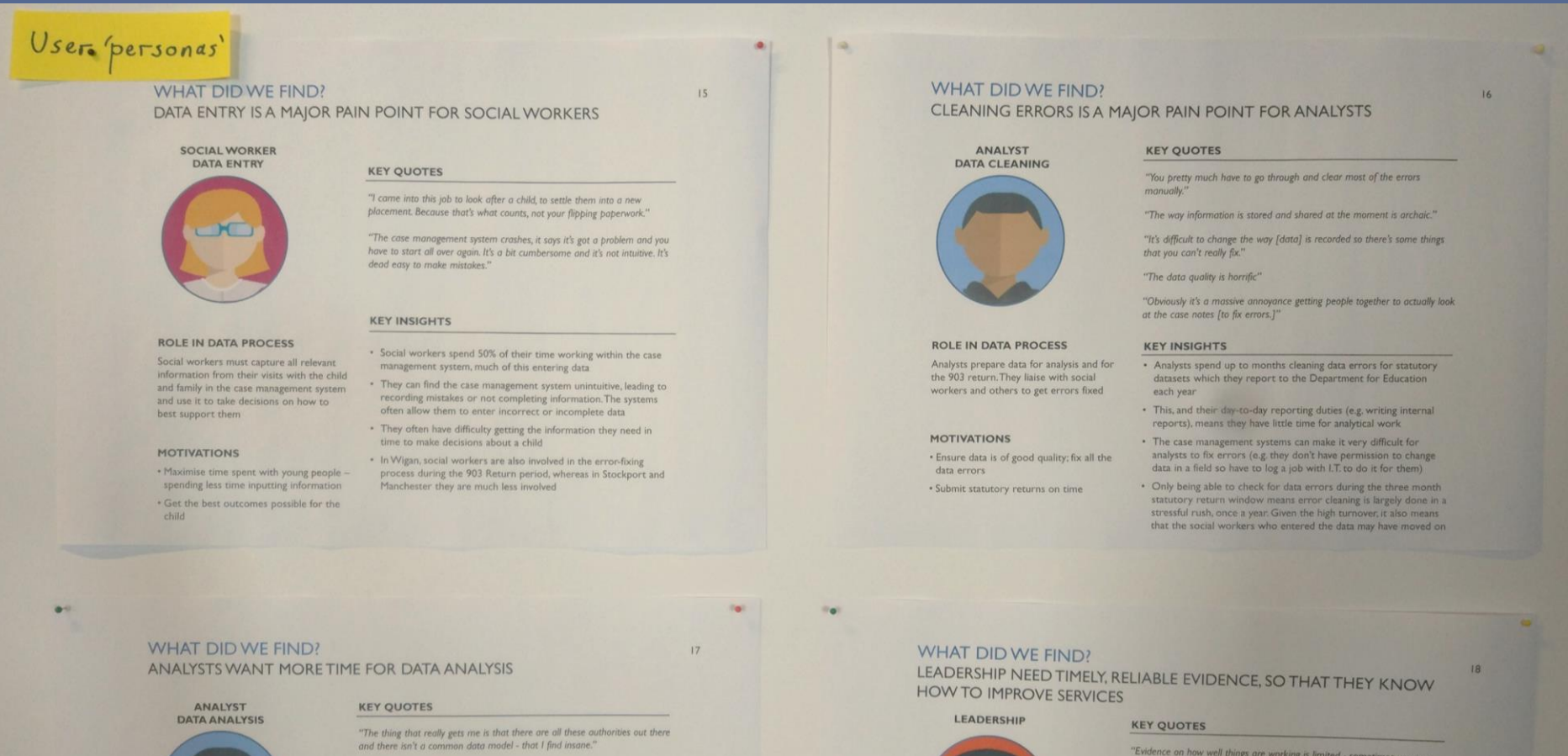
GMCA GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY | MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL | Wigan Council | STOCKPORT METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL | Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government | SOCIAL FINANCE

BETTER DATA ON CHILDREN IN CARE DISCOVERY PROJECT: BUILDING A COMMON APPROACH

FULL USER RESEARCH REPORT

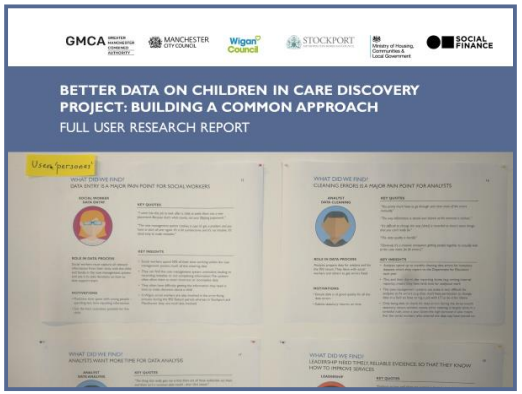


THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS THE DETAILED FINDINGS FROM OUR USER RESEARCH

We wrote up our findings in three documents:

Overall Summary Report

Detailed User Research Report



Benefits Case

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d) Understanding leadership and their needs

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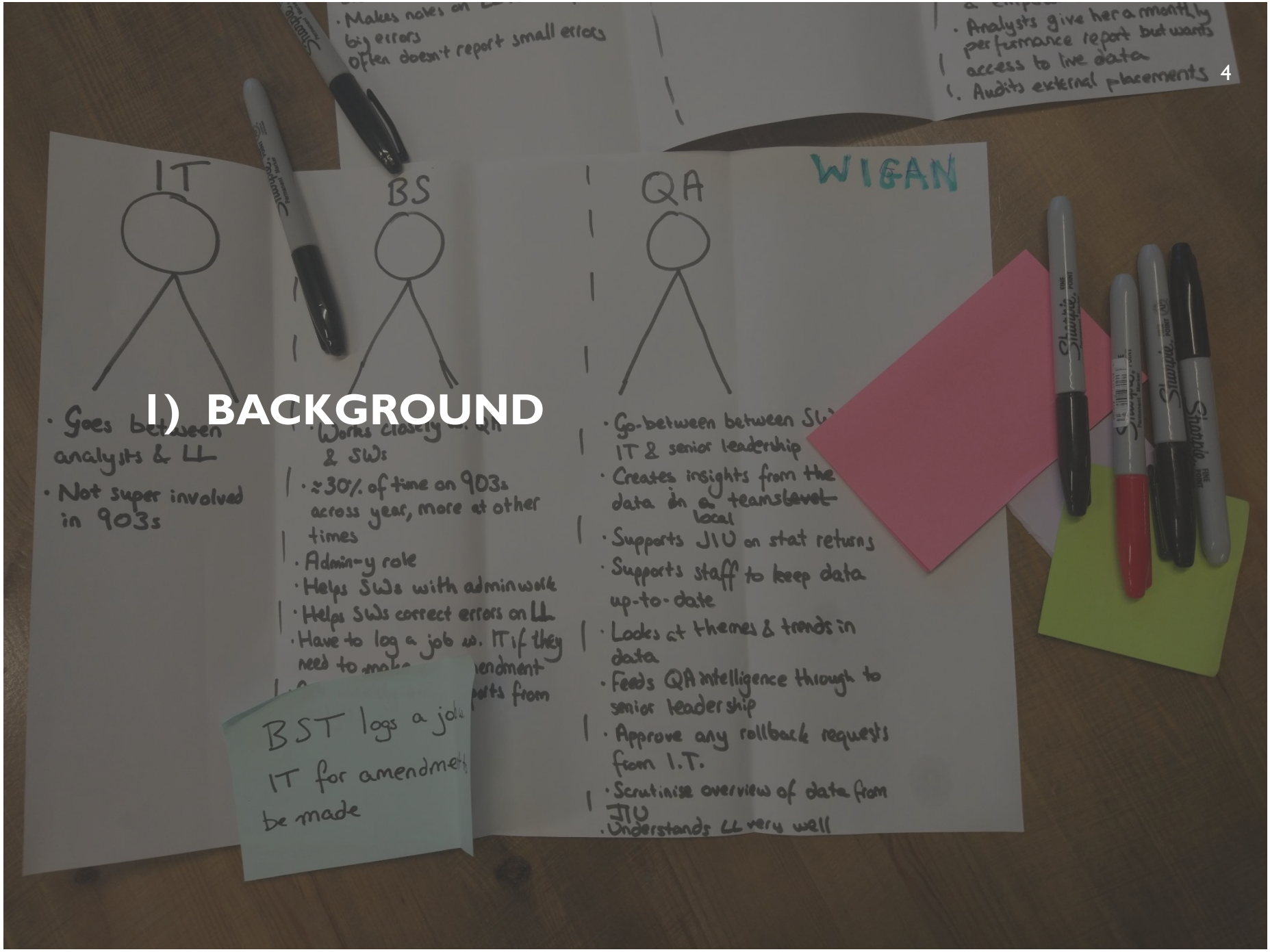
f) Understanding what decisions leadership make



I) BACKGROUND

THIS PROJECT WAS A CROSS-COUNCIL COLLABORATION

Project overview

Objective: Understand and improve how Children's Services Departments collect and use data on Looked After Children

Partners: GMCA, Manchester, Stockport, Wigan, Social Finance and MHCLG's Local Digital Collaboration Unit

Funding: MHCLG's Local Digital Fund and the Christie Foundation – both funders are focused on supporting local authorities to create common solutions to shared problems

The partners

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

GMCA GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY

STOCKPORT METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Wigan Council

SOCIAL FINANCE

THE PROJECT EMERGED FROM WORKSHOPS WITH 12 COUNCILS ON THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS FACING SOCIAL CARE

Last year, 12 leading councils and Social Finance met to discuss the strategic need to collaborate on better data to improve outcomes for vulnerable people. Together, we identified three priority use cases:

Use case	Description	Current status
Journey mapping between services	Understand the journeys children take between services so that we can understand their needs and better target the right level of service	Discovery completed
Understanding family context	Understand the needs, assets and risks inherent in a family so that we can better support vulnerable children, for example avoiding unnecessary escalation into care	Alpha project funded by MHCLG and the Christie Foundation
This project		
Common Data Model for Looked After Children	Understand why local authorities do not have access to the data and information they need to make sure Looked After Children access the right support	Discovery project funded by MHCLG and the Christie Foundation

The broader collaboration

Cheshire West and Chester
Sheffield City Council
SOCIAL FINANCE
Wigan Council
MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
North Yorkshire County Council
GMCA GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY
Haringey Council
Leeds CITY COUNCIL
Camden
STOCKPORT METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
ISLINGTON
Essex County Council

WORKING WITH MANCHESTER, WIGAN AND STOCKPORT ENABLED US TO UNDERSTAND DIFFERENT PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority selected Manchester, Stockport and Wigan because their varied sizes and systems provided a diverse sample from which to better understand data on Looked After Children.

Because these three councils are metropolitan boroughs, we also approached other councils to determine whether there were major differences around data collection, processing and analysis that needed to be taken into consideration.

We concluded that conducting a discovery project in Manchester, Stockport and Wigan would provide the insight needed to identify problems and opportunities relevant to other local authorities.

High level statistics for the councils

Metric	Manchester	Stockport	Wigan
Population	5,400,00[1]	2,900,00[2]	3,200,00[3]
Looked After Child population	1,200[4]	500[5]	600[6]
Children's Services Ofsted rating	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Case management system	Micare	EIS	Liquidlogic

Sources 1) https://secure.manchester.gov.uk/info/200088/statistics_and_intelligence/438/population, 2) (2017): ONS UK, 3) (2017): ONS UK, 4) (2016): https://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/24126/jsna_cyp_-_looked_after_children.pdf, 5)(2016): www.stockportjsna.org.uk/2016-jsna-analysis/looked-after-children/ 6) (2019): http://www.bridgewater.nhs.uk/ashtonleighwigan/children-in-care/

Looked After Children are some of the most disadvantaged people in the country

4x more likely to be involved in the Youth Justice System than their peers

5x more likely to face exclusion from school than their peers

40x more likely to become homeless than their peers

More likely to have a special education need (SEN) than their peers. 59% of Looked After Children have a SEN statement by age 11

More likely to have a mental illness Almost ½ of Looked After Children have a diagnosed mental health problem

Local authorities do not have timely access to all the data and information they need to make sure Looked After Children access the right support

"We need to target limited resources so I need to know what the impact of our decisions are, where's the cost, where's the demand, what's the quality like, what's contributing to it?

If we don't have this we're at risk of bringing another generation of people through the system who don't get the support they need"

James Winterbottom
Director of Children's Services
Wigan Council

We wanted to work collaboratively across three local authorities to see whether there are common reasons why their Children's Services Departments do not have all the information needed to improve support for Looked After Children

THE OPPORTUNITY – CONTINUED

DATA ON LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN CAN LEAD TO BETTER DECISIONS AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES

Data on Looked After Children helped Essex understand the cost of not investing in preventative services and helped build the business case to commission specialist interventions for children on the edge of care

Case Study:

When John was referred to the Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) service at the age of 13, he was at high risk of care or custody for a number of reasons: assaulting a teacher and three years of school absence, daily cannabis misuse, association with drug dealers, and threatening family and neighbours with knives and swords.

His mother, who had ongoing alcohol dependency issues, was balancing the need to manage his behaviour with looking after his severely autistic younger brother. His step-father, part of the local travelling community, was largely absent.

When the MST therapist started working with the family, their first priority was to put in place a safety plan due to the risk of physical aggression and access to weapons. As part of this, the mother now does a daily check for weapons and drugs, and has established a de-escalation plan for difficult situations.

Simple changes in the mother's parenting style, such as giving clear and consistent expectations, and committing to spend at least 30 minutes a day with John, have led to great improvements.

He has not taken drugs or been aggressive in the community, has stopped hanging out with antisocial peers, and has taken up a positive activity, fishing. John is due to finish the MST intervention shortly, and there are currently no plans for him to enter care.

2) USER RESEARCH APPROACH

BRIEFING - TERMS FOR UNDERSTANDING DATA AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Looked After Child	• Any child (person under the age of 18) who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours is known as a Looked After Child
SSDA903 Return (903 return)	• The SSDA903 return is a statutory dataset that every Children's Services Department in England must submit to the Department for Education (DfE) once a year • This dataset contains information on all the Looked After Children in that authority, and some information on those who are leaving or who have recently left care • The purpose of this dataset is to provide the government with the information to: (1) evaluate the outcomes of policy initiatives, and (2) monitor objectives on Looked After Children
Case Management System	• Social workers and others use case management systems to collect information on the children and families they're supporting • The most used case management system in Children's Services Departments is Liquidlogic • As of December 2017, 78 local authorities are using the same core Liquidlogic system in Children's Social Care,[1] but each have different forms and processes within it • Data that has to be submitted as part of the 903 return is extracted from the case management system before it is uploaded to the DfE portal

1. Source: http://www.initiativesincare.co.uk/PDF/INC-Report-SOCIAL-WORK-IT-March2018.pdf

THE '903 RETURN' IS THE MAIN STANDARD DATASET COLLECTED ON LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

What we knew already

The '903 return' is the key dataset on Looked After Children. Initial conversations across GMCA and Regional Information Groups suggested that data cleaning and limited insight were the two key problems with the 903 return:

- **Data Cleaning:** the process of preparing this dataset takes several months. Data cleaning is particularly frustrating for analysts.
- **Insight:** the data collected as part of the 903 return isn't often used because (1) it doesn't provide the right information to help inform decisions; and (2) it is 6-18 months out of date by the time it has been cleaned, submitted to the DfE and returned to local authorities.

What we wanted to find out

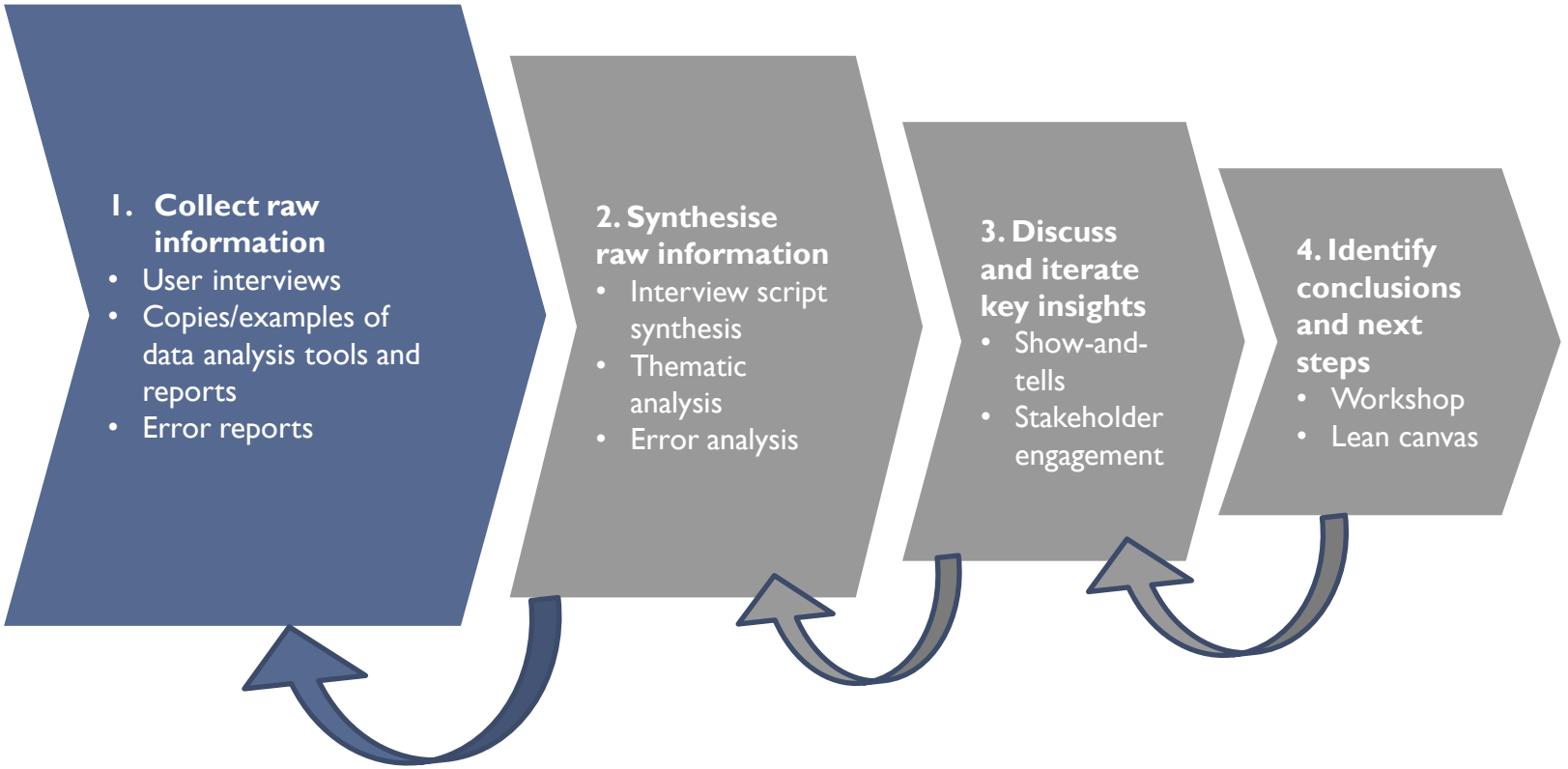
Why does it take so much time to clean this data?

What decisions do leadership make on Looked After Children?

- *Does the 903 return give them the information needed to make these decisions?*
- *If not, why not?*

Would it be possible to keep this data clean and up-to-date, ready for use throughout the year?

OVER 12 WEEKS, WE FOLLOWED A FOUR STAGE PROCESS TO UNDERSTAND USERS, THEIR NEEDS, AND CURRENT PROCESSES



Individual pieces of information are condensed to common themes as we synthesise the data collected

WE ASKED EACH COUNCIL TO PROVIDE A LONG-LIST OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE 903 RETURN PROCESS

Together, we then identified people from across the three main user groups involved in the 903 return process. We wanted to create a representative sample from which to understand the pain points and opportunities related to data on children in care.

SOCIAL WORKERS

ANALYSTS

LEADERSHIP

We spoke to an equal number of male and female social workers

We spoke to an equal number of male and female analysts

We spoke to 5 men and 7 women in leadership positions

The social workers we spoke to were aged between 30 and 50

The analysts we spoke to were aged between 30 and 40

The people in leadership roles that we spoke to were aged between 35 and 55 years old

They had been working as social workers for 5+ years

Most had been working as analysts in Children's Services for 5+ years, although two were newer

They had mostly been working in Children's Services for 10+ years

WE CONDUCTED USER RESEARCH WITH 29 PEOPLE FROM ACROSS THE MAIN USER GROUPS

We spoke to the key people involved in data and decision-making on Looked After Children:

	Council	Social workers	Analysts	Leadership			
				Service management	*Business management*	*Directors & Deputy Directors*	*Other*
Lead Authorities	***Stockport***	• Social Worker	• Children's Social Care Analysts x3	• Fostering Service Lead • Locality Leader, CSC	• Contracts & Commissioning Manager • Head of Business Support	• Principal Lead (Children's Social Care & Commissioning)	• Quality Assurance Officer, Safeguarding
Lead Authorities	***Wigan***	• Social Worker	• Senior Analyst • Manager, Joint Intelligence Unit	• Service Manager, Children's Social Care		• Practice Director, Director of Children's Services	• IT Support • Quality Assurance • Business Support
Lead Authorities	***Manchester***		• Data Support Officer • Research & Intelligence Lead, CSC	• Head of Service, South Locality & Leaving Care	• Business Manager, Children's Social Care • Commissioning Manager	• Director of Children's Services • Deputy Director of Children's Services	
Reference Group	***Leicestershire***				• Business Partner, Business Intelligence Development		
Reference Group	***East Sussex***						• Data and Information Manager
Reference Group	***North West Authorities***						• Regional Development Manager

WE SPOKE TO SOCIAL WORKERS AND ANALYSTS ABOUT THEIR ROLES IN COLLECTING AND USING DATA…

Social Worker

Local Authority Analyst[1]

(Data Cleaning)

Local Authority Analyst[1]

(Data Analysis)

ROLE IN DATA PROCESS

Social workers must capture all relevant information from their visits with the child and family in the case management system and use it to take decisions on how to best support them

Analysts must prepare all the data for the 903 return. They liaise with social workers and others to get errors fixed

Analysts analyse data according to what leadership ask for. They write reports and create dashboards to provide information to leadership

1. We also spoke to some people from business support, quality assurance and I.T. support teams to understand how they support analysts in their role

…AND TO LEADERSHIP ABOUT THEIR ROLES IN MAKING DECISIONS ON LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Director/Deputy Director of Children's Services

Service Managers: Head of Service, Service Manager, Service/Locality Lead

Business Managers: Commissioning Manager, Business Manager, Head of Business Support

ROLE IN DATA PROCESS

Directors and Deputy Directors have strategic oversight of all Children's Services. They use data to make high-level strategic and costing decisions

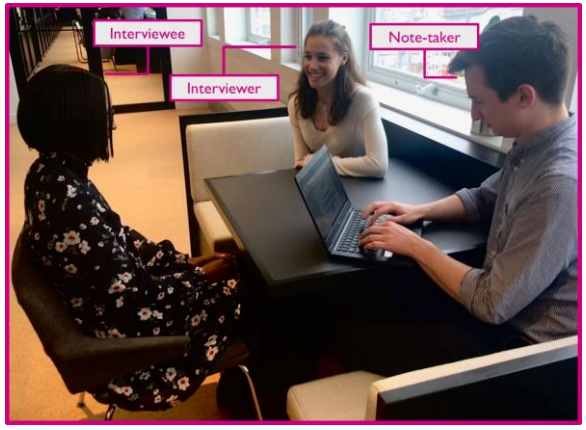
Service managers make operational decisions on a specific service or locality

Business managers make commissioning and contract decisions as well as oversee provision and performance management of services and teams

WE FOLLOWED A SEMI-STRUCTURED APPROACH FOR THE INTERVIEWS

Interview process

- We ran 45 minute semi-structured interviews
- These were mainly in person, with some over the phone or video-conferencing for easier logistics
- We interviewed one person at a time, so we could get detailed and independent responses
- We used two interviewers: one lead whilst the other took full verbatim notes to capture all the details



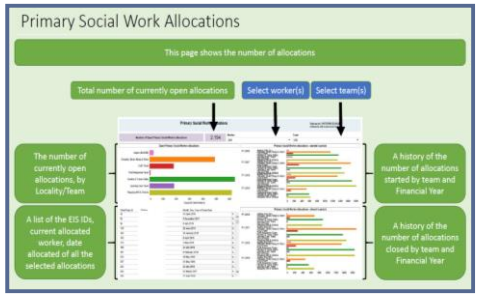
Example interview script (for leadership):

- Briefly introduce project and interview approach and logistics
- *Can you tell me a bit about your role?*
- *What does a typical day look like?*
- *What are the decisions you make about Looked After Children?*
- *How do you make these decisions?*
  - *What works well?*
  - *What works less well?*
- *What information do you have to inform these decisions?*
  - *What information would help you which you don't currently have?*
- *How do you know you've made the right decisions?*
- *Can you talk us through a recent decision you made?*
  - *Who was involved?*
  - *What was the issue?*
  - *How did you come to a conclusion?*
  - *What will happen next?*

WE COLLECTED DOCUMENTATION AND DATA TO IDENTIFY COMMON DATA ERRORS, REPORTS, AND TOOLS

In order to better understand the errors that occur in the 903 data:

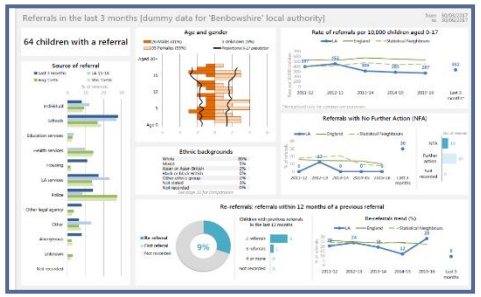
We asked each council for copies of their current and historical error reports from the 903 return, so that we could understand the distribution of errors in each council.



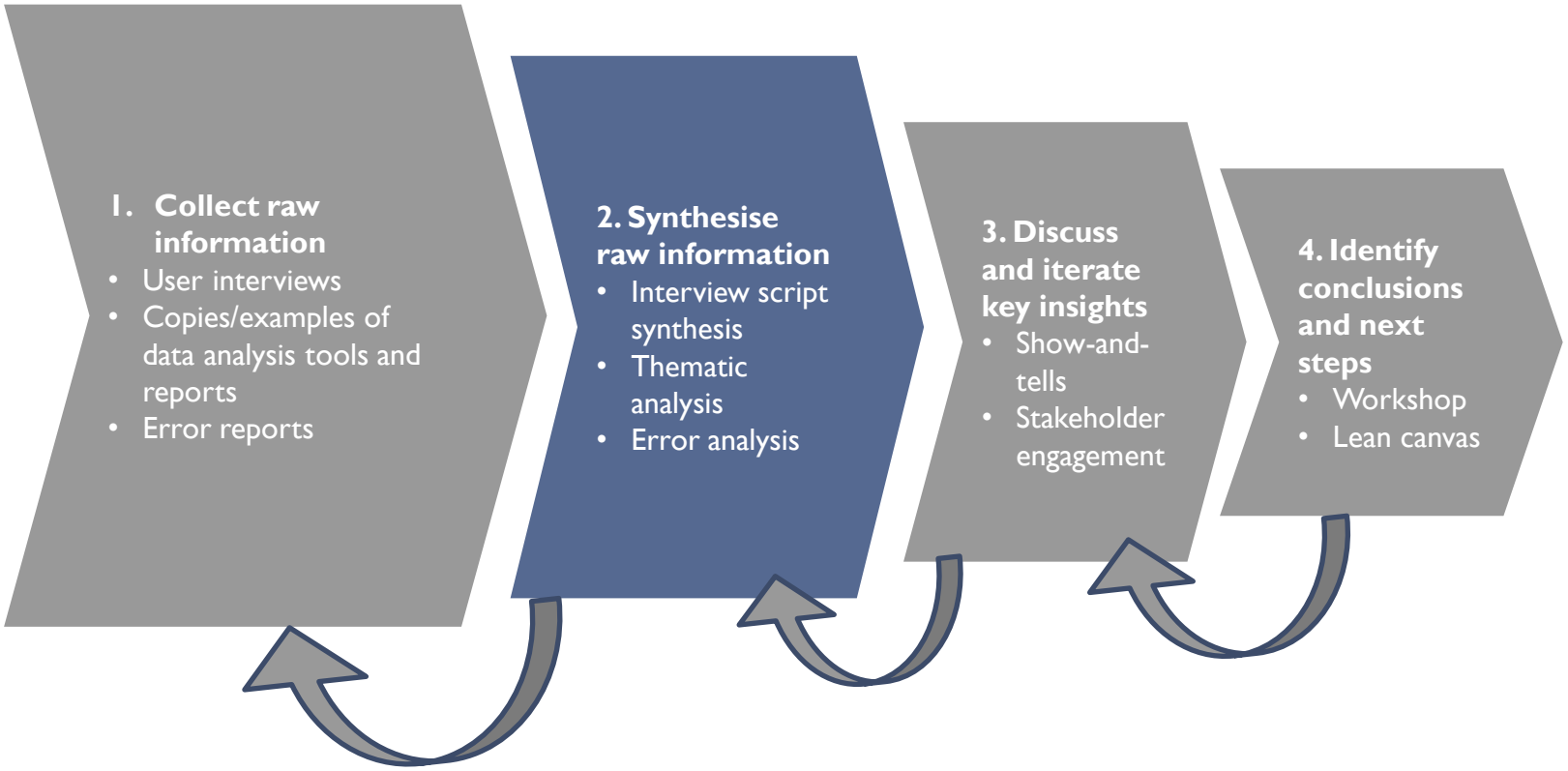
We also looked at the reports and tools that analysts use to give leadership the information they need to make decisions:

We looked at copies of different internal reports that each council uses. These included reports on overall numbers and statistics of Looked After Children, and placement reports with individual child-level data.

Lastly, we looked at the different data analysis dashboards that management look at to monitor the performance of their services.



OVER 12 WEEKS, WE FOLLOWED A FOUR STAGE PROCESS TO UNDERSTAND USERS, THEIR NEEDS, AND CURRENT PROCESSES



Individual pieces of information are condensed to common themes as we synthesise the data collected

WE THEN 'SYNTHESISED' OUR VERBATIM INTERVIEW NOTES TO BRING OUT THE KEY POINTS

Synthesis process

- We ran synthesis sessions with the interviewers and a team member not present in the interview to bring an external objective view
- During synthesis, each team member read the verbatim script and wrote a post-it on every key point they noted
- We then collected these observations by theme for each user

NEXT, WE CAPTURED THE FINDINGS ACROSS ALL INTERVIEWS IN A 'REALTIME BOARD'

Example synthesis on Realtime Board for 7 user interviews

Each column is one interview with a user

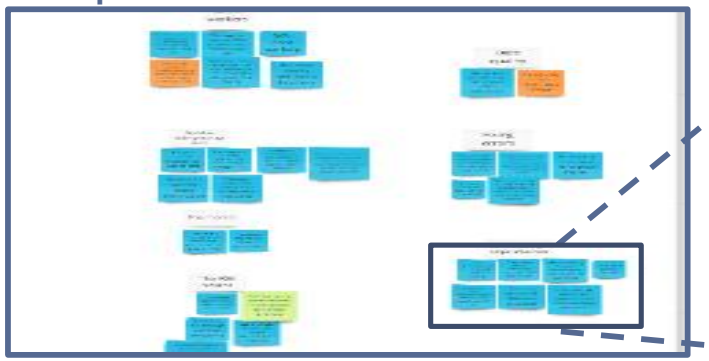
Findings are colour-coded:

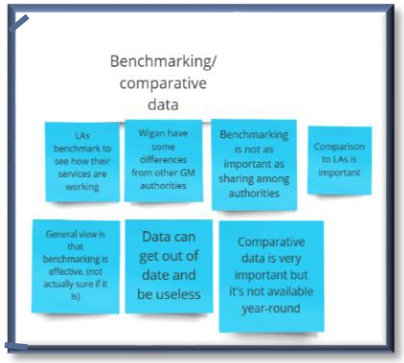
- Yellow = observation
- Green = opportunity
- Red = painpoint
- Blue = summary of a theme

Findings are grouped and summarised on blue post-its

THIS ENABLED US TO SYSTEMATICALLY DRAW OUT THE COMMON THEMES ACROSS OUR USERS

Example themes for a council

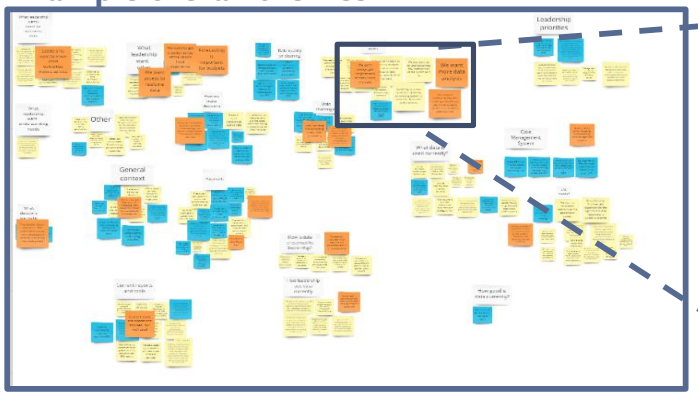




We found that the ability to benchmark against statistical and regional neighbours was mentioned as an important part of data analysis by multiple users

For each council, we drew out all of the key themes across users to give a summary

Example overall themes



We found that leadership across the councils expressed a need for more data analysis and for more insight

We then pulled out the key themes across councils into a single summary

Key:

Orange = general theme across all councils

Green = opportunity

Red = painpoint

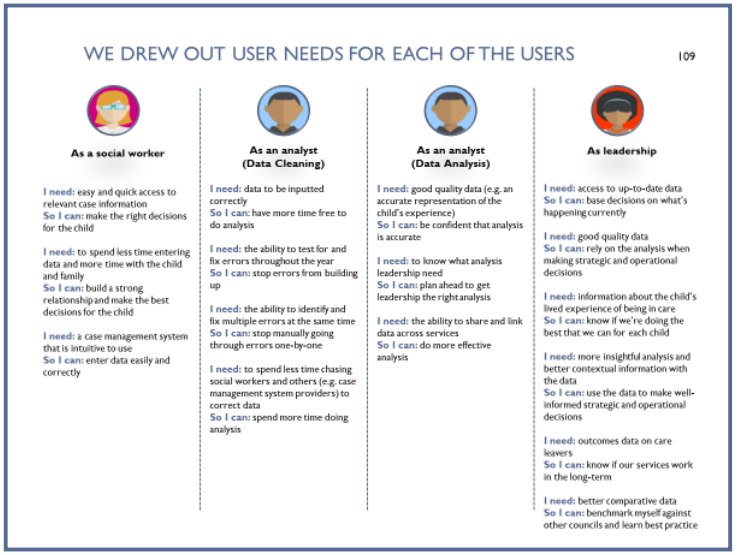
NEXT, WE CREATED PERSONAS FOR EACH CORE USER GROUP

For each user, we made personas

The persona summarises:

- Role in data process
- Motivations
- Key quotes
- Key insights
- Key responsibilities
- What works well
- Key tools & software used
- Challenges
- Unmet needs

We then drew up a list of the overall user needs for each persona



WE DREW OUT USER NEEDS FOR EACH OF THE USERS 109

As a social worker

I need: easy and quick access to relevant case information
So I can: make the right decisions for the child

I need: to spend less time entering data and more time with the child and family
So I can: build a strong relationship and make the best decisions for the child

I need: a case management system that is intuitive to use
So I can: enter data easily and correctly

As an analyst (Data Cleaning)

I need: data to be inputted correctly
So I can: have more time free to do analysis

I need: the ability to test for and fix errors throughout the year
So I can: stop errors from building up

I need: the ability to identify and fix multiple errors at the same time
So I can: stop manually going through errors one-by-one

I need: to spend less time chasing social workers and others (e.g. case management system providers) to correct data
So I can: spend more time doing analysis

As an analyst (Data Analysis)

I need: good quality data (e.g. an accurate representation of the child's experience)
So I can: be confident that analysis is accurate

I need: to know what analysis leadership need
So I can: plan ahead to get leadership the right analysis

I need: the ability to share and link data across services
So I can: do more effective analysis

As leadership

I need: access to up-to-date data
So I can: base decisions on what's happening currently

I need: good quality data
So I can: rely on the analysis when making strategic and operational decisions

I need: information about the child's lived experience of being in care
So I can: know if we're doing the best that we can for each child

I need: more insightful analysis and better contextual information with the data
So I can: use the data to make well-informed strategic and operational decisions

I need: outcomes data on care leavers
So I can: know if our services work in the long-term

I need: better comparative data
So I can: benchmark myself against other councils and learn best practice

CREATING USER PERSONAS ENABLED US TO GET A DETAILED UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMMON NEEDS AND PAIN POINTS OF THE DIFFERENT ROLES

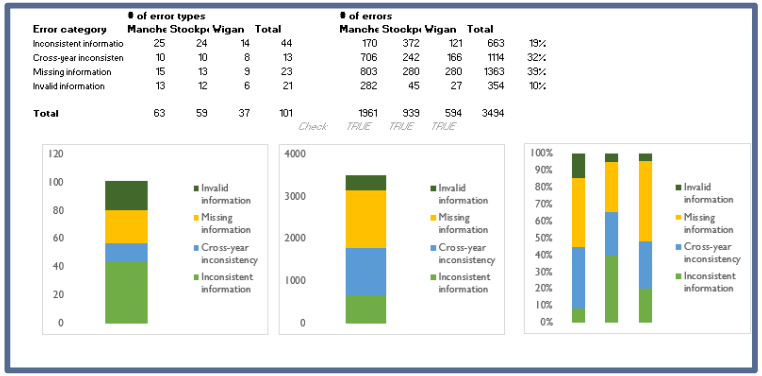
WE THEN ANALYSED THE DIFFERENT NUMBERS AND TYPES OF ERRORS IN EACH COUNCIL'S 903 DATA

We wanted to know:

- *How many errors do each of the councils have?*
- *What types of errors do the councils have?*
- *Are there some errors that are more common than others?*
- *Do the councils have the same types of errors?*
- *Do the councils have the same errors each year?*

So we analysed the error data:

- We got access to each council's log of the errors in their DfE 903 data
- We then examined how the errors changed from the start to the end of the statutory return window. This enabled us to see how the cleaning process works and try to identify any best practice



# of error types					# of errors				
Error category	Manche	Stockpı	Wigan	Total	Manche	Stockpı	Wigan	Total	
Inconsistent informatio	25	24	14	44	170	372	121	663	19%
Cross-year inconsisten	10	10	8	13	706	242	166	1114	32%
Missing information	15	13	9	23	803	280	280	1363	39%
Invalid information	13	12	6	21	282	45	27	354	10%
Total	63	59	37	101	1961	939	594	3494	
					Check	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	

WE REVIEWED EXISTING REPORTS TO UNDERSTAND WHAT INFORMATION LEADERSHIP CURRENTLY RECEIVES

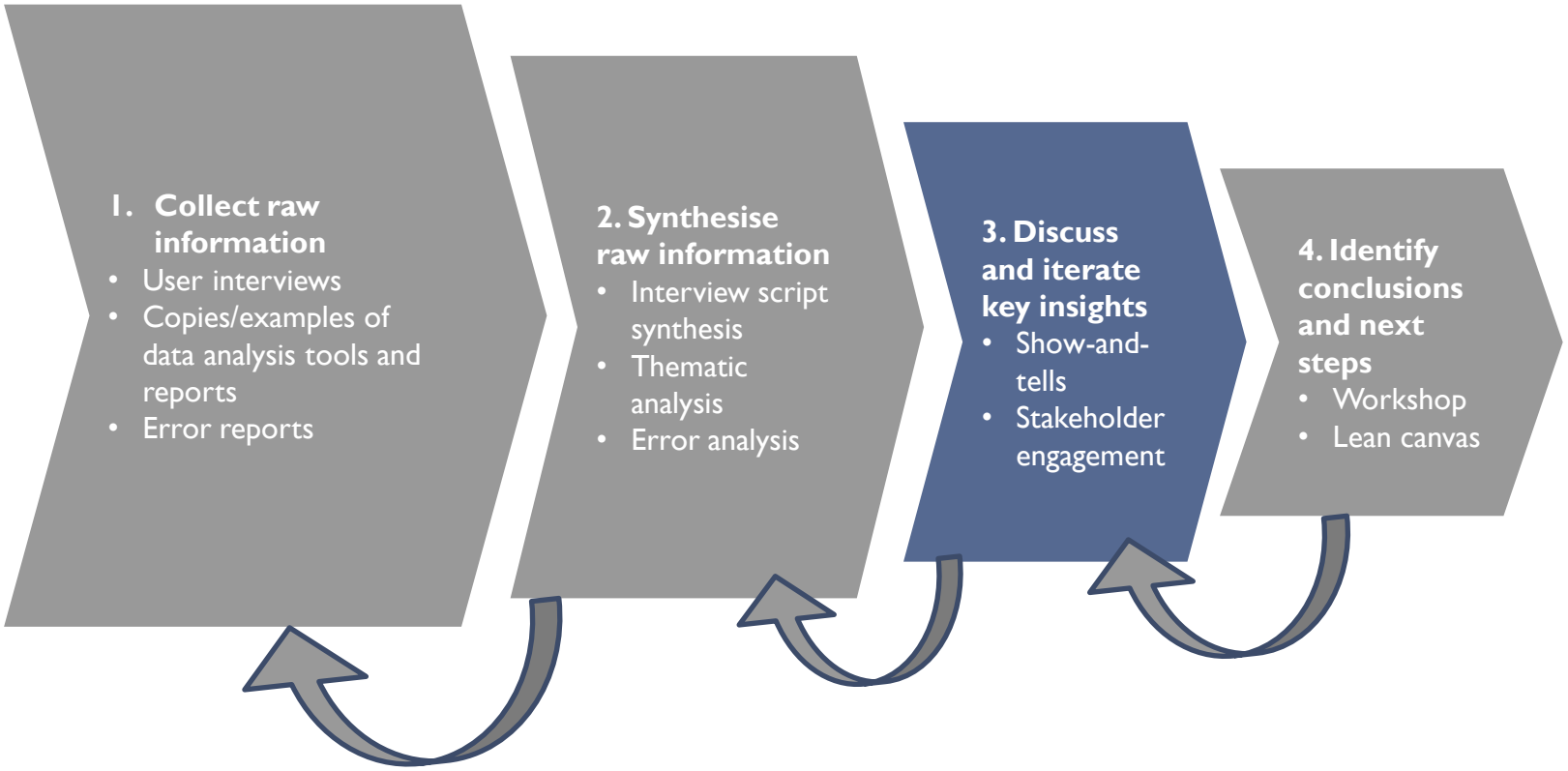
For each of the internal reports that we looked at, we asked leadership:

- *How often do you use this report?*
- *Which decisions do you make based of this report?*
- *Who sees this report?*
- *Do you know where the data in this report comes from?*
- *Do you trust the data in this report?*
- *How useful do you find this report?*

We then synthesized our findings to find common themes across all three councils:

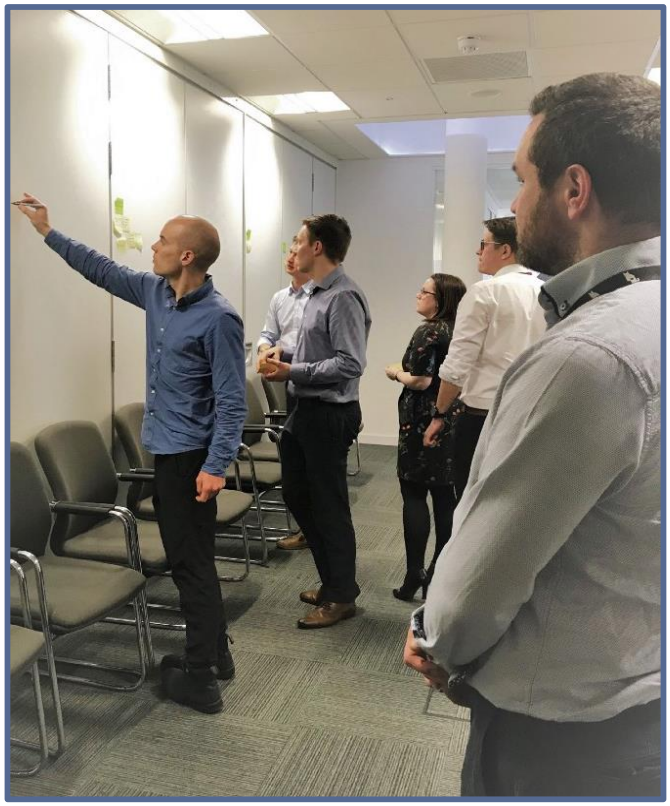
- Each council produces weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual reports to monitor the performance of teams and services and report any safeguarding issues or areas of concern

OVER 12 WEEKS, WE FOLLOWED A FOUR STAGE PROCESS TO UNDERSTAND USERS, THEIR NEEDS, AND CURRENT PROCESSES

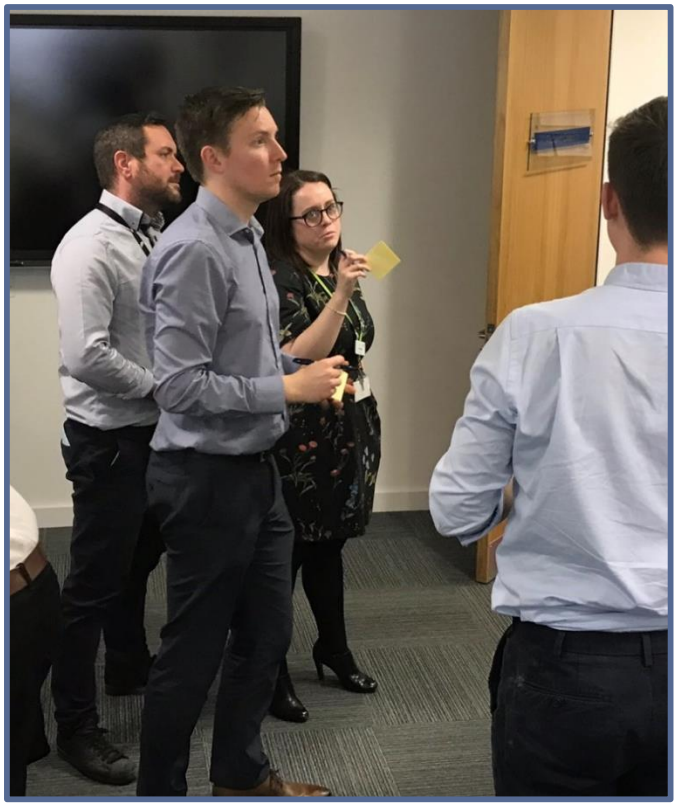


Individual pieces of information are condensed to common themes as we synthesise the data collected

WE THEN TESTED, REFINED AND PRIORITISED OUR FINDINGS IN WORKSHOPS WITH THE FULL TEAM



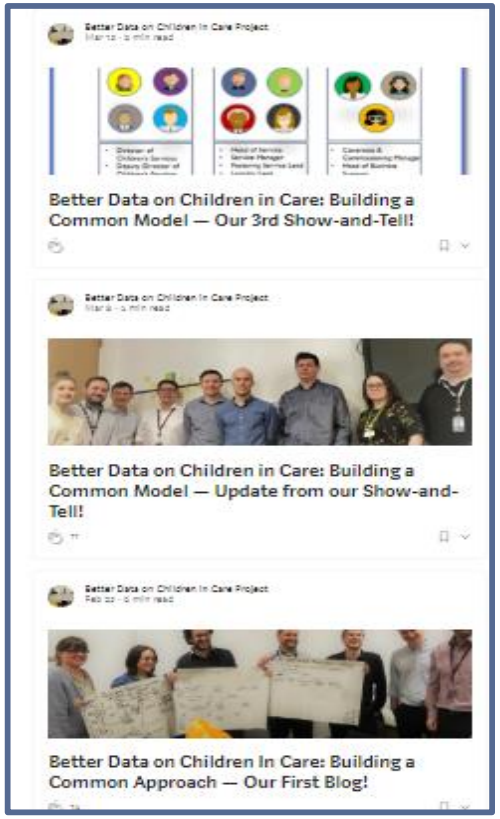
Here, we brainstormed potential solutions to the most common errors that occur in each of the council's data. We used sticky notes to group and prioritise ideas.



In this exercise, we used a 2x2 diagram to identify and prioritise best practices in the data cleaning process. We all wrote down what we thought worked well on sticky notes, and then arranged this on a scale of impact vs feasibility.

WE ALSO ENGAGED WITH OTHER COUNCILS TO TEST OUR FINDINGS AND SHARE OUR LEARNINGS

Blogs



Events

Regional networks

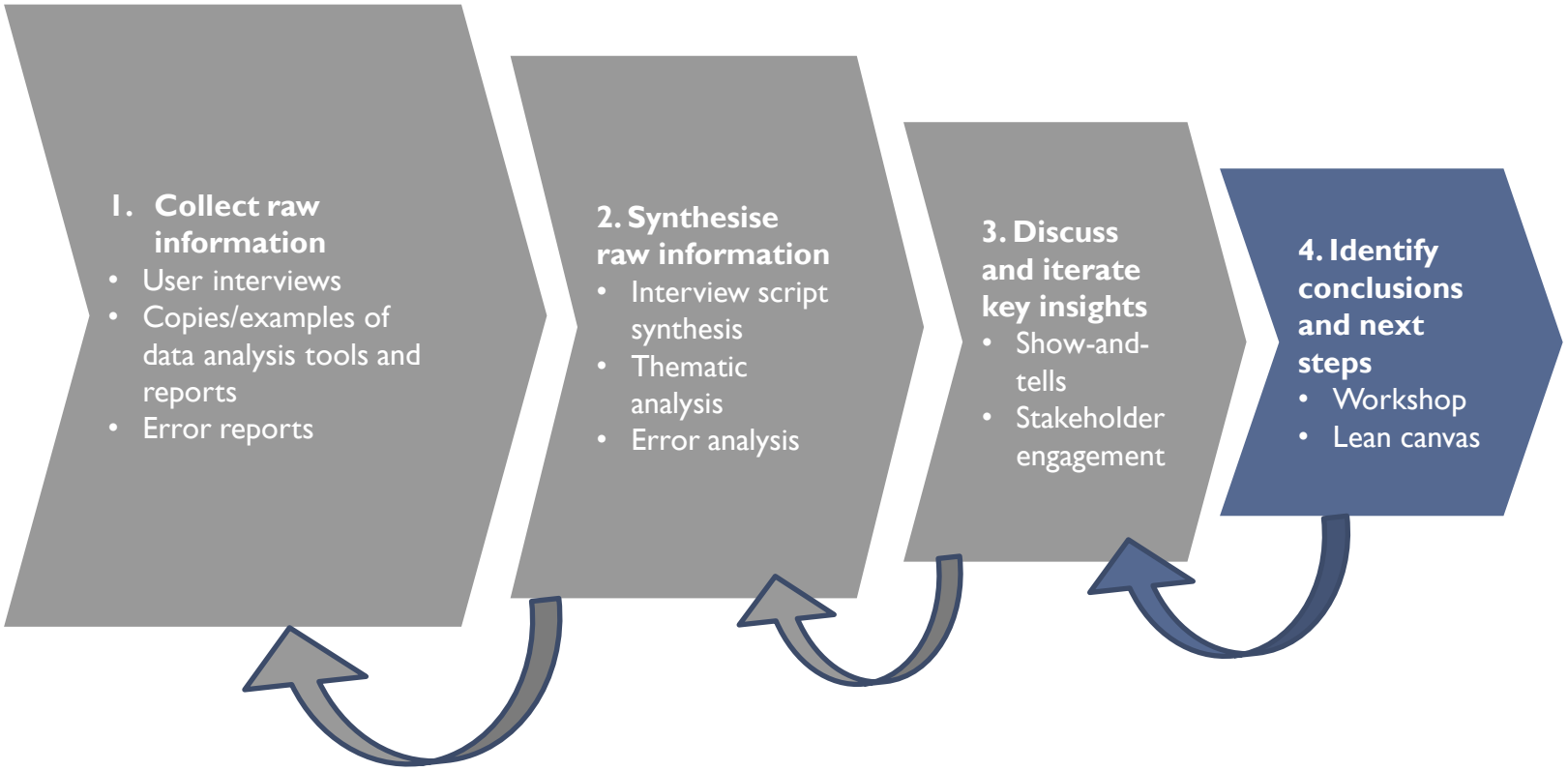
Leicestershire County Council

East Sussex County Council

Twitter

IT WAS GREAT TO SEE OTHER COUNCILS ENTHUSIASM FOR OUR WORK AND TO HEAR THAT THE PROBLEMS WE WANT TO TACKLE ARE COMMON ONES

OVER 12 WEEKS, WE FOLLOWED A FOUR STAGE PROCESS TO UNDERSTAND USERS, THEIR NEEDS, AND CURRENT PROCESSES

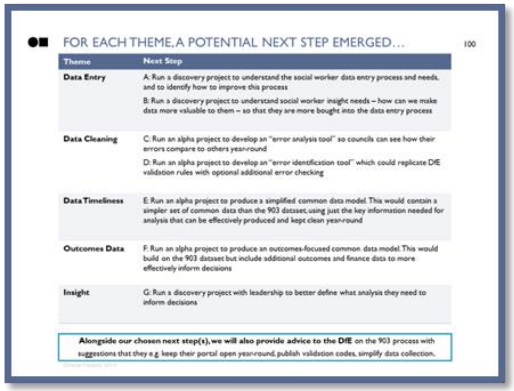


Individual pieces of information are condensed to common themes as we synthesise the data collected

FINALLY, WE DISCUSSED KEY FINDINGS AND POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS

Our final workshop in Manchester

We all met in Manchester one last time to talk through the potential next steps. We each chose two favourites from a list of options and then looked into these in more detail using a lean canvas



FOR EACH THEME, A POTENTIAL NEXT STEP EMERGED…

Theme	Next Step
Data Entry	A: Run a discovery project to understand the social worker data entry process and needs, and to identify how to improve this process
	B: Run a discovery project to understand social worker insight needs – how can we make data more valuable to them – so that they are more bought into the data entry process
Data Cleaning	C: Run an alpha project to develop an "error analysis tool" so councils can see how their errors compare to others year-round
	D: Run an alpha project to develop an "error identification tool" which could replicate DfE validation rules with optional additional error checking
Data Timeliness	E: Run an alpha project to produce a simplified common data model. This would contain a simpler set of common data than the 903 dataset, using just the key information needed for analysis that can be effectively produced and kept clean year-round
Outcomes Data	F: Run an alpha project to produce an outcomes-focused common data model. This would build on the 903 dataset but include additional outcomes and finance data to more effectively inform decisions
Insight	G: Run a discovery project with leadership to better define what analysis they need to inform decisions

Alongside our chosen next step(s), we will also provide advice to the DfE on the 903 process with suggestions that they e.g. keep their portal open year-round, publish validation codes, simplify data collection.

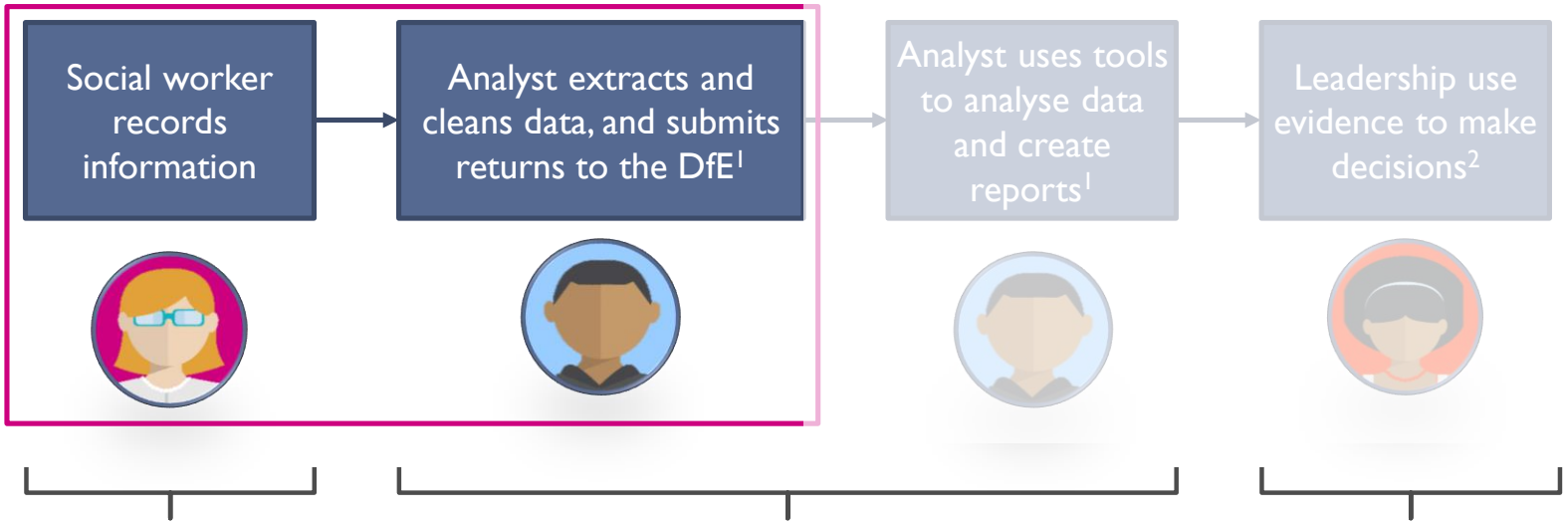
THIS ENABLED US TO PRIORITISE WHICH NEXT STEP WOULD BE MOST IMPACTFUL AND MOST FEASIBLE

3) Data collection and processing

A)UNDERSTANDING USERS AND THEIR NEEDS

THE KEY USERS INVOLVED IN DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING ARE SOCIAL WORKERS AND ANALYSTS

Social workers and analysts enter, extract and clean data in/from the case management system



We asked social workers about how they record and clean data on Looked After Children

We asked analysts about their two different roles: (1) extracting and cleaning data and (2) running analysis for leadership.

We asked leadership about decisions they make on Looked After Children and what data they use to make these decisions

1. We also spoke to some people from business support, quality assurance and I.T. support teams to understand how they support analysts in their role
2. In this report, leadership includes: Business & Commissioning Managers, Service Managers, Directors and Deputy Directors

SOCIAL WORKERS WORK DIRECTLY WITH THE CHILD AND RECORD INFORMATION IN THE CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

ROLE IN DATA PROCESS

Social workers must capture all relevant information from their visits with the child and family in the case management system and use it to take decisions on how to best support them.

MOTIVATIONS

- Maximise time spent with young people – spending less time inputting information
- Get the best outcomes possible for the child

KEY QUOTES

"I came into this job to look after a child, to settle them into a new placement. Because that's what counts, not your flipping paperwork."

"The case management system crashes, it says it's got a problem and you have to start all over again. It's a bit cumbersome and it's not intuitive. It's dead easy to make mistakes."

KEY INSIGHTS

- Social workers spend 50% of their time working within the case management system, much of this entering data
- They can find the case management system unintuitive, leading to recording mistakes or not completing information. The systems often allow them to enter incorrect or incomplete data
- They often have difficulty getting the information they need in time to make decisions about a child
- In Wigan, social workers are also involved in the error-fixing process during the 903 Return period, whereas in Stockport and Manchester they are much less involved

SOCIAL WORKERS WORK DIRECTLY WITH THE CHILD AND RECORD INFORMATION IN THE CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Safeguard and provide support to children and families
- Maintain accurate records of all interactions with children and families and have this ready for inspections (e.g. Ofsted), legal proceedings and statutory returns

WHAT WORKS WELL

- When they get help from business support and admin to fix errors
- Happy when they get to stay with a child throughout their stay in care

UNMET NEEDS

- Easy and quick access to relevant case information in order to make decisions for the child
- Less time spent entering data and more time spent with the child and family
- A case management system that is intuitive to use

CHALLENGES

- The forms for inputting data in the case management systems are confusing and not user-friendly e.g.
  - Some data entry requires using codes (e.g. placement codes such as "K2") rather than intuitive definitions or descriptions
  - Some placement type definitions are misleading
  - In some cases, the structure of the case management system is confusing, which leads social workers to skip sections
- Social workers are very time-pressured, with high caseloads and increasingly complex cases
- Social workers don't want to use a laptop when doing visits because it hinders communication
- Social workers would rather spend time with the child than doing paperwork
- There are different levels of digital/data literacy amongst social workers
- The benefits of data collection are not always clear to social workers

SOCIAL WORKER USER NEEDS

As a social worker,

I need: easy and quick access to relevant case information
So I can: make the right decisions for the child

I need: to spend less time entering data and more time with the child and family
So I can: build a strong relationship and make the best decisions for the child

I need: a case management system that is intuitive to use
So I can: enter data easily and correctly

WHAT DID WE FIND?

CLEANING ERRORS IS A MAJOR PAIN POINT FOR ANALYSTS

ANALYST
DATA CLEANING

ROLE IN DATA PROCESS

Analysts prepare data for analysis and for the 903 return. They liaise with social workers and others to get errors fixed.

MOTIVATIONS

- Ensure data is of good quality; fix all the data errors
- Submit statutory returns on time

KEY QUOTES

"You pretty much have to go through and clear most of the errors manually."

"The way information is stored and shared at the moment is archaic."

"It's difficult to change the way [data] is recorded so there's some things that you can't really fix."

"The data quality is horrific"

"Obviously it's a massive annoyance getting people together to actually look at the case notes [to fix errors.]"

KEY INSIGHTS

- Analysts spend up to three months cleaning data errors for statutory datasets which they report to the Department for Education each year
- This, and their day-to-day reporting duties (e.g. writing internal reports), means they have little time for analytical work
- The case management systems can make it very difficult for analysts to fix errors (e.g. they don't have permission to change data in a field so have to log a job with I.T. to do it for them)
- Only being able to check for data errors during the three month statutory return window means error cleaning is largely done in a stressful rush, once a year. Given the high turnover, it also means that the social workers who entered the data may have moved on

ANALYSTS IDENTIFY ERRORS IN THE DATA AND ENSURE THAT THEY ARE FIXED

ANALYST
DATA CLEANING

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Extracting data from case management system
- Working with social workers to fix data errors
- Running regular reports so that the department is ready for an Ofsted inspection on any given day
- Ensuring statutory requirements are met
- Testing the Department for Education portal

WHAT WORKS WELL

- The error reports created by the Department for Education (DfE) are generally helpful
- The DfE portal is easy to use

UNMET NEEDS

- The ability to test for and fix errors throughout the year
- Less errors in the data entry process
- The ability to identify and fix multiple errors at the same time
- Less time spent chasing social workers and others to correct data and more time for analysis

CHALLENGES

- Lots of time is spent manually fixing data errors and not much time is left for analysis
- Social workers don't always input data correctly & can be hard to get hold of
- It can take months for a social worker to update a record
- Analysts can't make changes to the data themselves
- When social workers don't fix errors it's often left to the analysts to do
- The case management systems cause many problems with data quality
- Data that isn't part of a statutory return is generally not well recorded
- Over-customization of case management systems has made them incompatible with add-ons and/or updates
- Senior management tend to be more concerned about their Ofsted inspections and ratings than about statutory returns and thus don't provide as much support on the 903 return
- The input:output ratio of analysts' work is poor
- Switching to a new system or updating existing systems is very time-intensive

ANALYST USER NEEDS – CLEANING DATA

ANALYST
DATA CLEANING

As an analyst cleaning data,

I need: data to be inputted correctly
So I can: have more time free to do analysis

I need: the ability to test for and fix errors throughout the year
So I can: stop errors from building up

I need: the ability to identify and fix multiple errors at the same time
So I can: stop manually going through errors one-by-one

I need: to spend less time chasing social workers and others (e.g. case management system providers) to correct data
So I can: spend more time doing analysis

B) MAPPING THE CURRENT DATA COLLECTION AND CLEANING PROCESSES

"TALKING TO THE SOCIAL WORKERS AND TELLING THEM WHAT TO DO IS THE BIGGEST PAIN POINT AND TIME-SINK"

Analyst, Manchester

WE FOCUSED ON THE '903' ANNUAL REPORTING ON LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The SSDA903 return is an existing common data model on the experiences of young people in care.

Background on the SSDA903 return

Once a year, all Children's Services Departments in England have to complete the **SSDA903 statutory return** (903 return)

This is a set of data reports on any child who has been Looked After in their authority at any point during the financial year

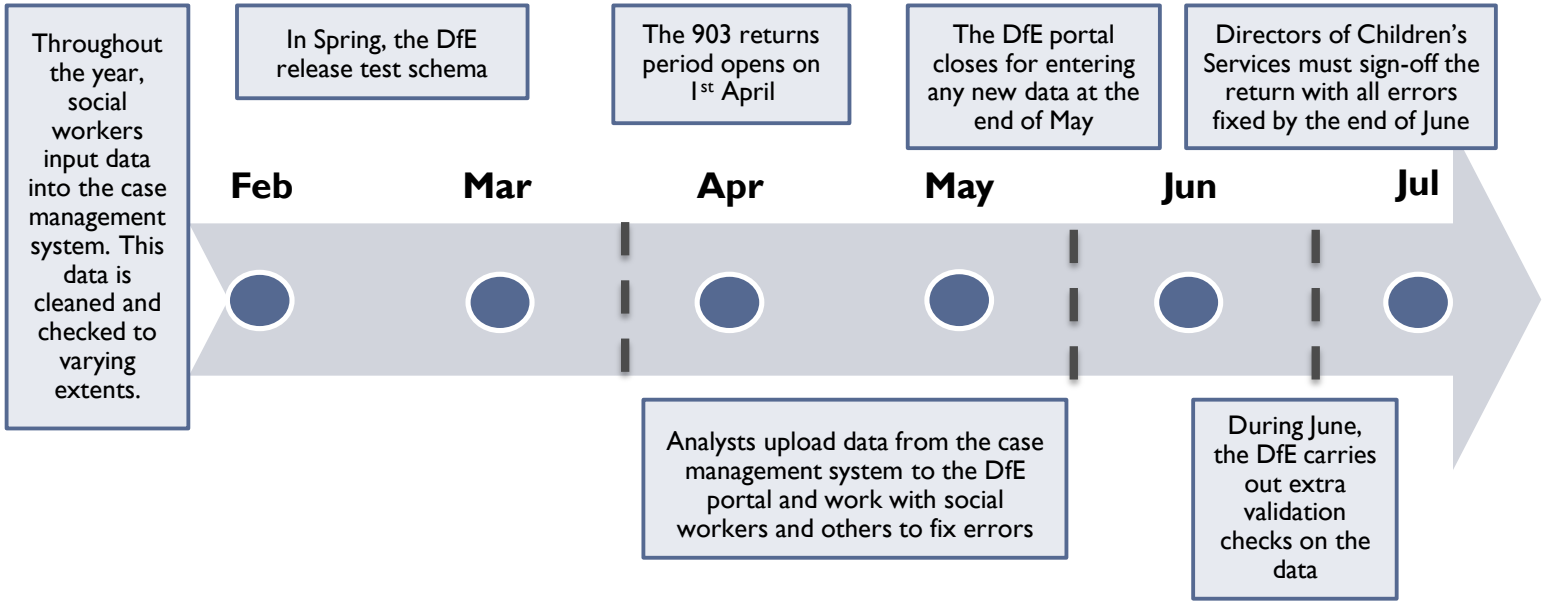
The purpose of this return is to provide the government with the necessary information to: (1) **evaluate the outcome** of policy initiatives and (2) **monitor objectives** on Looked After Children

All data has to be uploaded to the Department for Education's online portal in either xls format or in multiple csv files

Analysts, business support, quality assurance, social workers and others work to fix errors in the data

Once the DfE have finalised all the data, they produce a pdf report, *Children looked after in England (including adoption)*, along with data tables, in November

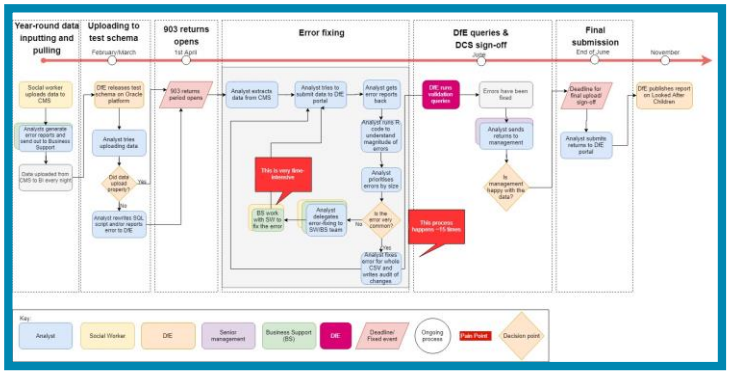
THE 903 STATUTORY RETURNS PROCESS RUNS FROM APRIL THROUGH JUNE



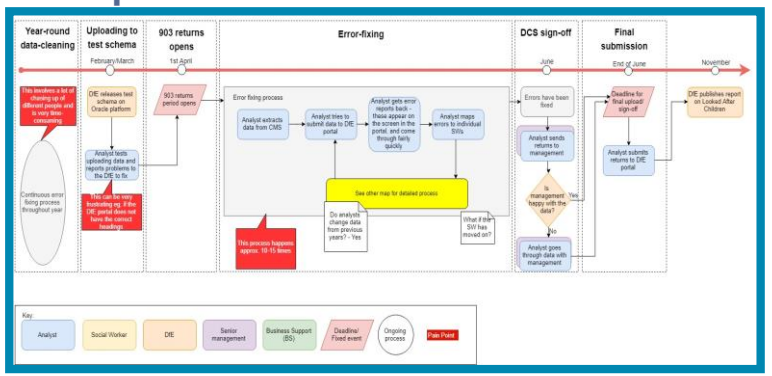
THE DFE PUBLISHES ITS ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARISING ALL THE 903 DATA, CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER IN ENGLAND (INCLUDING ADOPTION) WITH DATA TABLES IN NOVEMBER

EACH LOCAL AUTHORITY HAS A DIFFERENT PROCESS FOR PRODUCING THE 903 RETURNS

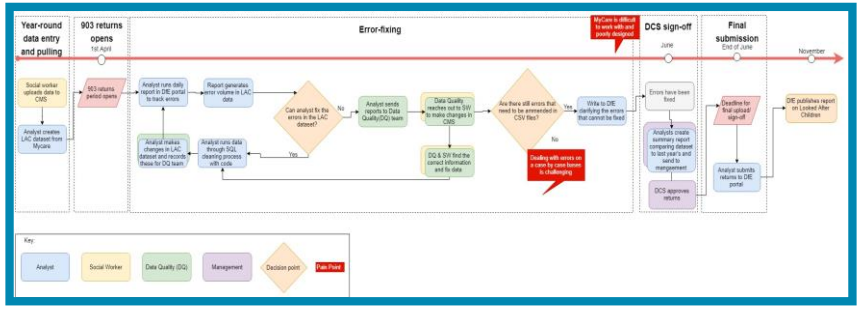
Wigan



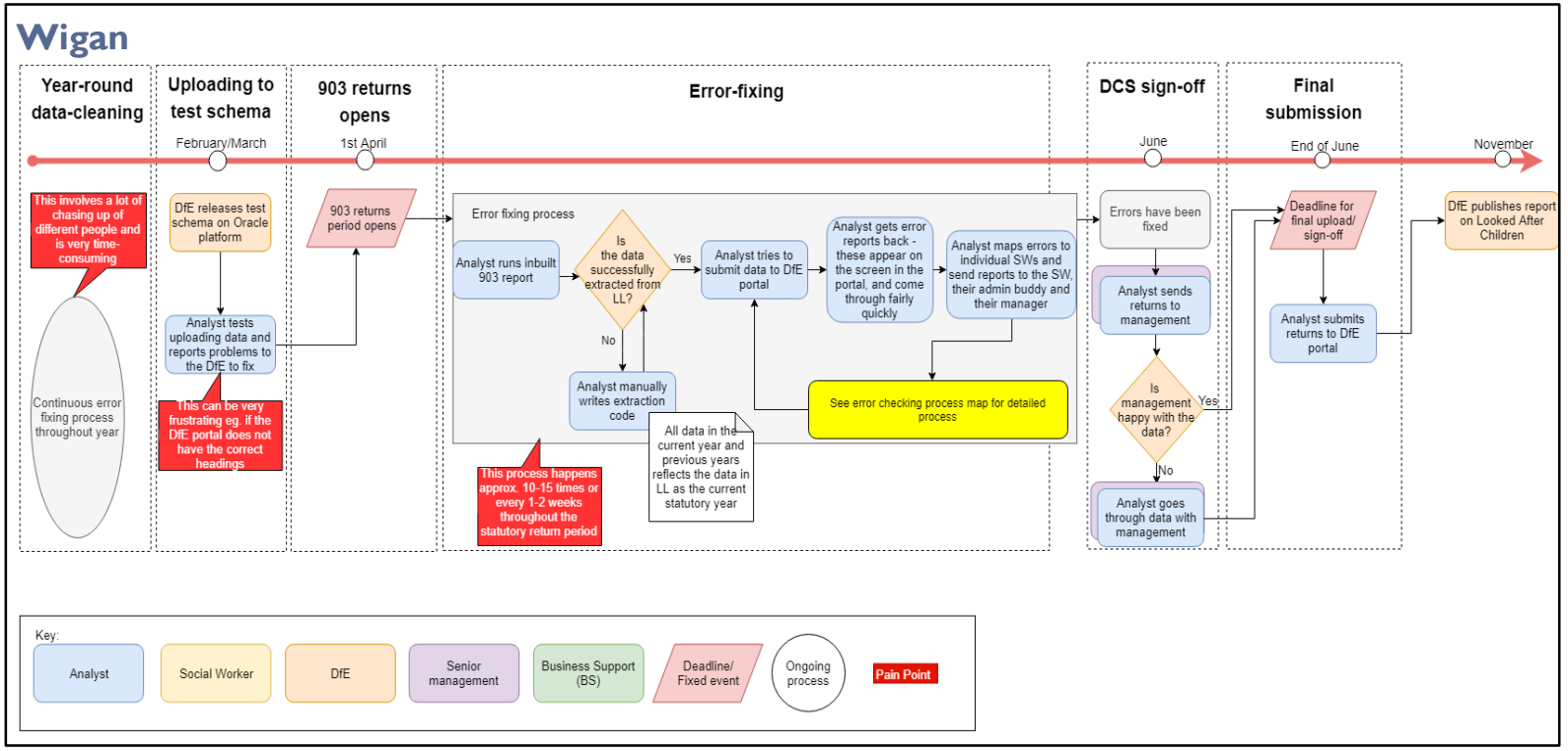
Stockport



Manchester



WIGAN'S 903 RETURN PROCESS IS SUPPORTED BY AN INTENSIVE YEAR-ROUND ERROR CHECKING PROCESS



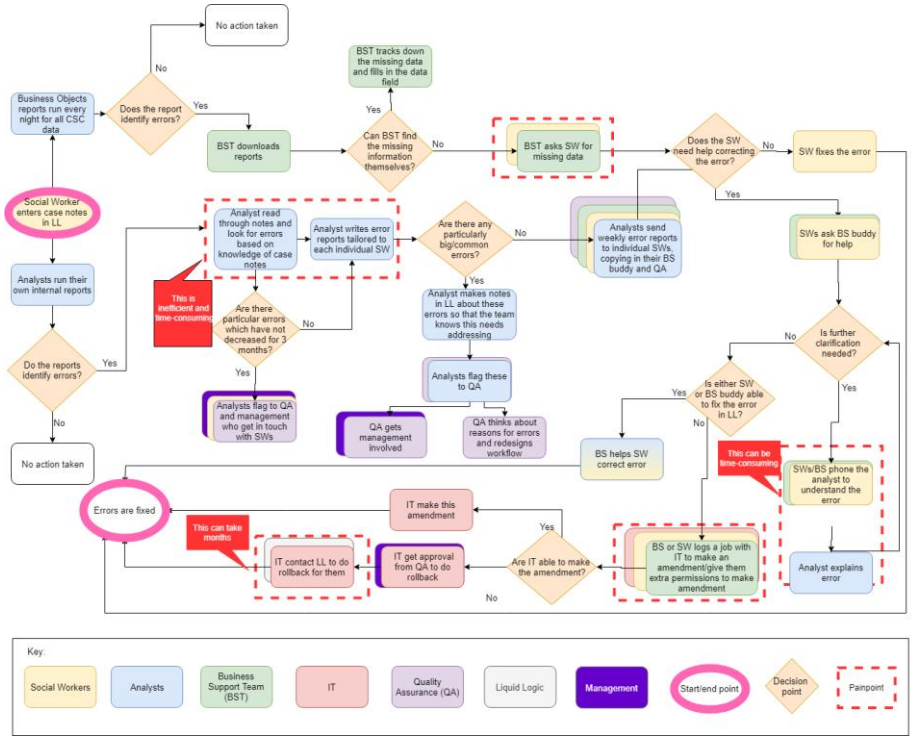
Key Takeaways

- Analysts work closely with business support and social workers to fix errors
- Social workers fix errors directly in the case management system

To view the diagram in more detail click here

CLEANING ERRORS YEAR-ROUND INVOLVES SEVERAL PEOPLE, BUT IS PARTICULARLY TIME-INTENSIVE FOR ANALYSTS

Wigan – error cleaning process



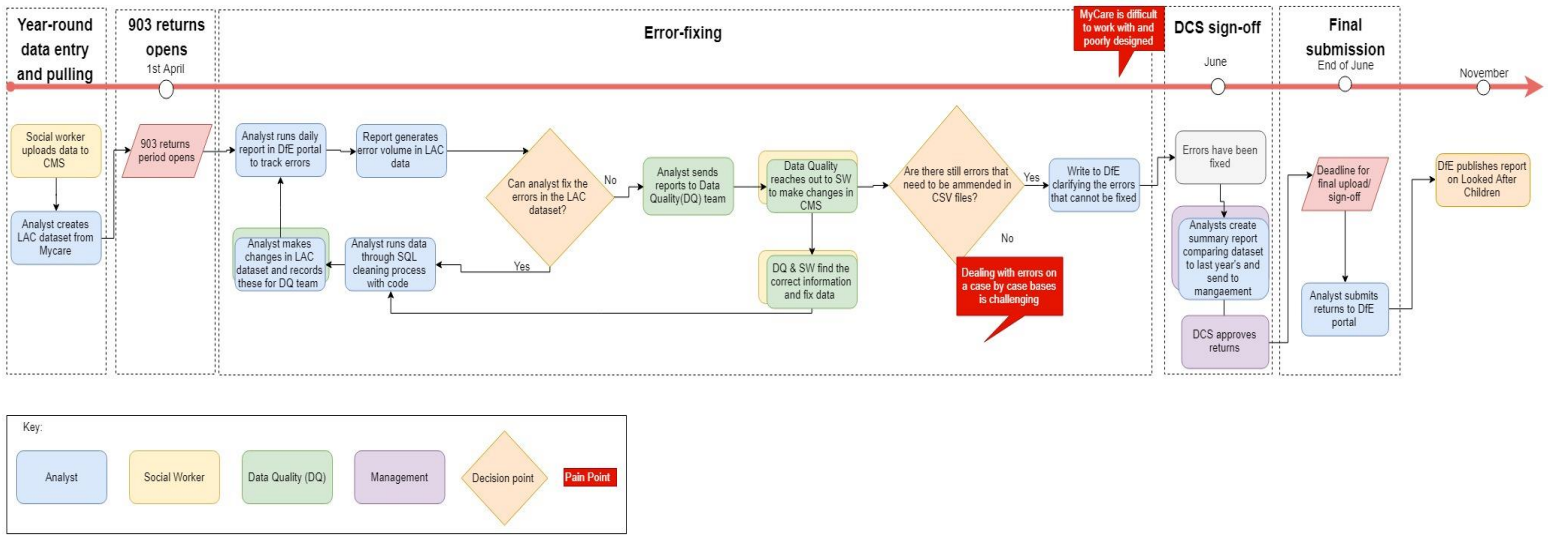
Key Takeaways

- Wigan's year-round error checking process involves analysts writing detailed, individual error reports to each social worker. This is a key pain point as it is very time-intensive
- If any errors are particularly frequent or slow to be fixed, quality assurance and/or senior management will step in

To view the diagram in more detail click here

MANCHESTER FOCUS ON FIXING GROUPS OF ERRORS IN A DATA EXTRACT; SOME OF THIS ERROR-FIXING IS AUTOMATED

Manchester



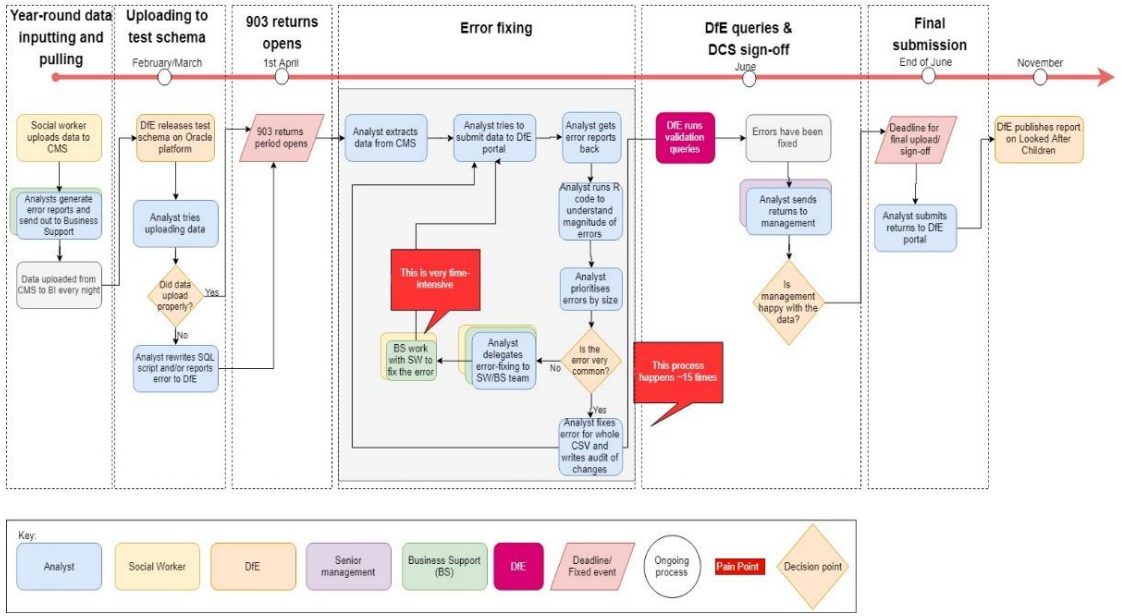
Key Takeaways

- Manchester use Micare case management system but are moving to Liquidlogic in the next few months
- Analysts and the data quality team fix errors
- Analysts fix errors in a data extract and then ask social workers and others to update the case management system
- The data quality team works directly with social workers to fix errors in the case management system

To view the diagram in more detail click here

STOCKPORT'S APPROACH IS SIMILAR TO MANCHESTER'S: THEY WORK ON AN EXTRACT AND DO SOME AUTOMATED CLEANING

Stockport



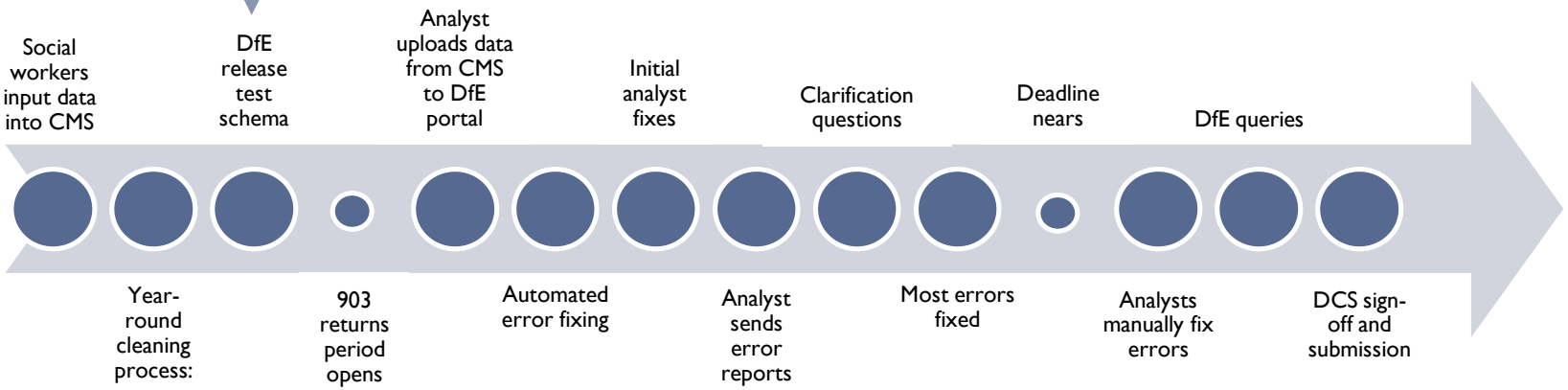
Key Takeaways

- Stockport use EIS case management system but are moving to Liquidlogic in the next few months
- Stockport also fix some errors in a data extract and then ask social workers and others to update the case management system.
- Business support work directly with social workers to fix the errors – this is a big pain point
- Analysts run the process of checking for and fixing errors in the 903 data about 15 times during the three months of the return period

To view the diagram in more detail click here

THERE ARE MANY COMMONALITIES BETWEEN THE THREE AUTHORITIES…

All councils test uploading their data to the DfE portal. They may rewrite their queries if there are problems here

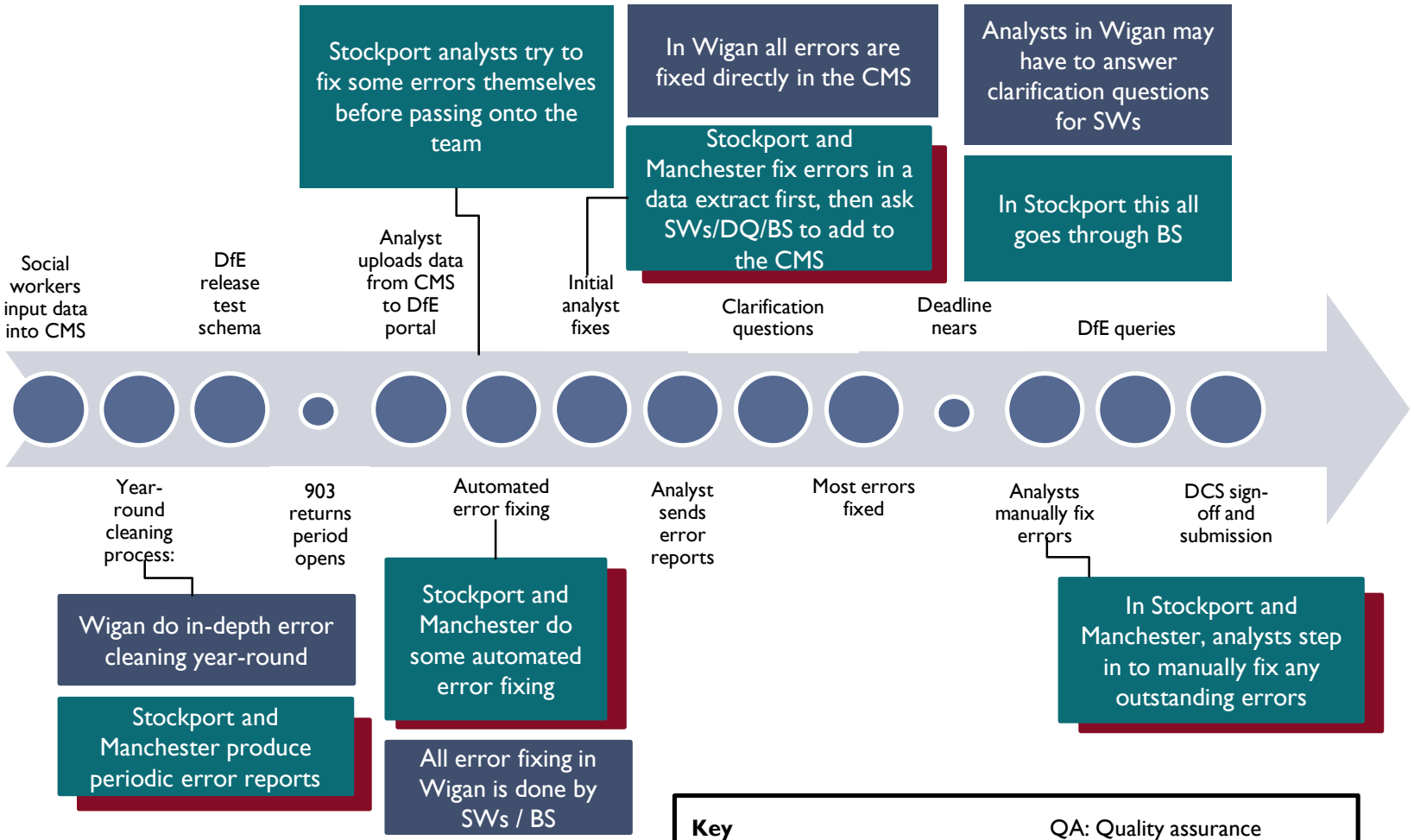


Analysts in each send error reports to BS/DQ/SW teams:

MCC: analysts pass errors to DQ who liaise with SWs
SMBC: analysts pass errors to BS who work with SWs
WC: analysts pass errors to BS, SW & QA directly

Key
DfE: Department for Education
CMS: Case management system
BS: Business support
DQ: Data quality
SW: Social worker
DCS: Director of Children's Services
QA: Quality assurance
MCC: Manchester City Council
SMBC: Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
WC: Wigan Council

… BUT ALSO KEY DIFFERENCES



Key

DfE: Department for Education
CMS: Case management system
BS: Business support
DQ: Data quality
SW: Social worker
DCS: Director of Children's Services
QA: Quality assurance
MCC: Manchester City Council
SMBC: Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
WC: Wigan Council

KEY LEARNINGS FROM MAPPING THE 'AS IS'

Council	Year-round error cleaning?	Who cleans data?	Where is data cleaned?
Wigan Council	**Yes** – throughout the year analysts check for certain well-known errors	**Social workers** – Analysts send social workers detailed emails explaining each error and options to fix it. Social workers then fix it with business support	**Case management system** – all errors are fixed directly in the case management system
Manchester City Council Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council	**No** – Manchester and Stockport have some summaries of the errors in the system, but don't do a significant amount of cleaning year-round	**Analysts** – analysts largely lead the error cleaning process, often finding the correct information and fixing it	**Data extracts** – analysts clean the data in an extract to save time. They tell business support about the errors so that they can fix them in the case management system

Although Wigan's process is more rigorous, it is also more time & resource intensive

WE CONCLUDED THAT THERE WEREN'T CLEAR ACTIONS THAT ALL AUTHORITIES COULD TAKE TO IMPROVE THEIR PROCESSES

C) ANALYSING AND COMPARING THE ERRORS IN EACH AUTHORITY

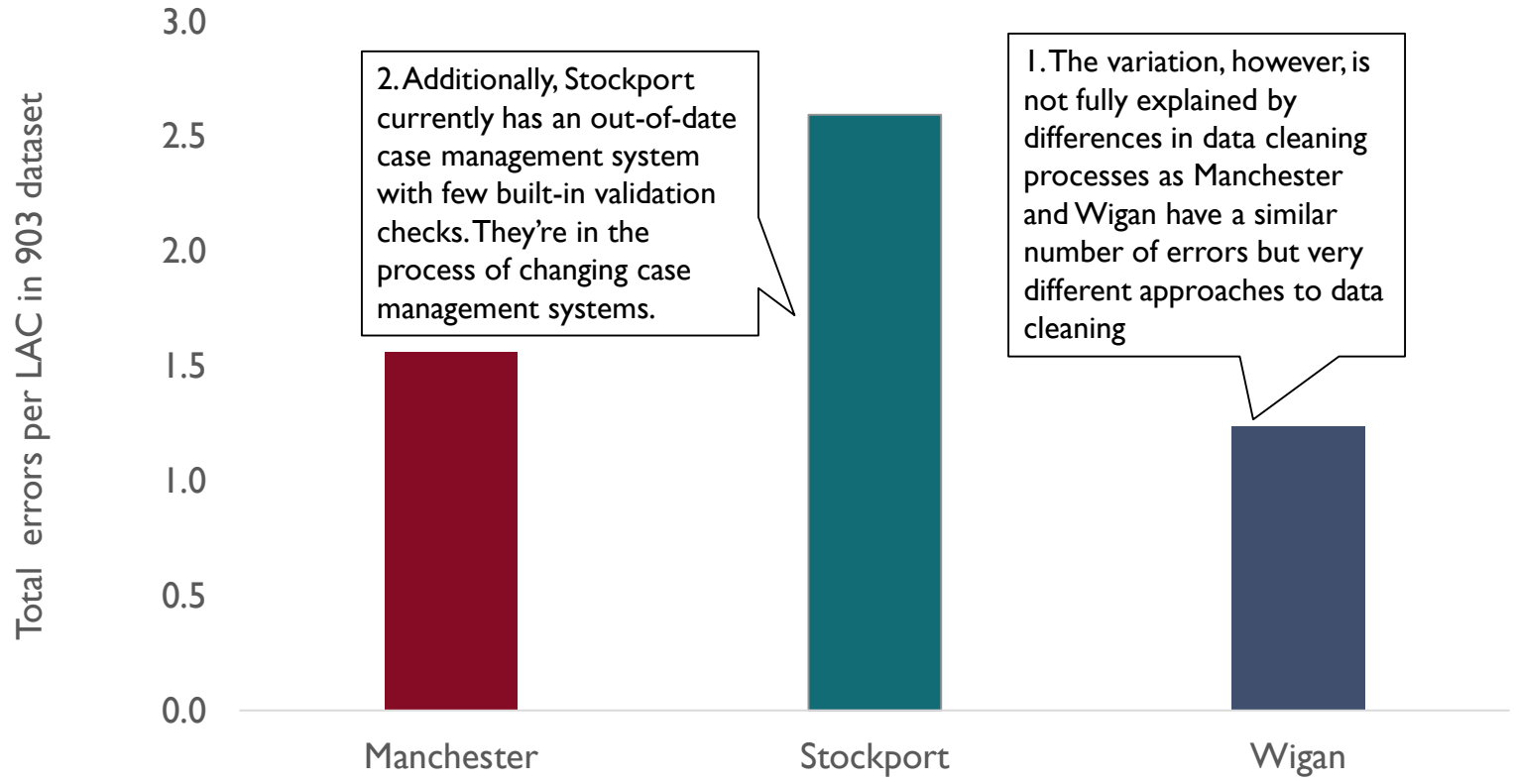
"THE DATA QUALITY'S NOT VERY GOOD – SO IF I PICK UP A ROCK, I FIND RUBBISH UNDERNEATH IT"

Analyst, Manchester

ANALYSING THE ERRORS IN EACH COUNCIL SHOWED THAT THERE IS VARIATION BETWEEN THE COUNCILS

Number of errors per Looked After Child in each council

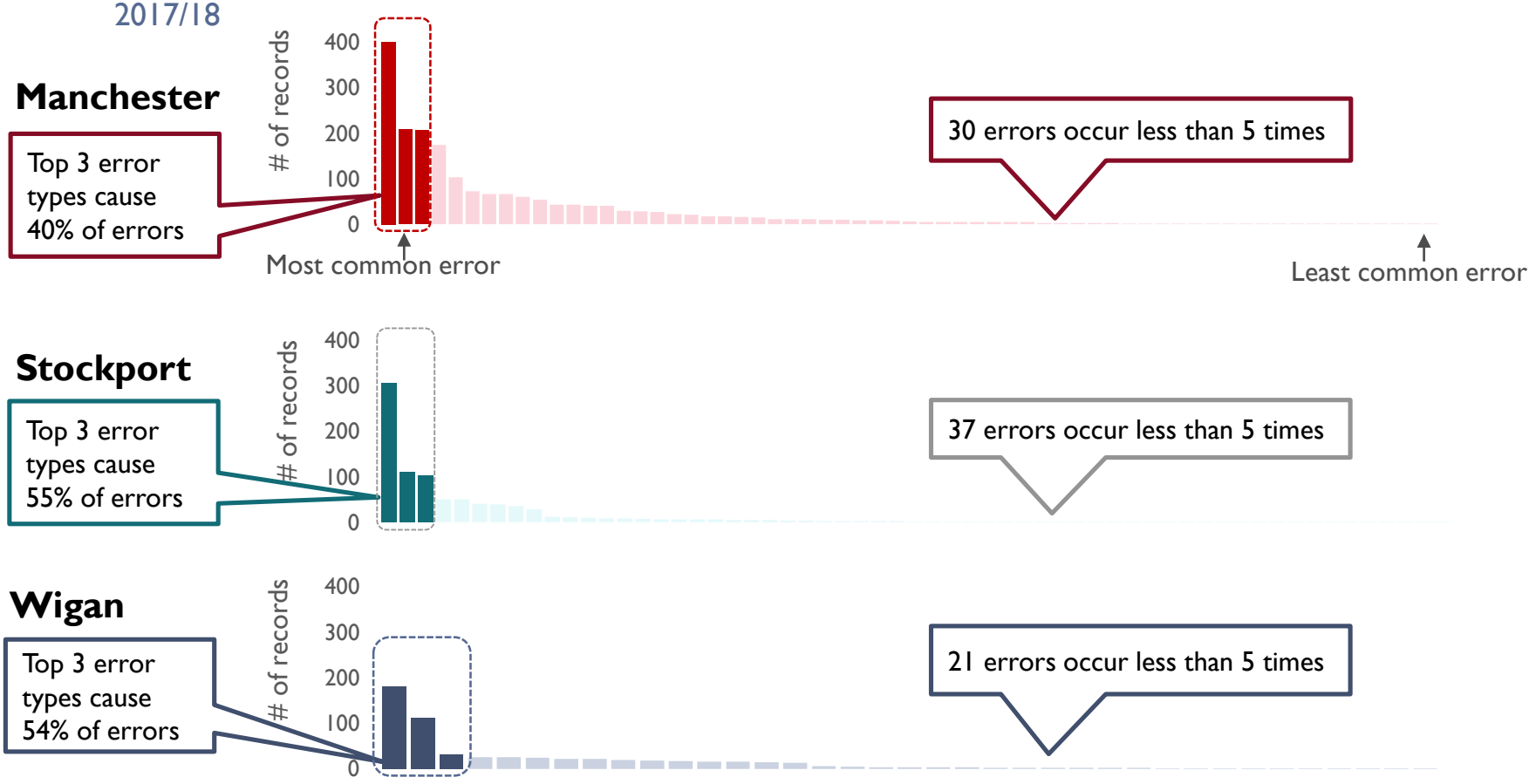
Opening of 903 Return window 2018



Source: Manchester, Stockport and Wigan SSDA903 error reports, LAIT tool 2017/18, SF analysis

FOR ALL THREE COUNCILS, MOST OF THE ERRORS ARE CAUSED BY ONLY A FEW ERROR TYPES

Frequency of error types in each council
2017/18

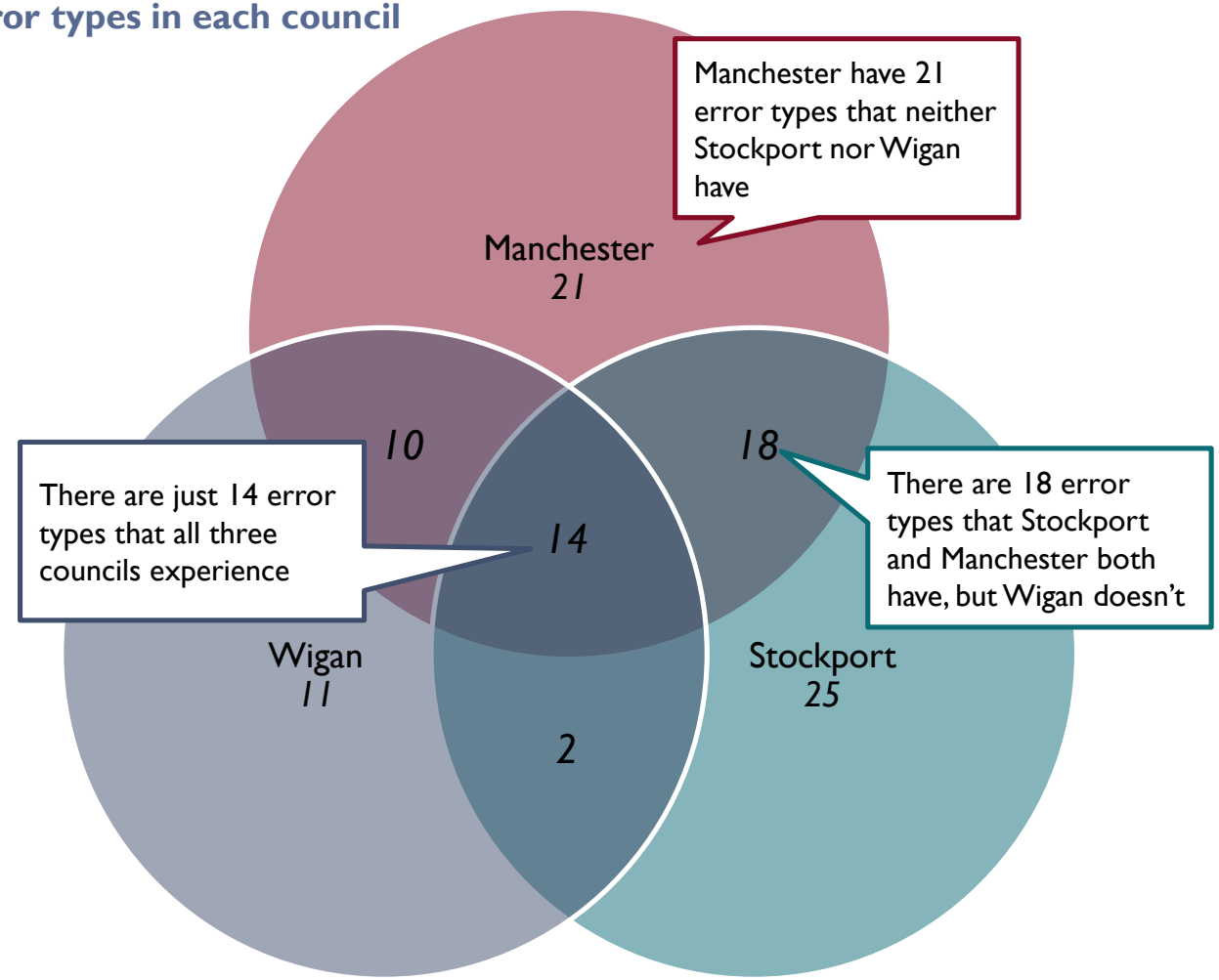


ELIMINATING THESE COMMON ERROR TYPES WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THE TOTAL NUMBER OF ERRORS

Source: Manchester, Stockport and Wigan SSDA903 error reports, SF analysis

HOWEVER, THE ERRORS FOR EACH COUNCIL DIFFER STRONGLY

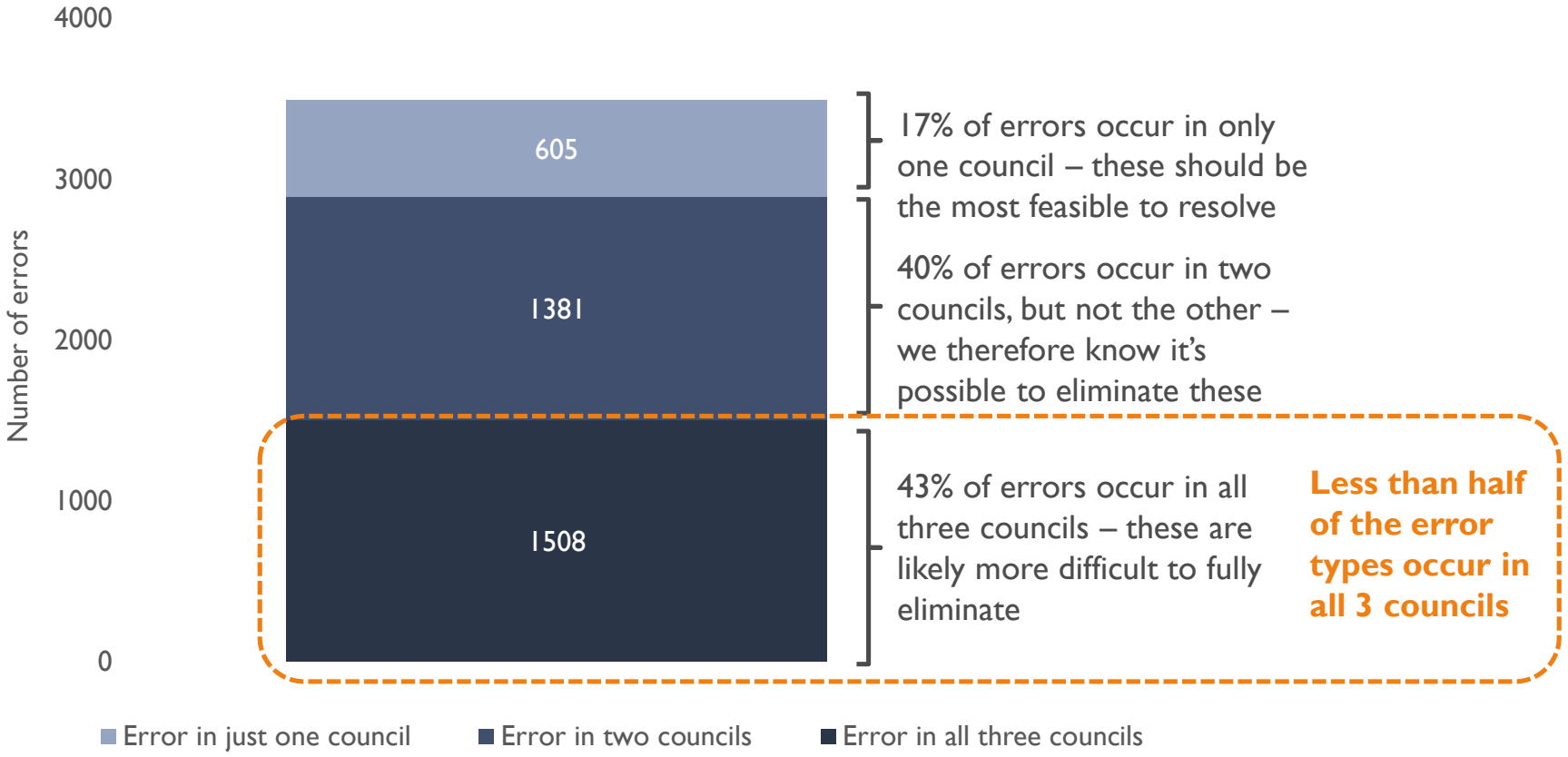
Overlap of error types in each council
2017/18



Source: Manchester, Stockport and Wigan SSDA903 error reports, SF analysis

IN FACT, ONLY 43% OF ERRORS ARE EXPERIENCED BY ALL THREE COUNCILS

Overlap of error types in each council2017/18

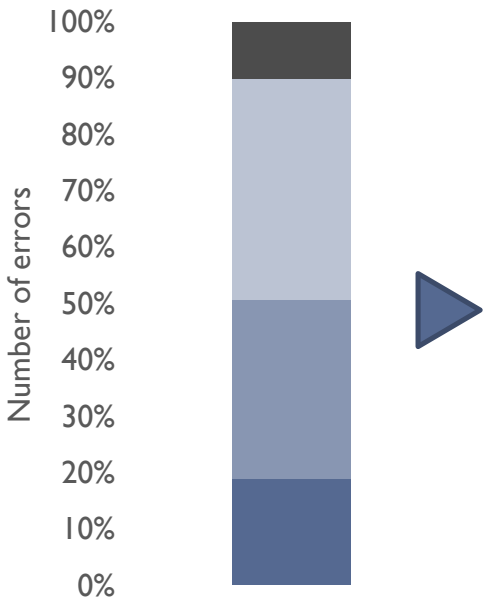


…THE OTHER 57% HAVE ALL BEEN FULLY ELIMINATED BY AT LEAST ONE COUNCIL – SUGGESTING WE COULD ELIMINATE THEM

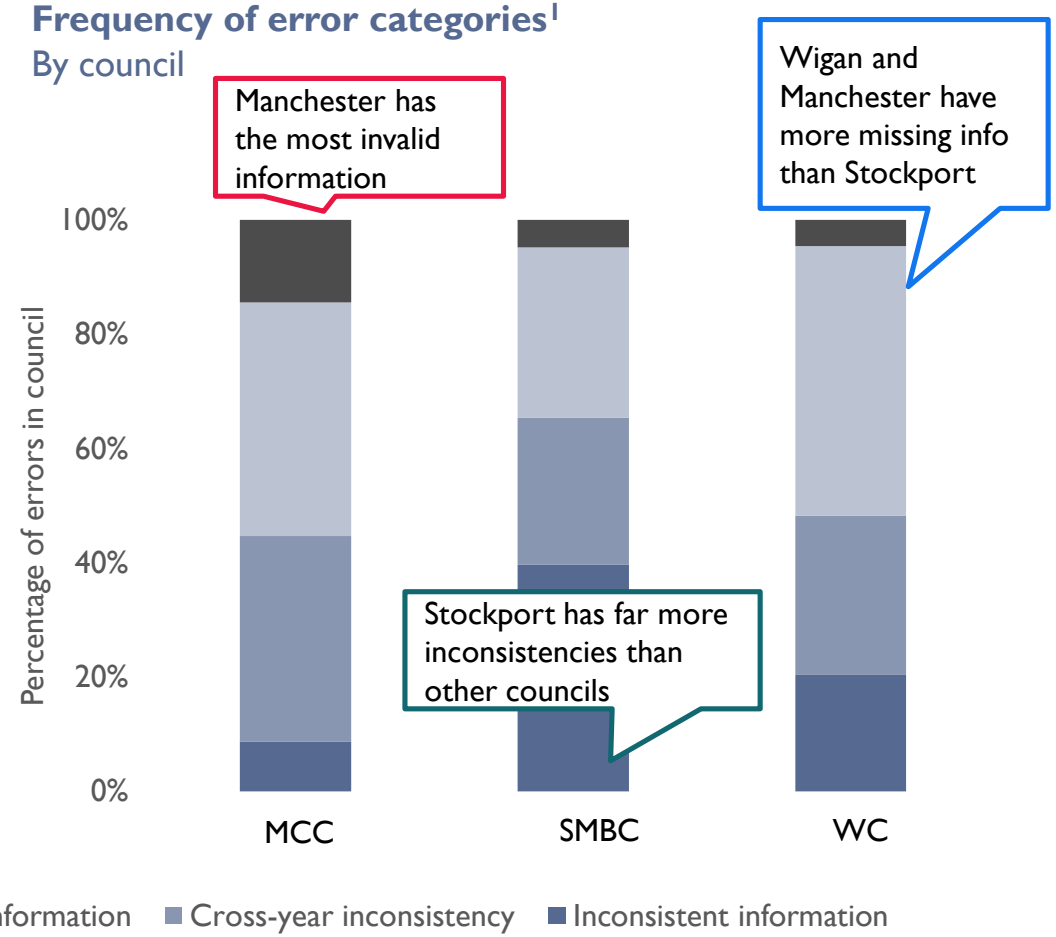
Source: Manchester, Stockport and Wigan SSDA903 error reports, SF analysis

THE MAJORITY OF ERRORS ARE EITHER MISSING INFO (39%) OR CROSS- YEAR INCONSISTENCIES (32%)

Frequency of error categories[1]
All three councils



Frequency of error categories[1]
By council



Source: Manchester, Stockport and Wigan SSDA903 error reports, SF analysis

1. Errors have been categorised into four categories: A) Invalid information = data does not meet DfE validation rules e.g. provider code is not the valid, B) Missing information = a required data point is blank e.g. no review data, C) Cross-year inconsistency = a data point in this year's return is inconsistent with the previous years and D) Inconsistent information = two data points in this year's return are inconsistent e.g. overlapping episodes

WE IDENTIFIED FIVE MAIN ERROR GROUPINGS

1. **Inconsistent data**: Data is inconsistent with the 903 return from the previous year. For example, this might be a child who was recorded as being in care the previous year, but does not appear on the list of those who are in care or who have left care in the current year

2. **Ofsted Unique Reference Number (URN) for placements**: Placements for children in care all have a URN from Ofsted which is either missing or incorrect (Wigan only)

3. **Multiple reviews**: Multiple reviews are recorded for one child as having taken place on the same day (Stockport only)

4. **Placement postcode**: The postcode of the placement is missing

5. **Placement provider code**: The code for the placement provider is invalid

IN MORE DETAIL - INCONSISTENT DATA: DATA IS INCONSISTENT WITH THE 903 RETURN FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR

1. INCONSISTENT DATA

Error description	% of errors: MCC	SMBC	WC	Cleaning workload	Cleaning method	Impact on decisions
The reason for new episode, legal status, category of need code, placement type, placement provider, placement Ofsted Unique Reference Number (URN), distance or placement location in first episode do not match open episode at end of last year	21%	12%	19%	H	Edit last years 903 return	M
Episode commenced before the start of the current collection year but there is a missing continuous episode in the previous year	2%	5%	3%	H	Edit last years 903 return	M
Last year's record ended with an open episode. The date on which that episode started does not match the start date of the first episode on this year's record	2%	5%	3%	H	Edit last years 903 return	M
Contradiction between placement distance in the last episode of the previous year and in the first episode of the current year	3%	1%	2%	H	Edit last years 903 return	M

IN MORE DETAIL - OFSTED UNIQUE REFERENCE NUMBER (URN): URN IS MISSING OR DOES NOT MATCH OTHER DATA

2. OFSTED UNIQUE REFERENCE NUMBER

Error description	% of errors: MCC	SMBC	WC	Cleaning workload	Cleaning method	Impact on decisions
Ofsted URN is required	3%	4%	30%	M	Support SWs to add/fix	L
The Ofsted URN provided for the child's placement does not match the placement provider recorded	1%	0%	4%	M	Support SWs to add/fix	L
The Ofsted URN provided for the child's placement does not match the placement type recorded	0%	0%	5%	M	Support SWs to add/fix	L

IN MORE DETAIL - MULTIPLE REVIEWS, PLACEMENT POSTCODE, PLACEMENT PROVIDER CODE: THESE ARE MISSING AND/OR INCONSISTENT

3. MULTIPLE REVIEWS

Error description	% of errors: MCC	SMBC	WC	Cleaning workload	Cleaning method	Impact on decisions
More than one review has been held on the same day	0%	33%	0%	H	Ask SWs to combine duplicates	L

4. PLACEMENT POSTCODE

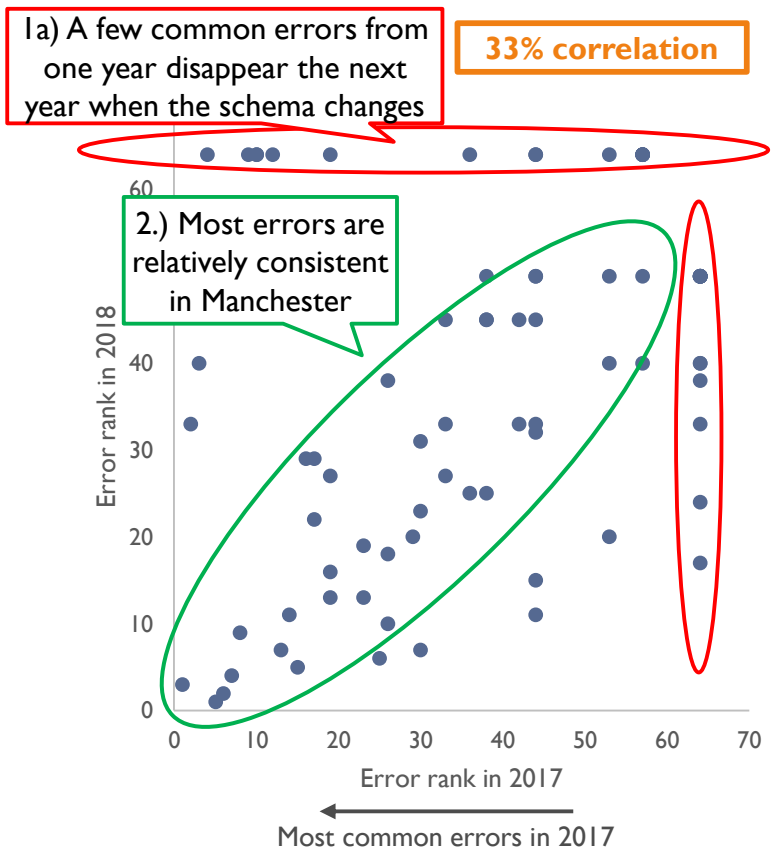
Error description	% of errors: MCC	SMBC	WC	Cleaning workload	Cleaning method	Impact on decisions
Distance is not valid. Please check a valid postcode has been entered	11%	11%	0%	M	Support SWs to add/fix	L

5. PLACEMENT PROVIDER CODE

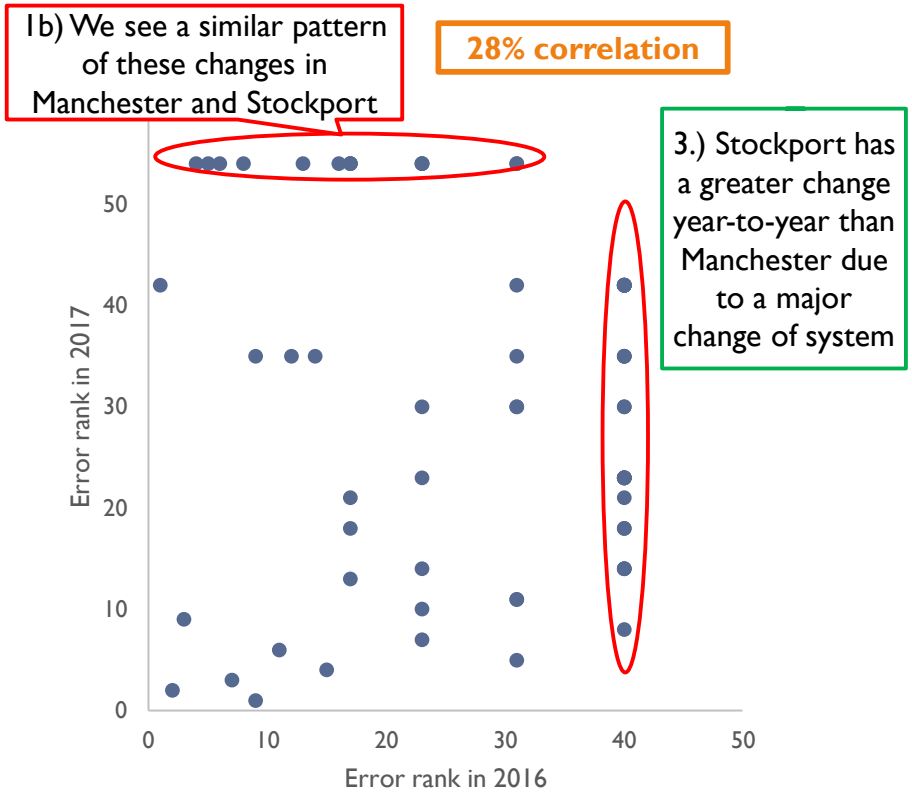
Error description	% of errors: MCC	SMBC	WC	Cleaning workload	Cleaning method	Impact on decisions
Local Authority (LA) of placement is not valid or is missing. Please check a valid postcode has been entered	9%	4%	0%	M	Support SWs to add/fix	M
Placement provider code is not a valid code	11%	1%	0%	M	Support SWs to add/fix	M

THERE ARE SOME CHANGES IN THE ERRORS EACH COUNCIL HAS FROM YEAR TO YEAR, LARGELY DUE TO RULE CHANGES

Manchester year-on-year error comparison
Rank of error in 2017 vs 2018



Stockport year-on-year error comparison
Rank of error in 2016 vs 2017

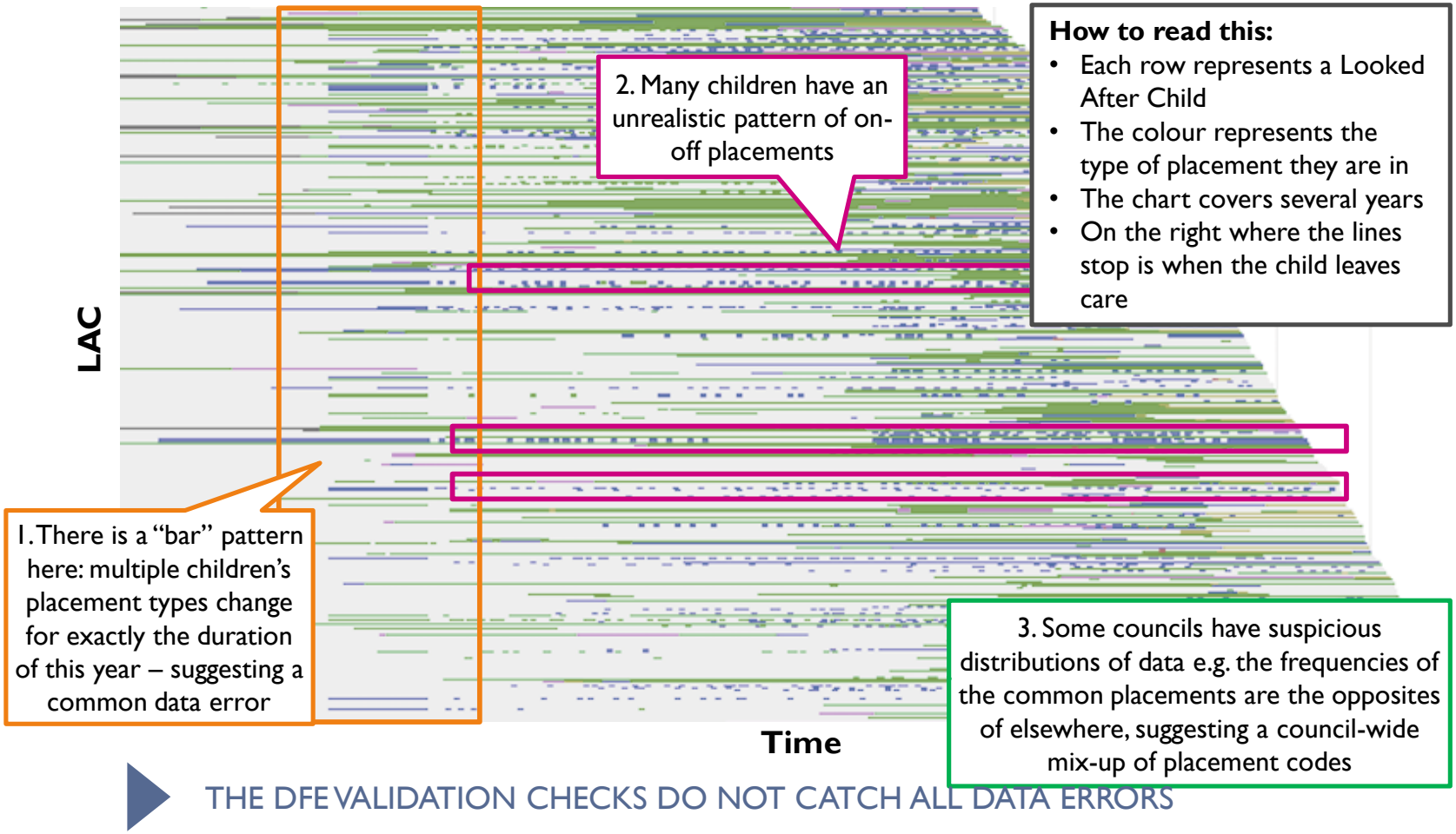


OVERALL THERE IS RELATIVE CONSISTENCY IN ERRORS FROM ONE YEAR TO THE NEXT, MEANING ENTRY PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS SHOULD DELIVER ONGOING BENEFITS

DESPITE THE DFE VALIDATION CHECKS, THERE ARE STILL SIGNIFICANT DATA ISSUES IN THE FINAL DATA

Looked After Child placement data from the National Pupil Database (based on 903 returns)

Time period, population, and legend suppressed to ensure non-identifiability



THE DFE VALIDATION CHECKS DO NOT CATCH ALL DATA ERRORS

CONCLUSION:
THERE IS NO OBVIOUS BEST PRACTICE TO SHARE, BUT THERE IS A MAJOR OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE DATA QUALITY

1

We can't simply share best practice process
None of the councils have a clearly better error cleaning process than the others, meaning we can't solve the problem simply by sharing existing approaches.

2

There's a major opportunity to eliminate common error types
Most of the errors are caused by a few common types, eliminating these would significantly reduce the problem.

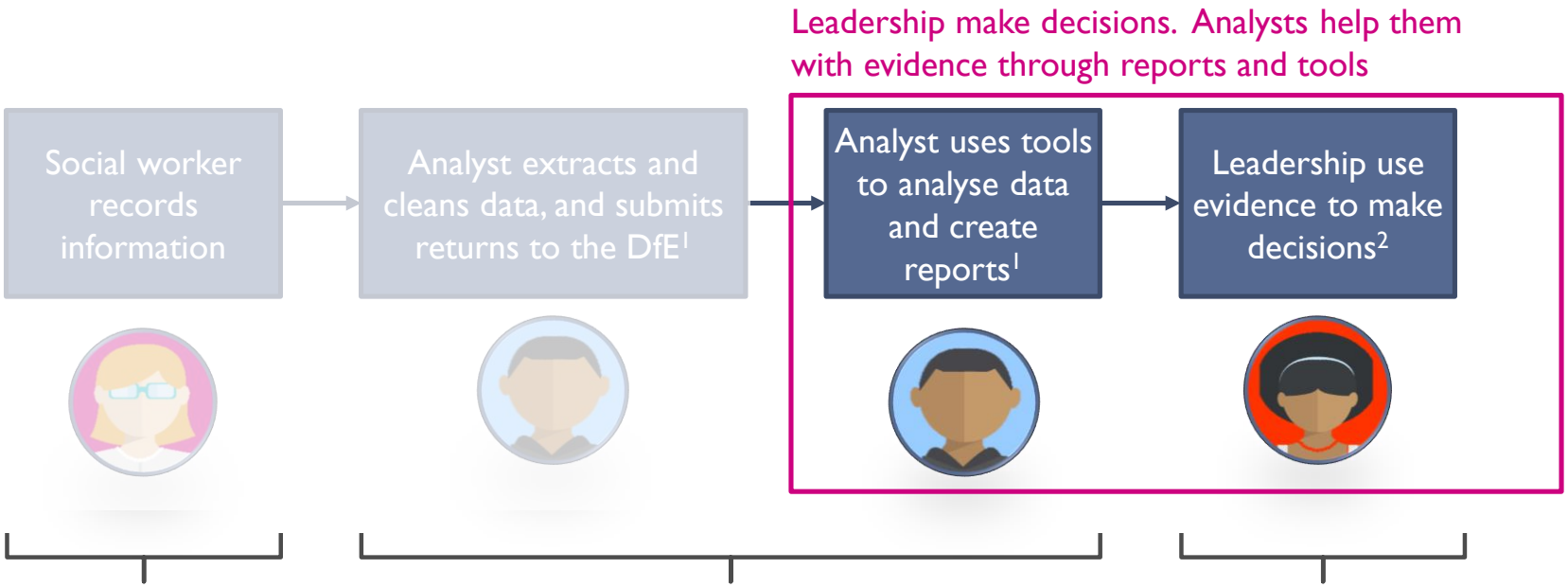
3

It should be feasible to reduce errors
The types of errors in each council differ strongly, with less than half of errors experience by all three. This suggests it is possible to eliminate these errors, although this may be case management system dependent.

4) Decision-making

D) UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP AND THEIR NEEDS

THE KEY USERS INVOLVED IN DECISION MAKING ARE LEADERSHIP AND ANALYSTS



We asked social workers about how they record and clean data on Looked After Children

We asked analysts about their two different roles: (1) extracting and cleaning data and (2) running analysis for leadership.

We asked leadership about decisions they make on Looked After Children and what data they use to make these decisions

1. We also spoke to some people from business support, quality assurance and I.T. support teams to understand how they support analysts in their role
2. In this report, leadership includes: Business & Commissioning Managers, Service Managers, Directors and Deputy Directors

WE IDENTIFIED THREE SENIOR DECISION-MAKER PERSONAS

SENIOR DECISION-MAKERS

Senior Management

Who
- Director of Children's Services
- Deputy Director of Children's Services

What
- Senior leadership with strategic oversight of all children's services

Service management

Who
- Head of Service
- Service Manager
- Fostering Service Lead
- Locality Lead

What
- Social work operational leadership, overseeing a service or locality

Business Management

Who
- Contracts & Commissioning Manager
- Head of Business Support
- Business Manager

What
- Leadership of business services supporting social work

DIRECTORS AND DEPUTY DIRECTORS OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES HAVE OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEPARTMENT

Senior Management

ROLE

Has overall operational and strategic responsibility for the Children's Services Department. Makes life-changing decisions about children in care; wants to be confident in these decisions and ensure that children only end up in care when absolutely necessary.

MOTIVATIONS

- Improving outcomes for Looked After Children
- Ensuring staff are motivated and supported
- Edge of Care support / early intervention work to prevent children becoming Looked After

KEY QUOTES

"I make decisions that affect children every day."

"The decisions we make are life-changing for children."

"We're good at getting information together, but less good at: what does this mean for us as a service?"

KEY INSIGHTS

- Directors and Deputy Directors find that their staff are very time-pressured and can't always provide them with the data and analysis that they want at the time they want
- Directors and Deputy Directors want to know how individual pieces of data link to the bigger picture, so that they can have a holistic view of their services
- Directors and Deputy Directors want more insight into the data that they are given

DIRECTORS AND DEPUTY DIRECTORS OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES HAVE OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEPARTMENT

Senior Management

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Ensuring that services are meeting statutory requirements
- Operational and strategic planning across all services
- Financial and commissioning decisions
- Chairing decision-making panels

WHAT WORKS WELL

- Data visuals are good
- They talk to social workers, service leads and families when making decisions as well as looking at case files

KEY TOOLS & SOFTWARE

- ChAT(Children's Services Analysis Tool)
- Report Manager and Tableau dashboards

CHALLENGES

- System and process inefficiencies waste time and limit what they can do
- Time pressures on their staff
- Lots of their time is spent in meetings

UNMET NEEDS

- Specific context to understand the "why" behind data
- Holistic view of the data – linking back to bigger picture
- Evidence base of outcomes to make strategic decisions
- Knowledge of who is exiting as well as entering care

SERVICE MANAGERS LEAD A PARTICULAR SERVICE (E.G. FOSTERING, OR CARE LEAVERS) OR LOCALITY

Service Management

ROLE

Has overall responsibility for a single service or area. Looks at the strategic vision and performance of their service/area. Has delegated responsibility for budgets and decisions within their service/area e.g. for placement budget or decisions on whether to enter care proceedings.

MOTIVATIONS

- Supporting social workers to feel empowered
- Long-term outcomes of Looked After Children
- Ensuring children are allocated to the best placements for them
- Moving children into adoptive placements where possible
- Investing in foster carers

KEY QUOTES

"I use data every day to inform the quality of the services"

"This is called a market for a reason and it's buy-and-sell; whilst it's horrific to talk about children in that way that's the reality."

"Some of the time you make the perfect decision, some of the time you don't."

"We need to look at how we work as smartly as possible. We need to look at how we structure the team to make it as productive as possible."

KEY INSIGHTS

- Service managers look at data on the overall provision of placements for Looked After Children
- They want more context and intelligence around the data that they get
- They are concerned about the availability of placements, particularly for children and young people with complex needs
- They want to know more about the child's experience of being in care

SERVICE MANAGERS LEAD A PARTICULAR SERVICE (E.G. FOSTERING, OR CARE LEAVERS) OR LOCALITY

Service Management

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Strategic and operational management of service
- Performance management of teams
- Major child level decisions e.g. whether to enter care proceedings
- Operational responsibilities e.g. Head of Fostering is responsible for recruiting, training and assessing foster carers

WHAT WORKS WELL

- Performance management frameworks that give detailed information on all Looked After Children and a good overview of provision and areas for improvement
- Comparative data from statistical neighbours informs strategy

KEY TOOLS & SOFTWARE

- Uses LAIT (Local Authority Interactive Tool) more than ChAT (Children's Services Analysis Tool)

CHALLENGES

- The foster care placements market is very difficult; recruiting foster carers is difficult and approving them is very expensive
- Care leavers are often not placed in appropriate accommodation
- High-need young people are especially difficult to place
- Lack of access to real-time data makes some decisions difficult
- They don't always know if they made the right decision
- The data is not always reliable

UNMET NEEDS

- Access to real-time data
- A better way of accessing data and measuring performance
- Context and intelligence around the raw data
- Better provision of accommodation for care leavers
- Better quality data

BUSINESS MANAGERS LEAD A SUPPORT SERVICE E.G. PROVISION AND BUDGETING FOR PLACEMENTS

Business Management

ROLE

Responsible for a support service, e.g. placement provision and the placements budget. Use data to see whether services are working or not. Constrained by the market and focus a lot on budgets and driving prices down. Work closely with social workers and placements team.

MOTIVATIONS

- Placement stability
- Value for money of placements
- Long-term outcomes for Looked After Children
- Recruiting enough good quality foster carers

KEY QUOTES

"The stability of placements is paramount – that is key to what we're trying to achieve"

"Our practice is informed by data – is it working is it working is it working?"

"The difficulty with outcomes is just that they don't tell the right story. We don't really know how to make the right difference."

"[Data entry] is so reliant on people; there's a lot of room for human error."

KEY INSIGHTS

- Business managers track costs and spending very carefully and want to make sure they are spending budgets as effectively as possible
- They find it difficult to forecast costs and therefore to plan budgets
- They want more focus on outcomes for Looked After Children and on the child's experience of being in care
- The increasing competitiveness of the placements market is a big concern for them

BUSINESS MANAGERS LEAD A SUPPORT SERVICE E.G. PROVISION AND BUDGETING FOR PLACEMENTS

Business Management

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Business support across the whole department
- Ensuring placements are suitable
- Managing placements, placement budget and providers
- Recruiting social workers
- Safeguarding decisions
- Recruiting foster carers

WHAT WORKS WELL

- The External Placements and Sufficiency Statement reports give detailed information on placements and performance
- Benchmarking is helpful for performance and service management, and for pricing
- Building personal relationships with providers helps lower costs

KEY TOOLS & SOFTWARE

- Uses the LAIT (Local Authority Analysis Tool) a lot

CHALLENGES

- Insufficient availability of local placements; placements are very competitive
- Spending predictions are difficult as costs are controlled by the child's needs, which are often unpredictable
- Looked After Child numbers are rising; there are problems in the teenage cohort especially
- Data often doesn't get cleaned until the last minute
- Outcomes data is not defined, and outcomes are hard to measure

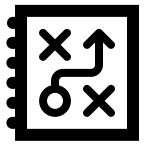
UNMET NEEDS

- Accurate, real-time data
- Greater ability to drill down to team-level data
- More data on the child's lived experience of being in care
- More focus on achieving key priorities and improving child outcomes
- More information from social workers on historical case information

DURING THE LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS A COMMON SET OF KEY QUESTIONS EMERGED (1/2)

Leadership need to know:

What are the needs of the children we support?



What journeys do children take through services?

What outcomes do children experience?

What are the costs and effectiveness of different services?

DURING THE LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS A COMMON SET OF KEY QUESTIONS EMERGED (2/2)

How do we target support towards the children who most need it?

How do we ensure looked after children have the right support to meet the needs of children?

How do we improve our services?

How should we prioritise our resources?

Which preventative services should we invest in?

OVERALL LEADERSHIP USER NEEDS

SENIOR DECISION-MAKERS

As leadership,

I need: access to up-to-date data
So I can: base decisions on what's happening currently

I need: good quality data
So I can: rely on the analysis when making strategic and operational decisions

I need: information about the child's lived experience of being in care
So I can: know if we're doing the best that we can for each child

I need: more insightful analysis and better contextual information with the data
So I can: use the data to make well-informed strategic and operational decisions

I need: outcomes data on care leavers
So I can: know if our services work in the long-term

I need: better comparative data
So I can: benchmark myself against other councils and learn best practice

E) UNDERSTANDING HOW ANALYSTS USE DATA TO SUPPORT LEADERSHIP

"THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES ANALYSIS TOOL DOES GIVE YOU A VERY QUICK OVERVIEW OF WHERE YOU ARE AND COMPARES YOU TO OTHER COUNCILS, BUT I WOULD NEVER RELY ON A FIGURE THAT CAME FROM IT"

Analyst, Manchester

ANALYSTS USE VARIOUS TOOLS TO ANALYSE THE DATA AND FIND KEY INSIGHTS

SUMMARY PERSONA

ROLE IN DATA PROCESS

Analysts analyse data according to what leadership ask for. They write reports and create dashboards to provide information to leadership.

MOTIVATIONS

- Provide leadership with useful insight from analysing the data in order to improve child outcomes
- Produce analysis quickly and efficiently
- Ensure analysis is correct

KEY QUOTES

"The thing that really gets me is that there are all these authorities out there and there isn't a common data model - that I find insane."

"Although we're analysts we don't really do much analysis because we're constantly churning out lists of figures."

"Leadership need to know: what is in our control as an authority to change and what is out of our control? Those sorts of in-depth questions we can't answer at the moment."

"Around half the time I'll find the data quality makes the analysis unreliable"

"We know the data in Annex A (a dataset related to 903 that is required by Ofsted) isn't right"

KEY INSIGHTS

- As well as statutory reports for the Department for Education and Ofsted, analysts produce reports and tools for leadership. These can either be PDF/Excel reports emailed out regularly, or self-serve dashboards
- These reports mainly focus on highlighting any areas of potential concern and tracking whether reviews and decisions were made in time (e.g. process management)
- Analysts struggle to know what leadership need. They feel that leadership aren't always clear or consistent on what they need

ANALYSTS USE VARIOUS TOOLS TO ANALYSE THE DATA AND FIND KEY INSIGHTS

DETAILED PERSONA

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Writing error reports and summary reports for managers, directors, and boards
- Providing management with comparative data for benchmarking

WHAT WORKS WELL

- Reports help them analyse trends
- Dashboards generally work well for those who use them
- Benchmarking can be helpful for identifying where something's going wrong

KEY TOOLS & SOFTWARE

- Varying views on the Local Authority Interactive Tool – some use it a lot but others hate it
- Some use Business Objects (a Microsoft tool) for data visualization
- Analysts in Wigan want to bring in Power BI

UNMET NEEDS

- The ability to share and link data across the council
- The ability to look at cause and effect
- Having all data on one dashboard
- Having more time to do data analysis
- Analyst managers want more time to focus on culture change and proactive thinking, and want more data on the child's lived experience

CHALLENGES

- Comparative data is usually out of date
- Lots of reports aren't very useful; many are duplicates
- Senior management tend to be more concerned about their Ofsted inspections and ratings than about statutory returns
- Switching to a new system or updating existing systems is very time-intensive

OVERALL ANALYST USER NEEDS – ANALYSING DATA

As an analyst analysing data,

I need: good quality data (e.g. an accurate representation of the child's experience)
So I can: be confident that analysis is accurate

I need: to know what analysis leadership need
So I can: plan ahead to get leadership the right analysis

I need: the ability to share and link data across services
So I can: do more effective analysis

ANALYSTS USE REPORTS AND TOOLS TO PROVIDE DATA AND INSIGHT TO LEADERSHIP

1. Reports: Analysts produce reports throughout the year. These reports summarise the data collected on Looked After Children. For senior management in particular, they cover:

- Performance management of services and teams
- Data quality
- Areas of concern, e.g. increase in children entering care, or teams not meeting their statutory duties
- Budgeting
- Ad hoc report requests

2. Tools: Analysts and senior management also use various tools to present and view data. The main tools are:

- The Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT)
- The Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)
- Tableau dashboards
- Business Objects dashboards

1. REPORTS

ANALYSTS PRODUCE VARIOUS REPORTS FOR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AT DIFFERENT POINTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Overview of reports – typical reporting structure across the three councils

Weekly/ Ongoing

These reports (often in xls format) are automatically generated from the case management system every week or fortnight. They give details on specific groups of Looked After Children and individual teams. They also highlight areas of performance that need particular attention. These reports are used by heads of services and team managers

Monthly

Analysts produce a monthly performance review from the 903 data which goes to team managers, heads of services and directors. This is used to monitor the performance of individual teams and services against performance indicators, which are often based on statutory process requirements

Quarterly

Analysts and quality assurance produce quarterly reports for leadership boards. These can be distributed in PDF format and give an overview of the Children's Services Department, reporting figures, such as numbers of Looked After Child admissions, number of those leaving the service, overall number of Looked After Children, etc

Annual

Analyst teams create an annual performance review from the 903 return data. This report compares annual performance of the Children's Services Department with comparators such as historical performance data and performance data from other councils, and goes to service managers, directors, and the safeguarding board

1. REPORTS

LOOKING AT SOME OF STOCKPORT'S REPORTS GIVES US AN IDEA OF THE LEVEL OF DETAIL GIVEN

The External Placements Sheet

This report lists all Looked After Children currently placed in residential children's homes that the Children's Services Department is paying external providers for, all Looked After Children in semi-independent units, and all Looked After Children in jointly-funded placements. The report also records data on foster agency placements outside of Stockport. For each Looked After Child, the report records:

- Individual ID number
- Weekly charge for their placement
- Costing forecasts
- Allocated social worker
- Locality
- DOB
- Placement address
- Start and finish dates of placement
- End of weekly charge
- Placement length
- Period length
- Days this year
- FTE
- Split of costs between three potential funding agencies (Social Care, Health and Education)

The Commissioning and Contracts Team update this sheet every fortnight.

The Sufficiency Statement

This is a placements report produced for the Director of Children's Services, but also used by Heads of Business Support Services.

The report also lists actions that should be taken based on what is outlined in the strategy.

A lot of the data in this report comes from the 903 return

This report is more difficult to update because not all of the data recorded in it is released or updated at the same time.

Placements Northwest Report

This report compares data from the 23 Northwest Network Local Authorities. It compares costs and spending in Children's Services Departments across the region. Most of the data is taken from the External Placements report.

THESE REPORTS ARE LARGELY OPERATIONAL; THEY TRACK WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE SERVICES

2. TOOLS

Analysts use various tools in order to summarise the data and present it in an easily readable format:

A) National data tools

The Children's Services Analysis Tool and the Local Authority Interactive Tool are both national tools used by councils across the country, built on national datasets

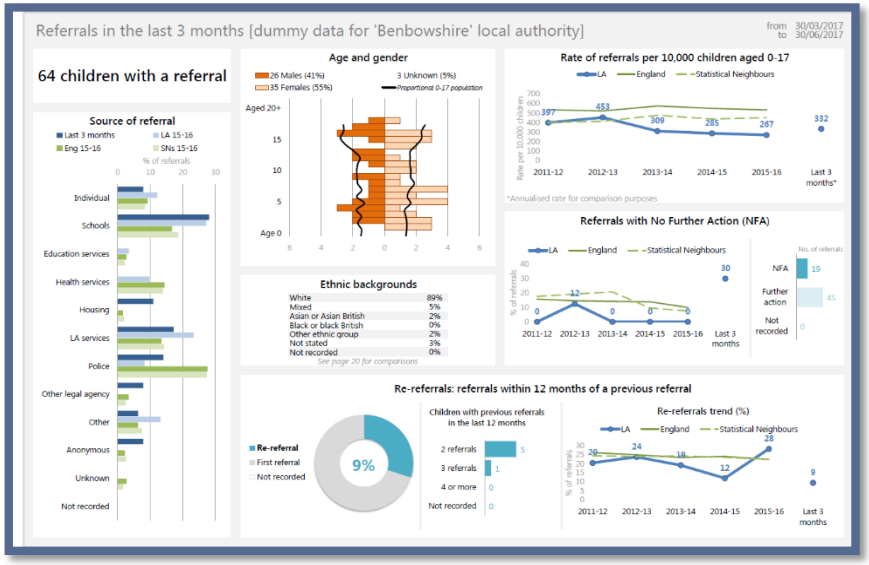
B) Local data tools

Councils use a range of tools, such as Power BI, Business Objects, Tableau, Report Manager and SSRS Reporting to analyse their local data

2. TOOLS

A) NATIONAL - THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES ANALYSIS TOOL (CHAT)

- The ChAT is a free Excel tool for all local authorities developed by Ofsted, Waltham Forest Council and Hackney Council
- It takes child-level data and benchmarking statistics, and produces a visual report that covers all areas of Children's Social Care
- The report highlights areas of focus, illustrates trends, provides real-time comparisons with other councils, and can help councils prepare for an Ofsted inspection
- The ChAT is developed around the Annex A dataset[1] – it combines this data with statistics published by the DfE and the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to enable the authority to compare itself across time and with its statistical neighbours, and national averages



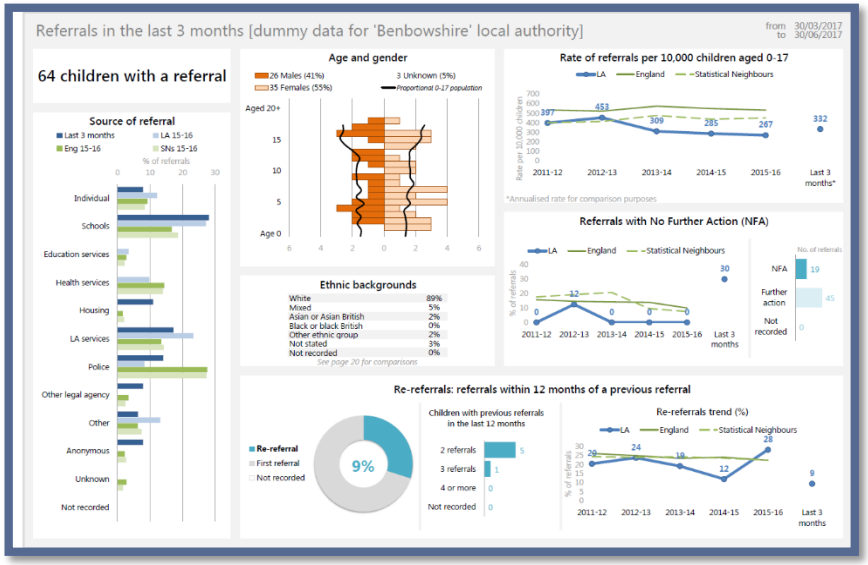
1. The Annex A dataset is a statutory dataset that councils must produce for Ofsted inspections

2. TOOLS

A) NATIONAL - THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES ANALYSIS TOOL (CHAT)

HOW IS THE CHAT TOOL USED?

- The ChAT is used a lot by directors and managers to get an overview of their services
- The data visualization that the ChAT provides is appealing to management
- Leadership use the ChAT to highlight areas where further investigation is needed
- Some analysts reported finding the ChAT unhelpful and confusing because the comparison data is out of date



What are people saying?

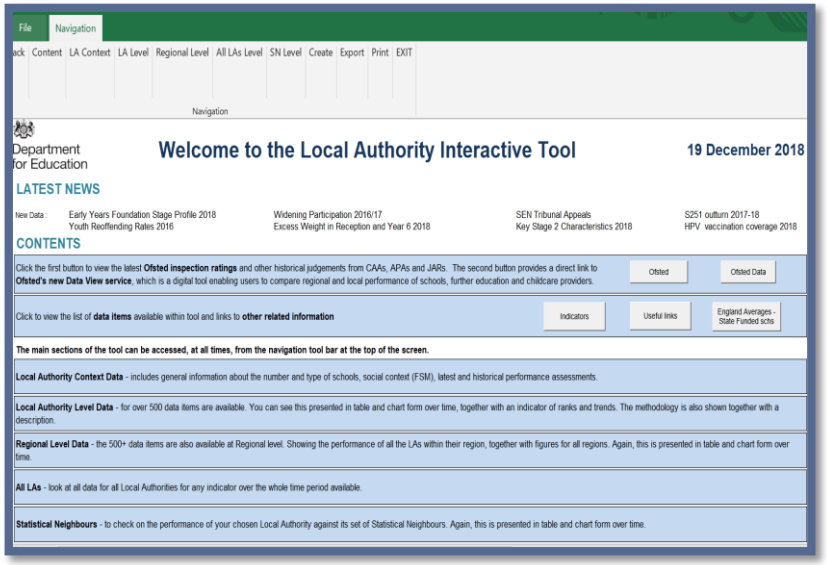
- *"The ChAT makes it a bit easier for [management] to see how things are going over the last few months." (Analyst)*
- *"ChAT would be more useful if it had more context and more intelligence." (Deputy Director of Children's Services)*
- *"The ChAT just shows data from the last 2-3 months, so people don't know what to quote and you've got figures flying around the place." (Analyst Manager)*
- *"The graphs are not too bad but some things you think 'I don't know what that means'." (Deputy Director of Children's Services)*
- *"I've never heard of the ChAT" (Head of Business Support)*

1. The Annex A dataset is a statutory dataset that councils must produce for Ofsted inspections

2. TOOLS

A) NATIONAL - THE LOCAL AUTHORITY INTERACTIVE TOOL (LAIT)

- The LAIT is a free Excel tool produced by the DfE for all authorities to use. It provides snapshot data on the experiences of children and young people.
- The LAIT aims to provide easy access to a wide range of data related to children and young people sourced from various departments across government, including Children's Social Care, Education, and others.
- It enables councils to benchmark themselves nationally, against their region, and against their statistical neighbours.
- Data is largely presented in tables and charts, which can be exported for use in other reports.
- Users are able to view data at authority, regional and national levels, compare their own authority against statistical neighbours, see recent and unpublished Ofsted data, and create their own tables and charts.

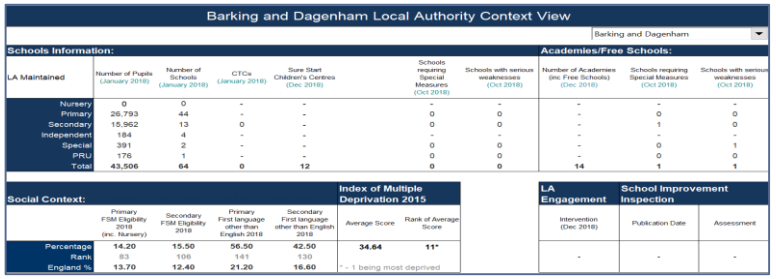


2. TOOLS

A) NATIONAL - THE LOCAL AUTHORITY INTERACTIVE TOOL (LAIT)

HOW IS THE LAIT TOOL USED?

- The LAIT is used more by service managers and business managers than by directors
- The LAIT presents information from a wide range of data on children and young people sourced from various departments across government. This includes schools data, safeguarding data, Health data and Ofsted inspections data



Barking and Dagenham Local Authority Context View

Barking and Dagenham

Schools Information:							Academies/Free Schools:		
LA Maintained	Number of Pupils (January 2018)	Number of Schools (January 2018)	CTCs (January 2018)	Sure Start Children's Centres (Dec 2018)	Schools requiring Special Measures (Oct 2018)	Schools with serious weaknesses (Oct 2018)	Number of Academies (inc Free Schools) (Dec 2018)	Schools requiring Special Measures (Oct 2018)	Schools with serious weaknesses (Oct 2018)
Nursery	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Primary	26,793	44	-	-	0	0	-	0	0
Secondary	15,962	13	0	-	0	0	-	1	0
Independent	184	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Special	391	2	-	-	0	0	-	0	1
PRU	176	1	-	-	0	0	-	0	0
Total	43,506	64	0	12	0	0	14	1	1

Social Context:					Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015		LA Engagement	School Improvement Inspection	
	Primary FSM Eligibility 2018 (inc. Nursery)	Secondary FSM Eligibility 2018	Primary First language other than English 2018	Secondary First language other than English 2018	Average Score	Rank of Average Score	Intervention (Dec 2018)	Publication Date	Assessment
Percentage	14.20	15.50	56.50	42.50	34.64	11*			
Rank	83	106	141	130			-	-	-
England %	13.70	12.40	21.20	16.60	* - 1 being most deprived				

Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

Publication Date	Type of Inspection	Overall Effectiveness	Experiences and progress of children in need for help and protection	Experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families
-	-	-	-	-	-

Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and Care Leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board

Publication Date	Overall Judgement	Children who need help and protection	Children looked after and achieving permanence	>> Adoption Performance	>> Experience and Progress of care leavers	Leadership and governance	Effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board
07/07/2014	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement

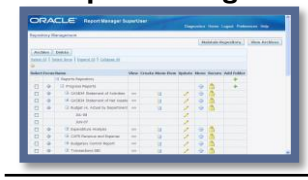
NB - See Ofsted Inspection View (accessed via Content page) for historical inspectorate judgements

What are people saying?

- *"The LAIT for me is really quite interesting because it will give you about 5 years' worth of data and it gives you a wealth of information." (Head of Business Support)*
- *"The LAIT is a really big ugly gnarly beast of a spreadsheet; it's really horrible to interrogate." (Analyst)*

2. TOOLS

B) LOCAL: MANY ANALYSTS USE TABLEAU AND BUSINESS OBJECTS TO CREATE DATA DASHBOARDS AND WRITE INTERNAL REPORTS

TOOL	WHO USES IT?	WHAT DOES IT DO	WHAT IS IT USED FOR?
Tableau	STOCKPORT METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL	• Tableau is a data analytics platform. Tableau Desktop gives live visual analytics and interactive dashboards. Users can build calculations, review statistical summaries, and perform trend analyses, regressions and correlations	• Stockport use Tableau for data visualization • The most popular dashboard shows how teams are performing against their statutory requirements, e.g. completing reviews within 45 days • *"The Tableau dashboards are working really well." (Analyst)* • *"The Tableau dashboard is a bit confusing" (Social worker)*
Report Manager 	STOCKPORT METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL	• Report Manager is a Microsoft web-based reporting tool. It allows the user to view, organize and configure reports	• Stockport use Report Manager to understand trends and identify children who may need additional support
Business Objects	Wigan Council MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL	• Business Objects is a business intelligence tool. As an analytics platform, it enables the user to perform ad-hoc queries, reporting and analysis in a Web environment	• Wigan use Business Objects to write internal reports and for data visualization
SSRS Reporting	STOCKPORT METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL	• SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS) is a Microsoft reporting tool. It works together with Power BI, a Microsoft data visualization tool	• Stockport use this tool for static reports • Analysts use SSRS to connect to internal SQL databases and write and format reports

WE ALSO SPOKE TO REGIONAL INFORMATION GROUPS TO SEE IF THERE WAS ALREADY A COMMON DATA MODEL IN USE

From our conversations with the North West, East Midlands and South East Regional Information Groups (RIGs), we found that:

RIGs use benchmarking reports to explore differences in practice. These reports cover just a few aggregate level numbers, such as the number of children who became Looked After over the previous 12 months.

Councils find these reports valuable for understanding their local trends and how they compare to national datasets published annually.

There is a growing recognition that having a common data model across all councils would better facilitate benchmarking and ensure consistency in how metrics are calculated.

However, there are challenges:

- Councils still struggle to track the child's experience of being in care and their outcomes after leaving care – e.g. RIGs only report on placement stability for certain cases, and do not sufficiently analyse the drivers behind this
- Councils are not able to link costs with operational and outcomes data
- The data used by the RIGs has not been cleared of errors
- The data collected is high level and doesn't give child-level details

CONCLUSION

CURRENT REPORTS AND TOOLS ARE LARGELY "OPERATIONS" FOCUSED, NOT PEOPLE AND OUTCOMES FOCUSED

1. **Data reports and tools work well for operational purposes** e.g. for highlighting where caseloads are high or which teams are meeting process requirements, such as completing reviews on time.

2. **Reports focus on process and on statutory requirements, not on people and outcomes.** This means that data doesn't answer the questions required to improve services such as "what services and approaches result in the best outcomes?"

3. **Councils use data to make two types of comparisons:**
   1. How have figures (such as number of Looked After Children) changed in comparison to previous months and years?
   2. How do figures compare to other councils? This can be useful to compare differences in practice models.

LEADERSHIP NEED MORE ANALYSIS ON CHILD OUTCOMES TO SHOW WHAT WORKS SO THAT THEY CAN IMPROVE SERVICES

F) UNDERSTANDING WHAT DECISIONS LEADERSHIP MAKE

"PEOPLE KNOW THAT LOOKED AFTER CHILD NUMBERS ARE HIGH, AND PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING THEY DO DAY-TO-DAY IS TO GET THAT FIGURE DOWN"

Analyst, Manchester

LEADERSHIP MAKE OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC DECISIONS ABOUT LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Operational

Day-to-day decisions responding to specific situations

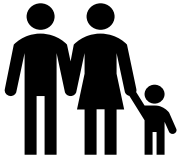
e.g. where to place a child, what other support services to offer, which social worker to assign to the child, etc.

Strategic

Long term decisions on how best to run the services and the department as a whole

e.g. which services to invest in, what the right approach is, how to prioritise resources, etc.

A CHILD'S JOURNEY IN CARE



Child enters care

1) Placements

There are a number of different types of placements a child could go into when they become Looked After, for example:

- Local Authority/family/ private foster
- Residential home
- Specialist residential home
- Secure unit
- Shared staffed house

2) Child support

Looked After Children can receive support from other organisations as well, for example:

- Education
- Health
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- Police
- Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises
- Employment and Training Providers

3) Foster carer support

Councils provide a range of support to foster carers, for example:

- Recruitment
- Assessment
- Training
- Respite care
- Social worker support

4) Leaving care

There are a number of different routes for a child/young person to leave care, for example:

- They reach16-18 years of age
- They are adopted
- They receive a Special Guardianship Order[1]
- They re-join their family

If placements break down, the case is reassessed

Ongoing assessment

Ongoing assessment

AT EACH OF THESE POINTS, LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL WORKERS MUST MAKE LIFE-CHANGING DECISIONS FOR THE LOOKED AFTER CHILD

1. A Special Guardianship Order is an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian'. It is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement.
https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/your-family/fostering-adoption-kinshipcare/special-guardianship-orders/

1) GETTING THE RIGHT PLACEMENT FOR A CHILD CAN HAVE A HUGE POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR LIFE

Placements

- Local Authority/family/ private foster
- Residential home
- Specialist residential home
- Secure unit
- Shared staffed house

Operational Decision

Decision:	What is the best placement for the child?
Who?	Child's social worker and placement manager
How?	Match child's needs to placement types, considering availability and price
Information required and availability	✓ Child's profile and needs ✓ Available placement options ✓ Professional experience of placement decisions × Evidence on what works

Strategic Decision

Decision:	• Which placements should we invest in? • Are we making the right decisions in order to get the best outcomes for the children in our care?
Who?	Placement Manager, Head of Service, Director & Deputy Director of Children's Services
How?	• Compare forecast supply with demand, cost and outcomes • Assess child outcomes from different placement options
Information required and availability	× Placement outcomes vs children's needs ✓ Placement costs (current and investment) × Future demand forecast

Key

√ = information is available currently

✘ = Information is not fully available

2) BRINGING IN THE RIGHT SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL TO MEET A LOOKED AFTER CHILD'S NEEDS

Additional Support

- Education
- Health and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- Police
- Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises
- Employment and Training Providers

Operational Decision

Decision:	What additional support does the child require?
Who?	Child's social worker and other services
How?	Assess child's needs and available support options
Information required and availability	✓ Individual child's needs ✓ Available support ✓ Professional experience of assigning support to Looked After Children × Evidence on what works

Strategic Decision

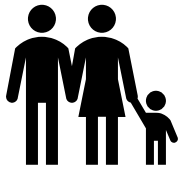
Decision:	Do we currently offer the right services?
Who?	Service Head, Direct & Deputy Director of Children's Services
How?	Assess child journeys and outcomes
Information required and availability	× Child outcomes × Overview of children's needs × Overview of support provided for each child

Key

√ = information is available currently

✘ = Information is not fully available

3) SUPPORTING FOSTER CARERS IS KEY FOR PLACEMENT STABILITY



Support options
- Recruitment
- Assessment
- Training
- Respite care
- Social worker support

Operational Decision

Decision:	What support should we provide to foster carers?
Who?	Foster carers' social worker
How?	Assess foster carers' needs against available options
Information required and availability	✓ Foster carers' needs ✓ Support available ✓ Professional experience of assigning support to Looked After Children × Evidence on what works

Strategic Decision

Decision:	Are we currently offering foster carers the right support?
Who?	Placement manager, Director & Deputy Director of Children's Services
How?	Assess foster placement stability, retention and child outcomes
Information required and availability	× Placement outcomes ✓ Foster placement stability and foster carer turnover × Overview of support provided for each foster case

Key

√ = information is available currently

✘ = Information is not fully available

4) LEAVING CARE IS A CRITICAL POINT IN A LOOKED AFTER CHILD'S LIFE

Leaving care
- Turn 18
- Adoption
- Special Guardianship Order
- Re-join family

Operational Decision

Decision:	Can the child be adopted, re-join their family or get a Special Guardianship Order?
Who?	Child, child's social worker, adopter/guardian
How?	Assess whether adopter / guardian is suitable; understand what the child wants
Information required and availability	✓ Child's views, needs and wants ✓ Background on potential adopter/guardian and their relationship with the child

Strategic Decision

Decision:	Do we offer the right things to care leavers?
Who?	Head of service, Director & Deputy Director of Children's Services
How?	Assess outcomes for child against support offered
Information required and availability	× Care leaver outcomes × Care leaver needs × Overview of support provided to each care leaver

Key

√ = information is available currently

✘ = Information is not fully available

CONCLUSION (1/2)

FOR OPERATIONAL DECISIONS, STAFF HAVE MOST OF THE INFORMATION THEY NEED

Operational decision-makers:

1. Know the child well
2. Know the foster carer or placement provider
3. Generally have significant professional experience of making decisions on individual Looked After Children
4. Know what support is available

CONCLUSION (2/2)

HOWEVER THERE IS A LACK OF OUTCOMES DATA TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WORKS AND INFORM STRATEGY

Strategic decision-makers currently lack and need data on:

1. Whether placements work well – e.g. Do they improve the welfare of the child?
2. Forecasting of future demand – e.g. How many children can they expect to be entering the Children's Services Department in the next 12 months?
3. Outcomes for Looked After Children after they leave care and later in their lives – e.g. Do they go on to university, are they in stable accommodation, do they have mental health problems, etc.?
4. An overview of the support provided to each individual child/young person and care leaver
5. A detailed understanding of the needs of Looked After Children – e.g. Do they need extra educational or psychological support?