

Finance and Public Administration Committee

National Performance Framework: Ambitions into action – summary of written evidence

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Introduction

The Committee launched its call for written evidence on 1 March 2022, which received 37 written submissions. [All submissions can be accessed on the Committee's webpages](#). This paper provides a high-level summary of the key themes to emerge from the written evidence received by the original closing date. It is structured according to the questions asked. First though it picks out some overall comments made by some respondents, which did not fit under the specified questions.

Overall comments

In terms of overall comments on the NPF and the Committee's inquiry, both **Dr Ian Elliot** and **Dr Max French** from Northumbria University highlighted their research in this area. Max French discussed his work on implementation, and around the concept of a "hard power" versus "soft power" strategy for implementing performance frameworks. Ian Elliot highlighted his work on the "strategic state" (using the NPF as an example) and the challenge of moving from a "whole-of-government" to "whole-of-society" approach (something discussed in the Committee's evidence session with the Scottish Leaders Forum). The Committee will be able to discuss both academics' work in the upcoming evidence session.

Carnegie also made some overall comments, stating that "While there are some sectors and Directorates where the National Outcomes are more visibly embedded, there are many places where other statutory duties or non-legislative frameworks are seen to take precedence. It is simply not clear to many within and outside Scottish Government that the National Outcomes sit atop, or guide, the myriad of policy frameworks currently in use." Carnegie also noted that both the Scottish Public Finance Manual and Procurement Policy Handbook had not been updated with the most recent NPF incarnation.

Similar to this, the **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)** provided a detailed submission, calling for visible policy coherence, effective accountability mechanisms and inclusive participation, and suggested a number of ways in which the Committee's inquiry could look into these issues.

The **Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)** suggested that "Better equality outcomes, linked to and informed by the National Performance Framework, would therefore enable better focus on the inequalities that people face every day." Linked, the **Scottish Sports Association** highlighted that there is "an absence of value and monitoring placed on cross-cutting interventions" (i.e. Sport and physical activity are measured and monitored against "health") and so the current national outcomes "underrepresents the impact that is being made."

Finally, the **Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO)** raised the issue of "the specific position of parliamentary-supported organisations and scrutiny organisations in relation to the National Outcomes."

Responses to specific questions

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

Almost all submissions responded to this question, many in some detail. From a local government perspective, **COSLA**, who are joint signatories to the NPF, noted that “The outcomes set out in the NPF have considerable influence over the way COSLA works.” However, evidence from individual local authorities was mixed as to the extent to which the National Outcomes shape the way they work.

Fife Council stated that the National Outcomes were reflected in their range of corporate planning documents and so “they have therefore played a key role on shaping the work of the Council and the Partnership.” Similarly, **North Ayrshire Council** stated that the National Outcomes influence the Council’s plan and therefore “It forms part of the ‘Golden Thread’ linking national outcomes through to each employee’s daily activities.” **Aberdeenshire** and **East Renfrewshire Councils** both made similar points. However, **the Highland Council** stated that “They shape the organisation where there is alignment with the role of local government or community planning. The main focus is on data returns to the Scottish Government which will feed key indicators within the framework.” **Stirling Council** noted that while the National Outcomes were in its Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP), “We do not currently refer to the National Performance Framework in reference to decision making.”

Public Health Scotland (PHS) noted that “the national outcomes – as qualitative statements of what we want Scotland to look like – are important but not as influential as the outcome indicators –the quantitative measures of Scotland’s performance in these areas–which underpin them.” PHS also stated that “we come across bodies who do not plan against the national performance framework’s outcomes or outcome indicators.”

Other public bodies, including **Nature Scot**, **Bòrd na Gàidhlig**, **Scottish Enterprise**, **Registers of Scotland (RoS)**, **Revenue Scotland**, and **Scottish Water** all noted that the National Outcomes influenced and informed corporate strategies and business plans etc and gave examples of how this worked in practice. For example, RoS stated that “Within the boundaries of what we need to deliver to comply with our statutory role, the National Outcomes provide an important element of shaping decisions around how we deliver.”

Third sector bodies responding to the consultation were generally positive about the extent to which the National Outcomes played a part in how their organisation (and sectors) worked. For example, **Children in Scotland** highlighted its Manifesto for 2021-26 and the close alignment with the outcome related to children and young people. **Oxfam Scotland** noted that uses them “as a lever to encourage the Scottish Government, and all political parties, to implement aligned policy and spending decisions.” **Volunteer Scotland** stated that it “has aligned our own strategic outcomes with those detailed in the Volunteering for All framework, which is in itself mapped to the National Outcomes.” The **Wise Group** noted that “The National Outcomes align extremely closely with our work, especially with regards to

our work on innovation within the economy and alleviating poverty” and explained this in some detail.

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) stated that “While the language of our charitable aims, drawn from our Articles of Association, differs from the language of the National Outcomes, the two are broadly aligned.” Finally, the **SDG network** noted that “the alignment between the National Outcomes and the SDGs is not fully developed and needs further thinking to ensure meaningful engagement with the National Outcomes by organisations who have adopted the SDGs as their own framework for action.”

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

A range of organisations considered this question. Many public bodies were clear as to their own contribution, but made a number of suggestions for improvements.

The **Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC)** noted that “there are aspects of all the National Outcomes that have relevance to human rights” but that “This is not currently understood, nor presented within the narrative of the NPF.” **PHS** noted that it used its “strategy map” to demonstrate this, but that “Currently, public bodies effectively self-select which outcomes they are contributing towards. This allows them to opt out, identify their own outcomes, or measure different things.” **Scottish Enterprise** gave a detailed account of the three forms of contribution it makes – direct contributions, broad contribution and indirect contributions.

Generally local authorities again set out the clear linkages through their LOIPs and other strategic planning documents. **East Renfrewshire Council** described its own exercise mapping the NPF indicators to its own local set of indicators, where “Although there were no direct matches between the Council’s strategic indicator set in terms of definition and source, around half of the indicators were similar. The remaining indicators in our set have been identified as they are meaningful at a local level.” **The Highland Council** stated that “Within the public sector there is no emphasis or requirement to frame strategic plans around the National Outcomes. The Council has mapped its key priorities and measures to the framework so is aware of where there is alignment.”

The **Open University** stated that it had “mapped our work against the National Performance Framework as we developed our prospectus Skills + Scotland for the 2021-26 session of the Scottish Parliament. We used this to produce our four key themes.”

Oxfam Scotland noted that while “much of Oxfam’s work aligns most closely to the National Outcome on Poverty [...] our work also links to several other Outcomes, including, but not limited to: Economy; Fair Work and Business; Environment; Human Rights; and International.” **CAS** helpfully provided a map of their work to the National Outcomes.

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

Submissions here tended to go a little beyond the National Outcomes but most felt empowered to some degree, albeit funding constraints were frequently mentioned. For example, **PHS** stated that “We were commissioned to do things differently and do different things to achieve progress on these outcomes. Our ability to do this is somewhat constrained by our funding model. 38% of our funding is non-recurring and originates from different Scottish Government policy teams. The nature of the funding makes it harder for us to do different things or do things differently in these areas towards national outcomes. Reducing the proportion of our funding from non-recurring sources would enable us to take more effective action to improve health and reduce health inequalities.”

Scottish Water stated that it “is empowered to achieve the National Outcomes relevant to us through the Water Sector Vision; the cocreation of our Strategic Plan with sector stakeholders including the Scottish Government; and the endorsement of our Strategic Plan by customers.” Similarly, **Scottish Enterprise** noted that it has “has sufficient operational independence to adopt a performance management framework which helps monitor economic impact and the contribution we make to the overall goals of the National Performance Framework.” And **RoS** explained that it “has significant choice about how we work to fulfil our statutory function and we can therefore ensure we are, wherever possible, meeting the expectations of the national outcomes as part of our work.”

COSLA noted that there was “potential for, and advantage of, a wide range of different and often innovative paths to be developed through which better outcomes can be achieved.” But it went on to state that “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.” Individual local authorities made similar points. **East Ayrshire Council** stated that “Current and anticipated financial constraints also make it difficult to fund new ways of working, when all of the available resources are needed to address the immediate challenges facing our local communities.” However, **East Renfrewshire Council’s** view was that “Given the high-level nature of the 11 national outcomes (not all are locally relevant) this does enable considerable scope to act across these areas that may contribute to the national outcomes, in particular, in the key policy areas of education, environment, local economy, and supporting communities.”

Similar to local authorities, **Children in Scotland** stated that “In line with many other third sector organisations, Children in Scotland experiences a number of barriers and opportunities to ‘doing something different’” including a “lack of sustainable funding.”

The **Open University** referenced its Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council, stating that it has “limited flexibility to do something different to achieve our

targets. Where we believe that a different approach needs to be taken, we would have a proactive discussion with the SFC to ensure there is a common understanding of why this is required and how it will be achieved.”

Finally, **CAS** stated that “If NPF is really going to become more mainstreamed and continuously improved then statutory actors need to embrace new leaner operating models, which will require a greater appetite for risk to complement the necessary and greater empowerment of delivery bodies to take decisions and devolve decisions and functions outwith statutory authorities: in short, it requires more trust. This will require a significant culture change of empowering and devolving responsibility for delivery to other organisations, whilst remaining accountable for scrutinising the delivery of the outcome.”

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

This question did not receive as detailed responses as the previous questions. Most organisations explained their regular accountability arrangements and noted that the NPF was part of those. **COSLA** stated that “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.” **RoS** noted that it was “directly accountable to the Scottish Parliament” but that “Specific questioning around the effectiveness with which we contribute to the National Outcomes has not been a direct subject in our annual parliamentary committee appearances, although questions that relate to aspects of the National Outcomes [...] have been asked.”

PHS explained that “We are held to account in two main ways: through our board and through our sponsors. Accountability through our board tends to focus mostly on our strategic plan and therefore has the strongest explicit link to the national performance framework. Accountability through our sponsors tends to reflect our performance against their strategic priorities.”

The **Royal Town Planning Institute (RPTI)** mentioned its research on “measuring planning outcomes” and that “There needs to be more consistency across the board if we are to make progress towards the National Outcomes.”

How are the National Outcomes reflected in everyday decision taking?

Again, detailed responses were more limited to this question, with most submissions highlighting activities covered in other questions that the National Outcomes are more related to strategic than every day decision taking. For example, **CANB** mentioned that “they aren't really present in everyday decision making, but more referenced in strategic programme development decisions on closer to a quarterly or bi-annual basis.”

Revenue Scotland stated that “Our business plan and team plans are checked against the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan which in turn is intended to align

with the National Outcomes. In this way the work we do is steered by the National Outcomes.”

PHS made a number of interesting points, including that “one issue we encounter as an organisation is perceived gaps in the national performance framework. Strengthening how the national performance framework speaks to healthcare access as well as quality and health protection measures such as vaccinations would address this. [...] Another challenge we encounter are different policy agendas. For example, Scotland’s public health priorities –jointly agreed by COSLA and Scottish Government – do not neatly join up to the national performance framework.”

Most **local authorities** stated that the National Outcomes are not a focus for everyday decision making.

Volunteer Scotland noted that “Given our significant involvement in the development of the Volunteering Action Plan, and our core purpose of supporting individuals and organisations to make a difference through volunteering, the National Outcomes are reflected in a considerable number of our everyday decisions albeit in an indirect way.”

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

Again, detailed comments were limited on this question. Overall, from the submissions received, it would appear that the National Outcomes do not play a significant role in this. **COSLA** noted that “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.” In terms of funding to others, **Fife Council** stated that “we do not assess grant awards against their contribution to the National Outcomes directly, nor do we map the awards to the National Outcomes that they contribute to. The focus of our assessment processes is placed on the contribution that is made to the Plan for Fife ambitions and the service plan priorities of the relevant funding service.”

Oxfam Scotland noted that “Positively, the Scottish Budget now details the “primary” and “secondary” National Outcomes which spending by different government portfolios is designed to support. While useful, clearer links could be established between each National Outcome and the spending decisions put in place to help achieve them; recognising that progress will also be driven by a range of non-spending decisions.”

On a similar theme, **the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Network** stated that “In our view, it naturally follows that it will remain highly likely that other organisations or public bodies will not link spending priorities to the National Outcomes and the SDGs if the Scottish Government themselves do not lead by example.”

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

Responses were again limited on this question, with most noting that funding was generally not contingent on delivery of the National Outcomes. **The Open University** noted that “Our core funding is not currently directly contingent upon demonstrating our contribution to the delivery of the National Outcomes as we report using the Outcome Agreement with the SFC [Scottish Funding Council] which is our guiding document.” And **Revenue Scotland** said that “Our budget and any public sector funding is not directly linked to us demonstrating our contribution to the National Outcomes. Our primary function is to collect and administer tax revenues to support other organisations to contribute towards the National Outcomes.” **PHS** again gave a detailed response, noting the differences between recurring (easy to align to the NPF) and non-recurring (less easy to align) funding.

COSLA noted that “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.” Stirling Council explained that “Public Sector funding is largely not contingent on demonstrating delivery of National Outcomes, although there may be specific instances of targeted funding which have conditions aligned with national priorities.”

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

Answers to this question often referenced approaches to strategic planning set out for earlier questions. For example, **PHS** stated that “As we have outlined above, the national performance framework’s outcome indicators are how we define our strategic priorities: therefore, they are among our top priorities.” **COSLA** stated that “the National Outcomes sit at the top level” and most local authorities again explained how the National Outcomes fed into their LOIPs and thus were near the top level.

The **Open University** provided a detailed response, while noting that they “are currently not an explicit part of our priorities and/or demands”, it went on to provide a range of examples of how they contribute to the outcomes. on the economy, it states that “The coronavirus pandemic has seen a strengthening and deepening of our relationships with employers and industry at what has been a challenging time for everyone. We have worked in an agile way to ensure that we provided targeted skills support where it is needed most. Drawing on our unique distance learning model, we have collaborated with partners to roll out support at scale across Scotland.”

The Wise Group also stated that “...almost all of our projects have grown up alongside the framework. By committing to go above and beyond, we ensure to bring the expertise gained from our wide ranging services to a cross section of our services, for example bringing energy advice to our justice work.”

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

Most organisations responding here indicated that they did work collaboratively at present, and gave useful examples. **Bòrd na Gàidhlig** noted that “We work extensively with other organisations to deliver the National Outcomes. For example, on the Faster Rate of Progress initiative. This brings together a variety of public authorities who are working to support the Gaelic language and those who wish to use it.” **RPTI** highlighted “the opportunity for place-based collaboration through the Place Principle. The Scottish Government and COSLA have agreed to adopt the Place Principle to help overcome organisational and sectoral boundaries.”

COSLA explained that it “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.” COSLA gave an example of the Business Gateway National Unit. Individual **local authorities** highlighted collaboration underway in Community Planning Partnerships. **Scottish Water** used the “Nature Calls” campaign as an example – “which asks the public to join forces with ourselves and our partners in this - Zero Waste Scotland, the Marine Conservation Society, RZSS, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, WFF and the Keep Scotland Beautiful Campaign - to avoid sewer blockages, flooding and pollution by binning wipes.”

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

A large number of submissions shared examples from their experience, as well as possible areas for improvement. Members may wish to explore examples outlined in submissions from COSLA, Paths for All, East Renfrewshire Council, Stirling Council, Scottish Enterprise, Oxfam Scotland, the SDG Network, and Volunteer Scotland among others.

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