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LIFEBLOOD 2018 DATA MANAGEMENT IN HOUSING



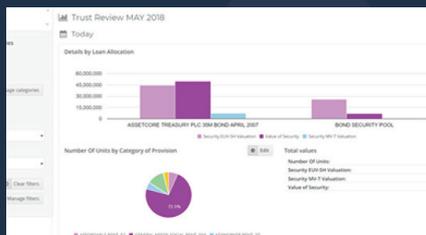
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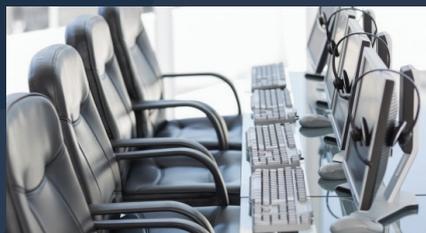
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EDITOR'S NOTES

SNEAK PREVIEW

– HOUSING TECHNOLOGY'S THE E-STATE OF THE NATION 2018

As you will see on page 31, we are in the middle of gathering data for our 'The E-State of the Nation 2018' report (there's still time to contribute to the online survey at www.housing-technology.com/2018report), so we thought it would be interesting to give you a very rough snapshot of the likely trends so far:



- Business vs. technology decisions – Housing providers' business teams now tend to drive most technology decisions, particularly around software for tenant communications, housing, finance and asset management, and external contractors, while the underlying technology infrastructure is, not surprisingly, driven by IT departments.
- Housing providers' digital transformation plans are strongly angled towards moving towards more cloud computing (internal) and more self-service options (external).
- Innovation for both IT and business is driven mainly by an equal mix of in-house staff, best practice from other housing providers and ideas from IT suppliers.

- The barriers to integrating disparate applications are predominantly the cost of external consultants, disparate data formats, dealing with legacy systems and a lack of in-house expertise.
- On-premise IT is still more common than cloud-based services, but these are fast catching up (particularly hybrid cloud).
- Business applications – Aside from the obvious importance of 'traditional' housing, CRM, asset and finance management software, social media and tenant self-service are two noteworthy additions to most housing providers' core business applications, although self-service applications do have the lowest ratings overall for customer satisfaction.
- IT infrastructure – Big data and the internet of things are both poised to become critical parts of housing providers' main IT infrastructure, despite both areas scoring the lowest overall for customer satisfaction.
- Technology budgets are rising, with a general trend towards annual increases of around 40 per cent.
- New IT projects vs. 'keeping the lights on' – Technology budgets are now broadly split equally between delivering new technology projects and maintaining existing systems.

Please note that these are merely general themes from the data gathered so far; the final report will naturally be more empirical and exact when it is published in September 2018.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

LIFEBLOOD 2018 – DATA MANAGEMENT IN HOUSING

In association with Aareon

11 September 2018

BT Tower, London

housing-technology.com/events/id2018



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY – EVENING RECEPTION

28 November 2018

Pizza Express, London

housing-technology.com/events/reception2018



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2019

6-7 March 2019

Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry, Oxford

housing-technology.com/events/ht19

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WHG TAKES AAREON'S NEW MANAGED SERVICES

WHG is now one of the first housing providers to adopt Aareon's new managed IT services in order to streamline and extend its use of Aareon's 1st Touch mobile repairs software and associated add-on modules, with the overall aim of reducing costs and improving value for money.

The first phase of WHG's implementation was the Aareon 1st Touch software, which is now being used by WHG's 250 repairs and maintenance operatives, followed by additional modules for gas and electrical inspections, doorstep appointments, stock-condition surveys, pre- and post-assessments, voids management and van-stock replenishment.

Nigel Harris, director of home maintenance services, WHG, said, "The first phases of our technology investment were very successful. Our repairs processes are now more efficient and there are significant savings too, such as no longer paying £70,000 to generate gas or electrical certifications or using the existing Contractor module of Aareon's housing management system, which saved £50,000.

"Doorstep appointments enable us to make follow-on and new appointments while still with tenants at their homes. With our pre- and post-inspections, there is no longer any need for someone to take photographs and return to the office because this is now done on-site before moving straight on to the next property, having already created a schedule of work. Void inspections are significantly more cost-effective and efficient, and digital van-stock management reduces wastage and saves time."

Having seen the benefits of the Aareon software, WHG then decided to sign up for Aareon's managed IT services, giving them cost-effective access to the IT services they needed without the need to deploy or manage the services themselves, with Aareon taking care of the new services' integration with WHG's existing back-office systems.

Harris continues, "Aareon's managed services option lets us add the systems we need quickly, and it has consequently really moved our business forward. It is also great news for our tenants who are very supportive of our new service enhancements. We are confident that the services we have accessed are the very latest systems operated and managed by the sector's leading experts."

Paul O'Reilly, head of account management, Aareon, said, "Many of our housing customers want to ensure that they are using their IT estates to the very best for their tenants while pursuing optimal VFM and the best use of their internal IT resources. Our managed services help them achieve this.

"WHG is an excellent example of this. By using our managed services, WHG can access high-performance, cost-effective services far faster than if they were deploying them themselves. In addition, they can be confident that the services supplied use only the very latest versions of Aareon's software and are being managed by the very best team."



CAPITA'S HMS AT DERBY HOMES

Derby Homes has chosen Capita One's OpenHousing as its new housing management system, including integrated support for mobile working.

The housing provider said that OpenHousing was expected to give them "a single version of the truth" via a unified platform integrated across its different service areas.

Having recently restructured its general needs housing service, its patch-based housing officers will now be re-allocated according to need, with OpenHousing providing information on which services are in greatest demand and where.

Capita One's web-based software will also provide remote and mobile working

capabilities for Derby Homes' 250 field-based workers.

Maria Murphy, managing director, Derby Homes, said, "With Capita One's housing management system, we're confident that we'll be able to get a unified view of activity, enabling us to deliver enhanced services and maximise the efficiency of our staff."

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

BT TOWER | LONDON
11 SEPTEMBER 2018

LIFEBLOOD 2018 DATA MANAGEMENT IN HOUSING



You are invited to join Housing Technology, BT Business and PowerObjects at the BT Tower in central London for our new 'Lifeblood 2018 - Data Management in Housing' one-day event on Tuesday 11 September 2018.

Lifeblood 2018 - Data Management in Housing will cover how housing providers can use tenant, property, geographic, government and numerous other datasets to improve their business operations and offer better services to tenants, as well as more easily complying with legislative requirements such as GDPR.

FIND OUT MORE AT
www.housing-technology.com/events/id2018



BT BUSINESS

Data - Business revolutions,
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GreenSquare

GREENSQUARE GROUP

Culture eats strategy for
breakfast, but a poor data
culture will eat the rest of
the company!



PLACES FOR PEOPLE

Leveraging 'all things data'



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Driving digital transformation
in housing



TORUS GROUP

The only impossible journey
is the one you don't begin...



VIVID HOUSING & SHAL HOUSING

Unleash your secret weapons
- To talk more, know more,
do more

Lifeblood 2018 will open at 9am on Tuesday 11 September 2018, with business/IT presentations from 10am in the BT auditorium, after which guests will have lunch at the top of the BT Tower. The event will close at around 3pm.

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HOUSING TECHNOLOGY

LIFEBLOOD 2018 DATA MANAGEMENT IN HOUSING



Register now for Lifblood 2018 – Data Management in Housing

Housing Technology, BT Business and PowerObjects are making our annual visit to the BT Tower in central London for our new 'Lifblood 2018 - Data Management in Housing' one-day event on Tuesday 11 September 2018. Find out more and book your place at: www.housing-technology.com/events/id2018.

The event's presentations will cover how housing providers can use tenant, property, geographic, government and numerous other datasets to improve their business operations and offer better services to tenants, as well as more easily complying with legislative requirements such as GDPR.

BT Business: Data - Business revolutions, customers & unicorns

Jason will share his insight and experience on how BT is increasing data utilisation for business transformation, better decision-making and a more personalised, real-time customer experience.

GreenSquare: Culture eats strategy for breakfast, but a poor data culture will eat the rest of the company!

GreenSquare will talk about the cultural and technological barriers to their ambition of having fully-automated, trend-based business insight and a culture where data is given the respect it deserves. The challenges are many and varied, including getting good supplier engagement to support data warehousing, changing the way the business thinks about metrics and why we have them, and

helping staff to understand the journey that data takes after they input it. All of these challenges, and more, can be overcome and GreenSquare will be talking about how they are going to change their approach to succeed and become truly insight-driven.

Places for People: Leveraging 'all things data'

This presentation will cover a brief overview of what Places for People has today in terms of leveraging data to deliver better services internally and externally. Our journey involves taking 'all things data' to the next level in order to be future ready, covering technology, governance and a common data language, and our future aims encompassing analytics, insights, machine learning and regulatory compliance.

PowerObjects, an HCL Company: Driving digital transformation in housing

Discover how a single source of accurate data across your front- and back-office can result in better informed and quicker business decisions, improved tenant experiences across multiple channels, automated operational processes, and a digitally responsive and mobile workforce.

Torus Group: The only impossible journey is the one you don't begin...

The story of Torus' ambitious and continuing journey to use data as a key, strategic asset and to use it to support intelligence-led decision making. This is a tale of ambition, courage, hard work and of many challenges experienced and overcome...

Vivid Housing & SHAL Housing: Unleash your secret weapons - To talk more, know more, do more

Two housing providers - one big (Vivid) and one small (SHAL) will share their common experiences and outcomes from using technology to change their organisations. It's not about budget, it's about mind-set, and how technology has revolutionised their understanding of their tenants, working patterns and interactions.

The BT Tower is limited to just 90 guests, so please book your place very soon at: www.housing-technology.com/events/id2018.

Australia's BaptistCare signs up for Civica HMS



Civica has gained its first Australasian customer after BaptistCare

(NSW & ACT) signed up for the company's cloud-based Cx housing management software.

Mike Furner, general manager for housing and retirement living, BaptistCare, said, "Our partnership with Civica will allow us

to expand our community housing in a sustainable and cost effective manner – reducing overall costs, improving our productivity and efficiency, and ensuring the limited funds we have are invested where it really matters, in social housing for our various communities.

"We were looking for a system that put the tenant at the centre of the solution, providing us with the ability to match

tenants with the most suitable properties for them. One that could provide all the information needed at the fingertips of our staff so that they could support and deliver services to tenants in the field as well as in the office. We also wanted a tenant portal with a range of channel options, including smartphone, tablet or PC, call centre or at BaptistCare locations. Cx offers us all of these requirements in a modern, responsive design."



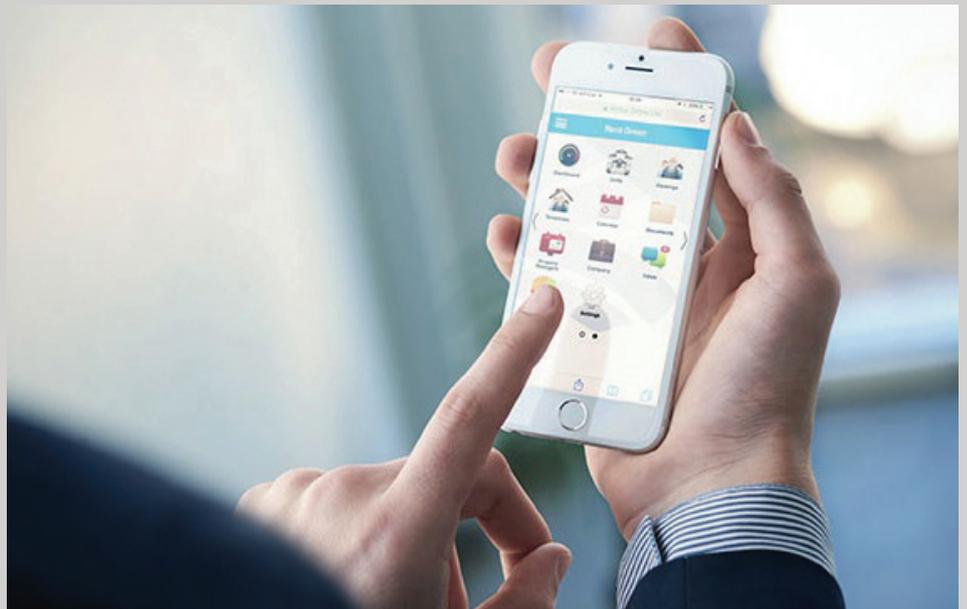
PROPTech EVOLUTION IN HOUSING

Marc Trup, Founder & CEO, Arthur Online

'PropTech' is transforming business and housing organisations, delivering a greater variety of solutions to problems. An end-to-end tenancy management solution is available once all platforms and parties are pulled into one. PropTech management systems are developing from traditional to newer breeds of platforms and this article looks at how they vary and how certain software can work for housing providers based on individual needs and size.

Traditional housing management systems, such as those from Civica, Aareon and MIS-AMS, typically offer full management solutions for the larger housing providers, and often with bespoke options, albeit at a higher price. 'Traditional' HMS suppliers usually offer a wide variety of services beyond their core HMS, such as strategic consultancy, digital services, e-commerce, management platforms and recruitment and HR software, all of which give an indication of the size of housing provider they are aimed at. However these systems usually want you to remain inside their system for everything, with additions they have usually built themselves within the software. This can be good if your business needs the software they provide but it might be worth looking at alternative systems if you would like to integrate with applications from other suppliers. Due to advances in technology and the increased use of apps, some traditional property management software is having to be rebuilt into app versions which is harder than creating software to suit an app in the first place.

New proptech software provides greater flexibility for housing providers. They allow clients to create their own bespoke apps and software, perhaps not to the same extent as the larger systems from the suppliers mentioned earlier but they still can to a reasonable level. Consequently, the software is cheaper and due to its inherent scalability, suits both small and large housing providers. Flexibility is primarily due to the integrations that are available because of systems that provide



an open API. With an open API, users are not limited to one system. It means you can get the best combination of software, selecting from the best in their field.

New proptech platforms such as Arthur Online allow users to integrate with software covering areas such as tenant referencing, payment gateways and digital signatures. Alternatively, clients can take Arthur Online's API and write their own integrations, which shows the flexibility clients have to tailor their own needs. Regarding costings with modern proptech, you usually pay for what you need, not a lump sum covering a range of (possibly unwanted) add-ons. This means housing providers can choose exactly what's necessary for them and purchase the quantity they need.

It's obviously very important to have integrated software that connects the different user groups (property managers, tenants and contractors) within one platform. An end-to-end tenancy management solution that brings all the stakeholders together on a single, flexible platform is the answer. Sharing the management of workflows, documents, communication and finance is also a must. Proptech systems must allow for universal

credit, housing benefit charges, tenant top-ups and arrears ensuring all scenarios can be catered for. Reminders and automated events functions on the software including late-rent notices keep tenants abreast of their rent payment schedules.

Proptech is very tailored to the tenancy journey; it carefully manages every point along the way. The larger HMS platforms offer a broader service, from CRM to recruitment, HR services and consultancy, whereas new proptech solutions focus purely on the property management process as well as the combined integrations making the software unique to each business and highly adaptable.

Proptech has allowed traditional companies to advance through improved technology. It has enabled all of the different parts of a business to come together. While traditional bespoke software is a good option for many companies, new breeds of proptech platforms offer a comprehensive solution to property and tenancy management, regardless of their size and budget.

Marc Trup is the founder and CEO of Arthur Online.



AS SAFE AS HOUSES?

Peter Walker, VP EMEA (North), Information Builders

Merge in turn

Two years ago, the Financial Times reported the merger of three housing providers, L&Q, Hyde Group and East Thames Housing, to form one of the largest housing providers in Europe. The new group employs 4,000 people, already owns 135,000 homes, and plans to build an additional 100,000 homes by 2026.

While such consolidation is designed to help the combined entity to save costs through efficiency gains, it is important to ensure that tenant records are seamlessly integrated. However, merging thousands of records, stored on disparate systems is no easy task.

Data integration challenges

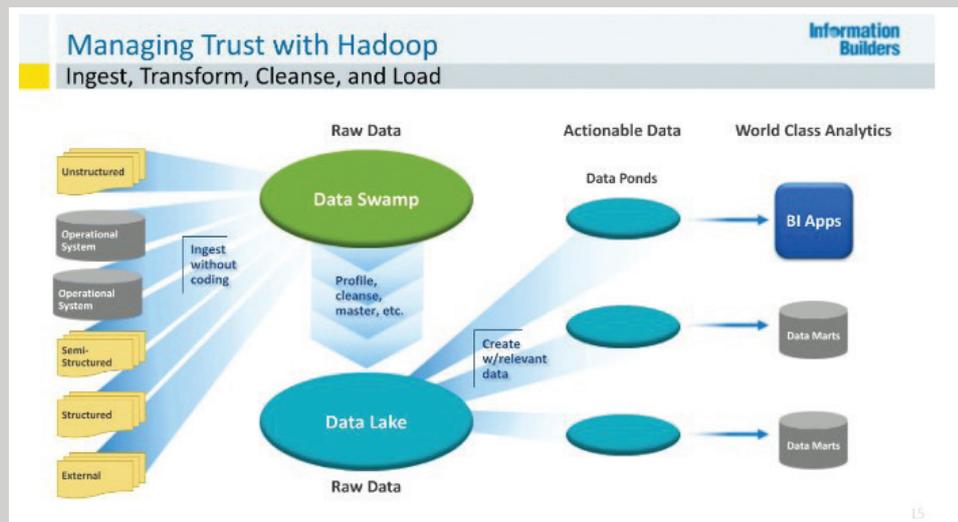
When housing providers merge, there may be pockets of duplicated data stored on local hard drives, back-up systems, and cloud services. It is important to create a central data repository that is de-duplicated, cleansed and trusted. This is where master data management technology can be used to automate data cleansing rules.

Once the housing provider has reached a point where it has a 'golden record', data discovery technology can be used to automatically identify where personal identifiable information (PII) resides and implement processes and technology to ensure that it is secured.

This process helps housing providers' governance and security by avoiding data sprawl. Working from a golden record makes data discovery a lot easier for reporting and auditing, employee collaboration, and the personalisation of services when housing support officers are on the phone, or face-to-face with tenants.

Benefits of good data governance

By allowing housing providers to detect where PII resides within their



IT estate, automated data integration and cleansing can also aid compliance with GDPR because they can comply with any requests for tenants' data to be deleted or returned to them in a portable format.

In addition to the obvious benefits of complying with GDPR and governance guidelines from the Regulator of Social Housing, a well-governed data repository can be used to reduce operational costs and improve the tenant experience.

For example, housing providers might enable tenants to view and manage all of their bills in a single portal, rather than forcing them to contact their electricity, broadband and facilities management providers individually. This improves the tenant experience and helps the housing provider to demonstrate good governance.

Data quality is key

Well-governed data can be offered as a service, allowing tenants to check on upcoming payments and pending repairs via portals and mobile apps. For this to work, it is critical for housing providers to know that their data is reliable.

Automated data-cleansing technology simplifies data integration and allows for content, such as repairs and arrears reports, to be automatically distributed to the right members of the housing provider's staff, so that they can act upon it, safe in the knowledge that the data is current.

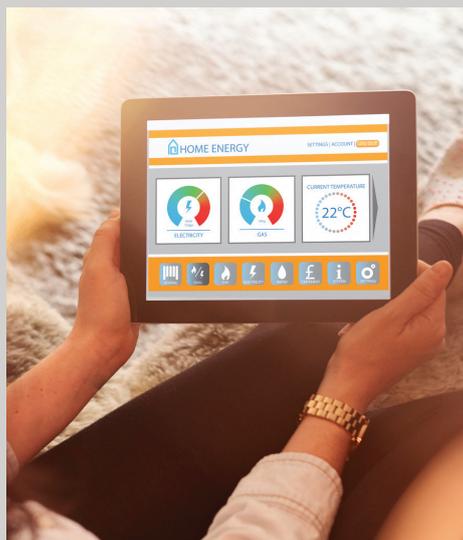
Big data for personalised service

An example of good data governance supporting improved tenant communications is where a housing support officer receives a call from a tenant called 'Joanna Smith' to report that the lock on her front door is broken. The housing officer can see that there are at least two Joanna Smiths on the system, each with very different circumstances and use the single data system to quickly confirm the tenant's address and her tenant ID number, so that he knows that he's dealing with the correct person.

With a well-governed data system, the housing support officer can see all the open cases on the tenant's report. He can also tap into the field-service records and see that the repair team is on route and will be with the tenant

AS SAFE AS HOUSES?

Continued from previous page



within 12 minutes. While on the phone, he can ask the tenant if there is anything else that she needs. If the tenant reports that her boiler also seems to be broken and that they have been without hot water for two days, the housing officer can see that this is a priority because Joanna has three young children. He can reassure the tenant to tell her that, while the team that's on its way is a carpentry team, he can open a new ticket for her and prioritise it with the facilities service manager.

Using trusted data to manage risk

From the housing provider's point of view, a broken boiler is a Decent Housing Standard risk. So the housing office can escalate the repair and book a central heating repair team.

The new ticket can be opened and a report generated for the facilities service manager. All of this can be done in the system while on the phone to the tenant. If Joanna Smith calls back the next day to check on progress and another housing officer picks up the call, he will have

access to exactly the same information and will be able to reassure Joanna and provide an update on when her boiler repair has been scheduled.

The second housing support officer can see the days estimated until the repair is complete, the days elapsed since the initial call and check with the facilities manager the earliest date when a team can be sent to the tenant.

The facilities manager can go into the same system and see a graph showing an upward trend on DHS risks and identify that there may be an issue with a particular boiler service company that provides planned preventive maintenance, or that boilers in a particular block of flats are nearing their end of life and need to be replaced.

A single view of assets

A well-governed data system will also show overall rent collected, rent arrears and the percentage of properties meeting the Decent Housing Standard. For governance of housing assets and suppliers, a member of the management team can use the same data repository to perform data analytics, allowing them to check on the housing provider's performance and to assess any other risks that might affect grading.

Managers can use the same data repository to identify upward trends. For example, a number of calls from tenants relating to water damage can be checked to identify that they are within the same building and that they are within the same area of that building. This might indicate that a plumbing repair carried out on a water valve the preceding month was not completed to a satisfactory standard and that the

plumbing contractor might need to be put into special measures.

All of this can be used to ensure that repairs are managed in a timely manner and that tenants are kept fully informed of progress and planned actions, thereby improving the tenant experience.

Using data for good

Using a single, well-managed data repository, a housing officer can instantly identify and provide a personalised service to tenants who call to request repairs, lodge a complaint, or ask for advice.

While many social housing tenants are in full-time employment and enjoy a reasonable standard of living, recent changes to the benefits system have severely affected some tenants. Good data governance allows housing support officers to communicate with tenants if their circumstances change, look back over their previous payment record and provide help where possible.

Automated integration and data cleansing technology allows information to be pulled in from any source, so that the housing provider has a full picture of the status of housing stock, tenants and service providers.

This provides a view of how tenants and service providers are interacting with the housing provider and can highlight any trends that might indicate underlying issues that affect tenants' lives and enjoyment of the properties in which they are living.

Peter Walker is vice-president for EMEA (North) at Information Builders.

PLENTIFIC DEAL WITH EHSL

EHSL Supported Housing is now using Plentific's online platform for booking and tracking maintenance and repair jobs, with the aim of saving money and reducing administrative overheads.

Having been successfully implemented at Notting Hill Genesis, the Plentific platform enables EHSL and its tenants to find, book and pay for trade professionals on a single digital platform. Housing officers and tenants will also be able to access real-time updates on active jobs, as well as a digital record of any messages, documents or invoices connected to the work.

Ali Costelloe, director, EHSL, said, "After seeing the positive work that Plentific had done with Notting Hill Genesis, we saw the potential that such a platform could offer us.

"Our tenants need a responsive and proactive housing management service in order to live independent lives in the community. This simple method for arranging repairs and maintenance will give us more power to focus our efforts on expansion and growth."



UNDERSTANDING YOUR TENANTS TO BEAT THE UC CHALLENGE

Gary Bell, Executive Director for Managed Services, Civica

Local authorities and housing providers must use data to provide a faster and more efficient service for the tenants they serve, says Gary Bell, Civica's executive director for managed services.

Universal credit, the government's 'flagship reform' of the benefits system, was introduced to make welfare payments easier for local authorities and housing providers. It was hoped that combining the likes of unemployment benefit, housing benefit and tax credits into one monthly payment would ultimately simplify the process.

While good in theory, problems with the roll-out, including many system design flaws and administrative glitches, are having a negative impact, not just on housing providers and local authorities but the citizens that they serve.

With around 6.5 million households still to move onto universal credit due to a phased roll-out, the pressure is set to grow. The impact of Universal Credit was therefore one of the key topics on the agenda at one of Civica's recent leadership forums, attended by executives from local government and housing providers. Our panel of leaders not only discussed the reasons behind some of the challenges but also looked at ways in which technology can be used to overcome them.

Know your citizens

By understanding a tenant's credit history, you can better judge and determine how people can pay debts and stay out of arrears. By identifying those who might have payment issues, housing providers will be better placed to work with those people likely to be impacted by universal credit early on in order to anticipate small issues before they become major problems. For

example, if a tenant clearly has funds but is paid at an inconvenient time of the month with respect to the universal credit and rent cycles then payment dates could be shifted.

This is a strategy being employed by Cartrefi Conwy, whose finance director, Tony Deakin, said at our forum, "We've undertaken work with Experian to understand the credit history of our tenants and their propensity to pay online or via direct debit. We are also using basic 'nudge' principles in order to better understand how we can influence our tenants' payment methods. All of this was influential in our work to develop and promote our online payment portal."

Use data to see the bigger picture

While local authorities and housing providers already hold a large amount of data on tenants, the challenge for all public-sector organisations is in making sense of that data in order to provide tangible benefits for end-users. These insights can also help better manage housing providers' resources and workloads by highlighting when they might need more employees or focused project teams.

One organisation doing just that is Prospect Housing. Its director, Brendan Fowler, talked about how they are using technology to adapt their arrears modules; predictive analytics is allowing them to see who is regularly missing payments or paying late, in turn enabling them to liaise with tenants to identify new payment dates and methods to ensure they don't fall into debt.

Map the customer journey

Housing providers will also benefit from looking at the multiple service points tenants use to get in touch and make payments to them. For example, having a

360° view of a tenant's payment journey could allow them to notice that a tenant is behind with their rent and then map that back to see whether or not they have received their universal credit.

While the issues surrounding universal credit are well documented, one key take-away from our leadership forum was that many housing providers are taking positive action to not only lessen the negative impact of universal credit but to also move forward to create better services for their tenants.

This sentiment was encapsulated by Manjeet Gill, interim chief executive of Wokingham Borough Council, who said, "The key thing we have discovered is the need to be positive – there's been an element of learning. We need to find the digital champions and the community development advocates to get people online."

With much work still to be done, housing providers need to turn to data to offer their tenants a faster, more efficient service to enable universal credit to become the positive reform it was intended to be.

Gary Bell is the executive director for managed services at Civica.

MOAT SAVES £800K WITH MOBYSOFT



Moat Homes has reduced its tenants' rent arrears by £800,000 within a year of deploying Mobyssoft's RentSense software as a replacement for a dated CRM system in advance of the full introduction of universal credit.

Moat's income team was originally using its CRM system to manage their arrears workload. However, the combination of the introduction of universal credit at many of the local authorities where Moat was operating and inaccurate or duplicated data from the CRM system led Moat to implement Mobyssoft's RentSense software.

Kristian Melgaard, director of customer contact, Moat, said, "We ran forecasts on the likely impact of full-service universal credit and estimated that it could result in 3,000 new arrears cases for the income team to manage. We also modelled universal credit's potential impact on our cashflow and bad debt.

"We would therefore need to free up capacity within our income team. We couldn't provide extra resources indefinitely so we had to target our efforts where they would be most effective."

Lorraine Grindley, head of customer accounts, Moat, said, "The most frustrating thing for the income team was that there was no framework or structure. Once they started using RentSense, they could go into the system and see their workload for the day.

"The income officers absolutely love RentSense because it has transformed their work. They are now completing all of their caseloads every week."

RentSense was implemented at Moat in June 2017 with the aim of reducing arrears by £600,000 within 12 months. Melgaard said, "We passed our original initial target within nine months of having RentSense and within a year our arrears had decreased by at least £800,000."

RentSense's use has also gone beyond the pure reduction of arrears and has helped Moat's teams operate across traditional silos of activity and different housing accounts. Grindley said, "We're

set up to be flexible and adaptable and RentSense helps with that because officers can work on each other's patches."

As the introduction of full-service UC gets closer, Moat has now begun testing RentSense's Daily Processing module which captures all payments made each day, immediately removing them from the weekly workload and removing duplicated cases.

Mobyssoft cuts arrears at VAHT

Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust has completed the implementation of Mobyssoft's RentSense arrears software, resulting in an almost-immediate cut of £65,000 in arrears and a substantial reduction in its income officers' caseloads.

Before the implementation of RentSense, the housing provider was generating a weekly yet often incorrect report from its housing management system, leading to wasted time by income officers.

Liz Prankard, income manager, Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust, said, "When we go 'full-service' later this year, we know that arrears will increase, whereas last year they had plateaued. To work more efficiently and combat the threat of rising arrears we had to do something different, and that was why we started looking at RentSense.

"By working on cases now when arrears are at their minimum means that we can try and help keep the tenants out of debt, and take a more supportive role. Being proactive minimises the levels of debt, rather than focusing on them when arrears are out of control."

Having implemented RentSense, VAHT was surprised by how quickly arrears were reduced. Prankard said, "We wanted arrears as low as possible before full-service UC takes effect. Within one month not only had our officers' caseload been cut dramatically, but this also enabled the team to lower arrears by £65,000. We were expecting to see the workload reduce, but not necessarily the arrears so quickly as well.

"The team is now getting through 100 per cent of their cases every week, whereas before RentSense this was unheard of. Furthermore, the income officers have said that they now have greater job satisfaction because they know they're not wasting time and can actually see the results of their work."

RentSense's predictive algorithms are also helping flag cases at their earliest stages, and even before tenants fall into arrears. Prankard said, "The software flags up when housing benefit payments are missing or reduced so we see these before they become arrears cases, whereas before it might have been four or five weeks before this was noticed."

Mobyssoft's UC research – extra £7bn to be collected



Housing providers are likely to have to collect an extra £7 billion in rent each year following the introduction of universal credit, according to research from Mobyssoft.

The study, which covered around one third of the UK's social housing stock found that rents being collected direct from tenants by housing officers will increase by 63 per cent on average.

The study found that housing providers in Wales are likely to be the worst affected, proportionally, by the increase in rent collections, with the managed rental income per officer (MIPRO) increasing by almost 75 per cent. The largest increase by income will occur in London, with the post-UC MIPRO expected to reach £4.46 billion each year.

Early reports have shown that up to 75 per cent of tenants in receipt of universal credit are already in arrears.

AssetCore data analytics at L&Q

Over the last 12 months, London & Quadrant has processed a number of property-related 'live' transactions using AssetCore's loan security and asset information tool.

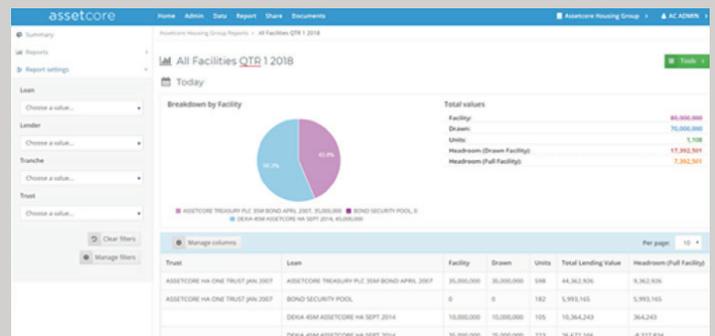
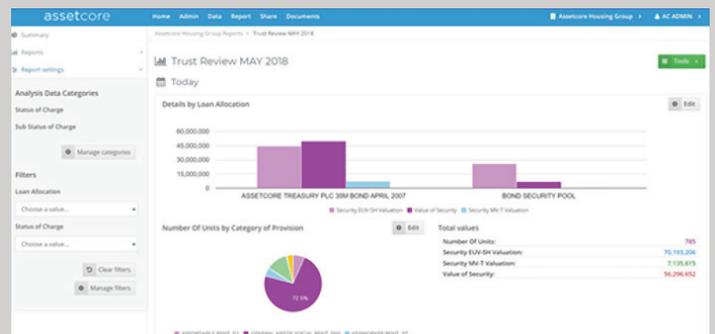
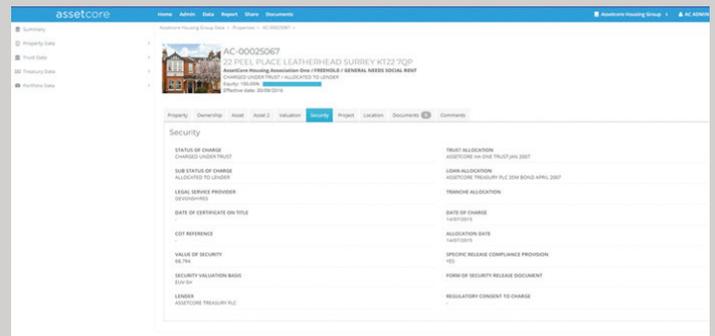
Documentation and data relating to properties held by housing providers is often held offline, in traditional spreadsheet and paper-based formats. When managing these property portfolios, this legacy approach means that communications between housing providers, funders, valuers and solicitors is time consuming and can lead to drawn-out transactions and additional fees to fix simple matters such as property lists and other inconsistencies.

AssetCore provides an online tool to standardise and facilitate the exchange of property information in real time between all participants granted access by the housing provider.

In February 2018, L&Q completed its second £500 million bond issue. Working with a security portfolio of several thousand properties and related documents, the L&Q team had to share, reconcile and work on their data with key service providers and stakeholders. AssetCore's live information-sharing capabilities enabled the team to provide direct access to the latest information with the legal, trustee and valuation teams involved.

AssetCore's reporting area provided all those involved with powerful data querying and historical reporting to analyse and manage the information at each stage of the process. This was particularly valuable when finalising the completion documents.

Yogeta Partridge, treasury solicitor, London & Quadrant, said, "While we are only in the early stages of using AssetCore for our property transactions, we have now completed a number of exercises where we have seen the real benefits of the system, particularly on the basis that there is a 'pen holder' throughout the transaction."



'BEST IN CLASS' PIMSS RETAINED BY GREAT PLACES HOUSING

Great Places Housing has retained its asset management system from PIMSS Data Systems following a thorough review of the market. The new three-year contract was confirmed following an in-depth review of all Great Places' IT systems by an independent consultant.

Using the PIMSS system Great Places uses the PIMSS asset management software to manage risk and audit its asset management requirements via a single view of all its housing stock within a central database.

Mike Hughes, business analysis manager, Great Places Housing, said "All of our IT systems were up for wholesale review in 2017 and as part of that process, it was very important to identify an asset management system to serve us for the long term. The PIMSS system did very well and was identified as 'best in class' by our independent analysts; because we already had a relationship with PIMSS we had no hesitation in re-engaging with them."



ORCHARD ANALYTICS TO PROACTIVELY MANAGE INCOME

Orchard's Income Analytics solution has been developed to support organisations with the growing pressure to decrease rent arrears and increase revenues against a transformational backdrop of universal credit, rent reductions and legacy systems.

While universal credit provides an opportunity for tenants with the change of responsibility of rental payments, this also provides a significant challenge for housing providers due to the potential shortfall in revenues. The previous mechanism of automated rent payments, through the form of housing benefit, meant social landlords were guaranteed to receive a certain level of income. With the move to universal credit, organisations are now faced with no guarantee that they will receive their entitled rental income and therefore face a loss of revenue.

The impact of universal credit on housing providers is being compounded further due to the previous establishment of the one per cent rent reduction policy for social housing rents under the Welfare Reform & Work Act 2016 and amendment regulations. With this act requiring the reductions to continue for a further two years, not only are social landlords faced with the challenge of decreasing overall value of potential rental income, but also much of what was guaranteed will no longer be.

The combination of these challenges and general pressures to streamline business processes to increase revenues, makes for a very challenging situation and further exaggerates the need to make sure that levels of arrears are reduced or at least maintained in order to maximise the available revenues.

Based on these challenges and its knowledge of the housing market, Orchard knew that it needed to provide customers with a solution that would address this. Orchard Income Analytics is the pioneer solution for a new analytics platform, which is cloud-based, predictive, user-experience centric and integrates with existing housing management systems. It delivers a



solution, incorporating data about universal credit, to help with identifying at-risk accounts and to promote effective arrears management.

With tenants now responsible for paying their own rent, areas with full-service universal credit have experienced an increase in rent arrears. According to a recent survey of 118 housing providers across the UK, at least £24 million of rent is now in arrears. The findings were released by the National Housing Federation, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Community Housing Cymru and the Northern Irish Federation of Housing Associations.

Focus on what matters most

Social housing providers are always looking to create smarter ways to work so that staff aren't stretched and have a way to easily make sense of relevant data to make informed decisions. Many organisations highlighted to Orchard the importance of data, intelligence, prediction and reporting in their ability to analyse rent arrears, particularly in the case of income and arrears. Orchard Income Analytics predicts and then removes technical arrears from case lists, enabling housing providers to target resources on accounts in arrears that need attention. Income Analytics is designed with the user in mind; the mobile-first, responsive web UI is intuitive, and enables email and text as you go.

Income Analytics is a true cloud-based, mobile-first solution, allowing staff to access all of the information they need on the go, at no additional cost. With Orchard's 'on the go' mobile reminders to tenants by text and email, Income Analytics helps make income recovery more cost-effective. More importantly, Income Analytics is fast and easy to deploy and requires minimal training.

Customer insight

With a number of customers actively using Income Analytics to gain real-time benefits, Orchard sees this becoming a major focus for housing associations in the near future. Poplar Harca chose to replace a competitor's arrears solution with Orchard Income Analytics.

Dawn Box, head of housing services, Poplar Harca, said, "Poplar Harca is pleased to be using Orchard Income Analytics to help reduce rent arrears. Its powerful filtering and data displays will allow us to prioritise cases, make quicker decisions and focus more on those tenants that need our help."

Orchard also reported that it is working in partnership with Newcastle University in order to incorporate advanced techniques such as machine learning into Income Analytics, with the aim of enabling housing providers' income teams to predict and proactively manage arrears.



MASTERING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Kate Maughan, Head of Member Engagement, Northern Housing Consortium,
and Chris Bartlett, Business Unit Director for Public Sector, Comparex UK

Reduced government grants and funding, as well as diminishing private-sector budgets, continue to put the UK housing sector under considerable pressure, with this all being played out against the backdrop of increasingly rigorous regulation. As housing costs and the management of available stock continues to captivate the media, providers in both public and private sectors want to cut spending and increase efficiency wherever they can. Digital transformation has already been a priority in other sectors for some time and is now high on the agenda within the housing sector too. As boardroom focus shifts to how technology can deliver savings, housing providers and local authorities' IT teams are now faced with new challenges.

Whether developing a fully-online repairs service, replacing legacy housing management systems, implementing self-service, dealing with GDPR, enabling remote working or migrating to the cloud, IT teams have a myriad of issues to deal with. Most of these technology challenges hinge on something few outside IT and procurement departments are even aware of – software licensing. In recent years, particularly with the growth of cloud-based services, licensing for software applications has become an increasingly complex (but critical) task. As organisations look to digitally transform, understanding how the integration of new technologies and services impacts their licensing position will be essential.

Why licensing and cloud can prove a tricky combination

Most digital transformation projects will have some element of cloud computing to them. As with most digital projects, cost remains a ruling factor in getting projects started as well as determining the speed of progression once underway.

There is also an added element for the housing sector to consider when weighing up cloud solutions; one other cost that needs to be factored in, but often isn't, are the consequences cloud has on software licensing agreements. Many licensing terms on the computing infrastructures of housing providers and local authorities are more suited to the era when most deployments were on-premise, despite still being used commonly in the sector. For example, many End User Licensing Agreements (EULAs) prohibit the use of software in a third-party or public cloud environment, meaning providers can quickly find themselves non-compliant, having to repurchase licences at significant extra cost.

Moreover, moving to the cloud can alter the licensing position of custom-built applications. This is particularly relevant to housing providers as many will have bespoke housing management systems or may have already rolled out a self-service platform or an online repairs portal. A move to the cloud will not only have a potential impact on performance (an organisation with an application built in-house may need to re-architect it to perform correctly in the cloud), but where this application was previously 'sitting' on a single owned server, it is now likely to be in a dynamic environment comprising virtual machines across multiple locations, all of which have different licensing considerations.

Overcoming the obstacles

For many housing organisations, the software licensing and cloud complications outlined above are magnified by the size of their organisation and the different types of user the IT team provides services to – whether employees, contractors or tenants. With a substantial, nationally-dispersed

workforce, the number of licences needed can often restrict large organisations. This means that, for IT teams, it can be tricky to justify to the board the potentially large outlay cloud migration can involve, especially in an era of belt-tightening.

However, there are steps that housing providers can take to ensure that overspending is removed and costs are comparable to make digital transformation a little bit easier. The extra flexibility and business-level SLAs major cloud system solutions provide should not be undervalued, nor should access to fully up-to-date versions of software.

Housing providers can conduct a full software audit to get a clear idea of the number and types of licences required and carry out pricing exercises to switch on-premise licences for cloud-based ones. In many cases this is best achieved by engaging with a third-party, experienced in decoding intricate licensing agreements. This solution is beneficial because complex software agreements can be a barrier for even the most experienced IT teams. Ultimately, we should treat software as a strategic asset in any digital transformation and cloud computing initiative.

Kate Maughan is head of member engagement for the Northern Housing Consortium, and Chris Bartlett is the business unit director for the public sector at Comparex UK.

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2018
THE E-STATE OF THE NATION
MARKET INSIGHTS

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HOUSING TECHNOLOGY THE E-STATE OF THE NATION

MARKET INSIGHTS | SEPTEMBER 2018

HAVE YOUR SAY...

IF YOU'VE NOT ALREADY DONE SO, PLEASE TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO SHARE YOUR VIEWS AND EXPERIENCE AS PART OF HOUSING TECHNOLOGY'S FORTHCOMING 'E-STATE OF THE NATION 2018' ONLINE SURVEY AND REPORT.

Find out more and share your views now at www.housing-technology.com/2018report.

In return for completing the short online survey, we will send you a complimentary copy of the final report (normally £95) in September 2018 comprising our detailed analysis of responses from hundreds of housing providers.

Our new E-State of the Nation 2018 report will be the most in-depth assessment of not only how social housing providers are using technology across all areas of their operations at the moment but also what the housing provider of the future looks like in terms of its use of technology. In addition, the report will benchmark the quality of the main housing IT suppliers' software, services and delivery models.

To get your free copy of the report, please simply visit www.housing-technology.com/2018report to find out more and share your views.



Rowley Maggs, Director, SDS

THE LIMITATIONS OF POOR HOUSING DATA

Housing providers collect lots of data - there can be more than 500 data points per property - but fragmented systems, low-quality data and an inability to integrate information all stand in the way of being able to realise the potential of this rich resource.

Poor data and antiquated data systems that are no longer fit-for-purpose are a huge challenge to efficiency. Typically, systems are linked together by a complicated series of spreadsheets with no 'golden thread' holding them all together. This introduces the opportunity for human error in data collation and extraction. Reports are then difficult to run and require talented individuals spending large amounts of time and effort to generate the most basic of outputs. It becomes challenging to assess progress against the business plan and to be sufficiently agile to respond to events decisively.

A brave new world of accurate & reliable data

What can be done to address these issues? What if your data was meticulously cleansed to ensure it was correct and accessible? What if you had all the information and data you needed at the touch of a button? This would give your board the confidence to know and understand and the evidence to set strategic goals that are right, both for now and in the longer term.

What if every member of your team had access to the data they needed, when they needed it, across every department and level in the organisation? Imagine what could be achieved with greater transparency and availability of information, such as how much a property costs to maintain, what should happen to it in the future, and what factors were causing it to perform as it does?

Transforming your data?

It's perfectly possible to move to a position where you know your data, have confidence in it and know which

strategies to set to support your business priorities. It's an iterative process, starting with an initial cleanse to improve accuracy and understanding, setting out a position, then testing and improving once again. The initial stage is spent cleaning up the various data sources; for example, for a finance team, this is:

- Removing properties from their list that have been sold or rebuilt under a different tenure type;
- Correcting rents that have been historically wrong, such as £96 rent charged per month where it should be per week;
- Correctly calculating three-year average voids for each dwelling.

Then the property management data will be scrutinised to ensure:

- Each unit has a plausible cyclical maintenance plan, based on actual historical repairs instead of the assumed future spend for typical properties;
- Each unit has an accurate three-year average maintenance cost;
- All the units that are being maintained are serviced by the closest maintenance office/depot;
- All the units where the tenure type is market rent, shared ownership or similar are not being maintained;
- All the units where the tenure type is social or affordable rent are being maintained.

What can you expect to achieve from this process?

The implementation of specialist profiling software, such as the SDS Stock Profiler, will help you get your data into shape. It will be cleansed and ranked to enable you to start the cycle of knowing your data assets and stock, which properties are profitable, and which ones are unsustainable.

The data is honed to capture specific data points such as level of investment, day-to-day repairs, income, value, worth, quantified value, social investment,

spend day-to-day, income, net present value, existing use value and energy efficiency.

You should expect to see a one-view report of performance against business priorities at the push of a button. The data is live, and the reports are up-to-date and refreshed in real time. From here a position statement (not just a report) is generated to highlight which elements of the asset portfolio need further investigation and which elements are operating with a good NPV.

Information from across the organisation is now accessible in a single point of contact where further investigation and action can be taken.

Examples of data cleansing

We have been working for several years with some housing providers on improving their data quality and ability to extract the information they need quickly and easily. We found numerous examples of how poor data quality and collation were resulting in poor performance and inefficiencies. For example, we identified a 15 per cent cost-saving for one provider undertaking a £150m+ 30-year planned maintenance programme simply through the identification of double counting.

What are the benefits of data you can trust?

- Greater efficiency - huge savings in cost and time: you will be able to generate your performance insights across your business without the need for intermediaries to expensively collect and clean data.
- Better decision-making: you will be able to bring together data on tenants or assets quickly and easily and use it to drive decisions in your businesses at a time when doing that right is more important than ever.
- Confidence in the data: you will have confidence that the reports you are extracting are correct, up-to-date and have taken all of the appropriate data sets into account.

THE LIMITATIONS OF POOR HOUSING DATA

Continued from previous page

In short, you can begin to get a grip on driving value across your business in ways that haven't been possible before, or at least not without huge effort, and

ultimately this will lead your organisation to long-term sustainability and growth.

Rowley Maggs is a director of SDS.

CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT

YARLINGTON APPROACHES 80% ONLINE WITH ACTIVE HOUSING

Active Housing has built a tenant self-service portal with its Active Repairs diagnostic software for Yarlington Housing Group, with the aim of having 80 per cent of its tenants' transactions conducted online by the end of 2018.

In the seven months since the portal was launched, 75 per cent of tenant households now have online accounts, 84 per cent of repairs are reported online and there has been a 50 per cent decrease in inbound calls.

Chris Reed, digital development manager, Yarlington Housing Group, said, "We've even had a 101 year-old resident sign up, showing the ease and convenience of MyYarlington."

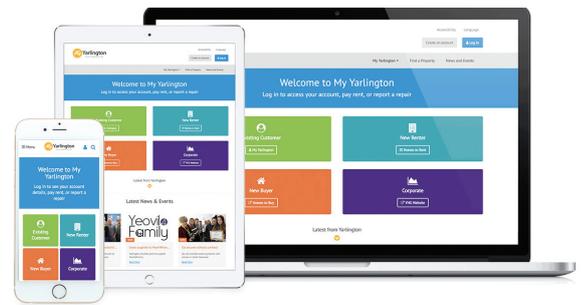
Assuming it reaches its 80 per cent online transaction target, Yarlington Housing has estimated that it will save almost £1 million, the equivalent of building 25 new homes.

In terms of the tenants' devices used to access Yarlington Housing's online service, 60 per cent are smartphones, 25

per cent tablets, and the rest laptops and desktop computers.

One Yarlington Housing tenant said, "The tenant portal is quick and easy to use, I managed to raise and book my own repairs appointment in a couple of minutes – so much easier than calling and waiting in a queue."

Active Housing's work also included integration of the MyYarlington portal with the housing provider's existing Capita OpenHousing back-office system.



Cloud CCTV brings fibre broadband to RHP

RHP is using the implementation of cloud-based CCTV from Cloudview at one of its south London estates to offer its tenants high-speed broadband using the newly-installed fibre network from Grain Connect.

When RHP wanted to extend its use of Cloudview CCTV to an estate in Hounslow, it initially found that the cost of installing broadband connectivity would be too expensive. However, in December 2017 Grain Connect stepped in and agreed to provide full fibre broadband across the site for CCTV and other communal systems as well as high-speed, uncontended broadband services to every tenant who wants them.

Tom Way, innovation project manager, RHP, said, "It's a 'win-win' situation for all parties. Our tenants get gigabit broadband and increased security, while we have immediate access to CCTV footage for a fraction of the cost of paying for a traditional broadband service.

"We've explained how the CCTV system works to our tenants, so they know that if they report a problem we'll be able to

find the footage quickly and, if necessary, pass the information direct to the relevant authorities for action. It also saves time for our housing staff because they don't have to go on-site to view footage and then spend a lot of time investigating before they can hand information to the authorities. Cloudview is now part of the specification for all of our new-build properties."

James Wickes, CEO, Cloudview, said, "This project shows that housing providers can benefit from the latest technology if they think laterally and build partnerships with like-minded organisations. RHP has found a way to combine increased security for its tenants with the added benefit of high-speed broadband."





THE EMPTY CALL CENTRE

Peter Luck, Technical Director, ROCC

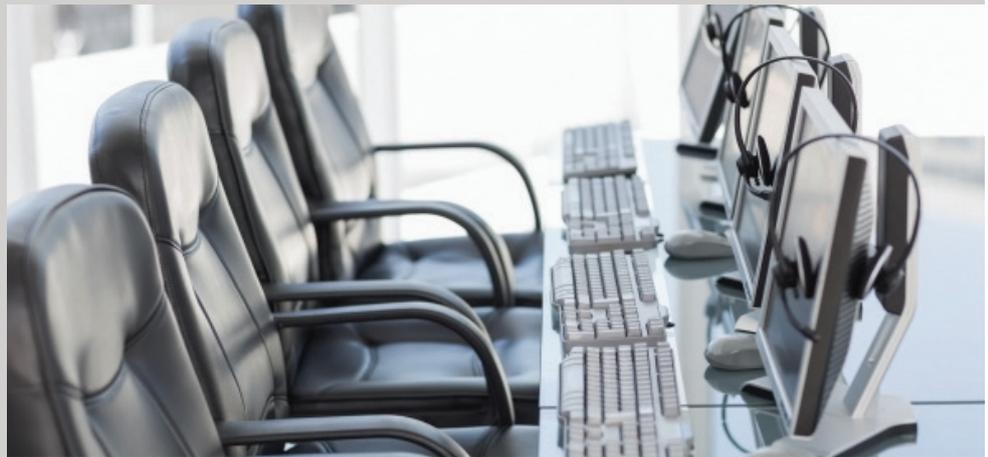
Channel shift has been a hot topic in housing for a few years now and certainly for us IT suppliers, it has been a buzz phrase that we've all been riding on the back of for a while.

Channel shift is essentially all about trying to get tenants online and reduce the number of times they contact call centres by phone. We've all worked very hard to get them on and using our portals and applications and encouraging them to do so by offering a plethora of web-based services.

In a world where housing providers are having to achieve more with less funding and fewer resources while continuing to provide better services to tenants and increase the number of affordable homes being built, we need to look at achieving what I call true channel shift. We really need to not only get the majority of tenants away from using call centres but also move away from back-office staff having to make countless decisions based on the information coming through from the various communication channels and systems in use.

What I'm talking about is the next generation of efficiency savings for housing providers and pretty much shutting down those expensive call centres. All of the technology to achieve 'the empty call centre' is already available and could be adopted today. It may be too early for a truly comprehensive service without the need for human involvement but the next few years will provide us with the advances in conversational interfaces and artificial intelligence (AI) to really make this work. It's safe to say that a lot of people will also have to get their heads around this concept over the coming years, just as they did with cloud (who remembers everyone objecting to the cloud just a few years ago?).

Let's trail this concept of an empty call centre and work through a quick case



study of a tenant with a problem with their central heating.

Instead of waiting for the tenant to log a problem online via your tenant portal, we can deploy smart devices into their home to be much more proactive at alerting us when an issue is either happening or likely to happen.

We can also deploy IoT-based sensors to check on the temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide and monoxide levels, even movement if we wish (I am well aware that we're stepping into some potentially dodgy areas here regarding monitoring people's movements and certainly explicit consent will be key).

If we now take this technology and use AI to start making sense of the information that these smart sensors and devices are sending to us then we can begin to not only remove the need for humans to be involved in the decision-making process but we can also be much more proactive with our service.

So, back to the example of a tenant with heating problems. Let's presume that we have deployed a smart boiler to this property and it is triggering an alert that it has an error code. This data alone doesn't really enable a computer to make a decision about what to do. However, if we add to that the fact that we've environmental monitoring in place,

we can see that even though the boiler is failing, the temperature in the property is still within comfortable limits. The system can now begin to prioritise this potential repair job without a human involved.

If we then add to that information feeds from the web about the external temperature over the next few days, data from our CRM or housing management systems to gain some knowledge on the customer (perhaps their age) and then finally we add in historic data collected about this and other similar properties about how quickly they are likely to get cold in the forecasted conditions then we can enable our IT systems to make a priority judgement and decide to get someone out as soon as possible.

We can go a step further and, still keeping people out of the loop, the system can then use information from our back-office systems regarding the availability of repair operatives and their current workloads, location, availability of parts and so on.

We can even proactively make an appointment and book this in direct with the tenant via a text or email. In fact, if we're really harnessing the power of conversational interfaces and natural language processing, why don't we get the computer system to give the customer a call or use their existing

THE EMPTY CALL CENTRE

Continued from previous page

home device if they have one (perhaps Amazon Echo) and let them know in a conversational way that firstly there is a problem and secondly details of when someone will arrive to fix the problem.

As we're using a true conversational interface here, the tenant can then discuss options with the system. Perhaps they aren't going to be around when the appointment has been made and therefore they would prefer a later appointment. The system can then handle the rescheduling of the work and communicate to the operative where

necessary. Now we've got truly dynamic and automatic scheduling!

This solution also can enable a complete shift away from operatives' traditional mobile apps. We can instead let them communicate conversationally with all the relevant back-office systems to ask where their next job is, what parts they may need and where to pick them up from on the way.

With a solution like this, we can completely remove the need for customer apps and portals, do away with mobile field-worker applications and

truly achieve channel shift and move to a world where we don't need many or any call-centre workers taking routine calls, planning work or communicating with customers and operatives.

The technology to deliver the above scenario is available now; with it, housing providers can aim to achieve the next wave of significant efficiency gains, cost savings and customer-service improvements.

Peter Luck is technical director of ROCC.

COASTLINE HOUSING'S E-HEALTH PROJECT

Coastline Housing is taking part in a multi-faceted research project in Cornwall to develop new e-health products, processes and services.

Smartline is a three-year (2017-2020) project led by the University of Exeter alongside Coastline Housing, Volunteer Cornwall and Cornwall Council. The project is funded by the European Regional Development Fund with additional funding from the South West Academic Health Science Network.

The project has recruited 350 Coastline customers to install a variety of sensors into their homes to collect data on internal air temperature, humidity, air quality and gas, electric and water consumption. Based on the data collected from the sensors and household surveys, the project will support individuals to engage with their

communities, through volunteering or participation in activities. It is anticipated that this will address issues such as isolation and that new products or services will support independent living, refocusing demand away from existing statutory services.

Dr Tim Taylor, senior lecturer, University of Exeter Medical School and Smartline principle investigator, said, "Our aim is to digitally connect Cornish communities to help individuals take back control of their health and wellbeing. Cornwall is the perfect starting point for this project because the infrastructure, talent, resources and general sense of community already exist."

Smartline will work with Cornish enterprises to develop the next generation of smart technology to improve wellbeing in the homes of the

future. The enterprises will be assessed for eligibility and then offered support in the form of grants, access to academic expertise or access to the households to test products and services.

Smartline 

 **European Union**
European Regional
Development Fund

The project is receiving around £3.7 million of funding from the European Regional Development Fund as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme 2014-2020.





WHEN IS AN INTERNET CONNECTION NOT AN INTERNET CONNECTION?

Craig Stephenson, Digital Participation Officer, Link Group



I want to tell you about my last 24 hours on earth. I don't mean that something terrible is going to happen to me tomorrow; what I mean is, let me tell you about the 24 hours I have just experienced and, specifically, my digital experience.

0645 – The alarm on my phone goes off. I know this is the right time because it is synchronised with the internet.

0650 – While eating Coco-Pops, I check my social media updates. Although I am also watching the BBC news, I check other news providers' apps on a tablet.

0745 – I get in my car and listen to a playlist on Spotify, via Bluetooth from my phone to my car stereo.

0820 – Go to Costa and use their loyalty app to get points and pay using Google Pay on my phone.

0830 – Arrive at work and log into my laptop. All of my software (G Suite) is cloud based and requires an internet connection.

1000 – I leave the office to go to a meeting. This is somewhere I've never been to before, so before I leave, I check the address and route on Google Maps to see how long the journey will take and if there are any road works, check on available parking, and use Street View so

I'll recognise the building when I arrive. I put the address into the Waze sat-nav app which gives live updates from other users on accidents, etc. I listen to Spotify during the journey.

1100 – Arrive at the meeting and park on the street outside the office using the Ringo app to pay for parking.

1115 – I make a presentation at the meeting using cloud-based software. Although I switch my phone to silent mode, with my smart watch I can get notifications from my phone on my watch without anyone realising.

1230 – Head back to the office using Waze and Spotify.

1330 – Go to the supermarket for sandwiches, pay using Google Pay and top up my loyalty points on my Tesco app.

1430 – I have a Skype call with some Link colleagues.

1600 – Because I have location services enabled on my phone, I receive an alert from Google to tell me that there are no major incidents on the route I usually take to get home and it gives me an estimated time of arrival. And, because it's a Monday, it's intelligent enough to know that I take a slightly different route every Monday in order to pick up our eldest child from school band practice; although the phone doesn't know this, it just knows that my route is different every Monday. I listen to a podcast on the BBC Radio iPlayer on my way home.

1700-2300 – There are four humans and one dog living in our house. Only the dog doesn't use any sort of online services, although I have seen an app where you and your dog can see each other via webcam and you can give your dog treats remotely... Anyway, while our

youngest child plays online games, my eldest watches Netflix and my wife and I watch BBC iPlayer. All of this media consumption is peppered with social media updates, instant messaging, web browsing, online purchasing and checking what other films that guy with the moustache has been in.

2300 – Bedtime. A quick check of my online diary for tomorrow then set my phone to act as my bedside alarm clock.

As I initially described, this is my last 24 hours on earth. Perhaps I should also mention that I live between a naval base and a large petrochemical plant, so if there was some sort of end-of-world scenario, I am toast. But then again, it is worth pointing out that in that event, it's not a siren that would warn me of my imminent demise but more likely a warning on my phone.

What were your last 24 hours like? Probably not unlike my own. The details will be different, such as various online services, particular digital habits, distinct preferences for one company over another and so on, but essentially we will be living the same digital experience.

The most extraordinary thing is that this is now normal. I don't even consider that I am using online services; I am just using my phone, watching TV and keeping up-to-date with stuff. Paying with my phone is just easier and quicker than fishing out my wallet, inserting a card, and typing in one of the many PIN numbers I need to remember. Using Waze for sat-nav; online service. Listening to music through Spotify; online service. The list goes on and I am sure I have missed lots of stuff out.

WHEN IS AN INTERNET CONNECTION NOT AN INTERNET CONNECTION?

Continued from previous page

Now, imagine if you had to start from scratch – what digital services would you keep? Which do you need, and which would you miss the most? And what if I told you that when starting from scratch, you didn't have a bank account? For you and me this may be a hypothetical question but for many, this is the reality of life.

It doesn't matter if you prefer Deezer over Spotify, Netflix over Amazon Prime, Instagram over Facebook or Samsung over Apple; if you don't have a contract then you can't get online and access digital services.

There are some Link tenants who are in that exact situation. For one reason or another, such as age, credit rating or financial situation, they can't get a contract to get access to the internet. They are therefore missing out on the opportunities only available to those who are online, such as convenience, cost savings, price comparisons, employability options, and avoiding the 'poverty premium'. Not to mention many government services which are now only available online (e.g. almost everything to do with driving, council services and universal credit, to name just a few).

In two places where there is a sufficient concentration of tenants having difficulties getting online, Link has used mesh-net technology to create a self-funding internet connection into each of the tenants' homes. Our aim was to provide voucher-based, non-contract access for anyone who needed a connection but had difficulty obtaining a contract.

In our pilot project, we brought in a new domestic broadband connection to a secure room connected to the ISP's router. Logging into the router, we switched off the wifi function. To this router we then connected an Open Mesh access point via a CAT4 network cable. As soon as this is powered up and connected to the internet, it automatically checks for a firmware update and because it's wired directly to a router, it's intelligent enough to know that it will be a 'gateway'. We also placed four other Open Mesh access points in a pattern over two floors covering the

widest area possible; these only need power and will 'talk' to one another and the gateway access point.

Using the Open Mesh cloud management portal, Cloudtrax, we registered each of the access points using their MAC addresses and provided a location for the pilot site. Through Cloudtrax, we set up the voucher-access facility; Cloudtrax can generate any number of access vouchers based on your requirements whether that's for one hour, one month, one year, or indefinitely and how many devices can be added using that one voucher. We generated vouchers which last for a month for a single device when activated and printed them out to sell to the tenants for £1 per voucher, which, with the number of users, comfortably covered the ISP costs, providing the low-cost, non-contract option which is not available through a traditional ISP.

The introduction of the voucher access mesh-net was incredibly successful. Not only was it reasonably cheap to buy the kit, it was also pretty easy to set it up. With a little bit of testing and giving everyone a free voucher for the first month, we ironed out some minor issues; mostly the location of the access points and the wifi coverage area.

The biggest impact on tenants was the ability to keep in touch with friends and family, do college work and save money on pay-as-you-go data plans (consider the data requirements of a teenager and the cost of PAYG data...). Tenants suddenly had the opportunity to gain all the benefits of being online at a genuinely affordable rate. It also gave us a great engagement tool, especially at the point of sale of the vouchers and with our younger tenants.

Something which should be kept in mind when we constantly hear about 'superfast', 'gigabit connections' from governments and ISPs. Clearly, investment in this area is important; as a nation we need to ensure that our digital infrastructure is world class. For you and me, even if we were starting from scratch, we would want to be patched into that superfast fibre network, but

then again we can afford to connect to this network. The faster the speed of data, the more ISPs can charge, and I can afford the £40+ monthly bills for the advantage gained from the fibre networks, as long as I am in an area deemed important enough to enjoy those speeds.

However, there are people who, while living in streets embarrassed by the wealth of fibre connections, gigabit speeds, and high-quality 4G signals, still live without a connection. As we have already discovered, for any one of many reasons, they can't get online. Being in that situation is a bit like being on a digital desert island; surrounded by a beautiful, blue digital sea but being unable to take advantage of it. This is not digital exclusion; it's digital poverty. And you can be sure that those in digital poverty suffer from poverty in other areas as well.

What does the future hold? With the advent of Amazon Go stores and the inevitable move to similar models by other retailers, could we soon see people not just experiencing exclusion from digital spaces, but exclusion from actual spaces? Without internet access, people won't have the required online Amazon/Tesco/Asda (et al) account without which they will not be allowed access to the physical store. And that can never be allowed to happen.

So, to return to the question that is the title of this piece; when is an internet connection not an internet connection? When it's a lifeline.

Craig Stephenson is a digital participation officer at Link Group.



GOING BEYOND A 360° CUSTOMER VIEW

Gill Newsome, Business Development Manager, Capita IT Professional Services

Much has been written (and continues to be) about omni-channel customer services and digital transformation. High expectations have been raised around what digital transformation will deliver to an organisation in terms of improved efficiency and customer service. This is often linked to the purchase of a new IT platform or the creation of an all-encompassing database.

The proposed solution, which originated in the retail market, is a 360° view of tenants across all channels. This is usually based on an enterprise CRM system, but while this is a key foundation, there is much more to it than just building a platform or database.

There are nuances around the design and use of a CRM system that need to be taken into consideration. Too often a CRM system is designed as more of a ticketing or customer service management solution rather than a true CRM system that is integrated with multiple service delivery channels. Having a true CRM system at the centre which takes data from the web, mobile apps and business systems, such as housing, finance or repairs and maintenance, is a better approach. In our experience, creating a repairs and maintenance system in a CRM application and then trying to use the same system as a true CRM system just doesn't work as well.

Bringing a 360° tenant view to life

Creating an omni-channel platform can give a housing provider a comprehensive view of its tenants across multiple touchpoints. However, really achieving a full 360° view needs the organisation to fully commit to customer service across all teams and interactions.

If the different teams are not all fully committed to capturing, analysing and responding to the multiple tenant interactions, then data is only captured but not 'brought to life' to improve efficiency and service levels. Being accurate and timely will help both office and mobile staff as well as tenants. This

requires data sharing and interaction across and between teams so that the relationships with tenants become broader and deeper.

It is only by recording, sharing and acting on current and correct data that tenants will really experience a professional service organisation. This can be supplemented by data from other sources such as IoT-based sensors (e.g. from lifts, thermometers, boilers and smart meters) and external data, such as credit referencing. It is even possible to add data from 'wearable tech' (e.g. for health conditions and locations) with the appropriate controls and agreements.

To achieve this, there needs to be a shared vision and purpose across the teams because differing levels of commitment from different teams will lead to gaps in the use of data and thus varying levels of customer experience. Teams such as lettings, finance, maintenance and contact centre will all benefit from keeping customer information up-to-date. It will also support improvements in delivering compliance because records will be more accurate and more reliable.

In other markets such as retail, this degree of information sharing and collaboration is easier to achieve because the teams' incentives can be closely aligned to easily-measured metrics such as sales revenues, while other sectors such as technology and finance are using customer satisfaction as a measure of service delivery rather than a purely sales or revenue-driven approach. In short, there are many applicable tools available for measuring satisfaction following a customer interaction that we have all experienced from different providers beyond the housing sector.

Improving customer service & business processes

Many organisations find it hard to create and use analytics to support the improvement of services and processes. In our experience, the use of predictive

analytics is enabling organisations to look forward and plan for predicted changes in demand.

The problems are primarily caused by a lack of understanding and commitment across the organisation in the correct capture and use of information. This requires a people-based approach rather than technology alone. Aligning the teams to a customer service approach, where they are reliant on each other's data, and experience both the positive and negative impacts of this, will help change the culture. Where teams are isolated from the actions of other teams and the customers themselves then the importance and inter-dependence of what they do is diminished.

The nirvana of customer insight and predictive analytics to forward plan service activities, increase efficiency, improve quality, remove wasted time and duplicated effort will not be achieved by technology alone. A great deal can be achieved using relatively simple and low-cost analytics software if the data is reliable because it is core to the way the organisation delivers services. With the best will in the world, the best AI engines can't put back what is missing or create insight if the data does not exist in the first place.

The approach that has worked across multiple organisations in different sectors is one of 'lean whole systems thinking'. It has been developed over more than 50 years based on academic research and real-life organisational experiences. This approaches the identification of problems and the agreement of solutions 'in the round'. It engages the people who actually work in the services and use the processes to deliver services to customers as well as those who manage and organise the service teams. The technology requirements are part of, and come from, this holistic approach. It's often surprising what can be achieved by a relatively simple and low-tech approach at the outset.

GOING BEYOND A 360° CUSTOMER VIEW

Continued from previous page

Once progress is made on agreeing the problems and the solutions and trying a few 'quick wins', then the requirements for a CRM system can be properly articulated. This will give a joined-up view across the different services and customer interactions of what's needed and the benefits it has to deliver to

customers, team members and the organisation.

Deploying relatively simple (and often already owned) reporting tools, such as Microsoft Power BI) will deliver a lot of value, before progressing to more complex and expensive tools such

as AI. Good CRM systems already have these embedded within them although sometimes they need further development from more technically-trained staff to really deliver value.

Gill Newsome is the business development manager at Capita IT Professional Services.



BETTER CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITH CONVERSATIONAL AI

Jonathan Sharp, Director, Britannic Technologies

Customer experience is everything to a brand and trumps product and price, with 89 per cent of companies competing on customer experience (according to Gartner). Buying behaviour has changed drastically, with buyers armed with more information up-front, comparing products and offers online. Aligned with technology advances, this shift in focus has forced companies to develop strategies to improve the customer experience by digitally transforming and automating their core service processes.

The AI explosion

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been around for years but is evolving rapidly and is predicted to explode. Gartner estimates that by 2022, 30 per cent of customer service experiences will be handled by 'conversational agents.'

Up against it

Some see the rise of AI as a threat that could cause jobs in contact centres and other areas to decrease or even cease to exist altogether. However, AI answers the need for new business solutions by augmenting them with human intelligence, not by replacing it.

A Forrester survey found that 64 per cent of the survey respondents said their greatest obstacle is creating a single view of customer data when trying to improve their CRM capabilities. And more than half acknowledged that they struggle with creating customer insights to drive decision-making. These issues

could stem from fragmented technology systems that prevent organisations from consolidating data and the skills to analyse and set strategies to drive the business forward.

Leading with AI

AI includes chat-bots and virtual digital assistants that disrupt markets and deliver new opportunities to transform customer service, innovate business processes, and produce new revenue streams and increase existing ones.

Sectors such as retail and travel have begun to embrace AI technology and reap the benefits. For example, we provide a conversational AI solution called Ami that has already helped companies such as Cruise 1st to boost profits by 47 per cent. A self-learning digital assistant, Ami reads the Cruise 1st website in real time and independently decides how to use the knowledge to respond to enquiries and achieve predefined business goals. These goals can include generating sales leads or providing customer support by interacting with website visitors.

The company found that their sales agents were dealing with general information-seeking enquiries when they needed to be focused on sales calls. Now, Ami handles the customer research that previously would have blocked the telephone lines. 'She' is delivering revenue to the business and the call-

centre conversion rate has increased from 20 per cent to 22 per cent.

AI in housing

Housing providers' customer service teams deal with numerous requests every day, ranging from general enquiries to urgent and complex tenant issues. Their websites are densely populated with information to give tenants a first port of call and, alongside customer portals, intended to provide fast answers without the involvement of an agent. Web forms, meanwhile, are popular to structure enquiries and route these through to the right teams within the organisation. Yet this process can be laborious and frustrating for the tenant, and convoluted for the agent because they are dealing with several different communication channels. Here, AI assistants and digital agents can be the bridge between the impersonal digital platform and human customer service advisors by handling standard enquiries in real time within the browsing session, speed up the tenant's information research, issue resolution and the customer identification process for the contact centre.

It's about strategy

Before you deploy AI, it's advisable to have a comprehensive CRM and multimedia contact centre strategy as part of your overall digital transformation process. It must be recognised that you can't just deploy technology without a strategy and this is where you will benefit

BETTER CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITH CONVERSATIONAL AI

Continued from previous page

from the expertise of a solution provider.

Integration is key

Tenants want to be able to contact their housing provider using the communications channel of their choice and the customer journey needs to be seamless at every touchpoint. A solution provider will assess what on-premise or cloud solution you already have, then identify where and how a virtual assistant could be integrated into your existing front- and back-office systems.

The solution provider will ascertain what objectives you want your digital assistant to achieve, whether it's to generate a sales lead or answer and process a customer service enquiry, and then fine-tune how the digital assistant interacts with the contact centre and your wider organisation, as well as the look and feel, conversational tone and content.

By parsing the content on your website as well as learning from real customer conversations in order to recognise your tenants' needs during similar interactions in the future, a digital assistant can then become your first point of contact for many website users. They can produce answers to any questions, resolve

housing-related issues by completing web forms during conversations, then proceed to transfer customers to the relevant customer service agents and departments where necessary.

A single view

When a customer service agent deals with a tenant's enquiry, they are often faced with several screens; this is cumbersome and difficult to manage. A solution provider will integrate a digital assistant within the contact centre so that tenants and agents are presented with a single user interface where all interactions can be completed on a single screen. This helps to make the customer's journey seamless and makes the agent's job easier.

Agents can also view the screen of the digital assistant so they have visibility of all chats and can access both real-time and historical interactions. For example, contact centre managers can use this information to analyse how many tenants have logged complaints, call about specific repairs or rent payments.

Augmenting the agent's role

AI helps contact centre agents to get rid of their mundane, everyday tasks.

These could include anything from call routing to answering basic questions that an auto attendant or web real time application could deal with. The more advanced technology in the call centre, the more contact centre agents' roles will be refocused on soft skills to deliver empathetic, personal service and advice.

A digital assistant can also reduce the workload for the customer service team, enabling them to deal with more complex enquiries and ensure that human agents are involved exactly where and when they are most needed.

AI – the opportunity

Artificial intelligence is the opportunity that busy customer services teams in housing have been waiting for. If you get it right from the start and work with a solution provider experienced in real-time applications, contact centre technology and systems integration then you can achieve increased revenues, improved communications and better customer service.

Jonathan Sharp is a director of Britannic Technologies.

MOBILE WORKING

Torus uses Kirona for dynamic scheduling



Torus has chosen Kirona's Dynamic Resource Scheduler (DRS) for its repairs and maintenance service, mobilising its field-based workers and improving its voids management processes.

Torus was formed in 2015 from the merger of Golden Gates Housing Trust and Helena Partnerships, with the latter already using DRS for its gas and electrical servicing and responsive repairs.

Torus went live with DRS in early 2018 for 150 operatives as well as introducing remote mobile workstreams using Kirona's DRS Project Planner module for voids management. It does so

by segmenting larger projects with multiple jobs into individual elements to create a plan for all visits needed for that property. That plan is then allocated to appropriate operatives through DRS to ensure completion dates are met.

Lisa Candland, group head of IHC operations at Torus said: "While we're in the early stages of the DRS implementation, we can already see the benefits of DRS and where we will be able to make efficiencies in the future. We can see the value and improvements that could be made by reallocating operatives where needed and ensuring jobs are completed

on time and within budget. We've been able to introduce a standard approach for all operatives, with the flexibility for operatives to move teams as needed and use resources more effectively.

"Our IT transformation strategy was ambitious and we needed to move over 5,000 repairs and maintenance jobs from the legacy system to DRS. Our IT team worked closely with Kirona to transfer data seamlessly and remove the need for manual interventions. We went live with a 'big bang' and so far our experience working with Kirona has been positive."

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An open technology for housing

The housing sector is calling out for a fresh approach to managing their customers, processes and people. That's why we've drawn a new blueprint for the technology that's shaping the future.

HAFOD HOUSING'S LONE-WORKER SECURITY WITH STAYSAFE APP

Hafod Housing has introduced a mobile app for the safety of its lone workers.

Running on both smartphones and tablets, StaySafe is a panic-button app with a surrounding cloud-based monitoring service that tracks the location of a lone worker via a real-time map and alerts their manager if they don't check-in within a specified time.

Nerys Eldridge, research analyst, Hafod Housing, said, "Although our staff rarely get into difficult situations, the app works alongside our in-house systems to minimise risk and provide peace of mind. StaySafe is proving to be reliable, user-friendly and very effective for our lone workers and their managers because it can easily be accessed on the devices they use every day."

Don Cameron, CEO, StaySafe, said, "Lone workers in the housing sector are often easy targets for verbal and physical abuse, as well as being at risk of accidents when inspecting facilities. We're seeing a strong trend of housing providers moving away from buddy systems and dedicated safety devices towards apps because of the prevalent use of smartphones."

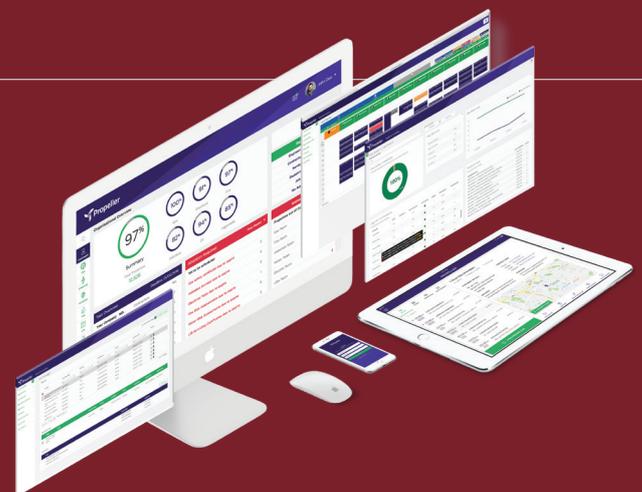
PROPELLER LAUNCHES INTEGRATED COMPLIANCE SYSTEM

Propeller, formerly known as VanCert, has launched a new digital platform for housing providers and their contractors to use their existing repairs and maintenance data to achieve better legislative compliance.

Propeller takes all the data generated from housing providers' repairs and maintenance activities and converts it into accurate and up-to-date information on service provision and performance. This is then available in real time to all stakeholders via a combination of dedicated KPI and compliance dashboards.

With a dedicated reporting dashboard for each service, housing providers' administrative staff and engineers can identify problems, raise a task or response and then track the job through to completion, effectively closing the loop on compliance. Information is always accurate because engineers and other service operatives can update their progress on jobs in real-time while in the field.

Dave Wilson, operations director, Propeller, said, "We know that after implementing Propeller, customers report an average saving of two hours per day for each engineer, administrator and compliance manager they employ."



"Our aim was to make innovative technology affordable, with transparent pricing and as risk-free as possible for budget-conscious housing providers. It's up to the user whether they implement Propeller as a replacement for one or all of their current field-service management systems, or as an additional layer to complement and boost the productivity of their existing systems. Either way, they will have an interactive compliance dashboard showing real-time data to achieve 100 per cent compliance across all services, ultimately giving them a single version of the truth."

INFRASTRUCTURE

HITACHI GAINS G-CLOUD ACCREDITATION

Hitachi Solutions has announced that it is now part of the government's G-Cloud10 procurement framework.

G-Cloud10 is a government-backed resource to allow housing providers and public-sector organisations to find pre-approved digital suppliers quickly and easily.

Ciara McMillan, industry director for housing, Hitachi Solutions, said, "Traditional procurement methods can often be a slow and ineffective way of choosing the right technology partner. Hitachi Solutions maximises this timesaving step by starting to work on building a relationship with you from day one, working in partnership on your requirements and offering advice and support."

"With terms and conditions pre-agreed as part of the framework, it makes sense for housing providers to invest energy into building a relationship with a supplier, instead of a lengthy tender process that ultimately might not give you what you want."

A photograph of two men in a meeting. The man on the left is older, with grey hair, wearing a dark green sweater. The man on the right is younger, with brown hair tied back, wearing a white shirt. They are both looking towards the right. The background is a bright, modern office with large windows and other people blurred in the distance.

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A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A HOUSING IT CONSULTANT

Jenny Shorter, Senior Consultant for Housing IT Services, Sovereign Business Integration Group

Work is certainly varied for Jenny Shorter, a senior consultant at IT services firm Sovereign Business Integration Group, who revisits an atypical week at work.

I've seen a great deal of change in the housing sector. Mostly, it now requires a far more commercially-minded approach than it did when I first joined the sector in the 1990s. I know that I have to be far more timely in my pitches to clients and in responding to their requests for support and always mindful of the return to be gained and how quickly this will be realised.

Overseeing two main housing client accounts as well as a range of other business-critical implementations means that much of my time is spent client-side or working with suppliers on the client's behalf, and while mobile working can mean being on the go a lot of the time, I really like the opportunity to be hands-on.

Tower Hamlets Community Housing and East End Homes, two of my on-going client accounts, are both well-established London-based housing providers that have longstanding relationships with Sovereign, where we manage their IT provision including support for their housing management systems.

I recently visited Orchard's offices in Newcastle, immersing myself in their products and meeting new and existing contacts to deepen my understanding of their products and who to go to in order to troubleshoot or fact-find for my clients.

Managing suppliers for housing clients

It makes sense to have a close relationship with the suppliers to our market in order to broaden my understanding of their vision, product pipeline and so on; it's a great way for us to help our clients to get the very most out of the relationship with the supplier as well as benchmark their products against the competition. It can also help with any troubleshooting issues, playing the role of the 'honest broker' to help to move things along and keep lines of communication open on both sides.

My job is to step in with technology suppliers wherever I'm needed, either on behalf of our client or the Sovereign implementation team (some of whom are wholly client-side), either negotiating the sale, arranging product demonstrations or project managing the implementation itself (for example, just last week I was working on a new Promaster asset management software implementation for a client).

The project management role is full on and typically involves setting up meetings to agree the way forward or fine-tune the client roadmap, procuring the product, booking implementation resources, training staff who will use the product, and then chasing any issues that need to be escalated.

I've just finished a four-hour session with Golding Homes after running a requirements gathering exercise with the customer services team there. The switch from an inner London housing provider to a Kent-based one resulted in very different requirements, no doubt due to the different demographic groups each serves, but they each had interesting suggestions about things that they currently do manually that could be automated.

It's great to work with an organisation that recognises that there is work to do with the culture within the organisation as part of a digital transformation project. Any organisation can buy new software and implement it, but if your people don't have the right mindset or aren't supported to have the right mindset, the service won't improve and no return on investment will be achieved.

Consultant with a housing background

Working with housing providers, in common with any other industry, it's a great help to have directly relevant industry experience. Some people will embrace change, while for others, there's a vested interest in being wary.

I'm not a standard IT consultant but instead someone who has worked in the housing sector for more than 14 years. It puts me in a strong position because clients

are assured that I know their world, their challenges and speak their language. It can really help to get over some of the hurdles that are often faced when implementing change.

As well as keeping an eye on our clients' progress, I am also keen to ensure that Sovereign is hitting the mark. I've been working on a project recently that involves reviewing a client's IT lifecycle. It has provided me with enormous insight into our processes and procedures and how we can continue to improve these.

Working in the housing sector

As I look back over 20 years of working in the housing sector, there are two key 'take-aways' for me:

Firstly, the social housing sector is so much more budget-driven than it ever was, but I always make sure my clients are aware that cheap can be more expensive in the long run. It's great that we've moved away from a 'cost-focused' decision model, but I always like to make sure my clients make the right decision considering the whole of their organisational needs and plan for future investment. What you think looks good on paper today could turn out to be more expensive to implement in the long run. If for some reason, it doesn't go according to plan, you are likely to spend a great deal more putting it right.

Secondly, the upside is that customers are really driving the impetus for so much change in the housing sector, especially when it comes to technology. If you can't communicate with your customers effectively, or be responsive when they need repairs, maintenance and so on, this just costs the organisation, in the long run. Housing providers have woken up to the fact that there is more choice for tenants and so, if there's a better service to be had, some tenants could potentially go elsewhere. They don't always have to take what's on their doorstep.

Jenny Shorter is a senior consultant for housing IT services at Sovereign Business Integration Group.



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**Saving
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**Saving
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19,500 miles

404g
per mile
average vehicle output

7.8 tonnes CO₂
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Plus Dane's HMS tender with Skype

In a change from the usual face-to-face 'beauty parade' of tender respondents, Plus Dane Housing recently used Skype for Business to run over 70 demonstrations online as part of its goal to choose a new housing management system, with the ultimate aim of reducing its 17 core business systems to just two.

Jill Burns, head of transformation, Plus Dane Housing, said, "Because of the interest we received from organisations wanting to work with us, we ended up needing to run a total of 72 demonstrations over an eight-day period. Given the scale and geographic spread of Plus Dane, with staff split across five offices in Liverpool, Congleton and

Runcorn, this had the potential to be a logistical nightmare."

With up to 74 staff needing to attend each of the demonstrations, Jill and her team decided to use Skype for Business to support the process. This allowed staff to attend demonstrations in person or remotely via Skype, and for the pitching organisations to go to the Plus Dane office most convenient to them.

Burns said, "As well as allowing every demonstration to take place and be attended by all interested parties, the cost savings of using Skype in this way were absolutely staggering. We estimated that it saved our staff almost 20,000 miles in travel, equating to about

£9,000 of potential mileage claims, and around 90 man-days of lost staff time. Furthermore, we were quoted over £15,000 to hire a suitable venue for the eight-day period, so obviously the use of Skype meant that we didn't even need to consider that option.

"As an ancillary benefit, the staff who were involved who hadn't used Skype before have continued to champion its use in their own roles, so that the general uptake of Skype across Plus Dane is rising, resulting in not only time and cost savings but also greater collaboration. The benefits we experienced on our individual project are now being replicated across the organisation."

SALIX HOMES GOES DIGITAL WITH ANS GROUP

Salix Homes has signed up cloud service provider ANS Group to improve its digital services, alongside pre-project research and assessment work carried out by Alysium Consulting.

The project involves migrating Salix Homes' everyday operations to Microsoft Azure, moving its on-premise CRM system to Microsoft Dynamics 365 and transferring all of its staff onto Office 365.

Chris Henry, ICT manager, Salix Homes, said, "This exciting development marks the next stage in our journey to 'rethink housing'. We're digitally transforming the way we deliver all of our services and we're confident that this ambitious upgrade with ANS of our ICT infrastructure will provide the foundations for a first-class digital experience for our staff and tenants."

As covered in the May 2018 issue of Housing Technology, Salix has already introduced IoT sensors in some of its properties as part of its MiiHome research project. The housing provider said that it hoped that its partnership with ANS would enable it to develop its smart home technologies further, including the introduction of intelligent household appliances, such as self-reporting boilers.

Andy Barrow, CTO, ANS Group, said, "It's very refreshing to be working with a forward-thinking housing provider who is willing to embrace new technologies. As a result, we expect to see the rest of the sector follow suit as they realise that IoT and automation are the future."



BEATING FUEL POVERTY WITH PASSIVHAUS

Don Barclay, Development Director, Hastoe Housing Association

Fuel poverty is a serious challenge in rural England. More than one in eight households in rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings are in fuel poverty. The more rural a location gets, the more the fuel poverty gap widens. As rural homes are more likely to be off-gas, more have to rely on expensive electric or oil heating arrangements. Shockingly, rural households with the worst 'fuel poverty energy efficiency rating' have an average fuel poverty gap of an enormous £1,223.

Hastoe is England's largest specialist rural housing provider. We recognise there is little point in providing affordable rents for rural homes if the homes are too expensive to run. We have to innovate to bring down fuel bills.

So, over the last seven years, Hastoe has pioneered building Passivhaus homes. Passivhaus is a simple technique in theory – a very energy-efficient method of building, based on good air-tightness with mechanical ventilation, and excellent insulation.

The homes are constructed to have minimal energy demands for heating and cooling, while providing high levels of comfort. Much of the heating in a Passivhaus home comes from 'passive' sources such as the sun, occupants and household appliances. The benefits are considerable. Passivhaus can achieve a 90 per cent reduction in space heating standards compared to standard UK new-builds. Fuel bills are slashed and carbon emissions for each home reduce very significantly.

Hastoe completed its first Passivhaus homes in the village of Wimbish in Essex in 2011. It was the first Passivhaus social housing development in rural England, providing 14 homes for local people at affordable rents and shared ownership.



Hastoe has worked with the University of East Anglia to monitor the performance of these homes since 2011 and the results have been startling. The average annual gas bill for the houses can be as little as £130, dropping to £62 for the flats. Performance remains consistent, seven years after the development was completed.

That's a huge annual saving for our residents of around £500 compared to the national average. It builds affordability into the fabric of the building – a saving that sits outside any benefit or rent regime. Quite simply, Passivhaus keeps more money in the pockets of our residents.

Moreover, there is a link between the energy efficiency of homes and the bottom line of social landlords. Research from over 500,000 homes shows that more energy-efficient homes have lower rent areas and are empty for shorter periods of time. For social landlords such as Hastoe, who expect to manage and maintain the properties we build for decades, it's a long-term investment that benefits both our tenants and our finances.

The development at Wimbish was so popular that the local community asked for another. Wimbish II was completed in 2016, making the village a pioneer in ultra-energy efficient homes. It shows how very high-energy efficiency and quality design can increase support for new development in rural areas.

Growing Passivhaus

Hastoe has now built over 100 Passivhaus homes and we plan to always have one Passivhaus scheme on site at all times. Building schemes to the Passivhaus standard has clearly brought long-term financial and health benefits to our residents. But our wider, strategic aim has been to demonstrate that this method is a viable one for the social housing sector.

Our hope is that, as more people and communities become aware of the benefits of Passivhaus, they will request and demand more homes to be built to those high standards. Hastoe is a founder member of the Passivhaus Trust – a UK-wide organisation to promote Passivhaus principles to the building industry and the government.

There also appears to be a growing recognition of the standard at political

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level. The Labour Party's 'Social Housing Green Paper', published in April 2018, committed to funding and support for housing providers and councils to build new homes to the Passivhaus standard. We hope the commitment will be repeated when the government publishes its own plans for social housing at the end of July 2018. Policy-makers are finally waking up to the potential of Passivhaus to tackle fuel poverty and ensure the UK hits its carbon reduction targets.

The costs

At Hastoe, we have been developing Passivhaus schemes repeatedly and have learned about managing the costs of the process. Building to the Passivhaus standard is more expensive than a traditional home; this is partly because in order to achieve certification, the properties must be far more airtight and built using specific and approved materials. This includes special membranes and tapes to ensure airtightness, triple-glazed windows, highly-insulated doors and walls, and a

very efficient mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) system. These materials are more scarce and, therefore, more expensive.

Passivhaus is as much about build quality and process as it is about design, and so there is also the supply chain to consider. Comparatively few architects and building firms have experience of building to the Passivhaus standard – making these skills more expensive to procure. However, we feel strongly that it's an investment worth making. As we have worked with more architects and contractors on more schemes, and applied lessons learned at one development to the next, we are seeing the design and build costs reduce and are building better homes. Although starting from a small base, skills and expertise in Passivhaus are increasing all the time.

Conclusion

Hastoe will continue developing Passivhaus homes and try to highlight the benefits of the technique in the

social housing sector. The lessons we have learned building to the Passivhaus standard have been invaluable for our development team. We find that, when we present to parish councils and local communities on why they should partner with us to build more homes, innovation like Passivhaus really catches their attention. When people hear a technology exists to cut their fuel bills to £30 per quarter, they want to learn more about it.

So Hastoe will keep building to and promoting the Passivhaus standard – to cut resident bills, to reduce building emissions and to promote the technique across the sector.

Don Barclay is the development director at Hastoe Housing Association.

Have your say – Housing Technology's 'The E-State of the Nation 2018' report

If you haven't already done so, please spare five minutes to contribute your views and experience to the online survey for our new report, Market Insights – The E-State of the Nation 2018; please visit www.housing-technology.com/2018report.

And as an added incentive to complete our short survey, we will send you a free copy of the final report (otherwise £95 for non-survey respondents) as soon as it is published in early September.

Market Insights – The E-State of the Nation 2018 will be the most in-depth assessment of not only how UK housing providers are using technology across all areas of their operations at the moment but also what the housing provider of the future looks like in terms of its use of technology. In addition, the report will benchmark the quality of the main housing IT suppliers' software, services and delivery models.

We hope our new report will be useful for any senior IT and business executives contemplating new technology investments and/or wanting to benchmark their own existing IT estate with those of their peers. The main areas of the

report will be business and technology goals, IT innovation, core business applications, infrastructure services, implementation and delivery models, IT budgets and value for money.

Please take part in the survey now – it'll take you less than 10 minutes to complete it and in return we will send you a copy of the final report: www.housing-technology.com/2018report.





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