

Boosting Social Value in the Local Government Sector: Strategies for 2025

'Social value' refers to benefits that extend beyond financial gains, including impacts on communities, individuals, and the environment. It aims to improve overall well-being and quality of life.

It can manifest in numerous ways, such as improved public health, increased educational opportunities, reduced inequality, and strengthened social cohesion. By prioritising social value, local authorities can ensure sustainable development that respects and uplifts diverse communities, creating a more equitable and harmonious society for all.

In the United Kingdom, local authorities are legally mandated to consider social value in their procurement processes, as stipulated by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.

This legislation requires that public sector bodies evaluate how the services they commission and procure might improve economic, social, and environmental well-being. But what does this look like in real terms?

We've asked experts with a range of backgrounds in the public sector, procurement, and talent acquisition how local authorities can boost their social value at a time of legislative change and economic challenges:



Simon Bullimore

Simon Bullimore MCIPS, Head of Group Procurement at **Norse Group**, has worked in procurement for more than 26 years within several sectors, most notably the Ministry of Defence, Manufacturing and now within Public Sector Services. Simon worked closely with the NHS Supply Chain during the Covid19 pandemic with the supply of PPE to hospitals and care homes and most recently, was part of the Cabinet Office and CBI collaboration for the creation of the Procurement Act.

"I believe Social Value is important to Local Authorities, as it should be, because it is important to the population that elects them. It is also important to Government, and we are seeing evidence of this with the PPN notices released, advising contracting authorities to allocate a fixed percentage of scoring when reviewing public sector bids, so this is a positive step to make sure contracting authorities give the subject clear consideration.

We are now also seeing the reshaping of the National Procurement Policy statement social prosperity through effective procurement sits high within the Labour manifesto and their drive towards Mission Driven Government.

For me, investment in procurement is essential to bring social value into full effect. Public Sector procurement professionals want to be able to deliver all the benefits of targeted procurement, participate in pre-market engagement and award contracts in a manner that matches the social value objectives of the councils and government departments they represent.

But they need time to do this well, and the budget constraints we see in local government mean that investment in resource is not happening, which leads to the same scenario of fast-tracked procurement exercises with contracts awarded to the lowest price, continuing to rule the landscape at present."



Michelle Walker

Michelle has recently joined **YPO** as their Head of Procurement Services, having enjoyed an extensive career in public sector procurement primarily within the NHS and higher education. Michelle has taken the lead on a number of nationwide award-winning procurements and feels passionately about the benefits the profession can release to the public sector. In addition to her procurement expertise, Michelle has developed and delivered a range of sought-after and highly-regarded training modules on the topic both to procurement and non-procurement staff, and has been a CIPS level 4 and 5 tutor across Yorkshire.

"The Social Value Act 2012 mandates a limited legal requirement for Contracting Authorities to consider economic, social, and environmental wellbeing in procurement. However, the word 'consider' is quite vague and does not give clear definition on specifically how much weight should be given to social value.

Having said that, there is a growing emphasis on extracting substantial Social Value from the public sector, where both people working within it and constituents themselves want to see their local authorities making a positive impact on communities and the environment.

The procurement profession plays a critical role in this by integrating Social Value into procurement processes, contract management, and supplier relationships. Opportunities for Social Value vary across sectors and can include training local people, boosting the local economy, supporting vulnerable groups, and developing innovative solutions to slow climate change.

This approach can transform communities without increasing contract costs or overburdening suppliers financially. Evaluating Social Value should focus on the quality of outcomes over quantity, ensuring realistic and achievable benefits while leveraging suppliers' skills and capacity. Effective Social Value delivery should be managed and measured alongside the main contract to ensure sustained impact and success.

By doing this, procurement teams in local authorities can be sure that their work goes beyond 'the standard' and genuinely changes the world around them for the better."



Gillian Askew

Gill Askew, Director at **Go4Growth**, is a Chartered Fellow of CIPS - The Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply. Gillian is an experienced business leader with years of expertise in procurement and supply chain, with a focus on socially responsible business development and sustainability.

"Social Value encompasses a wide range of areas, so it's understandable that local authorities might focus on certain 'headline areas' for social value delivery. However, could this approach risk missing opportunities to make the most positive impact for the widest range of people?

Apprenticeships and skills development are prominent areas that many local authorities have embraced. To truly maximise social impact, we need deeper insights into who is benefiting from these opportunities. Are care leavers, people from more deprived areas, those not in education, employment, or training (NEET), and the long-term unemployed able to access these opportunities as well?

In addition, a significant part of social value, and a longstanding public sector aim, is ensuring equitable access to local authority procurement opportunities for all businesses, whether directly or through the supply chain, considering and removing barriers to access for MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) and diverse businesses. There is a wealth of guidance available to support smaller businesses, but with so much information out there, it can be challenging for local businesses to identify what is most relevant and helpful.

Local authorities are working hard to reduce barriers to tendering for all businesses by commissioning support from organisations like ours and through local and regional 'growth hubs'. Together, we serve as key support intermediaries, helping local, SME, VCSE, and diverse businesses to discover and pursue growth opportunities within the public sector.

Currently, at Go4Growth support over 15,000 businesses, many of which are small or voluntary organisations. Our research has shown that 79% of these businesses say they struggle to find local authority opportunities, and once found, many are unsure of how to proceed with tendering. Our commitment is to help ensure that fairness and equity are at the heart of public sector procurement, giving confidence to smaller businesses and those led by under-represented groups, to successfully engage in public sector opportunities."



Aaron Wawman

Aaron Wawman is Sales Director at Comensura and passionate about proprietary, adaptive technology and data-driven insights. He has spent much of his career in the recruitment and MSP delivery industry, working with flagship clients and partnering with global organisations. He is passionate about helping companies to fully optimise the way they attract, engage and manage their workforce.

“Local authorities play a pivotal role in shaping the quality of life within their communities. Embracing social value in services procurement where SoW is being used presents a unique opportunity to enhance community wellbeing and foster sustainable development.

By incorporating social, economic, and environmental considerations into procurement processes, local authorities can effect positive change while delivering more than merely cost-effective solutions. By awarding contracts to businesses that exhibit a commitment to these values, local authorities can stimulate job creation, support local enterprises, and promote environmentally sustainable practices.

Incorporating social value also fosters stronger community relationships and trust at a time where there is often little. When local authorities engage with suppliers who prioritise community benefits, it signals a commitment to the public good. This approach not only enhances the reputation of the authorities but also encourages greater civic engagement and collaboration between the public, private, and voluntary sectors.

Local authorities should embrace social value in services procurement, with it positioned as a central aspect of tender submission as opposed to a ‘nice to have.’”



Chris Blackburn

Chris Blackburn, Director of Skills Growth at Impellam Group, has over two decades of experience in talent development and workforce planning, with a strong focus on empowering individuals and enhancing employability through skills growth and social mobility initiatives.

“A key area where local authorities can provide social value in 2025 is with more equity in access to apprenticeships and work experience opportunities for young people from less privileged backgrounds.

Apprenticeships and work-based training provide practical skills and knowledge, but also a career path that might seem inaccessible to those from disadvantaged backgrounds where a traditional academic route isn’t a financial option. However, accessing apprenticeships and work-based training is still not without its challenges.

Many young people from less affluent areas are not as likely to be aware of application processes, may have not been presented with as many potential career options, and in some cases are not given the encouragement to be ambitious for themselves.

Local Authorities could play a vital role in equipping young people with the competencies needed to excel in their chosen fields while getting paid in a range of sectors – planning, technology, education, health, legal and finance are all areas where there are skills shortages where they might flourish.

They are also ideally placed to be able to do this, with access to schools, colleges, youth schemes, and the social care system.

With the public sector facing massive talent shortages, this is a win-win situation for all, and I look forward to working with more organisations who want to support this approach in 2025.”



Hoa Ngo

Hoa Ngo - Managing Director at workforce management expert Comensura - is a business leader with a proven track record of delivering highly effective workforce managed solutions in both the UK and Australia and is passionate about workplace diversity.

“Equality is one area of social value that local authorities seem to want to really step up for. In fact, our recent report showed that 73% believed their authority was committed to unbiased hiring practices and social value, which is fantastic.

However, I believe that more local authorities could be thinking more outside the box when it comes to underrepresented groups. Gender equality, more ethnic diversity, more inclusivity for those with disabilities - these are all well-known ‘groups’ that are often underrepresented and therefore targeted.

There are lesser-known groups that need more assistance in getting into employment that might well value a career in the public sector. A couple that spring to mind come from projects we have been involved with at Comensura.

Many former prisoners seek to reintegrate into society, but to achieve this successfully, obtaining and maintaining employment is essential, which often results in elevated levels of motivation.

The work we have carried out with New Futures Network has seen many individuals on career paths with potential. Local Authorities could be doing likewise and finding a highly motivated pool of talent as well as reducing reoffending and making an incredible difference to communities.

Like many, the team at Comensura were incredibly saddened by the events as they unfolded in Ukraine. In 2023, we have found 50 Ukrainian refugees’ employment which took our total since the conflict began to 120. We predict the same number again by the end of 2024.

Refugees are displaced and in need of a role in the community, and local authorities could provide employment that enables that.

There are many other examples, and I hope to work with local authorities moving forward looking to go beyond the standard when it comes to diversity in social value.”

FIND OUT MORE

For more insight on boosting your social value in the local government sector, view our guide on The 7 pillars of the Child and Family Social Work Statutory Guidance 2024.

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