

*The 'go to' organisation for local
government improvement in Scotland*



Research and analysis offer

The Improvement Service (IS) - supporting
evidence-informed decision making

is.
improvement **service**

Context

The Local Government Revenue Grant Settlement has been declining for over a decade with real terms funding declining by 6% since 2010/11 and 4.2% since 2013/14. The medium to long-term outlook for local government finance looks likely to remain challenging, with the June 2022 Resource Spending Review maintaining local government resource at 2022/23 levels in cash terms until 2025-26 at least. When inflation, pay awards, and other additional cost pressures are factored in this amounts to a significant real terms cut in the resource available to local authorities.

This financial pressure will mean that it is increasingly important that investment is targeted at policies and programmes which will result in the greatest impact. Unfortunately - as resources become scarcer - and demands on them increase - it can become progressively more difficult to fully support evidence-informed decision making.

How can research help?

Research is the process of collecting and analysing data to produce intelligence. This is essential to assess where we have been, where we are, where we need to get to, and understand “what works” in order to inform decision making that leads to improvement.

The IS has a dedicated Research Team that can help to gather, analyse and use evidence to drive improvement. The team has a wealth of experience in developing and delivering research and analytical projects. We are expert at collecting, presenting, and analysing data and evidence to tell stories and provide actionable insights.



How can the IS help?

The Improvement Service can offer an independent and cost-effective research and data analysis service on a cost-recovery basis. The services we provide include:



Bespoke research projects such as literature review, briefing papers, and surveys

The team can provide bespoke research projects on topics of interest. This includes data collection, such as through literature review, surveys, or focus groups, and research reports summarising the key lessons and insights.

Examples include:

- [Collaborative Working Research Report](#)
- [The Impacts of Covid-19 Overview Report](#)
- Support for Angus Council's review of Community Councils, which included engagement with Community Councillors and survey of Angus residents.



Survey design, hosting, and insights

The IS Research Team has extensive experience of developing surveys on a range of topics and based on sampling frames including local authority services, local authority staff members, and the general public. We are also able to distribute and host survey data and can provide analysis and reporting on survey results.

Examples include:

- [National Customer Survey Building Standards](#)
- [National Trauma Training Programme workforce survey](#)
- [Annual Instrumental Music Survey](#)
- The Improvement Service staff and stakeholder surveys



Data analysis

We are experienced in basic and advanced data analysis and statistical modelling techniques to help derive lessons and value from your data. This could include analysis of the relationship between data or time series trends. In addition, we are familiar with forecasting and predictive modelling.

Examples include:

- [Projected Cost Pressures for Scottish Local Authorities](#)
- [Sub-Council Population Projections](#)



Data visualisation including developing Business Intelligence or dashboard products

The research team can provide a range of data visualisations, making statistics on inequalities and other outcomes presentable and more easily analysed. This includes mapping and spatial analysis.

Examples include:

- [Community Planning Outcomes Profile](#)
- [Local Government Benchmarking Framework Analysis](#)
- [Covid-19 Economic Impact Dashboard](#)



Support and advice for developing research proposals

We can support with developing your own research proposals or applications for funding. This could include support for sharing/distributing results, acting as a critical friend, support for writing, and linking to academia or other sources of support



Development and training in research methods and data analytics

The team are expert in using tools for data analytics including Excel, R and Shiny, PowerBI, and Python and can deliver training sessions on these. We can also offer training on research and data analysis techniques, and making use of open data portals such as NOMIS and statistics.gov.scot.

The IS has a role to support all local authorities in their use of evidence to inform decision making. This includes identifying best practice and sharing lessons across local authorities. The IS would therefore encourage participants to work with us to produce case studies and share outputs so that any work undertaken can add benefit across the whole sector and future opportunities for collaboration can be identified.



Case study

National Customer Survey for Building Standards

In 2021 the Improvement Service Research Team was commissioned by Building Standards Division (BSD) to redevelop the annual National Customer Survey for Building Standards. The research team worked with a small group of local authorities to define the key customer satisfaction measures required and to develop a new survey, far shorter and easier to answer than the previous version. The team then developed a new dashboard, allowing local authorities to log in and access all of their results in real time. The dashboard offers pre-made analysis and access to the raw data, and is updated on a daily basis with the latest results.

A news item was developed by Building Standards Division on this work: <https://blogs.gov.scot/building-standards/2022/05/20/new-national-customer-satisfaction-survey/>

Support options

We can work with you to agree and offer research support services in a way that best meets your needs and priorities on a cost recovery basis. We can also work collaboratively with researchers and analysts in the Council. This may include one or more of the following options:

- Support to carry out research into a particular area.
- Call-off service to provide support on demand for a fixed number of days, with packages of days available at a reduced rate.
- Advice, guidance or training on identified issues in sessions spanning a half day or over several days.
- Individual projects can also be purchased. These will include all of the required days to prepare and deliver the project as specified.

Example project: Survey

Example project: survey

- A local authority can commission the Improvement Service to undertake a survey on a topic or area of choice, for example a staff survey.
- IS would provide survey design (developed in collaboration with the local authority), survey hosting and distribution through the SmartSurvey platform, and a high-level report summarising all findings.

- The local authority would be expected to provide the IS with details on the desired sampling frame, such as their staff group, and, if relevant, contact details or alternative access routes, such as social media. The local authority will also be expected to provide a lead or leads to consult on proposed survey questions and analytical approach.
- Costs will be agreed based on the length and complexity of the survey, for example the number of questions. Additional analysis including comparison of smaller groups within the sample can also be included, with the cost dependent on the number of sub-sample groups to be included.

For further information on any aspect of our offer, please contact

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