

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 December 2021 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Finance Update

The Board noted that we have secured £5,051,716 funding from outwith the Local Government sector to date, exceeding our target of securing £2.5M for 2021/22.

HR Update

The Board noted the continued low absence rates and approved a new Subject Access Request (SAR) Policy and Procedure.

Review of the Finance Function

The Board noted that our external auditors reported that much of the finance function was falling to our company accountant and that reliance on a small number of staff in the finance team could cause problems with matters such as approval and oversight. It was also noted that the IS finance function has not evolved in line with the growth of turnover and increased complexity of IS funding streams. Board Members agreed it was critical therefore to get a finance team in place to protect the organisation. The Board agreed to permanently appoint a Head of Finance and Governance, change the Company Accountant role to a Management Accountant and to appoint a Trainee Accountant.

Digital Office for Scottish Local Government

The Board noted that a TUPE transfer date has been set for the 31st March 2022. The TUPE process has now commenced with COSLA and regular meetings are taking place between IS and COSLA colleagues to ensure a smooth transition.

Partnership Agreement Between Public Health Scotland, COSLA and the IS

The Board approved the Partnership Agreement between the IS, COSLA and Public Health Scotland and agreed that the three organisations jointly review progress of the delivery of the Partnership Agreement at the end of the first 18 months of its operation. The Board noted that the Partnership Agreement has been signed off by the Chief Executive of Public Health Scotland and is subject to approval by COSLA through its governance processes.

Local Government Data Platform

The Board considered a strategic case for the development of a Local Government Data Platform and agreed that the IS would fund phase 1 of the work, at an estimated cost of £60K. It was noted that this will take approximately 3 to 6 months with the work commencing in January 2022. Regular meetings are taking place between IS and Digital Office colleagues regarding this work.

The Board was supportive of the LGBF Board presenting the revised strategic case to Solace and COSLA Leaders in early 2022. The Board also agreed that the IS will formalise governance arrangements to take this work forward and develop a Terms of Reference for the governance group.

No One Left Behind - Employability Support Transformation Programme

Board Members noted the move to increased local governance arrangements for employability services in supporting a place-based approach to economic recovery and social renewal, and noted the significant contribution from the IS in supporting Local Authority Employability leads, enabling national coherence and local flexibilities.

The Board agreed that additional IS Employability programme funding is required to effectively support the partnership and the ongoing implementation of No One Left Behind, recognising the additional focus on child poverty and approved the submission to Scottish Government for continuous Programme funding on a multi-year basis. The Board also approved the additional financial contributions proposed by Local Employability Partnerships, following a request from SLAED for additional support. This funding would support national and bespoke elements of the programme such as commissioning, communications, data and knowledge management and the Board agreed that a report should be submitted to SOLACE.

Support for Scottish Community Councils

The Board's approval was sought to explore funding opportunities to expand the existing IS community council service by providing new and enhanced support for Scotland's circa 1,200 community councils as well as existing and new area based forums/federations.

Board Members highlighted the fragility of Community Councils and advised that drawing them into a bigger forum may be challenging as they may not have the capacity to take on further work. The lack of diversity on Community Councils was discussed and it was agreed that this will be taken into consideration as part of the work of the IS.

The Board agreed that the IS should explore opportunities to fund and support the development of local community council partnerships and the introduction of new and expanded services.

Board Development Day

Following a Board Development Day on the 30th November, the Board discussed and approved its Improvement Plan and agreed that a provision is made in the Articles for an extended term of office for the IS Chair, recognising that the President of COSLA can serve up to two terms in office. The Board also agreed that a Vice-Chair should be appointed from within the SOLACE members on the IS Board and this will be discussed further by the SOLACE office bearers.

Retirement

Iain McKay, Head of Data & Intelligence, will be retiring on the 5th April 2022. Iain has made a considerable contribution to the work of the IS over many years and, in particular, played a significant role in setting up and leading the Spatial Information Service before heading up and taking forward the work of the Data and Intelligence Team over the last couple of years.

Martin Brown, Head of Digital Public Services, will be retiring on the 31st March 2022. Martin has been an integral part of the Digital Public Service Team and the IS over many years now and has made a significant contribution to the development and delivery of our digital public services and our engagement with councils and partners.

Work will commence with our Remuneration, Appointments and Appeals Committee (Cllr Alison Evison, Lorraine McMillan and Victoria Rogers, West Dunbartonshire Council) to sign off the job descriptions and job adverts, and agree and commence the recruitment process.

Upcoming Events

- [Benefit Take-up strategy: how it started and how it's going](#)
10 February, 12pm-1pm, online
Hear from the Scottish Government about what the revised Benefit Take-up Strategy means for Scotland and those that provide money guidance.
- [Live Well Locally - The COSLA and Improvement Service Annual Conference 2022](#)
24 February 9.45am-5pm, online
Scottish Local Government is at the heart of ensuring everyone in our communities can “live well locally”.

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Economic Development/SLAED

The Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development (SLAED) Group held its AGM on Tuesday, 25th January 2022, via MS Teams. Gary Gillespie, the Scottish Government's Chief Economic Adviser, provided a keynote speech focused on the publication of the government's new National Strategy for Economic Transformation. This is an ambitious 10 year National Strategy to drive Scotland's economic transformation as the country recovers from the Coronavirus pandemic and transitions to a net zero economy. The strategy will prioritise investment in the industries of the future and deliver new, good and green jobs. Gary Gillespie's presentation will be followed by a Q&A session. There will then be a discussion and agreement of SLAED business for the year ahead.

Child Poverty

The annual one to one interviews with local leads has begun, with good examples of practice emerging. National Partners held a deep dive into child poverty and housing at its December

meeting. The National Child Poverty Co-ordinators developed an introductory paper to support the discussion which will now be further developed into a resource for local areas.

Work with Public Health Scotland is ongoing with areas of shared interest identified and some potential future work in train.

Fairer Scotland Duty (FSD)

We have published some training resources regarding the Fairer Scotland Duty on our You Tube channel [playlist](#).

We have also published A Fairer Scotland Duty [blog article](#).

Climate Change

IS colleagues supported the Sustainable Scotland Network conference held on the 8th December and the Scottish Cities Alliance peer to peer network event on governance held on the 16th December.

We continue to offer Carbon Literacy training for Elected Members via the Scottish Cities Alliance work. This will be extended to senior leadership in 2022 and then for Elected Members post-election.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Expansion

Since legislation came into effect in August 2021 to implement the 1140 hours childcare expansion, around 90,000 eligible children across Scotland are now benefitting from 1140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare.

Following the successful delivery of the expansion, the IS Early Learning and Childcare programme continues to work with stakeholders from Local and Scottish Government to realise the benefits of the expansion and support the ongoing sustainability of the sector. This includes service model redesign, assessing and improving flexibility, measuring and improving the uptake amongst eligible 2-year-olds, offering support & advise on workforce planning strategies and by supporting local authorities to understand how best to engage with the communities and families that they serve, improve engagement with parents and helping to articulate the stories and successes achieved by their ELC services.

In December 2021, the IS Early Learning and Expansion programme was shortlisted for The Project and Programme Management award at the Scottish Public Service Awards, an award that recognises good practice in project, programme and portfolio management. This was recognition for the continued commitment to supporting local authorities across Scotland to implement the statutory entitlement.

Protecting People

Trauma Quality Indicator Framework

Over 2020-21, we consulted a range of stakeholders across Scotland about the barriers and enablers to implementing a trauma-informed approach in their service/organisation/local area and multi-agency systems. These included practitioners, service managers, senior leaders, elected members and nominated Trauma Champions. We also asked about the kinds of support they need to embed trauma-informed practice and policy in a robust, consistent and meaningful way.

This [consultation document](#) sets out a proposal for developing a Quality Indicator Framework for Trauma-Informed Services, Systems and Workforces to support the next phase of implementation across Scotland and to respond to stakeholders' asks. The paper has been co-developed by the IS, NHS Education for Scotland, COSLA and the Scottish Government. The Framework will be developed over 2022 in collaboration with local and national stakeholders, including local authority colleagues and experts by experience and profession.

Learning report: Understanding the Mental Health Needs of Women and Girls experiencing Gender-Based Violence

From August-November 2021, The IS Protecting People team were commissioned by Scottish Government to coordinate a research project on understanding the mental health and wellbeing needs of women and girls who have experienced all forms of gender-based violence. The research brought together learning from engagement with survivors of gender-based violence, and local and national professionals working in relevant organisations/services, to provide tangible recommended actions for the Scottish Government and other key stakeholders. Full details of this [project and the learning report](#) are now available.

New project: Authentic Voice: Embedding lived experience in Scotland

The Protecting People team are undertaking a new project with partner organisations SafeLives and Resilience Learning Partnership to support survivors of gender-based violence to use their experience to shape pathways of support. The project Authentic Voice: Embedding Lived Experience will aim to help ensure that local authorities and other community planning organisations have the knowledge, confidence, and tools they need to embed survivor voice into local system and service design processes in a robust and meaningful way. More information about this work will be available soon on the IS website.

PSIF

Work continues with various Councils on corporate self-assessments and supporting Councils pre and post their Best Value Assurance Report.

Organisational Development Local Authority Network

Our Organisational Development Network members met virtually towards the end of last year where they heard from colleagues from East Ayrshire and Fife councils about their coaching approaches. We also hosted a webinar where South Ayrshire Council shared the findings of their recent survey about the OD function in Scottish councils. Details of future sessions can be found on the IS website.

Elected Member Development

Political Mentoring Development Programme

We arranged three new cohorts of the Political Mentoring Development Programme which develops current members to become effective mentors to candidates or newly elected members. We have also developed a new offer for political groups which will help them to put in place effective mentoring arrangements in place for new members following the Local Government elections in May.

Preparing for Elected Member Induction

All five national elected member induction notebooks have been consulted on with councils and are being finalised in January. Officers from all councils leading on preparations for induction have

been invited to the third and final national networking event in January which will allow them to share ideas and plans for induction in May.

Candidates support

We published guidance with COSLA for Independent candidates for the elections. The guidance is available on our candidates website www.localcouncillor.scot

Community Councils

We received a £10K grant from the Scottish Government to investigate the administration and technical needs of rural Scottish Community Councils. The team held a meeting with the National Association of Local Councils to explore the potential for joint research and collaboration.

Digital Public Services

Myaccount

38 organisations are now using the myaccount service - 32 Local Authorities plus NHS, Social Security Scotland, Young Scot and others. Discussions are ongoing with NHS Boards about further expanding use for other health services. myaccount subscribers surpassed 1.52 million by January 2022. During 2021 myaccount facilitated over 9.5million authentication requests, which was a direct result of more Councils responding to strong demand from customers for digital service delivery since the outbreak of COVID-19. Other services such as parentsportal.scot and GETYOURNEC.SCOT are continuing to fuel the increase in myaccount's adoption and usage.

GETYOURNEC.SCOT

Having launched GETYOURNEC.SCOT in 2020 as a new channel enabling people to apply online for a National Entitlement Card for the first time, 32 Councils had adopted the service by December 2021 ahead of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel scheme being launched. Over 64,000 online applications have been received through GETYOURNEC.SCOT by January 2022, proving its popularity with eligible citizens while taking cost and demand associated with traditional channels out of the system.

Parentsportal.scot

Parentsportal.scot is now available in 10 councils, with a further eight in the pipeline and discussions ongoing with other Councils expressing an interest. The service is now available to parents and guardians of children at over 800 of Scotland's local authority-run primary and secondary schools. New services have been developed within Parentsportal.scot to enable parents of primary school-age children to apply for a National Entitlement Card for young persons' free bus travel

Bisaccount.scot

We facilitated all of Scotland's childcare settings in the private and not-for-profit sector to obtain vital Scottish Government funding by providing a secure online application process through bisaccount.scot. It helped them meet the extra costs incurred in complying with public health guidance in response to Covid-19 and, in the process, it expanded bisaccount's adoption to all 32 Councils (for this purpose). Discussions are ongoing with Local Authorities and other public sector organisations to integrate with back office systems, to further facilitate business authentication for online services.

Data and Intelligence

Spatial Hub

We recently wrote to all local and national park authorities offering them the extended use of our Spatial Hub as an open data portal for their own local data, should they not have their own resources and capability for doing so. This means that there is now a free solution for Local Authorities to make any of the data they have provided previously (for [the current national datasets](#)) openly available and also that they can make any other data they wish (both spatial and/ or non-spatial) openly available. Authorities still need to have good governance and responsibility in place for maintaining this open data and we are encouraging metadata to be provided for them on the [national metadata portal](#).

Infralink

We are working closely via a Partnership Agreement with Scottish Futures Trust (SFT), the Scotland 5G Centre & Tay Cities Deal on a programme of work with the National Mobile Operators to identify suitable sites for the deployment of infrastructure to improve mobile digital connectivity. An Infralink “toolkit” has been developed with industry which includes:

- Standard set of documents - a set of documents that are a starting point for negotiations and take account of current legislation.
- Payment Guidance - consisting of a methodology and pricing table that builds on case law and recognises the impact of digital infrastructure as a tenant.
- Connectivity Marketplace – an online map-based shop window for Local Authorities interested in discussing connectivity in their area, allowing them to set out the assets and terms up-front and drive the discussions based on real data

The toolkit can be applied to Local Authority land, buildings and street assets as well as 4G, 5G and Internet of Thingstechnology, and takes account of the different needs of rural and urban areas.

More information is available from <https://infralink.scottishfuturestrust.org.uk/>

Planning Data Pathfinder

We have concluded a further Digital Planning Pathfinder, working with British Geological Survey, to investigate data standards and governance in the use of planning data, with a focus on development planning and environmental datasets as well as Health and Climate Change. This will support the delivery of Local Development Plans and the National Planning Framework, building on existing data platforms and stakeholder relationships as part of a future data ecosystem.

One Scotland Gazetteer

We have invested significant efforts to increase the usage and awareness, across the Scottish public sector, of the key identifiers which represent the street (USRN) and property (UPRN). Increasing the use of these IDs across systems, significantly helps interconnect Government data and intelligence, as well as enabling cross-organisation and departmental analysis.

This has been assisted by the mandating of these identifiers, which were recently ratified as a requirement for applicable systems by the Open Standards Board and the Scottish and UK Governments. This ensures the authoritative use of local authority street and address information across the Scottish public sector and prevents duplication of effort. It also means that new systems purchased by Councils are able to benefit from the definitive address and street information that they manage.

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 provides an invaluable picture of current system pressures facing local government, providing timely data in relation to staff absence levels; delayed discharges; Adult & Child Protection referrals; Homelessness and Arrears; and pupil attendance and absence, along with other elements. The dashboard also highlights where deprivation and rurality are playing a key role in emerging trends. We continue to evolve the set of indicators to reflect the changing circumstances facing Local Government and communities, removing those no longer meaningful, and identifying other available datasets which may add value, e.g. Social Care Unmet Need. The development of the Dashboard has supported efforts to automate and streamline data reporting and will provide a key building block in the development of the Local Government Data Platform.

We are continuing to work with the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government 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, including LGBF data. COSLA, IS and LGDO are working together to produce a strategic case to take this forward which we are aiming to share with COSLA Leaders and SOLACE in February. The IS has agreed to fund phase one of the project which aims to deliver improved governance and control of the lifecycle of Local Government returns, and will be completed later in 2022.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The LGBF will be published late February/early March 2021, slightly later than usual due to delays in this year's financial audit process. In time, the LGBF dataset will span pre-pandemic, pandemic-time, and post-pandemic periods. The continuity the LGBF provides will be critical to understanding the full impacts of Covid-19 on long-term trends. It will provide vital intelligence to assist the sector to learn lessons from its response and to strengthen and redesign services around future policy priorities to support recovery and renewal. It will also provide valuable evidence to support the work of the [Covid-19 Learning and Evaluation Group](#). This year's publication will present data which covers Year 1 of the pandemic, and will provide evidence on where we are seeing the impact of the pandemic on council services and local communities. It will also be important to reflect the data complexity issues arising from the altered operating and delivery landscape during this time, including different local conditions.

The LGBF strategic plan for 2021-2024 provides an opportunity to evolve the LGBF for the post Covid-19 world. We continue to work with professional associations to consider how we strengthen focus on key areas such as poverty and inequality, mental health and wellbeing, economic recovery, new ways of working and digital transformation. This year, new measures around Child Poverty and Youth Unemployment have been included in the upcoming iteration of the LGBF. We have also delivered a programme of events looking at the short and long-term impacts of the pandemic, providing opportunities for colleagues to share practice and learning in relation to Covid response and on future challenges, opportunities and new ways of working. Cross-cutting messages emerging from this activity were shared with SOLACE members in November. We continue to build momentum in the use of the LGBF to transform and improve council services, and recently shared a set of good practice principles which provide a clear picture of how the LGBF could be used locally to drive improvement. An offer of support is available to councils should they wish to

review their current use of the LGBF against these principles and explore how they might extract greater value from it in relation to strategic and budget planning, improvement, scrutiny and public performance reporting. We are working to build on improvements achieved in data and intelligence during this period, to ensure the LGBF provides relevant and timely intelligence for decision making around recovery and renewal priorities. We will prioritise key LGBF datasets to support progress in relation to streamlining and automating of data reporting processes, and development of the Local Government Data Portal.

Community Planning & Community Planning Improvement Board (CPIB)

We are continuing to support the [CPIB](#) to build on and promote evidence of the hugely positive role Community Planning has played in responding to Covid, and will continue to champion this agenda across the period ahead to ensure the gains achieved are not lost post-Covid. The CPIB has recently strengthened its membership reflecting a commitment at a senior level from all key Community Planning partners to work together to support recovery. The CPIB Strategic Plan aligns closely with the Covid Recovery strategy and will support partners to prioritise how Community Planning partners can work together to best effect to tackle recovery efforts. Evidence on the role Community Planning has played in responding to Covid-19 so far and CPIB briefings on the role of Community Planning in Recovery are available on the [CPIB website](#). The Chair of the CPIB recently met with the Deputy First Minister, Minister for Communities & COSLA President to share learning on how CPPs can and are already supporting Covid Recovery in their local areas, and also highlighting barriers which require national action as well as local. The CPIB Chair also shared a commitment to ensure the work being undertaken by the CPIB will continue to feed into the Covid Recovery Board to provide that essential connection to the work of local Community Planning partnerships.

Research

The [Instrumental Music Survey](#) was published for the 2020/21 academic year. The report shows how Covid-19 restrictions have impacted the service, with a large drop in pupil numbers and major disruption across the service. Despite this, local authorities have continued to deliver services to over 40,000 pupils in challenging circumstances, and have put a number of measures in place to ensure continuity where possible. This includes removing or reducing fees and moving lessons online. While local authorities reported some pupils leaving the service as a result of Covid, these services remain very popular have been crucial in supporting the wellbeing for many of those taking part.

This year is also the last that fees will apply for music services, as agreement between COSLA and the Scottish Government has been reached to remove these. Future years' surveys will explore what the long term impact of this is on pupil numbers. The results have been reported in several media outlets including TES and the Scotsman.

We have continued work to redevelop the National Customer Survey for Building Standards. A new questionnaire has now been prepared in consultation with the working group and a draft dashboard developed ahead of launch in April.

The Common Advice Performance Management Reporting Framework data has been collected and draft report prepared due for publication this coming quarter. The data shows the impact that advice services have both in terms of direct financial benefit, with £12 of financial gain for every £1 spent, as well as improving a wider set of outcomes, such as improved wellbeing for clients.

Evaluation

Evaluating the impact of partnerships can be challenging and it is an area in which limited information is available. Following engagement with Community Planning Partnership leads to find out the type of evaluation support that would be helpful, this was identified as one the key evaluation issues. In response, the IS and Public Health Scotland have arranged a series of information sessions. There are [three sessions](#) in total, covering evaluation planning, impact measurement and contribution analysis. Considerable interest has been shown and there were over 80 registrants for each session. Areas that participants have suggested in which further support would be helpful include examples of effective practice and guidance notes.

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.