

FINANCE COMMITTEE

DRAFT BUDGET 2014-15

SUBMISSION FROM WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

1. West Dunbartonshire Council welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence on the National Performance Framework, particularly the outcomes based approach to performance in relation to the spending review and budget allocation process.
2. The focus on a single overarching purpose, with underpinning objectives and outcomes gives a clear indication of the intent of Government and allows scope for evidencing the need for specific spending / budget decisions.
3. Measuring Government performance is of fundamental importance. The Scotland Performs framework provides a focus on the objectives that matter to Government, and makes clear the long term intention. The Government has tried to provide monitoring information on progress towards achieving its objectives in a way that is easily accessible to the public.
4. The transparent and accountable publication of Scotland Performs adds a governance element to the spending review and budget process in that it gives a clear line of sight between spending decisions and progress towards the ambitious targets set by Government.
5. There is no doubt that it is best practice to have clarity around key outcomes and objectives, with a supporting framework to evidence progress towards these. However this should be supported through a clear hierarchy for the performance information gathered as some indicators will be more significant and critical than others, either as the information is more robust and valid or because the indicator is direct evidence of delivery of the outcome or objective.
6. At present it is difficult to see from the Scotland Performs publication how the data gathered and published is used to inform decision making and prioritisation of resources. It would helpful if more information clarifying how the outcome areas are interconnected and therefore interdependent was presented. Without this, it will be difficult to evidence the complexity of the progress required to deliver on the overarching purpose as laid out by Government.
7. Although Government has set out its intention in Scotland Performs, a strategic approach across all Government departments towards achieving these objectives is required. There appears, at times, to be some inconsistent messages from different divisions within Government, which weakens to strategic approach being taken.
8. By focusing on and presenting more trend data at Scotland Performs level the National Performance Framework would be more accessible to the population and would allow clarity around the direction of travel for each specific indicator. This shift would focus the discussion, at all levels, on actions required to deliver the outcomes.

9. At present the focus is too often on the individual performance of each indicator in isolation rather than overall performance towards the overarching purpose. This means there is no real feel for which particular areas of performance require more targeted attention to ensure they deliver.

10. It may be helpful if Government would consider the option of leading on the introduction of outcome based budgeting; which would allow individual public sector organisations, and Community Planning Partnerships, to build knowledge, learning and experience in this area. Though the means of costing such budgeted or planned outcomes needs to be carefully considered, as there will be a number of ways of achieving the desired outcomes, none of which are necessarily more right than the others. Costing on, for example, unit costs will also present difficulties due to different approaches to unit costing across public bodies.

11. There are some areas within the National Performance Framework where further work may improve both the process and the outcomes. The indicators within the framework would benefit from having more detail on ownership and contribution to show which agencies/ departments are most likely to contribute to their achievement.

12. Given the focus nationally on prevention and early intervention at all levels it may be helpful and set a more positive tone if the national framework reflected this focus. There are some good examples of switching the outcomes focus to prevention and early intervention in relation to the plans and activities for the older people and early years' change funds. It is important, however, to recognise that such a switch of focus requires an element of 'bridging' support as the move from responsive service delivery to early intervention activity sees some 'double running' of services as current demand takes some time to lessen.

13. A number of the outcome areas require a change in culture and lifestyle choice by individuals as well as a change in practice and prioritisation from key agencies. Some contextual narrative to the framework and individual indicators to explain this complexity may make the framework more meaningful for the public. This approach would also allow more detailed analysis of differing contributions.

14. Within the national framework it is difficult to evidence the link between the outcomes / objectives and the spending review / resource allocation decisions. Mapping resource allocation and available budget against the outcomes/ objectives would enhance understanding of current activity and also inform better decision making by allowing the framework to act as a mechanism for objective prioritisation.

15. While Scotland Performs is a hugely important and critical tool to evidence that progress is being made in line with the clearly defined Government purpose it is weakened by the lack of aligned financial information within its published information.

16. The framework could be enhanced by adding a range of information both contextual and performance related which allows for an assessment of progress and value for money, and a defined set of data quality standards that will enable the government to produce clearer and more robust performance information.

17. In conclusion West Dunbartonshire Council is fully supportive of the Scotland Performs model and is keen to see this developed and enhanced as outlined above.