Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Insights Dashboard

Narrative Report

V1.0 May 25

Contents

Introduction

This narrative report accompanies the first iteration of the **Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Insights Dashboard,** a new resource designed to support improvement, planning and self-evaluation across Scotland's funded ELC sector.

The report aims to:

- Provide context for the development of the tool, including its origins, purpose and collaborative design approach.

- Offer an overview of the dashboard's current features, functionality and underlying data sources.

- Present illustrative use cases to demonstrate how the tool can support real-world decision-making.

- Set out key limitations and identify opportunities for future development.

This is not a technical guide but is intended to support understanding, build confidence in the tool's use and highlight its potential to inform meaningful improvement activity. The report is also designed to support transparency and engagement with wider stakeholders who have an interest in the delivery and impact of funded ELC.

The ELC Insights Dashboard and accompanying report represent the first step in an ongoing journey of development. Future iterations will continue to be shaped in partnership with local government colleagues and through continued engagement with users.

Background

In the **Strategic Childcare Plan 2022-26**, published in October 2022, the Scottish Government committed to working with partners in the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) sector **to develop an outcomes and measurement framework (OMF) for funded ELC** that would be jointly owned by Scottish Government and local government.

Since then, the Scottish Government and COSLA, working in partnership with the Improvement Service, have been working with a group of local authorities to develop a Framework that is workable in practice, and which adds value to the ELC sector. The goal was to create a shared resource that supports service improvement and accountability without increasing the reporting burden on local authorities.

The OMF aims to:

- Help councils understand and compare ELC delivery in a meaningful and robust way

- Enable learning from effective practice across Scotland

- Support assurance around the outcomes being delivered by funded ELC

- Promote data-informed planning and improvement activity

Key principles guiding its development included:

- Using existing data to minimise duplication of effort

- Avoiding league tables while supporting transparency

- Focusing on improvement and shared accountability

Outputs

Following engagement with stakeholders **four** key outputs were identified to be developed as part of the OMF:

1. An online **ELC Insights dashboard** for councils and SG policy leads with data on funded ELC service delivery.

2. A supporting **summary narrative report** providing context and insights and **analysis of outcomes and trends.**
3. An **offer of support and resources** to provide early intervention and access to best practice materials across councils and other partners.
4. A longer-term project that is reliant on SEEMiS Early Years to enable the **connection of individual-level data on funded ELC participation to long-term outcomes**, such as children's later educational outcomes.

Development Journey

From the outset, the Strategic Childcare Plan made clear that the Outcomes and Measurement Framework (OMF) must be jointly owned by the Scottish Government and local government. This principle has shaped both the process and ethos of the project, with a strong emphasis on collaboration and shared responsibility.

To ensure the ELC Insights Dashboard was grounded in the needs of the sector, a co-design methodology was adopted. A group of local authorities participated as co-design partners, with others acting as critical friends to test assumptions and provide feedback. These partners were involved throughout a series of agile project sprints, contributing directly to the design, development, and refinement of the tool.

The process began with a set of exploratory workshops with local authorities, helping to shape the initial scope and feasibility. From this, key questions were developed, and user stories were created to guide the design process. An interactive prototype was then built and tested iteratively, incorporating feedback from users at each stage.

In addition to local authority input, COSLA has been engaged throughout the development process, supporting alignment with wider policy priorities and governance structures. Alongside the technical development of the dashboard, this supporting narrative report was scoped and developed with input from the same group of councils through a dedicated project sprint focused on its content and purpose.

This collaborative and iterative approach has ensured the Dashboard is both useable and meaningful - reflecting real-world needs while maintaining a clear focus on improvement and assurance.

Current Tools and Functionality

The ELC Insights Dashboard has been developed to make a core set of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) data more accessible, visual, and usable for local authorities. It brings together data from several established sources and presents this through an interactive dashboard with four main components: **Map, Quality, Uptake, and Spine Chart.**

Local authorities only have access to their own council's data within the dashboard. While comparative analysis is supported — particularly through the spine chart tab — this is done without revealing other councils' specific data points, helping to support benchmarking and self-evaluation without enabling league tables.

This section provides an overview of each of the main components, describing what each tab does, the features available to users, and the types of insights it is designed to support. While it is not intended as a full user guide, it aims to give readers a clear orientation to the tool's layout and functionality.

Map Tab

Exploring Access and Setting-Level Detail

The map view is designed to support geographical analysis of ELC provision across a council area. To access filtering and display options, users should first expand the side panel by clicking the arrow in the top-left corner of the map interface (as shown in the image).

This will reveal a full range of filters, which are outlined in detail later in this section. Once expanded, users can customise the map display to support more targeted analysis based on their local priorities and planning needs.
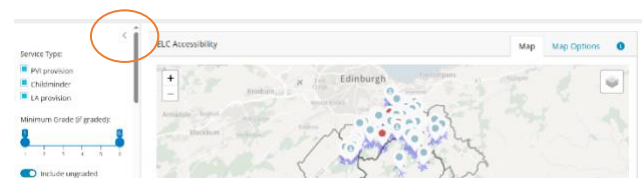
Navigation and Layout

Users can **click and drag** to pan across the map and **zoom** using mouse scroll or the on-screen "+/-" buttons.

All funded ELC settings are represented as location markers on the map. In the case of childminders, locations are approximate; childminders are mapped in the centre of the datazone which, according to Care Inspectorate data, they operate in.

Map Options

Within the options tab of the map interface, users can select a categorical variable to colour markers by. These include:

- **National Standard quality compliance** (i.e. whether the provider meets the minimum grade of 4 across all key questions), or

- **Detailed National Standard quality categories** (to differentiate between settings meeting and exceeding the National Standard, and those failing to meet the National Standard on only one, or more than one key question area), or

- **Service type** (e.g. local authority provision, private and voluntary (PVI) provision, childminders).

The options tab also includes a toggle to adjust the visibility of deselected settings, which appear in grey without their corresponding travel isodistances, enabling a clearer visual comparison between settings that meet the selected criteria and those that do not.

Clicking on any **location marker** opens a pop-up showing setting-level information, including:

- Care Inspectorate service number (with a direct link to the Care Service summary page on the Care Inspectorate website)

- Service type

- Whether the setting caters for eligible two-year-olds

- Grades across the four Care Inspectorate Key Questions

Filtering Options

On the left side of the map, users can apply filters to refine the display. Current filter options include:

- Service type (LA provision, PVI provision, Childminders)

- Minimum inspection grade

- Whether the setting offers places to eligible two-year-olds

- Attendance pattern (term-time only, extended year only, or both)

- Active status (Active, Inactive)

- Service Improvement Period status (Yes, No)

- Number of registered places (according to Care Inspectorate data)

- Ward area

- Service Registration Date

- Date of latest published graded inspection

- Count of complaints upheld in the previous and current inspection year

- Any requirements at inspections in the previous and current inspection year

- Count of enforcements issued

Data Overlays

The map also includes a number of optional data overlays which support analysis of equity and access. These can be accessed via moving the mouse over the layers symbol in the top right corner of the map. This will reveal:

- Council and ward boundaries

- SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) deciles (2020)

- % children in low-income families (DWP and NRS)

- 2–5-year-old population estimate and population density (IS and NRS sub-council area population projections)

- The ability to remove setting markers to view only

- And Isodistance overlays:

    - 10 minutes walking distance

    - 20 minutes walking distance

    - 5-mile driving distance

    - 10-mile driving distance
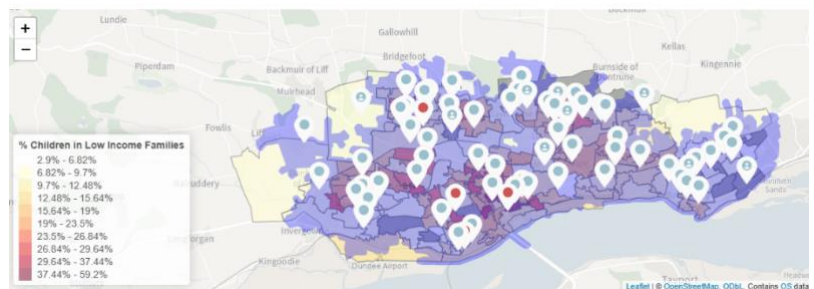
These distance overlays are created using ArcGIS Network Analysis and Ordnance Survey street networks and are intended to help users assess physical accessibility to ELC provision, particularly for target groups such as eligible two-year-olds.

Hovering over map shapes in the contextual data overlays shows the area name and corresponding data.

Results Table

Beneath the map, a table automatically populates with all settings that match the selected filter criteria. This provides a more detailed view of individual settings, including all of the filterable attributes listed above as well as:

- Setting name and Care Inspectorate number

- Inspection Grade for each key inspection are (Leadership; Staff Team; Care, Play, and Learning; Setting)

- Detailed National Standard compliance status

- Service Improvement Period start date (if currently on a SIP)

- Service Improvement Period reason category (if currently on a SIP)

- Number of inspection areas not meeting the required grade (maximum of 4)

The table is searchable, and clicking on rows isolates the appearance of corresponding settings on the map. This allows the user to visualise the accessibility of a group of settings which may not be easily isolated using the available filters.

In the map options tab, a download button enables the download of a CSV format of this table. If setting selections have been made by clicking on rows, only these selected rows will be downloaded.

Data Sources

The data presented in this tab is drawn from the **Improvement Service's biannual ELC returns** and the **Care Inspectorate Datastore**, both of which are updated regularly.

Quality Tab

Understanding Inspection-Based Quality Measures

The **Quality tab** in the tool presents setting-level quality information as assessed by the **Care Inspectorate**. This component allows users to monitor how well funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) providers are performing against the **National Standard**, as measured by inspection grades.

For conciseness, in this tool 'meeting the National Standard' means achieving a **grade of 4 ("good") or above across all four key inspection questions**. Settings which are categorised in the tool as meeting the National Standard (in term of Care Inspectorate gradings), may fail to meet the National Standard on other elements. However, there is insufficient standardised data available at this point to include these other elements.

At the time of initial deployment this tab does not yet include metrics for childminders. This is a **priority area for development** and will be added as a new feature in the data update at the start of the next academic year.

The Quality workspace is divided into two main tabs:

- All Funded Settings
- Recently Inspected Settings

All Funded Settings

This view gives a broad overview of the Care Inspectorate gradings that all funded providers hold at a given point in time. It includes three interactive graphs:

- Current National Standard Status – Overall
- Current National Standard Status – by Key Question
- National Standard Status Over Time

The above summaries can be further **broken down further** by sector.

Available Filters (on the left-hand side of the dashboard):

- Detail of grading analysis: Toggle between a simple pass/fail view (i.e. whether the setting meets the National Standard) and a more detailed categorisation:

Current National Standard Status - Overall

- Exceeds (all grades 5 or more)

- Meets (minimum grade = 4)

- Fails on 1 Key Question (only one KQ has a grade less than 4)

- Fails on more than 1 Key Question (2 or more KQ grades are less than 4)

- Graph view: Choose whether to display the graphs as counts or percentages

- Provider type: Split data by local authority provision and private and voluntary provision. To reiterate, this does not include childminder data at this point.
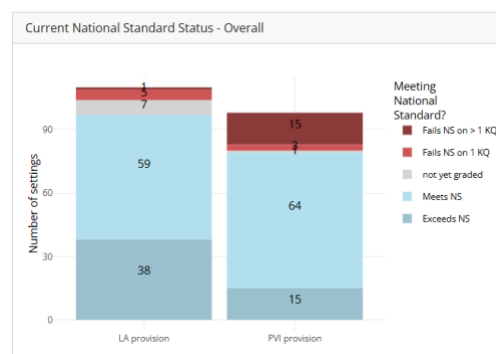
User Interactions

Clicking on elements of the **legend** allows users to hide or isolate specific data series — this can help to simplify visual interpretation.

When hovering over a plot, icons appear above each graph which offer additional interactivity. Clicking on the camera icon (see right) allows users to download graphs as image files (in PNG format). Further functionality may be added depending on user feedback.

Current National Standard Status - Overall
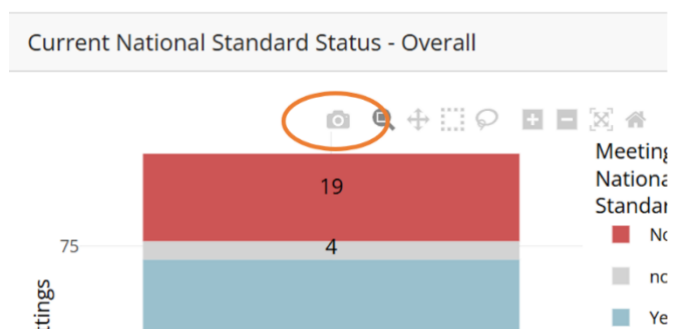
This view supports high-level monitoring of quality performance and can help identify differences between sectors and changes over time. Note that the list of funded ELC settings which is used to generate this analysis is currently updated twice a year as part of the biannual data collection; between collections the time series data does not account for turnover in funded settings, which may lead to small inaccuracies in the count and proportion meeting the National Standard.

Recently Inspected Settings:

This view offers a more dynamic perspective by focusing only on settings that have been **inspected in the past 18 months.** Some funded settings may have inspection grades which were given years prior and so focusing on more recent inspection activity may facilitate the identification of current trends.

This tab includes:

- **Two charts** visualising recent changes in inspection outcomes

  - National Standard status change
  - Grade change direction

- **A data table** displaying detailed information for each recently inspected setting

In this tab, recently inspected settings' latest gradings are compared to the grades the held prior to the inspection and summarised in two ways; the change to the national standard status and the direction of grade change (increased, decreased, maintained). This allows users to identify and visualise which settings have upgraded to, or lost, National Standard status (in terms of Care Inspectorate grade). It also facilitates the identification of improved grades among settings not yet meeting the National Standard, or indeed to identify whether there has been any marked decline in grades among those settings which have retained their National Standard status.

For instance, a setting inspected in February 2025 which was given the grades: 3, 4, 4, 5 and which, prior to this held the grades: 3, 3, 4, 4 would be categorised as 'Failing NS (previously failing NS)'. For (minimum) grade change this setting would be categorised as 'maintained' (with a 3 being the lowest grade in both instances). At the individual KQ level, however, there has been two areas with improved grades.

It is important to note that where a setting has been inspected multiple times in the 18-month period, only the most recent inspection instance has been included by default. Users can opt to include all inspection instances by de-selecting 'remove multiple inspections'. This allows users to choose between viewing summaries as a count of unique inspected settings or a count of inspection instances.

Available Filters (apply to both charts and table):

- Currently meeting National Standard (All, Yes, No)

- Change in minimum grade (All, Increased, Maintained, Decreased, No previous inspection)

- Service Type (Local authority, Private)

- Service Improvement Period (SIP) status (All, Yes, No)

- Cancelled settings (Include / Exclude)*

These filters allow users to explore how settings have changed over time, identify areas where improvement projects may be having an effect, or flag settings that may require closer attention.

By default, this filter includes inspection instances for settings that underwent a graded inspection during the specified period and later had their registration with the Care Inspectorate cancelled (e.g., inspected in September 2024 and cancelled in February 2025). This approach ensures that any potential impact on children receiving funded ELC before the cancellation is captured in the data. Cancellations may occur for various reasons; for instance, a setting might re-register, maintaining continuity of service under a new Care Inspectorate (CS) number. To address this, the IS cross-references new registrations with cancelled ones to ensure the continuity of service is reflected.

For local authorities aiming to focus only on settings that continue to influence children receiving funded ELC (i.e., settings still operating in partnership), this slicer can be used to exclude inspection instances for settings whose registrations have been cancelled. This allows for a more precise analysis of active settings and their current impact.

Data Note

- Data shown in this section is updated from the **Care Inspectorate** datastore and reflects both the most recent inspection results and local authority reporting (e.g. SIP status from IS returns).

- Where relevant, filters can help isolate those settings involved in local improvement projects, giving users a clearer view of progress and outcomes.

Uptake Tab

Monitoring Participation Patterns in Funded ELC

The **Uptake tab** of the tool presents time-series data on participation in funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), allowing users to explore trends across different age groups, service types, and hours claimed.

This part of the tool is designed to support planning, policy evaluation, and assurance by giving local authorities a longitudinal view of uptake and enabling comparisons with national trends.

Main Visuals

- An **area chart** showing the total uptake for the selected groups over time

- A **line graph** showing uptake rates over time for each of the selected age groups (with a comparison between national and local changes)
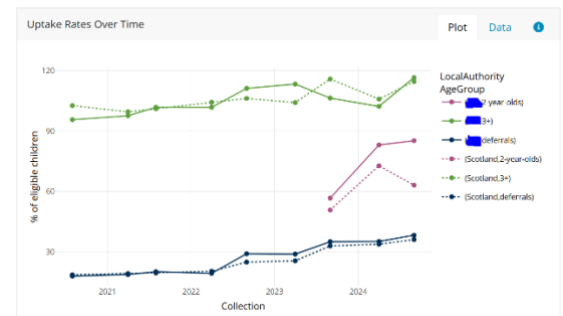
Data Tables

For each of the plots, there is a corresponding summary data table which can make it easier to extract figures when the plots are broken down by filters.

Available Filters/Slicers: Users can interact with a panel of slicers on the left-hand side to explore the data by:

- **Age group:** 2-year-olds, 3–5 year olds (excluding deferrals), and Deferred Entry children

- **Provider type:** LA provision, PVI provision, or childminder

- **Hours band:**

- **600 hours or fewer**

- **Between 600 and 1140 hours**

- **1140 hours or more**

- **Display format:** Choose to view the data as **counts** or **proportions**

The hour band and provider type can be combined to view shifts in the proportional split between these categories over time.

Users can toggle on and off different data series by interacting with the chart legends.

Data Source & Methodology

Uptake figures are derived from **Improvement Service returns**, with data points collected from August 2020 through to September 2024. These include returns from:

- August 2020
- April 2021
- August 2021
- April 2022
- September 2022
- April 2023
- September 2023
- April 2024
- September 2024

In April 2024 the Improvement Service introduced more explicit guidance on inclusions/exclusions for this data collection. Whilst this has improved data quality, it has resulted in some Local Authorities making small adjustments to their reporting practices which may affect year-on-year comparisons.

Uptake rates are calculated using **NRS monthly registered births dataset** aggregated by statutory eligibility.

It is important to note:

- Population estimates for 3–5-year-olds and deferrals are based on statutory intake periods, for example the eligible population estimate for the September 2024 period an aggregation of monthly births from March 2020 to August 2021 and in April 2025 this extended to include registered births from March 2020 to February 2022. These population estimates do not take into account local variations on intake periods (such as offering funded places for 3-year-olds from the month after their third birthday). These estimates also do not account for families moving out of the local authority where the child was registered at birth. While these factors may impact the accuracy of uptake rates, the methodology provides a consistent basis for comparing data across local authorities and between timeseries data points.

- For **two-year-olds**, uptake is calculated against the estimated number of eligible 2-year-olds produced by the Scottish Government from datapipeline data summaries for September data points. An imputed estimate of eligible-2 population has been created for

April data points. This approach may be subject to change in future iterations depending on the availability of this dataset.

Spine Chart Tab

Benchmarking Across Scotland

The **Spine Chart tab** provides local authorities with a high-level benchmarking tool to assess how their ELC service delivery compares across Scotland. This visual is designed to support reflective practice and strategic improvement planning, highlighting where an authority is statistically distinct from national patterns — either positively or negatively. It has been designed to avoid the creation of 'league tables'.

Each spine chart shows multiple indicators side-by-side, enabling users to quickly spot areas of strength or divergence. Indicators are **sorted by distance from the mean**, with those furthest above the national average listed first and those furthest below at the bottom. The ordering od indicators is therefore specific to each Local Authority.
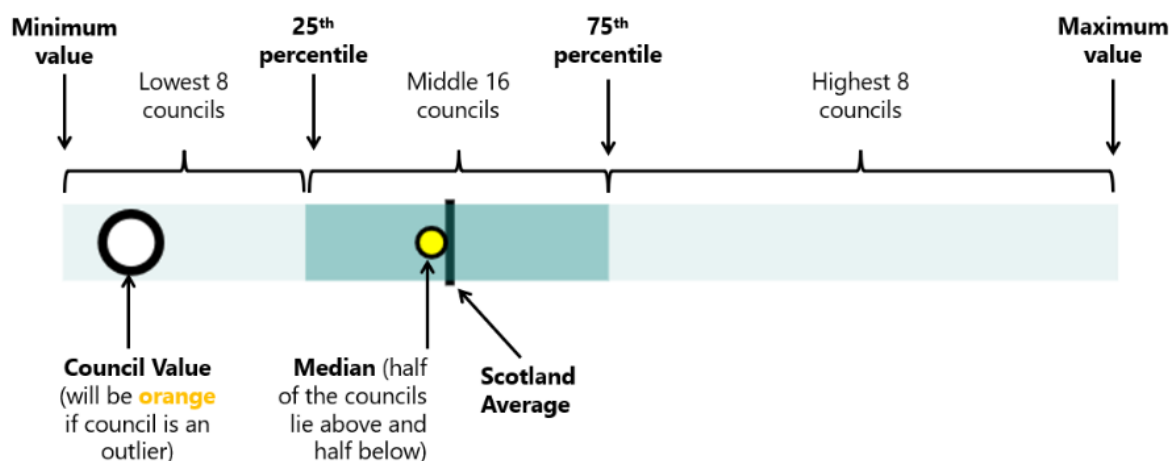
How to read the chart

- **White circle** - Your local authority's value on this indicator

- **Orange Circle** - Your value, highlighted only if it's a statistical outlier (i.e. significantly different from other councils)

- **Blue shaded bar** - Middle 50% of all councils (between the 25th and 75th percentiles)

- **Lighter tails** - Represent councils in the lowest and highest quartiles

- **Black line** - Scotland Average

- **Yellow dot** – National media (half of councils fall above, half below)

Filters

Users can apply select a particular theme from a drop-down to focus on (e.g., uptake, quality, settings)

Users can filter indicators by keywords using the search bar.

This tab supports:

- **Diagnostic insight:** quickly identify areas to investigate further

- **Comparative reflection:** understand how performance relates to others

- **Priority setting:** inform where local improvement efforts may be most needed

Important Note on Interpretation

The spine chart is **not intended to judge performance** in a league table format. A higher or lower value is not necessarily better or worse — context matters, and local variations may reflect valid differences in policy or demographics. The aim is to prompt useful questions, not direct conclusions.

About the data

This tab is a quick reference guide to the data sources which have been used in the tool. It includes the following attributes about data items:

- **Data item name** - in most cases a text string which matched an element in the tool

- **Entity** - the lowest level which this data is applied to (e.g. datazone, council, setting)

- **Source** – the dataset which the data item is taken from (or else the data controller and/or processor)

- **Description** – a definition of the data item and a description of how it was calculated if it was further processed

- **Data Period** – what time does each data item apply to / when was this last updated

Also included on this tab is a change log to capture when data updates, bug fixes, or feature changes will be time stamped.

Links

From the navigation panel 'links' section, users have direct access to three elements:

- **Request / Remove access** form

- **Report an issue** (give feedback) form

- **Narrative report** (and other resources)

Request / Remove Access

The ELC Insights Dashboard is developed for local authority early years services. Early years leads in councils will initially be granted access and can request or revoke access for employees directly involved in ELC service delivery and planning via an online form. To ensure optimal performance, wider access is currently restricted, and local authorities are advised not to request access for staff outside early years services.

Once a request is made, access to the dashboard is managed by the Improvement Service. New users will receive an email invitation to the dashboard and be prompted to create a ShinyApps account using their council email address. Personal email addresses are not permitted for account creation or dashboard access.

Report an issue

Throughout its development, the dashboard has been subjected to user testing and data validation checks to ensure that the data presented is accurate, and that the tool is functioning as expected in response to user-input. However, if users encounter any issue with the functionality of the tool or the data presented, they are asked to please inform the Improvement Service through the 'report an issue' form in the first instance. The IS will make contact via email to discuss and resolve this. Issues may include, incorrect data, inaccurate setting location. This form is not, however, for providing more up-to-date setting information which will be updated from the April 2025 data collection in the coming months.

Narrative Report (and other resources)

This link navigates to the section of the IS website which will be a repository for ELC Insights Dashboard resources going forward; starting with this narrative report, subsequently this is where case studies, webinar recordings, and future narrative reports will exist.

Hypothetical Use Cases

As part of the co-design process for this narrative report, the co-design councils felt it would be beneficial to illustrate how the tool could be used to support local authorities. During user testing, the following scenarios were presented to local authority colleagues to explore how the tool could meet practical needs. These have since been developed into examples to showcase the potential of the tool to support planning, decision-making, and service improvement.

Scenario 1: Exploring Uptake Trends in Deferrals

Context
A service manager is seeking to assess the impact of the policy change that introduced automatic deferral rights for children born between August and December. The local authority wants to understand how uptake patterns have changed since the policy was introduced and how their council compares to others in Scotland. This information is required for internal review and to respond to questions raised by elected members.

Key Questions

- Has the uptake rate of funded ELC among deferred children increased year-on-year in our authority?

- How does our current deferral uptake compare to the national average and other similar councils?

- Are deferrals taking full 1140 hours or fewer hours of funded ELC?

- What is the service type breakdown – are deferred children accessing places primarily in local authority settings, private providers, or childminders?

Using the Tool

The **Uptake** tab of the ELC Insights dashboard enables the user to track changes over time in the uptake of funded ELC among deferred children. Users can:

- Filter by *age group* to isolate deferrals and then view uptake figures as either a **count** or **proportion** of the estimated population.
- Further slice the data by *provider type* (local authority, partner provider, or childminder) and *hours banding* (600 hours or less, between 600–1140 hours, and 1140 hours) to understand both service model and depth of engagement.
- Use the trend chart and corresponding table to identify year-on-year shifts in uptake and spot any clear increases or changes in provision.

To understand how their council compares to others, the user can then navigate to the **Spine Charts** tab. By searching for "deferral" in the indicator list, they can explore eight benchmarking indicators, such as:

- Year-on-year % change in deferrals uptake

- % of deferrals taking 1140 hours

- % of deferrals accessing majority hours with private, LA, or childminder providers

- % of estimated deferral population accessing any funded ELC

The spine chart shows where the local authority sits in relation to the national average, median, and minimum/maximum thresholds. This enables the user to quickly identify if their authority is an outlier (high or low), or broadly in line with the national pattern.

Impact

Using these features together, a local authority can produce a succinct overview of how deferral uptake is changing locally, identify whether additional communication or support is needed for families, and evaluate whether delivery models are meeting demand.

Scenario 2: Assessing Quality in the Private Sector

Context

A local authority has received a request from an elected member following a recent negative Care Inspectorate inspection of a private early learning and childcare (ELC) setting. The elected member is concerned about the wider quality of provision in the private sector and has asked the council to provide more detail on:

- Which private providers currently fall below the National Standard

- How the quality of private providers compares with that of local authority-run settings

- Whether there are any noticeable trends in private sector quality over time

Key Questions

- How many private settings currently fail to meet the National Standard for Care Inspectorate quality grades?

- Are these settings geographically concentrated in any particular area?

- How does performance in private settings compare to local authority settings, both currently and over time?

- Are there patterns in which key questions are most frequently failed?

Using the Tool

The **Map** tab offers an intuitive starting point for understanding the geographic distribution of private settings that do not meet the National Standard. By:

- Applying the **service type filter** to show only *PVI provision.*

- Setting the **minimum grading filter** to show settings falling below a grade 4

- Using the **"colour by"** toggle to visualise differences by service type or National Standard status
  Users can view locations of lower-performing private settings and click on individual markers to view more details (including service name, type, CS number, inspection grades, and whether they offer funded two-year-old places).

To complement this spatial overview, the **Quality** tab provides more detailed analysis:

On the **All Funded Settings** sub-tab, users can:

- Toggle between a simple view (meets/does not meet National Standard) or a detailed breakdown (e.g. fails on 1 or more key questions)

- Filter by **service type** to isolate private settings

- Choose to display figures as **counts or percentages**

- Use the "**National Standard Over Time**" chart to assess trends since April 2023

- Compare these trends directly against those for local authority settings by switching the service type filter

On the **Recently Inspected Settings** sub-tab, the user can review:

- Whether recently inspected private settings have improved, declined, or maintained their grades
- The proportion that are currently meeting or failing to meet the National Standard
- Which settings have been subject to a Service Improvement Period (SIP)

Together, these features provide a comprehensive picture of the current quality landscape in private sector provision, supported by trend data and clear visual summaries.

Impact

The insights drawn from both the map and quality tabs can help inform a response to elected members, guide internal discussions about sector support or interventions, and contribute to wider quality assurance and planning activities.

Scenario 3: Exploring Accessibility for Families in High-Poverty Areas

Context

A local authority is undertaking a review of early learning and childcare (ELC) accessibility in one of its communities. In particular, the council wants to understand whether families living in areas of high child poverty have nearby access to settings that offer funded places for eligible two-year-olds. They are especially interested in identifying any gaps in provision within roughly a 20-minute walking distance.

Key Questions

- Are there any high-poverty areas that are not within a 20 minute walking distance of a setting offering funded two-year-old places?
- Which settings are currently offering two-year-old provision, and where are they located?
- Are the settings nearest to areas of deprivation meeting the National Standard for quality?

- Are there existing settings nearby that do not currently offer funded two-year-old places, but potentially could?

Using the Tool

The **Map** tab of the OMF tool is designed to support precisely this type of spatial analysis. To explore accessibility, users can:

- Enable the **overlay for child poverty rates**, which displays data zones colour-coded by the percentage of children living in poverty

- Toggle on the **10-minute walking distance isodistance**, which shows the walkable catchment around each setting

Apply the **"Offers funded spaces for twos"** filter to display only those settings currently offering funded places for two-year-olds

- Click on individual setting markers to see further details, including whether they meet the National Standard, service type, and inspection grades

The map also displays approximate **childminder locations**, offering a more complete view of potential access points.

If gaps in provision are identified—for example, a high-poverty area that is outside the catchment zones—the tool allows users to explore nearby settings that don't currently cater for twos by going to map options and toggling 'show deselected'. Greyed out setting markers (without corresponding isodistances) are added back into the map and table. This could help inform service planning, such as considering extending eligibility at those locations or assessing the impact of closing or altering provision in an area.

Impact

This type of analysis supports the council in identifying areas where accessibility may be limited and ensures decisions about expanding two-year-old provision are data-informed. The findings can also support local engagement and dialogue about improving equity of access to ELC services.

Scenario 4: Evaluating the Impact of a Quality Improvement Project

Context

A local authority has delivered an improvement programme focused on enhancing the physical environments of its early learning and childcare (ELC) settings. The project has been running for the past 18 months, and the project lead now wants to evaluate its effectiveness by examining changes in Care Inspectorate grades over this period. They are particularly interested in whether the initiative has had an impact on settings that had been placed on a Service Improvement Period (SIP).

Key Questions

- How many settings have been inspected in the past 18 months?

- Of those inspected, how many have shown improvement in their minimum quality grading?

- Have any settings moved from below the National Standard (grades of less than 4) to meeting or exceeding it?

- What trends are visible among settings that are currently on a SIP—have their grades improved since the project began?

Using the Tool

The **Quality** tab of the OMF tool provides a dedicated section for **recently inspected settings**, designed specifically to help users explore changes over time. Within this tab, users can:

- Filter for **settings inspected in the last 18 months**

- Choose whether to include settings with multiple inspections or focus on their most recent one

- Apply filters for **Service Improvement Period (SIP) status, change in minimum grade** (increased/maintained/decreased), and service type

- View graphs showing the proportion of settings that have improved their minimum grade, and those that now meet or exceed the National Standard

- Use the accompanying setting-level table to identify which individual settings have improved, including those previously on a SIP

In addition, users can toggle between **all settings** and **recent inspections**, allowing them to see broader trends and compare them to the targeted group.

Impact

This functionality enables councils to assess whether their improvement work is yielding results. The ability to isolate SIP settings and track their progress over time helps evaluate whether targeted support is effective. These insights support evidence-based planning and reporting, while also helping to identify where further intervention may be needed.

Looking Ahead: Future Development and Use

The release of the ELC Insights Dashboard marks the beginning of an ongoing process to strengthen how we use data to support continuous improvement in Early Learning and Childcare. The first iteration has been developed using existing data sources and shaped through a co-design approach involving Local Authorities, the Improvement Service, Scottish Government and COSLA. We are committed to maintaining and developing the dashboard in partnership with local government colleagues. Opportunities to stay involved in this co-design process will be communicated through the normal channels and we will continue to gather feedback to inform future iterations.

In the meantime, a link to a feedback form in the 'Links' section allows you to communicate any concerns or queries about functionality or data items. Local authority users are encouraged to raise issues here (big and small) to ensure that any issues can be addressed quickly and to inform our understanding of areas of frustration.

A set timeline for data updates has not been set for the first deployment; the project team aims to focus resource in the immediate months after deployment on supporting use of the tool and being responsive to queries and issues. From the start of the academic year 2025/26 there will be a more transparent data update timeline.

Future versions of the dashboard and its accompanying narrative report are expected to explore areas such as

- **Trend analysis** across key indicators to support ongoing monitoring

- **Thematic deep dives** into the intermediate outcomes, including flexibility, accessibility and quality

- **Case Studies** showcasing how local authorities are using the tool to inform planning, drive improvement and support local decision making.

Whilst the current dashboard makes best use of the data currently available, we recognise that some of the working definitions used are limited by what is collected through existing datasets. For example;

- **Flexibility** is currently captured through a basic distinction between settings offering places during term-time, beyond term-time or both. We recognise the true picture is more nuanced and responsive to the needs of the community

- **Accessibility** includes walking and driving distance overlays to assess proximity to provision but does not currently incorporate data on capacity or place availability. We also recognise that physical distance is just one element of broader equity of access

- **Quality** is based on minimum Care Inspectorate gradings, which offer a helpful measure but don't fully capture the breadth of professional judgements and lived experiences that shape quality.

We are aware of these limitations and are committed to expanding the scope and richness of the data over time - working in partnership to ensure that the dashboard continues to support meaningful, evidence-informed planning and delivery.

We look forward to continuing this collaborative journey with local authorities and partners, building a tool that drives improvement and supports positive outcomes for children and families across Scotland's funded ELC sector.