

SCVO response to the Finance and Public
Administration Committee

National Performance Framework: ambitions into action

April 2022

Summary

About us

The [Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations \(SCVO\)](#) is the national membership organisation for the voluntary sector (sometimes referred to as the third sector). We champion the sector, provide services, and debate big issues. Along with our community of 2,900+ members, we believe that charities, social enterprises, and community groups make Scotland a better place.

About our submission

SCVO welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's [inquiry](#) into the [National Performance Framework \(NPF\)](#). Here, we provide supplementary evidence alongside that provided by individual voluntary organisations on their experience with the NPF.

We hope this will be of use to the committee when considering the processes, systems, cultures, and behaviours that support NPF delivery. Our submission is split into two parts: a **summary of our response** and our **full response**.

We have not carried out fresh engagement with voluntary organisations concerning this inquiry to avoid replicating the committee's direct call to organisations. We base our submission on our own experience and understanding of the implementation issues we have built over many years.

Summary

Our submission covers three strands relating to the delivery of the NPF that we consider to be significant. Those strands include the need for visible policy coherence, effective accountability mechanisms, and inclusive participation. This summary shares our key asks.

Visible policy coherence

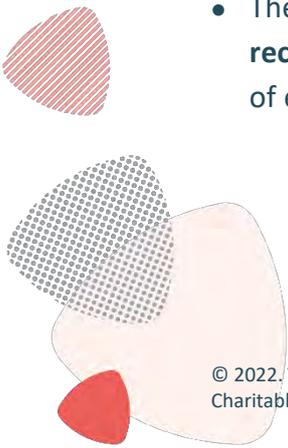
- There needs to be **a consistent commitment to and leadership of the NPF throughout the Scottish Government and other public bodies** that delivers policy coherence across strategies, plans, frameworks, and activities.
- We expect to see a **more profound analysis of how policies and activities in economic and other strategies and plans contribute** to and interact with and across the different National Indicators and Outcomes.
- The committee could **seek evidence from the Scottish Government on its use of specific methodologies and tools to assess the potential impact or influence** of policies and activities on National Indicators and Outcomes.

Effective accountability mechanisms

- The **Scottish Government, Parliament, COSLA and scrutiny organisations should indicate the next steps they will take to disseminate and act upon the report of the Scottish Leaders' Forum** on improving accountability to deliver the NPF outcomes.
- The committee could **ask the Scottish Government how it will use the Wellbeing & Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill to strengthen duties** on public bodies to demonstrate their impact against the NPF outcomes.

Inclusive participation

- The Scottish Government should **consider how data generated by the voluntary sector can be linked to National Indicators, with tools and guidance** for voluntary organisations to demonstrate their unique contributions.
- The Scottish Government should **consider the Social Renewal Advisory Board's recommendation that the NPF becomes a live dashboard**, informed by a broad range of experiences in addition to current outcome measures.



Our response

SCVO welcomes the Finance and Public Administration Committee's [inquiry](#) into the [National Performance Framework \(NPF\): ambitions into action](#). We have [promoted](#) the inquiry to our members and look forward to participating in the committee's informal evidence gathering sessions this May.

Here, we provide supplementary evidence alongside that provided by individual voluntary organisations on their experience with the NPF. We hope this will be of use to the committee when considering the processes, systems, cultures, and behaviours that support NPF delivery.

SCVO has been a long-time supporter of the National Performance Framework since its inception in 2007, calling for the NPF to guide the decisions and actions of public bodies. We have often asked a similar question to that of the committee – *“how well does it do that?”*

We agree with the committee that the 2023 review is an opportunity to *‘reposition the National Performance Framework at the heart of government planning, from which all priorities and plans should flow.’* However, the committee's inquiry provides a welcome space to consider what is required to deliver the NPF.

Our submission covers three strands relating to the delivery of the NPF that we consider to be significant. Those strands include the need for:

1. Visible policy coherence
2. Effective accountability mechanisms
3. Inclusive participation

1. Visible policy coherence

- There needs to be a consistent commitment to and leadership of the NPF throughout the Scottish Government and other public bodies that delivers policy coherence across strategies, plans, frameworks, and activities.
- We expect to see a more profound analysis of how policies and activities in economic and other strategies and plans contribute to and interact with and across the different National Indicators and Outcomes.
- The committee could seek evidence from the Scottish Government on its use of specific methodologies and tools to assess the potential impact or influence of policies and activities on National Indicators and Outcomes.

The committee has [recently highlighted](#) confusion across sectors around how the National Outcomes in the National Performance Framework influence policymaking. We agree that it is often unclear which of the Scottish Government's frameworks, strategies, or plans are the priority. Policy coherence is about joined-up thinking, but we are not seeing consistent links between strategy, plans, and activities with the NPF. This muddles the strategic vision set by the NPF and contributes to a confusing landscape.

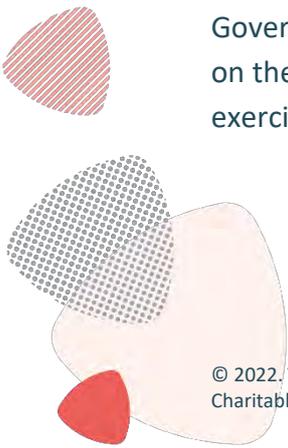
The NPF risks falling into the background of other frameworks and approaches that do not coherently reinforce policy actions across government plans and strategies and those of other public bodies. Policy coherence is crucial for addressing social, economic, and environmental outcomes in a balanced manner. However, the development of economic policy in Scotland over the past 18-months provides excellent examples of fairly light-touch and scattergun approaches to utilising the NPF.

The Scottish Government's [Advisory Group on Economic Recovery \(AGER\)](#) chose to sidestep the NPF. While it noted that the NPF was a "*sound framework*," it wanted to "*adopt a broad and robust framework for looking at the Scottish economy that would capture all of its assets and provide the basis for a holistic view of paths to a more robust and resilient economy in the future.*" The AGER adopted the [four capitals framework](#) rather than using the NPF to situate its work.

Looking at the [National Strategy for Economic Transformation \(NSET\)](#), it is hard not to notice the lack of a single mention of 'national outcome.' Across many government plans and strategies, we often see the line used in the NSET: "*The strategy is aligned with our National Performance Framework.*" However, there is usually little evidence of a robust alignment process that can demonstrate the potential impact or influence of policies and activities on National Indicators and Outcomes; the Scottish Government should publish this if it has undertaken one.

Likewise, many of those who gave evidence to the committee on the [Resource Spending Review \(RSR\) Framework](#) highlighted the lack of links between the NPF and other frameworks, policy directions, and spending decisions. The RSR Framework offers little to no clarity on the connections between the priorities set out and Scotland's National Outcomes. In our [oral evidence](#) to the committee, SCVO explained that we were unsure which of the Scottish Government's frameworks, strategies or plans were the priority.

As part of establishing the [Scottish National Investment Bank \(SNIB\)](#), the Scottish Government developed an impact assessment tool as a potential approach for the Bank to measure its performance against the NPF. However, it is unclear how the Scottish Government assesses the impact of policies and activities across the Scottish Government on the NPF and whether similar tools are deployed. Such tools should not be viewed as an exercise in form-filling but rather to help policymakers think and learn.



The prototype tool designed for the Bank highlighted how it is possible for the Scottish Government and other public bodies to score the potential direct and indirect impact of policy choices and activities across plans and strategies on the relevant National Indicators and, subsequently, the National outcomes. It is unclear whether the Bank now uses the tool. Still, it would have been able to assess whether activities were likely to influence the indicators positively or negatively.

Attributing a particular policy or activity directly or indirectly to changes in the National Indicators can be challenging. In these cases, civil servants developed proxy indicators relevant to the Bank as the best alternative. It helpfully demonstrated the possibilities and limitations surrounding the implementation of the NPF, and the approach taken here could be considered further to inform how other Scottish Government departments, public bodies, and other sectors demonstrate their impact robustly and coherently.

2. Effective accountability mechanisms

- The Scottish Government, Parliament, COSLA and scrutiny organisations should indicate the next steps they will take to disseminate and act upon the report of the Scottish Leaders' Forum on improving accountability to deliver the NPF outcomes.
- The committee could ask the Scottish Government how it will use the Wellbeing & Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill to strengthen duties on public bodies to demonstrate their impact against the NPF outcomes.

In announcing the inquiry to the Scottish Parliament on 1 March, the Convenor mentioned that in his blog of 7 September 2021, "[Christie 10-years on](#)", the Auditor General for Scotland noted that Scotland is suffering from "*a major implementation gap between policy ambitions and delivery on the ground.*" The report, '[Valuing the Third Sector](#),' published by the former [Equalities and Human Rights Committee](#) in 2019, highlighted the voluntary sector's evidence of the gap between national policy priorities and local delivery.

We agree with [Audit Scotland's analysis](#) at the time that there is a crucial issue around how to marry the Local Outcomes Improvement Plans and the national plans together and how the different plans align. According to the recently published report of the [Social Renewal Advisory Board \(SRAB\)](#), local government has responsibility for 65% of the NPF. Yet, local authorities have no legal duty to report on their contribution to the National Outcomes, only a recommendation that they look at how local outcomes link to national outcomes.

We recognise that other frameworks will be needed, particularly at local and thematic levels. Ensuring more visibility of the links and reporting across these frameworks is vital so that voluntary organisations can navigate a complex landscape of policies and

frameworks. We agree with [Evaluation Support Scotland \(ESS\)](#) that “it would be helpful if all of us involved in public services start with the NPF and, if other frameworks are also needed, link them to the NPF to join things up.”

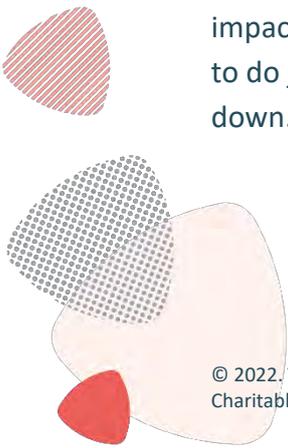
The former [Equalities and Human Rights Committee](#) called on the Scottish Government to outline its “views on the options available to it to strengthen the links between Scotland’s NPF and public bodies.” The [government’s response](#) pointed to its work to bring senior leaders from the public sector and other sectors together through the [Scottish Leaders Forum \(SLF\)](#). Since then, the SLF has taken a re-energised focus on the NPF, recently publishing its report on “[Improving accountability and incentives to deliver the NPF outcomes and live the values.](#)”

The SLF report concludes that the status of accountability against the NPF is at best “patchy” and that the NPF is not always actively used to shape scrutiny, funding decisions, and commissioning. The report goes on to outline how organisations across all parts of society – including design authorities, delivery agencies, enabling organisations, and scrutiny bodies – can be supported and encouraged to make changes to deliver on Scotland’s National Outcomes, covering aspects of awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement.

The SLF’s focus on these aspects supports our view that there needs to be a consistent commitment to and leadership of the NPF throughout the Scottish Government and other public bodies that stretches across strategies, plans, frameworks, and activities at a national and local level and other sectors. A report is only as good as the dissemination and implementation plans that run alongside it. Now that the SLF has delivered its report on strengthening the links between the NPF and other bodies, how will the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, COSLA and scrutiny organisations take the next steps required to deliver on the NPF?

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which puts Scotland’s NPF on a statutory footing, only requires Scottish ministers to consult on, develop and publish a new NPF every five years. It does not require public bodies, the Scottish Parliament, or local authorities to consult on the way we measure progress towards those national outcomes, nor does it require institutions to assess the impact of their decisions and actions against the 11 National Outcomes.

The committee may wish to consider the [Programme for Government 2021-2022](#) commitment to introduce a new [Wellbeing and Sustainable Development \(Scotland\) Bill](#). How will this bill be used to strengthen the requirements for all public bodies and local authorities in Scotland to take complete account of their decisions’ short and long-term impact by assessing the impact on Scotland’s National Outcomes? There is a commitment to do just that, and it is essential that any new legislation is meaningful and not watered down.



3. Inclusive participation

- **The Scottish Government should consider how data generated by the voluntary sector can be linked to National Indicators, with tools and guidance for voluntary organisations to demonstrate their unique contributions.**
- **The Scottish Government should consider the Social Renewal Advisory Board's recommendation that the NPF becomes a live dashboard, informed by a broad range of experiences as well as current outcome measures.**

Referring to the NPF as a '[beacon of hope](#)' back in 2019, SCVO's CEO, Anna Fowlie, explained that the framework must be more than an aspirational rallying call. We must measure our services, whatever sector they are in, against the National Outcomes. Some organisations use the NPF to shape services and dialogue with public sector colleagues. At an [event](#) hosted by SCVO, ESS, and the Scottish Government in 2019, attendees heard from several organisations who had embraced the NPF in their work and of which ESS had produced [case studies](#) of.

[Befriending Networks](#) discussed how they used the NPF when considering applying for new funding. The [Scottish SPCA](#) used the NPF as a vital tool in setting out its 2020 business plan. The [Scottish Youth Theatre Arts Scotland](#) and its members considered how they can collectively improve evidencing the impact of their work on non-arts priorities for Scotland. In addition to these case studies, we would recommend the Committee considers the [report](#) from ESS Scotland in June 2019 on what the national performance framework means for the third sector?

We know that voluntary organisations use the NPF and National Outcomes in many ways, from utilizing them in advocacy reports and funding applications to adopting them as a lens to undertake their annual planning. We would regard awareness of the NPF as relatively strong within Scotland's voluntary sector, demonstrated in the significant presence of voluntary organisations in the structured conversations and online survey as part of the [consultation process](#) undertaken to produce revised National Outcomes in 2018.

Better use of the NPF may be encouraged through greater commitment to and leadership of the NPF within the Scottish Government and across other public bodies, with more visibility of how National Outcomes feed through Scottish budget allocations. Considering how data and monitoring generated by voluntary organisations can be linked to National Indicators, and hence the National Outcomes, would be useful. It would also be beneficial to provide tools and guidance to civil servants and voluntary organisations on how to work together to develop appropriate proxy outcome indicators relevant to their projects that can link to National Indicators.

The Social Renewal Advisory Board's report – "[If not now, when?](#)" – offers 20 calls to action that, if acted upon, would make a substantial contribution to seeing progress

across Scotland's National Outcomes. More than this, it provides a key call to action that directly relates to the usability and success of Scotland's National Performance Framework. Under chapter five of the report, titled "*Closing the Gap between promise and practice*," call to action 20 states that "*decision-makers must commit to co-designing the means of gauging progress towards renewal.*"

The call to action states specifically, "*The NPF is a valuable asset but should become a live dashboard, informed by people's experiences as well as current outcome measures, improving our ability to strengthen effective approaches, change course and address gaps. Committing to this will generate insights which otherwise may be missed in a flurry of performance data.*" This reflects the views of those with lived experience who were [interviewed](#) as part of the Board's engagement; they supported enhancing the NPF with indicators reflecting their lived experience of what benefits their lives: belonging, confidence and connections, making contributions and participating.

The committee should consider this key call to action from the Social Renewal Advisory Board. It highlights the broader role that non-public bodies and citizens can play, if allowed to, in monitoring and reporting progress and demonstrating the impact or influence non-public bodies and communities are having on improving wider outcomes such as those in the NPF. If Scotland's NPF is a framework for the whole of Scotland, not simply the Scottish Government, then it needs to be informed by us all.

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