



Write Up of APSE Event: The role of local councils in delivering social value and community level inclusive economic outcomes in Northern Ireland

1. Introduction

On Tuesday 30th November 2021, the Association for Public Service Excellence held an event at Belfast Castle in Northern Ireland. Flowing from the [recommendations of previous work undertaken by APSE](#) around the impacts, implication, opportunities, and threats of EU Exit on local councils in Northern Ireland, the event sought to explore how Social Value could more effectively be embedded into local council practice in Northern Ireland, both generally and through the process of procurement. The event was facilitated by APSE's Head of Communication and Coordination and Northern Ireland Lead, Mo Baines and Matthew Baqueriza-Jackson, an Independent Policy Advisor and expert on Social Value Procurement.

This document details the key points presented during the event and highlights proposed next steps for further APSE led activities in Northern Ireland around Social Value.

2. Content of Event

The event was split into two key parts. The first part sought to explore what is meant by Social Value and Inclusive Outcomes, before placing it in the context of policy and practice in Northern Ireland. The second part provided our 'top 10 tips' for further embedding Social Value into Council practice in Northern Ireland.

2.1 Part 1 – defining Social Value and its policy context

After asking the participants to discuss what words came to their mind when thinking about Social Value, we talked through a series of definitions of Social Value and the policy context to Social Value in Northern Ireland. Social Value has been defined by the [Greater Manchester Social Value Network \(GMSVN\)](#) as:

“The Greater Manchester Social Value Network seeks to ensure that Social Value is at the heart of everything that Greater Manchester does. Public Institutions, Businesses and Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations should not only deliver their day-to-day activities, but they should actively bring local economic, social, and environmental benefits for communities in which they are based. This includes benefits around jobs, skills, the local environment, and support to the voluntary and community sector. Social Value should not be an add on – it should be a fundamental part of business behaviour”

In terms of context, we talked about the linkages of Social Value to various areas of policy in Northern Ireland including:

- EU Exit and the changing nature of procurement regulations in a UK context.
- Community Planning and in particular the link between Social Value and well-being outcomes.
- Economic Development, urban and rural regeneration, community development and local economic development.
- The new UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- Northern Ireland Assembly requirements around Social Value in public procurement contracts.

- The response to Covid-19 and the thematic areas of policy where Social Value will need to be considered.

2.2 Part 2 – top ten tips to embedding Social Value into local council practice

The bulk of the event focused upon our ‘top 10 tips’ to further embedding Social Value into local council practice in Northern Ireland. We explained each tip in turn, and then asked the participants what they were already doing around that tip, the barriers they faced in implementing that tip, and the support they would need in the future to implement it further. The ‘top 10 tips’ are as follows:

Tip 1 – Measure where existing spend goes

Our first tip is that local councils in Northern Ireland should set a baseline of where their existing spend goes. This includes spend on employees and grants but is predominantly focused on procurement spend and understanding where it goes geographically, sectorally, and in business type terms. It enables local councils to understand the direct contribution they make to their local economy and start the process of thinking about how they can bring Social Value through the process of procurement.

Tip 2 – Set policy narrative

Our second tip is that local councils in Northern Ireland should develop a narrative around Social Value in their organisation. Social Value should not be viewed in isolation and be restricted to the procurement process but instead be a core part of wider strategy. Social Value outcomes are often to wider outcomes that local councils will look to realise anyway.

Tip 3 – Develop Social Value Framework

Our third tip is that local councils in Northern Ireland should look to develop a Social Value Framework which drives forward their activities around Social Value and embedding it into all Council business. Such a framework should include sections on:

- Themes – overarching policy themes such as ‘Economy’ or ‘Environment’.
- Outcomes – the things local councils want to achieve such as reducing unemployment.
- Activities – the types of activities that could be delivered by suppliers during procurement contracts to contribute to such outcomes.
- Questions – the types of questions that can be asked in tender document around Social Value.
- Means of Evaluation – the quantitative and qualitative ways of evaluation responses to Social Value questions.
- Matrix – the types of goods, services and works contracts for which particular outcomes are relevant.
- Monitoring – means of measuring the impact of Social Value commitments.

Tip 4 – Make Cross-Departmental

Our fourth tip is that local councils in Northern Ireland should ensure that conversations around Social Value are not just restricted to the Procurement Team. Indeed, Social Value needs to sit across a number of functions and roles including strategists, policy leads, commissioners, economic development, procurers, and contract managers.

Tip 5 – Build in during service design (commissioning)

Our fifth tip is that local councils in Northern Ireland should build in considerations around Social Value at an early stage of the procurement cycle and when the good, service or work is being designed. This

means there is a key role for Commissioners to explore Social Value alongside wider factors such as budget, timeframes, quality requirements and technical specification.

Tip 6 – Engage the market

Our sixth tip is that local councils in Northern Ireland should engage with the market as part of the development and advertising procurement opportunities. ‘Meet the Buyer events’ can be opportunities to develop supply chains, explain specifications, explain Social Value, and to stimulate innovation in the market.

Tip 7 – Ask the right questions

Our seventh tip is that local councils in Northern Ireland should not ask generic questions around Social Value during procurement exercises but instead ask questions that are relevant to the outcomes detailed in their Social Value Framework. Local Councils can ask ‘how many’, ‘what’, and ‘do you have’ type questions around Social Value but should not make such questions too burdensome.

Tip 8 – Set the weighting

Our eighth tip is that local councils in Northern Ireland should set a weighting around Social Value recognising that cost and quality should remain the key decision-making factor in any procurement exercise. Generally, Social Value weightings are anywhere between 10% and 30% but this should be decided on a case-by-case basis, and dependent upon the type of good, service or work being procurement, and additionally be applied above a certain contract value such as £100,000.

Tip 9 – Monitor outputs

Our ninth tip is that local councils in Northern Ireland should hold suppliers to account on their Social Value commitments as they are effectively conditions of contract. They should collect data around both quantitative outputs and quantitative impacts but recognise that this will take time and capacity for both Council and the suppliers.

Tip 10 – Review and review and review again

Our tenth tip is that local councils in Northern Ireland should view this as an iterative process and one that take time, energy and commitment. They should continuously review their approaches to Social Value and amend as appropriate.

3. Next Steps

APSE has committed through their National Council to facilitate 3 further events on Social Value in Northern Ireland during 2022. During the final part of this initial event, we discussed with the participants what they would like to see happen during these events. Responses included:

- Showcases from Northern Ireland Councils on what they are already doing around Social Value and procurement and particularly the development of Social Value Policies.
- Advice on developing Council motions around Social Value and developing Social Value Working Groups.
- Advice around developing Social Value Frameworks.
- Guidance on undertaking Spend Analysis and monitoring Social Value outcomes.

We will have further discussions internally at APSE around these responses and engage with Councils early in 2022 around a programme of activities.

