



# Actioning Social Value for Care Leavers Essex County Council



Essex County Council

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## 1. Executive Summary

This report details the successful two-year delivery of the PEM Commitment under Mitie & Cabinet Office's Partnership Executive Meeting (PEM) by Mitie on the Essex County Council (ECC) contract. This initiative focused on the core mission of improving the experiences and opportunities for Children in Care and Care Leavers in Essex. Under the leadership of Ryan Nelson (Mitie, Strategic Account Director ECC), Pranay Kavathekar (Mitie, Energy, Sustainability & Social Value Manager) and Elliot Smith (ECC, Head of Infrastructure Delivery), Mitie and ECC have successfully piloted a groundbreaking strategic partner programme, translating our corporate social responsibility into direct, life-changing impact.

Key achievements include enhancing stakeholder engagement, developing employability skills for Care Leavers, and mobilising our supply chain. This report outlines our approach, the hurdles overcome, and the critical lessons learned. It concludes with a replicable framework for rolling out this transformative model across other Mitie contracts.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 The Partnership Executive Meeting (PEM)

The Partnership Executive Meeting (PEM) is a strategic partnership between Mitie and the UK Cabinet Office in a form of Strategic Partnering Programme (SPP). This forum brings together Mitie's executive leadership (e.g., CEO, CLO) and senior UK Government representatives (Crown Representatives, Commercial Directors). It is designed to leverage Mitie's scale and expertise across its public sector contracts to deliver enhanced value beyond core service delivery, focusing on social value, sustainability, and innovation.

## 3. The ECC Commitment

For the Essex County Council contract, the Commitment was dedicated to a profoundly important social objective: supporting Children in Care and Care Leavers. The programme was built on a VMOST framework:

- **Vision:** To lead an engagement strategy between Local Authorities and Mitie, assisting children in care teams to meet their strategic objectives and having a positive impact within the local communities in which we serve.
- **Mission:** To improve the experiences of children under the care of their local authority and to provide opportunities / remove hurdles for children exiting the care system.
- **Objectives:**
  1. Improve engagement with all stakeholders involved with children in care.



2. Improve employability skills and opportunities for Care Leavers.
  3. Create a pilot model for rollout across Mitie.
  4. Encourage supply chain partners to contribute to these activities.
  5. Ensure our workforce is reflective of the communities in which we operate.
- **Strategy:** To establish a direct, collaborative partnership with ECC's Children in Care service. This would be achieved by initiating a strategic dialogue to co-create a programme of support, focusing initially on providing work experience and career exposure, then expanding based on the service's needs.
  - **Tactics:**
    - Secure an initial kick-off meeting with ECC Children in Care service leadership.
    - Propose and co-design work experience opportunities for Care Leavers.
    - Develop and deliver careers events and presentations in Facilities Management.
    - Commit to supporting two annual events for Children in Care.
    - Maintain an ongoing dialogue to identify and respond to further support needs.

### 3.1 Why This Commitment is Important

Successful delivery of the Commitment enables:

- **Value Creation:** It moves Mitie beyond just 'delivering facilities management' to actively contributing to core social policy outcomes. This is important in its own right as well as providing Competitive Advantage in future public sector bids.
- **Future Growth:** The resulting framework is now a key asset for accelerating social value delivery across Mitie's wider public sector contracts (e.g., HMRC, DWP), helping to ensure our engagements are high-quality and consistent.

## 4. Project Leadership and Strategic Approach

The project was championed by:

- **Ryan Nelson**, Strategic Account Director, Mitie: Leveraging the senior relationship to secure the initial kick-off meeting and ensure strategic alignment.
- **Pranay Kavathekar**, Energy, Sustainability & Social Value Manager, Mitie: Driving the strategy, metrics, and programme development.
- **Elliot Smith**, Head of Infrastructure Delivery, ECC: Key senior stakeholder to drive ECC's teams to engage with Mitie and promote strategic partnership.

Our approach was executed as per the VMOST, beginning with the critical first step of identifying appropriate people within the ECC's Children in Care and Care Leavers team. Our work with ECC's It's My Life team helped us in getting the right steer to setup the kick-off meeting. This proactive engagement opened the door for Mitie to become a core partner, leading to a multi-faceted programme addressing both immediate and long-term needs.

## 5. Achievement Analysis: What We Did and How We Achieved Each Task

Over the past two years, we executed agreed activities to deliver against our objectives. This included creating meaningful local partnerships, ringfencing specific care leaver opportunities as well as multiple flagship initiatives:

### 5.1 Executing the Strategy: Partnership through Dialogue

- **Action:** Our journey began by leveraging existing community support to establish credibility and gather intelligence.. This was primarily achieved through our long-standing support of the ECC's annual "It's My Life" Festival. This event is vital for children in ECC's care system. Over the past few years, we have consistently provided support for this event by volunteering, supplying equipment such as temporary matting, barriers, t-shirts, ID badges, etc. During the event both Ryan Nelson and Pranay Kavathekar actively spoke with social workers, the Children in Care team, and Care Leaver teams to identify ECC's most pressing challenges and the correct operational contacts to establish a formal partnership.

Using this trust, we secured the necessary strategic dialogue and were introduced to ECC's Children in Care operational leaders (Keely Hutchings and Stephanie Doherty) and initiated a kick-off meeting. We clearly communicated our vision to support local Care Leavers, backing it with a specific, ring-fenced proposal for a paid 8-week work placement programme and an apprenticeship. This decisive, resource-backed offer was highly valued by ECC, securing their initial engagement and commitment to collaborate.

- **Achievement:** The successful outcome of the initial engagement led to formalisation of a continuous co-designed process, which ensured our support was sustained and effective. We established monthly meetings and regular communication with the ECC Employability Workers. To successfully remove typical application hurdles for Care Leavers, we proactively tailored the employment pathway. This included offering CV writing support and mock interviews, adopting an informal interview process, and providing flexible placement options across various sectors (e.g. FM, Helpdesk, Cleaning). This ensured candidates gained transferable skills in an environment comfortable to them (vs a standard corporate approach). This intentional, collaborative dialogue transformed the relationship from transactional to strategic, creating the trusted channel that ECC recognised as the "blueprint for how Care leaver engagement and recruitment should be done".

## 5.2 Achieving Objective 2: Employing a Care Leaver

- **Action:** Mitie established a multi-tiered employment pathway specifically for Care Leavers. This began with an 8-week, ring-fenced paid work placement for Bailey McMylor within our Electrical team in August 2024. Building on this pilot, we progressed to a long-term apprenticeship, recruiting Asmerom Tedros onto a two-year Property Maintenance Operative (Level 2) Apprenticeship which he started in January 2025. The programme has been further expanded with the enrolment of two additional Children in Care candidates onto a similar 8-week paid placement in our Landscape team in September 2025.



Figure 1: Asmerom Tedros, Mitie Apprentice

- **Achievement:** We have created a sustainable talent pipeline, moving from initial work experience to a multi-year, career-launching apprenticeship. This tiered approach de-risks the hiring process and provides multiple entry points. This enabled us to deliver against our mission to "remove hurdles for children exiting the care system." The success of this strategy has been recognised by ECC, with Employability Worker Keely Hutchings stating: "In short Mitie are the blueprint for how Care leaver engagement and recruitment should be done."

## 5.3 Achieving Objectives 1 & 4: Annual Compassionate Support

- **Action:** For the seventh consecutive year, Mitie supported ECC's Christmas hamper initiative for Care Leavers. In 2024, 10 Mitie volunteers helped pack 890 hampers, and 10 Mitie engineers used electric vans to deliver them across four distribution hubs.
- **Achievement:** This provided essential and compassionate support to hundreds of vulnerable young people during the holiday period. ECC publicly thanked Mitie for their "generous monetary donation and delivery support."



Figure 2: Mitie engineer delivering Christmas Hampers

#### 5.4 Achieving Objective 1: Multi-Year Safety Initiative for protecting Vulnerable Families

- **Action:** In response to rising child exploitation, Mitie launched a sustained safety initiative. In 2024, we donated 16 Ring doorbells and provided expert security guidance for vulnerable families. Due to its success, we repeated the donation in 2025.. Lee Brown (Head of ECC Security, Mitie) also provided advice on specification and GDPR compliance.
- **Achievement:** Directly safeguarded vulnerable children over two consecutive years. Samuel Perryman, ECC Senior Practitioner, confirmed the devices "*provide the families with a greater sense of security*" and are "*safeguarding several families against exploitation.*"



Figure 3: Mitie team donating Ring doorbell cameras to the ECC's Risk in the community team

#### 5.5 Achieving Objective 3: Creating a Replicable Model & Scaling Impact

- **Action:** One of the key outcomes from this initiative was extending the learnings and outcomes achieved with ECC to other Mitie Local Authority Accounts. Our initial approach was to proactively establish a formal Local Authority Working Group (LAWG), comprising social value managers and key account holders. Our intent was for this forum to showcase the ECC blueprint, learn from other Local Authority Accounts and share best practice. However, despite repeated attempts to influence these accounts through the LAWG, impact was limited. The reliance on a voluntary, quarterly forum resulted in inconsistent engagement and challenges in consistently translating shared guidance into concrete, actionable commitments. This particular initiative is now being taken forward by Mitie's Group Director of Social Value (Helen Longfils)
- **Achievement:** n/a

#### 5.6 Achieving Objective 4: Leading the Strategic Supplier Forum

- **Action:** To maximise impact across ECC, we co-led the ECC Strategic Supplier Forum alongside key peer organisations (Morgan Sindall, Microsoft, Ringway Jacobs, Capita). The objectives of this forum were to seek specific, measurable social value commitments from these suppliers that aligned with the needs of the ECC Care Leaver team.
- **Achievement:** The forum secured significant, tangible commitments from partners, notably:
  - Microsoft: Pledged a dedicated Mentoring Programme.

- Morgan Sindall: Committed to structured work experience and apprenticeship pathways.
- Ringway Jacobs: Adopted a Retention Best Practice by assigning a dedicated six-month mentor for Care Leaver hires.

It is noted that the ECC Strategic Supplier Forum was later disbanded due to conflicting priorities among the participating organisations. This outcome underscores that while immediate influence is achievable, successful long-term collaboration requires formal embedding into contractual objectives.

### 5.7 Achieving Objectives 1, 4 & 5: Large-Scale Event Support

- **Action:** We provided comprehensive support for the five-day "It's My Life" Festival, including 40 staff volunteering 190 hours, and collaborating with suppliers.
- **Achievement:** Created a "safe, inclusive, and joyful celebration" for hundreds of Children in Care.



Figure 4: Mitie staff volunteering for the It's My Life Festival 2025

### 5.8 Achieving Objective 5: The Pathway to the Care Leaver Covenant (CLC) signatory

- **Action:** To embed this work at a corporate level, we engaged with Mitie's Diversity & Inclusion leads to align the commitment with our broader corporate policy.
- **Achievement:** Mitie signed the Social Recruitment Advisory Group Covenant, which acts as an 'umbrella' charter covering all disadvantaged groups, including Care Leavers. This demonstrated immediate corporate commitment to inclusive recruitment practices.

## 6. Challenges and Lessons Learnt

The programme's success required navigating several significant challenges:

- **Securing Internal Investment:** A primary challenge was securing dedicated, ringfenced internal budget for initiatives such as paid work placements, apprenticeships, and event support. Justifying this investment required building a strong business case that linked social value to long-term client retention and reputational enhancement.
- **Resource Constraints & Specialised Skills:** Implementing the programme effectively required more than goodwill. It demanded dedicated, skilled personnel. A significant hurdle was ensuring we had the correct resources in place. The role of a dedicated Social Value Manager, to define strategy, project manage, measure impact, and maintain the required client relationships was key to ECC's success.
- **Complex Recruitment and Onboarding:** Integrating Care Leavers into the workforce demanded exceptional patience and tailored processes. Standard HR procedures were often ill-suited to the unique barriers to employment faced by this cohort. For this blueprint to be effective, other contracts must adopt these fundamental operational modifications to successfully transition candidates:
  - **Tailored Interview Process:** We moved away from formal, high-pressure panel interviews to mitigate candidate anxiety and ensure a fair assessment of potential. We adopted an informal interview process focused on soft skills and communication, conducted in a comfortable environment. This was directly supported by bespoke preparatory sessions, including CV writing guidance and mock interviews, which helped familiarise the candidates with the process and build confidence.
  - **Modified Vetting and Compliance:** Standard background checks and documentation requirements often pose substantial obstacles for Care Leavers. We worked in close collaboration with ECC support workers and Mitie's Safeguarding team to navigate these unique barriers. This required accepting alternative forms of identification or verification and focusing on support rather than rigid adherence to standard compliance procedures, whilst ensuring legal requirements were met.
  - **Enhanced HR and Manager Hand-off:** We established a direct communication channel between the ECC Employability Workers and the Mitie line managers and HR team. This crucial step ensured that, upon hiring, managers were immediately aware of the candidate's specific support needs (e.g., housing, transport, or pastoral mentorship). This created a robust, supportive network that transformed a simple HR procedure into a successful, supported transition into employment, ensuring managers could provide the necessary flexibility and understanding.
- **Balancing Immediate Action with Strategic Formality:** We managed the challenge of balancing immediate grassroots action with the lengthy process of strategic corporate formality by implementing a Two-Step Strategy..

- **Step 1- Quick Win Focus:** We prioritised launching high-visibility, local operational projects to build client trust and generate immediate, tangible evidence of impact. We delivered specific support by ring-fencing internal budget for paid work placements and apprenticeships for Care Leavers. This ensured support was delivered immediately at a local level.
- **Step 2 The Formal Charter Focus:** We ran this step simultaneously, engaging our Mitie central teams (Plan Thrive, Mitie Foundation, ED&I). We engaged with Helen Longfils (Group Director of Social Value), Mollie Green (Head of Mitie Foundation), Sim Sian (Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion), Marie Taylor (People Business Partner), and Mike Gibson (Managing Director: Healthcare, Local Government and Education) This culminated in Mitie signing up to the Social Recruitment Advisory Group Covenant.

## 7. A Blueprint for Replication on Other Contracts

We hope the ECC model provides a clear, actionable blueprint for other contracts. In summary:

- **Make the Business Case for Investment:** From the outset, build a clear business case that links social value delivery to client priorities, contract retention, and Mitie's strategic Plan Thrive goals. This is essential for securing the necessary internal budget for paid programmes.
- **Appoint a Dedicated Lead:** Ensure a Social Value Manager (or equivalent) is formally assigned to the contract with clear objectives and the bandwidth to lead the programme. This is a critical factor for success.
- **Pursue a Dual-Track Strategy:** Engage with Mitie's central ED&I/HR teams to pursue a formal charter while simultaneously launching a high-visibility "quick win" operational project to build client trust and generate evidence of impact.
- **Leverage:** Engage with or create client-led supplier forums, challenging others to act and amplifying the social value impact across the entire contract ecosystem.

## 8. Conclusion

We are proud of what has been achieved through the Children in Care Strategic Partnering Programme with Essex County. Over two years, Mitie has successfully transitioned from a facilities service provider to a genuine strategic partner, embedding itself in the delivery of one of ECC's most critical social objectives. This enabled us to move beyond immediate contractual obligations to create a lasting, transformative impact for an extremely vulnerable sector of UK society. We did this through the creation of employment pathways, the enhancement of safety for vulnerable families, and the delivery of life-enhancing experiences for hundreds of Children in Care and Care Leavers. We also highlight the effectiveness of leveraging broader supplier forums to maximise engagement and impact.

The lessons are clear: impactful social value requires dedicated leadership, strategic investment, and a dual-track approach that combines grassroots delivery with corporate

alignment. The ECC contract has proven that this is not just the right thing to do, but a smart business strategy that deepens client relationships and one which can provide competitive advantage.