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Editor's Notes

Extending the UC pilots

At the time of writing, the government has just announced that it is extending its pilot schemes for universal credit by six months. On the one hand, this is an encouraging sign that the Department for Work and Pensions wants to get the right systems in place before the widespread adoption of direct payments to tenants, and it also gives housing providers additional time to get their own systems prepared for UC.

However, on the other hand, the six-month extension also illustrates how difficult the UC project is and how hard many tenants are finding it to manage their own finances. While government figures report an overall rent collection rate of 94 per cent among the 6,200 tenants taking part in the pilots, it also reported that more than 20 per cent of the tenants have had their direct payments switched back to their landlord after getting into arrears.

If further evidence was needed, these figures clearly show how important revenue collection and arrears management will become when UC is introduced across the country; even a half percentage point increase in arrears represents a huge amount of money for most housing providers.

Reviewing your IT suppliers

Last month, we published our 'Review of IT Suppliers 2013' report. The report comprises the views of over 200 senior IT executives from across the UK, based around 20+ main technology areas, and includes almost 1,000 individual ratings of IT suppliers' performance.

This report is arguably the first and most comprehensive of its kind and given the importance of IT to all housing providers' business operations, it is a 'must read' for anyone involved in influencing, procuring or managing technology.

The survey respondents were asked to name their technology supplier for different applications and services and then rate their product/service for:

functionality, value for money, project management & implementation, ease of integration, and technical support & customer service.

You can order a copy of the report from www.housing-technology.com/report. A PDF of the report will be emailed to you immediately followed by a printed copy shortly afterwards.

Overtaken by events

As you will see from the events listing at the base of this page, we have just confirmed the dates and locations for our new Housing Reform 2013 event (BT Tower, 19th September) and our fifth annual Housing Technology conference and executive forum (Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry, 25-27 February 2014).

The one-day Housing Reform 2013 event will focus on the role of technology in successfully delivering the changes necessary for universal credit and look at how to increase digital inclusion so that fewer tenants are excluded when government services go 'digital by default'. We have again been lucky enough to secure the BT Tower for our event so guests will have unparalleled views from the rotating restaurant at the top of the tower, as well as listening to carefully-selected presentations and taking part in interactive discussions.

For 2014, we have decided to extend our annual conference into a two-day event, preceded by a pre-event dinner / drinks reception. Extending the duration of Housing Technology 2014 will give guests, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors greater scope to explore key IT topics in more detail as well as allow more time for informal networking and mingling with their peers. Naturally, delegates will have a choice of making either one- or two-day bookings.

For further information about attending, speaking or sponsoring Housing Reform 2013 or Housing Technology, please email **events@housing-technology.com.**

FUTURE EVENTS

Microsoft & EasyShare – Executive Briefing for Housing Associations
22 May 2013, Microsoft HQ, Reading
www.easysharepoint.com/news

Digital Unite – Social Housing Digifest
5 June 2013, Etihad Stadium, Manchester
www.digitalunite.com

Visualmetrics - SAP Business Objects v4 webinar
11 June 2013 (plus other dates later in 2013),
Online webinar
www.visualmetrics.co.uk

CIH Housing Conference 2013
25-27 June 2013, Manchester Central, Manchester
www.cihhousing.com

Housing Technology – Housing Reform 2013
19 September 2013, BT Tower, London
events@housing-technology.com

Housing Technology 2014 conference & executive forum
25-27 February 2014, Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry
conference@housing-technology.com

Framework chooses Kypera HMS

Framework has completed the implementation of a new housing management system from Kypera.

Framework aims to stop homelessness and accommodates adults and young people who often have complex support needs and move frequently. It manages over 800 bed spaces including flats and quick access hostels. Framework therefore has complex housing management requirements with relatively high rental values, rapid turnover and frequent maintenance.

Adam Jacobs, head of property and development, Framework, said, "Kypera will enable us to keep track of our housing provision much more effectively and minimise voids. Every time someone moves out, gas servicing, electrical checks and repairs need to be done. Kypera Housing will allow us to complete these more efficiently, enabling all office staff to access the system, entering items directly, instead of having to email or phone in with requests.

"Kypera offers a cost-effective licence fee structure for our staff numbers and gives us the tools to manage our accommodation and support services more efficiently. Things can change very quickly here and we cover quite a wide geographical area, so real-time access to accurate information is very important."

Northgate wins HMS contract at Cannock Chase Council

Cannock Chase Council has just awarded the contract for its new housing management system to Northgate Public Services.

The new Northgate HMS is intended to help the council manage its housing stock more efficiently and provide extended services to its tenants through the introduction of new technologies such as mobile working and web self-service.

Ian Tennant, head of housing, Cannock Chase Council, said, "The Northgate system will enable us to amalgamate all types of records into a single database so we will have an up-to-date and real-time view of our customers and our property stock, plus our tenants will gain extended and more personalised services."

With the adoption of mobile technology as part of the overall HMS solution, council staff will be able to operate more efficiently when working in the field, such as logging their whereabouts, receiving updated job schedules remotely and accessing information from back-office systems.

The new Northgate system will also give the council's staff a complete picture of each tenant when they make contact, including rent details and arrears, maintenance records and previous contacts with the council, in order to make it easier for the council to achieve 'first-time fix' for more tenant queries.

LHAITM renamed as the BATH Group

The Large Housing Association IT Managers (LHAITM) Group has renamed itself as the Business and Technology in Housing (BATH) Group.

With Ian Ward from The Regenda Group as its chairman, the group is continuing with its annual benchmarking exercise and quarterly events, and will shortly be publishing good practice and briefing guides on key IT issues in housing.

The first briefing guide covers the development of BYOD policies; please email john.paul@consulteast.co.uk for a copy.

The BATH group has been running a benchmarking exercise for six years, providing an inexpensive way of comparing costs and quality without generating lots of work. The methodology used is much simpler than Housemark's, but completing the exercise means housing providers have to properly understand the cost and demand drivers in their own organisation. The 2012 benchmarking report found that housing providers that spent more on IT had markedly higher ratios of properties to employees than those that spent less.

Places for People ready for UC and PCI-compliant with Civica

Jon Thomson, Head of Information Management & Technology, Places for People

Places for People has reported that it has completed the introduction of a PCI-compliant payment service in advance of the introduction of universal credit. The five-month project to run a hosted version of Civica's Icon income management system was completed in August 2012.

The housing provider originally implemented an on-premise version of the Civica income management system five years ago in order to reduce the administrative burden of dealing with hundreds of payments and transactions every day from multiple sources and a variety of channels, with the payments coming in the form of cheques, cash, credit cards, direct debits and online payments. Furthermore, because Places for People held customer-sensitive data, it needed to comply with PCI-DSS regulations.

Jon Thomson, head of information management and technology, Places for People, said, "We process over £25 million a year through various payment channels, including a large number of credit and debit card transactions. This means that there are stringent regulations for the management and administration of the payment system.

"Maintaining PCI compliance demanded a great deal of effort from our IT security team – something we knew would increase further as the organisation expanded and the number of transactions increased."

Places for People also wanted to get ready for the introduction of universal credit so decided to move to the hosted version of Civica's Icon system to streamline many of the financial and administrative processes as well as to share some of the compliance risk with Civica.

Thomson said, "Universal Credit is one of the biggest challenges we have had to face recently but by offering multiple payments channels for tenants, we are confident we can ease the adjustment to universal credit."

"We enable our tenants to pay rent in the way they prefer, but we need to make sure they can pay at anytime. The Icon hosted payment service is managed 24/7 and offers high availability, giving us confidence and peace of mind that every payment attempt will be successful."

Laura Halliwell, income accounts receivable manager, Places for People, said, "All our monetary transactions go through Civica Icon and since its implementation, the flexibility of our payments platform has been greatly improved with no impact on customer service."

As part of its plans for handling universal credit, the housing provider is in the process of integrating the housing benefit stream to the Civica system, a process which will involve digitising masses of documents.

Halliwell said, "Each week, housing benefit involves 500 printed pages and £1.9 million in revenues. However, many of the processes are currently being done manually, which is an incredible administrative burden that won't be sustainable once universal credit is introduced."

Civica bought by OMERS Private Equity

3i Group has sold Civica to OMERS Private Equity for an 'enterprise value' of £390 million. 3i originally bought Civica in 2008 and since then it has grown through a combination of software applications, cloud-based solutions and specialist outsourcing. During the same time, staff numbers have increased from 1,350 to more than 2,000, 60 per cent of which are in the UK.

OMERS will support the existing Civica management team in building on growth opportunities, and combine this with selective acquisitions to extend the company's products and services.

Simon Downing, chief executive, Civica, said, "There is no change to our trading companies as we carry on business as normal, led by the existing management team, and we remain committed to our strategy and to the long-term development of Civica."

UC will increase arrears by £180 per tenant

Law firm Winckworth Sherwood, whose clients include over 200 social housing providers, house builders and funders, reported that even tenants with little or no history of rent arrears could find themselves in arrears by an average of £180 after the introduction of universal credit.

Nikki Lynds-Xavier, a partner in Winckworth Sherwood's housing management team said, "In a universal credit pilot project involving around 2,000 tenants in the London Borough of Southwark, tenants who started the pilot with no rent arrears found themselves on average £180 in debt at the end of the pilot."

The pilot project found that only 60 per cent of tenants moved onto universal credit successfully, with 40 per cent failing to manage their monthly budgets. 11 per cent refused to take part or were unable to engage with the local authority, and 14 per cent were later considered too vulnerable to take part.

Lynds-Xavier said, "Further small-scale pilots have shown that under the new benefits system, housing officers have to make more than 40 visits in each case when chasing rent arrears, compared with just six under the current system."

Better HR & payroll at Havebury Housing with CascadeHR

Havebury Housing Partnership has reported the results of its implementation of an HR and payroll system from Cascade. The new system is saving Havebury Housing's HR team around 30 hours per week, at the same time as giving more control and flexibility to staff and managers through self-service options and better reporting tools.

Havebury Housing previously had separate systems for HR and payroll but there was no integration between them which meant that there was a massive amount of duplicated work and considerable scope for manual errors. Furthermore, reporting writing and data analysis were both time-consuming and difficult processes.

Time recording was carried out by the housing provider's staff on spreadsheets that were set up each month by the IT team, with holidays and flexi-time recorded on paper, with such records prone to getting lost or being hard to duplicate.

After spending almost four years considering whether to invest in improved HR and payroll systems, Havebury Housing finally short-listed a number of software providers. Cascade came out on top due to the flexibility of its options, the employee self-service functionality and the option to include timesheets and time recording.

Havebury Housing said that although the Cascade software was substantially more expensive than many of the alternatives, its advanced functionality and service far out-weighed the additional cost.

Allpay's UC survey – Affordability checks, door-to-door collections and higher arrears

A survey from Allpay has found that affordability checks, door-to-door collection and increasing the number of residents paying rent with a direct debit are just some of the ideas being considered by housing providers to minimise arrears once universal credit is introduced.

Based on the views of over 100 housing professionals, Allpay reported that more than 60 per cent believe their organisations will be carrying out affordability checks on new residents by the time the reform is rolled out in 2017, with nearly a quarter believing door-to-door payments will be part of their collection strategy.

In terms of the underlying ethos behind the welfare reforms and the introduction of universal credit, only 10 per cent of respondents expected the reforms to get more people into work. Furthermore,

almost a third of the respondents thought that universal credit would not be the default method by 2017.

Almost 90 per cent of the respondents thought that arrears would increase by 2017, with no respondents expecting arrears to decrease. In the six areas where direct payments to tenants are being trialled at the moment, eight per cent of the rent due remained uncollected on average after four months, with the housing providers warning of creeping arrears and increased resources being allocated to income collection.

The respondents expected that 40 per cent of tenants will be paying their rent via a monthly direct debit by 2017, over double the 17 per cent using it at the moment, as reported in the DWP's survey of tenants involved in the direct payment demonstration projects.

The Allpay survey shows that there will still be a big demand for cash payments with respondents believing that nearly 20 per cent of their residents will still be paying this way in 2017, with 15 per cent using a debit or credit card and 10 per cent using a standing order.

Nick Peplow, business development director, Allpay, said, "The survey results emphasise the importance for housing providers to offer tenants a wide range of payment options, and that with the increased support and advice being offered to them by landlords, local authorities, charities and other organisations, more tenants will be comfortable using automated payment channels such as direct debit."

Castle launches 'bedroom tax' software

Castle Computer Services has developed a simple QlikView-based system that quickly identifies tenants affected by the Housing Reform Act.

The Castle system integrates easily with existing housing management systems and any manually collated data to cross-reference tenant details against the Welfare Reform Act criteria to establish which households will receive reduced benefits. It also calculates the percentage reduction in benefit for those tenants who are deemed to have extra bedrooms under the Act.

George Strathie, software and services director, Castle Computer Services, said: "QlikView is a highly cost-effective business intelligence tool that integrates seamlessly with housing management systems and is incredibly user-friendly. It is extremely useful in helping housing providers to closely monitor the impact of the Housing Reform Act and provides a detailed and up-to-date picture at all times."

The new system also gives accurate predictions of changes in future circumstances as family members grow older, which helps housing providers to work with tenants and support their future needs.

Do you see the impact of UC?

Mike Eckersley, Senior IT Consultant, Housing & Consultancy Services, Sector

A quick canter around the internet at the moment will tell you all you need to know about universal credit:

- *It will start in October 2013;*
- *It replaces Jobseekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Housing Benefit;*
- *A pilot will run in four areas [at the time of writing] from April 2013.*

There are web-pages, blogs, forums and social media pages telling you all about how this will affect the disabled, the elderly and tenants in social housing. That's all well and good if you are connected, but unfortunately many of the people who need access to this information are not connected in the first place!

And it gets worse, because one of the more important pieces of information is hard to find, either on or offline. This is the news that universal credit is 'digital by default'; for the uninitiated, that means that claimants will only be able to apply for it via the internet.

Figures vary wildly, depending on whom you talk to, but regardless of the exact figures, it is clear that large numbers of tenants are either not online, have never been online or don't have access in their homes, with some surveys suggesting that 25 per cent of tenants in some areas have "no desire to get onto the internet."

So what does this mean for the housing sector? In simple terms, if your tenants can't get online, they can't make a claim so they won't receive their universal credit, which means you won't get your rent.

How can IT help?

Housing providers will want their ICT teams to make sure that the systems are up to date and that they do all they can to help the operational teams remain on top of their work. Effective contact management will be fundamental to making sure that anyone in the organisation who is dealing with a tenant has access to the most up-to-date picture. Customer profiling is merely information, and information is pointless unless you can use it; information with context becomes intelligence. Housing providers need to be able to predict late or non-payment based on trends, and need to have the ability to pick up when a known good payer has a Direct Debit that suddenly fails or when a tenant starts to pay a few pounds less each month.

What about digital inclusion?

You could launch a dedicated ISP to provide your tenants with broadband, such as the Diamond-net service I created in my previous role at North Lincolnshire Homes. Diamond-net is a broadband service which offers speeds of up to 50mbs and does not require the use of a phone line. This makes the service more accessible for tenants and the costing matrix makes it more affordable too.

However, the truth is that all that does is provide the means, not the desire. One of the most important things a housing provider can do is to educate its tenants about the issue.

Many have already set up housing task forces and run road-shows to explain what's happening, when, and to talk to tenants about areas such as under-occupancy and direct payments. Some have provisioned public access equipment in existing community venues and are running basic introductory courses for customers to learn how to access and use the internet. Others have teamed up with UK Online and are directing customers to these services. However, only a few have really got to grips with the digital aspect.

Start by assembling the right team in your organisation, and get external advice and help if you need it, covering areas such as ICT, PR and communications, customer service and resident involvement, and if you already have a universal credit task force, you will want them onboard as well.

You need people on your team whom the tenants know and trust for advice, and they need your technical expertise.

Then you need to engage with your tenants and get some detail on the specific barriers at play in your area. The need for a BT landline is often a problem due to the credit checks, deposits, connection charges and long contracts involved, but there will be different issues in each area. And don't forget desire and technical ability; they are usually quite near the top of the list as well.

The main thing is for all housing providers to establish a clear, forward-looking digital inclusion strategy that links with their customer access strategy.

Customer access strategies will become increasingly important because housing providers are likely to see a large increase in the number of customer enquiries they have to deal with. Tenants will want help and advice when dealing with all the changes to the welfare system and they will turn first to their housing provider. 'Channel shift' will help housing providers deal with these enquiries faster and more cost-effectively if they implement robust strategies to take advantage of the newer channels that their customers can use.

Don't be fooled into the 'build it and they will come' mindset, because they will only come if you make it worth their while. There has to be some benefit to the tenant in using the internet as a channel to contact you. Telling them that universal credit is digital by default is one way, but there are many more. For example, DWP says that digital skills are a factor in 72 per cent of all jobs.

So is it an IT problem?

If I'm honest, I don't think it is. The likelihood is that it will be better dealt with by your resident involvement team, but they may lack the technical skills and knowledge to explain the issue. That's why a cross-team approach will work best, with ICT at the heart of that team to support the message and its delivery, and using its technical skills to provide innovative and maybe even ground-breaking solutions.

Martin Shakespeare from DWP's stakeholder engagement team recently told a seminar that, "If we can't get people online, [universal credit] will fall at the first hurdle."

Of course universal credit will run on technology, and there are whispers that the new IT system might not be ready on time, but that's someone else's headache, right?

Mike Eckersley is a senior housing IT consultant at Sector.
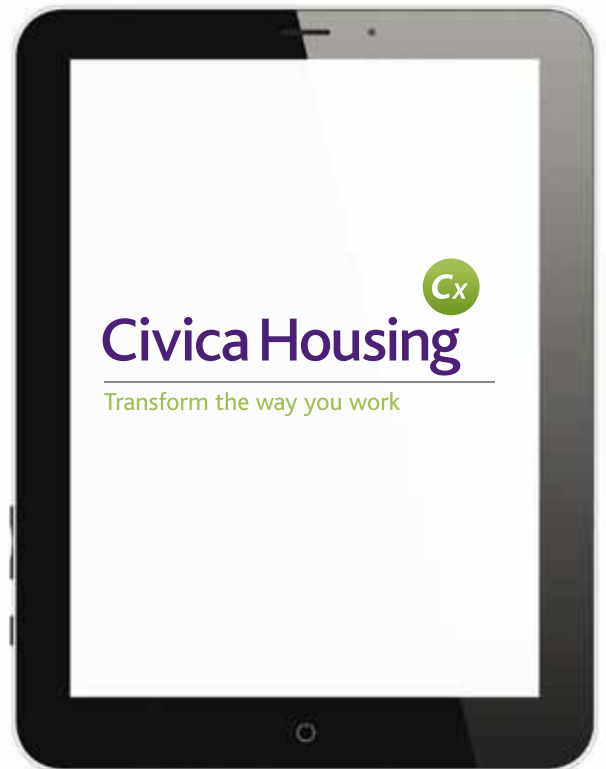
Red Box voice recording for Merlin Housing

Merlin Housing Society reported that it expected to complete the implementation of a voice recording system from Red Box Recorders at its three offices around Bristol during May 2013. The new system will be integrated with Merlin's newly-upgraded Mitel telephony platform.

Merlin will be using the quality management, replay to phone and audio-search modules of Red Box Recorders' Quantify system, enabling the housing provider to automate agents' evaluations for standards-based training and to improve customer service.

The system will also use Red Box Recorders' PCI suppression module which automatically blocks out specific parts of call recordings without fragmenting the call record when taking card payment details and other sensitive information, yet keeps it as a single call record. This will enable Merlin to comply with the Payment Card Industry (PCI) data security standard, regulatory authorities and any other evidential regulations for unaltered audio while taking payments for rent and repairs.

David Edge, senior ICT support engineer, Merlin Housing Society, said, "We've been considering call recording for some time as a way to improve customer service and to help resolve disputes. We were very impressed by the Red Box solution, particularly its easy to use interface and its ability to be deployed on a VMware-based infrastructure."

Lee Jones, COO, Red Box Recorders, said, "We have also agreed to further enhance the solution for Merlin with a replay to SIP phone capability because, due to its thin client environment and confidentiality requirements, it needs the playback to be via handsets rather than via desktop."

Common housing register from Abritas in North Ayrshire

North Ayrshire Council and three local housing providers have created an advanced common housing register, including mutual exchanges and a single set of criteria for assessing housing needs. Based on Abritas software, the new register went live in October 2012.

North Ayrshire Council, Cunninghame Housing Association, Irvine Housing Association and ANCHO originally set up Scotland's first housing register and allocations policy in 2009 using a web-based Abritas system to streamline operations and improve partnership working. Before this, the four organisations each had their own allocation systems and maintained their own waiting lists. Applicants had to apply to each housing provider separately, which created confusion because each provider assessed applicants' housing needs differently.

In 2012, the council and its housing partners decided to add extra functionality to streamline operations further and improve customer service. The council worked with Abritas to develop a Scottish version of the Housing Advice & Homelessness software for HL1 reporting, and they have also implemented the Abritas's mutual exchange and enhanced housing options modules. The next phase is to develop a new temporary accommodation module which includes a rent deposit scheme.

All applicants' housing needs are now assessed using the same criteria, which means they benefit from improved and more consistent advice. Tenants also find the process easier to understand and housing staff can provide a more complete picture of housing options within the region.

Bill McGhee, housing project manager, North Ayrshire Council, said, "It's usually very difficult to measure the cost savings of common housing registers, but because we now have a register of all applicants that the partners share, there is no multiple handling of any individual applications so processing costs should be reduced. And although we haven't been able to put a definite financial figure on the savings so far, as we move to greater self-service by applicants, costs should come down."

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The TotalMobile App Platform helps housing organisations to improve working processes, enhance productivity and save money.

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Housing Solutions kicks off £2.5m ICT programme

As part of a £2.5 million investment in new technologies, Housing Solutions is introducing a real-time online repair reporting system from Civica and delivering more services on the doorstep by staff using iPads.

Richard Harvey, ICT manager, Housing Solutions, said, "Over the next five years we will build over 1,000 homes, while the homes that we already maintain are now spread over four counties. With this technology investment, we can focus on creating services that are delivered direct to our customers which will reduce the reliance on our head-office facilities and allow staff to spend more time where they are needed in the communities."

In partnership with Civica, Housing Solutions has created a real-time online repair reporting system. By logging into their account, tenants now have real-time access around the clock to the maintenance and repairs teams' diaries so that they can make an appointment for a date and time that suits them. The new Civica system also allows them to cancel or amend booked appointments, view completed jobs and book appointments for gas safety inspections.

Debbie White, customer care manager, Housing Solutions, said, "Repair-related calls represent 50 per cent of the calls that come into our contact centre. By reducing those 3,000 calls a month and guiding more tenants online, we have cut waiting times for customers on the phones and reduced the demands on our staff."

Housing Solutions is also giving its support workers iPads so that they can work remotely while having immediate access to all relevant details about their tenants and properties.

Jessica Wray, community housing officer, Housing Solutions, said, "The iPads are brilliant. I can now give residents on my patch answers straight away. They no longer have to wait for an answer and I have more time to spend with them, supporting them in their home rather than going to and from the offices to access information."

Riverside Housing selects Kana's Lagan CRM

Riverside Housing is implementing Lagan Enterprise CRM from Kana Software to improve its customer service and broaden its channels of communications. Lagan Enterprise will be integrated with Riverside's Capita housing management system as well as antisocial behaviour, document management, telephony and email management systems.

Riverside handles 500,000 telephone and email interactions per year through its call centre, and this traffic is expected to increase rapidly and grow in complexity in the lead up to and after the introduction of the forthcoming welfare reforms.

Riverside's users will have access to all the information they need in both customer- and property centric views within a unified desktop. The resulting 360-degree view will show geographic and property information with linked family, tenancy, and personal information, as well as related data such as assets, alerts, tasks and service requests.

For example, during any interaction with a tenant, the call centre staff can be prompted or alerted about issues such as outstanding arrears, service requests and gas servicing, and any other data relevant to the interaction such as disabilities and profile information.

Richard Lyon, IT project manager, Riverside Housing, said, "Lagan Enterprise allows us to not only fundamentally change how we interact with our customers across all channels, but also maintain consistency and quality of service.

"Lagan Enterprise enables our staff to handle more calls more effectively and it will also give us clearer insights into our operational performance."

MOBILE WORKING

Vivark in the cloud with Oneserve

Housing repairs and maintenance provider Vivark is mobilising its workforce with a new cloud-based service from Oneserve. The field service management software and tablet devices will be used to improve collaboration and communication between Vivark's 160 field operatives and its office-based staff, call centre teams and contractors.

Oneserve was launched in 2011, having been originally developed as the in-house system at Connaught. Oneserve bought the rights to the system when Connaught went into administration. Vivark is part of the First Ark Group.

The Oneserve system will be mainly used for Vivark's void management services, which demands close working between the company's 50 void workers and a number of contractors to turn around vacant properties quickly. In future, the system will also be developed for use in gas servicing, supply chains, customer relationships and stock management.

The software includes a mobile app that can be used to complete surveys, upload photos and log completed work, as well as a web service which allows real-time data to be passed quickly between the team, contractors and sub-contractors.

AccuServ & 1st Touch consortium supports award-winning Osborne

A consortium of technology suppliers led by 1st Touch has helped Osborne, the property services, civil engineering and construction business, to win the Institute of Customer Services' Best Application of Technology Award earlier this year. Osborne beat competitive entries from many leading UK companies, including Prudential, British Gas, RBS and Barclays.

The integrated maintenance and repairs system comprised 1st Touch for mobile data, Opti-Time (now renamed Xmbrace DRS) for dynamic job scheduling, Keyfax for diagnostics, and AccuServ for job management and costing, stock control and KPI reporting. The new system is already being used for Osborne's 15-year contract with Ascham Homes.

Nick Sterling, managing director of Osborne's Property Services team, said,

"Maintenance and repairs require a strong customer services ethos, backed up by the technology and logistics to deliver it effectively. We are the only company from the social housing sector to be recognised at these awards and are pleased to have stood up to scrutiny against much bigger companies."

Osborne reported that the four technology companies' individual packages are seamlessly integrated and fast. This means that when the call centre takes a new call from a resident, the property is quickly located in AccuServ and Keyfax is automatically launched with the selected property already loaded. The call handler is then guided through the job diagnosis by a series of user-configured scripts which result in the correct priority and SOR codes. Once confirmed, the job is created in AccuServ and passed to Opti-Time, with

the call handler immediately presented with the job in Opti-Time to be appointed, while the resident is still on the phone.

Osborne is now making almost 100 per cent of appointments on the first resident contact. The job is dynamically scheduled by Opti-Time, despatched to the operative's 1st Touch PDA, and automatically updated in AccuServ, with variations to material and labour costs and SOR codes all captured at source.

Robert Dent, CEO, 1st Touch, said, "As outsourcing becomes more common, it's imperative that contractors use the best technology in order to deliver better and more economical services for repairs and maintenance to housing providers. Mobile plays a big part in this because they can manage their workforces so much better."

Halton Housing selects 1st Touch for responsive repairs

Halton Housing Trust has completed the first stage of a widespread implementation of a mobile working system from 1st Touch. The PDA-based system is already being used by 25 of the housing provider's responsive repairs workers and will eventually be available to all customer-facing staff.

Halton Housing's previous mobile technology had a number of limitations and was difficult to deploy across different areas of the business. The catalyst for the change was the housing provider's implementation of a new Aareon housing management system.

Carole Galsworthy, director of ICT and business improvement, Halton Housing Trust said, "We were aware of the benefits of

mobile technology as our aim is to get staff out of the office and to ensure that everyone can work when, where and how they want.

"When we upgraded to the Aareon QL housing management system, it was the ideal time to review our mobile strategy. 1st Touch not only had an existing integration link to Aareon, but also there were things that its software could do that would have been difficult to do with our previous system."

The most notable benefit of the 1st Touch system is that Halton Housing can now capture everything it and its customers need while talking to them in the comfort of their own homes.

Galsworthy said, "With the 1st Touch system, we gain the efficiencies derived from having workers who don't need to return to base between each visit, making them more productive as well as saving time and fuel.

"In addition, because 1st Touch is a real-time system, it provides good data visibility so that our customer services team now know the exact progress of all field-based jobs when talking to customers."

Halton Housing now plans to introduce the 1st Touch system into other business areas such as housing services, voids management and the regeneration and investment team.

Peak-Ryzex & 1st Touch mobilise £200,000 of savings for South Yorkshire Housing

Claire Sockett, Systems Development Manager, South Yorkshire Housing Association

South Yorkshire Housing Association has reported that it has saved over £200,000 and completed more than 1,100 extra jobs during its first year of using a mobile working system from Peak-Ryzex and 1st Touch.

South Yorkshire Housing's responsive repairs team previously used a paper-based scheduling process for managing all maintenance and repair jobs. This was time consuming and led to considerable amounts of duplicated work. It also meant that the 15-strong team had to go to the depot every morning to receive job information.

South Yorkshire Housing needed a mobile system that would integrate with its existing systems, including its Aareon housing management system. It also wanted to have a real-time picture of its workers' locations, which in turn ties in with the housing provider's health and safety and lone worker strategies.

South Yorkshire Housing chose a mobile working solution from 1st Touch. As part of the overall solution, 1st Touch recommended its partner Peak-Ryzex who helped in the choice of a suitable mobile

device, with South Yorkshire Housing opting for the semi-rugged yet easy to use Motorola ES400.

Peak-Ryzex also provided a range of mobility services for South Yorkshire Housing, including device deployment through its 'gold build' service to ensure

consistent device set-up, a next-day exchange service for damaged or lost devices and on-going maintenance and support.

The integrated mobile system enables real-time job scheduling that can easily and quickly take into consideration any emergencies or changes to the workforce. The repairs team receive their scheduled jobs every morning on their Motorola devices, with their job rota optimised to take their home address into account, so they don't waste time making unnecessarily long or convoluted journeys.

Claire Sockett, systems development manager, South Yorkshire Housing Association, said, "We have seen enormous benefit from the changeover. Not only have we saved significant amounts of money, but we have also improved the productivity of our workforce so that we can now give our residents faster and more efficient services."

GIS & MAPPING

Greenfields Housing launches StatNav online planning service

Greenfields Community Housing and Braintree District Council have teamed up to launch a website that allows them for the first time to see detailed information about affordable housing needs in over 55 locations across the district. The Housing StatNav website was funded by the Community Housing Investment Partnership Fund.

The data on Housing StatNav includes the profile of existing affordable housing, the number and types of homes which become available to let each year, waiting times, the profile of applicants waiting for homes and other relevant information. The website's data is being taken from both organisations' existing systems.

Housing StatNav provides detailed information which can be used to guide the best mix for new affordable housing developments. It also helps housing staff to advise local residents who are on the waiting list how long they may need to wait and what kind of homes are available.

Phil Adams, chief executive, Greenfields Community Housing, said, "One of the most exciting outcomes of the website is that it will help to guide what type and size of new, affordable homes are built and ties in with our commitment to addressing the ongoing housing needs of the Braintree area."

Lady Patricia Newton, cabinet member for planning and property, Braintree District Council, said, "Housing staff have already been using data provided by the project to advise applicants of likely waiting times and to tell people about the number of homes in the areas where they want to live."

Clearview gives Festival 'single version of the truth'

Lee Parkes, Head of Performance Improvement, Festival Housing Group

Festival Housing Group has completed the implementation of a comprehensive upgrade to its Clearview performance management system. The new system gives the housing provider a 'single version of the truth' for over 70 KPIs, based on 21 million rows of data.

Having been a Clearview customer since 2005, the upgrade to Clearview's web-based Performance Scorecard v2 has enabled Festival Housing to automatically feed data into the system without manual intervention, and to categorise KPIs in multiple ways to enable low-level analysis of data and spot 'root cause' problems quickly.

Lee Parkes, head of performance improvement, Festival Housing Group, said, "Back in 2009, we lacked confidence in the accuracy of the reported data. There were issues concerning a common understanding of the business rules being used when sourcing information and there was a 'cottage industry' servicing the information needs of the business because too much knowledge was in the heads of just a few members of staff.

"Performance Scorecard v2 gave us the opportunity to build a 'single version of the truth'; a definitive information resource that everyone in the organisation could use. We could cut the risks associated with sourcing accurate information and reduce our dependence on key resources."

Based on the functionality of the new Clearview software, Festival began a project to build a library of KPIs with clearly-defined and documented business rules regarding how they should be calculated, categorised and the data required sourced, alongside automating most of the data-capture processes, and then provide tailored, role-specific scorecards for people throughout the organisation.

Robert Blatchford, a business intelligence consultant hired by Festival Housing, said, "We identified over 70 KPIs of specific interest and for each we delivered a documented definition and the business rules for how to calculate it, details of where the data was held and how we would extract it, and a Microsoft SQL Integration Services package to get the data out."

Festival can now populate all of its reporting scorecards within an hour. It processes 21 million rows of data to automatically feed 10,000 records into Clearview to populate the 71 KPIs and their categories, saving the housing provider over 10 man-days each month.

Parkes said, "We now have a clearly-defined and documented set of KPIs that are used throughout Festival Housing, and the ability to analyse by category gives us a rounded perspective and analysis on each KPI. People no longer ask to have data amended in the reports because the source system is right, and as it's so easy to populate Clearview, we can run the capture routines again if necessary to pick up any late data."

Clearview and HouseMark partner to simplify PI data submissions

Clearview has developed a free integration service within its performance scorecard module to ease and streamline the upload of performance data to HouseMark's benchmarking products.

The Clearview performance scorecard module includes HouseMark's key performance indicators as standard. Clearview customers can now capture data against these indicators and simply upload it to HouseMark's E-form. This integration simplifies the data collection process, removes the double entry of performance information and improves data integrity.

Mark Hobart, managing director, Clearview Systems, said, "We are delighted to ease the data collection and submission process for our customers via the integration of our performance scorecard module with the national data provider, HouseMark. We are not charging for this service, and it's a direct result of customers asking for further ways of improving efficiency and adding value."

Vicky Johnson, director of benchmarking, HouseMark, said, "We are always looking for ways to make data collection quicker and easier. This initiative enables all performance data to be transferred from Clearview systems into HouseMark's E-form, significantly reducing the time taken to complete the submission."

CACI wins five-year OfficeBase deal with Housing 21

Housing 21, the UK's largest non-profit care provider, has given CACI a five-year contract to implement its OfficeBase software as a single, integrated care and services management system. This is one of the largest implementations of OfficeBase, covering the delivery of 100,000 care hours per week across 240 local authority and private contracts, as well as the scheduling and pay for over 7,500 staff.

Housing 21 is implementing the system as part of a wider transformation agenda, prompted by shifts in funding streams and a government drive to give those receiving care more flexibility and localised control of the services they receive.

OfficeBase will coordinate all the information, people and processes necessary to deliver Housing 21's portfolio of care and support services, including domiciliary care, re-enablement, end-of-life care, extra care and day care. The CACI system will manage the end-to-end processes with Housing 21's customers, contractual and billing arrangements with suppliers, and HR aspects such as on-boarding, training, compliance and pay.

Dominic Rothwell, director of business development, Housing 21, said, "The implementation of the services management system represents a large-scale business change. Having a single integrated system and improved business processes will result in better service delivery, increased levels of compliance, better rostering, and planning and improvements to billing and payroll."

Exponential-e moves Viridian into the cloud

Viridian Housing has recently completed the transformation of its IT service infrastructure and datacentre which is now available as a cloud-based service from Exponential-e. The move to the cloud will provide Viridian's 850 employees with a more flexible working environment and shift its ICT costs to a more efficient pay-by-usage model.

Viridian's cloud access is supported by Exponential-e's national 100 gigabit Ethernet core, Layer 2 VPLS network. A network link from the datacentre connects Viridian's London headquarters with its regional offices in the Midlands and West Sussex. This high-capacity network is critical to ensuring solid access to Viridian's cloud-based services, which manage everything from customer enquiries and payments to supplier and contractor coordination.

Phil Copperwheat, head of systems, Viridian Housing, said, "We needed to align IT costs more closely to the size and shape of the business and this informed our decision to move to a cloud-based model. Exponential-e's solution has been critical in enabling us to deploy the right technologies to meet our business goals."

Exponential-e has also installed an end-to-end management service that oversees Viridian's critical systems, including a virtual datacentre and disaster recovery. This guarantees that Viridian's critical data is constantly backed up and provides it with rapid access to any necessary information in the case of an unexpected outage.

Mukesh Bavisi, managing director, Exponential-e, said, "Rather than investing in bespoke, internal ICT infrastructure that is difficult and expensive to expand or adapt, Viridian can now access services on a pay-per-use basis. For example, it could pay for additional cloud storage to manage a spike in activity during a particular month and then return to a lower level when demand falls."

Viridian started researching potential suppliers in March last year. The project then began in July 2012 and was completed two months later.
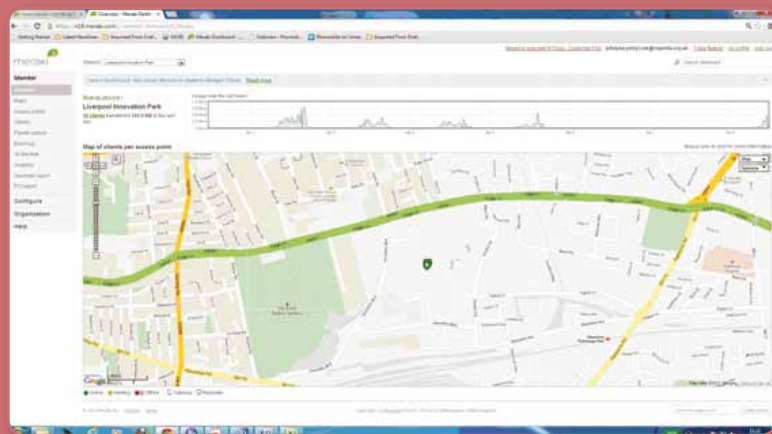
Regenda 100 per cent wireless with Cisco Meraki

The Regenda Group is using cloud-based technology from Cisco Meraki to turn its new Merseyside office into a completely wireless environment, with two Cisco Meraki wireless access points connecting the housing provider's array of mobile equipment to its corporate data network. The system was implemented by the Cisco partner Equanet.

John Paul Petryczuk, ICT mobile systems manager, The Regenda Group, said, "With Cisco Meraki technology running in the cloud there is no need for physical controllers, and without the need of complex integration methods, the set-up and installation of the equipment was completed within two weeks."

The system uses Radius Server for secure authentication to Regenda's corporate data network and allows a variety of devices to connect to the wireless network, including Wyse terminals, and multiple SSIDs to allow guest internet access.

The system's browser-based dashboard makes it easy to use and removes the need for additional staff time to manage the devices. It also paves the way for Regenda to introduce a 'bring your own device' strategy.

Petryczuk said, "The ease with which the browser-based dashboard functions work and the speed at which the access points can be deployed means that all of Regenda's remote office locations and depots will be equipped with the Cisco Meraki technology within a matter of weeks.

"The product also includes self-billing functionality, whereby credits can be bought in return for access to the internet. This could theoretically provide us with an additional revenue stream by charging staff for personal internet access on their own smartphones and tablets."

WCHT signs seven-year managed services contract with Sovereign

Watford Community Housing has just signed a seven-year contract with Sovereign Business Integration Group for a completely outsourced ICT infrastructure. WCHT previously had a hybrid service delivery model made up of some in-house staff and some outsourced infrastructure support. The contract began at the beginning of April 2013 following a six-month transition.

Sovereign is contracted to supply a complete ICT service, comprising fully outsourced IT infrastructure and desktop management, a 24/7 service desk and full networking covering WAN, LAN and internet access management. The contract also includes telephony and call centre support, and disaster recovery planning and annual testing.

Sovereign's overall service is underpinned with a continuous service improvement programme covering application development, project management and business improvement activities.

The contract also includes Sovereign's support for WCHT's in-house business applications; something that was not available from any other potential supplier without the use of third party resources.

Julie Robinson, resources director, Watford Community Housing Trust, said, "Applications support was very important and we were impressed by Sovereign's expertise in this area, which was more extensive than any other supplier."

Black Country Housing goes virtual

David Saunders, Finance Director, Black Country Housing Group

Black Country Housing Group had an IT infrastructure that was beginning to struggle to meet the demands of the organisation, and we recognised that we needed to invest further to secure the long-term stability and efficiency of our IT. Having made some investments in new blade technology, we also wanted to look at how to capitalise on that investment as part of the new solution, as well as provide scalability so we can integrate other servers at a later date.

Operating with only a small internal IT team, we decided to bring in a specialist IT consultant who could help us develop our long-term IT strategy, as well as source an appropriate solution to meet our needs. Alex Freeman joined BCHG on an interim basis at the beginning of this year and began a review of our requirements to drive the development of our IT strategy for the next 2-3 years. The main objectives of our strategy then provided the basis for the implementation of a new solution:

• Supporting front-line staff to deliver excellent services by providing fast, reliable access to information.
• Delivering value for money, both through effective procurement and by enabling more efficient working.
• Contributing significantly to the group's green goals.
• Enabling IT staff to be technically skilled, have an understanding of the business, and be able to support users in gaining maximum advantage from our systems.

Our operating environment has changed a lot and new technologies are being developed rapidly. This has created many new challenges for us:

• Growing demands on our ageing IT infrastructure resulting in an increasing amounts of system downtime, which affects the performance of end-users; IT uptime is critical.
• The changing needs of our remote and mobile workforce and the ability to manage job allocations to our engineers better because our communications infrastructure was no longer suitable for enabling real-time updates on jobs.
• Increasing demands on senior managers and non-executive directors' time meant that we needed to find better ways of enabling our senior colleagues to communicate, including virtual meetings.

During the review process, we also found out that many of the challenges we faced now were due to the IT infrastructure not being able to adapt and grow in line with our organisational needs. Therefore, a key requirement for the new solution was to ensure resilience and stability, as well as future-proof the business. It was also vital that the new IT infrastructure minimised our impact on the environment in line with our green policy.

Working with the senior team, Alex Freeman identified OGL Computers, an established IT supplier based in Worcestershire, to be our IT partner on the project.

The first phase of the project was to replace our existing Exchange email server and domain controller/file server to improve the user experience and reduce the level of IT downtime. This was done quickly and quietly with no impact on our staff during their working day, and the immediate improvements in efficiency have been excellent.

The second phase was to tackle the overall flexibility, stability and resilience of our core IT infrastructure. OGL Computers' solution consolidated our 11 existing servers, retaining the new blade servers and reducing the number down to just three servers. This has reduced our hardware support, power and cooling costs, as well as lowered both our physical server and carbon footprints. OGL Computers also implemented a VMware vCentre centralised management system so our internal IT team can manage our entire server farm from a single console which has improved efficiency, performance and productivity, all of which are vital with such a small team. The use of multiple virtual servers transferring data over a high-speed LAN has resulted in a robust network which caters for any hardware failure, switching from one to another, with no disruption to the end-user.

In order to implement a disaster recovery strategy, OGL Computers installed an offsite backup server in another office with Veeam backup and replication software for the virtual servers connected to an external network-attached storage device so that files or entire virtual servers can be quickly re-deployed in the event of a disaster.

To further enhance our business continuity plan, OGL Computers suggested an innovative way of removing single points of failure by implementing dual storage area network controllers and chassis with RAID-configured hard disks, switching power and connectivity to ensure network uptime is maintained.

Despite the complexity and significant structural change to our IT infrastructure, the entire project was delivered with minimal disruption; equipment was installed during the day and data transfers took place during the evenings and at weekends to avoid any downtime for staff. The project was delivered within extremely short lead times and the innovative approach to the system has also resulted in us now having the latest virtual technologies which will support us now and into the future, and all within our budget.

We have already started to see some financial savings, but we expect these savings to be even greater over the coming years. Minimising our environmental impact is very important to us and we are now confident that our new IT infrastructure will be a great help in achieving this.

David Saunders is the finance director of Black Country Housing Group.

A design for assisted living

Kevin Beirne, Group Director of Housing Care & Support, One Housing Group

Specialised housing with telehealth support will play a key role in building integrated and sustainable communities for the future with technology at the core.

There's no place like home, especially when it comes to helping older people and those with care needs to maintain their well-being and independence within their communities. This is why there's a growing drive to integrate housing provision with health and social care.

Although this integration is in its early stages, I believe the housing sector's skills and resources will be very important in helping social care and health providers sustain services when budgets are shrinking and give a better experience for people. Our experience of providing these services to a wide range of people makes a strong case for shifting long-term care away from hospitals and care homes, and improving outcomes for patients at a quarter of the price.

But how can housing providers ensure they deliver the right facilities and support for vulnerable people? In my view, it all starts with the design of the accommodation itself.

Building in care

Six years ago, One Housing Group decided to fully embrace telecare technology and make it a core part of our services. As well as expanding our own services, we wanted to promote aspiration, independence and social mobility among our residents and increase the choice and personalisation of services.

We saw that telecare was key to improving services and outcomes for individuals, and to delivering significant operational and maintenance benefits for us. So we built the technology into our accommodation and services as a fundamental component, not an add-on. This enabled true personalisation according to residents' needs. Taking a closer look at how telecare achieves this, let's look at a few examples of the types of accommodation we offer:

Extra care schemes and sheltered housing

Mixed populations of active older people alongside those with higher care requires flexible solutions to mitigating individual risks, such as falls, and telecare allows complete personalisation and unobtrusive support for residents. Telecare also enables easier overall management of the developments, boosting staff efficiency by negating the need for monitoring checks.

Specialist retirement schemes

One Housing is currently planning to build specialist retirement schemes featuring 80-100 homes along with communal facilities. It is expected that telecare will feature highly in the specification, enabling staff to cover the full spectrum of need. The latest telecare solutions support the efficient management of services by giving scheme managers a 'dashboard' view of calls and alerts, freeing up resources for those residents who may need urgent attention.

Building telecare technology into the design and fabric of accommodation allows us to support a much larger and more diverse group of residents without the need to increase resources. Our staff no longer need to make dozens or hundreds of routine risk-related checks, so they can focus instead on more meaningful contact with individuals, while still ensuring that full support is available in the event of an emergency.

Evidence for telecare

By using telecare, we are providing a service that is more cost effective than registered care or nursing accommodation, and we are offering better outcomes and increased satisfaction for people with long-term care needs. It reduces the number of hospital admissions related to incidents such as falls, and provides care and support for people to better manage their conditions. Furthermore, it also gives us a business edge over other housing providers.

For example, Bradford's Partnership for Older People Project provides intensive support to older people with mental health problems at risk of institutional care. The programme found that 26 per cent of users were prevented from being admitted to a care home, and a further 13 per cent avoided a hospital admission. There was a 29 per cent reduction in homecare hours following intervention, and at full capacity it was estimated that the programme would save £550,000 each year.

Working with a dedicated technology partner, we can provide a reliable service using a complete range of solutions, from door entry and fire systems to supporting re-ablement, reducing falls, clinical monitoring or tablet-based systems to connect individuals to family and services.

It's difficult to predict what the future holds in terms of the provision of care services and who will pay for those services. Recent market reviews such as the Dilnot Commission's report on how to reform funding for adult social care had few concrete proposals, leaving many people unclear about their options.

However, it's certain that telehealth and telecare technologies give us, as housing providers, the opportunity to offer our tenants a range of services to help ensure their long-term independence and wellbeing, regardless of future government policies or mandates.

Kevin Beirne is group director of housing care and support at One Housing Group.

Powerline internet access trial for tenants at Glasgow Housing Association

Glasgow Housing Association is trialling the delivery of internet access to some of its tenants using powerline technology from Power Ethernet.

GHA is using Powerline Sockets to share and deliver a single internet connection to six flats. The sockets use the existing mains electrical cabling within a home to deliver a fast and reliable data connection, avoiding the cost and disruption of needing to run new cabling through walls and floors.

Evelyn McDowall, lead for digital inclusion, Glasgow Housing Association, said, "Over the next couple of years, the drive by UK and Scottish Governments to put most public services online, including welfare benefits, makes it vital for tenants to have email and internet access. This is why we

are looking at schemes like this to see how we can roll out internet access to all of our tenants in the future."

Internet access is provided through a TalkTalk superfast broadband contract, and each socket has four Ethernet ports and was installed by local installation company City Building. VLAN intelligent

switching built into each Powerline Socket ensures that data is shielded between properties.

James Gardiner, marketing director, Power Ethernet, said, "There is still a large part of the UK population that can't afford a broadband connection. Housing providers are in a strong position to approach this because they can address connectivity 'per-block', rather than per-tenant, as the GHA scheme shows.

"With the Powerline Socket, we can bring an entire block of flats online within hours, and because it shares a form factor with a standard mains socket and is wired identically, installation can be completed quickly by a local electrician."

Bring your own device

Housing Technology interviewed experts on the 'bring your own device' (BYOD) trend from Accellion, Diligent Boardbooks, JMC IT, MET, Microsoft, Oneserve and Sovereign Business Integration Group to find out how BYOD is relevant to housing providers, its advantages and disadvantages, its different delivery models and who is driving its adoption in housing.

The BYOD trend stems from the widespread adoption of smartphones, tablet devices and, to a lesser extent, laptops. As a greater proportion of workers had easier access to computing power that was previously confined to desktop PCs and laptops, the boundaries between personal and work use became blurred. In short, BYOD is about letting employees use their own devices for work, ranging from simple applications such as corporate email and calendars to allowing users to access line-of-business applications and collaborative platforms. According to JMC IT, around 80 per cent of employees now use their own smartphones, tablets and laptops to access work applications.

Charles Brooks, the principal consultant at Sovereign Business Integration Group, said, "BYOD has exploded due to the consumerisation of IT and the ever increasing use of smart phones. Employees now bring their devices to work in the same way that they would bring their packed lunch."

> "Employees now bring their devices to work in the same way that they would bring their packed lunch."
>
> Charles Brooks, Principal Consultant, Sovereign Business Integration Group

Enterprise security specialists Gemalto recently surveyed 400 people from a cross-section of UK businesses with 3,000+ employees to find out about their IT security policies. A third of the respondents said that they used their own devices to work on corporate networks, despite 15 per cent of them admitting that their IT department didn't know about their device usage. All of the C-level executives and directors taking part in Gemalto's survey used at least one personal device at work, and of the wider BYOD users, 43 per cent didn't have the latest security software on the personal devices they used at work.

> "How you deliver BYOD depends on how much security you want. If you are looking for higher levels of security and control, you should be considering mobile device management solutions."
>
> Jes Breslaw, EMEA Marketing Director, AccellionNetcall

Different delivery models

As with all other areas of technology, there are many different models for BYOD, not only in terms of how much access is given to corporate application and data, but also in terms of how the devices are funded, owned and maintained.

Jes Breslaw, EMEA marketing director for Accellion, said, "How you deliver BYOD depends on how much security you want. If you are looking for higher levels of security and control, you should be considering mobile device management (MDM) solutions such as MobileIron or Good Technology. For example, if an employee is leaving acrimoniously, do you want to be able to remotely wipe the work-related emails and documents on their phone? MDM will also enable you to restrict the use of free consumer file-sharing applications like DropBox and enforce the use of secure alternatives."

Brooks from Sovereign said, "There used to be one model which enabled employees to access work-related content on their own device and use this device anywhere, albeit with little corporate control. Now companies are using MDM so that each device can be controlled via one corporate environment. This increases data security and enables all users to share upgrades, information and usability of software."

What constitutes a 'personal device' can vary from a typical smartphone owned and paid for by the employee to perhaps a tablet bought by the employee using either a lump sum or a monthly allowance paid by their employer, a model that Accellion's Breslaw described as, "CYOD – choose your own device."

Mark Summers, head of technology sales at JMC IT, said, "At its simplest, housing providers can adopt BYOD in two simple ways, either by offering employees a lump sum to cover the cost of their primary work device instead of buying it for them or they can be given a monthly allowance, much as they might offer employees a company

car. The next step is to combine this with a flexible working strategy, which can be achieved alongside BYOD in a variety of ways depending on the organisation's attitude to risk, data security and how they want their staff to access corporate information and applications."

Advantages of BYOD

For housing providers, BYOD presents considerable cost savings because, in most cases, the employee will be paying for the device and any monthly contract fees. For the housing staff, BYOD means that they no longer need to use one work device as well as one personal device.

Dominic Harrington, client services director at Oneserve, said, "First and foremost, BYOD offers huge capital savings, simply because a housing provider doesn't have to give its staff a tablet or smartphone. They can simply bring their own, and for a housing provider with 100 field-based workers and devices costing £200 each, BYOD could deliver an immediate saving of £20,000."

> "At its simplest, housing providers can adopt BYOD in two simple ways, either by offering employees a lump sum to cover the cost of their primary work device instead of buying it for them or they can be given a monthly allowance, much as they might offer employees a company car."
>
> Mark Summers, Head of Technology Sales, JMC IT

Kelvin McGlynn, business development manager at MET, added, "A controlled deployment of BYOD is one of those rare win-win situations. Housing staff will have greater flexibility, a better way of working and improved morale, while the housing provider can reduce its financial overheads and the IT department can ease the administrative burden, reduce its costs and complexity while still controlling security and maintenance."

The effect of BYOD on IT teams is often over-shadowed by concerns about security, but these can be outweighed by the maintenance and software lifecycle benefits of BYOD. Jeff Jones, director of security for Microsoft UK, said, "We can't ignore the cost savings related to device maintenance. Employee familiarity with their personal device leads to fewer support calls, and

Bring your own device

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the employees themselves, rather than the IT staff, will ensure the product is up-to-date. Another benefit of BYOD for housing providers is that individual users tend to upgrade to the latest hardware, and migrate to the newest software platforms much faster than their employers. The business therefore is able to take advantage of cutting-edge technology without the pain and expense of a massive hardware refresh or software upgrade."

> "For a housing provider with 100 field-based workers and devices costing £200 each, BYOD could deliver an immediate saving of £20,000."
>
> Dominic Harrington, Client Services Director, Oneserve

Bring your own disaster?

The most-commonly cited disadvantage of BYOD naturally concerns data security. Smartphones and tablets can be easily lost or stolen, and fraudsters and hackers are increasingly targeting mobile devices because they are usually less protected against viruses and malware. BYOD is therefore a two-way street in terms of data integrity and security as it could lead to 'data leakage', whether deliberately or unwittingly, from the corporate network at the same time as providing a conduit for the introduction of malware into corporate networks.

> "Face it and embrace it – assess what you need, design the solution, deploy it and support it, and then sit back and watch productivity rocket."
>
> Kelvin McGlynn, Business Development Manager, MET

Mascha van Eijk, EMEA sales director for Diligent Boardbooks, said, "The security of the corporate network and its content is a big concern for IT teams as far as BYOD is concerned. The key way of securing corporate data is to ensure that employees are aware of the company's IT policy, and, more importantly, actually adhere to it. Another key element is to have protocols for basics like username and password, and not using the same ones across social media sites and corporate logins."

JMC IT's Summers added, "There are some obvious challenges that housing providers need to address and work with their IT partner in order to make BYOD and, if they choose to, mobile working a success. For example, how do personal devices connect to the corporate network and run applications or access data, particularly if

the device is not Windows-based? And how is data security maintained, are individual's devices equipped with malware protection, and what about software licensing? If you're serious about BYOD, then providing adequate anti-virus software and security guidance will minimise the risks."

The use of personal devices to access corporate information also has a compliance and regulatory aspect to it. As MET's McGlynn explained, "The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has published its advice on BYOD, making it clear that data protection remains the responsibility of the data controller, not the owner of the device. Therefore, in some instances, the costs of applying additional security combined with the usage restrictions being applied to a personal device may actually outweigh the original benefits being sought."

While BYOD may reduce the workload for some parts of housing providers' IT departments, the variety of devices and operating systems and the vagaries of individual end-users may cause other headaches for IT staff. Sovereign's Brooks said, "Smartphones and tablets run on many different systems so BYOD means that IT teams must be ready to deal with all eventualities for all devices. Furthermore, many employees will be self-trained on the use of their device and therefore may not be using it correctly, causing additional issues for the IT team. This poses the question: does your IT department have sufficient staff and resources to manage BYOD efficiently?"

Is BYOD right for you?

It is clear that BYOD offers considerable financial and productivity advantages, but these are balanced by the resources needed to implement a BYOD strategy properly, and its inherent corporate and regulatory risks. The relevance of BYOD to a housing provider will depend on many criteria, such as its size, the maturity of its IT infrastructure, the availability of IT resources, the willingness of senior management to champion and support the chosen strategy, and its corporate attitude to risk.

> "Employee familiarity with their personal device leads to fewer support calls, and the employees themselves, rather than the IT staff, will ensure the product is up-to-date."
>
> Jeff Jones, Director of Security, Microsoft UK

Van Eijk from Diligent Boardbooks said, "Look at your current IT team and work out whether you want to offer the same tools that BYOD can offer, but on the company's own devices. BYOD can be an expensive strategy if your IT team is relatively small,

and you might want to consider which particular applications are available to BYOD devices, or only allow a limited number of variations, such as Pads in the boardroom and for senior management."

> "BYOD can be an expensive strategy if your IT team is relatively small, so take the time to establish whether BYOD is really going to make your employees more effective or if it is something that is merely 'nice to have'."
>
> Mascha van Eijk, EMEA Sales Director, Diligent Boardbooks

McGlynn from MET added, "As a BYOD user myself, I'm an evangelist on the subject so I would say that if BYOD isn't the right strategy for all housing providers now, it will be very soon. BYOD is an inevitable consequence of how society is adopting technology, and if housing providers want to recruit and retain talented staff, their working environments must mirror these cultural changes by giving employees flexible options."

Sovereign's Brooks simply said, "It's not compulsory to have a BYOD policy, and in some cases, the disadvantages may outweigh the positives."

Implementing BYOD

Having decided to embark on a BYOD strategy, its assessment, implementation and ongoing management should be treated in the same way as any other large-scale IT project affecting the entire organisation. Its potential benefits, risk, viability and costs need to be measured and planned, followed by testing it using a pilot project and gaining widespread support across relevant departments and people within the organisation, and finally full-scale implementation and ongoing monitoring.

Diligent Boardbooks' Van Eijk said, "Start with the basic questions: is this something we want to invest time and money in? Do we have the right skills in-house to manage all of the different devices in a secure and controlled manner? Do we have a policy already or do we need to create one? Is this really going to make our employees more effective or is it something that is merely 'nice to have'?"

McGlynn from MET said, "Face it and embrace it – assess what you need, design the solution, deploy it and support it, and then sit back and watch productivity rocket. However, don't neglect data protection because although the ICO hasn't yet fined anyone for data loss from a personal device, it has made it clear they are taking the issue very seriously."

Bring your own device

Continued from previous page

Oneserve's Harrington explained, "Be open to BYOD – involve end-users of mobile devices in discussions about the potential adoption of BYOD, and focus on its benefits, the potential pitfalls and what's right for your organisation. But, with BYOD only expected to increase in popularity, you should start engaging with your end-users right now."

Pull or push?

Originally, BYOD was driven by end-users who finally had access to mobile computing capabilities and therefore wanted to use their smartphones and tablets in a corporate context. At first, this was seen as something that organisations would merely tolerate and begrudgingly accept, but as BYOD has become a mainstream strategy and more and more end-users have their own devices, organisations have started to understand its benefits to them and begun to actively promote BYOD. So, is BYOD being 'pulled' by end-user demands or 'pushed' by housing providers?

MET's McGlynn said, "Until now, it has been 'pull' from end users but that needs to change. We are seeing the emergence of a strategic approach to BYOD in some areas which is encouraging, but there are still a huge number of housing providers who risk data loss because end-users will be using their own devices in an uncontrolled manner."

Summers from JMC IT added, "At the moment, BYOD is being driven by a natural shift from employees who want to access their work applications from their mobile phones and home devices, but IT departments and housing providers themselves are waking up to the benefits of how this can support a mobile working strategy."

Housing providers should be wary about the choice and variety of devices and operating systems. Harrington from Oneserve said, "While employees feel more motivated, comfortable and happier using their own device at work, operational, IT and procurement teams are embracing BYOD too. However, 'future jam' is often cited, where a housing provider gets tied to a single operating system and OS-related devices; when the devices are in short supply or the operating system becomes obsolete, that's when the jam starts."

Typical BYOD users

Several years ago, when BYOD was in its infancy, demand for BYOD was usually coming from younger members of staff who were among the first to embrace smartphones and tablets. Now that such devices are ubiquitous, demand for BYOD is coming from everyone, from board members and senior executives, mobile workers and 'generation Y' staff.

Van Eijk from Diligent Boardbooks said, "Anyone can be a BYOD user, but the reasons behind the choice vary, from young professionals who are used to working with mobile devices from an early age, to seasoned executives who travel frequently. Executives also tend to adopt new technology to save themselves and the company time and money by being in constant contact with the office."

Brooks from Sovereign added, "BYOD users are drawn from all generations but the main advocates of BYOD are 'generation Y'. The supporters of BYOD are usually those people who are very active in social media and want to be available and on the go at all times."

Conclusion

BYOD isn't something that can be dismissed as a short-term fad; it's now a mainstream area of technology and therefore needs to be considered alongside other operational requirements. BYOD could apply to everyone in your organisation, with the consequent financial and productivity benefits. Data leakage and security are certainly the main obstacles to the adoption of BYOD but they should be considered as part of the wider picture such as existing data transfer processes to and from your organisation using free file-sharing sites and USB memory sticks.

Housing Technology would like to thank Jes Breslaw (Accellion), Charles Brooks (Sovereign Business Integration Group), Dominic Harrington (Oneserve), Jeff Jones (Microsoft), Kelvin McGlynn (MET), Mark Summers (JMC IT) and Mascha van Eijk (Diligent Boardbooks) for contributing to this article. Please email news@housing-technology.com if you would like to contribute to our future feature articles.

BancTec wins document management contract at Hounslow Homes

Hounslow Homes is in the middle of implementing an electronic document and records management system from BancTec and its partner Serengeti Systems.

The first implementation of the BancTec EDRMS will be in Hounslow Homes' antisocial behaviour and tenancy departments before it is made available to more than 300 users across the rest of the organisation over the next three years. The overall goal is to improve the effectiveness of information storage and usage across Hounslow Homes and help meet efficiency and service delivery objectives.

Ray Nwanze, head of IT, Hounslow Homes, said, "We process hundreds of documents every day, including forms, customer letters, emails and notes. In addition, our head office holds approximately 400,000 microfiche and each regional office holds about 30,000 paper documents.

"Changing to an electronic document management system will ensure that we operate more efficiently by simplifying access to, and better managing, our company records."

The BancTec system will integrate with existing IT systems and processes, such as Northgate's housing management system and Lagan's CRM system. This implementation is based on Serengeti Systems' document scanning and records management software.

Steve Downey, general manager, BancTec, said, "Our system will reduce costs, improve access to information, reduce the number of lost or misfiled documents, and improve compliance with requests under the freedom of information and data protection acts."

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Realise possibility

What can housing learn about IT from football?

Matthew Gardiner, CEO, Trafford Housing Trust

This article is an abridged version of Martin Gardner's (CEO, Trafford Housing Trust) regular blog, in this instance written just before he was due on stage to speak at the Housing Technology 2013 conference in February.

Blog readers will know that I work in social housing and many of you know I follow a certain North London football team – not the ones who capitulate to Bayern Munich, if you want to get specific. In my life, housing and sport represent the sacred and the profane, both elements that are important to who I am, but in radically different ways.

Technology's primary purpose has to be to improve our efforts – is that true for your technology?

My passion for housing stems from the fact that it provides the foundations – literal and figurative – for everything else in human endeavour. I focus on social housing in particular because of the huge social value it creates. My passion for Spurs is simpler; where I grew up, the teenagers next door supported Arsenal and I was contrary even at that age. A lesser-known fact about me is that I am also something of a petrol-head, not in a car-owning or driving sense, but I do like to watch a bit of Formula One.

I think we can all agree that compared to housing's critical role in a healthy and fulfilling life and society, football is something of a trivial indulgence and motor-racing a grossly misjudged waste of resources; additionally both sports have the pungent whiff of elitism to them. So, on one side we have social housing – important, meaningful, heavy – and on the other we have two sports – trivial, ephemeral, froth.

So tell me this: why is it that a football manager will have at his fingertips performance statistics for all the players within moments of a match ending? How can football have real-time data on the contribution of each team member? How can something meaningless get a statistical breakdown on the opposition's key weaknesses and expect all of this information to be present without any time lag between the match ending and the data being available?

And why is it that the team managers of a Formula One pit crew have technology that predicts 'in race' results before the race is over, based on sophisticated telemetry, satellites and slick computer systems predicting failures that have not yet happened? Why is it that the same team manager expects to have at his disposal a car that automatically re-tunes its engine to optimise performance depending on whether the car is accelerating, braking, cornering or driving in a straight line, all without any human intervention?

Someone tell me how can it be that the trivial, the elitist and the inconsequential enjoy a level of technological sophistication in its business that the essential, the critical and the vital can only dream of?

Money would be the first response – and it's true that football and motor-racing are awash with money, but that is to overlook two things.

First, technology is cheap; Prozone (the 'gold standard' of football stats packages) costs teams around £200,000 a year, which is less than Gareth Bale spends on hair gel. Additionally, are housing providers so strapped for cash that they can't see how an investment of this kind would not be repaid over and over again?

Secondly, we can't say it's because the technology does not exist. Although perhaps it's because as a sector we are a bit pedestrian in specifying our requirements, we are woefully tolerant of the constraints that result from buying 'off the shelf' and 'being in the crowd'. I believe we lack the imagination or passion of our counterparts who measure success in terms of points won. Could anyone begin to describe how the housing version of Prozone would look? Do we really look to the edge that technology could bring our business and declare that it's worth it? Maybe not.

How tragic and how silly that when we should be measuring success not in terms of league positions or races won, but in terms of families housed, children reaching their potential, young people diverted from crime, our systems would not even be fit for purpose at an ambitious non-league football team, or an entry-level pro go-karting team. Can't we focus our collective imaginations on everything that a concerted software and hardware revolution could do for housing?

Commissioners – up your game, buy with imagination, ask to be impressed and demand that technology delivers incredible things to your organisations. Suppliers – deliver or disappoint.

If you had an unlimited budget and no technological barriers, what would be the technology you'd like to see available to the housing sector?

Matthew Gardiner is the CEO of Trafford Housing Trust. You can read his blog at www.housingassociations.org.

InforData reviews Genesis Housing's data management processes

InforData Consulting has completed a review and audit of Genesis Housing Association's governance and supporting processes for managing master data across the organisation.

Genesis has master data stored and replicated across a number of core business systems, and good governance methodology aims to ensure that all master data is managed and maintained within business-defined performance criteria.

After its review, InforData recommended several options to improve the housing provider's data management processes to deliver more accurate and controlled information, including more stringent data governance, a single data repository and an overall cultural change in its approach to data.

Grant Pyper, information service manager Genesis Housing Association, said, "InforData were very flexible and came up with a number of recommendations which have since been incorporated into our governance model."

Interview with Sir Clive Woodward

Whoever wins in IT tends to win in business

Sir Clive Woodward OBE, World Cup Winner and Team GB's Director of Sport for the London Olympics

George Grant, publisher of Housing Technology, had an exclusive interview with Sir Clive Woodward OBE, World Cup Winner and Team GB's Director of Sport for the London Olympics, after his keynote presentation at our 2013 annual conference.

George Grant: You know better than anyone how to get the best out of a team. What's the single most important factor in getting your team behind you?

Sir Clive Woodward: I think one of my favourite lines is, "great teams are made of great individuals", so the number one thing is to look for individual responsibility from every member of the team. It doesn't matter what role he or she is playing – we really look at your function and how you are going to improve that function. So it's understanding that yes, you are working in a team but to me, your individual responsibility is the number one thing that sets teams apart.

George Grant: Can the principles of sports leadership be applied successfully to other types of organisations, particularly housing associations which not only have staff to consider, but ultimately their key stakeholders and their tenants?

Sir Clive Woodward: Yes, absolutely. I think the way of working in partnership is absolutely crucial in sport and in business, so you must make sure all your stakeholders are aligned with what you're trying to do. But I still think the number one thing is knowledge; that the more you can actually capture knowledge and share that knowledge with the various stakeholders within the business and really always try to make marginal gains, the more effective you are going be as a business. And that applies exactly to both sport and business. It's all about how you capture knowledge, how you study it, how you then share it with the people who can actually help you and then deliver the final product.
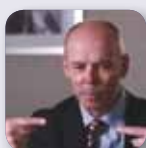
George Grant: Sir Clive, I know that when coaching you're a big advocate of planning ahead. Should this be a key strategy in the housing sector?

Sir Clive Woodward: Absolutely, I don't think you can do enough planning. In the world of sport, you are always trying to win the game on Saturday and you know you're going to be judged on fairly short-term results sometimes, and business is really no different; you still have to win the next deal and perform on a day-to-day basis. However, you must always have a long-term strategy – there is a great line about working 'on the business' as well as working 'in the business'. Many sports coaches and business leaders sometimes get so wrapped up 'in the business' that they don't give themselves any time to step back and consider the bigger picture.
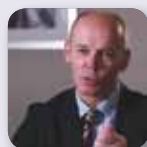
Personally, I'm planning every day, every week, every month, every quarter, every year. Although you have in the back of your mind the fact that you have to deliver at the weekend, in a sporting context, you must spend time working 'on the business' if you want to be a really effective coach or leader.

George Grant: You have had considerable business experience – how have you brought that experience to the world of sport?

Sir Clive Woodward: One of my key lines is always that whoever wins in IT tends to win. Sport is no different – if you go behind the scenes of any successful sports team, the amount of knowledge and IT that they're using is amazing. And the big thing for me is that I demand that every coach, every athlete and every player has to really learn the IT skills so that they can actually use the software and evaluate things themselves, because the more you can get them using IT to create knowledge and study, the better they're going to be.

People are often surprised when I talk about IT and sport, but every athlete must have an ability to understand their performance and find ways of doing things differently. The IT side of business is obviously huge, but again it comes down to knowledge and really using IT to increase your knowledge and beat the person you're trying to compete with.

Housing Technology: Do you believe that successful businesses, like successful sports teams, need to be open to new ideas and embrace new technologies and innovations?

Sir Clive Woodward: I think it's not only new ideas – what I find in both the business world and the sports world is that when you're doing well, you tend to go on and celebrate and without being too flippant, you go to the pub and have a glass of champagne or a beer and you celebrate. When things are not going well, it's the early Monday morning meeting and everyone's in a kind of panic.

In my opinion, you need to reverse that trend, so in other words when things aren't going well, don't over-react because you clearly don't become a bad individual or a bad team overnight, go down the pub and have a drink. But when things are going well, that's when I think you should have the early Monday morning meetings and you should really study why you've been successful, and then work out how you can do them better, how you can make marginal gains such as doing 100 things 1 per cent better.

But those gains are only possible if you actually know why you've won. And I think when you've won then new ideas start to come through. And that's what we did with the rugby team – when we started to win regularly we became really quite aggressive about why did we win, how can we do even better and not sitting back and being complacent.

It's a real change of mindset and cultural shift, but if you have that culture you will always be trying to find new ideas and thought processes, and it's also good because when you've won and things are going well, you can be quite tough in these Monday morning meetings. The time not to be tough is when things are not going well – to me, it's the opposite. When you're in a

Interview with Sir Clive Woodward

Continued from the opposite page

good position, you can be tough and people will respond because they're not threatened.

George Grant: You kind of created the term 'critical non-essentials' – could you please explain?

Sir Clive Woodward: First, you need to define critical non-essentials – they are not the big things you already know in your business, they are the real details that

you might study in the Monday morning meetings I mentioned earlier. What I've found in business and sport, most people remember you for the small things that you do and not the big things. I mean things such as "why would people remember us" or "how can we do the deal better"; these are the non-essentials insofar as life will go on if we don't do them, but if we do do them, then maybe people will remember us a little bit differently. It's a great saying,

'critical non-essentials' – they're kind of critical but they're not essential.

George Grant: Thank you.

This interview is the first in a series that Housing Technology will be conducting with high-profile figures from the housing and wider business sectors around improving business performance.

Gallions Housing protects lone workers with Skyguard

Gallions Housing Association is using Europe's smallest personal alarm to protect its lone workers. The MySoS devices allow users to discreetly raise an alarm, linked to Skyguard's UK incident management centre. Skyguard reported that the total value of its contracts with Gallions Housing was now over of £31,000.

Gallions Housing's decision to buy the MySoS devices was influenced by the fact that over half of the UK's police forces use Skyguard to protect the most vulnerable people under their protection. Skyguard has unique reference numbers (URN) for all of the UK police forces which gives the company direct access to their control rooms, allowing controllers in Skyguard's incident management centres to bypass the 999 service.

Barbara Tomlin, facilities Manager for Gallions Housing Association, said, "We wanted a fully-managed lone worker protection system for our neighbourhood service and revenue teams and grounds maintenance staff, and from personal experience, knowing that having a GPS location and not having to make a 999 call is a lot faster and more effective.

"What really set the MySOS apart from other devices was the small, compact design, and being similar to a key fob, it's discreet and only weights 40 grams. Our staff like the fact that it can be worn behind their ID badges using the optional ID accessory."

Skyguard's custom-built secure online portal gives every Skyguard customer the ability to create new users, update vital information and assign devices to different users at the click of a button, with changes made immediately.

Tomlin said, "We have a couple of pooled devices for late workers. Someone can ask me if have a spare device because they're working late tonight, and all I have to do is drag and drop the shared device onto the user in the online portal and they're instantly covered."

All of Gallions Housing's lone workers are protected 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by Skyguard. If the worker feels threatened or at risk, help is just one button away. Once they receive an alarm, Skyguard's controllers

know who the user is and where they are (via GPS positioning). The controllers will then listen to what's happening, and after reviewing all the information and the user's personalised escalation instructions a course of action is decided; police or paramedic response may be requested, Skyguard's 1,000+ vehicle national response service could be summoned, or someone designated by Gallions Housing.

TeamGB protection

Skyguard also provided around-the-clock protection to Team GB throughout the London 2012 Games. Security staff and key personnel of Great Britain's men's and women's football teams were issued MySOS personal safety devices to ensure protection wherever they were.

Affinity Sutton partners with Stone Group for affordable PCs for tenants

Affordable recycled PCs made available to housing association's tenants in drive to get residents online.

Stone Group is providing Affinity Sutton with cut-price recycled PCs as part of the housing provider's 'Get Connected' programme, set up to help get tenants online ahead of the introduction of new government initiatives such as universal credit.

The recycled PCs come with a 12-month warranty, are installed with Open Office software, or if eligible Microsoft Office 2007 Basic and Microsoft Security Essentials, and cost £133.00 including delivery and

installation. Affinity Sutton and Stone Group also ran a competition to give away 50 free PCs to tenants.

Iyabode Olaitan, a previous winner of the housing provider's 'Get Connected' programme, had to travel to a local school to use their spare computers in order to complete her Nursing Access coursework. Since then, she has saved countless hours travelling and cut her daughter's nursery school fees by £85 per month. Her savings on her nursery fees now pay her utility bills and the £40 per month she is saving on bus fares is now funding a pay-as-you-go dongle to access the internet at home on her new

PC. She said, "Since winning my PC, my work has improved and I am confident that I will pass my nursing course, helping me and my family to have a better life."

Scott McKinven, financial inclusion manager, Affinity Sutton, said, "As the government wants 80 per cent of applications for universal credit to be done online by 2017, we feel it is in our interests, and our resident's interests to have a means of getting online and accessing the services that they need. But beyond that, we recognise the wider benefits of our residents having a computer and access to the internet."

Housing Technology – Review of IT Suppliers

Housing Technology has finally published our 'Review of IT Suppliers 2013' report. The report comprises the views of over 200 senior IT executives from across the UK, based around 20+ main technology areas, and includes almost 1,000 individual ratings of IT suppliers' performance.

This report is arguably the first and most comprehensive of its kind and given the importance of IT to all housing providers' business operations, it is a 'must read' for anyone involved in influencing, procuring or managing technology. Furthermore, to ensure that there was no scope for bias, we eschewed any sponsorship of the report so that we could analyse and report the results without fear or favour.

1,000 ratings of IT suppliers

The survey respondents were asked to name their technology supplier for 20+ areas of technology and then rate their product/service around: functionality, value for money, project management & implementation, ease of integration, and technical support & customer service. A very small selection of the top-scoring results is listed below:

- **Asset management (functionality):** Keystone Asset Management & MIS-AMS
- **Customer relationship management (value for money):** Microsoft
- **Desktop hardware (functionality):** HP & Wyse
- **DR & business continuity (technical support & customer service):** Phoenix
- **Document management (project management & implementation):** Capita
- **Financial management (ease of integration):** Orchard
- **GIS & mapping (functionality):** ESRI
- **Housing management (ease of integration):** MIS-AMS
- **Human resources & payroll (value for money):** Sage
- **Job Scheduling (overall):** Xmbrace
- **Mobile working (functionality):** 1st Touch
- **Performance management (value for money):** Clearview Systems & Covalent Software
- **Repairs & maintenance (ease of integration):** Aareon
- **Virtualisation (value for money):** VMware

Senior IT endorsement

The original online survey was based on guidance from our steering committee of IT directors from many leading housing providers, including Adactus Housing, Affinity Sutton, Cadarn Housing, Circle, City West Housing Trust, Family Mosaic, Freebridge Community Housing, Futures Housing, Network Housing, Orbit Group, Pennaf Housing, RCT Homes, Richmond Housing Partnership, Riverside Group, Solihull Community Housing, Spectrum Housing, United Welsh and Yorkshire Housing.

Comprehensive coverage

In addition to the input of the steering committee, the report is based on survey data from over 200 housing providers, including A2Dominion, Aster, First Ark, Genesis Housing, Gentoo, Magna Housing, North Lincolnshire Homes, Peabody Trust, Regenda, Sanctuary Housing, Sovereign Housing, The Hyde Group, Thrive Homes, Trafford Housing Trust, Wakefield & District Housing and Worcester Community Housing.

You can order your copy of the report now from **www.housing-technology.com/report.** A PDF of the report will be emailed to you immediately followed by a printed copy shortly afterwards.

Changing attitudes

Sir – New research from the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) has found that six out of 10 companies now allow the use of employee-owned mobile devices for work. This changing attitude demonstrates quite a significant sea change among IT professionals as the BYOD debate surges forward.

By 2016, Ofcom predicts that 75 per cent of the UK population will be using a smartphone, and we now all expect to be able to access the web from wherever we are and at any time. And this is no different in the workplace.

Businesses of all sizes are reacting to this shift in working practices and are constantly on the look-out for the latest technology that can help them improve service delivery. For example, by letting employees work remotely using their own devices, organisations can save money as they no longer need to invest in clunky infrastructure. There is no reason why the technology that consumers use in their day-to-day lives cannot be applied to the working environment.

For businesses to make the most of this transformation, a new wave of web-based business software will need to be developed, to rise to the task and keep up with the technology that consumers use on a daily basis.

Martyn Rees
Housing product director, Civica

Don't forget the little things

Sir – My ALMO switched to a sub-regional choice based lettings scheme in October 2012. The mechanism prescribed to share information between our housing management system and the sub-regional systems was NDL AWIsx. NDL's universal application integration toolset enables disparate applications to be joined together cost-effectively. It allows the programmed system to interface with any application at the screen level; if a person can sit and use the systems then so can AWIsx.

During the training and implementation of the system, I spotted the potential to solve an IT problem as old as the systems themselves… the chore of a service desk having to reset users' passwords.

After some quick calculations, we found that we were manually resetting over 300 housing system passwords a year. Resetting a password might take a few seconds but when you consider the extra time wasted by the user logging the call and waiting for feedback, it can mount up considerably.

My team set to work developing a process using AWIsx to automate the request for a password. The users populate a simple web form with their housing system username and their email address. The NDL system then takes that information and starts Northgate, resets their password and emails the user a randomly generated password. When they login in, they have to add a new password and can carry on working.

This occurs in a few minutes and requires no involvement from ICT staff. It reduced downtime for the users significantly and put them in control. It has freed up time used by ICT staff for more proactive work, and we have even found that users are forgetting their passwords less as they have time to consider a new meaningful password via this system.

As a humble ALMO, we have few systems to use this approach on, but the approach can be used on any system because of the 'robot' nature of the NDL software, potentially saving even more time and increasing efficiency even further in larger organisations. A small change with a big impact…

Mark Birch
Strategic ICT manager, Gateshead Housing

Please submit your response to any of these letters or your own letter by sending an email to *news@housing-technology.com*.

Dispelling the myth of BYOD security

Sir – The security of your corporate data is not at risk by implementing a BYOD policy.

Many organisations are wary of implementing a BYOD policy as it is perceived that their corporate data will be at greater risk, but this is not the case. An effective BYOD strategy allows companies to centralise their corporate environment and manage the business through a single glass pane, actually improving control of sensitive business data.

With the implementation of a published desktop process, IT upgrades are far easier throughout the company. When any upgrades are needed, they can be carried out as soon as a user logs on to their device within the shared network, reducing disparity between devices and increasing employee productivity.

An effective BYOD scheme is increasingly important in the housing sector due to the growing number of individuals needing to access data and work from multiple locations throughout the day. By implementing a BYOD strategy, housing providers can ensure that their employees have all the resources they need to work from any location at any time in a secure and efficient way.

Implementing a BYOD policy will not only give employees the ability to work anywhere at any time; it will also provide the freedom to choose which device works best for each individual, boosting morale in the long run. Some companies even run very effective incentives in which they will offer employees money or vouchers towards a device of their choice.

The most common question asked when it comes to BYOD policies is that of security. However, before this is considered in the BYOD process, businesses must ask themselves how secure they feel their data actually is currently. If desktops are in place instead of roaming devices, companies may think that measures are in place to stop data leaving the building, but is this true?

For example, if an employee wants to add an attachment to a personal email account and send it out of the building, can they? The answer is probably 'yes'. So the risks are already there in any business. A BYOD policy may not put your data at any greater risk at all, but instead it could increase productivity, save time and allow employees to make the most of their days in and out of the office.

Mitesh Patel
Managing director, Fifosys

Universal credit and the importance of integration

Sir – I read with interest your article 'Are you ready for Universal Credit?' in the March edition of Housing Technology. It was heartening to hear Thurle Phillips from Paragon Community Housing Group acknowledge the importance of mobile working in helping to ease the administrative and logistical burden universal credit will place on social housing providers.

I would urge other housing associations to follow suit, but as well as arming employees with tablets and smartphones, due consideration should also be given to integration. As mobile working and integration software specialists we have worked with hundreds of public sector organisations, and experience has taught us that integration can easily be forgotten in the excitement of shiny new devices, but it is vitally important in order to gain the most out of this investment.

Ensuring mobile devices are properly integrated with an organisation's own back-office system is an important first step, but the real Holy Grail is to be able to integrate systems across organisations. As a recent report by the Communities and Local Government Committee made clear, universal credit fraud (caused largely by a lack of integration) is a real fear. The committee's chairman noted that the current state of the project's fraud detection system, which is unable to detect when multiple individuals make a housing benefit claim on a single property, was "extremely concerning given the advanced state of implementation."

Of course, this particular integration problem isn't for housing providers to solve alone, but it is another indication of just how important it is for the ability to integrate to be built, front and centre, into any IT system.

Declan Grogan
Managing director, NDL

Ready for BYOD?

Sir – This BYOD shift is showing up many housing providers' wireless LANs which might not be designed to cope with the demands of so many additional devices. Thus, an important prerequisite for BYOD is careful wi-fi planning to ensure your network can accommodate all those data-hungry devices in a secure and stable manner.

The challenge for any organisation is keeping their wireless LAN quality up while supporting BYOD. One way forward could be the implementation of an additional network dedicated only to BYOD. With an enterprise wi-fi network for employees and a guest network for internet access, IT managers can resolve issues easily by building a third network dedicated to BYOD. Each access point can be configured to broadcast three virtual networks, allowing network administrators to give one network greater performance over another. Isolating the BYOD network would give users the same access as they would have from their work stations, while the encryption to protect the BYOD traffic won't be necessary, leading to resource savings.

Balancing BYOD, your network load and its security is certainly not an easy task, but it can be achieved with reasonable management and monitoring. Some of the more effective tools developed in response to BYOD, such as mobile device management tools, provide centralised monitoring and management of those devices, enabling IT staff to monitor and control network capacity as well as other core functions such as remote data wiping in case devices get lost or stolen.

No matter which approach you choose, the most important aspect is careful planning – ad hoc solutions just won't cut it.

Martin Momchilov
Marketing specialist, ISG Technology

Bring your own disaster?

Sir – BYOD has sometimes been labelled 'bring your own disaster', but is that with good reason? It certainly has the potential to give IT managers a headache, through damage to or infiltration of the company's IT infrastructure, and the trend is not going away.

However, BYOD should be viewed as part of an ongoing mobility strategy and not just as an isolated issue. With the increased use of personal smartphones and tablets to access enterprise data in the workplace, IT managers should be looking at their whole mobility situation now rather than when problems happen.

Putting a BYOD plan in place immediately, as part of your mobile strategy, will help to protect corporate data. It would be great if you can employ a chief mobility officer (CMO) to make those 'anything that moves' decisions relating to bringing devices into the workspace. If not, think about outsourcing your mobile technology management to a trusted partner. Both options ensure that you have a plan to manage any mobility-related issues, including networks, line-of-business applications, devices and security issues that can leave organisations open to a cyber attack.

Allocate a BYOD security budget now; it's the horse and stable door scenario as it's better to prevent a security breach than having to find a budget to clean up afterwards. Training your employees on best practices and having a security policy from the outset will also help to avoid these costly situations.

Many companies don't realise that missing devices account for nearly half the security breaches. The key goal is to strike the right balance between making employees aware of potential security risks without compromising their privacy as their own data has to be considered as well. Don't open up your whole network; be selective by working on a 'need to access' basis and protecting your corporate data on the device, not all of the device's data.

Mobile device management (MDM) solutions can be useful tools when it comes to developing configuring security, encrypting corporate data and, when necessary, remotely wiping a lost or stolen device of that corporate data, but not necessarily the individual's data.

With mobility trends and the consumerisation of IT expected to accelerate, it's a good time to look at your mobility strategy, with BYOD as a key component. Remember, your aim should be to mobilise the user and not just the application.

Marc Begg
Sales director, Peak-Ryzex

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