

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 September 2025 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Core Grant funding

The Board noted that COSLA Leaders approved a 7.5% increase to the IS core grant from 1st April 2026 and that, going forward, any future increases to the core grant will align with COSLA's financial strategy.

Finance, Operations and HR Update

The Board noted that the management accounts for quarter 1 show actual income received year to date of £8,122,824 which includes investment income of £60,073.

The Board noted that stakeholder satisfaction increased by 4% from 2024 to 92%.

The Board approved the updated Pensions Discretionary Provisions policy.

Report from the IS Audit Committee

The Board noted that the Audit Committee agreed that future banking arrangements are aligned with the Scottish Government Framework Agreement for Banking Services.

The Board also noted that the Audit Committee agreed that a tender quote received in relation to professional advice for the visitor levy payments platform be explored further.

Strategic Performance Dashboard

The Board noted the annual and quarter 1 strategic performance dashboard. The annual dashboard highlighted increased additional income, reduced gender pay gap, improved staff and stakeholder satisfaction, and increased council engagement.

The quarter 1 dashboard highlighted increased LinkedIn followers, a reduction in X followers, a decrease in website page views which will be monitored, an increase in case study page views and a decrease in business analysis framework page views, the reasons for which are being explored.

Corporate Risk Register

The Board noted the corporate risk register and agreed to remove the risk relating to the Solace Review of Partner Organisations as the review has now concluded and the recommendations do not have any implications for the strategy and operations of the IS.

Annual Report and Financial Statements

The Board approved the Annual Report and Financial Statements 31st March 2025, the Audit Completion Memorandum and Letter of Representation to the auditors, which will be presented to all members at the AGM in December.

Board Governance Improvement Plan

The Board noted the progress being made with the delivery of the Board Governance Improvement Plan; agreed to advise the IS Chief Executive of training opportunities they are interested in; reached a view not to appoint a non-remunerated independent company director to the Board to fill a digital skills gap but agreed that a deep dive session in relation to digital and data enabled technology should be arranged; and noted that the Board composition reflects that of local government.

Chief Executive Performance Appraisal

The Board endorsed the IS Chief Executive's action plan and personal development plan for 2025/26.

Solace Scotland Review findings

The Board noted the findings and recommendations of the Solace Scotland Review Report.

Development update: National Visitor Levy Shared Service Platform

The Board acknowledged the collaborative progress between the Improvement Service and Early Adopter Councils in operationalising a national visitor levy service, and recognised the proactive steps taken to secure independent financial assurance, reinforcing the platform's credibility and readiness for national rollout.

Digital Identity Scotland

The Board noted the positive ongoing discussions between IS officers, Solace Portfolio Leads and Scottish Government in proposing that myaccount and ScotAccount should be assessed in a live environment, namely Digital Front Door.

Risk Management Deep Dive

Board members participated in a 'deep dive' workshop on the IS' Risk Management Framework. A report summarising the outcomes of the risk management session, including proposed changes will be presented at the December Board meeting for approval.

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Councillor Academy: Development begins on new learning portal

We are partnering with the Open University to develop the Councillor Academy – a dedicated learning portal for councillors. This marks an exciting step forward in our commitment to supporting elected members with high-quality, accessible learning opportunities tailored to the unique demands of public office.

The portal will be hosted on the Open University's OpenLearn platform and will feature a blend of existing Open University content and bespoke modules designed specifically for councillors and those interested in becoming a councillor.

This initiative allows us to respond to requests from a range of national bodies, for enhanced development for councillors and those interested in standing to be a councillor.

By partnering with the Open University, we are leveraging their global reputation for excellence in distance learning, access to subject matter experts, and a rich library of courses which councillors will be able to access for free from the portal.

Organisational Development (OD) Network

Local Government Leadership Success Profile (LSP) Pilot

We are working in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland (NES) to deliver the LSP pilot, involving 42 middle managers from 17 councils. Colleagues from the OD Network are supporting as learning partners, helping to assess materials and gather insights. The pilot runs until December, after which an evaluation will inform next steps and potential wider rollout.

OD Network Highlights

- **Recent Event – 26 August:** An Open Space session brought together 15 colleagues to explore key topics including Employee Surveys, Performance Management and Appraisals, E-learning, and Succession Planning.
- **Upcoming Events:**
 - **23 October: Council Induction Programme** – East Renfrewshire Council will showcase their newly refreshed induction approach.
 - **28 October: Skill Retention in Scotland's Local Government Workforce** – Presentation of key findings from a recent research project examining why older workers leave the workforce and what might encourage them to stay longer.

Local Government Connect Network

The Local Government Connect Network is designed to bring together professionals in the early stages of their local government career and promote collaboration across all 32 Scottish local authorities and local government partner organisations.

We have hosted a number of events over 2025, including regular drop-in sessions for both mentees and mentors to encourage networking and sharing of practice across the sector. Our most recent

drop in sessions were held in August and were well received by both mentors and mentees. The open forum style allowed people to share positive news stories, advice and learning from their experience with other members of the network promoting further collaboration.

We held a network event for mentees on 10th September. The focus of this session was on working effectively with elected members and the role of an elected member. This session featured a presentation from David Barr, Programme Manager for Democratic Governance and David O'Neill, a former Elected Member. The aim of this session was to develop mentee's understanding of the differences between members' and officers' roles, the boundaries between roles and explore what an effective working relationship between members and officers looks like.

Mentorship sessions are also ongoing with mentees and mentors meeting on a regular basis to support the mentee with any challenges and agree practical actions towards achieving their goals.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

ELC Insights Dashboard Launched

We are pleased to confirm that the first iteration of the ELC Insights Dashboard (developed through the Outcomes and Measurement Framework project) has now launched. This marks a significant milestone in our collaborative work with local authorities and the Scottish Government to improve how data is used in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) service planning and delivery.

The dashboard enables local authorities to access interactive data on key service dimensions, including quality, flexibility, accessibility, and uptake. It aims to support local self-evaluation, strengthen delivery assurance, and improve transparency. A supporting narrative report accompanies the tool, offering practical illustrations of how the data can be applied to inform service planning and policy development.

This is the first phase of an ongoing co-design process. Future developments will build on feedback from councils and reflect local and national priorities.

Workforce Data Project: coming soon: National ELC Workforce Planning Discovery session

Building on the Workforce Data Project, which is creating a single, accessible source of workforce intelligence for the sector, we are now moving into the next stage of engagement with councils. A national online discovery session will soon bring leaders together to consider future workforce needs, share strategic insights, and shape a sustainable, long-term approach to workforce planning. Details and registration will follow.

Exploring and Strengthening Local Data Approaches to School Age Childcare

We are inviting expressions of interest from local authorities to join a new exploratory project on school age childcare (SAC).

Building on our well-established role in supporting local authorities with Early Learning and Childcare, we are now turning our improvement and service design expertise to SAC. This new project will take an exploratory and collaborative approach to better understand how SAC is designed, delivered, and supported across Scotland.

The project will look at:

- How councils are responding to the childcare needs of families in their communities

- The role SAC plays in wider approaches to supporting children in need
- How family consultation is shaping local planning and delivery
- The operational barriers and enablers that influence provision

Working alongside a small group of councils, we aim to surface examples of effective practice, identify systemic challenges, and share learning across the sector. The insights gathered will help inform national policy thinking while supporting councils locally to reflect on and strengthen their own approaches.

We are looking to partner with 3–5 local authorities in this initial phase. Participation will include a discovery conversation and local mapping exercise, leading to a short profile of your authority's current approach.

Public Service Reform

Fairer Futures Partnerships (FFPs) Learning and Engagement Sessions

We are working in partnership with the Scottish Government to deliver a series of support sessions over 2025/26 for colleagues leading and delivering Fairer Futures Partnerships (FFPs). The purpose of these sessions is to bring together FFP colleagues to provide a space for peer support, foster shared learning and support effective service delivery aimed at tackling child poverty across Scotland. The sessions will comprise of online spotlight sessions, online drop-in sessions and in-person events. The first spotlight session took place on Thursday 18th September and focussed on leadership in the context of partnership working, considering how shared purpose, mutual respect, and collective accountability can strengthen impact. We heard from FFPs directly about practical approaches for leading collaboratively across teams, organisations, and communities.

These sessions have been developed as part of the Scottish Government's wider learning and engagement approach for FFPs in response to FFP colleagues' requests for support, collaboration, and opportunities to share learning. Together, we are in the process of developing a toolkit of resources, to capture key updates and information regarding the FFP programme and to share learning. This is due to be circulated with FFP colleagues over the coming month.

Scottish Community Planning Network (SCPN)

The SCPN held their second in-person network meeting of 2025 on Monday 1st September at the AK Bell Library in Perth. It was another great turnout, with 46 people joining the session both in person in Perth, and online via MS Teams with 75% of Community Planning Partnerships across Scotland being represented on the day.

It was a busy agenda, allowing the SCPN to focus on key issues both nationally and locally, including the Scottish Government's Public Service Reform Strategy: Delivering for Scotland, Mental Health and Housing. You can catch up on a [summary of the day](#).

Protecting People

Embedding Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change: National Survey & Learning report

Recognising that there are currently no formal reporting requirements for the work to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach across services, systems and workforces, in collaboration with local and national partners, the Improvement Service has developed an annual survey to capture work happening across local areas, including local authorities and key community planning partners. The survey, which is based on the [Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and](#)

[Responsive Change](#) closed at the end of August and received responses from 29 out of the 32 Scottish Local Authority areas.

The findings will inform an annual National Learning Report, highlighting the work happening across local areas (including local authorities and key community planning partners) in Scotland. The report will focus on sharing key learning about what works, the barriers and enablers to embedding a trauma-informed and responsive approach, and initial evidence around demonstrating impact.

The learning report will be published in November, and a national learning event is planned to mark the publication of the report and to share the key findings and recommendations with stakeholders, colleagues and national partners.

For more information, visit the [NTTP website](#).

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Needs Assessment Tool

We are supporting the Scottish Government and COSLA to develop a Needs Assessment Tool that can be used to develop a robust picture of the specific needs of women, children and young people experiencing VAWG in different local authority areas across Scotland. Following a range of engagement activities that took place with local and national stakeholders between April and June 2025, the Draft Tool will be tested with a small number of local authority areas between October 2025 and March 2026.

The Testing Phase will help identify further improvements needed to the draft Tool, identify examples of good practice partners can take when engaging with the Tool and to understand the support partnerships may require using the Tool in the future. Following expressions of interest, ten partnerships have been identified to take part in the testing phase.

The learning produced will be used to develop an updated version of the Tool, which will be available to any partners who wish to use it from April 2026.

European Conference of Domestic Violence

Staff from the Improvement Service (IS) Protecting People team recently had the opportunity to attend the [European Conference on Domestic Violence \(ECDV\)](#) in Barcelona, to present on two of the teams' projects; the [Authentic Voice Project](#) (a partnership project with SafeLives) and [Embedding Domestic Abuse Informed Systems](#).

The conference was a great opportunity to [share learning](#) from our work supporting Scotland's local authorities to create systems and services that are informed by the lived experience of victims and survivors, and help to improve outcomes for children and families experiencing domestic abuse, and to take part in knowledge exchange and discussion with other domestic abuse and VAWG practitioners and researchers from across Scotland, Europe and beyond.

UNCRC Implementation Project

The UNCRC Project continues to offer support to local authorities to progress their work to take forward children's rights across their organisation. An updated [UNCRC Implementation Framework](#) is a key tool that local areas can use to co-ordinate their approach across their organisation and full support can be offered from the Improvement Service. We are also working with local authorities

to help them to develop their approach to their first UNCRC report which is due soon after March 2026.

Our next UNCRC in Practice event takes place on 9th October at 10am where a webinar will focus on creating child friendly information - [register for the event](#).

National Planning Improvement (NPI)

The pilot of the new National Planning Improvement Framework is almost complete with 31 authorities now through the process. Those authorities that have completed the pilot have been asked to complete an 'end of pilot survey'. Feedback is very positive with all planning authorities agreeing that the 12 attributes of a high performing planning authority cover everything a planning authority needs to perform well and three quarters finding the process useful in allowing them to reflect on their performance. A full report will be published outlining feedback when all authorities have completed the pilot. [Guidance has been published](#) and shared with authorities for taking forward year 2. This concentrates on asking authorities to provide an update on progress with the improvement actions they identified in year 1. The deadline for completing this is 30th September 2025.

The Annual Workforce and Capacity Survey for planning authorities has been issued and the 2nd annual Customer and Stakeholder Survey will go live on 1 October. This will be open for 3 months.

NPI is undertaking a [rapid review to explore what a good customer experience](#) looks like in planning services, and what can be put in place to support this. The review comes on the back of findings from a number of pieces of work undertaken by the NPI that have highlighted service users' desire for a better user experience, and, from the National Planning Improvement Framework that shows that many planning authorities have identified a need for improvement actions to support better customer care.

The [National Planning Hub](#) is now fully functioning. It is led by Scottish Government, working in partnership with the Improvement Service, to provide additional surge capacity and expertise, brokerage support, professional capacity, and efficiency and practice, focussing on housing, renewable energy, and supporting local development plans. NPI is developing resources including a hydrogen planning process map, support on Environmental Impact Assessments, a Local Development Plan support programme, case studies and webinars.

Specialist Employability Support

Following the end of referrals to Fair Start Scotland in March last year, all Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs) are now responsible for ensuring that a specialist employability support offer is in place, as part of their No One Left Behind funded activity, to assist people with a disability or long term health condition, to progress towards, into and whilst in employment.

This year, the Scottish Government awarded an additional £5m worth of funding to LEPs to ensure that specialist employability support was in place in all 32 local authority areas by July 2025. Whilst there was already activity being delivered in the majority of areas, this gave an opportunity to add capacity to existing provision or trial something new, and for a few LEPs this was entirely new delivery.

From running specific initiatives such as Project Search for young people with a disability or autistic spectrum disorder, to offering holistic health and wellbeing support and laying the foundations to enter employment, opportunities now exist across all local authority areas with a focus on 'place then train' model.

'Place then train' is an approach that is proven to be very successful in supporting people with a disability, long-term health condition or those with severe mental health conditions and can be delivered via a Supported Employment (SE) or Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model.

Quarterly reporting and ongoing evaluation of the activities will take place over coming years, and supports the Scottish Government's ambition to halve the disability employment gap by 2038.

Scottish Climate Intelligence Service

Scottish local authorities continue to make great progress as part of the SCIS programme. Some highlights include:

- Aberdeenshire became the first local authority to [publish their ClimateView dashboard](#) as part of the SCIS programme.
- Over 550 interventions have been added to ClimateView dashboards across all 32 local authorities.
- 94% of local authorities have begun the process of co-creating and implementing tailored support plans.

In mid-August, we delivered a workshop exploring the idea of Transition Teams and how local authorities can leverage their broad expertise across service areas to implement more effective, joined-up climate interventions. 24 local authorities came to learn, engage and discuss the topic, including two excellent spotlight presentations from Glasgow City Council and West Dunbartonshire Council who have already implemented similar structures to accelerate climate action in their local areas.

We have published the first of a series of briefings highlighting some of the key social benefits and estimated monetary value of climate interventions that could be implemented by local authorities across Scotland. The [first briefing](#) covers Active Travel.

SCIS was also thrilled to be showcased as a case study at New York Climate Week 2025 in collaboration with the Scottish Government, COSLA, ICLEI and ClimateView. Our Co-Director Clare Wharmby joined Gillian Martin MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, to celebrate the programme as a world-leading example of multi-level climate governance in action. You can read the [full case study](#). To find out more about our progress over the last year, sign up to our [newsletter](#) and read [previous newsletters](#).

SCIS will continue to deliver workshops and tailored support for local authority users over the coming months. We are preparing the business case for future funding to be submitted to COSLA and Scottish Government in October, with a paper due to go to COSLA Leaders in November for a funding decision. We will also be presenting at COSLA's annual conference on Thursday 14th November at 5pm.

Climate Change

We published a [new series of briefings](#) to support elected members and officers to understand the links between climate change and other priority areas. These include “Climate Change and Child Poverty” and “Climate Action, Just Transition, and Community Wealth Building”, with tailored versions for each audience to support practical action.

Local climate action requires collaboration across and between councils. On 28 August 2025, we hosted an event titled “Just Transition in Local Government: From Policy to Practice” in collaboration with SLAED and Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN). Over 110 participants joined to explore how national just transition strategies can be delivered locally. The event featured national insights and local case studies, with nearly 80% of attendees reporting an enhanced understanding of Just Transition. We are now working with partners to plan further support in this area.

Additionally, we continue to support SSN, including quarterly Local Authority Forums and recent discussions linking climate and child poverty. We are also working with Public Health Scotland to set up a Population Health and Climate Partnership Group, focusing on climate impacts on public health and promoting fair climate policies.

Internally, we have delivered two Climate Emergency Training sessions for IS staff, with three more planned in the coming weeks (in-person and online). These aim to build climate awareness and support action across the IS.

Community Wealth Building (CWB)

The first instalment in a new series of case studies showcasing how Community Wealth Building (CWB) is being implemented across Scotland is now available on the Improvement Service website. This series will continue to grow, offering practical insights from local areas.

A briefing for elected members on the CWB Bill and their role in supporting its implementation is also available online. Further resources tailored specifically for elected members are in development, including a briefing note on CWB, Climate Action, and Just Transition. Produced in collaboration with IS Climate Change colleagues, this note highlights opportunities to align these agendas in both policy and practice.

Work is progressing on the CWB support offer, with a draft framework developed and discussions underway with two local authorities to pilot and refine the resource.

The CWB Practitioners Network has established two subgroups: one focused on action plan and strategy development, and another on measures and indicators. The measurement subgroup has held its first meeting and agreed to collaborate on a shared framework for evaluating CWB impact.

Digital Public Services

mygovscot myaccount

The platform now has over an incredible 2.8 million account holders which means that 58% of the eligible Scottish population have now signed up for a mygovscot myaccount. We predict that we will hit 3 million account holders in early 2026. This is testament to the growth of myaccount and the trust that people have in the platform.

We have introduced a new [quarterly myaccount newsletter](#). Each newsletter will provide you with the latest updates and news on myaccount.

We have also recently published two new case studies which focus on Falkirk Council and their use of myaccount. The [first case study](#) focuses on how myaccount helped Falkirk Council collect over £100 million back in revenue and the [second](#) is about how the council transformed customer experience by putting 170 council services online.

Paul Livingstone, Digital Leader, Falkirk Council:

"We've been on board with mygovscot myaccount from the very beginning, and it's absolutely proven its worth. Hitting the £100 million milestone shows just how much it's helped transform the way we work. It's a platform we can trust and one that consistently delivers value for the council and our residents."

Our annual mygovscot myaccount user forum will take place in January 2025. We look forward to this event every year and it's a great opportunity to speak to all councils across Scotland that are users of the platform.

parentsportal.scot

parentsportal.scot is now live in 23 local authorities with Stirling Council and Argyll & Bute Council actively going through the onboarding process. Other Local Authorities have also expressed their interest and we will begin the onboarding process with them soon.

The service is now available in 1,718 schools, with over 295K registered parental subscribers securely linked to over 339K approved pupils, with over 76K National Entitlement Cards (to children aged between 5-10) issued via the parentsportal.scot platform.

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 1.5 million applications for all National Entitlement card types have been facilitated through getyournec.scot since its launch in July 2020. This is a huge milestone. The platform has been instrumental in the rollout of the under 22s scheme and has supported the wider National Entitlement Card programme.

Tony Jones, NEC Programme Manager:

"Reaching the milestone of 1.5 million applications processed through getyournec.scot is a fantastic achievement. The platform has been instrumental in the success of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, but its impact goes much further. By providing an easy and accessible way to apply

online, it has also supported older and disabled citizens to access their National Entitlement Card more quickly and consistently. This has reduced the burden on councils, freeing up staff to focus on providing support where it is most needed. It is a clear example of how digital innovation, delivered in partnership, can benefit citizens of all ages while easing pressure on local services."

Bettina Sizeland, Director of Bus, Accessibility and Active Travel Bettina Sizeland, Transport Scotland:

"Reaching 1.5 million applications is a significant achievement and reflects the crucial role getyournec.scot has in the continued success of the National Concessionary Travel Schemes in Scotland. This milestone highlights the scale of demand for concessionary travel and the importance of accessible digital services in supporting public policy delivery."

Data and Intelligence

Spatial Hub

The Spatial Hub continues to provide Scottish businesses and citizens with unfettered access to open local authority geospatial data in a range of formats and across a variety of subject areas. Increasingly, the data is being updated automatically from source, demonstrating the value of automation and effective data management.

We also continue to increase the use of Spatial Hub as a data publishing tool for local authorities, offering the ability to publish geospatial data through the existing national infrastructure. This further reduces the data management and financial burden on local authorities, especially within the Planning discipline, through utilising available resources. We are also working with two of the main providers of geospatial software in Scotland to integrate Spatial Hub data within their software platform, so the data can be easily consumed across the public sector. This improves the accessibility of the data and thereby enables organisations across the public sector to carry out the critical geographic analysis that they require.

Digital Planning

The IS Digital Planning team presented on the value of data standardisation at the annual Heads of Planning Scotland conference and is now supporting the Digital Planning Working Group, championing the role of effective engagement with local authorities when progressing digital projects.

Additionally, the team presented at the annual Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland conference in September on the value of using spatial data for policy monitoring. The team also produced two case studies on excellence in Digital Planning, highlighting work delivered by the Highland Council on monitoring of housing completions and by Falkirk Council on democratising access to spatial data through their Open Data Portal.

One Scotland Gazetteer

The One Scotland Gazetteer team visited almost all Scottish local authorities over the past several months as part of our ongoing commitment to support data improvement. These series of meetings have seen excellent engagement where IS is assisting local authority gazetteer custodians to highlight how their work enables digital transformation and ensures that council services are more

streamlined. The sessions also considered how councils can easily use Improvement Service data support and analytics to remedy data, to improve its completion, accuracy and currency.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The LGBF Board has agreed the following priorities to drive forward the ongoing development of the LGBF across the next 3 years. These priorities were endorsed by the Solace branch in June, helping to ensure that the LGBF continues to provide a useful sector-led improvement resource.

Supporting a maturing in local government's approach to sector led improvement, and a significant shift towards self-improving councils

Building on the launch of the [Scottish Local Government Assurance and Improvement Framework \(SLGAIF\)](#), and the ongoing [Peer Collaborative Improvement Pilots](#), the LGBF Board is working closely with the [Local Government Transformation Programme](#) and Crerar Workstream to develop clear recommendations and standards of approach for Peer Collaborative Improvement, with the LGBF positioned as the cornerstone for this evolving approach. These recommendations will support continuous improvement in the Peer Collaborative Improvement approach and provide necessary assurance to audit/inspection bodies while striking a balance between impact and feasibility for local authorities. Once developed, these recommendations and standards will underpin the development and implementation of a sector wide approach to peer collaborative improvement.

A proportionate and focussed approach to the development of the LGBF suite of indicators to ensure ongoing relevance

We are working closely with professional associations to strengthen the LGBF Framework in key areas, including Housing and Homelessness, Adult Social Care, Local Government Workforce, Economic Development, Culture and Leisure, and Additional Support for Learning. This work is making extensive use of the [Online Data Return Register](#) to understand the data which is already reported by Councils, mapping this to strategic areas of interest to encourage greater use of data which already exists. Recommendations in relation to new indicators will be shared in due course.

Building momentum in the use of the LGBF to transform and improve council services

The IS Research programme is working with the LGBF Board to expand the use of LGBF data to drive service transformation in councils, with an initial focus on demographic change demand modelling and the local government workforce. A year-long calendar of LGBF Peer Learning Events has been published, and we are partnering with professional associations to deliver practice-sharing sessions across key service areas. Following the launch of the [LGBF Guide for Elected Members](#), several engagement sessions have been held to support their use of the framework. Additionally, new features will soon be introduced to the [LGBF Dashboard](#), enabling councils to customise indicators, comparators and timeframes, and quickly identify areas of strength and improvement, as well as high-performing councils for learning opportunities.

Leading improvements in the wider data reporting and scrutiny landscapes

The LGBF Board have started to consider the scope of the business case for the build and implementation of the Local Government Data Platform (LGDP), which will be produced in 2026. This will follow on from Phase 2 of the LGDP programme and the delivery of a technical prototype which is now nearing completion. We will continue to position the LGBF at the heart of this transformation in the data reporting and management landscape, as a key vehicle for the delivery of the local government platform and a core enabler to streamline the data reporting and scrutiny

landscape, support greater automation and technical integration of data systems, and deliver richer and more timely insights from available data and intelligence.

Peer Collaborative Improvement

We are continuing to make positive progress with the [Peer Collaborative Improvement \(PCI\)](#) pilot programme. Following the successful completion of two sector-led pilots, focused on the Scottish Welfare Fund and Housing Voids, the next phase of PCI will test both the council-led and thematic pathways and is due to start in October. We are working with Audit Scotland to progress the thematic approach with a focus on Workforce Innovation (specifically workforce skills and succession planning) utilising the Best Value thematic audits as an evidence base for this improvement activity. We recently sought Solace involvement to support the council-led approach, inviting councils to volunteer to host the next pilot in an area they wish to prioritise for improvement. Following receipt of expressions of interest, councils will be identified to take part as hosts and peer reviewers during October. So far, the following councils have taken part in the PCI programme: Falkirk; Inverclyde; East Renfrewshire; Midlothian; Aberdeenshire; Highland; Perth and Kinross; and South Lanarkshire. We will shortly announce the councils taking part in the next two pilot phases.

Peer Collaborative Improvement is a key element of the LGBF Board's commitment to develop and deliver a more assertive approach to sector-led performance improvement, with LGBF positioned as a key cornerstone, and has received support from the IS Board, Solace and COSLA Leaders. As such, peer collaborative improvement forms a central strand of the [Scottish Local Government Assurance and Improvement Framework \(SLGAIF\)](#) which has been developed by the IS and COSLA to provide robust evidence of the expansive landscape of governance, reporting, performance improvement, audit and scrutiny which currently relates to local government. The LGBF Board are working closely with the [Local Government Transformation Programme](#) and Crerar Workstream to build on the learning emerging from this PCI pilot programme in order to develop clear recommendations and standards of approach for Peer Collaborative Improvement, with the LGBF positioned as the cornerstone for this evolving approach.

Local Government Data Platform

We are in Phase 2 of this ambitious data transformation project and are nearing the end of work to develop the technical prototype for a [LGDP](#). A delivery plan for this phase has been approved by the LG Data Platform Oversight Group. The Oversight Group is co-chaired by Kenneth Lawrie, Solace and Jane O'Donnell, COSLA, and involves the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, IS, Public Health Scotland and Scottish Government. Phase 2 of this project focusses on the necessary arrangements to deliver simplification and streamlining of the reporting landscape, as well as delivering improved co-ordination of the data collection that continues to be necessary for assurance purposes, reducing the effort for manual data collection and improving the re-use of data collected.

The key deliverables in Phase 2 are:

1. Improved governance and reductions in the reporting landscape through the development and operationalisation of a new governance mechanism.
2. Prototyping the technology required to deliver the Local Government Data Platform and identifying existing solutions and components that a LG Data Platform may have to integrate with.

3. Improved data standards to enhance the quality and re-use of data provided via the establishment of a Local Government Data Standards Board to work across Scottish local government and the wider public sector to identify and curate existing data standards and support the development of new standards.
4. Creation of an [Online Data Return Register \(ODRR\)](#) to improve awareness and use of existing data, identify linkages, and highlight areas of duplication and potential rationalisation.

Completion of these deliverables will help inform the development of the final business case to Solace and COSLA Leaders in due course. Regular progress reports are being considered by the Oversight Group who meet quarterly, and an update on progress was shared with Solace and Leaders in April and May 2025. A business case for the full build and implementation of the LGDP will be brought back to Solace and COSLA Leaders in early 2026.

Community Planning & Community Planning Improvement Board (CPIB)

The CPIB continues to provide leadership and improvement support for community planning in Scotland, and to generate valuable evidence-based solutions to the significant challenges facing communities and local partnerships. Across the next period, the CPIB will set their future priorities and workplan for the next 2-3 years, and agree the vision, strategy and set of actions needed nationally, to provide further support to CPPs as they take local action to tackle deep-rooted inequalities and improve wellbeing. Public service reform will be central to this, and the CPIB will explore the opportunities for community planning partners and Community Planning as a way of working to help accelerate the reform that we need to see to deliver on the preventative shift as outlined by Christie. Greg Colgan, as Chair of the CPIB, continues to ensure CPIB members, which include senior representatives from all statutory community planning partners, the third sector, COSLA and Scottish Government, are able to feed into and inform the Public Service Reform work strand in the Solace/IS Transformation programme which he leads.

In recent months, the CPIB Chair and IS colleagues have been collaborating with statutory local community planning partners to explore and shape initial ideas around CPIB's priorities. This includes considering the Board's potential role in supporting the implementation of the newly published Public Service Reform Strategy and Population Health Framework. We will use the outputs from these discussions to bring forward a set of proposals and discussion questions that will help guide the Board's planning during their November meeting.

Further updates, newsletters and Board papers are available on the [CPIB website](#), where colleagues can access further detail on the evidence gathered by the CPIB and on the engagement taking place with local and national partners.

Research

We are now one year into our Child Poverty Accelerator Fund Project with West Lothian Council, which is aiming to use council-held data to identify unmet need. Significant progress has been made on developing a new interactive dashboard, in accessing new datasets, and in putting the insights into practice. A news item was recently published on the Improvement Service website reflecting on our progress to date. We are continuing to source and access new datasets and will shortly be looking to begin testing this approach with a small group of local authorities outwith West Lothian.

The team recently published a new briefing note on demographic change titled “Navigating Population Change - Economic and workforce implications for Scotland”. The report builds on a previous briefing, with a focus on how demographic change is likely to impact the labour market and Scottish economy. It focuses on the main drivers of change, including migration, and identifies case studies and policy levers that local government can exercise, as well as making a case for support that could help address barriers to future action. The report is available on the IS website.

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.

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