

Council Leader Newsletter



The Improvement Service is the 'go to' organisation for Local Government improvement in Scotland.

The purpose of this newsletter is to update Council Leaders on key decisions made by the IS Board at its meeting in September 2020 and key business plan developments.

COVID-19

The Board noted the range of work being delivered by the IS to support Councils and partners to respond to Covid-19. We continue to keep the Covid-19 section of our website updated with [new developments](#). We have a Covid-19 web page for [elected members](#). We are building up a collection of [case studies](#) showing how councils have rapidly redesigned services, created innovative solutions to new problems and collaborated with communities and other organisations throughout the pandemic.

Finance Update

The Board noted that total income secured for the year to 30th September 2020 is £9.2M. Of this, £1.94M has been brokered from outwith the Local Government sector.

IS Board Skills Framework & Review of Governance

The IS Board Members participated in a skills analysis and self-assessment exercise, and the results were discussed at a Board workshop held in November. The outputs of this workshop fed into a review of IS governance, which was undertaken by an IS Associate. The findings of this review were considered by the Board in December, and a revised improvement plan will be discussed at the March 2021 Board meeting reflecting decisions made by the Board. In light of Joyce White stepping down from the IS Board at its AGM in November, a vacancy has arisen on the Board for a company director to be nominated by Solace Scotland. The Board has asked Solace to give due consideration to nominating a director to the Board with expertise in digital strategy leadership and digital skills, which emerged as a skills gap through the skills analysis.

Accounts Commission

Elma Murray, Interim Chair of the Accounts Commission, attended the Board meeting and provided an update on the work of the Commission, and her thoughts on how the relationship could continue to be strengthened between the IS and the Commission. Board Members agreed that the IS should develop a strategic alliance with the Commission building on the good working relationship currently in place. A joint partnership statement will be presented to the Board for approval in March, and also to the Accounts Commission.

Appointment of Audit Committee Members

Gavin Whitefield, Cllr Kevin Keenan and Rory Mair came to the end of their term on the Audit Committee. The new Audit Committee consists of David Robertson (nominated by Directors of Finance and Chair for the first six months of 2021), Angela Scott (will take over the Chair from David) and Cllr Graham Houston. The new Audit Committee will review the Terms of Reference at its meeting in February.

IS Communications Strategy and Elevator Pitch

The Board approved the [Communications Strategy 2020 - 2022](#), which has now been published on our website. An elevator pitch has also been developed to support Board Members in their ambassadorial role

Digital Strategy - Deep Dive Workshop

A deep dive workshop for Board members to look at our digital strategy/future developments will take place on 5th February 2021.

Upcoming Events

- [Trauma is everybody's business: Introduction to the National Trauma Training Programme](#)
19 February 2021
- [Local Authorities Organisational Development Network Meeting](#)
11 March 2021

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Coaching for Elected Members

Evaluations from senior elected members who received coaching in 2020 were very positive.

"I cannot recommend coaching highly enough to other senior councillors. We have hugely impactful roles and it is only right that we take time to take stock, challenge ourselves and to grow as individuals but also to grow in our roles as leaders." (Senior Elected Member from a Scottish Local Authority)

Information about our coaching offer can be found [here](#) or by contacting david.barr@improvementservice.org.uk

Political Mentoring

The six cohorts of our Political Mentoring Development Programme were very well received by participants. Many participants have already started mentoring relationships with potential candidates for elected office, and some are working to embed political mentoring within their groups. New cohorts of the programme are being arranged for early this year.

Elected Member Webinar and Seminar Programme

We are planning our webinar and online seminar programme for elected members for 2021. Likely topics for the programme include:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Climate Change
- Growth Deals and Business Cases
- Fairer Scotland Duty
- 20 minute neighbourhoods

Webinars will be promoted to members through our mailing list and via designated officer contacts in all councils.

Economic Development/SLAED

We are supporting Solace, SLAED, COSLA and Scottish Government with the development of a 4 point plan on how local and national government and agencies can work better together to deliver Business Support and Employability.

Discussions are taking place with the SLAED executive regarding a Strategic Plan. The plan will likely be over 6-12 months to address the existing issues with the pandemic with a new 3 year plan being developed after that. We are also working with the SLAED Performance group to investigate a possible data dashboard for the SLAED indicators which could be updated as information is available, as well as exploring the possibility for other, wider measures that could identify how economic development contributes to other outcomes such as health and climate change.

Child Poverty

We are continuing to read the draft and final Local Child Poverty Action Reports and provide feedback to Councils. A Fairer Scotland Duty and Child Poverty and COVID briefing and a Practice Note with suggestions on how to target additional monies from Scottish Government to address disadvantage was circulated to all Chief Executives in December.

A meeting has taken place with colleagues from the Children's Parliament and Forward Scotland regarding the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law which is likely to happen in March 2021. There will be a need for all Local Authorities to consider how this will impact on their services and how they take a rights respecting approach to delivery.

Fairer Scotland Duty (FSD)

FSD leads met on 3rd December with attendance from Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Dundee, Highland Orkney, Midlothian, Scottish Borders, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire, and West Lothian Councils, alongside colleagues from Health Boards and Public Health Scotland. Public Health Scotland provided an update on the impact assessment of the Flu and COVID vaccination programme and NHS 24 recruited volunteers to assess the Redesign of Urgent Care. There was a request for good, clear briefings summarising
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and integrating the evidence and position on socio-economic impact and integrating with Equality Impact Assessments to package and use with senior teams, and as evidence for impact assessment.

A new work plan for the Fairer Scotland Duty has been drafted and discussions on this are currently taking place with Scottish Government colleagues.

Climate Change

The Improvement Service has recently appointed a Project Manager to lead on climate change and explore how to embed this agenda within our operations and the services we provide. The new role is working across the IS and the Local Government community to identify gaps in training and opportunities for improvement. This includes working with the Sustainable Scotland Network to develop the newly reformed Local Authority Forum and supporting the Scottish Cities Alliance to establish a new Peer to Peer Network for climate change and sustainability officers, launching in April.

Early Learning and Childcare Expansion

Discussions are taking place with Scottish Government colleagues regarding future funding for the Early Learning and Childcare programme to ensure the IS team are in place to support the revised statutory duty delivery date.

16 Days of Activism against Violence Against Women (VAW)

The Violence Against Women (VAW) team led on and contributed to a wide range of events during 16 Days of Activism including: (i) hosting an event to bring together VAW and Adult Support & Protection Leads to identify shared opportunities to improve outcomes for women with learning disabilities who experience domestic abuse; (ii) hosting a roundtable for Elected Members highlighting the needs of women engaged in prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation; (iii) supporting a deep dive for VAW professionals exploring opportunities to embed a trauma-informed approach to their work; (iv) hosting an event for Elected Members to explore the gendered nature of abuse and the experiences and needs of men as victims, perpetrators and allies and (v) hosting an online conference exploring the collective leadership needed to ensuring tackling VAW is embedded across different policy agendas. All events were really well received, with many including inputs from Scottish Government ministers, the COSLA President, VAW leads and other key stakeholders. Learning Reports will be published in early 2021.

National Trauma Training Programme

The IS involvement in supporting the National Trauma Training Programme to be embedded locally is gaining a lot of positive engagement. In addition to the programme of trauma deep dives, we have been leading on developing a programme of support for the Trauma champions that have been nominated from Councils and other community planning organisations across Scotland. An interactive [welcome pack for Trauma Champions](#) which includes links to videos, briefings and other support resources has been published on the IS website. We are also providing inputs to a wide range of groups including providing an update to the COVID-19 Children and Families Leadership Group, COSLA's Children & Young People Board and we presented to over 1,000 delegates at a recent National Trauma Training event.

PSIF

Work continues with various Councils on corporate self-assessments and reviewing how the IS can support Councils following their Best Value Assurance Report.

Police Scotland and Local Government Leadership Programme

We are working with colleagues in Police Scotland and Collective Leadership for Scotland (Scottish Government) to develop a leadership programme for Local Government and Police Scotland. As well as providing personal development for participants, the programme aims to enhance local partnership working. Three pilot sites have been agreed – Aberdeenshire Council, West Dunbartonshire Council & West Lothian Council.

Digital Public Services

Myaccount

29 organisations are now using myaccount (27 Local Authorities, NHS and Young Scot), 2 more are onboarding and a further 4 are waiting to onboard. Myaccount continues to see growth in both subscribers and usage (rising to 1,192,000 at 31 December 2020, a 29% year-on-year increase) as more councils roll out digital services for their citizens. Both parentsportal.scot and getyournec.scot are continuing to contribute towards the increase in myaccount's adoption and usage.

Getyournec.scot

Having launched getyournec.scot as a new channel enabling people to apply for a National Entitlement Card online for the first time, by 31 December 2020 we had onboarded almost half (15) of Scotland's 32 Councils in less than 6 months from its launch date. We are now finalising plans to launch getyournec.scot's remaining two of 6 development phases, aimed at enabling people to request a card renewal or a replacement.

Parentsportal.scot

[Parentsportal.scot](https://parentsportal.scot) is live in 8 councils, with a further 5 onboarding. The service is now available in almost 25% of Scotland's local authority-run primary and secondary schools. A further 9 Councils have noted interest with a view of moving towards onboarding. Discussions are also ongoing with a further 8 Councils expressing interest.

Bisaccount.scot

We developed a uniform, secure digital service for all Councils based on bisaccount.scot, enabling over 2,000 childcare providers across Scotland in the private, voluntary and not-for profit sectors apply for vital government financial grants, helping them meet the extra costs incurred in complying with [public health guidance](https://publichealth.scot.nhs.uk/public-health-guidance) in response to Covid-19.

Data and Intelligence

Data

Several short, thought-piece videos on '[The Importance of \(good\) Data](#)' to Local Government have been produced. The Data and Intelligence team continue to build relationships with various organisations across the health and social care sector to help influence improvements to the sector's collation and use of data, especially in relation to assisting with the continued Covid-19 response.

Digital Planning

The Improvement Service and the Scottish Government Key Agencies Group supported the Scottish Government's Digital Planning Strategy (released in November 2020) with a detailed Pathfinder project reviewing the data that will underpin digital planning. This work focussed upon planning data and associated standards and governance. The output is reflected in the [Digital Planning Strategy Mission 1 – Unlocking the value of planning data](#), which will be a focus of the forthcoming 24 months. Local development plans and the associated evidence base will be the first priority for further work, also considering land supplies and planning applications datasets.

TellMeScotland

TellMeScotland experienced a notable downturn of notifications during the 2020 lockdown, due to a lack of activity requiring licensing or other permissions, but has been used by some authorities to share planning notifications in lieu of physical site notices. We recently reviewed the service and concluded that a future focus should be on planning-related notifications and that it has considerable flexibility to support such wider utilisation.

Local Government Covid-19 Dashboard

We continue to produce a weekly Local Government Covid-19 Dashboard tracking key indicators to allow councils to monitor their response to the pandemic, and the impact on communities. The dashboard improves co-ordination of existing data reporting, bolsters data quality, and provides rich additional insight through time-series and family group comparative analysis. We continue to evolve the set of indicators to reflect the changing circumstances facing LG and communities.

We are continuing to work with the Local Government Digital Office (LGDO) and COSLA to progress plans for the development of a Local Government Data Platform. This aims to simplify data collection, improve quality assurance, and provide richer insight from data currently collected from councils. While the immediate focus for this development is in response to the multiple Covid-19 related returns, we hope this approach will offer longer term benefits in relation to the rationalisation of future data returns, including LGBF data. COSLA, IS and LGDO are working together to produce a business case to take this forward.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

We are currently working with LGBF Board members to agree priorities for the new LGBF Strategic Plan. With 10 years of time-series data, the LGBF will play an important role in revealing the impact of the pandemic on core Local Government services and in helping to understand how Local Government responds. The new strategic plan will provide an opportunity to evolve the LGBF for the post Covid-19 world, by building on improvements achieved in data and intelligence during this period, and ensure the LGBF provides relevant intelligence for decision making around recovery and renewal.

Community Planning & Community Planning Improvement Board (CPIB)

We produced a summary of learning on the role Community Planning is playing in responding to Covid-19 and in contributing to recovery efforts in local areas. We are supporting the CPIB to build on and promote evidence of the hugely positive role Community Planning has played, and continue to champion this agenda across the period ahead to ensure the gains achieved during this period are not lost post-Covid.

Research

The Instrumental Music Survey [report](#) was published in December. The report shows that Covid-19 has had a disruptive effect on these services, with lessons regularly delivered remotely and fees in many cases waived or suspended. The data also showed that the number of pupils participating in Instrumental Music Services is at the lowest level since the survey began in 2012/13. The results of the report have been widely reported within the press with focus on the decline in pupil numbers.

We have continued to update our [dashboard showing the economic impact of Covid-19](#) on local authority areas with the most recent data. The dashboard summarises available data on the current uptake of government support including those furloughed through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, unemployment benefit claims, Business Support Grant Fund claims, and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. The dashboard will be refreshed with new data reflecting the changing circumstances, particularly in light of extensions to several support schemes, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, as we enter a new lockdown.

The [Common Advice Performance Management Reporting Framework](#) report has been prepared and will be published in the coming months. The report covers the period from April 2019 to March 2020 prior to the first lockdown and demonstrates the major impact that local authority advice services had even before the economic downturn as a result of the pandemic. The data shows growing use of these services with over 300,000 people making contact with advice services, and a large majority of these from low income and other vulnerable groups. In total £378 million of verified financial gain was secured for these clients, a return of over £13 for every £1 spent by local authorities. Given the economic challenge posed by the pandemic it is likely that the returns for 2020-21 will show even greater levels of demand for advice.

Further information

If you have any questions on this information update or would like further information, please contact Sarah Gadsden, Chief Executive at sarah.gadsden@improvementservice.org.uk or 07901 513186. We hope you find the update helpful and would welcome your feedback.