



A Tech-Takeback Study

Jodi Harford and Amelia Burrell

THE SOCIAL VALUE OF REUSE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE SOCIAL VALUE OF REUSE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Tech-Takeback report, funded by the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM), investigates the Social Value generated by the UK's reuse sector, with a specific focus on technology reuse for digital inclusion.

Context and Importance

Social Value is becoming central to public sector procurement and organisational strategies, as evidenced by policies such as the Public Sector Social Value Act 2012 and the new Procurement Act 2023. These policies prioritise the broader human and social impacts of decisions, beyond the financial and environmental considerations.

The concept of reuse – extending the life cycle of products by keeping them in use before they are recycled or remanufactured – is gaining recognition as a cornerstone of the circular economy. A 2023 SUEZ report predicts that by 2028, reuse organisations could manage over 15 million items. And a Green Alliance report published in January 2025 report notes that “redistribution [of tech] maximises the social and economic value of reused devices and prevents tonnes of e-waste” and calls on the Government to set targets for reuse, including making device redistribution a requirement for government contracts.

However, justifying the higher costs of reuse compared to recycling remains a challenge. The growing emphasis on Social Value presents a crucial opportunity for reuse organisations operating within the resource and wastes management sector to demonstrate their broader significance, transcending traditional financial metrics.

The research aimed to demonstrate that the resource and wastes management sector can support the Government's commitment to moving to a circular economy through the creation of a Circular Economy Routemap and accelerating towards net zero, by helping to deliver:



New jobs in the repair and reuse economy.



A reduction in bills for residents in the UK by offering high quality reused items at lower prices.



Supporting people who are currently unemployed into employment through the provision of reused items (laptops for digital inclusion being just one example).



A greater capture of rare earth metals from the disassembly of end-of-life products (resource security).



A contribution to reducing carbon by reducing the need for new product manufacturing.

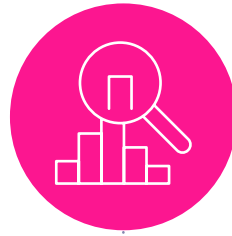
Project Objectives



Quantify
the Social Value
generated by
reuse initiatives.



Develop
and pilot a Social
Value credit model
centred on tech reuse
for digital inclusion.



Analyse
existing Social Value
frameworks to identify
gaps and propose
bespoke measures
to quantify the Social
Value of reuse within
the resource and waste
management sector.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative assessments. Key data sources included Tech-Takeback's operational data, industry reports, and stakeholder feedback from the reuse and public sectors. Social Value was measured using three widely respected frameworks and their associated tools:

1. TOMs

(Themes, Outcomes, and Measures Framework)

– A national framework connecting broad social improvement objectives with measurable activities, frequently used in local authority bids and tenders.

2. HACT

(Housing Associations' Charitable Trust Social Value Bank)

– Focuses on the subjective changes in people's social, emotional, and economic well-being, initially designed for housing but also applicable to reuse organisations.

3. LOOP

(National Social Value Standards Framework)

– A business reporting tool integrating qualitative and quantitative measures, with specific relevance to the waste, utilities, and not-for-profit sectors.

Each framework and tool has a different intended function and relies on different methodologies, which can lead to huge variations in the Social Value calculated. For example, the HACT framework assigns value to any changes to individual well-being that are achieved through direct interventions, alongside benefits to society and the exchequer. This can make the figures calculated seem unrealistically high in comparison to TOMs or LOOP; in reality, each tool is simply measuring different impacts.

Key Findings



Social Value Impact: The resource and waste management sector generated an estimated Social Value of between £120 million and £346 million in 2023/24, through collecting, processing and preparing items for reuse.



Tech-Takeback's Impact: The total Social Value of Tech-Takeback's reuse activities, including redistributing laptops for digital inclusion, was calculated to be:

- £657,000 by TOMs,
- £1.1 million by LOOP, and
- £19 million by HACT.

The higher HACT figure reflects the values assigned to individual well-being and benefits to the Exchequer as a result of our data protection and digital inclusion interventions.



Reused vs New: The significant benefits of reuse over new manufacturing is evidenced by the proportion of Social Value generated by Tech-Takeback, through collecting, preparing, and redistributing laptops, regardless of their onward use:

- £601,000 by TOMs (91% of total SV impact),
- £654,000 by LOOP (60% of total SV impact), and
- £15 million by HACT (79% of SV impact).



Latent Social Value: The 20 million unused but functional laptops and tablets currently stored in UK households could generate up to £44.7 billion in Social Value (Based on HACT) if repurposed for digital inclusion.



Social Value Credit Pilot: Exceeded expectations with 60 laptops funded and distributed to digitally excluded individuals, generating £258,000 of Social Value (an average of £43,000 per device). This demonstrates the potential for the Social Value Credit model to become a sustainable and income-generating initiative for Tech-Takeback and similar organisations.

Conclusions

The widely-varied results from different Social Value tools underscore the complexity of measuring social impact, with no single tool providing a complete picture, making it difficult to identify which tool is most appropriate for the reuse sector.

Tech-Takeback's Social Value Toolkit (Appendix 7) can help reuse organisations understand which tool(s) might be most appropriate for their needs, based on the impacts they are hoping to measure, and why. Where possible, using two different tools can give a more comprehensive overview of an organisation's Social Value.

The report also identifies significant gaps in current Social Value measures, particularly the lack of metrics tailored to reuse. This absence can diminish incentives to prioritise reuse over recycling, disadvantaging the sector.

To improve Social Value accounting for reuse, the report recommends bespoke measures, including:



Waste Diversion: Quantifying the tonnes of potential waste diverted for reuse.



Reduction in Manufacturing: Tracking reductions in newly manufactured items purchased.



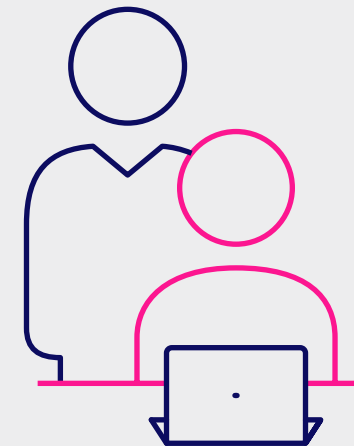
Wellbeing Metrics: Measuring the impact on wellbeing, such as reduced climate anxiety.

Despite these challenges, our research clearly demonstrates the significant Social Value that the resource and wastes management sector delivers through reuse, and identifies enormous potential for growth. Properly quantifying these benefits could bolster the UK's transition to a low-carbon, circular economy, making reuse initiatives more attractive in public procurement and business strategies. The findings present a compelling case for prioritising reuse over the purchase of new goods, and investing in initiatives to recover and repurpose items before they reach the end of their useful lives. They may also have implications for product design; designing for reuse may be seen as more appealing if the Social Value is better understood.

Toolkit and Future Directions

The Tech-Takeback Social Value Credit Pilot indicates strong interest among public sector contractors, local authorities, and private companies in funding reused laptops for digital inclusion. This interest suggests that the Social Value Credit model could evolve into a sustainable, income-generating initiative.

Recognising the challenges of calculating Social Value, Tech-Takeback has developed a Social Value toolkit to assist reuse organisations in navigating the complexities of Social Value measurement. This toolkit is designed to help organisations determine what to measure, identify the most suitable tools, and implement the process effectively.



Recommendations

A more formalised consortium is required to work on behalf of the resource and waste management sector to promote, facilitate and action the following recommendations:



The findings of this report should be used to raise awareness of the importance of reuse in product lifecycles, campaign for change and effect wider societal behaviour change.



All reuse organisations need to calculate the Social Value benefit. Tech-Takeback's Social Value toolkit can assist with this.



All recycling, waste and resource management companies with public sector contracts should consider funding socially valuable reuse projects as part of their contractual Social Value obligations.



A sector-wide survey or similar could provide evidence on reuse to enable more accurate and transparent sector-wide Social Value calculations.



The resource and waste management sector could work with existing Social Value framework and toolkit providers to:

- a. develop new measures that capture the real Social Value of reuse.
- b. explore how Micro and SMEs can also be supported to access their products in a more affordable way.



Reuse companies to build a reporting matrix to capture and evidence the Social Value created through the onward journey of their reused and refurbished products, including digital tracking where appropriate.



Since no one Social Value tool currently provides a full picture of Social Value, sector best practice should be to provide at least two calculations, using different frameworks for comparison and transparency.

In conclusion, this report highlights the significant Social Value generated by reuse, and provides the tools and recommendations needed to amplify these benefits; driving the sector forward in its contribution to a more sustainable, inclusive future.



Find out more about our work and the
services we deliver at techtakeback.com