Rt Hon Louise Haigh MP
First Secretary of State
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London, SW1A 2AS

12th August 2026

Dear First Secretary,

I am writing on behalf of Babyzone to welcome the publication of PPN 026 and the revised Social Value Model. The ambition to ensure that the £90 billion spent annually through government contracts creates tangible benefit in local communities is one we wholeheartedly support, and the decision to double the weighting given to social value in major procurements represents a significant step forward in how the state uses its purchasing power for the public good.

I am writing, however, because we believe the List of Community Programmes and the detailed guidance due in autumn 2026 present a particular opportunity to fund preventative action as well as help solve immediate challenges for young people seeking employment. The model as currently framed is built around two outcomes: good jobs and skills. Both are vital. But we would respectfully submit that the model would be materially strengthened if it also recognised early years family support as a qualifying form of social value, precisely because the evidence shows that this is where the roots of the outcomes the model is designed to improve are to be found.

PPN 026 rightly identifies NEETs as a target cohort and places a strong emphasis on jobs and skills for young people facing barriers to employment. The Milburn Review, which informed the development of the model, sets out the scale of the challenge in stark terms: youth economic inactivity is at its highest level in a generation. What the Review also finds, however, is that the drivers of becoming NEET reach back into early childhood, long before anyone is old enough for a job or an apprenticeship. To quote the report directly, 'The system knows, from the moment a child arrives at school, who is most likely to fail'. This is not a peripheral observation. It goes to the heart of whether the model addresses the symptoms of disadvantage or its causes.

Children who are not school-ready at age five are nearly three times as likely to be NEET at sixteen. Deprivation stretches the gap further still: the probability of becoming NEET runs at 1% for the most advantaged child and 25% for the most disadvantaged, but falls to 17% if that child reaches a Good Level of Development at school entry. A single developmental marker at age five claws back close to a third of the lifetime risk. Yet the trajectory of public spending runs in precisely the opposite direction. Early intervention spending was 44% lower in 2023/24 than in 2010/11, while late intervention spending rose by half over the same period. Over 1,300 Sure Start centres closed between 2010 and 2022, at a time when the IFS evaluation has since demonstrated that they worked: children eligible for free school meals who lived near a Sure Start centre left school three GCSE grades ahead of similarly disadvantaged peers, and every £1 invested generated £2.05 in long-term benefits. We know that the Government has an ambitious target for Good Level of Development and is prioritising support for families through the rollout of Best Start In Life Family Hubs, but there are existing charities and voluntary organisations working in this space who can accelerate the impact and implementation of the kind of support that will help those families most in need.

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A supplier that funds, hosts or delivers early years provision in the communities where it holds a public contract would meet this need directly. We say this not in the abstract but from experience. Babyzone operates eleven free, barrier-free community hubs for families with children aged 0 to 5 in some of England's most deprived neighbourhoods. We are universal and barrier-free by design, with no booking, no referral and no means-testing requirements. Yet we reach those who need support the most: 74% of the families who come through our doors live in IMD Deciles 1 to 4. 91% of parents report improved parenting confidence and 88% take what they learn at Babyzone home. The impact is measurable, the reach is independently verifiable at postcode level, and the cost per unit of outcome is modest by any standard.

Critically, this kind of provision can be counted and reported against contractual KPIs as readily as an apprenticeship start. The Milburn Review itself cites the Family Nurse Partnership, which is linked to a 5.8 percentage-point rise in children reaching a Good Level of Development. School readiness and reach into the most deprived neighbourhoods are quantifiable outcomes that lend themselves naturally to the reporting framework the model envisages.

PPN 026 asks contracting authorities to attach relevant programmes to tender documents, and the List of Community Programmes being developed for the autumn guidance is the mechanism through which this will operate in practice. We would respectfully urge that this list includes early years and family support programmes alongside employment and skills interventions, so that a supplier which commits to supporting a parent before their child starts school receives the same recognition as one that supports that child at sixteen. The two are not in tension; they are part of the same continuum.

We raise this point because we believe a social value framework that responds only to the rise in NEETs, rather than to the conditions that produce them, will always be addressing the problem after much of the damage has already been done. The evidence is clear that the highest return on investment in human development comes from the earliest years, and the Social Value Model is a powerful vehicle through which to deliver that return at scale.

We would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the autumn guidance and the List of Community Programmes, and would be glad to meet with you or your officials to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

George Looker

George Looker
Chief Executive Officer
Babyzone