

Winning with Social Value

No jargon. No empty theory. Just focused, actionable insight to help your organisation win and deliver with confidence.

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Executive Summary

Social Value is no longer an add-on. It's a core driver of effective procurement, business growth, and organisational performance. With the Procurement Act 2023 now in force, the expectations around Social Value are higher than ever, and they run through the full contract lifecycle.

Many organisations are unsure where to begin. Others are already delivering strong Social Value outcomes but lack the tools or guidance to demonstrate and communicate this effectively.

This guide has been created to cut through the complexity. It offers a clear, practical approach to understanding, measuring, and delivering Social Value that supports both compliance and growth. This guide is aimed at business leaders, bid writers, public sector managers, and anyone involved in shaping or responding to Social Value requirements.

You will not find jargon or theory here. This is an actionable guide, informed by on-the-ground experience. It's designed to help you build Social Value into your work in a way that is achievable, meaningful, and measurable.

Our consultants believe that organisations grow best when their people are engaged, their values are clear, and their impact is visible. Social Value, done well, supports all three.

Why Social Value Matters Now

Social Value has moved from the sidelines to the heart of procurement. It's now a core requirement; a key factor in competitive tenders, and an expectation from communities, customers, and staff alike.

The shift has been rapid. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 first introduced the concept into procurement. The Procurement Act 2023 has now raised the bar significantly. It requires contracting authorities to maximise public benefit, and to manage and report on Social Value delivery across the full contract lifecycle.

But the legal drivers are only part of the picture. The organisations that are leading in Social Value are not doing so simply to comply. They are doing so because it creates stronger businesses, stronger partnerships, and stronger communities.

There is now a clear commercial risk to not engaging with Social Value. Without a clear offer and evidence of delivery, businesses will find it harder to win public contracts, build partnerships, and retain talented staff.

**“A business with
a plan will grow by
35% next year”**

Done well, Social Value:

- **Makes your business more attractive to clients and customers**
- **Strengthens staff engagement, retention, and recruitment**
- **Builds trust with stakeholders and local communities**
- **Drives innovation and purposeful growth**
- **Creates a clear point of difference in competitive markets**

It also delivers measurable commercial results. Companies with a clear and credible Social Value strategy are meeting the requirements of the new procurement system while others fall behind.

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In short, Social Value matters because it is both the right thing to do, and the smart thing to do.



Understanding the Procurement Act 2023

The Procurement Act 2023 represents the biggest change to UK public procurement in more than 30 years. It's now the primary legislation governing public contracts in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

One of its most significant shifts is the strengthened role of Social Value. Under the Act:

- Authorities must have regard to maximising public benefit
- Social Value is embedded not only at the evaluation stage but throughout contract delivery
- Contracts over £5 million must include clear, reportable KPIs
- Non-delivery of Social Value commitments can result in contract penalties or exclusion from future contracts

The language of the Act matters. Where previous guidance asked authorities to consider Social Value, the Act now requires them to have regard to it. This is a stronger legal test and one that will shape procurement decisions at every stage.

The Act also replaces the concept of Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) with Most Advantageous Tender (MAT). This shift allows authorities to take a broader view of value, including environmental, social, and economic outcomes. This means no more chasing prices to the bottom, at least in theory.

In short, the Procurement Act 2023 makes Social Value a serious factor in whether contracts are won, how they are delivered, and how success is measured.

For suppliers, this is both a challenge and an opportunity. Those who can demonstrate clear, credible Social Value, and evidence delivery, will stand out. Those who can't risk falling behind.

What Buyers Want:

Public sector buyers are looking for more than compliance. They want suppliers who can deliver real, measurable Social Value, and who understand the communities they are serving. Three trends are shaping current expectations:

1. Place-based Social Value

Buyers increasingly expect Social Value to be local and relevant. National commitments and generic pledges will not stand out. What matters is how your offer supports the specific needs of the local area.

Successful suppliers invest time in understanding local priorities, often through:

- Local needs analysis
- Early engagement with buyers
- Engagement with community partners

2. Evidence and Accountability

Buyers are moving beyond promises. They want clear evidence that Social Value is being delivered.

Under the Procurement Act 2023, contracts must include KPIs, and suppliers must report on them. Authorities expect:

- Specific, measurable Social Value commitments
- Real-world delivery against those commitments
- Transparent reporting, using recognised frameworks such as the TOM System

3. Alignment with National Priorities

Social Value is not just about local impact. The Government's 5 Missions and the National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS) are setting wider expectations around economic growth, sustainability, skills, and community wellbeing.

Buyers want to see suppliers align with these priorities. They expect:

- Contributions to skills and employment
- Action on climate and sustainability
- Support for SMEs and VCSEs
- Inclusive and ethical business practices

The Bottom Line

Social Value is now a differentiator. It can help you win business, strengthen relationships, and build reputation. But buyers are becoming more demanding. They expect Social Value to be:

- Embedded in your business
- Relevant to their priorities
- Measurable and reportable
- Delivered throughout the life of the contract



What Great Looks Like: Principles of High-Impact Social Value

High-impact Social Value is not about box-ticking. It's about delivering outcomes that matter to buyers, to communities, and to your business. The best Social Value is:

1. Focused and Relevant

Great Social Value is targeted. It responds directly to local priorities, buyer objectives, and community needs.

- It avoids generic promises and focuses on where your organisation can make a real difference.
- A focused approach starts with asking:
- What does this community need?
- What matters to this buyer?
- What can we realistically and credibly deliver?

2. Embedded in the Business

High-impact Social Value is not bolted on. It's built into how you operate, how you deliver projects, and how you work with staff, suppliers, and communities.

It's reflected in:

- Recruitment and workforce practices
- Supply chain choices
- Environmental management
- Community partnerships
- Company culture

Buyers can tell the difference between Social Value that is embedded and Social Value that is written for a bid.

3. Measurable and Transparent

Great Social Value is measurable. Buyers expect clear outcomes, not vague intentions.

The strongest organisations:

- Set clear, specific targets
- Use recognised measurement frameworks (such as the TOM System)
- Monitor delivery through contract KPIs
- Report progress transparently, with data and narrative

Transparency builds trust and a strong track record improves future competitiveness.

4. Sustainable and Authentic

High-impact Social Value creates lasting benefit. It's not about one-off gestures or short-term PR. It's about building partnerships, creating opportunities, and supporting long-term outcomes for the business and for the wider community. It's also authentic. It reflects the organisation's values and strengths. Buyers, communities, and staff recognise when Social Value is real.



How to Build Social Value Into Your Business

Building Social Value is not about writing a policy and leaving it on the shelf. It's about how your business operates every day.

The strongest organisations take a practical, phased approach:

1. Understand Your Starting Point

Before you can build, you need to know where you stand. Start by asking:

- What Social Value are we already delivering?
- Where do we have strengths we can build on?
- Where are the gaps?

This is often a surprising exercise. Many businesses are already delivering far more Social Value than they realise but they are not measuring or communicating it.

2. Understand Buyer and Community Priorities

Next, look outward. Social Value must be relevant to your buyers and the communities you serve.

Ask:

- What are the local priorities?
- What matters to this buyer or sector?
- How can we align our work with those needs?

This is not guesswork. Engage early. Read published strategies. Conduct local needs analysis. Speak to community organisations.

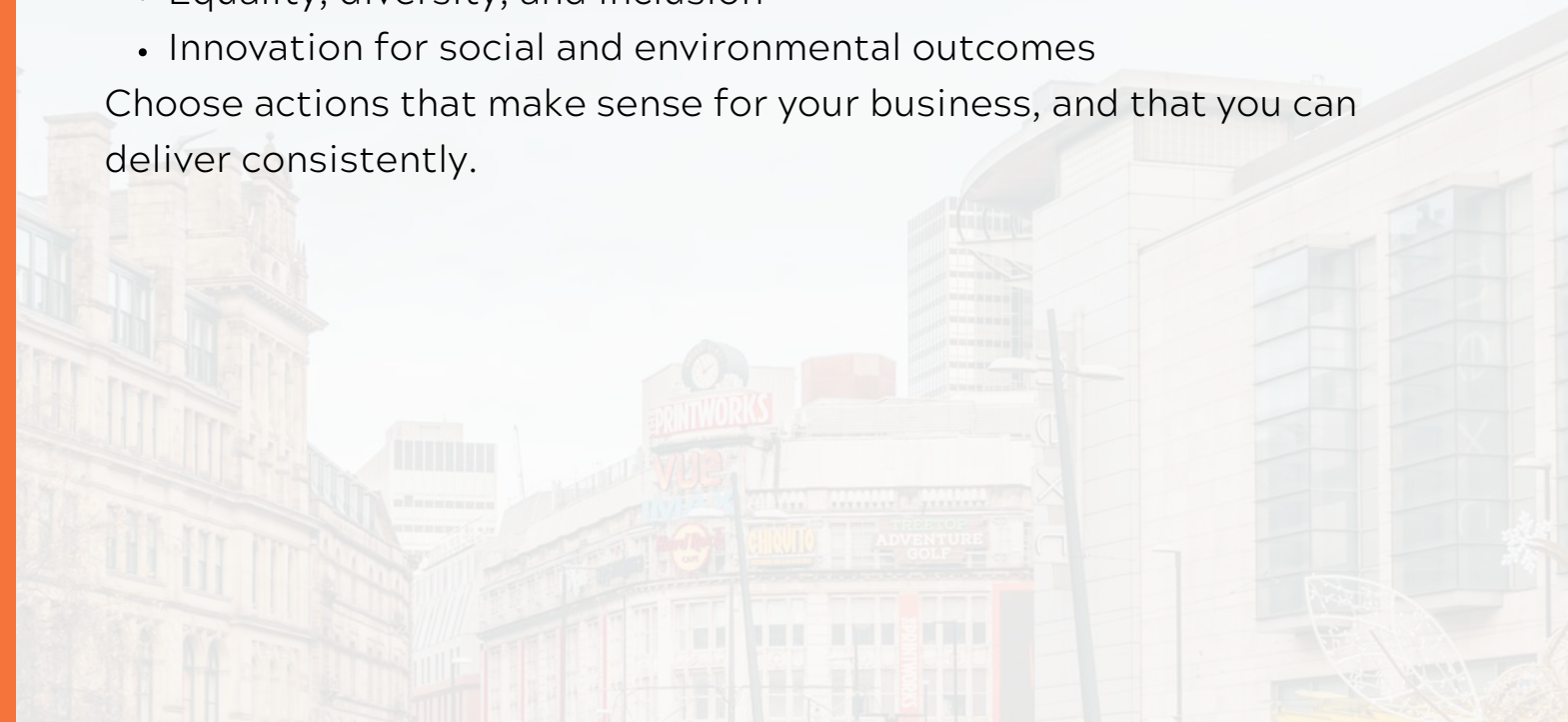
3. Define Practical Actions

Social Value should be built into your business plan, not treated as an add-on.

Look at every part of your operations:

- Recruitment and workforce
- Apprenticeships and skills development
- Local supply chain and SME engagement
- Environmental practices
- Community partnerships
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion
- Innovation for social and environmental outcomes

Choose actions that make sense for your business, and that you can deliver consistently.



How to Evidence and Measure Social Value

It is not enough to say you will deliver Social Value. You need to prove it. Buyers expect clear evidence:

- At bid stage
- During contract delivery
- In post-contract reporting

Here is how strong organisations approach it:

1. Use Recognised Frameworks

Measurement starts with using the right tools. The TOM System (Themes, Outcomes, Measures) is now the most widely used framework in UK public procurement.

It gives you:

- A clear structure for setting Social Value targets
- Agreed proxy values to quantify impact
- Alignment with national standards and reporting expectations
- A way to benchmark your performance

It's also aligned with the Social Value Model and supports reporting against the Procurement Act 2023 requirements.

2. Make It Real

Social Value evidence must link to your actual contract delivery.

Buyers want to see:

- Social Value that is directly attributable to the contract
- Actions that go beyond standard business practice
- Targets that are specific, measurable, and time-bound
- Clear accountability for delivery.

Tools and Frameworks: TOMs, MAT, and Beyond

The Social Value landscape can appear crowded. There are multiple frameworks, tools, and terms in use. Here is what matters, and what you need to focus on:

TOM System

The Social Value TOM System is the market-leading measurement framework.

TOM stands for:

- Themes
- Outcomes
- Measures

It provides:

- A consistent structure to plan and evidence Social Value
- Standard proxy values to quantify Social Value in financial terms
- Alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Compatibility with government expectations, including the Procurement Act 2023 and the Social Value Model

For public sector tenders in the UK, TOMs is widely recognised and increasingly expected.

MAT: Most Advantageous Tender

The Procurement Act 2023 replaces MEAT (Most Economically Advantageous Tender) with MAT (Most Advantageous Tender). This is an important change. It gives buyers explicit permission to value Social Value, not just price and quality, when awarding contracts.

Under MAT, buyers can:

- Weight Social Value more heavily
- Prioritise outcomes that align with community and policy priorities
- Award to bidders who offer the best overall contribution, not just lowest price

For suppliers, this means Social Value is not a “nice to have”, it can directly influence whether you win.

Social Value Model

For central government tenders, the Social Value Model remains the core reference for how buyers evaluate Social Value.

It's a qualitative model, focused on:

- Policy alignment
- Relevance of Social Value commitments
- Credibility of delivery plans

The TOM System and the Social Value Model are compatible. In fact, using both together is now best practice, TOMs for measurement, the Model for alignment.

Beyond the Basics

Depending on sector and buyer, you may also encounter:

- National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS)
- Local Social Value policies
- Place-based frameworks
- Voluntary frameworks such as GRI or B-Corp

What matters is not using everything, it is using the right tools for your market, and being consistent and credible in how you apply them.

Practical Tips for Bidding with Confidence

Strong Social Value is now a critical success factor in public sector bids. It can make the difference between winning and losing.

Here is how to approach it with clarity and confidence:

1. Engage Early

Do not wait for the bid release.

The Procurement Act 2023 places greater emphasis on early market engagement. Take advantage of this:

- Attend meet-the-buyer events
- Respond to Prior Information Notices (PINs) and Requests for Information (RFIs)
- Research local needs and priorities
- Build relationships with commissioners and community partners

Early engagement helps you shape relevant, targeted Social Value offers.

2. Understand What the Buyer Wants

Study:

- The National Procurement Policy Statement
- The buyer's own Social Value policy
- Local strategies and community plans
- The Social Value Model (for central government bids)

Align your Social Value commitments to what the buyer values.

Do not take a one-size-fits-all approach.

Authenticity builds trust, and improves your scoring

3. Make Commitments Specific and Deliverable

Buyers want:

- Specific, measurable commitments
- Clear delivery plans
- Named accountability
- Evidence of capability

Use the TOM System to structure your offer. Make sure commitments are:

- Additional to core contract requirements
- Time-bound and realistic
- Directly relevant to the contract

Avoid vague promises. Buyers will mark you down for them.

4. Show How You Will Measure and Report

Demonstrate that you understand the full contract lifecycle.

Explain:

- How you will measure Social Value delivery
- How you will report progress against KPIs
- How you will manage risks and challenges
- How you will leave a lasting impact

If you already have a strong Social Value track record, highlight it.

5. Be Authentic

Buyers can spot when Social Value is a bolt-on. They can also see when it is built into your business.

Be clear about:

- What you do already
- What you can do more
- How Social Value fits your values and operations

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Many organisations have good intentions when it comes to Social Value. But good intentions alone are not enough.

There are common mistakes that weaken bids and undermine delivery. Here is what to watch for, and how to avoid it:

1. Generic Commitments

Problem: Using the same Social Value commitments across multiple bids.

Why it fails: Buyers expect relevance. If your offer does not align with local priorities and the specific contract, you will not score well.

Solution: Tailor every Social Value offer. Use local needs analysis. Engage with the buyer. Align with their policies and objectives.

2. Overpromising

Problem: Making commitments that are unrealistic or unachievable.

Why it fails: Buyers are now tracking delivery. Failure to meet Social Value KPIs can damage your reputation and lead to penalties.

Solution: Be ambitious but credible. Only commit to what you can deliver. Provide evidence of capability. Build Social Value into delivery plans from the start.

3. Treating Social Value as a Paper Exercise

Problem: Writing a good Social Value section for the bid, but not embedding it in delivery.

Why it fails: The Procurement Act 2023 requires ongoing measurement and reporting. If Social Value is not part of contract management, performance will suffer.

Solution: Assign clear ownership. Build Social Value reporting into project governance. Engage delivery teams. Monitor progress throughout the contract.

4. Failing to Evidence Impact

Problem: Making claims without data to back them up.

Why it fails: Buyers want measurable outcomes, not vague statements.

Solution: Use recognised frameworks such as TOMs. Set clear targets. Report with transparency. Support data with case studies and narrative.

5. Not Keeping Up with Changing Expectations

Problem: Assuming past approaches will continue to work.

Why it fails: Social Value expectations are evolving. The bar is rising.

Solution: Stay current. Understand new legislation and policy. Learn from buyer feedback. Continuously improve your Social Value approach.



How Underpin Consultants Can Help

Social Value is now a strategic priority, for public sector buyers, private sector partners, and communities alike.

Getting it right will strengthen your business:

- You will win more contracts
- You will build stronger partnerships
- You will create lasting impact in the communities you serve

But Social Value is not simple. Expectations are rising. The Procurement Act 2023 has changed the rules. Buyers are more demanding. Delivery is under scrutiny. That is where Underpin Consultants comes in.

What We Do

We help organisations:

- Understand what buyers want, today, not last year
- Build Social Value into their business, not just their bids
- Identify strengths and gaps
- Develop clear, focused Social Value strategies
- Align with frameworks such as TOMs, MAT, and the Social Value Model
- Measure and evidence impact
- Strengthen bid responses
- Prepare for delivery and reporting
- Build long-term capability

How We Work

Our approach is:

- Collaborative, we work with your team, not over their heads
- Practical, no jargon, no unnecessary complexity
- Focused, aligned to your strategy, resources, and markets
- Actionable, everything we do is designed to help you win and deliver

We do not impose generic models. We help you build an approach that is authentic, achievable, and competitive.

Where to Start

Whether you are just starting with Social Value or looking to sharpen your current approach, we can help.

Typical starting points include:

- Social Value audit and gap analysis
- Bid readiness review
- Social Value strategy development
- TOMs measurement framework setup
- Staff training and capability building
- Support with specific tenders





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