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Leas Phrìomh Mhinistear agus Rùnaire a' Chaibineit
airson Eaconamaidh agus Gàidhlig
Kate Forbes MSP
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Karen Adam MSP

Convener
Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice
Committee

By email: EHRCJ.committee@parliament.scot

19 December 2024

Dear Karen,

Thank you for your correspondence of 20 November 2024 regarding the Committee's views on the proposed National Outcomes. I understand you addressed your letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government as you chose to incorporate scrutiny of the proposed outcomes into your pre-Budget scrutiny process. I am replying as the Deputy First Minister has portfolio responsibility for National Outcomes, and the associated National Performance Framework (NPF). I am pleased you were able to ask the Minister for Equalities questions on the outcomes when taking pre-Budget evidence. Feedback from the Committee will be helpful as the Scottish Government finalises and implements the next iteration of the NPF.

The review is an opportunity to look afresh at how the NPF supports longer-term strategy within Government and nationally to improve the lives of the people of Scotland now and in the future. I have considered the recommendations raised in your letter and offered initial responses below. Our formal response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee inquiry report will be issued on 15 January.

Budget

I note the theme of how the National Outcomes link to budget setting was raised as part of your evidence gathering and in particular, note support for spending decisions to be justified on the basis of National Outcomes. The evidence you heard from Dr Alison Hosie from the Scottish Human Rights Commission is similar to evidence gathered across the inquiry on the expectation of stakeholders to see a change in the National Performance Framework to enable more meaningful connection between the NPF, the Programme for Government and the Budget. We are considering this feedback carefully and it will help inform our response to the FPAC inquiry report in January.

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Equalities

I welcome the Committee's support of the increased focus on equalities within the proposed National Outcomes and agree that the approach to implementation will be crucial to success. I note your concern that there has been limited time to consider the findings of the Thematic Gender Review due to it being published when most committees had concluded evidence-taking. I can assure the Committee that the Scottish Government is committed to transparency and will support comprehensive scrutiny of proposed policy as we continue to develop next steps following the review.

National Indicators

To ensure the indicator set remains fit for purpose and focused on measuring progress towards the updated National Outcomes, national indicators will be revised to reflect the changes agreed with parliament to the National Outcomes.

The indicator set is not designed to provide a comprehensive view of all available evidence but to give an indication of progress through some key headline measures, and the indicator set is being reviewed with this in mind.

The ability to disaggregate data across population groups and show how Scotland is progressing in reducing inequalities is an important criterion in the development of the refreshed National Indicator set to accompany refreshed National Outcomes. How the National Indicators can be better disaggregated, and the development of new measures to track inequalities is being considered as part of this.

Equalities data is currently reported on the NPF website for relevant National Indicators, including by gender or sex for each National Indicator where that data is available.

The Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-2025 sets the vision "to tackle structural and intersectional inequality of outcomes, Scotland's equality evidence base will become more accessible, wide-ranging and robust". This is being taken forward through a number of actions across multiple analytical areas, overseen by the Equality Data Improvement Programme. A stronger evidence base will enable the development and delivery of sound, inclusive policies and services and enable the measurement of improvements in the lives of all of Scotland's people.

An intersectional approach is necessary to properly capture the experiences of women and girls, who are members of interconnected social categories which often compound existing structural inequalities. Scottish Government analysts and the Chief Statistician are working to explore what options are available, in conjunction with ongoing work undertaken by the equalities team.

Scottish Government analysts are also working to develop a project with the support of the Chief Statistician and Chief Researcher to provide intersectional information, both qualitative and quantitative, for the NPF. This includes using a range of evidence to understand key issues.

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National outcome on gender inequality

One over-arching consideration in addressing the gender gaps in the NPF was whether or not to have a stand-alone National Outcome for Women. While some in the review process did call for this, others proposed mainstreaming gender across all the other National Outcomes.

A stand-alone National Outcome would be in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and would undoubtedly increase the prominence of gender in the framework. However, it was proposed that gender is instead mainstreamed more effectively throughout the National Outcomes and their extended definitions. This prevents the perception that other National Outcomes do not relate to women and is in line with the approach to protected characteristics that is taken throughout the rest of the framework.

The extended definitions of the National Outcomes provide an opportunity to address barriers to outcomes experienced by distinct groups. As such, proposed extended definitions for National Outcomes for Care, Health, Equality and Human Rights, and Reduce Poverty have been strengthened to address specific gendered inequalities which exist in Scotland.

Implementation

The Government recognises the challenges that remain around implementation and ensuring better use of the outcomes. Our intention is to continue to develop this and 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. We will consider what more needs to be done with regards to implementation and delivery of the NPF. It is vital that everyone works towards achieving the National Outcomes, and that incentives and accountability support this.

Next steps

As you will be aware, the Finance and Public Administration Committee's report on the inquiry has also now been published. The debate scheduled for 8 January will provide an opportunity to discuss the inquiry's findings, including the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee's recommendations, in more detail.

The timetable for publishing the agreed National Outcomes, the associated Implementation Plan, and the National Indicators will be confirmed following conclusion of the inquiry.

Once again, I extend my thanks to the Committee for its consideration of the National Outcomes.

Yours sincerely,

KATE FORBES

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