



An Interview with **Cindy Nadesan**

Surrey County Council's ability to unlock Social Value in procurement is admirable, and this is in no small part down to Cindy Nadesan, their Procurement Improvement Officer. In her own words she is 'a catalyst for change, focused on linking people, systems and processes to increase value and create opportunities'. We met with Cindy to find out the thinking behind her success...

How did you get into procurement?

C I am originally from South Africa, I completed my Bachelor of Commerce degree specialising in Business Management in 2002. I always wanted to travel so in 2003 when a Norwegian oil company that was expanding their operations in the Republic of Ireland offered me a management role, I saw it as my ticket to the world. That was when I got my first opportunity to get involved in procurement. I'm a happy shopper by nature, so combine this with my business background and I was made for procurement! I did my MBA whilst I was in Ireland and really enjoyed the 'operations and supply chain' module. After graduating I went into consulting and I took on a 6 month role in India doing market development within the renewable energy sector. When I returned to Ireland I worked as an Operations Manager in the retail sector for a 5 star Home & Garden Centre where procurement was one of my many tasks. I moved to London in 2013 and was offered a 6 month category specialist role in the procurement service at Surrey County Council (now Orbis Procurement a partnership between Surrey, East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Councils). I had never considered working in the public sector, but they were looking for people from a commercial background and now I'm glad that I grabbed the opportunity. It's been an incredible journey and I've learned so much.



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Have you got any advice for young people looking to get into procurement?

C: The exciting thing about procurement is, if you adopt the same attitude when you spend your organisations money as you do when you spend your own then you are always going to get the best deal and deliver the most value to your customer. The word Procurement may be clunky, but don't be put off, it's a career path that can give you the space to be creative and influence the success or failure of every product developed and every service delivered. The skills you learn are transferable across sectors, if you thrive on change like me you will never be bored, procurement also requires discipline and offers good opportunities if you perform best within clearly defined structures and processes. In its most simple form, if you enjoy getting a good deal, Procurement is the place to be. If you are looking to make a difference, then the Public Sector is also a good way to do that.

Do you think Social Value being a big part of procurement has changed perceptions of it?

C: I guess that depends on the way stakeholders are engaged and the approach people have taken in explaining what social

value is and what their expectations are. Initially it was difficult to get buy in, but we persevered and focused on winning both the hearts and minds of internal and external stakeholders. Social value used to be what procurement did, but we have worked really hard to get everyone in the organisation to embrace a shared sense of responsibility for delivering social value by integrating it into our culture. We still have work to do but it's really encouraging when stakeholders approach us for support because they want to understand what more they can do to create social value through their networks. This shows that there is definitely more of a pull than push effect happening which is great.

Do you see more corporate social responsibility from private businesses since the Social Value Act?

C: We see more because we ask for more. We are working very closely with our suppliers to support them in delivering social value by providing guidance and being clear about what the needs of our residents are through engagement with our third sector organisations and our Social Value Marketplace. This is something they really appreciate because it makes doing good for the community a lot easier for them. Our suppliers are starting to think more about aligning what they are doing with the gaps that we have, and that cooperation is where the real magic of Social Value is.

So, the thing that matters most is working with private businesses and cooperating?

C: Absolutely. I believe we as the public sector need to be setting an example of what best practice is when it comes to collaboration because it is in our long-term interest to do so. And it's not just about working with private businesses, it's about facilitating discussions and creating networks between the private sector, other public sector organisations, social enterprises and our voluntary, community and faith sectors. When we work in partnership and target our combined resources we will leverage synergy and have much more of a positive impact in our communities. The whole is definitely greater than the sum of its parts, when it comes to social value we will achieve much more by working together than we will if we do things on our own.

Do other councils need to be pushed to pursue Social Value farther?

C: I think Councils always want to do more for their residents and through the Social Value Taskforce I know there are many that want to



The Social Value Maturity Index

A method for determining where you are on your Social Value journey compared to your peers, and to understand which steps to take next. [Click here](#) to find out more...

drive the delivery of social value further but may not have the resources to be able to do so. We have been successful because we dedicated resources to it. Like other areas of innovation and value creation, Social Value, is everyone's responsibility, but if you want to get maximum results you need a targeted, focused effort. If you leave it ticking over and nobody is directly responsible or accountable, then it's going to take a lot longer and you may not get the same success rate.

Why do councils leave it ticking over, is the Act not strong enough?

C: The concept of value creation is nothing new; the Local Government Act (1999) tells commissioners to consider the 'broader context' and value for money of projects, the Sustainable Procurement Agenda mentions environmental and economic considerations and in when assessing tenders choosing the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) is about giving consideration to aspects 'over and above the core service', how much more legislation do you need? I would argue that the call to 'consider' Social Value in the Act should be sufficient because of the subject matter at hand.

So, what was the motivation for Orbis to pursue Social Value so vigilantly?

C: Like most resourcing decisions it depends on the priorities of the organisation and senior management. For Surrey and East Sussex County Councils putting residents at the heart of everything we do is part of our culture. The senior leadership team saw the benefit of focusing on value creation and the potential social value provides for us to leverage not

just our expenditure but all our assets and resources.

How has your procurement process changed since the Act?

C: Before the Act we were considering specific aspects of Social Value such as creating apprenticeships opportunities and focusing on increasing local spend which are important council objectives. We now consider Social Value for all tenders over £100K. Our Social Value Measurement Charter that I worked with the Social Value Portal to develop identifies themes, outcomes and measures (TOMs) that are important to us and this has been embedded as business as usual within our internal approach to value creation. I have also developed training and guidance material to support our team and suppliers deliver Social Value more easily. We are collaborating more broadly and recently helped facilitate the creation of the ['Modern Day Slavery in Construction'](#) video that was used to raise awareness with Cabinet Ministers and organisations across the private, public and third sector both nationally and internationally.

Embedding Social Value in the process and imparting that knowledge then seems like the top priority?

C: Absolutely, it's included in all our procurement communication both internally and externally from before we go to the market all the way through to contract award. As Councils our duty is to create value for our residents and we know that we can only achieve this by collaborating with our supply chain, businesses based in the county and our partners such as District & Boroughs, Blue light services and Clinical Commissioning Groups.

What issues did you come across pursuing Social Value, and how did you overcome them?

C: The biggest issue was actually getting people to buy in. We wanted to include Social Value as a weighted criteria in our tenders, as opposed to just focusing on price and service quality, but we had to address concerns about risks in relation to increases in prices because we were including a new element within the bidding process. After piloting a few projects we received positive responses from

the market and there was no evidence to suggest that bidders were increasing their prices because of social value. I think much of this had to do with the fact that we were not prescriptive in our approach and left it up to suppliers to decide what was within their capacity and capability to deliver

What should Social Value look like in the future?

C: For me creating social value is not about compliance nor is it something that we should focus on because it's a 'nice thing to do', creating social value is something we must do if we want to continue to prosper in a sustainable way. We have all got to make an effort, whether you are an individual, multinational corporation, small business, public sector or third sector organisation. It's not about one person or organisation doing everything its about all of us, and the legacy of our combined efforts. I like to think of social value as a movement, a shift in the culture of our society that inspires and encourages civic engagement. Keep connecting the dots, focus on things that you can realistically do and bear witness to the positive impact that you can have.

What is one thing about you that would surprise people?

C: My brightest ideas come to me in the shower.

Thank you, Cindy, for taking the time to speak to us, and we hope you continue to impart your Social Value expertise on others!

For our readers, here are some key learnings from Cindy:

- You must be bold and actually ask businesses for Social Value commitments to get the best results, you cannot just expect it from them
- Create a role focussed on the pursuit and implementation of Social Value, such as Cindy's, so that it is always on the agenda
- Embedding Social Value into the procurement process ensures that it will always be considered
- Weighted tenders make businesses take Social Value seriously, and in turn get the best offers

- Examples of good practice are needed to show other councils, districts and

boroughs that increased Social Value is possible

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

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

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