

COSLA Response

The Finance and Public Administration Committee *Ambitions into Action* Inquiry: Call for views

COSLA welcomes the opportunity to provide views in response to the specific questions set out below by the Scottish Parliamentary Finance and Public Administration Committee. COSLA would further welcome a future opportunity (post-election) to provide oral evidence to the Committee on some of the wider aspects concerning the *Ambitions into Action* Inquiry and expand on experience to date.

The questions presented in this call for views seem to focus primarily on the more practical or operational aspects of the way outcomes are accommodated by the governance arrangements of responding bodies across Scotland.

In view of this, and the fact that COSLA is a co-signatory of the current National Performance Framework in 2018, the responses set out below relate largely to the way COSLA shape its policy making and decision taking as a body, rather than an attempt to duplicate the work the Scottish Parliamentary Committee will do when it comes to summarising the views of individual councils (and other bodies) responses to this call. These will likely comprise a range of approaches and practices adopted by individual councils across Scotland according to their local partnership and internal configurations.

1. *To what extent do the National Outcomes shape how your organisation works?*

COSLA worked in partnership with the Scottish Government on the development and launch in June 2018, of the revised National Performance Framework (NPF) and has embedded the eleven outcomes, set out therein, within the priorities listed in the COSLA workplan. Ultimately, the priorities to which COSLA works are agreed by the 32 councils in Scotland through decisions taken by elected members delegated by councils to the COSLA Convention.

Each of COSLA's policy teams work to a programme focussed on a range of outcomes that are linked in turn, and where appropriate, to the NPF Outcomes. These outcomes are threaded variously through all of our policy work and explicit links are highlighted as policy drivers in our political reports.

Furthermore, the COSLA *Blueprint for Local Government* published in September 2020¹ calls for the Scottish Government to provide the resources required by councils to achieve a more focussed set of six themes. These priorities are based on the empowerment of people and communities; all of which are designed to support post Covid-19 recovery and can be linked clearly to elements set out in the NPF. This enablement is further argued in the recent response to the consultation on the proposed *Resource Spending Framework*².

¹ [Blueprint for Local Government](#)

² [COSLA Response to Resource Spending Framework](#)

The outcomes set out in the NPF have considerable influence over the way COSLA works.

2. *How do you know which National Outcomes your organisation contributes towards? How do you demonstrate this to your organisation and more widely to others?*

COSLA works on behalf of councils and in partnership with the Scottish Government, and the range of other public sector organisations (e.g. Public Health Scotland, Police Scotland, etc) and the third sector, which all have a part to play in delivering services to local communities and which all impact on the progress being made toward better outcomes locally and, by extension, the range of National Outcomes. Progress towards the National Outcomes are routinely demonstrated at COSLA Leaders' and policy Board meetings through reports, presentations, dialogue, and the range of other engagements with other public sector organisations and the media.

Progress on COSLA's priority outcomes is reported annually at COSLA Convention (comprising a politically balanced group representing all COSLA's member councils).

3. *How empowered is your organisation to do something different (should it wish) to achieve the National Outcomes relevant to you?*

COSLA has a wide-ranging remit covering the breadth of public policy area pertaining to the delivery of services to local communities; as such all the National Outcomes are relevant, though not all can be a priority for COSLA at all times. COSLA understands that the route toward achieving National Outcomes is not prescribed. This leaves the potential for, and advantage of, a wide range of different and often innovative paths to be developed through which better outcomes can be achieved. At the local level this can translate into tailoring specific services to address unique local issues or targeting local groups or communities.

However, the empowerment councils and their partners have in respect of local flexibility to meet local priorities, and in turn contribute to achieving a National Outcome, is often constrained by a national focus on particular 'solutions' coupled with funding which is provided only for those centrally favoured solutions and is often short term in nature. There has to be flexibility and an understanding that local solutions can cumulatively provide better national outcomes.

COSLA is able, as far as the limited resource it has available allows, to focus on doing things differently; albeit COSLA must also respond to options proposed by national governments whether or not they are the best for all communities in Scotland. Similarly, and more generally, councils are constrained by overall levels of funding provided through Grant Aided Expenditure by the Scottish Government together with significant funding allocations contingent on being tied to specific government sponsored implementations. This piecemeal approach to funding does not truly support and outcomes-based approach.

4. How is your organisation held to account for how your actions and decisions impact on the National Outcomes?

As a member-based organisation COSLA is resourced by, and comprises representation from, all 32 Scottish Councils. At the highest level COSLA Convention, supported by COSLA Leaders, accounts for all the actions and decisions taken in its name; for example by Policy Boards. Accountability on all matters, including those which impact on the National Outcomes, is provided to these structures through regular reporting.

At the local level Community Planning partners each have their own lines of accountability. Councils, for example, have several nationally agreed frameworks and regime with which they have statutory obligation to comply (e.g. Local Outcome Improvement Plans, Audit Scotland Best Value Framework, Local Government Benchmarking Framework).

It may be worth noting at this point that the Scottish Leaders Forum – which is co-chaired by the COSLA Chief Executive and the Scottish Government Director-General Communities – recently produced a report on accountability in respect of the NPF, entitled *Leadership, Collective Responsibility and Delivering the National Outcomes*³. The report makes several positive conclusions around the steps that can be taken to support progress toward achieving the National Outcomes.

5. How are the National Outcomes reflected in everyday decision taking?

The commitment made in 2018 when COSLA co-signed, with the Scottish Government, the latest iteration of the National Performance Framework means that the outcomes set out therein are synergised with COSLA's policy development priorities. As such they are integral to the framework which guides and therefore reflects the National Outcomes through the decisions needed to draft a range of policy proposals. These are then decided upon by our member councils through our governance structures e.g. COSLA Leaders' meetings.

6. When it comes to spending priorities or providing funding to others, what role do the National Outcomes play?

The National Outcomes are woven into strategic plans at national and local levels, which are supported by operational decisions designed to help progress toward national and local outcomes; their role is to underpin, alongside other factors, decision making.

The National Outcomes provide an over-arching set of focuses to be considered, as appropriate, beside the range of other priorities, factors, and priorities which inform policy development by COSLA and similarly at the local level by councils; who also need to ensure value for money; this being a requirement of the Best Value approach.

COSLA believe that further work is needed to ensure councils are provided with more resources to direct toward their local priorities, set out and agreed at the local level by Community Planning Partnerships through their Local Outcome

³ [Leadership, Collective Responsibility and Delivering the National Outcomes](#)

Improvement Plans, rather than being tied to projects determined by the Government.

There needs to be an acceptance that local outcomes, which are developed in the context of driving toward national outcomes, are a proper and valid way to achieve the National Outcomes. It is not clear that that connection is yet fully accepted or embedded, as it should be, across all Scottish Government directorates.

7. *To what extent is any public sector funding you receive contingent upon demonstrating your contribution to delivery of the National Outcomes.*

Funding support to work on specific areas across COSLA policy teams is provided, on fixed term bases, by several national organisations and the Scottish Government. Without exception, this work is intended to contribute to the delivery of National Outcomes. The contribution these various streams of work makes is demonstrated through reporting arrangements agreed at the start of the support term as well as through COSLA's reporting structures; albeit linkage to the progress made toward National Outcomes themselves can be demonstrated through analysis of the NPF performance measures.

8. *Where do the National Outcomes sit within the range of priorities and demands on your organisation?*

In terms of all the outcomes and priorities identified by COSLA and agreed with our partners as integral to the range of different pieces of work ongoing across the public policy landscape, the National Outcomes sit at the top level. They provide an overarching reminder of the need for COSLA's national policy development work as well as the services we host (e.g. Business Gateway, myjobscotland, and Trading Standards Scotland) to converge toward these outcomes as long-term destinations.

9. *To what extent do you work collaboratively with other organisations in delivering the National Outcomes relevant to you?*

Most, if not all, of the outcomes set out as part of the National Performance Framework require inputs from more than one organisation; it is clear that no single organisation will secure the National Outcomes. As such the coordination of work, in terms of objectives and outcomes, is essential. COSLA works collaboratively with the panoply of public sector organisations in Scotland, the UK and Internationally in pursuit of the development of public policy which will secure progress toward the National Outcomes. With this in mind COSLA considers it important to frequently challenge SG and UKG to ensure that policy and legislation that are developed, contribute to the National Outcomes.

As an illustration of this and taking the National Outcome on the economy as one example, the Business Gateway National Unit in COSLA, works extensively and in collaboration with the Scottish Government, the three enterprise agencies, Skills Development Scotland, Visit Scotland and Creative Scotland as well as all 32 Councils. The principal mechanism for this is the Business Support Partnership, which is proving effective in removing duplication, increasing

collaboration, and improving the customer journey. The unit also works with the Scottish Government, VisitScotland, the enterprise agencies, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Tourism Alliance on the Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group which has proven effective in articulating and responding to the challenges faced by the tourism, hospitality, and leisure sector throughout the pandemic.

Likewise, councils collaborate extensively with many other local organisations, primarily through Community Planning Partnerships, and through other structures such as Integration Joint Boards, in terms of the work being done on prioritisation, design, development and delivery of services relevant to achieving local, and therefore, the National Outcomes.

10. Please share any examples of good practice, areas for improvement or practices that have not worked so well.

For brevity, the following provides a sample of experience drawn from the many areas of COSLA's activity which relate to progressing the National Outcomes.

Adult Social Care

The Scottish Government and COSLA have issued a joint statement of intent which outlines how they will work together to deliver the key foundation pillars which were set out in the Independent Review of Adult Social Care in Scotland, these are key to achieving National Outcomes. This has involved working collaboratively with a range of organisations, where workstreams with a range of stakeholders have been set up to progress each of the agreed outcomes. Some progress has been made with achieving the statement of intent, but it has also taken place against a context of ongoing response to COVID-19 including the emergence of variants and the requirement to respond to the pressures that have been exacerbated within the social care sector, as well as the development of proposals for a National Care Service.

Public Health

Another area where COSLA is closely collaborating with other organisations to deliver the National Outcomes is through our work on Public Health as joint sponsors of Public Health Scotland where we have been supporting the delivery of the Public Health Priorities and working to strengthen strategic relationships with Scottish Government, COSLA, Public Health Scotland and Directors of Public Health in delivering a world class public health system.

Mental Health

COSLA has also been working collaboratively with other organisations to deliver the National Outcomes through our partnership working on mental health policy including suicide prevention strategy development and implementation of actions within Every Life Matters suicide prevention action plan.

Economic Development

Local Government, despite recognition as a key partner in the delivery of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) and being a sphere of government, has had little engagement in the development of NSET. Given the many substantial areas that Local Government operates in, and which contribute

to the Economy, it would be helpful, going forward, for greater collaboration and co-production with the Government on economic recovery and development.

National Taskforce on Human Rights

COSLA was a member of the National Taskforce on Human Rights Leadership, Leaders endorsed the recommendations to establish a statutory framework for the incorporation of the economic, social, and cultural rights, along with a right to healthy environment. Leaders also agreed to support the recommendations to incorporate specific rights for women, persons with disabilities, race, older people and LGBTI people. Once enacted, the Scottish Government and public authorities will have a duty to progressively realise these rights using the maximum available resources. A key pillar of support for this was due to the commitment to the National Performance Framework, and how these recommendations will support improved outcomes.

Equality Budgetary Advisory Group

COSLA officers are represented on the Equality Budgetary Advisory Group (EBAG) which aims to help shape the Scottish Government's equality and human rights approach to the budget. EBAG made a number of recommendations around improving processes; communications; organisation and culture; and knowledge and understanding for the Parliamentary term. EBAG frequently references the importance of linking budgets to the National Performance Framework to advance equality and human rights.