

Proposes Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill

Q1. Individual

Q2. Professional with experience

My expertise: I have a professional background in energy, with particular focus on fuel poverty, community energy and environmental assessment of marine renewables; my work locally therefore cuts across many of the social indicators of sustainable development, with some experience of environmental and economic indicators. In addition to my work, I also have experience supporting voluntary work around the data challenges of localised sustainability indexes through UN Association Scotland, as well as global partnership links in Uganda via Bwindi Community Hospital and the UK charity Reach Bwindi.

3. Content for it to be published

4. Michael Butler – [REDACTED]

Q1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill

Fully supportive

Reason: Although fully supportive of the proposal to have a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development bill, the bill could include provision for greater institutional and financial support for the proposed commissioner position. Other states have created cross-departmental commissions that provide a means to support and enact the powers provided to the commissioner. The bill will require cross-departmental and cross-sectorial working, with a high level of both deep technical and generalist understanding, to ensure effective policy coherence across Sustainable development and Wellbeing. Although an individual commissioner may have the skills to enact this, or to support implementation across government departments, it seems that a commitment to the bill would also require creation of dedicated apparatus to bring disparate areas of work into a coherent whole. From my experience in sustainable development monitoring, a broad base of capacity and skills are required to link specialist knowledge within such a generalist framework, from data handling to community outreach and transparency protocols.

Q2: Do you think legislation is required, or are there other ways in which the proposed Bill's aims could be achieved more effectively? Please explain the reasons for your response.

Legislation is required, although it should be there to support the local and multi-level actions which are required to achieve the aims of the bill. Through public sector and national policy change the bill could create an environment that supports actions contributing to multiple goals whilst regulating actions that are detrimental across the goals. This would require assessing benefits and trade-offs between goals, involvement of multiple stakeholders particularly those with lived experience, as well as active management of power imbalances within such assessments. This would be particularly important at a local

level, where legislative support and public funding to build capacity and enact positive, evidence-based decision-making is key.

For example, communities and businesses often need to work with multiple public sector bodies to successfully fund and implement innovative sustainable development projects, e.g. land and forestry, civil infrastructure, energy infrastructure, energy efficiency policy and social security provision. This needs both carrots and sticks; providing cross-sectoral financial incentives for work that supports broad actions around sustainability as well as restricting public funding for work supporting unsustainable practice, whether that is in terms of climate change, poverty reduction or biodiversity. For example, national funding has supported energy projects that, although positive in terms of environmental impact and having the potential to positively impact communities, have resulted in increased economic and social inequalities due to the methods of implementation. Cross-sectoral legislation could avoid projects in one area causing sustainability issues in other areas.

Q3:

Partially supportive

From a legal perspective it would be important to have a clear definition of a term used across multiple policy areas. However, due to the complex nature of the term, it would also seem sensible to annex such a definition with a recommended set of key principles required for the defined term. For example, recent work by the Centre for Thriving Places on 'Shared ingredients for a Wellbeing Economy' suggested multiple cross-over areas between different sustainable development and wellbeing metrics and frameworks. An evolving underlying set of principles based upon such an analysis could provide a more grounded definition and follow precedents set within international procedural law.

Q4

Same reasoning as Q3, although I have less experience in the definitions of wellbeing.

Q5

Fully supportive

As previously outlined, a commissioner, and ideally a commission, could be key to ensuring policy coherence not only within public bodies but also in policy directly affecting households, communities, businesses and third sector organisations. Indeed, my main input would be that key functions should, at the very least, focus equally on working out-with the public sector system. This could be more easily achieved through an independent body.

Q6

No particular view on the title.

Q7

Partially Supportive

I have no direct experience of the impact of duties on public bodies other than the indirectly through requirements on climate change reporting; it seems likely that limited capacity and knowledge within authorities to enact the duty would restrict its effectiveness and potentially reduce it to a procedural 'tick-box'. On the other hand, much like including climate change requirements within policy development and implementation, it may be a

necessity to achieve action on sustainable development. Effectiveness of implementation could be measured quite simply through established sustainable development indicator indexes localised to a local authority level or restricted to relevant indicators for a public body; the important step would be how to support public bodies to monitor these indicators and enact achievable change based upon required targets.