

## MEASURING OBJECTIVE WELLBEING

Objective wellbeing views wellbeing as the outcome of wider living conditions. It has also been highlighted as a way to measure the overall outcome of public policy and service provision, in a context where wellbeing is seen as the aim of public policy. This is the context of the draft Programme for Government, and it is also evident in the initial community plans published to date.

Objective wellbeing can be measured using indicators highlighting the physical and social living conditions of a given area or population.

### **Key indicators for wellbeing include:**

- Demographic composition of the population, including age profile and population projections
- Economic activity rate
- Economic inactivity and unemployment rate
- Housing situation, including proportion of households in social housing and private rented accommodation; housing stress; homelessness; housing need information and property values in the area
- Quality of housing stock, including fuel poverty
- Educational qualifications of the working age population
- Educational attainment of young people
- Deprivation information
- Benefit uptake and dependence
- Healthy life expectancy
- Morbidity and mortality data for key conditions, e.g. cancer, diabetes, heart disease, mental health
- Self reported health
- Overweight and obesity rates
- Access to key services, e.g. transport, health care, education, play opportunities, leisure facilities, recreation and green space.

Wherever possible, it is helpful to have access to detailed information to assist in analysing the data and deciding on action. Demographic and economic indicators are also important to develop a fuller understanding of what influences wellbeing and how. For example breakdowns by age, gender and DEA are helpful and important in order to identify key issues, priorities and inequalities that affect wellbeing outcomes.

Engagement with residents and local organisations and businesses is also an important element of measuring objective wellbeing. Information gathered in this way provides context essential to understand the statistical data, and strengthens understanding of what it is like to live in a specific community and what the assets, wants and needs of people are. Methods for gathering this type of evidence include resident surveys, public meetings, workshops and community fun days, as well as direct meetings with constituents. Social media and other technologies also offer options for interaction with residents, businesses

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### CASE STUDY/EXAMPLE

A number of tools and indicator sets have been developed to support measurement of objective wellbeing. The Carnegie Foundation has collated examples of these and led work aimed at increasing the emphasis put on wellbeing in public policy, including a Northern Ireland Roundtable on Wellbeing, which contributed to the development of the PfG. The Young Foundation has also developed tools to support engagement of local communities in exploring wellbeing, along with indicator sets for example linked to wellbeing and housing.

### MEASURING SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

Subjective wellbeing views wellbeing as the personal life satisfaction individuals experience. Focus on this approach is on how to support people to make their own lives better, and it has been used extensively for example in the mental health and emotional wellbeing field. The Office for National Statistics also measures this through annual surveys, using questions like 'Taken all together, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?'

A key critique of the subjective approach has been that it does not take into account people's circumstances or the context they live in. It has also been noted that used in isolation it can introduce bias, where people have limited expectations or where cultural norms skew responses. For example, the ONS survey mentioned above highlights Northern Ireland as the region where people routinely report the highest levels of wellbeing, while other statistics indicate high levels of mental health problems as well as lower income and higher deprivation than many other regions of the UK.

Subjective wellbeing can be measured through surveys, including resident surveys as well as more targeted surveys aimed at specific population groups, communities or organisations. It can also be measured in direct engagement with people, through interviews or systematic use of questions linked to service provision.

### CASE STUDY/EXAMPLE

Take 5 - an emotional wellbeing campaign coordinated by the Belfast Strategic Partnership. It encourages people to take five key actions for their wellbeing, building on the new economics foundation's *5 Steps to Wellbeing*. The approach includes support resources and events to highlight services available to support people to improve mental wellbeing. A resident survey has taken place in 2012-13 and 2016 to explore people's views and experiences.



**Belfast Healthy Cities**  
tel: 028 9032 8811

Web: [www.belfasthealthycities.com](http://www.belfasthealthycities.com)  
email: [info@www.belfasthealthycities.com](mailto:info@www.belfasthealthycities.com)  
twitter: [@belfasthealthy](https://twitter.com/belfasthealthy)



**NI Local Government Association**

tel: 028 9079 8972  
web: [www.nilga.org](http://www.nilga.org)  
email: [info@nilga.org](mailto:info@nilga.org) twitter: [@NI\\_LGA](https://twitter.com/NI_LGA)

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