

Solace/IS Transformation Work

Getting started: a readiness tool National Self Evaluation Framework

For local government in Scotland



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Purpose

This document provides a practical readiness tool to help Scottish local authorities understand their current starting point for self-evaluation. It is designed to support leadership teams to surface strengths, gaps and inconsistencies in existing practice and to identify practical priorities that will support effective implementation of the National Self-Evaluation Framework.

What is your council's starting point?

If you are trying to find your way to somewhere, it is important to know exactly where you are starting from. While we might think we have a clear idea of where we are, there are often blind spots that get in the way of building an accurate picture.

A self-evaluation tool was developed and tested in East Lothian Council to help them identify implementation priorities in advance of the National Self-Evaluation Framework in Scotland. This self-evaluation provided leadership with a clear idea of the range and extent of self-evaluation in their council, and a sense of their readiness to implement the new National Framework.

Utilising the experience of East Lothian, this tool is designed to help councils reflect on how well self-evaluation is currently embedded across the organisation, and to identify **practical priorities for implementation**. It is not a scoring tool. Councils may be at different stages across different themes.

People	<p>How and who is mobilised around self-evaluation across the council?</p> <p>Effective self-evaluation depends as much on people and culture as it does on processes and data. In some councils, responsibility for self-evaluation sits with a small central team or a limited group of specialists; in others it is more widely owned by managers and staff across services.</p>
Approaches	<p>What approaches do you currently have in place and how well do they align with the national framework indicators?</p> <p>Most councils already undertake a range of self-evaluation and review activity, often driven by service specific requirements, external scrutiny, or improvement programmes. These approaches may be well established in some service areas and less so in others – some local authorities have built their approach around a tried and tested tool such as PSIF or How Good Is?</p>
Data	<p>How do you currently harness evidence for self-evaluation?</p> <p>Evidence, including performance data, should be aggregated to the corporate level from all business areas when there is confidence in the accuracy of the data. How far are you from this? How is this different across service areas?</p>
Technology	<p>How is technology used to help inform your corporate overview?</p> <p>Many councils create dashboards for corporate management teams using applications such as PowerBi or through their council performance management systems, with insights collated using platforms such as Microsoft forms. The quality of the information on the dashboard of course depends on the quality and consistency of the information collated.</p>
Governance	<p>How is self - evaluation overseen, challenged and acted upon?</p> <p>Strong governance helps ensure that self-evaluation leads to meaningful improvement rather than becoming a reporting exercise. Some councils utilise their corporate management team as the primary forum for aggregation and interrogation whereas others integrate this role into existing improvement or transformation governance.</p>

An approach: many people, many methods

In the East Lothian case study colleagues have shared their experience of undertaking their readiness assessment, offering advice to councils approaching similar explorations and setting out specific approaches and tools used in their local exercise. **Appendix A** is an exemplar of a project scope outline that mirrors that used in East Lothian.

Utilising the learning from East Lothian we have structured the readiness around the five themes to provide a clear structure.

Insights can be generated through leadership conversations, surveys, existing documentation, and service level discussion rather than a single structured exercise. A variety of methods may wish to be used to build a three-dimensional picture. Methods include:

- **Document Review:** Analysis of current self-evaluation frameworks, reports, and improvement plans.
- **Surveys and Interviews:** Engagement with CMT, Service Managers and Elected Members to gather qualitative insights.
- **Benchmarking:** Comparison with best practice models from other authorities or national guidance, including comparative analysis of observations from Best Value reports.
- **Case Studies:** In-depth review of selected services with strong or emerging self-evaluation practices.

Many councils may already be generating insight across all five domains, even where activity is not labelled or structured as self-evaluation. The table below helps make this learning visible, comparable and actionable.

Exemplars are provided to offer a helpful and practical starting point for those looking to undertake a similar analysis.

- Leadership Conversation Prompts (Appendix B)
- Heads of Service Survey (Appendix C)
- Desktop Review Checklist (Appendix D)
- Service Conversation Prompts (Appendix E)
- Benchmarking Sources (Appendix F)

Importantly, **this is not a formal assessment or scoring exercise.**

Experience from East Lothian highlights the importance of approaching this work as an exploration, rather than an attempt to produce a definitive or exhaustive picture. The purpose of

the diagnostic is to help councils surface patterns, strengths and blind spots — not to catalogue every activity or judge performance against a fixed standard.

“This is an exploration, not a mapping exercise”

Lesley Brown, East Lothian Council

	Leadership conversations / workshops	Survey/ questionnaire	Desktop review (documents & reports)	Service level discussions / case examples	Benchmarking / external reference
Exemplar tools	Appendix B.	Appendix C.	Appendix D.	Appendix E.	Appendix F.
People	✓	✓		✓	
Approaches		✓	✓	✓	✓
Data		✓	✓		✓
Technology		✓	✓		
Governance	✓		✓		✓

Insights: making sense of what is heard

The approaches outlined helped East Lothian to create a sufficiently clear picture of where self-evaluation was already strong, where practice was uneven, and where further attention might add value — without getting tied in knots to achieve a perfect comprehensive map.

Councils using this diagnostic are encouraged to take a similar approach: close enough to see the shapes and patterns, and confident enough to move forward.

The table below provides a starting point for analysis by describing some typical features of each domain at what could be considered different states of maturity or readiness. We would expect the insight gathered through these methods to begin to surface key features of your local approach. Importantly, **this is not a formal assessment or scoring exercise.**

Understanding the gaps

Experience from East Lothian highlights the importance of approaching this work as an exploration, rather than an attempt to produce a definitive or exhaustive picture. The purpose of the tool is to help councils surface patterns, strengths and blind spots — not to catalogue or compare against a fixed standard. However it is important for councils to know enough about the ‘as-is’ to understand what better looks like and the critical actions that will improve the overall approach.

	Emerging	Developing	Established
What we see	<p>The features below demonstrate a good foundation for self-evaluation in some areas, but lacking in consistency across the council</p>	<p>The features below demonstrate good progress towards a consistent approach to self-evaluation, but some business areas may require more support</p>	<p>The features below demonstrate an ideal state of readiness for rigorous and robust self-evaluation. A corporate overview can be achieved that reflects reality and directs priorities.</p>
<p>People How and who is mobilised around self-evaluation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation is led by a small central team or individual. Activity is driven mainly by compliance, inspection, or reporting requirements. Staff involvement is limited to providing data or responding to requests. Roles and expectations are unclear outside specialist teams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior leaders support self-evaluation in principle, but ownership is uneven. Some services demonstrate strong practice; others are disengaged or uncertain. Managers are involved, but staff participation is variable. Learning from self-evaluation is not consistently shared. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear leadership sponsorship at corporate and service levels. Managers and staff understand their role in self-evaluation and improvement. Staff feel safe to be honest about weaknesses as well as strengths. Learning and improvement are routinely discussed across services.
<p>Approaches What approaches are currently in place?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation activity is fragmented and reactive. Different services use different frameworks or methods. Activity increases sharply in response to inspections or audits. There is little alignment between service level and corporate activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some consistency in approach, often in regulated services. A mix of self-evaluation assisted evaluation and external review is used. Annual planning for evaluation exists but is not always followed. Links between self-evaluation and improvement planning are inconsistent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small number of agreed approaches are used across services, providing consistency while remaining flexible to service context. Approaches structured to be aggregated meaningfully at corporate level. Self evaluation is undertaken proactively and routinely and rooted in evidence.

<p>Data How is evidence harnessed for self-evaluation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data is held in silos and primarily used for reporting. Limited confidence in data quality or consistency. Corporate reporting relies on selective or high-level indicators. Qualitative evidence and lived experience are under used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service level performance data is improving in quality and coverage. Some aggregation at corporate level, but with caveats and gaps. Differences in maturity across service areas are evident. Narrative and data are not always well connected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong confidence in core performance and assurance data. Evidence from services can be aggregated to inform corporate insight. Quantitative and qualitative evidence are used together. Data is actively used to challenge assumptions and test improvement
<p>Technology How technology supports the corporate overview?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology is mainly used for static reporting. Dashboards exist but are not widely used or trusted. Data collection tools are inconsistent across services. Limited ability to connect evaluation activity across the council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate dashboards are in place for senior teams in most areas. Tools such as Power BI or Microsoft Forms are used, but inconsistently across the council. Manual intervention is often required to interpret or validate data. Insight depends heavily on local interpretation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology supports a clear, shared corporate view. Dashboards are trusted and regularly used for decision making. Data collection approaches are proportionate and consistent. Evaluation activity across services can be connected and interrogated.
<p>Governance How is self-evaluation overseen and acted upon?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation outputs are reported but not routinely challenged. Links to risk, assurance and improvement planning are weak. Elected member scrutiny focuses on performance rather than learning. Follow through on findings is inconsistent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear reporting routes exist to senior management and committees. Some challenge and discussion of findings takes place. Improvement actions are identified but not always tracked. Governance focuses more on assurance than improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation is embedded in governance and decision making. Corporate leadership uses findings to prioritise improvement activity. Elected members receive clear, honest narratives alongside data. Progress against improvement actions is monitored and reviewed.

Looking ahead: Identifying Implementation priorities

Once you have explored what the current situation, councils are encouraged to consider how they move forward and are in a position to implement the National Self Evaluation Framework.

People	How and who is mobilised around self-evaluation across the council?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure all staff have an awareness of self-evaluation and what it means in their role to ensure buy-in. ■ Consider training for key staff for an in depth of understanding and application, Ensure there are key contacts in all service areas for self-evaluation. ■ Consider whether a cross council working group to share experiences between services may be helpful
Approaches	What approaches do you currently have in place and how well do they align with the national framework indicators?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consider if direct support for service areas to enhance their approaches to self-evaluation is required. ■ Utilise learning from other councils to support services with application.
Data	How do you currently harness evidence for self-evaluation?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure there is an understanding of what data is and how it can be used to support self-evaluation. ■ Ensure there is an awareness of data that is collected across the service whether that is for internal reporting or for national returns. ■ Consider if streamlining data collection to reduce duplication and unnecessary collection is required.
Technology	How is technology used to help inform your corporate overview?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consider if performance management systems and tools are maximised to collate information across all council areas. ■ Consider the quality of data collected and whether it needs strengthened. ■ Consider how data is presented and how it can be presented to provide a single unified picture.
Governance	How is self - evaluation overseen, challenged and acted upon?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consider who is best placed to oversee self-evaluation activity? E.g. Senior leadership team; councillors. ■ Consider how self-evaluation activity is situated alongside council planning framework.

Appendix A: Exemplar Scope Outline

1. Purpose

Review to be carried out to assess the effectiveness, consistency, and impact of self-evaluation practices across all Council services, with a view to strengthening continuous improvement, accountability, and service outcomes alongside preparing the Council for implementation of a national framework for self-evaluation.

2. Objectives

- To evaluate how self-evaluation is currently understood and implemented across departments.
- To assess the extent to which self-evaluation informs strategic planning, service delivery, and performance improvement.
- To identify strengths, gaps, and areas of inconsistency in current approaches.
- To gather stakeholder perspectives on the value and impact of self-evaluation.
- To develop recommendations for a more coherent, impactful, and sustainable self-evaluation framework.

3. Scope

- All Council departments and services, including Education, Children's Services, Housing, Cleansing and Waste, Communities, Infrastructure, Economic Development, Finance, and Corporate Services.
- Use and impact of existing self-evaluation tools, frameworks, and processes (e.g., HGIOS4, HGIOELC, PSIF, internal audit tools).
- The use of data, stakeholder feedback, and performance indicators in self-evaluation.
- The role of leadership, governance, and culture in supporting self-evaluation.
- Training, support, and capacity-building for staff involved in self-evaluation.

4. Methodology

- Document Review: Analysis of current self-evaluation frameworks, reports, and improvement plans.
- Surveys and Interviews: Engagement with senior leadership, Service Managers and Elected Members to gather qualitative insights.

- Benchmarking: Comparison with best practice models from other local authorities or national guidance.
- Case Studies: In-depth review of selected services with strong or emerging self-evaluation practices.

5. Governance and Oversight

The review will be led by _____ with support from others as required, reporting to the senior leadership team.

6. Timescale

Enter date below.

- _____ : Planning, scoping and gathering of documentation
- _____ : Data collection and engagement
- _____ : Analysis and synthesis
- _____ : Drafting of findings and recommendations
- _____ : Final reporting and dissemination

7. Outputs

- A comprehensive report outlining findings, strengths, and areas for improvement.
- A set of practical recommendations for enhancing self-evaluation practices, including how a national framework for self-evaluation could be implemented.

Appendix B: Leadership Conversation Prompts

The questions below are selected extracts from the National Self Evaluation Framework Toolkit to support reflective leadership discussion. Grouped under the five readiness domains used in this tool, these questions help leadership teams to:

- explore how self evaluation currently operates in practice
- surface strengths, gaps and inconsistencies
- develop a shared view of readiness that can later be positioned within the Emerging / Developing / Established matrix

People – leadership, culture and ownership

- Do leaders at all levels model openness, learning and honesty about performance?
- How safe do managers and staff feel to surface weaknesses or challenge assumptions?
- Is there shared clarity about who owns self evaluation corporately and within services?
- How consistently do leaders signal that learning matters as much as assurance?

Approaches – how self evaluation is done

- How consistent are self evaluation approaches across services?
- Where do approaches feel fragmented, duplicated or reactive?
- How clearly does self evaluation link to improvement planning and decision making?
- Are approaches owned locally or driven mainly by inspection or reporting cycles?

Data – evidence, insight and confidence

- Where do leaders have high confidence in performance and outcome data — and where less?
- How effectively are qualitative insight and lived experience used alongside metrics?
- Can evidence from services be aggregated credibly to inform corporate understanding?
- How well does data support challenge and learning, not just reporting?

Technology – enabling the corporate view

- Do current systems support a shared, trusted corporate overview?
- How dependent is insight on manual interpretation or individual analysis?
- To what extent do dashboards and tools influence real decisions?
- Where does technology enable learning — and where does it constrain it?

Governance – challenge, oversight and follow through

- How visible is self evaluation within corporate and political governance?
- Is there sufficient challenge of findings, not just receipt of reports?
- How confident are leaders that learning leads to action over time?
- How well are risk, performance, improvement and assurance connected?

Appendix C: Self-Evaluation Questionnaire for Heads of Service

Type your response under each question.

How well is self-evaluation understood and used in your service area?

Which approaches/tools/methods do you use? (e.g., surveys, questionnaires, data reviews)

Do you use any specific frameworks? (e.g., PSIF, HGIOS, SHR) Please provide details and frequency.

Do you use any specific technological solutions? (e.g., Performance Management Systems, Microsoft Forms and PowerBi dashboards) Please provide details and frequency.

How well does self-evaluation inform strategic planning and improvement priorities?

In what ways do you use evidence from self-evaluation in decision-making?

Please give examples of self-evaluation processes used in your service area.

How confident are you in the consistency of these processes? How do you know? What further support would you need?

What approaches (if any) do you use to validate your self-evaluation evidence? (e.g., triangulating data, stakeholder feedback)

In what ways do you involve staff teams and/or stakeholders in self-evaluation?

How does feedback from stakeholders influence your improvement actions?

Have your staff received any training or support in self-evaluation? (If yes, please give details)

In your view, how important is leadership in promoting a culture of continuous improvement through self-evaluation? Please provide examples of practical actions leaders should take.

How confident are you that self-evaluation is embedded as a routine part of service improvement? Please explain your response.

What improvements are needed to strengthen self-evaluation practices in your service area and across the Council?

What practical steps would you suggest to support the introduction of a national framework so it integrates effectively into current approaches?

Any other comments:

Appendix D: Desktop Review Checklist

A desktop review draws on existing documentation already in use across services to surface patterns, variation and blind spots.

Aspect reviewed	Tick (✓)	What are we observing				
1. Existing self evaluation and review activity						
Overall observations			Self evaluation is well established in some services	Activity exists but is not labelled as self evaluation	Significant variation across service areas	Practice appears reactive or inspection driven in places
Service plans						
Improvement or transformation plans						
Self evaluation or review reports						
Inspection / audit / assurance evidence						
Other						

2. Approaches and consistency

Aspect reviewed	Tick (✓)	Notes/observations
Corporate performance reports		
Thematic review papers		
Transformation / improvement reports		
Committee papers referencing evaluation or learning		
Other (specify)		

What to notice:

Observation	Tick (✓)	Notes
Wide range of approaches in use		
Locally owned approaches evident		
Strong links between evaluation and improvement planning		
Duplication or fragmentation visible		

3. Evidence and data

Aspect reviewed	Tick (✓)	Notes/observations
Dashboards / scorecards		
Performance or outcome reports		
Committee papers using performance data		
Reports including qualitative insight or lived experience		
Other (specify)		

What the evidence suggests:

Observation	Tick (✓)	Notes
High confidence in some datasets		
Over reliance on “hard” data and limited gathering and analysis of qualitative data		
Variable confidence across services		
Data mainly used for reporting		
Data used to support learning and challenge		

4. Technology and systems

Aspect reviewed	Tick (✓)	Notes/observations
Corporate dashboards		
Performance management systems		
Data collection tools or templates		
Digital or data strategy papers		
Other (specify)		

What to notice:

Obervation	Tick (✓)	Notes
Technology supports a shared corporate view		
Insight depends on local interpretation		
Manual workarounds evident		
Tools or platforms are inconsistent		
Other (specify)		

5. Governance and oversight

Aspect reviewed	Tick (✓)	Notes/observations
Senior leadership agendas / papers		
Committee reports		
Risk or assurance documentation		
Improvement / transformation governance papers		

What governance appears to emphasise:

Observation	Tick (✓)	Notes
Assurance and reporting		
Challenge and reflection		
Learning and improvement		
Follow through on findings is variable		

Appendix E: Services Conversation Prompts

The questions below are selected extracts from the National Self Evaluation Framework Toolkit to support reflective leadership discussion. Grouped under the five readiness domains used in this tool, these questions are intended to help services reflect on existing practice and contribute insight that supports corporate sense making during the readiness phase.

People – roles, skills and engagement

- Do staff understand their role in reflection, learning and improvement?
- How confident are teams in having honest conversations about performance?
- Where do skills, capacity or confidence constrain self evaluation?
- How consistently are staff involved beyond providing data?

Approaches – service level practice

- What self evaluation or review activity already happens in the service?
- How planned or reactive is this activity?
- How clearly does it feed into service improvement planning?
- Where does practice align — or not — with corporate expectations?

Data – evidence at service level

- What evidence does the service rely on most — and why?
- How confident are staff in the accuracy and usefulness of data?
- What insight is missing or difficult to evidence?
- How well is lived experience captured and used?

Technology – systems in practice

- What systems or tools support performance and insight?
- How easy is it to extract meaningful information?
- Where do workarounds exist?
- How joined up are systems with corporate reporting?

Governance – accountability and learning

- How visible is service self evaluation to senior leadership?
- How useful is feedback or challenge from governance forums?
- How well are improvement actions tracked and reviewed?
- Where does governance help — and where does it add burden?

Appendix F: Benchmarking Sources

This appendix sets out illustrative sources that councils may find helpful when considering how their current self evaluation arrangements compare with recognised practice across Scottish local government.

Used thoughtfully, benchmarking can help councils develop a confident understanding of their starting point and identify practical priorities for strengthening self evaluation ahead of implementing the National Framework.

1. National Assurance and Scrutiny Frameworks

Helps councils test whether their self evaluation arrangements provide sufficient confidence at corporate and political levels.

Examples include:

- Best Value Reports
These reports can be particularly useful for benchmarking:
 - Understanding how others undertake self-evaluation both at corporate and service level.
 - Use of evidence in decision making
 - Links between performance, risk and improvement planning

2. Peer and Place Based Learning

Some of the most useful benchmarking comes from comparison of approach rather than metrics. This is helpful to surface practical insights across all themes.

Examples include:

- Learning from early adopter councils involved in piloting diagnostic or self evaluation approaches which can be access via the formal learning network.
- Thematic peer learning through professional associations and regional groupings to understand how self-evaluation approaches compare in specific functions.
- Improvement Service supported networks from programmes relating to Transformation, Performance and Improvement for example the PSIF network.

3. Internal Comparison and Consistency Checks

Benchmarking does not need to be external. Looking at how practice compares across service area makes duplication and blind spots visible in a way that corporate snapshots and external comparison can't offer.

Examples include:

- Comparison of self evaluation maturity across services
- Alignment between Service plans, Corporate performance reports, Risk registers and Improvement programmes
- Consistency of language and evidence used in committee reports

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