

Sustainable procurement

Common standards in the private sector,
public sector, NHS and EU



Ned Wells

Director, Cicada Consulting

#GrowthForGood

How to use this guide



Thanks for downloading this brief guide to sustainable procurement.

It covers key sustainability standards used by procurement teams in the private sector, public sector, NHS and EU. Each section offers a plain English explanation of the standard, where it applies, and what's at risk if you ignore it.

My aim is to help you understand what buyers are looking for, so you can spot gaps and make your sustainability commitments more visible and credible.

Need a second opinion on your current positioning?
Or a sense-check on how your website and credentials stack up?

Book a free call with me by following this link:
bit.ly/strategy-call-with-ned. I'll help you see what's working, what's missing, and what to do next.

Many thanks,

📞 07813 894 341

✉️ ned@cicadaconsult.co.uk

🌐 cicadaconsult.co.uk

1. Private Sector

Relevant to: UK businesses supplying large B2B clients, especially those with ESG policies, sustainability-linked reporting, or global supply chains

Standard: Net Zero Plan or Science-Based Targets

- **Description:** Many corporates now expect suppliers to have a clear Net Zero pathway, ideally aligned with science-based targets (SBTi). These targets are often part of their own ESG or investor reporting.
- **Risk if ignored:** Competitive disadvantage; exclusion from preferred supplier lists; failure to meet client ESG expectations.

Standard: Supply Chain Transparency

- **Description:** Buyers increasingly demand traceability on sourcing, labour conditions, carbon impact, and circularity. This goes beyond compliance – it's about values alignment and reputational risk management.
- **Risk if ignored:** Reputational concerns, reduced trust, or removal from supply chains prioritising ESG transparency.

Standard: ISO 14001 – Environmental Management

- **Description:** Often expected (if not mandated) in tenders within sectors like construction, engineering, logistics, and manufacturing. Acts as a shorthand for environmental process maturity.
- **Risk if ignored:** Scoring penalties or exclusion where ISO 14001 is a supplier baseline; perceived as less credible or capable.

2. Public Sector

Relevant to: UK businesses bidding for local authority, central government, NHS, or education sector contracts

Standard: PPN 06/21 – Carbon Reduction Plans

- **Description:** Required for public sector contracts over £5m. Suppliers must submit a Carbon Reduction Plan aligned with the UK's Net Zero target by 2050. Widely adopted across NHS and government departments.
- **Risk if ignored:** Ineligibility for large public contracts; poor scoring on environmental criteria.

Standard: PPN 05/21 – National Procurement Policy Statement

- **Description:** Requires public bodies to consider social value, sustainability, and economic recovery in procurement decisions. These priorities increasingly influence scoring.
- **Risk if ignored:** Low tender scores or failure to qualify for public sector frameworks

Standard: The Social Value Act 2012

- **Description:** Public authorities must consider economic, social, and environmental wellbeing when commissioning services. Social value is often weighted 10–20% in public tenders.
- **Risk if ignored:** Poor scoring or inability to demonstrate meaningful community impact.

Standard: Environment Act 2021

- **Description:** Introduces legally binding targets on air, water, biodiversity, and waste reduction. While not a procurement law, it's shaping environmental criteria in tenders.
- **Risk if ignored:** Lower environmental scores or exclusion from environmentally focused contracts.

Standard: Modern Slavery Act 2015

- **Description:** Requires businesses with turnover >£36m to publish annual slavery and trafficking statements. Public sector buyers expect compliance, even from smaller suppliers.
- **Risk if ignored:** Perceived lack of ethical standards; reputational damage; disqualification.

3. NHS

Relevant to: UK businesses supplying the NHS – especially in clinical, IT, facilities, and service contracts

Standard: NHS England Sustainability Requirements

- **Description:** From April 2024, all NHS suppliers must publish a compliant Carbon Reduction Plan. Larger contracts require reporting of Scope 3 emissions and evidence of decarbonisation planning.
- **Risk if ignored:** Disqualification from NHS contracts and frameworks.

Standard: PPN 06/21 – Carbon Reduction Plans

- **Description:** Adopted by NHS England for contracts over £5m. Requires suppliers to align with the UK's Net Zero 2050 target and provide detailed emissions reduction plans.
- **Risk if ignored:** Failure to meet minimum tender requirements; reduced eligibility for larger NHS contracts.

Standard: The Social Value Act 2012

- **Description:** NHS tenders often include a social value weighting (typically 10–20%), with expectations around health inequality reduction, workforce wellbeing, and community benefit.
- **Risk if ignored:** Low scoring on social value criteria; missed opportunities in competitive bids.

4. EU

Relevant to: UK businesses trading in or with businesses in the EU

Standard: EU Sustainability Compliance (CSRD, EU Taxonomy)

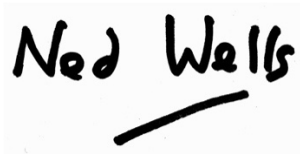
- **Description:** UK businesses trading with the EU may face exclusion without alignment to the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) or the EU Taxonomy for sustainable activities.
- **Risk if ignored:** Loss of access to EU supply chains and markets.


Your next steps

If this guide has raised questions – or helped you spot a risk you hadn't seen before – I'd be happy to talk it through with you.

Book a free call with me here: bit.ly/strategy-call-with-ned. We'll take a look at your current positioning, and work out how to make your sustainability commitments clearer and more credible – especially for procurement teams. Or drop me a line if that's easier.

Many thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ned Wells". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. Below the name, there is a single horizontal stroke that tapers at both ends, serving as a flourish or underline.

 07813 894 341

 ned@cicadaconsult.co.uk

 cicadaconsult.co.uk