

Today for Tomorrow: Wellbeing of Future Generations (UK) Bill

Background

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill builds on existing Welsh legislation, and seeks to make provisions to require UK public bodies to act in pursuit of the environmental, social, economic and cultural wellbeing of those living in the United Kingdom in a way that adheres to the Future Generations principle.

Why wellbeing?

For the Carnegie UK Trust, societal wellbeing means everyone having what they need to live well now and in the future¹. More than health and wealth, it includes longer-term considerations like the environment as well as the things that matter most directly to people in there here and now, like having friends and loved ones, the ability to contribute meaningfully to society, and the ability to make choices about our own lives. As a Trust that has been working for over 100 years to improve the wellbeing of people in the UK and Ireland, we welcome the Bill.

What is the future generations' principle?

In Our Common Future - the 1987 Brundtland Commission report² - sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The United Nations’ have since developed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which provide a comprehensive set of targets to improve societal wellbeing and reduce inequality, poverty, climate change and environmental degradation by 2030; the future generations principle is intrinsically linked to these goals.

What is the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill?

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill aims to put long term, strategic thinking at the heart of UK policy making to protect the wellbeing of people and communities now, and in the future. The Bill sets out several steps for public bodies in order to achieve this, which include:

- **A requirement for public bodies to set and publish wellbeing objectives**, designed to maximise their contribution to achieving the United Nations wellbeing goals (SDGs);
- **Publish a future generations impact assessment** when advocating for change in public expenditure, taxation, or policy which highlights the impact of the proposed change on the its wellbeing objective;
- **Account for preventative spending** by requiring public bodies to annually publish a report that details the proportion and total amount of preventative spending. The report would include an assessment of the degree to which the spending may be categorised as ‘primary’, ‘secondary’, ‘tertiary’ prevention or ‘acute spending’; and
- **Make provision for and establish a Future Generations Commissioner of the UK** who is responsible for protecting the interests of future generations by supporting public bodies to act in their interests.

¹ <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/wellbeing-whats-in-a-word/>

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>

Building on existing Wellbeing Legislation

There has been a significant shift taking place globally towards future generations. Across the UK, the devolved legislatures Scotland and Wales have most integrated the Sustainable Development Goals³ within the Scottish National Performance Framework⁴ and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015⁵ respectively. Across the water in Northern Ireland, the New Decade, New Deal approach deal, published by the new Northern Ireland Executive in January 2020, renews their commitment to placing wellbeing at the centre of the programme for Government.

The proposed Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill provides an opportunity to learn from and build on existing wellbeing legislation and policy. It is essential that any UK legislation on Future Generations takes these frameworks and policies into account and created opportunities for the constituent parts of the UK to learn from each other's approaches.

What can a wellbeing approach achieve?

Our research identifies a number of potential benefits to a wellbeing approach to public policy:

- Supporting new narratives on social progress as wellbeing: New narratives are being established to rebalance economic dominance of decision making with environmental and social domains of wellbeing.
- Focusing on outcomes. A focus on outcomes, rather than inputs, processes or targets, is an essential component of the move to a wellbeing approach.
- Supporting horizontal integration (whole of government approaches): With governments increasingly realising that the solutions to wicked policy problems can only be found in working together, as each part of the system (education, health, policing and so on) is dependent on the other to achieve its objectives. Whole-of-government approaches go further than joined-up or interagency working by ensuring that all stakeholder have the same vision and strategic priorities.
- Supporting vertical integration (localism): There is a corresponding drive to a new relationship between central and local government based on a shared understanding of the objectives but allowing for local tailoring to suit the needs and priorities of those communities.
- Shifting to prevention: A wellbeing approach requires problems to be identified and responded to before they become too entrenched and difficult to resolve or mitigate. The lost opportunities of intervening too late are recognised as costly not just for the public purse but also for overall wellbeing.
- Deepening citizen participation: That social progress cannot be understood without engaging people about what matters to them and that wellbeing cannot be 'done to' people but rather that it is a relational process where public servants enable people to realise their own wellbeing.

While these can be achieved without legislation, the experience of Scotland and Wales shows that a statutory basis focuses the attention on the shifts, and can create 'carrots and sticks' to embed the approach in the structure of public services.

The Carnegie UK Trust has been actively involved in promoting wellbeing in policy since the establishment of the first [Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring What Matters in Scotland](#) in 2010. Since 2011 we have published [case studies](#) of how governments and civil society organisations measure wellbeing in France, the USA, and Canada; made recommendations on [next steps for the Scottish National Performance Framework](#); funded a [policy assessment tool](#) which uses wellbeing indicators to critique policy proposals; set out steps for developing a [wellbeing framework in Northern Ireland](#); produced [guidance on wellbeing frameworks for cities and regions](#); and convened an [international roundtable discussion](#) on the successes and challenges of developing high-level strategies based on wellbeing and translating this to policy action.

³ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

⁴ <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/contents/enacted>