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National Data for Local Services Workshop Report

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Executive Summary

A workshop was convened, on 18 August 2026, to explore whether there is a common need across local authorities and partners for improved access to externally held service information, and whether national coordination could help reduce duplication of effort in maintaining service directories.

The workshop attracted significantly more interest than anticipated, indicating a strong appetite across the sector to address challenges associated with service information management. Participants represented a broad range of organisations (primarily local authorities) involved in maintaining, using and governing service directories.

Discussion confirmed that service directories are widely used by professionals and residents, but that maintaining accurate, comprehensive and trusted information remains resource-intensive. Participants identified particular challenges associated with accessing and maintaining information owned by external organisations, especially where ownership is fragmented, data changes frequently, or responsibility for updates is unclear.

A key theme emerging from the workshop was the desire for access to service information maintained nationally by public sector organisations and major community & charity organisations that could be reused locally, reducing duplication of effort and increasing confidence in data quality.

Workshop Objectives

The workshop sought to answer the following question:

What service information, currently held by other teams or organisations, would you want integrated into your service directory (or directories) to create a single, trusted source of information that supports better referrals, enables staff to answer residents' queries more effectively, and empowers residents to find the right support themselves?

The session was designed to:

- Test assumptions about how service directories are used and maintained.

- Understand what nationally available service information organisations currently use.
- Identify the most significant pain points associated with maintaining service information.
- Explore gaps in current service directories.
- Determine which externally held datasets would provide the greatest value if made available for integration.
- Understand ownership, value and barriers associated with those datasets.

Findings

1. Validation of Workshop Assumptions

Participants were asked to test six assumptions underpinning the workshop design. Responses showed strong support for all six assumptions and demonstrated a high degree of consistency across organisations. Whilst over 40 delegates attended the workshop, 29 respondents actively participated in answering the survey questions.

Assumption 1: **Local authorities maintain one or more online service directories populated with information collected directly from council services and external service providers.**

Assumption	Completely / Strongly Agree	Mostly / Agree	Partly / Neither	Does Not Really Reflect	Does Not Reflect At All	Don't Know
Assumption 1: Councils maintain service directories	37.9%	27.6%	27.6%	3.4%	0.0%	3.4%

Key finding: 66% of respondents indicated that this completely or mostly reflects their experience, confirming that service directories are a common component of local service delivery infrastructure.

Assumption 2:

These directories are used by both residents and professionals, supporting resident self-service, service discovery, and professional referral activity.

Assumption	Completely / Strongly Agree	Mostly / Agree	Partly / Neither	Does Not Really Reflect	Does Not Reflect At All	Don't Know
Assumption 2: Used by residents and professionals	27.6%	48.3%	17.2%	3.4%	0.0%	3.4%

Key finding: 76% of respondents indicated that this mostly or completely reflects their experience, demonstrating the dual role service directories play for both professionals and residents.

Assumption 3:

Service information is often distributed across multiple directories, reflecting different statutory duties, service areas, audiences, and organisational boundaries.

Assumption	Completely / Strongly Agree	Mostly / Agree	Partly / Neither	Does Not Really Reflect	Does Not Reflect At All	Don't Know
Assumption 3: Information spread across multiple directories	44.8%	34.5%	20.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Key finding: 100% of participants agreed to some extent, with 79% reporting that this mostly or completely reflects reality.

Assumption 4:

Local authorities are interested in reducing fragmentation by consolidating related service information into a more unified and manageable digital asset.

Assumption	Completely / Strongly Agree	Mostly / Agree	Partly / Neither	Does Not Really Reflect	Does Not Reflect At All	Don't Know

Assumption 4: Desire to reduce fragmentation	34.5%	41.4%	13.8%	0.0%	3.4%	6.9%

Key finding: 76% of respondents support consolidation and reducing fragmentation.

Assumption 5:

While councils collect and maintain core service information, there are gaps in the information available to them, particularly where relevant information is held by external organisations, partners, networks, or national bodies.

Assumption	Completely / Strongly Agree	Mostly / Agree	Partly / Neither	Does Not Really Reflect	Does Not Reflect At All	Don't Know
Assumption 5: Gaps exist in externally-held information	48.3%	31.0%	17.2%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%

Key finding: 79% of respondents confirmed that externally held information gaps are a significant issue.

Assumption 6:

These information gaps are likely common across many councils, creating opportunity to identify shared info needs & explore whether external info sources could be reused at scale rather than each council addressing the same gaps independently.

Assumption	Completely / Strongly Agree	Mostly / Agree	Partly / Neither	Does Not Really Reflect	Does Not Reflect At All	Don't Know
Assumption 6: Shared gaps could be addressed collectively	51.7%	31.0%	13.8%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%

Key finding: 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that councils face common information gaps that could be addressed through shared approaches and reusable information sources.

2. Current Use of External Service Information

Participants identified a broad range of nationally sourced information already being incorporated into local directories. Using Slido's AI categorisation, responses clustered into six main themes.

Healthcare & Wellbeing NHS services Mental health support Dental services Pharmacies Blood pressure checks Community rehabilitation Drug and alcohol support services Smoking cessation services Healthwatch National helpline	**Community & Charity Services** Local community groups Volunteering opportunities Food banks Age UK Third-sector organisations National charities Sports clubs Community activities	**Care & Support** Carers Support Carers UK Carers Scotland Young carers SEND support services Childcare providers Care homes CQC registered providers
Financial & Legal Support DWP and Jobcentre Plus Citizens Advice Social Security Scotland Benefits Debt advice Housing support Legal Aid National grants programmes	**Education Services** Schools OFSTED data Childcare data Universities Adult education ESOL provision Connexions Skills Development Scotland	**Transport & Accessibility** Public transport services Community transport Licensed taxis Travel assistance services

3. Key Pain Points

3.1 Current Data Maintenance Pain Points

As well as identifying information gaps, participants were asked to highlight which types of service information they currently maintain but find particularly difficult to keep accurate and up to date.

Using the fire emoji 🔥 to indicate 'pain', participants identified information sources that require significant manual effort to source, verify or maintain. The results demonstrate that the greatest challenges are not necessarily associated with statutory services, but with highly dynamic, distributed and community-based service information.

Service Category	Fire Emoji Votes	Key Sources Identified
Community & Charity Services	39	Local community groups (11), Small VCFSE organisations (6), Local charities (4), Community groups (5), Sports clubs (3), Volunteering (2), Food banks (2), Community offerings (2)
Healthcare & Wellbeing	15	ICB & NHS providers (5), Mental health services (4), National helplines (2), Drug & alcohol services (1), Healthwatch (1), Online peer support groups (1), NHS services (1)
Care & Support	11	SEND-specific support (4), Domestic abuse services (1), CQC information (1), Carers support (1), Young carers (1), Care homes (1), CQC care homes (1), Childminders (1)
Financial & Legal Support	5	DWP/Jobcentre Plus (1), Social housing (1), National grants (1), Housing support (1), Citizens Advice guidance (1)
Education Services	1	Ofsted childcare data (1)
Other	2	Prevent (2)

The results show that the greatest maintenance burden falls on community and voluntary sector information, which received 39 fire emoji votes, more than double the next highest category. Local community groups, small VCFSE organisations and local charities were identified as

particularly challenging to maintain, reflecting the dynamic nature of the sector and the limited capacity many organisations have to keep information updated.

Healthcare and wellbeing services represented the second-largest area of concern. Participants highlighted NHS provider information and mental health services as particularly difficult to maintain, citing fragmented ownership, uncertainty around authoritative sources, and frequent changes to service availability and eligibility criteria.

Within care and support services, SEND (Special Education Needs and Disabilities) provision was the most significant challenge. Participants highlighted the complexity of service landscapes, changing support arrangements and the difficulty of maintaining accurate information across multiple providers.

Overall, the findings suggest that the greatest maintenance challenges occur where information is owned by external organisations, changes frequently, or lacks a clear authoritative source. Community, voluntary sector and healthcare information appear to create the largest ongoing maintenance burden for local authorities, strengthening the case for nationally maintained, standards-based information sources that can be reused across multiple directories.

3.2 Challenges in Maintaining Trusted Directories

Participants were asked to rank a series of pre-identified challenges according to the impact they have on their ability to maintain a trusted service directory.

Rank	Challenge	Score
1	I'm not confident that the data in my service directory is accurate and up to date	5.23
2	I don’t know if the data already exists or who may have it	4.86
3	Data is available, but not in a consistent or useful format	4.32
4	I don’t know the data quality of external service information	4.27
5	I am wasting effort collecting information that is already out there	2.82
6	I am wasting effort in collecting information that is already out there	2.68
7	Some of my existing entries are incomplete	2.55

The findings suggest that the most significant challenge facing organisations is maintaining confidence in the accuracy and currency of service information. Participants ranked concerns about information being accurate and up to date above all other factors, reinforcing a key theme that emerged throughout the workshop: trust in service data is fundamental to effective referrals, signposting and resident self-service.

The next highest-ranked challenges related to the discoverability and usability of information. Participants highlighted difficulties identifying whether relevant data already exists, who owns it, and how it can be accessed. Even when information is available, inconsistent formats can make it difficult to consume, integrate and maintain within local service directories.

Participants also expressed concerns about the quality of information supplied by external organisations. The combination of uncertain data quality, fragmented ownership and varying publication approaches makes it difficult for directory managers to assess which sources can be relied upon as authoritative.

While duplication of effort, duplicate listings and incomplete records remain important issues, participants viewed these as secondary challenges compared with the broader issues of data quality, discoverability and trust.

Overall, the results indicate that organisations are less concerned about a lack of information than they are about their ability to identify, trust and effectively reuse information that already exists. This supports the workshop's wider conclusion that improved data standards, clearer ownership and reusable information sources could significantly reduce the burden of maintaining trusted service directories.

3.3. Additional Pain Points Identified by Participants

Participants were invited to identify important challenges that were not captured within the pre-defined ranking exercise. Responses revealed several recurring themes relating to governance, ownership, organisational culture, provider engagement and capacity.

Theme	**Issues Raised**
Provider Engagement	Difficulty encouraging providers to review and maintain their information over the long term; limited buy-in from organisations responsible for supplying service information.

Ownership & Governance	Lack of clear ownership and accountability for maintaining service information; absence of agreed governance arrangements for data stewardship.
Capacity & Resourcing	Limited capacity to keep information current; ongoing costs associated with data assurance and quality checking.
Internal Coordination	Challenges creating a shared understanding across teams and services; difficulties overcoming siloed approaches and establishing responsibility for maintaining a single view of services.
Directory Duplication	Providers expressed frustration at having to maintain information across multiple directories, particularly where services operate across local authority boundaries.
Data Reuse & Integration	Desire to consume data from other trusted sources rather than repeatedly collecting and maintaining the same information locally.
Process Consistency	Concerns that relying solely on providers to update information creates inconsistency; a need for dedicated processes and internal oversight was identified.
Awareness & Promotion	Some participants highlighted challenges promoting directories and encouraging wider use by residents, partners and service providers.

The responses suggest that maintaining a trusted service directory is not solely a data management challenge. While data quality and discoverability were identified as significant issues in the ranking exercise, participants highlighted that many of the underlying barriers are organisational in nature.

A recurring theme was the difficulty of sustaining engagement from service providers. Participants reported that providers often lack the time, incentive or capacity to keep information updated, leading to declining data quality over time. This challenge is compounded where providers are required to maintain listings across multiple directories and organisational boundaries.

Governance and ownership were also identified as significant concerns. Several participants noted a lack of clear accountability for maintaining service information, both within their own organisations and among external partners. This can result in duplication of effort, inconsistent approaches to maintenance and uncertainty regarding who is responsible for ensuring information remains accurate.

Internal organisational challenges were also highlighted. Participants described difficulties establishing shared ownership across multiple teams, particularly where historical service silos continue to influence how information is collected and maintained. Creating a single, trusted

view of services often requires changes to processes, responsibilities and organisational culture, rather than simply implementing new technology.

Taken together, these findings suggest that improving service directories will require more than better access to data. Success will also depend on establishing clear governance arrangements, reducing duplication, improving provider engagement and creating sustainable operating models for maintaining service information over time.

4. Priority Information Gaps

Having explored the information currently maintained within service directories, and the challenges associated with maintaining it, participants were then asked to focus on information that is **not currently available to them but would create significant value if it could be integrated into their directories.**

Participants were asked:
"What service information held outside your organisation would create the greatest value if it could be integrated into your service directory?"

The intention was to identify information that sits within government departments, national agencies, NHS organisations, neighbouring authorities, voluntary sector organisations or other external bodies, but which could improve resident outcomes, professional referrals and service discovery if made more accessible.

Participants submitted ideas using Slido's Ideas function, with each idea entered separately. Once all suggestions had been collected, participants were invited to vote using three heart ♥ reactions. The heart votes were used to identify the areas where participants felt collective effort would deliver the greatest value for local authorities and residents.

Slido's AI categorisation tool was then used to group responses into common themes.

Category	Total Hearts	Highest Priority Information Sources
Healthcare Services	**19**	Mental health options and waiting list times (9), NHS (4), NHS services (3), NHS data (1), NHS providers and services (1), NHS wellbeing services (1)
Community & Voluntary Services	**14**	National support services such as Samaritans and Shelter (5), Third-sector and voluntary sector services (5), VCFSE services in neighbouring authorities (3), Family Hub details (1)

Education & Ratings	**5**	CQC information (2), OFSTED school ratings (1), Ofsted information (1), CQC ratings (1)
Housing & Financial Support	**5**	Grants (2), Financial support (2), Housing provider support offers (1)
Directory Data & Listings	**5**	Standardised reusable datasets (2), Neighbouring local authority directory listings (2), Other public body directories (1)
Transport & Leisure	**4**	Bookable sessions (1), Community transport (2), Local sports clubs (1)
Other	**2**	Referral forms (2)

Key Findings:

Healthcare Services Emerged as the Clear Priority

Healthcare services received the highest level of support, accounting for 19 heart votes. Within this category, the strongest individual priority was access to mental health service information and waiting list data, which attracted almost half of all healthcare votes.

Participants highlighted a particular need for better visibility of:

- Mental health support services
- Waiting times
- NHS service availability
- Referral pathways
- NHS provider information
- Wellbeing support services

The discussions that followed suggested that access to this information would help professionals make better referrals, support residents in finding appropriate services more quickly, and help organisations better understand local service provision.

Strong Demand for Community and Voluntary Sector Information

The second-highest priority was community and voluntary sector information, receiving 14 heart votes. Participants showed particular interest in gaining access to:

- National support organisations such as Samaritans, Shelter and similar charities
- Third-sector and voluntary sector service information
- Information from neighbouring authority areas
- Family Hub information

A recurring theme throughout the workshop was that residents' needs do not always align with organisational boundaries. Participants reported that valuable support often exists outside their local authority area or within national organisations, but accessing and maintaining this information remains difficult.

Growing Interest in Reusable Data
Although attracting fewer votes overall, responses relating to Directory Data & Listings provide an important insight into the underlying challenge identified throughout the workshop. Participants expressed a desire for:

- Standardised datasets that can be reused across multiple service directories
- Access to directory listings maintained by neighbouring authorities
- Integration of information from other public sector directories

This suggests that participants are interested not only in accessing specific datasets, but also in finding ways to reduce duplication of effort through shared and reusable information sources.

Housing, Education and Regulatory Information
Several participants identified opportunities to improve access to housing, financial support, education and regulatory information. Areas highlighted included:

- Grants and financial support programmes
- Housing and homelessness services
- Housing provider support offers
- CQC information and ratings
- OFSTED ratings and information
- SEND-related eligibility information and support

Although these categories attracted fewer votes than healthcare and community services, participants indicated that easier access to trusted information in these areas would support both professionals and residents.

Key Insight:
Overall, this section revealed a strong demand for access to information that is currently maintained outside local authority control. Healthcare services, national voluntary sector provision and reusable directory datasets emerged as the highest priorities. Importantly, participants were not simply asking for more data. Rather, they highlighted the value of trusted, authoritative and reusable information sources that could be maintained once and consumed by multiple organisations. This finding aligns closely with earlier discussions about data quality, duplication of effort and the challenges associated with maintaining service information locally.

5. Exploring the Highest Priority Opportunities

Following the prioritisation exercise, participants discussed the highest-ranked information gaps in more detail. For each priority dataset, attendees were asked to consider:

- Ownership: who currently holds or maintains the information?
- Value: what benefits would be realised if the information could be integrated into service directories?
- Barriers: what challenges currently prevent access, sharing or integration?

The discussion focused on understanding not only which datasets are most valuable, but also whether there are practical opportunities to improve access to them.

Dataset	**Owner**	**Value**	**Barriers**
Mental health services and waiting list information	Ownership of this data is fragmented across Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), CAMHS services, NHS Trusts and NHS providers. Participants were often unclear where authoritative information resides.	The value of having this data includes: Support a more complete "one-stop-shop" for residents and practitioners. Waiting time information would help residents, parents, carers and professionals make informed decisions and enable local authorities to better understand demand, plan support and manage referrals.	Fragmented ownership, lack of clear accountability, uncertainty regarding who holds the authoritative data, and challenges accessing information consistently across NHS organisations.
National support services from third sector & voluntary sector across borders	National organisations and charities, including examples such as Samaritans, Shelter, Childline, Age UK, Mind and Alcoholics Anonymous, Family Groups.	Pointing to national data (especially national organisations) Confidence of data being up to date Drives down cost	Difficulty maintaining confidence that information remains current and accurate. Information changes frequently and maintaining local copies requires significant ongoing resource. There was also concern about the capacity required to assure the quality of externally maintained information.

6. Next Steps

The workshop identified strong commonality in both the challenges organisations face and the information they would most value access to. Participants highlighted healthcare, voluntary sector and community service information as priority areas, alongside a desire for more reusable and standardised datasets.

Based on the findings, the following next steps are recommended:

1. Engage Government to Support Access to Priority Datasets

The evidence gathered through the workshop should be used to engage with Government Departments, national agencies and other public sector bodies to explore how access to high-value service information can be improved.

Participants identified a number of priority datasets that are currently difficult to obtain, maintain or integrate locally, despite their potential value to residents, practitioners and service planners.

Particular focus should be placed on:

- NHS and healthcare service information, including mental health services and waiting list data.
- National voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) service information.
- Information held by national agencies, regulators and public bodies that could be reused across multiple local authorities.
- Datasets where fragmented ownership or unclear accountability currently creates barriers to access and reuse.

Government has an important role to play in helping identify data owners, facilitating conversations between organisations, and removing barriers that prevent high-value service information from being reused across the public sector.

2. Map Priority Datasets and Data Owners

Many participants highlighted uncertainty regarding who owns information and where authoritative sources can be found.

Future work should therefore focus on:

- Identifying the owners of high-priority datasets.
- Understanding how information is currently maintained.
- Assessing whether data is already available in a reusable form.
- Identifying legal, technical and organisational barriers to access.

This will provide a clearer understanding of where intervention is likely to have the greatest impact.

3. Validate and Strengthen the Case for the Open Referral UK Data Standard

The findings from the workshop provide further evidence of the need for a common approach to describing, publishing and sharing service information.

Participants consistently highlighted challenges relating to data quality, discoverability, inconsistent formats, duplication of effort and the difficulty of maintaining information across organisational boundaries. These challenges align closely with the problems that the Open Referral UK (ORUK) Data Standard is intended to address.

The workshop therefore reinforces the strategic importance of the ORUK programme and supports continued efforts to:

- Improve consistency in how service information is described and published.
- Increase interoperability between service directories and platforms.
- Enable service information to be maintained once and reused many times.
- Reduce duplication of effort across local authorities and partner organisations.
- Improve confidence in the quality and currency of service information.

Participants' feedback suggests that many of the pain points identified throughout the workshop are not unique to individual organisations but are shared across the sector. This strengthens the case for continued adoption and implementation of the ORUK Data Standard as a foundation for improving the discoverability, sharing and reuse of service information.

4. Explore Opportunities for Reusable National Data Assets

Participants repeatedly highlighted the burden of individually collecting, verifying and maintaining information that is likely to be needed by many organisations. Future work should explore opportunities to identify or establish reusable data assets that can be maintained once and consumed by multiple organisations, reducing local maintenance burdens and improving consistency across the sector.

5. Continue Sector Engagement

The level of participation and interest in the workshop suggests a strong appetite across the sector to collaborate on service information challenges.

Future engagement should seek to:

- Validate findings with a wider audience.
- Explore additional priority datasets.
- Share learning and good practice.
- Build a community of organisations interested in improving how service information is published, maintained and reused.

6. Use the Findings to Shape ORUK Engagement and Activity

The workshop has identified a clear set of priority information gaps, common challenges and potential opportunities for intervention. The findings should be used to help prioritise future engagement, standards development and implementation activity, particularly in areas where:

- There is strong demand for access to externally held service information.
- Maintenance burdens are being duplicated across multiple organisations.
- Ownership of information is fragmented or unclear.
- Common information needs exist across the sector.
- Standards-based approaches could enable reuse at scale.

This would ensure future ORUK activity is informed by evidenced sector needs and focused on areas where collective action is most likely to deliver benefit.