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2015 | CONFERENCE AND  
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**HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2015**

**3-5 MARCH 2015**

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# HOUSING<sup>TM</sup> TECHNOLOGY

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## Security for an Insecure World Seminar

Jaguar Visitor Centre, Birmingham

Seminar 10am till 12 noon (lunch) and Free Factory Tour between 1pm-3pm

Thursday 23rd October 2014. Key Note Speaker: Don Randall, Head of Security at the Bank of England

Contact Events Team at MET 0121 227 0730 and register FREE or register online via [www.met.co.uk/registration\\_security.html](http://www.met.co.uk/registration_security.html)



# Editor's Notes

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### Trends for IT in 2014 & 2015

We have compiled a very short preview of the results of our forthcoming Housing Technology 2014/15 report; the findings and figures below are general trends based on a first pass of the survey data. The final report will be published next month.

### Core housing applications

Among what we would term housing providers' core business applications, asset management, CRM, housing management, and workflow and EDM are the most likely to be upgraded and replaced within the next six months, while performance management and business intelligence applications are the least likely to be replaced within the next two years.

### Other business applications

Moving away from the core applications, housing providers highlighted customer apps, document management, self-service tools for tenants, external social media, survey tools and tenant profiling, and text messaging as the most likely areas for adoption or upgrades. Software and services for BYOD, choice-based lettings, and health and safety were the lowest priorities.

### Infrastructure plans

When asked where they planned to make new IT infrastructure investments, business continuity and DR, data management and governance, and mobile services were the most popular areas, while at the other end of the spectrum,

outsourcing, shared IT services and XaaS (incl. IaaS, PaaS & SaaS) were the least popular.

### IT delivery

The overall split between how housing providers deliver their IT services is approximately 70 per cent on in-house / on-premise delivery and 30 per cent using some sort of external services, with these split fairly equally between outsourced/BPO/managed services, public cloud, and private cloud. A little less than a third of the housing providers were involved in some form of shared services.

### Increasing budgets

IT budgets are set to rise by an average of 12 per cent across the sector, although the majority of housing providers will see no changes to their budgets.

In terms of how housing providers allocated and spend their technology budgets, the split is roughly as follows: 40 per cent on maintaining existing technology; 23 per cent on capital spending for new technologies; 19 per cent on operational spending for new technologies; and the remaining 18 per cent on paying off previous ICT projects.

### Housing Technology 2015 – registration is now open



Registration is now open for the Housing Technology 2015 conference and executive forum (4-5 March 2015, Oxford); don't miss the chance to book your place, and visit [www.housing-technology.com/events/ht2015](http://www.housing-technology.com/events/ht2015).

## FUTURE EVENTS

### Housing Technology - SMAC Your IT Up 2014

Social media, Mobility, Analytics & Cloud in Housing  
3 October, BT Tower, London  
[www.housing-technology.com/events/smac](http://www.housing-technology.com/events/smac)  
INVITATION ONLY



### Housing Technology - Beer & Pizza 2014

18 November, Olympia, London  
[www.housing-technology.com/events/reception](http://www.housing-technology.com/events/reception)  
INVITATION ONLY

### Housing Technology 2015 conference & executive forum

3-5 March 2015, Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry, Oxfordshire  
[www.housing-technology.com/events/ht15](http://www.housing-technology.com/events/ht15)



## SECTIONS

HOUSING MANAGEMENT  
FINANCE MANAGEMENT  
MOBILE WORKING  
CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
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# Happy families with good case management

Simon Stackhouse, Business Development Manager, BancTec

*Managing and assigning social housing has always been a socially- and politically-charged task. BancTec's Simon Stackhouse argues that continued money saving by housing providers, combined with new government policies and lengthy waiting times have meant an effective management system is critical to communicate with tenants.*

Problems with housing complaints procedures have been well noted in the national media in recent years. Cuts to public services have resulted in streamlining, which when combined with new policies such as the bedroom tax have resulted in confusion among tenants.

Complaints tend to skyrocket whenever the country is lashed by severe weather, such as the recent flooding experienced as we were hit by the remnants of Hurricane Bertha, again highlighting failures to repair housing.

No matter what policy the government chooses to take on housing, tenants will always need to get in touch with their housing provider and there will always be a base level of complaints. Strong communications between housing providers and their tenants is therefore critical and a case management system is a good solution.

The issue within many housing providers is not necessarily the result of a lack of resources, rather, confused communication and customer complaints procedures.

Case management allows the collaborative management of tenant information, from multiple sources, making data available whenever and wherever it is needed, ensuring complaints procedures, decision-making and communications are focused on the individual.

## Government policy

The UK's growing population has created pressure on housing, resulting in the government implementing policies such as the bedroom tax. Received with a mixed reception, the bedroom tax aims to encourage tenants to live in properties more suitable to the size of their household. Curbing the benefits of those with a bedroom deemed to be 'spare' has simply created confusion among tenants. In some areas of the UK, the bedroom tax is the most complained about issue, with thousands of tenants being affected by it.

The increased level of complaints has in turn resulted in a rise in the workload of housing providers and local councils, who have been left to determine if an individual house has a spare bedroom and is liable to the tax, and therefore deal with the complaints.

With housing regularly a key area for government legislation, effective management of tenants' needs through changing policy is essential to making them feel secure and happy.

## Multi-channel contact

While the majority of housing complaints and communications are made over the telephone, many tenants prefer email, letters or, increasingly, social media to get in touch or vent their frustrations. The problem arises when, within most housing providers, the multiple channels through which tenants communicate are totally separate. In order to efficiently manage complaints, it is critical for communications to be centralised.

Severe time delays in dealing with essential complaints demonstrates a failure by many housing providers to suitably deal with and manage customer communication. These providers might argue that delays in responding to tenants are simply a result of not enough time and not because they are choosing to ignore their tenants, merely that they are unable to deal with them fast enough, but the result is tenants often going straight to the housing ombudsman with their complaint.

This can be very easily solved, with time saved and productivity increased through the adoption of a case management system. Rather than dealing with the same complaint many times, housing providers and councils can see when a tenant has complained more than once and are then able to prioritise those people.

*Continued overleaf*

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## Happy families with good case management

*Continued from overleaf*

A case management system would allow housing providers to hold a case profile of every tenant, complete with all of the contact they have ever had, from every single access point. Whenever a tenant gets in contact, the communications will be documented within an individual case file, meaning whichever access point they use, the member of staff receiving the complaint will be able to track and examine the full case history rather than starting from square one.

### Decision making

The assigning of new housing and the management of waiting lists is arguably one of the most controversial aspects of housing policy. Prospective tenants are regularly frustrated by waiting times for housing, often being left in unsuitable accommodation for too long.

Having an overview of a tenant's case history can significantly help with this

stressful process, making the decision making easier and less disruptive. For example, having access to details on areas such as anti-social behaviour or issues a tenant has complained about in the past (such as noise), and a clear profile of the individual will mean the organisation is much better equipped to suitably house them.

For example, someone whose case history shows that they have had noise complaints previously directed at them or have regularly complained about noise can therefore be housed outside high-rise residences or shared accommodations.

### Conclusion

Case management provides housing providers with the ability to prioritise, seeing key flashpoint areas for concern and placing all communications in one space. No longer will staff be forced to ask, 'do you know who you spoke to

before?' or 'can you explain the issue to me again?'

Case management gives housing providers the opportunity to overturn the stereotypical label that they are slow to respond and unhelpful. With increased pressure on housing, and more and more people requiring it, communications procedures must be effectively managed.

*Simon Stackhouse is the business development manager at BancTec.*



## WM Housing updates its HMS with MIS-AMS



*WM Housing Group and MIS Active Management Systems have signed a contract for the delivery of a new housing management system, eliminating five different systems spread across the group. The implementation has begun, with the first phase expected to be live by the middle of 2015.*

Angus Groom, executive director for corporate services, WM Housing said, "WM Housing has grown tremendously

in the last five years, but as each new member has joined our group, we have seen a growing diversification of housing systems, processes and use."

Two years ago, WM Housing decided to migrate from its multiple business applications across the group and consolidate them onto a single housing management system. Software from MIS Active Management Systems was chosen after a detailed procurement process, including eliciting the views of the shortlisted solutions from front-line staff who would actually be using the software on a daily basis.

Groom said, "This is one of 2014's largest IT contracts in the UK housing sector and runs alongside work to upgrade our infrastructure backbone. The contract with MIS Active Management Systems is for around 10 years and will include implementing a full mobile working solution to enable us to deliver more 'first-time fix' services and rebalance our resources to provide a more visible front-line presence in the areas where our customers live.

"This is a particularly challenging project as we need to bring together five different housing management systems into one while enhancing our contact centre, online presence and mobile working."



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# CDS Co-Operatives goes live on Infor SunSystems

*CDS Co-Operatives has recently completed the implementation of Infor SunSystems to improve its financial reporting capabilities and accelerate payments. Further improvements are expected once the SunSystems software has been fully integrated with CDS Co-operatives' finance, asset and property management systems.*

CDS Co-Operatives' previous application lacked the necessary management accounting which led to a reliance on spreadsheets, which not only took too long but also meant that

staff were used for data entry tasks rather than business analysis. There were also cumbersome paper-based invoicing processes.

CDS chose Infor SunSystems on the basis of its reporting functionality, the application's intuitive ease of use and Infor's commitment to an accelerated deployment timetable due to CDS Co-operatives' impending financial audit.

Suzanne Twerdochilb, finance director, CDS Co-Operatives, said, "Moving away from our legacy application and over-reliance on spreadsheets

was a major challenge. We had to identify and select a new application quickly, but when our executive team met Infor, this gave us the necessary confidence that SunSystems would be able to develop the reporting that we wanted. This confidence has increased as the project was delivered on time and within budget, and even our auditors expressed a preference for SunSystems."

## Arrears kept at arms-length by St Leger Homes with Mobysoft



*St Leger Homes has completed the implementation of new rent arrears software from Mobysoft in order to enables its staff to focus on tenants needing the most help with their finances and to minimise overall arrears.*

The three-month implementation of Mobysoft's RentSense was finished in July 2014, and the software has already identified more than 40 per cent of cases which were

previously highlighted by its housing management software that don't actually need attention.

Judith Jones, director of housing, St Leger Homes, said, "We are always looking for ways to improve our efficiency and support tenants more effectively. RentSense is helping us to do exactly that."

## Salix Homes accepts payments via Facebook with Allpay



*Salix Homes is one of the UK's first housing providers to enable its tenants to pay their rent via Facebook through its payment gateway partner Allpay. In the last eight months, Allpay's online and mobile app channels have taken in nearly £100,000 in rental income for Salix Homes.*

To use the service, tenants need to have their own Facebook account and visit Salix Homes' Facebook page where they can navigate through the simple system.

Salix Homes has used its existing contract with Allpay to enable tenants to make secure payments to their landlord once in the app via Allpay's PCI-compliant gateway using a payment card. Once linked through to Allpay's online payments website, tenants can make payments, store their

details and view their payment history. Tenants can also make rent payments using their smartphone by linking to Allpay's online payments website.

Sian Grant, director of customer and neighbourhood services, Salix Homes, said, "Allpay's online and mobile solutions enable us to offer a secure payment gateway via online and mobile channels to our tenants, and then receive the data in a secure and timely manner with the rest of our payment information.

"With more and more people paying online, and with the roll-out of universal credit, having these options for our tenants is very important and promotes both financial and digital inclusion."



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# ISO-55000 – Taking asset management into the boardroom

*Karen Conneely, Group Commercial Manager, Real Asset Management*

*Karen Conneely, Group Commercial Manager, Real Asset Management, outlines the way ISO-55000 is set to change corporate attitudes to asset maintenance and explains the fundamental importance of a good computerised maintenance management system (CMMS) in delivering critical asset information and enabling process change.*

Maintenance managers know that proactive asset management can cut costs and improve lifetime value. Yet making that shift towards best practice has been an uphill battle... until now. With the launch earlier this year of the new ISO-55000 standard, asset management is now on the boardroom agenda.

ISO-55000 provides a framework to enable companies to use asset insight and good process to improve operational effectiveness. It is not only about reducing costs but also about understanding the business risk and cost associated with individual asset failures. It is about improving planning and providing individuals across the organisation, from finance to production and senior management, with visibility into the end-to-end spend on asset maintenance. In effect, ISO-55000 will change asset management from tactical to strategic.

## **Best practice**

The introduction of ISO-55000 for asset management is the beginning of a significant sea-change in corporate attitudes to asset value. Despite the long term awareness that strong proactive policies for asset maintenance can reduce costs and extend an asset's lifetime value, far too many organisations still retain a highly tactical approach to asset management. Jobs are primarily

reactive and there is no understanding of the business cost associated with individual asset failures or downtime. Any information that is recorded is often extremely sketchy and only retained as some way of keeping track of the reactive maintenance activity and providing a basic schedule.

Yet reactive maintenance is three to five times more expensive than planned maintenance. Scheduling stock, parts, trades and engineers in advance as part of a proactive maintenance strategy can deliver astonishing cost savings. There is no time wasted waiting for the right resources and individual workloads can be scheduled more proactively. Critically, assets that are maintained on a regular basis are less likely to break or stop working.

And it is for this latter reason that ISO-55000 is set to change the perception of asset management for good. Rather than just cutting asset maintenance costs through better practice and day-to-day management, the ISO standard is designed to enable organisations to understand the strategic value of individual assets and the entire asset lifecycle value, including the effect of asset downtime. Assets are no longer the sole preserve of the maintenance department but are of core strategic value and interest to the business as a whole.

## **Detailed asset insight**

ISO-55000 is about making the most effective use of assets to generate the most profit for the business. So what does that mean in practice? At the heart of the new model is a strategic understanding of the role each asset plays in the business and the associated risk of asset failure.

The first step – planning – requires the business to record detailed information about assets, costs, procurement and resource utilisation. Armed with this insight, the business can then determine clear corporate objectives which can then be reflected within the asset management strategy. Is the focus on decreasing maintenance costs, minimising resources by reducing reactive maintenance, or prioritising the uptime of key asset classes? How is contingency planning addressed within the maintenance plan? Organisations also need to understand how asset performance can affect business continuity and determine the strategic response to outages and other problems.

It is clear that good, accurate and detailed asset information is at the heart of a successful ISO-55000 accreditation. With a robust CMMS, an organisation can quickly collate the depth of information required. For example, how many jobs take place each day, week or month? What is the fix time? Which skills and subcontractors are needed to complete any given job? What items were requested from stores? Was there a delay in getting spare parts? And what are the associated costs in terms of business performance?

In-depth analysis of asset performance information, from purchase through to repairs, in tandem with the business impact of the failure of individual assets is key to understanding business cost and risk.

## **Quantifiable value**

Having gained this strategic understanding of asset value, status and related business risk for the first time, the business



## ISO-55000 – Taking asset management into the boardroom

*Continued from the opposite page*

can then use a CMMS to support the next phase of the ISO-55000 framework – namely delivering more effective asset maintenance. From improving scheduling to tracking staff performance and delivering appropriate training, the 'action' phase of the standard framework delivers immediate, measurable improvement in resource utilisation and the quality of the assets.

The ability to assign a risk level to each asset enables far better risk management and ensures maintenance activity can be prioritised for critical assets. With a good understanding of every aspect of the maintenance process, from ordering parts to accessing skills, organisations can run 'what if?' scenarios to accurately assess

the impact of increasing proactive maintenance and determine in which areas this would be most successful and valuable.

Indeed, ISO-55000 also provides a clear framework for enabling efficient, improved performance that will also help those organisations with mandated safety standards (such as the NHS) to achieve the required levels of performance and audit.

### Conclusion

While ISO-55000 is not mandated, over the next few years it is likely that more and more organisations will stipulate that suppliers and business partners achieve accreditation to demonstrate a level of excellence and competence in asset management and utilisation. ISO-55000 will not

only provide commercial benefits in areas such as better performing assets, reduced costs and improved asset lifetime value, but accreditation will increasingly offer a chance for competitive differentiation.

ISO-55000 places assets under the corporate spotlight. It is time for organisations across the board to recognise the new strategic imperative of asset management.

*Karen Conneely is group commercial manager for Real Asset Management.*



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# Interview with SDS – IT, funding and politics in housing

*Phil Shelton, CEO, Shelton Development Services*

*After five years as CEO of Shelton Development Services, Housing Technology interviewed Phil Shelton about IT, funding and political changes in social housing.*

## **How has IT affected the housing sector since 2009 when you took over at Shelton Development Services?**

The technology has advanced considerably since 2009, when the iPhone 3 had only been out for six months. Inevitably, consumer hardware and software will tend to outstrip that used in the corporate world, which can lead to friction in managing users' expectations.

We've seen a massive increase in the use of virtualisation, which is not surprising given the ease with which IT departments can manage hundreds of desktops with minimal staff. My concern is that there has also been an increase in the amount of IT outsourcing. IT may not be 'core business' for housing providers but they are critically dependent on their IT systems. While it may be prudent to outsource the procurement of hardware, housing providers need to ensure they have on-site staff who can administer their systems.

## **What will be the main IT advances in the next five years?**

The shift to the online delivery of software will continue. Web development in the last two years has come on leaps and bounds in terms of what's possible and what's available to deliver that. Google and Amazon are dominating this web services space at the moment, and the Safe Harbour agreement means it's practical to use these global platforms, with their scalability and low-cost, without infringing any data protection laws. Google is now facing the same anti-trust scrutiny in Europe as Microsoft does, but that's hardly surprising given its 95 per cent market share in online search in Europe. The legacy Windows systems will still be

used, but there are now alternatives, which are cheaper and easier to deploy. New software is likely to be fully cloud-based to take advantage of the different devices available and, in commercial environments, to remove the dependency on corporate hardware.

## **What are the main changes in social housing since 2009?**

The demand for new housing has continued to significantly outstrip supply, yet government funding has obviously been much reduced. A large withdrawal from the market by the banks has made getting funding difficult and expensive. At the same time, regulations and standards have both increased, putting additional strain on housing providers. In 2008, prices were rising and people were optimistic, but by 2009 this was over and confidence in development didn't really pick up again until 2013. In 2014, social housing development seems to be characterised by a more commercial focus, an increased need to closely monitor programmes, and a recognition that new ways of delivering housing are needed, whether through new funding mechanisms or new types of tenure.

## **What have been the most positive developments in government policy?**

I can't think of many! Ironically, the cost-saving measures of disbanding the TSA in 2012, and moving its regulatory powers to the HCA, meant that the amount of bureaucracy decreased, which was an unintended improvement; however, the resources of the HCA are severely limited, meaning it has a lot of bark and not much bite.

## **Do you welcome the return of local authorities to social building programmes after so long?**

Yes, this is one of the most active areas at the moment and while many developments are necessarily small, due to the local authorities needing

to replace lost skills in development, it will help deliver many new homes driven by local needs.

## **What are the biggest barriers to meeting the current target of 58,000 new affordable homes by March 2015?**

Funding and certainty. It's simply not possible to develop affordable homes without subsidy. This subsidy can't always come from housing providers' own reserves, with a little top-up from government. Cross-subsidy via speculative/market housing is slowly becoming normal, but this significantly increases the risk for the housing provider, and they don't always have the commercial skills or experience in this area.

Revenue funding through affordable rent conversion subsidies is not a good solution; it simply shifts the cost from a capital budget to the housing benefit bill. So they're capping that! Revenue funding also relies on the future conversion of the units, and it's easy to be overly-optimistic about the returns from this. The uncertainty over the housing market, the risks for housing providers in developing housing for sale, increased funding costs from lenders and more regulation from the HCA are all making it more difficult to deliver affordable housing.

## **What's the worst HCA red tape you would throw out?**

I'd love to throw out the IMS system and start again. We constantly hear about the volume of information required to submit schemes, and it's not clear what the HCA is actually doing with all this information. The HCA obviously wants to ensure grants are being properly used and it's getting value for money, but its approach often puts housing providers off bidding for grants, so that the HCA is left at the end of the year frantically trying to find recipients to take the grants. I would prefer to see a move towards only continuous market

## Interview with SDS - IT, funding and politics in housing

*Continued from the opposite page*

engagement (CME), removing the long programmes we have now, which invariably start slow and then end in a frantic rush to deliver.

### What would you like to see in the party manifestos next year to accelerate the building of social housing?

A firm commitment to increase infrastructure spending and an increase in capital grants for housing. Clear timelines and light-touch regulation to make it easy for housing providers to bid, and target the number of homes delivered, not

how much grant per unit. I'd like to see better social policies, including removing the bedroom tax, and a focus on identifying the types of homes actually required in an area.

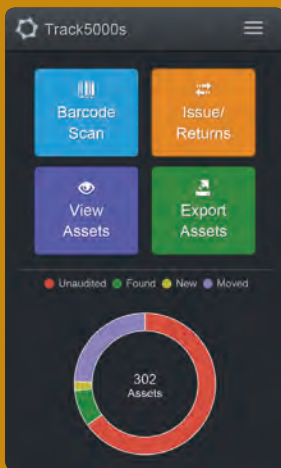
### Has project management changed much since you created your Sequel software for project management 10 years ago?

The reduction in grants and increase in open market engagement has meant that housing providers need to monitor their development programmes much more closely than before. We're seeing many more

organisations realise they need to do this better than they are at the moment, particularly around cash flows and the handover of properties. Regulatory compliance is onerous and the project management elements of SDS Sequel are being used to help manage that. 10 years ago, I'm not sure I would have called it project management!



## RAM launches asset tracking app



Real Asset Management has launched a smartphone app so that housing providers can conduct physical audits and update their asset registers using mobile devices. The app is available now on iOS, with Android and Windows Mobile versions coming soon.

Working with RAM's existing Series4000 software, the app will help users improve the accuracy of their asset register by providing an easy way to update and maintain assets

securely and in real-time on a day-to-day basis. The app includes barcode scanning capability via the smartphone camera to log any changes to company assets.

Karen Conneely, group commercial manager, Real Asset Management, said, "Users can simply download the app and access the secure asset register without the need for large, ruggedised and expensive devices. This will help our customers develop a clearer picture of the assets they have and avoid the unnecessary procurement of new equipment."

Anyone with access to the RAM back-office system and a mobile device can use the app and take part in auditing tasks. The app requires an initial internet connection in order to retrieve the data, but thereafter holds the data locally, enabling it to be used in any location with or without an internet connection.

Conneely said, "The simplicity of the app means that housing providers can involve more employees in the auditing process. This transforms the formal physical audit into a more informal exercise with multiple users all verifying data on a daily basis. This in turn makes the asset register much more accurate and much less taxing on the finance department to maintain."

## Capita wins ERP deal at Progress Housing

*Progress Housing Group has signed a three-year contract with Capita Integrated Business Solutions for its Integra finance and procurement software. The system is scheduled to go live during April 2015.*

The software will enable the housing provider to improve its finance, payroll and HR processes, including automated alerts and reports for better business intelligence. The system also manages

other finance activities including purchasing and invoicing.

Integra will be integrated with the Capita self-service HR and payroll software used by Progress Housing, so that it can carry out HR activities such as recruitment, absence, time and attendance management more efficiently.

Andy Speer, executive director of finance and resources, Progress Housing Group, said, "This is a significant investment for us, with the key drivers to provide self-service to staff and customers, and streamline processes which will improve efficiency and achieve value for money from the investment."



# Together Housing moves to Xbrace DRS v5

*Following a large corporate consolidation and restructuring, Together Housing Group has adopted the latest version of Kirona Xbrace DRS as its preferred software for dynamic appointment scheduling.*

Together Housing Group was formed in 2011 by five partner organisations. During the formation of the new group, it was able to cherry-pick the best IT applications from across the individual organisations; each IT supplier and their software was audited and only the fittest and most innovative applications survived.

The first stage in streamlining Together Housing's IT applications was the reduction of four housing management systems to just one for all properties and tenants. This was closely tied to appointments scheduling, with Together Housing making around 2,000 appointments each week for 195 technicians. Kirona's Xbrace DRS dynamic scheduling software was already being used in two of the five organisations and delivering good results, so it was then deployed across the group as the scheduler of choice, at the same time as upgrading to the latest version of the software (v5).

Amanda Birtwistle, module leader, Together Housing Group, said, "Having been an Xbrace DRS v4 user and a fan, we decided to upgrade the group to v5 so everyone had the same system, and we wanted to take advantage of the new functionality.

"Xbrace DRS v5 ensures that no matter who answers the phone, the best appointment is made, reducing travel time and costs. There is a simple yet very clever colour-coded system which shows the agent the best appointment to offer, whereas on the earlier version, they would have only been shown as available or not. The agent knows to select a green appointment slot when it is offered, followed by blue (10-20 minutes' travel) and finally as a last resort, a yellow slot (over 20 minutes' travel). We also love the quotas because this prevents the planners and customer service centre from overfilling diaries and means there is always capacity for emergencies."

Xbrace DRS v5 lets users set certain SOR codes so the time allocated to the job will be automatically split between two technicians. Together Housing now allocates one job at a time to stop operatives cherry-picking their tasks and to increase the efficiency of every resource, with each technician now completing 6-8 jobs per day depending on their trade.

Sarah Dudley, project manager, Together Housing Group, said, "We are in the final stages of implementing the InfoSuite reporting module. We have written our reports and are excited by the visibility the dashboard will give us. One of the particularly useful features is the ability to see the productivity levels of each technician. We can drill right down by trade, by job, by area.

This will give us actionable insight to make real improvements in our efficiency."

Together Housing's tenant satisfaction ratings are provided by external consultancy Leadership Factor, with a recent report showing that Together Housing has the highest repairs and gas servicing satisfaction levels (90 per cent) across all of Leadership Factor's portfolio of housing customers.

Following its move to Xbrace DRS v5, 100 per cent of Together Housing's jobs are now appointed at the first point of contact, with a consequent 92 per cent rate of first-time fixes, and 'no access' appointments have fallen to only eight per cent.

Ian Rumsam, group head of repairs and maintenance, Together Housing Group, said, "Simple, yet highly-effective functionality in DRS v5, such as the colour-coded appointment slots, means we have great confidence that our resources are being used in the best way.

"Likewise, the InfoSuite dashboard will transform our knowledge from what we think we know to what we really know about our performance and enable us to make tangible, quantifiable changes that make a real difference to our costs."



## 1st Touch adds new modules for Supporting People and Arrears

*1st Touch has just added 'supporting people' and 'arrears' modules to its mobile workforce solutions.*

The Supporting People module automates the processes involved in providing support officers with all the tenant information and functionality they need in the field, including pre-defined forms for possible areas of risk in order to initiate a programme of regular visits or to draw up a support plan. The administration time saved over manual methods boosts efficiency and means that more time

can be spent with those tenants who need it most. Supporting People data gathered using the 1st Touch module can then be automatically updated to a housing provider's back-office systems.

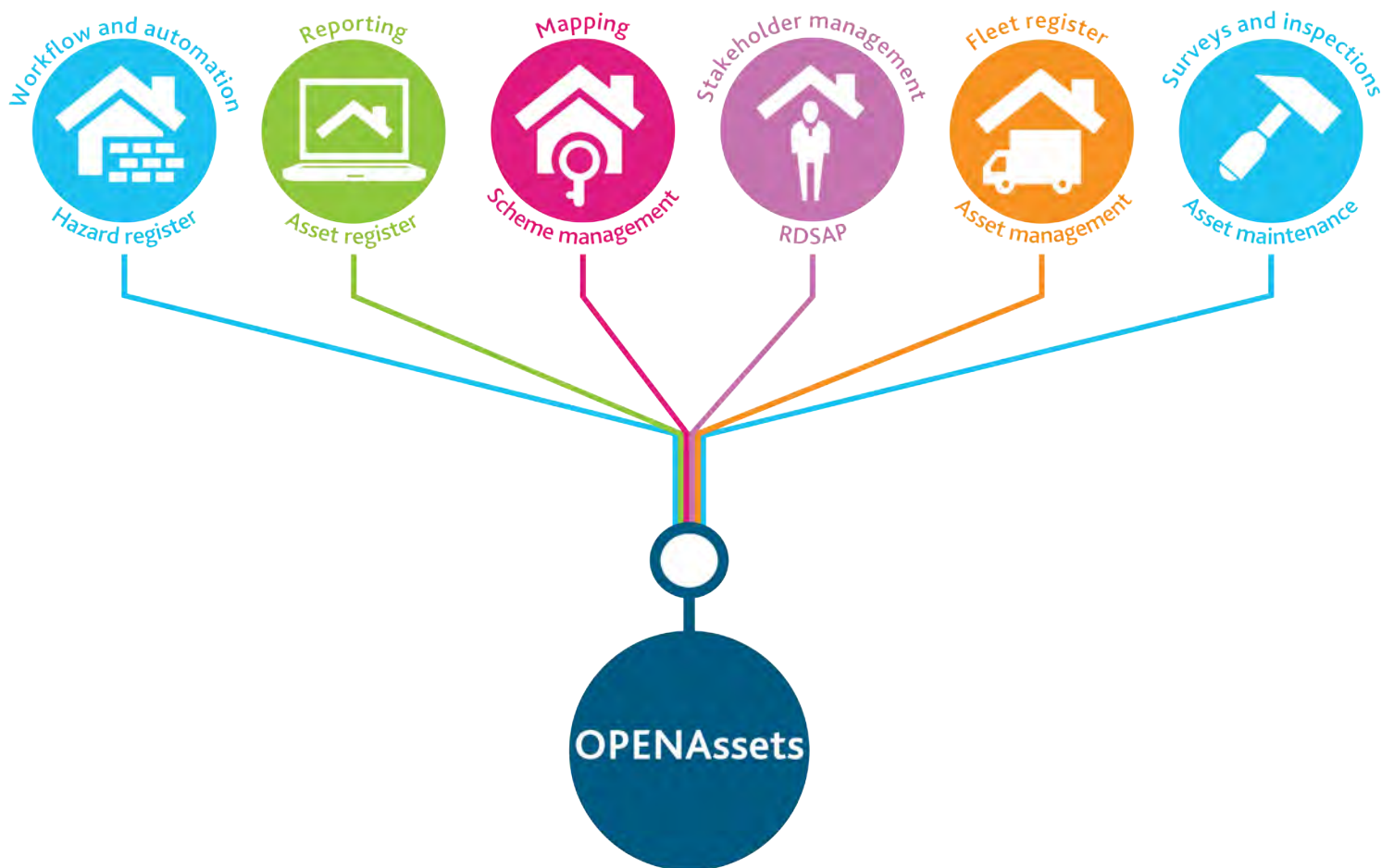
The Arrears module automates the arrears management function for both senior management and field-based workers. When used in the field, the mobile system can display, collect and update a wide range of data including recent history, transactions, charges, special arrangements and

details of completed or outstanding arrears. This lets workers add new arrears actions or activities such as generating supporting letters, and they can also use the system to calculate tenant budgets, to ask for a rent statement or to make a card payment.

Robert Dent, CEO, 1st Touch, said, "We have listened to what our customers need and these two modules came top of their lists."

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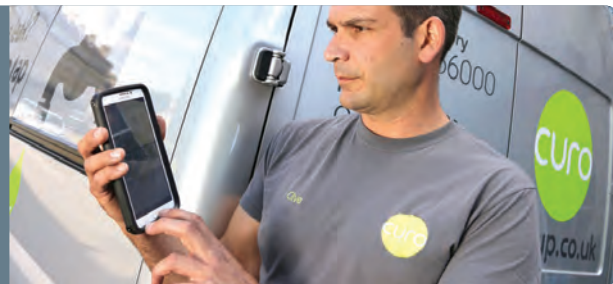


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## Peak-Ryzex manages Samsung tablets for Curo



*Curo Housing has chosen Peak-Ryzex to provide fully-managed mobile services for its new 7" Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 tablets. Peak-Ryzex will provide Curo with device software build and configuration, device training, a managed service helpdesk and next working day exchange. In addition, Peak-Ryzex will provide Curo with SOTI mobile device management (MDM) software, MDM server installation and MDM training.*

The Peak-Ryzex helpdesk provides the first point of call for Curo's mobile engineers, with full support for the tablet devices and software queries so that

engineers are never without a fully-operational device. If the query relates to the back office systems, then Peak-Ryzex escalates the call to Curo's ICT team.

Neil Higham, director of ICT, Curo, said, "We wanted to provide our responsive repairs team with a single point of contact to avoid any confusion about who they needed to contact about any problems. It would be difficult for us to provide the service with our existing internal resources and Peak-Ryzex brings the skills and experience of having done this many times before."

Curo's responsive repairs team use 1st Touch mobile

workforce software on the Android devices to receive their jobs automatically during the working day. Each day, the combined team will perform around 200 visits.

The 1st Touch software is integrated with a Kirona Xmbrace DRS scheduling solution so that Curo's planning team can dynamically allocate additional work when a repair is complete or reassign tasks to available staff. The engineers can also use the devices to sign off jobs electronically, automatically updating the back office Aareon QL system; having signed the job off, they then receive the next job.

Higham said, "The 7" tablet is a good choice because we needed a user-friendly device with a large screen that also allows the users to access the corporate intranet and other self-service systems as and when we introduce them.

"The Samsung tablets can also be managed remotely using the MDM software, which means it is easier to diagnose problems and reduce downtime. And if there are any issues that can't be fixed remotely, the next working day exchange service ensures that a ready-to-go device is despatched immediately."

## Guardian24 protects Notting Hill's lone workers

*Notting Hill Housing Group is using Guardian24's software to protect over 400 of its workers whose roles expose them to potential risks while working out of the office, with the risks varying from visiting empty or remote properties to verbal or physical abuse when dealing with confrontations from some tenants.*

NHHG has worked with Guardian24 for over 10 years and during this time it has used Guardian24 via standard mobile phones, via a specialised lanyard device and more recently via an application on their BlackBerry phones.

Fully compliant with the British standard for lone worker device services (BS8484), the Guardian24 system enables users to quickly log their visits when they are going out in the community by calling an automated log line. This tracks their progress and sets off automated alerts and escalation processes if the user fails to close their activity or doesn't respond to calls. Ultimately, Guardian24's alarm

receiving centres can involve the police and other emergency services.

Jacqueline Olulana, health, safety & environmental advisor, Notting Hill Housing Group, said, "Guardian24 gives us the peace of mind that our staff are protected and that we are meeting our statutory duty of care."

### Lone-worker app from Guardian24 on Google Play Store




Guardian24 has added its lone-worker safety app to the Google Play Store, making it faster to download and easier

to keep up to date with the latest version of the app or when an upgrade is available.

Guardian24's app enables lone workers to log in and out of daily tasks, leaving details of their location and the expected duration of the task. If an activity overruns, Guardian24 automatically calls the lone worker to confirm their safety. If the lone worker can't be reached, a nominated person will be notified to inform them of the overrun. At this stage, an agreed protocol can be followed to verify the lone worker's safety and location.

Should the worker feel in danger or become injured, they can press a 'hot' key on their smartphone or tablet to summon assistance. At this point, Guardian24 provides the lone worker's personal details, activity details and live audio to the respondent receiving the escalated call. The respondent can then call the incident helpline.





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## Severn Vale improves 'first-time fixes' with Orchard



*Orchard has completed an audit of how Severn Vale Housing is using its Orchard housing management system, particularly around improving avoidable customer contacts and encouraging tenants to use self-service channels. The audit also laid the foundations for mobile working and improved CRM, workflow and EDM to increase the number of 'first-time fix' resolutions.*

Severn Vale Housing asked Orchard to look at how the current system and

user experience could be improved and how they could move from the old GUI system to the new browser-based Orchard Housing software. Severn Vale also visited other Orchard customer sites to see how they were using Orchard Housing and how they approached ownership of the system.

Modular audits were carried out by Orchard across all of Severn Vale's business areas to review current practices and ensure that the latest module enhancements had been adopted, that the modules were being used correctly and that best use was being made of the available functionality. This resulted in greater efficiencies in the use of Orchard Housing across the business, a successful transition from the GUI

version of Orchard Housing to the browser version and a greatly improved user experience.

Tim Knight, chief executive, Severn Vale Housing Society, said, "Our engagement with Orchard has helped to influence our strategic direction and ensure that strong foundations have been laid for the further development of technology solutions, which are focused on efficiency and improving the services to our customers."

Orchard Housing's integral CRM capability has now been rolled out across the housing management, customer services, housing development and repairs management teams for all in- and out-bound contacts.

## Business Systems & Red Box Recorders introduce PCI-compliant call recording at Hexagon Housing



*As part of its plan to improve how it handles over 1,500 inbound calls per week, Hexagon Housing engaged Business Systems to install Red Box Recorders' Quantify system for call recording. The system includes PCI-compliant functionality to deal with card payments made over the phone.*

The call-recording system was installed and operational within eight weeks of the order being received, with the actual installation itself taking just three days. Business Systems said that the typical costs for this type of system, including maintenance and support, would range between around £10,000 for an eight-channel system up to £100,000 for a 250-channel system.

After looking at a number of call-recording products and suppliers and undertaking a formal tender process, Hexagon selected Business Systems as its partner to implement Red Box Recorders' Quantify product to help meet its targets of answering 80 per cent of calls within 30 seconds and aiming to resolve 85 per cent of complaints first-time.

Neil Nasser, customer services manager, Hexagon Housing, said, "Business Systems' approach from start to finish was seamless; they did everything they said they would do and were there with us every step of the way."

Prior to implementing the Red Box Recorders system, Hexagon was monitoring

calls live which was time consuming and demanding, taking up to 22 hours per month and proving difficult to uncover the key insights it was seeking. Following installation of its call recording system, Hexagon can now pick up on any inconsistencies in call patterns and use those as the means to pinpoint the calls worth listening to as well as adding notes to flag specific calls for future reference.

The system is also used to help resolve disputes and has recently helped to highlight where repair contractors were underperforming and failing to turn up for appointments by providing evidence through call recordings.

Targeted with keeping abandoned calls as few as possible and within the industry standard of 7 per cent, the call recording technology is helping the team to handle inbound calls better by diagnosing issues more quickly through coaching on the key questions to ask.

As an organisation also taking card details over the phone for rent payments, Hexagon is using the automated pause and resume function in the Red Box Recorders system so that as soon as the payment screen is opened on the desktop, it is automatically triggered to suppress all audio on the call while payment is taking place, thereby ensuring PCI compliance.

## Cairn Housing chooses Netcall for customer engagement



*Cairn Housing Association has signed a five-year agreement with Netcall to manage its end-to-end customer engagement process using Netcall's Liberty platform which includes email, SMS messaging, web chat and social media integrated with CRM software.*

By partnering with Netcall, Cairn hopes to rethink how it communicates with tenants. The housing provider's goal is to ensure that tenants can speak to a member of staff quickly and that as many queries as possible are dealt with at the point of contact through 'first contact resolution' techniques.

The Liberty platform supports remote working so people can work from the most suitable location and business continuity is maintained despite unexpected events. When

carrying out home visits, Cairn staff will be able to resolve tenant queries using smartphones and use reminder technology to reduce the number of appointments missed by tenants.

Jason MacGilp, chief executive, Cairn Housing Association, said: "We expect that our new contact centre and partnership with Netcall is going to revolutionise Cairn's approach to customer service. Our aim is that customers can contact us in whatever way is most convenient to them, and to have their enquiry or service request sorted out with minimum effort on their part. We're also really excited about the possibilities of mobile working and self-service in the future."

## Home Group tenants get Utilita smart meters



*Around 4,000 Home Group tenants in London have been offered the chance to switch to Utilita Energy, with the installation of a free smart meter to help them monitor and reduce their electricity and gas consumption. Similar projects with other housing providers have enabled tenants to save up to £40 each on their annual bills.*

This follows successful projects between Utilita and Home Group in the north-east and north-west

of the UK where over 2,000 tenants were given smart meters as part of a wider campaign by the housing provider to tackle fuel poverty.

Carl McCaughey, assistant procurement manager, Home Group, said, "This deal is about saving our tenants money and making their lives easier by giving them smart meters. We've had very good feedback from our tenants in other regions who have been impressed with features

like the emergency and friendly credit which stops them being automatically cut off if their balance drops below a certain level.

"Based on previous experience, we expect around 30 per cent of our tenants to choose Utilita as their new supplier and to install a meter, which could cumulatively save hundreds of pounds a year in reduced bills."

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# Changing behaviours with smart meters

*Bill Bullen, Managing Director, Utilita Energy*

*Smart meters are the future of domestic energy management, with the UK government committing to roll them out into every UK household by 2020. Bill Bullen, managing director of smart metering energy provider Utilita Energy, believes the key to success is in educating people about the benefits gained from using a smart meter, a model which is already being led by the social housing sector.*

People can be wary of a new technology, particularly when it is reinventing something such as the supply of energy which hasn't really changed in years. Research carried out by uSwitch in 2013 found that 55 per cent of people were unaware of how smart meters worked and the benefits that come with the technology and as a result, there are a lot of misconceptions which must be addressed before householders can be fully engaged in welcoming the change.

## **Bring the family**

Family workshops have been particularly effective in ensuring all generations understand the importance of energy efficiency and the steps everyone can take to help reduce consumption through changing behaviours. Children and adults alike are always surprised at the difference it makes by turning their gadgets off properly instead of leaving them on standby or how much energy it takes to boil a kettle – it may sound obvious but seeing their credit used in real time has a big impact!

In addition, it is also useful for energy providers to run regular surveys to understand the consumer's attitude towards energy usage, which allows providers to be responsive to customer needs. One of our recent

surveys found that 35 per cent of people are monitoring their energy usage more closely, a task which smart meters make easy and hassle-free.

## **Welfare reform**

Welfare reform has had a big impact on the levels of stress tenants experience when it comes to dealing with their finances. A recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation surveyed 16 housing providers to find out how the changes have affected tenants with worrying results. There is a general trend of incomes shrinking and costs rising, with food, energy and rent the most pressing points for those struggling to make ends meet. Food banks are now a vital lifeline for the poorest tenants as they increasingly have to make the choice between heating their homes and putting food on the table.

Using a pre-payment smart meter is one way to reduce the stress associated with energy costs as tenants always know exactly how much they are paying and no longer need to worry about receiving unexpected bills. Customers can use a pre-payment service to budget and stay on top of their monthly expenditure, with features including emergency and friendly credit ensuring energy doesn't run out on a winter's evening or on a Bank Holiday when payment points are closed. Mobile and online top-ups also ensure tenants are in control of their money and don't have to visit payment points in person.

Smart meters have the capacity to provide breakdowns of how household energy is used, with costs displayed in real currency, meaning tenants can be more aware of their energy expenditure and adapt their behaviour

to save money. They will also make it easier for tenants to switch suppliers to get the best deal, and according to government estimates, the average tenant will save £23 per year on their energy bills by 2020 as a result of the roll-out, dependent on households actively changing their energy usage habits.

There are a number of misconceptions around smart meters which must be understood and addressed before a full tenant engagement programme can achieve success. I've listed a few of the most common below:

## **Smart meters are undercover 'spies'**

With extensive media coverage of misused or lost public data, many people are wary of the information smart meters collect and how this might be used to 'spy' on them with negative effect. In fact, it is quite the opposite and the data collected from smart meters is invaluable in helping to shape the UK's energy provision. It provides valuable insight into how and when we are consuming energy which allows energy providers to better tailor their offering and ultimately improve service for customers.

## **Pre-payment smart meters reduce the quality of customer service**

Customers switching their energy supply to a pre-payment smart meter are often concerned that this might result in a lower level of customer service as contact with their energy provider becomes reduced. In contrast, the data collected from smart meters actually boosts service provision, allowing providers to help customers identify where they might be wasting energy, as well as recommending simple measures which can make a big difference to their consumption.

## Changing behaviours with smart meters

*Continued from the opposite page*

### Pre-payment smart meters are only for those with poor credit

In the past, pre-payment energy meters were typically provided to those with poor credit or on a low income, but they are now in use by almost 16 per cent of the UK's households who are reaping the rewards from taking control of their energy usage. Homes with a smart meter often use less energy because it

very clearly shows their consumption and exactly how much this costs - for example, using a tumble dryer less can save a significant amount of money.

There will always be critics of new technology and initiatives, but the value of pre-payment smart meters in helping tenants budget, reduce their energy consumption and live more

efficiently is one which cannot be argued with and which will continue to make a positive impact on the housing sector as a whole.

*Bill Bullen is managing director of Utilita Energy.*

## INFRASTRUCTURE

## Data governance at Notting Hill Housing Group with InforData



*Notting Hill Housing Group has completed a major master data management project with InforData Consulting to consolidate myriad data sources from across its operations and impose data standards on data input and usage. The four-month programme was completed in March 2014.*

Before InforData Consulting was engaged, many of the business areas within NHHG had their own data reporting systems and business processes which did not always communicate with a central data repository, making much of the data inaccessible to other parts of the organisation. Added to this, a widespread reliance on manual reporting meant that too much time was being spent on reconciling data between different systems.

After having carried out an audit of NHHG's existing data lifecycle, InforData created a matrix of data owners and

interviewed key people to gain their support for the project and to prioritise their particular areas of concern. During this process, InforData found that while some people had a clear idea of what it would take to achieve the data governance goals, others assumed that it was a job for the IT department alone, rather than a task requiring a business process solution. In response to this, InforData put together a full communications package to convey the goals of the project clearly to the rest of the organisation.

After delivering the first phase of the initiative, InforData was then invited to develop a blueprint for NHHG's solution architecture. By identifying the structures and behaviours of the problems discovered during the initial audit, InforData used NHHG's existing technologies, applications (only suggesting new ones where absolutely necessary) and in-house skills to design a solution blueprint. This included solutions for data-cleansing tasks, issues of data quality and incorporated a built-in timeline and set of milestones.

Maggy Dean, project manager, Notting Hill Housing Group, said, "The InforData consultants were a pleasure to work with and had a wealth of data governance knowledge and experience. They really understood our legacy data issues, so we now have a clear roadmap of what we need to do to improve the quality of our data."

## Gateway appoints Waterstons as IT Partner

*Gateway Housing Association has appointed Waterstons as its long term IT partner to work with its in-house IT team to provide first, second and third line support as well as IT governance.*

The contract began in February 2014 and will run for between three and five years. The delivery of the contract will be coordinated by an on-site manager with support

from two of Gateway's in-house support staff and Waterstons' ITIL-based service desk team.

Helen Routledge, finance director, Gateway Housing Association, said, "Waterstons' understanding of our requirements at a business level and their non-technical approach to IT service delivery clearly demonstrated how they would achieve value for money."

## Shavlik moves in with Severnside Housing

*A new software patch management system from Shavlik and its partner Satisnet is helping Severnside Housing gain greater control of its IT estate and creating more time for the housing provider's staff to resolve tenants' queries. The system is expected to ensure that sensitive data is secure and all software is up-to-date to allow employees to focus on looking after residents, rather than manually updating systems.*

Ian Pritchard, IT manager, Severnside Housing, said, "We selected Shavlik Protect because our previous system didn't give us the granular level of

control we needed. We now have complete confidence that all staff are using up-to-date software and our housing data is protected against security threats.

"This allows our staff to focus their time on offering the best service to the Shropshire community, ensuring that they can rehouse homeless people, control housing benefits effectively and make quick, timely repairs to properties."

The Shavlik Protect system automatically downloads patches and, once fully tested, applies them

to every relevant device across the organisation. It offers granular control, so that the more time-consuming software updates take place at convenient times for employees and don't disrupt them at peak times.

Pritchard said, "Shavlik makes our IT infrastructure and patching more manageable and transparent, which means we can roll out new solutions that provide greater access to housing services without compromising security or employee productivity."

### DIGITAL INCLUSION



## Free internet for tenants?

Colin Sales, Managing Director, Montal

*It is widely accepted that through community networking, we help individuals to connect with their communities, maximising their own potential and fuelling regeneration. Facilitating this is therefore often acknowledged as one of the duties of a social housing provider. Any digital inclusion strategy has to explore how the internet can be used to enhance community networking and indeed should consider the already proven methods in operation.*

The ability to provide free internet into the home is seen by many housing providers as the ideal. Drawing on a decade of experience, from the earliest days of community broadband and wi-fi, Montal and CommunityUK have formed a partnership to install wireless broadband across communities which allows free broadband connectivity to tenants, often in the most difficult of circumstances.

### No contract, no line rental

Key features of the service include a free 4Mb broadband service, with no contract, no line rental and no need for a TV or satellite connection. User support is also provided free via the telephone or an online help desk. The 4Mb service, which has an unlimited data allowance, is perfectly adequate for everyday web activities such as surfing, email, social networking and online learning; if tenants want a higher level of performance, then dependant on location, varying faster levels of bandwidth can be bought at competitive fixed rates, again without a connection fee or contract.

The funding for the wi-fi infrastructure underpinning the service is increasingly being justified by the social return on investment (SROI). For a current and 'real world' valuation, we can look at the free wi-fi network element of the pilot project being carried out by Castle Vale Community Housing Association in Birmingham.

Since the project started in January 2014, with the aim of providing free wi-fi broadband across around 500 homes, 380 residents now use the service, with around 15 new users joining each week.

### Rapid adoption

Working on an average of two potential users per home, 40 per cent of people in the pilot area are already using the network. If growth continues at the current rate, 100 per cent of the possible users could be online by March next year. A more realistic figure would be a 50 per cent take-up, with a potential increase to 75 per cent over three years, which is an impressive statistic.

For an internet-connected individual in the UK (outside London), the average 'social value' is £2,875 per year per person online (source: Global Value Exchange), so the social value of the pilot for the next 12 months on current users alone would be over £1 million.



## Free internet for tenants?

*Continued from the opposite page*

Working on the basis of a cost of £60 per household for the creation of the network (i.e. £30,000), the SROI over the same period is around £35 for every £1 spent.

This ratio improves as more homes are included in the project. Add to this the facts that, first, the cost to the housing provider is a single, one-off capital cost (i.e. there are no on-going costs and can be depreciated and at least partially recovered through tax relief) and, secondly, that the business model actually facilitates the repayment of this investment over an agreed period, and the SROI is even higher.

### Leading across Europe

There are a number of major community wi-fi projects being planned and it is expected that within

12 months this will lead to the UK having a number of the largest wide-area wi-fi networks in Europe. If this is the case, then Community wi-fi will have been proven and will need to be seriously considered within all digital inclusion strategies.

And it's not just about the connectivity. Wi-fi networks are the platform for the delivery of the far reaching 'going all inclusive' digital inclusion programme that CommunityUK has developed and are delivered with partners such as Montal along with all wi-fi networks.

### Going all inclusive

Providing hyper-local community web portals that deliver content and functionality for housing providers to their tenants, together with a range of initiatives covering education and

training, skills and employability, e-health and more, the 'going all inclusive' programme ensures that the community not only gets high-quality, affordable internet access but also the knowledge, tools and support they need to get the very best out of it.

This approach to delivering real and sustainable digital inclusion is already making headway in projects around the UK and is receiving considerable attention, with CommunityUK being nominated for the 'best digital inclusion product or service' in this year's Digital Leaders 100 awards as well as the Government Digital Service and Digital Birmingham both citing the Castle Vale project as an exemplar of real digital living.

*Colin Sales is managing director of Montal.*



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# All-inclusive – Tackling digital exclusion in housing



*Housing Technology interviewed digital inclusion experts from BT, New Charter Housing, Sovereign Business Integration Group, Trident Social Investment Group and Viridian Housing about how housing providers should tackle digital exclusion and enable more tenants to transact online.*

## Reasons for digital exclusion

The reasons for digital exclusion are manifold, but they tend to usually relate to a combination of access, cost and motivation. As Ed Wallace, research and innovation manager, Viridian Housing, said, “There are three main factors: tenants lack the confidence to go online, tenants don’t have easy access to get online, and tenants can’t afford to go online.”



“I don’t think it’s realistic to expect people to complete forms of any kind on a smartphone, especially those as important as universal credit. They’re just not designed for that purpose.”

Natasha Clough, head of business development for social housing & digital inclusion, BT Business

This situation is likely to change in time, partly due to economic and market forces and partly to do with the ageing demographic shift in tenants.

Tim Cowland, senior consultant at Sovereign Business Integration Group, said, “It is widely accepted that the main factors preventing digital take-up are a lack of interest or apathy, fear of technology, lack of basic computing skills, cost of connection, and cost of equipment. I would expect that costs may become less of an issue as mobile phone and tablet costs continue to fall. Equally, cost of access is likely to reduce as cheaper domestic deals become available and free wi-fi in public spaces becomes more accessible. I would also expect the

skills factor to reduce as more of the population becomes more familiar with technology through their schooling, work and social lives.”



“Our values mean that we will provide support wherever we can and while this may not be a moral obligation; it’s about doing what’s right for our tenants.”

Dave Burdis, financial inclusion manager, New Charter Housing

Illustrating how some tenants are confused or lack the confidence to go online, Philip Bowen, digital inclusion coordinator at Trident Social Investment Group, said, “From personal experience, people that don’t use IT often find technology confusing. The way Windows works may make sense to an office employee, familiar with in trays and out trays, filing systems, etc, but these may not factor in other jobs. Furthermore, users don’t always understand the logic processes of a computer. For example, understanding that a document is virtual, and that it does not exist on paper until it is printed and must be saved after changes, is a fairly subtle thought-process that many of us take for granted.”

## Business benefits for housing providers

While housing providers do have duty of care concerning their tenants, they naturally need to consider how any digital inclusion programmes fit within their wider commercial concerns and analyse the likely business benefits of digital exclusion, of which the most common benefit is cost savings.

Natasha Clough, head of business development for social housing and digital inclusion at BT Business, said, “Channel shifting enables housing providers to gain efficiencies and cost savings from using online channels,

but it also makes them more visible, especially to those ‘silent tenants’ with whom they currently have little contact. Furthermore, one housing provider I spoke to saw an additional benefit from rolling out wi-fi across its estate because that empowered its own mobile workforce, as team members could complete and upload forms remotely.”

Dave Burdis, financial inclusion manager at New Charter Housing, said, “Welfare reform and ‘digital by default’ are the primary motivations behind alleviating digital exclusion for our tenants. Having to apply for benefits online is a huge problem for tenants, especially for those without access to the right resources. Universal credit includes a housing element so it is prudent that housing providers help with skills training, hardware and internet access for tenants in order to help them to manage their rent payments.”



“There is little point in encouraging tenants to make more use of online services if the services they need are not fit for purpose.”

Tim Cowland, senior consultant, Sovereign Business Integration Group

Trident’s Bowen said, “If our quarterly rent statements were available online, as opposed to being printed and delivered, we could save a minimum of £10,000 per year from that alone.”

Viridian’s Wallace said, “As a sector, we need to rethink how we approach this issue because collectively we wield significant bargaining power. For example, Viridian is working with 11 other housing providers, the Mayor of London and Digital Unite to find partners to secure a better deal for our tenants and help more of them get online.”



## All-inclusive - Tackling digital exclusion in housing

*Continued from opposite page*

### Moral imperatives

After considering the business benefits to housing providers of supporting digital inclusion, the thorny question of the morality of doing so is raised; do housing providers have a moral imperative or ethical requirement to help their tenants get online? New Charter's Burdis said, "Our values mean that we will provide support wherever we can and while this may not be a moral obligation; it's about doing what's right for our tenants. As a community-based organisation, we have a huge opportunity to provide solutions and partner with other agencies to improve digital inclusion."

Cowland from Sovereign Business Integration said, "I believe that housing providers have a moral responsibility to support digital inclusion. As well as the benefits to the business of having more transactions completed electronically, tenants can improve their quality of life through improved job opportunities, cost savings through making purchases online and improved social interaction."

Trident's Bowen said, "Providers have a duty of care to protect both their tenants and to use their resources prudently. A part of that social care is striving to build the individual's confidence, and to help where possible in giving them the skills to better themselves in a digital age. This responsibility also has consequences, in that if you encourage someone to use the internet, you also have to give guidance on best usage and help them when they run into difficulties. So an effective IT support is also morally required."

### Standalone DI strategies

Unsurprisingly, the consensus view was that digital inclusion programmes work best when they are part of a wider business strategy, rather than as piecemeal, standalone projects. However, it should be obvious, although often not realised, that if housing providers want their tenants to transact more online, they need to make sure that their back-office processes are closely linked with their online services.

Clough from BT Business said, "Housing providers' internet strategies



"There is a tendency to think about tenants in quite a paternal way and feel nervous about change. We shouldn't shy away from doing more online because we're concerned that people won't be able to manage the transition."

Ed Wallace, research and innovation manager, Viridian Housing

have to be aligned to their digital inclusion plan, as there's no point asking tenants to pay bills and contact support staff online if the website is difficult to use or doesn't have the capabilities."

Sovereign's Cowland said, "Clearly, there is little point in encouraging tenants to make more use of online services if the services they need are not there for them to use or are not fit for purpose. Digital inclusion will not work if there have been no changes to the back office processes to accommodate the new methods of access."

### Push vs. pull

As with many housing providers' strategies for the 'bring your own device' trend, digital inclusion is a balance between 'push' programmes from housing providers and 'pull' from tenants for digital inclusion; as discussed earlier in this article, while there are business benefits and some moral imperatives for housing providers to help their tenants get online, it's also incumbent upon the tenants to make some efforts themselves.



"A housing provider's primary function is affordable shelter, so a tenant shouldn't expect a housing provider to become an ISP or training company."

Philip Bowen, digital inclusion coordinator, Trident Social Investment Group

As New Charter's Burdis said, "As long as we are providing services that meet tenants' needs, including the vulnerable and financially-challenged, and everyone has access to IT equipment at home or in their local New Charter hub and is offered training, then we feel we have provided what we can."

Trident's Bowen said, "A provider should look at how digital inclusion will improve a tenant's wellbeing

and assist within reason with communal provision of resources. A housing provider's primary function is affordable shelter, so a tenant shouldn't expect a housing provider to become an ISP or training company."

And considering the wider picture of housing providers' responsibilities to their tenants, Viridian's Wallaces said, "I still think there is a tendency in the sector to think about our tenants in quite a paternal way and feel nervous about change. I don't think that we should shy away from doing more online because we're concerned that people won't be able to manage the transition."

### Universal credit on smartphones?

The figures for digital inclusion often include the use of smartphones and then make the slightly spurious assumption that that counts as internet access. Perhaps one critical test of this assumption is whether or not tenants could use their smartphones to register for universal credit and complete the necessary forms; the universal view is that it would be next-to-impossible to do so.

Wallace from Viridian Housing said, "Although I've not seen the universal credit form yet, from what I've been led to believe, this is shaping up to be a weighty piece of work. I would assume that turning this into an intuitive online experience will be a significant challenge, so I struggle to see how this could be turned into a meaningful mobile experience."

Clough from BT Business said, "I don't think it's realistic to expect people to complete forms of any kind on a smartphone, especially those as important as universal credit. They're just not designed for that purpose."

*Housing Technology would like to thank Natasha Clough (BT Business), Dave Burdis (New Charter Housing), Tim Cowland (Sovereign Business Integration Group), Philip Bowen (Trident Social Investment Group) and Ed Wallace (Viridian Housing) for their time in contributing to this article.*





# Moving from digital inclusion to digital diversification

Jane Hancer, Communications Manager, Looking Local

*We know digital exclusion still exists, although it is steadily decreasing, with the majority of the digitally excluded aged 65+. However the argument about getting these people online is becoming less vocal, so perhaps the smart move would be to simply enable the people who support and care for those still offline to mediate digitally on their behalf, and accept that they might not be part of the digital revolution.*

The interesting new element to the digital inclusion debate is not around who is online or offline, but the range of different devices people now own and use. With sales of traditional PCs declining and tablet ownership soaring, with nearly 65 per cent of the adult population owning a smartphone, the fabric of 'digital Britain' is very different from just five years ago. And the challenge for many organisations is how to service this range and diversity of digital devices, not getting the final tranche of people online.

## Self-service apps

Working with over 50 housing providers over the past ten years, we have seen a shift from steadfastly trying to get everyone online, to focusing on enabling people to access integrated services better on their chosen device. What this has led to is the majority of people being able to self-serve, whether reporting a housing repair in seconds on their My Landlord app or paying rent via a secure website, leaving face-to-face

and front-line staff to handle more complex cases and help those people who just don't want to be digital.

For many, this is a far better balance in terms of efficiency, value for money and tenant satisfaction and Looking Local is an integral part of this balance; taking the technical overhead of managing all the different channels and devices away from partners, allowing them to focus on their core housing business.

The recent launch of Home Group's My Landlord app is a case in point, proving a clear appetite for easy-to-access digital services. In just six weeks, the app had been downloaded 1,000 times, handled 625 housing repairs, had 30,000 hits on supporting information (housing, welfare reform, tenant services, etc.) and communicated over 1,000 times with tenants around repair management and scheduling.

## Adding new channels

Similarly, Your Homes Newcastle is experiencing increased use of its digital services, in particular the use of choice-based lettings via its interactive TV channel, as well as the growing interest in welfare reform information and health.

While digital inclusion traditionally meant getting people online, it should now mean using appropriate digital channels for service delivery and communication. Not only does

Home Group's app mean that it can communicate more directly with its tenants, the image sent as part of the non-emergency repair report means the right parts are taken to the job first time around, making the whole process more efficient and far quicker than other digital channels.

The addition of national partner content from The Money Advice Service, the DWP and the NHS, as well as transport and journey planning information, means that Looking Local can offer a wider, more inclusive offering than most organisations can pull together alone. In addition there are solutions for self-care, mobile working and promoting the use of all digital channels to enable intermediaries to act on behalf of those people who are still offline.

Owned by Kirklees Council for all of the public sector, Looking Local can work with housing providers of all sizes to deliver relevant digital services across interactive TV (Sky & Virgin), smartphone apps, mobile, web, social media and even internet-enabled games consoles, leaving housing providers to focus their offline efforts on those who are happy to remain digitally excluded and benefit from the one-to-one interaction they are given.

*Jane Hancer is the communications manager for Looking Local.*

## Salix Homes scoops NFA award for helping tenants get online

*Salix Homes has won an award from the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) in recognition of its 2014 'connecting customers' project, which teaches tenants essential IT skills and money management to help prepare them for the introduction of universal credit. The project is now being introduced across Salford.*

Tenants identified by Salix Homes as unemployed and claiming benefits

took part in free computer classes where they learnt essential IT skills as well as tips and training on job searches, CV writing and interview techniques.

The NFA judges were also impressed by how the project taught tenants to save; one of the requirements of the course is that all participants must open a savings account with Salford Credit Union, which they can then use

to buy a low-cost laptop through the 'connecting customers' scheme.

Sue Sutton, chief executive, Salix Homes, said, "With the onset of universal credit, we are increasingly dependent on our tenants having internet access and the skills to manage their finances online, and this project has really helped to address those areas."

## Cascade announces new HR customers

*Five housing providers have confirmed that they are in the middle of implementing HR solutions from Cascade. Castle Vale Community Housing, Christian Action Housing, Orwell Housing, Teign Housing and Together Housing Group are expected to go live with their Cascade deployments within the next few months.*

Castle Vale Community Housing wanted a new HR system due to the limitations of its current system and its over-reliance on manual processes and Excel spreadsheets.

Christian Action Housing is replacing inefficient and cumbersome email- and intranet-based HR processes with the Cascade software, with the additional benefit that the HR system could also be used to gain a better grasp on staff absences and sick pay.

For Orwell Housing, the decision to implement Cascade was driven by its desire to ensure that its 560 employees remain dedicated, enthusiastic and motivated by their work, with the adoption of better reporting capabilities and advanced self-service functionalities.

Teign Housing is set to use a cloud-based version of the Cascade software, with additional online recruitment, self-service tools, workflows, surveys and auto-enrolment functionalities for up to 125 employees.

Finally, Together Housing Group is replacing multiple HR, payroll and learning and development systems with a single system from Cascade across the group's six partner organisations and 1,300 staff.

## A2Dominion goes green with Alfagy



*As part of A2Dominion's plan to demolish around 450 houses to make way for 700 properties, it is using combined heat and power (CHP) technology from Alfagy for the community heating system.*

Based on a blueprint from Conran & Partners, the Green Man Lane estate in west London is being regenerated through a shared £136 million project between A2Dominion and Rydon.

A community heating system using Alfagy's CHP technology will provide residents with low-carbon, cost-effective heating and electricity. Environmental performance will be further enhanced by the use of solar photovoltaic panels. Combined with the adoption of low-energy design principles, a cumulative CO2 saving of 57 per cent is expected, comfortably exceeding the 44 per cent needed

to achieve the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4.

Peter Kindt, chairman, Alfagy, said, "We were pleased to receive the residents' informed decision to choose our CHP. After insulation, Alfagy's CHP is the fastest way of reducing CO2 emissions and cutting fuel costs."



## Housing Technology 2014/15 report

*Our thanks to the 250+ people who completed our online survey for the Housing Technology 2014/15 report.*

Based on the survey responses from housing providers of all sizes, the Housing Technology 2014/15 report will: benchmark the use of existing business applications & technology infrastructures; predict future IT plans; assess changing delivery models; measure technology budgets; and

analyse IT staff and resource metrics. The report will therefore provide an important yardstick against which every housing provider can assess their future technology strategies and plans.

The report is expected to be published in October 2014. Printed copies of the report will be sent to all survey respondents, and electronic copies of the report will be sent to all of our housing provider subscribers.



# Housing Technology drinks reception

*Though we say it ourselves, our evening reception at Pizza Express in London's Olympia has become an annual institution as an amazing, informal networking event, going from just 60 guests five years' ago, to over 250 last year. The 2014 reception will take place on Tuesday 18th November.*

There is no charge to attend the reception; Housing Technology is pleased to provide an informal networking

arena for IT in social housing as a thank you to our readers, speakers, advertisers and sponsors.

Invitations to our evening reception will be sent out shortly. If you would like to be invited, please email [events@housing-technology.com](mailto:events@housing-technology.com) with 'evening reception' in the subject line.

## GGP GIS links to Google & Bing web mapping

GGP Systems has linked its geographic information system (GIS) to web mapping portals such as Google Maps and Bing Maps with a simple click-to-view tool. Designed to improve integration between GGP's professional GIS and popular internet mapping services, it automatically links the current working window of the GGP GIS to the same location on the selected mapping services, opening up access to the additional intelligence offered by the different map layers available online.

Jeremy Thomas, business development manager, GGP Systems, said, "Imagine, for example, a council call centre dealing with hundreds of queries every day, each one relating to a specific location. By giving staff the ability to access additional intelligence, valuable time can be saved, improving resolution rates and raising customer satisfaction levels."



Following a suggestion from Wyre Forest District Council, one of GGP's customers, the link to web mapping script gives other GGP users easy access to an array of additional visual information on their work in progress locations including aerial photomaps, 3-D imagery and street-level 360-degree videos using Google StreetView.

## Housing Technology's SMAC Your IT Up at the BT Tower

Housing Technology is returning to the BT Tower on Friday 3rd October 2014 with SMAC Your IT Up, covering the use of social media, mobility, analytics & cloud (SMAC) in housing. Housing Technology would like to thank Aareon, BT, Ciber, Kypera and ONI for kindly sponsoring the event. The presentations (below) will be followed by lunch at the top of the BT Tower.

### **Adactus Housing: Somewhere over the radar**

Adactus will explain how its approach to mobilisation has evolved in recent years, culminating in the availability of better performance analytics for staff previously 'under the radar'.

### **BT: Making SMAC technologies work for you**

How SMAC technologies can help you realise your potential and improve services for you and your tenants.

### **Orbit Housing: Housing goes digital... the right kit or the right culture?**

As housing providers grapple with social media, the expectations of 'generation Y' employees and tenants increasingly used to shopping online, how do we respond to the digital challenges of tomorrow's world?

### **Viridian Housing: Innovation in housing – how hard can it be?**

Viridian's innovation team is trying to think differently about the challenges

facing the company and encourage creative problem solving through the use of customer data and analytics.

### **Wales & West Housing: Clouds & daffodils – a dance to a brighter future?**

How real is the cloud and is it the answer for housing providers' future IT needs? Or is it a giant honey trap that you will regret?

### **Wheatley Group: Data analytics & digital inclusion**

Supported by data analytics, Wheatley Group is engaging with customers in an award-winning pilot study to reduce digital exclusion.



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# Idox's funding platform for Coastline tenants



Cornwall's Coastline Housing is using a dedicated training and development tool from Idox Group, based on the software provider's own Open 4 Training & Development portal which was originally developed by Idox for its HR managers to find extra funding for training and learning activities. Coastline's Idox portal went live in May 2014 after around five months' implementation time.

While Coastline's users merely need to type in their profile and requirements for an immediate list of education, training and employment results, behind the scenes a team of 35 researchers constantly scour the country for information published in news feeds, websites, documents and policy releases, and are tracking on a

weekly basis over 2,000 information sources as well as thousands of overnight website updates.

The information is entered into Idox's content management system, created specifically to cater to funding and other dynamic content. The Inspiring Futures portal is flushed and re-published every night to ensure all the changes to new schemes, updates to existing schemes and news items are communicated to users as quickly as possible.

The portal gives Coastline's tenants access to a service that could direct them straight to funding, bursaries, scholarships and employment, many of which they may not have considered or even been aware of.

For example, few people would think of applying to the 'Devon and Cornwall Aid for Girls' fund, but for females aged 16-23, there are discretionary grants available for pretty much any kind of training or support. As well as this type of county-specific fund, the portal searches nationally for more general sources allowing each user to pinpoint the most relevant results.

Having created the portal, Coastline faced two additional hurdles; Cornwall's population is both poorer

than the national average, and older. Many of its tenants have neither access to the internet nor any knowledge of how to use it. For these people, Coastline visited them in their homes with tablets and other mobile devices tethered to mobile phones for internet access. Once the information has been entered, Coastline staff print the personalised results there and then, enabling the tenants to apply for the relevant funding.

Since the successful implementation at Coastline, other housing associations have shown an interest in the portal, and because the costs of the portal are based on the number of houses under management, smaller housing providers are not debarred by set-up costs and on-going fees.

Leanna Cox, neighbourhood and involvement facilitator, Coastline Housing, said, "The Inspiring Futures portal enables us to supplement our training programmes by giving tenants new funding sources to meet their learning needs. They now have access to the online funding platform, giving each of them thousands of funding opportunities to cover their training and learning in order to help them get back to work."

## £101,000 funding prize from Ordnance Survey



In partnership with Land Registry, Ordnance Survey has launched its eighth 'GeoVation Challenge' with £101,000 in development funding to help develop the best ideas and solutions to housing issues.

Individuals, start-ups and existing businesses and organisations are invited to submit their ideas to improve housing by 19 November 2014. Outstanding entries will then be invited to a GeoVation weekend camp in January 2015, where the innovators can work on transforming their ideas into prototype business ventures. Those selected to receive funding will be announced at the end of the camp.

Chris Parker, head of Geovation, Ordnance Survey, said, "In the four years that the GeoVation challenges have been running, almost £650,000 has been awarded to create 28

new ventures based on geography and Ordnance Survey mapping. GeoVation is a test of resilience and our ability to tackle issues head on. Now we turn to housing and how geography and data can provide solutions to issues based around affordability, availability, access and infrastructure, and the best use of assets and resources."

Some of the issues outlined in the GeoVation Challenge include:

- How to provide better access to services for those living in rural areas;
- How to successfully build on flood plains;
- How to minimise the number of empty properties that are left to fall into disrepair;
- How to design and build energy efficiency into both new and existing houses.

All entrants to the GeoVation Challenge must use Ordnance Survey open or paid-for data and Land Registry licensable data in their ideas. For the full list of issues and how to submit an entry, visit [www.os.co.uk/geovation](http://www.os.co.uk/geovation).

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## Women's Pioneer Housing's office clearance with Invu



*One year after it implemented an electronic document management system from Invu, Women's Pioneer Housing has reported on how it has automated its finance function and digitised its invoices and tenancy records at the same time as creating valuable space in its central London offices.*

WPH decided last year that it had had enough of its room full of filing cabinets and that its paper-based records had to go. It wanted a single EDM solution that could be integrated with its existing Aareon QL Housing and business applications, had the ability to store electronic documents, and would provide better control and visibility of invoices through workflow tools.

Nathan Mallows, consultant director, Women's Pioneer Housing, said, "As a small

housing provider in central London, when it comes to gaining more space we have a choice of either moving to a bigger office or making the most of our existing space. Our location is great for serving our existing tenants since most of our properties are within a 20 minute radius and we own the space, so it was an easy decision to maximise the room we already have."

WPH started by scanning all invoices into Invu before embarking on a wider archiving project including tenancy agreements and other paper-based records.

Mallows continues, "The information we had in the piles of paper held real nuggets of information that would be of use to our tenants, but we had no way of accessing it without needing to dust off lots

of old files, which meant resident queries on service charges could take up a lot of time and resources. Invu provides a long-term solution that enables us to access our documents quickly and easily, and provide a better service to our tenants."

The Invu solution provides WPH with better visibility and control over invoices. Employees can immediately determine the status of a query and have visibility of invoices, providing both greater security and increased transparency for administrators.

WPH has also identified better ways of working within its own processes, including reallocating repair invoice processes to the finance team.

Mallows said, "Changing the process has allowed the repairs team to focus on making sure the values of the orders are correct, leaving the actual processing of the invoices to the finance team. This was an unexpected gain from the increased visibility provided by Invu; being able to understand the process in detail has enabled us to streamline all of our entire financial processes.

"We want the whole office to be paperless within two or three years. We've come from the point of having no electronic automation whatsoever to having most of the finance department being paperless in less than 12 months. Not only that, we've created a tremendous amount of space by getting rid of so much paper."

## Results of the Digital Deal funding programme

*The Tinder Foundation has announced the results of its Digital Deal funding which was designed to stimulate digital inclusion activities in social housing. 12 housing providers took part in the Digital Deal, which was jointly funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Communities and Local Government.*

Key findings from the evaluation projects included: the importance of long term investment to encourage digitally-excluded tenants to transact online; websites and online services need to be so simple that they become the preferred channel for tenants; support for digital skills should be embedded into all support services; the creation of tablet loans schemes and low cost borrow-to-buy partnerships with credit unions; and partnerships between housing providers, UK Online Centres, Jobcentres and others to accelerate digital inclusion.

Helen Milner, Chief Executive of Tinder Foundation says "Digital inclusion continues to be a huge priority for the

housing sector, and not only are more and more services moving online, but tenants are also beginning to demand online services."

Each organisation taking part in the Digital Deal took a different approach. For example, Golden Gates Housing installed estate-wide wi-fi and redesigned its online services portal; Queens Cross Housing opened five new 'digital community hubs'; and Leeds Federated Housing used two digitally-equipped buses to reach places that couldn't be reached by training in fixed locations.

Paul Earl from Golden Gates Housing Trust, said, "The Digital Deal has helped to raise the profile of digital inclusion in our organisation and helped to secure executive management and board-level buy-in. This has enabled us to be more aggressive in our targets for supporting our tenants into getting online."

# Housing Technology 2015 – first speakers and sponsors announced

**HOUSING  
TECHNOLOGY**  
**2015** | CONFERENCE AND  
EXECUTIVE FORUM



*The Housing Technology 2015 conference and executive forum returns to the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry on 4-5 March 2015, with a pre-event evening reception on 3 March 2015 and an informal dinner during the evening of 4 March, hosted by comedian Dominic Holland.*

Housing Technology 2015 runs for two days and combines thought-provoking presentations from housing providers and IT suppliers, informal networking among senior housing professionals, and a dedicated conference sponsor and exhibitor area. Delegates have the choice of attending both or either days of the event.

Housing Technology 2015 will cover:

- Housing operations, internal communications and staff productivity;
- Tenant communications and engagement;
- Mobile working, scheduling and operative management;
- Finance & asset management, digital inclusion, and external regulations;
- Blue-sky thinking and IT/business innovation;
- Social housing 2.0 – what does it look like?

We have a great line-up of speakers and presentations (please note that some of these titles and topics are provisional at the time of going press) featuring:

- **Aareon:** Presentation title to be confirmed
- **Adactus Housing Group:** Social housing 2.0 – what does it look like?

- **Amicus Horizon:** How to design mobile solutions to improve customer service and business efficiency
- **Cairn Housing:** Business planning, performance management and customer engagement
- **Capita:** Presentation title to be confirmed
- **Civica:** Presentation title to be confirmed
- **Community Housing Cymru:** Overcoming digital exclusion in Wales
- **Golden Gates Housing Trust:** Mobile working for better tenant engagement
- **Helena Partnerships:** Rolling out a new knowledge-based management system
- **Midland Heart:** An IT 'newbie' in housing
- **Orbit:** Housing goes digital – right kit ... or right culture?
- **Orchard:** Presentation title to be confirmed
- **Origin Housing:** Digital personal development
- **Peaks & Plains:** Streamlining and digitising housing services
- **RCT Homes:** Multi-tasking while mobile working
- **Rooftop Group:** Pulling the plug on offline services
- **Severnside Housing:** Using housing & tenant data for better investment decisions
- **SITS Group:** Presentation title to be confirmed
- **Solihull Community Housing:** A commercial approach to social housing
- **Southern Housing Group:** Social housing 2.0

- **Sovereign Business Integration Group:** Presentation title to be confirmed
- **Trafford Housing Trust:** Moving from legacy to 21st century HMS
- **Trident:** Wi-fi and digital inclusion
- **TVHA:** Delivering services digitally
- **Viridian Housing:** Digital inclusion and 'silver surfers'
- **Wales & West Housing:** Building a new housing management system from scratch
- **WDH:** IT and business innovation and social housing 2.0
- **Wheatley Group:** Data analytics and digital inclusion
- **WM Housing:** The journey to IT and housing excellence

At the time of writing, Aareon, Capita, Civica, Orchard, SITS Group and Sovereign Business Integration Group are already confirmed as sponsors of the event, with more expected to be announced over the next few months. Please email [events@housing-technology.com](mailto:events@housing-technology.com) with '2015 conference' in the subject line if you would like to know about sponsorship of and exhibiting at Housing Technology 2015.

Registration for the event is now open. Full details about Housing Technology 2015 are available at [www.housing-technology.com/events/ht2015](http://www.housing-technology.com/events/ht2015) to either provisionally reserve your place as a delegate, put yourself forward as a potential speaker or find out about sponsorship and exhibiting.





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