

# Response: National Performance Framework

April 2026

## Introduction

In a [letter to the Convenor of the Finance and Public Administration Committee](#) on the 16<sup>th</sup> February before the dissolution of parliament, Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes shared a new draft model for the National Performance Framework (NPF). In this letter, she also shared plans for engagement on the proposals and invited feedback from organisations across the public, third, and private sectors.

In our response, we share our reservations regarding the apparent change in direction since previous engagement in 2024. We also share our thoughts regarding the proposed National Outcomes, and the yet to be determined National Indicators, including our suggestion of closer alignment with the model adopted in Wales. Finally, we express the need for the NPF to be more explicitly embedded in all levels of decision-making, budgeting, and scrutiny.

## About Us

We are a movement for health creation working to reduce health inequalities to enable the people of Scotland to live well. We believe that health is more than the absence of illness, and together with our members and partners we champion this belief. We collaborate to provide the national voice for third sector health organisations in Scotland.

Through our policy work, Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS) seeks to ensure that the experiences, knowledge, and interests of our 300+ members and stakeholders are reflected in national decision-making about health inequalities and health creation. We regularly consult with our members to ensure that our policy voice and priorities are reflective of their views and interests.

## Our Response

### Framework Name

As an organisation that prioritises health creation, we welcome the focus on collective wellbeing within the proposed Framework. We further agree that the word ‘performance’ in the name of the Framework is not reflective of its renewed purpose as an aspirational vision

of sustainable and long-term wellbeing for the people of Scotland. We believe that any new name should emphasise the focus on long-term ambitions and, with this in mind, our preferred name would be ‘Scotland’s Future Wellbeing’ or ‘Framework for Scotland’s Future’. This focus on the word ‘future’ reflects successful models internationally, particularly the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act](#), which defines seven Well-being goals.

## National Outcomes and Indicators

Our strategic focus on health creation and addressing health inequalities at VHS clearly aligns across all six proposed outcomes, particularly the ‘Healthy’ Outcome. It is unclear, however, how the six proposed outcomes relate to the thirteen national outcomes proposed in 2024, or indeed how they reflect feedback from the extensive public engagement undertaken that same year and we would welcome clarification on the rationale for such a shift. The publication of the significantly changed proposals in such close proximity to the Scottish parliament election also provides less opportunity for meaningful engagement or parliamentary scrutiny given the extent of the changes proposed.

The [Finance and Public Administration Committee Inquiry into the proposed National Outcomes in 2024](#) reported competing views on the ideal number of National Outcomes. It concluded that further participatory consultation with citizens to ‘explore the potential consequences’ would be preferable. There is a risk that reducing the number of outcomes by more than half could, as stated by one of our members, ‘make them so high level that they lose meaning’. The proposed reduction also, in our view, serves to distance the outcomes from the more tangible [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), of which there are seventeen.

We also believe that the explicit focus on rights and equity has been lost in the new National Outcomes. In the previous iteration, there was a dedicated outcome related to equality and human rights. We believe that a seventh outcome named ‘Equal’ or ‘Fair’ would ensure that this focus is explicit. This would also align with SDG ten, ‘Reduced Inequalities’, and the Welsh Well-being goal ‘A more equal Wales’.

The lack of progress in reviewing the National Performance Framework and finalising the new National Outcomes in recent years, despite considerable consultation and parliamentary scrutiny in 2024, has also stalled the development of the National Indicators. We believe that these are arguably more important than the Outcomes in meaningfully setting policy priorities, allocating resources, and measuring progress. The indicators will be particularly pertinent as measures of success with the proposed reduction to six ‘high-level’ National Outcomes.

It is vital that the development of these National Indicators is completed in partnership with wider stakeholders, including the Third Sector through intermediary bodies like Voluntary Health Scotland. This will help to ensure that indicators draw from a range of data sources -

both qualitative and quantitative - and are reflective of all current and future activity to improve collective wellbeing. Indicators should be further developed to measure progress in shifting to preventative models, particularly in health, to ensure future public service sustainability and improve collective wellbeing.

In summary, we would ask that a clear plan and timeline for finalising the review of the NPF, should be agreed within six months of the election. Given the delays in recent years, we would like to see the revised NPF, including National Outcomes and Indicators, finalised within one year, with time built in for meaningful stakeholder engagement and parliamentary scrutiny.

### **Long-term Thinking and Wellbeing at the Apex of Decision-making**

It is our view that the National Performance Framework has the potential to play a central role in enabling long-term thinking and ensuring that wellbeing is at the apex of decision-making. It could, and should, provide a clear thread of continuity through government policy and budgeting, and a long-term lens for parliamentary scrutiny centred around wellbeing. However, the achievement of this in practice will require the NPF to be more explicitly embedded into government and parliamentary processes.

It was identified in the [Finance and Public Administration Inquiry Report](#) into the National Performance Framework that visibility of the NPF in Government strategies, policy and the Programme for Government is ‘implicit’, but that ‘visibility does matter’ until the NPF is effectively embedded. With this in mind, clearer standards for the *explicit* alignment of the NPF to Government strategies, policy and the Programme for Government would help to enable long-term planning to achieve collective wellbeing, and more transparent continuity of policy.

It would further enable long-term thinking, beyond the electoral cycle, if the NPF was afforded a greater degree of separation from the government. At present, the government has a central role in reviewing the National Outcomes, setting National Indicators, and measuring progress. Perhaps oversight of the NPF from an independent authority, such as Audit Scotland, would remove any perception that the NPF could be used as a political tool. In Wales, the Future Generations Commissioner is independent from the Welsh government, and his role is to act as a guardian of future generations, encourage public bodies to take greater account of the long-term impact of the things they do, and monitor and assess the extent to which well-being objectives set by public bodies are being met. A similar approach in Scotland, ideally utilising existing structures, would greatly increase the legitimacy and efficacy of the NPF.

Finally, to ensure that the NPF is fully and continuously embedded in decision-making and scrutiny, it is vital that reviews of the NPF take significantly less time than the current review. It is important that the National Outcomes are reviewed on a regular basis, in line with requirements in the [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#). However, the delay

in the current review has meant that the NPF, and the National Outcomes, have been archived from the Scottish Government website for well over a year and straddling an election. This likely means that the next Government will be setting strategic policies without reference to the NPF or the National Outcomes which is disappointing and sets an unwelcome precedent.

### **‘Ways of Working’**

We welcome the proposed shared ‘ways of working’ that embed a culture of strategic, long-term planning where the national outcomes are at the apex of decision-making. As stated previously, clearer standards for explicit reference to the NPF and national outcomes in decision-making, budgeting, and parliamentary scrutiny are required to fully embed the NPF. Whilst the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 does detail legislative requirements for reporting against the national outcomes, this has not resulted in the NPF being fully embedded thus far. Indeed, neither the 2024-25 or 2025-26 Programme for Governments are explicitly linked to the national outcomes.

Accountability and transparency should be central considerations in developing Scotland’s Ways of Working - how will government officials be held accountable, and how will the national outcomes shape parliamentary scrutiny? The ‘Impact Assessment’ model currently utilised for new policy and legislation could be more closely, and explicitly, aligned with the national outcomes to ensure better accountability and transparency at all levels of decision-making and budgeting. We are also seeing the introduction of a [Health in All Policies \(HiAP\)](#) approach, spearheaded by Public Health Scotland, which could provide a useful model to adapt for ensuring greater accountability and transparency around the implementation of the NPF going forward.

## **Conclusion**

In our response, we share a number of recommendations to ensure that the NPF better supports long-term decision-making on collective wellbeing in Scotland. Our recommendations are:

### **Framework Name**

- Ensure that any new name emphasises the focus on long-term ambitions related to collective wellbeing, such as ‘Scotland’s Future Wellbeing’ or ‘Framework for Scotland’s Future’.

### **National Outcomes and Indicators**

- Consider further timely engagement on the proposed National Outcomes given the significant deviation from the previous proposals in 2024.
- Introduce an additional National Outcome focused on equality and human rights, in alignment with the SDGs and the Welsh Well-being Outcomes.

- Ensure that wider stakeholders, including the third sector, are meaningfully involved in the development of National Indicators through intermediary bodies like Voluntary Health Scotland.
- Implement a clear plan and timeline for finalising the review of the NPF, including National Outcomes and Indicators, within six months of the election.
- Finalise the review of the National Outcomes and Indicators within one year of the election, including time for meaningful stakeholder engagement and parliamentary scrutiny.

#### **Long-term Thinking and Wellbeing at the Apex of Decision-making**

- Implement clearer standards for how the NPF should inform decision-making, budgeting and parliamentary scrutiny.
- Explore options for greater independent oversight of the NPF in future through bodies such as Audit Scotland.
- Implement time limits for future reviews of the NPF and the national outcomes to guard against significant delays.

#### **‘Ways of Working’**

- Ensure that accountability and transparency are central values in Scotland’s Ways of Working.
- Adapt existing approaches, such as the Impact Assessment model and Health in All Policies, to ensure the NPF and national outcomes are fully embedded at all levels of decision-making and budgeting.

## **Further Information**

If you require additional information about any of the points made in this briefing or if you would like to discuss them further, you can contact our Policy and Public Affairs Lead, Sarah Latto, by emailing [sarah.latto@vhscotland.org.uk](mailto:sarah.latto@vhscotland.org.uk).