

Solace/IS Transformation Programme

Progress Report April 2026



Purpose of the report

Scotland's councils continue to back a single, collective, sector-led approach to transformation, led by Solace Scotland and supported by the Improvement Service. The programme is focused on delivering sustainable services, efficiencies and better outcomes for communities. It combines a growing evidence base on Public Service Reform (PSR) with practical projects that unlock short-term improvements while building the foundations for longer-term change.

The programme originates from the system wide blueprint first presented at the Solace Scotland Conference in 2022 and formalised in 2023 with Chief Executive level sponsorship. The Accounts Commission's 2024 report recognised the programme's potential and challenged the sector to strengthen delivery plans, timelines and measures — momentum that has been taken forward through 2025/26.

The Transformation Programme has been deliberately shaped in response to the challenges consistently highlighted through national audit work, including the need for greater clarity of purpose, increased pace and scale of change, strengthened leadership capacity, and more effective use of collective mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of local government. While recognising differences in local context and readiness for change, the programme provides a shared national framework through which councils can progress transformation in a coherent and proportionate manner balancing ambition with realism in the face of sustained capacity and financial pressures. The approach taken reflects a conscious shift away from one-off initiatives towards building enduring national assets, leadership capability and system conditions that enable prevention-focused, outcome-driven reform. In doing so, the programme seeks to move from incremental improvement to sustained system change, offering assurance that the sector is not only responding to the findings of national scrutiny, but actively shaping a collective, evidence-informed pathway for transformation across Scottish local government.

The programme comprises three closely connected workstreams that collectively support the sector's reform ambitions:

1. an officer-led conversation on public service reform
2. short-term local government transformation projects
3. focused leadership development

Together, these phases recognise that while transformation is the objective, targeted change activity is essential to reduce risk, build momentum and support councils to move from intent to sustained system-level reform.

The programme therefore distinguishes between transformational outcomes - such as strengthened leadership capacity, prevention-focused reform and new system conditions - and the practical change activity required to build toward those outcomes in a credible and deliverable way.

Programme Theory of Change – at a Glance

The SOLACE / IS Transformation Programme is designed to deliver **system-wide reform**, not a collection of disconnected change initiatives. Its theory of change recognises that sustainable transformation must be **sequenced, collective and proportionate** to the capacity pressures facing councils.

The programme therefore progresses through three linked phases:



Build the conditions for change

Establish a shared evidence base, develop common national assets, and strengthen leadership capability and confidence across the sector. This phase prioritises alignment, learning and capacity-building to ensure transformation is credible, rather than fragmented or short-lived.



Accelerate collective action on shared challenges

Once challenges are well understood, the programme focuses on targeted activity where scale and collaboration add most value. Short-term projects and pilots are used to deliver tangible improvements now, while testing approaches that can be scaled or adopted across the sector.



Embed, assure and scale a new operating model

As national assets mature and duplication is reduced, the programme supports councils to redirect capacity toward prevention, outcomes and partnership working. Common approaches to self-evaluation and assurance strengthen transparency, accountability and shared learning, enabling change to be sustained and spread.

The programme recognises that **different elements of transformation progress at different speeds**. While some activity must move quickly to address immediate pressures, other aspects - such as leadership behaviours, culture and system alignment - require sustained effort over time. This balanced approach is intended to maximise the likelihood of lasting reform and avoid pursuing pace at the expense of impact.

At a glance: 2025/26 highlights

All 32 councils committed to the programme through the Solace Scotland Branch, with monthly progress reporting now routine.

Tackling Cause Not Symptoms published.

Engagement with professional organisations commenced to inform areas for change and develop reform propositions.

National Self-Evaluation Framework launched in May 2026.

Development of a national platform for managing unpaid work administration agreed, with 11 early adopter councils.

Digital “To-Be” State for local government set out in Local Government Rewired, with the associated implementation framework in development.

Shared services project developed from the Improvement Service research on collaborative working.

Single Point of Contact network established, ensuring each council has a named senior lead with oversight of involvement in the programme.

£700k financial commitment from all 32 councils to support delivery.

Duties and Powers dynamic portal live.

First change proposition underway: trialling an online approach to Public Information Notices.

Mapping of digital assets for the sector underway (publication planned summer 2026).

Feasibility study on the development of a national shared service for blue badge administration completed.

Contract Hub for waste management established with 10 contracts in place; bulky waste collaboration exploration underway.

11 Leadership Practitioner Forum events delivered, with 130+ participants.

Workstream 1: Public Service Reform (PSR)

Ambition

In setting out a clear rationale for public service reform, Christie (2011) highlighted the need to prioritise expenditure on public services that prevent negative outcomes from arising. A collective, coordinated and less fragmented public service approach was presented as essential to breaking cycles of deprivation, reducing demand and tackling deep-rooted inequalities at source. Fifteen years on, these messages remain highly relevant. In Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy (2025), the Minister for Public Finance recognised that Christie's vision has not been delivered to its full potential. The Strategy also highlights declining public satisfaction, duplication and a lack of progress on prevention, and seeks to increase the scale and pace of change to build a system that improves lives, reduces inequality and is fiscally sustainable.

Chief Executives are united in the view that some of the most immediate and high-impact opportunities for reform lie within children and families' services particularly in tackling child poverty and strengthening the role of active communities. Beginning in this area offers the greatest scope for prevention and for addressing root causes rather than symptoms, consistent with Christie's call for a decisive shift towards preventative, person-centred public services. This focus is reinforced by a growing pipeline of pilot initiatives centred on children, families and community-led approaches, demonstrating appetite and readiness for preventative reform at scale.

This workstream represents the programme's primary transformational lever, establishing the shared evidence base, reform narrative and system-level choices required to shift local government from transactional service responses toward prevention, early intervention and improved outcomes.

What we have delivered

This workstream is focused on building the evidence and shared understanding required to enable reform choices and credible change pathways.

- The first publication, *Tackling Cause Not Symptoms*, provides an overview of Scotland's public sector landscape, key "state of the nation" statistics, and commentary on the current and future state of Scotland's finances. It also sets out the scale of inequalities in the social determinants of health. Its purpose is to support and challenge thinking around a roadmap for public service reform, including the scope for wider integrated working, shared service delivery options and potential longer-term target operating models.

What we have delivered cont...

- A second evidence report is in development to strengthen understanding of the current local government landscape and identify tangible opportunities to advance public service reform within operational complexities. It is intended to raise awareness of the pressures facing the sector and highlight where decisive action will be taken by Solace Scotland.

What next

Local government has a central role to play in progressing public service reform, contributing leadership, expertise and delivery capacity in partnership with other public sector organisations to realise the commitments set out through the programme's evidence base and emerging reform propositions.

“

“The preventative approach to health outcomes called for by Christie are absolutely essential if Scottish public services are to remain financially sustainable.”

[Tackling Cause Not Symptoms Report](#)

”

Workstream 2: Short-term projects that provide the building blocks for Public Service Reform

This workstream focuses on targeted change activity designed to enable public service reform rather than constitute transformation in its own right. The projects address shared operational challenges where collaboration can reduce duplication, remove friction and release capacity. Collectively, they provide practical learning, confidence and national assets that support councils to engage in more complex, longer-term transformational change.

Duties and Powers

Ambition

This project is a foundational change intervention, strengthening the evidence and legislative clarity required to support future reform choices and system redesign. There is currently no common register of local government’s duties and powers. Several local authorities have carried out mapping activity in recent years, underlining the perceived value of developing this picture. However, these outputs were typically static and became outdated, often lacked analysis or interpretation to support a shared understanding, and had limited linkage to other relevant legislation and policy areas—reducing their usefulness for effective implementation. The project therefore sought to provide a single, up-to-date and dynamic view for all local authorities, reducing duplication and creating a common foundation for reform. The common register can be utilised as the starting point to enable sector-led insights to identify where change may be required.

What we have delivered

A single dynamic register of local government statutory duties and powers to provide a “spine” for developing a pipeline of change propositions that are evidence-led, options-appraised and sequenced for feasible delivery.

Commenced engagement with professional organisations to validate key challenges and inform the development of reform propositions.

What we have delivered cont...

Initiated the first tangible action linked to a statutory duty: exploring alternative approaches to publishing Public Information Notices. Work is underway with several councils to test publishing online through the Tell Me Scotland portal, reflecting modern communications practices and citizen expectations.

What next

Develop sector-led change propositions structured around a clear challenge question, options appraisal, interdependencies and a recommended path—building confidence and pace. For example, the statutory duty to publish Public Information Notices solely in the press no longer reflects modern communications. The programme has engaged with Scottish Government and made an “ask” to modernise this legislation to enable more relevant and efficient approaches aligned with digital capability and public expectations.

“

“The portal is an important part of the wider Local Government Transformation Programme led by SOLACE Scotland. By clearly setting out the legal responsibilities that shape council activity, it supports more joined-up and realistic transformation.”

Hannah Brown, Transformation Project Manager at the Improvement Service.

”

Collaborative Procurement

Ambition

To utilise procurement as a tool for transformation, delivering savings, cost avoidance and efficiencies through standard specifications, regional models and improved ways of working. This project is supported by Scotland Excel.

What we have delivered

The project is focusing on the service areas of **waste** and **fleet**, with extensive engagement across subject matter experts during the discovery phase to ensure problem identification is informed by credible operational insights.

- **Waste:** A centralised contract hub covering aspects of waste management has been launched to improve cross-council contract coordination. Discovery work is now underway to scope options for collaborative contracts to transform the delivery of bulky waste services.
- **Fleet:** The portal used to procure vehicles is being modernised. Work is also underway to assess the feasibility of developing a standard vehicle specification, beginning with electric vans (under 3.5 tonnes) as a test case for change.

What next

Following completion of the work on waste and fleet, the project will turn its focus to collaborative procurement on digital. The approach will then be scaled to other areas once benefits have been demonstrated.

Crerar – Towards proportionate scrutiny and self-improving systems

Ambition

The Crerar review had the potential to make a real difference to coordination of scrutiny and to reducing the burden on local authorities. Over time, momentum behind its aspirations has diminished, and in some cases stalled. As a result, the scrutiny landscape has become increasingly cluttered, uncoordinated and burdensome—at significant cost to both local and national government. This project aims to take action towards a more proportionate and affordable model of scrutiny, with clear assumptions and a focus on creating self-improving systems at a local level.

What we have delivered

The implementation of Crerar is a cornerstone of the Solace/IS Transformation Programme. A **Self-Evaluation Framework for Scottish Local Government** has been developed through intensive sector engagement and endorsed by all 32 local authority Chief Executives. The framework is designed to strengthen and standardise self-evaluation practice across local government, supporting a more proportionate, risk-based approach to scrutiny and helping reduce scrutiny burden. The framework is planned to go live in May 2026, with national implementation work to follow.

What next

The next steps during 2026/27 will be to work with four local authorities to pilot the National Self-Evaluation Framework and develop the sector's approach through shared learning and support. The aim is for all councils to reach a consistent standard by April 2027.

Digital “To-Be” State for Scottish Local Government

Ambition

To develop a shared vision and implementation strategy for the sector’s digital future, ensuring the infrastructure and capabilities are in place to help councils increase the pace of digital transformation and support the ambitions of the National Digital Strategy. The Digital “To-Be” State describes what a digitally enabled council could look like. Rather than focusing on the journey, it defines the destination—how digital innovation can transform services, empower communities and improve outcomes. A White Paper has been drafted through collaboration with a broad range of professional groups to set out this shared vision.

What we have delivered

- Development of the White Paper – Local Government Rewired. Through targeted workshops, local government officers have provided insights to inform the associated Implementation Framework. An Executive Summary has been produced outlining the framework’s purpose, benefits and structure. Guiding principles have also been developed, alongside a practical template for conducting “landscape reviews”.
- Mapping of the sector’s digital asset landscape is underway and is planned for publication in summer 2026.

What next

Complete the Implementation Framework for the Digital “To-Be” State - providing a practical toolkit to help local authorities translate the shared digital vision into delivery. The framework will include the following topics:

- a **Design Manual** (how digital solutions should be created)
- a **Delivery Manual** (how programmes and projects should be executed)
- a **Delivery Plan** (timelines and priorities)
- a **Monitoring Framework** (how progress and impact will be tracked)

Digital Shared Services

Ambition

To demonstrate the value and feasibility of shared digital service models while building a pipeline of further opportunities.

What we have delivered

- A 16-week feasibility study with 23 councils has been completed on developing a national platform to administer blue badge applications.
- An 8-week proof of concept explored the development of a national digital platform for facilitating unpaid work following Community Payback Orders. The proof of concept demonstrated technical viability and the potential to replace fragmented spreadsheet-based and manual processes with a secure, standardised approach.

What next

Deliver the national unpaid work squad management platform to a group of 11 early adopter councils.

Explore opportunities to implement the recommendations emerging from the Blue Badge Feasibility Study.

Shared Services

Ambition

To build a national picture of shared services across local government, identify opportunities to scale and support local, regional and national (“once for 32”) service models, drawing on the Improvement Service research on collaborative working in Scottish local government.

What we have delivered

Launched in December 2025, with discovery work underway. This includes links to existing regional work such as the Invest to Save collaboration between Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling Councils, and activity under development across North, South and East Ayrshire Councils.

What next

Refine and progress the development of local, regional and “once for 32” models, including business case activity for national approaches. Continue expanding regional scoping across areas such as fleet, revenues and benefits, alongside regional summits to explore “art of the possible” opportunities in procurement, economic development and waste management. Emerging activity across Ayrshire and the Forth Valley Invest to Save work will continue to inform future planning.

Workstream 3: Leadership capacity and programme enablement

Ambition

To deliver a complex programme of sector-wide transformation, it is critical to build capacity from within. This workstream provides the critical bridge between change activity and transformation, ensuring that leadership capability, confidence and behaviours evolve alongside delivery so that progress can be sustained and scaled.

What we have delivered

Single Point of Contact (SPOC) network

Each Council Chief Executive has appointed a senior leader as the council's single point of contact for engagement with the programme. The role is expected to operate as a two-way conduit—feeding locally aligned activity into the programme and ensuring programme asks are taken back into the organisation to support collective working.

Leadership Practitioner Forum (LPF)

The Leadership Practitioner Forum is a network for aspiring Chief Executives, Directors and Heads of Service, led and supported by the Improvement Service with input from current local authority Chief Executives. It is led by Pippa Milne, Chief Executive of Argyll and Bute Council and Solace Scotland Portfolio Lead for Leadership. Events focus on the transformation programme workstreams and provide opportunities for participants to contribute to programme delivery.

Forum members can expect to:

- capitalise on professional agency and lead courageously
- generate ideas and energy for the programme's workstreams
- build collective solutions
- contribute to and shape delivery projects
- network and build relationships across councils

What we have delivered cont...

The Forum includes 130+ participants across the sector. Since inception in 2024, 11 events have been delivered, providing a trusted environment for reflection, peer support and practical contribution into programme projects (including procurement, statutory services and Crerar).

What next

Embedding transformation skills across the current and future workforce is critical to sustaining progress. Through the Leadership Practitioner Forum, these skills are being developed through practical learning opportunities alongside thought-provoking inputs. The Chief Executive Working Group has also indicated that more can be done, particularly to address risk aversion and fear of failure. Strengthening the transformation skill set of leaders and aspiring leaders will be fundamental to embedding a culture that is confident, adaptive and prepared for complex change. This work is being progressed through the Solace workforce portfolio and the Local Government Workforce Board.



Email:
transformation@improvementservice.org.uk
www.improvementservice.org.uk

Email:
contactsolace@solace.org.uk
www.solace.org.uk/branches/branch_scotland/

