

Proposed Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill

Introduction

A proposal for a Member's Bill to ensure policy development and implementation by public bodies is in line with principles of sustainable development and wellbeing by introducing a duty for public bodies to promote these principles and establishing a Commissioner for sustainable development and wellbeing.

The consultation runs from 14 December 2022 to 24 March 2023

All those wishing to respond to the consultation are strongly encouraged to enter their responses electronically through this survey. This makes collation of responses much simpler and quicker. However, the option also exists of sending in a separate response (in hard copy or by other electronic means such as e-mail), and details of how to do so are included in the member's consultation document.

Questions marked with an asterisk (*) require an answer.

All responses must include a name and contact details. Names will only be published if you give us permission, and contact details are never published – but we may use them to contact you if there is a query about your response. If you do not include a name and/or contact details, we may have to disregard your response.

Please note that you must complete the survey in order for your response to be accepted. If you don't wish to complete the survey in a single session, you can choose "Save and Continue later" at any point. Whilst you have the option to skip particular questions, you must continue to the end of the survey and press "Submit" to have your response fully recorded.

Please ensure you have read the consultation document before responding to any of the questions that follow. In particular, you should read the information contained in the document about how your response will be handled. The consultation document is available here:

[Consultation Document](#)

[Privacy Notice](#)

I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice which explains how my personal data will be used.

On the previous page we asked you if you are UNDER 12 YEARS old, and you responded Yes to this question.

If this is the case, we will have to contact your parent or guardian for consent.

If you are under 12 years of age, please put your contact details into the textbox. This can be your email address or phone number. We will then contact you and your parents to receive consent.

Otherwise please confirm that you are or are not under 12 years old.

No Response

About you

Please choose whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.
Note: If you choose "individual" and consent to have the response published, it will appear under your own name. If you choose "on behalf of an organisation" and consent to have the response published, it will be published under the organisation's name.

on behalf of an organisation

Which of the following best describes you? (If you are a professional or academic, but not in a subject relevant to the consultation, please choose "Member of the public".)

No Response

Please select the category which best describes your organisation

Third sector (charitable, campaigning, social enterprise, voluntary, non-profit)

Optional: You may wish to explain briefly what the organisation does, its experience and expertise in the subject-matter of the consultation, and how the view expressed in the response was arrived at (e.g. whether it is the view of particular office-holders or has been approved by the membership as a whole).

Volunteer Scotland is Scotland's national centre for volunteering. We believe that volunteering should be an enjoyable, rewarding and fulfilling experience for the volunteer; that volunteers have the right to be safe and protected in delivering their volunteering roles; and that to derive health and well-being benefits from volunteering requires regular and meaningful contributions of time.

This response was developed based on our experiencing advocating on the strategic importance of volunteering. Volunteering has significant relevance in the Wellbeing Economy agenda, where volunteers contribute to the wellbeing of others through their roles, whilst also improving their own wellbeing. This response represents the views of Volunteer Scotland, but not necessarily the views of our wider membership who were not consulted on this particular response.

Please choose one of the following:

I am content for this response to be published and attributed to me or my organisation

Please provide your Full Name or the name of your organisation. (Only give the name of your organisation if you are submitting a response on its behalf).

(Note: the name will not be published if you have asked for the response to be anonymous or "not for publication". Otherwise this is the name that will be published with your response).

Volunteer Scotland

Please provide details of a way in which we can contact you if there are queries regarding your response. Email is preferred but you can also provide a postal address or phone number.

We will not publish these details.

[REDACTED]

Aim and approach - Note: All answers to the questions in this section may be published (unless your response is "not for publication").

Q1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill? (Please note, that this question is compulsory.)

Partially supportive

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.

We agree that legislation would be helpful to ensure collective understanding of the Sustainable Development agenda, and to ensure that measures are put in place to protect it as a priority. However, we think that including Wellbeing in the scope of the legislation could make it too broad to have a meaningful impact. Our reasons for this are explored in our answers to subsequent questions.

Q3. Which of the following best expresses your view on whether 'sustainable development' should be defined in legislation?

Fully supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response, including any views on what the definition should include.

We believe that a definition for 'sustainable development' in legislation would be beneficial, both to determine the scope of the legislation and to guide how this is interpreted in wider policy. It is also valuable for policy representatives from a wide range of relevant sectors, including the third sector, to fully understand and advocate for their contribution to this agenda.

As evidenced in the Consultation Document, the phrase 'sustainable development' is understood to mean different things despite being widely reflected in policy already. This means that effective implementation and monitoring is challenging, but also makes it particularly difficult for wider stakeholders to recognise if legislation is relevant to their specific area of work.

When looking at sustainable development in its broadest sense, as reflected in the Welsh legislative definition detailed in the Consultation Document, volunteering has a very clear and broad role in contributing to this agenda. Indeed, there is considerable evidence to support the fact that volunteering improves the 'economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing' of Scotland. Volunteering contributes an estimated £5.5 billion to the Scottish economy, as well as improving social capital and community connection. In 2020 almost 60,000 people volunteered in environmental protection charities and over 80,000 people volunteered for organisations promoting culture and heritage – a snapshot of the true contribution of volunteers to Scotland's environmental and cultural wellbeing.

If you focus instead on a narrower definition of sustainable development that has a more specific focus on 'the preservation of the environment', the benefits of volunteering are still considerable, but the nature of engagement would be quite different. As such, a clear definition illustrating how 'sustainable development' is interpreted in Scottish policy would be a welcome addition.

We also believe that a legislative definition for sustainable development should reflect the Scottish Government's existing commitment to develop a Wellbeing Economy, and to achieving net zero. Having a common shared policy narrative is important to ensure legislative clarity and facilitate wider stakeholder engagement.

Q4. Which of the following best expresses your view on whether 'wellbeing' should be defined in legislation?

Partially supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response, including any views on what the definition should include.

We believe that a legislative definition of 'wellbeing' would be beneficial, but that its meaning is perhaps less ambiguous than 'sustainable development'. As mentioned in our answer to question 3, the Scottish Government's commitment to developing a Wellbeing Economy has established a shared narrative around 'wellbeing' from a policy perspective that is already well established. This is also reflected in the publication last year of the Wellbeing Economy monitor to measure progress across a range of indicators related to wellbeing.

The term 'wellbeing' is used widely when describing the benefits of volunteering and the contribution of volunteers to Scotland's communities. In our report looking at the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering, we explore its impact on building social connection, improving employability and facilitating community cohesion. These benefits reflect a wider definition of wellbeing that needs to be reflected in any new legislative definition, and indeed in wider legislation related to wellbeing.

Q5. Which of the following best expresses your view on whether there should be a Commissioner for sustainable development and wellbeing?

Partially supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response, including any views on what the key functions of the proposed Commissioner should be (see pages 19 to 20 of the consultation document), what model of governance could be adopted (see page 22 to 23), and whether the Commissioner could play a role in strengthening existing duties or legislation.

We agree that a new Commissioner position would be beneficial, but we have concerns about the proposed remit of both Sustainable Development and Wellbeing. There is a risk that having such a wide a remit, in the current legislative landscape, will make it difficult to succeed in 'championing culture change' across the public sector. The Commissioner could end up spending significant time engaged in dialogue related to the Wellbeing Economy ambitions, potentially undermining a more defined focus on sustainable development.

The remit of a new Commissioner would need to be very tightly defined for it to succeed and would require significant resource to meaningfully influence public services on both sustainable development and wellbeing.

Indeed, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, referenced in the Consultation Document, has a wide remit but with a very particular focus on long term sustainability. This would appear to be far more manageable, and realistic, than the proposed Sustainable Development and Wellbeing Commissioner.

If the remit of the Commissioner was narrower with a specific focus on Sustainable Development, or indeed 'Future Generations', we would see them having a key role in advocating for the vital role of volunteers in responding to the climate emergency, leading community based activism and contributing to environmental projects, and in ensuring this is reflected in policy.

Q6. What, in your view, should the title of the proposed Commissioner be?

Please explain the reasons for your response.

As a result of our answer to question 5, we believe it would make more sense to introduce a Sustainable Development or a Net Zero Commissioner to focus primarily on the environmental aspects of sustainable development as a key part of wider ambitions related to a Wellbeing Economy and achieving Net Zero.

Q7. Which of the following best expresses your view on whether there is a need for duties for public bodies to promote sustainable development and wellbeing in policy development and implementation?

Partially supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response including views on any barriers to implementation of these duties and on how the effectiveness of implementation could be measured.

We would agree that it is important for public bodies, and other bodies delivering statutory services including many third sector organisations, to be guided by cross-cutting principles or duties such as sustainable development. However, the success of this in practice will be reliant on the reflection of such duties within existing and future policy and strategic plans.

Volunteer Scotland is a publicly funded body responsible for promoting volunteering and facilitating the implementation of the Volunteering Action Plan. Wellbeing is reflected throughout the Volunteering Action Plan, in both the overarching outcomes and in the identified actions, but sustainable development is less well represented. This may reflect the considerable contribution of volunteering to wellbeing more broadly, or indeed the Scottish Government's clear commitment to developing a Wellbeing Economy.

The introduction of a sustainable development 'duty' for public sector bodies and publicly funded organisations would help to ensure that it is better reflected in guiding documents such as the Volunteering Action Plan.

The publication of the Wellbeing Economy monitor last year was welcome and provides clear data around progress towards achieving this ambition. However, we would like to see the addition of more indicators in the Monitor, particularly around volunteer participation as an indicator of both human and social capital. With some changes, this Monitor provides a useful method for monitoring progress regarding wellbeing. A similar 'Sustainable Development monitor' could be established, with a wide range of indicators to measure progress against this ambition.

Financial Implications

Q8. Any new law can have a financial impact which would affect individuals, businesses, the public sector, or others. What financial impact do you think this proposal could have if it became law?

No Response

Equalities

Q9. Any new law can have an impact on different individuals in society, for example as a result of their age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

What impact could this proposal have on particular people if it became law? If you do not have a view skip to next question.

Please explain the reasons for your response and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts on particular people.

This proposed Bill would need to acknowledge the existing inequalities in both wellbeing and sustainability and ensure that marginalised groups are prioritised. Our research exploring the impact of volunteering on health and wellbeing found that the wellbeing benefits of volunteering were more acute in individuals who had experienced significant disadvantage. Despite this, such groups are often less likely to participate on volunteering.

Q9. Any new law can have an impact on different individuals in society, for example as a result of their age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

What impact could this proposal have on particular people if it became law? If you do not have a view skip to next question.

Please explain the reasons for your response and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts on particular people.

We know that people from marginalised groups are more likely to experience challenges to their wellbeing, as has been evident in Scottish Government research during the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis. As such, these communities have more to gain from interventions and activities which improve wellbeing, like volunteering, if their inclusion is prioritised.

Sustainability

Q10. Any new law can impact on work to protect and enhance the environment, achieve a sustainable economy, and create a strong, healthy, and just society for future generations.

Do you think the proposal could impact in any of these areas? (If you do not have a view then skip to next question)

Please explain the reasons for your response, including what you think the impact of the proposal could be, and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts?

We believe that this proposal has the potential to have a positive impact on work to protect and enhance the environment, achieve a sustainable economy, and create a strong, healthy and just society for future generations. However, as previously stated, we believe that the proposal is more likely to succeed in this regard if the scope is refined to just sustainable development.

General

Q11. Do you have any other additional comments or suggestions on the proposed Bill (which have not already been covered in any of your responses to earlier questions)?

No Response