



Newid Cadarnhaol mewn
Gofal Cymdeithasol
Positive Change
in Social Care



Llywodraeth Cymru
Swyddfa Genedlaethol Gofal a Chymorth
Welsh Government
National Office for Care and Support

State of the Nation 2024 to 2025 report

State of the Nation

Contents

State of the Nation	1
1. Chief Social Care Officer's Foreword	4
2. Summary	5
Context	5
Performance Assessment.....	6
Other Information Section.....	8
Conclusion	8
3. This report	9
4. Context section	10
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 11: refreshing and redefining the interconnected thinking underlying the key principles of the Act, to re-engage people and keep the principles dynamic?	11
Adult services	11
Children's services.....	13
Leadership	14
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 10: balance between the sometimes competing tensions of the duty to provide locally determined provision to meet social care needs (as identified by the Population Assessments and defined in Area Plans), and the importance of providing 'universal' social care provision irrespective of geography which avoids a 'postcode lottery' being perceived?	16
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 1: delivery of social care such that it reinforces compassionate, relationship centred forms of care and support services. ...	17
Workforce	17
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 4: workforce recruitment and retention, to ensure workforce quality, sufficiency and sustainability?	19
Financial resources.....	19
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 3: sufficiency, appropriateness and sustainability of funding so that everyone who has needs as defined by the Act can be supported and cared for?.....	21
5. Performance assessment section	21
People.....	21
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 7: the range and quality of innovative forms of citizen-directed support available under the Act including, but importantly not limited to, Direct Payments?	23

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 2: way that assessments for social care support are undertaken, when, and by whom so that they are better able to deliver the best possible well-being outcomes for individuals and carers?	24
Prevention.....	26
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 9: understanding of underlying issues and causal factors to inform prevention strategies in social care alongside effective models, resources and organisational cultural shifts?.....	30
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 15: quality, range, consistency, and implementation of data collection, analysis and interpretation in order to inform quality improvement and service development?	31
Partnership and Integration	32
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 13: role and status that social enterprises and co-operatives have under the Act in order to better support individuals, carers and communities?.....	33
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 8: support for those principled and motivated individuals who are in a position to champion and help embed co-productive practice?34	
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 12: development of a culture of innovation, creativity and quality improvement, rather than just of compliance?	35
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 14: extent to which good practice, and system knowledge ‘travels’ across Wales?.....	36
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 16: population planning and engagement processes that meaningfully engage local populations about needs?.....	37
Well-being.....	38
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 17: information, advice and assistance that service users and carers have prior to, and on entry to the social care system, alongside an understanding of their rights under the Act, so that their expectations are appropriately managed?	40
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 19: technological solutions that enable people to live independently, especially in a post-pandemic context of system pressures and workforce shortages?	41
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 18: multi-agency working and practice (including safeguarding), and in the practices of remote and distant working for some forms of interaction?	42
6. Other information section	44
Inspections and reviews	44
Complaints and representations	44
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 5: local government mechanisms and accountability for achieving people’s rights under the Act without having to resort to an adversarial complaints process?	46
Other sources of information	46
Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 6: the agency of citizens ensuring that the voices of those seldom heard and often marginalised resonate, leading to a step-change in their experiences?	48

Inspection Findings – thematic overview	49
Strengths	49
Risks	49
Actions	49
Appendices.....	51
Annex A – Glossary of terms	51
Annex B - Inspection Highlights and Agency Findings	56
Annex C – Social Services and Wellbeing Wales (2014) Act evaluation test question responses	60
Annex D – Data Quality and Sources	71

1. Chief Social Care Officer's Foreword

I am pleased to present this first State of the Nation report for Social Care in Wales, produced by the National Office for Care and Support. This report provides a comprehensive, evidence-based overview of how social care is performing nationally, at a time of sustained pressure, rising demand and significant reform. The evidence gathered illustrates the dedication, resilience, and innovation of our workforce, partners, and most importantly the people and communities we serve.

Social Care in Wales plays a vital role in supporting people to live well, safely and with dignity. It touches the lives of children, adults, families and carers every day, and underpins the resilience of our communities and the wider health and public service system. This report brings together data, inspection findings and local authority evidence to provide a national picture of where the system is delivering well, where pressures persist, and where collective effort is most urgently required.

The findings show a sector that continues to demonstrate resilience, professionalism and commitment. Across Wales, local authorities and their partners have made real progress in embedding person-centred practice, strengthening safeguarding, expanding prevention and early help, and working more closely across organisational boundaries. The principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014: voice and control, prevention, well-being and co-production; are increasingly visible in everyday practice. Investment in leadership development, the implementation of the Real Living Wage, and growing focus on equality, diversity and Welsh language provision all point to a sector striving to improve outcomes for people.

The workforce, now approaching 83,000 strong, is the backbone of this system, delivering person-centred care, championing innovation, and upholding these principles at every level.

This report is clear about the scale of the challenge facing social care. Demand for care and support continues to rise, driven by demographic change, increasing complexity of need, and the ongoing impact of poverty and inequality. Workforce challenges, particularly in children's services and specialist roles, remain a significant risk to sustainability. Financial pressures are ever-present, with budgets struggling to keep pace with demand and the need to balance immediate statutory obligations with long-term investment in prevention and innovation.

The sector's ability to adapt and improve is also tested by the complexity of integrated governance, the need for digital transformation, and the imperative to address inequalities in access and outcomes, especially for minority ethnic communities, rural areas, and for unpaid carers. The sector must also contend with the need for robust data, consistent performance management, and the imperative to ensure that the voices of all - especially those seldom heard - are truly reflected in service design and delivery.

Despite these challenges, there is much to be proud of. Across Wales, Social Care continues to demonstrate resilience, creativity and a deep commitment to people. Strong collaboration between partners, a growing confidence in new models of care, and an unwavering focus on well-being and safeguarding provide genuine grounds for optimism. The expansion of early help and family support, alongside a strengthening commitment to co-production and lived experience, reflects a sector that is determined to improve outcomes and respond differently to rising need. The implementation of the National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support, sustained investment in workforce development, and a

clear drive towards equality all signal a system that is not standing still but actively shaping a better future for social care in Wales.

As Chief Social Care Officer for Wales, I see this report as a foundation for more consistent national insight and dialogue. I am grateful to all those who have contributed to the ongoing work of improving social care across the nation. Your collective efforts are making a difference, but we must continue to listen, learn, and innovate. The challenges are real, but so too is our resolve to ensure that everyone in Wales can access the care and support they need to live well, with dignity and independence.

To everyone working in Social Care, thank you for your dedication, your professionalism, and your humanity. Your work changes lives, strengthens communities, and upholds the values that define us as a nation.

Albert Heaney CBE

Chief Social Care Officer for Wales

2. Summary

The social care system in Wales serves both adults and children underpinned by the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (SSWBWA) 2014 that protects peoples' rights and drives improvement. The sector's contribution is vast - socially and economically - with around 83,000 workers and billions invested each year. Services range from home care and reablement to child protection, fostering, and adoption. Local authorities lead delivery, supported by national oversight, inspection, and clear performance standards.

This 2024-2025 report gathers evidence from StatsWales, local authority Social Services Annual Reports, national publications, inspection findings, and Welsh Government policy sources. It aligns with Wales's Performance and Improvement Framework, particularly the strand that promotes using evidence to drive improvement. The structure mirrors statutory guidance for local authority annual reports, making local evidence easier to combine into a national overview. Throughout the report, responses to the questions posed by the evaluation of the SSWBWA are also provided.

Context

Adult Services

Adult social care spans domiciliary care, residential and nursing care, reablement, day services, supported living, direct payments, carer support, safeguarding, specialist support, equipment and adaptations, and information, advice and assistance (IAA). The scale is significant: over 40,000 adults are supported by local authorities at home and in care settings, and local authorities deliver thousands of reablement packages each year. In addition to this are a significant proportion of adults that fund their own care, without local authority involvement. Investment in home-based support and reablement helps people regain independence, while charging caps and outcome-based commissioning protect access and quality.

Children's Services

Children's social care focuses on early help, family support, child protection, children in need of care and support, children looked after (CLA), adoption and permanency, leaving care,

and youth justice. Wales has a high rate of children in care compared with other nations, reflecting complex need and safeguarding processes. Local authorities act as corporate parents, ensuring health, education, and emotional well-being for children who cannot live safely at home. Residential care is a small share of placements but accounts for a large share of spend, underscoring the need for preventative work and family-based alternatives.

Leadership

Leadership is anchored by statutory roles in local authorities - Directors of Social Services, Heads of Service for Adults and Children - and by national oversight from the Chief Social Care Officer for Wales, supported by the National Office for Care and Support. Regular data reporting, inspection, and ministerial powers provide accountability. While structures are consistent nationwide, local implementation varies, with some local authorities highlighting stable leadership and partnership strengths, and others noting gaps from senior vacancies or interim arrangements.

Workforce

The workforce is large and predominantly permanent, with women comprising around four fifths of staff but diversity is slowly increasing. Vacancy levels remain high in some services, particularly specialist children's roles, leading to reliance on agency staff. Local Authorities are investing in "grow our own" pathways, degree sponsorship, leadership programmes, and wellbeing support (counselling, flexible work, peer networks). The Real Living Wage is paid to substantial majority of social care workers, helping improve pay conditions. Staff feel supported by colleagues and managers, but financial pressures, caseloads, and complexity remain sources of strain.

Financial Resources

Funding for social services comes largely from Welsh Government through the Revenue Support Grant, supplemented by targeted grants (for example, to support reablement). Social services represent more than half of many local authorities' revenue expenditure, reflecting their central role in community well-being. The National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support - in effect since September 2024 - requires fees to be set fairly and in an open transparent way, prioritising ethical procurement and outcome focused contracts. Despite this progress, Local authorities report persistent pressures: rising demand, workforce costs, and the challenge of sustaining preventative services during fiscal tightening.

Performance Assessment

The Performance and Improvement Framework set out eight quality standards, grouped here into four lenses—People, Prevention, Partnership and Integration, and Well-being—to assess how services are improving lives.

People

Across Wales, person centred practice is becoming the norm. "What matters" conversations guide assessments and care plans, helping individuals to articulate priorities. Direct payments offer flexible, self-directed support, and digital tools make information and planning more transparent. Local authorities highlight progress in youth participation, bilingual services, and equality objectives, though engagement depth varies between areas. Workforce development—training, supervision, and leadership programmes—underpins quality. The main challenges are recruitment and retention (especially in specialist roles), variable advocacy provision, and gaps in performance data that make trend analysis difficult.

Local authorities describe their priorities for next year to include expanding direct payments, strengthening co-production, standardising tools and training, improving cultural competence, and building structured leadership and career pathways.

Prevention

Prevention is embedded across adult and children's services. Community hubs, local area coordination, and early help centres connect people to support before problems escalate. IAA services resolve many contacts without formal intervention. Reablement assists adults after illness or hospital discharge, and family support teams help keep children safely within their families. Carers are central - respite, training, and peer groups mitigate stress and isolation - yet support to carers can be uneven, and many unpaid carers still miss out on assessments and plans. Local authorities note pressures from poverty, housing, and mental health that drive complex needs; recruitment challenges limit the scale of preventative roles; and online services can exclude some older adults.

Local authority priorities for next year include scaling community led models (including social enterprises and cooperatives), expanding young carer support, tackling digital exclusion, and strengthening outcome tracking to evidence long term impact.

Partnership and Integration

Regional Partnership Boards exist to align planning and joint commissioning; multi agency panels coordinate support; and co-located teams bring social workers, health staff, and family support together in community settings. Market Stability Reports and Population Needs Assessments help local authorities plan services based on real demand and provider capacity. Co-production is growing through citizen panels, youth forums, and lived experience groups. The challenges are familiar: workforce and financial constraints, patchy digital integration between systems, and variable depth of engagement beyond statutory processes.

Priorities for next year include accelerating shared care records and interoperable IT, formalising co production frameworks, embedding fair pricing and long-term contracts under the National Framework, and advancing decarbonisation and biodiversity goals across estates and commissioning.

Well-being

Safeguarding arrangements are robust and multi-agency, with training and shared governance strengthening protection for adults and children. Trauma informed practice is now common in early help; mental health support in schools and communities is expanding; and assistive technology (telecare, digital tools) increasingly supports independence at home. Demand and complexity continue to rise, stretching capacity. Digital solutions can leave some people behind; specialist mental health provision remains under pressure; and inequalities in rural access and minority ethnic outcomes persist.

Priorities for next year include broadening assistive technology with blended support, expanding community-based activities, strengthening multi agency safeguarding capacity, and embedding co production and peer networks to reduce reliance on statutory care.

Other Information Section

Inspections and Reviews

In 2024-25, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) reported improvements in leadership, governance and public engagement in several local authorities, alongside persistent waiting times and recruitment issues. Audit Wales highlighted the need for clearer plans to meet domiciliary care demand and stronger performance monitoring. Joint inspections of child protection arrangements praised collaboration and practitioner understanding of roles, while noting risks linked to workforce shortages and incompatible IT systems. The overall message: inspection drives learning and change, but local authorities must integrate findings into resourced improvement plans.

Complaints and Representations

Complaints systems are well established, with most concerns resolved informally at an early stage. Common themes include communication delays, process clarity, and staff conduct - often concentrated at the “front door” where referral volumes are high. Advocacy services (including support for young people) help navigate procedures and uphold voice and choice. Local authorities are improving accessibility (bilingual materials and alternative formats), but more standardised reporting would enable better national learning. Reducing complaints will depend on stronger resourcing for intake teams, clearer communication protocols, and consistent ways to feed lessons back into service redesign.

Other Sources of Information

Social services are increasingly woven into the corporate plans of local authorities that address sustainability, equality, and Welsh language commitments. Climate action is gaining momentum - carbon baselines, energy upgrades, greener fleets, and digitalisation - though funding and consistent data remain challenges. Equality priorities are shaped by national action plans, including the Anti Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP) and the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES), with local authorities investing in cultural competence, fair recruitment, and community engagement. Welsh language strategies embed the Active Offer so people can receive services in Welsh without asking, supported by staff training and bilingual publications.

Conclusion

The core messages from this report:

- People first: Voice, choice, and control remain central. Direct payments, advocacy, and strengths-based practice are expanding.
- Prevention works: Early help, family support, and reablement reduce escalation and help people remain independent.
- Partnerships matter: Health boards, schools, voluntary organisations, and social enterprises are crucial to integrated support.
- Well-being and safeguarding: Multi agency arrangements keep people safe, with growing use of trauma informed approaches and assistive technology.
- Workforce and resources: The workforce is stabilising in some areas (more permanent contracts; Real Living Wage uptake), but vacancies and retention pressures persist. Financial settlements support core services, though demand continues to outpace capacity.
- Improvement and oversight: Inspection and audit drive learning, highlighting strengths and pinpointing gaps—especially for unpaid carers and data consistency.

3. This report

Social care in Wales is governed by the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#), which sets out four core principles:

- **Voice and Control:** Individuals are central to their care, with a say in decisions affecting their well-being.
- **Prevention and Early Intervention:** Services aim to prevent escalation of needs through early support.
- **Well-being:** Care is designed to help people achieve their own well-being outcomes.
- **Co-production:** Individuals are encouraged to participate in designing and delivering services.

Complementing this, the [Regulation and Inspection of Social Care \(Wales\) Act 2016](#) restructured oversight mechanisms. [Care Inspectorate Wales](#) (CIW) register providers, inspect services, enforce standards, and [Social Care Wales](#) (SCW) regulate the workforce. Both CIW and SCW have a clear focus on safety and continuous improvement for the social care sector.

[Local authorities](#) are responsible for:

- Understanding local population need, planning, commissioning, and delivering person-centred social care services.
- Safeguarding vulnerable adults and children in partnership with health services and police.
- Managing funding from the Welsh Government and individual contributions.
- Tailoring services to local needs, either by direct provision or commissioning from external providers.

The Welsh Government monitors local authority social care performance through the [Performance and Improvement Framework](#). This framework sets out quality standards which act as benchmarks for high-quality, person-centred care. The framework has three strands:

1. [Measuring Activity and Performance](#)
2. [Understanding Experience and Outcomes](#)
3. [Using Evidence to Drive Improvement](#)

This State of the Nation report aims to bring together data and research evidence to provide a comprehensive overview of the social care sector in Wales. As such, it fulfils Welsh Government's ambitions under the third strand of the Performance and Improvement Framework for the year 2024-25. This is the first report of its kind and is intended to be an annual publication produced by the National Office for Care and Support.

This report draws on evidence from a range of sources:

Published social care data on [StatsWales](#)

Local authority social services annual reports (published on local authority websites)
[National Outcomes Framework](#)

Welsh Government policy teams' input in responding to the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 Evaluation test questions](#)

This report aims to follow the same structure as the local authority social services annual reports that was stipulated in the [statutory guidance](#). This means that evidence gathered from local authorities can be more easily compiled into a single report.

This report will aim to answer each of the test questions posed by the evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. These answers will be added as standalone boxes at points throughout the report. Each answer comprises of how local authorities, stakeholders and Welsh Government have responded to these areas over the last year. Each question is posed with the start of “What has been done to improve...”.

It should be noted that generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) was used to support the production of this report. Welsh Government made use of CoPilot, the Microsoft AI tool, to summarise relevant information from the 22 local authority social services annual reports and organise them into the relevant sections. All references, quotes and examples have been independently checked by the drafting team.

4. Context section

Social care is provided to both children and adults, but in different ways. Adult social care in Wales is a broad system designed to support adults who need help due to age, disability, illness, or other vulnerabilities. Local authorities provide care needs assessments to people that are referred for social care. In 2023-24, [local authorities assessed](#) nearly 70,000 adults. Of those, more than one in three required a care and support plan. This means, in [March 2024](#), 48,519 adults had a care and support plan.

In 2023, the [adult social care sector](#) in Wales generated £4.6 billion in value and supported 116,700 full-time equivalent jobs through direct, indirect, and induced impacts. This represents around 6.98% of Wales’s total GVA, highlighting its importance to the Welsh economy.

Children’s social care in Wales is the statutory system that safeguards and supports children who cannot live safely at home, providing interventions from family support to fostering, adoption, and residential care under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The scale is significant: in [March 2024](#), 7,200 children were looked after, with 1,955 [entering care in the year](#), mostly due to abuse or neglect. Wales has one of the highest care rates globally, with more than 1% of all children in care, an 89% rise since 2003.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 11. refreshing and redefining the interconnected thinking underlying the key principles of the Act, to re-engage people and keep the principles dynamic?

Local authorities are refreshing the Act's principles by embedding them in day-to-day practice, leadership and engagement, using locally led approaches to keep them relevant and dynamic:

- **Bridgend:** Uses story panels and "Most Significant Change" feedback, supported by strengths-based training, to centre voice, choice and co-production.
- **Torfaen and Neath Port Talbot:** Emphasise regular engagement and inclusive dialogue with citizens and practitioners to renew the Act's principles
- **Wrexham and Pembrokeshire:** Stress strong leadership and collaboration to embed principles and sustain shared learning and innovation.

Adult services

Adult social care comprises several key components:

1. Personal Care & Support

- **Domiciliary Care (Home Care):** Assistance with daily living tasks such as washing, dressing, meal preparation, and medication. As of 31st of March 2025, [CIW reported](#) that 34,186 adults were supported by domiciliary care services. In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £257.0m on domiciliary care across Wales for adults aged 65 or older.
- **Residential Care:** Care homes providing 24-hour support for those who cannot live independently. As of 31st of March 2025, [CIW reported](#) that 10,376 adults were supported by residential (care home without nursing) care services. In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £286.8m on residential care across Wales for adults aged 65 or older.
- **Nursing Care:** Residential settings with qualified nurses for complex health needs. As of 31st of March 2025, [CIW reported](#) that 10,094 adults were supported by residential (care home with nursing) care services. In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £150.3m on nursing care across Wales for adults aged 65 or older.

2. Reablement & Intermediate Care

- Short-term, intensive support aimed at helping people regain independence after illness or hospital discharge. This often includes physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and personal care.
- In 2023-24, local authorities provided 9,327 reablement packages in Wales ([Reablement](#)).

3. Day Services

- Community-based activities for social interaction, skills development, and respite for carers.
- Includes day centres for older adults and those with learning disabilities. [Local authorities reported](#) providing day care services to 4,210 adults in 2023-24.

- In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £15.6m on day care services across Wales for adults aged 65 or older.

4. Supported Living or accommodation

- Housing arrangements for adults with learning disabilities or mental health needs, enabling independent living with tailored support.
- While adults can secure their own supported living arrangements, [local authorities provided](#) supported accommodation to 3,470 adults in 2023-24.
- In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £29.8m on supported living or accommodation across Wales for adults aged 65 or older.

5. Direct Payments & Self-Directed Support

- Financial arrangements allowing individuals to manage their own care by employing personal assistants or purchasing services.
- In 2023-24, [local authorities](#) provided direct payments to 6,000 adults, the majority of which live in their own homes.
- In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £30.6m on supported living or accommodation across Wales for adults aged 65 or older.

6. Carer Support

- Services for unpaid carers, including respite care, advice, and financial assistance.
- [Local authorities](#) provided 7,125 carers needs assessments in 2023-24 and reported that over a quarter (27.7%) of adults receiving care and support had a carer who is known to the local authority.

7. Safeguarding & Protection

- Systems to protect adults at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. This process includes safeguarding enquiries and multi-agency interventions.
- [In 2023-24](#) there were 18,169 reports of adults suspected of being at risk of abuse or neglect, which led to 15,037 where it was considered necessary for enquires to be made and 5,075 safeguarding investigations concluded in the year.

8. Specialist Services

- Mental health support, substance misuse services, and care for people with sensory impairments or complex needs.
- As of [March 2024](#), of the 45,685 adults with a care and support plan, 2,465 (5.4%) were reported to have a sight impairment, 1,935 (4.2%) were reported to have a hearing impairment and 1,690 (3.7%) were reported to have a long-term mental illness.
- In addition to this of those adults with a care and support plan [on March 2024](#) who had at least one recorded impairment, 19.9% of adults were recorded as having two types of impairments and 5.7% of adults were recorded as having three of more types of impairments

9. Equipment & Adaptations

- Provision of aids (e.g., grab rails, hoists) and home adaptations to promote independence.
- In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £10.0m on supported living or accommodation across Wales for adults aged 65 or older.

10. Information, Advice & Assistance

- First point of contact for individuals seeking help, mandated under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
- [Across Wales, in 202324](#), there were 190,000 contacts to adult services, with two thirds being initial contacts from people who were not already receiving care or support. Over half of these initial contacts then went on to receive advice or assistance.

Children's services

Children's social care in Wales is focused on safeguarding, supporting families, and ensuring children's rights and well-being. It comprises of:

1. Early Help & Family Support

- **Preventative Services:** Designed to support families before problems escalate, including parenting programs, family centres, and advice services.
- **Flying Start & Families First:** Targeted programs for early years and vulnerable families. In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £151.6m on Children's Centres/Flying Start and Early Years across Wales for children and families.

2. Child Protection

- Multi-agency arrangements to protect children from abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Regional Safeguarding Boards coordinate child protection and serious case reviews.
- **Child Protection Register:** Children at significant risk are listed and monitored. [In 2023-24](#), 3,926 children or young people were placed on the child protection register in Wales, the majority of which were under the age of 10 years old.
- **Strategy Discussions & Conferences:** Formal processes to assess risk and plan interventions. [In 2023-24](#), there were 28,126 Initial Strategy Meetings for children, 17,762 of these progressed to Section 47 enquiries and 3,951 then went onto a Child Protection Conference.
- In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £179.8m on safeguarding across Wales for children and young people.

3. Children in need of care and support

- Support for children who require extra help to achieve well-being but are not in immediate danger. [In 2023-24](#), there were 17,515 children or young people that had a care and support plan with their local authority
- Services provided can include respite care, specialist support for disabilities, and educational assistance as well as entering care or going through safeguarding procedures.
- In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £105.9m on family support across Wales.

4. Children looked after (CLA)

- Children who cannot live safely at home and [are placed in](#):
 - **Foster Care** - 4,875 children (31st March 2024)
 - **Residential Care Homes** - 885 children (31st March 2024)
 - **Kinship Care** (with relatives) – 980 children (31st March 2024)
- Local authorities act as corporate parents, ensuring health, education, and emotional well-being.
- In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £554.7 m on children looked after services across Wales for children and young people, making this the biggest area of expenditure for either children's or adults' services. Despite making up a small proportion of the children looked after, residential care homes accounted for approximately half of the spend on children looked after services.

5. Adoption & Permanency

- Services to secure permanent homes for children who cannot return to birth families and includes recruitment and support for adoptive parents.
- [In 2023-24](#), 155 children were placed for adoption by local authorities.

6. Leaving Care

- When a child in care reaches the age of 16, they start receiving help with housing, education, and employment as a care leaver up to age 25.
- [As of 31st of March 2024](#), there were 4,098 care leavers in Wales. The majority of these are category 3 care leavers, which means that they are aged between 18 and 21 years.

7. Youth Justice

- Youth Justice Services in Wales, are multi-agency teams that work with children aged 10–17 who have offended or are at risk of offending.
- In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) £21.3m on youth justice services across Wales.

Leadership

Social care delivery in Wales is guided by a robust legislative framework that delegates responsibility to local authorities. While Welsh Government provides national leadership and oversight to ensure quality, accountability, and continuous improvement. At the heart of this system is the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, which mandates local authorities to assess, plan, and provide support for adults and children, including safeguarding responsibilities. The local authorities deliver services both directly and through commissioning arrangements with private and voluntary sector organisations, adhering to statutory Codes of Practice to ensure consistency and uphold individual rights across the country.

Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) lead on partnership working and provide collaborative governance, embedding partnership working across a range of partners including health

boards and voluntary sectors. Their core function is to improve population well-being and service outcomes, particularly for people with complex needs, through joint commissioning and strategic oversight. RPBs are required to produce regional population assessments and area plans, report annually to Welsh Ministers, and demonstrate citizen engagement and co-production in shaping services across their region.

Local Authority Leadership Structures

Leadership within local authorities is structured around the statutory role of the Director of Social Services (DoSS), appointed under [section 144 of the Act](#). The DoSS advises on strategy, ensures statutory compliance, oversees safeguarding and workforce development, and integrates social care with health, housing and education services. Reporting directly to the Chief Executive and working with elected members, the DoSS is supported by Heads of Service for Adults and Children. This structure promotes strategic coherence across prevention and care pathways, fosters partnerships with the NHS, housing, and voluntary sectors, and maintains regulatory compliance as set out in the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016.

National Oversight and Performance Monitoring

National social care oversight is provided by the [Chief Social Care Officer for Wales](#), who offers professional leadership, advises Ministers, and drives integration between health and social care. Supported by the [National Office for Care and Support](#) (National Office), established in 2024, the Chief Social Care Officer has a team to drive forward improvements in social care to bring the best outcomes for the people in Wales as well as coordinating policy development, improving and transforming commissioning standards, and the [National Commissioning Framework](#), laying the groundwork for a future [National Care and Support Service](#). The National Office provides national leadership to improve outcomes, access, and user experience and brings together local authorities, service users, carers, and partners to drive improvement, innovation, and integration across health and social care.

Performance monitoring of social care delivery is a multi-faceted process involving data reporting, independent inspection, and public scrutiny. Local authorities submit annual performance data to the Welsh Government, covering key metrics such as assessments, safeguarding timeliness, and reablement outcomes. This information is published for transparency and benchmarking.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) undertakes thematic and regulatory inspections and reviews. Findings are made public, and improvement plans are mandated when necessary. Welsh Ministers retain the authority to intervene if standards are not met, guided by statutory Codes of Practice and guidance. Collectively, these mechanisms ensure that local authorities deliver safe, effective, and continually improving services that align with national priorities.

Variations in Local Delivery

While all Welsh local authorities operate under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act - requiring a Director of Social Services and supported governance structures - the implementation varies locally. For example, Carmarthenshire reported benefiting from stable leadership, enabling long-term planning and consistent governance. Rhondda Cynon Taff described how their leadership within social services remains robust, with the Director for Social Services forming part of the Council's Corporate Senior Leadership Team.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 10: balance between the sometimes competing tensions of the duty to provide locally determined provision to meet social care needs (as identified by the Population Assessments and defined in Area Plans), and the importance of providing ‘universal’ social care provision irrespective of geography which avoids a ‘postcode lottery’ being perceived?

Local authorities are balancing locally tailored provision with national standards to ensure equitable social care access across Wales and avoid a postcode lottery:

- **Conwy and Denbighshire County Councils** jointly operate the *Bwthyn y Ddôl* assessment centre, providing consistent assessment and access regardless of local authority boundaries.
- **Cardiff Council** delivers universal access through its integrated *Family Advice, Support and Protection Hub*, ensuring consistent entry points to children’s services across the city.
- **All local authorities** through Regional Partnership Boards and Directors of Social Services, align local delivery with Wales-wide minimum standards using joint funding arrangements and Population Needs Assessments.

System

Strengths:

The strengths of the Welsh social care system are evident. The Chief Social Care Officer role brings sector-wide benefits and is central to Wales’s ambition to create a more cohesive, sustainable, and a person-centred National Care and Support Service.

Clear accountability is monitored through regular data collection and through the local authority social services annual reports, which reinforce how local authorities are demonstrating integration with broader local authority plans ensure alignment with corporate priorities. Commitment to partnership working is highlighted in the Pembrokeshire and Conwy reports, which focus on multi-agency collaboration, particularly in prevention and early intervention. There is also clear evidence of investment in leadership development through structured programmes, strengthening succession planning. Reports also indicate that local authorities are demonstrating governance adaptability, prioritising safeguarding in response to serious child protection cases, reflecting strong crisis management.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 1: delivery of social care such that it reinforces compassionate, relationship centred forms of care and support services.

Welsh local authorities are strengthening compassionate, relationship-centred social care through trauma-informed, strengths-based and co-produced practice:

- **Bridgend** uses the *Signs of Safety* model to build trust and work collaboratively with families.
- **Isle of Anglesey** is a “*Trauma Informed Island*”, with 700+ staff and partners trained and reflective supervision embedded.
- **Conwy and Cardiff** invest in co-production and peer support, so services are shaped by ‘what matters’ to people.

System

Challenges:

Significant challenges persist within services. Workforce instability, as seen in some local authorities, is marked by persistent vacancies, especially in senior management positions in children’s services and mental health, leading to reliance on interim arrangements. Resource constraints in areas limit innovation and can dilute governance effectiveness, often forcing local authorities to focus on statutory duties at the expense of transformation. Local authorities describe the complexity of integrated governance makes maintaining clear accountability between local authority and health board roles challenging. There is also the tension of balancing immediate risk management with long-term service development.

Workforce

Workforce Size and Composition

The social care workforce in Wales has continued to grow modestly in recent years but this growth has not yet translated into system-wide workforce stability. [Social Care Wales](#) estimated the social care workforce has increased from 81,000 in 2022 to 82,265 in 2023 and further to 82,875 by late 2024, reflecting sustained recruitment activity and improved data coverage across the sector.

Vacancy levels have remained persistently high, peaking at [5,323 in 2022](#) (about 9%) but holding steady at 5,346 in 2024. Although the workforce has continued to grow, vacancy levels have remained broadly stable, suggesting that recruitment gains have primarily offset increasing demand and complexity rather than reducing overall workforce pressure. These shortages continue to pressure on services, particularly in children’s services and specialist roles, and contribute to reliance on agency staffing in some areas.

Workforce churn remains a significant concern. While 2022 recorded a small net gain in staff numbers, survey data from Social Care Wales indicates continued risk to retention. In 2023, 26% of respondents reported being ‘quite’ or ‘very’ likely to leave within 12 months, and 44% anticipated leaving within five years. These trends persisted into 2025, underlining the importance of sustained action to improve retention, progression and workforce wellbeing, as reported by [Social Care Wales](#).

Local authority social services annual reports provide a granular view of workforce challenges and responses. Authorities such as Neath Port Talbot, Anglesey, Bridgend, and Carmarthen reported modest turnover rates (generally under 15%) and high retention. Local authorities have evidenced effective succession planning especially in statutory services and specialist roles. Other authorities, such as Ceredigion and Conwy, face more acute challenges, with high vacancy rates (e.g., 22% in Conwy’s Children’s Services) and reliance on agency staff. Bridgend’s international recruitment and Social Care Academi, and Carmarthen’s Care Academi, are highlighted as best practice, winning a 2025 Social Care Wales award in the ‘developing and inspiring the workforce’ category.

Overall, the evidence points to a workforce that is growing but remains uneven in stability. Addressing vacancy levels, strengthening retention and spreading effective practice will be critical to sustaining services and delivering consistent, high-quality care across Wales.

Contractual Stability and Diversity

Permanent staffing contracts have increased over time, rising from 78% in 2021 to 80% in 2022, and [reaching 87.2% by 2024](#). This improvement suggests greater employment stability within the sector. While in 2025, 12% of social care workers reporting that were employed on a zero-hours contract, which is similar to 2024.

Diversity data shows limited change over the last three years. In 2021, 95% of the workforce identified as White, and by 2024, 8.9% identified as being from Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

Gender distribution has remained stable, with women consistently making up 80–82% of the workforce. Age profiling reveals that local authority staff tend to be older than those in commissioned services, with just over half of those working in local authorities being over the age of 45, which drops to 40% in commissioned services.

The sector is committed to inclusion and diversity, with anti-racist and LGBTQ+ action plans, cultural competence training, and promotion of Welsh language skills. Investment in professional development is also widespread. Most authorities report having “grow our own” programmes, supporting staff through degree sponsorships, apprenticeships, and secondments.

Well-being and Support

Despite the challenges, employee well-being and support has improved. In [2023](#), 71% of staff felt supported by colleagues and 61% by managers. In [2025](#), and similarly to in 2024, most social care workers reported positively about the support being offered, with 73% saying they felt helped and supported by their manager (70% in 2024) and 81% saying they felt helped and supported by their colleagues (79% in 2024).

Leadership stability and staff well-being are priorities for local authorities. Blaenau Gwent’s workforce strategy is a clear example of this, and Gwynedd focuses on leadership stability through regular meetings and direct reporting. Well-being initiatives include counselling, occupational health, and employee assistance programmes. Staff engagement is fostered through surveys and peer support networks. Succession planning is a concern, especially with an ageing workforce.

Financial stress is a common theme for the social care workforce, but the results from the Social Care Wales “[Have your say](#)” survey suggest the situation is improving. In 2023, 33% reported finding it quite or very difficult to manage financially, but in 2025, this had dropped

to 22%. Similarly, in 2023, 82% said their financial situation was more difficult than the previous year, but this has fallen to 48% by 2025.

A significant positive development has been the implementation of the Real Living Wage (RLW) for social care workers. Introduced in April 2022, [by 2024–25](#), over 80% of social care workers were earning at least the RLW. This marks a substantial improvement in pay rates.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 4: workforce recruitment and retention, to ensure workforce quality, sufficiency and sustainability?

Welsh local authorities are strengthening workforce recruitment and retention through local innovation and national reform, but persistent vacancies mean sustainability remains fragile:

- **Bridgend** – “Grow our own” apprenticeships and traineeships have improved retention and reduced agency use.
- **Isle of Anglesey** – Trauma-informed training, reflective supervision and qualification sponsorship support workforce wellbeing and stability.
- **Cardiff** – Centralised recruitment, university partnerships and the Cardiff Cares Academy have strengthened recruitment, including migrant workforce support.

Financial resources

The structure for social care funding in Wales is shaped by a nuanced blend of national direction and local flexibility, aiming to promote equity, quality, and sustainability. At the heart of this system is the [Revenue Support Grant \(RSG\)](#), allocated to local authorities by Welsh Government, based on demographic and need-driven factors.

[Local authorities in Wales were allocated £5.72 billion in 2024-25](#) through the combined Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and non-domestic rates (NDR), as part of the core local government funding settlement, which is an increase from £5.50 billion in 2023-24. In 2023-24, [local authorities spent](#) a total of £2.85 billion on social services (net current revenue expenditure), which is 51.8% of their total budget.

In addition, supplementary grants are offered throughout the year to address specific pressures or policy priorities, such as the [£120 million package for 2024–25](#), which included funding for reablement initiatives and capped domiciliary care charges at £100 per week. Local Authorities combine the RSG, targeted grants, and means-tested charges for adult services to fund services. Targeted funding for reablement and hospital discharge supports preventative strategies and reduces dependency on institutional care.

National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support

Local authorities are responsible for meeting the needs of their local population and providing services through a mix of internally and externally provided services. The [National Framework for Commissioning of Care and Support in Wales](#) came into effect on 1st September 2024. It sets national principles and standards to guide commissioning practices across the whole commissioning cycle. As a result, Wales has moved away from market-led models, embracing values-based care. The National Framework drives consistency, quality, and ethical standards, moving away from price to focus on quality and value. Local

authorities are increasingly adopting outcome-based commissioning, linking funding to measurable results and improving accountability.

The use of digital tools and data-driven planning is growing, enabling better resource alignment. Flintshire is an example of this with methodologies like Care Cubed to support fair provider fees and market stability. One of Flintshire's 2025/6 priorities is to "Develop a fair price for care using Care Cubed system".

The Welsh approach demonstrates strengths in its commitment to equity, holistic care, and long-term outcomes. Charging caps safeguard individuals in need of care and support, while the statutory National framework for commissioning care and support code of practice reduces geographical inconsistencies. The balance between national standards and local flexibility remains central to service delivery.

Systemic Challenges

Despite its strengths, the system faces persistent challenges. In 2023, the [Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru \(ADSSC\)](#) reported that local authorities are extremely concerned about the current pressures facing social care. The report highlighted that demand for services is increasing, and budgets are not increasing in pace with demand.

"For the foreseeable future, the Council is required to reduce budgetary spend significantly as we are unable to keep up with the cost pressures caused by growing demand and price rises. The Directorate will continue to undertake service reviews to identify areas where efficiencies can be realised leading to a reduction in expenditure or an increase in income generation as appropriate." – Vale of Glamorgan

Whilst local autonomy can be beneficial, it sometimes results in fragmented allocation and variable service quality. Implementing the new National Commissioning Framework aims to provide consistency across local authority commissioning practices, the National Office is providing implementation support for local commissioners to work towards meeting these standards. Market fragmentation is another concern, given the dominance of independent and third-sector providers.

Similarly, resource allocation methods vary, but all local authorities operate under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, drawing from core budgets, grants, and, occasionally, pooled arrangements with health boards. Examples include Ceredigion's focus on sustainability, North Wales's regional commissioning and fair pricing strategies, and Cardiff's investment in preventative care. The distinction between children's and adult services adds further complexity, with some local authorities reporting shortfalls in children's care and others benefiting from additional grants in adult services.

Across social care, prevention is recognised as a vital investment in people's health and wellbeing. However, such investment competes with immediate statutory obligations. Despite this pressure, preventative services are prioritised in areas like Pembrokeshire and Anglesey, with upfront investment in early intervention designed to manage long-term demand. Local Authorities like Bridgend and Flintshire are investing in digital transformation to modernise service delivery, although these initiatives require significant capital.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 3: sufficiency, appropriateness and sustainability of funding so that everyone who has needs as defined by the Act can be supported and cared for?

Local authorities are strengthening the sufficiency and sustainability of social care funding through better planning, prevention-focused investment and collaborative commissioning, but rising demand and costs continue to test long-term affordability:

- **Ceredigion** has adopted integrated financial planning and robust budget monitoring to better align resources with demographic pressures and statutory duties under the Act.
- **Cardiff** is implementing a five-year Adult Services Development Plan that prioritises prevention and “right-sizing” care to achieve savings while maintaining service quality.
- **Flintshire and Vale of Glamorgan** are using pooled budgets and regional commissioning to promote fair, sustainable funding and reduce disparities in care fees

5. Performance assessment section

This section seeks to address the [eight quality standards](#) under four sections: People, Prevention, Partnership and Integration and Wellbeing. These standards are quoted in each of these four sections. This assessment is completed for both children’s and adult’s services and describes how the local authorities have aimed to achieve these standards throughout the year.

The self-assessment approach asks local authorities to address the following four questions:

- What do we know about the quality and impact of what we are doing?
- How do we know? e.g. what evidence from research, engagement and the metrics are we using to inform this assessment?
- What are we doing well and how can we do better? What are our priorities for improvement particularly over the coming year
- What progress did we make on the areas for improvement identified in last year’s report? What difference did we make?

People

Quality Standards:

*“All people are equal partners who have **choice, voice and control** over their lives and are able to achieve **what matters** to them”*

*Effective **leadership** is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported **workforce** working towards a shared vision”.*

What is happening across local authorities

Based on the analysis of local authority social services annual reports and available national data, the actions being undertaken are:

- Local authorities report continuing to embed person-centred approaches through “What matters” conversations and strengths-based practice models. These conversations are now standard in care planning, ensuring individuals articulate their priorities and shape their support.
- Some local authorities have sought to support choice and control in service provision using “micro-enterprises”, such as Rhondda Cynon Taff, which describes establishing 34 “micro-enterprises” over the last two years to support their ageing population.
- Local authorities have expanded participation forums, youth councils, and feedback mechanisms to capture what matters most to children and families, such as in Neath Port Talbot, who make use of Most Significant Change methods to gain insight into the experiences of young people using their services.
- Choice over services is increasingly supported through direct payments. [In 2023-24](#), 6,217 adults were supported with a direct payment, an increase from 5,295 in 2020/21.

“Direct Payments can promote choice; voice, control and flexibility by enabling and empowering individuals to meet wellbeing outcomes as agreed in the Individual Assessment.” – Vale of Glamorgan

- There is a strong emphasis on edge-of-care services, family support teams, and trauma-informed approaches to reduce the need for statutory intervention.
- Support for diverse communities is evident in commitments to Welsh language services, equality objectives, and cultural competence (see [Other sources of information](#)).

“Our purpose is to place people at the centre of their own care. Our expectation is that each resident’s voice is heard by our service and listened to; people can speak for themselves, and they have control over any decisions that are made.” (Swansea)

- Local authorities emphasise workforce training and supervision as critical to delivering high-quality care. Examples include rolling out strengths-based practice training, safeguarding refresher training, and leadership development programmes. Supervision frameworks are being strengthened to ensure reflective practice and staff well-being.
- Effective leadership remains a priority, with several local authorities restructuring management teams to improve accountability and support.
- Local authorities report investment in leadership programmes and workforce strategies, including recruitment campaigns and retention initiatives. Many have introduced new roles (e.g., team leaders, practice leads) to strengthen supervision and support.
- Several authorities have adopted digital tools for care planning and communication, aiming to make processes more transparent and inclusive.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 7: the range and quality of innovative forms of citizen-directed support available under the Act including, but importantly not limited to, Direct Payments?

Local authorities are widening citizen-directed support beyond Direct Payments, offering more personalised, flexible and co-produced options that strengthen choice and control.

- **Cardiff:** Micro-enterprise programme and digital Advocacy Gateway enable tailored support and culturally appropriate personal assistant choice.
- **Conwy:** Enhanced Direct Payments include alternatives to residential care, council-managed indirect payments, and support for self-employed carers and micro-agencies.
- **Across authorities:** Co-produced support plans, personalised budgets and digital platforms are being used to increase transparency, flexibility and citizen control.

People

Strengths:

- Direct payments and flexible commissioning models allow individuals to tailor support. Digital engagement tools and advocacy services further enhance autonomy.
- Investment in early help and family support is reducing escalation to statutory services in several regions.
- Widely embedded in assessment processes, ensuring care plans reflect personal priorities rather than service-led decisions.
- Local authorities demonstrate clear progress in involving children and families in shaping services. Examples include structured consultation exercises and child-friendly planning tools.
- Welsh language strategies and equality plans underpin efforts to support diverse communities. Local authorities are required to provide bilingual documentation and some also provide cultural awareness training.

“We continue to support and encourage the use of Welsh Language in the workplace. To that end, we monitor Welsh language skills, so we can offer support through the medium of Welsh where required or requested.” (Torfaen)

- Training in strengths-based practice and safeguarding is common, alongside structured supervision to maintain quality.
- Restructures and performance monitoring frameworks demonstrate strong governance and a shared vision.
- Directors and senior managers are actively engaging with frontline teams and community stakeholders, reinforcing a shared vision for children’s services.
- Reports from Anglesey and Bridgend note relatively low turnover and strong retention rates, supported by wellbeing initiatives and flexible working arrangements. In Anglesey, retention rates were 96% across Adult Services (including Provider Unit). Children & Families Services turnover rate is similar at 6% with retention at 97%.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 2: way that assessments for social care support are undertaken, when, and by whom so that they are better able to deliver the best possible well-being outcomes for individuals and carers?

Social care assessments in Wales are becoming more timely, multi-disciplinary and person-centred, improving outcomes through earlier, strengths-based decision-making:

- **Isle of Anglesey:** Trauma-informed, relationship-based training for 700+ staff supports more empathetic and person-centred assessments.
- **Conwy:** Multi-disciplinary Community Resource Teams deliver holistic assessments and support timely hospital discharge.
- **Pembrokeshire:** Co-produced assessments embed “what matters” conversations to shape outcomes and prevention-focused support.

People:

Challenges

- Recruitment and retention challenges persist, limiting the ability to maintain a “highly skilled, well-qualified” workforce. Despite progress, workforce shortages remain acute in certain authorities, particularly in specialist roles such as child protection social workers.
- While “What matters” conversations are widely referenced, the depth and consistency of implementation vary between authorities.
- While engagement structures exist, some reports acknowledge variability in how children’s views influence final decisions.
- Although Welsh language provision is improving, engagement with ethnic minority communities is less consistently reported.
- Despite 3,059 adults being identified as needing an [independent advocate](#), only 1,684 (55%) were provided with one. Similarly, 3,051 “[active offers](#)” of advocacy were made to children, young people and families; 44.2% resulted in an advocate being provided. However, this may be due to offered being declined.
- Some local authorities struggle with incomplete performance data, affecting trend analysis and service planning.
- Rising demand and complexity of cases continue to strain resources, limiting the ability to deliver fully personalised support.
- Smaller authorities report difficulties in creating robust succession plans and maintaining leadership continuity.

Local Authority Social Services Priorities for the Coming Year

As part of the local authority social services annual reports, there is a requirement for each social services department to reflect on what the priorities are for the coming year. Across local authorities, these are the common themes:

- Expand direct payment schemes and digital platforms for self-service options.

“As an Authority we are committed to further expanding Direct Payments. We aim to increase the number of individuals accessing Direct Payments to recruit more Personal Assistants, and last year we increased the Direct Payments hourly rate and the Personal Assistant hourly wage with the aim to enhance these during 26/27.” – Vale of Glamorgan

- Move beyond consultation to genuine co-production, ensuring children’s voices shape service design and delivery.
- Standardise tools and training to ensure consistent application across all assessment teams.
- Improve cultural competence through targeted training and engagement with minority communities; continue Welsh language skills development. Several local authorities plan to integrate cultural competence training and equality objectives into workforce development.
- Address recruitment challenges through career pathways, leadership development, and well-being initiatives.
- Expand “grow your own” schemes, enhance training pathways, and improve recruitment campaigns to attract diverse candidates.
- Develop structured leadership programmes and mentoring schemes to sustain effective management at all levels.
- Embed new structures and enhance performance monitoring to demonstrate impact on well-being and independence for children and families.

Reflections on Last Year’s Social Service Priorities

Local authorities are also asked to report progress against the priorities and objectives that they set last year. Across Wales the reports note:

- Progress is evident in embedding person-centred approaches and improving leadership structures.
- Most local authorities have advanced engagement mechanisms, but translating feedback into tangible service changes remains a work in progress.
- “What matters” conversations are now routine in most authorities, and direct payment uptake has grown.
- Workforce training has expanded, and initiatives such as sponsorship for social work degrees and wellbeing programmes have improved retention, yet recruitment challenges persist.
- Welsh language commitments have advanced, with more local authorities offering bilingual services, but engagement with ethnic minorities needs further focus.
- Significant strides have been made in prevention and early-help, with expanded family support services and trauma-informed practice becoming embedded in several authorities.
- Leadership reforms have strengthened oversight. Structural reforms (e.g., Wrexham’s new leadership model) have strengthened accountability, though succession planning remains uneven.
- Data quality improvements are ongoing but not yet universal.

Conclusion

The findings from local authority social services annual reports and available data have been mapped back against the two quality standards.

“All people are equal partners who have choice, voice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them.”

- Person-centred practice is embedded: “What matters” conversations are now routine, strengthening voice, choice, and control.
- Direct Payments are being used, giving people more autonomy and flexibility in arranging support.
- Engagement mechanisms through youth forums, participation structures, advocacy and bilingual communication support equal partnership, even if consistency varies.
- Co-production is increasing, though not yet universal in depth or impact.
- Welsh language provision is improving, enhancing rights-based access for Cymraeg speakers.
- Gaps remain; minority ethnic engagement, advocacy access, and data quality still limit equal partnership in some areas.

The sector is demonstrably moving towards genuine partnership with people who access care, but equity and consistency of voice remain areas for improvement.

“Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly-skilled, well-qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision.”

- Leadership restructuring and strengthening are visible across authorities, improving accountability and clarity in roles.
- Workforce training and supervision are prioritised, supporting practice quality and reflective skills.
- Leadership engagement with frontline staff contributes to a shared vision and better oversight.
- Workforce stability, however, varies significantly—children’s and specialist services continue to face acute shortages.
- Recruitment and retention difficulties impede delivery of a consistently skilled workforce nationwide.
- Succession planning remains uneven, particularly in smaller or high-pressure authorities.

Leadership is strengthening and workforce support is improving, but persistent instability prevents the workforce from fully meeting the standard’s intent across Wales.

Prevention

Quality Standards:

*“The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is **prevented** whilst ensuring that the best **outcomes** for people are achieved”*

*“**Resilience within communities** is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and/or support including **carers** to learn develop and participate in society”*

What is happening across local authorities

Based on the analysis of local authority social services annual reports and available national data, the actions being undertaken are:

- Local Authorities have expanded community hubs and Local Area Coordination programmes, linking individuals to local resources and activities that prevent isolation and escalation of need.
- Most local authorities have strengthened multi-agency Early Help Hubs or Family Centres, providing advice, parenting programmes, and practical support before issues escalate.
- Nationally, in 2023-24, [just over half of all new contacts](#) to adult social care services and nearly 40% of [contacts to children's services](#), received information, advice or assistance (IAA), which potentially eliminates the need for interventions.
- Authorities recognise unpaid carers as central to prevention strategies. Carers are increasingly involved in co-production, shaping services that meet their needs and those of the people they support.
- Carers' assessments and respite services are being promoted to reduce stress and maintain family stability. Some local authorities report bespoke training for carers to help them support children's development and participation in society.
- Dedicated workers and peer support groups are being introduced to reduce isolation and improve wellbeing for young carers.

“Throughout the year we have continued to support local carers groups like the dementia group and the Cwmbran Carers & Friends Group, who meet each week for bowling, pool and coffee mornings.” (Torfaen)

- Collaboration with voluntary organisations underpins many preventative initiatives. Examples include befriending schemes, meal delivery services, and community transport, often delivered by charities and local groups. Collaboration with voluntary organisations is strong for family support, particularly in delivering community-based services such as play schemes, youth mentoring, and mental health support
- Local authorities are investing in community resilience through play schemes, youth engagement projects, and targeted support for vulnerable families. These initiatives aim to keep children within their families and communities wherever safe and possible.
- Local authorities reported that of the 48,355 [social care assessments completed for children in 2023-24](#), 29,453 (61%) determined that needs could be met by other means, such as preventative services
- Some local authorities reference partnerships with social enterprises to deliver flexible care options, particularly in rural areas. These models promote sustainability and community ownership of services. A few local authorities reference commissioning models that include co-operatives and user-led services, ensuring care solutions are shaped by those with lived experience.
- Joint working with health partners supports more timely hospital discharge and reablement, reducing escalation of need and promoting recovery at home. In 2023-24, 9,327 packages of reablement were completed.
- There is strong evidence of collaboration with health, education, and voluntary sectors to identify needs early and provide wraparound support. Joint panels and shared data systems are increasingly used to streamline referrals.
- Several authorities highlight efforts to tackle digital exclusion, enabling children and families to access online learning and community resources.

Prevention

Strengths:

- All local authorities demonstrate alignment with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act and Well-being of Future Generations principles, embedding prevention as a statutory and cultural priority.
- Some local authorities have described Early Response Teams and Local Area Coordination which illustrate pro-active approaches to preventing escalation.
- Local authorities report increased capacity in family support teams and improved accessibility through community hubs and outreach programmes.
- Local authority respite programmes and training initiatives empower unpaid carers, reducing breakdowns in care arrangements.
- Early help hubs and third-sector partnerships enable people to participate in society and maintain independence.
- Integrated approaches with health and education are reducing duplication and improving outcomes for families with complex needs.
- Voluntary organisations provide agility and cultural competence, particularly in rural and minority ethnic communities. Social enterprises and co-operatives provide flexible, locally tailored services, particularly where traditional provision is limited.
- Many local authorities have strengthened mechanisms for listening to children and families, ensuring services reflect lived experience.

“Pembrokeshire’s Early Help Team aims to target early help and support for children, young people and families with a focus on ensuring they have the access to the right services at the right time”.

- Local authorities are increasingly supporting the delivery of reablement to adults to reduce their need for ongoing support.
- Examples of innovative practice include trauma-informed approaches, targeted mental health support in schools, and culturally sensitive services for minority ethnic families.
- Dedicated programmes are improving access to carer education and wellbeing, reducing the risk of isolation and poor outcomes.

Prevention

Challenges:

Local authorities also reported some of the challenges they are facing in the delivery of social services:

- Despite prevention efforts, authorities report increasing numbers of families presenting with multiple and complex needs, often linked to poverty, housing insecurity, and mental health.
- Budget pressures limit the scale and sustainability of preventative programmes, with some local authorities noting reliance on short-term grant funding, especially for rural transport and community hubs.
- Recruitment challenges, particularly in specialist roles such as family support workers and social workers, affect the ability to sustain community-based roles and deliver timely interventions.

“Recruitment within Adult Services is relatively stable, with a turnover last year of 8% consistent with the average turnover figures across the Council. Retention rates were 96% across Adult Services (including Provider Unit). Children & Families Services turnover rate is similar at 6% with retention at 97%”. (Anglesey)

- Online IAA platforms risk excluding older adults and those without internet access.
- Variation in preventative services and third-sector engagement means outcomes differ significantly between authorities.
- While progress is evident, some local authorities report gaps in respite provision and emotional support for carers.

“Unpaid carers continue to report that the demands of their caring role can significantly affect their own wellbeing, including reduced opportunities to maintain social relationships and take part in everyday community life.” (Powys)

- While progress is evident, several reports acknowledge gaps in measuring the long-term impact of prevention initiatives, making it harder to evidence outcomes.
- Authorities recognise persistent disparities in access and outcomes for minority ethnic families and those in rural areas, requiring targeted responses.

Local Authority Social Services Priorities for the Coming Year

As part of the local authority social services annual reports, there is a requirement for each social services department to reflect on what the priorities are for the coming year. Across local authorities, these are the common themes:

- Scale up Local Area Coordination and community hubs, with stronger links to social enterprises and co-operatives.
- Enhance local networks and voluntary sector partnerships to provide sustainable, community-led support.
- Scale up co-operative and user-led services to diversify provision and empower communities.
- Expand Young Carer Support, specifically through increasing respite options, training, peer networks, and educational support.
- Expand capacity in Early Help Pathways and improve coordination between universal services and targeted interventions.
- Formalise collaboration agreements to ensure continuity and quality of preventative services.
- Address digital exclusion to ensure children and families can access online learning and support services and ensure services meet the needs of Welsh speakers and ethnic minority communities.
- Recruit and train staff for early intervention roles and support leadership in community-based models.
- Invest in recruitment campaigns, training, and wellbeing support to stabilise the workforce and build skills in trauma-informed and culturally competent practice.
- Ensure anti-racist practice and cultural competence underpin all preventative work.
- Develop robust frameworks to track outcomes and demonstrate the effectiveness of prevention strategies.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 9: understanding of underlying issues and causal factors to inform prevention strategies in social care alongside effective models, resources and organisational cultural shifts?

Local authorities are strengthening prevention by using data, insight and organisational learning to understand root causes and shift practice from crisis response to early intervention.

- **Carmarthenshire:** Uses predictive modelling, thematic reviews and lived-experience insight to target underlying causes rather than symptoms.
- **Cardiff:** Applies performance dashboards, self-assessment and a Prevention Toolkit to shape prevention programmes such as Ageing Well and Learning Disability.
- **Flintshire and Gwynedd:** Integrate intelligence systems to identify patterns linked to poverty, health inequalities and demand.

Reflections on Last Year's Social Service Priorities

Local authorities are also asked to report progress against the priorities and objectives that they set last year. Across Wales progress was reported in:

- Most local authorities have increased reach of their early help services and improved integration with statutory services, though demand continues to outpace capacity.
- There is evidence of stronger partnerships and co-production, with families more involved in shaping services.
- Community hubs and Local Area Coordination have expanded, supporting resilience and reducing isolation.
- Carer support initiatives have strengthened in some areas of Wales, offering more respite and training opportunities.
- Third sector partnerships have grown, though some local authorities note reliance on short-term funding.
- There has been increased visibility and partnership working regarding Young Carers and Third Sector engagement, but sustainability and capacity remain key challenges.
- Social enterprise involvement remains limited but is emerging as a promising model for rural service delivery.
- While initiatives such as “grow your own” programmes and flexible working have been introduced, recruitment challenges remain a significant barrier.

“Both Adult’s and Children’s Services have ongoing recruitment and retention issues, but this is in specific areas and actions have been taken to improve the situation. We have invested in our ‘grown your own’ social worker training and this will see higher numbers of existing staff in social care practitioner roles become qualified social workers over a 2 – 3-year period”. (Denbighshire)

- Progress is uneven in supporting people from diverse backgrounds; while training and policy commitments are in place, reports acknowledge the need for more tangible improvements in representation and culturally sensitive practice.
- Some improvement in data collection is noted, but consistent evaluation across Wales is still developing.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 15: quality, range, consistency, and implementation of data collection, analysis and interpretation in order to inform quality improvement and service development?

Welsh Government and local authorities are strengthening social care data to support quality improvement through new national censuses, local dashboards and improved analytics, but further consistency, shared standards and analytical capacity are needed to ensure local insight informs national decision-making and service redesign:

- **Cardiff:** Real-time dashboards support trend identification.
- **Carmarthenshire:** Predictive analytics inform prevention.
- **Across Wales:** Calls for national data standards and analyst capacity

Conclusion

The findings from local authority social services annual reports and available data have been mapped back against the two quality standards.

“The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved.”

- Prevention is embedded across local authorities through Early Help Hubs, Local Area Coordination, family support, reablement, and strong IAA pathways, all of which reduce escalation and respond early to presenting needs.
- Reablement services support thousands of adults to regain independence, directly minimising long-term care needs.
- Voluntary-sector partnerships (play schemes, mentoring, befriending, community transport) strengthen early intervention and reduce isolation and crisis risk.
- Support for unpaid carers — assessments, respite, and peer networks — is increasingly prioritised as a core preventative mechanism.
- Rising complexity of need, poverty-related pressures, workforce shortages in early-help roles, and digital exclusion all limit the full realisation of preventative impact.
- Data gaps around long-term preventative outcomes hinder authorities’ ability to quantify sustained impact.

Local authorities are making progress in preventing escalation and managing demand early, but workforce capacity, inequality of access, and limited outcome measurement continue to constrain consistent achievement of this standard.

“Resilience within communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and/or support — including carers — to learn, develop and participate in society.”

- Community-level resilience is strengthening through hubs, Local Area Coordination, youth projects, and community-based early-help activity that keep people connected and reduce isolation.
- Carers are recognised as central to resilience, with growing access to respite, training, and peer-support groups to sustain their wellbeing and capacity.

- Voluntary organisations and social enterprises play a major role in enabling participation, offering culturally competent, flexible services aligned with community need.
- Emerging user-led and co-operative models contribute to community ownership and more sustainable, locally designed preventative solutions.
- Resilience is uneven — young carers, rural communities, minority ethnic families and those experiencing digital exclusion face inequitable access to preventative support.
- Workforce shortages in early-intervention and family-support roles restrict the capacity to build and sustain resilient community networks consistently across Wales.
- Community resilience is strengthening through broad preventative activity and strong partnerships, but geography, digital exclusion, and workforce stability continue to shape uneven achievement of this standard.

Partnership and Integration

Quality Standards:

*“Effective **partnerships** are in place to commission and fully deliver fully **integrated**, high quality sustainable outcomes for people”*

*“People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as **equal partners**”*

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 13: role and status that social enterprises and co-operatives have under the Act in order to better support individuals, carers and communities?

Local authorities are strengthening the role of social enterprises and co-operatives as key partners in delivering flexible, community-based social care, embedding co-production and social value within commissioning to better support individuals, carers and communities.

- **Flintshire:** The *Micro-Care* initiative demonstrates how small, local providers—often social enterprises or co-operatives—deliver flexible, person-centred support that fills gaps left by traditional provision.
- **Across Wales (multiple local authorities):** Councils are commissioning social enterprises and co-operatives to deliver advocacy, day services and community activities, embedding co-production and social value within procurement approaches.
- **Local Authorities (Directors of Social Services):** Authorities are integrating social enterprises and co-operatives into commissioning frameworks, creating regional directories and providing capacity-building support.

What is happening across local authorities

Based on the analysis of local authority social services annual reports and available national data, the actions being undertaken are:

- Local authorities report strong collaboration within their Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) and Regional Safeguarding Boards (RSBs), and with health boards, schools, and voluntary organisations, enabling pooled budgets and joint workforce planning. Multi-agency panels and joint governance structures are increasingly used to align priorities and resources.

“Over the past year, we have worked closely with our health boards, police, third-sector organisations, social enterprises, and other local authorities to develop and deliver services that meet the needs of our population.” (Vale of Glamorgan)

- Local authorities have been using Market Stability Reports (MSRs) and Population Needs Assessments (PNAs) to identify service gaps, which inform commissioning priorities and strategies. These assessments inform service planning, identify gaps in provision, and guide investment in preventative and specialist services. Area Plans are being refreshed to reflect emerging needs and sustainability goals.
- Co-location of teams in community hubs is common, enabling social workers, health visitors, and family support staff to work side by side. Engagement with providers and the third sector is strong, particularly in delivering flexible, culturally competent services.
- Third sector engagement is growing, with local authorities’ report developing befriending schemes and community transport, and support for rural care co-operatives

- Compliance with the National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support is a key focus, with evidence-based reports underpinning market shaping.
- Local authorities are working towards the principles of the National Framework for commissioning care and support by adopting outcome-focused commissioning, promoting ethical procurement, and embedding co-production. Reports note some progress in developing transparent pricing models and strengthening provider relationships to ensure quality and sustainability.
- Commissioning now emphasises co-production, outcome-based models, and sustainability. Several local authorities have set up co-located teams for joint assessments and streamlined care planning, ensuring individuals receive timely, coordinated support.
- Co-production is embedded through advisory panels, youth forums, and lived experience groups influencing design and delivery, exemplified by citizen panels involving people in service design. New ways of working include shared digital platforms and joint workforce development programmes.
- Innovation in digital integration is underway, with local authorities trialling shared care records and joint IT platforms to improve data flow.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 8: support for those principled and motivated individuals who are in a position to champion and help embed co-productive practice?

Welsh Government and local authorities are enabling co-production by developing, supporting and recognising practitioners who champion co-productive practice, embedding this approach as a core cultural norm in social care:

- **Carmarthenshire:** Supports co-production champions through peer networks, leadership programmes and formal recognition frameworks, including toolkits and guidance, helping sustain culture change in practice.
- **Across local authorities:** Targeted workforce development, including strengths-based training and mentoring, equips motivated staff to lead and embed co-productive approaches.
- **Across local authorities:** Training, peer support and opportunities to influence policy and practice enable practitioners to shape organisational culture with progress monitored through staff and service-user feedback.

Partnership and Integration

Strengths:

- Clear alignment between local plans, regional partnerships, and national frameworks. RPBs provide strong governance for integrated planning and pooled funding.

“Across education, health, youth justice, community safety, commissioning and the wider third sector, there is a shared commitment to helping children remain safe, well and supported in their communities” – Neath Port Talbot

- Use of MSRs and PNAs ensure commissioning decisions are data-driven and responsive to population needs and ensure decisions reflect population needs and market capacity.
- Growing emphasis on involving children, young people, and carers as equal partners in service design. Citizen panels and “What matters” approach embed user voice in design and delivery.
- Several local authorities have described how they work with community organisations for flexible, locally tailored services.
- Local authorities are embedding decarbonisation in planning and commissioning.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 12: development of a culture of innovation, creativity and quality improvement, rather than just of compliance?

Local authorities are embedding innovation and continuous improvement in social care through leadership, workforce development and co-production, moving beyond a culture of compliance.

- **Isle of Anglesey:** The “*Trauma Informed Island*” programme has trained over 700 staff and partners, embedding reflective, trauma-informed practice into everyday service delivery.
- **Across Wales:** Local authorities are enabling staff and citizens to shape improvement activity, supported nationally by Social Care Wales through the *Ymlaen* strategy.
- **Across Wales:** Directors of Social Services are leading quality improvement cycles using co-production, data and digital tools to re-design services and focus on outcomes rather than compliance.

Partnership and Integration

Challenges:

- Recruitment challenges and financial constraints across health and social care limit the effectiveness of integrated models, the ability to invest in green infrastructure and negatively impact multi-agency teams and specialist roles.
- Digital integration remains patchy, with some local authorities struggling to align IT systems. Technical and governance issues continue to hinder seamless information exchange.
- Rising costs threaten sustainability of joint commissioning and climate-related investments.
- While some local authorities excel, others provide limited evidence of systematic engagement beyond statutory assessments.

Merthyr's key partners are neighbouring local authorities, Voluntary Sector and Health. "Partnership working continues to be key to help us deal with the demand in the service". (Merthyr Tydfil).

Local Authority Social Services Priorities for the Coming Year

As part of the local authority social services annual reports, there is a requirement for each social services department to reflect on what the priorities are for the coming year. Across local authorities, these are the common themes:

- Expand co-located teams and shared workforce planning with health partners.
- Use MSRs and PNAs to inform commissioning and market shaping consistently across regions.
- Formalise co-production frameworks for involving children, young people, and carers in all stages of service planning.

"Wherever possible, we will advocate for increased autonomy at a local level so that as a partnership we can use resources to build on existing strengths and tailor services to local communities." (Monmouthshire)

- Accelerate shared care records and interoperable IT systems and invest in shared spaces and interoperable systems to improve coordination.
- Develop measurable decarbonisation plans and targets for social care estates and integrate biodiversity into commissioning frameworks.
- Align all commissioning with the National Framework principles, ensuring fair fees and long-term contracts.
- Deepen joint commissioning arrangements and shared governance structures and advance ethical commissioning, transparent pricing, and outcome-focused contracts.

"Collaboration with BCUHB through the Integrated Delivery Board ensures services are better integrated to meet people's health and care needs." (Anglesey)

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 14: extent to which good practice, and system knowledge 'travels' across Wales?

Good practice and system learning are increasingly travelling across Wales through structured national and regional forums that enable local authority innovation to be shared, adapted and embedded consistently:

- **Carmarthenshire:** Through the West Wales Regional Partnership Board, joint commissioning and thematic reviews are used to share and spread effective practice across neighbouring authorities, supporting regional consistency and learning.
- **Denbighshire:** Active participation in national working groups and the use of shared toolkits has enabled learning from pilot activity to be disseminated and applied beyond the local area.
- **Conwy:** Engagement in national forums and collaborative pilots supports the transfer of practical learning, helping to align local delivery with emerging good practice across Wales.

Reflections on Last Year's Social Service Priorities

Local authorities are also asked to report progress against the priorities and objectives that they set last year. Across Wales progress was reported in:

- Local authorities report stronger regional collaboration and more integrated commissioning, though sustainability remains a concern. Early adoption of National Framework for Commissioning principles is noted, but full implementation will require cultural and operational shifts.
- Several local authorities reported reduced hospital delays and helping people to return home through joint working with health boards.

“Our hospital social work team is now part of the Home First Team/Discharge to Assess service being transformed as part of a wider Home First programme.” - Swansea

- Engagement has improved, with more local authorities reporting structured forums and youth involvement, though consistency varies. Local authorities are looking at how they can improve citizen involvement, while several local authorities reported embedding “What matters” conversations.
- Progress evident in embedding MSRs and PNAs into planning cycles but translating insights into service redesign is ongoing. MSRs inform commissioning decisions, though some local authorities note delays in updating PNAs.
- Initial decarbonisation actions have been taken, but local authorities acknowledge the need for more ambitious targets and investment. While some local authorities have advanced integration of decarbonisation into planning, most local authorities remain at early stages.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 16: population planning and engagement processes that meaningfully engage local populations about needs?

Population need planning is increasingly shaped by local engagement, with growing momentum to broaden inclusion and strengthen the impact of community voices.

- **Conwy:** Uses multi-agency panels and an engagement framework that involves families directly in decision-making, supporting improved outcomes and high satisfaction.
- **Local authorities:** Regular consultations, feedback mechanisms and partnership forums are widely embedded to inform population needs and service planning.
- **Local authorities:** There is a clear commitment to improving reach and inclusivity, with increasing emphasis on creative, targeted and co-productive approaches to better reflect diverse community needs.

Conclusion

The findings from local authority social services annual reports and available data have been mapped back against the two quality standards.

“Effective partnerships are in place to commission and deliver fully integrated, high-quality sustainable outcomes for people.”

- Strong multi-agency partnerships are established in some areas through Regional Partnership Boards, regional safeguarding boards, and joint panels, enabling shared planning, pooled budgets, and coordinated responses.
- Market Stability Reports and Population Needs Assessments are being used more consistently to shape commissioning decisions, identify gaps, and ensure services align with local population need, but this could be improved on.
- Some local authorities report co-location of teams across health, education, and social care supports more integrated assessments, quicker decision-making, and seamless care planning.
- The National Framework for Commissioning is influencing more consistent, ethical, outcome-based commissioning, with local authorities developing fair-pricing models and strengthening provider relationships.
- Challenges remain, including workforce shortages across sectors, financial pressures on joint commissioning, and limited interoperability across digital systems, all of which constrain full integration.

Local authorities demonstrate strong collaborative foundations and growing alignment in commissioning and integration, but workforce capacity, digital infrastructure, and funding stability continue to limit fully sustainable integrated outcomes.

“People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners.”

- Co-production is steadily growing, with citizen panels, youth forums, and lived-experience groups contributing to planning, reviewing services, and influencing commissioning.
- Local authorities are embedding user voice in strategic planning, with some actively expanding participation forums and co-production structures.
- Engagement depth varies, with some local authorities still relying on minimum statutory consultation rather than fully embedded co-production at all stages.
- Provider engagement also supports shared ownership of service design by maintaining continuous dialogue between local authorities, independent providers, and the voluntary sector.
- Barriers remain where digital fragmentation, limited capacity, and uneven community involvement weaken consistent partnership with people and families.

Co-production is strengthening and becoming more embedded but is not yet consistent across Wales. Structural pressures and variable local capacity mean equal partnership in design and delivery remains an aspiration not fully realised.

Well-being

Quality Standards:

*“People are protected and **safeguarded** from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm”*

*“People are supported to actively **manage their well-being** and make their own decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and **live independently** for as long as possible”*

What is happening across local authorities

Based on the analysis of local authority social services annual reports and available national data, the actions being undertaken are:

- The [number of adults suspected of being at risk of abuse or neglect](#) has been rising since 2020/21, up from 15,301 to 18,169 in 2023-24, an increase of 18.7% over the last four years.
- In 2023-24, there were 28,126 Initial Strategy Meetings for [children suspected of being at risk of abuse or neglect](#). Of these, 17,762 (63.2%) progressed to Section 47 enquiries: the second stage of the safeguarding process for children. 3,951 (22.2%) of the Section 47 enquiries progressed to an Initial Child Protection Conference
- Multi-agency safeguarding boards, risk assessment conferences, and strengthened child protection protocols are embedded across regions. Co-located teams and shared governance structures ensure timely identification and intervention for children at risk.
- Trauma-informed practice and resilience-building approaches are now standard in early help services. Mental health support in schools, parenting programmes, and community-based activities are helping children manage emotional well-being and achieve their potential.

“We are working to ensure a “No Wrong Door” approach across the service. It brings professionals together to make sure people get the support they need, without delay to prevent situations getting worse”. (Bridgend)

- Local authorities report rising complexity of needs, with more families presenting with multiple challenges, and in response to this, many have expanded early help and edge-of-care services, introduced targeted mental health interventions, and strengthened multi-agency coordination to prevent escalation.
- Services are increasingly tailored to individual capabilities and networks. Co-production and advocacy ensure care plans reflect personal circumstances, while community hubs and local partnerships provide accessible, culturally competent support.

“Anglesey County Council have strengthened their co-production with families to ensure services reflect individual needs and capabilities”.

- Local authorities are piloting digital platforms for care planning and family resources, expanding community-based activities, and promoting peer-led support networks. Flexible respite and active travel initiatives are also being used to help families maintain independence.
- Digital technology is being used to support independence for adults receiving care and support, such as telecare systems and virtual well-being sessions. Assistive technology is being piloted in domiciliary care, while other local authorities have introduced digital platforms for self-service information and advice.

Well-being

Strengths:

- Robust safeguarding frameworks with strong multi-agency collaboration, including integrated working with health, education, and third sector partners. Some local

authorities report multi-agency boards and staff training ensure strong protection measures.

- Growing emphasis on co-production and advocacy to personalise care. Several local authorities report using creative methods to improve the wellbeing of the people they provide care and support to, and to capture people's views about the care they receive.

“At Spring Gardens, we like to promote meaningful engagement with our residents who all have different diagnoses of dementia. Anything meaningful and fun, big or small activity has a positive outcome on the resident's wellbeing.” (Newport)

- Embedded trauma-informed practice and mental health support in schools.
- Innovative use of digital tools and community-based initiatives to promote independence. Use of telecare and assistive technology supports people to remain at home longer.

“Community-based initiatives and digital resources are helping families to manage their own well-being”. (Conwy)

With the roll out of digital services in Conwy, “The Community Equipment Service team, has enabled people who have been supplied with a digital telephone line, to have access to the digital units, which work via a roaming SIM; this is useful for people without a telephone line”.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 17: information, advice and assistance that service users and carers have prior to, and on entry to the social care system, alongside an understanding of their rights under the Act, so that their expectations are appropriately managed?

Wales is strengthening Information, Advice and Assistance through national coordination and local innovation, but inconsistent pathways and variable understanding of rights mean further workforce development and integration are needed to manage expectations effectively.

- **National coordination:** A Wales-wide Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) network brings local authority IAA leads together to share learning and improve consistency of local delivery.
- **Local practice improvement:** Ceredigion's Penmorfa Centre for Independent Living provides accessible advice, self-assessment tools and feedback-driven quality assurance to support informed choice.
- **Ongoing strengthening:** Local authorities are building clearer pathways and improving rights-based communication with a focus on workforce training, co-produced resources and better integration with health and third sector partners.

Well-being

Challenges:

- Rising demand and complexity of cases continue to strain safeguarding and well-being services. Increased referrals strain resources, particularly for safeguarding and reablement services.
- Workforce shortages affect capacity to deliver timely interventions. Recruitment and retention issues limit capacity to deliver personalised and preventative care.
- While technology supports independence, some older adults and vulnerable groups struggle to access digital solutions.
- High caseloads and complex investigations challenge timely responses in some areas.
- The percentage of voluntary organisations offering community activities, family welfare and children’s activities has fallen over the last two years according to the [Welsh Council for Voluntary Action](#).
- Specialist mental health support remains insufficient to meet demand.
- Variability in the depth of co-production across authorities.
- Persistent inequalities in access for rural and minority ethnic communities.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 19: technological solutions that enable people to live independently, especially in a post-pandemic context of system pressures and workforce shortages?

Local authorities are increasingly using digital, telecare and assistive technologies—supported nationally by the DiSC Cymru Framework—to help people live independently despite post-pandemic pressures and workforce shortages.

- **Ceredigion:** The *Penmorfa Centre for Independent Living* provides digital aids and pilots virtual check-ins, improving efficiency and enabling residents particularly in rural areas—to manage their wellbeing independently.
- **Across local authorities:** Expanded telecare, self-assessment tools and sensor-based monitoring are being used to support independence and reduce pressure on the workforce.
- **All Wales (national support):** The DiSC Cymru Framework provides a co-ordinated approach to strengthening digital foundations, scaling innovation and sharing good practice to enable more person-centred, preventative support.

Well-being

Priorities for the Coming Year

As part of the local authority social services annual reports, there is a requirement for each social services department to reflect on what the priorities are for the coming year. Across local authorities, these are the common themes:

- Expand training and audit processes; improve multi-agency coordination.

- Increase access to community-based activities and digital resources to support resilience and independence.
- Broaden access to assistive technology and address digital exclusion through blended support models.
- Strengthen safeguarding capacity through workforce training and multi-agency collaboration.
- Expand mental health support in schools and community settings.
- Formalise co-production frameworks to ensure meaningful involvement of children and families.
- Develop creative solutions such as flexible respite and peer-led networks to reduce reliance on statutory care.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 18: multi-agency working and practice (including safeguarding), and in the practices of remote and distant working for some forms of interaction?

Multi-agency working in Wales is strengthening safeguarding and integrated care through Regional Partnership Boards, shared governance and digital approaches, while further consistency in systems, training and remote practice is needed to sustain progress.

- **Conwy County Borough Council:** The *Strengthening Families Team* operates weekly multi-agency panels and forums, enabling coordinated safeguarding responses across social care, health, education and partners.
- **Cardiff Council:** The *'Listen Up'* digital tool supports remote safeguarding and engagement with children and families when face-to-face contact is limited.
- **All local authorities (via Regional Partnership Boards):** Delivery of joined-up care is supported by the Integrated Community Care System (ICCS) Framework and the Regional Integration Fund, underpinning joint commissioning, information sharing and safeguarding practice.

Reflections on Last Year's Social Service Priorities

Local authorities are also asked to report progress against the priorities and objectives that they set last year. Across Wales progress was reported in:

- Authorities report progress in embedding trauma-informed practice and improving engagement with families.
- Safeguarding arrangements have strengthened through regional collaboration, but demand remains high.
- Mental health support for children and families has expanded, yet capacity issues persist.
- Community-based initiatives have grown, and the expansion of community hubs and local area coordination has strengthened resilience and independence, but inequalities in access remain a challenge.
- Co-production has improved, with more structured forums and advocacy services, though consistency varies.
- Technology pilots have supported independence, but digital exclusion persists.

- Integrated discharge pathways have reduced hospital delays, yet overall demand for care continues to rise.

“The Council will develop a strategic plan to maintain and upgrade the standards of our residential care homes, ensuring warm, safe and respectful environments for residents. The costs of the improvements are highlighted in this Plan.” (Gwynedd)

Conclusion

The findings from local authority social services annual reports and available data have been mapped back against the two quality standards.

“People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm.”

- Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are in place across Wales, with collaboration between social care, health, education, and the voluntary sector ensuring timely risk identification and intervention.
- Safeguarding activity continues to increase, with rising numbers of adults and children identified as at risk, demonstrating active monitoring and response across systems.
- Trauma-informed practice is now embedded in early-help services, strengthening protection and support for children and families experiencing harm.
- Audit tools, training, and strengthened governance have been introduced in several authorities to improve compliance and safeguarding quality.
- Challenges remain, including increasing demand and complexity, workforce shortages, high caseloads, and variability in timely access to specialist mental health or safeguarding responses.

Safeguarding systems are increasingly trauma-informed, but workforce pressure, rising need, and uneven local capacity continue to limit timely and consistent protection across Wales.

“People are supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible.”

- Assistive technology, telecare and digital tools are increasingly used to support independence, allowing adults to manage their well-being at home.
- Community-based initiatives, including local hubs, peer support networks, and resilience-building activities, help people stay connected and maintain independence.
- Mental health support in schools and communities is expanding, enabling children and families to manage emotional well-being and reduce escalation to statutory services.
- Co-production and advocacy are increasingly shaping personalised support plans that reflect individuals’ needs, abilities and networks.
- Barriers remain, including digital exclusion (especially older adults and rural communities), limited voluntary-sector capacity, workforce shortages, and persistent inequalities in access for minority ethnic and rural communities.

Local authorities are expanding support that enables independence, choice, and improved well-being, but structural barriers — digital access, unequal provision, rurality, and workforce strain — prevent fully consistent achievement of this standard.

6. Other information section

Inspections and reviews

Between April 2024 and April 2025, social care services across Wales were subject to intensive external scrutiny and internal governance review. During this period, a coordinated programme of inspections, audits, and targeted investigations by regulatory bodies highlighted both enduring challenges and examples of commendable practice within the sector.

The main findings from the reports by Audit Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales reveal a sector demonstrating resilience through collaboration, multi-agency working and innovation. However, these reports also emphasise the urgent need for better integration of persistent issues into improvement plans, the development of safeguarding systems robust enough to cope with ongoing pressures, and—most importantly—an increased focus on supporting unpaid carers. As regulatory frameworks continue to evolve and expectations are raised, the ability of social care services in Wales to self-correct and adapt will be vital in meeting future demands.

Overarching Regulatory Landscape

The inspection regime for social care in Wales is underpinned by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. These statutes ensure that local authorities and independent providers are subject to ongoing evaluation, with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) as the principal external reviewer, complemented by other bodies such as Audit Wales and the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. Annual statutory reports from local authorities, such as those from Denbighshire and Flintshire, confirm that inspections and audits are now deeply embedded in governance, serving as both a compliance mechanism and a catalyst for improvement.

The Role of Inspection in Governance and Strategy

Local authority accounts consistently report that inspection findings are instrumental in shaping strategic direction, workforce development, and commissioning. Authorities anticipate that scrutiny will intensify around safeguarding, financial sustainability, and the Welsh Government's policy to remove profit from children's care in the coming year.

Complaints and representations

Local authorities in Wales operate under statutory frameworks such as the *Social Services Complaints Procedure Regulations (Wales) 2014* and local authority-specific policies. These systems typically involve two stages: informal resolution (Stage 1) and formal investigation (Stage 2). Complaints often span issues of communication, process failures, staff conduct, and service quality, with some local authorities noting equality-related concerns linked to protected characteristics.

Across Welsh local authorities, complaints and representations reveal consistent themes: communication gaps, procedural clarity, and resource pressures. While improvements in early resolution and advocacy are evident, further work is needed to standardise reporting, strengthen accessibility, and embed learning from complaints into service redesign. These steps will not only reduce complaint volumes but also enhance trust and quality in social care delivery.

Emerging Themes Across Local Authorities

1. Communication and Process Failures

A recurring theme is dissatisfaction with communication and perceived procedural shortcomings. For example, Monmouthshire highlights that

Within Stage 1 complaints from parents, “the most discernible trend [was] a perceived lack of communication, alleged failure of processes, staff conduct, disagreement with decisions made, lack of support and concern over standards”.

These issues were most prevalent at the “front door” of services, where high referral volumes and resource pressures exacerbate delays.

2. Volume and Resolution Trends

Complaint volumes vary significantly. Wrexham recorded 49 complaints in 2024-25, down from 75 the previous year, suggesting progress in early resolution and advocacy support. Conwy noted that “it can be difficult to identify single themes in relation to Social Services complaints as many are complex in nature and include more than one element”. Conwy notes a year-on-year decrease of formal complaints, but have seen an increase in overall complaint activity, alongside a rise in compliments, indicating improved responsiveness. In contrast, Denbighshire highlights that while overall numbers are low, formal investigations remain necessary for complex cases, particularly those involving safeguarding or court proceedings.

3. Advocacy and Representation

Several local authorities emphasise advocacy as a mechanism for ensuring fairness. Monmouthshire cites the role of Llais and National Youth Advocacy Service in supporting complainants, including young people who might otherwise struggle to navigate formal processes. This reflects a broader commitment to voice and choice, aligning with statutory duties under the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*.

4. Equality and Accessibility

Authorities such as Flintshire stress compliance with accessibility standards, ensuring that *“Complaints information is available bilingually, including online and hard copy, and adjustments can be made in other formats”*. This approach supports inclusion but also highlights the need for continuous monitoring to prevent barriers for neurodivergent individuals or those with communication difficulties.

Areas for Improvement and Learning

Despite progress, several systemic challenges persist:

- **Front-Door Pressures:** High complaint rates in intake teams suggest a need for better resourcing and streamlined processes to manage demand effectively.
- **Communication Standards:** Miscommunication and delays remain common triggers for escalation. Investment in staff training and clearer protocols could reduce complaints.
- **Data Transparency:** While some local authorities report trends and outcomes, others provide limited detail. Standardised reporting across Wales would enable benchmarking and shared learning.
- **Youth Engagement:** Few complaints originate directly from young people, indicating potential barriers to participation. Expanding advocacy and child-friendly processes is essential.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 5: local government mechanisms and accountability for achieving people's rights under the Act without having to resort to an adversarial complaints process?

Local authorities in Wales are strengthening accountability for people's rights through early resolution, quality assurance, co-production and transparent feedback mechanisms, reducing reliance on adversarial complaints.

- **Ceredigion** has implemented a Quality Assurance Framework and Quarterly Practitioners Forum, enabling routine scrutiny and early resolution of issues before escalation to formal complaints.
- **Conwy** uses engagement events and satisfaction surveys to capture service-user and staff feedback, helping address concerns proactively and strengthen accountability.
- **Denbighshire, Flintshire and Gwynedd** apply clear escalation pathways, self-assessment and peer forums.

Other sources of information

Local authorities demonstrate a strong emphasis on aligning statutory responsibilities with organisational objectives such as sustainability, equality, and Welsh language commitments. They also show how local authorities are responding to national policy drivers, including decarbonisation targets and equality legislation.

Corporate Alignment and Strategic Integration

A clear trend across local authorities is the integration of social services into wider corporate strategies. Local authorities increasingly recognise that social care cannot operate in isolation; it must contribute to overarching goals for community well-being, financial sustainability, and organisational resilience.

Climate Action and Decarbonisation in Social Care

Climate change is no longer a peripheral issue; it is increasingly central to social services planning. Welsh Government's *Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget* and the *Well-being of Future Generations Act* have driven local authorities to embed environmental considerations into service design and delivery.

Half of the 22 local authorities explicitly referenced climate change or decarbonisation within their social services' annual reports. These references range from high-level commitments in corporate plans to detailed decarbonisation strategies and operational actions.

Adult services in Powys worked with Commercial Services and ICT to develop a sustainability portal to support social care providers to reduce their use of carbon and move to greener practices in their supply chains.

"Adult services won a grant from Welsh Government's Health and Social Care Climate Emergency Committee and worked with Commercial Services and ICT to develop a sustainability portal to support social care providers to reduce their use of carbon and move to greener practices in their supply chains". (Powys)

“The portal has won two Welsh Go! Awards and is nominated for a UK climate change award for its work within public sector supply chains”. (Powys)

Most local authorities reference climate change within corporate plans and Integrated Impact Assessments (IIAs).

Of the local authorities which refer to climate change, many are developing decarbonisation plans for social services, including carbon baseline assessments, energy efficiency upgrades, and the adoption of renewable energy like solar panels and heat pumps. Efforts also extend towards staff using electric vehicles to undertake their care duties, electric conducting energy audits, promoting staff energy-saving habits, implementing green procurement policies, and increasing digitalisation to reduce paper and travel. Local authorities, such as Rhondda Cynon Taf are also supporting biodiversity initiatives, through providing green spaces and planting of trees, hedges and wildflowers.

Challenges remain, such as limited emissions data, funding constraints, ongoing workforce engagement, and influencing privately-run care homes. Future priorities include setting carbon reduction targets aligned with net-zero goals, expanding green procurement, and integrating climate resilience into safeguarding and emergency planning.

Strategic Equality Planning

Equality remains a statutory and political priority. The Welsh Government funds and supports targeted action plans on equality, including the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP), the Advancing Gender Equality Plan, the LGBTQ+ Action Plan and a forthcoming Disabled People's Rights Plan, all aimed at driving meaningful improvements for under-represented communities.

Social services departments across Wales are actively engaging in these plans, through reviewing policies and procedures around [recruitment and career progression](#), the [lived experiences of ethnic minority staff](#) and the use of [translation and interpretation services](#). Social Care Wales is also supporting the delivery of the ARWAP through training and support offered to the social care workforce. For example, Social Care Wales supports delivery of the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan through national anti-racism e-learning modules that help the social care workforce understand the impact of racism and apply culturally appropriate, anti-racist practice in their everyday work.

One way Social Care Wales and Welsh Government is supporting the ethnic minority workforce is through the development of the [Workforce Race Equality Standard](#) (WRES). The Workforce Race equality standard is a tool to help monitor the experience of people from ethnic minorities who work in health and social care in Wales. The intention of the tool is to help deliver real change across social care services.

Local authorities are actively embedding the principles of the ARWAP into their social care strategies. This includes delivering cultural competence training for staff, reviewing recruitment practices to ensure fairness, and working with communities to tackle systemic barriers. Many local authorities have linked these actions to broader equality and inclusion frameworks, ensuring that anti-racist commitments are reflected in governance, workforce development, and service delivery.

“The Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan is key for us this year and we are working on our implementation of actions and recommendations set out in the plan, including further iterations of cultural awareness training and support for staff from ethnic minority backgrounds in recruitment, retention and experiences of racism in the workplace.” - Conwy

Most local authority annual reports reference a Strategic Equality Plan, which sets out long-term aims and equality objectives.

Local authorities link these equality objectives to workforce development, service accessibility, and community engagement. However, implementation varies—some local authorities provide detailed action plans with measurable outcomes, while others offer only high-level commitments.

Evaluation of the SSWBWA Test Question 6: the agency of citizens ensuring that the voices of those seldom heard and often marginalised resonate, leading to a step-change in their experiences?

Local authorities are strengthening citizen agency by embedding inclusive engagement, co-production and advocacy so that the voices of seldom-heard and marginalised groups directly shape social care decisions and outcomes.

- **Cardiff Council:** The Participation Framework and digital tools such as “Listen Up” enable children and young people to influence service design and safeguarding practice, strengthening voice and agency.
- **Denbighshire County Council:** Dedicated engagement groups ensure carers and people with additional needs are heard, evidencing targeted inclusion beyond statutory consultation.
- **Welsh Government (national framework):** Statutory guidance under the Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act 2020 established Llais, reinforced by the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.

Welsh Language Strategies

Compliance with Welsh language standards is a statutory requirement under the *Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011*. Local authorities have prioritised the Welsh language in social care by embedding the *Active Offer* principle, the “More than just words / Mwy na Geiriau” strategy and complying with Welsh Language Standards. This means ensuring that individuals can access services in Welsh without having to request it. Local authorities have invested in workforce development through tailored training programmes, confidence-building courses, and partnerships with the National Centre for Learning Welsh. Bilingual publications, care planning, and advocacy services have become standard practice, supported by strategic leadership through regional boards and forums.

“We continue to roll out and monitor uptake of training among social care staff. We currently have 37 Council employees undertaking the 30 week Work Welsh courses for 24/25. Also promoting the Social Care Wales ‘Camau’ self-directed learning courses.” - Swansea

In addition to compliance, local authorities are taking pro-active steps to strengthen Welsh language use in everyday service delivery. Examples include monitoring staff language skills, funding Welsh-medium youth projects, and integrating Welsh language considerations into recruitment and governance. These actions reflect a commitment to cultural identity and equality, ensuring that Welsh-speaking citizens receive services that respect their linguistic rights

“We continue to comply with Welsh Language Standards and the ‘More than just words’ framework, making an active offer of Welsh communication for anyone who prefers it and supporting staff through tailored language training and confidence-building initiatives.” – (Caerphilly)

Inspection Findings – thematic overview

Strengths

Inspection evidence shows that, despite sustained system pressure, social care in Wales continues to deliver positive outcomes for most adults and children. Most regulated services provide good-quality care, supported by committed staff and increasingly strong, values-driven leadership. In adult services, inspectors found widespread person-centred, strengths-based practice, alongside growing innovation in domiciliary care and improved preventative and early-help approaches delivered through effective partnership working. Enforcement activity reduced compared with the previous year, indicating improvement in overall service quality.

Children’s services present a similarly positive picture. Most care homes were rated good or excellent, with evidence of improving workforce stability. Safeguarding practice was strongest where agencies shared a clear understanding of thresholds and worked collaboratively. Progress was also noted in reducing unregistered provision and improving reporting. Overall, CIW concludes that the sector demonstrates resilience, learning and improvement, underpinned by leadership, partnership working and a clear focus on people’s rights and outcomes.

Risks

Notwithstanding these strengths, the system remains under sustained pressure. Rising demand, increasing complexity of need, workforce shortages and financial constraints continue to affect both adult and children’s services. These pressures particularly impact the timeliness of assessments, access to care and workforce stability. Recruitment and retention difficulties persist, with continued reliance on agency and overseas staff. Ongoing delays in Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards further highlight system strain. Collectively, these risks threaten the sustainability and consistency of recent improvements if not addressed.

Actions

Inspection findings point to three system-level actions supporting improvement:

- **Strengthening leadership and partnership working**, building on values-driven leadership and collaborative practice to maintain service quality under pressure.
- **Stabilising and supporting the workforce**, through action on recruitment, retention and reducing reliance on agency staffing to improve continuity and resilience.
- **Improving timeliness and system flow**, including reducing assessment delays and addressing Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards backlogs, to ensure people can access care and support when needed.

Further detailed local authority inspection findings are in Annex B.

Conclusion

Local authority social services departments across Wales continue to evolve through a period marked by significant achievement, deepening pressures, and an ongoing commitment to improvement. Key trends this year reveal a sector increasingly shaped by person-centred practice, strengthened prevention, and growing collaboration across health, local authorities, and the third sector. “What matters” conversations, trauma-informed approaches, and co-production are now widely embedded, helping ensure that people have voice, choice, and control in shaping their care. Preventative work—through early help hubs, community-based support, reablement, and stronger IAA pathways—continues to reduce escalation and promote independence.

The sector’s achievements are notable. Local authorities have expanded early intervention services, strengthened safeguarding arrangements, improved the use of digital tools and assistive technology, and invested in the workforce through leadership development, wellbeing initiatives, and “grow-your-own” pathways. The implementation of the National Framework for Commissioning care and support marks an important shift towards fair, ethical, and outcomes-focused care, though at present this is still embedding into practice.

However, persistent challenges remain. Workforce shortages, high vacancies in specialist roles, rising demand, and increasing complexity continue to place pressure on services. Financial constraints are intensifying, limiting the ability to maintain preventative programmes and sustain commissioning markets. through the provision of a stable, diverse and high quality provider base to ensure the continuation of care and support. Digital exclusion, inequalities in outcomes for minority ethnic and rural communities, and inconsistent data quality remain barriers to fully delivering the Act’s ambitions.

Looking ahead, priorities across Wales focus on deepening co-production, stabilising and developing the workforce, strengthening integrated commissioning, expanding community-based prevention, and improving data and insight. With strong leadership, collaboration, and ongoing reform, the sector remains committed to delivering safe, compassionate, and sustainable care that promotes well-being for all.

The State of the Nation report provides a shared evidence base to inform policy development, improvement activity and national discussions on social care in Wales. It brings together data, inspection findings and local authority insight to highlight where the system is performing well, where pressures persist, and where targeted reform can have the greatest impact. The report will support Welsh Government in shaping future policy priorities, commissioning reform and workforce planning, while offering a clear, balanced picture of progress and challenge.

For local authorities, the report can be used as a benchmarking and learning tool, helping to contextualise local performance, identify improvement opportunities and showcase effective practice. It will also inform the development of the Director of Social Services Annual Report guidance notes, strengthening consistency and clarity across Wales.

Next steps include utilising the findings of this report into future policy developments and to feed into continuous learning and improvement mechanisms including through the following groups led by the National Office for care and support:

- Social Care Good Practice Forum
- Social Care Innovation Network
- Social Care Climate Change (Emergency) Project Group

Appendices

Annex A – Glossary of terms

Term/Acronym	Description
Reablement / Rehabilitation / Interim care	This short-term care is sometimes called intermediate care, or aftercare. Reablement is a type of care that helps people relearn how to do daily activities, like cooking meals and washing. It is provided by local authorities with the aim of mitigating the need for long term care and support.
Domiciliary Care / Domiciliary Support Service / Home Care	Domiciliary care, also known as "care at home", refers to a broad range of care services provided in a person's own home. It can include assistance with day-to-day living and certain health care issues for the elderly.
Residential Care Home / Nursing Home	A residential care home provides accommodation and 24-hour personal care and support to the older people and others who may find it difficult to manage daily life at home. Both a residential care home and nursing home provide care and support 24 hours a day, however the main difference is that a nursing home is able to provide a higher level of care. Nursing homes have qualified nurses on-site around the clock to provide medical care as needed whereas residential homes help people with personal care and support them to engage in physical activity

Care Experienced Children	Care experienced is an umbrella term which can mean children / young people who are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looked after at home through a Care Order • Looked after away from home in a residential children's house, in a foster placement or in a kinship placement (Looked After or Non-Looked After) • Previously looked after, where at some point in their lives they have had any of the above experiences. The child / young person may never have been formally looked after.
Care Leaver	In Wales, care leavers are individuals who have been in the care of the local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and have left care on or after their 16th birthday. The support provided to care leavers is intended to be equivalent to what a child who has not been looked after might reasonably expect from their parents.
Children looked after (CLA)	Children for whom local authorities have responsibility for under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
Safeguarding	Safeguarding is about protecting children and adults from abuse or neglect and educating those around them to recognise the signs and dangers.
Wales Safeguarding Procedures	They detail the essential roles and responsibilities for practitioners to ensure that they safeguard children and adults who are at risk of abuse and neglect. Provides a useful glossary of safeguarding terms: Safeguarding Wales
Performance and Improvement Framework: Measuring activity and performance data	This sets out a framework of metrics covering adults, children, and carers, which must be collected and submitted to Welsh Government together with anonymised person-level data and aggregated data on specific aspects of social care. It states local authorities should also gather their own data to understand better how the local delivery of social care is working according to local priorities.
Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)	CIW is the social care provider regulator. They will register, inspect and take action to improve the quality and safety of services for the well-being of the people of Wales.
Social Care Wales (SCW)	SCW is the workforce regulator. As part of this they register and set standards for the care and support workforce and develop the workforce. SCW also has an improvement remit, by which they will share

	good practice, set priorities for research and provide information for the public and other organisations.
Resident / Citizen	A person whose usual residence is within the local authority boundary
Service User	A person who is accessing social services.
Shared Lives / Adult Placement Scheme	Shared Lives Schemes – also known as adult placements – are a family-based way of supporting a vulnerable person’s housing needs. This type of supportive accommodation can be the ideal stepping stone on the way to independent living. This sharing arrangement is often referred to as ‘shared lives’.
Direct Payments	Direct payments are issued to individuals to allow them to pay for their own care. They are a way that local authorities can help to meet individual’s eligible need for care and support, or a carer’s need for support. They are a way for people to arrange their own care and support.
Supported Living / Accommodation	Supported living accommodation is a type of housing that provides personal care, support or supervision to help people live independently. The care and support are separate from the housing contract. The accommodation can be shared or single, depending on the needs and preferences of the occupants.
Unpaid Carer	An unpaid carer is someone who provides care and support to family members, friends, or neighbours who are affected by disability, physical or mental ill-health, frailty, or substance misuse. The carer does not need to be living with the person they care for.
Young Carer	A young carer is an unpaid carer who is up to the age of 18. They may be providing care and support to parents, siblings or other family members.
Care and Support Plan	A care and support plan is a document that sets out what has been discussed during a social care needs assessment and what is going to happen as a result. It is a plan which a local authority is required to prepare and maintain under section 54 (1) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
Carer’s Support Plan	If unpaid carers have needs that are eligible for support, the local authority has a statutory duty to plan for and meet those needs by providing a ‘Carer’s Support Plan.’ Where eligible needs for support are

	identified for the unpaid carer, local authorities must ensure these needs are met.
Advocacy	Advocates in social care are independent from the local authority (local council) and the NHS. They are trained to help people understand their rights, express their views and wishes, and help make sure their voice is heard.
Prevention and Early Intervention	Prevention and early intervention are forms of support aimed at improving outcomes for people or preventing escalating need or risk. They are also sometimes referred to as early help or preventative services.
The Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014	The Regulations which introduced a new two stage process to deal with complaints and representations about local authority social services. It brings the process for social services in line with the Model Concerns and Complaints Policy and Guidance and the NHS Complaints Procedure Putting Things Right.
Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)	The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) is a legal procedure in the UK designed to protect vulnerable people in care settings. It applies to adults who lack the mental capacity to give consent to their care arrangements and need to be deprived of their liberty. DoLS ensures that those who cannot consent to their care are protected when their arrangements deprive them of their liberty. It will be replaced by Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) in the future.
Mwy Na Geiriau / More than words	More than just words is a strategy and delivery plan to aim to improve the quality of care for individuals living in a bilingual country.
Extra care	The provision of a domiciliary care package to an individual living in supported living/accommodation.
Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP)	The Welsh government plan to tackle racism and make 'meaningful and measurable changes' to the lives of BAME people in Wales. The plan aims to make Wales an anti-racist country by 2030.
Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA)	Refer to contacts and referrals – consent and level of information recorded – link to proportionate assessment
Not in education, employment or training (NEET)	NEET stands for "Not in Education, Employment, or Training". It refers to young people who are neither engaged in education or vocational training nor in paid employment. NEET individuals may

	experience social and economic disadvantage.
Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014	The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 is a law that aims to improve the well-being of people who need care and support, and carers who need support, and to transform social services in Wales.

Annex B - Inspection Highlights and Agency Findings

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW):

- **Pembrokeshire – Adult Services (April 2024)**: The improvement check found progress in leadership and governance since the 2022 evaluation, with some reduction in waiting times for assessments. However, delays remain, and recruitment challenges continue despite signs of workforce stability. Ongoing monitoring and targeted support are recommended to ensure timely service delivery.
- **Isle of Anglesey – Adult Services (June 2024)**: Inspectors noted significant reductions in waiting lists and positive engagement with service users and carers. While improvements are evident, further investment in preventative services and digital systems is needed to sustain progress. Continued focus on early intervention is advised.
- **Carmarthenshire – Children’s Services (October 2024)**: The inspection highlighted strong commitment to safeguarding and effective multi-agency collaboration. Timeliness of assessments and care planning has improved, but workforce pressures pose a risk to sustaining progress. Recommendations include ongoing workforce development and embedding robust quality assurance processes.
- **Cardiff - Joint Inspection of Child Protection (Jan–May 2024)**: The JICPA, a collaboration between CIW, HMICFRS, HIW, and Estyn, found “*chronic pressure on services*” due to rising demand and workforce shortages, but highlighted that “*practitioners mostly understand their roles and responsibilities in the context of protecting children*” and praised collaborative practices. Nevertheless, some health safeguarding arrangements were cited as carrying “*immediate risk*”.
- **Overview report for Joint Inspections of Child Protection Arrangements (JICPA) 2019 – 2024**: This report reviews multi-agency safeguarding across six regions in Wales. It found strong leadership and effective collaboration in many areas, with good practices such as co-located teams, proactive return-home interviews, and shared prevention strategies improving outcomes for children. However, challenges persist, including inconsistent information sharing due to incompatible IT systems, workforce instability from reliance on agency staff, and gaps in expertise around criminal and contextual exploitation. The report recommends improving data-sharing platforms, stabilizing the workforce, strengthening understanding of exploitation, and embedding consistent quality assurance processes to ensure timely and effective child protection responses across Wales.

Audit Wales:

Cynqor Gwynedd – Domiciliary Care Service Review (Feb 2025): The Audit Wales review of Gwynedd Council’s domiciliary care found that while the local authority has improved its understanding of rising demand, it lacks a clear, resourced plan to address waiting lists and overspending. Governance and performance monitoring are weak, with fragmented financial and activity data and limited benchmarking. The report recommends creating a detailed Adult Services Plan, aligning budgets to demand, integrating performance and cost data, and strengthening oversight to ensure value for money.

"The Council does not have a clear plan that sets out how it will meet current and future demand for domiciliary care services."

Safeguarding follow-up reports (Newport, Powys and Blaenau Gwent): Each local authority progressed in implementing previous recommendations to strengthen **corporate safeguarding arrangements**. Corporate safeguarding refers to the responsibility of the whole local authority (not just social services) to protect children and adults at risk.

Newport City Council (Oct 2024): Some progress, but three recommendations from 2015 remain incomplete. Audit Wales's 2024 follow-up found Newport City Council had made some progress strengthening corporate safeguarding arrangements and awareness. However, three 2015 recommendations remained outstanding on safer recruitment, mandatory training and member oversight. Four new recommendations were issued. The review recognised increased focus and partial improvement, but highlighted the need for faster, whole-council implementation.

- Key gaps include safer recruitment, mandatory training, and performance reporting. Four new recommendations were issued.
- **Powys County Council (Nov 2024):** Strong improvement; most recommendations from 2022 implemented, with an effective Corporate Safeguarding Board and regular reporting. Still needs clearer success measures. The review recommended that Powys County Council strengthen corporate leadership and governance for safeguarding, clarify roles, responsibilities and workforce capability, and improve policies, assurance and performance management, so that safeguarding risks are consistently identified, monitored and managed across the whole organisation rather than within individual services alone. The Audit Wales progress review in 2024 concluded that Powys County Council had made significant and timely improvements and had implemented the majority of the recommendations and had plans in place to address the outstanding ones.
- **Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (Apr 2025):** Audit Wales's April 2025 progress review found Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council had "not made sufficient progress" in resolving longstanding corporate safeguarding weaknesses. However, Audit Wales did acknowledge that "some progress has been made" and noted that the council had developed a refreshed action plan.

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales:

Own-Initiative Investigation: Carers' Needs Assessments (Oct 2024): This investigation into four local authorities (Caerphilly, Ceredigion, Flintshire, Neath Port Talbot) revealed that only 2.8% of carers had received a needs assessment, with just 1.5% receiving support plans. The report urged that "*more must be done to ensure unpaid carers are proactively identified and informed of their right to a carers' needs assessment and the support that may be available to them*".

Social Care Assessment: Ceredigion (Oct 2024): In Ceredigion, a complaint resulted in an apology, re-assessment, and a meeting with the Director of Social Services.

Social Care Assessment: Powys (Jan 2025): In Powys, the Ombudsman intervened to ensure errors in assessment documentation were corrected and reassessed within a tight timeframe.

Emerging Themes and Systemic Challenges

A synthesis of these inspections and investigations identifies several recurring themes:

- **Inconsistent Performance Management:** Regulatory bodies acknowledged that local authorities often grasp systemic pressures but struggle to embed these realities into actionable improvement plans. This was particularly evident in Audit Wales’s review of Gwynedd, which observed a disconnect between understanding and prioritisation.
- **Strain on Safeguarding Services:** JICPA inspections revealed that increased demand and workforce shortages are stretching safeguarding services, although robust multi-agency collaboration was also noted. The Cardiff inspection concluded that *“practitioners mostly understand their roles and responsibilities in the context of protecting children”*.
- **Neglect of Carers as Service Users:** The Ombudsman’s investigation into carers’ needs exposed a critical gap: unpaid carers, despite legal protections, are often overlooked, with negligible rates of assessment and support. The report’s call to action was unequivocal: *“More must be done to ensure unpaid carers are proactively identified and informed of their right to a carers’ needs assessment and the support that may be available to them.”*
- **Responsive Case Interventions:** Individual complaints, such as those concerning Ceredigion and Powys, highlight the effectiveness of prompt Ombudsman interventions in prompting apologies, data corrections, and reassessments—demonstrating the tangible impact that can result from case-specific oversight.
- The Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Chief Inspector’s Annual Report 2024–25 presents a system under sustained pressure but continuing to deliver positive outcomes for most adults and children who rely on social care in Wales. Rising demand, increasing complexity of need, workforce shortages, and financial constraints remain consistent challenges across both adult and children’s services, particularly affecting timeliness of assessments, access to care, and workforce stability. Recruitment and retention difficulties persist, with reliance on agency and overseas staff and ongoing delays in Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards highlighting system strain.
- Despite these pressures, the report identifies significant strengths. Most regulated services deliver good-quality care, supported by committed staff and increasingly strong, values-driven leadership. In adult services, inspections found widespread person-centred, strengths-based practice, growing innovation in domiciliary care, and improved preventative and early-help approaches delivered through effective partnership working. Enforcement activity reduced compared with the previous year, indicating improvement in service quality.
- Children’s services show a similarly positive picture overall, with the majority of care homes rated good or excellent and evidence of improving workforce stability. Strong safeguarding practice was most effective where agencies shared a clear

understanding of thresholds and worked collaboratively. Progress was also noted in reducing unregistered provision and improving reporting.

- Overall, CIW concludes that while challenges remain significant, social care in Wales continues to demonstrate resilience, learning and improvement, underpinned by committed leadership, partnership working and a focus on people's rights and outcomes.

Annex C – Social Services and Wellbeing Wales (2014) Act evaluation test question responses

Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 has been evaluated to assess how effectively its principles and duties have been implemented and whether they have improved outcomes for people across Wales. The evaluation examines progress against core aims such as well-being, voice and control, prevention, co-production, safeguarding, partnership working and system sustainability, drawing on national data, inspection and audit findings, research, and local authority evidence.

To support a consistent assessment of progress, Welsh Government developed 19 test questions. These provide a structured framework for examining what has been done to improve social care under the Act, identifying strengths, gaps and priorities for future improvement. Responses were sought from policy officials regarding the 19 test questions and these have been woven throughout the report with the more detailed responses listed below.

1. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement delivery of social care such that it reinforces compassionate, relationship-centred forms of care and support services?

Local authorities have prioritised compassionate, relationship-centred social care by embedding strengths-based and person-centred practice models, investing in workforce development, and fostering co-production with service users and carers. For example, Bridgend has adopted the Signs of Safety model, focusing on building trusting relationships with families and enabling collaborative safety planning. Anglesey is committed to being a “Trauma Informed Island”, with over 700 staff and partners trained in trauma-informed approaches and a focus on reflective supervision. Across Wales, authorities like Conwy and Cardiff have invested in co-production and peer support, ensuring care is shaped by what matters most to individuals and families.

To further reinforce compassionate, relationship-centred support, key actions include investing in workforce wellbeing, retention, and training; embedding consistent practice models prioritising dignity and empathy; strengthening prevention and early intervention; enhancing collaboration with health and community partners for integrated services; and modernising digital systems to reduce administrative burden. Ongoing engagement with service users and carers is essential for reinforcing a culture where compassion and relationships remain central to social care delivery.

2. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement way that assessments for social care support are undertaken, when, and by whom so that they are better able to deliver the best possible well-being outcomes for individuals and carers?

Local authorities report having made considerable progress in improving how, when, and by whom social care assessments are carried out. For instance, the introduction of the “[Trusted Assessor](#)” model enables occupational therapists to conduct well-being assessments and prescribe care, which alleviates pressure on social workers and reduces waiting times. Anglesey has invested in trauma-informed, relationship-based training for over 700 staff and partners, fostering more empathetic and person-centred assessments. Conwy’s multi-disciplinary Community Resource Teams bring together occupational therapists, social workers, and health professionals to offer timely, holistic assessments and smooth hospital discharges. Across Wales, digital tools, streamlined access, and co-produced processes ensure assessments are timely and strengths based.

To further improve assessments, a holistic, person-centred approach prioritising prevention and early intervention is essential. Local authorities such as Pembrokeshire promote co-production with individuals and carers, ensuring that “what matters” conversations shape outcomes. Addressing workforce capacity remains critical, with Denbighshire emphasising recruitment, training, and specialist practitioner roles. Integration across health, social care, and community resources underpins effective improvement. Immediate implementation, robust digital support, and ongoing engagement with carers will help ensure assessments consistently drive sustainable well-being outcomes.

3. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the sufficiency, appropriateness and sustainability of funding so that everyone who has needs as defined by the Act can be supported and cared for?

Local authorities have introduced various measures to improve the sufficiency, appropriateness, and sustainability of funding for social care, ensuring support for all eligible individuals under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. Ceredigion, for example, has adopted integrated financial planning and robust budget monitoring to align resources with demographic trends and statutory duties. Cardiff’s five-year Adult Services Development Plan prioritises prevention and “right-sizing” care, targeting significant savings while maintaining quality. Flintshire and Vale of Glamorgan utilise pooled budgets and regional commissioning to ensure fair, sustainable funding and reduce disparities in care fees. Authorities are also investing in digital transformation, workforce development, and partnerships with health boards and voluntary organisations to maximise funding impact.

However, escalating demand and cost pressures—especially in domiciliary and residential care—require urgent action. Immediate steps could include realistic budget forecasting, ring-fenced investment for preventative services, and collaborative commissioning with health and third-sector partners. Long-term sustainability relies on ongoing workforce investment,

fair provider fees, and digital innovation, all of which are being prioritised by the National Office for Care and Support.

4. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the workforce recruitment and retention, to ensure workforce quality, sufficiency and sustainability?

Local authorities have adopted initiatives to bolster recruitment, retention, and sustainability within the social care workforce. Bridgend's "grow our own" scheme, which includes apprenticeships and traineeships, has reduced agency reliance and improved retention. Anglesey prioritises trauma-informed training and reflective supervision to support staff well-being, whilst sponsoring professional qualifications. Cardiff has enhanced recruitment through its centralised team, strong university partnerships, and the Cardiff Cares Academy, offering dedicated support to migrant workers.

Welsh Government has set workforce planning as a priority for Social Care Wales, which is working with all local authorities to develop action plans to support their workforce planning. This includes developing a network of contacts responsible for workforce planning, to enable peer support, action learning and consider the development of national resources.

However, challenges remain, with persistent vacancies in domiciliary and specialist care roles. Authorities emphasise the need competitive pay, parity with health sector roles, and accredited training. Flexible working arrangements and well-being initiatives are pivotal for reducing burnout.

To address this, Welsh Government continues to work with the [Social Care Fair Work Forum](#) on measures aimed at improving pay, terms and conditions for social care workers in Wales. The Forum is finalising a Social Care Pay and Progression Framework, highlighting the range of roles and progression opportunities within social care, with the aim of promoting social care as a career for life. The Forum is also supporting Welsh Government on the work with UK Government through the Employment Rights Bill, to introduce Fair Pay Agreements in social care.

5. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in local government mechanisms and accountability for achieving people's rights under the Act without having to resort to an adversarial complaints process?

In Wales, the Minister for Children and Social Care holds national responsibility for setting social care policy, legislation, priorities and funding, and is accountable to the Senedd. Local authorities, by contrast, have the statutory duty to assess needs, safeguard people, commission and deliver day-to-day social care services within their communities.

Initiatives such as Ceredigion's Quality Assurance Framework and Quarterly Practitioners Forum, and Conwy's engagement events and satisfaction surveys, enable routine feedback from service users and staff, ensuring concerns are addressed before escalating to formal complaints. Clear escalation pathways, self-assessment, peer forums, and regular scrutiny—seen in Denbighshire, Flintshire, and Gwynedd—foster a culture of learning and continuous

improvement. Reports from Caerphilly and Bridgend stress the importance of early resolution, independent advocacy, and accessible performance dashboards. Co-production in service design, promoted by authorities like Wrexham and Denbighshire, ensures that individuals' voices shape decisions from the outset. National leadership from Welsh Government on standards, supported by robust local governance, digital feedback tools, and regular engagement, will strengthen accountability and reduce reliance on adversarial complaints processes.

6. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement the agency of citizens ensuring that the voices of those seldom heard and often marginalised resonate, leading to a step-change in their experiences?

Local authorities have implemented focused initiatives to amplify the voices of seldom heard and marginalised groups, enhancing their agency and experiences in social care. Cardiff's Participation Framework and digital platforms, such as "Listen Up", empower children and young people to influence service design, while Denbighshire's groups ensure carers and those with additional needs are heard. As a result of Welsh Government's Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, mandatory cultural awareness training, and targeted advocacy services, promote equality and culturally competent care, reducing barriers for ethnic minorities. Councils also translate written resources and hold engagement events to foster inclusion.

To further improve citizen agency, local authorities are embedding co-production frameworks into service planning, establishing community engagement panels, and utilising accessible and digital communication formats to reach rural and marginalised populations. Culturally competent practice and targeted outreach remain priorities for groups such as carers, disabled people, and ethnic minorities. National guidance from Welsh Government, combined with local strategies and advocacy support, will strengthen inclusive engagement. These actions ensure lived experiences directly inform policy and practice, driving improvements in outcomes under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

Welsh Government has issued national guidance requiring local authorities to actively hear and act on the voices of minority and marginalised groups in social care. Statutory guidance under the Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act 2020 established the Citizen Voice Body, Llais, to represent lived experience and influence service improvement at local, regional and national levels. This is reinforced by the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, which mandates culturally competent engagement and accountability for change.

In commissioning, the National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support and equality guidance aligned to the Public Sector Equality Duty require authorities to address inequalities and evidence how engagement with minority groups has shaped decisions and outcomes.

7. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement the range and quality of innovative forms of citizen-directed support available under the Act including, but importantly not limited to, Direct Payments?

Local authorities are broadening citizen-directed support under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, moving well beyond Direct Payments to offer diverse, personalised options. Cardiff's micro-enterprise programme and digital Advocacy Gateway enable individuals to tailor care and select personal assistants reflecting their cultural needs. Conwy's enhanced Direct Payments include alternatives to residential services, indirect payments managed by the council, and support for self-employed carers and micro-agencies. Authorities are prioritising co-produced support plans, work-based training, and intergenerational opportunities to empower citizens.

Recent reports stress the need for personalised budgets, micro-enterprise development, and community brokerage to maximise choice and control. Digital platforms are increasingly used for managing support plans, offering transparency and flexibility. Key priorities to further improve citizen-directed support include staff training in strengths-based approaches, ensuring citizens are fully informed of their options, and embedding co-production in commissioning. National guidance from Welsh Government, alongside local pilots and robust monitoring, help ensure these innovations deliver meaningful outcomes and improved well-being for individuals across Wales.

8. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement support for those principled and motivated individuals who are in a position to champion and help embed co-productive practice?

Welsh Government and local authorities are committed to supporting individuals through championing co-productive practice, acknowledging their critical role in fostering cultural change and meaningful citizen involvement. Targeted workforce development—including training in strengths-based models and mentoring—empowers those wishing to lead co-production. This is supported by organisations such as [the UK Centre to Improve Adult Social Care \(IMPACT\)](#) who champion co-production to make a difference to front-line services, and to the delivery of social care.

Carmarthenshire enhances this approach through peer networks, leadership programmes, and formal recognition frameworks, including toolkits and guidance for co-production champions. Across Wales, authorities offer training, peer support, and opportunities for motivated individuals to influence organisational culture and policy. Local authorities have described a need for the structured recognition, dedicated leadership roles, and national frameworks set by Welsh Government. Local authorities also recognise that local strategies should prioritise mentoring, capacity-building, and resource allocation, with progress monitored via staff and service-user feedback. These combined measures aim to embed co-production as a core value throughout social care, ensuring champions are empowered to drive positive change from within teams and across service delivery.

9. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the understanding of underlying issues and causal factors to inform prevention strategies in social care alongside effective models, resources and organisational cultural shifts?

Local authorities are strengthening prevention in social care by investing in data analysis, collaborative research, and organisational learning to understand root causes and inform early intervention. Carmarthenshire uses predictive modelling and thematic reviews, partnering with research bodies and lived-experience panels to ensure strategies target underlying issues, not just symptoms. Cardiff employs performance dashboards, self-assessment, and a Prevention Toolkit, with strategies like the Ageing Well and Learning Disability initiatives shaped by demographic and community input. Workforce training and reflective practice underpin these approaches, fostering ongoing improvement.

Reports from Flintshire and Gwynedd stress integrating intelligence systems to spot patterns in poverty, health inequalities, and demand, while Wrexham and Pembrokeshire focus on staff training in root cause analysis and embedding strengths-based practice to shift organisational culture from crisis response to prevention. National guidance, effective resource allocation, and local multi-agency panels are recommended to embed preventative models in commissioning and practice.

The National Office for Care and Support will be publishing research later this year on the role of local authorities in providing preventative social care. These collective measures aim to make prevention a core principle under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, with continuous improvement at the heart of service planning and delivery.

10. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the balance between the sometimes-competing tensions of the duty to provide locally determined provision to meet social care needs (as identified by the Population Assessments and defined in Area Plans), and the importance of providing ‘universal’ social care provision irrespective of geography which avoids a ‘postcode lottery’ being perceived?

Local authorities are striving to balance local flexibility in social care provision with universal standards to avoid a 'postcode lottery'. Collaboration is evident in initiatives like Conwy and Denbighshire's Bwthyn y Ddôl assessment centre and Cardiff's integrated Family Advice, Support and Protection Hub, ensuring services are accessible regardless of geography. Regional commissioning frameworks, pooled budgets, and national eligibility criteria are reducing regional disparities, while digital platforms enhance transparency and monitor outcomes. Local authority annual reports emphasise the need for clear national frameworks and minimum service standards, set by Welsh Government, to guarantee equity while still enabling local innovation guided by Population Needs Assessments and Area Plans. Regional partnership boards, citizen engagement, and joint funding arrangements underpin this approach, ensuring consistency and upholding rights-based, universal principles, with Directors of Social Services leading alignment between local and national priorities. These actions aim to embed co-production and universal access alongside bespoke community support under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

11. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the refreshing and redefining the interconnected thinking underlying the key principles of the Act, to re-engage people and keep the principles dynamic?

Local authorities are reinvigorating the principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act by embedding them in organisational culture, staff development, and citizen involvement. For instance, Bridgend utilises “story panels” and “Most Significant Change” feedback to ensure principles like voice, choice, and co-production are central to everyday practice, supported by ongoing strengths-based training. Across Wales, reflective practice, leadership forums, and co-production forums are used to renew and adapt the Act’s core principles. Areas such as Torfaen and Neath Port Talbot highlight the need for regular engagement and inclusive dialogue with citizens and practitioners, while Wrexham and Pembrokeshire stress leadership and collaboration. Local authorities recommended actions include embedding principles in training, using outcome-focused measures, and sharing learning via digital platforms. The Welsh Government’s role is to provide refreshed guidance and national campaigns, while Directors of Social Services develop local engagement strategies, ensuring the principles remain active, relevant, and a catalyst for ongoing innovation in social care.

12. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the development of a culture of innovation, creativity and quality improvement, rather than just of compliance?

Local authorities are moving beyond mere compliance to foster a culture centred on innovation and continuous quality improvement in social care. Anglesey’s “Trauma Informed Island” initiative exemplifies this, training over 700 staff and partners in trauma-informed methods and embedding reflective practice throughout daily operations. Staff are encouraged to pursue further training, experiment with digital tools, and are recognised for innovative work.

Across Wales, initiatives empower both staff and citizens to shape services and drive improvements. This is supported by organisations such as Social Care Wales, who act to support the whole sector to innovate through their [Ymlaen strategy](#).

Local authorities highlight the importance of leadership in embedding innovation as a core organisational value. They also recommended actions include establishing innovation hubs, incentivising staff to trial new approaches, and applying data insights to redesign services.

Co-production with citizens ensures solutions reflect lived experience, while flexible funding and supportive national frameworks from Welsh Government are essential to reward improvement. Directors of Social Services describe how they should lead local quality improvement cycles, providing training in design thinking and digital tools, setting the foundation for a dynamic, outcome-focused culture under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

13. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the role and status that social enterprises and co-operatives have under the Act in order to better support individuals, carers and communities?

Local authorities are increasingly championing social enterprises and co-operatives as vital partners in delivering innovative, community-based social care, supported by organisations such as Cwmpas, who act to support social co-operatives in Wales.

Projects like Flintshire’s Micro-Care, demonstrate how small, local providers—often social enterprises or co-operatives—offer flexible, person-centred support that fills gaps left by traditional services. Across Wales, councils are commissioning these organisations for advocacy, day services, and community activities, embedding co-production and social value in procurement to empower citizens and strengthen local economies.

To further enhance their role under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, authorities are urged to formally integrate social enterprises and co-operatives into commissioning frameworks, create regional directories, and provide capacity-building grants. Local authorities emphasise the importance of involving these organisations in service design, not just delivery, with the Welsh Government working to set clear guidance and funding streams. Directors of Social Services seek to implement local engagement and procurement strategies prioritising social value, ensuring the provider market is diverse and resilient, and supporting individuals, carers, and communities effectively.

14. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the extent to which good practice, and system knowledge ‘travels’ across Wales?

The Welsh Government has implemented the Integrated Community Care System (ICCS) arrangements to enable collaborative leadership and drive transformation in the way regions work together and learn from each other. A central component of the ICCS arrangements is the monthly Building Community Capacity (BCC) meetings, which convene regional leaders to provide a forum for sharing examples of good practice and system knowledge. This enables regions to learn from one another and apply successful strategies within their own areas.

The insights from these meetings are used to inform the National Delivery Group, ensuring that local and regional experiences have an impact on national understanding and priority-setting. Through these regular meetings, service leads are given valuable opportunities to discuss local examples of effective practice, as well as to address system challenges and explore opportunities for improvement as regional partnerships. Examples of this include Carmarthenshire’s work with the West Wales Regional Partnership Board highlights how joint commissioning and thematic reviews help spread innovative approaches across counties. Similarly, Denbighshire and Conwy’s involvement in national working groups, use of shared toolkits, and dissemination of learning from pilot projects support consistency and improvement in social care delivery.

Social Care Good Practice Forum

The Social Care Good Practice Forum is facilitated by the National Office for Care and Support in partnership with Social Care Wales and colleagues from local authority social care teams. The forum focuses on sharing thematic learning and strengthening the link between policy and practice. Drawing on research evidence, local authorities showcase

examples of notable practice, with discussion centred on pan-Wales learning and the potential adoption or adaptation of these approaches in other areas.

With input from the social care sector, the forum adopted a refreshed approach in 2025–26, focusing on themes identified by forum members. Recent sessions have explored workforce recruitment and retention, staff wellbeing with a particular focus on decompression and trauma support, digital innovations supporting efficiencies in service delivery and approaches being undertaken to deliver the National Framework for the Commissioning of Care and Support. Forum discussions are linked to the National Office for Care and Support newsletter, enabling partners to build connections, share learning, and adapt good practice within their own organisations.

Social Care Wales also work to increase the reach of good practice through their [Insight Collective](#) website and [project finder](#) tool. Social Care Wales support the sector by sharing data through their data portal, evidence summaries, establishing communities of practice with regular peer learning, and coaching and mentoring for innovation and evaluation. Welsh Government further enhances this through the knowledge-sharing communities to support the new [National commissioning framework](#)

15. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the quality, range, consistency, and implementation of data collection, analysis and interpretation in order to inform quality improvement and service development?

Welsh Government and local authorities are improving data collection and analysis to drive quality improvement in social care. Over the last three years Welsh Government has established the new Adult Receiving Care and Support census and the Unpaid Carer's census, to improve the national understand of what care is being provided and to who.

Similarly, Cardiff's integrated dashboards and case management system allow real-time tracking of key indicators, helping managers to spot trends and address challenges quickly. Carmarthenshire and other councils are investing in predictive analytics and shared intelligence, supporting early identification of risks and preventative interventions. There is a growing emphasis on embedding data literacy, standardising reporting, and combining citizen feedback with quantitative data for continuous service improvement.

However, local authorities recommend establishing national data standards—such as mandatory fields and coding for language and carer status—to enhance consistency. A unified data model and shared metadata would enable local dashboards to contribute to a coherent national picture. Automated data quality checks and quarterly maturity reporting are proposed by local authorities, alongside greater analyst capacity and training in root cause analysis and outcomes measurement. Publishing dashboard methods could improve interpretation and comparability, while aligning commissioning to evidence and funding prevention analytics will ensure insights directly inform service redesign.

16. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the population planning and engagement processes that meaningfully engage local populations about needs?

Local authorities have made notable strides in involving local communities in shaping social care services. Local engagement is now widely embedded, with regular consultations, feedback mechanisms, and partnership forums helping to identify and address local needs. Conwy exemplifies this approach, using multi-agency panels and an engagement framework that includes families in decision-making, resulting in improved outcomes and high satisfaction rates among families.

However, despite this progress, challenges remain. Engagement is not always consistent or accessible, particularly for underrepresented groups such as disabled people, ethnic minorities, and those in rural or deprived areas. Existing methods—like surveys and forums—do not always reach everyone, and some residents feel disconnected from the process or unsure whether their contributions make a difference.

To enhance inclusivity, local authorities are encouraged to adopt more creative and diverse engagement approaches, such as community outreach, co-production workshops, and peer-led initiatives. Clearer communication about how public input is used, and ongoing dialogue, are needed to build trust and ensure engagement genuinely influences service design. Stronger partnerships with third sector organisations, schools, and local businesses will also improve continuous and responsive engagement.

17. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the information, advice and assistance that service users and carers have prior to, and on entry to the social care system, alongside an understanding of their rights under the Act, so that their expectations are appropriately managed?

Welsh Government and local authorities have established a national Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) network to bring IAA leads from across Wales together, to share good practice and learning, enabling opportunities for local authorities to learn from one another to improve local IAA delivery.

Local authorities have also enhanced the (IAA) provided to social care users and carers. Notably, Ceredigion's Penmorfa Centre for Independent Living offers accessible advice, self-assessment tools, and supports informed choices, while a Quality Assurance Framework gathers feedback to refine services. Despite this progress, inconsistencies remain; users and carers often face unclear referral pathways and eligibility criteria, and staff sometimes lack confidence in signposting support or explaining statutory rights. To address these issues, authorities should prioritise staff training in strengths-based, person-centred communication, and expand outreach in multiple formats and languages. Co-producing resources with service users and carers, alongside regular feedback, will further improve clarity and empowerment. Greater integration between health, social care, and third sector partners is also essential to deliver seamless, joined-up IAA, reducing confusion and ensuring that expectations are well managed from the outset.

18. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in multi-agency working and practice (including safeguarding), and in the practices of remote and distant working for some forms of interaction?

Welsh Government, in partnership with local authorities, the NHS, and the third sector, has established the Integrated Community Care System (ICCS) Framework for Wales. Regional Partnership Boards are utilising this framework, supported by the £146.8 million Regional Integration Fund and other resources, to deliver more joined-up community care and support services.

Local authorities have strengthened multi-agency working and safeguarding through integrated approaches, better information sharing, and joint training. Initiatives such as multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH), partnership forums, and shared protocols with health, education, police, and third sector partners have improved responsiveness to complex needs. For example, Conwy's Strengthening Families Team coordinates tailored interventions through weekly panels and forums, while Cardiff's 'Listen Up' digital tool supports remote safeguarding when in-person contact is limited.

To build on these advances, authorities are seeking more consistent digital systems and information-sharing, joint training for shared safeguarding cultures, and clearer escalation pathways for complex cases. Emphasis is also placed on co-producing solutions with service users and staff, closing engagement gaps among marginalised groups, and investing in secure, user-friendly digital platforms. Priorities include boosting digital literacy for staff and families, promoting digital inclusion, and evaluating the impact of remote working on safeguarding practices.

19. What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in technological solutions that enable people to live independently, especially in a post-pandemic context of system pressures and workforce shortages?

Local authorities are increasingly using technology to support independent living, particularly in response to post-pandemic system pressures and workforce shortages. Councils have invested in digital transformation, expanded telecare, and introduced assistive technology such as self-assessment tools and sensor-based monitoring. Ceredigion's Penmorfa Centre for Independent Living exemplifies this, offering a range of digital aids and piloting virtual check-ins, which have boosted service efficiency and empowered residents, especially in rural areas, to manage their wellbeing independently. To further enhance these solutions, local authorities recognise the need for improved digital infrastructure—especially in rural and deprived communities—integrated case management systems for seamless information sharing, and comprehensive digital literacy support for both staff and service users. Co-producing technology with citizens and providing ongoing technical assistance are also priorities. Sustainable funding and national coordination would help to expand successful innovations and ensure technology continues to meet evolving needs.

The Digital in Social Care (DiSC) Cymru Framework is a national partnership that supports social care organisations in Wales to use digital, data and technology to improve outcomes for people who need care and support, unpaid carers and the workforce. It is structured around the aim of better digital, better social care, better lives, including enabling more person-centred, preventative and resilient services and helping people to live independently for longer, even amid system pressures and workforce shortages.

DiSC Cymru is built around four interconnected pillars: Brilliant Basics, which strengthens digital foundations such as skills, data and processes; Bright Ideas, which supports innovation, testing and scaling of new approaches; Building Knowledge, which promotes shared learning and spread of good practice; and Big Change, which aligns digital transformation with national reform and policy priorities.

Annex D – Data Quality and Sources

[Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014,](#)

[Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014: part 9 statutory guidance \(partnership arrangements\)](#)

[Regulation and Inspection of Social Care \(Wales\) Act 2016](#)

[Care Inspectorate Wales \(CIW\)](#)

[Social Care Wales \(SCW\)](#)

[Performance and Improvement Framework.](#)

[Find statistics and data about Wales | StatsWales](#)

[National Outcomes Framework](#)

[Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 Evaluation test questions](#)

[Director of social services annual report: guidance](#)

[National Office for Care and Support](#)

[National Commissioning Framework,](#)

[Social Care Wales](#)

Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSSC)

The-world-shrinks-carer-loneliness.pdf

Audit Wales PDF: Follow-up Review of Corporate Arrangements for Safeguarding – Newport City Council

Powys County Council – Follow-up Review of Arrangements for Corporate

Safeguarding Progress in addressing corporate safeguarding arrangements – Powys County Council

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council – Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements Follow-up Report

The Digital in Social Care (DiSC) Cymru Framework

Anti-racism | Social Care Wales

STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON REPRESENTATIONS MADE BY THE CITIZEN VOICE BODY

251013-CIW-Annual-Report-2024-25-en.pdf

Homepage | Audit Wales