

Chief Executive Newsletter



The Improvement Service is the 'go to' organisation for Local Government improvement in Scotland.

The purpose of this newsletter is to update local authority Chief Executives on key decisions made by the IS Board at its meetings in May and June and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Finance, Operations and HR Update

The Board noted the year-end financial position for 2025/26, with income and expenditure largely in line with expectations and no material issues anticipated through audit.

The Board also noted a range of HR updates, including the outcome of recent formal consultations on employment contracts and policies. This included additional guidance on voluntary cosmetic surgery, developed in response to staff and trade union feedback. The Board noted that the guidance was very beneficial and that it may be of interest to the wider local government family.

Report from the IS Audit Committee

The Board received an update from the Audit Committee, noting that financial management, governance arrangements and risk oversight continue to operate effectively, with no significant concerns identified.

The Board approved the transfer of investment income to core funding to support digital public service development, the Local Government Benchmarking Framework and transformation activity, and noted the positive assurance provided through external audit work on the Visitor Levy payments platform.

The Board noted assurance provided on business continuity and disaster recovery arrangements, which have been tested and are considered fit for purpose.

Corporate Risk Register

The Board noted that the Corporate Risk Register continues to accurately reflect the organisation's risk profile, with no changes proposed in the most recent review, reflecting a stable operating environment and confidence in existing mitigations.

Strategic Opportunity Register

Building on the Board's previous focus on strengthening risk management, the Board approved the introduction of a new Strategic Opportunity Register. This represents a significant step in broadening the organisation's approach beyond risk mitigation to include the proactive identification and development of opportunities.

The register has been developed through horizon scanning and engagement across the Senior and Extended Leadership Teams, identifying a range of opportunities aligned to organisational priorities and risk appetite. The Board noted that not all opportunities will be taken forward, but that the register provides a structured framework to assess potential impact, feasibility and alignment with future strategic direction.

The Board welcomed the role of the register in supporting innovation, partnership working and the potential for commercial opportunities, while ensuring that risks and opportunities are considered together. The register will be reviewed quarterly alongside the Corporate Risk Register.

Further work will be brought back to the Board to prioritise opportunities and identify potential 'quick wins' alongside longer-term developments. The IS has had external interest in this work, with one council requesting support from the IS to develop its own opportunity register.

Reputation and Stakeholder Engagement

The Board considered the findings of the independent Reputation Monitor undertaken by PA Advocacy, which confirmed that the IS is seen as a trusted and highly regarded partner across local government, particularly by Chief Executives.

Actions are being taken to build on this position, including strengthening engagement with Council Leaders and professional associations in professions where engagement is currently lower.

Strategic performance dashboards

The Board noted continued strong performance across key services, including increased engagement with benchmarking tools and significant growth in use of the service design toolkit.

While some operational pressures were noted, particularly in relation to service capacity in the Digital Public Services team, actions have been taken to address these and key indicators are expected to improve in the next quarter.

Self-Assessment

The Board agreed to undertake a further self-assessment, with a survey issued over the summer and findings to be considered at the September meeting to inform a programme of continuous improvement.

Business Plan 2026/27 and Annual Budgets 2026/27 and 2027/28

The Board approved the organisation's [Business Plan for 2026/27](#) and agreed the annual budgets for 2026/27 and 2027/28, providing a clear framework for delivery over the coming period.

Research and Communications Plans

The Board approved the annual Research and Communications Plans for 2026/27.

Relationship Management and Engagement

The Board considered insights on council engagement with IS products and services, noting that overall coverage remains strong across the sector, with variation potentially reflecting differing local priorities, capacity and approaches.

The Board recognised that levels of engagement can fluctuate over time and may, in some cases, reflect increased local self-sufficiency rather than reduced value or impact. The importance of continuing to strengthen relationships and maximise engagement opportunities was discussed, including through targeted engagement with councils where activity is currently lower and through strengthened links with existing networks and transformation programme contacts.

National Visitor Levy Platform

The Board noted continued progress on [visitorlevy.scot](#), including successful early delivery and onboarding activity with councils, supported by strong assurance arrangements.

Expansion of Breakfast Provision

The Board agreed, in principle, that the IS should provide support to councils in relation to the expansion of breakfast provision, subject to confirmation of funding and policy detail.

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Solace/IS Transformation Programme

The Solace/IS Transformation Programme [Annual Report](#) has been published.

All 32 local authorities have reaffirmed their commitment to the Solace/IS Transformation Programme focused on delivering sustainable services, efficiencies, and better outcomes for communities.

The annual progress report highlights significant achievements during 2025/26, including:

- the launch of our [duties and powers portal](#)
- the development of a new [national self-evaluation framework](#)
- the publication of a major evidence base to support public service reform

For further information please contact clare.sherry@improvementservice.org.uk.

Local Government Connect Network

Launched in 2024, the Local Government Connect Network supports people in the early stages of their local government careers through mentoring, networking and development opportunities. Recent feedback from participants highlights the significant impact that mentoring is having on confidence, career development, professional networks and understanding of the wider local government landscape.

Feedback from mentors was equally positive. Many described the experience as professionally rewarding, providing opportunities to develop their coaching and mentoring skills, gain fresh perspectives from colleagues across Scotland and reflect on their own leadership practice. Mentors spoke about the satisfaction they gained from supporting emerging talent, sharing their experience and helping colleagues navigate challenges, build confidence and achieve their career aspirations.

As the network moves into its next phase, we would like to thank the mentors who continue to give their time, expertise and encouragement to support colleagues across Scotland. Their contribution is helping to build capability, confidence and connections across local government and is making a meaningful difference to the development of current and future public service leaders

Work is now underway to refresh the membership and develop a programme of future learning and networking opportunities.

For further information or to get involved, please contact amanda.spark@improvementservice.org.uk.

Organisational Development Network

The Organisational Development (OD) Network continues to bring together colleagues from across local government to share learning, build connections and explore emerging priorities for workforce and organisational development.

Recent events included:

17th May – National Self Evaluation Framework (NSEF)

The OD Network and Change Managers Network hosted a joint session to provide an overview of the recently launched National Self Evaluation Framework (NSEF) and the support being developed to help councils implement the framework. Discussions focused on the practical application of the NSEF and how it can support local improvement, transformation and organisational development activity.

1st July – Local Government Leadership Success Profile (LSP) Pilot: Learning from the Pilot and Next Steps

Colleagues from across local government came together to hear the findings from the Local Government Leadership Success Profile (LSP) Pilot, delivered in partnership with the Public Services Delivery Scotland Leading to Change team. The pilot involved managers and learning partners from 17 organisations and explored the relevance and value of a shared leadership development framework and supporting tools within a local government context. Feedback highlighted the value of the approach in supporting reflective leadership practice, career development conversations and collaborative learning. The session also considered opportunities to build on the pilot through shared resources, system leadership development and a more joined-up approach to strengthening leadership capability across Scotland's public services.

For more information, an informal chat or to join the network, please contact amanda.spark@improvementservice.org.uk.

Elected Member Development

Preparing for Elected Office in Scottish Local Government

We have developed a short course on [preparing for elected office in Scottish local government](#) in partnership with the Open University, for people who are considering standing to become a councillor.

The course helps potential candidates understand:

- what councils in Scotland do, including their powers and the broad financial context that they operate in
- the relationship between local government, the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament
- the broad roles and responsibilities of a councillor, including time commitments, expectations on ethical standards and working with council officers.

The course is free to access and we would encourage councils to share this with anyone who contacts them asking for information about standing for election.

Candidates' website

The OU course complements the www.localcouncillor.scot website for candidates. This website has been refreshed and we would encourage councils to use the resources on the website in their candidate information packs, or in Preparing for Elected Office workshops being run for candidates.

For further information, please contact david.barr@improvementservice.org.uk.

New Elected Member Briefings

We recently published the following elected member briefings:

- [Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Through International Obligations](#): This briefing is intended to assist elected members with effectively leading strategic decision-making and shaping local policy while meeting international obligations and legislative accountabilities in tackling violence against women and girls.
- [Strengthening the Role of Elected Members in Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls in Rural Areas](#): In partnership with COSLA, we developed this briefing to help

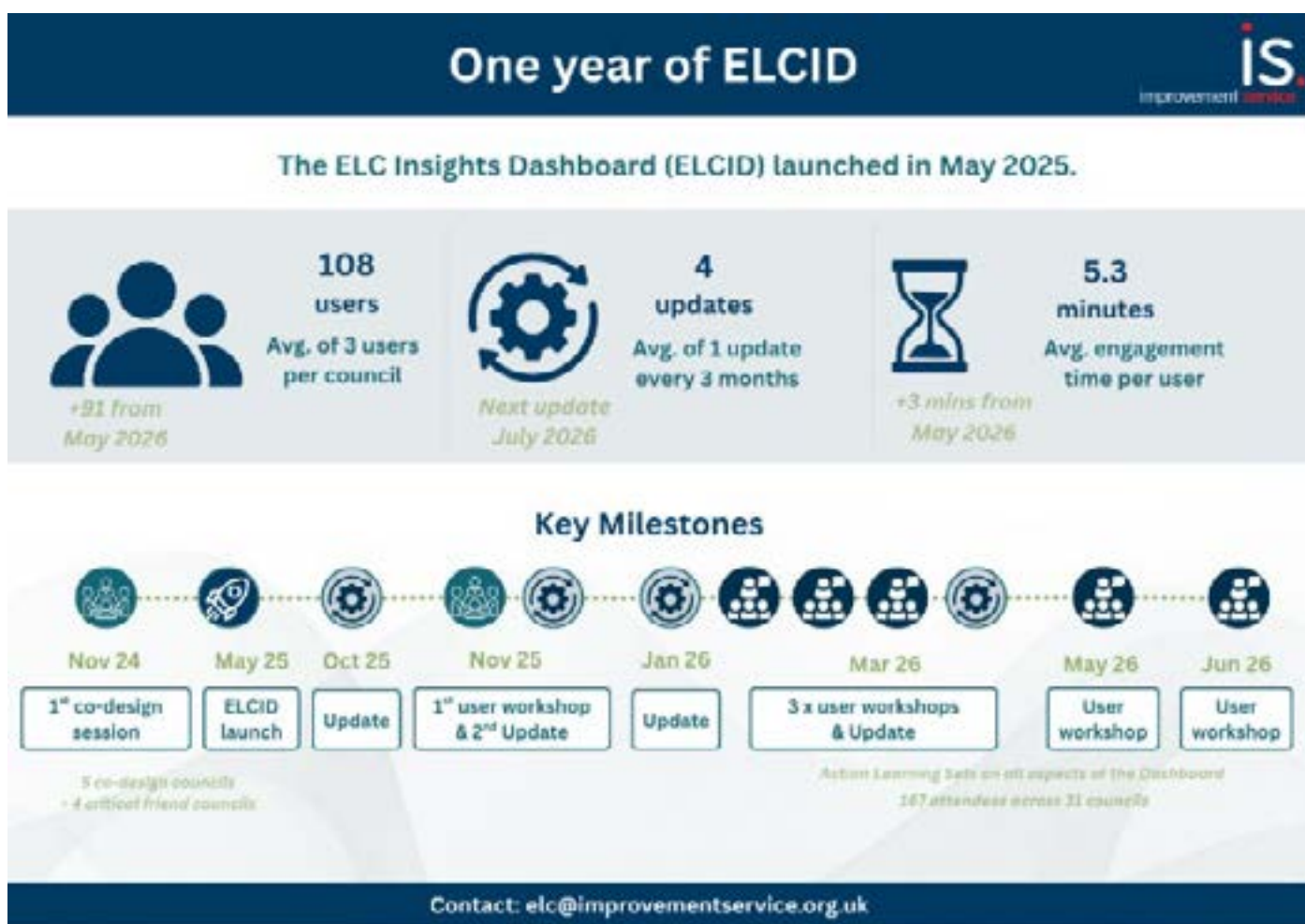
inform and equip elected members to tackle the unique challenges and obstacles that victims and survivors in rural and island communities face and ensure that local systems and services are robustly equipped to offer support. It also highlights a number of good practice examples from across Scotland.

- [Funded ELC for eligible two-year-olds](#) has been published. It highlights the role of this entitlement in reducing inequalities and supporting families, explores the gap between entitlement and uptake, and outlines key barriers to access, alongside the importance of increasing take-up to improve outcomes for children, support parental employment and contribute to tackling child poverty.

Early Learning and Childcare

One Year of ELC Insights Dashboard

May 2026 marked a year since the ELC Insights Dashboard (ELCID) launched - and the picture that emerges from that first year is an encouraging one.



ELCID was built to give local authorities a clearer, shared picture of ELC provision across Scotland - bringing together data on quality, uptake, mapping, and more in one place. In its first year, the dashboard has grown from a small group of co-design councils to 108 users across all 32 local authorities, with average engagement time more than doubling as colleagues have found more ways to put the data to work.

Four updates have kept the dashboard moving, and a programme of user workshops - 167 attendees across 31 councils - has helped build confidence and capability in using ELCID for real planning and improvement conversations.

We are proud of what has been built, and grateful to every council that has contributed to it - through co-design, through feedback, and through simply showing up and engaging with the data. The next year brings new themes, new data sources, and the co-design sprint to reshape the underlying data collection. There is plenty still to do, and we look forward to continuing that journey with partners across the sector.

For further information please contact rob.beal@improvementservice.org.uk.

New ELC Workforce Planning Network Launched

We launched a new ELC Workforce Planning Network, bringing together professionals from local authorities across Scotland who are involved in planning, developing and supporting the ELC workforce.

The network has been established in response to growing interest from councils in sharing approaches to common workforce challenges. While local circumstances vary, many authorities are working through similar issues including recruitment and retention, workforce sustainability, succession planning and ensuring they have the right workforce in place to meet future demand.

The network provides a space for peer learning, collaboration and the exchange of practical experience. Members will help shape future sessions, with a programme of discussions, case studies and spotlight presentations planned over the coming months.

The network forms part of our wider work to support strategic workforce planning and help local authorities make informed decisions about future workforce needs.

National ELC Workforce Planning Analysis Report

In March, a one-off report bringing together [national workforce data and local authority insight](#) to help provide a clearer picture of workforce planning across Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in Scotland was published.

The report highlights key challenges such as short-term planning and recruitment pressures, alongside strengths including workforce stability and apprenticeship pathways. It forms part of our wider work to strengthen workforce planning and support the development of a local ELC Workforce Planning Dashboard.

For further information please contact vicki.keirnan@improvementservice.org.uk.

Fairer Futures Partnerships

[Thematic Learning from Fairer Futures Partnerships \(2025/2026, Q3 and Q4 Report\)](#)

This report brings together thematic learning from Fairer Futures Partnerships (FFPs) across Scotland during Q3 and Q4 of 2025/26. It highlights key insights on delivering place-based approaches to tackling child poverty, including what is working well, the challenges being encountered, and the conditions needed to support long-term, sustainable change. The findings provide a snapshot of emerging learning to inform ongoing practice, policy and systems reform.

New briefings published by the IS are highlighting [Glasgow's pioneering work to tackle child poverty](#) through public service reform. Produced in partnership with the Glasgow Child Poverty Programme and the Scottish Government, the briefing series captures key learning from Glasgow's

ambitious city-wide initiative, which is testing new approaches to reducing child and family poverty through systemic change.

Protecting People

Exploring the Intersections Between VAWG and Substance Use

In June, we published the learning from our research and engagement project exploring the prevalence of, and relationship between, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and substance use which draws on the insights of both experts by experience and experts by profession across Scotland. The learning from this project is intended to support stakeholders working to improve outcomes for women and girls experiencing VAWG and/or substance use who are likely to come into contact with multiple systems and services locally while seeking support.

The full [Learning Report](#) and [Executive Summary](#) are available to read.

For more information, please contact ariane.beaver@improvementservice.org.uk or samantha.keogh@improvementservice.org.uk.

Embedding a Trauma-informed approach Evaluation Toolkit

In May, we published a new appendix to the National Trauma Transformation Programme (NTTP) [Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change](#). The Evaluation toolkit has been developed in collaboration with NTTP partners to support organisations and services to develop their own evaluation framework and identifying progress and impact of work to embed a trauma-informed approach across organisations, services and workforces.

Evaluation supports organisations to understand their progress, identify areas for improvement, and demonstrate the impact of the work to embed trauma-informed and responsive change. Find out more about how [this toolkit](#) can support your organisation or service and access [the toolkit](#) directly.

For more information, please contact jenny.smith-littlejohn@improvementservice.org.uk.

National Trauma Survey and Learning Report

For the third year, we are coordinating a national survey capturing work happening across local areas, including local authorities and key community planning partners, to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach. The findings will inform an annual [National Learning Report](#), providing an overview of progress and impact of the work to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach across Scotland's organisations, systems and workforces. This year's survey is now live and we encourage all local authorities and their partners to submit a response.

This year's learning report will be published in Autumn 2026.

For more information, please contact ariane.beaver@improvementservice.org.uk.

UNCRC Implementation Project

Children's Rights – First Statutory Reports Due to be Published by Local Authorities

Local Authorities are required to publish their first UNCRC reports under UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 outlining the steps that they are taking, and plan to take, to 'give better and further effect' to children's rights. Reports are due to be published as soon as practicable after 31st March 2026. A range of resources and support for local authorities is available from the IS to help

ensure that they are meeting the requirements of the legislation and are familiar with the reporting duty. A new resource to [support local authorities embed children's rights within their service area](#) was recently launched.

For help and support on all aspects of your UNCRC work, email: rebecca.spillane@improvementservice.org.uk.

Planning for Place

Place-based Working and Child Poverty

The [Planning for Place](#) team have recently published new resources exploring the links between planning, place, and child poverty. Our [first publication](#) was co-authored with our [Child Poverty](#) team to describe the planning and the child poverty landscapes in Scotland, with the aim to support collaboration of spatial and community planners with leaders working to reduce child poverty. A [supplementary paper](#) has now also been published on how the [Place & Wellbeing Outcomes](#) can be applied within a place-based approach to address child poverty. These resources provide practical guidance on how planning and place-based approaches can contribute to improved outcomes for children and families.

We are also continuing to test and demonstrate how place-based tools can be used in practice. This includes work with Inverclyde Council to apply a [Place and Wellbeing Assessment](#) to a vacant site proposal. This example showcases how the Place Standard Tool, the Place & Wellbeing Outcomes and other place-based assessments can be used together to support decision-making and improve outcomes locally.

Planning and Population Health Collaboration

As outlined in the [Population Health Framework](#), we are “supporting better collaborative working between Health Boards and planning authorities”, in partnership with Heads of Planning Scotland. To better understand the current landscape, we have completed a survey of planning authorities, with responses covering all 34 authorities across Scotland. A corresponding survey is now live with the NHS Boards. These findings will provide a comprehensive picture of how planning and health colleagues are currently working together. This will identify both effective practice, areas for improvement, as well as supporting future collaboration where planning has a key role in improving population health.

For any further information, please contact placeandwellbeing@improvementservice.org.uk or visit our [website](#).

National Planning Improvement (NPI)

Preparations are being made for the third year of the National Planning Improvement Framework following the completion of year 2 by planning authorities. This will ask planning services to provide an update on progress being made against the improvement actions they have identified and will be launched later this month.

The second annual planning authority workforce and capacity survey is being undertaken. This will track changes in workforce numbers, demographics, capacity, skills needs, income and budgets in planning authorities and the results will be published in September.

National Planning Improvement has agreed to undertake specific reviews to explore approaches to processing planning applications, how to measure and track planning authorities' contribution to place based approaches and workforce strategies. It has also been agreed that the National Planning Improvement Champion will work with Heads of Planning Scotland to explore how planning services can respond to public service reform, and this will kick off with a workshop in the late summer.

[The National Planning Hub](#), held a workshop for all planning authorities to discuss approaches to adopting Local Development Plans by the target date of May 2028. This informed a new support programme that is now in place comprising a MS Teams channel to support networking and matchmaking, face to face workshops, webinars and the development of learning resources such as case studies, toolkits and learning points. As part of this, a workshop was held with the Department of Environmental Appeals to help the most advanced authorities prepare for the Local Development Plan Examination that will be included as part of the process.

We are delighted to report that new National Planning Improvement Framework was commended in the Royal Town Planning Institute's Scottish awards in the best plan category.

For further information, please contact: craig.mclaren@improvementservice.org.uk.

Employability Strategic Plan - Recent Employability Activities

Additional funds to remove transport barriers for parents seeking employment

The publication of the new [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026 - 2031](#) brought unexpected funding of £9m to Local Employability Partnerships, to support transport to employment initiatives for parents. Regional Transport Partnerships received an additional £10m, bringing the total Transport to Employment fund to £19m.

The IS was tasked with establishing a cross-sector planning group with representatives from Scottish and Local Government, Transport Scotland, the third sector and all Regional Transport Partnerships. Through a short series of meetings, and a dedicated Transport to Employment planning session at the recent SLAED People Conference, a menu of options was created and shared with all partners to help with planning activity in the year ahead. Split into People, Project and Infrastructure sections, the menu of options will support Local Employability Partnerships to provide many opportunities to remove transport barriers for parents on the employability pathway.

From providing travel passes or active travel support, to upskilling opportunities for those seeking work in the transport industry, to working closely with community transport initiatives to add capacity to existing routes, the fund will make a difference to those where existing transport arrangements do not support entry to employment.

Whilst the funding is initially for this year only, partners will work hard to evidence the value of the additional funding and the difference it makes to parents where transport has been a barrier.

For further information, please contact susie.donkin@improvementservice.org.uk.

Scottish Climate Intelligence Service (SCIS)

The Scottish Climate Intelligence Service has made significant progress over the last quarter building local authority capacity and capability to reduce area-wide emissions.

Two New ClimateView Dashboards Published

This quarter saw Dundee City and Falkirk Councils become the second and third local authorities respectively to publish their ClimateView dashboards as part of the SCIS programme.

Dashboard publication is a key milestone on a local authority's journey with SCIS. A published dashboard facilitates cross-service area coordination and collaboration and promotes public awareness and communication on local climate action, all while highlighting a council's leadership and commitment to achieving local and national climate targets.

Falkirk Council's [dashboard](#) highlights how the Falkirk area is working towards its climate targets while pinpointing key emissions sources such as homes, transport and energy use. It shows the actions Falkirk is planning and how these actions are expected to reduce emissions over time. This helps explain what needs to happen, when changes might take place, and how different actions work together to reach net zero.

Dundee City Council's updated [dashboard](#) contains a live overview of the data relating to city-wide emissions and to scenarios outlined within the Dundee Local Area Energy Plan, a detailed roadmap for transforming Dundee's energy system developed in collaboration with key stakeholders from across the city.

Family Gathering Events

In April and May, SCIS hit the road again for three in-person events welcoming over 40 officers from 26 local authorities in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen to share knowledge and discuss area-wide climate action. In June, we followed this up with an online version for our more rural and remote local authorities.

Discussions ranged from the development of innovative frameworks for cross-sector climate action in councils, to tips and tricks for integrating ClimateView dashboards into climate delivery workstreams and how SCIS is supporting deepened engagement with key delivery partners across the country.

Support Plan Chats

From May to July, our Local Leads are completing 32 Support Plan conversations with each local authority. Based on a personalised needs assessment, our Support Plans are co-created with local authority officers to ensure SCIS is providing the most effective, tailored support for area-wide emissions reduction that we can.

These plans are reviewed annually in conversation with local authority officers, providing space to reflect on progress to-date and identify next steps to continue and build momentum, helping everyone to understand where we are going and how we are going to get there.

National Climate Delivery Workstream

April saw the conclusion of our initial 'National Sprint' workshop series with Scottish Government and Transport Scotland. Through three targeted sessions with key policymakers, we have co-

designed an improved approach to multi-level delivery of climate action by identifying national intelligence needs across key themes and sectors, sharing practitioner expertise, and showcasing insights from the SCIS programme.

Following the conclusion of the Sprint and subsequent workshop analysis, we have created a National Delivery Workstream setting out how we will build on these excellent foundations into 2027. That workstream has begun, and we thank those collaborators across government for their continued enthusiasm and commitment to this critical programme of work.

New Publications – Annual Report and Insight Briefings

SCIS has published its [Annual Impact Report 2025-26](#). In it you will find a summary of our progress across 2025-6, examples of our internal and external capacity building work with local authorities across Scotland, and a look ahead to what comes next.

Finally, over the last couple of months SCIS has published two new Insight briefings. Firstly, and in the context of recent heatwaves, on the [Benefits of Integrating Climate Adaptation and Mitigation](#). Second, the final of our series highlighting the multiple additional benefits of climate action: in this edition, [Heat Networks](#).

To find out more about SCIS, you can visit [our website](#), [sign up to our quarterly newsletter](#) and [follow us on LinkedIn](#). You can also contact the team at info@climateintelligenceservice.scot.

Scalable Approach to Vulnerability Via Interoperability (SAVVI)

Positive Destinations Data Pilot – East Lothian Selected as National SAVVI Demonstrator

East Lothian Council has been selected to lead the second Scottish pilot of the Scalable Approach to Vulnerability via Interoperability (SAVVI), a national programme hosted by the IS and designed to support earlier intervention through more effective use of data.

The pilot will explore how information already held across services can be used to identify emerging risk earlier and support more timely, preventative action. The initial focus will be on understanding the factors associated with young people not sustaining a positive destination after leaving school, helping to identify opportunities for support before difficulties become entrenched.

The work aligns closely with national and local priorities around:

- Prevention and early intervention
- Whole Family Wellbeing Funding
- Child Poverty
- Community Planning and integrated service delivery
- Improving outcomes for children and young people

A key objective is to better understand how routinely collected information from education, social work and partner agencies can be used collectively to identify early signs of divergence in educational trajectories. By bringing together intelligence that is currently held in separate systems, the pilot aims to strengthen decision-making and support earlier, more coordinated intervention.

The pilot also provides an opportunity to address several challenges commonly faced across local government, including uncertainty around data sharing and re-use, fragmented information systems, and difficulties translating data into practical insight for frontline services.

As the national demonstrator site, East Lothian will help develop and test an approach that can be replicated elsewhere in Scotland. Learning from the pilot will be shared nationally through case studies, guidance and practical tools to support wider adoption across councils and partner organisations.

New SAVVI Team Highlights the Foundations of Better Data Sharing

Since establishing the dedicated SAVVI team in September 2025, we have been helping councils and partners make better use of data to identify and respond to vulnerability earlier. A new blog by Technical Data Lead Fi Caryl explores one of the most important – and often overlooked – aspects of this work: the need to consistently define people, residences and households across public service systems.

While public organisations collect significant amounts of information, the same person or address is often recorded differently across different systems, using different formats, identifiers and data structures. These inconsistencies make it difficult to link data and build the joined-up picture needed to support prevention and early intervention.

The blog sets out how SAVVI is helping councils think differently about data by focusing on the foundations: common definitions, consistent entity structures and the use of unique identifiers. Rather than relying on complex matching of names and addresses, unique identifiers such as UPRN provide a more reliable way to recognise when systems are referring to the same person or place, improving data linkage and supporting the re-use of information across services.

Getting these basics right can improve data sharing, reduce duplication and create better opportunities to deliver earlier, more coordinated support for individuals and families.

As councils continue to develop prevention-focused approaches, this practical work on data interoperability will play a key role in turning data into actionable insight and improving outcomes for communities across Scotland.

Read Fi's blog: [Why Person, Residence and Household Matter for Public Service Data Sharing](#).

IS supports local authorities to tackling the Rural Childcare Challenge

The Child Poverty Team is launching a new programme of activity to help address one of the most significant barriers facing families in Scotland's rural and island communities: access to childcare.

In a recent blog, Rural Child Poverty Officer James Taylor highlights how limited access to affordable, flexible and high-quality childcare continues to affect family wellbeing, employment opportunities and efforts to tackle child poverty.

The blog outlines the unique challenges faced by rural and island communities, including workforce shortages, dispersed populations, funding pressures and transport barriers, all of which make childcare services more difficult to sustain than in urban areas.

In response, the Child Poverty Team has identified rural childcare as a key priority for 2026 and will be working with local and national partners to explore solutions, share learning and test new approaches. This includes a new Rural Childcare Sprint Series, taking place between September and November, alongside continued engagement through the Rural Child Poverty Network.

The initiative reflects our commitment to supporting councils and partners to tackle child poverty through practical, place-based solutions that respond to the realities of rural and island communities.

Read James's blog: [The Rural Childcare Challenge: State of Play and What to Expect](#).

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

In 2025, the LGBF Board agreed a new set of strategic priorities for 2025 to 2028, setting a clear direction for the programme. These priorities focus on strengthening peer collaborative improvement, developing the benchmark framework in key service areas, increasing the use of data to support service improvement, and improving the wider local government data and reporting landscape. Progress has continued at pace in recent months, with significant developments across peer collaborative improvement, benchmarking, sector learning and data reform.

The LGBF practice sharing programme has continued to expand. Since August 2025, 12 events have been delivered involving all 32 councils, generating more than 30 case studies, recordings and learning resources. All materials are published on the LGBF website, examples are listed below:

[Beyond Books: The Evolving Role of Libraries in Local Communities](#)

[Best Value in the Time of a Housing Emergency](#)

[Rethinking Recycling: Local Strategies for Smarter Recycling](#)

[The Contribution of Museums to Scotland's Culture and Economy](#)

[Physical Activity Impacts on Wellbeing](#)

[Clean Streets, Smart Futures: Preventative Approaches to Street Cleaning](#)

[Future Ready Workforce: Tackling Recruitment, Retention and Skills in Scottish Councils](#)

[Rethinking Roads: Embedding Sustainability](#)

[Leadership and Culture in Planning: Building Confidence and Capability](#)

Feedback has been highly positive, with councils particularly valuing the opportunity to share practical approaches, learn from peers and explore solutions to common challenges. Themes emerging from the programme include prevention, place-based working, partnership approaches and greater use of data and technology to support decision making. The [2026/27 LGBF Events calendar](#) is now underway, with 15 events scheduled for this year.

Work is also progressing to strengthen the LGBF suite of indicators in a number of priority areas, including workforce, housing and homelessness, adult social care and additional support needs. This work is being taken forward with professional associations and sector leaders to help build a stronger evidence base in areas of growing importance to councils.

Alongside this, councils continue to receive support to make greater use of LGBF data locally through the dashboard, tailored support and a growing programme of case studies showcasing how benchmarking data is being used to inform decisions and improve services. The LGBF

Dashboard has also been enhanced to make it easier for councils to use LGBF data within local reporting and performance management processes. New functionality provides a more flexible way to download and export charts, tables and underlying data for use in reports, presentations and briefings, alongside options to save personalised views and receive automatic updates.

For further information, please contact: emily.lynch@improvementservice.org.uk.

Peer Collaborative Improvement

Peer collaborative improvement (PCI) supports local authorities to improve a specific area of focus with guidance and collaboration from peer local authorities. It strengthens existing approaches like the LGBF and self-evaluation and responds to the need for greater shared learning across local government. The approach demonstrates local government as a self-improving system and contributes to wider efforts to reduce the burden of inspection by strengthening local assurance. PCI is supported by the wider sector, including endorsement from SOLACE and COSLA Leaders and is closely linked to the [Local Government Transformation Programme](#) whilst playing a key role in the [Scottish Local Government Assurance and Improvement Framework](#).

Following the successful completion of the first two peer collaborative improvement pilots on the Scottish Welfare Fund and Housing Voids, we are pleased to share that the next pilot is currently underway focusing on Information Governance with East Lothian Council hosting the work. Colleagues from Aberdeen City, Argyll and Bute, Perth and Kinross and Falkirk Councils have also joined the peer review team. In parallel, we are working with Audit Scotland on a thematic pilot focused on Asset Management with Dumfries and Galloway Council hosting. This will align the current Best Value audit with the new integrated pilot model of PSIF, helping to link council self-assessment, audit findings and peer collaborative improvement in a more joined up way.

For further information, please contact: emily.lynch@improvementservice.org.uk.

Local Government Data Platform

Progress has continued on the development of the Local Government Data Platform (LGDP), a sector-led programme designed to help councils make better use of the data they already collect. The LGDP aims to create a single, trusted platform for local government data, helping reduce reporting burdens while improving access to timely information and insight. By bringing data, dashboards and analysis together in one place, the platform will make it easier for councils and partners to access, reuse and analyse information, supporting better decision making, performance improvement and assurance across the sector.

The programme will also help address long-standing challenges associated with fragmented systems, duplicated effort and multiple data requests by providing a shared approach to managing and using local government data.

In April 2026, a sector wide Invest to Save funding bid was submitted to support phased development and implementation of the platform between October 2026 and March 2030. The proposal has been developed through agreed local government governance arrangements and endorsed by Solace Scotland and the Digital Partnership Board.

A funding decision is expected shortly and, subject to approval, the programme will move into delivery later this year. The LGDP represents a key part of wider efforts to modernise Scotland's local government data landscape and provide councils with the information, tools and insight needed to support reform and continuous improvement.

For further information, please contact: emily.lynch@improvementservice.org.uk.

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.

In May, the Board agreed a new three-year work programme. Priorities include strengthening leadership, governance and accountability across community planning, supporting continuous improvement and shared learning, promoting prevention and partnership working, and ensuring Community Planning Partnerships are well placed to play a leading role in delivering Public Service Reform and improving outcomes for people and places.

Work is also progressing on new governance arrangements to strengthen engagement and influence. This includes plans for a Strategic Chief Executive Group, increased political engagement, and a national event for CPP Chairs later this year to support leadership, shared learning and collective action. Greg Colgan's role as Chair of CPIB and lead of the Public Service Reform workstream within the Solace and IS Transformation Programme also helps maintain strong alignment between community planning and wider public service reform activity.

The Board has also published guidance to support Community Planning Partnerships in key areas of reform. This includes guidance on [fair funding](#), which encourages stronger and more equal relationships with the voluntary sector through longer-term, more sustainable funding approaches, and guidance on [embedding prevention in community planning](#), which highlights the role of early intervention, shared leadership and partnership working in improving outcomes and reducing long-term demand on public services.

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.

For further information, please contact: emily.lynch@improvementservice.org.uk.

Research

Our Child Poverty Accelerator Fund (CPAF) project with West Lothian Council came to an end earlier in the year. The team delivered the Unmet Need Dashboard, an analytical tool that brings together local and national datasets to help identify areas where support may not be reaching families most likely to need it. We have since begun working with a small number of councils to explore rolling out a similar dashboard in their areas. Work is also underway on [two CPAF round three projects](#) with West Lothian and City of Edinburgh Councils.

We have also published an update to our [child poverty map](#) supporting local authorities to explore and understand child poverty patterns geographically. The map provides an accessible way of exploring and downloading child poverty data for small areas across Scotland. The new update incorporates the most recent children in low-income families dataset, as well as newly published Scottish Child Payment Caseload data.

We also released an update to the sub-council area population projections, providing more localised evidence to support service planning, demand modelling, and strategic decision-making. Building on work published in 2020, these projections provide an insight into what future populations may look like for small areas within councils. Extensive work was undertaken to collaborate with councils to ensure the areas and assumptions best meet local needs. These data can be found on the [IS website](#) or using our interactive online [tool](#).

For further information, please contact the team at research@improvementservice.org.uk.

Evaluation

Value of IS Evaluation Service recognised by Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)

In an overview of different approaches to evaluating the impact of policies, programmes and projects and ways councils can assess and measure social value, the LGIU has highlighted the support available from the IS's evaluation team.

“The Improvement Service’s [Evaluation Offer](#), launched in 2024, sets out a structured but flexible package of support to help Scottish councils strengthen evidence-informed decision making in a context of constrained resources and rising demand. It recognises that many local authorities have limited internal capacity for evaluation, often prioritising data collection and reporting over deeper analysis of what works and why.

In response, the offer provides practical, tailored support across the full evaluation cycle, from design through to delivery and learning. This includes helping councils develop logic models and theories of change, carry out process and outcome evaluations, and undertake Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis. The IS also offers general advisory support, including reviewing programmes, building evaluation frameworks, and running workshops or training to build capability.

Overall, the aim is to enable councils to better understand the impact and value for money of their policies and services, ensuring that limited public resources are targeted toward those interventions that deliver the most effective outcomes.”

Reports show value of access to advice in schools and GP Practices in Dundee

We have worked in partnership with Dundee City Council’s Advice Services to measure the benefits making access to advice available in GP Practices and schools offers. To achieve this a Social Return on Investment approach was used. This methodology engages with individual and organisations to identify the changes they experience. It uses financial proxies to place a financial value on those changes which are considered by those who experience them to be the most important.

Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships (WAHPs) in GP practices

WAHPs integrate local authority, or third sector, welfare rights and money advice services into primary care settings. Advice is provided by a dedicated welfare rights advisor co-located within the medical practice.

This analysis confirmed many of the predictions that were made in the original [forecast report](#) from 2019. It found that as a result of accessing the service, patients/individuals felt more positive about the future and saw an increase in their household incomes, whilst clinical staff were able to make better use of their time and establish improved relationships with patients as they were more able to meet their needs. The report found that every £1 invested would generate around £33 of benefits.

Financial Inclusion Support in Dundee schools focussed on a project based in Morgan Academy in Dundee in which parents could access welfare rights and money advice in their child's school. As a result of accessing the service, parents/carers were less stressed or worried and had an increase in their household income. Morgan Academy was able to use staff time and resources more effectively. The report identified improvements in internal communications for the council and improvements in skills, knowledge and job satisfaction for staff involved in delivering the service. The report found that every £1 invested would generate around £32 of benefits.

For further information, please contact karen.carrick@improvementservice.org.uk.

Digital Public Services

mygovscot myaccount

We are delighted to share that [mygovscot myaccount](#) has reached a major milestone, with 3 million users. This means over 60% of Scotland's eligible population now has a mygovscot myaccount – a fantastic achievement and one worth celebrating.

Reaching this point has not happened overnight. Over the past 12 years, significant work has gone into developing the platform, making it the trusted, go-to solution it is today for local government and the wider public sector. We are hugely grateful to colleagues across local government and beyond for their support on this journey, as well as to our technical partners, [TCS](#).

It is particularly exciting to reflect that at the end of 2024 we were celebrating 2.5 million users – and now we have reached 3 million. We remain focused on continuous improvement, innovation, and delivering real value for our stakeholders.

Keeping stakeholders informed – mygovscot myaccount newsletter

We have now issued our third quarterly myaccount newsletter. The focus this time was on all the recent developments and improvements we have made to the platform over the last 12 months. Here is a highlight of some of the improvements we have made:

- Prompting users to check their details
Users are now periodically prompted to review and confirm their personal details, such as contact information and address, when logging in. This simple step helps ensure data remains accurate and aligns with modern security expectations.

- Registration using the Yoti app

We have introduced the option to register using the Yoti app, offering a faster and more streamlined experience. Users can securely transfer their details during sign-up, reducing the need for manual entry.

- Improved sign-in history visibility

Users can now view their recent login activity, including the services they have accessed. This provides greater transparency, helping users identify unfamiliar activity and strengthening confidence in the platform.

If you or your colleagues would like to be added to the newsletter mailing list or would like to find out more about the platform, please email us.

mygovscot myaccount case studies

We continue to work closely with councils to develop case studies, and they have proven to be very popular. If you would like to work with the Digital Public Services team to create your own case study about your use of myaccount and to showcase your work with other Councils, please get in touch.

visitorlevy.scot

In April 2026, we launched [visitorlevy.scot](#), a national digital service developed in partnership between the IS and early adopter local authorities. It supports accommodation providers in meeting their responsibilities where a visitor levy has been introduced, offering a consistent and secure way to register, submit returns and make payments. The service is powered by mygovscot myaccount, reinforcing its role as a key enabler of digital public services.

parentsportal.scot

Usage of [parentsportal.scot](#) continues to grow. 25 councils have now onboarded the platform, which means that 80% of councils are actively using and benefiting from all the free features that parentsportal.scot has to offer. We also have another council currently onboarding and they will be live in September 2026. The platform is now available in over 1,800 schools, with over 334K registered parental subscribers securely linked to over 385K linked children.

For further information on our Digital Public Services portfolio, please [get in touch](#).

Digital Planning

The Spatial Information Service delivered a new [housing land audit interactive map and dashboard](#) on behalf of South Lanarkshire Council. The dashboard allows users to explore land that has been allocated for house building across the authority, and forms part of the vital data that supplements the Local Development Plan.

For further information, please contact aline.kirkland@improvementservice.org.uk.

tellmescotland

The tellmescotland platform continues to provide vital digital access to public information notices, and the Team has been working to further automate the process that sources the planning applications directly from local authority systems. Once served to the tellmescotland site, citizens can then view and interact with the information and customise alerts so that they are notified of any

relevant new notices. 18 local authorities are now making use of this automated process, enabling the public to access the live information, while freeing up staff time from the previous manual loading process.

For further information, please contact aline.kirkland@improvementservice.org.uk.

Spatial Hub

The newly redeveloped [Spatial Hub platform](#) is now live, delivering a refreshed user experience with an enhanced look and feel. The refreshed site provides a more intuitive and user-friendly platform while improving the automation and efficiency of data processing from local authorities and partner organisations.

The volume and breadth of datasets published through the Spatial Hub continues to grow, alongside increased engagement from the user community. Over the past 12 months, there has been notable growth in webservice usage, reflecting rising demand for accessible location information. In support of our objective to expand the use of national geospatial data, spanning key themes such as transport, environment, education and health, we are continuing to broaden the range of data formats available. This ensures improved accessibility and supports the needs of an increasingly diverse user base.

For further information, please contact will.hensman@improvementservice.org.uk.

Cloud Connector Framework

Enhancement work has now been completed to expand the range of Planning and Building Standards information captured and published through the automated data exchange process between the IS and all local authorities.

The Connector continues to operate at full national coverage, receiving planning data from all 34 planning authorities and building standards data from all 32 local authorities. Following validation, this data is consolidated and published as national layers of standardised datasets, ensuring consistency, reliability, and accessibility across the system.

For further information, please contact will.hensman@improvementservice.org.uk.

One Scotland Gazetteer

The One Scotland Gazetteer team recently delivered Regional Community Events attended by all 32 local authorities. The events showcased presentations by councils that highlighted repeatable processes for data improvements, along with updates from our [SAVVI](#) and Data Hub teams on the same theme of improving data through internal collaborations. The sessions also saw updates from Ordnance Survey that demonstrated how the authoritative data from council systems is used to improve their digital mapping products.

The Team has also recently commenced a programme of meetings with all local authorities individually over the summer months. These sessions are customised to each council, and focus on data sharing, collaborative working and using national data sources to deliver key digital services to their citizens.

Training courses relating to managing a digital twin of the street network were recently delivered to 11 authorities to aid understanding relating to how street gazetteer data is collected and best managed to enable its use to plan utility installations and remedial works in our Scottish streets.

For further information, please contact roger.garbett@improvementservice.org.uk.

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](#).