HACT · CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY INVESTMENT · SNG · Supported by JPMorganChase

GROWING GREEN SKILLS

A collaboration to support social housing communities connect with training and employment opportunities

Learning Journal 3: A social value perspective



Introduction

The Green Skills programme is focused on developing skills, training and employment opportunities for social housing residents within the green economy. Led by HACT in partnership with Sovereign Network Group (SNG) and funded by JPMorganChase, the programme is based on collaboration between housing associations, the local council, local training providers and businesses. Supporting net zero goals, it aims to tackle stigma around green industries, create green job opportunities and boost financial resilience in local communities as part of our wider approach towards a just transition.

The project has two components. The first nurtures learning and collaboration at a national level through the Green Skills Network. Good practice examples and learning are shared by a range of organisations from different sectors, providing a space to identify effective ways to develop pathways for communities into the growing green job market and the spectrum of these job roles. Through connecting people and organisations, we aim to accelerate progress through shared knowledge and accessible expertise.

The second core aspect of the project is the localised place-based pilot led by SNG in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP). This started in September 2024 and has engaged over 220 local residents, supported 35 people into work and created over £1.28million in social value. By aligning local supply and demand, the Green Employment Pathway (developed by SNG) supports people to access advice, guidance, vocational training and roles with organisations better related to green skills.

A central part of our programme is to share learning. We know the housing sector has net zero targets to decarbonise homes by 2030. We know that unemployment and lack of access to good jobs is negatively impacting the financial resilience of many of our communities. This presents us with both a challenge and an opportunity. By pooling our collective learning and ideas we can co-create the solutions.

This learning journal reflects on our insights after close to two years of project delivery, focusing on the role of social value in supporting this agenda and employers' perspectives on how we can achieve a just green transition.

Context: working with procurement and social value

Engaging with procurement and social value teams is essential when supporting the green employment agenda, as they play a key role in influencing how contracts and services deliver wider community benefits.

Through bespoke social value frameworks in tenders, procurement teams can ensure that contracts with external suppliers include requirements for green skills, sustainability, and employment opportunities. Social value teams focus on ensuring that organisations deliver positive outcomes beyond the core service, including environmental sustainability and community development.

LEARNING

01 Utilising contracts

SNG has been working collaboratively with procurement teams and suppliers to embed green skills initiatives into contracts. This includes activities such as volunteering expertise time, mentoring support, delivering training, sharing job vacancies, and attending careers fairs and events.

This joined-up approach creates more opportunities for social housing communities to access green skills development and employment pathways, while also supporting wider organisational and environmental goals. It demonstrates how influencing procurement processes can directly contribute to improved outcomes for customers – providing tangible moments and opportunities for contract partners to connect, meet and build relationships with local members of the community.

An example of this is our partnership with Ridge and Partners LLP who had a contract with SNG and the two collaborated to create the Ridge Green Futures Workshop for customers. The session helps participants understand the basic science of carbon emissions and climate change, including the human impact. It also aims to increase confidence when discussing decarbonisation, identify climate change misinformation, and develop an understanding of what constitutes a green career.

The workshop explores a range of green career pathways, provides practical advice on securing roles in the sector, and helps customers recognise how their existing skills can be transferred into green employment and is now rolled out regularly to customers.

LEARNING

01 Utilising contracts *cont.*

The SNG team is also looking forward to 'Talking Sustainability with Confidence' session being delivered by SNG supplier Paula Rosa Manhattan. This session is designed to support customers to confidently discuss sustainability, climate action, and net zero in job interviews, even if they do not have prior experience in the sector.

The session will cover key themes including raising awareness of environmental issues, demonstrating a positive attitude and willingness to learn, applying practical thinking such as waste reduction and efficiency, and understanding how sustainability can be linked to different job roles.

This type of support is important in helping customers recognise that they already have transferable skills relevant to green careers, while also building their confidence to engage with employers. It strengthens SNG's Green Employment Pathway by preparing customers not just with knowledge, but with the ability to articulate their value in a changing labour market.

Contractual commitments help to capture the positive actions supply chain organisations can and often want to contribute and ensure there's the appropriate governance in place to enable delivery and impact to unfold.



Utilising contracts *cont.*

By working with our supply chain partners, we're creating meaningful opportunities for customers to develop new skills, build confidence and access employment opportunities within the growing green economy. These partnerships help customers recognise their transferable skills, connect directly with employers, and take practical steps towards sustainable careers.

Amy Evens, Employment and Skills Manager, SNG



LEARNING

02 Coordinating social value commitments in place

A common challenge is that many organisations are asking for similar outcomes from the same suppliers in the same places, such as apprenticeships, training or employment support, without always aligning these asks. This can lead to duplication and missed opportunities to achieve more collectively.

The Social Value Leadership Group (SVLG) is a strong example of how collaboration can help address this. By bringing together housing associations, local authorities and partners, the SVLG creates a space to share learning, align approaches, and influence suppliers more consistently. This helps reduce pressure on the supply chain while improving the impact delivered for communities.

This kind of joined-up working is particularly important for green skills. The scale of the skills gap across areas like retrofit and sustainable construction means no single organisation can solve it alone. By working together, across housing providers, suppliers, training organisations and community partners, we can pool resources, align investment, and create clearer, more accessible routes into green jobs.



LEARNING

02 Coordinating social value commitments in place *cont.*

In practice, this means moving beyond individual, contract-level activity towards a more coordinated, place-based approach. For example, instead of lots of small, disconnected training offers, partners could work together to deliver shared programmes, academies, or referral pathways that support more residents and create longer-term impact.

Overall, collaboration through groups like the SVLG shows the shift needed in social value, from individual commitments to collective impact. By aligning our efforts, we can do more with the same resources and make sure the green transition creates real opportunities for the communities we serve.

> *Cross-sector collaboration is key to delivering meaningful, scalable social value outcomes, particularly in the green skills agenda. Given the scale of the skills gap in retrofit and sustainable construction, no single organisation can address it alone. A more coordinated, place-based approach can pool resources, align investment, and create clearer pathways into green jobs.*
>
> *Deborah Williams, Social Value Manager, SNG*

LEARNING

03 From commitment to action: engaging the supply chain

It is essential to acknowledge the importance of actively engaging suppliers in conversations about the green skills agenda. While it is valuable to include social value commitments in contracts, this alone is not enough. Without clear processes and ongoing support, these commitments can sometimes remain as intentions rather than turning into real activity and impact.

SNG have deployed a number of activities to mobilise a more proactive and supportive approach helps bring these commitments to life. This includes creating practical opportunities for engagement, connection and delivery.

For example, the use of digital tools like Match My Project, which allow SNG and their community partners to post real requests for support. This helps suppliers clearly see where they can contribute and makes it easier to connect their offers to real community need.

Social Value Specialists – dedicated roles in the housing association – are key in bridging between suppliers and internal teams, such as the Employment Support Team, ensuring opportunities, particularly around jobs, training and green skills, are coordinated and accessible to residents.



LEARNING

03 From commitment to action: engaging the supply chain

Relationships are also strengthened through facilitated collaboration through face-to-face events, such as SNG's Social Value Switch Ons. These sessions bring suppliers and community partners together to share best practice, build relationships, and start turning ideas into action. SNG also make space to celebrate success to further build relationships and encourage engagement.

Through initiatives like the Stronger Together: SNG Social Value Awards, suppliers are recognised for the impact they've helped deliver and provides further opportunities to share learning and strengthen partnerships.

Overall, this approach reflects a shift from simply asking for social value, to actively supporting and enabling it. By creating clear routes for engagement and providing the right support, housing associations can help suppliers deliver meaningful outcomes, particularly in areas like green skills where coordination and collaboration are key.

> *Employers can help people learn about green jobs by offering more work experience opportunities, site visits and information sessions. When people can see what these jobs are really like, they feel more confident about taking their first step into the sector.*
>
> *Isabella Pogliaghi, Employment and Skills Coach Green Skills, SNG*

LEARNING

04 The role of suppliers in driving the green skills agenda

The housing and construction sectors are facing a well-known skills shortage, with demand for skilled workers growing across the supply chain. This creates a shared opportunity. Suppliers want to grow their businesses, maintain a strong pipeline of talent, and build a workforce that is ready for the future. Supporting people into green jobs is therefore not just the right thing to do, it also makes good business sense.

Much of what is already happening within organisations could be opened up more widely. For example, training programmes designed for existing employees could also support people looking to enter the sector or retrain for new opportunities. By extending access to training opportunities in this way, suppliers can help more people benefit while also strengthening their own talent pipeline.

Suppliers are also well placed to create clearer pathways into employment. Through links with their subcontractors, local networks, and live projects, they can offer real-world experience and opportunities that are often the missing link for people trying to access green careers.

Importantly, many suppliers are keen to play this role. Investing in workforce development helps improve productivity, retention and long-term stability, while also ensuring they have the skills needed to deliver future projects.

LEARNING

04 The role of suppliers in driving the green skills agenda

Through the local pilot is in BCP, we also know that it is possible to be creative with job advertisements and role descriptors to encourage a wider pool of applicants and engagement form community members. Honing on the most important softer skills and being clear what technical skills are needed from day one, can help simplify and make opportunities feel more accessible to those taking steps back into employment and/or into the green sectors for the first time.

Overall, the role of suppliers in the green skills agenda is both practical and strategic. By opening up existing opportunities, working collaboratively with partners, and aligning their workforce needs with community priorities, suppliers can play a key role in creating accessible pathways into green jobs. This creates a positive cycle, supporting communities, strengthening the supply chain, and helping the sector meet its long-term sustainability goals.



HACT is a long-established organisation with over 65 years of experience supporting the UK social housing sector. Through consultancy, innovation and collaboration, HACT works closely with housing associations to deliver meaningful social impact.

HACT brings national insights to local contexts with a strong track record in mapping community needs, engaging residents and analysing large-scale resident data. HACT's strength lies in its extensively experienced team and its ability to drive evidence-based, community-focused solutions.



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