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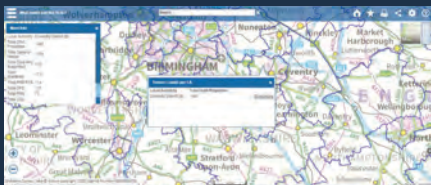
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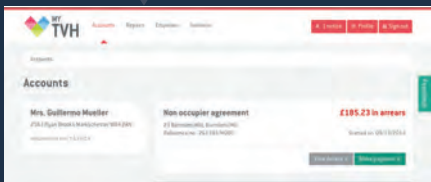ENTER THE Z-COORDINATE
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EDITOR'S NOTES

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Digital by Default – An initial snapshot

Although we are only halfway through the online survey for Housing Technology's forthcoming Digital by Default 2016 report (to be published in March in conjunction with Go ON UK), a quick snapshot and analysis of the responses provides some interesting results.

In terms of the factors preventing tenants getting online, a lack of knowledge and/or training combined with a lack of confidence are the most important factors, while the cost of IT equipment and the cost of internet connectivity are the least important.

Survey respondents reported that worries about the impact on vulnerable tenants and the cost and complexity of integration with back-office systems were the most significant factors hindering their digital inclusion strategies, closely followed by legal restrictions, such as the requirement to send rent change notifications via the post.

The most frequent reasons cited for pursuing a digital inclusion strategy were, in descending order of importance, tenant services, the changes to the benefits system, cost savings, more efficient operations and, lastly, moral/social obligations to tenants.

While the majority of respondents said that their organisation had a defined digital inclusion strategy, over a third of them had none at all.

The majority of housing providers' tenants are digitally excluded (defined for the purposes of the survey as the housing provider having no evidence of any online activity or presence), with the remaining tenants equally split between being fully included (they had transacted with their housing provider via at least one online channel) and partially included (no online transactions with their housing provider but they had an email address).

Accurately reflecting the reasons why tenants weren't online, most housing providers were spending around half of their DI budgets on IT training for tenants, with the remaining budget divided reasonably equally between giving tenants IT equipment and internet connectivity.

Only a quarter of housing providers have put together any special IT hardware/software packages for tenants, but just over a third of them have arranged special broadband packages and tariffs for tenants. The majority of housing providers do offer free internet access to tenants from their offices and community centres.

Published in conjunction with Go ON UK and kindly sponsored by Aareon, Advanced Business Solutions, Halton Housing, The Longhurst Group, Orchard Information Systems, RHP and Sentinel Housing, 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).

If you haven't already done so, you can still take part in the Digital by Default 2016 survey and add your views to the final report. **Please visit: www.housing-technology.com/events/dbd16.**

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

NHMF MAINTENANCE CONFERENCE 2016
26-27 JANUARY 2016, HILTON METROPOLE, BIRMINGHAM
www.nhmf.co.uk/conference

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

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 50TH ISSUE CHAMPAGNE RECEPTION
2 MARCH 2016, Q HOTELS' OXFORD BELFRY
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SECTIONS

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2016 IS ALMOST HERE... HAVE YOU BOOKED YET?

HOUSING™ TECHNOLOGY 2016 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

The Housing Technology 2016 conference and executive forum (2-3 March, Oxford) is around five weeks away. If you've not yet booked your place, there's still time; just visit: www.housing-technology.com/events/ht16.

Don't miss this brilliant opportunity to meet other senior IT and business executives from across the spectrum of UK housing providers and listen to thought-provoking, relevant thinking around the delivery of IT services and business integration. Run in a series of streams during the two days of the conference, the presentations will include:

/ 1st Touch
/ Aareon
/ Adullam Homes
/ Castleton
/ Catalyst Housing
/ Circle Housing
/ CloudView
/ Habinteg Housing
/ Havebury Housing
/ Home Group
/ IT Lab
/ Microsoft
/ North Hertfordshire Homes
/ Ongo
/ Orchard
/ PriceWaterhouseCoopers
/ Red Kite Housing
/ RHP
/ Seren Group
/ Severnside Housing
/ Solihull Community Housing
/ Southern Housing
/ Sovereign Business Integration Group
/ Thames Valley Housing
/ Town & Country Housing
/ Wakefield & District Housing
/ Wales & West Housing
/ Western Sydney University
/ WM Housing
/ Your Homes Newcastle

The conference's sponsors and exhibitors include **1st Touch, Aareon, BT, Castleton, Central Network Technologies, Cloudview, The Housing Contact Company, Internetalia, IT Lab, Kelway, MIS-AMS, Orchard Information Systems, Rostrvm Solutions** and **Sovereign Business Integration**.

In addition, on Tuesday 1 March, there will be a pre-event drinks reception. This will be followed on Wednesday 2 March by a champagne reception to celebrate the 50th issue of Housing Technology (see page 37) and an informal supper for all conference guests.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Dr Sue Black, OBE

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Rachel Neaman, CEO, Go ON UK

COMPANIES IN THIS ISSUE

HARNESS YOUR POWER TO TRANSFORM WITH PURPOSE

Tom Sewell, Head of Change, Circle Housing Group

The organisation of today is a complex animal, and housing providers are no exception to that rule. Demand for efficient, modern and transparent operating models that can cope with near-unprecedented levels of volatility and uncertainty are the order of the day. Can we rely on traditional methods to navigate our way out of the mire, or will a new set of leadership capabilities become the bedrock to enable true transformation with purpose so we are fit for the future?

It's no secret; hot on large organisations' agendas will be the transformation of operating models to gain efficiencies. Whatever your desired flavour of transformative change, the pace is often relentless, riddled with complexity and fraught with issues that can increase costs and decrease productivity. In the midst of constantly competing and conflicting transformation priorities, it's easy for organisations to lose sight of their purpose, and how well colleagues are, or aren't, plugged into this incredible source of organisational energy. This is where transformation initiatives are truly won and lost; in the hearts and minds of your staff.

What can be done to ensure the organisational purpose is lived out beyond the mission statement and stays at the forefront during transformation? How do we respond to the challenges we face when trying to build purposeful organisations? I think a shift in leadership thinking is the vital start to making the transformation agenda about enhancing organisational purpose first, and changing things, such as technology, second. This shift starts in a surprisingly simple way and has a single aim; strengthening your connection to what made you great as an organisation in the first place, by harnessing the innate energy of your purpose, and enabling your people to unleash the infinite power of transforming with it. Here are some of the ways you can do that:

Mind the gap
Colleagues often start to disengage during transformation because they can no longer see the link to the organisation's purpose and what resonates with them as individuals. All too often, the net effect is that the organisation's lifeblood is diverted away from being effective. It can become dissipated on things which don't align to the agenda, or its energy is sapped altogether. This reduces the momentum of transformation and the flexibility of the organisation when reacting to further challenges. A fantastic example of closing this gap was the London 2012 'Inspire a Generation' Olympic Games. Lord Coe led with purpose exceptionally well in the build-up and throughout. He was able to generate a level of commitment, energy and passion transforming the bid into what we now recognise as one of the greatest Games in living memory.

There is no escaping it
An organisation needs energy and passion to be great. It's at its most concentrated when staff feel that what they do relates to something with value and meaning. If they can't feel a connection to the purpose of the organisation, they create their own and synergy is lost. Too often the leadership, hierarchies, processes, relationships, contracts, technologies and offices constrain people's ability to connect into and work with purpose. It's the responsibility of leadership to ensure the path to getting to that purpose is clear for colleagues. Do absolutely everything you can to actively close down the distance between everyone's 'job' and your organisational energy. Once the path is clear, colleagues are free to enact and live out the purpose in the most powerful way possible, resulting in giving your customers an experience of your organisation that is absolutely second-to-none.

Ask yourself: what enables my people to connect to our purpose, and what around us might be blocking that connection? Does your transformation use your purpose as a guide for decisions and plans? Are you willing to consider whether the actions you are planning take you closer to your purpose or further away from it? Most importantly though, what action can you take to remove the blockers and 'close the power gap'?

Challenge entrenched, outdated and outmoded thinking
If in future you think like you do today, it's unlikely that you will be able to solve tomorrow's challenges. So if your thinking says one thing, but your purpose and those connected to it say another, then you and your shiny business case for transformation are in for a rough ride.

When committed to a programme of purposeful transformation, leaders have to be comfortable in positively challenging situational thinking that may have plateaued, become entrenched or reached its useful limits. The fruits of your labour will result in an eventual alignment of fresh and relevant thinking resonating with, and enhancing, this source of organisational energy. This makes it far easier for people to connect, and stay connected, with your purpose.

Ask yourself: how can you cater not only for the necessary delivery of things, but also maintain a focus on updating old knowledge? What action can you take to expose your organisation to new paradigms of thinking that might lead to it breaking free from the entrenched mental models and loops that hold it

HARNESS YOUR POWER TO TRANSFORM WITH PURPOSE
Continued from previous page

back? Commit to discarding comfort zones and break free of sector boundary lines when exploring new thinking. Dedicate time within your organisation to purely innovative, disruptive and entrepreneurial thought. After all, new and different thinking is a major catalyst of transformation, so harness this purpose-enhancing approach and start making it work for you.

The organisation as an organism
Everything is connected and is either enhancing or sapping your organisation's energy; it's your choice which one of those it is. The organisation is a complex, intricate and highly-connected system of values, beliefs, behaviours, levers, triggers and processes. The healthier that system is, the easier it is for your people to connect in and truly transform.

If the system becomes sick in some way and loses energy flow from your purpose, whole sections and functions begin to wither and die. That sounds melodramatic but it's true; your purpose is what makes the system exist in the first place. Your people's connectivity into that energy is what makes for a happy, healthy and powerful organisation. This is often why undertaking a set of transformation activities without an intricate understanding of the system, including all that is implicit and unspoken within it, can have hugely counter-productive results.

Ask yourself: how can I foster the understanding that to truly transform we must understand that we are all part of a much larger system? How can I challenge outdated mental models that see our projects and programmes as separate, different from the rest and unconnected to the whole? When people understand the interconnectedness of the organisation, the decisions they take during transformation start to account for the impact and resulting effects. This makes for a healthy system, which in turn improves the connections of individuals to the purpose, making your organisational transformation much more powerful and purposeful.

Truly long-lasting transformation comes at a mindful and behavioural cost that many organisations aren't even aware they have to pay. This is why so many efforts fall short of the mark. These are a few of the shifts we must all make when pushing boundaries toward transforming with purpose, and creating the organisations of the future that we want to see. If the purpose of the organisation is unclear or people feel disconnected from it, the energy is diluted. Harness the power of your organisation's purpose, plug people in and you will find transformation happens and achievements nearly always exceed plans.

Tom Sewell is head of change at Circle Housing Group.

MID DEVON'S SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS WITH ORCHARD

As an existing user of Orchard's housing management software, Mid Devon District Council has recently added Orchard's customer dashboard and messaging modules to improve its front-line services and add extra communication channels.

Orchard's customer dashboard is intended to promote better customer service by enabling the council's staff to answer a higher proportion of tenants' queries quickly and efficiently at the first point of contact.

Orchard's messaging module provides two-way integration with a range of customer service processes within the council's Orchard housing management system, replacing costly letters to tenants with SMS texting. The council has also implemented Orchard's ASB software.

Nick Sanderson, head of housing and property services, Mid Devon District Council, said, "We went live with the Orchard ASB solution in April 2015, two months after our first implementation workshop, and have received very positive responses from our users. Orchard's customer dashboard is about to be rolled out and we are really looking forward to the efficiency and customer service improvements that we will gain from it.

"Add Orchard Messaging to all of this and, in pretty short measure, we will have made a significant step change to our customer service delivery."

BAD APPLES - AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HOUSING SECTOR

Daniel Murphy. Financial Modeller, Gabriel Star

Dear Social Housing Sector,
Two members of Gabriel Star were fortunate enough to attend the Tenant Management Forum at Old Trafford recently. After standing in awe at the beautiful stadium and sipping coffee, the forum's attention turned to sharing ideas and discussing best practice for managing interactions with tenants.

Speakers formed a procession to stand and guide us through their recent innovations. It was intriguing to hear and later discuss the use of profiling when accepting nominations.

Profiling is nothing new to society. Your car insurance company clearly profiles you before every quote, using statistics to maximise their profits while reducing the extremities of risk. Now, it appears, housing associations are doing it en-masse. The ever-increasing need to show value for money and drive down bad debts means income teams are actively selecting future residents that fit a profile they believe is sufficiently safe enough to house.

However, as with children bobbing for apples on Guy Fawkes Night, those at the front of the queue tossing bad apples back into the water leave those behind them with a higher chance of selecting a rotten one.

My question to the housing sector is: with many housing associations tossing residents back, who, if anyone, will house them?

It must be said that as data analysts, we get 'it'. We really do. In some cases we've seen residents placed in homes they'd clearly struggle to afford or some cases where extra care was clearly needed. However, it doesn't change the principles that the social housing sector was built on; every man, woman and child in the UK is entitled to shelter.

It's not a huge mental leap to picture those being tossed back by housing associations finding themselves in a continuous cycle of emergency accommodation, bed and breakfasts or even Travelodges. This can't be right, can it?

It may appear blunt and crude, but it appears apt that housing providers willing to house tenants with high-risk profiles are remunerated appropriately for such efforts. In the same way that statisticians can calculate the difference in value between one insurance product and another, we as a sector can determine the value between one resident's profile and another's. We therefore should be re-directing our efforts ahead of time, towards local and central government.

We should rightly and justifiably differentiate between types of tenants. We already do when it comes to 'need'.

Families with immediate and acute need are afforded a larger budget for emergency housing. What we should lobby government for is to acknowledge the varying degrees of risk between tenants.

We have teamed up with Capital Resolve to offer the only former-tenant arrears collection service that is solely focused on the social housing sector. As the service combines both trace and collection with useful analytical feedback, we can say that over a large population, tenants who pay by direct debit are worth £715 more per year to a housing provider than those who only have the ability to pay by cash.

With enough lobbying and sufficient empirical evidence through obtaining quality data, we must believe we have a right to ask for some, if not all, of this shortfall in value to be subsidised to those housing associations who help the most vulnerable.

Join us in asking for this problem to be solved in advance, before the effects become disastrously acute. Lobby now.

Daniel Murphy is a financial modeller for the Gabriel Star consultancy.

MICROSOFT & HITACHI ERP AT AFFINITY SUTTON

Affinity Sutton has chosen Hitachi Solutions to deploy a Microsoft Dynamics-based ERP system across all of its operations.

Mark Washer, group finance director, Affinity Sutton, said, "We are making this investment because our current systems have come to the end of their useful lives and we want to deliver much more of our services online and in our tenants' homes."

The overall solution comprises Microsoft Dynamics CRM, Dynamics AX and Hitachi Solutions' own field service automation software.

Affinity Sutton launched its business transformation programme, Future Foundations, in 2013. The housing provider's staff will use a single, seamless IT solution rather than the multitude of different applications used by most housing providers, giving them access to unified data and a 'single version of the truth'.

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SMART METERING, IoT, CONNECTED HOMES AND BIG DATA IN HOUSING

Housing Technology interviewed IT experts from 1st Touch, Clearview, DXW, Mobysoft and Zonr on smart technologies/ metering, the internet of things, connected homes, and big data in social housing.

Smart metering, the internet of things (IoT), connected homes and big data are at the cutting edge of technology in the social housing sector. While only a few housing providers are actively progressing pilot projects in these areas at the moment, we're confident that these related technologies will enter the mainstream within the next year or so. As things stand now, while each of these four areas can be run as standalone projects, we've grouped them together in this article because their combined benefits are so much greater than the sum of their parts.

Looking at big data and how housing providers could take advantage of it, Mobysoft's CEO, Derek Steele, said, "All the technology and applications being used by housing providers are creating huge amounts of data. The most successful will be those that can join up the dots by intelligently mining and then analysing the data to spot trends and then using predictive technology to forecast macro and micro patterns and behaviours."

> *"Housing providers already have many of the tools needed to make a start on using these technologies. The key is to connect these together so that they can provide a 360° view of all data and sources of data."*
>
> Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch

Greg Johns, the CEO of 1st Touch, added, "By using big data in a smart way, housing providers can stream data from multiple sources, (such as sensors, tenant portals, field workers, call centres and IoT devices like traffic systems) to record, report and request tasks, actions and activities in an automated way. For example, using big data to develop patterns of behaviour with vulnerable tenants; this allows carers to understand whether they are at risk of going into arrears or at risk physically and/ or mentally. It can also identify whether there are assets in the property which are lower cost to maintain, so that better purchasing decisions can be made."

Smart technologies and metering, connected homes and the internet of things will provide an avalanche of data for powering housing providers' big data applications and services. However, a key factor will be deciding what data to collect (and how often) and which data to avoid as simply unnecessary 'noise'.

Zonr's CEO, Robert Dent, said, "While smart metering can help reduce costs by delivering information to the tenant around energy usage, sensor technology, which measures and monitors room temperatures and humidity, will deliver significant benefits to the housing provider as well. It does this by providing dynamic data about the state of the property and assets within the property such as boilers. This information can be used to significantly drive efficiencies and also to highlight or head off any potential problems.

"Data collected using IoT devices can be finely analysed to provide meaningful intelligence for both a housing provider and its tenants. Smart appliances, meters and sensor technology will all combine to present a complete picture of the state of each property, enabling the housing provider to make better decisions about repairs or replacing assets. And where homes are connected via the internet to a housing provider's back-office systems, the data collected from the sensors will be automatically processed and analysed, updating the in-house systems without human intervention. This could be used to automatically schedule a repair call, a visit from a housing officer or investigation of other services."

Benefits to tenants
Commenting on some of the advantages to tenants, Mark Hobart, the managing director of Clearview, said, "If the big data generated by this explosion in data sources is processed and analysed effectively to deliver relevant insight, then housing providers will be able to deliver much better services that tenants see as having greater value because they will be tailored to their specific needs, such as a boiler repair man turning up to fix the boiler just before it breaks."

Mobysoft's Steele said, "Organisations that

> *"Imagine being able to predict when the next boiler will break down and take preventative action while a repair operative is in the area or help to identify your next rent default."*
>
> Mark Hobart, managing director, Clearview

use data intelligently can properly profile tenants and predict behavioural patterns so that all tenants can be provided with the necessary support at the right times throughout their tenancies. When tenants are supported in this way, we've found that overall arrears decline, as do evictions."

Johns from 1st Touch added, "Smart sensors and meters enable tenants to see tasks raised automatically so that issues can be resolved earlier and they can also help to cut their energy bills by up to 30 per cent. At the same time, IoT allows tenants to control the devices in their homes remotely, so they can organise their lives in a more structured way, while also acting as a guardian service for vulnerable tenants."

Advantages for housing providers
As mentioned above, smart metering, IoT and connected homes act as prolific data sources for big data applications which in turn transform that data into business intelligence. This can then be used to streamline housing providers' operations and as the basis for better decision-making, often using automated workflows to reduce the need for human intervention.

> *"Many tenants still don't have usable online tools to pay their rent and arrange repairs. We have to focus on tenants' needs first, so let's get the bread and butter of housing services working properly."*
>
> Harry Metcalfe, managing director, DXW

Clearview's Hobart said, "If a housing provider puts in place the framework and tools to be data-led in all of its operations, the potential opportunities for service improvements and efficiencies are very significant. Big data, when used effectively, opens the door to predictive analytics giving foresight of potential issues. Imagine being able to predict when the next boiler will break down and take preventative action while you had a repair operative in

the area or, in the case of welfare reform, help to identify your next rent default and provide financial support services before the problem arises."

Looking at how housing providers deal with their tenants, Mobysoft's Steele said, "One example of big data benefiting housing providers is if they can use the data they hold about their tenants to accurately profile them and predict their behaviour with a greater degree of accuracy, which in turn means they can calculate what resources they will need to support all their tenants. Not only can this deliver huge efficiency savings, but also when new tenants are taken on, they can predict what resources they will need to best support that profile of tenant. The data can also alert organisations when their KPIs move out of set parameters, so they can address issues at the outset to minimise disruption."

"The technologies being used by housing providers are creating huge amounts of data. The most successful will be those that can join up the dots by intelligently mining and analysing the data to forecast patterns and behaviours."

Derek Steele, CEO, Mobysoft

Zonr's Dent added, "One area not yet mentioned is potential problems around budgeting. One of the single most expensive assets (excluding the actual properties themselves) for housing providers is boiler provision, repair and replacement. If a housing provider can repair and maintain a boiler for longer, then they can more accurately predict their budget for the purchase of new boilers. For example, if the lifetime expectancy of a boiler is ten years, and this is included in the budgeting process, then what happens if the boiler only lasts for eight years? That is enough to cause problems for funding a replacement programme. By using IoT technologies, boilers are likely to be used more effectively and thus enjoy longer lives with less maintenance.

"A second area to consider is the need for sustained tenancies. Every time a property is void, there is a cost to the housing provider in terms of lost rent and repairs. If a property can be better maintained then the incidence of a void is reduced, thereby extending the length of the tenancy."

Implementation strategies
When considering how to implement these technologies, either separately or as a combined strategy, 1st Touch's Johns said, "You have to start with understanding how these technologies will help the housing

provider deliver its strategic business plan. For many, the first step is to understand what the technologies can offer and then to ensure that the board supports the assessment of how they could be used across their properties and tenants. The business then has the support it needs to run pilot programmes across specific business areas that deliver quick and easily-identifiable returns."

Mobysoft's Steele added, "Big data already exists for many housing providers; the trick is being able to mine that data effectively. When adopting these types of solutions, housing providers should look for 'enabling' systems, in that the solution provides the analysis which enables the organisation to take action or amend their processes accordingly. What's more, it's important that solutions can provide evidence of a tangible return on investment, otherwise technology investments can cost rather than save money."

Future trends
Despite smart metering, IoT, connected homes and big data still being very new ideas for most housing providers, what are the future trends in these areas?

1st Touch's Johns said, "Collectively, the trend will be around expansion and convergence, with data captured from multiple sources. Initially, smart metering, IoT and connected homes will capture information relating to high-value assets in properties, such as boilers, to predict failure levels and diagnose issues. But eventually more of the elements of the property will 'talk' to each other, to the housing provider and to the tenant. Not only will they provide data, but they will self-diagnose problems, schedule repairs, and inform the tenants through a variety of channels."

Zonr's Dent said, "Business analysts predict that there will be two billion sensors in use around the world by 2020. There doesn't seem to have been any large-scale deployments so far, but a lot of talk about what could be possible. Systems will evolve over time as more needs are recognised, and soon every social home will be fitted with intelligent time- and cost-saving sensor-based technology.

"The number of connected homes is certain to grow. With over four million social homes in the UK alone, it makes sense to accumulate shared data, acquired by connecting homes to intelligent systems. Putting it another way, data collected from one property doesn't provide a great deal of benefit for the tenant or the housing provider, but where homes are connected en-masse, big data can be being generated

on a scale not previously possible." Echoing the need to share and aggregate data on a wider scale, Steele from Mobysoft said, "The next challenge will be for housing providers to take their own big data and aggregate it across the sector so organisations can benchmark their performance in all operations, and then copy best practice to deliver a better service with optimised resources. For example, these might include measurements such as void turn-arounds, the average cost of repairs or the effectiveness of different types of communications to reduce arrears."

"Analysts predict that there will be 2bn sensors in use around the world by 2020. Soon every social home will be fitted with intelligent time- and cost-saving sensor-based technology."

Robert Dent, CEO, Zonr

Integration with daily operations
Sounding a note of caution and the need to focus on 'mainstream' operations, Harry Metcalfe, the managing director of DXW, said, "These are exciting areas of technological development with great potential to improve housing. But I don't think they're the things we should focus on now. Many tenants still don't have usable online tools to pay their rent and arrange repairs. We have to focus on tenants' needs first, and those are the things tenants care about most. Let's get the bread and butter of housing services working properly, and then think about how big data and the internet of things might fit into the picture."

For many housing providers, these technologies can and should be integrated with their core business applications. As 1st Touch's Johns concluded, "Housing providers already have many of the tools needed to make a start on using these technologies. Housing management systems, mobile solutions, document management and CRM systems are in place for many, if not all, housing providers. The key is to connect these together so that they can provide a 360° view of all data and sources of data, linked to business process tools that enable tasks, actions and activities to be automated so that the cashable savings, productivity improvements and service enhancements can actually be realised."

AN ASSET BEYOND THE STANDARD

Rob Griffiths, Deputy Chief Executive, Longhurst Group

Rob Griffiths, deputy chief executive and chief financial officer at Longhurst Group, explains how modifying an online system provided a cost-efficient solution to a new compliance standard.

The Homes and Community Agency's governance and financial viability standard has once again raised the bar for regulatory compliance in the UK's housing sector. So this year, asset and liability registers are top of the agenda for boards and senior staff across the sector. In fact, Longhurst Group began work on a similar project before the new standard was announced. As part of our work to introduce a group-wide contingency plan, we had already recognised a business need to improve the information we hold on our assets and liabilities and to hold that information in one easily accessible location.

Longhurst Group began work on our register early last year and an integral element of our success has been to use a system that allows us to do more than simply store data but link key documents and draw useful inferences from that data.

We're using a geographical information system developed by Stanfords in conjunction with the Wright Hassall TIDEE system which supports all the functions we need, and as an online system it doesn't require any new investment in software. The GIS system was something we already had following a stock transfer in 2009, but working with Wright Hassall, our legal advisors, and Stanfords we found another use for the system. Our approach to the liabilities register has followed a similar methodology, with our online risk management system evolving to meet the needs of the asset register.

For all its merit, the act of compiling an accurate and useful asset and liability register is time-consuming and required resources beyond our initial projections. With more than 18,000 homes to account for, the process took longer than we expected due to the amount of administration involved.

So after investing so much time and energy, our focus is now on how we embed these registers into our daily operations and make them a living part of our organisation that adds value to what we do. This is not just another data-handling exercise to satisfy the regulator; these registers are assets that will work for us and they are worth the time they take.

Rob Griffiths is deputy chief executive and chief financial officer at Longhurst Group.

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL CUTS ARREARS AHEAD OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Oxford City Council has deployed Mobysoft's RentSense software in advance of the introduction of universal credit.

The council was one of the government's universal credit pilot projects to test the impact of direct housing payments to tenants. Having seen an initial increase in arrears during the pilot project, the council realised that it needed to provide more support to tenants, prepare itself for significant operational changes, and undertake more financial profiling of its tenants.

Damon Venning, income manager, Oxford City Council, said, "Before universal credit, around 65 per cent of our rent was from housing benefit and we, as a local authority, were in control of those payments. After the introduction of universal credit, we expect that 70 per cent of our rent payments will come direct from tenants. This means that we need to establish a payment culture with our tenants because it will soon be their responsibility to pay us themselves.

"We saw RentSense as a means to increase our collection rate as well as give our income team more time to help tenants prepare for universal credit. The role of an income collection service has changed whereby officers are required to provide more support and negotiate sustainable payment plans."

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THE CONNECTED VAN AND BEYOND - WHAT DIGITAL CAN DO FOR ASSET MANAGEMENT

David Rosewell, Head of Digital Offerings, Fujitsu UK & Ireland

Digital services have become extremely important in the modern commercial world. By using digital innovation, companies can improve their employee and asset productivity, providing increased customer satisfaction. It's true for every sector that businesses who fail to adapt to the digital landscape risk being left behind by their competitors. Alternatively, a new market disrupter, such as Uber, could launch and change the entire landscape of the industry. On the other hand, digital can be used to solve asset management challenges in difficult circumstances, and this is particularly relevant for the housing sector in repairs and maintenance.

It's clear that the housing sector is being tested by a tough financial climate. Following the last general election, the housing sector and social landlords are being faced with significant funding cuts in the next four years. The introduction of universal credit will also present income challenges, as housing associations will need to seek income directly from their tenants rather than through local authorities. But with a viable digital asset management system, reactive repairs in housing have the opportunity to improve first-time fixes and improve inventory control.

One new concept which could improve property servicing is the 'connected van'. The internet-enabled van is beginning to gain traction in the utilities space, where for many years leading companies have grappled with the challenge of the first-time fix. Frequently engineers are sent to a repair request, only to find that they don't have the correct equipment or skills to fix the problem. For our biggest utilities customers, a significant proportion of house calls are second- or third-time visits, which can add up to thousands of visits per day. The waste of time and resources is staggering, in addition to the negative impact that multiple visits have on customer relationships.

The connected van can address this issue in many ways, beginning with the lack of necessary equipment. Using RFID, every piece of equipment on board can be tracked; whenever an item is taken out, an alert can be shared with both logistics and procurement. This effectively turns the van into mobile warehouses and links the supply chain together. By providing central knowledge of vehicles' stock levels, this approach delivers enhanced and more efficient stock control, improving stocks and ordering processes.

Connected vans also provide information on teams' locations, to improve the speed with which they can respond to calls. Operators can despatch repair teams based on their locations, as well as their equipment and the skills of the engineers on board. Ultimately, this will increase the rate of first-time fixes, improve efficiency and give customers a better experience. A connected van would also provide wi-fi access for those in the field, enabling them to update their records directly through the device of choice. This form of mobile working would deliver reduced paperwork and increased productivity.

Digital will offer further opportunities for the housing sector in the future, particularly through the internet of things (IoT). IoT can create an environment where objects in tenants' houses are able to speak with servicing directly. Rather than deploying someone to assess whether a device is working, that device will be able to send a message about the problem, how serious it is and whether it can be repaired remotely. Fixing items remotely is far cheaper and quicker; alternatively, connectivity would ensure that the resources needed to fix an issue are identified before a team is despatched.

Many long-standing companies have developed infrastructures and practices gradually, sometimes over 50 or 60 years. But failing to innovate with digital tools can leave more traditional companies vulnerable to market disrupters, who can quickly start afresh and establish new, more effective supply chains and ways of working. To improve their offering, businesses in the housing sector should aim to make gradual improvements. Connected vans offer this sort of opportunity. Digital can give companies in the housing sector many advantages to help them flourish in these particularly challenging times.

David Rosewell is head of digital offerings for Fujitsu UK & Ireland.

RAM puts Abertay Housing on the road to FRS & SORP compliance

Abertay Housing Association has implemented component accounting software from Real Asset Management to ensure compliance with FRS 102/SORP accounting standards. The new software will replace its multiple spreadsheet-based processes and reduce the manual effort needed to manage its £24 million asset base.

Marjorie Sloan, corporate services director, Abertay Housing Association, said, "We are looking forward to finally having a centralised system to manage the accounting of our 12,000+ assets which are mostly associated with housing and flats.

"We previously used eight different spreadsheets at month-end. This was not only time-consuming to maintain but also raised concerns over the accuracy of our figures, both issues which the new software will enable us to overcome."

GETTING RID OF THE SILOS

John Fisher, Partner, Ark Housing Consultancy

The housing sector has been good at measuring performance and benchmarking against peer groups but this has often been done in functional silos, using measures imposed by regulation and inspection, to ensure that all fit a particular model.

This behaviour has stifled innovation and individual business plan ownership. Yes, all housing providers have their social and statutory responsibilities, but there are very different ways of interpreting and delivering these, so the key question of "how do we do it?" has been largely trumped by "what is everyone else doing?".

For good customer service reasons, the housing sector has been focused on operational delivery at the huge expense of strategic planning and investment. IT systems tend to be clunky and hold data in silos by function, so this is how housing providers traditionally report. Yet the sector's systems do hold a vast array of business intelligence, generally down to property level.

Until now, we haven't had the right business intelligence tools to look at asset and business performance in a cross-functional way. When was the last time your board had a routine report connecting tenancy lengths, demand, repairs, void turnarounds, arrears, planned investments, management costs, tenant satisfaction and so on, focused on the same assets and tenants at the same time? They will receive reports on all of these, but rarely connected together.

So cross-cutting business analysis is now critical if the current efficiency agenda is to be addressed, which is itself just about efficient business management. It's simple; just use the information you already have better to understand business and asset performance in market terms, using tools such as Ark's strategic asset performance model. In turn, this informs where housing providers need to objectively appraise options for under-performing assets and create a platform for sensible investment and disposal decisions.

A competent asset management strategy must take into account the true performance of all assets and have a plan to continue to invest in what are really assets, but also to resolve the shortcomings of liabilities (such as remodelling, reinvestment, tenure changes, disposals and redevelopments). For many housing providers, this can be a 5-10 year programme of key investment decisions.

The government and regulators can signpost the direction, and have now very clearly done that, but individual housing providers need to exercise the leadership and innovation to plan the journey. We have moved quickly from maps to GPS; we just need to up our game to use new technology wisely.

John Fisher is a partner at the Ark Housing Consultancy.

MOBILE WORKING

CAPITA DELIVERS MOBILE WORKING AT CLYDE VALLEY

Clyde Valley Housing Association has recently implemented Capita's mobile working software, and staff are already seeing the time-saving benefits.

The implementation is an extension of CVHA's existing Capita OpenHousing software deployment alongside its addition of Capita's mobile debt management module in May 2015. The housing provider went live with the pre- and post-inspection mobile modules in September 2015.

Andy McVey, ICT manager, Clyde Valley Housing Association, said, "Our key driver for moving towards mobile working is to reduce costs and improve efficiencies, while continuing to offer our tenants improved levels of service. Capita has enabled us to meet this challenge; in particular, our housing officers and technical inspectors no longer have to duplicate the work they do when they return to the office. Our back-office system is updated immediately and they are ready for their next appointment."

With a 2020 vision and strategy heavily focused on mobile working, CVHA will next be extending its mobile capabilities with the launch of Capita's estate management module.

SMARTER ASSET MANAGEMENT – THE TIME FOR TALKING IS OVER

Jonathan Holyhead, Managing Director, 365 Agile

What is smarter asset management and what does it mean for housing providers? The world is now a very different place for social housing. Recent events such as welfare reform and rent reductions mean that housing providers are under increasing pressure to radically remodel service delivery in order to reduce operational costs. In order to meet the current challenges housing providers need to work 'smarter' and use their resources far more effectively.

Smarter asset management is the ability to connect assets to the internet so that data can be received and/or transmitted. This allows real-time telemetry data to be accessible so that the condition or operating health of a device can be detected and, more importantly, people can be despatched to deal with an impending issue rather than having to respond reactively when something breaks down.

Traditionally, the sector has been slow to adopt new technology and some existing legacy system suppliers are not regarded by their housing customers as being particularly innovative. Current pressures mean that the sector needs to leapfrog a decade of technology and embrace innovative solutions such as the internet of things (IoT). IoT is a very broad term used to describe anything that can be connected to the internet. The term 'smart' has been banded around for a good few years, particularly in homes with smart TVs that connect to the internet so you can watch whatever you want, whenever you want.

So how and where can IoT solutions play a role in providing smarter asset management and better ways of doing things in the sector? Social housing by its very nature has a huge amount of properties and assets among its portfolio. The way in which these assets are currently managed is generally broken down into 'planned' or 'responsive' maintenance. Planned maintenance is managed by creating schedules of periodic visits to 'check' or 'service' something to make sure it is operationally fit for purpose; this is certainly the case for boilers and annual safety inspections. Responsive maintenance is generally when a tenant reports something is not working as

expected and they need this issue resolving in a timely manner. This is certainly the case when it comes to boilers due to the loss of heating and/or hot water within the property.

IoT or smart sensor technology has the capability to allow us to change the way we provide maintenance, but how? If we can somehow make devices 'smart', i.e. connect them to the internet, we can then get data from them and potentially talk to them to provide them with instructions and/or diagnose that something isn't working correctly. Why is this beneficial? If we know something is about to have a problem, we can despatch resources efficiently to provide the necessary repairs before the unit fails. This not only means that we can proactively send people to a geographical location to fix several devices which saves time and fuel, it also simultaneously improves customer service. Another example is if we deploy a smart temperature sensor, we can get it to periodically report the ambient temperature of that room or property. The moment a room becomes too cold or too hot, we can do something about it. Not that interesting on its own, but if this sensor joins several other smart sensors and devices, all of a sudden we could have a 'smart' home or property. This could enable tenants to gain greater control over their energy expenditure while having a positive impact on the environment.

Let's think about central heating boilers for a moment. Other than an annual safety inspection, the only time we visit them is to repair them when they break down. Imagine if we could somehow predict that they were not operating properly and then schedule a visit before they broke down. To do this, they would need to be 'smart' to allow us to get information from them. If this was achievable, we could then schedule to attend several boilers in the same area to fix them before they broke at a time that was convenient for both the tenant and the housing provider. The savings in operational efficiency would be potentially huge. In addition, a tenant would be more satisfied if a visit was needed to prevent their boiler breaking

down instead of them getting back home to find they had no hot water or heating.

Over the course of the next few years, most new devices such as boilers will be 'smart' as standard, and we will install them in all new-build homes. The trouble, of course, is that we already have thousands of assets in the field that need to run the course of their natural lives before we retire and replace them. The focus therefore needs to be on how we can easily 'retro-fit' things that will enable non-smart devices to become connected and smart.

You may have already heard of or spoken to several companies that are lining up products to provide such solutions, but one company that has already made IoT a reality is 365 Agile. Back in November 2015, we launched our very own Smart Heating Controller which can be retro-fitted to any boiler in less than five minutes. This not only allows the tenant to control their heating and hot water from their smartphone, but also automatically alerts the tenant and the housing provider when it detects that the boiler is not operating optimally. This will also deliver such benefits such as a reduced energy bills because it will be possible to control individual heating zones; i.e. don't heat the upstairs rooms during the day and don't heat the downstairs rooms during the night.

Housing providers have a responsibility to support some of the most vulnerable members of society. We read very sad cases of elderly people dying due to cold weather-related issues. Surely as a modern society in 2016, we cannot stand by and allow this to continue. If we deployed smart technology, we could easily monitor if someone has their heating on, it's working properly and their home is insulated to a satisfactory level. The cost of doing this is tiny and the technology can be easily and quickly deployed so that tenants can not only save energy but also heat their homes effectively.

Finally, I hope this article has helped in some way to enlighten you to the endless possibilities that IoT will deliver and the benefits of 'smart' technology.

Jonathan Holyhead is the managing director of 365 Agile.

in4systems welcomes new customers to the Promaster Community

We are delighted to welcome 11 new customers to our user community, all of whom have chosen to implement Promaster to support their asset management requirements. These organisations include:

Continuous investment from Orchard has enabled us to enhance our solutions portfolio, making it even easier for housing providers to manage their assets, as well as supporting a wide range of housing options.

Promaster is proven in helping Housing providers to address industry hot topics, including:

• Active Asset Management (Stock viability and investment decisions)
• Managing Compliance and Risk
• Compliance with Quality Standards
• Assets and Liabilities Registers
• Workforce Mobilisation

We are also continuing to invest in the integration capabilities of our solutions, ensuring they are able to interoperate successfully with other applications that housing providers have or select in the future. This includes Housing Management, Financial Management and Document Management systems, together with CRM solutions.

John Buckland, Director at in4systems commented:

"A combination of the recent HCA guidelines and measures announced by the government last summer are driving the need for Asset Management software solutions that extend far beyond stock condition surveys. We are delighted to welcome onboard all these organisations and look forward to working with them to address these industry challenges."

For a discussion on how we can help reduce your asset management costs contact us at **info@in4systems.com** or on **0118 989 0362**

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THAMES VALLEY HOUSING GOES DIGITAL FOR ITS TENANTS

Harry Metcalfe, Managing Director, DXW

2015 was an 'annus horribilis' for UK housing providers, plunging them into what the Financial Times described as their biggest financial crisis when the July Budget saw the Chancellor impose a rent reduction of 1 per cent a year for the next four years. Coming hot on the heels of cuts to welfare and changes to how welfare payments are made, it leaves housing providers searching for ways to manage significantly reduced cash flows without providing a poorer service to their tenants.
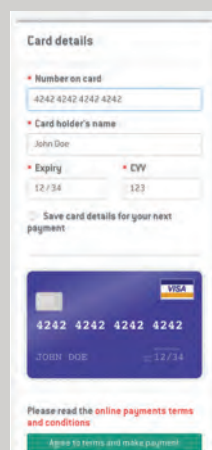
One way to address this 'triple whammy' is to reduce administration costs through the use of digital technology. However, many tenants are older or vulnerable people, and others lack easy access to online services, so it's vital that personal support is still available. The challenge for housing providers is to ensure that they invest wisely by developing digital services that will actually be used, reducing costs while freeing up their limited resources for more difficult cases that require personal intervention.
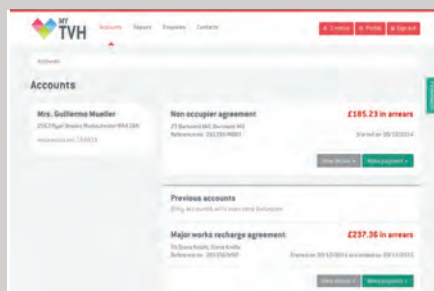
Designing services that users actually use
As digital services provider DXW, we have been working on public sector projects for almost eight years, and we have a simple guideline to help organisations ensure that their digital services will be effective. We believe that services will only be successful if the target audience actually enjoy using them and prefer them to the alternatives. If users can find answers to their questions or make a payment quickly and easily on a website, for example, they are less likely to contact a call centre or customer service department. They will also spread the word about how easy it is

to use the digital service and encourage others to do the same.

A hard-working website can improve straight-through processing, and if 80 per cent of user traffic goes through digital channels, the call-centre team can be smaller and more specialised. They can focus on people who really need personal support rather than spending time handling routine payments and simple queries.

Release a working service quickly, and learn as you go
Finding out what users want and how they would like to interact with a digital service requires user research and testing. But this needn't prevent a new service from being up and running quickly.
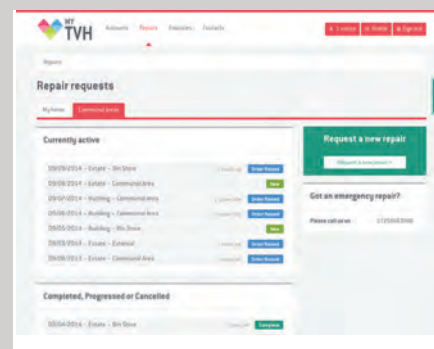
To keep costs and timescales down, DXW recommends an approach which is diametrically opposed to traditional public-sector IT projects; avoid up-front design and specification and instead focus on delivering small bits of functionality, designing and testing as you go. Learning from real experience leads to better decisions, reducing development costs. And focusing on delivering working software quickly speeds up delivery.

We also believe in keeping things simple, and avoiding 'reinventing the wheel'. Wherever possible, we recommend using component-based architectures and APIs to minimise the need for new code.

TVHA – not just digital and usable
Usability and reuse have been successfully combined in the MyTVH service which we developed for Thames Valley Housing Association. Having tried to implement a digital service in the past with limited success, it wanted an easy-

to-use online service that would enable tenants to make and track payments, book repairs and manage other aspects of their tenancies online. The solution also needed to interface with TVHA's legacy IT systems.

DXW designed and developed a digital service based on Ruby on Rails to meet TVHA's needs. During this process, we identified two factors which proved to be key to its success.

The first arose during focus groups with tenants to discuss how they would access the new service. We found that many people didn't have a PC, laptop or broadband, so support for desktop browsers wasn't the most important feature. The majority of tenants owned internet-enabled smartphones and were happy to use them to access the internet, so a responsive site that worked on mobile devices was clearly the way to go.
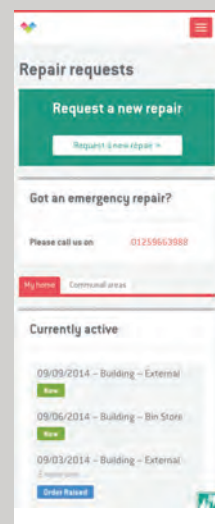
The second success factor followed the initial launch of the MyTVH service, when it was found that very few tenants were actually making payments. At the time, payments were made using a third-party payments service. Further investigation found that the need for users to leave

THAMES VALLEY HOUSING GOES DIGITAL FOR ITS TENANTS
Continued from previous page

MyTVH and log into a different system was a major barrier. Using a third-party service also meant that TVHA couldn't provide real-time payment information on a tenant's accounts. We designed a new payment tool using Barclay's ePDQ transaction engine which solved both problems.

The results have been a 27 per cent shift from phone to online payments, while transaction costs have reduced by 40 per cent from 49p to 29p per transaction. The portal has raised overall satisfaction levels among tenants and staff, saved time and money for both tenants and

TVHA, and is a key plank in TVHA's strategic plans to improve collections and arrears. MyTVH won a Digital Innovation of the Year award in June 2014 and TVHA is continuing to add new features to improve services to tenants.

It's not rocket science, it's common sense

There's no magic to designing digital services that people actually enjoy using, and you don't need a huge budget. If you find out what users actually want and keep testing your design with them to make sure it does what they've asked for,

you'll get something that they'll use when it goes live.

And by reusing existing products and services, you can keep costs down. Save bespoke development for the aspects that are unique to your organisation (which are usually relatively few). Get those right, ensure that they interface with any legacy systems you need to keep and you can introduce digital services quickly and effectively in any organisation.

Harry Metcalfe is the managing director of DXW.

ADACTUS HOUSING'S 1ST TOUCH 360 TENANT PORTAL

Adactus Housing Group is implementing 1st Touch's 360 Tenant Portal to offer its tenants more self-service capabilities. The software is expected to improve the group's existing online services and augment its incoming call centre and customer care facilities.

Initially, the new portal will offer two new services to Adactus's tenants. First, the system will enable tenants to book an appointment online to view a property that's available to let. The second will be the ability to book repair appointments online. Tenants will also be able to receive alerts, review rent account balances, view statements, track their current repairs and review their repairs history.

All portal activity will be recorded in Adactus's Aareon housing management system. This will provide the housing provider's management team with a single view of key data and KPIs, and the smart analytics available from this data will support the group's decision making for both the business and its tenants.

Suzannah Robinson, digital projects manager, Adactus Housing Group, said, "Our contact centre does an excellent job, and we want to complement this with an online offering that will handle many of the most routine enquiries and transactions. By reducing the number of calls our operatives deal with, they can spend more time on tenants with the greatest need. With its Aareon integration, the 360 Tenant Portal also allows us to drill down into the data to get live information."

1st Touch takes care of Halton Housing

Halton Housing Trust has chosen 1st Touch's Caretaker software for its estate services and environmental teams across 140 communal flat blocks and over 200 green spaces.

By using the software, recurring appointments are scheduled through 1st Touch's diary facility. On completion of the activity, this creates a contact in Halton's Aareon QL housing management system so that the information is available to all staff.

Halton Housing Trust chose the software because it already had a number of other 1st Touch modules as part of its Digital First Strategy, including those for responsive repairs, arrears, neighbourhood management, tenancy support and ASB.

Carole Galsworthy, director of ICT and business improvement, Halton Housing Trust, said, "We bought the Caretaker software as part of our Digital First programme. The biggest benefit is that the whole process is now paperless, so information on the completion of any work is instantly available.

"In addition, the processing of daily tasks and the ability to reassign work is now automated and has become far more structured. Team members can raise ad-hoc tasks from the diary, direct from the tablet. All tasks and outcomes are recorded so this makes performance reports far more accurate."

Incom & ShoreTel improve Teign Housing customer services

Teign Housing Association has deployed ShoreTel unified communications from Incom Business Systems as part of its plan to improve its customer service experience.

Comprising the ShoreTel unified communications platform and enterprise contact centre software, Incom's solution is intended to enable the housing provider to integrate all of its main business applications in order to achieve a 360-degree view of tenants' interactions.

With direct integration with Teign's existing housing management and rent payment systems, Incom's ShoreTel solution delivers simplified call management, automated reporting and

99.99999 per cent availability for better operational continuity.

Karen Johnson, Head Of Customer & Corporate Services, Teign Housing Association

The deployment supports 130 extensions, including 80 people at Teign's headquarters and 20 mobile workers. It also allows tenants to respond to service surveys using their preferred communication channel, enabling Teign to improve digital inclusion and accurately

measure its performance.

Karen Johnson, head of customer and corporate services, Teign Housing Association, said, "Incom's meticulous approach gave us complete confidence that its ShoreTel solution would be fit for purpose now and into the future.

"The deployment has been a complete success and our tenants are reaping the benefits that integration has delivered. The Incom solution is key towards us achieving our digital inclusion strategy and will bring about efficiencies in customer transaction processing."

BROADACRES USES UNIFY & ENGHOUSE TO TRANSFORM TENANT COMMUNICATIONS

Broadacres Housing has implemented a multi-channel solution from IT integrator Unify Communications based on Enghouse Interactive's contact centre software alongside its existing Microsoft Lync unified communications platform.

Rebecca Welburn, communications manager, Broadacres Housing Association, said, "For our tenants, email and social media are becoming more popular and increasingly rivalling the more traditional use of fixed-line telephony,

but we had no central coordinated approach for interacting across all of these platforms.

"That's why we sought out an IT partner with extensive knowledge of the contact centre market and experience of deploying Microsoft Lync and Microsoft Skype for Business. One of the great benefits of working with Unify is that it can provide a complete and fully-integrated contact centre solution for us and act as a single point of contact."

Mark Birch, head of ICT, Broadacres Housing Association, said, "One of the great advantages of deploying Enghouse Interactive is that it enables us to bring the customer service skills of the whole organisation, not just the contact centre, into play when answering tenants' queries. That means we can use presence management with Lync, enabling us to offer a more informed service, to see if the required contact is available and ensure we don't transfer calls to an unanswered line.

"We have also used Enghouse Interactive's reporting to get a much better insight into how we are performing. That means gleaning important information around how quickly we are meeting tenants' needs, who is getting in touch with us via social media, and what is the average time taken to answer communications over different channels, as well as the types of questions people are asking us and why they are getting in touch."

Capita supports WDH's tenants' well-being

Wakefield & District Housing is using Capita Support software to improve its previously paper-based support services operations.

Dedicated to support services for vulnerable people, Capita Support offers outcome-based management of information across housing-related

support, employment, education and training and sheltered housing. A pilot implementation of Capita Support went live in September 2015 and is now about to be rolled out to all of WDH's independent living schemes.

Louise Muirhead, senior business analyst, Wakefield & District Housing, said,

"We continue to invest in technologies to support the service we deliver to customers. Capita Support will be live across all of our independent living schemes by the end of 2016 and this will enable the ILS team to continue to support the most vulnerable people in our communities and adapt to the complexities of an ageing population."

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GAP

Stephen Rees, Director of Care Operations, Sanctuary Group

Sanctuary Group is one of many housing providers seeking to bridge the digital divide. We are rolling out wi-fi to our care homes across the country; by December 2015, over 50 will have had wi-fi installed, with the small number of remaining homes expected to have it by March 2016.

We are also supporting residents to get online and develop skills in this digitally-driven world by exploring the use of iPads and apps as a stimulating communications tool and as a platform for creative expression.

With the help of Salmagundi Films, residents and staff at Sanctuary's Orchard House care home in Cambridgeshire have been involved in interactive iPad sessions, with residents from Sanctuary's Caton House residential and nursing home in Milton Keynes due to take part in early 2016.

Beyond news, entertainment and games, tablets provide the potential for exploration. The aim of these sessions is for residents to explore the creative potential of iPads, learn new skills and develop talents. While these could be undiscovered talents, the project also encourages residents to reconnect with previous hobbies, interests and memories, many of which can be explored through the apps.

Aided by the latest technology, Salmagundi uses personalised activities in the sessions based on each resident's interests. A selection of creative apps are used, including art and painting, motion animation and time-lapse videos, a book creator and a virtual piano.

Residents can also create their own life story on the Book Creator app, using photographs from the internet and their own memories to produce a virtual book of their life history. It can then be used by staff to learn and understand more about the individual and their experiences and could also be used by residents to reminisce with family and friends.

As well as offering a creative platform for the residents to use, and keen to highlight the benefits of the digital age, Salmagundi also demonstrated how the tablets could be used as a tool for engagement.

Social inclusion is not just relevant to communication but can also widen social networks. Tablets and apps have been designed to connect people, reduce isolation and simply make them feel part of society again.

With the help of the iPads, residents can do online shopping, reminisce about the past through photographs and news websites, take photographs of family and friends and watch catch-up TV.

Orchard House has already set up a Skype account so residents can speak to family and friends, and a Spotify account so they can listen to their favourite music.

Salmagundi's work at Orchard House was part of a wider national arts programme called Shine!, which aims to shine a light on the individuals living in Sanctuary Care homes, encouraging their participation in arts-based sessions.

It's important that despite technology being perceived as the domain of the young, our residents are encouraged to realise they're never too old to learn. Computers and tablets can give older people access to a whole new world.

This digital world is a fantastic tool to introduce them to creative ways to express themselves, aid reminiscence activities and encourage interaction.

Stephen Rees is director of care operations for Sanctuary Group.

Invu launches new BPA functionality

The electronic document management, accounts payable and purchasing solutions provider Invu has launched new functionality in its products with its latest software update.

The new version includes collaborative chat-style notes for document-level support, improved web performance, web and invoice coding for better process efficiencies, custom workflows to increase automation, and improvements in its email manager for a better user experience.

Ian Smith, general manager, Invu, said, "As we start 2016, we have a strong pipeline of development across our software which we feel will meet the growing demand from our customers and businesses. User experience and satisfaction are of utmost importance, therefore we have included the enhancements in update 6.10 based on user feedback."

1st Touch

delivering world class **mobile** applications
dedicated to **Social Housing**

Reduce Costs	Increase Productivity	Improve Customer Service
reduce stock costs	increase operative visits by 40%	quicker works completion
reduce fuel costs	reduce office time by 40%	faster response to actions
reduce visit costs	eliminate duplicate data entry	real-time tenant self-service

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LOOKING AFTER YOUR ASSETS

Housing Technology interviewed IT experts from 1st Touch, Civica Housing, Kykloud and Zonr on the latest asset management software and associated strategies for housing providers.

Most housing providers tend to have a separate asset management system to monitor and manage their property and associated asset portfolios, even if in many instances it only consists of a number of Excel spreadsheets.

Kykloud's chief commercial officer, Simon Checkley, said, "Historically, there were two choices; opt for an all-encompassing system which was great in some areas but weaker in others, or run multiple systems across your organisation. Web-based technology has significantly changed this and means that there is no longer any need to compromise on quality and it allows operators to use a management system of their choice while bolting on additional best-in-class modules as and when they are needed."

> *"Mobile solutions already enable housing providers to capture asset data and to automatically update asset systems to improve accuracy. IoT sensors will enhance this further by providing feedback on asset reliability and economy."*
>
> Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch

Jan Maes, the operations director for Civica Housing, said "At the moment, housing providers will benefit most from having separate asset management systems. This is mainly due to the fact that the IT suppliers have been focusing on separate housing management or asset management systems but haven't provided functionalities to do both together.

Next-generation asset management
For housing providers with an asset management system that's more than a couple of years old, they will discover that

the latest asset management software offers much more integration throughout the asset management lifecycle, including automated remote data collection using the internet of things (IoT) and mobile devices as well as better straight-through processing into other applications such as housing management, finance and CRM.

Zonr's managing director, Robert Dent, said, "Where the new generation of asset management software encompasses a technology shift such as IoT meters and sensors, housing providers will benefit significantly from the accurate real-time data delivered by onsite asset monitoring. This enables auto responses, the scheduling of works and significantly improved response times. It can also extend the life of expensive assets such as boilers and related heating systems."

Kykloud's Checkley added, "The biggest change is undoubtedly mobile data collection. Not only is it far easier to collect and collate data via everyday mobile devices, the data is also automatically fed into central asset databases to make planning and maintenance far easier and more accurate. And SaaS solutions are far more cost effective because their costs generally relate to the size of the asset base rather than paying per user. This allows housing providers to have unlimited users and ensures quality control and standardisation, both of which are really important when using the services of external surveyors, engineers and other contractors."

Commenting on the use of ERP systems that are in widespread use in other market sectors, Civica's Maes, said, "There has been a lot of hype recently about replacing traditional asset management systems with enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions. In theory, this made sense but a lot of money has been spent on this with very few success stories coming out of it. Housing providers

> *"It's very important for housing providers to ensure their data is accurate and up-to-date. To do this they need to stop duplicating information. One fault of many housing providers is that they hold property information in a variety of systems and then spend large amounts of time trying to manually keep things synchronised."*
>
> Jan Maes, operations director, Civica Housing

are realising that a generalised ERP approach doesn't provide what they need. I think that asset management will continue along its current track but will have a greater emphasis on energy, modelling and forecasting indicators."

IT integration
In common with most other areas of housing providers' operations, asset management is usually operated in a standalone silo with its own data formats and protocols, making it difficult and time-consuming to integrate that data with other core business applications.

Maes said, "Traditional integration between asset and housing management systems has mainly consisted of exchanging flat files such as spreadsheets. Housing providers have been using technology that has existed for 30 years or more without any true integration. These models are simple but the drawbacks are that information is held in different formats, often using different configurations, therefore meaning you need more complex mapping to get them talking to each other. The challenge is that IT suppliers are reluctant to open up their systems to allow the integration to take place with another supplier's software; developing better collaboration is vital but it can only happen when organisations are ready to open up their systems and allow third-party integration to happen."

Zonr's Dent added, "Asset management software should integrate with other areas of operations such as the scheduling

of work based on real-time data, which enables an increase in predictive and planned maintenance. The most common requirement is an open approach from all software vendors involved so that data can be safely shared, for the benefit of their customers. For example, the installation of IoT technology should provide an open platform for all vendors to use, rather than having an IoT platform for each type of IoT device or sensor."

IoT and asset management
The internet of things is covered in more detail in the feature article on page eight, but it is particularly applicable to housing providers' asset management strategies, with many housing providers already running pilot projects to assess how they can use IoT.

1st Touch's CEO, Greg Johns, said, "IoT is a disruptive technology that will create entirely new opportunities for asset management. These include being able to identify the type of asset in a property, monitor whether any component of the asset is failing and automatically raise corrective measures, identify how the asset is performing and whether it's compliant with SLAs and service/manufacturer guidelines, and benchmark assets so that housing providers can identify those assets that last longer, perform better and have lower maintenance costs."

"SaaS solutions are far more cost effective because their costs generally relate to the size of the asset base rather than paying per user. And the time saved in the asset management process should be very visible and the cost savings should be at least four times the cost of the software."

Simon Checkley, chief commercial officer, Kykloud

Dent added, "IoT will have a huge impact on the future of asset management because it offers the opportunity to capture important and relevant data

in situ. Our vision is that every social housing property in the UK will be fitted with intelligent sensor-based technology over the coming years. Data about the property will automatically update the asset management system, helping to predict future potential costs based on stock condition or the likelihood of a need for boiler replacement, for example. However, real benefits will only be achieved by vendors of IoT solutions delivering low cost solutions that are platform neutral and simple to fit."

Accurate & up-to-date data
Asset management is based on, arguably, the least accurate and most out-of-date data of most housing providers' datasets, partly to do with the sheer variety of assets to be managed and partly to do with the difficultly and expense of getting access to those assets in the first place. The other problem is asset data being duplicated across multiple core business applications so that housing providers find it hard to work out which contains the correct data, to the extent that some housing providers don't even know how many properties they own or manage. The problem can be solved by making asset data collection easier and cheaper and then ensuring that you have a 'single version of the truth' rather than duplicated asset data.

Civca's Maes said, "It's very important for housing providers to ensure their data is accurate and up-to-date. To do this they need to stop duplicating information. One fault of many housing providers is that they hold property information in a variety of systems and then they spend large amounts of time trying to manually keep things synchronised."

Commenting on asset data collection strategies, Kykloud's Checkley said, "Mobile surveying is definitely the key. By stripping back so much of the administrative processes, surveyors can spend far more time on site collecting

real-time data which can then be fed into a central system which is easy to update, analyse and monitor."

Continuing the same theme, 1st Touch's Johns added, "Mobile working solutions already enable housing providers to capture asset data and for this to automatically update asset systems to improve accuracy. IoT sensors will enhance this further by providing feedback on asset reliability and economy."

"IoT will have a huge impact on the future of asset management because it offers the opportunity to capture important and relevant data in situ. However, real benefits will only be achieved by vendors of IoT solutions delivering low cost solutions that are platform neutral and simple to fit."

Robert Dent, CEO, Zonr

Measuring your success
The implementation of asset management software should deliver quantitative time and cost savings as qualitative benefits, both of which it's vital to measure and monitor.

Checkley said, "Measuring RoI is often where difficulties can arise but there are two very simple and accurate ways to measure the success of your asset management system. Firstly, the time saved in the asset management process should be very visible and the cost savings should equate to at least four times the cost of the software. If you can't demonstrate this, we'd say the software isn't the right one for you. Secondly, although with a less immediate impact, better data should enable you to plan more effectively which will result in cost reductions in both planning and procurement."

Housing Technology would like to thank Greg Johns (1st Touch), Jan Maes (Civica Housing), Simon Checkley (Kykloud) and Robert Dent (Zonr) for their editorial contributions to this article.

CONNECTING THE UNCONNECTED

Marc Hobell, Director of Geographic Information Systems & Location Intelligence, Pitney Bowes

Take a few moments to look up in any bustling first-world city, and you'll notice the urban landscape is moving skywards at a rapid pace. As buildings and populations jostle for space at ground level, ever-changing city horizons are evidence of the popularity of high-rise living and working. Glittering glass buildings dominate urban skylines and change the structure of these cities forever. Across Europe, the story is consistent: Frankfurt boasts the Commerzbank tower and the Messeturm, while the Paris skyline is punctuated by the Paris First tower, along with more historic and well-known vertical works of art.

In London, planning permission has either been approved or is pending approval for 236 new high-rise buildings, from a minimum of 20 storeys to a maximum of 75 storeys. Although even the tallest of the buildings proposed, the 75-storey Hertsmere House, is still 88 storeys shorter than the Buri Khalifa building in the United Arab Emirates.

For residents and businesses located in tower blocks, there are challenges which offset the far-reaching panoramic urban views. Aside from concerns about the lifts not working, sharing their address with hundreds of other inhabitants poses a huge problem for these high-rise dwellers. Along with the popularity of the high-rise, e-commerce has sky-rocketed and our love of online shopping has soared. Not a problem for high-rise inhabitants, you would think, as long as global addressing data is accurate and precise. Unfortunately, herein lies the problem; sometimes, the data isn't. And if it isn't, there are costs associated for businesses and consumers alike.

Without accurate addressing data, the chance of consumers receiving a product they've ordered is minimal. E-commerce companies have to absorb the costs of these returned, undelivered packages. And for businesses waiting to receive urgent deliveries, the problem is even more profound. They may be sharing high-rise office space to generate cost savings, which means their delivery address is exactly the same. If the sender fails to include the company name and just includes the person's name and address, it's unlikely that it will reach the intended recipient.

Enter the Z-coordinate. The Z-coordinate is an expression familiar to fans of virtual landscape-building game Minecraft. In the real-world, away from building blocks, unicorns and fantasy farmlands, it defines a location in a three-dimensional space. Most of us have heard of X- and Y-coordinates from our time at school plotting graphs. The Z-coordinate literally adds a new dimension, measuring height or elevation and providing the ability to pinpoint a location with absolute precision. In mapping software, the Z-coordinate can be added as an extra layer to create a visual representation of a building.

Z-coordinates demonstrate perfectly the depth and breadth of data we now have access to, and the positive impact this data has on the world we live in. The value of this exacting insight, and of spatial data in general, extends far-beyond that of the postal delivery service and its ability to get a package to a desired location. Emergency services crews can use it to identify the correct response to an urgent call; insurers can use it to identify areas of high risk; local governments can ensure the correct business rates are charged to the correct organisations; retailers can use it to scope out new store demand.

Utility firms, too, are finding the precision of this data invaluable in relation to smart metering. Utilities firms need to identify all buildings and properties where they will have difficulty receiving a signal for smart-meter monitoring, with no current internal GIS capabilities. These include tall buildings, old buildings and buildings made from certain materials. This is where data truly becomes the hero. A huge diversity of data is available on any building, such as:

- Detailed base data to identify high rise buildings;
- Identify where multiple addresses sit within a building;
- 230,000 UK buildings identified, based on parameters where six or more addresses are contained within a building;
- Classification: identify which addresses/properties are residential or commercial. Or use classification at the individual address level to determine more detail, such as residential dwelling or a bank, restaurant, primary school or guest-house;
- Level Information, such as which floor a property is located on;
- UPRN: each property has a Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN), recommended by the Department of Energy Climate Change as best practice for smart-meter programmes.

Unrelated, the data might not be particularly insightful. But draw the data together, integrating it across intelligent software platforms and combine it with different data sets, and the power of the data soon becomes clear.

This ability to specifically pinpoint location with absolute precision is invaluable. It adds depth to data, drives decision-making and enables planning and forecasting. As the analyst company Gartner says, "Organisations that implement geospatial and location intelligence (GLI) capabilities will benefit from opportunities to analyse the spatial dimension across their strategic, tactical and operational analytics. This type of insight can produce real business results".

This is about exploring context: adding the 'where?' to data brings it to life. It also brings the deliveries to the door, and if you're on the 75th floor, that's what it's all about.

Marc Hobell is the director of geographic information systems & location intelligence at Pitney Bowes.

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USING TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE SATISFACTION IN HOUSING

Luke Stewart, Geo-Practice Manager, Ancoris

Home is the safe haven at the core of people's lives, so any change to housing policy is bound to cause debate and stir up emotions. In recent months, the subject has moved further up the national agenda, sparking Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn to dedicate his first question as leader of the opposition at Prime Minister's Question Time to the "chronic lack of housing".

In the same vein as much of the public sector, housing providers have to spend less and deliver more. From April 2016, it's expected that budgets will be reduced by around 13-16 per cent, or around £130 million in revenues, as a result of lowered social rents. Despite the pressure, however, housing providers are still providing critical services and pioneering new schemes such as shared ownership, all the while continuing to support existing and potential tenants. For now at least, delivering more for less is going to be key.

Technology has a critical role to play to help deliver the same services at a lower cost, without damaging tenant satisfaction. Indeed, the right technology, implemented in the right places can drive up satisfaction through communications and distinctive improvements to tenant services.

Communications
Pressures on housing providers are intrinsically linked to the difficulties experienced by tenants. The last few years have seen a sharp rise in enquiries from tenants worried about paying rent. With the imminent cut in the benefit cap from £26,000 to £23,000, 84 per cent of housing providers are expecting rent arrears to increase by an average of 51 per cent. The key to finding a resolution will be communication; the backbone of quality customer service and therefore satisfaction.

While there is no substitute for human contact, smart use of technology can help housing providers deal with rising demand without needing to add more staff. Adopting a multi-channel strategy for example, incorporating social media, email and well-designed and constantly-updated websites alongside traditional face-to-face, telephone and paper-based contact, will encourage greater tenant involvement and take the pressure off stretched teams. A survey by England's leading tenants' organisation found that investing in tools such as online forums and social media can produce significant cost savings, as well as social and community benefits. These platforms can also support communication between tenants themselves, encouraging those with common needs and concerns to support one another.

One less-realised impact of major change to housing policy is the number of questions and queries that housing providers are currently receiving. Changes to benefits and housing policy have the potential to confuse, and combined with one of the most complex tax and welfare systems in the world, tenants are turning to housing providers for support. This has been particularly noticeable recently, with changes to universal credit starting to take effect. Being equipped to deal with these dramatic rises in requests, with the right technology to support them is therefore essential to maintaining satisfaction.

Better services
As well as improving services, housing providers must also look at how new technology can help them get a better understanding of tenants' needs.

Tenant satisfaction is a key measure of a housing provider's success, intimately linked to how well and efficiently the organisation is carrying out key functions such as repairs. It helps managers to understand how well they are meeting tenants' needs and priorities, and take action to improve operations.

Introducing new technology which combines location and logistical data can help housing providers to service tenants better. By making it quicker and easier to identify on a map the properties where local amenities match specific tenants' needs, housing providers can allocate the right property to the right tenant. For example, a young family might benefit from being close to green spaces and schools, whereas an elderly person might benefit from being closer to shops and services. With so many tenants to accommodate, evaluating specific needs on a case-by-case basis is time-consuming, so automating the process with relevant data will help to save time and better place people.

Technology can also enable maintenance, gas checks and repairs to be carried out more efficiently by identifying all the outstanding tasks in an area and using route planning to schedule maintenance crews, minimising travel time and ensuring staff make best use of their time. More tasks can be completed quickly, while also providing a faster and more efficient service to tenants. By improving time and resource management and, ultimately, productivity, housing providers can continue to keep their tenants happy, despite pressures on funding.

Housing providers face immense challenges as they strive to balance their books while achieving their aims of providing high-quality housing, creating successful tenancies and delivering wider social goals. As recent changes in government policy have shown, nothing about the environment they operate in is set in stone. To succeed in this difficult climate, housing providers need to transform themselves and find new ways to develop thriving communities with satisfied tenants supported by happy employees.

As we move into 2016, the next step for the housing community must be the adoption of innovative technologies to improve communication, deliver more for less and ensure tenant satisfaction is continually high.

Luke Stewart is the geo-practice manager at Ancoris.

Ancoris launches housing data visualisation and mapping service

Ancoris has launched Maps for Housing, an online mapping and visualisation package for housing providers, available on an annual cloud-based subscription basis.

Maps for Housing gives housing providers' workers access to live data from their existing systems such as property types, voids, rent arrears, housing officer patches, administration boundaries and maintenance status, which are then overlaid on a familiar Google Map.

Ancoris said that its online service would help housing providers to reduce costs, improve decision making and enhance tenant satisfaction. Its examples included increasing the number of property and tenant visits by letting, rent, maintenance and estate officers through improved travel planning, ensuring gas safety checks are valid and repairs are done

on time by allocating appropriate staff based on location, reducing rent arrears by visualising information to plan and take preventative action, and allocating properties to the right tenants by matching tenants' needs to local areas.

The solution combines operational data with location elements and is accessible from any device. This data can be filtered and analysed to identify trends and patterns to help improve operational performance. In addition, when staff are in the field, they can optimise travel planning from the map, and easily contact tenants, contractors and other workers.

Jon Cocker, director of business technology, Waterloo Housing, said, "Ancoris's Maps for Housing has given our directors and housing officers a much clearer picture of our housing stock to help make smarter decisions and improve productivity. In

addition, 94 per cent of our users said mapping would be a vital tool in future."

Ancoris's RoI model, based on customer data, suggests that a housing provider with approximately 22,000 properties could save over £100,000 per year in operational costs by improving housing officer productivity (£70,000), reducing rent arrears (£7,000), increasing estates officer productivity (£18,000) and optimising repairs (£18,000).

David McLeman, CEO, Ancoris, said, "We want to help housing providers experience the transformative nature of going digital with applications based on the simplicity of Google Maps. With continued pressure on housing, we can support housing providers with relevant information to help them make better decisions for tenants."

INFRASTRUCTURE

Castle's new infrastructure for Argyll Community Housing

Castle Computer Services has successfully completed the implementation of a new IT infrastructure for Argyll Community Housing Association.

Castle supported the implementation of new servers as well as WAN and LAN in a virtualised environment, with enhanced business continuity arrangements.

Vivienne Kerr, IT manager, Argyll Community Housing Association, said, "Castle worked closely with us to implement

the new infrastructure within agreed timescales. We now have a new platform that gives us the performance, efficiency and flexibility required to meet our future needs. The addition of a separate DR site will ensure that our business continuity arrangements are robust.

"This was a very challenging project that had to be delivered with minimal impact on day-to-day operations. We couldn't have done it without Castle and they made sure that the system was up and running in good time."

BATH GROUP REPORTS ON CLOUD USAGE IN HOUSING

The Bath Group, whose members comprise housing providers with more than 10,000 properties, has reported the results of its survey covering the use of cloud-based services by its members.

Almost half (47 per cent) of the survey's respondents said that cloud technologies hadn't

reduced their costs and only 27 per cent thought that cloud services were making them more agile.

When it came to the use (67 per cent) of software-as-a-service (SaaS) by Bath Group members, there was a wide range of services being used, including areas such as Office 365, HR & payroll, ICT service

desk, CCTV, CRM, IT process management, responsive repairs, procurement and virtual board meetings. None of the respondents was using platform-as-a-service (PaaS) nor had any plans to do so.

Infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS) was mainly being used (27 per cent) to provide

compute and storage from providers such as Amazon, Microsoft and Exponential-E. Organisations using DR/backup-as-a-service (33 per cent) were doing so to either reduce the need for a second datacentre or offering a third location for ensuring their data was secure.

TIPPING THE SCALES TOWARDS VISUAL SURVEILLANCE

James Wickes, CEO, Cloudview

Weighing up costs versus benefits is an established commercial balancing act that helps to decide the uptake of new products, services and technology across all industries. It's particularly relevant to CCTV because, until now, the balance for most organisations has seen the costs outweigh the benefits.

There are a multitude of reasons for this. But, in short, traditional CCTV is too expensive to install, access, run and scale. And to cap it all, the hardware, cameras or footage are often damaged or unusable. It seems a damning indictment of CCTV in general, but it begs the question 'Why do so many housing providers use CCTV at all?'. Our experience shows it's because CCTV still acts both as a deterrent against anti-social behaviour and a reassurance to tenants and staff.

But here at Cloudview, we think that CCTV can do so much more, and do it for a lot less. It's why we created our unique Visual Surveillance system and why it's been designed from the start to address the cost and scalability issues that have until now restricted the use, scope and effectiveness of traditional CCTV. You can see exactly how these issues affect Housing Associations by taking a look at the video case study highlighting the installation of Cloudview at MHS's Saxon Shore site (www.housing-technology. com/videos).

The costs of traditional CCTV fall broadly into two areas. The first area is setting up and using the system; the second is expanding, contracting or upgrading it. For many housing providers, they have no choice about the set up. Legacy systems are already in place and, until now, the costs of such systems simply had to be accepted. That meant expensive and cumbersome equipment, including onsite DVRs, had to be maintained. If footage was needed, it had to be accessed physically on site, often by expensive contractors or by using remote access via dedicated broadband links to a designated PC. MHS are not alone in having spent considerable time and money over the years on such call outs. These costs become even more onerous when you realise that in MHS's case, in over half the visits, the cameras were either not working or the footage was unusable for various reasons.

This is a common theme when it comes down to traditional CCTV costs. Cameras recording onto DVRs are at risk from vandalism, mechanical failure and even cyber-attacks. In some cases, something as simple as an incorrect time stamp can invalidate any recorded footage. The system we have developed circumvents all these issues. Our unique Visual Network Adapter can be connected to each camera and will then upload images securely to our cloud-based servers, ensuring 99.999 per cent reliability, with all footage accurately tagged, timed and encrypted. These images can then be quickly searched, found and shared remotely via laptop, tablet or smartphone. No expensive call outs and no time wasted searching for the right footage, only to find that it's useless.

But Cloudview is a real game-changer for visual surveillance, not just because it's easier and more cost-effective to set up and use. It's also because, in an age where the amount of data generated is growing exponentially, Cloudview has been designed from the outset to scale. That doesn't simply mean adding or subtracting cameras from existing networks, although Cloudview does make that easy. It means unifying and simplifying the use of visual data on an industrial scale; standardising the access and sharing of footage from disparate systems into one integrated solution that is both secure and compliant.

Automatic encryption, authorisation, secure servers and audit trails mean that Cloudview makes it much easier for its users to meet their regulatory requirements ranging from the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act to the Protection of Freedoms Act and the Human Rights Act.

Many legacy DVRs and systems are also extremely vulnerable from an internet security perspective as they represent vulnerable access points that hackers can use to gain entry to wider data networks. However, our cloud-based flexibility combined with our focus on security means that the latest firmware upgrades and system enhancements can be downloaded via the internet, ensuring systems remain secure against all threats.

Whether complying with the latest data protection regulations or simply combatting the latest cyber threats, Cloudview's ability to automatically update via the internet is a vital cost-saving when compared to the expensive on-site visits that were previously necessary to either check footage, repair equipment, ensure compliance or install upgrades. In many cases, the expense of such visits meant they were simply not carried out. Now everything, from reviewing images to meeting regulatory requirements, can be met without the need for specialist expertise or dedicated staff.

We believe Cloudview represents a step change in both the capability and cost-effectiveness of CCTV. More and more housing providers such as MHS are seeing visual surveillance in a new light; as an on-tap, affordable and scalable resource that helps to protect people, property and reputations.

James Wickes is the CEO of Cloudview.

I MUST GO DOWN TO HP AGAIN, TO THE LONELY PC ON STANDBY…

(WITH APOLOGIES TO JOHN MASEFIELD)

Barry Alford, Head of ICT, Paragon Community Housing

Barry Alford, head of ICT at Paragon Community Housing, explains how the housing provider carried out a live simulation of a full 'DR day' to test its business continuity strategy and what it learned from the experience.

It was in one of our senior management team meetings (in December 2012) that I presented a DR options report. I didn't really think that the management team would go along with one particular recommendation and so, when they apparently did, I had to double-check: "Just to be certain on this, you do realise that this means closing down the head office for the day, shipping some staff to our fall-back site, and other staff working from our other premises or at home?".

There were a few moments of silence as the full significance dawned on them and we went on to reach a (qualified) agreement on how and when this could be carried out. Anyway, in the event we didn't progress it at the time until the idea was resurrected by our new finance director, Paul Rickard, who proved to be very supportive. 'DR day' was provisionally planned for November 2015, thus missing the worst of the winter months.

It was surprisingly difficult to pin down an exact date in November; we had to avoid events such as a board away-day, a staff conference and a group-wide 'amalgamation' (restructuring). A Friday was favourite for DR day, generally being a 'lighter' working day than others and with a weekend available for staff to catch up on work (this was for re-entering data and for systems to synchronise; more of that later). We selected 20 November, which later slipped to 27 November.

Main objectives and success criteria
Our main objectives can be summarised as:
- To ensure that the DR environment

initialises and was ready for use;
- Validation of all procedures and recovery of all Paragon-protected servers, and capturing any failing processes;
- To document a repeatable set of procedural testing activities;
- To be able to carry out all normal day-to-day business operations;
- To re-synchronise from our production environment to our DR environment immediately after the end of the test.

With the help of our audit team, we drew up 19 success criteria, of which these were the most important:

- Paragon has validated all recovery procedures, and where changes are identified, the appropriate actions are captured for follow up;
- Hewlett Packard (HPE) has recovered all Paragon-protected equipment, with internet access available;
- The Case House (HQ) switchboard has successfully diverted to HPE;
- The DR servers were resynchronised post-test within 48 hours.

HPE arrangements
At this point, it's probably worth briefly describing our historic DR arrangements. Until early 2014, our business continuity (BC) strategy had been based on the availability of a second head-office building five miles away. This was a convenient, ready-made mutual back-up situation, which we used with a server 'ship to site' contract. However, we lost the use of the second head-office site around the same time as our old DR contract came to an end so we decided to use this as an opportunity to improve our BC and DR capabilities.

We took out a contract for data-streaming and the provision of office accommodation with HPE at its datacentre in Reading. With the new arrangements, we were able to improve

our RTO and RPO to hours and minutes respectively. The HPE datacentre would function as Paragon's headquarters until our relocation back to our normal head office or other alternative accommodation.

A server room to die for…

We did our 'on-boarding' (an initial data load of 21 virtual machines with one physical server and 7Tb of SAN data) in record time using a data circuit that had been increased in size for a few weeks.

During the early part of our contract we carried out increasingly comprehensive tests, extending them each time, and reached a situation where we wanted to replicate a real disaster situation.

Preparation and planning
There was considerable negotiation with HPE on the subject of risk; we eventually reached an agreement and started detailed planning with them. A tremendous amount of work and detailed thought was carried out by our networks manager, Dave Anthony, to whom great credit is due for this successful exercise. He covered questions and activities such as:

- How close could we go in simulation or replication of a real-life disaster event?
- Should we plan to resynchronise the data entered at Reading to our live servers after the day of the test?

I MUST GO DOWN TO HP AGAIN, TO THE LONELY PC ON STANDBY...
Continued from previous page

No, we decided that such entered data would be discarded.

- Holding workshop sessions with staff on getting them prepared and able to work on the day, whether at Reading, at home or in a car parked on one of our estates. We covered the sequence of events, the documentation needed for the day and got them familiar with Mimecast (our internet email fall-back system).
- Do we organise a coach to take staff to Reading (which, of course, would not be available in the real-life situation)? We decided to do so because it would mean that a good number of staff would arrive together and give us a good start to the test.
- Corporate BC and ICT DR plans needed to be updated, which included the checking of several emergency 'battle boxes' at some backup sites on our housing schemes.
- Can we take payments? It was all done over the internet, so there was no reason why not.
- Could staff without their own equipment at home work effectively at public locations?
- There would probably be a dip in KPIs.
- What would our co-located contractors want to do?

Frequent planning meetings and communications were necessary during the weeks leading up to the actual test day. Meetings were held with our senior managers group to explain what we wanted to do and to get their buy-in, and presentations were given by Dave Anthony to staff at our chief executive's briefing sessions, demonstrating commitment and support from the top.

PR and communications with stakeholders
We had an interesting discussion about how much to tell tenants and stakeholder organisations. A full-blown campaign would cause a lot of questions and unease, so we decided that it was probably better to take a low-key approach.

We advised staff not to say "We're having a disaster recovery day!" as it would be an irrelevant and perhaps strange concept to tenants. Calls would be answered in the normal way and if it was

necessary to add any further information, we'd just say something like "Hello, it's Tom from Paragon and just to let you know, we're operating from another office today" or "I might need to follow that up on Monday".

Pre-DR day preparations
A copy of the live replica at Reading was taken at 6.30pm on Thursday (a "snapshot"), which would form our live data for the test day, although it would all be discarded at the end of the Friday.

We normally have two-factor authentication fronting our internet-facing Citrix system but we turned it off for the day to simplify log-in by remote workers.

We had to choose the optimum time to switch over our internet outward-facing addresses from the head-office to Reading; in good time so that our (new) network location was known to the outside world but not so early that work on the Thursday was seriously affected. We chose 7pm and by 8.40pm all of our HPE server environment was up and running.

We turned off two routers and isolated the head office from the world.

DR day arrives
Isolating the head office did have one unfortunate effect; it meant that we couldn't check, by any means of communication, that our overnight backup had been successful. That meant an early trip up the A3 to check that the job had worked successfully (I got up by mistake at 4.30am and promptly went back to bed for a couple of hours).

Hi-ho, hi-ho, it's off to Reading we go...

The big red banner at the top of the backup job results email did not presage well! However, fortunately it only concerned one minor admin server; if it had related to any significant live server then we had already agreed that we would abort the test.

Dave Anthony had gone straight to Reading with an early start to check the integrity of the domain, servers and PCs and, apart from a few tweaks, it was all looking good.
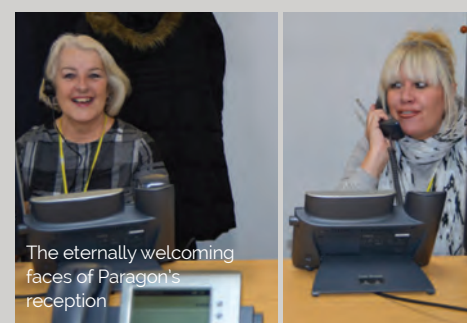
The eternally welcoming faces of Paragon's reception

We were go!

Staff started to trickle into our head office for the coach that we'd arranged to take them to Reading; others were making their own way and a few brave souls were on public transport. There was a nervous moment when the coach was a little late but then it was away…

Most of the DR ICT staff went directly to Reading to check the kit and help settle in our operational teams, while one member of our team worked at Head Office to support some training courses going on and do a special disc-to-tape back-up job. Willmott Dixon (our main maintenance company) staff are normally co-located with our repairs team and several accompanied us to Reading.

The coach arrived at Reading as planned at 10.30am and the first hour turned out be rather frantic. Many phones started ringing at once when we pointed our main NGN to Reading and switched over from our overnight control centre. It took staff a while, of course, to get used to their new equipment and desktops, and it was quite a shock for some with everybody working in an open-plan environment.

I MUST GO DOWN TO HP AGAIN, TO THE LONELY PC ON STANDBY…

Continued from previous page

The command and control centre for the day

As the day progressed, our staff settled in and thoughts turned to what would be happening about lunch? A sandwich run was organised which had a miraculously calming effect (with M&S doing well that day).

At the end of the day, we closed down the HPE environment, opened up the head office communications to the internet and started the resynchronisation of data from the head office to Reading, which was completed by 1.45pm on the Saturday. This was a period of risk, with no off-site data replica of integrity being available until the resynchronisation was complete.

In the event, only a few staff came in on the Saturday to rekey data from the test day and most preferred to wait until their return to the office on the Monday.

What worked well and not so well
Getting staff involved before the event was key to their willingness to make it work and one of the delights for me was the way our staff came together, with a great attitude of coming up with innovative ways of coping. Two examples were the use of WhatsApp to communicate within teams and nominated individuals leading on retrieving data from our housing system to avoid multiple Citrix logins.

The only real significant problem found during the day was that our live finance system would not come up, although surprisingly there was no problem at all with the test system (we think that this was due to an oddity with the overnight internal backup on 'live'). A couple of other systems did not come up straightaway but were fixed within several hours.

Our temporary offices

On the day, we met 17 of our 19 success criteria, one was partly met and we're still completing the final one.

HPE staff again proved to be very helpful and technically excellent.

Would we do anything differently?
After DR day, we asked our staff to carry out a survey on what worked well and what could be improved:

· Most of them said that they were enthused by it and were able to do what they needed to do;
· Those directly involved in the DR test felt very involved;
· Others working remotely felt 'out of the loop' to some degree;
· 'Tethered' phones generally worked well;
· Enhancements are needed to our 'hubs' (almost a small district office) with more facilities.
· It highlighted the heavy reliance of our staff on email, which may be well served by moving Microsoft Exchange to the cloud.

It was business as usual on the Monday after the test, with no ill effects and staff using our live systems quite normally.

On our 'things to do better' list:
· We need clear (DR) leads for each department, with plans of the immediate requirements for the day;
· Better organisation of lunch.

Conclusion
Without doubt, it was a worthwhile exercise to carry out and confirmed our confidence in our plans, the back-up environment and HPE.

The most important result was proving we could successfully transfer and use our systems on up-to-date data at our fall-back accommodation.

Would we carry it out again? Most certainly, yes. However, we would concentrate on different areas not covered in this first test, such as remote staff and the hubs, and test restoration of those systems not streamed to Reading.

Barry Alford is head of ICT, Paragon Community Housing.

oneserve ®

> ## Self-Service: *A Smarter Way to Work*

[**self-sur-**vis]

noun

1. a service organisation with true ownership of their Field Service Management software.

or

2. a SaaS provider that harnesses cloud innovation to power companies to grow.

adjective

3. pertaining to a self-sufficient practice of managing a mobile workforce with better control and efficiency.

or

4. the demise of costly professional services and long implementations.

See also...

Oneserve.co.uk; Self-Service **Mobility**; Self-Service **Success**; Self-Service **Performance Tracking**

> ## Example:
> *"Self-Service enabled us to achieve continuous improvement across our service delivery."*

ONESERVE'S VIEWS ON FIELD SERVICE MANAGEMENT

Chris Proctor, Sales & Marketing Director, Oneserve

Oneserve has reported that the market it operates in is being stifled by the market leaders who are putting their own interests before the needs of their customers. Operating in a service-oriented market, Oneserve is calling this a fundamental flaw, questioning the integrity of such providers and the quality of the service they deliver to the mobile field market, suggesting that, "the dominant business model lacks the flexibility to adjust to the prevailing market demand, and subsequently, opens up a field of discontent."

Oneserve's sales and marketing director, Chris Proctor explains further; he said:

Many of the large players in this market have grown wildly out of control, meaning that customers are now experiencing appalling levels of service and in many cases are paying extortionate amounts for professional services that shouldn't be needed, thereby increasing the true cost of ownership and hindering their ability to develop and grow.

There are too many of these lumbering dinosaurs in our sector. They are falling so far behind the ball in terms of where the market should, and will, be heading over the next few years that extinction seems to be only round the corner for them. For too long, the business model of selling cheap licences and then pushing hugely-expensive professional services

has been the tried and tested method of securing sales. But this is changing; it has to be about a true SaaS offering, a flexible approach that allows technology of different types to talk to each other and giving customers what they really want; a self-service model that allows them the freedom to use the solution as they see fit, without having to purchase extra services on top.

The financial turnover of a number of these dinosaurs in this market is impressive. What should be so worrying for them and their customers is that despite this, many are making huge losses. This, combined with their lack of appetite or ability to change, is adding to the momentum of the huge meteorite that is speeding towards them. There is no sign that this momentum is slowing down. Unless they are able to turn their business proposition upside down, which is not easy with such huge losses and multiple VCs piling on the pressure, there is a real chance that they'll be wiped off the face of the market.

The world of field service management is, like most, changing dramatically. The advances made in technology can make a difference to the way that organisations can manage, monitor and analyse their field forces. However, this is causing even more issues with so many companies in the field service management sector jumping on and over-hyping new

technologies and trends such as the internet of things without getting the basics right first.

The core issues that customers are crying out for, such as self-service, are largely being ignored. There are many customers who want to buy the solution and run it themselves and not be held to the whole swathe of professional services that too often accompanies any purchase in this sector.

Companies need to understand and reflect the fact that the role of a field-based workforce has changed dramatically over the past few years. Field service management can no longer be a rigid structured solution; it has to be a flexible one that embraces the many aspects of what a mobile workforce needs. The self-service approach is absolutely what customers want and need. They are no longer satisfied being tied to hugely expensive additional services, but instead want to buy the solution and grow and develop without 'forced' assistance.

The world has changed and a new breed of faster, more agile and innovative companies are taking the places of the out-of-date lumbering dinosaurs that have dominated our sector for so many years.

Chris Proctor is the sales and marketing director at Oneserve.

CAPITA LAUNCHES CISCO UC SERVICE

A new cloud-based unified communications service aimed at helping housing providers streamline collaboration has been launched by Capita.

The Cisco-based Capita Unified Communications in the Cloud service combines the Cisco Hosted Collaboration Solution (HCS) with Capita's secure cloud and service management expertise to deliver collaborative technologies including instant

messaging, voice, video, conferencing and presence from desktop phones, PCs, tablets and smartphones.

Capita's new service enables housing staff to work from anywhere on any device, increasing mobility and facilitating virtual teams and remote working. Employees can connect to team members from anywhere, whether they're in the office, at a hot-desk or in the field.

DELL NETWORK AT NEWPORT CITY HOMES

Newport City Homes has completed the implementation of a new network (wired and wireless) from Dell, replacing its previous end-of-life network and reflecting its need to handle higher volumes of data.

Owen Barrett, information systems manager, Newport City Homes, said, "If the wireless network went down, we had to contact our supplier and wait for its engineers to resolve the issue. At one point, we were without wireless access for three months.

"The network itself had never been easy to scale or simple to manage. Of the three-person senior IT team at NCH, only I had the technical skills to administer the network. Other members of the team

had to be able to manage the network if there was an issue while I was out of the office."

NCH decided to address the wireless network first. Barrett approached Dell and outlined the challenges with its current system and NCH's plans to 'flood' its offices with wi-fi connectivity.

"I talked to Dell about how wireless connectivity will play a greater role in our daily operations. In just a couple of days, we were given a Dell wireless solution to test and we installed the network in no more than 15 minutes after deploying the access points."

NCH built the new wireless network around Dell Networking W-AP135 access points with a Dell Networking

W-Series Mobility Controller for centralised management.

Barrett said, "We were able to give staff fast, secure access to the data they needed through our Dell solution. We were also able to offer wi-fi connectivity to guests. We had everything up and running the same day as the access points were delivered."

With the wireless challenges resolved, NCH's attention moved to its wired network. The existing Cisco-based network had come to the end of its life and the IT team expected a significant increase in data traffic. NCH asked for proposals from the incumbent Cisco, as well as HP and Dell. Comparing the options, NCH chose an open

standards solution rather than the Cisco offering.

Barrett said, "Given an alternative, we always try to avoid vendor lock-in from proprietary solutions. We received a networking proposal from Dell that met our requirements and ensured an open standards-based solution for a more cost-effective networking environment.

"We installed the new Dell network in three days, whereas we'd normally expect a project like this to take weeks. Plus, we can meet increasing data traffic and provide stable wired and wireless access to data for NCH as it expands over the coming years."

NOW WE ARE 50 – JOIN OUR CHAMPAGNE RECEPTION

Here we are, over eight years since the first issue of Housing Technology. To celebrate the 50th issue of Housing Technology (March 2016), we are hosting a complimentary champagne and canape reception for all of our readers from 1700-1900 on Wednesday 2nd March 2016 at the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry (in parallel with our 2016 conference).

The reception is open to all Housing Technology readers. There is no charge to attend the reception to celebrate our 50th issue; we are delighted to host an informal party as a thank you to our readers, speakers, advertisers and sponsors. If you would like to come along, please complete the short form at: **www.housing-technology.com/events/champagne**.

UPDATE ON HOUSING TECHNOLOGY'S DIGITAL BY DEFAULT 2016 REPORT

The online survey for Housing Technology's Digital by Default 2016 report is now open. At the time of writing, we've already received 160 completed surveys but there's still time for you to add your knowledge and experience to the survey and report.

The online survey will only take you 5-10 minutes to complete; in return, we'll send you a copy of the final Digital by Default 2016 as soon as it is published in March 2016. To take part in the survey, please follow the link from: **www.housing-technology.com/events/dbd16**.

Published in conjunction with Go ON UK and kindly sponsored by Aareon, Advanced Business Solutions, Halton Housing Trust, Longhurst Group, Orchard Information Systems, RHP and Sentinel Housing, 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).

ORBIT ROLLS OUT CADCORP GIS FOR HOUSING MANAGEMENT

Orbit Group has rolled out a web-based GIS system from Cadcorp for its 1,300 staff to view geographic information, maps and analysis. All Orbit staff now have access to the MyM@ps tool which allows them to profile housing stock and customer demographics, reducing the need for site visits and creating a more efficient way of working.

Steve Litchfield, GIS manager, Orbit Group, said, "The business is now using a much more efficient GIS platform, which supports our digital-by-default agenda and provides staff with the tools they need to deal with tenant queries faster and more effectively.

"I was the 'go-to' person when people needed specific geographic information, maps and analysis, but this was unsustainable as the business grew.
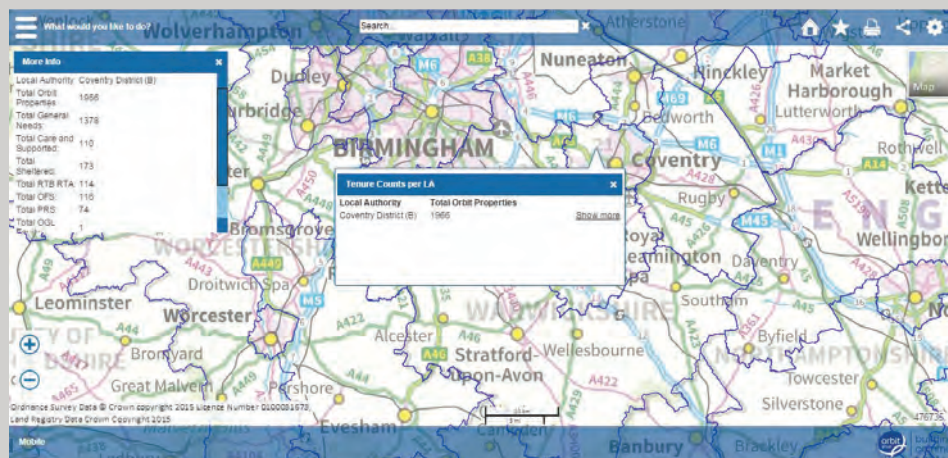
Together with Cadcorp, we have evolved the system to ensure it meets the needs of the business and enables staff to self-serve."

Orbit's estate management team ran the first myM@ps pilot and following the success of this, they were the first team to go live in March 2015. There are now six customised views for development, maintenance, letting and management, grounds maintenance and service charges, sales planning, and other general business activities.

Kevin Ruane, estates area manager, Orbit East and South, said, "For estates services, myM@ps will allow us to work smarter and deliver better value for money when negotiating new contracts. It will also help us deal with tenant queries as there is easy access to a street view of any designated area, enabling us to be more precise with our answers to any questions."

Martin McGarry, managing director, Cadcorp said, "Orbit started reaping the benefits of deploying geographic data shortly after installing their first desktop GIS. By moving to a web-based deployment it has shown it's now possible to share those benefits throughout the organisation."

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If you share our view of how technology could transform your operations, and more importantly, your tenants' lives, please visit www.housing-technology.com/events/ht16 to find out more and reserve your place at Housing Technology 2016.

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