

Council Leader Newsletter



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

The purpose of this newsletter is to update Council Leaders on key decisions made by the IS Board at its meeting in September 2021 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Finance Update

The Board approved a new financial reporting framework and noted that we have secured £1,067,895 funding from outwith the Local Government sector to date, against our target of securing £2.5M for 2021/22. One Council responded to the offer of a loan from the IS as part of our Treasury Management Policy and a legal agreement has been signed by both parties and the funds transferred.

HR Update

The Board approved a revised Health and Safety Policy, and new policies on Conflict of Interest, Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery and Volunteering. Our Volunteering Policy was developed following several requests from staff via our staff suggestion scheme and sets out our commitment to support employees to take paid time off to volunteer during working hours (this policy was benchmarked against similar Council policies).

Statutory Financial Accounts and Audit Management Report

The Board approved the Statutory Financial Statements and noted that a clean unqualified audit report was received. The Financial Statements will be considered by the company's members at our virtual AGM, taking place on 30th November 2021. Information on the AGM and a MS Teams meeting invite have been shared with all Council Chief Executives.

National Care Consultation (NCS)

The Board welcomed the support provided to COSLA to inform Local Government's response to the National Care Consultation. The Board agreed that the IS should not submit a response to the NCS consultation but should share the document and research produced with the COSLA Chief Executive, Solace and Council Chief Executives to support their submissions. The Board also welcomed the IS providing ongoing support to COSLA and Solace on the National Care Service work.

Climate Change

We recognise climate change as a key challenge facing Local Government with an impact on every community and local authority service area. We must lead by example and the IS Board recently agreed our [Approach to Net Zero](#) to drive forward our activity. As part of this, we are working in partnership to develop practical resources and case studies which support councils and their partners to embed climate change in the transformation agenda.

Knowledge Management Strategy

The Board approved a new [IS Knowledge Management Strategy](#) which sets out our vision for knowledge management and how we will improve the exchange of knowledge across the IS. The strategy is situated in a set of knowledge principles from the UK Government and aligns with our strategic priorities and values.

Digital Office for Scottish Local Government

The Board were advised that the COSLA Leadership Sounding Board were supportive of the proposal that the Digital Office hosting is moved from the IS to COSLA but requested that a more detailed report is presented to COSLA Leaders, and the aim is to take this report to the October Leaders meeting. A meeting between the Digital Office team and the Chief Executives of the IS and COSLA took place on 20th October to discuss timescales and provide an opportunity for the Digital Office team to raise any concerns.

Board Development Day

The Board agreed that this year's development day will take place virtually on 30th November. Board members will participate in a self-assessment and test an approach to peer-to-peer assessment. The development day will also focus on preparations for Board Member changeover following next year's Local Government elections.

Office Reopening

The Board approved the reopening of the IS office (iHub, Livingston) on the 1st November, for 3 days per week for a 3-month trial period, with minimum and maximum numbers to be set. The uptake of this will support any future decisions regarding the IS estate strategy.

IS Prospectus

The Board signed off the IS Prospectus and we have published two versions, one for Councils and one for Partners. Both documents are now available on our website:

[Prospectus for Scottish Councils](#)

[Prospectus for Local Government Partners](#)

Upcoming Events

- [Improving Outcomes for Young People through School Education](#)

1 December, 2pm-4pm, online

This IS and Accounts Commission event will discuss the findings of the Commission's report for improving outcomes for young people through school education.

- [Wellbeing for Money Guiders - Stress Management and Resilience](#)

7 December, 11.30am-1.30pm, online

This workshop by Money Guiders Advice Scotland will give guiders space to gain, share and better understand ways to support their own wellbeing at work.

- [Wheatley Group's Wraparound Services](#)

9 December, 12pm - 1pm, online

Hear from Wheatley Group about its wraparound services that ensure tenants get the welfare benefit, budgeting and fuel advice that they need.

- [Money Guidance Research in Scotland](#)

16 December, 11.30am - 12.30pm, online

Hear about 'Money Guidance: A User-centred Approach', the latest research by Money Advice Scotland.

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Place-based working

Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme

This programme is a 3-year delivery partnership with Public Health Scotland, funded by the Health Foundation and Scottish Government Public Service Reform Unit, supported by COSLA. Key aims are as follows:

- The programme aims to improve Scotland's wellbeing and reduce inequalities. It will create the conditions for better Place and Wellbeing Outcomes by enabling system-wide partnership action on the social determinants of health at a local level.
- Targeted local work will take place in four areas - Clackmannanshire (Alloa), West Dunbartonshire (Clydebank), Argyll and Bute (Dunoon) and South Ayrshire (Ayr).
- These four project towns will form the basis of a local learning cohort to be joined by a further four towns who will be mentored. Four areas will also be identified to participate as learning partners, who are already progressing work on place and wellbeing at a similar, or more advanced pace. The 12 partners will work together to provide cross-site learning and problem solving.
- The IS and Public Health Scotland will provide in-kind expertise working with the councils and

health boards involved, and their partners and communities.

- We have set up a National Leadership Cohort with membership from Scottish Government and COSLA's four Policy Boards. This is providing a forum to raise local level challenges that require attention at a national level. It is a place to consider and address any national barriers to successful implementation of the Programme Outcomes and to achieving local system change.
- We are developing an Evaluation Framework for the programme, and we are in the process of identifying appropriate indicators that will help us track progress against the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes.

Find out more about the [Shaping Place for Wellbeing](#) programme.

Spatial Planning, Health and Wellbeing Collaborative: Embedding Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

This programme is providing support to enable spatial planning to contribute to all Public Health Priorities using the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in the IS Strategic Framework. We are working with Directors of Public Health, Heads of Planning, COSLA and Public Health Scotland to:

- Promote a consistent set of place and wellbeing outcomes that provide clarity on the consistent features in the places in which we live, work and play that impact on health and wellbeing.
- Provide insight and shared learning as the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme proceeds.

Find out more about the [Spatial Planning, Health and Wellbeing Collaborative](#).

Public Health and Spatial Planning Practitioner Briefing

We worked with Public Health Scotland to develop a Briefing on [integrating land use planning and public health in Scotland](#).

Economic Development/SLAED

Work continues on the new SLAED Data Dashboard to capture the SLAED indicators and make the data more accessible and useable for each Local Authority. The dashboard was presented to the SLAED Performance Group and work with this group will continue over the next month to get their feedback which will be incorporated into the new dashboard. Work is ongoing on data collection and management for the 2020/21 SLAED Indicators Framework.

Child Poverty

Two successful [webinars](#) were delivered during September on 'Using Data to Understand Child Poverty Locally' and 'Child Poverty & Households with a Disabled Member in Scotland' for the Child Poverty and Fairer Scotland Duty leads.

A workshop has taken place for local child poverty leads to provide them with an opportunity to contribute to the Poverty and Inequality Commission's call for views on its advice to the Scottish Government in relation to its second Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

On the 6th October the Improvement Service – supported by key national partners including the Scottish Government, COSLA, Public Health Scotland, CPAG, the Poverty Alliance and Glasgow Caledonian University – delivered a National Conference on Local Action to Tackle Child Poverty. Attended by more than 250 delegates, the event focused on how local and national government can work together to ensure action to tackle child poverty is at the heart of recovery and renewal from COVID 19.

The event was chaired by Bill Scott of the Poverty and Inequality Commission with speakers
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including Cabinet Secretary Shona Robison and COSLA President Allison Evison. All highlighted the need for child poverty to remain a priority at all levels of government and to ensure those most vulnerable to poverty are not left behind as the county recovers.

Chris Birt, JRF Director for Scotland highlighted that Local Government holds “some of the most important levers to make changes within our communities” and that housing, planning, transport, childcare, economic development and employability must respond in a co-ordinated, strategic way to remove the barriers to work for parents – particularly parents in the six ‘priority groups’ most vulnerable to child poverty.

Child poverty leads from Aberdeenshire Council, Renfrewshire Council and Falkirk Council outlined their learning from the pandemic to date and their hopes for the next Scottish Government Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

Workshops included input from Argyll and Bute Council (tackling child poverty in rural settings), West Dunbartonshire Council (parental employability), North Ayrshire Council (community wealth building), Glasgow City Region (regional economies and child poverty) and Public Health Scotland (public sector approaches to supporting parental employment).

Key points and feedback from the conference inform our ongoing engagement with local and national partners. [Videos of all the keynote speakers](#) are available.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Expansion

We have published the latest [ELC Expansion Delivery Progress Report](#), which evidences the delivery of the expansion, with c. 91,000 children accessing funded ELC as of the end of August 2021. Of these, c. 88,000 children (97%) were accessing more than the previous statutory entitlement of 600 hours, and c. 79,000 children (87%) were accessing 1140 hours funded ELC. In addition, approximately 750 FTE have been brought into the local authority ELC workforce since April 2021. One of the cornerstones of the ELC expansion is that the services should be flexible to the needs of children and families. We are currently investigating how we would measure and assess flexibility at a local level to identify where service model redesign could be supported.

We have published a case study, which explores the challenges faced by [Strathisla Children's Centre](#) staff, parents and children after construction of their purpose-built nursery.

The ELC team continue to offer support to local authorities in their implementation of public health guidance, and with ‘firefighting’ where any local challenges arise in the immediate delivery of their expanded ELC service.

Protecting People

The team are currently working with colleagues in NHS Education for Scotland (NES), COSLA and the Scottish Government to develop a proposal for a trauma-informed practice quality indicator framework. The framework will aim to support local areas with implementation and improvement planning, and measuring the progress and impact of trauma-informed approaches across services, systems and workforces.

In partnership with COSLA, the Scottish Government, NHS Education for Scotland and the Safe & Together Institute, a [companion document](#) was recently published to support all professionals

working with women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse and those working with perpetrators to strengthen awareness and understanding about trauma-informed and domestic abuse-informed practice.

Over the last two months a short research project has been undertaken to look into the mental health and wellbeing needs of women and girls who have experienced gender-based violence, with an aim to providing recommendations to the Scottish Government on improvement actions to ensure appropriate support is available. A series of deep dive workshops have taken place as part of this research which were attended by a broad range of stakeholders, and a roundtable event took place on the 20th October to share key learning and consult on final recommendations. The full research report will be published in November 2021.

Fairer Scotland Duty (FSD)

The refreshed [Fairer Scotland Duty: guidance for public bodies](#) has now been published.

We delivered the final FSD refresher training session in September however, there have been a number of requests for additional sessions to be run. We will follow this up to identify if there is enough demand for further sessions. The video resources, compiled from all the sessions, will be available in the near future.

Change Manager's Network

Our [Change Managers Network Newsletter – Autumn 2021](#) has now been published.

A virtual Changes Managers Network meeting was held on 9th September with Climate Change being the main topic. There was a great turn out and participation, with good connections made by change managers in how climate change can be reflected within programme design.

We have produced “Taster Session” videos as part of the Change Manager Toolkit, including:

- [Introduction to the team](#)
- [Project Scope](#)
- [Vision and SMART objectives](#)
- [Options Appraisal](#)
- [Business Analysis](#)

PSIF

Work continues with various Councils on corporate self-assessments and supporting Councils pre and post their Best Value Assurance Report.

Organisational Development Local Authority Network

A [virtual Organisational Development Network meeting](#) was held on 7th October. We also recently hosted a Flexible Working Webinar for the OD Network and SPDS colleagues which was led by Timewise.

The [OD Network section](#) and the [Workforce Planning Section](#) on the IS website have both been updated. Both sections contain helpful guidance and resources

Police Scotland and Local Government Leadership Programme

Work continues with colleagues from Police Scotland and Collective Leadership for Scotland (Scottish Government) to deliver the programme at three pilot sites (Aberdeenshire, West Dunbartonshire & West Lothian). The programme is well underway with four sessions delivered each in West Dunbartonshire and Aberdeenshire and two in West Lothian. Further sessions will be taking place in all three sites areas over the coming months.

Introduction to Integration

We jointly launched the '[Introduction to Integration](#)' offer, which supports members of Integration Joint Boards(IJBs) to have active roles in their local IJB. It has been developed in partnership by the Scottish Government, the IS and NHS Education for Scotland.

The support consists of three short information videos setting out the aims and expectations of integration authorities, and an invitation to join a "live" online interactive session where participants will join other IJB members across the country to explore the key points covered in the videos and local experiences of integration. Participants will leave the session with a clear idea about how to take up their role and enable the integration of health and social care services.

Elected Members - Preparing for Induction

We hosted a second national learning event for officers preparing for induction, which was attended by over 40 participants. The keynote speakers were from the Scottish Parliament who outlined their approach to the induction of the new MSPs in May.

We also issued drafts of the first four induction notebooks for comment. The final notebook is currently being drafted and will be shared later this month. We will continue to engage with officers and support them in developing high quality local induction programmes for newly elected members in May 2022.

Digital Public Services

Myaccount

33 organisations are now using the myaccount service - 30 Local Authorities plus NHS, Social Security Scotland and Young Scot. A further two Councils are onboarding, and further discussions are ongoing with NHS Boards about the potential to use the service within health. myaccount subscribers surpassed 1.459 million by October 2021, a 27.34% year-on-year increase since October 2021, and a direct result of more Councils responding to strong demand from customers for digital service delivery since the outbreak of COVID-19. Other services such as [parentsportal.scot](#) and [GETYOURNEC.SCOT](#) are continuing to fuel the increase in myaccount's adoption and usage.

GETYOURNEC.SCOT

Having launched GETYOURNEC.SCOT in 2020 as a new channel enabling people to apply online for a National Entitlement Card for the first time, 27 Councils had adopted the service by October 2021 and a further 5 have noted their indication to sign up to the service. Over 38,000 online applications had been received through GETYOURNEC.SCOT by October 2021, proving its popularity with eligible citizens while taking cost and demand associated with traditional channels out of the system. GETYOURNEC.SCOT is currently being enhanced further to support

the expansion of free bus travel to Under 22s due to launch in January 2022, involving Transport Scotland and IS with joint accountabilities together with other delivery partners.

[Parentsportal.scot](#)

[Parentsportal.scot](#) is now available in 9 councils, with a further eight in the pipeline and discussions ongoing with other Councils expressing an interest. The service is now available to parents and guardians of children at over 25% of Scotland's local authority-run primary and secondary schools. New services are being developed within [Parentsportal.scot](#) to enable parents of primary school-age children to apply for a National Entitlement Card for young persons' free bus travel due to launch in January 2022.

[Bisaccount.scot](#)

We facilitated all Scotland's childcare settings in the private and not-for-profit sector obtain vital Scottish Government funding by providing a secure online application process through bisaccount.scot. It helped them meet the extra costs incurred in complying with public health guidance in response to Covid-19 and, in the process, it expanded bisaccount's adoption to all 32 Councils (for this purpose). Discussions are ongoing with Local Authorities and other public sector organisations to integrate with back office systems, to further facilitate business authentication for online services.

Data and Intelligence

The Data and Intelligence team are currently involved in a series of discussions and initiatives that are all looking to improve the way that Local Government standardise and use data. For example:

- Digital Planning data pathfinder – we continue to conduct research and make recommendations to Scottish Government in relation to improving specific parts of the planning data landscape (as per the [national strategy](#)).
- [Data thought-leadership videos](#) is a series of short videos exploring some of the issues we have around data and how they can be addressed.
- [Infralink](#) – the IS are working closely with Scottish Futures Trust on how Local Government asset data can be improved and shared with this initiative to improve broadband connectivity.

[Local Government Covid-19 Dashboard](#)

We continue to produce a weekly Local Government Covid-19 Dashboard tracking key indicators to allow councils to monitor their response to the pandemic, and the impact on communities. The dashboard improves co-ordination of existing data reporting, bolsters data quality, and provides rich additional insight through time-series and family group comparative analysis. We continue to evolve the set of indicators to reflect the changing circumstances facing Local Government and communities, including collaborative work in recent months to review the suite of measures for vulnerable children and vulnerable adults. We have also assumed responsibility for the collection of these core datasets on vulnerable children and vulnerable adults, which will support efforts to automate and streamline data reporting and provide a key building block in the development of the Local Government Data Platform.

We are continuing to work with the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government and COSLA to progress plans for the development of a Local Government Data Platform. This aims to simplify data collection, improve quality assurance, and provide richer insight from data currently collected

from councils, including LGBF data. COSLA, IS and LGDO are working together to produce a strategic case to take this forward which we are aiming to share with COSLA Leaders and SOLACE in November.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The LGBF strategic plan for 2021-2024 will provide an opportunity to evolve the LGBF for the post Covid-19 world. We are currently working with professional associations to consider how we strengthen focus on key areas such as poverty and inequality, mental health and wellbeing, economic recovery, new ways of working and digital transformation. Following recent engagement with stakeholders, the board has agreed to include new measures around Child Poverty and Youth Unemployment in the upcoming iteration of the LGBF. We are also delivering a programme of events looking at the short and long-term impacts of the pandemic, and providing opportunities for colleagues to share practice and learning in relation to Covid response and on future challenges, opportunities and new ways of working. We will also continue to build momentum in the use of the LGBF to transform and improve council services, and have produced a set of good practice principles to support this. We are working to build on improvements achieved in data and intelligence during this period, to ensure the LGBF provides relevant and timely intelligence for decision making around recovery and renewal priorities. We are currently working with colleagues to prioritise areas of the framework to deliver progress in relation to streamlining and automating of data reporting processes.

Community Planning & Community Planning Improvement Board (CPIB)

We are continuing to support the CPIB to build on and promote evidence of the hugely positive role Community Planning has played in responding to Covid, and will continue to champion this agenda across the period ahead to ensure the gains achieved during this period are not lost post-Covid. The CPIB report, Community Planning Progress & Potential provides important evidence on the role Community Planning has played in responding to Covid-19 and highlights its significant potential to contribute to recovery efforts in local areas. The report has been shared widely with stakeholders, including the COSLA President and Deputy First Minister to ensure the learning feeds into and supports the development of Scotland's recovery plan. As part of our recently refreshed purpose and strategic plan, the CPIB are undertaking a series of 'deep dives' into key recovery priorities to gain a deeper understanding of key issues, their impact on communities and the role Community Planning can play in addressing these. Key messages from recent sessions on Tackling Inequalities and on Climate Change will be shared widely to encourage partners and partnerships to consider how they might engage with these themes locally. Upcoming sessions will focus on the National Covid Recovery Strategy, promoting children and young people's life chances; mental health and wellbeing; low income and fair work; economic recovery; and place. All reports are available on the [Improvement Service website](#).

Research

We have recruited a new Graduate Apprentice in Data Science who will work with the Research Team and across the Data and Intelligence team. The Graduate Apprentice role is a unique position that provides the opportunity to study for a BSc honours degree in Data Science at the University of Stirling while gaining relevant work experience.

We have been commissioned by the Building Standards Division at the Scottish Government to develop and deliver a new customer satisfaction survey. Throughout the project, we will work closely with local authority Building Standards verifiers and Local Authority Building Standards

Scotland (LABSS). The work commenced in early October with one local authority workshop completed so far, and is due for delivery in April 2022.

Data is currently being finalised for this year's Common Advice Management Reporting Framework (CAPMRF). The CAPMRF has been published annually since 2014/15 and measures key performance indicators for welfare and money advice services funded by Scottish Local Authorities on both an in-house and commissioned basis. Over the next quarter, data provided by local authorities will be analysed and presented in a national report and 32 individually tailored local authority reports. In conjunction with this year's report, we are carrying out additional research. The research has three main aims and will;

- Provide a more detailed understanding of the support offered by local authority funded money and welfare rights advice services and what this achieves.
- Increase understanding of how COVID-19 has impacted the work done by these services, including the impact on face to face service delivery.
- Deliver an insight into how services are supporting clients with debt and also help preventing debt arising.

Data for this research is currently being gathered from local authorities through a survey and log of daily activity from advisers.

Our [dashboard](#) showing the economic impact of Covid-19 on local authority areas has been updated with the most recent data covering August. The dashboard summarises available data on the current uptake of government support. It is likely this will be one of the final updates of this dashboard, as many of these schemes have come to an end.

Further information

If you have any questions on this information update or would like further information, please contact Sarah Gadsden, Chief Executive at sarah.gadsden@improvementservice.org.uk or 07901 513186. We hope you find the update helpful and would welcome your feedback.

