

Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland – from rhetoric to reality

By Aideen McGinley, Chair of the Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland Advisory Group and Co-Chair of the Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland.

1 April 2015 marked the biggest transformation in local government in Northern Ireland since the Local Government Act (1972) created 26 single-tier district councils. With the reduction in the number of local authorities from 26 to 11, local government sought to be more efficient, more creative, more flexible, and crucially, more able to give power to the people it works to support. With the new structures came new powers and responsibilities – such as local economic development and Community Planning.

Northern Ireland is now three years into its new local government system, and at a critical point in its development. While the Executive has shown leadership in committing to a wellbeing and outcomes-based approach nationally in the [draft Programme for Government](#), local government reform means that it is up to the 11 Community Planning Partnerships to improve wellbeing at the local level. Charged with reflecting the approach taken nationally, but embodying local challenges and priorities, the recently launched Community Plans seek to improve economic, social, environmental, and democratic outcomes in the local authority districts by working across departments, across sectors, and across neighbourhoods.

The Community Planning Partnerships are now seeking to implement the Plans, to move from rhetoric to reality. Independent analysis commissioned by the Carnegie UK Trust has found that while all of the Community Plans have, to varying degrees, adopted both the outcomes-based approach and the language of wellbeing, challenges remain - but with challenge comes opportunity.

To build on the legacy of the [Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland](#), the Trust has launched its new project [Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland](#), a three-year project offering significant financial and in-kind support for up to three Community Planning Partnerships to implement a local wellbeing outcomes approach. The Trust is inviting all local authorities to apply with their particular Community Planning challenges. These challenges may be internal – such as aligning the approach taken with the draft Programme for Government or gathering appropriate data which links their activities to outcomes of the Plan – or they may be external – for example, engaging with citizens or communicating effectively about the Plan and what it seeks to achieve – and at any part of the policy cycle.

In return for participation in the programme, we are asking participants to commit to the principles of openness, partnership working, and shared learning. We are looking to gather evidence on successes (and challenges) experienced by Community Planning Partnerships. We hope this will improve the implementation of wellbeing frameworks within the three Partnerships selected. We also want to share the learning with others in Northern Ireland and with their counterparts across the UK and in Ireland, to pass on what we have learnt about how to plan for wellbeing.

This is something which will be of interest to all jurisdictions of the UK and Ireland – to those developing and implementing [neighbourhood plans](#) in England; [Local Outcomes Improvement Plans](#) in Scotland; and [Local Wellbeing Plans](#) in Wales. This project provides an opportunity to not only improve the coherence of the approach taken between central and local government in Northern Ireland, but to help with the implementation of equivalent local plans across the jurisdictions. It provides an opportunity, in the year of the twentieth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, to work towards a future with embedding wellbeing at the fore.

The Carnegie UK Trust's programme Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland is currently open to receiving expressions of interest from all local authorities in Northern Ireland. For more information please [click here](#) or email [Lauren Pennycook](#), Senior Policy and Development Officer at the Carnegie UK Trust.