

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

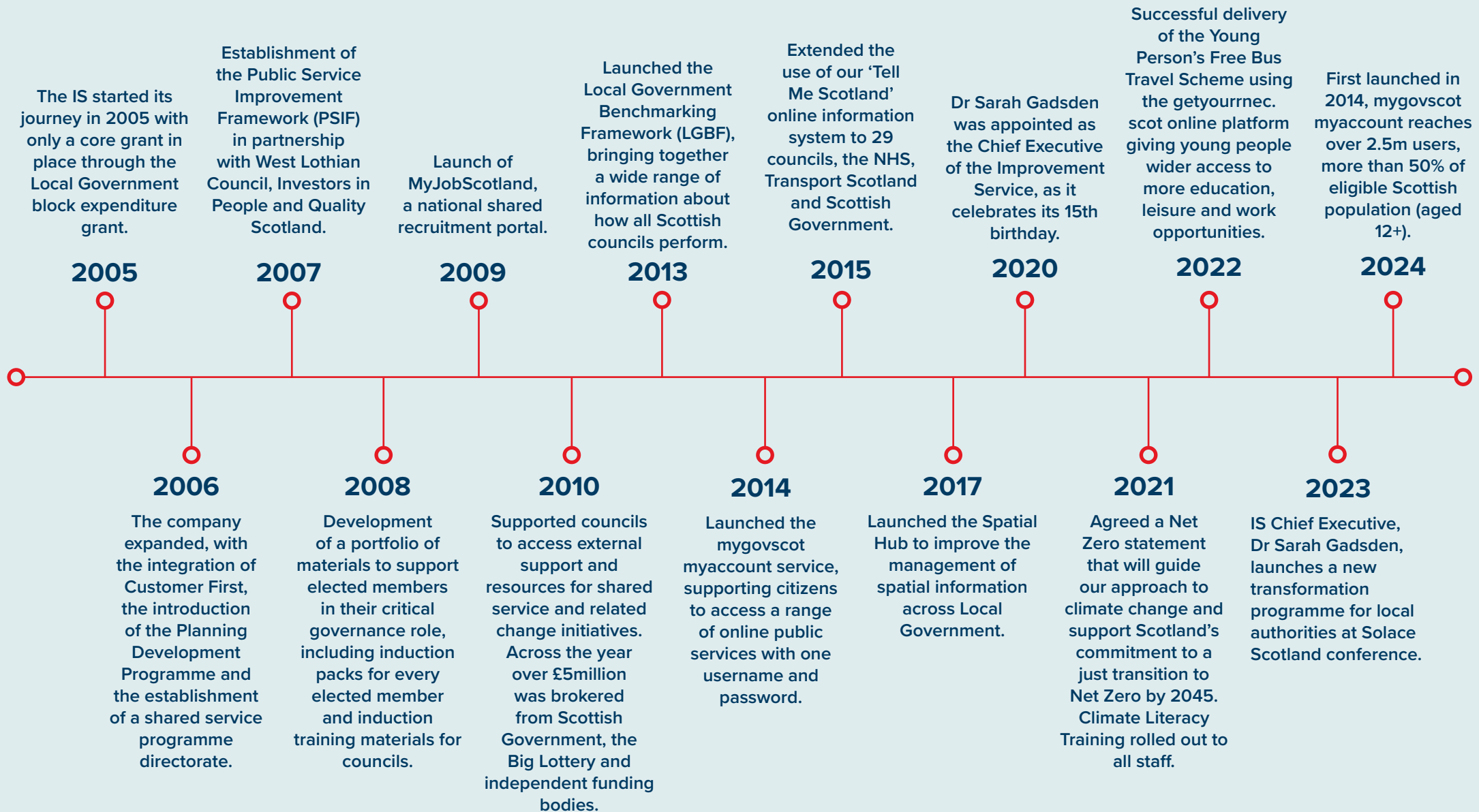
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# Improvement Service Annual Report

## 2024

# Our story so far



# Foreword



**Cllr Shona Morrison**  
Chair



**Dr Sarah Gadsden**  
Chief Executive

2024 has been another successful year for the Improvement Service, despite the longstanding challenges facing local government and the wider public sector.

Our innovative transformation programme, launched in 2023 with Solace Scotland, has gone from strength to strength thanks to the support of Chief Executives and council officers who have volunteered their time and expertise to support individual workstreams. The six short-term improvement projects, designed to effect real change in the way that councils deliver services, are making progress with some aspects of this valuable work close to completion. We are already seeing the practical outcomes of this transformation work in the new platform we are developing with early-adopter councils to administer the new Local Authority Visitor Levy Schemes.

The enthusiasm which has been shown across local government and the wider public sector for the transformation programme has been

matched by the commitment from Improvement Service colleagues to support this work, and their contributions have been a significant part of its success.

This year also saw our flagship mygovscot myaccount platform reach a new milestone of 2.5 million users across Scotland – more than 50% of the eligible population. Launched just 10 years ago, mygovscot myaccount is now the established method for councils to deliver digital public services and for users to access important citizen and data services in a way that makes their lives easier. mygovscot myaccount underpins a wide variety of other digital public services, delivered by the Improvement Service and others, including online applications for the National Entitlement Card and the newly-redesigned tellmescotland platform, which makes it easier for councils to share and for citizens to access Public Information Notices.

While it has been great to see our existing programmes continue to

progress so well in 2024, we have also been able to launch a number of brand-new projects in the last year, finding new and innovative ways to help councils deliver improvements.

The Scottish Climate Intelligence Service (SCIS) is a major new initiative which is being delivered by the Improvement Service in partnership with the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute and funded by the Scottish Government and all 32 local authorities. The SCIS aims to help councils build capacity and capability for the development of area-wide programmes of emissions reduction helping them to deliver their own area-wide net zero targets. This goes to the heart of our climate change work, which has always been to emphasise the important role local government has to play in delivering Scotland-wide net zero targets as well as ensuring councils consider the climate change implications of all their services.

We are particularly proud of the new Local Government Connect Network which launched in 2024. Bringing together ambitious individuals in the early stages of their local government career with more experienced mentors from other councils, the Local Government Connect Network already has 26 local authorities and other partner organisations signed up to take part. Initiatives like this are key to attracting, developing and retaining talented people within the sector, helping create a sustainable future for local government.

Last but certainly not least, it was announced in the Scottish Government's Programme for Government that the Improvement Service would be hosting the new National Planning Improvement Hub. The Hub will provide planning authorities with access to specialist expertise, support upskilling and help prepare their workforce for the future. It fits well with the existing work of the National Planning Improvement Champion to help planning authorities

assess their performance and identify the action they should take to improve.

2024 has been another busy year for the Improvement Service and our work over the last 12 months has continued to demonstrate our commitment to local government improvement. As an organisation we are always looking for new opportunities to use our expertise and experience to help local authorities identify solutions and deliver real changes to improve the lives of citizens across Scotland.



Sarah Gadsden

# Transformation programme

It has been one year since we issued our call for action to support the [wide-ranging local government transformation programme](#) launched by Solace Scotland and the Improvement Service and supported by a wide range of volunteers from across the sector.

The process started with the publication by the Improvement Service of [a paper on delivering a future for local authorities](#), which outlined the context within which councils are operating, the challenges and opportunities they face and how they 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 building blocks for transformation, and these have been at the heart of our transformation programme ever since:

- Unlock community action.
- Enable a functioning, trusted local and central government relationship.
- Design for people's needs.
- Create digital, design and technology-enabled transformation.
- Tackle inequality and meet the needs of all citizens.
- Lead council and cross-sector partnerships with a focus on outcomes.

These anchors are central to the three planks of the transformation programme: short-term local government transformation projects, a new leadership practitioner forum and an officer-led conversation on public service reform.

In the last 12 months, work has continued at an extraordinary pace on the six short-term projects which were identified as possible 'quick wins'; projects that could be actioned within a manageable short-term timeframe to deliver improvements to specific public services delivered by councils that would make a real difference to the lives of people in Scotland. The six projects are:

## ■ Collaboration within the local government sector on procurement

This short-term transformation project is looking at areas where councils can collaborate on procurement, saving time and resources in the process. The project group is focusing on three areas - digital, waste and fleet – with subject experts, procurement specialists and Scotland Excel all involved in the discussions.

## ■ Analysis of local government's statutory and discretionary services

The project group is currently mapping all local government statutory duties, while also considering where the 'pain points' and opportunities for change are, which will then inform their priority areas for action.

### ■ **The full implementation of Crerar for Local Government**

The Crerar Review in 2007 made a number of recommendations regarding the regulation, audit, inspection and complaints handling of public services, and this project group is taking a closer look at how these were implemented and where changes still need to be made.

### ■ **Repository of examples of active communities / participatory design**

The aim of this project group is to develop repositories of examples of how active communities are supporting the delivery of public services in their area and examples of how local authorities are developing the skills and capacities of staff to work alongside such communities. Four key outputs from this group are already underway.

### ■ **Development of a Digital To-Be State for Scottish Local Government**

Building on work by the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, this project group is developing a visual and supporting narrative for a digital-to-be-state. Four subgroups made up of multi-disciplinary experts across councils are currently working to co-create key components that will then be packaged into a single report.

### ■ **Identification of new digital shared services that could be delivered nationally or regionally**

This project group aims to maximise the capability of digital and data to improve access to customer-centric services while identifying and delivering new use cases for existing national shared service applications and technology platforms.

You can read an update on the progress of these six projects throughout 2024 on the [Improvement Service website](#).

The second part of the transformation programme is the [Leadership Practitioner Forum](#), a network for aspiring Chief Executives, Directors and Heads of Service. This has attracted members from across the country and across the local government workforce, with regular meetings to help share best practice and learn from each other's experiences. The Leadership Practitioner Forum hosted a number of events during 2024, which have taken an in-depth look at the current state of local government finances, the Verity House Agreement, an update on the work of the Crerar project and the short-term local government transformation projects listed above.

Finally, the [officer-led whole system dialogue on public service reform](#) aims to bring together leaders from across local government and Community Planning Partners to develop a collective roadmap towards public service reform, while identifying new and different ways to identify and tackle inequalities.

A national research proposal has been approved to undertake a robust analysis of Public Service reform and Collaboration from both a national and international perspective to understand:

- What models of reform exist for local government, working within and across organisations?
- What is the strength of evidence about their effectiveness in improving services and outcomes for people and communities?



# What's new in 2024

## Scottish Climate Intelligence Service (SCIS)

The Improvement Service is a partner in the set up and delivery of the [Scottish Climate Intelligence Service](#), jointly funded by Scottish Government and all 32 local authorities to support the planning and delivery of programmes aimed at reducing area-wide emissions across Scotland.



Working with Edinburgh Climate Change Institute, the SCIS is supporting local authorities and partners to design, manage and deliver plans for area-wide emissions reduction, targeting all sources of emissions by:

- Supporting collaboration and helping to share skills, knowledge, insights and common approaches which support and accelerate effective local climate action.
- Using a common data platform to track progress on the actions needed for local emissions reduction.
- Providing a clear picture on local emissions by source as well as the actions needed to address these.

- Assessing progress towards net zero targets by comparing against current actions.
- Championing transparency by ensuring our data platform allows anyone to see the current emissions profile of a local authority area, the measures and actions needed to bring those emissions to net zero, and the progress being made.

This year we have procured a data platform from [ClimateView](#) to support the work, established clear governance and relationships with local authorities and their partners and recruited a new team of five based in the Improvement Service to deliver the capacity building support. The SCIS was formally launched in September with [an introduction and demonstration of what the service offers](#).

All 32 local authorities have engaged in the design of the SCIS and are now attending training and regular meetings with the new team.

## National Planning Improvement Hub

It has been confirmed that the National Planning Improvement Champion in the Improvement Service is to host the new [National Planning Improvement Hub](#). The establishment of the hub was announced in the Programme for



Government to build capacity and resilience in the planning system, and to improve consistency and efficiency in decision-making. Its initial priority will be to help planning authorities make quicker decisions on hydrogen planning applications, with a plan to support wider developments in the future.

The hub will assemble specialist expertise and deploy this to support planning services and will work with them to support the sharing of expertise and learning amongst authorities. It will also develop tools and resources to highlight good practice and help planning authorities to use these to improve their practice through learning through events and networking.

The hub is funded by Scottish Government, meaning there will be no direct costs to planning authorities. The National Planning Improvement Champion will host and coordinate the hub's work and will be supported initially by staff from Scottish Government, key agencies and other partner organisations. Its work will be guided and supported by Scottish Government, COSLA, Heads of Planning Scotland, SOLACE, other members of the High Level Group on Planning Performance, and by industry.

## Community Planning

This year we have supported the [Scottish Community Planning Network](#) to develop as a forum to grow and embed a shared vision for partnership working. The Network brings together Community Planning stakeholders from across the country to collate their experience and



provide advice and guidance on collaborative working in community planning. The Network provides the opportunity for mutual support and capacity building, information exchange and building personal networks, now supported by our new Community Planning Project Officer.

## Community Wealth Building

Thanks to ongoing engagement and the development of good relationships with the Community Wealth Building team within Scottish Government's Economy Directorate, we were successful in securing funding to appoint a Community Wealth Building Project Officer. The officer is working on mapping progress in approaches to Community Wealth Building across Scotland, and supporting councils to implement these, with particular focus on inclusive models of business ownership.

## Digital Right to Work service

The new Right to Work service, which is powered by mygovscot myaccount, is now live with COSLA, the Improvement Service and Robert Gordon University, with East Ayrshire Council becoming the first local authority to use the platform in November 2024. Using a UK or Irish Passport, or Yoti app, an applicant will receive an email asking them to sign into the Right To Work Identity Verification Service. Their identity will be verified using the Yoti Identity Service and council agents can then download proof of the right to work checks and attach it to the candidate's HR file.



## Local Government Connect Network

In 2024, we launched the [Local Government Connect Network](#).

This is designed to bring together professionals in the early stages of their local government career, encouraging professional connections and providing opportunities for personal and professional development through a mix of online and in person events and mentorship opportunities.



We invited each local authority and partner organisation Chief Executive to nominate up to five members and up to five mentors to join and support the Local Government Connect Network and we currently have representation from 26 councils and partner organisations.

## National Visitor Levy Platform

The Improvement Service, in partnership with City of Edinburgh, Highland and Argyll & Bute councils, are working together to develop a National Visitor Levy Platform which will be used to administer Local Authority Visitor Levy Schemes. The platform will enable accommodation providers to register their properties, submit levy returns and make necessary payments. It is anticipated and hoped that other local authorities will join the Early Adopter Group and adopt the National Visitor Levy Platform in the future, if they decide to implement their own visitor levy schemes.

## Peer Collaborative Improvement

In January 2024, we launched our new approach to Peer Collaborative Improvement. Our pilot focused on the Scottish Welfare Fund, and involving involved colleagues from Falkirk, Inverclyde, East Renfrewshire and Midlothian councils to test this new approach. COSLA officers were also involved and played a key role in linking local practice to the development of national policy. This important development is a key element of the LGBF Board's commitment to develop and deliver a more assertive approach to sector-led improvement, with LGBF positioned as a key cornerstone, and has received support from the IS Board, Solace and COSLA Leaders.

# Key Achievements

## Digital Public Services

The Digital Public Services portfolio continued to grow and expand throughout 2024, hitting some significant milestones as the year progressed.

### mygovscot myaccount

The [mygovscot myaccount](#) service continued to increase its user base to [over 2.5 million users](#), accounting for more than 50% 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.

In March, a [redesigned version of mygovscot myaccount was launched](#), which aims to improve the user experience of citizens accessing public services online. New features were introduced to make it easier for new and existing users to set up and log in to their



accounts, recover passwords, edit information associated with their accounts and identify the services they have access to. mygovscot myaccount prioritises security and customers can now access different options to increase the security on their account, while the updated password policy is both easier to use and more secure.

mygovscot myaccount has now [introduced passkeys](#) to make it easier for users to sign in, while still maintaining security. A simple verification of their fingerprint or face, or a device PIN - the same action that consumers take multiple times each day to unlock their mobile phones, tablets or other devices - will now provide easy and secure access to mygovscot myaccount.

### National Entitlement Card

With more than 2.8 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.



The online application platform, [getyournec.scot](#), is used by all 32 local authorities and uses mygovscot myaccount's authentication

and identity verification services. Getyournec.scot has [processed over one million National Entitlement Card applications](#) online, for over 60s concessionary travel, disabled concessionary travel, young person's free bus travel and Young Scot cards. The platform has saved councils time and money and made it easier for users to apply from their own home without having to visit a council office.

[150 million free bus journeys](#) have now been made by children and young people across Scotland as part of the Young Person's Free Bus Travel Scheme, supported by the Improvement Service and getyournec.scot. Launched in January 2022, the Scheme aims to encourage more sustainable travel and tackle issues related to transport poverty while opening up social, education, employment and leisure opportunities to young people across the country. 1.2m young people now have access to National Entitlement Cards (NEC) for free travel.

## Young Scot Membership Platform

As part of a partnership with Young Scot, membership.young.scot continues to grow its user base. 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.

## parentsportal.scot

Now used by 20 local authorities and across 1,483 schools, the use of [parentsportal.scot](#) continues to grow. 2024 saw the highest usage of the platform to date and it is now used by over 236,000 parents/guardians to access educational services related to over 338,000

**parentsportal.scot**

children. The mobile application version of parentsportal for both Android (over 18K downloads) and iOS users (over 28K downloads) also continues to prove popular with parents.

## Data Hub

An [online data matching and cleansing solution](#) for the Scottish public sector is now used by 34 organisations, including 27 local authorities.



## bisaccount.scot

The [bisaccount.scot 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 councils, to provide authentication services for businesses accessing online council services. The platform will be at the core of a new National Visitor Levy platform which is currently in development.

**bisaccount.scot**

## datapipeline.scot

[datapipeline.scot](#) 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). Local authorities needed data about eligible families in their area, so they could contact



them directly to let them know about their entitlement. Working with Tata Consultancy Services, we developed datapipeline.scot which allows 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.

## ISO27001 accreditation

We successfully retained our ISO27001 accreditation following an annual audit.



## Spatial Hub

2024 further established the [Spatial Hub](#) as the Planning and Environment Evidence Base for Scotland. This was achieved through enhancing the vast data and intelligence sources related to these key policy themes.



Utilising secure connectors to source the planning and buildings standards data on a daily basis has ensured that this critical data is not only as current as possible, but also hosted in a single national location and is therefore able to be efficiently used and analysed by all of Scotland's planning community in the decision-making process. The work has been championed by Heads of Planning Scotland, who signed a letter of support for the Spatial Hub to host all necessary local government and third-party planning constraints datasets. This relates to the supplementary information that enables planners to make informed decisions about what should be allowed to be built and where, and includes information indicating the location of utility installations, environmental protection areas and sites of contamination.

## One Scotland Gazetteer

Already adopted by almost every Scottish public sector organisation, a priority for the One Scotland Gazetteer service in 2024 was further automating and increasing usage, through migrating existing users to the OSG webservice. This API gives almost any system the ability to access the latest authoritative address and street information, streamlining digital service provision, while preventing duplication of effort and reducing resource requirements in do so. We offer council IT and Procurement departments support to aid this transition and provide complementary data governance practices around use of the Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN).



Another focus in 2024 has been in relation to identifying high risk and tall buildings. Working with local government colleagues, the analysis is already being used by the Scottish Government as well as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service via the One Scotland Gazetteer; further utilising the Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN) to link critical information sources across the Scottish public sector.

During 2024, Ordnance Survey announced that the National Street Gazetteer for Scotland shall be used as the definitive source for road categorisation on their published maps. This includes identifying trunk roads and primary routes.

## Data Enrichment

We have sought to make geospatial information relating to planning as accessible as possible, by producing interactive webmaps and associated analysis.

We have [worked with Orkney Islands Council to publish data about marine infrastructure](#) on the Spatial Hub. The data includes commercial ports and marinas, ferry routes and safeguarded areas around the Flotta oil terminal. This is the first time that we have worked with an individual local authority to publish their bespoke data in a standardised form, allowing other organisations to find, access and use the information. We are now offering this service to all other councils, to help them make their data more accessible.

In August, [data from sportscotland on the location of sporting facilities](#) across Scotland was added to the Spatial Hub. Sports facilities included in the dataset range from ice rinks and bowling greens to fitness suites and swimming pools, covering a wide range of sporting activities. This information can support the development of the 20-minute neighbourhood concept in Scotland, which calls for good access to services that support local living.

## tellmescotland.gov.uk

During 2024, we incorporated new developments to improve [tellmescotland](#), Scotland's national public notice portal.

The [new look tellmescotland site](#) is now supported by mygovscot myaccount, streamlining the process for the public and businesses to sign up for tellmescotland



and access public information notices (PINs) in their local area. The new site has also improved the process of uploading PINs to the tellmescotland portal, making it easier for local authority staff. Local authorities can also see how many views their public notices receive.

The portal improves efficiencies of local government, reducing their spend on advertising and providing a platform that enables the public to easily access important information on planning, roads and licensing in their local area.

## 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.

## Organisational Development (OD)

Working with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) Scotland and the Society of Personal Development Scotland (SPDS),



we published [Scotland's Local Authority Workforce Report 2024](#). This report warns that councils are operating in a difficult economic, financial and labour market situation, with a range of ongoing organisational and workforce pressures. It also highlights the excellent work already being undertaken by councils to address these challenges and showcases a number of examples of innovative best practice that have been adopted across the country as a means to mitigate workforce risks.



scrutiny development for elected members, working relationships, elected member development strategies, and improvements to democratic governance processes.

We continue to support Community Councils through the development of good practice case studies, access to the Open University Community Council OpenLearn portal, and support for the Community Council Liaison Officers network.



In 2024 we have run seven events for our [Organisational Development Network](#), which have been a mix of Key Topic and Open Space Sessions. More than 70 colleagues from 29 councils and six partner organisations have participated in these events, covering topics including Evaluation and Measuring Impact, Leadership Development and Local Government Workforce.

## Governance

The Democratic Governance Programme combines our work to [support political leadership in Scottish local government](#) and the [Scottish Community Council project](#).

We have hosted webinars in partnership with the Standards Commission for Scotland on aspects of the Councillors Code of Conduct, produced guidance for community councillors on complying with the Nolan Principles of standards in public life, and published briefings on topical issues such as the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act.

We have also delivered bespoke support to councils on effective

## Research

The Board endorsed our Research Plan for 2024/25 at its June meeting. Projects included within the plan that the team is currently working on include:

- A [report](#) exploring the latest demographic trends as included within the Census, the implications of these, and good practice in developing policy responses from Scotland and internationally.
- A [survey](#) on behalf of the Scottish Government exploring the workforce's views and attitudes to trauma and the National Trauma Transformation Programme.
- "Business Baseline" survey on behalf of Business Gateway exploring the opportunities and challenges facing businesses in Scotland.
- Working with West Lothian Council and others to develop a child poverty index and approach to identifying unmet need.

We have been shortlisted for the Local Area Research & Intelligence Association (LARIA) award for Best Use of Data for our work with West Lothian Council to identify unmet need. By combining and



analysing publicly available and council held data, we were able to use analytical insights and local knowledge to create a model showing places where support entitlement is not reaching those in need.

## Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF)

The [Public Service Improvement Framework \(PSIF\)](#) team have supported councils and the wider public sector by providing self-assessments across a number of services and Boards. Self-assessments were provided to the following:

- 8 self-assessments in 6 councils.
- 2 self-assessments in Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs).
- 1 self-assessment in an Integration Joint Board (IJB).

In 2024, Edinburgh City Council and South Ayrshire Council, supported by the PSIF team, are piloting PSIF and then plan to rollout a programme of self-assessment within their councils. Police Scotland are also planning to use PSIF at a corporate level in the organisation to support their Best Value work.

At the request of councils, we have developed a new checklist on Workforce Innovation and a corporate checklist focused upon the seven themes in the Best Value Revised Statutory Guidance 2020.

The PSIF team have organised Joint Account Management (JAM) meetings with five Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) that provide offers of support from the national improvement organisations to HSCP senior leadership teams.



We are undertaking a new national [self-assessment for Community Planning Partnerships](#) (CPPs) which will be held every two years. This will support CPP Boards to ensure that areas such as governance, accountability, leadership and performance management are fit for purpose to deliver the Local Outcomes Improvement Plans (LOIPs).

## Communications

Throughout the year, the Communications Team has continued to support our work through the production of videos, reports and other published materials as well as social media and website content. A Communications Plan, developed on the back of our [Communications Strategy](#), has identified new opportunities to grow and develop our communications activities and engagement with stakeholders. The team are now putting this Communication Plan into action.



The Improvement Service [X account](#) has grown to 4,110 in total, while our [LinkedIn channel](#) has 541 more followers than in 2023 (2,917 in total). Other Improvement Service programmes have also joined LinkedIn this year, including [Protecting People, Planning and Place-Based Approaches](#) and the [Scottish Climate Intelligence Service](#). Since April 2024, there have been almost 53,000 views of the videos on the Improvement Service [YouTube channel](#). The Improvement Service [newsletter](#) currently has 2,167 subscribers, who receive a monthly update on all the latest news from the organisation. The Communications Team also supports the production of newsletters for Elected Members and Community Councils.

## Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The 12th annual Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) National Benchmarking [Overview Report](#) was published in March. The report found that during 2022/23, funding levels for councils did not keep pace with the increasing demand, growing need and rising cost pressures facing local government.

The [LGBF Dashboard](#) now publishes data releases on a monthly basis, to provide councils with access to more timely data.

We continue to engage with councils to explore how the LGBF Dashboard can be used and adapted to support local approaches to performance reporting, including public performance reporting. For example, we are working with a number of councils to develop locally bespoke versions of the LGBF Dashboard which present a basket of LGBF measures aligned to local council plans, for example, and allow for the inclusion of local narrative to provide context for the data trends and outline planned improvement action where appropriate.

The LGBF Board are continuing to evolve the suite of LGBF measures to reflect policy priorities which are of critical importance to local government, including Financial Sustainability. We are also working with the Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) to further 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 of councils.



We are currently in Phase 2 of the Local Government Data Platform project, and a delivery plan for this phase has been approved by the Local Government Data Platform Oversight Group, co-chaired by Solace and COSLA, and involves the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, Improvement Service, Public Health Scotland and Scottish Government. Phase 2 of this project focuses on the necessary arrangements to deliver simplification and streamlining of the reporting landscape, as well as delivering improved co-ordination of the data collection that continues to be necessary for assurance purposes, reducing the effort for manual data collection and improving the re-use of data collected.

## National Planning Improvement Champion

The National Planning Improvement team, through the [National Planning Improvement Framework](#) (NPIF) is piloting a new collaborative peer review process and published facilitation guidance to support this during 2024. Ten planning authorities have completed cohort 1 that has tested the NPIF, which is a new approach to measuring the performance of planning authorities and replaces the Planning Performance Framework. The framework is being tested incrementally throughout 2024-25 with all planning authorities expected to take part in one of three cohorts.

The NPIF has been developed by the National Planning Improvement Champion in collaboration with stakeholders from across the planning sector following a '[call for ideas](#)' in October 2023.



## Community Planning Improvement Board (CPIB)

We are continuing to support the [Community Planning Improvement Board](#) (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.

Across the next 12 months, the CPIB will consider the vision, strategy and set of actions needed nationally, to provide further support to CPPs as they take local action to tackle deep-rooted inequalities and improve wellbeing. Public service reform will be central to this, and the CPIB will explore the opportunities for community planning partners and Community Planning as a way of working to help accelerate the reform that we need to see to deliver on the preventative shift as outlined by Christie.

## Planning for Place

The Improvement Service's [Planning for Place Programme](#) continued to provide specific support to councils and their partners to collaborate in 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.

This includes sitting on the [Place and Wellbeing Collaborative Group](#) and promoting the use of the [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#) through the [Shaping Places for Wellbeing place-based approach](#).



## Shaping Places for Wellbeing

We delivered [The Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme](#) in partnership with Public Health Scotland. Between 2021 and June 2024 the [Programme worked locally in seven towns across Scotland \(Alloa, Ayr, Clydebank, Dalkeith, Dunoon, Fraserburgh and Rutherglen\)](#) supporting councils, health boards and other stakeholders to develop the resources to take a place-based approach in their decisions and actions and aimed to improve Scotland's wellbeing and reduce inequalities.

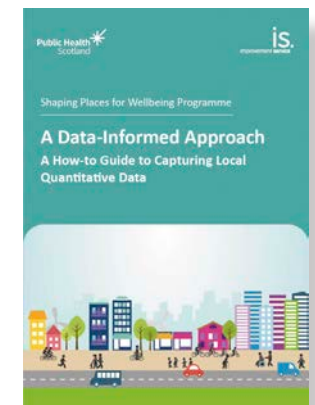
We supported partners to change their collective approaches to the places where we live, work and play, enabling partnership-based, wide-ranging action at a local level, while addressing the health of our planet. This was achieved through three activities:

- Knowing what people in an area are experiencing.
- Understanding the evidenced features every place needs.
- Considering the impact of the decisions we are making on both of these.

For each of these elements we developed a range of resources, including comprehensive '[How-To](#)' Guides to enable anyone in Scotland to take a place-based approach.

Throughout the Programme, we have been sharing our learning and approach through our '[Shaping our thinking, Sharing our Learning](#)' blog posts, [Impact Stories](#) and [Testimonials](#) from stakeholders involved in the Programme.

The Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme approach that



supported our Project Town partners, continues to be embedded into their decision-making processes and the resources produced to support this continue to be utilised. As a result of sharing the learning from our work, we have been [providing support beyond these areas](#) and have been working with the Clyde Gateway Supporting Families Programme, Shetland Islands Community Planning Team and we are in discussions with other local authorities and organisations regarding further place-based support.

## Early Learning and Childcare and School Age Childcare

Over the last few years, we have supported the delivery of one of the country's most fundamental policy changes: the expansion of funded [Early Learning and Childcare](#).

During 2024, we continued to support, empower, and improve the delivery of Early Learning and Childcare services across Scotland, while communicating successes and challenges faced to stakeholders.

This year's Programme for Government noted the importance of the funded offer for eligible 2-year-olds to the national mission of eradicating child poverty. We continue to support councils in increasing the uptake of funded families by providing tailored, bespoke support to councils while recognising the value of integrating funded childcare with broader family support services. Thanks to a new data sharing agreement with the Department of Work and Pensions this work is enhanced by information on the



families that are eligible for funded childcare, delivered to councils through our [DataPipeline.scot](#).

This year we have worked with the Association of Directors of Education (ADES) and the Scottish Government's School Age Childcare team to undertake a comprehensive, school-level survey to map and understand the provision of breakfasts and after school clubs across Scotland, offering a never-before seen level of detail on how schools and local authorities are providing this non-statutory service for the benefit of their children and young people.

## Public Service Reform

During 2024, we have continued to support local authorities to make the necessary changes required to deliver outcome-led, person-centred services that engender long-lasting reform, in line with the Christie Principles. This includes taking practical steps to identify and embed reformed ways of working through the Child Poverty Pathfinders.

This year we have [delivered direct assistance](#) to local authorities and their partners to design and deliver place-based and person-centred approaches using our toolkit for implementation. This toolkit draws on our experience in project delivery assurance, change management, service design and business analysis.

## Climate change

We continued to work closely with the Scottish Sustainable Network (SSN), Solace Scotland and COSLA to deliver national and targeted local support. This includes the design and delivery of the SSN Local



Authority Forum, supporting upcoming policy consultations, building links between officers on priorities and supporting the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies officer group.

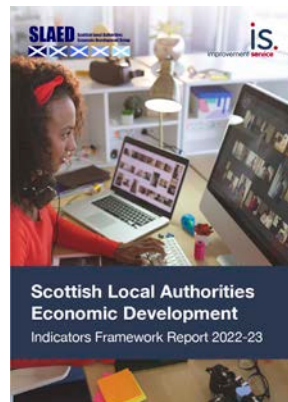
We have worked in partnership with the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute and the Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) on the development of the [Scottish Climate Intelligence Service](#), procuring a data platform to support the work, establishing clear governance and recruiting Local Leads who work to the Capacity Building Manager. The Local Leads have been assigned local authorities to work with and are developing their relationships and support offer with officers in each of these.



## Economic Outcomes

We published the [SLAED Indicators Report 2022/23](#) in January. The Framework is constantly evolving in line with emerging policy and priorities for local and national government, with a recent focus being on incorporating measures that reflect the wellbeing economy.

We delivered a 'Climate Resilient Economic Development' workshop in partnership with SLAED, Scottish Government, COSLA, Adaptation Scotland, Sniffer, Sustainable Scotland Network, and Edinburgh Climate Change Institute. This brought economic development and climate change professionals



in local authorities together to discuss how to adapt and build resilience for a just transition to a climate resilient economy. Further events are planned to explore this in more detail in 2025.

## Employability

We hosted 11 [employability](#) themed workshops during 2024, covering topics such as Local Commissioning Processes, Flexible Working, Supporting Neurodiversity, Inclusive Recruitment and Mental Health and Employability. These workshops have been attended by over 1,000 employability colleagues from across the public, private and third sector delivery partners.

We have supported effective local government employability officer involvement in various multi-agency working groups, including the All-Age Employability Steering Group, Specialist Employability Support Working Group and the Employability in Scotland Working Group, along with the joint Scottish and Local Government Employability Strategic Plan 2024-2027 which was launched in September 2024.

We hosted the 2024 SLAED Employability conference, which was attended by over 100 Scottish and local government employability colleagues.

March 31st saw the end of referrals to Fair Start Scotland (FSS) – Scottish Government's national devolved employment support service. Over 18,000 referrals per year were made to FSS providers, and these are now expected to be referred into employability support managed and delivered locally through Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs).

## Child Poverty

We have continued to support local authorities and their community planning partners in their efforts to tackle child poverty through hosting the National Coordinator for Local Action on Child Poverty. This has included coordinating analysis and feedback on 30 local child poverty action reports and delivering self-assessment and improvement support to four local areas. We compiled an informal analysis of best practice and good learning from Year 5 of the [Local Child Actions Poverty Reports](#).



In addition, we have supported two local authority areas through an Enhanced Child Poverty Self-assessment. This involved supporting these local areas to identify their priority areas for improvement then co-ordinating a package of support from national partners, including the Improvement Service, Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland and the Poverty Alliance. Independent evaluation has highlighted the clear value delivered by this approach for local areas.

Funding has been secured through the Child Poverty Accelerator Fund, in partnership with West Lothian Council, to host a Child Poverty Data Officer who will support us to develop a replicable dashboard to help local government identify pockets of unmet need and address child poverty.

We have continued to facilitate and support the [Remote, Rural and Island Child Poverty Network](#). This network meets on a quarterly basis and the quality of its work has resulted in the Improvement

Service being awarded funding by Scottish Government to appoint a Rural Child Poverty Officer.

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

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 [came into effect in Scotland on 16 July 2024](#).

This new legislation marks a strengthening of the protection of the human rights of children and young people across Scotland. Public authorities, such as local authorities and health boards, are required to act in a manner that is compatible with the UNCRC when delivering functions conferred under Acts of the Scottish Parliament. They also need to report every three years on the actions that they are taking, and planning to take, to protect and respect children's rights.

We continue to work with local authorities to provide advice and support on preparing for the requirements of the new legislation.

## The Promise

We produced a joint annual report with COSLA, [Local Government and The Promise](#), which sets out how local government has been working to keep its promise. The publication contains examples of work being done in local authorities, practical examples of changes in policy and practice, as well as challenges facing the sector in its attempts to keep the promise.





Over the summer of 2024 we carried out a survey within local authorities on their 'Moving On' support for care experienced young people. These findings were analysed and incorporated into Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum's 100 days of listening exercise, to identify key themes for further support through The Promise Scotland's Moving On programme.

In September, we facilitated an internal session on The Promise Plan 24-30 to identify work we are already carrying out to support the promise and what more we could do. The findings from this demonstrated that we deliver a number of programmes and projects that are aligned with the foundations of Plan 24-30, including child poverty, children's rights, trauma, and using data for person-centred service.

## Protecting People

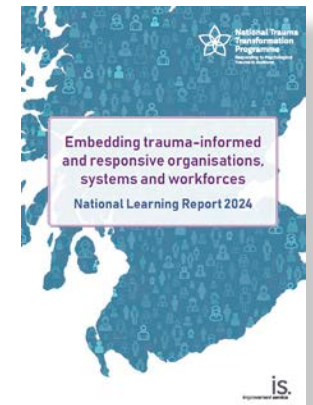
Following the publication of the [Implementing Safe & Together in Scotland: Creating Domestic Abuse-Informed Systems, Services and Workforces year two learning report](#) earlier this year, we hosted a learning event in March 2024 to bring together stakeholders across Scotland with a role to play in improving outcomes for children and families experiencing domestic abuse. The event was an opportunity for attendees to learn more about the Safe & Together model, explore links to other key priorities being advanced locally and nationally, and consider how we can move forward with a more joined up approach to person-centred and domestic-abuse informed systems and services. We also published a [series of case studies](#) to highlight



good practice and learning from council's working to embed the Safe & Together model locally.

In April 2024, we began developing and disseminating the Scottish Government's [Equally Safe Bulletin](#), a monthly newsletter that provides updates from the Scottish Government and partners on work taking place to progress Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women And Girls (VAWG).

In September 2024, we hosted a national learning event in partnership with the Scottish Government and NHS Education for Scotland (NES) to share learning about the progress, emerging impact, opportunities, and barriers from work happening across local authority areas as part of the investment in the National Trauma Transformation Programme. The session was attended by over 700 professionals across Scotland and highlighted learning and good practice in relation to creating trauma-informed and responsive systems services and workforces. It also provided an opportunity to showcase key resources that we have helped to develop this year to support this area of work, including the [Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change](#) and the [National Learning Report 2024](#).



The Improvement Service and the National Violence Against Women Network have been nominated for Campaign of Year Award at the Scottish Public Service Awards 2024 for the [16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign](#). This 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. Over the last 5 years, we have developed an annual toolkit of resources including digital logos, graphics and animations on key statistics.

## Evaluation

In September, we published initial findings from an evaluation of the effectiveness of the [Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships](#) (WAHPs) 'test-and-learn' initiative, funded by the Scottish Government. Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships (WAHPs) provide access to welfare rights and money advice services in GP Practices. The findings from this evaluation show that over 16,000 individuals used the service during the 'test-and-learn' period, making financial gains of £23 million.



We recently published an [evaluation of the second year of the Place Based Investment Programme - Direct Grants to Local Authorities](#), covering the period April 2022 to March 2023. The report contains evidence that the programme, which is funded by the Scottish Government, plays a critical role both in acting as a catalyst to attract additional funding, and also in enhancing existing projects for which funding has already been secured.

In March, we launched an [Evaluation Offer](#), which sets out how we can offer evaluation services on a full cost recovery basis. This has resulted in work being agreed with City of Aberdeen, Fife, Inverclyde and North Lanarkshire Councils.

Measuring and valuing the impact of activities continues to be a key objective of the Evaluation Service both internally and across the public sector. As well as producing social value analyses of key Improvement Service projects and programmes, we delivered an [Impact Report on the activities delivered by MissMsMrs](#), a social enterprise in Glasgow commissioned by the Hunter Foundation and the Scottish Government. This estimated the value of the organisation's impact to be worth £3,043,064 between April 2022 and March 2023, based on savings from preventing public sector intervention as well as the financial and quality of life improvements experienced by the women who participated.



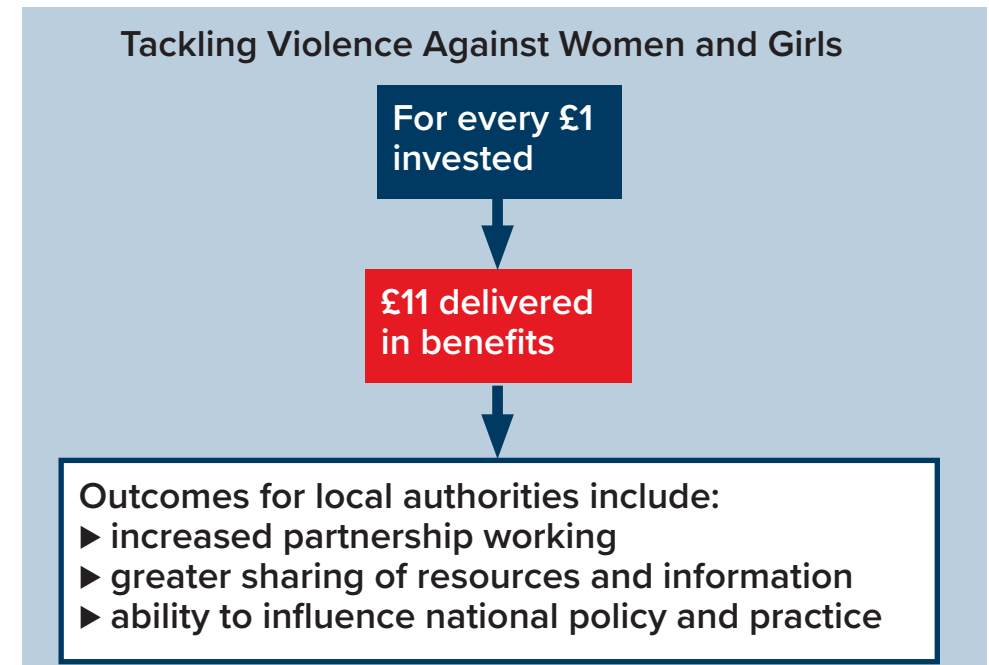
## Some of the key benefits of our work to local government

- ✓ 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 includes the Leadership Practitioner Forum, as part of our transformation programme, and the new Local Government Connect Network.
- ✓ 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 help a number of local government professional associations such as Heads of Planning Scotland, Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Group, Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development Group and Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists (SCOTS) 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 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 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 facilitate a range of self-assessment and improvement planning work, which helps councils evidence Best Value and improvement activity to inspection bodies such as Audit Scotland.
- ✓ 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 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.
- ✓ We support local authorities and their partners to evidence the impact of the services they deliver by highlighting who benefits from their activities. By working together, we can identify and measure the changes that occur for individuals, organisations and communities and monetise, or place a financial value, on each change. This can be used to support

decisions on investment and helps target resources to activities that create the greatest impact.

- ✓ We deliver value to local authorities through our programmes, for example;



### Sub Council Area Population Projections

For every £1  
invested

£9 delivered  
in benefits

Outcomes for local authorities include:

- ▶ improved local decision making
- ▶ cost saving through skilled external service
- ▶ avoids additional licensing fees
- ▶ reduces local staffing requirements

### Digital Public Services; Under 22 Free Bus Travel Card

For every £1  
invested

£13 delivered  
in benefits

Outcomes for local authorities include:

- ▶ digital service supported by skilled staff processing applications
- ▶ savings of over **£4 million** authorities would have spent on processing applications

# Our ethos and values

## Our values

The Extended Leadership Team led an all-staff session as part of World Values Day on 17 October. The session provided staff with an opportunity to discuss what our Accountability and Integrity Value means to them and what practical actions we could implement to help us all truly live and breathe this value both with our colleagues and external stakeholders.



Our Wellbeing Group has also met regularly to take action to develop and promote our Wellbeing and Growth value. The Group has met with COSLA officers to discuss what joint actions the two organisations can take to help support all our staff. We continue to support the mental health of our workforce 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 our two qualified [Mental Health First Aiders](#).

To support the work of the ELT in monitoring how IS Values are put into action, the Equality and Diversity Group has met regularly to discuss issues including venue accessibility and reviewing policies to ensure they comply with IS Values. We have been accepted to undertake the [Equally Safe at Work employer accreditation programme](#), with the support of the Protecting People team. 2024 also saw the launch of our new Gender Based Violence and Abuse Policy and Guidance.





# Our people

## Stakeholder and Staff Survey

The 2024 stakeholder survey was issued in April with each team distributing their own bespoke survey to their stakeholders. Surveys were issued across 23 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, with a 90% satisfaction rate. Respondents also felt that the Improvement Service has a positive impact on their organisation and its work, with 83% agreeing with this statement.



This year's staff survey showed a satisfaction rate of 86%, an increase of four percentage points from the previous survey and the highest since 2020. The results suggested that the main areas of strength were working relationships between colleagues and managers, as well as the flexibility the organisation offers. Overall, satisfaction was high across all areas of the survey and the majority of questions saw an increase in satisfaction rates.



# 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 teams. 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.

Throughout 2024, the ELT has worked with colleagues across the Improvement Service to implement the Improvement Plan developed as part of the Public Service Improvement Framework process carried out at the end of 2023. This has included actions on workforce planning, reviewing the Performance Appraisal and Personal Development Process (PAPDP), better promotion of climate leadership and environmental sustainability and developing opportunities for staff collaboration. This is a two-year process, but already Improvement Plan outcomes have included Improvement Service staff involvement in the new Local Government Connect Network, the launch of a new Climate Change Working Group and a working group to help make changes to the PAPDP guidelines and processes.

In June, the ELT took charge of the Staff Away Day, changing the usual format to create fringe-style sessions in the morning covering a range of Improvement Service work. This allowed staff to choose

the sessions they wanted to attend, and the change was broadly welcomed by staff who attended the event.

The ELT is currently reviewing the Improvement Service's current processes around job adverts with a view to creating new guidelines to help make these posts more engaging, attracting the best possible candidates in what is a competitive employment market.

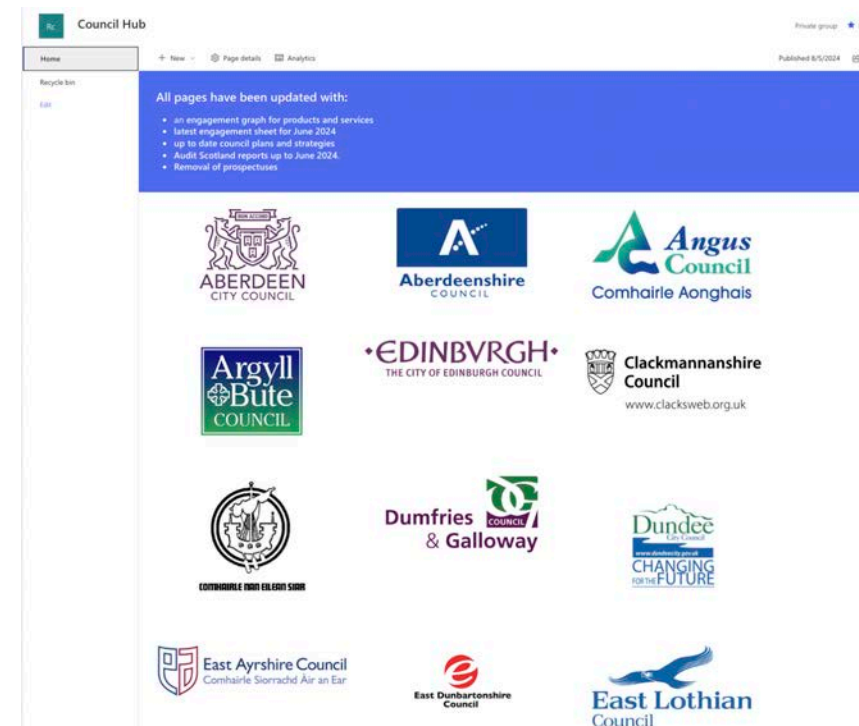


# Our people

## Relationship Management

We have continued to develop our Relationship Management service, to help ensure that all councils are aware of the full range of support available to them from the Improvement Service and to enable us to better plan future support, products and services based on the needs and demands of councils.

Our internal Council Hub, which includes useful background information on all councils as well as the latest reports and strategies, has been updated this year to include an engagement graph – an at-a-glance guide to illustrate how engaged each council is with the wide variety of Improvement Service projects and products.



# Our people

## Staff Data Network

We have set up a new staff data network as part of our work to improve our use of data and intelligence. This group, which includes staff from across the organisation, will drive delivery of the actions identified within our data improvement action plan, identify further areas for development and champion effective use of data and evidence within the organisation.

Delivery of our data improvement plan will be core to how we can best support councils now and in the future.



# Working in Partnership

## COSLA

We continue to work closely with COSLA across a range of programmes, projects and products, including major new initiatives like the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service, the digital Right to Work Identity Verification service and the National Planning Improvement Hub. We also worked together to develop the Scottish Local Government Improvement and Assurance Framework.



## Solace Scotland

The Solace/Improvement Service transformation programme has been an integral part of our work during 2024. The support of [Solace Scotland](#) and individual chief executives is key to the success of the work which is being delivered as part of the transformation programme. In September, a new report on the current state of the workforce in Scottish local authorities was published by the Improvement Service, Solace Scotland and the Society of Personal Development Scotland (SPDS). The Improvement Service was well represented at the Solace Scotland conference, delivering sessions on child poverty, the path to net zero and the local government workforce.



## Accounts Commission

This year, the Accounts Commission published a major report on [Transformation in councils](#) which highlighted the Solace/Improvement Service transformation programme as a “positive development representing a radical change to how councils work towards transformation”. We continue to work closely with the Accounts Commission on areas of joint interest.



## Young Scot

We continue to work closely with Young Scot to support Young Scot National Entitlement Cardholders to access services online and in person. This year we commenced the development of the Young Scot Membership App, which will make Young Scot Membership services available via Android and iOS mobile applications in early 2025. The Membership App will include new features and functionality, including a digital Young Scot National Entitlement Card for “show and go” purposes.



# Improvement Service Performance 2024



For every £1 of core grant invested in the IS, we brought in an **additional £6.68**



**32 councils** engaged in the National Planning Improvement Framework with **10 completing cohort 1** testing of the framework



**86%** Staff satisfaction

**92%** agreed the IS has a positive working culture

**88%** overall stakeholder satisfaction

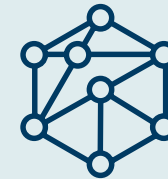
**90%** satisfaction with support provided by the IS



Over **2.8 million** cardholders access national and local services using the National Entitlement Card



**7 events** run by our OD Team with more than **70 participants** from **29 councils** and **6 partner organisations**



**23 councils, 3 partnership organisations** and **96 members** participating in the Local Government Connect Network.



**150 million** free bus journeys through Young Person's Free Bus Travel Scheme

This year we reached over **2.5 million mygovscot myaccount users**

**50% of eligible population** have myaccounts



**130 colleagues from 30 councils** attended Leadership Practitioner Forum events. In 2024 there were **5 events**, with each one attracting **37-61 people**



**20 councils** are using the Public Service Improvement Framework, along with **19 Community Planning Partnerships** and **1 Integration Joint Board**





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**is.**  
improvement **service**