

**Local Authority Children’s Social Care Data and Digital Solutions Fund Prospectus**

**October 2022**

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# **Introduction to the Data and Digital Solutions Fund**

In May 2022, in response to the [independent review of children’s social care](https://childrenssocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/), and the national review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, government committed to take action to drive forward three data and digital priority areas. The commitment puts local government and partners in the driving seat of reform through a Children’s Social Care (CSC) Data and Digital Solutions Fund[.](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/minister-quince-oral-statement-on-childrens-social-care-review) We want to take a step forward in CSC and enable better use of data and advances in technology to make significant progress for children and unlock better use of resources. Other areas of the public sector have demonstrated what is possible, and we are ambitious for CSC to enable improvement in services and protect children more effectively.

The CSC DDSF is open to all LAs whose children’s services are currently rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding overall and across all sub-judgements to collaborate with data and digital colleagues in the Department for Education (the department) on a range of projects which will contribute to three data and digital priorities:

1. Improving CSC data collection and how it is shared to inform decision making.
2. Improving case management systems (CMS) to reduce burdens on the frontline and support practice.
3. Using technology to achieve frictionless sharing of information between safeguarding partners.

## **Overview of themes and projects**

Seven projects (see table 1) have all been scoped into themes which build on existing work underway on the above priorities without pre-empting decisions which are yet to be made. They are part of a wider departmental CSC data and digital reform strategy implementation plan which will be shared and consulted on following the recommendations made in the independent review of children’s social care.

A detailed specification of each project is set out in **Annex A**.

The selection criteria and technical questions are set out in each application form. Application forms are provided in a zipped folder alongside and separate to this prospectus. Additional copies of this zipped file can be obtained by emailing: [cscfund.DATAANDDIGITAL@education.gov.uk](mailto:cscfund.DATAANDDIGITAL@education.gov.uk).

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| **Table 1 – Overview of the seven projects**  **Theme 1: Improving CSC data collection and how it is shared to inform decision making** | |
| **Problem to solve** | **Funding** |
| **1a) A good practice model for monitoring, understanding and sharing CSC data to improve services**.  We know that while some LAs do this very well, there is no standard model for what data LAs use for monitoring, understanding, and improving services. As such collaboration on shared tools is limited to a narrow data set, limiting the extent to which best practice can be shared. | We are therefore making funding available for a LA to develop a ‘standard CSC dataset’, together with freely available tools for producing it and a framework for maintaining the dataset in the future. |
| **1b) Creating or improving specific data sets**  In some specific areas of CSC there are gaps in the data collected by LAs and shared regionally or with the department. We know that different LAs collect slightly different versions of the data sets, in different ways, and this contributes to making the data difficult to collect and share. | We are therefore making funding available for LAs to develop/improve the following data sets, and their method of collection with a view to sharing the data and collection method with the department and other LAs:   1. Children looked after through kinship care 2. Children who are subject to pre-proceedings 3. 251 (financial) data 4. Data presenting the voice of children and families |
| **1c) Evaluation of data analytics**  Humans on their own will often struggle to analyse lots of data but data analytics tools can analyse large quantities of data to spot patterns, categorise and collate large amounts of information and help form a bigger pattern of events of things that have happened or could happen:  We know that data analytics tools can be useful across operational and strategic decision-making in CSC by:   * identifying individual children and families who are likely to need support (operational decision-making) * prioritising and informing decisions around resource and funding allocation (strategic decision-making) * setting out patterns and factors in vulnerability (strategic decision-making and operational decisions) and * evaluating service provision (strategic decision-making and operational decisions)   We also know that some LAs and areas are purchasing and using commercially available data analytic tools effectively within CSC and local area safeguarding, but there has not been an opportunity to date to evaluate the use of the tools and communicate the results of the evaluation to the wider sector so that practice can be replicated with confidence. | We are therefore making funding available for LAs to commission an independent evaluation of any predictive and diagnostic data analytics methods, practices and approaches which they are already using effectively and consider whether they have the potential for other LAs to adopt and therefore also use the data analytic tools effectively. |
| **Theme 2: Improve CMS to reduce burdens on the frontline and support practice.** | |
| **2a) User research into social worker inputted data to CMS.**  CMS are designed to support social work with children and families and statutory data collection; however, the data collection function can get in the way of achieving CMS that support good social work. | We are making funding available to LAs to commission user research which will contribute to the wider CMS improvement work by exploring in detail the data, which is inputted by social workers, when and why. |
| **2b) Using technology to reimagine CMS.**  Existing advanced technology, including “artificial intelligence” which is commercially available and utilised in other sectors could make significant improvements in the way social workers access and analyse data and information – as an extension of human capabilities, not a replacement. For example, from creating sophisticated alerts flagging where information needs to be shared, to interpreting information about individual children in written records or identifying potential family members. | We are making funding available to LAs to work with IT software and system development companies to develop a proof of concept and pilot innovative solutions to improve retrieval and information analysis from CMS. |
| **Theme 3: Using technology to achieve frictionless sharing of information between safeguarding partners.** | |
| **3a) A data and information sharing agreement template.**  There is no standardised data and information sharing agreement template which LAs and their safeguarding partners can use. | We are making funding available for a LA (or consortium of LAs), who have successfully worked with safeguarding partners and other LAs to implement data sharing agreements, to make the agreements available on a national level. |
| **3b) User research into the cultural and behavioural barriers to information sharing**.  We know that cultural behaviours and attitudes are a factor in poor information sharing between safeguarding partners and we know that many LAs have found ways to overcome some of these barriers and introduced systems and processes to make information sharing more straightforward. We want to understand more about the barriers and potential solutions implemented by LAs. | We are making funding available to LAs to set out the barriers to sharing information that they have identified and to describe solutions they have implemented. The information will be shared with all LAs and it will also feed directly into the report due to parliament on multi-agency information sharing in summer 2023. |

## **Project governance, methodology and reporting**

LAs undertaking projects will have their own governance and management arrangements in place to ensure successful delivery but will also need to work in close collaboration with the data and digital policy team in the department. To facilitate this, instead of lengthy monthly and quarterly written reporting, participating LAs will have regular and timely feedback loops with departmental and wider colleagues, sharing progress, achievements, challenges to delivery, and next steps. A project liaison person from the department will be allocated to each project who will work with them (unless stated otherwise in the project specification) to establish the **short project touch base meetings** expected every two to three weeks and agree the best format for sharing progress effectively. All end reports or end products required are set out in the project specification.

To ensure that all projects are developed with the advice of other expert LAs, we will work with the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS), Standards, Performance and Inspection (SPI) policy committee, the National Performance Information Management Group (NPIMG) and where appropriate, the ADCS Resources and Sustainability Policy (RSP) committee to ensure that there are wider LA representatives on each of the individual project touch base meetings.

On a quarterly basis there will be an opportunity to join with other projects, representatives of SPI, NPIMG and RSP and other national experts at a **DDSF programme board** where the project’s aims, replicability and suitability are considered throughout the lifetime of the grant programme. The programme board will also promote collaboration and sharing of learning across projects and a more focussed working level group to prevent data category duplication will be convened for all data projects 1a, 1b and 2a.

Project applications should acknowledge the above in the stakeholder engagement and (where appropriate) evaluation aspects of bids and be ready to engage.

## **Evaluation, quality assurance and feasibility**

Ongoing monitoring and assessment of projects is proposed. In the technical questions, bidders are asked to demonstrate how they will work with the department on this and to draw out the lessons from their projects. Projects are asked to describe how they will test, learn and adapt their activities across the lifetime of their project and ensure their project is replicable in other areas and will work for the wider sector. Projects (excluding those that involve evaluation and research) are also expected to include either an independent evaluation or an alternative means by which their aims and outcomes can be reliably assessed.

The use of project touch base meetings with representatives from the sector should be integrated into bids setting out how outputs will be reviewed and agreed by the department and the sector. All projects will also be invited to present their final products to the CSC Data and Digital Expert Advisory Forum, a voluntary consultative group comprising a range of representative national stakeholders with relevant expertise and experience.[[1]](#footnote-2) Members of the Forum will also be invited to quarterly programme board meetings (see project governance, methodology and reporting section above).

# **How to apply**

Grant application forms are available in a zipped folder alongside and separate to this prospectus. Additional copies of this zipped file can be obtained by emailing: [cscfund.DATAANDDIGITAL@education.gov.uk](mailto:cscfund.DATAANDDIGITAL@education.gov.uk). To apply for grant funding, please complete all three stages of the relevant project application form(s) and return to the mailbox [cscfund.DATAANDDIGITAL@education.gov.uk](mailto:cscfund.DATAANDDIGITAL@education.gov.uk) by noon on Friday 04 November 2022. Your ‘LA name’ followed by ‘Data and Digital Solutions Fund’ should be included in the email ‘subject’ field when submitting your application(s). When you have sent the department your application form(s), you will receive an email response to acknowledge receipt of your application.

The closing date for applications is noon on Friday 4 November 2022.

## **Grant type and eligibility**

**Grant type**

Grant payments to the successful LAs will be made through section 14 of the Local Government Act 2003. Grant offer letters will be issued to successful LAs on award. Grants will be paid in as per the agreed payment schedule set out in the grant offer letter

Funding will be available in arrears in instalments starting shortly after the project begins and each project specification sets out the latest date by which the project must be completed. The funding period is across FYs 22-23 and 23-24 subject to departmental approvals.

Key performance indicators for each project will include (but will not be restricted to) successful delivery of project milestones and successful engagement with the number of LAs or research participants as set out in each bid.

**Who is eligible for funding**

LAs can apply for grant funding individually or as part of a joint application with other LAs. Where LAs are applying as a group, a lead LA must be identified. The lead authority should complete and submit application on behalf of the other LAs. The lead LA will be the point of contact, responsible for meeting the grant funding and reporting requirements.

Eligibility to lead on a grant application is open to all LAs rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding overall and across all sub-judgements. We welcome applications from eligible lead LAs in partnership with LAs who may have other Ofsted ratings, (who may be in a regional or other group) but who have interest, expertise, and a strong track record in the project area.

**How funding can be used?**

LAs can allocate their grant funding to support costs related to capacity, expertise, resources, and the ongoing delivery of their DDSF project. Funding cannot be used for capital costs. This offer is subject to the department’s general [Grant Terms and Conditions](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/grant-funding-agreement-terms-and-conditions); this also sets out the department’s intellectual property rights (IPR) and data sharing conditions (Annex B). Failure to observe these terms and conditions may result in the funding being withdrawn.

If LAs plan to subcontract to third parties, this must be clearly set out in the pricing schedule and stating what services, and the expenditure, will be related to them

The grant funding is provided on the strict understanding that none of this funding is to be used for advertising, marketing, communications and consultancy, or for any costs associated with the maintenance, technical development or updating of existing websites or for the development/creation of new websites.

**How funding will be allocated**

All applications will be assessed against the criteria set out Annex C. Breakdown of costs will be reviewed and also assessed. Funding will be allocated to successful LAs via a section 14 grant and LAs will sign a grant offer letter which will set out data sharing and reporting requirements.

While we will seek to fund as many LAs as possible, there may be instances where we must limit the number working on each project due to the resources available – or because developing a national solution can practically only be developed one by one or with a limited number of LAs. This information is included in each project specification.

**Timeline of programme – including payment schedule**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Stage** | **Date** |
| Application window opens | 6 October 2022 |
| Clarification window | 6 October 2022 – 28 October 2022 |
| Online market engagement event | 6 or 11 October |
| Online market engagement event | 27 October |
| Application window closes | Noon on 4 November 2022 |
| Evaluation of bids commences | 7 November 2022 |
| Unsuccessful and successful projects will be informed by | Mid December 2022 |
| Grant letters issued FY22-23 | Early January 2023 |
| First Payments made in arrears (section 14) | February/March 2023 |

**Clarifications**

You may ask clarification questions during the application window, please email these to [cscfund.DATAANDDIGITAL@education.gov.uk](mailto:cscfund.DATAANDDIGITAL@education.gov.uk). The department may take a couple of days to respond and where appropriate will make responses available to all bidders. There will also be two opportunities to attend market engagement events during the tender window.

**Project Specifications**

The specification sets out what the requirement of the project is and what the expected outputs and end products will be within the timeframe.

**Selection Criteria**

To apply for funding, all lead LAs (i.e. those completing and submitting the application on behalf of the other LAs and taking a lead role in delivering project) must answer yes to each of the selection criteria. There are some criteria common to all projects and some which are project specific. The department reserves the right to not continue with any bidders that select ‘no’ to any questions. Once these questions have been assessed they are not scored and do not form part of the evaluation process described below.

**Technical questions**

The technical questions ask for evidence of how the specification will be met. Responses to the questions will be assessed using the assessment framework in Annex C. Any applications where a question scores 2 or below will be deemed unsuccessful. All technical question responses will be evaluated separately by 3 evaluators, and then there will be a moderation session to agree consensus scores for each bid.

**Cost**

We will also evaluate costs proposed. The department reserves the right to clarify and challenge costs where it deems necessary. Scores for costs will be awarded proportionally to other bids in that project. The lowest priced bid, including all financial elements, will be awarded the maximum percentage for price, and other LAs awarded a percentage in direct proportion to the relation between their bid and the lowest priced bid.

**Outcome**

**Each project contains details of the weightings for that specific project**. Once weightings are applied a final score for both price and quality is given. Please see example below for illustrative purposes only:

**Example provided for illustration purposes only where quality / price are weighted 60/40 – not all projects will have this weighting**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Bidder | **Quality Score**  (60%) | **Price / Million** | **Price Score**  (40%) | **Total Score** |
| A | 58% | £2.586 | 96.6% (2.498/2.586) x 40% = **38.64%** | 96.64 **%** |
| B | 56% | £2.593 | 96.3% (2.498/2.593) x 40% = **38.52%** | 94.52 % |
| C | 58% | £2.498 | 100% x 40% = **40.00%** | 98.00 % |

The named LA contact from each bid will be notified of the outcome of their application by email.

## **Application forms**

Application forms and the pricing schedule are available on request as a zipped folder of documents. Please request copies of the application forms and pricing schedule from [cscfund.DATAANDDIGITAL@education.gov.uk](mailto:cscfund.DATAANDDIGITAL@education.gov.uk).

The application process contains three stages: All bidders must complete Stage 1 and Stage 2, which covers their contact details and declarations. Bidders must then choose which project application forms in Stage 3 they wish to respond to; this requires their selection, technical and price responses within the respective application Stage 3 tables.

N.B If the bidder is applying for more than one project, they must complete an application form and associated pricing schedule for each project.

LAs submitting applications must chose the project(s) they wish to apply for and complete the relevant application providing responses contained in all the Selection Criteria, Technical Questions and Cost sections of Application table 3. A maximum word count is stated for each question where applicable. Any additional words over this will not be assessed. This word count does not include annexes.

Bidders must also complete the ‘DDSF pricing schedule’ to provide the proposed costings with evidence for the funding period, FY22-23 and /or FY23-24.

**Table of documents included in the Data and Digital Solutions Fund**

|  |  |  |
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| **Document** | **Type of document** | **Where to find it** |
| Prospectus | Word document | Current document |
| DDSF Project Application Forms | 10 individual word documents | Zip Folder |
| DDSF Pricing Schedule | Excel document | Zip Folder |
| The department’s general - Grant Terms and Conditions | Hyperlink | Page 7 |
| Example DDSF s14 Grant letter | Pfd. document | Annex B |

# **ANNEX A: Project specifications.**

**Theme 1: Improving CSC data collection and how it is shared to inform decision making.**

## **Project 1a: A standard CSC dataset for LAs**

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| **Project 1a: A standard CSC dataset for LAs.** |
| LA data teams must balance their limited capacity with high demand for data work. One way they address this is by sharing data tools, tasks and methods across professional regional and national networks. However, such economies of scale can only be achieved where datasets are standard across LAs. This limits data collaboration between LAs to standard ‘core’ datasets – most notably the Children in Need (CIN) Census and SSDA903, for children in need and looked after children respectively – and Ofsted’s “Annex A” specification of child-level data to be provided during an inspection. These datasets lack much of the depth and granularity that individual LAs will look to incorporate in bespoke local analysis, including to understand quality of practice.  This leads to a second issue: while it is inevitable that LAs differ in the quality of their data work to some extent, the lack of data visibility across the sector leaves some LAs unaware of what they could do to improve data collection and analysis. The existing standard datasets do not incorporate the breadth and depth of information which more data mature LAs analyse. We believe that this knowledge gap inhibits improvements in analytical practice in the sector and so limiting better outcomes for vulnerable children.  We are therefore looking for a partner to develop a ‘standard CSC dataset’ that is broader than the previously mentioned core data sets and solutions that would enable the production of this of this data set across all LAs. |
| **Project 1a: Specification** |
| The department is seeking a LA partner, or partners, to undertake two stages of work:  **Stage 1**: Lead a project defining a broader standard dataset for CSC in LAs, and then, subject to successful stage 1 completion, move to stage 2.  **Stage 2**: Create solutions for producing that dataset which can be adopted at low or no cost by any safeguarding authority.  We envisage the core components of the solution, which will be provided to the department to be:  **Stage 1**:   * mapping of data that a broad range of LAs are using to understand their services beyond those used ‘core’ data sets * user research across a broad range of LAs to define the data items, data structures and production methods which will best serve the sector drawing, where relevant, from existing research on this topic proposals for how other safeguarding partner information can be incorporated into the standard CSC dataset * documentation explaining the findings of user research, rationale behind the chosen indicators and how they’re intended to be used * a standard CSC dataset specification (including a list of data items and definitions) incorporating multi-year data histories across the range of safeguarding activities performed by councils, significantly expanding on the available standard datasets (e.g. CIN Census and Ofsted’s Annex A) in line with user research outputs * identify where data items in the proposed data set are already included in the CIN Census and SSDS903, Ofsted Annex A and the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance quarterly data return   **Stage 2**   * a suite of standard easily adoptable methods for regularly producing the standard CSC dataset from each of the case management systems currently used by safeguarding authorities, either as independently developed, free, open-source products, or as integrated components of those case management systems at no future cost to customers * a framework for maintaining and developing the standard CSC dataset into the future so it will be accepted by as many LAs as possible, and include changes made as a result of the care review and social work practice, keeping the interests of vulnerable children at the heart of all design decisions   The LA partner leading this project will be required to join a regular department convened **data project forum** **for all 1a, 1b and 2a projects** to ensure join up and read across, prevent duplication across 1a, 1b and 2a projects and share any common barriers / issues and means of overcoming them. |

## **Project 1b (I): Creating or improving specific data sets: Children looked after through kinship care.**

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| **Project 1b (I): Creating or improving specific data sets:** Children looked after through kinship care. |
| Lack of nationally accessed data on the full spectrum of kinship care arrangements made with the involvement of children’s services has long been identified as a key research gap (Hunt, 2020). More recently, the independent review of children’s social care suggested improving consistency of kinship care data and concluded that the current data landscape hindered policymaking and provided only a partial understanding of those cohorts (The independent review of children’s social care, 2022).  Whilst the department expects there is a degree of local variation in terms of data collected in relation for kinship arrangements, the department is aware of the following issues that have been identified in relation to kinship care data for children who are or have been in contact with services:   * data on children in kinship care looked after by carers who have been granted Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Orders. Whilst the department collects data on children leaving care through granting of these orders, no data is collected by the department on children subject to these orders who have previously not been in care. Additionally, the statutory collection does not allow us to disaggregate how many of Child Arrangement Orders for children leaving care are granted to kinship carers * data on children in kinship care receiving support from children’s services, including children in private family arrangements. Research suggests that some children in kinship care may be being supported on an informal or statutory basis, including as children in need (Hunt, 2020). The existing data collections do not provide information on how many children receiving support from children’s services are in kinship care arrangements   Given significant focus on this area in recent national reviews and publications, the department is looking to increase its understanding of kinship care, including to be able to appraise recommendations from the independent review of children’s social care. |
| **Project 1b (I): Specification** |
| The department is seeking a LA partner to undertake a discovery phase research project with a group of LAs, subject matter experts and sector leaders to explore the kinship care data landscape and scope options for improving this data and its use.  Specifically, the department is looking for the successful bidder to deliver a report which includes:   1. Outputs of user research with government stakeholders, LA leaders, managers, analysts, software providers and other users of kinship care data and outlining user needs; constraints to better use of this data; gaps in existing solutions; and an overview of how kinship data is being used in decision-making, including in setting policies and designing services. 2. Mapping of the kinship data landscape. This should include an overview of the data and types of data held by a range of LAs (considering differential features which might be important such as region, size, deprivation levels and CMS supplier); the technical solutions in use for producing, accessing and storing that data; constraints and limitations of the data held locally; the quality and consistency of the data. 3. A set of prioritised options to improve kinship care data that clearly specify what data items are both useful and feasible to collect, which address user needs both locally and nationally. 4. A high-level theory of change, benefits case and alpha plan for the prioritised options. Solutions should be replicable and take consideration of specific needs relating to CMS providers.   The LA partner leading this project will be required to join a regular department convened **data project forum** **for all 1a, 1b and 2a projects** to ensure join up and read across, prevent duplication across 1a, 1b and 2a projects and share any common barriers / issues and means of overcoming them. |

## **Project 1b (II): Creating or improving specific data sets: Children who are subject to pre-proceedings.**

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| **Project 1b (II): Creating or improving specific data sets:** Children who are subject to pre-proceedings. |
| **Project 1b (II): Background** |
| A key challenge for CSC nationally is the backlogs and delays to public law cases in the family court. The statutory requirement of 26-weeks from point of application for an order to case conclusion is far from being met, so more needs to be done to increase timeliness.  A better understanding of practice at the pre-proceedings stage and challenges related to this will both improve local decision making and practice and provide intelligence to enable evidence-based policy making – for the benefit of the system, but most importantly for vulnerable children and families.  Prior work has been conducted in this space during the 2021-22 CSC COVID-19 Recovery Fund data-collection pilot project. We will expect the successful LA partner(s) for this new project to use and build from the work in 21-22. ‘Bronze’, ‘silver’ and ‘gold’ level data indicators have been defined in relation to a child’s journey through pre-proceedings and these indicators will be defined further before the start of this next project. |
| **Specification** |
| The department is seeking one or more LA partners to undertake a research project with a group of LAs, CMS software providers, Cafcass, and data experts to explore the pre-proceedings data landscape, then to submit a report to the department which includes research findings and a set of proposals including:   1. **An assessment of which data indicators outlined in the list of ‘bronze’, ‘silver’, and ‘gold’ indicators would be feasible for reporting on a national basis without further system change including:**  * a clear description of each data indicator, identifying which of the LAs in the identified group could currently produce this data, why, and how they would submit the data if requested * suggestions for any new data indicators that are not already included in the list of ‘bronze’, ‘silver’, and ‘gold’ data sets, together with a rationale for inclusion  1. **A list of the blockers and challenges faced by LAs to collecting, recording, and reporting the ‘bronze’, ‘silver’ and ‘gold’ level data indicators including:**  * evidence of blockers and challenges that have been identified through working with family justice partners, including Cafcass, and a range of LA identifiers such as CMS supplier, size of LA, and data maturity levels * the LA(s) will need to inform the department of the differences in LA data practices (and the resulting challenges) for collecting, recording, and managing data relating to the identified pre-proceeding indicators  1. **A ranked list of the identified blockers and challenges, in priority order of those that must, should, and could be addressed in order to be able to collect the ‘bronze’, ‘silver’, and ‘gold’ data from LAs across England including:**  * availability assessment against each data point that shows which indicators could be collected and reported nationally if one or more of the blockers were to be addressed  1. **A set of recommended implementable and realistic solutions to overcome blockers and challenges that would enable the collection and reporting of ‘bronze; ‘silver’ and ‘gold’ level data at a national level, including:**  * clarity on which indicators would and would not be feasible for collection and reporting, as a result of implementing the solutions recommended in the report * the rationale for how the recommended solutions would ‘unlock’ the ability to collect and report the data points on a national basis * proposals on how the solutions could be implemented which have been agreed by CMS software providers, Cafcass and data experts. * a case study setting out how this data could be collected and provided by their own LA(s) at the end of the project via the recommended solutions   The LA partner leading this project will be required to join a regular department convened **data project forum** **for all 1a, 1b and 2a projects** to ensure join up and read across, prevent duplication across 1a, 1b and 2a projects and share any common barriers / issues and means of overcoming them. |

## **Project 1b (III): Creating or improving specific data sets: Section 251 children and young people’s services financial data.**

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| **Project 1b (III): Creating or improving specific data sets:** Section251 children and young people’s services financial data. |
| The independent review of children’s social care specifically criticised the current s251 LA financial data collection, saying it “is widely acknowledged to be poor quality and not comparable between LAs, [and] is creating major problems in understanding how LAs are using their resources.” It notes the collection as “a major barrier to understanding how LAs are using their resources in CSC and, by extension, to adequately funding CSC”and, along with issues with the CIN census “has made it very difficult to understand the extent and nature of support provided to families.”  There are issues with the s251 data about children and young people’s services across all the ONS [dimensions of statistical quality](https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/methodologytopicsandstatisticalconcepts/qualityinofficialstatistics/qualitydefined): relevance, accuracy and reliability, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity and coherence and comparability.  These issues include:   * data not being comparable between different LAs, as returns are completed inconsistently * insufficient capture of the level of complexity or nuance of CSC * a 15-month period where only budget data is available for reporting on spend * limited insight into reasons for variations in or drivers of spend * limited usefulness of the s251 to LAs   The department has been aware of these issues for a number of years, and commissioned reports including [Holmes (2019)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/951146/Children_s_social_care_cost_pressures_and_variations_in_unit_costs_Jan_2021.pdf), [Rome (2017)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/590738/Testing_s251_project_report2_b.pdf) and [EIF and Aldaba (2016)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535043/Childrens_services_spending_delivery_report_Aldaba_EIF_July_2016.pdf), as well as consulting LAs on changes to the s251 budget collection. CIPFA, LGA, NAO, OCC and academics have also noted issues with interpreting and issuing s251 data. These reports have identified the issues we wish successful bids to investigate and address. They have also identified that guidance could be improved but not how, and that current guidance is not currently followed by all LAs.  It is important that any changes to s251 LA financial data collection have the intended impact and impose proportionate burdens on LAs, which detailed research with LAs can help ensure. |
| **Project 1b (III): Specification** |
| The department is seeking a LA partner to conduct research with a group of LAs and provide a report or reports, including information on:   * a recommended solution or set of potential solutions, including evidence indicating these solutions could or should be adopted. This could include:      * recommended changes are compatible with the way LAs already collect or record data, or could reasonably be expected to adopt to make the return valuable to the sector * recommended changes would be implemented as anticipated by LAs * mapping of expected benefits for LAs, sub-regionally, regionally and nationally resulting from the solutions * mapping these solutions against current practice in LAs, including the range/variation in practice * delivery expectations, including speed of any changes or how many LAs * how this information relates to existing and current work on this topic, including the Sector Led Improvement and the Data Improvement Across Government Programme, and the Local Data Accelerator Projects   The successful bid should provide answers to some (not necessarily all) of the following questions (listed in order of priority).  1. How should the s251 be developed to enable meaningful comparative analysis across LAs, statistical neighbours and regions, including benchmarking to guide improvement and greater value for money?  2. How should spend on family help and/or early intervention services best be recorded in the s251 collection and LAs’ accounts?  3. How can spend be linked with other data which would make it more useful for analysis (e.g. unit costs) e.g. activity data; needs and circumstances of children and young people; service receipt data, staffing information  4. Should any contextual information be recorded along with the s251 to help interpretation? Which information and how should it be presented? E.g. service design/structure or accounting practices.  5. How can changes to the s251 enable more effective sense-checking and error correction prior to publication?  6. How can the s251 support LAs in improved commissioning and market development?  7. How can the s251 guidance and/or LA practice be changed to improve consistency of reporting? In particular, guidance on:   * + income   + separating out overheads   + codes used   The LA partner leading this project will be required to join a regular department convened **data project forum** **for all 1a, 1b and 2a projects** to ensure join up and read across, prevent duplication across 1a, 1b and 2a projects and share any common barriers / issues and means of overcoming them. |

## **Project 1b (IV): Creating or improving specific data sets: The voice of children and families.**

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| **Project 1b (IV): Creating or improving specific data sets:** The voice of children and families. |
| We do not currently adequately measure the voices of children and families in the system. This limits children and family's ability to be fairly heard through effective and open feedback systems, reduces accountability, and creates blind spots and a lack of triangulation of other quantitative statutory data returns. The care review emphasised the importance of ‘strengthening children's voice in decisions affecting them’.  While many LAs have feedback mechanisms there is a lack of understanding and documentation of what LAs currently collect, the variability between these LAs, the manner in which this is then used or analysed, and the extent to which this meets the needs of children and families.  More broadly across the system there is no consistent and comparable means by which the perspectives of children and families are captured and understood. This means there is no way to compare how children and families perceive services across LAs and partner agency footprints.  Work is now needed to explore what data is currently collected by LAs, what could be changed to make this more useful, and the feasibility of collecting this data more systematically.  Bringing in the voice of children and families can help ensure children and families are listened to, triangulate data from other sources, and help identify failings and improve the system. |
| **Project 1b (IV): Specification** |
| The department is seeking a LA partner to undertake a discovery phase research project with a group of LAs, children and families, subject matter experts and sector leaders. This project should explore the collection, use and reporting of children and families’ voice; feedback systems and data and scope options for improving this data and its use. It should look across LAs and consider children and families voice in different parts of the CSC system ensuring that children’s voice is captured separately not just as part of the family view. Overall, this research should provide a clear sense of user needs; constraints to better use of this data; gaps in existing solutions; and an overview of how feedback data is being used in decision-making, including in setting policies and designing services.  The department is interested in research with children and families who have received or are receiving CSC support including CIN, CPP, LAC and care leavers. Where possible, we are also interested in the view of children and families who have received early or family help. We are interested in a broad range of views to inform the development of robust proposals.  *Research with children and families should only be proposed if it can be demonstrated that there is capacity and experience to produce useful, non-bias, and ethical research (see e.g. Ofsted’s* [[*ethical research policy*](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsteds-ethical-research-policy/how-we-carry-out-ethical-research-with-people)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsteds-ethical-research-policy/how-we-carry-out-ethical-research-with-people)*) with this group.*  Specifically, the department is looking for the partner LA to deliver **mapping of the children and families voice landscape**. This should include:   * an overview of the types of avenues and platforms used by LAs to collect feedback (e.g. platforms, points of contact,), and the types of information/data collected (e.g. questions asked) * the levels of usage of those platforms and the quality and consistency of the data * a clear understanding of the technical solutions in use for producing, accessing and storing that data and data protection issues and solutions   **Research findings with relevant LA staff and children and families (minimum of five LAs)** and produce a report outlining:   * whether and how practitioners/LAs use the feedback received * an assessment of the content and quality of feedback practitioners/LAs receive * the type of experiences/views of CSC that children and families would like to share with practitioners or LAs (e.g. what they would like to be asked); if and how voice differs between children and families; and an exploration of when and how children and families want to provide feedback * a comparison with Brightspots ([Bright Spots Programme - Coram Voice](https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/bright-spots-programme/)) feedback mechanisms * Prioritised options to improve the collection of children and families voice including: * clear proposals on how and when to collect data, what data items (e.g. questions and format) are both useful and feasible to collect which address user needs both locally and nationally, and suggestions on use of reminders and junctures/timepoints to prompt children and families for feedback * a clear plan for how this data could be collected nationally   **A high-level theory of change, benefits case and alpha plan for the prioritised options.**   * this work should be done with range of LAs (considering differential features which might be important such as region, size, deprivation levels and CMS supplier) * active user research should also be conducted with both LAs and children and families from within these LAs   The LA partner leading this project will be required to join a regular department convened **data project forum** **for all 1a, 1b and 2a projects** to ensure join up and read across, prevent duplication across 1a, 1b and 2a projects and share any common barriers / issues and means of overcoming them. |

## **Project 1c: Evaluation of data analytics tools.**

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| **Project 1c: Evaluation of data analytics tools.** |
| While descriptive analytics will be possible for the majority of LAs, diagnostic and predictive analytics are more complex and require much greater investment in terms of expertise and resourcing.  We know that diagnostic and predictive data analytics tools can be used across operational and strategic decision-making in CSC by:   * identifying individual children and families who are likely to need support (operational decision-making) * prioritising and informing decisions around resource and funding allocation (strategic decision-making) * setting out patterns and factors in vulnerability (strategic decision-making and operational decisions) * evaluating service provision (strategic decision-making and operational decisions)   We also know that some LAs and areas are purchasing commercially available data analytic tools and developing ways of applying and using them effectively within CSC and local area safeguarding. However, there has not been an opportunity to date to evaluate the methods, practices, data, and approaches of using the tools and communicate the results of the evaluation to the wider sector so that practice can be replicated with confidence.  We are therefore making funding available for LAs to commission an independent evaluation of methods developed for using predictive and diagnostic data analytics software. Funding is available for a LA to commission an evaluation of the methods, practices, approaches and outcomes which they are already using effectively and consider that they have the potential for other LAs to adopt. |
| **Project 1c: Specification** |
| The department is looking for one or more LA partners to commission an objective and independent evaluation of their own use of diagnostic and predictive analytic tools that will provide the following information:   * the aims and objectives of the approach * a clear and comprehensive description of the methods, practices and approach which have been developed to use the tool * a clear and comprehensive description of how the approach works * a clear and comprehensive description of the organisational context and local conditions and any pre-existing enablers * an assessment of whether the approach achieves what it is intended to achieve * an assessment of the cost benefits of using the approach * an assessment of how transferable the approach is to other LAs, including any barriers to other LAs adopting it, whether and how those barriers might be overcome * evaluation must be able to report interim findings at mid-point and a final report by March 2024   It is expected that a technical advisory group with specific research qualifications and expertise will be set up as part of the evaluation commissioned. The technical advisory group will oversee the quality and robustness of the evaluation. It will review the scope of the evaluation, monitor progress and review impacts and use of the findings.  **NB:** Where there is opportunity to standardise and harmonise the evaluation approaches to improve their usefulness to the sector, the department will work with all successful LAs to agree this. |

## **Project 2a: User research into social worker inputted data to CMS.**

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| **Project 2a: User research into social worker inputted data to CMS.** |
| Recording of information and data is an important element of social work. It provides information for decision-making, and records that help those that have received children’s social care services make sense of their life story.    Part of what social workers record is directly relevant to their social work with and record-keeping for the children and families on their caseload. They also spend part of their time recording information and data for wider audiences and purposes not directly related to this, e.g. to inform service planning and strategic oversight.  CMS are designed to support both social work with children and families and statutory data collection, but we have been told that statutory data collection is prioritised in how they are structured. It has been suggested that this can get in the way of achieving CMS that support good social work. Social workers frequently told the independent review of children’s social care that strict conditions for when, how and what data must be input into CMS directly influences their practice ([Recommendation annexes, p207](https://childrenssocialcare.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Recommendation-annexes.pdf)).  To help us think about how recording could be made less burdensome and time-consuming for social workers, we want to understand in more detail what information and data social workers are recording, and how social workers’ data recording is impacting their social work practice. We also want to understand more about the value of the information and data that social workers record through their CMS (to them and the children and families they work with, and to others), and whether there might be ways to gather information and data that is of benefit to the wider CSC system in a way that reduces the recording burden on social workers and makes it easier to design CMS that support good social work. |
| **Project 2a: Specification** |
| The department is seeking up to six LA partners to each commission user research and business analysis, focussing on (as a minimum) social workers in child protection and initial assessment teams. At least six social workers must be interviewed. User research should include an in-depth 1-1 interview with each social worker to work through their CMS recording journey in detail.  The skills required of a senior user researcher can be found at this weblink: [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/user-researcher#senior-user-researc](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/user-researcher#senior-user-researcher)her  The skills required of a senior business analyst can be found at this weblink: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/business-analyst--2#senior-business-analyst>  A business analyst from each of the projects will be expected to work with a coordinating business analyst from the department to ensure that the lists in C and D below are all using the same definitions and terminology – so can be meta-analysed efficiently after they have concluded.  The output of the user research and business analysis should include:   1. a detailed research methodology 2. an overview of the LA CSC practice context that participating social workers are part of 3. a primary list of each information or data item that participating social workers are required to record through their CMS 4. a secondary list of any information or data items that the social workers are not asked to record but consider they should be recording – and why 5. an executive summary of the project’s findings and any recommendations for changes to what and how information and data is collected   For each information or data item in the primary list, the following 5 questions should be answered:   1. Whether social workers do or do not consider the item helpful to record in their work with children and families? 2. If the item is considered not helpful to a social worker – why is this? – does recording this item have a negative impact (e.g. time taken) on their practice? 3. If the item is considered not helpful to a social worker – are there other roles in the CSC LA find it helpful? (e.g. Service manager, audit, etc.) – why is this? 4. Whether the item is local data, statutory data, or Ofsted Annex A data. (If there are additional categories of data, please also specify these); and for each local data item, why it is being recorded?   The department is looking for bids from a range of LAs covering a range of differential features so that the research is representative. We will therefore initially award grants to the two highest scoring bids which use different CMS providers.  We will then award grants to the highest scoring bids in each of the following categories:   * London Borough * Shire County * Metropolitan Borough * Unitary Authority   If the total number of grants awarded is still less than six, awards will then be made to the highest scoring remaining bids, up to a maximum total of six awards.  The LA partner leading this project will be required to join a regular department convened **data project forum** **for all 1a, 1b and 2a projects** to ensure join up and read across, prevent duplication across 1a, 1b and 2a projects and share any common barriers / issues and means of overcoming them. |

## **Project 2b: Using technology to reimagine CMS.**

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| **Project 2b: Using technology to reimagine CMS.** |
| Existing advanced technology, including ‘artificial intelligence which is commercially available and utilised in other sectors could make significant improvements in the way social workers record, access, analyse and share data and information – as an extension of human capabilities, not a replacement. For example, making collection of the data and information the system needs easier (so reducing the burden on social workers), to creating sophisticated alerts flagging where information needs to be shared, to interpreting information about individual children in written records or identifying potential family members.  We are making funding available to LAs to work with IT software and system development companies to use existing advanced technology to develop a proof of concept and pilot a reimagining of recording, retrieval, sharing and information analysis information from CMS. The solution should save social worker time and enhance their ability to make decisions. |
| **Project 2b: Specification** |
| The department is looking for a LA partner who will develop an IT product which utilises widely available technology to:   * reduce the data recording and/or retrieval burden on social workers, whilst ensuring that the system has the data and information it needs for good service delivery and oversight * support good social work practice * as part of that, enhance social workers’ ability to share, analyse and understand complex information and make effective decisions   The product will have universal usability and should not be restricted to one model of service delivery, case management system or technology partner.  The application of the product will be cost effective for use by other LAs (using any technology provider) and will demonstrate an enhancement in the quality of children’s records, the progression of interventions and plans, and reduction in the time social workers spend at their computers.  The product should consider non-traditional information storage formats, such as audio, photos, video, etc. It should offer the ability to analyse these alongside current data arrangements, whilst also exploring opportunities to develop input mechanisms for future information storage formats, such as audio/visual. |

**Theme 3: Using technology to achieve frictionless sharing of information between safeguarding partners and other LAs.**

## **Project 3a: Information and data sharing agreement template.**

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| **Project 3a: Information and data sharing agreement template.** |
| Lack of appropriate and timely sharing of information between safeguarding partners is regularly cited as a theme in national and local reviews of practice, with almost half of local child safeguarding practice reviews (LCSPRs) citing issues related to information sharing [(Dickens et al, 2021)](https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/82101/1/Annual_review_of_LCSPRs_and_rapid_reviews.pdf). It is recognised there can be a number of agencies working with a child or family, and that they can each hold information that needs to be shared with the others to enable this, we know that many LA) have drawn up information sharing agreements (or a suite of agreements) with their local partner agencies; to detail the information to be shared, the method for sharing and the legal basis for this.  As discussed in the independent review of children’s social care, ‘legislation and guidance allow for information to be shared for the purposes of safeguarding. Despite this, practitioners perceive it as a barrier and find organisational information sharing agreements confusing’ [(MacAlister, 2022)](https://childrenssocialcare.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-Final-report.pdf). The Review made recommendations to the department related to Information Sharing Agreements, this included the use of model templates. |
| **Project 3a: Specification** |
| The department is looking for a partner LA (or consortium of LAs), who has successfully developed a local data and information sharing agreement (or suite of agreements) that has enabled better information sharing locally.  Specifically, the department is looking for the partner LA to deliver a model data and information sharing agreement template (or suite of model templates) that can be made freely available to all LAs as a downloadable document. The template(s) must be able to support other LAs to produce and implement their own information sharing agreement/s for the purposes of multi-agency safeguarding of children.   * a report setting out the process undertaken locally to implement their internal information sharing agreement/s and the impact it/they have had on information sharing. This report will be made freely available to LAs to provide a case study on the creation, implementation and impact of an information sharing agreement locally. the report should include (as a minimum): * the process undertaken to produce and implement an information sharing agreement, including the experts involved (i.e. information governance) * the partners involved and how agencies engaged and collaborated in the process * the evidence base used to develop the information sharing agreement (this may include case studies). * any challenges faced and how they were overcome during the production and implementation of the agreement * (a summary of) the content of the local agreement, including the types of information shared, methods for sharing and legal basis for sharing * the benefits realised by the information sharing agreement (referencing relevant broader improvement work in data and/or multi-agency working, if appropriate), this may include case studies * views of practitioners on the usefulness of the information sharing agreement * any challenges that remain for any safeguarding partner in relation to information sharing * annex including the various templates which comprise the information sharing agreement |

## **Project 3b: Solutions to overcoming the cultural and behavioural barriers to information sharing.**

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| **Project 3b: Solutions to overcoming the cultural and behavioural barriers to information sharing.** |
| We know that cultural behaviours and attitudes can be factors in poor information sharing between safeguarding partners. These can be based on legislative and regulatory assumptions, professional behavioural biases, lack of knowledge/challenge in a system, amongst other factors. Kantar Public’s recent report for the Department outlined some of the behavioural barriers related to information sharing, such as ‘frontline staff did not always see the value in sharing information and were concerned about the consequences of wrongful sharing. This led to hesitancy, tensions between organisations, and potentially missed safeguarding issues’ [(Kantar Public, 2021)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1041000/MultiAgencyReform_Kantar_Report.pdf).  We also know that many LAs have found ways to overcome some of these barriers and have introduced systems and processes to make information sharing between partner agencies more straightforward and effective. We want to understand more about the solutions implemented by LAs – and to utilise knowledge in the department’s multi-agency information sharing report to parliament, due summer 2023. |
| **Project 3b: Specification** |
| The department is seeking a LA partner or a consortium of LA partners to conduct user research into the cultural and behavioural barriers to information sharing in their collective workforce and the solutions they have implemented to overcome those barriers. Participants in the user research should include the LA workforce and their safeguarding partner workforce.  The findings of the research should be included in an analytical report including (at a minimum):   * the research methodology * an overview of the system context * findings from user research undertaken with workforce (LA and safeguarding partners) comprising:   + a detailed description of the barriers to sharing information for safeguarding purposes   + a detailed description and analysis of solution/s implemented locally and impact of the solution/s - Has [the solution] addressed some of the barriers? If so, what has changed?   + what else could be done to address the barriers? - Outlines of any other proposed / conceptual solutions (not yet implemented) |

# **Annex B: Grant terms and conditions – example grant offer letter**

An example of a grant offer letter is shown in the pdf document below.



# **Annex C: Assessment framework**

Evidence set out in responses to the technical questions will be assessed using the following scoring system:

5 - Strongly meets all the requirements of the criteria

4 - Meets all the requirements of the criteria

3 - Meets most of the requirements of the criteria

2 - Meets some of the requirements of the criteria

1 - Little or no evidence to meet the criteria

0 - Absence of evidence/ criteria not met

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| Score | Rating | Description |
| 5 | Exceptional evidence of the requirements | Exceptional demonstration in the Bid of the understanding and skills required to provide the services. Response identifies factors that will offer potential added value, with evidence to support the response. |
| 4 | Meets all the requirements | Above average demonstration in the Bid of the understanding and skills required to provide the services. Response identifies factors that will offer potential added value, with evidence to support the response. |
| 3 | Meets most of the requirements | Demonstration in the Bid of the understanding and skills required to provide the services, with evidence to support the response. |
| 2 | Meets some of the requirements | Some minor reservations of the Bidder's understanding and skills required to provide the services, with little or no evidence to support the response. |
| 1 | Little/no evidence | Considerable reservations of the Bidder’s understanding and skills required to provide the services, with little or no evidence to support the response. |
| 0 | No evidence | Does not meet the requirement. Does not comply and/or insufficient information provided to demonstrate that the Bidder has the understanding and skills required to provide the services, with little or no evidence to support the response. |

# **Annex D: Project 1b (II): Gold, silver and bronze data points: Children who are subject to pre-proceedings**

**These data points are being further defined in collaboration with Cafcass prior to the start of this project and an update will be provided to the successful LA.**

**Bronze**

Providing base level data on the following pre-proceedings activity (as established in agreement with Cafcass via the previous pilot project):

* volume and rate of children in pre-proceedings including child demographics
* length of time spent in pre-proceedings
* total LA open case duration for children in pre-proceedings
* proportion of pre-proceedings ending in issue

**Silver**

In addition to bronze, providing data on the following pre-proceedings activity:

* whether the child has been on a Child Protection Plan
* repeat periods of PLO
* number of review pre-proceeding meetings held with parents following initial meeting
* parental legal representation during pre-proceedings and/or point of issue
* number of PLOs that end in issue
* reason for ‘short notice’ applications
* number of hearings
* outcome of PLO ceasing e.g. was the LA plan approved / not approved
* changes to final care outcome compared to initial lead application

**Gold**

In addition to bronze and silver, providing data on the following pre-proceedings activity and proceedings activity:

* use of Family Group Conferencing
* changes of social worker
* involvement of experts during pre-proceedings – inc. number, type and whether the expert was externally commissioned, supported / opposed by LA and/or Cafcass
* number of externally commissioned and completed specialist assessments e.g. PAMS, cognitive/ psychological
* identification of carers / assessment of family care options e.g. viability/fostering assessments completed during pre-proceedings
* whether the child has seen the submitted evidence
* whether Cafcass has shared its recommendations with the child

extent to which the child’s wishes and feelings have been captured

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1. Membership of this group is still under review and will be made available in due course. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)