

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 2025 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Annual General Meeting

During the AGM, the Directors' report and financial statements, changes to our Articles of Association and reappointment of our external auditors were all approved, and our annual report was noted.

Changes to our Members's Agreement were also approved with only one council voting against a change relating to the IS Chief Executive approving invoices/accounts for payments up to and over £50K. They noted that it is unclear in governance terms and infers that the Chief Executive can sign any invoice/account. The council suggested that the wording should be confirmed, and it needs to be clear if it is unlimited approval levels or up to an amount. It was clarified at the meeting that there is no limit on the Chief Executive approval levels and that this was agreed by the Board under the Scheme of Delegation.

The Board appointments of Cllr Heather Anderson and Derek Brown, and the resignation of Louise Long were noted. The IS Chief Executive noted her thanks to Louise for the significant contribution that she made as an IS Board member.

Joint working agreement between Audit Scotland and the IS - annual update

The IS Chief Executive joined an Accounts Commission meeting in December and Blyth Deans, Audit Scotland joined the IS Board Meeting. Both were positive meetings where the constructive joint work undertaken during 2024/25 was noted and proposals for future joint work in 2026/27 agreed.

Finance, Operations and HR update

The Board noted that the management accounts for quarter 2 show actual income received year to date of £11.8m which includes investment income of £116k.

The Board approved an updated Artificial Intelligence policy and a new Neurodiversity in the Workplace Policy.

The Board noted the 2025 staff survey results which show an overall satisfaction rate of 87%.

Report from the IS Audit Committee

The Board noted that the Audit Committee were satisfied with the Q2 finance position and the Q2 reforecast, which the Board approved.

The Board also noted that the Audit Committee agreed to defer the internal audit to the next financial year due to competing priorities.

Strategic Performance Dashboard

The Board noted that the quarter 2 dashboard highlighted that staff numbers increased by 7.9% and staff absence reduced slightly from 2.4% to 2.1%.

The Board also noted that LinkedIn followers continue to grow, increasing by 5.8% since quarter 1 and that digital growth was observed across all areas, with system availability remaining at 100%.

Corporate Risk Register

The Board noted the corporate risk register and agreed to add two new risks relating to the use of AI services within the IS and the potential impact of the new SEEMiS delivery model on parentsportal.

Risk Management

Following the deep dive session last year, the Board agreed that IS officers will include a dedicated section on risk management in relevant Board papers; will publish a public statement on IS approach to risk on the IS website; and will introduce an opportunity register.

Development update: National Visitor Levy Shared Service Platform

The Board acknowledged the collaborative progress between the IS and early adopter councils in operationalising a national visitor levy service, and recognised the proactive steps taken to secure independent financial assurance to reinforce the platform's credibility and readiness for national rollout.

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Elected Member Development

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 included mandatory training for elected members as part of a package of measures designed to improve the effectiveness of the planning system as a whole. Following a period of consultation on how this should be delivered, the Scottish Government have taken the decision to deliver the training online, to allow elected members flexibility to complete it at a time that suits them. We are delighted to share that we will be working with Planning Aid Scotland to develop the mandatory training package ahead of the 2027 Local Government elections. The training package will be hosted on the soon to be developed IS Councillor Academy portal.

This training will provide a baseline that Chief Planning Officers can supplement based on local needs, covering additional topics and local matters as they see fit. The training package will be developed over the spring and will be tested during summer 2026. We will liaise with Heads of Planning Scotland throughout its development.

Change Management

We held 2 change manager's sessions over the last quarter and continued to respond to councils' requests for bespoke support. This has included sharing practice and connecting councils working on similar projects. Furthermore, we have built on the previous survey of 2022 to understand how change teams operate locally. The survey results will be used to shape change management support and were shared with colleagues at the most recent change manager's session in November 2025.

Solace/IS Transformation Programme

The transformation programme is progressing well, and progress continues to be reported monthly to Solace Branch Meetings. A newsletter is now up and running to update colleagues across local government and the wider public sector on the progress of the [local government transformation programme](#) as it moves through development and delivery. Our newsletter runs on a monthly basis and highlights progress in workstream 1 and 2 projects and importantly details upcoming asks for local government. You can [sign up](#) to receive a copy of the newsletter.

Organisational Development

Local Government Leadership Success Profile (LSP) Pilot

The pilot which is being delivered in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland (NES) has gone well, with managers from 17 councils participating in activities and events between October and December. Evaluation is now taking place which will inform next steps and further roll out of the programme.

OD Network Highlights

Recent Event

23 October: Council Induction Programme – Thanks to colleagues from East Renfrewshire Council who presented on their newly refreshed induction approach. A great session which was attended by more than 40 colleagues from 24 councils.

14 January: Open Space Session – This saw an opportunity for OD colleagues to find out what everyone is working on, challenged by and excited about.

Upcoming Events

5 February: Key Topic Session - Human Rights Capabilities in Local Government - our colleague Dr Aidan Flegg, Human Rights Project Manager, will share details of the human rights framework in Scotland and its implications for local government, and the work so far to build capabilities on human rights and develop practical human rights-based approaches.

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 November 2025 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. 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 Insights Dashboard Launched

Following the launch of the ELC Insights Dashboard earlier in the year, we have continued to work with local authorities and Scottish Government to understand how the tool is being used in practice and where further development would add most value.

In November, we hosted the first workshop with local authority colleagues to explore emerging uses of the dashboard, discuss priorities for future development, and consider how the tool can best support local planning, assurance, and improvement activity. The workshop generated rich feedback and a number of practical ideas that we will now take forward through a series of follow-up Action Learning Sets planned for later this year.

This ongoing engagement will ensure that the next phase of the dashboard remains firmly rooted in local priorities, supports meaningful insight, and plays a key role in shaping future approaches to data collection and reporting in partnership with the sector.

Eligible Twos National Improvement Project – Supporting Uptake and Engagement

We are continuing to work with five partner authorities through the Eligible Twos National Improvement Project, where we have moved from the discovery phase of the project into co-design and early testing of improvements to how families are identified, contacted, and supported to take up their funded entitlement.

Across the project, we are seeing common challenges around data sharing, referral routes, and how information reaches families. At the same time, authorities are developing creative local solutions,

including stronger partnerships with health and community services, more targeted, relationship-based approaches to engagement, and a growing focus on mapping data, capacity, and demand to better understand local needs. A key part of this work includes maximising the use of the IS datapipeline to support more joined-up insight and improvement activity.

Learning from this work will be shared with the wider sector later in the year, with the aim of supporting both local improvement activity and national thinking on how uptake for eligible two-year-olds can be strengthened.

Exploring and Strengthening Local Approaches to School Age Childcare

Our exploratory work on School Age Childcare continues to progress, with a number of councils now engaged in discovery conversations and local mapping activity. The project is helping to build a clearer picture of how authorities interpret and act on their duties around consultation with families and support for children in need, and how these responsibilities sit within wider children's services planning.

Through this work we are identifying examples of emerging practice, alongside shared challenges linked to commissioning, workforce capacity, and the variability of local delivery models. The insights generated will support local reflection while also contributing to national policy discussions in this developing area.

National ELC Workforce Planning Discovery Session

In November, we hosted a national discovery session bringing together professionals from 24 local authorities to share approaches, challenges, and opportunities in early learning and childcare workforce planning. The session highlighted innovative practices and common priorities, all aimed at ensuring the right people are in the right place with the right skills to give children and families the best start. You can [read the full summary](#).

We're now planning focused sessions with individual councils to dive deeper into local priorities. Information on the outcomes from these sessions will be shared in due course.

Public Service Reform

Community Planning

The end of 2025 saw us say thank you to Stuart Graham, Chair of the Scottish Community Planning Network (SCPN), who stepped down from this role having been in post for a number of years. Stuart was a dedicated Chair, who championed the network and Community Planning throughout his time in post. We are delighted to announce that as of January 2026, Annette Lang (Midlothian CPP) and Gail Prince (Highland CPP) will be following in Stuart's footsteps and taking on this role together as Co-Chairs of the SCPN.

Protecting People

Embedding Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change: National Learning Event

We published a new national learning report looking at the progress of trauma-informed and responsive approaches across Scotland. Developed with local and national partners, the report outlines the findings and learning from an annual survey about progress and impact of work taking place to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach across Scotland's organisations, services and workforces.

The [2025 National Learning Report](#) was published at a National Learning Event on 11 November 2025, which was attended by over 400 stakeholders on the day. This included a broad range of public, private and third sector organisations and policy areas, including representation from 31 local authorities, as well as senior leaders, managers, policymakers, practitioners and Elected Officials. The learning report and event highlighted substantial progress across all nine key drivers of the [Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change](#) whilst highlighting the need for joined up practice, supporting staff care, support and wellbeing across the public sector, and strengthening links to other cross-cutting policy agendas aimed at improving outcomes for people and communities.

More information about the report and event is available to [read](#) and a recording of the event along with a learning note will be available on the [NTTP website](#) shortly.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence 2025

To support the programme of activities that took place across Scotland as part of the 2025 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, we facilitated a [spotlight webinar series](#) between 25th November - 10 December 2025 on selected topics identified by the National VAW Network as crucial to supporting the delivery of Equally Safe and improving outcomes for women and girls.

Each webinar aimed to raise awareness of the current challenges being experienced by women, children and young people affected by VAW, hear from examples of good practice, and discuss what actions are needed to support joined-up working. Key themes explored at each webinar included: economic abuse; digital violence; the intersections between substance use and VAW; and meeting the needs of migrant victims and survivors. We also published a [toolkit of resources](#) to add value to local 16 Days campaigns and hosted a calendar of events on our website to showcase activities taking place across Scotland.

Recordings of all of the webinars will be available on the Improvement Service website shortly, along with a learning report from the webinar series.

UNCRC Implementation project

Join us for the 2026 UNCRC Local Government Conference hosted by the Improvement Service on Monday 23 February 2026! The event will bring together colleagues from across Scotland who are working to make sure infants, children and young people are experiencing their rights. Join us to:

- Encourage yourself to explore different approaches to deepening our understanding and commitment to children's rights in local government.
- Engage with colleagues who are working to put rights into policy and practice and learn and share experiences.
- Participate in workshops that explore rights in practice.
- Take time over coffee breaks and lunch to network and connect with colleagues.

You can [book a place](#).

National Planning Improvement (NPI)

Planning services continue to take forward the National Planning Improvement Framework. As part of this, 18 have now completed a review of progress made against their identified improvement actions. These reports have been sent to the relevant Chief Executive and the Planning Minister and [published on the Improvement Service website](#). The remainder of planning services are progressing with this. An [Evaluation Report](#) has been published providing feedback on the pilot phase of the framework from planning authorities, peer review participants and facilitators.

The [National Planning Improvement Annual Report](#) for September 2024 - September 2025 has been published setting out work undertaken and key strategic challenges for planning services across Scotland.

The first [Annual Workforce and Capacity Survey](#) for planning authorities has been published. It allows us to gain an ongoing understanding of the resourcing situation in planning services, which is recognised in the National Planning Improvement Framework as one of the factors that can impact on their performance. The 2nd annual Planning Customer and Stakeholder Survey was live between October and early January and a report outlining the findings will be published in due course.

NPI undertook 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. A report setting out actions and recommendations for planning services, Scottish Government, Heads of Planning Scotland and services users has been published.

The [National Planning Hub](#) which is led by Scottish Government and delivered in partnership with the Improvement Service continues 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. As part of this it has published a [hydrogen planning process map](#), provided a series of [case studies](#), launched a [learning and support programme on Environmental Impact Assessments](#) and is working with planning services and Scottish Government to deliver a Local Development Plan support programme.

Employability Strategic Plan - Recent Employability Activities

The first [Employability Strategic Plan 2024 - 27 Annual Report](#) was published in December and contained an update on many of the activities driven forward by Local Authorities and employability partners through cross-sectoral working groups over the last year.

Key achievements include:

- The refreshed [Local Employability Partnership Framework](#) was published, with a workshop delivered to 220 partner representatives
- Publication of [Good Practice Guidance for Commissioning Employability Services in Scotland](#) - with two thematic workshops delivered to almost 100 council staff and LEP partners involved in commissioning, plus an additional upskilling session for Scottish Government Employability colleagues
- Suggested good practice for [communication of employability services](#) using online platforms, as well as nationally agreed introductory paragraphs - shared with all partners

- Parental Employability Support Leads across all Local Authorities meeting regularly to share their experiences, good practice and offer support with thorny issues
- Service Design Working Group and Community of Practice established to build confidence and capacity in the use of people with lived experience in service design
- Local Employability Partnership Chairs Group established, majority of whom are Local Authority senior officers, to share good practice, ensure consistent voice and messaging across all 32 LEPs and strengthen relationships across all partners

On behalf of the LEP Chairs, the IS Employability Partnership Manager and Third Sector Partnership and Engagement Manager co-developed and facilitated an in-person event in December, to bring together representatives from key employability stakeholders across all Local Authority areas.

With almost 150 partner representatives in attendance - including Local Government, Scottish Government, Department of Work and Pensions, Skills Development Scotland, Third Sector, Health, Further Education/Higher Education and Business - the feedback from the event was that it was a very useful day where colleagues were able to share good practice, learn about different projects, discuss challenges and help plan for the year ahead.

Scottish Climate Intelligence Service

The Scottish Climate Intelligence Service programme continues to make good progress building local authority capacity and capability for area-wide emissions reduction. Q3 2025 highlights include:

- Over 700 interventions in total added to ClimateView dashboards across all 32 local authorities.
- 4 workshops and 8 drop-in sessions for 77 officers from 30 Scottish local authorities.
- Updated area-wide emissions inventories for all 32 local authorities.
- Half of 2026/7 core funding secured through COSLA with Scottish Government confirmation expected this quarter.
- SCIS team and programme referenced in Scotland's Draft Climate Change Plan 2026-40.

Workshop Highlights

In October we started our new SCIS Refresh workshop series centred on refreshing our core users with the key knowledge and themes underpinning the programme. First in the series was 'interventions': specific and measurable actions designed to target sources of emissions within a local authority area. Transferring interventions from climate-related plans and strategies to live ClimateView dashboards is the first step of each council's SCIS journey. Aberdeenshire were the first local authority to [publish their ClimateView dashboard](#) as part of the SCIS programme.

Our second refresher session in November was all about 'Making the Case for ClimateView', exploring the different groups our users engage to accelerate collaborative climate action, and how to best secure buy-in across the council, including examples from officers across several local authorities.

Also in November, we hosted a session on Tempo Analysis and Target Balancing (TATB), supporting users to evidence the scale and pace of action required across service areas to meet local and national climate targets. The TATB process requires setting targets across key sectors to plan a decarbonisation pathway, before breaking down these long-term targets into manageable yearly

activity shifts. We have tested this process out with several local authorities throughout 2025, centred primarily on heat in buildings and transport, and it was great to reflect on our learning to-date while looking ahead to ramping up of delivery in 2026.

Wider Engagement

SCIS continues to engage with key delivery partners across the country, which in Q3 included: presenting at the National Transport Strategy Board and Climate Delivery Framework Political Group, being showcased at the inaugural Just Transition Summit and providing evidence at two Scottish parliamentary committees. As ever, SCIS continues to be a ready and willing collaborator with those supporting local government to reduce area-wide emissions across Scotland.

In this vein, part of our mission is to help to bridge the gap between national policy and local implementation and solidify [multi-level climate governance in Scotland](#). As such, we are thrilled to have fed into Scotland's Draft Climate Change Plan 2026-40. Our co-benefits team have had their methodology for calculating the socio-economic benefits of climate action included in the draft Plan, while the SCIS programme is referenced as a primary support mechanism for local climate action. To find out more about the co-benefits of climate action, you can read our briefings published this quarter covering [Active Travel](#) and [Electric Vehicles](#).

What's coming up?

Over the coming months, SCIS will continue to deliver workshops and tailored support for local authority users, in addition to engagement with key delivery partners across the country, including a National Sprint programme with Scottish Government to support enhanced multi-level climate delivery.

Community Wealth Building (CWB)

The Community wealth Building Project continues to support Scottish councils with Community Wealth Building. A 'Creating the Conditions for Community Wealth Building' framework has been developed which is being reviewed by partners and will be tested with two pilot local authorities before being shared as a resource that can be used by councils independently. A series of [case studies of good practice](#) from Scottish local authorities is now available.

After the mapping exercise identified the need for strong leadership at political and executive levels, a series of activity has taken place. First, we brought council officers together in a confidential space to learn from one another on how to gain support from leaders. Second, we held a webinar for elected members looking particularly at how they can play a role in progressing CWB locally.

The webinar was well attended and included presentations from Miriam McKenna (Programme Manager for Economy and Inequality at the Improvement Service), Cllr Matthew Brown (a Senior Fellow with The Democracy Collaborative and Leader of Preston City Council), Lauren Bennett (Project Manager for CWB at Fife Council), and Neil Reid (Research and Improvement Manager at South Lanarkshire Council). Each contributor focused specifically on the leadership role of elected members and practical ways they can progress CWB locally. Discussion at the webinar focused on Pension investment as a key opportunity, which will be the focus of the upcoming CWB Practitioners Network Spotlight Session.

Two working groups have formed within the CWB Practitioners Network, one focusing on action

planning, and the other on measurement and indicators. The action planning group is gathering information on successful implementation of action plans through a questionnaire and will use this to develop resources to support the network. The Measures group is developing a logic model and mapping existing measures onto this to ensure there is national consistency in what is being measured across local authorities.

The CWB (Scotland) Bill is at stage 2 and a [daily list of amendments](#) was published on 14th January.

Digital Public Services

[mygovscot myaccount](#)

The latest figures show that the mygovscot myaccount platform now has over 2.9 million account holders which means that 60% of the eligible Scottish population have now signed up for a mygovscot myaccount. This is testament to the growth of myaccount and the trust that people have in the platform. Last year, myaccount securely handled 20 million authentication requests, and this year, it's expected to surpass 23 million—making it an essential gateway for Scotland's digital public services.

We will soon be issuing our second quarterly myaccount newsletter. Each newsletter will provide you with the latest updates and news on the platform. The focus this quarter is about the myaccount toolkit and all the extras that the platform has to offer; myaccount is much more than a secure sign-in solution – it is a versatile toolkit designed to meet the diverse needs of organisations, offering a range of configurations that are both flexible and scalable. The toolkit empowers organisations to deliver secure and efficient services tailored to their specific requirements.

We mentioned in our last newsletter about how we worked with Falkirk Council to publish two new case studies which focus on Falkirk Council and their use of myaccount. The case studies have proven to be popular.

[Right to Work, powered by mygovscot myaccount](#)

East Renfrewshire Council are soon to go live with the Right to Work (RtW) service. It's also live with the Improvement Service, COSLA, East Ayrshire, Orkney Islands and Aberdeenshire Councils and Robert Gordon University.

Using a UK or Irish Passport, or Yoti app, an applicant will receive an email asking them to sign into the Right To Work Identity Verification Service. Their identity will be verified using the Yoti Identity Service. Once verified, hiring teams can download proof of the check and attach it directly to HR records – saving time and reducing paperwork.

[parentsportal.scot](#)

2025 was a hugely successful year for parentsportal.scot and 2026 is set to be even bigger. We now have 25 local authorities live on the platform which means over 70% of councils are actively using and benefiting from all the free features that parentsportal.scot has to offer. Other Local Authorities have also expressed their interest in the platform. parentsportal.scot is now available in 1,718 schools, with over 310K registered parental subscribers securely linked to over 358K approved pupils, with over 81K National Entitlement Cards (to children aged between 5-10) issued via the parentsportal.scot platform.

If you would like to know more about the benefits that the platform can bring to your parents/carers and schools, and to you as a local authority please [email us](#) and we would be happy to give you a demonstration of the platform and answer any questions you might have.

Data and Intelligence

Digital Planning

As part of a new grant agreement with Scottish Government, the Digital Planning team is undertaking work to provide a national overview of available housing land and its development across Scotland. This work is in support of the response to the housing emergency and enables the monitoring of the housing pipeline and provides crucial construction information across all Scottish local authorities.

Additionally, the team continues to engage with the Heads of Planning Scotland's Digital Planning Working Group, and with the Planning Standardisation Sub-Group, exploring how a common approach to the monitoring of energy development sites can be achieved across Scotland.

One Scotland Gazetteer

The One Scotland Gazetteer Team delivered their annual Community Event in December, which was attended by all Scottish local authorities. The event highlighted the progress of both the Address and Street Gazetteers over the past 12 months and also included areas for advancement for 2026. Presentations were delivered that showcased the IS Data Hub, along with innovations by Ordnance Survey and the Office of the Road Works Commissioner, which highlighted the use and importance of Gazetteer data in underpinning service delivery.

In the coming year, the team will continue to collaborate with each local authority to help benchmark their current geospatial and gazetteer profile. This will identify where support can be provided and will be delivered in tandem with local improvement programmes, with the aim of ensuring that councils utilise address and location information in the most efficient way possible to aid the delivery of digital customer services.

Spatial Hub

Work is underway to enhance and redevelop Scotland's national location data repository, the Spatial Hub. This programme of work aims to deliver a more intuitive and user friendly platform, alongside more automated and efficient processing of the data supplied by local authorities and partner organisations.

The number of datasets published by the Spatial Hub continues to increase, as does the volume of data accessed by the user community, with significant growth in webservice usage over the last 12 months. As part of the drive to increase use of the national geospatial information (that covers themes such as transport, the environment, education, and health), we continue to expand the range of data formats that are made available, thereby improving accessibility, with the aim of providing geospatial information to an ever-diverse user-base.

Cloud Connector Framework

Enhancement work is underway to expand the content of Planning and Building Standards information that is captured and published through the automated data exchange process between IS and all local authorities.

The Connector continues to receive planning data from all 34 planning authorities and building standards data from all 32 local authorities. Once the data is received and validated, the consolidated datasets now support several new applications that have been developed by NatureScot and Historic Environment Scotland, demonstrating the growing value and cross sector adoption of the information.

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. Event briefings published in the last quarter include:

- [Beyond Books: The Evolving Role of Libraries in Local Communities - Event Briefing 2025](#)
- [Best Value in the Time of Housing Emergency - Event Briefing 2025](#)

- [Rethinking Recycling: Local Strategies for Smarter Recycling - Event Briefing 2025](#)
- [The Contribution of Museums to Scotland's Culture and Economy - Event Briefing 2025](#)

Following the launch of the [LGBF Guide for Elected Members](#), several engagement sessions have been held to support their use of the framework, with further sessions planned this quarter. New features have been 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 endorsed the scope of the business case for the build and implementation of the Local Government Data Platform (LGDP), which will be produced in early 2026 and be presented to the Digital Partnership Board for approval. This follows on from Phase 2 of the LGDP programme and the delivery of a technical prototype. 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. So far, the following councils have taken part in the PCI pilot programme: Falkirk; Inverclyde; East Renfrewshire; Midlothian; Aberdeenshire; Highland; Perth and Kinross; and South Lanarkshire. Evaluations for both pilots are available at the following links: [Scottish Welfare Fund pilot](#) and [Housing Voids pilot](#). Following the successful completion of two sector-led pilots, the next phase of PCI will test both the council-led and thematic pathways and is due to start in early 2026. 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. For the council-led approach, councils were invited to volunteer to host the next pilot in an area they wish to prioritise for improvement. We are currently scoping these two pilots with the identified host councils and will shortly announce the councils taking part in the next two pilot phases.

Local Government Data Platform

We are approaching the end of phase 2 of this ambitious data transformation project. Key achievements so far include:

- Creation of the Online Data Return Register (ODRR). This tool improves awareness and use of existing data, identifies linkages, and highlights areas of duplication and potential rationalisation.
- Prototyping the LGDP technology: We have designed and tested the technology required to deliver the LGDP and identified existing solutions and components that a LG Data Platform may have to integrate with.

We are now taking time to reflect on the lessons learned from the prototyping phase. Work has begun on preparing a business case for the full build and implementation of the LGDP. The LGBF Board has endorsed the scope of this business case which will be produced in early 2026 and presented to the Digital Partnership Board for approval. It will then be shared with Solace and COSLA Leaders.

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.

Over the coming period, the CPIB will set its priorities and workplan for the next 2-3 years. This will include agreeing a vision, strategy and set of actions needed nationally, to strengthen support for CPPs as they take local action to tackle deep-rooted inequalities and improve wellbeing. Public service reform will be central to this work, with the CPIB exploring how community planning partners, and Community Planning as a way of working, can accelerate the preventative shift as outlined by the Christie Commission.

Greg Colgan, as Chair of the CPIB, continues to ensure that CPIB members, including senior representatives from all statutory community planning partners, the third sector, COSLA and Scottish Government, contribute to and are able to feed into the Public Service Reform work strand in the Solace/IS Transformation programme, which he leads.

In November, following engagement with statutory local community planning partners, CPIB met to consider and agree priorities for the next period. Discussions focused on objectives around national leadership and strategic influence, engagement and co-ordination, support and improvement, and collaborative reform. The Board also reviewed its membership, governance, operating model, and measures of success. While proposals were broadly supported, members agreed to refine and prioritise objectives to ensure they are realistic and deliverable. Final priorities and the workplan will be confirmed in the coming months and shared with Solace and COSLA Leaders.

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

The research team has been working on several projects from our research plan and have recently published three new research reports. These are:

[Tackling Cause Not Symptoms](#), an overview of the evidence base supporting the SOLACE/IS Transformation Programme. The report outlines the worsening state of finances across the Scottish public sector in the face of poor health driven by persistent inequalities and an ageing population. The report highlights, for example, a gap of almost 25 years in healthy life expectancy between males from the most and least deprived areas and calls for preventative approaches that focus on the social determinants of health.

[Collaborative Working in Scottish Local Government](#), an overview of the wide range of collaborative activity and shared services currently in place across local government. 410 activities covering a range of functions and operating models were identified. The report also outlines the benefits and challenges of working collaboratively.

The second annual [Business Baseline report](#) was delivered on behalf of Business Gateway and partners. The report showed declining confidence in business prospects over the past 12 months

and low levels of confidence in the Scottish economy. In part this was driven by high costs with just under two thirds of respondents (63%) highlighting this as a challenge.

Evaluation

The evaluation team has published a series of evaluation reports on the Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships 'Test and Learn' Programme. In this programme, funding was provided by Scottish Government to support 15 councils to offer access to welfare rights advice in GP Practices. Recent reports considered a [service user perspective](#) and the [lessons learned](#) from developing and delivering the partnerships.

A report, including case studies from eight councils, assessing how local authorities are supporting the provision of [community-based advice services](#) has been published. This found that, despite funding uncertainties, several councils have expanded accessible advice services. Future plans vary, with some councils intending to maintain provision at existing levels while others are exploring innovative delivery methods, such as mobile libraries, video consultations and family support hubs.

Work is underway on a report to be published in Autumn about the impact created by councils using capital investment from the Place Based Investment Programme- direct grants in their local areas . Earlier interim evaluations have highlighted how effective the monies have been used to lever other sources of funding and to support community participation.

The Evaluation team are keen to explore how the [Evaluation Services Offer](#) can be considered for inclusion in any local framework agreements.

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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