



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Adult social care local authority waiting times metrics: methodology using Client Level Data

Version 1.0

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Introduction

This document describes the methodology and data processing steps used to produce two local authority adult social care waiting-time metrics from Client Level Data (CLD).

The philosophy for the metrics is that they are trying to represent the experience of the individual who is waiting for care. There are two related metrics:

Part 1 – request to first response – the median number of days from the start of a request or referral to the start of the local authority's response; this is usually an assessment but can be request or service in specific circumstances.

Part 2 – request to first service – the median number of days from the start of a request or referral to the start of the first service following the request.

The cohort for the waiting times metrics includes individuals aged 25 years or older at the time of their first request and new clients only. New clients are defined as those who have not received local authority commissioned care (short or long term) in the 12 months prior to the request. Waiting times for people receiving support as unpaid carers are not included in the current metrics. This will be reviewed as the quality of unpaid carer data improves, with the intention of including them in future.

In December 2025, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) published a new document setting out clear [priority outcomes and expectations for local authority delivery of adult social care from 2026/27](#). These waiting times metrics will be part of a set of metrics and data sources used to build a collective understanding of local and national progress against these priority outcomes and expectations. Using CLD to calculate local authority adult social care waiting times also meets a [long-standing sector aim](#) to have a standard national method for understanding waiting time performance across England.

We acknowledge that no single approach to measuring waiting times will accurately describe the diverse experiences of people seeking local authority social care support, or the level of support provided by the local authority while people wait. We are also aware that longer individual waiting times may support better outcomes if people are waiting longer for more appropriate support.

DHSC are seeking feedback from local authorities on this methodology. Local authorities can provide feedback through the Microsoft Form that has been provided in the Q3 2025/26 Athena dashboard letter sent out by AGEM on behalf of DHSC. Following this feedback, we will finalise the methodology and discuss any changes with the CLD local authority reference group.

Change log

Date	Document version	Related code version	Change notes
26/02/2026	Version 1.0	Version 1.0	Document created.

Methodology

Processing the data for analysis

This waiting times methodology uses a common central method for selecting, processing and joining CLD submissions covering multiple reporting periods. This is the same process used for other publications using CLD, including the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) and the Adult Social Care Activity Report.

As part of the central processing, joined submission data tables are updated on a quarterly basis to cover an extended period going back to 1 April 2023. Joined submissions are required to identify ‘new’ clients and to calculate waiting times where requests occur well before the first response or service.

The main processing steps in production of the joined submission table are:

- Selecting submissions covering the required analysis period
- Filtering the data to events in the period
- Creating cleaned and derived fields
- Deduplicating records

Joined submission processing stages

The processing steps to produce the main data tables are:

1. Data cleaning of priority fields – invalid values are replaced where the equivalent valid value can be confidently identified
2. Amending event end dates – to match the date of death where this precedes the service end date, or to match the reporting period end date where the service end date appears to have been erroneously left blank (i.e. the service has a blank end date in one submission but is not included in the next submission)
3. Selecting submissions – data is selected by combining submissions covering the last 12 months plus prior periods going back to 1 April 2023. The reporting period stated in the submission is not taken as given, instead it is derived by checking the data in each submission.

4. Deduplication – The table below lists the fields used to determine unique events. For requests, assessment and reviews, the fields used to produce the joined submissions and single submissions tables are the same.

	Requests	Assessments	Services	Reviews
LA Code	✓	✓	✓	✓
Derived Person ID (NHS number unless missing then LA_ID)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Event Start Date	✓	✓	✓	✓
Event End Date	✓	✓		✓
Client Type	✓	✓	✓	✓
Request: Route of Access	✓			
Assessment Type		✓		
Service Type			✓	
Service Component			✓	

Data cleaning

For variables in the CLD specification with a defined list of values, efforts have been made to replace invalid values where there is a clear corresponding valid value. Those invalid values that cannot be validated are recorded as “Invalid and not mapped”.

The joined submission table is based on the CLD release 2 specification. As part of the joined submission process, all release 1 values are mapped to their corresponding release 2 values. The methodology highlights where release 1 values do not map directly to a single release 2 value and explains how these cases have been handled.

Person identifiers

The anonymised person identifier used in this methodology is the pseudonymised traced NHS number in the first instance. If this is missing, the pseudonymised local authority provided NHS number is used. If both NHS numbers are missing, the local authority unique person identifier is used. Individuals with none of these identifiers are not included in the calculations.

Stage 1 – Filter for events of interest using the CLD joined submission table

Stage 1.1 – Create an initial table of CLD data

The source of CLD data for waiting times metric calculation is the latest joined submission table. The joined submission table contains data from local authority CLD submissions covering the period from 1 April 2023.

Stage 1.2 – Filter for relevant assessments and services

Services related to unpaid carer support are removed, since waits for unpaid carer support are not currently included in these metrics.

Only assessments which determine a person's care needs are included, i.e. financial assessments are excluded. Note there are special cases where a request can count as an assessment (see stage 3.1)

A person's age at start of their assessments or services is filtered in stage 2.1. This allows the new client criteria (stage 1.3c) to work effectively for clients around the lower limit of the age criteria.

Assessment criteria:

- Event Type = "Assessment"
- Assessment Type =
 - "Short term assessment" or
 - "Long term assessment"

Service criteria:

- Event Type = "Service"
- Service Type =
 - "Short term support: ST-Max" or
 - "Short term support: Ongoing low level" or
 - "Short term support: Other short term" or
 - "Long term support: Nursing care" or
 - "Long term support: Residential care" or
 - "Long term support: Community" or
 - "Long term support: Prison"

Stage 1.3 – Filter for valid requests

Stage 1.3a – Filter requests by client type and start date

Restrict requests to service users, as unpaid carers are not currently part of the waiting times cohort. Requests made before 1 April 2023 are excluded.

Criteria:

- Event Type = "Request"
- Client Type = "Service user"
- Event Start Date on or after 1 April 2023

Stage 1.3b – Filter requests by age at start of request

Requests are selected where the person's age at the start of the request is 25 or above.

Technical note: For data privacy reasons, DHSC do not have access to a person's date of birth. DHSC are instead supplied with derived fields including a field for age at start of the event (Der_Age_Event_Start_Date). We then create an age band (Der_Working_Age_Band) in the 'derived fields' stored procedure, which is part of the joined submission table creation process.

Stage 1.3c – Filter out requests from existing clients

Waiting times are only included for new clients, as care pathways may differ for people already receiving local authority care.

The provisional definition of a new client is any person who has not received local authority arranged or provided adult social care services in the 12 months before a request, encompassing short and long term support but not counting unpaid carer support.

New request criteria:

- No service ongoing on request Event Start Date
- No service ending in the 12 months prior to the request Event Start Date

Stage 1.4 – Filter out requests which do not indicate progress and create chronological request order for each client

Event Outcome is used to identify requests where no further action is intended, i.e. no progression to assessments, support planning or services. These requests are excluded from the calculation of waiting times.

For each person within a local authority, remaining requests are ordered chronologically by Event Start Date, with the oldest request ranked first. If two requests for a person have the same Event Start Date, they are ordered by CLD submission date, with the most recent first. If still tied, the request most recently loaded into the AGEM repository is selected.

Criteria:

- Event Type = “Request”
- Event Outcome Group is not one of
 - “NFA” outcomes or
 - “Admitted to hospital”

Request chronology:

1. Event Start Date, oldest request first
2. CLD submission date, latest submission first
3. Latest request processed by AGEM, latest derived record ID first

Stage 2 – Link assessment and services to requests

Stage 2.1 – Create single table of requests, assessments and services

Combine requests, assessments and services which met the previous inclusion criteria into one long table. Includes only assessment and services where the person's age at the start of the event is 25 or above.

For each person within a local authority, a chronological order of all their events is created. This uses similar logic to the request chronology, but with the addition of Event Type.

Event chronology:

1. Event Start Date, oldest request first
2. Event Type, in priority order of:
 - a. Request
 - b. Assessment
 - c. Service
3. CLD submission date, latest submission first
4. Latest request processed by AGEM, latest derived record ID first

Stage 2.2 – Remove clients who have assessments or services but no associated requests

Waiting times cannot be calculated for these clients because there is no request date to act as the starting point.

Stage 2.3 – Identify requests and assessments which indicate progress

Having filtered out requests indicating no further action in stage 1.4, the following Event Outcomes are used to indicate how events connect in the next stages. Request indicates progress criteria:

- Event Type = "Request"
- Event Outcome =
 - "Progress to reablement/ST-Max" or
 - "Progress to assessment, review or reassessment" or
 - "Progress to support planning or services" or
 - "Continuation of support or services" or
 - "Release 1 specification only: Not mapped"

Request indicates progress to service criteria:

- Event Type = "Request"
- Event Outcome =
 - "Progress to reablement/ST-Max" or

- “Progress to support planning or services” or
- “Continuation of support or services” or
- “Release 1 specification only: Not mapped”

Assessment indicates progress to service criteria:

- Event Type = “Assessment”
- Event Outcome =
 - “Progress to reablement/ST-Max” or
 - “Progress to support planning or services” or
 - “Continuation of support or services”

Technical note: The source table for this analysis has had all data transformed to release 2 values. When Event Outcome = “Release 1 specification only: Not mapped” it is capturing the dropped release 1-only Event Outcome values of “Progress to financial assessment” and “Progress to End of Life Care”. DHSC plan to publish data for the period 1 October – 31 December 2025 onwards, so all assessments should use release 2 and no mapping is used.

Stage 2.4 – Link each request for a person to the first assessment and service following the request

For each person, a table is created with one row per request. Each request date is then linked to the first assessment and the first service that occur after that request, using the event chronology created in Stage 2.1.

If only an assessment or only a service occurs after a request, the request is linked to the event that is present.

Stage 3 – Account for 3-conversations model, missing assessments and discount excess requests

Stage 3.1 – Allow requests to act as an assessment when a conversation is flagged for release 1 requests

This stage of the methodology enables requests submitted under the 3-conversations model to be counted as assessments in waiting time calculations.

The CLD release 1 specification asked local authorities to use the Event Description field to indicate when an initial assessment took place at the same time as the request for support i.e. an initial conversation under a 3-conversations model.

Release 2 guidance updated this approach, requiring both a request and an assessment event to be submitted in these cases (see Annex B of the [CLD release 2 guidance](#)).

3-conversations request criteria:

- Event Type = “Request”
- Event Description indicates a conversation has taken place
- Request indicates progress (stage 2.3) = Yes
- Event Start Date before 01/07/2025
- Request Event Start Date is before linked assessment Event Start Date or there is no linked assessment

Stage 3.2 – Allow services to be first response in part 1 metric

A service is counted as the first response when no assessment (or proportionate assessment) starts before it, even if an assessment starts later. This is to allow for situations where urgent or short-term support (e.g. reablement) starts immediately, and the care assessment is carried out/recorded afterwards (or the assessment record is missing from the submission).

Criteria:

- An assessment Event Start Date after the service Event Start Date, when both are linked to the same request. OR Assessment is missing but service is present.

Stage 3.3 – Exclude services from part 2 metric where an intervening assessment does not indicate progress to service

The part 2 metric - from request to first service - is not calculated when an intervening assessment does not indicate progression to service. This service may be linked to multiple requests; so this stage does not permanently exclude this service.

Criteria:

- Assessment indicates progress to service (stage 2.3) = No

Stage 3.4 – Exclude requests that overlap with ongoing activity linked to a previous request

As assessments and services may be linked to multiple requests, this stage prevents ongoing assessments or services from being reused to calculate more than one waiting time for a person.

A request is removed if:

- Its event chronology (stage 2.1) is less than the chronology of either the assessment or service for the preceding request of the person.

Stage 4 – Calculate waiting times

Stage 4.1 – Calculate waiting times at an individual level and group waiting times by reporting period

Part 1 and part 2 waiting times are calculated for each individual within a local authority. Individuals may be counted in multiple reporting periods for the same metric if they meet the new client definition after sufficient time has passed where they have received local authority arranged or provided adult social care.

Each waiting time is assigned to a reporting period based on the Event Start Date of the first response (for part 1) or the first service (for part 2) following a request.

Stage 4.2 – Create local authority level median waiting times

The median part 1 and part 2 waiting times are calculated for each local authority, representing the wait experienced by the individual halfway through the ranked distribution for people who received their first response (part 1) or first service (part 2) that quarter.

Stage 5 – Create contextual information for the Athena dashboard

The Athena dashboard is accessible to local authorities to aid DHSC in its development of its methods. This stage does not impact the calculations of the metrics but is included in the GitHub code for transparency. Details are not provided for this stage, please review the GitHub code for more information.

Stage 5.1 Count number of events within cohort for each combination of local authority, age band, statistical reporting period

Stage 5.2 Count of event types for first responses and assessment types where they are assessments included in waiting time metric

Stage 5.3 Count of service types for services included in waiting time metric

Stage 6 – Create output tables

This stage does not impact the calculations of the metrics but is included in the GitHub code for transparency. Details are not provided for this stage, please review the GitHub code for more information.