



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Officeholders – Draft Strategic Plans 2024-2028

25 January 2024

Reference: SPCB (2024) Paper 01

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider the draft strategic plans for 2024-2028 received from—
 - (a) the Standards Commission for Scotland, and
 - (b) the Ethical Standards Commissioner.
2. Their draft Strategic Plans are attached at Annexes A and B.
3. This is the first of three papers covering the officeholders draft Strategic Plans.
4. The SPCB has recently met with both offices. During these meetings, issues relating to the plans were discussed.

Background

5. The officeholders have a statutory duty to lay Strategic Plans before the Parliament for each 4-year period setting out how they will perform their functions. Before a plan can be laid, the officeholders must provide a draft of their plan and invite comments from the SPCB and any other body or person the officeholder considers appropriate, including a committee of the Parliament.
6. The officeholders have been laying plans before the Parliament since 2010. The attached draft plans cover the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2028. Each plan is required to set out (a) the objectives and priorities for the 4-year period, (b) how they will be achieved, (c) a timetable and (d) estimates of the costs.

Officeholders' Draft Strategic Plans

Standards Commission for Scotland

7. The Commission's role is to encourage high ethical standards in public life. It promotes and enforces the Codes of Conduct for Councillors and Members of Devolved Public Bodies and issues guidance to councils and devolved public bodies. The Commission adjudicates on cases of alleged contravention of the Codes of Conduct referred to it by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland, and on finding a contravention it has statutory powers to impose sanctions. It has a part-time Convener, four part-time Commission Members and employs four members of staff.
8. The Commission's Vision is for councillors and members of devolved public bodies in Scotland to uphold the highest standards in their behaviour, conduct and decision-making so that:
- the public has confidence in its local authorities and public bodies; and
 - to help local authorities and public bodies work effectively.
9. The Commission's Values in pursuing its vision, are –
- Fairness – we are objective, transparent, consistent and proportionate
 - Approachability – we are inclusive, collaborative, respectful and helpful
 - Leadership – we display leadership by initiating, advocating, being agile, delivering; and by seeking to learn and improve
10. The Commission's Aims and how they will be achieved are set out in the table below. They build on the aims in its current Strategic Plan which are (i) impact, (ii) stakeholders, (iii) clarity and (iv) improvement.

Promotion and Education	The Commission will take all opportunities to be a strong and consistent voice for the importance of the key principles of public life and to educate on the standards of conduct expected of councillors and members of devolved public bodies.
Stakeholders and Service Users	The Commission will continue to develop strong relationships with our stakeholders and work with them to resolve issues and prevent breaches of the Codes of Conduct.
Adjudication	The Commission will make clear, evidence-based and well-reasoned decisions on cases referred to us for adjudication to help improve standards and ensure any failure to meet those expected by the Codes of Conduct is

	dealt with in a fair, consistent and proportionate manner
Members and Staff	The Commission will continue to invest in, engage with and empower Members and staff to deliver our work effectively and efficiently

Monitoring Progress

11. The Commission will monitor progress through the publication of an annual business plan which outlines its planned actions, timetable for delivery, key targets and performance indicators and how each activity supports the vision and strategic aims. It will set targets and prioritises activities by balancing the need to meet its statutory duties to adjudicate on complaints about breaches of the Codes of Conduct and to provide guidance, with other objectives. In doing so, it will take account of its resources and any risk and quality assurance considerations. Its business plans are formally reviewed every quarter.
12. The estimated costs included in the plan are in line with those submitted as part of the 2024 budget approval process. The Commission is a demand-led organisation and the indicative costs are based on its current workload and remit etc.
13. **The SPCB is invited to consider the Commission’s draft Strategic Plan attached at Annex A.**

Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland

14. The Commissioner investigates complaints about the behaviour of MSPs, local authority councillors and board members of public bodies and lobbyists and looks into how people are appointed to the boards of public bodies in Scotland.
15. The Commissioner’s draft Strategic Plan for 2024-2028 has nine objectives-
 - We will ensure that we have sufficient staff and resources in place to deliver on all of our objectives, building resilience and flexibility across roles and remits. We value people and recognise that unless we have staff who are valued and supported to maintain their wellbeing, feel happy in and proud of our work and the way in which we do it, we will have failed

- We will ensure that our staff are properly trained, supported and developed to fulfil the requirements of their role and their career progression
- We will make the best use of up to date and secure digital technology to support our work, enhance our users' experience and safeguard our systems
- We will operate highly efficient and effective complaints handling processes that deliver consistent, evidence-based responses: ensuring fair and trusted outcomes
- We will engage meaningfully with our stakeholders to promote high standards in public life, listening to others view and working constructively to improve our systems and processes
- We will ensure appropriate systems of governance, quality review frameworks and robust external accreditation are in place, providing assurance to the public and stakeholders that our objectives are being met. We will also demonstrate our commitment to acquitting our environmental and social responsibilities
- We will contribute significantly to the maintenance of an effective ethical standards framework through supportive and constructive engagement with equivalent bodies both here and in other administrations
- We will, through supportive and constructive regulation, make a significant contribution to a public appointments system that produces effective and diverse boards that are reflective of the communities that they serve
- We will strive to be recognised leaders in the regulation of a system that is effectively run to achieve the appointment of the most able people to our boards and that is managed in compliance with the highest ethical standards.

Monitoring Progress

16. Beneath each of the nine Objectives are how they will be achieved. The Commissioner will report on progress through his Annual Report and Accounts, regular publication of minutes of Senior Management Team meetings at which progress will be discussed and recorded, publication of progress against all activities and goals in the form of annual biennial plan progress reports and other reporting mechanisms. The Commissioner has provided at Appendix 4, the metrics he will use to assess the office's performance against goals.

17. The estimated costs included in the plan are in line with those submitted as part of the 2024 budget approval process. The Commissioner's office is a demand-led organisation and the indicative costs are based on its current workload and existing remit etc. The Commissioner recognises public sector resources are limited and will review, scrutinise and report publicly on their work to ensure best value and continuous improvement.

18. **The SPCB is invited to consider the Commissioner's draft Strategic Plan attached at Annex B.**

Governance

19. Seeking comments from the SPCB prior to the laying of a strategic plan is a statutory requirement. The officeholders have until the end of March 2024 to lay their plans.

Resource Implications

20. Providing estimated costs in a draft Strategic Plan is a statutory requirement. The SPCB commenting on a draft plan does not guarantee future funding and we will make this clear when we responding to the officeholders. The officeholders' budgets are subject to annual approval by the SPCB.

Publication Scheme

21. This paper may be published.

Decision

21. The SPCB is invited to consider and provide any comments of the draft Strategic Plans of -

(a) the Standards Commission for Scotland, and

(b) the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland

Officeholder Services
January 2024