



Social Value Leaders' Summit

2026

Summary Report

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INTRODUCTION

This short report summarises key themes and discussions from the Social Value Leaders' Summit 2026, held in central London on 25 March.

The Social Value Leaders' Summit convenes policymakers, commissioners, business leaders, social enterprises, charities and social value practitioners who wish to see a procurement system which delivers better public services, better value for taxpayers, and better social and environmental outcomes for the country.

Now in its tenth year, the Summit brought together over 120 cross-sector leaders from the public, private, and social economy sectors. Sponsored by **Fusion21, GLL, PwC and Unity Trust Bank**, the event featured keynote addresses from **Josh Babarinde OBE MP** (President of the Liberal Democrats), **Professor Mariana Mazzucato CBE** (Professor in the Economics of Innovation and Public Value at University College London) and **Meté Coban MBE** (Deputy Mayor of London for Environment and Energy).

Panellists representing government, the private sector and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSEs) shared updates, insights and examples of best practice in using mission-driven procurement to help build a fairer, more resilient and more sustainable economy.

Interactive roundtables provided an opportunity for delegates to discuss key challenges in the development of an effective social value system and recommend solutions.



BACKGROUND

The Social Value Leaders' Summit 2026 took place at a time of increasing geopolitical uncertainty but also during a period when the UK government is implementing changes to support partnerships across the impact economy and drive enhanced efficiency, transparency, and inclusivity across the public procurement system.

Significant progress has been made on the journey to promote social value as a way to build a better future since the [Public Services \(Social Value\) Act](#) came into force in January 2013. Successive governments have strengthened the legislation and its implementation, ensuring that social value is increasingly seen as a tool to shape markets and organisational behaviour.

[The Procurement Act](#) went live in February 2025, transforming an annual £385bn spend on public procurement. Among its aims was the maximisation of social value. The accompanying [National Procurement Policy Statement \(NPPS\)](#) instructed public bodies to 'maximise procurement spend with VCSEs'.

The recently established [Office for the Impact Economy](#) was set up to enable the government to work more strategically and effectively with the impact economy. This provides opportunities for businesses, social investors and philanthropists to work with government to unlock billions of pounds worth of support for local people and communities and support national renewal.



Incentives to prioritise social value delivery have never been higher for the private sector, particularly for companies trading with, or wishing to trade with, the public sector. Opportunities are increasing for VCSEs to trade with both public and private sectors in order to deliver impact in communities across the country.

However, the transformative effect of social value is yet to be realised. There are pockets of good practice and the direction of travel is clear, but we have a long way to go before social value implementation becomes the default across the public and private sectors.

The Social Value Leaders' Summit 2026 provided the opportunity to review these developments in the round, tackle barriers to progress and identify new ways of working which will accelerate social value implementation across our economy.

THE STATE OF PLAY IN 2026: STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR SOCIAL VALUE

The Social Value Leaders' Summit 2026 saw widespread agreement that the potential for social value is huge. The commitment from the UK government is clear.

There was praise from Josh Babarinde OBE MP (pictured) for 2025's National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS), and the way in which it instructs contracting authorities to "*maximise procurement spend with SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) and VCSEs*".



“THERE HAS BEEN A HUGE AMOUNT OF POSITIVE CHANGE ON SOCIAL VALUE OVER RECENT YEARS AND THIS IS TO BE WELCOMED.”
– DAME PATRICIA HEWITT, FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY

This means that the money government spends is more likely to stay local, more likely to create jobs for people who most need them, and more likely to solve problems that government cannot solve on its own.

[Procurement Policy Note 001 \(PPN001\)](#), requires all central government departments (including executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies) to set targets for direct spend with SMEs and VCSEs and report results annually.

The Department of Transport provides a case study of how central government departments can respond. The department has a dedicated SME and VCSE Champion and runs regular SME and VCSE Meet the Buyer events around the country.

‘How are we going to deliver social value on this scheme?’ is a very common discussion now at National Highways and the agency has set up a [Social Enterprise Dynamic Purchasing System \(SEDPS\)](#), with clear guidance on the product/service categories which are of particular interest. Delegates heard of a government agency specifically ringfencing a contract for social enterprises and three social enterprises were identified which could bid at tender stage.

Legislation in Wales ([Well-being of Future Generations Act](#)) and Scotland ([Community Wealth Building Bill](#)) provide blueprints for further progress within the UK government.



“SOCIAL VALUE HELPS US ALL BUILD A BETTER ECONOMY AND IS A WAY TO CONNECT OUR WORK WITH OUR PEOPLE AND THE COMMUNITIES WE OPERATE IN.”

– [NANCY PARK, PARTNER, PWC UK](#)

When it comes to the private sector delegates at the Summit, there was recognition of the powerful contribution that social enterprises make to UK economic growth. Social value is now seen as a differentiator rather than a footnote at PwC. Social enterprises are seen as crucial in the drive to build inclusive supply chains at Mott MacDonald. Innovation, positive stakeholder engagement and community impact were referenced as key business drivers for private sector corporations in engaging with social enterprises.

Josh Babarinde OBE MP pointed to the Buy Social Corporate Challenge as evidence that there is genuine appetite from large businesses to work with VCSEs in their supply chains. Reflecting on the social value journey as a whole across all sectors, he also noted that although we now have strong foundations on social value, there is much work to be done.



“GOVERNMENT SUPPLY CHAIN DOES WANT TO BRING POSITIVE CHANGE ON SOCIAL VALUE, ALTHOUGH SUPPLIERS RECOGNISE THEY NEED TO GO FURTHER AND FASTER.”

– [CARON DUNLOP, REGIONAL HEAD OF SOCIAL VALUE, MOTT MACDONALD](#)



“WHILE THE FOUNDATIONS OF PROCUREMENT ARE STRONGER THAN EVER IN TERMS OF MAXIMIZING PUBLIC BENEFIT WITH SMES AND VCSES, THE HOUSE IS NOT FULLY BUILT.”

– JOSH BABARINDE OBE MP

CHALLENGES

A recurring theme throughout the discussions at the Social Value Leaders' Summit 2026 was that there remains a range of structural barriers that need to be addressed in order to collectively build on the foundations above and work towards a social value economy. Just 4% of public sector contracts have been won by social enterprises over the last five years, a figure that reveals a fundamental misalignment between the ambitions of social value policy and its practical delivery.

Social value not embedded fully or consistently

The existing legislation provides a workable framework, but procurement systems are not yet designed and operated in an optimal manner for social value to be embedded fully. An increasing number of organisations have social value objectives, but cultural change is needed to ensure social value is genuinely embedded in their strategies and day-to-day operations.

Inconsistent definitions and frameworks across organisations and sectors make social value difficult to compare, align, or communicate clearly. Procurement systems are not designed in a way which takes into account the full range of a community's needs. Environmental and social agendas are often treated as separate, despite the fact that the climate crisis disproportionately affects working-class communities.



Social value is too often treated as an add-on. It is frequently weighted as a separate scoring category rather than being designed in from the start and embedded throughout the contract design and delivery process. Social value commitments made at the bid stage are poorly monitored and rarely enforced during contract management.

An uneven playing field

A one-size-fits-all approach to tendering and contracting undermines the potential for public spending to generate a positive impact in the community. The tendering process is identical for large profit-maximising private sector companies and small VCSEs and it is as burdensome for small contracts as for large ones. This places VCSEs at a significant structural disadvantage as large profit-maximising companies with dedicated bid teams can outscore intrinsically social organisations on social value criteria.

Many social enterprises undervalue and underprice themselves, undermining their ability to deliver and damaging perceptions of the sector.

Social value is treated as a secondary responsibility rather than a dedicated, resourced function by contracting authorities, hampering their understanding of how to engage with VCSEs effectively.



Accountability and accessibility gaps

Government agencies are assessed only on direct contracting. Indirect supply chain spend through prime contractors — where much VCSE activity sits — is excluded from targets, limiting the reach and impact of the targets.

Some frameworks are less accessible to VCSEs as there is a financial cost in joining. The government's new central digital procurement platform is the place where all procurement notices live – [above threshold and below threshold](#) – and suppliers need to register only once rather than having to provide basic company information for every opportunity. However, a show of hands among Summit attendees revealed only a handful of social enterprises have registered, suggesting significant awareness and accessibility gaps.

Measurement and reporting

Social value defined in contracts is static, while community needs and circumstances change over time. This rigidity extends to measurement tools and frameworks (such as TOMS), which focus largely on outputs rather than outcomes and genuine community impact.

There is a mismatch between qualitative and quantitative impact measurement. Numbers matter and stories also matter. There is currently too much of a reliance on metrics-led reporting at the expense of storytelling and case studies. Price continues to dominate tender evaluation, with social value weightings typically stuck at a relatively low level.



RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of clear recommendations emerged from the Social Value Leaders' Summit 2026 on how to move towards full implementation of social value across our economy. Each major stakeholder group – government, contracting authorities, private sector and VCSE sector – has their part to play in the transition to a stronger, fairer and greener future.

Government

- Extend VCSE spend targets beyond direct contracting into the supply chains of prime contractors, and ensure government agencies are reviewed against this broader measure.
- Remove fear of legal challenge on direct award decisions for below-threshold contracts, where almost all VCSEs operate.
- Invest in building the capacity of procurement and commissioning teams to understand and engage with social value meaningfully.
- Apply the principle of subsidiarity: ensure service design takes place at the lowest feasible level, rooted in co-creation, local knowledge



Commissioners and Contracting Authorities

- Design social value into contracting from the outset — not as a weighted add-on at the end of a procurement process.
- Move away from short-term, output-focused commissioning toward long-term partnerships and systemic change.
- Engage with social value requirements well before the tender process begins, including co-creation with communities and social enterprises.
- Ensure contract management rigorously tracks social value delivery, not just bid-stage commitments.
- Ringfence appropriate contracts for social enterprise suppliers so that profits are invested into social and environmental missions.
- Simplify and proportion bidding processes to the scale of the contract — small contracts should not carry the same administrative burden as large ones.
- Adopt a mixed-method approach to impact measurement, combining quantitative metrics with storytelling, case studies and service user voices.



Private sector

- Embed social value into all core areas of business strategy and communicate this commitment to social value externally as well as internally
- Champion social value with the same organisational priority as health and safety, ensuring it is embedded across the wider team and not delegated to a single role
- Review your contracting, onboarding and payment processes to minimise barriers for VCSE suppliers
- Educate supply chain partners on how they can support your company's social value journey and use social value criteria in tenders to maximise opportunities for VCSE suppliers

VCSEs

- The sector should shift from cost-based to value-based pricing and resist the tendency to undervalue its contribution.
- Collaboration and consortium models offer significant potential — sector bodies such as Social Enterprise UK should facilitate and support these structures.
- Social enterprises should learn more about the [Central Digital Procurement Platform](#) and register to take advantage of direct award opportunities – short online video guide available [here](#).



FUTURE

Social value shaping a more inclusive, sustainable and thriving economy

Fully embracing the potential of social value and placing VCSEs at the heart of public and private sector procurement can unlock opportunities, reduce regional inequalities, empower people and communities, and help embed sustainability into the operations of public bodies and private businesses. It can harness billions of pounds in spend to reshape the economy and put it on a fairer footing.

The recommendations above can help build on the progress already made, level the playing field for VCSEs and remove the barriers they face. However, these steps are just the start. If we work together across sectors to use commissioning and procurement to their full effect, the prize could be a true Social Value Economy – one which is both resilient and strong but designed in a way to place the wellbeing and flourishing of people, communities and our planet at its core.

BETTER COMMISSIONING COALITION

THE SOCIAL VALUE LEADERS' SUMMIT 2026 DEMONSTRATED THAT SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE ON DEVELOPING A SOCIAL VALUE ECONOMY AND ACCELERATING THE TRANSITION TO A STRONGER, FAIRER AND GREENER FUTURE. SOCIAL ENTERPRISE UK IS EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE THE LAUNCH OF A NEW PROGRAMME WHICH AIMS TO MAKE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT A FORCE FOR GOOD.

THE BETTER COMMISSIONING COALITION WILL BRING TOGETHER A GROUP OF CROSS-SECTOR EXPERTS COMMITTED TO DEVELOPING A PROGRAMME OF WORK THAT DEMONSTRATES WHAT PROCUREMENT CAN DO WHEN SOCIAL VALUE IS PLACED AT ITS CORE.

[VISIT THIS PAGE](#) AND FILL OUT THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FORM AT THE BOTTOM IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN FINDING OUT MORE OR WOULD LIKE TO BE A PART OF THIS TIMELY, EXCITING NEW PROGRAMME.



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