

Putting collective wellbeing and sustainable development into action:

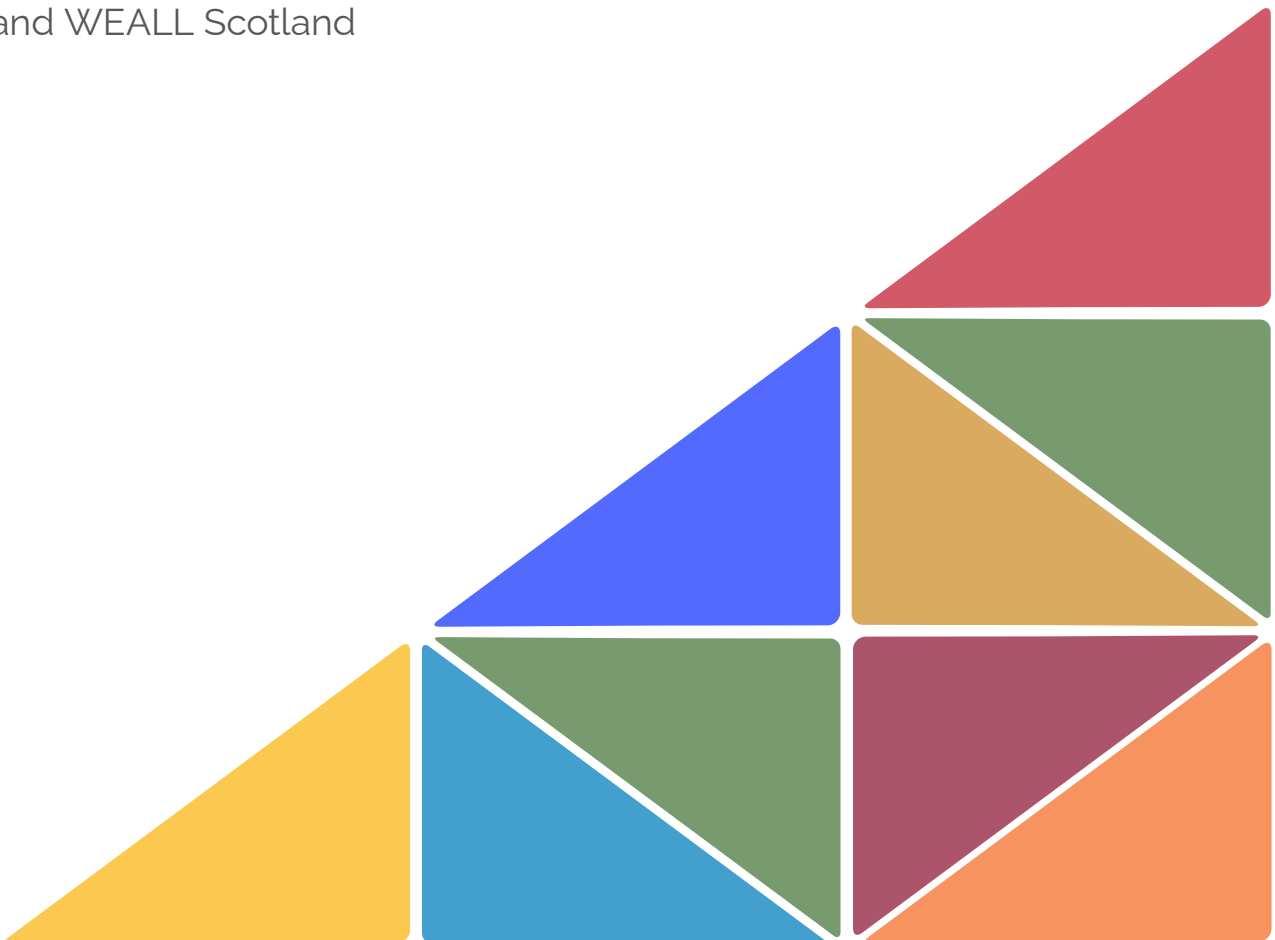
An options paper for Scotland

Report written by:

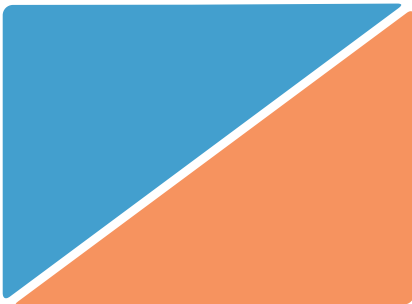
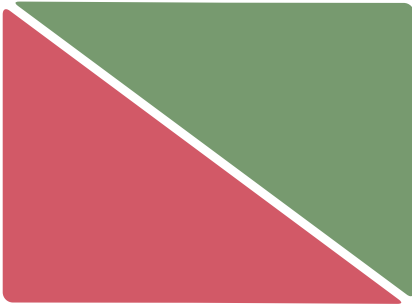
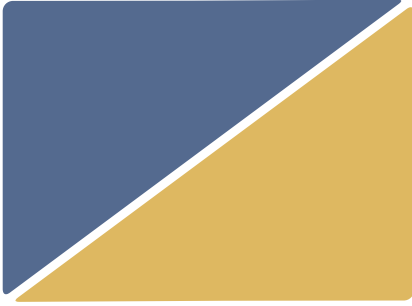
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Report summary

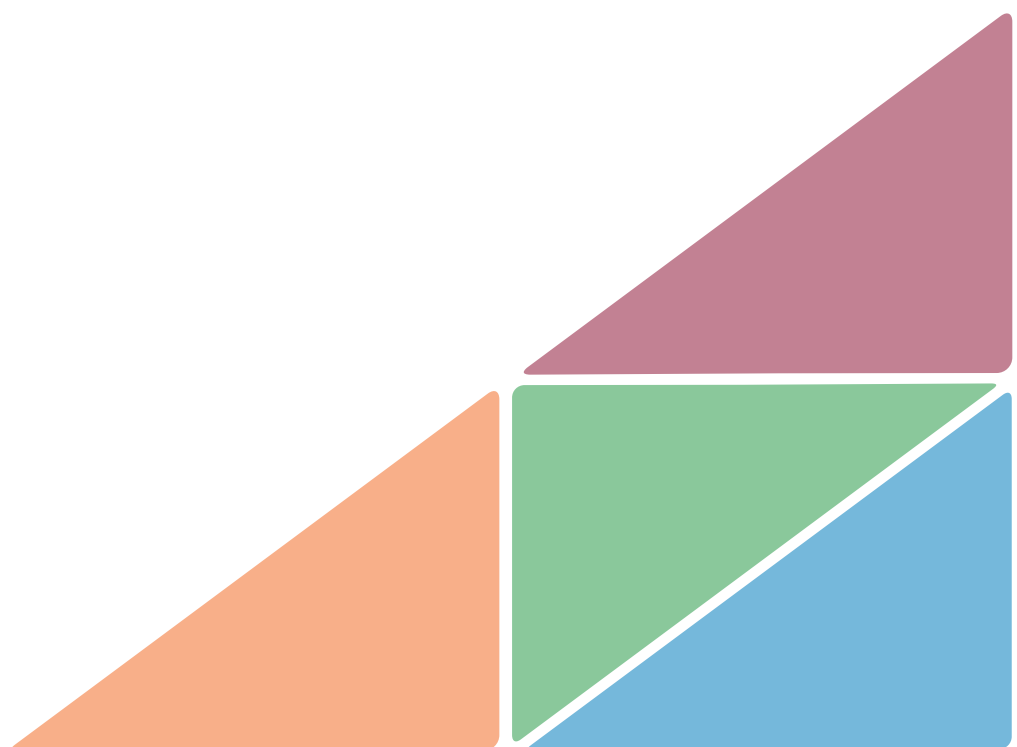
Based on primary research with leaders and senior officials across Scotland's public administration system, this report outlines a range of options to revitalise Scotland's approach to the Wellbeing of Future Generations and Sustainable Development. This report has two parts:

- ▲ Part 1 outlines the key barriers within Scotland's current approach to the Wellbeing of Future Generations and Sustainable Development.
- ▲ Part 2 develops and compares six possible operating models for carrying a new agenda forward.

This report was commissioned by the Scotland's International Development Alliance in partnership with the Wellbeing Economy Alliance in Scotland, Oxfam Scotland and Carnegie UK. The authors are grateful to the Working Group on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development for their support and encouragement throughout. This report represents the views of the authors alone.

This research report was undertaken and written before the Scottish Government's announcement of their intention to reform the National Performance Framework.

This report represents the views of its authors alone.



Background

Collective wellbeing and sustainable development are becoming fundamental principles that citizens expect their governments to pursue. More than two thirds of OECD countries now account for their progress through national measures of collective wellbeing.

Scotland was an early mover in this field, championing a vision of national collective wellbeing with sustainable development as its mode of operation. Through the National Performance Framework (NPF, Scotland's wellbeing framework, ostensibly linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals), the outcome-based approach to government, and co-founding the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership, Scotland developed an international reputation as a dynamic, resourceful nation, able to punch above its weight and spearhead an international agenda.

However, while other nations have grown in confidence, progress in Scotland has stalled. Scotland has not yet followed nations like Ireland and New Zealand in weaving its wellbeing framework through its budgeting processes, ensuring spending follows rhetoric. Nor can Scotland match the level of public engagement and participation achieved by Wales, Germany or the UK through the Office for National Statistics. Scotland has also failed to join other regional governments in reporting to the United Nations on their implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recent research comparing the integration of Scotland's NPF with equivalent frameworks in Wales and Northern Ireland found Scotland has lagged behind in most respects¹. This can be attributed to its lack of *hard powers*: the incentives, accountability and coercive tools that countries like Wales utilise through stronger legislative duties and the powers of a Future Generations Commissioner. The Finance and Public Administration Committee (FPAC)'s 'National Performance Framework: Ambitions into Action' Inquiry furnished the Scottish Government with recommendations for redressing this balance, expanding the NPF and its influence through a coherent implementation plan.

However, despite committing to action on FPAC recommendations², the Scottish Government has made limited progress. The Scottish Government reneged on its intention to bring to parliament a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill, while September 2024's Programme for Government was the first in years to omit mention of wellbeing, the National Performance Framework, or its National Outcomes and Indicators.

A hopeful prospect is the Members' Bill brought about by Sarah Boyack MSP, which seeks to establish a Future Generations Commissioner (FGC) for Scotland, mirroring a critical success factor in Wales. However, the clock is ticking down on a legislative opportunity within this parliamentary term. Further, following an FPAC review, the Scottish Parliament approved a motion on 31st October 2024 for a moratorium on new Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB) supported bodies like Commissioners and commissions, or any extension of the remit of existing bodies. The 2024/25 Scottish Government fiscal position provides little hope for additional discretionary investment in the near future.

1 French, M., & Wallace, J. (2024). Power, performance, and the governance of systemic goals: evidence from national wellbeing framework integration. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/6xmdv>

2 <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/committees/current-and-previous-committees/session-6-finance-and-public-administration-committee/correspondence/2022/national-performance-framework-scottish-government-response>

This report seeks to identify a way forward. We review the possible operating models for taking forward the agenda for collective wellbeing and sustainable development in a Scottish public administration context, providing a range of options that could and should be considered to progress this agenda both right now and across the next parliamentary term.

Defining Wellbeing of Future Generations and Sustainable Development (WFG/SD)

Wellbeing and Sustainable Development are interconnected concepts that aim to guide Scotland's vision for a fairer, greener and more inclusive future in Scotland and globally:

- ▲ Sustainable development focuses on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs wherever they might be in the world. It seeks to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity, ensuring that resources and opportunities are preserved for the long term.
- ▲ Wellbeing refers to the quality of life experienced by individuals and communities, encompassing physical and mental health, social connections, economic security, and a sense of purpose and belonging. Central to this is the commitment to reducing inequalities, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, has equal opportunities to thrive. It highlights the importance of creating environments that enable current generations to thrive while laying the foundation for future prosperity (hence it is often referred to as the wellbeing of current and future generations).

We refer to both concepts using the inclusive term **Wellbeing of Future Generations and Sustainable Development** (WFG/SD) as we see sustainable development as a process that leads to better wellbeing outcomes for current and future generations in Scotland and globally³.

Research approach

We interviewed nine senior leaders and strategic officers who could play significant roles within the possible models proposed. This included senior Scottish Government representatives and leaders of relevant public agencies engaged with support, representation, promotion and accountability functions analysed. In line with the necessary confidentiality agreements made with participants, we do not directly name any individual or organisation involved.

Next, we explored proposed new duties for each of these models in detail, focussing on practicalities involved and estimates of associated costs relating to each of our options. We reviewed detailed corporate documentation for the organisations involved with each model and liaised directly with organisational contacts to better contextualise our findings and sharpen cost estimates.

³ <https://carnegieuk.org/publication/scotlands-wellbeing-and-sustainable-development-bill/>

Our inquiry is guided by four questions building on initial exploratory work undertaken by the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Working Group:

- ▲ Who can hold others to **account** for their actions in pursuing the wellbeing of future generations and sustainable development?
- ▲ Who can **represent** future generations in public life?
- ▲ Who can **promote** and champion their interests?
- ▲ Who can **support others and build their capacity** to pursue the wellbeing of future generations and sustainable development?



Part 1: Deficiencies in the current Scottish approach to WFG/SD

Our interviews explored how WFG/SD was currently represented, promoted and accounted for within interviewees' own organisations, and across the broader public sector landscape. Aligned with current evidence on the Scottish experience⁴⁵, interviewees painted a dispiriting picture of progress. We found that four key structural deficiencies inhibit the current institutional arrangement for WFG/SD in Scotland.

Accountability: gaps and fragmentation

WFG/SD in Scotland is held back by a fragmented and poorly enforced accountability landscape. Mechanisms to ensure public sector organisations are aligned with long-term goals are inconsistent, and no central authority oversees or enforces adherence to these ambitions. There is no legislative requirement to systematically consider the needs of future generations, beyond a limited duty within the Consumer Scotland Act 2020⁶. This lack of accountability is mirrored in the absence of representation for future generations within the current set of SPCB-supported bodies and the strategic agendas of 15 Scottish Parliament Committees.

Across the public sector, existing accountability frameworks fail to prioritise WFG/SD. The National Performance Framework (NPF) and Wellbeing Monitor remain disconnected from government funding, budgeting, audit and inspection regimes. As one interviewee observed, "Not once have I been asked about the outcomes my teams were achieving in relation to the national performance framework." The scrutiny technologies applied by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Auditor General of Scotland and the Accounts Commission do not directly target National Outcomes or Indicators (or associated ways of working), or explicitly apply a future generations lens.

Promotion: over-reliance on individuals

No public body holds a statutory duty to promote or champion the interests of future generations, beyond the limited discretion of Consumer Scotland. Leadership for WFG/SD within Scotland is therefore, as one interviewee noted, "Very reliant on personal commitment or organisational personality, which leads to variation across the system".

Organisations that do actively pursue WFG/SD as a discretionary objective currently operate in isolation, lacking actionable guidance and a unified narrative to drive sector-wide progress. Without cohesive leadership, WFG/SD is often sidelined in favour of immediate organisational priorities. While advocacy is apparent (largely stemming from third sector organisations), current networks which support WFG/SD are largely informal and operate separately to Scottish political and administrative decision-making systems.

4 Battaglia, F. (2024). The Use and Impact of Well-Being Metrics on Policymaking: Developers' and Users' Perspectives in Scotland and Italy. *Soc Policy Adm.* <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.13084>

5 French, M., & Wallace, J. (2024). Power, performance, and the governance of systemic goals: evidence from national wellbeing framework integration. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/6xmdv>

6 This Act includes within its definition of consumer a 'potential consumer' which is being interpreted as future generations of consumers

Representation: poor coordination and short-termism

Scotland's institutional setup for WFG/SD is marked by insufficient coordination across government levels and sectors. This disconnection results in inefficiencies and unaligned, duplicative efforts between agencies. As one participant highlighted, "There isn't anyone with an overview of who is doing what... someone needs to map this out to understand where the gaps are." Another added, "We don't have a system that holds it all together, where everyone bakes long-term goals into their thinking".

The lack of a joined-up strategic orientation, coupled with financial pressures, mean that short-term goals often predominate in decision making among public bodies. One interviewee reflected, "Decisions are being made that don't factor where Scotland needs to be in three, five, ten future generations".

Although Scotland has a strong foundation for re-centring decision making on WFG/SD within the NPF, its potential remains underutilised. Meaningful implementation is a rarity, and no systematic guidance or enforcement mechanisms link National Outcomes and Indicators to financial or performance-based decision making: "The NPF ought to be the North Star... but we don't yet have a clear mechanism to align Scotland's budget to intended outcomes". Organisations pursuing WFG/SD report a lack of support and resources to help embed these principles into practice. Without training, tools, or actionable guidance, public bodies face significant challenges in operationalising sustainable development goals.

Support: enduring barriers to progress

Gaps in wellbeing data collection and analysis continue to hinder Scotland's ability to measure progress towards WFG/SD outcomes. Of the 81 NPF indicators, five remain 'in development' and the majority are out of date for policy purposes. When we reviewed the data set, only 1 was available for 2024 and 4 for 2023. We also noted concerns the National Indicators reflect what is currently straightforward to measure, rather than target the National Outcomes. One interviewee told us, "We're not deploying our analytic capacity to tell us about progress towards outcomes A, B, and C.", noting an unrealised potential for using data-driven insights to inform decision-making.

While public bodies must "have regard" to the National Outcomes under Part 1 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, there is no agency which provides support, guidance or training in the realisation of that duty. While public engagement in setting the National Outcomes is also statutory duty, this has fallen short of acceptable standards. As one participant observed, "There's a lot of rhetoric around citizen involvement, but it often doesn't translate into meaningful engagement." Without additional investment and prioritisation of public participation within future revisions of the NPF or broader WFG/SD policy ambitions, the WFG/SD agenda will remain disconnected from the communities it seeks to represent.

Part 2: Possible models for embedding WFG/SD in Scotland

The marginalisation of WFG/SD we found in Scottish public life makes plain the urgent need for enhanced powers, duties, and resources. However, there is currently a moratorium on creating new SPCB-supported bodies, a narrow parliamentary window for introducing new legislation, and a constrained Scottish Government fiscal position. Despite these limitations, the case for change is clear, and innovative approaches - not merely copying from international best practice - will be essential to advance the WFG/SD agenda.

In this part, we identify and review six potential operating models for advancing wellbeing and sustainable development (WFG/SD) in Scotland. The options reviewed respond to the particular constraints of Scotland's current policy context, so do not presume a Scottish Government-led response. Each model has been evaluated against the four key functions identified by the Working Group:

- ▲ Who can hold others to account for their actions in pursuing WFG/SD?
- ▲ Who can represent future generations in public life and decision-making?
- ▲ Who can promote and champion their interests?
- ▲ Who can support others and build their capacity to pursue WFG/SD?

Each of the six models considered could contribute meaningfully to the advancement of WFG/SD in Scotland. However, each has limitations, and only some are possible to enact in full in the interim before the conclusion of the parliamentary moratorium and the new Scottish parliamentary term in May 2026.



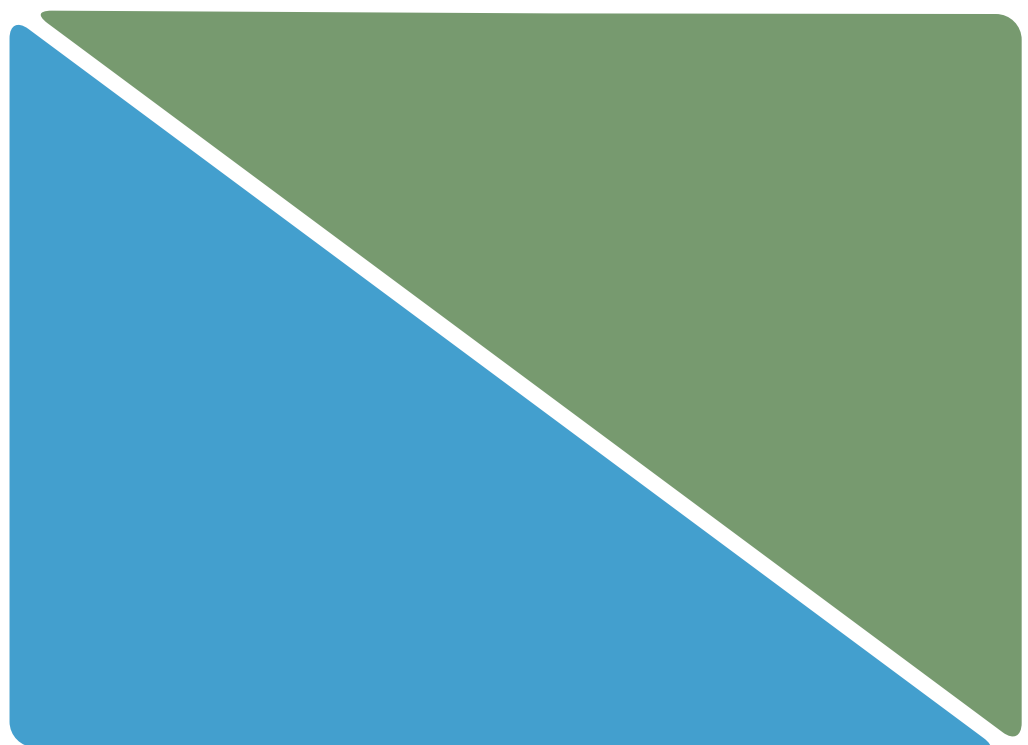
Model 1

A Future Generations Commissioner for Scotland



Formal powers ensure that the commissioner's role isn't just advisory but can drive systemic change.

(Interviewee)



Objective: Establish an independent Commissioner to champion future generations, provide oversight, and promote long-term thinking in public policy.

We found strong support among interviewees for strengthening powers and duties for WFG/SD. In particular, there was broad - though qualified - support for a new Future Generations Commissioner (FGC) to provide champion long-term thinking, ensure alignment with WFG/SD goals across public bodies and provide independent oversight. This would follow the Welsh Future Generations Commissioner model, which has been central to the Welsh WFG/SD approach, in establishing a Scottish FGC as a new SPBC-support public body.

Transferred to a Scottish context, a new FGC would address the significant representation gap we identified within the parliamentary system as an SPCB-supported body, and in public life more broadly. This model would also improve accountability by holding public agencies and public officials to account for their contribution to WFG/SD goals. This could be achieved by creating new statutory investigation or review powers, similar to those held by the Welsh FGC (though others such as Audit Scotland could play this role instead).

The Scottish FGC's Office, resourced commensurately with the Welsh model, would also address identified gaps in promotion and support for WFG/SD. This Office could provide crucial training, guidance and advice to help public agencies pursue WFG/SD goals and ways of working effectively, and engage proactively with associated legislative duties.

This model can be costed accurately at £1.5-£2m per annum based on the Welsh experience. However, additional challenges in Scotland arise from additional resource demands, legislative barriers, and integration with existing frameworks. If pursuing this model after the SPCB body moratorium, it is critical Scotland develop an approach which responds to the Scottish context, rather than merely mimic Wales. We have outlined the possible duties of a Scottish FGC in Appendix 1.

We identified the following limitations to this model:

- ▲ A Scottish FGC may struggle to meet the support needs of public bodies, given they far exceed the number of Welsh counterparts.
- ▲ Investigation and review powers are expensive, time consuming and likely more use as threats than actions. Accountability for WFG/SD will need to be aligned with and reinforced by other bodies like Audit Scotland.
- ▲ Centralising leadership within a single commissioner risks other bodies continuing to externalise leadership for WFG/SD, limiting the contribution of other essential organisations in driving change.
- ▲ Significant set-up costs and legislative hurdles delay implementation until after the 2026 Scottish Parliament election.

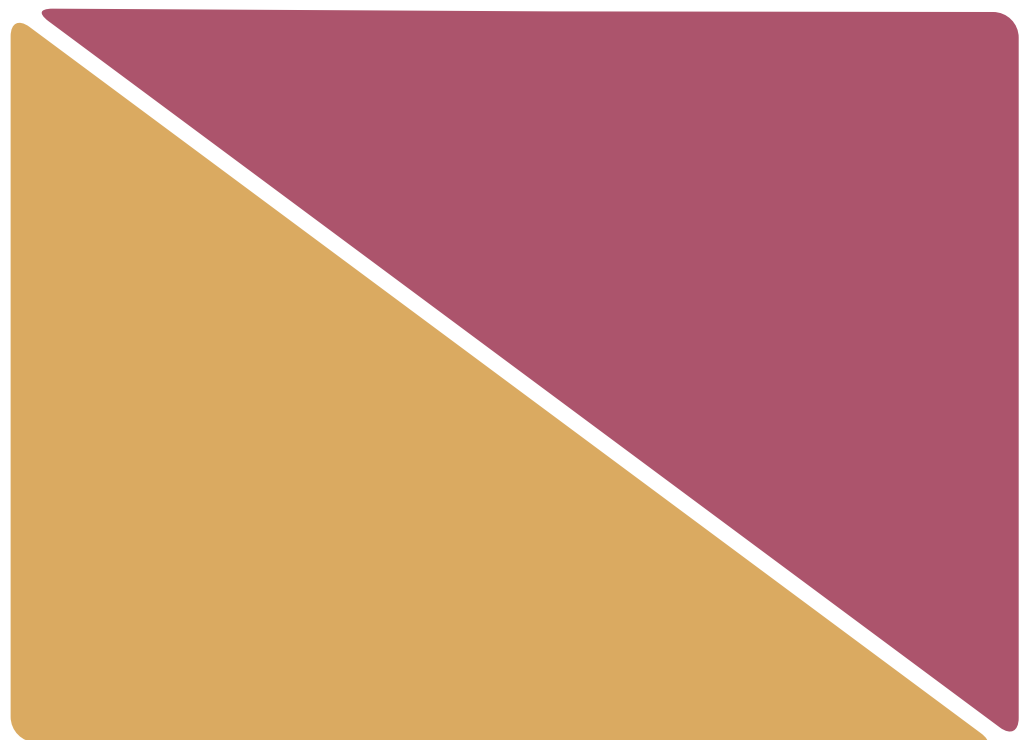
Model 2

Shared responsibilities across multiple SPCB-supported bodies



There's not something necessarily that holds it together that everybody is baking into their thinking. [WFG/SD] needs to be more of a collective effort

(Interviewee)



Objective: Leverage the comparative strengths of existing bodies to collaboratively advance WFG/SD goals without establishing a new Commissioner

Model 2 would involve amending existing legislation underpinning existing SPCB-supported bodies to amend remits and establish shared duties for WFG/SD. This could capitalise on particular areas of expertise developed in the business of existing Commissioner-style bodies, while economising through shared services.

Representation and championship and support could be provided by a Commissioner for Children, Young People and Future Generations. The investigative and review powers held by Consumer Scotland and the Public Service Ombudsman could then be trained on WFG/SD to enhance accountability. A multi-commissioner governance structure, or a Memorandum of Agreement signed jointly by these bodies, could then link these duties together. We have detailed an example Memorandum, involving SPCB-supported bodies alongside other public bodies, in Appendix 2.

This model could sidestep the set up costs and additionality of a Scottish FGC and reduce operating costs by sharing services across existing SPCB-supported bodies. The model could feasibly create a more cohesive and strategic approach to WFG/SD than centralising functions within a new FGC. However, there are a number of significant limitations to this model:

- ▲ New WFG/SD duties would layer on top of pre-existing functions and statutory directives. Role confusion and resistance is likely, while annualised cost savings may be modest relative to a dedicated Scottish FGC.
- ▲ Existing commissioners must conform to and often be accredited by agreed international standards (e.g. the Paris Principles) and international agreements (e.g. UN Declarations). As such, there is limited capability to pivot their remits to a WFG/SD frame of reference.
- ▲ There is a significant risk that WFG/SD would be a marginal focus within a multi-commissioner model. Current Commissioner-style bodies like the CYPCS and SHRC are more accustomed to a rights-based approach to scrutiny than a WFG/SD approach.
- ▲ This approach is also prevented by the current parliamentary moratorium. Extended remits would require legislative changes in the new parliamentary term, and would require significant additional resources to deliver an extended remit of duties.

Model 3

A strengthened role for Audit Scotland



I think what we see, not just in Scotland but wider... is an evolution toward saying, well, actually there is a place for scrutiny bodies to support healthy implementation, to point out the merits or risks of a particular approach.

(Interviewee)



Objective: Expand Audit Scotland's mandate, on behalf of the Auditor General of Scotland and the Accounts Commission, to enhance accountability for wellbeing and sustainable development.

Model 3 would focus on reconfiguring the suite of national audit functions (including performance audits, best value audits, financial audits, and broader advocacy roles) toward addressing WFG/SD. The NPF, with its National Outcomes and Indicators, alongside the Christie Pillars (Prevention, Partnership, Performance, People) could provide a framework for helping public bodies set objectives, and be held to account for their contribution toward WFG/SD objectives. Appendix 3 outlines draft legislative changes which would augment the national audit structure to promote WFG/SD.

Re-configuring the national audit structure was a factor cited by many interviews as being of critical importance. Audit Scotland, alongside the Accounts Commission, perform similar roles to an FGC-type body, since they are national-level statutory agencies with a 'helicopter view' of system performance. Audit technologies can perhaps be more straightforwardly trained on holding public bodies to account and monitoring progress than a new FGC.

In recent years, the Auditor General of Scotland has advocated for the NPF and public service reform and shows willingness to engage further with this agenda. Some interviewees queried whether the type of advocacy styles taken on by FGC-style bodies internationally would sit uneasily with a national auditor. We would expect an audit-led agenda to be based around objective, neutral and dispassionate analysis rather than public advocacy. While new legislative duties like those described in Appendix 3 would be beneficial, they are not essential.

Under Part 1 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, national audit bodies are required to "have regard" for the National Outcomes in their public duties. This provides an existing statutory basis to consider how national audit functions (the 14 performance audits undertaken per year, to name one example) could be reconfigured to align with WFG/SD. Alongside public audit, Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission additionally perform a range of support and guidance for public bodies which could also be adapted to provide support and capacity building for WFG/SD.

However, there are also clear limitations to this model:

- ▲ The national audit system has limited capacity to provide the support, promotion and representation functions typically associated with a Commissioner model.
- ▲ Additional WFG/SD duties might be diversionary to Audit Scotland's existing workplan without significant additional resourcing.
- ▲ Tasking the audit structure to play both support/'good cop' and accountability/'bad cop' roles could lead to role confusion (although the Welsh FGC does indeed play both roles). Support roles might be better played by a different set of agencies.

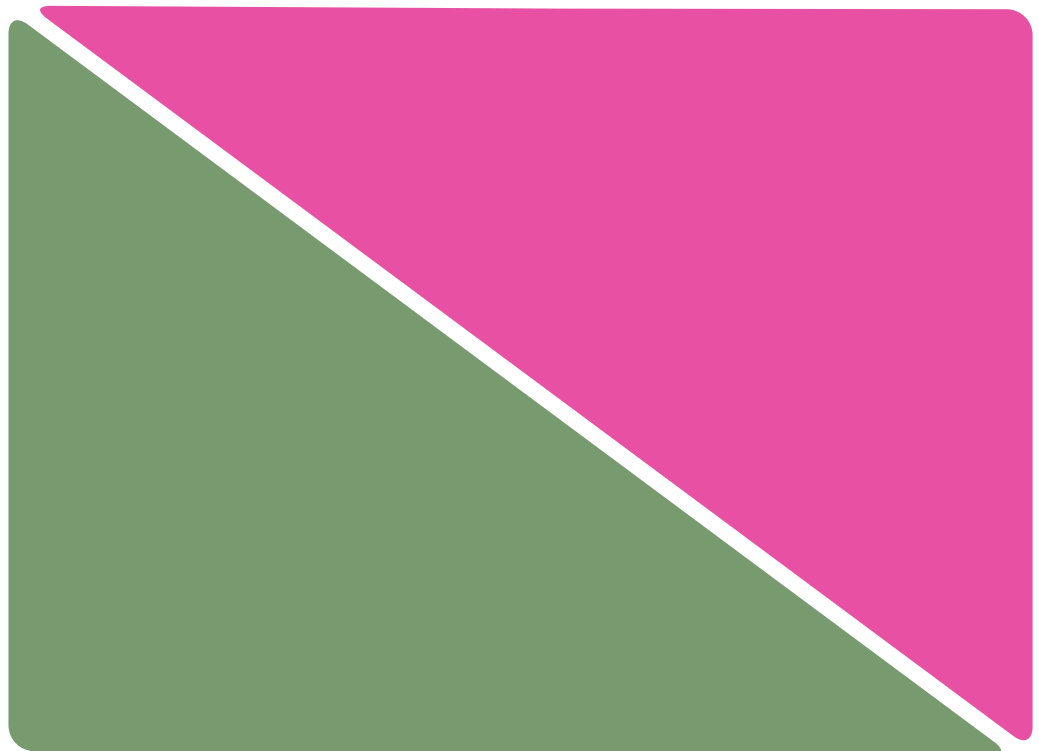
Model 4

Parliamentary representation



Preventative approaches are fiscally sustainable and morally right, and parliamentary oversight could help embed them into the system.

(Interviewee)



Objective: Establish representation within the Scottish Parliament committee system to oversee Scotland's progress toward WFG/SD ambitions.

Consideration of WFG/SD within the Scottish Parliament is currently very patchy, spread across isolated sections of 15 Parliamentary committees' workplans. The Scottish Parliament both approves the National Outcomes and scrutinises the annual Scottish Budget Bill. A logical argument is that the Scottish Parliament should join these functions together, scrutinising how policymaking and public spending has affected the achievement of National Outcomes. Model 4 would amend the parliamentary system to better represent WFG/SD and more coherently utilise the NPF in committee work.

One option is to work to establish a new 'Wellbeing of Future Generations and Sustainable Development' committee in the next parliamentary term. This committee could leverage its parliamentary powers to examine government legislation, hold inquiries, and pressure government on WFG/SD performance. The committee could also monitor progress toward the National Outcomes and integration of the NPF in decision making and policy development, hold Scottish Ministers accountable for long-term sustainability, and provide recommendations to the Scottish Government on policy alignment. Appendix 4 provides detailed list of possible duties a future WFG/SD Committee might play.

This could be achieved through a motion to the Parliamentary Bureau for a new Subject Committee. While this would not require any new legislation, it would require political support from the incoming administration following the May 2026 Election and ideally close alignment with a likely Ministerial portfolio. Any new committee would rely on effective collaboration with other committees to avoid duplication or misalignment. Interviewees noted the need for all parliamentary committees to target WFG/SD goals, and highlighted a risk that a new committee might divert from this collective effort.

An alternative - or additional - approach would involve engaging the Scottish Parliament's Convenors' Group, which involves all committee convenors, to establish a new cross-cutting 'Strategic Objective' on the 'wellbeing of future generations'. Convenors could be encouraged to integrate WFG/SD considerations across all committee workplans, and to formalise a request to the Parliamentary Bureau for 'joint consideration' of WFG/SD as a cross-committee matter. Scottish Parliament support staff could also produce practical guidance for parliamentarians to understand and use WFG/SD as a lens for scrutiny. In addition to existing tools (such as the Sustainable Development Impact Assessment tool⁷), dedicated guidance could be prepared for using the NPF for scrutiny of Scottish Government policies, budgets and spending decisions.

This model also comes with limitations:

- ▲ Parliamentary committees are unable to directly provision for the support, training and capacity building work required to enable organisations to engage with WFG/SD
- ▲ Parliamentary committees do not have the resources or specialist scrutiny expertise to hold public bodies to account for WFG/SD objectives
- ▲ Creating a new parliamentary committee for WFG/SD (in isolation) may remove the impetus for committees to jointly pursue shared wellbeing goals and represent future generations in their decision making.

⁷ <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/research-prepared-for-parliament/sustainable-development-scrutiny>

Model 5

A government-appointed advisory council



A national panel could act as a think tank, producing annual reports and advising the government on priorities.

(Interviewee)



Objective: Establish a government-appointed National Advisory Council on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development, which would report to the First Minister with recommendations on promoting WFG/SD and embedding the NPF.

Model 5 would require the Scottish Government to establish and resource an independent advisory body comprising representatives from local government, government agencies, academia, civil society and the private sector. This could follow Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body guidance⁸, and follow similar recent models like the Poverty and Inequality Commission, Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel and National Advisory Council on Women and Girls.

By bridging government policy and stakeholder expertise, this Council would act as a central mechanism to prioritise long-term goals in policy decision-making. Scotland has made previous attempts to establish similar advisory bodies, for example the aforementioned Expert Advisory Group and the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Wellbeing Economy, but these have often operated within limited scope for influence and lacked strategic focus. A high-level National Advisory Council on WFG/SD would need a clearly defined mandate, supportive representation at the most senior levels of the Scottish Government, and sufficient resourcing to avoid similar shortcomings.

A 'National Advisory Council' for WFG/SD could carry forward a number of roles:

- ▲ Provide strategic leadership and build public awareness for WFG/SD
- ▲ Produce regular public reports and consultations on WFG/SD policy issues
- ▲ Assess progress toward the National Outcomes and provide recommendations to address challenges
- ▲ Facilitate collaboration across sectors
- ▲ Build system capacity by delivering training, developing toolkits, and sharing best practices
- ▲ Engage proactively with parliamentary committees, ministerial offices and public bodies to help WFG/SD-related recommendations influence policy.

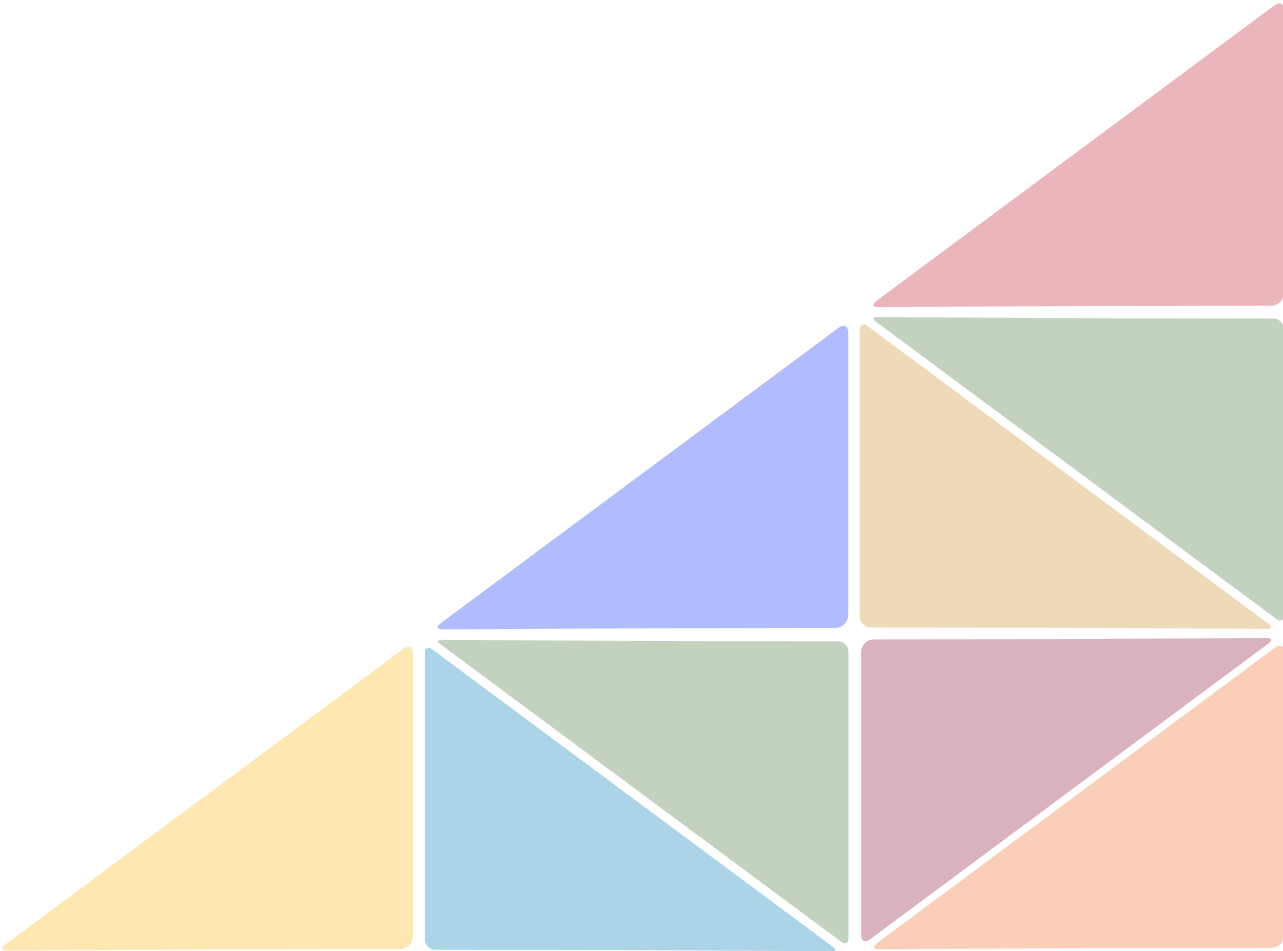
However this body would be limited to the 'soft powers' of advice, guidance and advocacy, lacking statutory investigation or review powers which have been effectively used by the Welsh Future Generations Commissioner⁹. To be effective, this council would require a robust mandate and personal commitment from the First Minister or Deputy First Minister, clear lines of responsibility, and a recognised framework to assess its policy impact. While not a replacement for formal accountability mechanisms, a Council would offer a flexible and collaborative approach to advancing Scotland's wellbeing and sustainability goals.

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2018/09/scottish-public-finance-manual/documents/spfm---advisory-non-departmental-public-bodies-model-framework-document/spfm---advisory-non-departmental-public-bodies-model-framework-document/govscot%3Adocument/Advisory%2BNon-Departmental%2BPublic%2Bodies%2BModel%2BFramework%2BDocument.docx>

⁹ French Wallace paper

Limitations for this model include:

- ▲ Without statutory authority, the Council's influence would rely on the willingness of government departments to adopt its recommendations.
- ▲ There is a risk of creating an additional bureaucratic layer, particularly if roles overlap with existing structures, and the Council has limited impact.
- ▲ Success depends on securing sufficient funding and high-profile buy-in to maintain credibility and authority, which is unlikely in the short term.



Model 6

An independent advisory board or Wellbeing Roundtable



There's a varied level of commitment... celebrating good work can inspire others to follow suit.

(Interviewee)



Objective: Establish a non-governmental advisory council to advocate for wellbeing and sustainable development and build capacity until statutory mechanisms are introduced.

The final option would be setting up a national advisory body, sitting outside of government, which would provide support, advice and influence national debates on WFG/SD. This model is potentially most flexible and actionable, since it could be initiated outside of existing public bodies and initiated by a coalition of non-governmental organisations.

By leveraging existing networks such as WEAll (Wellbeing Economy Alliance), member organisations of the Working Group on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN), the National Performance Framework's Expert Advisory Group, this body would provide strong advocacy for change, providing much-needed championship for WFG/SD. An NGO-convened body could take a bottom-up approach to promoting WFG/SD, prioritising grassroots initiatives and capacity-building, amplifying the voices of WFG/SD proponents, and building broader consensus for moving forward with WFG/SD in a new parliamentary term. While it would not have formal authority, its ability to influence policy through public advocacy and collaboration could position it as a respected voice in shaping Scotland's future. However, an ever-present danger is that this body is merely ignored, or becomes perceived as a fringe advocacy group, which could set the WFG/SD agenda back.

A more structured model, e.g. the 'Wellbeing Roundtable' approach used in Scotland in 2011, could have better results. A Wellbeing Roundtable is a time-limited multi-organisational body which deliberates over evidence to produce a set of agreed recommendations focussed on progressing WFG/SD¹⁰. This model gains buy-in from implementing organisations by directly involving them, and focuses on co-developing targeted recommendations with a good track record of adoption. This model carries higher costs since it requires intensive, dedicated support by a 'secretariat' organisation (examples of this approach can be observed in Carnegie UK's work with the North of Tyne Combined Authority¹¹ and partners in Northern Ireland¹²).

This approach could be valuable in the short term, providing an interim solution while Scotland mulls statutory options such as a Commissioner or a government-led taskforce. By maintaining an independent stance, the NGO-convened body, be that an advisory body or a wellbeing roundtable, could also serve as a trusted intermediary, bridging gaps between government priorities and community needs.

The limitations for this model are that it:

- ▲ Lacks statutory authority, which may limit its ability to enforce recommendations or demand accountability.
- ▲ Heavily reliant on voluntary participation, which may lead to uneven engagement across sectors or regions.
- ▲ Requires sustainable funding to maintain operations and deliver meaningful impact; higher in the case of the wellbeing roundtable

¹⁰ French, M. and Thurman, B. (2023). The Wellbeing Roundtable approach: a guide to creating effective wellbeing frameworks. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust. Available: https://d1ssu070pg2v9j.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2023/09/31162952/The-Wellbeing-Roundtable-approach-Final-web.pdf

¹¹ Thurman et al. (2022). The North of Tyne Combined Authority Inclusive Economy Board's Wellbeing Framework for the North of Tyne. Carnegie UK: Dunfermline.

¹² Carnegie UK (2015). Seven steps to developing a wellbeing framework in Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

Of the six possible operating models for WFG/SD, we conclude that a Future Generations Commissioner for Scotland (Model 1) would make the greatest impact. A Scottish FGC would provide dedicated representation for future generations and significantly address gaps in promotion, support and accountability in Scotland's WFG/SD system. Given the narrow legislative window in the current parliamentary term, the Member's Bill proposed by Sarah Boyack MSP provides the critical opportunity for this. Guidance for grounding a Scottish FGC in legislation is provided in Appendix 1.

However, a new Commissioner is also the most expensive option and the feasibility of this or a cross-commissioner approach (Model 2) within the current Parliamentary term are uncertain. Further, operating alone, even a Scottish FGC will struggle to overcome the substantial support and accountability challenges which currently stymie WFG/SD in Scotland. Our conclusion is that any long-term and comprehensive solution will require an integrated, whole-system approach involving multiple models.

There are pragmatic opportunities for this, even within the current challenging Scottish policy context. Sarah Boyack MSP's proposed Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill could make considerable headway within this parliamentary term in enacting legislative duties suggested in Appendices 1 and 3. The Scottish Parliament's Supported Bodies Landscape Review Committee could address the absence of representation of future generations' interests and accountability for WFG/SD goals by recommending changes in the Parliament's Committee system (Appendix 4) and SPCB-supported bodies (Appendix 2). Finally, it is important to note that none of these models are a substitute for dedicated leadership for WFG/SD from within the Scottish Government, which should commit to re-prioritising WFG/SD as an overarching national priority.

We therefore recommend that Scottish Government policymakers, advisors, WFG/SD advocacy groups and other key stakeholders collaborate to devise a new 'Scottish Approach' to WFG/SD. This report provides detailed guidance to assist with this. Using the six operating models outlined here, alongside the detailed proposals in Appendices 1-6, a cohesive and strategic architecture can be developed which address all the key barriers to WFG/SD we identified in Scotland. Table 2 sketches out one example of this, based on Models 1-4.



Table 1: potential operating models for WFG/SD in Scotland

	A Future Generations Commissioner for Scotland	Shared responsibilities across SPCB-supported bodies
Independence/ accountability relationships	Accountable to the SPCB	Accountable to the SPCB
Necessary conditions	Moratorium must conclude; new legislation required	Moratorium must end; new legislation required; bodies involved must commit to a significant change in focus
Promotion	Yes	Yes
Representation	Yes	Perhaps
Support	Perhaps	Perhaps
Accountability	Perhaps	Yes
Staffing requirement	Commissioner COO/Deputy Head of Policy Policy Analysts Research Officers Comms Manager Comms Officer Admin support	Shared programme lead Review/investigations officers Policy officers Comms officer Researcher or research budget Admin support
Annual cost*	In region of other Commissioners (£1.5-£2m)	Avoids set up costs and direct cost of a Commissioner (£1-1.5m)

* These are broad and indicative estimates, drawing where possible from existing comparator bodies (e.g. from other UK devolved nations)

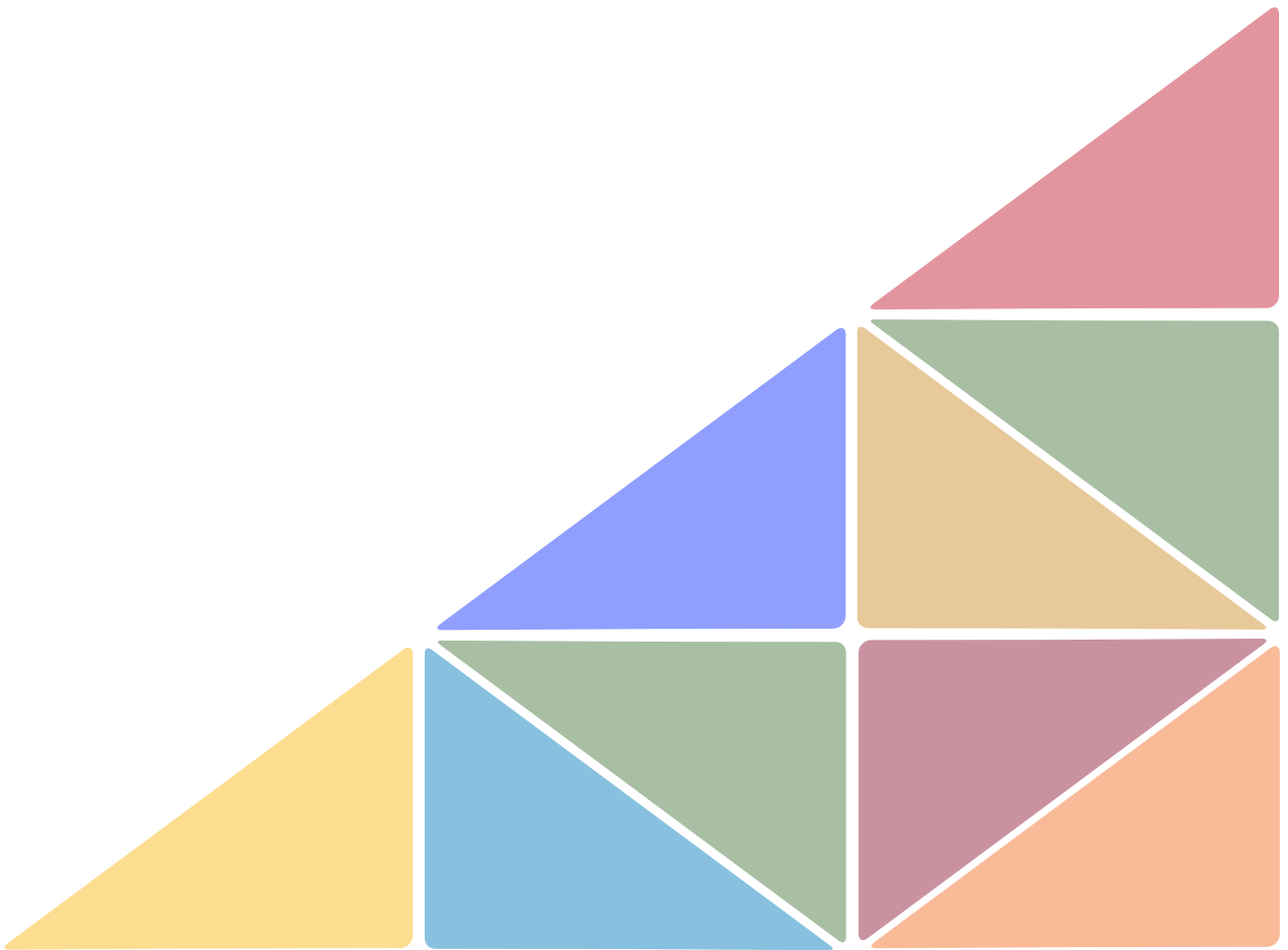
Parliamentary representation	A strengthened role for Audit Scotland	A government appointed advisory council	An independent roundtable
Political accountability /Scottish democratic system	AGS accountable to the sovereign; AS and AC accountable to SPCB	Accountable to Scottish Government Ministers	Accountable to an appointed board
Need to incorporate Future Generations within Convenors' Forum, or establish a new Committee in next parliament term	AGS, Audit Scotland and Accounts Commission must jointly commit to a significant change in strategic focus.	Scottish Government must commit to funding this body and act on recommendations	Scottish Government, Parliament, and other power holders must commit to listening and acting on advice.
No	No	Yes	Yes
Yes	Perhaps	Yes	Yes
No	Perhaps	Perhaps	No
Yes	Yes	No	No
Committee Clerk Administrative support Researchers and research budget	WFG/SD Audit Lead 2-3 Audit specialists Data analyst Admin support	Civil Service secretariat Chair Engagement officer Research officer Admin support	Chair(s) Programme Manager. Researcher or research budget Engagement officer Admin support
Aligned with committee costs (£100- £150k)	Requires additional capacity within Audit Scotland (£200- £250k)	In line with comparable task forces / commissions (£250- £300k)	In line with other Roundtables (£50- 100k)

Table 2: A whole system approach to WFG/SD in Scotland

	A Future Generations Commissioner for Scotland
Promoting wellbeing and sustainable development in public life	Promotion and advocacy through campaigning, marketing
Representing the interests of future generations	The interests of future generations are championed by a dedicated statutory representative
Supporting others to engage with wellbeing and sustainable development responsibilities	The FGC's office becomes the one-stop shop for training and capacity building for WFG/SD duties
Upholding accountability for wellbeing and sustainable development	FGC given power to request review and investigation via Audit Scotland and SPCB-supported bodies based on intransigence/non-compliance with duties

SPCB-supported bodies	National audit agencies	Scottish Parliament
Commissioner-style bodies collectively advocate for a rights-based approach to WFG/SD		
A Scottish FGC is accommodated within a strategic and integrated SPCB-supported multi-commissioner structure.	The Auditor General of Scotland and Audit Scotland commit to promote WFG/SD in public audit	WFG/SD established as a cross-cutting strategic priority amongst the Convenors Group and used to set workplans within all Parliamentary Committees.
SPCB-supported bodies trained by the FGC in carrying forward WFG/SD duties within an integrated structure	National auditors integrated WFG/SD goals and ways of working into public audit technologies	SPICe in collaboration with the Scottish FGC offer training and guidance to utilise the NPF in parliamentary scrutiny/ debates
SPCB-supported bodies with investigatory and review powers (Consumer Scotland, Ombudsman, SHRC) respond to FGC recommendations for inspection, review and sanction	As well as responding to the FGC's review / investigation requests, Audit Scotland reconfigures performance and best value audits around contribution to WFG/SD goals and ways of working.	Committee convenors ensure a future generations perspective focussing on long-term National Outcomes/Indicators undergird all committee proceedings

Appendix: Detailed proposals



Appendix 1: : A Future Generations Commissioner for Scotland

- ▲ Enact a **Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Act** to establish the office of the Commissioner.

Define the Commissioner's remit to include:

- > Promoting long-term thinking in policy and decision-making.
- > Monitoring public bodies' adherence to the National Outcomes.
- > Providing independent advice to government and public bodies on aligning with the National Outcomes.

- ▲ Grant the Commissioner powers to:

- > Review public bodies' compliance with national outcomes and issue recommendations.
- > Require public bodies to respond publicly to recommendations, outlining actions taken or reasons for non-compliance.
- > Mandate that all public bodies provide the Commissioner with data and access necessary for monitoring progress.
- > Allow the Commissioner to refer persistent non-compliance to oversight bodies such as Audit Scotland/Accounts Commission or the Scottish Parliament.

- ▲ Require the Commissioner to:

- > Use the National Outcomes as the primary framework for assessing public bodies' performance.
- > Collaborate with Audit Scotland, other Commissioners and NDPBs, local authorities, and the Sustainable Scotland Network to integrate efforts.
- > Publish an annual **State of Wellbeing Report** evaluating national progress on the National Outcomes and involving substantial public consultation.

- ▲ Require the Commissioner to:

- > Consult with public, private, and third-sector organisations on policy recommendations.
- > Facilitate public engagement initiatives, such as citizen assemblies or consultations, on key sustainability issues.
- > Establish a statutory Advisory Council to support the Commissioner, with representatives from academia, civil society, and industry.

- ▲ Review the long-term impact of government policies, especially in areas like climate resilience, public health, and inequality.

- > Provide annual recommendations for reallocating resources to preventative measures
- > Mandate that government policies and budgets include Future Impact Assessments reviewed by the Commissioner.

Appendix 2: Joint working across independent public bodies for WFG/SD

Example Memorandum of Agreement (MoA)

Between Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB)-Supported Commissioners, Audit Scotland, and the Auditor General for Scotland

For the Shared Promotion, Representation, Support, and Accountability of Wellbeing and Sustainable Development

1. Purpose

This Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) establishes a framework for collaboration and shared responsibility between SPCB-supported bodies, Audit Scotland, and the Auditor General for Scotland to advance Scotland's Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (WFG/SD) goals. The signatories commit to collectively promoting, supporting, and holding public bodies accountable for achieving the National Performance Framework (NPF) and the national outcomes, with a particular focus on future generations' interests.

2. Parties to the Agreement

The signatories of this MoA are the following SPCB-supported bodies and oversight organisations:

- ▲ Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS)
- ▲ Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC)
- ▲ Consumer Scotland
- ▲ Standards Commission for Scotland
- ▲ Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC)
- ▲ Public Services Ombudsman (PSO)
- ▲ Audit Scotland
- ▲ Auditor General for Scotland

3. Shared Objectives

The signatories agree to cooperate to:

- ▲ Promote WFG/SD Goals:
 - > Raise awareness of the national outcomes among public bodies and the public, particularly the intergenerational dimensions of wellbeing and sustainability.
- ▲ Represent Future Generations everywhere:
 - > Ensure that the voices and interests of children, young people, and future generations are integral to decision-making processes.
- ▲ Support Capacity-Building:
 - > Provide guidance, tools, and resources to public bodies to embed WFG/SD principles into their operations and decision-making.
- ▲ Hold to Account:
 - > Monitor, evaluate, and report on the progress of public bodies in achieving national outcomes, ensuring compliance with statutory duties and public commitments.

4. Key Principles

The parties commit to adhering to the following principles:

- ▲ **Collaboration:** Work together to achieve common goals, avoiding duplication of efforts.
- ▲ **Transparency:** Share information openly and provide public access to key findings and reports.
- ▲ **Independence:** Respect the independent mandates of each organisation while pursuing shared objectives.
- ▲ **Equity and Inclusion:** Ensure that efforts prioritise fairness, inclusivity, and the protection of marginalised communities.
- ▲ **Sustainability:** Prioritise long-term outcomes over short-term gains, embedding sustainability at the core of all activities.

5. Responsibilities of Each Party

- ▲ Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS):
 - > Advocate for children and young people's rights in public policies related to WFG/SD.
 - > Provide expertise on intergenerational justice and equity.
- ▲ Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC):
 - > Highlight and address human rights dimensions of sustainability, including environmental justice.
 - > Ensure public bodies integrate rights-based approaches into their sustainability efforts.
- ▲ Consumer Scotland:
 - > Represent consumer interests in sustainability-related decisions, ensuring affordability and accessibility.
 - > Promote responsible consumption aligned with sustainability goals.
- ▲ Standards Commission for Scotland:
 - > Ensure ethical standards in public bodies' sustainability-related activities.
 - > Address conflicts of interest that may hinder progress on national outcomes.
- ▲ Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC):
 - > Facilitate access to data and information that supports public understanding of WFG/SD progress.
 - > Promote transparency in decisions impacting national outcomes.
- ▲ Public Services Ombudsman (PSO):
 - > Investigate complaints related to public service failures in advancing WFG/SD goals.
 - > Recommend systemic changes to improve public service delivery and alignment with national outcomes.
- ▲ Audit Scotland:
 - > Provide independent assessments of public bodies' progress on WFG/SD goals.
 - > Develop thematic audits to evaluate how sustainability principles are integrated into public governance.
 - > Offer recommendations for improving the alignment of public spending with national outcomes.

- ▲ Auditor General for Scotland:
 - > Oversee and report on the financial performance of public bodies in relation to sustainability and wellbeing.
 - > Highlight systemic risks and opportunities in achieving the national outcomes.

6. Governance and Meetings

- ▲ A **Steering Group** composed of representatives from each signatory body will be established to oversee the implementation of this MoA.
- ▲ The Steering Group will meet quarterly to:
 - > Review progress towards shared objectives.
 - > Address challenges and identify opportunities for improvement.
 - > Publish an annual **Shared Accountability Report** outlining achievements and areas for development.

7. Funding and Resources

The signatories acknowledge that fulfilling this MoA requires adequate resourcing. Each organisation will allocate internal resources to support shared activities, and additional funding will be sought collaboratively from the Scottish Government or external grants.

8. Term and Review

- ▲ This MoA will remain in effect for five years from the date of signing, with annual reviews to assess its effectiveness.
- ▲ Amendments may be made with the consent of all parties.

9. Signatories

By signing this Memorandum of Agreement, the parties commit to fulfilling their shared responsibilities for advancing wellbeing and sustainable development in Scotland.

Appendix 3: Augmenting audit legislation to support WFG/SD

Enhancing the focus of Audit Scotland, the Accounts Commission, and the Auditor General for Scotland on the wellbeing of future generations and sustainable development would require specific legislative amendments. These changes would embed long-term sustainability into their mandates, ensuring that public auditing processes align with WFG/SD.

1. Amend the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000

The legislation governing these bodies is the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. Revisions to this Act could explicitly incorporate sustainable development and the wellbeing of future generations into their statutory functions.

- ▲ **Audit Scotland's Mandate:** Modify Section 10 to include a duty for Audit Scotland to assess how public bodies integrate sustainable development and future generational wellbeing into their operations and policies.
- ▲ **Auditor General's Responsibilities:** Amend Section 21 to require the Auditor General to evaluate and report on the long-term sustainability impacts of public spending and policy decisions.
- ▲ Include requirements for the **Scottish Government** to publish **guidance** on audit and accountability for WFG/SD.

2. Update the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973

The Accounts Commission operates under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. Amending this Act can ensure that local government audits consider sustainability and future generational impacts.

- ▲ **Accounts Commission's Duties:** Revise Section 97 to require the Commission to scrutinise local authorities' adherence to sustainable development principles and their efforts to safeguard the wellbeing of future generations.

3. Introduce Statutory Guidance on Sustainable Development Auditing

The Scottish Government can issue statutory guidance directing these bodies to incorporate sustainable development into their audit frameworks. This guidance would provide clarity on expectations and standardise practices across audits.

- ▲ **Audit Methodologies:** Develop comprehensive guidelines detailing how audits should evaluate the sustainability of policies and their long-term effects on future generations.
- ▲ **Reporting Standards:** Establish criteria for reporting on sustainable development, ensuring transparency and accountability in public sector performance.

Appendix 4: Establishing parliamentary committee representation for WFG/SD

Proposed changes:

- ▲ Create a new committee with powers to:
 - > Summon ministers and public officials to provide evidence on decisions affecting long-term wellbeing.
 - > Request detailed reports from public bodies on their contributions to NPF outcomes.
 - > Refer cases of non-compliance to Audit Scotland or relevant oversight bodies.
 - > Require the government to respond formally to the committee's recommendations within a specified timeframe (e.g., three months).
 - > Initiate joint inquiries with other committees on cross-cutting issues.
 - > Review government budgets to ensure adequate allocation for preventative spending.
 - > Publish an annual report highlighting opportunities for reallocating resources to prevention.
 - > Appoint independent advisors to support the committee's work on complex issues.
- ▲ Require the committee to:
 - > Use the National Outcomes to assess public bodies' performance.
 - > Produce an annual **Wellbeing and Sustainability Review** evaluating progress against the National Outcomes.
 - > Work collaboratively with other parliamentary committees to ensure the National Outcomes are considered across all areas of government policy.
- ▲ Require all parliamentary committees to consult with the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Committee when considering policies with long-term implications.
- ▲ Ensure all proposed legislation considers its impact on wellbeing and sustainability.
 - > Introduce a statutory requirement for all bills to include a **Wellbeing and Sustainability Impact Assessment**.
 - > Task the committee with reviewing these assessments and providing recommendations before bills proceed to debate.

Appendix 5: Draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for a National Advisory Council on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development

Purpose

The National Advisory Council on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development is established to provide expert guidance, oversight, and strategic advice on matters related to wellbeing and sustainable development across Scotland. The Council will support the Deputy First Minister in shaping policy, planning and implementation in relation to Scotland's National Outcomes and long-term sustainability.

Objectives

- ▲ To provide advice and recommendations to the Deputy First Minister on strategies and policies related to wellbeing and sustainable development.
- ▲ To support the integration of the National Outcomes into Scotland's policy landscape, ensuring they are reflected in governance, policy frameworks, and day-to-day practice.
- ▲ To monitor the effectiveness of policy implementation and advise on improvements, ensuring alignment with national priorities such as the National Performance Framework.
- ▲ To engage with a broad range of stakeholders, including public institutions, third-sector organisations, academic experts, and communities, fostering collaboration to drive sustainable development and enhance wellbeing.
- ▲ To provide evidence-based recommendations on resource allocation, policy priorities, and actions that enhance wellbeing and sustainable development in Scotland.

Membership and operations

- ▲ The National Advisory Council will be co-chaired by two individuals, who will be remunerated for their time and expertise. In addition to chairing meetings, they will represent the Council in external forums, ensuring effective communication and advocacy.
- ▲ The Council will comprise approximately 12 members, selected for their expertise in areas including governance, equalities, public health, environment and social justice.
- ▲ Members are appointed based on their individual expertise rather than their affiliation with any specific organisation or interest group.
- ▲ The group may include advisors or specialists as necessary, whose expertise will supplement the work of the Council.
- ▲ The Council will operate on a consensus-based decision-making process. If consensus cannot be reached, decisions will be made through a majority vote.

Resources

- ▲ Scottish Government will provide adequate administrative and logistical support to the Council. The secretariat will ensure effective communication and coordination between the Council, the Deputy First Minister, and other stakeholders. They will be responsible for producing policy reports as well as administrative duties such as agendas, minutes, and action and decision trackers.
- ▲ A research and participation budget will be available to support the work of the Council, including public and stakeholder engagement as required.

Appendix 6: Draft Terms of Reference of a renewed Scottish Roundtable on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development

Background

The Wellbeing Roundtable is a collaborative initiative established to develop the next steps for legislation and the implementation of wellbeing and sustainable development in Scotland.

This process is informed by the principles and approaches developed by Carnegie UK, which emphasise a collaborative, evidence-based, and iterative process. The Roundtable will focus on translating the principles of wellbeing into actionable legislative and whole system frameworks that promote sustainable development and enhances quality of life for all.

The Wellbeing Roundtable is a time-limited initiative, operating for 12-15 months. After this period, the Roundtable members will continue to advocate to ensure its recommendations are adopted into Scottish legislation and policy frameworks.

Purpose

- ▲ Build a shared understanding of wellbeing, sustainable development, and their role in governance and policy development in Scotland.
- ▲ Develop legislative and policy recommendations to promote the integration of wellbeing and sustainable development into public policy and practice in Scotland.
- ▲ Foster collaboration among stakeholders to ensure that the recommendations are widely supported and implemented effectively across sectors.
- ▲ Provide actionable recommendations to the Scottish Government, ensuring that legislation and policy development is taken forward as a priority action in the 2026/27 Programme for Government.

Objectives

- ▲ To engage stakeholders: Create a platform for a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss and define wellbeing and sustainable development, ensuring the Roundtable's recommendations are aligned with Scotland's needs and priorities.
- ▲ To develop legislation: Provide recommendations to advance legislation that integrates wellbeing and sustainable development goals into Scotland's public policies.
- ▲ To support implementation: Develop recommendations that ensure any future wellbeing framework is effectively implemented and integrated into legislation, policy and planning.

Roles and Responsibilities

- ▲ Convening organisation: To facilitate meetings and provide research, policy and administrative support.
- ▲ Chairperson: The Chair will ensure the Roundtable maintains its independence and that discussions are focused and productive. They will also ensure that all stakeholders' views are considered and respected.
- ▲ Roundtable Members: Members will participate in discussions, contribute evidence and insights, and support the development of recommendations. They are expected to advocate for the adoption of the recommendations within their respective organisations and networks.

