



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Finance and Public Administration Committee

Committee Conveners

By email

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Dear Convener

Parliamentary scrutiny of proposed national outcomes

As you are aware, the Finance and Public Administration Committee is expected to be appointed as lead committee for the Scottish Parliament's forthcoming scrutiny of the proposed national outcomes arising from the Scottish Government's recent statutory review. This review is required every five years under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

We expect the proposed national outcomes to be laid in Parliament in late March 2024. Alongside the proposals, the Scottish Government is required to publish a document setting out further details of the review, including information on the responses received and how the proposed national outcomes have taken account of the views gathered.

The Committee recognises that a number of subject committees will wish to examine and comment on the proposed national outcomes most relevant to their respective remits. At the Conveners Group meeting on 26 April 2023, we therefore discussed a joint approach to scrutiny. More recently, committee clerks and SPICe researchers have been discussing what this approach might look like and how they can best support our committees in this work.

Subject to the Finance and Public Administration Committee being appointed as lead committee for this scrutiny, the Committee proposes that we co-ordinate a joint call for views and news release. It is suggested that SPICe analyses the responses received and we then pass these on to the relevant committees to decide what action they wish to take, including whether to respond formally in a report to Parliament. Thereafter, a debate will take place on the published reports.

The 2015 Act specifies a period of 40 days for the Scottish Parliament's consultation. Feedback received from committees regarding the previous consultation suggested that this time period is insufficient for the level of parliamentary scrutiny we would wish to take. The Committee has therefore been discussing with the Scottish Government whether a longer period can be put in place. We understand that the Scottish Government is sympathetic to this approach and the Committee will therefore shortly be writing formally to the Deputy First Minister to propose that Parliament has more time to carry out this scrutiny.

I would therefore be grateful if you could let me know if you have any views on the proposed approach set out in this letter and/or on the appropriate time period needed for this scrutiny. As a starting point for discussion, can I suggest a possible deadline of mid-September 2024 for reporting and holding the parliamentary debate. I will be in touch with further information in the coming weeks. In the meantime, I have included with this letter a background note on the National Performance Framework and national outcomes for your information.

Yours sincerely



Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convener
Finance and Public Administration Committee

BACKGROUND

National Performance Framework

Introduction

1. The National Performance Framework (NPF) was launched more than 15 years ago, in November 2007. It has undergone various changes since then, most significantly in 2015, when Part 1 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 put the concept of 'National Outcomes' into law. The Act also provided for these Outcomes to be reviewed every five years. The first such review took place in 2018. On 14 March 2023, the Scottish Government launched a consultation on its second review of the National Outcomes, which closed on 5 June 2023. The Scottish Government explains that the consultation is only one part of the Review. It will also be "reviewing previous consultation exercises to understand more about what matters most to communities in Scotland and meeting with stakeholders".
2. The Government must then consult the Parliament on any proposed changes to the National Outcomes arising from its review.
3. This parliamentary process is expected to be led by the Finance and Public Administration Committee (FPAC), which has responsibility within its remit for the NPF. However, the National Outcomes will engage most committees' remits.
4. The Convener of FPAC led discussion on the Review at the Convener Group meeting on 26 April 2023, to raise awareness of the Scottish Government consultation on the National Outcomes that was underway. The Group noted that each relevant committee will be asked to consider, in due course, the arrangements for joint scrutiny of the draft National outcomes to be laid in Parliament. FPAC Clerks will also liaise with Clerks of other committees and SPICe researchers on how best to support committees in their scrutiny.

The National Outcomes

5. The current NPF has the following [11 National Outcomes](#):
 - **Children and Young People:** We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential
 - **Communities:** We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
 - **Culture:** We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely
 - **Economy:** We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy
 - **Education:** We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society
 - **Environment:** We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment

- **Fair Work and Business:** We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone
- **Health:** We are healthy and active
- **Human Rights:** We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination
- **International:** We are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally
- **Poverty:** We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally

Current snapshot of national indicator performance

6. The NPF measures progress against the National Outcomes through [81 National Indicators](#). SPICe produces a monthly [blog](#) which provides a snapshot of performance.

Parliamentary consultation on any revised National Outcomes

7. The Act states that, where revisions are proposed, the Scottish Government "must ... consult the Scottish Parliament on the proposed revisions". The Parliament therefore does not have a role in approving the proposed revisions (or indeed the National Outcomes or the NPF as a whole) but is consulted and may scrutinise the proposals and provide comments/feedback on them. Following this parliamentary consultation period, the Scottish Government has the option to further revise the National Outcomes based on this scrutiny and comments provided.
8. Rule 17.5 of the Standing Orders sets out a parliamentary process for consulting the Parliament. Once a consultation document required under statute is laid, it is then referred by the Parliamentary Bureau to a lead committee, which shall consider and report to the Parliament, including any other committees' views. Once the lead committee has reported, "the Parliament shall consider the consultation document in the light of the lead committee's report".
9. Under the 2015 Act, the Scottish Parliament has 40 days in which to consider the results of the NPF review, including any proposals for revisions to the National Outcomes). In February 2022, FPAC wrote to the previous Deputy First Minister seeking an extension to this statutory 40-day consultation period, reflecting the concerns of previous Parliamentary committees regarding the impact of this short timescale on their scrutiny during the last review in 2018. Responding, the DFM committed to explore this further and asked his officials to liaise with FPAC on how much additional time may be required, and how this would fit with the programme for the review overall.
10. At this stage, the results of the review of National Outcomes are not expected to be laid in the Scottish Parliament for consultation until March 2024. FPAC Clerks remain in discussion with Scottish Government's officials over how much additional time will be made available for scrutiny.

11. Set out below is the approach agreed for scrutiny of the draft revised National Outcomes laid in the Parliament in 2018. In practice, much of the administrative process was developed between the clerks of the relevant committees. The agreed approach was then set out in a letter from the lead committee to all other committees and responses invited by an agreed deadline.

Previous approach to scrutiny in the Parliament

12. A lead committee was appointed, which then wrote to the relevant committees to seek their views on the National Outcomes that fell within their remit. To support committees in their scrutiny, SPICe provided generic briefing on the National Outcomes and the NPF, as well as some subject-specific analysis for individual committees where appropriate.
13. During the first review and, given the limited time for scrutiny, the lead committee invited relevant committees to look at the following issues and to report their views to the lead committee on:
 - how the National Outcomes had changed;
 - whether these changes were appropriate; and
 - whether wider consultation exercise was sufficient.
14. Committees were also asked to consider wider issues, if time permitted, such as:
 - whether the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had been incorporated into the NPF in such a way as to ensure that they were fully implemented;
 - whether the proposed revisions to the NPF would ensure policy coherence between the different National Outcomes, National Indicators and SDGs;
 - the extent to which the National Outcomes were being used by the Scottish Government and other public bodies to measure their performance.
 - whether the indicators selected were likely to both support and measure the achievement of the Outcomes;
 - how public bodies in their scrutiny area had aligned their work with the NPF and whether the revised NPF could be readily and effectively used in outcome-based budget scrutiny.
15. Given the 40-day time constraint, it was for each individual committee to decide what form, if any, its scrutiny would take within the agreed deadline for reporting. It was up to each committee to also decide whether they wished to take evidence (and if so, from whom) or whether they wished to discuss any proposed changes to the National Outcomes within committee, by correspondence, etc. These views were then submitted to the lead committee.
16. The lead committee then published a report detailing its own views on the draft revised National Outcomes and reporting the views of the other relevant committees. The Parliament then considered the consultation document in light of this report as part of a debate on a committee motion.

17. This approach to joint scrutiny has also been used to scrutinise other cross-cutting issues, such as regular revisions to the National Planning Framework and to the Scottish Government's Climate Change Report on Policy and Proposals. As such, it represents a familiar and potentially useful template for joint scrutiny of the forthcoming draft revised National Outcomes.

March 2024