



‘Recovery and Redesign’: Learning from Lockdown

Speakers

Terry Brewer,
Head of Public Sector Delivery,
The Social Value Portal

Hannah Chapelhow,
Senior Associate,
Clyde & Co LLP
(facilitator)

Emily Davies,
Head of Social Impact,
Amey

David Hansom,
Partner, Clyde & Co LLP
(Chair and Facilitator)

Darren Knowd,
Chief Procurement Officer,
Durham County Council

Jacqui Oughton,
Chief Operating Officer,
Shaw Trust

Martin Wood,
Policy Officer,
North of Tyne Combined
Authority (NTCA)

The BSA, in collaboration with Clyde & Co LLP, organised a discussion in March 2021 on lessons from the lockdown period for joint working between stakeholders in the recovery phase.

The discussion had a particular focus on the North East. The event involved speakers and participants from local authorities in the region, along with BSA members from the private and VCSE sectors and wider experts on social value and inclusive and sustainable growth.

David Hansom from Clyde & Co LLP opened the discussion, setting out the backdrop in terms of reforms to public procurement rules, including through the Green Paper. He focused in particular on social value; the extent to which Green Paper proposals would increase simplicity and flexibility and allow procurement to be used to benefit local communities; and the shift from Most Economically Advantageous Tender to Most Advantageous Tender.

Martin Wood from NTCA provided a Combined Authority perspective. The context was regional inequality even prior to the pandemic, along with the global climate emergency. These reinforced the need for a dynamic, green and inclusive recovery.

Partly this was about the Combined Authority setting an example, and partly about signalling expectations of partners, including businesses, relating to employment practices, social value, equality and inclusion, local supply chains and carbon neutrality. These principles ran through the work both of NTCA and of its constituent authorities. The focus was on using procurement policy, as well as initiatives such as the Good Work Pledge, to deliver defined objectives.

Jacqui Oughton from Shaw Trust presented a VCSE perspective on responding to the needs of those who had been left behind. Jacqui outlined aspects of increased inequality, with a growing inter-generational cycle of unemployment compounded by the pandemic, and then set out the considerations involved in tackling these in the recovery phase.

Place-based leadership was key. So was delivering a holistic approach to public services, more joined up and delivered in collaboration with on-the-ground projects and partners. This was epitomised by Shaw Trust’s own approach. There was now potential for all sectors to work together to innovate and level up to the benefit of those who were being left behind.

Asked about any positive lessons from the pandemic, Martin and Jacqui spoke about the seeds of change. There was renewed acknowledgement of the importance of resetting the agenda to achieve shared outcomes, and of the potential for genuine collaboration to achieve this, and a new focus on social equity and on innovation in its broadest sense which would be needed to realise it.

Hannah Chapelhow introduced the second session, which would take forward this discussion on partnership working between the public, private and VCSE sectors, including through use of the Social Value Act and public procurement rules.

Terry Brewer began by returning to the theme of the COVID pandemic as a wake-up call, and of taking this opportunity to press a reset button.

Social value was now an ever-increasing focus across sectors. National TOMS were used across local government, and the recent PPN was galvanising central government in this area. Social value weighting was also increasing. In turn, suppliers were increasingly going out of their way to identify local SME and VCSE supply chains, on top of SMEs being able to tender directly. They were also focusing more on corporate responsibility more widely, not least because of pressure from investors.

In local government, typically social value started within procurement departments, and was then rolled out across the council. But social value now needed to break out of procurement and into areas such as grant funding, recruitment, and planning. Local plans were beginning to link development with social value, and there was potential to gain £30-40 billion in social value in this area, especially if occupiers were also asked for social value; such benefits could also be delivered over a much longer time horizon than that involved in a contract.

Emily Davies gave a provider perspective, with reference to several case studies. Her employer had reappraised its role within the community, and its wider purpose - taking pride in public service - with a renewed emphasis on wellbeing and putting people first. There was wider public recognition of the role of front-line workers, for example refuse collectors. Amey had increased pay to real living wage levels, for example, and was focused on opening doors to those facing barriers or inequality, and in committing to Net Zero. Such actions enabled suppliers to be authentic in their delivery of social value, and in leaving a lasting legacy in communities when contracts were delivered.

Emily called for continued ambition at central government level, and across all partners, in delivering social value outcomes. There was an ever-growing need for partnership to this end, and Amey was redirecting spend to social enterprises and using its size and reach to help new social enterprises form or grow. There was now a need to see social value in terms of knowledge and expertise, and to professionalise social value within a wider context of procurement, skills development and communications.

Darren Knowd gave the final presentation, from the perspective of Durham County Council and the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO), and also the Local Government Association and its National Social Value Taskforce, which he chaired.

There were clear themes arising from the recent National Social Value Conference, not least a renewed recognition of inequality, especially with younger people. Darren returned to social value and planning policy, which was a new focus area across local government. The Conference had also looked at the Net Zero aspects of social value. And its central theme was collaboration between all sectors, including the faith community and also increasingly including a social value focus from investors.

Darren also highlighted progress in Durham County Council itself, with a 'County Durham Pound' Programme, working with anchor institutions to collaborate in adoption of a Place-based approach to procurement. Regionally, NEPO were collaborating on procurement, as well as looking at issues such as supplier capability, and were planning a possible Social Value Statement.

Finally, Darren outlined central government initiatives, including the Green Paper, the social value PPN and, in particular, the publication of the National Procurement Policy Statement, expected later in the Spring. This was likely to incorporate wider economic, climate change and social considerations into local authority and other public procurement decisions, as well as mandating pipeline publication and capability benchmarking.

Hannah then facilitated discussion involving all participants.

Asked what challenge each sector had for other sectors, suppliers emphasised the need for clarity on social value priorities from commissioning authorities, so providers could focus their attention in the highest priority areas. Local authority participants emphasised the importance of collaboration and talking to the community in order to prioritise their goals.

Local authority speakers had noticed a positive and proactive shift in the private sector's attitude to social value, partly led by societal attitudes, amongst younger generations in particular.

There was discussion of changing training and retraining requirements, and the need for employers to link up with training and education institutions to fully align training with the skills that were needed, and the potential role of local government in this regard.

The BSA rounded up the discussion by thanking all participants and, in particular, the speakers and Clyde & Co LLP. This was the second such regional seminar, and the conclusions would inform the BSA's wider work on social value and inclusive growth in the weeks and months ahead.