

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 meetings in December 2023 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Finance, Operations and HR Update

The Board noted that at the end of quarter 2, the total funding secured for the year is £12,627,609. The Board also considered the findings of the recent staff survey, and noted that the staff satisfaction rate remains high at 81.7%.

Accounts Commission

Ronnie Hinds, Interim Chair of the Accounts Commission and Alan Campbell, Secretary to the Accounts Commission attended the Board meeting to discuss the IS/Accounts Commission Strategic Alliance. Following a wide-ranging discussion, Ronnie encouraged the IS Board to maximise the Strategic Alliance as a vehicle for progressing and promoting matters of mutual importance and interest.

Board Development Day

The Board met on the 22nd November to review their self-assessment and peer to peer assessments results. At the December Board Meeting, the Board agreed a development plan. This includes the following actions:

- Arranging for the new Chair of the Accounts Commission to meet with the IS Board to renew the relationship between the Board and Commission, as part of the Strategic Alliance.
- Considering how the IS can build relationships with other inspection bodies.
- Continuing to dedicate time at Board meetings to look forward and generate opportunities for business development and innovation.
- Considering how the Board can better help COSLA articulate the impact of the local government sector, including highlighting the work of the IS/Board as part of this.
- Undertaking a review of IS governance, using the previous review as a benchmark.

IS Chief Executive Performance Appraisal

The Board asked that we invite IS Associates with the necessary experience and expertise to quote for organising and facilitating the Chief Executive's performance appraisal. The Board agreed the appraisal panel should include the Chair and Vice Chair of the IS Board and the Chair of the IS Audit Committee.

Communications Plan

The Board approved the IS Communications Plan for 2024.

Young Professionals in Local Government Network

The Board agreed that we will establish and facilitate the Network for professionals in the early stages of their Local Government career and agreed that following an initial 6-month period, this network will be funded by combining the network fee model with exploring opportunities for external funding.

National Planning Improvement Programme

Craig McLaren, our National Planning Improvement Champion presented an update on the national planning improvement programme. The Board noted the issues in this area and the importance of this work and agreed that it would be helpful to provide an update to Solace in the near future.

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Governance and Political Leadership

Upcoming webinars with Standards Commission

The IS are hosting two webinars with the Standards Commission on following the ethical standards of public life when engaging with the public. The webinars will cover the key issues members need to be aware of with the Councillors Code of Conduct when engaging with the public, including the use of language, data protection and confidentiality.

The first webinar will provide an overview of the key points that members should be aware of and provide examples of what can go wrong, and the second will focus on social media.

The webinars are being held at the following times, and presentations will be recorded and made available on the IS website:

- Following the ethical standards of public life when engaging with the public – Wednesday 24th January, 10.00-11.30am
- Following the ethical standards of public life when using social media – Friday 2nd February, 10.00-11.30am

Elected members can register for the webinars at <https://forms.office.com/e/01CRZWDp2h>

Upcoming publication

Along with the Standards Commission, we will be publishing a short guidance note for elected members on their Rights to Access Information. This will be published in February and sent to Monitoring Officers and Elected Members.

Solace/IS Transformation Programme

In our last update we noted the progress being made in the Solace / IS Transformation Programme, with a specific focus on a call for volunteers from across the sector to support the delivery phase that is now underway. We received a great response from across all councils and services which will provide us with a wide range of skills and expertise as we progress. We also had a large number of officers sign up for our Leadership Practitioner Forum, with 2 meetings having been held in late 2023.

As we move into 2024, the delivery phase of the Programme has now started with project kick-off meetings being held in late January / early February, for the following projects:

- 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.

Our next Leadership Practitioner Forum is also scheduled to take place on 29th February.

Change Management Support

The Change Management Team continue to provide all councils with support for operational and transformational change. We run our successful change managers network events and have held three events between September and December with representation from 30 councils.

We also provide direct support to councils where required. Support ranges from undertaking research and sharing of best practice; critical friend support on transformation plans; to providing design and facilitation of workshops to support change and transformation.

Organisational Development Local Authority Network

We host virtual events for our Network members every six weeks, bringing colleagues together for sessions on a variety of topics. Recent events included an Open Space session in October where colleagues discussed and shared details of their coaching strategies and activity and their employee wellbeing policies and initiatives, and a joint OD/Change Managers Network event in November which provided an update on the Solace/IS led Transformation work. More than 50 people from 28 councils participated in the sessions, sharing experiences and learning and exploring opportunities for further work together. Details of future 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.

Our Project Manager works with an established Development Group representing Children's Services Planning Partnerships (CSPPs) from across the country to shape the programme of activity over the course of the year. The Development Group will be working with the Project Manager to

co-design a potential in person Network event in 2024 to further promote effective collaborative working.

Participation in the Network 'Link and Learn' sessions continues to attract high levels of engagement with representation from 22 of the 30 CSPPs consistently attending, alongside relevant partner organisations across the third and public sector. During these sessions, connections have developed across local areas whereby CSPPs have shared knowledge, experiences and practice which has been highlighted in survey feedback as being beneficial to delivering WFWF locally. In addition, there have been initial proposals developed for collaborative events to be delivered in conjunction with other programmes and policy areas such as The Promise, UNCRC (Children's Rights), Child Poverty, Trauma-informed care, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and others to support local leads identify the areas of overlap between different programmes of work in the shift towards a more holistic, joined up approach to service design and delivery.

Furthermore, a 'Monthly Mingle' programme is in place which provides a comfortable, informal 'drop in' space specifically for CSPPs to come together each month and discuss emerging themes and continue to share knowledge and strengthen connections.

UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024

In December 2023, the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill and Royal Assent was granted on the 16th of January 2024. The ambition behind the legislation is to build a society which has respect for, protection of and fulfilment of children's human rights. The legislation will bring new duties to Scotland's public bodies to act compatibly with the UNCRC requirements set out in the Act. Public bodies will also have to report every three years on what they are doing to ensure compliance with the compatibility duty and what steps they have taken to secure better or further effect to the rights of children. Non statutory guidance on how to take a children's rights approach has been recently published by the Scottish Government and the consultation on the statutory guidance will take place over a 12 week period from the end of January. The majority of the provisions within the Act will commence in July 2024.

Help and support is available from the Improvement Service to support councils' approach to UNCRC Implementation. Current resources available include:

- ['Getting Ready for the UNCRC Framework'](#) – a guide to preparing your organisation for the Requirements of the Act
- [Understanding the UNCRC for Public Bodies](#)
- [Understanding the UNCRC for Elected Members](#)
- UNCRC Local Government Peer Network open to all local authorities
- [Knowledge Hub Group](#) : Children's Human Rights in Scotland – open to anyone working in children's rights in Scotland
- A range of blogs and papers also available on our [webpages](#)

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

In December, the ELC team ran a datapipeline.scot learning event. 26 local authorities have now signed both elements of the data sharing agreement that allows access to DWP data, enabling them to identify and offer funded ELC to more eligible two-year-olds. This event was very well attended and received, and was an opportunity to celebrate the successes of the project to date, and for

those in attendance to hear from two local authorities about the impact datapipeline.scot has had for them. The [event resource pack](#) is available.

We continue to support with the development of an Outcomes Measurement Framework for ELC in collaboration with councils, COSLA and Scottish Government. This includes undertaking an exercise to develop a concept map of how each outcome might be assessed and exploring existing data that can be fed into the framework.

Protecting People

[Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls](#) - We have supported the Scottish Government and COSLA to refresh the Equally Safe strategy which sets out a joint vision for creating a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected, and where women, children and young people live free from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. Published in December 2023, the refreshed strategy recognises violence against women as a major public health issue and highlights the need to adopt a public health approach to tackling it, which focuses on preventing violence, abuse and exploitation before it occurs wherever possible. Over the coming months, we will be supporting local multi-agency Violence Against Women Partnerships across Scotland to embed the refreshed strategy in their local authority areas and to identify opportunities to take forward improvements to get the best possible outcomes for women, children and young people in local communities.

[Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change: Guidance for Organisations, Systems and Workforces in Scotland](#) - The National Trauma Transformation Programme (NTTP), a partnership between the Improvement Service, the Scottish Government, COSLA, the Resilience Learning Partnership and NHS Education for Scotland, has published a new Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change. The resource is designed to be used flexibly and independently across all sectors of the workforce in Scotland, to help identify and reflect on progress, strengths and opportunities for embedding a trauma-informed and responsive approach across policy and practice. The Roadmap builds on the international evidence base and is the result of collaboration among experts by experience, experts by profession and leaders from across Scotland, recognising that people often inhabit more than one of these roles. Over the coming months we will be supporting local authorities, and their community planning partners, to use the Roadmap to identify opportunities to create trauma-informed systems, services and workforces.

Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme

The [Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme](#) is supporting seven local project towns across Scotland: Alloa, Ayr, Clydebank, Dalkeith, Dunoon, Fraserburgh and Rutherglen. The Programme aims to improve Scotland's wellbeing and reduce inequalities through changing our collective approaches to the places where we live, work and play, enabling partnership-based, wide-ranging action at a local level, while addressing the health of our planet.

Since the Programme commenced, a lot of work has been undertaken in each of the Project Towns and a key part of Phase 1 of the Programme has involved carrying out Place and Wellbeing Assessments in each Project Town.

We've had a busy few months undertaking another five Place and Wellbeing Assessments – taking our total completed to over 30 since the Programme began:

- Clackmannanshire Interim Climate Change strategy (Alloa Project Town)
- Argyll and Bute Economic Strategy (Dunoon Project Town)

- Fraserburgh Beach Front Masterplan (Fraserburgh Project Town)
- Aberdeenshire HSCP Strategic Plan (Fraserburgh Project Town)
- Fraserburgh Primary School Merger (Fraserburgh Project Town)

The reports following these Assessments will be uploaded onto our website soon - you can learn more about our [Place and Wellbeing Assessment process](#). The reports focus on the [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#) and how a more place-based approach can be taken.

Along with the Assessments, we've been continually gathering our impacts from across the 7 Project Towns throughout Phase 1 and sharing these [on our website](#). Read Impact Stories from our [Dunoon Project Town](#) about how our Programme has worked with Police Scotland to discuss the contribution of local policing work to a place and the role of partnership working by the Police in prevention of ill health and reducing inequalities, to the positive impact of taking a data focused approach in our [Fraserburgh Project Town](#).

We've put together a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document to cover the questions we regularly get asked from those interested in the programme such as:

- What is the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme aiming to achieve?
- Why were the seven Project Towns chosen to be part of the Programme?
- What are some common themes which have emerged from our Project Towns?

Employability Partnership - No One Left Behind (NOLB)

With the next phase of [No One Left Behind](#) due to begin in April 2024, we have been busy supporting local government employability leads, their teams and delivery partners, to prepare for this through sharing of best practice and having a better understanding of specialist employability support for those with a disability or long-term health condition.

We have held a series of Capacity Building sessions, with input from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) who shared their experience of an innovative programme of basing employability advisers within health care settings, information from Falkirk Council on their wide range of health and wellbeing support and North Ayrshire Council shared their successes through their Supported Employment offer and innovative triage tool.

We also continue to support local government's voice in various Scottish Government working groups, such as the development of the 2024 – 2027 NOLB strategic plan, finalising the NOLB improvement plan, and reviewing current reporting templates to ensure that data collection fully represents the breadth of employability delivery across the country.

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 11th December covered upcoming policy consultations, interaction with arts and cultural organisations and a discussion with Audit Scotland. Next meeting will be on 6th March), feeding into the forthcoming statutory guidance on climate change duties and supporting the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies officer group.

Work continues in setting up the Climate Intelligence Service, with our partners Edinburgh Climate Change Institute. An update on progress to date was presented at COSLA Environment and Economy Board in December. Procurement of the data platform is due to be completed by the end of March with further user engagement taking place over the next few months.

Public Service Reform

We continue to work with one council in the development of phase 2 of their Child Poverty Pathfinder project. This has involved supporting the development of programme plans, planning, and facilitating workshops with stakeholders from across the community planning partnership.

We are working with another council to support their project to re-design services at a locality level with communities to develop and enhance the networks that work together effectively to prevent, intervene, support, and respond to the needs of residents and communities, with particular attention on how services can better align to be more holistic in how they alleviate poverty.

Digital Public Services

mygovscot myaccount

The mygovscot myaccount platform now has over 2.3 million registered accounts across all 32 local authorities and partner organisations.

We are about to launch a new design of the platform which has taken on feedback from users and stakeholders. Whilst maintaining security, we have simplified the process to create a new account and improved the guidance for users signing in.

We are now displaying your organisation's brand with more prominence to help users understand where they've come from and where they are going next and we are ensuring your citizen's data is more secure than ever by encouraging users to switch on additional security measures (i.e. Two Factor Authentication).

Right to Work powered by mygovscot myaccount

We have been working with myjobscotland and Aberdeenshire Council on a Proof of Concept to enable online Right to Work checks powered by mygovscot myaccount. 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.

The Improvement Service is now live with this service (October 2023), meaning that we can now complete Right to Work checks for our preferred candidates online.

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.

New Artificial Intelligence Policy

As we continue to embrace technological advancements, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the workplace has become increasingly prevalent. Our new AI policy is designed to provide

guidelines on the responsible and secure use of AI tools, promoting productivity and efficiency while ensuring the protection of sensitive information.

Digital Public Services Security Review/Two Factor Authentication

The Improvement Service carried out a review of security controls on mygovscot myaccount to ensure that customer data is well protected from unauthorised access. The addition of controls such as mandatory use of Two Factor Authentication for agent accounts will raise the security of the service and help to protect the confidentiality and integrity of customer data. The review also generated a number of recommendations to further optimise security which will be implemented alongside the mygovscot myaccount redesign work. Further review work is planned to optimise security across the rest of the Digital Public Services portfolio.

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. Over 932,918 applications for all National Entitlement card types have been facilitated through getyournec.scot. Over 294,271 applications have been facilitated in 2023 alone.

Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme (Under 22s)

Approximately 698,849 young people are in possession of a National Entitlement Card to use for free bus travel to access new opportunities while also helping to meet environmental targets.

parentsportal.scot

16 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 1,318 schools, with 180,213 registered parental subscribers securely linked to over 216K approved pupils, with over 40K NEC Cards (to children aged between 5-10) issued via the parentsportal.scot platform.

Data Hub

24 Councils and 8 other public sector organisations (Public Health Scotland, Lothian Valuation Joint Board, Scottish Fire and Rescue, NHSNHS, Scottish Water, Scottish Government ADR Team, Scottish Government Heatmap Team, and Scottish Government GIS Team) have all signed up to use the Data Hub platform.

dcn.scot

All 32 Councils continue to use dcn.scot, Scotland's National Dog Control Database. Launched in February 2022, the service is also used by Police Scotland.

Datapipline.scot

Datapipline.scot launched in May 2023. It enables the secure transfer of data about early learning and childcare eligibility between the Scottish Government and local authorities.

All 3-and 4-year-olds in Scotland are eligible for 1140 hours of funded early learning and childcare (ELC), along with some 2-year-olds who meet eligibility criteria targeting children facing the most disadvantage. In most cases, this is because their parents receive a qualifying benefit.

For further information on Datapipline.scot and how this works, please visit the [IS website](#).

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Data and Intelligence

Tell Me Scotland

We commenced a redevelopment and relaunch of the public service notices website Tell Me Scotland. The site will be refreshed to create a more user-friendly experience for both local authority users and the general public. A demo site was developed and presented to the Improvement Service Change Board in December 2023. Further user acceptance testing is currently underway with the goal of relaunching the site in Spring 2024.

Local Heat Energy Efficiency Strategy

Our Spatial Information Service is now actively supporting the Local Heat Energy Efficiency Strategy work across local government by improving the way that Building Assessment Report is created and maintained. This ensures that such data can be used for much wider purposes in the future by more organisations and programmes.

Digital Planning

We supported Scottish Government on the Data Mission as part of the Digital Transformation of Planning. We also worked in collaboration with Historic Environment Scotland, comparing conservation area data with planning authority datasets to ensure that the authoritative version is maintained and made available to users.

The national planning application dataset has also been reviewed and enhanced and published on the Spatial Hub, maximising the usage and exposure of the valuable information.

One Scotland Gazetteer and National Street Gazetteer

Our Spatial Information Service recently met with all the Scottish local authorities on a 1-2-1 basis and drew up a list of recommended actions as well discussing the best approaches to support data custodians moving forward.

The Team continues to work with the Scottish Government's Data Standards team relating to supporting the wider public sector on how to implement geospatial data capture methods that will allow organisations to better utilise data sources, including using the One Scotland Gazetteer webservices for data capture and verification.

Storm Babet also brought into focus the need for local authorities to create a Persons at Risk Database and we have since been approached by Angus Council for assistance to implement.

Our Spatial Information Service capped off the year with the annual Community event which was attended by over 100 members from Scottish local authorities. The event was headlined by the Scottish Emergency Services, underlining the partnership that has been in place for over a decade.

Cloud Connector Framework

Two more local authorities have now gone live with the Planning & Building Standards Cloud Connector Framework, taking the total number of authorities supplying this key data to IS to 33 for planning and 32 for building standards. This was coupled with an increase in frequency of data provision too; with 30 local authorities moving from a weekly supply of Planning & Building Standards data to a daily upload – representing an exemplar in public sector data sharing.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The annual LGBF Report will be published in February 2024. 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.

As part of the LGBF Board's commitment to develop and deliver a more assertive approach to sector-led improvement, we have received the support of the IS Board and Solace to introduce an approach to Peer Collaborative Improvement, positioning LGBF as a key cornerstone. 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. Following approval by COSLA Leaders in January 2024, we shall pilot this approach using the LGBF to facilitate deep dives into areas of critical policy importance, aligned to the VHA priorities, to promote where progress is being made and identify where there are opportunities for improvement, and importantly tying in a new offer of Peer Collaborative Improvement to support and drive change.

Local Government Data Platform

Following endorsement of the [Phase 1 Recommendations](#) by Solace and COSLA Leaders, a delivery plan for Phase 2 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 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 co-ordination.
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 info@improvementservice.org.uk | www.improvementservice.org.uk |  follow us: @improvserv

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 (CIPB)

We are continuing to support the CIPB in their 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 CIPB 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 CIPB has identified a series of local and national actions to unblock barriers limiting progress and help community planning fulfil its potential.

The CIPB Action Plan outlines the commitment of CIPB 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 CIPB, there are a number of national actions which are essential to the progress of this work. These 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.

The CIPB has also responded to the recommendations identified by the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee inquiry into Community Planning, highlighting four themes where further emphasis would be helpful. These include: resourcing for Community Planning; streamlining accountability arrangements; skillsets and resourcing for meaningful community engagement; and the role of the Third Sector.

The Chair of the CIPB (Greg Colgan, Chief Executive, Dundee City Council) has sought support from 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.

A CPIB newsletter will be shared with CPP stakeholders in early 2024, and further regular updates will be circulated following quarterly CPIB meetings. Updates will also be 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 eleventh annual [Instrumental Music Survey Report](#) was published in December. The results showed that the impact of the pandemic is largely in the past, with a very large increase in pupil participation. This increase in participation also reflected the impact of the removal of fees, as agreed by COSLA and the Scottish Government in 2021. Local authorities continue to take steps to ensuring that their services are more inclusive and engage with as many schools and pupils across their areas as possible. Although the services remain popular, costs were very high and staffing levels remain historically low, meaning services are likely to be stretched to meet demand in future years. A new [dashboard](#) was also launched this year, providing access to all current and historic results.

A draft report has also been produced for the Common Advice Performance Management Reporting Framework, based on data collected from all local authorities about money and welfare rights advice services. The report will be published early in the new year and provides a picture of the support provided by local authority advice services and their impact over time. The provisional results show an increase in the volume of clients seeking and receiving advice, perhaps indicating greater levels of financial insecurity due to the pandemic and cost of living crisis. Advice clients were often from the most vulnerable groups, including those with lower incomes. Results also show the large financial gain achieved for clients at over £330 million or £12 for every £1 invested.

We are continuing to work with the PhD researcher at the University of Stirling who is co-funded by the Improvement Service. The research has now moved onto the fieldwork stage with several case study local authorities identified. These case studies focus on a range of ways that data is used by local authorities to communicate with and empower communities to understand and improve their local areas. As the work progresses, we will develop and share case studies, blogs, and other outputs to inform best practice on an ongoing basis.

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.