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Innovation through inclusion: rethinking social housing with residents at the centre

If we focus, even at a high level, on one or two of the consumer objectives outlined in the he Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)'s Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, the focus is around the quality and safety of homes, and tenants.



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This has many facets primarily falling under Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's), with reporting on both a landlord-led technical assessment and tenant perception survey, but in the current economic environment, do organisations stand a better chance of success through collaboration? In particular, the role collaboration plays in driving innovation within the sector, leading to better outcomes?

Brining residents into decisions

With communities at the heart of organisations, can they be leveraged by involving residents in decision-making? Organisations often reference resident involvement in this, but what does this mean in practice? How is it done? And, should more be done to include customers? Community-led housing fosters innovation in design, financing, and social inclusion, and becomes a field where diverse experiments take place, addressing the needs of various social groups. After all, these are the ultimate stakeholders, why shouldn't they be involved?

There is undoubtedly a resourcing challenge within the sector which could use collaboration to drive efficient resource allocation; if housing organisations could collaborate to pool resources, share data, and divide workloads more effectively, is there scope to utilise more 'local' resource to deliver better, more timely services to customers?

With financial challenges in the sector, there is a direct impact on having appropriate resources with the right skill sets – collaboration to fill the gaps and ease the pressures through strategic partnerships can alleviate these pressures and put focus on delivering great services rather than fighting to keep up with competing priorities.

Technology in social housing

Technology underpins a lot of this; my view is that housing organisations must look to work together to encourage long-term technology investment and drive innovation to 'do things differently' as opposed to the continuing mantra of 'that's how it's always been done'. New technology is out there but often organisations struggle to justify adoption – could an economies of scale approach be the answer? With the objective of enabling organisations to enhance transparency, inform investment decisions and improve customer satisfaction.

At Waterstons we live by strategic partnerships, with collaboration extending beyond internal teams, or a business to consumer approach; we believe successful outcomes depend on long term partnerships across organisations, their communities and local stakeholders to drive real and lasting community change.

We are beginning to see a change in the sector, but it needs a bigger effort - a willingness to take a risk through prototyping and proof of concepts that involves customers. After all, if it actually works for the customer, as opposed to the sector *thinking* it works for the customer, we may be able to embrace new and emerging technologies more quickly.

Collaboration = success

By raising these questions in the hope of finding answers, and collaborating to do so, as a community we can work together to foster innovation – if you feel the same then we're with you.

Over the last year, our innovation team has worked on many different styles of projects, and while that will always be true, we have recently spent a lot of time focusing on one specific idea: our Innovation Workshops. We have been polishing our format into something really tight, something fun, something that can guide our clients into finding where technology can create real opportunities in their organisations, and a workshop that will give them the space to craft value propositions for projects that they can take away, share and involve customers and run with.

If you'd like to find more our innovation workshops and how Waterstons can help you foster innovation, then contact us today at info@waterstons.com.au