

# What Works Wellbeing

## *How to run a Wellbeing Dialogue*



### *Executive Summary*

## 1. Introduction – what’s included?

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This document accompanies the wellbeing dialogue ‘Guide and Toolkit’ and provides a high level summary of each of the sections, outlining the case for wellbeing dialogues, when you might want to use one and how to go about it. The toolkit has largely been informed by practice and experience: wellbeing dialogues carried out in 2014 and 2015 tested the concept and found that using wellbeing as a way in to discussing policies proved very productive, helping participants to engage in a meaningful way. The intention is that this summary forms an introduction as to what’s included in the toolkit and is a quick read. If you think a wellbeing dialogue is something you might be interested in exploring further, the toolkit then goes into the detail – including the information, tools and resources you would need to run a wellbeing dialogue yourself.

## 2. What is a public dialogue?

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Public dialogue is a form of engagement, and is a robust and structured approach to getting citizens involved in discussing complex issues and considering solutions. It differs significantly from other forms of engagement such as consultations, surveys or focus groups. Facilitated by dialogue experts it involves engaging directly with targeted members of the public to understand their deeper views, values and motivations around the problems which affect them. It includes cycles of deliberation and reflection and can enable the testing of ideas to reveal whether they are feasible or deliverable. It can also highlight messages which will or will not resonate with those who will be affected by the policy or service in question, and therefore will help or hinder future delivery. In summary dialogue is very much about empowering citizens - it is not a one-way communication channel ‘to’ the public and should always have a purpose, with the real potential to influence decision making.

## 3. What is unique about wellbeing dialogues and why do it?

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Wellbeing dialogues use the structured approach of public dialogue to get participants to think about issues from the perspective of their own wellbeing or quality of life, and that of others. It is the adoption of this wellbeing ‘lens’ on issues that makes them unique. It helps participants to internalise and relate directly to the questions being raised, leading to deeper, more effective engagement. It also brings a fresh perspective which allows for a more rounded and people-focused assessment of issues. For example factors that are important to personal wellbeing - such as relationships, trust, altruism and control - can be considered and actively ‘designed in’ to solutions. The wellbeing lens also allows for a greater opportunity to reflect on more integrated, holistic approaches to tackling problems which fully consider the links to other important aspects of quality of life – health, the environment, education and community for example. This can promote joined up working with other organisations – public sector,

business or charity. Ultimately it is important to remember that people are the experts in their own wellbeing, which is exactly why the wellbeing lens is so suited to this type of engagement.

It is clear that wellbeing dialogues can add real value to decision making. Feedback from those who have participated has highlighted the benefit of sitting in dialogues and hearing the views of public participants directly. There are also benefits for public participants. Wellbeing dialogues in 2014 and 2015 highlighted the significant value that the public derived from participation and the different ways in which they benefited. For example it can help tackle participants' potential feelings of disengagement and detachment from the decisions which affect their lives - so dialogue really does help to connect people to decision making processes in a mutually beneficial way.

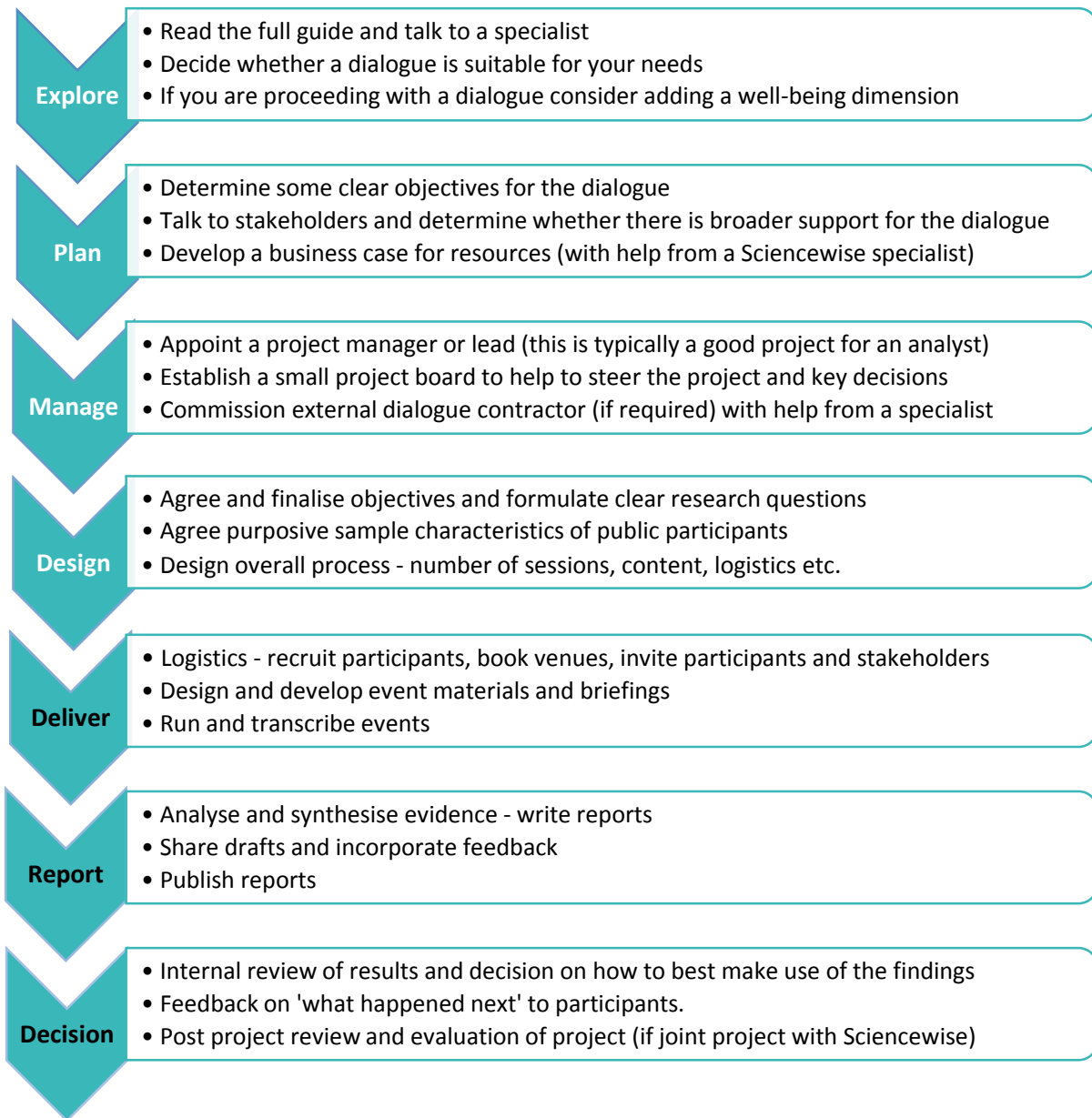
**Some of the benefits of wellbeing dialogues:**

- **Deeper engagement and participation** – public participants are able to engage with the issues and discussion on a more personal level.
- **Supports more credible and robust decision making** – informed by the direct knowledge and experience of those who will be affected by the decision.
- **Supports more rounded, people-focused solutions** – which better account for the potential impact on people's lives.
- **Supports integration and more 'joined up' solutions** – across the different elements that are important to quality of life, and between organisations working on them.
- **Gets beyond false assumptions and 'received wisdom'** – based on what the public really think and the values, motivations and views of those who will be directly affected.
- **Increased public awareness and understanding of wellbeing evidence** – which can encourage positive behaviour change.

## 4. What will it involve?

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Dialogue is an investment that will typically take a minimum of 3-months from start to completion, and often longer depending on the complexity of the topic. More time will be needed to allow for a tendering process if an external dialogue contractor is used. It can be as light touch or as intensive as required to address the objectives but will usually involve the following stages:



## 5. Who to involve?

There will be a variety of different stakeholders involved in a dialogue and helping to deliver it. A project manager will need to manage the process. In most cases this should not need to be a full time job – rather an additional project possibly for an analyst or social researcher, for example. Other appropriate stakeholders should be involved such as decision makers (those empowered to act on the findings), front-line workers and topic specialists – all of whom will bring different expertise and perspectives to the project. Stakeholders can be invited to contribute in a number of ways such as being involved in a governance group, commenting on the planned dialogue process, reviewing materials being sent to

public participants, and attending the dialogue events themselves to be drawn on for 'expert' information when needed.

In practice the actual dialogue can be delivered by an external contractor who will conduct much of the design, delivery and reporting stages of the project – a list of experienced contractors is provided. It might also be possible to run this in-house if facilitation and public engagement expertise exists within your organisation.

Whichever route you choose it is particularly important that those stakeholders who have the ability to take the dialogue findings and act upon them are involved. The dialogue will lack validity if there is no clear route for public participants to influence decisions.

## 6. When to use it?

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An overarching consideration on timing is that dialogue must take place when important aspects of a decision can still be influenced and action taken on the findings. Aside from this important constraint, wellbeing dialogue can add value throughout a policy or programme cycle but it is perhaps most useful at key points. Early on, it can be used to develop a clear and shared understanding of the problem that needs addressing and can help to set objectives. It can also be useful in developing new options, or if potential options are already identified then it can help compare or refine them, and explore their likely positive/negative impact on wellbeing. Dialogue can add value and contribute to fresh thinking downstream in implementation, for example in helping shape narrative and communications once decisions have been made.

Dialogue is most valuable when you have a particularly complex issue which involves values, motivations, behaviours and beliefs – perhaps on controversial topics in which there are strongly held views. The approach is therefore relevant to a broad range of issues and it will help to capture these motivations and understand them within the context of the issue or challenge that needs addressing. That said it is not universally relevant to all and if dialogue isn't suitable there are other public engagement methods available. The guide signposts a few of them.

## 7. How to build wellbeing in?

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Given that public dialogue is a well-documented, tried and tested approach much of what is new in the guide focuses on how to build in the wellbeing perspective. There are a number of tools and resources which can be used to incorporate wellbeing into the dialogue process, and the guide includes these and provides examples. In most cases it will be helpful to present public participants with some of the relevant evidence on what is important to wellbeing or more specifically, evidence around different interventions which can improve wellbeing. The guide also draws upon the different workshop exercises used in past public dialogues to give you practical examples.

## 8. What next?

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If you think a wellbeing dialogue might be of benefit to your area it is recommended you read the main document - the 'Guide and Toolkit' - which contains more detailed information and resources on how to run a wellbeing dialogue yourself. The document does not need to be read end to end and is organised in such a way that you can easily access the information you need. It might be helpful to start with the wellbeing dialogue case studies from the [2014](#) and [2015](#) dialogues which are included in the toolkit. Alternatively contact the [What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#) to discuss.

# What Works Wellbeing

is funded by the



and partners



HM Government

It funds four evidence teams on wellbeing:

**Community; Cross cutting capabilities; Culture and sport; Work and Learning.**



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