SHRC
Scottish
Human Rights
Commission

Ivan McKee MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform

Via CabSecforPSR@gov.scot

Date: 16 November 2026
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Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Re: Reform of the National Performance Framework

Thank you for your letter of 18 September 2026 to the National Performance Framework (NPF) Advisory Group, in which you shared your correspondence with the Finance and Public Administration Committee setting out the Scottish Government's proposed National Outcomes and the next steps in reforming the NPF. This provided a welcome update.

In particular we warmly welcome the inclusion of the new Fair National Outcome, with its explicit commitment to respecting, protecting, and fulfilling human rights. This is a significant and positive development. Throughout the review process we have emphasised the importance of retaining human rights within Scotland's national vision and ensuring that they remain central to how progress is understood and assessed. We are pleased to see that the Scottish Government's proposals reflect this importance.

We also welcome your recognition that the relationship between the National Outcomes, government priorities and the actions taken to deliver them has not always been sufficiently clear. As we discussed when we met on 2 September, the SHRC has long believed there is further progress to be made in this space. It is our view that addressing this is one of the most important opportunities presented by the Scottish Government's renewed focus on Public Service Reform.

The NPF has considerable potential to provide the overarching framework through which Scotland's long-term ambitions are translated into government policy, public spending, and public service delivery. Additionally, and to underpin this, there are a number of other established human rights tools and frameworks in existence which can practically support the embedding of a human rights-based approach into Scotland's public service design, delivery, and accountability. In our view, this is what should constitute the Scottish Government's commitment to mainstreaming human rights. Human rights mainstreaming should provide clarity rather than undue bureaucracy. In the current stage of reforming public service delivery, this means there is a clear opportunity to make human rights the 'golden thread' which flows throughout the National Outcomes, the Programme for Government, the Scottish Budget, the decisions taken by public authorities, and the auditing and regulation of these.

We recognise ongoing efforts to strengthen the relationship between government priorities and budget planning. However, in our view the NPF itself needs to be more visible within these arrangements. Without this connection, there is a risk that the National Outcomes continue to operate primarily as a statement of national ambition rather than as a framework that actively informs decisions and accountability.

A human rights-based approach offers a practical means of strengthening these connections. Human rights obligations should inform the development of national priorities, the assessment of policy options, the allocation of public resources and the monitoring of progress. Human rights budgeting, alongside meaningful impact assessment and scrutiny arrangements, can help translate those obligations into routine public sector decision-making.

SHRC has undertaken substantial work to develop practical guidance and tools to support human rights budgeting and budget scrutiny. We see a valuable opportunity to bring this work together with the NPF reform process, the wider Public Service Reform agenda and ongoing consideration of human rights mainstreaming, to demonstrate how existing and developing mechanisms could form a more coherent approach to decision-making and accountability across government.

Annexed to this letter is a schematic setting out our view on how these ' golden threads' of work connect across all domains of public service design, delivery and accountability, and we believe that this could usefully inform the baseline frameworks for public service reform. We hope that this is helpful to inform further discussion with you and relevant officials about the implementation framework referenced in your letter. We would be pleased to contribute our expertise and practical resources to a discussion about how this framework can establish clear connections between national outcomes, government priorities, resource allocation, and accountability.

We hope that the renewed commitment to human rights within the National Outcomes can provide a foundation for ensuring that the NPF plays a more meaningful role in shaping Scotland's policy choices and the use of public resources.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Angela O'Hagan
Chair, Scottish Human Rights Commission

Annex A: A human rights-based approach to Scotland's public services

