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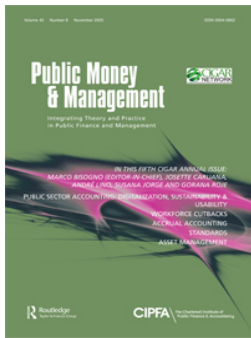
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Debate: Social value and social deprivation

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Defining social value

Historically, social value has been seen as lacking a precise definition (Mulholland et al., 2019); however, some particular definitions help us focus on its relationship to social deprivation:

- It is the extent to which an intervention or project generates value for society (RICS, 2020).
- It is a net positive change in human wellbeing (BSI, 2020).
- It captures the difference an organization or project can make to the community or communities it operates in (Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Social Value Policy and Framework, 2022).
- It is the value of the net impact that a policy, organization or project has on the wellbeing of people in society (Fujiwara et al., 2021).

From a global academic perspective, the definition of social value is also well debated, with a few relevant journal article definitions:

- 'Improved income, health and well-being and reduced crime, substance abuse and incarceration' (Denny-Smith & Loosemore, 2020).
- 'How we contribute positively to the communities in which we work' (Raiden et al., 2018).

While there is a need to conduct more qualitative research and empirical studies (Redpath, 2018) in order to gain a greater understanding of social deprivation, after a superficial examination of relevant academic literature, it is not difficult to convince the reader that the common social value interventions being proposed in social value bid submissions to the public sector (increased employment, volunteering, charitable donations) are, if properly directed, the solutions to many social deprivation issues.

Example from case study

To illustrate the subjectivity in measuring social value and to demonstrate that any given project may have a wide range of potential social value solutions, Harrow Council engaged the Social Value Portal (SVP) to pilot a social value assessment tool on a tender for the renovation and refurbishment of a council property in Harrow. There were nine financial submissions, plus each bidder produced a social value submission through SVP. Each bidder was asked to

construct and evaluate its social value proposal expressed as a percentage of total contract value. The comparison shown in Figure 1 reveals that the social value submissions ranged from +4% to +57% of Social Value Add (SVA).

The highest social value proposal (£781,000) ranked fifth in contract price. The lowest contract price included over 41% SVA and the highest only 3.5% SVA—confirming that there is no correlation between the contract price and the SV offer, as proposed solutions differ radically from supplier to supplier (Social Value Portal, 2021). While it was not the primary purpose of the case study, this outcome illustrates how diverse social value bid responses can be when there is no specific direction provided by the customer. How much more advantageous would it have been if all nine bidders had been asked to target specific, relevant social deprivation issues local to Harrow?

Social deprivation indices

Official UK neighbourhood data is published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, and relates to seven specific deprivation categories, namely: income, employment, education/skills/training, health/disability, crime, barriers to housing and services and living environment. Every one of the circa 33,000 English neighbourhoods has been ranked by category, relative to each other, from the most deprived to the least deprived. Then, for ease of comparison, sub-divided into 10 equal groups. Decile #1 includes the circa 3,300 most deprived regions, decile #2 has the next most deprived regions and so on.

Using an agreed apportionment specific to England (see Table 1 below), the seven individual categories of deprivation are combined into a single Multiple Deprivation Score with subsequent ranking and decile designation.

While these indices are used in the publication of other useful information, such as an annual well-being index, there is a lack of evidence that this information is used to direct social value tender questions.

Prioritization tool

We constructed a tool that relies on the premise that there is a direct relationship between the level and type of social deprivation in a society, community, region or neighbourhood and the efficient prioritization of specific social value initiatives.

Contract Value vs Target Social Value

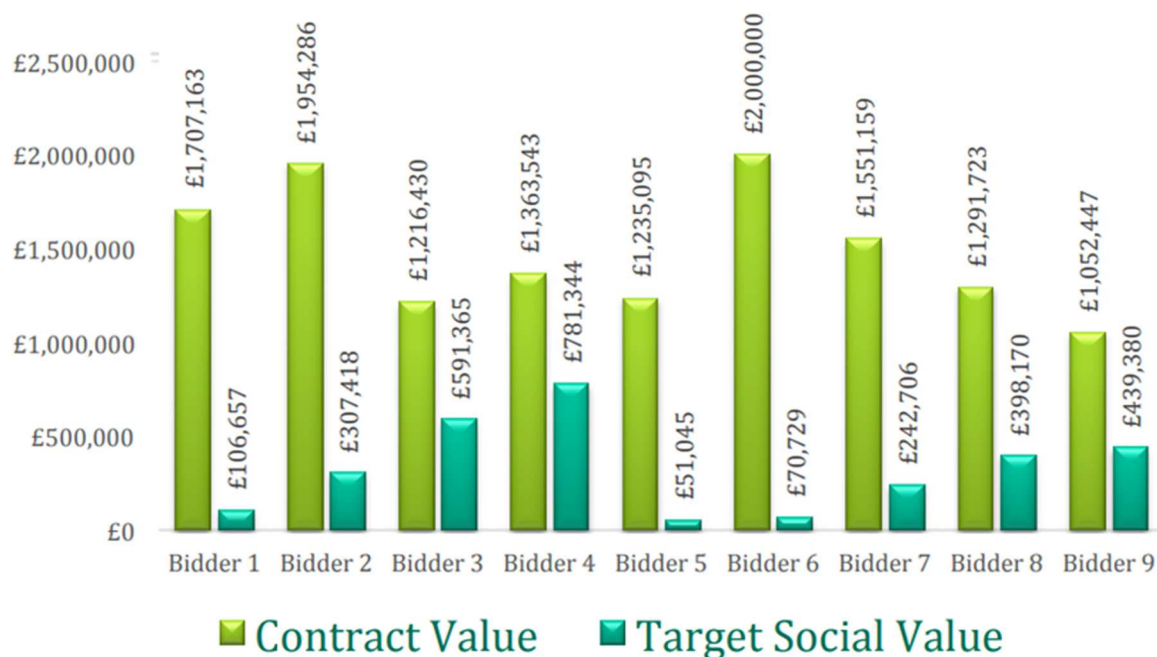


Figure 1. Summary of social value bids to Harrow Council (source: SVP).

Table 1. Deprivation report information (source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019).

Deprivation Report Information							
LSOA Description	Lower-Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are small areas designed to be of a similar population size, with an average of approximately 1,500 residents or 650 households. There are 32,844 Lower-layer LSOAs in England. LSOAs are a standard statistical geography produced by the Office for National Statistics for the reporting of small area statistics. LSOAs are also referred to as <i>Neighbourhoods</i> .						
Deprivation Category:	Income	Employment	Education, Skills & Training	Health & Disability	Crime	Barriers to Housing & Services	Living Environment
Proportion applied to Multiple Deprivation Score:	22.5%	22.5%	13.5%	13.5%	9.3%	9.33%	9.33%

Local Area Region 'X' Comparative Deprivation

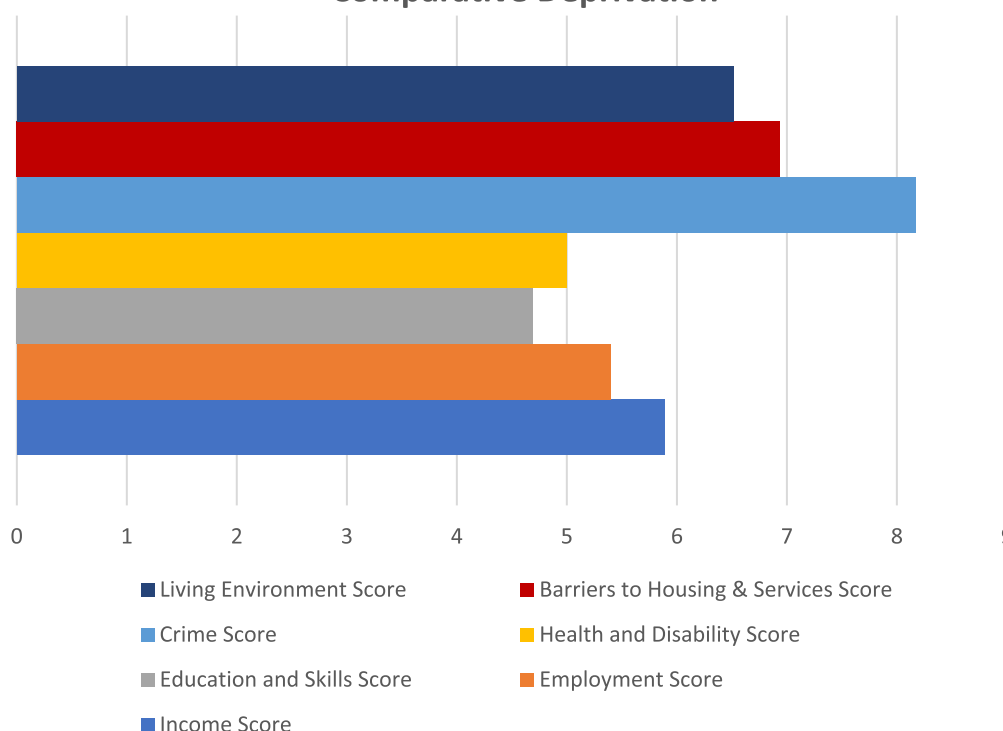


Figure 2. Typical comparative deprivation for a neighbourhood.

Deprivation data from each neighbourhood (Lower-Layer Super Output Area or LSOA) as listed in the English Indices of Deprivation 2019 has been grouped within its respective region (corresponding with local council areas) in an individual worksheet and its individual deciles together with its Multiple Deprivation Deciles have been averaged to give an indicative overall score for the region. Regional deprivation information has not been published in this format before—it is based on the average of decile memberships as opposed to a more statistically accurate score. The tool nevertheless represents a valid approach for the purpose of prioritizing social value intervention types, in that each region is scored using a consistent means, and each neighbourhood (LSOA), which is the denominator in the calculation of each average score, is the same approximate size (1,500 residents or 650 households).

A summary of the comparative deprivation is produced in the format of Figure 2. In this case the area of greatest deprivation is 'Education and Skills'. The tool therefore directs the user to a series of focused social value questions such as: 'State your commitment to creating new apprenticeship roles for individuals previously unemployed'.

References to the corresponding mission, outcome and metric from the 2025 Social Value Model are provided, together with logic developed by the authors through previous research (Shields et al., 2025). This tool has the potential to be highly useful to procurement authorities and suppliers alike.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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