

Finance and Public Administration Committee
26th Meeting 2024 (Session 6), Tuesday 17 September 2024
National Performance Framework- Inquiry into proposed National Outcomes

Purpose

1. The Committee is invited to take evidence from the following witnesses as part of the National Performance Framework: Inquiry into proposed National outcomes:
 - Sarah Davidson, Chief Executive, [Carnegie UK](#)
 - [Dr Max French](#), Assistant Professor, Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University
 - Dr Alison Hosie, Research Officer, [Scottish Human Rights Commission](#)
 - Lukas Bunse, Policy and Engagement Lead [Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland](#)
2. Links to the written submissions from those giving evidence are provided above. **Annexe A** contains an additional joint report provided by Carnegie UK and Dr Max French on *How a strengthened National Performance Framework can drive effective government in Scotland*.

Background

3. The Scottish Government is required, under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 ('the Act') to consult on the National Outcomes, which set out the aims of the National Performance Framework, every 5 years. Alongside the proposed National Outcomes, the Scottish Government is required to publish a document setting out further details of the review, including information on its consultation and the responses received, as well as how the proposed national outcomes have taken account of the views gathered.
4. The Scottish Government undertook a review of the National Outcomes in 2023, and, on 1 May 2024, laid its [proposed National Outcomes](#) in Parliament for formal consideration in a document entitled *Consultation with Parliament in connection with the Review of National Outcomes* (hereafter referred to as the "Review Document"). Those National Outcomes are set out in **Annexe B**.
5. On 19 June 2024, the Scottish Government published its impact assessments on how the proposed National Outcomes will impact on [equalities](#), [island communities](#), [child rights](#) and [fairer Scotland](#).
6. As confirmed by the then Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic's [letter of 17 May 2024](#), a longer period for statutory consultation of Parliament is proposed (than the 40 days in the Act). As such that consultation should be concluded by 29 November 2024 with the Parliamentary debate scheduled for the week beginning 25 November 2024.

7. In its Review document, the Scottish Government are proposing changes to the purpose of NPF and most of the National Outcomes. It explains that these changes are a “necessary course correction rather than another complete overhaul” as was seen following the last statutory review in 2018. The 2018 Review saw a “significant repositioning” of the NPF including making it a framework for the whole of Scotland and adding the values section and simplifying the overall format and language.
8. The Review Document explains that within the wider context of the Verity House agreement¹ “changes to the NPF have only been recommended where there is strong evidence that this is necessary to ensure the NPF remains ambitious and forward looking for the coming five years, as it did in 2018.”
9. The changes proposed to the National Outcomes in the Review Document are as follows:
 - **New Outcomes:** Care, Climate Action, Housing.
 - **Amended Outcomes:** Children and Young People, Communities, Wellbeing Economy and Fair Work, Education and Learning, Environment, Equality and Human Rights, Health, International, Reduce Poverty.
 - **Unchanged Outcome:** Culture.
 - **Amended extended definitions** (see Annexe 4 of the Review document): All the National Outcomes have proposed changes to their extended definitions, informed by the consultation evidence. The extended definitions provide greater detail of what is covered by each National Outcome.
10. The Scottish Government explains that National Indicators, which are used to measure progress towards the National Outcomes, will be revised to reflect the final agreed National Outcomes. An Implementation Plan, which will be informed by the review, is expected to be published by the Scottish Government alongside its final agreed National Outcomes. The timetable for publishing the agreed National Outcomes (following Parliamentary consultation), the associated Implementation Plan and the National Indicators has yet to be confirmed.

Committee Scrutiny approach

11. The Finance and Public Administration (FPA) Committee is the lead committee for the Scottish Parliament’s scrutiny of the proposed National Outcomes. As the National Outcomes fall within the remits of a number of committees, Committee Conveners agreed a joint approach to scrutiny at the Conveners Group meeting on 26 April 2023.

¹ In June 2023 the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and the Scottish Government agreed a new Partnership Agreement setting out a collective vision for a more collaborative approach to delivering on shared priorities – it is referred to as the Verity House agreement.

12. The FPA Committee wrote to all Conveners on [6 March 2024](#) and again on [3 May 2024](#) setting out the scrutiny approach to be undertaken by Committees. As set out in the letters, following the proposed National Outcomes being laid, the FPA Committee co-ordinated a joint call for views and news release. The joint call for views on the proposed National Outcomes ran from 13 May 2024 to 28 June 2024. The consultation received 72 submissions which are available to view on [Citizen Space](#). The call for views questions are attached at **Annexe C** and SPICe has provided [an analysis of the responses received](#).
13. Whilst it will be for each Committee to consider their approach to scrutiny of issues raised in submissions that relate to their remit, the Finance and Public Administration Committee has agreed that it will focus more on the cross-cutting elements of the proposed National Outcomes and the review.
14. This approach also builds on themes arising from the Committee's previous inquiry entitled: [National Performance Framework: Ambitions into Action](#), with the Committee publishing its [report on 3 October 2022](#) (hereafter referred to as the "2022 NPF report"). Where particularly relevant, the findings from that inquiry and [the subsequent response](#) to the Committee's report from then Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery, John Swinney MSP, (hereafter referred to as the 'then DFM') are referenced in this paper.

The National Performance Framework (NPF) and its purpose

15. The Review document explains that the NPF is Scotland's Wellbeing Framework "setting out a vision of societal wellbeing through the National Outcomes and charting progress towards this through a range of social environmental and economic indicators."
16. In its 2022 NPF Report the Committee reflected upon the evidence it heard about the title of 'the NPF' and whether it adequately reflected the way in which it is intended to operate. The Committee welcomed the then DFM's commitment to reflect on the terminology within the NPF and its title, including as part of the next review. This was particularly if, as a consequence of that review, the NPF moves further away from being a 'Performance Framework.'
17. In its Review document, the Scottish Government reports that amongst the main themes arising from the consultation responses it received were "change the purpose wording" and "change the name of the NPF". Evidence it received proposed changing the name of the NPF to 'Scotland's Wellbeing Framework' in order to improve clarity about the role and purpose of the framework. There was, however, also concern that changing the name of the NPF could impact on the "framework's brand" as built up since 2007. Another concern was whether removing 'performance' could be perceived as altering the focus of the framework. The Review document confirms that the Scottish Government does not propose to change of title of 'the NPF'.

18. The Scottish Government does, however, propose to change the purpose of the NPF (set out below) based on the consultation and engagement it undertook.

Current Purpose: To focus on creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing, and sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Proposed Purpose: To improve the wellbeing of people living in Scotland now and in the future.

19. The joint Committee consultation invited comments on the changed purpose of the NPF and, whilst the extensive coverage of the NPF on key areas impacting wellbeing was largely appreciated, there were concerns regarding the omission of explicit references to economic growth. Others also suggested that the scope of the NPF should extend beyond Scotland to reflect a global outlook.

20. The Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) considers the updated NPF purpose appeals as more streamlined, simple and better aligned with the global focus on wellbeing. That said, they highlight that the framework needs to clearly articulate a holistic understanding of wellbeing which encompasses social, economic and environmental rights. They consider that the proposed National Outcomes align well with the updated purpose of the NPF, with each National Outcome inherently supporting the realisation of a rights-based wellbeing economy. They suggest that making these connections more explicit throughout the narratives² that sit around the National Outcomes “would help to improve a wider understanding of the human rights foundations of this framework amongst duty bearers in Government and Scotland’s public bodies, as well as wider society.”

21. Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland (WEAS) also support the change in the purpose for the NPF for similar reasons. They are disappointed, however, that the Scottish Government has not changed the NPF to ‘Scotland’s Wellbeing Framework’ to better align with the new purpose and support better engagement with it, particularly by business and citizens. They add that the name of ‘the NPF’ is a barrier to more deeply embedding it in decision-making in Scotland.

22. WEAS explain that the proposed National Outcomes and the wider NPF do not include any references to the values of democracy and participation beyond the value to act in an open and transparent way. They consider this is a “major omission” as a “thriving democracy that enables everyone to participate in civic life and influence the decisions that affect them is an important ingredient for a successful Scotland and collective wellbeing in its own right.” In addition, robust democratic values and structures are “important for delivering the other National

² These are referred to as ‘extended definitions’ in the Review document.

Outcomes.” They therefore propose a new National Outcome that explicitly highlights the need for democracy and protection of civic space.

23. Carnegie UK welcome the proposed updated purpose as framing the NPF as Scotland’s Wellbeing Framework, adding that it brings it closer to international comparators. They are disappointed, however, with the decision to retain the NPF title “because we do not feel it is clear or engaging” – it reflects the NPF’s origins as an internal document and does not reflect that it is a framework for the people of Scotland. They recommend renaming it ‘Scotland’s Wellbeing Framework’ and contend that effective communication could address the Scottish Government’s concerns about the potential negative impact of a change of name.
24. Dr French notes that the National Outcomes cover a suitable cross-section of key wellbeing areas but adds that there are two problems - firstly the consultation was too limited in its scope, involvement and reach and secondly the proposed set of National Outcomes lack an implementation goal, more on which is set out below. Along with Carnegie UK, he calls for “formally rebranding the NPF with its unofficial moniker ‘Scotland’s Wellbeing Framework’ to better reflect its updated purpose”.

Cross-cutting issues

25. Responses to the joint call for views identified some cross-cutting themes that needed to be better integrated across all proposed National Outcomes. Those themes were Equalities/Human Rights, and Sustainability. It was considered that addressing these issues not only requires a comprehensive and integrated approach to policy design and implementation but that incorporating them across the proposed National Outcomes could result in more effectively achieving the NPF goals of promoting inclusive growth and reducing inequalities.
26. In its Equality Impact Assessment, the Scottish Government noted the evidence it received calling for a more gendered NPF. In response they propose to mainstream gender more effectively across the National Outcomes. They also respond to concerns regarding the lack of disaggregated data, commenting that due to how the NPF data is collected and presented “it is currently not possible to take an intersectional approach.” Work is however underway to “pursue a route to providing intersectional information on the National Indicators.”
27. SHRC consider that the changes proposed to the National Outcomes are “commendable” moving it towards a more inclusive and comprehensive framework. They express disappointment, however, that 10 years on from SHRC’s initial input into the National Outcomes, they have “failed to show their human rights foundations”. Integrating human rights considerations into each outcome would, they consider, “highlight a commitment to ensuring policy efforts contribute to the realisation of human rights for all” and supports wider capacity

building. In their submissions SHRC then also identify the human rights connections for each proposed National Outcome.

28. Responding on how the proposed National Outcomes will impact on inequality, WEAS considered that they “have the potential to reduce inequalities” but that more action is needed to embed the National Outcomes at the heart of decision-making in Scotland. However, by splitting inequality across different outcomes they suggest there is a risk of inequality not being given prominence it deserves. Strengthened accountability and capacity building are therefore important to ensure it remain “front and centre.” They also explain that a future generations approach is needed to achieve collective wellbeing in a way that is sustainable. They set out the ways of working that should be included within any Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill.
29. In its Programme for Government for 2021/22 the Scottish Government confirmed that it would further develop the use of the NPF through the then upcoming review of National Outcomes and through consultation on a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill. In response to the Committee’s 2022 NPF report the then DFM explained that “The proposed Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill will be informed by the findings of this report as well as the findings of the upcoming Review of National Outcomes.” The Bill is not identified in the First Minister’s [year four priorities for the legislative programme 2025-26](#) published on 4 September 2024. In December 2022, Sarah Boyack MSP lodged a [proposal for a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill](#) which following consultation has now secured the right to be introduced as a Bill. As part of that consultation the potential for the proposed bill to improve the efficacy of the NPF as the distinct overarching framework for achieving National Outcomes was recognised by respondents.
30. In addition, as the SPICe [briefing on the Programme for Government \(PfG\) 2025-26](#) notes “The PfG makes no reference to the National Performance Framework (NPF) or how the measures set out under each of the four priorities will contribute to the National Outcomes which underpin the NPF.”

UN Sustainable Development Goals

31. The Review document explains that the NPF is a framework “to localise the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Progress towards the National Outcomes is a proxy for progress towards the SDGs given the close alignment between the two.”
32. In its Review document the Scottish Government report that they had heard from stakeholders that alignment with the United Nations SDGs could be improved. The Scottish Government then sets out the ways it has addressed this including a new Climate Actions Outcome that mirrors the wording of SDG13 and more effective representation of equalities in some National Outcomes. In addition,

consideration will also be given “during the development of National Indicators to the consultation evidence received that suggested how better to align the Indicators with the SDG indicator set.”³

33. Submissions to the joint Committee call for views commended the effort to incorporate SDG principles into the NPF but also called for improvements. SHRC consider that the proposed National Outcomes could align well with the United Nations SDGs but called for more explicit linking between each outcome and relevant SDG goal within that Outcome’s narrative (along with suitable targets and indicators) to enhance coherence and accountability.
34. The SHRC explain that it understands the importance of the NPF in measuring progress towards delivery of the SDGs. As it stands, however, “it doesn’t allow for an analytical understanding of why these results are what they are, or importantly how to change them where necessary.” As such they recommend (as they have done previously) the inclusion of human rights-based indicators to support this analytical potential. They highlight best practice in their submission, set out how those indicators work in practice and what insights they might provide.
35. Dr French considers that the National Outcomes are aligned with the SDGs but that this requires ongoing attention and SDGs should be applied by the appropriate bodies as a lens through which to understand Scotland’s part on the global mission of UN Agenda 2030. In relation to his concerns regarding the absence of an implementation goal he highlights UN SDG 17 which seeks to “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development” with subsidiary indicators measuring the investment, policy coherence and mechanisms for implementation. He would welcome the introduction of a comparable National Outcome within the current proposed Outcomes.

Scottish Government’s consultation on the proposed National Outcomes

36. The Act sets out that the Scottish Government, as part of its review of National Outcomes, must lay in Parliament a report describing the consultation it has carried out, the representations it received and how they have been taken account of.
37. For this review the Scottish Government’s consultation aimed to build on the 2018 review, primarily considering the National Outcomes, but also considering the purpose, vision, name and presentation of the NPF and its implementation and data. The consultation and engagement phase of the Scottish Government’s Review consisted of four strands: Desk-based research, Online consultation, Call for evidence and Stakeholder workshops.

³ Paragraph 77, Review document

38. The Scottish Government held an online consultation and call for evidence on the National Outcomes between 14 March to 12 June 2023. The Scottish Government received a total of 87 responses to the consultation and 125 responses to the call for evidence. Further details, including the results, can be found in the thematic analysis [summary report](#) in Annexe 3 of the Review document.
39. Respondents to the joint Committee call for views had mixed views on the approach taken by the Scottish Government to its consultation process. Some respondents stated that the consultation process was thorough and inclusive, that a broad range of perspectives were considered, and that the proposed National Outcomes demonstrate that feedback from the consultation process has been considered and absorbed. Others highlighted concerns around the scope and meaningfulness of the Scottish Government's consultation process.
40. Whilst the Scottish Government's thematic gender review and its commissioned report from the Children's Parliament⁴ are both welcomed, a number of respondents raised concerns surrounding the data available from the consultation exercise. The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland also states that the review exercise was not "a substitute for direct participation of children in developing the National Outcomes" and that children's views should have been actively considered in the development of all outcomes. Age Scotland's submission, though supportive of the efforts to include children's voices in the review, notes that there was no comparable effort to ensure that older people's voices were equally heard and considered.
41. A number of respondents highlighted the missed opportunity to connect the NPF and National Outcomes to a range of Scottish Government plans as well as local plans. The Scottish Women's Convention state that there appears to be significant gaps in the Scottish Government's interaction with community action plans. Aberdeen City Council explain that the Scottish Government's consultation missed an opportunity to consider how alignment with community planning partnerships and partners' activities could be progressed towards the Outcomes, and how the approach to "mutual accountability" for the Outcomes could be enhanced.
42. Several respondents, such as Engender, note the lack of disaggregation of the responses received to the Scottish Government's consultation in the consultation document. They also query when the Scottish Government's thematic gender review will be published.
43. SHRC comment that the consultation process was relatively comprehensive, making use of existing resources. They note that in the absence of a budget

⁴ This report reviewed the work of the Children's Parliament from 2018 to 2023 in the context of the NPF.

sufficient to allow the team to undertake any meaningful participative process to inform the review, the NPF team have made use of existing data, online consultation, a call for evidence and a series of stakeholder meetings. They add that this approach, however, was “far from ideal nor good practice for a significant process such as this.” As such they considered there was a risk of some voices not being heard such as from marginalised communities or from children.

44. In their submission, Carnegie UK write that the consultation “was not designed to engage a wide cross-section of the people of Scotland, and deep, purposeful engagement with citizens was not a priority within the National Outcomes review process. Inevitably, this meant that many of those traditionally furthest from the policy process did not have an opportunity to contribute.”
45. The WEAS submission states that “We are very disappointed with the Scottish Government’s lack of investment into a meaningful consultation process to engage people in Scotland in the process of revising the National Outcomes.” They suggest that the “depth of future consultations should be increased” to ensure the Outcomes are developed transparently, reflect the public’s priorities and to build collective ownership over the resultant NPF. They recommend in their response that future consultations must reflect Scotland’s demographics, and that fully disaggregated data on the engagement process should be published in order to increase public trust in the consultation process. They also call for the public to have a stronger role and propose establishing a public panel of randomly selected citizens to review the National Outcomes and their progress, reporting to Parliament.
46. Dr Max French’s submission describes the consultation as being “narrow in scope, limited in the opportunities provided for participation, and poorly resourced”. He notes that the consultation process relied heavily on one online survey, an approach which has drawbacks as it provides “no means for interaction, and no opportunity for respondents to become more informed and develop their views”. Dr French suggests that offering more deliberative structures for engagement would have resulted in a better consultation process. He also notes that, as surveys don’t provide a means of active outreach, “the voices of key constituents for the national outcomes ... remain absent.” His research with Carnegie UK found a strong consensus that consultation and public engagement were critical for giving wellbeing frameworks like the NPF legitimacy and political weight.

Joined Up Decision-making

47. As the Review document states, the NPF has several functions including that “it provides a framework for collaboration and planning of policy and services across the whole spectrum of Scotland’s civic society, including public and private sectors, voluntary organisations, businesses and communities.” It explains that decision-making is supported by reporting “systematically and objectively across

a range of economic, social and environmental indicators.” This helps to understand publicly and transparently the progress being made towards realising the NPF vision. The Review document explains that the data provided helps “us to understand the challenges in achieving our outcomes and helps us focus polices, services and resources on tackling those challenges”.

48. In its 2022 NPF Report the Committee reported its concern that a number of National Indicators still have no data, almost five years after the last review. This, the Committee explained that this “hampers the ability to fully track and scrutinise progress in those areas. We therefore recommend that the next iteration of the NPF includes a set of indicators which have been agreed, between Scottish Government, local government and relevant sector representatives, to best track progress in delivering the outcomes. We consider that these should not be left for development.”
49. As well as considering how the next iteration of National Indicators can better align with the indicators for UN SDGs, the Review document sets out⁵ how the indicators will be developed as well as the quality and assurance analysis they will have to undergo. In addition, feedback will be sought from the NPF related Policy Advisory Group (PAG) and Expert Advisory Group (EAG), and the Scottish Government’s Executive team.
50. How the National Outcomes influence decision-making was a key focus of the Committee’s 2022 NPF report. As the Scottish Government acknowledged, its approach has been “more carrot than stick” when it comes to the use of the NPF to influence policy making and delivery. The Committee found that the NPF is not seen as explicitly or transparently driving financial decisions by the Government nor for holding organisations to account organisations for spending funding effectively. A core part of the Committee’s report recommendations was that there should be a ‘golden thread’ from the NPF through all other frameworks, strategies, and plans to delivery on the ground. The Committee added that “the current approach whereby the NPF is sometimes seen as “implicit” in policy development and delivery does not reflect the status or importance the Scottish Government, COSLA and others consider it should have.” The Committee made a range of recommendations aimed at more clearly setting out how the NPF is used to make decisions as well as for scrutiny and accountability.
51. Responding the Scottish Government recognised the challenges and committed to publish a set of resources alongside the next iteration of the NPF that will better explain and showcase how it can be used in policy development and delivery.
52. Many of the concerns in the Committee’s 2022 NPF report are also echoed in the submissions to the joint Committee call for views. Some, such as Audit Scotland, highlighted that “Currently, it is not clear how budgeted spending which is working

⁵ see paragraphs 79-81.

towards shared wellbeing outcomes fits together”. SHRC consider that the proposed National Outcomes have the potential to support joined up decision-making but for it to move beyond being a statement of ambition towards a tool for transformational change “the NPF needs to be front and centre in policy development throughout all government directorates including finance.”

53. WEAS also consider that the proposed National Outcomes could support more joined up decision-making but that “this will require the creation of a stronger decision-making framework through the proposed Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill.” They suggest that, for the NPF to be used effectively, it will require a number of interconnected elements such as clear definitions of wellbeing and sustainable development, a stronger legal underpinning, and a Future Generations Commissioner to provide scrutiny and guidance.
54. Dr French comments on his recent research with Carnegie UK in comparing the integration of National Outcomes and Indicators in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales (see Annexe A). Whilst National Outcomes play a more prominent role in public life in Scotland than their comparators, he notes that their overall integration within the public administration system is now significantly lower than their counterparts in Wales and some areas in Northern Ireland. He adds that “we could not find a single case where the National Outcomes and Indicators were actively used (not just passively referenced/aligned to) in the design appraisal or evaluation of a Scottish Government national policy or Strategy.”
55. Carnegie UK explain that although the outcomes are intended to support joined up working “we are not yet seeing a consistent, comprehensive and effective outcomes-based approach.” As such challenging protectionist behaviours, extending accountabilities beyond single services and organisations, and finding ways to span organisation, financial and political boundaries are all needed to fulfil the NPF’s vision. They add that “the sheer number of outcomes does not aid coherence” noting that there are seven wellbeing goals or outcomes used in Wales. They believe that National Outcomes should be embedded in a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill as this has the potential to drive better joined up decision-making in Scotland. They explain that a key goal of this Bill should be “to strengthen and streamline duties to promote the National Outcomes” and to ensure they are developed in a more democratic way.

Implementation

56. In its 2022 NPF report the Committee made a number of recommendations aimed at making more sustained progress towards achieving the NPF vision and to ensure its ambitions are translated into action. Those recommendations included a more systematic approach to the implementation of the next iteration of the NPF, including consulting on that plan as part of the next review of the National Outcomes.

57. The then DFM agreed and, as part of its review of the National Outcomes, the Scottish Government sought views on how to improve implementation of the NPF. It received 874 consultation comments related to the 'Implementation Gap' which were focussed around five key themes of Policy, Delivery, Funding, Legislation and Accountability.
58. The Review document set out that "analysis of the implementation gap of the National Outcomes noted several common barriers including policy coherence, a complex reporting landscape, difficulties embedding the NPF in practice as a driver of change, and dissatisfaction with current funding models."
59. The Review document explains that in terms of developing the implementation plan, the Scottish Government is committed to working with a wide range of stakeholders throughout its development and that the plan will be published alongside the reviewed NPF (which follows on from the completion of Parliamentary consultation). It sets out⁶ how the plan will be informed by evidence and developed in order to set out "a route for change". The evidence received by the Scottish Government will feed into the plan and has been passed to the legislation team to continue work on the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill.
60. Responses to the joint Committee call for views also highlighted the need for a robust implementation plan and accountability to ensure there are tangible improvements. This includes detailed action plans specifying the steps needed to achieve each outcome as well as metrics to monitor progress and evaluate success.
61. In its response SHRC set out a list of components that the implementation plan should include, such as clear timebound (SMART⁷) targets and indicators for each National Outcome to measure progress and resources, accountable developments in law, policy and practice, and that it should be adequately funded.
62. WEAS also considers that the NPF needs to be embedded into a wider system of duties and guidance with the best way being through the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill. They consider that, without the Bill, the implementation plan will be "far less effective in making sure that the National Outcomes are used in decision making." They include a range of ways of working that could be included in the Bill such as through participation, integration, prevention, openness and evidence-based decision-making.
63. Dr French concludes from his comparative research that the increasing implementation gap in Scotland (relative to Wales) arises from the NPF largely relying on "attracting or convincing others to pay attention" to it (so called 'soft

⁶ See paragraphs 82-84

⁷ SMART – stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

powers'). As such he contends that by lacking 'hard powers', such as recourse to coercive statutory duties, performance incentives or public scrutiny, it is a 'steeper battle' to try and reduce that implementation gap. His research published with Carnegie UK shows that a "smart power" approach, which combines both soft and hard powers, is essential to effective integration.

64. Carnegie UK also consider that to achieve collective wellbeing, public bodies need a future generations approach that is based on "long-term thinking, that is collaborative and reaches across silos, that can effectively resolve trade-offs and deal with complexity, and that considers impacts both local and global". Investment in good working relationship and mutual understanding remains important but this must be accompanied by "effective alignment of harder-edged incentives, accountabilities; processes and systems with the outcomes." This should be the focus of the implementation plan "with an emphasis on areas where insufficient progress has been made" since the NPF's introduction in 2007. They add that "we remain of the view that without improved legislative underpinnings and associated accountabilities, an implementation plan alone is unlikely to be effective."

Committee Clerking Team
September 2024

How a strengthened National Performance Framework can drive effective government in Scotland

by Dr Max French



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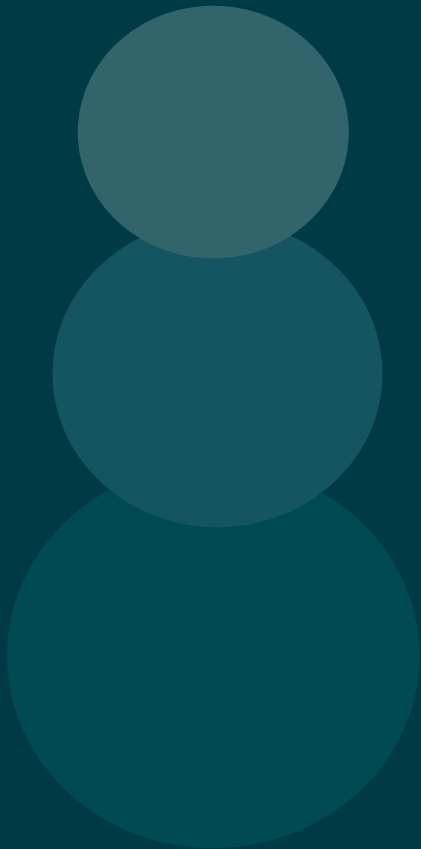
This report was written by Dr Max French, Northumbria University Newcastle and designed by Alison Manson, Carnegie UK.

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All photographs on [Unsplash](#) by: [Evan Wise](#), [Aarón Blanco Tejedor](#), [Markus Spiske](#) and [Melissa Askew](#)

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In one of his first major speeches as First Minister, John Swinney set out his administration's economic vision:

The goal is to help people live happier and healthier lives with higher living standards, to help businesses boost profitability and build a more resilient Scottish economy that **promotes the wellbeing of all of our citizens.**



¹ National Performance Framework: picture illustration – Scottish Government

The idea that a nation's collective wellbeing - now and in the future - should be its driving political concern is hardly new to Scotland. In 1791, the Scottish Enlightenment figure Sir John Sinclair undertook the Statistical Account of Scotland, the first nationwide survey with the purpose of "ascertaining the quantum of happiness enjoyed by its inhabitants, and the means of its future improvement." Prior to this, the national statistics (a term also coined by Sinclair) merely counted the stocks a government needed to feed its own population or wage war on others.

The modern torchbearer of Sinclair's idea is Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF), which has since 2007 asserted the National Outcomes and Indicators which determine Scotland's collective wellbeing. The NPF is known internationally as a wellbeing framework: its purpose is not only to measure our collective wellbeing, but to frame political and administrative decision-making around it. The NPF's 11 National Outcomes and 81 National Indicators should, in theory, determine how Scotland's ~£60bn annual budget is spent, how senior leaders coordinate Scotland's 131 public bodies, how decisions made across Scotland's public life are scrutinised and how those responsible are held to account.

Our new research², for the first time, systematically compares how well integrated into decision-making the wellbeing frameworks used in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland actually are. Despite being in operation for twice as long, Scotland does not come out of this comparison well. Wales' Well-being Goals and Indicators are now far better integrated into policymaking, strategic planning, and people management within the Welsh Government and public bodies. While Wales' wellbeing framework has shaped the national planning, transport, net zero, recycling and marine strategies, we could not locate a single national policy in Scotland that the NPF has significantly impacted. In fact, integration was in certain respects greater in Northern Ireland, despite the historic collapse of its power sharing government. Far from the "North Star" the Scottish Government claims the NPF to be, its use is largely relegated to lip service paid in strategies and corporate plans.

This matters. The failure to make good on the NPF means Scotland now cuts a diminished figure on an international stage of wellbeing-focussed governments it helped establish. It sits awkwardly alongside both the current [First](#) and [Deputy First Ministers'](#) declared commitments to wellbeing-oriented government and raises broader questions about the strategic and decision-making competency within the Scottish Government, a conclusion echoed by a [recent parliamentary inquiry](#).

So, what can be done? The Scottish Government's commitment to bring forward a Wellbeing and Sustainability (WSD) Bill provides a critical opportunity to embed the NPF in policy making and bolster a strategic, effective approach to government. Borrowing from Wales is the right approach, given the critical role the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act played in enabling that country to pull ahead. But the WSD bill must go further than emulation. With ambition and creativity, it can actually deliver on a 200+ year national commitment to put collective wellbeing at the heart of governance. Drawing from [our research](#), here are six elements the WSD bill could introduce which would, working in tandem, achieve this transformation.

2 French, M., & Wallace, J. (2024). Power, performance, and the governance of systemic goals: evidence from national wellbeing framework integration. SocArxiv. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/6xmdv>.

1. Complete the journey from a National Performance Framework to Scotland's Wellbeing Framework

The NPF is stuck part way through its transition from a technical performance framework to a broader vision for progress shared with Scotland's citizens and the organisations which serve them. The WSD Bill should complete this journey, establishing the NPF as a galvanising agenda and mutual obligation for all Scotland's public bodies and recipients of public funds.

This should begin with formally rebranding the NPF with its unofficial moniker, "Scotland's Wellbeing Framework", to better reflect its updated purpose ('to improve the wellbeing of people living in Scotland now and in the future'). The statutory basis afforded to the National Outcomes within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 should then be extended to the whole revised NPF and, as in Wales, the Scottish Government made subject to the same accountability and delivery duties as other public bodies.

These changes would mandate the NPF's delivery from all tiers of government, public bodies, and social and commercial organisations. But if these groups are to feel like partners rather than subjects of the revised NPF, they will need to play an active and empowered role in its leadership. The Bill should therefore also establish a multi-stakeholder National Advisory Board, modelled closely on the 2011 [Wellbeing Roundtable](#) convened by Carnegie UK, which would hold a duty to scrutinise, report and advise on NPF implementation. This would improve buy-in from outside central government and inject energy and ambition into the WSD Act's roll out.

2. Make the NPF the lynchpin of a renewed Scottish Public Service Reform Programme

The WSD Bill is likely to follow Wales in introducing a set of expected "Ways of Working" against which public bodies will be scrutinised. Wales' five Ways of Working (Integration, Prevention, Long-term Thinking, Involvement, Collaboration) now play an important role in public scrutiny and accountability. But Scotland should not start from scratch. In fact, the country has a head start.

In 2011 the influential Christie Commission report into the future of public services already committed government and public bodies to four pillars of reform: Power, Prevention, Partnership and Performance. The WSD Bill should integrate these Christie Pillars - suitably revised through consultation - as a separate tier of the revised NPF and grant them statutory footing as expected Ways of Working. Public bodies would then be scrutinised for both their particular contribution to the National Outcomes and incorporation of the Christie-informed Ways of Working.

By doing this, the WSD Bill would establish a much-needed throughline in Scottish public service reform. In responding to new duties, public bodies and those carrying out publicly funded work would, in one fell swoop, implement Christie and pursue the National Outcomes. This would embolden a stuttering commitment to a distinctive Scottish approach to public service reform, and address related concerns expressed by the [Auditor General](#) among others that too little progress has been made in embedding Christie's recommendations.

3. Reframe accountability and scrutiny relationships around the revised NPF

Our research makes clear that the Scottish Government cannot continue to rely solely on its small central government team to integrate the NPF across Scotland's public administration system. The Welsh experience shows that an independent body, capable of championing the NPF and managing relationships with each body subject to WSD Bill provisions, is required to achieve the level of culture change needed. The clearest way is to follow Wales in creating a Scottish Future Generations Commissioner (FGC), with a suitably resourced Office. Existing scrutiny and inspection agencies, most obviously Audit Scotland, could also play an integral role.

An external body (FGC or equivalent) would perform a range of vital, currently absent, functions:

- By possessing powers of review and inspection, equivalent to 'Section 20' duties within the Welsh legislation, they could enact the 'hard powers' currently lacking in Scotland's accountability system.
- By playing the role of an independent champion, they could provide energy, legitimacy and credibility for the NPF as a galvanising collective endeavour.
- By holding relationships with all public bodies, they could take a 'helicopter view' of progress and identify and unblock issues preventing the implementation of the NPF.
- By acting as a single front door for guidance, training and support for implementing the NPF, they could help public bodies engage constructively with new legislative duties.

4. Introduce new duties for public bodies - in return for new powers.

Our research found Scottish public bodies commit little attention to the NPF despite their duty under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to "have regard" for the National Outcomes. This duty should be extended and strengthened. Each public body should plan and account for their contribution to the National Outcomes and their application of the Christie-informed Ways of Working. The intention should be to normalise a model of outcome-oriented accountability which extends beyond short-term organisation-level targets and directives.

But without the right infrastructure in place, these duties will succeed only in creating a new tier of bureaucracy, further burdening public bodies at the very time they can least afford it. To avoid this, the WSD Bill must make two provisions. First, every public body must be able to access the necessary support, guidance and constructive challenge before they confront their statutory duties. This can be achieved, as in Wales, through a suitably resourced FGC or equivalent body.

Second, the WSD Bill should focus on enabling - not merely coercing - compliance with new duties. Facing diversionary performance targets, directives and duties, public bodies pursuing National Outcomes might feel they have their hands tied behind their back. The WSD Bill should task a new FGC or equivalent body to identify and remove these structural barriers on behalf of public bodies. This could be formalised in the Commissioner's review powers as a 'Right to Challenge' counteractive targets, procedures or directives preventing the pursuit of National Outcomes, or request a trial of exemption from these. In this way, local governments and public bodies might welcome the legislation as a route to empowerment and partnership, rather than as another obligation to central government.

5. Use the revised NPF as a tool for direct democracy.

Scottish Ministers hold a duty to consult on the set of National Outcomes every five years. The two reviews so far have been limited in scope and missed opportunities to meaningfully engage the Scottish public in setting future priorities for their country. To enhance its credibility and influence, the NPF should become an integral component of Scotland's democratic system.

The WSD Bill should extend the Ministerial duty to mandate a more ambitious National Conversation every parliamentary term, like those undertaken in [Wales](#) and [Germany](#), which involve the public in longer-term deliberative engagement. Scotland could leverage its expertise in developing National Citizen Assemblies, becoming the first nation to adopt an empowered, deliberative model in setting its National Outcomes.

The National Conversation should be overseen by the newly appointed National Advisory Board and supported by the FGC or equivalent body. That Board should oversee the National Conversation's design and delivery and deliberate over evidence gathered to set new National Outcomes, in line with the Wellbeing Roundtable approach used in Scotland in 2011.

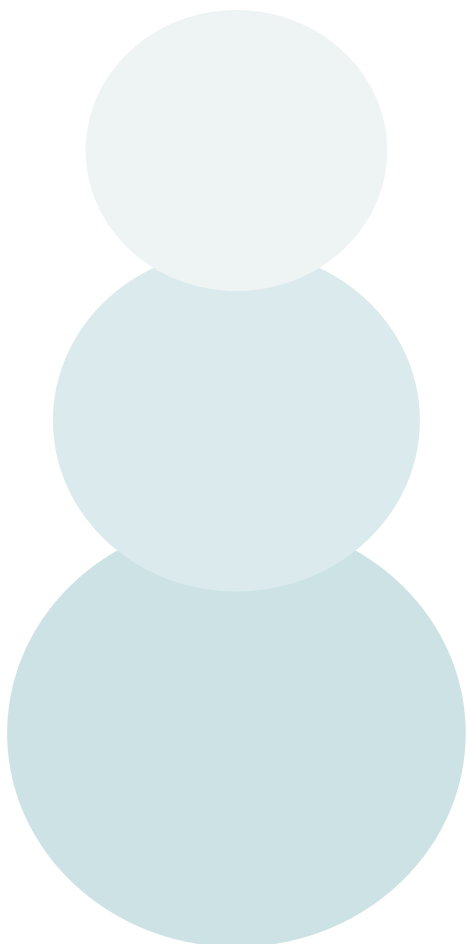
6. Review the NPF's integration, not just its content

The Scottish Government has responded to the Finance and Public Administration Committee's recent review by [committing to publish an implementation plan](#). Our [research](#) shows that a "smart power" approach, which combines both soft and hard powers, is essential to effective integration. The WSD Bill should therefore require Scottish Ministers to consult on, develop and present before Parliament a revised implementation plan as part of its continuous improvement approach.

The National Advisory Board, again operating similarly to the 2011 Roundtable, should lead the consultation and development process of this document, supported by the Future Generations Commissioner or equivalent agency. That Board's report into the use and impact of the revised NPF in Scottish public life should form the basis for a revised implementation plan in the following parliamentary term.

Summary

The NPF has recently been positioned as a means for governing a 'Wellbeing Economy'. But it can work far more generally as a tool for governing well. Given the right tools by the WSD Bill, the NPF could help align accountability, incentives and support around the long-term outcomes which matter most to the Scottish public. The key challenges facing this administration – from child poverty to net zero to the increasing demand on health and social care – all demand this mode of operation. John Swinney was Cabinet Secretary when the NPF was first introduced as a galvanising collective ambition in 2007. With the WSD Bill, he now has the opportunity to turn that ambition into action.



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The proposed new National Outcomes

CARE	We are cared for as we need throughout our lives and value all those providing care
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	We grow up loved, safe and respected and every single one of us can realise our full potential
CLIMATE ACTION	We live sustainably, achieve a just transition to net zero and build Scotland's resilience to climate change
COMMUNITIES	We live in communities that are connected, inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
CULTURE	We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely
WELLBEING ECONOMY AND FAIR WORK	We have a competitive, entrepreneurial economy that is fair, green and growing, with thriving businesses and industry and fair work for everyone
EDUCATION AND LEARNING	We are well educated, have access to high quality learning throughout our lives and are able to contribute to society
ENVIRONMENT	We actively protect, restore, enhance and enjoy our natural environment
EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS	We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination
HEALTH	We are mentally and physically healthy and active
HOUSING	We live in safe, high-quality and affordable homes that meet our needs
INTERNATIONAL	We are connected, open, show leadership and make a positive contribution globally.
REDUCE POVERTY	We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally

Call for views questions

At present, the NPF purpose is “To focus on creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing and sustainable and inclusive economic growth”. The Scottish Government proposes to update the NPF’s purpose to “To improve the wellbeing of people living in Scotland now and in the future”

1. What are your views of this updated purpose for the National Performance Framework?
2. In your view, do the proposed National Outcomes match the purpose of the National Performance Framework (please explain your answer)?
3. What do you think of the changes being proposed?
4. Are there any policy priorities that should be reflected in the proposed National Outcomes but which, you consider, are not?
5. What are your views on the Scottish Government’s consultation on the proposed National Outcomes?

In deciding on its proposed National Outcomes the Scottish Government must consider how the outcomes will reduce inequalities.

6. How do you think the proposed National Outcomes will impact on inequality?

The United Nations (UN) has set a series of [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) that are part of an internationally agreed performance framework to be achieved by 2030. The Scottish Government says that the National Performance Framework is Scotland’s way to reflect the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals.

7. Do you think the proposed National Outcomes align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (please explain your answer)?

The Scottish Government says that through the National Outcomes, the NPF provides a framework for working together and planning of policy and services across the whole range of Scotland’s civic society, including public and private sectors, voluntary organisations, businesses, and communities.

8. To what extent do the proposed National Outcomes support joined-up policy making in Scotland?

The Scottish Government has committed work with wide range of others during the development of an implementation plan to ensure the success of the NPF across the Scottish Government, the wider public sector and beyond.

9. What should the implementation plan contain to make sure that the National Outcomes are used in decision-making?