

July 2018 Monitoring Report

Introduction

This month's monitoring report returns to the question of what role local government should play in facilitating community input into the description and measurement of well-being. It does so by examining the development and implementation of well-being plans in Wales and the development of the Canadian Well-being Index (CWI).

Wales

The Welsh approach to well-being is enshrined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The act is "about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It will make the public bodies listed in the Act think more about the long-term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach." (Quoted from a publication on the essentials of the act).

The act sets out seven well-being goals, a set of responsibilities binding on the Welsh public sector and a framework for the development and implementation of well-being plans. This is to be done in accordance with the principle of sustainable development defined to include "the importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves."

Crucially, the role of developing and implementing well-being plans is to be led by local government. The act provides for the establishment within the district of each Welsh local authority (there are 22) of a public services board to be convened by the Council and to include a number of designated public bodies.

The act requires that each board will:

- assess the state of economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being in its area
- set objectives that are designed to maximise the PSBs contribution to the well-being goals.

Each PSB must prepare and publish a plan setting out its objectives and the steps it will take to meet them. This is called a Local Well-being Plan. It must say:

- why the PSB feels their objectives will contribute within their local area to achieving the well-being goals

- how it has had regard to the assessment of Local Well-being in setting its objectives and steps to take.

The office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has the oversight responsibility which includes undertaking an assessment of each well-being plan. The first well-being plans were completed in 2016 and the Commissioner's assessments published in 2017.

Among the main concerns expressed by the Commissioner were "the need for a clearer demonstration of the willingness to change, to step out of siloes and to move away from a short-term approach to doing things the way they have always been done." and developing better understanding of the communities they serve, recommending "further work needs to be undertaken to better understand the **context, issues, challenges and opportunities between and within communities in PSB areas** (rather than only at a local authority level), and this should be clear in well-being planning.

Further emphasis is given to the importance of working closely with communities in guidelines for community and town councils¹ on their responsibilities in relation to well-being plans:

Welsh Ministers would strongly encourage community and town councils to engage with their communities on the local objectives and the proposed steps by which the council intends to contribute to these objectives.

Current engagement methods such as the use of websites, social media, public meetings and workshops, focus groups, and local notice boards would all play their part.

Practice in relation to well-being is still very much work in progress but it is clear that the emphasis is very much on developing and implementing well-being initiatives with a strong bottom up component, recognising the importance of understanding the circumstances of individual communities and the extent to which communities differ from each other. It is the Welsh government which has set the framework and identified the seven well-being goals but development and implementation itself is seen as very much a function led by local institutions and developed in conjunction with communities they serve.

Canada

Development of the Canadian well-being index began in the late 1990s as the initiative of a social justice foundation, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation. In 1999 the foundation convened a workshop bringing together experts in social indicators research to consider "what would it take to create a tool to measure the well-being of Canadians?" The following year, based on advice from the workshop, "the Atkinson Charitable Foundation²³ began the process of developing the CIW. This process included expert advice, broad public

¹ These councils are roughly the equivalent of New Zealand's community boards although with rather more power.

² Canadian Index of Well-Being Bryan Smale and Margo Hilbrecht Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON, Canada and accessed at: <https://www.google.com/search?q=%22canadian+index+of+well-being%22&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b>

³ responsibility for the CWI was transferred to the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo in 2010

consultations, contributions of research teams from across Canada, and discussions with practitioners, government officials, and potential users. There were three overlapping stages between 2001 and 2010 in the evolution of the CIW: (1) the identification of the key domains associated with Canadians' quality of life, (2) the identification of indicators directly associated with well-being in each of the domains and compilation of relevant data, and (3) the consolidation of a composite index for each domain and for the CIW composite index, bringing together all of the domains and their specific indicators."

The composite index provided a measure of the well-being of Canadians as a whole (much the same way as the living standards framework will for New Zealanders). The rationale for the development of a well-being index in Canada, as elsewhere, was the perceived inadequacy of GDP as a measure of social progress or overall quality of life. Publication of the first composite index emphasised this. A recent publication from the Association of Ontario Health Centres, *Measuring What Matters: how the Canadian index of well-being can improve quality of life in Ontario*, noted "from 1994 to 2010, while Canada's GDP grew by a robust 28.9 per cent, improvements in Canadians' wellbeing grew by a considerably smaller 5.7 per cent. In other words, much of our productivity gains are not being translated into the day-to-day quality of life of typical Canadians."

Whilst the CWI continues to be developed as a measure of well-being of Canadians as a whole, there is increasing emphasis on developing ways to apply the CWI at the provincial, regional, local and neighbourhood level. It has been the underpinning for the development by Canada's community foundations of the vital signs research project, developing indicators to assist individual foundations decide where they should target their grant-making activities, and is increasingly used by local government bodies to gain a better understanding of the communities they serve.

Discussion

There are obvious similarities and contrasts between the Welsh and Canadian approaches. The Welsh approach to the development and implementation of well-being plans is a government initiative supported by statute. The Canadian approach is a civil society initiative, with no statutory backing and thus no compulsion.

On the other hand, both emphasise the importance of community involvement. In the case of the CWI, although the composite index is nationwide and applying a common approach, the indicators it uses were developed based on extensive community consultation across Canada to identify the values Canadians associated with well-being. In Wales, the emphasis is very much on well-being as a community phenomenon which requires a high level of engagement with communities not just to determine levels of well-being but also to contribute to the development of policy responses.

Arguably the Canadian approach has benefited from the absence of statutory backing as the success of the index has depended on its acceptance both by researchers and by Canadian communities themselves thus imposing a quite strong discipline on its development.

In contrast the Welsh approach whilst benefiting from the statutory backing of government in gaining momentum has also suffered from its status as a

statutory monopoly with relatively minimal discipline to ensure the support of the communities it serves. As an example, this can be seen in the Future Generations Commissioner's concern that public services boards have in some cases been taking too much of a business as usual approach (although in fairness this may also be because of the relative newness of well-being planning).

From a New Zealand local government perspective the Welsh and Canadian approaches provide important examples of how to approach the development of well-being indicators (plans) in ways which truly recognise the concerns of the communities they serve whilst also meeting the national policy of developing overarching indicators which can inform government policy.

As a final note, the Welsh and Canadian experiences each in their own way highlight the importance of local government being at the centre of defining and measuring well-being and developing responses which can meet the needs of their diverse communities.