

# SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENTS

STEPHEN HERBERT

This paper provides an overview of the 32 Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) which have been signed off by the Scottish Government and each local authority over the summer.

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## KEY POINTS

- The Concordat signed by the Scottish Government and COSLA in November 2007 contained a commitment that every local authority would produce a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA)
- In 2008-09 the SOAs are intended to cover local authority service provision
- For 2009-10 community planning partnerships will be fully involved in developing and agreeing the Single Outcome Agreement for their area
- 15 local authorities have involved community planning partners in the SOA process in 2008-09
- 1,215 outcomes have been established across all 32 SOAs representing an average of 38 outcomes per SOA
- Across all 32 SOAs a total of 3,599 indicators have been used by local authorities
- On average a SOA consists of 112 indicators
- There are seven national indicators which roughly two-thirds of local authorities have used in their SOA
- Locally generated indicators account for over two-thirds of the indicators contained within SOAs
- SOAs contain a section which allows local bodies to raise the issues which they consider the Scottish Government needs to address in order for SOAs to be successfully delivered. These 'asks' tended to fall into four categories: strategic issues, local priorities, clarification of current or intended policies, and funding issues
- The majority of SOAs make no explicit reference to how equalities will be dealt with
- The Local Government and Communities Committee is engaged in an on-going process of evidence taking with regard to SOAs

## BACKGROUND

The [Concordat](#) signed by the Scottish Government and COSLA in November 2007 contained a commitment that every local authority would produce a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA). The Concordat stated:

That there will be a move to a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) for every council, based on the agreed set of national outcomes (underpinned by agreed national indicators), supported by streamlined external scrutiny and effective performance management.

In particular, the Scottish Government will work with local government on a new performance reporting system which over time will replace the myriad of existing systems and will provide regular, timely and transparent reporting to the Scottish Government on progress against national outcomes, and to local communities on progress against related local outcomes (and indicators). Each council will be required to submit a single report around the turn of the financial year on the year just finished and plans for the year to come, starting in 2008-09, setting out progress and achievements towards the national outcomes. Over and above these, with the exception of the requirements associated with statutory requirements, any agreed transitional arrangements in moving to an outcomes based approach, ongoing statistical returns and formal inspections, local authorities will not be asked to submit any other monitoring returns or plans to the Scottish Government without prior agreement. (Scottish Government / COSLA, 2007, p.2).

The Concordat went on to state:

“The national outcomes and indicators are listed in Annex A to this concordat. As part of this package each local authority would aim to reach a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) with the Scottish Government at the earliest opportunity, based on the national outcomes and, under a common framework, local outcomes to take account of local priorities. The SOA will cover all local government services in each local authority area as well as a significant range of the responsibilities of Community Planning Partnerships where local authorities have a significant part to play. The initial agreements would be with each of the 32 councils with the possibility of agreements with Community Planning Partnerships at some future date. SOAs will be expected to be in place across all councils during 2008-09. (Scottish Government / COSLA, 2007, p.3).

In 2008-09 the Single Outcome Agreements are intended to cover areas of local authority service provision. Over the course of the summer of 2008 all 32 local authorities have signed a Single Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Government. All 32 SOAs can be accessed on the Improvement Service website at:

[http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/component/option,com\\_docman/Itemid,43/task,cat\\_view/gid,561/](http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/component/option,com_docman/Itemid,43/task,cat_view/gid,561/)

For 2009-10 community planning partnerships will be fully involved in developing and agreeing the Single Outcome Agreement for their area.

The national outcomes and indicators referred to in the Concordat are the same as those contained in the national performance framework termed ‘Scotland Performs’. This can be accessed at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms>

In total there are 15 national outcomes and 45 national indicators. As part of the process of supporting local authorities in the development of SOAs guidance was produced by the

Improvement Service. This guidance<sup>1</sup> contained a set of 55 indicators which local authorities could choose to use. At present local authorities are required to provide performance data against 'Statutory Performance Indicators' (SPIs). Additionally, the Accounts Commission specifies a number of Statutory Performance Indicators against which councils, police and fire and rescue authorities are required to report annually. The number of SPIs is determined annually by the Accounts Commission and some variation occurs both in the number and the content. For 2008-09 there are 71, of which 13 relate to police and fire and rescue services. Lastly local authorities could also develop their own 'local indicators'. In practice local authorities have used a combination of indicators contained in existing corporate plans or Community Planning Partnership documents as well as creating new local indicators.

## **PURPOSE**

The SOAs set out the priority outcomes for a council and, in many cases, its Community Planning Partners too. They set out how the council intends to contribute towards the Government Purpose and associated 15 National Outcomes. In doing so, they reflect local circumstances, needs, priorities and preferences. As a result, there is no standard format for the SOAs and each is principally an expression of local will in pursuit of local and national goals.

SOAs also describe out a council's ambitions towards each of these priority outcomes, as measured through a range of indicators. Unlike an organisation's corporate or business plans, it is not the purpose of SOAs to set out the tasks and projects a council will undertake in order to support these outcomes. Furthermore, it is not the purpose of SOAs to reflect the totality of a council's activities or services, including those which councils are required by statute to carry out. Consequently, it should not be inferred that the absence of a reference to a particular issue or service in an SOA means that a council either does not treat that issue seriously or intends not to provide that service.

## **WHO HAS SIGNED UP?**

As noted above Community Planning partner organisations are not required to have signed up to SOAs for this financial year. However 15 local authorities have involved Community Planning Partners in the SOA process in 2008-09. The range of involvement varies considerably across the 15 local authorities from 'partner organisations' being formally signed up to the SOA to having been consulted in the development of the SOA. In addition virtually all local authorities have taken account of their existing Community Planning strategy in shaping the priorities of the SOA. The quotes below, which have been taken from the relevant SOA document, provide an indication of the range of approaches adopted:

### ***Aberdeen***

"Between 2008 – 2010 the Single Outcome Agreement will be between National Government and the Council – moving to the Community Planning Partnership in 2010. However from 2008, the strategic priorities identified in the Community Plan will form the basis of our Single Outcome Agreement. ... As we move toward the Community Planning Partnership taking responsibility for the Single Outcome Agreement, the relationship between the Community Plan and the Single Outcome Agreement is intrinsically linked until ultimately they become one document" (Aberdeen City Council, 2008, p.10-12).

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<sup>1</sup> The Improvement Service guidance can be accessed at: <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/core-programmes/single-outcome-agreements/>

## **East Renfrewshire**

“For the 2008-2009 SOA we have gained the commitment of several of our statutory community planning partners, including:

- NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and the East Renfrewshire Community Health and Care Partnership
- Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire
- Strathclyde Police
- Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, and
- Strathclyde Partnership for Transport

...We plan to build on this during 2008-09 to ensure we have a full partnership SOA before April 2009” (East Renfrewshire Council, 2008, p.5).

## **Inverclyde**

“The agreement is primarily between the Council, its key partners, including organisations within the public, private and third sectors and equally the Scottish Government. The SOA has been considered by members of Inverclyde Alliance whose current board membership includes:

- Strathclyde Fire and Rescue
- Job Centre Plus
- Scottish Enterprise
- Inverclyde Council
- Strathclyde Partnership for Transport
- The Voluntary Sector
- Strathclyde Police
- Community Councils Forum
- James Watt College
- Greenock Chamber of Commerce
- Inverclyde Community Health Partnership

A number of other organisations are also engaged in the Community Planning Partnership through the Thematic Partnerships including Riverside Inverclyde, River Clyde Homes and a wide number of Voluntary Organisations” (Inverclyde, 2008, p.5).

## **South Ayrshire Council**

“This agreement covers the services that will be delivered in 2008-09 by South Ayrshire Council and its associated agencies. In preparing it we have been inclusive of both the Scottish Government’s national priorities and the local priorities as set out in the Council’s vision document, ‘Securing the Future for South Ayrshire’, as well as the objectives of the South Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership as set out in the plan, ‘A Better Future Together’. ...

Both the Community Plan and the Council’s vision document were the product of extensive consultation with stakeholders and the wider public and we are, therefore, confident that the priorities in them reflect the concerns of people who use our and our partners’ services. To further develop an agreement which fully reflects the priorities of the community planning partnership and fully involves the community, we are planning in 2008-09:

- To engage our partners in the development of the agreement from April 2009 and in setting the outcomes and targets through a series of formal and informal dialogues;
- To improve the structures for engaging with the wider community;
- To hold a first Community Conference in the summer of 2008 to provide a forum for identifying the concerns and priorities of the residents of South Ayrshire.

As a result of this, we expect to move towards an agreement in April 2009, which not only reflects the national priorities, but is shaped by local concerns and enjoys the full support and ownership of all community planning partners” (South Ayrshire Council, 2008, p.3).

## OUTCOMES

The focal point of SOAs should be the commitment of a council (and its Community Planning Partners) to support the improvement of outcomes for the area. The 15 National Outcomes provide a framework within which a council, and its partners, can express its priorities. Most SOAs have been drafted on this basis.

Some SOAs have been drafted on the basis of a series of locally identified outcomes. In such cases, the SOAs remain able to demonstrate alignment between the local outcomes and the National Outcomes. Most of the SOAs cover all 15 National Outcomes.

In total there are 1,215 outcomes established across all 32 SOAs. This represents an average of 38 outcomes per SOA. The number of outcomes set varies from 82 in Argyll and Bute to 14 in Orkney. The outcomes which are often cited in SOAs are frequently statements of intent or strategic objectives.

## INDICATORS

Progress towards outcomes can be measured through a range of performance indicators set out in the SOAs. In developing SOAs local authorities have utilised a range of indicator ‘menus’ from a range of sources namely the 45 indicators contained in the National Performance Framework, the 55 indicators provided in guidance to the Improvement Service, the 71 Statutory Performance Indicators, indicators taken from existing local Community Planning Partnership plans and local authority strategic documents. Lastly, local authorities were also free to develop their own local indicators to take account of local circumstances.

Although SOAs are intended to be driven by outcomes, not indicators, it is worth considering for the purposes of this note the number of indicators contained within SOAs and the sources from which they have been derived. In reporting the numbers of indicators which have been used it is important to highlight that this paper reports the ‘raw’ number of indicators which have been used and recognises that indicators can appear more than once within the one SOA and therefore a degree of double-counting will have taken place. Therefore the figures presented here may overstate the exact number of indicators used however the figures presented are intended to provide an indication of the range of indicators used.

Across all 32 SOAs a total of 3,599 indicators have been used by local authorities. These split across the range of sources which local authorities could have used as follows:

- 433 National Indicators (12%)
- 363 Improvement Service indicators (10%)
- 348 Statutory Performance Indicators (10%)
- 2,455 Locally Generated indicators (68%)

On average a Single Outcome Agreement consists of 112 indicators.

The total number of indicators used in individual SOAs range from 41 (East Renfrewshire) to 320 (Shetland Islands).

In terms of the targets set against the 3,599 indicators within SOAs:

- 12% (445) have targets still to be confirmed
- 29% (1,040) have set 'Direction of Travel' targets (e.g. 'increase in the proportion of people receiving home care compared to the number resident in care homes' or 'increase the percentage of respondents stating they feel very safe or fairly safe going out after dark in 2008').
- 59% (2,114) of indicators have set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time related) targets

## **NATIONAL INDICATORS**

In terms of the national indicators, on average, local authorities have used 14 indicators out of the 45 national indicators available. Overall the national indicators have been used on 433 occasions by local authorities. There are 7 national indicators that tended to be used most frequently by local authorities (by roughly two-thirds of local authorities). These were:

- Increase the business start-up rate
- Increase the proportion of school leavers (from Scottish publicly funded schools) in positive and sustained destinations (FE, HE, employment or training)
- Increase the proportion of schools receiving positive inspection reports
- 60% of school children in primary 1 will have no signs of dental disease by 2010
- Increase the proportion of pre-school centres receiving positive inspection reports
- Reduce the proportion of people aged 65 and over admitted as emergency inpatients two or more times in a single year
- Increase the percentage of adults who rate their neighbourhood as a good place to live

In terms of the indicators suggested by the Improvement Service there were 4 indicators that tended to be used by two-thirds of local authorities:

- Number and percentage of children attending publicly funded schools and achieving appropriate levels for stages 5-14
- Number of suicides per 10,000 of the population
- Percentage of delayed discharges within the six week delayed discharge planning period
- Tonnage of biodegradable municipal waste landfilled

Similarly there are 4 Statutory Performance Indicators which tended to be used (again by roughly two-thirds of councils). These are:

- The number and percentage of young people ceasing to be looked after, who achieved SCQF level 3 or better in English and Maths or other subjects
- The number and percentage of reported crimes cleared up (non-sexual crimes of violence; crimes of indecency; crimes of dishonesty; fire-raising / vandalism; other crimes; miscellaneous offences; motor vehicle offences)
- The number / number per 100 million vehicle kilometres of persons killed or injured as a result of road accidents (all people killed or seriously injured / children or killed seriously injured / all people seriously injured)
- The percentage of municipal waste collected by the authority during the year that was recycled and composted

Indicators which have been locally generated, either through existing local strategies or created by local authorities for SOAs, account for the largest proportion of indicators contained within SOAs. Overall 2,455 local indicators have been used by local authorities. In terms of where the data for local indicators is sourced from:

- 52% (1,277) of indicators use council sources of information
- 24% (594) of indicators are sourced from 'partner organisations'
- 24% (584) use of other sources of information such as the Scottish Government and the Office of National Statistics

There is a degree of clustering around certain indicators which tend to be used across the majority of SOAs. Nevertheless, as is evident from the number of indicators being used, the striking feature of SOAs is the degree of variation which exists across SOAs. This is not surprising given that local authorities tend to state in SOAs that the document is intended as a key means of tracking local activity and is not designed primarily as a means for comparing performance nationally or between local authorities. The quotes from SOAs below provide a sense of the statements which are contained on the reporting of results:

### **Glasgow**

"In addition to performance reporting duties on Councils and Community Planning Partnerships under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, nationally agreed arrangements for reporting to stakeholders on progress made on the delivery of outcomes under this Agreement will apply.

In response to research which showed that Glasgow residents wanted more 'localised' public performance reporting than city-wide reporting, it has also been agreed by the Community Planning Partnership Board that joint reporting of the roll out of the Community Plan will be undertaken to each of the City's ten community planning areas. It is proposed that the first Local Reports be produced by December 2009" (Glasgow, 2008, p.12).

### **South Ayrshire**

"As regards formal reporting, it is proposed that, in June of each year, the Council will provide both a report on its progress in the preceding financial year towards delivering the national outcomes to the Scottish Government and a report to local communities on its progress with delivering local outcomes. The report, starting in 2009, will cover progress during the year just finished and plans for the year to come" (South Ayrshire Council, 2008, p.6).

### **Stirling**

"In addition to performance reporting duties on Councils and Community Planning Partnerships under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, nationally agreed arrangements for reporting to stakeholders on progress made on delivery of outcomes under this Agreement will apply. It is intended that an annual report on progress will be made to Stirling's citizens and communities each Autumn" (Stirling Council, 2008, p.3).

The existence of a degree of clustering around certain indicators may allow for a degree of comparability between local authorities although at present it will be an extremely laborious exercise attempting to ascertain comparability between local authorities given the degree of variation in the indicators which are being used.

## **SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ACTIONS**

In addition to setting out indicators and targets describing how local authorities intend to contribute to the 15 national outcomes contained in the national performance framework local

authorities have also set out in the SOA any issues which they consider will affect their ability to deliver against the indicators set. In agreeing the SOAs, Scottish Ministers and councils understood the status of these “asks” to be requests which the Scottish Government would consider in consultation with COSLA and SOLACE and report back upon, and not commitments by the Scottish Government.

Roughly 900 issues have been raised by all local authorities although again given that similar issues are raised both within single SOAs and across SOAs it is important to note that these are not 900 discrete issues. In broad terms there were four main categories of ‘asks’ which local authorities have tended to put in SOAs. These are:

- Strategic issues
- Local priorities
- Clarification of current or intended policies
- Funding issues

The High Level Steering Group has been working on categorising and synthesising these “asks” over the summer.

### ***Strategic Issues***

Local authorities tended to make a range of requests in relation to performance framework issues and ensuring that data will be available to assess whether progress is being made. Local authorities sought greater integration of performance framework systems across sectors. For instance that the HEAT (Health Improvement, Efficiency, Access, Treatment) targets within the health sector should be aligned with SOAs. A wide range of requests for data systems to be developed or for work to be commissioned in order that data can become available was made across a number of policy spheres. In addition the issues of reducing the reporting requirements of local authorities and implementing the Crerar review were raised within SOAs.

Another issue which emerges from the SOAs relates to the governance structure of SOAs. In particular local authorities sought clarity on whether SOAs were a process via which local authorities and local agencies would be held responsible to local communities or via which local bodies would be responsible to Scottish Ministers.

These “asks” are informing consideration by the High Level Steering Group (see section, below, on Local Government and Communities Committee) over which strategic issues local government would want to prioritise for policy development discussions with the Scottish Government, under the terms of the Concordat.

### ***Local Priorities***

Local authorities tended to raise a wide range of issues which were specific to their area. Typically these related to specific areas of investment in local projects, such as road and rail infrastructure projects, and that funding is provided for such projects. The Scottish Government will consider these asks with councils individually.

### **Clarification of current or intended policies**

Seeking clarification of existing Scottish Government policies, requesting that legislation or guidance in specific areas be introduced or that particular policies be developed were common 'asks' within SOAs. Examples of policy requests within SOAs include:

- Legislation to allow children previously looked after priority access to housing
- Legislation to allow development of affordable housing for vulnerable adults / young people especially care leavers
- Acceleration of the development of the Curriculum for Excellence
- Clear direction on the future of Supporting People
- Clear guidance on the implementation of the abolition of Priority Need
- Conclude negotiations with COSLA regarding the transfer of the local economic regeneration function
- Seeking Scottish Government support on the respective roles of the Scottish Government and the UK Government on employment and employability

Two policy areas where issues were frequently cited were the issue of class sizes and housing policy, particularly with regard to the implementation of homelessness legislation. For example West Lothian Council cited 'homelessness' and 'reduction in class sizes' as two of five 'areas for engagement' with the Scottish Government. The box below details West Lothian Council's comments in relation to these issues.

#### **Homelessness**

The council is committed to meeting the needs of homeless people and complying with the changes to homeless legislation, which will see the phasing out of the priority need test by 2012.

The council has developed an ambitious programme to address homelessness. However from its modelling of the demand for housing in West Lothian against homeless presentations the Council is seriously concerned that it may not be possible for it to meet the target by 2012. This position has been discussed with officials of the Scottish Government who are supportive of our strategy towards meeting the target involving greater use of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and the private sector, high quality prevention activities, a strong corporate approach to homelessness and where necessary, affordable and deliverable, increased supply.

The detailed Capacity Plan Model allows the council to model the impact of homelessness and assess its ability to discharge its statutory homeless duties over time, based on various assumptions. These include:

- Legislative requirements (reduction in non priority cases)
- High proportion of lets to Homeless applicants
- New Build programme (council and RSL)
- Changes in Allocation Policy and other prevention activity
- Right to Buy (pressurised area status), and
- Private sector leasing (releasing council temporary tenancies for permanent housing)

Information provided by the updated Capacity Plan Model, building in all the above assumptions, currently estimates that year-on-year there will be a shortfall in provision of permanent housing solutions for homeless people. This modelling suggests that by 2012 there will be an anticipated shortfall of 5,083 properties, with a significantly increasing shortfall in subsequent years. This means that in the future, without the ability to secure a substantial number of additional houses (through the construction of a greater number of public sector homes and the ability to discharge duty in the private sector), West Lothian Council would be unable to meet its statutory obligations to homeless people. Engagement is also required in relation to right to buy legislation and the role of RSLs in addressing homelessness. The Council is committed to meeting the needs of homeless people and complying with the changes to homeless legislation, which will see the phasing out of the priority need test by 2012.

The Council has agreed to meet Scottish Government officials again in August to discuss further progress with the model.

### **Reduction in class sizes**

West Lothian Council will work towards the delivery of class size reduction over the next 3 years. In year 1 (2008/2009) the target will be to support 14 schools in areas of recognised deprivation to operate classes of 1:18 or less in P1 to P3. The provision of supernumerary Probationers will support this delivery. In year 2 the target is to deliver Class Size Reduction to an additional 8 schools. Again, supernumerary Probationers at 2008/2009 levels will be required to meet the target. Additional capacity will be added where required from funding provided by the Scottish Government. By the end of Year 3 the target is to have 40% of West Lothian Primary Schools with P1 to P3 classes operating at 1:18 or less.

Work is under way to identify schools in years 4, 5 and 6 of the strategy. Substantial investment in the school estate will be required at this stage due to capacity issues in West Lothian.

### **Funding Issues**

Lastly SOAs tended to contain requests for additional funding with regard to a range of issues. Suggestions that the Grant Aided Expenditure resource allocation mechanism should be reviewed to account of a range of issues such as rurality and demographic changes were frequently made. More generally funding for specific policies would be highlighted whilst in some instance suggestions that guidance on how monies should be spent in particular areas as a result of ring-fencing having been removed were made. The Scottish Government provided the following response in relation to funding issues:

“The general position of the Scottish Government on this is that funding allocations for the current Spending Review period have been announced and no more funding is available. Requests for future funding requirements will be considered as part of the next Spending Review” (Scottish Government, 2008).

## **EQUALITIES**

The majority of SOAs (21) make no explicit reference to how equalities issues will be dealt with. 9 SOAs make a detailed statement on how equalities issues have been integrated into the planning process in developing the SOA whilst a further 2 SOAs discuss the issue of equalities in relation to indicators associated with National Outcome 7 – ‘We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society’. The quote below, from the Inverclyde SOA provides an example of a detailed SOA equality statement:

“An equal society seeks equality in the freedoms that people have to lead a fulfilling life.

The Inverclyde Alliance has adopted the Equalities Review definition of an equal society:

**‘An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and substantive opportunity to live in the ways people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish. An equal society recognises people’s different needs, situations and goals and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and can be.’**

There is a role for the partners involved in the Inverclyde Alliance to enable residents of Inverclyde to overcome prejudice and systemic bias. If the Alliance gets it right it can create the conditions to liberate the aspirations of those trapped by persistent disadvantage.

Underpinning our vision for Inverclyde is equality in everything we do. It is important to develop active measures to implement the legislation and opportunities the equality agenda brings.

This SOA is informed by the UK Equality Review and the ten dimensions outlined within it to help tackle persistent inequality and discrimination and to create the conditions to tackle the most entrenched inequalities.

Over the course of the next year partners will work to develop joint performance measures which will assist the Alliance to identify how it is meeting its equality obligations, but more to ensure that the needs of customers are being met. Monitoring of service users will be key to this, particularly to ensure that we meet the needs of and do not discriminate against younger people, older people, people with disabilities, minority ethnic people, lesbian, gay and bisexual people, people with different religions or beliefs, and men, women and transgender people.

Partners will work on a joint process to research and identify equality target groups and implement impact assessment in developing this single outcome agreement and actions and proposed developments.

We will impact assess the delivery of the SOA to ensure services are fair and can be accessed by those who need to use them and that they won't discriminate against anyone. This is especially true of people who are socially and economically disadvantaged. In developing services we will engage with equality groups and try to get as representative a sample of views and opinions as we can.

We will use the equality legislation as a guide to the delivery of the SOA to achieve freedom from poverty, discrimination and disadvantage, but also freedom to be able to achieve things that, individually, matter most to us". (Inverclyde Council, 2008, p.9-10)

The Scottish Government detailed their position on how equalities should be dealt with in SOAs in response to a Written Parliamentary Question from Johann Lamont MSP, as follows:

**S3W-13464 - Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab) (Date Lodged Tuesday, May 27, 2008):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether, in the event of there being no written evidence that equality impact assessments have been carried out by local authorities on their draft single outcome agreements, these draft agreements will not be signed off by the Scottish Government.

**Answered by John Swinney (Friday, June 13, 2008):** It is intended that single outcome agreements (SOAs) will develop over time and equality impact assessments will be part of that process. The Scottish Government would not delay signing off an SOA at this stage because the EQIA is not complete. However, we are emphasising to councils and Community Planning Partnerships their responsibilities in relation to the public sector equality duties, in particular toward 2009-10 when we expect SOAs will include Community Planning Partnerships

The Scottish Government provided a further response on this issue as follows:

"This reply reflects the status of SOAs. They reflect priority outcomes and measures against which progress against these can be measured. They are not designed as comprehensive delivery plans for council services. Councils and their partners are already required to complete equality impact assessments on the work programmes underpinning SOAs. The High Level Steering Group is likely to consider whether and how references to equalities issues should and can be strengthened in SOAs for 2009-10" (Scottish Government, 2008).

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

The Local Government and Communities Committee took oral evidence at its meeting of 18 June 2008 from representatives of the High Level Steering Group (HLSG), which was established by the concordat to oversee the development and implementation of SOAs. In addition the Committee has also agreed to take evidence from a grouping of local authorities

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regarding their experience of developing SOAs with the intention of taking evidence, on a rolling basis, in order to track progress in the implementation of SOAs as well as from voluntary and community groups, the Scottish Government and the aforementioned 'High Level Steering Group'.

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