

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 March 2024 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Board Members

The Board noted the resignation of Andrew Kerr, Chief Executive, City of Edinburgh Council and thanked him for all his support, and noted that Paul Manning, Chief Executive, South Lanarkshire Council will replace Andrew on the Board.

Finance, Operations and HR Update

The Board noted that at the end of quarter 3, the total funding secured for the year is £12,049,851. The Board approved our new Gender Based Violence Policy.

Business Plan and Budgets

The Board agreed the [Business Plan 2024/25](#) and annual budgets for 2024/25 and 2025/26, and also agreed to transfer 50% of bank interest earned to the core budget to support local government in its ambitions to deliver a more robust approach to sector led improvement.

Digital Public Services Board

The Board and Scottish Government agreed to stand down the IS Digital Public Services Board. From June 2024, we will report to the IS Board on the performance of our digital public services funded through the Local Government grant settlement (e.g. myaccount). The Board noted that governance arrangements for the Digital Directorate grant funding (this funds the concessionary travel card element of the National Entitlement Card) will be presented for discussion at a future meeting.

IS Audit Committee

The Board approved the Audit Committee's self-assessment Improvement Action Plan and changes to the Audit Committee's Terms of Reference. The Board noted that the Audit Committee approved the use of investment managers in order to seek optimal return on investments for the IS.

IS Associates Framework

The Board noted a decision made by the Senior Leadership Team to disinvest in the IS Associates Framework, as the total volume of work put through the framework has fallen significantly over the last couple of years.

High Level Strategic Performance Dashboard

The Board agreed to the development of a high level strategic performance dashboard reporting key information on finance, HR, governance, digital, communications, customer satisfaction and business plan deliverables. The Board also agreed to undertake deep dives on individual IS products and services, to help them better understand the impact of our work.

Relationship Management Service

The Board noted that the council engagement updates will be circulated to Council Chief Executives in June and this will include a table showing the number of Councils using our products and services.

Scottish Climate Intelligence Service

The Board noted the progress being made with the development of the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service and endorsed the approach being taken by officers to manage and mitigate the risks associated with the procurement of the data platform which will underpin the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service.

Chief Executive Performance Appraisal

The Board agreed an approach to the Chief Executive's Performance appraisal with support being provided by West Lothian Council's senior OD advisor who will produce a report on the 360 degree feedback for the appraisal panel.

Upcoming events

SSN Annual Conference 2024

Tuesday 22 May, 9.00am - 3.00pm, Online

Sustainable Scotland Network's annual conference on public sector climate action. [Register online.](#)

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Bespoke support for Elected Member Development Programmes

We have been supporting and advising councils on their ongoing elected member development programmes. This includes the roll out of our free [Political Skills Assessment](#), and contributing to development sessions in councils.

We are able to support elected members with Coaching and Mentoring. If you would like any further information about the bespoke support available to elected members, please contact:

david.barr@improvementservice.org.uk.

Solace/IS Transformation Programme

Since our last update, the implementation phase of the Programme is well underway with all projects now having held at least one meeting of their project delivery group. As a reminder these projects are:

- Officer-led whole system dialogue on public service reform
- Collaboration within the local government sector on procurement
- Analysis of local government's statutory and discretionary services
- The full implementation of Crerar for Local Government
- Development of a Digital To-Be State for Scottish Local Government
- Identification of new digital shared services that could be delivered nationally or regionally
- Active communities/participatory design.

Capacity for the projects is being provided through the volunteers that have come forward from across the sector, supported by a Programme Management Office within the Improvement Service.

The Leadership Practitioner Forum also continues to progress with the most recent meeting taking place in February, with contributions from the Directors of Finance (on the current financial challenges) and COSLA (on the Verity House Agreement). The next meeting of the Forum is due to take place on 18th April 2024.

Change Management Support

The Change Management Team continue to provide all councils with support for operational and transformational change. Our next Change Manager's Network event will be on 16th April and Audit Scotland will be inputting on the new integrated assessment approach and councils who have been through the new process will share their experiences.

We also provide direct support to councils where required, for example we will be delivering a workshop for a range of colleagues in one council on Delivering Effective Change.

Organisational Development Local Authority Network

Our OD Network events bring colleagues together virtually every six weeks. Recent events included an Open Space event in January where colleagues came together to consider current OD priorities and challenges and a key topic session in March which focused on Evaluation and Measuring Impact. Colleagues from 23 councils participated in the sessions. Looking ahead, forthcoming sessions include:

- 25 April - Open Space Session
- 19 June - Key Topic Session - Leadership Development
- Headspace Sessions will take place on 16 May and 17 July

Details of all our events can be found on the [IS website](#).

Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF)

The Learning into Action Network (LiA Network) has been developed as part of the Element 2 Whole Family Wellbeing Funding (WFWF) offer and is being co-designed and co-delivered with stakeholders and to enable collaboration, facilitate peer support, share learning and approaches from across the country, and support solution-focused discussions around the barriers to whole system change.

There has been a bespoke programme of activity developed and delivered to support Children's Services Planning Partnerships (CSPPs) implement WFWF locally. In March, the LiA Network facilitated a Link & Learn session exploring engagement with families. This event was well attended by CSPPs and other stakeholders who had the opportunity to hear from the Participation Lead in Falkirk CSPP and one of the parents involved in the project who shared their experiences of delivering and accessing meaningful engagement practices and the impact it's had. This event enabled colleagues to explore the different approaches to engagement and participation, share learning and experiences, and reflect on how to embed the voices of children, young people and families in their own policy and practice. Following the session, a need for further support to those delivering this work has been identified and as a result, a proposal has been developed to facilitate a series of deep dive sessions exploring engagement practices as part of a wider learning system. This support offer will encourage colleagues from across the whole family support sector to come together, share practice, learn from each other and develop tools and resources to aid their engagement and participation work.

In addition, colleagues within the IS have worked collaboratively to invite local partners to a 'Cross-Cutting Agendas Reflection and Discussion' session in April. This session aims to bring together local leads working to improve outcomes for children and families across Scotland with the shared focus of adopting a cross-policy, person-centred approach to improving outcomes for people and communities affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity. It is anticipated that this may include:

- Local trauma leads based in local authorities/ HSCPs
- Violence Against Women Partnership Co-ordinators/ leads based in local authorities
- Child Poverty Action Report Leads based in local authorities

- Whole Family Wellbeing Funding leads, based within CSPPs
- Children's Rights Leads, based in local authorities
- Local authority Promise leads

The session aims to create an informal and meaningful space for reflection and conversation across the Networks we support to collectively and collaboratively consider how we're all navigating challenges, share learning and ideas and consider what support might be helpful in joining the dots across these agendas.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

We will continue to work with Scottish Government, Local Authorities, and their partners across several workstreams to strengthen, enable and assure the delivery of ELC services across Scotland, while communicating successes and challenges faced to stakeholders.

We work across a number of discrete workstreams that cover all aspects of the design and delivery of councils' ELC services. This includes Data Collections to evidence the status of ELC delivery, supporting councils in improving uptake amongst those who can benefit most from funded ELC, the 2-year-old population. We are working with Scottish Government, COSLA and local authorities to improve the guidance and processes in setting sustainable rates paid to secure delivery from private and third sector providers (including childminders). We also support councils in workforce planning improvements, understanding, and improving the quality of ELC. More generally, our team acts as a key point of connection between Scottish and Local Government, bridging the gap between national policy and local implementation and sharing intelligence and evidence from both sides.

Protecting People

[Authentic Voice: Embedding Lived Experience in Dundee](#)

As part of the Authentic Voice project, the IS and SafeLives have been working on a pilot of implementation support, in partnership with Dundee City Council, as part of their aim to ensure lived experience has a meaningful contribution and influence within local multi-agency governance and strategic planning arrangements across their Public Protection Partnerships. We developed a programme of work including research and mapping, improvement planning, and facilitated sessions with leadership. A [report of the findings](#) from this work is available to read and a learning event will take place in the coming months.

[Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework 2022/23 Learning Report](#)

The IS has published a new learning report highlighting key trends, examples of good practice and barriers and enablers identified from the local Equally Safe Quality Standards & Performance Framework data returns submitted for 2022/23. The report showcases a wide range of work taking place across Scotland to improve the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people affected by violence against women, as well as noting barriers and enablers to progress that have been identified locally.

[Embedding Safe & Together in Scotland: Creating Domestic Abuse Informed Systems, Services and Workforces - Year 2 Learning Report](#)

In partnership with the Safe & Together Institute and local Safe & Together leads, the IS has published a new report highlighting key learning about the activities that the 12 local authorities/

partnerships funded through the Scottish Government's Delivering Equally Safe (DES) Fund to embed the Safe & Together Model have undertaken since October 2021, the emerging evidence on the impact this is having for professionals and families, and the barriers and enablers being identified in relation to embedding domestic abuse informed systems, services and workforces.

SLAED

The [Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development \(SLAED\) Indicators Report 2022-23](#) was recently published, adding to over a decade of data on a series of performance measures relating to local authority economic development delivery. The report presents a range of data and information which is primarily based on returns submitted by the 32 local authorities. The purpose of the SLAED Indicators Framework is to assist local authorities to evidence and publicise the contribution they make to Scotland's economy through their economic development activities, provide a basis for collating consistent data which can be used to better understand impact, and identify potential areas for improvement.

Employability Partnership - No One Left Behind (NOLB)

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).

To support this change, a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and local government working group have been developing a national, standardised referral form and process for those who require employability support. Initially, this will be a clerical process, with potential for further development of a digital process.

The new referral process came into effect in April and will be closely monitored over the coming months to ensure that the expected numbers and quality of referrals are achieved, ensuring that those who require support to progress into employment, are able to access it.

The working group will continue to meet to review the future development of the process and potential digital solutions, including a local pilot of a digital, self-referral process and future DWP digital systems.

Climate Change

We continue to work closely with the Sustainable Scotland Network, SOLACE and COSLA and develop relationships with Scottish Government to deliver national and targeted local support. This includes the design and delivery of the Local Authority Forum (Previous meeting on 6th March covered upcoming policy consultations, priorities for officers, procurement and use of PAS2080 and the next meeting will be in June), helping support the development of [SSN's Annual Conference on public sector climate action](#) and supporting the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies officer group. We have been working with Adaptation Scotland, SLAED and Scottish Government on a session to bring together economic development and climate change professionals in local authorities to discuss how Scotland can adapt and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Further engagement with officers also has taken place to support establishing the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service, with our partner Edinburgh Climate Change Institute.

Public Service Reform - Community Planning

In a new addition from April 2024, the Recovery and Delivery Programme now also holds the Secretariat for the Community Planning Managers' Network. This network brings together all Community Planning Managers from across the country to collate their experience and influence leaders and policy makers, providing advice and guidance on collaborative working in community planning. The Network provides the opportunity for mutual support and capacity building, information exchange and to build personal networks.

We will work with the Community Planning Managers' Network, supporting its use as a forum to develop and embed a shared vision for partnership working - identifying the current barriers and exploring ways to strengthen relationships so that more collaborative working across the community planning partners can be put into practice.

A new [Community Planning Project Officer vacancy](#) has arisen with the Recovery and Delivery Programme. The new Community Planning Project Officer will be in place to support councils and their partners to share knowledge, skills and experience to spread best practice in community planning across Scotland. A primary forum for this will be through the Community Planning Managers' Network, for which the Project Officer will be the secretariat. As part of the IS's established Recovery and Delivery Programme, the Community Planning Project Officer will work collaboratively both internally, and with Scottish Government and Local Authorities in support of Community Planning across Scotland.

Digital Public Services

mygovscot myaccount

mygovscot myaccount has been re-designed with a brand new look, making it easier to sign up for and use the service.

As part of the mygovscot myaccount redesign, new features have been 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 was launched in 2014 and there are now 2.35 million people in Scotland signed up to the platform, almost 50% of the eligible population. mygovscot myaccount has 92 integrations with back-office systems across 40 organisations.

All 32 local authorities use [getyournec.scot](#) for National Entitlement Card applications, which uses mygovscot myaccount authentication, and 17 local authorities use [parentsportal.scot](#), which again uses mygovscot myaccount for authentication.

Right to Work powered by mygovscot myaccount

The Right to Work service which is powered by mygovscot myaccount continues to gather a lot of interest from both councils and other public sector organisations, who are keen to use the service. We have given a number of demonstrations of the platform and so far, have received really positive

feedback. There are several organisations who are currently going through the onboarding process, and we hope to have them live and using the service very soon.

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. Council agents can download proof of the right to work checks and attach it to the candidate's HR file.

If this is a service you think your council would benefit from, or you would like to know more about it, please get in touch and we can arrange a demonstration for you.

parentsportal.scot

17 Local Authorities are live with the platform and continue to promote the service to its parents. A further 4 Local Authorities are in the process of onboarding. The service is now available in 1,343 schools, with over 192K registered parental subscribers securely linked to over 233K approved pupils, with over 44K NEC Cards (to children aged between 5-10) issued via the parentsportal.scot platform.

getyournec.scot

All 32 Local Authorities consume the service to facilitate online applications for National Entitlement Cards for over 60s concessionary travel, disabled concessionary travel, Young Scot card and Young Persons' Free Bus Travel.

Almost 1 million applications for all National Entitlement card types have been facilitated through getyournec.scot since July 2020, which is an incredible milestone. This has helped ease pressures on councils as applications have been processed online via getyournec.scot, meaning less applications for councils to process.

Data and Intelligence

One Scotland Gazetteer and National Street Gazetteer

We recently held regional events that toured five Scottish regions, covering all 32 Scottish local authorities. The events allowed members of the Spatial Information Service the opportunity to highlight best practice and encourage information sharing amongst the attendees. At the introductory session, we discussed developments over the past 12 months, whilst highlighting our data roadmap for the year ahead, along with detailing existing areas for improvement and tabling new data asks on the horizon. The team also highlighted how we plan to support local government colleagues with these proposed long-term improvements.

The events had a range of speakers in attendance throughout the day highlighting the benefits of underpinning corporate services and strategies with good data. Examples were drawn from both the public and private sector and underlined by attendance from the Scottish Government Digital Directorate, who promoted Data Standards and Open Data Community of Practice, which has a large number of representatives from the wider Scottish public sector.

Digital Planning

We have recently reached out to all planning authorities in Scotland to coordinate a standardised approach to housing land supply data and we are holding engagement sessions with all interested local authority planning teams. We have also commenced an engagement series on the standardisation of planning application data at a national level.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The annual [LGBF Report](#) was published on 1st March. In 2023/24, to provide Councils with access to more timely data, we have provided quarterly LGBF data releases via the new online [LGBF dashboard](#). Data releases will be provided on a monthly basis from April 2024. We are continuing 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.

In recognition of the local and national policy importance given to Climate Change, and the limited coverage currently within the LGBF, we have expanded 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 progress of Councils. We have added to the existing area-wide emissions indicators, and included measures on Electricity, Transport and Natural Gas Emissions. We will continue to engage in further development work with SSN to improve the underpinning data quality of the Corporate and Waste Emissions indicators to allow future inclusion.

In January 2024, we launched the new approach to Peer Collaborative Improvement. The pilot is underway, focussing on the Scottish Welfare Fund, and involving colleagues from Falkirk, Inverclyde, East Renfrewshire and Midlothian councils to test this new approach. 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. Peer Collaborative improvement presents a significant opportunity for local government to implement a sector-led approach to improvement, within the context of the Verity House Agreement and future local government accountability and assurance arrangements. It may also influence the wider scrutiny landscape, in relation to supporting discussions with Scottish Government and audit and inspection bodies to enable local government to realise the full benefits of Crerar.

Local Government Data Platform

We are in Phase 2 of this ambitious data transformation project, and a delivery plan for this phase has been approved by the LG Data Platform Oversight Group. The Oversight Group is co-chaired by Solace and COSLA, and involves the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, IS, Public Health Scotland and Scottish Government. Phase 2 of this project will focus 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. The key deliverables are:

1. Improved governance and reductions in the reporting landscape.
2. Improved data standards to enhance the quality and re-use of data provided.
3. Improved orchestration of data returns using scheduled workflows to create improved coordination.

4. Greater automation of data collection and distribution, by running a proof-of-concept with selected returns to establish capacity to support further automation.
5. Improved access and re-use of data, via the development of a business intelligence tool which provides data exploration, visualization and sharing features.

Regular progress reports will be considered by the Oversight Group who will meet bi-monthly, and a final Phase 2 report on key findings and next steps will be brought back to Solace and COSLA Leaders later in 2024.

Community Planning & Community Planning Improvement Board (CPIB)

The [CPIB Newsletter](#) provides an update on the CPIB's work to provide leadership and improvement support for community planning in Scotland, and to generate valuable evidence-based solutions to the significant challenges facing communities and local partnerships. 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. As a starting point, and building on work undertaken to date, the CPIB has identified a series of local and national actions to unblock barriers limiting progress and help community planning fulfil its potential.

The CPIB Action Plan outlines the commitment of CPIB members to work together to deliver practical action to drive forward change at a local level. The plan includes the following priorities:

1. To support implementation of new and existing local models relating to Third Sector funding
2. To work with Scotland Excel to bring greater co-ordination in procurement in relation to Climate Action
3. To support co-ordination and streamlining of Climate funding at a local level
4. To encourage greater focus of City Deal money on Climate Change
5. To promote good practice & learning on local progress in data sharing in relation to poverty, including Child Poverty
6. To develop national principles on data sharing and risk levels.
7. To encourage partners to recognise, resource and sustain the places (inc. 3rd Sector) where nurturing relationships happen to improve wellbeing outcomes for children and young people.
8. To encourage CPPs to put in place mechanisms for collective prioritisation and decision-making in relation to allocating funding in relation to wellbeing for children and young people.

In addition to the above local actions to be taken forward by the CPIB, there are a number of national actions which are essential to the progress of this work. The Chair of the CPIB (Greg Colgan, Chief Executive, Dundee City Council) will meet shortly with the Deputy First Minister and the COSLA President to discuss our national asks in more detail and to come up with a plan for how we can continue to work together to take these forward. These asks include:

1. To address the fragmentation of the climate funding landscape by consolidating and aligning national budgets and funding streams
2. To secure sustainable funding for the third sector, recognising their instrumental role in the development and delivery of early intervention offers and relationship-based alternatives to statutory service delivery, including in key areas such as whole family wellbeing approaches.

3. To give greater emphasis to the provision of flexible and multi-year funding to enable available resources to be better used in ways that reflect priorities for communities.
4. To reduce reporting requirements, including in relation to Child Poverty Action Reports.

Further updates, newsletters and Board papers are available on the CPIB website, where colleagues can access further detail on the evidence gathered by the CPIB and on the engagement taking place with local and national partners.

Research

The [Common Advice Performance Management Reporting Framework](#) has been published describing the impact that council funded advice services had in 2022/23. The figures show that every £1 of investment returns £12 of financial gain for clients.

The team is currently working on a survey to support a trauma-informed workforce. The survey follows a similar survey launched in 2021, and will include analysis of understanding of trauma and engagement with National Trauma Transformation Programme resources across services areas.

Our [research and analysis offer](#) has been launched, with the team able to deliver research projects on a cost recovery basis.

Evaluation

We are finalising our second evaluation report on the Place Based Investment Programme - Direct Grants. The report contains evidence that the Programme has played a critical role in attracting additional funding and enhancing existing projects. It is often used in conjunction with other Place Based funds to maximise impact. In relation to addressing inequalities and climate change mitigation and improving economic outcomes through job creation, there is evidence of the positive impact created by the funding. It also includes case studies from Aberdeen, Argyll & Bute, Clackmannanshire, and North Lanarkshire Councils.

The Scottish Government have extended funding on a tapered basis, i.e. contributing 75% until March 2024 for the majority of local authorities/ HSCPs participating in the Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships 'Test and Learn Programme'.

We have produced an Impact and Cost Value report for MsMissMrs, a social enterprise in Glasgow that enables participating women to reach their potential by accessing capability-enhancing support. It is hoped that this can be published on our website shortly.

We are currently working on a Social Return on Investment Analysis for Cosy Kingdom which is an energy advice and Handyman service part funded by Fife Council.

At the webinar on 19 March we launched our [Evaluation Offer](#). This sets out how we can offer evaluation services on a full cost recovery basis.

We are holding an open session on 'Preparing a Logic Model' for all interested parties on 21 May between 11:00 and noon.

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.