

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 March 2022 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Finance Update

The Board noted that we have secured £5,600,190 funding from outwith the Local Government sector to date, exceeding our target of securing £2.5M for 2021/22.

HR Update

The Board noted the continued low absence levels and that the biennial PSIF self-assessment exercise took place in quarter 3. Regular updates on the PSIF improvement plan will be shared with the Board.

Budget 2022/23

The Board approved the budget 2022/2023 and agreed that an IS Reserves Policy should be developed. The Board requested that officers re-calculate redundancy costs in the event of the company being wound up, and using this analysis, make a recommendation to the Board about the level of formal reserves required going forward.

The Board also requested that the Chief Executive commence discussions with Scottish Government and COSLA's Director of Membership and Resources to highlight that the IS core grant funding (£1.656M) has not increased since 2011/12 and to request that the IS core grant should feature in spending review discussions for 2023/24.

A discussion on future premises took place and the Board asked officers to undertake work on what the IS future operating model will look like before a decision is made regarding the office lease. This will be reported back at the June Board Meeting.

Business Plan 2022/23

The Board approved the draft Business Plan 2022/23, subject to minor updates being made. The [published version](#) is now available. The Board agreed a target of £2.5M for bringing additional resources into the sector during 2022/23.

Communications Plan

The Board recognised the improved communications, noting the progress made to date and thanked the Communications Teams for all their hard work. The Chair reminded Board Members that they all have a role to play in promoting and communicating the work of the IS.

Board Development Plan

The Board noted the progress made with the delivery of the Board Development Plan and agreed that a session between Board Members and IS staff takes place once we have a changeover in Board membership following the Local Government elections.

The Board agreed to set a diversity target for Board membership (for gender) and suggested that to get diversity of thinking on the Board, it may be helpful to invite people in for specific agenda items, or to attend Deep Dive sessions.

The Board formally noted that Solace nominated Maggie Sandison, Chief Executive, Shetland Islands Council to take on the position of IS Board Vice Chair.

The Board agreed that they would like to engage with the Permanent Secretary, the Chair of the Accounts Commission and the Chair of the Local Government Committee.

IS Board Members (nominated by COSLA)

The Vice-Chair of the Board thanked all the Elected Members on the Board for all their hard work, noting the importance of their role over the years. The Vice-Chair also passed on her thanks to the Chair for her leadership role over the years.

Retirement

The Chair of the Board thanked Iain McKay, Head of Data and Intelligence and Martin Brown, Head of Digital Public Services, both retiring over the coming weeks, for all their hard work over their many years at the IS and wished them well for the future.

Recruitment

Work has commenced with our Remuneration, Appointments and Appeals Committee (Cllr Alison Evison, Lorraine McMillan and Victoria Rogers, West Dunbartonshire Council representing SPDS) to recruit a Head of Data & Intelligence and a Head of Digital Public Services with final interviews being held the first week in April.

Upcoming Events

Through April and May there are a series of One Scotland Gazetteer regional meetings and drop in sessions covering a range of topics including updates for Gazetteer custodians, data and data governance, climate change, the Green Agenda and asset management. The full range of these events can be found on the IS website [events page](#).

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Elected Member Development

National Induction

The national induction resources have been completed and the generic versions are being published on the IS website. Each council will receive their own copies with their council's logo for them to disseminate to elected members via internal channels. A further notebook is being finalised for returning members which contains some of the key information from the core resources but prompts returning members to reflect on the new opportunities and challenges of the new council.

Political Skills Assessment

The Political Skills Assessment has been developed to replace the CPD Framework for elected members. It supports councils to put in place a structured process for elected member development in the council. This will be ready to offer to members following the election.

Publications

We have published two new briefings for elected members.

- [Mainstreaming PB](#) provides elected members with information on mainstream participatory budgeting (PB) as councils work towards meeting the 1% Community Choices Framework Agreement.
- [Trauma is Everybody's Business](#) highlights what we mean by psychological trauma, and the impact and prevalence of trauma across Scotland. It seeks to raise awareness of how trauma-informed services, systems and workforces can respond in a way that reduces barriers to support, supports people to recover from their experiences, improves people's life chances, and supports workforce wellbeing. It also explores the key role that elected members play in supporting the sustainable development of trauma-informed services, systems and workforces.

Economic Development

The [SLAED Indicators Report for 2020/21](#) was published on 18 February 2022. This is an annual report that provides consistent data and evidence on what councils throughout Scotland are delivering as local economic development organisations, both individually and collectively. Data is provided directly by councils, as well as by partner agencies and from public datasets, to make up the Framework of input, activity, output, outcome and inclusive growth indicators. It allows meaningful comparisons to be made on the relative performance of areas and assists in ensuring the most effective use of resources to maximise the positive impact of councils on Scotland's economy.

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

We have recently employed a new Project Manager who will lead on support for the implementation of the UNCRC across Local Government. This post is funded by the Scottish Government to help Councils to ensure they are fully realising the rights of children once the UNCRC has been incorporated into Scots Law. Our work will include facilitating peer networks and providing opportunities to share and learn from each other's practice.

Rural Child Poverty

We will be carrying out a focussed piece of work on Rural Child Poverty in partnership with the Scottish Rural Network. This project will accelerate action on an understanding of Rural Child Poverty and provide support for rural local authorities and their health boards in identifying what works in tackling child poverty in a rural setting. It will build on existing activity and trial the recommendations emerging from the Scottish Rural College research report recently completed. . It has identified key factors that cause and/or amplify child poverty in rural and island communities.

Fairer Scotland Duty (FSD)

The National Co-ordinator for the Fairer Scotland Duty continues to deliver training on the duty and its implementation across a wide range of public bodies.

Climate Change

IS colleagues chaired the Sustainable Scotland Network Local Authority Forum held on the 24th February attended by COSLA and Scottish Government focusing on collaboration. Moving forward the IS will support a working group of officers from across Scotland to explore decision making using climate impact assessments. We are working with the Scottish Cities Alliance to deliver Carbon Literacy training to senior officers across the cities which has been well received. We continue to develop our work with Audit Scotland who have published a [summary of key recommendations for public bodies](#).

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Expansion

Following the successful delivery of the expansion, the IS Early Learning and Childcare programme continues to work with stakeholders from Local and Scottish Government to realise the benefits of the expansion and support the ongoing sustainability of the sector. This includes service model redesign, assessing and improving flexibility, measuring and improving the uptake amongst eligible 2-year-olds and offering support and advice on workforce planning strategies. We are also supporting local authorities to understand how best to engage with the communities and families that they serve, improve engagement with parents and helping to articulate the stories and successes achieved by their ELC services.

Covid Recovery Strategy

We have received funding from Scottish Government to support the Covid Recovery Strategy Programme in three key ways:

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

This work began by organising, facilitating and reporting on three workshops with officers from Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council, COSLA and partner organisations to understand the current successes and barriers to the effective delivery of Child Poverty Interventions, before guiding the group to consider and articulate, with a practical focus, what the features of a well working system would be.

Protecting People

Companion Document: Alcohol and Drug Use and Trauma-Informed Practice

In partnership with COSLA, the Scottish Government and NHS Education for Scotland, we have published a companion document to support professionals working with people and their families affected by alcohol and drug use to adopt a trauma-informed approach. [The document](#) aims to:

- raise awareness of the prevalence and impact of trauma for many people affected by alcohol and drug use
- strengthen understanding of how taking a trauma-informed approach can support improved outcomes for people and their families affected by alcohol and drug use and can support staff wellbeing and safety; and
- provide practice-focused reflective questions to support professionals to work in a trauma-informed way

Discovery Report: Embedding Lived Experience in Scotland

In partnership with SafeLives and the Resilience Learning Partnership, we have published a learning report on how lived experience is currently used in organisations across Scotland. This report outlines emerging learning from a wide range of organisations on the activities currently taking place across the country to embed lived experience in local system and service design processes, what 'works', the challenges encountered and the resources needed to fully embed lived experience and participation in a safe, meaningful and trauma-informed way. [This report](#) is available to read and the findings will inform the work of our Authentic Voice project going forward.

New Project: Embedding Domestic Abuse Informed Systems in Scotland

The Protecting People team are undertaking a new project with the Safe and Together Institute to support local authorities, and their partner organisations, to identify actions they can take to improve outcomes for children affected by domestic abuse. As part of this project, we will be coordinating a Safe and Together Implementation Forum, to bring together local authorities who are using the Safe and Together Framework to develop domestic-abuse informed systems, services and workforces to support them to do so in a robust, meaningful and collaborative way. More information about this work will be available soon on the IS website.

PSIF

Work continues with various Councils on corporate self-assessments and supporting Councils pre and post their Best Value Assurance Report.

Organisational Development Local Authority Network

Our Organisational Development Network events last quarter included an event called 'Supporting Employees with Positive Conversations' where we heard from colleagues from East Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire Councils about their approaches. We also held an 'Open Space' session where members came together to discuss and share hot topics and challenges in OD, and we hosted a webinar led by Scottish Government about the new National Leadership Development Programme for Health, Social Care and Social Work. Details of [future sessions](#) can be found on the IS website.

Digital Public Services

Under 22s Free Travel Scheme

More than 3 million journeys have been made using the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme – an impressive achievement given that the scheme went live just two months ago. 315,000 applications have been received, with the majority coming through the online GETOURNEC.SCOT platform. 235,000 cards have been issued by the National Entitlement Card Programme Office (NECPO) and are in the hands of young people across Scotland who will be able to use their free travel to access new opportunities while also helping to meet environmental targets.

We have already made improvements to the online platform, following feedback from the public and discussions with delivery partners, Transport Scotland, NECPO, Young Scot and, of course, local authorities themselves. This should make it easier for young people and parents to make applications, while maintaining the robustness of a system which needs to adhere to identity verification standards and meet strict child safety requirements for young people aged 15 and under.

Almost 27,000 people who previously had their online applications rejected have now resubmitted those applications successfully, having addressed the issues which were identified by the Customer Service Team. The IS has also taken on more Customer Service staff to help with the influx of applications; they have cleared the backlog and new online applications are now being processed within 1-2 working days, with NECPO then printing and sending out cards within a further 2-3 working days.

Transport Scotland have recently launched a mobile app, which allows existing Young Scot cardholders aged 16 or older, who do not need parental consent, to add the travel product to their card using their smartphone. Almost 8,000 people have used this method to access the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme. Offline, delivery partners have worked with local authorities to add capacity to their own ability to process applications and handle enquiries. Following these discussions, we have established a back-up data entry service capable of processing paper application forms, making the service available for local authorities to use if they have a need and a demand for it. Other support options include a service which facilitates the redirection of telephone enquiries from local authorities and delivery partners to an overflow service, and we have initiated contact with those councils which have expressed an interest.

A User Experience Design Review of GETOURNEC.SCOT is currently taking place, with a view to improving the user experience of card applicants. Informed by a technical feasibility assessment, it is expected to lead to more changes to the online application platform being implemented in the coming weeks in pursuit of the broader objective of ensuring as many of the eligible young people as possible can begin benefiting from free bus travel.

Myaccount

38 organisations are now using the myaccount service - 32 Local Authorities plus NHS, Social Security Scotland, Young Scot and others. Discussions are ongoing with NHS Boards about further expanding use for other health services. myaccount subscribers surpassed 1.7 million by March 2022. During 2021 myaccount facilitated over 9.5million authentication requests, which was a direct result of more Councils responding to strong demand from customers for digital service delivery since the outbreak of COVID-19. Other services such as parentsportal.scot and GETYOURNEC.SCOT are continuing to fuel the increase in myaccount's adoption and usage.

Parentsportal.scot

[Parentsportal.scot](#) is now available in 11 councils, with a further eight in the pipeline and discussions ongoing with other Councils expressing an interest. The service is now available to parents and guardians of children at over 825 of Scotland's local authority-run primary and secondary schools. New services have been developed within [Parentsportal.scot](#) to enable parents of primary school-age children to apply for a National Entitlement Card for young persons' free bus travel.

Bisaccount.scot

We facilitated all of Scotland's childcare settings in the private and not-for-profit sector to obtain vital Scottish Government funding by providing a secure online application process through bisaccount.scot; the Omicron Impacts Fund being the most recent. It helped them meet the extra costs incurred in complying with public health guidance in response to Covid-19 and, in the process, it expanded bisaccount's adoption to all 32 Councils (for this purpose). Discussions are ongoing with Local Authorities and other public sector organisations to integrate with back office systems, to further facilitate business authentication for online services.

Data and Intelligence

Infralink

A 13-month Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA) project working with the 4 Tay City local authorities has now officially commenced. Funded by the UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), the Infralink-Exchange pilot project will work with the National Mobile Operators to identify suitable sites for the deployment of infrastructure to improve mobile digital connectivity. The first Phase 1 data (Council Asset Register) will be published on the [Sitenna data platform](#) this month, and additional data (including street furniture) will be published in the coming months. The principle aims of the original Infralink project have been reinforced by the additional funding this pilot project has brought, and the lessons learnt will be used in the continued development of a national approach to the data asks, approach and improved investment and subsequent connectivity enhancement. More information on the Infralink-Exchange project is available from <https://infralink.scottishfuturetrust.org.uk/page/infralink-exchange> and the more wider Infralink project is available from <https://infralink.scottishfuturetrust.org.uk/>

Automated Planning and Building Standards Data

7 planning authorities are now live with an automated data submission process for their Planning and Building Standards data into our Spatial Hub platform. Along with over 40 other geospatial datasets, Planning and Building standards data is critical to many public sector organisations, and this latest development helps ensure that we have the most up to date local authority data possible. Along with on-going work on data standards and data quality in conjunction with Scottish Government Digital Planning, it is envisaged that a single point of access to quality-assured Planning and Building Standards data, in a consistent format will be available very soon.

One Scotland Gazetteer

The IS has recently arranged a series of [regional sessions](#) with Local Government data and intelligence colleagues, with a focus on the green agenda, and in particular, exploring the use of Council street and address data to underpin the discovery and delivery of net zero policies. The sessions shall explore best practice in local authorities relating to data management, and how to exploit the large volumes of data generated.

The team also recently began working in collaboration with the Department for Transport and Transport Scotland to lay the framework for the digitisation of local authority Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs), and the electronic publication of TROs in the future.

Local Government Covid-19 Dashboard

We continue to produce a weekly Local Government Covid-19 Dashboard tracking key indicators to allow councils to monitor their response to the pandemic, and the impact on communities. With Covid case numbers rising again, the dashboard provides an invaluable picture of current system pressures facing local government, providing timely data in relation to staff absence levels; delayed discharges; Adult & Child Protection referrals; Homelessness and Arrears; and pupil attendance and absence, along with other elements. The dashboard also highlights where deprivation and rurality are playing a key role in emerging trends. We continue to evolve the set of indicators to reflect the changing circumstances facing Local Government and communities, removing those no longer meaningful, and identifying other available datasets which may add value, e.g. Social Care Unmet Need. The development of the Dashboard is supporting efforts to automate and streamline data reporting and will provide a key building block in the development of the Local Government Data Platform.

Local Government Data Platform

We are continuing to work with the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government and COSLA to progress plans for the development of a Local Government Data Platform. This aims to rationalise the current data reporting landscape, simplify data collection, improve quality assurance, and provide richer insight from data currently collected from councils, including LGBF data. COSLA, IS and LGDO have produced a strategic case to take this forward which will be shared with Solace members shortly, with an update to be provided to COSLA Leaders in April. Phase 1 of the project has been funded by the IS and is now underway. This phase aims to:

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

An oversight group has been established to steer this project, drawing representation from COSLA, IS, LGDO, SOLACE, Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland. In addition, the LGBF Board has agreed to provide an advisory role.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The LGBF Overview Report was published in March 2021. This year's publication presents data which covers Year 1 of the pandemic, and provides evidence on where we are seeing the impact of the pandemic on council services and local communities. In time, the LGBF dataset will span pre-pandemic, pandemic-time, and post-pandemic periods and the continuity the LGBF provides will be critical to understanding the full impacts of Covid-19 on long-term trends. The variation within the dataset provides vital intelligence to assist the sector to learn lessons from its response and to strengthen and redesign services around future policy priorities to support recovery and renewal.

The LGBF strategic plan for 2021-2024 provides an opportunity to evolve the LGBF for the post Covid-19 world. We continue to work with professional associations to consider how we strengthen

focus on key areas such as poverty and inequality, mental health and wellbeing, economic recovery, new ways of working and digital transformation. This year, new measures around Child Poverty and Youth Unemployment have been included. We continue to build momentum in the use of the LGBF to transform and improve council services, and have published a set of good practice principles which provide a clear picture of how the LGBF could be used locally to drive improvement. An offer of support is available to councils should they wish to review their current use of the LGBF against these principles and explore how they might extract greater value from it in relation to strategic and budget planning, improvement, scrutiny and public performance reporting. We are working to build on improvements achieved in data and intelligence during this period, to ensure the LGBF provides relevant and timely intelligence for decision making around recovery and renewal priorities. We will prioritise key LGBF datasets to support progress in relation to streamlining and automating of d

Community Planning & Community Planning Improvement Board (CPIB)

We are continuing to support the [CPIB](#) to build on and promote evidence of the hugely positive role Community Planning has played in responding to Covid, and will continue to champion this agenda across the period ahead to ensure the gains achieved are not lost post-Covid. The CPIB has recently strengthened its membership reflecting senior level commitment from all key Community Planning partners to work together to support recovery. In January, the Chair of the CPIB (Greg Colgan, Chief Executive, Dundee City Council) met with the Deputy First Minister, Minister for Communities and COSLA President to share learning on how CPPs can and are already supporting Covid Recovery in their local areas, and to highlight barriers which require national action as well as local. The CPIB Chair has been invited to sit on the Covid Recovery Strategy Programme Board to promote connections between Community Planning and recovery efforts.

In February 2022, the CPIB refreshed its Strategic Plan to ensure it is positioned to effectively support Community Planning to contribute to local recovery priorities and to align with and support delivery of the national Covid Recovery Strategy (CRS). Across the coming months, the CPIB will undertake a series of 'deep dives' focussing on the three priorities outlined in the Covid Recovery Strategy:

- Financial security for low income households
- Wellbeing of Children and Young People
- Good, green jobs and fair work

These 'deep dives' will focus on how partners will work differently (or are already doing so) in order to achieve improved outcomes. The CPIB will identify and take action in relation to:

- Barriers that are stopping us delivering person led services
- Governance and planning arrangements that could be streamlined
- Areas where better data sharing is needed
- Engaging partners who have a key role to play
- Good practice examples of innovative/effective progress (including those emerging from COVID)

Evidence on the role Community Planning has played in responding to Covid-19 so far and CPIB briefings on the role of Community Planning in Recovery are available on the [CPIB website](#).

Research

The Common Advice Performance Management Reporting Framework has been published for 2020/21. The report shows the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how services continued to

deliver support and advice for some of the most vulnerable members of society. The report also shows how services shifted to primarily online and telephone delivery as a result of lockdown measures. Web services in particular saw a huge increase in use rising from 1% of initial contacts with services to 42%. The report also highlights the enormous benefit and value that these services provide for clients. While the number of clients fell in 2020/21, partly due to an increase in government support available during the pandemic, the value provided by these services continues to be very high, delivering over £315 million in financial gain for clients or £12 per £1 invested by local authorities. [The full report and individual local authority reports](#) are available on the IS website.

We have continued work to redevelop the National Customer Survey for Building Standards. A new survey has been developed and now shared with all Building Standards services for the launch which took place on the 1st April. In addition, we have developed a new dashboard which will allow services to track performance in real time as the survey is completed and access data on an ongoing basis.

Evaluation

We are evaluating the effectiveness of offering access to welfare rights advice in GP Practices as a service delivery model with a focus on the impact created. As part of the evaluation process it will be possible to identify the benefits gained for individuals across a range of demographic characteristics, including those most likely to experience child poverty.

Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships have now been established in many areas across Scotland. Ten local authorities, or Health and Social Care Partnerships, have received funding for two years from Scottish Government to provide access to welfare rights in around 140 GP Practices serving the most deprived areas in Scotland. Advice will be provided by skilled advice workers, who are employed either directly by local authorities or through a range of third sector organisations, based in individual GP Practices and who have consensual access to medical notes.

We are carrying out an evaluation of Scottish Government's Place Based Investment Programme. Following engagement, a reporting framework and guidance will be shared with local authorities in the next few weeks. It is intended to use the data collected and reported to demonstrate the contribution the fund makes to realising the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes.

For further information, on either of the above or to discuss how evaluation support can be provided at a local level.

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.