

## Community wellbeing 'Voice of the User' report: Summary for stakeholders

What Works Centre for Wellbeing, Community wellbeing evidence programme  
December 2015

This short report summarises the stakeholder engagement activities that the What Works Centre for Wellbeing community wellbeing evidence programme carried out between June and September 2015. We would like to thank all the organisations, groups and individuals who shared their views with us.

### Who did we consult with, how many and how?

In June, we created a large database of interested and relevant stakeholders by inviting people from amongst consortium members' relevant contacts, and from a database of local authority contacts. We also provided a subscription link on the What Works Centre for Wellbeing website. The database currently holds around 1,800 people, 95% of them are in the UK, but there are also subscribers in Europe, the USA, Australia, and South America.

We used workshops, interviews, online questionnaires and community sounding boards to speak to over 650 people (Figure 1). This included stakeholders from central, local, and devolved government, NHS, charities, charitable trusts, businesses (e.g. housing associations, developers, and insurance companies), academia and local communities.

Hopkins Van Mil also conducted two pairs of public dialogues in Belfast and Bristol, where they spoke to 40 local residents.

We held our engagement activities between June and September 2015 in Glasgow, Exeter, Birmingham, Cardiff, Leeds, Belfast, Durham, Liverpool, London, Grimsby and Bristol.

Figure 1: Stakeholder engagement process and map



## What is important to wellbeing in a community?

We wanted to know which community level factors stakeholders identified as important for wellbeing. We asked participants in the community sounding boards, public dialogues and workshops. Their responses included:

- **Social capital / social networks:** for example, neighbourliness and relationships within communities, networks of family and friends, community spirit
- **Participation and voice:** being listened to, young people having a voice, civic engagement, access to information, co-production, wide representation
- **Safety and security:** fear of crime, feeling safe walking home at night
- **Environment:** green and open space, cleanliness
- **Local facilities:** public transport, childcare, access to education, pubs
- **Health:** health services, access to healthy lifestyle e.g. food, exercise
- **Community identity:** connectedness and belonging
- **Activities:** access to culture, activities, sports, volunteering
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion**
- **Financial security:** jobs, local economy
- **Affordable housing**
- **Governance:** accountability, joined up systems
- **Access to support**

*"I see it in social capital terms... amount of space and opportunities to mix: mix between social groups." – Interviewee*

**Social networks, participation, environment, local facilities and safety and security** emerged as particularly strong themes and were mentioned in all consultation activities.

## What is 'community wellbeing'?

We wanted to explore whether community wellbeing is the total sum of (or average) wellbeing of all the individuals who live in a community, or whether it is something else. We asked people in the online questionnaire, interviews and community sounding boards about their understanding of community wellbeing.

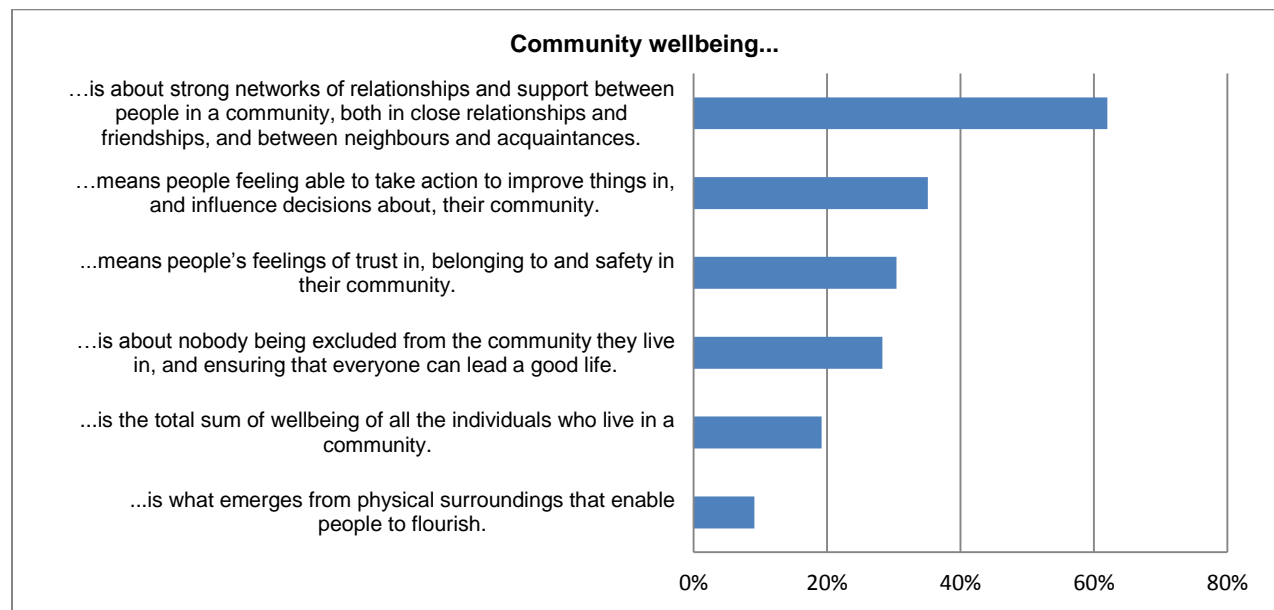
Overall, the stakeholders we spoke to understood community wellbeing as primarily being about social networks and connectedness.



*"We have a local group which has taken over a piece of unused green space and is making a community garden with places to walk, sit and play and a vegetable garden. It has brought people together and is improving community cohesion, social capital and individual wellbeing."*  
Online questionnaire respondent

Figure 2 shows online questionnaire responses (283) to the question ‘which of the following statements comes closest to how you understand community wellbeing?’

**Figure 2: Definition of community wellbeing: online questionnaire**



### What kind of wellbeing evidence (types and topics) do stakeholders need?

We wanted to know what kind of wellbeing evidence stakeholders felt would be useful to their work, both in terms of the types of evidence, and the evidence topics. The topics that came up most frequently were:

- Social relationships and networks
- Health and public health
- Community development
- Participation and volunteering
- Co-production
- Safety
- Opportunities for informal social interaction

*“Wellbeing has tended to be a very academic subject we’re trying to convert into something that’s very clearly actionable and can influence decisions’. For policy-makers this might be ‘a checklist of ten questions that policy-makers should ask themselves based on domains of wellbeing, or whatever it is.” – Interviewee*

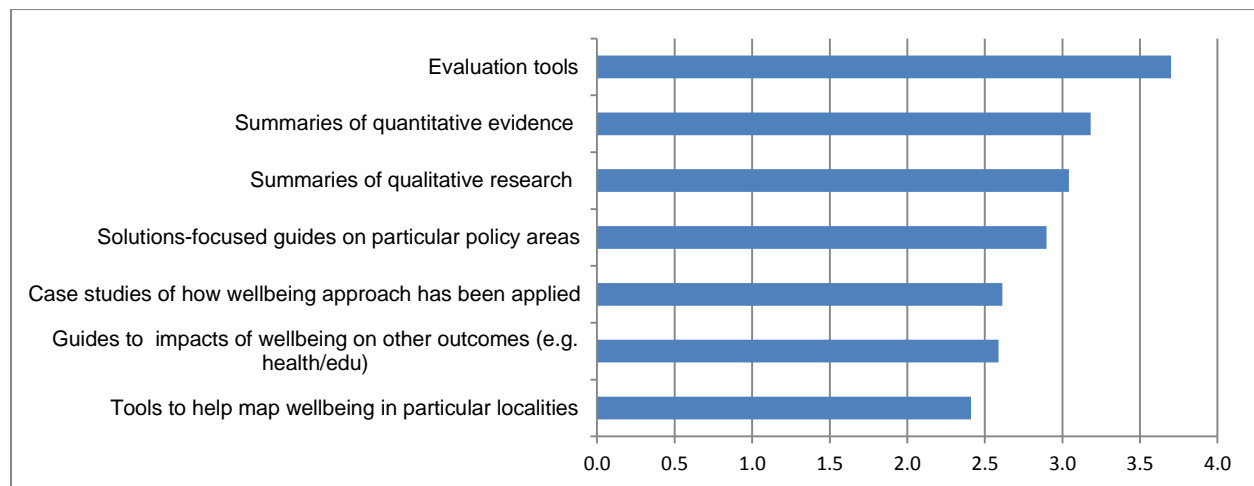
There was broad agreement amongst stakeholders that diverse types of evidence are needed, including bottom-up evidence from service providers and qualitative data (Figure 3). However, some senior stakeholders from government and the third sector, and participants in the workshops, told us that quantitative evidence was more important because the government favours it.

*“What evidence is there for the relationship between well-being and usage of health services? Does it have a contribution to prevention and therefore financial savings?” – Workshop participant*

Some stakeholders suggested that evidence of how wellbeing leads to other outcomes, like reduced expenditure and use of health services, is needed in order to make the economic case for wellbeing. However, some individuals preferred to talk about the intrinsic value of wellbeing and resisted the ‘commodification’ of it.

Stakeholders from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland expressed a need for context-specific evidence. Others said evidence must be comparable between different regions of the UK.

**Figure 3: Ranked outputs and tools that stakeholders want: Online questionnaire**



### What are the barriers to using wellbeing evidence?

In our analysis of the online questionnaire responses, we found that there is a gap between people’s intended and actual use of wellbeing evidence. This finding was confirmed by discussions with participants in the workshops.

We wanted to find out what barriers people face in using wellbeing evidence, so included questions on this topic in the workshops, online questionnaire and interviews. We found that the most common barriers were:

- Not knowing it exists
- A lack of capacity to access and understand it
- A lack of evidence that is high quality, timely and addresses the complexity of the issues
- Wellbeing evidence is not perceived as credible by others

In the online questionnaire, the most common challenge was that “there is not enough evidence that is up to the quality standard that I require, e.g. randomized controlled trials (RCTs)”, which 44% of

*“We want this evidence to be so strong that the government and the Treasury cannot turn away the findings because they’re methodologically unsound.” - Interviewee*

respondents chose.

*"I don't think there's resistance to wellbeing. The white elephant in the room is the funding crisis. It's increasingly difficult to innovate and do long-term planning." - Interviewee*

Stakeholders across the board regularly referred to the 'current climate' and issues of funding and resources. For example, the 'funding and resources' challenge was mentioned in 7 of our 10 workshops, and it was also referred to in interviews.

### Find out more

To find out more about the What Works Centre for Wellbeing's *community wellbeing evidence programme*, contact [whatworkswellbeing@neweconomics.org](mailto:whatworkswellbeing@neweconomics.org).

### What is the What Works Centre for Wellbeing?

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing is a UK government-funded initiative recently launched by the What Works Network to enable a range of stakeholders to access independent, high quality, accessible evidence syntheses on wellbeing. Over the next three years, teams will explore wellbeing evidence in the following areas; work and learning, culture and sport and community wellbeing.

Sign up to updates from the wider What Works Centre for Wellbeing here:  
<http://whatworkswellbeing.org/>

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