

Finance and Public Administration Committee Session 6 legacy issues– Public administration

National Performance Framework

- The Scottish Government makes a strong rhetorical commitment to high-level and joined up thinking on policy.
- It is attracted to methods to involve citizens and stakeholders in high-level long-term thinking.
- It struggles to translate this high-level thinking into detailed deliverable action.
- This disconnect is not a coincidence. It results from the decision to describe high-level aims vaguely enough to avoid engaging with trade-offs between aims.
- By default, economic growth becomes the principled priority that overshadows other aims.
- Only by making a concrete commitment to a new principled priority will it overcome this tendency towards prioritising the economy over all other issues.
- Yet, the NPF often gives the impression that a government does not need to make these hard choices (everyone is contributing to win-win strategies).

Public Service Reform

- The Scottish Government's commitment to prevention - for the public sector to be 'preventative, to better join up and to be efficient' - is a restatement of policies signalled in 2011 (a 'decisive shift to prevention') following the Christie Commission report.
- The Scottish Government often describes itself as a learning organisation.
- Therefore, it should present evidence on what it has learned – good and bad – from 15 years of experience on its decisive shift to prevention.
- There is also a wealth of previous FPAC reports on this topic on which to aid learning, which would help to avoid a sense of déjà vu when the next initiative comes along.

Effective Scottish Government decision-making

- There are many principles of effective government.
 - My report to this committee summarised them as:
1. Hold to account the people and organisations responsible for policy.
 2. Anticipate and prevent policy problems rather than react to crisis.
 3. Avoid power hoarding at the 'centre'. Co-produce policy with citizens.

4. Ensure policy coherence and policymaking integration.
5. Foster evidence-informed policymaking.
6. Mainstream equity, fairness, or justice across all policy.
7. Ensure that public services deliver public value.
 - It then highlighted the routine likelihood that some principles would overshadow the others.
 - For example, the primacy of national elections concentrates power in the centre, fosters short-term thinking, biases evidence-gathering towards experts, limits consensus seeking, and reduces incentives to learn.
 - There is some scope to connect this topic to issues with the NPF and public sector reform.
 - For example, each topic highlights a lack of clarity about how the Scottish Government seeks to manage its aims and objectives, and how it engages with trade-offs between aims.
 - In other words, it is easy to find Scottish Government statements on its high-level aims, but difficult to see how it proposes to deliver.