
Waikato Wellbeing Project Deliverables and Funding Review

Prepared for the Waikato Wellbeing Project
February 2025

Executive Summary

In 2019, Waikato Regional Council and WEL Energy Trust created the Waikato Wellbeing Project (WWP). The project's purpose was to elevate communities' lived experiences into regional decision-making. The WWP is guided by the Waikato Wellbeing Targets (based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)) and supported by its Kaitiaki Advisory Board and Manu Taki leaders in the community. The project's primary role is insight provision, with priority topics relating to kai, youth, housing, and responsible consumption. Key deliverables for the WWP focus on research, wellbeing knowledge, storytelling, and advocacy and communications.

The WWP is funded primarily by WEL Energy Trust, and in 2024, the WEL Energy Trust board requested a review of the WWP's deliverables and funding. The review was conducted in late 2024 using a qualitative data collection approach. A total of 36 people participated in the review, including funders, capital beneficiaries, the WWP board members, and stakeholders.

The review found that the WWP has achieved solid results for most deliverables, with the strongest results derived from the storytelling function. The review uncovered mixed feedback in the funding space, with some funders reflecting on the project's positive achievements while others challenged the value that the WWP has delivered. When the deliverables are considered together, the WWP has generated several benefits for the region, particularly to the community sector. The WWP has been easy for the community to access and the work and has started to build cross-sector relationships. Importantly, this project provides independent research that will grow as the WWP matures and embeds itself in a wider range of topics.

Despite the positive results, the WWP has faced challenges implementing its work. The WWP has sometimes lacked clarity around its role and deliverables; the areas it focuses on have changed over time, and the SDGs' relevance to the Waikato Region have also been challenged. The WWP has also faced questions about the change or impact that its work had delivered, both at policy and community levels. Furthermore, the role of key supporting functions for the project (Kaitiaki Advisory Board and Manu Taki) do not appear to have yielded the benefits that were originally intended.

Despite these challenges, the community welcomes the project, and most stakeholders state the WWP has the potential to benefit the region significantly. To build and grow the work the WWP has completed to date, the WWP will need to make changes to its structure, accessible skill sets, and engagement practices. To truly leverage the insights it develops, the WWP needs to find avenues to scale its work upwards to affect policy and structural change and determine how it can scale deeply to better support community initiatives. Additionally, the WWP will need to develop a broader funding base and use a combination of funding sources to deliver its work in the future.

Acknowledgments

Special acknowledgment must be given to the review participants who took time out of their busy schedules to provide feedback. Their openness, insightful comments, and considered responses were greatly appreciated and have been instrumental for informing the review findings.

The WWP and the Waikato Region

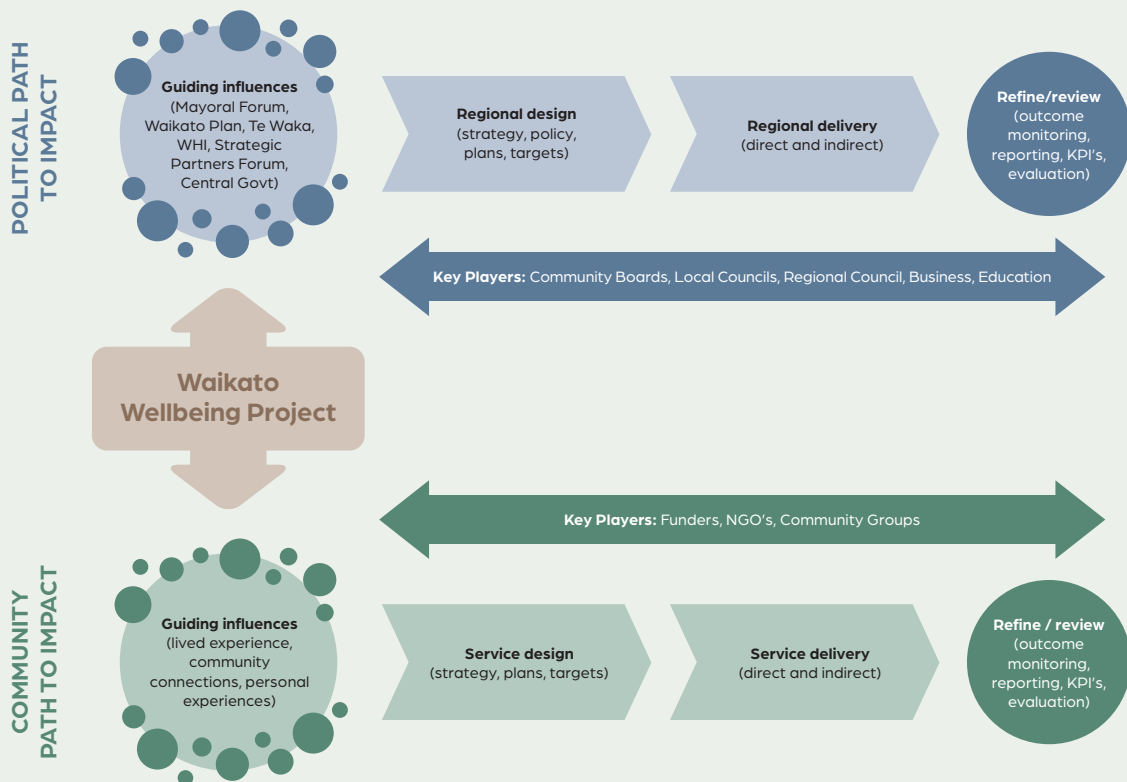
THE WWP GENESIS

The Waikato Wellbeing Project (WWP) was established in 2019. It is a regional initiative to support and promote a systems approach to achieving evidence-based, community-led priorities for improving wellbeing in the Waikato region¹.

The WWP initially emerged from conversations between the Waikato Regional Council and WEL Energy Trust. These conversations identified that communities' lived experiences were often missing from political planning and policy development. Similarly, community initiatives were not always aligned with the strategies of the wider region and struggled to gain the momentum to deliver broad change.

As such, the WWP was created to connect the political and community sector decision-making processes by providing open and accessible knowledge and data for all parties to use to improve policy development, decisions, and initiatives.

Figure 1 Creation of the Waikato Wellbeing Project



¹Page 1 of the Partnership and Funding Agreement Between the Waikato Regional Council and WEL Energy Trust to Support the Achievement of the Waikato Wellbeing Project Targets.

HOW DOES THE WWP OPERATE?

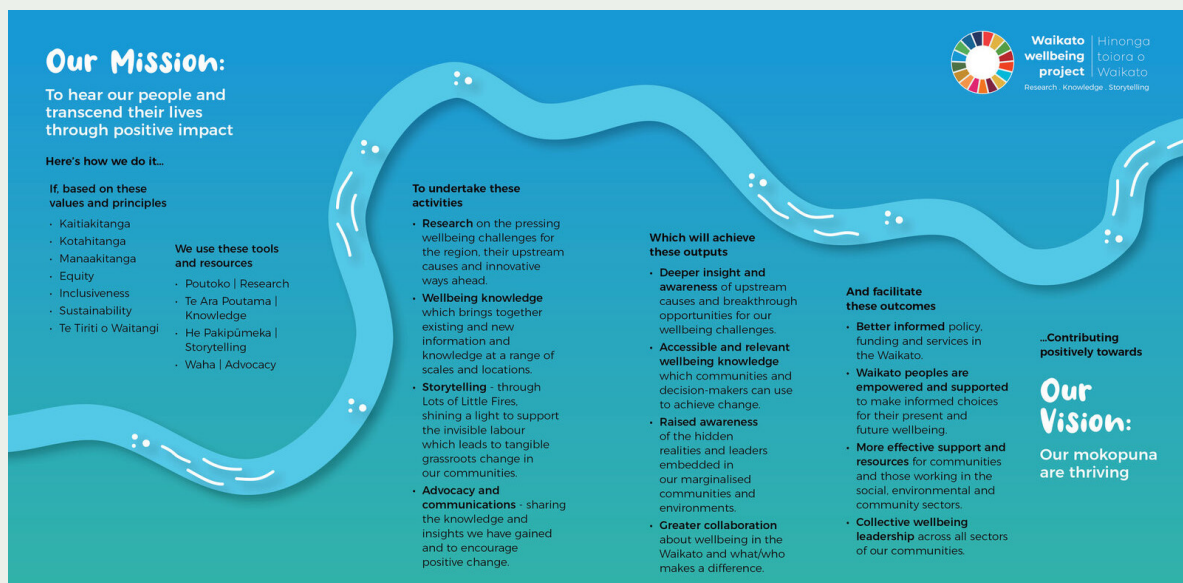
The WWP's original role was to facilitate connections between the political and community sectors by providing evidence based on lived experiences, data, and research. To drive this forward, a steering group of representatives from WEL Energy Trust and Waikato Regional Council established the following overarching structure for the WWP to operate under:

- **A framework to guide information needs:** At its inception, the group identified ten wellbeing goals based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG); these goals were deemed locally relevant and framed to reflect local indicators to guide the WWP's focus and reach. These indicators were referred to as the Waikato Wellbeing Targets and became the primary areas the WWP would operate across.
- **A direct connection to the community:** Upon selecting the SDGs, the steering group established Manu Taki, a group of 25 Waikato leaders who would catalyse the Waikato Wellbeing Targets into action. Manu Taki members were aligned with a specific SDG and charged with uplifting and leading the issues associated with that SDG at a regional level.
- **An advisory board and project director:** The steering group also established a director role (filled by Harvey Brookes) and a Kaitiaki Advisory Board (appointed in conjunction with the WWP Director). Members of the Waikato community applied for a board member position, and Waikato-Tainui nominated an Iwi member for a co-chair position. This board was charged with advising the WWP team on wellbeing matters.

WHAT DOES THE WWP DO?

The WWP's primary role is to support regional decision-making by advising those who can act in the wellbeing space. The WWP focuses on exploring complex problems where issues are interrelated, evolving, uncertain, and have a systemic impact. The primary ways in which the WWP provides support is through insight development, knowledge, storytelling, and advocacy. These activities are outlined in the WWP's Theory of Change, a copy of which is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 The WWP Theory of Change



Given the breadth of the original Waikato Wellbeing Targets, the WWP prioritised specific areas² and workstreams³ to focus on during its initial term. These focus areas were selected as they were considered most critical to the community and stakeholders. There was also an element of pragmatic acknowledgment that these were areas where developments were already underway but were not over-saturated with data, allowing the WWP to bring new insights and support initiatives at a localised level.

HOW IS THE WWP FUNDED?

The WWP partners with the central government, local government, philanthropic funders, iwi, and community leaders. WEL Energy Trust, Waikato Regional Council, and Trust Waikato provided the initial five-year funding for the WWP, which was agreed upon as follows:

- \$3,000,000 from WEL Energy Trust over five years
- \$450,000 from Trust Waikato over three years
- Contributions from Waikato Regional Council, mainly in kind, for the initial five years

Additionally, smaller donations from individual funders have been made including The Glenice and John Gallagher Foundation, the Ministry of Education, and the Medical Assurance Society (MAS) Foundation.

Some impact research projects are jointly funded (cash and in-kind) through partnerships, such as the Rangatahi Opportunity and the Hauraki Opportunity.

²Kai, youth, housing, and responsible consumption.

³Impact projects, knowledge, advocacy, communications, and leadership support.

Deliverables and Funding Review

REVIEW REQUEST

In early 2024, the board of WEL Energy Trust reviewed its investment in the WWP. While the original funding arrangements were retained, the board requested a review of the WWP's deliverables and funding to understand the WWP's achievements and consider funding paths or channels that may assist in the future.

REVIEW APPROACH

This review used a qualitative approach to gather evidence and insights about the WWP's achievements. It combined face-to-face and online interviews with three participant groups: funders and capital beneficiaries (n=7), current and previous WWP Kaitiaki Advisory Board members (n=7), and stakeholders (n=22). To ensure a breadth of views were included, stakeholders included community members who had a high (n=7), moderate (n=7), or low (n=8) proximity to the work the WWP undertakes. A list of participants is included in the appendix.

The deliverables addressed in the review are the core activities that the WWP undertakes, specifically:

- **Research:** Deeper insight and awareness of upstream causes and breakthrough opportunities for wellbeing challenges. The workstream associated with this deliverable is Poutoko—research impact projects.
- **Wellbeing Knowledge:** Accessible and relevant wellbeing knowledge that communities and decision-makers can use to achieve change. The workstream associated with this deliverable is Te Ara Poutama.
- **Storytelling:** Raised awareness of the hidden realities and leaders embedded in marginalised communities and environments. The workstream associated with this deliverable is Lots of Little Fires.
- **Advocacy and communication:** Greater collaboration about wellbeing in the Waikato and what/who makes a difference. The workstream associated with this deliverable is the support of the region's community leaders and advocacy and communications across all the above workstreams.

Specific criteria were developed for each deliverable and funding area and shaped into a rubric to assess overall achievement. These criteria, created in consultation with the Kaitiaki Advisory Board, were used to determine what good performance looks like. The appendix includes further details about the rubric and the criteria for each deliverable.

Review Findings

This review is structured under three parts:

- **What so?** The initial section outlines some basic feedback regarding the extent to which the deliverables have achieved their intended goals and how well the funding facilitates this work.
- **So what?** The second section examines what the WWP brings to the region through these deliverables. Specifically, it looks at the WWP's strengths and some of the challenges it faces to fully achieving its deliverables.
- **Now what?** The final section examines the WWP's future, specifically its role and connections, workstreams, and resourcing.

WHAT SO?

Figure 3 below provides an overview of the performance of the funding and deliverables measures⁴. Overall, the WWP has achieved solid results for most of the deliverables and the funding measures, with excellent outcomes observed for storytelling. The content within this section summarises the main points related to these findings.

Figure 3 WWP deliverables and funding overview



Deliverable 1: Research

Building deeper insight and awareness of upstream causes and breakthrough opportunities for wellbeing challenges.

The WWP has produced insight reports, including the Rangatahi Opportunity, the Kai Challenge, the Waikato Responsible Consumption Challenge, and data for the Waikato Housing Initiative. Additional wellbeing reports are also being undertaken in the Hauraki area and among young women.

These projects have performed well in providing a clear and consistent understanding of the causes of issues and challenging people's thinking about these issues. Notably, the research projects have taken positive steps in starting conversations and raising organisations' awareness of the wider wellbeing picture.

⁴A detailed breakdown is provided in the appendix.

The most significant criticism of this deliverable was the lack of turning the research insights into action, with some claiming that the work was simply re-stating what was already known in the community rather than moving this into tangible action. An example of such comments related to the Rangatahi Opportunity project. In this instance stakeholders see significant research has been undertaken but commented that they were not aware of a solution that directly eventuated from this work.

However, in counter to the above point, some participants noted that the body of research the WWP holds will build over time, and tangible actions and initiatives will emerge as knowledge grows and communities adopt and build on the most relevant findings. These participants noted that solutions take time to create and that poorly planned and rushed single-provider solutions will fail to have the longevity needed to solve complex problems. Additionally, other participants noted that further strengthening the connection between individual research areas will be necessary to understand how different issues interact and affect overall wellbeing, which is important for delivering multi-faceted solutions to the complex problems the WWP addresses.



We have the same question sometimes in economic development around what the deliverables are because often the outcomes are actually owned by others. Our job is to put people in a room, facilitate the conversation, get something going, but then wherever people do something with that or how effectively they use it is sometimes up to them that we don't have control over...the question comes back to what is the WWP's role [in this research]? Is their role to take up the fight for every sort of wellbeing issue across the Waikato because there's thousands and thousands of them, and how do you pick which ones you champion and which ones you highlight? So I sort of see their role more as working at a system level, and so the outcome is creating the system and trying to get uptake of that system or that approach or style. – Stakeholder

Deliverable 2: Wellbeing Knowledge

Providing accessible and relevant wellbeing knowledge that communities and decision-makers can use to achieve change.

One of the WWP's key deliverables was Te Ara Poutama, the Waikato Wellbeing Knowledge Initiative. This centralised evidence base provides data and insights to decision-makers and communities in Waikato to empower them to make decisions about their own wellbeing. It includes both qualitative and quantitative data and aids people, groups, or communities in finding their own definition of wellbeing.

While this initiative will inevitably grow over time, early development suggests it is simple to access and has a range of frameworks that can be applied at a regional and local level. Participants noted that this will only strengthen as the data sources that inform the insights expand.

Importantly, Te Ara Poutama was seen as independent of other entities and was not developed with any specific policy or funding outcome in mind. This factor was critical as the data has no particular 'slant' or alliance requiring it to justify resource allocation or policy priorities. The agnostic nature of the work allows it to provide a breadth of information across sources and sectors. Furthermore, the insights created through Te Ara Poutama were seen as robust and rigorous, given the external and independent input provided in framing the initiative.

The primary criticism of Te Ara Poutama was the ability for the data to drive change within the community. This criticism stemmed from two significant concerns:

1. Although data is readily available, it is not yet in a format that users can simply pick up and apply, reducing its ability to generate change.
2. Te Ara Poutama has yet to start bringing the data pieces together to demonstrate the intersectionality of issues and big-picture trends, turning the work from data into practical insights.

However, it should be noted that the WWP team identified both criticisms before undertaking the review and recently appointed an analyst to address these specific challenges.

Deliverable 3: Storytelling

Raising awareness of the hidden realities and leaders embedded in marginalised communities and environments.

Storytelling in the WWP was about raising the awareness of the community's lived experience to those in decision-making positions. The primary way the WWP approached this was through the Lots of Little Fires (LoLF) programme. This series of short videos showcased the hidden realities of people in Waikato communities and those who were making a change.

LoLF has been hugely successful and was one of the most well-known and appreciated components of the WWP. LoLF's strengths were making video participants feel seen, validated, and positive about themselves and their work while increasing awareness of positive acts undertaken in the community.

Importantly, LoLF videos have provided a tool for those profiled to progress their cause and advocate for greater support. The most recent example of such progression was the Len Reynolds Trust's donation to the Western Community Centre.

The biggest question of the LoLF programme was how to increase the reach of these videos to inspire and assist others in replicating these acts in their own community and to drive community-led development. Participants suggested that having greater capacity to follow on from the videos and assist in building and adapting the solutions the videos showcase will help increase the impact the videos can have.

Some consideration could also be given to further integrating these videos into the broader work the WWP undertakes, particularly regarding issue selection and the ability to support the acts demonstrated with data and insights. However, greater integration should be carefully considered as the success of these videos has been built on respectful and trusting relationships, which enable the video's participants to convey their genuine feelings rather than appearing as contrived or reported. Removing this would challenge the programme's authenticity and, ultimately, impact.

Deliverable 4: Advocacy and Communication

Increasing collaboration about wellbeing in the Waikato and what/who makes a difference.

An integral part of the WWP involved using its position to elevate and drive regional wellbeing awareness. The WWP drives awareness primarily through presentations, submissions, and regional engagement, both at a formal and informal level. Key work in this space included presentations to local government elected representatives (2022), a submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry "A fair chance for all" (2022), a submission on the Review of the Future for Local Government (2023), submissions on the regional and district long-term plans (2024), a submission on Hamilton City Council's Waste Minimisation Strategy (2024), and a submission on the Treaty Principles Bill (2024). Furthermore, the WWP has held six-monthly hui with Manu Taki and community sector leaders, most recently in December 2024.

Review participants provided positive feedback about both the submissions and the engagement work the WWP undertakes. Submissions provide a formal advocacy process, and feedback indicates they have been important for elevating and advocating wellbeing issues; indeed, they provided a straightforward option for re-framing topical issues through a wellbeing lens.

However, stakeholder feedback was more positive about the hui that the WWP facilitates. Primarily, this provided face-to-face connections and assisted in building engagement across multiple sectors. In particular, feedback indicates that hui provided a mechanism to start conversations that would not otherwise occur at a cross-sector level.

The main criticism across the advocacy and communication deliverable was that there had been a lack of tangible outcomes from the connections and relationships built through the hui and associated events. While this has started to occur in pockets, e.g., through Go Eco moving into the kai space, it needs to be accelerated so that these connections can start to deliver real change to the community.

There were also calls from some participants for greater advocacy of grassroots issues, with explicit requests for the WWP to advocate more directly to decision-makers beyond the submission process. These participants felt the WWP could do more to challenge the narratives around wellbeing issues within the region and needed to have bolder and braver conversations to interrogate the status quo. Given the knowledge, insights, and connections the WWP has, these participants felt the WWP was well-placed to speak with authority on many wellbeing issues and also noted this has become increasingly relevant as there were no other collective forums to elevate wellbeing in the region.



I think it's great the funders did put funding into it [the WWP]. I think it did get us all talking and got us on a bit of a united vision [around] what some of the challenges are and the goals. And I think that's a good thing...I think it is important to try and bring us together. We can't always do it, but I think that is a good thing that we're all kind of on the same page. – Stakeholder

Funding

The primary funding source for the WWP was through philanthropic grants from WEL Energy Trust and Trust Waikato. WEL Energy Trust was a founding funder and committed to funding three million dollars over five years. The funding from Trust Waikato commenced in year two and provides funds for specific community-led research projects through Te Ara Poutama.

The original funding arrangement with WEL Energy Trust was outlined in the partnership agreement, which detailed each party's contribution and support, reporting requirements, and annual funding allocations. The WWP has provided six-monthly reports to the primary funder on how the funds have been allocated and the proportions of funds provided to projects. The WWP has also provided deliverable reporting to the WEL Energy Trust Board for its six-monthly meetings.

However, feedback from WEL Energy Trust suggested that the reporting has failed to demonstrate the tangible change that the WWP has made in the community. Specifically, the reporting has been output-focused and has not adequately outlined the impact directly resulting from the WWP's work. The perceptions of a lack of impact have been amplified by observations of ambiguity in the partnership agreement regarding precisely what the WWP was tasked to deliver and how it would provide this. Such concerns have led the WEL Energy Trust board to question how the WWP adds value over and above the funding it gives directly to community organisations. WEL Energy Trust also challenged the WWP's sustainability due to its narrow funding base.

To some extent, this sentiment was also echoed by WEL Energy Trust's capital beneficiaries. Feedback from the capital beneficiaries was that they see value in the work the WWP does but felt there were opportunities for closer alignment with their local wellbeing endeavours, and there was an opportunity to remedy this through a closer relationship between the WWP and local authorities.

Feedback from Trust Waikato was that the relationship and funds were working well. There was a strong alignment between Trust Waikato's goals and the WWP's goals, as the WWP's work supports community-led projects by building on localised wellbeing knowledge and understanding.

Despite the mixed reviews, the current funding approach also has positives in that the multi-year funding meant there could be a plan for the WWP. It is a credit to the WEL Energy Trust that the innovative funding approach was adopted, as it provided the freedom to 'try something new' and explore new ways of working. This element has also been enhanced through the provision of funds from Trust Waikato, which has allowed the WWP to explore ideas and concepts about the issues that affect wellbeing, e.g., Hauraki Opportunity.

This flexible and high-trust model has also allowed the community voice to have equal participation in the project's direction. This approach has removed the power dynamic of the funder-grantee relationship and allowed the project to adopt a relational approach to undertaking its work.

SO WHAT?

When considering what the WWP brings to the region, it was important to look at the WWP deliverables in their totality, not simply as individual activities. Feedback from stakeholders indicated they saw value in the WWP's work, and the project is much needed within Waikato. Even those who were critics of the project recognised the role that the WWP can have in progressing wellbeing forward. As one participant explained:

"I can't stress enough that regardless of my critique, I do think the project has been worthwhile, not without its frustrations, but we are glad to have been there because it has in a non-measurable kind of way through relationships, supported our work and allowed us to grow our work." – Stakeholder.

Benefits of the WWP

When looking at the WWP in its totality, there were clear benefits of having the WWP within the region, specifically in relation to cross-sector development and regional knowledge growth. These benefits have been discussed below.

Building cross-sectional relationships

One of the primary benefits of the WWP was how it facilitates building relationships between people within the community sector by bringing them together for a common reason. This has strengthened and developed the building blocks for relationships that can create future impact. A large contributor to these relationships was the hui that the WWP runs. These events have improved over time as the WWP has moved to focus on key issues rather than wellbeing generally and have brought a wider range of people together, ensuring the events are cross-sectional and assembling a range of perspectives on a specific problem.



This is not research for us, it's a research for the whole community. We couldn't have done the research part on our own because we don't have that many connections. So it was all about getting as many other organisations and schools and everybody involved in spreading the message about the survey so that we can get more results. And then now that the results are here, now the real work starts and it's about having those conversations and going to all the different organisations. This is what the research shows, what are we going to do about this together because there's no way that we can do anything about it on our own. – Stakeholder

Easy to access

Feedback throughout the review demonstrated that the WWP was accessible and easy for community organisations to engage with. This starkly differs from prior regional collective initiatives, which were more challenging to raise a community voice within, e.g., Te Waka or The Waikato Plan. This easy engagement was primarily because no single organisation has more power or control than any other; thus, it removes the power

imbalance often evident in traditional funding relationships. This open access was critical to the WWP's success, as the ability to engage freely was key to elevating the authentic lived experiences of those in the community.

Breadth of perspective

By the nature of the WWP's work, it has the advantage of understanding wellbeing issues more broadly than any single entity. This breadth of view and cross-sector connections helps to break through silos and to start creating networks between organisations and concepts, allowing different perspectives to be brought together to seek solutions. Some strong steps have been made in this space, and there were signs that this will grow as the WWP's data sources and inputs grow and build, allowing it to draw stronger and more detailed insights and implications.

Independent research that will grow over time

In keeping with the above point, the research and insights that the WWP has created can build a bigger picture than any single organisation's understanding or resources can produce; consequently, the research can go deeper and broader and take an elevated view of issues. The WWP's research is also independent of government agencies, allowing for a balanced and honest assessment of the wellbeing issues and challenges. The recent kai research exemplifies the breadth of work that can be undertaken through this process.



I respect the value that some of the work that I've seen [it is]...robust data analysis that feeds a narrative to bring complex problems to light, backed by data, but in a relatively simple way to understand, which is no mean feat. And that'll be my observation of where it has added value to some of the real challenges. – Stakeholder

Stakeholders expect that as this body of research grows, so will its impact. Undoubtedly, no research project can fully understand all facets of wellbeing issues. However, the WWP work acts as a stepping stone to the growth of such knowledge. Ultimately, the long-term value will be demonstrating a deep understanding of the multi-factor and interconnected nature of wellbeing issues and looking for solutions that can concurrently benefit multiple sectors and address multiple issues.

Challenges for the WWP

Despite the above benefits, the WWP has not been without its challenges, some of which have been significant impediments to the project having greater impact in the region. The challenges and barriers have been primarily related to how the WWP's outputs were leveraged and the relationships and connections that the WWP itself holds. These points have been discussed below.

Lack of clarity of role

The WWP has sometimes struggled to communicate and clarify its role and the value that it provides. Indeed, it took time to establish itself in the region, and stakeholders reported a lag and a loss of momentum between the project inception and the appointment of a project director in the initial year. This was followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning the project took significant time to find its feet after a seemingly considerable launch.

Some participants also observed that the work and role that the WWP takes has evolved over time. For many the space that the project originally occupied was unclear and how it was going to tackle the brief it was given was not always obvious. This issue was compounded by the fact that the project has not always told its own story well and in enough places across the region, choosing to champion the projects it completes rather than its function in the region. This has led to a lack of clarity around the WWP's role, particularly when compared to other regional collective initiatives.



I don't understand, I honestly don't quite still get the difference between what Te Waka was trying to achieve, what the Wellbeing Project is trying to achieve. And then there's probably a bunch of smaller sub-agency pieces. So I still don't quite understand how they'll fit together and I'm a systems thinker if you get what I mean. So that's my problem. I need to know how this works so that then we can plug in and enable. – Stakeholder

Furthermore, there has been some disagreement amongst stakeholders about the role of the SDGs and their applicability to the Waikato region. While these goals and targets were adapted to a local context, they can be seen as being derived from a Eurocentric framework which was less relevant to the New Zealand context. Such disagreement has made it hard to reconcile the project's work, which was primarily place-based, with the more international goals determined by the SDGs.



I think when they started, it was probably a huge brief, and then over time they've had to try and say, okay, well what is achievable? And who is able to put the energy behind these things? So therefore there's been a refinement as they've gone along. And I think that has to be part of the process. I don't think anybody specifically knew exactly, because you're also talking about a movement that's led by a community. – Stakeholder

Criticism around a perceived 'lack of action'

A key criticism of the project relates to the perceived lack of action that has resulted from the investment in the WWP. Given the scope of the issues the WWP addresses it was unlikely that any systemic change would be achieved in the WWP's initial five-year term. However, a few key elements have challenged the WWP's ability to catalyse its insights into tangible action.

There have been limited levers by which the WWP can engage in action. While often compared to The Southern Initiative, the WWP was different in its ability to influence or direct from within a local government entity (an element that was key to the Southern Initiative's success in moving from research to action). The most efficient ways for the WWP to engage with regional decision-makers were primarily through other collective entities, specifically the Waikato Plan, Te Waka, or the Regional Funders Group. The dismantling of these entities over time has made it difficult to elevate the lived experience into regional-level strategy decisions. The WWP also has had limited connection with local government Chief Executives or the Waikato Mayoral Forum, which has also meant that the work of the WWP was not aligned with local-level political decisions; the impending removal of wellbeing focus from the local government setting adds yet another challenge to establishing meaningful relationships in this space.

Where the project has found alignment, the parties involved have managed to translate the insights provided by the WWP into meaningful action. An example of this is work in the housing space. Working in partnership with the Waikato Housing Initiative (WHI), the WWP's insights and inputs have informed key knowledge areas, including housing supply, affordability, and insecurity. From a qualitative perspective, Lots of Little Fires demonstrated the importance of focusing on housing insecurity, particularly for the region's youth. This content challenged the dominant WHI narrative and highlighted the 'invisible cohort' of people suffering from housing insecurity who are often missed within the social housing system. This work supported agencies to provide better transitional housing for young mothers and has started a movement of ethical landlords and property managers who are willing to support at-risk rangatahi into housing.

The second area that has challenged the WWP has been the lack of resources to better support community-led initiatives. While significant work has been undertaken to uncover the hidden realities of marginalised communities or research the issues that affect wellbeing, the project has not had the capacity or capability to reach further into communities to offer greater support. Creating action in this space would entail building on the opportunities recognised in the research and aligning these with projects already in place in the community. This would require skill sets of convening, community-led development, and an intrapreneurial focus, which are not currently within the WWP team at the scale needed to make a difference.

Misaligned circles of support

Different parties support the WWP team in several ways; however, this has not always assisted the WWP's progress. The role of Manu Taki in the project has not been clear and, therefore, has not delivered the intended benefits. Specifically, there has been a lack of clarity around how Manu Taki were selected, how they fitted into the project, how they could practically contribute to the project beyond their usual line of work, or how they should work with other Manu Taki responsible for different SDGs. At best, the Manu Taki have supported the project within the public sphere. However, having these fixed roles in place may have impeded access to others within the community who work in key areas and who could bring innovative ideas and community connections to the project.

Similarly, the role of the Kaitiaki Advisory Board was also unclear. The advisory board did not take a governance role, nor were they expert advisors on wellbeing. As a result, the Kaitiaki Advisory Board has been unable to provide substantial guidance on the checks and balances required for the project to meet its objectives, nor could it provide input into translating research into policy or action.

Finally, the primary funder for the WWP has undergone several leadership changes over the life of the project, both in terms of elected board members and the chief executive role. With each transition, there has been a re-interpretation of the original partnership agreement and challenges to the specifics of the agreement. This change, while inevitable, has meant that there have been challenges in building a relationship between the WWP and the WEL Energy Trust Board, and this has limited the extent to which WEL Energy Trust has been able to leverage its investment.

Furthermore, the project's initial funding model of WEL Energy Trust as the sole and significant funder may have limited the investment from other parties with a view that the project was already 'well funded'. To be a truly collaborative project, the WWP needs to have a breadth of input and ownership of the project. Indeed the work the WWP has undertaken has grown and gained greater traction as other partners have been secured.

NOW WHAT?

The feedback gathered in this review suggests the WWP is now at a critical time in its journey forward. Indeed, a lot has changed in the five years since the project’s inception, and there is now a need to reconsider WWP’s role within the region. Likely, some level of change in structure, accessible skill sets, and engagement practices will need to occur to ensure the WWP continues to build on the work it has completed. The early steps the project has taken and the work it completes show signs of supporting good decision-making, which will likely strengthen as the project matures and relationships and insights develop further.

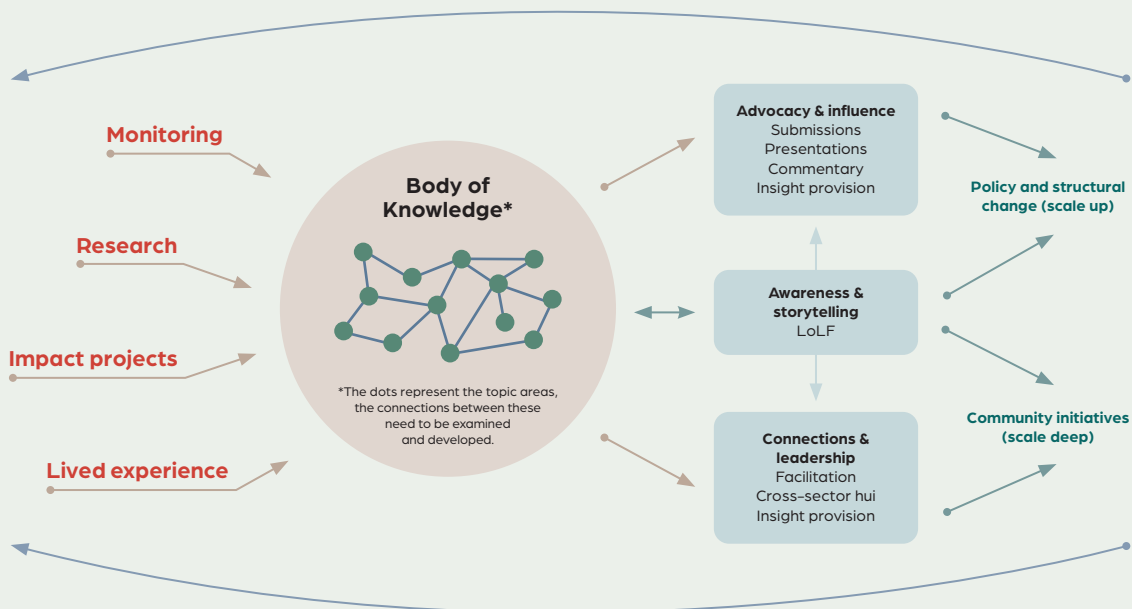
When considering its future, the WWP should address the following points to ensure it moves towards supporting positive change within the region.

Role and connections

What is the WWP’s role, and how can its work have a more significant impact in the region?

There is no specific need to change the type of work the project undertakes. Indeed, the project’s work is sound, based on best practices, and well thought out. What needs to be reconsidered is who this work is completed for and how it can add value to the region. As identified by stakeholders, the value in the work that the WWP undertakes is in the collective knowledge built across projects and through the interactions it facilitates. One possible way to demonstrate how this knowledge is leveraged is shown in the diagram below, which depicts a central body of insights that the WWP could use to influence change.

Figure 4 The WWP’s role within the region



The WWP needs to explore how this collective knowledge can become a more significant catalyst for regional change. For this, the WWP needs to consider how it can scale its work up to affect policy decisions and scale its work deeply to directly affect communities (the elements identified in green font).

To scale up, the WWP needs to find a way to leverage its work into policy and strategy decision-making to ensure long-term change. Translating this collective knowledge into policy decision-making is difficult without strong support and connections with regional and government bodies. The WWP needs to find (or create) the right avenues and audiences to receive its work.

To scale deeply, the WWP needs to find a way to connect with and support change occurring in the community. The primary strategy for initiatives which scale deeply is a focus on using stories to shift norms and beliefs and investing in transformative learning and communities of practice⁵. Again, this requires an audience willing and able to act on this knowledge.



I think, I mean this is hard work. It's not easy. There's no blueprint, there's no silver bullets. There are no one way to do it. But my experience lends me to think, to keep people's confidence and trust, you have to be demonstrating it in action at the same time as doing the knowledge work. And also, I think... people find it extraordinarily difficult to imagine things different from what they currently are. And I think this is a challenge for an initiative like this. So you have to help people to re-imagine it. And some of that, you have to actually start doing some things differently, even on a small scale, so people can start to see an alternative way of doing things. – Stakeholder

Workstreams

How can the WWP build more significant insights across the data?

The topics and areas that the WWP has developed research around are well grounded. However, there is an opportunity to connect these areas to build more nuanced insights and provide depth and detail. Building connections between the topic areas is crucial as it helps to strengthen the work by introducing different perspectives into the findings. It also helps to illuminate more innovative solutions or where there are options for outcomes which can have multiple implications. One example is the work on housing and kai; with evidence that people prioritise housing needs over kai, there is an opportunity to strengthen and better understand how these elements affect each other and identify solutions that may alleviate stress in both areas.

⁵ Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Advancing Systemic Social Innovation and the Learning Process to Support it. Prepared for J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and Tamarack Institute by Darcy Riddle and Michele-Lee Moore (October 2015).

How can the WWP continue to facilitate relationships within the region?

A key strength of this work is the project's ability to bring people together across sectors and roles. Interestingly, stakeholders recognise that no other entities are currently positioned to replace the work the WWP undertakes. Specifically, no organisation has the ability to bring people together in a neutral and independent format for the betterment of the community.

It will be essential to consider how the WWP can build on the successes of the recent hui and who the best people are to have at the table to enable the development of ideas and innovation. Critically, the WWP must also consider how it ensures these discussions progress into meaningful action and how new workstreams can be developed further.



I see the value in the future and even now for the Wellbeing Project is to convert the data and information into insights and then tell the story and communicate and go out there as a regional think tank and with a credible information base and whether it's for next year's local government elections for example, tell the stories from different perspectives and bring that change people's ideas and maybe behaviour whether it's for voting or for other staff making decisions. I think that providing those insights and communication needs to be really independent. – Stakeholder

Resourcing and structure***What is the most appropriate structure for the WWP moving forward?***

Finally, the WWP also needs to reconsider its surrounding support structures and funding arrangements. In particular, the project could look to re-align its operating model to ensure that it has adequate and appropriate resources (internal skills and knowledge) and support (external connections and funding) to achieve the outcomes it is looking for. Specific areas to consider are the role of Manu Taki, the Kaitiaki Advisory Board, and its broader relationships with the project's funders and sponsors.

Furthermore, the WWP needs to build a broader funding base to ensure future sustainability. One option could be to consider splitting its funding sources. Specifically, the WWP could seek funding for its core functions (research, advocacy, knowledge, and storytelling); this funding is likely to come from philanthropic trusts or grants and may require a change to the current legal structure of the WWP, e.g., a transition to a formal charity rather than a project. Additional funding could then be sourced for specific research projects; such funding could be sought from sponsorships, commercial, government, or academic partnerships. Involving a broader base of funding will not only assist with the sustainability of the project but will grow the collective ownership of the work and strengthen the collaborative ethos of the project.

Appendices

REVIEW APPROACH

This review was undertaken using a qualitative data collection approach. A qualitative approach was selected over a quantitative approach as it was necessary to understand the experiences of those who have been involved in the WWP in sufficient detail rather than the perceptions of the WWP amongst the broader population.

The specific qualitative method used for this review was in-depth interviews, which followed a semi-structured discussion guide. Thirty-six interviews were completed online or face-to-face between October 18th and December 11th, 2024.

ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING DELIVERABLES ACHIEVEMENT AND FUNDING

The review focuses on how well the deliverables have been achieved and how well the funding model has worked. To understand the extent to which the WWP was delivering on its intended activities, a set of criteria and measures were created to determine successful achievement.

The review used a simple rubric as the basis for the analysis of this work. This involved the creation of criteria for each deliverable and funding measure. Criteria were used to determine the elements that constitute good achievement and were assessed against a generic achievement scale. The criteria for each deliverable and funding measure were developed via discussions with Kaitiaki Advisory Board members and a review of the WWP's current Theory of Change. The final rubric is shown in the figure over the page.

Figure 5 Review rubric

Component	Criteria	Generic assessment
Deliverable 1: Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a clear and consistent understanding of upstream wellbeing causes • The research challenges thinking and understanding and breaks down barriers or perceptions • The causes of wellbeing and their interconnectedness are known • The research is used to change how people act and start innovation 	<p>Always: Clear example of excellent performance in this domain, no weaknesses</p>
Deliverable 2: Wellbeing Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The data is easy to access • There is a range of data/frameworks that can be applied at a local level • The data is relevant/usable for decision-making • The data drives change, and knowledge is used to generate change in practices. 	<p>Almost always: Strong overall performance but not quite excellent, no weaknesses of any consequence</p>
Deliverable 3: Storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those in the videos feel seen, validated, and positive • There is increased awareness of the acts within the community • The videos help the causes to progress or advocate for themselves • The videos inspire others to see the potential to replicate acts in their community 	<p>Mostly: Reasonably good performance overall, a few weaknesses</p>
Deliverable 4: Advocacy and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a breadth of engagement across sectors. • Connections between sectors are building, and there are new conversations happening. • The WWP has become embedded in the collaboration space as a leader and a facilitator. • The WWP elevates wellbeing issues and is an advocate for policy change (role can be as a supporter or as a leader) • New workstreams are developed from new or strengthened collaborations. 	<p>Sometimes: Fair performance, some serious weaknesses</p>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity in what is being funded and how funds are being used • Sufficiently funded to deliver the goals of the project • A broad base of funding • Positive connection/relationship developed 	<p>Never: Poor performance, a number of weaknesses</p>
		<p>NA: Insufficient evidence: Evidence unavailable or of insufficient quality to determine performance</p>

REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

A total of 36 people participated in the review, representing a mix of stakeholders, funders, capital beneficiaries, and those involved in the Kaitiaki Advisory Board. The review participants are listed below alongside their organisation where relevant.

Kaitiaki Advisory Board

Chris Williams

Delwyn Abraham

Dujon Cullingford

Justin Connolly

Mike Rolton

Rebekah Graham

Samantha Lee

Funders and Capital Beneficiaries

Dennis Turton (Trust Waikato)

Gavin Ion (Waikato District Council)

Janet Carson (Hamilton City Council)

Karen Bennett (Waikato Regional Council)

Lance Vervoot (Hamilton City Council)

Marcel Manders (WEL Energy Trust)

Rachel Afeaki (WEL Energy Trust)

Stakeholders

Anna Casey-Cox (Hamilton City Council)

Beat Huser (Waikato Regional Council)

Brad Jackson (The University of Waikato)

Corren Ngerengere (Waipā District Council)

Gael Surgenor

Helen Flynn (Thames Coromandel District Council)

Ilana Frost (Waikato Housing Initiative)

Ioana Manu (Hamilton City Council)

Jeremy Mayall (Creative Waikato)

Jo Wrigley (GoEco)

Joe Wilson

Katie McLaren (Hauraki District Council)

Mark Rawson (Kāinga Ora)

Melissa Gibson (Len Reynolds Trust)

Mitch King (Thames Coromandel District Council)

Neil Tolan (Western Community Centre)

Norm Hill (Te Hira)

Riikka Anderson (YWCA)

Rogena Sterling (The University of Waikato)

Tamia Campbell (Te Korowai Hauora o Hauraki)

Tania Jones

Tania Witheford (CELF)

DELIVERABLE AND FUNDING BREAKDOWN

The achievement for each of the criteria within the rubric is shown in the tables below.

Deliverable 1: Research Deeper insight and awareness of upstream causes and breakthrough opportunities for our wellbeing challenges. <i>Key workstreams: Poutoko – research impact projects</i>	
There is a clear and consistent understanding of upstream wellbeing causes	Almost always
The research challenges thinking and understanding and breaks down barriers or perceptions.	Almost always
The causes of wellbeing and their interconnectedness are known	Mostly
The research is used to change how people act and start innovation	Sometimes

Deliverable 2: Wellbeing Knowledge Accessible and relevant wellbeing knowledge that communities and decision-makers can use to achieve change. <i>Key workstreams: Te Ara Poutama</i>	
The data is easy to access	Almost always
There is a range of data/frameworks that can be applied at a local level	Almost always
The data is relevant/usable for decision-making	Mostly
The data drives change, and knowledge is used to generate change in practices.	Sometimes

Deliverable 3: Storytelling Raised awareness of the hidden realities and leaders embedded in our marginalised communities and environments. <i>Key workstreams: LoLF</i>	
Those in the videos feel seen, validated, and positive	Always
There is increased awareness of the acts within the community	Almost always
The videos help the causes to progress or advocate for themselves	Always
The videos inspire others to see the potential to replicate acts in their community.	NA

Deliverable 4: Advocacy and communication

Greater collaboration about wellbeing in the Waikato and what/who makes a difference.

Key workstreams: The support of the region's community leaders as well as advocacy and communications across all the above workstreams.

There is a breadth of engagement across sectors	Almost always
Connections between sectors are building, and there are new conversations happening.	Almost always
The WWP has become embedded in the collaboration space as a leader and a facilitator.	Mostly
The WWP elevates wellbeing issues and is an advocate for policy change (role can be as a supporter or as a leader)	Mostly
New workstreams are developed from new or strengthened collaborations	Sometimes

Funding

Clarity in what is being funded and how funds are being used	Almost always
Sufficiently funded to deliver the goals of the project	Mostly
A broad base of funding	Sometimes
Positive connection/relationship developed	Sometimes

