

London HS2 contractors launch scheme to help tackle homelessness, improve skills and benefit local communities

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HS2 Minister, Andrew Stephenson MP has launched a major social legacy programme to be delivered by HS2 London contractors SCS called *Empowering Communities*, intended to benefit communities along the final part of the HS2 route into London.

Empowering Communities is the first programme of its kind to be led by the construction industry, working in partnership with HS2 Ltd, to deliver long-lasting benefits for local people for generations to come. It brings together the strengths of major construction companies Costain, Skanska, STRABAG, Mace, Dragados and Arup.

The programme aims to create jobs for those experiencing worklessness and homelessness, help young people to develop new STEM skills and access apprenticeships, and support community projects.

Working together with local communities, the partner organisations will enable local people to have a say in what the programme delivers for their communities.

Empowering Communities is already reaping rewards and has provided Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) education support to over 11,000 young people across seven London boroughs.

The programme has also created jobs for more than 200 previously unemployed people and supported nine homeless people into work on the HS2 project.

The partner organisations are working with local charities and community groups such as Buses for Homeless (B4H), a social enterprise which aims to get homeless people off the street and into full time sustainable employment and accommodation. B4H refurbishes decommissioned London buses into spaces suitable for their guests to live and takes them through an intensive 12-week training programme. The site set up includes separate buses for sleeping, cooking and eating, learning, and wellness and therapy.

Other commitments under the initiative include supporting young people, particularly those leaving care. The partner organisations are working with the Care Leavers Covenant, an organisation designed to support care leavers, ages 16 to 25 to live independently. We will be offering opportunities to this cohort of young people to gain an insight into construction through mentoring, work placements, apprenticeships and job opportunities, and will be working alongside Local Authorities to ensure those opportunities are given to those care leavers who are within the communities HS2 work is taking place in.

HS2 Minister, Andrew Stephenson MP said: "This fantastic initiative highlights how being a good neighbour doesn't just mean minimising the impact an infrastructure project has on local communities, it's about maximising the benefits to the surrounding areas.

"The Empowering Communities programme will help unleash the enormous potential of communities on the HS2 route – addressing social issues such as homelessness and unemployment and creating a legacy of jobs, skills and community initiatives for the people and places along the line."

HS2 Chief Executive Officer, Mark Thurston said: "As we build Britain's new low carbon railway, there will be lots of opportunities for local communities to get involved in the project. Our contractors are leading the way in creating career opportunities for local people, and providing benefits to communities all across the route, creating a legacy for generations to come."

Louise Dailly, Head of Legacy at Costain Skanska joint venture said: "This joined-up approach enables us to deliver more together than we could individually, boosting outcomes for local people and laying the foundations for innovative and powerful outcomes that the community can continue long after we leave the area.

"Empowering communities works closely with vulnerable groups, including refugees, people with previous convictions and young people who have been in care. By targeting harder to reach groups alongside wider goals to support skills, employment and education, homelessness, young people and equality diversity and inclusion, Empowering Communities really can offer everyone an opportunity to succeed."

Dan Atkins, Founder of Buses 4 Homeless said: "From the day we moved onto the HS2 site in October 2019, we have had nothing but support from Costain Skanska joint venture and HS2. The team gave us the opportunity we needed to be able to get our pilot programme up and running and it would not have been

as successful as it is without their support and commitment.

“Not only have they provided us with key equipment, supported us with paperwork and the land to run our project, most importantly, the team have helped us upskill our guests and through their Supply Chain, they have offered full time employment on the HS2 programme, giving our guests a big confidence boost to be able to gain independence and get back on their own feet.

“We couldn’t be more grateful for the incredible support we have received since we moved onto site and we can’t wait to welcome the next cohort of guests on board so we can, together, help change their lives.”

Photo credit: HS2 Ltd