
Mission-led procurement: Early insights from exploratory work in Camden

An IIPP Policy Studio insights report in collaboration
with Camden Council

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Partners

UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP) aims to develop a new framework for creating, nurturing and evaluating public value in order to achieve economic growth that is more innovation-led, inclusive and sustainable. We intend this framework to inform the debate about the direction of economic growth and the use of mission-oriented policies to confront social and technological problems. Our work will feed into innovation and industrial policy, financial reform, institutional change and sustainable development.

The project is delivered by the IIPP Policy Studio, which brings together bespoke multidisciplinary teams to design policies and tools, combining different methodologies, lenses, and approaches. The Studio works in partnership with governments and institutions from across the world to co-design and test new policy frameworks and on-the-ground solutions to translate new economic thinking into practice. This report by IIPP Policy Studio is supported by Laudes Foundation.

Camden Council is committed to reflecting on the capacities, approaches and resources needed to tackle the complex challenges our communities face, and to more effectively incorporate the wider resources of our Borough (whether from business, community or civic sectors) into our missions work. Having embedded our Missions in our We Make Camden strategy, we are now exploring how we can orient our levers and facilities as an organisation to support effective delivery.

Our partnership with IIPP reflects our ongoing commitment to reflection, transparency and learning as part of understanding the role that the public sector could and should play in the twenty-first century in leading and improving places. We are excited to continue to work with IIPP to develop and share learning that can support our work in our communities, and share early thinking with our Camden partners and sectoral colleagues.

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Abstract

For the last 40 years, public procurement has been seen as a back-office function, whose main objective was to keep costs down and buy goods and services at the cheapest price. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 aimed to increase emphasis on the environmental and social values enabled by procurement activity. Today, there is growing interest in procurement as a strategic lever at all levels of government.

IIPP has been working with Camden Council to explore the question: 'How can public sector procurement support mission-oriented organisations?' This builds on the work of the Camden Renewal Commission, in which the council included four Missions as a core part of its new *We Make Camden* strategy. They are:

- By 2030, Camden's estates and their neighbourhoods are healthy, sustainable and unlock creativity.
- By 2030, everyone eats well every day with nutritious, affordable, sustainable food
- By 2030, those holding positions of power in Camden are as diverse as our community – and the next generation are ready to follow.
- By 2025, every young person has access to economic opportunity that enables them to be safe and secure.

This paper examines the emerging lessons from the first phase of IIPP's work with Camden Council through the Policy Studio, combining insights from literature, interviews and practical experience. The paper is – by design – incomplete and open ended. We hope to make this a collaborative inquiry for all those interested in the practical realities of mission-oriented innovation. We invite and welcome comment, critique and challenge, especially from practitioners and thinkers interested in enhancing the potential of public procurement to address the social and economic challenges we face today. While our focus is primarily on UK local government, we believe the trends and opportunities discussed in this paper have close parallels in other contexts too.

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Executive summary

The procurement landscape today

Public procurement in UK Local Authorities continues to prioritise a management through measurement approach that predominantly conceptualises value for money in terms of lowest cost. Grounded in the New Public Management Paradigm, this has made it difficult to justify selecting suppliers based on wider public value that they may provide and reduced the strategic importance of procurement as a lever in delivering policy goals.

The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 sought to broaden that conception of value, placing obligations on public bodies to secure socially-valuable outcomes through their procurement processes. This has been widely embedded and it is now common practice for contracts to include a social value component. However, given the financial and political constraints that councils operate within, it has proved difficult for many public managers to move beyond seeing social value as an 'add-on.' For many Local Authorities, including Camden, it also lacks strategic coherence: the social value commitments secured from suppliers are not necessarily always related to the highest priority goals. Camden is undertaking a separate piece of work to review its approach to social value.

From a theoretical perspective, social value is a 'market fixing' approach to delivering public value. It seeks to correct an externality (the exclusion of non-financial value), and then to use a competitive, price-based market mechanism to select providers. It is also generally conceived of in static terms (eg % of spend with SMEs) rather than dynamic objectives (growth of local SMEs into new markets).

A variety of organisations have been theorising and practising new approaches to enabling commissioning and procurement to deliver public value. These include CLES (Community Wealth Building), New Local (Community Power), Centre for Public Impact (Human Learning Systems), Localis (Ethical Procurement). Although these frameworks prioritise different things, they are generally complementary, and all emphasise the strategic role of procurement in supporting transformation and system change.

Mission-led procurement

Procurement plays a key role in the innovation chain, and governments have long recognised the power of procurement to support new technologies and businesses.

There are three mechanisms through which public procurement can play this role. Firstly, procurement can create markets by providing a demand side pull for new products and services – known as providing a 'lead market.' Second, by changing their approach to procurement governments can widen the ecosystem of companies able to access government contracts. Finally, changing how procurement is done can increase the local economic multiplier.

Over the last few years a number of governments have adopted 'Missions' as a key part of their organisation's strategy (eg. Greater Manchester, Scottish Government, Camden Council, European Commission). Procurement has huge potential to be used as a strategic lever to enable governments to operationalise those Mission-oriented strategies (we call this 'Mission-led' procurement). We suggest adopting a 'Mission-led' procurement approach is distinct because:

- It takes a dynamic view rather than a static view
- It explicitly targets transformation of a system
- It sets public value priorities
- It sets a timeframe that is longer than typical contract cycles;
- It seeks to make questions of public value intrinsic rather than additional to the procurement

Through interviews and workshops with Camden officers, we suggest the following key features and characteristics of 'Mission-led' procurement:

Market shaping is the proactive building of capabilities in the local market. This encompasses some of the elements Foss et al (2023) refer to as ecosystem leadership, such as creating a shared vision and securing co-investment and commitment from partners. Camden may also be able to provide support to current or potential suppliers that enables them to take on new work or to work in new ways – for instance, helping suppliers improve their resident engagement capabilities.

Outcomes commissioning is an approach which seeks to improve the quality of public services by focusing on the overall outcome rather than on quantitatively specified inputs or outputs. By doing so, it makes the objective of the commissioning body clear, but is open to multiple different ways of achieving it. For example, a tender for employment support services might ask for 'higher confidence amongst job seekers' rather than specifying '1 meeting with every job seeker per fortnight.' It aims to spur innovative solutions and align the commissioner and provider around shared goals. However, it can be difficult to measure, and the risk of targeting complex outcomes is that they are inevitably influenced by external factors. This can make payment by outcome contentious and difficult to achieve in practice (Saunders et al, 2020), and can lead to gaming from suppliers.

Place-based commissioning seeks to drive collaboration between services that happen in a particular place, recognising the impact that they have on each other. Local Authority commissioning tends to happen within silos constructed built around service lines. Place-based commissioning would enable Camden to think at the system level – making investments in one area of the system that deliver value (and may reduce cost) in other areas. Place based work also opens up greater possibilities of co-design and participation in procurement. One aspect of the commissioning and procurement cycle that often gets overlooked as a source of social value is deciding what services need to be commissioned in the first place.

Organisational change means adapting the internal processes and governance of Camden's commissioning and procurement system. Opportunities for change were identified at various points of the process. The three key themes that emerged were around mindset & culture, leadership, and learning.

A range of organisational and individual capabilities are required to enable a mission-led procurement approach. These build on the Local Government Association's National Procurement Strategy framework. Organisational capabilities might require new teams or processes – they are not necessarily things that individuals can develop on their own. Individual capabilities focused on the central procurement team in particular. At the root of all of those skills is the “need for an understanding of what we're trying to achieve,” seeing the strategic relevance of each act of procurement in its wider context rather than just applying legal, financial and regulatory expertise.

Based on the challenges and opportunities identified so far, we are creating a set of 'problem briefs' to respond to. In the next phase of the project, we will design and test interventions under a selection of these; the remaining problem briefs can be used by Camden as they take the work forwards, and other contracting authorities that are interested in experimenting with a mission-led procurement approach.

Context: The procurement landscape today

Public sector procurement is “the process by which governments and other bodies under public law purchase products, services and other works” (Handler, 2015). It is a large market: in the UK approximately a third of public spending is procurement, worth almost £300bn in 2019/20 (House of Commons, 2022). In 2021, local authorities spent a total of c. £70bn with third parties – of which £14.6bn was from the London Boroughs (EY and Oxygen Finance, 2022). The market is characterised by a few ‘mega-firms’ that receive significant sums from Local Authorities across the country. The biggest of these is Veolia Group, which predominantly provides waste services, and received over £600m in 2021. In total, Local Authorities spent £7bn with the top 20 suppliers (ibid); for context, the total size of the Government’s Levelling Up Fund is £4.8bn (DLUHC, 2022).

Camden’s annual procurement spend is ~£400m out of a total budget of £850m. That provides significant potential leverage for supporting Camden’s Missions. But the full impact of the Council’s procurement is even bigger, given the local multiplier effect – the additional money spent locally as a result of the Council’s activities (Sacks, 2002). For example, if Camden uses suppliers with a local workforce, then they are likely to spend some portion of their salary in local shops.

Since the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering in 1980, the laws and regulations governing procurement activity in UK local governments have changed significantly. This section provides a brief overview of some of the main changes in that time, and where the conversation is today.

New public management and compulsory competitive tendering

The Thatcher Governments of the 1980s aimed to expose public services to competition and create new markets for private sector companies, a strategy grounded in New Public Management (NPM) and a wider approach to reducing the influence of the trade unions. NPM privileged private sector management techniques and sought to introduce competition and choice and is often summarised in the mantra ‘markets, managers and metrics’. The policy mechanism for this was the Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) regime, introduced and strengthened through Local Government Acts in 1980, 1998 and 1992 (progressing from blue collar to white collar services over time). This required a comparison of cost of continuing in-house provision of specified services with interested private sector bidders, with cost the ultimate measure. It was the tendering process rather than outsourcing that was compulsory and if no private sector bid was forthcoming or the in-house offer was lowest cost the service stayed in-house. CCT didn’t result in all services being contracted out, but it did build a mixed economy and encouraged a client-contractor split even where services remained in-house. Short term cost savings resulted but mainly through a reduction in terms and conditions and studies (often sponsored by the outsourcing industry) that set out unit cost savings ignore wider impacts of increased complexity, loss of in-house capability, and reduced responsiveness to citizens. New Labour’s Best Value regime superseded CCT, broadening how value was defined to place greater emphasis on quality and wider economic considerations. But it retained a legal duty to compare provision with private

sector and a set of assumptions grounded in NPM – and outsourcing continued to increase across the public sector and local government under New Labour.

Social value act

In 2012, the UK brought in the Public Services (Social Value) Act, placing obligations on public bodies to secure socially-valuable outcomes through their procurement processes. Illustrative examples included in the guidance and the original lack of clear definition or methodology for specifying or measuring social value led to a generalised and under-ambitious approach, with Social Value inclusion in procurement being seen by many as ineffective at tackling deeper social problems. New guidance accompanying HM Treasury Green Book updates in 2021 and 2022 added more sophisticated and robust illustration and methodology to address this, particularly in the area of wellbeing. This has revived ambition and provided a clearer structure for negotiation and partnering between public, private and VCSE sectors. Two key criticisms remain, however: that social value is still fundamentally conceived as 'value-added' rather than intrinsic to the act of procurement (though intrinsic social value is a recognised form); and that the logic of guidance remains fundamentally mitigatory – conceptually it is aimed at extracting socially valuable outcomes from a process that sits outside of social value (Karthaus and Richards, 2021).

These shifts in public guidance are both informed by and responding to developing debate in ESG in the private sector. Frustrated at the lack of depth in social value practices, many organisations are exploring more qualitative methods to understand social value, stimulating further debate about the limitations of measurement and reporting of impact.

European directives

European public procurement rules were designed to foster competition and efficiency by promoting interest from businesses across Member States. The original aim was to move away from 'buy national' policies and habits, and to promote and embed the single market (Handler 2015). Traditionally, the most important award criterion was price. Thus the EU procurement regulations were historically grounded in a *market fixing* paradigm – in which the government sought to create a level playing field (in this case, between competitors in different countries).

However, since at least 2008 the EU has recognized the *market shaping* power of procurement as well, particularly with regard to environmental objectives, noting that public procurement “can shape production and consumption trends and a significant demand from public authorities for 'greener' goods will create or enlarge markets for environmentally friendly products and services” (European Commission, 2008).

This approach was made tangible in the 2014 Public Procurement Directives, which tried to move towards a more strategic approach to public procurement by integrating environmental aspects, social and ethical standards, and innovation. These three components provide the structure for much of the conversation about procurement today.

<p>Green procurement</p>	<p>Green procurement refers to the inclusion of environmental considerations in the procurement process. This goes right from the legal and policy framework through to market engagement, specification and award criteria, and monitoring (OECD, 2015). To take one example, the Estonian Road Administration carried out a procurement of buses in 2010. Tenderers were given points on their application for buses that met certain emissions limits, could use diesel fuel, and had particular air conditioning specifications (ibid).</p>
<p>Socially responsible procurement</p>	<p>Socially responsible procurement refers to the inclusion of a range of criteria – such as employment opportunities, decent work, ethical trade, accessibility, and equal opportunities. Hamilton (2020) points out that there is a long history of governments leveraging public procurement to advance social objectives, such as the executive order of 1840 that established the 10-hour working day for those on particular government contracts in the USA. In this sense, it is the last 40 years – marked by a narrow focus on price and financial value – that is an anomaly.</p>
<p>Procurement for innovation</p>	<p>Procurement for innovation refers to the use of public procurement to stimulate the creation and adoption of solutions that are not yet commercially available. It recognizes that large government procurement contracts can provide a <i>lead market</i>, and thereby provide enough scale for a new solution to become viable. The classic case is the USA Department of Defence (DOD), which provided a market for many of the innovative products that came through the DARPA research programme. Without the DOD's spending power, it may have been difficult for many of the technologies to reach the scale needed to be commercially viable.</p>

The UK, of course, is no longer bound by European procurement regulation. Before Brexit, the Johnson government promised a bonfire of red tape to give smaller firms a bigger slice of Government contracts (Sánchez-Graells, 2022). However, the UK's obligations are the same under the World Trade Organisation's Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) as they were before Brexit – and the UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement replicates obligations under EU law that go beyond GPA. As a result, the government is unlikely to be to adopt an expansive 'Buy British' policy or reserve a greater share of procurement contracts for domestic businesses (ibid).

UK Government Procurement Bill

Though the WTO GPA places limits on the scale of change, the Government's Procurement Bill, based on the Green Paper *Transforming Public Procurement* (2020) marks a significant change in policy. Alongside aiming to speed up and simplify procurement processes, there is a strong focus on enabling more SMEs, charities and social enterprises to access government contracts. The Cabinet Office stated in the Green Paper that they "want to send a clear message that public sector commercial teams do not have to select the lowest price bid" and that they should "take a broad view of value for money that includes social value." The Bill requires contracts to be awarded on the basis of the "Most Advantageous Tender," (MAT) rather than the "Most Economically Advantageous Tender" (MEAT) as it had previously been – reflecting the desire for broader considerations to be given greater space in procurement decisions.

A series of Procurement Policy Notes (PPNs) gave further detail into the Government's approach. They included ensuring that all central government procurements contain at least 10% Social Value Weighting and requiring certain suppliers to provide a Carbon Reduction Plan. PPN 05/21, the National Procurement Policy Statement, directs contracting authorities to consider three national priority outcomes alongside local issues:

- Creating new businesses, jobs and skills,
- Tackling climate change and reducing waste,
- Improving supplier diversity, innovation and resilience

McLinden (2021) highlights some concerns that Local Authorities have raised – in particular that "the primary focus [is] on changing legal processes, rather than how stated principles and objectives can be achieved in practice or any plan on how public procurement will be invested in by government." He argues that, despite the NPPS laying out some high-level priorities, there is still no detailed delivery plan that contracting authorities will be able to follow. The Local Government Association (LGA) raises the concern that the Bill may limit the ease with which Councils can collaborate with each other to run shared services without engaging the market, even for arrangements wholly within the public sector (Local Government Association, 2023). Burch (2023) notes that the Bill does not address transparency questions raised by the COVID 'VIP' lane, and that the change from MEAT to MAT based evaluation may not have much impact. The Bill is currently at Committee Stage in the House of Commons, and would come into force in late 2023 at the earliest.

Beyond the incremental

Whilst the trends noted above do point towards more of a market shaping approach, it remains the case that in most procurement activity cost remains the dominant factor. Even where new approaches allow for or require non-price considerations to be taken into account, the logic is often still grounded in the market-fixing paradigm that has dominated the past 40 years: that by fixing the information asymmetry of the benefits each supplier offers, the best possible outcome will be found through a competitive market-based procurement process. As a result, the 'market-shaping' element of the work is often marginal and incremental, reduced to adding a few points in

an evaluation of bids, and the relationship between contracting authority and supplier is still primarily thought of in transactional terms.

Against this backdrop, there has been increasing interest in procurement's role in supporting transformation and system change. Procurement is never going to address the complex challenges faced by governments alone – but it seems reasonable to ask whether it can do more. There is an active field of thinkers and doers working on new, ambitious approaches to procurement.

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) has for many years seen procurement as an integral part of its Community Wealth Building approach. It aims to “change the way our economy functions, retaining more wealth and opportunity for local people” (CLES 2023) and focuses on increasing the proportion of money spent locally and with SMEs or co-operatively owned businesses.

Similarly, recent work from the Centre for London explored how local authorities could increase the impact of community asset approaches, including procurement, pensions and property (Centre for London, 2022). A key recommendation was for local authorities to better define what they want to achieve – ie. to articulate the *direction* they are aiming for, in collaboration with local residents. Camden's work to define its missions through the Renewal Commission – which included extensive community engagement – provides the structure within which social value and procurement can have greater strategic impact.

Localis have argued for an 'ethical procurement' framework for local government (McLinden, 2021). This is a mix of embedding requirements on suppliers (to provide good jobs, a positive local impact, and to be low carbon), and councils improving their own practice (through greater transparency, simpler application processes, and good training).

New Local have set out proposals for broader change to public services in *The Community Paradigm*, which seeks to move power down to communities and individuals by making local government more collaborative and open. They advocate for 'community commissioning' - which would mean “would mean taking budgets currently controlled by public services and transferring them to the control of organisations formed directly by service users or members of the local community” (Lent and Studdert, 2021).

The Centre for Public Impact and Collaborate CIC have been developing the *Human Learning Systems* framework as an approach to commissioning grounded in the complexity of people's lives, the issues that funders care about, and the systems that respond to support people (Knight et al, 2017). They emphasise a relational approach to funding, in which suppliers are seen as partners working towards a shared vision, rather than service providers aiming to hit agreed targets.

In the commercial world the professional network The Art of Procurement has been promoting the concept of '10x procurement' – which challenges procurement leaders to aim for exponential rather than incremental improvement and argues that “we box ourselves into this idea of what procurement should be” (Art of Procurement, 2022). Although they are focused on the private sector, they frame their work in terms of missions and the moon landing – recognising the level of ambition that is demanded of procurement is similarly high.

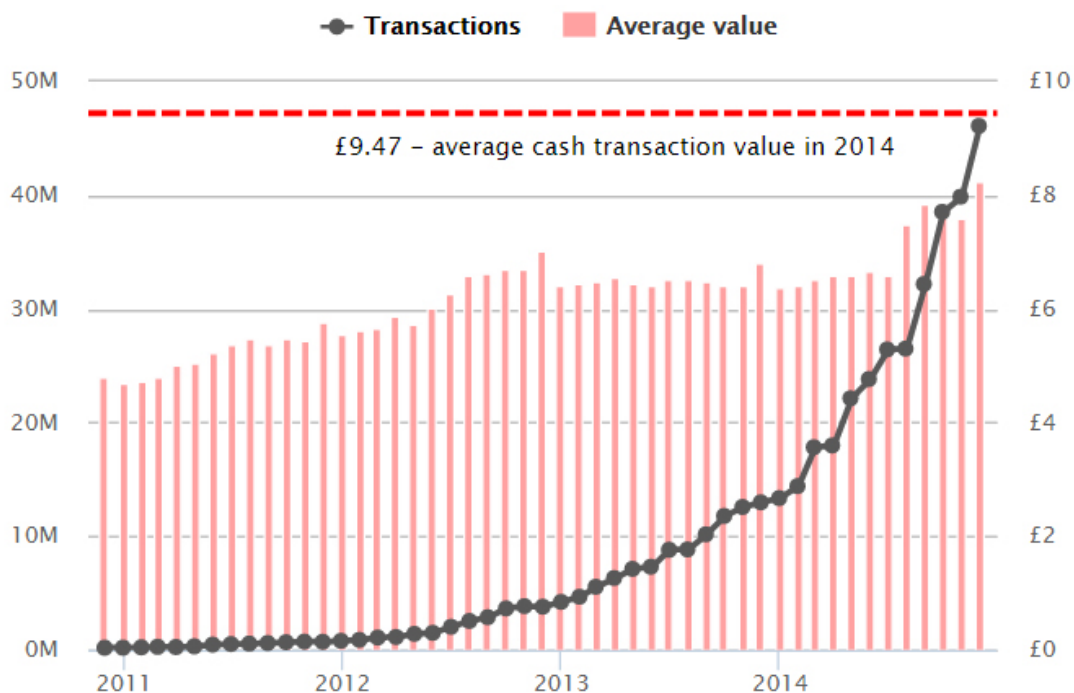
Mission-led procurement

Procurement and the economics of innovation

Procurement plays a key role in the innovation chain, and governments have long recognised the power of procurement to support new technologies and businesses. There are three mechanisms through which public procurement can play this role.

Firstly, procurement can create markets by providing a demand side pull for new products and services – known as providing a ‘lead market.’ In 2012 Transport for London (TfL) started accepting contactless payments on buses, followed in 2014 by the London Underground. This was “seen by many as the catalyst for contactless being adopted more generally by consumers in the UK” (Transport for London, 2022) – with Visa commenting in 2015 that “We’ve seen the use of contactless terminals more than triple over the last year and believe that TfL’s adoption of the technology is a leading reason why consumers have embraced it as fast as they have” (Transport for London, 2015). The chart below shows the growth of contactless transactions from 2011 to 2015 – until TfL’s decision in 2012 the contactless payment industry had “struggled to implement mass consumer use of the technology” (Marketing Week, 2012).

Figure 1: Contactless payments, UK



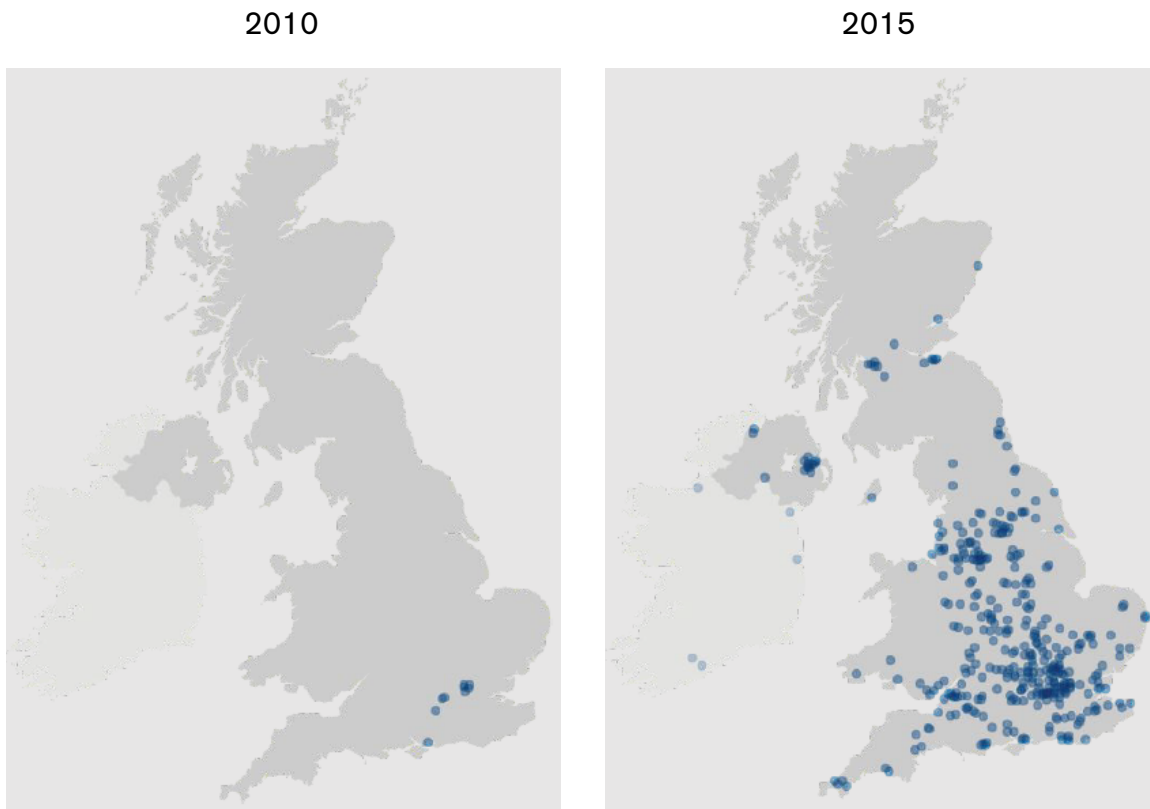
Source: Payments Cards & Mobiles, 2015

Second, by changing their approach to procurement governments can widen the ecosystem of companies able to access government contracts. In 2011 the National Audit Office (NAO) found that of the £16bn the UK Government spent on ICT, 80% was with just 18 suppliers (National Audit Office, 2011). Individual contracts with large IT suppliers were often unmanageable large

and lengthy – one contract between HMRC and Capgemini was for 13 years and valued at £2.3bn, and “too complex to manage” (Public Accounts Committee, 2011).

Government Digital Service (GDS) was the team created in 2011 to lead the UK Government's digital transformation. A core part of their work was the creation of the Digital Marketplace, which is an online service for public sector organisations to find people and technology for digital projects. They made it easier for suppliers to sell to government – by simplifying framework applications, reducing the number of legal documents, and engaging with potential suppliers among other things – and as a result helped create a much more diverse supply base. By 2018 92% of the 5,100 suppliers on Digital Marketplace were Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs), and almost half of the £4.3bn that had been spent through the Marketplace had gone to SMEs (OECD, 2018). As the graphic below shows, increasing diversity also meant that suppliers from across the country were better able to access government contracts.

Figure 2: UK Government IT Suppliers: 2010 and 2015



Source: Mike Bracken, 2020

Finally, changing how procurement is done can increase the local economic multiplier. The multiplier is additional spending by firms and individuals as a consequence of the original government spending. Increasing the number of times money circulates within a local economy is equivalent to increasing investment in the area. For example, if a Council spends £100 with a national catering company, then most of that money will leave the local area; by contrast if they spent it with a local shop more of it would be re-spent through wages, supplies, and further consumption.

As Sacks (2002) showed, understanding the local multiplier effect is more complex than just evaluating what percentage of spend is with local firms – you need to dig down to understand their supply chains and staffing model to understand the flow of finance through the local economy. For example, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council initially found that a non-local construction supplier had a higher multiple than the local supplier. However, the 'local' supplier turned out to be the regional headquarters for a national chain, whereas the 'non-local' one was very geographically close, with many staff that lived in the Borough and commuted (Sacks, 2002).

Our research approach

Over the last few years, an increasing number of governments have adopted a missions framework in their long-term strategic planning. A missions approach is one in which government sets a clear goal and direction, and aims to enable innovative and experimental solutions to a complex challenge from a coalition of cross-sector actors. Moving towards a market shaping mindset opens up new possibilities to address the grand challenges we face today – allowing governments to rethink some of the tools, processes, levers and ways of working that are embedded in the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm, including procurement.

This work explores how taking a missions lens might change procurement in Camden, and more broadly for UK local authorities. Camden is already undertaking work to update and improve the way it approaches social value, in particular focusing on providing contract managers with new tools to better measure and understand the social value actually delivered through the lifetime of a contract. But NPM remains as an underlying philosophy in many places – in a belief in management and measurement as a way of delivering public value, and the risk of a disconnect between the activity of procurement and its commissioning context. We are interested in whether mission-led procurement can help better connect diverse procurement activities to the core organisational goals, providing a greater sense of direction and therefore pick between options that NPM would see as the same.

Our hunch is that mission-led procurement may be distinct from a social value approach because:

- It takes a dynamic view rather than a static view – such as moving from asking 'what % of spend is with SMEs' to 'how has SME spend supported them to scale up and enter new markets?'
- It explicitly targets transformation of a system, not a steady state;
- It sets public value priorities;
- It sets a timeframe;
- It seeks to make questions of public value intrinsic rather than additional to the procurement (which may mean rethinking what is being procured, as well as how).

In particular, we are interested in the following research questions:

- What are the opportunities for targeting outcomes and conditionality to be implemented through procurement?
- What forms of collaboration around procurement might support missions?
- What are the skills and capabilities needed to make this change?

Our approach is founded on close collaboration between IIPP and Camden Council's Strategy and Design team, in conversation with services with procurement responsibilities, officers with significant experience in procurement, and Camden's central procurement team. An engaged research approach prioritises exploration, reflection, and experimentation within psychologically safe conditions so that all those involved are able to bring their experience, expertise, and design capability to the table.

This process is a starting point towards investigating a range of opportunities, tensions, and challenges within the Council. There are complex questions around how this can be operationalised, what new ways of working this approach can enable, and what skills and capabilities would be necessary. In order to provide tangibility to the project, we are grounding our research in Camden's Estates Mission.

The Estates Mission

Camden Council established a Renewal Commission in 2020 to explore what life beyond the Covid-19 pandemic could and should look like, how we could get there, and how we could build a more equal and sustainable society in the process. The Renewal Commission recommended that the Council adopt four missions, which were incorporated into the *We Make Camden* vision document. The Estate Mission sets a vision that by 2030, Camden's estates and their neighbourhoods are healthy, sustainable and unlock creativity. It is about reconceptualising how we think about Camden's housing estates – emphasising the need to see them as whole places in which the Council and partners deliver a coordinated suite of services that are shaped by the voices of local residents and strengthened by the relationships that exist within the estate and between the estate and the wider neighbourhood.

The Estates Mission creates the space to think differently about how the services that Camden collectively delivers in and around estates can contribute to achieving the shared vision. This isn't about the Council working in isolation. Taking a mission-oriented approach also means shaping the conditions for partnership with communities, private sector and third sector organisations. The mission sets a direction and a timeframe which mobilises a whole system – people, public and private – around achieving it.

Within the overall vision of the Estates Mission, Camden wants to achieve three main outcomes. These outcomes are a provisional starting point; they will be agreed and adapted over time based on what matters to people and communities. They are:

1. Camden's housing estates and communities will play an active role in achieving net-zero
2. Camden's housing estates contribute to people living happy and healthy lives
3. Camden's residents are empowered and feel a sense of ownership over the places they live

Clearly, a wide range of public services fall within the scope of these three outcomes. The ambition around net zero incorporates planning, development management, and housing management services among others and may include initiatives to retrofit homes, promote active travel, and reduce waste. Services with an impact on residents' health and happiness include social care, employment support, and public health, while empowerment and ownership open up possibilities for participatory democracy and management of spaces on estates. It is also true that the three outcomes are likely to support each other – more sustainable estates are likely to also be healthier and happier estates.

The ways in which Camden commission and procure goods and services have significant implications for all these areas – ranging from big waste and social care contracts to routine maintenance services. There is therefore an opportunity to transform the lives of our estates by embedding a focus on the mission outcomes within the procurement function.

Emerging lessons and opportunity areas from Camden

Our conversations with Camden officers have sought to explore possible definitions of mission-led procurement and identify areas of opportunity to shift procurement in this direction. We held a series of semi-structured interviews, followed by two workshops with officers from the Estates Mission, procurement, and service leads. Three core themes emerged as central to participants' understanding of *what* mission-led procurement could be: market shaping, commissioning for outcomes, and place-based commissioning; there were also ideas about *how* the Council could change its ways of working in order to mainstream these practices.

Market shaping

Market shaping, in the context of local authority procurement, is focused on understanding the local market, setting expectations with suppliers and building local capacity in areas where there are gaps. Interviewees recognised that “We could be more proactive about engaging with the market – sometimes we just put an advert up and hope that there will be a load of innovative new providers that want to work with us.” Timing is critical here – one of the barriers for Camden is that “the dialogue doesn’t happen early enough to identify that the market isn’t there; so there isn’t an opportunity to codevelop [a tender].”

Market shaping in this context has an inherently relational aspect – it’s about being embedded and active in the local ecosystem of the relevant market to both gather knowledge and influence others’ actions. This part of the commissioning process is hard to formalise and may be left out as a result – as one interviewee said, “there’s no recognition that you are as much choosing the partner as you are the produce and price – how you evaluate the relationship is almost half the job.” A key tension here is that procurement practices are built to guard against personal bias – but that makes it difficult to make use of implicit, tacit knowledge about which suppliers are able to provide high quality work. Procurement systems have an underlying assumption that relevant knowledge about the supply chain can be articulated in a fully objective manner and put down on paper – but this may be more difficult to do than assumed. Interviewees believed that their counterparts in the private sector had much greater leeway to use accumulated market knowledge and experience to exercise judgement about suppliers.

One interviewee framed commissioning as “partly a curatorial role to build up and foster an ecosystem of VCS organisations.” This encapsulates why progressive procurement has to rethink more than just regulatory or technical change – leaders in local government have a role to play to proactively shaping the market so that the right types of actors are able to supply the right kinds of goods and services to deliver the greatest public value. Market shaping might therefore involve taking up a role as an eco-system leader: developing a commonly held vision, securing commitments and investment from partners, and problem-solving ad hoc issues on behalf of the group (Foss et al, 2023). This capability was seen to vary significantly across the Council – as one interviewee put it, “not all of our directors have had the capability or time to invest in [deep market engagement].”

Market-shaping opportunity areas

- Reframing the Council's role as an orchestrator
- Improving story telling & building a shared vision with residents, suppliers, anchor institutions, community organisations
- Securing co-investment and commitment from partners
- A relational approach to supplier and business engagement & earlier engagement
- Proactively creating local capabilities within the local supply chain
- Embedding market engagement in senior directors' roles

Outcomes based commissioning

Outcomes based commissioning is an approach which seeks to improve the quality of public services by focusing on the overall outcome rather than on specified inputs or outputs. By doing so, it makes the objective of the commissioning body clear, but is open to multiple different ways of achieving it. For example, a tender for employment support services might ask for 'higher confidence amongst job seekers' rather than specifying '1 meeting with every job seeker per fortnight.' It aims to spur innovative solutions and align the commissioner and provider around shared goals. However, it can be difficult to measure, and the risk of targeting complex outcomes is that they are inevitably influenced by external factors. This can make payment by outcome contentious and difficult to achieve in practice (Saunders et al, 2020).

Outcomes-oriented commissioning opportunity areas

- Using missions to prioritise and articulate public value outcomes
- Embedding mission outcomes into the procurement stage gate process, and ultimately into contracts
- New approach to measurement and evaluation that prioritises mixed and comparative methods to create confidence that outcomes are being delivered
- Stronger connection between monitoring and evaluation so that service is improved over time

PERSPECTIVES FROM PRATICE

Camden environmental services

In 2017, Camden tried to embed an outcomes approach in its procurement of environmental services (recycling, waste, cleansing). In part this was driven by the need to find £5m of savings, but there were also changing political and social contexts – for example, a desire to increase recycling. Rather than specifying particular activities or outputs (such as clean each street twice a week), the council described four outcomes it would ask suppliers to meet:

- Managing Camden's Local Environmental Quality to an agreed standard
- Minimise waste and maximise participation in reuse and recycling
- Generating additional surplus from business recycling and waste services
- Increasing local employment opportunities and local economic development

The process had some success in driving innovation – in part because it forced earlier engagement with the market. This in turn enabled potential suppliers to reach out to local VCSEs to better understand how they might collaboratively change behaviour on recycling. Focusing on outcomes forced providers to “turn up the volume on innovation” and demonstrate a willingness to trial new approaches.

However, there were political and reputational challenges. One tension that emerged was between the need for universality and the nature of an outcomes-based contract. Politicians wanted to be able to promise a clear level of equal service across the borough (for example, that your street will be cleaned at least once a week), but an outcomes contract requires the flexibility for providers to be able to deliver those outcomes in the way they think works best.

Another challenge was embedding outcome-oriented commissioning in the context of falling budgets. This led to an evaluation framework weighted towards the financial benchmark. The acute financial pressure that local authorities in the UK are operating under makes it difficult to maximise public value from procurement. Well-funded local government is integral to delivering public value.

Finally, measurement, tracking and performance evaluation present a significant barrier to outcome level contracts, for two reasons. Firstly, the timeframes over which outcomes might be achieved is often longer than standard contracts: changing the culture around recycling and waste might take many years, with local government holding only a few of the levers required. Secondly, focusing on outcomes inevitably reduces the control that a supplier has over the result. For example, the decision of supermarkets to change the packaging for their products may have a significant influence over recycling rates, but is outside the control of the Council's waste services supplier.

Place-based commissioning

Place-based commissioning seeks to drive collaboration between services that happen in a particular place, recognising the impact that they have on each other. For Camden's Estates Mission, that might mean asking services that deal with the physical environment – such as green spaces, estate management, environmental services, and air quality – to consider whether they are reinforcing or undermining each other's objectives. Going further, it could also mean connecting to the commissioning activities of services focused on people, such as early years, adult social care, and community learning. For the Estates Mission to be a success, Camden will need to think deeply about the connection between the built environment and the services it provides. How might the procurement of green spaces support the aims of early years and youth services? What are the connections between mental health services and housing needs? Working in a place-based way – for example, by focusing on particular estates – may help map these connections and make their interdependencies tangible.

Place based work also opens up greater possibilities of co-design and participation. One aspect of the commissioning and procurement cycle that often gets overlooked as a source of social value is deciding what services need to be commissioned in the first place. Councils have certain statutory duties, but there are also opportunities to give residents of Estates greater say in deciding what services they need and want. It's the difference between 'doing the right thing' and 'doing the thing right' – much of the conversation about social value falls into the latter camp, and finding opportunities to reflect on whether the goods and services being procured are actually in line with the Mission objectives and priorities of Estate residents is important.

Place-based commissioning opportunity areas

- Breaking out data to an estate level
- Co-design: Bringing residents voices into goal- and agenda-setting part of the commissioning process
- Better connection and reinforcement between capital budgets and service delivery
- System financing (bringing multiple financial lines together based on co-dependencies)

PERSPECTIVES FROM PRACTICE

Participatory budgeting pilot

Camden is starting to experiment with bringing residents voice into spending decisions through its participatory budgeting pilot in Hilgrove Estate. The council has estimated the spend within the estate on a range of 'estate management' service lines where it might be possible to hand greater control to residents, which includes elements of caretaking, non-essential repairs, and greenspaces. In total, that pot is £100k per year – about a quarter of the total spend on the estate. The two-year pilot will enable residents of Hilgrove to spend that pot across those areas flexibly, reflecting what they see as the priority for the Estate and the option to take some of the work on themselves.

While this pilot does represent an innovative attempt to move power away from the Council and towards residents, it has limitations. Firstly, as the residents are not part of a formal Tenant Management Organisation, the actual act of commissioning will likely remain with the council – meaning that residents will need to check up on whether their stated goals have been met. It also is relatively narrow in the budget lines that have been 'delegated' – excluding all of the people-focused services mentioned above.

One of the key barriers that the pilot has revealed is the lack of granular, place-based data on Council spending in some service areas. In order to use procurement to power the Estates mission, we would need to understand the flow of finance through those Estates – but that doesn't match with the ways in which contracts are written. Most contracts are not written at the level of an estate – a tree maintenance contract, for example, might be borough wide or cover a ward. This makes it difficult to either understand the potential leverage with Camden's procurement system to make change within a particular place, or to give greater ownership over procurement budgets to hyper-local groups.

Organisational change

Organisational change means adapting the internal processes and governance of Camden's commissioning and procurement system. Opportunities for change were identified at various points of the process. Some of these changes are not particular to the idea of mission-led procurement – they are areas of improvement that are valuable to get right whether your focus is missions, cost, social value, or another overall objective. Three key themes that emerged were around mindset & culture, leadership, and learning.

A number of interviewees highlighted the fact that adopting a missions approach to procurement was a change in **mindset** as much as it was a change in policy – as one said, “it can't be a new set of rules – it's a cultural question.” The perception and relationship to risk is central to that – as another interviewee said, “if the value you see in the process is reducing legal risk, then you design a process that minimises that.” Others argued that “good decisions come out of people taking slightly uncertain decisions” – being comfortable accepting that level of uncertainty is seen to be at odds with the current approach, which is focused on stopping councillors and officers taking what are seen as undue risks. Cultural norms are hard to shift – and this may be particularly true in Camden where a “long-serving workforce has quite engrained habits and ways of thinking.”

Members of the central procurement team had a different perspective. They emphasised that “procurement is still seen as people who say no,” and that a core part of embedding a new culture would be to bring the procurement team into conversations about commissioning earlier – rather than waiting until the strategic goals have been set. One question this raises is around capacity – as a result of significant cuts to Camden's budget by Government since 2010, the procurement team has shrunk. Senior leaders recognised that investing in the team is a necessary step in moving towards a mission-led procurement approach.

Leadership was also highlighted as a central piece in enabling the culture change described above. A senior leader 'holding the risk' means accepting there is a chance of a project going over budget, being challenged in court, or failing in delivery. Camden recognises that reimagining its approach to procurement requires collective leadership across the organisation, not just within one function. As the Centre for Public Impact (2020) found in their research on enabling local governments to embrace failure as a necessary part of innovation, “leaders set the tone for their team's culture and have the power to create and enforce structures that maintain this culture”. Staff need to feel like their efforts to work in new ways will be appreciated and rewarded, even if the outcome is not always successful.

Finally, interviewees recognised the potential for deeper **learning** after a commissioning and procurement cycle. Missions are by their nature ambitious goals that require research and innovation (Mazzucato and Dibb, 2019) - which is impossible without learning. As Mazzucato and Collington (2023) argue, learning is an incremental and collective process, which builds on both explicit and tacit knowledge. Creating a learning culture within the commissioning and procurement teams will involve more than just new processes – it is also a new mindset that allows experimentation, reflection and knowledge transfer.

At the moment Camden “rely heavily on paperwork (reading templates and decision reports)...[but] don't do very good debriefs.” Although there is a ‘lessons learned’ process it tends to happen soon after the contract has been signed and is not often shared beyond the team involved. There are few opportunities for senior leaders to take a longer-term view – looking back at contracts further through their lifecycle to interrogate whether they delivered the expected value. Interviewees who attend the commissioning and procurement board – a key part of the governance process – said that there needed to be a greater focus on reviewing the outcomes of contracts.

Organisational change opportunities

- Embedding new values and mindsets through the onboarding process
- Redesigning performance and appraisal processes to incentivise innovation
- Creating a forum for reflective practice on past commissioning and procurement projects

Procurement capabilities

Complex procurement processes require sophisticated capabilities within government, but procurement functions have suffered from “neglect and under-investment” (House of Commons, 2013) in central and local government. As noted above, that story is true in Camden, driven in part by the reduction in core funding for local government throughout the era of austerity.

The Local Government Association (2022) sets out 10 core capabilities across three themes that are required for excellence in procurement.

Table 1: Core capabilities for the National Procurement Strategy in England

Showing leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging councillors Engaging senior managers Working with partners Engaging strategic suppliers
Behaving commercially	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating commercial opportunities Managing contracts and relationships Managing strategic risks
Achieving community benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating social value Enabling local SMEs and micro-businesses Enabling VCSE engagement

Source: Local Government Association (2022b)

These are all essential building blocks for mission-led procurement too. However, our interviews also highlighted a range of other capabilities that Camden officers felt were important for this approach. Organisational capabilities might require new teams or processes – they are not necessarily things that individuals can develop on their own. These include:

- Ecosystem leadership
- Developmental evaluation
- Co-design
- System level budgeting and accounting
- Reflective practice
- Enabling leadership across the organisation

Individual capabilities focused on the central procurement team in particular. At the root of all of those skills is the “need for an understanding of what we’re trying to achieve,” seeing the strategic relevance of each act of procurement in its wider context rather than just applying legal, financial and regulatory expertise (all of which were regarded as strong points by interviewees). They speak to the need for the procurement team to see its purpose differently, with less emphasis on risk management and more on impact (though of course it will always be a balancing act).

Table 2: Individual capabilities for mission-led procurement

Technical skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative facilitation Analytic skills A commitment to data Understanding different markets.
Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patience Flexibility Adaptability Pragmatism Opportunism Creativity and thinking differently An inquisitive mind and openness to new ideas Passionate about trying to do something different An entrepreneurial mindset
Working with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration The relational parts of commissioning Storytelling Communication Ability to voice opinions and speak up

Howlett et al (2018) divided policy capacity into the individual, organisational and system level. Our interviews with Camden have so far been more inwards looking, and so have focused more the first two elements. Further research could explore the system level capabilities for mission led procurement – in particular looking at coordination between different levels of government in procurement objectives.

Table 3: Characteristics, opportunities and capabilities of mission-led procurement

Characteristic	Opportunity	Organisational capabilities	Individual capabilities
Market shaping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reframing the Council's role as an orchestrator Improving story telling & building a shared vision with residents, suppliers, anchor institutions, community organisations Securing co-investment and commitment from partners A relational approach to supplier and business engagement & earlier engagement Proactively creating local capabilities within the local supply chain Embedding market engagement in senior directors' roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ecosystem leadership and orchestration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication, storytelling, relationship building, understanding different markets, technologies and communities
Outcome based procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using agreed missions to prioritise and articulate public value outcomes Embedding mission outcomes into the procurement stage gate process, and ultimately into contracts New approach to measurement and evaluation that prioritises mixed and comparative methods to create confidence that outcomes are being delivered Stronger connection between monitoring and evaluation so that service is improved over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developmental evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data and analytics, patience, pragmatism, creativity, an inquisitive mind
Place based procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breaking out data to an estate level Bringing residents voices into goal- and agenda-setting part of the commissioning process Better connection and reinforcement between capital budgets and service delivery System financing (bringing multiple financial lines together based on co-dependencies) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-design System level budgeting and accounting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative facilitation, flexibility, opportunism, data and analytics
Organisational change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embedding new values and mindsets through the onboarding process Redesigning performance and appraisal processes to incentivise innovation Creating a forum for reflective practice on past commissioning and procurement projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflective practice, double loop learning Enabling leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration, openness to new ideas, communication, an entrepreneurial mindset

Conclusion and next steps

Since the 1980s, the New Public Management paradigm has dominated public administration in the UK. This drove a commissioning and procurement strategy focused on outsourcing and low cost provision. As a result local authorities, along with other contracting authorities, often felt they were not able to select the most appropriate provider to deliver high quality services that generated public value.

Since the turn of the century, there has been increasing attention on incorporating non-financial aspects of value. In the UK, this was codified in the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, which enabled environmental and social factors to be taken into consideration in the procurement process. The EU directives of 2014 served a similar purpose.

However, there were limitations with these approaches. Firstly, the social value aspect of a contract tended to be regarded as an add on – reinforced by the fact that it was often only given a small weighting in evaluation. Price continues to be the dominant factor by which bids are scored. Secondly, the social value commitments secured by contracting authorities were often unrelated to the core organisational aims and strategy – driven as much by what was easily measurable and on offer from suppliers as what was needed. Some forms of social value – such as apprenticeships in particular – were relied on too much.

Recently, a range of alternative approaches to progressive procurement have emerged. These include community wealth building, ethical procurement, and community asset approaches. Although they emphasise different practices, they are in general complementary, and all highlight the strategic significance of procurement spend.

Our exploration into mission led procurement adds to this field. Through interviews and workshops with Camden officers, we have identified four opportunity areas for the commissioning and procurement system to support Camden's mission-oriented strategy:

- **Market shaping** by improving market engagement and pro-actively orchestrating actors within local markets in order to create a supplier base in line with the Mission objectives
- **Outcome-oriented** procurement by using the Mission outcomes to inform the social value framework and embedding them into the procurement stage gate process
- **Place based** commissioning by co-designing the services to be procured with residents and bringing together different service lines that intersect in particular places
- **Organisational change** by changing the mindset from a focus on risk to impact, providing supportive senior leadership and embedding reflective practice to support learning

The goal of the next stage of our work is to move from understanding the problem and opportunities to generating ideas and early prototyping of possible new approaches. Our first step will be to create a set of 'problem briefs' based on the research so far. This will involve further work with internal Camden stakeholders, but we also recognise the need for us to move beyond the Council, to engage with residents, suppliers, anchor institutions, and others.

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