



Measuring National Wellbeing in the United Kingdom

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Presentation Structure

- Brief background to MNW programme
- Selecting indicators
- Getting the results out
- How has the programme made a difference?
- Some challenges we have faced
- Some next steps

Background to MNW programme

1970 - ONS has been reporting on developments in society in the UK for over 40 years in its Social Trends publication



2007 - ONS started looking in more depth at existing datasets and how these could be used to help build a clear picture of societal wellbeing



2010 – The National Statistician launched the ONS National Wellbeing Programme.

“We must measure what matters - the key elements of national wellbeing. We want to develop measures based on what people tell us matters most.”

“Government has the power to help improve wellbeing”



“From April next year we will start measuring our progress as a country not just by how our economy is growing, but by how our lives are improving, not just by our standard of living, but by our quality of life. ...”

PM 25.11.10

What are we trying to achieve?

An accepted and trusted set of National Statistics to help people understand and monitor national wellbeing.

The 'triple bottom line'



Economy



Social



Environment &
Sustainability

Key messages

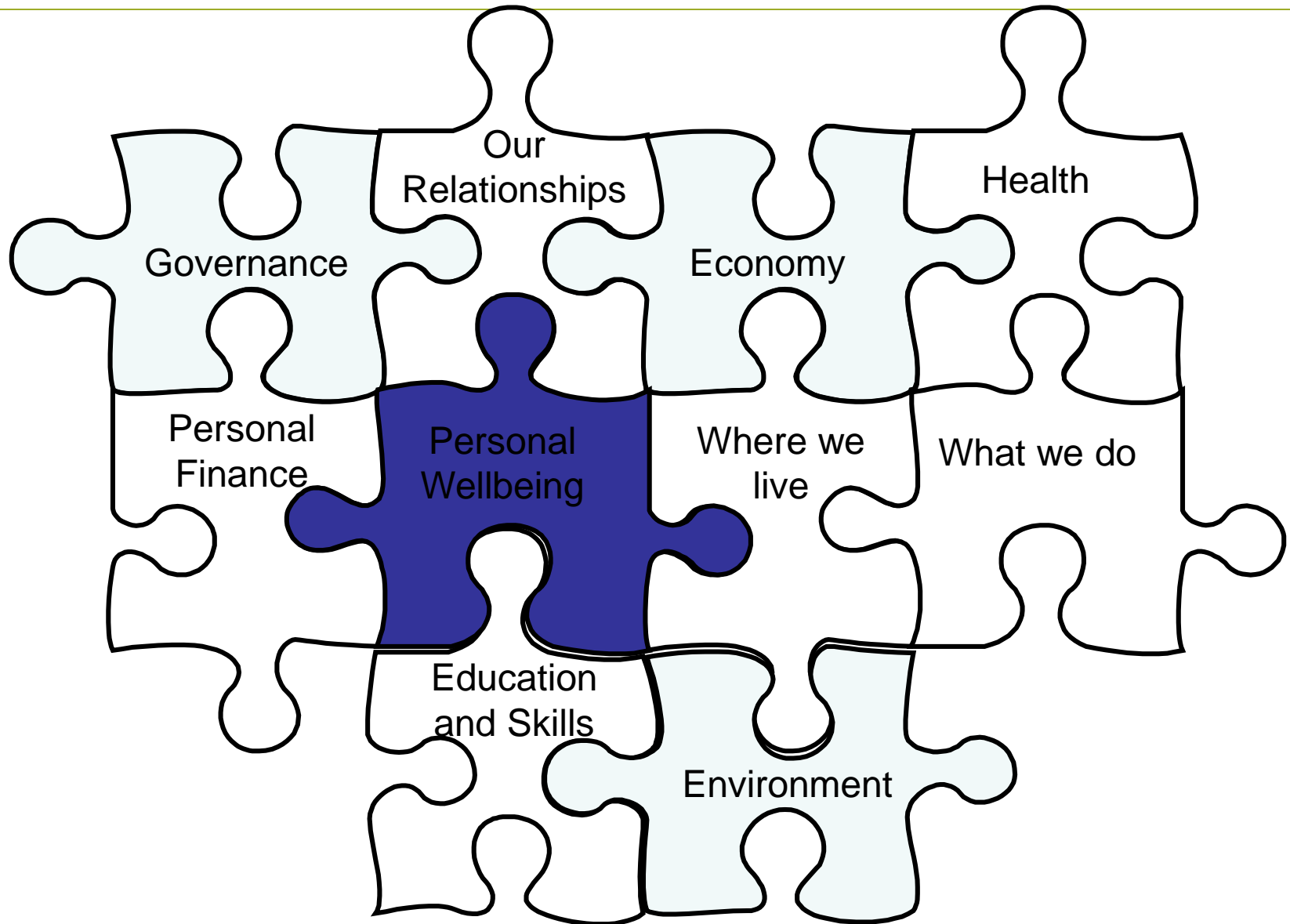
- Objective AND subjective measures both important – no single measure
- Supplement - not supplant GDP
- Current AND future wellbeing
- Distributions important not just averages
- Long-term development project

ONS National Debate – what matters to you?

Aim - to consult academics, interested bodies and the population more widely to build a firm basis for what wellbeing represents

- semi-structured survey and online debate on ONS website
- used social media - Twitter
- 170 events across the UK attended by 7,000 members of the public
- 34,000 responses in total

What is National Wellbeing?



How did we select indicators?

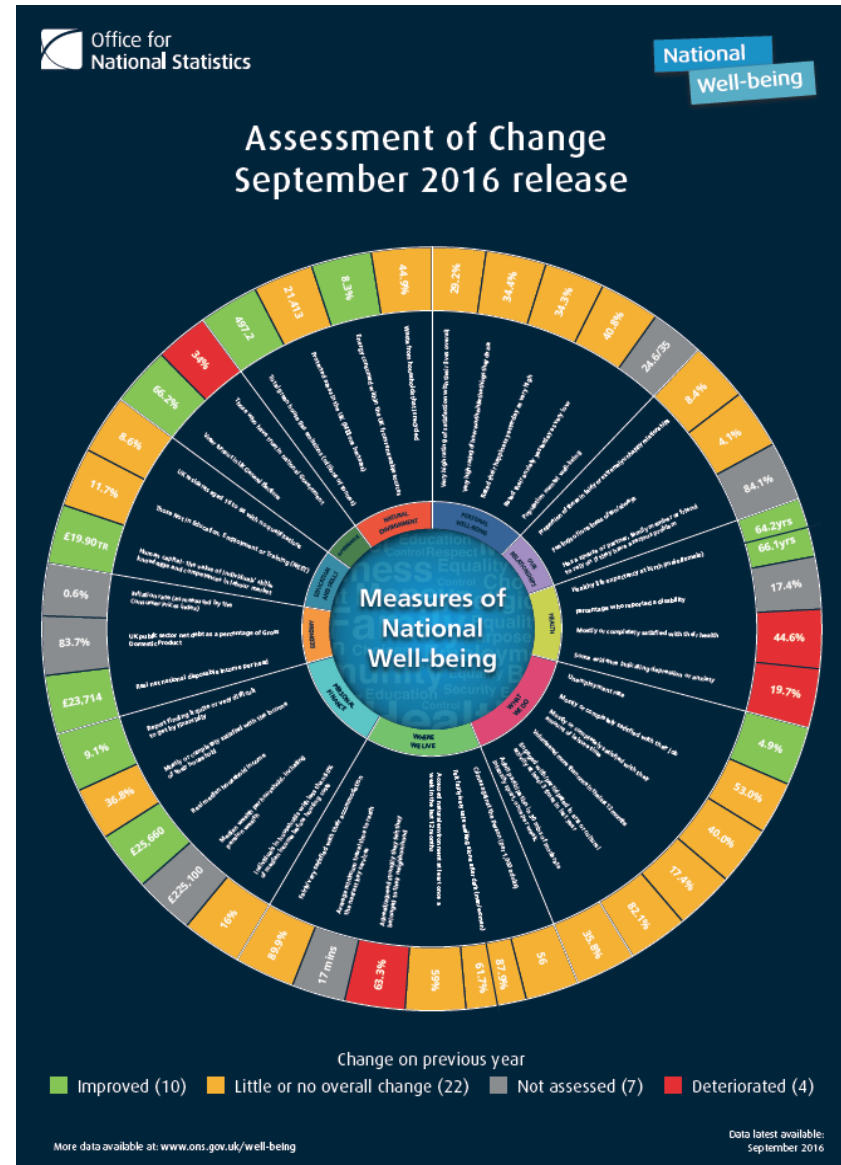
We performed quality appraisal against harmonised international standards:

- relevance;
- accuracy and reliability;
- timeliness;
- comparability (level of harmonisation between UK nations and internationally);
- Clarity

Additional criteria included: responsiveness to policy change; opportunity for disaggregation (by sex, disability status etc.); and, the need for both objective and subjective measures.

How do we publish the findings?

- We assess UK progress against our 41 headline national indicators twice a year
- Each of the measures are assessed to determine whether they have improved, shown no overall change, or deteriorated over a 1-year and 3-year period
- Our September 2016 update identified that improvements were dominated by an improving economic picture

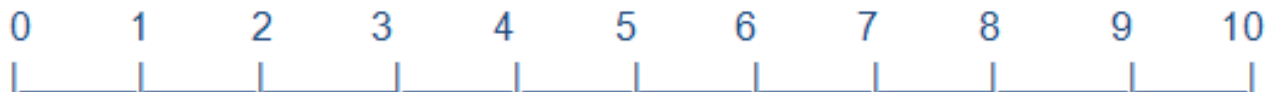


Personal Wellbeing Questions

Since 2011, we have asked personal wellbeing questions to adults in the UK, as part of the wider programme of work, to better understand how they feel about their lives

- Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
- Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Response scale:

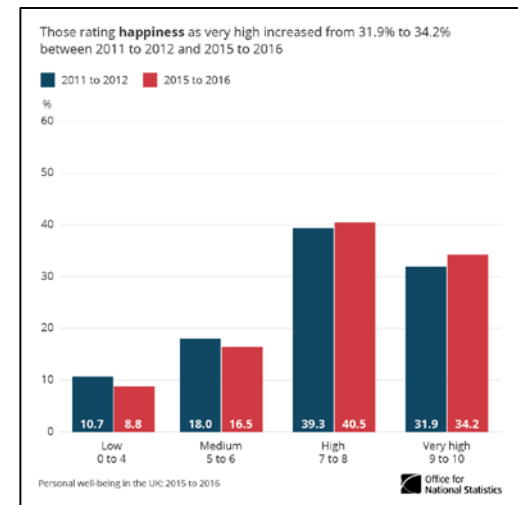
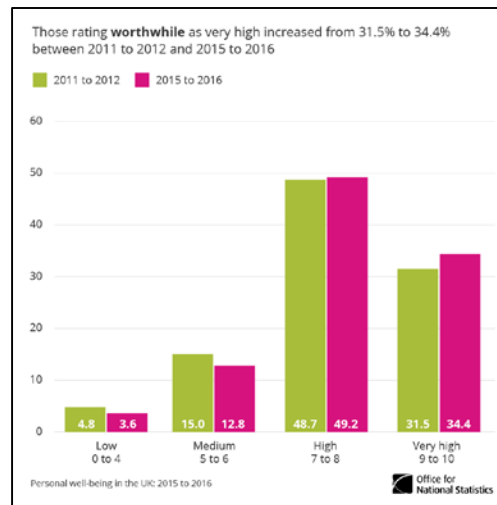
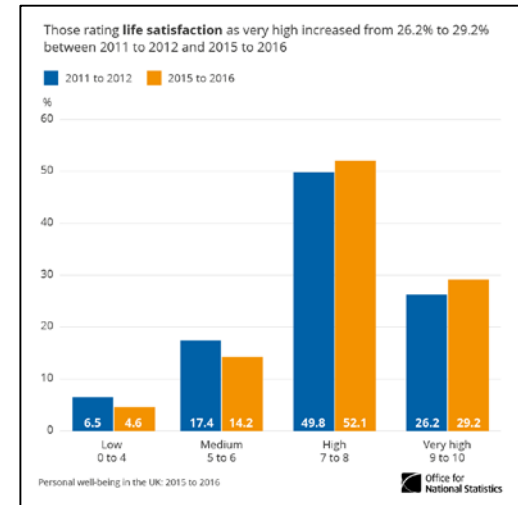
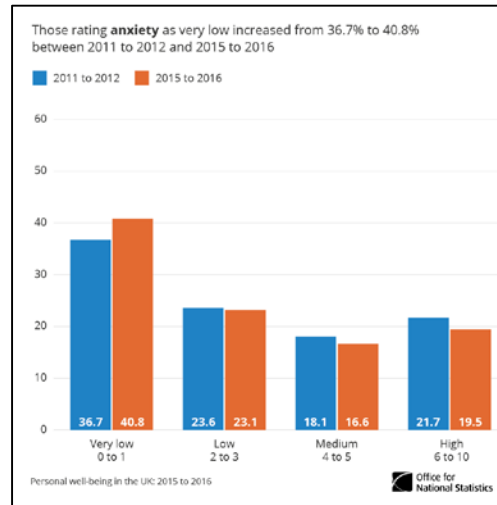


Not at all

Completely

Personal wellbeing

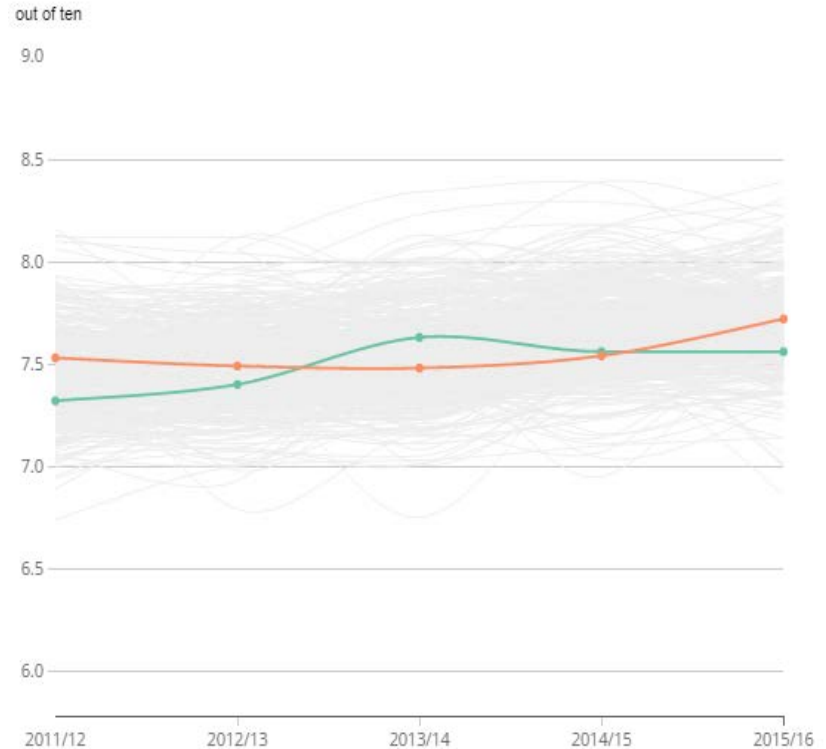
- Large sample (150,000 adults) allows detailed analysis of sub-groups of the population and sub-national estimates
- Our 2015/16 update represents the first time we haven't seen year-on-year improvements in 3 of the 4 measures (happiness, anxiety and feeling that what you do is worthwhile) since we began collecting the data in 2011



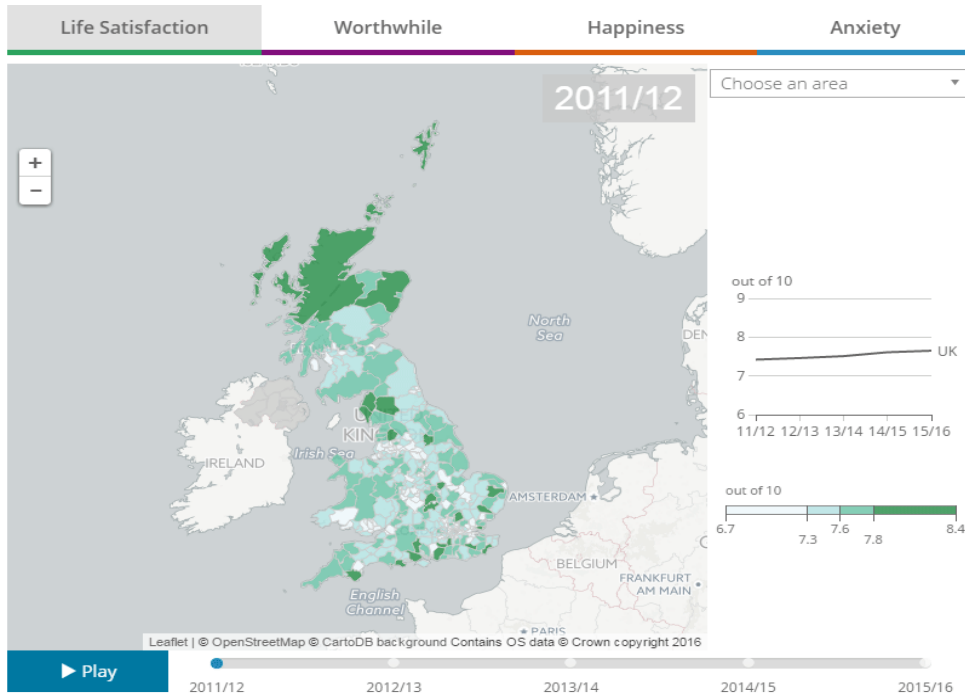
Sub-regional personal wellbeing data

- Significant demand for data at the lowest geographic level
- Interactive tools enable easy access and comparison of data

Personal Well-being Explorer, financial years ending 2012 to 2016



Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS

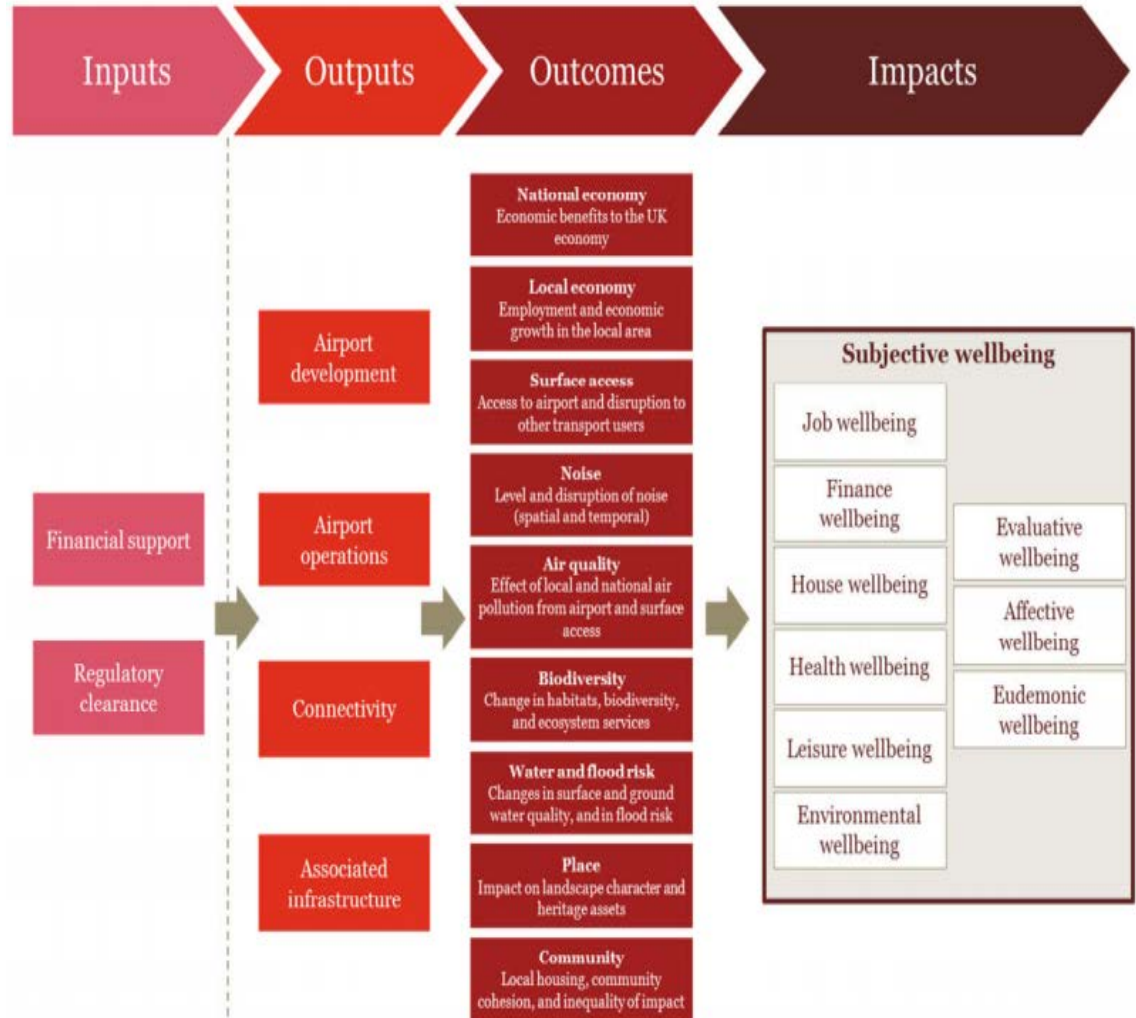


Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS

How has the programme made a difference?

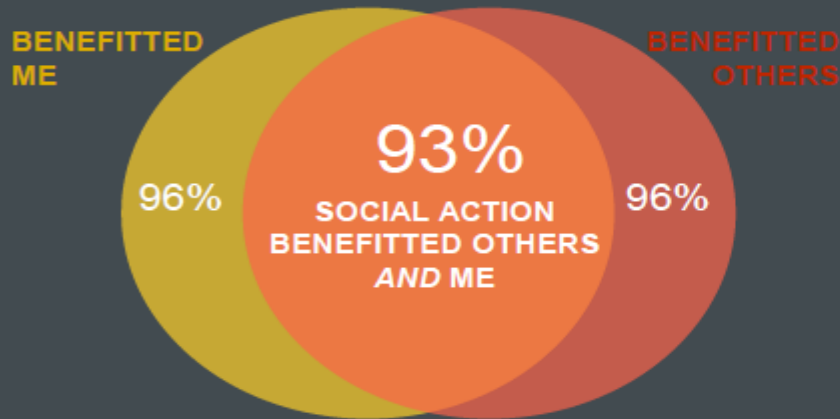
More examples are emerging which highlight how our framework has helped policy makers understand how their decisions may affect people's quality of life.

For example, the **Airports Commission** performed a quality of life assessment study which utilised all domains to assess the wellbeing impact of airport expansion



Recognising the benefits of volunteering

PARTICIPANTS RECOGNISE THE 'DOUBLE BENEFITS' OF SOCIAL ACTION



As in 2014, the great majority of social action participants report feeling both a personal benefit *and* seeing others benefit, the same as in 2014. Regular participants are more likely to feel the double benefit of social action.

Social action participants record higher levels of satisfaction with their lives (in line with 2014 results) and a greater sense that their lives are worthwhile than non-participants. A difference of 0.6 in life satisfaction is similar to the difference between adults who report 'fair' and those who report 'good' health¹. Note that a survey of this nature cannot establish causality (i.e. whether happier people do social action, or whether social action makes people happier). However, other research has demonstrated the positive effects of volunteering.

97% of regular participants (doing social action at least every few months) felt the **double benefit**, compared with 86% who did a **one-off activity** in the past year

Mean life satisfaction score (out of 10)

8.6 vs 8.0

those doing social action

non-participants

Mean life worthwhile score (out of 10)

8.7 vs 7.9

those doing social action

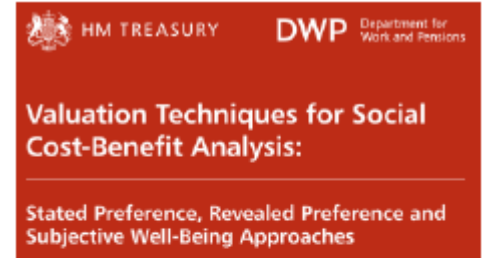
non-participants

Base: 10-20 year olds participating in any social action in the past 12 months (1175)
¹http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_312125.pdf

Some further examples...

• **The HM Treasury Green Book** provides central government best practice on the appraisal of policies, programmes and projects. It recognises wellbeing as an opportunity to monetise the full social costs and full social benefits of policies.

• UK Government created a dedicated **'Wellbeing 'What Works' Centre'** to bridge the gap between evidence and policy. It continues to develop a growing evidence base on what works to improve wellbeing.



This approach has been used to value a variety of impacts including:

- Unemployment
- Drought
- Crime
- Satisfaction with area
- Air pollution
- Terrorism
- Job satisfaction
- Sport/ Culture
- Relationships
- Commuting
- Caring
- Airport Noise
- Health conditions
- Bereavement
- Flood prevention

**What Works
Wellbeing**

How does the ONS programme link to what is happening internationally?

Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress



Main Challenges

- **Personal wellbeing doesn't tell the whole story**, nor was it ever intended to paint a complete picture of UK progress
- **We do not provide an index.** Despite the many advantages of a single number, we made the decision not to produce a composite indicator. Instead we opted for assessments of change
- **Press cynicism** at the beginning
- **Cost.** Only 4 of the 41 headline indicators required new data to be collected

Next steps

- **Improved timeliness:** Quicker estimates of personal wellbeing and a live dashboard for the headline indicators of national wellbeing
- **Community (local level) indicator set:** giving individuals, communities and local authorities the tools to look at wellbeing locally alongside other traditional measures of progress
- Supporting the **Sustainable Development Goals** agenda...

Supporting the SDGs

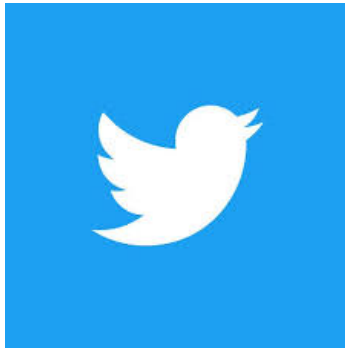
- We are responsible for the official reporting of UK data
- In November 2016, we will be launching an open consultation to seek views on proposed national indicators for SDGs and a framework for reporting
- We will continue to consider how this agenda and our Measuring National Wellbeing programme fit together when developing plans for reporting UK progress



Any questions?

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