

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 June 2021 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Finance Update

The Board noted that total income secured for the year to 31st March 2021 is £12,385,188. Of this, £4.5M has been brokered from outwith the Local Government sector. The Board agreed that an offer to invest £4M should be circulated to Local Authority Directors of Finance (£2m for 12 months and £2m for 6 months).

HR Update

The Board approved the Employee Code of Conduct which was developed in consultation with staff and Unison members. It sets out the ethical standards we expect from our employees in carrying out IS business, along with the policies, procedures and guidance that support them and was developed using our shared values that describe what is important to us about how we work.

The Board noted the staff survey results, from the survey carried out in late 2020, where a 72% response rate was achieved. The overall satisfaction rate, calculated by the number of employees who agreed or strongly agreed with all questions across the survey, was 87.3%.

Year 1 report from COSLA and IS Partnership

The Board reviewed the work that has been progressed jointly through the COSLA/IS Partnership Agreement and agreed the priorities for the partnership for 2021/2022. However, should new imperatives emerge during the year ahead (e.g. as a result of a new Programme for Government or a change to the pandemic recovery's trajectory) the priority areas will be adjusted accordingly.

Governance Improvement Plan

The Board agreed the following documents to support ongoing improvements to IS governance: Board Terms of Reference, Board Member Role Profile, Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Chair and Chief Executive, Board Member Code of Conduct and Guidance on the IS Chair and Board Members' Annual Performance Review. The Board also agreed to undertake a self-assessment and to participate in peer-to-peer assessment, the findings of which will inform discussion at a Board development day later this year.

Business Development and Growth Strategy - Update on implementation

The Board considered an update on the progress being made with the implementation of the IS Business Development and Growth Strategy. This included a discussion on products, services and support that we currently deliver, which could be expanded to new customers and markets, as well as ideas for future products, services, support and ways of working which are likely to need new capabilities and/or business models.

The Board also considered a draft IS prospectus for local authorities and partners, which provides an overview of the products and services that we deliver. Board members suggested some revisions, which are currently being worked on, and the prospectus will be available shortly on our website and shared through our account management approach. Finally, the Board agreed that we should publicise advertising and sponsorship opportunities to relevant organisations, given the reach of our digital platforms.

Building and Facilitating a Data Ecosystem for Scottish Local Government

The Board were updated on the collaboration between the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, COSLA and IS to develop a Local Government Data Platform. The Board agreed that the IS should put itself forward to play a key role in the delivery of aspects of the Data Platform, and that the IS should work with the Digital Office and COSLA to develop a business case for the Data Platform over the Summer, to be presented to Solace and COSLA Leaders in the Autumn.

Transformation Support Programme

The Board approved a programme of transformation support, that focuses on working with Chief Executives/Chief Officers on designing a future council operating model that is fit for purpose in the 21st century. The programme will have a focus on innovation, new ways of working including empowering staff and communities to be part of the overall transformation. Over the summer we will undertake a research piece to support the Programme with a view to hosting the initial Chief Executive / Chief Officer workshop in early Autumn. [View the presentation.](#)

Future arrangements for Digital Office for Scottish Local Government

To inform Solace's discussion and decision making process on the future arrangements for the Digital Office, the IS Board considered whether or not the IS should continue to host the Digital Office. Board members considered the options presented to them within the context of what is in the best interests of the IS, to fulfil their legal responsibilities as company directors. After a robust discussion, the Board agreed that it would make an offer to Solace to transition over time from the current hosting arrangements to fully integrating the work of the Digital Office into the IS, with an end date for full integration to be agreed between the IS Board and Solace.

Board Member Vacancy

The Board authorised the IS Chief Executive to approach Solace to nominate someone from within their membership to join the IS Board, and to discuss with Solace the areas of expertise and skills that would be desirable from a new Board Member.

Upcoming Events

- Fairer Scotland Duty Refresher
[24, August](#) and [23 September 2021](#)
- [From Inspiration to Practice: Delivering Net Zero Through Local Government](#)
30 September 2021

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Political Mentoring Development Programme

"This programme provides an opportunity for mentors to develop their own knowledge and skills. The course allows the mentors to explore what a mentoring relationship will entail and how to support mentees in the political context. I would highly recommend this course to elected members."

(Councillor Jennifer Layden, Glasgow City Council)

New dates have been released for the next three cohorts of this programme. For more information and to register <https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/products-and-services/skills-and-development/elected-members-development/political-mentoring-development-programme>

Guidance for Elected Members on Scrutinising Business Cases

We have [published guidance](#) to support elected members to more effectively scrutinise business cases.

Collaborative Rapid Scoping Assessments informing 20 Minute Neighbourhoods Ambition

We have completed rapid scoring assessments with City of Edinburgh, North Ayrshire and Argyll and Bute Councils on the impact of policy in shaping places for wellbeing, grounded in the application of Place and Wellbeing Outcomes:

- [Comparing the 20 Minute Neighbourhood and Traditional Scenarios in Edinburgh Local Development Plan](#): a Rapid Scoping Assessment
- [Ardrossan North Shore Development Framework](#): a 20 Minute Neighbourhood Rapid Scoping Assessment
- [Argyll and Bute Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy](#): a 20 Minute Neighbourhood Rapid Scoping Assessment

We will review the effectiveness of the rapid scoping assessment approach and develop a short process to support local authorities to run their own rapid assessments.

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

We continue to work with key stakeholders, including Directors of Public Health, Heads of Planning, COSLA, and Public Health Scotland to:

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

Strengthening Local Partnerships

In recognition of the variability of Local Employability Partnerships across Scotland a new [Framework](#) was developed to provide some consensus around structure and remit of employability partnerships, whilst allowing flexibility reflective of local circumstances. To support an increasing and sustained shift towards user engagement, collaboration in service design, more effective and improved partnership working through increased local governance and a move to shared measurement there is a commitment to strengthen local partnerships. It was agreed a self-assessment survey would be undertaken by Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs) in order to strengthen the work of the partners at a local level. A self-assessment was undertaken with all 32 LEPs and a [national report](#) has been developed by the Improvement Service to collate the findings from the 32 Local Employability Partnerships.

Economic Development/SLAED

SLAED have commissioned a Data Dashboard to capture the SLAED indicators and make the data more accessible and useable for each local authority. The IS has been working with the SLAED Performance subgroup to develop and refine the definitions for the indicators to ensure they are more robust and accurate. A second COVID supplement to the indicators is being developed and will be made available on the SLAED website. We are also considering how we can strengthen the suite of Economic Development measures in the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.

Child Poverty

We continue to provide feedback to councils on the [Local Child Poverty Action Reports](#), with policy, practice and themes for improvement being collated from the reports. Update reports on child poverty have been presented to COSLA's Environment and Economy and Children and Young People Boards, generating positive discussion and an action to engage with the Minister. A child

poverty self-assessment framework has been developed to support Councils and Health Boards to identify improvements to their work on tackling child poverty. This will be launched on 27th July and we will deliver a supportive training session.

A successful webinar on '[Reducing the Cost of Education and Maximising Family Incomes](#)' took place on 23rd June with 150 attendees.

We have been working in partnership with Public Health Scotland to draw together [examples of practice](#) across the three drivers of Child Poverty from the Local Child Poverty Action Reports.

Climate Change

Officers from across Scotland joined a workshop organised by the IS, the Sustainable Scotland Network and SLAED to explore what a “green recovery” means in practice. Another recent event explored the role of Elected Members in this crucial agenda. Presentations and summaries of both sessions [are available](#) and will be used to shape future support and events.

We are continuing to embed climate change across a range of relevant IS programmes. All IS staff are currently participating in carbon literacy training, with the IS aspiring to achieve accreditation as a carbon literate organisation. Through [a new partnership](#) with the Scottish Cities Alliance and Keep Scotland Beautiful, we are also delivering Carbon Literacy training to Elected Members from the Alliance cities and opportunities for offering training more broadly are being explored.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Expansion

We have concluded the latest data collection exercise which shows that, as of April 2021, 119,551 children were accessing funded ELC, of whom 87% were accessing more than their statutory entitlement, and 72% were accessing 1140 hours funded ELC. The results show a very positive national picture and we will continue to provide critical friend support on programme plans, workforce planning, workforce resourcing, critical path analysis and project management assistance where required.

Violence Against Women

We recently published an elected member briefing note on [Tackling violence against women and girls: what about the men?](#) We have also published a report on: [How can adopting a trauma-informed approach help drive forward improved outcomes as part of Scotland's roadmap for COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation?](#)

Fairer Scotland Duty (FSD)

The FSD draft guidance consultation has closed and Scottish Government have indicated that the refreshed guidance will be published in Autumn. We have produced a [FSD and Protected Characteristics briefing](#) on sex and gender, focussing mainly on inequality experienced by women. The FSD Leads Network has recently heard from Engender on the intersectionality between sex and gender and socioeconomic disadvantage and from CRER on Ethnicity and Poverty and the intersectionality between Ethnicity and socioeconomic disadvantage. A sub group of the network has been established to explore the possibility of a 'once for Scotland' online integrated impact assessment tool. FSD refresher training sessions are currently taking place and will run until September.

Change Manager's Network

A virtual Change Manager's Network meeting was held on 17th June and included a presentation from Audit Scotland and a Q & A session around Best Value Auditing.

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 3rd June 2021 and included a demo by Angus Council colleagues on HIVE, an employee engagement tool.

Police Scotland and Local Government Leadership Programme

We continue to work with colleagues from Police Scotland and Collective Leadership for Scotland (Scottish Government) to develop this programme. Three pilot sites have now been agreed with Aberdeenshire, West Dunbartonshire and West Lothian Councils and the programme is well underway with three sessions being delivered in West Dunbartonshire Council and two in Aberdeenshire Council. West Lothian Council will commence in August.

Digital Public Services

Myaccount

30 organisations are now using the myaccount service - 28 Local Authorities plus NHS and Young Scot. A further two Councils are onboarding, and a further three organisations are waiting to onboard. myaccount subscribers surpassed 1.338 million by June 2021, a 29% year-on-year increase since June 2020, and a direct result of more Councils responding to strong demand from customers for digital service delivery in a lockdown environment. 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, 19 Councils had adopted the service by June 2021 and a further 12 have noted their indication to sign up to the service. Over 18,000 online applications had been received through GETYOURNEC.SCOT by June 2021, proving its popularity with eligible citizens while taking cost and demand associated with traditional channels out of the system. New functionality was launched in April 2021 on GETYOURNEC.SCOT to enable people to request a card renewal or a replacement. GETYOURNEC.SCOT is also being geared up and enhanced further to support the expansion of free bus travel to Under 22s due to come into effect in 2021/22, 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](https://www.parentsportalscot.nhs.uk/) 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 2021/22.

[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).

Data and Intelligence

[Gazetteer](#)

Earlier this year members of the Data and Intelligence team ran a series of regional day-long meetings for approximately 200 staff in local authorities who specialise in or have responsibility for collating and using location-based data – particularly for addresses and roads. This crucial network of data experts is responsible for systematically collecting each local authority's Land and Property and Street Registers, as well as many other location-based datasets, which are used for a multitude of different purposes both within Local Government and by many other organisations and sectors. The regional sessions touched on a variety of themes around location-based data, as well as the wider issues of data standards and governance, and how this network could be given more exposure and leadership responsibility across Local Government.

[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 LG and communities.

[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. This includes 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 are currently working with councils to develop good practice principles and examples 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 a summary of learning on the role Community Planning is playing in responding to Covid-19 and highlighting its significant potential to contribute to recovery efforts in local areas. The report will be shared widely with stakeholders in the summer, including the COSLA President and Deputy First Minister to ensure the learning feeds into and supports the development of Scotland's recovery plan. We have recently refreshed the purpose and strategic plan for the CPIB and set out the focus of work for the next two years. This will involve 'deep dives' on 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. The two-year programme includes a focus on: inequalities; climate change and sustainability; mental health and wellbeing; low income and fair work; economic recovery; promoting children and young people's life chances; and place.

Research

Our [dashboard showing the economic impact of Covid-19](#) on local authority areas has been updated with the most recent data covering April this year. In addition, we have now added a new section with constituency furlough data, which provides a more detailed breakdown for areas with multiple constituencies. The dashboard summarises available data on the current uptake of government support including those furloughed through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, unemployment benefit claims, Business Support Grant Fund claims, and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. It also now includes more detailed data, for example, the proportion of furloughed employees by economic sector. The dashboard will be refreshed with new data reflecting the changing circumstances.

We carried out a survey with residents within a Council area exploring views, levels of awareness, and participation in Community Councils. With just over 300 participants the results showed a good level of understanding of the role of Community Councils with 52% saying they knew a lot or some about what they do. Most respondents also felt that Community Councils played a positive role in particular in representing the local community, however only 16% of respondents said that they would like to get more involved with their work.

[The Instrumental Music Survey](#) has been issued for 2020/21. There is particular interest in the results this year, given the Scottish Government's commitment to removing tuition fees for all pupils. The results will give an important picture of existing provision and expenditure on services and are expected in July.

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.