

CAS Response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee Inquiry into National Outcomes

April 2022

Key Points

- Scotland's Citizens Advice Network is an essential community service that empowers people through our local bureaux and national services by providing free, confidential, and independent advice. We use people's real-life experiences to influence policy and drive positive change. We are on the side of people in Scotland who need help, and we change lives for the better.
- CAS welcomes this inquiry as we are of the view that the National Outcomes should shape Scottish Government policy aims and spending decisions to a greater extent, and that that these should drive delivery at both national and local levels.
- We would like to see funding models recognise and prioritise outcomes for individuals and communities. This would reflect a shift in the funding paradigm away from output and input measures.
- We have seen the beginnings of a shift in approach from Scottish Government and very much welcome the approaches that have been taken in the COVID Recovery and Child Poverty strategies. We are also beginning to have very positive discussions about placing outcomes as central to funding agreements but there is more to do to see this replicated across National and Local Government as a whole.
- Many local CAB still do not see the outcomes they deliver for communities recognised in their funding arrangements with Local Authorities and we would like to see their role as an essential community service better recognised.

1. To what extent do the National Outcomes shape how your organisation works?

CAS's charitable objects are "the promotion of any charitable purposes for the benefit of the community in Scotland and elsewhere by the advancement of education, the advancement of health and the relief of those in need by reason of age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage". This has been the focus of our work for many years.

While the language of our charitable aims, drawn from our Articles of Association, differs from the language of the National Outcomes, the two are broadly aligned. It would not however be accurate to state that they have been shaped by the National Outcomes and NPF as they predate them by some way. Nevertheless, we do recognise the importance of the NPF, and of placing value on outcomes. This shapes the delivery of our work in the delivery of both advice and advocacy.

For example, every month, CABs give advice to around 20,000 people and around 200,000 people are checking our online advice. We unlocked £147million for people during the pandemic. On average, for those who saw gains the average result was £4,400 – money that can be simply life changing. This figure includes both cash benefits and benefits in kind but does not include debt advice, which can help people by reducing their repayments, or the gains experienced by citizens who have benefited from understanding and enforcing their rights in a non-financial sense.

To illustrate this point we will demonstrate how we achieve this by looking at a more granular level of assessment as it relates to Child Poverty and the way in which we make real impact on Child Material Deprivation. Between April 2021 and January 2022, we gave advice 196,717 times to families with children, with benefits advice being the primary advice type sought:

- For families with children under 1: where we were able to realise a financial gain (i.e. maximise income and/or reduce costs) for the client, those gains averaged £3,939. Where debt could be written off, those gains averaged £13,553.
- For families with a mother under 25: where we were able to realise a financial gain for the client, those gains averaged £2,920. Where debt could be written off, those gains averaged £3,848.
- For single parent families: where we were able to realise a financial gain for the client, those gains averaged £4,068. Where debt could be written off, those gains averaged £10,989.

This demonstrates the very real way in which the Citizens Advice Network makes a very positive impact on Child Material Deprivation: by getting money back into the pockets of parents or carers. This type of contribution is replicated in across multiple outcomes and measures.

In general terms, for the NPF to be successful, the delivery of national outcomes needs to be translated into a local context. To deliver outcomes relevant to a local community in a way which is accessible and desirable to them, we see a requirement to innovate to meet specific needs, often within a very tight financial envelope. The onus often falls upon the third sector to deliver outcomes which are consistent with the desires of another sphere of government, but within a particular local context. That's a clear challenge of matching up the needs of local, varied communities with the desired impact imposed through national drivers and at low cost.

2. How do you know which National Outcomes your organisation contributes towards? How do you demonstrate this to your organisation and more widely to others?

CAS recognises the importance of the National Outcomes and Measures: as indicated in the response to Q1, our network makes a significant contribution to improving

outcomes for individuals and communities and we are keen to be able to demonstrate our value in a way that is recognised by National and Local Government and other partners.

To assist with this, we have mapped the work of our network and the CAS strategic framework to National Outcomes and Measures to allow us to align our positive contribution both in real terms and in our communication.

National Outcome	Relevant Measures
<p>Children and Young People</p> <p>We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential</p>	<p>Child Material Deprivation</p>
<p>Economy</p> <p>We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy</p>	<p>Income Equality</p>
<p>Human Rights</p> <p>We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination</p>	<p>Public services treat people with dignity and respect</p> <p>Quality of public services</p> <p>Access to Justice</p>
<p>Poverty</p> <p>We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally</p>	<p>Relative poverty after housing costs</p> <p>Cost of Living</p> <p>Debt</p> <p>Persistent Poverty</p> <p>Food insecurity</p>
<p>Communities</p> <p>We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe</p>	<p>Social Capital</p>

While many stakeholders would immediately recognise our valuable and natural contribution to many of these Outcomes, we are placing greater emphasis on communicating the outcomes we deliver both internally within our network and externally and will be doing this as part of the communication of the new CAS Strategic Framework and in our day-to-day activity, both to support the delivery of the National Outcomes and to recognise our own accountability and contribution.

We recognise the importance of how we communicate what we do, as we believe outcomes should drive interventions at community level which deliver fair and relevant local outcomes. But to achieve these goals we need to resource our ability to deliver upon the aspirations set out. This requires a fair funding approach especially for the voluntary sector who have a good understanding of the needs in communities and how that can be delivered, but the strategic value of which is often overlooked.

3. How empowered is your organisation to do something different (should it wish) to achieve the National Outcomes relevant to you?

There are no legislative or cultural barriers to us seeking to set out to deliver against a National Outcome (as we are an independent charity) and we are often actively encouraged to do so by funders and partners.

However, the reality of our funding structures and the systems within which we operate presents real and significant barriers to being able to focus solely on the delivery of outcomes. As indicated in our [Resource Spending Review](#) submission, we believe Scottish Government should consider the structures and mechanisms by which funding reaches organisations such as Citizens Advice, alongside the quantum of resource allocated, with a view to building funding systems that allow for:

- Preventative expenditure
- Outcomes and relationship focussed solutions
- Long term thinking
- Placing due regard on the strategic expertise of the third sector
- Building community wealth.

We are currently working with a department within Scottish Government to refocus an area of service delivery, specifically to align it more fully with the delivery of NPF outcomes. So far that experience has been positive and while these areas were already performing well, we would hope to see a further enhancement in what we are able to offer. In this directorate our offer to work towards a more outcomes focussed model was eagerly received and actioned; however, this is not representative of our experience across Government to date, where engagement can often be caught up in output measures.

If NPF is really going to become more mainstreamed and continuously improved then statutory actors need to embrace new leaner operating models, which will require a greater appetite for risk to complement the necessary and greater empowerment of delivery bodies to take decisions and devolve decisions and functions outwith statutory authorities: in short, it requires more trust. This will require a significant culture change of empowering and devolving responsibility for delivery to other organisations, whilst remaining accountable for scrutinising the delivery of the outcome.

4. How is your organisation held to account for how your actions and decisions impact on the National Outcomes?

As a publicly funded charity we are subject to 2 forms of oversight in terms of our delivery:

1. By our Board of Trustees, who have set us a strategic framework which is mapped to National Outcomes and Measures as indicated in the response to Q2; our Board are accountable to our members: the 59 independent CAB across Scotland who represent their communities and client base.
2. In our grant agreements for funded projects, we are held accountable for delivery of items by funders, but these are usually input or output driven agreements and aren't centred upon the delivery of outcomes in a meaningful way. The example indicated above in response to Q3 is our first experience of developing a more outcomes focussed funding relationship with Government. If successful, we would like to see our 'test case' as an indicator of a paradigm shift to an outcome focussed model of funding which would be replicated across these types of funding agreements more broadly.

5. How are the National Outcomes reflected in everyday decision taking?

As indicated previously, our strategic framework has been mapped to the National Outcomes, and our strategic framework is our Executive's guide to decision making; for CAS this link is very real.

6. When it comes to spending priorities or providing funding to others, what role do the National Outcomes play?

As indicated previously, our strategic framework has been mapped to the National Outcomes, and our strategic framework is our Executive's guide to decision making; for CAS this link is very real.

For the next NPF to be a success there needs to be a recognition that improving subsidiarity of governance and outcomes for communities would necessitate national authorities and agencies to commit to fiscal and functional empowerment of any new structures and frameworks/measurement that would be required. Again, there would need to be sufficient trust to allow the third sector to fulfil its role.

7. To what extent is any public sector funding you receive contingent upon demonstrating your contribution to delivery of the National Outcomes?

As indicated in our response to Q4, it isn't in a mainstream way. However, we are developing an outcome focussed model in one area and if successful we would like to see this applied more broadly for our own funding relationships, and possibly more widely across our sector.

8. Where do the National Outcomes sit within the range of priorities and demands on your organisation?

As indicated previously, our strategic framework has been mapped to the National Outcomes, and our strategic framework is our Executive's guide to decision making; for CAS this link is very real.

9. To what extent do you work collaboratively with other organisations in delivering the National Outcomes relevant to you?

CAS has strategic partnerships in place which recognise our organisations' mutual strengths in delivering against National Outcomes. For example:

- We have a strategic partnership with Young Scot which recognises Young Scot's ability to reach younger people and improve their life chances while leveraging our expertise in delivering high quality advice and our community footprint.
- We are developing a strategic partnership with Consumer Scotland which recognises their new statutory and advisory advocacy role and complements this with our real-life data and insight gained from our advice role; working together we can more accurately understand the detriment that is being experienced by consumers and take action to address it.

There is an increasing focus on achieving outcomes through partnership, which can mean greater community and citizen involvement in the co-design of services and delivery of outcomes, with decisions made closer and quicker to the end user.

This means there is a challenge to the mindset of communicating decisions, to actively involving communities in processes, moving towards collaborative design of services and a clear cultural shift in how work is undertaken and who can make decisions. As previously stated, this means that there needs to be trust in the end user, community or third sector organisation designing or delivering the solution, which also means that National and Local Government would need to

cede control and accept a larger appetite for risk that comes with such models of delivery.

10. Please share any examples of good practice, areas for improvement or practices that have not worked so well

As indicated, we are currently revisiting a funding relationship with Scottish Government through the lens of the National Outcomes. So far this has been a positive experience, albeit it is not yet complete, and we have not reached the delivery stage of this change. We anticipate that the new approach will release more capacity to front line delivery of outcomes, increasing the level of benefit or value we can offer from our service.

However, this is not replicated across the wide range of our funding relationships and at many levels throughout our network we fall victim to funding structures that don't recognise or value the delivery of the outcome for the citizen as the primary objective, but instead place priority on the cost of the service in a 'race to the bottom' or other output or input measure(s). If priority is placed on cost effectiveness or 'throughput' of people, with scant regard for the effectiveness of the intervention, then this is a failure of policy making and can lead to the wrong outcomes being delivered from the right intention.

Going into the next NPF there is a requirement for community empowerment to deliver the challenging national outcomes and the expectation on all sectors of Scottish society to deliver inclusive economic, social, and environmental growth. This means that the next NPF monitoring framework and national outcomes need to have adequate and effective recognition of non-economic measures and specifically how to measure wellbeing returns made to Scottish society. Given that enormous social value can be delivered in very small, local contexts, consideration also needs to be given to the scale of the monitoring framework, as macro-level measurements of the economy and society bias the system and delivery of national outcomes towards large statutory bodies who can operate at scale or in partnership at scale.