

***Wellbeing: a common approach
Working Conference Paper***

DEVELOPING A COMMON APPROACH TO WELLBEING

Summary

1. This working paper is intended to inform discussions on developing a shared understanding of wellbeing that can be used across government. It is not a statement of government policy. It sets out the policy background to the work, and proposes criteria for common approach, and examples of potential short statements of common understanding. It includes questions for discussion on the statement, and on policy needs for the longer term. Annex A gives an overview of how wellbeing has been defined in the academic literature. Annex B includes a table summarising the evidence on the influences on wellbeing reviewed in Defra commissioned research. Annex C lists and summarises examples of where wellbeing is currently used in policy contexts.

Policy Background

2. The UK 2005 sustainable development strategy, *Securing the Future*, recognised that wellbeing is at the heart of sustainable development. It identified a need to ensure that wellbeing issues are being tackled consistently, in the right way and that government is genuinely making a difference to people's lives. To address this, the strategy committed the government to get a better understanding of wellbeing by sponsoring cross-disciplinary work to bringing together existing research and international experience and to exploring how policies might change with an explicit wellbeing focus. The strategy also provided for the development of wellbeing indicators to add to the existing UK sustainable development indicator set. Defra, as lead department for the strategy, is also leading on delivery of the wellbeing commitment.

3. To take the strategy commitment forward, Defra commissioned a number of research projects on wellbeing that were launched in March/April 2006 and have now been completed. The Whitehall Wellbeing Working Group (W3G), was set up by Defra in the autumn of 2005 on an informal basis to steer the research, share information, and consider the policy implications of the research. The specialist Wellbeing Indicators Group was set up in December 2006 to advise on the development of wellbeing indicators.

4. W3G recognised that there is a continuing need for policy makers using wellbeing concepts/measures to share information to ensure consistency, avoid duplication of research, and identify potential joint working opportunities. Defra Ministers have agreed that Defra officials should continue to play a co-ordinating role, and work with departments to develop wellbeing indicators for the existing sustainable development indicator set. W3G discussions on the policy implications of the research concluded that while there are strong attractions to a wellbeing approach, there are a number of challenges in using it in policy contexts.

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5. The attractions of a wellbeing focus are that it promotes a more people-centred, inclusive, holistic and multi-dimensional approach to policymaking. A major difficulty is that there is no consensus on a definition and often uncertainty about exactly how it might help or change policy making. It was proposed that a common understanding of what wellbeing means in a policy context would be valuable for policy makers seeking a greater focus on wellbeing.

Developing a statement of Common Understanding

6. We propose that the common understanding should meet the following criteria:

- be the starting point from which policymakers can structure their thoughts;
- be informed by academic debates but also be pragmatic and clearly relevant across a wide range of policy domains;
- be consistent with existing approaches to wellbeing in policy;
- reflect the importance of taking holistic views of people's lives;
- express the government's role in wellbeing. This includes addressing inequalities of opportunity between individuals and groups, and between generations over time and the trade-offs these may incur.

7. We have drafted a number of examples of a statement of common understanding for discussion, which are informed by previous discussions in W3G. Two approaches have been discussed: wellbeing can be described as either an outcome (i.e. as an end state) or process (with more focus on the conditions that contribute to wellbeing). In the illustrative examples below, we have reflected both approaches to varying degrees. You should note that, to avoid repetition, not all of them meet all the criteria listed above.

Example 1

Wellbeing is a positive state that people experience when they are able to meet their needs for strong social relationships, equality of opportunity, rewarding work, economic and physical security, health, and opportunities to participate in cultural activities and enjoy contact with nature. It is enhanced when an individual is able to fulfil personal goals and achieve a sense of purpose and fulfilment in society.

Example 2

Wellbeing is a positive physical, social and mental state; it is not just the absence of pain, discomfort and incapacity. It arises not only from the action of individuals, but from a host of collective goods and relationships with other people. It requires that basic needs are met, important personal goals are achieved and people are able to achieve a sense of purpose and fulfilment in society, and that they are satisfied with their lives.

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Example 3: People's wellbeing is enhanced if their lives are shaped by a number of experiences such as strong relationships, family life and involvement in empowered communities (whether neighbourhoods, faith communities or communities of shared interests and values), good health, financial security, stable employment in rewarding jobs, and living in high quality spaces (including good housing conditions and access to quality environments). Government's role is to ensure people have fair access to the resources to achieve these conditions. An understanding of the combined effect of policies on the way people experience their lives is important for designing and prioritising them.

Next Steps

8. The outputs of the 22 May conference will be used to advance further discussions on a common understanding through the Whitehall Wellbeing Group (W3G). The high level cross Government group (Sustainable Development Programme Board), which oversees the implementation of the strategy, will agree the statement and the selection of the wellbeing indicators before they are submitted to Ministers for approval.

9. There will be further opportunities for participants to feed into this discussion through the wellbeing forum discussion website¹. The finalised 'understanding' will be delivered for the launch of wellbeing indicators in July 2007, which are being adopted on a provisional basis.

Questions for discussion

10. Statement of common understanding

- i) Do you agree with the proposed criteria for the common understanding in paragraph 6 above? Please suggest how they should be improved.

- ii) What elements of the examples do you like/dislike and why? What would you include in a statement of common understanding?

Please see overleaf for further questions

¹ <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/wellbeingacommonapproach.html>

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11. Developing a common approach

Wellbeing concepts and measures are already being used in a number of policy areas, some of which have been presented to the conference². (These and further examples are summarised in Annex C).

- i. What benefits are there in adopting a focus on wellbeing?
- ii. What are the barriers/problems?
- iii. What could be done by policy makers to overcome these?

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Wellbeing Definitions in the Academic Literature

'Wellbeing' has a rich history of academic theorisation/conceptualisation and debate. It has been used interchangeably with quality of life, welfare, life satisfaction, happiness, welfare, living standards, human development and more recently with happiness and subjective wellbeing. Although distinct, all these terms capture an evaluation or description of the state of a person's situation. Attempts to define and measure wellbeing have highlighted the relative importance of non economic influences on wellbeing.

Some important distinctions in mainstream approaches to wellbeing are that between objective and subjective; and that -between hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions.

- Objective dimensions capture the material and social attributes that are thought to contribute or detract from an individual's or community's wellbeing e.g. housing, education.
- Subjective dimensions capture an individual's assessment of their own circumstances: what they think and feel. This area has displayed a great deal of activity more recently amongst psychologists and economists collectively under the banner of 'subjective wellbeing'.

Under 'subjective wellbeing', two streams can be distinguished: hedonic and eudaimonic (sometimes called psychological wellbeing).

- The hedonic approach (often conflated with subjective wellbeing) equates wellbeing with a combination of happiness, pleasure attainment and satisfaction with life.
- Eudaimonic theorists clearly distinguish wellbeing from happiness, arguing that not all desires and pleasures will contribute to wellbeing and may even cause harm. Rather, wellbeing should extend beyond 'pleasure' to capture the concept of human flourishing that incorporates the idea of realising one's potential and achieving individual goals. This includes achieving a sense of purpose and meaning in life (i.e. self-realisation).

There is growing consensus in the academic world that a combined/multi-dimensional approach is necessary. Hedonic approaches may neglect the fact that positive feelings do not always lead to personal growth and fulfilment; may be transitory and achieved in unsustainable ways; and there may be occasions where a state of wellbeing requires the experience of negative emotional states. Similarly, a state of wellbeing cannot be achieved entirely by realising one's potential since these behaviours do not necessarily lead to happiness and contentment.

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ANNEX B

Evidence on factors influencing wellbeing

The following table summarises the main factors and sub factors identified in research by the Sheffield University’s Centre for Wellbeing in Public Policy ([Influences on personal wellbeing and its application to policy making](#)) report as having some influence over wellbeing. The review of evidence focuses on large datasets where there was an opportunity to isolate the impact of one factor upon wellbeing by controlling for other factors. A total of 153 papers from literature in economics and psychology were reviewed. Most of the evidence relates to subjective wellbeing measures (i.e. how people think and feel about their lives). . Additional evidence on relationship between wellbeing and materialism and pro-environmental attitudes is included from the New Economics Foundations report [“Sustainable development and wellbeing: relationships, challenges and policy implications”](#).

Main factors	Sub factors	Evidence	Type/strength of relationship with wellbeing
Income	Absolute	Fairly strong	Individual level studies show a positive association with wellbeing (especially when measured as life satisfaction). This is generally found to be non linear, suggesting diminishing marginal returns. Some of this positive association may be due to reverse causality and unobserved individual characteristics (e.g. personality).
	Relative	Good	When individual income is controlled for a significant negative relationship is found with reference income defined in a range of different ways and with different reference groups, suggesting relativities have strong effect on wellbeing. High aspirations and expectations have negative impact on subjective wellbeing (SWB) yet are raised by higher incomes. This reinforces findings that perceptions of financial status have stronger predictive power than actual income. Additional income for those who are not at low levels of income is unlikely to increase SWB in long run if additional income increases expectations about necessary income. “There is good evidence that relative income effects are relatively large and significant, and these findings have potentially important implications for policy. Although the evidence cannot rule out an effect of absolute income, it does suggest that the impact of absolute income is smaller than that of an individual’s comparison income. There is some evidence that the nature of this comparison is upward looking” p.41
	Savings	Limited	Positive association with wellbeing
	Debt	Limited	Associated with lower wellbeing

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Personal characteristics	Age	Good	U-shaped, lowest amongst 35-50. However, most studies deal with different cohorts and the results could be due (in part) to cohort effects rather than age. (NB. Studies which control for income and health etc. are picking up a pure age effect)
	Gender	Good	Controlling for a range of factors (at least income) males tend to have slightly higher SWB when measured using mental health outcomes, but slightly worse when using evaluative, life satisfaction outcomes. There is also some variation across countries. Gender has also been found to interact with other factors, although some of these interaction effects remain under-explored.
	Ethnicity	None (for UK)	UK evidence too limited to determine whether a relationship exists. However, many studies in the US show that whites tend to have higher wellbeing than African Americans.
	Personality	Limited evidence in large scale studies	Much of the evidence on impact of personality on wellbeing draws on research on twins (mostly from the US), suggesting that SWB has a genetic component, but relationship rarely examined using large scale surveys. Some evidence that personality related to WB, but not possible to determine if innate or developed in childhood/adulthood. One study reported that people with higher self-esteem reported fewer depressive symptoms
	Physical characteristics	Limited	Few studies have explored this relationship. One study in Sweden identified no impact of Body Mass Index on life satisfaction. An Australian study identified that wellbeing was highest for those in common height range and lower at the extremes at either end.
	Health	Strong	Strong positive relationship between wellbeing and both physical and psychological health. "Some of association may be caused by impact of wellbeing on health, but the effect sizes of health variables also suggest that health has impact on wellbeing" (p. 48). Specific conditions (e.g. heart attacks and strokes) reduce wellbeing. Personality may be affecting the relationship between wellbeing and health.
Socially developed characteristics	Education	Mixed (depends on choice of wellbeing measure)	Some evidence of positive relationship with flourishing wellbeing measures, less so with SWB. Some studies show ambiguous findings due to relationship with other drivers (health, income). Some evidence that education has positive impact in low income countries.
	Type of work	Insufficient	More research required, particularly to investigate how different measures interact with self-employment.

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	Un-employment	Strong	Large negative effect on wellbeing across national and international datasets. Although mixed evidence on adaptation to unemployment, agreement that effects are severe and long lasting and cannot be explained in terms of income loss. Some evidence that effect can be moderated by living in household/area with other unemployed people.
How we spend our time	Hours worked	Limited	Although strong evidence that employment is better than unemployment, limited data from large scale surveys on the effect of working hours on wellbeing. Some evidence of a u-shaped relationship with wellbeing and hours worked, and that work amongst older people contributes to wellbeing. Out of the studies reviewed little consideration given to impact of <i>type</i> of work. A distinction needs to be made between those who choose to work many or few hours.
	Commuting	Good	Generally linked to lower wellbeing. Analysis of BHPS supports this (but not many studies of this relationship covered under the review)
	House-work	Limited	From the 3 studies reviewed, mixed evidence on impact of housework although some evidence that negative impact depended on whether activity was voluntary or not.
	Caring for others	Limited	From the 3 studies reviewed, some evidence supporting the finding that those engaged in informal care display lower levels of wellbeing and more depressive symptoms. Some evidence that transition out of care-giver role also associated with negative wellbeing. BHPS analysis supports that those who care for another person for over 50 hours take a big knock to their SWB, but some of these findings may be caused by unobserved effects e.g. deterioration in health of a loved one.
	Community involvement & volunteering	Mixed	Mixed evidence from outside UK on impact of community involvement and volunteering with wellbeing in spite of general assumption that there is a positive relationship. Lack of evidence in the UK. Need further work to identify what type of community/voluntary activities generate positive effects.
	Sleep	Limited evidence in large scale studies	(2 studies reviewed). Some evidence that less sleep linked with lower wellbeing. Difficult to establish causality.
	Exercise	Limited evidence in large scale studies	Some simple forms of exercise linked with higher life satisfaction, particularly amongst over 60s (but little use made of large datasets)

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	Religious practice	Good	Consistent evidence that regular engagement in religious activities positively related to happiness, life satisfaction, positive emotions and negatively with depressive symptoms. This effect was relatively comparable across different religious denominations; suggesting that going to church and its associated interactions were more important than the actual belief.
Attitudes and beliefs	Attitudes towards our circumstances	Good	May be a strong predictor of life satisfaction and self-reported measures of SWB. Strong evidence that perceptions of change in financial circumstances are linked with lower levels of life satisfaction. When domain perceptions used to predict global life satisfaction, the explanatory power of such models is larger than when objective circumstances entered as predictors (van Praag et al, 2003).
	Trust	Limited evidence in panel studies	Analysis of World Values Survey and European Social Survey show that the degree of trust in others appears to be positively correlated with life satisfaction. Trust in key public institutions (e.g. police, legal system and government) also associated with higher life satisfaction. However, evidence in UK is limited and few data is reliable.
	Political persuasion & attitudes	Limited	Limited number of studies reviewed, but agreement that the impact of external circumstances was dependent on perceptions and attitudes. One study found that preferences for democracy and pro-market values were associated with higher life satisfaction in Latin America and Russia. One study drawing on British Household Panel Study found that people have higher life satisfaction if care about animal extinction but lower if worry about ozone layer.
	Religious beliefs	Good	Supports overall finding that beliefs have positive impact on wellbeing. Religious people generally happier than non-religious irrespective of faith.
	Pro-environmental values	Limited	Some evidence that pro-environmental values and attitudes are themselves associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing, and that these attitudes to some extent predict the likelihood that people will behave in environmentally responsible ways (growing evidence on the latter). At the same time, (in theory) perceptions of the future – in particular, the prospect of dramatic social, economic and environmental change – may result not in pro-environmental attitudes, but in maladaptive responses such as nihilism or fundamentalism. However, there has been little empirical research on the latter to date. More research is required to understand <i>how</i> pro-environmental attitudes develop. See nef report for more detailed discussion
	Materialist values	Growing	Growing evidence that there is a correlation between materialism and wellbeing. Strong materialist values and motivations associated with dissatisfaction, anxiety and lower well-being. Some research suggests, that they may also be negatively associated with pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. However, people who strive towards materialist goals and actually succeed in achieving them suffer less than those who do not. See work of Kasser, 2002; 2006. Kasser's analysis using psychological scale measures suggests that those who hold more materialistic

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			values score less well on scales that measure subjective well-being than those who hold less materialistic values. They also show that people who make deliberate choices to consume less and reduce the material dependency of their lives show higher levels of well-being. Some limited evidence that high levels of consumer debt significantly negatively correlated with psychological wellbeing at individual level but requires further investigation.
Relationships	Marriage and intimate relationship	Strong	Being in an intimate and stable relationship positively associated with wellbeing and the dissolution of relationships is damaging over short to medium term. However, difficult to establish causality when controlling for other factors (e.g. income, employment status). (Given the size of the effect of being divorced, separated or widowed, even if the changes in income and other external circumstances were accounted for, there is still likely to be a significant impact arising from the dissolution of relationships).
	Having children	Mixed	13 studies report no effects, 14 report negative effects of having children, 3 report positive effects and 2 report mixed effects depending on type of wellbeing measure. Generally, if the household circumstances are negative, having children appear to be additional challenge to wellbeing (e.g. if single parents, when child is over 3 years, family has recently moved, or child is sick and needs more than average care). (Some of the variation may be caused by whether income has been equalised or not)
	Seeing family and friends	Mixed	Socialising with family and friends generally positively associated with wellbeing, but direction of causality is yet to be established. Few studies distinguish between family and friends; those that do show mixed results. Generally people who engage in more social activities are happier, but cause and effect is not clear, need to examine more closely the selection effects of social contact and whether personality variables may interact with the returns of social contact on wellbeing. There are circumstances where contact with family and friends can be detrimental to wellbeing. For example, when it involves 'care from friends and family' or when an adult is living at home with parents
Economic, social, political and natural environment	Income inequality	Limited	The existing evidence on balance suggests that inequality reduces SWB, but there are some contradictory findings from different sources from World Values Survey and Eurobarometer data and depending on what is controlled for and which countries are included. E.g. one study using the Eurobarometer finds a positive relationship between inequality and life satisfaction. But this is reversed when you control for a longer time span. It is worth noting that the impact of income inequality might be indirect (e.g. through its effect on health).
	Un-employment rates	Limited	Most studies find a negative association, but further work required to understand extent of wellbeing loss and ensure causality runs from unemployment rates rather than another unobserved macroeconomic variable.

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	Inflation	Limited	Impact on wellbeing limited by comparisons across countries and over time. It is impossible to isolate an inflation effect from other time effects within the same country. Many studies have a limited number of macro variables, opening up possibility that other important variables are not adequately controlled for. One study found that when controlling for individual personal characteristics, inflation has a consistent negative effect on wellbeing.
	Welfare and public insurance	Limited evidence in panel studies	Evidence on impact of welfare state is very limited. One study using European data showed higher benefit replacement rate increases life satisfaction of unemployed and employed.
	Democracy	Limited evidence in panel studies	A study in Switzerland found some evidence that participation in referenda and decentralised governmental structures increases life satisfaction. However, a reworking of these data and analysis of another Swiss dataset found no significant relationship once language group had been controlled for. Using international data, one study found a positive link with democracy when controlling for income and another when controlling for income and language group.
	Climate and quality of natural environment	Limited	Few studies look at impact of pollution and environmental factors on wellbeing. Some evidence that pollution, localised airport noise and localised environmental damage is detrimental to wellbeing. Some evidence that access to green public spaces supports wellbeing (nef report).
	Security of local environment	Limited	Living in unsafe area associated with lower life satisfaction and mental health.
	Urbanisation	Limited	Some evidence across range of different geographical locations that living in densely populated areas reduces SWB. Because many of these studies control for income (and because incomes more likely to be lower in rural areas), the conclusion that wellbeing is greater in rural areas could be misleading. More research required to determine the benefits of living in less urban areas. The urban rural distinction may be picking up other location differences such as differences in income inequality.

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ANNEX C

POLICY AREAS USING WELLBEING CONCEPTS AND/OR MEASURES

Opportunity Age (2005), the government's strategy for an ageing society (led by the Department of Work and Pensions), aims to improve the independence and wellbeing of older people, ensure that longer life is healthy and fulfilling, and that older people are full participants in society. It sets out five domains that underpin older people's experiences of wellbeing.

- Independence in supportive communities
- Healthy active living
- Fairness in work and later life
- Material wellbeing
- Support and care (especially for people over 80 years old)

Progress along these domains are monitored using 33 indicators³ that include one overarching wellbeing measure designed for older people (CASP-19). The indicators cover a range of objective wellbeing measures (e.g. income) and some subjective measures (e.g. fear of crime).

The Department of Health's (DH) overall purpose is "*to promote health and wellbeing*". Several National Service Frameworks (NSFs) are explicit about improving wellbeing, especially the Children's and Maternity, Mental Health and Older People's NSFs. A Green Paper published in March 2005, **Independence, Wellbeing and Choice**, contains proposals for the social care of adults. The Public Health White Paper, **Choosing Health**, makes several commitments to improving and gauging wellbeing. There are plans to develop and implement a comprehensive public health information and intelligence strategy. This will include "*bringing together sources of information on health and wellbeing from routine sources and local studies to give a comprehensive picture of how lifestyle factors affect health*"⁴. The **National Suicide Prevention Strategy** for England includes objectives of improving mental wellbeing in the population as a whole

'Local Area Profiles' are being developed to produce profiles of the quality of life and services in a local area by bringing together existing data collections. A tool is being developed to assess local health and wellbeing that will help Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and local authorities to jointly plan services and check on progress in reducing inequalities: a health and wellbeing equity audit. There are efforts to measure the effectiveness of mental health promotion activity in line with standard one of the mental health NSF. DH is working with Scottish Executive on a 3 year project on indicators of mental health/wellbeing. To date, the work on inequalities has been completed and is being actively promoted via the National Inequalities Support teams in areas experiencing the greatest health inequalities. There is also a general approach that the personalisation of services, move to individual budgets and increased choice will increase the locus of control

³ http://www.dwp.gov.uk/opportunity_age/indicators/

⁴ *Choosing Health*, page 191

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and achieve greater wellbeing outcomes - but as yet there is no hard evidence this aspiration is matched by outcomes. There is an increasing emphasis on health working with local authorities to influence the wider determinant of wellbeing - i.e. through joint appointments, shared targets through Local Area Agreements linked to developing a simpler metrics set designed to better capture wellbeing outcomes.

The **Health, Work and Well-being-Caring for our future strategy**⁵ (2005) implemented through a partnership between DWP, DH, Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Government aims to improve the health and wellbeing of the working age population. The strategy recognises the important contribution that employment makes to health and wellbeing. The focus is three fold: preventing people becoming injured or ill, keeping them healthy in work and providing wide ranging, accessible support to enable them to remain in or return to work more quickly. The programme set up to deliver the strategy includes a range of initiatives including those by the Health and Safety Executive such as the Backs and Stress campaigns and Workplace Health Connect.

DH's **Commissioning Framework for Health and Well-being** (under consultation) proposes a new approach to commissioning that includes a move a way from a system characterised by a focus on treating illness and ill health towards the promotion of health, wellbeing and independence.

Every Child Matters: Change for Children (2006)⁶ implemented by the Department Education and Skills (DfES) aims to improve the daily experiences of all children and young people. It sets out a national framework for local change programmes to build services around the needs of children and young people to maximise opportunity and minimise risk. It advocates a holistic approach that recognises how services can shift the focus towards preventing things from going wrong for children rather than dealing with the consequences of difficulties in children's lives. The strategy identifies five priority outcomes for all children (identified by children) that cover different dimensions of wellbeing such as the need for material welfare as well as enjoying life and feeling a sense of achievement and the role that this plays in the process of understanding yourself and your place in the world:

- being healthy;
- staying safe;
- enjoying and achieving;
- making a positive contribution;
- achieving economic well-being

Wellbeing is assessed against the Every Child Matters framework using various data sources. The Family and Children's Survey - led by DWP and co-funded by DfES - asks children if they are happy in general, happy with their

⁵ http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2005/health_and_wellbeing.pdf . The strategy is being advanced by a partnership between DWP, DH and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

⁶ <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/files/F9E3F941DC8D4580539EE4C743E9371D.pdf>

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parents etc. It also includes surveys on bullying and anti-bullying, surveys of teenagers related to the teenage pregnancy survey, and a range of studies on quality of life and happiness. Obesity will be measured in schools in future.

Defra's strategic focus on ***Natural Environment Policy*** is built on the understanding that our natural environment – encompassing air, water, land & soil and biodiversity - provides:

- Clean air, water and food for our basic survival
- The resources we need for a strong economy
- A place for recreation, exercise and interaction with nature

Defra's Ecosystems Approach project aims to help us deliver natural environment outcomes more effectively and more efficiently through managing the natural environment in a more holistic and integrated way, and communicating more clearly and reflecting in decision-making the value of the 'ecosystem services' which a healthy natural environment provides for people. These ecosystem services are vital to our health, economy and wellbeing. This work draws on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) which sets out a typology of services which ecosystems provide. Examples of ecosystem services include the provision of food and raw materials, high quality green space for recreation and wellbeing, and basic resources such as clean air and water. This project is involving internal and external stakeholders to produce by the end of the year an action plan for embedding an ecosystems approach across policy-making and delivery in England.

Natural England's aim is "to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity that it brings". Similarly, the **Environment Agency's** vision includes efforts to improve a better quality of life with specific targets set out in the Corporate Strategy for 2006-11. It also includes references on how a quality environment contributes to health and wellbeing.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) includes wellbeing in its five year plan ***Quality of Life for Everyone***. The ***Taking Part Survey*** launched in 2005 includes questions on wellbeing and is administered to 50,000 people. It investigates what people do in their spare time and what helps or hinders people from taking part. The survey includes questions on happiness and trust which can be linked to wellbeing. DCMS are considering how to go about establishing causality between participation and wellbeing.

Local councils were given wide a Power of Wellbeing under the ***Local Government Act 2000*** to improve economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas. The Power was designed to enhance local authorities' role as community leaders by ensuring that they had broad powers in law to develop innovative solutions and work with a wide range of partners. Wellbeing is also mentioned in the more recent White Paper ***Strong and Prosperous Communities*** (2006) in the context of a sustainable framework for local action on health and wellbeing. DCLG's Best Value Performance

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Indicators 05/06 include indicators for 'corporate health' and 'community safety and wellbeing'.

In August 2005, the Audit Commission, Defra and ODPM published a revised set of **local quality of life indicators** to combine the 2002 indicators with various sustainable development and quality of life indicators. Since October 2005 the Audit Commission has published **Area Profiles** on its website which "bring together all the information and data on the quality of life and local services to provide for the first time a comprehensive picture of each local area".

The Audit Commission is also working closely with other inspectorates and Government departments to develop the new **Comprehensive Area Assessment** (CAA) which was outlined in the recent Local Government White Paper as a way of risk assessing the danger of non-delivery of key quality of life and service outcomes in local areas (this will replace the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of local councils). The indicators allow local authorities and their partners to prioritise their activities in order to achieve sustainable development.

The Home Office regards wellbeing as an implicit objective of two policy areas: **Victim Support and National Offender Management** (NOMS⁷). The former covers Victim Support and Criminal Injuries payments. NOMS within prisons covers 'decency' and addresses wider needs such as Think First, drug programmes, behaviour programmes and education. Measurements covering aspects of these include:

- Waves survey which measures victims and witnesses experiences of the Criminal Justice Service and agencies, but questions relate to satisfaction with services rather than wellbeing.
- Standards Audit Unit in the Prison Service regularly measures prisoner wellbeing with the Measuring Quality of Life (MQPL) instrument.
- QASyS: psychological assessment in prison which measures self-esteem

The Home Office's **British Crime Survey** (BCS) includes data on crime and 'fear of crime' that can be linked to wellbeing. Recent progress in this area has expanded the scope of the BCS to attitudinal measures such as public perceptions of changing crime levels; worry about crime; public confidence in the criminal justice system; victim and witness satisfaction with the police; and perceptions of anti-social behaviour (ASB)⁸. Within the Home Office ASB measures are being examined as potential measures of sustainability in as far as they relate to people's perception of problems within their environment and communities. The ASB measures are also used to monitor performance of the relevant Home Office policy teams such as the ASB Unit and the Respect

⁷ Responsibility for NOMS was passed to the Ministry of Justice following its creation on 7 May

⁸ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/anti-social-behaviour/>

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team⁹. Overall perceptions of ASB may be useful measures of improvements in wellbeing.

Wellbeing has been identified as being at the heart of the **Scottish Executive (SE) Sustainable Development Strategy**, December 2005. The SE also has a major policy initiative focussing on mental health and wellbeing in the crosscutting **National Programme for Health Improvement, Improving Scotland's Health: The Challenge** which includes a focus on Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing. The aims include raising awareness of positive and negative influences on mental health and wellbeing. Funding for local authorities for projects to address local concerns on the environment and community wellbeing are provided through a **Quality of Life Fund**. SE has not yet agreed explicit wellbeing measures but a variety of surveys include questions that touch on some aspect of wellbeing or quality of life:

- Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation – an important resource when considering wellbeing, data includes income, employment, health, housing, education, skills and training, and access.
- Scottish Social Attitudes Survey – small survey seeking people's opinions and ideas rather than reported behaviour. Topic change – 2004 survey included environmental incivilities, crime, and what makes a good neighbourhood.
- Scottish Household Survey – includes questions on social networks and participation, satisfaction with local services, self reported health
- Scottish House Condition Survey – as well as housing specific data collects information of perception of neighbourhood, crime, environmental incivilities, social problems, psychosocial wellbeing (GHQ12).
- Scottish Crime and Victimization Survey – includes questions on health and effect of crime on quality of life

“Quality of Life” is an objective within the **National Assembly for Wales’** Scheme for Sustainable Development and the Assembly is considering making a policy commitment to establishing a “genuine health service”, i.e. focussed on keeping people healthy as well as treating illness. In Wales, the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) has been considered as a measure to meet the WAG headline sustainable development indicator “genuine economic progress, taking account of environmental factors, resources and wellbeing”, to complement Gross Value Added (GVA), a headline indicator of “the level of economic activity”. ISEW was not adopted because of concerns about the robustness of the methodology. However, continuing development of the methodology will be monitored and its measurements reported. Most recently ISEW has been measured for Wales for the period 1990-2005. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation was considered as a potential measure for the headline SD indicator “the overall level of deprivation in Wales” but was not adopted because it could not provide an all Wales figure or allow changes to be mapped over time. Other indices considered and rejected were the UN's Human Development Index and the Measure of Domestic Progress. “Overall well being” is also included

⁹ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/hosb1206.pdf>

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separately as an indicator within the full suite of SD indicators in Wales, but there is currently no confirmed measure to report against this.

The East Midlands Development Agency's **Regional Economic Strategy** measures its success against a Regional Index of Sustainable Economic Wellbeing (ISEW). This includes valuations for social and environmental costs and benefits as well as traditional Gross Value Added (GVA) measures of economic growth. For example, the benefits of volunteering are included as well as the social costs of divorce, crime and car accidents. The measure is currently being rolled out across other regions.

Local government and its partners, working through Local Strategic Partnerships, have been developing and using indicators of quality of life, wellbeing, and sustainable development in their community strategies and (more recently) their local area agreements (LAAs). These include objective measures, often drawn from the UK Sustainable Development indicator set, along with subjective wellbeing measures designed to track levels of social capital, trust, and happiness.

A three year **Local Wellbeing Project** is being jointly undertaken by the IDeA, the Young Foundation, and the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics, involving the local authorities of Hertfordshire, Manchester, and South Tyneside. This will test interventions designed to contribute to public happiness and wellbeing.

Local Area Agreements now provide a framework within which different localities can consult and engage with citizens on what constitutes wellbeing, in areas with different demographics and economic and cultural histories. LAAs allow for such outcomes and targets to be defined and negotiated with central government, and for the resources of all public sector partners to be re-aligned around relevant interventions and services. A number of LAAs (South Tyneside, Wakefield) feature wellbeing as a prominent theme.

As referred to above, the Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly have developed alternative frameworks which encourage collaborative working across the public sector, and allow local authorities and partners to pursue a more cross-cutting approach to wellbeing and quality of life. The Welsh model of local service boards, responsible for developing local service agreements, aims to build on the English experience.