

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 2025 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Accounts Commission

The Board had a positive discussion with Jo Armstrong, Chair of the Accounts Commission and Alison Cumming, Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value. Jo presented an Accounts Commission update highlighting the role of the Accounts Commission, current priorities, work programme, recent and upcoming outputs, proposed Best Value thematic options for 2025/26 and the longer-term pipeline proposals for audit work. Jo highlighted the importance of the relationship between the IS and Accounts Commission and welcomed more regular engagement with the Board.

Finance, Operations and HR Update

The Board noted that the management accounts for quarter 3 show actual income received year to date of £12,179,225 which includes investment income of £165,069.

Report from the IS Audit Committee

The Board approved the Q3 Reforecast, our Revised Reserves Policy, recommendations from the West Lothian Council internal audit team on the review of our Digital Public Services which received the highest audit rating of effective, and our Risk Management Policy and Guidance, noting that work is underway to organise a 'deep dive' session for the Board on risk management.

The Board agreed that the Chair of the Board writes to the Directors of Finance section to request that a local authority Director of Finance joins the IS Audit Committee, and agreed the Audit Committee's preference that the new Audit Committee member takes on the role of Chair, given they are independent of the Board.

The Board noted that the Audit Committee agreed to commence the re-tendering process for external audit services in September 2025.

Strategic Performance Dashboard

The Board noted the quarter 3 strategic performance dashboard and agreed to include the Corporate Risk Register as a stand-alone agenda item at future Board meetings.

Board Governance Improvement Plan

The Board noted the progress being made with the delivery of the Board Governance Improvement Plan and agreed the refreshed Board Terms of Reference.

The Board also agreed to participate in a Board Skills Analysis, to further explore the feasibility and benefits of appointing an independent company director to the Board and to revisit board level diversity and inclusion after the completion of the Skills Analysis.

The Board requested that officers capture feedback from Board Members as they leave the Board.

Annual Budgets

The Board approved the annual budgets for 2025/26 and 2026/27 and agreed to engage in early conversation with COSLA for an increase in the block funding grant from April 2026.

Business Plan

The Board approved the [2025/26 Business Plan](#), and noted the considerable progress made during 2024/25 with the delivery of our four strategic priorities. The Vice Chair will present an annual report to the Solace branch signposting Chief Executives to our Business Plan and key achievements from 2024/25.

Research Plan

The Board approved the 2025/26 Research Plan.

Communications Plan

The Board approved the 2025/26 Communications Plan.

Solace Review

The Board noted an update on the Solace Review of partner organisations.

Digital Identity Scotland

The Board received an update on the componentry analysis being undertaken on myaccount and ScotAccount and agreed that a request be made to Scottish Government officials for the componentry analysis to be carried out within the live environment of Digital Front Door.

Relationship Management Update

The Board noted the number of Councils using our services and that the council engagement documents will be shared with Council Chief Executives in May with an update on our funding provided in the cover email to raise awareness of how the IS is funded. The Board also noted that the findings of our relationship management survey would be presented to them in June.

IS 20th Anniversary

The Board noted proposed activities planned for 2025 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the IS' incorporation and agreed to play an active role in the 20th anniversary celebrations by participating in proposed Board activities.

Awards

The Board noted the following awards:

Our Digital Public Services team won the Public Sector Innovation Award at the Digital Technology Awards for our parentsportal app.

Our Research and Child Poverty Teams won the Local Area Research & Intelligence Association (LARIA) Research Impact Award for Best Use of Data for our work with West Lothian Council to identify unmet need. This project used data to better understand child poverty within West Lothian Council. By combining and analysing publicly available and council held data, we were able to use analytical insights and local knowledge to create a model showing places where support entitlement is not reaching those in need. The project brought together the assets and strengths of the two partners and other organisations to deliver simple, low-cost, actionable insights that will deliver support to those in need within West Lothian. The analysis has had an immediate impact on informing decision making. West Lothian Council have been able to use the findings to target interventions such as door knocking campaigns, community outreach events, and work with local schools and other partners including the third sector.

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Organisational Development (OD) Network

Our OD Network events bring colleagues together virtually every six weeks. Recent events included an Open Space event in January where colleagues came together to consider current OD priorities and challenges and a key topic session in March which focused on Leadership Development, looking at the activities and resources across all councils in Scotland. Colleagues from 25 councils participated in the sessions. Future sessions will further explore collaborative opportunities for Leadership Development and will also consider Organisational Culture.

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. Our most recent event was held in March and focused on leadership stories. This session featured presentations from three experienced leaders working in local government and gave members the opportunity to learn from their honest account of their career journey, including challenges and advice on how to overcome them. We have a number of events in the diary over 2025, including regular drop-in sessions for both mentees and mentors to encourage networking and sharing of practice across the sector. 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

Outcomes and Measurement Framework

April 2025 will mark the release of the first iteration of the Outcomes and Measurement Framework (OMF) Dashboard tool for all local authorities across Scotland. Developed in collaboration with local government and Scottish Government, the OMF is designed to support improvement in Early Learning and Childcare planning and service delivery by making key data more accessible, interactive, and actionable. This initial version is the starting point of an ongoing co-design process with councils, with future iterations shaped by feedback and evolving needs.

Workforce

To help support workforce capacity planning in the sector, we are working to bring together all available workforce data into a single, accessible resource. This includes data from our own IS returns, as well as information from the Scottish Social Services Council and the Care Inspectorate. By consolidating this information, we aim to create a clearer picture of workforce supply, capacity, and potential gaps across the sector.

The goal is to develop a practical tool that enables more effective analysis of both quantitative and qualitative workforce data. This will support local authorities in making informed decisions about workforce planning, recruitment, and training needs, while also providing a national overview to help shape future policy and investment in the sector.

Case Studies

Following a visit to the Craighalbert Centre in October 2024, the team have worked with the Centre to develop a [case study](#) that encourages local authorities and their partners to draw inspiration from the approaches used at Craighalbert and learn from the key elements of success.

With the support of Little Bugs Outdoor Nursery, the ELC team have developed a [case study](#) that explores practical steps and approaches that can be implemented to develop, integrate and deliver high-quality outdoor ELC provision. This builds on the Exploring Caring for Outdoor Spaces guidance, Outdoor Learning and Learning for Sustainability [event](#) that took place at the end of last year. A copy of this resource, and the new [case study](#) are available on the [IS website](#).

Protecting People

16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence 2024

A series of national spotlight webinars took place during [16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence 2024](#), focusing on key topics identified by the National Violence Against Women Network as crucial to supporting the delivery of the [Equally Safe Strategy](#). The sessions all centred around Scotland's national theme for the 16 Days campaign: Imagine a Scotland without violence against women and girls. Participants reflected on what this future would look and feel like, and explored the steps we can take within our systems and services to make this vision a reality. A summary of the key messages from this webinar series, as well as [recordings of the presentations](#) are available.

Authentic Voice: Embedding Lived Experience in System and Service Design Processes

In December 2024, the Authentic Voice project hosted a [national survivor-led conference](#). The event had over 100 attendees from a range of organisations including specialist violence against women and girls (VAWG) organisations and local VAW partnership leads, police, health, education, third sector organisations, and local and national government stakeholders from across key policy areas such as trauma, social work and justice. Attendees of the conference highlighted the thread of lived experience voice throughout all presentations and inputs. Attendees also valued the event as an example for taking a trauma-informed approach in developing their own events, and appreciated the acknowledgement of workforce lived experience of VAWG and trauma, and staff experiences of vicarious trauma in these areas of work. A video report from the day is [available to watch](#).

Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change

Following the publication of the Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change in 2023, the IS hosted a webinar in January 2025, in partnership with the Scottish Government, COSLA, NHS Education for Scotland and Resilience Learning Partnership, to share learning from across Scotland around how a range of services/ organisations are using the Roadmap to support them in their journey towards embedding a trauma-informed and responsive approach. There were nearly 600 attendees on the day. A [brief learning note](#) from the event is available to read along with the [recording](#).

Public Health Implementation Forum Launch Event

In February 2024, the IS launched a new Public Health Implementation Forum in partnership with Public Health Scotland. The Forum will meet quarterly from May 2025 and aims to: raise awareness of good practice taking place across Scotland to adopt a public health approach to tackling challenging issues; explore what it means to adopt a public health approach to preventing violence against women and girls; and support partners to identify and implement actions within

their organisation/ policy area to embed this approach. More information about the Public Health Implementation Forum, including how to get involved, will shortly be available on the IS website.

National Planning Improvement Hub

The National Planning Improvement Framework pilot is progressing and cohort 1, comprising 10 authorities, has been completed. Each of these authorities' performance assessment reports and improvement action plans have been shared with the relevant Chief Executive and the Planning Minister and have been [published on our website](#). Cohorts 2 and 3 are underway and it is hoped to complete these by the end of April. The first four [case studies](#) generated through the process have been published, as has a [think piece paper](#) reflecting on the peer collaborative review aspects of the National Planning Improvement Framework.

The first annual [planning customer and stakeholder survey](#) has been published along with a [blog](#) outlining the context and way forward. This was undertaken to help all planning authorities gain a better understanding of the challenges faced in providing high levels of customer care and satisfaction with the service provided. It is part of the wider work being undertaken through the pilot National Planning Improvement Framework.

The Hydrogen Planning Hub has published an [insights report](#) on planning for hydrogen. This examines the challenges and opportunities in planning for hydrogen that have been identified through discussions with planning authorities, hydrogen industry, agencies and regulators. A webinar was held for planning authorities with the Health and Safety Executive on their role in planning and outlining the health and safety aspects of hydrogen. A range of other resources are being developed including a hydrogen planning process map and an 'explainer programme' to provide communities with unbiased factual information on planning for hydrogen.

Economic Outcomes

The [SLAED Indicators 2023/24 report](#) was published in February and is the twelfth annual report setting out consistent evidence of what Scottish councils are delivering as local economic development agencies. The SLAED Indicators are a set of measures that can be used to assess the overall and relative delivery of council economic development activity, highlight areas of good practice, and identify areas for improvement.

Specialist Employability Support

An additional £5m in funding from Scottish Government has been made available to Local Employability Partnerships to support Specialist Employability Support delivery and is included in the No One Left Behind grant award for this year.

Specialist Employability Support is additional activity to support those with a disability or long-term health condition to progress towards, into and whilst in work, and must be in place by July 2025. This additional funding will allow the further development of local provision and give some areas the ability to expand on their existing activity.

To build knowledge and understanding of what Specialist Employability Support is, and to support future commissioning, the IS has facilitated a number of thematic workshops and webinars for Local Authority employability teams.

From Outcome Star which is an online tool for measuring an individual's journey towards work, to a specific session on DFN Project Search - an intensive programme for young people with a disability or who are neurodiverse, through to a provider 'marketplace' event for twelve local and national third sector and private providers to share their offers with local authority employability leads, the first quarter of the year has been very busy.

Capacity building sessions will continue to be delivered to support this very important agenda and there will also be themed workshops and a panel discussion on how to support those who are economically inactive into work, at the forthcoming SLAED People conference in May.

Scottish Climate Intelligence Service

Our work on the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service (SCIS) is progressing well. Since January 2025, the team have delivered 2 more training workshops and met with all local authorities to discuss needs and priorities. We have also delivered 3 in person roadshows in Glasgow, Inverness and Edinburgh with 75 officers and Elected Members from 23 local authorities and a number of delivery partners. Feedback from these events has been very positive and will shape the development of the programme.

Our Climate Change Transformation Project Manager has engaged with all four IS clusters in the last few months to evaluate climate change integration across our projects and programmes. While some service areas already incorporate climate considerations, the review identified opportunities to strengthen this through clearer guidance. Key next steps include developing briefings to clarify climate change connections across our service areas, creating consistent messaging about climate relevance, and delivering climate emergency training to build climate literacy. This will ensure that we embed climate change throughout our service delivery.

Community Wealth Building

We have mapped [community wealth building](#) (CWB) activities across Scotland to form a picture of progress and potential of the economic development approach. This baseline mapping reveals a rich tapestry of approaches, innovation, and collaboration. It shows that community wealth building has been widely adopted, shifting the focus from traditional economic development to one that retains wealth in communities, strengthens local supply chains, and improves wellbeing.

Through a review of local strategies, action plans, and updates from practitioners, the baseline mapping aims to:

- Understand Scotland's current CWB landscape
- Identify emerging best practices
- Spot opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing

You can read about the [key findings](#).

Public Service Reform

The team has been working closely supporting the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership (GCPP) in the development of a Performance Management Framework (PMF). This work has been summarised in a case study, which highlights the agile approach adopted by the IS team to create a framework that integrates both quantitative and qualitative measures. Through a series of intensive sprints and co-design workshops, GCPP partners worked together to build a comprehensive PMF that captures the impact of their efforts to reduce poverty and inequalities in Glasgow's communities. You can find out more by reading the [case study](#).

Community Planning

The Scottish Community Planning Network has had a busy start to 2025, with the first Spotlight Session which focussed on Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIPs) taking place in February. This was followed by the first national event of the year which was held in March and focussed on the [National CPP Self-Assessment Overview Report](#). These were well attended by Community Planning Partnerships across Scotland and continue to be a great resource for sharing learning nationally. We look forward to welcoming network members to our next national event which will be held in person in June 2025.

The network has also published 3 case studies this year, highlighting the great work ongoing in both Perth and Kinross Community Planning Partnership and Community Planning Aberdeen. These can be accessed via the IS website by following the links below:

- [Perth and Kinross Community Planning Partnership Board Development](#)
- [Community Planning Aberdeen: Improving Outcomes and Partnership Working](#)
- [Community Planning Aberdeen: Achieving Better Outcomes, My Way to Employment Project](#).

Child Poverty

The IS Child Poverty team worked with Dundee Community Planning Partnership to deliver an event exploring how local government can support meaningful engagement with families at risk of child poverty. Involving 96 people from across 22 local authorities, the event included powerful testimony from officers, parents and third sector organisations from Dundee as well as Aberdeenshire, Argyll & Bute and Renfrewshire. It also provided an opportunity to share practice and discuss [a recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation report](#) which noted the importance of:

- Enabling empowerment, often through a third sector partner which can identify and support community members to engage meaningfully.
- Strengthening the relationship between the community and decision-makers.
- Changing perceptions between groups of people that are systematically separated.
- Providing a clear route to designing better policies for communities.

What Matters 2 You also presented their work on empowering communities to tackle poverty and inequality in Dundee, [screening their film](#) and supporting a live Q&A with some of its stars. A report, including presentations from the day will be available in May.

Digital Public Services

mygovscot myaccount

mygovscot myaccount usage has continued an upward trajectory with year on year and month on month increases which look set to continue throughout 2025. The platform hit the huge milestone of 2.5 million account holders in 2024 which has now increased to 2.6 million as platform usage continues to grow. Currently, 54% of the eligible Scottish population has now signed up for mygovscot myaccount.

The platform also comes equipped with a suite of security features including passkeys which was added in 2024. Passkeys ensure the mygovscot myaccount user experience is familiar and consistent. A simple verification of their fingerprint or face, or a device PIN - the same action that consumers take multiple times each day to unlock their mobile phones, tablets or other devices - now provides easy and secure access to mygovscot myaccount.

We have also developed an improved registration experience for mygovscot myaccount users. The process now includes an email verification step at the very beginning of registration, enhancing both security and usability. When users enter their email address during registration, they will receive an email with a verification link. Users click the link to confirm their email address and continue setting up their account. This simple but effective enhancement is designed to:

- Prevent issues caused by typos in email addresses.
- Streamline the registration process for users.
- Reduce the volume of helpdesk queries related to incorrect email entries.

Introducing the new Young Scot Membership App

Our Product Development Team has been working closely with Young Scot to deliver the new mobile app which is now available for download and has been extremely well received.

The app, which uses mygovscot myaccount for authentication, is now available to any young person aged 12-25 in Scotland with a Young Scot National Entitlement Card (Young Scot NEC) and can be downloaded for free from the Apple or Android store. This app is set to transform how Young Scot cardholders access discounts, rewards, and activities, all in one convenient location.

The features of the new app include:

- Interactive discount map Using the 'Near Me' function. Young people can view the nearest Young Scot discounts to their location, from 10% off at Co-op and 20% off at Pizza Hut to many special local discounts at cafes, restaurants, shops and attractions.
- A digital card to make use of Young Scot discounts. The app links to the Young Scot NEC and can be used in store to access show and go discounts. **Please note that young people should continue to use their physical Young Scot National Entitlement Card for free bus travel and proof of age (PASS).**
- Order a new replacement card. Once a young person has already linked their card to the Young Scot app and if their personal details haven't changed, they can also use the app to apply for a replacement Young Scot National Entitlement Card.

The app also serves as a portal to the free Young Scot membership platform which gives young people the opportunity to earn points by participating in a wide range of activities including sharing their views and reading articles.

parentsportal.scot

parentsportal is now live in 21 local authorities and it continues to grow from strength to strength. We are pleased to report that another 2 local authorities are currently going through the onboarding process, and we are speaking to several other local authorities who have also expressed their interest in onboarding the platform.

The service is now available in 1,651 schools, with over 254K registered parental subscribers securely linked to over 362K approved pupils, with over 63K NEC Cards (to children aged between 5-10) issued via the parentsportal.scot platform.

Our Digital Public Services team together with technical partners TCS recently won the Public Sector Innovation award at the ScotlandIS Digital Technology Awards 2025 for the development of the parentsportal app. Launched in 2023, the app was designed to make it even easier for parents and carers to access parentsportal.scot features and communicate with their child's school. The app is available to both Android and iOS users and has been downloaded 118,200 times.

If you are a local authority who would like to know more about the benefits that the platform can bring to your parents/carers and schools, please get in touch and we would be happy to have a discussion and give you a demonstration of the platform.

Data and Intelligence

Digital Planning

We are pleased to announce upcoming **Introduction to GIS** training sessions tailored specifically for local authority planners. These sessions will highlight the strategic importance of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in shaping modern urban planning, with a focus on their role in delivering 20-minute neighbourhoods and supporting data-driven decision-making. Attendees will gain insights into the tools and techniques required for effective GIS analysis, real-world examples of its application in urban planning, and the value of leveraging high-quality data to enhance outcomes.

Geospatial Information Offer

We have now formally launched our [Geospatial Information Offer](#), which is the support that we are able to provide to the public sector, relating to maximising the use of location data throughout operations and service delivery. The offer was launched in response to an IS Strategic Framework priority to support local government to deliver digital and data enabled transformation, and is in direct response to requests for support from local authorities over the last few years. We are offering a range of support services, including data hosting and publication, data management, webmapping, reviewing the application of geospatial data within an organisation, analytics and insight, and dataset cleansing / geocoding. Some of these services are provided at no cost, whilst others will incur a charge on a cost recovery basis.

One Scotland Gazetteer

During March, the One Scotland Gazetteer team delivered regional events to Scotland's location data community. The sessions included presentations from East Renfrewshire and Falkirk Councils regarding promoting the use of the Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN) in helping their Waste Management Service deliver a reduction in customer complaints and how address data has facilitated a self-serve customer engagement portal to drive efficiency.

IS colleagues presented a review of how local authorities are doing exemplar work across the country in relation to managing key property and street datasets, which has helped others in their local authorities deliver more integrated services along with a reduction in data processing. Additional sessions focussed on data sources to identify unmet needs in council areas and using data to identify nursery and early years' places using location-based analysis, and how the Persons at Risk Database (PARC) can provide a holistic approach to supporting vulnerable citizens. Ordnance Survey showcased the National Geographic Database, and how it is helping public sector bodies use authoritative data to underpin their national mapping, while ViaEuropa delivered a talk on how they are streaming mapping and data services to the Scottish public sector.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The annual [LGBF National Overview report](#) was published in March 2025. While this year's report reveals the extraordinary effort and achievements delivered across local government against an increasingly challenging backdrop, it also shows how sustained financial, demand and workforce pressures have substantially disrupted performance and efficiency improvements gained in previous years. In parallel to this year's publication, we also published a new [LGBF guide for Elected Members](#) which we hope will be helpful in supporting their use of the LGBF.

The [LGBF Dashboard](#) continues to publish data releases on a monthly basis, to provide councils with access to more timely data. We are continuing to engage with councils to explore how the LGBF Dashboard can be used and adapted to support local approaches to performance reporting, including the development of bespoke dashboards and a basket of priority LGBF indicators aligned to local council plans, for example.

The LGBF Board will take time over the coming period to review the strategic priorities for the ongoing development of the LGBF. This will include:

- Supporting a maturing in local government's approach to sector led improvement, and a significant shift towards self-improving councils.
- Prioritising improvements in the timeliness of reported data.
- A proportionate and focussed approach to the development of the LGBF suite of indicators to ensure ongoing relevance.
- Building momentum in the use of the LGBF to transform and improve council services.
- Leading improvements in the wider data reporting and scrutiny landscapes.

The LGBF Board will engage closely with Solace colleagues to inform the development of these priorities to ensure that the LGBF continues to provide a useful sector-led improvement resource.

Peer Collaborative Improvement

Following a positive evaluation of the first pilot of our new [Peer Collaborative Improvement](#) approach, we are now delivering Pilot 2 on Housing Voids to continue to test and refine our approach. Aberdeenshire Council are the host authority for this pilot, and peer authorities include South Lanarkshire, Perth and Kinross, and Highland Council. 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.

We are working closely with the [Solace/IS Transformation Programme](#) and Crerar Workstream to develop clear recommendations and standards of approach for Peer Collaborative Improvement. 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.

Scottish Local Government Assurance and improvement Framework (SLGAIF)

The IS and COSLA have been working together to set out the significant local government improvement and assurance 'architecture' that exists in Scotland, both internal and external. The [Scottish Local Government Assurance and Improvement Framework](#) (SLGAIF) has been published and provides robust evidence of the expansive landscape of governance, reporting, performance improvement, audit and scrutiny which currently relates to local government in an attempt to enhance understanding with key stakeholders. The SLGAIF sets out the 'as-is' state and provides greater understanding and clarity for both Scottish and Local Government around existing accountability and assurance, revealing how crowded the landscape is, and helping to direct focus on how it can be refined, reduced and/or rationalised for a more effective focus on outcomes, and to build trust and common understanding across the two spheres of government. The framework will also support local government as we look to mature our approach to sector led improvement, and work towards achieving our desired 'to-be' state, for example, more emphasis on peer led improvement and self-evaluation thereby releasing our capacity to focus on local accountability rather than servicing national accountability.

Local Government Data Platform

We are in Phase 2 of this ambitious data transformation project, and a delivery plan for this phase has been approved by the LG Data Platform Oversight Group. 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 will be shared with Solace and Leaders in April/May 2025. A final Phase 2 report on key findings and next steps will be brought back to Solace and COSLA Leaders late 2025/early 2026.

Community Planning & Community Planning Improvement Board (CPIB)

The [latest CPIB Newsletter](#) provides an update on the CPIB's work 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. This newsletter has been circulated to the Chairs of all CPP Boards across Scotland as well as Community Planning partner organisations. The next Newsletter will be published in Spring 2025 and will include a focus on data sharing, the learning from the recent National Community Planning self-assessment programme, and reinforcing the CPIB Guidance on Fair Funding of the Voluntary Sector.

Across the next 12 months, the CPIB will consider 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. In the May CPIB meeting, NHS and Police Scotland will share their sector perspectives on public service reform. In June, the CPIB Chair and CPIB members will attend a visit to the Prevention Hub to learn more about the work the Hub is doing to increase a practical focus on prevention, and to provide an opportunity for CPIB to learn more about what the Hub offer is for Community Planning Partners. This meeting will also provide an opportunity for colleagues to discuss the progress needed in relation to data sharing, culture, collaborative leadership and values. The CPIB is also supporting the Whole Family Support workstream on Community Planning and has agreed to provide support and guidance on the recommendations which arise from the Short Life Working Group. It is anticipated that this work will help to refocus reform efforts on those priorities identified previously by the CPIB in relation to funding flexibility, sustainable funding for the third sector, challenges to data sharing, and the growing burden of data reporting.

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 team has begun work on a new project in partnership with West Lothian Council, which will seek to understand unmet need around uptake of council provided benefits. This is building on previous work undertaken with the Council and is funded through the Child Poverty Accelerator Fund. The team has recruited a new data project officer to take this forward. The first steps for the project are an exploration of the approaches taken to understand and address child poverty across Scotland, working with West Lothian to expand the range of council-held data sources we can incorporate into our analysis, and developing an interactive dashboard. This project will continue to run throughout 2025.

In January the latest iteration of the annual Instrumental Music Survey was published. The results showed that more pupils than ever before are participating in these services at 65,985, a 7% increase from the previous year. At the same time, instructor numbers have risen by less than 1% and remain below historic levels. The data also show increasing cost pressures for the service. The full 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.

You can find the latest Improvement Service news, insight blogs, events and information on our products and services on our website, www.improvementservice.org.uk. You can also keep up to date with all our news by subscribing to our [monthly newsletter](#).

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