

Scottish Parliament Finance and Public Administration Committee Call for Views for National Performance Framework: Inquiry into proposed National Outcomes

Response from Obesity Action Scotland
Closing date: 28 June 2024

Question 1: What are your views on this updated purpose of the National Performance Framework?

We find the updated purpose watered down, compared to the previous one. It is concerning that specific reference to sustainable and inclusive economic growth has been removed. Ensuring economic growth is both sustainable and inclusive is an essential component of meeting the aims of the National Performance Framework and National Objectives, and to deliver a healthier and happier Scotland for all. For example, with regards to obesity, by removing sustainable and inclusive from the updated purpose, this could lead to certain groups of individuals being left behind such as through widened inequalities and increased weight stigma, both of which impact the ability of individuals to participate in the economy and negatively impacts on wellbeing.

Further, we note that 'flourish' has been removed from the updated purpose and has instead been replaced by 'improve.' We would argue there is a real difference between what it means to flourish and what it means to improve, with the former much more ambitious than the latter. We are concerned about the practical implications of this for what the National Performance Framework seeks to achieve.

It is welcome that a future looking element has been added to the purpose. Ensuring decisions made now account for the needs of future generations is an important consideration and should be a key focus of the National Performance Framework.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires a review of the National Outcomes to be undertaken every 5 years, and this call for views forms part of that review process. However, in relation to this, we are concerned that there is no mention of making any amendments to the Act as it reads currently. The current wording of the Act states that public authorities are required to have regard to the National Outcomes. However, we feel this is weak and needs to be strengthened to ensure the legislation is effective, and the interests of current and future generations are upheld. We called for this in our response to the recent Scottish Government consultation on the proposed Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill¹, and would like to see this change actioned as part of the process of reviewing the National Outcomes. We understand the outcome of this consultation has not been published, and we await to see how proposals within it will be taken forward.

¹ <https://www.obesityactionscotland.org/media/scnnl2jg/oas-response-wellbeing-and-sustainable-development-bill-february-2024.pdf>

Question 2: In your view, do the proposed National Outcomes match the purpose of the National Performance Framework? Please explain your answer

We feel the proposed National Outcomes match the purpose of the National Performance Framework to an extent. There is some reference to wellbeing in some of the National Outcomes, but we don't feel these references are strong enough to deliver this purpose. As outlined in our response to question 1, we also feel the revised purpose of the National Performance Framework has been weakened from the original purpose. We comment on the specific National Outcomes in our response to the next question.

Question 3: What do you think of the changes being proposed?

We will comment on the proposed changes to each National Outcome we wish to comment on in turn.

Children and young people National Outcome

Revised National Outcome: We grow up loved, safe and respected and every single one of us can realise our full potential

We are disappointed that healthy hasn't been added to the Outcome. We called for this in our response to the Scottish Government's earlier consultation on the review². Children and young people have a right to grow up healthy and this should be made explicit and enshrined within the National Outcomes. For children and young people to reach their full potential, they need to be healthy. This is also essential for achievement of central aspects of the vision and many, if not all, of the associated indicators. Omission of it risks excluding children and young people who are unwell or living with disabilities such as from obesity from the ambit of the National Outcomes. Additionally, for consistency with the National Outcome on health (discussed later in our response), healthy needs to be included in this Outcome.

The Outcome states "*we uphold the human rights of all children and young people and do all we can to ensure they grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding, through which they can flourish.*" Children and young people can only flourish if they are healthy, and their right to be healthy is recognised. Furthermore, given that the importance of flourishing is reflected in this statement, it is disappointing that it has been removed from the overall purpose the National Outcomes besides reflecting an internal inconsistency (as outlined in our response to question 1).

We believe the updated Outcome should be: *Children and young people – We grow up healthy, loved, safe and respected, and every single one can realise our full potential.*

We understand from the consultation document that the plan is to review the indicators associated with the National Outcomes at a later stage. When this review does take place, we believe there are some important indicators missing with regards to children and young people we would like to see included. For example, there are no indicators in relation to children's health, such as child weight. Data on this is recorded in the Scottish Health Survey and Primary 1 BMI statistics reported annually by Public Health Scotland, and so would likely meet a minimum data quality level, which is detailed as a requirement for indicators, on page 22 of the consultation document. Additionally, we would like to see the primary 1 BMI measurement extended to also include children in primary 7, to be equivalent to what is recorded in England. Expanding the measurement programme in such a way would provide a more comprehensive picture of child weight in Scotland, monitoring weight changes at a population level over a number of years.

² <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/media/4r5oz5ma/obesity-action-scotland-response-review-of-national-outcomes-call-for-evidence-final.pdf>

There is currently an indicator on healthy weight, but not a specific one for child healthy weight. We feel it would be more appropriate to have child healthy weight listed as a separate indicator from adult healthy weight. Having separate indicators would make it easier to monitor progress in achieving the indicator(s) for adults and children. It would also recognise the commitment by the Scottish Government to halve childhood obesity by 2030, which it committed to in the 2018/19 Programme for Government and features in the 2018 Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan³. Having a separate indicator could act as a further catalyst for achieving this commitment and recognises the important role that obesity prevention, particularly in the early years, plays. Other indicators we proposed for inclusion in our response to the Scottish Government consultation include free school meals and maternal obesity – these are both important parameters for child health and should be considered as indicators.

Communities National Outcome

Revised National Outcome: we live in communities that are connected, inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe

It is once again disappointing that healthy hasn't been included in the revised Outcome. We called for this in our response to the previous Scottish Government consultation on the topic. For communities to be connected, inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe everyone in those communities needs to be healthy or enjoy support if unhealthy, and the community itself also needs to be health promoting and health sustaining.

We know that what's around us shapes us, and this should be recognised within the National Outcomes. The places and spaces we live in, visit, and use every day have a profound impact on our health and wellbeing. It is disappointing that the importance of physical communities for their impact on health is not recognised in the Outcome and associated text in the consultation document.

For example, lack of availability of healthy food outlets in communities has a profound impact on health and can drive inequality. Evidence shows that it is those living in the most deprived communities who are the most likely to be exposed to social and environmental factors that negatively impact on their health. Research has found that essential food items can cost up to three times as much in rural and deprived areas⁴, and the clustering of fast-food outlets also disproportionately affects deprived areas⁵. Further, the poorest fifth of UK households would need to spend 50% of their disposable income on food to meet the Eatwell Guide healthy diet, compared to just 11% for the richest fifth⁶. There needs to be recognition of the importance of the places we live in for health and happiness. Linking in with planning legislation, and utilising National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) locally to make this a reality, by delivering healthy food environments, rather than an abundance of unhealthy fast-food outlets, provides an opportunity in this regard. NPF4 provides a basis for action – it contains a commitment that where development proposals are likely to have a significant adverse effect on health, they will not be supported, and a health impact assessment (HIA) may be required, and a presumption against drive-through takeaways, unless they are specifically detailed within local development plans⁷. This provides a useful foundation for action, and we would like to see the effect on our health of the places and spaces we live in every day, and the role the planning system plays in this, better reflected in this Outcome.

³ Scottish Government (2018) A Healthier Future – Scotland's Diet & Healthy Weight Delivery Plan

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2018/07/healthier-future-scotlands-diet-healthy-weight-delivery-plan/documents/00537708-pdf/00537708-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00537708.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/What-are-the-barriers-to-eating-healthy-in-the-UK.pdf>

⁵ Macdonald, L, Olsen J. R, Shortt, N. K and Ellaway, A (2018) Do 'environmental bads' such as alcohol, fast food, tobacco, and gambling outlets cluster and co-locate more in deprived areas in Glasgow City, Scotland? Health and Place 51, 224 – 231

⁶ Food Foundation (2023) The Broken Plate 2023. The State of the Nation's Food System

https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/TFF_The%20Broken%20Plate%202023_Digital_FINAL..pdf

⁷ <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/blogs/does-revised-draft-npf4-represent-a-positive-step-for-health-in-planning/>

Wellbeing Economy and Fair Work National Outcome

Revised National Outcome: We have a competitive, entrepreneurial economy that is fair, green and growing, with thriving businesses and industry and fair work for everyone

It is positive to see the name of this Outcome has been updated to wellbeing economy and fair work, having previously been economy. However, this change doesn't seem to have been reflected within or throughout the Outcome itself. For example, there are limited mentions of wellbeing in the accompanying text, and it has introduced an enhanced focus on businesses and industry, which wasn't there previously.

The accompanying text detailed in page 139 of the consultation document does recognise that investing in a wellbeing economy can drive economic prosperity and support income, jobs, and quality of life for everyone. It goes on to state *"Economic development takes a whole system, partnership approach between public, private, voluntary and community spheres, helping to reduce poverty and inequality and improve health and living standards across all of Scotland."* It is welcome this has been recognised within the Outcome, however, we feel this is not sufficiently reflected in the accompanying indicators and in other parts of the text. Further, as previously mentioned, the addition of explicit reference to businesses and industry within the revised Outcome itself suggests a prioritisation of businesses and their interests over other core components of the wellbeing economy. As part of this, we would like to see health-harming product industries that take away from the Outcome of a wellbeing economy excluded from the process, as their activities do not support achievement of a wellbeing economy.

In our response to the previous Scottish Government consultation, we called for health to be included and reflected within the Outcome, as population health and economic performance are inextricably linked. A healthy working population drives healthy economic performance and equally, an unhealthy workforce drives poor(er) economic performance. The costs of population ill-health to society and the economy are huge. For example, a recently published report has calculated the cost of adult obesity to the UK economy to be £58 million each year⁸, with an estimated annual cost of £600 million alone to the NHS in Scotland⁹.

Annex 5 on page 147 of the consultation document lists economic growth and economic participation as indicators. The economic growth indicator measure is GDP. As previously mentioned, we understand that the plan is to review the indicators at a later date. In this regard, it is vital that the indicators are updated to better reflect the wellbeing economy approach, as there are currently no indicators specifically focused on this. Indicators focused solely on economic growth and participation are not appropriate measures of a wellbeing economy. In developing wellbeing economy-focused indicators, the Wellbeing Economy Monitor developed by the Scottish Government could be used as the basis. The Wellbeing Economy Monitor has 14 measures focused on the areas of human, natural, social, and produced and financial capital, and includes measures on inequality, preventable deaths, and poverty¹⁰. Measuring economic growth and overall economic performance by GDP alone is no longer appropriate, and the indicators need to be updated to deliver a wellbeing economy. It is disappointing that the Monitor hasn't been referenced within the updated Outcome.

Having an Outcome and indicators that look beyond simply measuring GDP is vitally important. Action to achieve improved healthy weight outcomes is crucial for delivering economic success. Obesity is impacting on the productivity of our workforce and therefore our economy and we must

⁸ Frontier Economics (2022) Estimating the full costs of obesity <https://www.frontier-economics.com/media/5094/the-full-cost-of-obesity-in-the-uk.pdf>

⁹ Butland B, Jebb S, Kopelman P, et al (2007) Foresight. Tackling obesities: Future choices - project report. 2nd edition

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2023) The Wellbeing Economy Monitor – December 2023 update <https://www.gov.scot/publications/wellbeing-economy-monitor-december-2023-update/documents/>

take the steps necessary to improve population health and recognise its link to ensuring a healthy, active workforce.

The Scottish Government previously consulted on a proposed Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill which is welcome. As we understand it, work is currently ongoing on the Bill. In our response to the consultation, we highlighted the need for a clear definition of what is meant by wellbeing, which was absent in the consultation proposals. Without a clear definition, it will be more challenging to embed the concept of wellbeing into legislation and make it statutory¹¹. In our response to the consultation, we proposed that wellbeing should be defined based on the definition outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO) which defines wellbeing as “... a positive state experienced by individuals and societies... it encompasses quality of life, as well as the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world in accordance with a sense of meaning and purpose”¹². This definition is widely recognised, evidence based, and accepted globally, and would provide a clear foundation for developing a definition of wellbeing for legislation in Scotland.

Health National Outcome

Revised National Outcome: We are mentally and physically healthy and active

It is welcome that the Outcome has been updated to specifically reflect mental and physical health, and to see a focus on preventing ill-health in the accompanying text in the consultation document. It is also welcome to see healthy and affordable food is available to all communities and minimising the impact of unhealthy food, tobacco, alcohol and drugs, and provide support where it is required, referenced within the associated text of this Outcome. However, if this is to be achieved, it needs to be clear what actions will be taken and how they will be measured. The current indicators are not appropriate for this purpose. It is unclear within the Outcome and current indicators how these commitments would be measured. The indicators should therefore be updated accordingly when the review of the indicators takes place.

We note that combating food and drink industry facilitation of ill health has been removed from the accompanying text for the Outcome. This was included in the previous version¹³, which was consulted on, and it is deeply disconcerting to see it removed from this updated version. Its removal is concerning given the known role industry play in contributing to poor diet and health outcomes and indicates a prioritisation of business needs over that of public health.

With regards to the indicator on health risk behaviours, we would like to see this amended and updated, when the review of the indicators is undertaken. The indicator as it is currently written remains focused on an individualist narrative, emphasising the behaviours and decisions of individuals, rather than recognising the structural drivers of these behaviours and outcomes. We suggest the indicator is amended to remove the focus on behaviours and is instead replaced with a focus on the wider determinants of health, including commercial determinants.

Related to this, the National Outcomes should take into account the Public Health Framework that is under development and ensure the National Outcomes align with the Framework and support delivery of it. Further, we understand the Scottish Government plan to hold a National Conversation on the future of the NHS in Scotland. The National Outcomes should inform this process, to include effective and timely support for those living with overweight and obesity.

¹¹ <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/media/scnnl2jg/oas-response-wellbeing-and-sustainable-development-bill-february-2024.pdf>

¹² World Health Organization (2021) Health Promotion Glossary of Terms 2021
<https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/350161/9789240038349-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

¹³ <https://consult.gov.scot/national-performance-framework-unit/review-of-the-npf/>

Reduce poverty National Outcome

Revised National Outcome: We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally

There has been limited revision to the revised Outcome. It is welcome the name of the Outcome has been updated from poverty to reduce poverty, to reflect the need to focus on actions that help reduce and eliminate poverty. In the accompanying text, it is also welcome that food is listed in terms of something everyone should have access to and as a recognition of its relationship with poverty. We would like to see this taken a step further to state healthy food, recognising the close linkage between diet and poverty, and how this can drive inequalities.

The indicators which sit under this Outcome are cost of living and food insecurity. We believe both should be retained, as important measures of poverty, however, there is scope to improve them. With regards to the cost-of-living indicator, we note this refers to the percentage of net income spent on fuel, food, and housing. In our response to the previous Scottish Government consultation on the topic, we expressed our concern with collating these three items together into one measurement, as this masks significant differences between the different elements. It is welcome that food is included as part of this calculation. However, we would like to see these three elements separated out to be calculated individually, to provide a more accurate reflection of the contribution of each of these elements to the cost of living. Food continues to be one of the main contributory elements to the rising cost of living, with food prices fluctuating by as much as 20% of the course of the last 18 months¹⁴. Within the overall rise, it is healthier and staple food products, like eggs, some fruit and vegetables, and milk that have seen the biggest rises, with prices of unhealthy discretionary products rising much less sharply. The indicator therefore needs to be updated to include a separate measure of each of the three items, one each specifically for food and HFSS food products. Additionally, we would like to see an indicator which records the difference in price changes between unhealthy food and drink products and healthy and staple products.

The indicator on food insecurity reports on the proportion of adults who have indicated they are worried would run out of food. It is welcome this indicator is included as access to food is an important measure of dietary outcomes. We would like to see the indicator expanded to measure food insecurity in more depth, specifically what proportion of adults have insecure access to healthy food. This is linked to the cost-of-living indicator discussed previously. We outlined this in our response to the previous Scottish Government consultation and would like to reiterate it here. We are concerned that the indicator has not been updated to include this, as having easy and affordable access to a healthy diet is essential for health and wellbeing.

Question 4: Are there any policy priorities that should be reflected in the proposed National Outcomes which, you consider, are not?

We feel that inequality is not sufficiently considered, despite being detailed as a primary consideration of all the National Outcomes. Addressing inequality is mentioned in some of the Outcomes and it is welcome there are some indicators specifically focused on this, i.e. income inequality and wealth inequality. However, these are outlined as measures and the Outcomes say very little overall about how inequality will actually be reduced.

Further, commercial, and other wider determinants of health, are not reflected or properly considered within the National Outcomes. This is a significant omission given their known impact on many of the core elements of many if not all the Outcomes. A recently published report by World Health Organization (WHO) Europe has acutely demonstrated the profound impact of commercial determinants of health, with almost two-thirds (61.3%) of all NCD-related deaths across the European region directly attributable to key risk factors such as unhealthy food, tobacco, alcohol

¹⁴ Food Foundation Food Price tracker – April 2024 <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/news/food-prices-tracker-april-2024>

and fossil fuels, equivalent to 2.7 million deaths annually, which is nearly a quarter of all deaths¹⁵. Modelling data from Scotland shows that obesity-related NCD deaths are continuing to rise, and are projected to increase by 10% by 2026, if no action is taken, such as addressing the commercial determinants of health¹⁶. These figures demonstrate why it is vitally important the commercial determinants of health are a central component of the National Outcomes, as the main framework driving policy decisions in Scotland.

Question 5: What are your views on the Scottish Government’s consultation on the proposed National Outcomes?

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

We have outlined our comments and concerns with regards to each of the Outcomes in our response to question 4.

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

We note the additional note provided alongside question 5 indicates that the Scottish Government must consider how the Outcomes will reduce inequalities. However, as detailed in our response to question 4, we don’t feel that inequality has been consistently considered across the National Outcomes.

Question 7: Do you think the proposed National Outcomes align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals? Please explain your answer

Yes, we do feel that the proposed National Outcomes do largely align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Page 21 of the consultation document outlines where each of proposed changes bring closer alignment to the SDGs which is welcome.

However, there remains an issue of there not being an agreed definition in legislation of sustainable development, which can make it more challenging to map alignment with the SDGs.

In the recent Scottish Government consultation on the proposed Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill, a statutory definition of sustainable development was discussed, which emphasised the need for alignment with the commonly regarded definition of “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. In our response to the consultation, we agreed this to be a good basis for defining sustainable development, but it could be expanded further to include concepts of fairness and equity, to ensure that any decisions made are done in so in a way which doesn’t undermine fairness and equity and doesn’t widen inequalities¹⁷.

Ensuring a statutory definition of sustainable development based on the principles outlined above is enshrined within legislation and will help strengthen linkages between the SDGs and National Outcomes.

Further, looking at an example from a specific SDG, Goal 17 requires governments to address conflicts of interests. This provides a basis and opportunity for taking action forward and should be more strongly reflected in the National Outcomes.

¹⁵ World Health Organization European Region (2024) Commercial determinants of non-communicable diseases in the WHO European Region <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/376957>

¹⁶ NCD Alliance Scotland (2022) Trend projection of preventable risk factors in Scotland <https://www.bhf.org.uk/-/media/files/what-we-do/in-your-area-scotland-pages/ncd/scotland-trend-projections.pdf?rev=bf18fb8533f04e419a0e104f642e01bb&hash=48CB25EDB4DAB657DCE0B6F69D50B5ED>

¹⁷ <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/media/scnnl2jg/oas-response-wellbeing-and-sustainable-development-bill-february-2024.pdf>

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

The proposed National Outcomes should support joined-up policy making in Scotland. Page 101 of the consultation document discusses an implementation gap which was reported as a finding of the previous consultation and outlines the need for better policy coherence and better alignment, improved delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals, and better use of the NPF to inform budget decisions.

The proposed National Outcomes will support this joined-up policy making and reduce the implementation gap to an extent as wellbeing is identified as a common thread through most of the Outcomes. However, as discussed throughout our response, we do not feel that this is reflected strongly enough and will therefore not deliver truly joined-up policy making in Scotland. There still remains too many competing priorities within the National Outcomes, such as (public) health and economic growth, which prevent this from happening in reality, and the Outcomes say very little about how such tensions will be resolved.

From what we understand, there are no indicators specifically focused on ensuring delivery on joined-up policy making and coherence. There needs to be a specific indicator for this, as without one, a joined-up approach will be challenging to achieve.

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

The implementation plan should contain a commitment to strengthening the Community Empowerment Act, to help ensure the National Outcomes are used in decision-making. Currently, the Act outlines that relevant public authorities are required to have to regard to the National Outcomes in their decision-making. This position is weak and needs to be strengthened, to ensure the legislation is effective, and the interests of current and future generations are upheld. This should be a statutory duty to ensure full compliance. Stakeholders in previous consultation processes, including that on the proposed Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill, acknowledge that have regard to doesn't go far enough. "Have regard to" is subjective which can therefore make it difficult to know if the National Outcomes have been fully considered in decision making processes.

We propose that "have regard to" is replaced with something more concrete such as "must comply or must meet..." the National Outcomes in all decision-making processes. To make implementation as effective as possible and to achieve the most desirable outcomes, the National Outcomes, and the indicators within them should be updated, as discussed throughout this response, and also to better reflect the principles of wellbeing and sustainable development, which sit alongside the Outcomes.

Related to this, clear definitions of wellbeing and sustainable development, established through the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill, are required to support implementation of the National Outcomes, and should be detailed within the implementation plan.

Further, the implementation plan also needs to specify how the National Outcomes will be funded. For the Health Outcome, for example, a health supplement could be used to fund policy activities that support delivery of the Outcome. Monies would be raised from charging a supplement to industries which produce products harmful to health, which is then fed back into the system to be used to support and fund policies that support delivery of health and wellbeing outcomes.

About us

Obesity Action Scotland provide clinical leadership and independent advocacy on preventing and reducing overweight and obesity in Scotland.

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