

Position paper responding to Government comments on rolling back on social value weightings and ethics in procurement

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Executive Summary:

This paper outlines SVUK’s response to comments made regarding social value and ethics in government procurement, attributed to the Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government efficiency, which indicate potential changes in these areas¹.

The gross procurement spend of the UK government is approx. £300 billion² per annum³, so, any changes in the practice of procuring goods, works and services using public spend has a huge potential impact on people's everyday lives. In addition, such changes would affect practice that organisations across public, private and civil society are embedding to respond to growing need to

¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2022/03/19/jacob-rees-mogg-reduce-government-focus-ethical-contracts/>

² approximation based on [Summary – Government procurement: the scale and nature of contracting in the UK | The Institute for Government](#), estimation from 2018

³ Total Government spend in 2020-2021 is estimated as 1,053 billion in the 2021 Budget, based on data from the Office of Budget Responsibility and HM Treasury Calculations: [BUDGET 2021 - PROTECTING THE JOBS AND LIVELIHOODS OF THE BRITISH PEOPLE \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

manage their impacts. SVUK and the Government generally appear to hold a shared view that a focus on social value has the potential to direct public spend towards creating the most value for people in the UK, and to drive forwards ambitious agendas at the local level, such as the Levelling Up agenda. From a Social Value Principles⁴ perspective, it is also about embedding accountability to those affected into the resource allocation decisions that are taking place every day.

The reported comments indicate the following potential changes to managing social value and ethics in government procurement:

- To focus more on taxpayer value-for-money and less on ethical principles.
- To roll back on the prescribed weighting of social value in contracts.

Additional issues raised include:

1. How social value manages the incorporation of a wide range of non-financial metrics such as environmental, work related, wellbeing, and the impact on local communities
2. How social value is being defined
3. Social value requirements of tenders causing a barrier to access for SMEs into supply chains
4. The creation of a social value sector or profession

These comments raise potential issues in relation to overall government direction, as well as potential to contradict other government agendas, support and action such as Levelling Up, Net Zero, Global Goals (SDGs); and government practice development e.g., Greenbook and supplementary guidance on wellbeing.

There is also an assumption that focusing more on taxpayer value for money is in contradiction to achieving greater social and environmental value. SVUK and our members advocate that including social value in spending government money, rather than reducing value for money, actually increases the value for money achieved (arguably but proven within reasonable doubt). The different types of value (financial, social and environmental) do not have to be contradictory or at odds with each other. Rather, including this wider sense of value can bring greater efficiency to the public purse and achieve more for local communities and the environment.

The following paper will address the points raised in turn, offering the SVUK perspective using input from members gathered through a variety of means. SVUK and our members strongly support continued collaboration with the Government to continue to improve practice in managing social and environmental value throughout government spend, and within organisations, for the shared goal of greatest value for the public.

SVUK's proposals for its members to collaborate with government for improvements to social value practice:

SVUK and our members propose the following areas of collaboration to support the continued development of better social value practice in the UK:

- **To continue to, and to increase, work with government to make social value practice better and to give the Social Value Act more effectiveness through improved guidance, standards, training and verification** - SVUK would support collaboration with

⁴ <https://socialvalueuk.org/what-is-social-value/the-principles-of-social-value/>

government in establishing agreed professional standards of practice for UK Social Value professionals and practice.

- **To improve social value practice in procurement** – SVUK is leading on this through the member led *Contract for Change programme*⁵
- **To support a review of the Act and development of better practice** – One member said, ‘We do support a review of how Social Value in public contracts is determined to make stronger clearer links to Net Zero and SDG’s. At the moment some of the social value options in public tenders are wide ranging, manipulatable and difficult to compare in terms of true impact against each other.’
- **To improve confidence in claims of social value, and social value practice through better verification** – SVUK would gladly collaborate with government to build on the Competition & Market Authority’s new Green Claims Code and develop a CMA Social Impact Claims Code
- **To input on practice review** which could offer the opportunity to further the goal of having every company report on impact annually, similar to annual accounts
- **To advise on the development of more easily accessible platforms** for supply chain use in collaboration with the social value sector, and suppliers
- **To guide the Government on weighting how social value produced by SMEs can be achieved and meaningfully compared to larger commercial organisations**

Response from SVUK and its membership:

ISSUE: Proposal to focus more on taxpayer value-for-money and less on ethical principles

SVUK⁶ is part of the global Social Value International movement with a shared mission to ‘*Change the Way the World Accounts for Value*’⁷. At the core, this movement is based on redefining our understanding of what value is, moving away from the limited link to financial value and towards a multi-value definition, incorporating environmental, social, cultural, and economic.

The perspective put forward in the comments of moving towards ‘taxpayer value for money’ seems to be based on a definition of value linked to money, rather than a broader sense of value. This is misaligned to the Government’s own definitions of social value and public value. Public value is outlined in the HM Treasury Greenbook⁸ as:

- **HM Treasury Greenbook:** “*Social value / public value, is based on the principles of welfare economics and concerns overall social welfare efficiency, not just economic market efficiency. This includes all that affects the welfare and wellbeing of the population, not just market effects. For example, environmental, cultural, health, social care, justice and security effects are included.*”

⁵ [Contract for Change Programme: https://contractforchange.org/](https://contractforchange.org/)

⁶ Who is SVUK? <https://socialvalueuk.org/>

⁷ [Who is SVI? — Social Value International](#)

⁸ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063330/Green_Book_2022.pdf - paragraph 2.3 at page 5

This also goes against the direction outlined in the *Transforming Public Sector Procurement Green Paper*⁹ which included a distinctive message that contracting authorities should take a broader view of value for money incorporating social value, rather than selecting lowest price bid.

‘Taxpayer value for money’ from a public sector perspective must include value created for the public beyond best cost-saving, or price of contract from a purely financial perspective. The focus on financially defined value for money runs the risk of a few large firms monopolising government contract delivery, rather than opening up the marketplace to smaller enterprises and diversifying the delivery. This runs the increased risk of failure of public service provision if any of those large suppliers fail, such as in the case of Carillion in 2017¹⁰.

ISSUE: Proposal to roll back on the prescribed weighting of social value in contracts.

The issue raised with prescribed weightings for social value in contracts appears to be in relation to the new *PPN 06/20*¹¹ requirements, and the prescribed *Social Value Model*¹², and the 10% weighting for all Central Government contracting authorities. This issue has been interpreted as distinct from an issue with Social Value practice in its entirety, or with weightings that have been trialled and embedded throughout different contracting and procurement practice, such as that at Local Government level which offers different approaches to those promoted through the Central Government *Social Value Model*.

There are a few points in relation to this that the SVUK membership raised:

- *PPN 06/20* and *The Social Value Model* are new, only having been around for 1 year. This means that a large portion of the Contracting Authorities that are responding to this, as well as their suppliers, are a) new to social value, and/or b) developing new practice in social value. So, the practice is likely to be more clunky than in other areas where social value practice is more mature. Rather than rolling back the weightings and requirements regarding social value, the SVUK membership supports continuing development of practice, sharing of good practice across sectors, as well as the development of clearer standards of practice in social value management in procurement and contracting.
- There have already been vast improvements in social value practice at Local Authority level, and in the private sector. There has also been, broadly across society, greater recognition of the value created by the VCSE¹³ sector and how to better include this in public sector delivery as well as private sector supply chains for better total value for society at large (including impact on environment).
- Whilst it was recognized that it is right to ‘test’ social value assumptions and test whether weightings are correct, and rightly applied and so on, the issue raised is that any rolling back of the social value requirements in procurement will be related to the full suite of practice rather than just to any changes needed for one particular model, tool or methodology. This

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/943946/Transforming_public_procurement.pdf

¹⁰ [When Brexit opportunities knocked social value | Public Finance](#)

¹¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/921437/PPN-06_20-Taking-Account-of-Social-Value-in-the-Award-of-Central-Government-Contracts.pdf

¹² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/940826/Social-Value-Model-Edn-1.1-3-Dec-20.pdf

¹³ The Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise

risks undoing a decade of progress (we are in year ten of the *Social Value Act*¹⁴ in 2022) with reforms still in progress, and organisations still working to embed what has been legislated already. There is work being done to review the *Social Value Act* and ensure it is appropriate for the future, which needs to be considered. This bears the added risk of contradicting and working against other critical government agendas, namely *Levelling Up* and *Net Zero*.

- Government and the public sector have been leaders in developing practice to better understand, measure and manage social and environmental value and wellbeing through initiatives such as the *Value Toolkit*, led by the Construction Innovation Hub and funded by Government, the *What Works Centre for Wellbeing*, and increasing practice in the NHS. SVUK and our members would strongly support collaboration in continued government progress in leading the way towards better social value practice.

ISSUE: How social value manages the incorporation of a wide range of non-financial metrics such as environmental, work related, wellbeing, and the impact on local communities

From a Social Value Principles-based perspective, the incorporation of the preferences of stakeholders in understanding outcomes and the value they place on them is fundamental for ‘good’ social value practice. This understanding allows for the best possibility of understanding and bringing visibility to the value that is created or destroyed in any activity.

SVUK also recognises the role that predefined measures play in social value measurement and management. Members and partners across the network often grapple with balancing the benefit of shared measures (often “high level” and reflecting an overview of project outputs such as numbers of apprentices or numbers of course participants) required by funders, and the more bespoke measures which reflect the needs and experiences of the specific stakeholder group/s that are affected by any activity.¹⁵

One member said ‘One of the problems is ... there is no single measure that covers all needs, and some are focused on business outcomes (employment, apprentices, local spend and so on), whilst others are more about the savings across public sector budgets (local authority contracts reducing loneliness, isolation, improving health, reducing emissions or whatever the associated outcomes are). That makes it harder for those letting contracts to understand the value achieved to be measured, so, perhaps, a guide to assist the understanding of what makes a social value outcome or claim valid would help.’

Defining areas of priority at central government, or national level is a necessary task for measuring overall progress towards goals. However, basing reporting requirements of suppliers only on these broad goals (or measures derived from these goals) runs the risk of missing the local, community based, or place-based needs that could be most or of more importance to those being affected by the activities.

Without a recognition that useful social value measurement includes more granular/bespoke measures which reflects the needs and experiences of stakeholders, there is a significant risk that the total impact generated (or destroyed) by suppliers is not adequately recorded or recognised. More importantly, there is a risk that suppliers base their social value measurement and management systems around the broad goals set out in the contract rather than collecting the

¹⁴ Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012

¹⁵ For example, see blog by NPC on [Shared measurement: Greater than the sum of its parts - NPC \(thinknpc.org\)](https://www.thinknpc.org/blog/shared-measurement-greater-than-the-sum-of-its-parts)

granular data which gives them the insights into how their service provision can better serve the needs of their stakeholders and the communities in which they operate.

Throughout the nations of the UK, there are different methods being embedded that should be considered in relation to this point:

- *SPPN 10/2020 Measuring Social Impact in Public Procurement*¹⁶ outlines Scottish Government requirements. The note focuses on social impact not social value and defines this as ‘...the effects on people and communities that happen as a result of an action, activity, project, programme or policy. A common way to think about social impact is to consider it as the change that happens for or to people as a result of an action or activity.’ The note does not endorse using monetary valuation and focuses on outcomes aligned to the *National Performance Framework*¹⁷.
- *The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act Wales*¹⁸ promotes the sustainable development principle, in particular, to act as a guardian of the ability of future generations to meet their needs and encourage public bodies to take greater account of the long-term impact of the things they do. The Act encourages public bodies to align how they respond to *The Social Value Act*, and *Central Government PPN 06/20* and the *Social Value Model* to the overall wellbeing goals for Wales.
- *The Sustainable Development Goals*¹⁹ offer a globally agreed upon framework aligned to 17 sustainable development goals, of which the UK is a signatory.

At a local authority level, the incorporation of non-financial metrics into procurement is becoming mandatory above and beyond that which is required for meeting Government policy. An example is Greater Manchester Combined Authority which is going to make net zero non-negotiable in their contracting. The hope for national policy would be to support these progressive aims through raising the national standard and baseline, rather than reducing this and allowing for increasing inconsistency across different areas.

There are some critics of social value who argue that it introduces an added layer of complexity for suppliers and contracting authorities. However, we will be increasingly challenged in achieving best value for society and the environment without it. The recognition that we cannot achieve a sustainable future without going beyond financial management is reflected in the various initiatives towards this end (IFRS, SASB, EFRAG, UNDP SDG Impact Standards and IMP are other examples who are moving in this direction).

An area of great importance is increasing confidence in social value claims made by organisations and in procurement and contracting exercises. Third party assurance, verification or validation could be a useful tool here. The Government is leading the way in this area in relation to Green or Environmental Claims with the Competition and Market Authority creation of *The Green Claims Code*, helping to address issues of green washing. SVUK would support the progression of this to social value with the creation of a Social Claims Code.

ISSUE: How social value is being defined

SVUK adheres to an understanding of social value based on the Principles of Social Value. Social Value has been defined across the international Social Value network as ‘...the quantification of the relative importance that people place on the changes they experience in their lives’ for many years.

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/measuring-social-impact-in-public-procurement-sppn-10-2020/>

¹⁷ <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>

¹⁸ <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/WFGAct-English.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

We would also describe this as ‘*the value that people place on the changes they experience in their lives*’ or ‘*the value stakeholders place on the changes they experience in their wellbeing*’ or as ‘*a broader definition of value that includes the worth or importance stakeholders place on changes (impacts) to their wellbeing*’.

The Principles of Social Value offer an accountability and decision-making framework for organisations who want to optimise impacts on wellbeing for all materially affected stakeholder groups.

Crucially, the Principles start with ‘*involving stakeholders*’, which is a powerful accountability principle that ensures the people who experience the impacts are informing the measurement and management of the activities in question.

From a Principles-based perspective, any account of social value that has not been informed by stakeholder experience at best risks inaccuracies, and at worst, leads to decisions which cause negative impacts.

SVUK recognises that numerous working definitions of social value are being used. Unlike financial accounting, society has not agreed a standard definition and standards for measuring social value. In the medium term this has resulted in a plethora of responses to the need to measure it.

A ‘red thread’ through an increasing majority of these include reference to wellbeing. Key examples include:

- *BSI BS8950* – Social value is created through the generation of personal and collective wellbeing over the short and long term.
- *Social Value Act* – “...to require public authorities to have regard to economic, social and environmental wellbeing in connection with public services contracts; and for connected purposes.”
- *HM Treasury Greenbook*: Social value/public value is based on the principles of welfare economics and concerns overall social welfare efficiency, not just economic market efficiency. This includes all that affects the welfare and wellbeing of the population, not just market effects. For example, environmental, cultural, health, social care, justice and security effects are included.
- *Wellbeing Guidance for Appraisal: Supplementary Green Book Guidance*²⁰ 1.1” *What is wellbeing? Wellbeing is about how people feel.*”
- The ONS defines wellbeing as “... ‘*how we are doing*’ as individuals, communities and as a nation and how sustainable this is for the future.”²¹

Specifically in the UK, a common and specific confusion amongst members and those new to social value is the difference in definitions and therefore purposes of social value which then leads to the vast range of different practice that is being put into place.

There are distinct differences in the definitions of social value that SVUK adheres to, and those that are utilised in public sector procurement. The comments indicate a belief that the current definition of social value favours large companies with well-staffed public affairs and policy departments.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005388/Wellbeing_guidance_for_appraisal_-_supplementary_Green_Book_guidance.pdf

²¹ ONS: [Measures of National Well-being Dashboard - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/indicators/metrics/dashboards/national-well-being)

SVUK's recommendation would be for more alignment in terms of engaging stakeholders and developing a holistic approach, rather than an approach that only focuses on 'additionality', or an approach that only addresses social value through procurement rather than throughout the activities of the organisation as a whole.

This could help to address confusion firstly, but also emphasise recognition of organisations that are producing the most social value overall (not just in their 'extra' activities). This could help to bring greater visibility to smaller enterprises, and VCSE orgs that have social value at their core not in, for example, how many apprentices they can deliver.

ISSUE: Social value requirements of tenders causing a barrier to access for SMEs into supply chains

The comments reported indicate a belief that social value is causing issues for accessibility into procurement for SMEs²² and smaller providers, which is in contradiction to the original intention of *The Social Value Act*, and all Social Value or Social Impact policy that is being published across all nations in the UK. Procurement reforms off the back of Carillion and other large supplier failures were focused on broadening out accessibility and social value requirements were a part of this practice development. This is also a key aspect of the purpose behind the *Central Government Social Value Model*, clearly stated as important in the *Transforming Public Sector Procurement Green Paper*, and explicitly defined in the *SPPN 10/2020*.

Our membership highlighted that, when undertaken properly, measuring and managing social value should bring greater visibility to those organisations that are creating more value overall, in alignment with the broader definition of value previously outlined. SVUK members raised concerns that SMEs will suffer more from removal of social value requirements rather than gain improved access to the public procurement market, especially considering SMEs are embedded in local place-based social value creation

To improve the situation, SVUK members highlighted a number of ideas:

One idea from our membership is to assess the reality of the issue outlined, i.e. *'Since the social value weighting has been introduced, has there been a significant drop in the proportion of smaller businesses winning government contracts?'* This would help to shed light on the issue if there is one, and then help to identify how to address this whilst still rising to the challenge of actively managing our collective impacts on people and planet.

Another is to improve practice to recognise social value holistically, rather than only in additionality to the purpose of the contract or based on the number of social value-type activities that an organisation can offer. Social value requirements should not be onerous, rather they should be enabling, supporting recognition of the value organisations are *already* delivering in an area, over an organisation that is not, and encouraging organisations to change their behaviours for greater impact.

Improvements could be made to accessibility of social value practice, particularly in relation to social value platforms. This could be addressed by investing in accessible, easy to use, low cost, transparent social value measurement platforms that prioritise diverse organisational access. As one of our members, What Impact²³ says: *'The solution lies in more equal and transparent processes and practices. Also, in efficient low-cost technology available for all. Our research has*

²² Small and medium-sized enterprises

²³ <https://whatimpact.com/>

*demonstrated that expensive SROI social value planning and reporting tools are not accessible to many SMEs and instead have helped to create a tick-a-box approach to social value among large corporations.*²⁴ – an easy problem to solve with cheap / accessible / easy to use options that favour the organisations creating social value over those that have the resources for 'flashy' systems.

Where tenders are of substantial value, government could place more emphasis on evaluation of the impact through the supply chain not just the first-tier provider. This could and should diversify and add more value for SME/VCSE's to engage with. Social value requirements can help differentiate the offers of smaller providers, if the requirements are relevant and well considered.

The issue lies with the application rather than with the social value requirements themselves – this is a key point and an area that SVUK and our membership would enthusiastically support government in developing.

ISSUE: The creation of a social value sector or profession

It is interesting to see this being highlighted as an area of concern, considering it was not an issue in relation to other necessary professional areas such as law, finance/ accounting, engineering and so on. SVUK is the professional body in the UK for those working in social impact and social value and is a strong advocate for the need for standards of practice both in organisations, and by individual professionals. SVUK was founded in 2008 (as the SROI Network), pre-dating the Social Value Act (2012). To have better practice we recognize and are actively supporting the need to see the improvement and professionalisation of social value.

SVI / SVUK as professional bodies (International and UK) would strongly argue for the need for this. But so would other bodies such as the IMP²⁵, and the UNDP SDG Impact Standards²⁶. In the UK, the BSI published a guide on social value, which is a strong step towards a British Standard for social value, and ISO is currently setting up a working group to develop an international standard. This is all pointing towards better more consistent practice based on a recognised profession. This transparency of standards of practice will help to differentiate between the 'good' and 'poor' practice that is currently present and causing issues within the social value landscape. SVUK would support collaboration with government in establishing agreed professional standards of practice for UK Social Value professionals and practice.

ISSUE: Contradiction with other government agendas, and government practice development

A key concern raised by the SVUK membership is the contradiction of rolling back on social value requirements with the other critical government agendas, such as Levelling Up. There is at present possibly missing from the dialogue with Government a recognition of the opportunity for social value to be a key driver for levelling up in terms of wider social mobility agenda, economic recovery. Examples from members include:

'In the university sector, there's ... a thought leadership movement of civic universities where universities are playing more of a role within their local economies.'

²⁴ [Now's not the time for the UK to roll back on social value \(themj.co.uk\)](https://themj.co.uk)

²⁵ <https://impactmanagementproject.com/>

²⁶ <https://sdgimpact.undp.org/>

'Within the health sector, we have health anchor institutions who are using local place-based recovery as engagement to improve health [and] fund ... the local economy beyond [the] purely medicinal aspects of their work.'

There is also technical contradiction with recently updated government guidance in the *Greenbook and Supplementary Guidance on Wellbeing* which explicitly recognises the importance of understanding and measuring wellbeing to be able to make decisions on options for public sector spend.

Reducing social value in contracting could bring added risk for companies through contradicting requirements in other directive areas. For example, it would contradict Company legislation (the mandated duties of Company Directors to consider wider social determinants in their decision making). It could also move against the growing trend amongst investors for 'ESG', meaning it may be harder for firms to subsequently engage with, and attract, investment. It could deviate from growing practice in private sector industries to manage ESG, social value and sustainability to manage risk, create greater value, and to respond to increasing consumer pressure for better social and environmental management for their products.

Instead, maintaining the shared goal of better value through integration of social, environmental and financial value management within public sector procurement Government can continue to play a key role in connecting wider Governmental agendas together, linking this to increasing public sentiment to manage these critical areas and support growing practice and reporting requirements within the private sector. SVUK and our members would support continued and increased collaboration with Government in leading this progress.

SVUK's proposals for its members to collaborate with government for improvements to social value practice:

SVUK and our members propose the following areas of collaboration to support the continued development of better social value practice in the UK:

- **To continue to, and to increase, work with government to make social value practice better and to give the Social Value Act more effectiveness through improved guidance, standards, training and verification**
- **To improve social value practice in procurement** – SVUK is leading on this through the member led *Contract for Change* programme
- **To support a review of the Act and development of better practice**
- **To improve confidence in claims of social value, and social value practice through better verification** – SVUK would gladly collaborate with Government to build on the Competition & Market Authority's new Green Claims Code and develop a CMA Social Impact Claims Code
- **To input on practice review** - this could offer the opportunity to further the goal of having every company report on impact annually, similar to annual accounts
- **To advise on the development of more easily accessible platforms for supply chain use in collaboration with the social value sector, and suppliers**
- **To guide the government on weighting how social value produced by SMEs can be achieved and meaningfully compared to larger commercial organisations**

Social Value UK, 21st July 2022

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