DDSF Project 1a
Standard Safeguarding Dataset
User Research Synthesis

Last updated: 6th June 2023

DATA to INSIGHT

Summary of UR process

- User research started in March – now completed.

- 17, hour-long, 121 sessions.

- 3 workshops (35+ attendees).

- Questionnaire (open invitation via D2I newsletter).

- Included LA analysts, senior leaders, ADCS, CSC workers, academics, charities, system suppliers and Government depts.

Report key

Headline findings.

Paraphrased comments from UR contributors.

Commentary and analysis by the project's research/design teams.

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Themes

There are many positives about current collections

- Current data collections/publications are felt to be useful, particularly rates per 10k of headline measures (contributors talked about using a 'spine' of key measures to aid decision making).

- The data is used by a wide range of professionals – not just local authorities – but also academics, charities etc. LAs use the published aggregates in benchmarking exercises, while researchers can apply to access disaggregated data.

- Having access to historical benchmarking data is seen as a useful tool in decision making and quite unique in local government, with other service areas not felt to be as data rich.

- Some contributors commented about ways the publications could be more useful (examples given include suppression making analysis difficult, and an inability to stratify published data).

- Lead times for changes to case management systems can be significant – often at least 12-24 months – contributors felt this has been handled well in main stat return changes where DfE have long lead times/consultations/Star Chamber sign-off process. Reported as more challenging for other collections where lead times are often significantly less.

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Themes

Local authorities are concerned about the use of 'process' data as the primary tool for understanding their services, particularly by DfE/Ofsted

- There is concern about the use of this data as the primary tool for understanding children's social care.

- CSC systems are complex, and it's felt there is little evidence that 'process' type measures alone can accurately indicate the effectiveness of services.

- Within CSC services, process data is one tool amongst many – audit, voice of child, reflective practice, partnership working, supervision etc. There are myriad sources of 'soft' information used by leaders to understand their services.

- Because of this, there is some concern from LAs and beyond that analysis using just this data, may not provide accurate understanding by outside agencies.

- This is compounded by mistrust in some LAs of DfE receiving data, particularly when unvalidated.

- This is a recognised view from regulators etc. who stress their understanding that data is only used a starting point, but not the whole picture.

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The voice of the child is not clearly evident in the data we use to describe their journey through the social care system

- Policy and guidance is clear – services should be child focused and the views of children should be represented and taken seriously.

- Looking at casefiles or talking to social workers/leaders (and also regulators and policy makers) this is clearly evident. However, this focus is not often present in the way we collect, publish or talk about data.

- Example given of corporate parenting – how do you know a Council is a good corporate parent? To answer this, often LAs will produce a dashboard with CLA numbers, placement stability etc. This is not how parents would generally measure their own success; for leaders this is the only available benchmarking.

- Are there small ways we could make processes more child focused – i.e. not categorising by 'is the accommodation suitable', but asking young people: 'do you feel safe'. Not measuring 'what % had three or more placements' but asking children: 'do you feel secure and happy in your placement'.

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We struggle to understand whether the CSC system is making children's lives better through data

- Outcomes for children were mentioned as a gap in many interviews.

- As a sector, we know we need to better understand outcomes but don't currently have the tools to effectively do so.

- At all levels, outcomes frameworks are using 'process' measures as a proxy for outcome data.

- Supporting families outcomes framework is used in many LAs but can often be seen as 'separate' to CSC and data availability from partners can be challenging.

- While outcomes are difficult at a local level, they become more even more so at larger geographies where differences in local need can hinder comparison.

- To measure outcomes, LAs would need to use less commonly used data ('multi-agency', voice of the child), there are technical and ethical challenges here. What is proportionate and how do children and families feel about this?

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Outcomes data/voice of the child is difficult and work needs to be done to develop this

- While these areas were identified as gaps – there was no suggestion that these areas were able to be addressed quickly or that there were quick wins available.

- Needs funding/development and appropriate voices around the table and a rethink of general approach to data.

- LAs want to know that the work they are doing makes a difference to the children they work with. They want a rich picture of the child's experience, but this does not provide top line figures that are easily sharable.

- Local areas will have different needs so challenges in making a one-size-fits all approach (an example would be Bright Spots providing lots of support for LAs to gain understanding vs SDQs, which are standardised and often not fully analysed).

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Multi-agency data is challenging to obtain and analyse

- Increasingly, data that is not owned by local authorities is seen as critical to understanding services.

- Areas where multi-agency data is regularly used include: Supporting Families, Safeguarding Partnerships and Family Hubs.

- There is a growing recognition that children and young people can't be seen in isolation from the area that surrounds them (contextual safeguarding).

- Two challenges are consistently mentioned:
  - Obtaining the data, often this in itself is challenging. Health data is the most commonly identified as difficult to obtain, though all LAs have different local challenges sourcing partner data.
  - Understanding the data. Often aggregated data is provided to LA analyst with no expertise in that service area. Difficult to analyse without understanding context – what are normal seasonal variations, what local context has impacted changes etc. This lessens the value of shared data.

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A collaborative approach to developing data seems to work best

- Local authorities, and other stakeholders, need to be engaged when new data requests are being developed.

- The RIIA was mentioned as a model for this – DfE, ADCS, Regional groups and supporting agencies like D2I all working together to find a solution.

- Gap for more D2I-like work.

- All data asked for needs to have a purpose – LAs mention providing data but not receiving worthwhile information back.

- Question: What data products are useful for LAs etc?

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Reliance on informal networks to make things work

- Multiple organisations requesting data (DfE, Ofsted, Children's Commissioner, regional groups etc.)

- Multiple channels that changes could be communicated through.

- Challenging for LA analysts to monitor all changes.

- Informal networks are filling this gap (Google groups forum, D2I newsletter) as well as formal networks (respondents mentioned that regional groups were a good source of information).

- At local level some things work because of informal relationships – an example might be data team and IT working together to implement new software (Python IDEs etc.), or partnership working relying on having the correct contact to ask for data.

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Local authorities are variable

- Significant differences in resourcing of data teams.

- Some LAs have large well-resourced teams, others have 1 or 2 people covering everything.

- Some sit corporately, some within Children's Services.

- Where data teams are already very stretched, there is apprehension about providing new measures.

- LAs want requests for new data items to be sufficiently supported with appropriate resourcing.

- Core functions of all data teams are similar (monthly/quarterly reporting, stat returns etc.)

- Additional functions variable – deeper analysis and understanding.

- Where other departments are involved (IT, other reporting teams) it can make work more complex – examples include having to ask for new reports to be developed.

- There are skills gaps within teams, particularly as we move away from spreadsheets to dedicated BI software.

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Different structures mean analysts are not always empowered to make changes

- LA data teams are spending so long on returns that there is little time left for the people who know the data best to draw interesting conclusions that could benefit understanding.

- Distinct tasks (e.g. optimising a report) may be prioritised at the expense of internal relations (e.g. ensuring analysts can communicate with social workers).

- Positive examples of internal collaboration are often the exception rather than the rule.

- Where data teams and social workers do come together, it allows for deeper understanding of the system.

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We asked participants at our workshops: If you could pick one thing to stop collecting, what would it be? (multiple occurrences in brackets)

- CiN Primary need codes are felt to be outdated. (2)

- CLA Reviews – not reported back to us. (2)

- CLA placement changes – the 'other' category is overused.

- Adoption dataset – hard to produce.

- Workforce – hard to produce. (3)

- Foster care return.

- Assessments started.

- Distance placed from home.

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We asked participants at our workshops: If you could pick one thing to start collecting, what would it be? (multiple occurrences in brackets)

- Early Help data (requests, open plans by agency, closed plans etc). (3)

- Contacts data (i.e. contacts from partners NFA).

- Young people's mental health and wellbeing. (2)

- Overdue (but not completed) assessments.

- Better partner data.

- More on outcomes – answering the 'so what' question. (4)

- Voice of child.

- SEND Data.

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We also asked for any other thoughts respondents would like to be taken into consideration.

- Timeliness of data.

- Why so many different collections, can't we just have one that combines the lot, and then is shared across the various organisations (DfE, ASGLB, etc)?

- With all the new projects going on, we need to be acutely aware that LA performance teams are already cut to the bone with resourcing. Whilst the system is widely recognised to be struggling to meet the needs of children, adding a plethora of KPIs isn't what will fix it.

DATA to INSIGHT

Chart 1 - Survey section comparison

Section 1 - How well do you think your data currently works in these areas?
Section 2 - How effective is your current reporting on these outcomes?
Score from 0-10
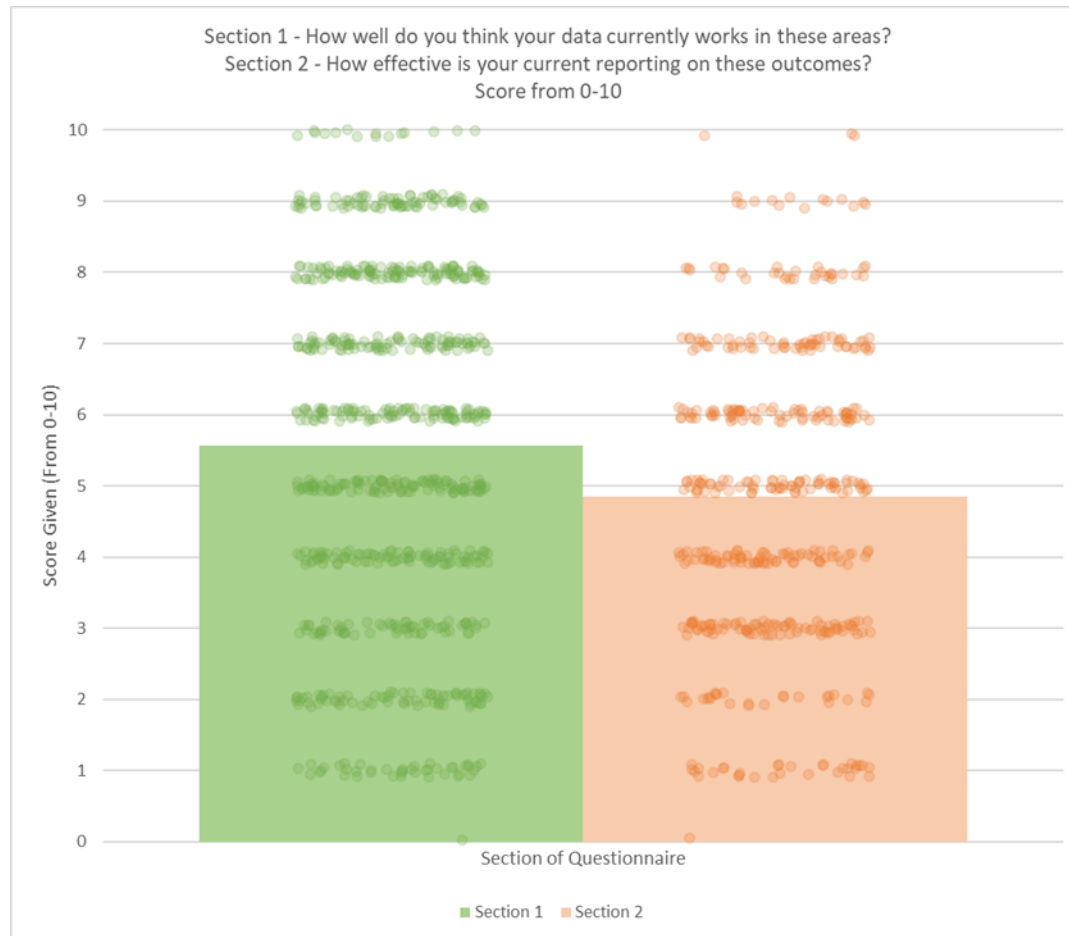
Comparing the first half of the questionnaire to the second half (outcomes). The bar chart shows the average score and the scatterplot shows individual scores. The scatterplot is jittered so the score density is visible.

When we ask about how well data works **generally**, we get a much more positive response than when we ask how effective data is at reporting on particular **outcomes**.

This suggests that **our primary data focus** is on managing workflow – which is of course important – but not on understanding the impact of services on children's lives.

When talking outcomes, it's vanishingly unlikely for anyone to score a "10" for their effectiveness on data reporting.

When it comes to data effectiveness generally, we see **a wide range of views** – due either to differences between councils' arrangements, or differences between employees' perceptions of what "good" means.

Chart 2 - Average scores for section 1 of survey

Part 1 Averages
How well do you think your data currently works in these areas?
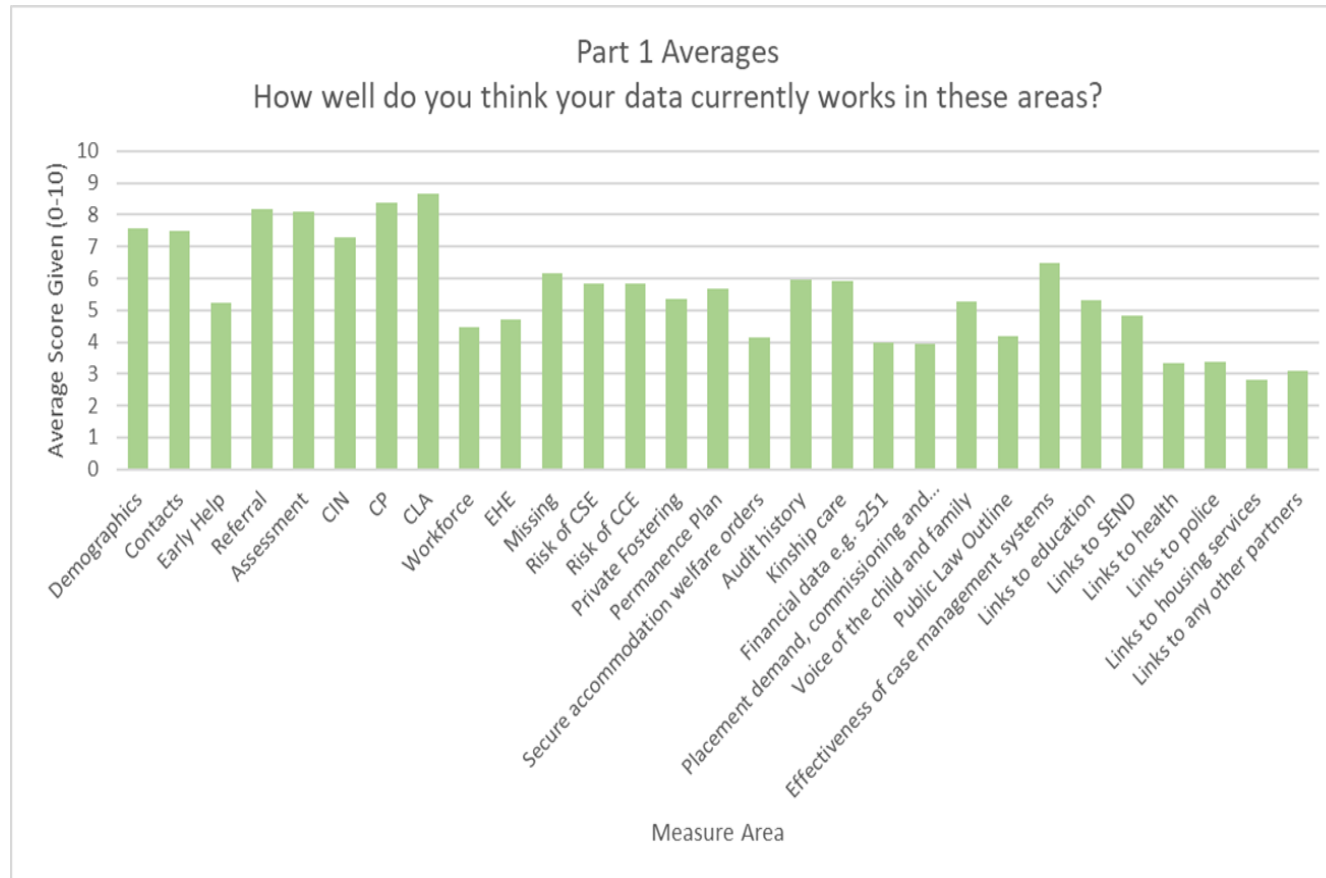
Seems to be **a sliding scale**:

Most

1: On Case Management System & stat return (CiN/CP/CLA)

2: On CMS (maybe) but not stat return or vice versa (EH)
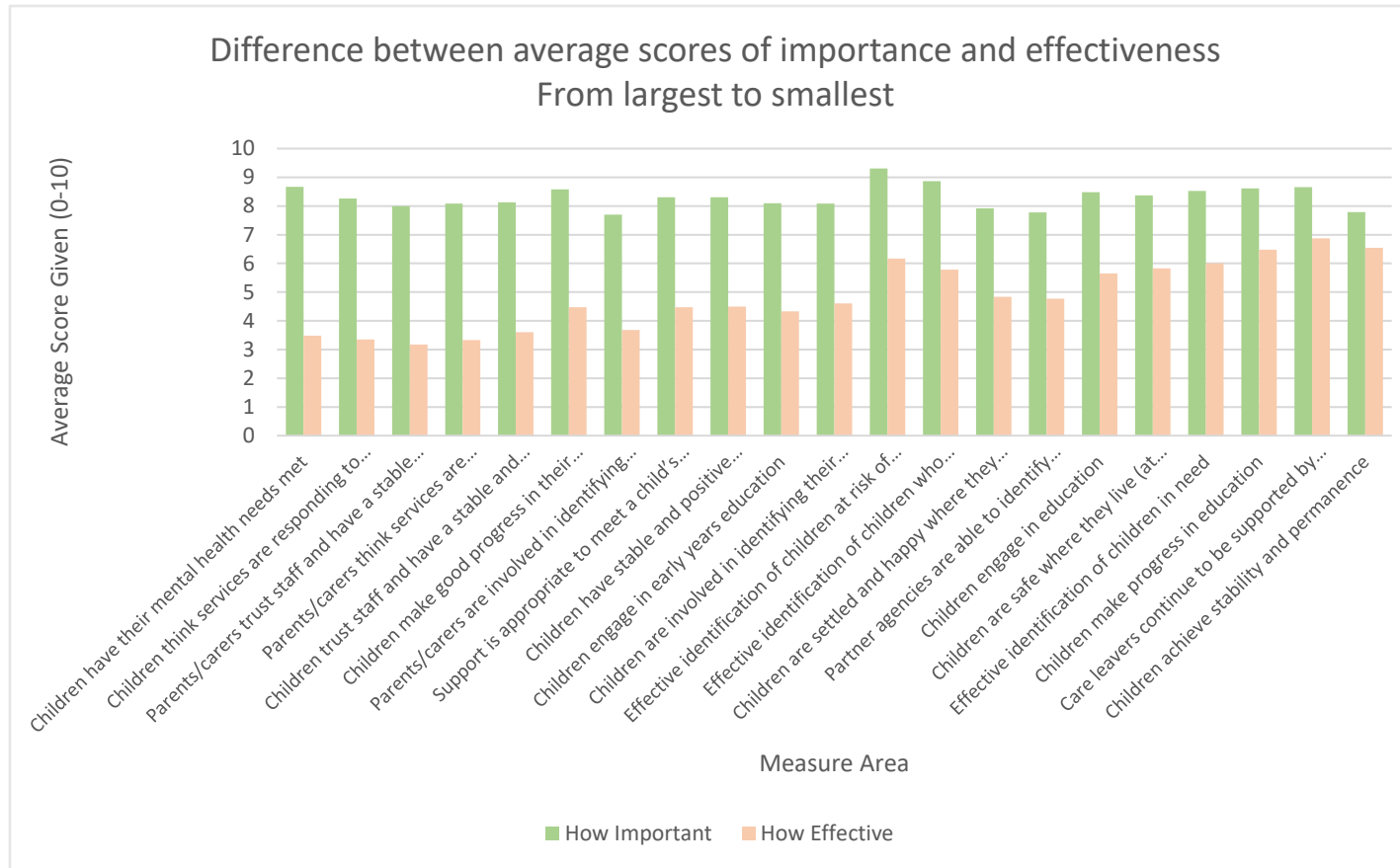
3: Not on CMS or stat return (partner data, secondary internal source)

Least

Similar to EH findings.

Where data is incorporated into systems/returns/benchmarking, it works better. But is this because items are "statutory", or are items "statutory" because they're useful?

Chart 3 – Importance vs effectiveness of understanding outcomes

Difference between average scores of importance and effectiveness
From largest to smallest

Average Score Given (0-10) — scale 0 to 10

Measure Area

■ How Important   ■ How Effective

Categories (x-axis):
- Children have their mental health needs met
- Children think services are responding to...
- Parents/carers trust staff and have a stable...
- Parents/carers think services are...
- Children trust staff and have a stable and...
- Children make good progress in their...
- Parents/carers are involved in identifying...
- Support is appropriate to meet a child's...
- Children have stable and positive...
- Children engage in early years education
- Children are involved in identifying their...
- Effective identification of children at risk of...
- Effective identification of children who...
- Children are settled and happy where they...
- Partner agencies are able to identify...
- Children engage in education
- Children are safe where they live (at...
- Effective identification of children in need
- Children make progress in education
- Care leavers continue to be supported by...
- Children achieve stability and permanence

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This shows **how important we think it is to measure outcomes compared to how good we are at measuring them**. In every category, we rate the importance higher than our current effectiveness.

We're closest in those items which are either universal (education outcomes) or highly targeted and regulated (permanence, identifying need).

We struggle most with mental health and child/parent views – arguably the most important measures of whether we helped. A question remains around whether traditional data analysis is the right vehicle for understanding these outcomes.

Chart 4 – Current effectiveness (self-appraisals)

How well do you think your data currently works in these areas?
Score from 0-10
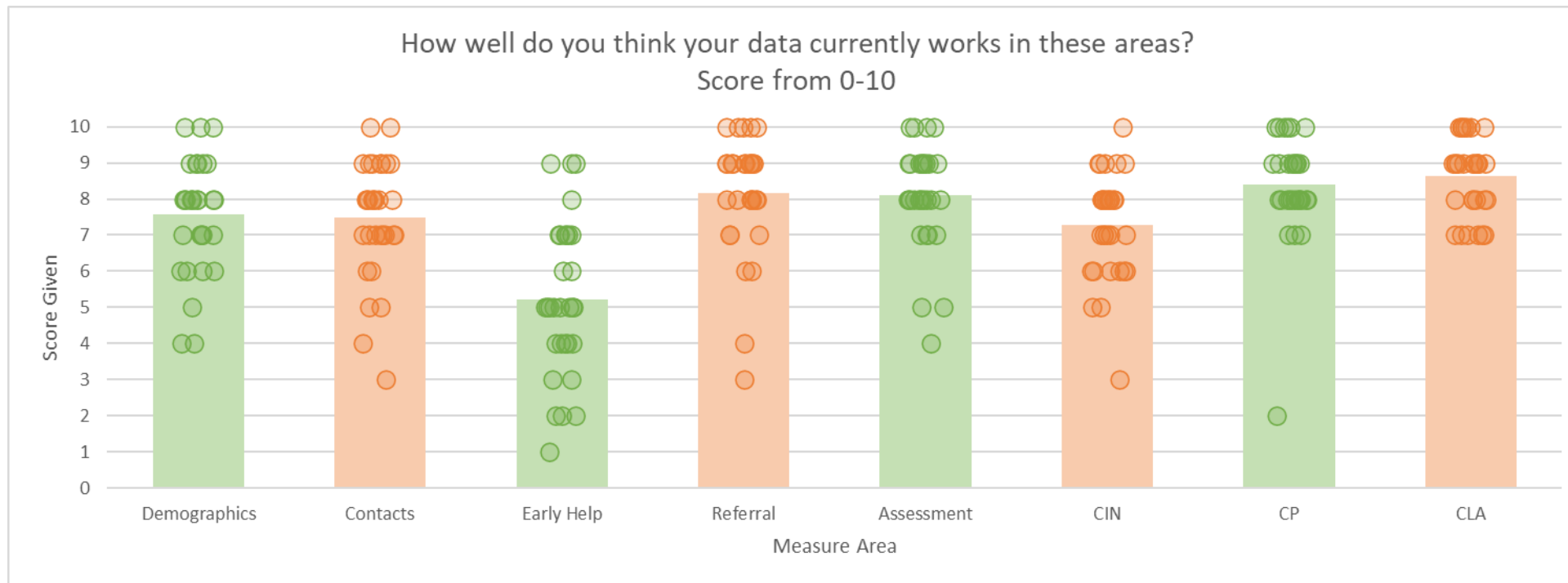
The bar chart shows the average score; the scatters show individual respondents' scores.
Ignoring some outliers, we see **broadest divergence in Early Help (the least regulated data area)**.
CIN's relatively low score might suggest that the stricter data regime in CP/CLA is useful.

Chart 5 - Current effectiveness (self-appraisals)

How well do you think your data currently works in these areas?
Score from 0-10
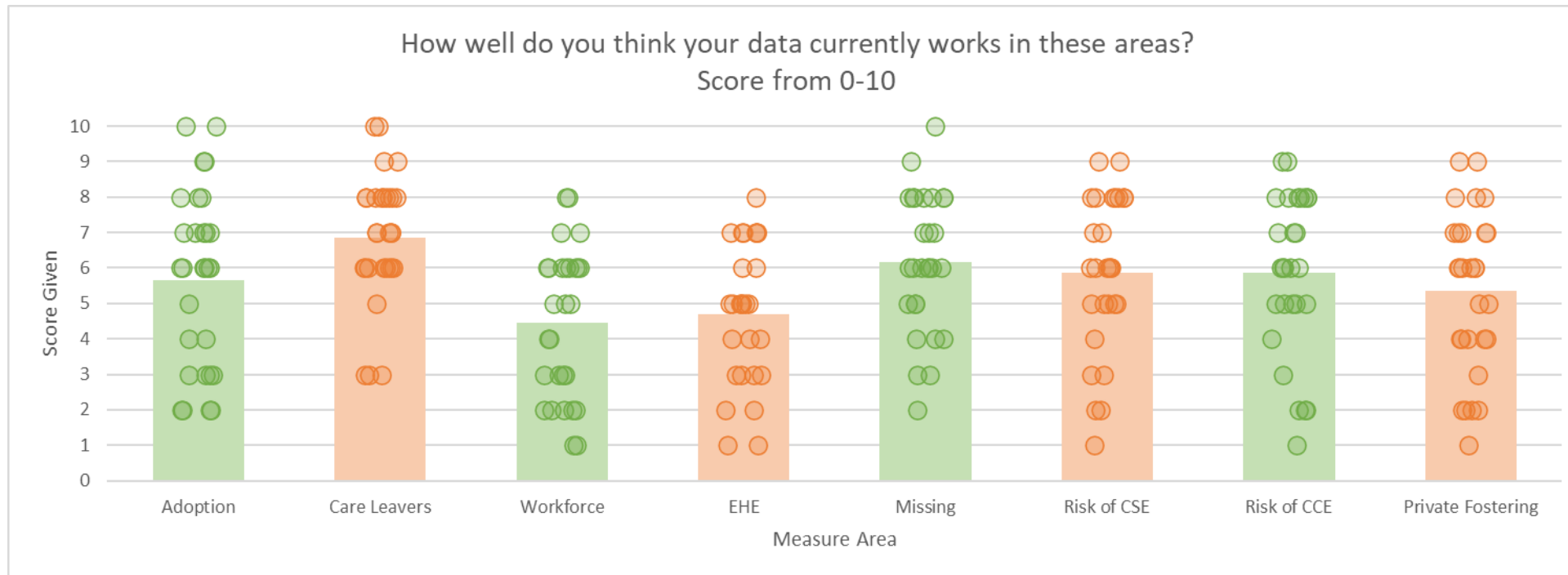
Looking now outside the "core process" data areas, we see **lowest perceived effectiveness in those areas typically managed outside the CMS** – workforce and EHE.
Compared to the "core process" areas overleaf, we also see generally **wide divergence between LAs**.

Chart 6 - Current effectiveness (self-appraisals)

How well do you think your data currently works in these areas?
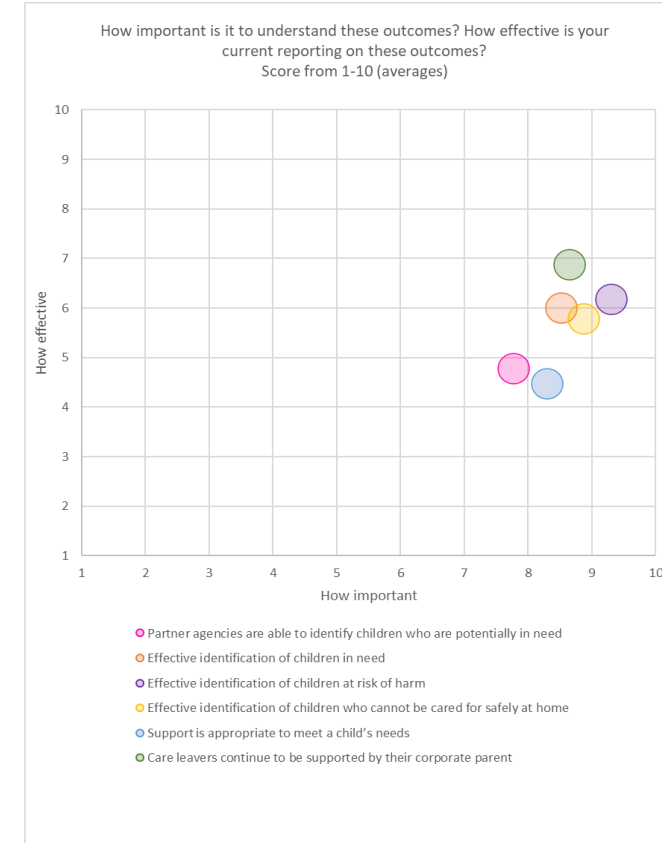Score from 0-10
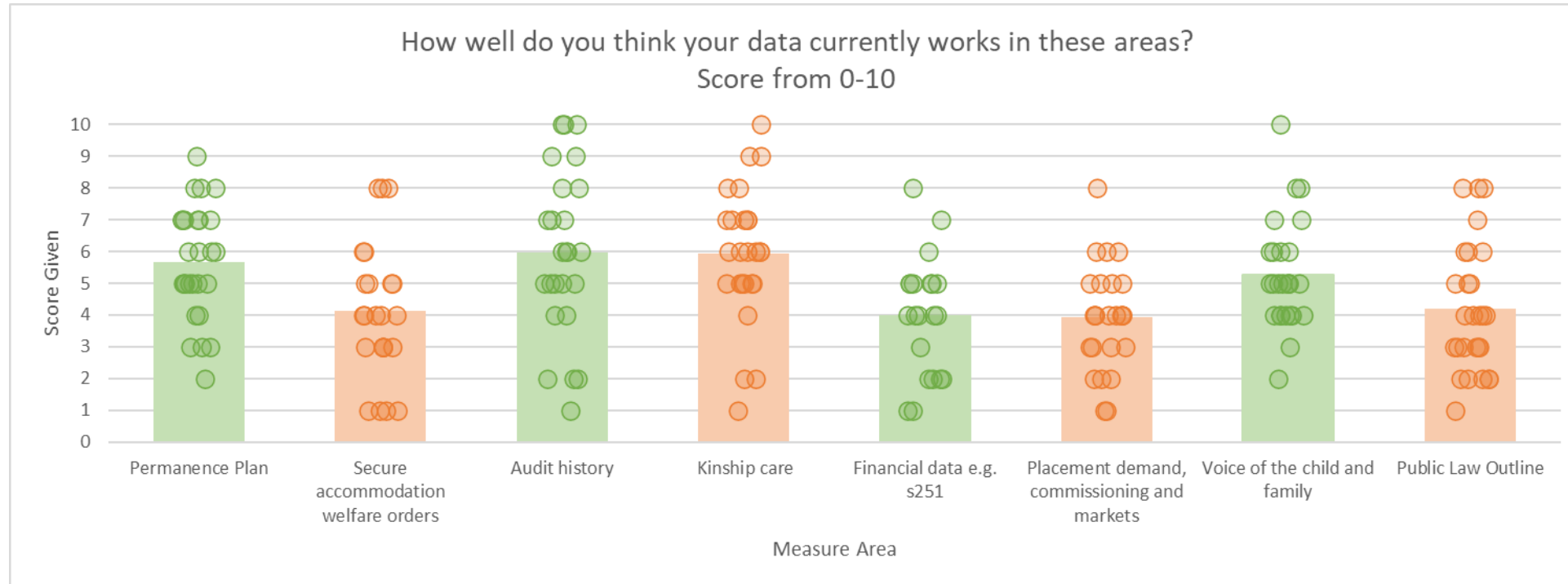
The **low scores around PLO and Financial Data** support DfE's intentions to improve these via DDSF.
Responses about the voice of the child are mostly "somewhere in the middle" with a few outliers.
Again we see broad diversity between different LAs and respondents on the non-stat-return items.

Chart 7 - Current effectiveness (self-appraisals)

How well do you think your data currently works in these areas?
Score from 0-10
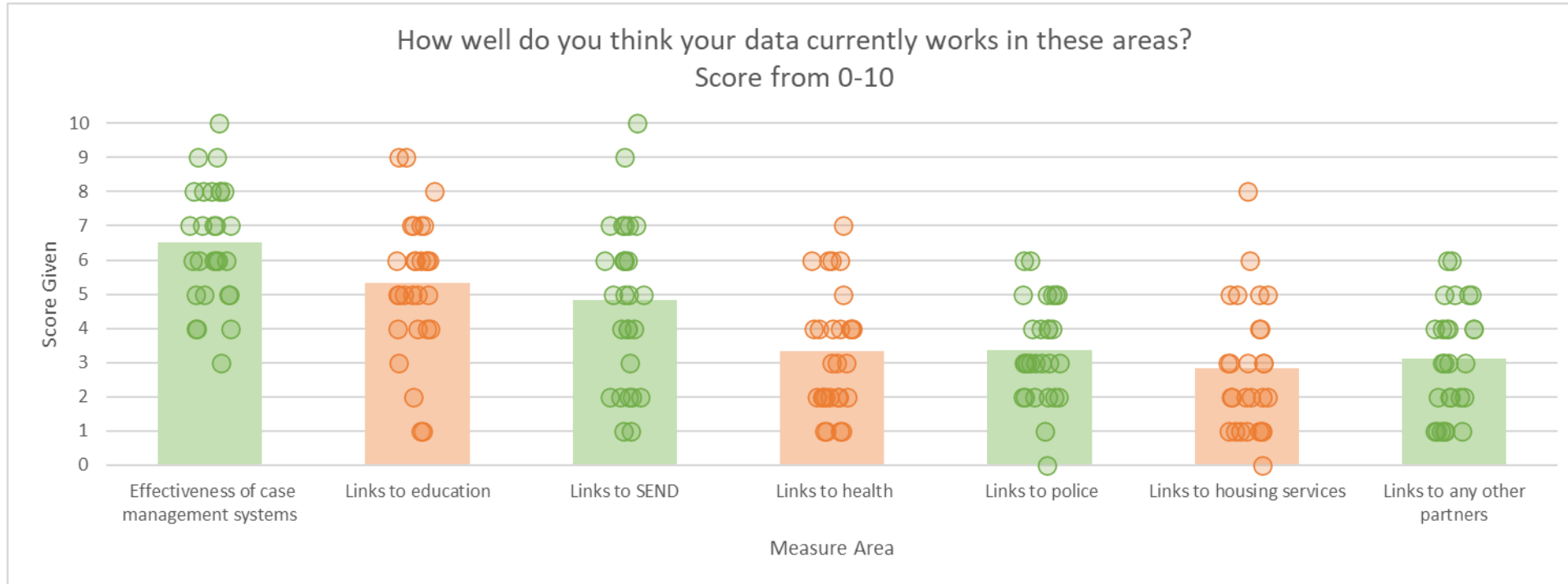
These items relate mostly to integrations and data sharing arrangements with other services.
Some LAs think their links with internal services are good; **almost all respondents saw plenty of room for improvement in links to services hosted by other organisations** – health, police, housing, etc.

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Charts 8, 9 & 10 - Scatterplot Averages

Chart 8

How important is it to understand these outcomes?
How effective is your current reporting on these outcomes?
Score from 1-10 (averages)

- Children are safe where they live (at home/placement and their community)
- Children are settled and happy where they live
- Children achieve stability and permanence
- Children make good progress in their behavioural, emotional and social development
- Children have their mental health needs met
- Children engage in early years education
- Children engage in education
- Children have stable and positive educational experiences
- Children make progress in education

Chart 9

How important is it to understand these outcomes?
How effective is your current reporting on these outcomes?
Score from 1-10 (averages)

- Children trust staff and have a stable and supportive relationship with them
- Parents/carers trust staff and have a stable and supportive relationship with them
- Children are involved in identifying their needs and planning their support
- Parents/carers are involved in identifying their needs and planning their support
- Children think services are responding to their needs

Chart 10

How important is it to understand these outcomes? How effective is your current reporting on these outcomes?
Score from 1-10 (averages)

- Partner agencies are able to identify children who are potentially in need
- Effective identification of children in need
- Effective identification of children at risk of harm
- Effective identification of children who cannot be cared for safely at home
- Support is appropriate to meet a child's needs
- Care leavers continue to be supported by their corporate parent

These show an effectiveness/importance scatter for various outcomes.
We see universally high importance, but **low effectiveness around child voice, trust, and relationships**.

Summary of key insights / initial impressions

Most LAs want better data *and* most LAs place high value on benchmarking capability

We're encouraged both that this project specifically, to establish a shared standard for producing safeguarding data, is valuable to address current LA needs, and that the wider project of national standards for data collection is valuable.

We need to keep a clear eye on why we think the history-to-date of safeguarding data collection leaves us, as LAs, still wanting "better data" – what needs to change about our approach, and why did it happen that way in the first place?

If we can establish clear proposals for new standard data items addressing current data gaps, evidence from this research suggests that this will be well-received and useful to LAs in their work to assure good outcomes for children.

Many LAs mistrust DfE use of their data

This can't be overstated – repeatedly LAs voiced concerns about how any new data specification would be used by DfE.

This resonates with wider concerns around DfE data strategy – "daily data flow" and "scorecards" and phone check-ins.

Improving and maintaining relationships between DfE and LAs around data strategy should be a core strategic goal for DfE.

We're right to think current data doesn't do a good job of exploring outcomes/"voice"

The disparity between desire to understand these areas, and ability to do so, is the clearest story from our survey.

How much of this is a solvable problem – by data strategy – is an open question. We will prioritise outcomes data design.

Expanding or changing data arrangements in LAs is costly

Current data returns and ad hoc requests place a high burden on LA data teams, often inhibiting local insight work.

A key priority from the LA perspective is closing the loop on data asks, so that they properly benefit the LA's local work.
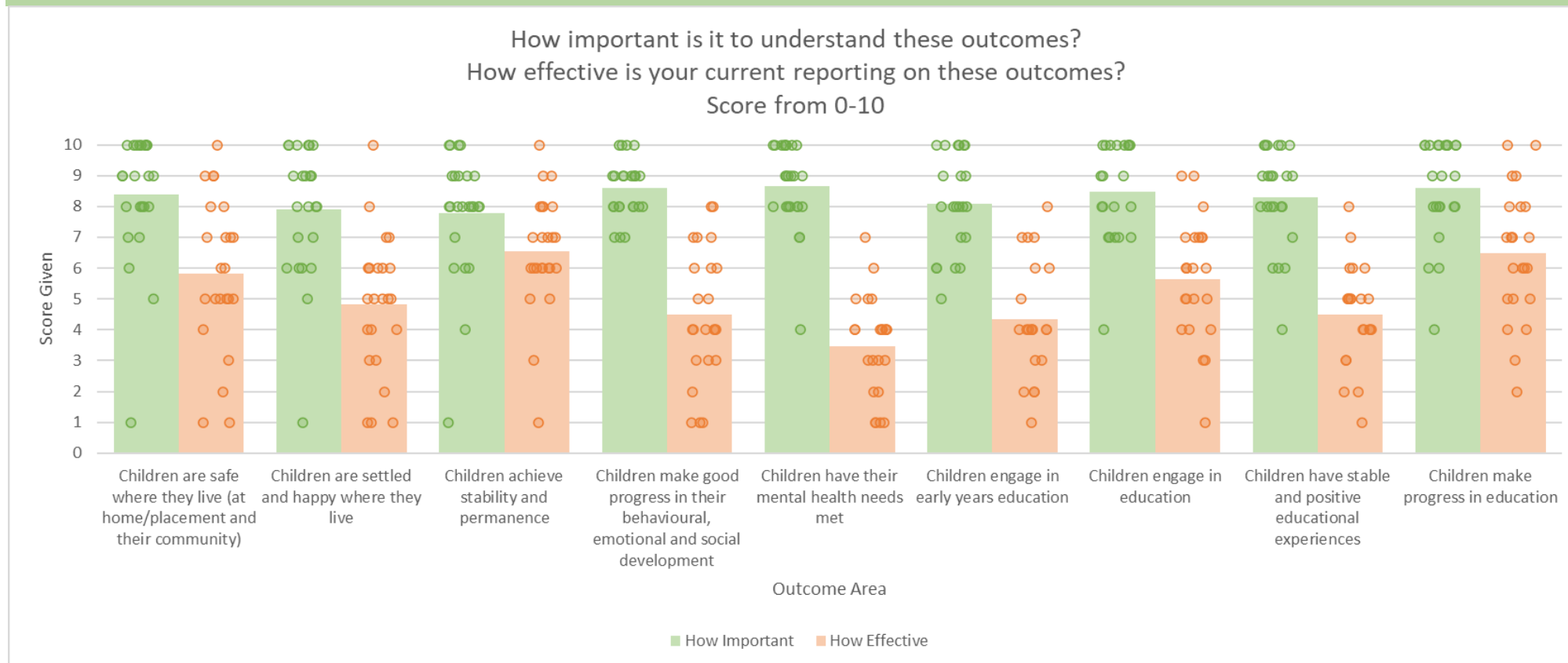
LAs aren't all the same

We found diversity of size, caseload, practice priorities, organisational structures, data strategy and systems responsibility.

There's no "one size fits all" approach to LA data work; economies of scale do exist, but always incur some local tailoring.
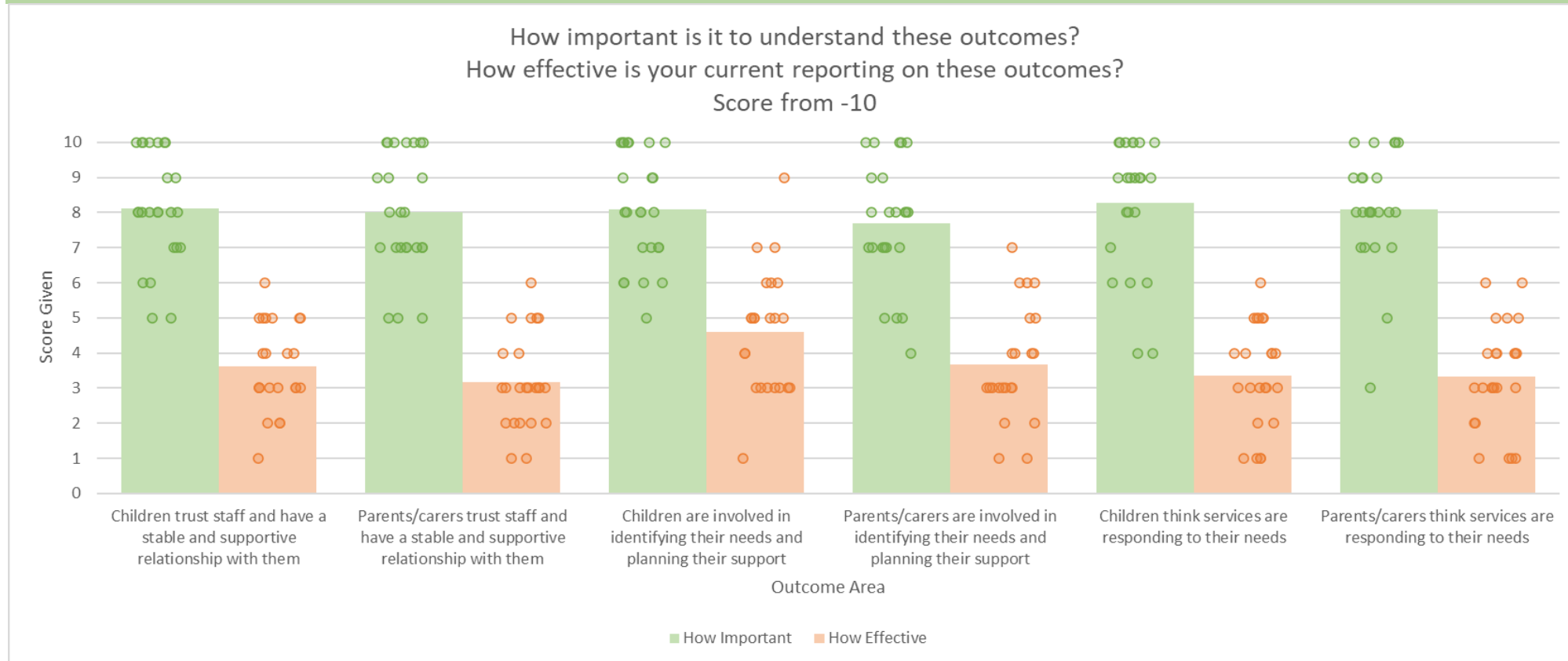
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How important is it to understand these outcomes?
How effective is your current reporting on these outcomes?
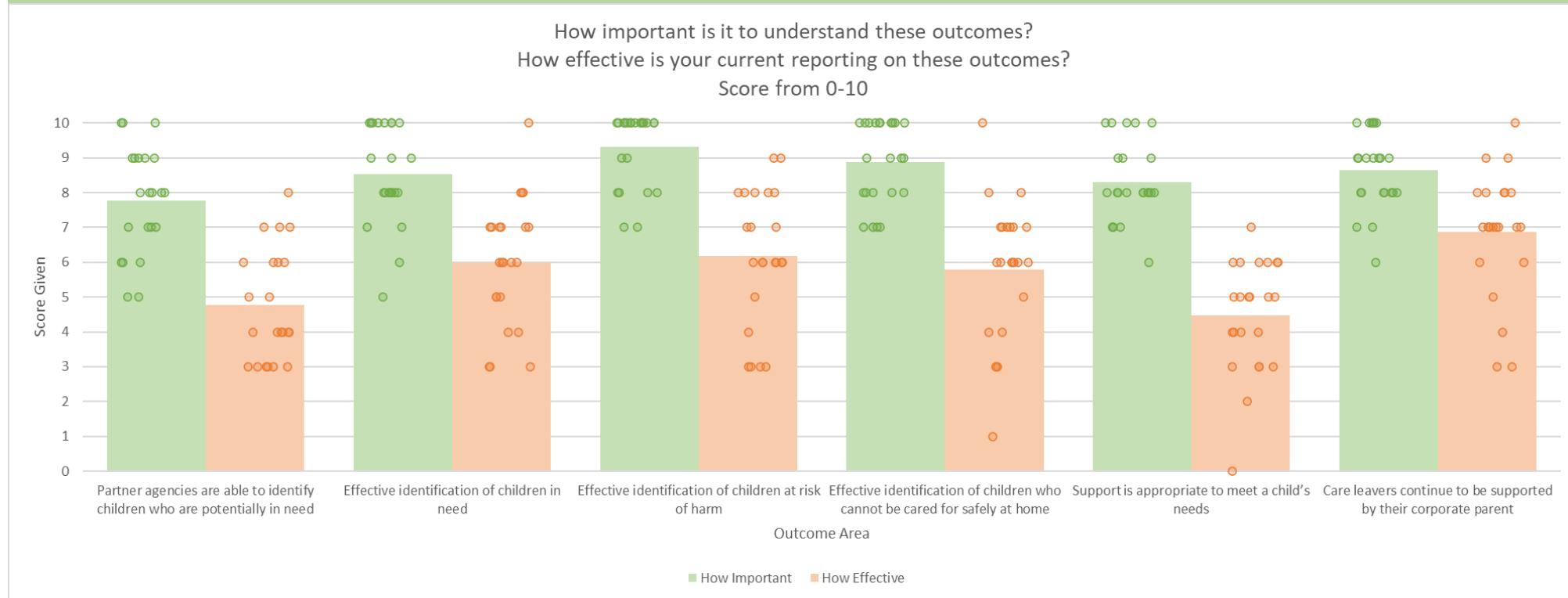Score from 0-10

■ How Important   ■ How Effective

Green shows the scores for the question on importance of outcomes, orange shows the scores for the question on effectiveness on current reporting of the outcomes. The bar chart shows the average score and the scatterplot shows individual scores. The scatterplot is jittered so the score density is visible.

Appendix: Chart 12 – Detailed Outcomes Breakdown

How important is it to understand these outcomes?
How effective is your current reporting on these outcomes?
Score from -10

Green shows the scores for the question on importance of outcomes, orange shows the scores for the question on effectiveness on current reporting of the outcomes. The bar chart shows the average score and the scatterplot shows individual scores. The scatterplot is jittered so the score density is visible.

Appendix: Chart 13 – Detailed Outcomes Breakdown

How important is it to understand these outcomes?
How effective is your current reporting on these outcomes?
Score from 0-10

Score Given

Outcome Area

- How Important
- How Effective

Green shows the scores for the question on importance of outcomes, orange shows the scores for the question on effectiveness on current reporting of the outcomes. The bar chart shows the average score and the scatterplot shows individual scores. The scatterplot is jittered so the score density is visible.

Useful links

- Data to Insight website: https://www.datatoinsight.org/

- Email: datatoinsight.enquiries@gmail.com

- Questionnaire about this session: https://forms.office.com/e/3f2cAHLibK

- To allow collaboration, continuous integration and publish the project, we're using Github. The repository is available either indirectly through data-to-insight (github.com) or direct data-to-insight.github.io/ssd-data-model/. Continuous integration during our current development cycle is very frequent, hence the last published timestamp is always shown. It's hoped that these initial published pages provide a basis for collaboration and invite feedback or suggestions. A Change Request|Suggestions form is also linked.

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