



**IMPROVEMENT SERVICE
STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK
2015 - 2020**



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Introduction

The Improvement Service is the national improvement organisation for local government and community planning in Scotland. Working with councils, we have played an integral and active role in helping set the development agenda across the last five years, and supporting development and improvement across Scotland.

The document sets our forward strategic framework and development priorities for the next five years. It gives our reading of the challenges local government and local services will face across the period; the key developments necessary to deal with them effectively; and maps out the support that the Improvement Service and other improvement partners want to provide in that context. The strategic framework is not a Business Plan, but it provides the basis on which our annual Business Plan, Programme Plans and Resource Plans will be developed.

The Improvement Service is a small, agile and responsive organisation with a core annual budget of £1.65 million. We will continue to use our core budget to mobilise external resources to ensure the widest range of resources are available to support local improvement. Across the last five years, we have brought in over £20 million to support local improvement and we will seek to repeat that across the next five years.



Our Vision is to be:

An agile organisation that supports and mobilises resources for our partners to deliver excellent services, improve outcomes and reduce inequalities.



Our priorities are to:

Support a step change in efficiency and productivity

Support the delivery of improved outcomes – with a focus on prevention, early intervention and tackling inequality

Support future resilience and sustainability



We will do this through:

Continuously improving our products and services

Driving collaboration

Brokering and mobilising resources

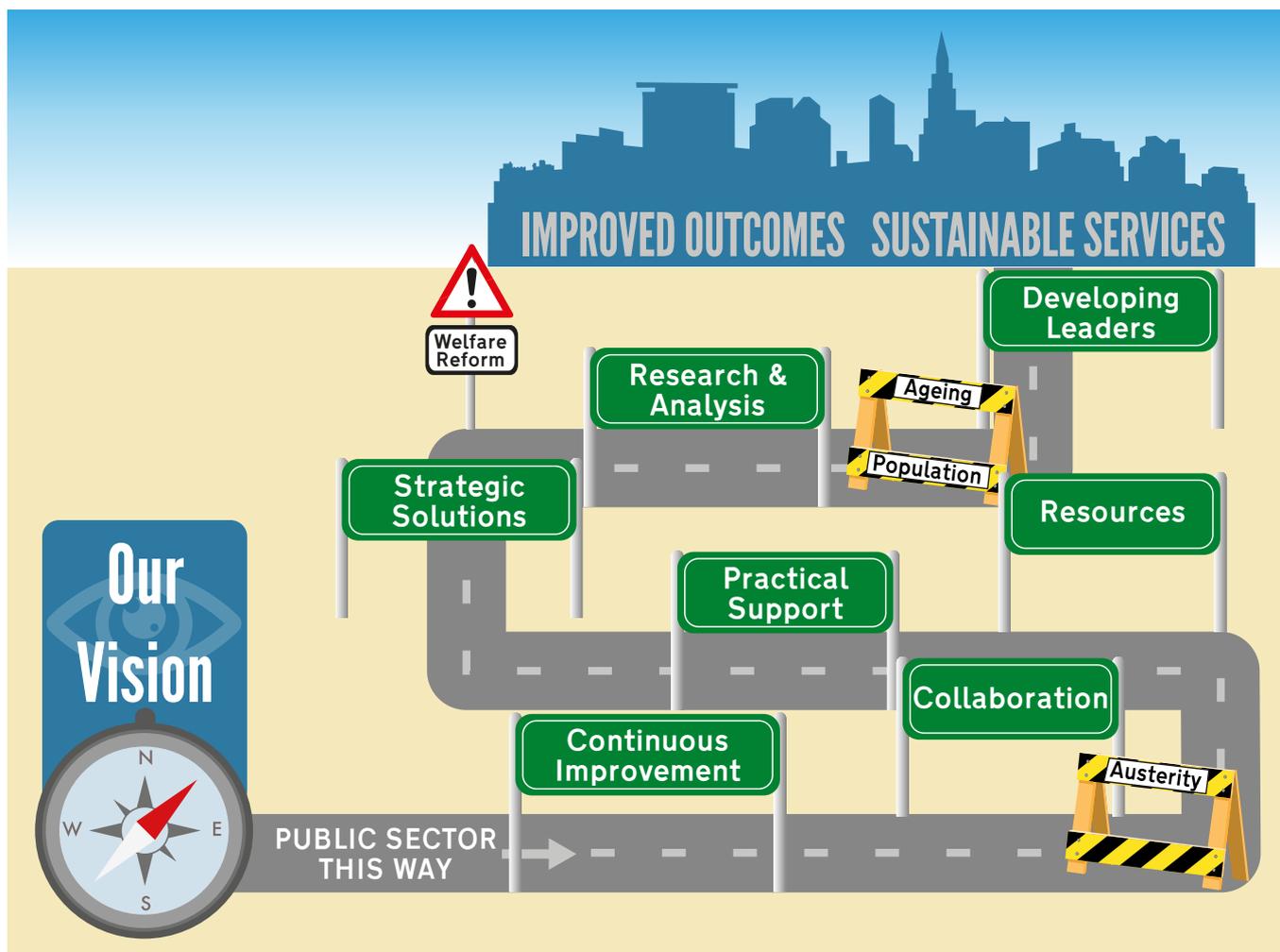
Providing practical support

Supporting the development of sustainable strategic options

Improving research and analytical support

Supporting the development of next generation political and executive leaders

Our Journey



1. Context for the Vision and Framework

Scotland's public services have faced formidable challenges across the last five years, many driven by factors outwith our direct control. The response has been positive and councils, with their partners, have:

- made significant budget cuts while maintaining services and, in many cases, increasing use of services
- built consensus around the wider reform agenda with a widely accepted focus on prevention, communities and inequality
- shaped key changes in community planning and deepened partnerships with other local services and the third sector

This is encouraging but we continue to face increasing challenges. Factors such as demographic change, including the ageing population, and the ongoing impact of further roll-out of welfare reform, will continue to drive demand across the range of local public services. Across the next four years, budgets are likely to reduce by at least a further 10% in cash terms (18% in real terms) as demand on major services will continue to rise. As schools and social care are likely to be relatively protected, other services will face higher levels of budget reduction and this will raise issues about capacity, resilience and quality in often small scale services.

The pace of technology innovation and adoption is likely to increase in wider society and within our own organisations. The next five years will be more transformational than the last 50 years in terms of technology in health and social care, education, planning, waste management, transport and corporate services such as HR. Alongside this, public expectations of our digital offer are likely to be shaped by experience of the best of the private sector in terms of convenience, responsiveness and personalisation. But it's not about technology alone. New organisational models, and cultures, will be necessary to enable staff to connect with users and communities in a much more direct, flexible, and cost-effective way. This is both a challenge and an opportunity, given the wider finance and demand pressures we face.

All of the above reinforces the need for a change in mind-set. We are on a move from seeing citizens as simply recipients of services to being empowered co-producers and as an integral part of the democratic process, not just voters. Local democracy is founded on the simple premise that it is right for decisions about making communities stronger and fairer to involve those that are most affected by them. The rights of individuals and communities in local democracy are being advanced through democratic innovations such as deliberative assemblies, participatory budgeting and citizen scrutiny of public services. The challenge is how to make this the norm and to go beyond: for example, from participatory budgeting that focuses on a consultation on predetermined options for budget cuts, to approaches that focus

on wider choices over local tax and spending priorities. Again, new technology can help make this happen, but only if the culture and leadership are right.

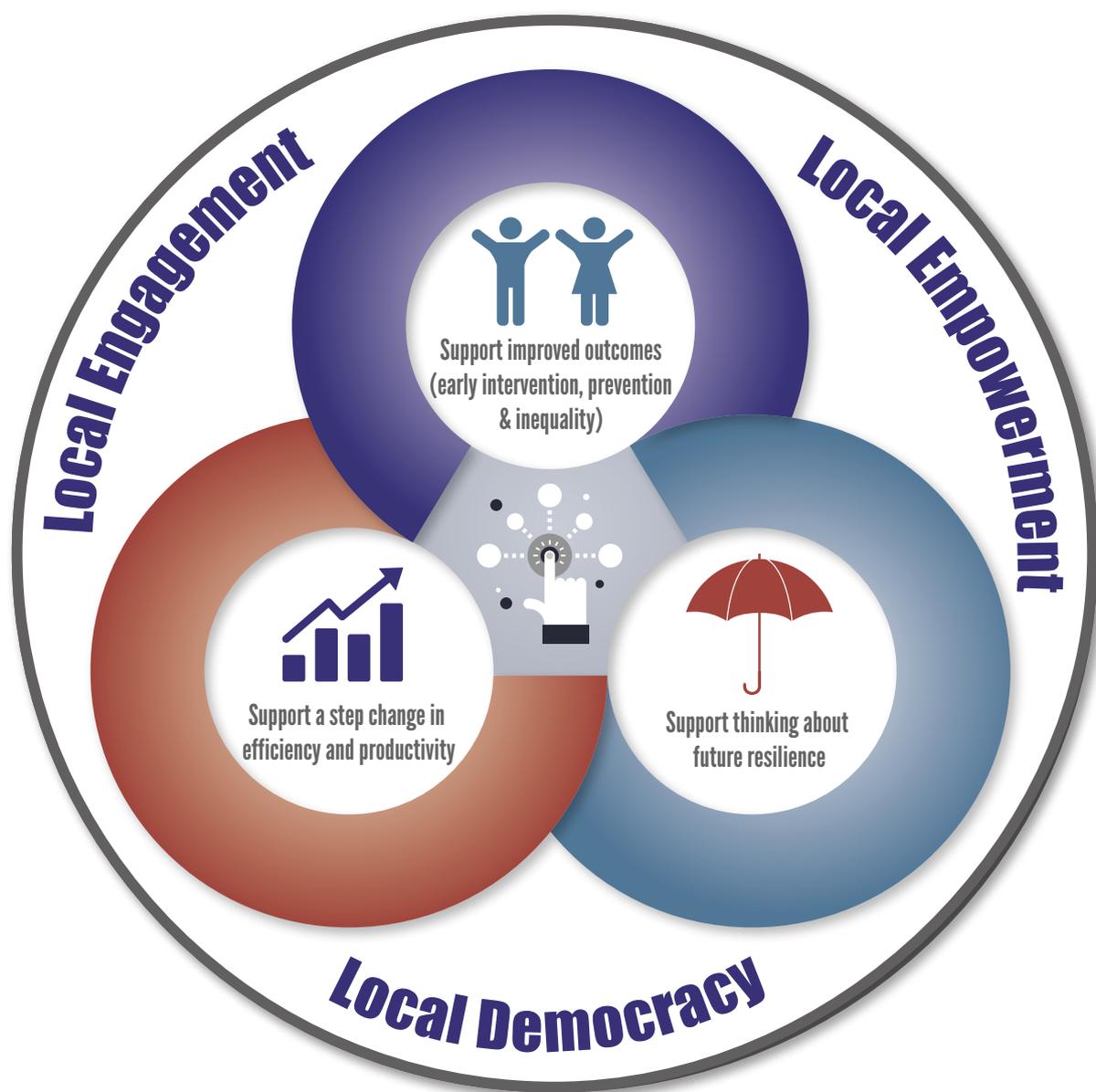
The Improvement Service has played an active role across the last five years and our ambition is to see the agreed reform and innovation agenda embedded and delivered. We will continue to contribute to shaping policy about what needs to be delivered but our priority will be to support delivery. This means better and more focused Knowledge Management to capture and share best practices, interventions, and solutions that work but it also means more practical support for Councils and Partnerships to adopt and implement new practices.

We also need to pay more attention to supporting governance and performance management that drives efficiency, productivity, and accountability in service delivery. We need to make sure that the very best tools for review, evaluation and self-assessment are available to Councils and partnerships, and that they are supported to use them.

Critically, this must and will include improved development support for elected members whose governance role should be at the heart of local accountability and local improvement across Scotland. Supporting community participation in decision-making and performance assessment is also central to this with focus on ensuring that “representative” and “participative” democratic approaches are better linked.

Finally, the need for an integrated cross-sector approach at a local level means that the Improvement Service should also work with our national partners to ensure that all national improvement capacity is harnessed to support local change and innovation, driven by local needs.

2. Our Priorities



Our priorities for targeting support for councils and their partners across the next five years are outlined below. Whilst described separately, they are clearly linked and interdependent.

Support a step change in productivity and efficiency

Develop support for achieving 18%+ efficiency and productivity gains across the next 5 years whilst, as much as possible, minimising harm to 'outcomes'. As major efficiency savings have already been made across the last five years, this means a step change, not simply more of the same. This will require the adoption of new delivery models, new ways of working and the sharing of capacity and resources.

Support the delivery of improved outcomes

Provide practical support for a focus on prevention, early intervention and tackling inequality. The current reform agenda in Scotland puts “prevention” at the heart of forward development. However there is still a challenge in setting clear targets and lack of evidence both about what actually “works” and how long interventions would take to work. We will work to ensure that national capacity and expertise is available and accessible to support local development.

Support thinking about future resilience and sustainability

We will support the identification and development of new ways of working that help councils and their partners invest over the long term to achieve better outcomes more cost effectively. A priority will be to explore how short term pressures can be managed in ways that do not undermine or negate longer term resilience and impact.

These priorities are clearly interrelated but they are also dependent on the priority we attach to strengthening the role of local democracy and exploiting digital potential to the full. We know that what works and how it would work will vary across Scotland therefore local engagement and empowerment will have to be consciously prioritised so that decisions about making communities better and fairer involve those that are most affected by them. This is essential to support the development of the right local solutions, and allow them to evolve. Equally prevention, wider reform, efficiency and productivity cannot be delivered without the full exploitation of the potential of digital.

3. What We Will Do

We have explained our view of the context and challenges and set out our priorities. This section explains more fully what we will focus on across the next five year period. Our commitments, as described below, will be more explicitly defined each year in the form of our annual business plans.



We will continually improve our products and services

Continuous improvement is intrinsic to our business. Our range of products and services are useful and making a difference today. However we must ensure our offers complement those

of other partners, continue to be effective and add value. We will listen to stakeholders and respond, recognising that what works best in practice will evolve over time and in response to ever increasing challenges.

We will drive collaborative working

Integrated local services means collaborative working should be the norm at a local level. We will continue to support local and national partnerships and shared capacity programmes. We will maintain current and forge new collaborations with a focus on organising resources and governance around outcomes and benefits that advance local priorities.

We will work collaboratively with national improvement partners. We will actively explore opportunities for joint working including joint programmes and common account management that ensures the widest range of improvement resources are locally accessible on an integrated basis.

What works, and how it would work, will vary across Scotland. We will work towards ensuring that national improvement support and resources are driven by local requirements, and that the national effort supports local development. We will also explore options for joint governance across programmes and resources to enable proper oversight and accountability for joint working.

We will broker and mobilise resources

We have a good track record of brokering additional resources in support of collaborative working and improving outcomes. We will set annual targets as part of our business planning process and look to diversify and extend the current funding base with match funding agreements and wider funding generation models.

We will provide practical support

We will continue to provide practical support for councils and partnerships to adopt and implement new practices using the full range of our capacities such as our self-assessment tools, Knowledge Hub and online learning and development platform.

We will support the delivery of new models, new ways of working and the sharing of capacity and resources. Our work on business analysis, digital and online services, flexible and mobile working, organisational development and elected member development will focus on this.

We will work to enable faster learning so that councils and their partnerships can select and implement the right approach at the right time, and get the support they need when they need it. We will focus on better and more targeted Knowledge Management to capture and share best practices, interventions and solutions that work, for example, how to effectively use digital and online services to reduce transactional costs and maximise the release of resources.

We will work with councils to ensure their substantial economic, regulatory and procurement power is used to drive prevention. The focal programme will be the Economic Outcomes programme. Our related work through PSIF, benchmarking, community profiling, research, digital services, business analysis and OD will also have a focus on identifying, scoping and supporting initiatives to exploit existing capacity for preventative purposes.

We will support the development of sustainable strategic options

We will undertake a focused “Futures” exercise that develops credible scenarios for the next 20 years and the challenges and opportunities such scenarios present. This will allow us to ensure that the infrastructures that support communities and the built environment are inclusive, sustainable and cost effective as the population and its needs change over time.

We will develop our understanding of new funding, financing, technological, organisational employment and service delivery models that will improve future resilience. A priority will be to use this to inform how short term pressures can be managed in ways that do not undermine or negate longer term resilience and impact.

We will focus what we learn on the development of strategic options that deliver change and innovation, are shared with other partners and include effective funding and integrated change implementation support, for example, alternative routes to securing investment in prevention with returns over longer timescales.

We will improve research and analytical support

We will support improved research and analytical support to enable better decision making. Our work will focus on improving the evidence base for understanding the pattern of needs in local areas across Scotland, and the factors shaping outcomes and inequalities of outcome.

We will refine and develop tools to make available data more accessible and useful to local decision makers ‘on the ground’. A further focus will be to refine and improve performance data to provide the most meaningful measures of cost, output and outcome to drive better decision making and improvement.

We will support the development of next generation political and executive leaders

We will work to provide high quality development and support programmes to improve the capabilities of next generation political and executive leaders. We will ensure support focuses on the capabilities required for strong and accountable local leaders, equipped with the skills to lead sustainable change such as adopting new and resilient models, integrating community participation into decision making and working together to prioritise and resource delivery of shared outcomes for communities.

4. How We Will Measure Success

We will refresh our performance management framework to ensure a broader evidenced based approach which is both balanced and responsive, adequately reflects our strategic priorities and informs the IS Board and partners of how well we are doing.

We will use data from regular stakeholder survey to assess and report the extent to which councils and partnerships perceive our support has been valuable.

We will draw upon our account management processes and systems to improve our communication and relationships with our stakeholders moving forward and to capture feedback on the value we have added.

We will use evidence from the work of Audit Scotland and other best value reports to inform on the wider impacts of our work.

We will create a programme of evaluation combined with internal best value reviews to assess and report on the “value added” that our support brings.

We will report on operational progress, activity and measures across all Improvement Service projects and programmes.

We will report on a small number of key corporate performance indicators.



5. What This Means for the Improvement Service

Our Board

Highly skilled and experienced representation from our partner organisations COSLA and SOLACE make up the Improvement Service Board. Board members are therefore well placed to ensure that our work is strategically aligned with our partners' needs and priorities. They also play a key role in ensuring that our resources are effectively deployed against priorities and that we continue to operate as a responsive, relevant and resilient business.

Our Organisation

As an organisation, we will concentrate on building our capabilities to deliver effectively on our priorities. We will continuously work hard to ensure we remain responsive and lean and that we maximise resources behind our range of products and services. The review process and stakeholder engagement exercise has helped us recognise that we need to refocus our internal efforts in the following areas:

- A greater targeting of knowledge management capability and capacity
- Strengthening research and analysis to improve the evidence base
- Increased ability to be reactive/market driven and work even more closely with customers
- More flexible/agile programme and project management resourcing
- Greater capacity to mobilise and provide OD advice and support
- Identifying and mobilising subject matter expertise – e.g. alternative investment and income generation

Our People

We aim to recruit and retain the right people with the right skills who are empowered, kept motivated and challenged and provided with the opportunity to develop and grow. This approach is supported by a workforce development and resourcing plan that will evolve to meet the challenges we face over the coming years.

In today's digital environment the Improvement Service aspires to exploit ICT to deliver real business value while reducing operating costs. We aim to provide the right tools and the right work environment to get the very best from our people. We have developed a range of flexible and mobile working practices and delivered a definitive shift towards the paperless office. We will continue to build on this approach over the coming years.

Our Resources

We manage our finances and resources well and will continue to align our resources behind our priorities, managing staff time and expertise flexibly across programmes. However over the next five year period we estimate, on an annual basis, around 30% of our work will be in direct response to support requests from councils.

The Improvement Service core grant is anticipated to decline in cash and real terms across the next five years. The core grant accounts for around 25% of our annual revenue and is partly used to lever further funding and resources for programme and service developments. This approach will continue and income targets will be set on annual basis. However, we will also establish ways to further diversify our funding base and explore additional income generation opportunities in support of our priorities.

We will always seek to augment our own resources with our partnership arrangements and with other public sector improvement services.

Our Relationships

We will engage and work with councils and partners to ensure that we continue to understand their needs and to ensure that our products and services are improving continuously and that we develop new partnerships to meet evolving needs.

We have established a more systematic approach to account management which will be fully implemented across the next period. This will help us respond more effectively to feedback and help strengthen relationships with councils, partners and key stakeholders.

Our Partnerships

We cannot and should not do it alone. We will recognise who is doing what already and be clear about their and our added value and contribution to improvement and development.

Our Business Plans

Our strategic priorities and framework will inform our annual business plans and drive our self-assessment and improvement planning across the next five years.



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