



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Paul McLennan MSP
Minister for Housing
Scottish Government

12 November 2024

Dear Paul

Scottish Parliament's scrutiny of revised National Outcomes

The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee has considered the new 'Housing' outcome in the revised National Performance Framework, gathering the views of stakeholders during the course of related Committee work including our evidence sessions on the National Planning Framework (NPF4) and on the Housing Emergency.

This letter provides a summary of those views and reflects the written submissions received to the call for views issued by the Finance and Public Administration Committee. It also draws some key issues to the attention of the Scottish Government.

For context, the new Housing outcome is copied in full below:

"We live in safe, high-quality and affordable homes that meet our needs.

We ensure that everyone has housing that is safe, secure, accessible and affordable. Homelessness and the causes of homelessness are addressed. There is availability of housing of all tenures, including social housing, in our urban and rural areas.

We plan our communities sustainably to ensure there is suitable, good quality housing for all types of households and access to local services. Housing is sustainable, energy efficient, resilient and well maintained.

Housing meets everyone’s needs, throughout all stages of life. We are supported to live independently within our communities.”

Views on the new Housing outcome

The Committee notes that in the responses to the call for written views on the revised national outcomes there was wide support for the inclusion of a Housing specific outcome. Similarly in their oral evidence to the Committee stakeholders were supportive of the creation of the new outcome and of its scope, reflecting the importance of housing in underpinning social and economic outcomes.

In relation to how the outcome might be delivered, suggestions were made by witnesses that the delivery of new homes should be prioritised. A number of organisations said however that the outcome must not just be about housing supply or infrastructure, but also about the support which some people need to enable them to access and live successfully in their home, particularly those with vulnerabilities (for example elderly or care experienced people). This might range from providing help with managing tenancies and bills through to providing support packages where needed.

One recommendation made was that the outcome should make reference to housing within ‘thriving communities’. A related call was made for there to be a ‘Home’ outcome which could strengthen housing rights for people with a range of support needs.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of energy-efficient housing, addressing homelessness, and the provision of accessible housing. The Committee notes that the revised outcome references each of these issues.

The Committee has previously heard from stakeholders about the challenges of aligning various national policies with local, sectoral or organisational policies, and was interested to hear their views on whether a new overarching national outcome for housing might help with that alignment. During the Committee’s examination of what progress is being made with delivery of the fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4), witnesses described the importance of the existing Housing to 2040 strategy knitting those priorities together.

Measuring and monitoring progress

Whilst stakeholders told the Committee it would be difficult to disagree with the aspiration of the outcome, it was made clear that it will be vital to determine what will be measured in order to evidence the progress which is made towards achieving the outcome. This has not always been the case with previous national outcomes.

Contact: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP. Email: localgov.committee@parliament.scot. We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

Professor Kenneth Gibb noted that it will be essential for there to be a progressive realisation of the outcome. Other witnesses highlighted that it must seek to tackle underlying long-term issues.

An example of one possible measurement was provided of the need to reduce the number of households who do not live in safe high-quality homes that meet their needs.

The Committee agrees that in order for the creation of the new housing outcome to be meaningful its delivery must be monitored. However it is aware through its wider work on housing issues, including most recently its scrutiny of the Housing (Scotland) Bill, that there is presently a significant lack of robust data on the housing sector, in particular the size and cost of all rental tenures and the condition of homes. Without that data it would be difficult to evidence what progress is being made on the 'availability of housing of all tenures, including social housing, in our urban and rural areas' which is a core component of the Housing outcome.

Similarly, it would appear that measuring progress against the ambition within the Housing outcome to 'plan our communities sustainably to ensure there is suitable, good quality housing...' etc is closely related to delivery of the Scottish Government's planning framework NPF4, however it has not yet been established how NPF4 will be monitored. It is not therefore clear how we will know what progress is made towards meeting this worthwhile aspiration.

Conclusion

The inclusion of a Housing specific outcome within the revised national outcomes has been welcomed by stakeholders, and the Committee agrees that it is a positive step by the Scottish Government. The Committee hopes that the creation of the outcome will help ensure there is an increasingly joined up approach between national and local government and the full range of sectoral partners across both public and private sectors in order to tackle the current housing emergency.

It is however concerned that there is currently insufficient data available on housing availability, costs and condition across all tenures. Without this being available it is difficult to see how progress in delivering the outcome can be measured and thus make the objective effective and meaningful.

The Committee is also concerned about the likely timescales for establishing how the outcome will be measured, given the existing delays in monitoring NPF4 which would appear to be closely linked to delivery of the outcome.

The Committee therefore asks the Scottish Government to clarify how progress against the Housing outcome will be measured. This should include its timescales for identifying what will be measured, and which data sources will be used.

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Yours sincerely,

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