



Social Mobility
PLEDGE



MEARS GROUP AND
THE SOCIAL MOBILITY PLEDGE
**SETTING THE STANDARD
ON SOCIAL IMPACT**

MEARS®

Forewords

Rt Hon Justine Greening

Founder of the Social Mobility Pledge & Former Education Secretary

When I was growing up in Rotherham, my parents lived very close to where their parents lived. I grew up with my grandparents being just round the corner.

My first economics lesson was when my Dad became unemployed during the local British Steel closures of the 1970s and 80s.

I felt like I had to leave my hometown to pursue the particular opportunities I wanted.

But that's not how it should be in Britain today. It has to change. Opportunities have to be on people's doorsteps.

If we're going to make the most of ourselves as a country, and make Brexit a success, then we have to make sure every person and every place is fulfilling its potential.

We need to make sure that social mobility and getting on in life isn't defined by geography.

Because we all know that talent is spread evenly across our country; but we sadly also know that opportunity isn't.

I set out to bring together a coalition of businesses in Britain that were up to

challenging this, connecting up opportunity and tackling the widest opportunity gaps across the country.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, this has never been more important. It is the same young people, from the least privileged groups in society, that have suffered from the pandemic most, both in terms of the immediate public health impacts, and the socio-economic consequences.

Mears Group is one of these businesses that has understood the need to go further in delivering for communities, creating opportunities and delivering social value throughout its everyday business operations.

As a social housing provider it is by definition present in some of the most deprived communities in the UK, where opportunity and the help to break out of entrenched disadvantage is needed most.

I believe the approach Mears has taken in building relationships with its tenants, seeking to boost their quality of life and access to opportunity, is a stand out contribution to wider social impact and social mobility that we can learn from and also build on.



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Introduction

Addressing Low Social Mobility and the Opportunity Gap

The Social Mobility Pledge was founded to bring together businesses to provide practical solutions to the United Kingdom's problem of low levels of social mobility.

This centres around three simple commitments: partnership with schools and colleges; providing access to meaningful work experience, internship and apprenticeship opportunities; and considering how recruitment practices can be made fairer.

The Pledge is partnering with some of the UK's leading businesses in highlighting best practice in boosting social mobility. But first it's important to consider what exactly social mobility is, and what the current situation is in the UK.

Social mobility is typically measured as the difference between a person's occupation or

income and that of their parents. When there is a weak link, there is a high level of inequality, when there is a strong link, there is a low level of social mobility.

Levels of social mobility in the United Kingdom have remained stagnant for years. This means that those who are born into deprivation are statistically likely to remain in those circumstances throughout their lives.

A recent study commissioned by the OECD showed that this isn't just a problem confined to the UK, but a majority of the most developed OECD nations. The study showed that while absolute living standards have increased within OECD nations, income mobility to people born to low-educated parents has stagnated for those born after the mid-1970s, particularly when



compared to many people born to low-educated parents between 1955 and 1975.

This shows a real decrease in social mobility over time.

Lower levels of social mobility come against a backdrop of the highest levels of income inequality in decades. The average income of the richest 10% of the population is about nine times that of the poorest 10% across the OECD, an increase by approximately seven times since 25 years ago.

The United Kingdom has one of the highest levels of income inequality among OECD nations. By comparison, only in Turkey, Chile, and Mexico has inequality fallen, but in the latter two countries the incomes of the richest are still more than 25 times those of the poorest.

While the economic crisis of the late 2000s added to the urgency of solving these problems, and the increased alertness by the Government to these problems, there remains significant challenges.

But it's not just the obvious measures of income inequality and intergenerational measures that underpin low social mobility. It's important to be aware of social issues that might contribute to the problem, or exacerbate the problem in the future. One of these is a deficiency of skills that young people are being equipped with, whether that's from the education system or business.

The United Kingdom is currently facing what could potentially be one of the most significant socio-economic problems it has faced in decades. This is a deficiency in the supply of skilled labour against demand. In other words: a skills gap.

According to recent findings by the CBI, three-quarters (79%) of businesses expect to increase the number of higher-skilled roles in the coming years. However, two-thirds (66%) of the same businesses are concerned that there will be a lack of sufficiently skilled people to fill vacancies. This means that there is a worrying deficit between the demand for skilled labour and the supply of skilled labour. It is clear that not enough is currently being done to equip our young people with the skills for the jobs and opportunities that are available across the country.

But there isn't just one silver-bullet solution for these significant socio-economic problems. There is a strong need for businesses to not only work together across the private sector and invest in young people but to engage with schools, colleges and universities to ensure that the next generation of talent that will be entering the workforce is aware of the opportunities, and those young people can acquire the right skills for those opportunities.

It is clear that businesses have the potential to make a transformative effect in boosting social mobility and addressing the increasing skills gap, solutions to social mobility that if properly scaled can benefit many of the over 27 million people employed in the private sector as a whole, across many of the 5.7 million private sector businesses in the UK, from large corporations to SMEs.

This report shows how Mears is a company that has shown significant best practice in both boosting social mobility and seeking to alleviate social problems in the communities it operates. As it will demonstrate, there is clear potential for industry-wide learnings from Mears Group's work to boost social mobility.





Introducing Mears Group

Mears Group began the new decade with a renewed commitment to responsible business which set out to ensure in all its work, it was a partner for purpose.

This underpins Mears' commitment to ensuring the contribution of social value isn't just an additional programme, but something that results from the business' every day activities.

As the second largest provider of housing in the United Kingdom, Mears recognises it has a responsibility and duty to be an advocate for a new model of responsible business.

Founded in 1988, Mears has grown rapidly both organically and through acquisitions made in the last decade. Now responsible for over one million social homes across the country, including the maintenance of plumbing, electrics, painting, and decorating, Mears reaches further into communities than most businesses.

This tight working relationship brings them into contact naturally with communities that are more likely to be disadvantaged. Mears embraces this opportunity to provide the best services and create opportunities in its communities.

It is with this business model and purpose in mind that Mears views social mobility as a business imperative. With 95% of its business delivering services to the public sector, for which it provides housing and welfare support, it becomes a necessity to ensure services are delivered with higher quality, and greater social value and impact, than the public sector itself could deliver.

Mears views itself as 'a great place to work'. It believes that delivering on this aspiration can be done - and should be done - alongside delivering the best services, through having a happy workforce that enjoys and finds meaning in what it does, along with a sense of opportunity and purpose in all of its activities. Ultimately, it recognises that if its colleagues are motivated and happy at work, they deliver the best services to service-users.

Mears makes a specific point of setting out to achieve and maintain a diverse and inclusive culture, one that looks beyond the protected characteristics and attracts and retains the best talent, with a focus on enabling progression once colleagues are within the company.

A purpose-led culture that puts its people first: The Red Thread

Mears recognises that generating social value shouldn't be an abstract thing, or be viewed as an additional tick-box programme. It all starts with going back to basics and ensuring that a business delivers wider social value as a result of its everyday business activities.

At the foremost level, this begins internally, and then permeates throughout the company, into its delivery of services to the public sector and over a million people across the UK.

This is why having the right culture internally is so important to Mears. Culture isn't something you can invent, or introduce with a special scheme, it's something that makes up the DNA of a company, and how inclusive the company is for its colleagues.

Mears believes in creating the best environment for its people to reach their own potential, as well as recognising the business imperative of

being a company with a great culture: happier people deliver better services. Mears believes a 'Red Thread' runs through all elements of the company and binds employees together through the social value the company has recognised as creating chances in the communities it works.

Sharing values leads to shared success – all Mears colleagues are bound by a common set of behaviours. Mears this the Red Thread.

The Red Thread has five principal strands: motivation, empowerment, customer focus, role models, and high standards. This further reinforces stronger foundations within company culture, and binds the company's people with its purpose.

Like all strong ideas, the Red Thread was born out of challenge. Since its founding in 1988, Mears' success has seen rapid business growth to being one of the largest businesses in the UK by



both revenue and employees. In 2011, concerns were raised internally that like many fast growing companies, the core founding values might be at risk, and become diluted.

It recognised that much of the business success was due to these very founding values, that focused on high quality outcomes in services and ensuring colleagues were motivated and fulfilled in delivering these services everyday.

The Red Thread encompasses five 'Red Thread Behaviours:'

- > Motivation
- > Empowerment
- > Customer Focus
- > Role Models
- > High Standards.

These are the five principles that embody the culture Mears fosters internally. In terms of wider

social impact. Mears has set out the four ways this is delivered, including four focuses, on being: fair for all; championing local; creating chances; and ensuring a healthier planet.

These four themes can be identified throughout Mears' work, particularly throughout the best practice identified by the Social Mobility Pledge, from focusing on progression and development of colleagues, to addressing the Gender Skills Gap, and helping communities thrive.

Mears' leading practice and provision of services has also demonstrated the capability of delivering equity for the taxpayer through relieving pressure on wider public services such as health care. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, relieving such pressure and health services is more important than ever, and means this crucial public money and resources can be allocated to other areas where it is needed.

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3.1 Progression and development of colleagues

Mears recognises that motivated colleagues, who are fulfilled in their roles, can exceed expectations and both individually and collectively exceed expectations every day.

It has demonstrated its commitment to development of its colleagues, namely through its newly introduced Pathways programme and its award winning development and training programmes.



3.1.1 Mears' Pathways

In September 2019 Mears launched its 'Pathways' programme, which has set out to further enable its employees to learn, develop and progress in their careers.

Mears Pathways provides both customers and colleagues access to fully funded, flexible learning programmes, which are delivered over a 6-8 week period on an individual or team basis.

These are delivered across all divisions and branches across Mears covering a range of subjects, including employability, mental health, and diversity & inclusion.

3.1.2 Award winning in-house customer service training

The focus that Mears has on learning and development is reinforced by further accolades it has received for training programmes.

Mears' in-house customer training accreditation has been independently recognised by the Institute for Customer Service as TrainingMark status.

The training scheme is recognised at professional level, allowing employees who complete the training to receive Institute membership at professional level, giving them further access to training and accreditation through the ICS.

These training schemes are important - not just for businesses, whose concerns about a lack of skilled labour this report highlighted in its introductory chapter, but for tackling social immobility also.

The UK has a distinct and significant problem with a lack of invest in adult up-skilling, meaning that adults from disadvantaged backgrounds aren't able to break into what has been called a 'virtuous cycle of learning'.



The Social Mobility Pledge has identified that employers need to take two actions: improving the level and flow of skills within the business by developing workforce skills to help career progression, and investing in the skills of the economically inactive in their local areas to increase the supply of skills into the business.

The TrainingMark scheme promotes the former and the Pathways scheme helps with the latter.

3.1.3 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a crucial stepping stone into fulfilling careers, and are particularly important as

a high-quality alternative for young people who choose not to attend university.

Mears is currently training approximately 900 apprentices across the Group, both within the Housing Division and Care Divisions of the company.

These apprenticeship programmes provide qualifications, including the opportunity to participate and be trained in Mears' Academies in Rotherham and Brentwood.

Mears has extended its apprenticeship opportunities from the traditional technical or vocational roles to roles across the entire

The United Kingdom isn't just facing a Skills Gap, but also a growing Gender Skills Gap too.

business. This creates wider access pathways into work, with an emphasis on learning and development, and ensuring young people can also earn while they learn.

Mears also works in partnership with the Construction Industry Training Board to deliver construction related apprenticeships to non-levy paying organisations.

3.2 Building a truly diverse and inclusive workforce

Mears wants to build an inclusive and diverse culture by enabling its colleagues to have a bigger voice – listening and acting on feedback.

It has an active approach to reviewing its policies and takes proactive steps to ensure these become embedded into its daily working practices.

It is creating an environment which organically increases the representation of women, minorities, individuals with disabilities and older people at all levels within its business.

3.2.1 Addressing the Gender Skills Gap: empowering women

The United Kingdom isn't just facing a Skills Gap, but also a growing Gender Skills Gap too.

Equality of opportunity between genders in the tradespeople industry is a significant challenge, as only 3% of tradespeople are women. This is one

of the largest gender access and participation gaps of any industry.

Mears has demonstrated its aims and commitment to tackle this with an outcomes-focused approach - with efforts just as ambitious as the problem.

Mears has taken an approach that looks to address the root causes of this problem. It recognises that the problem of gender inequality in the trades is primarily one that starts even before the point of recruitment, with very few women getting into the sector in the place, or even realising this is an option.

It is important to break this cycle. As American social activist Marian Edelman notes, "you can't be what you can't see." and Mears cites one of their own apprentice plumbers, Sarah Bull, as saying "I've always enjoyed manual work and plumbing, but I never thought it was possible because I had never seen a woman plumber".

While anecdotal and based on one case study, this accurately reflects the wider problem, further demonstrated by a gender gap existing across STEM disciplines as a whole, and amid a UK Skills Gap, which demonstrates an even wider gap for women.

Mears has identified that gender stereotypes about tradespeople is a key reason for the lack of women joining the sector.

Tradeswomen into Maintenance

Mears is helping lead the way into ensuring the trades sector has a diverse workforce, meaning anyone, from any background, can aspire to learn skills and have a career in any trade.

The Tradeswomen into Maintenance project aims to increase the awareness of trade employment and training opportunities for female trade apprentices and operatives in the social housing building maintenance sector.

The project intends to increase the inclusion of targeted recruitment and selection in the procurement of social housing; increase the number of females working in trades and crafts in social housing maintenance by providing signposting, toolkits and best practice guidance; and to identify to employers how they can best retain women in this non-traditional area of work, once they have been recruited.

As part of its commitment to boosting the number of tradeswomen in maintenance careers, Mears produced a Best Practice Guide to help facilitate change, principally by targeting social housing landlords and maintenance companies to encourage more women to enter trades, and how to deliver a better strategy.

This is one of many ways Mears has demonstrated real and proactive industry leadership in tackling the Skills Gap.

Inspiring ambition in schools

Having addressed perception as a key cause of the problem, Mears views school engagement and outreach as an important priority to tackle this gender imbalance early on, challenging stereotypes before they can be instilled and before women are filtered out of the sector as a consequence.

Mears creates teacher packs, including items such as lesson plans that fit into the curriculum and make it easier for teachers to talk about these career choices and opportunities in a way that has no gender bias.

Mears is also working with other organisations in the sector-wide campaign to help women get into plumbing. This has been successful, and other organisations and businesses are now asking Mears how they're doing it in order to scale up the best practice.

Improving awareness of career opportunities later in life is also important to Mears. The Group focuses on publicity at a target market of women who might want to retrain: those women living within the social houses it serves. Through local authorities, it promotes opportunities.

Helping women in social housing into skilled careers

Mears recently worked with Nottingham City Council and Leicester City Council to promote opportunities in trades to women from diverse backgrounds within their social housing tenancies.

This included Mears hosting taster days and helping promote future careers in the sector, and the many opportunities and pathways available within it.

The ability to target these opportunities directly to specific customers, rather than relying on social media or traditional advertising allows a high response rate, and demonstrates how Mears has recognised its responsibility to go further as a provider of social care to boost social mobility.

An additional business benefit to this is that single women living alone in social housing are more likely to be comfortable around other women. This scheme is advertised to people right up to those on the cusp of retirement.

It's important to note that in targeting these opportunities for women in social housing, Mears is addressing more than an issue of gender inequality, but one of wider economic opportunities too, given the increased number of those from less privileged backgrounds living in social housing.





Women into Construction

Mears also works with 'Women into Construction,' a not-for-profit organisation that promotes gender equality in construction. It provides direct support to women aspiring to work in the construction industry.

Mears has partnered with them on the creation of work placements, apprenticeships, and traineeships - ensuring that all of these are as effective as possible in making the trades accessible to women.

However, one challenge of this current model of providing apprenticeships as pathways to

entry for women into construction - is that the wages within apprenticeships might be unsuitable for those in the older cohorts, particularly if they're looking for a career move out of current employment.

This is a challenge Mears is aware of and it aims to address, to ensure women of all ages can retrain and learn a skill if they wish to.

3.2.2 Black Lives Matter

Mears wants to be the best advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement that it can be - and has outlined that it understands that it must get its approach right.



It knows that talk is cheap, and as such it has decided to look at its people, policies, procedures and working practices to ensure that it removes the barriers to black people working in its business.

Through such a forensic review, Mears wants to create a culture that supports dignity, equality and fairness, by increasing the number of colleagues from all underrepresented communities at all levels, including within its senior leadership teams.

It wants to create a genuinely diverse workforce which fully reflects the communities it serves.

It also wants to look at how it can better deliver services to communities to ensure that

it is improving its service based on their needs – not based on the perception of their needs.

Mears will be delivering a strategy that works as a result of this forensic and technical approach, understanding, taking seriously and addressing the barriers that exist to entering work for people from diverse groups.

3.3 Helping Communities Thrive

By nature of its role as a provider of social housing, Mears is placed directly within some of the least privileged communities that are often furthest away from opportunity.

This means that even in its everyday delivery of services to customers, Mears has the opportunity to make a difference, but it has demonstrated a record of exceeding expectations, and going beyond what is required.

It has presented best practice principally in a strategic approach of developing tailored 'social value plans' for all branches and divisions of the business; implementing the 'Your Voice' programme to empower customers and members of local communities in which services are delivered; and through its pioneering Pathways programme.

3.3.1 Social Value Plans

Each division within the Mears is responsible for developing a social value plan for their area.

These plans seek to demonstrate where Mears will contribute value to the community in its everyday business activities, in a way that often exceeds any contractual commitments within its services.

Examples of how Mears delivers the social value within these plans include engaging with local schools to support young women into work, such as skilled apprenticeships that have significant gender gaps; partnering with local charities to assist and support people who have become socially isolated and might suffer from resulting mental health issues.



3.3.2 Your Voice

Mears Group recently reviewed its company-wide engagement scheme to ensure that relations with their customers were meeting and exceeding those standards, and created a new customer involvement strategy called Your Voice.

Your Voice includes a scrutiny board that has been empowered by Mears to look at all aspects of their work and hold them to account to ensure that service standards are as high as possible.

The scrutiny board reports directly to the PLC's board and members are provided with training, remuneration, and have their expenses covered to ensure that the scrutiny board is as inclusive as possible.

This industry first shows the ambition Mears has in empowering its customers, and senior representatives are required to attend meetings in order to make sure that customers are listened to and their comments acted on at a high level.

3.3.3 Creating Chances and Pathways

Mears Group launched Pathways which is available to all customers and colleagues to support career development and employability. Mears is committed to making a positive difference to enable the individuals and communities to flourish and thrive. Creating Chances is one Mears' four social value priorities, and Pathways is a great opportunity to offer free learning to our customers and communities, to enable learning and career opportunities.

Developed through a strategic partnership with the Learning Curve Group, a national education and expert training provider, Mears Pathways will provide career, skills and employment opportunities to both customers and colleagues. Learning Curve are experts in the field of learning and training and this partnership will allow Mears to offer an exciting programme of learning opportunities to customer groups and colleagues, free of charge.

This goes a long way towards increasing accessibility of learning and development, particularly given the openness for use by customers.



3.3.4 Power Up North

Last year, Mears' colleagues in Manchester were approached to join a Business Network Group to help on the issue of mental health and wider social issues across Manchester.

They joined forces with local businesses, Manchester City Council and NHS England to form a group to get the project going.

The group was named 'Power Up North' and focused on working in partnership and community engagement to help make a positive difference to people in Manchester.

It is Mears' goal to have a fully embedded social and diversity impact in all aspects of their organisation within the next two years.

They recently held an event and invited small charities and community groups along to showcase what the group could offer the local communities and also promoted Mental Health awareness.

3.4 An evidence-based approach to creating social value

It is Mears' goal to have a fully embedded social and diversity impact in all aspects of their organisation within the next two years.

Through establishing comprehensive and consistent measurement models, they will be able to use data to drive positive change, and scale up best practice from local to national level through a 'thought leader' programme.

Mears will be using this data benchmarking in order to measure its progress against its targets, adding to the measurement of social value and impact which it already conducts every year.



Mears' priorities are to improve the wellbeing of people and the communities they serve, reduce prejudice, improve understanding of differences, support social inclusion, make a positive contribution to the planet, and to provide career, skills, and employment opportunities.

An ambitious plan to fully embed social impact includes linking social impact to reward and recognition and embedding the approach in Mears's supply chain.

Alongside this, the Group will create a funding framework specifically designed to make it easier to deliver social value projects across the Group.

The Social Mobility Pledge considers Mears' sophisticated considerations of how it can further add social value, and measure

that effectiveness, is one that should be recognised.

It is taking an industry-leading approach to embedding social and diversity impact into its culture and business practices.

3.5 Taking the pressure off public services

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, it has never been more clear how important an effective NHS is.

While under pressure, with overwhelming demand for health services, it's crucial to support our health services across the country by ensuring hospital appointments and beds are taken by those who need the care. In doing this, everyone can do their bit simply by leading healthier lives.

3.5.1 Improving quality of lives and healthier living

Mears is playing its part by helping its customers, and those in the communities it serves, lead healthier lives. It is promoting positive health habits, leading to better quality of life and outcomes.

Mears is committed to delivering this in an evidence-based way. To this end, Mears commissioned the Housing Learning and Improvement Network to investigate the evidence for the health and social care benefits, and specifically cost benefits, of housing for older people, particularly in extra care housing, including the services Mears provides to its customers.

The research produced evidence which showed that housing for older people (and particularly extra care housing) provides significant cost-benefits to the NHS and local authority adult social care.

The report also mapped the density of specialist housing across the country and demonstrated that there is a significant geographic variation too.

The evidence presented by the Housing Learning and Improvement Network indicated that for those receiving such services visit a GP less frequently, require fewer community

nurse visits, are less likely to enter long-term care, need relatively fewer ambulance callouts and hospital admissions. It has been shown that this could result in a lifetime savings for the taxpayer of at least £5,000 per person.

Therefore, there is a strong relationship between the effective provision of high quality social care, such as those by Mears, and improved outcomes for recipients, thus relieving pressure from off public services, including the NHS. Something which is more important now amid the COVID-19 pandemic, than ever before.

3.5.2 Creating value for local authorities and the taxpayer

Mears' business is founded in local communities where they deliver the highest standards of care to people, their homes and their environment. They strongly believe in the benefits of combining housing and care approaches, to give the best possible service and to help tackle the deep rooted challenges to the NHS and Social Care.

Through long-term, sustainable partnerships with local and central government contracts, they deliver high quality, value-for-money services to meet their customers' needs. Mears aims to achieve this through a culture which values people, promotes innovation and encourages continuous improvement. This will help Mears to grow a successful and profitable business, which is highly valued by its customers, employees and shareholders.

At Mears Group's conference in February 2019, their Islington branch was crowned Red Thread Branch of the Year 2018. Because of the branch's success, Mears had their contract with Islington Council renewed, resulting in an additional £17m revenue for the Group. Mears believes that this is because of the high standards that the Islington branch operates with, showing directly how being a good business is good business.

The branch was able to deliver £2m of social benefit in 2018, through strong links with local schools, colleges, and community groups - the top performing social value branch in Mears. The fully inclusive branch embraces the diverse range of abilities, skills, personalities and cultures of their staff, and together they work as a strong team in which every member receives recognition for their work.



Few stories are better told than by those who've experienced them.

Case Studies

The Social Mobility Pledge team spoke with two apprentices to put the positive work that Mears is doing into the context of their own life stories, hearing how the opportunity at Mears gave them the first step on the career ladder.

Chelsea Apprentice

Chelsea was working in a call centre before she embarked on an apprenticeship with Mears to become a plumber. Chelsea had heard about the opportunity from a relative and, upon finding out about the culture at Mears as well as the significant opportunities for progression and meaningful work, she viewed taking the apprenticeship as a “no brainer” and immediately enquired about the process. Chelsea applied for a placement on the apprenticeship programme which was then followed by a general applicants test which was followed by an interview.

Commenting on the gender difference in the plumbing trade as a female plumber, Chelsea said that even when she was younger she had viewed all trades, not just plumbing, as being a ‘man’s job’ but having a close female relative in trades helped to break down that gender barrier for her.

Chelsea is now progressing her career at Mears and as part of her work is helping with school engagement to prove to other young women that there are opportunities in the trades for them should they wish to join them, not just for men.

Michael Forster Mental Health First Aider

Poor mental health costs British employers nearly £35 billion in 2017. So not only is there a moral duty to assist people with mental health issues, there is an economic benefit to doing so too.

One in four people will experience ill mental health in the UK every year. That means that at any one time Mears recognises, in their business, more than 2,000 people could be suffering. Given that 50% of working people with ill mental health say they feel uncomfortable talking to their employees about it, at least 1,000 will be suffering in silence. Feeling alone and ashamed, at their most vulnerable.

Mears organisational ethos is one of caring and compassion. So, in 2020, they decided to address national stigma around mental health in the Group, helping colleagues feel supported so that they don't have to suffer in silence. Mears believes that through encouraging a culture within their organisation where colleagues feel capable of discussing their mental health issues, sickness can be reduced, productivity won't be lost, and employees will be happier and healthier.

The drive to embed this as a focus for the organisation is being led by the brand new Mental Health Steering Group, which includes representatives from every part and every level of the Group. Their work is grounded in a new mental health policy which launched in March 2020.

Michael Forster is a Data Analyst at Mears Group and completed a mental health training course with St John's Ambulance.

After completing the course, he delivered a presentation on Mental Health First Aid & Stress in the Workplace, which has been delivered to a wide cross section of Mears's staff across multiple branches.

Michael has now become the driving force behind Mears' efforts to combat mental illness and his leadership in this area has been fully aided by Mears, whose communication teams have helped enable him to create blogs about his mental health first aid journey. His initiative encourages colleagues to open up about their mental situation and others across the Group have now joined Michael, a mental health first-aider.

Liam Apprentice

Liam joined Mears as a school leaver as an alternative to going to university or college. He says that this was originally a bit of an uncertain decision as lots of his friends had gone to university and have since graduated, but he felt strongly that university wasn't the right decision for him to make.

Liam commenced an apprenticeship programme at Mears that began with a short test followed by an interview. Progressing through the apprenticeship, he gained qualifications along the path and has since completed the apprenticeship

and he now has a permanent role at Mears. Liam credits the mentoring he received from Diane Keay, Customer & Community Manager at Mears, with boosting his confidence and helping him to believe in himself.

Liam recently spoke at a gala dinner in front of 300 of Mears' managers, something he doesn't believe he could previously have even dreamed of doing.

Liam emphasises that apprenticeships really are a strong alternative to university. Liam is only 22 and owns his own home, is debt free, and has a good career in the sector.

Insight & Assessment

Demonstrating authentic leadership and culture are key for any organisation that wants to be leading edge on social mobility, across any sector, anywhere. And the word authentic is vital – creating social value and making a social impact is something that businesses can't fake or just pay lip-service to.

As the Financial Reporting Council indicated in late 2019, far too many businesses have substituted a clear purpose for "slogans or marketing." It's easy to spot when Corporate Social Responsibility is for one company nothing more than a tick-box measure, or a 'nice to do' project that doesn't align with its business.

The Social Mobility Pledge is working with the businesses that get it, the businesses that put boosting social mobility, addressing the widest gaps in society and creating social value at the heart of their business in their everyday activities. It doesn't have to be heroic, but it should be outcomes and impact focused, and be aligned with the very purpose of a business.

It is this real leadership and authenticity that is clear from Mears Group's work. Its culture, as encapsulated by the Red Thread, is one that runs right through the business, its people, and permeates right through its service delivery, towards creating additional social value and benefit for its customers, service users and local communities.

The key is how they have brought the Red Thread culture and ethos to be something that's real on a day to day basis for employees and communities. This runs through all its people, its processes and its systems, creating an ecosystem that creates a significant social impact, internally and externally.

Social mobility doesn't stop when someone enters the workforce, it continues through their career. Mears has outlined a clear understanding of this and has taken steps to prioritise the learning and development of its people, through its new flagship Pathways programme, which provides free training to its people in multiple areas; to its award winning in-house customer service training; and its high-quality training of 900 apprentices, across a range of disciplines, and within its skills academies in Rotherham and Brentwood.

Mears has demonstrated that it is not only seeking to address the UK's Skills Gap, but also the significant underrepresentation of women in skills, with only 3% of women tradespeople. It has developed a holistic approach to deliver this, including launching Women into Maintenance; using its relationships through its social housing provisions to help women into employment, specifically within the industry; and supporting early outreach in schools to tackle gender perceptions and stereotypes about working in trades, from plumbing to carpentry.

For social impact to be truly authentic, it is best delivered within the realms of a company's purpose. This has the benefit of when times get tough, it's not an outside initiative that disappears. Mears has achieved this, as it's through its key value of ensuring customer focus that it ensures the communities it serves thrive.

Mears' social value plans, which are led bottom-up from its grassroots branches, delivering services on the ground, ensures that Mears makes a difference where it matters, enabling the company to better address local community gaps. The company's establishment of 'Your Voice' further reinforces this ethos, enabling local communities to have a more powerful voice in directing efforts, resources and focus.





Next Steps

and Recommendations

The Social Impact Standard

Drawing on Mears' best practice in delivering social value and focusing on impact, Mears should work to develop a "Social Impact Standard" campaign as part of its commitment to the national recovery following coronavirus. This should build on the best practice it has demonstrated through its cohesive and wide-ranging approach to achieving the best possible social impact for its employees and its customers in the communities where they live.

The campaign should focus on encouraging councils across the country to commit to signing up to a "Social Impact Standard" to level up the playing field when commissioning social value. Building on the Localis report which advocated a standardised approach to evaluating social value, it should give communities a greater say in ensuring that residents' lives are measurably improved as a result of the way councils commission and provide local public services. While the Social Value Act's fundamental

principles are still relevant, action needs to be taken quickly and directly to protect local opportunity, and business-led advocacy with local authorities and Westminster is the best way to lead that.

In the same way that businesses can sign the Social Mobility Pledge to commit to outreach, access and recruitment practices that will boost opportunity and social mobility, local authorities will be asked to set out their credentials for social value in terms of the social, economic and environmental impact of their approach. In return, they will be able to display a Social Impact Standard "Kitemark", similar to the Social Mobility Pledge logo, that will identify them as delivering transparent and authentic social impact.

The five areas draw on how businesses can look to implement a standard of social impact across their business practices, and how local authorities and government bodies can look to expect a standard delivered by businesses when outsourcing. The Appendix explores how businesses might also look to address specific opportunity gaps and areas of low social mobility in targeting their social impact efforts.

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The five expectations of the Social Impact Standard outline how businesses should deliver social impact through:

1. **Outreach:** Target community programmes and outreach to the least privileged communities to close the opportunity gap
2. **Access:** Work towards 100% of work experience being offered to young people in the top 100 social mobility 'cold spots.' or from the least privileged groups
3. **Relationships:** Reframe all relationships to take into account their own progress on social mobility and social value
4. **Advocate:** Become a recognised leader in social mobility, advocating for a new purpose-focused approach directed at less privileged communities
5. **Transparent:** Measure and publish progress in redirecting efforts towards those furthest away from opportunity.

07

Data Analysis

Social Mobility by Area and Life Stages

The Social Mobility Pledge has analysed the social mobility indicators in some of the key areas that Mears Group has a presence. The aim of this overview of social mobility in different areas is to exemplify how businesses can and should come to understand opportunity gaps in communities and amplify their impact.

These proposed target areas have been identified by assessing four key life stages, and 14 key data-sets, the methodology for which is centred around the Department for Education's approach to considering social mobility outcomes, with each area geographically represented as a parliamentary constituency.

It considers the relative social mobility performance of the most the least privileged groups, such as those entitled to free school meals, across the life stages. The life stages considered are early years, school years, youth and adulthood; with key datasets for assessment for each.



At the centre of this is the belief that if businesses target their efforts and resources to areas with the widest gaps and the least privileged in society, this is what can most effectively contribute to business-led 'levelling up' of the United Kingdom.



Overall Ranking

Office	Constituency	Ranking/533 constituencies
Head Office (H/O)	Tewkesbury	<u>357</u>
H/O worst in area	Forest of Dean	<u>443</u>
H/O county town	Gloucester	<u>419</u>
Rotherham Contract	Rotherham	

Life Stage
National
Rank/533

Tewkesbury

Early Years
412

Percentage of Nursery providers rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	94
Percentage of children eligible for free school meals achieving a good level of development	45

Schools
295

Percentage of children eligible for FSM attending a primary school rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	96
Percentage of children eligible for FSM achieving at least the expected level in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2	39
Percentage of children eligible for FSM attending a secondary school rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	70
Average Attainment 8 score for pupils eligible for FSM	32

Youth
457

Percentage of young people eligible for FSM that are not in education, employment or training (positive destination) after completing KS4	84
Average points score per entry for young people eligible for FSM at age 15 taking A-level or equivalent qualification	25
Percentage of young people eligible for FSM at age 15 achieving two or more A-Levels or equivalent by the age of 19	28

Adulthood
457

Median weekly salary of all employees who live in the local area	443
Average house prices compared to median annual salary of employees who live in the local area	7
Percentage of people that live in the local area who are in managerial and professional occupations	33
Percentage of jobs that are paid less than the applicable Living Wage Foundation living wage	18
Percentage of families with children who own their home	73

Tewkesbury Analysis

Mears's head office is located in Tewkesbury. Tewkesbury is ranked at 357/533 constituencies in England, placing it in the bottom third of constituencies.

Early Years

At the early years life stage, Tewkesbury ranks poorly, at 412/533. Although 94% of nurseries in the constituency are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted, slightly beating the national average of 93%, only 45% of children eligible for free schools meals achieve a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, far below the average of 53% and scoring Tewkesbury as the 43rd worst area in England.

School

Tewkesbury rises at the school stage, ranked at 295 out of 533. A dramatically higher percentage (96%) of people eligible for free school meals attend good or outstanding primary schools compared to the national average of 83%. This is Tewkesbury's single best indicator across all stages: it is ranked at 24 out of 533 constituencies.

However, this strong performance in this area does not translate into much higher results, with 39% of children who are FSM eligible attend the expected level in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2, the same as the national average. At secondary school, 70% of FSM children go to a good or outstanding school, worse than the England average of 72%; consequently the average attainment 8 score is lower at 32 than the English average of 39.

Youth

Tewkesbury falls back in the Social Mobility Index at the Youth life stage indicators. Eighty-four percent of young people who were eligible for free school meals find themselves in a positive destination (defined as being in education, employment, or training) after having completed Key Stage 3; at 473/533 this is Tewkesbury's second worst indicator.

Only 28% of FSM eligible pupils will have achieved 2 or more A Levels or equivalent by the age of 19, and the average point score per entry is slightly less than the average of 26, at 25.

Adulthood

At the adulthood life stage, Tewkesbury shows its best performance, coming in the top 100 at 90/533. Average earnings in Tewkesbury are the same as across England, both at £443, but houses are slightly more affordable at just 7 times the average salary compared to 8 nationally and there is consequently a higher rate of home ownership, at 73% in Tewkesbury compared to 65% in England.

Managerial and professional jobs make up 33% of those in Tewkesbury, slightly higher than the national average of 30%; the best measure across all life stages is that 82% of jobs pay at least the living wage, ranking Tewkesbury at 88/533.

Life Stage
National
Rank/533

Forest of Dean

Early Years
289

Percentage of Nursery providers rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	94
Percentage of children eligible for free school meals achieving a good level of development	50

Schools
139

Percentage of children eligible for FSM attending a primary school rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	96
Percentage of children eligible for FSM achieving at least the expected level in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2	46
Percentage of children eligible for FSM attending a secondary school rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	60
Average Attainment 8 score for pupils eligible for FSM	37

Youth
177

Percentage of young people eligible for FSM that are not in education, employment or training (positive destination) after completing KS4	87
Average points score per entry for young people eligible for FSM at age 15 taking A-level or equivalent qualification	31
Percentage of young people eligible for FSM at age 15 achieving two or more A-Levels or equivalent by the age of 19	32

Adulthood
183

Median weekly salary of all employees who live in the local area	414
Average house prices compared to median annual salary of employees who live in the local area	6
Percentage of people that live in the local area who are in managerial and professional occupations	26
Percentage of jobs that are paid less than the applicable Living Wage Foundation living wage	20
Percentage of families with children who own their home	73

Forest of Dean Analysis

The Forest of Dean is the worst ranked constituency for social mobility in the vicinity of Mears's head office in Gloucester. It ranks at 443/533, making it a social mobility coldspot. It remains in the bottom 40% of constituencies for every life stage.

Early Years

At the early years stage, Forest of Dean ranks at 386/533. Ninety-four percent of nurseries in the constituency are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted, slightly beating the national average of 93%, but a bottom 10% ranking in the other measure, the percentage of children eligible for free school meals achieving a 'good level of development' (only 46% of FSM children achieve this) holds the area back.

School

The school life stage is Forest of Dean's worst area with a ranking of 421/533 overall. A higher percentage (87%) of pupils eligible for free school meals attend good or outstanding primary schools compared to the national average of 83% but strong performance in the quality of schools does not result in strong attainment levels: 38% of children who are FSM eligible attend the expected level in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2, slightly worse than the national average of 39%.

Only 50% of FSM eligible children go to a good or outstanding secondary school compared to the average of 72%, and results in Forest of Dean's worst score being average attainment 8 scores of just 33, the 22nd worst score in the country.

Youth

Forest of Dean rises slightly in its position in Youth life stage indicators. Eighty-six percent of young people who were eligible for free school meals find themselves in a positive destination (defined as being in education, employment, or training) after having completed Key Stage 3. This is slightly worse than the national average of 88%.

While a much lower percentage of young people eligible for FSM achieve 2 or more A Levels or equivalent by 19 (26% in Forest of Dean vs 34% nationally), those that do have a slightly higher than average point score per entry at 27 in Forest of Dean compared to 26 nationally.

Adulthood

At the adulthood life stage, Forest of Dean again rises to rank at 340 out of 533. While some measures are very positive - house prices are just six times the average salary compared to eight nationally, resulting in home ownership being at 73%, ranking Forest of Dean as the 106th best area for this - some are very poor.

In particular, only 69% of jobs pay at or above the living wage, much lower than the national average of 25%, and average earnings are consequently quite lower than average, at £391 weekly in Forest of Dean compared to £443 nationally. Further, only 25% of jobs are managerial and/professional, lower than the England average of 25%.

Life Stage
National
Rank/533

Gloucester

Early Years

475

Percentage of Nursery providers rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	92
Percentage of children eligible for free school meals achieving a good level of development	45

Schools

193

Percentage of children eligible for FSM attending a primary school rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	93
Percentage of children eligible for FSM achieving at least the expected level in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2	37
Percentage of children eligible for FSM attending a secondary school rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	44
Average Attainment 8 score for pupils eligible for FSM	44

Youth
460

Percentage of young people eligible for FSM that are not in education, employment or training (positive destination) after completing KS4	85
Average points score per entry for young people eligible for FSM at age 15 taking A-level or equivalent qualification	26
Percentage of young people eligible for FSM at age 15 achieving two or more A-Levels or equivalent by the age of 19	23

Adulthood

219

Median weekly salary of all employees who live in the local area	407
Average house prices compared to median annual salary of employees who live in the local area	6
Percentage of people that live in the local area who are in managerial and professional occupations	25
Percentage of jobs that are paid less than the applicable Living Wage Foundation living wage	18
Percentage of families with children who own their home	67

Gloucester Analysis

The county town for Gloucestershire, Gloucester is located near Mears's head office in Tewkesbury. Gloucester overall ranks at 419/533, narrowly avoiding coldspot status. The fact that three indicators are in the top 100 and four indicators are in the bottom 100 highlight that social mobility is a complex problem.

Early Years

At the early years life stage, Gloucester is in the bottom 60 of constituencies at 475/533. Ninety-two percent of nurseries in the constituency are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted, slightly worse than the national average of 93%. In the other measure, the percentage of children eligible for free school meals achieving a 'good level of development', Gloucester scores at just 45% compared to a national average of 53%, making it the 46th worst area in England for this metric.

School

The school life stage is a much better stage for Gloucester; it is ranked at 193 out of 533 overall. Ninety-three percent of children eligible for free school meals in Chippenham attend a good or outstanding school, much higher than the English average of 83%. Despite this, 37% of FSM eligible children achieve the expected level in reading,

writing, and maths at the end of Key Stage 2, worse than the average of 39%. This is reversed at secondary school, where despite a bottom 100 ranking in secondary school quality, the attainment levels are in the top 75 - with average attainment 8 scores of 44 compared to the English average of 39.

Youth

Gloucester falls again at the Youth stage, where it ranks at 460 out of 533. Eighty-five percent of young people who were eligible for free school meals find themselves in a positive destination (defined as being in education, employment, or training) after having completed Key Stage 3. This is slightly worse than the national average of 88%.

Gloucester's worst ranking in any life stage is the percentage of FSM eligible young people who achieve two or more A Levels or equivalent by 19. In England the figure is 34%, in Gloucester it is just 23%, making it the 35th worst area in the country for this measure. Of those that do go on to A Levels or equivalent, the average point score is 26, which is the same as the England average.

Adulthood

At the adulthood life stage, Gloucester rises again to 219 out of 533. Although more jobs pay at or above the real living wage in Gloucester compared to England as a whole, at 82% of jobs vs 75%, average weekly earnings are lower, at £407, than in England, where they are £443.

Fewer jobs are managerial and professional, at 25% compared to 30%, and despite housing affordability being higher in Gloucester than across England as a whole, at six times the annualised salary, only slightly more families own their own home, at 67%.

Life Stage
National
Rank/533

Rotherham

Early Years

89

Percentage of Nursery providers rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	96
Percentage of children eligible for free school meals achieving a good level of development	56

Schools

362

Percentage of children eligible for FSM attending a primary school rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	69
Percentage of children eligible for FSM achieving at least the expected level in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2	40
Percentage of children eligible for FSM attending a secondary school rated outstanding or good by Ofsted	70
Average Attainment 8 score for pupils eligible for FSM	39

Youth

372

Percentage of young people eligible for FSM that are not in education, employment or training (positive destination) after completing KS4	85
Average points score per entry for young people eligible for FSM at age 15 taking A-level or equivalent qualification	28
Percentage of young people eligible for FSM at age 15 achieving two or more A-Levels or equivalent by the age of 19	27

Adulthood

495

Median weekly salary of all employees who live in the local area	329
Average house prices compared to median annual salary of employees who live in the local area	5
Percentage of people that live in the local area who are in managerial and professional occupations	17
Percentage of jobs that are paid less than the applicable Living Wage Foundation living wage	28
Percentage of families with children who own their home	60

Rotherham Analysis

Rotherham is one of the areas of Mears' largest contracts. It ranks at 341 out of 533 areas in terms of overall social mobility indicators, and presents with particularly low social mobility outcomes from the adulthood life stage at 495 out of 533 areas.

Early Years

At the early years stage, Rotherham ranks at 89/533, in which it performs well, exceeding the average. 96% of nurseries in the constituency are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted, slightly beating the national average of 93%, and 56% of children eligible for free school meals achieve a 'good level of development.'

School

For the school life stage, Rotherham performs below average, at 362/533. A lower percentage (69%) of pupils eligible for free school meals attend good or outstanding primary schools compared to the national average of 83%. Forty percent of children who are FSM eligible attend the expected level in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2, slightly better than the national average of 39%. Seventy percent of FSM eligible children go to a good or outstanding

secondary school compared to the average of 72%, and results in Rotherham's attainment 8 score being 39, meeting the national average.

Youth

Rotherham ranks below average at 372/533 for youth outcomes. In Rotherham, 85% of young people who were eligible for free school meals find themselves in a positive destination (defined as being in education, employment, or training) after having completed Key Stage 3, meaning 15% of those young people find themselves NEET, higher than the national average. Only 27% of young people eligible for FSM achieve 2 or more A Levels or equivalent by 19, significantly lower than the national average of 34%. However, average point per entry to A Levels in Rotherham is 27%, compared to 26 nationally.

Adulthood

The Adulthood life stage is one where Rotherham presents with particular problems compared to its other life stages, and compared to other areas nationally. Overall, Rotherham's adulthood life outcomes rank 495/533 nationally, making it present in the bottom 10%. Rotherham has a median weekly salary of £329 per hour, for which it ranks as the fifth lowest in the country.

While its house prices are in the top 40 areas in terms of affordability nationally, only 60% of households with children own their own homes, ranking Rotherham 409/533 for this social mobility indicator. Furthermore, 28% of jobs in Rotherham do not pay the Living Wage, below the national average, meaning fair pay in Rotherham is also a relatively significant issue.

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