

At the end of last month we asked a group of interested housing professionals for their views on the use of Social Value within the Housing Sector. This sample provides an interesting insight into current views within the sector. We received 38 individual responses from 35 different organisations, including Housing Associations, Local Authorities and ALMOs, varying in size from individual organisations with around 2,000 properties to groups with over 60,000 properties. The professionals who filled in the survey came from a variety of different backgrounds with job titles including: Involvement Officer, Community Development Officer, Assistant Director, Neighbourhood Manager, Policy Officer, Business Improvement Manager, Heads of Department and Finance Director.

This suggests that Social Value is a topic that interests not only Directors and high level Managers but the professionals working directly with communities on a day to day basis. Another observation is that both the smaller and larger sized housing organisations have this on their agenda which is perhaps unsurprising as it has now become law (Social Value Act 2012) that local authorities and those aiming to get public sector service provider contracts must consider how their services might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area and communities they serve (i.e. the Social Value).

Therefore it is a must to record and demonstrate Social Value for some activities when trying to get funding. However for the bigger picture of the use of Social Value, there are still many questions that are yet to be fully clarified. The following questions seem to be ones that many Housing Professionals are currently toying with. Our survey was designed to get a snapshot view on these questions and shed some light on what the current sector viewpoint is and what approach might be the best way forward.

#### **1. Does your organisation currently conduct social valuations (Tick most appropriate).**

- Yes, but only for certain activities – 41.9%.
- No, but we are thinking about it – 31.7%.
- Yes, but only on a trial basis for a few selected activities – 9.7%.
- Yes, it's a routine process for a wide range of activities – 6.5%.
- No, it's not on our current agenda at all – 3.2%.

#### **2. What do you or might you use social valuations for? (Tick all that apply)**

- Post-activity to identify the outcomes achieved – 82.8%.
- Post-activity to measure Value for Money – 82.8%.
- As part of strategic business planning to evaluate and select options - 62.1%.
- At the planning stage to define expected outcomes – 58.6%.

**3. What sort of activities would you want to evaluate in this way? (Tick all that apply)**

- Resident Involvement – 96.6%.
- Community Regeneration – 69.0%.
- Personal Support and Development – 48.3%.
- Asset Management – 20.7%.

**4. If they were available, which social values/proxies would you want to use? (Tick all that apply)**

- Social Housing specific values – 85.2%
- Local regional standard values – 63.0%.
- UK national standard values – 59.3%.
- Your own values – 44.4%
- English National Standard Value – 37.0%
- International standard values – 14.8%.

**5. What sort of standard values/proxies might be used when calculating social values? ( very likely/possible answers)**

- Values for improved well being of participants 100%/0.
- Values for benefits to communities – 93.1%/6.9%.
- Values for benefit to other stakeholders/ funders 48.3%/51.7%.
- Values for benefit to the state – 30.8%/46.2%.

**6. Within the next 12 months to what level of detail would you envisage calculating the social value of an activity? (Tick most appropriate)**

- Basic: using simple output values – 37.9%.
- Intermediate: as above but with the addition of well-being questionnaires for each participant – 51.7%.
- Advanced: the full SROI Network methodology (or equivalent) with “Deadweight”, “Displacement” and “Drop-off” calculations – 10.3%.

**7. Would you currently envisage this changing to a higher level at a later date?**

- Yes – 34.5%.
- No – 13.8%.
- Don't know – 51.7%.

**8. What might you like to see included in an overall report of social value evaluation? (Tick all that apply)**

- An overall “story” of what happened and why – 82.8%.
- Separate figures for the values of benefits to the state, to the participants and to the other stakeholders – 62.1%.
- Comparisons against activities from other organisations – 62.1%.
- A single figure for the Social Value of the activity – 58.6%.
- The social return of the activity (social value of outputs/value of inputs) expressed as a ratio or percentage – 58.6%.
- Full details of all the inputs, outputs and social value calculations – 51.7%.
- Comparisons against other activities from your organisation – 51.7%.
- The social return of the activity (social value of outputs/value of inputs) expressed as a payback – 44.8%.

Social Value in the Housing sector is still in its infancy but quickly developing as organisations aim to demonstrate to funders, stakeholders, tenants and the broader community, the far reaching value of their work. This is just a small snapshot survey in time.

However here at Arena Partnership it is an area in which we have great interest. We are currently using this data and continuous conversations with our customers to ensure our software is designed and developed in a way that provides real data and insight into the social value provided by our customers in the social housing sector.

We would also like to re-run this survey in 12 months time to see how the social value climate is evolving and developing as standards are being set, best practice shared and tools such as our own software (Support Tracker™) are being utilised.