



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**
Social Care **Wales**

Social care data maturity

We recently published research about the data maturity of local authority social care teams in Wales.

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Go to <https://socialcare.wales/research-and-data/data-maturity-assessment-2023> for the latest version.

We recently published [research about the data maturity of local authority social care teams in Wales](#).

What is data maturity?

‘Data maturity’ refers to the readiness of an organisation to make best use of the data it holds.

What did we do?

We commissioned a company called [Alma Economics](#) to carry out an independent data maturity assessment of all local authorities in Wales.

The local authorities completed a questionnaire about different aspects of their social care data functions. Each authority then received a summary report which provided advice on the steps it could take to improve its own data maturity.

Alma Economics also used the assessments from all 22 local authorities to produce a [national report](#) which gives an overview of the social care data landscape in Wales. The local authorities remained anonymous in this report.

The questionnaire also explored the sector’s readiness to integrate social care data with healthcare data through the [National Data Resource \(NDR\)](#), which would mean being compatible with the Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR) standards.

FHIR standards are an internationally recognised way of describing healthcare data and have been selected by the four UK nations as the standard of choice.

Find out more about FHIR

You can find out more about FHIR standards and why they're important to social care in a blog on our Insight Collective website.

Why did we carry out a data maturity assessment?

Our aim is to support social care providers in Wales to understand how they can make best use of the data that's collected, processed and shared as part of their delivery of social care, starting with local authorities.

Understanding how data mature your organisation is allows you to know where to focus your resources to make the best use of the data you collect.

Becoming better at using the data we collect ultimately improves services. It does this by giving you the information you need to make more informed, evidence-based decisions.

Being better with data also leads to an improved work environment for your staff as they become more confident and empowered to use the information you have in their day-to-day activities.

This isn't about collecting new data, but making better use of the data we already collect.

What did the research find?

The research found that data was widely considered a core priority for local authorities, while most have robust data collection processes in place and use data to influence policymaking.

But the report also identified areas for improvement. These include a need to increase skills and resources to make the most of social care data, making data systems more user-friendly and compatible, and making sure data is shared effectively with other organisations.

Among the findings related to FHIR compatibility were that many local authorities have not yet developed robust data exchange practices, while most still rely on manual and semi-structured data formats like Excel (96 per cent) and Word or PDF (72 per cent) to exchange data.

What did the report recommend?

The report acknowledged that additional funding and collaboration across the sector will be important in increasing data maturity in social care and delivering on its recommendations, which included:

- expand the data maturity assessment to other social care organisations
- building on our [Statement of strategic intent](#), the sector should develop a data strategy and roadmap outlining clear actions to improve data maturity
- a sector-wide ‘data dictionary’ should be developed, to standardise definitions of core social care data
- data maturity should be monitored over time through follow-up assessments or self-assessment tools
- social care organisations should develop individual data maturity action plans, informed by sector-wide strategies and individual assessments.

The report made other recommendations specific to supporting compatibility with FHIR, which is pronounced 'fire', including:

- raise awareness of the NDR in the social care sector
- carry out a FHIR-compatibility review
- work together to create an action plan for achieving FHIR compatibility, and set up a multidisciplinary working group to oversee its implementation
- work with systems suppliers to align data systems with FHIR standards
- increase awareness and knowledge of FHIR standards through targeted training and events
- develop a set of shared FHIR resources to support local authorities and other social care organisations on their way to FHIR compatibility.

We're talking to our partners about how we can work together to address the recommendations in the report.

Read the report

Read the report on our Inisght Collective website.

Find out more

If you'd like to know more about our data maturity work, please contact data@socialcare.wales.