

Centre 47, Impact Furniture Services

Introduction

Impact Housing is more than just a social landlord. It also promotes other activities including Centre 47, a place which provides support, personal development, training and employment opportunities for people on low incomes or unemployed. Cumbria Furniture Services (CFS) is one of Centre 47's projects and was established in 1995. It has developed into a large recycling business providing training and employment in furniture recycling, bikes, computers and white goods. It has sites in Carlisle, Penrith, Ulverston and shortly to open on the west coast of Cumbria. Impact Furniture Services employs around 15 full time equivalent posts. All projects are initially supported with grant funding but Impact Housing looks to them becoming self sustainable within 3 years. CFS is on the verge of being self sustaining.



Social accounting and audit

Social accounting was introduced in 2005 when the Community Services division of Impact Housing was re-structured. At that time the management and Directors made a commitment to develop social accounting and it was written into the governance of the organisation. Centre 47 Cumbria Furniture Services was the first project to undertake social accounting. The manager took part in a training programme delivered by the Directory for Social Change and organised by Community Recycling network. It is now being rolled out throughout the organisation.

Benefits and value of social accounting and audit

The organisation is very enthusiastic about social accounting and believes that it is important to measure and provide evidence of social impact. Their first audit showed that they were 'better than they thought they were' as they had a tendency to underestimate their outcomes and impact. Since then they have used the results for new funding bids and to demonstrate to donors, local authorities and the general public that they do achieve what they set out to achieve. Furthermore, the information from social accounting helps them pre-empt problems and do something about them early on

Negatives, problems, snags

They see very few negatives about the social accounting process and are constantly refining it in the light of experience. They now gather information over a longer period of time and make sure that staff are involved right from

the beginning. Resources for social accounting are available as they are built into the annual budget

General thoughts on social accounting and audit

The organisation recognises that external verification is important as it moves them out of working in their comfort zone. But as it already works in a highly regulated industry and has to comply with a range of audits this extra level of verification can feel like another burden. There is some internal questioning about whether external auditing really adds value, but not about social accounting itself.

*Centre 47
Impact Housing
Nelson Street
Carlisle
Cumbria CA2 5NE
01228 633 638
margaretg@impacthousing.org.uk*