

Finance and Public Administration Committee
7th Meeting 2026 (Session 6)
Tuesday 17 February 2026

Session 6 legacy issues and key themes – public administration

1. The Committee is invited to take evidence from the following witnesses to inform its Session 6 legacy report—
 - Sarah Davidson, Chief Executive, Carnegie UK
 - Alison Payne, Research Director, Enlighten
 - Dr Ian Elliott, Senior Lecturer in Public Administration, University of Glasgow
 - Professor Paul Cairney, Professor of Politics and Public Policy, University of Stirling.
2. Legacy reports are intended to pass on knowledge and experience, both in terms of policy and Committee working practices, and inform the successor Committee's priorities for scrutiny.
3. In Session 6, the Finance Committee's remit included, in addition to financial matters, "matters relating to the National Performance Framework within the responsibilities of the Deputy First Minister, public service reform within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, and public administration."
4. The Committee held an evidence session on financial issues on [10 February 2026](#). The evidence session on 17 February will focus on issues related to public administration, public service reform and the National Performance Framework.
5. This paper provides an overview of the Committee's scrutiny in these areas, summarising the key pieces of work and recommendations made in its reports.
6. Written submissions have also been received from the following witnesses, and are available in the annex to this paper, and on the Committee's [legacy report webpage](#)—
 - [Written submission from Carnegie UK](#)
 - [Written submission from Enlighten](#)
 - [Written submission from Professor Paul Cairney](#)
 - [Written submission from Dr Ian Elliott](#)

National Performance Framework

7. The National Performance Framework (NPF) was introduced by the Scottish Government in 2007, setting out its "ambitions, providing a vision for national wellbeing across a range of economic, social and environmental factors" and the "strategic outcomes which collectively describe the kind of Scotland in which

people would like to live and guides the decisions and actions of national and local government". The NPF consists of 11 National Outcomes, which are measured for progress against 81 National Indicators.

8. In 2015 the concept of the National Outcomes was enshrined in law as part of the [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#) which requires the Scottish Government to review its National Outcomes every five years and to regularly report progress towards them. It also sets out consultation requirements, including with the Scottish Parliament. The Act requires that public bodies, or those that carry out public functions must "have regard to" the National Outcomes in carrying out their devolved functions.
9. The Committee launched an [inquiry](#) on 1 March 2022 to establish how the NPF and its National Outcomes shape Scottish Government policy aims and spending decisions, and in turn, how this drives delivery at national and local level. It found that "The NPF remains an important vision of the type of place Scotland should aspire to be but there needs to be more sustained progress towards achieving that vision. Whilst there will be no one solution, of key importance is positioning the NPF as the start of a 'golden thread' from which all other frameworks, strategies and plans flow, through to delivery on the ground."
10. The Committee's recommendations aimed to make the NPF a much more explicit delivery framework, asking the Scottish Government to set out clearly how it would use it in setting national policy as well as collaborating with COSLA and wider Scottish society on how they can do the same.
11. At the time of the Committee's inquiry, a [review of the National Outcomes](#) was anticipated to begin in 2022 and conclude in 2023. The Scottish Government undertook its second statutory review in 2023, and laid its proposed National Outcomes in Parliament for formal consideration on 1 May 2024. The changes proposed to the National Outcomes were described by the Scottish Government as a "necessary course correction rather than another complete overhaul", with "changes to the NPF [...] recommended where there is strong evidence that this is necessary to ensure the NPF remains ambitious and forward looking for the coming five years, as it did in 2018."
12. The Parliament agreed a joint approach to scrutiny of the proposed National Outcomes, with the Finance and Public Administration Committee focussing its scrutiny more on the cross-cutting elements of the proposed National Outcomes and the review.
13. The Committee's report, published in November 2024, endorsed the Committee's 2022 findings, and made recommendations in relation to an implementation plan for the NPF. The 2024 scrutiny also focused on the coherence of the proposed National Outcomes. It found that "there is a mismatch between the First Minister's priority on economic growth with the National Outcomes focus on the wellbeing economy as well as between the proposed National Outcome to 'reduce' poverty compared with the First Minister's focus to 'eradicate' poverty." The Committee recommended further and more participative consultation on a number of areas, including the development of National Indicators.

14. Following publication of the report, the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic [announced](#) during a debate at the end of the review on 8 January 2025 that “Over the next year, we propose to start again with the national performance framework—in other words, to look again at every aspect of it in order to develop and implement a stronger and more strategic and impactful framework for Scotland.” Her [response to the Committee’s report](#) states that “an immediate priority will be to engage stakeholders and partners, including the NPF Expert Advisory Group, to provide advice on the scale and scope of reform.”

15. The Scottish Government website clarifies that “For now, no immediate changes will be made to the NPF (last updated in August 2024), and the [NPF website](#) has been archived. The current 11 National Outcomes are still in operation as is the duty (Community Empowerment Act) on public bodies ‘to have regard’ to them.” It further states that “Work on NPF reform has commenced. We expect to be ready to launch the next iteration of the NPF around the start of the new parliamentary session and new government. Full implementation would be an ongoing exercise, as the implementation plan is executed, and website/user interface development would continue through 2026.” The Committee has received no further updates on the review, although it is noted that the [Scottish Budget 2026-27 document](#) still includes intended contributions of portfolio spend to the current National Outcomes.

16. As part of its pre-budget scrutiny in 2025 and linked to its earlier work on the NPF, the Committee undertook a fact-finding visit to [Lithuania](#), where, among other topics, it explored potential models for implementation and monitoring of a long-term vision. The Committee was impressed by the development process behind the Lithuania 2050 vision and the extent to which this involved and represented different sectors of society, ensuring a document which has buy-in across both public and political sphere. The Lithuanian Committee for the Future was also highlighted as a model that can bring parliamentary focus to long-term issues and implement strategic thinking across different policy areas and across the political divide.

17. The Committee in its [pre-budget 2026-27 report](#) welcomed the Cabinet Secretary’s commitment to considering the model in more detail and asked for her conclusions on this issue by the end of January 2026. It is understood that this information is being prepared and should be with the Committee shortly.

Public Service Reform

18. The Scottish Government’s 2022 Resource Spending Review identified five key areas of focus for reform over the lifetime of this Parliament:

- digitalisation
- maximising revenue through public sector innovation
- reform of the public sector estate
- reform of the public body landscape, and
- improving public procurement.

19. It included a Scottish Government commitment to "return the public sector workforce broadly to pre-Covid-19 levels". Further information on the government's plans for reform, including workforce levels, were expected in the Scottish Budget 2023-24 but did not materialise.
20. The then Deputy First Minister later confirmed that, instead of targets and an overarching framework for reform, public bodies would be expected to "change the way that they operate in this financial year to ensure the sustainability of their public services". He explained that "those changes will become apparent as organisations take decisions in order to live within the resources that have been made available to them".
21. In May 2023, the Committee launched an [inquiry into the Scottish Government's public service reform programme](#), and sought written views from Scottish public bodies on their plans for public service reform in their sectors, and others with a view on how the reform programme is working in practice and how it is delivering effective and efficient services. The evidence gathered was used to inform the committee's [pre-budget 2024-25 scrutiny and report](#).
22. In the report, the Committee stated that, while it "accepts that government policies will, of course, evolve and develop over time, we are concerned that the focus of the Scottish Government's public service reform programme has, since May 2022, changed multiple times, as have the timescales for publishing further detail on what the programme will entail."
23. The Committee's report found "a collection of disparate workstreams and sectoral reforms, with no overall strategic purpose and with limited oversight and direction from Government". It therefore recommended that "the Scottish Government sets out a clear vision and strategic purpose for what it wants to achieve with its public service reform programme, including how it will provide leadership and oversight to support public bodies to deliver on this vision".
24. In its [report on the budget 2024-25](#), the Committee found "few other signs of progress. This is disappointing given the urgent need for reform."
25. The Scottish Government's first [Public Service Reform Strategy](#) was published on 19 June 2025 and sets out "commitments to change the system of public services - to be preventative, to better join up and to be efficient - in order to better deliver for people". The strategy has three pillars: prevention, joined up services, and efficient services. It also includes a section setting out how the Scottish Government will measure and understand progress, which notes that each of the workstreams and programmes included has its own governance and evaluation framework. Monitoring and evaluation will also take place at a "system wide level to ensure coordination", through the Public Service Reform Board and a Theory of Change and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework is being developed to support this work.
26. Evidence received during the Committee's pre-budget 2026-27 scrutiny suggests the PSR Strategy is welcome in looking at Government strategies across the

piece, however, witnesses highlighted that the higher the number of Government strategies, the higher the risk that they do not align.

27. The Committee had already highlighted a complicated landscape of Scottish Government strategies and plans in its first pre-budget report of the session, calling on the Scottish Government to outline how it could streamline and link up its various strategies and plans.
28. On the [17 May 2024](#), when speaking about the economy in Glasgow, the First Minister said the Scottish government is producing too many strategy documents and "concrete actions" are needed instead. He added, "A strategic approach is clearly essential, but I want the first question we ask ourselves to be - what can we do, rather than what can we write down." In its [2025-26 Budget report](#), the Committee asked the Scottish Government for information on the number of 'live' strategies. The Scottish Government confirmed that as of 22 August 2025 it had 100 live strategies in place. In its [pre-budget 2026-27 report](#), the Committee asked the Scottish Government "to report annually on what steps it is taking to monitor and reduce this number wherever possible to minimise overlap and ensure alignment." In its [response](#), the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government committed to update the Committee as requested, and to provide an updated list of live strategies and supporting narrative on an annual basis, with the next being due before the end of April 2026.
29. The 2025 PSR strategy committed to reducing annualised Scottish Government and public body corporate costs by £1 billion over the next five years, representing around 20% of the identified public body corporate and core government operating costs. In 2025, the Scottish Government also committed to a public sector workforce reduction of around 0.5% a year over the next five years, with "frontline services remaining protected".
30. In its [pre-budget 2026-27 report](#), the Committee welcomed "the Scottish Government's renewed impetus on public service reform" and asked for "a detailed plan on how it will meet its high-level targets on efficiencies and workforce while minimising the impact on public services", noting that "Evidence and trends suggest these targets will be incredibly challenging to meet".
31. The [Scottish Spending Review](#), published alongside the Scottish Budget on 13 January 2026, includes detailed Portfolio Efficiency and Reform Plans "to set out actions to secure the sustainability of Scotland's public services". The plans cover workforce savings, efficiencies in corporate functions and wider service reforms, with £1.5 billion in cumulative savings set out over the Spending Review period.
32. The most recent update on the PSR programme received on [27 January 2026](#) provides detail on the progress of the 18 workstreams set out in the strategy. Of the actions covered under the 18 workstreams, 60 are "progressing", 10 are marked as "to progress", and 13 are "in development". Actions marked as "complete" are listed below—
 - Work with regional and local partners to identify how best to formally devolve further elements of decision-making and delivery to Regional

Economic Partnerships (REPs), and present options before the end of this Parliament

- Refreshed Shared Priorities Plan agreed with COSLA to set out actions to enhance community planning.
- Selection criteria for 3 CPPs agreed using data from national self-assessment exercise
- Publish the refreshed Digital Strategy which will set out how we will accelerate the digitisation of Government – The [Digital strategy for Scotland: sustainable digital public services - delivery plan 2025-2028 - gov.scot](#) was published in November 2025
- Compile a register of grant funding programmes currently in operation across Government and public bodies, and build on our CVFM programme to make the landscape more straightforward for users and reduce delivery costs (complete for 2024/25)
- We will work closely with public bodies as key colleagues and partners in driving efficiency and as part of this commitment to working together, we will hold an operational summit in 2025 to share best practice and identify next steps - The operational summit was held on 14 October 2025

33. Throughout this parliamentary session, the Committee took a particular interest in digitalisation, calling for “greater progress with digitalisation, shared services and rationalisation of estates”. Members visited [Estonia](#) as part of pre-budget scrutiny 2025-26, to learn from Estonia’s experience as a global leader in digital transformation, and find out how the approach works in practice as well as the challenges associated with digital reform of the public sector. While the Committee noted that Estonia benefited from a very specific set of conditions in its digitalisation journey, which cannot be directly replicated in Scotland, their experience shows the crucial importance of consistent investment, collaboration with the private sector, coherence and interoperability of systems, alongside transparency and public trust, to delivering successful public service reform.

Public administration

34. In Session 6, the Finance Committee’s remit included public administration matters, defined as “oversight and scrutiny of the way in which government exercises its overall functions and the quality and standards of administration provided by the civil service in the Scottish Government”¹.

35. This is the first time that a Scottish Parliamentary committee has specifically included this subject within its remit. In its legacy report, the Committee has previously agreed to reflect on lessons learned from its inquiries into public administration and consider recommendations regarding the inclusion of public administration in future Finance Committees’ remit.

36. The Committee undertook three inquiries into matters related to public administration, in addition to taking evidence from the Permanent Secretary on

¹ Parliamentary Bureau paper on establishment of committees, June 2021.

an annual basis². A key focus of the annual evidence sessions in 2022 and 2023 was scrutiny of progress against the Scottish Government's response to the three harassment reviews that took place in late Session 5. The Continuous Improvement Programme was completed, and the Committee received an [update](#) on activities carried out by the Directorate for Propriety and Ethics in May 2024. Further evidence sessions covered issues including public service reform, civil service workforce and reform, fiscal sustainability, and culture and transparency within the Scottish Government. The Committee's final annual evidence session with the Permanent Secretary is scheduled for early March 2026.

37. The Committee has also tended to look at financial issues through a public administration lens, for example, the number of government strategies, governance, culture and transparency, and the Scottish Government's approach to decision-making have all featured in the Committee's budget/pre-budget reports.

Effective Scottish Government decision-making

38. The Committee's first inquiry into public administration matters focused on [effective Scottish Government decision-making](#). The inquiry sought to bring greater understanding around the current policy decision-making process used by the Scottish Government, and to identify the skills and key principles necessary to support an effective government decision-making process.

39. The Committee considered the Scottish Government's approach and structures, its framework for decision-making, the use of evidence, the impact of civil service and ministerial churn and matters related to performance and accountability. It found that, in the complexity of the policy making process, "it is difficult to encourage reflection and learning when the primary focus is on accountability for real and potential failure". The Committee's "impression [was] that such learning is more likely to be triggered by issues with policy delivery", rather than a well-designed process in which monitoring and evaluation are routine part of government work.

40. The Committee found it difficult to identify how key aspects of the decision-making process and civil service governance work in practice, for example, how the civil service working for the Scottish Government relates to that working for the UK Government, particularly in relation to senior levels of policymaking and accountability. The Committee's report called for clarity on Scottish Government and Civil Service processes, to encourage meaningful internal evaluation and engagement. It further called for the Scottish Government to consider publishing much more information about Cabinet decisions to improve transparency and allow for better accountability. It asked the Permanent Secretary to give greater focus to standards in policy-making, to enable the quality of decision-making and advice to be assessed by Ministers, civil servants or those outwith Government.

² Annual evidence sessions with the former Permanent Secretary, John-Paul Marks, took place on [3 May 2022](#), [16 May 2023](#), [21 May 2024](#) and [18 March 2025](#), and with the current Permanent Secretary, Joe Griffin, on [24 June 2025](#).

41. The Committee's report found that "there should be a much stronger presence and identity, than there is currently, for the civil service that supports the Scottish Government. This begins with setting out clearly and transparently (such as on the Scottish Government website) more detail on the grounds on which the Permanent Secretary is accountable to Scottish Ministers".
42. The Committee recommended a more systematic approach to the use of evidence in decision-making, highlighting the example of the Wales Centre for Public Policy approach as a transparent way to gather robust evidence from a spectrum of stakeholders and create safe spaces to enable more challenging evidence to be provided to civil servants or Scottish Ministers.
43. In relation to the challenges Government faces in balancing short-term issues with tackling longer-term issues, the Committee recommended that consideration be given to civil servants working for the Scottish Government providing long-term insight briefings on the challenges facing Scotland over the next 50 years.
44. Responding to the Committee's decision-making report in 2023, the former Permanent Secretary, John-Paul Marks, highlighted horizon scanning work already undertaken as well as work underway to strengthen the Government's capacity to assess future risks and preparedness. He confirmed that, in addition to responding to the Scottish Fiscal Commission's Fiscal Sustainability report³, "we will begin publishing reports of longer-term insights in the early autumn of next year [2024] to create a new resource for public bodies and partners in the third and private sector". The first such report, [Future Trends for Scotland: findings from the 2024-2025 horizon scanning project](#), was published on 18 June 2025.
45. In his response, the former Permanent Secretary also made a number of commitments, including to explore what further information can be made more accessible publicly in relation to his role and relationships with wider civil service governance and how the civil service working for the Scottish Government explains what it does. A more detailed description of the Permanent Secretary's role and accountability is provided in his [letter to the Committee](#) of 25 March 2024, alongside updates on the review of the Scheme of Delegation for the Scottish Civil Service and a new curriculum for the Policy Profession, aiming "to bring greater oversight to and accountability for the quality of decision making".

Scotland's Commissioner landscape

46. The Committee's inquiry into [Scotland's Commissioner Landscape: A Strategic Approach](#) was prompted by Members' concerns at the potential for, and implications of, this landscape growing exponentially over this parliamentary session and beyond.
47. At the time the inquiry was launched (December 2023), there were seven Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) supported bodies, with the

³ The Scottish Government has not published a full response to the SFC's report but did hold a debate on fiscal sustainability at the request of the Committee in October 2024.

creation of another having recently been agreed by Parliament but not yet in operation, and proposals for a further six being considered.

48. The Committee first highlighted concerns regarding this potential significant increase in its [report on the Scottish Budget 2023-24](#), and later through its scrutiny of Financial Memorandums for Bills proposing additional SPCB supported bodies. This inquiry therefore had both financial and public administration elements.

49. The inquiry's aim was to establish the extent to which a more coherent and strategic approach to the creation and development of SPCB supported bodies is needed and how this might be achieved. Based on the evidence received, the Committee concluded that "creating a series of individual new SPCB supported bodies can no longer be the default response of Government and Parliament to perceived failures in public service delivery, or to calls for new 'champions' to promote a specific cause".

50. It found that the current model "is no longer fit-for-purpose", having developed in an 'ad hoc' way with individual proposals being agreed on a case-by-case basis. This approach, the Committee concluded, "led to a disjointed landscape comprised of a collection of individual bodies, with varying functions and powers", with evidence of duplication and overlap between existing SPCB supported bodies and capacity issues for the SPCB in providing comprehensive oversight and governance.

51. The Committee's view was that the creation of new advocacy officeholders presents democratic accountability concerns, and that this advocacy role is for MSPs to undertake, "with Parliament holding Government to account on how it seeks to improve the lives of specific groups of society or develop and deliver effective policy", and "funding [...] spent on improving the delivery of public services 'on the ground', where greater impact can be made".

52. The Committee therefore called for "a moratorium on creating any new SPCB supported bodies, or expanding the remit of existing bodies, until a 'root and branch' review of the structure is carried out, drawing on the evidence and conclusions set out in this report".

53. In response to the Committee's findings, the [SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape Review Committee](#) was established by Parliament in December 2024, with the remit—

"To consider, review and report on the SPCB supported bodies landscape in accordance with the Parliament's resolution of 31 October 2024 and develop a clear strategic framework to underpin and provide coherence and structure to the SPCB supported bodies landscape by the end of June 2025, including:

- creating effective accountability and scrutiny mechanisms,
- formalising strengthened criteria for creating new supported bodies; and
- identifying and addressing any barriers to sharing services and offices."

54. The new Committee's work built on this Committee's findings, and following publication of its report in June 2025, the Scottish Parliament resolved that—

“the SPCB supported body landscape should not be expanded to include new advocacy-type SPCB supported bodies;

any future proposals for new SPCB supported bodies must satisfy two-tier criteria, as set out in paragraph 150 of the report, comprising both justification and effectiveness tests, and that a parliamentary committee should be given the remit of assessing proposals against these criteria;

a parliamentary committee should be given the specific responsibility for the accountability and scrutiny of SPCB supported bodies for a fixed period as a pilot exercise in Session 7.”

55. As a consequence of this work, only two proposals to create new SPCB-supported bodies have been agreed by Parliament this session (the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland and the Victims and Witnesses Commissioner for Scotland). The Scottish Government decided not to progress with its plans for other commissioners (for wellbeing and sustainable development, and for learning disability, autism and neurodivergence). The Bill to create a Disability Commissioner for Scotland was withdrawn during Stage 1, while the Commissioner for Wellbeing and Sustainable Development did not pass Stage 1. The Bill to create a Commissioner for Older People also currently looks unlikely to proceed.

Cost-effectiveness of Scottish public inquiries

56. The Committee's more recent public administration work focused on [statutory public inquiries, and their cost-effectiveness.](#)

57. This was the first time that a Scottish Parliament Committee examined this matter in depth. The inquiry sought to foster a greater understanding of the current position with public inquiries in Scotland, including their number, timescales, extensions to terms of reference, costs, categories of spend and outstanding recommendations.

58. It found that the current system is “overstretched and poorly defined”. The evidence received highlighted escalating costs and limited ability for Ministers to control expenditure once an inquiry is up and running. Members concluded that “Statutory public inquiries remain a vital mechanism for investigating matters of significant public concern, and their independence must be safeguarded. However, this cannot come at the expense of accountability for public funds.”

59. In its report, published in December 2025, the Committee made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the operation of the public inquiry system, in a way that retains the flexibility to meet the unique circumstances of individual inquiries, while also strengthening financial control and promoting fiscal sustainability.

60. The Committee recommended the setting of defined budgets and timescales at the point of establishment of public inquiries, with notification and justification for extensions to be provided to the Parliament. It asked the Scottish Government to work with the UK Government to update the Inquiries Act 2005 to make this a primary legislation requirement.
61. It further recommended the development of a clear framework and enhanced transparency in decision-making, including in relation to the appointment of chairs, the creation of a central budget for public inquiries, to avoid further strain on specific public services, and the establishment of a central public inquiries unit within the Scottish Government
62. It requested regular reporting of public inquiry costs, the adoption of an eight-week timescale for responses to public inquiry reports and the establishment of a robust, transparent system for tracking and publicly reporting on the implementation of inquiry recommendations.
63. To enhance scrutiny, the Committee also asked Parliament to consider adding oversight of public inquiries to an existing parliamentary committee's remit.
64. The Parliament will debate the Committee's report towards the end of February 2026, and the Scottish Government's response is expected in advance of this debate.

Next steps

65. The Committee will continue taking evidence on legacy issues at its meeting on 3 March, when it will hear from the Scottish Fiscal Commission. The Committee will then publish its legacy report in March 2026.

Committee Clerking Team
February 2026

Carnegie UK response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee on legacy issues

February 2026

About Carnegie UK

Carnegie UK is a charitable foundation based in Dunfermline. Our purpose is better wellbeing for people in the UK and Ireland. We seek to achieve this by growing support for a wellbeing approach to public policy, working with governments and policymakers at all levels in the UK and Ireland to help them think differently about how we understand society and contribute to social progress. We work with partners to contribute to what is known about wellbeing, testing and studying what works in practice. We use this evidence to make the case for which approaches and systems need to change and recommend how to make that happen. Visit www.carnegieuk.org to find out more about our work on collective wellbeing.

We are pleased to submit evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee which reflects Carnegie UK's long-standing interest in public administration, public service reform and the National Performance Framework. We hope that this will be useful in informing your legacy report.

Committee remit – public administration

A Scottish Parliament committee should continue to have an explicit remit to scrutinise public administration over the next parliamentary term, building on the strong foundations laid down by the current committee. How government functions is an important matter for scrutiny and debate; our previous submissions to the Finance and Public Administration Committee highlighted persistent challenges in ensuring that Scotland's strategic frameworks and decision-making systems operate effectively and coherently.¹

It has been particularly useful to have a committee which takes an interest in the evolution and operation of the National Performance Framework (NPF), theoretically the guiding framework for the Scottish Government's policy governance. In our evidence on the NPF, we noted that significant weaknesses remain in how government uses the Framework to guide policy and resource decisions. We emphasised that national outcomes are not consistently embedded across government and that there remains a gap between policy ambition and delivery. Strengthening parliamentary oversight of public administration would support more consistent attention to implementation, accountability and alignment with strategic outcomes.

¹ Response to Scottish Parliament Finance and Public Administration Committee Consultation – Scottish Government Review of National Outcomes – June 2024.
Response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee: Inquiry into Public Administration - Effective Scottish Government decision-making – February 2023
National Performance Framework: Ambitions into Action – April 2022

In earlier evidence to the Parliament, we argued that the NPF must be more fully integrated into oversight and scrutiny if it is to function effectively as Scotland's strategic framework.² A committee with a defined public administration remit has a key role to play in examining system-wide barriers, monitoring adherence to agreed principles of good governance, and ensuring that long-term outcomes remain central to decision-making.

The work of this Committee has also identified issues relating to decision-making practices within the Scottish Government including transparency, record-keeping, clarity of roles and the use of evidence.³ Evidence received by your committee on effective decision-making shows that processes and behaviours vary substantially across government, and that improved scrutiny could help reinforce principles such as clear governance, appropriate challenge and stronger analytical support.⁴

Finally, wider committee work has shown that public administration issues cut across multiple areas of government. Reports considering the operation of public bodies and cross-government systems reinforce the need for a parliamentary forum dedicated to examining how institutions function and whether existing arrangements support effective delivery.

In Carnegie UK's view, embedding a standing remit on public administration within the committee structure of the Parliament would provide the continuity and focus required to support improvement, strengthen Parliament's ability to oversee the systems that enable effective government and enhance accountability.

The reinforcing benefits of the dual remit – finance and public administration

The next Finance and Public Administration Committee should ensure that scrutiny of Scotland's public finances and its systems of public administration are treated as mutually reinforcing elements of effective governance.

We believe that weaknesses in how the Scottish Government uses the National Performance Framework (NPF) and wider governance systems stem partly from insufficient parliamentary oversight of public administration. Strengthening this scrutiny is essential to improving long-term outcomes, accountability and decision-making; the Scottish Government will note and respond to signals sent by Parliament about what matters.

At the same time, the Committee's budget-focused work has repeatedly shown that financial decisions are not consistently aligned with outcomes, and that Parliament lacks clear sight of how spending choices advance strategic objectives. Improved oversight of public administration would directly support more effective financial scrutiny by illuminating whether systems, processes and behaviours are fit to deliver on budget commitments.⁵

Increasingly treating finance and public administration as interlinked topics would allow the Committee to examine not just how public money is spent, but whether Scotland's public sector is genuinely capable of delivering the outcomes that spending is intended to achieve.

² Response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee: Inquiry into Public Administration - Effective Scottish Government decision-making – February 2023

³ Report on Public Administration - effective Scottish Government decision-making, July 2023

⁴ SPICe briefing - Summary of Evidence on Inquiry on Effective Scottish Government decision making

⁵ Written Submission from Carnegie UK - Finance and Public Administration Committee review of budget in practice – March 2025

Support for the scrutiny of public administration

Given that scrutiny of public administration involves assessing and analysing systems, culture, decision-making processes, and performance frameworks, we suggest that MSPs should receive tailored induction training on these public administration fundamentals. This will be particularly relevant for future members of a committee with specific responsibility for public administration.

Across the UK, parliamentary committees routinely appoint specialist advisers to bolster their expertise, particularly when inquiries involve complex administrative or technical matters. The successor committee (and the parliament as a whole) may wish to consider how elected members could best be supported to scrutinise the performance of government effectively.

Public administration scrutiny is as technically demanding as financial scrutiny. To deliver rigorous oversight, the committee must be supported by clerks with appropriate grounding in governance and scrutiny, and elected members must be inducted into the specialist lens required to examine administrative systems, not just policy or budgets.

Relationship between the Scottish Parliament, its committees, and the national Performance Framework

Over the next parliamentary term, the Scottish Parliament and all of its committees should adopt much more structured, consistent and influential engagement with the National Performance Framework (NPF). Previous Carnegie UK submissions to the Finance and Public Administration Committee highlighted that the NPF is not yet embedded across government and wider public services in a way that reliably guides long-term policy and strategy, decision-making and resource allocation. Strengthening parliamentary engagement is therefore essential.

We would encourage a constructive and early dialogue between the Parliament and the next Scottish Government with a view to building a shared understanding about the role that the NPF plays in the overall governance of policy and strategy. The relationship between long-term goals and medium-term activities could thereby be better understood and more effectively scrutinised.

Building on this common understanding, Committees should use the NPF data and associated ways of working as a key reference point when scrutinising legislation, budgets and public service reform proposals. This aligns with the Finance and Public Administration Committee's findings that the link between national outcomes and government activity remains unclear and that greater transparency and routine use of the NPF would improve accountability.⁶

In addition, Parliament should require transparent reporting from the Scottish Government on progress towards national outcomes, with committees empowered to examine gaps in implementation and follow up on issues such as decision-making quality, transparency and record-keeping.

⁶ Report on the National Performance Framework: Review of National Outcomes, July 2023

The Parliament should ensure that scrutiny of the NPF informs long-term planning by embedding it into pre-budget work and cross-committee collaboration, improving alignment between outcomes, budgets and delivery. We note in this context your committee's findings on the need for early engagement in budget scrutiny, with earlier publication of data and modelling.

Parliamentary scrutiny of the relationship between the National Performance Framework and public service reform

The relationship between public service reform, the NPF and the Scottish Parliament should be managed through more integrated, accountable and long-term governance arrangements over the next parliamentary term. The NPF provides the shared national vision and supporting outcomes. Public service reform aims to create preventative, joined-up and outcomes-focused services which help to realise these goals. Parliament's role is to ensure both are aligned, delivered and scrutinised effectively.

Carnegie UK's analysis of public service reform shows that reform is most effective when it is explicitly aligned with the NPF, which sets the long-term outcomes that services are intended to deliver. The Public Service Reform Strategy emphasises prevention, collaboration and long-term outcomes, all of which correspond directly with the NPF's purpose. The strategy also points to ways of working which are all well aligned with those that are necessary to operate effectively in an outcome-focussed context, such as collaboration, long-termism and prevention.

Dr Max French's report⁷ on strengthening the NPF highlights that it must become the "lynchpin" of a renewed reform programme, with Parliament using the framework to hold government and public bodies to account for how policy, spending and delivery contribute to national outcomes.

Therefore, Parliament should: embed the NPF in scrutiny of budgets and legislation; monitor progress on public service reform through the lens of national outcomes; and ensure clear accountability mechanisms that connect reform plans and activity to measurable wellbeing improvements.

Contact: Stuart Mackinnon - Head of Communications and Advocacy, Carnegie UK

⁷ How a strengthened National Performance Framework can drive effective government in Scotland, Dr Max French, August 2024

Finance and Public Administration Committee
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5 February 2026

Thank you for giving Enlighten the opportunity to give evidence on public administration as part of the Committee's work creating a legacy report.

Enlighten would agree with a lot of the Committee's report into public administration and effective government decision making, especially with regard to issues such as managing public expectations; the importance of transparency and accountability; and the need for greater focus on the long term.

Against the backdrop of the committee's previous work there are a couple of additional issues that we would like to pick up, some of which will be of more relevance than others to the committee's thinking, but we believe also have an impact on policy delivery – data & outcomes; trust & the implementation gap; and scrutiny.

Data & outcomes

The importance of robust data when it comes to measuring outcomes cannot be overstated. We are aware that the National Performance Framework website is currently archived, with reform being carried out, and await the new work with interest.¹ However, we are concerned about the lack of meaningful data upon which to evaluate outcomes in a number of areas, alongside a tendency to focus more on inputs over outcomes.

For example, Professor Lindsay Paterson has written extensively for our Commission on School Reform on the lack of data in education, while Des McNulty's report on Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland² cautioned that measures aimed at reducing child poverty needed to be carefully examined for their effectiveness, adding that we must do better at understanding outcomes as well as celebrating inputs.

A specific example would be the policies around free bus travel for the under-22s and over-60s. These bus passes are often celebrated as great Scottish political achievements. However, while the policies bring huge benefits if you live somewhere like Edinburgh where there is a comprehensive and reliable bus service, too many places in Scotland do not have such coverage.³ Indeed, some school pupils, even in urban areas, cannot access bus services to get to school on time.⁴ The bus pass is no

¹ [National Performance Framework - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/national-performance-framework/)

² [Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland: Striking the Right Balance - Enlighten](https://www.enlighten.org.uk/tackling-child-poverty-in-scotland-striking-the-right-balance/)

³ [Last bus home to Glentrool leaves five minutes after first one arrives - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-53407071)

⁴ ['Kids in danger' on 60mph road after school bus scrapped as parents launch petition - Daily Record](https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/uk-news/kids-danger-60mph-road-after-school-bus-scrapped-parents-launch-petition-1440000); [Parents 'disgusted' as council propose to scrap school bus service | Glasgow Times](https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/1440000/kids-in-danger-as-council-propose-to-scrap-school-bus-service)

guarantee of public transport provision, but focusing on the input can obscure the problems with outcomes.

Enlighten believes more needs to be done to scrutinise delivery, especially in the face of shrinking budgets, to ensure that the policies enacted are the most effective way of helping those most in need. This requires data, analysis, evaluation, and crucially a willingness to accept that not all policies will be effective and that when the information changes, it is important that policy changes too.

There are a number of portfolio areas in Scotland which are badly in need of reform. We need far more courage to try out different approaches. Some will work, some won't, and we need the data and evaluation to analyse those results. Too often there appears to be a fear of being wrong, which results with us being stuck in a failing status quo. Such an approach takes courage and humility, but Scotland badly needs that.

Trust and the implementation gap

The committee's report noted that "systematic policy-making aspirations are unhelpful if they encourage unrealistic expectations".

We would suggest that there is a problem around public expectations in Scotland, which undoubtedly impacts on trust in politics and the Scottish Parliament. But those "unrealistic" expectations are also part of our inability to be honest with the public about the scale of some of the challenges we are facing and why difficult decisions are needed.

For example, the policy of "free personal care" can leave the public with an expectation that when they require social care they will be able to access it free-at-the-point-of-need, just as they do with health care. But that isn't the case. Indeed, polling carried out by the Diffley Partnership, commissioned by Enlighten for our health conference in October 2025, showed that only 42% of the public understood how social care was funded and delivered.⁵

There have also been many issues which have had strategies, consultations and policies developed, but failed at implementation. Fifteen years ago the Christie Commission recommended a far greater focus on prevention and early intervention. We are still talking about it as a priority, but have collectively failed to deliver.

The Scottish Government recently closed its latest consultation on reforming council tax – everyone agrees the tax is unfair and out of date, but again we have collectively failed to reform.

Scrutiny

Effective public administration requires effective scrutiny and opposition – it is not just a job for government, but also for the Scottish Parliament.

⁵ [NEW NHS POLLING RELEASED AHEAD OF MAJOR HEALTH CONFERENCE - Enlighten](#)

Enlighten has published a number of articles and reports on this issue, including from MSPs.⁶ There have now been several calls from different parties, and others, on the need to improve the committee system at Holyrood. In particular, the suggestion of directly electing conveners in order to enhance the status of the role and help separate the committees from the political parties has been mentioned by many, including by the Commission on Parliamentary Reform which reported nearly ten years ago. This is an example of the Parliament creating its own implementation gap. Reform to the committee system should be an easy fix and a priority in the next Parliament.

Finally, while we appreciate that local government reform is not an issue for the Committee, we would want to highlight the role of councils in the delivery of public administration. Part of the problem around expectations and the implementation gap is undoubtedly a result of the relationship between central and local government. It is nearly three decades since local government reorganisation and, despite the creation of the Scottish parliament and subsequent devolution of additional powers to it, there has been no review of the capabilities or structures of councils by the Scottish Government. There needs to be a discussion about what the role is for the centre, but we need to recognise that if we are to improve outcomes in Scotland, whether that is in education, poverty, housing or other areas, local government is key to that success.

We recently published an article by Sean Duffy, Chief Executive of the Wise Group⁷ which powerfully summed up the problem with public administration in Scotland at present:

“Scotland does not lack policy ambition. If anything, it suffers from oversupply. Public Service Reform. Christie. Whole Family Support. No Wrong Door. Trauma-informed systems. Community empowerment. Place-based working. Integration. Co-design. Prevention spend.

“The language is impressive. The frameworks are sophisticated. The documents are polished. The conferences are busy. But beneath the rhetoric, the incentives tell a different story.

“Budgets remain siloed. Accountability remains vertical. Risk is still punished rather than supported. Short-term funding dominates. Outcomes are discussed but rarely structurally enforced. Frontline autonomy is praised but tightly constrained. Leaders speak the language of collaboration while defending organisational territory behind closed doors.”

If we want different outcomes, we need to start taking a different approach.

Yours sincerely,
Alison Payne
Research Director
Enlighten

⁶ [A Blueprint for a More Effective Scottish Parliament; Devolution at 20 - Enlighten](#); [Everyone agrees that Holyrood needs change, so why isn't it changing? - Enlighten](#)

⁷ [Scotland's public services are still “living within the lie” - Enlighten](#)

Response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee, legacy issues and key themes – Public Administration.

Dr Ian C. Elliott, Centre for Public Policy, University of Glasgow.

I am a Senior Lecturer in Public Administration at the Centre for Public Policy, University of Glasgow. My research covers a range of public administration issues including the strategic state and mission-led government as well as the teaching of public administration. I am a member of the Scottish Government's Reform Advisory Group for the National Performance Framework.

Public Administration

The existence of a Finance and Public Administration Committee is an important feature of the Scottish Parliament and one that should continue over the next parliamentary term. Over the current parliamentary term, the FPAC have conducted valuable inquiries into the National Performance Framework (NPF), public service reform, decision making, the commissioner landscape and the cost effectiveness of public inquiries. All of these have provided valuable insights to inform better policymaking and public service delivery. Having a committee with a direct remit for public administration is important to support good governance.

My research has highlighted the need for more investment in knowledge and skills related to public administration in order to support better public service design and delivery. Professional development of public servants in many other countries is supported by national schools of government such as in France (École Nationale d'Administration), Canada (the Canada School of Public Service) and Australia and New Zealand (Australia and New Zealand School of Government [ANZSOG])¹. The announcement of a National School for Government and Public Services by the UK Government is a welcome move² but it is important that the Scottish Government engages with this initiative whilst at the same time providing its own bespoke training and development for public servants in Scotland that is tailored to the national context and Scottish Government priorities³. The FPAC should consider how best to ensure that the Scottish Parliament has the knowledge and skills to fulfil its duties in scrutinising legislation and holding the Scottish Government to account.

National Performance Framework

A key part of the Scottish Government's approach to policy making has been the National Performance Framework (NPF). This has provided a framework for long-

¹ Elliott, I. C., Bottom, K. A., Glennon, R., & O'Connor, K. (2025). Educating a civil service that is fit for purpose: perceptions from UK stakeholders. *Public Money & Management*, 45(2), 119–128.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2024.2343798>

² <https://theconversation.com/why-the-establishment-of-a-national-school-for-civil-servants-matters-273938>

³ https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/publicpolicy/news/headline_1242563_en.html

term, outcomes-focused, decision making since 2007. My research has shown that the development of the NPF provided some immediate benefits⁴ to the Scottish Government but that a lack of sustained focus and momentum have contributed to a growing implementation gap⁵.

There is a need for long-term and sustained investment in strategic capabilities, a connection from strategy to action through clear accountability processes, and effective collaboration between different levels of government⁶. The FPAC has an important role in scrutiny of the cross-cutting elements of the National Outcomes and the NPF review. Whilst the NPF and National Outcomes cut across all parliamentary committees, it is important to have a focal point for scrutiny and oversight of the functioning of the NPF and strategic decision making in government. Aligned to this is the scrutiny and oversight of public finances and how budgetary decisions can be used to facilitate more preventative policy making and progress towards the National Outcomes. Again, this highlights the benefit of having a parliamentary committee that is tasked with both public administration and finance.

Positive Public Policy

Finally, the FPAC have explored the role of commissioners and public inquiries. These both provide a crucial role in scrutiny and in identifying areas for improvement. Yet they are typically focused on matters of maladministration, failure, and redress. At the same time, the Permanent Secretary is right to note that “not everything is broken”⁷. There are important lessons that can also be learned from policy success. The FPAC could play a role in identifying and learning lessons from public policy and service delivery that are found to be effective. My research on Positive Public Policy has highlighted the NPF as one example of a range of approaches that have been used to facilitate effective government⁸. Examples of successful public service design and delivery can be found at all levels of government and across all parts of the UK. Gaining a better understanding of policy success can help to identify lessons for others and to provide a more balanced public debate about failure and success⁹.

⁴ Elliott, I. C. (2020). The implementation of a strategic state in a small country setting—the case of the ‘Scottish Approach.’ *Public Money & Management*, 40(4), 285–293.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2020.1714206>

⁵ Elliott, I. C. (2023). "Chapter 6: The strategic state: a case study of devolved government in Scotland". In *Handbook on Strategic Public Management*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. Retrieved Feb 11, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789907193.00013>

⁶ Elliott, I. C., & Roberts, A. (2025). The concept of the strategic state: An assessment after 30 years. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 84, 558–569. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12685>

⁷ <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/snps-top-civil-servant-insists-not-everything-is-broken-amid-pressure-on-services-to-make-cuts-5481873>

⁸ <https://acss.org.uk/positive-public-policy-a-new-vision-for-uk-government/>

⁹ Cairney, P., Boswell, J., Ayres, S., Durose, C., Elliott, I.C., Flinders, M., Martin, S., Richardson, L. (2024) The state of British policymaking: How can UK government become more effective?, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 77 (4): 837–864, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsae019>

Paul Cairney, Professor of Politics and Public Policy, University of Stirling

Finance and Public Administration Committee

Session 6 legacy issues– Public administration

National Performance Framework

- The Scottish Government makes a strong rhetorical commitment to high-level and joined up thinking on policy.
- It is attracted to methods to involve citizens and stakeholders in high-level long-term thinking.
- It struggles to translate this high-level thinking into detailed deliverable action.
- This disconnect is not a coincidence. It results from the decision to describe high-level aims vaguely enough to avoid engaging with trade-offs between aims.
- By default, economic growth becomes the principled priority that overshadows other aims.
- Only by making a concrete commitment to a new principled priority will it overcome this tendency towards prioritising the economy over all other issues.
- Yet, the NPF often gives the impression that a government does not need to make these hard choices (everyone is contributing to win-win strategies).

Public Service Reform

- The Scottish Government's commitment to prevention - for the public sector to be 'preventative, to better join up and to be efficient' - is a restatement of policies signalled in 2011 (a 'decisive shift to prevention') following the Christie Commission report.
- The Scottish Government often describes itself as a learning organisation.
- Therefore, it should present evidence on what it has learned – good and bad – from 15 years of experience on its decisive shift to prevention.
- There is also a wealth of previous FPAC reports on this topic on which to aid learning, which would help to avoid a sense of déjà vu when the next initiative comes along.

Effective Scottish Government decision-making

- There are many principles of effective government.
- My report to this committee summarised them as:

1. Hold to account the people and organisations responsible for policy.
2. Anticipate and prevent policy problems rather than react to crisis.
3. Avoid power hoarding at the 'centre'. Co-produce policy with citizens.

4. Ensure policy coherence and policymaking integration.

5. Foster evidence-informed policymaking.

6. Mainstream equity, fairness, or justice across all policy.

7. Ensure that public services deliver public value.

- It then highlighted the routine likelihood that some principles would overshadow the others.
- For example, the primacy of national elections concentrates power in the centre, fosters short-term thinking, biases evidence-gathering towards experts, limits consensus seeking, and reduces incentives to learn.
- There is some scope to connect this topic to issues with the NPF and public sector reform.
- For example, each topic highlights a lack of clarity about how the Scottish Government seeks to manage its aims and objectives, and how it engages with trade-offs between aims.
- In other words, it is easy to find Scottish Government statements on its high-level aims, but difficult to see how it proposes to deliver.