

Carnegie UK response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee on legacy issues

February 2026

About Carnegie UK

Carnegie UK is a charitable foundation based in Dunfermline. Our purpose is better wellbeing for people in the UK and Ireland. We seek to achieve this by growing support for a wellbeing approach to public policy, working with governments and policymakers at all levels in the UK and Ireland to help them think differently about how we understand society and contribute to social progress. We work with partners to contribute to what is known about wellbeing, testing and studying what works in practice. We use this evidence to make the case for which approaches and systems need to change and recommend how to make that happen. Visit www.carnegieuk.org to find out more about our work on collective wellbeing.

We are pleased to submit evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee which reflects Carnegie UK's long-standing interest in public administration, public service reform and the National Performance Framework. We hope that this will be useful in informing your legacy report.

Committee remit – public administration

A Scottish Parliament committee should continue to have an explicit remit to scrutinise public administration over the next parliamentary term, building on the strong foundations laid down by the current committee. How government functions is an important matter for scrutiny and debate; our previous submissions to the Finance and Public Administration Committee highlighted persistent challenges in ensuring that Scotland's strategic frameworks and decision-making systems operate effectively and coherently.¹

It has been particularly useful to have a committee which takes an interest in the evolution and operation of the National Performance Framework (NPF), theoretically the guiding framework for the Scottish Government's policy governance. In our evidence on the NPF, we noted that significant weaknesses remain in how government uses the Framework to guide policy and resource decisions. We emphasised that national outcomes are not consistently embedded across government and that there remains a gap between policy ambition and delivery. Strengthening parliamentary oversight of public administration would support more consistent attention to implementation, accountability and alignment with strategic outcomes.

¹ Response to Scottish Parliament Finance and Public Administration Committee Consultation – Scottish Government Review of National Outcomes – June 2024,
Response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee: Inquiry into Public Administration - Effective Scottish Government decision-making – February 2023
National Performance Framework: Ambitions into Action – April 2022

In earlier evidence to the Parliament, we argued that the NPF must be more fully integrated into oversight and scrutiny if it is to function effectively as Scotland's strategic framework.² A committee with a defined public administration remit has a key role to play in examining system-wide barriers, monitoring adherence to agreed principles of good governance, and ensuring that long-term outcomes remain central to decision-making.

The work of this Committee has also identified issues relating to decision-making practices within the Scottish Government including transparency, record-keeping, clarity of roles and the use of evidence.³ Evidence received by your committee on effective decision-making shows that processes and behaviours vary substantially across government, and that improved scrutiny could help reinforce principles such as clear governance, appropriate challenge and stronger analytical support.⁴

Finally, wider committee work has shown that public administration issues cut across multiple areas of government. Reports considering the operation of public bodies and cross-government systems reinforce the need for a parliamentary forum dedicated to examining how institutions function and whether existing arrangements support effective delivery.

In Carnegie UK's view, embedding a standing remit on public administration within the committee structure of the Parliament would provide the continuity and focus required to support improvement, strengthen Parliament's ability to oversee the systems that enable effective government and enhance accountability.

The reinforcing benefits of the dual remit – finance and public administration

The next Finance and Public Administration Committee should ensure that scrutiny of Scotland's public finances and its systems of public administration are treated as mutually reinforcing elements of effective governance.

We believe that weaknesses in how the Scottish Government uses the National Performance Framework (NPF) and wider governance systems stem partly from insufficient parliamentary oversight of public administration. Strengthening this scrutiny is essential to improving long-term outcomes, accountability and decision-making; the Scottish Government will note and respond to signals sent by Parliament about what matters.

At the same time, the Committee's budget-focused work has repeatedly shown that financial decisions are not consistently aligned with outcomes, and that Parliament lacks clear sight of how spending choices advance strategic objectives. Improved oversight of public administration would directly support more effective financial scrutiny by illuminating whether systems, processes and behaviours are fit to deliver on budget commitments.⁵

Increasingly treating finance and public administration as interlinked topics would allow the Committee to examine not just how public money is spent, but whether Scotland's public sector is genuinely capable of delivering the outcomes that spending is intended to achieve.

2 Response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee: Inquiry into Public Administration - Effective Scottish Government decision-making – February 2023

3 Report on Public Administration - effective Scottish Government decision-making, July 2023

4 SPICe briefing - Summary of Evidence on Inquiry on Effective Scottish Government decision making

5 Written Submission from Carnegie UK - Finance and Public Administration Committee review of budget in practice – March 2025

Support for the scrutiny of public administration

Given that scrutiny of public administration involves assessing and analysing systems, culture, decision-making processes, and performance frameworks, we suggest that MSPs should receive tailored induction training on these public administration fundamentals. This will be particularly relevant for future members of a committee with specific responsibility for public administration.

Across the UK, parliamentary committees routinely appoint specialist advisers to bolster their expertise, particularly when inquiries involve complex administrative or technical matters. The successor committee (and the parliament as a whole) may wish to consider how elected members could best be supported to scrutinise the performance of government effectively.

Public administration scrutiny is as technically demanding as financial scrutiny. To deliver rigorous oversight, the committee must be supported by clerks with appropriate grounding in governance and scrutiny, and elected members must be inducted into the specialist lens required to examine administrative systems, not just policy or budgets.

Relationship between the Scottish Parliament, its committees, and the national Performance Framework

Over the next parliamentary term, the Scottish Parliament and all of its committees should adopt much more structured, consistent and influential engagement with the National Performance Framework (NPF). Previous Carnegie UK submissions to the Finance and Public Administration Committee highlighted that the NPF is not yet embedded across government and wider public services in a way that reliably guides long-term policy and strategy, decision-making and resource allocation. Strengthening parliamentary engagement is therefore essential.

We would encourage a constructive and early dialogue between the Parliament and the next Scottish Government with a view to building a shared understanding about the role that the NPF plays in the overall governance of policy and strategy. The relationship between long-term goals and medium-term activities could thereby be better understood and more effectively scrutinised.

Building on this common understanding, Committees should use the NPF data and associated ways of working as a key reference point when scrutinising legislation, budgets and public service reform proposals. This aligns with the Finance and Public Administration Committee's findings that the link between national outcomes and government activity remains unclear and that greater transparency and routine use of the NPF would improve accountability.⁶

In addition, Parliament should require transparent reporting from the Scottish Government on progress towards national outcomes, with committees empowered to examine gaps in implementation and follow up on issues such as decision-making quality, transparency and record-keeping.

⁶ Report on the National Performance Framework: Review of National Outcomes, July 2023

The Parliament should ensure that scrutiny of the NPF informs long-term planning by embedding it into pre-budget work and cross-committee collaboration, improving alignment between outcomes, budgets and delivery. We note in this context your committee's findings on the need for early engagement in budget scrutiny, with earlier publication of data and modelling.

Parliamentary scrutiny of the relationship between the National Performance Framework and public service reform

The relationship between public service reform, the NPF and the Scottish Parliament should be managed through more integrated, accountable and long-term governance arrangements over the next parliamentary term. The NPF provides the shared national vision and supporting outcomes. Public service reform aims to create preventative, joined-up and outcomes-focused services which help to realise these goals. Parliament's role is to ensure both are aligned, delivered and scrutinised effectively.

Carnegie UK's analysis of public service reform shows that reform is most effective when it is explicitly aligned with the NPF, which sets the long-term outcomes that services are intended to deliver. The Public Service Reform Strategy emphasises prevention, collaboration and long-term outcomes, all of which correspond directly with the NPF's purpose. The strategy also points to ways of working which are all well aligned with those that are necessary to operate effectively in an outcome-focussed context, such as collaboration, long-termism and prevention.

Dr Max French's report⁷ on strengthening the NPF highlights that it must become the "lynchpin" of a renewed reform programme, with Parliament using the framework to hold government and public bodies to account for how policy, spending and delivery contribute to national outcomes.

Therefore, Parliament should: embed the NPF in scrutiny of budgets and legislation; monitor progress on public service reform through the lens of national outcomes; and ensure clear accountability mechanisms that connect reform plans and activity to measurable wellbeing improvements.

Contact: Stuart Mackinnon - Head of Communications and Advocacy, Carnegie UK

⁷ How a strengthened National Performance Framework can drive effective government in Scotland, Dr Max French, August 2024