

*The 'go to' organisation for Local
Government improvement in Scotland*

is.
improvement service

Communications Strategy 2023—2027



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1. Introduction

“The Improvement Service will support local authorities, working with their partners, to deliver transformational change to sustain and, where possible, improve outcomes, reduce inequalities and achieve efficiencies.”

Our Vision, IS Strategic Framework 2023-27

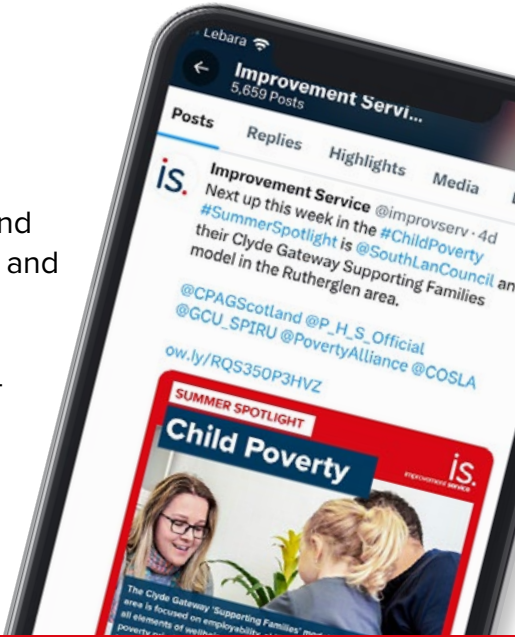
The Improvement Service is the national improvement agency for local government in Scotland. We deliver improvement support that helps councils to provide effective community leadership and strong local governance, and to deliver high quality, efficient local services.

Our purpose is to:

- Support local government to deliver sector-led improvement
- Provide leadership to local government and the wider system on transformation and improvement
- Develop capability and capacity for improvement within local government
- Support local authorities to collaborate and work together to tackle shared challenges and drive improvement and innovation
- Support local authorities to share knowledge, practice, learning and skills
- Deliver national improvement programmes for local government and partners, supporting local authorities to improve at a local level

- Provide research, data and intelligence to inform local government’s policy-making and decision-making and to drive improvement
- Deliver national shared service applications and technology platforms
- Broker additional resources to support our improvement work.

Communications plays a key role in achieving our purpose and vision. Whilst our communications work has grown in recent years, becoming more proactive and strategic, we will continue to build on this and ensure our activities stay aligned with the organisation’s priorities and objectives as laid out in the Strategic Framework 2023-27.



Purpose of the communications strategy

This document sets out the strategic direction for IS communications over the next period.

It sets out how we will deliver a planned approach to communications and engagement which will continue to build awareness of the Improvement Service and its role in local government, enable wider stakeholder engagement, demonstrate our practice, skills and effectiveness and increase the demand for the uptake of our products and services.

Context and priorities

These are challenging times for local government, with councils facing financial pressures and increasingly difficult choices about spending priorities.

The potential development of a National Care Service for Scotland and review of education mean there is some uncertainty about the future shape and role of local government.

Whilst still managing post-Covid recovery, local government also now faces a cost-of-living crisis which is affecting the delivery of its own services as well as the lives of citizens and communities.

The pressure to embed and accelerate climate change action to help achieve Scotland's 2030 climate change target is also very real.

Use of digital services increased significantly during the pandemic, a trend expected to persist and reshape local authorities' operations. The pandemic response also demonstrated the vital role data plays in public services, highlighting the importance of timely, relevant, and high-quality information for decision-making and the need for local government to improve how it manages and uses data.

These challenges, coupled with Scotland's ageing population, have created uncertainty for those working in and engaging with public services. They have also helped to fuel innovation and transformative change in local government. It is now crucial to build on the changes already achieved to sustain and enhance local services within available resources.

We have listened to local authorities to understand their priorities and the type of improvement support that they will need over the next few years. Our strategic priorities have been developed in response:

- We will assist local authorities to transform and transition to new models of service delivery
- We will support local government to deliver sector-led improvement in a range of policy and service areas
- We will provide leadership and facilitate collaboration to enable a more preventative, integrated approach to tackling poverty and inequality
- We will support local government to deliver digital and data-enabled transformation

2. Our identity and values

Our strapline is:

The Improvement Service is the ‘go to’ organisation for local government improvement in Scotland

What does that mean in practice?

- Our name and purpose is strongly recognisable across key stakeholders.
- We are a trusted, supportive and dependable partner that understands local government and its challenges.
- Improvement support for local government is at the heart of everything that we do.
- We are leaders in improvement. Our range of work means that we are uniquely placed to support local government to make communities better and more equal places to live.
- We have a critical role in reform of local government. We support councils through their transformation journey and transition to new models of service delivery in order to increase resilience and sustainability throughout the sector.
- We have expertise in delivering national shared services and technology platforms and national improvement programmes for local government and their partners in key policy and outcome areas.

- We are creative and agile in developing responses to challenges. We care about doing the right thing and we tackle issues by experimenting, learning, adapting and collaborating.
- We are open, transparent and accountable to local government and our partners.
- We have a clear improvement architecture which can be deployed and flexed to support sector-led improvement across different policy and service areas.

These key messages will be at the heart of all our communications work. All communications will use the strapline to promote recognition of our corporate identity and reputation. They should also emphasise at least one of the key messages above.

Our Values

Our core values underpin all our work and communications is no different. All our activities will reflect the values below, setting out the type of organisation we are:

Equality and Diversity

We believe that by embedding equality, diversity, fairness and respect in all that we do we will help create more successful communities.

Leadership and Collaboration

We adopt a collective leadership approach at all levels and collaborate with others to do meaningful work that drives change and improvement.

Innovation and Creativity

We are innovative, creative and forward thinking. We are enthusiastic about new ideas, new technology and new contributions that will help deliver improved outcomes.

Wellbeing and Growth

We care about increasing wellbeing and supporting the growth and learning of everyone, and of organisations. We are respectful, supportive and kind and encourage flexibility and a healthy work-life balance.

Accountability and Integrity

We are open, honest and accountable. We inspire and have integrity in all that we do.



3. Communications Objectives

Our over-arching objective is to:

Build the awareness, reputation and impact of the Improvement Service so it is recognised throughout the sector and more broadly across public services as the go-to organisation for local government improvement.

1. Ensure our name and purpose is strongly recognisable across key stakeholders

We will continue to ensure our brand and key messages are understood by our stakeholders by identifying and developing our strategic partnerships. An important part of this process will be to develop our communications channels to reinforce our brand and messages to our key stakeholders.

2. Increase engagement with key stakeholders

We will employ online and offline channels to communicate with our key stakeholders while also identifying new and under-engaged stakeholder groups and developing methods to address their needs and interests. We will establish feedback mechanisms to help us measure engagement and improve our performance.

3. Increase awareness of what we do/our range of services

We will work closely with teams across the Improvement Service to ensure that we are communicating the wide range of work we carry out and the latest developments to our stakeholders and wider

external audiences. We will use our communications channels to share regular information about the work of our colleagues.

4. Demonstrate our practice, skills and effectiveness

We will highlight the skills, expertise and effectiveness of the Improvement Service through practical examples of and reflections on our work and its impact. We will support IS staff to become recognised as experts in their field. We will seek endorsement of our work from local government and other partners.

5. Increase demand for and uptake of our products and services

We will work closely with teams to develop and promote their 'offers', using feedback and analytics to establish that our communications are reaching their target audience. We will help establish the IS and its staff as the go-to experts on local government improvement in Scotland, driving demand for our products and services.

4. Our Audiences

Our audiences will be a core part of our communications approach.

- Council leaders and chief executives
- Elected members
- Local government officers
- Scottish Government ministers and civil servants
- Our public, private and third sector partners
- Audit, inspection and accreditation bodies
- Grant funders and sponsors
- Academia and think tanks
- Public service users
- Our staff



5. How we work

The Communications Team works with the Senior Leadership Team and each of our programmes to provide a strategic, joined-up approach to communications.

We ensure that all communications align with the organisation's priorities and values, and that all activity contributes to achieving both our communications objectives and the IS's overall goals.

We produce an annual communications plan in support of this strategy, which sets out our priorities, targets and planned activities for the year. The plan is monitored and developed throughout the year.

Although the Communications Team takes responsibility for, coordinates and creates many corporate communications, achieving our communications objectives is a joint effort. Every person in the IS is an ambassador for the organisation and has a role to play in promoting us as the go-to organisation for local government improvement. Therefore, we work closely with programme teams to help them develop their individual communications plans and activities, and ensure these are aligned to the organisation's priorities and are resourced appropriately.

We are responsible for setting the editorial direction of communications and for ensuring that all content is high quality, accurate, timely, appropriate for its audience and accessible.

We work to understand our audiences and their needs, using a range of communication channels as appropriate.

We evaluate the success of our communications and use this information to inform and improve our practice.



6. What we deliver

Content

We will continue to produce a wide range of content for all our communications channels, including web content, press releases, articles, newsletters, corporate documents and reports, presentations, videos and blogs.

We will exercise editorial control over all content to ensure it aligns with the Strategic Framework and that it is high quality, accurate, useful and accessible.

We will adopt a campaign-style approach to aspects of our work, ensuring that it receives attention beyond launch or an initial splash and that we showcase our strengths in a more strategic fashion.

We will develop case studies that tell the story of how we work with councils and partners to help them achieve their goals.

and refresh its content and delivery to make sure it meets user needs and requirements.

Social media

Our social media use has grown significantly since the previous communications strategy, through adopting new platforms for certain projects and increasing the volume of communications through all our corporate social media accounts. We will continue this growth by seeking out opportunities for projects/teams to target new/under-engaged audiences using new channels. We will also monitor emerging social media platforms and trends to see if they present opportunities to reach relevant audiences or drive engagement in new ways.



Website

The Improvement Service website is our main communications channel, with other activity driving traffic to it. We redeveloped the website in 2020 and continue to review, expand

We will continue to manage the corporate social media accounts, creating and identifying interesting and informative content to engage stakeholders, increase our credibility, start and contribute to conversations and gain support/affirmation for our work.

We will continue to support and advise individual IS programmes/teams on their own social media use and work with them to coordinate activity across accounts.



We will support IS staff with using their personal social media to promote their own and the IS' work, where requested.

We will work with other local government partners to help promote the IS in a reciprocal manner by sharing and engaging with communications.

Video, graphics and audio

The widespread use of digital technologies and social media has led to increasing demand for communications in visual and interactive forms. We will further develop our use of video, audio and imagery to convey our messages.

We have grown our use of video since the previous communications strategy and will continue to do so. We will increase use of videos and animations in our communications, in particular aiming to reuse and repurpose videos across our own and partner channels.

We will make more use of images and data visualisation to increase engagement on our website and social media, whilst also being aware of accessibility considerations.

Newsletters

We currently produce a monthly IS newsletter. We will review the use of the newsletter and look to improve its design, engagement and how staff contribute.

We will continue to advise and support teams that wish to produce their own newsletters for specialist audiences.

Traditional communications

Although we take a digital first approach, there are some aims and audiences best reached through traditional means.

We will continue to offer a design, layout and print service. This includes reports and publications, newsletters, conference materials, logo design, promotional materials and adverts.



Stakeholder engagement and networks

As the national improvement organisation for local government in Scotland, we have strong partnerships in place which can be used to enhance our brand and widen our reach.

We will continue to work with key partners such as COSLA, Solace, Audit Scotland, Public Health Scotland and Scottish Government to promote shared priorities and joint working at a national level.

We will support the IS Board in its advocacy role, working with them to champion the work of the IS. We will develop new approaches that assist Board members to report to COSLA and SOLACE on work of strategic importance.

We will work with COSLA to communicate and engage with elected members, for example, issuing jointly badged Briefing Notes. We will provide regular contributions to COSLA's weekly elected member bulletins.

We will build on existing and develop new relationships with other improvement organisations, using their networks and reach to increase awareness of the IS and amplify our message.

We will work with professional associations to engage specialist audiences across fields we work in.

We will provide relationship managers and programme teams with

the tools and content they need to support their communications with councils and partners.

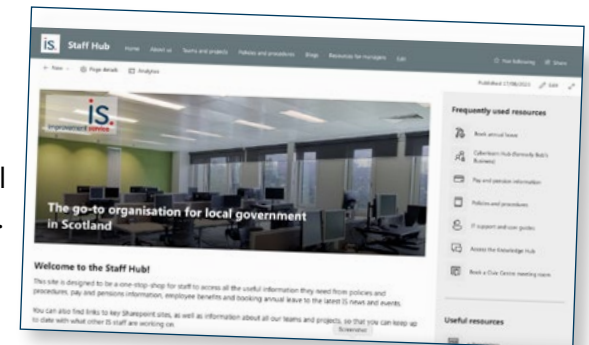
We will work with relationship managers and programme teams to identify opportunities for joint communications with councils and partners, helping councils tell the story of what they have achieved with help from the IS.

Internal communications

Every employee has a role in communications. Each interaction they have as a representative of the IS contributes towards the overall impression of the organisation.

We recognise that staff can only fulfil this role if they have a clear understanding of the organisation's priorities and objectives and how they contribute to achieving them. We will ensure that staff are kept up-to-date with the latest information about the IS; every employee should be aware of the full range of work that the IS carries out and engaged in its success.

We will work with colleagues to ensure they also understand our communications objectives and key messages, and that their individual and team communications reflect them.



We will keep our internal communications channels under review to ensure they are effective and staff feel engaged and connected. We set up the Staff Hub in 2023 as an internal corporate communications channel. In the coming period, we will seek to increase its use and value by expanding the range of information it contains as well as keeping existing content up to date. We will continue to support other internal channels including 'IS News' emails and MS Teams.

We will evaluate internal communications through our annual communications survey.

Conferences and events

Well-run events on subjects relevant and of interest to local government can enhance our reputation as experts in our field, thought leaders, problem solvers and collaborators.

We will continue to host events and webinars on a range of topics, and make the recordings and outputs of events widely available.

We will work with strategic partners to deliver co-branded events and webinars.

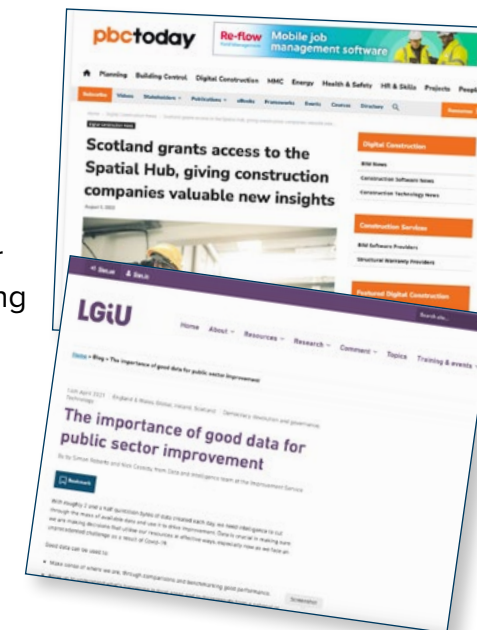
We will host fringe events or exhibition stands at other organisations' conferences where there is relevance to our work or an audience we wish to reach.

Media relations

We will continue to engage with specialist media covering local government/public sector to showcase our work, and seek out new sectors and publications where our work may have relevance.

We will identify and pursue opportunities for local and national media coverage for our work.

We will provide a press office function for the organisation, receiving and responding to enquiries about our work. We will also engage with the press offices of our partners to capitalise on opportunities to publicise our work.



7. Evaluating our communications

We will monitor and measure our communications activities to determine their effectiveness and impact. We will use the information we gather to learn what works and feed these into our future activities.

Evaluation measures we will use include:

- Surveys and workshops to test brand recognition
- Website visitors and engagement statistics
- Monthly newsletter analytics
- Social media engagement statistics
- Surveys of website users and newsletter subscribers
- Annual stakeholder survey
- Annual staff survey
- Media monitoring – amount of coverage and sentiment
- Number of attendees and feedback at events



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The logo for Improvement Service, featuring the letters 'is' in a large, blue, sans-serif font. The 'i' has a red dot above it, and the 's' has a red dot at the bottom right. Below the 'is' is the word 'improvement' in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font, and the word 'service' in a smaller, red, sans-serif font.
improvement **service**