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Looking inwards, outwards and forwards



Celebrating 50 years of leadership: The Solace Scotland Conference 2024



By **Dr Grace Vickers**, Chair of Solace Scotland and Chief Executive of Midlothian Council

Solace stands as the UK's foremost membership network for public sector and local government professionals, proudly representing more than 1,600 members across the country. With regional branches hosting various events – from development days to skills training and networking opportunities – Solace serves as a vital hub for leadership and innovation in public service.

This year marks a significant milestone for Solace as we celebrate our 50th anniversary. In recognition of this momentous occasion, we are hosting the Solace Scotland Conference at the historic Melville Castle in Midlothian (as of when you will be reading this *Connected* supplement). The conference, aptly titled 'Looking Inwards, Outwards, Forwards', will focus on four pivotal themes critical to the future of local governance in Scotland.

A step change in tackling child poverty

One of the primary themes of this year's conference is child poverty – a pressing issue that local authorities in Scotland have been tasked with addressing through a transformative 'step change'. The potential benefits are vast: a healthier population, a thriving economy, and reduced pressure on public services. This session will explore what this 'step change' entails and how Scottish local authorities are striving to make it a reality.

Delivering the promise: A halfway reflection

In line with Scotland's commitment to



care-experienced children and young people, all local authorities have pledged to deliver The Promise by 2030. As we approach the

halfway mark of this 10-year mission in February 2025, the conference will offer a reflective session on the progress made and

the road ahead, reaffirming our collective dedication to fulfilling this promise.

Driving towards net zero

Our third focus is on Scotland's journey towards net zero, showcasing the work of the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute and introducing the new Scottish Climate Intelligence Service. This initiative, a collaboration between local government and the Scottish Government, will be presented in partnership with the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute and the Improvement Service. Attendees will also have the unique opportunity to participate in a study tour of Midlothian Energy Ltd, a pioneering joint venture between Midlothian Council and Vattenfall.

Building sustainable public services

The final theme of the conference addresses the sustainability of public services, focusing on both financial resilience and workforce development. Scotland's councils face significant challenges, including financial pressures, recruitment difficulties, an aging workforce, and skills gaps – all exacerbated by increasing service demands.

Despite these hurdles, there remains a strong, shared commitment to building a robust workforce that will not only sustain current service levels but also drive the future transformation of local government in Scotland. A new cohort of Springboard participants – our next generation of senior leaders – will also be welcomed as part of this commitment.

We look forward to seeing those of you joining us in celebrating this milestone year and contributing to the critical discussions that will shape the future of local government in Scotland. ●●●●●

INSIDE:



- A winning team: Dumfries & Galloway
- Making a positive impact in Scotland
- Q&A: David Purdue

A council transformed

Gillian Brydson and Lesley Watson of Dumfries and Galloway Council share their reflections about how they created and delivered service innovation that was labelled ‘simply awe inspiring’ by judges at *The MJ*

Dumfries and Galloway Council took home the Digital Transformation award at this year’s edition of *The MJ* Achievement Awards. At the time, judges said: ‘This outstanding entry showcases groundbreaking creativity in service delivery. The success stems from inspirational and courageous leadership, robust political support, and clear ambition, highlighting a unique blend of factors driving transformative change in public service provision and resulting in positive life changing opportunities for the young people.’

Connected spoke to Gillian Brydson (Executive Director, Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing) and Lesley Watson (Programme Director) at the council about how they approached the challenge.



Gillian Brydson and Lesley Watson: (below) Dumfries and Galloway Council wins at *The MJ* Awards 2024 (also see story right)

What key principles guide your leadership approach, particularly in the context of fostering digital innovation across the partnership?

Commitment to social justice, levelling the playing field, ambition for school community, eyes on the big prize, not taking no for an answer, determination and confidence to take risks and being solution focussed. But this is against the backdrop of empathy for headteachers and the challenges they face, taking the risk on their behalf with judgements based on experience and asking them to trust us based on our track record.

How do you encourage your team to think creatively and take risks when it comes to implementing new digital initiatives?

By recognising schools’ vulnerability and exposure by doing this alone, but with the protection of doing this together with senior management and political leverage. We look outwards to other sectors to see what worked and how it could be shaped to suit schools and rural education. Also we ask a wide range of people to contribute to planning – we knew we didn’t have all the answers but we had confidence in young people. On top of that, we use pupils’ voices to inform and influence – becoming advocates for change. We make lots of checks and balances to minimise risk to pupil attainment and protecting the schools from ‘unhelpful scrutiny’ at early stages in the development. And we recognise that it was never going to be perfect and have that window of tolerance, improving as we go along.

Can you share an example of a challenge you faced while leading this programme of digital transformation effort, and how your leadership style contributed to overcoming that challenge?

Winning the hearts and minds of headteachers and parents was not

and relentless focus on quality of learning and teaching. There was also a reminder to school management that even small numbers of children matter, as they have rights to a broad curriculum choice too. As the programme evolved, this has become less challenging as we have demonstrated successful outcomes for young people.

In what ways do you believe your leadership style has evolved as a result of leading this award winning project, and what lessons have you learned along the way?

We see the importance of moral authority, in harnessing the values that brought us into education in the first place and not to get distracted or demoralised because things are hard. We acknowledge the importance of humour and a safe space to resolve issues. We appreciate the need to be able to give slow adopters a route for a dignified change of heart. We see the importance of the right people in the room with the right skills and levels of influence (identification of the movers and shakers) and reaching out to other partners for economies of scale. A big

lesson that has been learned is don’t always wait for someone else to do it first and don’t wait for the perfect technical solution or financial injection. If you know what you have to do, and know what you already have to work with, we create the solution with the existing resources. Small organisations can have big ideas and while we could have waited for a national solution, we just got on a did it ourselves.

How do you balance the need for innovation with the importance of maintaining a shared vision?

By telling the story of disparity through data – creating the case for change – the core vision remained in all schools across the four councils to meet the aspirations of young people in preparing them for life in the 21st century, but building momentum over the last three years that there is a different way of delivering. We share a constant vision but know the innovation is how this can be realised. Also it was important to establish clear red lines – shared vision was about equity and quality, and this was non-negotiable.

considered a second tier offer. We listened to their fears and worked through the barriers that they put up, we listened, compromised, persuaded and challenged the status quo (or the ‘aye been’ if you want a Scottish twang). We gave constant reinforcement that this was about equity



Connected hears from Gillian Brydson and Lesley Watson about the @SWConnects programme of courses that contributed to an overall Digital Transformation win at this year’s *The MJ* Awards

Four Local Authorities in the South-West of Scotland have created a virtual learning campus for senior pupils. @SWConnects makes sure young people have the broadest choice of qualifications for Advanced Higher and

Higher through real time teaching online across all secondary schools in Dumfries and Galloway, East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire Councils. In 2020, we threw a spotlight on the inequity of opportunity available to

significant numbers of 15-18 years old pupils, often in small rural secondary schools where choices were limited because numbers were low and resources stretched. We have now been offering digital learning across 40 schools for three academic years, with 371 pupils having studied this route.

@SWConnects courses are recognised by schools as having parity with class based teaching and the results compare well. Three years on from the first cohort, we are absolutely delighted to have won the award for Digital Transformation. It is important to us *The MJ* Awards saw that @SWConnects focussed not on the technology but about educational leadership and the elements that are needed for excellent learning and teaching. We overcame some of the initial resistance about the right technology but we shifted the conversation to learning – that it is not the ‘kit’ that makes the difference but creating a compelling vision, with excellent teachers as the pathfinders and nudging people towards thinking differently.

This has all been about taking people with us, finding the ‘willing conscripts’ who saw that we could deliver qualifications online and give young people more subject options to follow their career paths if we changed what we did in school. It also needed schools and parent to trust that we were not taking risks in critical exam years.

While there was some concern among headteachers and parents initially that this might be a watered down or second class option, the focus on keeping the ingredients for excellent learning and teaching has put minds at rest, a confidence which is growing year on year. Most importantly, our young people like the wider options it has brought for subject choice and the

relevance the online learning has in preparing them for further study and work in the future.

One headteacher on attainment said: ‘There is a strong track history of our learners attaining really well in these courses, ultimately because they are getting to learn in subjects they are most passionate about,’ while a parent of a pupil taking one of the courses commented: ‘I’ve been very impressed with the standard of education delivered. South West Connects has been a fantastic way for my daughter to broaden her learning in a subject she loves. The quality of teaching has also been excellent.’

Continuing the positive comments, a teacher involved with the courses remarked: ‘If you’d said to me three or four years ago “What is Teams?” I would have said I haven’t got a clue. Certainly from my own experience I think I have become quite an expert in delivering online courses and quite an expert in Teams.’ A pupil taking one of courses added: ‘If it hadn’t been for South West Connects I wouldn’t have been able to get the grades I require to study medicine at university.’

The digital delivery of qualifications has had real impact across the four authorities. This has been a low cost option as it used existing technology and existing staff, but through working together, having robust quality assurance, clear governance oversight and regular pupil evaluation, we have realised the ambition of a broadening the curriculum in small and remote secondary schools.

This model has demonstrated a proof of concept – that with the right ingredients, schools in Scotland can successfully deliver SQA courses within a virtual classroom.



Meet the PPMA Service Super Star



David Ratchford, Strategic Payroll and HR Operations Manager at Salford City Council – and winner of the PPMA Service Superstar Award 2023 – shares some insights about attending the Digitally Disrupting HR Summit earlier this year. The event featured Lucy Adams, CEO at Disruptive HR and Scott Lieper from Imaginoscity, and was hosted by Oracle.

Have you always worked in Local Government?

Yes, I am a proud local government officer and started my career after leaving school starting as a ‘play worker’ in children’s services before moving into the HR profession in 2010. Not many people choose a career in payroll and tend to fall

in to it, but I am delighted that I managed to discover the opportunities it can offer – I love it.

Can you share your insights from attending the Digitally Disrupting HR Summit?

First and foremost, this event was a brilliant way for me to connect with a new

community of HR professionals from across the private and public sector – I also had the opportunity to meet up with Rebecca Lea, PPMA’s current HR Rising Star. It is really important to take time out to share, learn and connect and although there are always many reasons that can get in the way from attending such events, I am so pleased I committed time and made the effort to attend.

The way the subject of digitally disrupting HR was presented on that day was new to me – challenging my thinking about what a modern HR and OD service looks like based on best practice not just from the UK but also from companies operating on a global level. The information shared by Lucy Adams opened my mind to the art of the possible in areas such as recruitment, employee experience, learning, engagement, performance management and equality, diversity, and inclusion. The

reality check for me was that the changes required to drive a better service experience doesn’t necessarily require lots of financial resources but more about shifting the way we think and act – seeking to find new ways of doing things by starting with the end user and working back from there. This may sound obvious but it is not something we do enough of – treating people as adults and trusting them to do the right thing. I believe this principle could positively change the way HR is sometimes perceived.

A small but very relevant example Lucy shared with us related to organisation’s bereavement policy where generally there is a specified amount of time off an individual is allowed depending on the deceased person. A more compassionate approach would be to have a conversation with the individual and discover exactly what is needed to enable the individual to grieve and return to the

workplace when fit to do so. Many people are deeply affected by the loss of a pet which doesn’t usually feature as a legitimate reason for time off.


We also had the opportunity to understand how technology can drive a better experience for our employees and see what the art of the possible is thanks to a brilliant session delivered by Deano McCloy, a Solution Engineer at Oracle. I was very much intrigued by the ‘intelligent advisor’ and the concept of ‘employee journeys’ – I want to find out more about these and how we can use the functionality in our team.

The session with Scott Lieper was genuinely eye opening. Scott’s message highlighted the importance of being open to exploring different ways of providing services. This is something you can train and coach colleagues to do and time needs to be allocated to it. It reminded me of my time working as a play worker

and brought to my mind the quote ‘We don’t stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing’. It reminded me that we need to create the environment at work to encourage and support colleagues to experiment and try out new ways of doing things.

What was your main takeaway?

From the session with Lucy Adams it was definitely the notion that one size doesn’t fit all and how we in HR & OD need to seek out ways to be creative in order to make work more personalised and as a result treating people as adults.

Scott Lieper has already made me think differently about the way I engage with my own team – for example rather than have the standard agenda for every meeting, how can I mix it up to create a different experience so we don’t become stale and stuck doing the same thing over and over. 

Transforming Your Oracle Cloud Application ‘Value Realisation Glass’

Richard Twelvetrees, Value and Experience Director at de Novo Solutions, outlines the company’s 4-dimensional managed service strategy to help local government clients maximise return on investment and unlock the full potential of the cloud

Maintaining transformation momentum while demonstrating genuine value realisation is challenging. How full is your ‘Value Realisation Glass’? Recent media reports have highlighted ‘suboptimal’ cloud implementations in the public sector; however, these complex stories aren’t often what they seem. Articles like this should present alternative strategies and improvement approaches for discussion.

The potential gap between projected value and actual value realisation may indicate an organisation is struggling to extract the maximum from its investment.

Failing to achieve the anticipated value and transformational outcome goals can have widespread consequences. In my opinion, there are typically three main impact areas: Continuing Operational Inefficiency, User

Dissatisfaction and Low Organisational Morale, and Financial and Strategic Setbacks.

Unlike traditional on-premise solutions, cloud means continuous service improvements through regular vendor updates. However, the update cadence requires a re-evaluation of how to calculate and monitor value, considering the regular stream of innovation and resulting business changes.

The actual value of a service update ebbs and flows and is unique to each organisation’s circumstances, cloud configuration, transformation maturity, and user expectations.

To help measure ongoing value realisation, de Novo Solutions has developed Value as a Service (VaaS) – the new standard in Oracle Cloud managed services.

As a pioneering cloud implementation and managed service



delivery organisation, de Novo brings proven expertise and a strong reputation to the market. With VaaS, we have crafted a new service that is transforming the value equation.

VaaS shifts the value realisation narrative from a static ROI (Return On Investment) measure to a dynamic, ongoing client-centric value conversation.


The VaaS 4-dimension value measurement framework, inspired by Design Thinking, covers cognitive, strategic, and practical human experiences, encouraging clients to explore







value. Regular value calibration identifies strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, fostering action and collaboration throughout the digital transformational journey.

VaaS ‘Value Action Reports (VAR)’ are generated quarterly. To learn more about Value Realisation and VaaS join Leatham Green’s Oracle Cloud Applications webcast at noon on 9 October 2024. Alternatively for a conversation on this article or on VaaS please contact de Novo at www.de-novo-solutions.com



www.de-novo-solutions.com (E: contactdenovo@de-novo-solutions.com / T: 01633 492042). 

 DIMENSION 1 OPTIMISATION	Exploring knowledge share, recommendations, advice and contextual guidance to optimise performance	 DIMENSION 2 EFFICIENCY	Streamlining and automating services to reduce the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) while maximising release capabilities
Analysing service engagement and performance commentary to establish improved user experiences that make a difference	 DIMENSION 3 ADOPTION	Assessing and planning the potential use of new features, exploring improvements and innovations to assist the client’s journey	 DIMENSION 4 INNOVATION



Q&A

David Purdue: Chief Nurse, Chief People Officer and Deputy Chief Executive at North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board



Oracle and the Healthcare People Management Association recently hosted a roundtable event focusing on #inclusiveHR which featured David Purdue. Leatham Green, Transformation Director at Oracle took the opportunity to find out a little more about David what the current challenges facing HR in healthcare are.

How did you end up in your current role?

I joined the Integrated Care Board (ICB) as Chief Nurse when it was created in July 2023 having been in a variety of executive positions in the health sector for the last 14 years. I have always had a passion for talent and workforce development and when I was offered the opportunity to take on the role as Chief People Officer I jumped at the chance.

The health care sector is dependent on talented people and making sure we have a skilled and motivated workforce is vital if we are going to deliver the best quality care to our patients. I am in a very privileged position and I want to ensure we have all of the right foundations in place to enable our workforce to give of their best every day. I have personally been very fortunate to have been given a variety of great opportunities in my career within the health sector, whether that be as a practitioner through to working for NHS England that have enabled me to thrive and flourish and succeed.

My portfolio of responsibilities is quite unique in the sector and reflects my interest in workforce development – it is also a reflection of local restructuring to deliver financial efficiencies for the ICB – so quite similar to what colleagues in local government may well have experienced!

What is an ICB and what is it responsible for?

The ICB for the North East & North Cumbria covers a geographical region the size of Wales – 3.1m people – commissioning health services from 11 acute trusts, dentistry, pharmacy optometry and community health services, and ensuring those services are delivered to the best possible standard for the population of the region. This also includes public health covering the full life cycle from young people to ensuring people die with dignity and care.

The ICB connects with local government to ensure local residents

have the best quality care. We work collaboratively with many delivery teams across local government. I am the lead officer for integration specifically around workforce development and quality of care linking in with the Care Quality Commission.

What are the key people challenges for you across the region?

Formulation of a long-term plan for health as well as social care. We have created a People and Culture Strategy for the Region highlighting that we have one workforce across the healthcare eco-system. Strategic workforce planning is an area where we need to improve and responding to an ageing workforce as our longer serving colleagues retire and sit this alongside the need to recruit in a new workforce and ensure they have the right skills.

We do have some recruitment challenges that are common across the country such as general nursing and mental health nursing along with radiographers and the we face very specific challenges based on location which is not surprising given our size and that much of the region is rural and coastal. Our work is very much focused on creating the conditions whereby people who are in the jobs market want to be part of the caring and health profession and we do have a lot going for us, however we need to be better at promoting the vast array of brilliant career pathways that exist across the health sector. To support this promotional drive, we now do much more with our local schools and colleges, showcasing the exciting breadth of career opportunities open to them.

We will continue to seek positive strategies that drive positive improvements on our staff retention levels by ensuring we put the foundations in place that enable our workforce feel that they have a positive future. This will necessitate us to have strong leadership and clear career pathways across health and care.

As I shared earlier, we need to be far more effective in workforce planning and therefore we will continue to allocate a great deal of our time into the development of our Long-Term Workforce Plan.

What are you seeking from your HR team?

It goes without saying that I expect all of the basic services to be effective and to ensure our HR processes are simple and effective.

We are now working to put the necessary steps in place to enable us to move away from focusing on the tractional personnel activities and enhance our OD capabilities – this is to create a culture and climate that will keep people wanting to work in health and developing our managers to be effective coaches and creating a work environment for our colleagues to feel comfortable to speak truth to power and have a voice for everyone.



Making a positive impact across local government in Scotland

Connected takes a look at the progress of the Edinburgh and South East of Scotland City Deal as outlined by the Programme Management Office

Through the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal, close to £1.6bn of investment is being delivered, representing a fantastic return on the combined £600m investment from UK and Scottish Government.

Comprising six local authorities, four universities, six colleges, the private and third sectors and social enterprise, the Deal builds upon the region's strengths in delivering transformational programmes across innovation, skills, transport, culture and housing.

Following the Edinburgh and South East Scotland Science and Innovation

Audit (SIA) the Data-Driven Innovation Programme has created six 'hubs' of innovation space across areas such as robotics, population health sciences and informatics, agritech, healthy food and drink and translational medicine.

Our award-winning skills programme exemplifies inclusive growth having already delivered more than 111,000 skills improvements; 4,500 job outcomes and 500 career progressions.

The housing programme will deliver more than 41,000 new homes across seven strategic sites, creating 8,400 jobs and contributing more than £30bn to

the wider economy. The transport programme includes £36m to facilitate further economic growth in West Edinburgh, an area of national economic importance, together with a much-needed grade separation at Sheriffhall on the city bypass.

The Dunard Centre will be Edinburgh's first purpose-built concert hall in over a century and will become home to the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, opening doors internationally and symbolising our national creativity and innovation.

The Deal has proved the catalyst for greater collaboration and partners have agreed an ambitious Regional Prosperity Framework describing our collective ambition and future opportunities to develop the regional economy.



hr&od
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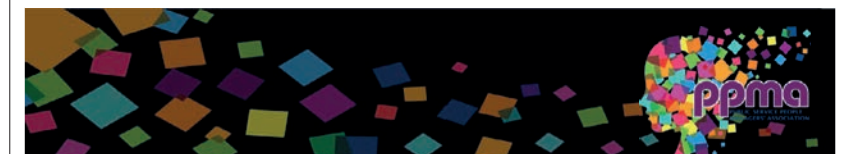


Exciting News: PPMA Virtual Conference Returns 25th September 2024!

We're thrilled to announce that this year's **Virtual Conference** is back this September! This one-day online event is **free for all PPMA Members** and promises a diverse lineup of inspiring speakers.

Stay tuned for more details coming soon!

www.ppma.org.uk



Championing our young people

By **Joan Tranent**, Chief Social Work Officer and Chief Officer Children's Services Partnership and Communities at Midlothian Council



Midlothian Council has always acknowledged the voice of the child is paramount in how we design our services for children and young people. Midlothian Champions Board is a group of care experienced young people who are supported to engage directly with those who make key decisions about children and young people who are 'looked after'. More than simply a chance to meet and consult, our vision has always been to create a cultural shift, with a focus on creating opportunities to improve outcomes for care experienced young people.

Midlothian House Project is one major example of where this has happened. Through consultation with our Champions Board, it was clear that transition from care to independent living was a particular concern for care experienced young people. Moreover, it is well documented that the housing outcomes for care experienced young people (CEYP) are poor.

To date Midlothian House Project has supported 39 young people from a variety of care settings including, residential, kinship and secure care

Scottish Government statistics reveal that CEYP have a 50% chance of becoming homeless, when they leave their care placement. We know the lack of a permanent home has a negative impact on a range of other indicators such as health, offending, education, employment and mental health. In 2019, Life Changes Trust offered Midlothian Champions' Board the opportunity to apply for three-year funding to deliver The National House Project framework within their local authority. Midlothian Champions Board along with extensive input from our young people were successful in their application and along with match funding from Children's Services were able to implement the Midlothian House Project in June 2020.

The National House Project (NHP) is a UK-based charity that supports young people leaving the care system to live independently. It helps them establish their own homes by providing practical and emotional support, fostering life skills, and ensuring long-term stability. Local housing projects



such as Midlothian offer housing solutions and personalised guidance, empowering care leavers to build a secure and sustainable future.



Midlothian's House Project stands as a model of innovation in supporting young people transitioning out of care, embodying the principles set forth in The Promise. This initiative emphasises a holistic approach, focusing on 'interdependent' living—a concept that encourages mutual support and self-reliance among young people.

Central to this model is the emphasis on relationship-based and trauma-informed practices, enhanced by the involvement of a dedicated psychologist.

This approach reflects the local authority's strong commitment to aligning with the five foundation pillars of The Promise, ensuring that services are reformed and redesigned to meet the needs of those they serve. Midlothian Children's Services has evidenced this by restructuring existing core resources to

commit permanent funding incorporating Midlothian House Project into its mainstream children's services.

To date Midlothian House Project has supported 39 young people from a variety of care settings including, residential, kinship and secure care. From this cohort, 71% have successfully moved into their own permanent properties with coincidentally the same percentage in education or employment. The remainder are offered intensive assistance and support until such times they have the confidence and ability to transition into independent living.

One young beneficiary of the project commented: 'It gave me the opportunity to be where I wanted to be in life' while another noted: 'They are always there for us (House project staff) when you need them' – proof that Midlothian Housing Project is a success story many others could follow. 