

## AT A GLANCE

SHARED VALUE IN PRACTICE: PRACTICAL MODELS FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR  
(9<sup>th</sup> December 2025, (in-person, Better Pathways, Birmingham))

Please see below the session summary of notes from the December 2025 Social Economy FORUM meeting focused on 'Shared value in practice: Practical models for social economy engagement with the private sector'.

**OUR HOSTS** | This session opportunity was kindly hosted by [Better Pathways](#), 201-206 Alcester Street Digbeth, Birmingham, B12 0NQ.

**FACILITATED AND WRITTEN BY** | [Jakira Khanam](#), Partnerships Lead, [BSSEC CIC](#)

### BACKGROUND & CURRENT LANDSCAPE

WMCA's framework for growth is built on an ecosystem approach that recognises the need for collaboration. This policy explicitly calls for a closer relationship between the private and social sectors. The value of collaboration extends far beyond simple resource exchange. It is a strategic tool for systemic change, resilience and innovation for both sectors.

There is a win-win for both sides of the equation:

#### For social economy organisations

- Access to funding and investment.
- Pro-bono support and specialised volunteering that professionalises operations.
- Utilisation of corporate supply chains and distribution networks.
- Enhanced reputation and access to new networks.

#### For the private sector

- Tangible way to meet CSR and ESG goals.
- Increases employee engagement, aids talent attraction and develops staff skills through project involvement.
- Builds stronger place-based and community ties for greater social value.

### KEY INSIGHTS FROM GUEST SPEAKERS

Two guest speakers were invited to share their experiences of working in partnership. We heard from:

- [Sue Roberts](#) (CEO, [Better Pathways](#))
- [Andreea Tudor](#) (Regional Lead, [Business in the Community](#))

#### Sue Roberts, CEO, Better Pathways

Better Pathways is a social economy organisation which delivers commercial packing, assembly and signage work while supporting people with mental health needs and learning disabilities into employment. Sue highlighted the commercial activity was key to financial resilience and

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sustainability. Commercial trading also means that quality standards, consistent delivery and competitive pricing are crucial factors.

An example of successful private sector partnerships included with [Oakland International](#) and Roche to purchase 12-week placements on their employment preparation pathway.

Better Pathways has launched a commercial services website: [Commercial Services - Better Pathways](#)

### Key challenges and growth needs

Social enterprises face significant commercial challenges. Sue listed these:

- Difficulty breaking into commercial supply chains due to a lack of visibility
- Responding to unpredictable workloads without economies of scale
- Limitations in sales and marketing.
- Pricing competitively is difficult without economies of scale.
- Quality must come first, as social value alone is not sufficient to win contracts.
- Limited access to competitor pricing or market intelligence.
- Innovation constrained due to limited investment funds
- Sales roles require a long lead-in time, and high salaries are not always affordable

Furthermore, public sector contracts are often small, short-term and carry high administrative and compliance requirements. To overcome these challenges and diversify income, Sue emphasised that a steady flow of commercial work is needed. Access to networks and introductions to new customers, as well as support to understand market trends and competition, were also important requests.

### How the private sector can work with Better Pathways

- Commission packing, assembly, rework and signage
- Purchase pathway placements
- Joint marketing and case studies
- Longer-term partnership development
- Supporting innovation through collaboration or shared investment

### Strategic opportunities and support

The WMCA and BSSEC provide strong networks and policy support, and collaboration with the sector strengthens capability. Trade associations help with technical credibility and market knowledge.

The Procurement Act 2023 is a key opportunity. It simplifies procurement, encourages evaluation based on value (not just the lowest price) and provides specific routes for reserved contracts for

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supported employment organisations. However, the Act does not remove issues like low margins or short-term contract issues. The procurement Act also requires clearer procurement pipelines and better feedback, especially for contracts that are of lower thresholds.

### Andreea Tudor, Regional Lead – West Midlands, Business in the Community

Business in the Community (BiTC) is the UK's largest and longest-established responsible business network. Responsible business is defined by BiTC as one that puts creating healthy communities and a healthy environment at the centre of its strategy to achieve long-term value for all stakeholders. This is an all-encompassing approach that moves beyond traditional CSR to embed responsibility into the core strategy and governance of the organisation.

### Strategic opportunities and support

A key focus of the network is on social value, which involves quantifying and evidencing the social, environmental, and economic benefits a business contributes to society. The network stresses that winning contracts requires due diligence behind the wins, ensuring that a company's success is backed by real and measurable social value commitments. Andreea mentioned the Social Value Portal Taskforce which lobbies at a national and a local commissioner level on good social value practices.

<https://www.nationalsocialvaluetaskforce.org/>  
[Social Value Portal | Measure, report and amplify your Social Value](#)

### Examples of partnerships

#### Coventry Building Society and Kaleida

The partnership between Coventry Building Society and [Kaleida](#) was given as a good example of social economy and private sector partnership. Coventry Building Society chose to partner with Kaleida to improve access to competitive bid invitations for marginalised businesses, recognising that a diverse supply chain brings a breadth of thinking and access to new communities and ideas.

[The Coventry Building Society joins our growing list of corporate partners](#)

#### Midcounties Co-Operative and Miss Macaroon

The Fairer Futures Programme is an example of embedded social value created through a strategic partnership between The Midcounties Co-operative the social enterprise Miss Macaroon. This initiative tackles the pressing issue of youth unemployment in areas of high economic inactivity. By leveraging the Co-op's funding, retail knowledge and physical space, Miss Macaroon can scale its proven Macaroons that Make a Difference training course into a bespoke package.

[The Fairer Futures Programme | Miss Macaroon](#)

[The Midcounties and Miss Macaroon Launch The Fairer Futures Programme | Your Co-op](#)

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### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key themes arose out of the discussions, particularly in relation to data and impact stories and the articulation of win-win value propositions, access to markets and influencing procurement policy to demonstrate tangible social value.

- **Facilitate market access and professionalisation** – networks like BSSEC can actively broker introductions and networks as well as facilitating access to corporate pro-bono support e.g. expertise in sales, marketing, pricing.
- **Champion best practice** – build a bank of case studies and disseminate examples of collaboration such as the Fairer Futures Programme and the Coventry Building Society/Kaleida model. An emphasis on data, impact stories and the business case for private investment in social supply chains are crucial factors.
- **Policy and procurement advocacy** - press WMCA and local commissioners to fully implement the spirit of the Procurement Act 2023. This includes working with the Social Value Portal Taskforce to ensure measurable social value commitments are prioritised.

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Our thanks to all who attended this SHARED VALUE IN PRACTICE: PRACTICAL MODELS FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR session, our speakers and for the engaging contribution to this topic.

