



Department
for Education

Children's social care private dashboard: principles for data collection and use

Purpose of this document

The [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) sets direction for practice and describes the outcomes we want to see achieved for children, young people, and families. We have a shared goal to improve these outcomes, and better use of data can support us to achieve that aim.

Our ambition is to improve how children's social care (CSC) data is collected, shared, and used to help:

- enable appropriate, accurate, and more timely insights and analysis to support evidence-based decision making at local and national level
- support improved benchmarking, learning, and collaboration across local authorities (LAs)
- address the data lags that currently limit the insights available from our statutory data collections
- better understand and address the data burdens on local authorities

We want to work with a group of LAs as early adopters on a private access version of the [CSC dashboard](#), allowing us to test the value and quality of more timely data flows for benchmarking and learning against CSC outcomes.

This document explains how we'll collect and use data collected through the CSC private dashboard early adopters scheme.

Why are we collecting more timely CSC data

We want to work with early adopter LAs to shape our solution for more timely data, understanding how automated collections could reduce data burdens for LAs, and improve access to learning and insights. The private dashboard would provide a shared, secure platform for participating LAs which can be used to better understand and learn how more timely CSC data can support improved outcomes for children and families.

By testing these solutions in a pilot, we are able to work closely with a small group of LAs to understand the sustainability and scalability of more timely data flow options.

Allowing us to develop a solution that meets needs on a smaller scale before any wider roll out.

We will work with participating LAs to continuously evaluate and assess the scheme throughout to understand its future potential. If the data flow solutions aren't viable for scaling, we wouldn't seek to further roll out to all LAs.

The data collection mechanism

Using a test and learn approach, we will work with volunteer LAs to test our API (application programming interface) solution which has been developed to enable automated, low-burden movement of CSC data. We will test three data ingestion methods to best understand the burden, accuracy, scalability, and cost of each option:

- **Build your Own:** LAs develop their own data extraction and API integration
- **Data to Insight¹:** LAs work with Data to Insight, building on the existing standard safeguarding dataset work.
- **Case Management Systems (CMS):** CMS suppliers extract and submit data via the API.

The data collection mechanism will involve creating an automated daily extraction of specific CSC data (set out in our API data collection specification) from each LAs CMS data warehouse, or their own warehouse for build your own. This data will be formatted as a JSON file and submitted automatically to DfE's new API.

The initial data sent to the DfE will include 1-2 years of historic data to support the inclusion of trend data and analysis over time.

Participating LAs will sign a data sharing agreement before any data is transferred. This agreement will outline which data categories will be shared and explain how we will use the data in line with the [DfE Personal Information Charter](#).

How DfE will use the data you share

We know that you will want reassurance about how this data may be used.

As part of the early adopters scheme, DfE will use the data exclusively for research, evaluation, and development purposes. The data will not be accessible to any individual without a legitimate or objective reason directly related to the scheme, and it will not be used or shared for accountability or performance management purposes.

¹ [Data to Insight](#) is the sector-led service for local authority children's data professionals. They developed the [Standard Safeguarding Dataset](#) (SSD) as part of DfE's Data and Digital Solutions Fund. Details on how the SSD has been developed to connect to our API is set out in Annex B of the CSC private dashboard early adopters application guide.

We are collecting this data to understand the end-to-end data quality and burdens trade-offs between regular, more timely data feeds and the current annual bulk data collections. That learning will be used alongside research into user experience, how the dashboard is used, and evaluation of the initial indicators, to inform how the CSC dashboard(s) best evolve to maximise responsible use of what is a complex suite of data.

All data will be stored in accordance with DfE's data storage and protection policies. The data will be shared back with participating LAs through the [View Your Education Data service](#), with user level permissions to allow for QA and assurance as set out in the sections below.

Linking with other DfE data

As the scheme progresses in phase 2, and confidence in the data flow and quality increases, DfE plans to explore linking CSC data with other data sources within DfE, for example school attendance data, to explore if it is possible to gain additional insights. As part of this pilot, we would look to evaluate the quality of data-linking and assess whether it can provide DfE, LAs (and potentially schools) with new insightful data, for example on school attendance for children receiving CSC support.

The intention for any data-linking will be to use the insights from a richer set of data to help improve outcomes for children, by informing policy thinking, supporting learning to improve delivery of services, and evaluating programmes. Any integration will be developed in collaboration with participating LAs and will be subject to appropriate data protection and governance measures.

Access to data and user level permissions

We understand that there are likely to be increased inaccuracies when collecting more timely data due to the nature of how CSC data is collected.

Participating LAs will have the opportunity to review their data before it is shared in an aggregated format for benchmarking and learning with the other early adopter LAs through the private dashboard. The timeframe for quality assurance will be refined during the pilot phase in collaboration with participating LAs.

To securely enable this validation and assurance, DfE access to this data will be limited to those with a strict need for development, analysis, and evaluation purposes. LA user access will be controlled by each respective LA across three views:

- **Data quality assurance:** LAs will have the opportunity to view any validation errors on their own data, that have been flagged through the API, to enable them to correct any issues in their source data for resubmission.
- **Preview of aggregated data:** LAs will have access to their own unsuppressed aggregated data for approximately one month for internal

review before it is shared on the private dashboard for benchmarking and learning. This timeframe may be refined during the pilot phase in collaboration with participating LAs, as we understand more about the data quality and benchmarking needs.

- **Private dashboard:** Once data has undergone the QA and preview stages, it will be shared onto the private dashboard for wider benchmarking and learning with other participating LA data. Standard data suppression will be applied to aggregated benchmarking data.

Working with the sector

We have engaged with LAs through user research to understand what they need from a private dashboard—what it should show, how it should work, and why it matters.

We will continue to support participating LAs by:

- providing coaching and technical support for API integration
- addressing technical issues as they arise
- facilitating best practice communities for peer learning
- offering a channel to raise and resolve data sharing or protection concerns

We are committed to working transparently with the sector and are sharing these principles to build confidence in the project.

What happens next

If your application is successful, you will receive:

- a data sharing agreement outlining the legal basis for data transfer and use
- technical documentation to support API integration
- access to onboarding support and guidance