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Towards a Wellbeing Framework:

Findings from the Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland



About the Roundtable

Chairs

Martyn Evans (Co-chair)
Chief Executive, Carnegie UK Trust

Aideen McGinley OBE (Co-chair)
BBC National Trustee for
Northern Ireland

Dr Theresa Donaldson
Dr Peter Doran

Chief Executive, Lisburn City and Castlereagh District Council
School of Law, Queen's University Belfast and Carnegie Associate
(Executive secretary)

Megan Fearon MLA
David Gavaghan
Professor Neil Gibson
Will Haire
Kat Healy

Nominee of Chair of Finance & Personnel Committee
Chief Executive, Titanic Quarter
Director, NI Centre for Economic Policy, University of Ulster
Head of the Policy Profession, NI Civil Service
Policy, Research and Evaluation Officer, Community Foundation for
Northern Ireland

Dr Helen Johnston
David McIlveen MLA
Dr Denis McMahon

Senior Social Policy Analyst, National Economic and Social Council
Nominee of Minister of Finance & Personnel
Deputy Secretary, Office of First and deputy First Minister

Joe Reynolds
Dr Tracy Power
Quintin Oliver

Alternate
Director of Analysis, NI Statistics Research Agency
Joseph Rowntree Foundation

James Orr
Dr Colin Sullivan
Dr Bernie Stuart

Director, Friends of the Earth
Director of Policy and Reform, Department of Finance and Personnel
Alternate

Jennifer Wallace
Dr Jane Wilde CBE
Lisa Wilson

Head of Policy, Carnegie UK Trust
Former Chief Executive, Institute of Public Health in Ireland
School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work,
Queen's University Belfast

John Woods

School of Law, Queen's University Belfast and Carnegie Associate
(Executive Secretary)

(Roundtable representatives contributed on an individual basis. Not all of the views expressed in this report therefore necessarily represent the views of every individual in the Roundtable or their associated organisations).

Introduction and Recommendations

Around the world, governments are exploring how they can meet the needs and expectations of citizens. Wellbeing provides a way to understand what is required and how best we can all work together to improve our lives in a complex world. It is not just about getting better at measuring what matters; it is about using what we know to create a better society. Most importantly, it is about engaging citizens in meaningful deliberation about what that better society should look like.



The Carnegie Roundtable on Wellbeing in Northern Ireland believes that improving our wellbeing should be the clear and stated aim of the Northern Ireland Executive. Taking our lead from proven international evidence, and developments from our near neighbour Scotland, we have spent a year speaking to an extensive range of people. We would like to thank all those who took the time to contribute to our work.

Wellbeing is a holistic concept, bringing together social, environmental, economic and democratic outcomes (see figure 1). A wellbeing approach asks us to consider how society is progressing in the round, rather than using economic indicators as a proxy for wellbeing or focusing on specific areas at the expense of others. It also asks us to look at the outcomes, focusing on how people's lives are improving (or not) rather than allowing the conversation to centre on the inputs or processes we use to improve society.

We believe the time is right to develop what we are calling a 'wellbeing framework' to guide and support the work of all public services in Northern Ireland. We have identified seven steps in taking forward this agenda:

- Step 1: Set wellbeing as our collective goal
- Step 2: Engage the public
- Step 3: Establish new ways of working
- Step 4: Align tiers of government
- Step 5: Communicate social progress
- Step 6: Improve accountability
- Step 7: Support the Wellbeing Framework

These steps are challenging for all: the NI Executive, public bodies, the private sector and communities. Developing an effective focus on citizens' wellbeing can only be successful if it is seen as a joint venture. Government, business and civil society each have a critical role to play. It will take an enormous effort and commitment to move to a future-focused and outcome-based approach. Our Roundtable identified significant and wide-ranging interest in these moves. The key issue is leadership. While this will be a joint venture, it is the politicians and civil servants of the Northern Ireland Executive who can provide the initial energy and drive to encourage others to join in the journey. Although our recommendations are to the Executive, our hope is that business and civil society will be quick to see the value and become enthusiastic partners. We have evidence that this will be the case.

In order to implement the seven steps, a series of recommendations has been identified.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CARNEGIE ROUNDTABLE ON MEASURING WELLBEING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Northern Ireland Executive should:

1. Integrate the concept of wellbeing as our collective purpose into its mission statement for all public services as part of the 2016-2021 Programme for Government.
2. Lead a society-wide conversation on wellbeing which feeds into the development of a Wellbeing Framework to guide the work of the NI Executive.
3. Agree a set of strategic commitments and outcomes (the Wellbeing Framework) and place this at the core of the 2016-2021 Programme for Government.
4. Set out, through the future Programmes for Government, the reforms required to achieve the Wellbeing Framework, including a whole-of-government operational culture.
5. Develop a training and capacity-building programme for all those bodies responsible for implementation.
6. Embed the Wellbeing Framework by linking it to collaborative budget processes and informing the allocation process.
7. Work with local government to agree a new relationship to fully integrate and monitor local outcomes within the context of the Wellbeing Framework.
8. Invest in communicating the Wellbeing Framework and trend data to the public by a range of techniques including data visualisation, live dashboards, social and traditional media.
9. Lay an annual report before the Northern Ireland Assembly for debate on the progress made by the Programme for Government towards outcomes described in the Wellbeing Framework.
10. Convene a Standing Advisory Group to provide ongoing technical support, advise on capacity-building activities and provide external review of the implementation of the Wellbeing Framework.

Our conclusions and recommendations are made with the intention of continuing to work with the Northern Ireland Executive and others to turn them into a reality. We invite you to help us in this by following us on Twitter (@NIwellbeing) and giving us feedback on our approach and recommendations. We would be interested to hear any feedback on how to move this important initiative forward.

Martyn Evans

Martyn Evans

Co-Chair, Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland

Aideen M. Conley

Aideen McGinley

Co-Chair, Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland



The Work of the Roundtable

The Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland was established following a successful event on wellbeing in the autumn of 2013. The Roundtable was welcomed by Simon Hamilton MLA Minister, Department of Finance and Personnel and Daithí McKay MLA Chair, Finance and Personnel Committee, Northern Ireland Assembly who wrote (in a joint foreword to the report of the conference):

'We trust that the Roundtable will be an ideal platform for an inclusive and creative dialogue that will also feed into a number of related developments here in Northern Ireland, notably ongoing work on public sector reform, the reform of local government and community planning, and the Executive's commitment to Delivering Social Change. It is time to place the wellbeing of our citizens at the heart of what government is about, at the heart of a shared narrative.'

We thank them for their support and enthusiasm for this area of work and we have kept their words at the heart of our work over the past year.

The Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland carried out its work during 2014 and early 2015. Our membership aimed to draw on a wide range of experience, including those of a number of public servants who contributed on a personal basis. We wanted to raise awareness of the importance of an outcomes-based approach to improving wellbeing, the positive impact it can have on policy development and explore the next steps necessary to develop an outcomes-based wellbeing framework.

Wellbeing ('linking social, economic, environmental and democratic outcomes') is about all aspects of society and from the outset, we knew that it would be critical to speak to a wide range of people. We engaged with the public to explore their views on wellbeing through a number of focus groups with key constituencies and used what they told us to inform our work. With the support of the School of Law at Queens University Belfast, we met and took evidence from a large number of public servants, representatives from political parties, and other interest groups, such as trade unions, business, and the voluntary sector. We were impressed by the level of interest in our work and the positive engagement from such a wide range of stakeholders, and thank them all for their time and enthusiasm. We have included direct quotes from these discussions and interviews in this report.

We also took inspiration from our near neighbours in Scotland and arranged a study visit to Edinburgh in June 2014, to learn from their world-leading approach to measuring wellbeing. We are grateful to John Swinney MSP (formerly Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth now Deputy First Minister), for hosting our study trip and contributing to our thinking. We would like to thank in particular Anne-Marie Conlong, Alison Dewar and Anja-Maaike Green of the Scottish Government's Performance Unit for their assistance in setting up the study trip and sharing their experiences with us.

We took written and verbal evidence from a number of people and we thank them for taking the time to contribute their thoughts. We would like to thank all those who presented to the Roundtable.

We would also like to thank Lauren Pennycook, Policy Officer, and Genna Nelson, Corporate Services Officer, for their work to support the Roundtable. This short report is supplemented by a full technical report available on the Carnegie UK Trust website produced by Peter Doran, Jennifer Wallace and John Woods.

STEP 1: SETTING WELLBEING AS OUR COLLECTIVE GOAL

Vision and leadership

From the outset, the Carnegie Roundtable on Wellbeing in Northern Ireland identified the need to encourage a new narrative or vision drawing on the language of wellbeing. We face a number of challenges, including poverty, mental health and far-reaching debates on the state of public finances, which are shared by many regions and countries at this time. All institutions require public trust and confidence. This can be damaged if there is disconnect between politics and the lives of citizens which is allowed to replace a sense of ownership, accountability and engagement. These challenges are layered with our recent history and our desire to move forward as a post-conflict society.

We took inspiration from:

The conversations we held with people across Northern Ireland on what wellbeing means to them and how to improve outcomes for all. International expertise on measuring what matters, including the OECD Better Life Index, and in the UK from the ONS Measuring Wellbeing programme and Scottish Government National Performance Framework

But in order to move forward, we need an idea of where we are going and one that resonates with citizens. Wellbeing provides an easily understood concept which can form the basis of a new approach to the relationship between citizens and government, focusing on assets and shared responsibilities between citizens, communities, government and the private sector. The concept of wellbeing can be used to link the everyday experiences and priorities of people with the sometimes remote and often opaque world of policymaking and politics.

"A shift in emphasis from measuring GDP to wellbeing is essential and can be enormously beneficial ' it needs to be explicit, known, understood and referenced in government policy and strategy"

Stakeholder Interviewee, 2014

A holistic perspective on social progress is not currently captured by GDP, GVA and other production-oriented aggregate measures of economic performance. Wellbeing is about more than what we produce and have. It is about what we are able to do and to be with what we have or forego: such as living long, healthy and meaningful lives, being educated, and enjoying the freedom and voice to participate in decision-making that affects our lives. This is not to suggest

that income and commodities are unimportant, but that if we are concerned with wellbeing outcomes, then we need to improve our understanding of the other aspects of our lives that contribute to wellbeing.

We understand wellbeing as the basic objective of creating the conditions for citizens to enjoy long, healthy, creative and valued lives. Alongside the constituent elements of wellbeing such as health, meaningful and rewarding work, social relationships, and access to a healthy environment – locally and globally – society must also pursue substantive freedoms by tackling inequalities, promoting a sustainable economy, and respecting planetary or ecological boundaries.

In developing our thinking about wellbeing, we have been influenced by the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. This approach to wellbeing goes far beyond mental and physical health and includes people's objective conditions and capabilities. Sen and Nussbaum's understanding of wellbeing has important political insights for post-conflict societies, including opportunities to cultivate conditions for democratic participation, engagement and autonomy.

We must rekindle our conviction that people and communities have a deep and instinctive desire to work for social and political participation and transformation. Indeed, these democratic capabilities are – in themselves – valuable for human life and wellbeing. Meaningful democracy is intrinsically valuable as a means and as an end in the pursuit of wellbeing.

New Narrative

A new narrative would contribute to building a sense of shared purpose and ways of working across government departments, as well as reconnecting the content and delivery of the Programme for Government with the day-to-day experience and aspirations of citizens.

Our work identified three reasons for moving towards wellbeing as our shared, collective purpose:

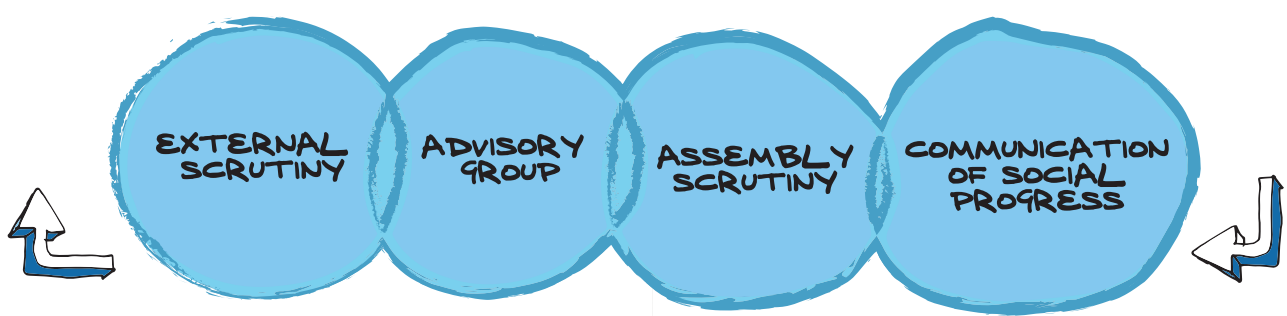
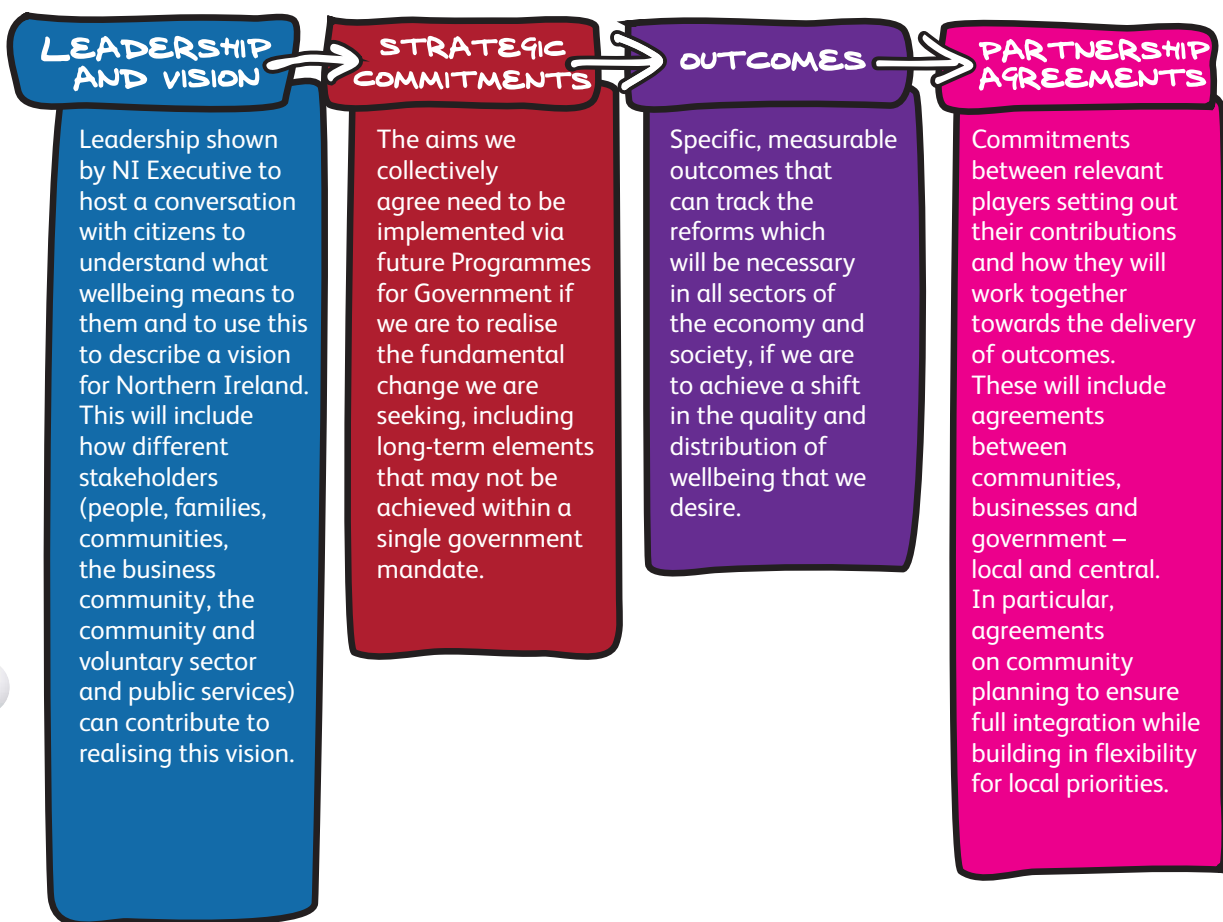
1. There is a wealth of evidence that shows that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is no longer an adequate measure of social progress. This is not to say that it is irrelevant, but rather that other measurements must sit alongside it. Economic outcomes are part of any wellbeing framework but they should be on an equal footing with, and informed by, social, democratic and environmental outcomes.
2. Using wellbeing as a guiding narrative helps governments to focus on medium and long-term outcomes for citizens and communities, rather than just inputs and processes. The most intractable or wicked challenges facing society have formed over decades (if not centuries) and resolving them will require sustained efforts well beyond a single Assembly mandate.
3. Public services in the 21st century are complex, focusing increasingly on prevention and requiring joined-up services and an engagement with service users. A wellbeing narrative can be part of the mix in helping services focus on outcomes for citizens rather than on silos and reactive top-down management. It can shift the focus in policy design from the provider interest to the user interest.

Components of Wellbeing

The chart on page 7 shows the key components of a wellbeing framework, which includes leadership and vision, strategic commitments, outcomes and agreements about roles and responsibilities. We envision a dynamic process whereby these elements are part of a new conversation about the future of our society. The diagram shows how we foresee moving from a statement of purpose to a deeper understanding of wellbeing which influences new ways of working across public services and supports democratic engagement and renewal.



Figure 2: Key Elements of the Wellbeing Framework



Strategic Commitments and Outcomes

The next step in a wellbeing approach is to develop a number of high-level strategic commitments which can form the basis of a wellbeing framework. These commitments are underpinned by specific outcomes that can show progress towards that aim. For example, our commitment may be a fair society and the outcomes towards that aim are likely to focus on distribution of income and wealth and access to employment and training. The determination of high-level government commitments are, most fundamentally, the responsibility of the Executive parties.

This approach received universal approval during our deliberations with stakeholders. We heard that the current focus on inputs and targets is, in some cases, detracting from outcomes and working against the improvements that people seek. Emphasis can often be on funding rather than focussing on which activities could have the greatest impact on citizens' health, income or education. Figure 2 shows the key differences between an inputs or processes approach and an outcomes approach.

Figure 2: Inputs, processes, outcomes and commitments



International research by the OECD, Eurostat, the European Commission and the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission all demonstrate that we can identify the key elements that contribute to wellbeing and that these are shared across communities. Research and policy developments within countries such as Scotland, Canada, the US, France and the UK also shows remarkable similarities in relation to what elements contribute to a sense of wellbeing.

There is, of course, a specific context in Northern Ireland, and we therefore also gave consideration to the need to include outcomes that help to track the capabilities associated with the deepening of a democratic culture such as the level of genuine citizen participation and ownership and building united communities.

"People in Northern Ireland are trying to shed a skin and to find a new face, mind-set and disposition. A wellbeing focus can help with this."

Stakeholder Interviewee, 2014

Our work to date suggests that strategic commitments for Northern Ireland could address:

- Building the conditions for wellbeing
- Deepening democratic engagement
- Developing an innovative, fair & sustainable economy
- Building a creative and inclusive society
- Living long and healthy lives
- Safeguarding the environment (local and global).

Progress towards each of these strategic commitments would be demonstrated by use of a number of key outcomes.

We explored the ONS National Wellbeing Programme, Scotland’s National Performance Framework and the OECD Better Life Index to identify outcomes that we think could form the basis of a wellbeing framework. Our draft framework is offered on page 10. In proposing this draft framework, we are not suggesting that this is an end product, but rather that it offers an illustrative example building on work already carried out. The end product will be the result of a conversation between the Government and the people of Northern Ireland.

The intention should be to track these over time to show the progress made. Many of the relevant statistics exist in Northern Ireland and are collected by public services and statistical offices. There are also technical issues in the availability of some of the data that we would like to see collected as part of a Wellbeing Framework. These include:

- how we measure and value unpaid work
- how we measure the quality and security of employment
- how we include the experiences of children and young people
- how we measure creativity and innovation
- how inequalities are reflected in the framework.

These issues were not the primary focus of the work of the Roundtable. Our priority was to explore what an overall wellbeing framework would consist of and what it might achieve. We did not want to be curtailed by detailed discussion of what current measurements are. We were conscious of the need to avoid the trap whereby we conclude that we must measure what we always have, rather than what really matters to people. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency has been expanding its activities to include the collation of wellbeing data in one place. There are some gaps where NI data are either collected differently from the rest of the UK or not collected at all, but the exercise is a very useful starting point for collating the datasets needed to underpin the Framework.



DRAFT WELLBEING FRAMEWORK

PURPOSE STATEMENT
OUR COLLECTIVE PURPOSE IS TO IMPROVE THE WELLBEING OF EVERYONE BY CULTIVATING A PEACEFUL, PROSPEROUS AND FAIR SOCIETY, NOW AND FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS!

WHAT'S MISSING?

ARE THESE THE RIGHT GOALS?

STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS



ARE THESE OUTCOMES FOR ALL?

ARE THESE OUTPUTS OR OUTCOMES?

STEP 2:

BUILD PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT INTO THE HEART OF THE WELLBEING FRAMEWORK

The Wellbeing Framework (the purpose statement, strategic commitments and outcomes) are only meaningful insofar as everyone, including and especially citizens, are actively engaged in the deliberations around their rationale, design and application. Government will not be able to deliver outcome improvements without the active participation and efforts of the public and all key stakeholders. An integral part of this approach to wellbeing is a recognition that meaningful civic participation in the democratic process is both a means and an end: it is a means to a better framework that reflects the needs of the people of Northern Ireland; it is an end because reasoned deliberation and engagement with the decisions that affect our lives is known to directly improve wellbeing. Moreover, understood in this wider sense, wellbeing also captures vital conditions for a deep democracy. A reported sense of control over our lives is one of the most reliable indicators of wellbeing.

We took inspiration from:

Evidence of the importance of agency and democratic engagement for wellbeing and international examples of best practice in engagement on wellbeing.

Citizen participation will ensure that a shift to an outcomes-based approach to delivering public services and measuring progress attracts legitimacy and mobilises user groups. The framework can become one element in a movement to renew and deepen democratic engagement with our political institutions. We were interested in the approach taken by The Wales We Want initiative which is an opportunity for citizens to shape the long-term ambition for Wales. This national conversation focuses on understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals and communities, and identifying how to create a more vibrant and sustainable Wales.

"The best policies are the ones that are informed by people closest to the ground. Having your say is not always having your way, but it is important."

Stakeholder Interviewee, 2014

We are inviting the Executive to take a lead in launching a conversation on wellbeing and governance with a view to collaboratively designing the Wellbeing Framework. To do this effectively, we must go further than the traditional consultation approach used by governments across the UK. Instead, we are envisioning a deep conversation on wellbeing in Northern Ireland. Governments have had success by working with voluntary and community organisations, asking them to lead community conversations and feeding back into the overall process. Others have experimented with social media to reach a wider range of citizens, especially young people. These approaches require resourcing and careful crafting, but we believe it would be instrumental in renewing democratic engagement and rebuilding trust in our institutions.

Some commentators have raised queries over how our proposed approach would interact with representative democracy. However, public engagement in understanding wellbeing and setting the framework does not reduce the need for political debate, but rather supports it by providing further evidence on which politicians can explore how best to achieve shared outcomes and cultivate ever wider circles of learning and participation in the policy cycle.

We are advocating for a Northern Ireland-wide conversation on wellbeing and we would also very much welcome opportunities within local community planning processes to hold 'local wellbeing conversations'. This would allow engagement to inform and underpin these discussions, in parallel to the wider conversation. The Carnegie UK Trust has begun work on a wellbeing toolkit that may be used within these settings.



STEP 3:

ESTABLISHING NEW WAYS OF WORKING TO SUPPORT WELLBEING

The global conversation about wellbeing is about much more than measurement. It is also about 'doing things differently'. The nature of outcomes means that it is highly unlikely that improvements can be achieved and attributed solely to the activities of one actor, department or initiative. Achieving wellbeing outcomes requires action in partnership across departments, local government and the wider public sector and a new relationship between citizens and government.

It also requires a greater understanding of what citizens contribute themselves to outcomes. To embrace this model is to appreciate that all outcomes are 'coproduced' between a range of participants – be they citizens, public services, businesses or community and voluntary sector groups, including funding bodies. This sense of shared endeavour must be at the heart of our relationship with government. An alignment of funding body criteria with an outcomes-based approach could contribute significantly to the objectives set out in these findings.

This requires significant changes to traditional ways of working. Many of these changes are captured in the concept of the 'enabling state' which can be summarised as the move:

- From setting targets to outcomes
- From top-down to bottom-up
- From representation to participation
- From silos to working together
- From crisis management to prevention
- From doing-to to doing-with
- From state provision to the third sector.

These approaches are important ways of working that are not yet universally established in Northern Ireland. We heard evidence that joined up working across departments is challenging and there was an overwhelming sense of silo-based government which trickles down to citizens' lives by producing a system that is difficult to navigate. There were calls from stakeholders for greater horizontal integration between departments and agencies. Research consistently shows

We took inspiration from:

The Enabling State programme of activities carried out by the Carnegie UK Trust. Over 18 months, the Trust reviewed evidence from across the UK and Ireland on the changing relationship between the state, citizens and communities.

The work of the OECD Senior Budget Officials Performance and Results Network, particularly from Ontario, Canada, where they link financial decisions to logic modelling to track outcomes.

citizens' frustration with the lack of joined-up thinking and delivery of public services. Joined-up, partnership working is difficult to achieve and many governments struggle with this challenge. The Wellbeing Framework can help to overcome obstacles by encouraging people to see themselves as contributing to shared outcomes. The intention is that by working backwards from a robust evidence base and desired outcomes to key drivers and policy levers, policymakers can create more effective policies which can deliver change. The Wellbeing Framework should form the basis for a new collaborative culture throughout our public services and in relations between the centre and local government.

"The reform of local government and introduction of community planning presents an opportunity to engage citizens in what people want and need at local level - that's the grand prize"

Stakeholder Interviewee, 2014

The forthcoming Programme for Government (PfG) and succeeding PfGs should be informed by, and reflect the Wellbeing Framework and its collaborative approach. The NI Executive should show leadership by taking steps to cultivate a new whole-of-government operational culture, including mechanisms and training to promote a collaborative problem-solving culture and management structure. There are many barriers to collaboration, including the number of departments, the focus on financial governance processes which inhibit innovation, flexibility and partnership working. Experience from Scotland suggests that a Wellbeing Framework can align different aspects of government activity. The NI Executive should commit to overcoming these barriers in their ongoing reviews of policy and operations.

An important approach in support of wellbeing outcomes is a much greater focus on prevention ranging from upstream activities to avoid problems arising in the first place through early intervention to early remedial treatment. While this concept is most familiar in the health sphere, it is relevant across government, from keeping young people out of the judicial system to pollution prevention and early years interventions for children in families at risk.

The financial benefits of preventative approaches are well recognised – it being almost invariably cheaper to prevent a problem than to solve it – but there are challenges in that it is rarely possible to remove funding from services designed to react to current problems to avoid those in the future; return on investment is often long term and well beyond a single political mandate; and the financial benefits often accrue to a different part of the system to that which made the investment in the first place. The long-term focus of the Wellbeing Framework combined with the proposals on outcomes budgeting can support a shift towards prevention that it moves from being a frequently low priority to being a key approach to improving outcomes for citizens.

For the Wellbeing Framework to be successful, it must be embedded in normal policy and scrutiny processes. In other countries, this is pursued through legislation (see for example proposals in Scotland and Wales).

In the absence of legislation for now, the most effective way of embedding the Wellbeing Framework would be to link it to financial decision making. There is increasing interest in Northern Ireland, as well as the UK and internationally, on linking budget decisions to outcomes. Governments around the world (for example, in Canada and Australia) have begun to focus on how to link outcomes to the budget process. The literature suggests three reasons for the link between outcomes and budgets

- it supports accountability and transparency and facilitates proper scrutiny of the budgets presented to parliaments and assemblies
- it aids efficiency by improving allocation of monies
- it improves public sector performance.

By focusing relentlessly on the outcomes that we seek, the wellbeing approach can contribute to effective decision making in difficult financial times. It is likely that this approach will lead to debate around prioritising activities and programmes, as well as giving a new way to explore and compare the benefits of new initiatives.

In terms of policy development and evaluation, appraisal of policy options that are focused on wellbeing outcomes cannot be achieved using conventional cost-benefit analysis, which undervalues or excludes many of the things that matter most to wellbeing. The adoption of new appraisal methodologies that accept the multi-dimensionality of policy impacts and allow for value judgements will be important.

Outcomes-based budgeting is a complex area of activity and the Executive and the Assembly Finance and Personnel Committee have already begun looking at this issue. The Executive should further consider performance linked, collaborative budget processes, using the Wellbeing Framework to inform the allocation process. The NI Assembly Finance and Personnel Committee have an important role to play in scrutinising the Executive's overall performance and delivery of the strategic commitments and outcomes.





STEP 4:

ALIGNING TIERS OF GOVERNMENT

A Wellbeing Framework has the capacity to align central and local government through a shared sense of purpose and shared outcomes sometimes called vertical integration. The current reform of local government and the introduction of community planning provide the opportunity to develop a culture of mutual respect and partnership between central and local government. We took our inspiration from Scotland, where the relationship with local government was rewritten in 2007. However, we recognise that the situation in Northern Ireland is very different.

"The reform of local government and introduction of community planning presents an opportunity to engage citizens in what people want and need at a local level – that's the grand prize."

Stakeholder
Interviewee, 2014

We took inspiration from:

Single Outcome Agreements in Scotland that provide an important focus for partnership working, bringing together key partners to plan and deliver better outcomes for local communities, whilst showing how progress on these local outcomes contributes to central outcomes.

While we measure wellbeing on a national or regional level, local government has a critical role to play in helping us reach our potential, enjoy our environment and support our communities. The new community planning partnerships will be led by local councils, but responsibility for delivery will be spread across a range of statutory partners. The draft statutory guidance on community planning is strongly focused on outcomes that improve social, economic and environmental wellbeing and the partnership approach is designed to achieve a high degree of horizontal integration

at the local level. Thus the thrust of this report is already very much present in this new and welcome direction for local delivery.

It is difficult to see, however, how the potential of community planning will be realised without a similar degree of horizontal integration at the centre. If this can be realised via the use of the Wellbeing Framework, both central and local priorities can be aligned in a way that both responds to local priorities and contributes to shared high-level outcomes.

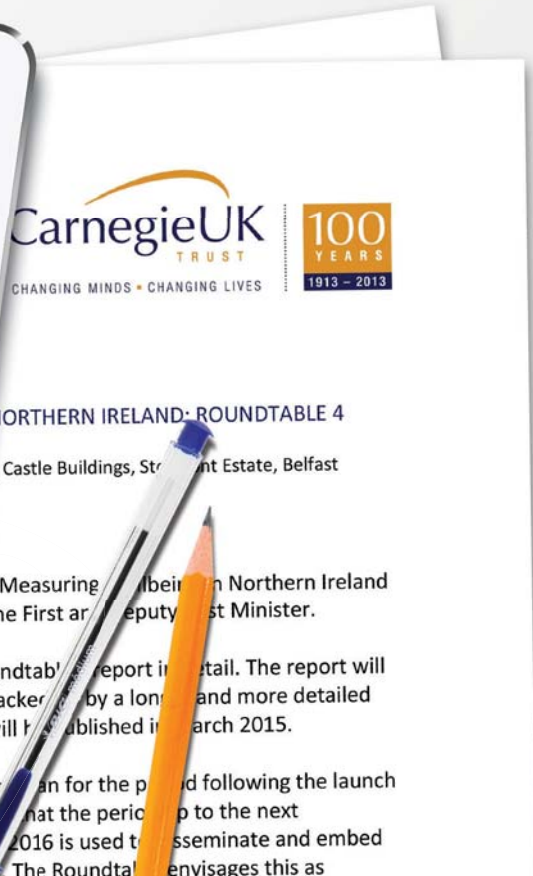
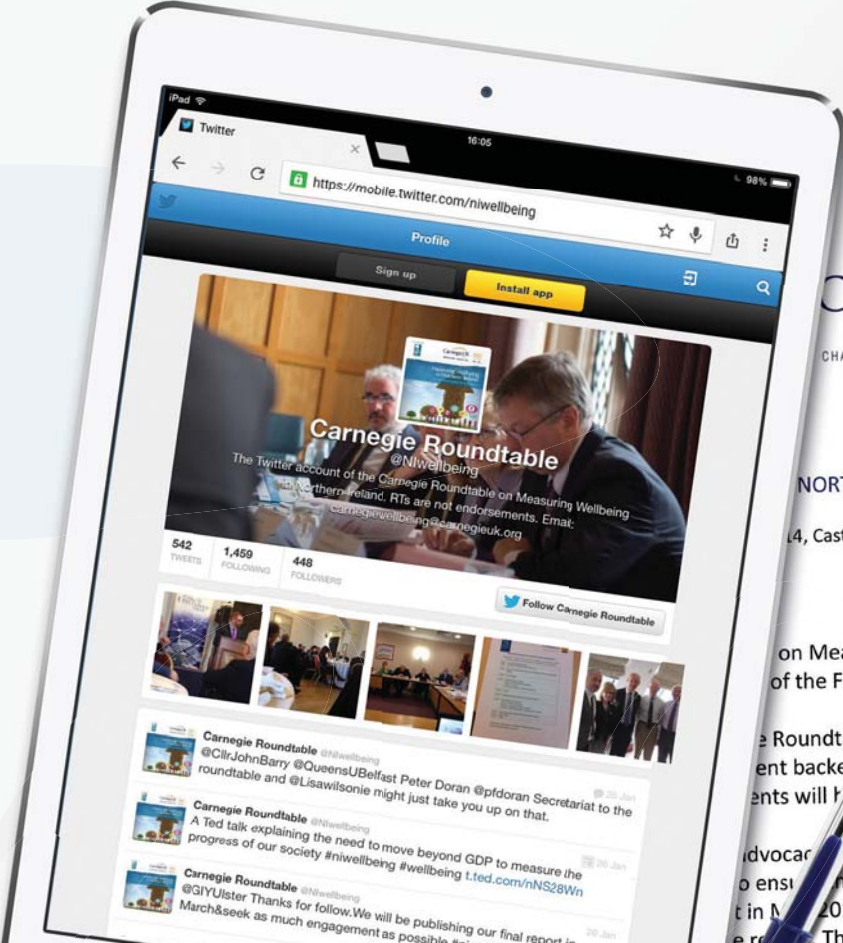
We anticipate a compact whereby local government and the community planning partnerships commit to contributing to outcomes in the Wellbeing Framework, but which sets its own local outcomes, targets and priorities to reflect their local situations. For example, in relation to outcomes on environmental and health issues, improving access to green spaces is likely to be a key indicator but the partnerships will themselves have a view as to what is achievable and where this sits amongst their other priorities and opportunities. While the Wellbeing Framework sets out a desired direction of travel, it does not commit

councils to particular interventions to achieve these outcomes. Such decisions remain within their responsibility.

Councils across the UK are already engaged in work to understand and improve local wellbeing outcomes. In Northern Ireland, work has begun between the Department of the Environment and the new local councils in developing an outcomes-based approach to community planning.

To be effective, this approach must include a sharing of information between central and local government, so that central government has clear information on how the process is working and whether there are any unintended consequences emerging from the new relationship. Overall, the process of community planning will provide significant information on the priorities of local people and the types of services required.

We would welcome a formal link between the Wellbeing Framework, the Programme for Government and the new community planning partnerships or their representative bodies. The Programme for Government should include information on how central and local government will work together to achieve outcomes, including commitments between central government and local government and the community planning partnerships, to fully integrate and monitor local outcomes within the context of the Wellbeing Framework. Close consideration of the Single Outcome Agreement concept may be helpful in this regard.





STEP 5:

COMMUNICATE OPENLY ON SOCIAL PROGRESS

The ability to monitor progress towards the achievement of outcomes is a central function of a wellbeing approach. The Wellbeing Framework will only work if it can provide a compelling and immediate understanding of where we are, where we want to go and what progress is being made. The public are at the heart of developing the Wellbeing Framework and they are the primary audience for the information that is gathered. This requires a different approach from normal statistical publications and government press releases.

We took inspiration from:

Data visualisation techniques used by the Office for National Statistics in the UK and the OECD Better Life Index.



In communicating social progress to the public, there is a tension between presenting too much information and presenting too little. Reducing wellbeing down to one number (whether subjective wellbeing or an index that produces a single figure) has the benefit of simplicity but can look shallow and struggle to convey the depth of the issues being considered. Internationally, there are examples of indexes of wellbeing that can be expressed as a single figure, however 'dashboards' (as shown in the illustrative framework on page 10) provide a

more meaningful form of presentation.

In developing dashboards, there is an understandable desire to include more outcomes rather than fewer. However, the need to communicate openly and clearly suggests that there is an optimum number beyond which it is difficult to process. Dashboards are commonly designed to sit on one page.

Communication with the public can be further developed by tracking outcomes over time, showing increases and decreases visually. The State of Virginia Government, for example, publishes a publicly accessible scorecard that uses arrows to show the direction of travel for each indicator over time.

The ONS has experimented with data visualisation techniques through its wellbeing wheel to help the public understand the various elements of wellbeing. The Northern Ireland Executive should take a similarly innovative approach, focusing on simplicity and accessibility. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency should experiment with a range of techniques including data visualisation, live dashboards, engagement through cultural and media communities, social media and crowd-sourcing experiments in data collection and display.

In the mid- to long-term, a wellbeing framework can serve as a transparent platform for some of the far-reaching conversations that will face society. We have in mind such challenges as the transition to a low carbon economy, structural changes to our economy driven by local and global challenges, and the emergence of new forms of democratic participation in the design and delivery of outcomes.

STEP 6: USE THE WELLBEING FRAMEWORK TO IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY

We took inspiration from:

Developments in Scotland where the Scottish Government has used the performance framework to send briefings to Parliamentary Committees in advance of the budget scrutiny process. The Scottish Community Empowerment Bill will also legislate for an annual report to be laid before the Parliament to aid in the scrutiny process.

Trust in government is a key component of wellbeing yet the OECD cites it as one of the top three challenges facing governments. Improving trust in government and confidence in the judgements it makes about its own performance, should be a priority. Meaningful scrutiny is therefore crucial to a Wellbeing Framework.

Scrutiny of public services must strike the right balance in terms of holding people and organisations to account for the delivery of change, while promoting an open dialogue in which everyone – including the people who are tasked with delivery – can be honest about what works and what does not work. Scrutiny will need to focus on the economic and non-economic sources of wellbeing and the trade-offs that form the basis of policy and resource debates.

The Roundtable concluded that the current focus of scrutiny on the processes associated with financial governance fails to adequately focus on outcomes for the public. We are concerned that current scrutiny is often adversarial in nature rather than focused on a shared endeavour. As such, the current scrutiny suppresses innovation and the partnership working which is necessary to promote real societal change.

Integrated scrutiny of the Executive would serve two purposes. It would improve trust in the Executive generally by stimulating constructive scrutiny focused on understanding trends in social progress rather than facilitating a culture of blame. And it would improve the Executive’s own self-regulatory function by encouraging a questioning approach to understand the underlying causes of shifts in the wellbeing framework.

- New processes could be introduced to assist this process of open, positive scrutiny, such as:
- The Executive laying an annual report before the Assembly for debate on the progress made by the Programme for Government towards outcomes described in the Wellbeing Framework
 - Briefings to Assembly Committees on the Executive’s progress against relevant indicators and the use of scorecards by Committees to assess the Executive’s performance. These could be supported by the Assembly’s Research and Information Service (RaISe) and should supplement the indicators with qualitative information to help explain identified trends
 - The adoption of the Wellbeing Framework as part of the NI Audit Office’s programme of work, including a capacity building role that could shift the culture of accountability from one of ‘blame’ towards the delivery of outcomes, facilitation and collaborative problem-solving.

These innovations would provide a snapshot of progress towards wellbeing outcomes against the Executive’s Programme for Government and change the culture of accountability to a more proactive approach that focuses on what works.

STEP 7:**SUPPORTING THE WELLBEING FRAMEWORK****We took inspiration from:**

The Council on Virginia's Future which employs a variety of methods and tools to keep Virginia leadership informed about how the state is doing and to shed light on the challenges facing the Commonwealth.

Implementing a Wellbeing Framework for Northern Ireland is part of a broader paradigm shift towards an outcomes-based, preventative approach to public services. These changes are not primarily in the structures of public services but rather in their culture. Such a shift takes time and needs to be supported. A programme of training and capacity building should be developed to support the Wellbeing Framework. At a minimum, this should include training for Assembly members, local government officials and elected members, civil servants and managers in partner organisations such as the third sector.

The Roundtable heard evidence on the establishment of the What Works Wellbeing Centre and we believe that it will provide

significant additional information that will help develop practice. The Carnegie UK Trust and School of Law at Queens University Belfast have been holding discussions to ensure that What Works Wellbeing includes a focus on devolved governments' activities, as well as the UK as a whole. In addition we would encourage sharing of lessons and collaboration with the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England and across Europe at central and local government levels, including the use of North-South and East-West bodies. The Centre for Cross Border Studies could have a role here in supporting dissemination of lessons across the island of Ireland. It is important that the Wellbeing Framework is an outward looking and evidence-informed mechanism for reform.

To assist in this work, we recommend that the NI Executive convene a Standing Advisory Group to provide ongoing technical support and input on the delivery and review of the Wellbeing Framework. It should draw on stakeholder representatives from across civil society, business and academia to ensure that the ongoing conversation reaches deep down into our communities while drawing on the latest thinking on wellbeing from across the world.

