Department for Education

Children in need census 2027 to 2028

Business and technical specification

Version 1.0, October 2026

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Version history

Version number	Update	Author, team and date
V0-1	Initial quality assurance version: Key dates rolled forward and links checked 'CIN details' module renamed 'Episode details' 'CIN Referral date' (N00100) renamed 'Referral date' 'CIN Closure Date' (N00102) renamed 'Closure Date' 5C and 5D in code set CS060 for 'Referral Source (N00152) amended RC7 in Code set CS022 Reason for Closure (N00103) amended RC9 in Code set CS022 Reason for Closure (N00103) RC10 in Code set CS022 'Reason for Closure (N00103) added 4 new data items capturing (1) level of support at referral, (2) initial assessment, (3) any change in level of support after assessment, and (4) the date of any level of support change <PresentingLevelOfSupport> (N00858) <AssessmentLevelOfSupport> (N00859) <LevelOfSupportChange> (N00860) <LevelOfSupportChangeDate> (N00861) 'Assessment Factors' (N00181) data item and associated code set (CS085) removed and replaced with a new data item, 'Factors' (N00862) and code set (CS139). 'Primary Need' (N00101) removed and replaced with a more expansive, non-hierarchical set of options in the form of 'Factor Group' (N00863) which group the longer list of Factors 'Extra-familial harm', 'Domestic abuse' and 'Other' added to the child protection plan categories of abuse and 'Multiple/Not Recommended removed' (See CBDS RFC 1388 for further details and full revised list)	Simon Summers, COG – September 2026

Version number	Update	Author, team and date
V1-0	This is the base lined version of the specification: Children receiving targeted early help (TEH) delivered through the family help pathway are now within scope of the census. Clarification of guidance regarding coding of factor group and presenting level of support for open episodes at 1 April 2027 Clarification of guidance regarding level of support at assessment and factors relating only to assessments completed in the reporting year. Clarification of guidance around the removal of 'Multiple/Not Recommended' (MUL) from the categories of abuse code set (see p.26 above for details) Renaming of 'Level of Support Change' module to 'Change in Level of Support'. Note: section 5.10 (pp, 28-29) was inadvertently omitted from the pre-baselined version of the document that was circulated to software suppliers	Simon Summers; COG; October 2026

1. Introduction

1.1. Scope

This specification describes the children in need (CIN) census 2027 to 2028. This data collection covers all local authorities in England, who are expected to provide data on all cases and episodes for the period from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2028.

In line with statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children, local areas are moving to a single, integrated 'family help' pathway, which brings together targeted early help (TEH) and children in need (CIN) support into a more seamless offer for families.

As a result, the scope of this census has been extended. Children receiving targeted early help (TEH) delivered through the family help pathway are now within scope of the census.

The data consist of child-level information for those children in scope, showing their characteristics and information about their assessments. The majority of children requiring support will be up to 19 years old but there will be a few exceptions where children's social care services are providing support to older persons. The collection covers the following groups:

- Children receiving family help, including both targeted early help (non-statutory support and services is provided thought sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004) and child in need (section 17 of the Children Act 1989). This will include unborn children who have been identified as potential children requiring services
- Those children for whom there is a child protection plan (CPP) at any time during the period
- Children who were referred to children's social care services but for whom no further action is taken after initial consideration or assessment
- Children who were the subject of pre-proceedings which started during the data collection period

1.2. Variations

The paragraphs above describe most records within the return. Local authorities are asked to note the following variations in the requirement:

1.2.1. Unborn children

For an unborn child the following requirements apply:

- Applicable data are 'LAchildID; expected date of birth; sex; ethnicity; episode details (all fields); child protection plans (all fields)

- Sex should = U (not been recorded/not known/not been registered/unborn)
- Ethnicity should be 'NOBT' (information not yet obtained)
- Disability information is not required

Please note that it is possible that there is more than one unborn child with the same details other than the 'LAchildID'.

1.2.2. Looked after children who are adopted and remain in need of support

If a looked after child is adopted during the collection year and the child remains in need of support, the local authority must submit two separate unlinked records for that child.

The first (pre-adoption) record should record the child's episode details as they were when they were a looked after child:

- Closure date will match the date of the court's adoption order;
- Reason for closure will contain code RC1 (adopted)

The second (post-adoption) record for that same child must contain new child identifiers:

- A new 'LAchildID'
- A new UPN which should have been assigned to the child by the school. Do not record the child's pre-adoption UPN under former UPN
- Referral date will match the date of the court's adoption order.

1.2.3. Looked after children who are adopted and no longer require support

If a looked after child is adopted and at that point no longer requires support then the second, post-adoption record (as detailed above) is not necessary. If a child doesn't remain in need, the closure date can be up to a month after the adoption date.

The second (post-adoption) record-type could be provided in subsequent years, if the child starts a new episode of need.

1.2.4. Referral no further action

If a referral is received about a child, but no action is taken, then the following requirements apply:

The child identifiers module should contain:

- 'LAchildID'

- Date of birth or expected date of birth
- Sex

The child characteristics module should contain:

- Child ethnicity

One episode details module should be supplied containing:

- Referral date
- Referral no further action flag with a value of true or 1
- Source of referral

There should be no other activities recorded in the episode details module. As with a referral that leads to action, if a single referral is about more than one child, then a separate record is required for each child.

1.2.5. Child moves into your local authority who is the subject of a CPP

If a child moves permanently into your local authority, having been the subject of a child protection plan in another local authority (sometimes referred to as ‘transfers in’), the data requirements are:

- Apart from episode details, all modules are required in full including details of the new child protection plan
- For the episode details module, the following items only are required:
    - In all cases, referral date, factor group code, and referral no further action with the value of false or 0
    - If the case was closed during the census year the episode closure date and reason for closure are also required
    - The initial child protection conference (CPC) date must be completed within the episode details module, and not in the section 47 module.

The referral date should be the date on which formal notification is received from the originating local authority.

The receiving local authority should convene a child protection conference within 15 working days of being notified of the move (that is, referral date). The date of this child protection conference should be recorded within the episode details group and not within the section 47 group. This is to allow us to distinguish between conferences due to a child moving and other conferences.

If notification is received from another local authority of a child requiring support who has not been the subject of a child protection plan, then the case is treated as any other

referral for the purposes of the children in need census, and information on assessments and section 47 enquires are required as described in section 5.4.

1.3. Audience and references

This document has been developed to support local authorities and their software suppliers of local authority management information systems (MISs). It should be read in conjunction with:

- Common basic data set (CBDS) (which can be accessed via the following link common basic data set
- [CIN 2027 to 2028 guide v1-0 – when available]
- [CIN-Census2028-v1-0.xsd – when available]

The common basic data is a database comprising all levels, all modules, all data items and all code-sets within the one spreadsheet. This spreadsheet makes use of filters and hyperlinks to navigate around. The filters make it possible to view extracts of the common basic data set for use in specific collections, including children in need 2027 to 2028. All the items relating to this specification can be found on CBDS by filtering on the column headed children in need census 2027 to 2028 of the data definitions worksheet.

The children in need census collection guide will be available electronically under census documents.

The government's statutory guidance is 'Working together to safeguard children'.

As previously advised, from the 2020 to 2021 census onwards XSLT will only be provided when there has been significant change from the previous collection. XSLT will be provided for the 2027 to 2028 collection.

1.4. Changes from the 2026 to 2027 specification

1. All through: Dates and links updated
2. 'CIN Details' module renamed 'Episode Details'
3. 'CIN Referral date' (N00100) renamed 'Referral date'
4. 'CIN Closure Date' (N00102) renamed 'Closure Date'
5. 5C and 5D in code set CS060 for 'Referral Source (N00152) amended as below:

5C	LA services – External from another LAs services, e.g. social care or universal services and community based early help
5D	LA services – universal services and community based early help

6. RC7 in code set CS022 Reason for Closure (N00103) amended as below:

RC7	Services ceased for any other reason, including child no longer in need or child no longer in need for family help services

7. RC9 in code set CS022 Reason for Closure (N00103) amended as below:

RC9	Case closed after assessment, referred to universal services and community based early help

8. RC10 in code set CS022 'Reason for Closure (N00103) added as below:

RC10	Targeted early help services ended following withdrawal of consent

Collect the 4 new data items below. These capture (a) level of support at referral, (b) initial assessment, (c) any change in level of support after assessment and (d) the date of any level of support change reported via (c). Further details below.

Presenting level of support, N00858 <PresentingLevelOfSupport>

This data item captures the initial view of the child and family's level of need based on the information available at the time the referral is received. This should reflect the reason the case has been referred to children's social care and the expected level of support required.

Valid values (new code set CS138):

- TEH (targeted early help)
- CIN (Child in Need)

Level of support after assessment, N00859 <AssessmentLevelOfSupport>

This data item captures the child and family's agreed level of support based on the information gathered during the assessment.

Valid values (new code set CS138):

- TEH (targeted early help)
- CIN (Child in Need)

Level of support change, N00860 <LevelOfSupportChange>

This data item captures where the level of support has changed and a new assessment is not required. If there have been no changes in the level of support after assessment, leave this blank

Valid values (new code set CS138):

- TEH (targeted early help)
- CIN (Child in Need)

Date of level of support change, N00861 <LevelOfSupportChangeDate>

This data item captures the date on which it was agreed the level of support should change.

Valid values: Any valid date

9. Current ‘Assessment Factors’ (N00181) data item and associated code set (CS085) removed and replaced with a new data item, ‘Factors’ (N00862) and code set (CS139). See RFC 1388 for further details and full revised code list.

10. ‘Primary Need’ (N00101) removed and replaced with a more expansive, non-hierarchical set of options in the form of ‘Factor Group’ (N00863) which group the longer list of Factors (N00863). See CBDS RFC 1388 for further details and full revised list.

11. ‘Extra-familial harm’, ‘Domestic abuse’ and ‘Other’ added to the child protection plan categories of abuse and removal of ‘Multiple/Not recommended’ (code set CS024). See CBDS RFC 1388 for further details and full revised list.

1.5. Definitions

MIS: Within this document the term MIS (management information system) is used in a generic sense as the source system, or systems, where the data are normally maintained and from where they are exported. In most cases this will be the local authority’s social care electronic case management system.

Census year: Within this document census year always refers to the period 1 April 2027 through 31 March 2028, inclusive.

1.6. Important note on this version

Version 1.0 is the base lined version of the 2027 to 2028 specification (see version history for details).

2. Assumptions

Assumptions made in creating this specification:

A1	Each local authority will provide a single file containing all data.
A2	Where appropriate the data specification has used e-Gif data standards
A3	The census will use COLLECT (Collections On-line for Learning, Education, Children and Teachers) as the data collection mechanism
A4	The Department for Education (DfE) will only accept submissions in XML format
A5	For most local authorities the electronic case management system will be the primary source of data

3. Coverage and timings

To complete the census all local authorities will be required to capture the data attributes specified for the year from 1 April 2027 until 31 March 2028 inclusive. Submission of data to the Department for Education (DfE) will occur between 1 April and 31 July 2028.

4. Data standards

It is the long-term strategy of the DfE to adopt the e-GIF standards to support the transfer of data across other public sector bodies and government departments. This specification has been developed with those standards in mind; where deviations occur explanation notes have been provided.

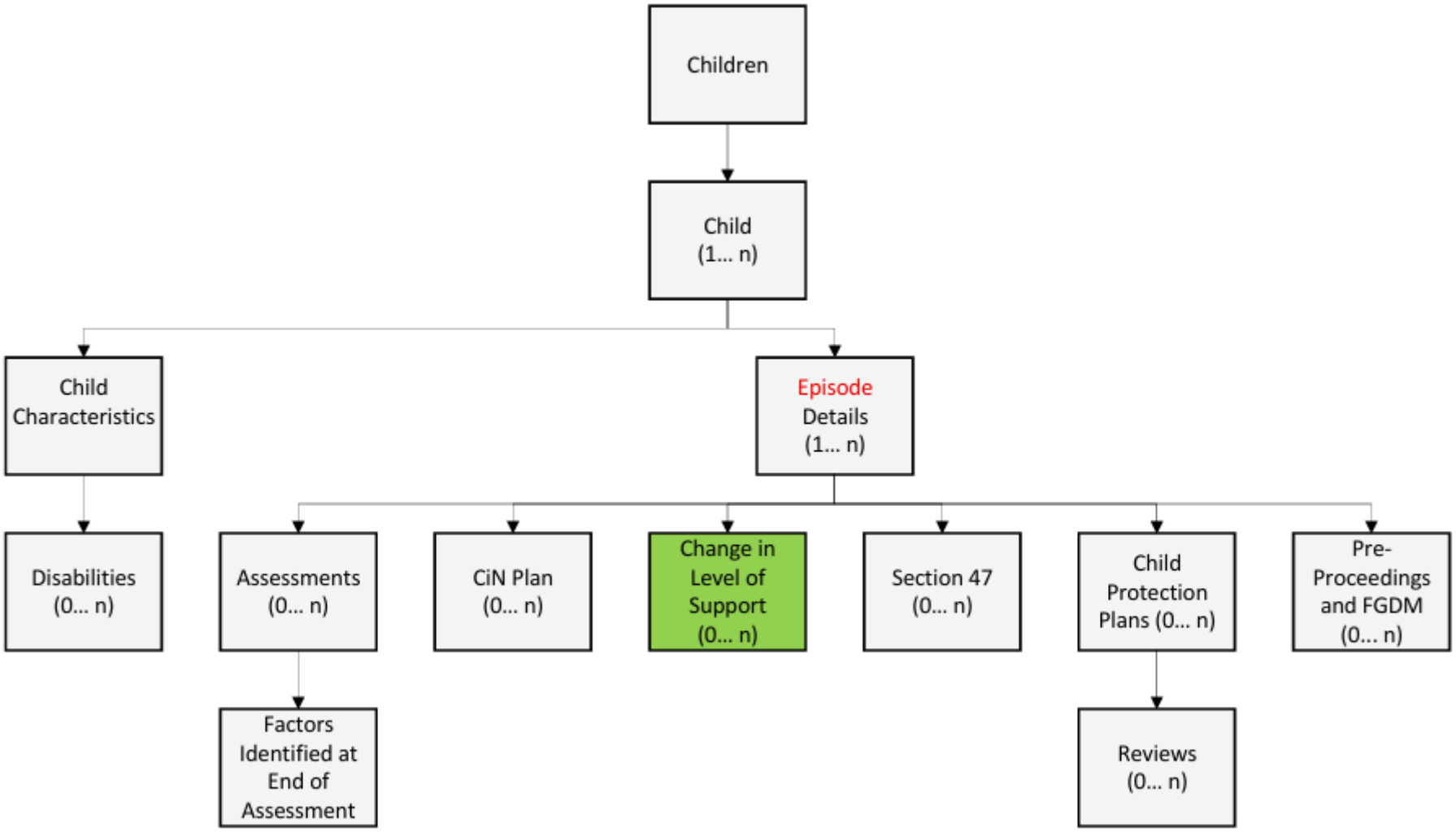
5. Structure and guidance

Data items have been included in the same containers (modules) as those used for CBDS and school census for consistency purposes. For example, sex conceptually belongs to the child identifiers module. So, sex is one data item (amongst others) within the child identifiers module.

5.1. Child level

The children in need census for 2027 to 2028 will contain the modules: child identifiers, child characteristics, episode details, assessments, CIN plans, change in level of support, section 47, child protection plans, and pre-proceedings and FGDM. Each module is described in the following paragraphs.

The number of instances of each module per child is shown in the following children in need 2027 to 2028 logical data model.


Children
Child
(1... n)
Child Characteristics
Episode Details
(1... n)
Disabilities
(0... n)
Assessments
(0... n)
CiN Plan
(0... n)
Change in Level of Support
(0... n)
Section 47
(0... n)
Child Protection Plans (0... n)
Pre-Proceedings and FGDM
(0... n)
Factors Identified at End of Assessment
Reviews
(0... n)

5.2. Child identifiers

5.2.1. Module description

A set of standard identifiers, required to identify children and to match children from the children in need census to the children looked after data collection and to the national pupil database (NPD).

5.2.2. Module composition

This contains the standard identifiers ('LAchildID, UPN, DOB and sex'). The UPN (unique pupil number) should be provided as well as the 'LAchildID' to provide a primary and secondary key (as the UPN will not be available for some children). The 'LAchildID' is as defined in the children looked after collection. It is unique within the return from one local authority.

Where the child is not of school age the UPN is not required (but may be provided if available). However, children of school age are expected to have a UPN. The UPN is optional for referral no further action cases.

UPN unknown (optional for referral no further action cases or for children not of school age) allows local authorities to include a reason for a missing UPN within the return preventing queries after the data has been submitted. This specification includes validation that will show a query for every instance of a missing UPN for a child who is school age unless a UPN unknown reason is provided that is not UN1 (i.e 'Child is not of school age and is not yet assigned a UPN'). Those local authorities not returning a valid UPN unknown reason should provide a return level note to explain why UPNs are missing.

Date of birth is mandatory for all children born before 1 April 2028 and the expected date of birth is mandatory for unborn children. Please note that users may wish to retain the expected date of birth on their systems, but it must not be included within the census return if the date of birth is present (see also validation rule 8525 in annex A).

A date of death item is required (where applicable) as it shows where children's social care services continue to be provided after a child has died. The final case closure date should also be provided; this may be after the date of death if the case remains open for investigation and review procedures after the child dies.

5.2.3. Cases to include

Provide one record per child in scope.

5.3. Child characteristics

5.3.1. Module description

This module includes the child's ethnicity and disability.

5.3.2. Module composition

The ethnicity data item uses the coding specified in the CBDS.

Children should be reported as disabled if they are disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. Multiple disabilities should be recorded if applicable. An entry of none should be recorded if the child has no disability.

Feedback in previous years has been that some local authorities have had difficulty providing the specific disability type, although MISs should more easily be able to tell whether a child has a disability or not. If this is the case for your local authority, we will continue to allow local authorities to record all children with a disability under the code DDA (other DDA) but given the mandatory nature of this data item please endeavour to ensure the identification of individual disabilities is resolved for future years. If a local authority is going to do this, they will need to make it clear in their COLLECT notes that this has been done so we can analyse the data appropriately.

5.3.3. Cases to include

Provide one record per child.

5.4. Episode details

5.4.1. Module description

For 2027 to 2028, this module has been renamed 'Episode details'. This module contains information on all episodes open during the census year including factor group code, referral and closure dates, and source of referral.

A child can have more than one episode in the year. This module, therefore, must include details for each of the episodes active or reviewed during the period. This includes episodes that started prior to the data collection period, but that remained open at 1 April 2027. The section on cases to include below provides full rules to identify all cases in scope.

5.4.2. Module composition

For the minimum data required in this module, please see the notes in section 5.4.3.

The data item ‘referral no further action’ is included in this module. Where no action is taken the flag should be set to true or 1, otherwise set the flag to false or 0. Section 5.6 describes what should be included in other modules in this case.

For 2027 to 2028 ‘Primary Need’ (N00101) will be removed and replaced with a more expansive, non-hierarchical set of options in the form of ‘Factor Group’ (N00863) which group the longer list of Factors (N00863). See CBDS RFC 1388 for further details and full revised list.

For episodes open at 1 April 2027, assign a factor group code based on the reason the child started to receive services. Only if all available information has been considered and it is still not possible to assign a factor group based on the reason the child started to receive services should the factor group be based on the reason the child is receiving services on 1 April 2027.

As this requires existing open episodes to be re-coded, further guidance on mapping primary need and factor groups will be provided shortly in an updated version of this document. The re-coding of primary need to factor group can be carried out up until 31 March 2028, prior to the 2027 to 2028 census go live in April 2028. Primary need can be retained in local systems but will not be collected in the 2027 to 2028 census.

The following new mandatory data item is being collected from 2027 to 2028:

Presenting level of support, N00858 <PresentingLevelOfSupport>

This data item captures the initial view of the child and family’s level of need based on the information available at the time the referral is received. This should reflect the reason the case has been referred to children’s social care and the expected level of support required.

Valid values (new code set CS138):

- TEH (targeted early help)
- CIN (Child in Need)

For episodes open at 1 April 2027, record the indicative level of support using information presented in the referral. If this information is not available, or the level of support has changed between referral and 1 April 2027, record the level of support relevant at 1 April 2027.

For 2027-2028, we have implemented the following amendments to the Reason for Closure code set:

- Closure code RC7 now includes ‘child no longer in need of Family Help services’
- Closure code RC9 now includes ‘Universal services and community based early help’

- Addition of code RC10 – ‘Targeted early help services ended following withdrawal of consent’

The reason for closure code RC8 should be used by local authorities to categorise a case for a child who they assess as not requiring support following a referral, and for whom they do not provide services and whose case is subsequently closed. It should not be used for any other reason.

The reason for closure code RC9 should be used by local authorities to categorise a case for a child who they assess as not requiring support following a referral, and for whom they do not provide services, but is subsequently referred to universal services and community based early help and whose case is then closed.

The RC8 and RC9 codes are different from cases that were closed at the referral stage when the referral no further action flag is used. Codes RC8 and RC9 should not be used for cases that were closed prior to assessment.

For each new referral, the source of referral must be recorded from a pick list of source codes. Only one category may be picked from the list. Where there is more than one referral for the same child on the same day, the first referral should be recorded and it is this referral source that should be recorded for the census. Sources of subsequent referrals should be recorded separately that is, in relation to the specific referral. The data should be returned each year the episode remains open.

For 2027 to 2028, the ‘Source of Referral’ code set has been amended. 5C and 5D now include ‘Universal services and community based early help’.

5.4.3. Cases to include

The principal reason for including an episode is that it is active at some point during the census year.

The return must include at least one episode details module per child. The following episodes should be included:

a) If the episode is open at 1 April 2027; or

b) If the referral date occurs within the census year:

For a) and b) include referrals where no further action was taken.

The items to populate for each episode vary depending on which of the above criteria has resulted in their inclusion, see notes below.

Where criteria a) or b) above mean that an episode is included, then all the dates that allow any relevant key indicators to be calculated must be included. This means that if:

- An assessment starts and/or ends within the census period, the assessments group must be completed;
- A section 47 enquiry starts and/or ends within the census period, the section 47 enquiries group must be completed, including any dates prior to 1 April 2027.

Although the above groups may include dates prior to 1 April 2027, they must not include dates after 31 March 2028 apart from target end dates and internal review dates.

The data collection allows for referrals to be followed by more than one assessment, CIN plan, s47 enquiry, CPP, or pre-proceedings and FGDM episode. For this reason, these groups may repeat within the census's data structure so that multiple instances can be included. Please note however that where these activities should not overlap, the census will validate the data provided.

The data collection allows for variations in process. The following is therefore the minimum valid content for one instance of the episode module.

In each instance, a referral is a request for children's social care services from someone not currently in receipt of them from the local authority. Do not include new information received on already open cases as a referral.

Either option A

For a 2027 to 2028 referral that leads to further action:

- the referral date
- the factor group code
- one assessment actual start date,
- the referral no further action flag with a value of false or 0
- source of referral

Or option B

For a 2027 to 2028 referral that does not lead to any further action:

- the referral date
- the referral no further action flag with a value of true or 1
- source of referral

Note: For option B, a no further action case is only where the initial consideration of the referral means that no action is taken. This is not the same as a case that is closed following assessment. These cases should use RC8 and set referral no further action flag to false.

5.4.4. General notes on dates

Actual start dates are the date the assessment actually started and these can be any day (working or not).

The census only asks for dates, and not times.

Referral dates and closure dates can be any day (working day or not).

Some MISs allow local authorities to record extra statutory days (ESD) as additional holidays. The DfE should be informed of any ESDs so that they can be taken into account in calculations and validations. These can be regarded as non-working days and excluded from any working day calculation, as long as the ESD is implemented locally as a non-working day across the local authority. In those local authorities where one or both of the ESDs are taken at the choice of individual members of staff, ESDs should not be taken into account.

5.4.5. Additional information on target dates

The return of assessment target dates is no longer required due to the removal of initial and core assessment modules. The internal review point date in the assessments module remains optional. Return of an initial child protection conference target date also remains optional.

The majority of local authorities will expect their MIS to calculate target dates automatically either as part of the system's workflow or as a reporting function when extracting data for the census. In calculating target dates the following points should be taken into account:

- Non-working days such as bank holidays or extra statutory days (ESDs) are treated the same as weekends in any working day calculation;
- Working days are evaluated as whole days. This means that the target date does not take into account the time of day on which the activity started. Close of business on the target day is the time by which the activity would be expected to be completed;
- Some target dates will fall beyond the end of the census year. These should still be included;
- Internal review date on the assessment module should be the local authority's own locally set date.

The date of the child protection conference appears twice within the XML file. In most cases the conference will be held as part of a section 47 enquiry and the data should be shown within the section 47 group and should not be included at the episode details level. For a transfer in case, the date of initial child protection conference should appear at the episode details level only and not within the section 47 group.

The assessment authorisation date should be the date an assessment was authorised by the team manager and this can be any day (working or not). Assessments are deemed to be completed once the assessment has been discussed with the child's family (or carer(s)) and the team manager has viewed and authorised the assessment.

5.5. Assessments group

5.5.1. Module description

Local authorities carrying out continuous assessments can record their data appropriately in the assessment module.

5.5.2. Module composition

The group consists of:

- Assessment actual start date
- Assessment internal review date (optional)
- Assessment authorisation date
- Level of support after assessment
- Factors identified during assessment

The following new mandatory data item is being collected from 2027 to 2028:

Level of support after assessment, N00859 <AssessmentLevelOfSupport>

This data item captures the child and family's agreed level of support based on the information gathered during the assessment. This applies to all assessments completed within the year 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2028, which are recorded in the assessments group. There is no requirement to assign a level of support to assessments completed in earlier years.

Valid values (new code set CS138):

- TEH (targeted early help)
- CIN (Child in Need)

Current 'Assessment Factors' (N00181) data item and associated code set (CS085) will be removed and replaced with a new data item, 'Factors' (N00862) and code set (CS139). See RFC 1388 for further details and full revised code list.

5.5.3. Cases to include

The assessment actual start date must be filled in for all assessments groups. If the assessment authorisation date falls after the end of the census year, it should be left blank.

The factors identified at assessment module within the assessments module, allows for multiple contributing factors to be recorded per assessment. All factors that are understood during the assessment which compromise the ability to parent, or are potential risk factors to the child, should be recorded. This applies to all assessments completed within the 2027 to 2028 year. The information should be recorded at the end of the assessment and all relevant factors should be reported from the list provided. There is no requirement to re-code assessment factors completed in earlier years to the revised factors code set.

Note: Assessments should be completed within 45 working days of referral. Internal review dates are optional and will be determined locally by the needs of the child and the nature and level of the harm being suffered.

5.6. CIN plan dates group

5.6.1. Module description

This module contains information on CIN plan dates. CIN plan dates relate to the Section 17 Child in Need (CIN) plan. Only plans where the child has been assessed as meeting the Section 17 child in need threshold should be recorded. Targeted early help (TEH) plans should not be reported in this group. A child can have one, more than one or no CIN plan(s) – but can only have one at a time.

For the 2027 to 2028 reporting year CIN plan data will continue to be collected pending consultation outcome. Subject to the outcome, this may be replaced by collection of family help plan information.

5.6.2. Module composition

The CIN plan start date and the CIN plan end date.

5.6.3. Cases to include

This module is required where any of the following conditions apply:

- A CIN plan start date and/or end date fall within the census year;
- The plan was already open at the start of the year, that is, there is a CIN plan start date for the episode, even if it is before the census year
- If neither of the above applies the module may be omitted.

For the 2027 to 2028, CIN plan data should be reported in accordance with the guidance listed in the bullets below. This may be updated in future years, dependant upon the consultation outcome

- If a child is assessed and the outcome is CIN, a CIN plan start date is recorded in the census.
- If a child's level of support was CIN and their case is closed, they will record a CIN plan end date in the census.
- Where level of support decreases from CIN to TEH, the date of the change in level of support is the same as the CIN plan closure date.
- Where level of support increases from TEH to CIN we expect the CIN plan start date and the change in level of support date to be the same.
- If a child is assessed as TEH, there is no CIN plan start date.

5.7. Change in Level of Support group

5.7.1 Module Description

This is a new module from 2027 to 2028. It contains information where the level of support has changed and a new assessment is not required. It also includes the date on which it was agreed the level of support should change. As the level of support can change one or more times after the assessment during a child's episode, this module allows for multiple levels of support changes throughout the reporting year to be recorded. There is no requirement to record changes in level of support prior to the start of the reporting year.

If there have been no changes in the level of support after assessment during the reporting year, it can be left blank.

5.7.2 Module Composition

- Level of support change N00860 <LevelOfSupportChange>

  This data item captures where the level of support has changed and a new assessment is not required. If there have been no changes in the level of support after assessment, leave this blank

- Date of level of support change N00861 <LevelOfSupportChangeDate>

  This data item captures the date on which it was agreed the level of support should change. If there have been no changes in the level of support after assessment, leave this blank.

5.7.3 Cases to Include

This module is required where any of the following conditions apply:

- The level of support has changed from TEH (targeted early help) to CIN, or from CIN to TEH, after assessment, within the census year.
- If there has been no change in level of support after assessment, the module may be omitted.

5.8. Section 47 enquiries group

5.8.1. Module description

This module contains information on section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences (ICPCs). During section 47 enquiries an initial child protection conference (ICPC), if held, should take place within 15 working days of the start of the section 47 enquiry.

5.8.2. Module composition

- Section 47 enquiry actual start date;
- Initial child protection conference target date (optional);
- Date of initial child protection conference;
- Initial child protection conference not required.

5.8.3. Cases to include

Each section 47 group will comprise one of the following:

Case type	Detail
Either type 1: For a section 47 enquiry that does not lead to any further action	- the section 47 enquiry actual start date - the ICPC not required flag with a value of true or 1
Or type 2: For a section 47 enquiry where the initial child protection conference has taken place	- the section 47 enquiry actual start date - the initial child protection conference target date (optional) - the date of initial child protection conference - the initial child protection conference not required flag with a value of false or 0

Case type	Detail
Or type 3: For a section 47 enquiry that the initial child protection conference has not yet taken place	- the section 47 enquiry actual start date - the initial child protection conference target date (optional) - the initial child protection conference not required flag with a value of false or 0

Note: The initial child protection conference target date (optional data) should be 15 working days after the section 47 enquiry start date.

Note: In the instance type 2 above, the date of initial child protection conference should only be completed in the section 47 group and not in the instance in the episode details module. The instance in the episode details module should only be used when a child who is the subject of an existing child protection plan transfers into your local authority.

5.9. Child protection plans

5.9.1. Module description

This module contains information on child protection plans (CPP). A child can have one, more than one or no child protection plan(s) but can only have one at a time. A child who is not requiring support cannot have a child protection plan.

5.9.2. Module composition

The module contains the following fields:

- the child protection plan start date
- the child protection plan end date
- the initial and latest category of abuse
- plan review date
- the number of previous child protection plans

The specification allows more than one plan review date to be provided. All reviews within the year should be included along with, for cases open at 1 April 2027, the last review date in 2026 to 2027. The final review date in 2026 to 2027 is required to calculate whether all reviews in 2027 to 2028 were carried out within the required timescales.

If the case is closed, the latest category of abuse should be taken as when the case closed or if the case is ongoing, it should be as at 31 March 2028. The initial category of abuse records the assessment made at the time the plan commenced and does not change. Both items use the same code set. For 2027-2028, ‘Extra-familial harm’, ‘Domestic abuse’ and ‘Other’ have been added to the child protection plan categories of abuse and ‘Multiple/not recommended’ has been removed. Any open CPPs at 1 April 2027 coded as ‘Multiple/Not Recommended’ (MUL) must be re-coded to whichever valid code is most appropriate. MUL will be removed and no longer accepted as a valid code within the categories of abuse code set (CS024) from the 2027 to 2028 collection onwards.

This module is repeatable.

5.9.3. Cases to include

This module is required where any of the following conditions apply:

- A child protection plan start date and/or end date fall within the census year;
- The plan was already open at the start of the year, that is, there is a child protection plan start date for the episode, even if it is before the census year.
- If neither of the above applies the module may be omitted.

A child can have more than one child protection plan, but these plans should not overlap, that is a second child protection plan should not be started if an extant child protection plan is ongoing. The census will validate the data provided and query any overlaps that are included.

5.10 Pre-proceedings and Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)

5.10.1 Module Description

Pre-proceedings are a key part of a child's journey through the family justice system. Pre-proceedings refer to the formal stage before care proceedings are initiated, where local authorities work intensively with families to address concerns, aiming to avoid the need for court intervention and children being separated from their families. Capturing data on this important process will ensure disparities and trends can be analysed and areas for improvement identified.

This new module is informed by learning from local innovation projects, including Warrington Borough Council's work on improving children's social care pre-proceedings data. Warrington piloted a structured approach to capturing and analysing data on pre-proceedings, which has helped to identify patterns in decision-making, timeliness, and outcomes for children. Their work has demonstrated the value of consistent data in improving practice, supporting families earlier, and reducing the need for care proceedings.

In addition, through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, we are legislating to require all local authorities to offer a family group decision-making meeting to all parents, or those with parental responsibility, whose children's cases have reached the pre-proceedings stage. Family group decision-making (FGDM) is a term used to describe a voluntary process that enables a family network to come together and make a family-led plan in response to concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing, working alongside skilled professionals. Evidence suggests that FGDM can be an effective way of diverting children from care proceedings when used at pre-proceedings.

The inclusion of pre-proceedings and FGDM data in the Children in Need census from 2026–27 reflects a growing recognition of the need for better national insight into how these processes are used across local authorities.

5.10.2 Cases in scope

Please include only cases where pre-proceedings were started during any part of the year from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2028. In further years, we will look to include cases that were already open before the collection year begins.

5.10.3 Cohort

This module does not introduce a new cohort of children. Instead, it adds a new layer of information about children already within the CIN cohort. That is, it is the Department's expectation that all children in pre-proceedings should already be captured in the CIN

census. This module identifies which of those children have progressed to the pre-proceedings stage.

5.10.4 Multiple episodes of pre-proceedings

This module can be entered more than once for a particular child record, if that child has had more than one episode of pre-proceedings during the reporting year.

6. Local authority data returns

6.1. Data return formats

A submission file from a local authority should be provided in an XML file structure as described below. Within XML, an item or module that is omitted (for example, UPN or child protection plan module) should not show any tags.

6.2. Header details

Section 6.3 describes formats for the return of the data in XML format. The data items required within the header are as follows. The header follows the DfE standard header for data collections, although <Term> and <Estab> are omitted as not relevant to this census.

Data item	XML tag	CBDS reference	Description
Collection name	<Collection>	N00600	Name of the data collection. Will be 'CIN'
Year	<Year>	N00602	The year of the collection. Will be '2028'
Reference Date	<ReferenceDate>	N00603	The reference date is normally the day of the census or collection. It is used as the baseline date from which comparisons with other dates in the return can be made. Will be '2028-03-31'.
Source Level	<SourceLevel>	N00604	Should be set to 'L' for a local authority system
LA	<LEA>	N00216	Three digit local authority number as used by education departments.
Software Code	<SoftwareCode>	N00604	Software product identification. Suppliers may use their own system name, or use a value of 'Local Authority'
Release	<Release>	N00607	Software release number. Optional free-text item which suppliers are requested to use if possible. In some cases, it is useful to trace problems with returns back to a specific software release, for example where upgrades have been provided but not installed.

Data item	XML tag	CBDS reference	Description
Serial Number	<SerialNo>	N00606	An incremented number generated by a provider's software, which enables data collection systems to identify re-submissions. Will start at '001' and then be incremented by 1 each time a new file is prepared for submission.
Date/Time	<DateTime>	N00609	Date and time of the generation of the return in CCYY-MM-DDhh:mm:ss format.

6.3. XML schema

6.3.1. XML format submission

An XML submission will be a single message consisting of

- A header;
- A series of repeated nodes containing data on one or more funded children.

Children in need census 2028 – overall message structure:

CBDS number	XML element
	<Message>
	<Header> - see below for details
	<Children>
	</Message>

6.3.2. XML header

A standard XML message header is required for each census file. The data items should be populated according to the guide in 6.2.

Children in need census 2028 - header structure:

CBDS number	XML element
	<Header>
	<CollectionDetails>
N00600	<Collection>CIN</Collection>
N00602	<Year>2028</Year>
N00603	<ReferenceDate>2028-03-31</ReferenceDate>
	</CollectionDetails>
	<Source>
N00604	<SourceLevel>L</SourceLevel>
N00216	<LEA>201</LEA>
N00605	<SoftwareCode>Local Authority</SoftwareCode>
N00607	<Release>ver 3.1.21</Release>
N00606	<SerialNo>001</SerialNo>
N00609	<DateTime>2028-05-23T11:14:05</DateTime>
	</Source>
	</Header>

Standard CBDS header items <Term> and <Estab> are not shown above. These items are not required in this data collection and should be omitted by suppliers.

6.3.3. Child XML message structure: children in need census 2027-2028

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
		This column contains notes on repetition. Item level elements can be assumed to occur once only, unless otherwise stated
	<Children>	
	<Child>	Each <Children> group contains 1..n <Child> groups
	<ChildIdentifiers>	Each <Child> group contains one and only one <ChildIdentifiers> group
N00097	<LAchildID>DfEX0000001</LAchildID>	
N00001	<UPN> A123456789123</UPN>	0..1
N00002	<FormerUPN> X98765432123B </FormerUPN>	0..1
N00135	<UPNunknown>UN3</UPNunknown>	
N00066	<PersonBirthDate>2016-03-25</PersonBirthDate>	Should complete either Date of Birth or Expected Date of Birth but not both
N00098	<ExpectedPersonBirthDate>2028-10-13</ExpectedPersonBirthDate>	Should complete either Date of Birth or Expected Date of Birth but not both
N00783	<Sex>F</Sex>	

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
N00108	<PersonDeathDate>2027-10-08</PersonDeathDate>	0..1
	</ChildIdentifiers>	
	<ChildCharacteristics>	Each <Child> group contains one and only one <ChildCharacteristics> group
N00177	<Ethnicity>WBRI</Ethnicity>	
	<Disabilities>	Each <ChildCharacteristics> group contains 0..1 <Disabilities > group Only unborn children should have no Disabilities group
N00099	<Disability>HAND</Disability>	Each <Disabilities> group contains 1..n <Disability> item. A single value of 'NONE' appears if the child has no disabilities
	</Disabilities>	
	</ChildCharacteristics>	
	<EpisodeDetails>	Each <Child> group contains 1..n <EpisodeDetails> group
N00100	<ReferralDate>2027-10-06</ReferralDate>	

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
N00152	<ReferralSource>1A</ReferralSource>	One and only one category
N00858	<PresentingLevelOfSupport>TEH</PresentingLevelOfSupport>	
N00863	<FactorGroup>FG1</FactorGroup>	
N00102	<ClosureDate>1071-02-28</ClosureDate>	
N00103	<ReasonForClosure>RC1</ReasonForClosure>	
N00112	<ReferralNFA>false</ReferralNFA>	
N00110	<DateOfInitialCPC>2027-12-06</DateOfInitialCPC>	Only to be used in this module for transfers in
	<Assessments>	Each <EpisodeDetails> group contains 0…n <Assessments> groups
N00159	<AssessmentActualStartDate>2027-06-03</AssessmentActualStartDate>	
N00161	<AssessmentInternalReviewDate>2027-06-22</ AssessmentInternalReviewDate>	0..1
N00160	<AssessmentAuthorisationDate>2027-07-18</ AssessmentAuthorisationDate>	0..1
	<FactorsIdentifiedAtAssessment>	

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
N00862	<Factors>FG1A</Factors>	Each <FactorsIdentifiedAtAssessment> group contains 1..n <Factors> items
N00859	<AssessmentLevelOfSupport>CIN</AssessmentLevelOfSupport>	
	</FactorsIdentifiedAtAssessment>	
	<Assessments>	
	<CINPlanDates>	Each <EpisodeDetails> group contains 0..n <CINPlanDates> groups
N00689	<CINPlanStartDate>2027-01-24</CINPlanStartDate>	1..1
N00690	<CINPlanEndDate>2027-01-27</CINPlanEndDate>	0..1
	</CINPlanDates	
	<ChangeinLevelOfSupport>	Each <EpisodeDetails> group contains 0…n <ChangeinLevelofSupport> groups
N00860	<LevelOfSupportChange> TEH</LevelOfSupport>	0… 1
N00861	<LevelOfSupportChangeDate>2027-01-01</LevelOfSupportChangeDate>	0… 1

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
	</ChangeinLevelOfSupport>	
	<Section47>	Each <EpisodeDetails> group contains 0..n <Section47> groups
N00148	<S47ActualStartDate>2027-06-02</S47ActualStartDate>	
N00109	<InitialCPCtarget>2027-06-23</InitialCPCtarget>	
N00110	<DateOfInitialCPC>2027-06-17</DateOfInitialCPC>	To be used in this module for all cases except transfers in
N00111	<ICPCnotRequired>false</ICPCnotRequired>	
	</Section47>	
	<ChildProtectionPlans>	Each <EpisodeDetails> group contains 0..n <ChildProtectionPlans> groups
N00105	<CPPstartDate>2027-02-17</CPPstartDate>	
N00115	<CPPendDate>2027-03-14</CPPendDate>	
N00113	<InitialCategoryOfAbuse>PHY</InitialCategoryOfAbuse>	
N00114	<LatestCategoryOfAbuse>PHY</LatestCategoryOfAbuse>	

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
N00106	<NumberOfPreviousCPP>10 </NumberOfPreviousCPP>	
	<Reviews>	Each <ChildProtectionPlans> group contains 0..1 <Reviews> group
N00116	<CPPreviewDate>2027-02-15</CPPreviewDate>	Each <Reviews> group contains 1..n <CPPreviewDate> items
	</Reviews>	
	</ChildProtectionPlans>	
	<PreProceedingsandFGDM>	Each <EpisodeDetails> group contains 0..n <PreProceedingsandFGDM> groups
N00826	<PPStartDate>2027-09-09</PPStartDate>	
N00827	<LBPSentDate>2027-09-20</LBPSentDate>	
N00828	<FGDMMeetingOffer>1</FGDMMeetingOffer>	
N00829	<FGDMMeetingFac>1</FGDMMeetingFac>	
N00830	<InitialPPMeetingDate>2027-09-28</InitialPPMeetingDate>	
N00831	<ReviewMeetingsCount>3</ReviewMeetingsCount	

CBDS No	XML element	Cardinality/notes
N00832	<StepDecisionDate>2027-12-01</StepDecisionDate>	
N00833	<PPOutcome>A</PPOutcome>	Code set CS131
N00834	<CourtAppDate>2027-12-18</CourtAppDate>	
N00835	<LetterInitCPDate>2027-02-05</LetterInitCPDate>	
	</PreProceedingsandFGDM)>	
	</EpisodeDetails>	
	</Child>	
	</Children>	

6.3.4. Special notes for XML returns

The standard XML entity references should be used for the following special characters:

Character	Entity reference
Ampersand (&)	&
Left Angle Bracket (<)	<
Right Angle Bracket (>)	>
Single Quote/Apostrophe (‘)	'
Double Quotes (“)	"

For special characters such as é use a character reference such as &#233. This produces a generic XML file which can be viewed as such in a suitable browser. Details of all such characters are found within the XML standard documentation; see for example Extensible markup language (XML) 1.0 (fifth edition) section 2.

There is no naming convention for the XML file; however we recommend that the name should be meaningful to a user attempting to locate the file. Spaces in the file name are not a problem. The file extension should be .xml.

6.4. Data validation rules

This section specifies validation rules that are applied to the data by DfE, using COLLECT. They should also be applied, as far as possible, by local authorities prior to loading the data onto the COLLECT system and any issues resolved. Validation rules are supplied in annex A, which is an MS Excel spreadsheet provided alongside the main specification. Those data items included in the tables but not appearing in the validation rules - that is, those not shown in the validation rules as must be present - should be supplied where available (for example child’s UPN). The spreadsheet (annex A) also shows which validations are errors and which ones are queries. An error is a failed validation check that must be corrected. A query is one which must be investigated, and potentially corrected, as it identifies data that would usually be invalid. Where a validation rule is identical to one that is specified for the school census or school workforce collections, the same sequence number is used. Otherwise, new sequence numbers are used.

Where an item occurs more than once for the same child, suppliers must ensure that the validation checks against that item are applied to each instance. This should happen whether the item recurs multiple times within a single module, for example, <Disability>,

or the item is within a module that may occur more than once, for example, <EpisodeDetails>.

Syntax:

- Validation checks are expressed as conditions that must be true (errors) or that should be true (queries). The error message shows what is displayed if the condition fails;
- Data items are indicated using the XML tag with the CBDS number in parentheses, for example <LAchildID> (100379);
- Data groups are indicated using the XML tag only, for example <Assessments>;
- Single dates or date ranges are sometimes defined in relation to <ReferenceDate>, which is from the XML header;
- Date ranges also use [Start_of_Census_Year], which is not an item within the XML, but which has a constant value for this census of 2027-04-01. If this is calculated as (<ReferenceDate> minus one year plus one day) within MISs, then this will future proof some of the validation, since the reference date for CIN will always be the 31 March at the end of the census year;
- Date ranges also use [Period_of_Census], which is not an item within the XML, but which has a constant value for this census of 2027-04-01 to 2028-03-31 inclusive;
- Notes, in italics, are explanatory and non-normative.

Please note there should be no negative values allowed.

6.5. Re-submission guidance

When re-submissions are required the serial number in the header must be incremented by the provider's software. We have also assumed that the whole file will be re-submitted. Note that a re-submission will delete and replace all the data contained in the previous submission.

Department for Education

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