

TO: Assembly

FROM:

RE: Calling for Durham University to terminate their contract with Mitie and bring all staff currently employed by Mitie 'in-house' and employed by Durham University with workers' rights protected.

DATE: 26 May 2022

Assembly Notes:

1. Durham University sources its £5m facilities management contract to Mitie Group PLC.
2. Mitie is the UK's largest provider of services for migrant detention centres, including Hassockfield/Derwentside Detention Centre in County Durham.
3. Inspections have criticised these centres. A report by the Chief Inspector of Prisons on Harmondsworth in 2015 described 'desolate' conditions and noted dirty, overcrowded and poorly ventilated residential units.
(<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisonswpcontent/uploads/sites/4/2016/02/Harmondsworth-web-2015.pdf>) A 2021 visit revealed no apparent improvement in conditions, with "persistent problems with pests, filthy cell toilets and broken and dilapidated communal showers."
4. Despite the aforementioned criticisms, Mitie continues to be cited for a wide variety of issues around the management of immigration centres in particular: "Home Office probes immigration contractor Mitie over racist text claims" (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60455935>), "Immigration detainees' 'fearing for their lives' as people with Covid not moved due to lack of space" (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/removal-centre-covid-outbreak-deportation-colnbrook-home-office-b1903295.html>), "Mitie investigated by UK regulator over immigration centre contracts" (<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/04/mitie-investigated-by-uk-regulator-over-immigration-centre-contracts>).
5. Mitie has a record of poor treatment of staff and clear records of paying poverty wages to its employees. From cleaners in our nation's rail network to maintenance staff at car factories; from security guards at key national energy sites to essential NHS staff, Mitie is a reprehensible firm.
(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-57007037>)
6. Durham University's own Responsible Procurement Policy indicates that it "expects relevant ethical and sustainability standards are applied to business transactions." The policy also includes a commitment to "ensure that ethical, social and environmental considerations are built in." (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/procurement/suppliers/cser/>)
7. Durham University students are working with Sussex University students on joint action against the universities' contracts. They are very open to more universities joining this cross-university campaign.

Assembly Believes:

1. Durham University should promote the highest standards of individual behaviour and personal accountability, and value social responsibility as a University and in the external partnerships it forms.
2. Mitie Group PLC's business practices are exploitative of some of the most vulnerable members of our society; asylum seekers, hence, working in partnership with Mitie Group PLC undermines the University's commitment to "be a socially responsible institution and to contribute effectively to economic and social development."
(<https://www.dur.ac.uk/about/shaped/responsible/#:~:text=1.2%20The%20University%20strives%20to,as%20any%20in%20the%20world>)
3. Durham University cannot claim to support people seeking asylum (such as people from Ukraine) while holding a contract with the biggest provider of detention centres., Durham Students' Union has a long history as a socially conscious and progressive student body. Assembly has previously passed policy [UA-1617-057_Mitie_Motion.pdf] which led the way in opposing the University's relationship with Mitie, opposition which should be continued.

Assembly Resolves:

1. To publicly oppose any renewal of Mitie Group PLC's facilities management contract with Durham University and to encourage the University to explore alternatives for facilities management, including the possibility of moving such staff 'in-house.'
2. To oppose Hassockfield/Derwentside Detention Centre and other bordering operations and push for the University and University Leaders to make a similar statement.
3. To lobby for a ban on future contracts with Mitie Group PLC and other companies which operate detention centres and/or have records of the institutionalised mistreatment and exploitation of vulnerable people and are therefore in breach of the University's procurement policy (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/procurement/suppliers/sustprocpolicy/>) and publicly call for an Amendment of 'Responsible Procurement' policy to include provision against engaging with companies involved in the border industry.
4. To lobby for more transparency in the procurement process and greater opportunities for student input in determining procurement criteria.