

Case Study: Social Value

Purpose

NI Water's Capital Procurement Team oversees the procurement of professional services and capital works frameworks and plays a key role in shaping future delivery strategies. In alignment with Procurement Policy Note (PPN) 01/21 on Social Value in Procurement, the team is committed to ensuring public spend is used strategically to maximise public benefit and improve outcomes for people, communities, and the environment.

How we adhere to this?

Social value requirements are embedded within the professional services and capital works frameworks supporting delivery of NI Water's Capital Works Programme (CWP). This ensures social value is a structured, measurable, and contractually enforceable element of delivery, rather than a standalone or optional consideration.

Suppliers are required to deliver defined social, economic, and environmental outcomes through a formal Social Value Delivery Plan (SVDP), supported by ongoing monitoring, annual reviews, and continuous improvement to respond to evolving programme and community needs.

Delivery is driven through:

- A quantifiable, points-based system
- Mandatory requirements (e.g. action plans for skills, environment, and supply chain resilience)
- Targeted priorities, including allocating at least 50% of outcomes to employment and skills, reflecting local needs

This approach aligns fully with the PPN by operationalising social value across four core themes—employment and skills, ethical supply chains, environmental sustainability, and wellbeing—while requiring collaboration across supply chains, robust reporting, and delivery at no additional cost to the client. This ensures public spend delivers transparent, accountable, and outcome-focused benefits.

Outcome

NI Water's Capital Procurement Team receives suppliers' annual SVDPs and compiles a consolidated return for the Strategic Investment Board, providing transparency of delivery across all themes.

Success is measured through:

- Achievement of defined social value outcomes against the points-based framework
- Compliance with mandatory delivery requirements
- Ongoing monitoring and reporting

This ensures outcomes are measurable, verifiable, and aligned to programme and community objectives.

Key outcomes against the key themes include:

- **Employment and Skills:** Suppliers have created apprenticeships, graduate roles, and student placements, supported by ongoing mentoring from senior staff to enable skills progression and clear pathways to full-time employment.

Site visits for primary, secondary, and FE students provide early exposure to engineering careers and entry routes, helping raise industry awareness and address future skills shortages.

- **Ethical and Resilient Supply Chains:** Suppliers are integrating social and micro enterprises into their supply chains, supporting them through business development and knowledge sharing across the supply chain and wider community sectors.

Case studies highlight strong collaboration with institutions such as Ulster University and Engineers Ireland, supporting skills development, capability building, and long-term workforce sustainability.

- **Environmental Sustainability:** Suppliers are delivering environmental initiatives to reduce impact, improve resource efficiency, and promote sustainable practices across projects and operations.

Case studies evidence environmental improvements through schemes such as rainwater harvesting systems, reuse of materials within local communities, and training to strengthen environmental awareness and incident response (e.g. spill drills).

They also demonstrate a proactive approach to sustainability through ongoing staff training, continuous improvement in environmental practices, and integration of sustainable behaviours into day-to-day operations.

- **Promoting Wellbeing:** Suppliers are delivering initiatives and events to support mental and physical wellbeing for staff and local communities.

Case studies evidence mental health awareness through toolbox talks and boardroom sessions (including a presentation from Lighthouse Charity), alongside physical health initiatives such as site health checks, one-to-one assessments, and lifestyle advice.

They also demonstrate a strong wellbeing and safety culture, with investment in workforce capability, reduced stigma, and the use of training, inductions, and repeat programmes with measurable participation.

Collectively, this approach evidences a mature, structured model for delivering social value, ensuring NI Water's investment generates sustainable, long-term benefits for the economy, environment, and local communities.