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1-3 MARCH 2016
Q HOTELS' OXFORD BELFRY

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EDITOR'S NOTES

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A single version of the truth

A common problem for the majority of housing providers is that due to the plethora of business applications that each of them typically has, even a simple query such as 'how many properties do we own or manage' may result in different answers depending on which application is being used.

The phrase 'a single version of the truth' is commonly used to describe this problem, most frequently caused on the one hand by the same data-fields and data being duplicated across different applications, and on the other hand by data being manually processed, manipulated and analysed using 'offline', standalone spreadsheets on individual PCs and laptops.

In the case of duplicated data fields, how can a housing provider know which application has the correct figure for, say, 'number of occupants' or 'number of completed repairs'? And if the figures are different, why are they different?

And for 'offline' spreadsheets, consider the example of a financial analyst at a housing provider being tasked with calculating depreciation schedules for its housing stock, taking into account the changing ages and demographics of its tenant population. In order to do this, the analyst might have to source data from multiple systems and then consolidate those data-sets into a spreadsheet on his desktop. Aside from the complications of actually combining the data in the first place, that spreadsheet is then prone to errors due to becoming immediately out of sync with its parent applications' data.

The quest for 'a single version of the truth' isn't necessarily about best-of-breed applications vs. a single ERP-style application, it's more about streamlined data engineering so that the same information is captured as infrequently as possible, along the lines of 'enter once, use many times'.

News from Housing Technology
As you will see on pages 26 and 28, we have a few interesting developments to report covering the next six months. In each case, further details are available from **www.housing-technology.com**.

The first is that, with the support of Go ON UK, we are about to start work on our 'Digital by Default 2016' report; this will be the first significant technology report on digital inclusion in the UK social housing sector since our original 2012 report (published in conjunction with RaceOnline 2012).

The 'Digital by Default 2016' report will cover how housing providers have successfully adopted digital inclusion into their business strategies, provide guidance for best practice around digital inclusion in housing, and show the results of an online survey of all UK social housing providers and their views on digital inclusion and their strategies to support it.

The second development is that we have confirmed the date (Wednesday 18 November 2015) and location (Pizza Express in Olympia, London, as usual!) for our annual evening reception. The event is free to anyone involved in technology in social housing as a thank you to all of our readers, speakers, advertisers and sponsors.

Finally, we are very pleased to announce that the **Housing Technology 2016 conference** and executive forum will take place on **1-3 March 2016** at the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry. Our seventh annual conference will cover the full spectrum of technology in social housing, including:

- External & multi-channel communications with tenants, contractors and suppliers
- Smart technologies, including the internet of things, connected homes and big data
- Mobile working, dynamic scheduling and real-time communications
- Core business applications, including housing, finance and asset management systems
- Software licensing, application consolidation and shared services
- IT infrastructure, including cloud, virtualisation, SaaS and data security
- Pay to stay, universal credit and other financial/regulatory areas

Please have a look at www.housing-technology.com to find out more.

COMING SOON...
DIGITAL BY DEFAULT 2016 REPORT

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GO ON UK

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY EVENING RECEPTION
18 NOVEMBER 2015, OLYMPIA, LONDON
www.housing-technology.com/events/reception

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2016 CONFERENCE & EXECUTIVE FORUM
1-3 MARCH 2016, OXFORD
www.housing-technology.com/events/ht16

SECTIONS

WHY SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING MOVED TO OPEN HOUSING

Chris Deery, Head of ICT, Solihull Community Housing

I have been thinking about the issue of IT systems and consolidation. This seems like an extremely relevant issue here in Solihull at the moment. In the past, our users have generally favoured the idea of using best-of-breed business applications. They argued that if they could get a smaller system that is specifically built for a function such as ASB for the same cost of a more generic case management system that is part of a larger integrated housing system, then that is what they would rather do. However, this view has tended to ignore the on-going costs of supporting and developing multiple smaller systems.

We recently signed an agreement with Capita worth over £270,000 to migrate to its Open Housing platform. Currently our rents, leaseholders and arrears functions are using Capita Housing and our repairs function and DLO are using Open Housing. We also have a number of smaller systems for things such as money advice and ASB that we also want to migrate to the Open Housing platform. There are three main reasons why we have decided to migrate to a single consolidated system.

Reducing costs
Firstly, in these days of benefit reform and a one per cent decrease in rent every year for the next four years, we need to reduce our costs. Having multiple systems costs more to maintain than having a single system. This year alone we have had to upgrade all of our systems either because the supplier only supports a limited number of older releases or because Microsoft has decided that the Windows servers that they run on are no longer supported. There seems to be a lot of work and cost involved in just keeping our current systems and infrastructure fully supported. The more systems you have, the more work that is involved in just keeping everything going.

At the same time our users are still keen to develop new services and to expand their use of technology. Upgrades need to happen but from a user's perspective, things often don't look any different. The more we can reduce the amount of time we spend carrying out upgrades and other maintenance work, the more we can work with our users to develop new solutions in the increasingly challenging social housing world.

Secondly, we want to provide usable, integrated and simple online services for our tenants. This is partly driven by the need to cut costs but also by the desire to encourage our tenants to be digitally included. The provision of a single portal that allows tenants to pay their rent, enquire about their rent balance, book a repair, report anti-social behaviour and update their contact details is made far more complex and expensive if you need to link to multiple back-office systems.

Mobile on the go
Finally, we want to enable our workforce to be totally mobile and able to access information and systems using laptops, tablets and smartphones. Again, this is much easier and cheaper if we can reduce the number of back-office systems that need to be integrated into the mobile application. We want to provide our staff and contractors with access to information and the ability to update systems in the field and for that information to be immediately available to all other users.

There will always be people who believe that you can have your cake and eat it too, and that with middleware and integration tools you can link together multiple systems from different vendors. Indeed, these days even when you buy all of your software from the same supplier, you often find that they are re-selling software from other vendors and additional software has to be bought to make the various elements talk to each other. But here in Solihull for the three reasons above, we have decided to reduce the number of smaller bespoke systems we use and to focus our efforts on a much smaller set of systems.

Chris Deery is head of ICT at Solihull Community Housing.

COMPANIES IN THIS ISSUE

BUILDING INFORMATION MODELLING - THE NEXT BIG THING FOR HOUSING PROVIDERS?

Paul O'Reilly, Senior Consultant, Aareon

Twenty years ago, in my days in managing a 'patch' of social housing in West Yorkshire, there was no real culture of using IT to help you do your job. Arrears were managed with a pencil, a ruler and a pile of computer-generated reports that grew week by week on my desk until I struggled to see my colleagues when I looked up. Planned maintenance was tricky, too. The lesson we learned was 'never replace all the bin store doors and frames just before Mischievous Night'. The surveyor's face when he saw the scorched outline of the bonfire that had been enjoyed the previous night was a picture. And suddenly, none of the blocks had any communal doors. Nor frames.

The reason I reminisce is that I'm trying to illustrate that, between fleeing angry dogs, serving notices nervously on Friday afternoons, trying to confiscate stolen mopeds and marvelling at the sheer creativity of vandalism left behind in many of our void properties, we carried all our knowledge around in our heads. If somebody asked me about 6 Sykes Close, an image appeared in my mind of a three-storey block with a central stairway and a flat roof. It may have existed on a crude, green-screen property database somewhere in the office, but that would be little used.

And all that time, although I never realised it, 'building information modelling' existed in a crude early form. Even now, a quarter of a century later, it is not a term that is commonplace in the housing sector. But is that about to change?

Building information modelling (BIM) is a technology used to visualise a building. A digital, three-dimensional representation of the physical characteristics of a building (airport, school, factory, block of flats) gives the viewer an immediate ability to see in their physical place all the features of that building, and to make decisions about it from prior to it being built and then through its lifecycle. The data files that enable these representations are rather like GIS or CAD files, and can be exchanged in similar ways.

Therefore in construction management, data is gathered and added as it becomes known (architects' drawings, for example). It becomes a growing resource, with room shapes and sizes, stairways, envelope and so on. As the building evolves and is fitted out, those items also become objects attached to the model, and objects can also inherit data from one another to enable predictability. This is great for architects and builders, because it enables much more accurate working and material usage.

The step change between CAD drawings and a BIM of the same building really lies in the depth and richness of information that can be made available once it has been gathered. For example, take a house made of traditional brick. What BIM can add to the traditional CAD model is all the little features that are not seen on a typical CAD rendering, such as the wall ties and internal insulation boards, as well as far richer information about those items that can be rendered in CAD – for example, if there is a lintel above the window, what is its maximum load, and, in the case of other items, qualities such as tensile strength, heat or moisture conductivity, and so on. You can hold data on information such as the standard (and the expected standard) of the brick laying or the sound insulating performance (which of course could be of interest to those dealing with ASB and noise!). Each product used in the building has detailed specification data held against it, to ensure that in the long term, its performance can be accurately assessed.

Housing providers tend to manage the entire building lifecycle, from development feasibility right through to disposal or demolition. Think about the potential that having such models would give your organisation. In the future, will you work with architects and construction companies if they cannot or will not provide you with a BIM? There are a growing number of large property-owning companies in the UK and Europe who will not!

In your housing management system or your asset management system, you may store stock condition information. So, for example, when an electrical fault is reported within a block, you enter a repair request based on (vague) information that the tenant reports and a surveyor may then have to visit the block to find the cause of the problem. If you were instead able to call up the BIM of the block on screen and locate the electrical wiring circuits (held as objects on the model), you would have a far greater chance of dealing with the problem quickly and efficiently.

Let's look longer term. You are an asset manager and you can call up a model of a block and view its water and heating system graphically, with not only the location of the pipes, boilers, valves and radiators, but also manufacturers, model numbers, performance information, energy rating data, cost and replacement date.

Compliance is a subject with growing focus in building management – imagine being able to view all smoke alarms in properties and blocks, and see if their current positions are optimal for ensuing that residents are safeguarded from risk. It would also be possible to review general fire safety based on the construction of the building, whether extra fire escapes might be advantageous, where the 'risk' areas are

BUILDING INFORMATION MODELLING - THE NEXT BIG THING FOR HOUSING PROVIDERS?

Continued from previous page

in stairways in terms of rubbish dumping and subsequent enhanced fire risk. This kind of strategic modelling could then be the basis for planned works to reduce risks in communal areas.

BIM also offers tools for the creation of new models; for example, an enhanced energy model could be created and added to a block to enable the effects of a potential energy improvement programme to be easily visualised. This creates a far more compelling and effective view than a simple printed report is ever likely to offer. And again, because metadata and documentation can be added at any time to the model, a massive resource of information can be created and then used.

The 'facilities management' application of BIM is probably going to form the main basis of its potential use by UK housing providers. However, consider its uses in other areas, such as estate management. If a tenant in a block reports a noise nuisance, how often does the person taking the call know which number flat is above, below, or across the landing? Calling up a BIM model on screen would answer that question quickly (as well as giving information on wall thickness!). It would also highlight the area where the sofa has been dumped in the stairwell, so a contractor can be called to remove it.

BIM has had a slow start and it is used in different ways globally. However, its rate of adoption is gaining pace. A survey of the UK construction industry in 2010 found that use of BIM stood at 13 per cent but by 2014 that figure had risen to 48 per cent. Aareon's experience of both the Swedish and Norwegian

housing markets suggests that interest is increasing and standards are being adopted.

Will BIM become a standard tool for UK housing providers any time soon? I'd say we are currently some way off from seeing it as a standard tool.

Firstly, the sector is relatively cautious about adopting new technologies. Mobile working and tenant portals both took years to become truly accepted by the sector. I suspect BIM will be the same, until some exemplar customers begin to show business benefits are possible.

Secondly, it is a technology that is very much about 'you get out what you put in'. The sheer volume of data that would need to be gathered to create accurate building models is a daunting task in itself for existing stock, and unless you inherit the model data from the construction company who built the units in the first place, you somehow need to acquire a digital model of the building. Given that many providers currently don't even have a full stock condition survey (to put that into context, many years ago, during an implementation that will remain nameless I found that the customer was delighted to discover three properties that they did not realise they owned!), it is unlikely that the necessary data will be gathered quickly or easily without an intensively managed project. But like all IT implementations, that can be overcome and it is not a good reason in itself not to do it.

Thirdly, I think we need some good business case information from the early adopters. Like the aforementioned

mobile working, for example, there was considerable scepticism and resistance in the early days until the efficiency case was made. Then it became far more compelling and I think the same will be true of visualisation technologies such as BIM. The possibilities I have listed above have clear benefits in terms of asset management, and I would argue that they at least have customer service benefits in the housing management sphere as well.

Take into account also the changing user expectations – the internet in general is becoming more and more visual and immediate with the ubiquity of tools such as Google Maps and Apple Maps. Almost all apps these days enable the tagging of photos you have taken on your smartphone, so that you can visualise them on a map view. BIM takes this a stage further and, when combined with geographic information systems, enables this kind of rich media tagging on a 3-D model as opposed to a 2-D map or CAD. Photos, data, documents, manuals and so on become useful and relevant in the same way as your holiday photos do.

Aareon sees the technology as an emerging one in both the commercial and social sectors and so I suspect that this could, with some hard work and creative application in future years, become a game changer in the way property and asset data is managed in the UK.

Paul O'Reilly is a senior consultant at Aareon.

LUMINUS SHINES ON NEW AAREON HOUSING SYSTEM

As part of its '2020 Vision', Luminus is implementing a new housing management system from Aareon. The Aareon QL software will be used to provide a wider choice of online services for tenants and support greater scope for mobile working by Luminus's staff.

Luminus started its procurement process in August 2014, beginning with a review of all the solutions available via the Crown Commercial Service (framework agreement RM1059)

and a tender specification was issued. Aareon was then chosen after a market review and a number of very detailed demonstrations.

The housing provider reported that its reasons for selecting Aareon QL included its workflow capabilities, flexibility of operations and integrated mobile functionality.

LET'S GET DIGITAL – TRANSFORMING THE IT-ENABLED HOME

Kevin Alderson, Sales & Marketing Director, Tunstall Healthcare

Kevin Alderson, sales and marketing director at Tunstall Healthcare, considers the challenges and latest thinking around digital and IP technologies.

It's an exciting time for technology as we move into the digital world, but it's a challenge to understand what it actually means for housing providers. Technology is moving towards fully digital/IP-based systems and there is a limited understanding of what 'the art of the possible' actually is.

In July, South West Housing held a workshop and tour of Taunton Borough Council's Extra Care facility. The workshop tried to answer this conundrum with over 50 people from the housing sector. It focused on 'you don't know what you don't know' and attempted to paint the art of the possible in terms of digital/IP technology. The discussion unearthed some real concerns for people.

There was a big debate about new technologies which perhaps were untested. For example, the NHS says there were 125,000 new health apps developed last year alone, but only 125 had been tested. Some innovations (such as Uber, which allows you to find a taxi easily) are not regulated, but are still extremely popular. Other things which are available include geo-tagging, which defines the area a vulnerable person is in (linked to Google maps), and if things go wrong; for example, if an elderly person travels more than 10 miles per hour or goes outside the safe zone, a carer can be alerted.

Another key issue is listening to people's needs. 72 per cent of people die in hospital even though most people say that they want to die at home; surely technology can help here? In fact, we know that it can.

At the workshop, general public awareness was highlighted. For example, one problem might be that an elderly man comes downstairs at 2am, puts the bacon on the hob but forgets the frying pan. Or an elderly woman wanders too far and gets disoriented. We have no idea where to look for useful technology to support our loved ones, and how to make the right choices, so start with the problem and work towards the right technology.

So what does the technological future hold?

The next five years will be much more transformational than the previous 50 years in terms of technology in care.

The IP transformation is enormous for the housing sector because it allows you to do so much more. For example, trains allow you to go from A to B but eight-lane motorways have transformed the speed, flexibility and ease of travel. However, you have to bear in mind that there are some disadvantages which need to be dealt with; for example, IP-enabled devices cost more and their reliability and resilience needs to be taken into account.

It is not advantageous just to buy IP-enabled equipment, as the equipment alone will produce the same outcomes as before but at a higher cost. You need to work with a provider who will make sure it works reliably in every circumstance – it's about a broader service delivering more benefits.

In the home of the not too distant future, you will have potentially hundreds of IP-enabled devices. Bringing the home to life through digital connectivity is where the future lies. If you get your infrastructure in place, your motorway into the home will go on to achieve outcomes, efficiency and productivity gains.

Kevin Alderson is the sales and marketing director for Tunstall Healthcare.

BRISTOL COUNCIL SELECTS CIVICA TO TRANSFORM TENANT SERVICES

Bristol City Council has a signed a five-year, £1.9 million contract with Civica for a new cloud-based housing management system to support its 61,000 tenants.

Civica's Housing Cx software will enable the council's staff to access all information about tenancies, rents, repair works and feedback in one place as well as give them up-to-date information on waiting lists, repairs and maintenance logs. The system, which supports self-service, features separate CRM, tenant and supplier portals, allowing housing managers to instantly check on the status of a repair using the same application and update records on the spot.

Housing Cx automates tenant preferences, enabling them to receive communications through their preferred methods so that tenants can receive information about repairs via text and rents or arrears via letter. The solution integrates seamlessly with the council's own digital platform and with its Keystone asset management software.

Daniella Radice, assistant mayor for neighbourhoods with responsibility for housing delivery at Bristol City Council, said, "The new system will work better for both housing officers and tenants. Our housing officers will be able to access lots of different housing information in one place, and while they are out and about, not just in the office. Tenants will also be able to communicate better with the council about their housing issues using Civica."

The solution was bought via the Local Authority Software Applications procurement framework run by the Crown Commercial Service. The overall project, which began in May 2015, will be delivered through a phased implementation designed to provide early benefits where possible.

THE NEED FOR DIGITAL SERVICES IN HOUSING

David Rosewell, Head of Digital Offerings in UK and Ireland at Fujitsu

The importance of digital services has never been more apparent than in today's society. Whether shopping online or collaborating across the globe, digital services provide us with new opportunities and as such, it is no surprise that more organisations are embracing them than ever before.

According to research from Fujitsu looking into the UK's digital landscape, over a fifth of us will always opt for a digital service when offered it. In addition, online banking and online shopping reign supreme as the most used and valued digital services every day (both around 67 per cent).

The current landscape

Despite this growth, there are still obstacles when it comes to digital services because fully exploiting digital and the Internet of Things requires a huge change in thinking. For housing providers in particular, if they don't take advantage of digital services, other organisations could enter the market and provide better services such as assisted living.

Over the last few years, the entry barriers into the new markets have come down. A company can now come into existence and create a new infrastructure very quickly using various cloud and digital services. The cost of entry and time to launch a new business has also dramatically reduced as people can access these services more easily. Organisations need to be looking over their shoulder to see who might steal a march on them.

As well as this, the housing sector as a whole is also facing disruptive challenges. After the election, the government announced that it would force housing providers to sell homes at a below-the-market value despite warnings that the policy could cause not-for-profit organisations to go bankrupt. This will have a huge impact on the sector; however, it has also opened the door for housing providers to talk about services they had not previously considered, such as outsourcing, shared services and digital transformation.

Embracing digital

Market forces are now coming together and, with the great change of technology and what is now available such as social media and analytics, together with drastic financial cuts, mean that a dramatic digital transformation is coming. There are three levels in which a housing provider can transform.

1. Digitisation of the business

It will be the IT department who will drive major change; IT outsourcing, exploitation of the cloud and the Internet of Things (IoT) are just some of the areas that can provide new opportunities, for example in the management of physical assets. Utility companies have already started to embrace IoT through sensor technologies to better monitor their assets and arrange maintenance visits when needed.

2. Transforming the end-user experience

It's about transforming the end-user experience for both tenants and employees by providing new channels and moving to an omni-channel approach. In addition, IoT can support assisted living, helping to create a smart house that allows people to live

independently. By monitoring where people are in the home, making sure they haven't fallen, are still moving, have a heart rate and more provides vital means to monitor people's health. Everyone seems to get obsessed with assets and objects when it comes to IoT, but it's actually about the connectivity to provide organisations with data. Exploiting this data through smart analytic processing and drawing insights is where organisations can do things differently and create a unique experience for tenants.

3. Reinventing the business model

Finally, housing providers need to reinvent their business models and think about how they can disrupt the market before someone else does. Uber is one example of a company that entered a market and ended up leading the way. The housing sector should be asking "what is the Uber equivalent in the housing market?" They may not know the answer, but it's about asking the question and being prepared to disrupt to really make a difference.

As the digital landscape continues to develop, there are more ways than ever to innovatively interact and engage with organisations. This is particularly important for housing providers that are now facing various market changes and need to start doing things differently. It's about all these forces coming together to embrace digital transformation. It's not about picking and choosing which one to embrace, but considering them all to achieve savings and become a truly digital organisation.

David Rosewell is the head of digital offerings in the UK and Ireland at Fujitsu.

RAM enables component accounting and FRS 102 compliance for CHS Group

CHS Group has successfully moved to the FRS 102 accounting requirements using component accounting software from Real Asset Management.

Under SORP 2010, CHS saw its asset register increase from around 2,000 property records to over 26,000 componentised assets. Eager to upgrade from its previous spreadsheet-based system when component accounting was first introduced, CHS Group recognised that the sheer volume of data resulting from the componentisation of its assets would be too difficult and arduous to manage.

James Khan, management accountant, CHS Group, said, "We needed a specialist asset management solution which would enable a smooth transition to component accounting while also having the flexibility to deal with future regulatory changes. The RAM system came highly recommended by many other housing providers and has stood us in good stead in not only meeting SORP regulations but also the recent FRS 102 requirements.

"Accounting tasks relating to the depreciation and reconciliation of our housing assets are now performed much more efficiently. We can now conduct more thorough analysis and slice and dice the data as required, enabling us to forecast and forward plan more accurately."

CHS is using RAM's software in conjunction with its existing Great Plains finance system for greater efficiencies, particularly for month-end reporting. The asset management software reports and collates information in a consistent format which is then automatically imported into the finance system, providing CHS's finance team with better visibility and control.

CHS has now made the move to FRS 102. Khan said, "RAM has enabled us to cope with the recent FRS 102 changes with a minimum of disruption. A RAM implementation manager worked with us on-site and performed a data conversion which enabled us to become FRS 102 compliant within days."

Hendre selects Real Asset Management for FRS102 and SORP

The Hendre Group has selected Real Asset Management to deliver a component accounting solution to cover the group's fixed assets and ensure compliance with key accounting standards.

The new system will replace its manual, spreadsheet-based processes which had become inefficient in supporting its large volume of data, while key reports had become too cumbersome to create. Following the requirement to componentise assets under SORP regulations, Hendre has seen its register increase to more than 60,000 assets over the past three years.

Gareth Yeoman-Evans, head of finance, Hendre Group, said, "We had previously been using two separate spreadsheets to manage the group's large number of depreciating assets but these had become far too complex and time consuming. It had reached the point where we needed to implement a specialist component accounting solution to streamline our period-end process and increase departmental efficiency and productivity."

Commenting on the group's transition to FRS 102, Yeoman-Evans said, "It's a perfect opportunity to step back, review our asset base and sort out the necessary systems and procedures so that we can accurately and efficiently complete a 'comparative' year. Having to run two parallel sets of accounts will be so much easier with the new system."

Real Asset Management helps Thames Valley Housing's component accounting

Thames Valley Housing Association has reported that it has made a smooth transition to the FRS 102 financial requirement with a component accounting solution from Real Asset Management.

Thames Valley Housing Association has been using Real Asset Management's component accounting software since 2007 to control and manage its £565 million asset base. The system was implemented initially to manage its property records, but the introduction of component accounting under SORP regulations saw the housing provider's register grow to 113,000 individual assets. The software enabled TVHA to meet the SORP deadline and has most recently facilitated a successful transition to FRS 102.

Jason Schofield, component accountant, Thames Valley Housing Association, said, "Having a flexible software tool to split out the costs of each unit at a component level has been invaluable. Calculations such as depreciation and determining costs on disposals are made so easy and having the facility to upload data files in large batches, hundreds of lines at a time, makes our period-end process very efficient.

"The system allows for exceptionally detailed analysis. This has been vital in enabling us to measure and report on our assets in compliance with the requirements of the new accounting and statutory frameworks and to ensure an efficient and speedy adoption of component accounting and FRS 102."

As with all housing providers facing the task of becoming FRS 102 compliant, TVHA had to overcome a number of challenges last year, such as assessing the most suitable basis for measuring its asset and grant treatment, working out prior-year adjustments and undertaking data cleansing and recalculation work.

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THE FUTURE OF APPLE PAY IN HOUSING

Nick Peplow, Bill Payments Director, Allpay

With Apple Pay now established in the UK, customers have a new method at their disposal for making quick, easy payments using their iPhone or Apple Watch devices. Beyond everyday consumer transactions such as paying for a coffee or using public transport, Apple Pay also has considerable potential within social housing. With contactless payment technology increasing in both sophistication and popularity, its on-going development could provide new levels of convenience for tenants making regular payments using Apple Pay.

By embracing Apple Pay as an additional payment option, housing providers can increase choice and convenience for their tenants, while reducing the administrative burden created by older payment methods by further digitising their collection processes.

From a tenant's point of view, flexibility and choice are very important, especially when it comes to budgeting their income and making rent payments. Digital inclusion, of which Apple Pay represents a key part, goes a long way towards providing this. Smartphone ownership, even among lower-income groups, is increasing rapidly, pay-as-you-go deals are getting cheaper and the phones themselves are becoming more affordable as one-off costs. Adopting Apple Pay as a payment option helps to bring that flexibility, in the form of a service which is familiar to many users.

At present, Apple Pay transactions must be within the same £20 limit as contactless bank cards, with this expected to increase to £30 in September 2015. This would mean that for now, the platform is useful mainly for making lower value housing payments, including rent top-ups and reducing arrears, assuming the tenant is permitted by the housing provider to make payments in this way. However, the security advantages that Apple Pay holds over standard contactless cards raises the possibility of much larger payments being made through the service in future.

Inevitably, such a swift and straightforward method of parting with cash will raise concerns about safety, especially among tenants who may be following strict budgets. To combat the threat of fraud, credit or debit card details are not stored on the tenant's device or on Apple's servers when added to Apple Pay. Instead, a unique Device Account Number is assigned, encrypted and safely stored in the Secure Element of the Apple device, and each transaction is authorised with a one-time dynamic security code. A two-factor authentication process, involving a combination of a tap of the phone with the Apple device's Touch ID sensor, adds an extra layer of security that contactless cards don't offer.

This offers peace of mind to users in the first instance, but it also makes an unlimited transaction limit a distinct possibility in future, which in turn would mean that tenants could eventually make full housing payments by using the platform. Apple Pay's two-factor authentication process means that the service is not actually legally bound by the same transaction limit as standard contactless cards. Indeed, Visa and MasterCard have already confirmed that some UK retailers will remove this limit in the near future.

So how could this be deployed for housing payments? The answer lies not in the Apple Pay technology itself, but in the contactless terminals which accept the payments. Currently, most of these are programmed to process transactions at the £20 limit only.

Those outlets which accept and process housing payments can make some headway by being proactive here: invest in the new hardware and software to remove transaction limits on Apple Pay and tenants will immediately have a convenient, highly manageable new payment method at their disposal. In our digital age, convenience is king, and anything housing providers can do to make things easier for tenants on tight budgets is likely to have a positive impact.

Nick Peplow is the bill payments director at Allpay.

POLICY IN PRACTICE LAUNCHES UC BUDGETING TOOLKIT

Policy in Practice, a social policy software and consultancy business, has developed a universal benefit toolkit. Aimed at housing providers and local authorities, this intuitive online range of universal benefit calculators and budgeting tools streamlines the calculation of benefit entitlement.

The toolkit includes a universal credit calculator, a budgeting tool for claimants, a discretionary housing payment calculator and a self-service tool for claimants. The toolkit provides full management reporting and has the facility to support data sharing between departments.

Deven Ghelani, CEO, Policy in Practice, said, "With the government aiming to save £12 billion from its benefits budget, combined with the accelerated rollout of universal credit and the localisation of support, the need for a clear approach is more important than ever. Our software allows housing providers to see the impact of current and future changes to the welfare system on a case-by-case basis, and helps them to prepare for the upcoming changes to welfare policy so that people get the support that they need."

HANOVER HOUSING REVAMPS SERVICE CHARGING WITH QUBE PM

Hanover Housing is using Qube PM software to transform its service charge processes and increase transparency for tenants.

Philip Marns, service charge policy and projects manager, Hanover Housing, said, "The social housing sector generally has struggled to find a system that effectively manages the service charge aspect of its portfolios.

"Most housing providers are primarily property businesses so rent collection is clearly critical to their success. The systems that handle this part of the business are effective enough, but the systems that handle service charges are typically not particularly sophisticated and don't offer the functionality required. The result can be a lack of transparency and uncollected fees."

Qube was initially implemented in 2010 but with a restricted remit. Marns said, "Originally, the company was looking to operate Qube on a limited basis. At the time, the aim was simply to produce apportioned service charge budgets more accurately and easily. The estate schedule charge set-up prevented us from taking full advantage of Qube PM, although it was apparent that the software could help us solve many of our problems."

Qube PM was re-implemented in October 2014 and Hanover Housing now has over 65 staff using the system. Marns said, "The first major challenge was to prepare for the 2015 service charge budgets, which were due at the beginning of April 2015. This went extremely well and the feedback from tenants is that the information is much clearer than before. Because our tenants are now receiving statements that show exactly how the cost is derived from the estate budget, it is easy for them to see exactly what they're being charged for."

Qube PM's functionality has also enabled the housing provider to produce reports for individual estates detailing the breakdown of the service charge. Marns said, "The key benefit of this is that estate managers receive fewer questions. As a result, any enquiry is more likely to be solved at a local level."

Commenting on Hanover Housing's year-end accounting procedures, Marns said, "Because some expenditure is not service charge-related, we have to be able to filter these costs. Qube PM is integrated with our current financial system to enable us to do this. Had this issue not been tackled, we wouldn't have been able to produce the service charge element of our year-end accounts through Qube PM.

"In addition, when we let a property, the report produced via Qube PM is now a key part of the tenancy agreement. We refer to the statement of estimated service charge as the amount tenants are required to pay. This offers a clear breakdown from the outset and therefore helps to manage their expectations."

Allpay warns that UC delays shouldn't stop income reviews

Universal Credit has suffered another setback as it was reported that a further £3 billion has been spent on the rollout, thanks largely to disposable IT projects, which now is expected to be completed by 2020, a year later than planned.

Despite the delays, public sector payments specialist Allpay has warned that this shouldn't stop housing providers preparing for the rollout, ensuring they offer a wide range of payment choice and flexibility to support tenants and help to secure their rental income.

Ross Macmillan, head of research and market intelligence, Allpay, said, "Some housing providers are ahead of the game in terms of offering greater choice and flexibility for universal credit, while others are still relying on limited and rigid payment options. For example, it's staggering the number of housing providers that are still relying on posting out paper mandates to set up direct debits. Those using paperless systems can set up instructions over the phone with tenants in minutes.

"Housing providers should consider adopting 'any day' collection dates for direct debits. This flexibility not only improves the attractiveness of direct debits to tenants but also means that rent can be guaranteed and missed payments minimised as the rent can be debited as close to the universal credit payment date as possible.

"Ensuring residents have multiple ways to pay, such as via a text message or through a smartphone app, will also be important. For example, in some cases, smartphone payments accounted for around four per cent of a housing provider's transactions. That's a significant figure in a sector where large numbers of tenants still prefer to budget in cash."

Allpay offers Apple Pay for bill payments
Payments specialist Allpay is now offering Apple Pay to its customers via the Post Office, enabling tenants to pay bills using an Apple iPhone or Watch for contactless payments.

Tony Killeen, managing director, Allpay, said, "The Post Office continues to be a key strategic partner for us. With its 30,000 contactless terminals, it has one of the largest estates in Europe, so we're naturally delighted to be able to offer contactless payments via Apple Pay through the network."

ADULLAM HOMES TRACKS MOBILE USAGE OF OMNILEDGER'S PYRAMID

Adullam Homes has begun to deploy the mobile version of OmniLedger's Pyramid solution to housing, maintenance and support staff. As part of the implementation programme, one of Adullam's support workers logged her working day to get an idea of the possible savings; this is what she found:

At home: check that my device is charged up and is updated. First visit is in Bakewell to help a tenant applying for PIP. The first use of my device is to check the phone number and address of the tenant to put on the form; then make a call to make an appointment for blood tests. Finish the form, complete the Support Meeting and make notes on the tablet. I then ask the tenant to sign the form as a record of our meeting. This is saved onto the meeting note and passed to the Pyramid back-office system. I then agree an appointment for the next meeting and record this on the Planner on the tablet.

It's too early for the next meeting so I find a local wi-fi hotspot and use the facilities to complete some notes and make some calls. All my notes and records are automatically passed to and recorded in Pyramid's client records.

The next visit is to a tenant in a village in the middle of nowhere. I pick up the tenant and take them to the mental health assessment centre and use the car journey for a support meeting. Again, I use the waiting time to update notes onto Pyramid, make calls to other service users and partner organisations, make new appointments, update my Pyramid Action Logs and drop the tenant back home.

The third meeting is a tenancy sign-up in a neighbouring town and again this is processed in Pyramid Mobile and passed back to the main back-office system. At this point I have no signal, but I can work offline, knowing that Pyramid will automatically synchronise my data

as soon as I get a signal. The service user has been homeless for nearly six months and has finally been allocated a flat. I continue to make notes as we go along to remind me what she will need help with, such as setting up utilities and getting pre-payment cards. I then arrange a furniture pack from a local YMCA and then drop the service user off.

Time for lunch. All of today's actions and meeting notes have been automatically updated onto Pyramid and copies are automatically emailed to my Outlook folders.

The fourth meeting is with a service user to pick up a food parcel.

The fifth and final meeting is to drop off the food parcel to a family on the way home; they have no transport and it's too far for an agency to deliver. I update the action on Pyramid after the drop off and go home.

Miles driven: 67;
Hours taken: 8.5;
Estimated time saved: 2-3 hours.

Adullam Homes has now rolled out more than 40 devices to key staff and is set to deploy a further 20-30 more over the next few months. Other Pyramid modules will be deployed on these devices to allow staff to record incidents, complaints, ASB cases, safeguarding issues and outcome assessments.

Phil Gardiner, operations manager, Adullam Homes, said, "The current usage figures of forms submitted by staff direct onto Pyramid using mobile devices is phenomenal. We can email repairs direct and access personal details, such as rent accounts and tenancy details. We have added other bespoke forms for areas such as health and safety, voids, property inspections and housing benefit.

"This has helped our staff to engage more with tenants and service users as they now have confidence that things are being reported and actioned because

they can see what staff are doing there and then. Staff have described using tablets as 'a real time saver and a real life saver too'. Our staff have now embraced using tablets as simply the normal way of working."

Omniledger's Pyramid HMS moves to the cloud

Omniledger has announced that its long-established Pyramid housing management system is now available as a hosted and cloud-based service.

Pyramid Essentials and Essentials Plus are designed around the needs of smaller housing providers, giving them access to an integrated rent arrears, cyclical/responsive repairs and finance system.

Both are available as part of a subscription package, starting at £99/month (max. three users), including telephone support, daily backups and regular updates. Omniledger reported that it already has nine customers using its hosted and cloud-based service.

Other housing successes

Following the launch of its hosted platform Pyramid Essentials and Essentials Plus, Omniledger has reported that in the last year it has won contracts with a number of smaller housing providers. These include Lyng Community Housing, Holland Rise & Whitebeam Close TMO, Hull United Charities, Quo Vadis and Inspire Wellbeing.

Omniledger has gained new customers for its 'traditional' on-premise housing management system at Action Housing, Downslink YMCA Group, Causeway Irish Housing Association, Humbercare and the Society of St. James.

The company also won the contract for the merger between St Mungo's and Broadway Homelessness & Support, now St Mungo's Broadway, and the consequent consolidation of their two systems.

EQUITY HOUSING MOBILE VIA GOLDEN GATES & FOOTPRINT SOLUTIONS

Equity Housing Group has mobilised its neighbourhood officers using Housing Support Pro software from Footprint Solutions, acquired via a framework agreement set up by Golden Gates Housing Trust and the software provider. The software was implemented in June 2015.

The adoption of the mobile working software follows the transformation of Equity's neighbourhood services, of which one side effect was an increase in the number of mobile workers needing to return to the office to update records.

Kenneth Power, executive director for corporate development, Equity Housing Group, said, "We are a geographically-dispersed organisation and all too often mobile officers are under pressure to become more visible and accessible to tenants, yet they were trapped by having to regularly return to the office to do paperwork.

"The driver for implementing a mobile working solution was to enable housing officers to become more mobile and accessible to tenants, working effectively within their communities while maximising time and visibility."

Equity identified an opportunity to work with Footprint Solutions via a framework agreement set up in partnership with Golden Gates. The framework, which is open to all housing providers and local authorities in the UK, allows Equity to bypass standard procurement processes because Golden Gates has completed all of the necessary legal procedures, including OJEU compliance. This means housing providers and local authorities can buy software direct from Footprint at fixed prices.

Power said, "We have been impressed with the level of service provided via the framework and the seamless integration with our existing Civica system. The ability to bypass standard processes and access cost effective, innovative solutions such as Housing Support Pro was a very attractive option."

Orchard's texting solution strengthens Futures Housing's improvement programme

Futures Housing Group is using a text-messaging solution from Orchard to better engage with its tenants. The solution was co-developed by the two companies, with Orchard using the housing provider's insight into tenants' preferred means of communication and the most relevant operational areas for the initial roll-out of an automated SMS system.

Gavin Hitchcock, head of ICT, Futures Housing Group, said, "Responsive repairs is probably one of the most transaction-intensive services we offer so there was a lot of scope for adding value by streamlining tenant contacts. We chose to focus on the income team because welfare reform has increased the team's need for timely communications and text messaging was seen as a way to 'pull' communication from tenants, as well as 'push' information to them."

SKYGUARD PERSONAL ALARMS HELP CIRCLE HOUSING'S LONE WORKERS

Circle Housing Property Services has introduced MySOS Mandown personal safety devices from Skyguard.

Circle Housing Property Services (CHPS) is an in-house property maintenance team providing services to Circle Housing's regional providers. It employs around 115 lone-working tradesmen across a large geographical area, with a consequent risk of workplace injury or assault.

To mitigate the risk to its workers, CHPS adopted the MySOS Mandown devices - a small, discreet and easy-to-use personal safety alarm, featuring GPS, GPRS and Mandown technologies. When a user raises an alarm, an alert is instantly sent to Skyguard's incident management centre (IMC) along with the GPS location of the device. A controller at the IMC will first listen in and assess the situation, before talking to the user and taking the appropriate action.

Mark Perkins, health and safety manager, Circle Housing Property Services, said, "We used to have a phone-in system for lone worker protection but this was complicated and cumbersome and because of those factors, it was not always used correctly.

"The direct access to the emergency services' control rooms was an important factor when deciding to buy the Skyguard service. The response received to activation calls and accidental man down alarms has been fast and accurate which gives confidence in the support offered should there be a genuine incident."

Kirona puts North Lanarkshire on the move

North Lanarkshire Council has chosen Kirona's mobile working and dynamic job scheduling software to support staff in its housing and home care departments. Since implementing the Job Manager and Xmbrace DRS software, the council has reduced its administrative costs by almost £300,000 per year. It has also boosted the productivity of its local homes' teams by 20 per cent and reduced the 'no access' rate of its housing repairs team from 40 per cent to just three per cent.

The main challenge within the housing department centred on the availability of its repairs staff to carry out vital repair work. In some cases, tenants had to wait for up to three days for an appointment to be met and the work completed.

Robert Forman, service manager for business process change and improvement, North Lanarkshire Council, said, "Typically, housing repair representatives would come into a central hub in the morning, pick up their job list and then go out to work. After they'd completed their jobs for that day, they would then travel back to the central hub to log their activity.

"By using Kirona's Job Manager, they can get up in the morning and are allocated a job that is never more than 15 minutes away. Also, now that their work is logged electronically, there's no need to keep travelling back and forth. They are now also geographically profiled, so we are better able to manage their time effectively and provide a more efficient service for our residents."

In the home care department, the council carries out 2.5 million home visits a year, meaning around 7,500 home visits every day. The council's main challenge was front-line care, with its home support workers having a limited amount of time to spend with service-users due to increased administrative duties between home visits.

Home support workers are now provided with mobile devices to receive and organise home visit information, allocated and managed centrally via Kirona DRS software at a local authority building.

Des Murray, head of housing property, North Lanarkshire Council, said, "Kirona's workforce management software was chosen as it demonstrated a wide range of capabilities, supported by a proven track record with its customers. It manages everything from the scheduling of jobs in the office with the Xmbrace DRS software, through to the fulfilment of the work by housing repair representatives using the Job Manager mobile application."

Forman said, "Kirona Job Manager is now being used by over 1,200 home support workers carrying out 2,500,000 essential visits each year. The benefits of doing this electronically mean we are no longer posting out at least 3,000 schedules a week (150,000 a year) and no longer making at least 4,000 outgoing calls a week advising of changes (200,000 a year), leading to savings of around £280,000 per year in reduced administrative costs."

CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT

FREE WI-FI FOR STOCKPORT TENANTS

Stockport Homes has partnered with CommunityUK.net to launch 'WiFi@3S', a free wi-fi pilot service for tenants in three of its high-rise blocks in Stockport.

Helen McHale, chief executive, Stockport Homes, said, "This pilot project is a new step in our efforts to include more of our tenants in the digital revolution, and make sure everyone has

the opportunity to get online. The lessons we learn from this pilot will then be used to develop digital schemes for many more residents in the borough."

The future
of Orchard
is everywhere.

CAPITA HELPS COMBAT HOMELESSNESS IN LIVERPOOL

Capita's software services division is helping the City of Liverpool to streamline how it deals with homelessness and demands for short-term accommodation.

The City of Liverpool developed its MainStay project in order to join up services and provide improved access to short-term housing. Central to the project's success was the need for all housing support providers to work together to share information on available accommodation so that those with the greatest need received shelter quickly.

David Pugh, director of quality and policy, Liverpool YMCA, said, "People in need of accommodation were going from hostel to hostel, being asked 99 per cent of the same questions each time, only to discover often that they were not at the right place for their situation and needed to be referred elsewhere.

"People were also remaining on waiting lists at hostels after they'd found somewhere else to stay, meaning others were pushed further down the list. It was wasting time, money and resources. We wanted to put a stop to multiple assessments and we knew that an IT system that all partnership agencies could access would greatly improve our service."

Capita's case management and support solution, Capita Support, is helping MainStay ensure that more vulnerable people can be assessed and receive the exact help they need quickly.

Pugh said, "We knew what we wanted was quite complex, and we found that Capita Support fitted the bill. It offered us a single assessment system so that all accommodation providers and related support teams could add in or access relevant information."

Keirron Goffe, business development manager, Capita, said, "People looking for support and a place to sleep now have just one standardised assessment, which can be carried out day or night at a greater number of places. Once details are logged, matches for housing providers that can help are suggested and referrals are automatically sent to the best hostel to suit someone's circumstances."

When a homeless person is accepted by a housing provider, the system updates their status immediately. This means the turnaround time for those in critical need is much faster, and feedback shows that 100 per cent of providers believe the MainStay system has improved the prioritisation of how vacancies are filled.

Pugh said, "By having all the data in one place, we realised that we were helping around three times more people than we thought. Having data to back this up has been instrumental in postponing some of the cuts we face."

ORCHARD HELPS SAXON WEALD IMPROVE TENANT COMMUNICATIONS

Saxon Weald is extending its use of software from Orchard to implement a new CRM system. The new system will build on Saxon Weald's existing Orchard software to avoid the need to develop complicated interfaces and wherever possible re-using screens that its staff are already familiar with.

The focus of the project was to improve the quality of its contact with tenants, and in particular reducing the need for repeat calls via a 'first-time fix' approach.

The 18-month project was divided into three phases. The first phase, which began in October 2014 and is now complete, consisted of auditing and consulting services from Orchard around Saxon Weald's workflow processes and computer-telephony integration.

The second phase, which is scheduled to go live later this year, consists of Orchard's self-service portal and mobile software alongside improvements to Saxon Weald's existing working processes. Orchard's anti-social behaviour software will also be implemented during this phase.

The final phase, covering the implementation of Orchard's SMS software and the extension of case management processes, is expected to go live during the first quarter of 2016.

Alex Gunter, head of IT, Saxon Weald, said, "Saxon Weald is working closely with Orchard to build a comprehensive CRM solution to improve the customer service experience. Orchard was also tasked with a number of health-checks, remedial consultancy and training."

1st Touch launches new tenant portal

1st Touch has launched a new tenant portal solution aimed at boosting tenant engagement and efficiency for housing providers. The company said that the new cloud-based, standalone system is an alternative to bespoke web development options or tied-in add-ons from other technology suppliers.

Using their own devices, tenants can access the portal at any time to review details of their tenancy and submit online requests for a wide range of services, such as repairs and maintenance requirements, estate management issues, anti-social behaviour concerns or rent account queries. Tenants can also access and review documentation relating to their tenancy, including gas and electrical certificates, previous rent statements and tenancy agreements.

Depending on the nature of a tenant's request, the tenant portal can trigger the start of a new workflow, such as automating an entire repairs appointment process without any need for staff interaction. The system also supports community interaction and participation by providing a convenient forum for tenants to promote social events, offer services locally or sell items online.

The 1st Touch Portal integrates with all existing 1st Touch systems and can be configured to suit any housing provider's branding and corporate design requirements. The system also enables management teams to analyse tenant trends and monitor service delivery levels.

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch, said, "We identified a gap for a cloud-based portal that does not have the prohibitive costs of a web development solution and yet offers a level of look, feel and functionality that is beyond the vendor-tied apps currently on the market."

1st Touch appoints Greg Johns as CEO

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch

1st Touch has appointed Greg Johns as CEO. Johns, who previously ran the company's sales operations, replaces Robert Dent who, having joined as managing director in 2007, guided the company through its acquisition by Aareon in 2012.

ACCENT'S 'DIGITAL BY DEGREE' GETS TENANTS ONLINE

Accent Group has launched a new online portal for its tenants, based on the housing provider's original implementation of an MIS ActiveH customer portal module.

Through a secure online account, Accent's tenants can now report and view repairs, view account statements, view and request changes to personal details, report anti-social behaviour and pay their rent via AllPay. The portal is integrated with the ActiveH customer relationship management module so that Accent's contact centre staff can get an instant view of requests as they are raised and respond more effectively to online enquiries.

As part of its 'digital by degree' strategy, Accent has made the portal available to all of its 32,000 tenants. In July 2015, the first month of operation, 10 per cent of tenants activated their accounts, exceeding initial expectations, and usage continues to rise.

Andrew Kidds, Head of Customer Contact, Accent Group

Andrew Kidds, head of customer contact, Accent Group, said, "The integration with our housing management system provides a great opportunity to develop our digital offering and, more importantly, given the financial climate, move away from more expensive methods of customer interaction."

Capita's Engage app to support Fortunatus' vulnerable adults

Fortunatus Housing has launched a new app to help support tenants, offer advice and promote fundraising events. The Engage platform, developed by Capita's software services business, gives Fortunatus a complete browser-based management console, allowing them to develop, populate and deploy their own mobile app.

The app will provide a wealth of information to residents and the wider community about local news, events, ways to donate and details of other support agencies. The app will also give Fortunatus' tenants more choice about how to get in touch with the charity.

Catherine Nicholson, managing director, Fortunatus Housing, said, "We are always looking for better ways to communicate with our tenants and Capita's app platform is a great way of helping us do that. It is also helping us to promote our Unity Lottery, which will go a long way towards raising funds to support vulnerable adults across the North West of England."

USING IT AUTOMATION TO PERSONALISE CUSTOMER CALLS

Peter Graddon, Managing Director, Omfax Systems

Relationships matter to us. How we interact with others and with the world around us is important. Where we have a relationship, it is important that we feel valued and the same applies when we talk to organisations about personal matters. Aside from health, our homes are the most personal things to us. So when residents deal with their landlord, especially a social housing landlord, they expect the relationship to matter and the history between them to be known and understood. Personalising the service using IT automation is paramount.

How can technology help?

Integrate your contact centre with your CRM system and asset database
The starting point for personalisation is to integrate your customer service centre with your CRM system and with other databases that hold asset or service information. This ensures advisors can screen-pop the tenant's details when they make contact – and your advisors know them, their history and their property inside out.

Advisors should also be able to see a history of all previous interactions in one place, and have ready access to an appropriate knowledge base so that they can quickly resolve your tenant's problem.

The use of dynamic call flow navigation (DCFN) technology enables the right information to be accessed when handling the call. CRM systems hold all manner of information, but advisors don't need all the information all the time. DCFN technology is useful because it focuses on the bits that are relevant to the current call.

Value your tenant's time, and don't waste it!

Another way to personalise and improve the tenant's experience is to understand the value of their time, and not waste it! Don't ask for information that is already available or the tenant has previously provided. By keeping track of your contact with tenants (from how often they call to recent requests and complaints), you can deliver a truly personal experience.

Your advisors will be able to talk to them about previous contacts they have made, as well as make sure that any complaints have been dealt with and responded to in the appropriate manner.

CRM systems allow advisors to gain access to tenant information, while using DCFN interfaced with CRM puts advisors in control from the outset.

As well as having access to relevant information without needing to question the tenant, advisors will be better equipped to respond to a complaint or take a call to a successful conclusion. Rather than allowing tenants to be passed from pillar to post, DCFN technology can guide call handling to determine the appropriate service response.

Empower your front-line staff
The key to successful personalisation and creating a great customer experience is making each tenant feel valued as an individual.

Technology can be a great enabler here, but it is vital that your contact centre technology provider gives you the flexibility to adapt and keep pace with tenants' preferences. With DCFN technology, call navigation pathways are in the hands of customer services and not dependent on IT, so they can be

quickly and easily updated, encouraging improvement and innovation.

Focus on metrics such as first-call resolution
It's important to track how you are performing too. Make sure your contact centre KPIs reflect the importance you place on personalisation by focusing on metrics like first-call resolution and avoidable calls.

With DCFN technology, advisors are provided with the guidance of experts. This can be compared to the most experienced specialist from each department sitting with each advisor, prompting and guiding them through each call, while checking all the relevant information across a number of different systems. The outcome being that the caller is given the right answer for them every time.

Overlaid on your existing housing management, CRM and repair management systems, DCFN systems make it possible to define the optimum call flow for each type of call. It automatically takes into account the best way for the caller to convey information that reflects their personal circumstance and the necessary information needed to determine the correct response. In simple terms, it aligns the needs of the tenant with the operational needs of the contact centre.

Peter Graddon is the managing director of Omfax Systems.

BOOSTING TENANTS' CREDIT SCORES WITH HOUSING PARTNERS

Housing Partners has extended its support for the Rental Exchange, a partnership between Experian and Big Issue Invest.

Inclusion of rental payment data in the Rental Exchange enables tenants with good payment records to build a stronger credit history and helps boost their credit scores in the same way that mortgage-holders currently enjoy.

Jonathan Westley, managing director of Experian's consumer information services, said, "Our research shows that over a quarter of social housing tenants in the UK pay bills in cash rather than direct debit, generally as a result of financial exclusion and an inability to build up a good credit history. Thanks to this partnership, Housing Partners will be able to help social housing tenants to build a credit history, while also better helping landlords with their ongoing tenancy management."

Housing Partners' Insight service draws on Experian data to allow housing providers to predictively model rental risk. It provides up-to-date information on household composition, highlights tenants who would benefit from setting up direct debits, and identifies those who are in financial distress. It also supplies case management tools that help housing officers to support those tenants.

Simon Hollingsworth, chief operating officer, Housing Partners, commented, "We work with over 700 housing providers every day and we know just how significant the impacts of welfare reform are for them and their tenants. By working with Experian, we hope to play a part in supporting landlords and tenants, in particular those tenants who fall into financial difficulties, before it becomes too late."

MULTI-CHANNEL SERVICES FROM EMH GROUP WITH ENGHOUSE INTERACTIVE

EMH Group is coordinating its tenant services capabilities using software from Enghouse Interactive, in partnership with Montal and 5i. The Enghouse Interactive Communications Centre (EICC) software is now being used by 80 customer service advisors at EMH.

The EICC software provides EMH with multi-channel options for both inbound and outbound communications, mainly covering online, email and text messaging.

EMH also makes extensive use of the system's callback facility, particularly for residents for whom English is not their first language. They can simply select a convenient time, day and language and the EICC solution arranges the callback at that time. Furthermore, using EICC to offer callbacks helps EMH to reduce queues, call times and abandonment rates.

David Morris, head of customer service, EMH Homes, said, "It's a good example of how our contact centre technology, with the EICC solution at its heart, can be key in bringing benefits to tenants. You don't want your staff having to use multiple applications; it's confusing for them and inefficient. Instead, use CTI integration to reduce the number of screens and applications your advisors need to use and you'll see productivity and efficiency benefits."

EMH's self-service portal for tenants is connected to its CRM system, with any tenant activity on the site also triggering alerts within the EICC relating to repair requests, housing benefit queries and appointment scheduling.

Helen Bradford, head of ICT, EMH Group, said, "Our current target is to resolve 83 per cent of queries at the first point of contact. We use codes within the EICC to create reports which tell us how many calls we have resolved and how many of each relate to either repairs or housing."

DIGITAL INCLUSION IN SHEFFIELD FROM SANCTUARY HOUSING

Sanctuary Housing has been working to address the issue of digital exclusion for its tenants in Sheffield through an educational project in partnership with community regeneration charity SOAR.

The programme aims to support local residents through digital workshops where they can learn how to use computers and see the benefits of getting online.

Funding from the housing provider is allowing SOAR to host digital drop-in sessions over a 12-month period. The sessions will focus on introducing tenants to the world of IT and teaching them new skills so they can get online.

The programme aims to reach and support a minimum of 60 local tenants, and also recruit ten local volunteers to support the delivery of the sessions. The volunteers will receive training from SOAR and use this to provide dedicated one-on-one guidance to residents, allowing them to further develop their learning.

APPLICATION CONSOLIDATION – IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

Housing Technology interviewed IT experts from Clearview, DXW, Horton Housing Association and PIMSS Data Systems about the merits of consolidating existing business applications.

The most common reasons for application consolidation tend to be around reducing the complexity of managing a diverse portfolio of business systems and minimising data duplication between them, but there are other important benefits.

Mark Hobart, the managing director of Clearview, said, "Re-using application functionality across the business can save on capital licence and maintenance costs, reduce the need for training and enhance existing software investments. It can also lead to some of the more granular functionality available within an application being used to really maximise its use."

> *"The first crucial step is to understand what is already available; it is surprising how many organisations don't know what licences they hold, particularly for systems like GIS which may be bought by one department but could be of use to several others."*
>
> Rachel Patterson, Managing Director, PIMSS Data Systems

Martin Nowak, a software project manager at Horton Housing Association, said, "The key advantages of application consolidation are reduced costs and time spent on application upgrades and the standardisation of processes, as well as reduced complexity and improved security."

Reflecting the need of housing providers to achieve value for money, PIMSS Data Systems' managing director Rachel Patterson said, "In other sectors, the quest for value for money often actually leads to increased spending on technology

because good decisions can only be made with accurate and comprehensive data. Where a piece of data is held in more than one system, integration or interfaces are essential to reduce the overhead of double entry and to manage the risk of conflicting information sources."

However, the actual process of consolidating applications is difficult, with the potential benefits sometimes being eclipsed by the time and costs of doing so. Horton's Nowak said, "There are many disadvantages to application consolidation, such as the time it takes to see the cost reductions, the complexity of an application consolidation programme (e.g. identifying which applications to consolidate and how to consolidate them) as well as the potential necessity to retrain users to change their existing ways of working."

PIMSS' Patterson said, "Changing any critical IT system carries inherent risks and costs both time and money. These costs and risks grow exponentially with the size of the system involved and can lead to housing providers continuing to use outdated systems or putting up with poor service and high support costs because they cannot face going through the change process."

Best of breed?
Application consolidation inevitably raises the question of the merits of having a suite of best-of-breed application, each dedicated to a particular area, versus having fewer applications, with the consequent disadvantage of having to make some sacrifices in terms of functionality.

Clearview's Hobart said, "Best of breed applications are more feature rich and you don't need to compromise on functionality. Best of breed applications have their place, especially within a consolidated application strategy as they

> *"Organisations need to use techniques such as Wardley mapping to help them understand the systems landscape that they're in, communicate it clearly, and make strategic decisions about how to change it."*
>
> Harry Metcalfe, Managing Director of DXW

can help to mitigate some of the risks. A good example is business intelligence and reporting tools. In many applications, there are reporting tools but these are often restricted for use within that application. A new application can often bring with it a new reporting tool with its own challenges to leverage its value to the full or, in the worst case, no reporting tool at all.

"In contrast, a best of breed reporting tool that will work across any data sources means reduced training as existing skills can be used to tackle new application requirements, less IT resources required, cost savings on implementation and significant savings on licences. It also opens the door to take full advantage of an application's more granular functionality as you have skills within the organisation that really understand the application and how to use it."

PIMSS' Patterson said, "Best of breed applications are very focused on their target market. Suppliers can specialise and develop a deep knowledge of the relevant business functions and this enables them to provide best practice advice. IT suppliers can also be very responsive to requests for change and allow a high degree of flexibility in their system when it's more specialised.

"At the same time, the applications are designed with interfaces in mind to allow organisations to pick the very best combination of systems for their needs. A single solution to all an organisation's IT needs seems very attractive but few systems are both truly integrated and meet all requirements. Why put up

with poor functionality in one part of a system, just because another part of the system meets the needs of a different department? If two systems can interface data seamlessly and provide a better overall service, they can provide better value for money than a single monolithic system."

Rip and replace vs. application evolution
Any application consolidation programme needs to balance 'ripping and replacing' existing legacy applications with supporting their evolution by using additional, modern applications.

> *"Best of breed applications are more feature rich and you don't need to compromise on functionality. Best of breed applications have their place, especially within a consolidated application strategy, as they can help to mitigate some of the risks."*
>
> *Mark Hobart, Managing Director, Clearview*

Hobart said, "This is a tricky area and each case needs to be taken on its own merits. At some stage, the availability of skills and platform support for legacy applications means that the business risk of continued use is untenable. That said, you can often extend the life of some perfectly robust and useful applications by using best of breed supporting technologies such as reporting tools."

Patterson said, "A well-designed modular system will allow organisations to break a large change programme into manageable projects to reduce the risk and the impact on front-line staff. The core system can be installed while other functions remain on the legacy application temporarily. As and when a business case is made for each additional area, new modules can be implemented gradually.

"In many instances, change can just be a case of using already purchased modules more widely. For instance, a module designed to track gas safety can also track electrical inspections, fire risk assessments, equipment safety checks, tree hazards and all sorts of other inspections and cyclical maintenance tasks often held in a wide array of spreadsheets. Centralising all of these in a single set of registers allows more visibility, better cost control, easier cover for absent staff, more comprehensive auditing and less chance of properties being missed out."

Managing an application consolidation programme

Patterson said, "The first crucial step is to understand what is already available; it is surprising how many organisations don't know what licences they hold, particularly for systems like GIS which may be bought by one department but could be of use to several others. It is worth including all the random spreadsheets and Access databases within this review, to see where users have developed their own approaches and rely over-heavily on one person who understands Excel inside out.

"Where the disparate systems are not interfaced together, it is also worth exploring options for improving the current set-up instead of ripping it all out. Retraining staff, re-engineering a few business processes and adding integration between systems can be very cost-effective and have a major impact in some situations."

Harry Metcalfe, the managing director of DXW, said, "Services need good portfolio management, with technical expertise available to advise on how architectures could be refactored for better reuse, and hence, better efficiency, with teams who are incentivised to do the hard work to make things simpler. Organisations need to use techniques such as Wardley mapping to help them understand the systems landscape that they're in,

> *"The key advantages are reduced costs and time spent on application upgrades and the standardisation of processes, as well as reduced complexity and improved security."*
>
> Martin Nowak, Software Project Manager, Horton Housing Association

communicate it clearly, and make strategic decisions about how to change it."

Performance gains

As with any business change programme, it's important to establish from the start how you will measure any performance gains, such as speed, cost and productivity, and build those metrics into the overall programme.

Clearview's Hobart said, "There are obvious maintenance and support revenues and resource costs that are directly attributable to reducing the application estate within an organisation. There are also methods of measuring process efficiency which should be taken before and monitored thereafter to ensure business benefits are delivered."

PIMSS' Patterson concluded, "Some gains can be measured financially, while others can be measured with 'before and after' estimates of hours per week spent on particular activities. Other measures are less tangible; how do you measure the rise in confidence that if the HSE come knocking, you can provide all the information they ask for quickly and correctly? Its value in lowering risk is no less because it is harder to measure in pounds and pence."

Angus Housing chooses Castle's cloud

Angus Housing Association is moving to the cloud after choosing Castle Computer Services to deliver a hosted solution as part of an IT infrastructure upgrade, with all of Angus Housing's infrastructure, applications and services hosted in a tier 3+ certified data centre.

Arlene Grant, finance and corporate services manager, Angus Housing Association, said, "The move to a hosted service is part of an upgrade to our existing systems that was originally driven by a need to replace our legacy housing and finance management system. It will deliver greater efficiency and higher productivity, with robust disaster recovery built in.

"We will have the peace of mind that in the event of a failure of any kind, our key business systems can be up and running very quickly. Once the project has been completed, we expect to see a demonstrable improvement in the connectivity between our offices, less downtime and greater productivity."

INTERCITY TECHNOLOGY RINGS THE CHANGES FOR SOUTH LIVERPOOL HOMES

South Liverpool Homes is now using Intercity Technology for its mobile phone provision, based on a fixed-cost package.

Before its relationship with Intercity Technology, South Liverpool Homes had been very disappointed with its previous two mobile phone providers. The issues included poor service delivery, the re-charging of staff calls and inefficient call monitoring.

With their previous provider, South Liverpool Homes also had difficulties accessing an online web portal for usage reports for accounting purposes. Furthermore, it often took the network weeks to respond when information was requested, reflecting an unacceptable level of customer service.

Intercity now creates bespoke reports for the housing provider, which are emailed to them every month. The reports and easy access to online billing have enabled the housing provider's accounts department to save a significant number of time each month.

Furthermore, after analysing the mobile phone usage for South Liverpool Homes, Intercity Technology was able to propose a flexible solution to cover its requirements. The solution was based on a fixed cost per month for the majority of users, allowing them unlimited access to voice and texts and a provision to access data using smartphones to communicate with the office and tenants.

David Chatterton, infrastructure manager, South Liverpool Homes, said, "The customer service offered by Intercity is outstanding on a 24/7 basis. On a few occasions, it's almost as if the staff have a sixth sense for sorting out our issues."

Two Saints appoints Central Networks for fully-managed ICT solution

Central Networks has been appointed by Two Saints to provide a full suite of ICT services. The five-year appointment, starting in September 2015, follows a four-way competitive tender managed by Service Matters.

Central's team will deliver a single point of contact for all ICT support for 250 permanent and relief staff and up to 50 volunteers. The programme will include a full system upgrade and investment in enhanced connectivity, as well as supporting hosted production and DR environments and the provision of a fully-managed desktop service.

Nigel Miles, IT manager, Two Saints, said, "Central Networks brought a fresh and forward-looking perspective to the provision of ICT. Its depth of experience in the care and support sector coupled with a focus on business deliverables, particularly maximising productivity and enabling access, gave it the edge as we continue our commitment to the intelligent use of technology."

GLOUCESTER CITY HOMES SELECTS EXPONENTIAL-E TO BOOST SUPPORT FOR TENANTS

Exponential-e has been selected by Gloucester City Homes to deliver cloud and networking services to support its move towards becoming a 'digital-first' organisation. Exponential-e will use its 100-gig Ethernet network to deliver a virtual desktop infrastructure that gives the housing provider's employees access to a persistent, personal desktop from any device or location.

Since all services are delivered down a single piece of fibre, Gloucester City Homes has the flexibility to easily scale or adapt its infrastructure to meet changing needs. In addition, Exponential-e provides constant managed service support and security assurance so that Gloucester City Homes doesn't need to invest large amounts of resources to manage the system.

Lesley Williams, head of IT, Gloucester City Homes, said, "In a short space of time, we've already seen the benefits that a secure and stable infrastructure delivers. Staff can now move from a desk to a meeting room to home and pick up their desktop in exactly the same state as they left it. This makes a huge difference and gives us an opportunity to deliver better services.

"For example, we recently underwent a programme where our 5,200 tenants needed to renew their tenancy agreements as part of our separation from the council. Previously, this would have been a manual, paper-based process. However, the flexibility of the infrastructure means we've been able to use a combination of smartphones and laptops to run events that allow tenants to

refresh their agreements from designated locations throughout the city, something that was more convenient for our tenants and enabled more efficient processing for us."

Lee Wade, CEO, Exponential-e, said, "Since its foundation in 2005, Gloucester City Homes has undergone a massive amount of change. It has successfully transitioned from operating as an arm's length management organisation with all its ICT infrastructure and services being provided by the local council to an independent body with complex back-office demands controlling everything from renewing tenancy agreements to managing broken drains."

SITS virtualisation boosts Bernicia

Bernicia Group has completed an overhaul of its IT infrastructure, adopting a virtualised environment and reducing its disaster recovery (DR) period from days to less than 30 minutes. Work conducted by virtualisation specialist SITS Group has enabled the housing provider to cut costs, speed up its processes and bolster security.

The firm worked with SITS to virtualise over 80 physical servers and switch from Microsoft Hyper-V to VMware software. Bernicia's storage architecture has now been reduced from 18 rack units to

just three and, with a second virtual infrastructure deployed securely off-site, the firm's total complete systems recovery time is now an average of just 28 minutes.

Where previously Bernicia's DR processes would have taken days to complete, they can now be activated, and continually tested and monitored, at the push of a button using VMware's Site Recovery Manager.

SITS has also implemented a resilient virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) using VMWare Horizon View,

providing a faster and universal experience for remote and in-office staff.

All 300+ users can now access software via virtual PCs running centrally on Bernicia's servers. Existing PCs are being converted into thin clients and are now centrally managed by Igel's device management platform. The Horizon View software has also been installed on laptops, tablets and off-site PCs, all of which are being increasingly used by Bernicia staff as the organisation expands and remote working rises.

Gary Hind, head of ICT, Bernicia Group, said, "Management of our desktop estate has become much easier as upgrades, patches and application rollouts only need to be performed centrally and we have much better control of our software licensing.

"Overall, our new technology infrastructure has allowed us to make major savings in several areas, including in licensing, power consumption and DR contracts, as well as significantly improving our productivity."

APPLICATIONS INTEGRATION THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Jonathan Sharp, Sales & Marketing Director, Britannic Technologies

At a time when the anticipated repercussions of welfare reform on previously near-certain revenues are shaking up housing providers, it is all the more important to understand the role technology can play in reducing operating costs. After all, changes to the way in which housing providers achieve better operating efficiencies could help to realise their continued commitment to delivering affordable housing and social value despite restricted resources. Jonathan Sharpe, Britannic Technologies' sales & marketing director, takes a closer look at applications integration and explains what it offers housing providers in search of cost-effective innovation.

As a direct result of the latest welfare policy changes, including universal credit, many housing providers expect a surge both in debt due to falling rental income from reduced rents as well as more tenants defaulting on rent payments, and in tenant contact as tenants turn to their landlords for advice on the new housing benefit rules. Tenants, in turn, are likely to demand more convenient services from their housing providers to access information and arrange rent payments.

With this demand for improved services comes the challenge to enhance IT systems in a way that delivers a fast, friction-free customer experience across all tenant touch points while helping housing officers to prioritise and deal with requests most efficiently. This is where applications integration offers a wealth of opportunity because it removes traditional silos and islands of technology that can be disconnected from the operational landscape with the aim of streamlining day-to-day business activities.

Importantly, applications integration allows housing providers to mix and match best-of-breed solutions to better

suit the exact needs of the organisation and provide deeper functionality than a one-stop suite could, at the same time as mitigating the risk of vendor lock-in. More often than not, such solutions will already be in place, for example, in the form of a tailored housing management system and CRM database. With housing providers under serious financial strain, the key is to enhance these existing applications to protect your IT investments. That is not to say that redundant applications should not be reviewed and ultimately phased out. It is rather a reminder to leverage tailored applications that are in place but whose value is not maximised as they are not knitted together.

In practice, this means that housing providers may want to look towards linking their business communications system, including handsets, contact centre software and social media applications, into their respective tenant database (CRM) and housing management software. While all of these applications can be coherently integrated at the back end, all that is visible to housing officers and support staff at the front end is one consolidated, simple-to-use interface that allows them to draw together disparate data and obtain a 360° view of any given household.

In-built features such as 'screen popping' database information as soon as a tenant calls the housing support team, for example, can account for immense efficiencies as housing officers automatically have access to the complete contact history, tenant records and property data without the need to go into multiple applications to retrieve information. That not only helps to process calls faster and more accurately but also raises satisfaction levels among tenants.

Operations can be further streamlined with phone-based and web-based self-service apps that can be woven into the current contact centre solution. Web portals are popular but even social platforms like Facebook can be useful in encouraging self-help through tenant-to-tenant assistance. Both facilities allow instant transactions between tenants and their landlords without overstretched staff needing to answer a call or email at all, which unlocks further resource efficiencies. The freed-up resources can then be focused on other crucial areas.

Forward-thinking businesses in the housing sector already recognise that smarter technology use presents a viable route to better organisational performance and value-for-money customer service.

For example, specialist contact centre provider Mears 24/7 improved its customer service through a seamlessly integrated, cloud-based communications environment and also managed to reduce the total cost of ownership for landlords, supporting their property maintenance needs with booking the appropriate repair staff with the right materials at the required time. Here, fast and accurate action in repairs questions ensures tenant satisfaction and asset protection but this also goes to show that integrated applications deliver benefits on more than just the tenant level; they are equally useful when it comes to supplier management and coordinating requests and appointments between suppliers and tenants. Housing providers can take a cue from this in that integrating key applications will improve communications on various levels through a more cohesive view of tenants, the properties they occupy and suppliers.

APPLICATIONS INTEGRATION THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS
Continued from previous page

Beyond applications integration for better tenant services, integrating mobile devices to function smoothly with the existing fixed network infrastructure and any cloud-hosted databases facilitates more productive mobile working and alleviates the administrative burden that many field-based workers face on a daily basis. Locating physical files for field visits in the office is no longer required. Neither is manual note-taking or repetitive rekeying of the same information at the end of the day as these activities can be accomplished digitally in the field, leaving staff with more time to visit more tenants in a day without the need for interaction with office-based staff to retrieve or update information. With field-based housing officers typically being particularly

costly to deploy, this translates into vastly improved productivity for housing providers under pressure to use human resources more wisely.

In short, applications integration across fixed, mobile and portable devices, contact centre software, CRM and housing management platforms that results in clear, cost-saving performance improvements could, at the very least, be a vital piece of the puzzle to delivering the government's 'more for less' maxim, and at the very best, help to buffer the effects of dwindling grant funding and dreaded debt build-up brought about by the latest welfare policy reforms through operational cost savings.

One thing is clear: technology will have a role to play in enabling new levels of productivity across housing providers. From efficient maintenance of customer relationships to process automation and intelligent resource allocation, the resulting benefits have long been reaped across other sectors in the UK.

Jonathan Sharp is sales & marketing director at Britannic Technologies.

Pinnacle regenerates its IT infrastructure with Adapt's Habitat

Pinnacle Group has selected managed service provider Adapt to deliver a private cloud solution to underpin its key applications and create a more secure, stable technology environment to support future developments.

Adapt has provided Pinnacle with its own fully scalable, secure dedicated private cloud; this will underpin 80 per cent of Pinnacle's core applications and deliver flexibility via its fluid software-defined performance layers.

Adapt's Habitat is an application hosting platform that aligns IT budgets and business requirements to provide customers with permanently agile and efficient infrastructure, and makes enterprise-grade services commercially accessible to mid-size businesses.

Richard Jackson, head of IT, Pinnacle Group, said, "Working with Adapt has provided us with the flexibility, security and agility to continue to grow without worrying about our IT infrastructure."

TRIDENT GAINS ISO SECURITY STANDARD

Following an audit of its ICT security processes, Trident Social Investment Group has been successfully recommended for accreditation to the ISO 27001 Information Security standard. This accreditation gives a public and independent statement of the housing provider's capabilities and confidence that it has addressed all security risks to its business.

The accreditation ensures that controls are in place to reduce the risk of security threats and to avoid any system weaknesses being exploited. It also reduces costs due to following a methodical risk assessment approach, ensuring that resources are applied to reduce overall risk.

Ed Reed, head of IT, Trident Social Investment Group, said, "This has given us a best practice management framework and guidance for implementing and maintaining security."

RHONDDA HOUSING ON TRACK FOR IMPROVEMENT WITH NEIGHBOURHUB

Neighbourhub, a partnership between Visualmetrics and Places for People, has signed a three year agreement with Rhondda Housing Association to deliver enhanced neighbourhood analysis and drive housing service delivery.

Rhondda Housing will follow Neighbourhub's five-step approach:

· The breakdown of existing housing stock groupings, and the creation of focused neighbourhood units.

· In-year and on-going monitoring of neighbourhood performance against a set of best practice KPIs.
· The undertaking of annual assessments to rate the performance of all neighbourhoods.
· Focused neighbourhood action planning for poorly performing areas.
· Options appraisals where neighbourhood challenges and long-term outlooks demand less conventional thinking.

Each stage will be supported by data from the Neighbourhub cloud-based solution, comprising a best-practice data warehouse to automate the integration of data from Rhondda Housing's source applications and a performance management toolset which

distributes the information required for informed decision making through the Neighbourhub Dashboard.

Luke Takeuchi, housing services director, Rhondda Housing Association, said, "Neighbourhub offers something unique to Rhondda Housing and we are the first Welsh housing provider to adopt this solution. The combination of a proven methodology that has already delivered tangible benefits for Places for People and Visualmetrics' information delivery capabilities means that it is a truly end-to-end solution. It spans both the delivery of the information needed for confident decision making as well as the knowledge of how to interpret and exploit that information."

GENERAL NEWS

Dates announced for Housing Technology 2016 conference

The next Housing Technology conference and executive forum will take place on 1-3 March 2016 at the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry.

The conference brings together masses of senior IT and business people from all sizes of housing providers and always delivers an eclectic mixture of presentations and discussions over the two days of the event alongside a technology showcase in the exhibition area.

Our seventh annual conference will cover the full spectrum of technology in social housing, including:

· External & multi-channel communications with tenants, contractors and suppliers
· Smart technologies, including the internet of things, connected homes and big data
· Mobile working, dynamic scheduling and real-time communications
· Core business applications, including housing, finance and asset management systems

· Software licensing, application consolidation and shared services
· IT infrastructure, including cloud, virtualisation, SaaS and data security
· Pay to stay, universal credit and other financial/regulatory areas

The conference is now in its seventh successful year and is widely-regarded as a 'must attend' event by hundreds of past guests, speakers and sponsors; there are several short videos from past conferences on the Housing Technology website.

If you would like to attend the conference as a speaker, guest, sponsor or exhibitor, please email **alastair@housing-technology.com** for further information or visit **www.housing-technology.com/events/ht16**.

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Housing Technology's annual evening reception

Housing Technology is hosting its annual evening reception at Pizza Express next to London's Olympia exhibition centre on Wednesday 18th November 2015 from 5.30pm until around 9pm.

Our evening reception has become an annual institution as an amazing, informal networking event, growing from just 60 guests six years' ago, to over 250 last year.

All readers are invited to attend as our complimentary guests; we are pleased to provide an informal networking arena for IT in social housing as a thank you to our readers, speakers, advertisers and sponsors.

This year, the reception will be the launch-pad for Housing Technology's new 'Digital by Default 2016' report, in association with Go ON UK and a follow-up to our original 'Digital by Default 2012' report.

Join the Housing Technology team and many of the UK's biggest housing providers and leading technology suppliers with drinks and nibbles at Pizza Express, only one minute's walk from the Olympia exhibition centre on the way to Olympia tube station.

Numbers are limited so we suggest you register your attendance as soon as possible at **www.housing-technology. com/events/reception**.

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY'S 'DIGITAL BY DEFAULT 2016' REPORT

Published in conjunction with Go ON UK, Housing Technology's 'Digital by Default 2016' report will be the first significant technology report on digital inclusion in the UK social housing sector since our original 2012 report (published in conjunction with RaceOnline 2012). The report will be published to coincide with our 2016 conference next March.

The report will:

· Cover how leading social housing providers have successfully adopted digital inclusion into their overall business strategies;
· Provide guidance for best practice around digital inclusion strategies in housing, and;
· Show the results of an online survey of all UK social housing providers and their views on digital inclusion and their strategies to support it.

The original 2012 report was very successful and widely read across the housing sector; indeed, the report is still very popular, frequently downloaded and regularly cited by housing providers in their various digital inclusion plans.

More information on the 'Digital by Default 2016' report will be available soon. If you are interested in contributing to the report, please email **alastair@ housing-technology.com**.

Zonr's Internet of Things app drives smarter social housing

An Internet of Things application from Zonr Group could transform social housing efficiency, boost tenant satisfaction and support sustainability targets. The Zonr application combines the latest intelligent sensor technology, smart data transmission and decision engine analytics to centrally monitor and support heating systems across a housing provider's property portfolio.

Robert Dent, CEO, Zonr Group, said, "By definition, a smart home is the sum of the devices inside it that create a home that is integrated, clever and simple. The Internet of Things has enabled this to become a reality and represents a new opportunity for both housing providers and their tenants.

"The intelligent sensor technology used by Zonr can be deployed across a wide range of housing types, irrespective of whether the properties are occupied, new-build or void. Once installed, Zonr's cloud-based system drives down the operating and maintenance costs of heating equipment, boosts tenant satisfaction through lower energy bills and optimises both assets and workforce productivity. It also allows managers to identify problems such as fuel poverty, poor insulation, potential safety scares and threats to the environment."

Zonr is headed up by Robert Dent, latterly in charge of 1st Touch, alongside Cherry Rance as business development director and Karl Hulme as technical director. The company has spent the past 18 months on research and development and has already conducted a number of successful pilot projects.

THE TECHNOLOGY OF CARING

Cloudview®

Cloudview is a ground-breaking cloud-based visual surveillance system, which aims to provide cost-effective visual protection of people, property and assets. Commercial enterprises have been quick to catch on to its potential, from utility companies who want to protect remote assets to major retailers safeguarding their brands.

However, the most positive response we have seen has been from organisations whose primary goal is to protect and empower vulnerable people wherever they live. While there are many thousands of dedicated care professionals providing the highest standards of care in social housing, care homes and sheltered housing, the media understandably focuses on cases where standards of care have fallen well below both what vulnerable people deserve and that which their families expect.

In the care home environment, this has created a demand from both service providers and the loved ones of residents for oversight of the care they are being given. This has driven the creation of a new service called Care Protect. This combines Cloudview's visual surveillance system with professional, expert monitoring from independent observers to safeguard vulnerable people who are in care.

What's this got to do with social housing? Well, there are many parallels to be drawn between the two. And there are also many valuable lessons, which the creators of Care Protect have learnt in the development of their product, to be shared.

Of course, the level of care expected in a residential home extends to 24-hour availability of help, medical expertise and catering facilities. But, social housing also has a duty of care to its residents, some of whom need help to ensure that they can enjoy independent living. From the very young to the very old, from single mums to vulnerable adults, social housing provides a vital service. Anything that can make that service safer and better, and reduce some of the harrowing incidents that we see reported in the media, will become a vital tool for the housing sector.

For the founders of Care Protect, Cloudview proved to be 'the missing link' without which affordable, accessible and actionable visual monitoring would not be practical. Many of the issues that Care Protect have faced in developing their solution are applicable to that of housing providers. These include the ability to quickly scale multiple, affordable cameras in a variety of locations, the granting of variable permissions to specific users, the addressing of statutory privacy issues and the advantages of cloud-based secure storage and retrieval of imagery compared to the time-consuming process for hard-drive recorders.

In particular, an essential facet of the service, and one only available with a system such as Cloudview's, is that any data collected does not become actual video until it is required by an authorised user. This is in stark contrast to traditional CCTV where access to the CCTV hardware is synonymous with access to footage.

This new method of harnessing visual data is already proving a success. In a pilot project exploring the effectiveness of Care Protect in a care home environment, a number of significant issues were highlighted and resolved thanks to the clear and incontrovertible visual evidence provided by the system. In addition, care home staff, who were at first the system's biggest opponents, have become its best ambassadors as they have found it often vindicates their position.

We believe that housing providers can enjoy similar results by making the most of the Cloudview Visual Surveillance System. Working together we can develop solutions that will help to protect your tenants, staff and property, and ensure that our vision of safety and security for all is not just an ambition but a reality.

22ND CENTURY HOUSING REPAIRS – A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

Chris Potter, Uniclass Director, ROCC

What will the housing providers' repairs service look like in the future? This article (the first of two in this and the next edition of Housing Technology) from Chris Potter, ROCC's Uniclass director, is his personal view of some very probable scenarios and others a little bit more fanciful, looking at what a 22nd-century repairs service would look like and covering different aspects such as housing stock and transportation and scheduling.

The housing stock

Housing stock will be more diverse and eco-dwellings will co-exist alongside legacy properties which will be well over a hundred years' old and will present different challenges to the workforce. Some of the features of the eco-home will include an 'upside-down' roof which hides a bunch of solar arrays in addition to the ability to capture rainwater meant for irrigating the garden's native plants. Apart from that, there is a special system that treats 'grey' water from the washing machine with chlorine and UV light, where it will then be used to flush the home's dual-tank loos.

A trio of geothermal wells under the home will stash away warm water (which in turn has been heated partly by the rooftop panels), where it will then circulate this water to the house for heating and cooling purposes.

A triple-coat glaze on the glass will offer more than double the thermal resistance of standard double-paned glass, while honeycombed shades ensure more heat is retained – perfect for lowering heating bills in the winter.

The emphasis will change from reactive repairs to a pro-active and pre-planning approach. The eco-house will be constructed using recyclable, smart materials such as smart concrete which will require little or no maintenance.

Concrete is a core building material. But even concrete starts to crumble when it comes face-to-face with water, wind, stress and pressure. The current method of dealing with structural instability in concrete has been to replace or repair it.

But what if all you had to do was add a little water? A new type of smart concrete contains dormant bacteria spores and calcium lactate in self-contained pods. When these pods come into contact with water, they create limestone to fill up the cracks and reinforce the concrete. Self-healing concrete is estimated to save up to 50 per cent of the lifetime costs by eliminating the need for repair. Smart concrete is still being tested to determine how long the bacteria sustains itself, but researchers are hopeful they will be able to officially introduce smart concrete to the construction industry very soon.

The housing stock of tomorrow will be computer controlled, carbon-zero, solar-powered and have no heating. Nothing will need maintaining; problems will be self-diagnosing and either fixed remotely or during an annual service.

Transportation & scheduling

Travel and scheduling will be provided by self-driving cars which will be pre-programmed to get to each location in the most efficient way. They will automatically provide tracking, communication with the tenant and operative safety.

The smart car ferries operatives from one place to another without any user interaction. The car is summoned by a smartphone for pick up at the operative's start location with the destination set. There is no steering wheel or manual control, simply a start button and a big red emergency stop button. In front of the passengers, there is a small screen showing the weather, the current speed and a small countdown animation to launch.

Once the journey is done, the small screen displays a message to remind the operative of the job and any risk assessment as well as contacting the tenant to establish identity and credentials.

Each vehicle will be equipped with a 3-D printer. A range of materials will be produced directly on-site using the vehicle as a mobile manufacturing unit.

Additive manufacturing, or 3D printing, is the process of fabricating solid objects from digital models and has been around for three decades. Talk of how this technology could transform both the construction industry and the way we conceive of and build cities has long circulated, too. In the developing world, low-income housing could be erected en-masse, while speedily-printed structures would provide disaster relief or temporary homes for refugees.

But until recently such talk was largely theoretical. Then in March last year, the

22ND CENTURY HOUSING REPAIRS – A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE
Continued from previous page

little-known Chinese company Winsun announced it had 3-D printed 10 £3,200 concrete houses in a day. This raised the question of whether the technology was about to become commercially viable.

In Winsun's showroom, a video on a giant LED screen shows a printer head moving horizontally along a massive gantry frame. Winsun's 3-D printer is 7m tall, 10m wide and 150m long. A filmed close-up of the nozzle reveals what looks like a giant icing bag extruding a grainy batter in a careful pattern. This 'ink' is made from recycled rubble, fibreglass, steel, cement and binder and takes 24 hours to dry. The ribbed-finish printed walls are hollow inside apart from a corrugated filler, a design that saves on materials without sacrificing strength.

Chris Potter is the Uniclass director for ROCC.

Shared culture at Together Housing with Cascade HR

Having streamlined processes, reduced unnecessary admin and shortened the time needed to undertake tasks such as collating data for reports, Together's HR team can now provide a value-adding service which offers support and guidance on strategic business issues. And because the technology is browser based and accessible regardless of location, HR professionals throughout the group have access to the same data and can work in a more unified way.

As a result of its merging a number of separate housing providers and their disparate technology infrastructures and business applications, Together Housing has just completed the implementation of a new HR and payroll system from Cascade HR to support of 1,400 staff. The aim of the implementation was to harmonise the HR policies inherited from the original housing providers and provide the basis for a shared culture.

Emma Tomkinson, head of HR business parters, Together Housing

Emma Tomkinson, head of HR business partners, Together Housing, said, "We are delighted with the progress our service has made. For example, we've reduced the number of HR policies from 74 to 20. We have also formed a new payroll team, making effective use of new-found capacity in the HR team. Furthermore, the cost savings that Cascade helped to recoup, given the value of the system, have funded the recruitment of a new payroll manager."

M2'S SPECIAL OFFER FOR HOUSING

M2, a leading managed print IT service provider, is offering housing providers specially-discounted packages on printers and print servicing, based around high-end Ricoh MFD printers from £180/quarter.

With more than 65 customers in the housing sector, M2 can offer housing providers complete MFD/print packages, from enterprise-wide print infrastructure and supporting IT solutions to a project-based service or management of a small network of devices.

HOW GOLDEN GATES GENERATES £1M ANNUAL CASHABLE SAVINGS

Peter Fitzhenry, Managing Director, Golden Gates Housing Trust

Peter Fitzhenry, managing director of Golden Gates Housing Trust, explains how the housing provider has generated savings of over £1 million in the last 12 months in addition to other non-cashable reductions and £500,000 in reduced building capital costs by introducing new technologies and processes.

As government changes necessitate cashable reductions to ensure the future financial viability of the social housing sector, cash is increasingly becoming king. The question for housing providers is how to generate cashable savings and how to do so quickly.

By implementing and integrating new insurance administration, neighbourhood management and GIS systems, Golden Gates is achieving significant cost savings where it matters most, while also realising unexpected benefits across other services.

One year on

Following a review one year after implementing our changes, we have already shown savings of over £1 million, with similar savings expected every year from now on. The savings include:

- £50,000 through not providing desks for our neighbourhoods team in our new head office because staff now work in the field rather than coming to the office. In addition, one-off capital savings of around £500,000 have been made.
- The number of ASB cases has been reduced by 20 per cent and legal fees cut by over £40,000.
- £250,000 in staff savings by moving the neighbourhood team to a field-based operation including reduced travel costs.
- Paper, print and stationery costs dropped by over £30,000.
- Income collection now at 99 per cent, saving £92,000.
- Voids reduced to just over one per cent, saving £64,000.
- Gas inspections at 100 per cent every month for over a year.

- Estimated £100,000 insurance claims savings annually by way of insurance premiums being held at 2013/14 levels.
- Bringing insurance administration in-house gives us access to detailed data from which we can better manage our cases and we have the data to assist with identifying any fraudulent claims.
- Insurance claim repudiation rates have risen from 41 per cent to 87 per cent, consequent on the introduction of an inspection regime, and the amount set aside in a holding account for this year's claims has dropped by £15,000 (this is expected to be considerably higher next year) and the amount expected to be paid out in satisfaction of claims has dropped by £87,000, which should also increase next year.

Effecting change in housing

Welfare reform was the catalyst for our management team to look at how revenues could be maintained and costs reduced. We concluded that much closer relationships with our tenants, involving primarily face-to-face contact, was vital. Consequently, our neighbourhoods team was restructured with a new focus on more generic working, with staff managing their own small geographic areas. Any functions that can be handled in the field are done by the neighbourhoods team, expanding their role.

Work began in early 2014 following a brief pilot to assess the use of iPads and iForms and a new mobile working solution system was designed from scratch to support the need for:

- Neighbourhood officers to be the primary contact for tenants on their patch.
- All data from the housing management system that was necessary for neighbourhood officers to do their job to be available on their iPads at all times, whether a network signal is available or not. This enables them to deal with all queries and complete all actions in a single visit.
- The replacement of paper forms with

pre-populated iForms to address all functions for which the team is responsible. Data entered on these iForms is automatically attached to the tenant record, and the data is automatically updated into the housing management system.
- Chip & Pin payments to be collected via iPads, with over £100,000 collected in the first year.
- Accommodating photos, scanning, text, keyboard and signatures via the iPads.
- Shared calendars between outside staff and our call centre.
- Reducing calls from tenants and workload for our call centre.

This mobile working solution has now been redeveloped as an app for iPads or smartphones by our supplier, Footprint Solutions, under its Housing Support Pro banner.

We also gained a number of unexpected benefits; during discussions with insurance provider, Zurich, it became clear that significant cash could be saved by implementing claims administrative software combined with a formal inspection regime.

And because everything we do happens somewhere, we introduced a geographic information system to graphically represent our data against a backdrop of a map. In that context, we use it to identify whether land and properties belong to us or not, and for identifying where insurance claims occur in conjunction with the iForms used for insurance inspections. Data from our housing management system is shown by patch. Neighbourhood officers and caretakers now identify where repairs are needed and hence reduce claims as well as improve estates. Photos are taken to record the state of the estates for use in claims management.

Procurement vs. framework

Considerable interest has been shown by housing providers across the country in adopting our neighbourhoods system, in particular as a corporate mobile

HOW GOLDEN GATES GENERATES £1M ANNUAL CASHABLE SAVINGS
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system. In order to save them having to go through the OJEU process, we set up a framework agreement, open to all housing providers and local authorities who can each save around £40,000 by not having to go through a tender process and also save several months in time, so bringing forward the returns from the investment.

All implementation and commercial contact is handled by Footprint Solutions until a decision to procure is made. At that point contact is made with us and an Access Agreement is signed, followed by a contract with Footprint Solutions.

Basis for success
Without joined-up thinking and the resulting integration between the software, most of the savings achieved to date, with more expected in the future, would not be possible.

Returns on investment will not be maximised without data being complete, accurate, and accessible. With staff on the streets, there is no excuse for not having the latest data and for filling in any gaps in the data. Surveys are easily implemented as are changes to iForms necessitated by business change or the need to collect data not previously required (welfare reform is a good example, as is digital inclusion). Similarly, new systems without new processes will never generate the benefits expected.

If costs are to be turned into investments with cashable returns, it follows that speed of implementation is of the essence. Every unnecessary day's delay in implementation is a day's return on investment wasted.

The 'plug and play' implementation approach means that you can log into

the cloud and be up and running within days with a limited range of functionality, phasing in the rest at a speed you wish. You could use the library of (some 60+) iForms already being used by other housing organisations. These are branded with your logo so you can be up and running quickly and then make changes as and when you want to, specific to your organisation.

The housing sector is relatively open in comparison to other sectors; the more housing providers coming on-board to use the system, the more innovation and new ideas can come about on how to improve the system.

Peter Fitzhenry is managing director of Golden Gates Housing Trust.

ALLIANCE HOMES SADDLE UP FOR CHARITY

Staff from Alliance Homes took part in an ambitious cycle ride from Portishead to Paris to raise vital funds to support local people in urgent need.

11 cyclists and two support staff completed the ride in July, with the aim of raising £5,000 for the Alliance Homes Charitable Fund. The fund aims to provide 'a small amount when it counts' with up to £75 worth of goods. For those in real need, support is often as simple as providing basic equipment such as a kettle, a chair, a bed or a blanket but it can make a huge difference to someone's life.

Mike Nicholls from Alliance Homes said, "The fund means that our employees can give those in urgent need essential goods and equipment, without which many people in the local community would find themselves in a much harder position."

£2,000 was raised from Alliances Homes' corporate sponsors Shaw Consulting, Northgate Public Services and Total Mobile.

MOSAIC ISLAND CREATES SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR CATALYST HOUSING

In 2012, Catalyst Housing Group embarked on a £5 million internal change programme, which involved the consolidation of legacy systems to an Orchard solution. Faced with a number of difficulties internally, the programme fell behind schedule.

Mosaic Island was then invited to conduct a review of the programme and to make recommendations with a view to getting it back on course. The company's revised delivery schedule, which encompassed

an Agile methodology and structured governance, impressed Catalyst Housing and Mosaic Island was invited to deliver the entire programme, which was completed within 18 months, one year ahead of the previously-planned delivery.

The following year, Catalyst reported tangible benefits in increased tenant satisfaction, a reduction in rent arrears, fewer complaints and also greater flexibility in meeting future challenges and opportunities.

Rod Cahill, chief executive officer, Catalyst Housing Group, said, "Mosaic Island has transformed the way our business copes with major IT changes. Every level of the organisation, from income officers through to the finance director, can now understand the programme and actively contribute to it. We now have a platform from which we can confidently deliver innovation and growth to meet the challenges of our sector for years to come."

IT INNOVATION AT SOUTHERN HOUSING

Kevin Connell, IT Director, Southern Housing Group

Working in IT can offer exciting and dynamic opportunities for any business leader; however, the housing sector is perhaps one of the lesser known sectors in which to build a career.

Yet at Southern Housing Group, we're aiming to change that through a clear and focused IT strategy that links directly to our corporate strategy's focus on providing excellent customer service. In particular, we're doing what few others in our sector have done and are looking beyond housing to other industries well known for their innovative and customer-focused approaches and introducing these into our business.

How are we doing this? Naturally, delivering an innovative IT strategy is playing a key role in transforming customer service delivery, but we're also looking at the qualities we want to attract to ensure we have the right type of people in our team. In the last couple of years, most of our new staff members have joined with no previous housing experience.

Our IT strategy is based upon five key themes: fix the basics; reinforce and build; optimise and integrate; integrate and innovate; and secure the estate, all of which we're well on our way to achieving. We have a number of steps to take if we're to deliver our vision of providing a modern, resilient IT infrastructure that provides a set of foundations to build on, moving from a fragmented estate to using standard IT integration technologies through a service-oriented architecture with the principle of 'build once, use many'.

As we're embracing technology as a key enabler and introducing a new approach with a technology and applications reference model, and taking a collaborative approach to business engagement, we're ensuring a feeling of ownership among senior stakeholders and that our transformation is truly business-led, not IT-driven.

So what does that look like? Well, while I am personally leading a programme to change the way we deliver tenant services, encompassing digital services, mobile working and omni-channel communications, many of our newer team members are using their expertise gained in other sectors to add significant value. To ensure we remain business-led and don't become IT-driven, we're also engaging with people from across the business to ensure that design and implementation work for both our internal and external customers.

A key part of my approach is to give individuals within my leadership team accountability for the delivery of major pieces of work. One team member, who started his career in the corporate world, is developing our architectural strategy based on his knowledge of external best practise, while another is leading on developing our group project methodology. A third member is leading the development of our service management framework, based on ITIL principles.

Yet it's not just the infrastructure that we're using this external knowledge for; one of our team is developing an IT customer-service strategy to ensure we're fully aligned with the group's increased focus on this area. This new approach reflects the significantly improved operational efficiency the IT department is delivering and maximises the benefits we're getting from knowledge of and experience in different sectors.

We still have a fair way to go to deliver our vision, but we are working on a number of areas, including:

- Portable device/technology rationalisation;
- Updating our operating systems and enhancing our infrastructure;
- Adopting an internet-based 'cloud first' approach;
- Using digital communications tools, both internally and externally.

As a group, we are putting our tenants at the forefront of our thinking to ensure we are a tenant- rather than property-centric organisation. We have adopted the principle of being 'digital by design' and, through a structured programme over the next year, we will be looking at how we can use digital technology to help us in the way we work and in the way we provide our tenants with services.

Taking lessons from the success of large businesses such as Asos and British Airways, the focus is on omni-channel, digital-first solutions rather than a predominantly telephone-based service and this will make change management simple and business-process-driven. Transformation will enable service delivery that tenants want to receive via value-for-money capabilities.

We will soon be delivering CRM capability to give a holistic view of all tenant- and property-related contacts in one place, enhancing the way we use our existing information. This will provide a full view and transparency of service provision and current status, including services delivered by third parties through contract arrangements. It will provide the basis for flexible service provision with the drive towards integrated mobile device access and the springboard to the analysis and contextualising of data to inform future service provision, including resource management. This project will play a key role in helping save £1 million per year and will be central to achieving technological efficiencies in service delivery.

We are also working hard to deliver value for money within IT; we've recently signed a new licence agreement with Microsoft that will save £275,000 over the next six years, with all savings being re-invested back into the group. Our new project methodology will also reduce costs, ensure faster delivery and drive greater efficiency.

As an IT department, we are significantly improving our levels of professionalism and adopting best practise from beyond the housing sector to ensure we continue to improve everything that we do. Taking such an approach will ensure we play a key part in the group's transformation and help it to achieve its strategic goals. Looking beyond our own doorstep also means that we will achieve our vision to create and maintain a modern, resilient, integrated IT estate that supports the business goals and challenges of a 21st Century housing provider.

Kevin Connell is the IT director of Southern Housing Group.

COMING SOON...
DIGITAL BY DEFAULT 2016 REPORT

HOUSING™ TECHNOLOGY

HOUSING | IT | TELECOMS | BUSINESS | ECOLOGY

IN-DEPTH | 2016

Published in conjunction with Go ON UK, Housing Technology's 'Digital by Default 2016' report will be the first significant technology report on digital inclusion in the UK social housing sector since our original 2012 report (published in conjunction with RaceOnline 2012).

The report will:

- Cover how leading social housing providers have successfully adopted digital inclusion into their overall business strategies;
- Provide guidance for best practice around digital inclusion strategies in housing, and;
- Show the results of an online survey of all UK social housing providers and their views on digital inclusion and their strategies to support it.

Find out more about how you can be involved by visiting Text: Visit **www.housing-technology. com/dbd16**, plus you can still download our original Digital by Default report from our website.

GOOn UK