

F.A.O. Ms Burgess MSP  
Scottish Parliament  
(by email)

28<sup>th</sup> August 2025

Dear Ms Burgess MSP

**Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee pre-budget scrutiny**

I am responding to your letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> July 2025, which requested information to inform the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee's pre-budget scrutiny of the 2026-2027 Scottish Budget.

There is a range of evidence available which demonstrates how local authorities have been transforming service delivery locally, regionally, nationally and with partners. For example, the Accounts Commission's local authority Best Value Reports, local authority Best Value thematic management reports focused on transformation, annual Local Government in Scotland Overview Reports and Financial Bulletins, and the national report on transformation in councils.

Drawing on this evidence and our own improvement work, I have provided responses to six of the eight questions posed, which are relevant to our role and remit, and these are in **Appendix 1**. Please note that the examples provided are illustrative and not exhaustive. For question 1, I have focused on how the IS has and is supporting councils to transform in addition to the work we're progressing on the Solace/IS Transformation Blueprint Programme. I also asked local authority Chief Executives to share how their Council has been transforming services over recent years, and this forms **Appendix 2**. I have provided an overview of the progress being made with the Solace/IS Transformation Blueprint Programme in **Appendix 3**.

In response to the inquiry regarding the Improvement Service's engagement with the Scottish Government during the development of its Public Service Reform Strategy, I can confirm that I participated in the Public Service Reform Summit 2025, which was hosted by the Minister for Public Finance. Additionally, in my capacity as a member of the National Community Planning Improvement Board, I was kept informed about the progress being made by Scottish Government officials.

Whilst the Public Service Reform Strategy is very much targeted at the Scottish Government and its 131 public bodies, it is complementary to the work that we are progressing with Solace on the local government Blueprint Transformation Programme. We have undertaken a high-level comparison of the Public Service Reform Strategy against the Blueprint workstreams, which demonstrated strong alignment between the Strategy and Blueprint anchors. We have also identified touchpoints and potential opportunities for collaboration between the workstreams within the Strategy and the Blueprint. We have 2-monthly meetings diarised with Solace, Scottish Government and COSLA officials, which will focus on the touchpoints, explore collaborative opportunities and discuss any barriers/challenges being encountered with the delivery of reform.

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The Improvement Service has not been invited to sit on the Public Service Reform Board. However, our work with Solace will be represented through Solace Scotland's membership of the Board via Pippa Milne, Chief Executive Argyll and Bute Council and incoming Chair of Solace Scotland.

I trust that the information provided is satisfactory. Should you require any further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Gadsden  
Chief Executive

## Appendix 1: Response to the relevant and appropriate questions

We have responded to six of the eight questions posed, which reflect our role and remit and the improvement support that we deliver to Scottish local government.

### 1. How have local authorities been reforming public services in recent years?

The IS delivers a range of products and services to help local authorities reform public services, in addition to the work we are supporting Solace with on transformation (*see Appendix 3*). Key elements of this work are summarised below.

#### ***Driving Transformation Through Data and Digital Integration***

The IS is playing a central role in modernising Scottish local government by embedding data-driven decision-making and delivering scalable digital services. These two pillars – data and intelligence and digital infrastructure – are not standalone efforts but deeply interconnected strategies that enable councils to operate more efficiently, respond to community needs and deliver better outcomes.

- ***Building a Smarter Data Ecosystem***

At the heart of IS's data transformation agenda is the **Local Government Data Platform (LGDP)**. This initiative, developed in partnership with COSLA, Solace, and the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, aims to simplify and streamline data reporting across councils. By reducing manual data collection and improving reuse, the LGDP is laying the foundation for intelligent, coordinated service delivery.

Complementing this is the **Scottish Climate Intelligence Service (SCIS)**, which is jointly funded by Local Government and Scottish Government and delivered in partnership by the IS and Edinburgh Climate Change Institute. This provides a national platform that collates emissions data, builds baselines and visualises the impact of local climate actions. It empowers councils to interpret data, engage communities, and demonstrate progress on climate goals. By embedding a common approach, SCIS is supporting coordination and accelerating capacity building across all 32 local authorities. This creates efficiencies and cost savings by sharing knowledge and resources and frees up officer time to concentrate on delivery and engagement. It also helps climate teams within local authorities to leverage the skills, knowledge, capabilities and capacity from across their own organisations to more effectively deliver their local commitments and to better realise the local social, economic and environmental benefits of local climate action.

The **One Scotland Gazetteer (OSG)**, operated by the IS, is a nationally consistent spatial dataset that serves as the authoritative source of address and street information in Scotland. It sources data from all 32 local authorities, Transport Scotland and Network Rail. By collating and publishing this information centrally, the OSG delivers significant benefits to the Scottish public sector. It plays a critical role in integrating disparate council systems by linking data sources, which delivers system efficiencies, reduces laborious data reconciliation work, and prevents duplication of effort. It is vital for various use cases, including emergency services Command and Control operations, Registers of Scotland for property transactions, the electoral roll, ePlanning, NHS, the Census, the Office of the Scottish Road Works Commissioner, and many others.

The data is harvested from local authorities using a data connector that delivers real-time information to the IS. Once validated, this information is made available to all users. The connector exemplifies public sector data sharing by providing up-to-date information and removing the need for local authorities to manually upload data, thanks to an automated pipeline. The data connector was a strategic investment by the IS, reflecting the importance placed on the currency of the data. It enables real-time access to vital data for key users, including Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and the Scottish Ambulance Service. Additionally, the connector delivers essential Planning and Building Standards data to the IS' national **Spatial Hub** daily. The availability of these national datasets is fundamental for analysis and insight by a wide range of public sector organisations, including the Scottish Government, SEPA, National Records of Scotland, and local government.

The IS also champions the **SAVVI (Scalable Approach to Vulnerability via Interoperability) framework**, which enhances data sharing to identify and support vulnerable populations. The IS recently received funding from the Scottish Government to set up a SAVVI team in Scotland. This approach is being used to tackle child poverty and financial crisis. Efforts are underway following work the IS undertook with three local authorities and SAVVI, to amend the Digital Economy Act to create a new objective focused on Early Help and Prevention or Financial Vulnerability, to provide a legal basis for sharing and reusing data to identify households at risk of child poverty and financial crisis.

- ***Delivering Scalable Digital Public Services***

The IS delivers a range of national shared digital public services for Scottish local government and public service partners. These are designed to be nationally scalable, locally adaptable and citizen centred. These platforms are not only improving access to services but also reducing administrative burdens and costs. Some examples are provided below.

- **mygovscot myaccount:** Launched in 2014, myaccount is a secure sign-in service used by over 2.8 million people, enabling seamless access to public services. Used by 41 organisations and growing, myaccount offers robust authentication and identity verification tools which are compliant with Government standards. A practical example of digital transformation in action is Falkirk Council's launch of MyFalkirk in 2016. From day one, the platform was fully integrated with the myaccount sign-in, giving residents seamless access to over 170 online services. Since its launch, citizens have made more than £100 million in payments through services accessed via myaccount. Today, 65% of households are registered, resulting in 2.2 million transactions and an impressive average of £36 collected per household every minute. In addition to improving service accessibility, MyFalkirk has introduced digital workflows that empower council staff to resolve issues instantly and significantly reduce paper usage.

We conducted a social value and cost-benefit analysis of the investment in myaccount for the period from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. The analysis revealed that citizens benefited from improved and easier digital access to a range of public services. For local authorities and other public sector organisations, the advantages included reduced costs for providing secure and trusted authentication and Identity Verification Services, fewer incidents of online fraud, and a decreased need for customer support services. The projected benefits and cost savings indicate that for every £1 invested in myaccount, approximately £17 in benefits are likely to be realised.

- **parentsportal.scot:** Delivered in collaboration with SEEMiS, this platform provides a digital bridge between schools and families, replacing paper-based communication and improving engagement. It is currently used by 23 councils, supporting over 1,715 schools, 231,900+ parents/guardians and 313,800+ children. A mobile app was launched in 2023 to enhance accessibility for parents/guardians. Parentsportal.scot streamlines the Annual Data Check (ADC), allowing parents and carers to securely review and update their child's school data online. By digitising this previously paper-heavy, manual process, the ADC achieves significant savings. For instance, moving the ADC online saves up to 2 million sheets of paper annually. Local authorities benefit from substantial reductions in printing and postage costs, which are eliminated with digital ADCs. Schools also save time as they no longer need to manually enter data into SEEMiS, reducing administrative workload and freeing up staff for other priorities. While exact savings vary by council, the cumulative savings across Scotland are likely in the hundreds of thousands of pounds annually. Additionally, the ADC enhances data quality by reducing errors from manual entry and enabling real-time updates to pupil records.
- **getyournec.scot:** Used by all 32 local authorities, this platform enables residents to apply for, renew or replace their National Entitlement Card. Since its launch in 2020, the platform has processed over 1.4 million applications and supports 2.8 million cardholders across Scotland. Local authorities saved over £4M in processing costs by using the platform to deliver the Young Person's Free Bus Travel Scheme. It also achieved a 56% reduction in offline applications to local authorities, freeing up staff time for other services. A Social Value analysis study suggested that every £1 invested in the online processing of the Under 22 Free Bus Travel Card is likely to deliver around £13 in benefits.

- **visitorlevy.scot:** This new platform, currently under development, aims to assist local authorities in implementing the Visitor Levy, with a "once for the sector" delivery approach. The initial upfront cost is approximately £560,000 for a national system that all local authorities can use, rather than each developing their own platform. The ongoing business-as-usual and support costs are expected to be around £500,000 per year for the platform's operation, which will be divided on a pro-rata basis among participating councils. This cost is significantly lower than the estimates in the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill Financial Memorandum, which projected that setting up a visitor levy scheme for a single local authority would cost between £110,000 and £480,000. Additionally, the recurring annual costs for administering the scheme were estimated to be between £190,000 and £500,000 per local authority.
- **Digital Right to Work Service:** Powered by mygovscot myaccount, this service simplifies employment checks by enabling local authorities to verify a job candidate's identity online and download proof of the right to work checks which are attached to a candidate's HR file.

### ***Driving Transformation through the IS Improvement Architecture***

The IS has a dynamic [improvement architecture](#) designed to support sector-led improvement across various policy and service areas. Below are some key examples, with more details available in the IS [Business Plan 2025/26](#)

- **Change Management:** We lead the local authority Change Managers' Network, encouraging all 32 local authorities to participate, share learning, and collaborate. Our developed tools are readily available to support local authorities' reform efforts.
- **Organisational Development:** Our local authority Organisational Development Network is a hub for enhancing skills, knowledge, and capabilities in organisational development, culture change, workforce planning, facilitation and leadership.
- **Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF):** For over a decade, we have delivered the LGBF, a cornerstone of a more assertive approach to sector-led performance improvement.
- **Self-Assessment:** We offer a suite of self-assessment and improvement planning tools for local authorities, aiding them in conducting self-assessments at corporate, service, and partnership levels. Notably, we co-designed a Culture Checklist with Renfrewshire Council, now available for all councils to gain deeper insights into their organisational culture.
- **Grant Funding and Policy Support:** Our efforts are bolstered by grant funding from the Scottish Government, supporting local government reforms in connected policy areas like employability, tackling violence against women and girls, trauma-informed practice, rights-based approaches, child poverty, early learning and childcare expansion, planning improvement, and community planning.

## **2. What is preventing councils from achieving 'transformative change'?**

Local Government has been transforming consistently since the formation of the current unitary authority model in 1996. That said, local authorities face a complex web of barriers when attempting to deliver transformative change, which span financial, structural, cultural and political dimensions.

There is a range of evidence available which illustrates these barriers. Drawing on this evidence and our own improvement work, we would summarise the key barriers as follows:

**(a) *The Cost of Change***

Local authorities face challenges in funding transformative change because of budget constraints, even when the long-term benefits are evident. As a result, they are frequently required to prioritise immediate service delivery to meet their statutory duties and address the growing demand for local services.

Taking digital as an example, a council may identify the need to replace a legacy IT system to improve service delivery and achieve long-term savings. However, the initial investment – both financial and in staff time – can be prohibitive. Furthermore, if the new system fails or underdelivers, the reputational and operational risks are high.

There are also examples of delayed or scaled back transformation projects due to budget uncertainty. For example, rising construction and inflation costs have forced some local authorities to defer or scale back city deal projects aimed at transforming public spaces and infrastructure. Those projects that are proceeding are doing so at a higher cost than was originally anticipated.

Furthermore, there is evidence that real-term budget cuts have left councils struggling to sustain existing services, let alone invest in transformation. In many cases, the cost of maintaining current service provision is outpacing available funding, thereby stalling reform efforts. In some cases, local authorities are now having to re-evaluate the level of provision for statutory services.

Finally, as core funding is declining in real terms, demand for services continues to rise. An analysis by the Directors of Finance section shows that the increase in legislative requirements for local authorities, without additional resources, has driven some of the increased demand for services.

**(b) *Leadership Capacity and Workforce***

While local government has strong leadership capabilities, there are significant capacity challenges in leading and driving transformation. Over the years, senior management capacity has diminished, with councils having much leaner Corporate Management Teams and Chief Officer roles covering more service areas than they did five years ago. The increasing responsibilities of councils can also divert senior officers' focus away from transformation efforts. Many leaders are stretched thin managing day-to-day service delivery, leaving limited bandwidth for strategic transformation. Additionally, in recent years, local authorities have faced recruitment and retention challenges in key leadership positions.

Likewise, there are significant risks around workforce capacity and skills to deliver large-scale transformation projects. Councils face challenges filling critical specialist and professional roles, impacting on their ability to progress service redesign and digital enabled transformation. Staff are also often stretched thin delivering day-to-day services, leaving little room for innovation or change. Workforce morale and resilience can also be strained, due to ongoing restructurings required to address budget cuts. Despite these challenges, many Councils have been progressing significant transformative work; the work on Single Authority Models is a good example.

**(c) *Limitations of Past Legislation***

Local government is a creature of legislation, and the legislative environment has developed incrementally over decades. Not all of that legislation is fit for the modern era. For example, the legislation does not allow for the registration of births, deaths and marriages to take place online, yet the technology is available to do so.

**(d) *Cultural Resistance to Change***

Due to the financial pressures and years of budget cuts, local authority staff often perceive transformation as a means of cutting costs rather than improving outcomes. This can result in transformation seeming more like a threat than an opportunity, resulting in resistance.

Some local authorities have implemented transformation programmes that necessitate a significant cultural shift from a traditional hierarchical structure to a more horizontal, collaborative model. This shift has often

encountered resistance, especially from staff who are used to working in silos and making top-down decisions.

Others have commented on ‘transformation fatigue’, with staff expressing concerns about the pace and volume of change, leading to disengagement and reluctance to adopt new practices.

Risk aversion and fear of failure can be deeply embedded in organisational culture. Local authorities are highly scrutinised, and any failure can lead to negative press, political fallout or public distrust, which can discourage bold ideas or experimentation and staff not feeling safe to fail and learn.

Finally, the political environment in which local authorities operate poses significant challenges. Achieving public service reform necessitates political support and a shift in community engagement, which can encounter resistance. Elected members may struggle to prioritise long-term systemic reforms over immediate, visible successes. Additionally, innovation can be hindered by concerns about political repercussions or public opposition.

**(e) *Data and Evidence Limitations***

Local authorities often lack access to real-time, integrated data to inform decisions. Furthermore, legacy systems are often incompatible with modern technologies and have limited data integration capabilities, leading to data silos that impede effective service delivery and data-driven decision-making. Replacing or adapting these systems can be challenging due to the high costs involved.

Local authorities and partners also often encounter challenges with data sharing, linked to legal and privacy concerns, lack of common data standards, lack of trust and technical and infrastructure limitations. Resource constraints make it challenging to invest in data governance, training and technology.

**(f) *Barriers to partnership working***

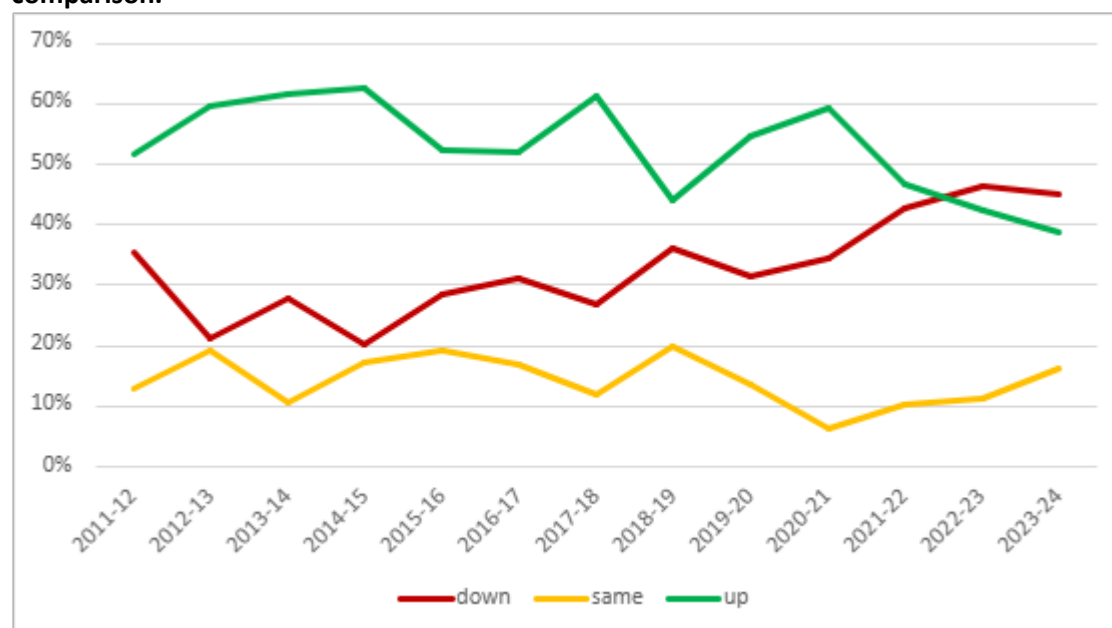
The National Community Planning Partnership (CPP) Self-Assessment Overview Report 2024 highlighted several key barriers which could prevent Councils and their partners from achieving transformational change. For example, a significant proportion of CPP Board members expressed uncertainty about how well governance arrangements support collective accountability, with fragmentation diluting responsibility and hindering decisive action. Furthermore, there is often variable partner engagement within the CPP, which can lead to siloed working which is antithetical to transformation. 36% of CPP board members who responded to the self-assessment disagreed that all partners provide leadership and make significant contributions to the partnership’s work, limiting collective ownership of outcomes and weakening the drive for systemic change.

**3. Given local government’s claims that efficiencies have been achieved over the past 15 years, what impacts have these had on service users?**

There is clear evidence from the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) that local government performance improvement has slowed in recent years. This follows a decade where considerable progress has been achieved against an increasingly challenging context. While the recent slow-down in performance improvement is system wide, and true for all councils regardless of local priorities and the policies they are pursuing, there is variation in the depth, severity and focus of impacts. For example, those councils who serve the most deprived communities generally report a greater slow-down in performance improvement compared to other councils.

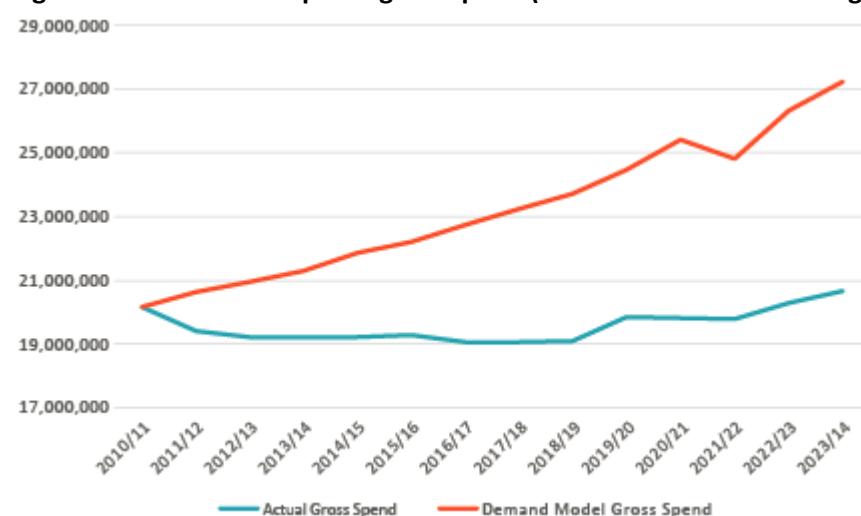
The long-term picture of council service performance remains positive, with 68% of performance indicators within the LGBF showing improvement since the base year. In recent years, however, year on year trends show a slowing in this improvement, and an increase in the number of performance indicators which are now declining. In the last two years, the rate of decline has overtaken the rate of improvement (45% compared to 39% respectively).

**Figure 1 – Proportion of LGBF Performance indicators that improved, declined, or stayed the same, year on year comparison.**



This is not unexpected. The scale of financial and demand pressures means councils are having to make increasingly difficult decisions about the shape and level of service delivery which are beginning to have a clear impact on performance and efficiency improvements gained in previous years.

**Figure 2 - Actual and required gross spend (based on modelled demographic demand)**





**Table 1 - Real change in Council Revenue Expenditure since 2010/11 (£000s)**

	2010-11	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	Change since 2010-11	Change since pre-Covid	Change since 2022-23
Education	£5,575,300	£6,049,555	£6,357,894	£6,452,877	£6,655,523	£6,654,175	19.4%	10.0%	0.0%
Adult Social Care	£3,568,699	£4,113,403	£4,379,454	£4,344,116	£4,560,631	£4,587,844	28.6%	11.5%	0.6%
Looked After Children	£518,142	£621,687	£616,828	£608,310	£600,412	£623,260	20.3%	0.3%	3.8%
Culture & Leisure	£754,815	£533,153	£523,729	£537,138	£569,493	£555,704	-26.4%	4.2%	-2.4%
Environmental Services	£1,021,817	£843,002	£843,454	£827,466	£815,698	£836,151	-18.2%	-0.8%	2.5%
Roads	£850,436	£623,251	£585,540	£659,018	£728,380	£743,353	-12.6%	19.3%	2.1%
Planning	£172,231	£128,868	£125,913	£119,905	£125,438	£128,747	-25.2%	-0.1%	2.6%
Economic Development	£525,361	£410,647	£421,018	£512,241	£507,302	£483,817	-7.9%	17.8%	-4.6%
Central Support Services	£1,095,372	£788,280	£799,156	£803,326	£817,467	£839,272	-23.4%	6.5%	2.7%

Note: Table 1 includes expenditure covered by the LGBF measures. While the LGBF measures reflect the significant areas of local government expenditure, there are some minor areas of spend excluded, which accounts for differences with Scottish Government published expenditure data. All trends represent gross expenditure.

The data on council service performance provides a stark warning on the future resilience of essential council services. If the current trend continues, the improvements and progress that has been achieved thus far, could potentially be lost and council service performance may start to decline over the longer term. This will have serious implications in relation to access to frontline essential services for communities.

The LGBF also shows declining levels of public satisfaction with council services. This is true for all service areas except for parks and open spaces, and more recently, refuse collection. The decline is evident for almost all councils, although it is important to note that a couple of councils have seen their satisfaction improve over the longer term. Public expectations have not reduced despite the reduction in local government resources and increased demand due to demographic and other change.

**Table 2 – Public satisfaction with council services**

Yearly data	2010-11	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	Change since 2010-11	Change since pre-Covid	Change since 2022-23
Schools	83.1	73.0	70.0	72.5	73.0	78.0	74.0	69.0	69.0	-14.1pp	-4.0pp	0.0pp
Libraries	83.5	73.0	72.0	72.1	73.0	78.0	71.0	64.0	66.0	-17.5pp	-7.0pp	2.0pp
Parks & Open Spaces	83.1	87.0	85.0	82.5	83.0	91.0	88.0	83.0	84.0	0.9pp	1.0pp	1.0pp
Museums & galleries	75.5	70.0	69.0	68.9	70.0	75.0	74.0	65.0	69.0	-6.5pp	-1.0pp	4.0pp
Leisure facilities	74.6	73.0	72.0	69.3	69.0	77.0	71.0	65.0	65.0	-9.6pp	-4.0pp	0.0pp
Refuse collection	81.0	79.0	75.0	75.0	73.0	78.0	77.0	79.0	79.0	-2.0pp	6.0pp	0.0pp
Street Cleaning	73.3	70.0	66.0	62.9	59.0	58.0	59.0	58.0	57.0	-16.3pp	-2.0pp	-1.0pp

Note: As a result of the change in methodology, the lower response rates, and the change in the profile of respondents compared to typical survey years, the results for 2020/21 and 2021/22 are not comparable to earlier or later years. While annual data is presented here, within the LGBF, 3-year rolled averages are used to boost sample sizes and improve levels of precision at local levels. The data in this table will differ therefore from data within the LGBF dashboard.

Three things are particularly important to note: Firstly, the LGBF data is not based on people who have used services: it is the total population whether they have used services or not. Second, it does not establish what it is about services people are satisfied with or not. They may be dissatisfied with cuts to funding for local services, for example, rather than service quality. Finally, across the period since 2010/11, public satisfaction has not reflected other measures of service quality, performance or impact which have consistently improved.

It will be vital for local government to continue to work closely with communities to communicate the impact of growing fiscal, demand and workforce pressures on local services and to shape local priorities. This wider discussion should consider whether current expectations of public services are realistic in the context of such changing conditions. As councils respond to increasing levels of need and demand, within ever tightening budget constraints, it is important that expectations in relation to local government priorities and performance adapt to reflect the dynamic circumstances councils are operating within.

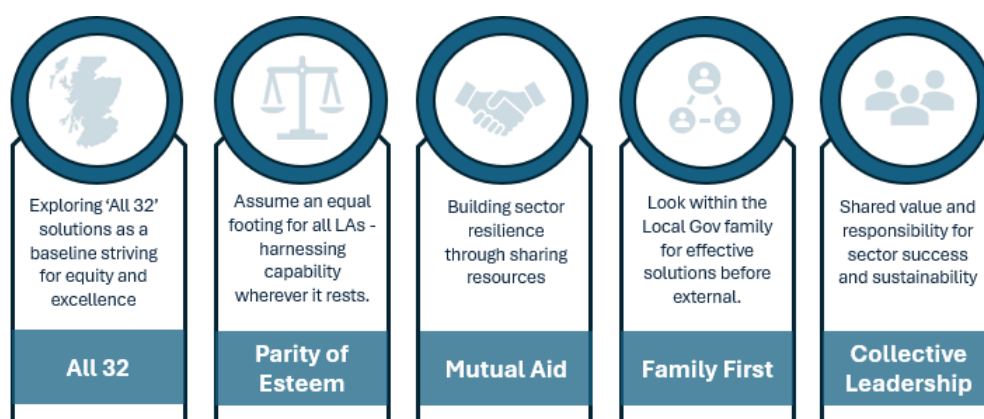
#### 4. What support is available to councils looking at ways of reforming how they deliver services?

There is a range of support available to councils from within the local government family, as outlined below:

##### Peer support

- As part of the Solace/IS Transformation Blueprint Programme (**Appendix 3**), Chief Executives agreed a small number of guiding principles centred on peer support, to underpin their collective transformation efforts, guiding assumptions made and agreed scope.

**Figure 3- Guiding Principles**



- The IS is piloting a new Peer Collaborative Improvement approach, which is a key element of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework Board's commitment to develop and deliver a more assertive approach to sector-led performance improvement.

##### Improvement Service

- The IS is supporting Solace Scotland with the delivery of the Solace/IS Transformation Blueprint Programme (**Appendix 3**).
- Further information about the work of the IS is included in our response to question 1.

##### Digital Office for Scottish Local Government

- The Digital Office's role is to ensure that the infrastructure and capabilities are in place to help councils increase the pace of digital transformation and to deliver on the ambitions of the National Digital Strategy for Scotland.
- At a national level, the Digital Office works alongside COSLA to work in partnership with Scottish Government for national policies and strategies relating to digital transformation. This includes the overall Digital Strategy for Scotland, Digital Health and Care Strategy, the Digital Learning Strategy etc. The Digital Office involves

representatives from across local government in the development of these strategies to ensure that there can be strong alignment between national and local digital strategies.

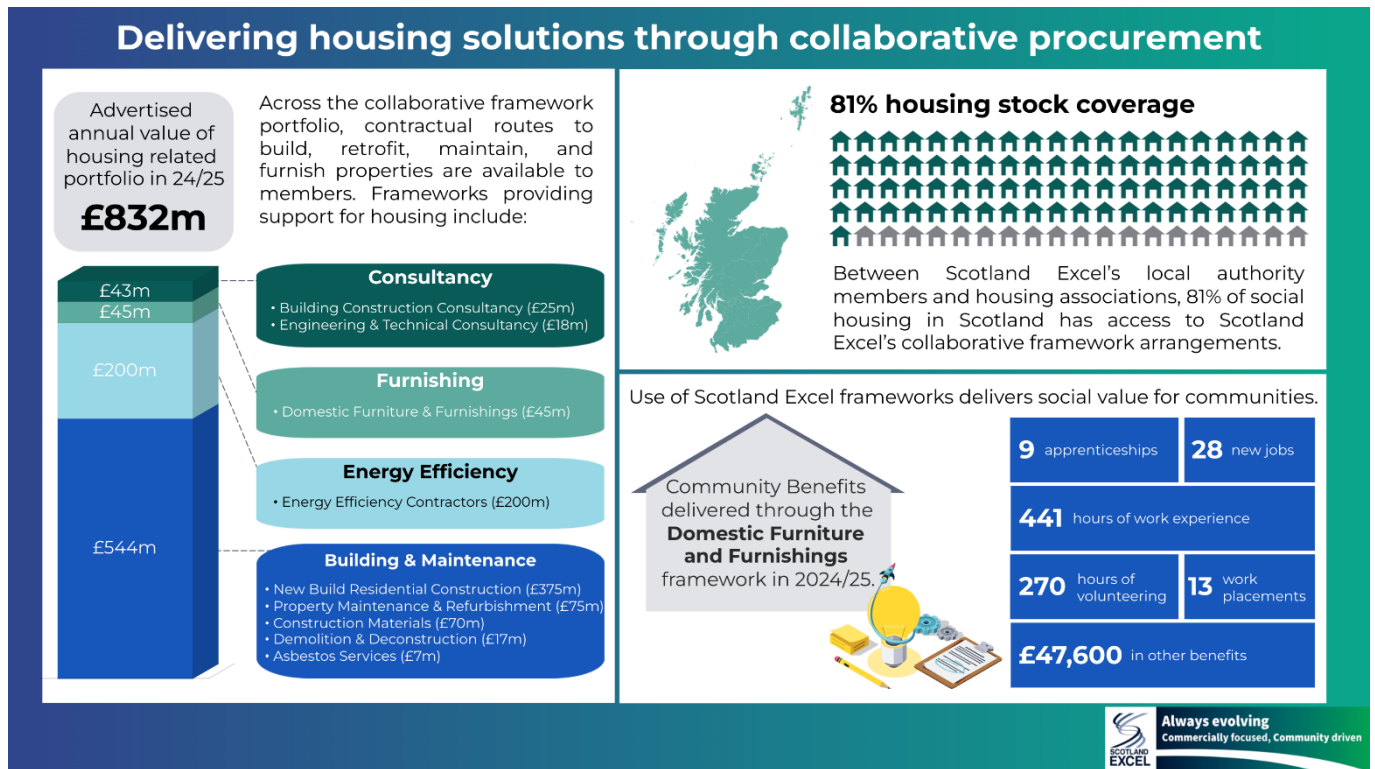
- At a sector-level, the Digital Office:
  - works with and on behalf of Solace Scotland to convene professional groups to develop a vision for digital transformation in local government, including the development of the Digital To Be State within the Solace/IS Transformation Programme.
  - works with Councils and in partnership with Scotland Excel to deliver a portfolio of collaborative digital transformation programmes, particularly where there are opportunities for standard approaches and shared solutions that can reduce implementation and support costs. Examples of this include:
    - A programme to support health and social care partnerships to migrate from analogue to digital telecare;
    - The procurement of a shared Alarm Receiving Centre platform for telecare;
    - A programme to help Councils to match social care records to the NHS Community Health Index (CHI) to support health and care integration and the development of the Digital Front Door;
    - Aggregated procurement for M365 licensing;
    - Procurement of a shared process modelling tool to improve process redesign and enable re-use of process designs across the sector; and
    - Procurement of private sector data that can help to target interventions and services (including supporting child poverty and housing).
  - convenes experts from across IT and security to provide assurance of sector-level technical designs to ensure that they meet the technical and security requirements of local authorities.
- At a Council level the Digital Office supports Councils to enhance their own capability for digital transformation. This includes a Digital Maturity toolkit and service, digital skills development which is delivered in partnership with the Society of Personnel Development (Scotland) (SPDS) and Scottish Government and playbooks and blueprints (informed by the experience of local authorities) that can help Councils to accelerate adoption of solutions at a local level.
- Further information about the full range of work delivered by the Digital Office is available in the [Digital Office Action Plan 2024 – 26](#).

### **Scotland Excel**

- As the leading authority in procurement for the local government sector, Scotland Excel is aiding local authorities in their transformation initiatives through the implementation of collaborative procurement frameworks. Currently, Scotland Excel oversees a portfolio of these frameworks worth around £2 billion. These frameworks encompass a diverse array of goods and services that support public sector functions, including social care, construction, roads and transport, environmental services, facilities management, and food and education.
- Scotland Excel also delivers a focused savings programme which aims to identify tangible financial savings opportunities for a local authority and a flexible procurement service, which provides a cost-effective professional procurement service to meet short and long term demands and additional resources in the near future to satisfy existing and planned demand.
- Capital programmes and investment in community infrastructure have increasingly become an area where Scotland Excel has been able to support councils to deliver local priorities. This is achieved through a range of services, particularly those that are focused on development, operation and improvement of social housing and councils' property estates. Contractual routes to build, retrofit and maintain property are developed and managed on behalf of local government, with a focus on energy efficiency and high-quality local infrastructure.
- Scotland Excel also supports the aims and delivery of local Social Housing Investment Plans (SHIPs) through its Associate Programme. This includes the provision of added value services including flexible procurement resources, developing skills and procurement consultancy services as well as undertaking a formal capability assessment of housing associations receiving government funding for housing development, which is a stipulation of grant. These services support the effectiveness of social housing delivery and management in Scotland.

- Between Scotland Excel's local authority members and housing associations (Scotland Excel associate members), 81% of social housing in Scotland has access to Scotland Excel's collaborative framework arrangements. Figure 4 provides an overview of housing solutions delivered through collaborative procurement.
- Further information about Scotland Excel's services is available here - <https://home.scotland-excel.org.uk/our-services/>

**Figure 4: Delivering Housing Solutions through Collaborative Procurement**



Support is also available to local authorities from COSLA and the Scottish Government to explore opportunities for reform. For example, the jointly led Local Governance Review underpins the Single Authority Model being progressed by Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council and Argyll and Bute Council.

The Scottish Government's Invest to Save Fund is financing several reform initiatives within Local Government.

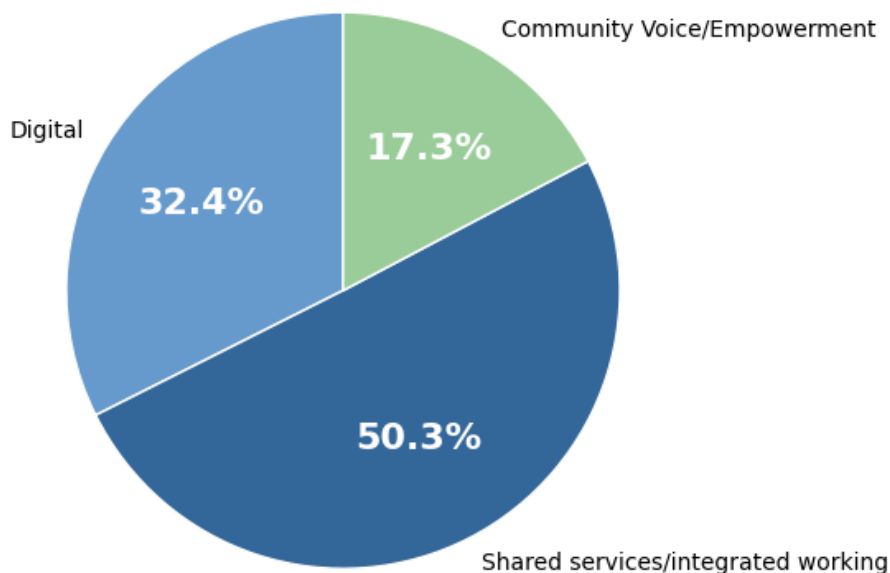
Officers from Solace, COSLA and the IS have recently started meeting with Scottish Government civil servants every two months to discuss the touchpoints between the Solace/IS Transformation Blueprint Programme, COSLA's reform work and Scottish Government's Public Service Reform Strategy. These meetings will provide an opportunity for local government officers to seek assistance from civil servants in overcoming barriers and creating favourable conditions for reforming council service delivery, including multi-agency services.

Finally, local authorities also seek support from private sector consultants to assist with their transformation efforts. For example, some local authorities are using PwC to provide advice on shared service arrangements.

## 5. The extent to which local authorities have engaged with the Scottish Government's Invest to Save Fund

Local government has received £5,767,752 in total from Scottish Government's Invest to Save Fund, Figure 5 shows the breakdown of this funding by theme.

**Figure 5 - Percentage of local authority Invest to Save funding, by theme.**



We understand that Solace Scotland submitted bids in relation to the local government workforce and digital leadership and skills, however, these were unsuccessful. We do not have any information on any bids that may have been submitted by individual local authorities.

Solace Scotland are keen to ensure that the learning from each of the bids is captured, extracted and shared across all local authorities, and wherever possible and appropriate, the work being progressed by each bid is rolled out or accessible to other local authorities. The IS has agreed to work with Solace Scotland to develop an approach to capturing and sharing the learning from the Invest to Save Bids across the sector.

There are synergies between these bids and the workstreams being progressed as part of the Solace/IS Transformation Blueprint Programme (**Appendix 3**). In particular, the Single Authority Model and Regional Collaboration bids offer a valuable opportunity to deliver the vision and aspirations of the Blueprint at a place level. This will benefit the sector by generating insights that will contribute to the development of more tailored and targeted 'blueprints' for other local authorities looking to adopt single authority models or implement shared services and more integrated delivery models with neighbouring local authorities and partners.

Local government colleagues appreciate the Scottish Government's approach with the Invest to Save Fund and are hopeful that future rounds of this funding will continue to support local authorities in their transformation efforts.

## 6. To what extent would multi-year funding packages help local authorities make changes to how they deliver services?

Multi-year funding packages could significantly enhance the ability of local authorities to make meaningful, sustainable changes in how they deliver services. The current reliance on short-term funding cycles limits the ability of councils to take a strategic, long-term approach to service redesign and improvement.

Longer term certainty would allow councils to plan beyond annual cycles, fostering strategic thinking rather than reactive decision making. It may enable local authorities to invest in long-term transformation, innovation, test

new service delivery models and scale successful initiatives without the fear of funding cuts in the short-term. It may also help facilitate the shift of resources towards early intervention and prevention.

Multi-year funding would also likely help local authorities build financial resilience and manage risks more effectively, whilst minimising the need for short-term cuts that can have long-term negative impacts on communities.

## Appendix 2: Local Authority examples of how they are transforming public services

Scotland's local authorities have been transforming their service delivery to address increasing demand, financial constraints, demographic shifts, and evolving community needs. Guided by the Christie Commission's enduring principles, local government has been advancing a reform agenda focused on **Prevention, Partnership, People, and Performance**. Local authorities have focused on empowering communities, fostering integrated service delivery through cross-sector collaboration, preventing issues before they arise, addressing inequalities, enhancing efficiency by reducing duplication and sharing services, and embracing digital transformation. Throughout these efforts, they have maintained a strong emphasis on outcomes, equity, and sustainability.

Local authorities have provided the following examples of how they have been transforming public services over the last few years. These examples are by no means exhaustive. An analysis of these examples highlights three key insights. Firstly, early intervention and prevention are central, with councils investing in proactive support to reduce long-term demand and improve outcomes. Secondly, integration and collaboration across services and communities are driving more person-centred, efficient, and sustainable public services. Lastly, digital transformation and data-driven decision-making are enabling councils to streamline processes, enhance service delivery, and target resources effectively.

### **Aberdeen City Council – Transformation Journey**

Aberdeen City Council's transformation journey, through TOM 1.0 to TOM 1.2, has focused on redesigning service delivery to ensure financial sustainability and reduce inequality. The Council adopted a Target Operating Model to restructure leadership, workforce, and customer engagement, underpinned by digital innovation. Transformation governance is robust, with oversight from internal boards and multi-agency groups.

Strategic partnerships, notably with Microsoft, enabled cloud migration, Robotic Process Automation, and AI tools like Copilot, to greatly enhance efficiency and personalising services. The Council's digital transformation has modernised social work via Dynamics 365, enabling financial savings and improving case handling. And the chatbot and data dashboards support proactive service delivery.

Workforce redesign has embraced flexible working, internal mobility, and the Council's capability frameworks have been aligned to digital and inclusive practices. Service design principles guided co-creation with citizens, embedding prevention and early intervention. The Health Determinants Research Collaboration and initiatives like Homewards and GIRFE exemplify data-led, cross-sector collaboration.

Estates and assets are being reconfigured to support net zero goals and community needs.

The Council's approach integrates digital, data, and design to deliver responsive, equitable services. This positions Aberdeen as a forward-thinking, resilient authority, capable of adapting to fiscal pressures while improving outcomes for citizens through innovative service redesign.

### **Angus Council – Angus Prevention and Proactive Care Programme (APPCP)**

The APPCP was launched in September 2022 as a joint investment between local partners, including Angus Council, Angus Health and Social Care Partnership and ANGUSalve. The programme aims to deliver services that achieve long-term behaviour change in targeted areas to improve public health in Angus and contribute towards tackling health inequalities. The focus of the APPCP is on evidence-based, non-medical interventions, such as physical activity. The programme has established a range of initiatives and continues to grow at pace and scale. The objectives of the programme are divided into short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals:

- *Short-term:* Improve the provision of suitable physical activities for inactive, older adults and those living with long-term health conditions; and introduce evidence-based alternatives to a medicines-first approach.
- *Medium-term:* Explore opportunities for people to look after themselves while they are on a waiting list for treatment.
- *Long-term:* Encourage and support people to manage long-term conditions through lifestyle choices; and reduce inactivity across Angus.

Key initiatives of the APPCP include:



- **[ANGUSalive's BE ACTIVE...Live Well Physical Activity Referral Programme](#)**: This initiative offers a variety of activities designed to support individuals with long-term health conditions, those at risk of developing such conditions, or those who are currently inactive, in becoming more active.
- **[Healthy Steps Angus](#)**: This initiative has supported the continued delivery and expansion of health walks across Angus.
- **Better Balance classes**: These aim to improve balance and prevent falls among older adults.
- **Pulmonary Rehabilitation classes**: These are designed to help individuals with chronic respiratory conditions improve their physical fitness and overall well-being.

The Chief Medical Officer for Scotland [visited Angus](#) on 10 April 2025 and commended the APPCP leadership and programme of work. The Chief Medical Officer's [annual report 2024-2025](#): Realistic Medicine - Critical Connections, launched on 9 June 2025, contains a case study focusing on the collaboration taking place across Angus to promote prevention and proactive care. The report highlights how the principles of Realistic Medicine and Value-Based Health and Care can encourage sustainability by prioritising preventative care that achieves the most meaningful outcomes for people, preventing illness while optimising the considerate use of resources across the population.

#### **East Ayrshire Council – Early Intervention and Prevention Fund**

The Council established the Early Intervention and Prevention Fund in February 2024, setting aside around £4 million annually for ten years to support early intervention and prevention initiatives aimed at supporting communities and enhancing jobs and skills. This innovative approach reflects the Council's commitment to rethinking public services and supporting change initiatives for better community outcomes. The Christie Commission's principles guide this effort, focusing on prevention, integration, collaboration, empowerment, accountability, and resource maximisation. Evidence led policy and decision making is crucial to the success of the Early Intervention and Prevention Fund.

The Fund provides a unique opportunity to take positive action to reduce service demand and address social and economic issues within East Ayrshire's communities. The following investments have been agreed by Elected Members to date; half-price school meals £0.86m; continuation of half-price school meals £1.898m; Fairer Futures Partnership £0.6m; Additional support needs holiday support £0.6m; Power of Attorney £0.6m; jobs and training £4.5m; Speech and Language Therapy £0.6m; 3 and 4-Year Old Clothing Grants £0.06m; Wellbeing £1.25m; and Anti-Poverty & Inequalities Strategy £0.5m. Updates in respect of each project listed above are provided in a report presented to the meeting of East Ayrshire Council held on 26 June 2025, available from this [link](#).

#### **East Dunbartonshire Council – Key elements of transformation programme**

Key elements of the Council's transformation programme include:

- Creating Community Hubs, as part of the Council's Customer Service Strategy.
- Co-location/Co-production with other public services, for example, with Police Scotland in Kirkintilloch Police Station, where Community Protection Services are based.
- Continued rationalisation of accommodation to reduce operational costs, focusing on SMART/ flexible working.
- Digital Strategy, with key themes relating to digital culture, person centred services and digital learning and teaching. The Strategy considers key stakeholder groups including residents, employees and businesses and their experiences of their interactions with the Council. This has resulted in residents using 'My Account' to access services, employees using Microsoft 365 collaboration tools and businesses receiving new digital tools through a revised Bis Account that will allow businesses to transact with the Council online. A new CRM system will also provide a 24 x 7 'one stop shop' to track every touchpoint made across all services.
- The Council works collaboratively with other local authorities as part of the Glasgow City Region.
- Partnership working with the third sector and voluntary organisations across communities.
- Community Grants Scheme.



### **East Lothian Council – Delivering Changes in Waste Services**

The Council has successfully met the expectations outlined in the Scottish Household Waste Charter, aiming to increase recycling participation by shifting the frequency of non-recyclable waste collection to every three weeks. This change necessitated re-routing all collections, transitioning residents from a bi-weekly service, and reducing the capacity of household (green) bins to 80 litres per week. Additionally, the Council introduced a fortnightly chargeable garden permit service, with the revenue generated supporting the delivery of this non-statutory service. Lastly, a booking system was implemented for van and trailer users at all Household Waste Recycling Centres to curb misuse by tradespeople disposing of commercial waste.

### **Falkirk Council – Strategic Property Review (SPR) and Connected Falkirk**

The SPR is a transformative initiative aimed at evaluating and managing the Council's property requirements for the future. The primary goal is to reduce the number of properties the Council operates from, particularly those in poor condition, and to support the financial strategy by delivering savings. This initiative also includes a planned programme for capital investment, which aims to reduce the total backlog in maintenance and assess the necessary works. The SPR seeks to invest in a smaller number of core buildings that are modern, fit for purpose, and in good condition. As part of the approach to the SPR, mitigations to closure options have been identified including Community Asset Transfer (CAT), Alternative Delivery Model and Improved Financial Performance. There are currently 27 properties in Phase 2 progressing with a CAT and, a £3m Capital Enabling Fund has been created to support community groups undergoing CAT with building improvements, subject to eligibility. The borrowing of this capital fund is being funded through the SPR revenue savings. Annual financial savings of £3,338,030 are projected from 2028/29 onwards.

Connected Falkirk (<https://youtu.be/VpgnZHD8WYU>) is a transformative project aimed at enhancing learning and teaching in classrooms by redefining learning experiences to improve outcomes. It provides children and young people with the confidence, skills, and knowledge needed to thrive in a digital world. It includes the provision of digital devices to reduce digital inequality and support learning at home. Connected Falkirk:

- has revolutionised how learning and teaching are delivered, allowing for tailored and individualised feedback, which research shows can significantly boost student progress.
- supports children with Additional Support Needs and those with English as an Additional Language.
- has led to increased engagement and competencies in STEM and digital learning, with initiatives like the Digital Schools Award and live coding sessions.
- has improved staffing efficiency in timetabling and allowed for a broader range of Senior Phase subjects to be offered across schools.
- has transformed the educational landscape in Falkirk, providing modern, digital learning experiences that prepare students for the future.

### **Fife Council – Rebalance of Care and Kinship Care Project**

The Rebalance of Care and Kinship Care Project in Fife, initiated in response to The Promise, aimed to redesign family support for children who cannot be cared for by their parents. The project moved beyond traditional social work interventions by integrating a broader network of services around families to enhance the success of kinship care arrangements. This approach aligned with the council's goal of providing more preventative, early-stage support to improve long-term outcomes and manage financial pressures associated with residential and foster care placements. Fife's Kinship Care Service Redesign embedded policy changes to reflect the local authority's focus on ensuring children remain within their own communities and families wherever possible.

The project adopted the Double Diamond Approach, a structured methodology for problem exploration, co-design, and solution development. By incorporating the voices of children, young people, kinship carers, birth parents, and professionals, the project highlighted critical areas for service improvement and ensured those most affected were active contributors to the transformation. Over two years, the project evolved into a continuous improvement process, establishing a Kinship Steering Group and using data to adapt services sustainably. The resulting support structures strengthened kinship care networks and demonstrated positive impacts on the well-being of children and families, highlighting the importance of professional values in shaping care systems that

prioritise stability, reduced trauma, and preserved family connections. These improvements contributed towards financial benefits by reinforcing the value of investing in early, family-based support models, and the balance between external and internal placements has switched, resulting in cost savings.

### **North Ayrshire Council – Transformation Programme**

The Council is actively advancing a Transformation Programme aligned with key priorities, aimed at delivering service improvements, and achieving financial efficiencies to safeguard essential Council services. This dynamic programme is governed by a Transformation Board, which includes chief officer representation and sponsorship, and is chaired by the Council's Chief Executive. The programme is part of a broader suite of activities designed to address the Council's financial challenges. The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy encompasses several broad categories of activity, including the phased use of Council reserves to run in parallel with the delivery of sustainable savings, revenue generation through statutory powers, fees, charges, and council tax levels, a comprehensive Council Transformation and wider Service Reform programme and a programme of community engagement to consider service delivery levels within the context of the Council's priorities. The Transformation Programme is divided into three main categories:

#### **1. Transformation programme activity across various themes**

This includes sustainability projects focused on achieving net zero and financial efficiencies through investments in solar renewable energy, fleet decarbonisation, flood prevention, and community-based energy programmes. The non-commercial property programme aims to optimise property use, rationalise the estate, and promote community asset transfers. The commercial property estate programme seeks to maximise rental income and generate revenue through capital investments aligned with the Ayrshire Growth Deal and Levelling Up fund. The digital programme encompasses projects such as enhancing council accessibility, piloting artificial intelligence and improving the procure-to-pay process. The development of data assets aims to support the child poverty agenda by providing targeted support for families and ensuring proper consent structures are in place.

#### **2. Programme of Service Reviews**

The reviews are set within the context of Council priorities and aim to deliver a more effective use of available council resources, taking cognisance of statutory and regulatory responsibilities.

#### **3. Wider Service Reform**

Activity to date in the area of wider reform includes partnership working and collaboration across a range of partners including East and South Ayrshire Councils, Solace, IS and Digital Office. For example, shared service and collaboration opportunities are being progressed across the three Ayrshire Councils. This work is at an early stage, however, the opportunities in this area could provide scale and help protect outcomes for the region. This work has oversight through Solace as part of the public service reform workstream in the transformation programme. The Council is also collaborating with the IS to progress Digital Public Services through Parentsportal, Myaccount and early work on the Tourist Visitor Levy platform.

### **Scottish Borders Council – Transforming Social Care and Health Service**

The Council is addressing significant challenges in Social Care and Health services, such as increased demand, financial pressures, and workforce shortages in their rural area. They have set clear objectives to enhance service delivery, improve outcomes, and build community resilience. The primary objectives include reducing waiting lists for social work and occupational therapy, reducing waiting times for care, improving recruitment and retention of staff, creating financially sustainable services, enhancing service delivery through integrated and person-centred approaches, and building community capacity and resilience. To achieve these objectives, the Council has integrated services and developed pathways across the Council and NHS Borders, developed Integrated Huddles (What Matters Hubs) for multi-disciplinary responses, developed an Integrated Discharge Team and joint workforce plans and implemented a new Target Operating Model and 90% budget approach for financial sustainability. They have also focused on digital transformation by streamlining processes, improving data capture, and introducing mobile devices to improve efficiency and decision-making.

A strengths-based approach has been adopted, focusing on the inherent strengths of individuals and communities via the continued development of the What Matters Hubs. The benefits of these efforts are numerous. They have reduced waiting lists for Adult Social Work Assessment from 650 to just over 100 within eighteen months, achieved full integration of services across the Council and NHS Borders, introduced mobile technology to frontline staff, and developed multiple Social Work dashboards for better oversight. Additionally, they have reduced waiting times for care, supported individuals via What Matters hubs, and improved recruitment and retention through professional development and career pathways.

These initiatives have empowered individuals and communities, fostering independence and resilience while ensuring tailored support that meets unique needs.

### **South Lanarkshire Council – Transformation Review Programme**

South Lanarkshire Council is actively reforming its service delivery to address financial challenges and improve efficiency. The Council's Transformation Review Programme, which is aligned to the Solace/IS Transformation Programme, is led by the Corporate Management Team and aims to bridge the budget gap by shaping responsive services that are flexible and fit for purpose. The outcomes and opportunities from the review are presented to Elected Members, and any identified savings undergo public consultation.

Key areas of reform include:

- **Digital Transformation:** The Council's Digital Strategy focuses on transforming lives with digital by improving business systems, workforce productivity, and customer engagement. This work is aligned with the Digital Council of the Future operating model, being developed as part of the Solace/IS Transformation Programme and supported by the Local Government Digital Office.
- **Customer Engagement:** A new Customer Engagement Strategy aims to enhance digital engagement, accessibility, and efficiency.
- **10-Year Estate Strategy:** This strategy aims to reshape property management to respond to changing demographics, financial pressures, and net zero targets.
- **Marmot Place Programme:** South Lanarkshire is participating in a pilot programme to reduce health inequalities in collaboration with Public Health Scotland and the University College London's Institute of Health Equity.
- **Community Asset Transfers:** The Council is working with eligible organisations to transition unused assets into the community.
- **Third Sector Partnership:** Strategic engagement with the local Third Sector aims to reform the relationship between the Council and the Third Sector, ensuring that there is an understanding of the role and the value of the local Third Sector's contribution to local strategic outcomes.

### **West Lothian Council – Supporting looked after children and young people**

West Lothian Council has worked with third sector organisations to develop an in-house intensive fostering service and an internal adoption service for looked after children and young people. This is also known as its Family Based Care Service. Both services reduce the need for the council to purchase external care placements, allowing children to remain within their local communities, while reducing costs for the council. The council also works in partnership with Children First to deliver its Kinship Care Service. This supports extended family members and friends who care for a child or young person where they cannot live at home.

### Appendix 3: Update on Solace/IS Transformation Blueprint Programme

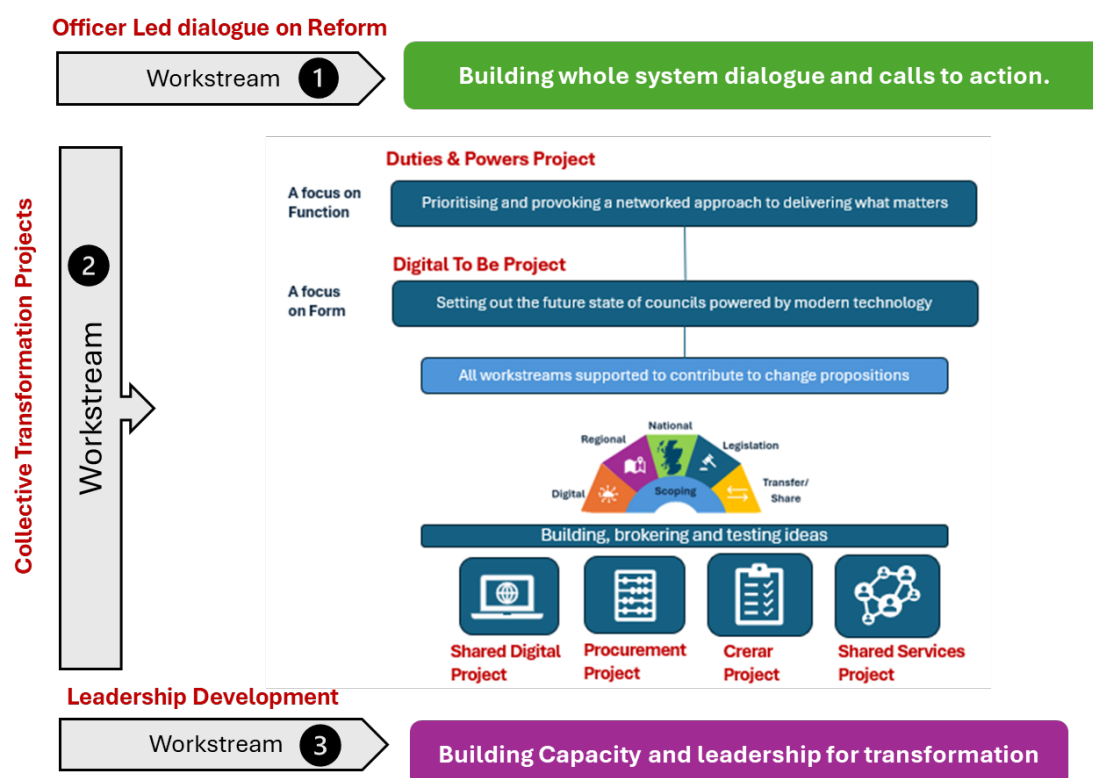
The Solace/IS Transformation Blueprint Programme is a sector-led initiative launched at the Solace Scotland Conference in September 2023. It aims to shape a future operating model for Scottish local government, grounded in six transformation anchors and structured around three core workstreams. The programme is governed by a Chief Executive Working Group, which is chaired by the Solace portfolio lead for transformation and supported by the IS Programme Management Office.

Connectivity is at the heart of the Blueprint, both in terms of strengthening connectivity within the local government family at a local, regional and national level and between local authorities and partners at a place level. The Blueprint's ethos is very much a 'plug and play' model, with local authorities connecting with each other and tapping into the three workstreams as and when it is helpful, depending on local needs, circumstances, challenges and opportunities. The Programme is also designed to be iterative, evolving with new projects as existing ones reach delivery.

In November 2024, Solace agreed that councils would collectively contribute £700K funding to support the delivery of the Transformation Blueprint Programme, with tranche 1 funding of £400K provided in 2024/25 and tranche 2 funding of £300K following in 2025/26.

An overview of the Solace/IS Transformation Blueprint Programme is provided in figure 6. The programme comprises of three workstreams tasked with developing distinct components towards national scaffold and collective opportunities for transformation.

Figure 6 – Overview of Solace/IS Transformation Blueprint Programme



#### Workstream 1 – Multi-Agency Public Service Reform

Grounded in the Fairer Scotland Duty, which requires public bodies to consider how their decisions can reduce socio-economic inequalities, this workstream is aiming to develop proposals for improving how different public agencies work together across the social determinants of population health.

The national Community Planning Improvement Board, chaired by Solace Scotland, will be a key stakeholder in this work and a key enabler to coordinating public service reform efforts across local government and its public and third sector partners.

This work is at an early stage, and the anticipated outputs are as follows:

- Publication of updated Solace/IS 'Tackling Cause Not Symptoms' report – Autumn 2025
- Publication of public service reform narrative – Winter 2025/26

## ***Workstream 2 – Transformation Projects***

### ***1. Statutory Duties and Powers Review***

This project is conceptualised as the 'spine' of the overall transformation programme: a scaffold that ensures that a fundamental hallmark across the programme is to assess opportunities through the reality of the legislative landscape that local government operates within, developing propositions and assets that provoke new approaches to how all 32 local authorities work together to respond to challenges around existing and incoming duties and powers.

The project team are working on a statutory duties and powers portal, with an anticipated go-live date of winter 2025. This aims to provide a single-entry point for accessing up-to-date legislative duties and powers relevant to local authorities. It will support transformation by offering a shared understanding of the legislative landscape, enabling pain points and opportunities for service redesign and innovation to be identified.

The project team has contacted all local government Professional Associations, to request their support with peer reviewing information relevant to their profession for the purposes of publication within the Duties and Powers portal, and their participation in a collaborative design approach to validate pain points within the current legislative landscape and to design new approaches to service delivery, including a focus on opportunities for digital service delivery and collaborative procurement.

This will ultimately result in a pipeline of Change Propositions being presented to the Solace branch for initial consideration, with some of these then proceeding to Leaders on the advice of the COSLA Innovating, Developing and Transforming Special Interest Group. If these change propositions require legislative change, discussions will then need to take place with Scottish Government officials.

The project team have produced their first Change Proposition on digitising Public Information Notices and removing the legislative requirement to publish these in local newspapers. Based on local authorities' figures for estimated spend on Public Information Notices for 2023/24, it is estimated that removing the legislative requirement could save local government approximately £1.5 to £2 million annually.

### ***2. Realising the Full Implementation of Crerar***

The project team's discovery work focused on the current scrutiny and inspection landscape for local government. The group mapped all scrutiny and inspection activity across local government, examined the footprint for each inspection, including the time taken to prepare for inspection and undertook some analysis on the cost of inspection, both to scrutiny bodies and local government.

From the analysis undertaken, the project team concluded that, with the passage of time, the aspirations, actions and intent of the Crerar review have lost momentum and, in some cases, have stalled. As a result, the scrutiny landscape has become even more cluttered, uncoordinated, and burdensome. This is now coming at significant cost to both local authorities and to Scottish Government as they seek to fund each of the scrutiny bodies. It appears that individual Scottish Government departments (possibly as a result of Ministerial Direction) along with the individual aspirations of each scrutiny body as layering more scrutiny, reporting requirements and thematic review on local government. What is not clear is what benefit this is bringing to communities across Scotland.

There are very good examples of sector-led improvement now in place and a strong appetite amongst local authorities to harness self-evaluation including the rigorous use of data to support continuous improvement. The project team proposed that the time is now right to consider how best to approach public assurance and accountability through a more proportionate, risk-based approach that supports local improvement and capacity building.

The team made four recommendations summarised in figure 7, and work is now progressing to deliver these.

**Figure 7 – Crerar Discovery Project recommendations**



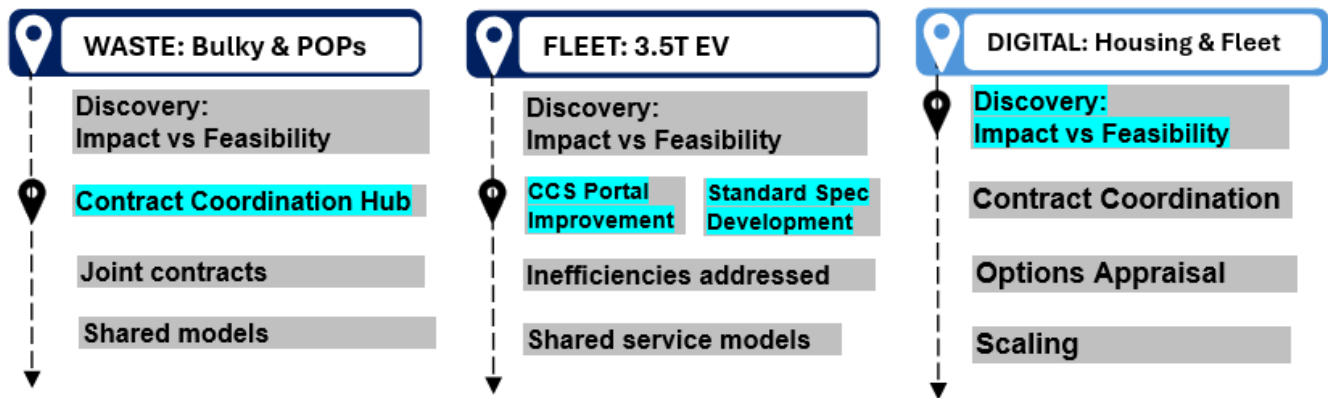
### 3. Collaborative Procurement

Following a scoping exercise, the priority areas of fleet, waste and digital were selected by the project team as key to demonstrating potential benefits and savings in the short to medium term and delivering a range of statutory services.

Solace have approved two strategic outline cases for fleet and waste, with work now underway in both workstreams, with phase one outputs expected in Winter 2025. A further project focused on procurement of digital assets remains in discovery phase with an emerging strategic outline case dependent on further scoping in line with the digital-to-be state. Figure 8 provides an overview of the Collaborative Procurement project.

The provision of fleet incurs significant costs, and there is widespread recognition that the collective purchasing power of local authorities has substantial potential to reduce these expenses. The project team has identified specific areas with potential savings and is supporting an initial pilot to lower costs through a standard specifications approach. With incoming legislation and policy developments forecasting increased costs for local authorities, our focus on waste aims to achieve cost avoidance through contract coordination and the design of shared services. Additionally, we are exploring the feasibility and impact of a collaborative approach to fleet and housing management systems as an "all 32 solution".

**Figure 8 - Overview of Collaborative Procurement project**



All Chief Executives were asked to consider how their council could get involved in this work based on current contract arrangements, either as an early adopter or by participating in sub-groups to progress the work on fleet, waste and digital.

#### **4. Digital To-Be-State for Scottish Local Government**

The Project Group (consisting of representatives from different professional groups across 22 Councils), supported by the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, have prepared a Digital To-Be State White Paper, 'Local Government Rewired' and work is now underway to develop an implementation plan and supporting tools, via active engagement with relevant professional associations.

The Digital To Be State provides a clear yet detailed vision and blueprints for a future digital-enabled Digital Local Government, that is framed in terms of public service reform but is based upon the role that digital, data (and Artificial Intelligence in particular) can play to enable reform. The vision is broken into three parts:

- Community Engagement and Empowerment (including Informing Communities, Engaging Communities and Empowering Communities)
- Service Delivery (including Operational Efficiencies, Customer Service, and Improving Outcomes)
- Service Reform (including Process Redesign, Service Design, and Innovation)

The blueprints for each of these describe the future state in terms of what it means for citizens, the workforce, information, processes and technology.

Work is also underway to develop toolkits that will help Councils, and the sector, to realise the vision. This will include four components, with an ethos of balance in proportion, performance and pragmatism around what to buy, build and reuse:

- Design Manual
- Delivery Manual
- Delivery Roadmap
- Monitoring Framework

The White Paper and Implementation Plan will be presented to the Solace branch for discussion and approval later this year.

#### **5. Digital Shared Services**

The Project Group, with support from the IS, is dedicated to discovering new digital shared services by leveraging existing local government assets. This project is guided by the digital-to-be-state and statutory duties and powers projects, which help identify opportunities for delivering statutory services digitally where such options are currently unavailable or where existing pain points could be alleviated by digital solutions.

Applications for Blue Badges was identified by the project group as a service that could be delivered nationally. The IS worked with 8 local authorities to undertake a discovery project on how Blue Badge applications are currently administered and the cost of this. Several options were presented, and the discovery report recommended undertaking a full feasibility study on the option to build a bespoke Scottish platform for Blue Badges. The report highlighted that developing a national shared service for Blue Badges would enable local authorities to achieve savings, efficiencies and improved standardised citizen services that avoid a “postcode lottery” depending on where they reside in Scotland. A Blue Badge Feasibility study will now take place over 16 weeks from September to December 2025, and all local authorities have been invited to participate in this work.

The IS also worked with three local authorities to undertake a proof of concept on Unpaid Work Squad Management (Community Payback Orders), the purpose of which was to investigate whether it would be feasible to design a digital platform to replace a laborious manual process for squad management in unpaid work. The proof of concept revealed clear demand for a digital solution for unpaid work squad management and identified distinct users’ requirements. The IS and local authorities are working together to develop a business case.

## **6. *Shared/Collaborative Arrangements***

Solace agreed a new transformation project at its branch meeting in June 2025, on shared/collaborative arrangements. Building on previous research undertaken by the IS in 2009, 2016 and 2019, all Chief Executives have been asked to provide information regarding their Council’s current and planned involvement in any shared or collaborative arrangements with at least one other Council, partner or agency. For the purposes of the research, a shared or collaborative arrangement reflects one or all of the following: sharing capacity across services and/or agencies; joint delivery of services across services and/or agencies; and joint investment decisions across services and/or agencies.

Work is now underway to analyse the survey findings, and a report will be published in due course. We are also setting up a project team to consider opportunities to scale existing shared/collaborative arrangements.

### ***Workstream 3 – Leadership Practitioner Forum***

The Leadership Practitioner Forum was set up in 2023 to provide a programme of events that focus on the anchors and associated workstreams in the Transformation Blueprint Programme, providing a space for local government colleagues to come together to explore topics and challenges and enabling participants to learn and share collectively. Led and supported by Chief Executives, the events run in parallel to the workstreams and projects, shaping the work as it progresses.

The purpose of the forum is to

- Engage senior leaders in transformation efforts.
- Provide an overview of the work and projects within the Transformation Blueprint Programme.
- Provide a space for discussion, challenge, support and exploration with peers.
- Facilitate peer learning and networking across local authorities.