Children's Social Care Dashboard

Supporting information

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Ministerial foreword

Janet Daby MP, Minister for Children and Families

I feel truly privileged to be working for you as the recently appointed Minister for Children and Families. Throughout my life I have been dedicated to improving the lives of children, families and communities, starting my career as a social worker, and later focused on projects to alleviate food poverty, a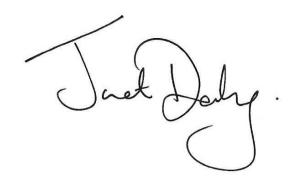nd improve community safety. Being part of this government's mission to break down the barriers to opportunity and give each and every child the very best life chances is truly close to my heart.

Children's social care works with some of the most vulnerable children and has the ability to transform lives. The Children's Social Care National Framework statutory guidance sets direction for practice and describes the outcomes we want to see achieved for children, young people, and families. I am pleased to introduce the new Children's Social Care Dashboard, which is here as a learning tool, to help us all understand how well we are achieving the outcomes we want to see from children's social care. The Dashboard should make it easier to understand where there are similarities and differences, and where we can learn from others. Data can support our understanding, but social care is complex, and it is important that indicators and trends are not viewed on their own.

The Dashboard will not remain static. It will evolve over time, as we evaluate and iterate it, and work to fill key gaps in the data, such as understanding the experiences of children and families, measuring the effectiveness of multiagency working, and better understanding the longer-term outcomes for care-experienced young people.

While this Dashboard provides an opportunity to look at data across different regions and local authorities, it does not currently allow us to look at how social care is experienced differently by children with different characteristics. We want to give all children the start in life that they deserve, and that includes respecting the child's culture, language and religion. This data is complex and sensitive, but we will work with local authorities to analyse and interpret this data so that we can be more transparent about the support we provide to all of our most disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

This government is on a mission to create a new era of opportunity and a fairer society for everybody. As the Minister for Children and Families I am proud to be part of this mission, which is personal to me. I look forward to working alongside partners and stakeholders, listening to the voices of children and young people who experience social care, to help make their lives better.

Janet Daby MP

Minister for Children and Families

Introduction

The Children's Social Care Dashboard (the "Dashboard") and the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) are central to our ambition to set greater national direction for children's social care, and to build a system that can continually learn and improve.

In December 2023, under the previous government, the department published its Children's Social Care Data and Digital Strategy, outlining how data can support and enable local authorities to deliver children's social care services. It sets out the ambition to develop a system that effectively shares children's social care data to provide necessary insights to those who need it, when they need it, building public trust in data use.

The Dashboard supports that ambition, working to achieve the strategic objective of improving the data we collect, share, and use, by providing timely analysis and insights that inform evidence-based decisions and actions.

The National Framework brings together the purpose of local authority children's social care, the principles by which children, young people and families should be supported, the enablers that should be in place so that the system is effective, and the outcomes that should be achieved so that children and young people can grow up to thrive.

The Dashboard will support the implementation of the National Framework by providing insights and learning through a clear, visual representation of key metrics and indicators. In time, this will provide information on what is happening in practice and how the outcomes and enablers set out in the National Framework are being achieved.

The National Framework outcomes and enablers, which form the context for the Dashboard are:

Outcomes

1. Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need

2. Children and young people are supported by their family network

3. Children and young people are safe in and outside of their home

4. Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

Enablers

- o Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective

- o Leaders drive conditions for effective practice

- o The workforce is equipped and effective

Journey to develop the Dashboard

We consulted on the Dashboard alongside the National Framework between February and May 2023, and sought feedback on a list of suggested indicators. Following the consultation, in December 2023, the department issued the National Framework as statutory guidance, and published plans for the development of the Dashboard and the initial list of indicators..

Since then the proposed list of indicators has been further tested and iterated to ensure it best meets the needs of users and provides an accurate, clear representation of how the outcomes and enablers set out in the National Framework are being achieved. Changes to the proposed list are detailed in Annex A, while the complete set of indicators in the present version of the Dashboard are available in Annex B.

Where possible each indicator has a time series with national, regional and local authority comparison, a regional chart, a local authority level chart and an option to compare local authorities with their statistical neighbours.

This Dashboard does not provide any comparisons based on the characteristics of children, such as gender or ethnicity. Numbers of children in these breakdowns are often very low at a local authority level, leading to large amounts of suppressed data and making the picture more difficult to interpret. Child characteristics are also complex and have complex interactions which can be difficult to interpret without further contextual information or statistical analysis. We see the value that including breakdowns on the characteristics of children would bring to the Dashboard. Given the sensitivities with this data we intend to work with local authorities to develop and socialise appropriate data in a secure environment as part of the private Dashboard. This will feed into decisions made for developments of future iterations of the public Dashboard. It should be noted that breakdowns of many of the Dashboard indicators by a number of child characteristics can be found on Explore Education Statistics.

We are committed to ensuring the Dashboard remains relevant and useful and are publishing it as the first step on an iterative process that welcomes feedback, will adapt to emerging needs, and works towards the ambition set out in our Data and Digital Strategy.

This document supports the publication of the Dashboard in 2024, sharing our final list of included indicators, outlines our plans for further development, and guidance for its use.

How the Dashboard will be used

We intend the Dashboard to be used by:

- o **Government** as a consistent, trusted measure of the outcomes and enablers that set strategic direction for children's social care services. The Dashboard will allow us to understand if there are system-wide successes or issues and highlight where barriers are being faced.

- o **Local authority regions**, both as Regional Improvement and Intervention Alliances (RIIAs), and in the future, potentially through regional care co-operatives or other regional approaches. The Dashboard is an opportunity to use a consistent set of measures to compare progress, share learning, and work together through sector-led improvement, to embed best practice across children's social care delivery.

- o **Local authorities** as they design, deliver and quality assure their services, particularly when embedding the National Framework guidance. They will identify areas of practice that need to improve and areas of success that can be shared with others.

- o **Safeguarding partners** for considering outcomes in their area, and in future to look at the enabler of multi-agency working, supporting them to understand the wider picture of children's social care service delivery.

- o **Children, young people and families and the wider public** to have a consistent set of measures and help bring transparency to the outcomes in children's social care. This can help them understand the services that their local authority delivers and the outcomes that are achieved compared with other local authorities, within their region or nationally.

The Dashboard is not intended to be a tool to measure local authority performance on children's social care. The Dashboard, and the data it contains, is intended to be the start of a conversation around understanding the outcomes and enablers and generating learning to improve outcomes for children.

Ofsted are responsible for the inspection of local authorities, against their framework, Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). They use a range of data sources to consider the performance of local authorities. The Dashboard will not prompt

inspection, and it does not currently include any new data that is not already in the public domain.

The Dashboard is not intended to be used to understand day-to-day operational delivery. Local authorities will doubtless use a large range of metrics to understand service delivery and performance within their own area. The Dashboard reflects the National Framework, and as such presents a system level overview, with local data available for comparison to aid learning and insight.

The Dashboard will allow for comparisons to be made between local authorities, however all data will be provided with the caveat that the system is complex and that indicators and trends should not be viewed in isolation.

Using the Dashboard to support LAs

The Dashboard supports local authority practitioners, practice supervisors and senior leaders with to set out how data should be used to inform decision-making, and to support learning.

To capitalise on the benefits of the Dashboard, local authorities are encouraged to collaborate within their regions to regularly review the Dashboard. This will allow local authorities to effectively compare different datasets, identify patterns, detect irregularities, and gain a comprehensive understanding of progress towards outcomes and enablers. The Dashboard will support learning across local authority boundaries and encourage discussion around how they deliver practice in line with the expectations set out in the National Framework.

Alongside the National Framework, we published a guidance document that outlines advice for how local authorities can integrate the National Framework into their practice, with a specific focus on enhancing collaboration among multi-agencies within the system to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families. The Dashboard will facilitate multi-agency working by providing a common platform for different stakeholders to access and compare data. This collaborative approach will improve communication and coordination, leading to better outcomes for children and families.

DfE's Case Leads and Regional Improvement Support Leads (RISLs)

Over time, the Dashboard will be integrated into the existing suite of tools used to facilitate discussions between the Department's Regions Group and local authorities. We know that currently, many local authorities maintain their own performance dashboards, which vary significantly in quality due to differences in data maturity. This inconsistency can lead to challenges in accurately assessing and comparing National Framework implementation across regions.

The Dashboard aims to address these issues by providing a unified platform that presents consistent and reliable data. This will not only enhance the quality of information available but also reduce the administrative burden on local authorities. By using the Dashboard, local authorities can avoid the time-consuming process of creating their own reports, allowing them to focus more on strategic decision-making and improving service delivery.

We would like local authorities to:

- use the Dashboard as part of their conversations and understanding around how the outcomes and enablers set out in the National Framework are being achieved;

- review the Dashboard following data publications to view the updated picture and consider trends in practice;

- engage with the Department in the process of iterative development of the Dashboard, sharing honest and constructive feedback, in particular with regard to identifying areas of future data need; and

- discuss the Dashboard within their safeguarding partnerships to consider how their work influences outcomes.

Sector Led Improvement

Alongside actions that individual local authorities take in their own organisations and with DfE, we want to encourage collaboration between local authorities, such as through the Sector Led Improvement Partners (SLIPs) and Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIIAs). By sharing knowledge and working together, local authorities that demonstrate stronger performance against key outcomes and enablers can mentor and share best practices with other local authorities. Additionally, including statistical neighbours in these discussions can facilitate more localised and relevant exchanges, promoting improvements in practice at a regional level.

Future improvements to children's social care data and the Dashboard

This is the first iteration of the Dashboard. It is based on data that is currently available, considered to meet standards of robustness and consistency, and is published at local authority level.

It is our intention to continue to improve it over time. To play that role and support learning, we know that the Dashboard must evolve in 3 key ways:

- Data must be available more frequently (without creating undue burden on those who curate and provide it).
- We want to develop more outcome-focused data to more holistically measure the outcomes and enablers in the National Framework.
- We want to allow users to more fully explore the characteristics of the available data and ensure that ease of use of the dashboard remains high.

Next steps

Following the publication of the Dashboard in 2024 (where we will launch a public Dashboard), the Department will:

- Work with a group of local authorities to develop and test new ways of moving pre-agreed data, in a timely way, between local authorities and the Department. Depending on what we learn from that early group, we then anticipate developing a restricted access version of the Dashboard (referred to as the 'private Dashboard'), using this more timely data. Together with these LAs, we will be able to understand the end-to-end data quality and burdens trade-offs between regular/fast data feeds and the current annual bulk data collections. That learning, alongside user experience, understanding how the Dashboard is used, and evaluating the initial indicators, will inform how the Dashboard(s) best evolve to maximise responsible use of what is a complex suite of data.

- Continue to refine the list of indicators, review data gaps across children's social care and scope out ways in which these data gaps can be addressed over time, particularly regarding the experience of children, young people and families. While we feel that the data in the current iteration of the Dashboard provides a good overview of the National Framework outcomes and enablers, we know there are

gaps to address. This can be seen particularly in the multi-agency enabler. We will work with the sector and other experts to look at 'what good likes like' for multi-agency working and how this can best be reflected through data. By filling these and other data gaps, over time we will have a more comprehensive tool reflecting the outcomes and enablers in the National Framework.

- Regularly update the public Dashboard in accordance with each statistical return, ensuring that the information remains current and accurate.

- Maintain a programme of user testing and evaluation of the Dashboard to ensure that it provides maximum value for insight and learning for both internal and external stakeholders as part of continuous improvement practices.

Annex A: Changes to published indicators

Indicators modified

- **Percentage of no further action (NFA) at assessment against the percentage of NFA that progressed to assessment within 6-12 months.** There is currently no published data on [Explore Education Statistics](#) (EES) for the number of NFA who progressed to assessment within 6-12 months and therefore we cannot calculate this indicator from the available data. We would like to test developing this indicator in the private Dashboard initially.

- **Persistent absence (CINP (Child in Need Plans), CPP (Child Protection Plans), CLA (Children Looked After)).** We have included this indicator within the Dashboard but are aware that there are small numbers recorded in these groups and therefore substantial amounts of suppressed data on the charts and tables. We will continue to monitor the inclusion of these indicators.

- **Repeat Child Protection Plans (CPPs) within 12 months.** We do not currently publish data on how frequently repeat CPPs are issued. Therefore, we are using the indicator of repeat CPPs rather than repeat CPPs within 12 months. We would like to test the repeat CPPs within 12 months indicator in the private Dashboard initially.

- **Percentage of Child Protection Plans longer than 2 years.** We wanted to include this metric in combination with repeat Child Protection Plans within 12 months to provide a complete picture of how CPPs are being used within local authorities. While we have included the percentage of CPPs longer than 2 years at a national and regional level, we have been unable to provide a local authority breakdown for this indicator as the small numbers recorded in most local authorities mean that the data is suppressed and cannot be shown in a chart. We would hope to be able to include this data in the private Dashboard.

- **Average number of placement changes.** Data is currently not published to show the average number of placement changes, only where children have had three or more placements in a year.

- **Distance of placements from home.** Data is currently not published to show the distance or average distance of placements from home, but only where placements are more or less than 20 miles from home.

- **Average time between placement order and match for those children who are adopted.** This data is only published on EES at a national level. We have therefore included this data in the Dashboard, but as national level data only.

- **A&E visits caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries to children and young people.** We have identified an Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) data source which may allow us to present this data for 0–14-year-olds. This is a one-year data source only published in 2022-23 therefore we cannot present a time series for this data.

Indicators removed

- **Reunification of children in care without a return to care within 1 year.** This data is currently being explored by the Department for Education CSC statistics team for publication. However, as it is not currently published or included on EES we are unable to show this data on the Dashboard. We hope to add this data in a future iteration of the Dashboard.

- **Rates of self-harm.** There is ad hoc published data for this indicator from 2018-19, but the data is now significantly older than other data displayed in the Dashboard, and we feel that inclusion of this data will be potentially misleading with limited additional value.

- **Missing children.** There are serious concerns about the quality and consistency of this data, with different thresholds used for recording and reporting incidents in different areas. We do not recommend using this data currently as it has the potential to be misleading in a public Dashboard. We would like to explore options for this data in the private Dashboard.

- **Local areas crime statistics.** These statistics are available for the entire population (i.e. not split by relevance to children's social care) and at police force rather than local authority area level. Different police force areas may report crimes differently and reporting will be heavily influenced by local policies. We feel

inclusion of this data could potentially be misleading and not substantively add to users' understanding of delivery of children's social care.

- **Number of adoption early permanence placements.** We do not have a published data source for this data, and it is not currently collected by DfE or trusted partner organisations. We will continue to explore options for developing this data for future iterations.

Annex B: List of indicators included in the current iteration of the Dashboard

Outcome 1: Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need

Access to support and getting help

- Rate of Children in Need (CIN)
- Re-referrals within 12 months of a previous referral

Family stability

- Rate of children starting to be looked after, with a breakdown by whether new entrants to care are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)
- Rate of Children Looked After (CLA) on 31 March

Child wellbeing and development

- School attendance, including those with Child in Need Plans (CINO), Child Protection Plans (CPPO), and Children Looked After (CLA)

- Persistent absence, including those with Child in Need Plans (CINO), Child Protection Plans (CPPO), and Children Looked After (CLA)

Educational attainment

- Educational attainment in Key Stage 2 (expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined) and Key Stage 4 (average attainment 8) for those with Child in Need Plans (CINO), Child Protection Plans (CPPO) and children in care (CLA)

Outcome 2: Children and young people are supported by their family network

Families engaging and receiving support from their family network

- Percentage of children who cease being looked after due to moving into Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Child Arrangements Order (CAO)

Outcome 3: Children and young people are safe in and outside of their home

Child safety - general

- Percentage of Child Protection Plans (CPP) started during the year, which were a second or subsequent plan
- Percentage of Child Protection Plans (CPP) longer than 2 years (national and regional data only)
- Hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries to children and young people (0-14 years only)

Child abuse / neglect

- Factors identified at the end of assessment in the year related to child abuse or neglect

Harms outside the home

- Factors identified at the end of assessment in the year related to specific types of harms outside the home

Outcome 4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

Stability and quality of where a child lives

- Percentage of children looked after with 3 or more placement changes in 12 months
- Percentage of children looked after placed 20 miles or more from home
- Percentage of children living in foster, residential care, or secure children's homes
- Average number of months between decision that a child should be placed for adoption and matching of child and adopters (national data only)
- Percentage of children living in foster, residential care, secure children's homes or other residential settings

Child wellbeing

- Strengths and difficulties questionnaire (average SDQ score)

Quality of life for care experienced people

- Care leavers in employment, education and training
- Percentage of care leavers in accommodation considered suitable

Enabler: Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective

We will work with the sector and other experts to develop indicators for this National Framework enabler.

Enabler: Leaders drive conditions for effective practice

Spending

- Share of total local authority spending on Children's Services, and average per capita (of all children in a local authority) spend on children's services
- Share of Children Services spend not on CLA

Culture focused on outcomes from children and families and continually improving services

- Ofsted leadership rating

Enabler: The workforce is equipped and effective

Workforce stability

- Social worker turnover rate
- Agency worker rate
- Vacancy rate

Quality of support for children and families

- Social worker average caseloads

Social worker ethnicity

- Ethnic diversity of workforce, and levels of seniority

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