

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 2022 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Finance and Operations Update

The Board noted that the total additional income received to date this financial year from outwith the Local Government sector is £1,034,822. The Board also noted our 2022 Stakeholder Survey results, our newly developed IS Policy Register and approved our new Pregnancy Loss Policy.

IS Strategic Framework

The Board received a presentation on the progress being made with the development of our new five-year Strategic Framework. The direction of travel was agreed, and the Board requested that the draft Strategic Framework be presented at the March Board meeting for discussion.

Office Relocation Update

The Board noted that the move from the iHub to West Lothian Council's Civic Centre has been delayed due to building work still to be undertaken. It is anticipated that the move will now take place on 1st February.

Climate Change

The Board noted the progress made against the IS climate change action plan and approved the IS climate change priorities for 2023. The Board also noted the IS Carbon Footprint report and agreed to continue to consider climate change in decision making.

National Planning Coordinator

The Board agreed that we should enter into a grant agreement with Scottish Government to recruit to the post of National Planning Coordinator (NPC). The role of the NPC was identified during the passage of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. The Board agreed that the grant agreement should include a clause that ensures the reporting arrangement for the post is to our Head of Transformation, Performance and Improvement (and by consequence the IS Board), and also the High-Level Group on Planning Performance, not to Scottish Ministers.

Whole Family Wellbeing Fund Project Officer

The Board agreed that we should enter into a grant agreement with Scottish Government to recruit a Project Officer to lead the development of a National Learning into Action Network for the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund. This is a new area of work but similar to other roles within the IS.

Proposed release of National Data under an Open Government Licence

The Board noted that we reached agreement with the Scottish Government's Planning and Architecture Division to enable the release of national spatial information as part of a proposed grant settlement. The Board welcomed this development and agreed that the IS will release a suite of national datasets under Open Government Licence terms, thereby pursuing the IS' ambitions to maximise the usage and benefit of Scottish local government, national parks and health-related data assets, noting that if further funding is not provided by Scottish Government beyond 2023/24, a business case will be presented at a future Board meeting with a proposal for an alternative commercial model.

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Elected Member Development

We have published an elected members briefing on [Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Through the Public Health Priorities](#).

We supported the Standards Commission with the development of elearning for elected members on the Councillors Code of Conduct. The elearning modules help members to understand certain key aspects of the Codes of Conduct and should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. They can be accessed by clicking on the links below:

- [When do the Codes apply?](#)
- [Identifying and Declaring Interests: The Three-Stage test](#)

We are supporting several councils to launch the Political Skills Assessment with their elected members as part of a structured process to guide member development activity.

Economic Development

We have been supporting SLAED to engage with key organisations, including the Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland, around common priority areas. This has involved developing partnership working approaches to Community Wealth Building and Wellbeing Economies, with a joint webinar being planned for February. We have input into a number of key publications in this area, including the Scottish Government's Wellbeing Economy Monitor, and supported Public Health Scotland's development of an Anchors Framework, as well as their work around Community Wealth Building metrics. We have continued to enhance internal and external communications on behalf of SLAED, publishing regular newsletters, reviewing membership, responding to key consultations and ensuring all groups are functioning and supported. The final draft of the SLAED Indicators Report 2021/22 is with the Executive for sign-off and is on track for publication in January.

Climate Change

We continue to work closely with the Sustainable Scotland Network, SOLACE and COSLA to deliver support to local authorities. This includes developing the proposal for the Climate Intelligence Service, undertaking research into behaviour change and engagement with Scottish Government, facilitating events such as the Local Authority Forum, Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (LHEES) discussion group and a workshop on low carbon infrastructure, and producing a range of resources including guidance on impact assessments which will be available in the near future. We are also supporting several local authorities with bespoke support. Member information, resources and events are available on the [SSN website](#).

Child Poverty in Remote, Rural and Island Communities

We have taken a service design approach to investigate the barriers to using data and intelligence to understand and address child poverty in remote, rural and island authorities. We have produced a [report](#) which highlights four main areas for further action:

- Data sharing to reach households at risk of financial crisis
- Using local intelligence to map and plan for changing needs
- Understanding how the cost of living varies between and within local authority areas
- Finding efficient ways to involve those with lived experience in meaningful ways

We are continuing to work with remote, rural and island authorities through our short life rural child poverty network to:

- Investigate barriers to data sharing and examples of interesting practice
- Pilot the use of SEEMIS and DWP/HMRC data to map child poverty at datazone level in several local authority areas
- Continue discussions with academics, the Scottish Government and COSLA about how variation in the cost of living is taken into account in policy development and funding decisions.

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

We are continuing to work with local authorities to support them to get ready for the incorporation of the UNCRC, offering tailored support including presentations, and support to use our 12 step approach to understanding what is needed to support readiness as well as general advice. Local areas recently took part in an event focused on developing child friendly complaints processes with a guest speaker from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. During the 16 Days of Activism For Violence Against Women, we hosted an event highlighting gender based Violence as a children's rights issue with presentations from The Children's Parliament, CEDAR and Every Day Heroes project. Future events include a focus on children's rights and climate change, children's rights reporting and child poverty. A new web based resource will be launched in February to support public bodies to learn more about the UNCRC and their responsibilities arising from it. We also continue to work closely with the Scottish Government to share local experiences of implementation and contribute to their UNCRC working groups.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

93,902 children across Scotland were accessing funded ELC as of the first week of September 2022, according to the latest [ELC Delivery Progress Report](#). Of these, 91,465 children (97%) were accessing more than 600 hours, and 83,237 children (89%) were accessing 1140 hours of funded ELC.

The report, published by our ELC team in November 2022, also shows that there has been a year-on-year increase in the number of 2–5-year-old children reported to be accessing funded ELC (3% increase). Throughout November, we facilitated webinars on the ELC data sharing project and SEEMiS Early Years. The next ELC eligible two-year-olds data sharing webinar is scheduled to take place at the end of January. Scottish Government officials will provide more in-depth guidance and we will share an update about what the new platform will look like.

We are continuing to support the development of the Scottish Government ELC sector Strategic Workforce Frameworks, and collating intelligence on the status of the ELC workforce through engagement with councils and analysis of data. Engagement sessions with the workforce are scheduled to take place later in January. During these sessions, officials from the Sector Support & Workforce Unit will present an overview of the Strategic Framework for the Childcare workforce, and members of the workforce will be asked for feedback about the vision and values, and the priority actions included in the framework.

We published a case study on South Lanarkshire Council's award-winning project on LGBT+ Education in Early Years project, and we will continue to work with the Project Lead to develop a podcast style recording and learning event.

Finally, a Lessons Learned survey was sent to all stakeholders to solicit feedback on how the National Cost Collection exercise was conducted and how the outcomes were being used locally. We will look to analyse the results of the survey and identify lessons to be learned from the exercise.

Covid Recovery Strategy (CRS)

Since delivering feedback on the Covid Recovery Assurance in October and November 2022, the Covid Recovery team have engaged with individual Community Planning Partnerships, Local Authorities and pathfinders to understand the practical steps that are being taken locally to reduce the barriers identified within the report and move the dial on the outcomes noted in the Covid Recovery Strategy, with particular focus on;

- Removing the Barrier of Siloed Working in Local Authorities: We supported a successful event centred on understanding how a whole systems approach can be taken to tackling child poverty;
- Sharing and Developing Person-centred Approaches to Council Planning: We engaged with a number of councils to understand how their council plans are being developed differently now compared to pre-pandemic.
- Sharing Practice from the Dundee Pathfinder: In November 2022, we met with the Programme Manager of the Dundee Pathfinder with an aim to understanding how other areas can learn from the successes and challenges being faced in this piece of work. The team also visited Linlathen to see first-hand the way the project is being conducted.

Over the coming months, our Covid Recovery team will;

- Work with our Child Poverty and Employability colleagues to deliver a series of follow up events that will look to broaden the policy areas to be included in pursuit of whole-system, person-centred approach to designing services that alleviate poverty;
- Continue to work with a small number of local authorities to understand the detail of how “One Plan” council plans are being developed, and what practical steps can be taken to ensure that

community engagement can be at the heart of this development to make council plans truly person-centred; and

- Continue to connect with the project team in Linlathen to articulate and share the experience in delivering the project, while looking to understand the extent to which the approach taken there can be scaled and replicated elsewhere.

Protecting People

Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework - Key Learning from 2021/22 Data Returns

We published a new [report](#) highlighting key learning from local authorities that submitted Equally Safe Quality Standard and Performance Framework data returns for 2021-22. The report aims to highlight key trends in work taking place across Scotland to improve outcomes for women, children and young people affected by gender-based violence, as well as to showcase example of good practice happening in different local authority areas.

Implementing Safe & Together in Scotland: Creating Domestic Abuse-Informed Workforces, Services and Systems

In partnership with the Safe & Together Institute, we published a [Year One Learning Report](#) highlighting the work that has taken place across Scotland over 2021/ 22 to embed the Safe & Together Model and the impact this is having on creating domestic abuse informed systems, services and workforces. This report marks the first in a series that we will produce over the life of the Scottish Government's Delivering Equally Safe Fund, and aims to showcase how creating domestic abuse informed systems, services and workforces can lead to better outcomes for children and families affected by domestic abuse.

Authentic Voice: Embedding Lived Experience in Scotland

In partnership with SafeLives and Resilience Learning Partnership, we launched the new [authenticvoice.scot](#) website which aims to help ensure stakeholders have the knowledge, confidence and tools they need to embed lived experience of gender-based violence and other forms of complex trauma into local system and service design processes in a robust, trauma-informed and meaningful way. The website includes: (i) learning from the initial discovery exercise which looked at how survivor voice and lived experience is currently used in organisations across Scotland; (ii) videos and key messages from our virtual launch event in March 2022; (iii) learning and videos from the series of deep dive workshops that took place over the course of 2022; (iv) episodes of the new Authentic Voice podcast, produced by Resilience Learning Partnership; and (v) the opportunity to sign up to our mailing list to receive the Authentic Voice newsletter, which will begin in the new year.

Showcasing Good Practice in Developing and Embedding Trauma-informed Policy and Practice across Services, Systems and Workforces

We have published a series of new [case studies](#) showcasing good practice in embedding trauma-informed policy and practice across services, systems and workforces. The case studies feature a range of work across different policy areas and services in local authority areas across Scotland including East Lothian, Fife, Glasgow City and the Shetland Islands.

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 OD Network met in October and December, coming together to share experiences and learning and to discuss current challenges and opportunities. We also hosted a Systems Leadership Programme in November for colleagues from our OD and Change Management Networks. The workshops were led by Joan O'Donnell, Systems Thinking Lecturer with the Open University. 26 colleagues participated in the workshops where they learned about systems leadership tools and applied them to live issues.

Digital Public Services

mygovscot myaccount

All 32 Councils are using myaccount for at least one online service; the majority use myaccount more widely to access various online services. myaccount is also used by Social Security Scotland, Young Scot, NHS My Diabetes My Way and most recently, NHS Lothian to access hospital bookings. The myaccount service continues to experience a prolonged surge in demand, with registered subscribers rising by over 500,000 throughout 2022 to 2 million. Authentication requests for 2022 was 62% higher than what the service received for the same period in 2021; 15.6 million in 2022 compared to 9.6 million in 2021. The increase in authentication requests demonstrates that the service is being used frequently by account holders to access multiple services.

getyournec.scot

All 32 Local Authorities consume the service to facilitate online applications for National Entitlement Cards for over 60s concessionary travel, disabled concessionary travel, Young Scot card and Young Persons' Free Bus Travel. Over 638,000 applications for all National Entitlement card types have been facilitated through getyournec.scot. Over 590,000 applications have been facilitated in 2022 alone.

parentsportal.scot

15 Local Authorities are live with the platform and continue to promote the service to its parents. A further 3 Local Authorities are in the process of onboarding. The service is now available in 1,138 schools, to 120,417 registered parental subscribers securely linked to 176,302 pupils. A mobile app is currently in development, and is due to be launched in spring 2023 to existing and new users.

Data Hub

23 Councils and 9 other public sector organisations (Public Health Scotland, Lothian Valuation Joint Board, Scottish Fire and Rescue, SEEMiS, University of Glasgow – Urban Big Data Centre, Scottish Government Heatmap Team, NHSNHS, Scottish Water and Scottish Government ADR Scotland Data Acquisition) have all signed up to use the Data Hub platform.

dcn.scot

All 32 Councils continue to use dcn.scot, Scotland's National Dog Control Database. Launched in February 2022, the service is also used by Police Scotland.

Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme (Under 22s)

564,000 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.

Data and Intelligence

One Scotland Gazetteer

We are engaging with the Usher Institute, as our One Scotland Gazetteer custodian will be presenting to MSc Data Science students to discuss the benefit of using Gazetteer data to help underpin data for Emergency Planning purposes.

National Street Gazetteer

Local Authority and Transport Scotland Street Gazetteer Custodians have had a busy period in improving their Gazetteer information including 16,000+ geometry improvements and 30,000+ added records – ensuring that the data held represents a digital twin of the Scottish road network. The improved data shall be incorporated into the Scottish Road Works Register, which is required by legislation to be produced by each roads authority. The data is also already incorporated into Ordnance Survey's Highways product and is available to every local authority to use in analysing service provision relating to routing and networking.

Digital Planning

We continue to support Scottish Government's Digital Planning Smart Applications programme – the development of a working prototype of the online national portal that will replace E-Development, for Planning and Building Standards. This entails the supply of planning authority data from across Scotland and liaison with Heads of Planning Scotland and Key Agencies, and also integrating with wider activities in the data sector and improving the suite of data that is fundamental to the programme.

Local Government Covid-19 Dashboard

In February 2023, we will stand down the weekly Local Government Covid-19 Dashboard we have produced since May 2020 which allowed councils to monitor their response to the pandemic, and the impact on communities. This dashboard provided an invaluable and timely picture of system pressures facing local government during this time and also supported efforts to co-ordinate, automate and streamline data reporting. Following a review with the LGBF Board, it has been agreed to migrate key data from the dashboard into the LGBF on a range of critical policy areas relating to vulnerability, poverty and inequality to ensure the benefits delivered through more timely data are retained. From this year, the LGBF will incorporate data on Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments to strengthen our focus on poverty, and will also begin to include more timely data for existing measures such as Delayed Discharges, Business Start-up activity, Claimant Count, and Pupil attendance. It is important to re-iterate, that inclusion within the LGBF will not 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 2022.

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

- Create a comprehensive overview of all current data returns Local Authorities are required to produce. This has been shared widely with LG and SG colleagues to sense check and seek initial reflections.
- 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.

The final report will be shared with Solace and COSLA Leaders in March 2023, and will present key learning and recommendations emerging from Phase 1 of the project, and will set out proposals for phases 2 and 3 of the LG Data Platform development.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The next LGBF Publication will be issued in March 2023. In line with the LGBF Board's refreshed strategic priorities, this year's publication will include a redesigned and slimmed down LGBF Annual report which provides a clearer focus on sector wide performance, with detailed indicator level analysis and narrative now delivered via an online LGBF dashboard to facilitate release of data in a timelier manner. The key themes of focus within this year's annual report will include:

- Financial & Workforce pressures
- Poverty and Inequality
- Education
- Health & Social Care System pressures
- Economic Recovery
- Environment

The Board have also agreed to undertake a deep dive focus on progress against The Promise later in 2023, upon availability of contemporary data.

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 next meeting in February will provide an opportunity to take stock and refresh our focus, and agree an implementation plan for the year ahead.

Currently CPIB Short Life Working Groups are focussing on the national and local action needed to address the following barriers to inform our next engagement with the DFM and COSLA President, and with wider CPP partners:

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.

Wellbeing of Children & Young People:

- Securing sustainable, flexible and bridging funding to enable the required shift to prevention
- Ensuring Families receive the right support at the right time
- Addressing growing workforce recruitment and retention issues
- Understanding and responding to the impact of the National Care Service
- Strengthening joint prioritisation across services, removing silos and delineation between partners.

Outputs from these Working Groups will be shared widely with CPP partners, and will also be available on the CPIB website, where colleagues can access further 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.

Research

The National Instrumental Music Survey was published in December. This year was the first where fees were not charged for lessons in any local authority and saw a strong improvement in pupil numbers from the previous year, which had been heavily impacted by Covid restrictions. The report and key messages are available on the IS website. The team is also continuing to work with LARIA in Scotland to improve collaborative working across the research community in Scotland.

Evaluation

An initial analysis of data returned by local authorities participating in the Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships 'Test and Learn' Programme show the multiple benefits of delivering advice services in this way in relation to both financial gain and engagement with service users.

We are working with the Scottish Illegal Money Lending Unit (part of Trading Standards Scotland) to evaluate projects they have funded to raise awareness of the risks of illegal money lending.

In partnership with Public Health Scotland we are evaluating the effectiveness of the role of community pharmacies in relation to Routine Enquiry of Rape and Sexual Assault during Emergency Hormonal Prescribing.

Our report on the approaches local authorities have taken, or funded, to increase the accessibility of advice services will be published this month. It includes examples of effective practice from 11 local authorities.

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.