



## An Interview with Haydn Brown

Haydn Brown is Head of Procurement Strategy and Development for Birmingham City Council. He is also one of the key members of our West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Social Value Taskforce. Haydn is leading the Social Value initiative at Birmingham City Council, so we sat down with him to find out more...

### Let's start at the beginning, how did you get into procurement and why?

**H:** The Strategic Procurement Services department for Birmingham City Council was initially established from within the Works procurement service. I was a Quantity Surveyor within that Works department and I enjoyed the tendering aspect of the role, so I applied for a move to broaden my experience into Services procurement. The department later merged with the Supplies function and formed the Corporate Procurement Services that has continued to evolve ever since.

### Why do you think Social Value is important?

**H:** Social Value is about improving the wellbeing of citizens. It cuts across politics and public/private/3rd sectors and is something everyone should be able to identify with. It's important that we work collaboratively to achieve more together.

### What's your view on the impact of the Social Value Act?

**H:** The Act has stimulated an industry of organisations helping to define, measure and manage the process. Some of this is really helpful and many local policies have emerged that are broadly similar, but we're in danger of over-engineering the process. I think we should keep it simple and work with organisations that help you understand



(Photo: Bob Hall, Flickr)

community needs and pursue Social Value where it will have the most impact.

### In the future would you change the wording of the legislation?

**H:** I think the legislation could go further than just services and that proportionality and therefore Social Value thresholds could be different for supplies and works.

### Birmingham City Council's stance on the Social Value Act is that the 'implementation of the duties in the Act will be as wide as practicable', what drives this strong approach?

**H:** The development of a Birmingham Business Charter for Social Responsibility (**BBC4SR**) was a key element of the incoming Administration's Manifesto in 2012 that was to be seen as the normal way of doing business in Birmingham. In April 2013, the Council Cabinet approved three interlinking policies – the **Social Value Policy** through which it would conduct its commissioning activities, the **Birmingham Living Wage Policy** and the **BBC4SR**.



Birmingham Business Charter for Social Responsibility (BBC4SR) A set of guiding principles aimed at boosting the local economy by maximising the Social Value potential of Birmingham City Council's £1billion purchasing power.

All three policies have recently been revised to ensure processes are efficient and deliver maximum Social Value. As Social Value was more difficult and resource intensive to realise on smaller contracts a tiered approach has now been adopted. This includes thresholds to make the most efficient use of Council resources by focussing the BBC4SR on larger contracts where greater Social Value is possible. This adheres to the proportionality principle of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 and puts less of a burden on SMEs when tendering. Contracts are still tested against the Living Wage Policy below the thresholds and contracted employees are uplifted where applicable.

### **How has your procurement process changed since the Social Value Act?**

**H:** Where a project is above the relevant policy threshold, all successful tenderers including grant recipients must now sign up to the BBC4SR and be assessed against the Living Wage Policy (regardless of contract/grant value).

Social Value is now expressed in the tender and forms part of the evaluation (usually about 10% weighting) and tenderers complete an action plan stating their specific Social Value commitments for the life of the contract. This action plan forms part of the contract and is updated throughout the contract period.

We are also currently finalising developments to our e-tendering/contract management software to incorporate the Social Value action plans to make the process simpler for all parties to manage.

### **What benefits are you now seeing after utilising the Act and tapping into Social Value?**

**H:** The benefits we've achieved include **over 1,000 jobs and 200 apprenticeships, 623 contracted employees to be uplifted to the Living Wage and 400 work placements with over 95,000 hours of experience gained**, including opportunities for some of the most disadvantaged individuals.

We've also seen the importance of getting behind the numbers to understand the human side. We have seen the effect this has on organisations that have, for example, employed homeless

people, and now want to create longer term sustainable relationships.

### **Birmingham City Council has secured:**

- 1,000 jobs
- 200 Apprenticeships
- 623 Contracted Employees on Living Wage
- 400 Work Placements (95,000 hours of experience)

### **What are the biggest challenges you've faced with the Act, and how have you overcome them?**

**H:** Clearly, it's been a challenge to implement our Social Value policies since the legislation came into effect, but we continually develop and improve our approach. This has resulted in much head scratching, process development and officer training. However, we've learned a lot over the last 4 years and there's still a great deal more to do! It's been crucial to have a Cabinet Member with Social Value within their portfolio as this has enabled the policies to be driven from the top.

### **Why is it important for others to follow suite?**

**H:** With the ongoing budget cuts, we all need to think and work differently to provide solutions to those that are most in need. There are many different approaches to achieving Social Value and we need to enable as much of this as possible – we even have organisations that we don't contract with signing up to our BBC4SR on a voluntary basis. They deliver Social Value commitments because they either benefit from or demonstrate such experience, and recognise the importance of this to their business and the communities that buy their goods/services.

### **Have you got any advice for young people looking to get involved in public sector procurement?**

**H:** You need to be open to balancing the rigour and responsibility of ensuring value for public money with the creativity, innovation and co-operation required to achieve this quickly and at scale.

**On a less serious note, what's one thing about you that would surprise people?**

**H:** I used to play alto sax in a big band – that was quite a while ago now!

**Thank you Haydn for taking the time to talk to us, and for the good work you are doing in the pursuit of Social Value!**

**And for our readers, here are some of the key lessons we have learned from Haydn:**

- Consultation about Social Value in the early stages of the commissioning process is crucial
- A tiered approach to contracts based on price allows for increased efficiency with council resources
- Having a Cabinet Member with a Social Value agenda allows you to drive policies from the top
- Focus on the most vulnerable and deprived communities to maximise Social Value

If you'd like to find out more, please visit us at:

<https://socialvalueportal.com/what-is-social-value-2/>

The Social Value Portal Team

✉ [info@socialvalueportal.com](mailto:info@socialvalueportal.com)

☎ 02033550530

