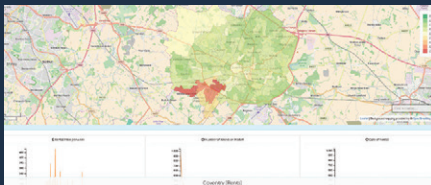
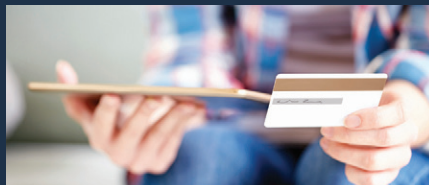


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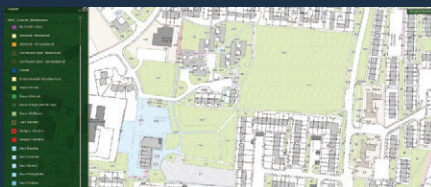
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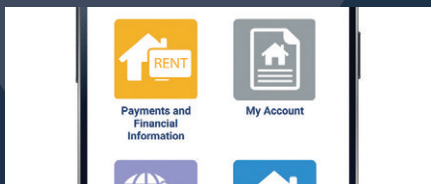
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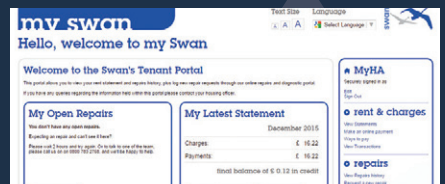
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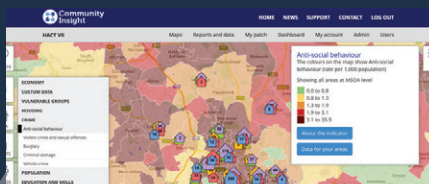
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HOUSING TECHNOLOGY IN-DEPTH 2016

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21 JULY 2016

FURTHER DETAILS TO FOLLOW...

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EDITOR'S NOTES

What's that coming over the hill?

Housing providers are going to have a lot on their plates over the next 2-5 years and beyond. Whether you're worrying about universal credit, rent reductions, pay-to-stay, right-to-buy, mergers and acquisitions, or the wider economy (or all of them), any of these has the potential to be either a disaster waiting to happen or an opportunity for growth.

Although those possible worries are varied, what they have in common is that technology lies at the heart of each of them, not only as a basic enabler but also as a very important differentiator. Those who flourish and those who fall behind will be distinguished by how they've chosen to make technology central (or not) to what they do and how they manage their businesses.

We've written in the past about how technology in social housing has gone from being a basic service to now being a successful enabler for operational change. However, we've now reached the next 'tipping point', where technology, and IT departments, should be proactively leading operational change and better business performance.

In short, a change from, 'yes, we can do that for you' to, 'here's how we're going to do it'.

Getting to know you

We've written in past Editor's Notes about the importance of both 'straight-through processing' (in short, the automation, from start to finish, of as many standardised repetitive processes, such as a tenant requesting a repair through to the repair being completed without needless manual interventions during the processing of that repair) and gaining 'a single version of the truth' across multiple siloed applications.

However, there is a third area to consider: how well do you really know your tenants and do you actually know which properties or land you own or manage?

Due to the above-mentioned disparate applications, isolated spreadsheets and simple human mistakes, most housing providers either don't know their tenants as well as they think they do (most commonly) or they don't know them as well as they would like. In addition, there are frequent stories of housing providers 'discovering' properties or land that they didn't know they owned.

Why is this important? The most important reason is that the introduction of universal credit, pay-to-stay and annual rent reductions (among other regulatory and legislative changes), all of which will have a considerable effect on housing providers' financial affairs, mean that housing providers must become more efficient in collecting rents and maximising revenues from their property portfolios as well as ensuring that maintenance and repairs contracts, for example, only cover the properties and land for which they are responsible (c.f. the feature article on 'GIS in housing' on page 14).

Technology is the key to how you get to know your tenants better as well as how you can maintain more accurate property records. Whether you use CRM and surveying software to gain more accurate information on your tenants or use GIS and mapping tools to help monitor your property portfolio, the important point is that technology is the fundamental enabler for 'getting to know you better'.

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Grŵp Cynefin chooses MIS-AMS software to manage its estates

Grŵp Cynefin has chosen MIS Active Management Systems' housing management software after a competitive three-way pitch. The ActiveH software will be used to manage the housing provider's rents, repairs, resident texting, planned maintenance, business intelligence reporting and CRM in a single integrated system.

Grŵp Cynefin, created from the merger of two smaller housing providers in 2014, began evaluating how to integrate the new organisation's housing management systems and processes in February 2015. Chosen from an initial list of six IT suppliers, MIS-AMS's ActiveH will replace the two previous systems, Aareon QL and Capita IBS.

The housing provider will use ActiveH to provide a single view of its asset and tenant data, making it simpler to manage maintenance and repairs across its estate of 4,500 properties and easier to communicate with residents.

Roy Carroll, project manager, Grŵp Cynefin, said, "Choosing the new housing management system was central to our strategic plan of being able to offer tenants consistency across all communications channels.

"We've done a full evaluation of the business requirements and taken the opportunity to write a new suite of policies that will allow us to tailor our services and communicate more efficiently with not just residents, but contractors and employees too."

The project will be undertaken in two phases and began in April 2016.



Walis George (L), CEO of Grŵp Cynefin and Chris McLaughlin, Managing Director, MIS-AMS

SENTINEL HOUSING UPGRADES TO CAPITA OPENHOUSING

Having used Capita's housing management software for the past 12 years, Sentinel Housing Association is upgrading to Capita OpenHousing.

The upgrade is part of Sentinel's strategy to improve the delivery of customer services and to increase efficiencies in its business processes, including housing strategy, housing management and property development, as well as maintenance and asset management.

Duncan Brown, finance director, Sentinel Housing Association, said, "We're excited about moving to OpenHousing and really pleased with our ongoing partnership with Capita. Our 'doing it differently' programme marks a major transformation which involves redesigning all of our business processes to be digital by default."



Capita software protects tenants from rogue landlords

Capita's software services business has launched a new web-based application, Advantage Impact for Rogue Landlord and Agency Management, to enable local authorities to take action against rogue private landlords and letting agents. As part of its launch, Capita is offering the software free for the first year to the first 100 local authorities who sign up by the end of May 2016.

The online solution will accommodate full investigation and case management details, multiple accommodation information, appeal information, the recording and management of bans,

sanctions and complaints, and the aiding of improvements and enforcements. Landlords and letting agents can also be registered and published by local authorities, making it both easier for tenants to identify the best providers and for local authorities to report on rogue landlords.

Roger Birkinshaw, housing director at Capita's software services business, said, "We have worked with local authorities for over 10 years to support them in protecting vulnerable people. Tackling the issue of rogue landlords and letting agents is a natural next step.

"Advantage Impact will help local authorities to easily manage and investigate complaints about private landlords and agencies, and it will support their ability to issue banning orders and other sanctions if needed."

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AAREON WINS AT ONE MANCHESTER, SOHA, HFT AND KNOWES HOUSING

Aareon has won four new contracts for its QL housing management system at One Manchester, Soha Housing, Hft and Knowes Housing.

One HMS for One Manchester

one.manchester
social innovation

One Manchester was launched in 2015 when Eastlands Homes and City South Manchester Housing Trust joined together. As a result, the newly-formed organisation wanted to consolidate its existing finance systems onto a single platform as well as consolidate and maintain only one housing management system by October 2016.

One Manchester's tender invitations were for the provision of a licence for up to 300 desktop users (and 12,500 properties under management) of its proposed new housing management systems. Following a series of demonstrations and reference site visits, One Manchester decided to move the whole group to the Aareon QL housing management system.

Adam Cowking, transition project manager, One Manchester, said, "After a detailed review, One Manchester saw that Aareon QL was best-placed to meet our needs. We chose Aareon on the strength of its core product, a clear roadmap that supported our wider ambitions, and a strong track record in successful partnership working."

Soha's CRM, self-service and mobile working



Soha Housing's IT team

Soha Housing has chosen Aareon as its preferred supplier for a new housing management solution. The implementation of Aareon QL at Soha Housing began in February 2016 and is scheduled to go live in May 2017.



In addition to providing housing and asset management functionality, Aareon plans to improve Soha's CRM module, create a new self-service portal and support more advanced mobile working.

Nasreen Hussain, director of finance and resources, Soha Housing, said, "Ultimately, IT is there to support us in providing and managing homes and tenancies. So any new system had to meet tough criteria and the whole procurement process involved staff from across the organisation."



QL Lite at Hft

Hft, a national charity for people with learning disabilities, has chosen Aareon QL Lite for its new housing management system. QL

Lite will replace Hft's spreadsheet-based processes and will be mainly used by Hft's estates and facilities department. It is due to go live in July 2016 after work started on the implementation in September 2015.

Knowes Housing's speedy implementation

Following the decision by Knowes Housing Association's previous housing management system supplier to 'end of life' their software, the housing provider had less than a year to implement a new housing management system.

Knowes Housing began its procurement process in March 2015 and went live with Aareon QL Housing & Finance in March 2016, just before support for its previous system ceased. The housing provider said that the timescale was a huge challenge for its internal team because they had very little technical knowledge in-house and needed to outsource this to a third party.



Pierre De Fence, director, Knowes Housing Association, said, "Following

the announcement from our previous supplier, giving us around 12 months' notice of ceasing support for our system, we knew that selecting, procuring and implementing a new housing management system in the time available would be challenging."

Unlike many implementations, Knowes Housing couldn't devote any staff to the project full time so the project had to be carried out alongside staff carrying out their full-time jobs, with Knowes Housing staff drafted in at weekends to undertake testing. Aareon also advised Knowes Housing to use an external contractor to help them manipulate their data into a format which was suitable for transfer into QL.

De Fence said, "The implementation process was well managed on both sides, with our staff going the extra mile in undertaking training and checking data alongside carrying out their normal day jobs. However, we still have a lot to do in terms of developing reporting frameworks and implementing the phase two modules, such as Visual Studio, Task Centre, Case Management, Voids and Asset Management, later this year."

A man in a brown suit and striped tie is looking out a window. He has a watch on his left wrist and is adjusting his tie. The background is a blurred cityscape.

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THAMES VALLEY HOUSING TRACKS RIGHT-TO-BUY AND PAY-TO-STAY WITH CLEARVIEW

Thames Valley Housing Association has been using Clearview's business intelligence and reporting suite in order to assess the financial impact of the government's right-to-buy and pay-to-stay policies on its operations by building a financial model.

Chris Roberts, data analyst, Thames Valley Housing Association, said, "We chose to use Clearview because it is perfectly suited to the task we faced. We needed to combine and blend a number of data sets, identify where we had holes in our data, and then supplement the model with data to ensure we could effectively assess the impact of all aspects of the policies by fully considering all eligibility and restrictions imposed."

Regarding right-to-buy, Roberts said, "We started with our property data and then added length of tenure to it from our

Civica housing management system. We then included fields to help us identify properties specifically built for older people, where the council had imposed restrictions on a property's use, and also whether a property was part of a section 106 agreement or adapted for those with a disability or rural support. Clearview was great for this because it was easy to combine data sets and add extra columns and filters. We were also able to see early on where we had missing data.

"For pay-to-stay, we needed more data about tenants and also an assessment of what the market rents were. For this, we identified a data set of average UK rents from gov.uk and used it in the model. We expanded our tenant data with historical rental payments information, looking at arrears, those on benefits, and so on, to assess eligibility."

Midland Heart dials up Rostrvm for universal credit

Midland Heart and Rostrvm Solutions have developed a bespoke call-dialling system in order to mitigate the effects of the introduction of universal credit by improving rent collection rates and reducing arrears. Midland Heart is using the system to get in touch with tenants via voice alerts and text messages as soon as their agreed payments become overdue.

Gary Hardy, head of income, allocations, property sales and tenancy standards, Midland Heart, said, "The Ofcom-certified system makes it very clear that Midland Heart is trying to get in touch and simply asks them to stay on the line to speak to a member of our income team. Alternatively, if they are unable to talk,

we provide a specific number the tenant can use to call us back when it's more convenient.

"Following the introduction of the automated dialling system in November 2015, we've seen a 300 per cent increase in tenant contacts and reduced the amount of time the team are spending chasing tenants with calls and letters. We have also achieved an increase of almost £350,000 in cash payments during the last six months."

Midland Heart reported that it had increased direct debit payments to 25 per cent of all rent payments, having been fixed at 15 per cent for over seven

years, and turn-around times for voids had been reduced by 25 per cent, down to 19 days per property.



Axiom Housing's financial flexibility with Capita

Axiom Housing Association is using Capita's Income Management solution to help its tenants manage their finances. The housing provider can now offer greater flexibility for tenants when applying for, and managing, repayment arrangements, particularly following the roll out of universal credit.

Peter Matthews, head of ICT, Axiom Housing Association, said, "By offering greater flexibility for our tenants, we can support them better in their repayments and any arrears arrangements,

while also having a much clearer understanding of the entire organisation's income management."

Other recent 'go-live' projects from Capita's housing team include Cartrefi Conwy Housing with Capita's Homelessness solution, North Devon Homes with Capita InSight's Rental Exchange solution for tackling financial exclusion, and ISOS Group and Aragon Housing with additional Capita mobile working modules.

CAMPBILL VILLAGE TRUST SIGNS UP RAM FOR COMPONENT ACCOUNTING



Camphill Village Trust is using Real Asset Management's fixed asset software to improve the financial reporting for its 300 properties and implement component accounting under SORP guidelines.

In future, the charity's asset register will increase from 300 to almost 2,500 records under component accounting for which depreciation calculations and detailed reporting will be needed.

Balbinder Lally, central financial controller, Camphill Village Trust, said, "Even managing our small number

of property assets on a spreadsheet had become time consuming and its limitations for analysis and reporting were apparent. Although as a charity we are not yet forced to comply with SORP requirements, we were keen to follow best practice and to get our accounts, processes and procedures up to date in preparation for meeting any future regulations.

"The new system will let us adopt component accounting with the peace of mind that all data is recorded in a central

location and, most importantly, that the depreciation on each component is being calculated correctly and that all financial reporting is accurate."

Used alongside its existing finance system, Sage 50, RAM's software will give CVT the facility to create user-defined fields for comprehensive searching and analysis as well as the ability to produce instant analysis reports in accordance with SORP for past, present and future periods.

Two Saints' accounting with Paloma Systems

Homelessness charity Two Saints is using Paloma Systems' Harmonia and WRAPP software for rent accounting, monitoring its supporting people requirements, exit questionnaires and outcome monitoring.

Nigel Miles, IT manager, Two Saints, said, "We originally looked at Paloma's WRAPP rent account system in 2012 to replace our old rent accounting package when we were introduced to Harmonia.

"It was very new and didn't quite fit our needs, plus we were also looking for some very specific support management

recording based around the 'outcome star' methodology, but Paloma agreed to develop Harmonia to include all our specific requirements and mostly to the benefit of the application itself.

"Combined with WRAPP in the back-end, we were also able to integrate rent and account information right into Harmonia, providing a single support management application that is very powerful and easy to use. Our staff love it."



LAKE'S HOUSING FINANCE SURVEY 2016

Cost reduction and streamlining are necessities driven by the twin pressures of rising demand for housing and funding constraints. Purchase-to-pay and procurement systems have a crucial role to play and have been a particular area of interest for housing providers' finance departments in recent years.

According to a recent survey from Lake Financial Systems, investment in systems for electronic purchasing and document

management has been particularly strong. These kinds of systems have achieved near universal adoption among housing providers with 1,000 or more homes.

That being so, what is the likely focus of investment in the future? The answer may be in the growing trend for systems to manage employee expenses due to the time and cost of processing expense claims for large numbers of people.

Expense claim management systems help improve budgetary control, simplify workflows and ensure adherence to corporate policies.

The survey also indicates that there is scope for further investment in procurement software. Currently the preserve of the larger organisations, there is now growing interest among housing providers of all sizes.

MOBYSOFT WINS QUEEN'S AWARD FOR INNOVATION

Mobysoft has won a Queen's Awards for Enterprise in Innovation for its cloud-based solution RentSense.

Following the government's one per cent rent cut, Mobysoft's RentSense is helping housing providers to achieve substantial efficiencies, such as helping Asra Housing Group reduce arrears by £1.65 million over two years.

Many housing providers' IT systems for managing rent payments and arrears typically wait for tenants to miss a payment before flagging them for contact. RentSense uses

innovative algorithms to analyse tenants' payment histories and then predicts which tenants will pay on time and which won't, so income teams can be proactive and able to help support tenants more effectively while reducing arrears.

Janette Pearce, head of neighbourhoods, Together Housing Group, said, "Working with Mobysoft is reducing our arrears. RentSense helps us to minimise costs, waste and ultimately reduce the workload for our income team."

MOBILE WORKING

Wales & West Housing's Sharepoint mobilisation with K2



Wales & West Housing Association has completed the implementation of K2's Blackpearl and Smartforms to augment its existing Microsoft Sharepoint capabilities. The software is now being used by over 300 end-users.

Wales & West previously relied on Microsoft SharePoint

and several other key IT systems in areas such as housing and repairs, but none of these different technologies were connected to each other. To improve the efficiency of its processes, as part of its plan to find a better way to collect business data, share it across various systems and make it accessible to mobile employees, Wales & West shortlisted two workflow solutions during its selection process.

Gareth Abramczyk, Sharepoint administrator, Wales & West Housing Association, said, "We could see straight away that K2 was easily the most capable and complete solution, but it wasn't until we received the product training that we realised just how many doors it would open for us."

The housing provider has since developed six separate business applications using K2 Blackpearl and K2 Smartforms. One particularly useful solution allows mobile employees to access information about historical property repairs while they are doing site visits. Using any web-enabled mobile device, employees can log in, load up a K2 form and enter their enquiry details.

Abramczyk said, "K2 gives employees views of all the data they need, in one place, without having to return to the office and go from one system to another."

Another mobile solution enables employees to collect data about ad-hoc maintenance jobs in the field. Data is recorded in a K2 Smartform using a mobile device and automatically sent to the relevant back-office systems.

Abramczyk said, "Employees can now do in seconds what might otherwise have taken hours. K2 allows us to pass data safely from what is essentially an insecure web to a secure intranet. It creates an efficient, easy-to-follow process for tenants, while also saving administrative time."

KIRONA IMPROVES RIVERSIDE'S CUSTOMER SERVICES

Riverside has implemented Kirona's Job Manager and Xmbrace DRS software enabling its customer service centre and responsive repairs teams to deliver better services to tenants.

Ian Gregg, director of asset management, Riverside, said, "Tenant feedback highlighted to us that improvements were needed in how repairs were reported, scheduled and managed. By implementing Kirona's Job Manager and Xmbrace DRS software, our customer service centre staff can now book and change appointments with

real-time availability so fewer appointments are having to be rearranged."

Ryan King, responsive repairs team leader, Riverside, added, "The new software is very effective when it comes to daily planning. Because it can plot appointments geographically, we can schedule jobs by postcode so that jobs in the same area can be arranged on the same day. We can even use the system as a database for repairs information, such as special instructions about avoiding school run times."



HALTON HOUSING TRUST

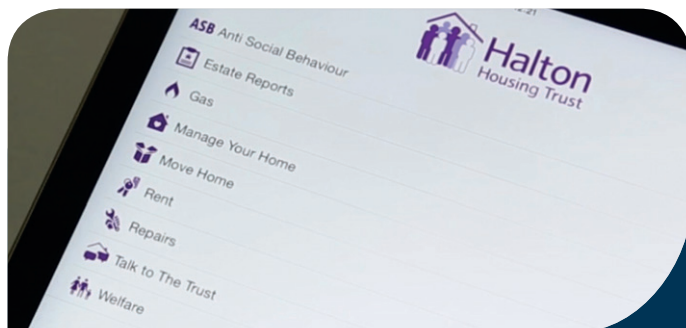
Customer app enables Halton Housing to re-focus £2.5m to help support their most vulnerable customers

By constantly reviewing the services it provides and with the advent of Welfare Reform and in particular Universal Credit, Halton knew that it needed to make a number of changes to ensure the best possible support for its customers during these challenging times. One area it identified was the need to exploit the potential of digital technology to support the delivery of services.

As a result, Halton decided to work closely with 1st Touch to deliver a ground-breaking Customer Self-Service App. The app is available 24/7/365 and customers can access it via their mobile devices - smart phones and tablets, allowing them to action requests themselves through this self-service portal using the technology that they are familiar with, whenever it is convenient for them.



Halton Housing Trust is a forward thinking and dynamic not-for-profit housing association that owns and manages over 6,700 homes with over 16,000 customers in the Cheshire towns of Runcorn and Widnes. Halton's Board works closely with its executive management team to ensure the Trust's Strategic Aim of 'Improving People's Lives' is achieved.



"1st Touch took the time to understand what we needed and delivered a highly effective solution which is all the more impressive because of the real time integration and the automation of CRM contacts and colleague workflows"

Director of ICT, Carole Galsworthy

With this 1st Touch App, customers can contact Halton to request a Repair, report Anti-Social Behaviour or Estate issues such as Graffiti or Fly Tipping and it allows them to send in related photographs too. They can order a gas service or gas repair or report a gas leak, request a move or transfer and much more. If they need to check their rent balance or to make a payment, this is also now possible, via the App.

The 1st Touch self-service App allows Halton to free up significant resources that can be re-directed and re-focused to delivering additional support to its most vulnerable customers supporting the main aim of the Digital First strategy, which is to ensure that the Welfare Reform changes and particularly the introduction of Universal Credit will have a net nil impact on the Trust in terms of costs and resources.

Contact us today to find out how 1st Touch can help you too.

SPECTRUM HOUSING SAVES £180K WITH MIS-AMS

Spectrum Housing Group has estimated it will save £180,000 in the first year, or the equivalent time of five members of staff, by implementing ActiveH Mobile CRM and Mobile Surveyor from MIS Active Management Systems.

Rob Webber, group director of operations, Spectrum Housing Group, said, "Since July 2015, we have been developing mobile solutions for our frontline staff so that they can enquire, action and update information while on the road using their iPads. The mobile working solutions being implemented will revolutionise the way frontline officers conduct their day-to-day activities and improve the service we can offer to our residents."

Mobile Surveyor will enable a team of nine surveyors to spend more time in the field, with each of them looking after around 2,000 properties and conducting 400 stock condition surveys each year. Each survey takes vast amounts of time in terms of filling in the relevant paperwork, accessing the correct documents for each property and making sure that the survey information is filed correctly after the survey is completed, as well as travel time to and from Spectrum's offices.

Webber said, "Some of the savings come from the surveyors' new-found ability to conduct the survey, access the information remotely in the field, and then update the system with the stock condition report from the property. This cuts a 20-step process down to just six steps, resulting in a 10 per cent increase in productivity."

The deployment of Mobile Surveyor forms part of Spectrum's overall digital strategy which also includes the launch of a new online service portal for tenants and the implementation of Mobile CRM for neighbourhood officers.

Webber added, "Mobile CRM will provide time savings for a team of 40 neighbourhood officers and five welfare benefit officers, freeing them up to visit tenants at home as well as providing them with the means to better answer questions relating to repairs, rent enquires, and any other requests residents may have."

NEW DOORSTEP APPOINTMENTS MODULE FROM 1ST TOUCH

1st Touch has just launched a doorstep appointments module to simplify and speed up appointment scheduling by either mobile housing staff or by tenants through a self-service portal and self-service app.

Whilst visiting tenants at home, the new module enables mobile workers to book appointments through their handheld devices for services such as repairs, financial inclusion reviews or care assessments. This eliminates the need for staff to return to the office before attempting to schedule suitable times and dates or spend time getting hold of the appropriate members of staff to complete an appointment.

The software, which is integrated with 1st Touch's 360-degree dashboard application, enables the operatives to request the best appointment times available, prioritise or rearrange any appointments already made, order text reminders, book follow-up actions and record related text and voice notes. The new module also enables all operatives visiting a client to become multi-disciplinary, by offering appointments for a full range of services, not just those in their own area. So a

repair operative can arrange a visit by a housing officer to discuss issues such as anti-social behaviour or estate issues. Alternatively, a care operative could arrange an appointment for a financial inclusion officer to discuss the prospects of a discretionary housing payment where, for example, a tenant has lost income through ill health.

The software can also be used as part of 1st Touch's tenant self-service portal and app, enabling tenants to book appointments themselves online through their own devices.

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch, said, "Many housing providers want to mobilise tenant-facing staff and need the tools to support this level of engagement with their tenants. The new module meets these requirements, significantly improving operational efficiency by ensuring that mobile staff can request a full range of appointments when visiting tenants at home.

"Similarly, by building this same technology into our tenancy self-service portal, tenants can take control of the appointment scheduling process at their own convenience and through their own devices."

Day	Date	Start	End
Mon	02/05/2016	08:30	13:00
Mon	02/05/2016	09:30	15:00
Mon	02/05/2016	08:30	16:24

AmicusHorizon to lead 1st Touch user group



AmicusHorizon's business solutions manager, Robert Stewart, has been appointed as the new chairman of 1st Touch's user group. The appointment follows AmicusHorizon's

development of 1st Touch-based solutions for repairs, health and safety inspections, voids, lettings, income management and ASB visits.

Stewart said, "I'm keen to share knowledge and collect feedback. We need the user group to be more than a focus group and to be a proactive, positive influence on 1st Touch's product, service and solution development."

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch, said, "Robert has an unrivalled knowledge of mobile and related technology in the social housing sector because he's seen 1st Touch software at work in the context of a London G15 member."

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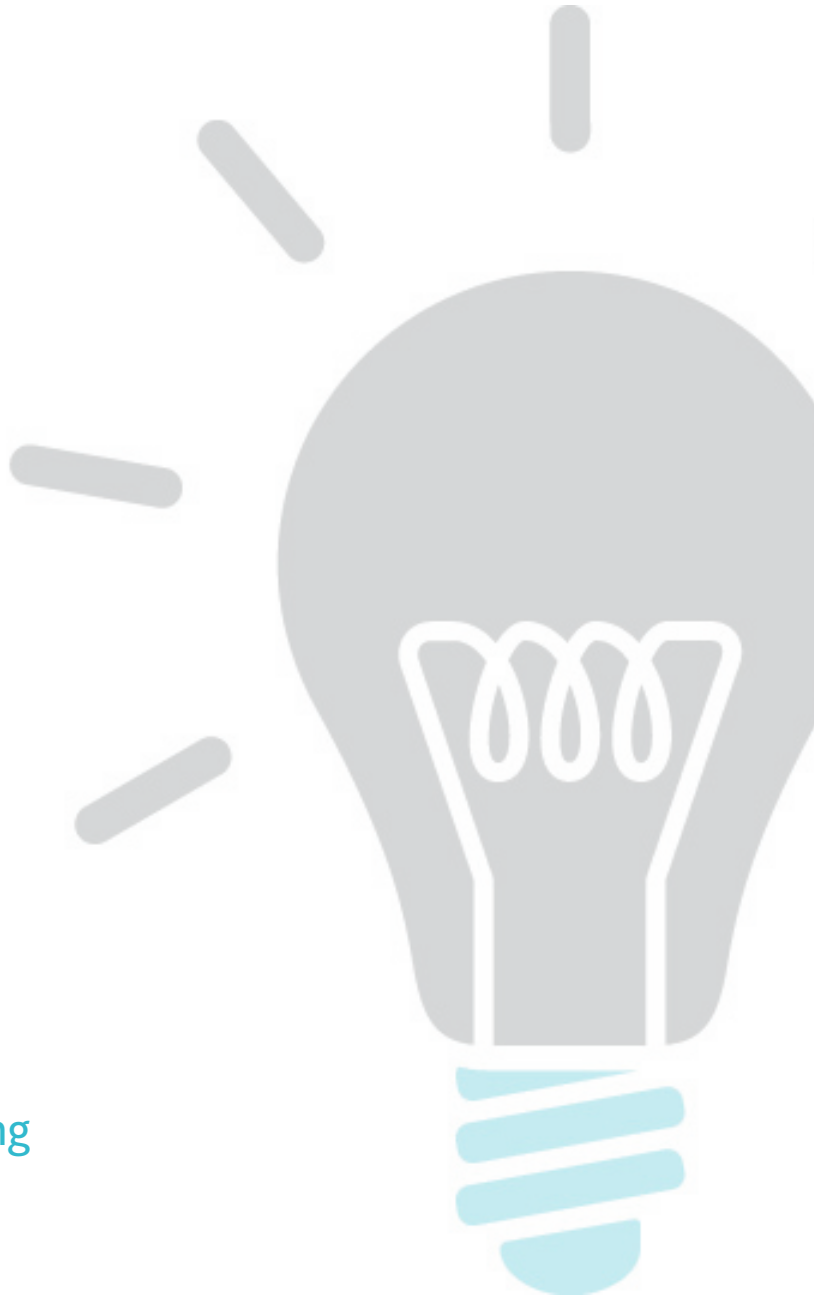
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CADWYN HOUSING CONNECTS WITH CENTRAL NETWORKS



Cadwyn Housing has just completed the deployment of Central Networks' PanConnect mobile working software and self-service tenant portal.

The appointment of Central Networks to manage the implementation of the new

service followed a review by Cadwyn Housing to identify a single, scalable solution with the flexibility to work with any housing management system while providing field-working benefits across multiple departments.

Following Central Networks' proof of concept and a review of PanConnect installations at United Welsh, RCT Homes and Bron Afon Community Housing, Cadwyn Housing decided to purchase the full system, including the PanConnect tenant app and portal.

Sarah Cole, finance and IT director, Cadwyn Housing, said, "We've already seen the challenges faced by a number of housing providers in mobilising their workforces. Central Networks delivered a live test environment, providing data extraction, digital forms and digital task management to very tight timescales, giving us hands-on experience of PanConnect."

GUARDIAN24 PROTECTS RCT HOMES' HIGH-RISK STAFF

RCT Homes is using 250 Guardian24 MicroGuard devices to protect their lone working and at-risk employees.



The devices enable users to raise an alarm simply by pressing the device's central SOS button. This connects them to Guardian24's alarm receiving centre (ARC) where two-way audio enables a trained controller to either listen in to the situation or speak if it's safe to do so.

The MicroGuard devices also have a voice-memo button so that users can leave a pre-alert message with details such as where they are going and who they are meeting. ARC controllers can then listen to the message as soon as an alarm is raised.

The Microguard devices are designed to be worn discreetly on a lanyard, attached to a belt or ID card or carried as a keyring. This is a crucial element of the device, allowing it to remain unseen by an aggressor in potentially dangerous situations.

The Guardian24 service proved a success recently when an incident occurred during one employee's visit to a tenant's home. The tenant became

verbally aggressive towards the member of staff who subsequently pressed the alarm button. Controllers at the ARC were able to listen in to the situation and once it was safe to speak, confirmed the safety of the member of staff and contacted managers at RCT Homes.

Claire Overd, support services team manager, RCT Homes, said, "We were impressed by the device's ability to listen in and have two-way communication. It's necessary that all staff can speak with a responder in case something like this happens again."

Will Murray, marketing director, Guardian24, said, "Fortunately, on this occasion the employee was not harmed, but it's a sad fact that changes to the benefits system are leading to an increase in violence towards housing staff."

"As Guardian24 is certified to the highest possible standards, every alarm we receive is treated as life-threatening and our controllers will keep the alarm open until they are certain the individual is safe."

Cloud EDM from ORS Group at CDS Co-operatives

ORS Group has completed the implementation of a cloud-based DocuWare electronic document management system at CDS Co-operatives. The project was part of the housing provider's move to smaller offices in London and the consequent need to significantly reduce the amount of paper-based records and filing cabinets.

Because of the short timescale of the office move, ORS had to act fast in order to collect CDS Co-operatives' documents and get them to the scanning facility as quickly as possible.

While the documents were being scanned, ORS planned the subsequent implementation of DocuWare Cloud.

The project was delivered on time with CDS moving into their new and almost paper-free offices in December 2015. CDS can now scan incoming post daily and allocate it to staff members for action. Individuals can also access tenant documents via smartphones, tablets and PCs, with pre-assigned access rights.





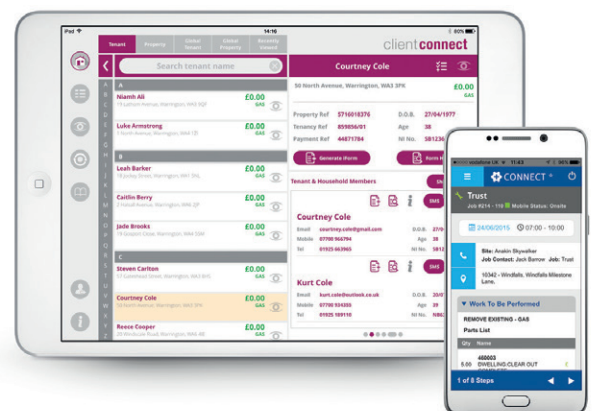
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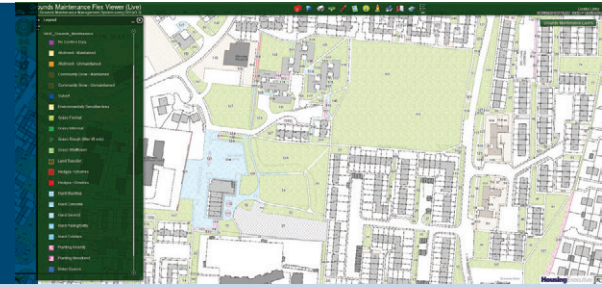


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GIS & MAPPING IN HOUSING



Housing Technology interviewed experts on geographic information systems (GIS) from Ancoris, Civica, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Orbit Group and Orchard Information Systems about how housing providers can use GIS to improve business performance, save money and boost tenant services.

Understanding GIS and mapping

As a brief one-sentence summary of GIS before we cover how it can help housing providers, Steve Ainsworth, managing director for community protection at Civica, said, "A geographic information system (GIS) is a software application that enables a clear visual representation of data on a map, allowing people to easily see, analyse and understand trends to make better business decisions."

Craig Tither, Orchard Information Systems' marketing officer, added, "GIS is based on three fundamental components – mapping data, software, and people; one without the other two will not succeed. It's also important to understand that GIS will only provide useful answers to scenarios if the user has asked the right questions and is then able to analyse and interpret the resulting data in order to understand relationships, patterns and trends."

GIS examples in housing

The power of GIS is that it can be used for so many areas of housing providers' operations, from short-term, day-to-day aspects such as ASB and fly-tipping, through to long-term new-build programmes and planned maintenance cycles.



"Large housing providers will continue to use full-blown GIS, but we expect to see another stream emerge that we call 'business mapping'; easy-to-use mapping, visualisation and analysis tools that are available to the entire organisation and don't require specialised training."

Luke Stewart, Geo Practice Manager, Ancoris

Patrick McGarry, GIS manager for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), said, "GIS can be used to answer so many questions, such as where are our properties, what land do we own, how do we know which grass to cut, where are the most

deprived communities, are there hotspots of ASB in an estate, and are there any viable properties available for a tenant within a five-mile radius of their current home?"

"GIS can also be used to analyse patterns and geographic distributions of data to show, for example, concentrations of void or vacant properties, areas with an above-average elderly or youthful population from the census, locations of utility networks when designing a new scheme, and showing hotspots of house prices."

Luke Stewart, geo practice manager, Ancoris, said, "GIS can be used by housing providers to visualise all the information they need to manage their property portfolios. It can hold data such as property locations and information about properties or an area in order to drive better decision making, improve staff productivity, and better communicate with tenants. Housing providers can also use GIS to improve operations, and specifically reduce rent arrears, ensure repairs are completed on time, reduce voids and better manage their maintenance programmes."

Orbit Group's GIS consultant, Steve Litchfield, added, "Some of the areas that we use GIS for include re-tendering for ground maintenance and resurfacing contracts, property ownership queries, resource management and identifying potential sites for new-build developments."

Saving money with GIS

While the initial investment in GIS and the associated mapping licences may be relatively high, the consensus is that GIS provides a fast and measurable return on investment, aside from any additional qualitative benefits derived from the use of GIS. For example, one of Ancoris's housing customers reported that by using GIS to enable them to increase their housing officers' visits from six to seven per day, they immediately saved up to £70,000 per year in that area alone.

NIHE's McGarry said, "It really makes sense to invest in a technology [GIS] that shows you where your assets are, enables the overlay of other relevant geographic data, such as census information, deprivation rates and house prices, and

"Modern web-based GIS require only overview training to gain familiarisation because of the trend towards creating interfaces that are closer to the common mapping applications, such as Google Maps, which most people use on a daily basis."

Steve Ainsworth, Managing Director for Community Protection, Civica

has the functionality to analyse that data to produce customised outputs in the form of maps, reports or dashboards. In my experience, the common feedback from staff who now use GIS is that they can't imagine how they got by before."

Orchard's Tither said, "For example, if information about maintenance, rent or repairs is in one place, any member of front-line or customer-service staff can handle tenants' queries without needing to refer or pass callers between different departments. As another example, you can reduce costs by only maintaining what you own by using GIS to map and visualise ground maintenance areas for more accurate cost analysis and calculation of service charges."



"GIS shouldn't be seen as purely a piece of software. It should be a way of optimising an organisation's locational data and integrating that with other corporate information management systems."

Patrick McGarry, GIS Manager, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Related benefits

GIS also offers additional qualitative and quantitative benefits beyond basic mapping and costs savings. Civica's Ainsworth said, "GIS can add both accuracy and efficiency benefits to otherwise laborious processes. For example, if it's essential to know which properties are within a conservation area, housing providers can use GIS to create a spatial query, which is much easier and faster than manually cross-referencing property records. Spatial searches can also be combined with text-based searches to allow housing providers to speed up searches of housing records. For example, with GIS you can quickly access data on houses built during a certain year or when they were last inspected, rather than trawling through a mass of paper-based records."

McGarry from NIHE said, "People like to view information via graphics and maps. A skilled GIS professional can work with business units and their specific data sources to produce mapping and associated reports that can reveal hidden spatial relationships or highlight an issue that could save time and resources."

Orbit's Litchfield said, "Some of the other areas for GIS include stock rationalisation, whereby plotting all properties in a portfolio may highlight remote properties which should be sold off, identifying more efficient 'patches' for housing officers, and making service charges more transparent and fair."



"Orbit has chosen to integrate its GIS in-house and receives a daily extract from our housing management system which then gets imported into a specific GIS database. This frequency reflects any changes to the existing portfolio the following day and is adequate for our current needs."

Steve Litchfield, GIS Consultant, Orbit Group

Integration with core applications

GIS and mapping applications need to be closely integrated with housing providers' existing core business applications, such as housing and finance management systems, mobile and scheduling applications, CRM and other tenant-facing applications.

Stewart from Ancoris said, "Integrating GIS and mapping with housing providers' core applications is essential. For example, visualising rent arrears from a housing management system and anti-social behavioural patterns from a CRM, combined with demographic data, can give real insights into an area."

Civica's Ainsworth said, "GIS can be used to plot the location of any record with coordinates on a map. This means that, at the most basic level, GIS can be used to show the distribution of assets just by accessing the housing stock or premises database. Additionally, by integrating the GIS with the housing management system, tenants can raise service requests direct because the software will simultaneously update the housing management or CRM systems as part of the process."

Commenting on the actual integration process, Litchfield from Orbit said, "There are several ways GIS can be integrated, each dependent on the range of in-house skills and resources. Orbit has chosen to integrate its GIS in-house and receives a daily extract from our housing management system which then gets imported into a specific GIS database."

This frequency reflects any changes to the existing portfolio the next day and is adequate for our current needs. There are two GIS specialists dealing with administration and data analysis on a desktop GIS, while users across the business can access a web-based GIS via Orbit's intranet and via mobile devices."

GIS training

The use of GIS was previously only really the preserve of highly-trained users, in part due to the complexity of the software itself. Nowadays, most GIS are very user-friendly and don't require specialist geo/mapping skills. However, depending on how much GIS and mapping are intended to be integrated into housing providers' operations, dedicated GIS professionals are sometimes needed.

Civica's Ainsworth said, "Modern web-based GIS require only overview training to gain familiarisation, rather than specialist training. This is mainly because of the trend towards creating an interface that is closer to the common mapping applications, such as Google Maps, which most people use on a daily basis."

"McGarry from NIHE said, "If an organisations needs a fully enterprise-level GIS infrastructure, it needs to invest in GIS professionals who have the experience of using GIS software and data and understand the business requirements of the organisation. A centralised GIS team can produce custom applications that require minimal staff training and can also provide analytical services to the organisation via the more complex desktop solutions."

Orchard's Tither added, "In order to benefit from the maximum capability of GIS, well-trained professionals knowledgeable in spatial analysis and skilled in using GIS software are essential to the GIS process. Nevertheless, GIS are continually transforming and, through their evolution, have become increasingly intuitive."

"For our sector, it means that housing providers are no longer restricted by the need to have an in-house GIS expert in order to use GIS and see a return on their investment. A specific example of how developments in GIS are benefiting those in our sector is the growth of self-service GIS. This enables all employees to now view, find and work with the geographic information they require, quickly and easily via a customised portal application that serves as a single point of entry."

Future directions

Five years ago, GIS was only being used

by the larger and more technologically-advanced housing providers but its ease of use and lower cost has opened up the market to smaller housing providers.

Stewart from Ancoris said, "Large housing providers will continue to use full-blown GIS to help manage and analyse their properties and grounds. However, we expect to see another stream emerge that we call 'business mapping'; easy-to-use mapping, visualisation and analysis tools that are available to everyone and don't require specialised training. These tools provide the same high level of insight as traditional GIS, but are much simpler to use and better able to expose, distribute and visualise geographic information."

Orchard's Tither said, "GIS provides a platform for better planning and decision making. Not only mapping and visualisation but also modelling, spatial analysis, data management, web services and mobile solutions. The consensus is that GIS will play a greater role in housing as a sophisticated operational and strategic tool. An example of this is evidenced by Orchard's business partner ESRI's Drone2Map. The use of this technology will enable the creation of ortho-mosaics, three-dimensional meshes, and more, in ArcGIS from your drone-captured still imagery, in hours rather than days."



"GIS provides a platform for more effective planning and decision making. Not only mapping and visualisation but also modelling, spatial analysis, data management, web services and mobile solutions."

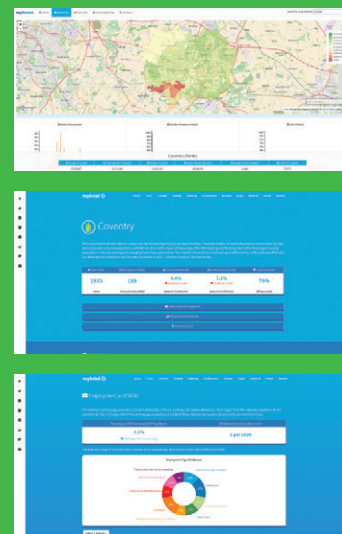
Craig Tither, Marketing Officer, Orchard Information Systems

Last word goes to NIHE's McGarry. He said, "GIS shouldn't be seen as purely a piece of software. It should be a way of optimising an organisation's locational data and integrating that with other corporate information management systems. In this context, there are so many more opportunities for GIS in housing in future. Other future benefits include 3-D mapping of planned housing developments/estates, integration with building information modelling (BIM) and visualising geographic data along with data analytic dashboards."

Housing Technology would like to thank Luke Stewart (Ancoris), Steve Ainsworth (Civica), Patrick McGarry (Northern Ireland Housing Executive), Steve Litchfield (Orbit Group) and Craig Tither (Orchard Information Systems) for their editorial contributions to this article.

Orbit creates real-time insights tool

Orbit Group has created a bespoke online tool to deliver instant insight into its communities, key data and assets. The housing provider's new MyIntel tool provides a one-stop shop for stock levels and arrears breakdowns and related intelligence on demographics, crime rates and education.



Developed entirely in-house by Orbit's strategy and insight team, the tool collates a group of web apps which analyse and visualise open-source tenant- and asset-level data.

Charley Gibbons, director of strategy and communication, Orbit Group, said, "We deliver services over a wide geographical area, and MyIntel gives us very local insights that inform key business decisions and allow us to target our resources so that they have the greatest impact. It provides up-to-the minute data in an interactive and very usable way."

Orbit plans to extend MyIntel by integrating it with its existing GIS software, in-house databases and reporting dashboards. Written in JavaScript, the tool will be redeveloped to take advantage of the scalability and performance that a server-side language and database can offer.

In addition, Orbit has also produced MyMarket, providing analysis of rental and sales data, for Orbit's sales and marketing arm, which has a target of developing 12,000 new homes by 2020.

Lianne Ticehurst, development officer, Orbit Group, said, "What a fantastic tool; it has saved me time when doing market research and saved the organisation money. It is quick and easy to use, providing recent values and rents in local authority areas."

Orbit's real-time feedback with Rant & Rave



Orbit Group has reported that it's the first UK housing provider to use real-time tenant feedback, based on software from Rant & Rave. Already used by the likes of Npower, Sky and EasyJet, the Rant & Rave platform is now the housing provider's main channel for listening to what its tenants are saying.

Previously Orbit conducted telephone surveys with residents to monitor tenant satisfaction, but its research found that the process resulted in disengaged staff who felt removed from the feedback loop.

With real-time feedback, after a service request has been completed, tenants are invited to share a comment and score on their experience via text message, email, or via a voice recording. The scores and comments are then analysed in real time and presented back to staff using specially-designed 'fast feedback' dashboards.

Dean Ballard, head of performance excellence, Orbit Group, said, "Rant & Rave has allowed Orbit to bring the voice of the customer 'front and centre' within the business, change the way we think about service improvement and ensure that staff at all levels start to engage and own customer feedback."

Real-time feedback has been rolled out across all of Orbit's major service areas including its customer service centre, responsive repairs, planned maintenance, housing management and gas servicing.

More than 30,000 survey responses have been received so far and following the successful piloting of the platform, real-time feedback is now Orbit's primary method for gathering regular service experience feedback.

The real-time feedback project has also helped change the way feedback is managed and acted on across the business. A 'resolution team' has been introduced to the customer service centre to proactively manage negative customer feedback. Customer service advisors can now identify an issue, contact the customer and put in steps to resolve any problems within 48 hours of receiving feedback.

Since implementing the feedback platform, Orbit is now working with a vastly improved volume of feedback, and with response rates up and tenants engaging well with the new method, service levels have also steadily improved, with an average satisfaction rating of 4.2 out of 5.

Real-time feedback has also had a positive impact on staff because it helps to identify when and where staff are going above and beyond their role on a daily basis; managers can use this information to reward and recognise good performance in real time too. In addition, the use of real-time feedback has helped to drive a decrease in sickness rates to less than five per cent and a 70 per cent reduction in the number of advisors on improvement plans.

Go digital with RSM and Halton Housing

Audit service provider RSM and Halton Housing Trust have launched an initiative to help housing providers implement effective digital strategies. It aims to provide support to ensure the sector is prepared to respond to welfare reform, and in particular the introduction of universal credit and the resulting need to collect 65 per cent of their income direct from tenants, which is currently paid direct in the form of housing benefit.

The two organisations have developed a digital roadmap to help housing providers deliver a bespoke digital strategy that will improve efficiency, save money, enhance tenant services and protect their income streams.

Halton Housing Trust has enhanced its digital strategy to transform how it engages with tenants. Drawing on this experience and working with RSM, the

Peter Head of RSM's Social Housing Practice



two organisations have created an effective model tailored for the social housing sector.

Peter Lunio, head of RSM's social housing practice, said, "From our recent survey, we know that improving digital functionality is a key priority for housing providers. 87 per cent want to implement new technologies in the next 12 months; it's a pressing issue, but many are unsure how to tackle it."

Nick Atkin, group chief executive, Halton Housing Trust, said, "The housing sector has seen more change in the last two

years than the preceding 50 years and the operating environment is almost unrecognisable from where it was just a few years ago. With the rollout of universal credit by 2018 the number of transactions will increase markedly. This is not just payments, but will also include a much wider range of transactions and contacts.

"The majority of housing providers don't currently collect 65 per cent of their income as this is paid through housing benefit. However looking ahead, this income will need to be collected following the rollout out of universal credit which will significantly increase the number of transactions. To release the internal resources required to collect this income, the service model needs to shift to one which enables the majority of tenants to access services via a self-service route."

SCOTLAND'S DIGITAL INCLUSION TOOLKIT

The Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations, together with the Digital Glasgow programme, Digital Scotland and Glasgow Kelvin College, has developed a digital toolkit (digitalinclusionandhousing.scot) to support housing providers' digital inclusion projects.

The toolkit is intended as a starting point for housing providers wishing to support digital inclusion for their tenants and their communities.

The toolkit covers the main digital inclusion issues; the national context and ambition, barriers to inclusion,

skill development approaches, how to support volunteers, digital inclusion case studies, and the role of digital housing services.

David Bookbinder, director, Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations, said, "It was clear from a small working group of GWSF members set up to look at digital inclusion that although many were keen to develop digital inclusion projects, they didn't necessarily know where to start. Equally important for the group was that members learned from the successes and challenges faced by those who had



already tried to develop projects in a very fast-moving environment."

Housing Technology's Digital by Default 2016 report is also still available free of charge from www.housing-technology.com.

Bracknell Forest Homes trials live chat

Bracknell Forest Homes has been testing a new live chat service on its website since February 2016. The pilot service not only gives tenants an additional communications channel to reach their housing provider but also enables contact agents to deal with multiple queries at the same time.

During the first six weeks of its launch, Bracknell Forest Homes dealt with around 160 live chats, with multi-skilled agents aiming to deal with most

enquiries during the first point of contact, including repairs, rent payments and tenancy queries.

The service also enables documents and images to be exchanged between tenants and Bracknell Forest Homes during the chat session to make it easier and quicker to resolve any queries. The service works on smartphones and tablets and has operating hours that mirror the housing provider's normal opening hours.



FORVIVA SELECTS AMILLAN FOR CONTACT CENTRE SOFTWARE



Amillan has been awarded a contract to deliver a new multi-channel contact centre solution based on Enghouse Interactive's EICC platform for two ForViva group members, City West Housing Trust and Villages Housing Association.

Multi-channel capability will give tenants greater choice in how they engage with City West Housing and Villages Housing, with seamless telephone, email, SMS, live webchat and social media communication channels all supported by the EICC platform.

The Amillan solution will also enable more efficient contact agent management and improvements in service quality via integrated call and screen recording, speech analytics and Teleopti workforce management modules.

Matt Jones, director of customer operations, ForViva, said, "We decided that an all-in-one, multi-channel contact centre system would enable improvements in our service delivery and extend tenant access via a range of multi-media channels."

Cairn Housing and The Highland Council enhance customer services with Netcall CXM

Cairn Housing and The Highland Council are now both using Netcall's Customer Experience Manager (CXM) software to streamline tenant engagement and save money by providing the right business intelligence, in the right place, at the right time.

A Netcall survey found that 58 per cent of customers said that having to repeat information is their biggest irritation, and 44 per cent said, "each time I speak to a company, they don't really know who I am", indicating that many organisations' front- and back-office systems are disjointed. Netcall said that CXM sets out to address this challenge by unifying data from front- and back-office systems to

Fin Smith, Head of Business Improvement, Cairn Housing Association



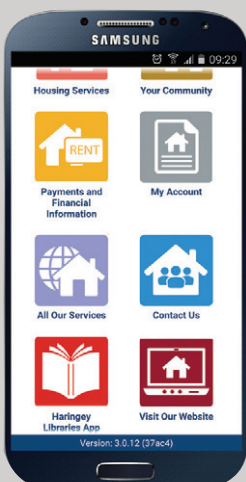
create a holistic and personalised view of each customer and a seamless user experience.

Fin Smith, head of business improvement, Cairn Housing Association, said, "We began using Netcall's CXM in October 2014 as the central system to drive delivery of an enhanced customer experience through our contact centre.

Since then, we have developed a range of workflows so that we can resolve customer contacts faster, while also increasing the transparency of our processes and performance."

Darren MacLeod, digital services manager, The Highland Council, said, "We carried out a 'whole of the market' procurement exercise to replace our previous CRM system because it needed upgrading at a significant cost. Netcall CXM offers a high degree of flexibility and is fully configurable; elements such as the Task Wizard and workflows can be easily adapted and customised to fit our changing needs."

HOMES FOR HARINGEY'S LOOKINGLOCAL APP



Homes for Haringey has launched a new mobile app to streamline its repairs processes as well as improve the overall digital offering it provides to tenants.

Developed by Kirklees Council-owned LookingLocal, Homes for Haringey's new mobile app allows tenants to easily report housing repairs and estate issues, as well as provide easy links to pay rent, search for housing and jobs, and access money and benefits advice.

Available on smartphones, mobile devices, and the web, the free app can be downloaded by Homes for Haringey's tenants.

The smartphone app means tenants can complete tasks such as paying rent or reporting repairs on the go and at a convenient time. For Homes for Haringey, this will result in a considerable reduction in the need for routine matters to be handled over the phone or face-to-face, freeing up customer

service staff to deal with more complex enquiries.

Kieran Toussaint, project manager, housing information team, Homes for Haringey, said, "The RoI for the project is driven by the savings from 'channel shift', allowing our tenants to report issues and log repairs to their homes much faster and more efficiently than by doing so over the phone."

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THE DIGITAL TENANT – REALITY OR MYTH?

Chris McLaughlin, Managing Director, MIS-AM

Digitisation is transforming how services are delivered to tenants in social housing. It represents both the greatest challenges and the biggest opportunities in the history of the sector and requires a top-down, holistic approach with cultural change. But how far have we come already, and what does the future look like as we move towards the 'digital tenant'?

The speed of change is gaining momentum, with market factors affecting the need to drive efficiencies. Much has been written about the Welfare Reform and Work Bill which sets out that rents are to be reduced by one per cent per year for four years starting April 2016. Housing providers are working towards cutting costs in line with this to counteract the loss in rental income, and are looking to technology to bring about those efficiencies the fastest way possible.

We are now entering the next phase of social housing where the digital tenant is becoming a reality as the sector increasingly digitises. The government is also driving digital adoption; 80 per cent of applications for universal credit must be made online by 2017, and it aims to cut the number of citizens who are still offline by 25 per cent every two years until the population is connected. Similarly, housing providers themselves are setting up schemes where they provide the internet to communities in order to increase digital adoption. It's these factors in tandem that are contributing to the implementation of technology and ultimately the changes to the social housing sector.

Let's also not forget that the tenants are changing too. We've read a lot about the generation known as millennials, digital natives or generation Y, and how they differ from previous generations. And

the next succession, 'generation Z', who want information instantly and prefer to order, transact and get a response from a company without speaking to anyone or physically touching any paper. All of the above are of course digitally savvy, own smartphones and tablets and use social media almost ubiquitously. They have high expectations that technology can provide the benefits associated with creating an easier life for them. But they're not totally alone; our older generations are also increasingly more digital, perhaps being driven to communicate with their children and grandchildren in the way that they demand, and owning smartphones and using computers for online banking and shopping. All of this means that housing associations have an unprecedented opportunity to engage with tenants and to deliver a more inclusive, efficient and cost-effective service to them.

What is the digital tenant?

A true digital tenant should interact with their housing provider via several channels, such as online via a customer portal accessed on a desktop PC or tablet, via web chat and by email as well as WhatsApp or SMS on a smartphone. They are truly multi-channel, but generally prefer non-verbal communication, especially for every day requests. They should also be able to log repairs, report anti-social behaviour and make complaints online, update all of their personal information, make rental payments and raise basic requests digitally. In a nut shell, they should be able to do everything for themselves online that a call centre agent would do if they called customer services.

A number of our customers who are MIS ActiveH users have made great strides when it comes to offering the multi-channel approach. Orbit has set itself clear targets and has already

introduced its customer portal, online repair appointments, web chat, email and SMS. Others are not far behind with over 80 per cent of our customers currently looking to expand their channels.

How far have we come?

Many housing providers are beginning to set deadlines for when they will interact with their tenants via digital means, and this can be a double-edged sword. To stipulate that by 2020, for example, all rental and maintenance requests will be handled via a customer portal might drive the use and adoption of their technology by tenants, but that doesn't necessarily guarantee sufficient engagement to return to that portal a second time without calling customer services in the first instance. This is more the 'stick' than the 'carrot' method of engagement, and doesn't always result in digital success.

The most innovative housing providers are probably about 60% of the way towards full digitisation, having implemented portal technologies, mobilised their workforce and, with the help of SMS messages and mobile CRM software, are communicating clearly with tenants. Mobile CRM has been and continues to be a big driver towards digitisation because it empowers housing officers to spend less time updating paper records and more time in their communities. We've seen around 25 per cent of our customers move towards mobile CRM in the first 12 months of its release; armed with a tablet and a smartphone, the technology gives housing officers a way to access information back at base online or offline, update information while out in the field and also provide tenants with the answers to any questions they may have, even if it's not their area of expertise or their department. These represent genuine efficiencies and are often at

THE DIGITAL TENANT - REALITY OR MYTH?

Continued from previous page

the centre of making the leap towards digitisation.

I've seen at first hand the impact mobile CRM is having on customer service at Accent. It has gradually rolled out ActiveH CRM across its business and identified efficiencies in the process. Accent's internal employee survey on mobile working identified that 68 per cent of staff think they've been able to visit more residents face to face, 54 per cent believe rent arrears have been reduced and 76 per cent believe customer service has improved. The majority of them also

thought that mobile working had improved the quality of their own working lives.

The future

In the future, many more housing providers will offer digital tenants the ability to make appointments online for repairs, often dealing directly with a maintenance company for some of the more common problems. 'Appointing online' is the next wave of digitisation to reach the sector and has already been rolled out at Orbit, once again increasing

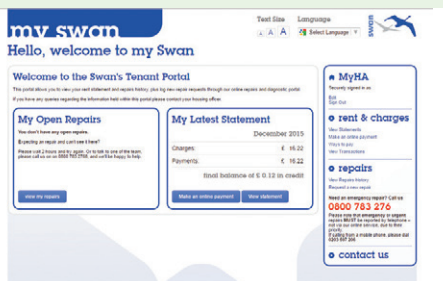
efficiencies while delivering faster customer service.

And beyond that? The next step is reducing home visits with remote monitoring devices (the internet of things) or virtual visits through on-screen face-to-face chats. And who knows, looking further ahead, maybe even augmented reality (AR) devices could help tenants with repairs diagnostics or even doing their own minor repairs.

Chris McLaughlin is managing director of MIS-AMS.

SWAN HOUSING'S MYHA PORTAL FROM ELEMENT3

Swan Housing Association has implemented Element3 Software's myHA online tenant portal for real-time repairs, rents, statements, housing officer access and a range of additional housing services. Taking Swan's existing self-service portal, the myHA framework has been integrated to provide a suite of online features for both tenants and housing officers.



Using myHA, tenants can log repairs without any intervention from Swan's call centre or housing staff. With a real-time link to Swan's repairs contractor, Axis Europe, repairs are effective immediately and, via an integrated system at Axis, drip-fed to contractors in the field.

Suzanne Wicks,
Executive Director
of IT, Swan Housing
Association



Once authenticated to the portal, tenants can select the type of repair, book appointments with immediate confirmations and monitor the progress of repairs. The self-service portal also lets tenants view and print online rent statements as well as providing a view of balances and transactions including debits and payments.

With extended access for Swan's housing officers, myHA enables them to work in the field, with access to tenancy information, rents and repairs.

Suzanne Wicks, executive director of IT and private-sector services, Swan Housing Association, said, "We were early adopters of online services, with our first portal going live over eight years ago. With the experience we gained and years of tenant feedback, we knew how and where we could improve services using the latest online technologies and Element3's myHA portal."

Sigma joins government digital framework

Digital user-experience (UX) agency Sigma has been appointed to the government's new 'digital outcomes and specialists' framework, which connects public-sector organisations with carefully-selected suppliers of digital services. The framework is part of the government's digital marketplace, which aims to make commissioning digital and cloud services simpler, clearer, and faster.

Being included in the framework will allow Sigma to extend its user research, testing, and co-design work to new

public-sector organisations. As projects of a certain size in government have to go through a recognised procurement framework, it will also allow the business to work on larger projects.

Shaun Gomm, commercial director, Sigma, said, "We've always worked extensively on information-rich websites, apps and digital services, and aligned ourselves closely with the Government Digital Service's principles of openness, data-driven decision-making and agile working."



SECURITY VS. CONVENIENCE – MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES WITH THE CLOUD

Lucie Glenday, Digital Insight & Innovation Specialist, IT Lab

The emergence of cloud platforms and the number of software applications now being delivered 'as a service' has presented a plethora of choice, but how can you keep things simple as well as ensure users' safety and security online? Lucie Glenday, digital insight and innovation specialist at IT Lab, discusses solutions that have been designed to make our lives easier, such as single sign-on and multi-factor authentication, and how they are providing a higher level of security and control for users.

In recent years, social housing providers have faced the challenge of doing more with less funding, and this had led to a need for ingenuity and a realignment of resources, with particular emphasis on an increased use of technology.

Whether it's applying for a tenancy, reporting a fault with a boiler, accurately recording which rents have been paid and those which are still owed, or administering maintenance budgets, housing providers rely on complex IT systems to allow them to function effectively. Many public sector and housing services have now embraced cloud solutions, but only to a limited extent. There is still a degree of hesitancy on behalf of administrators to fully commit to the cloud for applications and certain functions for which the platform is best suited. This, in part, is understandable, because housing providers deal with sensitive data such as names, addresses, national insurance numbers and bank account details, all of which are potential targets for identity theft and hacking. However, the question that needs to be asked is, are decision-makers correct in assuming that there are security-related uncertainties around using cloud solutions?

Strategic partnerships

In a prescient report in 2002 entitled 'Remote control – Housing associations and e-governance', authors Martyn Pearl

and Martina Scanlon argue the case for the early adoption of technology by housing providers in order to meet statutory target obligations, to 'invest resources accordingly' and to enhance accountability and service delivery. Of course, over the last 14 years, many things have changed, including the availability of far more sophisticated solutions to the problems faced by housing providers.

Their primary responsibilities have remained the same but how they achieve their goals has shifted dramatically. They are still involved with making appointments for tenants, managing assets and contractors, document management, reporting, and dealing with complex finance systems. Many, if not all, housing providers are actively seeking ways to cut costs through efficiencies within their organisations and, with the over-arching reach of technology these days, the majority have put in place systems which, while not detrimental, certainly do not allow them to reach their full potential.

There is also a great deal of misunderstanding and mistrust of cloud-based applications, especially when it comes to data security. It's time that housing providers embraced forward-thinking digital strategies which would allow them to improve services and make efficiencies at the same time.

Phil Turner, vice-president for the EMEA region at Okta, a leading provider of identity and mobility management for the cloud and mobile enterprise and an IT Lab partner, said, "Many housing providers still think of IT providers simply as vendors that deliver solutions to address their IT needs. But SaaS companies can deliver much more; the cloud offers flexibility, increased security and lower costs, ultimately making the lives of housing providers and their tenants easier.

"For example, Okta provides its customers with a foundation for secure connections between people and technology — cloud applications, mobile devices and more — so they can give their employees, customers and partners access to the best tools available, while enforcing strong security."

A deeper understanding

The common core of IT provision in the social housing sector can be said to concentrate on three main objectives: systems integration, mobile working and customer communications. Cloud-based services for all these applications offer significant flexibility and ultimately better customer service thanks to the levels of security provided.

There are many myths surrounding the use of the cloud, and one of the most common concerns is that it's not secure and is open to hackers. It's therefore important to provide secure solutions which make use of enhanced encryption and intrusion detection systems to minimise the risk of outside infiltration and keep sensitive information secure. It's also vital to educate decision-makers to help them better understand the possibilities such technology offers. A greater understanding of the cloud solutions available will ultimately ensure better IT solutions that directly benefit employees and ensure a completely secure end-user environment.

One of the other major challenges facing the housing sector is that most housing providers have multiple contracts for different services with multiple suppliers, thereby complicating the migration of applications and systems to the cloud. Bringing together all of the operations which a housing provider needs under one roof offers them the opportunity to improve their processes as well as enhancing their infrastructure performance.

SECURITY VS. CONVENIENCE – MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES WITH THE CLOUD

Continued from previous page

The future

There's no doubt that housing providers face many challenges, not least of which is the provision of high-quality, affordable homes backed by responsible and responsive support services. An organisation which has a legacy approach to its IT infrastructure, perhaps as a result of years of 'evolution' without a coherent

strategy, will not be maximising its RoI and will be failing those it seeks to serve.

Housing providers must invest in IT infrastructure in order to improve life for their staff, correctly maintain their asset management programme and enhance communication systems for their tenants. A move away from a piecemeal approach

to a more integrated system, backed by the security of the cloud, is now vital, with IT providers working in partnership with housing providers in a more strategic and inclusive way.

Lucie Glenday is a digital insight and innovation specialist at IT Lab.

Manifest Software develops universal IT adapter for housing

Two housing IT consultancies, Manifest IT and Blaze Information Systems, have developed the Manifest Universal Adapter to streamline system integration projects within the housing sector.

The two companies created Manifest Software Solutions in early 2016 in order to launch the universal adapter. Working across all existing IT systems, the universal adapter seamlessly transfers, streamlines and integrates data via one manageable hub. Requiring no programming skills and compatible

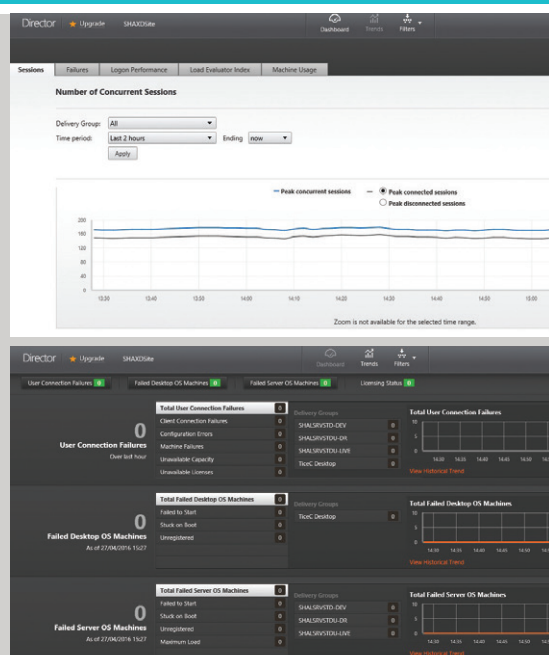
with almost any data source, the universal adapter supports the full range of information managed by housing teams such as rent and arrears, tenancy management, maintenance and asset compliance.

Manifest Software said that the new software would save housing providers money by removing the need for bespoke interface development and also help them to automate admin-heavy roles and processes.

Charlie Willenbrock, director, Manifest Software Solutions said, "We believe our product is a game-changer. Our adapter can be implemented quickly without programming skills and adds further value by providing enhancements in housing management systems such as triggering workflows, CRM and other functionalities.

"New interfaces can be created quickly, helping housing providers achieve greater efficiencies and true channel shift, as well as removing multiple data entries."

23TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMS INCOMMUNITIES AND SOUTHDOWN HOUSING



23Technology, a cloud and virtualisation consultancy, has completed desktop transformation projects at Incommunities and Southdown Housing Association that have increased productivity, optimised user experience and securely extended connectivity across multiple sites.

For Incommunities, 23Technology carried out a 1,500 desktop virtualisation project to deliver remote working, mobile device support and improved IT flexibility. After a one-month pilot, the full project included a Microsoft Server 2012 R2 RDS platform deployment, delivery of applications (including full-screen HD video) for each user type, centralised system management tools and an ongoing support services framework.

At Southdown Housing Association, 23Technology resourced and project managed the upgrade of 600 Citrix users across the housing provider's sites in East and West Sussex.



HOW SECURE IS YOUR DATA?

Russell Francis, Consultant, SOCITM

Are you comfortable that your IT policies are protecting your data? I would have started "you only have to pick-up a newspaper", but that seems rather dated today. No matter how you get your news, whether via social media, online, television or radio, every day seems to bring a new data breach scandal.

Here are some of the better known recent incidents: on New Year's Eve 2015 the BBC website was hacked, Talk Talk's breach last October was the third in a single year, everyone has a view on the Ashley Madison data breach and, of course, the recent 'Panama Papers' offshore revelations.

Cyber-crime is rife and takes many forms, but closer to home, are housing providers taking this issue seriously?

Most housing providers will be in receipt of benefits information, many will be holding details of very personal family issues, and all maintain details of the most vulnerable in our society.

All new house-building developments and refurbishments are governed by strict standards, whether they are planning applications, fire regulations, gas safety or building regulations, and the security of any building forms part of those standards, yet similar standards don't take centre stage when it comes to data protection.

Individuals and organisations are under constant attack, yet the most likely breach is from within, whether malicious or, in most cases, ignorance of best practice. It is recognised that 80 per cent of all cyber-attacks are the result of phishing (emails opened from an unknown or disguised source and then clicking on links or opening attachments).

SOCITM's recent survey of IT professionals showed that IT security policies are not reviewed as often as they should be, and in fact many organisations lack the basic skills and budgets to protect their data. At the same time, millions of pounds are being spent on shifting tenants online, partly to improve services and support digital inclusion, but ultimately to reduce costs.

Our survey found that 96 per cent of respondents thought that IT policies were essential, while 85 per cent said that maintaining policies was time-consuming and laborious, and 58 per cent said that policies were expensive to maintain. International standards exist for IT security, yet few organisations certify, and although best practice suggests that policies should be reviewed regularly, our survey showed that most IT security policies were only reviewed every five years.

In the housing sector, IT departments typically have 9-12 policies whereas best practice suggests 20-28 policies are needed. And while it's not surprising that recent technologies such as BYOD and cloud are often not covered by IT security policies, the lack of knowledge and application around firewalls and network protection is surprising.

At board level, data protection should be number one on the agenda. The cost of data breach isn't just a substantial fine by the Information Commissioner's Office, it's the breach of trust with your tenants which will ultimately diminish the upside of any digital transformation programmes.

Ed Lucas from The Economist made this point, "We need to treat computer security like another complicated mix of technology and human behaviour. In the 1970s, 6,000 people were killed

on the roads every year. Since then, we have cut that number by three quarters. We designed cars to be safer, we rebuilt accident black spots, we changed the law, notably on drink driving, we also created public messages: 'Don't drink and drive', 'Speed kills', 'Clunk-click every trip'. We can do the same with computers."

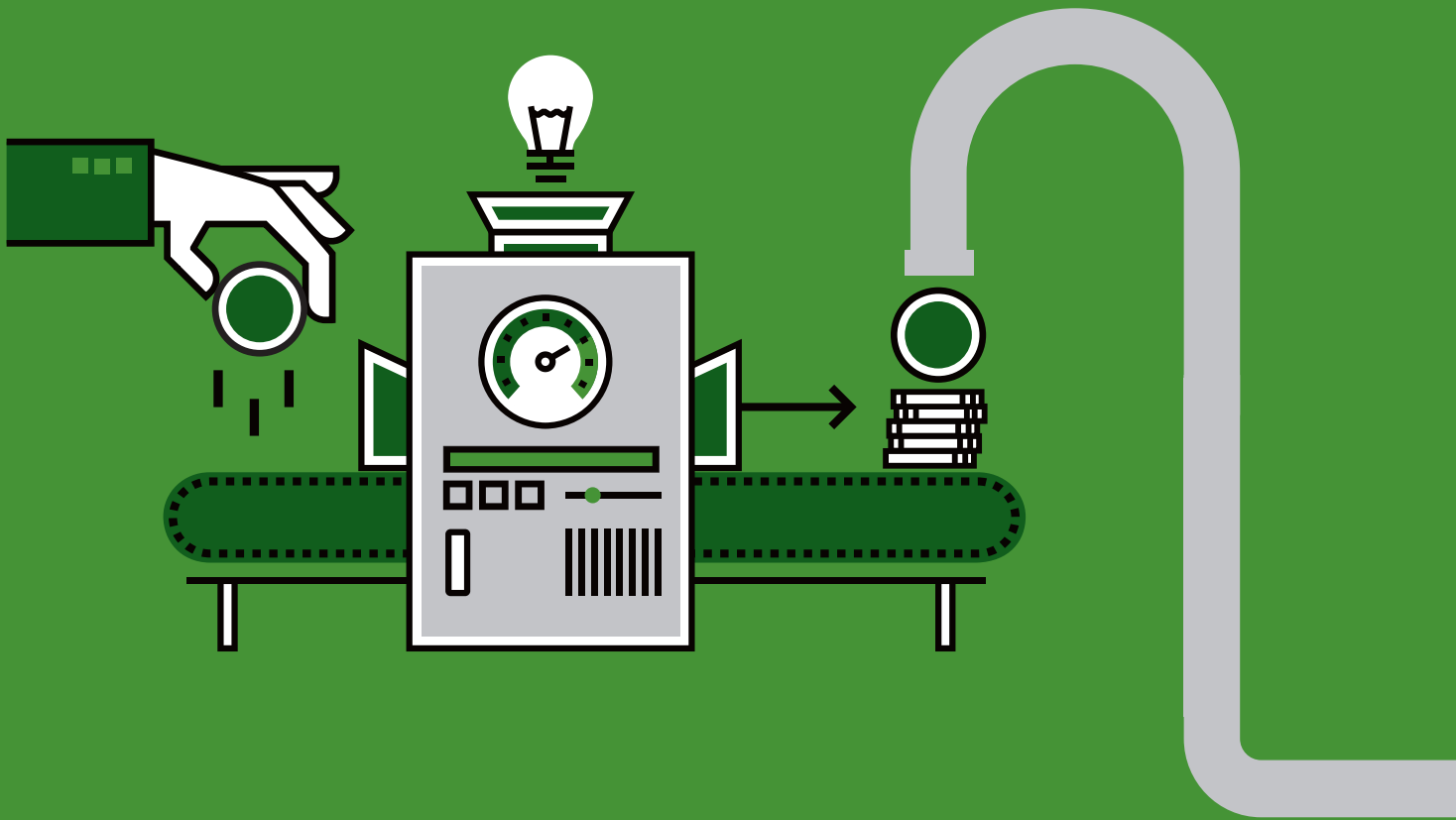
Most IT professionals understand the risks involved and provide protection as best they can, but senior housing executives need to make sure they are setting the correct policies in line with recognised standards and giving the appropriate training to all staff, together with the tools to protect the organisation and its customers.

Only 10 per cent of all organisations in the UK insure against data breach, despite the cost of data breaches to British industry being estimated at £34 billion (source: Lloyd's of London). The cost of protection is high, but is the cost of non-protection higher?

Russell Francis is a consultant to SOCITM (Society of IT Management).

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BRINGING THE INTERNET OF THINGS TO SOCIAL HOUSING

James Wickes, CEO, Cloudview

The internet of things (IoT) is probably the hottest topic in technology at the moment, with applications ranging from 'smart' fridges to controlling your heating from your phone. When applied to CCTV, it also offers the ability to revolutionise the way social housing is managed, as one housing provider in Kent has discovered.

CCTV is routinely installed in social housing to protect people, property and places. A complete system is usually installed in each location, and the majority are still analogue, with only around one fifth of new installations being digital. Both types typically record data onto an onsite DVR. If footage has to be viewed, each system requires a site visit, or in rare cases direct access via the Internet using a previously secured connection (usually a VPN), by someone who is both authorised and has sufficient knowledge of the system to retrieve the data. This can be further complicated by the fact that CCTV models and brands are extremely varied. Even worse, because systems require a site visit in order to view and download footage, sometimes the fact that they are not working is only discovered at the point when they are needed most.



Imagine the efficiencies if all of an organisation's cameras could be securely accessed remotely by authorised staff. Instead of needing to visit premises to access and download footage, find out if systems are functioning correctly or check for data protection compliance, staff could do everything from their own

desk or even their smartphone. Today, the IoT makes all this possible. Systems enable the DVRs storing footage to be accessed via a web browser or app so users can view live or recorded footage from another location, and dedicated cloud solutions are also available.

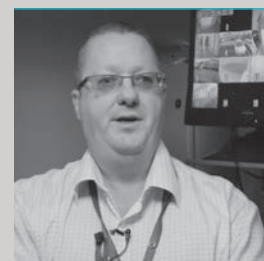
However, there is a potential downside to the IoT. By opening up their CCTV systems to the internet, organisations provide a point of entry for malicious intruders unless they implement effective security, and recent DDoS attacks and research have shown that the majority of systems are extremely vulnerable. In recent research by independent consultant Andrew Tierney, five routers, DVRs and IP cameras running the latest software were placed on the open internet. One device was breached within minutes and within 24 hours two were under the control of an unknown attacker, while a third was left in an unstable state and completely inoperable.

Data security is another concern. The 1998 Data Protection Act outlines the steps organisations must take to preserve the confidentiality of gathered data. CCTV users need to ensure that their potential providers have strictly-defined controls around the access to, and management of, customer data, and do not share that data with a third party without the explicit consent of the user.

Cloudview has addressed this by developing an intelligent cloud adapter, which only needs an outbound internet connection to connect existing analogue and IP cameras securely to the cloud. This enables footage from CCTV systems across an entire property portfolio to be recorded into a secure, consolidated cloud account. Recording can be initiated either by automatic event triggers, such as motion detection, or manual activation, and can be accessed and managed by authorised staff on a normal PC, tablet or smartphone. This solution can also be used as standard to add remote

monitoring and alerting to a CCTV system, or to add visual verification to intruder alarms.

Security is provided through HTTPS/TLS and public key encryption and all footage is accurately stamped with date and time. The system provides an automatic alert when there is a problem with a camera, thereby eliminating the problem of visiting a site to obtain footage only to discover that a camera isn't working. MHS Homes has been trying out the Cloudview technology at its Saxon Shore site in Kent. Mark Merriman, the electrical contracts manager at MHS Homes, had mixed views about the system's potential at first. However, this has changed now he has used it. He can look up footage on his mobile phone or tablet at any time and quickly check what has happened on site.



Mark Merriman,
Electrical Contracts
Manager, MHS
Homes

Merriman said, "This will make it a lot easier if we have to provide video to the police. I won't have to arrange for the subcontractor to go on site, retrieve the footage and put it onto a memory stick. An authorised member of our team can do it from our office or wherever they are in a few minutes, so it will save time and money."

He has also used the system when working with subcontractors, from downloading a photo to show the subcontractor the exact location of a lighting change to checking that that repairs had been completed.

For Matthew Eddy, neighbourhood services manager at MHS Homes, the key advantage has been ease of use, but he too has gained unexpected insights

BRINGING THE INTERNET OF THINGS TO SOCIAL HOUSING

Continued from previous page

which will benefit residents. As well as getting an immediate alert if a camera is down, he was able to see that some cameras were in the wrong places.

Eddy said, "For example, we realised that the footage from one camera was not viewable at night because a nearby light was in the wrong place. We've now moved the light so we have clear images at all times. This gives us and our residents the reassurance that, should anything happen, we'll have captured it on video."

He described the Cloudview system as something that adds value, rather than the current system which is not always reliable. He is now talking to us about expanding the system to more sites. In particular, he is looking at installing it in four large tower blocks.

Eddy said, "All the equipment is currently in the lift monitor space in the roof, so if we need any footage, we have to use a specialist contractor to visit the site, climb down a ladder, burn a CD and deliver it to our offices. It would be so much cheaper and save so much time if we used the Cloudview system."

MHS Homes is confident that Cloudview's innovative technology will bring numerous benefits to the business and to its tenants. It has already identified additional applications, depending on camera coverage, such as providing evidence of serious anti-social behaviour, damage, fly tipping and graffiti; enabling staff to check the maintenance of communal areas; and as a reference

for attendance by contractors whose services are required for safety compliance (such as fire, lift maintenance, electrical and gas checks and legionella testing). Staff in MHS Homes' contact centre can even use the Cloudview technology to check on urgent communal repairs reported by residents while those residents are on the phone, and a video grab can be sent instantly to the relevant contractor to increase the likelihood of a 'first-time fix'.

For more information, including a white paper on the security risks of insecure CCTV systems and more information about the MHS Homes trial, please visit www.howtocloudview.co.

James Wickes is CEO and co-founder of Cloudview.



APP-BASED MAPPING IN HOUSING

Matt Leach, CEO, HACT

The success of HACT's Community Insight – affordable, GIS-powered community profiling and housing data-mapping software now used by more than half of the largest 150 housing providers in the UK – demonstrates the value of carefully-focused feature sets, workflow integration, immediate cost savings through implementation, and low training and installation overheads.

One of the biggest changes we've seen during the last 20 years in housing has been the move from technology as a tool for specialists towards sophisticated digital tools being available to any staff. With mobile working now mainstream, we've seen technology leaving offices and being placed in the hands of housing providers' mobile workforces. And with the coming shift to resident self-administration of their own homes, we'll see a further outward movement of the boundaries of housing technology to tenants and leaseholders.

Among the consequences of these shifts has been the rethinking of what technology is and needs to be. A move from complex systems and interfaces to simple, dedicated apps has required a rethinking of user interfaces, and a focus on workflow and the widest possible usability above bloated (and often unused) feature sets and specialist users. It has also flagged up issues around the real cost of system roll-outs and training; if you are putting technology in the hands of an entire workforce, staff need to be capable of being trained to use them quickly and cheaply.

When we launched Community Insight in early 2013, the ambition was to deliver a simple, low cost data-mapping tool which would enable anyone in a housing provider to access sophisticated social, economic and demographic data on any of their neighbourhoods. Most importantly, we wanted anyone in a housing provider to be able to do it with the click of a mouse, with zero installation

overheads, a workflow-oriented feature-set and no more than a 90-second learning curve to get a user started. The initial market was intended to be community investment and tenancy sustainment professionals, but over the last three years we have seen the user-base grow significantly beyond that, drawing in users from across housing management, central strategy and development teams.

This wasn't new capability for housing providers; a significant number of larger housing providers had or were in the process of installing sophisticated GIS systems to map assets and access wider internal and external datasets. But almost all of these systems came at a cost. The need (in some cases) for integration with (often integration-averse) business systems, the need to employ specialist staff to use complex tools (thereby limiting access to an expensive and important resource) and the need

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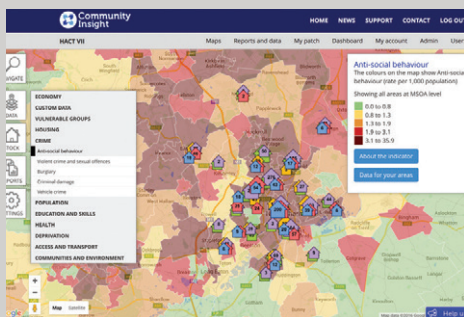
APP-BASED MAPPING IN HOUSING

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to invest in keeping data up-to-date to avoid being owners of nothing more than an expensive historic data archive.

By way of contrast, there were also a significant number of housing providers without the capacity to implement GIS. Housing providers often resorted to hand-crafted mapping and investing significant staff resources in accessing and presenting profiling data, often in non-optimal ways, and with little certainty about whether the sources it was accessed from were reliable and up-to-date.

An approach to development based on the new wave of app-based technologies has provided a model for addressing both of these issues, and a strong driver for the direction of the Community Insight tool.



We've based Community Insight on a Google Maps platform, providing a recognisable interface that people are

already comfortable with, reducing any need for training or familiarisation. We stripped features out from the outset in order to provide tools that addressed 80-90 per cent of the needs of the user-base, such as simple heat-mapping, matrix-based traffic lighting and full community profile preparation, all of which could be used with little or no specialist training, rather than loading on capabilities most users wouldn't normally need or use. A simple wizard-led process for uploading organisational data provided greater flexibility and removed the cost and complexity arising from having to address system integration issues. Even the licensing requirements were simple and straightforward; a single price for the product, with no installation or integration costs and unlimited user licenses.

Most importantly, by partnering with OCSI, the data business that created the Index of Multiple Deprivation for the Government, we were able to ensure there was no data maintenance overhead; all of the thousands of data sets on Community Insight are always up-to-date, without the need for staff resources to maintain the tool.

As a consequence, at a time when budgets are under pressure across the housing sector, we've seen an increase in subscriptions to Community Insight. And we've seen housing providers with

extensive GIS capacity subscribing to Community Insight as a way of providing basic mapping and analytic tools for staff to do their own place-based profiling and analysis, leaving specialist staff to do more specialist and value-adding work for the business.

All of this points to an interesting split in technology trends within housing. While there is clearly a need to look at ways to rationalise and integrate core systems and reduce the sheer number of bits of technology used by housing providers, there are also business areas where simpler and more straight-forward app-based approaches can provide more effective solutions. GIS-based mapping looks likely to be a test-bed for this as mapping technologies fall in price and the ability of ordinary users to access and deploy analytic tools, previously the domain of specialists, becomes mainstreamed. There is clearly huge value available for those organisations able to invest in integrated mapping solutions to complement their core business management systems. But at the same time, a growing market for non-specialist, app-based, off-the-shelf solutions provides a significant element of that value to a much broader user-base, but at a significantly lower cost.

Matt Leach is CEO of HACT.

GENERAL NEWS

Housing security & privacy forum

With cybersecurity and data privacy firmly in the headlines, members of the Housing Security and Privacy Forum met for their second conference in March 2016. Founded by Adrian Leung, head of information security at Catalyst Housing Group, the forum aims to share information and enable its members to discuss common challenges and work collaboratively to address them.

Hosted by Peabody at its offices in London, the conference was attended by over 40 delegates from 31 housing providers and the topics discussed ranged from cloud security to the new data protection regulations.

Audrey Olden, information governance manager, First Wessex said, "Still being fairly new to the sector and with the world of data protection changing dramatically, it is very helpful to work with peers because we all have the same objectives."

The Housing Security and Privacy Forum is open to anyone in the housing sector who has a responsibility for information security and data privacy. To join and get involved, go to LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/groups/8320754) where the group has a thriving online presence.





GOLDEN GATES' FITZHENRY APPOINTED CEO OF HOUSING SUPPORT PRO

Peter Fitzhenry, CEO, Housing Support Pro

Mobile working software provider Footprint Solutions has appointed Peter Fitzhenry as CEO of its new subsidiary Housing Support Pro. The company has been created as a separate entity as a result of the success of its namesake product.

Fitzhenry was previously the managing director of Golden Gates Housing Trust until last month. He has over 20 years' experience across the public, private

and not for profit sectors, having worked for Liverpool City Council, Sheffield City Council, Liberate PLC and Kendric Ash.

Fitzhenry said, "To paraphrase Victor Kiam, 'I was so impressed with the company that I bought into it'. At Golden Gates, I led the company's very successful ICT service for 11 years, and during that time I started working with Footprint Solutions and familiarised myself with Housing Support Pro, and

what really stood out for me was its quality, adaptability and the speed of implementation.

"It's a time when housing providers need to innovate to respond to the challenge of delivering core services with fewer resources. The solutions available from Housing Support Pro can add value to any business that is serious about reducing costs while improving performance and productivity."

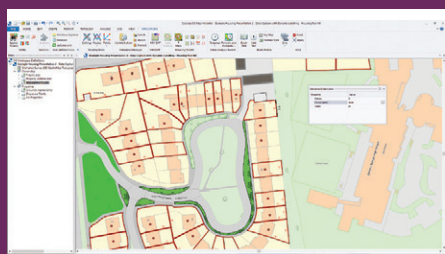
365Agile and Castleton Technology join forces

Castleton Technology has entered into a new perpetual licence agreement with 365Agile, with Castleton now having an exclusive licence within the social housing sector for 365Agile's suite of mobile working software.

Castleton said that its strategy for what it terms a 'mobile first, cloud-first' world is for all of its products to work on a tablet or smartphone; the 365Agile software further advances its strategy. As part of the agreement, a number of 365Agile employees

are being transferred to Castleton in order to help with the development and implementation of Castleton's suite of software, including 365Agile software.

Davinder Sanghera, chief operating officer, Castleton Technology, said, "This new arrangement extends the existing distributor relationship between both companies and is expected to improve the delivery of 365Agile in the social housing sector for the benefit of Castleton customers."



CADCORP ANNOUNCES ENTERPRISE GIS LICENSING MODEL

Cadcorp Housing Toolkit on Map Modeller desktop GIS.
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Cadcorp has just changed the way in which housing providers and other organisations can licence its desktop GIS and mapping software, based around an enterprise licence agreement (ELA).

The Cadcorp ELA provides a cost-effective option for organisations to licence the company's SIS Map Modeller

desktop software and is available as an annual subscription including full support and upgrades.

Martin McGarry, managing director, Cadcorp, said, "The new licence model provides an efficient method of corporately deploying desktop GIS and offers a compelling alternative to other suppliers including open source."

IBM buys Optevia for Microsoft Dynamics in housing

IBM has bought Optevia, a SaaS systems integrator specialising in Microsoft Dynamics CRM solutions for housing and public sector organisations. Optevia will become part of IBM Global Business Services.

Unlike traditional housing management systems that are tied to the property record and proprietary to the suppliers, Optevia said that Microsoft Dynamics CRM offers housing providers independence and flexibility.

Steve Lyon, business director for housing and health, Optevia, said, "The investment provided by IBM has enabled Optevia's Dynamics team to think beyond everyday activities and focus on more innovation with Microsoft Dynamics CRM."



GIS GOES MOBILE – THE BENEFITS OF GIS IN MANAGING PROPERTY PORTFOLIOS

Simon Weaver, Analytics Programme Manager, Esri UK

As not-for-profit organisations, housing providers are constantly looking for ways to operate as cost efficiently as possible, reinvesting any revenue income to create homes and communities that residents can take pride in. But how can housing providers and local authorities manage evolving property portfolios while providing a better standard of accommodation?

The benefits of geographic information systems (GIS) as systems of record for predictive analytics and data visualisation are well known and documented in a wide range of sectors. However, what is less known is the transition from GIS in the office to its use with mobile workforces enabled with mobile devices running apps that extend the GIS capabilities into the field. Organisations are now starting to realise significant operational efficiencies and improvements in customer service through the dynamic real-time operations that this new approach enables.

Improving a mobile working strategy

Housing providers face a variety of challenges and, as a result, require efficient operations to manage costs, ensure a rapid response to any issues and provide exemplary levels of customer service to tenants. A significant contribution to achieving this is to review the strategy for mobile workers as they play a key role in operations.

There are a number of issues that potentially hinder reliable mobile working. For example, housing providers' staff regularly collect information by hand in the field and then bring paper notes back to the office to be manually transferred into a digital format. However, by the time that data has been input into a system, it's not uncommon for inaccuracies to have crept in, for the data

to already be out-of-date and in some cases, even redundant. This is combined with valuable time being wasted with trips back and forth to the office to record the information, complete administrative tasks and receive the next assignment.

By equipping a mobile workforce undertaking maintenance tasks, inspecting damage, maintaining grounds and responding to tenants' complaints with mobile devices running GIS apps, they can communicate direct with those that are stationed in the office. This significantly improves data accuracy as information captured in the field can be communicated and analysed in real time without delays and errors in transposition. It also allows field-based workers to receive new assignments based on their geographic location, while remaining out in the field, minimising response time and maximising efficiency.

Gaining operational efficiencies

Maintenance tasks, issues and customer complaints are all accessible through the GIS platform, making them available for internal and external teams to access. Direct communication with field-based workers provides operations managers with an almost real-time picture of what's going on, what the priorities are and any new issues that may arise, allowing them to become more agile, to make more informed decisions and to adapt forward planning. New assignments can be quickly and easily assigned to the nearest field teams based on their skill and location to provide optimal efficiencies.

It's even possible to predict the future and plan maintenance projects before issues arise. For example, by looking at a collection of properties that all share the same problem, such as flood damage, broken roof tiles or single-glazed windows needing to be replaced,

a housing provider can create economies of scale, allowing it to address a range of issues in a given area at speed.

Enhancing internal and external communication through apps

Housing providers can now develop mobile applications that their tenants can use to report any issues direct to the office through an app installed on a mobile device, dramatically improving response times. If a housing provider has existing data about housing stock and resident details, they can easily publish a native mobile app to iOS and Android with very minimal software development. This cuts out time wasted on the more conventional methods of registering complaints and requests through traditional phone calls and sometimes even via post.

Until fairly recently, it would have taken a substantial amount of software development to deploy a mobile app interface to a GIS system. However, it can now be done conveniently and quickly using core technology within the Esri ArcGIS platform, which includes a range of configurable out-of-the-box mobile apps native to the main mobile platforms.

One source of truth

GIS is often talked about as the system of record. It's the one authoritative 'source of truth', providing data about the assets of that organisation, and can be used to make information intuitively available to whoever needs it, wherever they need it. For example, asset management can sometimes be problematic because it's not always easy to determine the boundary lines between council- or housing provider-owned land and those owned by other organisations, meaning that maintenance tasks on boundary lines are either missed or irregularly checked. GIS can not only provide location data about properties

GIS GOES MOBILE – THE BENEFITS OF GIS IN MANAGING PROPERTY PORTFOLIOS

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and owned land within a boundary, it can also be used to provide centralised access to external data feeds that may affect them such as the environment, including information on the weather or infrastructure.

One of the biggest benefits of having 'one source of truth' is the ability to share this information, making it available to others in the organisation at the point they need it most, whether that's the customer service team dealing with a boundary enquiry, the operations team assessing the scale of a maintenance project, or a field worker needing to know the previous history of a project or location information on a property by accessing the GIS platform via a mobile app on the go.

GIS in action

Sovereign Housing manages and maintains more than 38,000 homes across the south and south-west of England. Already one of the UK's largest housing associations, the organisation aims to grow to 50,000 homes by 2018 to help address the critical shortage of affordable property in those parts of the country. However, it is often difficult to identify suitable development sites

that will pass the scrutiny of planning authorities, so Sovereign has to be able to work closely with local councils to facilitate its growth plans.

Sovereign had been using GIS to manage spatial data for some time, but it took the strategic decision to exploit the analytical capabilities of Esri's ArcGIS extensively across the organisation, and aimed to train 500 employees by last summer. With help from Esri UK, it built a centralised GIS-based app to deliver accurate information to all employees about properties, assets, land and residents. The enterprise-wide use of ArcGIS has transformed the way in which employees work and has begun to deliver long-term benefits for the organisation.

Sovereign Housing uses ArcGIS as a system of record to conduct analysis and gain a deeper insight into business issues and tenants' needs. For instance, the company collected data on the incomes and living costs of its tenants, at all of its different locations, to assess the impact that the government's new 'benefits cap' would have on tenants over a period of 5-10 years. They were then able to draw conclusions from the data and

identify where and when different types of households would start to struggle, helping them to respond accordingly. It has also allowed them to successfully identify and qualify development opportunities using ArcGIS Online to share information with councils and start negotiations about mutually-beneficial new housing projects.

Realising the power of location through GIS

The benefits of GIS to housing providers and local authorities are vast. From driving operational efficiency to delivering exceptional customer service, and from improving underlying data quality to empowering a mobile workforce, GIS has become a prominent force in many organisations and will continue to become a fundamental part of core business operations.

Simon Weaver is an analytics programme manager at Esri UK.

Alysium Consulting celebrates first birthday

Change management specialist Alysium Consulting has celebrated the end of its first year of business after the completion of more than 50 projects in the housing and public sectors, including projects at Fortis Living, Riverside Housing and Metropolitan Housing.

Alysium was founded by Ian Lever and Phil Smith, previously director of transformation and business development director,

respectively, at Capita, with operational housing expert Lesley Buckels.

Ian Lever, managing director, Alysium Consulting, said, "We work with housing teams to understand the opportunities and risks in channel shift, to identify the potential of different technologies in a broad suite of delivery environments and, as tenants become increasingly empowered, to understand end-users' expectations."

Phil Smith, Alysium's business development director, added, "The drive to deliver performance efficiencies continues to set the public-sector agenda. Quick wins, for example through headcount reductions and channel management, have provided some breathing space but these will need to be built on with longer term, strategic goals in mind."

Some of the projects completed in the past year by Alysium include a transformation programme for Your Housing Group to modernise service delivery through channel management, procurement of a complete housing management system for Poole Housing Partnership, and the scoping, specification and procurement of network infrastructure for Riverside Housing.



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