



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

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Via email only

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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.

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

Annexe

Themes from the Call for Views

This summary highlights key themes from the National Performance Framework (NPF) consultation responses that are particularly relevant to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee. The responses also underscore the interconnected nature of various outcomes and emphasises the need for comprehensive and inclusive policies to address social justice and social security issues in Scotland.

Care

Respondents appreciate the new Care outcome but highlight the need for a more detailed focus on high-quality care services and the rights of carers. There are significant calls for better support structures for both paid and unpaid carers, highlighting the importance of fair wages, training, and working conditions for care workers. Additionally, the well-being of carers, particularly unpaid carers who are often family members, is stressed, with suggestions for more respite care options and financial support to alleviate the burdens they face.

The importance of intersectionality is echoed by other respondents, who call for care policies that address the specific needs of marginalised groups. For example, Zero Tolerance welcomes the gender review's findings and stresses the need for intersectional data and gender mainstreaming throughout the NPF, stating, "It is essential that the purpose of the NPF is embedded throughout the National Outcomes. People across Scotland face different challenges to their well-being, and these challenges often intersect and compound".

Moreover, the responses reveal the need for enhancing the support of unpaid carers. Several responses suggest that more support is needed for unpaid carers who often face significant financial and emotional burdens. These responses state that it is crucial to ensure that unpaid carers can continue to provide care without compromising their own health and well-being.

The role of digital technology in improving care services is also highlighted. Respondents suggest that integrating digital tools and platforms can enhance the delivery of care services, making them more efficient and accessible. Optometry Scotland explains that there is a need to improve care services, particularly in remote and rural areas where access to care can be challenging.

A Scotland That Cares went as far to provide a list of potential indicators in their response. These included indicators to measure quality of care, quality of life for those receiving and giving care and access to training among others. They go on to state: "It is vital that whatever Indicators are selected are tested — particularly with those with direct experience of care — and improved if necessary. Work will also be needed to

identify appropriate data sources, and to plug gaps where these exist; this process should involve extensive stakeholder engagement”.

While the new Care outcome is welcomed, respondents highlight the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach that addresses the diverse needs of all individuals requiring care. This includes better support for both paid and unpaid carers, integration of digital technologies, and a strong focus on intersectionality to ensure that care services are equitable and accessible to all.

Communities

There are several themes present in the responses relating to the Communities Outcomes. Volunteering is highlighted as a key indicator of community wellbeing, with suggestions to promote volunteer participation and recognise its value in fostering social cohesion. Respondents also suggest the inclusion of digital connectedness as part of the Communities Outcome to reflect the growing importance of digital inclusion in modern society. Enhancing community facilities and public spaces, along with promoting social interactions, are seen as vital components for building strong, resilient communities.

Equitable access to community health services is also a critical aspect of community wellbeing. Respondents stress the need for consistent access to services like community pharmacies, GPs, and dental practices across the nation, noting that these are vital as the first point of contact for physical and mental health support. Additionally, Optometry Scotland stressed the importance of community health services, stating, "We support the emphasis on equitable access to community health services, which are crucial for both physical and mental health support". The Poverty Alliance highlights that "supporting families with a sustainable route out of poverty needs to be more clearly defined in the outcomes. There is also an opportunity to show how poverty is intrinsically linked throughout the majority of the outcomes," underscoring the interconnectedness of health, poverty, and community support systems.

Several responses highlight the role of volunteering in building strong communities. Volunteer Scotland explains further, stating that "volunteering underpins local service delivery, promotes social capital, and stimulates the social norm of reciprocity." There are calls for policies that encourage volunteer participation and recognise the contributions of volunteers to community wellbeing.

Digital inclusion is also seen as a critical component of community resilience. Respondents suggest that ensuring access to digital technologies and training can help bridge the digital divide and enhance community connectedness. Additionally, respondents suggest that ensuring access to digital technologies and training can help bridge the digital divide and enhance community connectedness. The Scottish Women's Convention stresses the need for improved public transport links and digital connectivity to combat social isolation, particularly in rural areas.

Enhancing community facilities and public spaces is another key theme. Respondents call for investments in community centres, parks, and recreational facilities to promote social interactions and support community wellbeing.

The Communities outcome is seen as a vital component of the National Performance Framework, with respondents stressing the importance of volunteering, digital inclusion, and investments in community facilities. Ensuring equitable access to community health services and promoting social interactions are also highlighted as key factors in building strong, resilient communities.

Equality and Human Rights

Respondents stress the importance of integrating human rights into Scots Law through the proposed Human Rights Bill. There are calls for improved access to justice for those experiencing violence against women and girls, highlighting the need for better legal support and protection services. The importance of addressing systemic inequalities and ensuring equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic status, is emphasised. Specific measures to combat discrimination and promote inclusion across various sectors are recommended.

Zero Tolerance emphasised, "The new definition should be further expanded to 'We respect, protect, and fulfil human rights and live free from violence and discrimination.' Adding 'free from violence' would help ensure further accountability to eradicating violence against women and girls in Scotland". This underscores the need for explicit commitments to address gender-based violence within the framework.

Improving access to justice for victims of gender-based violence is also highlighted. Scottish Women's Convention discusses the need for better legal support and protection services for women victims of sexually motivated crimes. This includes providing accessible legal advice, support services, and ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable. Ensuring that victims have access to justice is seen as crucial for upholding human rights and protecting vulnerable individuals.

There is also strong support for a dedicated Gender Equality Outcome. "Zero Tolerance recommends the inclusion of a Gender Equality Outcome, with robust indicators for measuring violence against women and girls (VAWG). Women's rights are human rights, and men's violence is a violation of the right to live in safety and with dignity". This would ensure that gender equality is given the attention it deserves, and that progress can be effectively measured.

Addressing systemic inequalities is another key focus. By tackling these root causes of inequality, the framework can help create a more just and inclusive society. Additionally, Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP) urges the Scottish Government to add the following to the Outcome "a strong commitment to tackle barriers and discrimination faced by Scotland's minority ethnic communities".

The Equality and Human Rights outcome is seen as a critical component of the National Performance Framework. Respondents call for a focus on gender equality, addressing systemic inequalities, and improving access to justice for victims of gender-based violence. By addressing these areas, the outcome can help create a more equitable and inclusive society.

Housing

The inclusion of a standalone National Outcome on Housing is widely supported, with respondents advocating for a comprehensive approach to housing that ensures affordability, accessibility, and energy efficiency. Homes for Scotland places a strong emphasis on the necessity of a clear National Outcome that prioritises the delivery of new homes, with a target of 25,000 new homes per annum. Additionally, there are calls for policies that address homelessness and housing insecurity, ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to safe and stable housing.

A joint response from Citizens Advice Scotland, Churches Action for the Homeless, Crisis, Cyrenians, Homeless Network Scotland, I-SPHERE, Legal Services Agency, Poverty Alliance, Rock Trust, Salvation Army, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, and Turning Point Scotland noted, "This outcome must not be just about housing supply or infrastructure, vital as these are. It should recognise that some people may require support to enable them to access and live successfully in their home, including older people, young people and care leavers, people with mental health needs or learning disabilities and homeless households. This support is wide-ranging and include things like low-level or short-term support to manage tenancies, bills and repairs, through to intensive support for people with disabilities or complex needs such as supported housing or Housing First, and may also be linked to individual care packages".

Several responses stress the importance of energy-efficient housing to address both environmental and economic concerns. This aligns with broader climate action goals and the potential to reduce the financial burden on households.

Addressing homelessness is a key concern for many respondents. There are calls for comprehensive strategies to prevent and reduce homelessness, including providing adequate support services and affordable housing options. The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice also highlights the integral role housing can play in mitigating recidivism.

The need for accessible housing for disabled individuals is also highlighted. Respondents emphasise the importance of ensuring that housing policies consider the needs of disabled individuals, providing accessible housing options and necessary adaptations. There is also a call for a related Home Outcome from Citizens Advice Scotland, Churches Action for the Homeless, Crisis, Cyrenians, Homeless Network Scotland, I-SPHERE, Legal Services Agency, Poverty Alliance, Rock Trust, Salvation Army, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, and Turning Point Scotland:

“A national outcome focusing on home – and the support people need to live as independently as possible at home – will strengthen housing rights for people with a range of support needs including older people, homeless households, people with learning disabilities, mental health needs and others.”

The standalone Housing outcome is seen by respondents as a crucial step towards addressing housing-related issues in Scotland. Respondents emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach that includes the delivery of new, energy-efficient homes, strategies to prevent and reduce homelessness, and ensuring accessible housing for all.

Poverty

Respondents call for the inclusion of explicit measures to tackle poverty, highlighting the interconnected nature of outcomes and their contribution to overall social and economic well-being. Emphasising the need for targeted interventions to support low-income families, respondents stress the importance of affordable housing, access to quality education, and comprehensive social safety nets. Addressing child poverty and ensuring that all individuals have the resources and opportunities to lead fulfilling lives are seen as essential.

The Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland highlighted the necessity of clear and strong language in the poverty outcome, stating, "It is welcome to see 'reduce poverty' as a national outcome but this wording does not fully match the proposed updated purpose of the Framework or existing government commitments. For this outcome to better match the Framework's purpose, the wording should be amended to 'We will end poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally'". This comment suggests that the framework should reflect stronger commitments, to align with existing governmental promises and ambitions.

North Ayrshire Council stressed the importance of integrating poverty reduction with other outcomes, noting, "There is also an opportunity to show how poverty is intrinsically linked throughout the majority of the outcomes". This suggests the need for a holistic approach that recognises the interplay between poverty and other social determinants such as health, education, and housing.

Affordable housing is frequently mentioned as a critical factor in poverty reduction however there are many other factors. The joint response from Citizens Advice Scotland, Churches Action for the Homeless, Crisis, Cyrenians, Homeless Network Scotland, I-SPHERE, Legal Services Agency, Poverty Alliance, Rock Trust, Salvation Army, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Turning Point Scotland calls for an expanded outcome stating, "when defining [the Outcome] further this must recognise the importance of sustaining a home and not be restricted to a narrow definition regarding numbers of houses". This response suggests the need for a broad and inclusive definition of housing that goes beyond mere availability to consider the quality and sustainability of living conditions.

The importance of addressing child poverty specifically is also highlighted. The Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland suggest amending the Children and Young People Outcome in to include poverty specifically. This perspective suggests that addressing child poverty is fundamental to achieving broader social and economic goals.

Respondents also call for comprehensive social safety nets to support low-income families. North Ayrshire Council stated, "supporting families with a sustainable route out of poverty needs to be more clearly defined in the outcomes". This suggests the need for well-defined and robust support systems that provide long-term solutions rather than temporary relief.

In conclusion, responses related to the Poverty outcome state that it should include explicit measures to address various aspects of poverty, with a strong emphasis on interconnectedness with other outcomes, affordable housing, and child poverty. Comprehensive social safety nets are also essential.