

Note for Finance and Public Administration Committee

One problem with assessing public administration progress is that governments want to pursue many contradictory aims, prompting them to make trade-offs and prioritise one aim over another. In the case of Christie, the Scottish Government may desire to carry out the main principles but, *at the same time*, prioritise the practices that undermine them. Presenting these aims as a dichotomy discourages platitudes like ‘we would like to achieve both aims’. I want to eat crisps and lose weight, but seeking both does not achieve both.

Christie and other aims	Corresponding aim
Empowering individuals and communities by involving them in the design of services	Centralisation – ensuring some uniformity of services to avoid a postcode lottery
Partnership working to create more integrated services that improved outcomes	Silo working to foster specialisation
Prioritising expenditure on prevention	Maintaining expenditure on acute services
Reducing duplication to be more efficient	Maintaining services to remain resilient
Oblige public bodies to consider the long-term consequences of their policy decisions	Oblige public bodies to fulfil their current statutory duties
Focus on long-term sustainable development (over decades)	Focus on governing competence in relation to regular elections (every five years)
Use the National Performance Framework to develop shared aims and accountability across (and perhaps outside) the public sector	Use other performance management and accountability measures to ensure that ministers are accountable to Parliament (via scrutiny) and the public (via elections)

Common issues include:

1. Paying lip-service to local empowerment while holding on at the centre.
2. Encouraging partnership working in principle, while putting statutory and financial weight behind silo working.
3. Providing small incremental changes to ‘prevention’ budgets while maintaining large ‘reactive’ budgets (with the potential for the latter to soak up the former during crises)
4. Describing ‘prevention’ without defining what preventive policies or services are.
5. Signalling rhetorical support for the reduction of non-departmental public bodies by reducing their number but increasing the overall NDPB budget.
6. Maintaining separate discussions of the short and long term, with no clear way to connect the two or achieve a transition.
7. It is possible to think of everyone – and therefore no-one – to be accountable for the delivery of shared aims (which makes ministerial accountability the default option).

These issues are government wide, but with variations across sector, including:

1. Health. Long-term public health loses out to NHS services (and now COVID-19).
2. Education. Long-term ‘social justice’ loses out to ‘neoliberal’ performance measures.

In short, parliamentary accountability on Christie and ‘preventive’ policymaking requires us to know (1) how serious the Scottish Government is about the aims in the left-column, by knowing (2) how it relates to activity on the right-column.