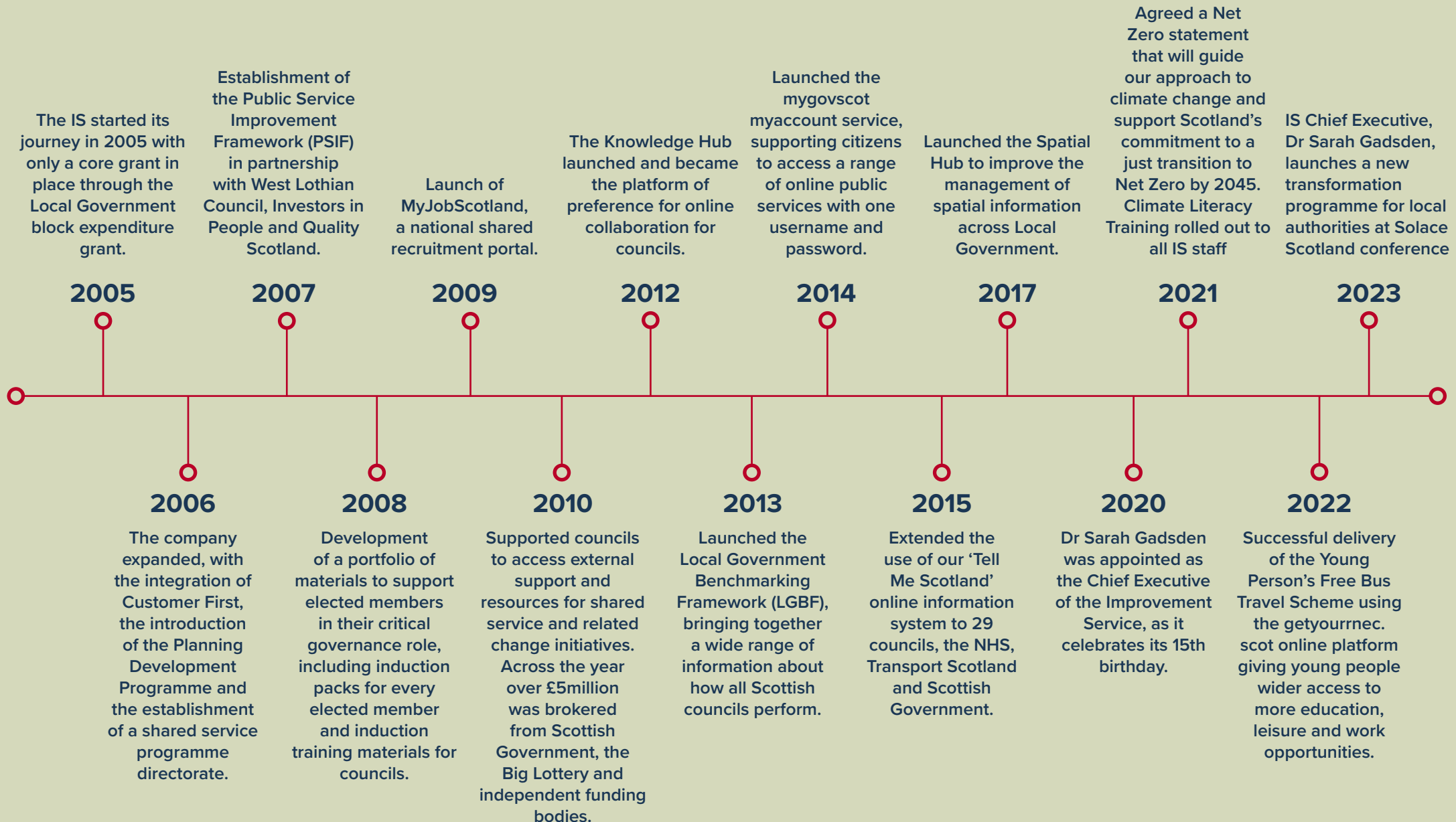


*The 'go to' organisation for
Local Government improvement
in Scotland*



Improvement Service Annual Report 2023

Our story so far



Foreword



Cllr Shona Morrison
Chair



Dr Sarah Gadsden
Chief Executive

2023 has been another challenging year for local government. The cost of living crisis shows no sign of abating, and many councils are still struggling to recover from the impact of Covid, all while operating under continuing financial constraints.

There have been positive developments this year, however, including the signing of the Verity House Agreement between our colleagues at COSLA and the Scottish Government. This new Partnership Agreement between local and central government in Scotland sets out the way they will work together and identifies three key shared priorities – tackling poverty, just transition to net zero and sustainable public services.

It remains to be seen how the Verity House Agreement will work in practice, but the shared priorities mirror those which have been at the core of Improvement Service work for many years. Our work on

child poverty has been instrumental in developing new approaches to addressing this challenge, including solutions designed specifically for rural and islands communities. We continue to be at the centre of new innovations when it comes to the just transition to net zero, working with partners at the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute and Sustainable Scotland Network to develop the new Climate Intelligence Service. Jointly funded by Scottish Government and local government, the Climate Intelligence Service will help councils build capacity and capability for the development of area-wide programmes of emissions reduction.

In the coming year, the Improvement Service will continue to play a key role in supporting local government with the delivery of the Verity House Agreement priority on sustainable public services. Throughout 2023, we have been working closely with Solace Scotland to develop a radical transformation programme which will support local

government to achieve the aspirations set out within our think piece [‘Delivering a future for Scottish local authorities: the challenges they face, the questions that need asking and a model for the future’](#). We have the support of all 32 local authority chief executives, as well as from key council and public sector staff in areas such as change management and organisational development. We are hopeful that our approach will deliver real change. The aims of this transformation programme are also reflected in our new Strategic Framework, which will take us to 2027. This was published earlier this year alongside our annual Business Plan. We have set out four strategic priorities for how the Improvement Service will support local government through the current challenges and those still to come.

If the last few years have shown us anything, it is that it is impossible to predict the challenges that we might face in future. What we can do is ensure that we remain a flexible, innovative and responsive organisation, able to adapt to support local authorities through whatever issues they encounter. We will continue to support local government to deliver sector-led improvement through our products and services and the collective efforts of our staff, Board and partners.

S. Morris

Sarah Gadsden



Transformation programme

The Improvement Service has been working with Solace Scotland on a local government transformation programme which is developing options for the future delivery of council services.

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The programme builds on an Improvement Service report, published in October 2022, which outlines the context local government is currently operating within, the challenges and opportunities it faces and how councils might transition to a model of service delivery that builds on current success but more deliberately supports effective partnerships to improve outcomes for communities.

The paper identified six anchors as key areas for transformation, and each has a chief executive sponsor from a Scottish council. These anchors have been paired into three groups based on the inter-connectedness of their aims:

- Enable a functioning, trusted local and central government relationship and Unlocking Community Action
- Lead council and cross-sector partnerships with a focus on outcomes and tackle inequality and meet the needs of all citizens
- Design for People's Needs and Create digital, design and technology-enabled transformation

Our Chief Executive Sarah Gadsden spoke at the recent Solace Scotland conference about this new vision for the future of local government and we are currently looking for volunteers from local government and the wider public sector to join our programme. These volunteers will have key roles to play in three workstreams within the programme: leading a whole-system dialogue on public service reform at an officer level; participating in transformation projects over the next 12-18 months; and ensuring that there is capacity in local government to lead and deliver this transformation work.

Volunteers can also sign up for the Leadership Practitioner Forum, a new network for aspiring Chief Executives, Directors and Heads of Service. The Forum is led and supported by the Improvement Service along with council Chief Executives, and members will be invited to attend a series of events that focus on the anchors and associated workstreams of the transformation programme, bringing colleagues together to explore topics and challenges. The first meeting of the Leadership Practitioner Forum took place in October and was well attended with representatives from 22 local authorities.

Strategies and policies

We published our new [Strategic Framework](#) in 2023, setting out our agenda for the next four years. This reflects our understanding of the challenges facing local government, as well as the opportunities they present to develop and improve public services. It sets out our vision, purpose, values and strategic priorities, along with the unique contribution that we can make to local government in Scotland.



If the last few years have shown us anything, it is that it is impossible to predict the challenges that we might face in future. Our new Strategic Framework ensures that we remain a flexible, innovative and responsive organisation, able to adapt to support local authorities through whatever issues they encounter. [We will continue to support local government](#) to deliver sector-led improvement through our products and services and the collective efforts of our staff, Board and partners.

We also published our [Business Plan](#) for 2023/24 in March which demonstrates how we will support local authorities and their partners to deliver transformational change to sustain current services, and



where possible, improve outcomes, reduce inequalities and achieve efficiencies. Given the multiple and complex challenges facing local government, our Business Plan details the critical role the Improvement Service will play into 2024, assisting local authorities to continue to improve and transform services, focus on prevention and generate financial savings.

Our [Prospectus for Scottish Councils](#) has also been updated in line with the new Strategic Framework and Business Plan, providing details of the products and services available to councils and partner organisations.



In 2023 we also launched a new [Data and Intelligence Strategy](#) and [prospectus for our Data and Intelligence services](#). This is designed to demonstrate to local authorities how we can use our extensive range of data and analytical skills to help them and their partners to increase the impact of the services and activities they provide. These skills can be applied collectively to support the use and re-use of data and intelligence to drive improvement and encourage evidence informed decision-making.



This year, the Improvement Service also adopted a [Digital First](#) approach to our own way of working, as well as how we engage with our clients and stakeholders. Digital solutions will be the preferred method for our customer base to engage and interact with us, and our digital solutions and processes will support the delivery of end-to-end services which are designed to meet the needs of our customers.



Towards the end of 2023, we also published a new Communications Strategy which will define our internal and external communications going forward and underpin a new Communications Plan.



Key Achievements

During 2023, we undertook an organisational restructure, which resulted in us stepping down the Data and Intelligence team. The Spatial Information Service moved into the Digital Public Services team and the research, evaluation and Local Government Benchmarking Framework teams moved into the Transformation, Performance and Improvement team.

Digital Public Services

The Digital Public Services portfolio continued to grow and expand throughout 2023, with the addition of brand-new platforms, along with the launch of new services, features, and functionality to existing platforms.

mygovscot myaccount

The [mygovscot myaccount](#) service continued to increase its user base to over 2.3 million users, accounting for 48% of the eligible Scottish population (aged 12+). The mygovscot myaccount toolkit, which comprises a variety of authentication, identity verification and data services, is now used by 40 organisations across Scotland, including all 32 local authorities. The continued expansion of the service means mygovscot myaccount is now integrated to 90 different entities and growing, to facilitate citizen access to an increasing number of digital public services locally, regionally, and nationally.



National Entitlement Card

With over 2.7 million cardholders, [Scotland's national smartcard](#) continues to support the delivery of national and local services, making it convenient for citizens to access various public services and facilities with only one card. A new National Entitlement Card Strategy, developed by the Improvement Service, Transport Scotland, Young Scot, Scottish Government, National Entitlement Card Programme Office (NECPO) and all 32 local authorities, was published in the autumn of 2023 and sets out a vision for the future of the scheme and how it will be implemented by supporting and developing existing card functions, expanding the scope and growing the usage of the National Entitlement Card. This includes the development of a new Digital National Entitlement Card.

getyournec.scot

Scotland's online application platform to apply for a National Entitlement Card is now used by all 32 local authorities and uses mygovscot myaccount's authentication and identity verification services. Since it was launched in July 2020, [getyournec.scot](#) has facilitated over 900,000 applications for a National Entitlement card.

for over 60s concessionary travel, disabled concessionary travel, young person's free bus travel and Young Scot cards.

The getyournec.scot platform was also shortlisted in the Digital Public Services Award category at the 2023 Scottish Public Service Awards.

Young Scot Membership Platform

As part of a partnership between the Improvement Service and Young Scot, membership.young.scot continues to grow its userbase. The service, which uses mygovscot myaccount for authentication, enables over 110,000 Young Scot Card holders to access an increasing range of rewards, discounts and information. Plans were progressed during 2023 between Improvement Service and Young Scot to develop a roadmap of new features and functionality, which will be introduced to Young Scot cardholders in 2024.

parentsportal.scot

Now used by 16 local authorities (due to be 19 by early 2024) and across 1,311 schools, the use of [parentsportal.scot](#) continues to grow. 2023 saw the highest usage of the platform to date and it is now used by over 172,000 parents/guardians to access educational services related to over 250,000 children. Following a redesign of the platform in early 2023, the Digital Public Services Team also launched a mobile application version for both Android (over 18K downloads) and iOS users (over 28K downloads).

parentsportal.scot

Data Hub

An [online data matching and cleansing solution](#) for the Scottish public sector is now used by 31 organisations, including 23 local authorities, due to increase to 25 local authorities by early 2024.



bisaccount.scot

The platform was previously used in 2021 and 2022 by all 32 local authorities to facilitate various rounds of COVID Grant Applications for childcare providers. Following the initial launch, the platform is now integrated to back-office systems for both North Lanarkshire and East Lothian Council, to provide authentication services for businesses accessing online council services.

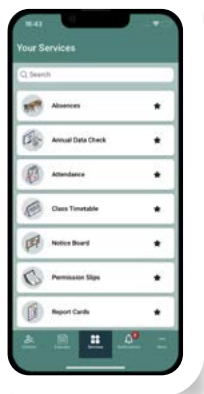
bisaccount.scot

Developing, innovating, and continually improving the products and services within the Digital Public Services portfolio to meet the existing and emerging requirements of our customer base, has been at the heart of the work that the DPS Team have been doing throughout 2023.

This focus has resulted in the DPS Team undertaking several projects such as:

parentsportal.scot mobile app

2023 was the year that our parentsportal.scot website went mobile with the launch of a new app, making communication between schools and parents even simpler. Using mygovscot myaccount, a parent/guardian can use a single sign-in to see information about all their children, pay for school meals, check attendance, read report cards, reply to permission slips and update their own data. We also launched a new-look parentsportal.scot website which offers the same functions as the original, with the addition of a new “Favourites” option to help make it even quicker for users to find the services they use most often.



Accessibility tools

In March, we added the [Recite Me toolbar](#) to mygovscot myaccount, getyournec.scot and parentsportal.scot to improve accessibility. Recite Me is a cloud-based web accessibility assistive toolbar solution that allows website visitors to customise a site in a way that works best for them. Features include a built-in screen reader for people with a visual impairment; translation services with access to over 100 languages; personalised styling customisation options to help neurodivergent users; and reading aids to ensure everyone can understand all the content and instructions contained within the platforms.

Platform status

We also launched a new status update feature for several digital platforms, including mygovscot myaccount and getyournec.scot. This allows users to check the operational status of our digital services, keeping stakeholders informed of any issues in the unlikely event of an outage.

datapipeline.scot launch

June saw the launch of a new service datapipeline.scot, which was developed in response to a request by councils for information on families in their area with a child who is eligible for funded early learning and childcare (ELC). Research into barriers to the uptake of ELC found that many households with an eligible 2-year-old child were not aware that they met the criteria. Local authorities needed data about eligible families in their area, so they could contact them directly to let them know about their entitlement. [Datapipeline.scot](#) was developed by Improvement Service, working with Tata Consultancy Services, to allow Scottish councils to securely access that data after it has been received from the Scottish Government via Social Security Scotland, Department of Work and Pensions and HM Revenues and Customs.



mygovscot myaccount redesign

Summer 2023 saw the commencement of a user experience and user interface redesign project for the mygovscot myaccount service to improve the user experience of citizens accessing public services online. With significant stakeholder engagement, the project includes input from various public sector organisations, citizens, and special interest groups who supported the Improvement Service through the research, prototype, testing and feedback stages. The redesign will be launched by the end of 2023.

Service security review

The Improvement Service carried out a review of security controls on mygovscot myaccount to ensure that customer data is well protected from unauthorised access. The addition of controls such as mandatory use of Two-Factor authentication for agent accounts will raise the security of the service and help to protect the confidentiality and integrity of customer data. The review also generated several recommendations to further optimise security which will be implemented alongside the current mygovscot myaccount redesign work.

Digital Right to Work service

This year, we embarked on a proof of concept with COSLA and Aberdeenshire Council to enable the myjobscotland platform to use mygovscot myaccount's Right to Work verification service. With the

introduction of new guidance from the UK Home Office, this enables employers to harness the power of digital identity for Right to Work checks for UK and Irish citizens. The service not only improves the onboarding journey for both employer and employee, but reduces costs, streamlines the process, and enhances security for sensitive information. The service was launched in late 2023 and will be made available to all myjobscotland organisations by early 2024.

ISO27001 accreditation

It is the policy of the Improvement Service to maintain an Information Security Management System (ISMS) designed to meet the requirements of ISO27001:2017 in pursuit of its primary objectives and the purpose and context of the organisation. The Improvement Service maintained its ISO27001 certification status following a successful recertification audit in September 2023.



Procurement of technology suppliers

In August 2018, the Improvement Services' Digital Public Services team entered into contracts with suppliers to provide technology and innovation services to support the delivery of the Digital Public Services portfolio. The contract terms were for a maximum of five years, meaning existing contracts were due to end during August 2023. The Improvement Service, with support from Scotland Excel, conducted procurement activities to secure new contracts to ensure

stability and continuity of service to its ever-growing customer base. Those procurement activities are now complete, and contracts have been signed with three suppliers for the following services:

- IT Services and Solutions - Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)
- Hosting Services – Brightsolid Online Technology Ltd
- Identity Verification Services – Yoti Ltd

Spatial Information Service

Spatial Hub

This summer saw the Improvement Service launch open access to the [Spatial Hub](#), a local government data resource covering the whole of Scotland. This is the first time in the UK that such a significant geospatial resource has been made available as open data: [open for anyone to access, use and share as they see fit](#).

The Spatial Hub collects a wide range of data directly from local authorities and other partner organisations, which is then compiled and published in Scotland-wide datasets for others to use. Until now, Spatial Hub datasets were only available to public sector organisations and academics, but with support from the Scottish Government, we have now been able to make this information available to everyone.



The availability of these Spatial Hub datasets saves organisations time and money, as they no longer need to source this data from individual local authorities, while also helping to standardise and improve the quality of the data used across a wide variety of sectors. In addition to the significant benefits to those parties who can now access the data free of charge, local authorities benefit through a considerable saving of resource in developing their own data sharing solutions. They also benefit through increased standardisation of much of the data and from expert guidance relating to best practice for data management.

One Scotland Gazetteer

The Improvement Service has been promoting the use of the [One Scotland Gazetteer](#) webservice to local authorities. This is a free address lookup service for the public sector that can be connected into almost any system within government, saving money on licence costs while also preventing duplication of effort. This live API provides the most up to date, verified address and street data available, and is already used in systems across Scotland – including within council customer relationship management, education, environmental health, and social care systems.



As part of our commitment to local authority engagement, the Gazetteer Team met with local authority data managers over the summer months. The sessions explored topics relating to data quality and how the information can be used to improve and inform

other areas of the council. Themes discussed during these meetings included business continuity in light of staff changes as well as ensuring that local authorities continue to capitalise on the return on investment through more expansive use of Gazetteer information.

During 2023, North Lanarkshire Council was named as the winner of the inaugural Improvement Service Gazetteer Innovation award. Councils were asked to demonstrate innovative uses of the data derived from the One Scotland Gazetteer and National Street Gazetteer as well as the service delivery benefits that they have achieved. North Lanarkshire Council demonstrated a wide range of uses of the gazetteers, such as Waste Collection, School Transport, Community Asset mapping and Find Your Nearest Services.

Digital Planning

We have continued to support Scottish Government's Digital Transformation of Planning Programme, and in particular activities relating to the data which will underpin the systems and applications for the years ahead. The Improvement Service has a key role to play in the data assimilation, quality assurance and data publication for the programme, and the team has been working closely with key third party agencies to collate and quality control planning constraint information.

We have been working in collaboration with the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government on a strategic review of Planning and Building Standards casework management systems that are used by local authorities and national parks. Supported by the Scottish Government's Digital Transformation of Planning programme,

the review provided evidence of the current status of casework management systems, their interdependences with other service areas, and linkages with other relevant systems in use. This provided the Scottish Government with options for delivering a state-of-the-art planning casework management solution for the future, as outlined in the Digital Planning Strategy.

Community Map Scotland

The [Community Map Scotland service](#) is now being provided free of charge to every Community Council in Scotland. The easy-to-use mapping tool contains many useful local government Spatial Hub datasets along with other information sources that will be of interest to Community Councils and their citizens. This will aid Community Councils in their engagement with their communities and the creation of Local Place Plans for consideration by the local authority as part of the Local Development Plan process.



Transformation, Performance and Improvement

We have a comprehensive [improvement architecture](#) which can be deployed and flexed to support sector-led improvement across different policy and service areas. Our improvement architecture is comprised of a range of IS tools and approaches which are integral to our work to support local authorities with sector-led improvement.

All of the component parts of our architecture are interlinked, enabling us to bring together different elements of this architecture together, as required, to provide a holistic improvement response, where the sum is much greater than the individual value of the parts. As well as designing, developing, delivering and constantly refining our improvement approaches and tools, we also play a key role in building the skills and capacity of local authority colleagues to engage with and use these tools and approaches.

Change Management

During 2023, we held eight online [Change Managers' Network](#) events, and over the course of the year we have had 31 councils engage with network events. Our network events are an opportunity to share practice and learn from each other and this year we have held several joint Organisational Development and Change Managers Network events as well as our specific



Change Manager events as we recognise some of the topics are relevant across both disciplines. Our events have been varied across the year and some examples have included presentations from Angus Council about the evolution and development of their Transformation Programme and colleagues from Aberdeenshire presenting on their Council transformation programme - Shaping Future Aberdeenshire.

We have also provided bespoke support to various councils this year, including supporting two councils as they aim to work more collaboratively by designing and delivering a series of workshops. We have delivered training to elected members in one council on how to scrutinise a business case and conducted a session with over 60 employability colleagues on service design and the support available through the Improvement Service.

Organisational Development (OD)

Our [Organisational Development Network](#) has continued to provide support to councils through monthly meetings. As well as holding joint sessions with the Change Managers Network in February and May, we also welcomed Audit Scotland to the OD Network in June to talk about their annual Local Government Overview Report.

The August OD Network meeting heard from colleagues at Angus, Perth and Kinross and South Lanarkshire councils who presented details of their innovative Collaborative Coaching Programme, and we also ran a workshop on Utilising Behavioural Insights for network members. We carried out a survey to determine the type of organisational development resources across councils and shared the results with our OD Network members.

Governance

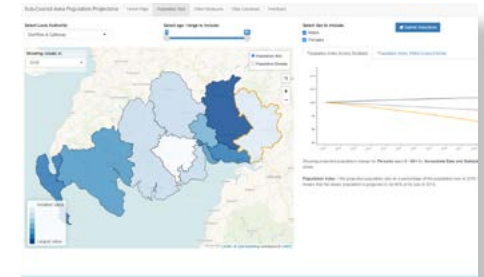
September saw the establishment of a new Governance programme at the Improvement Service. This programme incorporates the support for elected members and governance that was previously situated within the Organisational Development programme, and the Community Council project that had been part of Knowledge Management. The Programme Manager also has a coordination role for work on [The Promise](#), in particular, providing support to The Promise Local Government Programme Board.

Existing support for good governance in councils, community councils, Community Planning Partnerships and Integration Joint Boards will continue, and new priorities will be shaped for the programme in the coming months. In the meantime, key workstreams will continue. This includes:

- support to the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC) on Councillor pay and expenses.
- support for a council to review and make changes within the council to reduce barriers to elected office faced by elected members from underrepresented demographic groups.
- support for councils to put in place elected member development activities, including our Political Skills Assessment offer, development workshops, and coaching/mentoring and bespoke support for individual elected members and groups.

Research

We created a [new interactive visualisation](#) in April that allows users to explore [sub-council area population projections](#) for the whole of Scotland. Sub-council population projections provide an indication of the potential future population size and structure for small areas within local authorities. The new tool uses maps, graphs and data downloads to allow users to more easily analyse the current set of published sub-council area population projections.



Published in February, the eighth annual report of the [Common Advice Performance Management Reporting Framework \(CAPMRF\)](#) found that the number of people seeking debt advice from local authority-funded advice services increased by 24% across Scotland in 2021/22. The report showed that the total number of clients returned to pre-pandemic levels, with almost 250,000 money and welfare rights advice clients supported, with Council Tax arrears, rent arrears, and utility arrears among the most common debt problems. However, face-to-face contact remained low with only 12% of initial contacts to services made through this channel.

Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF)

The new Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) 2023 was launched at the annual PSIF Learning Event after its three-yearly review. This review also coincided with recent changes to Audit Scotland's approach to auditing Best Value, which places increased importance on councils being able to evidence a consistent and coordinated approach to self-assessment. This supported the work of the review group to ensure that the framework remains up-to-date and relevant to councils' needs.



In addition to Councils' use of the framework, the PSIF Team have undertaken PSIF assessments with 4 Community Planning Partnerships, 3 Integration Joint Boards and a Child Protection Committee.

PSIF was also highlighted in a [recent Audit Scotland publication](#) where they noted the following:

"The increased emphasis on self-assessment in BV2 helped to embed self-assessment, particularly the local government Improvement Service's Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) in local government."

Communications

This year, our Communications Team developed a new Council Hub for staff. This compiles useful facts, figures and documents relating to local authorities in one place, making it easier for colleagues to find the information they need and improving our relationship management process with key council colleagues. The Council Hub pages also incorporate Improvement Service digital data dashboards including the LGBF, Spatial Hub and others to help staff make the most of our own resources.



Throughout the year, the Communications Team has continued to support the work of the Improvement Service through the production of a range of videos, reports and other published materials as well as social media content. This included a summer social media campaign promoting good practice examples from the Local Child Poverty Action Reports and the use of Facebook advertising to promote [parentsportal.scot](#) to parents in specific local authority areas.

The [Improvement Service X account](#) has grown by 267 Followers in 2023, up to 4,057 in total, while our [LinkedIn channel](#) has 480 more Followers than in 2022 (2,376 in total). Our other social media channels have also continued to grow, including our [Community Councils Facebook page](#) and X accounts for a number of individual Improvement Service teams such as [Protecting People](#), [Shaping Places for Wellbeing](#), [Spatial Hub](#) and [Digital Public Services](#).

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The 11th annual [Local Government Benchmarking Framework \(LGBF\) National Benchmarking Overview Report](#) was published in March, and introduces data from 2021/22, a period when communities and council services were still managing the significant ongoing impact of Covid, while new challenges were emerging in the shape of soaring inflationary pressures and a cost of living crisis.



However, the report found that councils are continuing to develop innovative and effective community-based solutions, despite increased pressures around funding, demand, Covid and the cost of living crisis. It is clear that councils have adapted quickly to meet new demands, create new services at pace, maintain essential services and implement new ways of working. Critical to this has been the strengthened partnerships with communities as well as the third and private sectors, helping to protect those who are vulnerable, and maintaining community wellbeing.

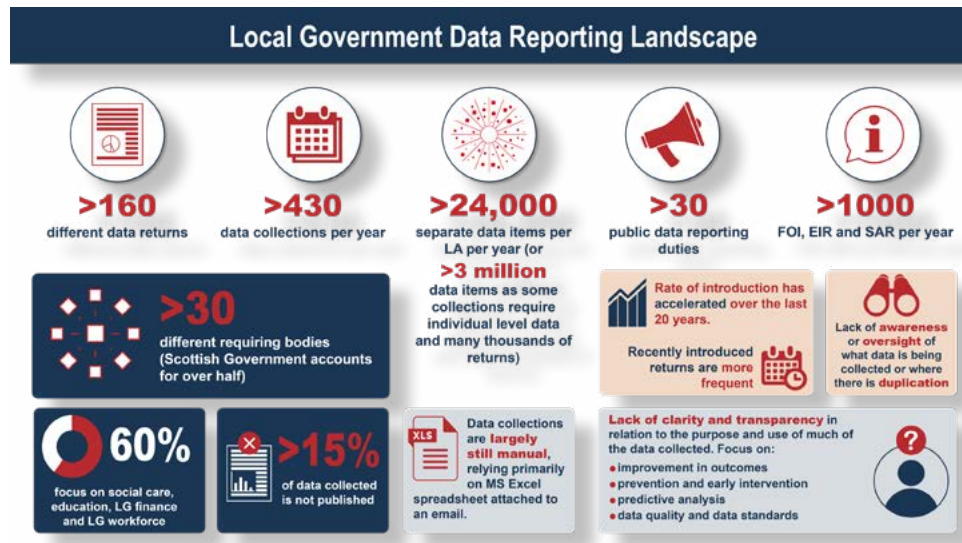
In line with the LGBF Board's refreshed strategic priorities, this year's publication included a redesigned and slimmed down LGBF Annual report which provides a clearer focus on sector wide performance, and a new [online LGBF dashboard](#) which includes detailed indicator level analysis and narrative and facilitates release of data in a timelier manner.

The LGBF dashboard has allowed us to release LGBF data quarterly throughout 2023, and from April 2024 it is intended that data releases will be provided on a monthly basis. In recognition of the local and national policy importance given to Climate Change, and the limited coverage currently within the LGBF, the LGBF Board also agreed to expand the suite of climate measures within the LGBF to include more tightly scoped and directly controllable measures of emissions which will help to directly track the progress made by councils.

As part of the LGBF Board's commitment to develop and deliver a more assertive approach to sector-led improvement, they have agreed to link the LGBF to the introduction of a Peer Collaborative Improvement approach. The IS Board endorsed the introduction of a Peer Collaborative Improvement approach as a key element of its improvement architecture and a priority within the new IS Strategic Framework 2023-27.

A report outlining the findings and recommendations from Phase 1 of the Local Government Data Platform project were shared with and endorsed by Solace and COSLA Leaders in summer 2023. There was strong endorsement for the recommendation that Local Government and Scottish Government should use the Verity House Agreement to ensure a focus on reporting. We are continuing to work with the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, COSLA and Solace to progress Phase 2 of this project which will focus on simplification and streamlining of the reporting landscape, and a report on the findings and next steps will be brought back to Solace and COSLA Leaders in 2024. As part of Phase 2, we have focused on the LGBF and other IS data management processes to pilot proof

of concepts on better data orchestration and data automation to improve data flow, data quality and deliver process efficiencies.



National Planning Improvement Champion

Scotland's first [National Planning Improvement Champion](#) has begun work, based within the Improvement Service. Craig McLaren, formerly director for Scotland, Ireland and English Regions at the Royal Town Planning Institute, will monitor the performance of planning authorities and provide advice on how to improve. He will also take the lead on developing a performance management model for planning authorities, sharing good practice and embedding learning across the sector. The Champion's priorities for the first six months include engaging with stakeholders to hear their views on his ambitions for the role and how to assess performance, as

well as learning from others working in performance management, improvement and good practice in other organisations and countries.

Community Planning Improvement Board (CPIB)

We are continuing to support the [CPIB](#) in their work to illustrate how excellent outcomes are being achieved locally when partners come together and respond innovatively, and to surface with Scottish Government Ministers those barriers which are getting in the way of delivering person led services.

The CPIB has focused on three main areas over the past year in line with the [CPIB Strategic Plan](#): Climate Change, Financial Security for Low Income Households and the Wellbeing of Children and Young People. Across each of these areas, the CPIB has continued to build a wide and varied evidence-based understanding of the important work community planning partnerships are carrying out to improve outcomes through good practice, and of the barriers limiting progress. In May 2023, the CPIB developed an action plan to take forward a number of local and national recommendations, and the Chair of the CPIB has sought support from the Deputy First Minister, the COSLA President and the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth to discuss these in more detail.

Shaping Places for Wellbeing

The [Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme](#) is being jointly delivered by Public Health Scotland and the Improvement Service. The programme is supporting seven local Project Towns across Scotland: Alloa, Ayr, Clydebank, Dalkeith, Dunoon, Fraserburgh and Rutherglen and aims to improve Scotland's wellbeing and reduce inequalities.



The programme is doing this by changing partners' collective approaches to the places where we live, work and play, enabling partnership-based, wide-ranging action at a local level, while addressing the health of our planet. This is achieved through three activities: [local project action](#), [local learning cohort](#) and [national leadership cohort](#).

We have recently added programme activities and programme stages to the Improvement Service website, providing information about the work that has already taken place in each [Project Town](#); [Impact Stories](#) detailing our action-based work; and a suite of 'How To Guides' that have been developed for those who wish to replicate these activities within their own place-based work.

Twenty-eight [Place and Wellbeing Assessments](#) have been completed across our Project Towns since the beginning of the programme. These assessments are an integral part of our programme approach and have supported decision makers and

partner organisations to identify how a plan, policy or proposal will affect a place. They range in their coverage from high level policy at a regional level to more specific proposals at a local scale. Each [Place and Wellbeing Assessment](#) ends with the production of a report recommending how a more place-based approach can be taken.

This phase of the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme is running until March 2024, and phase two is in development.

Planning for Place

The Improvement Service's Planning for Place Programme provides support to councils and their partners to collaborate on place-based approaches to joint planning, resourcing and the delivery of places that enable all communities to flourish.

The programme provides a range of support including working with stakeholders to promote the role of places in delivering health and wellbeing, including sitting on the Place and Wellbeing Collaborative and working closing with stakeholders, as well as the Shaping Places for Wellbeing programme team to promote and enable the use of the [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#).

Recovery and Delivery

Our Recovery and Delivery Programme supports the work of the Scottish Government's Public Sector Reform team, building on work that was undertaken to deliver the Covid Recovery Strategy, while continuing our existing good work in supporting the sustainable delivery of Early Learning and Childcare.

Over the last few years, we have been involved in one of the country's highest-profile policy changes: the expansion of funded Early Learning and Childcare. In this area the Recovery and Delivery Programme has continued to support, empower, and improve the delivery of Early Learning and Childcare services across Scotland, while communicating successes and challenges faced to stakeholders.

We have provided support to councils and their employees by facilitating a range of improvement planning work, including bringing local authority colleagues together to [share learning and good practice](#). One highlight this year was the event we ran with the Innovation Award-winning [LGBT+ Inclusive Education in Early Years project](#).

The project was designed to improve the life experiences of LGBT+ adults, children and families in Scotland and aims to ensure that Scotland really is the best place for all children to grow up.

[Workforce planning](#) is a core part of the strategic planning of any Early Learning and Childcare service to ensure that people and strategies are aligned with the future requirements of the service



and the changes that lie ahead. We continue to work with councils to challenge, support and advise on workforce planning, recruitment and resourcing strategies and plans.

The Recovery and Delivery Programme team were also instrumental in the development of [Datapipeline.scot](#). The system allows Scottish local authorities to securely access data about families in their area so they can contact them directly to let them know about their entitlement to funded Early Learning and Childcare. We continue to raise awareness and support councils to understand what the data means to them, and how to make best use of it to target children facing the most disadvantage.

We've also grown the capacity of the Recovery and Delivery team in order to provide a range of data and intelligence services to help support effective decision making, scrutiny, and improvement activities across Early Learning and Childcare and within individual local authorities, with a particular focus on the quality of ELC services.

This year's [Programme for Government](#) signalled intentions to further expand early learning and childcare, and we stand ready to support local authorities through the service changes that any new policy will necessitate.

Last year the Recovery and Delivery Programme began work with the Scottish Government and COSLA on delivery of the [Covid Recovery Strategy](#), working with local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships to strengthen, enable and assure the delivery of the aspirations of the strategy – to learn from experiences in the pandemic and make changes that embed the person-centred approaches that services were able to enact during Covid.

The situation faced by the public sector and its partners is now moving away from Covid recovery and towards other pressures - the cost-of-living crisis faced by communities, tightening local government budgets, and increasing service demands. Recognising this, the work of the Recovery and Delivery Team has adapted to incorporate broader work on public sector reform with a focus on the immediate changes that can be made, building on what was achieved and learned through the response to the pandemic.

We're supporting local areas, teams, and individuals to make changes to deliver outcome led, person centred services, whilst contributing to broad and deep work that engenders long lasting reform. This includes taking practical steps to identify and embed reformed ways of working through the [Glasgow Child Poverty Pathfinder](#).

Working with Glasgow City Council and other local authorities, we're facilitating changes that move services to be more locality-based with local people deciding on the best ways to tackle inequality.

Climate change

The new Climate Intelligence Service (CIS), which is under development, is jointly funded by Scottish Government and local government to help councils build capacity and capability for the development of area-wide programmes of emissions reduction, to deliver their own area-wide net zero targets and to contribute to Scotland's national commitment to net zero by 2045. Activity will be delivered by a partnership between the Improvement

Service, the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute and Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN). This brings together expert knowledge and practitioner insights, a track record of successfully supporting local authorities and access to existing networks to engage stakeholders and progress actions.

Working with Public Health Scotland (PHS) and Adaptation Scotland we published a new briefing on [working together to build climate-resilient, healthy and equitable places](#). This resource is aimed at council officers and elected members, as well as local government partners such as Health Boards, Community Planning Partnerships and community organisations. It sets out how [our changing climate can affect health and health inequalities](#) both directly, and indirectly through impacts on housing, transport and access to goods and services, which are the building blocks of good health.



A new report on [climate change training in Scottish local government](#) was published in June, presenting the findings of research carried out between January and March 2023 by the Improvement Service, on behalf of the Scottish Government and the Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN). Four key areas were identified where changes and improvements could be made: standardised guidance and resources; co-benefits and shared priorities; delivery models; and communications alignment and support.

In March, Sustainable Scotland Network developed a [Climate Emergency Checklist](#) in partnership with the Improvement Service

and the SSN Steering Group, SOLACE and COSLA designed to enable senior leaders in local government and the public sector to assess their organisation's maturity and capability in tackling the climate and nature emergencies. We also supported a working group of officers from councils across Scotland to produce [climate change impact assessment guidance](#).

We led an engagement sprint across the public sector about the just transition to net zero in Scotland. 114 representatives from across the public sector attended a series of workshops to provide feedback on the discussion themes and draft outcomes identified within the Just Transition Plan discussion papers.

Economic Outcomes

The [SLAED Indicators Report 2021/22](#) was published in January, and as this marks a decade of the Framework being in place, we supported the compilation of a report looking at interesting trends in some of the data over the ten-year period, potential drivers for these, and opportunities for learning.

We have provided support to SLAED to help the organisation respond to national consultations on Community Wealth Building, the replacement for EU Structural Funds and the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill. These responses have helped to raise the profile of SLAED, enhance the economic development officer voice at the national level, and influence government policy.



The Service Level Agreement for provision of the secretariat service to SLAED was also renewed in April 2023 for a further three-year period.

This year we published a briefing on the [City Region and Growth Deals](#), setting out the deals currently in place and which local authorities are included in each, as well as those that have successfully bid for Levelling Up Funding and those involved in Community Wealth Building pilots.

Employability

Further development work to embed the [No One Left Behind](#) principles into local government employability provision has been the main focus for the Improvement Service this year.

Working with a range of stakeholders to further simplify the employability landscape and to develop an all age offer of employability activity for those who require additional support is a key priority of the [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#).

Through a programme of information sessions, thematic workshops and sharing best practice, we have continued to build the capacity of Local Employability Partnerships (LEP) to fully understand their roles and responsibilities in meeting the ambitions of [NSET Programme 5: A Fairer and More Equal Society](#), the fair work agenda and tackling child poverty.

We are also supporting local government in a variety of working groups as we move towards the next phase of No One Left Behind,

which will see additional responsibilities for LEPs to deliver support to those with a disability, long-term health condition or at risk of becoming long-term unemployed.

Community Councils

The Improvement Service was at the Scottish Parliament in May to give evidence to the [Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee](#) on Community Councils.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the legislation which created Community Councils, and the Holyrood Committee wanted to celebrate their achievements as well as look at how they could be improved in the future. Communications Officers Brian Davey and Emma Swift appeared on the first panel, alongside Dr Oliver Escobar, Senior Lecturer in Public Policy at the University of Edinburgh, Andrew Paterson from SCDC and Jackie Weaver, Chief Officer of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils, who was celebrated for her firm-handed management of an online parish council meeting during the pandemic.



In October, a [new set of guidance documents](#) for Community Councils were published by the Improvement Service, Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), COSLA and the Scottish Government. Community councillors and local authority Community Council Liaison Officers (CCLOs) were also involved in reviewing the existing Model Scheme and guidance document at a series

of meetings in 2021 and 2022. These documents needed to be updated to take into account technological changes in the way Community Councils are meeting, conducting their finances and engaging with their communities. All the relevant documents are available on the [Scottish Community Councils website](#), and SCDC have provided British Sign Language, Easy Read, Braille, Large Print, Audio and Gaelic versions of these valuable resources.

We also published a new guide to social media for community councils and community councillors. [#FollowMe: A Social Media Guide for Community Councillors](#) aims to provide community councils with an introduction to using different channels, plus advice on social media strategies.



April saw the launch of a new [cost of living hub](#) on the Scottish Community Councils website. The hub compiles a list of national resources as well as local organisations which can provide help and support, listed by local authority region and contains case studies from Community Councils who have been taking action to help tackle the cost of living crisis in their local area.

Throughout the year the project also developed and expanded upon its webinar series for community councils working in partnership with organisations including Sustrans Scotland, SCDC, Scottish Government and the Carbon Literacy Project. Also included in the series were webinars with a rural and islands focus.

Child poverty

An in-person meeting of the Child Poverty Peer Support Network was held at Verity House in October. The meeting was an opportunity to share innovative approaches and included presentations on place-based, family centred working in Glasgow, Dundee and Shetland. It also provided a chance to feed into the development of a framework to guide future place-based working on child poverty and was an opportunity for leads to get together after many years of meeting online to take stock, build relationships and consider how the network can continue to tackle poverty in Scotland.

In June, we published a new report on [embedding access to money and welfare rights advice in education settings](#) following an online event chaired by Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) Scotland with the Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland. The report includes key messages from the event and suggested next steps, as well as summaries and videos of each of the presentations.

Published at the end of 2022, our report, [A Design Based Approach to Understanding and Tackling Rural Child Poverty](#), summarises the findings from a series of workshops held to build and strengthen relationships between peers and colleagues working in child poverty at a local and national level. The report also makes nine recommendations, including sharing good



practice across local government, acting upon the cost of living crisis in rural areas and ensuring that lived experience forms part of the response to rural child poverty.

Work around these recommendations has been taken forward through the establishment of a Remote, Rural and Island Local Child Poverty Network chaired by the Improvement Service. The network has provided an opportunity to showcase [innovative approaches to using data and intelligence](#) to identify and reach those experiencing or at risk of child poverty in rural areas. The network also initiated a joint project between the IS, SAVVI (Scaleable Approach to Vulnerability Via Interoperability), Argyll and Bute, Angus and Inverclyde Councils to explore whether consensus can be reached about sharing and re-using personal data to identify and reach out to families with children at risk of financial hardship or destitution.

We have also been working to support a [Whole Systems approach to tackling child poverty](#), with two events in late 2022 and Spring 2023 bringing those leading on child poverty, employability and childcare together to explore how they might develop a more seamless and intuitive system of support and opportunity for families.

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

We created a new resource to support the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in Scotland. The resource, [Getting Ready for the UNCRC Framework](#), is designed to support public bodies in Scotland through the steps they need to take to prepare for the [UNCRC Bill \(Scotland\)](#) which returned to the Scottish Parliament in September.

The UNCRC Implementation team also published an [online resource aimed at those working in public bodies in Scotland](#) beyond local government. It was developed as an introduction to children's human rights to allow users to learn about the UNCRC, including what is happening in Scotland to protect children's rights and what responsibilities public bodies will have as a result of changes to legislation.

[Understanding Child Poverty as a Children's Rights Issue](#) is a briefing paper that aims to support local authorities taking a children's rights approach to tackling child poverty in Scotland. It is important that children's rights are embedded in everything public authorities are doing and therefore the UNCRC Implementation Project team have organised webinars that looked at [child poverty](#) and [climate change](#) from a children's rights perspective. We will soon be publishing another briefing paper that looks at the issue of place-making and children's rights.



Whole Family Wellbeing Fund

In 2023, we launched a Learning into Action Network (LiA Network) as part of the Element 2 Whole Family Wellbeing Funding (WFWF) offer. This is being co-designed and co-delivered with stakeholders and to enable collaboration, facilitate peer support, share learning and approaches from across the country, and to support solution-focused discussions around the barriers to change. The key aim of the network is to provide a space to share experience and learning about reshaping whole family support and to promote effective

joined up working across Children Services Planning Partnerships (CSPPs).

There has been great participation in Network events so far, with representation from 21 of the 30 CSPPs consistently attending the Network 'Link & Learn' sessions. During these sessions, connections have developed across local areas where CSPPs have shared knowledge, experiences and practice which has been highlighted in survey feedback as being very beneficial. We also established a LiA Network group on the Knowledge Hub, where members can access a streamlined bank of resources, learning materials, policy updates, briefings and other useful information to support ongoing development as Element 2 progresses.

The Promise

We have supported The Promise Local Government Programme Board by carrying out research on [local government strategic planning](#) for The Promise and the measures being used to indicate progress. This demonstrated that Local Government is planning for The Promise and supported learning on what effective strategic planning looked like in the sector. The research into measures being used to indicate progress has led to further work to develop high level indicators for Local Government to determine the progress it is making on delivery of The Promise. This work kicked-off in September 2023 with a group of Promise Leads from local authorities.



Protecting People

In January, the Improvement Service, SafeLives and Resilience Learning Partnership launched a new website to help embed lived experience in the design of Scottish public services.

[Authenticvoice.scot](https://authenticvoice.scot) aims to help ensure stakeholders have the knowledge, confidence, and tools they need to [embed lived experience of gender-based violence](#) and other forms of complex trauma into local system and service design processes in a trauma-informed and meaningful way.



In March, Public Health Scotland commissioned the Improvement Service to coordinate an insights gathering project on the experiences of minority ethnic women experiencing violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Scotland, and produce a report of the key findings. The project took place from April – August 2023, and included consultation with both professionals working with minority ethnic victims/ survivors of VAWG and consultation with minority ethnic women with lived experience of multiple forms of VAWG. The full report will be published by Public Health Scotland in winter 2023.

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international campaign that starts on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until 10 December, Human Rights Day. To add value to the programme



of 16 Days activities being planned by local authorities across the country we published an [updated toolkit of resources](#), which support this year's chosen theme of "Imagine a world without Gender-Based Violence."

Throughout 2023, as a key national partner within the National Trauma Training Programme, we collaborated with a wide range of local and national partners to develop a number of resources to continue to support the implementation of trauma-informed and responsive organisations, systems and services across Scotland. Working closely with local authorities, Scottish Government, COSLA, NHS Education for Scotland and the Resilience Learning Partnership, we have also led on the development of a resource designed to support local and national organisations with sustainable implementation of a trauma-informed and responsive approach.

We continue to support local authorities and community planning partners to strengthen their capacity and capability in embedding a trauma-informed approach, including coordinating the Trauma Champions and Lead Officers Network to share learning and good practice, developing a suite of tools and resources to support local areas, and providing one-to-one support.

The National Trauma Training Programme (NTTP) was shortlisted for the Campbell Christie Public Service Reform Award at the 2023 Scottish Public Services Awards.

Evaluation

We published the final report on potential [funding models and delivery approaches to allocate the levy funding](#) devolved to the Scottish Government for debt advice. The report, based on desktop research and stakeholder engagement, assessed eight potential funding models. Only one model – a grants programme managed by an independent organisation – had almost unanimous support across the advice sector as a proven and effective model.



The first evaluation exercise for Place Based Investment Programme's (PBIP) direct allocation to local authorities in 2021/22 is now complete. In tackling some of the biggest challenges around climate change mitigation and improving economic outcomes through job creation, projects funded by PBIP have demonstrated positive contributions. At a local authority level PBIP has been used as a catalyst to lever in additional investment and aligned with other place-based funds.

Our report, [Advice Services in Accessible Settings](#), highlights the ways that local authority-funded services are delivering advice to improve engagement and to make them easier for individuals to use. Accessible settings are locations that people already visit and in which they feel safe and connected, for example, schools and GP surgeries, and the report included several case studies outlining examples from across Scotland.

We continue to evaluate Scottish Government's Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships 'Test and Learn' Programme. The programme

has resulted in access to advice services being provided in 180 GP Practices across Scotland – with a focus on social and economic deprivation or rurality. In the first year of the Programme, over 10,000 individuals have been able to access advice in their local GP Practice. Of them, 89% had never previously sought advice, about a third have a household income of less than £10,000 and a third live in families with children. As a result of the investment of £1.46 million in the first year of the Programme by Scottish Government, individuals have made financial gains of around £16.2 million.

As a result of having a Welfare Rights Advisor located a day a week in their Practice, GP's have stated that this will allow them to spend more time on clinical matters. As one said,

"It is a local and accessible service in a deprived area and reduces the need for patients booking clinical appointments for non-clinical matters."

The [Money Guiders Scotland network](#) has been delivered as a project on behalf of the Money and Pensions Service to support anyone who talks to people about their money worries. The network has been developed to form a diverse membership of money guidance practitioners across the third, voluntary and public sectors. The project has managed an active events programme and grown an online community to support it. During the first two quarters of 2023/24, for example, it delivered 15 events, with a total attendance of nearly 500, saw high levels of satisfaction with event content and its online community grew to nearly 350 members.



Some of the key benefits of our work to local government



We add value to the work individual local authorities undertake on elected member development, through the delivery of national briefings, guidance, webinars, workshops, coaching, political mentoring programmes and other learning resources which councils can use locally to help increase members' knowledge of issues, or which members can use themselves as part of self-directed learning.



We bring local government colleagues together, often with partners, in peer networks focused on sharing knowledge, practice, learning, experiences and resources and signposting support in a range of priority areas for councils. This reduces duplication of effort and supports local authorities to collaborate and work together to tackle shared challenges and drive improvement and innovation.



We support the development of skills and capabilities in the local government workforce through the provision of training in a range of areas, and through skills transfer by working directly with local authority colleagues. In some cases we provide training to all councils, which reduces duplication and is more cost-effective than each local authority sourcing training separately.



We provide a range of data and intelligence to help support effective decision making, scrutiny, improvement and public transparency within local government as a sector and within individual councils, including the delivery of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.



We deliver a range of bespoke improvement support, which provides a resource to local authorities that they do not always have internally and would require to procure.



We facilitate a range of self-assessment and improvement planning work, which helps councils evidence Best Value and improvement activity to inspection bodies such as the Accounts Commission.



We help a number of local government professional associations such as Heads of Planning Scotland, Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development Group and Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists to organise themselves efficiently, facilitating effective engagement with other professional associations, national agencies and the Scottish and UK Governments and ensuring robust responses to government consultations.



We deliver the One Scotland Gazetteer on behalf of local government, which provides a national look-up for all addresses in Scotland, which are provided by the 32 Local Authorities. Scotland's emergency services use this complete dataset of Scottish addresses, which is updated on a nightly basis, when responding to emergencies.



We deliver a range of national digital public services which are free at the point of access for local authorities, minimising the need for them to develop their own digital solutions or procure, install, maintain and fund solutions. These digital services help councils generate efficiencies and free up staff to deliver other services or support, as they take traffic away from offline channels.

Our ethos and values

Our values

As part of our commitment to learning and development, we provided support for 17 employees to undertake Open University courses via the Flexible Workforce Development Fund as well as regularly bringing managers together to talk about their role as people managers and refresh their knowledge of their responsibilities.



Our Equality Working Group has taken forward a number of pieces of work this year, including supporting the Improvement Service to become a certified [Disability Confident Employer](#).

Moving up from Disability Confident Committed, we have undertaken a self-assessment which helped us understand how we are meeting the core actions of a Disability Confident employer and where we are already delivering on the actions to help recruit the right people for our business and to retain and develop our people.



The Improvement Service signed the [Miscarriage Association Pregnancy Loss Pledge](#), enhancing the support available to employees experiencing pregnancy loss, including providing paid time off to parents experiencing pregnancy loss at any stage. By taking the pledge, the Improvement Service has shown a commitment to creating a supportive work environment, with pregnancy loss guidance in place which aims to support people affected, including partners, back to work by showing flexibility wherever possible.



Our people

Mental health and wellbeing

Supporting good mental health in the workplace remains a priority with a new Wellbeing Policy being developed and implemented. We continued to support the mental health of our workforce over the last year by offering weekly online wellbeing sessions where colleagues can drop in and have a chat about anything on their mind, work or non-work related, with one of the two qualified [Mental Health First Aiders](#) at the Improvement Service. The weekly e-mail about these drop-in sessions is also used to inform employees about national campaigns such as World Mental Health Day, as well as signposting them to resources that can help them to maintain and improve their mental health and wellbeing.



A blog has been published on the new Staff Hub about workplace wellbeing, while our Mental Health and Wellbeing Sharepoint site directs employees who need help to external resources. We have a Wellbeing Teams Channel, where people can share ideas about how to boost their mental health.

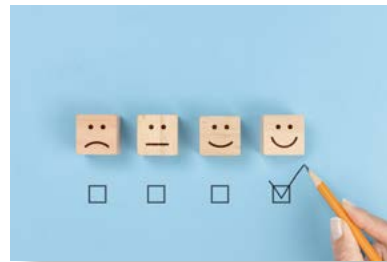


The Improvement Service now has an established Wellbeing Group, made up of colleagues across the organisation who develop communications and ideas for further support on specific issues.

Our people

Stakeholder and Staff Survey

The 2023 stakeholder survey was issued in April with each team distributing their own bespoke survey to their stakeholders. This year the survey questions were refreshed and the survey was shortened. Surveys were issued across 23 Improvement Service products and services, with 88% of respondents to the survey saying that they were satisfied with us. This was one of the highest rates of satisfaction recorded in the stakeholder survey to date, and satisfaction has trended upwards since 2017, when the survey was first issued. Satisfaction was high this year in all areas of the survey but was especially high in relation to the support provided by staff. 82% of respondents agreed that the Improvement Service has a positive impact on their organisation and its work.



reporting that they have a good work-life balance – one of the highest proportions recorded - and 89% reporting that they were happy with hybrid working. Overall, satisfaction was high across all areas of the survey.

Towards the end of 2023, the Improvement Service undertook our own biennial PSIF assessment, in addition to the PSIF team facilitating a self-assessment with the IS Audit Committee to support its role and functions. In parallel, the IS Board also undertook a self-assessment and it is meeting in late November to consider the findings and any action the Board wishes to take in response.

This year's staff survey showed a satisfaction rate of 82%, a slight decrease from the previous staff survey, but still a very positive response. The results suggested that staff have adapted well to new ways of working, with 94% of respondents



Our people

Workplace changes

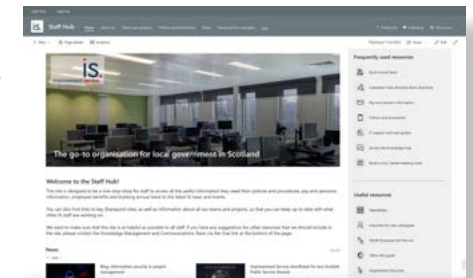
2023 saw the Improvement Service move to new premises within West Lothian Civic Centre in Livingston. This downsizing reflects the new Hybrid Working Policy published this year, which replaced the previous Remote Working Policy introduced during the pandemic. The new Policy reflects a belief that “work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go to” and gives employees more choice over deciding when and where they work best in a way that balances the needs of the IS, their team and themselves. The move to the Civic Centre also gives us access to their expanded services such as conference and meeting rooms, an on-site café and spaces for socialising to improve collaboration between colleagues at the IS and at West Lothian Council.



We have agreements in place for Improvement Staff to work on a hot desking basis at the Audit Scotland and COSLA offices in Edinburgh, and a reciprocal arrangement for COSLA staff to work from our Livingston office, should they choose to do so.

A new online Staff Hub has been created to help staff access

essential internal services and to improve communication between teams. This features company news and internal blogs, as well as easy access to the minutes of Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meetings and Extended Leadership Team (ELT) meetings among other useful documents. The Staff Hub will make the induction process easier and provides a space for IS staff to share information with colleagues.



During 2023 the Improvement Service transitioned to a new finance system, SAGE Intacct. Preparation for this move and configuration of the new system has been a large piece of work for the Finance and Governance team this year, involving mapping of a full years' transactions and opening balances to an improved coding system that echoes the management structure of the organisation. The new system is fully administered and configured by the IS Finance and Governance team and will enable the development of new reports, with drilldown capability, plus individual dashboards with live data in order to aid managers with planning and decision making.

Our people

Extended Leadership Team

The Extended Leadership Team (ELT) is a forum for staff from throughout the IS to work collaboratively to identify links and connections between programmes and team. Members volunteer, meeting regularly to work on projects and assist the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) on projects. The ELT has also now taken responsibility for issues relating to IS Values.

During 2023, the ELT completed important work supporting the development of the new Strategic Framework, which ensured that staff input was at the heart of this document. Working with the Senior Leadership Team, the ELT conducted research, interviewed partners and stakeholders, and led sessions with staff to learn about their priorities. The draft which was put forward was the base from which the SLT and board finalised the current Framework.

The ELT also assisted with the delivery of the previous PSIF improvement plan, liaising with colleagues to ensure the improvement actions were being progressed within the agreed timescales.

Finally, the ELT has been a strong conduit for communication between staff and senior leadership. Members discuss suggestions from staff and meet with SLT on a regular basis. Some suggestions

which have been taken forward include an information session on the staff pensions scheme and the facilitation of team social activities. A new intake of members will join the ELT in the new year.



Working in Partnership

COSLA

In April we published a new report, *Delivering the Promise in Local Government*, with COSLA. This report followed a series of engagements with local authorities to understand the progress, successes and challenges as they seek to achieve the collective ambition to #KeepThePromise by 2023. The actions and next steps required to progress, grow and succeed at the pace required will be owned by The Promise Local Government Development Board.



The IS Board and Accounts Commission also restated their commitment to their Strategic Alliance and agreed priorities for the next 12 months.

Solace Scotland

The Improvement Service has been working closely with Solace Scotland throughout 2023 on our local government transformation programme which is developing options for the future delivery of council services.



We also support a number of local government professional associations (e.g. Heads of Planning Scotland, Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development Group, Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists) to organise themselves efficiently, facilitating effective engagement with other professional associations, national agencies and the Scottish and UK Governments and ensuring robust responses to government consultations.

Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission has published a new report highlighting the impact and value of 20 years of reporting on Best Value audit work, including two case studies from the Improvement Service. Through Best Value work, the Accounts Commission has shared best practice, reported to the public on what's working well and continued to shine a spotlight on what needs to improve across Scotland's councils. Our Governance programme hosted a webinar for Elected Members to discuss this new report, as well as repeating their annual event with Audit Scotland looking in more detail at their Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023 report.



Improvement Service Performance 2023



For every £1 of core grant invested in the IS, we brought in an **additional £6.53**



One Scotland Gazetteer searches:
1,046,790 via website
2,695,499 via API
 Total of **3,742,289**



82% Staff satisfaction
94% agreed to having a good work-life balance
88% Stakeholder satisfaction
82% agreed IS has a positive impact on their organisation



Over **2.7m** cardholders access national and local services using the National Entitlement Card

Two-thirds of councils in Scotland use our PSIF process to drive Improvement



We held **eight** online Change Managers' Network events to **31 of Scotland's councils**.

The Change Managers' Network Knowledge Hub group has **493 members**

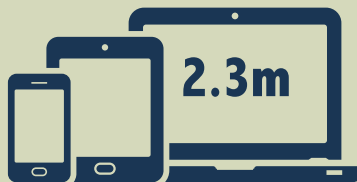


Knowledge Hub's Scottish Public Services Network has **14,415** members working across **458 groups**



This year we reached **2.3 million mygovscot myaccount users**

48% of eligible population have myaccounts



28 Place and Wellbeing Assessments

completed across Project towns by the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme



Spatial Hub, has experienced a month-on-month increase in data downloads from **1803** in January 23, to **9082** in October 23



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