

This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social justice Committee](#) on the [inquiry into Social Cohesion](#)

SC 07

Ymateb gan: Carnegie UK

Response from: Carnegie UK

12 February 2025

Equality and Social Justice Committee,
Welsh Parliament,
Cardiff,
CF99 1SN
By email

Dear Jenny Rathbone MS,

Re: Social cohesion consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your committee's consultation on social cohesion.

As you may know, Carnegie UK is a 111-year-old independent policy foundation based in Dunfermline, Scotland with a mission to improve the wellbeing of the people of the UK and Ireland. Our focus is on collective wellbeing, which means everyone having what they need to live well now and in the future. We work to tackle threats to wellbeing and to grow support for a wellbeing approach to decision making across the whole spectrum of public policy.

Carnegie UK produces the [Life in the UK Index](#) – the largest independent research study examining the collective wellbeing of the people of the UK, with detailed nation-by-nation reports for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and [Wales](#) on environmental and democratic themes.

In late 2024 Carnegie UK published Life in the UK: Wales index findings. The index findings tell us that the collective wellbeing of people in Wales is stagnant since 2023, much like the rest of the UK. This stasis in living standards is being driven by persistent and entrenched inequality across the four domains of social, economic, environmental and democratic wellbeing, all of which can contribute to social cohesion. **Our research found no improvement in wellbeing across any of our headline measures for the people of Wales in 2024.**

The index findings highlight the specific groups of people, geographical areas, and issues impacting society in Wales which the Committee could build on. The

Carnegie United Kingdom Trust

Chair

David Emerson CBE

Chief Executive

Sarah Davidson

following four factors stand out as particularly significant in predicting lower or higher collective wellbeing for people living in Wales:

- **Household income** is strongly associated with overall collective wellbeing in Wales, particularly for lower earners. People with higher annual household incomes of £52,000 and above have a collective wellbeing score of 66, ten points higher than people earning up to £26,000 (56).
- People living with a **disability** in Wales have an average collective wellbeing score of 54, which is ten points lower than for people without a disability (64).
- **People aged 16 to 34** have a collective wellbeing score of 59. This is seven points lower than the collective wellbeing score of people aged 55 and over (66).
- **Rural versus urban living** - People living in urban areas in Wales have a collective wellbeing score of 60, six points lower than people in rural areas (66).

Based on this evidence, Carnegie UK recommends that the Committee considers the following issues and interventions urgently needed to support social cohesion and overcome tensions:

1. Repairing democracy – the missing mission:

Since 2021, the health of democracy in Wales and across the UK has been on a continuous decline. The 2024 Life in the UK: Wales index evidence highlights why this must be addressed as a matter of urgency. 2024 is a significant year for democracy and delivery. A new UK Government, Welsh First Minister, and the marking of 25 years of the establishment of the National Assembly of Wales offer a moment in time to make headway in terms of increasing awareness of the systems, structures and processes of participatory and deliberative engagement. **To achieve this, the Welsh Government must go further in delivering the statutory ways of working, which includes the involvement of citizens.**

2. Empowering public bodies to successfully implement the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

A significant amount of support is needed to equip people working in public bodies with the skills to think long term. Too often, legislation placing new duties on the public sector is passed without providing any support for the training, development and longer-term cultural change required to properly implement it. In a year where various implementation plans and strategies have been completed and published, the Welsh Government should not overlook the importance of ensuring public sector workers have the skills and knowledge to embed a preventative approach in practice.



We urge both the London and Cardiff governments to use the 25th anniversary of devolution as an opportunity to rebuild public confidence by increasing meaningful public participation in decision-making in Wales which in turn would help with social cohesion across the nation.

We at Carnegie UK commend the Welsh Government for its commitment to improving wellbeing but from the findings in our report, we would also warn that long-term, cross-government action will be required to improve people's lives and address inequality.

We are pleased to enclose a copy of the report to feed into the consultation with further details of the demographic breakdowns and recommendations.

Carnegie UK would be pleased to offer our support as you develop this strategy in the months and years ahead. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

Life in the UK 2024

Wales



Creating the Life in the UK Index

Carnegie UK's Life in the UK wellbeing index measures collective wellbeing across the UK. It is based on what people in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland tell us about their lives. The purpose of this index is to help governments across the UK focus their attention on the things that really matter to people, and to help us understand whether we are collectively living better or worse over time. The index will also help identify where progress is being made and the areas of our lives that require policy intervention.

The evidence for the 2024 index was collected via a 26-question survey of 6,774 respondents using [Ipsos' KnowledgePanel](#), a random probability survey panel with selection based on a random sample of UK households. The fieldwork was carried out between 9th and 15th May 2024, ahead of the announcement of the 2024 General Election.

This report provides an overview of findings based on the 531 respondents living in Wales. Reports that provide an overview of the overall [UK](#) findings, along with the findings for [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) are available on Carnegie UK's website. The overall collective wellbeing index score and the wellbeing domain scores have a value of between 0 and 100.

- The collective wellbeing scores, domain scores, and individual questions were all analysed to compare aspects of life for different groups of people in different parts of the UK.
- Regression analysis was used to help understand which demographic characteristics are most associated with both collective wellbeing overall, and with social, economic, environmental and democratic wellbeing specifically. We have used this analysis to structure the discussion of the demographic characteristics impacting on wellbeing throughout this report.

Carnegie UK and Ipsos designed, developed and analysed the Life in the UK index in partnership. More information on the methodology used to create the index and the full technical report are available [here](#).

Carnegie UK is committed to following the principles of the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) in the production of our Life in the UK index. We outline how we adhere to these principles in our [Voluntary Statement of Compliance](#).

Carnegie UK works to put wellbeing at the heart of decision making. This report provides an independent and authoritative overview of collective wellbeing in Wales in 2024. We hope it makes the case for better measures of social progress and highlights where policy intervention is urgently required.

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Introduction: Life in the UK - Wales 2024

The Life in the UK index now provides two years of evidence about what life is like for people in Wales. Out of a possible score of 100, Wales's collective wellbeing in 2024 was just 62. This score has not changed since our inaugural publication of this index in 2023¹. **This year's index findings tell us that the collective wellbeing of people in Wales is stagnant, much like the rest of the UK.** This stasis in living standards is driven by persistent and entrenched inequality across the four core domains of social, economic, environmental and democratic wellbeing.

In this significant year for democracy, which marks a quarter century since the establishment of the Senedd (formerly the National Assembly for Wales), as well as a UK general election, it is concerning that democratic wellbeing once again attracts the lowest scores. Wales has a democratic wellbeing score of just 39. This figure is largely shaped by depleting levels of trust in members of the Senedd and members of the UK Parliament, and a growing sense that people feel unable to influence decision making both in Wales and across the UK. **In nearly all areas that we measured, income inequality is the single biggest driver of low wellbeing in Wales.** Our data also highlights the impact of factors such as age and disability on people's wellbeing scores.

Since 2015, Wales has been at the global forefront of legislation and ways of governing focused on the achievement of collective wellbeing and sustainable development. It has been more ambitious with this agenda than the other UK nations, with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) 2015 Act² ensuring that public bodies have a legal duty to think about the long-term impact of their decision making. This approach can be observed in some of the ways the Government in Wales operates. For example, the Programme for Government³ sets out the Welsh Government's five-year delivery commitments structured around ten wellbeing objectives.

However, effective integration and joined-up policy making with an emphasis on delivering better outcomes for citizens continue to be elusive. **The evidence in the 2024 Life in the UK index for Wales indicates that progress has stalled and a real focus on implementing the Act and delivering on the statutory ways of working, is now required.** Despite the multiple challenges facing decision makers in Wales, there is cause for hope. **Wales has some of the most progressive and future focused legislation in the world.** Ambitious leadership is now needed at both a local and national level to support public bodies to think and act for the longer term⁴. The new UK Government has stated its commitment to strengthening its work with Welsh ministers. It has also outlined its ambitions for a mission-led UK Government, where there is learning to draw on from the Welsh approach.

At Carnegie UK we have worked for more than 100 years to help improve the wellbeing of people across the UK and Ireland. We believe in the power of evidence based public policy to improve people's lives. We hope that this report can provide inspiration and ideas for policy makers in Wales as we continue our efforts to ensure we can all live well together now and into the future.

Sarah Davidson
CEO, Carnegie UK



Collective wellbeing in Wales 2024

Like the overall UK picture, the story of life in Wales in 2024 is one of stagnant wellbeing⁵.

Wales is considered a pioneer of a wellbeing approach to government. The world-leading Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015⁶ provides a legislative framework for an outcomes-based approach to public policy. Despite this, the evidence in the 2024 Life in the UK index indicates that not enough progress has been made and a focus on implementing the Act is now required. These findings are consistent with the annual reports of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales⁷ and the Welsh Government⁸.

Wales has a marginal lead on social wellbeing when compared with England. However, it is evident that like many people across the UK, but particularly those in the other devolved nations, people in Wales are experiencing democratic alienation and feel unable to influence UK decision making, as well as the decisions made about their lives closer to home in Wales.

Overview of scores

The overall score for collective wellbeing in Wales in 2024 is **62** out of a possible 100.





Understanding what influences collective wellbeing in Wales

People's experiences of life in Wales vary substantially according to a range of important factors, highlighting the reality of inequality between people and within communities.

The following five factors stand out as particularly significant in predicting a lower or higher collective wellbeing score for people living in Wales ➤

- **Household income** is strongly associated with overall collective wellbeing in Wales, particularly for lower earners. People with higher annual household incomes of £52,000 and above have a collective wellbeing score of 66, ten points higher than people earning up to £26,000 (56).
- People living with a **disability** in Wales have an average collective wellbeing score of 54, which is ten points lower than for people without a disability (64).
- **People aged 16 to 34** have a collective wellbeing score of 59. This is seven points lower than the collective wellbeing score of people aged 55 and over (66).
- **Rural versus urban living** - People living in urban areas in Wales have a collective wellbeing score of 60, six points lower than people in rural areas (66).

* It should be noted that there was a small base size for the 16-34 year old subgroup (64 respondents).



Social wellbeing in Wales in 2024

We all have the support and services we need to thrive.



100



Wales scores 74 out of a possible 100 for social wellbeing.
This is the same score as reported in 2023.

Social wellbeing is about everyone being able to achieve their potential and contribute to society because they have their basic needs met. Our basic needs include having access to health and social care, education, housing, transport, digital and childcare.

To determine trends in social wellbeing across Wales, we asked questions about access to public services, community relationships, safety and community cohesion, and self-reported health and mental health.

The group most likely to experience high levels of social wellbeing in Wales in 2024 is ➤

- **People aged over 55**, who have a social wellbeing score of 78. This is seven points higher than the social wellbeing score of 16 to 34 year-olds (71), and six points higher than for 35-54 year olds (72).

The groups most likely to experience low levels of social wellbeing in Wales in 2024 are ➤

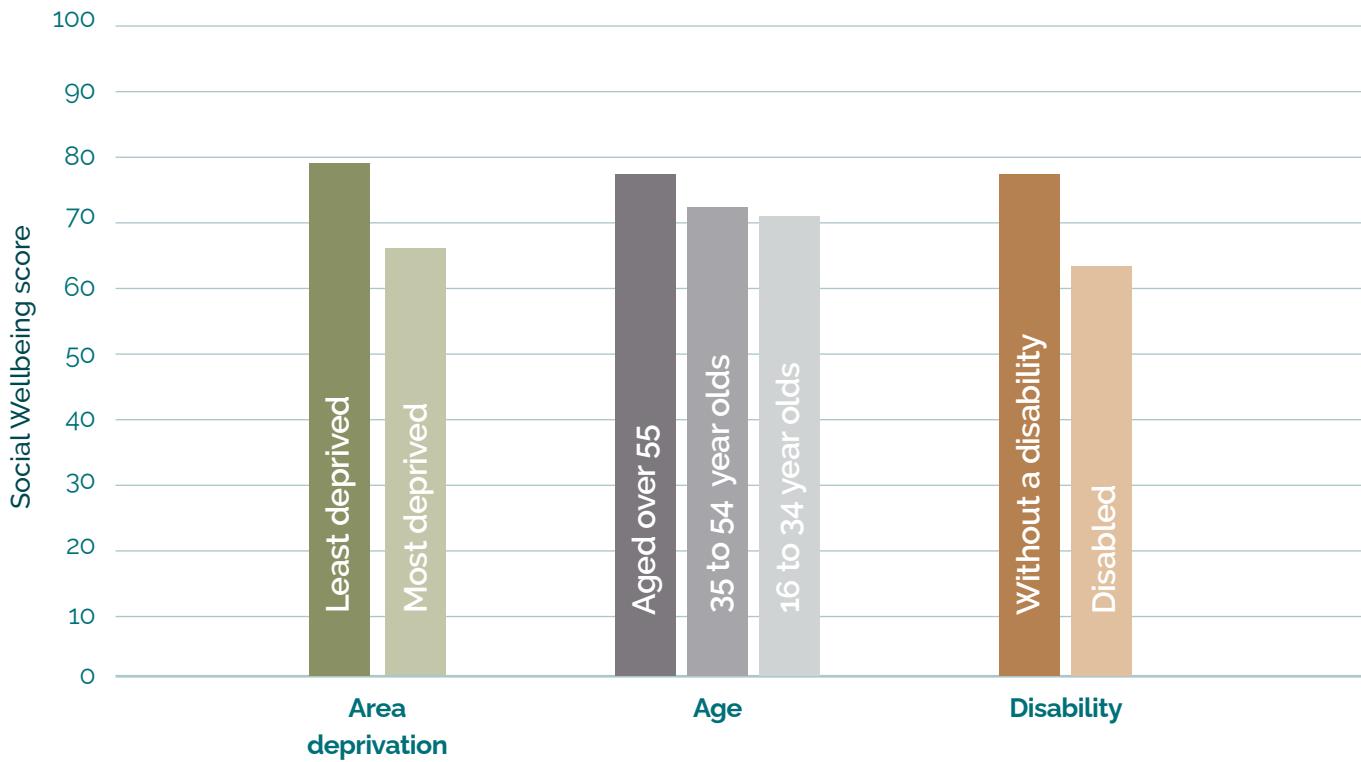
- **Disabled people** - People living with a disability in Wales have an average social wellbeing score of 64, fourteen points lower than for people without a disability (78).
- **People living in deprived areas** - Where people live and the associated area deprivation has some impact on social wellbeing in Wales. People living in Wales's most deprived areas (IMD1*) have an average social wellbeing score of 67, which is 12 points lower than people living in the most affluent areas (IMD5) (79).

These findings are consistent with the 2023 Life in the UK: Wales index scores.

Social wellbeing scores were not significantly associated with gender, income, ethnicity, number of children or urbanity.

* The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measures relative deprivation across the UK. Areas are ranked from the most deprived area (rank 1) to the least deprived area (rank 5).

People most likely to experience high and low levels of social wellbeing in Wales



Social wellbeing - standout statistics

- **39%** have experienced discrimination over the past year.
- **21%** feel unsafe or very unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark.
- **9%** don't have anyone to rely on in their neighbourhood. This is a six-point improvement on the score reported in 2023 (15%)
- **7%** have bad or very bad mental health. This is a five-point improvement on the score reported in 2023 (12%).





Carnegie UK observations

Wales has a marginal lead on social wellbeing when compared to England. The Programme for Government, which takes a longer-term approach than the other UK nations, sets out the government's commitments over a five year period. This includes a focus on providing effective, high quality and sustainable healthcare. It also prioritises the development of services for vulnerable people⁹. In 2024, Wales reported a disappointing set of NHS performance figures, which included record levels of waiting times for hospital treatment¹⁰. This demonstrates why the delivery of these government priorities are urgently needed.

Our relationships, and more specifically the quality of our relationships – between individuals and communities and across generations – have a significant influence on collective wellbeing. Personal connections contribute to a range of different wellbeing outcomes, such as in education, employment, and health. Preventative methods like social prescribing recognise the impact of these relationships on wellbeing and connect people with voluntary organisations within their community¹¹.

It is encouraging to see that the number of people who report that they do not have someone in their neighbourhood to rely on has fallen since 2023. Similarly, fewer people report poor mental health. This may indicate encouraging progress towards the commitments made in the 2021 Programme for Government to prioritise investment in mental health and roll out social prescribing to tackle isolation.

In January 2024, the Welsh Government published its National Framework for social prescribing which acknowledged the absence of a standardised and consistent approach¹². In future Life in the UK: Wales index scores, we will see if the implementation of the framework as part of the government's wider priorities around health and the delivery of services for vulnerable people positively impact the social wellbeing scores.

To participate in society, people must have accessible opportunities and networks. This is particularly important for more vulnerable groups whose wellbeing is at risk due to isolation or segregation¹³. **It is concerning, therefore, to see that 39% of people in Wales have experienced discrimination over the last year, particularly as one of Wales's wellbeing objectives is to celebrate diversity and move to eliminate inequality in all its forms.** This must be addressed as a matter of urgency.



Economic wellbeing in Wales in 2024

We all have a decent minimum living standard.





Wales scores 70 out of a possible 100 for economic wellbeing. This is similar to the score reported in 2023.

Economic wellbeing means that everyone has a decent minimum living standard and can absorb financial shocks. This includes access to a decent income, affordability, financial resilience, job opportunities and skills.

To determine trends in economic wellbeing across Wales, we asked questions about skills and job availability, and the affordability of essential items like food and fuel.

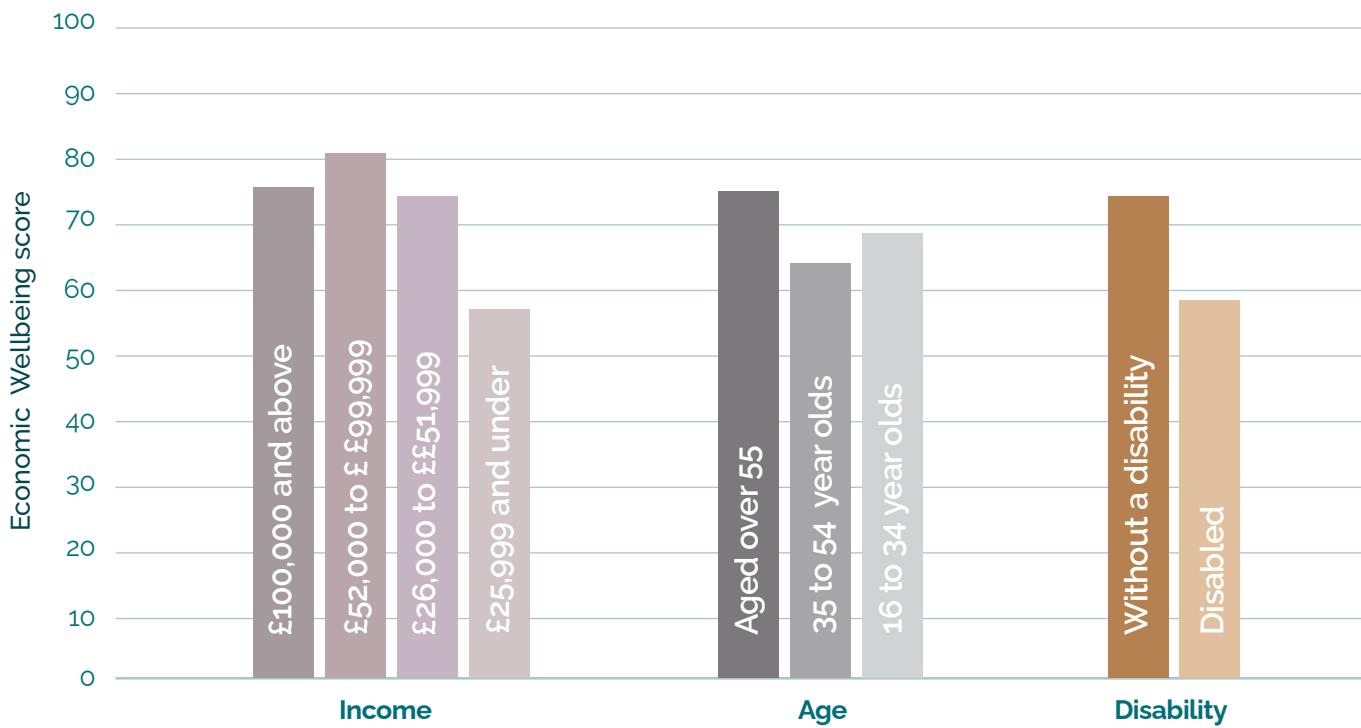
The group most likely to experience **high levels of economic wellbeing in Wales in 2024 is ➤**

- **People with a high household income** - As in the other wellbeing domains, household income is strongly associated with economic wellbeing in Wales. Those with an annual household income between £52,000 and £99,999 have an economic wellbeing score of 81, which is seven points higher than those with lower household incomes (74 - £26,000 to £51,999) and 23 points higher than those earning under £26,000 (58).

The groups most likely to experience **low levels of economic wellbeing in Wales in 2024 are ➤**

- **People aged under 55**, who have lower economic wellbeing compared to people aged 55 and older. 16 to 34 year-olds have an economic wellbeing score of 69, and 35-54 year olds have an economic wellbeing score of 64. This represents a seven and twelve point gap when compared with the score of people aged 55 and older (76).
- **Disabled people** - People living with a disability in Wales have an average economic wellbeing score of 59, which is 15 points lower than for people without a disability (74).

People most likely to experience high and low levels of economic wellbeing in Wales



Economic wellbeing - standout statistics

- **34%** are dissatisfied with the availability of job opportunities in their local area.
- **32%** can't afford an unexpected expense of £850.
- **23%** can't afford to go on holiday away from home.
- **13%** can't afford to keep their home warm.
- **11%** can't afford to socialise with friends or family outside of the home once a month if desired.
- **8%** can't afford enough food for their household.
- **7%** are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their education and skills.





Carnegie UK observations

The significant gaps in economic wellbeing, based on factors such as age, disability and housing tenure, show the scale of structural inequality in Wales, which is also prevalent across the UK¹⁴. Economic deprivation is deepening poverty and widening inequality, and has an impact on multiple aspects of people's lives¹⁵.

The cost of poverty goes beyond the hardship experienced by people living in low-income households. It has a long-term impact across society, including on the economy through reduced employment¹⁶, and on public services, as people persistently tackle the symptoms and consequences of poverty on their personal wellbeing, like poor physical and mental health¹⁷.

It is encouraging to see the Welsh Government's stated commitment to building an economy based on the principles of fair work, sustainability, and the industries and services of the future within its current Programme for Government. The 2024 Life in the UK evidence demonstrates why delivery on this mission is so important, particularly as Wales has the highest economic inactivity rate in the UK¹⁸. At Carnegie UK, we know that fair work and productivity matter because they are among the main determinants of living standards¹⁹.

However, the fact that 34% of people are dissatisfied with the job opportunities in their local area is significant. Attempts to address skills shortages, such as through the delivery of the Young Person's Guarantee established in 2021, must be matched with increased job opportunities and availability.

At Carnegie UK, we are also concerned about the impact of low economic wellbeing on children and young people. Almost one in three children in Wales lives in poverty²⁰.

The Welsh Government should be commended for completing its planned rollout of universal free school meals for primary school children in 2024. This forms part of their commitment to tackling poverty and improving health and educational attainment – an example of public services working together to deliver long term change across multiple wellbeing outcomes.

2024 saw the publication of the Welsh Government's much anticipated Child Poverty Strategy which is rightly focused on putting more money in families' pockets. **However, it falls short of the potential impact of policies aimed at increasing household incomes.** In future Life in the UK index scores, we will see if the Social Partnership Duty²¹, which came into force in Wales this year, along with the UK Government's priority to 'make work pay' by providing greater job security, banning exploitative zero-hour contracts and delivering a genuine living wage, contributes to addressing this gap and positively influencing wellbeing scores in this area.



Environmental wellbeing in Wales in 2024

We all live within the planet's natural resources.





Wales scores 64 out of a possible 100 for environmental wellbeing. This is similar to the score reported in 2023 (66).

Environmental wellbeing means that everyone has access to green and blue spaces, and collectively we live within the planet's natural resources, protecting the environment for future generations.

To determine trends in environmental wellbeing across Wales, we asked questions about access to and the quality of local parks, rivers and other green and blue spaces. We also asked about levels of satisfaction with efforts to preserve the environment.

The group most likely to experience **high levels of environmental wellbeing in Wales in 2024 are ➤**

- **People aged over 55** - Increased age is positively associated with environmental wellbeing. Those aged over 55 have an environmental wellbeing score of 69. This is 10 points higher than the environmental wellbeing score of 16 to 34 year-olds (59) and seven points higher than the environmental wellbeing score of 35-54 year olds (62).

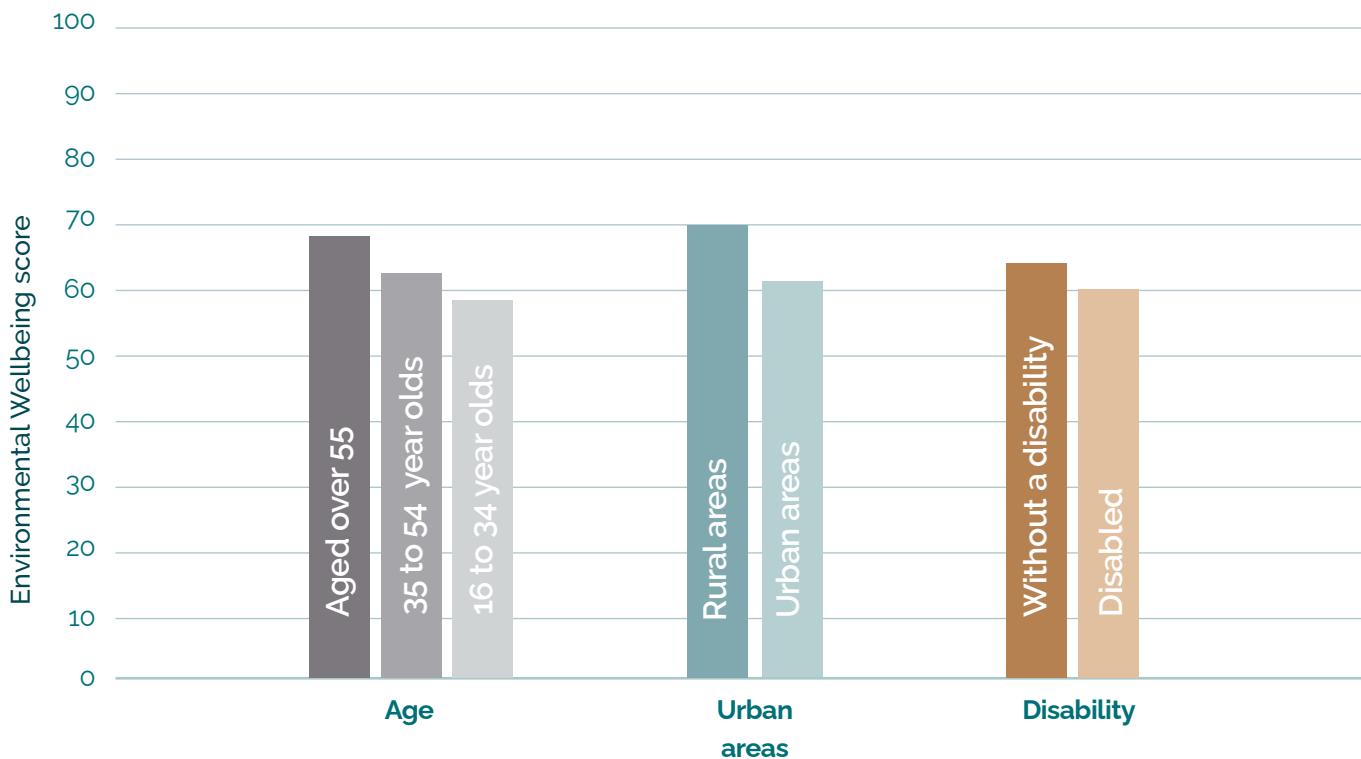
The group most likely to experience **low levels of environmental wellbeing in Wales in 2024 are ➤**

- **People living in urban areas**, who have an environmental wellbeing score of 61. This is a nine-point gap when compared to those living in rural areas (70).

None of the other demographic characteristics, including gender, income, ethnicity, disability, number of children and local deprivation, were significantly linked with environmental wellbeing.

It should be noted that demographic variables explained around a quarter of the variation in environmental wellbeing scores. This indicates that environmental wellbeing is more strongly influenced by factors other than demographic characteristics.

People most likely to experience high and low levels of environmental wellbeing in Wales



Environmental wellbeing - standout statistics

- Most people experience issues with litter (**83%**), noise (**59%**) and air quality (**43%**) in their local neighbourhood.
- **37%** are dissatisfied with current efforts to preserve the environment.
- **13%** are dissatisfied with the quality of the local green or open space nearest their home.





Carnegie UK observations

Wales's commitment to climate is reflected in two of the wellbeing goals enshrined in law within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 - a Prosperous Wales and a Resilient Wales. These ambitions are further underlined in the wellbeing objectives outlined within the Programme for Government:

- Build a stronger, greener economy as we make maximum progress towards decarbonisation; and
- Embed our response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do.

It is concerning, then, that Wales's environmental wellbeing score has not improved in 2024. This finding is consistent with the Climate Change Committee's 2024 progress report²² which found that the Welsh Government is failing to mitigate climate emissions and prepare communities in Wales for the forthcoming impacts of climate change. **The need to take action to tackle climate change is now more urgent than ever.** Reported levels of dissatisfaction with efforts to preserve the environment (37%) suggest that a significant proportion of the population in Wales believes that not enough is being done to tackle the climate emergency.

At Carnegie UK we know that disproportionate exposure to pollutants and noise, and inadequate access to green and blue spaces like parks, woodlands and rivers - environmental injustice - is a threat to collective wellbeing. It further entrenches inequality between people and communities in the UK.

In 2024, Wales became the second-ranked country in the world for rates of recycling²³. This demonstrates the ability of Wales, as a small nation, to act swiftly and decisively on a course of action if the goal is clear and the means of achieving it are agreed. Since the index was published in 2023, the first phase of the Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Act 2023 has also started, with eight single-use plastic products now either banned or restricted²⁴.

However, the index scores suggest that the Welsh Government must now go even further to move from rhetoric to reality. The National Energy Plan for Wales – expected by the end of 2024 – will set out the energy system changes required to achieve Net Zero by 2050, while delivering a secure and affordable energy system in Wales²⁵. The Welsh Government hopes that this will enable Wales to accelerate the transition to a Net Zero energy system. If successful in its implementation, we would expect to see the environmental wellbeing score start to improve in the coming years. However, this must be matched with steps to increase public awareness of the action Wales is taking to address the climate challenge.



Democratic wellbeing in Wales in 2024

We all have a voice in decisions that affect us.



100



Wales scores 39 out of a possible 100 for democratic wellbeing. This is the same score as reported in 2023.

Democratic wellbeing is about everyone having a voice in decisions made that affect them. This means having local and national leaders who support participation, foster trust, and encourage diversity.

To understand democratic wellbeing in Wales in 2024, we asked questions about levels of trust in local, regional and national government(s), perceptions of personal ability to influence decisions, and experiences of discrimination.

It should be noted that unlike the social and economic domains, less than one fifth of the variation in democratic wellbeing was explained by demographic characteristics. This indicates that democratic wellbeing is more strongly influenced by factors other than demographic characteristics.

Influence

Most people in Wales feel that they cannot influence decisions affecting the UK, Wales, or their local area (74%, 66% and 55% respectively). The proportion of people in Wales reporting that they cannot influence decisions affecting the UK is similar to England. Scotland and Northern Ireland were higher (74% in Wales compared to 72% in England, 77% in Scotland, and 78% in Northern Ireland).

Trust in government

The proportion of people in Wales who do not trust the UK Government is 56% which is similar to the score for the rest of the UK overall.

Trust in local councils is similar to the UK overall, with 31% of people in Wales reporting low trust in local councils compared to 28% in the UK.



Democratic wellbeing - standout statistics

- **74%** disagree that they can influence decisions affecting the UK as a whole.
- **66%** disagree that they can influence decisions affecting Wales.
- **56%** have low levels of trust in the UK Government.
- **55%** disagree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area.
- **51%** have low levels of trust in MPs.
- **41%** have low levels of trust in members of the Senedd.
- **39%** have low levels of trust in Welsh Government.
- **31%** have low levels of trust in local councils.





Carnegie UK observations

Wellbeing cannot be 'done to' people: it must be done by and with them. Giving people voice and choice, enhancing transparency, and promoting dialogue between people, sectors and communities, are all influential enablers of collective wellbeing.

It is striking then that when compared to the other domain areas (social, economic and environmental), **it is difficult to see as strong a Welsh Government commitment to improving democracy within the policy proposals outlined in the 2021 Programme for Government**, beyond holding a national conversation about Wales's constitutional future²⁶. 'Involvement' is one of the five statutory ways of working within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) 2015 Act. The new Senedd law that will remove barriers to democratic engagement by automatically enrolling people to the electoral register is encouraging, but on its own will not go far enough to tackle alienation²⁷.

The evidence within the Life in the UK index demonstrates why the Welsh Government must be more ambitious: it is concerning that almost three-quarters of people in Wales (74%) feel unable to influence UK decision making. Similarly, over half of Welsh people (66%) disagree that they can influence decisions affecting Wales.

2024 marks 25 years of devolution, when significant policy powers in the UK were devolved to Wales. In this time, important progress has been made. The devolved institutions in Wales have increasingly accrued new powers and policy levers and directed the country through challenging times, such as the Foot and Mouth disease outbreak which had a devastating and lasting impact on the farming and tourism industry in 2001, and the Covid-19 pandemic twenty years later²⁸.

Over the years, the Senedd has shown that it can both get things done and do things differently²⁹. It must now adopt this approach to improving public trust and participation and mainstreaming public engagement.

A new UK Government and the marking of 25 years of devolution offer a moment in time to make headway in terms of increasing awareness of the systems, structures and processes of participatory and deliberative engagement. This must be matched with the development of mechanisms to embed these approaches in policymaking and build a culture of participatory and deliberative democracy within Welsh institutions.

The anticipated reform as part of the 2026 Senedd elections will both offer a moment of risk, and of opportunity. With a more proportionate voting system and an enlarged Senedd better equipped to carry out its increased functions, we would hope to see the democratic wellbeing score improve in the years ahead.

At Carnegie UK, we know that this is possible – Wales has led the way in holding National Conversations on topics such as wellbeing³⁰, and most recently the constitutional future of Wales, which made several important recommendations. These proposals include the need to strengthen the capacity for democratic innovation and inclusive community engagement in Wales. **The Welsh Government must now take steps that go further than simply accepting the recommendations, otherwise they risk being tokenistic**³¹.

➤ **Life in the UK: Wales 2024 - Policy Recommendations**

Wales should be commended for its efforts to put wellbeing at the heart of decision making. Its groundbreaking legislation is ambitious, and while it will take time to see the longer-term impact emerge, it is clear that the Welsh Government has a vision for the country and is using the wellbeing goals to guide and shape decision making. However, the evidence in the 2024 Life in the UK index indicates that progress has plateaued for now. **A sustained focus on implementing the Act and on delivering the statutory ways of working set out within it is now required to see sustainable change.**

In future Life in the UK: Wales index scores, we will see if the various implementation plans and strategies, including those on social prescribing, achieving Net Zero and tackling poverty, are enacted in practice and go some way to addressing these challenges. **Coherent political and administrative leadership will be critical, as will the provision of sufficient support to embolden public bodies to think and act long term.**

The scores in this report provide stark evidence of the demographics of those people who are being left behind in Wales today. It is on these groups that the local, regional and national governments of the UK should be focusing their attention if they are to make progress on the UK Government's ambition of 'initiating a decade of national renewal'³² and make progress on the largescale challenges facing Wales around the future of the economy and health and social care services.

At Carnegie UK, we believe that there are three key areas of opportunity which Wales should grasp in order to further develop an effective outcomes-based approach to addressing these issues. The Welsh Government should:

- Focus its efforts on repairing democracy – the missing mission.
- Empower public bodies to successfully implement the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- Increase public awareness about what the wellbeing legislation means for citizens.



Repairing democracy – the missing mission

It is difficult to see a strong commitment to improving democracy within the policy proposals outlined in the 2021 Programme for Government, beyond holding a national conversation about Wales's constitutional future. Since 2021, the health of democracy in Wales and across the UK has been on a continuous decline. The 2024 Life in the UK: Wales index evidence highlights why this must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

2024 is a significant year for democracy and delivery. A new UK Government, Welsh First Minister, and the marking of 25 years of the establishment of the National Assembly of Wales offer a moment in time to make headway in terms of increasing awareness of the systems, structures and processes of participatory and deliberative engagement. **To achieve this, the Welsh Government must go further in delivering the statutory ways of working, which includes the involvement of citizens.** This must be matched with the development of mechanisms to embed these approaches in policymaking and build a culture of participatory democracy within the Welsh Government.

It is essential that all those in power work to build trust with the people of Wales: a failure to address the root causes of discontent will further threaten the foundations of democracy. We need a bold agenda to re-engage people in our democracy and rebuild trust in those we elect to represent us.



Empowering public bodies to successfully implement the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

A significant amount of support is needed to equip people working in public bodies with the skills to think long term. Foresighting, analysing future trends and developing 25-year plans are not skills generally taught or traditionally required in the public sector. The Future Generations Commissioner Office – established as part of the 2015 wellbeing legislation – has been instrumental in fostering cooperation between different public bodies and driving a focus on prevention in public policy. This is an asset that public bodies should continue to use and seek guidance from.

Too often, legislation placing new duties on the public sector is passed without providing any support for the training, development and longer-term cultural change required to properly implement it. **In a year where various implementation plans and strategies have been completed and published, the Welsh Government should not overlook the importance of ensuring public sector workers have the skills and knowledge to embed a preventative approach in practice.** We recommend that public bodies put plans in place to move through the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales Maturity Matrix³³, using the Progress Checker to monitor progress, and publishing this progress annually.

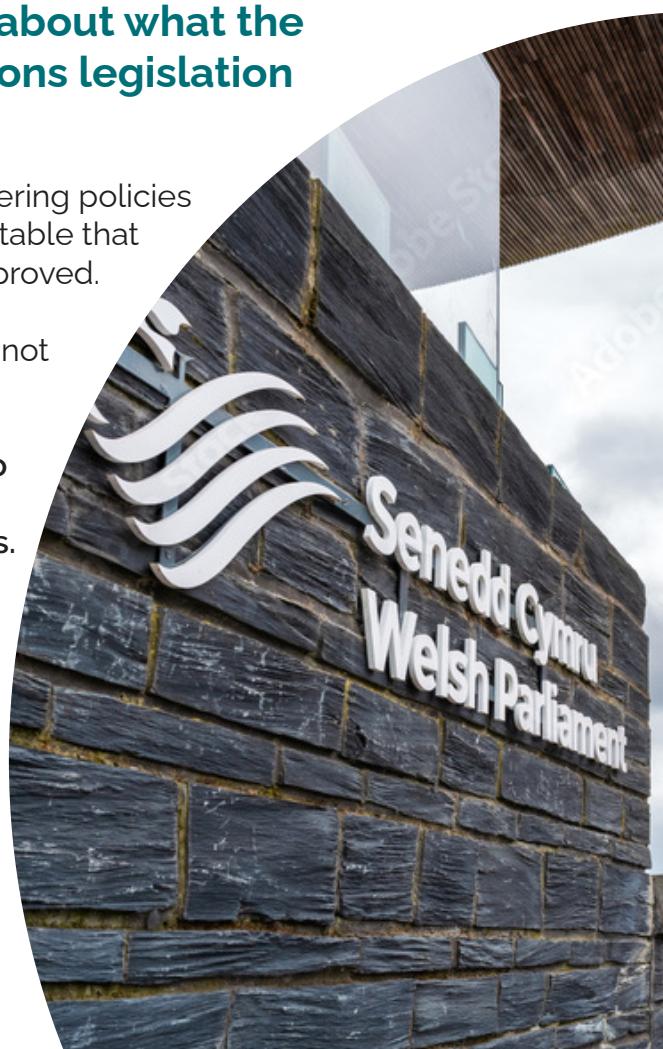


Increasing public awareness about what the Wellbeing of Future Generations legislation means for them

While Wales has been making good progress in delivering policies designed to improve environmental wellbeing, it is notable that the overall environmental wellbeing score has not improved.

A significant proportion of the Welsh population does not believe that the Welsh Government is doing enough to tackle the climate emergency. **This indicates that more must be done to communicate progress and to increase public awareness of the Welsh wellbeing agenda and how it could and should affect their lives.**

The Welsh Government must be bold. It should build on the positive environmental action it has taken so far and communicate this to citizens with confidence. Additionally, we support the recommendations of the Wales Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group and propose that facilitating a national conversation about the climate and nature crisis in a holistic way is the next essential step to bringing all Welsh citizens into a dialogue about creating a safer and more prosperous future for current and future generations of Wales³⁴.



Collective wellbeing: standout statistics overview



Social wellbeing – standout statistics

- **39%** have experienced discrimination over the past year.
- **21%** say they feel unsafe or very unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark.
- **9%** don't have anyone to rely on in their neighbourhood. This is a six-point improvement on the score reported in 2023 (15%).
- **7%** have bad or very bad mental health. This is a five-point improvement on the score reported in 2023 (12%).



Economic wellbeing - standout statistics

- **34%** are dissatisfied with the job opportunities in their local area.
- **32%** can't afford an unexpected expense of £850.
- **23%** can't afford to go on holiday away from home.
- **13%** can't afford to keep their home adequately warm.
- **11%** can't afford to socialise with friends or family outside of the home once a month.
- **8%** can't afford enough food for their household.
- **7%** are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their education and skills.



Environmental wellbeing - standout statistics

- Most people experience issues with litter (**83%**), noise (**59%**) and air quality (**43%**) in their local neighbourhood.
- **37%** are dissatisfied with current efforts to preserve the environment.
- **13%** are dissatisfied with the quality of the local green or open space nearest their home.



Democratic wellbeing - standout statistics

- **74%** disagree that they can influence decisions affecting the UK as a whole.
- **66%** disagree that they can influence decisions affecting Wales.
- **55%** disagree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area.
- **51%** have low levels of trust in MPs.
- **56%** have low levels of trust in the UK Government.
- **39%** have low levels of trust in the Welsh Government.
- **41%** have low levels of trust in members of the Senedd.
- **31%** have low levels of trust in local councils.

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Appendix 1: Summary table of domain scores by key demographic characteristics

		Collective wellbeing	Social wellbeing	Economic wellbeing	Environmental wellbeing	Democratic wellbeing
	Total	62	74	70	62	39
Disability	Not disabled	64	78	74	65	40
	Disabled	54	64	59	60	35
Age	16-34 years	59	71	69	59	40
	35-54 years	59	72	64	62	36
	55 years & over	66	78	76	69	40
Household Income	£25,999 and under	56	70	58	61	38
	£26,000 to £51,999	63	75	74	64	38
	£52,000 to £99,999	66	79	81	66	40
	£100,000 & above	66	77	77	71	41
Area deprivation	1st quintile (highest deprivation)	55	67	60	56	37
	2nd quintile	61	74	67	63	41
	3rd quintile	61	75	73	65	36
	4th quintile	64	77	73	66	40
	5th quintile (lowest deprivation)	67	79	79	69	40
Gender	Women	61	73	70	63	40
	Men	62	76	71	65	38
Ethnicity	Asian	57	63	63	56	43
	Black	56	67	48	63	46
	Mixed/multiple	57	70	55	62	42
	Other ethnicity	64	76	69	72	39
	Other White	63	73	76	60	42
	White British	62	75	71	64	39
	Ethnic minorities (excluding White minorities)	59	68	61	62	42
	White (including White minorities)	62	75	71	64	39
Urban areas	Urban living	60	73	69	61	38
	Rural living	66	78	74	70	41

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Find out more about the work of the Network here: <https://povertytruthnetwork.org/>.

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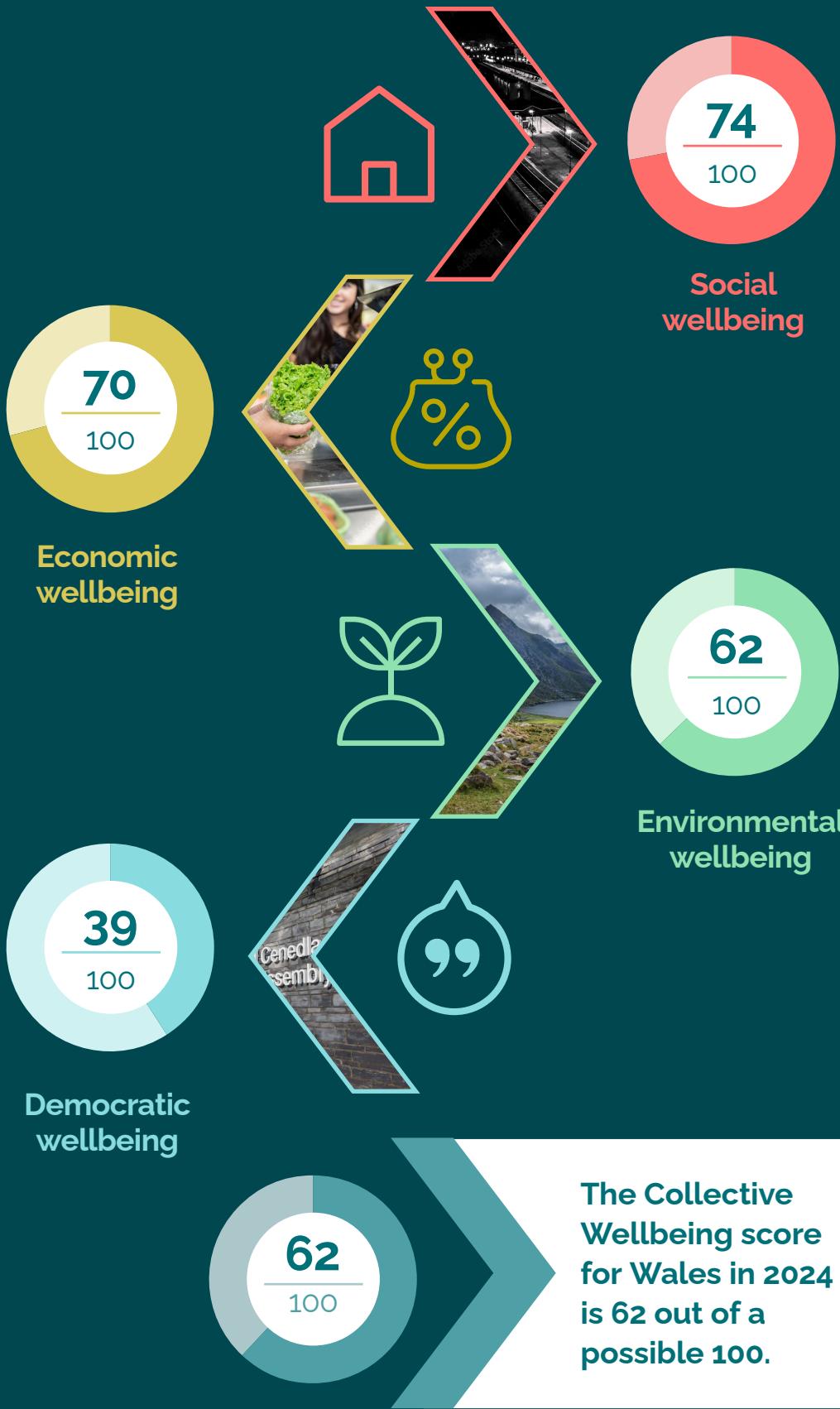
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➤ Collective Wellbeing in 2024 in Wales summary



Life in the UK 2024

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