HOUSING™
TECHNOLOGY

HOUSING | IT | TELECOMS | BUSINESS | ECOLOGY

Free housing apps from NDL
Page 08

EXCLUSIVE – Simon Weston OBE and George Clarke to give keynote presentations
Page 24

Free online access at Golden Gates with Social Telecoms
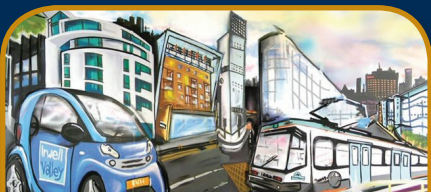Page 14

Orchard win HMS deal at Greenfields Community Housing
Page 03

Paperless debits from Allpay at North Lincolnshire Homes
Page 04

Cloud computing in Housing
Page 20

Irwell Valley Housing in harmony with Soprano
Page 06

Feature article: STP or mind the gap
Page 12

A2Dominion signs up with Student@Home
Page 17

Credit boost for Asra tenants with Rental Exchange
Page 18

1st Touch mobile iPads for North Lincolnshire Homes
Page 10

Ciber launches SAP centre for social housing
Page 03

Editor's Notes

Universal credit – Still too much taxation?

Aside from Housing Technology's continuing scepticism about the IT systems underpinning the ongoing implementation of universal credit, one of the little reported benefits of universal credit is how it will reduce the effective taxation on claimants' earnings from almost 100 per cent to around 65 per cent. Or to put it another way, at present for every £1 earned, claimants lose the same amount of benefits whereas with universal credit, earned income will be subject to a withdrawal rate of 'just' 65p per pound earned.

While some people argue that an effective tax rate of 65 per cent is still much too high, especially when one considers that HMRC's top tax band is 45 per cent for income over £150,000, it is certainly a step in the right direction.

Housing Technology 2014

If you haven't reserved your place at Housing Technology 2014 in Oxford next month, there is still time. Although we have extended our annual conference to two days, guests have the option of attending either day (Wednesday 26th and Thursday 27th February) or both days.

As ever, we have a plethora of exclusive presentations from housing providers and IT suppliers on the most pertinent topics, even more time for informal networking with 250+ senior IT/business executives from UK social housing providers, ALMOs and local councils, and an exhibition of many of the sector's most advanced IT suppliers, all set in the amazing Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry. Find out more and reserve your place at **www.housing-technology.com/conference.**

New year, new web

We hope that most of Housing Technology's readers have discovered our completely-revamped website, still at **www.housing-technology.com.**

The updated site is now the most comprehensive repository of IT, technology and telecoms news, comment, information and research specifically for the UK social housing sector, with stories from every issue of Housing Technology, from January 2008 right through to this issue.

This new online resource lets you to search for topics of direct interest to you, whether you are looking for all stories about a particular IT supplier or housing provider, or whether you are researching a particular technology area.

Once logged in, you can search our archive of 2,000+ stories, indexed by over 1,000 housing providers and IT suppliers across numerous housing-specific topics, as well as download back issues of the magazine as PDFs.

Do please let us know if you have any feedback on the site or indeed if you notice any discrepancies that you would like us to correct; please email us at **contact@housing-technology.com.**

FUTURE EVENTS

Housing Technology 2014 conference & executive forum

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

Xmbrace - InMotion 2014

29 April 2014, Heritage Motor Centre, Warwickshire
inmotion-forum.com/inmotion-2014

Orchard win HMS deal at Greenfields Community Housing

Greenfields Community Housing has chosen Orchard to supply a complete housing management system, replacing a number of disparate systems from multiple suppliers. The new Orchard Housing solution, which incorporates housing management, asset management, mobile-working, CRM and BPM, will enable all data about a resident or a property to be held in one place, rather than duplicated across different systems.

The first phase of the project is due to go live in April 2014 and will include both CRM and mobile working. In order to deliver a successful project, Greenfields has invested heavily in project resources and has created a dedicated team called SWAT – the Smarter Working Assignment Team.

Helen Harvey, head of business services, Greenfields Community Housing, said, "We set some clear objectives from the start so that we will be able to measure our return on investment from the Orchard system, plus we spent a great deal of time before the project started, mapping and re-engineering our business processes in preparation for the new system. We feel that Orchard's solution offers us the best combination of functionality and flexibility, and we particularly liked the CRM and BPM capabilities within Orchard Housing."

Ciber launches dedicated SAP centre for social housing

Leading SAP partner Ciber has launched a dedicated solution centre for SAP deployments within UK housing providers, combining the company's SAP experts in the UK with its off-shore and near-shore SAP resources. The solution centre's aim is to build a portfolio of interoperable and repeatable industry-specific solutions and custom applications based on SAP technologies.

Alan Miller, sales director, Ciber, said, "The centre of excellence has been set up as a solution factory to harness the intellectual property of highly specialised SAP consultants, housing sector advisors and a network of technical experts worldwide to advance the development of SAP solutions for social housing."

Through the solution centre, a full spectrum of SAP solutions can be deployed on a single platform to support the entire housing organisation with all processes and data seamlessly integrated. The interoperable solutions provide flexibility in project scale and scope, and can be delivered with a phased approach. Some of the key functionalities covered by the solutions centre include finance and accounting, procurement, scheduling, business intelligence and reporting, property lifecycle management, customer interaction and HR.

Gary Springall, managing director, Ciber, added, "Over the last two years we have been building significant expertise in the housing sector, culminating in the development of our housing solution centre. Comprising a team of 50 dedicated people with expansion plans already in place, our continued investment will provide our clients with sustained benefit."

COMPANIES IN THIS ISSUE

Metropolitan targets 25% reductions with Mobysoft

Metropolitan Housing is using software from Mobysoft to gain a better understanding of its tenants' rent arrears.

Jenny Danson, executive director, Metropolitan Housing

In advance of the introduction of universal credit, the housing provider has spent three months implementing RentSense, a rent arrears decision engine which uses complex algorithms to analyse a tenant's account and assess whether they are in genuine arrears or just technical arrears. This enables Metropolitan to accurately

identify which cases warrant further attention so that it can allocate staff resources as efficiently as possible.

Metropolitan estimate the technology could reduce the time spent dealing with arrears by 25 per cent.

Jenny Danson, executive director, Metropolitan Housing, said, "The programme with Mobysoft aims to release up to 25 per cent of staff time, enabling our staff to manage their workloads better and to therefore have more time to focus on proactive tenant engagement."

Paperless direct debits from Allpay at North Lincolnshire Homes

As part of its plans to improve and strengthen its income collection processes, North Lincolnshire Homes has just signed a three-year contract with Allpay for its paperless Direct Debit service. The web-based service is expected to go live early in 2014 and will allow the housing provider to set up new Direct Debit instructions over the phone and give residents complete flexibility on payment dates and frequencies.

NLH previously managed its Direct Debits in-house but wanted to provide further flexibility with its arrangements to increase take-up among residents in advance of the introduction of universal credit. The Allpay service is costing around £20,000 per year.

Holly Wilson, VFM & procurement manager, North Lincolnshire Homes, said, "Having researched the options available, Allpay's web-based system was the easiest and most straightforward to administer whereas other suppliers wanted to implement software on our servers.

"We already use Allpay's payment collection technology and find it

integrates well with our systems. The costs of its Direct Debit service were also competitive and the system will help us increase take-up among residents through Universal Credit."

At the same time, Genesis Housing has found that Allpay's paperless Direct Debits are speeding up the way it collects rent from residents.

Akeem Abiola, collections manager, Genesis Housing, said, "We can set new customers up on the system straight away and it takes less than five minutes to sort out Direct Debit payments over the phone."

SDS and Orbit create new Sequel Tablet for development & appraisals

Orbit Group has been working with Shelton Development Services to create a tablet-based version of the software company's Sequel tool for the project management of new property developments. The new mobile devices and software are being trialled by Orbit's development staff at the moment before being made available to all Sequel users at the end of January 2014.

Orbit has been using SDS's ProVal tool for development appraisals since 2003, and the company's LandVal tool for land valuations and Sequel since 2006. The new tablet version will enable Orbit's Sequel users to access the project and property sections of the system while out on site.

Kiran Kalair, development business support officer, Orbit Group, said,

"We needed a solution that would help mobilise our workers. The need to increase productivity and remove duplication of workloads was a primary focus of our development and sales and marketing teams, and SDS's product has enabled us to do exactly that."

Irwell Valley Housing in harmony with Soprano

Irwell Valley Housing Association has successfully digitised its invoicing and purchase-to-pay (P2P) process using a Kofax-based OCR scanning system from Soprano Solutions and Data Capture Solutions. This follows Soprano's original contract to supply Irwell Valley's P2P service (Housing Technology, March 2012).

The OCR system is being used first by the housing provider's finance department to process 30,000 invoices each year through its P2P system. After this first stage, the lettings team will use the same tools to process new application forms, amounting to around 18,000 pages per year, followed by the income management team scanning a further 1,000 pages each year, comprising housing benefit letters and legal documents.

To meet Irwell Valley's finance department's initial requirements, the OCR system links to its Soprano e-procurement and P2P system in order to read supplier details generated by Soprano in a CSV format which are then used to validate the OCR-scanned data. The scanned invoices are also seamlessly processed and imported into the Soprano environment. In later phases of the project, the majority of scanned documents will be forwarded to defined storage locations in SharePoint, with an associated audit trail. The solution also sorts invoices into batches, with rules defined by Irwell Valley, based on data fields such as purchase order number, supplier name, invoice date, VAT number and invoice value.

For the initial finance stage of the system's implementation, IVHA assigned a Fujitsu scanner for the task, with Soprano's partner, Data Capture Solutions, then deploying Kofax's Capture, ReScan (VRS) and Transformation modules. The Fujitsu scanner is connected to two Kofax-enabled workstations and assigned to individuals who are responsible for operating the daily scanning workload.

In preparation for the implementation of the OCR system, Irwell Valley's original Soprano system was enhanced with a new invoice import feature to provide Kofax with supplier data and outstanding orders data in CSV format twice a day, and receive CSV files from Kofax on successful validation and completion of the OCR scanning process.

Using shared CSV data, Kofax and Soprano now work together to automatically process invoices that match with Soprano order numbers and immediately send them to the appropriate reviewer or budget holder. Finance staff can now concentrate on only validating exceptions instead of manually processing every match, with the time saved now spent on tasks that require human attention.

Furthermore, the system's Knowledge Approval Database continues to learn how the transactions and associated information are processed and therefore continues to improve the accuracy of automated transaction processing.

The daily arrival of invoices to the finance department now takes about one hour for a member of staff to validate, compared with around 3-4 hours prior to the deployment of the Kofax-Soprano system. 30 per cent of invoices go straight through without requiring validation from staff, with the remainder taking about a minute each to tap through and validate. In addition, Irwell Valley's backlog in paperwork has been eliminated and the risk of in-house processing errors has been considerably reduced.

Experian partners with Circle Housing Circle 33 to tackle fraud

Circle Housing Circle 33, part of the Circle Housing Group, is working with Experian to filter and screen tenancy records of its 8,400 properties using a data-matching technique to flag tenant records or properties which might present a high risk of fraud. Although the project was reported as costing less than £5,000, six months after the start of the project, the housing provider had reclaimed 65 properties by November 2013, worth an estimated saving of around £1.2 million.

Jamie Branch, investigator, Circle Housing Circle 33, said, "Experian has been working in partnership with Circle Housing Circle 33 for only six months but has already achieved significant results, with six per cent of properties under management identified as high or very high risk. Experian's systems provide robust data and flag strong matches, pulling out discrepancies among tenancy records to produce a high number of leads for investigation. As a result of our partnership, we're expecting between 80 and 100 properties to be recovered by the end of the year – double last year's target."

Circle Housing Circle 33 also plans to sign up with the Rental Exchange, a partnership between Experian and Big Issue Invest, to share rental payment information, with the aim of enabling some of its tenants to improve their credit scores and gain access to lower cost credit, at the same time as detecting unlawful occupancies across multiple housing associations.

Intelligent software solutions

'grown' specifically for housing providers for over 35 years

Housing
Management

Asset and Asbestos
Management

Financial
Management

Information
Management

Performance
Management

Content
Management

Mobile
Working

Business
Process Management

CRM

Corporate
Scheduling

Document
Management

GIS

Care and Support

HR & Payroll

ICT
Consultancy

Hosting and
Managed Services

35 Years
From 'acorn' to **Orchard**

Why not get in touch to see what sets us apart from other suppliers?
T 0191 203 2500
www.orchard-systems.co.uk

Orchard
Realise possibility

Free housing apps from NDL

NDL has launched a free App Showcase, designed to allow customers to quickly implement mobile working projects and to improve end user adoption of the final apps.

The App Showcase has launched with 23 apps, with more being added all the time. Each app can be branded as required by the customer and will work across iOS, Windows, Android and BlackBerry devices. The apps are free to all of NDL's 200 customers and have been built using NDL's newly-launched MX 6.1 software.

Declan Grogan, managing director, NDL, said, "The App Showcase is about three things: first, inspiring thought and conversations about what can be achieved with mobile applications. Secondly, it's about accelerating delivery and ROI for those early projects as these apps can be downloaded and tweaked to fit rather than having to start from a blank canvas.

"Thirdly, and most importantly, we believe this provides an opportunity for our customers in IT and business development teams to engage with their end-users by involving them in the process of designing apps that fit the way they really work. Using a real, on-device application with a user rather than a white board is a far more realistic and effective way of getting the final application right."

The App Showcase's development has been supported by a number of NDL's customers, including Bolton Council which originally used NDL's software to create mobile working systems for waste collections, highway inspections and flood risk assessments. The council then passed its apps to the NDL apps team to 'white label' for the App Showcase.

Chris Lloyd, strategy and development manager, Bolton Council, said, "By adopting this technology relatively early, we've already saved significant amounts of time and resources. NDL's App Showcase is a great example of how co-operation between authorities can be mutually beneficial; we'll certainly be looking at the showcase to see if there are any templates we can use.

"By using these templates, housing providers and local authorities can cut the time to roll out by downloading and implementing an app, while also retaining the flexibility to adapt the template to suit their needs, whether that's altering the process, changing the app's look and feel or running it on a different device."

Mobile integration for Scottish Borders with NDL

Scottish Borders Housing Association has completed the final element of its mobile workforce programme with the use of NDL's AWI integration technology to allow remote workers to close jobs while in the field.

Scottish Borders' original mobile working platform comprised Xmbrace Opti-Time for dynamic scheduling and Cognito for PDA-based mobile working. However, Scottish Borders' staff were unable to close jobs remotely in the Northgate housing management system and had to do so manually back in the office, leading to delays and affecting performance indicators.

Scottish Borders decided to use NDL's AWI integration technology to integrate the different systems, providing a seamless flow of information between them, taking the place of multiple proprietary APIs.

Paul Bonser, IT manager, Scottish Borders Housing Association, said "It was becoming critical that we removed the time lag between finishing and closing a job because this was significantly affecting our performance monitoring. NDL developed a solution for us which delivered exactly what we wanted. It's now been working successfully for over a year, it's very stable and there has been almost no need for intervention."

Scottish Borders' operatives in the field can now view, update and close jobs in the central housing system, eliminating not only the need for staff to re-key the information, but also the time lag between finishing and closing a job. Records in the Northgate application are now automatically updated within minutes of a job being completed.

Bonser said, "We recognised the scope NDL's AWI integration technology had in other areas of our business and this was a key reason for selecting it in the first place. We're now confident that it's going to support us in our future plans to automate housing inspections, enabling us to streamline the entire process."

CCG signs three year deal with Connexion2 for lone-worker devices

Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd has signed a three-year contract to protect its lone workers with Identicom lone worker devices from Connexion2. CCG has bought 120 devices through the software company's SoloProtect package, comprising the devices, 24/7

manned monitoring, SIM cards and mobile network usage, device training and monthly reporting. The project went live in July 2013, and took around two months to implement.

The Identicom 877 devices include functions such as GPS, and 'man

down' detection for users suffering from environmental risks, with Connexion2 reporting that the devices are the most efficient way to elicit a Police response in the UK. The devices automatically activate an alert if a user slips, trips or falls. CCG also uses the added feature of the Mobile Worker Management Platform (MWMP) which provides greater safety benefits to the worker.

Alan Thomas, CDM co-ordinator, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd, said, "After testing a number of lone worker systems, Identicom proved most popular with both users and managers, offering peace of mind and value for money. The MWMP feature allows managers to easily locate staff, aiding in location-specific tasks and workforce management."

ROCC wins contractor software deal at First Choice Homes

First Choice Homes Oldham has selected ROCC Computers for its new contractors system, alongside software from Kirona for mobile working.

The new contractors system is intended to increase the number of repairs and maintenance jobs completed each day while reducing back-office administration and paperwork. The system is also expected to make management reporting easier and faster, and to enable more accurate evaluations of profitability.

The new system comprises ROCC's Uniclass Repairs and Maintenance system, including the Uniclass Dashboard and Sub-Contractor Portal modules. The Sub-Contractor Portal will enable FCHO's partners to receive and complete jobs online, directly into the FCHO system, removing the need for the housing provider to re-key contractors' data. The solution also incorporates Kirona's mobile working and dynamic resource scheduling software, so that more jobs will be completed first time, without the costs and inconvenience of having to re-book appointments with tenants.

As part of the overall solution, the ROCC systems will be integrated with FCHO's existing business applications, including a housing management system from Northgate and a finance management system from Agresso.

1st Touch mobile iPads for North Lincolnshire Homes

North Lincolnshire Homes has completed the implementation of 1st Touch mobile workforce technology running on Apple iPads for its maintenance and responsive repairs operations.

1st Touch was chosen by North Lincolnshire Homes as the software had existing integration capabilities with its Aareon QL housing management system.

Steve Hepworth, director of operations, North Lincolnshire Homes, said, "With 1st Touch software on our iPads, we have increased the speed of our responses and our mobile operatives are out on the road more. This has helped us to achieve some fantastic customer service responses from our tenants.

"1st Touch also allows us to look at how we can use a similar system for our other services, such as our tenancy support teams who will be able to have the right information with them when they are in tenants' homes, and we can also design forms to use for home check visits for tenancy verification purposes."

Neil Keay, head of maintenance, North Lincolnshire Homes, added, "We have 41 people in our maintenance department using 1st Touch running on iPads. The software has reduced the paperwork significantly as we no longer have to fill in paper forms that are difficult and time-consuming to administer. We estimate that the software will save us more than 80 hours each month, which is a lot of extra jobs that we can fit in."

West Lancashire Council mobile with 1st Touch

West Lancashire Borough Council is working with 1st Touch to introduce a mobile working system for housing officers in its estate management team. The team was picked to be the first to use the new system because of the wide range of services it delivers across the council's housing estates, ranging from anti-social behaviour, neighbour and boundary disputes to graffiti problems and fly tipping.

The new mobile technology will enable the council's housing officers to use their iPads to access a wealth of information, until now only available back at the office, so that they can answer tenants' queries, record issues and immediately pass on information to other council staff. 1st Touch was chosen as there was an existing integration with the council's Aareon housing management system.

Val Hopley, responsible for landlord services, West Lancashire Borough Council, said, "We are constantly working to improve our services to tenants and this new mobile workforce system will help us do that. Work can begin immediately on tackling issues raised by tenants rather than having to wait until staff return to their offices."

Civica Housing
Cx
The next generation

Civica UK announces the first implementation of the Civica Cx Housing Management System...

...the next generation product for Social Housing. Rollout will commence in the first quarter of 2014 with the first of five customers who have already committed to Cx and will be taking their organisations forward with the web deployable application software.

Jeff Hewitt, Civica Housing's Managing Director, comments: "Cx is the culmination of almost three years' design and development, and has been engineered from the ground up. The easy option for us would have been to re-use an existing database, and provide a new front end in Cx. Instead, we have looked at the fresh challenges facing the sector and have designed a system around the latest developments in the industry, from provision of services to non-tenants, to offering communication choices to tenants and leaseholders, Universal Credit and the move to Social Enterprise. Cx provides a framework permitting growth and diversity in a sector facing real challenges, and housing management systems must enable, not constrain, diversification into new areas of work."

Using expertise gained over twenty years in the housing sector, Cx (Customer eXperience) has been developed as a best-of-breed Application in .Net, and HTML5 running against a SQL Server database deployable respectively on internal customer infrastructure, as a Managed Service, or available in the Cloud using Software As a Service (SaaS).

The application puts the citizen at the heart of the business allowing the landlord to interact with the resident in the manner of their choice – their preferred language and method such as email, text and/or social media – and delivers seamless integration with CRM applications and self-service portals to track the organisation's whole-life relationship with the resident.

Cx has been specifically designed to run on tablets, smartphones and traditional computers using an intuitive interface, and use-anywhere on any device basis based around a Windows 8 look and feel, providing a rich functional interface available anytime, anywhere and any place.

To find out more

Email: civicahousingcx@civica.co.uk
Call: 01384 453400

@CivicaUK
www.linkedin.com/company/civica

CIVICA

Straight-through-processing or mind the gap

With most housing providers having a diverse selection of business applications running across their various operations, particularly when they have a 'best of breed' approach to the adoption of new technologies, Housing Technology interviewed a number of experts on how straight-through processing could improve housing providers' operations and services.

For many housing providers, individual applications areas such as mobile, housing management and finance have been successfully implemented. The next step is what can be termed straight-through processing (STP). This is the concept that not only do all of the disparate technologies integrate with one another, but more importantly, that an initial tenant enquiry or repairs request, for example, can pass seamlessly to all relevant parts of a housing provider (and its contractors) without the need for re-keying data or manual intervention. Not only should this reduce costs and improve the accuracy of housing providers' data, it should also dramatically improve the quality and speed of their services.

"The key to achieving STP is two-fold; first planning and structuring the an 'open data' strategy and, secondly, ensuring the relevant systems can be integrated to allow the process to flow seamlessly."

Chris Potter, director of Uniclass, ROCC Computers

STP across the board?

Few companies in any business sector have achieved genuine STP across all of their operations; there are always likely to be 'outliers' where the time and resources needed to bring them into the STP fold outweigh the advantages of doing so. At the same time, the benefits of STP accrue exponentially as more applications can talk to each other.

Elizabeth Sipiere, the chief executive officer of Valueworks, said, "It's unrealistic to expect to achieve STP across all areas of a housing provider's operations due to the number of systems that they typically have.

"With most IT suppliers offering a similar portfolio of applications, the problems of achieving STP are more due to competitive issues between them, rather than any issues with technology or skill-sets."

Chris Berry, director, Liquid Voice

However, from a finance perspective, we would certainly expect everything to be automated and seamlessly integrated, from placing an order with a supplier, through importing invoices into a finance system, to outputting management reports."

Chris Berry, a director at Liquid Voice, said, "Integration has long been the sticking point in delivering seamless end-to-end processing of customer requirements within housing, principally because of the breadth of disparate systems within any given environment. But with most IT suppliers offering a similar portfolio of applications, in truth, the problems are more due to competitive issues between them, rather than any issues with technology or skill-sets."

Considering STP from the well-established enterprise resource planning (ERP) perspective, Paul Swannell, the sales manager for social housing in Ciber UK's SAP Practice, added, "If an ERP approach is taken to deploy an integrated business platform, STP is delivered 'as standard', reflecting the fundamental nature of the technology. In this case, the scope of STP is limited only by the scope of the ERP platform."

Examples of STP

As mentioned earlier, in an ideal world of STP a repairs request, for example, would be able to flow seamlessly to all relevant parts of a housing provider's operations without the need for re-keying data or manual interventions, but what are the more realistic scenarios?

Chris Potter, director of Uniclass for ROCC Computers, explained, "The housing repairs process is a good example of STP. In a responsive repairs scenario, the tenant raises the repairs

request, asset and resource information is collated, scheduled and actioned, the service is then delivered and customer satisfaction and costing is recorded and analysed. It is basically a single process, from the repair request being raised to the customer satisfaction with the job being measured."

Helen Rogers, Netcall's product manager, said, "Activities such as changes in tenant circumstances or data become so much more efficient and accurate as information is entered only once, thus avoiding the need for 'double keying', and information and records are therefore consistent across all systems."

"We are seeing the best-in-class housing providers automating everything from the tenant call through the repair to the invoice payment."

Elizabeth Sipiere, chief executive officer, Valueworks

Valueworks' Sipiere added, "We are seeing the best-in-class housing providers automating everything from the tenant call through the repair to the invoice payment. And in line with the best STP in other sectors, they are starting to manage these aspects of the business on an exception basis – not reviewing every transaction, but only those with some reason to be noted as exceptions. In many cases, even exceptions might be passed through to enable operational efficiency on the job, with the exception triggering a review to prevent a recurrence of such an exception."

How to achieve STP

Apart from the cultural implications and issues around STP, the principal barriers to STP seem to be around data fields or data attributes differing between applications, and providing the means for the different applications to transfer data between them.
ROCC Computers' Potter explained, "The key to achieving STP is two-fold; first planning and structuring the organisation's 'open data' strategy and, secondly, ensuring the relevant

Straight-through-processing or mind the gap

Continued from opposite page

> "STP offers many advantages for housing providers which start with an integrated workflow to ensure that processes are consistently followed and also that exceptions are not lost in the system."
>
> Sophie Bell, account manager for Civica

systems can be integrated to allow the process to flow seamlessly. The data pools generally cover three key areas: finance, people and property. The data pool is the common point in the communications between all the process partners, such as housing providers, tenants, sub-contractors, suppliers and regulators, and ensures the information is synchronised and accessible to everyone in a common, fast and accurate manner."

Swannell from Ciber UK's SAP Practice added, "By following an ERP approach, STP becomes a natural by-product of what is essentially an innately integrated process landscape. Without ERP, and especially without genuine single-vendor ERP platforms, the most fundamental barrier to STP is the fact that each application typically uses a different data hierarchy, meaning certain types of record or attribute simply don't exist or are inconsistent across discrete processes."

Sophie Bell, an account manager for Civica, said, "STP is partly a technology challenge and a processes change, but creating a STP solution also requires organisations to sometimes adapt how they view technology deployment. The legacy method consists of standalone and often on-premise applications that are stitched together into STP. This can cause additional challenges when multiple IT suppliers are not setup to work well together or in some case are even rivals. From a development standpoint, an end customer can end up trapped between antithetical technology approaches or standards differences."

What are the advantages of STP?

Different departments within a housing provider are likely to have widely varying views on what constitutes 'good STP'; the finance department will be more concerned with seamlessly processing invoices

from inception to final settlement, CRM teams may be more interested in using STP for 'first-time fix' for tenant enquiries, and asset and property managers might want to use STP for their planned maintenance programmes.

Liquid Voice's Berry said, "A lack of inter-departmental communication is a huge factor in the inefficiencies seen within the public sector and as a by-product, it is one of the main contributors in reduced customer experience. Getting this right has no end of benefits which include housing providers benefitting from massive improvements in efficiency, reducing costs and saving time. In addition, tenants can experience an uplift in service through a reduction in time to process requirements."

> "If an ERP approach is taken to deploying an integrated business platform, STP is delivered 'as standard', reflecting the fundamental nature of the technology. "
>
> Paul Swannell, sales manager for social housing in Ciber UK's SAP Practice

Bell from Civica explained, "STP offers many advantages for housing providers which start with an integrated workflow to ensure that processes are consistently followed and also that exceptions are not lost in the system. For tenants, a simple thing such as case notes being seamlessly passed around the organisation as calls are moved between departments dramatically improves the customer experience."

Looking beyond a housing provider's internal operations and its tenants, Netcall's Rogers added, "STP enables processes which are outsourced to contractors to be handled and tracked more effectively, such as making sure staff carrying out repairs, cyclical maintenance, ASB visits all have pertinent information to hand and available on a smart phone or tablet, at the same time as giving contractors the capability to login to the housing provider's system via a portal so that they can log the progress of their tasks, resulting in the logging of a completed repair task automatically setting off the financial processes related to that task."

New technologies vs. new processes

The technologies necessary to achieve STP, such as middleware, APIs and integration tools, exist already and are widely available. These are merely the foundation for the business and operational processes sitting on top of them, combined with a concerted shift in a housing provider's culture.

> "With STP, activities such as changes in tenant circumstances or data become so much more efficient and accurate as information entered only once, thus avoiding the need for 'double keying'."
>
> Helen Rogers, product manager, Netcall

As ROCC Computers' Potter explained, "Both technology and processes are important in achieving STP. The processes should have been computerised using mobile and web technologies, which allow data to be exchanged and shared, and different parties to be plugged in and connected to the process. All systems in the process should have open APIs, which allow real-time updates to all the data sources."

Swannell from Ciber UK's SAP Practice added, "In the context of an ERP approach, STP is not a new technology; it is an excellent illustration of the benefits delivered by integrated processes based upon centralised common data structures."

Looking ahead

It is highly likely that more and more housing providers will start to look at their IT estates in conjunction with their business processes to assess where STP can deliver the greatest benefit, beginning perhaps with a 'bite-sized' approach that focuses on linking only two or three applications at first, based on a common data hierarchy, before joining up the dot across the rest of the organisation.

Housing Technology would like to thanks Paul Swannell (Ciber UK), Sophie Bell (Civica), Chris Berry (Liquid Voice), Helen Rogers (Netcall), Chris Potter (ROCC Computers) and Elizabeth Sipiere (Valueworks) for contributing to this article.

Free online access at Golden Gates with Social Telecoms

Social Telecoms CIC has announced that it is working with Golden Gates Housing Trust to give tenants on one of its estates in Warrington free internet access and computers in their homes via a tiny device that effectively turns tenants' televisions into large tablet computers.

The project is being part funded through the government's Digital Deal and gives Golden Gates' tenants who don't have their own computer, laptop or smartphone one of Social Telecoms'

free Rascal mini-PCs; Rascals are tiny computers that plug into a television and are operated wirelessly using a keyboard and mouse.

John Clarke, director, Social Telecoms CIC, said, "The Rascal effectively turns a television into a giant Android tablet. It's amazing how much technology can be packed into something not much bigger than a memory stick. It plugs straight into a USB socket so it doesn't need any cabling or even a separate power supply, but it can run office applications and even support gaming. What's more, it's very easy to use and it proves you don't need expensive equipment to access the internet."

The government's funding will be 'match funded' by Golden Gates and will see Social Telecoms install and manage a wi-fi network in Longford, providing free wireless broadband to its tenants and low cost access to other local residents without the need for expensive broadband connections and monthly line rental fees.

Peter Fitzhenry, director of housing management, Golden Gates Housing Trust, said, "We believe this is an exciting opportunity that will benefit a significant number of digitally-excluded tenants living in one of the most disadvantaged areas of the UK, and will enable hundreds of tenants to experience the wonders of the internet in their own home without having to buy a computer."

The contract is worth around £40,000 and includes the planning, supply, setup and configuration, 100 Android-based Rascal devices, and 12 months' maintenance and support of the wi-fi network and a dedicated fibre leased line. The project will run for 12 months as a pilot with an interim evaluation in May 2014.

HTML5 web for Flagship Housing with VerseOne

Following Flagship Housing's work in 2012 to redevelop its web presence with help from its long-term partner VerseOne and its VerseOne content management system, it has since launched an informational website (www.rftrepairs.com) for its new in-house repairs service and also carried out a complete redesign of its customer website (www.flagship-housing.co.uk).

The housing provider wanted to remain at the forefront of new features and technologies, such as HTML5 and responsive design, with Flagship's strategy focused on the user journey, incorporating prominent sign-posting and calls to action, plus interactive animations throughout the site.

The web redesign has been the main focus of Flagship's digital communications team, and the hard work seems to have paid off, with the Flagship website voted 'Best Website in Housing 2013' at the VerseOne Awards.

In order to drive traffic to the new customer website and raise the company's profile online, Flagship worked with VerseOne on a digital strategy, in which search engine optimisation and pay-per-click campaigns were tested to promote one of Flagship's commercial services.

These 'test and learn' campaigns contributed to the housing provider's

business intelligence about its direct marketing and website visitors.

Campaign benchmarking and analytics showed an increase in traffic to landing pages and more responses to calls to action during the campaign period.

Mark Pearce, e-communications manager, Flagship Housing said, "We want to use this business intelligence to develop our digital marketing presence in 2014, specifically with the use of Google Adwords and responsive design for mobile and tablet marketing, and greater integration with our social media platforms."

CAPITA

Reaching the right people at the right time

A focus on digital services for your social housing organisation
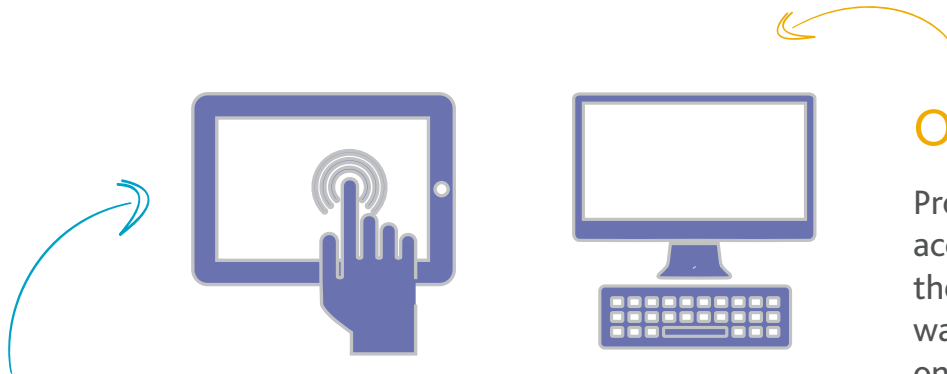
Online services

Providing your customers access to the services they need and an efficient way to interact with you online, how and when best suits them.

Mobile working

Helping you realise the benefits of true mobile working across your entire organisation.
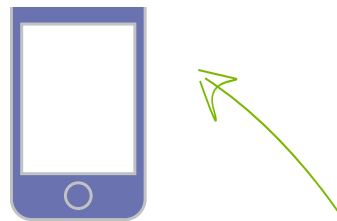
Smartphone apps

Putting information and services in the palms of your customers' hands, allowing you to engage with your community anytime, anywhere.

> "We saw a reduction in cost while providing a far better service for our customers - a combination that is the Holy Grail for any housing organisation at the moment.

Geoff Kirk, service director - business systems, WDH
after implementing Capita TotalMobile

For more information about Capita's digital solutions as a part of your complete social housing management system, email cssenquiries@capita.co.uk, call 08700 100347 or visit www.capita-software.co.uk/housing

Cheshire Council opts for CTI with Liquid Voice

Liquid Voice has helped Cheshire West & Cheshire Council to streamline its call-handling procedures and improve accessibility to council services. The £45,000 CTI project is linking the council's existing CRM and PABX systems.

The council receives more than 500,000 calls each year, with a target of answering each call within 20 seconds by one of the 80 agents at its contact centre. As part of its on-going 'Think Customer!' initiative, the council therefore decided that better integration between its Kana CRM system and its Avaya PABX would allow it to reduce the number of simple calls coming into the contact centre and shorten the process for customers to reach the council.

Maria Byrne, head of services, Cheshire West & Cheshire Council, said, "Like much of the public sector, we are facing challenging times and are looking at ways to improve efficiency so we are turning to technology and in particular CTI."

The council selected Liquid Voice based on its technical capabilities and its successful CTI work with other public sector clients such as Flagship Housing and Bernicia Group.

For callers needing to speak to the council, integration with the council's Kana CRM package means that contact centre agents and operators can see who is calling and deliver a more personalised and efficient service. Caller information is provided to the agent instantly so call handling times are reduced on every call, allowing agents to handle more calls.

Byrne said, "The Liquid Voice system also helps our contact centre agents to self-manage their time better following on from each call."

The new CTI platform has full audit and reporting capability which allows the council to effectively maintain staffing levels within the contact centre and understand trends to help better plan on-going activities and expected demand.

Julie Bellis, senior customer services manager, Cheshire West & Cheshire Council, said, "In the few months that we have been working with Liquid Voice, we have changed direction several times and they have worked with us and been very, very flexible."

Liquid Voice and Civica partner for better CTI

Liquid Voice has released details of its successful integration of Civica's Contact Centre applications with Liquid Voice's telephony technology to help housing providers to streamline tenant engagement, meet regulatory requirements and remove IT complexity.

Over the last year, technical teams from Liquid Voice and Civica have built tight integration and a set of advanced telephony and call recording features into the core of the Civica application suite. These include the ability to seamlessly pass calls and tenant details across departments and workflows while maintaining call recording policies and functionality. The solution spans both on premise and hosted applications and provides a reliable and scalable contact management platform.

Michael Hayward, sales director, Civica, said, "Liquid Voice are subject matter experts in the field of telephony, and by working closely with their team we are able to ensure that telephony functionality is delivered seamlessly, and as both of our application sets develop, our customers don't have to worry about the application becoming incompatible."

The integration has proven particularly useful for the housing sector, with housing providers such as BPHA, A2Dominion and Bernicia Group that have deployed Civica software with an integrated Liquid Voice CTI and call recording solution.

Adam Gould, head of customer contact, BPHA, said, "We have worked with Civica for a number of years and the new integration with Liquid Voice has helped us improve how we communicate with our tenants and meet our PCI compliance requirements in respect to call recording."

Chris Berry, business development director and co-founder, Liquid Voice, said, "Our relationship with Civica is more than just a one off project but an ongoing partnership that simplifies the integration of telephony management and recording within workflows, so it simply delivers without housing providers having to invest time and resources on complex and ongoing technical support.

"The result is that our joint customers gain advanced features from day one and as requirements evolve, they know that they will be supported either on premise or in a hosted environment in a completely seamless fashion."

Liquid Voice will also provide Civica with new products that will help customers to drive efficiency, streamline processes and ultimately enable them to save time and money, such as Liquid Voice's new Speech Analytics Managed service that uses software to analyse both natural speech and calling patterns to help housing providers to improve their call handling strategies.

A2Dominion signs up with Student@Home

As part of the government's Digital Deal, A2Dominion was awarded £40,000 of 'match funding' to help around 1,300 tenants get online through its Digital DIY project.

As well as delivering a 'train the trainer' programme to create a network of staff and volunteer

mentors who will support tenants in getting online, A2Dominion is working with the award-winning social enterprise Student@Home which brings trustworthy and knowledgeable IT students into tenants' homes to help solve computer and technology issues.

Student@Home gives students struggling for work experience the opportunity to gain employment, while at the same time providing a cost-effective support service for local residents needing help with technology. Student@Home has also designed a series of IT educational materials for the Digital DIY project which are being digitalised into a series of one minute videos.

Heather David, head of community involvement, A2Dominion, said, "Following welfare reform changes, many residents' benefits are now paid direct into their bank accounts. Our Digital DIY project aims to help tenants get online to make payments and keep track of their rent accounts and benefits, helping to avoid the risk of rent arrears."

Getting Westminster residents connected with Community Fibre

Community Fibre is installing fibre-optic cabling to 1,000 homes in London's Westminster area as part of a pilot project to support digital inclusion among Westminster City Council's housing residents. By working with Westminster City Council and its ALMO CityWest Homes, Community Fibre's installation is being carried out at no cost to residents or the council.

The fibre is installed directly into residents' homes and gives them access to online services at up to 100 Mbps through their television and other devices. Residents will be able to access free digital TV channels, selected government websites and basic email. They will also be able to opt-in to additional services such as Sky TV, ultrafast broadband and telephony available at competitive rates.

Tim Stranack, head of business development, Westminster City Council, said, "We want all of our residents to have online access. This initiative by Community Fibre further reduces the number of Westminster residents that are on the wrong side of the digital divide."

A pilot project was launched in October 2013 and, after initial positive feedback, is expected to be completed in 2014, before being applied to the rest of the council's housing stock.

# Credit boost for Asra tenants with Rental Exchange

Asra Housing Group has signed up to share rental payment information with the Rental Exchange, with the aim of enabling some of its 36,000 tenants to boost their credit scores and gain access to lower cost credit. The Rental Exchange is a partnership between Experian and Big Issue Invest, the investment arm of The Big Issue.

Asra Housing will submit regular information to the Rental Exchange on how its tenants pay their rent. Through the Rental Exchange, this data will be included in a secure and compliant way in credit reports to improve the detail available to help credit providers assess risk and affordability.

Amanda Hack, head of economic development, Asra Housing Group, said, "Social housing tenants don't currently have the benefit of using their rental payment histories to build up a positive credit file. Those with a lower credit score have fewer choices available to them and may have to pay more to access loan facilities.

"The Rental Exchange is a simple, but valuable solution. Many of our tenants have rented their homes for many years, they've been good tenants, paying their rent continuously and on time. Currently this is not recognised on their credit file, so ensuring that rental payment data is taken into account when credit decisions are made is one way in which we can help our tenants to access mainstream financial products and services."
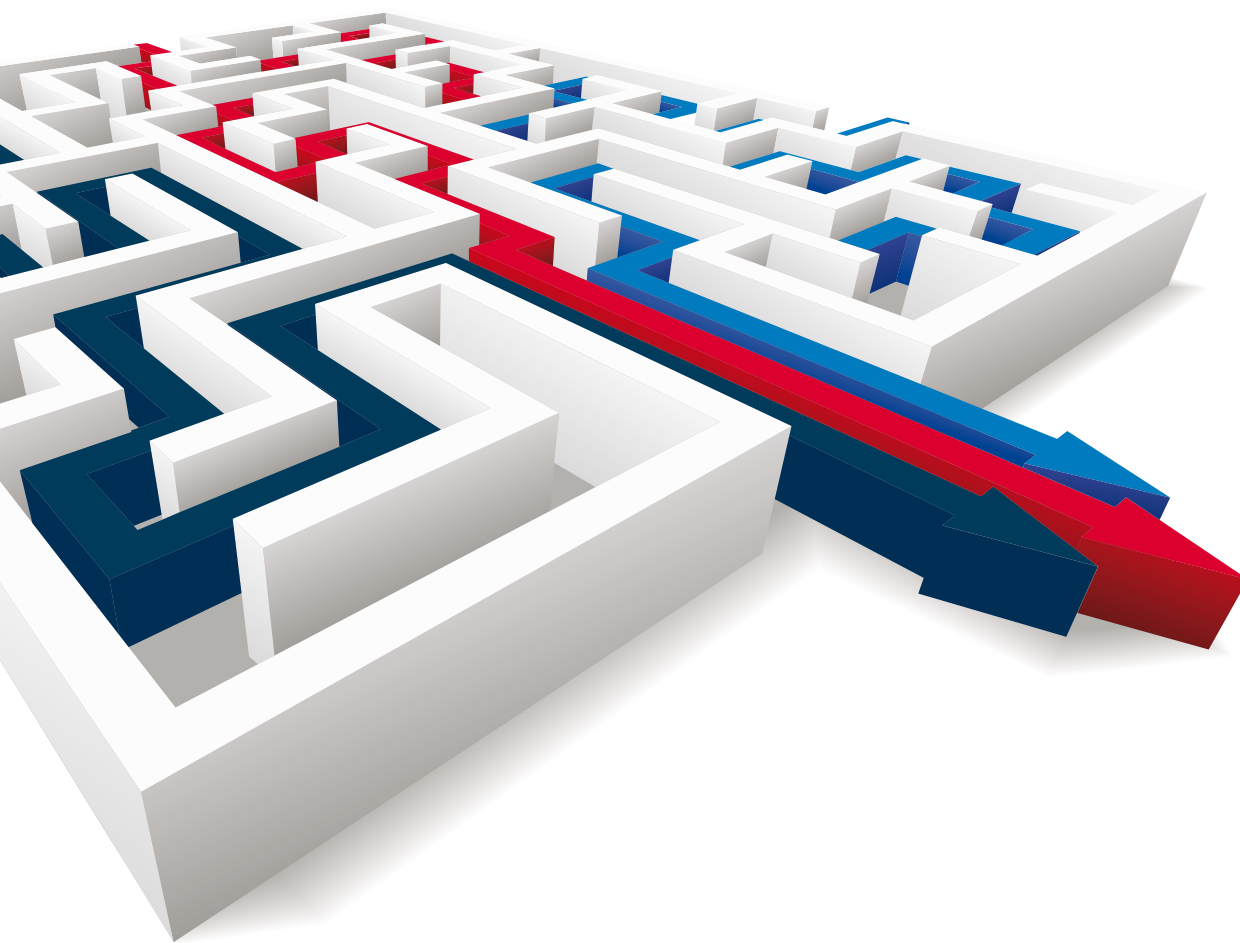
**TAKE THE DIRECT ROUTE TO
BOOK YOUR PLACE AT
HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2014**

HOUSING™
TECHNOLOGY
2014 | CONFERENCE AND
EXECUTIVE FORUM

Cloud computing in Housing

Kevin Doran, CTO, Sovereign Business Integration Group plc

As cloud computing finally starts to become mainstream within the UK social housing sector, Kevin Doran, chief technology officer at Sovereign Business Integration Group, outlines some of the key considerations to contemplate when appraising the options for IT service delivery.

It seems everyone has their own idea of what cloud computing means, so for the purposes of this article, I'll share what we here at Sovereign think of as 'cloud'. Cloud computing currently falls into three discreet categories:

Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)
- Compute, network, storage, power and data centre services available on demand, operated by a specialist provider
- Self-service or operator-serviced
- Hosted off-premise
- Provider owned and maintained
- Shared or dedicated

Platform as a Service (PaaS)
- Includes IaaS
- Provides software tool stack to end-users
- Self-service development and deployment

Software as a Service (SaaS)
- Includes IaaS
- Applications, often available on demand
- Hosted externally, owned by provider
- Licenced for use to end-users by a variety of methods (as with non-SaaS)

Following the path well-trodden in other sectors, housing providers are looking at cloud as part of a broader strategy to deliver what the sector needs in terms of cost savings, value for money, efficiency of operations and improved availability of systems. Some of the benefits include:

- Expenditure switched from large-scale capital budgets to ongoing operating budgets;
- Better utilisation of computing and shared services, reducing costs;
- Improved ability for 'elastic' infrastructure – scaling on demand;
- Less business downtime, improved operational processes and change management, and better responses to service failures;
- Staff deployment from traditional infrastructure management to more value-adding tasks and services, such as business and systems analysis.

There are several different ways to get your 'cloud': private cloud; public cloud; community cloud; and hybrid cloud. The reluctance by housing providers to deploy public, rather than private cloud services is an understandable caution regarding sensitive data residing on shared infrastructure, despite reassurances on the sophistication and reliability of security arrangements through software solutions and architecture design. However, a private cloud is dedicated (unshared) by definition and therefore offers none of the economic benefits of a shared infrastructure.

For this reason, Sovereign has established a Housing Cloud – a community cloud for its housing sector clients – which offers the financial benefits of a shared infrastructure while ensuring that only those with a similar sensitivity of data and associated security requirements are sharing. A community cloud feels instinctively safer for a traditionally risk-averse sector.

Caveat emptor
What generally needs to be considered?

1 Data theft - a breach of regulatory governance and reputational damage
2 Data loss - e.g. through accidental or malicious deletion
3 Account hijacking - e.g. through malware imports and 'denial of service' attacks
4 Insecure APIs – e.g. an interface on one tenant (of the shared cloud infrastructure) could open a vulnerability to all tenants
5 Abuse of cloud services - e.g. the demand on services of one organisation is detrimental to the performance experienced by others.

Mitigation - top considerations
First stop – is the cloud right for me?

1 What are the software implications? Will the application providers support a cloud-based installation? Not all software licenses are portable
2 Does my current network have sufficient capacity and resilience? Cloud services are dependent on WAN. Hence the WAN must meet the availability and performance needs; this can be expensive, especially for many (larger) locations to support.
3 Are we using desktop virtualisation (thin-client delivery)? Cost and performance is usually much better when using a virtualised desktop solution to deliver cloud-based services.

Cloud computing in Housing

Continued from the opposite page

4 Are my applications and data secured to the right level of governance standards in the cloud?
5 Can I retire some traditional applications? Reducing the number of applications managed in the cloud may reduce operational overheads.

Other recommendations I would make to any housing provider considering cloud include:

• Buy wisely: do due diligence and choose your partner carefully, examine financials and on-going growth trends.
• Consider: what would happen to my data if the worst case happened? Are there backup and DR processes in place, and tested regularly?
• Be wary of cheap: check contractual terms, penalty clauses, rights of termination as the cheapest is often not the best value and there may be good reasons for a low headline cost.

If nervous, go gradually and learn lessons along the way. Here are a few areas where cloud should deliver easy wins:

• Development/test environments: these are typically temporary, with sporadic use and therefore lend themselves well to a non-dedicated infrastructure. The ability to commission new servers and databases quickly, and to shut them down equally fast, should prove very cost-effective.
• Disaster recovery: as an alternative to replicating to secondary infrastructure located off premise but managed in-house, those with a virtualised environment can commission online back-ups in the cloud. This is a lower risk entry level to cloud computing relative to deploying elements of the production (or live) environment.
• Remote access services: cloud deployment enables a Martini approach to service availability – anytime, anyplace, anywhere. By definition, cloud providers should have excellent network connectivity, supporting a mobile and flexible workforce.

• New business or new services within existing organisations: we are seeing an increasing variety in off-the-shelf, cloud-based applications such as CRM, intranet and email services. These can be deployed quickly, delivering benefits much faster than traditional on-site application delivery.
• Services with highly volatile demand: a traditional on-site infrastructure and applications set must have sufficient capacity to cope with maximum demand. Not so cloud services, which can be scaled up and down to cost-effectively match peaks and troughs.

Service sustainability

Finally, and most importantly, select your cloud provider carefully. The sensitive nature of the data held, and the need to offer sustainability in services means that housing providers should consider commissioning not just a remote, faceless entity but a strategic partner.

Security

Thoroughly investigate the organisation's approach to: data integrity; infrastructure security; data encryption; location of data; and back-up methods and routines.

Reliance on 3rd-party supply chain

Do they own their own data centre? This is a key advantage, as it means everything is within their control, offering maximum flexibility and responsiveness. There are also fewer links in the chain to break. Beware the 'white label' – some cloud operators offer a comprehensive service from a single source which in reality is a stable of services offered from multiple sources delivered under a single contract. While this provides a single point of contact, your partner is reliant on others in order to deliver its service to you. How comfortable would that feel? By contrast, a simple and shallow supply chain usually offers the lowest risk and greatest flexibility.

Infrastructure

Where do the services actually sit, and how are they operated? Don't be afraid to ask searching questions;

as a minimum, expect to see highly robust DR policies and procedures, with evidence of external validation through accreditation and testing, and check the supplier lock-in period.

Data

Establish beyond doubt the most feasible and cost effective methods of exporting and managing your data when in the cloud. If you need to extract your data at short notice, how will that happen and at what cost? Crucially, have they invested in implementing a culture of rigorous data security?

Return on investment

Select a partner who understands the housing sector and is more likely to be able to work with you to build the business case for investment, to describe the business impact and value of deployment via the cloud.

Working together

Take time to understand the provider's staff structure. Who will you be dealing with? Establish who's in charge of which areas. Question the organisation's approach to working efficiently; how closely do they deliver according to established best practice in data centre operations? This is likely to be an indicator of how they react during the course of the partnership.

In summary…

The cloud is growing in popularity. It offers clear benefits – so be open-minded to take advantage. It comes with risks – which can be mitigated. Therefore, identify the right cloud service to go with at the outset. Crucially, pick the right partner, go and see the facilities for yourself, and if you need to – take advice.

Kevin Doran is CTO of Sovereign Business Integration Group.
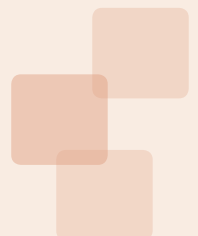
Supporting business outcomes

Paul Swannell, Sales Manager for Social Housing, Ciber UK's SAP Practice

At Housing Technology's 'Reform IT' event in September 2013, a common theme emerged regarding the impact of universal credit and the experience from regional trials; and it was the impact on resources, rather than on debt. My notes from a number of presentations on the day include quotes such as "the key is to free up front-line capacity in order to support tenants", and "our operations need to be much more efficient so our staff have more time to engage with residents".

This started me thinking about the role technology can play in delivering or supporting business objectives, and how its real value comes not from features and functions, but in enabling organisations to meet new challenges or achieve strategic goals. Thinking of my own field of ERP –

the integrated business platform – I started working back from what I'd heard at Reform IT. The integration of systems and data leads to more efficient and joined-up processes, which means people can get more done in less time, and/or certain tasks can be completed with the involvement of fewer departments. And when you consider the inclusion of an enterprise mobility platform, which makes these integrated systems and data available outside the office, the same efficiencies can be seen in the field and staff therefore need spend less time travelling back to offices to complete their tasks.

So one of the results of adopting this kind of technology is the support of a fundamental and very tangible business outcome; to enable staff

to spend more time visiting and supporting tenants, which the trials have shown as necessary to help meet the challenge of universal credit.

All technology offers features and functions, and most people will tell you these are only valuable when they deliver benefits. But the true value, and the real 'light bulb moments', only come from matching these benefits to business outcomes, especially when those outcomes are at the top of the agenda.

Paul Swannell is the sales manager for social housing within Ciber UK's SAP Practice.

Serif Launches WebPlus X7

For smaller housing providers who either don't have staff with the necessary specialist IT skills to take care of their online services or don't have the budget to pay a specialist external agency, WebPlus X7 from Serif might be of interest.

Serif said that, "WebPlus X7 is the complete website designer, providing users with everything they need to quickly and easily get online without having any previous HTML or design experience."

WebPlus X7 offers HTML5, the latest web standard, together with flexibility in an easy, drag-and-drop design system. It gives smaller housing providers, local businesses and charities the power and flexibility to design attractive and interactive websites optimised for any device – without needing any HTML coding experience.

Novices can choose a pre-designed template that is fully customisable and royalty-free, while more accomplished designers can create their own layouts with a number of flexible tools and advanced features. WebPlus X7 automatically publishes HTML5 code so that all sites are

faster and compatible with the latest mobile and tablet devices.

WebPlus X7 is compatible with Windows 8/7/Vista/XP and retails at £89.99 (incl. VAT). It is available from Serif at www.serif.com and major computing retailers and includes a free 30-day hosting package.

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2014 – THE COUNTDOWN BEGINS

HAVE YOU BOOKED YOUR PLACE?

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2014 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

WITH AROUND A MONTH UNTIL HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2014 TAKES PLACE AT THE Q HOTELS' OXFORD BELFRY ON 26-27 FEBRUARY, WE ARE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE THAT SIMON WESTON OBE, THE FALKLANDS VETERAN, AUTHOR AND MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER, AND GEORGE CLARKE, PRESENTER OF CHANNEL 4'S RESTORATION MAN, THE GREAT BRITISH PROPERTY SCANDAL AND GEORGE CLARKE'S AMAZING SPACES, WILL BE GIVING THE TWO KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS.

SIMON WESTON OBE, FALKLANDS VETERAN, AUTHOR AND MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

GEORGE CLARKE, PRESENTER OF CHANNEL 4'S RESTORATION MAN, THE GREAT BRITISH PROPERTY SCANDAL AND GEORGE CLARKE'S AMAZING SPACES

Housing Technology 2014 runs over two days, with guests having the option of either attending both days or just one of them. Over 40 exclusive presentations and talks will take place, spread across 5-6 streams; no pre-booking of specific presentations is necessary, with guests free to pick and choose from any of the presentations. Please note that the full synopses for all of the presentations are online at **www.housing-technology.com/ conference.**

> "Another great event – well attended, very well organised and very good speakers."
>
> WM Housing

Sponsors and exhibitors

The exhibition area is at the heart of the event. As well as showcasing the sponsors & exhibitors' products and services, it is also where all the informal networking takes places as well as where all refreshments are served. At the time of writing (mid-January), the following companies will be sponsoring and exhibiting their latest products and services at Housing Technology 2014:

Sponsors
• 1st Touch
• Aareon
• BT
• Capita
• Civica
• Cloud Dialogs
• MET
• Orchard

> "I was very impressed with the organisation, the punchiness, the challenges, and relevance of the presentations."
>
> Wulvern Housing

• Sovereign Business Integration Group
• The Housing Contact Company

Exhibitors
• Axonex
• Ciber
• South View Solutions

Presentations: Wednesday 26 February 2014 (running order TBC)

Guest speaker: George Clarke, presenter of Channel 4's Restoration Man, The Great British Property Scandal and George Clarke's Amazing Spaces

1st Touch – Mobile technology innovation for housing

AmicusHorizon – Promoting financial inclusion through innovation

BT – Transforming IT services in housing

Capita – Why put all your apps in one basket? The importance of user interfaces for devices and roles

City West Housing Trust – Using IT & business intelligence to support tenants through welfare reform

CityWest Homes – Housing services & technology: The exciting challenges ahead

Civica – Social housing: diversification in a changing world

Cloud Dialogs – Implementing mobile working beyond repairs and rents

HACT – Housing, big data & beyond

Helena Partnerships – CRM & VFM for welfare reform and compliance

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

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

Looking Local – Exploring universal credit, multi-channel access & joined up public services for channel shift, business transformation & digital inclusion

MET – Totally transform IT through mobile working

Orbit Group – Going beyond 'likes' and hashtags: a digital journey at the Orbit Group

Orchard – Presentation title and synopsis to be confirmed

Peaks & Plains Housing Trust – Making your income & collection systems deliver £s for pounds: An advanced rules-based approach to tackling income management

RHP – 'Nudging' customers in an omni-channel world

The Housing Contact Company & Accent Group – How and why is customer satisfaction important in 2014?

The Hyde Group – Positioning ICT for business efficiency and growth

unITe Solutions

South Shropshire Housing & Severnside Housing – Shared IT services and collaborative working to deliver IT transformation and business change

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

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2014 - THE COUNTDOWN BEGINS

Continued from opposite page

"The format was excellent with the right mix of presentations & ample time to network with peers."

Affinity Sutton

West Kent Housing Association – 'It's your call': How we improved the customer journey by delivering a 'right person, right answer, first time' service

Wulvern Housing – 'Keep taking the tablets!': Mobile working & welfare reform

Your Homes Newcastle – Doorstep delivery: A warts and all account of introducing a mobile-working pilot

"Congratulations on a great conference. Speakers, venue, food and communications – everything was great."

Peabody

Presentations: Thursday 27 February 2014 (running order TBC)

Guest speaker: Simon Weston OBE, Falklands veteran, author and motivational speaker

Aareon & Partick Housing – Partick Housing heads for the cloud

Adactus Housing Group – Stop procrastinating and get the cash in! (Or using technology to automate income collection)

Affinity Sutton – Bringing the world of business intelligence to asset management

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

Ashton Pioneer Homes – The launch of 'HMS Welfare Reform'

CHG – Our IT predictions for 2014 and the top 10 tips for delighting customers

Circle – We used to do projects? Managing change from incremental technology projects to large scale organisational change

Future Housing Group – I have a smart phone so I must be mobile!

GreenSquare Group – Getting ready for universal credit with the DWP pilot

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

NIACE & EMH Group – Digital inclusion, welfare reform and universal credit

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

Salford City Council – AYOD, BYOD, CYOD... What next DYOD, EYOD... Destroy, encrypt your own devices?

Saxon Weald Housing – Nudging closer: Can behavioural change smooth the way for universal credit?

Sovereign Business Integration Group – The rise of the housing cloud

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

Yorkshire Housing – The impact of welfare reform on the customer experience

"It's the glue in the housing sector – brilliant for networking."

Family Mosiaic

Pre-Event Drinks Reception

In conjunction with the event's sponsors, Housing Technology is hosting an informal drinks and canapé reception at the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry on the evening of Tuesday 25 February 2014 to which all delegates, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors are invited as Housing Technology's guests.

Housing Technology Informal Dinner

At the end of the first day of Housing Technology 2014, we will be hosting an optional informal dinner at the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry to which all delegates, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors are welcome to attend (details nearer the event)

"Just to say how much we enjoyed the conference – great venue & the format & content absolutely hit the mark."

RCT Homes

Exclusive venue

The Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry is a fantastic venue and for the second consecutive year Housing Technology will have exclusive use of all its meeting rooms and conference facilities for the duration of the event. The Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry is set in 17 acres of Oxfordshire countryside just a few minutes from the M40 (junctions 8/8a & 7) and close to the nearby mainline station.

"Another excellent conference – I thought the content & the mix was absolutely spot on."

North Lincolnshire Homes

BOOK YOUR PLACE AT HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2014 NOW AT WWW.HOUSING-TECHNOLOGY.COM/CONFERENCE.

Sponsors and exhibitors

1sttouch Aareon axonex BT Business CAPITA ciber CIVICA

clouddialogs met managed enterprise technologies Orchard solutions SOVEREIGN Business Integration Group Housing Contact HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2014

Yarlington Housing wins national IT award

Further to the story in the last issue about Yarlington Housing's success with GIS, the housing provider has since won the 'Best Not for Profit IT Project' at the UK IT industry awards.

Beating companies including Barclay's Bank, Scottish FA, Disabled Living Foundation, and Cancer Research UK in its category, Yarlington Housing demonstrated its solution to link in-house and external third-party data using a geographic information system.

Karen Dumper, head of information, Yarlington Housing, said, "This project demonstrates our need to understand our working practices, our neighbourhoods and our residents, and shows what a relatively small business by comparison to the multi-nationals can do to change the way it operates."

SDM adds new staff

Technology company SDM Housing has expanded its development team in Cheshire with three new members of staff.

Oxford University graduate Christopher Stokes joins the company as a junior programmer after completing a Master's Degree in Mathematics and Jessica Smith joins as part of SDM's apprenticeship scheme.

On a three month secondment from Australia, Geoff Bomford joins the team as an experienced developer with his own company in Sydney. He will be familiarising himself with SDM's software before returning to Australia, from where it is expected that he will work with SDM on various projects for its Australian customers.

Parabola researches SharePoint in housing

Parabola Software has completed a research project covering how housing providers are using Microsoft SharePoint.

The research found that 60 per cent of the housing providers surveyed were already using SharePoint, with it being most commonly used as an intranet and for supporting knowledge bases,

staff directories, internal collaboration and automated forms and workflows.

The survey found that the most significant benefits of SharePoint were that it made housing providers' intranets easier to navigate, gave better access to important information and made it easier to share files.

The Parabola research found that the two most common reasons holding back housing providers in their use of SharePoint were a lack of in-house skills and low user adoption, which the software company attributed to the poor implementations by third parties and insufficient buy-in from senior management.

Wolverhampton Homes bags top award for its apprenticeships

Wolverhampton Homes has won a national award for its apprenticeship programme, beating off competition from nationally and internationally acclaimed companies such as Nokia, Vodafone and Asda.

The housing provider's Learning, Employment and Achievement Programme, dubbed 'LEAP', was named overall winner of the national Peer Awards for Excellence at a ceremony in London at the end of 2013. IT also won the 'Business Awareness for the Community' award.

Launched in 2012, the LEAP programme has helped more than 80 council tenants and their families to get work experience, training and qualification opportunities in a bid to get more council tenants into work.

LEAP has taken on 36 apprentices so far and has seen 14 tenants secure full time jobs. One LEAP graduate and Wolverhampton Homes' tenant, Michelle Sawyer, who left school with no qualifications and had never worked before enrolling on LEAP, was recently named 'Apprentice of the Year' for the West Midlands.

Mark Henderson, director of housing, Wolverhampton Homes, said, "We are so proud of all our apprentices and the work they've put in to make the most of the opportunities they've been given through LEAP. To see Wolverhampton Homes recognised by peers and coming out on top against some of the biggest companies in the UK and indeed the world really is quite something."

Balancing Your Drivers

For Social Housing Performance Management

"We required a tailored solution, not a product; aligned to our unique requirements, not someone else's"

"We needed to align our strategic goals to our operational measures, to drive cost efficient services"

EXECUTIVE

- Regulators & Government
- Executives & Strategy
- Management Functions
- Finance & Budgets
- Tenant Engagement

BUSINESS AREAS

- Tenancy
- Asset Management
- Compliance
- Repairs
- Developments

Optimised Performance Management

OPERATIONAL

- Information Aggregation
- Drill to Detail
- Time-Based Analysis
- Financial Comparatives
- User-Self Service

TECHNICAL

- Integrity
- Integration
- Automation
- Auditable & Traceable
- Security

"We wanted one scalable information platform where we could start small in one area, but think big"

"We had to be able to automate data integration from multiple sources, to deliver one version of the truth"

Call: 0870 7606467
or visit www.visualmetrics.co.uk

visualmetrics | Specialists in the scoping, design and delivery of Performance Management and Data Warehousing solutions for Social Housing operations, through a consultative approach that solves your unique information challenges.

visualmetrics

SAP Partner

Microsoft®

ORACLE® PARTNER

IBM Business Partner

Success for Sentinel's IT apprentice

Adrain Dunwell, IT Apprentice, Sentinel Housing

Adrian Dunwell said, "Originally I wanted to go to university, but I didn't want the stress of debts and financial problems when I left so I decided to do an apprenticeship instead. A lot of my friends are at university so I hear about all the parties they go to, but I see my apprenticeship as a real stepping stone into a good career."

After having studied IT at school, Dunwell went to an apprenticeship open day hosted by IT training provider QA who advised him about Sentinel's scheme. After a one-day trial, he was accepted as one of the housing provider's eight apprentices.

Dunwell said, "I'm now working towards my Microsoft Systems & Networking (Advanced) apprenticeship which will take me about 14 months to complete. I'm assessed on the work I do on the job and I also attend block release sessions to study for different IT qualifications. During my last two-week block, I passed the Microsoft Technology Associate (MTA) Networking Fundamentals accreditation.

"Lately, I've been working on server management and on our IT helpdesk, which is great as you never know what the problem might be. There's a lot for me to learn and I've made some mistakes, but I've learnt from them which is really important. I'm keen to work my way up and an apprenticeship is a great way to do so."

Pete Davis, head of IT services, Sentinel Housing, said, "We're really pleased to be helping Adrian take his first steps in his IT career. We're looking to the long-term development of our team and for us, apprenticeships are a great way to increase productivity, introduce new ideas and improve skills. More than 100,000 employers currently employ apprentices and we're very proud to be one of them."

Infor insights at Spectrum Housing

Spectrum Housing Group has implemented performance management software from Infor for planning and budgeting, replacing a very spreadsheet-led culture. The new software is intended to help Spectrum to deploy its resources more effectively and provide all budget holders with the tools to forecast more accurately.

Spectrum's previous spreadsheet-based planning processes meant that there was an increased risk of inaccuracy, poor data quality and inconsistencies across different areas. Furthermore, expensive accountancy resources were needed to manually analyse data, and Spectrum decided that these skills could be deployed in more value-adding areas across its operations.

In order to address these issues and reduce risk, Spectrum selected Infor CPM Planning and Budgeting. The main benefits of the Infor software are that management accounts can be created quickly and confidently, and through interfacing with the housing provider's HR system, budget holders have access to current meaningful data on total employee costs, not just retrospective, two-dimensional data. Infor CPM Planning and Budgeting is now being used by 20 finance staff and 80 budget holders across Spectrum's business operations.

Kathryn Price, director of finance, Spectrum Housing, said, "Infor CPM stands to deliver immense value to us. Straight away the improved visibility allows us to budget and forecast more accurately. In particular, the interface with our HR system means that we can perform this based on accurate meaningful information – for example, the system will factor in whether an employee is leaving halfway through the budgeting period or if pay reviews are likely to result in a spike in salary costs."

Salix Homes saves £30,000 with Kirona

Salix Homes has reported that it is saving around £30,000 each year following its introduction of a mobile working system from Kirona, combined with a new housing management system from Northgate.

Salix Homes' six housing inspectors were given Motion CL 900 tablet devices and so could start their day by picking up their work on the device rather than on paper after a drive to the office which was wasting valuable time. As they conduct each inspection, each inspector completes a report on the tablet which interfaces directly with the main Northgate housing management system.

Salix Homes has a contact centre of ten advisors, so when a repair is called in, the advisors raise the work in the housing management system which interfaces with their contractors' system. Within minutes, that job appears on the contractors' system and they can schedule the appointments.

Chris Henry, technical ICT support officer, Salix Homes, said, "One of the highlights is the real time communications between housing inspectors and the housing management system. Interfacing is instant and the inspectors can interact with the system in real time. Previously it would have been the end of the day before the work was even logged. Customers are a lot happier as inspectors can answer more queries on the spot and, for example, check notes on the system about previous repairs.

"The plan is to give our inspectors a dashboard view of each customer while in the field, which would allow us to offer a fully personalised service to each tenant. So much valuable customer data is held in our back-office systems but it's about the portability of that data and making it available securely on tablets on site that is key to improving our service and efficiency."

Kirona wins 'Little British Battler' award

TechMarketView, in association with MXC Capital, has awarded Kirona a highly coveted 'Little British Battler' award. The awards impartially celebrate and promote the success of 12 small- or medium-sized technology companies (less than £25m turnover) in the UK that punch above their weight.

TechMarketView said that Kirona was chosen based on a strong operational, financial and customer track record since it was founded 10 years ago.

Tola Sargeant from TechMarketView said, "Ten-year old Kirona is a Little British Battler (LBB) that has a promising future in the field force automation market. Kirona impressed us with its end-to-end approach to field force automation that incorporates software and transformation services, and its strong financial track record. It is already punching above its weight, with particular strengths in the local government and social housing markets."

Housing Contact Company's second win at Adactus Housing

The Housing Contact Company has announced its first contract for its Call2Collect service at Adactus Housing Group following the completion of a two-month free pilot project.

The Call2Collect service supports earlier interventions for rent arrears by replacing expensive agent-based, outbound calling activity with an automated service designed to convert the collections of arrears into inbound calls that can be then managed more successfully.

The Housing Contact Company, a subsidiary of specialist voice technology provider Voicescape, reported that the contract with Adactus Housing was expected to be worth around £100,000 over the next five years.

John Doyle, managing director, The Housing Contact Company, said, "The timing of this endorsement, being just before the Housing Technology 2014 conference and executive forum is key for us because I am convinced it is a service that every housing provider needs to at least consider as part of their technology toolkit for managing rent arrears."

Adactus Housing is already using The Housing Contact Company's Call2Survey tool to monitor the standards of its DLO's repairs. Andy Marshall, director of asset management, Adactus Housing Group, said, "The Call2Survey process allows us to catch individual issues with repairs before they become big problems for our residents. By understanding the causes of dissatisfaction, we have been able to make service improvements."

Auriga helps Viridian protect its tenant data

Viridian Housing is using Auriga Consulting's DataACL services to ensure the continued protection of its tenant data and generate evidence that this duty of care had been performed. The dual phase project includes security gap analysis and a data management and landscaping programme, allowing the housing provider to perform systematic data capture and classification.

Over a year, the project captured and instigated new data management processes and established a programme of works to deliver a proportionate security and information assurance programme. BPM elements such as gap analysis were used to benchmark current provisions and custom security processes and controls, encourage staff buy-in to new security policies, and apply technical measures such as secure access and authentication. Data analysis was used to ascertain exactly what information was accessed, by whom, and for what purpose, and data-landscaping allowed information to be catalogued, given a value and assigned to senior management staff.

Phil Copperwheat, head of systems, Viridian Housing, said, "Securing our tenant data and meeting our legal responsibilities is very important to us, particularly given the pace of change in the housing sector. The outcomes being delivered by the information security and assurance programmes are providing a step change in how we manage and secure our tenant data."

Louise Dunne, managing director, Auriga Consulting, said, "Using a blend of data analytics and business-process modelling with ICT security, we can offer insights into which data is most valuable, and protect and improve data handling processes. Viridian Housing is now ahead of the curve and able to better protect tenant data."

BOOK YOUR PLACE

HOUSING™ TECHNOLOGY

2014 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM