

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 June 2022 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

New Board Members

Our new COSLA nominated Board Members as follows:

- Cllr Shona Morrison, Chair of IS Board (President of COSLA) (Moray Council)
- Cllr Ellen Forson (Clackmannanshire Council)
- Cllr Sandra Macdonald (Aberdeen City Council)
- Cllr Neil Benny (Stirling Council) has been reappointed, after originally joining the Board in 2017

Finance Update

The Board were advised that we have secured £5,968,927 funding from outwith the Local Government sector during 2021/22, exceeding our target of £2.5M.

New Finance System

The Board approved the procurement of the Sage Intact finance system. We are currently hosted on the West Lothian Council finance system but this is no longer suitable for the size of the organisation. We aim to have the new finance system in place by January 2023.

Future Operating Model

The majority of Board Members agreed that we should continue to adopt a flexible hybrid operating model with staff not expected to come into the office for a minimum number of days per week. Arrangements will be agreed between staff and managers, based on the exigencies of the service.

The Board also agreed that we should relocate from our current office in Quarrywood Court, Livingston to West Lothian Council's Civic Centre; that we enter into an initial two-year lease with West Lothian Council; and that the IS Chief Executive should review the new arrangements after 18 months and report back to the Board with any further changes that might need to be made to the IS operating model once the two-year lease expires.

The Board noted that relocating to the Civic Centre will save circa £105K per annum, reducing our 2023/24 projected deficit to £164K and ensuring our ongoing running costs are as low as possible.

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Elected Member Development

Upcoming events

Our online events for elected members kick-off in August and September. Details of these events and information on how to register for them are as follows:

Local Government Overview Report

Wednesday 3 August 2022, 14:00-16:00, MS Teams

Audit Scotland will provide an overview of the key findings and recommendations coming from the Local Government Overview 2022, which was published on the 25 May 2022. This will include a focus on the role of elected members in leading councils through the recovery and renewal phase of the pandemic, and will highlight a supplementary paper to the report that sets out questions for elected members to consider.

This 'checklist' was designed to support elected members in scrutinising and understanding how well their council is planning for recovery and renewal. The event will provide opportunities for Q&A as well as a chance to discuss key findings amongst other elected members in small groups.

[Register for Local Government Overview Report](#) and you will shortly receive an MS Teams invite to the event.

#FollowMe2 – Social Media for Elected Members

Tuesday 23 August, 2022, 14:00-15:00, MS Teams

Social media is now a fundamental part of being an elected member. Whether you are a new or returning member, this session, delivered by communications guru Dan Slee, will educate, inform and take the fear out of what is increasingly an essential communications channel.

This webinar will introduce the main social media channels, and help you learn how to listen, spot case work and tell people what you are doing. You'll also leave with some proven strategies to help you deal with comment, criticism and abuse.

[Register for #FollowMe2 - Social Media for Elected Members](#) and you will shortly receive an MS Teams invite to the event.

Improving Awareness and Knowledge of the Fairer Scotland Duty

Wednesday 7 September 2022, 14:30-15:30, MS Teams

This webinar will improve your awareness and knowledge of the Fairer Scotland Duty and what your role is in supporting your council to pay 'due regard' to socio-economic disadvantage in all strategic decision making.

[Register for Improving Awareness and Knowledge of the Fairer Scotland Duty](#) and you will shortly receive an MS Teams invite to the event

Economic Development

Over the coming months, data will be collected for the 2021/22 SLAED Indicators Report, which will be published at the end of the year. This includes councils' own data, as well as data from a

number of other sources including the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and the Business Gateway National Unit. We appreciate the engagement from councils in supplying their data. The SLAED Executive will be supported to engage with the Scottish Government to consider the local government contribution to delivering the priorities set out in the National Strategy for Economic Transformation.

Climate Change

Over the summer our IS Climate Change Project Manager will be partly funded by the Sustainable Scotland Network to support a number of strategic projects including the Local Authority Forum, the SOLACE conference, enhanced data analysis and a Net Zero manual. We are working with a number of local authorities to develop training and support for Elected Members.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Implementation Support

The first UNCRC Implementation Local Government Network for those leading on UNCRC Work in local authorities was held in June to provide a space for officers to share and discuss their approach to children's human rights in their local authority. Colleagues connected on various issues including participation of children and young people, training and awareness raising and child friendly complaints processes.

Rural Child Poverty

The intelligence sprint on Rural Child Poverty specifically focussing on data and lived experience was really successful, with excellent participation from across the rural and island councils. Informed by the Scottish Approach to Service Design, the workshops helped to discover and better define issues and barriers, and started to develop some potential solutions, linking up with existing initiatives to learn from their experience. A report will be drafted which will be submitted to Scottish Government reflecting the issues raised and making recommendations for further action.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

The 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 supporting in measuring and improving the uptake amongst eligible 2-year-olds and offering support and advice on workforce planning strategies. We are also continuing with our [regular reports](#) tracking the status of the ELC sector and understanding the workforce and the number of children accessing their funded offer.

Covid Recovery Strategy (CRS)

The Recovery and Delivery Programme is in place to support the work of the Covid Recovery Strategy (CRS) Programme in three key ways:

- Contribute to the Joint Analytical Group, developing a framework of indicators for each of the outcomes in the CRS;
- Identify, gather evidence on and interrogate successful service delivery programmes to understand what makes them work – articulate and report on these studies appropriately; and
- Establish a reporting framework and report on the progress of delivery of the Covid Recovery Strategy.

Through a series of pathfinder workshops, the Recovery and Delivery team is supporting Local Government and their partners to develop services and approaches that are effective in improving the outcomes set out in the Covid Recovery Strategy. Over the last month, workshops were held

with roughly half of all CPPs to understand how local actions are contributing to the outcomes identified in the Covid Recovery Strategy, and where local delivery teams are facing barriers that could be addressed systematically by the Covid Recovery Strategy Programme Board.

Protecting People

National Trauma-Informed Practice Quality Indicator Framework

In response to requests for support from Councils, we are currently working with NHS Boards and other key partners, the Scottish Government, COSLA and NHS Education for Scotland to develop a [Quality Indicator Framework for Trauma-Informed Services, Systems and Workforces](#), which will be based on evidence, learning from the Scottish context, and learning from experts by experience and profession. The Framework is currently being developed by an advisory group, co-chaired by the Scottish Government and COSLA. We will be developing a programme of engagement later in 2022 to encourage and support colleagues across the range of community planning partners across Scotland, and the people with lived experience of trauma that they support, to provide feedback on the draft to ensure it is shaped by experience and profession.

Elected Member Briefing: Trauma is Everybody's Business

In partnership with COSLA and NHS Education for Scotland, we have published a new [Elected Member briefing](#) that aims to raise awareness of what is meant by 'psychological trauma', and the impact and prevalence of trauma across Scotland. The briefing aims to highlight how trauma-informed services, systems and workforces across all policy areas can respond in a way that reduces barriers to support, supports people to recover from their experiences, improves people's life chances, and supports workforce wellbeing. It also explores the key role that councillors and board members can play in supporting the sustainable development of trauma-informed services, systems and workforces.

Adopting a Public Health Approach to Improving Outcomes for Women, Children and Young People Experiencing Gender-Based Violence

Over the course of June 2022, we have worked in partnership with Public Health Scotland to organise a series of workshops to explore links between tackling Gender-Based Violence and achieving Scotland's six Public Health priorities. We have also supported stakeholders across a wide range of policy areas to identify tangible actions they can take to adopt a Public Health approach to improving outcomes for women, children and young people experiencing violence and abuse. A learning report will be published shortly and the full range of briefings that underpinned the workshop series are available to read here on the [Public Health Scotland](#) 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

We hosted several events for our Organisational Development Network last quarter. They included 'UNCRC – What will it mean for our workforce?' which was led by our UNCRC Project Manager and also an Open Space session where members came together to discuss OD topics and current priorities, challenges and priorities in their council. Our webinars included 'Using Data and Intelligence in Organisational Development' and 'West Dunbartonshire's Skills Passport' – thanks to colleagues in North Ayrshire, Perth & Kinross and West Dunbartonshire councils for their contributions. We launched our [Leadership Resources](#) platform which was developed in

partnership with the Open University and contains links to free online courses aimed at managers and leaders in Local Government. We are hosting a Workforce Planning workshop on 24 August and 1 September - led by the LGA and aimed at colleagues with responsibility for workforce planning. Details of other [future sessions](#) can be found on the IS website.

Digital Public Services

Under 22s Free Travel Scheme

More than 12 million journeys have been made using the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, since the scheme launched on 31st January 2022. 404,000 young people are in possession of a National Entitlement Card to use for free bus travel to access new opportunities while also helping to meet environmental targets.

To date:

- 56% of cardholders applied online via [getyournec.scot](#) or [parentsportal.scot](#).
- 4% of cardholders applied via the Transport Scotland mobile app.
- 18% of cardholders applied offline via Local Authority routes.
- 22% of cardholders applied via the schools facilitated bulk process.

A User Experience Design Review of GETOURNEC.SCOT recently took place, with a view to improving the user experience of card applicants. A new version of the platform was launched mid-June 2022 with a newly designed user interface along with the addition of multiple new features and functionality. Customer feedback has been positive with the majority of customers commenting that the new platform was much better and easier to use than its predecessor and new features improved the customer experience. Since the changes were implemented, the IS has noticed that more applications are being approved first time.

Myaccount

39 organisations are now using the myaccount service - 32 Local Authorities plus NHS, Social Security Scotland, Young Scot and others. NHS Lothian are the latest organisation to go live with myaccount for authentication and identity verification purposes. myaccount subscribers surpassed 1.8 million by July 2022. During the first 6 months of 2022, myaccount facilitated over 8.3 million authentication requests; nearly double the number of authentications for the same period in 2021, 4.6 million. The significant increase in usage is a direct result of more Councils responding to strong demand from customers for digital service delivery. Other services such as [parentsportal.scot](#) and [getyournec.scot](#) are continuing to fuel the increase in myaccount's adoption and usage.

Parentsportal.scot

[Parentsportal.scot](#) is now available in 13 councils, with a further six 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 1,069 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 as well as further enhancements to improve customer experience.

Bisaccount.scot

North Lanarkshire are the first Local Authority to integrate bisaccount with back office services. bisaccount.scot is now used in North Lanarkshire for businesses to create an account and

authenticate when accessing waste related services. 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. The Council plans to roll out further business related services which require business authentication via bisaccount.

Data and Intelligence

One Scotland Gazetteer

We have been promoting the use of the One Scotland Gazetteer webservice to local authorities. This is a free address lookup service that can be connected into almost any system within local government, saving money on licence costs, whilst also preventing duplication of effort. This live API provides the most up to date, verified address and street data available, and is already used in systems across Scotland – including within Council customer relationship management, education, environmental health, and social care systems.

Harnessing data and intelligence to tackle rural child poverty

The Data and Intelligence Service has been supporting a series of workshops focussing on how local government could use data and intelligence to help identify and address rural child poverty. One of the key outcomes has been linking to the ‘Scalable Approach to Vulnerability Via Interoperability’ (SAVVI) framework, which helps guide local authorities in how to join potentially sensitive data together to address vulnerabilities in society. By trialling this framework in Scotland for the first time it is hoped that it might be used to address other vulnerabilities that Scotland is currently facing.

Local Government Covid-19 Dashboard

We are currently reviewing the future of the Local Government Covid Dashboard, and exploring how we retain the benefits delivered through more timely data on a range of critical policy areas relating to vulnerability, poverty and inequality. The Covid pandemic has underlined the importance of securing accurate meaningful information with weekly or even daily regularity. The LG Covid-19 Dashboard was developed in May 2020 to harness some of this progress, by bringing together key metrics from these more timely datasets, and to support Councils to visually track and monitor aspects of their response and be alert to issues and pressure points that may arise. The central principle from the outset of this work was to include data already being collected and reported to ensure no additional work is created for councils and this principle has been retained throughout.

We are currently exploring with the LGBF Board how we ensure the benefits of this approach can feed into and inform the LGBF, and continue to support efforts to automate and streamline data reporting, a key building block in the development of the Local Government Data Platform. While a number of Covid related datasets are being stood down, many datasets which provide useful insight in relation to the ongoing and longer term impacts of the pandemic are set to continue. These include those which provide vital insight in relation to vulnerability and poverty, for example: Child and Adult Protection, Scottish Welfare Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments, Rent Arrears, Homelessness and Delayed Discharges. Given the value of much of this data for Local Government in terms of both relevance and timeliness, we are keen to consider how this could support the LGBF Board realise its ambitions, and ensure some of the gains particularly in relation to more timely data, are not lost.

In the coming months, the LGBF Board will consider potential indicators from these more timely datasets that might be included in the LGBF. In the meantime, as a transition arrangement, we will continue to publish the LG Covid Dashboard to ensure councils continue to have access to this data on a timely basis. We anticipate moving to a monthly publication schedule for the dashboard, to align with recent schedule change for datasets on child and adult vulnerability. It is important to re-iterate, that neither the continuation of the dashboard, nor any future inclusion within the LGBF, will involve any further data reporting burden for authorities since this is based on data which is already reported. The purpose is to improve access for councils to this data in a more timely, more accessible and more useful fashion.

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 rationalise the current data reporting landscape, simplify data collection, improve quality assurance, and provide richer insight from data currently collected from councils, including LGBF data. A strategic case setting out the long term vision for this project was endorsed by Solace members and COSLA Leaders in April.

Phase 1 of the project has been funded by the IS and is now underway. This phase aims to:

- Create a comprehensive overview of all current data returns Local Authorities are required to produce.
- Map data flow involved in producing current returns for a specific use case (Annual Looked After Children return, CLAS) and produce recommendations for improvement and efficiencies.
- Review and improve the governance arrangements around data return requests.

An oversight group co-chaired by COSLA and Solace has been established to steer this project, drawing senior level representation from IS, LGDO, Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland. In addition, the LGBF Board has agreed to provide an advisory role. An engagement strategy has been produced to ensure this work both builds on and influences wider sector developments in relation to the data reporting landscape.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The LGBF Board has agreed to undertake an annual review of priorities within its 2021-2024 Strategic Plan to ensure the changing context during these uncertain times is reflected. This current review is particularly timely following the recent refresh of Board Membership (including expanded Solace representation) and provides an excellent opportunity for new Board Members to help the LGBF engage with and respond to the ambitious innovation and transformation agendas in recovery and renewal.

The current priorities are:

1. To continue to strengthen the relevance and credibility of LGBF, evolving the LGBF framework to reflect the challenges, risks and opportunities facing Local Government as it responds to the Covid pandemic and aims to build back better.
2. To position the LGBF to lead improvements in the wider data reporting and scrutiny landscape, addressing current lags in data availability, streamlining data reporting and scrutiny landscapes, enabling greater automation and technical integration of data systems, and strengthening available insights from data and intelligence.

3. To continue to build momentum in the use of the LGBF to transform and improve council services, promoting good practice and creating opportunities to share practice and learning

As part of the current review, the Board have agreed to strengthen their focus on how the LGBF can be used to enhance the sector wide improvement agenda, continue to prioritise improvements in the timeliness of reported data, and focus framework development on those specific issues which are most important for Local Government (e.g. Climate Change). The Board are keen to seek the input from Solace members, and a refreshed strategic plan will be shared in the Autumn.

Community Planning & Community Planning Improvement Board (CPIB)

We are continuing to support the [CPIB](#) in their work to illustrate how excellent outcomes are being achieved locally when partners come together and respond innovatively, and to surface with Scottish Government Ministers those barriers which are getting in the way of delivering person led services. CPIB deep dive sessions and short-life working groups provide a vehicle to support this approach, with topics aligned to the Covid Recovery Strategy to demonstrate the valuable role Community Planning is playing in supporting recovery and renewal efforts. The CPIB Chair (Greg Colgan, on behalf of Solace) has been invited to sit on the Covid Recovery Strategy Programme Board to promote connections between Community Planning and recovery efforts.

Currently CPIB Short Life Working Groups are focussing on the action needed to address the following barriers:

Climate Change:

- Decluttering the funding landscape to improve access to resources, and to develop a coherent investment strategy in relation to Climate.
- Prioritisation of big-ticket areas through evidence based analysis on which areas where there is most to gain and where more collective progress is needed.
- Addressing how we use and co-ordinate procurement strategies to apply the full weight of the public sector collectively to support the drive through the economy to net zero.
- Ensuring sustainable funding is available to support community organisations and local communities play a central role in driving the Climate agenda.

Financial Security for Low Income Households:

- Addressing barriers in relation to organisational sharing of population and personal data, building on progress made in overcoming such barriers during the pandemic.
- Addressing the challenges partners face in relation to funding cycles, ringfencing and reporting to different funders with different timescales.
- Reducing the complexity of recording, reporting, and inspection frameworks which create both a burden and lack of clarity in relation to shared outcomes and priorities

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](#).

Research

The team has continued to provide a range of research support to IS colleagues and external partners. Within the IS, the team have prepared and launched our most recent staff and external stakeholder surveys, supported with a series of rural child poverty workshops, and developed and

facilitated a “lessons learned” session for the rollout of the under 22 free bus travel scheme. For our external partners, we have worked with Scottish Government’s Building Standards Division to develop a new Power BI data analysis and cleaning system. In addition, we have been working with a small group of local authority researchers to explore how the Local Area Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) in Scotland can support the research community in Scotland. This work aims to improve skills and capacity, share best practice, develop effective networks with academia, and influence and support policy makers in using evidence.

Evaluation

We are evaluating the effectiveness of offering access to welfare rights advice in GP Practices as a service delivery model with a focus on identifying the impact created. Scottish Government have agreed to extend the funding for this ‘test and learn’ programme to include two rural areas- those covered by Highland and Aberdeenshire Councils. An interim report of the results to date will be available in August.

During July and August we will start the engagement process on the findings from our evaluation of potential funding models to allocate the debt levy funding that is devolved to Scottish Government. This equates to around £4 million per annum and is raised through a levy on consumer credit firms.

We have re-issued our [Guide to Collaborative Council Tax Collection](#). This offers a set of principles to support a collaborative approach between those in Scottish councils who are responsible for administering council tax and those offering debt and money advice. The guide includes a one-page summary of the key elements..

We are carrying out an evaluation of Scottish Government’s Place Based Investment Programme and a reporting framework and guidance has been shared with local authorities. It is intended to use the data collected and reported to demonstrate the contribution the fund makes to realising the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes.

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.