



Department
for Education

Data and digital maturity in children's social care

**Findings from a national survey of
local authorities**

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Association**



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Executive summary

Research context

In November 2025, the Local Government Association (LGA), in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) and consortium partners (Coram, Data to Insight, ICT Revolutions and Social Finance), conducted an online survey with heads of data or digital within children's services across English local authorities responsible for children's social care. This survey forms part of a wider programme of work in which the LGA, DfE and partners are collaborating to design a Centre of Excellence (CofEx) for Data and Digital within children's services.

The purpose of the survey was to understand local authorities' current level of maturity and how data, digital and technology are being used to support outcomes for children and families. It also sought to identify where the CofEx can best provide support, and offered authorities the opportunity to influence the design of the centre. The survey explored maturity across five key pillars: strategy and governance; data management and quality; technology and infrastructure; people, skills and culture; and service design and use of data, digital and technology. Each pillar was examined through a series of questions on current practices and standards, accompanied by a self-assessment measure. The survey also included questions about authorities' approaches to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and procurement arrangements. The full set of questions can be found in [Annex A](#).

Of the 151 local authorities invited to participate, 110 responded – a response rate of 73%.

Summary of key findings

- **Critical data flows remain highly manual.** Seventy-one per cent of authorities report using email attachments to transfer safeguarding data, whilst 46% use file transfers. Only 25% of authorities are using automated or API-based methods. The high reliance on email to transfer data could be creating avoidable inefficiencies, delays and risks.
- **Access to analytical tools is restricted by organisational barriers.** Over half of authorities report obstacles, and these include financial constraints (reported by 45% of authorities), procurement requirements (43% of authorities) and IT security restrictions (42% of authorities), indicating that structural processes and lack of resources could be limiting the adoption of modern analytical tools.
- **Systemic barriers hinder effective data sharing.** Authorities face consistent internal and external challenges, which included incompatible systems (a barrier to external data sharing for 62% of authorities, and to internal data sharing for 51%), a lack of unique identifiers used in systems (60% external, 54% internal), and limited

staff capacity (50% external, 48% internal), potentially resulting in reduced interoperability and increased administrative burden.

- **AI adoption is high, but governance has not kept pace.** While 79% of authorities are using AI, only 4% have a children's-services-specific AI strategy, highlighting a significant gap between operational uptake and the strategic frameworks needed to manage responsible AI use.
- **Beam: Magic Notes is rapidly emerging as a sector-specific AI tool.** With 53% of AI-using councils adopting Magic Notes, its uptake indicates that authorities are increasingly investing in specialist tools tailored to social-work practice.
- **Advanced analytical skills remain underdeveloped.** Although most authorities report that their staff are well trained in the core analytical tools they use (89% of those using Excel formulas and manipulations state their staff are well trained), proficiency declines markedly for more advanced technical skills. Less than half (49%) of authorities whose staff use statistical analysis report that their teams are well trained, and this falls to 26% for programming languages such as Python or R. This pattern highlights a significant skills gap that may hinder the sector's ability to progress towards more advanced, data-driven analytical practices.
- **Leadership encouragement is high, but support is insufficient.** Although 80% of authorities say their leadership teams drive staff to make better use of data, digital and technology, a lower proportion (59%) report receiving the resources or support needed to introduce new tools or data-related improvements. This suggests a gap between leadership ambition and the practical investment required to deliver change.
- **Disconnect between areas of perceived and derived data maturity.** There was broad alignment between the two measures of maturity within each pillar. Authorities who performed stronger against the derived framework tended also to self-assess higher, and vice versa, however, there was a mismatch between relative areas of strength. Authorities tended to self-assess strategy and governance as their strongest area of maturity: 37% of authorities self-assessed as either 'advanced' or 'leading', whereas the derived measure of maturity suggests that this was the weakest relative area with a mean average maturity score of 67% compared to 83% for the strongest pillar – people, skills and culture. Further detail on perceived versus derived data maturity is provided in the section [Evaluating Data and Digital Maturity](#).

Background

Introduction

In November 2025, the Local Government Association (LGA), in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) and consortium partners (Coram, Data to Insight, ICT Revolutions and Social Finance), conducted an online survey of heads of data or digital within children's services in single-tier and county councils across England. The survey was open for just over four weeks and received 110 responses, representing a response rate of 73%. This work forms part of a wider programme through which the LGA, DfE and partners are collaborating to design a Centre of Excellence (CofEx) for Data and Digital within children's services.

The purpose of the survey was to understand local authorities' current levels of data and digital maturity, how data, digital and technology are being used to support outcomes for children and families, and where the CofEx can most effectively provide support. The survey also provided authorities with an opportunity to influence the development of the centre's design.

Maturity was explored across five key pillars: strategy and governance; data management and quality; technology and infrastructure; people, skills and culture; and service design and use of data, digital and technology. Each pillar was examined through questions on current practices and standards, alongside a self-assessment measure. The survey also included questions on local authorities' approaches to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and procurement arrangements.

Methodology

The online survey was distributed via email by the Local Government Association's Research and Information Team and was open for completion between 13 November and 14 December. Whilst the survey was initially sent to heads of data and digital, responses were received from a broad range of senior leaders and specialists, including those responsible for performance, intelligence, analytics, digital transformation, technology, service improvement and children's services operations (such as heads of service, assistant directors, and other strategic data, digital and performance roles). A response rate of 73% provides confidence that the respondents are broadly representative of the target group. However, it should be noted that not all members of the target group participated, and therefore some insights or experiences may not be captured.

It should also be noted that two responses were submitted on behalf of shared-service arrangements, meaning the total number of eligible responding authorities was 151 rather than 153.

Table 1 displays the response rate by region. The highest level of response was received from the East Midlands, with nearly nine-tenths (89%) responding. This was followed by

the North West (83%), the South West (80%) and Yorkshire and Humber (80%). The lowest response rates were observed in London (63%) and the West Midlands (57%).

Table 1: Response rate by region

Region	Number of responses	Target number of responses	Response rate
East Midlands	8	9	89%
North West	20	24	83%
South West	12	15	80%
Yorkshire and Humber	12	15	80%
South East	15	19	79%
North East	8	12	67%
East of England	7	11	64%
London	20	32	63%
West Midlands	8	14	57%

Figure 1: Mapped response rate by region

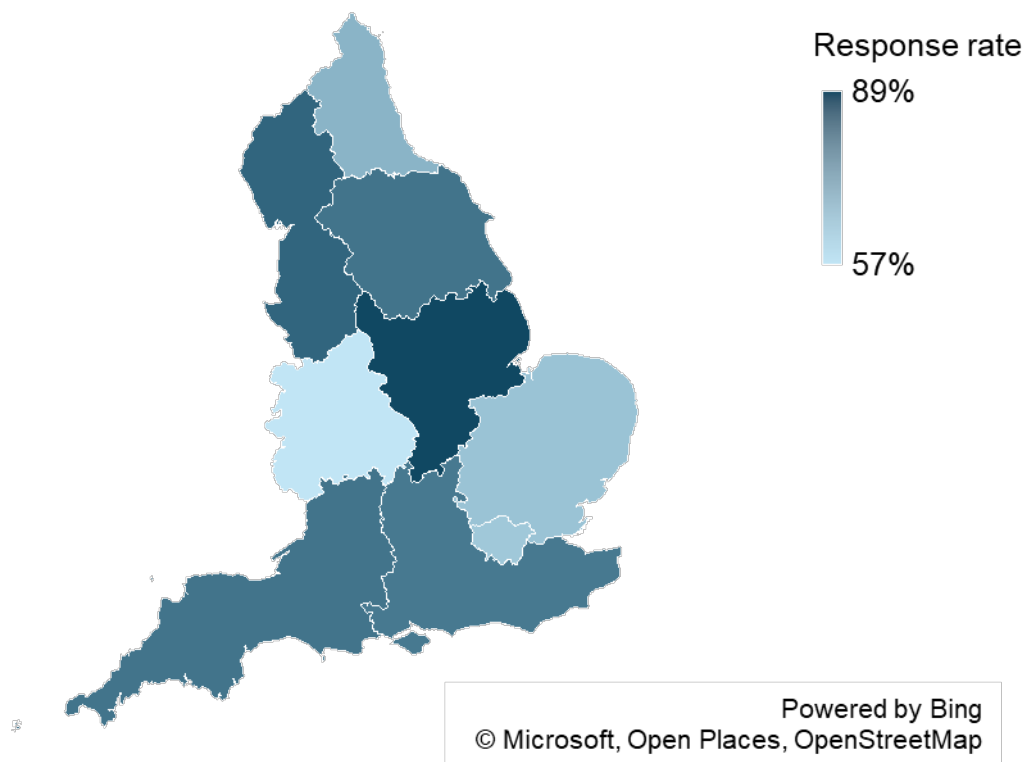


Table 2 displays the response rate by type of authority. The highest level of response was received from county councils, with over three quarters (81%) responding. This was

followed by metropolitan districts (78%) and unitary authorities (73%). The lowest level of response was received from London boroughs (63%).

Table 2: Response rate by type of authority

Type of council	Number of responses	Total number	Response rate
County	17	21	81%
Metropolitan district	28	36	78%
Unitary authority	45	62	73%
London borough	20	32	63%

To make the results of this survey more representative of all English single tier and county councils overall, responses have been weighted by region and council type.

In addition, the following should be considered when interpreting the findings of this survey:

Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the unweighted number of respondents who answered each question. Please note that bases can vary throughout the survey, depending on whether respondents answered all questions.

- Chi-squared tests of association were carried out to explore whether relationships existed between survey responses and key contextual categories, including council type, regional grouping and Ofsted's Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) ratings. This enabled us to assess whether any observed differences between groups were unlikely to have occurred by chance. Due to the relatively small sample sizes within some sub-groups, only limited statistically significant associations were identified. Where statistically significant correlations did emerge, these have been highlighted and discussed within the analysis section of the report.
- Throughout the report, where a statistically significant association was identified, this is explicitly signposted using the phrasing "**showed a significant relationship**" to ensure consistency and clarity for readers. This wording is used only where statistical testing confirmed that differences were unlikely to be due to chance.
- Throughout the report, percentages may not appear to add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Non-respondent analysis

Analysis was undertaken to explore whether the characteristics of non-responding authorities differed in any meaningful way from those that completed the survey. The assessment considered four key attributes: council type, region, Ofsted ILACS overall effectiveness, and the proportion of children within the local authority population.

London boroughs were disproportionately represented among non-respondents, while county councils were notably under-represented. Only four counties appeared on the non-respondent list, compared with 17 that submitted a response. At a regional level, Greater London contained the highest concentration of non-responding councils, accounting for nearly one-third of all non-respondents. The West Midlands was also over-represented among non-respondents, relative to its overall share of councils.

Differences were also evident in Ofsted ILACS ratings. Non-respondents were more likely to hold a 'Requires Improvement' judgement (32%), compared with only 15% of respondents. Conversely, a greater proportion of respondents were rated 'Outstanding' compared to non-respondents.

There was minimal difference between respondents and non-respondents in the proportion of children within the local authority population. Non-respondents had only a marginally higher average ratio of children to total population, indicating that demographic profile did not materially affect the likelihood of response.

Data and digital maturity survey

This section contains analysis of the key findings from the survey. For the full set of tables, please refer to [Annex B](#).

Organisational structure

The survey results reveal clear structural variation in how local authorities organise their data and technology functions. Rather than converging around a single national model, the sector operates with a diverse set of arrangements, which could reflect differences in local priorities or available capacity. This variation is evident across both data and technology functions (Figure 2).

Across data functions, authorities distribute responsibilities in notably different ways:

- Forty per cent of responding authorities have one or more centralised corporate data teams that undertake children's services work
- Thirty-two per cent have data specialists directly within children's services, which could suggest a preference for more embedded expertise that can align closely with operational needs
- Fifteen per cent use a hub-and-spoke model, sharing responsibilities between corporate, centralised teams and data specialists located within the children's services function, which suggests a blend between corporate oversight and service-level specialism.

Technology functions show equally varied patterns, but with an even stronger pull towards centralisation:

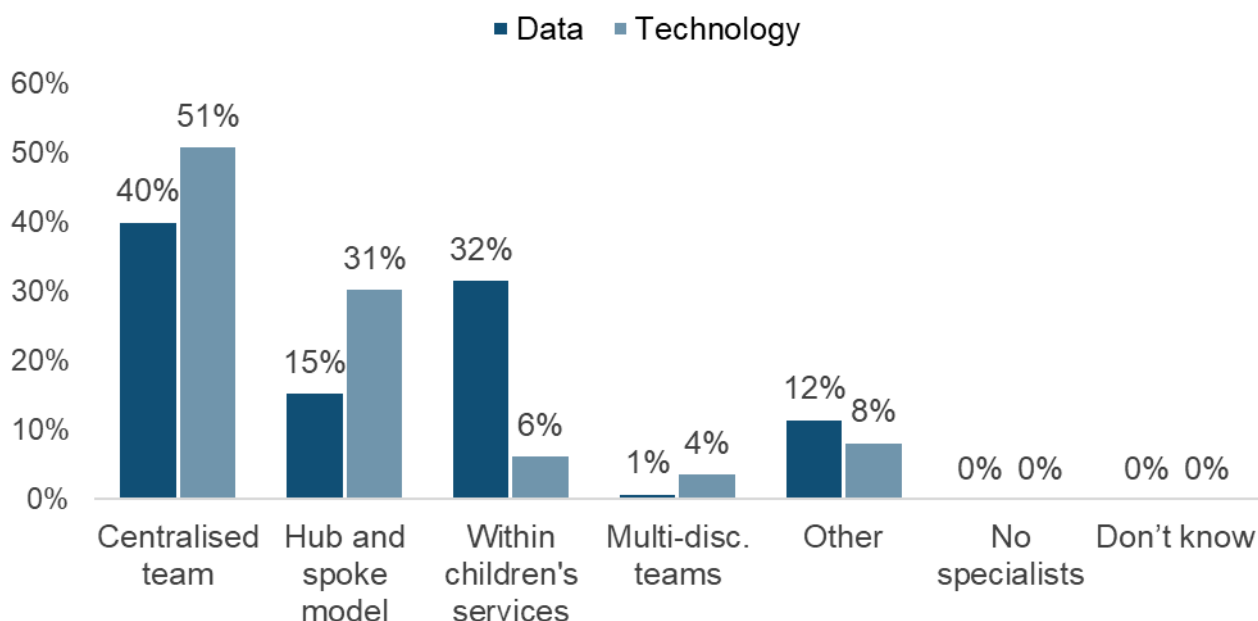
- Over half of responding authorities (51%) operate a centralised corporate technology team
- Thirty-one per cent use a hub-and-spoke model
- Only 6% embed technology specialists within children's services.

This contrasts with data functions, where embedded roles are more common, which could reflect traditional organisational norms around IT management, including centralised procurement and security governance, which often sit within corporate IT teams. Moreover, no statistically significant correlation was identified between council type and the organisational arrangements in place, indicating that authorities of different types do not consistently converge around any particular structure.

Taken together, these findings show that local authorities employ a wide range of structural approaches for both data and technology functions, with no single model

emerging as dominant across the sector. The absence of a consistent framework may make it more challenging for authorities to benchmark themselves or assess which structures are most effective for organisations of similar size, geography or service complexity, recognising that the most effective approach can vary between large and small local authorities.

Figure 2: Structure of respondents' data and technology functions (%)



Base: 110 respondents (Data), 102 respondents (Technology)

Workforce capacity

The survey also revealed variations in data and technology staffing levels across local authorities. The following results likely reflected genuine differences in resourcing across authority types, but should also be interpreted with caution, as variation in how respondents understood which roles were in scope, and the challenges of estimating staff numbers, may have introduced measurement error.

As Figure 3 shows, county councils employed larger data teams than any other council type, with the mean size sitting at 25.6 full-time equivalent posts (FTE) and a median of 23.7 FTE. The spread of values was also much wider than in other authorities, with some counties employing relatively modest teams of around 5–10 FTE, while others employed over 40 FTE, resulting in a large interquartile range. This variation could suggest differences in organisational scale, service complexity or investment in data capability among counties. The upper outliers visible in the chart reflect those authorities that looked to be particularly well-resourced in data functions.

In contrast, London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary authorities all had far smaller and more consistent data teams. Their mean lay between 9 and 11 FTE, and their

medians were also clustered around 9 to 11 FTE. While each group contained occasional outliers, such as a small number of metropolitan districts and unitary authorities with larger teams, these were exceptions, and the overall pattern showed that these types of councils operated with much more moderate levels of data workforce capacity compared with counties.

The “Overall” category, representing all councils combined, reflects this mixed picture. The mean is 12.4 FTE, and the median is just over 10 FTE, indicating that typical councils employ relatively small data teams.

Taken together, the data showed a clear structural difference in data-team size between counties and all other council types. County councils consistently maintained the largest and most varied data teams, while London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary authorities maintained more modest and uniform teams with only occasional exceptions. Overall, the dataset suggested that the majority of councils operate with small data teams, while a smaller number, largely counties, drive the higher-end variation seen in the overall distribution.

Figure 3: Number of FTE data roles supporting children’s services function by authority type



Base: 102 respondents (Overall), 16 respondents (County), 17 respondents (London boroughs), 27 respondents (Metropolitan districts), 42 respondents (Unitary authorities)

Table 3: Number of FTE data roles supporting children's services function by authority type

	Overall	County council	London borough	Metropolitan district	Unitary authority
Minimum (non-outlier)	1.3	4.5	3.4	2.0	1.3
Lower quartile	5.4	13.4	4.5	5.0	5.6
Median	10.3	23.7	10.0	10.6	8.8
Mean	12.4	25.6	9.8	11.0	9.6
Upper quartile	15.0	39.0	14.0	14.0	13.2
Maximum (non-outlier)	28.0	47.0	20.0	27.0	20.0

Base: 102 respondents (Overall), 16 respondents (County), 17 respondents (London boroughs), 27 respondents (Metropolitan districts), 42 respondents (Unitary authorities)

When looking at the technology workforce (Figure 4), again county councils employed noticeably larger and more variable teams than any other council type. The mean county team size was around 16 FTE, and the median sat close to 9 FTE, but the distribution stretched widely. While some counties operated with only 3–6 FTE, others reported technology teams of up to 50 FTE.

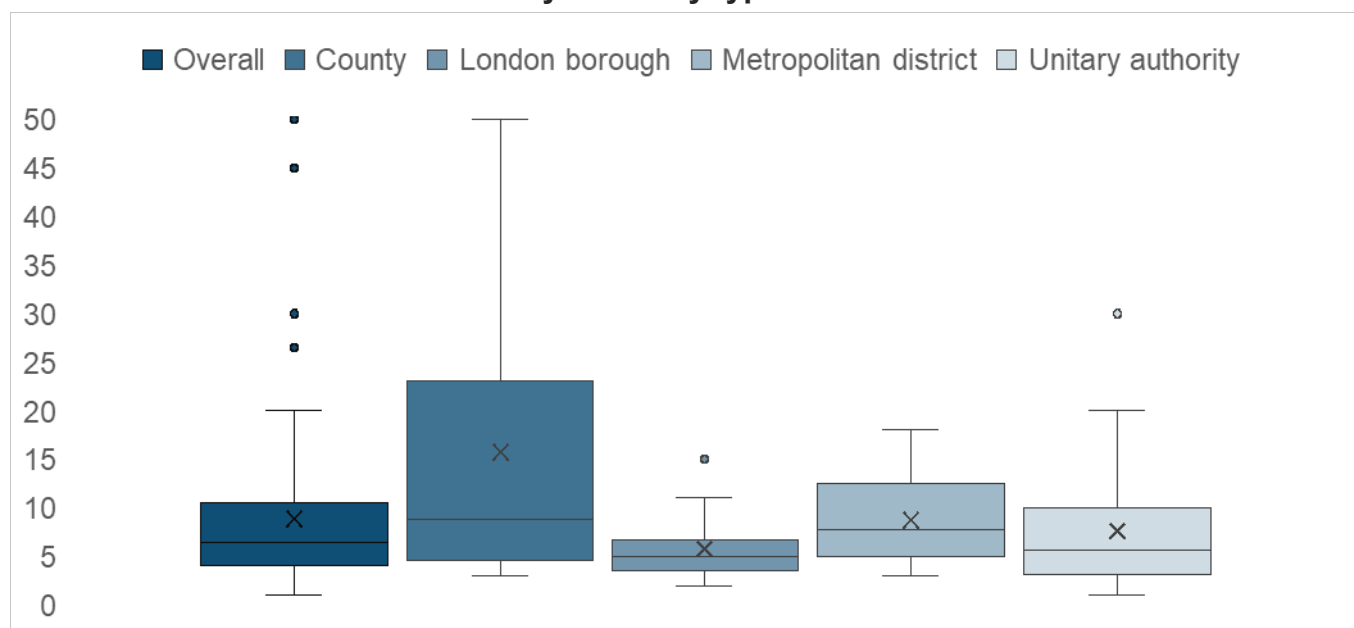
In comparison, London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary authorities had smaller and more consistent technology teams. London boroughs showed a mean of 5.8 FTE, typically ranging between 4 and 6 FTE for most authorities, with a maximum of 15 FTE. Metropolitan districts had a mean of 8.7 FTE, with most falling between 5 and 12 FTE, and a maximum of 18 FTE. Unitary authorities had a mean of 7.6 FTE, with most reporting between 3 and 10 FTE, although a small number reached higher levels, up to 30 FTE.

The “overall” category combined all council types and therefore reflected the mix of the smaller typical teams and the few much larger ones. The overall median sat at 6.5 FTE, which showed that most councils have relatively small technology teams. However, several very large values, up to 50 FTE were apparent, and these outliers largely originated from a small number of county councils with significantly higher staffing levels.

Taken together, the data indicated a clear structural difference in technology workforce capacity across council types. Most councils, particularly London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary authorities, operated with relatively modest and consistent technology teams. County councils stood out as having both the largest technology teams and the greatest variation. The overall distribution therefore reflected a sector where the majority of

authorities operated with small teams, while a limited number, again mainly counties, accounted for the largest and most extreme values seen in the chart.

Figure 4: Number of FTE technology roles supporting children's services function by authority type



Base: 79 respondents (Overall), 12 respondents (County), 13 respondents (London boroughs), 22 respondents (Metropolitan districts), 32 respondents (Unitary authorities)

Table 4: Number of FTE technology roles supporting children's services function by authority type

	Overall	County council	London borough	Metropolitan district	Unitary authority
Minimum (non-outlier)	1.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	1.0
Lower quartile	4.0	4.6	3.5	5.0	3.2
Median	6.5	8.9	5.0	7.8	5.7
Mean	8.9	15.8	5.8	8.7	7.6
Upper quartile	10.5	23.1	6.75	12.5	10.0
Maximum (non-outlier)	20.0	50.0	11.0	18.0	20.0

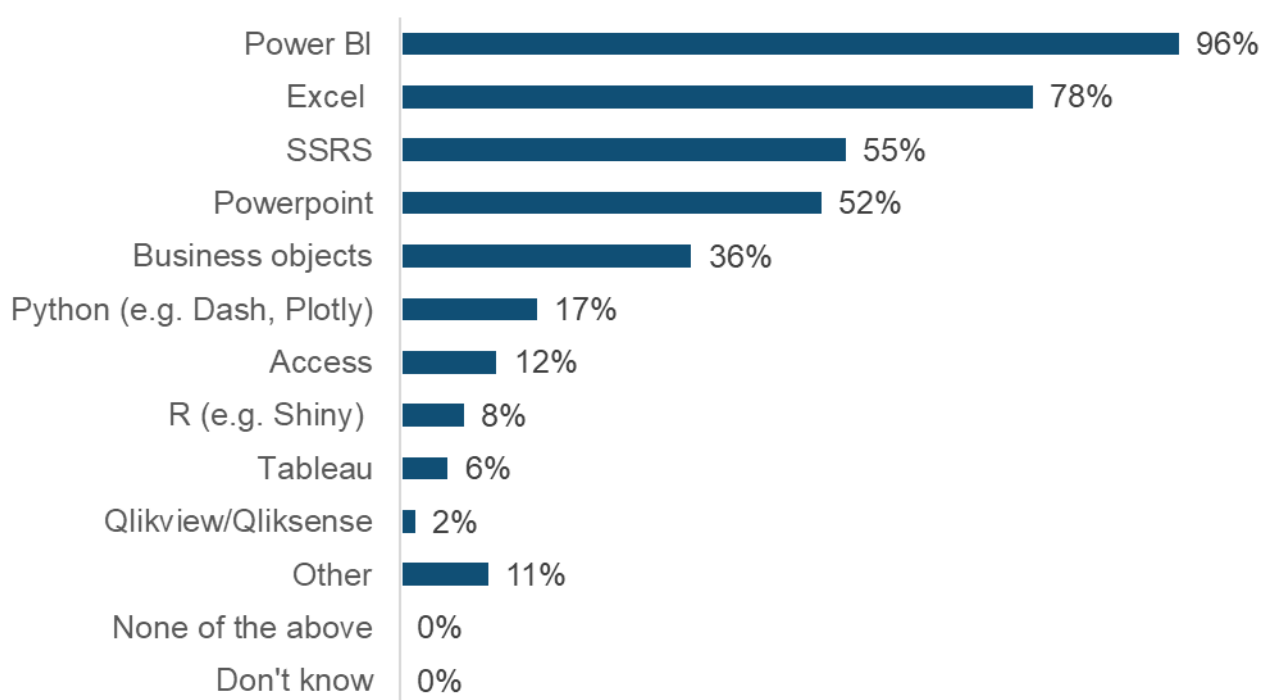
Base: 79 respondents (Overall), 12 respondents (County), 13 respondents (London boroughs), 22 respondents (Metropolitan districts), 32 respondents (Unitary authorities)

Technology and tools

The survey findings suggest that, while authorities have adopted modern reporting and analytical tools, many continue to rely on manual, legacy processes for some of their most important data flows. Findings indicate high usage of a variety of contemporary reporting tools and analytical platforms across local authorities (Figure 5) where the results show:

- Almost all authorities (96%) used Power BI, demonstrating a shift towards interactive dashboards and automated reporting environments
- High levels of usage were also reported for Excel (78%)
- Just over half of responding authorities were using SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS) (55%) or PowerPoint (52%).

Figure 5: Which of the following tools, if any, does your local authority use for reporting, dashboard or analysis?



Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could select more than one option

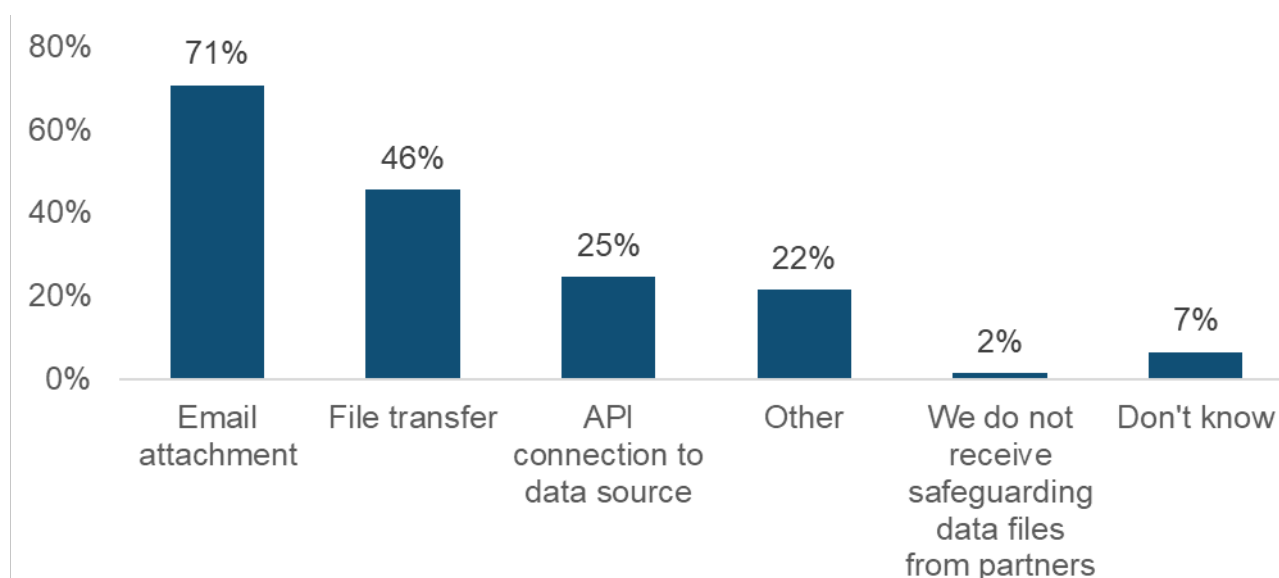
Taken together, these results suggest that most authorities operate within a relatively modern business-intelligence landscape, where staff have access to tools that support visualisation, data exploration and routine performance monitoring.

Despite this progress, the way councils described how safeguarding data is transferred was considerably less mature. As shown in Figure 6, authorities predominantly relied on manual, outdated methods to receive safeguarding files from external partners:

- Seventy-one per cent of authorities said they received files via email attachments

- Forty-six per cent received files through file transfer mechanisms
- A quarter (25%) of authorities received safeguarding data via an API connection to the data source
- And only two authorities report using API connections as their sole method.

Figure 6: How, if at all, does your local authority generally receive data files for safeguarding purposes from external partners? By external partners, we are referring to organisations that handle safeguarding data e.g. NHS, Police, Schools etc



Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could select more than one option

This contrast between modern reporting tools and manual ways of sharing data shows a clear disconnect in the sector's digital setup, where authorities are using effective tools but not modernising the data flows behind them. While reporting environments have modernised, the processing of data flows have not kept pace. The continued dependence on email-based transfers for safeguarding information could be creating unnecessary operational risks, including delays and increased opportunities for error. The findings therefore suggest that, while the sector has improved how data is analysed and presented, it has not yet fully modernised how data is shared and integrated. This imbalance may be limiting the overall efficiency and reliability of analytical processes. For example, even the most sophisticated reporting tools cannot fully compensate for inconsistent or manually handled upstream data feeds.

Access to tools

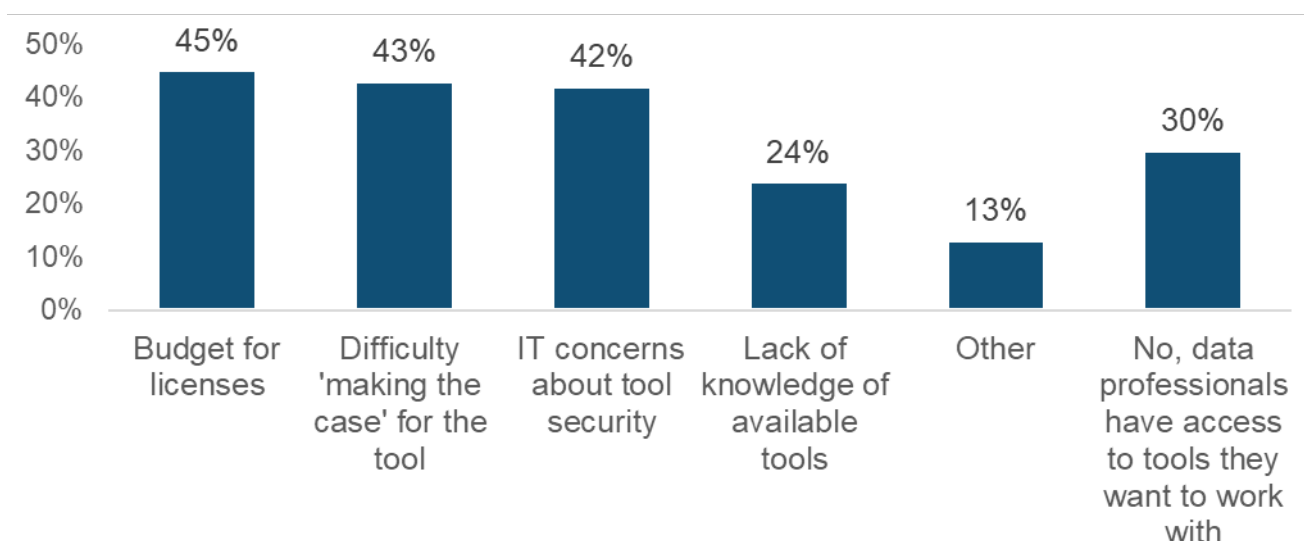
The results suggest that data professionals within children's services are frequently constrained by wider organisational factors that limit their ability to access the tools they need. Over two-thirds of authorities (69%) reported experiencing at least one barrier that prevents staff from working with preferred analytical or digital tools (Figure 7).

These findings indicate that access to tools is shaped not only by operational need or staff capability but also by broader organisational decision-making structures. Barriers cited included:

- Financial constraint, which was the most common barrier cited by 45% of responding authorities, demonstrating the pressure authorities face in acquiring licences for required tools
- Case-making requirements (43%), where data teams are struggling to justify new tools even when existing solutions may limit efficiency or capability
- Governance processes (42%), namely IT security requirements, which frequently determine whether tools can be procured or used
- A lack of visibility of what tools are available (24%), suggesting inconsistent organisational awareness of data and digital options.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the data professionals' ability to access the tools they need is influenced as much by organisational factors, such as budgeting processes, procurement rules and IT governance, as by the skills or capacity of data teams themselves. While many authorities have staff with strong analytical capabilities (Figure 8) these skills cannot be fully leveraged if access to appropriate tools is restricted. This misalignment between workforce skills and tool availability may be slowing the adoption of innovative practices, reinforcing existing inefficiencies, and contributing to uneven digital maturity across the sector.

Figure 7: Do any of the following issues inhibit data professionals in children's services from accessing the tools they want to work with?



Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could select more than one option.

Staff skills

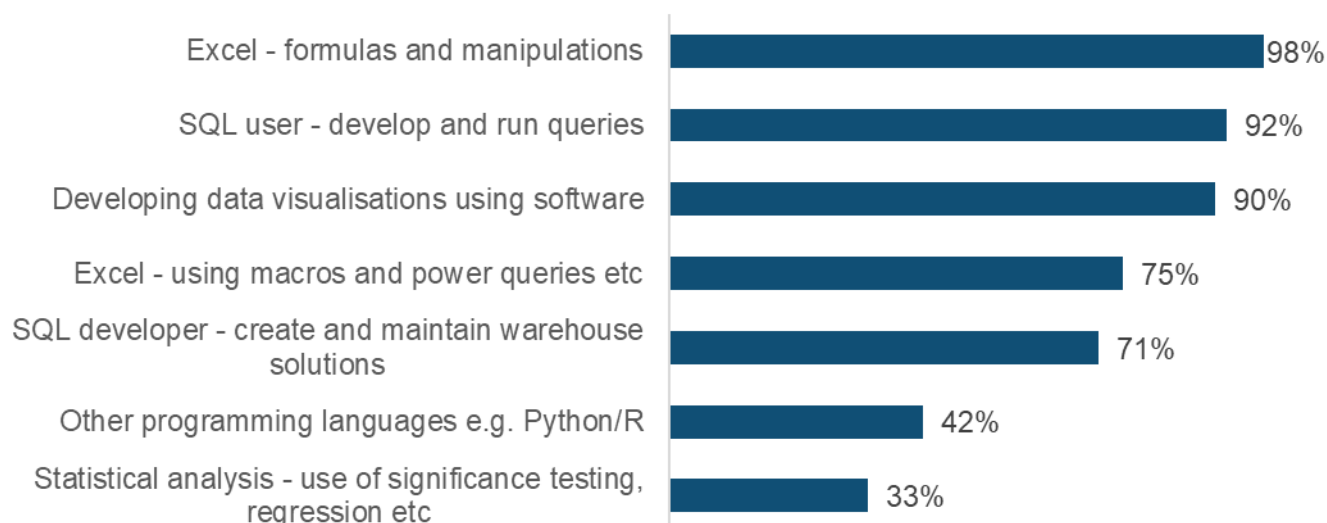
The survey findings suggest a gap between the skills commonly used in everyday analytical work and the more specialist technical capabilities required to develop, automate and modernise digital processes and use of data. Respondents reported that their data, digital and technology staff working on children's services data are using traditional business-intelligence tools and methods on a day-to-day basis (Figure 8):

- Almost all respondents said they have staff using Excel for formulas and manipulations (98%)
- Ninety-two per cent reported they have staff using SQL to develop and run queries
- Similarly, 90% of respondents said they have staff who are developing data visualisations using software.

However, regular usage falls sharply when looking at what are considered more advanced or specialist technical skills:

- Two-fifths (42%) of respondents said they have staff using programming languages such as Python or R.
- And a third (33%) said they have staff who are using statistical analysis, such as significance testing or regression.

Figure 8: Which of the following tools and skills, if any, are your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children’s services data, using in their day-to-day roles?



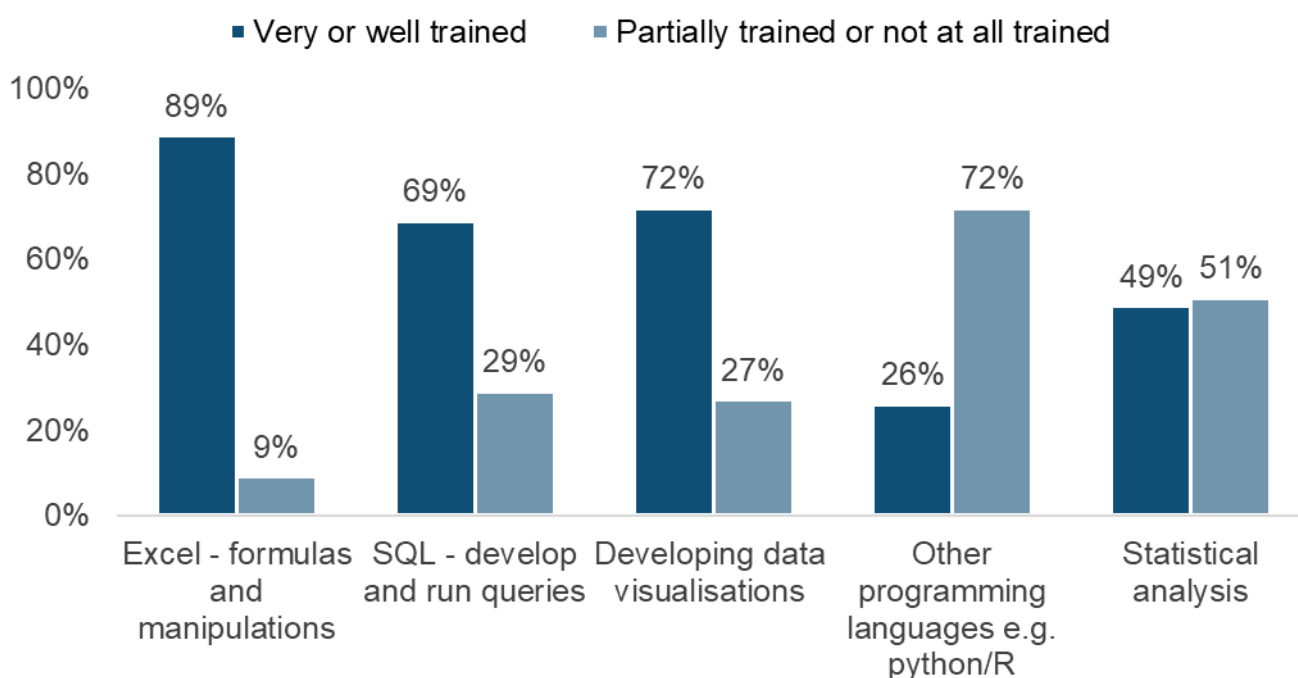
Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could select more than one option.

These findings indicate that while regular use of traditional analytical skills was firmly embedded across the sector, regular use of more advanced skills associated with predictive modelling and automation was less prevalent.

The training data presented in Figure 9 reinforces this pattern. While the majority of authorities described their staff as very or well trained in the core tools that they use, much lower proportions report equivalent proficiency in more advanced skills:

- Seventy-two per cent of authorities that report their staff using programming languages said their staff are only partially trained or not all trained in programming languages
- Fifty-one per cent of authorities that report their staff using statistical analysis said their staff are only partially trained or not at all trained in statistical analysis.

Figure 9: Please indicate how well your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children’s service data, are trained in...



Base: 108 respondents (Excel), 102 respondents (SQL), 98 respondents (Data visualisations), 47 respondents (Other programming languages), 37 respondents (Statistical analysis).

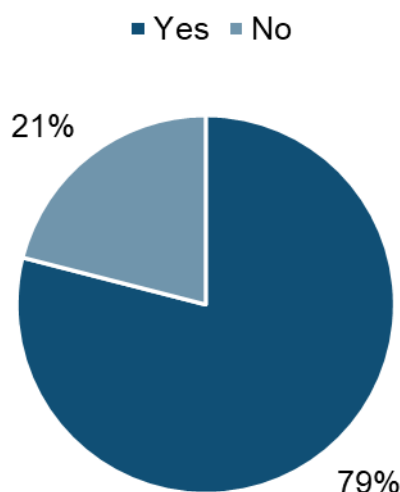
Taken together, these findings suggest a skills gap within children’s services analytical teams. Whilst responding authorities say their staff are generally well equipped for routine data management and operational reporting, there is a suggestion that staff appear to lack the specialist skills needed to progress toward more sophisticated, advanced data management and analysis, or that the skills reside in only a few people. This disparity could limit the sector’s ability to modernise data processes and use of data and their ability to reduce reliance on manual workarounds.

AI adoption

The survey showed that AI is now used across children’s services. Four-fifths of respondents reported that their council is using AI for work, tasks or processes (Figure 10). Among those using AI, Microsoft Copilot is the dominant tool with 95% of AI-using authorities saying they use it (Figure 11). This widespread use is likely influenced by Copilot’s integration into standard Microsoft enterprise products, meaning staff may be accessing it informally or as part of routine workflows.

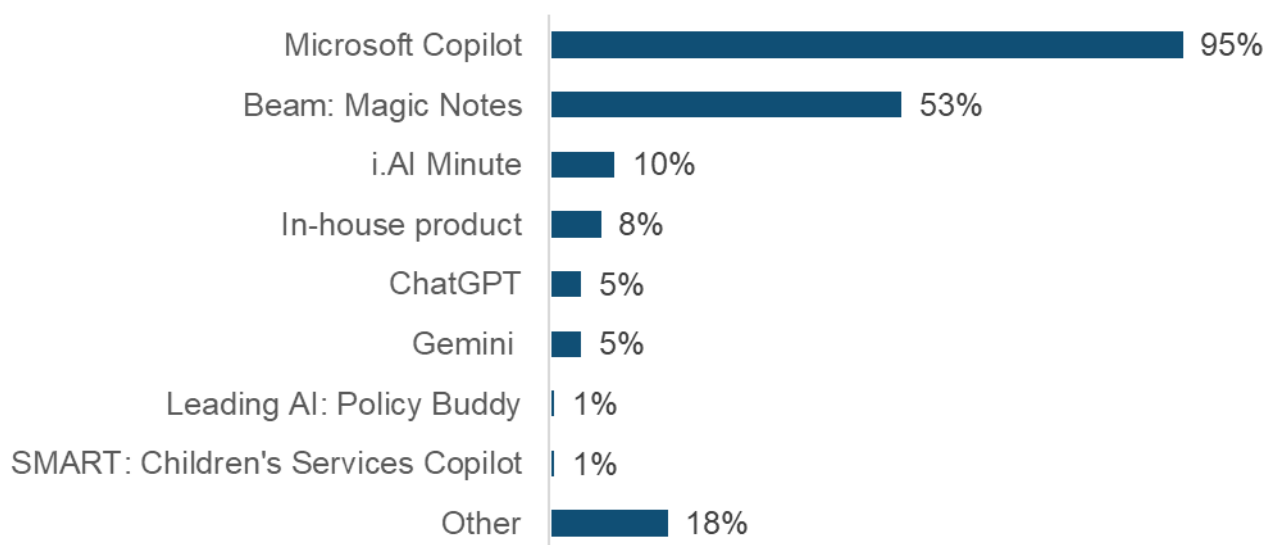
More notably, over half of respondents using AI reported using Beam: Magic Notes (53%), a tool specifically designed for children’s social care that must be purchased separately. The use of Beam, along with tools such as Minutes AI (10%), suggests that a significant proportion of councils are investing specifically in bespoke sector-specific AI, rather than relying solely on tools bundled within existing corporate IT estates.

Figure 10: Is your children's services team currently using AI for any work, tasks or processes?



Base: 110 respondents.

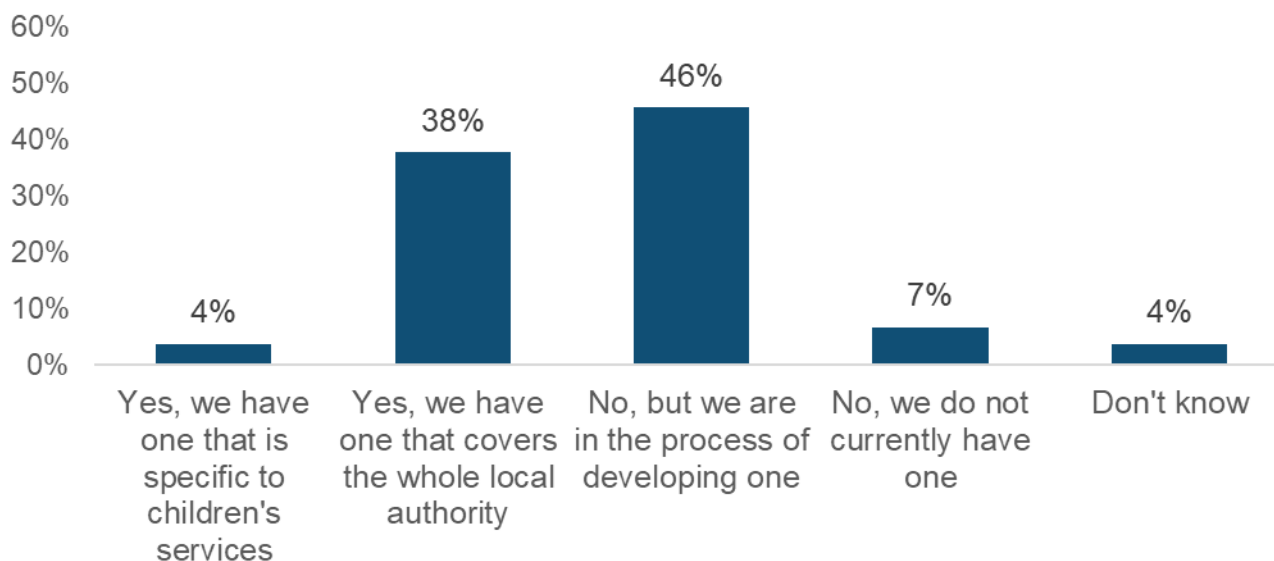
Figure 11: Within children's services, which of the following AI tools do you use?



Base: 87 respondents. Please note respondents could select more than one option.

Despite this growing use of AI tools, the survey highlighted that strategy and governance arrangements are not developing at the same pace as adoption (Figure 12). Four per cent of authorities have an AI strategy specific to children's services, and while 38% have a whole-authority AI strategy, almost half (46%) are still in the process of developing one. A small minority (7%) report having no strategy at all. Taken together, these results suggest a sector in transition where councils recognise the need for formal governance, but most have not yet embedded mature frameworks.

Figure 12: Does your local authority have an AI strategy which covers children services?

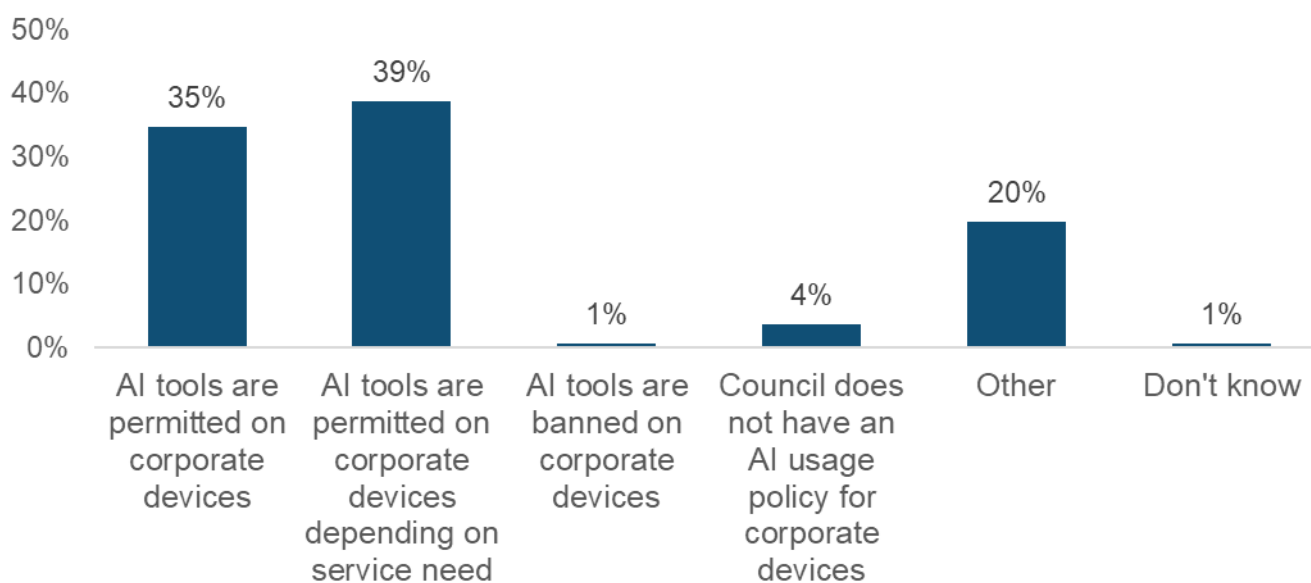


Base: 110 respondents.

Approaches to AI usage policies also vary considerably (Figure 13).

- Thirty-five per cent of authorities said they permit AI tools on corporate devices
- Thirty-nine per cent allowed them only where there is a clear service need
- Twenty per cent adopted alternative approaches, such as Microsoft-only policies or tightly controlled access
- Four per cent had no policy, and 1% ban AI tools entirely.

Figure 13: Which of the following most closely reflects your council's AI usage policy for corporate devices?



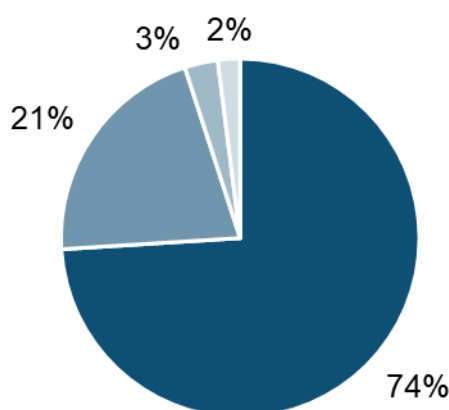
Base: 110 respondents.

This wide variation suggests that councils are taking different approaches to managing risk, enabling access and responding to staff demand. It also suggests that corporate IT teams are still developing their understanding of which AI tools are appropriate and how best to manage their use.

AI usage guidance is more developed than strategies or policies (Figure 14), with nearly three-quarters of councils (74%) reporting that they already have guidance in place and a further 21% currently developing it. Only 3% reported having no guidance at all. This suggests that while strategic frameworks are still emerging, operational guidance is being introduced at a faster pace to support AI usage.

Figure 14: Does your local authority have AI usage guidance for staff?

■ Yes ■ No, but we are developing some ■ No, we do not have usage guidance ■ Don't know



Base: 110 respondents.

Taken together, the findings show that AI adoption is progressing more rapidly than the governance structures required to oversee it. Authorities are using a range of tools, yet the strategies, policies and safeguards needed to support responsible, consistent and transparent AI use are still catching up. Overall, the survey indicates that AI is become commonplace within children's services, but the wider governance environment is only beginning to align with this rapid expansion.

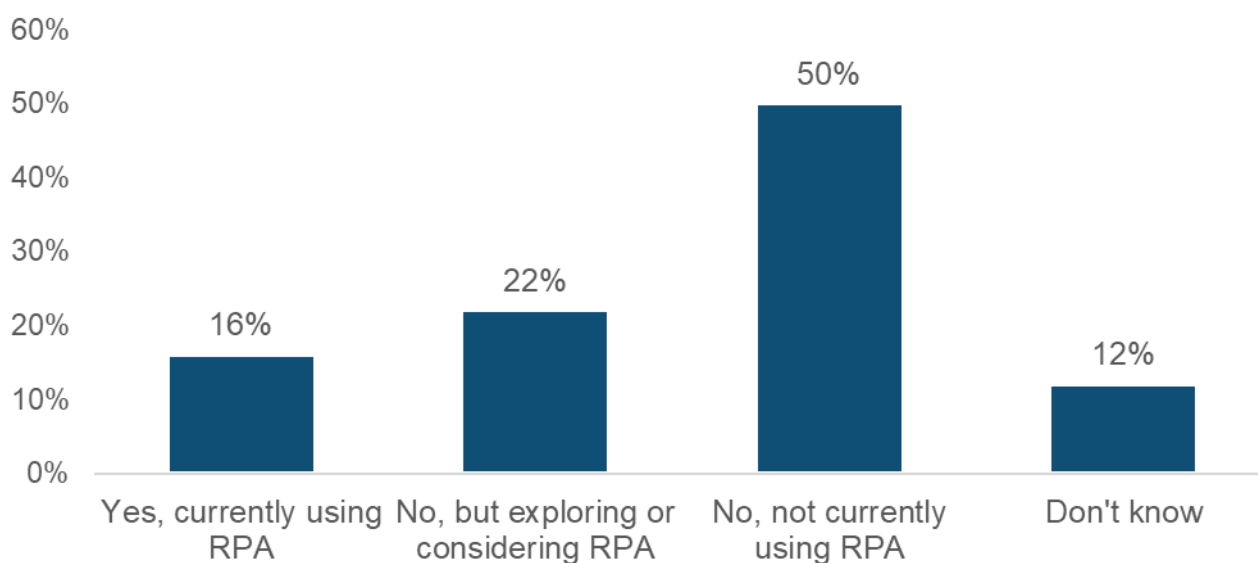
RPA adoption

The survey findings go on to indicate that, although AI tools are being increasingly used across children's services, the use of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is far less developed (Figure 15). RPA, which automates routine rule-based administrative tasks such as data entry, form completion and the movement of information between systems, has the potential to reduce workload, standardise processes and improve efficiency. Despite this, adoption across the sector appears to remain limited.

The survey shows that fewer than one in five authorities currently use RPA:

- Only 16% were currently using RPA
- Twenty-two per cent were exploring or considering it
- Half of responding authorities (50%) were not using RPA at all.

Figure 15: Is your local authority currently using Robotic Process Automation (RPA) within CMS?



Base: 110 respondents.

These findings highlight that, although a number of councils are actively exploring the technology, only a small minority have implemented it in practice, while many have not engaged with it at all. This pattern shows that:

- Adoption was modest, with only a small proportion using RPA reporting active use.
- Exploration was more common than implementation, suggesting that many councils are still in the early stages of considering it.

Overall, while interest in RPA is evident, most authorities have yet to move beyond investigation. This means that RPA uptake lags significantly behind that of AI, which is used in many councils. Part of this slower uptake may be explained by the nature of RPA itself. RPA is a rules-based automation approach rather than a form of artificial intelligence. Given its applicability to high-volume administrative processes, areas where children's services face significant workload pressures, one might expect broader adoption. However, deep-dive work undertaken across the Centre of Excellence consortium suggests a key limiting factor. CMS vendor systems often restrict what is technically possible, limiting opportunities to integrate RPA effectively with existing case

management workflows. These constraints, combined with local variation in CMS configuration capability, could be acting as practical barriers to wider implementation.

In conclusion RPA use is far lower than AI use across the sector. Most authorities are still exploring what RPA could offer rather than putting it into practice, and structural or technical barriers, particularly around CMS configuration, could be holding back wider implementation.

CMS configuration capability

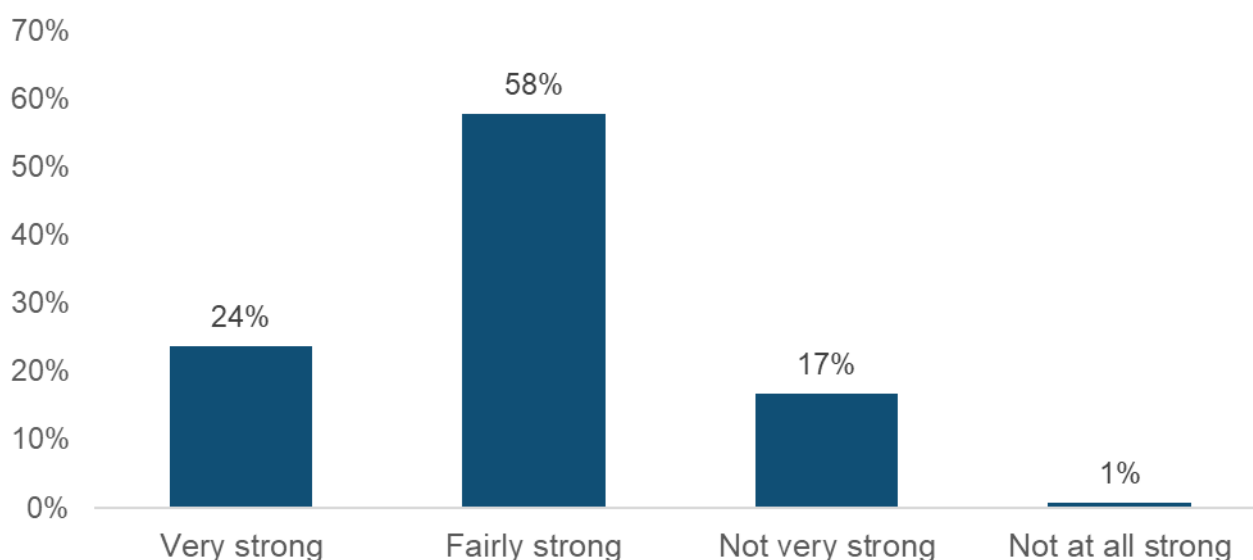
The survey shows that local authorities vary considerably in how confident they feel about their ability to configure and maintain their children's social care case management system (CMS). Because the CMS underpins almost every aspect of children's social care supporting workflow, case recording, reporting, and statutory processes, this capability can have a direct influence on how efficiently and effectively services can operate.

Overall, respondents reported generally positive levels of capacity and capability, with the majority indicating that their ability to configure and maintain their CMS is 'strong' (Figure 16). However, most positioned this strength at the 'fairly strong' level, suggesting confidence in current operations but also an acknowledgement that there remains scope for improvement. Moreover, almost a fifth of responding authorities (18%) identified their ability to configure and maintain their CMS as 'not very strong' or 'not at all strong'. This pattern aligns with findings from other deep-dive research conducted by ICT Revolutions, which highlighted CMS configuration capability as an area of relative weakness in authorities.

These results indicate that, while a clear majority of authorities believed they have at least sufficient capability and capacity, a sizeable minority said that they continue to face challenges in configuring or maintaining their CMS. Even where capacity and capability were rated as strong, the high number choosing "fairly strong" suggests that authorities still see room for improvement.

The next section explores how current data-capture practices within case management systems may be affecting overall system performance and where improvements could further strengthen digital maturity across children's services.

Figure 16: How would you describe your authority's capacity and capability in relation to configuring and maintaining your CMS?



Base: 110 respondents.

Social workers

The survey findings indicated wide variation in how social workers record information within case management systems (Figure 17). Because accurate and timely case notes are fundamental to safeguarding and decision-making, these differences in recording practices may have important implications for data quality, workload, and the speed at which risks can be identified. While many authorities have introduced more modern, digital approaches to support recording, others continue to rely on manual or retrospective processes that may introduce delay, inconsistency or additional administrative burden.

Authorities reported three main ways in which social workers record and store case information:

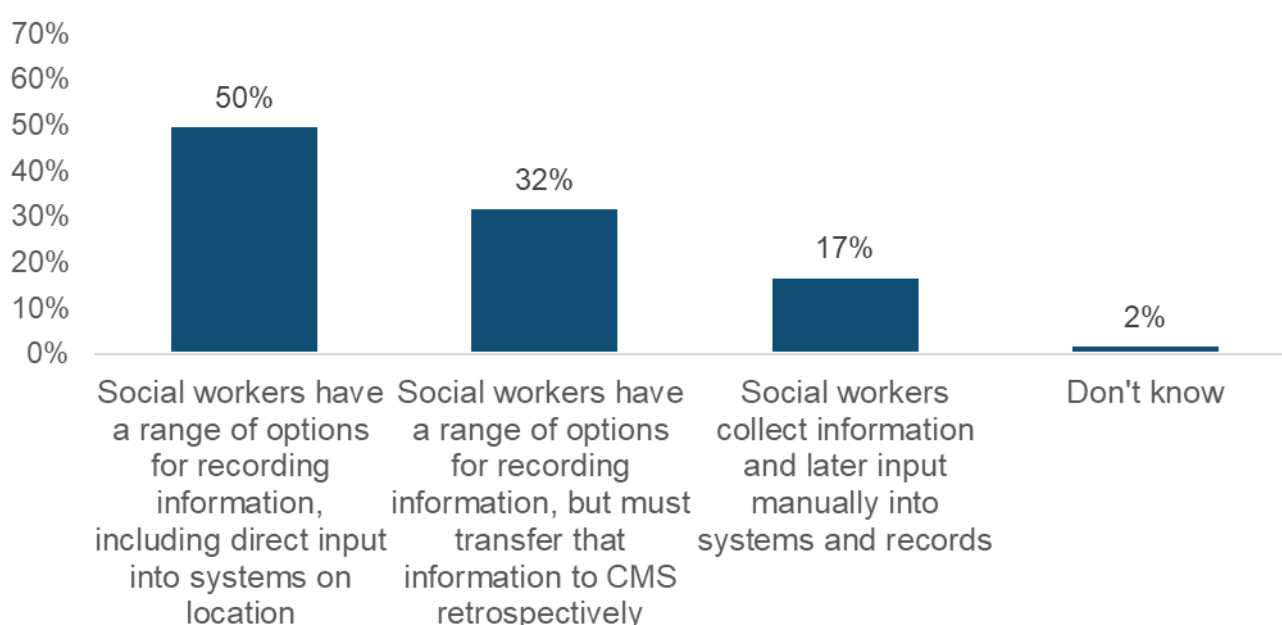
- Fifty per cent of authorities said they allow social workers to record information directly into systems on location, supporting live digital entry
- Thirty-two per cent said they require social workers to record information first and then re-enter it retrospectively, meaning case notes are written once and later added into the CMS
- Seventeen per cent reported they rely on fully manual note taking, with information typed into the system at a later stage, increasing workload and the risk of inaccuracies.

Taken together, these findings highlight wide differences in data-capture practices across the sector. While half of responding authorities now support direct input into systems on location, a significant proportion still rely on delayed or manual processes. These

approaches may lead to administrative inefficiencies, increased duplication of work, and greater potential for errors or gaps in case records. Given the critical role that high-quality, up-to-date information plays in safeguarding, the variability in recording practices may also have implications for how effectively authorities can monitor risk, and ensure that children and families receive timely and appropriate support.

The diversity of approaches further reflects the broader digital maturity landscape observed across the survey, and improving the consistency and efficiency of data capture could help strengthen both operational practice and the wider quality of data within children's services systems.

Figure 17: Which of the following best describes how information from your social workers is captured and stored?



Base: 110 respondents.

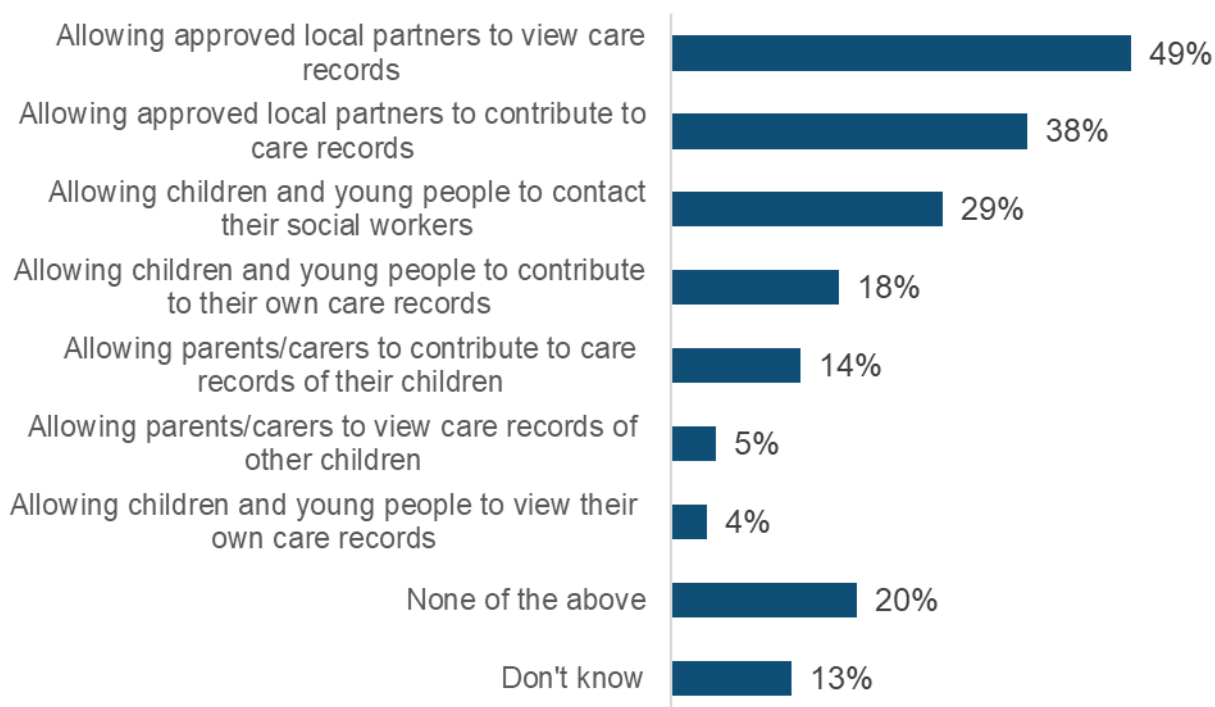
Accessing records

The survey findings show that, although local authorities have made some progress in modernising internal digital workflows, such as enabling more social workers to input information directly into case management systems during visits, the digital options available to approved partners, children, young people and families remain significantly less developed (Figure 18). As a result, children and young people and their families continue to have very limited opportunities to view, contribute to, or engage with their own records online. Even for professional partners, levels of digital access remain modest, with fewer than half of responding authorities enabling partners to view or contribute to care records.

Authorities reported that only a limited set of digital features is currently available to families and partner agencies:

- Just under half of responding authorities (49%) said approved local partners can view care records
- Thirty-eight per cent allowed approved partners to contribute to care records
- Twenty-nine per cent of authorities enabled children or young people to contact their social worker digitally
- Only 18% allowed children or young people to contribute to their own care records.
- Just 14% allowed parents or carers to contribute to children's records.
- Only 5% allowed parents or carers to view those records.
- And only 4% enabled children or young people to view their own records.
- A fifth of responding authorities (20%) reported having no technology that enables local partners, children, young people and families to contribute to or view care records.

Figure 18: Which, if any, of the following does your technology enable?



Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could select more than one option.

These findings demonstrate that most authorities have not yet developed digital approaches that meaningfully support partner or family engagement in children's social care. Digital access for families and partner agencies is not embedded as standard

practice, and they remain largely excluded from interacting with systems that hold information about them. It is particularly striking that 20% of authorities had no technology in place allowing any families or partner agencies to view or contribute to care records, highlighting a substantial limitation in core system capability. While many councils reported having the capacity to configure and maintain their CMS, the limited use of CMS functionality to support partners, children, young people and families indicates that these systems are not yet being used to their full potential. The absence of features that allow families and partner agencies to view or contribute to their records may be limiting opportunities for participation, reducing transparency, and leading to inconsistent ways of capturing family views.

Barriers to data sharing

The survey results show that local authorities face significant barriers to sharing data effectively, both with external partners and within their own organisations (Figure 19). Although data sharing is essential for safeguarding, early help, and coordinated multi-agency support, the systems and processes required to facilitate that can be inconsistent or underdeveloped.

Authorities reported a wide range of obstacles that hinder effective data exchange with partners such as the police, NHS, schools and other local agencies. The most frequently cited external barriers were:

- Sixty-two per cent reported incompatible digital and technology systems, preventing effective data exchange
- Sixty per cent reported a lack of unique identifiers
- Fifty-two per cent cited different governance frameworks
- Fifty-one per cent reported GDPR and data protection concerns
- Fifty per cent cited limited staff capacity or expertise.

These findings show that the barriers to sharing data with external partners come from both technical issues (systems, identifiers) and organisational factors (governance, capacity), creating a set of challenges that cannot be solved by addressing just one area.

The survey also revealed that local authorities face similar challenges when sharing data internally across services. The most common internal barriers were:

- Fifty-four per cent reported a lack of unique identifiers, highlighting that this is not only an external challenge but also a major barrier within councils
- Fifty-one per cent cited incompatible digital and technology systems

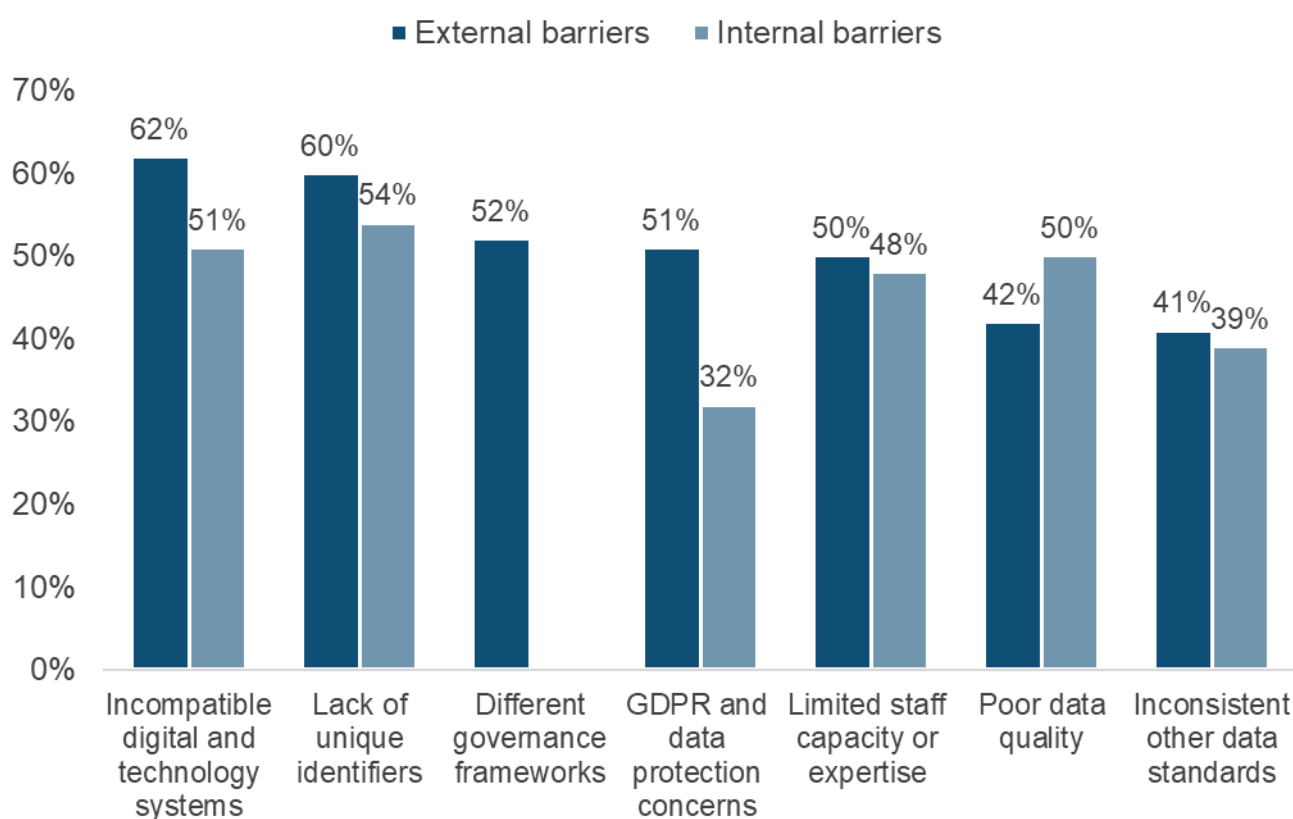
- Fifty per cent identified poor data quality which can block internal sharing
- Forty-eight per cent reported limited staff capacity or expertise
- Thirty-nine per cent cited inconsistent data standards.

These internal barriers closely mirror those seen externally, suggesting that difficulties with data sharing are systemic across authorities rather than confined to specific relationships or workflows. The evidence highlights three main barriers:

- System compatibility is a persistent challenge. Many services rely on systems that cannot easily exchange data with each other, which could be leading to manual workarounds, delays and greater administrative burden. Unique identifiers could help mitigate these issues by enabling records to be linked outside of systems but, as the next finding shows, their inconsistent use across authorities limits this potential.
- Unique identifiers remain a fundamental barrier. Both internal and external sharing are significantly hindered by the lack of consistent identifiers such as NHS numbers or UPRNs. Without reliable identifiers, record matching is more difficult, increasing the risk of duplication or incomplete histories.
- Capacity constraints are widespread. Staff shortages or expertise gaps can slow or prevent data sharing activities. These constraints are often exacerbated by incompatible systems and inconsistent data standards, which make data integration more labour-intensive.

Overall, the findings demonstrates that children's services face significant, multi-layered barriers to effective data sharing, both within their organisations and with external partners. The interplay between inconsistent identifiers, incompatible systems and limited capacity creates a complex environment in which reliable and timely data sharing can be difficult to achieve.

Figure 19: Which of the following, if any, are barriers to data sharing with the local partners your authority is working with? (External). Which of the following, if any, are barriers to internal services within your local authority providing each other with data access to support joined up service delivery? (Internal).



Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could select more than one option.

Inconsistent collection of unique identifiers

With 'lack of unique identifiers' identified as a significant barrier to effective data-sharing both externally and internally, the survey also revealed a fragmented and inconsistent approach to collecting and using two key unique identifiers in children's services: the NHS number and the Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN). These identifiers are essential for linking records across systems and agencies, yet the data shows that their collection is far from universal.

The data shows that NHS numbers and UPRNs are collected consistently only in child protection and children looked after cases (Figure 20). Even here, however, the level of consistency differs markedly between the two identifiers.

- Seventy-nine per cent of authorities collect the NHS number for all child protection and children looked after cases, compared to 55% who collect the UPRN.

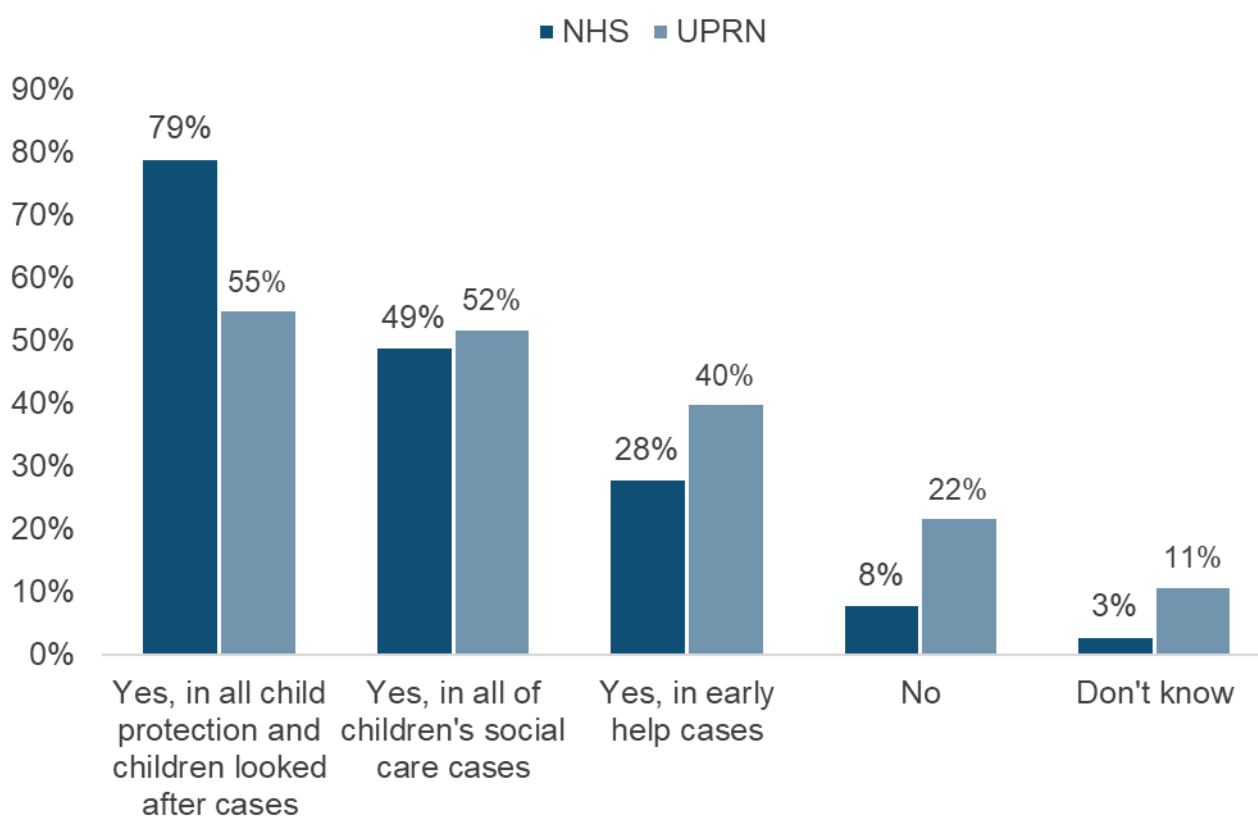
This suggests that while the NHS number is more embedded in workflows associated with the most vulnerable, the UPRN is less consistently adopted. Beyond these cases, the level of identifier collection drops sharply:

- Less than half (49%) of authorities collect the NHS number for all children's social care cases, while 52% collect the UPRN for these cases
- Collection is lowest in early help cases, where under a third (28%) collect the NHS number and 40% collect the UPRN. This suggests that early help cases remains an area where data linkage is particularly weak.

A notable minority of authorities do not collect these identifiers at all with 8% of authorities not collecting NHS numbers at all, and 22% not collecting UPRNs at all.

Taken together, the findings show that the collection of unique identifiers is inconsistent across both types of cases and councils. This inconsistency can directly undermine authorities' ability to accurately match records, track children across services, and share information with external partners. When unique identifiers are missing or inconsistently applied, authorities may be more likely to rely on manual matching or incomplete data, increasing the risk of duplication or error.

Figure 20: Does your local authority currently collect the individual NHS number/UPRN in all your children's services case management data?



Base: 109 respondents (NHS number). 101 respondents (UPRN). Please note respondents could select more than one option.

Out of area data sharing

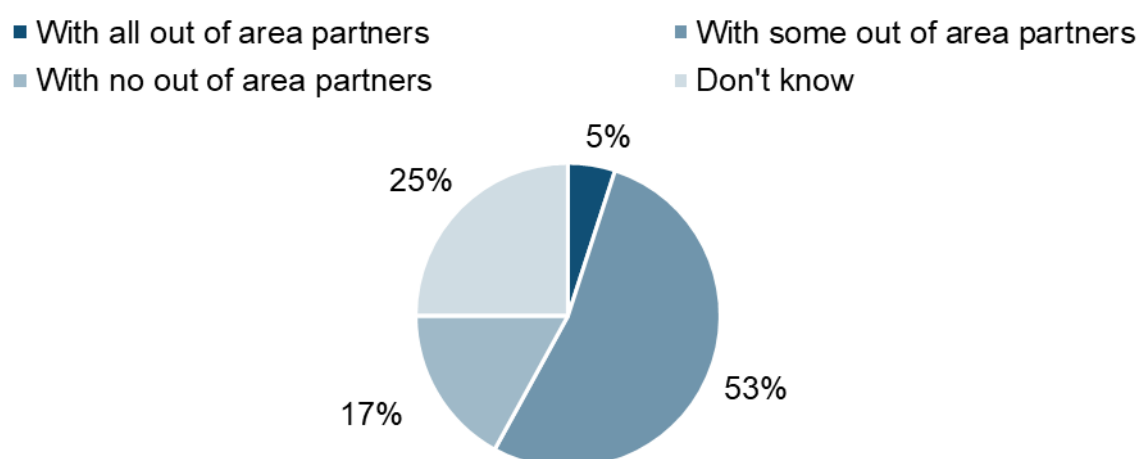
The survey findings suggested that data-sharing arrangements between local authorities and out-of-area partners are not well developed and vary considerably across the sector (Figure 21). Because many children move between areas for reasons such as placements, education or safeguarding, reliable and timely information sharing arrangements are essential. However, the findings indicate that most authorities do not have comprehensive agreements in place, and a significant proportion are unclear about the arrangements that do exist. This may, however, be caused to some extent by emergency placements requiring a child to be placed before an agreement can be established.

The data highlights a number of issues:

- Only 5% of authorities reported having data sharing agreements with all out-of-area partners, indicating that full coverage is extremely rare.
- Fifty-three per cent said they have agreements with some, rather than all, out-of-area partners, meaning that coverage is partial for the majority of councils.
- Nearly one in five (17%) authorities reported having no out-of-area data sharing agreements at all, suggesting that almost one in five councils may lack the basic mechanisms needed to exchange information about children who move across boundaries.
- A quarter of respondents (25%) said they do not know whether such agreements exist, which could suggest either that arrangements are not established or existing arrangements may not be clearly communicated.

Taken together, these findings show that out-of-area data sharing is not yet a routine or well-structured aspect of children's services. Many authorities operate with only partial arrangements, and a sizeable minority are either operating without any formal agreements or are unaware of whether agreements are in place. This inconsistency could be leading to risks.

Figure 21: Do you have data sharing agreements with out of area partners?



Base: 110 respondents.

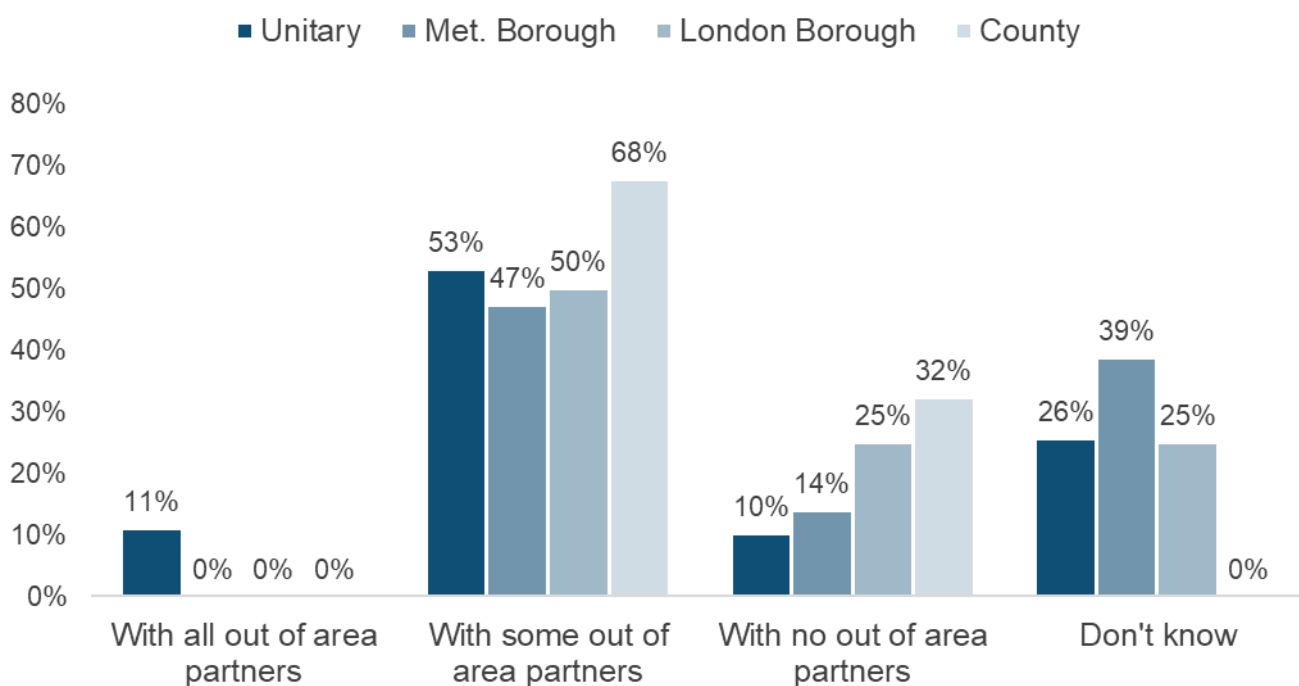
Furthermore, analysis of these survey findings showed a significant relationship between council type and the extent to which authorities have established data-sharing agreements with out-of-area partners. The distribution in Figure 22 indicates that different council types take notably different approaches to cross-boundary information-sharing, with county councils demonstrating the highest levels of engagement and metropolitan boroughs showing comparatively lower clarity or coverage.

Sixty-eight per cent of counties reported having agreements with some out-of-area partners, the highest proportion of any council type. Unitary authorities also showed relatively strong engagement, with 53% reporting agreements with some out-of-area partners (and a further 11% reporting agreements with all out-of-area partners). Unitary authorities are the only type of council who reported having agreements with all out-of-area partners, indicating that comprehensive cross-regional coverage is rare across the sector.

In contrast, metropolitan boroughs show a more mixed picture. Although 47% reported having agreements with some out-of-area partners, the chart also shows that metropolitan areas had the highest proportion of respondents who do not know whether such agreements exist (39%).

Taken together, the results suggest that while most authorities have at least partial out-of-area agreements, the extent and consistency of these arrangements vary substantially by council type. The variation suggests that out-of-area data-sharing remains an uneven and under-standardised area of practice, which could have implications for safeguarding, placement transfers and continuity of support for children and families who move across boundaries.

Figure 22: Data sharing agreements with out of area partners by council type (%)



Base: 110 respondents.

Presence of data and digital strategies

The survey findings show that, although a number of responding authorities have established strategies for data, digital and technology at a corporate level, far fewer have strategies that explicitly address the needs of children's services (Figure 23). This could be creating a gap between the level of strategic direction required and the number of children's services-specific strategies currently in place.

Across all three domains of data, digital and technology, the survey revealed a broadly similar pattern:

- Between 34 and 40% of authorities had corporate strategies with children's services elements
- Between 32 and 34% reported having corporate strategies that do not include children's services elements
- A small proportion (between 4 and 6%) have a dedicated strategy for children's services
- Between 13 and 19% say they have no strategy at all in these areas.

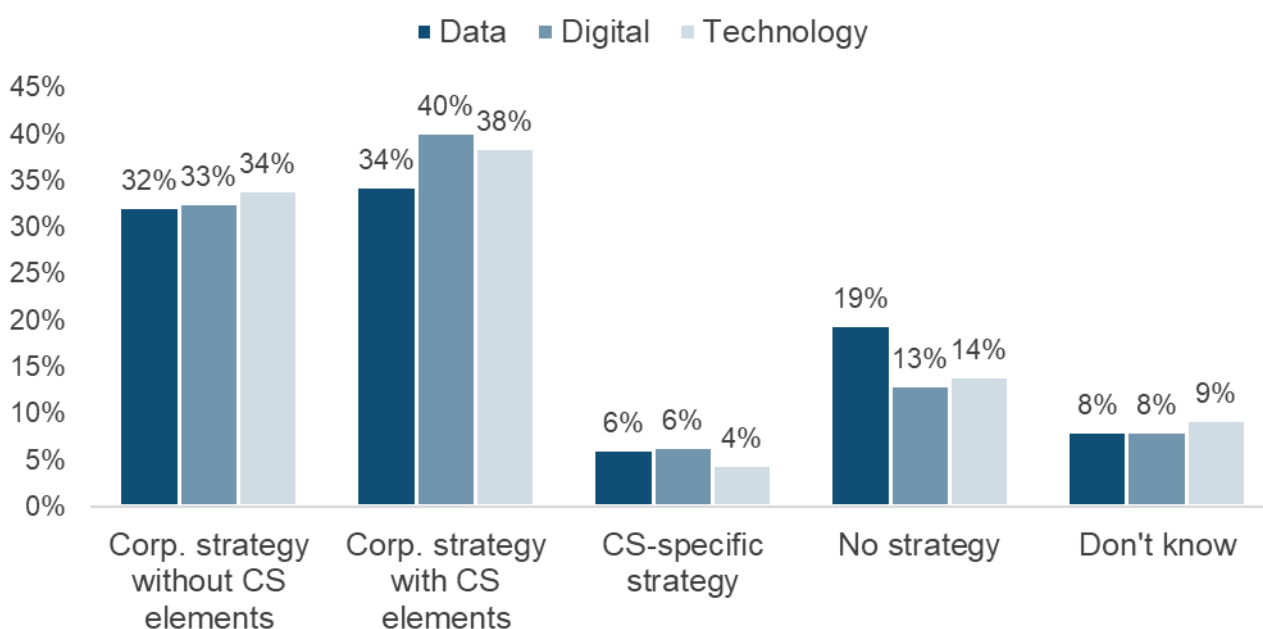
These findings suggest that a high proportion of authorities rely on high-level corporate strategies that may set overarching organisational ambitions but do not necessarily reflect

the unique operational, regulatory and workforce needs of children’s social care, nor the specific digital, data and technological requirements. The evidence suggests:

- Strategic provision is uneven, with most authorities lacking any formal strategy that addresses children’s services directly.
- The absence of formal strategies, whether corporate or service-specific, remains substantial, with nearly one in five authorities having no data strategy at all (19%), and similar proportions lacking digital or technology strategies.

Overall, the survey demonstrates that many local authorities lack clear, children’s-services-specific strategies for data, digital and technology. This strategic absence could lead to uneven maturity, and inconsistent progress across the sector.

Figure 23: Respondents with a data, digital or technology strategy in place (%)



Base: 109 respondents (Data). 109 respondents (Digital). 106 respondents (Technology).

Leadership culture

The survey presents a consistent picture of broadly positive leadership support for data, digital and technology within children’s services. Senior leaders were perceived to place strong value on performance information, to work closely with analytical teams, and to encourage good data-driven practice across their services.

Engagement with performance information was particularly high (Figure 24):

- The majority of respondents (96%) agreed that performance data and KPIs are regularly discussed by children’s services leadership teams.

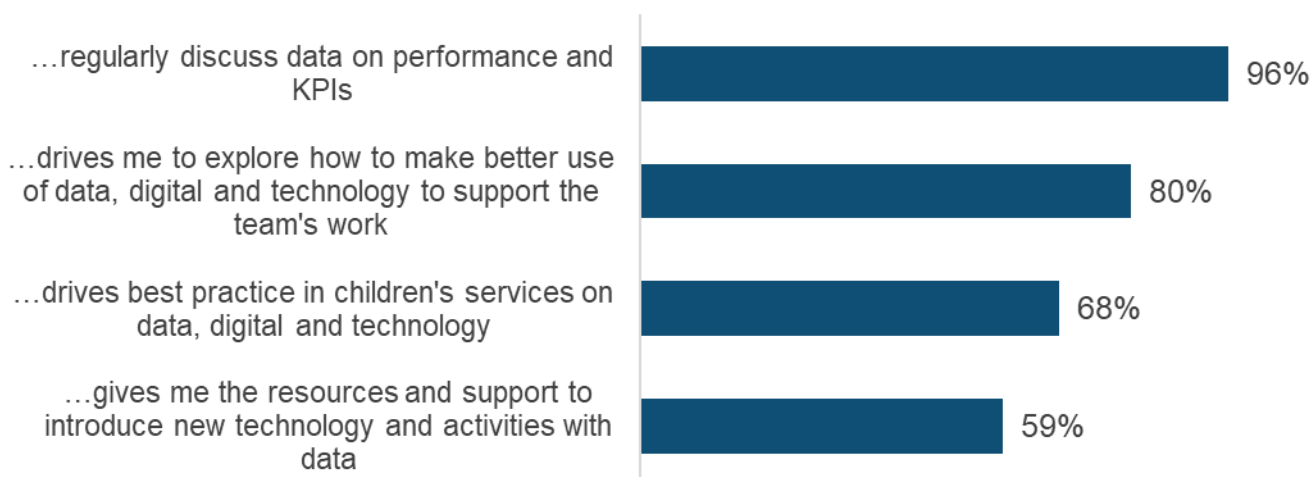
- Very few respondents were neutral, and almost none disagreed, suggesting widespread recognition among leadership teams of the importance of data within leadership oversight.

Leadership team involvement also extended beyond monitoring performance, with leaders seen to be actively encouraging improvements to digital systems and promoting a culture of ongoing development:

- Eighty per cent agreed that leadership teams drive staff to explore how to make better use of data, digital and technology in their work.
- Sixty-eight per cent agreed that leadership teams drive best practice in data, digital and technology.

However, this clear ambition did not always translate into the practical support required to fully modernise data and digital practice. While 80% agreed that leadership teams drive staff to explore how to make better use of data, digital and technology in their work, fewer than three fifths (59%) said they receive the resources or support needed to introduce new technology or undertake data related improvements. This suggests a gap between leadership intent and operational reality, where leaders appear committed to the effective use of data, but this is not always matched by the investment or organisational capacity needed to enable change.

Figure 24: The children's services leadership team... (% agreement

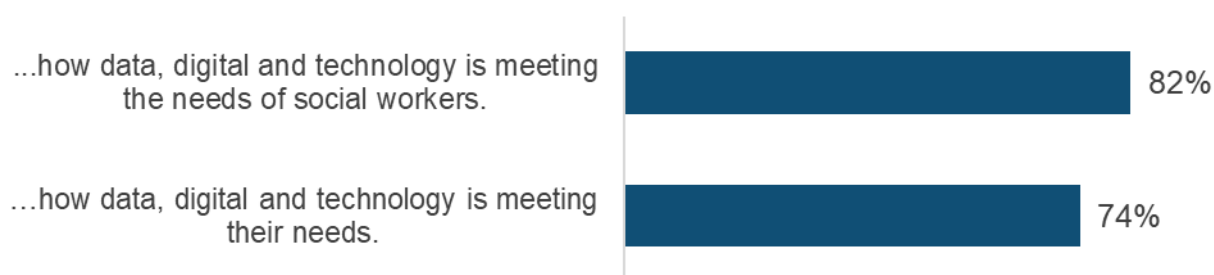


Base: 110 respondents (Statement 1, 2 and 4), 109 respondents (Statement 3).

The findings did, however, highlight close and regular collaboration between analytical teams and senior decision-makers (Figure 25):

- Eighty-two per cent agreed they meet regularly with their leadership team to discuss how digital and data tools meet strategic needs
- Seventy-four per cent agreed these discussions also address the needs of social workers, demonstrating leadership attention to frontline requirements.

Figure 25: I meet regularly with the children's services leadership team to discuss...
(% agreement)



Base: 110 respondents.

Overall, the survey suggests that leadership teams in children's services are highly engaged with data, digital and technology. Leaders make frequent use of performance information, champion good practice, and maintain strong links with analytical teams. This creates an environment where data-driven improvement is encouraged. However, the findings also underscore that turning this ambition into concrete action remains a challenge for many authorities, particularly where resources, capacity or competing priorities may limit their ability to invest in new technology or modern analytical approaches.

Furthermore, analysis of these survey findings showed a significant relationship between council region and perceptions of leadership support for data, digital and technology. Figure 26 illustrates the clear regional disparities in both the extent to which leadership was seen to encourage staff to explore better use of data, digital and technology, and the extent to which leadership provides the resources and support required to introduce new tools and approaches.

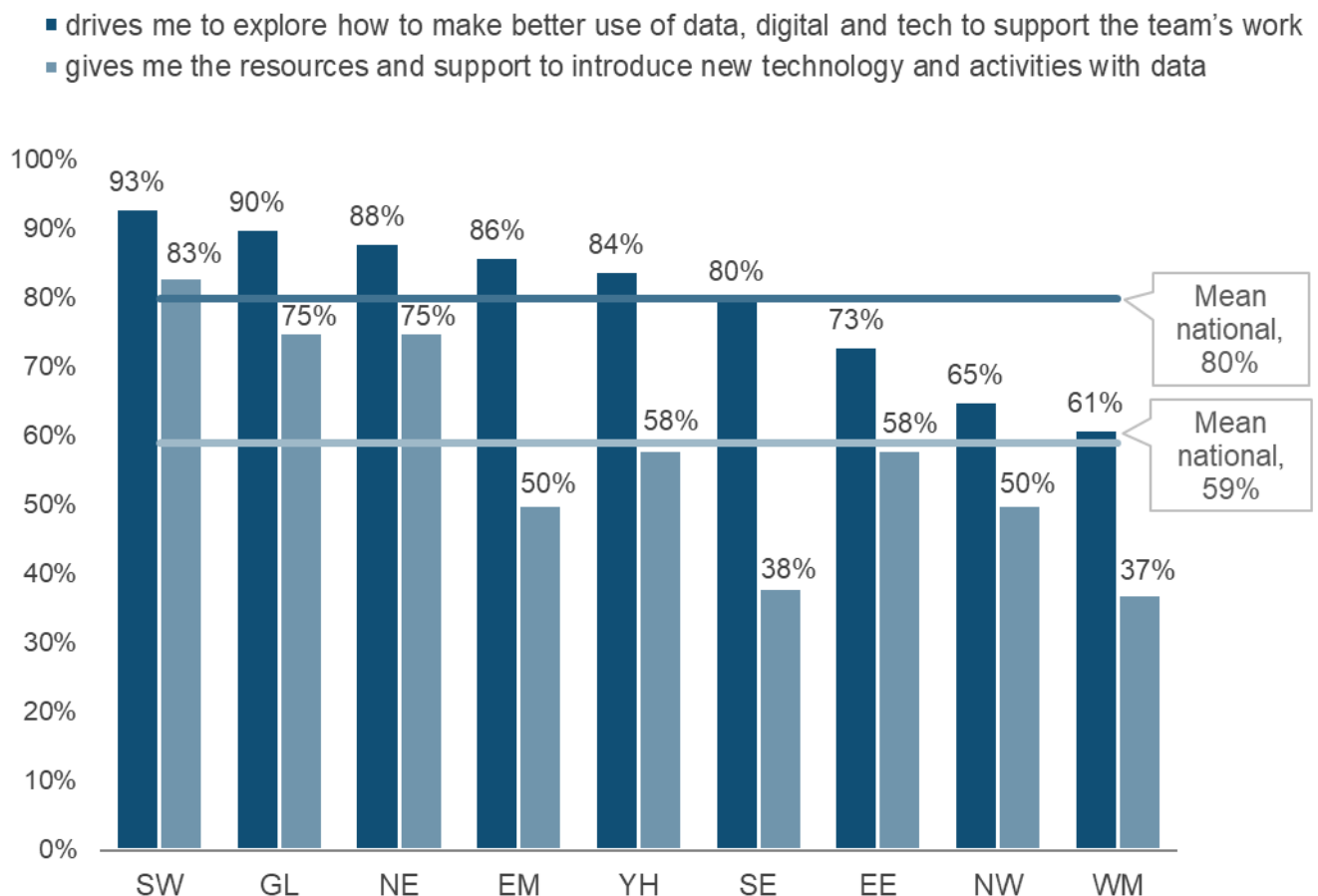
Across regions, reported encouragement from leadership is consistently higher than reported access to resources; however, the size of this gap varies meaningfully by geography. The South West (SW) reports the strongest leadership encouragement, with 93% agreeing that leadership drives them to make better use of data, digital and technology. This is accompanied by comparatively high levels of resourcing and support (83%), suggesting that SW authorities have leadership cultures that are both aspirational and well-supported operationally. Similar patterns are seen in Greater London (GL), where 90% report strong encouragement and 75% report adequate resourcing.

By contrast, regions such as the West Midlands (WM) demonstrate the weakest levels of support, with 61% reporting leadership team encouragement and 37% reporting access to resources. A similar picture emerges in the South East (SE), where 80% agree that the leadership team drives improved use of data, yet 38% feel they have the resources needed to do so.

When considered collectively, the chart suggests that while leadership culture is broadly positive across the country (with an overall average of around 80% reporting strong encouragement), the provision of resources is more uneven, averaging 59% and dipping

far lower in several regions. These regional patterns indicate that the strength of leadership support is not experienced uniformly across England. In regions where both encouragement and resourcing are high, such as SW, GL and NE, authorities may be better placed to innovate and adopt modern data-driven approaches. Conversely, regions with pronounced gaps between the two measures may face greater challenges in operationalising their ambitions, which could potentially constrain progress in digital transformation.

Figure 26: The children's services leadership team... (% agreement by region)



Base: 110 respondents.

Further comments

At the end of the survey, respondents had the opportunity to provide any further comments or suggestions on the topics covered by the survey, including any support that they would like to see provided by the Centre of Excellence. A total of 26 respondents provided comments, which have been analysed and grouped into common themes.

Around half of all comments described areas of support that local authorities would like to see provided by the Centre of Excellence. Generally, respondents were positive about the potential of the Centre of Excellence, and the specific areas for support noted were:

- **AI strategy**, including use of specific tools and how to incorporate AI within social work and casework
- **Technical training**, including support for analysis tools (Python, R, SQL, PowerBI)
- Sharing examples of **best practice**, enabling authorities to implement things that have worked well in other authorities
- **Data literacy**, including at senior levels, to boost understanding of data output and reports and support leadership buy-in
- Centralised guidance and support on **information sharing** agreements, as respondents noted that current practice can feel complicated and burdensome, and that the information governance landscape can be a “blocker rather than a facilitator” to safeguarding
- **Data quality**, as poor data quality can be a barrier to effective use of data
- **Data integration**, to improve how data flows between systems
- **Better standardisation** between local authorities, so standards and practices are more consistent across the country which better enables local authorities to work together and enables staff to move between local authorities smoothly
- The establishment of a **discussion forum** or group to enable communication and collaboration between local authorities
- Information on **how to access funding** for data innovation opportunities.

Around a quarter of comments expanded on their response to an earlier question about the use of a single unique identifier (NHS number or UPRN). Some noted that they have the capability to collect and record a single unique identifier, however, they do not record it as this is not mandatory. Furthermore, a few respondents described problems they faced, including that the current options are not reliable for matching data, that the UPRN available does not cover out of area cases, and that the lack of, or poor data sharing agreements between organisations inhibit the value of a single unique identifier to match cases. One respondent described the potential effective, compulsory use of a single unique identifier as a “game changer”, however, support and funding would be needed to encourage its introduction.

Some comments noted that, whilst the Centre of Excellence is focused primarily on children’s services, data professionals often work across multiple services or across the whole organisation. Indeed, some comments explained that calculating FTE for children’s social care data and digital roles was difficult as staff work across multiple services areas. It would be useful therefore for skills and strategies to be transferrable across education, adult social care, public health, and more broadly across the local authority.

Some comments mentioned the recruitment and retention difficulties faced for data, digital and technology roles. Respondents noted that local authority salaries may not be particularly competitive, especially for smaller authorities, and therefore applicants may not have the skill level required. One authority described the “small pool” of applicants available to local authorities, and that they have had to resort to using expensive agency staff when unable to recruit. Some comments highlighted the wider issue of stretched local authority finances, and how budget is often a barrier to effective working.

Other themes mentioned by a small number of respondents included:

- A few authorities were currently in the process of reviewing and improving their data and digital maturity
- The need to consider the differences and nuances between local authorities
- The burden of procurement regulations.

A thematic analysis of the open-ended responses to the follow-up question, “Have you made, or are you planning to make, any changes to your case management systems to adapt for the Families First Partnership programme? Please use the space below if you would like to provide any additional information about your changes” is provided in [Annex D](#).

Evaluating data and digital maturity

Introduction

As part of the survey design process, the concept of data and digital maturity within children's services was broken down into five key pillars, identified from a rapid review of existing data and digital maturity tools. These formed the basis of the structure of the survey, and a set of questions was asked against each as shown in [Annex C: Derived Maturity Assessment question framework](#). The five pillars were:

- Strategy and governance
- Data management and quality
- Technology and infrastructure
- People, skills and culture
- Service design and use of data/digital

Maturity across each of the five areas was evaluated in two ways, which can be reviewed as standalone assessments, or in direct comparison to each other.

- **Self-assessment:** the end of each section of the survey, respondents were asked to self-assess their authority's level of maturity in that area against a five-point framework, with a short statement to illustrate each level in practice. Respondents were asked to choose the statement that most closely aligned with their level of maturity.
- **Derived assessment:** as part of the post-hoc analysis, the full range of survey questions and possible responses were reviewed and evaluated to create a scoring framework. This dictates the maximum score for each question and assigns a score for each answer option, with a higher score reflecting a higher level of maturity. For each pillar, each authority's scores for the relevant questions were totalled up and divided by the maximum possible score to generate a percentage. This percentage score reflects an authority's level of maturity in that area, with a score of 100% meaning that the authority answered all of the relevant questions in the best possible way.

Whilst the derived assessment provides a more objective view of an authority's level of maturity, it must be noted that the derived assessment rests on the authority's responses to the questions in the survey, and whilst not as explicit as the dedicated self-assessment questions, it does still reflect the individual respondent's judgement of their authority's performance.

Summary of key findings

- Maturity levels varied between the five pillars – people, skills and culture was the strongest maturity pillar, with authorities scoring an average of 83%, whilst strategy and governance was the weakest area, with authorities scoring an average of 67% and the weakest authority scoring 41%. Technology and infrastructure had the largest range of percentage scores, suggesting that there is most variance in maturity levels in this area.
- By contrast, strategy and governance was the area with the strongest **self-assessed maturity** score, whilst people, skills and culture was the weakest area. There is, therefore, a mismatch between perceived strengths through self-assessment, and strengths through the derived maturity framework.
- Self-assessment scores were, however, broadly aligned with the derived maturity scores within the five pillars – authorities who performed weaker against the derived maturity framework tended also to self-assess lower, and self-assessment scores generally rose as derived maturity did.
- Yet, self-assessment plateaued among the most mature authorities, suggesting that the most mature authorities perceive their performance strong, but not as leading. Just one authority, across one self-assessment pillar, assessed their performance as ‘leading’.
- Authority type and region had limited influence on maturity, as all authority types and regions sat close to the national average.
- The discord between the self-assessment and derived assessment of maturity within strategy and governance makes it a key target for the work of the Centre of Excellence. Effective data sharing and the presence of data, digital and technology strategies are key drivers of maturity within this pillar, as these are collective strengths of higher-scoring authorities, and collective weaknesses of lower scoring authorities.

Self-assessment

Respondents were asked to assess their authority’s performance in each of the five pillars from ‘ad hoc’ through to ‘leading’. For each option, there was a short statement describing features of that level of maturity, within the pillar area.¹

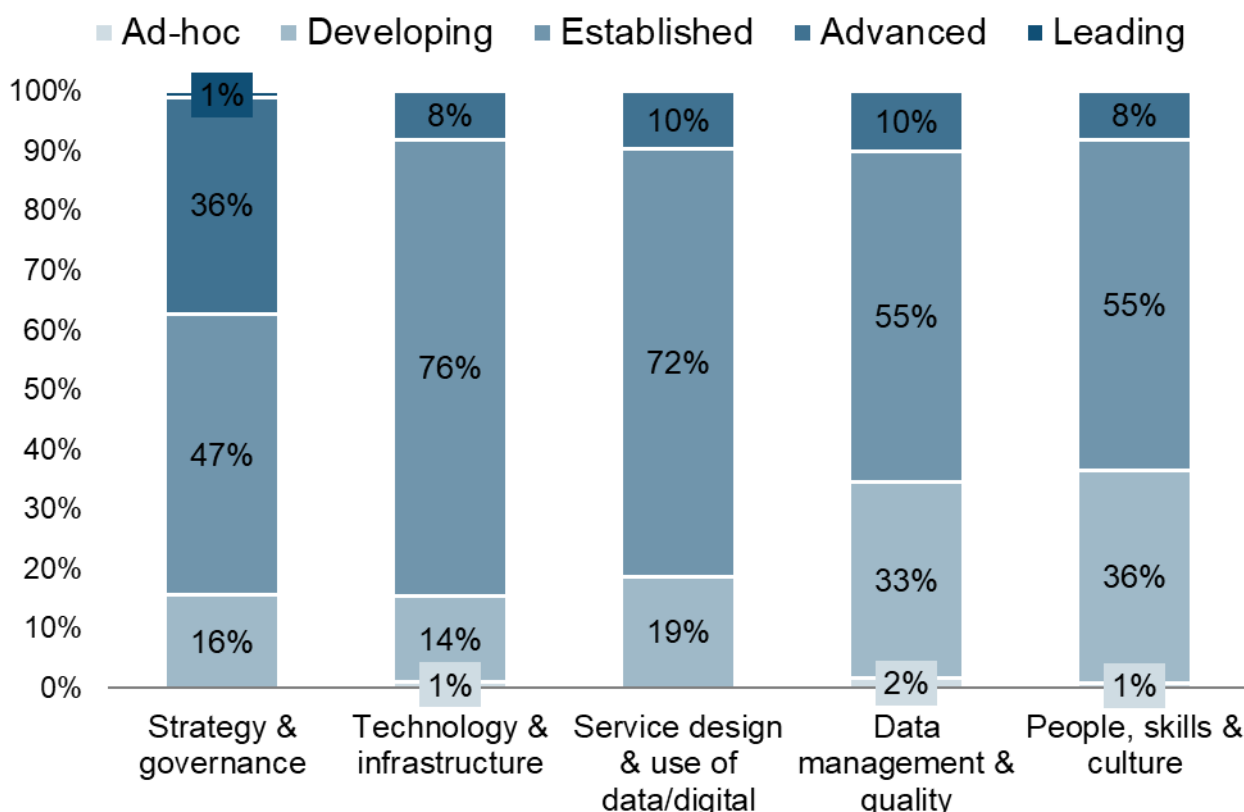
Figure 27 illustrates the distribution of self-assessment scores across the five pillars. The figure shows that strategy and governance was the area where respondents perceived themselves strongest – 36% of respondents assessed themselves as ‘advanced’, compared to between 8 and 10% of respondents in the other four pillar areas. Around three-quarters of respondents viewed themselves as ‘established’ in technology and infrastructure (76%) and service design and use of data/digital (72%), compared to just

¹ Please see Annex A (survey questionnaire) for a full breakdown of the question wording.

over half (55%) within data management and quality, and people, skills and culture. People, skills and culture had the weakest self-assessment profile, with 36% rating themselves as 'developing'.

No authorities – with the exception of one, within strategy and governance – rated themselves as 'leading'. This suggests that authorities do not feel, or are hesitant to state, that they are excelling and sitting with the top authorities.

Figure 27: Self-assessment score distribution



Base: 110 respondents.

Derived maturity assessment: percentage score

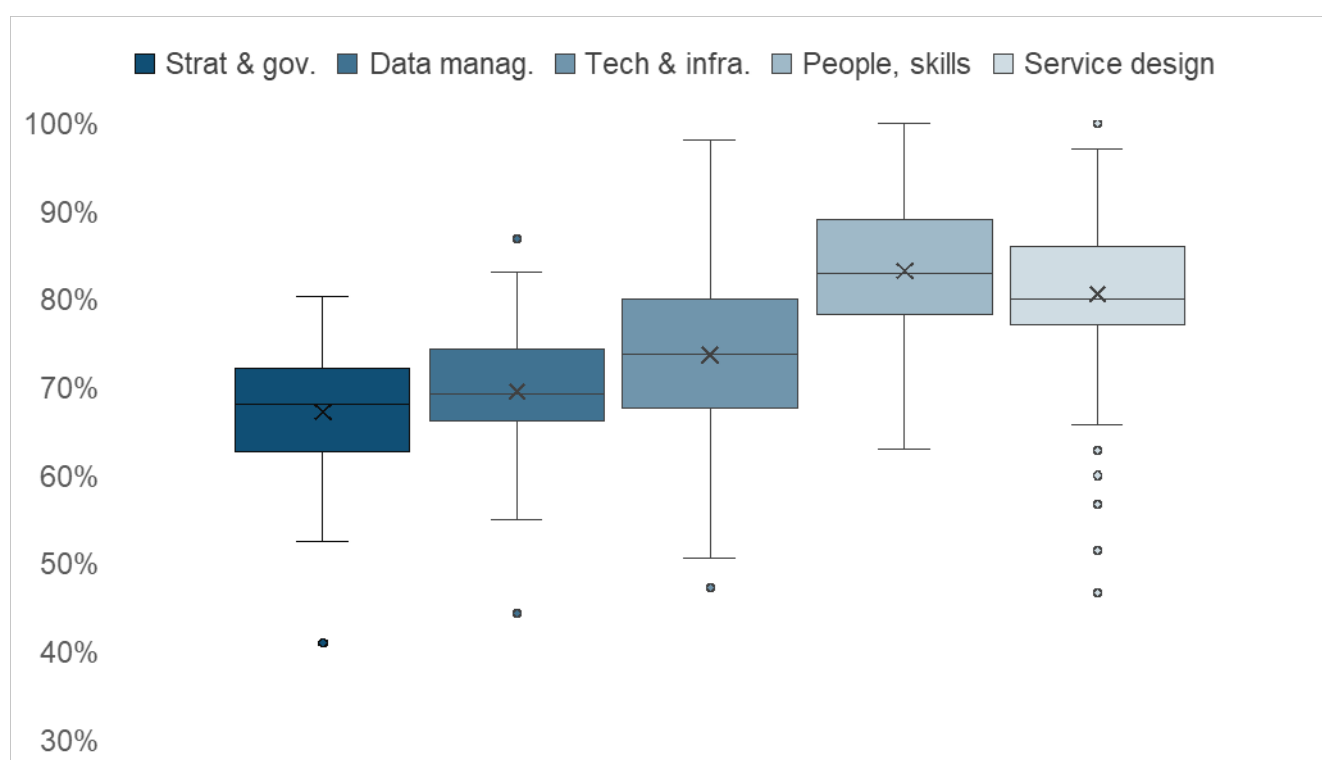
As part of the survey analysis, the full range of survey questions was evaluated in order to develop a derived maturity framework. Within the framework, each relevant question was given a maximum possible score, and each potential answer was given a corresponding score to reflect the level of maturity that the answer suggests. Questions were then categorised under each pillar of maturity (note: some questions were relevant to more than one pillar). For each pillar of maturity, the sum of each authority's answer scores was divided by the maximum possible score. This generated a percentage score for each pillar, for each authority. A higher percentage indicates a higher level of maturity.

Figure 28 illustrates the distribution of percentage scores. The figure shows that derived maturity levels varied considerably between the five pillars – people, skills and culture was the strongest pillar with a mean derived maturity score of 83% and a maximum score of

100% achieved by two authorities, whilst strategy and governance was the weakest pillar, with the lowest mean (67%) and lowest minimum (41%).

The figure shows that technology and infrastructure had the widest range, suggesting that there is most variance in maturity levels when it comes to technology and infrastructure. Service design and use of data/digital had a number of outliers at the lower end of the scale. This suggests that, although the mean and median for this pillar are strong comparative to other pillars, there are a cluster of authorities who are struggling in this space.

Figure 28: Derived maturity percentage score distribution



Base: 110 respondents.

Comparison: self-assessment and derived maturity

To support comparison between the self-assessment and the derived assessment, respondents were categorised into quintiles based on their derived maturity percentage scores. This process created five equal-sized groups of respondents within each pillar, from the lowest-scoring 20% (quintile one) to the highest-scoring 20% (quintile five). This gave each respondent a one-to-five derived maturity value, to enable comparison with the one-to-five self-assessment scoring framework.

Table 5 presents the mean average self-assessment score within each quintile, for each pillar of maturity. The data within Table 5 is also visualised in Figure 29. Generally, the table and figure show that self-assessed maturity increases from quintile one to quintile five. This indicates that those who score lower against the derived maturity framework are

also self-assessing lower, whilst those who show the strongest performance against the derived maturity framework generally have higher self-assessment scores. To take strategy and governance as an example, the table shows that the weakest 20% of authorities (by this pillar's derived framework) had an average self-assessment score of 2.8 for the pillar, whilst the next 20% had an average self-assessment score of 3.1, rising steadily to the strongest 20% with an average self-assessment score of 3.6. This suggests that the two measures of maturity are broadly aligned, and that responding authorities are able to contextualise their maturity well against other authorities.

Table 5: Mean self-assessment scores within derived maturity quintile

Derived maturity quintile	Self-assessment: strategy and governance	Self-assessment: Data management and quality	Self-assessment: Technology and infrastructure	Self-assessment: People, skills and culture	Self-assessment: Service design and use of data/digital
1 (lowest)	2.8	2.3	2.7	2.3	2.7
2	3.1	2.6	2.9	2.5	3.0
3	3.3	2.9	3.0	2.9	2.9
4	3.5	3.0	3.0	2.8	3.1
5 (highest)	3.6	3.0	3.0	3.3	3.1
Mean	3.2	2.7	2.9	2.7	2.9

Base: 110 respondents.

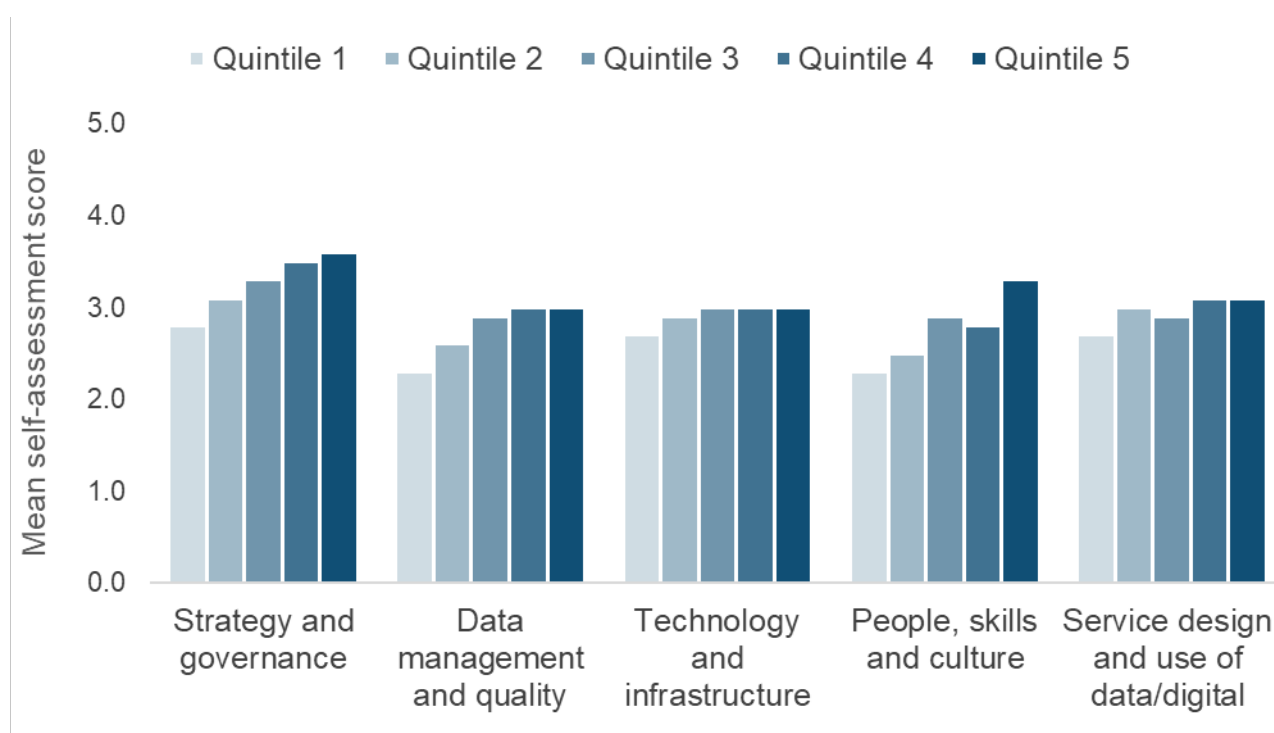
Yet, across three of the five pillars, self-assessment scoring appears to plateau among the most mature local authorities (those in the top quintile, as per the derived maturity framework). This is more pronounced in the technology and infrastructure pillar as the plateau occurs from the third quintile onwards. This plateau suggests, therefore, that although there is generally a positive correlation between the derived maturity score and self-assessment score, the most mature local authorities, as per the more 'objective' derived framework, do not view themselves as the most mature. Indeed, as illustrated by the self-assessment scoring alone, only one authority in one domain scored themselves as five ('leading'). This hints at a lack of confidence across the sector, as even the two authorities scoring 100% in people, skills and culture self-assessed as four ('advanced').

The strategy and governance pillar sees the highest mean self-assessment scores across all quintiles, and the highest mean self-assessment score overall. This indicates that strategy and governance is the area in which local authorities feel that they perform strongest in relation to data and digital maturity. This, however, contrasts with the derived maturity framework, which identifies the strategy and governance pillar as the weakest area with the lowest mean derived maturity percentage score. On the other hand, the people, skills and culture pillar has the joint-lowest mean self-assessment score, yet this

pillar sees the strongest performance against the derived maturity framework, with a mean percentage score of 83%.

Thus, whilst self-assessment within each individual pillar is broadly in line with the derived assessment (taking into account a slight plateau in self-assessment among the most mature), there appears to be a disparity between self-assessed areas of strength and derived areas of strength. Respondents perceive themselves to be strongest in strategy and governance and weakest in their people, skills and culture, whilst the derived maturity assessment reaches the opposite conclusion.

Figure 29: Mean self-assessment score within derived maturity quintile



Base: 110 respondents.

Drivers of low maturity within strategy and governance

As observed, respondents perceived strategy and governance as the strongest area when self-assessing, while the derived maturity assessment indicated that strategy and governance was the area in which data and digital maturity is weakest. As such, the components of this pillar have been broken down to explore drivers of low maturity in this area.

Of the components of the strategy and governance derived assessment, data sharing stood out as a shared weakness of authorities that scored in the bottom 20% of respondents. As shown in Table 6, among the lowest scoring quintile of authorities against the strategy and governance maturity framework, 79% experience five or more barriers to data sharing with external partners, and 54% experience five or more barriers to data sharing with internal services.

The proportion of respondents experiencing five or more barriers to data sharing with external partners decreases steadily with each quintile; among the top quintile, 13% of authorities experience five or more barriers. A broadly similar pattern is observed for data sharing difficulties with internal services, and although there is a slight jump among the top quintile, this remains below the mean and below the levels seen within quintiles one and two. Barriers to data sharing, both externally and internally, appear therefore to be a key differentiating point between authorities sitting in the lower-performing quintiles and higher-performing quintiles.

Table 6: Strategy and governance quintile index broken down by barriers to data sharing

Strategy and governance derived maturity quintile	Percentage of respondents experiencing 5 or more barriers to data sharing with external partners	Percentage of respondents experiencing 5 or more barriers to data sharing with internal services
1 (lowest)	79%	54%
2	65%	25%
3	39%	9%
4	22%	4%
5 (highest)	13%	13%
Mean	45%	21%

Base: 110 respondents.

The presence of – or lack of – children’s services elements within local authorities’ data, digital and technology strategies is another key factor in maturity within the strategy and governance pillar. Table 7 explores the relationship between derived maturity quintile and the articulation of children’s services-specific goals, either as a standalone strategy or as part of a wider corporate strategy.

The table shows that more mature authorities were more likely to have a data, digital and technology strategy for children’s services, or a general strategy that specifically mentions children’s services. This difference was most pronounced when considering data strategies – 13% of authorities in the bottom quintile had a children’s services data strategy, compared to 80% of authorities in the top quintile – however a similar pattern is seen across both digital and technology. This indicates that having clearly articulated data, digital and technology goals that are specific to children’s services is a key driver of maturity, and offers a clear opportunity to direct support for less mature authorities.

Table 7: Strategy and governance quintile index broken down by presence of a children's services data/digital/technology strategy (either a stand-alone strategy, or specific children's services elements within corporate strategy)

Strategy and governance derived maturity quintile	Percentage of respondents with a CS data strategy	Percentage of respondents with a CS digital strategy	Percentage of respondents with a CS technology strategy
1 (lowest)	13%	21%	22%
2	20%	40%	21%
3	39%	43%	43%
4	56%	70%	69%
5 (highest)	80%	60%	60%
Mean	40%	47%	43%

Base: 109 respondents (Data), 109 respondents (Digital), 106 respondents (Technology).

A view across all five pillars

Whilst each pillar provides an insight into maturity in a specific area, it is also possible to review which authorities are performing well, or less well, across the board.

Within the derived maturity framework, there are five authorities (5% of respondents) that are in the lowest derived maturity quintile across all five pillars. This means that they sit in the bottom 20% of respondents in all five maturity pillars. There were no clear demographic commonalities between these five authorities – they were a mixture of authority types from different regions. Four out of five of these authorities had an average self-assessment score of two ('developing'), suggesting an awareness of their weaknesses but that they are working to improve.

On the other hand, there were no authorities that sat in quintile five – the top 20% of authorities – across all five pillars. There were, however, six authorities (5% of respondents) that sat in quintile five across four pillars, and quintile four in the remaining pillar. Three of the six were rated 'outstanding' by the Ofsted ILACS framework. Two of the six had an average self-assessment score of four ('advanced'), whilst the remaining four had an average score of three ('established'). This again suggests that authorities are able to recognise that their performance is good, but not leading.

This may indicate that, having built a strong foundation, the more mature authorities have a wider awareness of the advanced skills, technology and practices that they could implement to develop their service further, whilst less mature authorities are still building their basic functions and therefore not yet considering additional, advanced functions.

Table 8 explores the relationship between overall derived maturity quintile and two measures of leadership support. The table shows that those authorities who, on average, sat in the top quintile across the pillars, were more likely than average to agree that their children's services leadership team are driving them to make better use of data, digital and technology, and, critically, were more likely than average to agree that they are being given the resources to do so. Those who sat, on average, in the bottom 20% of authorities, sat well below average in both leadership team measures, with 38% reporting that they drive them to make better use of data, digital and technology, and give them the resources to introduce new technology and activities with data.

It must be noted that, due to low sample sizes, the findings in Table 8 are not statistically significant, but the table hints that the most mature authorities are being driven to look towards new technology and approaches, which may feed into why they are reluctant to self-assess as 'leading'.

Table 8: The children's services leadership team... (% agreement)

Average overall derived maturity quintile	...drives me to explore how to make better use of data, digital and technology to support the team's work	...gives me the resources and support to introduce new technology and activities with data
1 (lowest)	38%	38%
2	66%	38%
3	93%	68%
4	94%	73%
5 (highest)	100%	86%
Mean	80%	59%

Base: 110 respondents.

Annex A: Questionnaire

Organisational structure

1. Which of the following most closely describes the structure of children's services data function within your organisation?

By data specialists we mean roles such as analysts, data scientists or officers using data for performance management.

- There is one or more corporate, centralised team(s) which contains most of the data specialists who do children's services work
- There is a "hub and spoke" model with some children's services work being done by a corporate, centralised team of data specialists, and some by data specialists located within the children's services function
- Data specialists sit primarily within the children's services function
- Data specialists are embedded in multidisciplinary teams and support children's and other services
- The organisation currently doesn't have any data specialists
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

2. How many officers does your organisation employ **in total**, to support the children's services function, across the following data roles (or equivalent)?

- Chief data officer
- Performance management officer
- Data analyst
- Business intelligence officer
- Data scientist
- Data engineer
- Data architect
- Data ethicist
- Database administrator
- Information governance officer
- Data quality officer
- User researcher
- Accessibility specialist
- Interaction designer
- Service designer
- Other data specialist role

Please estimate the number of officers who support the children's services function and who fulfil the roles above, even if that is not reflected in their job title. Include vacancies if your local authority is currently recruiting for them. Please use full-time equivalent (for example, two half-time staff count as one full-time).

Total FTE: *[write in]*

Please tick here if you do not know. [Tick box]

3. Which of the following most closely describes the structure of children's services technology function within your organisation?

By technology, we include CMS, finance systems, data technology and software, assistive technology for social workers, and any other technology that the children's services workforce uses.

- There is one or more corporate, centralised team(s) which contains most of the technology specialists who do children's services work
- There is a "hub and spoke" model with some children's services work being done by a corporate, centralised team of technology specialists, and some by technology specialists located within the children's services function
- Technology specialists sit primarily within the children's services function
- Technology specialists are embedded in multidisciplinary teams and support children's and other services
- The organisation currently doesn't have any technology specialists
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

4. How many officers does your organisation employ **in total**, to support the children's services function, across the following technology roles (or equivalent)?

- Chief digital/IT officer
- Frontend developer
- Other software developer
- Application support officer
- CMS support manager
- IT infrastructure manager
- Product manager
- Service, content or interaction designers
- Security manager
- Other technology specialist role

Please estimate the number of officers who support the children's services function and who fulfil the role, even if that is not reflected in their job title. Include vacancies if your local authority is currently recruiting for them. Please use full-time equivalent (for example, two half-time staff count as one full-time).

Total FTE: *[write in]*

Please tick here if you do not know. [Tick box]

Strategy and governance

5. With which local partners, if any, do you have data sharing agreements? *Select all that apply*

- Police
- Local authority other services (e.g. housing, education, SEND)
- Domestic abuse services
- Youth Offending services
- Department for Work and Pensions
- NHS
- HM Prison and Probation Service
- Other, please specify
- Don't know

6. Do you have data sharing agreements with out of area partners?

By out of area partners, we mean the external organisations (e.g. other local authorities, police, NHS, schools) that function outside of your local area, for out of area placements.

- With all out of area partners
- With some out of area partners
- With no out of area partners
- Don't know

7. To what extent, if at all, are your data sharing agreements currently fit for purpose, including facilitating data sharing with external partners where appropriate?

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

8. Which of the following, if any, are barriers to data sharing with the local partners your authority is working with? For example, Police, NHS etc. *Please select all that apply.*

- Lack of data sharing agreements
- Complex data sharing agreements
- Different governance frameworks
- Accountability concerns
- Incompatible digital and technology systems
- Funding constraints
- Poor data quality
- Lack of unique identifiers
- Inconsistent other data standards
- GDPR and data protection concerns
- Lack of leadership buy in
- Limited staff capacity or expertise
- Other (please specify)

- No barriers, we do this well
- Don't know

9. Which of the following, if any, are barriers to internal services within your local authority providing each other with data access to support joined up service delivery? *Please select all that apply.*

- Poor data quality
- Lack of unique identifiers
- Inconsistent other data standards
- GDPR and data protection concerns
- Lack of leadership buy in
- Limited staff capacity or expertise
- Accountability concerns
- Incompatible digital and technology systems
- Funding constraints
- Other (please specify)
- No barriers, we do this well
- Don't know

10. How, if at all, are children's services' goals and priorities articulated in your council's data, digital and technology strategies?

By data strategy, we mean a structured plan that outlines how the local authority will collect, manage, use, share, and protect data to improve public services, inform decision-making, and ensure transparency and accountability.

By digital and technology strategies, we mean structured plans that guide how the local authority uses digital and technology to improve public services, internal operations, citizen engagement, and overall community outcomes.

Column headings: data / digital / technology

Row options:

- We have a corporate strategy without significant children's services elements
- We have a corporate strategy with children's services elements
- We have a separate strategy for children's services
- No formal strategy document of any kind currently
- Don't know

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Scale: strongly agree/tend to agree/neither agree nor disagree/tend to disagree/strongly disagree/don't know

- a. The children's services leadership team is driving best practice in children's services on data, digital and technology.

- b. The children's services leadership team gives me the resources and support to introduce new technology and activities with data.
- c. The children's services leadership team drives me to explore how to make better use of data, digital and technology to support the team's work.
- d. Data on performance and KPIs is regularly discussed by the children's services leadership team.
- e. I meet regularly with the children's services leadership team to discuss how data, digital and technology is meeting their needs.
- f. I meet regularly with the children's services leadership team to discuss how data, digital and technology is meeting the needs of social workers.

12. Please identify which of these models best describes the current approach to strategy and governance for children's services within your local authority. We understand that you might not exactly fit one model, but might be transitioning between two or have elements of two, if this is the case, then please select the highest number and explain this in your comments.

Level	Description
1 – Ad hoc	No clear strategy or vision; responsibility scattered; minimal awareness of compliance; no performance metrics tracked. Activities are reactive and fragmented.
2 – Developing	Draft strategies exist but are siloed; some champions identified; compliance is reactive; limited KPIs tracked inconsistently.
3 – Established	Formal strategy aligned to objectives; accountable roles and governance defined; policies exist and audits occasionally performed; regular reporting with defined metrics.
4 – Advanced	Strategy embedded and monitored; strong executive sponsorship; proactive compliance; data-driven performance management across teams.
5 – Leading	Recognised externally for leadership; governance models best practice; exceeds compliance standards; outcomes optimised using predictive analytics.

Data management and quality

13. Does your local authority currently collect the individual NHS number and the Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN) in all your children's services case management data? *Please tick all that apply*

Column options

- NHS
- UPRN

Row options

- Yes, in all child protection and children looked after cases
- Yes, in all of children's social care cases
- Yes, in early help cases
- No

- Don't know

14. Which of the following best describes how information from your social workers is captured and stored?

- Social workers have a range of options for recording information, including direct input into systems on location
- Social workers have a range of options for recording information, but must transfer that information to case management systems retrospectively
- Social workers collect information and later input manually into systems and records
- Don't know

15. Which of the following best describes how social work records are made available to other appropriate services in the local authority? *Tick all that apply*

- Where agreed, other services are provided direct access to case management systems
- Where appropriate, direct or automated data access is provided for specific information
- Where appropriate, reports or data extracts are generated and provided to services
- Don't know

16. Please identify which of these models most closely reflects the current approach to data management and quality within children's services in your local authority. We understand that you might not exactly fit one model, but might be transitioning between two or have elements of two, if this is the case, then please select the highest number and explain this in your comments.

Level	Description
1 – Ad hoc	Data held in silos with no architecture; quality often incomplete; systems isolated; no systematic approach to security or ethics.
2 – Developing	Some shared databases; basic data validation; point-to-point integrations; minimal compliance controls in place.
3 – Established	Documented data models; quality processes across major datasets; some APIs/interfaces for interoperability; policies and training in place; risks managed.
4 – Advanced	Enterprise-wide architecture implemented; continuous monitoring and automated data quality checks; seamless sharing internally and with partners; proactive risk monitoring with ethics framework.
5 – Leading	Dynamic, scalable architecture enabling cross-sector collaboration; data proactively assured and trusted; fully interoperable ecosystem; sector-leading ethical and secure practices.

Technology and infrastructure

17. Please select the name of your children's social care CMS supplier.

If you will shortly be moving to a new supplier, and you have reached a stage where you have published a preferred supplier, please indicate the supplier you will be moving to.

- System C / Liquidlogic / LCS
- The Access Group / MOSAIC
- OLM / Eclipse
- Advanced / Care Director
- Azeus
- In-house
- Carefirst
- Other, please specify
- Don't know

18. What is the end date of your main children's services CMS contract?

Please write in:

Please tick here if you do not know. [Tick box]

19. Please select the name of your adults' social care CMS supplier.

If you will shortly be moving to a new supplier, and you have reached a stage where you have published a preferred supplier, please indicate the supplier you will be moving to.

- Access
- Advanced
- Azeus
- Civica
- In house
- Liquidlogic
- OLM
- OLM - CSC Liquidlogic
- OLM/Liquidlogic
- TPP
- Other, please specify
- Don't know

20. Who undertakes the procurement for your children's services data, digital and technology?

- A general corporate procurement officer
- A children's services procurement specialist
- Other (please specify)

- Don't know

21. How would you describe your authority's capacity and capability in relation to configuring and maintaining your CMS?

- Very strong – significant in-house expertise and capacity to try innovation
- Fairly strong - sufficient in-house expertise and capacity to do what we need
- Not very strong – some in-house expertise and capacity but can't do everything we need
- Not at all strong – limited in-house expertise and capacity and can do little of what we need
- Don't know

22. Have you made, or are you planning to make, any changes to your case management systems to adapt for the Families First Partnership programme?

- Yes, all changes completed
- Yes, but more changes planned
- No changes yet, but some are planned
- No changes needed
- Don't know

a. Please use the space below if you would like to provide any additional information about your changes. *This question is optional.*

23. Which of the following systems, if any, does your local authority use for processing and data management of children's services data? *Please select all that apply.*

- Excel
- Microsoft Access
- Internally built SQL database
- Other internally built database (please specify)
- Sentinel
- Holistix
- Alteryx
- Xantura
- Fibonacci
- Azure synapse
- Business objects
- Qlik
- Knime
- Python
- R
- Other (please specify)

- No system – manual
- Don't know

24. Which of the following tools, if any, does your local authority use for reporting, dashboards or analysis? *Please select all that apply.*

- Excel
- Access
- Powerpoint
- Power BI
- Python (e.g. Dash, Plotly)
- R (e.g. Shiny)
- Tableau
- Qlikview/QlikSense
- Business objects
- SSRS
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above
- Don't know

25. How, if at all, does your local authority generally receive data files for safeguarding purposes from external partners?

By external partners, we are referring to organisations that handle safeguarding data e.g. NHS, Police, Schools etc.

- Email attachment
- File transfer
- API connection to data source
- Other (please specify)
- We do not receive safeguarding data files from partners
- Don't know

26. Please identify which of these models best describes the current state of technology and infrastructure within children's services in your local authority. We understand that you might not exactly fit one model, but might be transitioning between two or have elements of two, if this is the case, then please select the highest number and explain this in your comments.

Level	Description
1 – Ad hoc	Legacy/manual systems; little or no analytics; ageing on-premises infrastructure; minimal cybersecurity protection; reactive incident handling.
2 – Developing	Some modernisation; basic descriptive analytics; initial cloud adoption; basic controls such as antivirus and firewalls.
3 – Established	Modernised core systems integrated; organisation-wide BI tools used; hybrid cloud approach; formal cyber risk management and standards in place.
4 – Advanced	Enterprise-grade integrated systems; advanced analytics (predictive/AI); cloud-first, resilient infrastructure; proactive monitoring and tested incident response.
5 – Leading	Agile, modular systems enabling innovation; sector-leading AI/ML insights; fully optimised, future-proof infrastructure; resilient, adaptive security posture with sector collaboration.

People, skills and culture

27. Which of the following tools and skills, if any, are your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's services data, using in their day to day roles? Please select all that apply.

- Excel – formulas and manipulations
- Excel – using macros and power queries etc
- Developing data visualisations using software
- SQL user – develop and run queries
- SQL developer – create and maintain warehouse solutions
- Other programming languages e.g. python/R
- Statistical analysis – use of significance testing, regression etc
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above
- Don't know

28. *Pull forward selected options from Q27.* Please indicate how well your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's services data, are trained in the following areas. When answering please think about your data, digital and technology staff as a whole, rather than focusing on individual capability.

Row options

- Very well trained
- Well trained
- Partially trained
- Not trained
- Don't know

29. Do any of the following issues inhibit data professionals in children's services from accessing the tools they want to work with?

Please tick all that apply

- IT concerns about security of certain tools
- Difficulty obtaining budget for licences
- Challenges in 'making the case' for why the tool is needed
- A lack of knowledge of which tools are available
- Other (please specify)
- No, data professionals have access to the tools they want to work with
- Don't know

30. Please identify which of these models best describes the level of data, digital and technology skills, culture and change capability within children's services in your local authority. We understand that you might not exactly fit one model, but might be transitioning between two or have elements of two, if this is the case, then please select the highest number and explain this in your comments.

Level	Description
1 – Ad hoc	Staff lack data, digital and technology skills; few specialists; resistance to change; no structured approach to change management.
2 – Developing	Basic training for some staff; limited specialist roles; pockets of adoption; ad hoc and inconsistent change initiatives.
3 – Established	Training embedded for most staff; specialist roles adequately resourced; general acceptance of data, digital and technology; formal change management approaches in place.
4 – Advanced	Organisation-wide data, digital and technology culture; advanced capabilities (scientists, architects, UX); strong culture of adoption and innovation; change embedded in projects/programmes.
5 – Leading	Sector-leading literacy and skills; recognised centre of excellence; fully embraces data, digital and technology-first culture; excels at transformation and models best practice.

Service design and use of data, digital and technology

31. Which, if any, of the following does your technology enable?

- Allowing children and young people to view their own care records
- Allowing children and young people to contribute to their own care records
- Allowing parents/carers to view care records of their children
- Allowing parents/carers to contribute to care records of their children
- Allowing children and young people to contact their social workers via technology channels
- Allowing approved local partners (e.g. Police, NHS, Schools) to view care records
- Allowing approved local partners (e.g. Police, NHS, Schools) to contribute to care records

- None of the above
- Don't know

32. Does your local authority have a process for evaluating and maintaining configuration of your CMS (e.g. updating your system to reflect a change in the design of the service)?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

33. Please identify which of these models best describes how service design, delivery, and use of data are approached within children's services in your local authority. We understand that you might not exactly fit one model, but might be transitioning between two or have elements of two, if this is the case, then please select the highest number and explain this in your comments.

Level	Description
1 – Ad hoc	Limited digital and technology services, decisions made without data; no systematic outcome measurement.
2 – Developing	Basic digital and technology services; some decisions informed by basic reporting; outcome metrics occasionally tracked.
3 – Established	Comprehensive digital and technology services; regular use of data to inform policy/operations; outcomes tracked and reported.
4 – Advanced	Multi-channel seamless services; predictive/prescriptive analytics support decisions; outcomes and impact routinely measured to improve services.
5 – Leading	Fully digital and technology-first and sector benchmark; data central to all decisions influencing policy nationally; demonstrated sector-wide outcomes and impact; and learning shared externally.

Module: AI

34. Is your children's services team currently using AI for any work, tasks or processes?

By AI, we mean computer systems that can perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. Examples include generative AI systems that create text or images, and predictive AI systems that try and predict an outcome.

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

35. Does your local authority have an AI strategy which covers children's services?

An AI strategy sets out the council's long-term vision, priorities and approach to adopting and benefitting from AI technologies.

- Yes, we have one that is specific to children's services
- Yes, we have one that covers the whole local authority
- No, but we are in the process of developing one
- No, we do not currently have one
- Don't know

36. Which of the following most closely reflects your council's AI usage policy for corporate devices? *An AI usage policy sets out the rules, boundaries and responsibilities for how staff are allowed to use AI tools (such as Chat GPT) on a day-to-day basis.*

- AI tools are banned on corporate devices
- AI tools are permitted on corporate devices
- AI tools are permitted on corporate devices depending on service need
- Council does not have an AI usage policy for corporate devices
- Other, please specify below
- Don't know

37. Does your local authority have AI usage guidance for staff?

- Yes
- No, but we are developing some
- No, we do not have usage guidance
- Don't know

Show if indicate use AI at Q34:

38. Within children's services, which of the following AI tools do you use? *Select all that apply.*

- i.AI Minute
- Beam: Magic Notes
- Leading AI: Policy Buddy
- SMART: Children's Services Copilot
- ChatGPT
- Gemini
- Claude
- Perplexity
- Grok
- Microsoft Copilot
- In-house product
- Other, please specify
- Don't know

39. Is your local authority currently using Robotic Process Automation (RPA) within CSC?

- Yes, currently using RPA
- No, but exploring/considering RPA
- No, not currently using RPA
- Don't know

Final comments

Please use the space below to provide any further comments or suggestions on the topics covered by this survey, including any support you would like to see provided by a new Centre of Excellence for children's services data and digital.

This question is optional

Annex B: Tables

Table 11: Which of the following most closely describes the structure of children's services data function within your organisation?

Structure type	Number	Per cent
There is one or more corporate, centralised team(s) which contains most of the data specialists who do children's services work	44	40%
There is a "hub and spoke" model with some children's services work being done by a corporate, centralised team of data specialists, and some by data specialists located within the children's services function	18	15%
Data specialists sit primarily within the children's services function	34	32%
Data specialists are embedded in multidisciplinary teams and support children's and other services	1	1%
The organisation currently doesn't have any data specialists	0	0%
Other (please specify)	13	12%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 12: Which of the following most closely describes the structure of children's services technology function within your organisation?

Structure type	Number	Per cent
There is one or more corporate, centralised team(s) which contains most of the technology specialists who do children's services work	56	51%
There is a "hub and spoke" model with some children's services work being done by a corporate, centralised team of technology specialists, and some by technology specialists located within the children's services function	34	31%
Technology specialists sit primarily within the children's services function	7	6%
Technology specialists are embedded in multidisciplinary teams and support children's and other services	4	4%
The organisation currently doesn't have any technology specialists	0	0%
Other (please specify)	9	8%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 13: The children's services leadership team is driving best practice in children's services on data, digital and technology.

	Number	Per cent
Strongly agree	24	22%
Tend to agree	50	46%
Neither agree nor disagree	20	18%
Tend to disagree	10	9%
Strongly disagree	3	3%
Don't know	2	2%

Base: 109 respondents.

Table 14: The children's services leadership team gives me the resources and support to introduce new technology and activities with data.

	Number	Per cent
Strongly agree	17	16%
Tend to agree	48	44%
Neither agree nor disagree	19	18%
Tend to disagree	17	15%
Strongly disagree	5	5%
Don't know	4	3%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 15: The children's services leadership team drives me to explore how to make better use of data, digital and technology to support the team's work.

	Number	Per cent
Strongly agree	26	23%
Tend to agree	62	57%
Neither agree nor disagree	10	10%
Tend to disagree	7	6%
Strongly disagree	4	4%
Don't know	1	1%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 16: Data on performance and KPIs is regularly discussed by the children's services leadership team.

	Number	Per cent
Strongly agree	86	78%
Tend to agree	19	18%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	3%
Tend to disagree	1	1%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	1	1%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 17: I meet regularly with the children's services leadership to discuss how data, digital and technology is meeting their needs.

	Number	Per cent
Strongly agree	36	33%
Tend to agree	53	50%
Neither agree nor disagree	9	7%
Tend to disagree	7	6%
Strongly disagree	2	2%
Don't know	3	2%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 18: I meet regularly with the children's services leadership to discuss how data, digital and technology is meeting the needs of social workers.

	Number	Per cent
Strongly agree	27	25%
Tend to agree	54	49%
Neither agree nor disagree	17	15%
Tend to disagree	5	5%
Strongly disagree	3	3%
Don't know	4	3%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 19: How, if at all, are children's services' goals and priorities articulated in your council's data strategies?

	Number	Per cent
We have a corporate strategy with significant children's services elements	37	34%
We have a corporate strategy without children's services elements	34	32%
We have a separate strategy for children's services	7	6%
No formal strategy document of any kind currently	22	19%
Don't know	9	8%

Base: 109 respondents.

Table 20: How, if at all, are children's services' goals and priorities articulated in your council's digital strategies?

	Number	Per cent
We have a corporate strategy with significant children's services elements	44	40%
We have a corporate strategy without children's services elements	35	33%
We have a separate strategy for children's services	7	6%
No formal strategy document of any kind currently	14	13%
Don't know	9	8%

Base: 109 respondents.

Table 21: How, if at all, are children's services' goals and priorities articulated in your council's technology strategies?

	Number	Per cent
We have a corporate strategy with significant children's services elements	41	38%
We have a corporate strategy without children's services elements	35	34%
We have a separate strategy for children's services	5	4%
No formal strategy document of any kind currently	15	14%
Don't know	10	9%

Base: 106 respondents.

Table 22: Does your local authority currently collect the individual NHS number in all your children's services case management data?

	Number	Per cent
Yes, in all child protection and children looked after cases	87	79%
Yes, in all of children's social care cases	52	49%
Yes, in early help cases	30	28%
No	8	8%
Don't know	3	3%

Base: 109 respondents. Please note respondents could select more than one option.

Table 23: Does your local authority currently collect the Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN) in all your children's services case management data?

	Number	Per cent
Yes, in all child protection and children looked after cases	56	55%
Yes, in all of children's social care cases	52	52%
Yes, in early help cases	40	40%
No	21	22%
Don't know	12	11%

Base: 101 respondents. Please note respondents could select more than one option.

Table 24: Which of the following best describes how information from your social workers is captured and stored?

	Number	Per cent
Social workers have a range of options for recording information, including direct input into systems on location	54	50%
Social workers have a range of options for recording information, but must transfer that information to case management systems retrospectively	35	32%
Social workers collect information and later input manually into systems and records	19	17%
Don't know	2	2%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 25: Which of the following best describes how social work records are made available to offer appropriate services in the local authority?

	Number	Per cent
Where agreed, other services are provided direct access to case management systems	74	66%
Where appropriate, direct or automated data access is provided for specific information	54	49%
Where appropriate, reports or data extracts are generated and provided to services	85	76%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 26: Which local partners, if any, do you have data sharing agreements with?

	Number	Per cent
Police	93	85%
NHS	91	82%
Local authority other services (e.g housing, education, SEND)	88	80%
Youth offending services	85	77%
Department for Work and Pensions	66	59%
Domestic abuse services	54	50%
HM Prison and Probation Services	45	40%
Other (please specify)	13	12%
None of the above	0	0%
Don't know	7	7%

Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 27: How many local partners, if any, do you have data sharing agreements with?

	Number	Per cent
0	0	0%
1	0	0%
2	5	5%
3	11	11%
4	17	16%
5	25	25%
6	14	14%
7	26	26%
8 or more	4	4%

Base: 102 respondents.

Table 28: Do you have data sharing agreements with out of area partners?

	Number	Per cent
With all out of area partners	5	5%
With some out of area partners	59	53%
With no out of area partners	19	17%
Don't know	27	25%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 29: To what extent, if at all, are your data sharing agreements currently fit for purpose, including facilitating data sharing with external partners where appropriate?

	Number	Per cent
To a great extent	19	16%
To a moderate extent	70	63%
To a small extent	6	5%
Not at all	2	2%
Don't know	13	13%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 30: Which, if any, of the following does your technology enable?

	Number	Per cent
Allowing approved local partners (e.g. Police, NHS, Schools) to view care records	55	49%
Allowing approved local partners (e.g. Police, NHS, Schools) to contribute to care records	42	38%
Allowing children and young people to contact their social workers via technology channels	31	29%
Allowing children and young people to contribute to their own care records	19	18%
Allowing parents/carers to contribute to care records of their children	16	14%
Allowing parents/carers to view care records of their children	5	5%
Allowing children and young people to view their own care records	4	4%
None of the above	21	20%
Don't know	15	13%

Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 31: Which of the following, if any, are barriers to data sharing with the local partners your authority is working with? For example, Police, NHS etc.

	Number	Per cent
Incompatible digital and technology systems	67	62%
Lack of unique identifiers	65	60%
Different governance frameworks	57	52%
GDPR and data protection concerns	56	51%
Limited staff capacity or expertise	55	50%
Poor data quality	47	42%
Inconsistent other data standards	45	41%
Complex data sharing agreements	43	39%
Funding constraints	37	33%
Lack of data sharing agreements	30	28%
Accountability concerns	28	25%
Lack of leadership buy in	22	20%
Other (please specify)	13	12%
No barriers, we do this well	2	2%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 32: Which of the following, if any, are barriers to internal services within your local authority providing each other with data access to support joined up service delivery?

	Number	Per cent
Lack of unique identifiers	57	54%
Incompatible digital and technology systems	55	51%
Poor data quality	55	50%
Limited staff capacity or expertise	52	48%
Inconsistent other data standards	42	39%
Funding constraints	39	35%
GDPR and data protection concerns	35	32%
Accountability concerns	18	16%
Lack of leadership buy in	11	10%
Other (please specify)	14	12%
No barriers, we do this well	14	12%
Don't know	1	1%

Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 33: Which of the following systems, if any, does your local authority use for processing and data management of children’s services data?

	Number	Per cent
Excel	78	70%
Internally built SQL database	73	66%
Business objects	40	38%
Python	27	24%
Microsoft Access	19	17%
R	16	14%
Azure synapse	13	12%
Other internally built database (please specify)	9	8%
Sentinel	7	6%
Holistix	2	2%
Alteryx	1	1%
Fibonacci	1	1%
Qlik	1	1%
Xantura	1	1%
Knime	0	0%
Other (please specify)	32	29%
No system – manual	1	1%
Don’t know	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 34: Which of the following tools, if any, does your local authority use for reporting, dashboards or analysis?

	Number	Per cent
Power BI	105	96%
Excel	87	78%
SSRS	60	55%
Powerpoint	58	52%
Business objects	39	36%
Python (e.g. Dash, Plotly)	18	17%
Access	13	12%
R (e.g. Shiny)	9	8%
Tableau	8	6%
Qlikview/QlikSense	2	2%
Other (please specify)	12	11%
None of the above	0	0%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 35: How, if at all, does your local authority generally receive data files for safeguarding purposes from external partners? By external partners, we are referring to organisations that handle safeguarding data e.g. NHS, Police, Schools etc

	Number	Per cent
Email attachment	78	71%
File transfer	51	46%
API connection to data source	27	25%
Other (please specify)	24	22%
We do not receive safeguarding data files from partners	2	2%
Don't know	8	7%

Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 36: Which of the following tools and skills, if any, are your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's services data, using in their day to day roles?

	Number	Per cent
Excel – formulas and manipulations	108	98%
SQL user – develop and run queries	102	92%
Developing data visualisations using software	98	90%
Excel – using macros and power queries etc	83	75%
SQL developer – create and maintain warehouse solutions	79	71%
Other programming languages e.g. python/R	47	42%
Statistical analysis – use of significance testing, regression etc	37	33%
Other (please specify)	16	15%
None of the above	0	0%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 37: Please indicate how well your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's service data, are trained in excel formulas and manipulations?

	Number	Per cent
Very well trained	56	51%
Well trained	41	38%
Partially trained	9	9%
Not trained	0	0%
Don't know	2	2%

Base: 108 respondents.

Table 38: Please indicate how well your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's service data, are trained in SQL developing and running queries?

	Number	Per cent
Very well trained	25	24%
Well trained	46	45%
Partially trained	28	28%
Not trained	1	1%
Don't know	2	2%

Base: 102 respondents.

Table 39: Please indicate how well your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's service data, are trained in developing data visualisations using software?

	Number	Per cent
Very well trained	29	29%
Well trained	42	43%
Partially trained	24	25%
Not trained	2	2%
Don't know	1	1%

Base: 98 respondents.

Table 40: Please indicate how well your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's service data, are trained in excel using macros and power queries?

	Number	Per cent
Very well trained	29	36%
Well trained	33	38%
Partially trained	19	23%
Not trained	1	1%
Don't know	1	2%

Base: 83 respondents.

Table 41: Please indicate how well your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's service data, are trained in SQL developer creating and maintaining warehouse solutions?

	Number	Per cent
Very well trained	19	25%
Well trained	36	45%
Partially trained	19	25%
Not trained	1	1%
Don't know	3	4%

Base: 78 respondents.

Table 42: Please indicate how well your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's service data, are trained in other programming languages e.g. Python/R?

	Number	Per cent
Very well trained	5	11%
Well trained	8	15%
Partially trained	32	70%
Not trained	1	2%
Don't know	1	2%

Base: 47 respondents.

Table 43: Please indicate how well your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's service data, are trained in statistical analysis and the use of significance testing/regression?

	Number	Per cent
Very well trained	8	22%
Well trained	10	27%
Partially trained	16	44%
Not trained	2	7%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 36 respondents.

Table 44: Do any of the following issues inhibit data professionals in children's services from assessing the tools they want to work with?

	Number	Per cent
Difficulty obtained budget for licenses	50	45%
Challenges in 'making the case' for why the tool is needed	48	43%
IT concerns about security of certain tools	47	42%
A lack of knowledge of which tools are available	26	24%
Other (please specify)	14	13%
No, data professionals have access to the tools they want to work with	33	30%
Don't know	1	1%

Base: 110 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 45: Does your local authority have a process for evaluating and maintaining configuration of your CMS (e.g. updating your system to reflect a change in the design of the service?)

	Number	Per cent
Yes	102	93%
No	4	4%
Don't know	4	3%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 46: Please select the name of your children's social care CMS supplier.

	Number	Per cent
System C/Liquidlogic/LCS	67	60%
The Access Group/MOSAIC	37	34%
OLM/Eclipse	3	3%
Azeus	2	2%
Advanced / Care Director	0	0%
In-house	0	0%
Carefirst	0	0%
Other, please specify	1	1%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 47: Please select the name of your adult's social care CMS supplier.

	Number	Per cent
System C/Liquidlogic/LCS	53	47%
The Access Group/MOSAIC	37	35%
OLM	5	5%
Azeus	4	4%
Advanced	2	2%
Civica	1	1%
TPP	1	1%
In house	0	0%
OLM – CSC Liquidlogic	0	0%
OLM/Liquidlogic	0	0%
Other, please specify	1	1%
Don't know	6	5%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 48: Do respondents have the same supplier for their children's and adult's social care CMS suppliers?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	83	76%
No	27	24%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 49: What is the end date of your main children's services CMS contract?

	Number	Per cent
2025	1	1%
2026	11	17%
2027	11	18%
2028	17	27%
2029	4	6%
2030 and beyond	19	30%

Base: 63 respondents.

Table 50: Who undertakes the procurement for your children's services data, digital and technology?

	Number	Per cent
A general corporate procurement officer	53	48%
A children's services procurement specialist	9	8%
Other (please specify)	38	34%
Don't know	10	10%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 51: How would you describe your authority's capacity and capability in relation to configuring and maintaining your CMS?

	Number	Per cent
Very strong – significant in-house expertise and capacity to try innovation	27	24%
Fairly strong - sufficient in-house expertise and capacity to do what we need	64	58%
Not very strong – some in-house expertise and capacity but can't do everything we need	18	17%
Not at all strong – limited in-house expertise and capacity and can do little of what we need	1	1%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 52: Have you made, or are you planning to make, any changes to your case management systems to adapt for the Families First Partnership programme?

	Number	Per cent
Yes, all changes completed	1	1%
Yes, but more changes planned	28	25%
No changes yet, but some are planned	77	71%
No changes needed	0	0%
Don't know	4	4%

Base: 110 respondents.

A thematic analysis of the open-ended responses to the follow-up question, “Have you made, or are you planning to make, any changes to your case management systems to adapt for the Families First Partnership programme? Please use the space below if you would like to provide any additional information about your changes” is provided in [Annex D](#).

Table 53: Is your children's services team currently using AI for any work, tasks or processes?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	87	79%
No	23	21%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 54: Does your local authority have an AI strategy which covers children's services?

	Number	Per cent
Yes, we have one that is specific to children's services	4	4%
Yes, we have one that covers the whole local authority	43	38%
No, but we are in the process of developing one	51	46%
No, we do not currently have one	8	7%
Don't know	4	4%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 55: Which of the following most closely reflects your council's AI usage policy for corporate devices?

	Number	Per cent
AI tools are banned on corporate devices	1	1%
AI tools are permitted on corporate devices	38	35%
AI tools are permitted on corporate devices depending on service need	43	39%
Council does not have an AI usage policy for corporate devices	4	4%
Other, please specify below	23	20%
Don't know	1	1%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 56: Does your local authority have AI usage guidance for staff?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	82	74%
No, but we are developing some	23	21%
No, we do not have usage guidance	3	3%
Don't know	2	2%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 57: Within children's services, which of the following AI tools do you use?

	Number	Per cent
Microsoft Copilot	83	95%
Beam: Magic Notes	46	53%
i.AI Minute	8	10%
In-house product	7	8%
ChatGPT	4	5%
Gemini	4	5%
Leading AI: Policy Buddy	1	1%
SMART: Children's Services Copilot	1	1%
Claude	0	0%
Grok	0	0%
Perplexity	0	0%
Other, please specify	16	18%
Don't know	0	0%

Base: 87 respondents. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Table 58: Is your local authority currently using Robotic Process Automation (RPA) within CMS?

	Number	Per cent
Yes, currently using RPA	17	16%
No, but exploring/considering RPA	25	22%
No, not currently using RPA	55	50%
Don't know	13	12%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 59: Please identify which of these models best describes the current approach to strategy and governance for children’s services within your local authority?

	Number	Per cent
Ad hoc: No clear strategy or vision; responsibility scattered; minimal awareness of compliance; no performance metrics tracked. Activities are reactive and fragmented.	0	0%
Developing: Draft strategies exist but are siloed; some champions identified; compliance is reactive; limited KPIs tracked inconsistently.	17	16%
Established: Formal strategy aligned to objectives; accountable roles and governance defined; policies exist and audits occasionally performed; regular reporting with defined metrics.	51	47%
Advanced: Strategy embedded and monitored; strong executive sponsorship; proactive compliance; data-driven performance management across teams.	41	36%
Leading: Recognised externally for leadership; governance models best practice; exceeds compliance standards; outcomes optimised using predictive analytics.	1	1%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 60: Please identify which of these models best describes the current approach to data management and quality within children’s services in your local authority?

	Number	Per cent
Ad hoc: Data held in silos with no architecture; quality often incomplete; systems isolated; no systematic approach to security or ethics.	2	2%
Developing: Some shared databases; basic data validation; point-to-point integrations; minimal compliance controls in place.	35	33%
Established: Documented data models; quality processes across major datasets; some APIs/interfaces for interoperability; policies and training in place; risks managed.	62	55%
Advanced: Enterprise-wide architecture implemented; continuous monitoring and automated data quality checks; seamless sharing internally and with partners; proactive risk monitoring with ethics framework.	11	10%
Leading: Dynamic, scalable architecture enabling cross-sector collaboration; data proactively assured and trusted; fully interoperable ecosystem; sector-leading ethical and secure practices.	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 61: Please identify which of these models best describes the current state of technology and infrastructure within children's services in your local authority?

	Number	Per cent
Ad hoc: Legacy/manual systems; little or no analytics; ageing on-premises infrastructure; minimal cybersecurity protection; reactive incident handling.	1	1%
Developing: Some modernisation; basic descriptive analytics; initial cloud adoption; basic controls such as antivirus and firewalls.	15	14%
Established: Modernised core systems integrated; organisation-wide BI tools used; hybrid cloud approach; formal cyber risk management and standards in place.	85	76%
Advanced: Enterprise-grade integrated systems; advanced analytics (predictive/AI); cloud-first, resilient infrastructure; proactive monitoring and tested incident response.	9	8%
Leading: Agile, modular systems enabling innovation; sector-leading AI/ML insights; fully optimised, future-proof infrastructure; resilient, adaptive security posture with sector collaboration.	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 62: Please identify which of these models best describes the level of data, digital and technology skills, culture and change capability within children's services in your local authority?

	Number	Per cent
Ad hoc: Staff lack data, digital and technology skills; few specialists; resistance to change; no structured approach to change management.	1	1%
Developing: Basic training for some staff; limited specialist roles; pockets of adoption; ad hoc and inconsistent change initiatives.	39	36%
Established: Training embedded for most staff; specialist roles adequately resourced; general acceptance of data, digital and technology; formal change management approaches in place.	61	55%
Advanced: Organisation-wide data, digital and technology culture; advanced capabilities (scientists, architects, UX); strong culture of adoption and innovation; change embedded in projects/programmes.	9	8%
Leading: Sector-leading literacy and skills; recognised centre of excellence; fully embraces data, digital and technology-first culture; excels at transformation and models best practice.	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents.

Table 63: Please identify which of these models best describes how service design, delivery and use of data, digital and technology are approached within children's services in your local authority?

	Number	Per cent
Ad hoc: Limited digital and technology services, decisions made without data; no systematic outcome measurement.	0	0%
Developing: Basic digital and technology services; some decisions informed by basic reporting; outcome metrics occasionally tracked.	21	19%
Established: Comprehensive digital and technology services; regular use of data to inform policy/operations; outcomes tracked and reported.	78	72%
Advanced: Multi-channel seamless services; predictive/prescriptive analytics support decisions; outcomes and impact routinely measured to improve services.	11	10%
Leading: Fully digital and technology-first and sector benchmark; data central to all decisions influencing policy nationally; demonstrated sector-wide outcomes and impact; and learning shared externally.	0	0%

Base: 110 respondents.

Annex C: Derived maturity assessment question framework

The following section provides a breakdown of the survey questions which have been used to generate the derived maturity scores for the five pillars of maturity.

Strategy and governance

1. Which of the following most closely describes the structure of children's services data function within your organisation?
3. Which of the following most closely describes the structure of children's services technology function within your organisation?
5. With which local partners, if any, do you have data sharing agreements?
6. Do you have data sharing agreements with out of area partners?
7. To what extent, if at all, are your data sharing agreements currently fit for purpose, including facilitating data sharing with external partners where appropriate?
8. Which of the following, if any, are barriers to data sharing with the local partners your authority is working with? For example, Police, NHS etc.
9. Which of the following, if any, are barriers to internal services within your local authority providing each other with data access to support joined up service delivery?
10. How, if at all, are children's services' goals and priorities articulated in your council's data, digital and technology strategies?
11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 - a. *The children's services leadership team is driving best practice in children's services on data, digital and technology.*
32. Does your local authority have a process for evaluating and maintaining configuration of your CMS (e.g. updating your system to reflect a change in the design of the service)?
35. Does your local authority have an AI strategy which covers children's services?
37. Does your local authority have AI usage guidance for staff?

Data management and quality

5. With which local partners, if any, do you have data sharing agreements?
6. Do you have data sharing agreements with out of area partners?
7. To what extent, if at all, are your data sharing agreements currently fit for purpose, including facilitating data sharing with external partners where appropriate?
8. Which of the following, if any, are barriers to data sharing with the local partners your authority is working with? For example, Police, NHS etc.
9. Which of the following, if any, are barriers to internal services within your local authority providing each other with data access to support joined up service delivery?
10. How, if at all, are children's services' goals and priorities articulated in your council's data, digital and technology strategies?
11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 - b. *The children's services leadership team gives me the resources and support to introduce new technology and activities with data.*
 - c. *The children's services leadership team drives me to explore how to make better use of data, digital and technology to support the team's work.*
13. Does your local authority currently collect the individual NHS number and the Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN) in all your children's services case management data?
14. Which of the following best describes how information from your social workers is captured and stored?
15. Which of the following best describes how social work records are made available to other appropriate services in the local authority?
23. Which of the following systems, if any, does your local authority use for processing and data management of children's services data?
25. How, if at all, does your local authority generally receive data files for safeguarding purposes from external partners? By external partners, we are referring to organisations that handle safeguarding data e.g. NHS, Police, Schools etc.
31. Which, if any, of the following does your technology enable?

Technology and infrastructure

10. How, if at all, are children's services' goals and priorities articulated in your council's data, digital and technology strategies?

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

a. The children's services leadership team is driving best practice in children's services on data, digital and technology.

b. *The children's services leadership team gives me the resources and support to introduce new technology and activities with data.*

c. *The children's services leadership team drives me to explore how to make better use of data, digital and technology to support the team's work.*

e. I meet regularly with the children's services leadership team to discuss how data, digital and technology is meeting their needs.

f. I meet regularly with the children's services leadership team to discuss how data, digital and technology is meeting the needs of social workers.

21. How would you describe your authority's capacity and capability in relation to configuring and maintaining your CMS?

23. Which of the following systems, if any, does your local authority use for processing and data management of children's services data?

24. Which of the following tools, if any, does your local authority use for reporting, dashboards or analysis?

25. How, if at all, does your local authority generally receive data files for safeguarding purposes from external partners? By external partners, we are referring to organisations that handle safeguarding data e.g. NHS, Police, Schools etc.

29. Do any of the following issues inhibit data professionals in children's services from accessing the tools they want to work with?

31. Which, if any, of the following does your technology enable?

39. Is your local authority currently using Robotic Process Automation (RPA) within CSC?

People, skills and culture

1. Which of the following most closely describes the structure of children's services data function within your organisation?

3. Which of the following most closely describes the structure of children's services technology function within your organisation?

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

a. The children's services leadership team is driving best practice in children's services on data, digital and technology.

c. *The children's services leadership team drives me to explore how to make better use of data, digital and technology to support the team's work.*

21. How would you describe your authority's capacity and capability in relation to configuring and maintaining your CMS?

23. Which of the following tools, if any, does your local authority use for reporting, dashboards or analysis?

25. Which of the following tools and skills, if any, are your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's services data, using in their day to day roles?

28. For each of the options selected at the previous question: Please indicate how well your data, digital and technology staff, who work on children's services data, are trained in the following areas. When answering please think about your data, digital and technology staff as a whole, rather than focusing on individual capability.

29. Do any of the following issues inhibit data professionals in children's services from accessing the tools they want to work with?

37. Does your local authority have AI usage guidance for staff?

Service design and use of data and digital

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

d. Data on performance and KPIs is regularly discussed by the children's services leadership team

e. *I meet regularly with the children's services leadership team to discuss how data, digital and technology is meeting their needs.*

f. *I meet regularly with the children's services leadership team to discuss how data, digital and technology is meeting the needs of social workers.*

14. Which of the following best describes how information from your social workers is captured and stored?
15. Which of the following best describes how social work records are made available to other appropriate services in the local authority?
31. Which, if any, of the following does your technology enable?
32. Does your local authority have a process for evaluating and maintaining configuration of your CMS (e.g. updating your system to reflect a change in the design of the service)?

Annex D: CMS changes for Families First Partnership

Have you made, or are planning to make, any changes to your case management systems to adapt for the Families First Partnership programme? Please use the space below if you would like to provide any additional information about your changes.

Respondents had the opportunity to elaborate on their answer to this question. A total of 22 respondents provided additional information to support their answer, and these have been grouped into common themes.

The majority of respondents explained that they were awaiting further guidance from either DfE or from their CMS supplier in advance of making any changes. In some cases, respondents explained that they had been specifically advised to wait until the guidance was available.

A handful of respondents reported that they were currently working through the changes, including doing pre-work and configuration testing.

A small number explained that they were still determining what changes would be needed.

Two respondents reported some barriers to implementing the changes. One explained that they were in the process of switching CMS when the changes were announced, so the process mapping could not be modified at that stage. Another respondent reported that they are moving to a hosted version of their CMS and therefore will be unable to make changes themselves.



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