

Improvement Service Annual Report 2020



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

Our story so far

2005

The IS started its journey in 2005 with only a core grant in place through the Local Government block expenditure grant.

2007

Establishment of the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) in partnership with West Lothian Council, Investors in People and Quality Scotland.

2009

Development of a national shared recruitment portal with the launch of MyJobScotland which advertises public service jobs.

2012

The Knowledge Hub was launched on 1st April, and became the platform of preference for online collaboration for councils, Scottish Government and a wide range of national programmes.

2014

Launched the mygovscot myaccount service in April, supporting citizens to access a range of online public services with one username and password.

2015

Extended the use of our 'Tell Me Scotland' online information system to 29 councils, the NHS, Transport Scotland and Scottish Government.

2017

Launched the Spatial Hub to improve the management of spatial information across Local Government.

2020

Dr Sarah Gadsden was appointed as the Chief Executive of the Improvement Service, as it celebrates its 15th birthday.

2006

The company expanded, with the integration of Customer First, the introduction of the Planning Development Programme and the establishment of a shared service programme directorate.

2008

Development of a portfolio of materials to support elected members in their critical governance role, including induction packs for every elected member and induction training materials for councils. We delivered a political leadership programme to 70 council leaders, opposition leaders and senior elected members.

2010

Supported councils to access external support and resources for shared service and related change initiatives. Across the year over £5million was brokered from Scottish Government, the Big Lottery and independent funding bodies.

2013

Launched the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) which brings together a wide range of information about how all Scottish councils perform in delivering services to local communities. It is designed to encourage councils to examine why variations in cost and performance are occurring between similar councils.

2016

Launched the IS Account Management Framework to help raise awareness of the IS and its range of products and services, improve accessibility for councils and provide local tailored support.

2019

An award-winning year. The Spatial Hub won an award at the 20th annual Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning. A programme to develop project management skills in the public sector, created by the IS, East Renfrewshire Council and Scotland Excel, won the Employee Development and Skills Award at the Public Sector Awards 2019. Digital Public Services won the Innovate Award at the Holyrood Connect Awards.

Covid-19 response

External

We established a '[Covid-19 support for councils](#)' section on our website which is updated with new developments. It provides a detailed breakdown by programme of how we are adapting our products and services to assist councils and partners. It also signposts relevant research and briefings including:

The [Covid-19 Economic Impact Dashboard](#) (This tool summarises the publicly available data relating to the current economic impact of COVID-19. It shows, at a Scottish local authority level, the current uptake of government support);

- [The Impacts of Covid-19: An Overview of the Research to Date](#);
- [Briefing document on Poverty, Inequality and Covid-19](#); and
- [Coronavirus – Considering the Implications for Child Poverty](#).

We developed a dedicated [Covid-19 web page for elected members](#) which includes resources to support them. We have a dedicated [page for case studies](#) showing how Scotland's councils have responded to Covid-19. We update these regularly and we work with councils' communications teams to develop the case studies. We worked with COSLA to agree which case studies would be helpful in illustrating key points made in the Blueprint for Local Government. We also have an agreement with the Local Government Association to add a link to their case studies on our website and they do likewise for us.

We produced overview reports for Solace on councils' renewal plans and political governance arrangements. We participated in, and supported the work of, the COSLA Special Interest Group on Recovery. We worked with COSLA to capture the lessons learned from the response to Covid-19, and the work undertaken by Local Government in response

to Covid-19. The learning will be used to inform the work of Local Government moving forward and key campaigns, such as COSLA's Blueprint for Local Government and the next Essential Services campaign.



We prepared weekly analysis on the Local Government Covid-19 Data Dashboard for Solace and COSLA. We commenced work with Solace, COSLA and the Scottish Local Government Digital Office to develop a business case for a Local Government Data Platform that will collate all existing data returns required by Scottish Government and regulatory agencies and enable Local Government to derive a richer insight from its investment in data. We worked with COSLA to create a weekly 'Local Authority Delivery of Services' statistics graphic which highlights the key milestones reached each week by councils.

We input to various work being delivered as part of Public Health Scotland's Social and Systems Recovery Cell and participate in its Social and System Recovery Advisory Group.

Webinars are becoming an increasingly popular method of communication. We have hosted a number of webinars for councils and partners and also developed a [webinar guide](#). We have supported the creation and maintenance of the 'Wellbeing during Covid-19' Knowledge Hub group, which features resources for councils to support wellbeing during the pandemic.

Internal

The IS established a Covid-19 Emergency Planning Group on 5th March 2020, given the spread of the virus and the increasing likelihood of a period of lockdown. The office was closed from 17th March 2020. Our Emergency Planning Group developed a plan for the safe reopening of the office, with a view to this being implemented when Scottish Government change their guidance from homeworking being the default position.

All IS employees are well-equipped to work from home through Office 365 and teams are checking in regularly using MS Teams. We have set up a supportive framework for homeworking and have put in place a number of measures to support our people with their health and well-being including weekly drop-ins by our Mental Health First Aider; a Coronavirus SharePoint site which is the go-to place for our employees to seek updates on our response as an employer to Covid-19; and pulse check surveys to find out how they're feeling and to gather their views.

Programme-specific support

Child Poverty

Covid-19 has led to an increased awareness of child poverty and a deeper challenge to address it. We have worked with national partners to support local authorities, elected members and health boards to understand the impact of Covid on child poverty and identify important action to address emerging challenges. We have established online peer support networks to share policy and practice and provided one-to-ones to local areas to ensure they can meet the requirement to produce their Local Child Poverty Action Reports.

Employability Partnership Programme

The role of supporting the [joint commitment](#) of Scottish and Local Government to better align and integrate services to deliver improved outcomes has been extremely challenging as employability services are pivotal in supporting those who are most vulnerable to the adverse economic impacts of Covid-19. Activities have focused on repurposing and refocusing resources to ensure that the right support is put into place at the right time for those who need it most. We are working with Scottish Government

and other key stakeholders to deliver on [No One Left Behind](#) commitments and the recent joint [communication](#) highlights how we have been responding to the emerging recommendations for economic recovery. The Young Person's Guarantee and Joint Delivery Plan for No One Left Behind published in November 2020 reinforce the central role of Local Government in contributing to inclusive economic recovery.

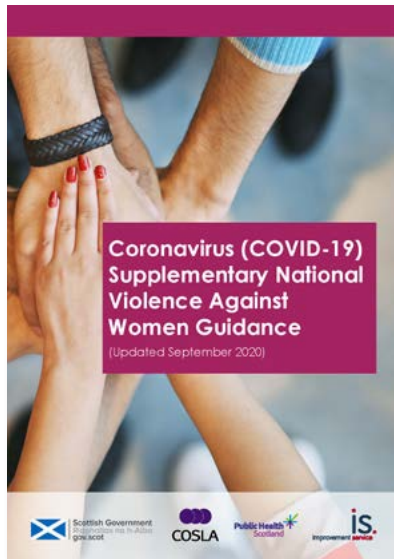
Early Learning and Childcare Expansion

Due to the pandemic, the legal obligation to deliver 1140 hours of funded childcare from August 2020 was removed. We have been continuing to work with key partners to understand the provision available through the pandemic and gather evidence from local authorities which will be used to inform when the statutory duty can be re-introduced. We have also been supporting councils with specific business analysis and workforce support as they adjust their programme delivery.

Violence Against Women (VAW)

We have worked in partnership with local authorities, COSLA, the Scottish Government

and Public Health Scotland to help ensure the needs of women and children affected by domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence are met during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has included publishing [guidance for local authorities](#) on responding to the heightened risks to women and children during the pandemic, hosting monthly virtual [VAW Network meetings](#) and providing 1:1 advice and support to local VAW Partnerships and Cedar groups working to transform their systems and services to meet the new needs of the people and communities they support.



Economic Development

We are providing ongoing support to SLAED to bring local authority economic development colleagues together to share good practice and tackle common challenges around Covid-19 through the various Strategic and Thematic Groups. We have also published a '[Covid-19 Supplement](#)' to the SLAED Indicators Report 2019/20 to acknowledge the significant role that local economic development teams have played in both response and recovery.

Spatial Information

Over the course of the pandemic we have continued to provide expertise and guidance on geospatial data issues – through geospatial coordination groups, Public Health Scotland, the Local Government Data Task Force and the Scottish Covid-19 Data and Intelligence Network. We have begun to capture and publish authoritative locations of health and social care services via our Spatial Hub platform and we have worked with local authorities throughout, as part of ensuring

that the national address register – the One Scotland Gazetteer - is the originating source of this vital location information.

Digital Public Services (DPS)

We redeveloped our [bisaccount.scot](#) platform to enable applications for the Transitional Support Fund for Childcare Providers to be facilitated online in a standardised national approach for all 32 Local Authorities. We worked with Scottish Government and councils to support the application process for COVID-19 Business Support Grants, enabling a standardised form to be digitised by all councils. In July, we launched [getyournec.scot](#), a brand new online service, enabling Scottish residents to apply for and manage their National Entitlement Card online.



Change Management

We have developed a scenario planning toolkit to assist in Covid-19 recovery and renewal. The toolkit can be used by councils at a strategic, service or team level, providing a framework for thinking about the future and exploring possibilities of what that might look like. We provide training to support councils in using the toolkit.

Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF)

In order to support recovery and renewal planning in councils, we have developed a number of checklists that can be used to capture learning using the PSIF self-assessment approach. Checklists are available for use by services, corporate teams, community planning partnerships and elected members.

Our ethos

We're an employer with an environmental conscience



We have two foldable bikes located at the office which staff were encouraged to use prior to March. We also have a bike shed thanks to Cycling Scotland.

We have installed an Electric Vehicle Charge Point at the office thanks to a grant received from the Energy Savings Trust (EST).

When in the office, we recycle our food waste and other waste.

We encourage our people to give back

One of our employees, Dominic Greenslade, volunteers with [Map Action](#) who has recently featured in an [article on the BBC website](#) for its role in disaster response.

We encourage employees to use the flexible working policy to allow them to fit in volunteering duties. For example, Alison Clark-Dick volunteers for the Poppy Appeal each year and uses the policy to allow her to deliver tins and poppies in her local community.

We actively encourage our people to organise their own charity activities.

Climate Change

We have appointed a Climate Change Project Manager to work across all 32 Local Authorities and support us with our climate change programme.

We have been successful in applying for a grant award from Smarter Choices Smarter Places, which is a Paths for All programme to increase active and sustainable travel throughout Scotland. The programme is grant-funded by Transport Scotland.



Our people can nominate charities to raise money for during the festive period. For the second year running,

Angela Mairs is arranging for staff to contribute to the Reverse Advent calendar for their local foodbank. Staff donate certain items each day to make up grocery bags to help families enjoy Christmas.

We also nominate charities to raise money for during the festive period

Our people are key to our success

Listening to our people

The IS is a place where all our people have a voice and are empowered to make a meaningful contribution, adding real value. We actively listen and respond.

We undertake PSIF self-assessment on a bi-annual basis by seeking the views of our people to enable us to collectively identify our strengths and areas for improvement. This helps inform planning and the implementation of improvement actions on a continuous basis.

We also undertake an annual staff survey which this year has been supported by two 'pulse check' staff surveys during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure that our employees feel they are supported. We also have a staff suggestion box which has been moved online for the moment.

We also defined our values. Everything that we do will be consistent with our values, which will shape and influence our approach.

This involved:

- Vision and priorities workshop May 2020 – led by our Chief Executive, outlining her vision and priorities, asking teams to contribute ideas around their hopes/aspirations and how teams will help deliver the vision.
- Developing IS Values June 2020 – work began to develop IS values, with all staff asked to contribute. These were developed over the summer. Our IS Values working group are leading the work to integrate the values into our work. Our Equalities and Diversity Group are using the values to develop our Equalities Outcomes.
- An Employee Code of Conduct has been developed, based on our values. It sets out the standards expected from all employees and the policies, procedures and guidance that support them.

Our shared values describe what is important to us about how we work:

Equality and Diversity

We believe that by embedding equality, diversity, fairness and respect in all that we do we will help create more successful communities

Leadership and Collaboration

We adopt a collective leadership approach at all levels and collaborate with others to do meaningful work that drives change and improvement.

Innovation and Creativity

We are innovative, creative and forward thinking. We are enthusiastic about new ideas, new technology and new contributions



that will help deliver improved outcomes.

Wellbeing and Growth

We care about increasing wellbeing and supporting the growth and learning of everyone, and of organisations. We are respectful, supportive and kind and encourage flexibility and a healthy work-life balance.

Accountability and Integrity

We are open, honest and accountable. We inspire trust and have integrity in all that we do.

Our people are key to our success

Developing our people

We are fortunate that a number of our people already have a range of skills and experience across a broad range of subjects. We work with them and build on their skills, knowledge and experience to deliver training and development opportunities to all IS staff.

Recently we have:

- Delivered in-house organisational wide coaching and facilitation workshops for staff
- Developed a new managers checklist, outlining managers' responsibilities in relation to managing, supporting and developing performance and providing support, encouragement and feedback

that enables high performance of individuals and teams.

- Delivered workshops for managers to consider their responsibilities and identify strengths and development areas

Looking After Our People

We strongly support a balanced working life, and over the last few years the IS has developed a range of flexible working practices to aid effective working and promote a healthy working culture. We strive to find the right balance between what our organisation needs and what our people need.

As we start to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are likely to see different working patterns in terms of more home or remote working. We have ensured our people have the right tools, technology and support to be able to work remotely and have invested in training to help us develop our use of Office 365 to support maximum flexibility and to help us transition to this new working arrangement.



Our people are key to our success

Workforce of the future

We recognise the importance of attracting new talent to Local Government and supporting the skills development of the future workforce.

We support Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) experience weeks, providing students in S4 (age 15-16) in West Lothian Council secondary schools the chance to experience a range of STEM skills in one week. Students learn about the workings of Local Government and the careers opportunities available, they take part in site tours and try out hands-on activities linked to our work.

This year, we have supported the development of our future workforce by:

- Attending school careers fairs and classroom employer presentations.
- Participating in the interactive “Step into STEM” event using Minecraft.
- Providing employer briefings to teachers in West Lothian during staff in-service days.
- Participating in the Career Ready senior pupil mentoring scheme.
- Supporting two pupil placements with a focus upon coding.

This year, events have been significantly curtailed because of Covid-19. However, we have sought to support virtual events and meetings where possible, including participation in a Virtual Internship with the Career Ready Partnership, Developing Young Workforce and West Lothian Council.



Improvement Service Performance 2020



Achieved certification to ISO27001:2017 standard. ISO 27001 is the internationally recognised Information Security Management Standard that proves an organisation's commitment to the security of their customer, employee and shareholder information.



For every £1 of core grant invested in the IS, we brought in an **additional £5.00**



£1.644m

additional funding brought in from outwith the sector to support Scottish Local Government - an increase from last year!

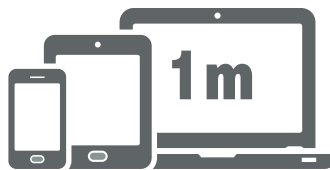


91%

Staff satisfaction

99.3%

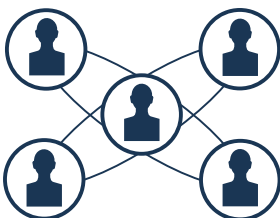
Programme performance



This year we reached over **1 million myaccount users**



Over **45 organisations and partnerships** are using the PSIF model.



Knowledge Hub's Scottish Public Services Network has **20,000** members including:

12,000 from local authorities

3,000 from Scottish Government



We've invested **£250,000** in automation of geospatial data flow between the IS and local authorities.



During 2019/20 we've had **48 participants from across 14 councils** enhance their skills and knowledge by undertaking their PDA in Project Management.