

AI in children’s social care: where are we now?

Coram-i

At Coram-i’s *AI in Children’s Social Care* event, independent consultant **Kevin Yong** offered a wideranging and grounded assessment of the sector’s current position on AI adoption. His keynote painted a picture of a field characterised by increasing interest and momentum, but also uneven readiness and significant gaps in guidance, capability and impact measurement. Drawing heavily on conversations with local authorities as well as **the Local Government Association’s 2025 *State of the Sector* analysis**, Kevin provided a crucial baseline for understanding where the sector stands, and where it may be heading.

A sector that has started the journey – but slowly, and not always safely

Kevin began with an overview of the current intelligence landscape. Despite a flurry of new national resources, such as the **LGA Artificial Intelligence Hub**, the newly established Centre for Social Care and AI Learning (SCALE), and the **AI.gov.uk Knowledge Hub**, he noted that the field still suffers from a shortage of detailed, children’s social care specific research and guidance. These initiatives are promising but remain in early stages, meaning local authorities often lack sector tailored evidence and examples to guide their decision making.

More robust insight comes from the **LGA’s State of the Sector: AI survey**, which consulted 104 councils, including 65 responsible for children’s social care. According to the data Kevin presented, nearly all local authorities report having “started their AI journey,” although this spans a wide spectrum, from those merely beginning to think about AI to others already testing or using tools in practice. Notably, the vast majority of adoption has occurred since 2023, coinciding with the arrival of widely accessible tools like ChatGPT which dramatically raised awareness of generative AI.

Yet this growth is not always supported by clear guidance or governance. Kevin highlighted two worrying findings: a small number of councils have banned AI tools altogether on corporate devices, likely leading to staff using them informally on personal devices, and nearly one-fifth have no AI usage policy at all. The absence of basic guardrails is particularly concerning given the data privacy risks of entering sensitive data into public AI tools.

When asked to assess their own readiness, councils expressed confidence in their overall technology infrastructure and organisational culture, but far less certainty around the quality of their data and the capability of their workforce. Kevin argued that training in AI should become mandatory, treated as seriously as safeguarding, GDPR, or health and safety, because the workforce will increasingly need to use AI safely and effectively in their day-to-day roles.

He also noted that the biggest barriers to deploying AI remain the fundamentals: funding, staff capacity, governance clarity, and the ability to evaluate impact. Without investment and structured learning, councils risk using AI without fully understanding its value or consequences.

How AI is being used today

Kevin then turned to a description of how AI is already showing up in children’s services. Perhaps unsurprisingly, **Microsoft Copilot** has quickly become one of the most widely used tools, largely because it integrates directly into existing Microsoft 365 environments. This makes it easy for councils to adopt with minimal additional procurement.

Transcription tools represent the other major driver of early AI activity. Applications like **Magic Notes** (Beam) and **Minute** (developed by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology) are being tested across many councils. These tools promise efficiency, but Kevin emphasised the importance of rigorous evaluation by continuing work such as the **Ada Lovelace Institute’s report *Scribe and prejudice?* (2026)**.

Beyond these high-profile use cases, smaller but significant pockets of innovation are emerging. Predictive analytics and data matching tools, such as Sentinel Partners’ platform, are being piloted in cities including **Liverpool**, **Portsmouth** and **Birmingham**. Meanwhile, North Yorkshire has taken a more cautious, low risk approach with its **“Polly” policy assistant**: a tailored AI model trained only on its own policies and designed expressly to only generate content within that scope.

New tools are also being developed to support the drafting of Education, Health and Care Plans. Companies such as **Invision360** and **Agilisys** are exploring ways to use AI to synthesise assessment information, while **Somerset Council** has developed its own opensource solution to improve the quality and consistency of EHCPs.

Where AI could take us next

Looking ahead, Kevin outlined several opportunity areas where AI could meaningfully transform practice. One promising domain is **automated insight extraction** from unstructured records, enabling the creation of relationship maps, chronologies and case summaries. These tools could help practitioners quickly surface key information, especially when working with complex or long running cases.

Councils are also beginning to explore AI’s potential in public facing information and guidance, tools that help families identify the right services more easily, or that match them with providers who have availability in real time. AI may additionally play a role in supporting professional development, offering personalised training and coaching tools for social workers, foster carers and adopters.

Kevin also referenced the use of thematic analysis models, like those used in central government consultations, to draw insights from written feedback and engagement responses. And although risk identification remains the most controversial application, he argued that supportive, well-designed tools could one day help practitioners make more informed decisions.

Finally, he noted a longer-term possibility: enabling children and young people themselves to query and understand their social care records in ways that respect their agency and provide clarity about their journey.

Conclusion

Kevin’s presentation underscored that AI is no longer theoretical in children’s services. It is here, evolving quickly, and already reshaping daily practice in pockets across the country. But the sector remains tentative, with significant disparities in readiness and a pressing need for consistent governance, training and evaluation.

“How do we measure who benefits from AI, and how do we ensure that those benefits accrue to children, families and frontline practitioners, not just organisational processes? These questions must guide the next phase of development.”

As the sector continues to explore AI, his message was both pragmatic and hopeful: progress is visible, but meaningful impact will require collective learning, intentional design and a renewed focus on the people at the heart of children’s social care.