

# Finance and Public Administration Committee

## National Performance Framework: Ambitions into Action

### Note of key issues discussed at the Dundee engagement event on 10 May 2022

#### Background

Three<sup>1</sup> Members of the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee met informally with representatives of the local authority, other public bodies, business organisations and the voluntary sector, in Dundee on 10 May. Members heard about the experiences of participants on how the NPF influences their day-to-day roles and the approaches of their organisations. A parallel event was held involving the other four<sup>2</sup> Members of the Committee in Glasgow on the same day, and a similar engagement session with Scottish Government officials took place on 3 May.

At all three events, participants were asked the same questions, which are listed below, along with the key points of discussion at the Dundee event. Separate notes of the issues raised at the other two engagement sessions are also available on the [Committee's inquiry page](#).

#### Discussion

##### Q1. What role does the NPF and national outcomes play in your decision-making?

For some participants, the National Performance Framework (NPF) is the 'umbrella' for strategic plans and performance management, it shapes the policy landscape, and influences delivery and behaviours. For others, it doesn't tend to affect their day-to-day roles, nor is it a "driver for action".

For the local authority there is a clear "golden thread" from "city plan" (the Community Planning Partnership plan) through to the Council plan, then to individual service plans and to those delivering services on the ground. Those 'on the ground' services were less likely to use the language of the NPF, but nevertheless, the connections are clear. It was felt to be much easier to map to the broad NPF outcomes given the broad nature of the local authority's activities.

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Johnson MSP (Deputy Convener), Ross Greer MSP, , Douglas Lumsden MSP, and John Mason MSP.

For other bodies with a narrower remit, the connections with the NPF were sometimes less apparent – their obvious indicator might not actually be a good descriptor of their work, for example. In some bodies, an attempt has however been made to map their organisational Key Performance Indicators to the NPF, providing ‘a line of sight’.

Some suggested that the NPF provides a common goal across organisations and encourages collaboration. In fact, one attendee suggested that the NPF “gives us a reason to be in the same room” and can foster a greater understanding of what organisations are collectively trying to achieve. Another participant however noted that collaboration between sectors is happening locally but not because of the NPF.

The contrast between the national outcomes being longer-term goals and the short-term motivation of politicians and the media was discussed, along with the challenges of “squaring that circle”.

The NPF was described as ‘ethereal’ and ‘anodyne’ and it was suggested that the document be rebranded as ‘The Wellbeing Plan’, as “everyone wants to achieve better wellbeing outcomes”. However, it was argued that the allocation of funding needs to also join up with these wellbeing outcomes.

Contradictions were highlighted within the outcomes, for example economy vs the environment. Some also suggested that the outcomes needed local content and colour to be meaningful.

It was unclear what the ‘hook’ is for the private sector to be involved.

## Q2. To what extent are you supported to deliver the national outcomes?

In terms of support, again this varied between different public bodies. For the local authority this seemed to work well, with COSLA and the Improvement Service having a key role. For other bodies, the picture was more mixed, however Scottish Government sponsor teams and official letters of guidance, which include emphasis on delivery of national outcomes, do play an important part.

The question was asked whether the NPF needed to be a more ‘dynamic’ document, which is responsive to the multiplicity of plans, strategies and policies. One attendee, for example, suggested that individual strategies, such as Scotland’s National Strategy for Economic Transformation, often have more relevant outcomes than those in the NPF. It was argued that the complexity of the Scottish public landscape for such a small country is not helpful and this “cluttered landscape” may be hampering delivery of the NPF.

It was also suggested that there is a need for resources to be pooled to better effect and for collective prioritisation; “perhaps don’t try to deliver everything”. The question was asked whether all indicators are equal, if they are too detailed, and whether some of the ‘big issues’ are missing. It was noted that “we need to understand indicators and what’s working and how organisations are working together on delivery”.

### Q3. To what extent are you held to account for delivering national outcomes?

The wide range of ways in which bodies are held to account was discussed. Attendees said that the extent to which this accountability is directly focused on NPF outcomes or if it is more general isn't clear but, where the NPF is built into strategic planning, accountability is implicit.

For the local authority, it was felt that accountability was strong through its normal democratic structures of committees, and progress reporting. The Local Outcome Improvement Plan maps directly to the NPF and national reporting, even though it might not mention the NPF specifically. Within the local authority (and other bodies) the role of strong leadership at official and political level is seen to be crucial.

Participants discussed being held to account for contributions to outcomes over which their organisation might have little control, and there was a recognition that while this is challenging, it could be done proportionately.

General difficulties in achieving accountability were noted and it was suggested that a broad conversation about how the public sector is being held to account for delivery is needed. Participants argued that each leader needs to feel accountable for delivery and there is a role for the Scottish Government in mapping out how best to achieve this.

Some felt that a clearer link between the national outcomes and local priorities would secure better outcomes and enable greater accountability. Particular difficulties in holding voluntary bodies to account were highlighted, with one participant indicating that "the NPF should be the beating heart of voluntary bodies, but it's not".

One attendee highlighted that "we do what we do as an employer as it's the right thing to do, not because of the NPF", while another from the private sector said "my Board don't expect to see the NPF in my strategic plan".

### Q4. What does good practice look like?

There is a lack of awareness as to what other bodies, which carry out similar functions, are achieving. One participant from the private sector suggested that "success is like trade secrets – it isn't shared, so we don't know if we are doing well or otherwise". Local government officials would in contrast "readily share willingly and easily", while in the voluntary sector sharing good practice "is down to good relationships".

Some felt that it can be difficult to identify good practice through measuring outcomes, asking "are we measuring the right things, too many things?" and suggested that duplication is happening "but we don't know the extent".

Funding and competition are barriers to sharing good practice. There is a feeling that "my competitors will benefit". The focus needs to be on successful human stories rather than 'big data'.

Participants suggested that there is a role for the Scottish Government to marshal this information and share good practice and that this could create a better understanding of what works well and less well.

## Q5. Can you give an example where there has been effective collaborative working across different public / private / third sector organisations? What was it that made it work well?

The experience of transforming the old Michelin site in Dundee was most frequently mentioned as an example of good practice, being a quick response, building on strong relations across public and private sectors, with everyone coming together with a “common purpose”.

Another example was work across many organisations on addressing poor behaviour in the countryside – success here was driven by a shared understanding of the immediate problem.

There was a lot of discussion on the impact of Covid-19. The pandemic forced change, quickly. In many areas this has led to new, innovative ways of working. The fear of some participants is that things might revert to “bad old ways”.

A positive example of Covid-19 prompting positive change is work on food insecurity in Dundee, which led to a Food Network in place now that has become a centre for a wide range of other advice and support. It involves local people delivering, with the council supporting activity.

Finally, a discussion was held on community wealth building, with an example of the trade-offs between community-produced hand sanitiser versus imported, but much cheaper, hand sanitiser.

## Q6. What culture, training, systems, or processes would you like to see changed for the next revised NPF?

Participants recognised that the NPF is a ‘wellbeing strategy’, while noting this was “intangible”, “opaque” and is not relatable to the public. They were unsure as to how the Scottish Government defines wellbeing and noted it can be difficult to measure.

Others argued that a wellbeing framework is about using a values-based approach, leadership, relationships and how we treat each other. This, they suggested leads to productivity. The same methods used in organisations’ consideration of staff wellbeing can be applied to achieving the wellness of society. One participant highlighted the example of getting people into jobs and young people into positive destinations as a way of contributing to wellbeing outcomes.

A discussion was held on how we can know what good looks like in a wellbeing strategy. Identifying examples of good practice and producing case studies can, it was argued, help with this. Leadership and cultures are also seen to be important

factors and it was suggested that the Scottish Government needs to take a lead on encouraging this.

The Parliament's role in holding bodies to account was recognised. It was noted that this was perhaps easier with the earlier iteration of the NPF where bodies were named against specific outcomes for delivery. Now every organisation is expected to deliver against every outcome. In the current structure, it is "hard to hold everyone to account for everything". Some participants felt that more clarity is needed in relation to roles, with their preference being for this to be more prescriptive.

One attendee highlighted that the NPF plays a role in incentivising organisations to consider how they can achieve better outcomes.

The question was asked whether there is awareness of the NPF within the civil service, with one person noting that "looking in from the outside, the Scottish Government is paying 'lip service' to the NPF". There are, they argued, "different agendas in government", whereas "Government strategies and plans should fit together and link to the NPF; they don't currently".

Finally, it was noted that the Scottish Leaders' Forum has a role in encouraging greater shared leadership and providing training and support.

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