Practical approach toolkit: Using data to strengthen workforce planning overview

Who is the toolkit for?

It's for people who work in:

- integrated care boards (ICBs)
- local authorities
- combined authorities
- voluntary community and social enterprise partners
- planning and workforce lead roles.

What the toolkit offers

It outlines how a unified, systemwide data platform can act as a foundation for smarter decision making, more equitable service planning and stronger collaboration across sectors. The toolkit:

- establishes a consistent, transparent way to view population, health, care and workforce data in one place.
- provides step by step guidance on developing a shared data model, from scoping to testing and embedding
- strengthens alignment between system partners by grounding planning in reliable, standardised datasets.
- shows how this approach can drive long term improvements in workforce planning, commissioning and policy development.

Why this approach matters

Health and care systems commonly rely on disconnected data, making it difficult to understand local need or plan a workforce that can meet future demand. Poor data quality, inconsistent formats and multiple sources create inefficiencies and erode trust.

Key features include:

- **Neighbourhood-level insight:** LSOA-granular data enables precise understanding of need, supporting fairer and more targeted decision-making.
- **Triangulation across datasets:** Users can combine population, workforce, socio-economic and health indicators in a single view to reveal deeper patterns.
- **Accessible, intuitive design:** Clear navigation, visual mapping and consistent terminology make complex data easier to interpret and use across sectors.

Overarching lessons
- **Standardisation is essential:** Agreeing consistent definitions and data structures improves confidence and reduces duplication.
- **Shared ownership drives adoption:** Early involvement of NHS, ASC, VCSE and education partners creates a platform that reflects whole-system needs.
- **Granularity transforms insight:** Moving from local authority to neighbourhood-level data significantly increases the relevance and usability of the platform.
- **Sustained communication builds trust:** Regular updates, demos and feedback loops ensure users remain engaged and confident in the data.

Key takeaways
- A single, systemwide platform can close long-standing data gaps and create a shared evidence base for planning.
- Standardised, integrated datasets improve accuracy, comparability and decision-making across partners.
- Neighbourhood-level insight supports more targeted interventions and helps reduce inequalities.
- Co-production with partners strengthens governance, engagement and long-term sustainability.
- This model is scalable, adaptable and can be replicated or expanded to support future analytics, modelling and scenario planning.

You can find the full toolkit including the building blocks that shaped the approach and practical recommendations to help you adapt the model, alongside a recorded presentation on our website. Together, these insights provide a clear pathway for closing data gaps, strengthening systemwide planning, and building a more connected, evidence driven health and care system.