



Response to Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland

May 2014

Belfast Healthy Cities welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Roundtable.

Belfast Healthy Cities is a partnership organisation working to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Belfast and beyond. The organisation acts as the link to the World Health Organization (WHO) European Healthy Cities Network on behalf of Belfast as a WHO Healthy City, and currently holds the WHO secretariat for the Network. Belfast Healthy Cities' key partners include Belfast City Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Bryson Group, DHSSPS, DSD, DRD, NIHE, Public Health Agency, QUB and UU.

The role of Belfast Healthy Cities is to bring organisations and sectors together to consider how their work contributes to health and wellbeing; to share evidence and build capacity, and to introduce and pilot new concepts linked to core themes identified by the WHO European Healthy Cities Network. Developing the concept of wellbeing has been a long term theme for the WHO European Healthy Cities Network. The focus is on raising awareness and building capacity on wellbeing and its importance. Wellbeing is a helpful concept, in particular in relation to highlighting the broad connections between people's life outcomes and their living conditions.

The comments below are made within this broad context.

It appears that there is limited involvement in the Roundtable from the health sector. Belfast Healthy Cities has initiated work on wellbeing within the context of the health sector, and would be pleased to contribute to this initiative, should that be helpful.

1. Is 'wellbeing' a useful focus for the Northern Ireland Executive, local government and partners? If you were to draft a high-level statement of purpose for the Northern Ireland Executive focusing on wellbeing, what would it be?

The World Health Organization defines health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.'

'Health and wellbeing are largely determined by people's living conditions – physical, environmental, economic and social. Therefore, local government can and does make a major contribution to health and wellbeing.' This definition is included in Wellbeing: A guide for Political representatives, Tackling inequalities and promoting wellbeing, produced by Belfast Healthy Cities in 2011. It creates a framework by which elected representatives can draw clear links between wellbeing and prosperity in society. This further enables wellbeing to be included in policy development and

service planning. Wellbeing is a useful way to measure productivity of an area considering prosperity is not a measure of materials alone, it is about good environments, encouraging people to be more productive and ensuring they are more able to participate in society.

The Scottish government adopted a National Performance Framework for measuring all government policies against a set of wellbeing indicators in 2007. Within this framework, prosperity in a society is no longer measured by GDP alone, as Scotland works towards a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth, wellbeing is the central focus of this. Analysis of the Scottish approach and its success is a good basis by which Northern Ireland can base the development of a shared approach to wellbeing, including a relevant indicator set or framework. Since the introduction of this method of measuring government, a set of high level purpose targets measured against specific benchmarks; indicate there has been a steady increase in growth and productivity for Scotland. Since there are close linkages between Scotland and Northern Ireland, it appears that this approach could similarly be helpful for Northern Ireland. A single framework helps collaboration and ensures organisations work in the same direction.

There needs to be a clear focus on creating capacity around the concept of wellbeing so that members of the Assembly and Northern Ireland Executive, local government and partners are fully aware of what it is and the benefits for all of society for taking this approach. Belfast Healthy Cities would be pleased to support this process, should that be helpful.

Improving wellbeing is fundamental to providing a focused understanding of the broad issues that help people fulfil their potential and create a more prosperous society for all.

2. What are the priority challenges for:

a. Subjective wellbeing? (e.g. social connection, poor community relations, insecurity, identity issues, mental health, addiction etc.)

b. Objective wellbeing? (e.g. income inequality, unemployment, poor environmental protection, shelter, educational under achievement etc.)

It is important to differentiate between subjective or personal level wellbeing, and the contextual factors shaping this. Belfast Healthy Cities would emphasise that these are interlinked, and understanding this interlinkage is a priority. The social determinants of health approach; which views health as the outcome of people's wider physical and social living conditions, offers an effective way of demonstrating the linkages.

In order to measure subjective wellbeing a coherent wellbeing model should be developed for Northern Ireland, which all policies are developed in line with. Increasing the level of community and personal resilience can have a positive impact on subjective wellbeing. The promotion of positive mental health across the life

course; with greater awareness of support for anyone with mental ill health, and provision of addiction services and life coaching will have a positive impact on subjective wellbeing. Within the challenge of creating a resilient community that displays high levels of social capital, acknowledgement must be paid to Northern Ireland as a society emerging from conflict and the bearing this has on subjective wellbeing.

The elements of objective wellbeing are important indicators of measuring overall wellbeing of a society; however, it must be acknowledged that people make choices within context. The decisions people make are influenced by the conditions in which they live, this is supported by an existing body of research which highlights a social gradient in health. This implies that risk factors for ill health tend to accumulate at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, which ultimately means shorter life expectancy and higher levels of physical and mental morbidity. This directly impacts the opportunities and choices available to people since they are strongly influenced by income and socioeconomic status.

The Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) provides extensive data on issues such as the level of educational attainment, household characteristics and benefit data, which offer a basic picture relevant to wellbeing. However, Belfast Healthy Cities believes that considerable additional work is required should a focus on wellbeing be established. As a priority, local agreement on the concept of wellbeing is required, along with a framework and appropriate indicators for measuring this.

Investing in improving health and strengthening the contextual factors that shape people's lives and health offer an effective way of strengthening both personal and community level wellbeing and resilience. A high level of community resilience, in turn, will create better pathways that enable people and communities to take control of their lives and wellbeing. Leadership and direction by government, local and regional, is required to improve physical and social conditions in an equitable way, and also to illustrate hope for change through provision of employment and learning opportunities. Social contracts have been a recent inclusion in some public procurement and provide local training and employment opportunities. The promotion and implementation of a living wage creates a greater awareness of issues of in work poverty. Early intervention, including investment in early years and educational as well as family support for those at risk of educational under achievement or becoming marginalised from education, offer evidence based 'best buys' for preventing and breaking the cycle of disadvantage, family support, raising aspirations and goal setting.

3. Do you agree that many of the post-conflict and legacy challenges in Northern Ireland are essentially wellbeing issues that – once addressed – could unlock a more peaceful future?

It may be helpful to explore these issues in the context of the social determinants of health, which understands people's health and life outcomes to be the result of their wider physical and social living conditions, including overarching global, national and local systems. A focus on investment in early years, education and high quality

employment opportunities would enhance wellbeing and in particular reduce inequalities.

The Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland (CVSNI) have conducted a number of research projects on the impact of the conflict in Northern Ireland. 'Better Future' research project focused on the impact of the conflict's enduring legacy and how it is impacting on the lives of today's children and young people. This is occurring through intergenerational trauma, sectarianism and segregation and paramilitarism. The CVSNI also published 'Troubled consequences: A report on the mental health impact of the civil conflict in Northern Ireland' a key finding identified that individuals who experienced any conflict-related traumatic event were more likely to have had any lifetime anxiety, mood, substance or impulse-control disorder compared to those who experienced a non-conflict related event and those who had not experienced a traumatic event.

4. How can wellbeing inform a shared policy narrative across central and local government in Northern Ireland?

Wellbeing offers a basis for a people focused narrative, and can act as the basis of a framework where policies and services are assessed against outcomes for local people. Key to enabling this is highlighting that an understanding of people's lived experience offers a stronger position to deliver what people need. Belfast Healthy Cities have sought to introduce this through the 'Wellbeing – a guide for political representatives' publication, which is built on the premise that all local government functions contribute to wellbeing, and that a focus on wellbeing can strengthen the ability of local government to improve prosperity for all. This publication also began to explore potentially relevant indicators to measure wellbeing across council departments.

Belfast Strategic Partnership has identified emotional resilience as the core component across all thematic groups, being considered across all the work they deliver and highlighting well-being. It is also an opportunity to draw on learning from elsewhere, Scotland Performs and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, to demonstrate the benefit of this approach for all.

5. How might an outcomes based approach be embedded in government at all levels in Northern Ireland? What outcomes should the Executive aspire to in the next two Programmes for Government?

Belfast Healthy Cities supports an outcomes based approach. The Executive should aspire to having a set of wellbeing indicators which underpins the work for all priorities of the Programme for Government. This may involve a programme of building capacity to increase awareness of how wellbeing is impacted and promoted through all policies.

The transfer of community planning powers provides local government an opportunity to strategically shape and influence the wellbeing of local neighbourhoods. It is an opportunity to identify current activity, build on this by influencing the provision of services, depending on need.

The outcomes approach should include aspirational rather than process outcomes, and identify a step by step approach to achieving these. It is important to develop a baseline by identifying what already happens, establishing a starting point and building on what already exists.

6. If the Northern Ireland Executive adopted a transparent performance framework, with wellbeing as a focus for measurement, how could the Government effectively mobilize communities of users (policy designers, civil servants, local government, the private sector, NGOs, think tanks, citizens)?

The Scottish Government work to fifty National Indicators which enable progress to be monitored towards the achievement of a set of sixteen National Outcomes and ultimately the delivery of a single purpose for government over the next ten years. This common set of indicators help to sharpen the single focus of government, enable priorities to be clearly understood and provide a clear structure for delivery. By achieving these outcomes across all areas of government Scotland strives to be a better place to live and a more prosperous and successful country.

Capacity building on the subject of wellbeing will also contribute towards a shared understanding. Including training with elected representatives to demonstrate how wellbeing already is affected by the work they carry out and how measuring against a set of wellbeing indicators will strengthen this understanding and has the potential to improve wellbeing as well as prosperity and productivity for all of society.

Belfast Healthy Cities would be pleased to support this area of work. Through acting as the link between Belfast as a WHO Healthy City and the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, Belfast Healthy Cities has access to evidence, expertise and experience from WHO and 100 WHO Healthy Cities across Europe. This expertise includes examples of concrete initiatives relevant to wellbeing, as well as development of indicators and measurement frameworks.