

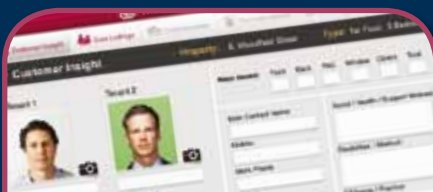
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HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2014
26-27 FEBRUARY 2014
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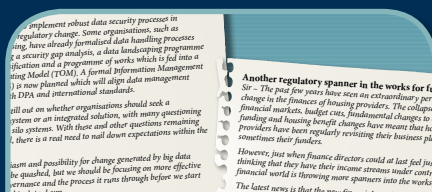
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Christmas lists

The 'C' word has crept into the November issue of Housing Technology but with good reason. As we approach the beginning of 2014, which 'must-have' technologies will be on your Christmas list and what New Year resolutions will you make and try to keep?

While most housing providers have adopted mobile working to greater or lesser extents, cloud computing, analytics and social media should be on most housing IT director's wish-lists for 2014. Why? Because individually they each represent an important part of housing providers' operations. Cloud computing gives you more flexibility, greater agility and better financial control compared with on-premise servers and IT infrastructure. Analytics, including its 'big data' incarnation, is vital for housing providers to be able make sense of the wealth of data they hold, albeit often in dislocated datasets, so that they can model, forecast and predict outcomes for better decision making. And social media is becoming ubiquitous as an additional two-way channel for tenant communications, particularly for tenants whose main internet access point is through mobile devices.

However, social media, mobile, analytics and cloud (SMAC – see Housing Technology, July 2013) should collectively exist in an overlapping matrix, where the importance of each of them increases because it takes advantage of the capabilities of one or more of the others.

These technologies also address many IT directors' long- and short-term issues. At a tactical level, they are concerned about areas such as BYOD, dealing with 'shadow IT', reducing IT operating costs, and integrating cloud with in-house operations. At the same time, their strategic concerns are likely to include data quality, dealing with the demand for innovation, preventing IT being viewed as a

commodity and presenting IT as an enabler at the heart of the business, and reducing IT complexity.

Counting down to April 2014

As covered in more detail in the Windows XP article on page 25, Microsoft will cease to support Windows XP and Office 2003 from April 2004, arguably making it the most major software expiry event of the decade, so how prepared are you?

Without updates, the Windows XP operating system and everything connected to it will rapidly become increasingly vulnerable to external dangers, ranging from viruses and malware through to hacking. Furthermore, internal auditors and external regulators may consider failures to upgrade as control failures.

There is, of course, still time to upgrade but housing providers should begin their preparations now if they haven't already done so.

Housing Technology 2014 – speakers announced

With three months to go before the Housing Technology 2014 conference and executive forum, we are delighted to reveal a fantastic line-up of speakers from housing providers of all sizes from across the country – see page 30 for full details.

Housing Technology 2014 returns to the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry on 26-27 February 2014. We have extended the event to two days (with the option of attending either or both days) to allow more presentations, greater scope for networking and more time to visit the sponsor and exhibition area. There will also be an evening drinks reception on Tuesday 25 February and an informal dinner on the evening of 26 February. You can register now at www.housing-technology.com/conference.

FUTURE EVENTS

Housing Technology 2014 conference & executive forum

26-27 February 2014, Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry
conference@housing-technology.com

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EDITOR
Alastair Tweedie
alastair@housing-technology.com
0774 860 7462
Twitter housingtech

PUBLISHER
George Grant
george.grant@housing-technology.com
07739 432190
Twitter tibcomp

DESIGN & PRODUCTION
Jo Euston-Moore
design@housing-technology.com

EDITORIAL AND NEWS
news@housing-technology.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Subscribe at www.housing-technology.com or
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Hoppingwood Farm
Robin Hood Way
London
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United Kingdom
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Aareon, 1st Touch & Documotive plans at Mansfield Council

Mansfield District Council is in the middle of replacing its 30-year old Unix-based housing management system with an integrated solution from Aareon, 1st Touch and Documotive. The new system is scheduled to go live in April 2014.

At the end of 2012, the council's housing department employed Sector Group to help it with the procurement of a new housing management system and although it was already using a council-wide CRM system, the housing department was keen to consider housing management systems that

would offer this as an integrated feature. The housing team also wanted to introduce an electronic document and records management system.

After a market review and Competitive Dialogue procurement led by Sector, the council selected Aareon for its core QL Housing management and maintenance solution as well as QL Asset Management, QL TaskCentre, QL CRM, 1st Touch Mobile, and Documotive EDM.

Hayley Barsby, head of housing, Mansfield District Council, said, "After evaluating a

number of well-known suppliers, we selected Aareon based on the overall functionality of the system, the cost and the benefits this new system is expected to deliver.

"Local people want council services to be available at the right time, in the right place and in ways that suit them. The QL Housing system will help us to achieve this by improving the processes and facilities for dealing with customers' initial contact with us and their continued experience while dealing with us."

Orchard and ITPS extend partnership with £2m development

Orchard and ITPS, long-term partners in the housing sector, are extending their relationship as part of a £2 million 'software as a service' project, leading to the creation of at least 50 new jobs in the North East of England.

Orchard's development project, codenamed Liberty, will transform its housing management software into a fully web-based product suite, available on a 'software as a service' basis and accessible on any device. ITPS's expertise in complex infrastructure design and management is underpinning Orchard's delivery of a cloud-based solution to its expanding list of customers.

The move also sees Orchard adopt its own cloud-based infrastructure, via virtualised servers in ITPS's Tier 3, ISO27001-certified data centres. ITPS has spent £750,000 on a 10Gb ring to support Orchard and its customers with high-speed communications circuits and strengthened business continuity and disaster recovery.

Ian Shard, managing director, Orchard, said, "The housing sector was formerly fairly traditional but that's changing and it's no longer just about taking rent and doing repairs. Today, it's more about people and building sustainable communities.

"Our customers are changing their business models to meet the challenges of universal credit and welfare reform, and a growing move towards 24/7 service delivery is driving innovation."

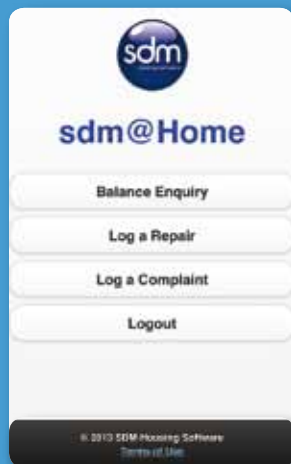
Andy Hunter, director of technical services, ITPS, said, "The new secure and scalable infrastructure we have created for Orchard gives it a framework for swift and agile development as well as a robust backup, storage and recovery platform for its own business and those of its customers. Switching to a cloud model means Orchard can give its customers the flexibility and functionality of a bespoke system at a fraction of the cost.

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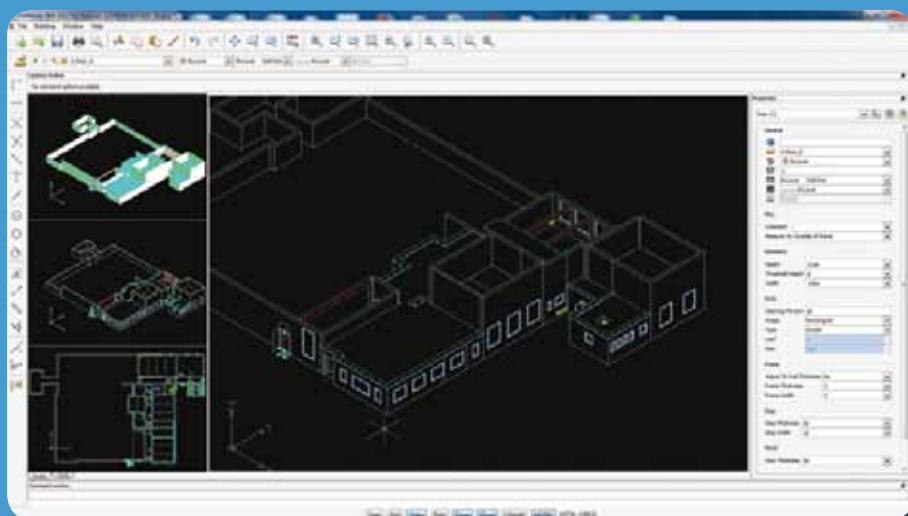


SDM's housing software goes mobile

SDM Housing has introduced a range of free mobile apps for its housing customers to enable them to provide services on the move to their tenants. The apps provide mobile access through iPhones and android devices to SDM's complete suite of housing management software.

Clive Harris, chairman and CEO, SDM Housing, said, "We launched the apps to customers

during the summer through a series of road shows in Bristol, London, Manchester, Belfast and Glasgow. As we expected, the apps were very well received as it means that our customers can now offer even more choice and convenience to their tenants in the way they access their rent accounts, for example, or request a repair."



New 3D SiteMaster BIM software from Graebert

Graebert iSurvey has just launched a 3D version of its popular SiteMaster software for building information modelling.

SiteMaster BIM 2013 enables users to create fully object-oriented 3D models using only a handheld laser distance meter. Furthermore, the 3D models and 2D representations can be exported in multiple formats so that architects and engineers can add materials, objects and other component information.

The new software continues to use Graebert's ARES CAD engine; this is the same engine used in the well-known CAD software DraftSight from Dassault Systems, which has been downloaded over four million times to date.

The Graebert software is designed to be used by surveyors with varying capabilities and CAD knowledge. SiteMaster BIM 2013 provides the optimum solution for BIM users, allowing surveyors to select just the right level of survey data to satisfy an architect's brief.

It is flexible enough to be configured to suit individual surveyors and has a survey-oriented user interface that allows surveyors to select the features they are working on; selecting a wall, for example, brings up different types of wall features – rectangular, arched, inclined walls, gabled, etc. SiteMaster BIM 2013 can be used to create additional categories of feature if they are a recurring feature within a building.



Leicester City signs with Northgate

Northgate Public Services has signed a seven-year contract with Leicester City Council to improve its housing IT systems.

Northgate will work with the council to amalgamate all types of tenant and housing records into its database, ensuring that it has a more comprehensive view of its tenants and property stock, enabling it to operate in a more efficient manner.

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IS DOING
NEW THINGS**

Theodore Levitt
Economist

Innovation = Orchard + Practical development



In February 2013 we were delighted to be nominated by Blackpool Coastal Housing for 'Most Innovative IT Solution' at the Housing Innovation Awards.

We carried this theme forward to our 7th annual Customer Conference, where we discussed and explored 'Innovative thinking for challenging times'. View our animated video on this theme at: youtu.be/IVQ5j02DZvA

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Prioritising business intelligence in housing

Dr Tony Munton, Managing Director, theRTK

The July edition of Housing Technology carried several articles exploring how large data sets are creating new opportunities based on the capacity to mine that information. Several important points emerged. First, the social housing sector is facing major challenges as new legislation creates a new financial landscape; second, housing providers collect large amounts of data as a core part of their business activities; and third, effective use of this data could drive new insights into service delivery, business improvement and the development of a robust evidence base on the social value created by housing providers' activities.

The project we are describing was intended to help the care and support business of a large social housing provider develop its capacity to produce effective business intelligence (BI).

What is BI? In short, BI is about leveraging value from business performance data. Getting BI right provides you with a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of your organization, identifies the potential to cut costs and losses, and highlights where improvements in service delivery could be made.

What makes BI so important to the social housing sector? The simple answer is better decision making. The slightly longer answer is providing the capacity to improve outcomes by providing better, more tailored and customer-appropriate services, while reducing operating costs.

We worked with the care and support business of a large provider to source and collect the data it needed to assess the impact its services have on customers, and the value that those services create for commissioners. The business employs over 1,000 staff and has a total turnover of approximately £55 million, including £10 million on agencies, £24 million on supported housing, and £20 million on older persons. The business works with 80 different independent providers to ensure its customers receive services that meet their needs effectively.

The business vision was to become one of the most efficient providers of community investment services, transforming lives and communities. In a competitive market, it wanted the advantage of having access to information regarding where spending achieves the greatest impact in achieving the desired impact for customers.

We set out to help the business collect and analyse their data in a way that would enable them to quantify the costs of each element of their service, compare the efficiency of delivery across different care settings, and quantify the impact on customers and ultimately the financial benefits to service commissioners.

Our approach involved working closely with the business's in-house research team through four processes: developing a logic map; identifying the right performance data; evaluating the impact of services; and finally, calculating the relative costs and benefits of specific services.

Developing a logic map

This first stage was to help people think critically about how their services change customers' lives. Working closely with front-line delivery staff, we drew up a detailed map of service components and how they thought each one brought about change for customers.

Identifying the right performance data Albert Einstein famously said: 'Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.' The next step was to make sure the business was collecting the right performance data. If delivery of any part of the logic map could not be monitored, that meant there were evidence gaps that had to be filled. We used a simple business case framework developed by the National Audit Office map data collection. It organises data into four categories: resources (what is being spent), inputs (what it is being spent on), outputs (what the service delivers) and outcomes (the impact that the service has on end users).

Once we had all the necessary data, we stored it in a simple Excel-based data

warehouse. The final product created a robust analytical tool the business could use to develop clearly-evidenced business cases for services for homeless customers. Equally as importantly, the business could use the tool to monitor business performance with regard to economy (are we paying the right amount for our resources?), efficiency (are those resources delivering as we would expect?), and effectiveness (are services delivering change for customers?).

Evaluating impact

The third element of the project was to evaluate the impact of services on homeless customers. Because we had the right data stored in the Excel-based data-warehouse, we were able to explore the relative impact different service components had on customers' lives. Our modelling highlighted the critical role economic factors played in helping customers to achieve independent living. We found help with education, with employment and with training all made a difference to customers' ability to generate an income. Where customers had specific needs around social contact, substance misuse, mental health and the exercise of choice and involvement, it was important for services to meet those needs.

The analysis also highlighted the value of having robust risk assessment procedures. Services for homeless customers must have the capacity to reliably identify and subsequently meet individual needs if they are going to be effective. A key business issue was making sure risk assessments (a) provided an accurate picture of client needs; and (b) informed subsequent decisions about the kind of support customers received.

Calculating cost-benefit

The final part of the project was to deliver a cost-benefit analysis (CBA). We compared the costs of each intervention with the impact on customers (expressed in monetary terms). Our analyses suggested that services for homeless customers represented good value for money in the medium to long term. It took time for

Prioritising business intelligence in housing

Continued from the opposite page

customers to turn their lives around, but once achieved, that change brought with it financial benefits not just to themselves, but to their communities as well.

Delivering the capacity for good BI, the project highlighted several important issues for the business:

- The importance of effective relationships between support workers and customers;
- The extent to which successful outcomes rely on reliable risk assessment;
- The potential to improve cost-effectiveness by targeting support more effectively;
- The key role that support for education, employment and training has for customers;
- The important contribution of meeting individual needs around social contact, substance misuse, mental health and the exercise of choice and involvement;
- The importance for customers of social networks and a feeling of having control over their lives;
- That business cases need to include consideration of the medium to long term net benefits of services.

The project successfully delivered a unique and robust analytical capacity that enabled the care and support business to optimise cost-effectiveness across services for homeless customers and respond to demands for evidence of impact that are becoming an integral part of the contracting process.

Dr Tony Muntun is the managing director of theRTK.

FINANCE & ASSET MANAGEMENT



Tim Knight (left), Finance Director, Severn Vale Housing Society, with Tony Merrill, Procurement Consultant, and Matthew Roper (right), Managing Director, Buying Support Agency

Severn Vale Housing saves £400k with 'value for money' culture

Following a critical Short Notice Inspection report by the Audit Commission, Severn Vale Housing Society has transformed its procurement processes with the help of the Buying Support Agency and has already made savings of over £400,000 in the first year.

Tim Knight, Finance Director at Severn Vale Housing Society, said, "Nobody likes negative feedback, but we took the regulator's findings on board and decided to not only meet the inspectors' recommendations, but to exceed them by developing a roadmap for future improvements. The challenge for us was that we didn't have the in-house skills or experience to do this alone."

Matthew Roper, managing director, Buying Support Agency, said, "When Tim explained that the Commission's audit pointed at poor value for money, a weak procurement approach and a lack of customer

involvement, the challenges sounded similar to those of other businesses that we have helped."

The project began with an in-depth audit by BSA of Severn Vale's procurement processes, which laid the foundations of a procurement strategy that included specific tasks to help Severn Vale develop more effective procurement processes.

A procurement improvement working group, comprising a range of stakeholders including some Severn Vale managers with budget responsibility and customers of Severn Vale's services, was set up to develop a set of purchasing procedures and development activities to guide all future buying. Severn Vale now has evidence of the potential financial improvements available by adopting a value for money culture and

treating external expenditure strategically by first implementing a procurement strategy with clear procedures and training, secondly reviewing and renegotiating all supplier contracts, and thirdly using BSA's supplier contracts as needed.

Last year, Severn Vale made savings of over £400,000, including £20,000 on cleaning services, £25,000 on asbestos removal services, £19,000 on vehicles, and £40,000 on lift contracts.

Knight said, "All of the changes have been about doing things properly and cleverly, and after three years of hard work, we are now better informed and have robust procurement practices. People now treat the money that they spend at work as carefully as their own, and actively look for value for money."



Grand designs – Is your house in order for FRS 102?

Karen Conneely, Group Commercial Manager, Real Asset Management

The imminent introduction of new financial reporting standards is likely to have a major impact on the housing sector. Managing the transition from SORP 2010 towards the inclusion of the international standards of FRS 102 will not be without its challenges. However, as has been the case with previous shifts in accounting requirements, the process does not need to be daunting.

To progress, housing providers need to be fully aware of the new legislation, identify its likely implications at a local level and establish whether their financial systems can support the demands of the new era. For most housing providers, the full implementation of FRS 102 may not require a grand redesign. But for everyone, being ready for the new regulations will dictate the need for a proactive and comprehensive programme of preparation, starting now.

What is FRS 102?

FRS 102, which is expected to officially come into force in 2015, is based on the international financial reporting standards for SMEs but has been amended for the UK market. It will change the way accounts are currently prepared under UK GAAP and prompt an overhaul of the format of financial statements and the disclosures required. Moreover, it will change the recognition criteria for various assets and liabilities which in turn will affect how some items are measured. And it will have implications for the treatment of certain gains and losses compared with the current methodology.

Policy and process

International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) have already been adopted across various divisions of the public sector, but its introduction into the housing sector continues to be the subject of much discussion. The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has concluded that the majority of housing providers will be mandated to implement IFRS Tier 2, and published the principles of this tier in FRS 102 in March 2013. Interpretation of FRS 102 for the housing sector will be supported by a new SORP (Statement of Recommended

Practice) which aims to provide sector-specific guidance around issues such as social housing and the treatment of grants and pensions. The SORP is currently being reviewed by the SORP working party and an update will be published by the National Housing Federation in March 2014.

The timetable for change, however, already outlines with wide expectation that the transition will officially start in FY2014/15 when housing providers will be expected to complete a 'comparative' year. This will comprise a comparison between the current SORP and FRS 102, requiring providers to run both methods in parallel. From FY2015/16, organisations will be expected to adopt FRS 102 as a stand-alone process in anticipation of the first year of full reporting. As a consequence, the most proactive housing providers are currently focused on making sure they are prepared for the transition and ready to do their comparison.

Impact on housing

The new regulations will have a marked impact on the housing sector, not least in the important area of grants. The vast majority of social housing is, of course, underpinned by grants and in some cases local authorities and housing providers have grant funding in excess of 100 per cent of unit value. FRS 102 aims to reduce the balance sheet to a point where it only shows the true value of its properties, with the grant slowly released over time.

Under the new guidelines, grants will be treated in one of two ways. Primarily, under an accrual method, grants will be classified as capital or revenue, with capital grant recognised as income over the economic life of the building and revenue grant recognised as costs. Alternatively, under the performance method, grant will be taken as income when performance criteria specified in the grant conditions are met.

For many housing providers, the transition period is likely to raise eyebrows. Making balance sheet comparisons with prior years will most likely show significantly less grant and substantially higher asset values – and

this could appear worrying for smaller housing providers. In Scotland, where many providers are heavily grant-funded, the comparative reports could make for stark readings. However, this is not likely to happen overnight as the release of a grant will take a number of years and in the short term, the variance between 2014 and 2016 will not be huge.

FRS 102 will also create complexities in the reporting of financial instruments, pensions, leases and property classification. For example, with leasing standards set to change, providers will need to classify current leases as either finance leases or operating leases, depending on who owns the risk and reward. Likewise, housing property will become classified as plant property and equipment if used for social purposes or investment property if otherwise. In the latter case, properties will need to be recognised at fair value at each reporting date, once again increasing the likelihood of fluctuation through the I&E. Moreover, FRS 102 now gives providers the opportunity to account at valuation as an accounting policy.

How to proceed

Despite the imminent changes, housing providers should not be daunted by the prospect of FRS 102. The transition period will give them time to adjust to the new way of working and allow alarming fluctuations in comparative balance sheets to be set in a proper long-term perspective.

There are things that housing providers can be doing now to make sure their processes are fit for purpose when the changes arrive. They can prepare the ground by ensuring that their accounting systems are flexible in how they handle data. They will need to be agile enough to allow them to treat the accrual of grants differently – enabling them to be released over longer periods of time.

In addition, systems need to provide clear visibility of reporting so that they can quickly and easily understand the impact of releasing grants over specific time periods. The ability to view the implications

Grand designs – Is your house in order for FRS 102?

Continued from the opposite page

of aspects such as depreciation will significantly improve their ability to manage the business from a financial perspective.

Housing providers that are currently reliant on spreadsheets or rigid in-house systems may not be able to handle these requirements easily or effectively. Spreadsheets generally provide insufficient reporting or audit capability. Similarly, in-house systems are often inflexible and give organisations no ability to model or reclassify assets as things change. The alternative is to take the specialist

route. By partnering with trusted providers of asset accounting solutions – with dedicated experience of working in the housing sector – housing providers can benefit from significant productivity and efficiency gains. A specialist partner will not only be able to deliver practical tools that can help save time and provide immediate visibility of real-time accounting implications, but they will also be able to play an important role as a strategic advisor with sector-specific knowledge and experience. Moreover, they will be able to

provide unique access to an established user community of peers.

For the housing sector, the move to FRS 102 will not require a grand design. But with the right support, organisations can proactively and easily ensure that their house is in order.

Karen Conneely is the group commercial manager at Real Asset Management.

New housing data service from Zoopla

Property website Zoopla has launched a service to offer housing providers annual valuations of all their stock (in terms of open market value and market rent rate at low, mid and high points) and batch valuations throughout the year. This transparency in service delivery and free access to Zoopla Pro, an online tool for running comparable reports on individual properties, is aimed at making

housing providers more efficient and flexible in their decision making and offerings to the market.

Open market valuations enable housing providers to achieve a consistent approach to rent restructuring and the '99' valuation process. This extends to comparing original '99' values to a deflated 2013 valuation.

Using Zoopla, potential future cash flows from right-to-buy sales and mortgage rescue properties can be forecast to a greater extent and the final decision on disposal is made instantly with the formal valuation taking place afterwards.

A total value of shared ownership equity enables housing providers to focus

'stair-casing' where it benefits the most and also reassess their modelling of tenures in terms of asset appreciation in the long term rather than just an existing use approach.

Welfare reform – more evidence of arrears

New research by three housing bodies representing over 1.3m council households shows rising numbers of tenants in arrears and a significant rise in the level of rent owed since the introduction of the bedroom tax. The findings are the result of a joint project from the National Federation of ALMOs, the Association of Retained Council Housing and the Councils with ALMOs Group into the impact of welfare reforms on council tenants.

During March to June 2013, the number of council households in arrears rose by 21 per cent, with the total monetary value of arrears rising by 16 per cent. Based on the trends identified by the survey, this suggests that local authority rent arrears rose nationally by £17.5 million in the first three months after the implementation

of the government's welfare reform. For households affected by the spare room subsidy, there was a 59 per cent increase in households deemed to be under-occupying going into arrears.

Chloe Fletcher, policy director, NFA, said, "Given the rising cost of living, local authority spending cuts, and changes to the wider welfare benefits system, it isn't surprising that councils and ALMOs are finding it more difficult to collect rent. What is alarming is the speed by which households affected by the under-occupancy penalty have struggled to maintain rent payments and the scale of unintended consequences of the reforms for housing providers in some parts of the county."

The research also found that 24 per cent of landlords reported a rise in empty properties with the associated costs of dealing with these, and 42 per cent reported a drop in demand for some types of properties as households struggled to afford larger homes in some parts of the country.

Matthew Warburton, policy advisor, ARCH, said, "The survey confirms that most councils will not have enough smaller accommodation available in the coming year to enable more than a small proportion of affected tenants to downsize. This implies that arrears are likely to go on rising as tenants continue to struggle to pay."

Curo Housing SORP compliant with Real Asset Management

Curo Housing is using Series4000 from Real Asset Management to manage its component accounting as well as its non-housing assets throughout the business, comprising 11,000 properties in Bath and 90,000 assets.

The housing provider has been using Series4000 for the last five years to track its

non-housing assets, replacing time-consuming and inefficient Excel spreadsheets. It has since adopted the system for the management of all of its component accounting. The system also provides a complete tracking history of non-property assets using Real Asset Management's barcoding and RFID software.

Ben Chalker, finance analyst, Curo Housing, said, "The need for more visibility and compliance with SORP/IFRS persuaded us to use Real Asset Management for component accounting as well as our non-housing assets.

"Series4000 makes the data more visible and allows us to calculate asset depreciation

and create reports as and when we need them. We have also been extremely pleased with the ease of use of the system and the time savings we have seen compared to our previous, manual way of working."

Circle & Hereford Housing first to adopt new Valueworks software

Valueworks has just launched its Gateway Mapping Tool to provide a link between housing providers' supply chains and their finance and housing management systems to drive further efficiency improvements in their procurement processes. Its first customers include Circle Housing and Hereford Housing.

At Circle Housing, Valueworks is implementing the Gateway Mapping Tool as part of a project to improve the control and effectiveness of purchasing materials for Circle's direct labour organisation by creating a link between Circle's Total Mobile system, its materials supply chain arrangement with a national distributor and Valueworks' e-Marketplace system. For Hereford Housing, Valueworks is providing

an integration solution between a number of construction materials suppliers using e-Marketplace and the housing provider's Orchard housing management system.

Elizabeth Sipiery, CEO, Valueworks, said, "Enabling housing providers to integrate e-marketplaces with their other systems is integral to ensuring customers deliver the efficiency savings targeted within their business plans."

Valueworks in UK's top 20 for cloud computing

Valueworks has been included in the top 20 UK cloud-based technology companies in Clearwater's 'Cloudex 20:20' award.



The criteria for the Cloudex 20:20 listing took into account growth prospects, innovation and global competitiveness.

Elizabeth Sipiery said, "We have operated in the cloud from day one and are still learning how to build the best service we can across complex business processes and integration to create great client experiences."



Journey into the 'known'... Collaborating towards a common goal

Mandy Dunstan, Head of Business Transformation, The Barnet Group

Welcome back to part three of our journey! One of Barnet Group's key business values is 'one team' and we encourage our people to work together towards a common goal. It can be difficult to promote this to staff against a corporate background that is constantly shifting, and in our case, transforming the business.

Ensuring that there is debate, discussion and information-sharing across a diverse workforce spread across a large borough is essential to our success. This is the reason why we invested in Clearvale, our

new intranet system, which was officially launched in October 2013.

Clearvale is an intranet system made up of a network of users, called communities, linked together by departments. This means we can share information with each other, have live discussions (therefore cutting back on email trails) and upload videos, blogs and images.

My major challenge as a head of service for an operations portfolio in housing management is communication. It's

really important to lead and inspire my staff by engaging them in the vision of the organisation, the performance of the services and monitor how staff feel about our direction of travel and their contribution to the journey.

Our investment in Clearvale has brought enterprise social networking to The Barnet Group; the hardest part of our move to social collaboration was getting started, along with implementing the cultural changes required for success. To overcome this, we agreed a mandate from senior

Journey into the 'known'... Collaborating towards a common goal

Continued from the opposite page

management to apply social networking principles to real business issues.

We backed this up by encouraging our 'super-users' to create service area communities and loading engaging content that gives our staff a reason to join the network when invited.

Our staff have really embraced the new technology and the network is growing. We can now communicate daily operational issues across teams and service areas.

For example, we recently had to manage communications to our residents during some severe weather conditions. With Clearvale, staff were able to share live updates on the situation with each other and use the same information to relay to our residents. This resulted in a joined-up working approach to find solutions and improve customer service.

My personal vision for this system was to enable, empower and engage our people and the early indication is that our

investment is proving a great success. Social networking for our business is a new concept and we can see already that the efficiency, transparency, and serendipity created by working socially will have a positive impact on the bottom line, so it is well worth the effort.

Mandy Dunstan is head of business transformation at The Barnet Group.

MOBILE WORKING



Streamlined scheduling at Wigan & Leigh with Xmbrace

Having used Xmbrace DRS dynamic scheduling software since 2009, Wigan and Leigh Housing extended its use earlier this year to its wider estate management services.

Before the widespread introduction of mobile working and dynamic scheduling, WLH's 80 customer-facing staff had two main problems. First, appointments were made in isolation with no way for the officers to know about any outstanding enquiries the tenants had previously phoned the contact centre about, so officers were unable to deal with multiple enquiries per visit.

Secondly, appointments were allocated to the next available slot with no reference to location, rather than planning the most sensible and efficient route. The planners also had no visibility of productivity levels or the whereabouts of caretakers so when a high priority task came in, there was no way to see which caretaker was nearest to the job.

Given the large number of users and their varying degrees of IT skills, WLH implemented Xmbrace DRS, now part of the Kirona Group, in a phased approach, starting with those least comfortable with IT. By May 2013, all 23 caretakers were fully trained and using the handheld devices running Xmbrace DRS. This enables the caretakers to pick up tasks remotely on the device and report on progress during the day. This frees them from having to complete manual timesheets and gives the planners visibility of where each caretaker is at that moment and also provides an indicator of productivity levels.

The remaining customer-facing staff moved onto the mobile system during the third quarter of 2013. They now have a complete customer view on their devices and no longer have to go to one estate in the morning, a different one mid-morning and then back to where they were first

thing. And the improved customer visibility on the mobile devices means that a number of enquiries can be dealt with in just one visit, removing the need for tenants to constantly contact WLH about each separate issue.

With two planners managing the caretakers' workloads, WLH can now fill gaps with ad-hoc jobs. For example, if the planners receive a call from a supervisor during the day to report a case of fly-tipping, they can instantly see where the nearest caretaker is and schedule the task for an appropriate time.

Elaine Pierce, IT manager, Wigan and Leigh Housing Company, said, "We are very happy with the results from our estate management implementation to date and are looking forward to having all our departments fully mobile as part of our wider strategy."



1st Touch appoints implementations manager

1st Touch has appointed Tim Birkett as an implementations manager. He joins from Morrison Facilities Services where he was the senior applications architect.

Birkett will manage the customer implementation of 1st Touch mobile solutions, including the supervision of a team of implementation

consultants who ensure the smooth integration of 1st Touch software with customers' existing housing management systems. The role also

involves ensuring that 1st Touch mobile works across multiple platforms including Windows Mobile, Android and iOS.



iPads for Asra Housing workers

Running as a pilot project in Leicester, Asra Housing Group has given iPads to all of its housing and income officers, with firm instructions to get out onto the streets and deal with customers' complaints and comments face-to-face.

Sally-Anne Underhill, who is in charge of the mobile working project at Asra Housing, said, "It is too easy to become desk-bound when the phone never stops ringing and the emails keep pinging into your inbox. And we have listened to our tenants, who told us that they would like to see our housing and income officers working on the ground on our estates.

"We are already seeing some great results. These include faster and more consistent handling of enquiries, reduced paperwork, less travel for staff and increased tenant satisfaction."

One year after the project was first piloted in Leicester, staff feedback shows that people are spending 59 per cent of their time with their customers, compared with only 22 per cent before the pilot began. Furthermore, Asra Housing's income and housing teams are only spending 6 per cent of their time in the office now that they have the mobile technology.

Kelly Kirby, one of Asra Housing's Leicester-based housing officers, said, "I'm really enjoying mobile working and I can already see that customers are getting a quicker and more personable response to

their queries. For example, if a tenant wants to see how much rent they owe, I can show them there and then. I can also log antisocial behaviour issues, whereas before I would have had to go back to the office to do so.

"The best thing is that we're out and about and I get a chance to talk to lots of customers face-to-face every day. Often, if someone has called our call centre and logged an enquiry, I'll go straight to their door to see them rather than picking up the phone."

The success of the first phase of the project has led to the technology also being rolled out across Asra Housing's allocations and maintenance teams to increase efficiency. Asra Housing has also implemented a new document management system so that housing and income officers can access information through their iPads instead of having to return to the office.

Underhill said, "This is great news for tenants. It means our housing officers can visit them at home and deal with their issues there and then, rather than tenants having to wait for us to return to the office to process the issue. We can give them answers and advice on the ground, face-to-face."

This is a revised version of the news item first published in the previous issue of Housing Technology.



New iPad forms app from Digital Field Solutions

on the spot and then send it directly to the office system, reducing the burden of paperwork and the potential for data errors, while also enabling orders to be processed quicker. The app also has a facility for users to take pictures and incorporate them into the form.

The app is available with Digital Field Solutions' Cloud Hub so that managers can track activity in real time via a dashboard, and drill down and view captured data in a range of formats including PDF, Excel and CSV.

Tim Howard, director, Digital Field Solutions, said, "We developed Formworks to give organisations greater control over their remote data capture process in a fraction of the time it takes to use traditional pen and paper.

"We found that many data capture products were fiddly to use and actually made life more difficult for the user. We have therefore sought to design electronic forms, with intuitive handwriting recognition technology, that are even simpler to use and more efficient than paper forms."

Forms can be personalised with company logos and include the option of typing or writing using the best handwriting recognition technology available. They can also be updated remotely by an administrator so that all field workers are instantly using the correct and most up-to-date forms.

Formworks can be downloaded now from Apple's App Store.

Digital Field Solutions has released its new Formworks app for iPads. The app eliminates the need for paper forms and has the potential to halve data-processing times, and enables surveyors, property and facilities managers to easily create and update their own mobile forms.

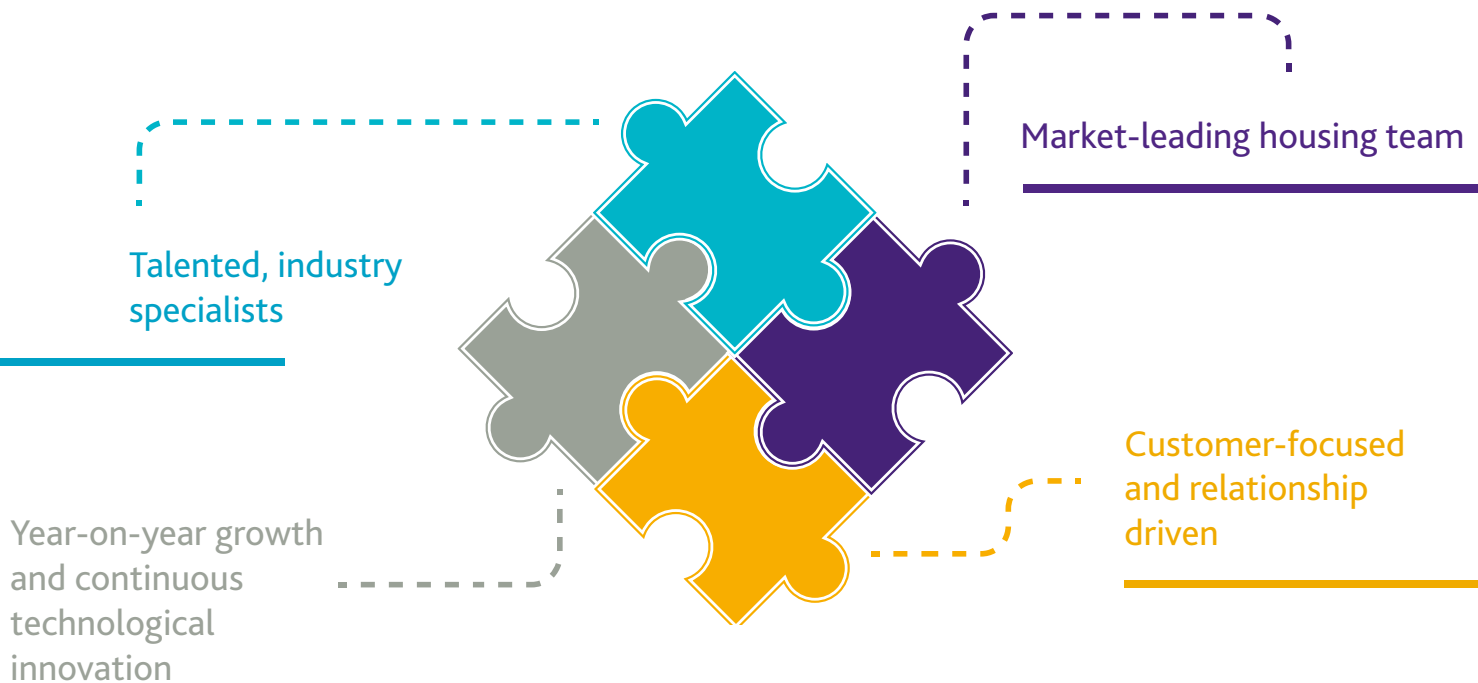
The Formworks app allows field staff to easily complete a form during a meeting or inspection, capture signature authorisation

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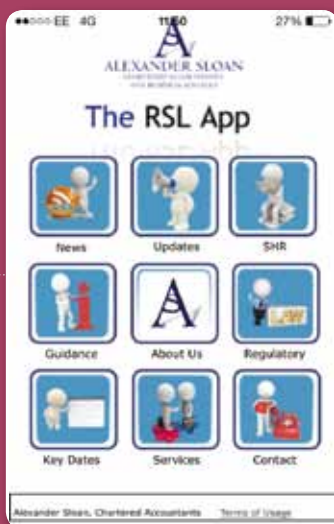
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Alexander Sloan launches first mobile app for RSLs in Scotland

Chartered accountants Alexander Sloan have just launched the first mobile app aimed exclusively at housing providers in Scotland. The free RSL App can be downloaded from Alexander Sloan's website, and links direct to the companies blogs and their guide to component accounting.

The company said that the app is unlike any other because it is RSL-specific, and focused on

the issues and areas of interest that affect RSL in Scotland. The app is mainly intended to help to directors, management and staff in Scottish housing providers remain fully cognisant with the implications of component accounting and FRS102.

1st Touch announces its 2013 award winners

Mobile working software provider 1st Touch has announced its housing awards for 2013, based on how some of its customers have used its software. The winners were:

- **Success award:** based on outstanding benefits and return on investment gained from mobile technology implementation and roll-out, won by South Yorkshire Housing based on it completing an extra 1,200 jobs in 12 months and saving £240,000.
- **Enterprise award:** based on the greatest number of 1st Touch applications implemented or used by multiple mobile teams, won by Amicus Horizon.
- **Innovation award:** based on the most innovative use of 1st Touch software, jointly won by North Lincolnshire Homes as first adopters of 1st Touch software on iPads and Affinity Sutton as an early adopter of the 1st Touch caretaker module on the Android platform.



From paper to iPad at Golden Gates Housing

Golden Gates Housing Trust has replaced its paper-based repairs processes with an iPad-based mobile forms solution from Footprint Solutions. The implementation is as a result of the housing provider's repairs staff increasing from 230 in 2004 to 370 in 2013 and the need to provide more transparent reporting to tenants.

Golden Gates' tenants submit repair requests via a customer contact centre, with the repair requests historically passed to the trade operatives in a paper format. When a service request was fulfilled, the trade operative would often take five or more days to return the service paperwork to the contact centre. During this period, the contact centre staff had no visibility of the status of the request, thereby preventing them from providing any service information to the tenant.

Peter Fitzhenry, director of housing management, Golden Gates Housing Trust,

said, "Our paper-based practices relied heavily upon our contact centre team to process paperwork, but the increased workloads resulting from the investment programme meant that we were forced to look for a paper-free solution."

Golden Gates decided to implement Footprint Solutions' iPad reporting software iForm Pro to provide paper-free service reports. iForm Pro was configured to automate Golden Gates' existing service forms to provide a quick and structured method of collecting information using check boxes, drop-down lists, radio buttons and pre-completed fields. Signatures and photos can also be captured on the iPad and there are built-in areas of forms where users can sketch plans and drawings directly into the form.

Fitzhenry said, "Operatives can now take photos of a site or location and hand draw onto the photo using iForm Pro.

The form is delivered along with all photo attachments, plans and any comments written onto the attached media. This has saved them approximately one hour per operator per day in saved administration time and the solution has saved us a substantial amount of money."

iForm Pro also supports hand-written form filling, providing a fast and convenient method of capturing generic service information such as job comments or customer feedback. The solution converts the hand-written content into data on the device and the operative can review and amend the information before sending it to the service centre in real-time.

Steve Lamb, head of ICT services, Golden Gates Housing Trust, said, "The simplicity of iForm Pro and the fact that it is an integrated device that communicates directly to our contact centre were key to the project's success."

Acuma delivers mobile SAP solution for Community Housing



Community Housing Group has completed the implementation of an SAP-based mobile working solution developed by Acuma to increase productivity of their housing and field officers by giving them access to corporate data on iPads.

Having reviewed CHG requirements and business operations, Acuma recommended a native iPad application with offline capability, integrated with CHG's core business applications (housing management, document management, CRM and payments), and delivered with role-based access.

Acuma created a native iPad application so that CHG could move from paper-based systems to evidence-based systems and transact in the field. This was first implemented as a pilot, enabling CHG to

test the features and identify areas it would personalise and extend for its systems and field officers.

As a SAP 'Gold Partner', Acuma based its solution on SAP's enterprise mobility platform to design, deploy and manage the application and devices. SAP's platform allowed Acuma to combine its experience with application development with market-leading technology to produce a feature-rich solution. In addition, the SAP platform can be extended to cover CHG's future needs such as mobile device management, mobile documents and tenant applications.

CHG reported that it was particularly impressed with the elegant user interface and its ease of use. The application can also be extended to provide modules for different roles, such as housing,

repairs and maintenance, welfare advice, neighbourhoods and income recovery, each with specific features.

The application has helped CHG reduce arrears, report fact-based inspections on-the-go and take advantage of iPad features such as the camera, video and signature capture. Housing Officers no longer have to complete pre- and post-inspection work in the office and various specific inspections such as 'move-in', 'scheduled', 'abandon' and 'mutual exchange' are now carried out using evidence-based inventories to increase productivity. An innovative 'scored neighbourhood walkabout' feature enables CHG's management to monitor the performance of its estates under different housing officers.



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Transforming neighbourhood mobile working at Yorkshire Housing

Nadhia Khan, Head of Neighbourhoods, Yorkshire Housing

Yorkshire Housing's head of neighbourhoods, Nadhia Khan explains the results of staff working in a mobile way in neighbourhoods and what they have learned along the way.

Neighbourhood operating model principles

In 2012, we set up a customer service programme to create a new customer service centre in Leeds, review service processes and implement a new neighbourhood operating model.

Our vision for the new neighbourhood model is for local teams to spend the majority of their time with tenants and not to perform routine administrative tasks in offices. The principles of the new neighbourhood service are to take the service to the tenant, be more flexible and mobile in delivering services, and provide a speedy response to queries.

Mobile working pilot projects

A pilot was established in November 2012 to develop a mobile working solution. The objectives were to assess the benefits of mobile working using local touchdown points, flexible working policies and using technology in the form of tablet devices. Neighbourhood teams were given iPads to trial the new ways of working. A key part of the change was to look at how the pace of change was managed to increase staff engagement so that they were able to own and influence the outcomes from the pilot.

Technology choice

Adrian Hall, our head of ICT, and his team provided support and training with the

mobile devices. We chose Apple devices based on stability, ease of use and user experience, plus our ICT team was reassured by Apple's iOS roadmap for hardware and software releases.

We added mobile device management software for additional security, device support and encryption. We also tested the capabilities on the 4G network in Leeds. The Citrix receiver on the iPads connects with everything on the desktop at work such as emails and calendars, the internet, data input into forms and our Orchard housing management system.

Our focus has been on how our neighbourhood teams work and not on a gadget-driven piece of work; the iPads are simply there to support these changes and provide the flexibility.

What happened?

The results show that staff have been able to spend an average of 45 per cent more time with tenants, in their own home and in other locations. Tenants are receiving better real-time information around arrears and benefits advice. The iPad has proved a useful tool in enabling staff to operate remotely and to spend more time in their neighbourhoods servicing our tenants.

Staff mileage claims on journeys to and from the hub have reduced by about 20 per cent. For the Leeds team, this has given us a cost saving of £1,800 from November 2012 to March 2013.

We can achieve other cashable efficiencies through improved processes. For example, on lettings there are fewer journeys back to the hub, emailing proofs, and data inputting into the Orchard system. This equates to a cashable efficiency saving of £42 per letting.

There was also an increase in staff satisfaction with the flexibility that mobile working provides and they feel happier with their work/life balance.

Lessons learned

We are now rolling out mobile working to 60 neighbourhood and income officers. We have learned that change should be introduced incrementally. And we need to allow staff time for learning and adopting this new way of working. The introduction of the new Orchard browser, service reviews and iPads affected the speed with which staff were able to implement new ways of working.

By empowering staff to make changes to processes and systems – staff felt engaged rather than it being imposed upon them. And to that end, we have produced a video for staff to show how the new ways of working has worked. This is available on the Yorkshire Housing YouTube channel, called 'Excellence in Neighbourhoods'.

Nadhia Khan is head of neighbourhoods at Yorkshire Housing.

Montal helps Eastlands Homes with mobile working



With help from Montal Computer Services, Eastlands Homes has completed the first

phase of implementing mobile working for its responsive heating and electrical services within its repairs team, with 55 workers now using the system.

The new system proposed by Montal comprises 1st Touch for mobile working, Xmbrace DRS for scheduling and SOTI MobiControl for mobile device management, integrated with Eastlands Homes' Orchard housing management system.

Mark Murphy, repairs manager, Eastlands Homes, said, "It's early days but the system seems to be bedding in well and operatives are quickly becoming familiar with the new ways of working. Our decision to have specific expertise provided by Montal who

helped us procure and project manage the initiative was a good one.

"We are very pleased with what we have achieved, but there's still a bit to do to get to where we would like to be. We will be working hard to make these further improvements over the coming months".

The second phase of the project will introduce Xmbrace DRS's Project Planner module for Eastlands Homes' voids and planned works services.



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Together Housing consolidates service centres with mplsystems

Together Housing Group has deployed a next-generation contact centre system from mplsystems. The new intelligentDesktop is intended to optimise the performance of the Together Housing customer services team that manages around 35,000 homes across its five contact centres.

Together Housing handles customer service calls for ten different social housing brands. By using intelligentDesktop, the group's customer services team can now act as a single virtual contact centre, routing calls from one centre to another and sharing resources to ensure faster responses and better customer service. Agents can now resolve all customer enquiries irrespective of the housing group involved, with a single, smart, agent-friendly user interface helping to improve the overall customer experience.

Stephen Batley, head of customer services, Together Housing Group, said, "Each partner had its own telephony system, which was clearly not suitable if we were to realise the benefits of the group structure. But it was vital that we maintained the local identity of each of the individual associations for customers."

"Now, thanks to the flexibility of the intelligentDesktop and the multi-channel iContact solution, we have one virtual customer contact centre. This ensures that tenants are dealt with quickly and efficiently and the call handler has all the information needed to deal with the call."

From a financial perspective, Together Housing said that it chose mplsystems because it recognised that the functionality and capabilities available from mplsystems' portfolio meant that it was getting more capability and flexibility for its money when compared with alternatives, leading to a better return on investment over the lifetime of the solution.

The new system went live in March 2013 across Together Housing's five contact centres after a two-month implementation.

Tunstall telecare at Cross Keys Homes



Cross Keys Homes has chosen Tunstall to implement an advanced telecare system as part of its new Extra Care facility in Peterborough.

Opening next year, the new £9.9m facility will offer retirement and sheltered housing that has been designed to provide older residents with fully managed on-site support. The 79-apartments will have Tunstall's Communicall Vi system installed to make the

development fully telecare-enabled.

Claire Higgins, director of operations, Cross Keys Homes, said, "The new Extra Care scheme will allow us to extend our services further with the provision of accommodation that takes into account the specific needs of each person living there."

"With Tunstall's Communicall Vi, we have the latest technology, providing a flexible service that offers safety and security for residents and offering managers information that helps them deliver high-quality care as well as a range of preventative services that support health and well-being."

ROCC Computers launches digital inclusion portal



To help housing providers become more digitally inclusive, ROCC Computers has launched its Uniclass Tenant Portal which enables them to offer tenants a full online repair logging and enquiry system.

Uniclass Tenant Portal can be integrated into housing providers' existing websites and customised to ensure it is familiar to tenants. The portal translates on screen to 54 languages, supports resizable text for sight impaired users, has an intuitive design with context sensitive help and is viewable across all web browsers and devices.

Chris Potter, director of Uniclass, ROCC Computers, said, "Over 90 per cent of housing providers offer tenants some form of online repair request reporting, but the majority of these limit the tenant to completing an online form and provide no interactive feedback to the tenant."

"Our system is fully interactive. Uniclass Tenant Portal allows tenants to raise repair requests, query outstanding repairs and request appointments. Tenants receive immediate feedback on the screen and there's a follow-up confirmation via email and text message."

Digital Champions Network for digital inclusion in housing



With serendipitous timing, on the day of Housing Technology's 'Reform IT 2013' event at the BT Tower in September, a new Digital Champions Network for Housing was launched to help housing providers support their residents to get online and extend their digital skills before the introduction of universal credit.

Ten housing providers representing a combined housing stock of over 221,000 properties and 455,000 residents have signed up as Founder Partners. They are: Eastlands Homes, Hanover, The Hyde Group, Midland Heart, North Hertfordshire Homes, Orbit Group, Peabody, Raven Housing Trust, Southway Housing Trust and Sovereign Housing.

Powered by Digital Unite and inspired by Affinity Sutton, the Digital Champions Network for Housing (DCN4H) is an innovative online platform to create, develop and support digital champions in local communities.

Extending the success and investment of Affinity Sutton's 'Get Connected' project, DCN4H provides access to practical online courses, extensive teaching resources

and a moderated community forum to help people become digital champions. Furthermore, the functionality behind DCN4H enables each participating housing provider to track activity and monitor management data to measure and evaluate its impact and success.

Kathy Valdes, business development manager, Digital Unite, said, "In our 17 years of delivering digital skills, we know that the best and often only way to support people to get online is by having trained volunteers and staff working locally who can inspire and teach others and provide support.

"DCN4H provides housing providers with a practical and comprehensive set of tools to develop their own armies of digital champions. Most excitingly, it will be the conduit to enable collaboration and knowledge sharing across the housing sector, at both a management level and on the ground, to tackle digital exclusion."

Stephanie Noyce, head of financial Inclusion, Affinity Sutton, said, "Having our digital champions trained and supported has been fundamental in keeping our digital inclusion activities running on the ground. It has provided us with a sustainable programme that works nationally across communities, in turn enabling residents to tackle common challenges such as welfare reform.

"Our Get Connected e-learning site has already helped 68 of our residents establish themselves as digital champions, in turn supporting more than 300 residents, and we are continuing to see results. A recent survey of ours found that digital inclusion among our residents has increased from 57 per cent in 2011 to 74 per cent 2013."



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OpinionWise launches tenant dialogue portal



OpinionWise has developed its new OurHousing online service to help housing providers and tenants share their experiences with the aim of improving services. Anybody with an experience of a housing provider's property can tell their story online and engage in dialogue with others around it. Housing providers can also reply and benefit from new insights, including benchmarking their services with other providers.

The website is backed by Nominet Trust who seed-funded its development in conjunction with OpinionWise who will manage and moderate the service as an independent intermediary.

Jayne Hilditch, corporate services director, Thames Valley Housing Association, said, "Understanding tenants' experiences is vitally important when designing service improvements. These stories illustrate what works well and what doesn't, and by giving tenants the opportunity to do this online, housing providers might also hear from the 'unusual suspects' who haven't engaged in the traditional resident involvement channels."

Fraser Henderson, founder and director, OpinionWise, said: "This is an opportunity to help tenants make more informed decisions and normalise their views by

exposing and grouping everyday narratives, from general experiences to words of praise. The nature of the tenants' stories makes them an incredibly powerful instrument for capturing intricacies and helping others relate to difficult situations."

Housing providers can trial the OurHousing service free of charge by registering at www.opinionwise.co.uk/ourhousingbeta.



Remote control Riverside



Riverside is piloting a new service that will help tenants save money by controlling their central-heating boilers remotely. Tenants will be able to send a message from their smartphone to switch the boiler on or off and adjust their heating temperature from outside the home. The device also provides humidity readings to encourage families to reduce moisture in their houses.

Around 100 of Riverside's properties are being fitted with

2 Save Energy's OWL Intuition smart heating controls; the devices need a broadband connection, a hard-wired dial room thermostat and a smartphone with internet access.

One Riverside resident, having trialled the new service for the last two months, said, "We've cut our gas bills by £5 per week so far and have used the device when we were out shopping. We've shown it to our neighbour and he wants to try it too."

Michelle Melvin from Riverside said, "Tenants on our Halton Brook estate can contact me if they want the free energy-saving devices. Often people are unexpectedly delayed from getting home, or spend unplanned nights away. The OWL Intuition device means you can turn off heating if you are not going to be home, or turn it on before getting home earlier than expected."

One year on – Netcall completes integration with Serengeti Systems

A year on from its acquisition of Serengeti Systems, Netcall has completed the integration of the Serengeti expertise with Netcall's enterprise content management capabilities to address the company's wider proposition of seamless end-to-end customer engagement.

Netcall has also just launched a number of new modules for the housing sector, including modules

for anti-social behaviour (ASB), complaints, HR and finance.

The addition of this new capability has enabled Netcall to secure contracts with several housing providers including Acis Group, Alliance Homes, Gloucester City Homes, North Wales Homes and Orbit Housing Group.



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Better performance for Cairn with Clearview

Cairn Housing Association is using performance management software from Clearview Systems to improve its strategic and operational planning processes. The housing provider implemented Clearview's strategy and performance suite at the start of 2013, followed by the intelligence and reporting module, with the customer engagement suite scheduled to be added this month.

Fin Smith, head of business improvement, Cairn Housing Association, said, "We implemented Clearview to support our programme of organisational change and improvement because its suite of modules really complements our approach to strategic planning, project management, risk management and performance improvement.

"This approach has brought clarity to the processes involved and greater transparency for all involved by providing 'a single point of truth' that we can all agree on and work from. This enables us to be much more targeted in terms of directing our resources towards effective improvements."

Cairn has since added the Clearview intelligence and reporting module to bring its performance data to life and provide insights into its performance management data. The system has also been extended further to embed and cascade performance data down to the individual appraisals of Cairn's 240 staff.

Smith said, "The personal performance module pulls the performance measures and tasks from the previous year straight into the appraisal form. We can also monitor the process at every stage to ensure we get maximum participation from all levels during our performance reviews."

Rory Gaffney, director of business services, Cairn Housing Association, said, "The

Clearview customer engagement suite will allow us to consistently capture and monitor all aspects of our customer and community engagement activities, including the social outcomes achieved. This information will provide valuable insight into our communities and help us tailor our services to them."

A full house for Clearview at Cunninghame Housing

Cunninghame Housing Association has become the first housing provider to adopt the full suite of Clearview Systems' performance management modules.

CHA originally implemented Clearview's strategy and performance suite in 2011, followed by its customer service improvement suite, using data extracted from CHA's Capita housing management system to drive performance improvement in voids, lettings, repairs and income management.

Allison McColl, director of corporate services, Cunninghame Housing Association, said, "We're now using the system in 'real time' every quarter for our management committee. They have even shown an interest in being able to access and use the system for their own performance."

Following the successful implementation of these two software suites, CHA decided that it then wanted to manage performance at an individual level. Using Clearview's personal performance module, this involved linking the strategic and operational goals of the organisation to those of each member of staff.

When it was announced that support for Hummingbird BI-Query was to be withdrawn, CHA needed to find a replacement solution. CHA decided to implement the Clearview Business

intelligence and reporting suite to address the need for a single reporting tool across the business.

McColl said, "Our previous reporting system, Hummingbird BI Query only linked to our housing management system, and Open Accounts has its own reporting tool, and Sage HR and Payroll have their own reporting tools; for each system we use, we needed another reporting tool.

"The Clearview system allows us to retrieve data from all of our application databases and display it using powerful graphics in order to streamline and simplify our reporting processes. Ultimately, we will have one system for BI reporting, attached to all databases, with as many end-users trained on it as we need."

Frank Sweeney, chief executive, Cunninghame Housing Association, said, "Clearview has improved our ability to plan workloads, and has also allowed us to demonstrate compliance and accountability at all levels."

Clearview across the country

Clearview Systems has also reported that it has recently secured new contracts from customers representing every country in the UK and Eire.

FAS in Eire, Cynon Taf Community Housing Group in Wales, Oaklee Housing Association in Northern Ireland, Cairn Housing Association in Scotland and Wellingborough Homes in England. Each of them has chosen to implement the entire portfolio of Clearview's solutions. This comprises a strategy and performance suite, a personal performance module for managing appraisals, a business intelligence and reporting suite, and a customer engagement suite.

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Mapping the future at Yarlington Housing

Yarlington Housing Group has introduced GIS and spatial analytics across its operations to make significant cost and efficiency savings, based on linking disparate in-house and third-party data. The housing provider reported that the budget for the project was around £50,000.

Based on Ordnance Survey mapping, Yarlington's bespoke web-based system centralises data from in-house systems, partners, and statistical organisations and presents it visually using more than 300 custom-built layers, enabling smarter strategy development, enhanced customer service, informed decision making and greater cost-effectiveness.

Karen Dumper, head of information, Yarlington Housing Group said "Working with partner agencies and using information available through intelligence networks to deliver a GIS project like this is innovative. The project has fired the interest of other organisations, and has introduced more collaborative working for the benefit of our communities."

Prior to the introduction of the GIS, Yarlington staff had to query multiple systems when responding to basic enquiries and, due to the time this took, it was often referred to specific departments. Now, most queries can be dealt with at the first point of contact through the use of

GIS and consolidated access to data from all systems. In addition, Yarlington Housing has used GIS to proactively identify, target and prepare the tenants likely to be most affected by the bedroom tax and the introduction of universal credit.

Yarlington Housing's introduction of GIS and the associated spatial analysis have resulted in the turn-around time for lettings decreasing from 23 days to 14 days, rent arrears have fallen to only one per cent, and maintenance and repairs workers have increased their productivity from 2.7 to 3.3 jobs completed per day per operative alongside a related cut in annual fuel costs of 13 per cent.

Cadcorp mapping central to Plus Dane success

Plus Dane has put spatial analytics at the heart of its operations following its widespread adoption of GIS and mapping tools from Cadcorp.

Plus Dane Group was formed in June 2008 when Dane Housing and Plus Housing merged; the group now has over 15,000 homes in ownership and management across Merseyside and Cheshire. The coming together of two very different companies presented a challenge to Plus Dane's new GIS department; Dane Housing had a small GIS department while Plus Housing had none. Users varied from those managing tenants, grounds maintenance and land ownership to arrears and property administrators. Each user has different needs so Plus Dane needed to find a solution that would promote data sharing across the group and work for everyone in the company while also being easy to develop in the future.

Plus Dane chose Cadcorp to deliver a desktop and web-based GIS solution via its intranet which has empowered faster thinking, better sharing of data and ensures everyone is using the most up-to-date information. The solution includes Cadcorp's web based mapping application GeognoSIS Viewer, desktop licences for Map Modeller, Map Editor and Housing Toolkit, and mSIS for mobile data capture.

The solution was integrated with an open-source PostGIS database to reduce costs.

Although Plus Dane had a GIS department and previous experience using GIS systems, it didn't have the in-house skills for extensive GIS development and programming. Cadcorp's support staff worked with Plus Dane to help specify and implement any detailed requirements.



Alex Hill,
GIS Manager,
Plus Dane
Group

Cadcorp
SIS allows
GIS data to
be created

quickly on the desktop and then be easily shared with others over the intranet. This saves time and means that staff with little or no GIS experience can access up-to-the-minute data.

For Plus Dane, one of the key features of Cadcorp SIS is its comprehensive spatial analytics, which the housing provider uses to ensure that arrears officers are allocated tenants fairly, with equal numbers in each territory. In the past, different arrears officers could have tenants in the same

street, tenants spread over a wide area, or far more tenants to manage than others. Being able to map these territories, quickly edit and change an area and see accurate data on the number of tenants has enabled sensible reallocations.

Cadcorp also provides a tool which allows the creation and display of 'hot spots' such as districts with higher arrears; the tool is used to quickly highlight relevant properties and areas which have the highest arrears so that Plus Dane can allocate resources accordingly.

In future, Plus Dane plans to integrate GIS across more of its operations, including enabling its staff on estate walk-about to photograph and report on situations such as fly-tipping, graffiti, vandalism and dog fouling. This will reduce the need for pen and paper and avoid any misunderstandings arising from word-of-mouth reports.

Alex Hill, GIS manager, Plus Dane Group, said, "We chose Cadcorp because it was willing to go the extra mile. It was the only vendor who was offering a package that we can develop and tune to our current and future needs; with the added bonus of flexibility, excellent support and a great rapport."



The Windows XP time bomb

David Mitton, Director, Liberata

Early in 2010 Microsoft confirmed that it would cease support for Windows XP in April 2014. With other challenges such as the impact of the universal credit taking up precious time, resources and capex, how many housing providers have left themselves exposed to the risks of continuing to use this soon-to-be unsupported operating system?

Upgrading your desktops to Windows 7 or Windows 8 may seem low down on the priority ladder but a clear understanding of the risks and potential impact on operations may make you rethink your strategy.

Threat

Why should you invest in an upgrade when Windows XP works perfectly well? After 12 years, surely it has few problems and can continue to deliver what you need?

The answer lies in the fact that no more security updates will be released and therefore risk exists across applications that remain un-patched. Unfortunately, there are individuals and organisations that want to disrupt or access other company data and business continuity and will do so using any means available. They will monitor patch releases to later operating systems and use those potential holes in XP to exploit security weaknesses in any XP systems that are exposed to the internet, or exchange data with other systems via USB sticks or other media.

What if your system controls or audits failed? What if you are unable to maintain your customer information – or worse,

your customer information becomes available to everyone else? You hold sensitive data on behalf of your tenants and your organisation, so compromises in the security or availability of this data are potentially very serious. Some of your partners, such as local authorities, must migrate from Windows XP in order to meet compliance requirements for the Public Service Network (PSN). They will be looking for their data sharing partners to demonstrate the security and resilience of their own systems. How can you prove this if your main desktop operating system doesn't have ongoing security updates?

Make the most of the upgrade opportunity

Windows XP is almost three generations behind Microsoft's current technology and with costs increasing on older PCs and operating systems (up to 5 times higher per PC per annum compared with a Windows 7 installation), risk shouldn't be the only factor in your decision making. User productivity can be significantly enhanced, albeit sometimes viewed as an intangible point in a business case, but new features in Windows, including enhanced device, desktop, printing and power management, will all help your users to become more effective.

With any desktop, Microsoft Office and infrastructure upgrade, there is an opportunity to improve existing capabilities and functionalities while reducing capital expenditure and operational overhead. Common demands across users today is for the:

- Support of flexible work practices;
- Support of an increasingly mobile workforce;
- Support of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) and non-standard corporate hardware;
- Delivery of a reliable and consistent end-user experience, regardless of location and device;
- Support of the business in an environment of constant change;
- Costs and risks to be kept under tight control;
- Networks, data and information assets to be kept secure.

Conclusion

Retirement of Windows XP is an important business decision and not solely an IT-led cost/benefit review. Every organisation will have a different development plan and level of security risk and compliance to manage and it is that business and risk assessment which should lead your decision process.

A high-level performance review of potential improvements from the upgrade in areas such as user productivity, device and infrastructure optimisation, application compatibility, remote access and security improvements may highlight previously unseen financial benefits for your organisation. Add to this a reduction in support costs from moving to a flexible, supported desktop environment and you may quickly realise that the business case for migration is much more straightforward.

David Mitton is a director of Liberata.

Bolton at Home live with Liberata private cloud



Liberata has implemented a private cloud solution as part of a four-year managed services contract covering IT and telephony with Bolton at Home Housing Association.

The Liberata solution has enabled Bolton at Home to take a more

flexible approach to office space following the migration of services to Liberata's secure virtual platform. The project included a refresh of Bolton at Home's network, desktop and phone technology for over 750 staff across 15 sites.

The whole solution was designed and implemented in 10 weeks, with all server and desktop infrastructure deployed over a single weekend to coincide with the housing provider moving to a new head office.

Keith Fenton, assistant director for ICT and business support, Bolton at Home Housing Association, said, "We were delighted with Liberata's delivery of a complex project within challenging timescales. Liberata approached the implementation with a real 'can-do' attitude and delivered the project efficiently and professionally, and allowed us to concentrate on delivering our core services to tenants."



Making room for the agile business

Joanna Sedley-Burke, Managing Director, Sovereign Data Connect

As growing numbers of organisations begin to make positive plans for the future, is the office really the best place for the data centre, asks Joanna Sedley-Burke, managing director of Sovereign Data Connect.

Organisations cannot afford any constraints on expansion (e.g. mergers) and one of the key areas of agility must be within IT. Why retain the computer room within precious office space? Why overspend on electricity because the internal computer room is, by default, far less efficient than a dedicated specialist provider's data centre? Why place your servers in an environment that isn't managed and monitored 24/7?

Don't be constrained by space

There is no doubt that many housing providers have become far more flexible over the past five years, from the use of hot-desking to the adoption of flexible, remote and home working. However, when organisations need to increase staff resources, the reality of squeezing new individuals into already overcrowded offices is an increasing challenge.

Yet many of these organisations will also have a significant amount of floor space dedicated to housing computer equipment. Indeed, to the frustration of the rest of the business, many of these computer rooms are actually less crammed than in the past because organisations have used virtualisation to reduce hardware.

Of course, should a major expansion be required, it is highly unlikely that the current infrastructure will be able to scale, despite virtualisation, to meet requirements without massive capital expenditure and significant upheaval.

Cost-effective option

There is a growing fear that too many organisations are, perhaps unwittingly,

going to find themselves constrained by continuing to locate the computer room within expensive office space. From cost to scalability, risk to skills, keeping the server room 'in house' fundamentally compromises the concept of an agile business.

Not designed from the ground up to support the needs of IT equipment, the internal computer room is unlikely to be power efficient, however innovative the cooling design and air conditioning technologies, and certainly consumes far more electricity (at a significant cost) than the equivalent equipment located within a state-of-the-art data centre designed to achieve the best PUE (power usage efficiency) ratings.

Indeed, the most recent figures reveal that while the PUE rating of a good, modern data centre is between 1.3 and 1.4, the average in-house computer room has a PUE of between 2.0 and 3.0. This demonstrates the huge additional and unnecessary levels of power consumption needed by an internal computer room, and the business is unlikely to have access to the wholesale electricity prices enjoyed by a dedicated data centre supplier.

Dedicated data centre services

By relocating the equipment to a dedicated data centre outside a major urban conurbation, an organisation gains access to a more energy efficient design and lower electricity prices, and also gains the economies of scale of the dedicated data centre resource to manage the infrastructure. It also automatically achieves the essential disaster recovery and business continuity planning that so many businesses do not achieve.

Furthermore, freeing up that space for revenue-generating personnel provides an

immediate financial benefit to the business. Indeed, as one company discovered recently, removing the computer room from a central London office to a dedicated data centre not only enabled the addition of new staff without adding space, but also improved its disaster recovery strategy and created a fully-scalable model to support future expansion plans.

Flexibility is key

Even with a more optimistic outlook, economic growth is unlikely to be smooth. Organisations need to build in far more flexibility to the model; to add revenue generating staff without investing in additional space and extending IT capability without requiring significant capital expenditure. In reality, the argument for locating a data centre within the office makes no sense given the quality of colocation and hosting services now on offer and the wide access to fast, reliable communications.

Moving the data centre to a dedicated provider gives the business the ability to expand without incurring additional costs, and gives the IT team access to the scalable, flexible, well-managed data centre resources required to respond to fast-changing business needs. Critically, by removing the data centre from the office, housing providers can get one step closer to creating a far more agile and responsive business model, an approach that will undoubtedly be essential to exploit emerging opportunities for growth.

Joanna Sedley-Burke is managing director of Sovereign Data Connect.

Award-winning cloud from Castle Computer Services & Partick Housing



Castle Computer Services and Partick Housing Association have been working together to move the housing providers ICT infrastructure to Castle's private cloud service. Following the completion of the project, Castle and Partick were the only Scottish companies recognised in the UK Data Centre Solutions Awards

and won the 'Public Sector Project of the Year' award.

Arlene Casey, ICT manager, Partick Housing Association, said, "The move to a private cloud gave us benefits that would normally only be achievable in a large enterprise environment. We now have a high performance secure infrastructure that can grow with our business

and is resilient. Castle is responsible for managing all of our systems, which reduces IT management time and allows us to focus on our key tenant priorities.

"We have the peace of mind that all of our data is held in a world-class data centre in central Scotland and replicated to a secondary data centre for business continuity. This allows our organisation to operate from another location in the case of a disaster."

George Strathie, software and services director, Castle Computer Services, said, "The highly secure, constantly monitored infrastructure meets all of Partick's operational needs, and the return on investment can be measured in terms of the mitigation of risk and the freedom for in-house IT teams to work strategically within their business."

Easynet offers next-generation fibre for housing

Easynet Global Services has launched the next generation of its EtherStream V fibre access service, with 320Mbps download and 80Mbps upload speeds. In addition, because Easynet is squeezing more bandwidth from the copper services already in place, there is no need for the disruption or costs that can come from major fibre installations.

Easynet said that this provides flexibility, crucial in a market which sees the frequent consolidation and integration of different IT systems as housing providers change in structure and make acquisitions, as well as the ability to implement cloud-based, centralised data centres and new ways of working such as BYOD and unified

communications, all of which place additional strains on the available bandwidth of existing networks.

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Look after your workers

Sir – The recent incident in London during which a bailiff and a housing association worker were left with gunshot wounds during an eviction allegedly over rent arrears, has highlighted the possible dangers faced by front-line workers sent to deal with unknown situations.

The two injured people during the London incident were a collections officer for Metropolitan Housing Association and a bailiff from Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service. Thankfully, due to their partnership with Argyll, they were sent to the job with their safety at the fore due to a full risk assessment being in place as part of our lone worker solution.

The bailiff had both an SOS panic button and a GPS device with his co-ordinates keyed in so we knew his exact location at all times. One of the two Metropolitan Housing workers had an alarm and a mobile solution which told us what time he was going in and what time he expected to leave.

As things turned out, we got alerted by one worker's personal alarm and then shortly afterwards by the other. As soon as the alerts reached our emergency centre, our system ensured police and ambulance services were immediately informed and despatched to the scene. They were there within minutes; the speed of their response may have saved lives.

The introduction of the bedroom tax and universal credit is likely to increase the number of evictions carried out by housing providers. If this does happen, then housing providers' employees, council housing staff and bailiffs will face increasing numbers of unknown and potentially hazardous situations where emotions could run high and the chances of conflict could be increased.

If housing providers have not already done so, they should implement cost-effective risk solutions. If they have already done so then, like Metropolitan Housing, they must resist the urge to compromise on safety in the face of financial pressures.

Tom Morton
CEO, Argyll

Bedroom tax – fewer voids & shorter waiting lists?

Sir – While some see the bedroom tax as a controversial tussle between the political parties, the real life ramifications are proving to be a huge challenge for both the housing providers' management teams and the tenants affected by the new regulations.

Among our customers, comprising many of the UK's leading housing providers, we have seen a significant increase in voids activity. This is the result of people moving out of properties because either they can't afford to rent them under the new rules or they don't want to pay for rooms that are not being used. However, what has also become apparent is that these properties are very quickly taken up by families who provide full occupancy; indeed, some of these families have been waiting many years for suitable accommodation. Irrespective of the political backdrop and controversy of this policy, one cannot ignore the evidence that this trend is creating a fundamental shift in the housing sector as it begins to reduce the waiting lists for social housing.

However, this policy has thrown unprecedented pressure and resource demands onto housing providers to manage such changes. As they are already committed to delivering the very highest standards for their tenants, the changes need also to be handled sensitively and professionally. Thus, as housing providers aim to optimise their stock inventory in the fairest way, it is reassuring to hear that the widespread adoption of enterprise-wide mobile technology to manage processes such as voids inspections and remedial repairs is helping to minimise the time taken to turn such properties around as quickly as possible before the new tenants can move in.

Interestingly though, the driver for housing providers to already have such mobile systems was not borne out of any desire to cope with the stresses that the bedroom tax adds. Rather, it was the result of a constant and evolving strategy by housing providers over the last few years to invest in technologies that help them to deliver the very best service levels they can to their tenants. In short, this on-going strategy to put their tenants first has paid dividends and proved to be a very wise investment indeed.

Robert Dent
CEO, 1st Touch

Big security for big data

Sir – In his call to arms, Matt Leach from HACT (Housing Technology, July 2013) calls for a sector-wide approach to harness the benefits of big data by pooling resources, but he fails to address the issue of security and compliance. Tenant data is highly sensitive in nature and the sector has a responsibility to protect data on individuals. Housing providers seeking to share tenant data run the risk of contravening the Data Protection Act (DPA) and could incur a punitive fine from the Information Commissioner's Office of up to £250,000.

Data management in the sector is woefully out-of-date and there is currently no information security standard along the lines of the ISO series to help share big data securely. Until the sector receives better guidance in the form of security regimes that govern both the collection and sharing of information, pooling big data will be little more than a pipe dream.

Yet it is possible to implement robust data security processes in anticipation of regulatory change. Some organisations, such as Viridian Housing, have already formalised data handling processes by conducting a security gap analysis, a data landscaping programme for data classification and a programme of works which is fed into a Target Operating Model (TOM). A formal Information Management System (IMS) is now planned which will align data management processes with DPA and international standards.

The jury is still out on whether organisations should seek a standalone system or an integrated solution, with many questioning the value in silo systems. With these and other questions remaining unanswered, there is a real need to nail down expectations within the sector.

The enthusiasm and possibility for change generated by big data should not be quashed, but we should be focusing on more effective security governance and the process it runs through before we start beating the big data drum.

Louise Dunne
Managing director, Auriga

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

Another regulatory spanner in the works for funding?

Sir – The past few years have seen an extraordinary period of change in the finances of housing providers. The collapse of the financial markets, budget cuts, fundamental changes to development funding and housing benefit changes have meant that housing providers have been regularly revisiting their business plans and sometimes their funders.

However, just when finance directors could at last feel justified in thinking that they have their income streams under control, the financial world is throwing more spanners into the works.

The latest news is that the new financial regulator, the Prudential Regulation Authority, is imposing a requirement for some of the banks who fund housing providers to hold more capital against their loans. Under this proposal, banks could be required to hold capital of 35 per cent against loans to corporate bodies which, of course, includes housing providers, and capital of 45 per cent for unsecured debt.

At the moment, most housing provider portfolios require just 10 per cent of capital to be held; if this change happens, it could lead to the re-pricing of around £40bn of loans with increased lenders costs and more expensive debt.

This will not do much for the financiers' appetite for lending to housing providers. They are already considering the fact that earlier this year, Moodys downgraded some UK housing providers because it lacks faith in the Homes and Communities Agency's ability to support landlords who run into financial difficulties.

The good news is that the HCA is aware of the problem and is taking steps to restructure its regulatory teams. Seven new senior members of staff are set to be appointed in a bid to boost its effectiveness. This follows concerns expressed by the regulation committee members last year that it does not have the 'resources to function effectively'.

Slowly and surely, the HCA is turning itself into a fully-functioning body that funds new affordable housing and regulates registered housing providers. In fact, it's beginning to look a lot like the Housing Corporation that it replaced several years ago at enormous cost to taxpayers.

Keith Searle
Director of development, Shelton Development Service

Housing Technology 2014

speakers confirmed

**HOUSINGTM
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2014 | CONFERENCE AND
EXECUTIVE FORUM



With three months to go before the Housing Technology 2014 conference and executive forum, we are delighted to reveal a fantastic line-up of speakers from housing providers of all sizes from across the country.

Housing Technology 2014 returns to the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry on 26-27 February 2014. We have extended the event to two days (with the option of attending either or both days) to allow more presentations, greater scope for networking and more time to visit the sponsor and exhibition area. There will also be an evening drinks reception on Tuesday 25 February and an informal dinner on the evening of 26 February.

Sponsored by Aareon, Orchard, Sovereign Business Integration Group and The Housing Contact Company, the key themes for the 2014 conference and executive forum are:

- IT transformation & business change
- Universal credit, welfare reform and digital inclusion
- Omni-channel communications, social media and customer experience
- BYOD & IT consumerisation
- Core applications: housing, finance, asset & performance management and mobile working
- Data analytics and visualisation
- Cloud computing & network infrastructure

Wednesday, 26 February 2014 (running order TBC)

AmicusHorizon – Apps and mobile working to help tenants with universal credit and welfare reform

City West Housing Trust – Using technology & business intelligence to deploy resources and practical interventions to support tenants through welfare reform

CityWest Homes – Moving tenants online for digital inclusion, universal credit and lower arrears

HACT – Big data in housing & shared datasets for better analytics

Helena Partnerships – CRM in relation to welfare reform and compliance

Home Group – How to embark on an omni-channel strategy

Knightstone Housing Group – Business transformation and the role of IT in delivering smarter ways of working, better tenant services and greater efficiencies

Looking Local – Using technology to anticipate channel shift, revenue protection and digital inclusion

Orbit Group – Building a digital culture, including an omni-channel strategy

Peaks & Plains Housing Trust – An advanced rules-based approach to tackling income management

RHP – Getting to know our tenants better and providing the right online services

South Shropshire Housing Association – The business benefits of shared IT services and core application rationalisation

The Hyde Group – Positioning ICT for business efficiency and growth

West Kent Housing Association – Delivering a 'right person, right answer, first time' service for customer service

West Wales Housing Association & F-fectis – Showcasing the results of research into the cost drivers for IT in housing

Wulvern Housing – Wulvern's innovative approaches to welfare reform and digital inclusion

Your Homes Newcastle – A blow-by-blow account of introducing a pilot project for mobile working

Thursday, 27 February 2014 (running order TBC)

Adactus Housing Group – Using technology to reduce arrears and improve income recovery

Affinity Sutton – Business intelligence: modelling, analytics and mobilisation

Alliance Homes – Moving from a CRM and EDM procurement project to a larger business transformation programme of works

Ashton Pioneer Homes – Using social media to tackle welfare reform & tenant engagement

CHG – Information security, cloud computing and BYOD

Circle – Business change at Circle: Full title to be confirmed

Future Housing Group – Going it alone: introducing mobile working without any IT resources

Gentoo Group – IT provision and delivery to remove organisational barriers and improve productivity

GreenSquare Group – A new era: Greensquare's experience of the DWP's pilot projects and its preparations for universal credit.

Halton Housing Trust – Digital first: the provision of all services online, integrated with the HMS

NIACE & East Midlands Housing Association – How NIACE and EMHA are approaching digital inclusion, welfare reform and universal credit

Papworth Trust – Practical experiences of BYOD and the consumerisation of IT

Salford City Council – Choose your own device: a happy medium between the status quo and BYOD – what are the benefits and the risks?

Saxon Weald Housing – Using behavioural change and 'nudge' in preparation for universal credit

Tower Hamlets Homes – Demand- and insight-led housing management to transform organisational performance

Yorkshire Housing – Find out how Yorkshire Housing approached the impact of welfare reform on the customer experience

Please note that the above presentation titles are subject to change nearer the event. The final agenda and running order for Housing Technology 2014 will be confirmed in January 2014.

Online registration for Housing Technology 2014 is now open at www.housing-technology.com/conference.

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Review of Reform IT 2013



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Housing Technology returned to the BT Tower in central London for the third time in September for our inaugural Reform IT 2013 event.

Sponsored by BT, Ciber, European Electonique and MET, Reform IT covered the convergence of technology, universal credit and welfare reform, and digital inclusion. The event was heavily over-subscribed as we were limited to the



90-person capacity at the top of the BT Tower.

Our thanks to the very illuminating speakers from Affinity Sutton, Ashton Pioneer Homes, BT, GreenSquare Group, Orbit Housing, Origin Housing, Wakefield & District Housing and Yorkshire Housing.

A special mention should go to Adam Stewart and Joanne Foster from Yorkshire



Housing who led the entire audience in a rousing sing-a-long of Adam's rewrite of The Beatles' 'Yellow Submarine' as a paean to the joys (or otherwise) of spreadsheets.

You can watch a short video filmed during Reform IT 2013 at www.housing-technology.com/videos.

Orbit's IT team sleep out for Action for Children

Orbit Services is celebrating after raising over £1,000 more than its initial £5,000 fundraising target for young homelessness prevention charity, Action for Children.

Orbit's IT team secured £6089.44 in donations following a series of events to raise money for the charity, including a raffle, cake and samosa sale, car wash service, quiz night, and sleep out in a Birmingham grave yard.

The fundraising events were organised by the IT team in conjunction with Byte Night, the IT industry's annual sleep out where

thousands of technology teams across the UK spend a night sleeping rough on the streets to raise awareness of youth homelessness and gain sponsorship to support the charity.

Eight members from Orbit's IT team gave up an evening at the start of October and slept rough in the grounds of St Paul's Square, Birmingham, while others washed over 50 of their colleagues' cars during the course of the day.

David Leach, IT director, Orbit Group, said, "We are delighted to have smashed through

our £5,000 target, and would like to say a huge thank you to all of our partners and colleagues for their generous support. The sleep out was well organised and great fun – knowing we raised so much money for Action for Children and the great work they do to tackle youth homelessness made all the hard work worthwhile."

The £6k donation raised by Orbit's IT team has contributed to Byte Night breaking through the £1million barrier for the first time in the event's 16 year history.



Hexagon expands project team

Paul Sutcliffe (L) & Robert Cann, Hexagon Software

Hexagon Software has expanded its project delivery team following its recruitment of two specialist project management consultants who will be responsible for the planning and implementation of software solutions for Hexagon's customers.

Paul Sutcliffe joins Hexagon from BPP Learning Media where he was responsible

for developing targeted learning materials used by clients to prepare for the examinations of professional bodies. Before this, he held senior accounting positions with Thorne & Co, Honda UK and Grant Thornton.

Robert Cann joins from Unit 4 Business Software where he was an implementation

consultant. Before this, he held senior project management positions with the Talley Group and Epicor Software where he focused on ERP implementations.

Kirona joins Sunday Times' Tech Track

Kirona has been listed in the Sunday Times Tech Track 100 'Ones to Watch' league. The Tech Track 100 ranks Britain's private technology, media and telecoms companies with the fastest growing sales. Kirona appears in the feature for the first time as a company that has been highlighted as having a promising future, hence its 'One to Watch' status.

David Murray, CEO, Kirona, said, "Since its inception in 2003, Kirona has grown every year and has a particularly exciting recent couple of years, having first been invested in by Lloyds Development Capital and then making our first acquisition of fellow technology company Xmbrace. We are moving from strength to strength with the company now employing over 75 people and having recently opened our third office in Caen, France."

Kirona helps to reduce income deficit problems

With the introduction of universal credit and the likelihood of increased arrears, Kirona has created a new website aimed at

helping housing providers to reduce income deficit problems at: www.kirona.com/welfare-reform.

The new website shows housing providers how their income management processes can be streamlined, including scheduling rent arrears collection at the same time as repairs visits and advice on doorstep payments using a chip and pin device connected to a tablet or smartphone.

The website has examples of how housing providers can quickly assess the scope of any income deficit, identify which tenants are in arrears and by how much. In addition, they can see monies recovered, arrears by region or team and arrears profiling and officer performance. There is also a forecasting tool to show trends against expected rental income.

Meadow Prospect 'putting' back into the community



Last month, 80 golfers took to the fairway in Meadow Prospect's first annual charity golf day. The 18 teams raised over £8,500 during the tournament, held at Celtic Manor Resort. Meadow Prospect is the charitable arm of RCT Homes, Wales's largest social landlord.

Malcolm Wilson, deputy chief executive, RCT Homes, said, "This is our first charity golf day for the group and it's been a great success. This is all down to the generosity of our partners who have been extremely supportive – so thank you very much to

them. Also our congratulations to Hugh James Solicitors who were the winning team; they had a fantastic round."

John Cardona from Capita, the main sponsor for the event, said, "Capita is delighted to support this great cause and we are very proud of our relationship with RCT Homes, which goes back a very long way. The regeneration work that Meadow Prospect carries out in the community is an inspiration to us all."

Meadow Prospect has already helped more than 1,700 young people who struggle to make the move from the job market into the workplace. Meadow Prospect works with partner organisations to deliver projects, which support three core objectives: community capacity-building projects such as youth work and supported employment programmes, community-based renewable energy projects, and social enterprise development.

The golf day was supported by: Capita, M.Delacey & Sons, Jasonic, Bellerophon, 5i, Deeplake, Network by Wireless, Jefferies Decorating, Keepmoat, Quicksons, LCB Construction, Capital Law, Clarkslegal, Hugh James Solicitors, Morgan Cole, Envirovent, British Gas, UKDN Waterflow, Richmond Cabinet Company, PSS, SERS, Xmbrace, Costain, Tower Print, Colin Laver and Quinn Radiators.

Peabody appoints Parabola as SharePoint consultant

Peabody has appointed Parabola Software as its SharePoint adviser after completion of a tender process for the 18-month contract, starting in October 2013.

Parabola will be tackling a number of projects as Peabody's SharePoint consultant, including advice and guidance in

the development of a strategic plan for taking advantage of SharePoint 2013, replacement of Peabody's current intranet with a SharePoint solution, and integration of the SharePoint electronic document management system with Peabody's tenant portal.



IT wish-list from CompanyNet and Phoenix

Better KPI reporting, 'first-time fix' for tenant queries and more automation have emerged as the key demands of IT managers for housing providers, according to a survey by CompanyNet and Phoenix.

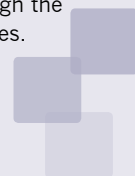
Other findings from the survey included:

- 90 per cent of respondents thought data protection exposure due to a lack of controls was very important;
- Technology for remote working was considered very important by 86 per cent of respondents;

- 78 per cent of respondents thought sharing data between internal departments was very important;
- 71 per cent rated a lack of documentation and reporting for electrical / gas safety checks as very important;
- 60 per cent of respondents did not consider 'end of support' for Windows XP or Office 2003 as important;
- Fewer than 50 per cent have a digital inclusion policy.

Overall, the survey found that the three most important requirements were:

1. 'First-time fix' for tenant issues and queries;
2. Better capabilities for KPI reporting;
3. Reducing manual processes and paper-based record-keeping through the adoption of new technologies.



Origin Housing scores for digital marketing

Origin Housing won the Best Digital Marketing award at the National Housing Awards 2013 for its unique application of a digital platform providing easy access to information on the home-buying process for first-time buyers.

The three-pronged marketing campaign gives potential purchasers a chance to learn about other buyers' experiences through watching a series of animated clips, with voiceovers from real

Origin buyers. They are then offered the opportunity to take virtual tours of a property with their own personal 'spaceman' guide; a voiceover by one of Origin's sales advisers gives details about the property throughout the tour. The online campaign is backed-up by a live internet chat system and after viewing the property online, potential buyers can book chat sessions to speak to one of Origin's sales representatives.



Southern IT Forum at Merlin Housing

The Southern IT Forum met at Merlin Housing Society for their September 2013 meeting. The session included presentations from Goldcrest Solutions on Microsoft CRM 2013 and from the BCS on the benefits of group membership and its SIFplus skills framework for the information age.

The next Southern IT meeting coincides with the National Housing Federation's 'IT in Housing' event and will be held on Tuesday 19 November at Olympia in west London. For more information about the forum and membership please contact: jonathan.creaser@rhp.org.uk.

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