen a notable exodus coinciding with COVID-19. One-third of setting/group-based childcare providers stated in autumn 2021 that they had seen incidences of staff leaving their setting to work elsewhere, typically it appears in the schools, retail and hospitality sectors. It was also fed back that some staff had left the sector because they had experienced mental health problems and anxieties, some of which was attributable to them having concerns about catching COVID-19 during the 2020-2021 peak periods. It was evident in autumn 2021 that certain early years childcare providers/settings were struggling to replace this 'lost' expertise and ideally this outward flow needs to be stemmed, and new talent, including in the form of apprentices, needs to be encouraged to consider early years and childcare as a career. Though this is a traditional challenge for the sector because of relatively low levels of pay, as the sector emerges from the effects of COVID-19 it has now become a challenge that it is (even more) essential for childcare planners and those that support the sector to help out with.

A final potential challenge that this CSA has highlighted which should be considered a priority for childcare planners and partner who are seeking to address gaps (including before they arise) during the period 2022-2027, concerns the sometimes overlooked support of out of school childcare, including such childcare which has a wrap-around element. The majority of out of school childcare – including after school clubs, holiday playschemes and breakfast clubs located across the Merthyr Tydfil locality is school-based. This means that provision could be vulnerable aligned to the individual needs and funding positions of such schools. Given the forecast population increase for the Merthyr Tydfil locality and the known forecast increase in

dwellings, it is likely that demand for out of school childcare – and quite possibly, in particular holiday provision, will increase during the period 2022-2027.

Ultimately, the narrative above has summarised challenges that could be faced during that five-year period and it remains in the power of partners and stakeholders **to continue to** work together to rise to these challenges - and it will require a concerted joint effort to galvanise and energise new provisions and places, particularly aligned to (new) places for those that wish to (or need to) access a childminder and/or a (non-school based) out of school childcare provision.

## 15 Barriers to Childcare Provision

The 2021 Welsh Government parental survey invited its target audience to give feedback about any barriers that they had encountered with regard to them accessing childcare *of their choice*. The collective feedback of the parents/carers is summarised in Table 43 below.

Table 43 - frequency of reasons stated as to why a parent/carer was not accessing/receiving support with childcare in autumn 2021

Reason	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers
Child is on a waiting list for a provider & we are waiting for a place to become available	2.5%
There is no childcare with sufficient quality	1.5%
There is no suitable Welsh Language provision	1.5%
No suitable provision in our language, which is neither Welsh nor English	0
The childcare available is not flexible enough for my needs	4%
<b>The cost of childcare is too expensive</b>	<b>13%</b>
Childcare times are unsuitable	3.5%
There is no childcare available that is suitable for my child's age	2%
There is a problem with transport	2%
There is no childcare where I need it to be	2.5%
There is no childcare that can cater for my child's specific needs	6%
Other	10.5%

15.1 Table 43 indicates that when a barrier was highlighted it was only ever, at most, stated by approximately 1:10 parents or carers. Further scrutiny of the quantitative data generated by the Welsh Government parental survey indicates that:

The three most frequent barriers that were reported by working parents were (in order of frequency):

1. The cost of childcare is too expensive (stated by approximately 1:7 of relevant parents)
2. Childcare times are unsuitable



3. The childcare available is not flexible enough to meet my needs

The three most frequent barriers that were reported by parents evidently seeking work or training were (with all three by approximately 1:8 relevant parents):

1. The childcare available is not flexible enough to meet my needs
2. Childcare times are unsuitable
3. I only use childcare on an ad hoc basis and it is impossible to plan

The sole repeated barrier that was reported by parents who were not working or not looking for a job was: the cost of childcare is too expensive.

20% of respondents denoted that their weekly earnings was below £150.00. The sole repeated barrier highlighted by these respondents was again that the cost of childcare is too expensive.

The one repeated barriers that was reported by lone/single parents was: the cost of childcare is too expensive (stated by approximately 1:7 of relevant parents)

Finally, the two repeated barriers that were reported by carers of a child with additional learning needs were:

1. There is no childcare that can cater for my child's special needs
2. The cost of childcare is too expensive

- 15.2 The Welsh Government parental survey and the series of focus groups convened with parents and carers in late 2021 also enabled respondents to provide qualitative feedback about their childcare situation, satisfaction levels any evident barriers that they had experienced or that they continued to experience.

In terms of the theme of barriers to accessing formal childcare – the most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect):  
*“Affordability continues to be a problem”.*

Specific feedback on this theme included:

*“Childcare is far too expensive. I can either work and spend my salary on childcare or stay at home. I am a qualified professional who wants to work but it simply isn’t worth it due to the amount childcare costs. Also there was also not one childcare provider who would pick my child up from school, so I couldn’t stay in work...”.*

*“Having to pay for expensive childcare is an issue. Also my work sometimes doesn’t finish until 8pm and this will make it difficult to find childcare”.*

*“It is a very difficult decision of whether to put two very young children in full time private daycare, because we aren’t entitled to any financial help. I earn £1,500 a month and pay £1,200 for childcare”.*

*“I am currently looking at different jobs I can apply for because it will probably work out better financially if I work less hours”.*

*“I would have needed childcare to be able to go back work, but it’s just too expensive”.*

*“Even though we are two parents who work full-time, we find the cost of childcare too expensive and we struggle to afford it”.*

*“[In my opinion] childcare fees are extortionate. Prior to moving in with my partner I was able to claim universal credits which helped towards 85% of my childcare costs... however, when I moved in with my partner and we bought our first home it meant I could no longer claim any of the benefits I had been receiving. I’ve had to take on a second job in the evening to cover the cost of childcare on top of our mortgage. If we had a second child in the next year, I dread to think how I would ever be able to return to work and afford ‘crèche’ fees without the help from the government. This gives me great anxiety”.*

*"I am really struggling getting help to get back into employment. I am now waiting for my child to be in full time school and at the moment cannot afford to pay for childcare".*

The second most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect) *"I have a child with additional learning needs and it is challenging to find suitable childcare"*.

Specific feedback on this theme included:

*"My son has Prader-Willi syndrome and to use after school childcare he would need one-to-one support"*.

*"There are [in my experience] 0 after schools settings that pick up from my son's special school"*.

*"There is not enough choice for children with learning disabilities who need to have close supervision"*.

*"When packages of care became individualised and schemes such as playschemes for children with disabilities were 'abandoned', us families were left to cope. Children with high support needs and/or autism need a predictable and safe venue where their needs can be met during holidays to meet the need for structure. [In my experience] Direct Payments do not fill that gap. Where is the equality?"*

The third most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect) *"The availability of holiday clubs and places is inconsistent"*.

Specific feedback on this theme included:

*"During the holidays I called the local authority Social Services Department asking for help as I wasn't coping well and I was looking after my son's 'ALN and disabilities' all of the time on my own. There needs to be more childcare support for children with disabilities. It is difficult trusting someone to manage your child's multiple disabilities. We need more help and support"*.

*"I personally find that there is not much option at the moment during the holidays. My children used to access multi-sports clubs but this is no longer running and there doesn't seem to be an alternative?"*

*"In my experience there are 0 holiday clubs that have been available since COVID-19"*.

*“The difficulty for ‘school holiday childcare’ was not in finding childcare, it was in affording the childcare... as if my working hours spanned both sessions I would have to pay for a full day irrespective if I only needed a few hours in total. Finding childcare that catered for a range of ages in one place was also difficult. It would mean dropping off all the children at different places or one of the children going to a “baby nursery” (their words) even though the setting said they catered for up to 12 years of age... there were no activities for that age range except ‘screen time’ or being outside”.*

*“There is a difficulty now my child is 12 years of age as [in my experience] there are 0 childcare or holiday clubs available for age 12 years plus children... it’s like they are the forgotten age group and I think people expect them just to look after themselves”.*

A fourth repeated type of feedback was (words to the effect) *“The times that childcare is offered are not suitable”.*

Specific feedback on this theme included:

*“All the childcare options I found did not start early enough for me to get to work in Cardiff”.*

*“An after school pick-up service for my eldest child when I needed it was limited. There were two providers (a day nursery and a childminder) and neither had space for at least two terms. I had to ask school mums if they were able to take my child home, just so I could work”.*

- 15.3 In late 2021 and early 2022, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council organised and facilitated a series of e-focus group sessions with parents and carers who were resident throughout the locality, which focused on the theme of accessibility childcare and parental priorities. Parents and carers from specific backgrounds were consulted: i.e.: 1. Carers of children with additional learning needs; 2. Parents and carers that were resident in the (relatively deprived) Gurnos area and; 3. Parents and carers who were either accessing welsh-medium childcare or were interested in accessing such provision in the future.

In terms of the themes of **barriers to childcare**, carers who attended the e-focus group session that addressed the needs of their ALN children provided valued feedback including:

- (Once again) the cost of registered childcare can be prohibitive
- The ideal of one-to-one childcare support can be challenging to organise
- The school holidays can be a particularly challenging time – for example, in the words of one parent:

*"It is also very difficult during holiday times as my husband comes home from work exhausted and I am exhausted so fitting in time to complete assignments becomes a major challenge. We have no support during the school holidays so real pressure on us as do not have supportive parents".*

In terms of the themes of **barriers to childcare**, parents and carers who were resident in the Gurnos locality provided, again, valued feedback was provided and two themes were emphasised:

- (Most frequently) that **choice** aligned to Welsh-medium childcare could be limited. One attendee stated:  
*"The availability at the Cylch Meithrin of our choice is an issue. It's excellent but [to the best of my knowledge] over-subscribed".*  
Carers at times *"struggled"* with finding suitable childcare that could support ALN needs. For example:  
*"There is not enough choice for children with learning disabilities who need to have close supervision".*  
*"There needs to be more support for children with disabilities".*

Finally, in terms of the themes of **barriers to childcare**, parents and carers who were either accessing Welsh medium childcare provision in late 2021 or had an ambition to do so, provided their feedback, and this included:

- (More) Welsh Medium provision for children aged under 2's was considered to be a priority. One attendee stated that (in her experience):
- *"There are nurseries who say they have Welsh speaking staff but it is usually just one member of staff"*  
Ideally there would be more Welsh-medium after school provision *"linked to play and social experiences rather than Welsh language specific class"*
- One attendee summarised the view of other attendees when stating: *"it would be good to have a better pathway to can access Welsh Medium provision from toddler age and up to schools".*

## 16 Nursery Education, Flying Start and Childcare Offer Provision

In terms of Welsh Government funded childcare programmes:

16.1 As part of the In autumn 2021 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council survey with childcare providers:

16.1.1 92% of representatives of early years childcare providers/settings, i.e. Full Day Care providers and sessional providers stated that they offered Flying Start (childcare) places for 2-3 year olds, at an average of 14 places/setting.

Of these settings, 77% stated that they were experiencing vacant places – and 42% stated that they had observed changes in terms of parent's/carer's uptake of Flying Start (childcare) places since the start of the pandemic, which *included*:

- There have been more absences from Flying Start places
- New parents are 'noticeably cautious'

16.1.2 12.5% of representatives of early years childcare providers/settings, i.e. Full Day Care providers and sessional providers stated that they offered Foundation Phase nursery places for 3-4 year olds, at an average of 11 places/s relevant setting.  
Of these settings, all 3 stated that they were experiencing vacant places.

16.1.3 73% of representatives of early years childcare providers/settings, i.e. Full Day Care providers and sessional providers stated that they offered Childcare Offer places for 3-4 year olds, at an average of 8 places/setting.

Of these settings, 69% stated that they were experiencing vacant places – and 50% stated that they had observed changes in terms of parent's/carer's uptake of Childcare Offer places since the start of the pandemic, which *included*:

- (Repeatedly, words to the effect) *"we are finding it not as viable as it once was to offer such places in the afternoons"*
- (Repeatedly) some parents could benefit from more detailed information about the Childcare Offer

16.2 67% of early years childcare providers/settings, i.e. Full Day Care providers and sessional providers stated that they were registered for facilitating parents/carers to access Tax Free Childcare. Those who were not registered repeatedly stated that this (words to the effect) *we only offer Flying Start funded places.*

In terms of *promoting* Tax Free Childcare, 67% of early years childcare providers/settings (also) stated that they did actively do so – and 33% stated that they did not.

- 16.3 The July 2021 SASS Self Assessment of Service Statement invited childcare providers to respond to the following question: *Does the Service receive funding to provide Flying Start Places?*  
(Once again, the same percentage), 67% of responding childcare providers stated that it did.

Additionally, in response to that survey 80% of childcare providers stated that they were registered to provide the Childcare Offer.

## 17 Workforce Development and Training

The following section presents feedback that was received via the July 2021 SASS Self Assessment of Service Statement responses from childcare providers situated in Merthyr Tydfil and the outcomes of the autumn 2021 survey with the same stakeholders/providers.

It focuses on the (a) Merthyr-Tydfil locality childcare and early years workforce and; (b) their perceived training needs, including those that align to the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare (NMS) and which focus on themes including opportunities for play and learning, nurturing and well-being, behaviour, conduct and management of the service, equal opportunities and child protection.

As initial context it can be recalled that the 2017 Merthyr Tydfil Childcare Sufficiency Assessment concluded that:

- 67% of staff were qualified to Level 3 with 15% qualified at Level 5
- 62% of all childcare staff were not working towards a qualification – rising to 65% of all staff in Full Day Care settings.
- All staff at out of school settings were not working towards any form of qualification
- Childminders showed the greatest training activity, with 24% working towards a Level 5 qualification

17.1 As part of the autumn 2021 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council survey with early years childcare and out of school childcare settings, representatives of settings were invited to state how many staff were currently employed?

- The average number of **full-time** currently employed by early years childcare settings was 3.5.
- The average number of full-time currently employed by out of school childcare settings was <1.
- The average number of part-time currently employed by early years childcare settings was 5.
- The average number of part-time currently employed by out of school childcare settings was 4.



Table 44 indicates the number of workforce members in the Merthyr Tydfil locality that held particular qualifications in each of the three main sectors in summer 2021

Source: SASS July 2021

Type of Qualification	Total number holding the qualification in the Early Years Childcare sector	Total number holding the qualification in the Childminding sector	Total number holding the qualification in the Out of School Childcare sector
Children's, Care, Learning and Development qualification at level 2	6	0	3
Children's, Care, Learning and Development qualification at level 3	106	0	12
Children's, Care, Learning and Development qualification at level 5	48	0	9
Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP)	3	0	0
Level 2 Diploma in Playwork	1	0	0
Level 2 Diploma Playwork; Principles into Practice (P3) - comprises award, certificate and diploma	0	0	0
Level 3 Award in Managing a Holiday Play Scheme	0	0	0
Level 3 Award in Transition to Playwork from Early Years	22	0	11
Level 3 Diploma Playwork	6	0	7
Level 5 Diploma in Playwork	0	0	0

- 17.2 The survey with setting-based childcare providers requested feedback on how COVID-19 had affected the recruitment and retention of staff/professionals including (as would be expected) with regard to their own setting. 33% of all of all early years childcare and out of school childcare providers outlined that they had seen a number of their staff decide to leave their setting in the past 12 months, **as a direct result of COVID-19.**

In total, across all relevant respondents, this totalled 17 members of staff/childcare professionals – with two settings reporting that they had *lost 4 members of staff to COVID-19*.

The Local Authority understands that recruitment and retention is an ongoing key issue – a pan-Wales issue as well as an issue for the Merthyr Tydfil locality. In February 2022, a workshop was convened by the Welsh Government to address and discuss, with key partners, the challenges across the sector. The workshop – which members of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council attended brought together partners who are supporting the early years and childcare workforce in the face of these challenges with the aim of helping to:

- Gain a better understanding of the recruitment and retention challenges across Wales
- Improve understanding of what is already in place/forthcoming to support these
- Explore how we might all maximise these opportunities to ensure we can support the workforce with these challenges

The Local Authority is aware that prior to the pandemic, there were reported immediate and long-term issues recruiting and retaining staff, especially suitably qualified staff – and this need has only become greater, post the pandemic. In addition, Welsh Government has announced the expansion of Flying Start which means based on 2021 figures, an increase of 35% of 2 year olds accessing childcare. To accommodate this increase it would equate to an approximate 60 additional qualified staff – which does not take into consideration inward and outward migration and staff retention (aging workforce).

It should also be noted that in autumn 2021, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council invited representatives of setting-based childcare providers, through a structured telephone survey, to state whether they were happy that their setting had a requisite number of staff with a fluency in the Welsh language. 63% of relevant childcare providers stated that they were happy **and 37% stated that they were not happy**. Of the early years childcare providers/settings (i.e. Full Day Care providers and sessional care providers) who stated that they were not happy, 33% of stated that they were having problems recruiting such Welsh-speaking staff.

17.3 The autumn 2021 survey with early years childcare and out of school childcare settings/providers requested details about (any) staff training needs or gaps. 21% of responding early years childcare and out of school childcare settings stated that they **did** have needs and/or gaps with the five most frequent being (in order of frequency):

1. Curiosity Approach Training
2. Welsh language training
3. ELKLAN training

4. Autism training
5. GDPR training

(Only) one registered childminder considered that they did have a training need in autumn 2021: which focused on wishing to know more about the Curriculum for Wales.

- 17.4 The autumn 2021 survey with early years childcare and out of school childcare settings/providers sought to ascertain the approaches that were taken to train staff.

37% of early years childcare providers and out of school childcare settings/providers stated they currently used face-to-face in-situ training methods and courses. In comparison, 100% of early years childcare providers and out of school childcare providers stated they accessed virtual training methods and courses.

37% of early years childcare providers and out of school childcare settings/providers also stated that they had sourced an independent training provider during the past 3 years (since 2018) as an alternative to Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. The three repeated independent training providers were (in order of frequency):

1. First Aid via St. John's Ambulance
2. National Day Nurseries Association
3. <https://www.thecuriosityapproach.com/>

Additionally, each of the responding early years childcare providers and out of school childcare settings/providers were requested to state whether face-to-face training ever causes any issues/problems in terms of their setting meeting its ratios. 33% of settings answered that this approach to training did.

- 17.5 Also on the theme of training, the July 2021 SASS Self Assessment of Service Statement responses highlighted how:

- 35% of (all type of) childcare providers stated that they had offered/organised less training for their staff as a result of COVID-19 (of these respondents, three stated that this was also affected by a lack of staff cover)
- 31% of childcare providers stated that they had offered/organised *more* training for their staff as a result of COVID-19.

Plus the Self Assessment of Service Statement invited childcare providers to respond to the following question: *Do you currently have access to the training that you need?* 100% of responding childcare providers stated yes.

Finally, as part of the SASS Self Assessment of Service Statement process, childcare providers were asked: *Have you been able to access specific Infection Prevention Control (IPC) training?* The responses saw a relatively even split: with 52% of childcare providers stating yes and 48% stating no.

17.6 The autumn 2021 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council survey with early years childcare and out of school childcare settings ascertained the number of childcare career apprentices that were currently being employed throughout the Merthyr Tydfil locality.

22% of responding early years childcare providers/settings and out of school childcare providers/settings stated that they did employ at least one apprentice at their setting - and the average number of apprentices that were employed across all relevant provisions was 1.5.

0 responding early years childcare providers and out of school childcare providers stated that they currently did not employ any childcare apprentices **but were** looking to recruit to such role(s) in the near future and; 78% of responding early years childcare providers and out of school childcare providers stated that they had **no immediate plans to recruit any apprentices** with repeated reasons for this position including:

- “We do not them at this time”
- “Our [occupancy] numbers are too low at this time”
- “We are too busy to recruit at the moment”.

17.7 It was noted that the autumn 2021 survey with early years childcare and out of school childcare settings/providers resulted in 100% of representatives of early years childcare providers/settings stating that they were aware that the Childcare Offer is moving to a different system – in terms of processing parent applications and payments to providers of Childcare Offer places.

## 18 Appendix 1 –Draft Action Plan

### Recommendation 1:

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to work with new and existing childcare providers where feasible to adopt a more flexible business model, to respond to how families wish to access childcare.

ACTION	LEAD ORGANISATION/ RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	POTENTIAL TIMESCALE	OUTCOME	PRIORITY STATUS (HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW)	MARCH 2023 PROGRESS
<p>Promote the business advantages to childcare providers of developing more flexible opening hours in line with demand.</p> <p>Offer Business Support/advice and grant funding to help facilitate the expansion of provision.</p>	<p><b>MTCBC Early Years team</b></p> <p><b>Mudiad Meithrin</b></p> <p><b>MTCBC Early Years Business Support Contractor</b></p> <p><b>Cwlwm</b></p>	<p>2022-2025</p>	<p>Increase in the number of providers offering atypical hours.</p> <p>All registered childcare providers to have a working Business Health Check and action plan reflecting their current and future business model.</p> <p>Decrease in the number of parents citing lack of childcare during atypical hours as a barrier</p>	<p><b>HIGH</b></p>	<p>To be completed in March 2023.</p>

**Recommendation 2:**

In response to a high percentage of parents citing childcare as a barrier to employment and training., the local authority will work in collaboration to reduce the number of families citing childcare as a barrier to engaging in training and employment opportunities.

ACTION	LEAD ORGANISATION /RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	POTENTIAL TIMESCALE	OUTCOME	PRIORITY STATUS	MARCH 2023 PROGRESS
				(HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW)	
Work in partnership with organisations to address issues of availability and affordability of childcare.	<b>MTCBC</b>	2022-2025	Reduction in the number of parents reporting childcare as a barrier to accessing employment and training.	<b>HIGH</b>	To be completed in March 2023.
Better sharing of information between family support and employability programmes.	<b>Early Years team</b>		An increase in families with children under 5 years of engaged with employability programmes.		
Establish an ongoing marketing campaign to ensure that parents are aware of how to access employment and training support and	<b>Employment Programmes</b>		Parents that wish to enter or return to the workplace are aware of how and where they can access support and advice		
	<b>External partners</b>				

advice including the widening of the Childcare offer to parents in training or education.					
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**Recommendation 3:**

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to monitor the need to develop new provision aligned to geographical and any emerging age and/or language gaps – particularly with the implementation of universal childcare for 2 year olds.

ACTION	LEAD ORGANISATION / RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	POTENTIAL TIMESCALE	OUTCOME	PRIORITY STATUS (HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW)	MARCH 2023 PROGRESS
<p>The local authority will work with partners to develop new provision and places as and when need demonstrates – including responding to emerging demand</p> <p>(a) age gaps (b) geographical gaps (c) type gaps (d) any localised identified Welsh-medium provision gaps.</p> <p>The roll-out and initiation of the universal offer for</p>	<p><b>MTCBC Early Years team</b></p> <p><b>Wider partners</b></p>	<p>2022-2025</p>	<p><b>Age/ geography;</b> In line with WG guidance a 3-5 year Flying Start expansion implementation plan is in place that takes into consideration current supply, population estimates and deprivation data.</p> <p><b>Age and welsh language -</b> new out of school/ holiday childcare provision developed in areas of need including welsh medium provision;</p> <p><b>Geography;</b> new provision developed in areas with lower than average supply</p>	<p><b>HIGH</b></p>	<p>To be completed in March 2023.</p>



<p>2 year olds will progressively develop so as to ensure that all families that wish to access a place are able to do so.</p> <p>Identify further options to develop out of school childcare, during term time and during the school holidays.</p>			<p>and higher housing developments.</p> <p><b>Welsh language;</b> demand for welsh medium early years provision is increased and existing provision extended or new provision developed.</p> <p>Risk avoidance assessment in place to ensure new developments do not destabilise the sustainability of existing childcare provisions.</p> <p>Increase in the number of childcare settings delivered on school grounds</p>		
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**Recommendation 4:**

Aligned to the ALN Transformation Programme, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council should continue to support early years and out of school childcare providers to offer inclusive provision for children with ALN – with a focus on children aged under 2 years and those who are school aged who may not be in receipt of funding that currently supports ALN children.

ACTION	LEAD ORGANISATION /RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	POTENTIAL TIMESCALE	OUTCOME	PRIORITY STATUS (HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW)	MARCH 2023 PROGRESS
<p>Ensure a programme of ALN training and development support in place for early years providers with</p> <p>Ensure the ALN graduated response continues to be embedded into practice and is regularly reviewed</p> <p>Maximise use of existing funding to ensure ALN children can access provision and</p>	MTCBC Early Years team	2022-2024	<p>Carers of children <i>of all ages</i> with ALN will continue to have confidence in their ability to access suitable and quality childcare which can support their child(ren).</p> <p>Childcare providers access ALN training;</p> <p>ALN graduated response is embedded into practice;</p> <p>Funding opportunities are maximised so that children who required additional support can access provision.</p>	HIGH	To be completed in March 2023.

explore funding opportunities for children who do not meet current funding criteria.					
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**Recommendation 5:**

As a key priority for the period 2022-2027, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council will work in partnership to re-establish a buoyant childminding sector in the locality.

ACTION	LEAD ORGANISATION / RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	POTENTIAL TIMESCALE	OUTCOME	PRIORITY STATUS (HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW)	MARCH 2023 PROGRESS
As a priority and in collaboration with key partners MTCBC will undertake a childminder recruitment drive with a focus on childminders offering childcare outside of traditional hours.	<b>Early Years team</b> <b>Cwlwm partners</b>	2022-2024	An increase in the number of registered childminders by 2024 with a focus on priority wards where low supply and a higher number of new housing developments expected.  Increase in childminders (new and existing) offering childcare outside of traditional hours 8am – 6pm Monday- Friday	<b>HIGH(EST)</b>	To be completed in March 2023.

**Recommendation 6:**

In recognition of the recruitment and retention issues facing the sector, a key priority is a need for a focus on the development of a five-year workforce plan.

ACTION	LEAD ORGANISATION / RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	POTENTIAL TIMESCALE	OUTCOME	PRIORITY STATUS (HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW)	MARCH 2023 PROGRESS
MTCBC will work in collaboration to develop a workforce plan  Work with key education, training and employment partners to develop a clear training and employment pathway for those wishing to work in the sector.  Work with employment and training organisations to increase apprenticeship opportunities across the sector.	<b>Early Years team</b>  <b>Early Years Workforce task and finish group</b>	2022-2025	The Local Authority will have a cohesive and recognised recruitment pathway starting with pupils in secondary schools  A reduction in the number of professionals that have Level 3 and Level 5 qualifications exiting the sector.  An increase in the number of qualified people entering the workforce.	<b>HIGH(EST)</b>	To be completed in March 2023.

<p>MTCBC to ensure that there are opportunities for childcare qualifications through the medium of Welsh and work with employment services to ensure there are opportunities for the recruitment of a Welsh speaking early years workforce (inc childminders).</p> <p>To support retention within the sector, the local authority will continue its important approach of being able to signpost any professionals that are struggling with mental health and wellbeing to appropriate support services.</p>			<p>A highly trained workforce that is able to meet with expansion plans including welsh medium.</p> <p>Low staff turnover and low vacancy levels across the sector.</p> <p>Given the issues around out of school childcare and qualifications it is surprising that this is not being addressed</p>		
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**Recommendation 7:**

Whilst evidence suggests that current parental demand for Welsh-medium provision does not exceed current supply, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council will continue to prioritize its work with partners and commit to ensuring Welsh-medium childcare places grow in number, including for out of school and holiday times.

ACTION	LEAD ORGANISATION / RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	POTENTIAL TIMESCALE	OUTCOME	PRIORITY STATUS	MARCH 2023 PROGRESS
				(HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW)	
<p>The local authority will continue its priority work with WESP and other key partners to promote the benefits of the Welsh language to increase demand and ensure that any family that wishes to access Welsh-medium childcare is able to.</p> <p>All new developments will incorporate a strategic 'check' to ensure that Welsh language places have been actively considered and planned for.</p>	<b>Early Years Team</b>	2022-2025	<p>The number of Welsh language accessible places will increase in the Merthyr Tydfil by 2025.</p> <p>The WESP will continue to be <i>fully</i> integrated into strategic developments associated with childcare sufficiency. Welsh-speaking families and/or families that wish to develop their Welsh-language skills will be further enabled to access childcare of their choice.</p>	<b>HIGH</b>	To be completed in March 2023.

**Recommendation 8:**

In response to the evidence which suggests a lack of awareness amongst professionals and parents of the Family Information Service, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council should priorities a marketing campaign to raise the profile of the Service.

ACTION	LEAD ORGANISATION / RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	POTENTIAL TIMESCALE	OUTCOME	PRIORITY STATUS (HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW)	MARCH 2023 PROGRESS
<p>The MTCBC Family Information Service will prioritise its outreach and promotion strategies with the following stakeholders: (a) schools; (b) employers; (c) health sector colleagues (d) parents</p> <p>Family Information Service website redesigned to ensure it is accessible</p> <p>Audit of Dewis and FIS undertaken to ensure</p>	<p><b>Family Information Service Officer</b></p> <p><b>Early Years team</b></p>	<p>2022-2025</p>	<p>The number of FIS enquiries including website traffic will have increased, as will the 'where did you hear about the FIS' metric(s) aligned to the sources of: (a) my local school and; (b) my local employer.</p> <p>Parents and professionals will continue to have access to high quality information on early years and childcare provision including financial assistance towards childcare costs.</p>	<p><b>MEDIUM</b></p>	<p>To be completed in March 2023.</p>



<p>information accurate and in line with statutory requirements</p> <p>FIS to prioritise the promotion of financial assistance towards childcare costs including but not exclusively the extension of the childcare offer and Flying Start programme</p>			<p>Family Information Service website easily accessed by families and professionals with a wide range of up to date information on services.</p> <p>Families are aware of the financial assistance towards childcare and are confident of how to access the support.</p> <p>The take-up of Tax Free Childcare will increase year-on-year.</p> <p>Parents of eligible 3 year olds who are in education and training will be able to access funded childcare places</p>		
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