



OFFICIAL REPORT
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Finance and Public Administration Committee

Tuesday 24 May 2022

Session 6



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FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE
16th Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con)

*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Elle Adams (Scotland CAN B)

Vicki Bibby (Public Health Scotland)

Paul Bradley (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations)

Neil Ferguson (Revenue Scotland)

Mirren Kelly (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Tim Kendrick (Fife Council)

Jamie Livingstone (Oxfam Scotland)

Keith Robson (Open University in Scotland)

Amy Woodhouse (Children In Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Joanne McNaughton

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Finance and Public Administration Committee

Tuesday 24 May 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

National Performance Framework: Ambitions into Action

The Convener (Kenneth Gibson): Good morning and welcome to the 16th meeting in 2022 of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

Before we start, I put on record the committee's thanks to members of the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, who visited us here at Holyrood yesterday. We had a very productive discussion on the work and approaches of our respective committees in relation to public administration, and it was fascinating for those of us who were here to see how in parallel we are with that committee with regard to our experiences and the challenges ahead of us.

Today, we continue our evidence gathering for our national performance framework: ambitions into action inquiry. I welcome to the meeting our first panel of witnesses: Mirren Kelly, chief officer, local government finance, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; and Tim Kendrick, community manager, development, Fife Council. First of all, I would like to thank you for your excellent written submissions. Both were interesting and have certainly given the committee food for thought.

I will go straight to questions. Mirren, the first paragraph of your submission says:

“COSLA would further welcome a future opportunity ... to provide oral evidence to the Committee on some of the wider aspects concerning the Ambitions into Action Inquiry and expand on experience to date.”

Let us kick off with that, then.

Mirren Kelly (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): So, a simple one to start off with. [Laughter.]

The Convener: Indeed, but I am not saying that you should go over the whole paper.

Mirren Kelly: For COSLA, the context is how we as an organisation interact directly with the national performance framework not only on our own behalf but on behalf of our members and the councils. We are always looking at this almost

from a dual perspective, which, when we see how things unfold, has its benefits and challenges.

As co-signatories to the national performance framework, we are particularly committed to its vision and outcomes, but we know that this is a journey. It is all about progress. There is a good opportunity to build on what we have learned and what we can see is working well and perhaps what needs to improve.

There can be challenges in how we demonstrate a particular contribution to the outcomes, partly because of the underlying indicators. A lot of them sit potentially at national level or break down in different ways, which can make it particularly challenging for local authorities to reflect on how exactly they can contribute to certain outcomes in the national performance framework and how they might then choose to prioritise things. As a result, you will see local authorities linking to outcomes in the framework through their local outcomes improvement plans and other areas, but they often have access to more specific and local data that can drive decisions and local priorities. Although there is frequently a clear link between those things, the submissions show that that link is not always explicit. Some of that might have to do with timing with regard to the development of plans, but local authorities are certainly focused on making these contributions and can identify where the biggest gaps are and focus on areas of most need to improve outcomes for people in their local areas.

The Convener: You have suggested that the outcomes are perhaps not as prescriptive as they should be. Do you think that they should be tightened up? After all, many others who have made submissions have talked about the need for enhanced flexibility in the approach to the outcomes. Where exactly does COSLA sit on that issue?

Mirren Kelly: I do not think that the outcomes should necessarily be tightened, but many organisations are facing challenges in how to contribute to and deliver on them. I note that several submissions have focused on funding constraints and the fact that funding is being provided to multiple organisations for specific interventions that might make a contribution but which will not always or necessarily be the best way of working on that outcome, depending on circumstances. Another frequently cited funding constraint is the restriction as a result of single-year or short-term funding and the challenge that that can create in making a sustainable contribution to delivering on outcomes and different ways of working.

The Convener: I think that funding is going to come up a lot in our next evidence-taking session.

It has certainly been mentioned by everyone who has made a submission.

Tim Kendrick, you are obviously very proud of Fife's local outcomes improvement plan. Indeed, you highlight in your submission Fife's specific focus on three priorities—

“tackling poverty and preventing crisis; addressing the climate emergency; and leading economic recovery”—

all of which look sensible.

However, with regard to how you would innovate as a council, you refer to

“A tendency for national policy and inspection arrangements to focus on certain, more easily measurable outcomes”,

highlighting SQA attainment as an example and saying that such a tendency

“distracts attention away from the importance of wider wellbeing for improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children.”

Can you expand a wee bit more on your thinking in that area?

Tim Kendrick (Fife Council): Yes. That particular comment refers specifically to some of the work around children and young people. The sense that I get from colleagues in our education and children's services directorate is that in order to make longer-term improvements in key measures such as attainment, you sometimes have to take a much broader approach to children's health and wellbeing. Sometimes the national focus is on single inputs or interventions on, for example, teacher numbers and children in early years places. Clearly we welcome additional funding in those areas, but such an approach can at times put pressure on other parts of the system.

Although we have our 13 plan for Fife ambitions, which mirror the national outcomes pretty closely, we felt that, post Covid, we needed a much clearer focus on where we should put our energy. As you will know, if everything is a priority, nothing is. As a result, we have put in place new governance, leadership and delivery arrangements for the three specific recovery and renewal priorities just to give pace to the post-pandemic recovery, all within the framework of community wealth building. I would also echo Mirren Kelly's comment that some of the national requirements can constrain, either through ring-fenced funding or particular inspection regimes, our ability to innovate at a local level.

The Convener: Actually, my next question is on funding, and I will quote from Mirren Kelly's submission rather than your own, Tim, on that particular issue, although you have obviously commented on the matter.

Mirren, you have said:

“councils are constrained by overall levels of funding”—

which I think we are all well aware of—and go on to say that this

“piecemeal approach to funding does not truly support an outcomes-based approach.”

How can the Scottish Government implement its manifesto commitments in areas covered by local government and, at the same time, take a more constructive approach?

Tim Kendrick: Ring-fenced funding can sometimes be a bit of a blunt instrument. It is just as important to work on policy developments, look at the evidence on what works and work with local authorities on piloting new approaches and developing best practice in those areas. Funding does not necessarily lead to better practice and better outcomes; it can result in just doing more of the same.

The Convener: Obviously, COSLA is not happy about ring fencing. However, the Scottish Government would argue that if it gave, say, £10 million to local authorities to employ more teachers, local authorities, if they had the flexibility, might spend that money on something else and then ministers would be attacked in the Scottish Parliament for not putting enough teachers in place. Ministers think, “We provided the money for teachers; councils didn't spend it on them; and we're the ones getting the kicking, even though we provided the money.” How do you square that circle?

Mirren Kelly: That is a good example, and it goes back to the need for an outcomes-based approach. Why are teachers seen as the best intervention in such circumstances? Additional teachers might well be exactly what is needed in Edinburgh, say, but in other areas a share of the £10 million investment might be best directed at nurture programmes or at supporting children and their families at a much earlier stage of their lives, which would actually contribute to their educational attainment and all those other elements.

The Convener: I agree with that, but I am looking at this from a ministerial point of view. I know that some local authorities will say, “Look—we do not need additional teachers. What we need is a peripatetic higher biology teacher for the six kids in each school doing advanced highers in sixth year. It seems daft to have an extra teacher to cover that in each school, so we will just have one.” However, the headline in the media is still the reduction in teacher numbers or whatever. The political imperative, if you like, is what the public see and, in that example, what the public are seeing is fewer teachers in their area, not an improvement in the delivery of advanced higher in biology. That is the absolute nub of this. Ministers

would really like to give local government more flexibility—and, of course, local government would like more flexibility, too—but they are perhaps concerned that politics gets in the way of delivering on these outcomes. That is what I am suggesting. How do we square that circle with a hostile media?

Mirren Kelly: That is a good point, and I found it interesting when I saw it in some of the other submissions. I cannot remember who it was, but someone suggested that there was perhaps a lack of what they framed as proactive journalism to support the outcomes and the NPF more broadly and to change that narrative. We should all be working to change the public perception of how outcomes work and their importance so that we can move away from journalists being able to create a challenging situation for politicians by saying, “You don’t have enough teachers.” How many teachers are “enough” anyway? How do you define that? If we focused on supporting that shift in public perception, increased engagement in and understanding of the national performance framework and the delivery of outcomes and made all of this part of the public discourse, it would be really beneficial as we moved forward.

Tim Kendrick: I agree with Mirren Kelly. I have a lot of experience in promoting partnership working around safer communities, and I would highlight as another good example the political focus at national level on numbers of police officers, which is only one of many inputs with regard to making communities safer. It could be argued that, according to the evidence, the key inputs are addressing poverty and providing positive opportunities, particularly for young people. As for the dilemma with regard to the perceptions of the media, that sort of thing needs to be challenged. We should be working on the basis of what the evidence tells us rather than what the headlines say.

09:45

The Convener: I understand that, but it is difficult for ministers to do that if they are always getting a kicking in the press for a decline in police or teacher numbers, not putting enough nurses in place or whatever. For example, my health board thinks that we have 85 beds too many, but it knows that if it cuts them, there will be an immediate outcry, even though those resources will be devoted to delivering services elsewhere. That money will not vanish; it will be spent where the health board thinks that it will deliver better health outcomes. However, we continue to face that kind of difficulty. Every politician here is probably guilty of pressing that button when it suits them, too, because you have to get re-elected, apart from anything else. In my view, that is

probably the most fundamental barrier to the national performance framework delivering on its outcomes.

In your submission, Mirren, you say:

“the route toward achieving National Outcomes is not prescribed. This leaves the potential for, and advantage of, a wide range of different and often innovative paths to be developed through which better outcomes can be achieved. At the local level this can translate into tailoring specific services to address unique local issues or targeting local groups or communities.”

I wonder whether you can give me a couple of examples of that—and not from Fife, as I will be asking Tim Kendrick for some examples from his neck of the woods.

Mirren Kelly: I think that Tim will be able to answer with more explicit examples than I can, because what we in COSLA try to do is enable our local authority members to work within that non-prescriptive framework. After all, they have access to more detailed local knowledge, know where the biggest gaps and challenges are and can develop interventions that work locally. Those interventions will not be the same for every area; indeed, we often say that what works in Glasgow will not necessarily be the best choice for the island councils.

There are particular examples of priorities being driven by demographics. In some areas that are experiencing depopulation or which have an ageing population, the focus will need to be on support within communities, while in other local authorities where the population is increasing, the focus might be on supporting younger families. Ultimately, the ability to focus attention on what matters locally is important in delivering on all of the outcomes. One of the challenges that we face is that a lot of the indicators are Scotland-wide only, and sometimes it is very hard to see what is actually happening in particular areas. A local authority might have made big improvements with regard to some of the indicators while not focusing on others, because they are not the biggest priority locally. However, that does not mean that gradual improvements have not been made.

Equally—and this has been a particular risk post Covid—we sometimes miss things that are going wrong. We have all seen the significant impact of Covid and the likely increase in health, economic and other inequalities as a result of it. That is a real concern, and the question is: how can we adapt within the framework and focus on what is needed? The approaches that are taken will be different. Even if everyone were to agree one priority to work on, the interventions needed to improve that priority outcome would likely be different in different areas.

Tim Kendrick: I would highlight the insights and the evidence that have come out of the work that

we have been doing post Covid, particularly the priority of tackling poverty and preventing crisis. For example, when we undertook some research on where the bulk of Fife's anti-poverty funding goes, we found that up to 70 per cent of our current funding goes on either crisis interventions or mitigating the impact of poverty, while only a tiny amount goes into preventative approaches such as supported employment and getting people who are furthest from the employment market back into work. That means that, as well as looking at no wrong door and community wealth building approaches, Fife has to focus on supporting people back into employment and looking at positive destinations. However, that might not be the priority for Highland or for Aberdeenshire, and that brings me back to my earlier point about using the evidence to look at the policy interventions that need to be made to address one's specific circumstances.

The Convener: If you had additional resources in Fife, would you allocate them to increasing the amount of money for preventative spend on, say, poverty? You mentioned your 70:30 split in funding, but if you had a significant increase in the resources available for that, would you continue with that proportion of spend or would you say, "Well, we've got this additional money—let's try to make a real difference in prevention"? How would that work?

Tim Kendrick: We would have to follow the evidence and look to put the resources in upstream to prevent people from falling into crisis. Indeed, that is particularly urgent, given the current pressures on families as a result of inflation and energy costs. It is also about looking at systemic change across the local authority and other partners and making it easier for people to get the support that they need, hence the focus on no wrong door approaches, which ensure that people get the joined-up support that they need at their first point of contact with public services.

The Convener: I have just one more question for Mirren Kelly before I open it up to colleagues. On economic development, you say in your submission:

"Local Government, despite recognition as a key partner in the delivery of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation ... and being a sphere of government, has had little engagement in the development of NSET."

Can you tell me why that would be?

Mirren Kelly: For detail on that, I would have to refer to some colleagues who are not currently present, because I did not lead on the engagement on that. More generally, though, I would say that that strategy does not contain as much direct reference to the performance framework as we would have liked to have seen.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I now open the session up to colleagues.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Good morning. I want to flag up to you some of the evidence that we took when we went out from Parliament to visit two local authorities. At the workshop that I attended, senior local government officials said that everybody is agreed that, in principle, the national performance framework is a good thing, because it focuses minds on what we ought to be doing, and because central Government and local government come together to decide on it.

However, there is a big dilemma at the heart of delivery in practice because, if you make the prescription too state-orientated and too cumbersome, it is difficult for local authorities and other stakeholders to have the freedom to do exactly what you have both said this morning, which is to deliver where you know that things will improve most at local level. Do you agree with the perspective of those senior officials?

Tim Kendrick: Yes, broadly speaking, I do. There is a difference between having clear, shared ambitions at national and local level and having a prescriptive performance regime. I do not think that the latter would help, but it is helpful to have clear sight of where we want to get to and how we are doing on getting there. Most importantly, as far as I am concerned, it is helpful to understand what we need to do to improve our policy outcomes in the future, rather than to look back at lagging indicators from two years ago. It is about much more than performance reporting against a performance framework; it is about having clear insight and understanding about what is and what is not working. You cannot separate the policy and the research input from what you need to do to achieve your outcomes in any performance regime.

Liz Smith: If I follow the logic of that, are you saying that it is beneficial and helpful to somebody like you who makes local decisions on what is best for, say, Fife to have considerable flexibility and autonomy in what you decide to do; to have less ring-fencing of money so that you can choose the priorities that you feel will deliver the best outcomes; and not to have anything too prescriptive at national level?

Tim Kendrick: Yes. On the other hand, it makes a lot of sense for the broader policy agenda for local authorities and national Government to work towards the same or similar outcomes so that national policy interventions are, broadly speaking, in line with what we try to achieve locally. I agree that it is not all about where the ring-fenced funding is put.

Liz Smith: Earlier, Mirren Kelly quite rightly said that what works in Fife might not work in the Borders, that what works in Glasgow might not work in the Highlands and so on. The dilemma that the committee faces as we scrutinise the national performance framework is that there is broad agreement across the board as to what we should be trying to achieve in improving the wellbeing of communities across Scotland, but the measures that will ensure that that happens could be very different in different parts of the country. I am interested to know whether you feel that the structure of the national performance framework allows for that or whether we should have a slight change in approach.

Tim Kendrick: I think that it allows for that, because the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 states, in essence, that community planning partnerships should ensure that local outcomes improvement plans are informed by the national outcomes but that the local plans do not need to follow the national outcomes rigidly. That flexibility is important. For example, in Fife, following the declaration of a climate emergency, we as a community planning partnership agreed that we needed to raise our game on climate mitigation and resilience.

The national outcomes are long term, and perhaps there is a need to be slightly more fleet of foot about the way in which we prioritise elements of the national performance framework.

Liz Smith: My final question is for Mirren Kelly. One of the people who gave evidence to us was clear that, when there is good practice in another local authority, they pick up the phone and speak to their counterpart there, then agree to follow their practice because it worked for them. Does COSLA have any way of collecting in all 32 local authorities the data and the delivery improvements that are working? How do you measure what is and what is not working?

Mirren Kelly: Honestly, we could probably all do better on that.

Liz Smith: Do you mean on the collection of data?

Mirren Kelly: I mean the collection of how successful some specific interventions are. There is a challenge in how to measure and evaluate what has been done and how it has contributed to an outcome, particularly given that so many of the outcomes are long term. The identification and sharing of best practice happen, but you are right that that is slightly more informal. It is done through officer networks or political networks, whereby somebody says, "We did this and it worked brilliantly" and somebody else says, "Oh, can I find out about that?" and seeks to implement it. In the same way, someone might say that they

have tried something but that it did not work out as they had planned, and that others might want to learn from that experience.

Liz Smith: That begs the question whether a national performance framework is needed.

10:00

Mirren Kelly: As Tim Kendrick said, overarching shared outcomes and ambitions are helpful, and not just for the partnership between the Scottish Government and local government. Those are useful things to have with our other partners in the public sector, the third sector and, ideally, the private sector, if we can build on and get behind them. The space for sharing and learning from best practice and evaluating interventions is perhaps missing; that could be improved on. You have put it in my mind to potentially raise and discuss that with the Improvement Service. There are networks, but perhaps we are not capturing or sharing information as well as we could. That is an important point.

There is also the community planning improvement board, within which quite a lot of work is happening. We need to ensure that that explicitly feeds into how all this is contributing to outcomes and the best interventions, given our limited resources.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I want to continue for a minute on the idea, which I get, that local outcomes should be valid for national outcomes. We have a problem in that the third sector tends to come to us and say, "If it is happening in Grampian, it should be happening in Strathclyde," or whatever. That is especially true in health—I realise that you folk are not focused on that—so, if there is a specialist nurse for something in NHS Tayside, we hear that there should be a specialist nurse in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. How do we square that?

Tim Kendrick: Again, that is very much about what inputs are appropriate and required, given a particular set of local circumstances. If a claim can be backed up by evidence that something is needed in a specific local circumstance, that is a perfectly valid statement to make. The whole point about community planning and local outcomes improvement plans is that one size does not fit all. When single-outcome agreements were initially agreed, the whole point was that local community planning partnerships should get on and deliver according to the local priorities and needs of their area.

Mirren Kelly: It is a challenge and, until we have infinite resources, it will always be a challenge. There is something there about having a conversation about why certain things might be

prioritised in certain areas. It is not that a specialist nurse or teacher would not be welcome but that there are people at greater distance from realising other outcomes. That is why there might be a focus on an intervention rather than a specialist nurse, who might well be helpful but might not be the best use of resources to achieve what we want to achieve. It is about whether something is best value and will help people most, given that we do not have infinite bags of money.

John Mason: Thank you. I want to move on to something else. One or two people have said to us that the public does not get excited about the national performance framework, which is pretty obvious. Is that important? Linked to that is the suggestion that we rename it to something such as the national wellbeing framework. Do you have any thoughts on that? Would renaming it and putting “wellbeing” in make a difference?

Mirren Kelly: I noticed that suggestion in the submissions. There is merit in discussing it, because, as you say, performance and performance indicators are not the most exciting or easiest things to get engaged with, and it is important to get the public engaged. If they see the national performance framework as something that can support them to achieve better outcomes, that will helpfully provide better challenge to us all and help to pivot the media away from its current focus on input. That is absolutely worth a discussion.

Tim Kendrick: Any name with the words “performance” and “framework” in it will not excite people. I told my son that I was coming to give evidence on the national performance framework this morning, and he said, “Dad, do you do anything that is interesting?” A focus on shared ambitions and striving to improve the wellbeing of the nation would probably get people’s interest, but the national performance framework probably will not.

John Mason: I want to ask you specifically about Fife. Am I right in saying that you have a Fife plan?

Tim Kendrick: It is called the plan for Fife. It is all a bit confusing. We have the FIFEplan, which is the spatial plan, and we have the plan for Fife, which is the community plan. However, we are all part of the same system.

John Mason: How do the more local plans tie in with the national performance framework? Is it your argument that all the things that are in the national performance framework are in the local plan, even though you might not use the language of the national performance framework? We have heard that from a number of organisations, which say that the thinking is there and is implicit, but

that they do not use the language of the national performance framework.

Tim Kendrick: We have mapped our 10-year ambitions against the national outcomes, and there is a good match. It is not a complete match because, as I said earlier, if everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. We have our particular Fife spin on that.

We have our 10-year ambitions because, when we developed our local outcomes improvement plan in 2017, we felt that it would be important that, as a partnership, we could be held to account in 2027 on whether we had moved towards the ambitions. All the ambitions are measurable in one form or another so that we can be held to account. Similarly, it is important that national Government can be held to account on key issues such as reducing carbon emissions and making progress on the wellbeing of children.

It is important that we have the ambitions. However, it is also important that, when needed, there is a clear focus on areas such as poverty, carbon reduction and economic recovery, for example at a time when we have just been through a period like the past two years.

John Mason: In response to the committee’s consultation, your answer to the question on being held to account talked quite a lot about being audited, which is obviously happening, and the statutory requirements for public reporting. When you are audited, do auditors take into account the national performance framework and how you relate to it?

Tim Kendrick: It is hard to answer that. The audit is generally around best-value considerations and whether we are doing what we said we would do, which, in our case, is in our strategic plan—the plan for Fife. We are audited indirectly but not directly against the national performance framework.

John Mason: Do you want to come in, Mirren Kelly? Is that a typical picture across the country?

Mirren Kelly: I understand that Audit Scotland is doing quite a lot of work on how it considers or interacts with the national performance framework. The framework was refreshed in 2018, so it is relatively young for this kind of framework. It is not a surprise that some things are still embedding; there is an opportunity to learn about that.

I agree that there are inspection and regulatory regimes and audits that are not aligned to the national performance framework and that do not explicitly take it into account. However, they might look at other explicit performance measures. As we all know, that drives behaviour. If you are going to inspected on something, that focuses what you do.

There is a good opportunity over the longer term if we can better align all regulatory inspection and audit regimes to focus thinking on an outcomes approach. Sometimes, the focus is on input measures, sometimes it is on output measures and sometimes it is on outcomes. Whether audits are clearly linked to the national or the local outcomes, if they have been through the community planning partnership and been developed locally to reflect local need and priorities, they should link to those.

John Mason: I have one more question, which follows on from what you have just said. It has been raised with us that, even at Scottish Government level, the national performance framework and the budget are not always closely tied together. Do you have thoughts on that?

Mirren Kelly: I agree. It is not always clear in the budget exactly how everything contributes to the outcomes that are to be delivered. Even when that is clear, it is not always quite clear of how much value that is. Interventions might be made to alleviate child poverty but, given their cost, are they the best interventions? Certainly, in the decisions that are made, the opportunity cost might not be clear.

John Mason: Tim Kendrick, do you have any thoughts on the budget and the national performance framework?

Tim Kendrick: No, I do not feel qualified to answer that question.

John Mason: That is fine.

The Convener: Quite right.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I begin by reassuring Tim Kendrick about children's perceptions of what we do. Last night, my daughter said to me, "Oh, daddy, I think you're really good at your job," and I was delighted. I asked, "Why do you think that is?" and she said, "I don't really know because, whenever I listen to anything you have to say in Parliament, I find it too boring to listen to for very long." I went from elation to deflation in a very short period.

I will move on to some substantive questions. John Mason touched on the point that has been raised by a number of people, both in writing and in person that, in essence, the national performance framework is being used in an implicit way and almost sits behind things as a set of values rather than anything else. I want to ask a less technical and perhaps blunter question than some of our more formal questions. Do you find the national performance framework useful and do you use it day to day? If so, how? If you do not use it daily, do you actively use it when you are framing policies, or is it just something that you

refer to when you are engaging with the Scottish Government?

Tim Kendrick: Largely, yes.

Mirren Kelly: As someone who works for COSLA, I find it useful, because it allows me to engage with the Scottish Government on some of the issues. When policy developments come forward, I always ask civil servants how those developments are contributing to the outcomes, and where they fit. There is a bit of a challenge, in that there are 11 outcomes, which is quite a lot and, broadly, policies will always find a way to fit in there. There is that conversation about whether a policy is the best intervention to achieve what we are trying to do.

From the COSLA perspective, I find it useful when we are engaging at the national level and trying to broaden conversations with our partners across the piece. That is not always the easiest thing to do. In the same way as when you talk about rights realisation, some of the language is challenging and is not what people use in everyday circumstances or really understand. Even if it is what they are doing and if they are making decisions that will improve outcomes or realise people's rights better, they just do not use that terminology or do not explicitly think about things in that way.

Daniel Johnson: As a follow-up to that, should we be putting these things into much plainer language?

I also have a substantive question. Another observation has been that, frankly, the framework is not used as much as it was when it was first conceived of in 2007. Critically, one of the other observations that I found interesting was that it was part and parcel of the concordat—

The Convener: The historic concordat.

Daniel Johnson: Exactly.

Lots of issues go with that, but do you agree with that point? If so, what have we lost along the way? If you wanted to revitalise the national performance framework, what would you revive from what was done 15 years ago? Should it be put into plainer language? Are there lessons that we learned back then that we have forgotten?

10:15

Tim Kendrick: I would not necessarily say that, but I think that it is time to revisit the national outcomes and to check whether, as they are set out, they are still valid and relevant.

There is nothing in the national outcomes that anybody could argue with, because they are all good things to do and aspire to. Your question was about how useful they are. I suggest that they

are national outcomes and are much more useful at national level than at local level. We have our local outcomes, which are broadly speaking in line with the national outcomes, but we would not necessarily have the same balance in the focus on each of the national outcomes. That will vary, because what local authorities and community planning partnerships need to focus on varies, depending on the levels of deprivation and the geographical and social mix of the area.

Daniel Johnson: Mirren, do have anything to add, or do you broadly agree?

Mirren Kelly: I broadly agree. I had not picked up on the point that some people feel that there was greater engagement 10 years ago than there is now. I am certainly interested in seeing whether, where there are things that we did better, we can reintroduce some of those and reinvigorate the approach.

Daniel Johnson: I will put two broad questions. One point that comes across loud and clear is, as Tim Kendrick has suggested, it is all a bit motherhood and apple pie—no one disagrees that any of these things are good things. Perhaps we need to ask how the framework can be influenced. If we are going to change the framework, is there a strategy that needs to layer on it so that agencies and ministers can seek to engage and contribute towards the strategies, so that the outcomes are a bit narrower? Structurally, does that need to happen? Do we need a point of view on the outcomes? How are the outcomes influenced and how can people contribute towards them?

My other point relates to what Mirren Kelly said about greater clarity on contribution. A suggestion that came up in previous evidence sessions was that, in essence, the framework needs to be embedded by agreement with individual agencies, so that there is a bit of clarity. That is not so much about particular outcomes being one person's responsibility but, where public money is being handed out, there should be an agreement on how a contribution will be made to national outcomes.

Should there be a point of view and a change in structure, and should there be specific agreements on the contribution towards the national performance framework between Government and agencies?

Mirren Kelly: We would not want it to be too prescriptive because, as we have discussed, there are variations across the country and across organisations. Some organisations work nationally versus locally, so anything that supports that would need to be able to flex.

A strategy setting out the expectation for how the framework could be influenced would not be simple, but it would be interesting to see whether

that could be developed. Part of the issue is that not everyone is clear how they can and cannot engage with the framework.

I would not want to be too prescriptive about who contributes to which outcomes, because there is still a lack of understanding of how many organisations contribute or should contribute to a number of the outcomes. I would want to be careful with that.

Apologies—I have lost my train of thought.

Daniel Johnson: That is absolutely fine. Those points are useful.

Tim Kendrick: I agree with Daniel Johnson's suggestion that a lot more emphasis should be put on how best we achieve the shared national outcomes, rather than any prescriptive enforcement of how much an organisation is doing. A good example of that is the national outcome of

"communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe".

We all agree that that is a valid ambition, but whether the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and elements in it such as community asset transfer are the best way of achieving that is open to discussion.

In Fife, for example, we always want to promote community involvement in the ownership and management of services and assets. However, in reality, the areas that have benefited most from community asset transfer have been the more affluent areas in north-east Fife, where communities have the capacity to take on such assets. I have no problem with that, but is that where we should put our energies when mid-Fife is lagging behind on all the key outcomes, such as those on health and income? That is an example of where being prescriptive does not necessarily lead to the outcomes that you are looking to achieve.

Daniel Johnson: Finally, and briefly, when you look at the framework, you see the high-level outcomes and then you are straight into a sea of words and numbers being referenced. Do we just need to present this stuff a bit better so that, when people look at it, they get a sense of what is going on?

Tim Kendrick: Yes. To go back to Mr Mason's question about what we call this thing, it is about where we want to get to as a nation and what our ambitions are. Calling it a national performance framework does not really do it, does it?

Mirren Kelly: Are you going to reopen the flower versus cog debate?

Daniel Johnson: Definitely not. The problem is that, all too often, when the national performance

framework is referenced, you just see that diagram, but it is about the numbers. In this day and age, we have all seen wonderful infographics that bring data to life. However, my humble suggestion is that this data is not being brought to life.

The Convener: Yes. I think that, because the acronym is NPF, some people confuse it with the national planning framework. If it was called the national ambitions for Scotland or something, ordinary people who are not particularly involved in what we are deliberating would understand that it was something positive and what the Government was aiming for. It is a very dry and completely uninspiring title.

Anyway, talking of uninspiring, we have Douglas Lumsden followed by Michelle Thomson. *[Laughter.]*

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Thank you very much, convener.

Last year, the Auditor General said that Scotland is suffering from

“a major implementation gap between policy ambitions and delivery on the ground.”

He went on to say:

“I am not convinced that public sector leaders really feel accountable for delivering change”.

Do you agree?

Tim Kendrick: The accountability question is difficult. It is important that we are accountable to our communities and the public by being clear and honest about what we have and have not achieved. At times in the whole industry of performance reporting and performance frameworks, there is more of an emphasis on reassurance than on challenge.

When reports are taken to committees such as this one—particularly service committees—there is a sense that we are throwing lots of numbers at you and showing that we are measuring things, and if the figures are going down, there may be a good reason for that. However, who is asking the difficult questions about whether we are making a difference and making things better? That is where accountability comes in. There has to be internal challenge as well as external challenge.

Douglas Lumsden: Should we measure that at a local level?

Tim Kendrick: The way in which community planning is set up requires that to be done at local level. I do not think that we should get tied up in national inspection regimes, because there are always ways of presenting data that show the work that you are doing in the best light possible. Inspection regimes tend to encourage that kind of behaviour, whereas we need to promote and

support internal challenge and have a clear focus on outcomes rather than inputs and performance information, which might not tell you much, because it is two or three years old.

Before we came into the meeting, Mirren Kelly and I were saying that it is as much to do with the capabilities of the people who work in organisations as with how the performance regimes are set up. Are there people in an organisation who have the analytical skills to look at the data and say, “Are we really making a difference? Is this telling us that things are getting better?” It is about internal challenge. We are certainly considering that issue, so that we do not have the separation between policy development, research and performance reporting.

We should be challenging services and working with them to look at better ways of delivering them and improving the outcomes, rather than throwing a whole load of performance data at managers who are probably busy as it is. Having to wade through that is probably the last thing that they want to spend their time doing.

Douglas Lumsden: I go back to your example about north-east Fife doing quite well and your having to commit resources there for community asset transfer when you could commit resource in central Fife, where there are larger areas of deprivation. Do you feel that your hands are tied because of some of the things that you have to do?

Tim Kendrick: There is sometimes an element of pull. Resources are pulled to certain areas when perhaps we would prefer to push them into parts of mid-Fife, such as Templehall in Kirkcaldy, that need support and work on capacity building. Much as we admire the work that is being done in places such as Crail, they have pretty good skill sets from retired professionals who are more than capable of delivering some of the projects that they want to deliver. It will always be a challenge.

Local place plans are another example and are part of the national planning framework. That policy will draw resources to areas that want to develop local place plans, because people there have concerns about house building on the fringes of their villages. That is perfectly understandable, but it will possibly pull resources away from areas that need them more.

Douglas Lumsden: I guess that the Government would say that that is why we have so many ring-fenced funds—it is to put resource into certain areas—but that is too prescriptive as well, is it not?

Tim Kendrick: Yes, although there are no additional funds for local place plans or for community asset transfer—we have to support that work from our core budgets.

Douglas Lumsden: Daniel Johnson touched on the relationship between the LOIPs and the NPF. You mentioned that mapping is done, but is that done after a LOIP is created, in trying to map it back to the NPF, or is the LOIP produced in looking at the NPF and seeing how it would flow down the way instead?

10:30

Tim Kendrick: No. We developed our local outcomes improvement plan based on what the evidence in Fife told us that we needed to do. It was not based on the national performance framework; it was mapped against it. I guess that that was a source of reassurance to some that we have not missed anything important, but it certainly was not a top-down process.

Douglas Lumsden: Is that typical across all local authorities?

Mirren Kelly: I cannot speak for all of them. There will obviously be a timing issue, particularly to do with when the framework was refreshed versus when a local authority did its LOIP or 10-year plan and so on—there will always be a bit of a risk of lag or interaction within that. The key point is that a LOIP has to be driven by local need, but it should not be wildly unrelated to the national performance framework.

Douglas Lumsden: You mentioned in your written submission that, in funding for the voluntary sector, you do not assess grant awards against the NPF. Are those awards assessed against the local outcomes improvement plans?

Tim Kendrick: Yes. We ask organisations to state which elements of the plan for Fife they are supporting with their interventions.

Douglas Lumsden: So all voluntary groups in your area will be well aware of the LOIP, because they have to know about that to get any sort of funding. The NPF is probably quite distant and alien to many of them.

Tim Kendrick: I guess that it depends on whether it is a national voluntary organisation or a Fife-based one. For some organisations, the NPF would probably be one step removed, unless they were applying through a national funding stream such as the shared prosperity fund.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Good morning, and thank you for attending. I have a couple of brief questions.

First, I will take things back to the top. We discussed earlier the legislation requiring you to have regard to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. My general question, which sets aside some of the issues with the NPF that we have covered, is whether, in a perfect world, it

would be beneficial to have something tighter than merely “having regard to” the national performance framework, along with a sexier name, clearer linkages and so on. These are national missions, so would that be beneficial? In other words, does the concept of “having regard to” allow agencies some wriggle room?

Mirren Kelly: I think that having regard to the framework is sufficient. That is not a small duty; it has legal standing that is not insignificant. There would be a potential risk in overstrengthening it, in the sense that, as Tim described, you may run the risk of everything becoming a priority. The duty to have regard to the NPF provides the flexibility that is necessary to enable that consideration of prioritisation within the NPF and the outcomes that need to be focused on locally.

The risk in strengthening the requirement is that it becomes overprescriptive, with people feeling that there is a need to contribute to every single outcome equally, as opposed to focusing on those local outcomes. There are ways around that, depending on how things are framed, but I feel that having regard to the framework has sufficient legal standing.

Michelle Thomson: Before you come in, Tim, you referenced—I am quoting loosely—raising our game with regard to the climate emergency. What I am trying to get at is this. I fully accept your comment that, if everything is a priority, nothing is a priority, so if we had fewer national priorities but they were utterly compelling—climate change, for example—could it be advantageous to have something tighter than merely the duty to have regard to them?

Tim Kendrick: It should be a partnership between national Government, local government and other organisations—it is about having those shared ambitions. Within that, we welcome the fact that we have prepared a recovery and renewal plan for the next three years that has that tighter focus on the three recovery and renewal priorities, and we do not feel that we are vulnerable to any Scottish Government criticism that we have missed out eight of the national outcomes. We still have that tie-in to our longer-term ambitions, which are linked to the national outcomes, but sometimes leadership efforts have to be focused on delivering on the really urgent aspects. It is important to have that element of freedom, which is why I would be against something more rigid and prescriptive.

Michelle Thomson: I will carry on to my next question.

In your view, to what extent is the NPF gender blind? Do you consider it to be so, and, if not, what areas would you highlight where specific consideration is given to gender? That is a generic

question for Mirren and a specific question for Ken.

Mirren Kelly: There is a challenge not just for gender but for all protected characteristics and socioeconomically, and in relation to human rights. There is an opportunity with the work coming through from the national task force on the human rights framework to address some of the underlying inequalities. Depending on your gender, you experience things differently through your life: your interaction with the outcomes and how far away you are from their realisation are different. There are opportunities to embed tackling inequality in the framework, which relates to support for the way in which we prioritise. Where are the problems that are based on gender within the outcomes? How do we focus on that issue, and how do we support others to focus on it? That is about evidence and sharing knowledge, and there are opportunities to improve in that regard.

Michelle Thomson: I agree with what you said about the human rights element, which will give a different perspective that should be enlightening. My question is, to what extent is the NPF already not gender blind, but fully aware at every step and every measure. I appreciate that this is a huge question to ask, but in general terms, what assessment—red, amber or green—would you give it?

Mirren Kelly: I do not think that I can comment on that.

Tim Kendrick: It comes down to the extent to which gender and equalities issues are reflected in the delivery of the national outcomes, rather than what is said in the NPF. How issues around equalities and human rights are represented in strategic plans is always a bit of a dilemma.

In Fife, we have gone for fairness being at the heart of our LOIP—that is our overarching vision following the work of the fairer Fife commission six years ago. A number of our ambitions and indicators focus on fairness. Whether the focus should be more explicit around gender and other protected characteristics or equalities issues is open to debate. The ability to look at what your delivery plans say you will do, and what your outcomes demonstrate you are doing, is the key thing to reflect on, rather than the extent to which some of the issues are overtly included in the outcomes.

Michelle Thomson: It is a very interesting area but I will move on, as it is quite a big area, too.

This is my final question. In this evidence session and in others, we have touched on the lack of linkage to budget planning. My observation is that the means of measuring wellbeing in economic terms are still relatively

underdeveloped—academics such as Rutger Hoekstra, the author of “Replacing GDP by 2030”, are still puzzling over that. Is the real issue the fact that our adherence to gross domestic product—because it gives firmer measures—makes it difficult to measure wellbeing and link it to economic activity, and therefore to the budget? Is that the real challenge, which we have to accept is difficult and have to keep working on?

Tim Kendrick: I would accept that it is difficult and that we have to keep working on it.

Michelle Thomson: I have given you a get-out.

The Convener: That concludes questions from committee members, but I still have a couple of questions that touch on areas that we have not covered yet.

The first is for Mirren Kelly. The submission from COSLA talks about the impact of the national outcomes on the economy as one example of collaborative working. It says that

“the Business Gateway National Unit in COSLA ... works extensively and in collaboration with the Scottish Government, the three enterprise agencies, Skills Development Scotland, Visit Scotland and Creative Scotland as well as all 32 Councils.”

It goes on to talk about community planning partnerships and other structures, such as integration joint boards. One area that is not covered, but I am sure that it is also in your mind, is city and regional deals.

Do you feel that delivery of the national outcomes would benefit from a decluttering of the public sector landscape?

Mirren Kelly: I do not think that that is something that I am able to comment on in this context. Whether decluttering is or is not necessary is a much broader discussion, I think. However, there is the opportunity to improve that shared approach and shared ambition. I would hope that a renamed national performance framework could help to drive that, but I do not feel that I can comment on whether anything should be decluttered right now.

The Convener: Tim, at the Dundee session that we held two weeks ago—I am sure that Michelle Thomson and Liz Smith also picked up on this—some people said that, whenever there is an issue, another organisation, reporting facility or whatever is created. Given your experience in Fife, do you feel that there should be a decluttering? I am not suggesting that you should go into specifics unless you wish to, but, in general, do we have to look again at the structure in Scotland? I do not think that the public knows—indeed, probably only a few elected representatives know—exactly where everything fits. It is so incredibly complicated.

Tim Kendrick: I am all for decluttering, and I think that the Scottish Government is not always as joined up as it might be when it comes to looking across issues—policing or community justice are examples of that. Sometimes requirements are put on local authorities to develop specific reporting. I will give the example of child poverty action plans. It is very difficult to address child poverty without addressing poverty within families. We have delivery and reporting arrangements around the work that we are doing to tackle poverty. I sometimes feel that, just as the local landscape can be overly complex, so, too, the national landscape can be overly complex. There is scope to declutter, but I certainly would not want to name any names.

The Convener: We might want to look at that further in the months and years ahead, given our public administration remit.

I have a question on best practice. Tim, your submission is excellent, but I thought that your response to the final question that you were asked to answer was fairly terse. The final question was:

“Please share any examples of good practice, areas for improvement or practices that have not worked so well.”

Your response said:

“Examples of good practice and challenges during the Covid 19 pandemic are detailed in the Fife Partnership Annual Report 2020-2021. A copy of this report can be provided on request.”

That was not really what we were looking for.

The committee has talked about there being a lot of examples of good work that is going on in Scotland, but there does not seem to be much enthusiasm for sharing it. This was an opportunity to share an example or two, which you did not take up.

10:45

Tim Kendrick: I do apologise; I ran out of steam. *[Laughter.]*

The Convener: Is there any area where you, as a local authority, have learned from other local authorities, and is there any area where other local authorities have learned from some of the good work that you are doing in Fife?

Tim Kendrick: I would be more than happy to share some written evidence along those lines. I jotted down some notes when I was reading over my submission. One of the things that we are building on now—I do not think that this is unique to Fife—is the development of multidisciplinary teams in each of our seven local community planning areas, around which a lot of the response to Covid was based. Those multidisciplinary teams met weekly to identify families and individuals who needed urgent support. We are building on that

through a local people and place leadership approach. In each of our seven areas, we now have a local people group and a local place group, which bring the various community planning partners and disciplines together to look at what is needed. For example, the people group looks at what is needed to provide more of an early intervention approach to crises and tackling poverty. That is one good example of learning specifically from Covid.

The Convener: You have talked about sharing internally, but what about either learning from or sharing with other local authorities?

Tim Kendrick: We share through communities of best practice. We have been very active on community wealth building, for example. A lot of best practice is being shared around the work that we and other areas such as Clackmannanshire, North Ayrshire and Edinburgh are doing around community wealth building. We are always open to sharing best practice.

I think that we need to do more sharing of best practice around the no wrong door initiative in particular, because that cannot be looked at internally within a local authority. People do not care what organisation you belong to—whether it is social care, the national health service or a voluntary sector organisation—when they come for support if they are in crisis.

I am more than happy to share some examples.

The Convener: I would be delighted if you did. You have mentioned the no wrong door initiative a couple of times. I am quite intrigued by that. Resources are tight and are likely to be tight for the foreseeable future, and I hope that, if best practice can be shared, resources will be spent at a more optimum level than perhaps happens at the moment across Scotland.

I will finish where I started, with a point for Mirren Kelly, which is also on the question about sharing examples of good practice. Again, I was somewhat disappointed in COSLA's response to that question. Your response said:

“This has involved working collaboratively with a range of organisations, where workstreams with a range of stakeholders have been set up to progress each of the agreed outcomes.”

There was a sentence before that, and a long sentence after it, but not really any specific examples of best practice, as I would consider it, where improvements have been made. If we are going to deliver on the outcomes, it is important, as I have already pointed out, that we share that information. Do you have any specific direct examples that you can share?

Mirren Kelly: One of the things that we probably should have included in that response is

the COSLA excellence awards. That is an opportunity to shine a national light on best practice and invite local authorities to say what they have been doing—put in a submission is not quite the right description—in a number of categories. We probably should have reflected that in our answer. I am happy to share our winners and nominees from this year with you—the information is available on our website.

The Convener: It is not just about people being given awards; it is about how other local authorities have looked at those awards and said, “That is something that we want to adopt in our local authority.” We are keen to see how that has worked in a practical sense.

Mirren Kelly: I know that there has been a lot of interest in one of the award winners, which I think was Angus Council’s introduction of the four-day week. There is definitely quite a lot of interest from other areas in how that has worked and how it has led to improvements for the staff and for services. One of the challenges, of course, is that that approach cannot be translated across every single service that local authorities deliver.

The Convener: Yes—or services delivered by the NHS, for example; I would imagine that there would be issues there.

Are there any further points that our witnesses want to make before we end the session?

Tim Kendrick: No, I think that we have covered everything.

The Convener: I thank Tim Kendrick and Mirren Kelly for their evidence today and their responses to our questions.

I will now call a 10-minute break. We will start the round-table session on schedule at 11 o’clock.

10:50

Meeting suspended.

11:01

On resuming—

The Convener: We will continue evidence taking for our national performance framework inquiry with a round-table discussion. I welcome to the meeting Amy Woodhouse, head of policy, projects and participation at Children in Scotland; Keith Robson, senior public affairs manager at the Open University in Scotland; Jamie Livingstone, head of Oxfam Scotland; Vicki Bibby, director of strategic planning and performance at Public Health Scotland; Neil Ferguson, head of corporate functions at Revenue Scotland; Elle Adams, programme manager at Scotland CAN B; and Paul

Bradley, policy and public affairs manager at the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations.

I thank you for your detailed written submissions. We have around 90 minutes for this session, which is intended to generate a discussion rather than be a straightforward question-and-answer session. If you want to make any points in the discussion, let Joanne McNaughton, our clerk, know and I will take you in.

This is not going to be Buggins’s turn—I am not going to take you in sequence. People will just put their hands up when they want to come in, and it may be that we bounce back and forward, and the same people may get in more than others. I do not intend to do a lot of talking, which colleagues on the committee will be pleased to hear. I have specific questions about each of your seven submissions that I will ask if I need to, but if we get a free-flowing discussion and we touch on the areas that we want to cover, that will not be necessary. I do not want to be in a situation where I am just going through the questions that you have already answered in your submissions, so if I ask questions, it will be to expand on some of the comments that you have already made.

Without further ado, Vicki Bibby already knows that I am going to go to her first, because forewarned is forearmed. In the written submission from Public Health Scotland, Vicki has said:

“In summary, we believe the national performance framework is fundamentally important as a statement of the shared national priorities and a clear expression of what wellbeing means for the people of Scotland today.”

Vicki Bibby (Public Health Scotland): We in Public Health Scotland are huge supporters of the national performance framework and what it is trying to do. It highlights the complexity of the system of delivering public services and the need for a whole-system approach, which we recognise—I think that the need for all services to come together was touched on in the previous session. We in Public Health Scotland are big fans of the national performance framework.

The national performance framework needs to be taken to the next level and have more teeth with regard to accountability, how we measure and how those who are delivering public services on a day-to-day basis think about how they are contributing to the national performance framework and what that means for the outcomes for people. That is not maybe how it feels on a day-to-day basis. We need to do much more to give it teeth and to get down to a more granular level, but we are fully supportive of its ambition and what it is trying to do.

John Mason: In your paper, you say that bodies are self-selecting outcomes. Can you

expand on that, and do you think that that should change?

Vicki Bibby: There is not a big driver in terms of our strategic plan and the work that we do with our joint sponsors—Public Health Scotland is jointly sponsored by the Scottish Government and COSLA, for local government. I think that what we are saying is that we will contribute but we are not being marked off against anything, and there is nothing in the landscape that is looking at every public body and asking where the gaps are and how we are working on those. It is self-selection. As I said, I think that the national framework needs more teeth so that we drive forward what we are doing from a performance basis and a financial basis and ensure that we are taking a longer-term outcomes approach.

Particularly as we know that finances are going to get tighter, we could just revert back into the way we have been doing things. It is difficult and complex, as was touched on in the previous session, but I think that we need to be braver in what we are trying with new ways of delivering; otherwise, we will continually be on the same road.

In terms of self-selection, with the work that the Scottish Leaders Forum did on accountability and what scrutiny bodies are doing, much more could be done to hold people to account on the NPF. I do not feel that people are being held to account on the NPF for delivering long-term planning each year. There is much more to do.

Douglas Lumsden: How do you give the NPF teeth, if that is what you think should happen? The local government witnesses we heard from earlier today said that they have the local outcomes improvement plans and they feel that they are working towards those. They do not want things to be too prescriptive and too rigid, and they feel that, if they were going to be held more accountable to the NPF, that is what would happen.

Vicki Bibby: That is a very good point, because we do not want layers of planning. The purpose of good planning is the end point of improving the outcomes. Of course local authorities have their LOIPs. How we will give it teeth is multifaceted. It needs leadership, scrutiny and accountability.

Again, I come back to the work that the Scottish Leaders Forum did. There are many layers that different bodies can do around this. I am sure that we will come on to this, but we talk in the submission about the different indicators that we can use. However, we need to start smaller. We are having conversations about everybody going in a one. Let us try new things and, where we have success, build on that and build that greater coalition of success around what we are looking at.

To tackle the problems that we have from a Public Health Scotland perspective and to tackle the inequalities that we have in Scotland, we absolutely need a whole-system approach. The national performance framework is a brilliant opportunity to bring the whole system together. We all agree with the Christie commission and we all agree that this looks good on paper, but we need to move from talking about it to the stage of bringing the system together.

I do not want to keep talking, but you mentioned earlier the ways and structures in which that could be done. Community planning is already there. If you reinvented the wheel, you would probably come up with community planning partnerships. There are real opportunities in giving those teeth and the power to bring partners together to deliver in local areas for the communities

Daniel Johnson: I will bring somebody else in but, in some ways—and I hope that this is not unfair—you are giving us a glass-half-full version of what is going on. If I could paraphrase, I think that you are saying that having the national performance framework is incredibly useful, but you are talking about how it should be working, rather than how it is. Would that be fair?

Vicki Bibby: Absolutely. I am saying that we do not need to reinvent another national performance framework. We need to move into the stage of making it work.

Daniel Johnson: I want to bring Jamie Livingstone in, because I was interested to see that the Oxfam Scotland submission referenced what Germany did. That was refreshing, because we are lucky if we get an example from somewhere else in the United Kingdom, so it is good to get one from another country. I noted from your evidence that one of the key insights is that there was popular participation in generating the framework in Germany. Could you step us through that and also tell us whether there are similar structures there to ensure that, once the framework is developed, it is applied and there is a plan to use it? In a sense, what Vicki Bibby is articulating—certainly, it is what we are articulating—is that the framework is there but there is no real plan or structure to use it. Are you able to bring in any examples from Germany or elsewhere?

Jamie Livingstone (Oxfam Scotland): It is refreshing to hear the enthusiasm about taking the national performance framework to the next step. At times, when we talk about performance, it has a negative connotation for people, but accountability moments give us the chance not only to take stock but to build public awareness about the national outcomes and about the performance framework. We can all agree that, if you go out on to the streets of Edinburgh to ask people about the

performance framework, you will be lucky if anybody has a clue. They are also key moments for civil society to get behind and push for that on-going progress. There is always going to be reticence, particularly in relation to outcomes that by their very nature require multiple actors to drive progress, about holding people accountable for a specific outcome, but there is a difference between that and holding people to account for transparently showing where they are contributing.

In the evidence session earlier, there was a question about whether the term “due regard” should be strengthened. For me, it is less about that terminology and more about whether local authorities and other public bodies are transparently saying which national outcomes they are contributing to, how they are contributing to them and, if they are not contributing to them, why not.

To go back to the point about public engagement on this, we all have a role in scrutiny—Parliament, organisations such as Oxfam and the public—but we need to create the architecture that empowers people to hold people to account. Right now, we would argue, having been involved as an organisation in the 2018 review that set the current national outcomes, that the scale and depth of public consultation was not great enough to give the framework that core legitimacy.

In Germany, there was certainly a broader process. In Scotland, we ran some street stalls, and workshops were held by Carnegie Trust and the like, but there was not the depth and quality of public engagement needed to ensure that the national outcomes were right in the first place or then to involve the public in reporting—ensuring that lived experience goes side by side with the hard data—and in scrutiny. Where are committees picking up the national outcomes and scrutinising them and creating an opportunity for the public or civic society to come and give their views?

Finally, there is obviously a close alignment between the national performance framework and the sustainable development goals. There is a great example. A couple of years ago, Oxfam, the SCVO and others commissioned an independent snapshot of delivery against the SDGs, but we did that because the Scottish Government was conducting its own review. Those accountability moments are important, as we have seen with child poverty or climate targets, in allowing people to get behind and scrutinise and build that accountability and engagement.

Daniel Johnson: On that point, as we brought up in other discussions, in some ways the SDGs seem to have a bit more purchase and currency. Do we even need the national performance framework? Should we just be focused on SDGs,

because they are better understood and they are more comparable, because they are used internationally? I would encourage other people to pile in. Do not wait for one of us to ask you to speak.

The Convener: I am about to name one of you any second if I do not have a volunteer.

Keith Robson has saved the rest of his colleagues.

Keith Robson (Open University in Scotland): I will chip in, if only from my fear that it was me you were going to land on first.

The Convener: It was going to be Paul Bradley actually.

Keith Robson: The SDGs are where we would look to initially in doing our work, as we did when we were mapping our activities in preparation for last year’s election manifesto. The national outcomes are not something that we reflect on on a day-to-day basis. As we said repeatedly in our submission, what we have is an outcome agreement with the Scottish Funding Council, which is a rather dry, dusty document that nobody would want to read unless they had to. That has been fairly light touch the past couple of years, because of the pandemic. I think that, arising from of the Funding Council’s review, there is a commitment to revisit what that document might look like and potentially that is an opportunity to have those discussions and say, “Here is the myriad of activity that is going on. Where does it relate to the framework and how are we contributing?” It will only be a contribution from the Open University; we are not going to solve any of these issues on our own.

11:15

Paul Bradley (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations): There are a number of points that I want to pick up on. The first one is about the sustainable development goals and, in particular, something that I have been working on since 2017 with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. At that time, we and others were calling for there to be a central team in the Scottish Government with responsibility for the sustainable development goals and central responsibility for the national performance framework. We were not the only ones calling for that, but we were one of the groups that were. That happened in 2018 and, to this day, there is a dedicated team in the Scottish Government that has responsibility for the national performance framework and the sustainable development goals. I know through working with that team directly how crucial it was in enabling us to get a Scottish Government joint review published with civil society on the sustainable development goals.

Without that central co-ordination, it would not have been possible to pull in that expertise and contributions from other places across Government.

I had not realised until I read some of the submissions that there was also a round-table session on the NPF until 2018, and that seems to have dissipated or gone away. I do not know this for sure but, just from reading that and from my own reflections, as we have seen a shift to the national performance framework being overseen by a central team—that is important and I am not saying that it is a bad thing—I wonder whether there has also been a shift in terms of accountability and leadership across Government portfolios to one portfolio in the Government. It would be interesting to know how the NPF team in the Government works with others across the Government to ensure that it is embedded.

The Convener: I am going to bring Amy Woodhouse in, but leadership was something that I was going to come to you next on, because you said in your submission:

“There needs to be a consistent commitment to and leadership of the NPF throughout the Scottish Government and other public bodies that delivers policy coherence across strategies, plans, frameworks, and activities.”

Have you identified a significant gap in that regard?

Paul Bradley: Absolutely. You will have heard from us in our submission—I think when I was in Dundee—but also from others about the national economic strategy, so I will not go into too much detail on that. We are using that as an example of something that had no mention of national outcomes and maybe a throwaway line on the national performance framework because it is timely and is a crucial document. It was not a surprise to see that in a national strategy—it is important to make clear that we were not shocked when we saw no mention of national outcomes.

For me as a policy professional, I am always looking towards what the Government is doing and saying, and I am trying to think about how we can make our case and how we can align what we do with what the Government is doing. If I see no mention of national outcomes or the national performance framework in policy documentation and strategies, we internally at SCVO and other charities are probably not going to focus on those as a priority way to make our case, because our Government counterparts are not making that a priority.

The Convener: Yes, so it is not just about talking the talk but about walking the walk.

Amy Woodhouse (Children In Scotland): One of the challenges is that the national outcomes are high level and quite general, so they can be

difficult to translate into action and meaning. I am going to speak from a children’s services perspective today. One of the things that we have been supportive of at Children in Scotland is the development of a set of children, young people and family wellbeing outcomes, which should sit underneath the national outcomes and provide that connection between the high-level outcomes and planning and delivery at a local level.

In a few different evidence sessions and submissions, there has been reference to the golden thread that runs from a national level to the local and then to the individual relationship between a service and a person, such as a child. That is probably one of the areas that we need to do a bit more work on to see how it follows through. The development of a set of sub-outcomes beneath the national outcomes might help translate them into action that is a bit more usable at a local level.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I am keen to hear others’ reflections in relation to the example that Paul Bradley gave of experience of engaging with Scottish Government officials, civil servants and folk from various national agencies, and whether they are bringing the NPF to their discussions with you, and how that is shaping the requests that you make of them and your strategic decisions. Does anybody have a different experience—expecting to go to meetings with civil servants knowing that they will ask how you are contributing to NPF outcomes? Are others’ experiences broadly similar to what Paul outlined?

Jamie Livingstone: I will give a brief response. We have certainly never been asked about how we are contributing to the national outcomes. In being proactive in engaging with the Scottish Government, we are getting good levels of engagement. We are currently engaging because we are pushing with a coalition of organisations for a new national outcome on care, because we think that it is largely invisible in the current basket of outcomes, and we think that the coming review is an opportunity to change that.

The door is open and there is a small team—much smaller than, for example, the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner, in Wales. Paul Bradley mentioned the round-table discussion; it is a shame that that has dropped off the radar. I participated in it and one of the key things that I found to be of value in that discussion was that it was cross-party. That is important for the legitimacy of the national performance framework, going forward.

At that point, we were pushing for wellbeing to be placed in the purposes of the national performance framework. We were hoping that economic growth would drop out completely. I think that this committee could usefully restate the

disconnection of the ends and means from the purpose.

Cross-party engagement helped; I think that Murdo Fraser sat on that group in the past. The absence of that round-table platform has eroded the level of civil society engagement in the national performance framework. Paul Bradley is right that it is a chicken-and-egg situation. If we are banging on about the national outcomes, but we do not hear about them from Government or parliamentary exchanges, we go where the energy is; for example on child poverty plans, on climate plans, on the programme for government or on budgets. We need some sort of moment to elevate the status of the national outcomes—certainly at national level but also, perhaps, at local level.

Neil Ferguson (Revenue Scotland): It sounds to me as though what we are talking about is embedding the national performance framework in practice. The Revenue Scotland perspective might be helpful. We have been going since 2015, and our core purpose is to collect and manage two devolved taxes. To that extent we collect revenue, and all the revenue that we collect stays in Scotland and goes towards funding public services. We claim to contribute to all the outcomes by helping to fund them, although our purpose is not necessarily related to any of the outcomes in particular.

Part of the problem with the national performance framework is that it can be seen as being away “up there”. It is the end goal—it is not necessarily about the day-to-day and the everyday. We have tried to align our corporate plan and our strategic objectives to the outcomes. Sitting below that is a business plan that sets out all the projects that we will undertake to deliver that corporate plan. We then have plans at team level, then we have individuals’ performance objectives.

The idea is that there should be what Amy Woodhouse referred to as the golden thread—a line of sight from what I do, to my team plan, to the business plan, right through to the corporate plan. That is how we deliver on the national performance framework outcomes. We hope that that structure would be helpful for other bodies in terms of relating what individuals do to outcomes.

We look at the matter not only in terms of delivery of outcomes, but as a public body and employer. We have a green strategy and an equality strategy, so in that context we are trying to bring the framework to life within the organisation. I do not know whether that helps to bring the framework to life a little bit day to day, but only by doing that can we engage with it more meaningfully, rather than just saying that it is a thing that we are trying to achieve that is away up there.

Daniel Johnson: That is an interesting point that probably—to be blunt—brings to life why, essentially, the NPF is withering on the vine, if we are being honest. It is interesting because you are saying that to make it work you need almost a translation of what your organisation’s contribution does. Unless—this is the point that I was making in the previous session—the overarching strategy for how the Government seeks to influence and advance measures and outcomes is holistic, it becomes incredibly difficult for individual agencies or partners to demonstrate how they are contributing to it.

I wonder whether what Neil Ferguson just outlined is what the Government as a whole needs to be doing, by saying, “Here is the national performance framework as a whole, and here is how Government and the public sector are seeking to influence it and deliver against it.”

Paul Bradley: Yes. First, on the sustainable end goals that Daniel Johnson mentioned, our position is definitely that the national performance framework should stay and should be built up better. We need to look at the sustainable development goals and how they are developed, and at monitoring and how it is used in relation to accountability and greater participation, to ensure that we are measuring progress across the board.

For example, on the sustainable development goals, the national review that we developed was co-designed by the Scottish Government and civil society; there was a process of developing chapters openly on Google Docs and there was an exercise to gather intelligence and case studies. It is better to speak to people about the impact that Scotland is making in the various areas than it is to look on the website at the mundane statistics on the national performance framework.

I have heard a few times that people pick one, two or three outcomes and focus on those. I understand that those might be priorities, but the outcomes are interconnected. The good thing about the sustainable development goals is that it is very clear that their being interconnected is central: the goals are indivisible. People might prioritise or turn their attention to one, two, three or several outcomes, but they need to think about the impacts that that has on the other outcomes.

I am pretty sure now that all directorates have primary and secondary outcomes that align with the budget. We need much deeper analysis of how spending is impacting on all the outcomes—whether it is doing that obviously and clearly or is having a knock-on effect.

The Convener: We have moved on to a subject that I was about to touch on, and which everyone touched on in their submissions.

Michelle Thomson: I, too, was going to drift on to that subject, with your permission, convener. I was very interested in the SCVO submission, which makes a number of comments that allude to something that I asked the earlier panel about, which is the complexity of aligning national outcomes with budgets, and the situation being about more than that. Wellbeing measures are relatively immature in economic terms. You referenced the advisory group on economic recovery electing not to use the NPF, but instead using the four capitals framework. I have absolute sympathy with that approach being adopted, and with your comments. My question is this: is it not just really difficult?

Paul Bradley: It is really difficult. There are people who have spent years working on the subject who know far more than I do who say that it is difficult.

What we want, as is clear in our submission, is consistency. If we start to see consistency we can start to develop what we do better and more clearly, and we can learn from what works and what does not work.

I gave the example in our submission of the Scottish National Investment Bank, and said how I had worked with economists on developing proxy indicators to demonstrate how investments would impact on the national outcomes. That process was extremely difficult and challenging. The difficulty is in showing a clear line of sight between an investment and the national outcomes or indicators. That highlights that there is something going on in relation to Government. We talked about best practice and sharing; have the tools and ideas on how to measure progress been shared across Government.

Michelle Thomson: In that case, are you saying that it can be argued that proxy measures are, if they are applied consistently across the board, better than nothing at all? I do not want to put words in your mouth, but that is what I took from what you were saying.

11:30

Paul Bradley: What we would like starts with the national performance framework. That is the north star that people refer to. From there, of course, we need to build different frameworks where necessary, and to have different outcomes and indicators.

We heard from Amy Woodhouse about specific indicators and sub-outcomes for children and young people. That makes total sense. I feel that there is disconnection between the various agendas. It might just be me, but I do not understand how in the Government the wellbeing economy agenda and the national performance

framework are being connected. I understand that there is a link, but I do not see how it is working in practice.

Vicki Bibby: That probably covers a few of the points that have been developed. Daniel Johnson asked whether the NPF is going to wither on the vine. It would be sad if that were to happen. It is difficult, but is that a reason why it should be allowed to wither? We need to put more energy behind it to make it work, or the same will happen as happened with the Christie commission report. We are 10 years on, and we know that the NPF is the right thing to do, but there is no obvious answer to the difficulty.

I sat here, probably about eight years ago at a previous finance committee, hearing what New Zealand has done on focusing budgets on outcomes. That is difficult to do; it is not easy, which is why we need to no longer allow it to be the homework for another day. We have been focused on getting through the budget this year, and we have had Covid.

There is always something that seems to be a greater priority, so we can put things off until another day. That is what is allowing inequalities to increase. Leadership and energy are needed. We hear about that from Scottish Government officials, but individually at a superficial level. Does it go down to the level of discussion of the new pieces of work that we are going to do and funding? Absolutely not. That is nowhere. We are asked about how work will link to the NPF and are told that accountability is needed, which takes us back to the old ring fencing and so on. We will maybe come on to that.

Leadership is needed from all levels—in Parliament, Government and scrutiny bodies. We need to keep talking about the matter in order to make sure that we are doing our homework on the difficult stuff, otherwise—I absolutely agree with what everyone has been saying—we will be here in another two years talking about the same thing.

The Convener: Well, we are pursuing this inquiry to ensure that it does not wither on the vine, and there will be the statutory review next year.

I think the point that Jamie Livingstone made about the round-table session is extremely significant. In fact, that was the bit that I highlighted to ask you about when we came to that subject. I was pleased that you brought that into the discussion—it is certainly something that we will put to Scottish ministers.

Amy Woodhouse: There are limits to what the national performance framework can do. It is a framework, but it does not make the decisions for you. I suppose that that is possibly the bit where we need confidence that the right decisions are

being made to achieve the outcomes. The outcomes set the priorities and the indicators measure the progress, but are the decisions that are made going to achieve the change? We need evidence to make informed decisions.

We have a lot of evidence already. The Christie report has argued for greater investment in early intervention and prevention—we all know that, and we all agree with that. However, somehow, the budget decisions are not shifting things significantly enough to make the change that we need. That is because some difficult decisions need to be made around prioritisation. How do you fund early intervention at the same time as people need crisis support? We are probably just going to keep on going round and round in circles unless we grasp that nettle and make some hard decisions about how we spend.

I am drifting into finance and budgeting.

The Convener: I was actually going to bring you in on that subject. I am going to let John Mason in, and then we will come back to you to talk about finance. It is a thread that runs right through the submissions, and you have made several specific comments relating to it, so we will come back to you after a question from John Mason.

John Mason: It is in the same area. At one of our workshops in Glasgow, the comment was made that the NPF should be more practical and not so aspirational. You are in that space as well. Is the NPF too vague? Oxfam made the comment that there is a lack of time-bound commitments.

I am struggling with this a bit. I see the NPF as being aspirational, which I think is good, but maybe it should not be just aspirational. Does it need to be more than that, or is there a danger that we would just end up with a set of rules if it said that A, B, C and D must be done by 31 December?

Jamie Livingstone: In many regards, Scotland was an early adopter in this space and other countries have been catching up. It is good to see the Scottish Government engaging in things like the wellbeing economy Governments initiative, to foster Government-to-Government learning. Although this is a difficult issue, we are not the only country grappling with it, and there are opportunities to keep developing the NPF and building on what is there.

When I read the Scottish Leaders Forum's report, one statement jumped out at me as being a bit depressing:

"typically the NPF is not actively used to shape scrutiny, provide sponsorship, undertake the commissioning of work or shape the allocation of funding".

A pretty broad suite of things are being missed. Clearly, something in the implementation needs to be addressed, and we have an opportunity, through this inquiry and the review of the national outcomes, to help to achieve that.

It is about improving it and not allowing it to wither on the vine.

John Mason: Does "improving it" mean more detail?

Jamie Livingstone: I think there is a balance to be struck. At the previous review, we removed the targets and the time-boundness, and the focus was on continuous improvement.

John Mason: Was that a mistake?

Jamie Livingstone: It is quite challenging to build those accountability moments without being clear about what we want to achieve and by when. That needs to be wrapped within a culture of continuous improvement, and it goes back to the difficulties of holding a single body accountable for a national outcome dealing with multiple actors. The social renewal advisory board suggested that local authorities are responsible for about 65 per cent of delivery. However, if you look at any of the national outcomes—on poverty, say—the Scottish Government alone is not going to deliver the national outcome. The UK Government and local authorities have a role to play.

We need greater transparency about the policies and spending choices of the Scottish Government and local authorities and about the results of those, so that Parliament can scrutinise them and test the assumptions. We need a national vision of our outcomes, our outputs, our inputs and who is doing what, and there need to be conversations about whether those are adding up to the delivery of the national outcomes over time. I think that some time-boundness would help that.

The Convener: I agree with that. If I have to do a piece of work and I have been given a deadline of Friday, I will do it on Thursday. If the deadline is the following Monday, I will do it on Sunday. If there is no deadline, there is always something else to fill my time. I do think that that is an issue. With the best will in the world, we always have other priorities, some of which are time driven.

I said that I would go back to Amy Woodhouse. In your submission, you say:

"We believe there is scope for funding to be more closely aligned to the national outcomes, and we would welcome the opportunity for discussion about how this could be taken forward appropriately."

How can it be taken forward? You talk about that in your submission, but, rather than read it out, I will let you cover that ground.

Amy Woodhouse: Sorry—could you repeat the question? I missed the first part of it.

The Convener: You say:

“We believe there is scope for funding to be more closely aligned to the national outcomes, and we would welcome the opportunity for discussion about how this could be taken forward appropriately.”

I am giving you the opportunity to do just that.

Amy Woodhouse: It follows on from what we have all been talking about. Once you have your outcomes and you are deciding your priorities, the funding must match those and help you to achieve what you want to achieve.

As I say in our submission, Children in Scotland received some core funding from the third sector intervention fund, for which we set our own outcomes. There was no reference to accountability to the national performance framework or the national outcomes other than in the most general terms, because the outcomes are very general and you can see yourself in any of them.

There is definitely scope to link funding decisions more specifically to the national outcomes. That would help with seeing what contribution the third sector can make to achieving the outcomes, which is significant if you look at the funds that the third sector receives to do very important work on an individual level. The cumulative effect of that work will be significant, but it is very difficult to say what that is at the moment. Continuity of funding across the Government would also help with recognising the contribution of all parts of the public sector, including the third sector.

The Convener: You say:

“Our manifesto calls for five-year funding timescales and we believe this stability would allow third sector organisations to be truly creative, ambitious and impactful.”

I think that it would, but the Scottish Parliament does not have a five-year funding arrangement, so it is very difficult for the Scottish Parliament to deliver that. Two and a half years ago, we would not have anticipated a pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and so on. There are always imponderables that can arise. The issue is in trying to have that stability when it is difficult to anticipate what lies further ahead and budgets are not made available so far ahead.

Amy Woodhouse: Yes, I completely appreciate that. However, we have to say what we think is needed to make the change that we want to achieve. I guess that part of your challenge is to think about how we can move towards longer-term funding not just for our sector, but for public bodies. From previous roles, I know of grant-making bodies that give up to seven years'

funding, which allows voluntary organisations to stretch into the work and achieve longer-term change. There must be progress on the current situation.

In our submission, I mention the year-on-year funding that we are getting now, which is, frankly, not good enough. It leaves us in the position of having to put staff on notice of redundancy on a yearly basis in services that have been running for 20 years. We should feel confident that we have the funding to make those services secure and to build on the work that we do. Maybe five years is wishful thinking, but we must be able to get better than year-on-year funding.

The Convener: I think that everyone on the committee supports multiyear funding, if it can be delivered, because the current situation is extremely wasteful, as has been pointed out. People are doing an excellent job, but, in the run-up to the end of the financial year, they are wondering whether they should be applying for a job elsewhere, because their current funding might not be renewed. That is an important point, and it is something that we have taken on board.

Four people are keen to speak, and I will take them in order. Daniel Johnson will be followed by Michelle Thomson.

Daniel Johnson: My first point is on that subject and is not what I originally wanted to speak about. At the risk of contradicting you, convener, coming from a private sector background, I should point out that not knowing what revenue you are going to generate in the coming year does not prevent you from formulating a business plan. You do it on the basis of a high expectation and a pessimistic outcome. It is not set in stone, but the fact that you do not know precisely what your budget is going to be in the following year does not prevent you from setting parameters. Something could be done around that.

The key point that I want to return to is the timeliness point. Having some broad projections and broad plans would be sensible, but do we just need some simple things? For example, on climate change and carbon emissions, everything needs an environmental impact assessment. Whether it is a bit of legislation or a Government strategy, it requires a constant reference back to that. Do we need to do something as simple as requiring all new legislation, strategies, initiatives and programmes to state how they contribute towards achieving the outcomes in the national performance framework—both the primary outcomes that they seek to influence and the secondary ones that they hope to affect in broader terms? Would something as simple as that be useful?

The Convener: I do not necessarily disagree with what you have said, because local authorities are encouraged to do short-term, medium-term and long-term planning. However, the Government is not going to make an overall commitment in terms of that. Organisations must plan for those different scenarios and we, as a committee, want to ensure that there is as much funding that they can rely on—as much sustainable funding—as possible. We will certainly be pressing the Government on that.

Michelle Thomson: I want to ask Jamie Livingstone a question that was asked at the tail end of the previous session. To what extent is the NPF gender blind? I fully accept the need to take account of the other protected characteristics as well, but I am asking about gender blindness specifically in terms of processes and culture. Gender blindness can often be part of culture without organisations being conscious of it. You reference Engender in your submission, so I would like your thoughts about that.

11:45

Jamie Livingstone: I do not want to speak on Engender's behalf, but I know that it is quite critical of the national indicators in the NPF not being sufficiently gendered. I think that it says that only two out of the 81 indicators are explicitly focused on women.

We have the equality evidence finder, which I think is a good initiative, but it remains very much in development and there are lots of caveats on the front page. That is not to say that we are not making progress in reporting and in improving the disaggregation of data, but the data on equalities could be improved.

At a level up from that, in terms of the national indicators that are selected, once the new set of national outcomes is approved, engagement and consultation on which indicators sit below that will be really important. I was struck by the one on greenhouse gas emissions. At a headline level, that is marked as "Performance Improving", which jumped out at me as being strange. It is marked as such on the basis that emissions are falling year on year, yet we have missed the last three climate targets. There is a mismatch between what the national indicator is telling us and what the facts on the ground require.

There is still a bit of work to be done on the indicators and on the equality impact finder. We are coming to a review point, but something like 20 per cent, or near enough 20 per cent, of the indicators' data sources have been identified and we still do not have the data. That goes back to the need to empower scrutiny by making sure that we have up-to-date data.

The Scottish Parliament information centre is doing quite a good job of trying to keep across the indicators—how many are showing improvement, how many are showing maintained performance or the like—but there are still big gaps. Our ambition must be to have a constantly updated set of dashboards with review moments built into them—for example, the annual targets for the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 and for greenhouse gas emissions provide fairly robust moments of accountability that enable Scotland to see where we are going. That would provide key moments that would enable civil society to maintain the pressure for the new actions that are going to help to realise our aims not just on child poverty and on climate change, but across the national outcomes, including on equality.

Michelle Thomson: On that point about data, I noticed that Paul Bradley referenced methodology in his submission. I brought up the point with the Deputy First Minister—it seems like ages ago, now—that I did not have any sense that methodologies were being used. We have not really even begun to consider that whole area. I am not saying that there is a right or wrong way, but that is incredibly important when it comes to data. Furthermore, the lack of data is just as important as the data that we have.

The Convener: Before I let in Douglas Lumsden and Vicki Bibby, I want to go to Keith Robson. You said in your written submission that you want to avoid

"significant additional reporting burdens at a time when our core funding is failing to match rising costs."

I have noticed that you are writing things down. Do you agree with Jamie Livingstone, or do you feel that that is an area of disagreement? What do you feel about data and reporting?

Keith Robson: Our experience of reporting is that it can be quite burdensome. A few weeks back, we had five reporting deadlines to meet from the Scottish Funding Council on a couple of different projects. Obviously, we want to be transparent and held accountable for how we spend the public money that we receive and the progress we are making on the targets.

This exercise is an opportunity to talk about the good work activity that we do as an institution and in partnership with lots of other organisations in the private, public and third sectors. I will take any chance that I can to learn and take some notes, so that I can go back to the senior management team to ask it, "How about this?" or, "Why don't we try that?" That will be helpful when we are working through our strategic plan, our business plan and our team planning cycle, as well as when we are identifying other ways in which we can explicitly

talk about the activities that we are doing and the contribution that we are making.

I am thinking right back to my one term as a local government councillor in Edinburgh. When I was appointed as play champion, the appointment line in the dashboard was given green status. That was great, and I enjoyed the role—much sandpit fun was had. However, in reality, by the end of that term, what was the impact? At a few committees, I had banged on about the importance of strategic thinking on play across the council. You can make your own judgment on the success of that role on the basis that council did not have a play champion in the next term—it went for a cycling champion instead.

That is a roundabout way of saying that we are always looking to show the good work that we are doing in conjunction with other organisations, including around employability and the work that we have been doing with some of the football club foundations. You will see from our submission that I have listed them alphabetically, not in order of success. My club, Hearts, is not part of the initiative; hopefully, we will get to do some good work with the club in the future, too. We have also been working with the SCVO on skills portals, with community councils on upskilling community councillors to help them to do their job a lot better and with the Improvement Service.

We cannot have somebody else sitting there filling out more forms and finding eight different ways to say the same thing. The measures must be right, so having a green box because something has been ticked on that day does not mean that you will have made the difference that you are seeking to make.

The Convener: Here is a man who will say it once: Douglas.

Douglas Lumsden: I was wondering whether, for once, Aberdeen was top of the table. That would be a first. *[Laughter.]*

I want to go back to Amy Woodhouse's point about funding not being linked to the NPF. Fife Council gave evidence to us earlier. Its submission says:

"In terms of our funding to the voluntary sector we do not assess grant awards against their contribution to the National Outcomes directly, nor do we map the awards to the National Outcomes that they contribute to."

When I asked the council about that, I was told that it maps and links that against its LOIP. If we consider the golden thread, its LOIP should have due regard to the NPF. Maybe it is not directly explicit, but there is that link, using the golden thread, through the LOIP back to the NPF.

Amy Woodhouse: Yes. The equivalent for children's services is children's services plans,

which are statutory plans that must be produced on a three-yearly basis. I had a look to see what the guidance says about those plans. It says that

"it is expected that all actions, activity and initiatives are aligned with, and seek to deliver the ambitions contained in the National Performance Framework,

so that link is there. I do not know how that translates, because the guidance then talks about getting it right for every child. People are probably much more familiar with and happy to think about wellbeing indicators and so on in that regard.

Yes, in theory, there are mechanisms for making the link, so maybe it is just about tightening up and making things more explicit in reporting, because whether they are reported in that way is another matter.

Douglas Lumsden: Maybe the link is there but just through another connection.

Amy Woodhouse: We have a national perspective, so maybe it is happening better at a local level than it is for some of the national organisations. That might be something to consider.

The Convener: Vicki Bibby has been very patient.

Vicki Bibby: Daniel Johnson mentioned all organisations making a statement on performance. That might help; that might be good. However, if that was the single thing that we did, it would probably fail. This is about building up a swell around reporting. You could have such a statement, but even within Government and Government agencies, there are performance measures individually relating to the national performance framework.

Our board asks us about the national performance framework. Public Health Scotland is a new organisation and it is easier for us to develop and start such things, so I recognise that we have had that luxury. However, if everybody was required to do that, it would create more of a groundswell around such reporting. Given Public Health Scotland's system leadership and data roles, we are well placed to help.

We have seen through Covid that real-time data, not bureaucratic data, can really engage the public. We need to share and build on some of the learning that we can do around that.

We do not know exactly what money we will get from each spending review, but we know the bulk of what we will get. Each spending review is at the margins of the £30-odd billion funding that we have in Scotland. We must find a better way to give consistency.

In Public Health Scotland—I say this regularly to ministers and Scottish Government officials—we

have started our financial year, but I still do not know our budget. We probably will not get our full commitment for the financial year until about August. This is not uncommon. We need to get into a multiyear budgeting process and not have a plethora of ring-fenced funding.

Public Health Scotland was set up to do quite different things, but 40-odd per cent of our budget is still ring fenced to do the tasks of our legacy organisations. How do we change the way that we do things? How do we work to the national performance framework when we are required to do the same things, with small pots of money of £100,000 or £800,000, and provide input measures of how we are spending it on people? I know there is quite a lot in there—sorry.

The Convener: I am quite happy for you to mention that. We are here to hear your views and opinions and that of your organisation, and to share it with others. There are quite a lot of common threads here. For example, Jamie Livingstone's submission says:

"As a non-public body, we are not held to account for how our actions and decisions impact on the National Outcomes."

In his submission, Keith Robson has expanded on that point:

"Our core funding is not currently directly contingent upon demonstrating our contribution to the delivery of the National Outcomes as we report using the Outcome Agreement with the SFC which is our guiding document. None of the additional funding we receive through the National Training Transition Fund, Upskilling Fund, Universities Innovation Fund and Workforce Development Fund is contingent upon demonstrating a contribution to the delivery of the National Outcomes."

Should it be?

Keith Robson: I would have thought that, in an ideal world, yes, if I was sitting on the other side of the fence. However, how easily do you allow organisations to do that? You would have to deal with layers of bureaucracy and you would spend more time writing the reports than doing the delivery.

I have a 20-year career in the voluntary sector. I have worked with many organisations in which I have spent hours doing a report that is never even looked at. That does not mean that the work that we do is not important and it does not mean that we should not be held accountable for our use of public money. However, sometimes, I have wondered why we are being asked to write reams of reports on which no one has ever come back to ask me a single question. At the same time, you might have different parts of the Scottish Government chasing you about the same pot of money or asking you different questions. That has left me wondering why those different elements cannot talk to one another, so that I have to do

only do one set of reports. Thankfully, I have experienced that less at the Open University than I have during my past career.

We should be accountable, and we want to be accountable. It is up to the Scottish Government to think about how it does that with those pots of money. I have probably been thinking about things in a rather simplistic way compared with colleagues around the table who are more embedded in this. However, even just dropping into documents, "We report on these goals," or, "We are working towards these goals," at least gives an indication of our contribution. For us as an organisation, it might be as light touch as that, and the funding body can come back if it wants more information.

We have targets on the number of students that declare with disabilities and the number of students who come through different routes. We are hitting our targets. However, if we are not, there is good rationale for that, and we set out the progress that we are making year on year—that is because our funding model is different, as I mentioned in our submission.

During the pandemic, the Scottish Government gave the higher education sector additional funding to tackle digital exclusion. I have referenced that in our submission, and I can go into more detail in writing if the committee wishes. We had a relatively small amount of money to disperse among our student body. Colleagues who were at the chalkface thought that looking at our care-experienced students was an easily identified cohort that we knew from past experience that we could support quite quickly and easily. A digital inclusion fund was set up for those students. We opened the fund on a Friday and the money was gone by the Monday morning. As an institution, we have backed up what the Scottish Government has given us with an additional 100 per cent of our own funding. We had a positive meeting with civil servants back in February, I think. We explained our process, how we had gathered evidence and what had led my colleagues to come to the recommendations on the approach that we would take.

A light touch was taken. You know that you have an issue, so you talk to the community that you deal with to try to resolve that as best as you can. However, we still are able to say what we did, what impact it had, how many people received payments to pay for their wi-fi and how many people received a laptop. We have students who previously had told us they got by. They might have had one device in the house, so things were okay when their kids were at school and their partner was working. However, that changed during lockdown, with everyone trying to work or study from home using the one device. That led us

to look at that cohort and the experience that we had through our student support team. We still managed to report on that, without providing reams of paper, in a way that satisfied officials that we had spent the money wisely.

12:00

Amy Woodhouse: On Keith Robson's point, if we focus reporting around a national set of outcomes, that might help to streamline reporting approaches so that we do not have to report in different ways to different funders.

I want to make a point about the data gap and the onerousness of gathering lots of evidence and data. My recommendation is that we should look at what we want to prioritise and what we really need to know. The work that I was involved in in developing the children and young people's wellbeing outcomes and indicators showed that there is a real gap in the information that we gather on early years, which surprised me, to be honest. There is so much evidence that shows the importance of investing in the first 1,001 days of life—I nearly said the first 1,001 years of life; it would be really aspirational to want to live that long. If we invest in early years, we are likely to affect outcomes in adult life. If we want to gather robust evidence and data to show impacts, I suggest that a good place to start would be to focus on addressing the gap in early years data.

Elle Adams (Scotland CAN B): I thought that I would add my voice into the mix, having not piped up yet. I am here to represent an initiative that has a business lens. Scotland CAN B's mandate is around leveraging the role of business towards building a wellbeing economy in Scotland. The national performance framework is close to our hearts, as are the SDGs, which businesses are often much more aware of.

I echo what has been said about not having the teeth to provide accountability for the NPF; a lot of that experience resonates with me. The NPF is not mentioned in any of our sponsorship with the Scottish Government. It is disappointing that there are no references to it in the national strategy for economic transformation or in relation to the business purpose commission, work on which is in progress. Increasingly, business advisers and intermediaries are training businesses in accountability methodologies so that they can provide evidence of what they are contributing to in the NPF. However, when we have a system that does not reflect the importance of the NPF, that does not make it visible and that does not champion the fact that it exists and sets out the nation's direction of travel, it is hard to reinforce that we want everyone to get behind it. There should be a commitment to making the NPF more tangible for businesses and business advisers, so

that they can engage with it, because they do not feel very supported in that regard currently.

Paul Bradley: In relation to the budget, Keith Robson said "in an ideal world". We want spending decisions to marry up with our national outcomes, but, at the same time, if there are gaps in our outcomes and indicators, or if they do not measure the right things, that could have a big impact on other areas that we are not currently measuring. For example, as Jamie Livingstone mentioned, if there are gaps around gender in the national performance framework, finding a way of aligning our spending decisions with national outcomes and indicators could have an adverse effect on gender equality. We need to consider that.

I was taken aback a little when I read in the committee's papers that Scottish Government officials who work on the budget said that they had no consideration of the national performance framework. That was really interesting and telling, particularly because the national performance team has been in close proximity to the Scottish exchequer over the past number of years. If the NPF is not coming through in that part of Government, in what other parts of Government is it not coming through?

Jamie Livingstone mentioned that that team is quite small, and it is quite small. If we are pushing towards the national performance framework—if it is to be our anchor and our focus—how much investment in it is being provided by the Government? That is why my organisation and Jamie Livingstone's organisation support the calls for a wellbeing and sustainable development bill and for a future generations commissioner, who could look at best practice from elsewhere. The NPF needs to have resources and to have bite.

The Convener: When the national performance framework was set up, John Swinney, who was the finance secretary at the time, had an overview of it. Of course, he is now the Deputy First Minister, and he still has an overview of it.

Neil Ferguson: I must confess that I have come to this fairly fresh, so I have found the whole discussion fascinating. I want to pick up on the points that were made by Mr Johnson and the convener about reporting and inputs. It would be helpful to include a statement about what we are committing to and how that ties in with the national performance framework. That should be built in.

However, I am conscious that we have to produce whistleblowing reports and record management reports—lo and behold, we also have to produce an annual report, and we have to fulfil a tonne of requirements in that regard. It would be helpful if the process was a bit more simple and we had to produce just one annual

report that included all the other reports and, up front, a statement about the national performance framework. In that way, whenever you look at the annual report, you know what you will find in it. You should be able to find all the stuff on equalities and so on in the one place. It would simplify the whole process if we could, as the convener said, do it once and have it in the one place. That would be terrific.

The Convener: We talked about decluttering with the previous witnesses.

Neil Ferguson: Decluttering the reporting landscape would be a great start.

The Convener: Absolutely.

Douglas Lumsden: Elle Adams made the point about businesses focusing more on the SDGs than on the NPF. At the start of the discussion, Daniel Johnson asked whether we should just scrap the NPF. Should we focus on the SDGs instead? Would that get more buy-in from businesses and other sectors?

The Convener: Are you just throwing that out there, Mr Controversial?

Douglas Lumsden: Yes.

Jamie Livingstone: No, I do not think that we should scrap it. The national performance framework and the statutory requirement relating to the national outcomes help to bring the SDGs down to a Scotland level. We should make sure that we stress test whether the national outcomes, and the national indicators that sit beneath them, are fit for purpose, because people need to see their relevance to their individual lives. That is not to say that the SDGs are not relevant—they certainly are—but an international framework, by its nature, should be the guiding beacon.

We should see those connections and, to be fair to the Scottish Government, it has established good connections. It has increasingly done that through things such as the budget statement. It is important to recognise that this is a continuing journey. We have seen bits of progress in how the national outcomes translate into budgets and in reporting, but it takes time.

As we shift away from the simplistic and narrow measures of success that have dominated the landscape for decades and that have not produced the outcomes that we are looking for, we need to nurture that journey but recognise that with those richer measures of success comes a degree of complexity. Trying to find a way through those complexities is a good thing. For example, there has been some talk about identifying a series of beacon indicators or proxy indicators below which some of the detail exists. We cannot do away with the detail for exactly the reasons that we have talked about in relation to leaving no one

behind and bringing in qualitative data, but there are ways of cutting through the complexity.

Removing the necessity for the national performance framework or, in statute, the national outcomes would not be the way to go.

Elle Adams: I definitely do not advocate getting rid of the NPF, which provides powerful contextualisation for Scottish businesses. The businesses and business advisers that we introduce to it might have more experience with the SDGs. However, as soon as they realise that there is this amazing vision for the nation's direction of travel and understand, with our help, how they can tangibly measure their contribution to those outcomes, there is a real sense of galvanisation and empowerment. They want to move collectively towards the changes that are needed to create a wellbeing economy. It is a powerful document to have. Of course, change looks different for every nation that wants to work towards a wellbeing economy, so the tailored outcomes for Scotland are important.

I will pick up on the point about the NPF needing to be more than a statement of intent. In our context, it is important that businesses use one of the national outcomes, or multiple ones, as part of their theory of change, but that will not get us very far without the accountability mechanisms to measure improvement over time. The business pledge, which has existed for some years now, is more of a tick-box exercise. It is about saying, "We can do these five things, and we have the badge". That is not where we are coming from. We want businesses to improve year on year and to track their impact over time. That goes beyond saying, "This is our outcome", but not having any evidence in that regard.

John Mason: Keith Robson, in your paper, you talk about a national impact framework, which appears to be an attempt to tie the national performance framework and the sustainable development goals together. Is that correct?

Keith Robson: Guide me to the page, please, Mr Mason.

Daniel Johnson: It might just have been a typo. *[Laughter.]*

Keith Robson: I admit that that is not beyond the realms of possibility.

John Mason: The suggestion is about the funding framework and the SFC.

Keith Robson: It is about our outcome agreement. We have an agreement with the Scottish Funding Council, which sets the targets—a series of key performance indicators—against which we are measured. As was alluded to earlier, the document can be quite dry, although one of our deputy directors will probably take me to task

when I get back to the office for describing it in that way. If that discussion with the Funding Council took place from the perspective of the national performance framework, we would look at how to relate that to the KPIs in the outcome agreement and how we reference where we are. *[Interruption.]* I am getting a bit of help. It is on page 23—thank you.

John Mason: It is the third-last paragraph. You say:

“the SFC has committed to working collaboratively with the sector and key stakeholders to develop a new overarching National Impact Framework ... to ensure greater alignment”.

Keith Robson: Yes. That came out of the Scottish Funding Council’s review of tertiary education and research. It is looking at the current outcome agreements, and I think that it has tentatively started discussions on a new framework. That might be the opportunity for us to pitch in. On the basis of this morning’s experience, I can go back to our senior management team and say, “I think we want to talk to these organisations so we can be better equipped for those discussions.” We should be able to say, “Here’s the ambit of the work that we do. Here’s where it fits with the NPF. Here’s how a new framework within the Scottish Funding Council explicitly talks about how we meet those goals.” I hope that I have not rambled on too much.

The Convener: We have about 16 or 17 minutes left, and the last topic that I want to touch on is collaborative working. After that wee topic, I want to give all our guests an opportunity to make one last comment on any aspect that we may or may not have touched on that they feel is critically important for the committee to pick up on.

Neil, how does the NPF underpin collaborative working?

Neil Ferguson: I was going to come at it from a slightly different angle.

The Convener: Come at it from a different angle if you wish.

Neil Ferguson: Revenue Scotland prides itself on collaborative working—it is at the heart of what we are all about and how we operate as an organisation, both within the organisation and with other organisations. The NPF could not be delivered without collaboration. That would not work; it would not happen. I have no truck with anybody who wants to protect their own nest. The NPF provides a set of priorities. Ultimately, to deliver priorities, you need commitment and people need to work together to deliver them. Frankly, it will not work any other way.

I do not know whether that answers the question or whether you would like me to elaborate any

further. We cannot deliver the tax function that we have without the Scottish Government and without the Scottish Fiscal Commission. The Scottish Fiscal Commission cannot perform its role in tax forecasting without the detail that we give it. It is all about collaborative working and working together to make the process work, but we need to have the same set of common priorities and the same set of commitments towards those goals. If we tore up the NPF and threw it away, we would essentially go out the back door and come back in the front door, as we would need to put something else in its place.

The Convener: We would have to start again and reinvent the wheel.

Neil Ferguson: Yes. We would need to have something. To pick up on Elle Adams’s point, the strength of the NPF is the fact that it is a set of common priorities, but that is the case only if everybody works collaboratively towards those common priorities.

12:15

Vicki Bibby: The ambitions and the challenges that we have are complex, as we all know, so we need a whole-system, collaborative approach to tackling them. That point, which has been mentioned throughout the meeting, is at the heart of what Public Health Scotland is about. We need to think about system leadership and bringing people together to tackle some of those issues.

Maybe it is at the more granular level that we can see why collaboration is necessary. If we look at some of the challenges that we face in relation to community wealth building and anchor organisations, we see that those will require us to work together with procurement and other agencies on how we take decisions. I might make a decision that might cost Public Health Scotland more, but it might free up money in another part of the system. That might happen in year, or it might happen in years to come. How do we improve collaboration around our finances with a view to improving outcomes? We need to get to that next level of discussion. That is why it is so important that there is joint accountability on the NPF. At the moment, each individual organisation is statutorily accountable for delivering what it is directly responsible for.

The NPF is an exciting lever for change and for bringing things together, but it is difficult for Parliament to look at from a scrutiny perspective. We have talked about how difficult that is, but we could start to test some of this on a smaller scale and see how that works.

We should also think about giving more teeth and more power to community planning and ensuring that all partners come together around

the table. There are good examples but, from a Public Health Scotland perspective, when it comes to tackling some of the public health issues, we absolutely believe that the way to do that is through community planning and by bringing the systems together.

The Convener: You make a fundamental point. If Public Health Scotland can save money through an initiative for another area of the Scottish Government's work, should some of that resource go back to Public Health Scotland, for example?

When I used to work in pharma, we had a staff suggestion scheme on how to improve the company, its business, its profitability and so on. Nobody put in any suggestions, but the suggestion was then made—by yours truly, I have to say—that if the company gave a little reward to people who made a suggestion—of, for example, 10 per cent of the money that was saved by the company as a result—it might get more suggestions. The company was inundated with suggestions. A lot of people in the company felt, “It's making multimillion-pound profits and I'm not getting anything out of it.” As soon as there was an opportunity for people to get a reward, they put in suggestions. Some of those suggestions saved the company huge amounts of money, and the staff benefited accordingly.

Even in the public sector, that can work. The public service ethos is that if you deliver something, you should want to do it for the sake of doing it, apart from anything else, but, at the same time, if, for example, Public Health Scotland was able to save £1 million in another department, why should half of that money not return to Public Health Scotland to contribute towards other initiatives?

Vicki Bibby: This might be a wee bit idealistic, but we are all public servants. If there was something that I could do in my area of work in public health that could deliver on the national performance framework and save some money in the system, I would be driven by that. Again, the national performance framework is the hook for accountability—broader, system-wide accountability, rather than individual accountability on an annual basis. That will require scrutiny bodies and Parliament to think a bit differently.

The Convener: Absolutely.

I am keen for our guests to make any last-minute points. You do not have to make any final points, but if there is anything that you think that we have not touched on that we should have touched on, now is your opportunity. I will also give my MSP colleagues the same opportunity.

I will not go round the table one by one; it is up to our guests to let me know if they have any points to make. You do not have to if you do not

wish to. Does anyone want to make any final points?

Jamie Livingstone: There is a point that I would like to make, given Oxfam's international remit. One element that has not come through in the conversation yet is the fact that the values statement in the national performance framework specifically says that we should be a society that treats

“all our people with kindness, dignity and compassion”.

We would like to ensure—the research by Scotland's International Development Alliance that will come out later this week will point to this in relation to the wellbeing and sustainable development bill—that the pursuit of wellbeing, which is the core purpose of the national performance framework in Scotland, does not come at the expense of communities internationally or, indeed, future generations. The elements of sustainability and policy coherence for sustainable development come into that.

We can follow up by submitting that report, which is imminent. It will make a series of recommendations that are relevant to the committee's inquiry. I hope that the national outcomes review, the committee's national performance framework inquiry, the wellbeing and sustainable development bill and the commitment to a future generations commissioner can be viewed as a continuum, rather than as four separate pieces of work. We need to pull those together and make sure that there is solidarity, and that the goal of wellbeing does not stop at Scotland's border.

The Convener: Yes. The phrase “our people” does not need to be there; it should just be “people” or “everyone”.

Daniel Johnson: I have one final reflection and a comment that I did not manage to get in.

During the pandemic, I became addicted to looking at Public Health Scotland's data dashboard. In a sense, it achieved something that the national performance framework has not achieved. For such things to be used, whether we are talking about qualitative or quantitative measures, they need to be engaging, and the NPF is not there yet. The Covid data on the PHS dashboard was complex, but it was rich and it allowed people to look at different things. That is a good example of what we might need to do.

From what has been said in today's conversation and others, I am struck by the sense that there is a real desire for the NPF to work and for there to be a common language so that different agencies and different parts of the public sector can show their contribution. Ultimately, there has been a failure on the part of the

sponsoring organisation to place sufficient emphasis on that. That is my reflection from today's discussion and the preceding ones.

Paul Bradley: I agree with that 100 per cent. Voluntary organisations were already doing the work that we do before the national performance framework came along and before the sustainable development goals came along. The NPF reinforces the type of society that our organisations were already pushing for. Organisations in the sector will retrospectively work out how their work is achieving the national outcomes, rather than using them to drive the work that they do. Success for the national performance framework would be for it to be a framework that drives the work that is done in Scotland, whether in the voluntary sector, the public sector or the private sector.

Amy Woodhouse: I want to expand on an earlier point about the importance of what matters to people and involving people in the next iteration of the NPF and the review that is coming.

I will give a little example from my own field of children and young people and education. Over the past few years, there has been a considerable focus on qualifications, but we have worked with the young ambassadors for inclusion, who are secondary school children and young people with additional support for learning needs, to launch their success looks different awards, which seek to recognise and praise schools that recognise other forms of achievement for children and young people, because they see that there are priorities for them in their lives other than that of getting qualifications, and they want those to be recognised as well.

That is a good example of how we should not assume that we know what is important to children and young people or to people in general. Asking them what is important to them might help us to develop much more purposeful indicators that are much more meaningful to their lives.

Elle Adams: I will finish by giving a tangible example that builds on some of the needs that we are hearing about. For the past year—we hope that this will continue into next year, depending on funding—we have been working with our sister initiative at Scotland Can Do, which is the entrepreneurial and innovative nation backbone, and the Can Do Collective, on a mechanism for all the entrepreneurial support intermediaries to measure their collective impact. We centred that on the NPF and the creation of a shared language and collective vision that would contribute towards the NPF.

We look forward to seeing how that evolves. Something such as a dashboard is super compelling in enabling people to feel that they are

all pulling together and helping them to collaborate better to further those outcomes. That is an example of something that is in progress.

Vicki Bibby: I am part of the Scottish Leaders Forum, which I know that the committee has had evidence from. The next stage of our work is to gather good examples of such work in practice. Some of those are quite small. I know that we will be happy to share some of those examples with the committee once we have finished that work.

The Convener: That would be very helpful. Does anyone else have anything that they want to say? As would be said at an auction, going, going, gone.

I thank everyone for their contributions, which will be extremely helpful to our future deliberations. Once we have completed our evidence taking, we will work to put together a report, which you will all be able to access.

Our business planning day has been confirmed for 1 September. We have completed all our work for today, so no one has to stay behind. I thank everyone very much.

Meeting closed at 12:26.

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