

WLGA Update - WSLC October 2026

1. WLGA conference 2026

The WLGA Annual Conference brought together elected members, senior officers and partners from across Wales to consider the opportunities and challenges facing local government in the new Senedd term. Highlights included the renewal of the Strategic Partnership Agreement between Welsh Government and local government, the launch of the “More than you think” campaign marking the 30th anniversary of Wales’s 22 councils, and the Welsh Local Government Awards. Our fringe session, Sector Led Improvement: Building Data Capability Across Wales, explored councils’ experiences of using data and evidence, including what is working well, the challenges they face and the support that would make the greatest difference. The session attracted a fantastic turnout, and the insights shared by participants will help inform the WLGA’s ongoing plans for data support, training and capacity-building activity.

If you are interested and would like to get more involved, please get in touch with [Suzanne Draper](#).

2. Data work programme

The WLGA Data Programme was established following the merger with Data Cymru and brings together a range of data-related activity previously delivered across different services and organisations. The programme provides a coordinated approach to data collection, research, analysis, governance and the development of data tools, helping councils and partners make effective use of data to support decision-making and service improvement.

The programme continues to support councils and partners through the delivery of data collections, surveys, dashboards, benchmarking tools, analytical support and research activity. Alongside maintaining these services, work has continued to identify opportunities to improve how data is collected, managed, shared and used across Welsh local government.

Recent activity has included progressing the Local Council Data Audit, supporting the continued development of data dashboards and tools, securing future access to commercial data through consortium arrangements, and engaging with councils and partners to better understand current and emerging data requirements. The programme has also continued to provide analytical support, reporting services and data expertise across a range of policy and service areas.

The programme will continue to deliver core services while engaging with councils and partners to better understand future data requirements and opportunities for collaboration across the sector. Findings from current projects and engagement activity will help inform future priorities and identify areas where shared approaches could add value.

Engagement with representatives from the Digital Advisory Group (DAG) will continue over the coming months to help shape the future direction of the programme. These discussions will provide an opportunity to better understand council priorities, identify common challenges and opportunities, and explore where the programme can add most value through data, research, analysis and shared tools. A dedicated Data Programme session is also planned as part of a future in-person DAG meeting to facilitate wider discussion on sector needs, emerging priorities and potential areas for future collaboration and development.

For further information, please contact [Brenna Organ](#).

3. NRS

Seven councils are participating in the September 2026 National Resident Survey. Lower participation levels were anticipated this year, as participating councils have agreed to align future survey activity around a September 2027 cycle, with most councils indicating a preference for a biennial approach. Work is underway to support councils throughout the fieldwork period, including providing guidance and responding to operational queries while surveys remain live.

As reported previously, the Welsh Language Commissioner provided four proposed Welsh language questions for consideration within the survey. Since then, engagement has taken place with councils and Welsh language colleagues to better understand the evidence, reporting and performance requirements across the sector. Feedback identified an opportunity to expand this work beyond the initial questions and develop a dedicated Welsh Language module that would provide councils with richer insight to support planning, service improvement, policy development and reporting activities.

The four questions proposed by the Welsh Language Commissioner will form part of the module, alongside additional questions developed in collaboration with local authority Welsh language colleagues. The proposed approach was presented to Welsh language representatives from across Welsh local government and received positive support. A small working group has now been established to help shape the content of the wider module, ensuring it reflects local government priorities and provides meaningful, actionable evidence for councils. The group will continue development work over the coming months, with the aim of including the new module in the 2027 National Resident Survey.

Alongside questionnaire development, work continues to enhance the National Resident Survey dashboard and reporting outputs. Building on previous improvements to dashboard functionality and accessibility, development is underway to introduce dynamic explanatory text alongside charts and tables. This will provide users with additional context, highlight notable findings and trends, and help non-technical audiences interpret results more effectively. The enhancements are intended to improve accessibility, support evidence-based decision-making and enable councils to derive greater value from their survey results.

For further information, please contact [Brenna Organ](#).

4. Commercial Data Procurement

Work has continued to coordinate the procurement of commercial data on behalf of participating organisations through the PayCheck consortium. Consortium arrangements for 2026/27 have been successfully agreed, ensuring continued access to household income data for the 15 participating organisations and maintaining an important evidence source used to support service planning, policy development and analysis across the sector.

The continuation of the consortium for a further year provides an opportunity to undertake wider engagement with councils and partner organisations to better understand how commercial data is currently being used, assess future requirements, and determine the level of demand across Welsh local government. This work will help inform consideration of longer-term options for the procurement and delivery of commercial data beyond 2027, ensuring any future arrangements continue to meet sector needs and provide value for participating organisations.

Over the coming months, work will continue engagement with current and potential participants to gather evidence on the use, benefits and future demand for commercial data. The findings will be used to explore sustainable long-term procurement options and help shape future arrangements for accessing commercial data across the sector.

For further information, please contact [Brenna Organ](#).

5. Council Data Audit

The WLGA's Council Data Audit explored how required data reporting affects Welsh councils and how effectively the data is used. The research focused on Social Care, Education and Planning.

The project was developed in response to concerns about things such as manual processes, duplicated effort and the resources needed to meet reporting requirements. Research conducted in April and May, with input from 17 of the 22 councils, provided insight into both the range of returns councils manage and the experiences of the officers responsible for them.

This work has produced a Data Return Catalogue – containing information about each data return that we covered - and a findings report containing recommendations for improvement. Both are undergoing final review and awaiting senior approval. Once signed off, we expect to share them at the upcoming WSLC meeting.

For further information, please contact [Rob Pascoe](#).

6. Self-Assessment Performance dataset (SAPD) Communities of Practice

The [SAPD tool](#) is a resource for Welsh Council's to access a standardised set of performance data that allows them to understand how they are performing against their objectives and how this compares to others. The dataset brings together a range of data from multiple reliable sources to allow users to access, interrogate and understand their performance.

Work is currently underway to redevelop the underlying data model for SAPD, which will provide greater flexibility and allow further functionality to be developed within the tool. A key development will be to bring the base data used to calculate performance measures into SAPD. This will allow users to view the underlying data alongside the calculated performance information, providing a fuller picture of performance in one place.

The development of SAPD continues to be led by the Welsh Council's Performance Information Community of Practice (WCPI CoP), which provides a forum for councils to shape the development of the tool and share good practice.

For further information, please contact [Ana Harries](#).

7. Welsh Local Government Performance Outcomes Framework (WLGOF)

The Renewed Strategic Partnership Agreement between Welsh Government and the WLGA was signed at the WLGA Conference last week. The SPA reflects a shared commitment to strengthening the trusted partnership between the Welsh Government and local government. The agreement sets out plans to work collectively to develop the Welsh Local Government Performance Outcomes Framework. The framework will help councils collectively define what success looks like from a local government perspective and establish a shared approach to understanding progress towards agreed outcomes.

For further information, please contact [Ana Harries](#).

8. Capacity building: Training and webinars

Open training programme

Are you looking to learn more about collecting and using data? Do you work with data and want to extract more value from it? Are you thinking of expanding your skills?

We have a suite of training courses that will **introduce** you to:

- Summary statistics;
- Presenting data;
- Survey design and analysis;
- Planning and delivering focus groups;
- Data 101;
- Performance data; and
- Understanding Power BI dashboards
- Beginner's guide to Microsoft Excel

We have published training guides available on our [website](#).

We run each of our training courses online every quarter where local council colleagues can register to attend for **free**. Other organisations can attend at a cost of £50 plus vat per person, per session.

We are now able to offer both English and Welsh language sessions.

To find out more and to book a place on one of our open sessions, please visit [TicketSource](#).

Alternatively, for a small cost, we can provide training courses specifically for your organisation, online or in person, at a time and date that suits you.

If you'd like to discuss your requirements, then please get in contact with [Róisín Roberts](#).

9. Economic modelling and AI

We are exploring a project aimed at supporting local councils with their local economic development strategies. The project hinges around a tool that will allow local councils, at a hyper local level, to:

1. understand the interdependencies between different policies and investment strategies within a place, and
2. model their potential impacts and improvements on longer term economic and social outcomes.

We are also exploring what role AI might play in this.

Before we consider any design work, we are undertaking a short discovery phase focused on three questions:

- Has this already been done, or is there something that could be adapted?
- Would such a tool add value to the sector?
- Would councils want and use it?

If you are interested and would like to get more involved, please get in touch with [Suzanne Draper](#).

10. Partnership support

The WLGA is reviewing and updating the core dataset and data catalogue used to support the previous round of Well-being Assessments. The updated resources will support both Public Services Boards and Regional Partnership Boards as they prepare their latest Well-being and Population

Needs Assessments. This will give partnerships access to relevant, up-to-date information, help reduce duplication and support a more efficient use of analytical capacity across Wales.

Alongside this immediate support, Welsh Government will explore options for developing a national data tool that could support partnerships data needs on an ongoing basis.

For more information, please contact [Shannon Richards](#).

11. Education

The WLGA Digital and Data Team is progressing a focused programme of work to help council education services respond to changes in policy, data requirements, systems and technology. Building on the programme's initial discovery phase, the work will develop a shared evidence base, ensure that the local government perspective informs national activity, and identify where coordination, shared learning or further support could add value.

Work relating to Additional Learning Needs (ALN) has now been confirmed as a dedicated project. Its scope will focus on council systems and processes, roles and responsibilities, information flows, and councils' readiness for revised national data requirements. This reflects the programme's emphasis on how local authorities manage and use education data to support oversight, decision-making and improved outcomes.

The previous DP26 School Management Information System project is also being reviewed. This follow-up activity will establish the current position across councils and capture councils' experiences of system migration, including the benefits achieved and practical lessons that could support future activity.

Alongside this, the proposed review of the wider education digital and data landscape has been refined into a short, desk-based exercise. It will bring together evidence from recent activity, recurring challenges, identified gaps and potential opportunities, while avoiding the creation of an additional information-gathering burden for councils.

A Programme Oversight Group will be established to provide direction and coordination across the work programme. The group will bring together education and digital leadership, policy colleagues, representatives from the Digital Advisory Group and relevant expertise from councils.

A programme briefing has been shared with Education and Digital Cabinet Members, Directors of Education and the Digital Advisory Group. The briefing outlines the work now under way and highlights where support and engagement from councils will be required.

During September and the following months, activity will focus on targeted evidence gathering to establish the ALN baseline, completing the initial desk-based landscape review, and reconnecting with leads involved in the earlier School MIS project. This engagement will help establish the current position across all councils and inform the programme's next phase.

For further information, please contact [Sheena Thomas](#).

12. Digital in Social Care (DiSC) Cymru

The WLGA continues to support the development of Digital in Social Care (DiSC) Cymru, a national partnership bringing together councils, care organisations and national partners to strengthen the use of digital, data and technology across social care in Wales. The partnership continues to mature, with 18 councils now having signed the DiSC Cymru Partnership Agreement alongside the core support organisations of the WLGA, Social Care Wales and Cwmpas.

Engagement is continuing to promote the partnership's benefits, ambitions and commitments, and to strengthen relationships with organisations contributing to the digital social care landscape. DiSC Cymru provides a shared structure through which partners can coordinate activity, reduce duplication and improve how people across the sector access relevant support, information and opportunities.

The partnership's governance arrangements have evolved to support these aims. A Strategic Leadership Board has been established to shape and coordinate activity, provide direction and guidance, and ensure that delivery is aligned with the agreed long-term vision, priorities and intended outcomes for digital transformation in social care.

A cross-sector communications group is also meeting monthly to coordinate updates on forthcoming activities and opportunities. An initial priority is to develop a shared communications strategy and plan, supported by consistent messaging that raises awareness of the partnership, its purpose and the activity being delivered through its programmes of work.

DiSC Cymru is the headline sponsor of the National Social Care Conference. This will provide an opportunity to showcase the strength of the partnership, highlight achievements to date and share future plans with organisations and individuals from across the social care sector.

Activity is organised around four interconnected pillars: Big Change, Bright Ideas, Brilliant Basics and Building Knowledge.

Big Change

The Big Change programme focuses on progressing national social care programmes, strengthening alignment with relevant health activity, and influencing national policy and funding. Its overall purpose is to ensure that digital, data and technology can contribute effectively to the reform and improvement of social care across Wales.

Current activity is focused on progressing recommendations from discovery reports commissioned during the previous financial year, particularly in relation to Technology Enabled Care and procurement. Working groups have been established to review and prioritise the recommendations and develop appropriate action plans. Organisations and individuals with an interest in either area are invited to contribute to these groups.

The programme will also work closely with the Strategic Leadership Board to agree the direction of priority activity. This includes sustainable funding, engagement with the health sector, provider digital maturity, commercial engagement, and the development and ongoing management of data standards.

Bright Ideas

The Bright Ideas programme supports the development of evidence-led and innovative responses to existing and emerging challenges in social care. It brings together research, technology and innovation to identify opportunities that can deliver practical benefits for the people who provide and draw on care and support.

An important part of the programme is engagement with organisations that can provide specialist expertise, research, guidance and opportunities for innovation. This includes working with partners such as Life Sciences Hub Wales and SCALE to promote existing resources and ensure that the priorities and requirements of the social care sector inform future activity.

As the potential opportunities and risks associated with artificial intelligence continue to develop, DiSC partners are coordinating cross-sector work to understand current and emerging priorities, practical opportunities and developments in the AI market. This activity is planned for early in the third quarter and, together with the Social Care Challenge Book, will help inform future priorities across the DiSC Cymru programmes.

Brilliant Basics

The Brilliant Basics programme focuses on strengthening the essential digital and data foundations that support social care services across Wales. It brings together work relating to technology, services, customers, data, people and skills, helping councils and partners develop a shared understanding of the current position before future improvement activity is agreed.

Current priorities include the Know Your Technology audit and the Social Care Challenge Book. Related activity on process mapping, data standards and the Annual Workforce Implementation Report is being progressed through the Connecting Care workstreams.

The Know Your Technology audit has been issued to councils and is gathering perspectives from digital and IT teams and operational social care services. It covers systems, suppliers, integration, hosting, contractual arrangements, the use of AI, manual processes and opportunities for improvement. Once the audit closes in mid-September, responses will be reviewed and followed up where necessary to ensure that the findings reflect both technical and frontline social care perspectives.

The Social Care Challenge Book is bringing together existing research and evidence to develop draft challenge statements for testing with the sector. This will help establish a prioritised view of shared challenges and provide a stronger evidence base for future DiSC Cymru activity. The next stage will include interviews, validation discussions and survey activity, with councils encouraged to contribute as the work develops.

Alongside this activity, Welsh Government has worked with the WLGA and councils to develop an AI Essentials e-learning package for the public sector. The training is now available through councils' Learning Management Systems and provides an accessible introduction to AI, including its opportunities, risks and responsible use. It is intended to establish a consistent foundation of

knowledge as councils explore and adopt AI-enabled approaches, with some councils already using the package as mandatory training in support of their AI policies.

The programme is also continuing to work with Cwmpas to support digital inclusion and accessibility across Wales, helping to ensure that digital services and technologies remain accessible to everyone.

Building Knowledge

The Building Knowledge programme focuses on improving how digital social care learning, evidence and good practice are identified, evaluated, shared and reused across Wales. While considerable knowledge and innovation already exist across the sector, learning can be difficult to locate, inconsistently captured and not routinely reused beyond individual organisations, regions or networks.

The Knowledge Sharing Mechanisms discovery report has now been finalised. It brings together evidence about the current landscape and identifies the need for a more consistent approach to sharing knowledge. The findings show that strong foundations are already in place, but that information remains dispersed across different organisations, platforms and networks.

The findings and initial options have been presented to the DiSC Strategic Group. A follow-up options paper has also been developed to support consideration of whether to create a new national approach, strengthen and connect existing resources, or retain the current arrangements.

Engagement has continued with Social Care Wales, including discussions about the proposed “what good looks like” framework and opportunities to align future work where capacity and funding permit. The next stage will be to confirm the preferred direction and develop a proportionate delivery plan covering governance, ownership, participation and any further engagement required with councils and partners.

The programme will maintain links with Social Care Wales and other partners to ensure that future activity builds on existing communities, evidence and routes for sharing learning, rather than creating unnecessary duplication.

For further information, please contact [Emma Willis](#).