Update on the Well-being Mission

25 January 2024

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Well-being is about how people feel they are doing. It captures the extent to which people across the UK lead happy and fulfilling lives. Well-being is affected by a range of different factors that matter to people, such as physical and mental health, good quality employment and social connections, as well as factors that apply to communities such as feelings of safety and environmental quality.

The Levelling Up White Paper included a mission on well-being that: **By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.**

The mission was described as exploratory at the time of publication, meaning more work needed to be done to define the detail behind it. The conclusions from this work are set out below.

Why have we set a Well-being mission?

Measuring well-being is important because it gives an insight into how the many different aspects of people's lives are interacting and affecting them. Globally, well-being is increasingly seen as complementary to Gross Domestic Product for measuring how well a nation is doing, and the UK Government has made significant progress in being able to consider the well-being impact of policy decisions, including through publishing Green Book supplementary guidance on the valuation of well-being impacts in policy appraisal. Well-being also has wider benefits for other Levelling Up missions and for economic growth. For instance, it is related to improved outcomes in areas such as productivity,[1] life expectancy[2] and educational attainment.[3] As well as improving outcomes for individuals, policies aimed at improving well-being can support economic growth, for example by reducing the number of people who are economically inactive due to illness[4][5] and improving social trust at a local level.[6][7]

Our approach to defining the mission

To define the detail behind the mission, we have drawn on extensive research in the UK and internationally, engaged with a wide range of well-being experts and led a programme of analysis across government departments. We commissioned the Centre for Economic Performance at The London School of Economics to assure the quality of our work. The mission definition that resulted from this work is set out below.

Defining the scope and the target population

What do we mean when we say 'well-being'?

Whilst there has been increasing research into well-being over the last ten years and a growing interest in the role of well-being in policy making frameworks around the world, there is no single definition of well-being that is used across organisations. To focus our policy efforts and analysis, we have been specific about what we mean when we say 'well-being'.

We have defined well-being as consisting of three components

1) self-reported assessments and emotions (from the ONS' four measures of subjective well-being);
2) what individuals say matters to them; and
3) what individuals say matters to their community.

To reach our definition we undertook research and engagement, including reviewing existing well-being frameworks. Since government has already established the Office for National Statistics' (ONS)

[1] Bellet C, De Neve J-E, Ward G. *Does Employee Happiness have an Impact on Productivity?* Saïd Business School WP. 2019.

[2] Steptoe, A., Wardle, J., *Enjoying life and living longer*, Cogn Emot. 2021.

[3] Durlak, J., *The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: a meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions*, Child Dev. 2011.

[4] Clarke, C.E., Frijters, P., Krekel. C., Layard. R., *A happy choice: wellbeing as the goal for government*, Cambridge University Press. 2020.

[5] Wood, M., *From safety net to springboard: putting health at the heart of economic growth*, NHS Confederation. 2022.

[6] Helliwell, J. F., Wang, S., *Trust and Wellbeing*, International Journal of Wellbeing. 2011.

[7] Blagden, J., Stanley, L., *Good Neighbours: How do levels of hyper-local trust vary and why does it matter?* Onward. 2023

Measuring National Wellbeing Programme, we wanted to ensure the mission builds upon this extensive work. In particular, we wanted to use subjective measures of well-being and have therefore decided to incorporate the ONS' four measures of self-reported well-being into the mission. Often referred to as the ONS4, these are: life satisfaction, whether the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety. We also wanted our definition to capture broader aspects of things that are important for well-being and so we have also included two additional elements: what individuals say matters to them and what individuals say matters for their community.

These three components of well-being build upon one another so that community well-being includes all three aspects as illustrated in **Figure 1** below.

Defining the target population

The mission will focus on those people with low well-being.

This approach is in keeping with wider levelling up ambitions and was strongly supported by government departments and the experts we worked with. It is also likely that focussing on people with low well-being will be more impactful and thus will enable government, and other actors, to concentrate their efforts on policies that are likely to bring about the greatest benefits.

Identifying the priority drivers for the mission

In order to understand what actions will improve people's well-being, we needed to identify the drivers that are most likely to have the biggest impact and that government and other actors can influence.

For the ONS4 component, we assessed impact by considering two elements:
1) the share of the target population likely to be in scope to benefit from a potential change in the driver (prevalence)
2) the expected impact of that change on the benefitting individuals (impact).

To understand the drivers for the other two components of well-being, we worked with the ONS to run two additional survey questions to identify what individuals say matters to them and what individuals say matters to their communities.[8]

In identifying the priority drivers, we recognised that certain characteristics and circumstances put people at greater risk of experiencing low well-being (including people living with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, victims of domestic abuse, carers, and people with multiple complex needs). Providing support to these vulnerable groups is key to improving well-being. Rather than including this consideration as a standalone driver, we will embed this focus across our work on all of the drivers for the mission, recognising that these groups are likely to be underrepresented in some of the metrics.

The priority drivers for the mission are shown in Figure 1 at Annex A.

Alongside these priority drivers for the mission, we also acknowledge that there are other important drivers that influence well-being outcomes, such as access to housing, exposure to noise, and participation in culture. Evidence shows that participation in culture, heritage and the arts can improve well-being in adults, children and young people.[9][10] Whilst these are not listed as priority drivers, they

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[8] Results from the surveys are available here. ONS. 2022. ' Link.

[9] Fancourt, Warran & Aughterson, '*Evidence Summary for Policy The role of arts in improving health & wellbeing*', Report to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport. 2020.

[10] Fancourt D, Finn S. '*What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review.*' Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2019 (Health Evidence Network (HEN) synthesis report 67).

still play an important role in driving progress against the mission. Given the role that culture plays in the public's leisure time it will be captured via the supporting metric for 'satisfaction with leisure time'.

To prioritise the drivers, we have drawn on existing evidence about a driver's impact on the different components of well-being as defined in the well-being mission. In some cases, a driver might not have been ranked as priority due to a lack of evidence (rather than evidence suggesting only a small impact on well-being). We will keep emerging evidence under review and add amend our list of priority new drivers accordingly.

Measuring progress against the mission

As is the case with all of the levelling up missions, we have identified headline metrics to enable us to measure progress. For the well-being mission, the headline metrics will be the ONS' four measures of personal well-being. To measure personal well-being, the ONS uses four survey questions and people are asked to respond to the questions using an 11-point scale (0-10). These measures of personal well-being are subjective assessments and enable us to capture how people feel they are doing.

Since the mission is focussed on improving outcomes for people with the lowest well-being, the headline metrics will track the share of individuals who have low well-being according to each of the ONS4 questions. In line with the ONS' guidance, we consider low well-being to be a score of 0-4 in the positively worded survey questions (those relating to life satisfaction, feeling the things done in life are worthwhile and happiness) and a score of 6-10 for the negatively worded question (relating to anxiety). We also acknowledge that some of the people with the lowest well-being will not be captured in the ONS survey data. These are likely to be people experiencing multiple disadvantage. As above, we will embed consideration of how to improve the well-being of these groups throughout the mission. This includes working with relevant departments and organisations to ensure these groups are considered in policy work and to identify opportunities to improve the data on the well-being of these groups.

The headline metrics for the mission are:

Proportion of individuals aged 16+ with low ratings of life satisfaction
Proportion of individuals aged 16+ with low ratings of feeling that things done in life are worthwhile
Proportion of individuals aged 16+ with low ratings of feeling happy
Proportion of individuals aged 16+ with high ratings of feeling anxious

These metrics will be measured over UK lower-tier local authorities. The gap referred to in the mission will be measured as the difference between the worst-performing third of UK local authorities and the rest, when ranked according to their worst performing headline (ONS4) metric. Whilst we are interested in understanding a place's performance across all four of the headline metrics, ranking places according to their worst performing metric, as opposed to their average performance across all of the headline metrics, means we will focus on places that have a more acute well-being need in a particular dimension. The mission ambition is to achieve a statistically significant improvement (of any size) in the well-being of every UK region and nation and a reduction (of any size) in the gap between areas' well-being, taking pre-pandemic levels as the baseline.[11]

The headline metrics only include data on individuals over 16 years old due to data availability at local level. However, children's well-being is in the scope of the mission.

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[11] In light of the data available at regional/national and local authority levels, this will mean using 2019 data as the baseline for the regional and national improvements and 2017-2019 data as the baseline for the gap reduction.

<u>Supporting metrics</u>

In addition to the headline metrics for the mission, we have also identified a number of 'supporting metrics' to track our priority drivers. Supporting metrics serve to measure intermediate outcomes, provide additional context and act as early indicators of progress towards the mission. They will be used to give a deeper insight into what might be driving well-being trends at both national and local levels. A full list of supporting metrics can be found at Annex B.

Delivering progress against the mission

Since the drivers of well-being are diverse, achieving the ambition set out in the mission will require concerted, cross-government focus. The well-being mission provides an opportunity for government to take a co-ordinated approach to improving well-being, especially in areas where it is lowest. Government recognises the importance of addressing gaps in our knowledge such as in children's well-being data and understanding the well-being needs of people not captured by ONS surveys. Government is already taking action on the drivers of well-being: for example, by investing up to £30 million in the Know Your Neighbourhood Fund to widen participation in volunteering and tackle loneliness in 27 disadvantaged areas across England. Government will use the framework of the well-being mission to continue to look for opportunities to go further by taking a holistic, integrated approach to the causes of poor well-being.

Figure 1: Table showing the most impactful drivers for each component of well-being

Most impactful drivers of self-reported life assessments and emotions	Most impactful drivers of what individuals say matter to them	Most impactful drivers of what individuals say matter to their community
• Physical health • Mental health • Access to health and social care services • Sports participation and physical activity • Unemployment • Family safety, stability, and family dynamics • Support given to individuals in their transition to adulthood • Loneliness • Educational participation • Level of engagement and belonging in educational settings • Preventing homelessness • Individuals' access to the natural environment • Air quality	• All of the most impactful drivers of self-reported life assessments and emotions. • Individuals' financial situation • Community connectedness • Job quality and satisfaction with leisure time	• All of the most impactful drivers of what individuals say matter to them (including all of the most impactful drivers of self-reported life assessments) • Feelings of safety • Level of trust between people • Environment quality • Having the facilities you need
Individual Well-being		
Community Well-being		

Across all drivers, we will give particular consideration to people at greater risk of low well-being including people living with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, victims of domestic abuse, carers, and people with multiple complex needs.

Annex B

List of Supporting Metrics

Driver	Supporting metric	Geography level	Source
Physical health	Physical Health Conditions as measured by the Health Index Score.[12]	LA level	ONS
Mental health	Mental Health Conditions as measured by the Health Index Score.[13]	LA level	ONS
Access to health and social care services	Average Consultant-led referral to Treatment Waiting Times for 'all treatments'.	Integrated care board (ICB) level	NHS England
Family safety, stability and family dynamics	Children looked after rate.	LA level	DfE
Unemployment	Claimant count.	LA level	ONS
Educational participation	School absence rates.	LA level	DfE
Level of engagement and belonging in educational settings	School persistent absence rates.	LA level	DfE
Support given to individuals in their transition to adulthood	Percentage of 16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training.	LA level	DfE
Sports participation and physical activity	Percentage of adults (16+) who on average take part in "at least moderate intensity" physical activity for at least 150 minutes a week.	LA level	Sport England
Loneliness	Answer to the following survey question: How often do you feel lonely?	LA level	Community Life Survey. Available at LA level in 2025 for 2023/24 years and 2026 for 2024/25 years.
Individuals' access to the natural environment	An interim metric (the percentage of people who visited green spaces in the last 14 days) until	LA level (using three year rolling average)	People and Nature Survey

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[12] The Health Index has been paused whilst ONS explores alternative funding options and a wider review on Health and Social Care statistical outputs is conducted. The joint public consultation can be found here.
[13] As above.

	development of a '15 minute to nature' measure as part of the Environmental Improvement Plan commitment.		
Preventing homelessness	Number of households in temporary accommodation per 1000 households.	LA level	DLUHC
Air quality	Annual mean NO2 concentration.	Air quality 'zone'	DEFRA
Individual's financial situation	Answer to the following survey question: Which of these statements best describes your current financial situation? 1. I am saving a lot 2. I am saving a little 3. I am just managing to make ends meet 4. I am having to draw on savings 5. I am running into debt.	LA level	Community Life Survey. Available at LA level in 2025 for 2023/24 years and 2026 for 2024/25 years.
	Median weekly earnings of full-time workers	LA level	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
Job quality and satisfaction with leisure time	Answer to the following survey question: How much of the time do you enjoy the type of job that you do?	LA level	Community Life Survey. Available at LA level in 2025 for 2023/24 years and 2026 for 2024/25 years.
	The enjoyment rating of participating in activities categorised as 'leisure' according to survey responses.	Regional level	Time-Use Survey
Community connectedness	Answer to the following survey question: To what extent would you agree or disagree that people in your neighbourhood pull together to improve the neighbourhood?	LA level	Community Life Survey. Available at LA level in 2025 for 2023/24 years and 2026 for 2024/25 years.
Level of trust between people	Answer to the following survey question: Thinking about the people who live in your local area, to what extent do you believe they can be trusted?	LA level	Community Life Survey. Available at LA level in 2025 for 2023/24 years and 2026 for 2024/25 years.
Environmental quality	Fly-tipping incidents in England by Local Authority.	LA level	DEFRA

Having the facilities you need	Index of an area's connectedness to a variety of amenities that people need to reach.	LA level	DfT Connectivity Tool index. Available from 2024-25.
Feelings of safety	Answer to the following survey question: Have you personally experienced or witnessed any sort of anti-social behaviour in your local area in the last 12 months?	LA level	[Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) / Community Life Survey. Available at LA level in 2025 for 2023/24 years and 2026 for 2024/25 years.