**Process Mapping – Key Themes**

## Executive Summary

Local Authorities should move away from “return driven processes” towards “data driven processes” and ensure their use of the data for local operational and strategic decision making is the central driver for process and system design.

Ensuring the data is used effectively to monitor activity and take strategic decisions will in turn improve the quality and value of the data, creating a virtuous cycle.

Procuring a data management system is just the beginning of the process. Systems need to be configured, to suit the needs and requirements of the local authority, and ongoing staff training needs to be seen as a key priority and resourced appropriately.

## Checking and validating the data

Checking and validating datais by far the most time-consuming task of all the processes. Despite regular validation checks conducted throughout the year by most local authorities, there is still a significant number of incorrect/missing records that need to be updated before and after the submission on ProcXed.

A lot of resource is put into checking and validating the data at the end of the process (i.e. before submitting it to the SG as part of the CLAS return). Systems could include (or be configured to include) basic automated validation checks which provide more emphasis on improving data quality at the point of data entry and at regular intervals throughout the year.

## Data entry

Much of this additional checking and validating work is created by the fact that front line staff (e.g. Social Workers or Business Support staff) do not always see the value of the data they input, and the importance of completing missing information when it becomes available (e.g. ethnicity, DOB or disability status for example). The knock-on effect of this is significant further along the process.

Ease of access to data entry systems can exacerbate these challenges and make it less likely that timely, accurate and complete data entry is prioritised, given other pressures. Systems could be made more accessible through the use of modern technology (e.g. mobile devices that Social Workers could update in real time while at their client's home).

## System flexibility

Generally, the systems in use do not provide the flexibility required in terms of managing, extracting and reporting on the data. This may be a result of a number of overarching reasons:

* How the process for extracting and reporting data was incorporated within the initial procurement process (e.g. via the technical specification)
* The implementation and configuration of the system is not complete, meaning the inbuilt reporting tool doesn't work effectively
* Staff may not have been fully trained to use the system, the system has changed, or trained staff may have left the authority
* The systems have not been "Scotified" and were built to allow reporting based on English legislation, so the data required for reporting in Scotland can’t easily be extracted
* Different systems do not speak to each other therefore the data needs to be merged manually. There is a requirement for system interoperability
* Changes often take a long time to be implemented by software developers (often at a cost to Councils)
* There is a lack of knowledge sharing between local authorities who use the same system. If there are “issues” in a particular LA there should be a mechanism for these to be discussed

All of these factors increase the need for local authorities to develop their own local solutions as ‘work-arounds’, by using third party software, such as Business Objects for reporting on data, or manually merging different data extracts and spreadsheet in Excel.

## Re-use of data

Many (but not all) local authorities have processes in place to make use of the data at a local level, both operationally and strategically. How effective this use of data is depends very much on the data culture within the local authority, and an awareness of the value and importance of high quality data by senior managers. For example, if managers are interrogating the data and using it, this in turn improves the quality of the data and the output that it is based on. If front line staff can see the data being used, this improves their appreciation of the value of good quality data and in turn improves the data entry process. This then creates a “data driven culture”, and ultimately reduces inefficiencies in the current process due to checking and validation.

## Automation

There is significant potential and appetite across local authorities to automate each stage of the process. Whilst this is laudable, there should be significant attention placed on the simplification of the process first, and an emphasis on putting in place good data management practices, rather that trying to automate a lot of separate steps, using different tools.

Where there is existing functionality (or tools) available as part of the system(s) in use these should be configured appropriately so that there is a move towards a “one button” reporting process. This may require a level of investment with software suppliers, but the collective bargaining powers of 5 or 6 local authorities (rather than individual ones) should help “persuade” software supplier of the value of completing any development work (especially if it is paid for collectively).

Often systems have basic automated validation checks, these needs to be configured appropriately to ensure that the correct data is input

## Staff Skills

Many local authorities have skills “gaps” around the management and configuration of the system they use, but also in extracting data from the system. In some local authorities there is a lack of understanding on how to make best use of the system. There are also examples of a lack of understanding of how the system actually works, resulting from a lack of training and knowledge transfer amongst staff.

There is often an overreliance on the skills and knowledge of key individuals within some local authorities. There are a number of “single points of failure” which means that the process can be delayed or incomplete if a key individual is not available. There is also a burden of pressure on these key individuals to provide the data as and when it is required.

Internal (and external) knowledge transfer does not always appear to be embedded within the local authority, and the lack of a cohesive user community around system usage (e.g. via khub) for sharing best practice or ideas leads to skills gaps, with local authorities “muddling on” based on the skills of key individuals. This is most obvious around the reporting element of the process (e.g. the use of Business Objects for example)

Several local authorities indicated that they were moving to new systems. Buying a new system is not enough to overcome many of the problems that local authorities have highlighted. Any system needs to be configured properly and staff need to understand how it works. This requires investment and the appropriate resources allocated to train staff.

Within many local authorities data literacy (the ability to read, understand and communicate data as information) is an issue, and a data driven culture is not embedded within the service or authority.

## Variation

There is significant variation in the approach taken by different local authorities. This is often dictated by the size of the local authority and the skills of the staff. Another key factor of the approach depends on where the local authority is on their “data journey” and if there is buy-in from senior managers.