

SURF CONSULTATION RESPONSE:

National Performance Framework – Scotland's Wellbeing

About This Paper

In February 2026, the Scottish Government published an overview of proposed changes and key considerations relating to the National Performance Framework. NPF is currently undergoing a formal review, as part of the wider Public Service Reform Strategy. The purpose of the review is to further improve NPF and ensure it is fit for purpose, and that it reflects current policy trends and best practice.

Relevant background on this consultation can be found [here](#).

Please see below SURF's response to selected questions from this consultation.

CONCEPT

These changes hone our focus on long term wellbeing by basing it on the evidence of what works. Will this proposed approach support better decision making that will improve wellbeing? Will this renewed focus help with long-term thinking? Will having a more focussed wellbeing framework at the apex of decision making, enable the reduction of inequalities in Scotland?

The extent to which the proposed approach will support better decision making ultimately relies on how it is used by key stakeholders in government – both locally and nationally. The renewed focus on wellbeing, however, is something that SURF

welcomes, although there are some explicit ways in which an anti-poverty focus could be better integrated into the overall framework (see below for more info).

Of crucial importance will be how data is used, collected, aggregated, and – most important of all – presented, both to stakeholders, politicians, and the public.

Countries like Germany and New Zealand have successfully enabled buy-in to their frameworks because of the usefulness of the data and interactive tools that are designed and kept updated as part of the framework. This also builds trust and accountability. How we measure a reduction of poverty and integrate key data – such as the SIMD – will be crucial, but there are also longstanding questions about how data is used (and how useful it is) when looking at various regions in Scotland, especially rural and island areas.

How the qualitative element is incorporated into this remains a challenge. For many communities, top-level indicators reveal very little about the reality and lived-experience on the ground. While a qualitative understanding can help with this, such data can be difficult to integrate into a wider quantitative dashboard / system, and pose challenges when it comes to interpreting and acting on qualitative data such as case studies.

Success can also be measured in different ways in different communities. This can be a challenge of a future wellbeing framework. What does success look like for a deprived community with poor health outcomes, low employment, and high crime? How does the framework itself deal with the high inequalities that currently exist in Scotland? We have often heard about the postcode lottery effect determining your life outcomes, but how does a national framework help further our understanding of how these inequalities are best addressed and – perhaps more importantly – help embed accountability? This also raises the question of ownership of key indicators, how performance will be measured, and who will ultimately be held accountable.

We believe changing the name of the framework would better reflect its purpose while also making it more accessible to a wide range of audiences.

Possible names could include:

- ***Scotland's Wellbeing Framework***
 - ***Scotland's Wellbeing Goals***
 - ***Scotland's Wellbeing Vision***
- ***National Progress Framework***

- **Scotland's Goals**
- **How's Scotland?**
- **Scotland's Future**

Agree with changing the name to something that better represents the focus on wellbeing, rather than performance or progress. Scotland's Wellbeing Framework would be SURF's recommendation. Future, Goals, etc., may have political connotations and / or be easily misinterpreted, whereas there is a general public consensus around wellbeing as a non-political, cross-party priority.

OUTCOMES

This proposal has a smaller number of higher-level outcomes. Can you see how and where your work would contribute towards these outcomes? Is there something missing that isn't captured by any of the above outcomes?

In the fourth outcome, adding poverty is critical:

Secure – We live safe lives, free from violence, injustice, and poverty.

Although poverty and inequality is somewhat captured by the previous outcome (Prosperous), there is something about capturing this anti-poverty approach more broadly in the outcome – especially in a country which still suffers so deeply from poverty, especially regionally. Insecurity is not just about violence and injustice, it is also deeply connected to poverty – and rather than apply an 'anti-poverty lens' (see below for more detail) it would be better to name this explicitly. Many – if not all – of Scotland's key societal challenges arise from poverty.

In the first outcome, we would recommend adding the word actively so it reads as follows:

Connected – We participate freely and actively in the civic, cultural and social life of our communities.

This is because participating freely says very little about the *quality* of our engagement, it merely describes our ability to do so. While important, there is now enough evidence to suggest that active participation in civic, cultural, and social life is a good in itself, and brings with it myriad benefits for individuals and communities more broadly. Our ambition should be active participation.

This proposal discusses a range of cross-cutting perspectives (or lenses) that are critical to the success of national wellbeing goals. How should we best represent these in the final model?

While lenses and cross-cutting perspectives can be useful, these also have the potential to further complicate the wider framework. We have seen in some frameworks or tools that the addition of more and more lenses can, in some instances, detract from the broad use of the wider framework. It also may create a culture of creating additional lenses – and calls from certain organisations or sectors for bespoke lenses to be created – that may not add further value.

UNDERSTANDING OUR PROGRESS

While we are not inviting technical feedback on the national indicator set at this stage, we would welcome views on how we use them to better tell the story and to influence change in policy.

WAYS OF WORKING

Is this level of ambition enough or could we go further?

What would you want to see included in ways of working?

What opportunities do you see for improved implementation within your organisation and what might be important barriers?

Thinking about the Public Services Reform strategy, how could the reformed NPF help strengthen accountability and transparency and guide culture and behaviours?

Should Scotland introduce something similar to the Welsh Government's five ways of working? If so, this would be linked to the Public Services Reform Strategy so as not to duplicate work and over-burden public bodies.

That makes sense, especially further embedding prevention as part of the policy approach.

What would you like to see included in overarching guidance, materials and resources? Is there scope for collaboration to develop these?

The interactive dashboard in [New Zealand's Living Standards Framework](#) or the [Germany's interactive report](#) should be the ambition for Scotland.

This doesn't just shape policy decisions, it helps build transparency and accountability, and democratises data and information – all key outcomes the Scottish Government is already working towards. Such a tool could further help research, policy development, and generate community and democratic participation and engagement.

Committing to an iterative and open data tool is pivotal – and provides opportunities for Government to integrate new data systems and technologies in a way that actively shapes better understanding and transparency.

Whatever the NPF becomes must not just become a tool for Government to shape policy – it should also become a method for citizens to understand progress and embed accountability.

Data should also be provided at an appropriate regional level which is more local than Local Authorities.

End of SURF's response

Augustijn van Gaalen, Policy & Advocacy Manager, April 2026

Visit our [policy page](#) for more on SURF's policy influencing activities and other consultation responses.