



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP,
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice,
Scottish Government

10 October 2024

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

National Performance Framework: inquiry into proposed National Outcomes

Following closure of the call for views on the National Performance Framework: Inquiry into proposed National Outcomes, the Committee agreed to write to you about its scrutiny of the themes within its remit, with the goal to reduce poverty being of central concern.

Reduce poverty

During its consideration, the Committee drew on relevant extracts from the [SPICe analysis](#) of the call for views on the inquiry, which are annexed to this letter. Responses received underscored the interconnected nature of several key National Outcomes, and emphasised the need for holistic solutions to reduce poverty that cut across other Outcomes such as Care, Housing and Communities.

North Ayrshire Council in particular has said there is now an opportunity to demonstrate that poverty is “intrinsically linked” to other Outcomes, while the Fraser of Allander Institute commented during the Committee’s [2024-25 Pre-Budget](#) scrutiny that “it will be the cumulative impact of different policies that will have the overall impact of getting people with complex circumstances above the poverty line”.

This letter examines the links between reducing poverty and other National Outcomes relevant to the remit of the Committee, while drawing on work the Committee has undertaken since it was formed in 2021.

Care

Care as a National Outcome links to poverty reduction because of the costs associated with it. The Committee commissioned some research on [the extra costs of living with a disability](#) in 2023, which highlighted that disabled households were more vulnerable to rising energy and food prices, and that disability benefit payments did not sufficiently meet additional costs associated with disability.

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Email SJSS.committee@parliament.scot. We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

The Committee also previously received evidence from SCOPE as part of its 2024-25 Pre-Budget scrutiny which indicated that disabled households, with at least one disabled adult or child, need an additional £900 per month to reach the same standard of living as non-disabled households. SCOPE'S updated figures FOR 2024 state this amount has risen to £1,010.

During this scrutiny work the Committee also heard from Inclusion Scotland which argued that prioritising social care spending could take pressure of the National Health Service as opposed to it "treating people for things such as hypothermia because they are not eating properly and not using the heating".

Inclusion Scotland also highlighted additional health related energy costs that disabled people can incur from equipment such as hoists, beds and breathing equipment and argued that the NHS should be paying these health-related costs, urging the Scottish Government to make funding available to allow local NHS boards to provide this support.

Housing

The impact of poverty on housing options came through strongly in the Committee's recent [consideration](#) of Part 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Bill. This part covered homelessness prevention, and it is clear that enduring poverty has an impact on the extent to which Housing as a National Outcome can be achieved.

As part of its scrutiny, the Committee heard from Crisis, which commented that "homelessness is one of the most acute forms of poverty", while the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland said a quarter of children in Scotland live in poverty and 10,000 children are in temporary accommodation.

Underlining the link between poverty and homelessness, the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers talked about the need for mainstream education services to be involved in homelessness prevention by spotting children "at risk of poverty, and certainly at risk of homelessness down the line."

Communities

The role of the third sector in reducing poverty is important because organisations can plug service delivery gaps and provide support in their communities. However, stakeholders within the sector are clear that they need more certainty around their funding arrangements if they are to function as envisioned.

The Committee's Pre-Budget scrutiny for this year has focused on third sector funding principles, and as part of this the Committee has [heard from](#) national and local organisations.

Stakeholders the Committee engaged with cited issues associated with one-year funding arrangements that could see projects being wound up having only got off the ground. Members were also told that insecure funding can mean insecure service delivery, affecting vulnerable people within communities.

Organisations also stressed that continuity of funding, and therefore services, also helps to foster trust and cohesion within communities.

Given the positive impact on communities organisations can have, many within the third sector are calling for multi-year funding arrangements to support their services and society more widely.

The Committee considers that the work of the third sector is essential to fulfilment of the National Outcomes.

Equality and Human Rights

The link between poverty and human rights was explained by the Scottish Human Rights Council (SHRC) in written evidence to the Committee during its [2023-24 Pre-Budget](#) considerations—

“Poverty represents a failure (a violation) to fulfil the right to an adequate standard of living as is established in international human rights law. Other rights, like the right to education, to work and decent working standards, to health and adequate food and adequate housing, are also affected by poverty [...] Poverty, viewed through this lens, is thus best viewed as a cluster of human rights violations in Scotland.”

The SHRC’s description of these interactions can similarly be applied to how the National Outcome to reduce poverty is connected to other key National Outcomes, and the Committee considers it is not possible to uphold equality and human rights while poverty remains. Equality and Human Rights as a National Outcome is therefore vitally dependent on poverty reduction.

When giving evidence to the Committee as part of its [2023-24 Pre-Budget scrutiny](#), the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) called for more support for those in the refugee and asylum system, as well as for refugees to be included in the Scottish Government’s child poverty action plan and local authorities and health boards’ legal duty to annually prepare and review their child poverty actions plans, given the extreme poverty this group faces as a result of having no recourse to public funds.

Poverty reduction and Scottish Government spend

In addition to how poverty reduction is intrinsically linked to several other National Outcomes already mentioned, the Committee also considered how National Outcomes should be tethered to the Scottish budget and the programme for government.

The Committee believes such links are crucial if poverty is to be reduced, however the connection between the National Outcomes and Scottish Government policy is currently insufficient. Dr Alison Hosie, Scottish Human Rights Commission, commented as part of the Committee’s 2023-24 pre-budget evidence taking that –

“Currently, there is no connection between the NPF and the Scottish budget. As far as measuring progress goes, we need to have a rethink and, now that the NPF is being reviewed, this is a good time to do that. What outcomes are we trying to achieve? What are we putting in place to achieve them? What resources are we putting in, and how do we generate those? There is a linkage. How do the national outcomes link to the programme for government? All of that needs to be better linked to the budgetary decisions that are being made.”

Scottish Women’s Budget Group (SWBG) made a similar point, explaining that, given the National Outcomes should demonstrate societal values, the “budget should look at how it spends on our values”. SWBG also thought the Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget statement should link to the National Performance Framework to show how analysis informs spending decisions, which then informs National Outcomes.

In the Committee’s Pre-Budget 2023-24 report it stated its support for two of the Finance and Public Administration (FPA) Committee’s recommendations in its report on the National Performance Framework. The recommendations the Committee supported were –

“147. We acknowledge that linking the Scottish Budget to outcomes is complex and that, given the breadth of the National Outcomes, it could be said that if organisations spend money on improving people's lives then arguably they are implicitly aligning spending with the NPF. The Scottish Government has, however, a budget of over £45 billion and as the "driver" of the NPF should be much more than a facilitator or provider of strategic direction to other public bodies.”

“148. It is therefore disappointing to hear that the NPF is not seen as explicitly or transparently driving financial decisions by the Government nor as a mechanism by which organisations are held to account for spending funding effectively.”

Considering these recommendations, the Committee came to its own conclusion that the Scottish Government should –

“ [...] consider how it can link spending and equalities and human rights analysis to National Outcomes to improve accountability and to set out a timescale as to how it will take forward this action.”

Different groups experiencing poverty

As part of its consideration, the Committee talked about the effect of poverty on groups other than children and families, such as 19-25 year olds and older people.

In discussion, Members considered the Poverty and Inequality Commission’s comments that groups such as young single people and disabled people “face not just the choice between heating and eating but difficulty in continuing to live.”

The Committee had also previously reflected on this as part of its 2024-25 Pre-Budget scrutiny, where it concluded –

“The Committee acknowledges the actions the Scottish Government has already taken to mitigate the effects of the cost of living crisis on low income households. However, from the evidence the Committee has gathered, more help is needed for priority groups (lone parent families, minority ethnic families, families with a disabled person, families with younger mothers, families with a child under one, families with three or more children) but also for younger people who live on their own, older people and disabled people, particularly as some people would struggle to withstand much more.”

The Committee wishes to highlight this conclusion again, given its relevance to the cross-cutting nature of the National Outcomes, and calls on the Scottish Government to take it into consideration as the proposed new National Outcomes are developed further.

A copy of this letter is also being sent Kenneth Gibson MSP, Convener of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Collette Stevenson MSP
Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee