

Social Value case study

Orbit Group are one of the UK's leading housing providers, managing more than 46,500 affordable and social rent homes across the Midlands, East and the South East.

Since 2022, HACT have been working with Orbit to strengthen their approach to measuring, managing and maximising social value across their operations.

This collaboration has focused on embedding consistent, data-driven frameworks that help demonstrate Orbit's wider impact on people and communities.

We spoke to Russell Smith, Orbit's Social Sustainability Lead, about his experience working with HACT and the value this partnership has brought to their social value reporting and decision-making.

HACT's ability to challenge, advise, and guide us through complex assurance processes has been a key factor in embedding a consistent, organisation-wide approach to social value at Orbit.

Partnering with HACT has given us the confidence that our social value reporting is transparent, reliable, and meaningful — and has enabled us to make better, evidence-based decisions that maximise our positive impact for customers and communities.

Russell Smith
Social Sustainability Lead, Orbit Group

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This year's social value audit showed higher figures than before. What do you think has driven that improvement, and how has the audit process supported your understanding of Orbit's impact?

It has been a significant and considered journey to establish a comprehensive methodology for calculating Orbit's social value across the entire organisation, including its development arm. This commenced in November 2023.

To provide assurance to our sustainability-linked loan providers on this key performance indicator, we commissioned HACT to audit our delivery for 2021 and 2022, both of which were verified and approved. As part of this process, HACT was asked to provide recommendations for strengthening our reporting practices to ensure alignment with best practice standards for data quality. One of the key recommendations was the creation of a business-wide social value framework designed to identify the expected outcomes of each department, link these to the corresponding social value measures, and enable a more accurate representation of the social value delivered across the organisation.

Our new social value framework was approved by the Board in early 2024, coinciding with the approval of our new 2030 strategy. A key pillar of this strategy is to ensure that "Orbit are making a positive difference to our customers and society and maximise the social value we deliver by optimising efficiencies so we can do more for our customers and society and deliver more new affordable homes."

To achieve this ambition, our focus is on:

- **Demonstrating value for money and driving efficiencies across our operations, systems, and processes**
- **Enabling resource optimisation and person-centred decision-making**
- **Influencing policymakers and key stakeholders**
- **Expanding the reach and impact of our localised services**

In the first quarter of 2025, Orbit achieved its social value commitment in delivering £100million for March 2026 from our front-line services. This milestone places us in a strong position to set a new organisational social value target covering the period April 2026 to March 2030, which will shortly be presented to the Board for approval.

More importantly, we now possess robust baseline data evidencing the impact we are delivering to our customers. This insight enables more data-driven, customer-centred decision-making and ensures that social value considerations are embedded within business cases for future strategic and operational decisions.



Assurance is a key part of your social value approach. Why is it so important to you, and how has working with HACT influenced the way you communicate or make decisions internally?

By embedding assurance at the heart of our social value approach, we can demonstrate that our outcomes are measurable, our performance is verifiable, and our reporting aligns with recognised standards of best practice. This ensures that our stakeholders — from customers and colleagues to partners, investors, and regulators — have full confidence in the impact we are delivering and the claims we make about the value we create.

Working with HACT has been instrumental in strengthening this assurance process. Their independent audits have provided objective validation of our data and methodology, helping to identify areas for improvement and supporting the development of a more consistent, business-wide approach to measuring and managing social value.

Through their expertise, we have enhanced our internal processes, improved data quality, and developed a more integrated understanding of social value across all parts of the organisation.

How has the Built Environment Bank helped you capture a wider range of activity or embed social value more broadly across the business?

It's been a genuine game changer for Orbit. Having a single, integrated tool that enables us to evaluate data across multiple areas of the organisation has significantly improved our ability to ensure consistency, accuracy, and transparency in how social value is measured and reported.

Importantly, the Built Environment Bank has enabled us to calculate the social value of our homes — both those currently in development and those undergoing appraisal prior to build. This has been transformational in helping our decision-makers understand the potential social value impact of our developments from the earliest stages of planning. It allows us to assess and compare different options not only in financial terms but also in the broader value they create for customers, communities and society.

By embedding this approach, we have been able to integrate social value more deeply into our development and investment processes, ensuring it is considered as a core metric alongside cost, quality, and sustainability.



How do you see Orbit's approach to social value and assurance developing over the next year?

The launch of the Procurement Act 2023 for all public procurement in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland represents a critical milestone for social value, strengthening its role not only at the evaluation stage but across the entire contract lifecycle.

Orbit is working to ensure a greater focus on unlocking social value across the supply chain — not in a piecemeal way, but through enhanced collaboration between contractors to deliver meaningful, long-term impact that addresses customer and societal needs.

Assurance will play a key role in this approach, ensuring that social value is genuine and that "social washing" does not occur. For example, it will help prevent situations where contractors deliver the same outcomes across multiple contracts, which could dilute overall social value delivery and reduce the impact for our customers and society.

Would you recommend working with HACT?

Absolutely. We would highly recommend working with HACT. Their expertise, credibility, and collaborative approach have been invaluable in strengthening our social value measurement, assurance, and reporting. HACT brings both rigour and practical insight, helping us to align our work with recognised best practice and industry standards.

Their support has not only enhanced the robustness of our data but also built greater confidence internally and externally in how we communicate our impact. HACT's ability to challenge, advise, and guide us through complex assurance processes has been a key factor in embedding a consistent, organisation-wide approach to social value at Orbit.

In short, partnering with HACT has given us the confidence that our social value reporting is transparent, reliable, and meaningful — and has enabled us to make better, evidence-based decisions that maximise our positive impact for customers and communities.



Get involved today.

Want to see the Social Value Insight tool and UK Social Value Bank?

Get in touch with our social value team and book a demo.

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