

Future wellbeing policy: Lessons from Wales and beyond



collective
wellbeing
Carnegie
UK



Contents

Executive summary	5
Introduction and context	7
The history and provisions of the Act	9
Impact	13
<i>Collective wellbeing in Wales</i>	13
<i>Barriers to impact</i>	14
International perspectives	19
<i>New Zealand and Australia</i>	19
<i>Canada</i>	20
<i>Estonia</i>	20
<i>The UN and EU</i>	21
Considerations for the future of wellbeing approaches	23
<i>Ways of working</i>	24
<i>Resources</i>	25
<i>Governance</i>	26
<i>Measuring progress</i>	27



Executive summary

In January 2026, the Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA) together with Carnegie UK, the Centre for Welsh Politics and Society/WISERD, and the Co-production Network for Wales convened a conversation in Cardiff among people who have lived and worked with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act since it was enshrined in law just over ten years ago.

The event offered thought-provoking reflections on the past, present, and future of this ambitious legislation, providing insight not just for leaders and practitioners in Wales, but for other countries and regions who seek to embed wellbeing approaches into their own institutions and societies.

The Act is often held up as an exemplary model of embedding wellbeing into policy governance. It is undoubtedly a landmark piece of legislation for the wellbeing movement and for Wales but, in the decade since it was passed, change has been more limited than many hoped. Key barriers that have been observed include a perceived lack of 'teeth'; misaligned institutional structures and resourcing processes; and the broad (and sometimes abstract) nature of the Act, which can limit how relevant it feels in day-to-day decision making.

These are not issues that Wales faces alone. Across the globe, governments are working to address complex issues like these. Some have embedded budgetary tools that support long-term cross-departmental investment. Others have established strong strategic governance that aligns decisions with long-term visions. While each approach is unique to its context, such illustrative examples offer potential tools for advancing the impact of the Well-being of Future Generations Act in Wales, as well as the effective implementation of wellbeing approaches more broadly.

Applying the lens of a maturity model provides a new way of understanding how wellbeing approaches can evolve through future stages of development. One such model, under development by Carnegie UK and published alongside this paper, helps to identify three core areas that should be embedded or enhanced to support the Act in Wales, and that could apply equally in other contexts. These are:

- ways of working that build trust and enable clear and frank communication at all levels to facilitate better collaborative processes
- tools to direct spending to what matters most for people in the present day and what they think matters for their children and grandchildren
- governance that supports institutions through these changes by actively engaging with them and holding them to account for setting and working towards outcomes in alignment with the wellbeing vision.

Change for the long term can take a long time, but it is nonetheless important to ask how we will know if or when a given approach to wellbeing is working. This work requires a focus on the conditions for the structural and cultural progress that will be fundamental to ensuring that the wellbeing of people now and in the future is not a 'nice to have' but a guiding principle of government.



Introduction and context

In 2015, the Welsh Government passed a landmark piece of legislation: the Well-being of Future Generations Act. At the heart of this Act is a recognition that decisions taken today have repercussions for people in the future, and a commitment to ensuring that these decisions make life better for people who come after us, as well as protecting the environment and planetary systems on which we all depend.

Ten years on from the implementation of the Act, there are examples of positive impact. But there is also concern that the Act has not yet fulfilled its potential. Around the world (and indeed in other parts of the UK), governments are increasingly seeking to place wellbeing at the core of their work via a range of mechanisms.¹ Wales's pioneering legislation, and people's experiences of implementing and living with it, can offer lessons for others at different stages on the journey.

In January 2026, the Institute of Welsh Affairs together with Carnegie UK and the Centre for Welsh Politics and Society/WISERD hosted a workshop convening voices from the private, third, and public sectors to discuss experiences of the Act, and look to the ways in which it could have greater impact in the future. The intention was to understand how the Act is being experienced on the ground by those who have responsibility for implementing it and those who stand to benefit from it.

This report first outlines an overview of the history and provisions of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, before turning to current perceptions of how the Act is – or is not – changing the lived experience of people in Wales. We draw on conversations like those at the IWA event, our own Carnegie UK research into collective wellbeing in Wales, and emerging themes from post-legislative scrutiny in the Senedd to offer perspectives on why there has been relative stagnation in the wellbeing of people in Wales despite the Act's supposedly ground-breaking provisions.

This report then explores international examples of practice in centring wellbeing in policy decisions. This covers a range of approaches including legislation, strategic governance, indicator frameworks, and resource allocation.

Finally, we look at the learning from Wales and the international examples through the lens of a maturity model. This model provides a shared framework for understanding how far advanced individual wellbeing policy models are, and suggests some of the steps governments could take to enable these models to progress, helping today's decision-makers make choices that mean everyone has what they need to live well, now and in the future.

¹ Scotland's [National Performance Framework](#) (NPF) sets a vision for collective wellbeing, and tracks 81 indicators across 11 national outcomes. The NPF is currently under review. Northern Ireland has developed a [Wellbeing Dashboard](#) to show wellbeing across ten domains to inform future iterations of the Programme for Government.



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament

The history and provisions of the Act

History

Wales benefits from a strong constitutional and legislative basis for putting wellbeing at the heart of decision-making. This basis underpins the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, the most explicit statement of Wales's long-held commitment to the principles of sustainable development. The history matters because it shaped the ambition of the Act and the institutional conditions in which it was introduced and now operates.

Sustainable development has been woven throughout the founding constitutional principles of Wales since devolution. Since the Government of Wales Act 1998 created the National Assembly for Wales (now the Senedd), the Assembly has had an explicit duty to promote sustainable development.² In 2006, the Government of Wales Act – which formally separated the executive committee from the National Assembly and gave Welsh ministers independent executive authority – created a statutory duty on Welsh Ministers to “make a scheme... to promote sustainable development” and report annually on the scheme's implementation.³

In 2007, WWF Cymru published the “One Planet Wales” report, which called for a commitment from the whole of the public sector in Wales – not just the ministers under the purview of the 2006 Act – to take responsibility “as stewards of our environmental assets and managing markets in those public goods for the benefit of all,” alongside other governments and local communities and private and civic actors.⁴

In 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government set out its “One Wales: One Planet” Sustainable Development Scheme. The scheme embedded some of the lessons from “One Planet Wales” and made sustainable development the “central organising principle” of the government across all ministerial portfolios.⁵ Drawing on the UK's shared framework for sustainable development (created by the Sustainable Development Commission) this scheme defined “sustainable development” as “enhancing the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of people and communities, achieving a better quality of life for our own and future generations.”⁶

The next year, in 2010, the UK Government abolished the Sustainable Development Commission. In response, Wales created the temporary position of Commissioner for Sustainable Futures. The Welsh Labour manifesto of 2011 proposed to legislate to embed sustainable development as the central organising principle in all actions across government and public bodies, and “to put in place a new independent sustainable development body for Wales,” enshrining the commitment to sustainable development further in law.⁷

Accordingly, in 2012 – just as the United Nations was developing new Sustainable Development Goals – a series of consultations on the Welsh Government's proposals for a Sustainable Development Bill was launched, and in 2013 the working title of the bill changed to the “Future Generations Bill.”⁸

2 Government of Wales Act 1998, Section 121.

3 Government of Wales Act (2006), Section 79 (1).

4 WWF Cymru, [One Planet Wales: Report Summary](#) (2007).

5 Welsh Assembly Government, [One Wales: One Planet](#) (2009).

6 Welsh Assembly Government, [One Wales: One Planet](#) (2009), p.8.

7 [Welsh Labour Manifesto 2011](#), p.91. This proposal is credited to Jane Davidson.

8 Jeff Cuthbert, [Written Statement: Future Generations Bill - Better Choices for a Better Future](#) (17 July 2013).

In 2014, the national “Wales We Want” conversation was launched to “discuss the Wales that [people] want to leave behind for their children and grandchildren.”⁹ An interim report on the national conversation was published in July 2014, alongside the introduction of the legislation as the “Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill” to the National Assembly.¹⁰ The final findings from the national conversation reported in March 2015, and the Bill attained Royal Assent later that year.¹¹

Provisions

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 makes a legal provision “requiring public bodies to do things in pursuit of the economic, social, environmental and cultural Well-being of Wales in a way that accords with the sustainable development principle.”¹² Alongside and to enable this, the Act created the Commissioner for Future Generations, and public service boards.

The Act lays out seven well-being goals, which are:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- A globally responsible Wales.

The Act also sets out five ways of working for public bodies to take account of to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle. These are:

- Long-term: balancing short-term needs with safeguarding the ability to meet long-term needs, especially where short-term decisions could have a negative long-term effect
- Integration: considering the impacts of well-being objectives on each other, other public bodies' objectives, and the well-being goals, particularly where a decision might help meet one objective but negatively affect another
- Involvement: involving other people in a way that reflects the diversity of the population
- Collaboration: acting in collaboration with other people or bodies
- Prevention: deploying resources to prevent problems developing or getting worse.¹³

9 Jeff Cuthbert, [Written Statement: The Future Generations Bill – national conversations](#) (13 November 2013); [The Wales We Want Report: A Report on Behalf of Future Generations](#) (2015)

10 The interim report appears to be no longer publicly available.

11 Jeff Cuthbert, [Written Statement: Introduction of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Bill](#) (7 July 2014).

12 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Doing something in accordance with the sustainable development principle “means that the body must act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Part 2, Section 5(1).

13 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Part 2, Section 5(2).

Welsh Ministers must publish indicators that measure progress towards the well-being goals, and must also set milestones towards the goals, expressed in relation to the indicators. At present, Ministers have set seventeen national milestones, and fifty national indicators. Progress must be reported in an annual report to be laid before the Senedd (formerly the National Assembly).¹⁴

The Act requires all public bodies under the remit of the Act – currently a list of 56, including Welsh Ministers – to set (and take steps to meet) their own well-being objectives that contribute to these well-being goals.¹⁵ Public bodies must publish annual reports on the progress they have made towards these objectives. In addition to public bodies setting their own objectives, the public service boards created by the Act are required to set and work towards local objectives.

The Auditor General for Wales is required to examine the extent to which public bodies set and work towards their objectives (but not the extent to which they are adopting the five ways of working).

The Future Generations Commissioner has the power to monitor and report on how far public bodies are setting and seeking to meet their objectives, and may carry out reviews of public bodies, known as ‘Section 20 reviews’.¹⁶ The statutory Commissioner’s report, published every five years, must outline the improvements public bodies should make to set and meet objectives, with a particular focus on how they should safeguard the ability of future generations to meet their needs and take greater account of the long-term impact of choices. These reports have, to date, offered a broad national-level assessment of how public bodies are adopting the five ways of working as part of their overall assessment of progress towards objectives, but do not offer formal assessments of individual bodies in the way a section 20 review could.

Each Future Generations Commissioner is in post for a seven-year period. The first commissioner, Sophie Howe, was appointed in 2016 and in 2023 Derek Walker was appointed as her successor.

The Act has been cited as being influential in a number of decisions made since its implementation, and to date various strategies, policies, and government proposals have been informed by and drawn explicitly on the Well-being of Future Generations Act. These include the 2021 Wales Transport Strategy, the 2022 proposal to introduce a 20-mph limit on all residential streets in Wales, and the 2022 extension of the provision of free school meals to all primary school children in Wales.¹⁷

14 See [Wellbeing of Wales](#) reports.

15 In 2024, and additional eight public bodies became subject to the Act’s provisions, including Qualifications Wales and Transport for Wales, bringing the total to 56: Jane Hutt, [Written Statement: Additional public bodies subject to the Well-being duty \(Part 2\) of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) (19 February 2024).

16 For example, the Commissioner undertook a [section 20 review of the Welsh Government](#) in 2022.

17 Welsh Government, [Llywybr Newydd: The Wales Transport Strategy 2021](#) (2021); Welsh Government, [Proposal to reduce speed limit to 20mph on residential streets: summary of responses](#) (2022); Roads Review Panel, [The Future of Road Investment in Wales](#) (2023); Welsh Government, [Welsh Government response to the Roads Review](#) (14 February 2023); Welsh Government, [Integrated Impact Assessment: Universal primary free school meals](#) (December 2021).



Impact

Collective wellbeing in Wales

Carnegie UK's annual Life in the UK index measures how people are collectively living over time and includes a dedicated report for Wales.¹⁸ This index provides scores across four domains: social, economic, environmental, and democratic wellbeing. While these are not explicit equivalents of the well-being goals in Wales, there are crossovers between, for example, "a prosperous Wales" and economic wellbeing; and between "a healthier, more equal, and cohesive Wales", and social wellbeing.

It is reasonable to anticipate that progress towards the well-being goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act would catalyse improvements in the Life in the UK scores. However, Life in the UK data shows that wellbeing in Wales has remained stagnant in all domains over the three years since the index began. People in Wales are also no more likely to have better collective wellbeing than people in other parts of the UK, despite living in the only jurisdiction with such explicit wellbeing legislation. While social wellbeing was higher for those in Wales than the UK average, economic wellbeing was not any better, and democratic wellbeing was notably lower.

Similarly, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) measures of personal wellbeing indicate little change for Wales since the introduction of the Act.¹⁹ While several policy decisions in Wales (such as the cancellation of the planned M4 relief road, and changes to the curriculum) are credited to have been influenced by use of the Act, there is little policy consensus on whether these decisions were an explicit result of the legislation, or whether they may have been made regardless.

In addition, following an attempt in 2019 by a community in Neath Port Talbot to use the Act to overturn a decision to close a local school, a High Court Judge stated that a judicial review process would be inappropriate because the Act only prescribes "a high-level target duty which is deliberately vague, general and aspirational and which applies to a class rather than individuals."²⁰ While Sophie Howe noted that the case "was at a very initial stage which would not set precedent," it nonetheless highlights the ambiguity around the Act's application in legal cases.²¹

As others have argued, the absence of enforceable legal standards for all of the Act's provisions does not necessarily make the Act defective. Many elements of the Act (like the setting of well-being objectives) are, as academics have noted, "ordinary, hard-edged obligation[s] with scope for judicial challenge."²² Besides that, thanks to the "nascent" state of "rights-based administrative procedure law" and "legal culture" more broadly in Wales, "the Act may nonetheless be regarded as an important feature in the changing political and constitutional landscape of Wales," with scope for new judicial roles and

18 Carnegie UK, [Life in the UK 2025: Wales](#) (2025)

19 Office for National Statistics, [Personal wellbeing estimates by local authority](#), 2023 update.

20 Paul Martin, [Law to protect future generations in Wales 'useless'](#) (15 May 2019).

21 Ibid.

22 Stokes and Smyth, "[Hope-bearing legislation? The Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)," *Transnational Environmental Law* 13, no.3 (2024), p.575.

norms to grow up around the Act and other rights-based legislation.²³ While this will take time to develop, it is context worth bearing in mind.²⁴

As Stokes and Smyth argue, the Act has the capacity “to create the structural conditions for hope.”²⁵ This is borne out in practice, with the Act having been described as an “excuse for good people to do the right thing,” and its principles continuing to get strong support and buy-in from those responsible for implementing it.²⁶

It is widely agreed that there is great potential inherent in the Act, but this has not yet materialised in better wellbeing for people in Wales. For as long as people in systems of power need ‘an excuse’ to do the right thing, we cannot say that the Act’s principles have been fully embedded.

At the recent IWA event, Carnegie UK was particularly interested in hearing about why this might be the case. The event highlighted several barriers that may be contributing to the non-realisation of the Act’s potential thus far, many of which reflect themes heard during the Senedd’s post-legislative scrutiny of the Act. We consider three of these further below.

Barriers to impact

Lack of ‘teeth’

The concept of ‘teeth’ – hard-edged powers within a piece of legislation – is often cited as a reason for nonfulfillment of promise in the context of the Act. While there was some discussion about this at the IWA event, there was less focus on it than is often heard in policy forums, with conversations more focused on the structural and institutional changes to practice that are needed. Nonetheless, it is a topic that recurred here as well as in the Senedd inquiry and beyond.

A ‘section 20’ review is the strongest power available to the Commissioner to encourage those under the Act to comply with its provisions, but there are limitations to the weight of this. The power enables the Commissioner to undertake an investigation and require bodies to take part and respond to (but not necessarily act on) its recommendations. Only two section 20 reviews have been conducted to date, but there have been some positive outcomes, with the bodies accepting the recommendations and working with the Future Generations Office to deliver them.²⁷ Undertaking more reviews may drive change, and the Commissioner has noted that if [he] had the resources, [he’d] be doing them every six months. But they’re not there.”²⁸

23 Nason and Pritchard, “[Administrative Justice and the Legacy of Executive Devolution: Establishing a Tribunals System for Wales](#)”, *Australian Journal of Administrative Law* 26, no.4 (2020), p.233-254; Stokes and Smyth, “[Hope-bearing legislation?](#)”, p.578.

24 Stokes and Smyth, “[Hope-bearing legislation?](#)”, p.578.

25 Stokes and Smyth, “[Hope-bearing legislation?](#)”, p.583.

26 Dr Calvin Jones, [Post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: Evidence session 1—academic panel](#), 23 June 2025.

27 [Procuring Well-Being in Wales: A review into how the Well-being of Future Generations Act is informing procurement in Wales \(2021\): A government fit for future generations: A review in Welsh Government’s implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) (2022).

28 Derek Walker, [Post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: Evidence session with the Future Generations Commissioner](#), 10 November 2025.

Some believe that greater enforcement powers – ‘teeth’ – would enable the Act to make better progress towards its goals. However, this could pull against the deliberately ‘friendly’ design of the Act, which was intended to enable the Commissioner to work cooperatively with the bodies under the Act to encourage wider cultural change.

Increased enforcement activity increases the likelihood of implementation becoming a superficial ‘tick box’ exercise that does not drive transformational change; one attendee at the IWA event gave the example of the Equality Act, which has objectively strong ‘teeth’ but has not driven the envisaged embedded change in the culture of decision-making.²⁹

Besides a formal section 20 review, the main ‘stick’ open to the Commissioner is public “naming and shaming.” This can be an effective tool but there is reluctance to use it, partly because it goes against the collaborative spirit of the Act.

At the crux of the question about ‘teeth’ is the balance of maintaining the collegiate spirit of the Act to facilitate a long-term shift in attitudes and practice, versus the potential to achieve greater change through stronger enforcement mechanisms that risk alienating those responsible for implementation.

Structures and resource

Some commentators have suggested that legislative changes are required to address the ‘lack of teeth’. A further issue underpinning many conversations about barriers to progress was that of institutional structures, which are harder to change through the mechanism of legislation alone.

At the IWA event, we heard that the Act was “plonked on top” of a public sector with little money to spare, limited institutional change cultures, and no incentives to follow the Act. Several people recognised that there is limited capacity or capability in public bodies to make the innovations – which inherently involve some risk – that the Act requires to drive outcomes.

Aside from outcomes, existing institutional structures do not enable public sector employees to properly adopt the ways of working that the Act sets out and that are fundamental to its success:

- Long-termism and prevention are both made difficult by annual or short-term funding and political cycles
- Integration is hard to achieve in bodies that are inherently organised (and funded) according to departmental portfolios
- Meaningful involvement and collaboration require strong practical, temporal and financial resources, currently absent in many public bodies.

²⁹ See also Audit Wales, [Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?](#) (September 2022).

There have been examples of successful co-production within and by Public Service Boards, but there is a sense that these mark moments in time and have not addressed wider structural issues in the public sector. Observations at the IWA event suggest that there has been limited success in creating strong connections between community groups and public services. This means that while communities and third sector organisations may already be implementing the ways of working, they cannot reach the 'next rung' of public administration to drive change. This ties into a concern that there has, to date, been limited involvement of the voluntary sector in actively pursuing the aims of the Act.

Relevance

A final recurring theme from the IWA event was that the Act remains abstract to many people, both those who implement it and those who stand to benefit. While 'teeth' and resources go some way to explaining why the Act's progress has been limited, this perceived irrelevance is another key limiting factor.

A participant reflected that the goals and the ways of working are hard to disagree with, but also hard to solidify and implement. This makes it difficult to understand whether they are being met or furthered in a day-to-day context for those who come under the remit of the Act.

A key challenge for many public bodies is identifying objectives and indicators that contribute meaningfully to the seven well-being goals, and accurately understanding and communicating their own role in a complex system. Seeing only limited progress being made on challenging indicators may further entrench perceptions within public bodies of the Act's constrained ability to drive tangible change.

In relation to public perceptions, a question posed at the IWA event asked how to "humanise" the Act. While many people resonate with the Act's ambition, it is perceived by some as being so broadly drawn as to become practically meaningless in many instances. People already understand the vital importance of the early intervention and prevention that the Act underlines, but do not yet see this happening in practice.



While the breadth of the Act's remit and timescale is what confers the potential for true transformative change, this is also seen as a core reason for limited evidence of day-to-day implementation and use of its provisions. Being unable to articulate the benefits of the Act in a way that resonates with people, particularly in the context of difficulties with the cost of living and other present-day problems, means the Act runs the risk of being perceived as another layer of bureaucracy that addresses neither the needs of the present nor of the future.





International perspectives

Other countries around the world are, like Wales, seeking to embed better governance approaches for the wellbeing of present and future generations. While Wales was a first mover in many regards – and has, perhaps, experienced the inherent first mover disadvantage – examples of wellbeing frameworks, legislation, and resource management are becoming increasingly prominent globally. Some of these offer alternative perspectives that could usefully inform what Wales and other UK jurisdictions should do next. In a recent analysis published by the government of Finland to support the development of their own model for an economy of wellbeing, researchers categorised wellbeing governance into four broad approaches:

- Strategic: e.g. long-term plans, and leadership to advance these
- Regulatory: e.g. laws and legislation
- Knowledge: e.g. measurement and indicators of aspects of wellbeing.
- Resource: e.g. budgetary processes and impact assessments.³⁰

This typology offers a useful tool for understanding potential gaps and opportunities in a wellbeing approach. Wales, for example, has one of the strongest regulatory frameworks for wellbeing, has a set of long-term and short-term objectives, and produces knowledge through indicators, but it has no resource allocation mechanism relating explicitly to wellbeing. In contrast, while the Netherlands has tools to support resource allocation, a framework of indicators, and an advisory group to strengthen this framework, it lacks a statutory framework comparable to that in Wales.

While there is no one route to guarantee the success of wellbeing governance and any approach will require tailoring to context and aims, sharing learning across jurisdictions can encourage and support progress for all concerned.

New Zealand and Australia

Where other countries do have regulatory frameworks in place to support wellbeing, these often take the form of fiscal legislation, to ensure resource is directed in the most effective way. In New Zealand, the Public Finance (Wellbeing) Amendment Act 2020 stipulates that each government budget must include wellbeing objectives and explain the long-term wellbeing effects of decisions. Treasury guidance supports this by requiring departments to conduct a cost-benefit analysis that accounts for social and wellbeing impacts of interventions – an analysis underpinned by the specially-developed CBAX tool.³¹ This links departmental spend to wider outcomes, and in turn requires the government to account for these outcomes in budgetary processes. It also encourages each department to better understand the knock-on effects (positive and negative) of their choices on other areas of government.

30 Iivonen and Korpi, "[Building blocks for a strong wellbeing economy approach: Highlighting practical tools and processes for governance](#)" (2025).

31 New Zealand, [The Treasury's CBAX Tool](#), *The Treasury* (2025)

Other regions have taken alternative approaches to wellbeing budgeting, including the Australian state of Victoria, where departments are encouraged to work with each other and with the Treasury to develop early intervention initiatives under a model that shares the benefits accrued outside the spending department.³²

Canada

Canada's Quality of Life Framework supports a wellbeing approach to decision-making. This Framework (based on a comprehensive analysis of existing indicator frameworks such as the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and the OECD Better Life Index), measures 91 indicators across five domains. Statistics Canada publishes the data on a Quality of Life Hub, while the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat leads on implementing the Framework in policy cycles.³³

Legislation mandates analysis and publication of gender impacts, supported by the 'Gender-Based Analysis Plus' process which also assesses impacts on other characteristics.³⁴ Since 2021, spending proposals also include assessments of their expected impact on quality of life, as outlined by the Framework, with impacts published in each year's Budget Impacts Report.³⁵

Prior to 2025, mandate letters from the Prime Minister to ministers explicitly directed them to use the Quality of Life Framework.³⁶ In 2025, a 'Quality of Life and Well-being' cabinet committee was established with a remit that includes "augment[ing] the overall quality of life and well-being of Canadians."³⁷

The framework, legislation, and strategic governance all work together to place quality of life as a central pillar in government decision-making.

Estonia

Whole of government strategic direction is also key. In 2021 the parliament of Estonia approved a strategy to 2035 which set a vision for the coming 15 years together with 27 "necessary changes," and a set of indicators to monitor progress with targets to meet by 2035 and in the interim.³⁸ All measures in ensuing government action plans must be linked to one of the 27 necessary changes; budgets are based on sectoral development plans, which are produced with a cross-government steering committee and are designed to advance the 2035 strategy; and each Minister presents annually on how the 2035 strategy has progressed in their sector.³⁹ In this instance, the long-term strategy actively directs government plans and spending, while maintaining public accountability.

32 See Gaukroger, [Budgeting for Wellbeing: International approaches](#) (2025) for further information and additional examples.

33 Sanmartin et al., "[Moving Forward on Well-being \(Quality of Life\) Measures in Canada](#)" (July 2021); Statistics Canada, [Quality of Life Hub](#).

34 [Canadian Gender Budgeting Act 2018](#); [Impact Assessment Act 2019](#), s.22(1)(s).

35 Government of Canada, "[Annex 6: Impacts report](#)", Canada Strong; Budget 2025 (November 2025).

36 In 2025, the newly-elected Prime Minister Mark Carney replaced individual departmental mandate letters (which under Justin Trudeau had outlined over 800 specific commitments) with a single letter outlining seven broad priorities.

37 [Cabinet Committee Mandate and Membership](#), Prime Minister of Canada (November 2025).

38 Estonia, [Estonia 2035](#) (2021)

39 Iivonen and Korpi, "[Building blocks for a strong wellbeing economy approach](#)" (2025), p.17.

The UN and EU

The UN's 2024 Declaration on Future Generations takes a largely strategic approach in its commitment to "leave a better future for generations to come and to fulfil our commitment to meet the demands of the present in a way that safeguards the needs and interests of future generations, while leaving no one behind".⁴⁰ Some of the actions identified to support the Declaration include:

- Implementing necessary institutional reforms for evidence-based decision-making and responsive governance
- forward-looking impact assessments
- encouraging the use of measures of progress on sustainable development that complement and go beyond gross domestic product
- taking a whole-of-government approach to coordinating the assessment, development, implementation and evaluation of future-oriented policies
- supporting member states to implement the declaration
- systematically promoting long-term and intergenerational thinking at all levels.

The Declaration recognises the importance of strong strategic governance together with evidence-based approaches to decision-making and effective monitoring, while acknowledging the need for institutional reform and culture change. The UN expert group on 'Beyond GDP' is currently working towards a new set of measures that place "the Well-being of people and the planet... at the centre of what we measure and value."⁴¹

In alignment with the UN declaration and other global initiatives, in March 2026 the EU adopted its first Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness, which aims to "guarantee that current decisions are made with the future in mind, ensuring a fair balance of benefits and burdens across all generations."⁴² The strategy recognises that intergenerational fairness is fundamental to social, economic, environmental, and democratic wellbeing.

The strategy proposes a new intergenerational contract based on three dimensions of:

1. Fair policymaking – embedding long-term thinking and the youth perspective
2. Fair opportunities – uniting generations around shared goals for a better future
3. Fair places – ensuring intergenerational fairness across territories.

The Strategy sets out actions including helping public administrations across the EU to build futures literacy; compiling an Intergenerational Fairness Index; boosting citizen engagement (particularly of young people); and publishing a 'Longevity Roadmap' to identify age-specific policy issues.

The Strategy recognises that many member states are already seeking to embed future generations-oriented approaches to governance, and aims to enhance these by bringing greater coherence, shared learning, and consistency of practice. It draws on the EU's convening and leadership powers to offer strong international strategic direction as well as supportive resources.

⁴⁰ United Nations, [Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations](#) (September 2024).

⁴¹ António Guterres, [UN High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP](#).

⁴² European Commission, [Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness](#) (2026).



Considerations for the future of wellbeing approaches in the UK and Ireland

The lessons from ten years of the Well-being of Future Generations Act in Wales, together with international examples of wellbeing policy approaches, offer an important opportunity to reflect on and improve the ways in which future models of wellbeing governance in the UK – including the Act in Wales – are developed, implemented, and cultivated to realise their aims. However, as we have seen in Wales, it can be difficult to understand how well an approach to wellbeing governance is working when we can only look through the lens of the present day.

Codifying a maturity model may offer a meaningful way of understanding how any given approach to wellbeing governance is progressing within government. Carnegie UK's evolving maturity model describes progress through five stages:

Stage 1: Awareness: stakeholders become aware of the importance of wellbeing as a public good.

Stage 2: Experimentation: government begins to pilot or trial wellbeing initiatives.

Stage 3: Integration: wellbeing is more systematically incorporated into policy design, delivery, and evaluation.

Stage 4: Alignment: wellbeing policy approaches are harmonised across all government departments, agencies, and policies, at all levels; there is alignment between political priorities, operational processes, and lived experience of citizens.

Stage 5: Systemic culture: wellbeing is fully embedded as a defining principle in the ethos, culture, and functioning of government, public bodies, and civil society.

Using a common framework like this can enable a greater understanding of the current state of any wellbeing approach in relation to where it has reached and had impact, and where it might seek to develop.

To apply this to the example of Wales, the Future Generations Act is well beyond the stages of awareness and experimentation. Most elements of integration are met, although the Act lacks budgeting and resource allocation processes that are tied explicitly to the Act's goals and, in some cases, has difficulty working across departments and with civil society. These factors limit progress from integration towards alignment. Accountability also plays a key role in alignment, but the current accountability mechanisms attached to the Act are perceived as being insufficiently robust to support meaningful progress. We have also heard that the lived experience of citizens does not currently feel aligned with the Act's intentions

While its legislative status means the Future Generations Act already achieves one of the core mechanisms for sustaining considerations of wellbeing, there remain gaps in citizen and stakeholder co-design; systematic investment in training, research, and evaluation; and purpose-led governance. All of these must be in place to ensure that consideration of the wellbeing of future generations is not a 'nice to have' but a guiding principle of government.

Lessons from Wales as well as from other jurisdictions seeking to place wellbeing at the heart of decision-making suggests that this rests on a foundation of:

- ways of working that build trust and enable clear and frank communication at all levels to facilitate better collaborative processes
- tools to direct spending to what matters most for people in the present day and what they think matters for their children and grandchildren
- governance that both supports institutions through these changes by actively engaging with them and holds them to account for setting and working towards outcomes in alignment with the wellbeing vision.

Ways of working

The decisions that are made in complex governments are shaped – for better and for worse – by a network of relationships. Changing decisions therefore requires changing ways of working. The Act in Wales recognises this, but legislation alone has not achieved the necessary culture change. Instead, we have heard that success requires a foundational focus on institutional working cultures, across all levels of government and civil society.

- **Public sector approaches:** There should be a particular focus on the ways of working for officers and civil servants in the middle layers of the sector. This includes providing support to change practices and approaches to decision-making – for example in greater evidence-based risk-taking, or true cross-departmental working. Achieving objectives is likely to be easier once the operating culture supports the values behind them.
- **Build trusted relationships:** There is a need for an honest conversation with citizens about the current state of affairs within public institutions, the economy, and society more broadly. This requires two-way trust: the state must trust communities to understand complexities and constraints, and communities must be able to trust the state to be transparent about its decisions and to listen to new ideas.
- **Collaboration:** The private sector and civil society also need to have a role. This requires partnership models that create greater parity between sectors when developing interventions and recognising the contribution of the sector in achieving progress towards goals.

This all requires ongoing behaviour change within institutions and practices, and an investment in dialogue and awareness before solutions, taking an approach that enables all parts of the system to engage from a place of optimism rather than of obligation.

Resources

Cultural shifts are often likely to be dependent on changes in resourcing practices, both within cyclical budgetary processes and in the approach to everyday spend.

- **Commissioners' offices:** In Wales, the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner receives less than 0.1% of the Welsh budget, giving the Office limited ability to lead and direct change.⁴³ For governing structures like this to work as intended, their budget must be sufficient to facilitate a comprehensive range of work, including undertaking accountability processes and offering training to the public and private sectors to support necessary institutional change.
- **Budget oversight:** Significant resource can be brought to wellbeing approaches by embedding this perspective in budget-setting processes. Linking government budget-setting and spending directly to the goals by using tools like social cost-benefit analyses or early intervention frameworks provides a 'hard power' that enables meaningful influence over spend and aligns resource decisions with long-term policy aspirations.
- **Longer-term funding:** Short-term funding cycles limit capacity for the long-term planning that wellbeing approaches require, for both the public and third sectors. Even without additional funding allocations, moving away from single-year funding cycles would enable longer-term planning, facilitating the development of projects tailored to local contexts, thorough evaluation, and good endings where necessary. For third sector organisations, it would facilitate a delivery focus, instead of continuous application cycles.
- **Measuring preventative spend:** Audit Wales has noted the importance of understanding the impact of preventative spend in assessing the value of initiatives. For any government seeking to embed wellbeing approaches, the use of tools like New Zealand's CBAX or Greater Manchester's Cost-Benefit Analysis tool offer valuable starting points, provided that support is available for those who use them.⁴⁴
- **Public sector resource:** In any context where public sector staff are asked to work with ever-decreasing funds to deliver greater returns under a business-as-usual model, there is likely to be limited organisational capacity for change. Public sector funding must be sufficient to give officers time and capacity to learn and practice new ways of working.

43 Joe Rossiter, [Progress, challenges and unleashing transformative potential: 10 years of the Well-being of Future Generations Act \(2026\)](#), p.7.

44 In the Post-Legislative Scrutiny, deputy Commissioner Marie Brousseau-Navarro noted that the Office were working to baseline the latest Welsh Government's budget's investment and spend on preventative measures "with the idea of mapping it year on year": [Post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act: evidence session with Future Generations Commissioner](#), 10 November 2025.

Governance

Governance also has a significant role to play in achieving cultural change in ways of working, and in resource allocation.

The balance of 'hard' and 'soft' power should be carefully considered. 'Hard' powers should not be applied to the detriment of 'softer' tools like encouragement and collaboration which contribute to cultural support and, when used correctly, can have considerable influence. Clarity over the roles of those involved in implementing a wellbeing approach will support progress.

- **'Soft' vs 'hard' roles:** The Welsh example suggests that having discrete input monitoring bodies and output monitoring bodies can make it challenging to achieve aligned broader change. Instead, giving one body (e.g. an audit authority) responsibility for all aspects of public body monitoring, while a Commissioners Office (or equivalent) takes responsibility for supporting and advising public bodies, may provide a more coherent and effective accountability and support ecosystem.
- **Audit:** Effective audit has a significant role to play in strengthening practice. For example, comprehensive audit has contributed to good financial practice in the UK. To ensure that public bodies can embed the cultural change required for wellbeing approaches to work, an audit body's remit should address objective-setting and delivery processes as well as ways of working or the broader implementation of wellbeing approaches.⁴⁵
- **Reporting:** Requiring formal reports on a chosen wellbeing approach that mirrors those produced for areas like finance would enhance its standing and make wellbeing a primary, rather than a secondary, consideration. Similarly, expanding the reach of public interest reports or similar to include a government's wellbeing approach could raise its profile, put it on a more even footing with financial concerns, and highlight areas that require further public attention.⁴⁶
- **Leadership:** Leadership has a substantial role to play in progressing any wellbeing approach. There will inevitably be decisions where improving wellbeing for one group comes with trade-offs for another. For example, building social housing could transform the living conditions of people currently in inadequate housing or without housing at all, but this could be detrimental to local ecosystems and, consequently, the needs of future generations. Political leadership must therefore play a role in determining priorities. Leadership is vital not just for promoting the principles of wellbeing approaches, but in being transparent and mediating where tensions require to be resolved.

45 [Post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act: evidence session 3](#) 30 June 2025, 200 and 241.

46 [Post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act: evidence session 3](#) 30 June 2025, 265.

Measuring progress

It remains important to ask: How will we know if or when a given approach to wellbeing governance is working? Progress towards indicators may go some way to showing success. But as we have already seen, because many wellbeing policy innovations – like the Well-being of Future Generations Act – are designed to hinge on successful co-operative working rather than hard-edged requirements, it is difficult to attribute outcomes directly to them. The things that long-term approaches to wellbeing governance are intended to change, such as cultures of working in public services, or planetary health, do not lend themselves to being captured in set metrics and KPIs.

Instead, in the short-term, people should be experiencing better services in their day-to-day lives and feeling more included in the processes sitting behind the decisions that deliver and shape these.

Long-term outcomes are inherently hard to measure because they have not yet been realised. It is also hard to measure the often-intangible shifts in organisational cultures that will enable wellbeing approaches to flourish. However, it is possible to change structures and to incentivise new ways of working, and to shift power and resources in a way that enables people to adopt processes and attitudes that will progress the goals of ambitious approaches. This is not necessarily an easy task. It may well require wide-scale structural and hierarchical reforms, as well as continued scrutiny to assess and refine the models.

Those of us who are here today may never know if the Well-being of Future Generations Act and other innovations like it have delivered on their long-term commitments to protect the opportunities and interests of those who come after us. But it is possible to work to embed cultures and systems that allow decisions to be based on what is in the interests of a society where everyone has what they need to live well, now and in the future.



Carnegie UK Trust

Andrew Carnegie House
Pittencrieff Street
Dunfermline
Fife, Scotland
KY12 8AW

Registered Charity No: SC 012799 operating in the UK
Registered Charity No: 20142957 operating in Ireland
Incorporated by Royal Charter 1917

T +44 (0)1383 721445

www.carnegieuk.org

ISBN:978-1-917536-10-3

