

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 2024 and key business plan developments.

IS Board Update

Finance, Operations and HR Update

The Board noted that total operational funding secured during 2023/24 was £11,940,069. The Board approved our new Flexible Retirement Guidance.

IS Audit Committee

The Board noted that the Audit Committee agreed that the IS Chief Executive should write to the Scottish Government in relation to our Section 33 VAT application, to confirm that the IS is exempt from corporation tax and advise that the IS is delivering services on behalf of all 32 councils.

The Board noted discussions at the recent Audit Committee meeting in relation to our Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery arrangements and the agreement that the IS Chief Executive will write to all Council Chief Executives to advise them of the robustness of these arrangements.

The Board approved that a functionality test is carried out across the portfolio of IS products/services to allow for a more accurate provision required for redundancy to be agreed. This will allow us not to have unnecessary funding tied up in reserves which could be spent on improvement work.

The Board agreed that Paul Manning, the IS Board member nominated by Solace, replaces Angela Scott on the Audit Committee when she steps down from the Board in September.

High Level Strategic Performance Dashboard

The Board approved the design of a mock-up high-level strategic performance dashboard and agreed to the development of two dashboards – one that will be presented to the Board on an annual basis in September, which includes a comparison of the IS' annual performance against key indicators and one presented on a quarterly basis, which includes quarterly performance information where available.

Measuring Our Impact

The Board approved a methodology to be used to illustrate the social value/cost benefit of key IS products, services, projects and programmes, and noted that this was tested with three key areas of work:

- Violence Against Women and Girls project, which is part of the Protecting People programme.
- Sub Council Area Population Projections, which is a product delivered by our research team.
- Processing the Under 22 Free Bus Travel Card, which is a key part of our online national entitlement card application process (getyournec.scot).

The Board agreed that we should include key elements of our impact analysis in our Annual Report 2024 and on an ongoing basis thereafter, and include key cost-benefit figures in our ongoing communications with local authorities, funders and key partners to continue to evidence our value and the contribution we make.

The Board noted that we will continue to promote social value/cost benefit analysis as a 'paid for' service, as part of our [Evaluation Offer](#) which the Board agreed in March 2024.

Planning Hub

The Board discussed the potential role of the IS in hosting the proposed Planning Hub. The Board agreed that we should take soundings from key stakeholders (HOPS, COSLA, SOLACE and the Key Agencies Group) to ascertain the appetite for the Planning Hub, to discuss any issues raised and to test if the IS is seen as an appropriate lead agency on its practice and CPD role. It was also agreed that officers should engage with Scottish Government now that the consultation has been completed to discuss their proposed way forward and any envisaged role for the IS. A further report will be presented to the Board after these discussions to agree next steps.

Climate Change

The Board discussed the future IS role in providing support to councils in regard to Climate Change, noting the positive developments to date and the establishment of the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service. The Board agreed that it will be helpful for the IS to continue to provide a wider improvement role in climate change transformation, and asked officers to speak to councils and key partners to ascertain what types of support would be most helpful.

Local Government Workforce Report 2024

The Board noted the Local Government Workforce Report 2024 and the links with other IS programmes, and approved the opportunities for further IS work to support the delivery of the report's recommendations. The report will be launched at the Solace Scotland Annual Conference.

Chief Executive Performance Appraisal

The Board endorsed the Chief Executive's action plan and personal development plan for 2024/25.

Key Business Plan Updates

Transformation, Performance and Improvement

Elected Member Briefing Notes

Following the General Election, we will be publishing elected member briefing notes on the following topics:

- The Social Determinants of Mental Health.
- How to be an Effective Community Leader in an Emergency.
- Hate Crime and Public Order Act (Scotland).

These will be sent to elected members via our mailing list after the General Election, and then again in post-recess.

Solace/IS Transformation Programme

The [local government transformation programme](#) was launched by Solace Scotland and the Improvement Service at the end of 2022, and since that time we have been working together with partners and volunteers across local government and the wider public sector to put our ideas into action. You can [read more on progress](#). The implementation phase of the Programme is well underway with the project teams meeting on a regular basis. 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.

Each project is being managed by a Project Sponsor and Project Director.

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 on 12th June on Local Government workforce issues, including a focus on the implications of digital transformation on the workforce.

Change Management Support

The Change Management Team continue to provide all councils with support for operational and transformational change. Our latest Change Manager's Network event was held on Tuesday 25 June. The June session provided an update on the Solace/IS Transformation Programme and covered project progress to date and what the direction of travel is looking like. We also provide direct support to councils where required, for example, we will be delivering an in person workshop in July for a range of colleagues in one council on Supporting Effective Change.

Local Government Connect Network

The Improvement Service is launching an exciting new networking opportunity - The Local Government Connect Network. The network is designed to bring together professionals in the early stages of their local government career and promote collaboration across all 32 Scottish local authorities and local government partner organisations. It will encourage professional connections and provide opportunities for personal and professional development through a mix of online and in person events and mentorship opportunities.

Following approval from the Solace Scotland branch in November 2023, we have been working hard to establish and raise awareness of the network. We held an engagement session on 30th April, to provide more information, advise key next steps and give those interested in the network a chance to ask questions. There was a great turnout, and we received positive feedback from prospective members and mentors.

Following this session, we invited each local authority and partner organisation's Chief Executive to nominate up to five members and up to five mentors to join and support The Local Government Connect Network by 31st May. The uptake of nominations so far has been incredibly positive, and it is great to see the level of interest and support for the Local Government Connect Network across all councils. The next step is pairing mentors and mentees and hosting our first event.

Organisational Development Local Authority Network

We host virtual events for our OD Network members every six weeks, bringing colleagues together for sessions on a variety of topics. There was an Open Space session in April, and in June a key topic session which focused on leadership development. Thanks to colleagues from Fife Health & Social Care Partnership and Scottish Prison Service for excellent presentations on their leadership programmes. 34 colleagues from 21 councils participated in the sessions.

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

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

Our ELC team recently published the first two documents in a series of 'myth-busting' materials.

- The [Local Authority Early Learning and Childcare Finance guide](#) intends to explain the background to the funding of Early Learning and Childcare provision as administered and delivered by local authorities.
- [Local Authorities' Role as Guarantor of Quality in Early Learning and Childcare](#) intends to summarise the role of local authorities as overarching "Guarantors of Quality" as defined in the National Standard.

An updated [Elected Member Early Learning and Childcare: Sustainable Rates 2024-25 briefing note](#) has also been published, to raise awareness of how the commitment for childcare workers delivering funded ELC in private and third sector services, including childcare to be paid at least £12 per hour from April 2024, will be delivered through the sustainable rate setting process in 2024/25.

Protecting People

Implementing Safe & Together in Scotland

Following the publication of the [Implementing Safe & Together in Scotland: Creating Domestic Abuse-Informed Systems, Services and Workforces year two learning report](#) earlier this year, we hosted a learning event in Spring 2024 to bring together stakeholders across Scotland with a role

to play in improving outcomes for children and families experiencing domestic abuse. The event was an opportunity for attendees to learn more about the Safe & Together model, explore links to other key priorities being advanced locally and nationally, and consider how we can move forward with a more joined up approach to person-centred and domestic-abuse informed systems and services.

[Videos of all the speakers and presentations](#) are available to view, along with an action note from the event. [A library of case studies](#) showcasing how the Safe & Together model is being implemented in different local authority areas is also available.

Equally Safe Bulletin

In April 2024, we began developing and disseminating the Scottish Government's Equally Safe Bulletin. This is a monthly newsletter that provides updates from the Scottish Government and partners on work taking place to progress [Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women And Girls \(VAWG\)](#), along with news, research, resources, events and training that may be of interest to professionals working to improve outcomes for women, children and young people affected by violence, abuse and exploitation in Scotland.

If you wish you can [subscribe to this bulletin](#) and receive it direct to your inbox. You can also read the [most recent issue](#).

Adopting a Trauma Informed Approach

We will be undertaking a programme of communications activities over the summer to promote learning from local authorities and partners around embedding a trauma-informed approach. This includes: (i) publishing and hosting a launch event for a national learning report that pulls together learning around progress and impact from local authorities and partners over the last three years; (ii) a summer spotlight communications campaign sharing our existing resources, local learning and key messages, with a focus on progress, achievement and successes; and (iii) a webinar to support professionals to learn more about the [Roadmap](#), how they can use it to support self-assessment, and share learning about how some organisations have been using the Roadmap.

United National Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Are you UNCRC ready? The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 comes into effect in Scotland on 16 July 2024. This new legislation marks a strengthening of the protection of the human rights of children and young people across Scotland. [Find out what's required from public bodies and how we can help.](#)

Employability Partnership - No One Left Behind (NOLB)

This quarter saw the annual SLAED People Conference take place in Stirling on May 15th and 16th, with over 100 Employability Leads and delivery officers from across all 32 local authorities and Scottish Government Employability colleagues coming together to shape priorities for the year ahead and share good practice.

The first day was jointly introduced by Ruth Cooper, Chair of the SLAED People Group and Claire Renton, Depute Director of the SG Employability Division, who laid out the achievements and ambitions of No One Left Behind (NOLB) to date. Further sessions focussed on data and reporting, partnership working, improvement and key updates from relevant policy areas including Child Poverty, Lifelong Learning and Skills and Public Health Scotland. Day two was for local government colleagues only and started with a presentation on a piece of research around supported

employment that was carried out in Shetland, with a series of conclusions and recommendations that resonated with all.

The thematic workshops over the rest of the day, presented by colleagues from across the country included: Using lived experience in service design; The role of key workers- training and quality assurance; Local approaches to NOLB service standards, Customer charter and Key Delivery Indicators, Parental Employability Support Activities; and How good is your LEP?

A key takeaway from the conference was a desire to bring other partners such as Department for Work and Pensions, Skills Development Scotland, Developing Young Workforce, business representatives and the Third Sector together to align priorities and share good practice around employability development and delivery, so plans are in place to progress this later in the year.

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 12th June covered work with Scottish Government on Scope 3 emissions, an update on Public Bodies Climate Change Reports and upcoming work by Audit Scotland and Adaptation Scotland) and supporting the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies officer group.

Recruitment has now taken place for the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service with training for local authority climate change officers on the ClimateView platform due to take place towards the end of the summer.

Public Service Reform

Our Public Service Reform team presented at the Scottish Leaders Forum lunchtime learning webinar, led by the Office of Chief Social Policy Advisor Prof. Linda Bauld, in collaboration with The Corra Foundation & the Improvement Service.

Covid-19 served to create the conditions that led to a unique period of experimentation in the design and delivery of public services. In November 2023, the Covid-19 Learning and Evaluation Oversight group published a report: 'Learning to inform Scotland's recovery from COVID-19'. This report synthesised evidence from evaluations of Covid-19 interventions and a series of workshops with senior leaders from across Scotland.

The Covid Learning Webinar was run by the authors of this report, in collaboration with The Corra Foundation and the Improvement Service, to highlight and operationalise the key finding around themes such as trust, collaboration and partnership working, risk and accountability and equality and inclusion.

Community Planning

We welcomed our new Community Planning Project Officer into post, in early May. As part of the Public Service Reform team, the Project Officer will work collaboratively both internally, and with Scottish Government and Local Authorities, and is responsible for:

- Performing the secretariat role for the Scottish Community Planning Network.
- Gathering the Network's advice, opinion, and influence on Scottish Government policy and

representation of Community Planning Managers on other national groups and projects.

- Collation and analysis of Local Outcome Improvement Plans and Locality Plans, identifying, documenting, and sharing exemplar practice.
- Pre-legislative horizon scanning to identify all future policy that may impact on the work of Community Planning Managers.
- Working collaboratively with other Programmes in the Improvement Service to drive forward joint delivery of action across disciplines and sectors, understanding how Community Planning is affected by and can impact other policy areas.

June saw the first meeting of the Scottish Community Planning Network (SCPN) in 2024. Over 45 colleagues attended both in person at COSLA Conference Centre and online via MS Teams, to hear from a panel of expert presenters covering topics ranging from an articulation of the support for Community Planning from the Scottish Government and Improvement Service, to a proposal for a National CPP self-assessment, including reflections from East Ayrshire to a deep dive on the Enabling Local Change – Place and Wellbeing Programme. [A summary of the event](#), including presentations can be viewed.

A dedicated Community Planning mailbox has also recently been established.

Digital Public Services

[mygovscot myaccount](#)

mygovscot myaccount underpins several of the products and services delivered by the Digital Public Services team. It is used by all Scottish Local Authorities and has over 2.4 million account holders, meaning that over 50% of the eligible Scottish population have now signed up for a mygovscot myaccount, the easy way to access Scottish public services online.

[Right to Work powered by mygovscot myaccount](#)

The Right to Work service, which is powered by mygovscot myaccount, is now live with COSLA, the Improvement Service and Robert Gordon University.

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.

[tellmescotland.gov.uk](#)

We are pleased to announce that a new and improved [tellmescotland site](#) is now live, which is more accessible, user-friendly and has a fresh new look and feel. The site has also been recently brought in-house to the Improvement Service.

[parentsportal.scot](#)

19 Local Authorities are live with the platform and continue to promote the service to its parents. A further 3 Local Authorities are in the process of onboarding. The service is now available in 1,422 schools, with over 207K registered parental subscribers securely linked to over 253K approved pupils, with over 48K 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.

We have recently hit a massive milestone with the getyournec.scot platform as over 1 million applications for all National Entitlement card types have now been facilitated through getyournec.scot since July 2020. 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

Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

The [LGBF Dashboard](#) now publishes data releases on a monthly basis, to provide Councils with access to more timely data. 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. For example, we are working with a number of Councils to develop locally bespoke versions of the LGBF Dashboard which present a basket of LGBF measures aligned to local Council plans, for example, and allow for the inclusion of local narrative to provide context for the data trends and outline planned improvement action where appropriate. The LGBF Board are continuing to evolve the suite of LGBF measures to reflect policy priorities which are of critical importance to Local Government, including Climate Change and Financial Sustainability. We are continuing to work with the Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) to further expand 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 the progress of Councils. We have already added measures on Electricity, Transport and Natural Gas Emissions and are undertaking development work with SSN to improve the underpinning data quality of the Corporate and Waste Emissions indicators to allow future inclusion. We are also working with the Directors of Finance to explore which areas of financial sustainability would benefit from a stronger focus within the LGBF, and whether there would, for example, be value in including additional measures which focus on areas such as the use of reserves to balance budgets, and the percentage of savings achieved.

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. COSLA colleagues are also involved and play a key role in linking local practice to the development of national policy. 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. It is expected that the pilot will conclude later this year and will be fully evaluated to identify the benefits provided by this approach, and to learn how we might refine and improve the methodology used, before identifying next steps in terms of further pilots and wider roll out.

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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 Louise Long, Solace and Jane O'Donnell, COSLA, and involves the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, IS, Public Health Scotland and Scottish Government. Phase 2 of this project focusses 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 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 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. This newsletter has been circulated to the Chairs of all CPP Boards across Scotland as well as Community Planning partner organisations. 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) met with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, the Minister for Public Finance, and the COSLA President in June 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 Board endorsed the Improvement Service Research Plan for 2024/25 at its June meeting. The plan has been developed together with IS colleagues and other partners including COSLA.

Projects included within the plan that we are currently working on include:

- A report exploring the latest demographic trends as included within the Census, the implications of these, and good practice in developing policy responses from Scotland and internationally.
- A survey on behalf of the Scottish Government exploring the workforce's views and attitudes to trauma and the National Trauma Transformation Programme.
- Exploring cost factors associated with "islandness".
- Supporting preparation of a SPDS/Solace report on workforce planning, which is due to be published later this year.

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

Evaluation

Our [second evaluation report](#) on the Place Based Investment Programme - Direct Grants has now been published. The report contains evidence of the impact created by the funding. It also includes case studies from Aberdeen, Argyll & Bute, Clackmannanshire, and North Lanarkshire Councils.

The findings from the evaluation of the Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships 'Test and Learn Programme' funded by Scottish Government will be presented at an event in COSLA on Wednesday 21st August.

We are currently exploring ways of measuring and monetising the impact of activities within the IS and the local government family.

Following interest in our evaluation offer and the open session we held on 'Preparing a Logic Model' we are planning a series of evaluation themed webinars over the next six months.

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.