



Seminar: Community Impact and Commissioning

Speakers

James Bennett,
Procurement and Commercial Manager,
Lancashire County Council

Catherine Gee,
Head of ESG Operations,
DWF Law LLP
(Chair and Facilitator)

Scott Latta,
Social Value Manager,
Eric Wright Group

Sara Gaskell,
Manager,
The Lancashire Skills & Employment Hub
(welcome and introduction)

Anthony Lengden,
Head of Social Value Partnerships and
Innovation, Mitie

Leigh McLaughlin,
Employment & Skills Coordinator
(Social Value),
Lancashire Skills and Employment Hub

In November 2025 the BSA organised a seminar in Preston, hosted by the Lancashire Skills and Employment Hub. The event brought together representatives from local councils, private sector organisations and VCSEs to explore best practice in commissioning for social and community impact, with a particular focus on Lancashire.

Sara Gaskell welcomed attendees and provided an overview of the Hub's work within the Lancashire Combined County Authority. This included publication of a Lancashire Skills and Employment Strategic Framework, which embedded social value in all its work.

Catherine Gee outlined the work of DWF Law on responsible business and social value and set out the aim of the seminar. This was to assess progress to date and identify opportunities for further advancement in delivering meaningful outcomes for communities.

Session 1: Policy Development

The first session focused on the development of policies in this area, including best practice in how they were drawn up.

Leigh McLaughlin opened this session. He detailed the creation and implementation of the Strategic Framework. Anchor employers and public sector organisations were encouraged to be involved, with work guided typically by TOMs, aligned to local strategies. Social value was seen as an enabler. The ultimate goal was better skills and higher employment.

From the Framework had developed several initiatives, including a Skills Pledge, a Social Value Network and a Practitioners Group.

There was still more to do in terms of enabling better delivery of social value, building stronger links between sectors and framing social value to support the strategic aims of the region.

Scott Latta then presented the first private sector perspective. The ownership structure of the Eric Wright Group, via a Charitable Trust, had enabled deeper community engagement. Scott outlined examples of this, including the Eric Wright Learning Foundation.

The Group's social value framework was based on four themes: People (supporting, inspiring and developing them to enhance their potential); Place (striving to create a more sustainable and environmentally focused business); Planet (transforming communities and the lives of people who live there); and Performance (creating better futures for everyone involved).

A panel discussion followed, focusing on how communities were involved in shaping social value plans. Early engagement, ongoing feedback, and a strong local presence were identified as critical factors.

The speakers were asked in particular about the voluntary sector. There were often gaps in knowledge here, both in the private and local authority sectors. There was discussion of the importance of a co-ordination role, and tying this in with CVSs. Co-ordination was also important in relation to other anchor institutions, and in particular the NHS, so the social value strategy encompassed the place as a whole. It was important not to be too prescriptive at a county level, however, as local areas knew their needs best.

There was also discussion of the importance of supply chain collaboration, and how the construction sector had taken a lead on this.

Finally there was discussion of TOMS, and it was suggested that quantity needed balancing with quality. Impact and outcome were the ultimate goals. It was often clear during the assessment process which bidders had engaged in early engagement with the community; they could be scored accordingly.

Session 2: From Policy to Delivery

The second session looked at turning social and community impact from policy into delivery, and how commissioning practices were being changed on the ground in order to make that happen.

James Bennett opened this session. He explained how, for Lancashire County Council, social value had become embedded in how the Council commissioned, procured, and managed services. This arose from a belief that commissioning was ultimately about shaping impact for communities.

James outlined the social value outcomes achieved under TOMS, along with further progress currently being made. The Council was:

- moving towards outcome-based contracts that rewarded measurable social impact;
- investigating mandating local labour and skills development clauses for major infrastructure projects;
- encouraging green practices and carbon reduction commitments;
- co-designing with communities to make sure services provided were relevant and inclusive; and
- partnering with suppliers and providers who committed to being part of Lancashire for the long term, not just until the project or contract ended, in order to create a legacy rather than a transaction.

For the future, plans were underway to:

- develop category plans that aligned industries with specific Lancashire-based organisations on the ground;
- expand early market engagement, so suppliers and providers understood expectations early in the process, allowing more time to develop meaningful proposals; and
- use digital dashboards for real-time social value reporting.

One challenge was to build market capacity to deliver social value impact.

Simultaneously, suppliers themselves needed to evolve, moving from transactional delivery to relational engagement with communities, including investing in skills and sustainability as core business strategies. Public sector agencies could help with clear guidance, capacity-building workshops, and sharing best practice, in a partnership approach that delivered a legacy long after the end of a contract.

Anthony Lengden gave the second private sector presentation of the afternoon. He introduced the work of Mitie in delivering facilities management, professional services, and integrated and specialist services, with a focus on sustainability and creating exceptional work environments. Mitie had a Plan Thrive¹, which involved uplifting one million lives and enabling a thousand places to prosper through social mobility, inclusive employment, wellbeing, and place-based delivery.

Anthony set out some challenges to achieving social value outcomes, along with a ‘call to action’ to all sectors which would help overcome them.

Challenges included balancing cost pressures with social value priorities, the need to ensure smaller suppliers could meet reporting and compliance requirements, and the need for a cultural shift for outcome/impact-based commissioning. What was required was clear, consistent guidance, flexible frameworks and early engagement from the public sector, and for suppliers to embed sustainability and social value in Business-As-Usual, not just an add-on.

¹ [Plan Thrive | Creating meaningful social value | Mitie](#)

Mitie was also developing a Supplier Charter, to set expectations for social value and sustainability activities, through local community partnerships. The Charter would contain principles around climate action, social mobility, inclusive employment and ethical business, which would be achieved through building capacity.

Mitie was trying not to build what it could buy, which provided the opportunity for engaging VCSEs and SMEs in delivery of goods and services for contracts. It was building the capacity of small and niche suppliers to be able to grow commercial income. Mitie was also learning to 'be local to think local', and to involve the customer and the community in developing compelling and relevant social value impact.

Discussion turned to the need to include VCSEs and local organisations as equal partners in design and delivery. Early engagement was vital, including to match larger bidders with smaller organisations. A questioner raised the need to ensure that supply chain commitments were delivered. Mechanisms to do so depended on the size of the organisation concerned.

Volunteering was also discussed, and the difference between this and offers of social value, including employee offers, which were made as part of a contract.

Some areas were developing category plans which matched requirements with specific sectors or markets. There was always a balance between direction from commissioners and leaving room for supplier initiative.

There was also discussion of the way in which the length of a contract helped to determine whether long-term legacy could be achieved. Some considered that frameworks didn't provide the necessary stability, although through them suppliers could have a commitment to bid into the future.

Finally, the seminar concluded with a consensus on the need to expand communication at all levels - from local networks and hubs to regional and national sharing of best practices. Continued collaboration and open dialogue were essential to realising the full potential of social value and community impact in commissioning.