

Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme

Mechanisms of change

December 2024



This document presents the mechanisms of change that Shaping Places for Wellbeing believe to support system change when taking a place-based approach.

Shaping Places for Wellbeing

The Shaping Places for Wellbeing ambition is to improve Scotland's wellbeing by reducing the significant inequality in the health of its people while addressing the health of our planet. Evidence shows that the places where we live, work and relax have an impact on our wellbeing, on the wellbeing of our planet and on how much inequality exists between the richest and poorest in society.

Between 2022 and June 2024, Shaping Places for Wellbeing worked locally in seven towns across Scotland supporting councils, health boards and other stakeholders working with them to develop resources to take a place-based approach in their decisions and actions.



The Shaping Places for Wellbeing Approach

Given the importance of place, it is crucial that we create ones that contain all the features that evidence tells us will have a positive impact. For Shaping Places for Wellbeing, this means combining three key elements:

- Knowing what **people** in an area are experiencing
- Understanding the evidenced features every **place** needs
- Considering the impact of the **decisions** we are making on both of these.

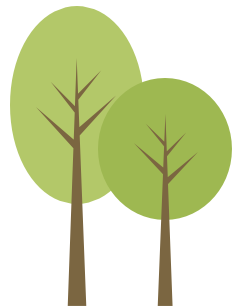
The activities delivered through local project action 2022-2024 supported these three elements of a place-based approach.

What are "Mechanisms of Change"?

The mechanisms of change describe the behaviours, attitudes, values, motivations and experiences that enable delivered activities to support system change. They are the link between the activities delivered and the outcomes we hope to achieve.

For example, we aimed to increase the number of plans being developed using a place and wellbeing lens. We undertook Place and Wellbeing Assessments to encourage this. We noticed that if people engaged with the Assessment process had certain experiences, thoughts and feelings then we were more likely to see the desired changes.

We have used the term "mechanisms of change", as described by [New Philanthropy Capital \(NPC\)](#).



Capturing the Mechanisms of Change

These mechanisms of change were identified through a workstream during delivery of local project action in 2023. They were captured through reflection of the team's experience working to create systems change in seven Project Towns.

Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme team members engaged in a forcefield analysis activity exploring perceived barriers and facilitators of change in our Project Towns. Contributions to this activity were then reviewed and possible mechanisms of change identified. Relevant ideas from the team's 'Reflect and Capture' reports analysis completed by the IS Research Team were also integrated.

The mechanisms of change have been constantly reviewed and updated as local project action progressed, and with learning from other workstreams. The Programme team and Project Town members also engaged in a learning exercise to understand how effectively these mechanisms were working to date, which informed Shaping Places for Wellbeing's ongoing work supporting place-based work across Scotland.

Sharing the Mechanisms of Change

The following pages present the mechanisms of change that we believe make change more likely, based on our experience of delivering local project action. They present an ideal vision of how Shaping Places for Wellbeing is experienced by those engaged with activity under the three elements of a place-based approach. In reality, these mechanisms of change will be experienced to a greater or lesser degree depending on a range factors.

Using a place-based approach

From our experience delivering local project action, we believe change is more likely when:

- ❑ People have a foundational and mutual understanding of 'place', and its relationship to health and inequality.
- ❑ People understand the aims and offer of the Shaping Places for Wellbeing approach.
- ❑ People believe the Shaping Places for Wellbeing approach is credible and will add value to their current work.
- ❑ People understand and value systems change as a meaningful approach to their work – it's not just perceived as a buzz word.
- ❑ People hold realistic expectations about a place-based approach and systems change.

There are three key elements to taking a place-based approach:



People

What they are experiencing

Data - inequality
Quantitative
Qualitative



Place

All the features that have a positive impact

Place and Wellbeing Outcomes



Decisions

How they impact people and place

Leadership
Governance
Assessing impact





People

What they are experiencing

Using data and community insights

From our experience delivering local project action, we believe change is more likely when:

- ☐ Community representatives believe their voice will be meaningfully heard and are therefore motivated to share insight.
- ☐ Decision makers acknowledge and value the voice of local communities.
- ☐ People have confidence in the data sources and process of data collection used.
- ☐ People have confidence in the analysis and interpretation of data.
- ☐ People believe the data is meaningful and representative of the local area.
- ☐ People believe the data gives added value to decision making.
- ☐ Data profiles and community insight together tell a meaningful story that is well understood by everyone involved in the decision-making process.
- ☐ All stakeholders feel able to have open dialogue about the issues raised by the data and community insights.
- ☐ People know how to access data sources themselves and how to analyse data.
- ☐ People have confidence in data sharing practices.





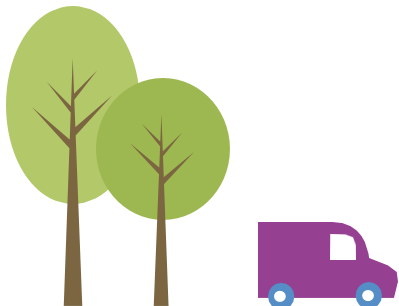
Place

All the features that
have a positive impact

Using the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

From our experience delivering local project action, we believe change is more likely when:

- ☐ People wish to invest time and energy in understanding the Outcomes.
- ☐ People comprehend, understand, and feel engaged by information provided on the Outcomes.
- ☐ People are aware of, understand, and have confidence in the evidence behind the Outcomes.
- ☐ People believe the Outcomes are a useful framework.
- ☐ People value all the Outcomes equally.
- ☐ People understand how the Outcomes are relevant to their own area of work – they aren't dismissed as a 'spatial planning thing'.
- ☐ People adopt the Outcomes as part of their usual working language and thinking.





Decisions

How they impact
people and place

Using Place and Wellbeing Assessments

From our experience delivering local project action, we believe change is more likely when:

- ☐ Participants have a foundational and mutual understanding of place, the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes, and the Programme.
- ☐ Participants have an understanding of, and familiarity with, the document being assessed.
- ☐ Assessment participants, including the decision makers/document owner, feel supported by managers and colleagues to take part in the process.
- ☐ Participants feel equally valued and safe to openly contribute during the Assessment.
- ☐ The decision makers/document owner believe the Assessment process adds value to their work.
- ☐ The decision makers/document owner have a sense of ownership over the process from pre-Assessment to post-Assessment stage.
- ☐ The decision makers/ document owner are open to the feedback given through the Assessment and believes it to be constructive.
- ☐ Participants remain engaged for the duration of the Assessment.





Decisions

How they impact
people and place

Embedding recommendations from a Place and Wellbeing Assessment

From our experience delivering local project action, we believe change is more likely when:

- ☐ Recommendations are understood.
- ☐ Recommendations are respected and believed to give added value to document.
- ☐ The decision makers/ document owner and relevant team(s) believe the recommendations are actionable and achievable.
- ☐ The decision makers/document owner and relevant team(s) believe that system change is possible, and that the recommendations support change.
- ☐ The decision makers/document owner and relevant team(s) feel confident communicating and building partnerships with all relevant stakeholders to embed recommendations.
- ☐ The decision makers/document owner and relevant team(s) feel a sense of ownership and leadership over the embedment of recommendations.
- ☐ The decision makers/document owner and relevant team(s) feel confident, empowered and equipped to progress recommendations, and try new approaches.
- ☐ The work suggested by the recommendations is believed to align with existing priorities.



Using the Mechanisms of Change

Use them to guide embedment of the Shaping Places for Wellbeing approach

As stated at the start, the mechanisms of change laid out in this document describe an ideal vision of how activities delivered when taking the Shaping Places for Wellbeing approach are experienced to enable system change. Don't worry if they feel more aspirational than realistic at this stage. Think about how you can work towards people experiencing more of the mechanisms of change to a greater extent through your day-to-day work.

Monitor whether they are being experienced

Consider how you may be able to monitor the degree to which the mechanisms of change are being experienced in your work. This doesn't have to be a formal evaluation of each mechanism but even informal review of the mechanisms through conversation with partners may allow improved focus on creating conditions for change.

For example, we believe that change is more likely when people value all the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes equally. In some of our Project Towns, we noticed that some people had a tendency to focus disproportionately on some of the Outcomes. We therefore put more effort into emphasising the importance of all Outcomes and raising awareness of any that were inadvertently being neglected.

Think about what other mechanisms may be acting locally to create change

The mechanisms of change laid out in this document are based on our experiences delivering Shaping Places for Wellbeing local project action in seven towns from 2022-2024. There will be other mechanisms for each local context and understanding of the mechanisms should be constantly evolving based on who you are working with. If you are developing a theory of change as part of your own work, you may wish to integrate consideration of mechanisms of change through that process.

Learn more about the three elements of a place-based approach and our approach to systems change on our [website](#).

Follow us on X @place4wellbeing to keep up to date with our latest news.

If you are looking at place-based approaches or want to find out more, please contact placeandwellbeing@improvementservice.org.uk.

