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Guidance and Resources Toolkit

VAWG Needs Assessment Toolkit Data and Analysis Guide

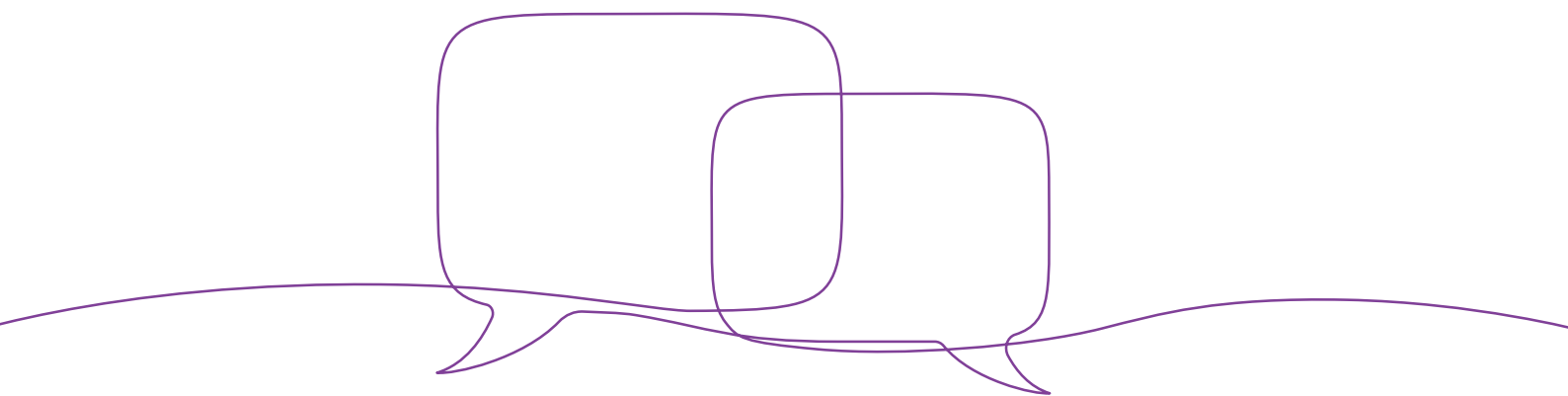
A practical guide to analysing data and information
as part of a VAWG Needs Assessment



Acknowledgement

This toolkit has been developed in partnership with the initial testing areas: Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee, East Ayrshire, Fife, North Lanarkshire, Orkney, Perth and Kinross and West Dunbartonshire and integrates resources created by a range of consultants and third sector and public sector partner organisations.

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1. Gathering quantitative and qualitative data

A robust picture of local need depends on bringing together both quantitative and qualitative data. Figures can show the scale and pattern of an issue, but rarely capture the lived experience behind them, while qualitative insight alone can struggle to demonstrate prevalence, scale or track change over time. This section focuses on gathering quantitative data; for guidance on gathering qualitative data, see the **Engagement Guide**, and the accompanying resources for tools and templates to support the process.

Quantitative data can be obtained through several routes, each with different advantages, limitations and resource implications. In many cases, relevant information will already be available through published national statistics or existing local datasets. Where information is not routinely available, additional requests may need to be made to internal services or external partners.

The most efficient approach is usually to start with readily available sources before considering bespoke data requests. This helps identify existing evidence, reduces duplication, and clarifies where genuine information gaps remain. It also gives an early understanding of local trends to inform discussions with partners. The three routes below, national datasets, local authority datasets and local datasets, together help partnerships access the information needed to answer their selected needs assessment questions.

Using national data sources

National datasets are often the most accessible starting point for building the evidence base. They provide robust information on population characteristics, equalities, crime prevalence and public attitudes, helping partnerships develop an initial understanding of the local landscape before collecting more data.

This is particularly vital for answering Question 1 (who are we?). Because they are collected consistently across Scotland, national datasets are well suited to benchmarking local areas against regional or national averages, and can provide historical trends that may not be available through local systems.

A data dashboard brings together the most relevant national indicators for the needs assessment, applying a gendered lens where possible and enabling exploration of local-area trends (see the **Data Dashboard** resource).

National sources are particularly useful for understanding:

- Population size and demographic characteristics

- Socio-economic conditions and inequalities
- Health outcomes and health inequalities
- Crime and justice trends
- Child protection and children's services activity
- Housing and homelessness
- Education and attainment
- Labour market participation and income

National datasets also have limitations: data may be published at different geographic levels, involve significant time lags, or be subject to disclosure controls that limit local analysis. They are most valuable when combined with local administrative data, service data and lived-experience evidence to build a complete picture.

Requesting data from local authorities

Many datasets needed for a needs assessment are already held within the local authority. However, identifying the most relevant datasets and understanding how they are recorded and interpreted can require significant engagement with service leads, data owners and analytical staff. Early conversations help identify available data, highlight limitations and avoid duplication; in some cases, existing reports or dashboards may already hold what is needed.

Information often available from local authority teams includes:

- Social work and children's services: child protection registrations, looked-after children, children affected by domestic abuse, referrals, assessments, family support and contextual safeguarding concerns
- Housing and homelessness services: homelessness applications linked to domestic abuse, refuge placements and repeat presentations
- Employability and welfare services: financial insecurity, employability support, welfare advice and related support needs
- Equality, policy and research teams: demographic profiles, equality data, local surveys, consultation findings and previous research

A fuller mapping of commonly available council data is provided in the **Council Tab of the Data Landscape**.

Requesting data from other partners

Requests to external partners may take significant time to define and action, so it is worth considering them early. Partners know their own data best and can help you understand how sources might be combined to give a more robust picture of VAWG locally. A preliminary conversation with someone knowledgeable about the data of

interest is a helpful way to narrow the scope, and analytical staff may be needed to define the specifics and format.

Information that may need to be requested from partners includes:

- Specialist services: referral volumes and pathways, waitlists, types of support, repeat referrals, numbers in service, refuge capacity, helpline call volumes, case outcomes, children in the household and support needs
- Health boards: routine enquiry for VAWG, sexual assault response data and FGM
- Police: disclosure scheme (DSDAS) requests
- Schools, colleges and universities: participation in healthy relationships education, instances of gender-based violence and disclosures of VAWG
- Alcohol and drug services: routine enquiry

A fuller mapping of data held by non-council organisations is provided in the Partner Tab of the Data Landscape.

Agreeing the parameters of a request

For both internal and external requests, it is important to agree the specific parameters of the data. This usually includes:

- **Geographic boundaries:** align boundaries to the local authority area where possible, so the data has greater explanatory power
- **Definitions of VAWG:** organisations understand VAWG and gender-based violence differently; this may not be changeable, but should be understood so that limitations and likely undercounts can be flagged
- **Equality and demographic characteristics:** disaggregated data supports the continued consideration of intersectionality
- **Reporting time frames:** recent data is most representative of the current picture, though requesting three to five years of historic data supports pooling and trend analysis. Also you may need to align academic years, tax years and calendar years

Note There is a huge volume of data that could be requested, so define the core question driving each request. A successful data request answers an important question, is specific, and asks only for data the responding organisation is known to hold or can comfortably gather.

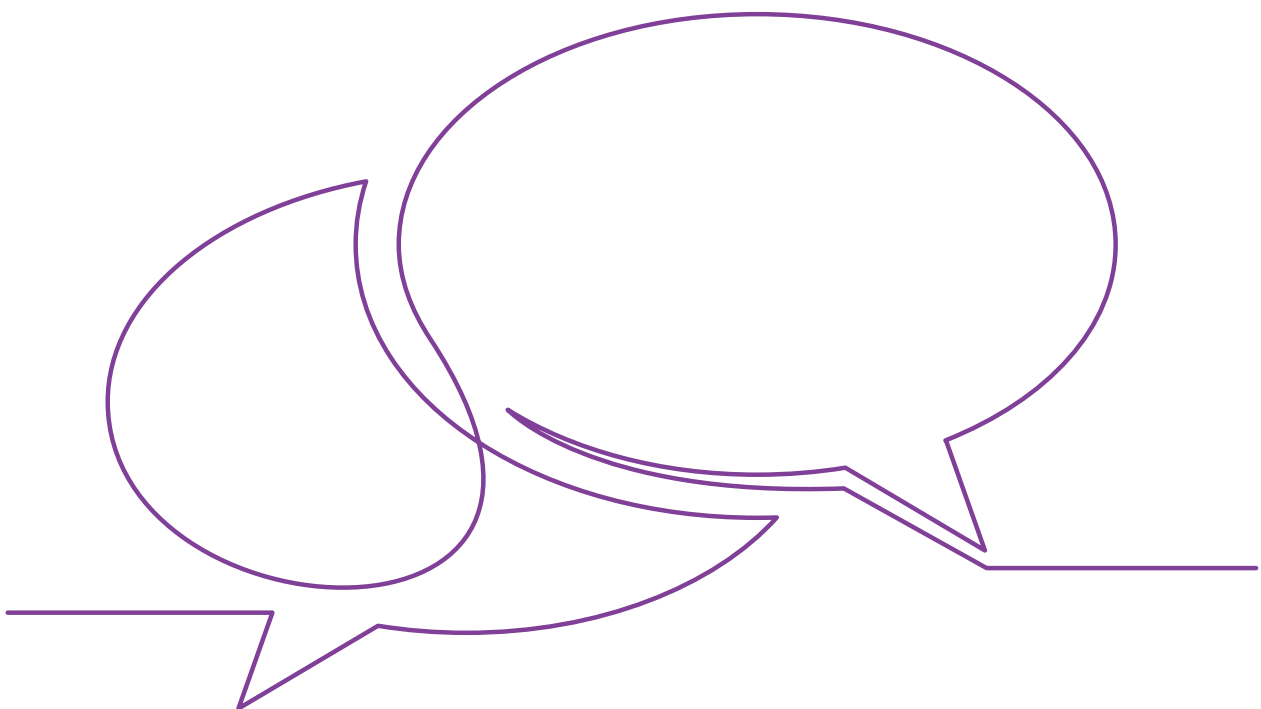
An example data request

Driving question: Are local secondary schools delivering healthy relationships education, and are young people disclosing experiences of relationship abuse through school safeguarding systems?

Why it matters: it supports assessment of local prevention systems (Question 3), gives insight into issues affecting young people (Question 2), and contributes evidence on whether support pathways are meeting need (Question 4).

What to ask for: for the last three academic years, the number of pupils reached by healthy relationships or GBV education, and the number of safeguarding disclosures by type (domestic abuse, adolescent dating violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, other), broken down by year group, sex and age where available, for schools in the local authority area. Request aggregated, anonymised data only.

A **Data Request Planning Template** is provided to help you build, standardise and collate requests.



2. Analysing quantitative data

Once data has been gathered, analysis turns it into findings. It is usually best to start simple: most of the value in a needs assessment comes from clear descriptive, temporal and comparative analysis, with more advanced techniques added only where a specific question justifies the extra time and skill. The aim is not technical sophistication but a fair, well-evidenced picture of local need.

The core analyses

- **Descriptive analysis:** counts, proportions and rates that show what the data looks like now. Converting counts into rates (per head of population) lets you compare areas and groups fairly
- **Temporal (trend) analysis:** how figures change over time, showing direction and any seasonal pattern. Be alert to changes in recording or definitions that can look like real change
- **Comparative analysis:** how the local picture compares with national or regional averages, similar areas, or between localities and groups (benchmarking)
- **Equality analysis:** breaking figures down by demographic characteristics to see where need concentrates and to keep intersectionality in view

More advanced analyses

- **Cross-tabulation and correlation:** examining how two factors relate, such as deprivation and referral rates (remembering that correlation is not causation)
- **Geographic and spatial analysis:** mapping where need and provision cluster, including hotspots and distance to services; this usually needs mapping (GIS) skills
- **Advanced statistics and data linkage:** standardisation, significance testing, regression, and combining datasets at individual level; these add rigour and depth but need analytical expertise and, for linkage, information-governance approval

These more advanced techniques can add real value, but they are rarely essential. Match the method to the question, and to the time and skills available.

Working through an example

Much can be learned by layering simple analyses on a single dataset for example, police-recorded domestic abuse incidents:

- **Start with description:** count the recorded incidents for the latest year and express them as a rate per 10,000 people, so the figure can be compared

- **Add time:** plot that rate across the last three to five years to see the direction of travel, noting any recording changes that could explain a shift
- **Add comparison:** benchmark the local rate against the Scotland average and a few similar local authorities
- **Add disaggregation:** break the figures down by locality, age and sex to see where need concentrates and whether some groups are over-represented
- **Interpret carefully:** recorded incidents undercount actual harm, and a rise can reflect greater confidence to report rather than more abuse; state these limits alongside the numbers

Layering these simple analyses on one dataset builds a fuller, fairer picture without any advanced techniques.

Numbers rarely speak for themselves. Recorded data undercounts hidden harm; changes in recording or definitions can mimic real change; small numbers are volatile and may be suppressed for confidentiality; and correlation is not causation. Always report figures with their limitations.



3. Analysing qualitative data

Engagement produces rich qualitative information like interview and focus group transcripts, free-text survey responses, workshop notes and case studies. Qualitative analysis is how that material becomes clear, robust findings about what is happening locally and what needs to change. It should be planned from the start, handled in a trauma-informed and confidential way, and kept transparent so that others can see how conclusions were reached.

There is no single correct method. Below are some suggested approaches for a needs assessment, and you may wish to blend them.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is the most widely used and accessible approach, identifying patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset.

- **Familiarisation:** read and re-read the data, noting initial ideas
- **Coding:** work systematically through the data, labelling features relevant to your questions
- **Generating initial themes:** cluster related codes into candidate themes
- **Reviewing and developing themes:** test themes against the coded data and the whole dataset, then split, merge or discard them
- **Refining, defining and naming themes:** clarify what each theme captures and how it relates to the questions
- **Writing up:** tell the story of the data, using anonymised extracts to illustrate each theme

Two points matter. Themes are actively developed by the analyst through careful engagement with the data, rather than simply ‘emerging’ from it; and the process is iterative, you will move back and forth between phases. Analysis can be inductive (led by what is in the data) or deductive (organised around the needs assessment questions), and usually blends both.

Example In survivor interviews, repeated codes such as ‘telling my story again and again’, ‘waiting months’ and ‘feeling judged’ might be drawn together into a theme about the cumulative toll of navigating a fragmented system.

Framework analysis

Framework analysis was developed in the UK for applied policy research and is especially well suited to a needs assessment. Its defining feature is a matrix: rows for cases (individuals, groups or organisations) and columns for themes, with each cell holding a short summary of what that case said on that theme. This makes it straightforward to compare systematically, for example, between survivors and practitioners, across services, or across localities and to organise themes around the needs assessment questions while still allowing new themes to surface. It works well for teams and for large volumes of text. In outline, the stages are: familiarisation; building a working framework of themes and questions; coding the data to that framework; adding summaries into the matrix; and mapping and interpreting patterns across it.

Example You might build a matrix with rows for survivors, frontline staff and strategic leads, and columns for each needs assessment question, then summarise each group's view in the cells, making it easy to see where survivors and practitioners agree and where they differ.

Rapid analysis

When time or capacity is limited, rapid analysis offers a quicker route. Each interview or focus group is summarised into a structured template built around the needs assessment questions, and the summaries are transferred into a matrix (often a spreadsheet) so the team can read across participants and topics. It is well suited to feeding back early findings and can be a first pass before fuller analysis, at the cost of some depth.

Example After each practitioner focus group, a facilitator completes a one-page template under headings drawn from the needs assessment questions; transferring these into a spreadsheet matrix surfaces common gaps.

Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis keeps each person's account whole rather than fragmenting it into codes, focusing on the sequence and meaning of their journey through services. It is a natural fit for the case study work in the toolkit, where the value lies in the journey itself.

Example Reading a survivor's case study as a whole shows how each transition compounded harm, in a way that fragmenting the account into codes would lose.

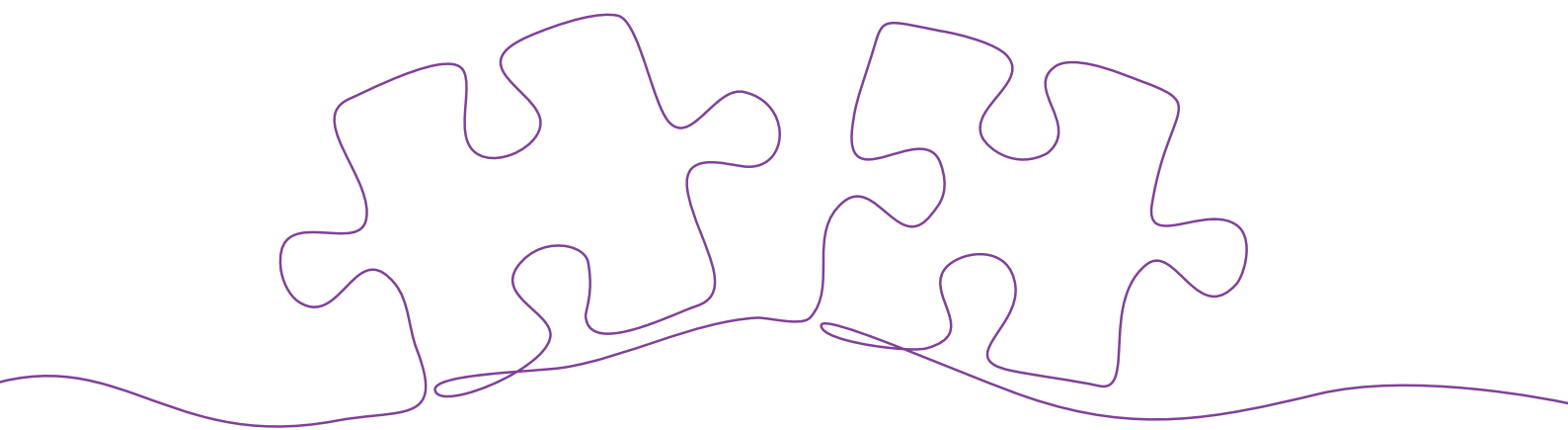
Choosing an approach

Approach	Best suited to
Thematic analysis	A flexible, accessible default for most interview, focus group and free-text data.
Framework analysis	Structured, systematic comparison across groups, services or localities, and findings mapped to the needs assessment questions.
Rapid analysis	Time-limited work and feeding back early findings, where some loss of depth is acceptable.
Narrative analysis	Lived-experience journeys and case studies, where the whole story matters.

Doing it well

- Plan analysis at the design stage: let the needs assessment questions shape both your topic guides and your coding framework
- Handle data in a trauma-informed way: store it securely, anonymise it, and remove identifying details, taking particular care in small communities where people are easily identified
- Choose proportionate tools: a spreadsheet matrix is enough for many needs assessments but specialist software helps with larger volumes
- Involve lived experience and frontline staff in making sense of the findings and sense-check emerging themes with them

- Build in rigour, keep an audit trail of decisions, use a second analyst or reviewer where possible, write reflexive notes, and actively look for views that do not fit the pattern rather than only confirming it
- Be clear about strength, distinguish a theme raised widely from one raised by a few, and use anonymised extracts to illustrate



4. Bringing the evidence together

No single source answers a needs assessment question on its own. Quantitative data shows scale, distribution and trends; qualitative data shows how systems are experienced and why; service data shows activity and demand; and lived experience shows what it is actually like to move through the system. Triangulation, reading these sources against one another, is what turns data into findings.

How you bring the strands of information together depends partly on the order in which you use them:

- You might gather quantitative and qualitative evidence in parallel and bring them together at the end
- Or you might first use the data to show what is happening and where, then use engagement to explain why
- Alternatively, you could let lived experience or practitioner insight surface an issue, then use data to suggest its scale

The approach you take will likely be driven by the timescales and resource capacity as well as the questions you focus your needs assessment on.

When you place the quantitative and qualitative findings side by side, it can be helpful to name the relationship between them:

- **Convergence:** the two sources agree and reinforce each other
- **Complementarity:** they show different but compatible things, each adding to the picture
- **Expansion:** the sources overlap, but one opens up further detail or questions
- **Divergence:** the sources disagree. Sometimes when it comes to VAWG, disagreement between sources can point to hidden harm or under-recording

Joint displays

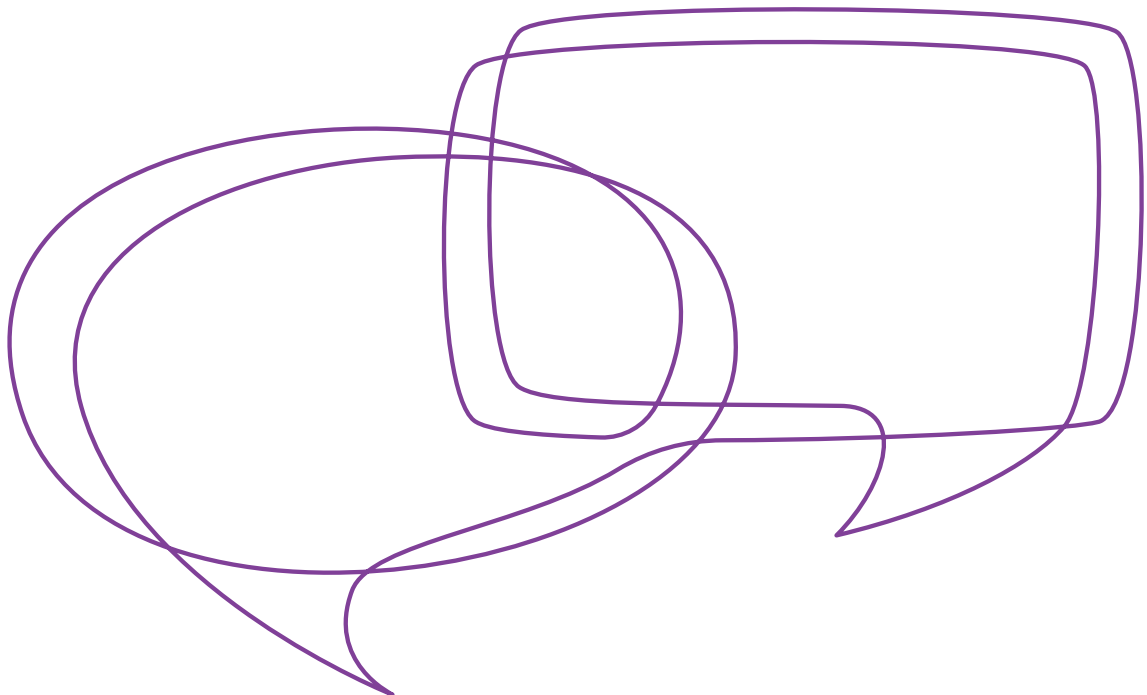
A joint display is a simple table that sets the quantitative and qualitative findings side by side, with a final column for the integrated insight. Building one for each needs assessment question or theme makes patterns and contradictions visible and is an effective way to integrate evidence.

Needs assessment question	What the data shows	What people told us	Insight
Q1 • Who are we? What does our local landscape look like in terms of population, demographics and socio-economic outcomes?	Population and deprivation data show a younger profile and pockets of high deprivation.	Community organisations point to migrant and minoritised groups under-counted in official figures.	Expansion: engagement extends the demographic picture beyond the data.
Q2 • Key issues and challenges What are the key issues and challenges being experienced by women, children and young people affected by VAWG?	Recorded incidents are concentrated in domestic abuse and sexual offences.	Survivors describe coercive control, economic abuse and online harms that rarely reach records.	Complementarity: the data shows recorded forms; lived experience reveals the wider pattern.
Q3 • Systems and services in place What systems and services are currently in place locally to prevent and respond to VAWG?	A service mapping lists specialist, health, housing and justice provision.	Practitioners describe gaps at the transitions between services.	Complementarity: the mapping shows what exists; practitioners show how it connects.
Q4 • How well needs are met To what extent do local systems and services currently meet people's needs?	Referrals to specialist services have fallen over three years.	Survivors describe long waits and being turned away at first contact.	Divergence: falling referrals may signal barriers, not falling need.
Q5 • Collective resources across partners What collective resources are currently available to partners to meet need?	Capacity data show specialist provision is static while demand rises.	Service leads report stretched teams and short-term funding cycles.	Convergence: both show capacity is not keeping pace with demand.

Things to consider

- Data and information gaps are often findings themselves
- Very often recorded data undercounts forms of VAWG and groups that do not reach services, so absence in the data is not automatically absence of need
- Be transparent about limitations e.g. differing definitions, undercounting, time lags, self-selection and small samples
- Treat lived experience as evidence with equal weight to quantitative data and practitioner insight

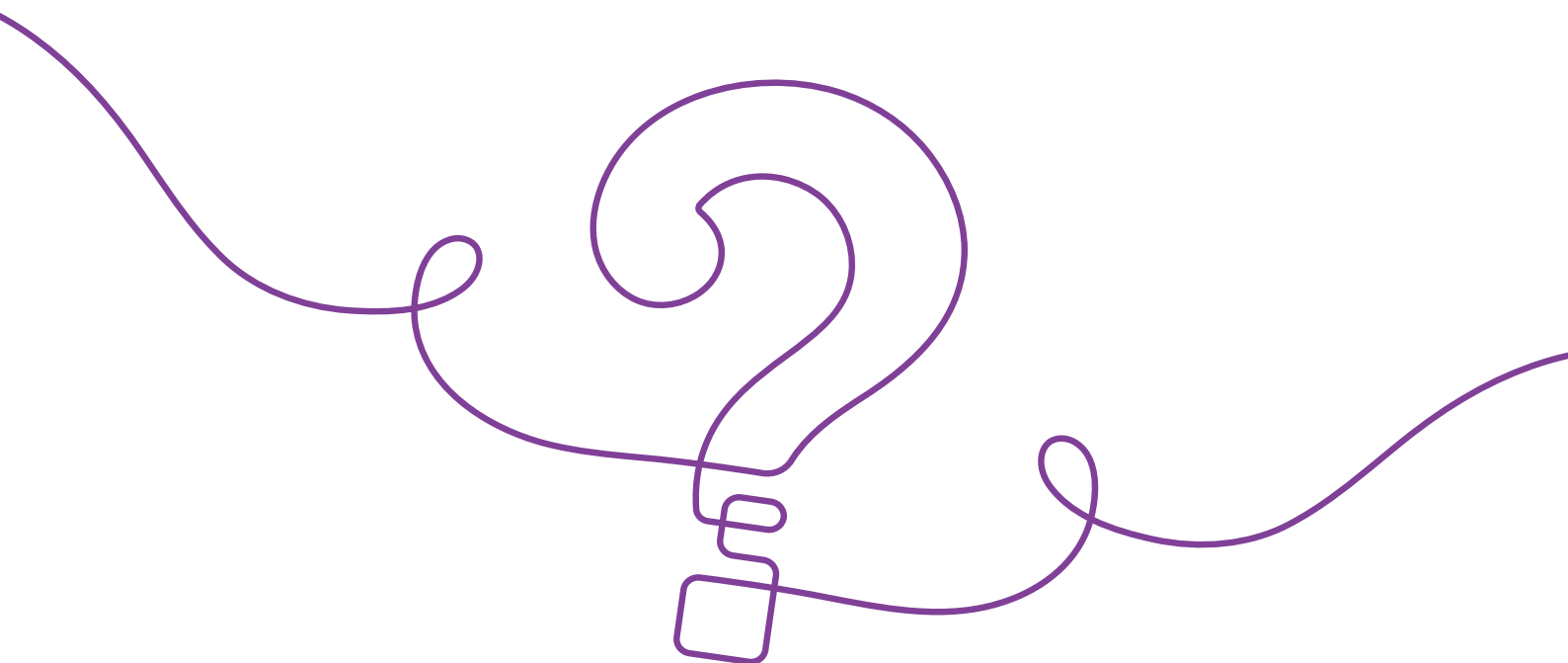
The aim is a clear, honest picture of local need, current provision, and the gaps between them.



Resources alongside this guide

The following data resources accompany this guide. Each can be adapted to local circumstances before use.

Approach	Best suited to
Data Dashboard	National statistics relevant to the needs assessment, brought together with a gendered lens, for exploring local trends and benchmarking against national figures.
Data Landscape	A mapping of data commonly held within the local authority and by partners.
Data Request Template	A template and response spreadsheet for building, standardising and collating data requests to partners, with data-validation rules for consistent returns.



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