

IS SOCIAL HOUSING READY TO PUT ASIDE ITS GUILTY PLEASURE?



Sharon Collins SSA is a Housing Specialist and has created a strategic tool to understand the pre-requisite business appetite for a collaborative solution.

There's a huge housing crisis in the UK.

For decades, the UK has failed to build enough new homes; supply is not in any way keeping up with demand, many adults still live with parents in overcrowded homes with many more families struggling to afford to keep a roof over their heads, or becoming homeless.

Set this in the context of strengthening austerity measures, cuts in government housing grant, the growing impact of Welfare Reform with more still to come, and you find yourself operating in a challenging new state of 'normal'.

Make, buy or share...

In September 2014, I published a thought leadership paper in partnership with HouseMark (who are owned by the National Housing Federation and Chartered Institute of Housing) into the need for the sector to rethink how it can generate greater social value and deliver on value for money by working more collaboratively.

The paper provides research and debate through illustration of 'early adopters'. This is helping to begin a conversation with sector leaders, to enable the next generation of regional collaborative service delivery models, utilising the VAT efficiencies and wider benefits of cost sharing groups, as a key enabler of collaborative transformational change.

My concern is that the housing sector's current response to this challenging operating environment is to deploy the same old tried and tested strategies to mitigate risk and build business resilience.

But, how can we continue to use yesterday's solutions in an operating environment when radically new solutions are needed to solve increasingly complex problems?



The sector seems so focused on its 'guilty pleasure' of remaining autonomous independent businesses, that it's lost sight of the need to fundamentally rethink the shape of operating models and traditional service and sector boundaries.

It doesn't make sense for 2,000+ housing organisations - all with similar core values and strategic intent, operating shoulder to shoulder within regions - to maintain traditional service boundaries and operating models which duplicate spend within the same communities.

Testing the market appetite to share

For my postgraduate Shared Service Architect qualification, I studied the pre-requisite market conditions required before collaborative advantage can emerge as a viable strategic option.

It was a fascinating area to study as it delved into hidden need and tried to find answers to the Donald Rumsfeld conundrum of 'not knowing what you don't know'. It kept me out of mischief for months!

I truly believe that by re-imagining operating models will be able to sustain and support some of the most vulnerable people in society by freeing up capacity to build more homes, enabling families and individuals to flourish.

The research evidenced that there are key drivers that, if present, are more successfully satisfied through collaboration than by solo working. These drivers are now present in the housing market, but are not being recognised.

So, in my consultancy work, travelling the country, I have decided to get on my soap box and take this debate to sector leaders.

To do this I developed the simple, effective, high-level questionnaire tool on the following page to help understand the market appetite to collaborate. I wanted to share it with you as a contribution to the Shared Service Architect's body of knowledge.

The tool tests market appetite for collaboration across three different metrics:

- economic drivers,
- strategic intent, and the
- imperative to improve.

So far, the questionnaire has proved invaluable in understanding the tipping point of whether a collaborative strategy is viable in terms of leadership and board appetite.

Because, let's face it, they are the people who have to stay in the room, both mentally and physically, if collaborative advantage strategies are to be successful.

I absolutely believe that future business advantage, or even survival, will go to organisations which can stimulate and support business-to-business collaboration.

This could be by re-imagining service delivery, by cutting across traditional service and sector boundaries or, more simply, by working in a collaborative partnership with like-minded organisations to deliver front or back office services.

I'm passionate to take this debate forward, because by working together I truly believe that by re-imagining operating models we will be able to sustain and support some of the most vulnerable people in society by freeing up capacity to build more homes, enabling families and individuals to flourish.

How to use the "Market Appetite For Collaboration Tool"

This effective, high level tool tests market appetite for collaboration across three different metrics:

- economic drivers,
- strategic intent, and the
- imperative to improve

So far the questionnaire has proved invaluable in understanding the tipping point of whether a collaborative strategy is viable in terms of leadership and board appetite.

To use this tool, simply:

1. Mix participants into small discussion groups.
2. Ask each individual to complete a questionnaire alone, and then chat about their findings in pairs.
3. Facilitate feedback discussion and debate from each table, while a colleague collects completed sheets and totals the scores for each metric.
4. Voilà! You better understand strategic appetite, drivers and barriers to collaborate.

You can download the Make, Buy or Share thought leadership paper from www.collinscorporatesolutions.co.uk or join the debate on Twitter #CollaborateDebate

Understanding Collaborative Appetite

Market conditions	Yes	No	Maybe
1. Are there clear cut economic drivers to collaborate through...?			
Is there a focus on cost reduction and/or greater efficiency?			
Are plans impeded by a lack of organisational scale?			
Is there clear drive to reduce financial risks?			

2. Is there clear strategic intent to seek new/resilient markets through...			
... product/service development?			
... consolidation?			
... cessation?			
... diversification?			

3. Is there an organisation imperative to improve...			
... performance and protect quality?			
... agility or flexibility?			
... service resilience?			
... or take action to overcome regulatory, policy or political barriers?			

1. Is there an openness towards the principle of sharing both at Board and Executive level?
2. What do you see as the biggest benefits to collaborate?
3. What do you see as the biggest barriers to collaboration efforts?
4. Where are you in your collaboration journey?

Please complete and leave this questionnaire for collection on your tables. Thank you.