

Executive summary

Purpose of the report

This is the first Outcomes Report to be published by the Canal & River Trust (the Trust).

The Trust acknowledges that it cannot depend solely on storytelling but must be able to demonstrate its impact more persuasively through an evidence base, to prove and validate the difference it is making to individuals, communities and society. The Trust's ambition is for waterways to make a difference locally, to be inclusive and relevant. There is significant potential and opportunity to achieve this ambition and for waterways to contribute to personal, community and societal wellbeing.

To demonstrate and evidence that our waterways are 'transforming places and enriching lives', we recognise the necessity to measure the value of the multipurpose nature of our waterways in terms of:

- how they are being used by others as platforms for a wide range of activity;
- the difference that our activities and interventions are making to local people's lives; and
- the contributions they are making to the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the nation.

To be credible, it is important that we publish robust and transparent evidence-based outcome reporting, which can track trends and stand up to external scrutiny. This evidence base will help to demonstrate that the waterways are a truly cross-cutting policy theme and also demonstrate the contribution that waterways are making to personal, community and societal wellbeing in England and Wales. We are seeking to build an evidence base that supports a shift away from traditional and narrow perspectives of waterways towards a wider recognition in policy terms, that truly reflects the cross-cutting nature of waterways' contribution to wellbeing in its widest sense.

Through robust measurement, the Trust will be able to:

- prove and validate to national and devolved policy and decision makers, as well as to statutory and voluntary funders and partners, the value generated from investing in waterways and their waterside communities; and
- improve effectiveness by understanding which of our activities and interventions make the greatest difference.



Our first Outcomes Report is a 'technical' report aimed at sharing our approach to measurement – explaining our 'whole framework' model and the measurement and evaluation methodologies being adopted.

In collaboration with the Sustainable Places Research Institute (PLACE) at Cardiff University, we have designed an Outcomes Measurement Framework (OMF) which:

- adopts a cross-cutting approach to outcome measurement that embraces the breadth of the potential impacts and outcomes that are being generated by the presence of the waterways themselves and the activities and interventions made by the Trust, partnerships and other organisations using our waterways as a platform;
- encompasses the diverse and 'multi-benefit' nature of waterways, the Trust's strategic goals and 2025 ambitions and the breadth of these potential impacts; as well as
- reflecting the strong synergy with wider economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing.

The report focuses on explaining the OMF design and methodologies being adopted and is supported by early insights learnt. We have deliberately not attempted to report on the outcomes delivered, as there is insufficient evidence at this stage to be robust and credible. It is hoped that by openly sharing our learnings and experiences, that this will encourage engagement and dialogue, galvanise support and build a strong foundation for our second Outcomes Report, to be published next year.

Report section summaries

SECTION 1: WHO WE ARE & WHY WE MEASURE

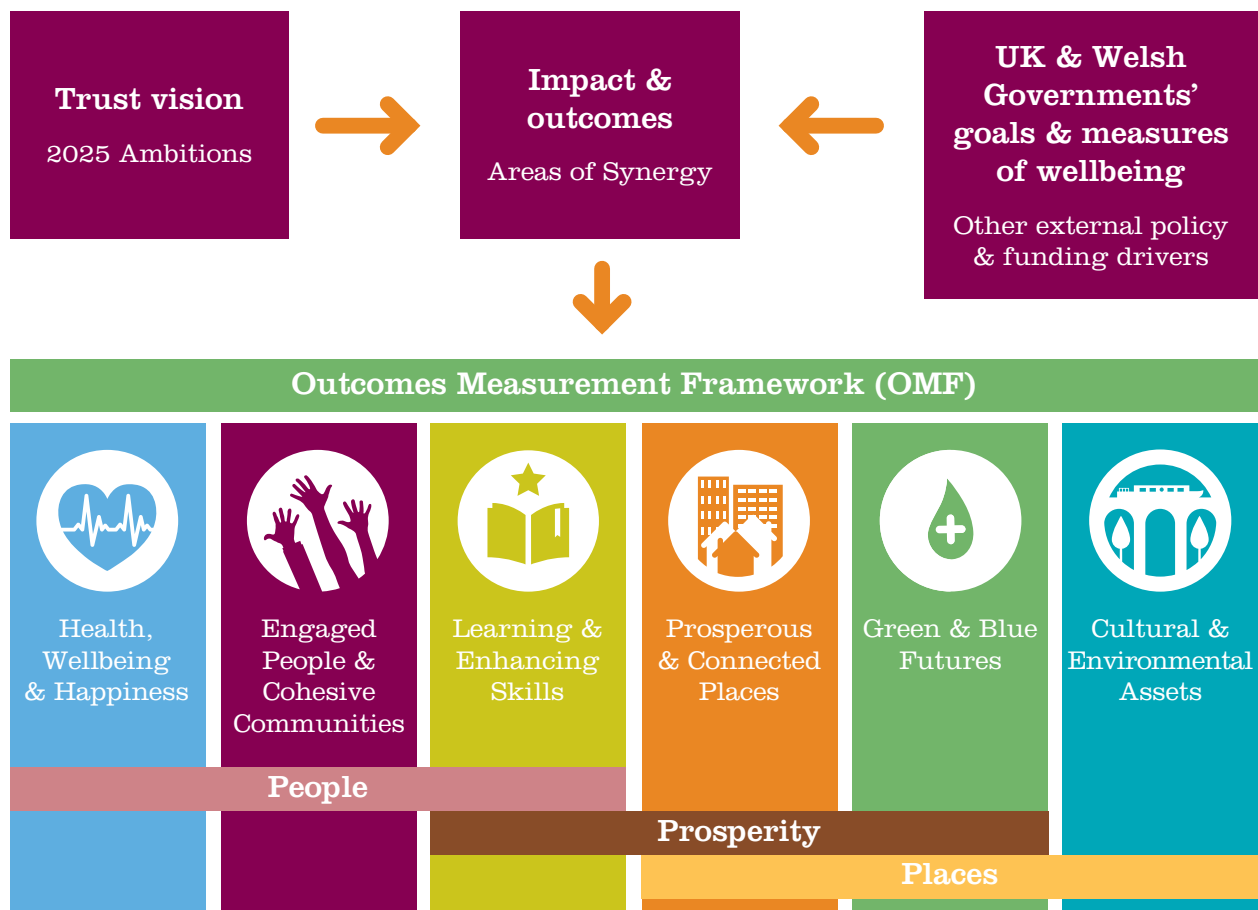
This section of the report provides background on:

- the organisation, our vision and ten-year strategy;
- our role as a waterway and wellbeing trust; and
- the reasons why we are engaging in measurement of outcomes.

SECTION 2: WHAT WE MEASURE – Waterways & Wellbeing

The Trust's ambition is for waterways to make a difference locally, to be inclusive and relevant. This section of the report outlines:

- the opportunities and challenges in realising this ambition;
- the synergy between our outcomes measurement work and the measurement frameworks for national wellbeing in England and Wales; and
- our Outcomes Measurement Framework (OMF).



SECTION 3: HOW WE MEASURE – Design

This section of the report explains our approach to building the Outcomes Measurement Framework (OMF) in collaboration with PLACE, including details of the guiding principles and research method adopted; our selection process for shortlisting the OMF indicators; and the production of logic chains to provide a 'route map' for implementation.

SECTION 4: HOW WE MEASURE – Governance & Baseline

In November 2015, our Board of Trustees approved the OMF and the establishment of an External Reference Group (ERG) to act as a sounding board for this framework. This section of the report sets out the governance that has been put in place to maintain rigour, scrutinise our evaluation and measurement activities as well as learn from best practice.

The starting point for the phased implementation of the OMF, has been to gain a better understanding of the communities living within our waterway corridors. This section also explains the demographic profiling and analysis work undertaken to-date to establish our baseline on waterway corridor populations in terms of reach potential and the diversity of demographic characteristics.

SECTION 5: HOW WE MEASURE – Measurement Tools & Data Sources

This section of the report sets out:

- our approach to evaluation and measurement – at three levels: national, local and project;
- selection of fourteen longitudinal study areas (LSAs) and two counterfactual study areas (CSAs) to demonstrate the degree of impact delivered over time at a local level but when aggregated can be used to present a national picture on waterways and wellbeing and track changes, impact and trends over time. These LSAs will be the areas where we focus our in-depth measurement and evaluation work across all the six OMF domains;
- the principal quantitative and qualitative measurement and valuation methodologies that we are utilising to evaluate and measure outcomes, namely:
 - Waterway Engagement Monitor (WEM);
 - towpath measurement of volume, type and motivations of towpath users;
 - evaluation of projects and day-to-day activities (including on building our new e-Project evaluation toolkit, repository of evidence for effective storytelling and suite of research tools); and
 - the valuation methodologies for monetisation that we intend to apply;
- the main activities associated with 'putting the measurement and evaluation infrastructure in place' so that we can start collating the data to build the evidence base.

SECTION 6: HOW WE MEASURE – Filling Knowledge Gaps

As part of the OMF development work, we identified two key areas where the Trust lacked proper insight and evidence to support our activities. This section of the report provides an overview our outcomes related research programme, which has focused on these two areas and has involved the Trust working with academia and sectoral experts, namely:

- understanding of the motivations and barriers to use by different communities, a participatory research project conducted by PLACE; and
- appreciation of the role that waterways could play in improving mental health outcomes, a desktop research project undertaken by the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare.

SECTION 7: HOW WE MEASURE – Findings & Insights

This section of the report seeks to outline what we have learnt so far from the national WEM monthly online survey, the local community surveys conducted in the fourteen LSAs and two CSAs, the first wave of towpath intercept surveys conducted in the LSAs and the findings and conclusions from the two aforementioned research projects. The insights gained have been grouped under the following headings:

- subjective Wellbeing (Personal);
- communities and their waterways;
- local identity, value and connections;
- physical and mental health; and
- motivations and barriers.

SECTION 8: HOW WE MEASURE – Future Plans

This final section of the report describes our planned activity for the next twelve months including: putting the outstanding measurement and evaluation infrastructure in place; building evidence base on Trust's activities and outcomes generated by others; and our planned research programme.

Collaborative working

Throughout the report there are references to the different collaborative working arrangements between the Trust and various partners from the public and charity sectors, academia and sectoral experts from the private sector.

Although our outcomes measurement work is still in the early phases of implementation, we are keen to disseminate and share our work with the wider, well-informed community that will be able to advise, support and champion what we are doing. We hope that firstly, our approach and activities in the fields of research, measurement and evaluation will contribute to the growing evidence base. Secondly, we hope that our future evidence-based case studies can be used to help distil and share the evidence on waterways and wellbeing supporting national and devolved policy and decision makers in England and Wales.

Later this year, the Trust intends to share the detailed insights derived from the local community surveys and towpath intercept surveys undertaken within the fourteen longitudinal study areas, with the relevant local authorities and other key local partners.

Finally, the Trust would like to take this opportunity to thank firstly, the ERG members for all their time and support in providing insight, guidance and constructive feedback and challenge, which has been invaluable in shaping our work. Secondly, we would like to give special thanks to Nancy Hey, Director of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, for all her guidance, introductions, sharing of knowledge and encouragement and for connecting us with the wider wellbeing research, evaluation and policy community.