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HOUSING™ TECHNOLOGY HOUSING | IT | TELECOMS | BUSINESS | ECOLOGY BOARDROOM PERSPECTIVES 2016

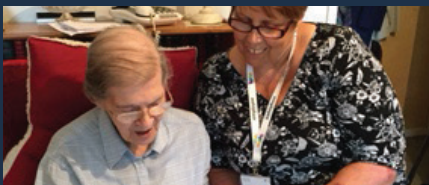## LOOKING AHEAD WITH HOUSING TECHNOLOGY

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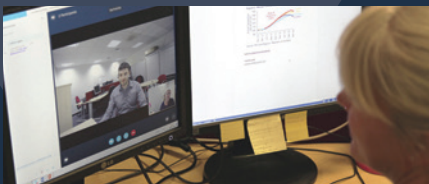**Page 06**

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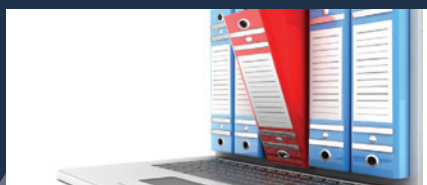**Page 16**

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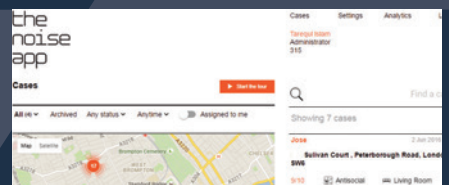**Page 14**

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BOARDROOM PERSPECTIVES 2016

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY BOARDROOM PERSPECTIVES 2016

BT Tower | London
Wednesday 21 September 2016

BT

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Boardroom Perspectives

Housing providers' IT services, and their associated IT teams, are now at the absolute centre of their operations. And at a time when many housing providers are trying to transform their business models and operational processes to become more streamlined, cost effective and better able to cope with things such as universal credit and rent reductions, technology is playing a pivotal role.

It's therefore vital that housing providers' board members and most senior executives have a wider understanding of the available technologies and how they can help with business transformation.

They don't need to know or even understand the technical side of game-changing technologies such as the internet of things, cloud computing, social media and analytics, but they do need to appreciate how these technologies could act as the catalysts for huge changes to their business.

Related to this, and as we've covered in previous Editor's Notes, Housing Technology expects that we will see massive changes to the social housing sector over the next 2-5 years.

These will include more mergers and acquisitions as bigger housing providers look for economies of scale, the diversification of income streams and the need to develop new commercial offerings to compete with private-sector companies, upheavals around regulatory and legislative changes from the government, and dealing with changing tenant demographics.

And lastly, while its impact is as yet unknown, Brexit will certainly have some repercussions (both positive and negative, no doubt) for the sector.

For all of those areas and many more, technology is by far the most important area to get right.

We would therefore strongly encourage housing providers' IT directors and heads of their various business units to distil the business benefits and 'blue sky' opportunities of new technologies so that board members and senior executives can understand them better and offer more support for new IT and business initiatives.

Future Housing Technology events

We have a number of great events lined up over the next nine months, including the launch of our 'Boardroom Perspectives 2016' C-level forum in September at the BT Tower in London, our annual evening reception in November, and our main conference in March 2017. Please see page 28 for further details.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY – BOARDROOM PERSPECTIVES 2016
21 SEPTEMBER 2016, BT TOWER, LONDON
www.housing-technology.com/events/
perspectives2016

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY – EVENING RECEPTION
16 NOVEMBER 2016, PIZZA EXPRESS, OLYMPIA, LONDON
www.housing-technology.com/events/
reception2016

**HOUSING TECHNOLOGY
– CONFERENCE & EXECUTIVE FORUM 2017**
7-9 MARCH 2017, Q HOTELS' OXFORD
BELFRY, OXFORD
www.housing-technology.com/events/ht17

SECTIONS

EMH Group now live with new HMS from Orchard

emh group

EMH Group has gone live with a full re-implementation of its housing management system from Orchard Information Systems as part of an ambitious change programme.

David Morris, head of customer services and project manager, EMH Group, said, "This was a major project which was part of the group's organisational development plan. The preparatory work in creating a governance and delivery structure proved to be invaluable in the project being delivered on time and within budget. It was very much a one-team approach with our project team working closely with Orchard's team. It was fitting that we went live during our 70th anniversary year."

Helen Bradford, head of ICT, EMH Group, said, "The aim of the project was to deliver a housing solution that addressed the business need for efficient, streamlined and standardised processes, improved customer service, and supported the group's strategic objectives; this is what

we have achieved. Working in partnership with Orchard, and the creation of a project team from a range of specialisms, including ICT who were focused on maximising the potential of the Orchard solution, ensured the successful delivery of the project."

POOLE HOUSING SELECTS CIVICA HOUSING CX

Civica has won a five-year contract with Poole Housing Partnership for its Housing Cx software to improve the customer experience, introduce more streamlined ways of working for its staff and deliver better services for tenants.

Housing Cx will allow Poole Housing's staff to instantly access all information about tenants from one place, including details of all previous contacts and services received. The system also includes tenant and supplier portals, enabling tenants to access services and communicate online and repair contractors to update the progress of jobs in real time.

Su Spence, director of finance and resources, Poole Housing Partnership, said, "We now have a state-of-the-art, flexible solution that will evolve with us and the needs of the tenants we serve. The new system will enable us to offer our tenants the same level of service as any leading consumer brand."

In the last three months, Housing Cx has also been chosen by Barrow in Furness Borough Council, Central and Cecil Housing Trust, Local Space, Orwell Housing Association and Prospect Community Housing.

Brendan Fowler, director, Prospect Community Housing, said, "The work that was put in by Civica staff over the past month or so to resolve our issues and work with us to go live has been exceptional. We are delighted to be live with Cx, and already staff are excited at the possibilities that this will bring for improving the service we provide to tenants."

COMPANIES IN THIS ISSUE

OMNILEDGER & M-FILES PAPER CUTS AT SHIAN HOUSING

Shian Housing Association is now using an M-Files electronic document management (EDM) system in conjunction with its OmniLedger Pyramid housing management system to reduce its reliance on paper-based documents.

Leslie Laniyan, managing director, Shian Housing Association, said, "We maintain a detailed record of anything related to our properties and tenants. This includes maintenance work, invoices, arrears letters, new projects and other miscellaneous documents. Therefore it is vital to ensure that all this data is handled with great care, from document recording and retrieval through to archiving and destruction.

"However, there are unavoidable overheads including storage space, staff time, printing supplies and shredding services. Time is a particular problem when we're manually combing the archive for documents stamped for disposal. These problems will only grow as we take on new projects, hence the need to develop a solid EDM foundation while our paper archive is still of a manageable size.

"Implementing M-Files with OmniLedger gave us the opportunity to integrate a document management solution within Pyramid. This kind of integration lets us use our internal tenant and property database in Pyramid as a source of metadata for all our documentation, making the saving process seamless, and provides our staff with a fixed universal indexing procedure to work from."

BPHA care & support from Octavia

BPHA went live in May 2016 with a new care and support system from Octavia Software Solutions, including on- and offline digital forms.

As part of a wider exercise to implement a new housing management system from Orchard, BPHA chose Octavia's Oska software because of its easy integration with Orchard and it now forms part of the newly-procured business software suite. All of BPHA's contact data is now in one place, with Oska providing a single care and support system for transparency and simplicity.

Clive Thacker, Technical Project Manager, BPHA

Clive Thacker, technical project manager, BPHA, said, "Using Oska and the iPad forms has opened people's eyes to the possibilities that technology offers. There is no limit to the type of forms that can be created: assessments, support plans and health and safety checks are just a few examples. The offline working facility is very good, with the digital forms working just as well offline as online.

"Capturing visits using the iPad forms gives staff more time to spend with their clients; it's actually getting them back to what they do best, supporting the people that need them."

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West Lancs Council automates with Orbis TaskCentre

West Lancashire Borough Council has implemented Orbis TaskCentre in conjunction with Aareon QL to automate many of its previously manual or inefficient housing processes around rent arrears, universal credit, asbestos monitoring and other services.

Craig Round, project manager for service development, West Lancashire Borough Council, said, "We have to use service automation if we want to save money and resources. We might not be making cashable savings for some of the things we do, but we are releasing the resources to be directed to the right areas."

Craig Round, Project Manager for Service Development, West Lancashire Borough Council

The introduction of Universal Credit in 2013 meant that the council had to re-evaluate its entire rental management process.

Round said, "Whereas in the past the housing benefit was paid direct to us, the introduction of universal credit means that the benefit is paid direct to the tenant and then they pay us, but sometimes this can be a challenge. We've therefore now built some tasks in TaskCentre to manage all of the different elements so that people don't have to manually enter information into Aareon QL and chase up tenants; it's all automated."

Managing debit and arrears is another significant issue for the council's rent and money advice team. Every Monday morning, the team needs accurate and current information regarding the rent balance of every tenant. TaskCentre now automatically monitors the 'debit run' in Aareon QL over the weekend and reports when debits have failed, succeeded or if there is a problem. It then collates all of the information and displays it to the council's rent team so that it has everything it needs on Monday morning.

Similarly, TaskCentre has also been deployed to monitor the state of cash flow in Aareon QL and to email all the relevant people concerned about the value of the posting each night. Round said, "With TaskCentre also monitoring the cash flow and notifying the team, they know what to expect on the accounts and what payments we've got when they come in the next morning."

The council reported that it has saved £1 million in the past year, mainly from jobs and posts that haven't needed to be filled as a result of the increased automation from using TaskCentre.

Round said, "Rather than spend a lot of money with third party developers, we want to do as much as possible ourselves and TaskCentre allows us to do that. For us, it's not only freeing up a lot of our income officers' time, it's also removing the need for a lot of expensive integration."

NORTHGATE HELPS REDUCE ARREARS AT ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

Aberdeen City Council is using software from Northgate Public Services to enable earlier interventions regarding rent arrears. The council has implemented Northgate's Payment Arrangements and Task Manager modules.

Aberdeen City Council wanted to improve how it collected rent from its 22,000 properties by engaging with tenants before rent arrears became a problem and by offering a wider choice of payment options.

The council is using Payment Arrangements to create a schedule of payments for each tenant and, through Task Manager, create early alerts when a payment is about to go unpaid or has been missed.

Diane Leaver, Systems Manager for Communities, Housing & Infrastructure, Aberdeen City Council

Diane Leaver, systems manager for communities, housing and infrastructure, Aberdeen City Council said, "Payment Arrangements enables us to show our tenants what they have agreed to pay and when, and we can react very quickly when they miss a payment. Ultimately, it enables us to become more proactive on rent management.

"Incredibly, we'd never really paid attention to whether our tenants paid their rent or not; we were simply led by them falling into arrears. Payment Arrangements gives us the opportunity to do so much more and do it faster."

Adactus automates purchase orders with Invu

Stuart Evans, chief technical officer, Invu, said, "We recommended that Adactus should capture invoices electronically using Abbyy FlexiCapture and then traffic those invoices through the Invu document management and workflow system in order to get those invoices authorised in an auditable fashion."

Chris Holden, management accountant, Adactus Housing Group, said, "We had no central purchase ordering solution before. Having looked at other systems that were not user-friendly, we decided to develop a bespoke solution with Invu. Most people have used Amazon or an eBay portal without having to use a help manual, which is the spirit in which our system has been designed and built.

Adactus Housing Group has implemented an automated purchase-order processing system from Invu, based on Abbyy's FlexiCapture data capture and document processing software.

Prior to implementing an electronic document management system with automated invoice processing, Adactus had a manual process that had resulted in long delays in handling invoices. And although automating the process improved invoice approval practices, it didn't give budget-holders full control of their budgets at the point when a spending commitment was made. Adactus realised that what it was missing was a purchase order system to connect to and complement the entire purchase planning and accounting process.

The housing provider compared various purchase ordering systems and chose Invu as a document management system provider. Invu then developed a customised solution, which moves the point of control from the invoice's arrival to the earlier point of requesting a purchase and enables the budget-holder to see the potential impact of that commitment on their budget before committing to any expenditure.

Invu's solution is based on Abbyy's FlexiCapture platform which helps to automate the capture and extraction of data from any kind of document, such as supplier invoices for matching against purchase orders, for use in a variety of back-office applications.

"Budget-holders now have far greater control over what is being spent against budgets because they can see purchase requests before goods are ordered. This gives us better oversight and we can forecast our cash commitments better. The combined Invu and Abbyy solution enables budget-holders to easily approve purchase requisitions or reject any that they don't wish to commit to before the supplier receives a purchase order, thereby preventing cash from leaving the business unnecessarily."

Cardinus releases Indigo risk management software

Cardinus Risk Management has just released its new Indigo property risk management system for housing managers. Indigo supports housing managers by providing them with an online, secure scheduling and management platform.

Cardinus said that the new, streamlined software will make it easier for housing managers to schedule surveys, notify surveyors and analyse housing portfolios. Indigo provides an easy, user-friendly 'everything in one place' approach that sees ordering, administration, reporting and improvements all carried out within a centralised platform.

SUFFOLK HOUSING MITIGATES UNIVERSAL CREDIT WITH MOBYSOFT

Suffolk Housing Society is using Mobysoft's Rentsense software to help them mitigate the effects of rent cuts and the introduction of universal credit.

Wayne Tatlow, income manager, Suffolk Housing Society, said, "These ongoing changes mean that we need to manage payment patterns and income streams that are far more complex and varied than before.

"Rentsense will enable us to proactively monitor rent accounts to ensure we can quickly identify tenants who are not paying the correct amount so that we can contact them promptly and work with them to minimise their arrears. Rentsense will also allow us to prepare for the full roll out of Universal Credit and build up resilience in advance."

South Yorkshire Housing Association has also deployed Rentsense to create immediate efficiencies in its arrears recovery processes, particularly regarding the workloads of its income officers.

Tim Crawford, rent and lettings manager, South Yorkshire Housing Association, said, "At the moment, there are cases that our housing officers are looking at on a regular basis that don't need any action, taking up valuable time that could be used elsewhere. And on the day of 'go live' and training, Rentsense reduced our overall caseload from 2,761 cases, as recommended by our housing management system, to just 744 cases."

WHEATLEY GROUP & DERWENT LIVING SIGN WITH HOUSING CONTACT

The Wheatley Group and Derwent Living have both signed up to use Housing Contact's Call2Collect software to tackle their rent arrears.

The two housing providers are using Call2Collect to contact multiple tenants simultaneously using call automation. When a tenant picks up the call, they then have the option of pressing a number to be connected directly to an adviser who can talk to them about the amount they owe, and, where necessary, to offer support and payment arrangements.

John Doyle, managing director, Housing Contact, said, "The combined impacts of the one per cent rent cut, the roll out of universal credit and wider housing policy changes have created revenue risks for housing providers and as a result many are now thinking about smarter ways to protect their core income. A number of our customers are seeing six figure annual savings in staffing costs at the same time as increasing their overall collection rates."

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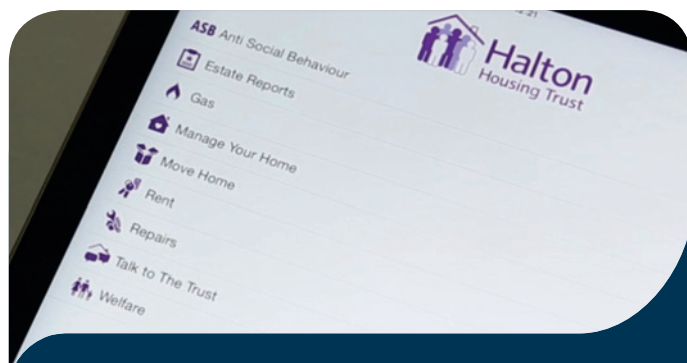
"1st Touch took the time to understand what we needed and delivered a highly effective solution which is all the more impressive because of the real time integration and the automation of CRM contacts and colleague workflows"
Director of ICT, Carole Galsworthy

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.

NEW HOUSING CUSTOMERS FOR CAPITA SOFTWARE SERVICES

Derby Homes, Melin Homes, Newark and Sherwood District Council, Southway Housing Trust, Community Housing Group, and Yarlington Housing Group have all recently implemented new software from Capita Software Services to extend their mobile working capabilities.

Roger Birkinshaw, housing director, Capita Software Services, said, "We're pleased to see the impact and benefits mobile working continues to offer housing providers, with over 10,000 mobile devices now live across our customers' field-based staff. Multiple organisations going live with new mobile working functionality in the last two months alone is testament to the sector's dedication to this technology and how it continues to support their evolving requirements."

The new modules implemented by the housing providers include instant access to repairs and maintenance scheduling via smartphones and full end-to-end repairs processing from mobile devices direct to back-office systems.

Mplsystems secures Innovate UK funding for IoT mobile solution

Mplsystems has just won its second funding award from the UK's innovation agency, Innovate UK. The 'Advanced Engineer Scheduling Optimisation & Prediction' (AESOP) project will prototype a new application to enable real-time optimisation of field service technicians using the internet of things (IoT) and other external feeds.

The AESOP project will combine real-time data feeds about traffic flows, the weather and calendar events, with data from IoT devices. This will be correlated with customer preferences and information about engineers' workloads, locations, parts and skills. The scheduling will include optimised sequencing of the various field-service activities and the best routes between them.

Paul White, CEO, Mplsystems, said, "Scheduling technicians and optimising routes in real-time is a challenge for any business which provides services in the field. Couple that with unforeseen events, such as traffic delays, over-runs and customer changes, and the result is that these companies are forced to trade off efficiency against customer service.

"Companies today rely on inefficient manual or partly-automated internal processes and are therefore unable to react quickly. Our latest algorithms are changing the dynamics, plus we are combining the latest IoT devices to predict and resolve break-downs before they happen."

Mplsystems said that the anticipated benefits of the AESOP were dramatic, with organisations expected to be able to reduce their overall maintenance, planning and administrative costs by at least 50 per cent.

This latest funding follows Mplsystems' first award from Innovate UK which focused on using text analytics to provide intelligent, automated responses in complex contact centre environments.

NEW CEO FOR TOTALMOBILE

TotalMobile, the Belfast-based mobile software provider, has appointed Jim Darragh as its new CEO. He joins the company from CMO Compliance, a global provider of enterprise health, safety, environmental and quality software. The company's previous CEO, Colin Reid, will remain involved as a non-executive director.

David Carman, chairman, TotalMobile, said, "Jim Darragh has over 20 years' experience of building successful international corporate software businesses. After an extensive search, we chose him from a large field of candidates as he's a proven strategic thinker with a strong focus on growth. This appointment is part of our plans to treble the size of the business in the next three to five years."

HOUSING SUPPORT PRO APPOINTS NEW TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

Housing Support Pro, a subsidiary of mobile solutions provider Footprint Solutions, has appointed Steve Lamb as its technical director. This follows Housing Support Pro recently being spun out of Footprint Solutions as a separate entity.

Lamb has 30 years' management experience delivering business transformation, technology change and service transition programmes within social housing environments.

Peter Fitzhenry, CEO, Housing Support Pro, said, "Having previously worked with Steve at Golden Gates Housing Trust, I know that he will bring added value to the company with his wealth of knowledge and expertise."

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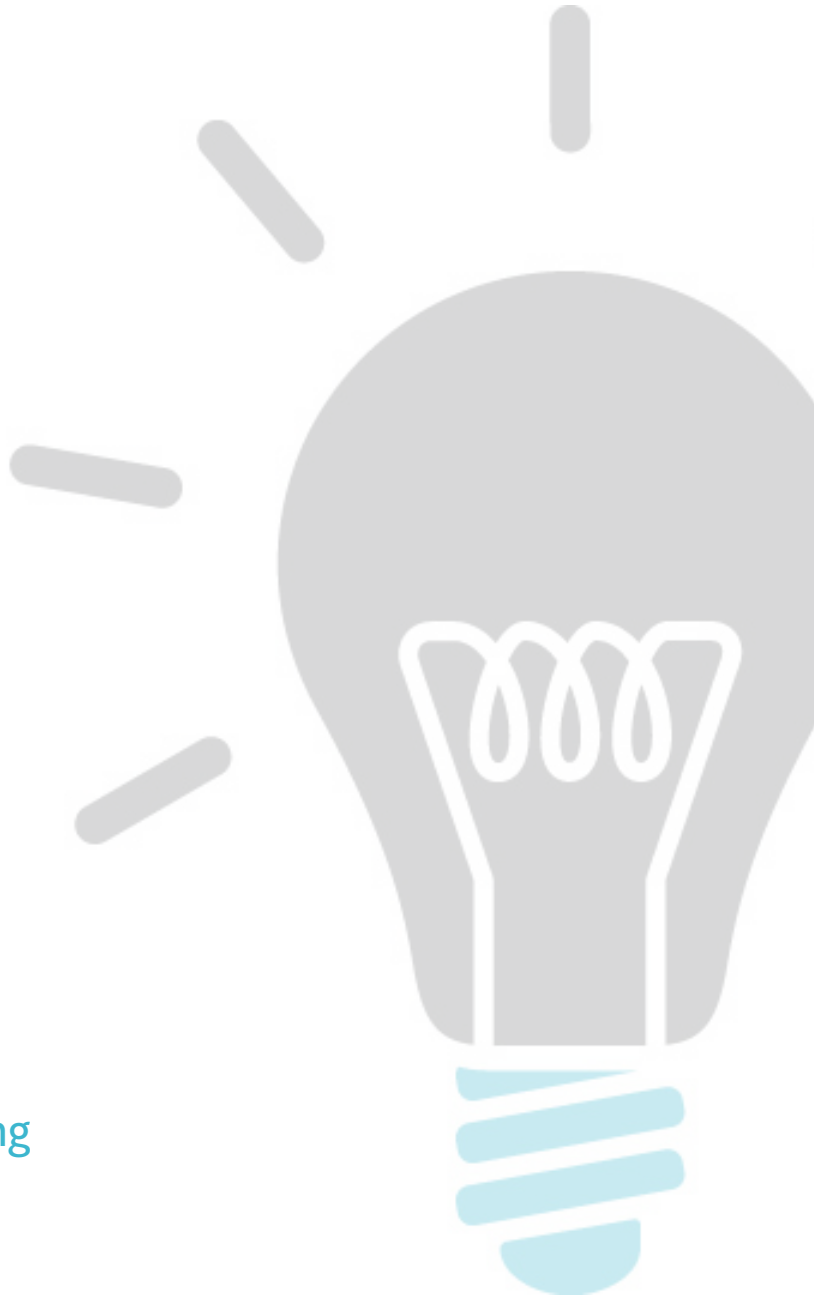
OPENING DOORS TO TENANT APPOINTMENTS

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch

1st Touch CEO Greg Johns comments on how doorstep appointment technology will be the next IT revolution to reach housing providers. In his view, the benefits are especially attractive to those seeking greatly enhanced customer service levels for their tenants.

I've always believed that the quicker that customers can get their needs addressed fully, then the better that customer service levels are for both the customers themselves and for those who serve them. Nowhere is this more true than in the world of social housing. Tenant requirements are often quite pressing and very real. They might, for example, include urgent responsive repair requests, pending social care issues or important housing management queries.

Naturally, tenants feel that their own particular issues need to be resolved promptly and we are all too aware of the horror stories of customers being passed endlessly around an ever-widening collection of people who aren't able to help them. Fortunately, in these days where housing providers are looking for optimal value for money, it's also in the interest of the housing provider to meet their needs quickly too; the more time taken, people involved or systems connected, then the higher the costs are bound to be.

Consequently, any IT solution aimed at resolving such tenant issues must be able to generate the right appointment for the tenant first time; i.e. be able to confirm an appointment time and date promptly with the particular part of the housing provider that is most capable of addressing their needs. This appointment should be confirmed to the tenant by text in advance and be simple to rearrange should circumstances change.

To be a truly effective solution though, any such system needs to be highly accessible to tenants too. Thus, it needs to be as available through a home visit from a mobile operative or field worker as it is online through a self-service portal accessed through a tenant's smartphone, PC or other mobile device.

Luckily, through the evolution of technology, innovation has lent a much needed and timely hand here. Like all the best innovations, it is a straightforward and reasonably cost-effective solution. The idea is to seamlessly combine all the key data relating to a tenant, the property in which they live and the housing provider's resources together with an easy-to-use online appointment system. This highly-integrated concept is known generically as 'doorstep appointment' technology. It allows tenants to schedule their own appointments either through visiting field workers automating the processes involved, or directly online through their housing provider's tenant portal and apps.

Such systems greatly simplify and speed up appointment scheduling. Tenants really appreciate this because they can also see everything they need to review, either on the field worker's device or online via their own device at any time of day. The tenant then simply books a suitable appointment for the appropriate services to be delivered. These appointments might be for responsive repairs, gas or electric checks, financial inclusion reviews, social care assessments and more. The tenants can request the very best appointment times available, prioritise or rearrange the appointments made, order text reminders and book any follow-up actions required. There is also a facility to add voice notes, photos and videos.

This approach reduces tenant frustration considerably because it eliminates the very time-consuming need for field staff to return to the office first before attempting to schedule suitable times and dates or alternatively having to spend time getting hold of the most appropriate member of staff to confirm the details of an appointment.

One cannot underestimate the positive impact that this level of automation has on tenants. The fact that they can now have all their issues reviewed and dealt with promptly and efficiently is a huge improvement over what had been the norm in the past; the immediacy and thoroughness of this type of automation is incredibly well received.

I have heard it said that "one of the greatest motivators is to hand people more responsibility for running their own lives" and it is quite remarkable how tenants are immensely impressed at being allowed to take their own affairs into their own hands. By empowering them to resolve their own problems, the doorstep appointments approach is big on convenience and allows the tenant to feel much more valued, respected and, above all, in control.

There is a correspondingly enormous leap forward in terms of both perceived and actual customer service levels here. The positive and valuable perceptions generated will indelibly underpin the relationship with the housing provider over time as well, and as the breadth of areas accessible through the web increases, it will also generate future relationship opportunities and benefits. This 'future proofing' of tenant benefits is another excellent advantage of this new technology. And from our own research, we can confirm with some certainty that those housing providers investing in this kind of innovative technology will see a significant, valuable and immediate customer service dividend.

So, given the very significant benefits available for all parties concerned, doorstep appointment technology has risen to the top of many housing providers' agendas recently. Given the correspondingly sharp increase in interest levels for this new approach, the chances are that this highly customer-focused appointment technology will open many doors across the sector and establish itself as a new best-practice in customer relations. I'm delighted to say that the real winners of any such investment will be the tenants themselves, and that's very good news for both them and their housing provider.

Greg Johns is CEO of 1st Touch.

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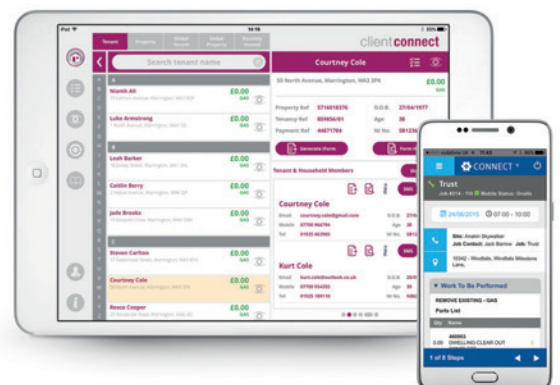
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TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE GLOBAL MOBILE MIGRATION

Peter Fitzhenry, CEO, Housing Support Pro

The rise and rise of mobile connectivity has been well documented. According to the 2015 GSMA Mobile Economy Report, the mobile ecosystem generated almost four per cent of UK GDP in 2014; a contribution that amounts to over $3 trillion of economic value across 236 countries. By 2020, mobile broadband connections will account for almost 70 per cent of the global base.

Not only are more people using mobile devices, but they are also spending more time online; browsing the internet, making purchases and networking via social media. At the other, less consumer-driven end of the spectrum, manufacturers and service providers are finding it easier to manage sales and operations from handheld devices.

There is also a compelling argument for achieving a return on your investments. In the 2015 CEO survey run by PwC, the majority of CEOs thought that digital technologies had created high value for their organisations in areas such as data and data analytics, customer experience, trust and innovation capacity. The CEOs also pointed to operational efficiency as a key area where they have seen the best

return, with 82 per cent believing value had been created.

Applications for the housing sector

Given the proven benefits of mobile technology, it's reasonable to suggest that the social housing sector could learn a lesson in embracing change.

Did you anticipate pay to stay, right to rent, universal credit or voluntary right to buy when you bought your software? Does your existing system help you respond to these new challenges, or are you in a cycle of switching providers; a time consuming and expensive process? I imagine most will agree that any fixed IT infrastructure installed in the past four years is now partly or wholly redundant.

Making a case for mobile

There is nothing more frustrating for a business, its employees, customers and, of course, the in-house IT team than delay upon delay when installing a system that's designed to cure all known evils. What they want is an agile project management approach that can see systems and mobile technology operating within four weeks. However, major IT systems take a considerable

time to develop, which means future-proofing software that accounts for today and tomorrow's problems is a tough task.

To combat this, the DIY mobile market has become a regular feature in most major businesses across various sectors. It allows customers to have a say in the design phase of applications to ensure they cater for what they want today and tomorrow. This approach to skills and knowledge transfer means that clients don't need to worry about getting it exactly right from day one; systems can develop as they learn more about the environment they are operating in.

Adapting to change

Change should not be approached with scepticism; as Charles Darwin said, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change". Being open to change and finding opportunity in new technologies, such as the global mobile migration, will set you apart from those that still pine for paper and pen.

Peter Fitzhenry is CEO of Housing Support Pro.

Qube Global launches Task Hub for mobile working

Qube Global Software has developed Task Hub, a remote access portal for on-the-go housing management by existing users of Qube's software as well as their external partners.

The Task Hub can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection, displaying the user's personal to-do list, including tasks, diaries, jobs and calls. With access to real-time Qube data, users can work more efficiently and accurately, adding notes and uploading supporting documents such as invoices, emails and letters.

The Task Hub also acts as a communications enabler between external parties involved in housing management, such as contractors and suppliers, all of whom can access the hub and update the status of tasks.

John Cuppello, CEO, Qube Global Software, said, "Accessible from anywhere at any time, Qube users no longer need to return to the office in order to complete tasks. This in turn makes them more efficient and, with all the information they need at their fingertips, better equipped to make the right decisions."

VIDEO KILLED THE RADIO STAR

(AND LIVE STREAMING KILLED THE REPAIRS INSPECTION...?)

Adam Rigg, New Media & Channel Specialist, Red Kite Community Housing

During the past month, Red Kite Community Housing has been experimenting with Facebook's new live-streaming tool, ingeniously entitled Facebook Live. Okay, Facebook might have used up all of their creative juices for the actual technology and had none left when it came to naming their new status tool but aside from that, it's very clever stuff indeed.

Having previously tried other streaming tools and getting quite into Periscope at one point, I was immediately looking for the little hook in Facebook Live that might set it apart from the others. Could it be the fact that most people now have a Facebook account and so don't need to download anything new or sign into anything else? Well...yes, that's probably it.

Or... maybe it's the ability to limit your stream to a particular audience? This was one of the biggest hurdles we had to overcome with Periscope; the privacy settings were not really configurable enough for business use. Periscope is great if you want to be the next big live-streaming star and show the world and his wife what you had for lunch, how you ate it and how you washed up the dishes afterwards, but not so great if you want to have less public communication, related to a service that you offer a customer.

Because Facebook Live offers the ability to restrict streams between two Facebook accounts, that means, for example, one of our customers could live stream into us without any other customer seeing. Ah-ha, I hear you cry. That might be useful for repair issues! That's what I said too. I even used the words Ah-ha.

I imagined one of our customers live streaming into us, showing us a repair issue that needed sorting, and we could then assess (via the live stream) what needed doing and raise the repair on our system. This would potentially remove the need for a member of staff to physically visit a home and have a look, saving time and money and offering a better service to our customers. Technology is clever, isn't it?

However, when we mocked up a customer reporting a repair, we encountered some challenges. One of our technical officers pretended to be a customer (we called him Mrs Miggins for the sake of anonymity) and he live streamed in to one of our relationship specialists. His mock repair was related to his packet of broken biscuits, live from his desk. I know, exciting stuff. They were bourbon creams, in case you were wondering, but we don't know the circumstances that led to them being damaged.
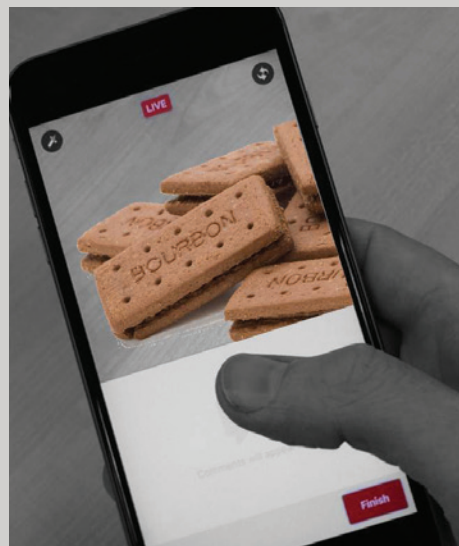
The technical officer we used is far from the most technological savvy member of staff, so observing him start the stream took a little while at first. When the stream was live, it took him some time to grasp what a live stream was; at one point, I think he was talking to the packet of biscuits on his desk.

Our relationship advisor was able to comment (by typing) back to him while he streamed, so this could be used to query various things about the repair. Did we get the biscuits repaired? No.

The damage was too severe and unfortunately the entire packet had to be dunked and then destroyed.

Overall, our initial experiments have been mixed. Without doubt, live streaming has great potential for a wide variety of uses in our sector but one thing that our experiments showed is that the technology will only be useful and fully embraced if both customers and our staff can easily use it. The second thing is that if it becomes annoying or more difficult to use than traditional channels, customers will jump straight back on the phone and tell everybody how terrible live streaming is. Which it isn't. It's very clever. And efficient.

Looking to the future, where could live streaming take the housing sector? Probably the most prominent developing technologies for housing providers are the internent of things (IoT), dynamic mobile working and (always controversial) drone use.

Hang on to your socks, though, because they might be about to be blown off; how's this for a scenario to end the article with?

Imagine a sensor on a customer's roof that checks the roof for damage following heavy weather. If there are any issues that need assessing, it sends an iAlert to one of your fleet of drones. The drone then flies up to check the roof and (wait for it...) live streams video of the damaged roof to your repairs department, who then send someone out to fix it using their dynamic mobile working solution.

Okay, okay, calm down. There may be a few technical (and legal) issues to overcome in that scenario, but the future won't build itself you know.

Adam Rigg is a new media and channel specialist at Red Kite Community Housing.

FUTURES HOUSING'S UNIFIED & MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS

Gavin Hitchcock, Head of ICT, Futures Housing Group

Futures Housing Group is embarking on a £600,000 plan to revolutionise the way it works to create effortless experiences for its tenants, improve business processes and deliver financial efficiency. In the first of four articles, Futures Housing Group's head of ICT, Gavin Hitchcock, explains the housing provider's journey to launch a new unified and multi-channel communications system which will make it easier for staff to work flexibly, as well as give tenants more choice when contacting Futures or accessing its services.

With more than 300 members of staff and over 20,000 people living in our 9,000 homes throughout the Midlands, the challenge for us is to deliver a range of online self-service options and contact methods for tenants through an integrated communications approach which supports back-office efficiency.

Our new system will use Microsoft Skype for Business (SfB) to deliver telephony, video conferencing, instant messaging, desktop sharing and collaboration for staff. It also brings in Enghouse Interactive Contact Centre (EICC) which will provide customer communication options including telephone, email, SMS, live web chat, social media interaction, self-service and contact automations for tenants.

Integration between EICC and our back-office systems (including Orchard Housing) will enable automated inbound customer identification (by looking up the telephone number, email address, social media identifier or webchat login) combined with automated contact centre agent 'screen pops'.

The starting point for the project was to gain insights into customer demographics and their propensity to use technology, differing communication methods and self-service options. The research findings informed the project's business case, set expectations on customer 'take up', and allowed us to plan longer term customer marketing and support strategies.

As significant investment would be needed to move to such a solution, Alysium Consulting was employed to investigate and challenge the internal business case against value for money principles. Substantial benefits were identified in improved customer service provision and associated operational and financial efficiencies such as reduced travel costs/time, back-office efficiencies, and reduced transaction costs by increased customer self-service and greater process automation.

Ian Lever from Alysium Consulting said, "We had already done a significant amount of work with Futures Housing relating to the channel shift agenda and challenging the use of paper and older customer contact processes which were both time consuming and costly.

"We reviewed Futures Housing's progress and added some additional benefits which demonstrated a real return on the investment. We then appraised these benefits using our knowledge of the technologies available (and in development) to ensure the business case was not only financially viable but also achievable and deliverable."

Following final approval, we moved to the specification and procurement phase with support from Alysium. Due to the complexity and range of potential solutions available, coupled with the anticipated financial commitment over its contract term, we chose a competitive dialogue process with a published opportunity in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). Competitive dialogue was chosen so that we could speak to the bidders direct, with the aim of developing one or more suitable alternative solutions to meet our requirements.

The first lesson we learned was that competitive dialogue offered the best option (under the regulations in place at the time) to ensure that the correct outcome took precedence over process efficiency, albeit at the expense of what can seem an overly-long process). However, the new 2015 procurement rules allowed for a competitive procedure with negotiation, and the soft market testing is considered as preliminary market consultation, showing that these limitations have now been recognised and allowed for by EU directive 2014/24EC.
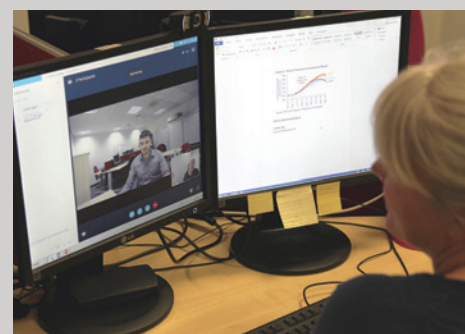
The procurement process finished in September 2015 with the contract being awarded to Amillan, a communications integrator specialising in unified communications, cloud and mobility technologies, and advanced contact centres.

However, we recognised at an early stage that this wasn't an 'off the shelf'

FUTURES HOUSING'S UNIFIED & MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS
Continued from previous page

solution that had been tried and tested within our type of infrastructure. For this reason, we designed a proof of concept into our project approach. It's a little bit like cooking a meal; we knew all the ingredients should work together, but until you actually cook it in your kitchen using your cooker, you can never be certain that it will taste as good as it should.

The second lesson was that technology solutions like this are complex, with many 'known unknowns' and 'unknown unknowns'. I'd say that including a proof of concept is essential to generate confidence that the solution will actually work within your environment. Linking this to an 'exit plan' for the contractual commitment is also highly recommended.

From December 2015 to May 2016, our ICT team and Amillan worked together to deploy the proof of concept which involved a series of test phases against a pre-defined list of core system functions. The testing was done on a pass/fail basis, on the understanding that a formal contractual commitment would be made if all test areas passed.

Chris Cheetham, Futures Housing's project manager, said, "The proof of concept that we developed with Amillan was very comprehensive and allowed us to exercise and test almost every

detailed element of the solution. This was essential because we needed to have sufficient confidence in it to proceed with the full replacement of our existing legacy systems."

The proof of concept phase ended this May, and alerted us to a number of learning points. Perhaps the most important was the difficulty in delivering video using our existing thin-client terminals due to hardware limitations. A number of alternative devices were tested and we decided to fast track 40-50 staff members from thin clients to notebooks. This was an obvious solution because it supports agile/mobile working for our staff as well as allowing us to progressively replace terminals over the next couple of years as part of our hardware replacement programme.

The proof of concept also highlighted that the accessibility software used by a visually-impaired member of staff wasn't compatible with EICC. This resulted in us accepting an earlier version of EICC's desktop software, with Enghouse proactively committing to deliver the required functionality by late 2017. A number of minor (and acceptable) SfB/Citrix compatibility issues and hardware restrictions were also identified to be dealt with during the project delivery phase. So, what next? Following the successful proof of concept, we plan to:

- Replace our existing contact centre with the EICC multi-channel contact centre solution;
- Replace our legacy telephone system with SfB unified communications;
- Finalise the specification and integrate Orchard Housing with EICC;
- Upgrade selected desktop hardware for 'at desk' video conferencing;
- Implement dedicated SfB video-conference meeting room solutions;
- Initiate a comprehensive change management programme to ensure that staff, tenants, partners and stakeholders gain the maximum benefits from the new solutions.

Watch this space to find out how the Futures journey unfolds in the next few issues of Housing Technology.

Gavin Hitchcock is head of ICT at Futures Housing Group.

Lanarkshire Housing moves digital tenants with MIS-AMS

Lanarkshire Housing Association has just implemented automated text, CRM and mobile solutions from MIS-AMS, alongside its existing use of the software provider's ActiveH housing management system.

The new solutions will improve communications with tenants as well as providing housing and maintenance officers with a mobile solution to gain access to important information while working in the field.

Teresa Ward, housing services director, Lanarkshire Housing Association, said, "Mobile phones are second nature for a large number of tenants, with most of them having at least one mobile device, and texting is accepted as an instant medium of

communication, being read within minutes of receipt. We are therefore delighted to introduce our automated text system to provide tenants with a better service."

The SMS solution from MIS-AMS enables Lanarkshire Housing to text residents if they fall behind with rental payments as well as set up repairs appointments.

Ward said, "We've used ActiveH for many years, but we're constantly upgrading to make sure we keep pace with tenants' demands and communicate with them in a way that they prefer, and mobile CRM will give staff access to important information while on the move."

GENTOO GROUP AND HOUSING PARTNERS IN 'STREETWISE' PARTNERSHIP

Gentoo Group, the housing provider and creator of the Streetwise web-based case management system, is teaming up with Housing Partners to deliver an all-encompassing software solution to enable safer communities.

Designed in-house by Gentoo, Streetwise comprises an anti-social behaviour (ASB) module and a domestic abuse module. Both provide a controlled way to record incidents, actions and interventions and the measures taken to tackle ASB, support victims and deal with perpetrators. Streetwise is currently being used by more than 15 housing providers,

including the Wheatley Group, Poplar Harca and North Tyneside Council.

Housing Partners' Insight product helps provide timely, personalised support to tenants while enabling housing providers to protect their income and manage risk, by aggregating data from multiple internal applications combined with external intelligence.

The focus of the partnership is the integration of Streetwise into Insight where it can be analysed and reported alongside existing data to build a single picture of tenants and their

current circumstances so that the most appropriate person-centred support and interventions are made available.

Two Castles Housing self-serves with Capita

As part of its channel-shift strategy, Two Castles Housing Association has implemented Capita's OpenAccess self-service portal to offer tenants online and anytime access to frequently-used services such as making payments, reporting repairs and updating contact details and preferences.

Chris Sowiak, assistant IT manager, Two Castles Housing Association, said, "We are very impressed with the success

of our mobile tenants' portal. It offers very easy self-service, it looks great and our tenants are really taking to it, with 94 per cent of those who signed up continuing to use it regularly to transact and engage with us."

RANTING AND RAVING AT AFFINITY SUTTON

Affinity Sutton is using software from customer engagement specialists Rant & Rave to capture real-time feedback from its tenants.

Anyone who calls Affinity Sutton's contact centre is now invited via text message to share their thoughts on the service they received, and anyone visiting the housing provider's website is also invited via a web widget to rate their experience and comment in real time.

Rant & Rave's technology instantly interprets every comment and presents the results back to Affinity Sutton for action. Opportunities for

process improvements are highlighted, outstanding customer service recognised and training needs addressed.

Affinity Sutton is also using Rant & Rave's Frontline Engagement module to present the voice of its tenants back to the wider business in an engaging way. Individual agents can read feedback received specifically about them and view how their performance compares to others in their team.

Catrin Jones, director of customer service, Affinity Sutton, said, "We are constantly looking for ways to better understand what is driving tenant satisfaction. The feedback that we get via Rant & Rave allows us to focus our efforts on the processes and services that have the greatest impact and matter most to our customers."

Hammersmith & Fulham Council and Mitie join in the rant

Hammersmith & Fulham Council and its contractors Mitie are also now using Rant
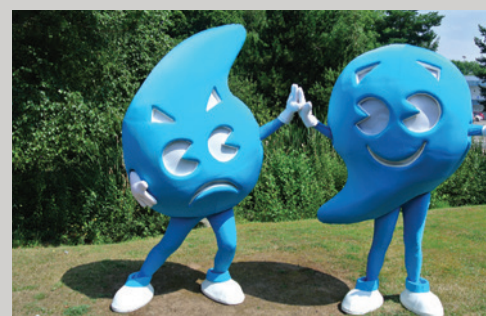
& Rave to give residents the ability to provide real-time feedback on repairs.

Since June 2016, residents who have contacted Mitie to report a fault or request a repair are being invited to rate the service they have received and share their thoughts via text.

Rant & Rave's technology collates and analyses every comment instantly and routes the results back to the appropriate Mitie contacts so that residents who are less than satisfied can be contacted quickly and have their issues dealt with.

Get **Time** On Your Side

33:33

If the time stamp on CCTV footage is wrong it's useless.

So all that effort spent retrieving the footage? **A waste of time.**

All that downloading of huge files for sequential review? **A waste of time.**

Ensuring you've got the right Codec for playback? **A waste of time.**

So, here's something worth spending a few moments dwelling on: Cloudview, the revolutionary new cloud-based visual surveillance system checks 5,000 times a day to ensure that the correct time is applied to all footage from every camera connected to it. **No errors. No mistakes.**

Not only that, with Cloudview you can find the visual data you need quickly, easily, and access it from anywhere you want via laptop, tablet or smartphone.

- No downloading huge files.
- No site visits to get footage.
- No need for Codecs.

So, why not make sure you've got time on your side with Cloudview?

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Email: cctv@cloudview.co

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Etive Technologies secures three housing contracts

Solihull Community Homes, Gloucester City Homes and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets have all signed up to Etive Technologies' Digital Log Book service, so that their combined 40,000 tenants can manage their tenancies and digital identities better. This will also enable each housing provider and the council to tailor their services more effectively to tenants through a more detailed understanding of their different demographic profiles.

Etive Technologies provides personal and property digital data handling solutions through a series of web-based Log Book products, the Digital Log Book for personal information and the Home Log Book for property information.

Stuart Young, managing director, Etive, said, "Our service lets housing providers and local councils engage better with digitally-disadvantaged tenants. By aggregating each user's online data, the

Digital Log Book allows tenants to have privacy and control of their personal information and access to services tailored to them. It also helps people and organisations to avoid loss and data, making it both easily accessible and reusable for users online."

APPELLO'S IOT-BASED CARE AT HOUSING & CARE 21

Housing & Care 21 is now using an internet of things-based care system from Appello at one of its housing developments in County Durham.

The new digital system, designed, installed and maintained by Appello, and manufactured by Green Access, offers an accelerated connection of just under three seconds to Appello's 24/7 emergency Careline service, enhanced quality of two-way speech, and the capacity to connect multiple fire, door access

and emergency calls from the housing development through to Appello simultaneously. Other benefits include room-to-room calling (which can be video enabled to support social inclusion), easy integration of other digital services and the ability to transfer large amounts of data.

Tony Tench, chief operating officer, Housing & Care 21, said, "Traditional analogue systems don't provide modern two-way conversations and they can take a long time to connect, so it makes little sense to offer this to our residents when we can now use digital and IP technologies, such as those provided by Appello. At a practical level, we're taking the stance that all new developments, and replacements at existing developments, should be digital."

Carl Atkey, chief technology officer, Appello, said, "The move from analogue to digital or IP systems is the first step in transforming housing. The benefits are clear for both providers and residents, from vastly improved response times to telecare monitoring centres, insight into data and activity to provide intelligent care, costs savings, as well as improved trust and wellbeing among residents."

VerseOne's Vocoll online at Regenda

Regenda Group is now using VerseOne's Vocoll Live Support software across its online services. In the first six months of using the new system, Regenda has successfully closed almost 1,000 tenant enquiries.

When contacting Regenda's customer service team via Live Support, tenants can now choose topics to ensure that their queries are picked up by the most suitable people, while the ability of Regenda's customer service staff to easily handle multiple enquiries simultaneously has reduced response times.

Chris Long, customer service manager, Regenda Group, said, "We wanted to increase the volume of enquiries that our customer service team could handle without increasing costs and, in an ideal world, even saving us money. The implementation of VerseOne's Live Support platform has meant exactly that and much more.

"We are also in a better position for the future. We will be able to handle more easily the predicted increase in the number of enquiries following changes such as universal credit."

Chris Mounsey, technical director, VerseOne, said, "We build solutions that enable our customers to realise the value of their content. The Vocoll suite, which also includes a live web-chat application, is our communications platform that drives value through collaboration. Regenda started with a trial version of Live Support and almost immediately found that it was incredibly popular with their tenants."

COULD IT BE THE GOLDEN YEARS FOR THE INTERNET OF THINGS ALREADY?

HOW THE RETIREMENT MARKET IS POISED TO BRING THEORY TO PRACTICE FOR IOT

Carl Atkey, Chief Technology Officer, Appello

Technology in the home, historically, has been adopted and accepted for two main reasons: time-saving, and time-enhancing. We began adapting the physical design of our houses to accommodate technology with the advent of fitted kitchens and gas boilers. Now, things are about to change again.

The internet of things will change residential design

The internet of things (IoT) is the industry term for connecting devices like these together, over the internet, to make them work even smarter, and further improve their time-saving and time enhancing capabilities. This will change the design of residential housing, and the development of long-term family housing, with the same revolutionary effect as fitted kitchens.

The internet of things will further blend technology into the design of the home, interlinking rooms digitally using high-speed internet, allowing devices such as the fridge or television, to interact and support the resident. Home technology is being upgraded from time-saving to potentially life-saving.

The Golden Years for IoT and the post-60 housing model

The new model of housing for the post-60 market in the UK is the perfect environment for the internet of things to make a difference. Using connected devices to augment the lifestyles of retirees and support their health and social care will make a difference to their quality of living. We believe that smart devices, which support mobility, social inclusion and independence, will become as indispensable as in-built appliances are today. We're entering the golden years for the IoT.

2016 research from estate agents Knight Frank shows that around 25 per cent of over-55s said they wanted to move into some sort of retirement housing in the future. This equates to around 2.5 million households. However, many would rather stay in their own homes and adapt the design of their surroundings.

Family houses are becoming an even longer-term investment; homes that enable an entire lifetime of comfort and support, while retaining independence. The IoT is going to enable housebuilders and investors to produce competitive offerings to support this demand.

What's going to drive the change?

In short, a high-speed internet connection will, within a relatively short space of time, be a utility that's expected by people of all ages, including the post-60s. In purpose-built new homes, including retirement living communities and apartments, superfast broadband will be pre-available, installed, and part of the package. The internet of things will then be enabled, and can layer smart devices on top of the connection, to attract buyers to developments by demonstrating life-supporting and enhancing features.

Appello's top five IoT developments to watch

We're developing IoT-capable services and solutions for our retirement living customers. Here's our top five technologies that we believe are going to bring these golden years of the IoT to life for post-60s residential developments.

- The personal monitoring device: Fitbits, Jawbones and Apple Watches and all similar smart devices can be worn more comfortably and discreetly by older adults than care bracelets and alarms. These wristbands can collect vital health data, such as heart rate and number of steps completed, which can be gathered and monitored as part of a healthcare support package.
- White goods with smart capabilities: The IoT makes headlines by promising ovens that cook dinner ready for your return from work. However, a more immediate and practical application would be to enable the appliance to carry sensors which record their use. Opened fridge doors suggest food is being prepared and eaten, a water jug emptying suggests a person is drinking. A toilet-flush sensor suggests that a person is using the bathroom. When monitoring many long-term health conditions, this information can prove vital, and monitoring negates the need for invasive visits and embarrassing questions.
- Social inclusion features: Stepping up from the ability to 'pull a cord and know that help is on its way', the IoT will focus more on social inclusion and the creation of community. This would feature the construction of apps such as a Facebook-style social tool, available via reliable digital access. Door access and calling for assistance would be delivered via video interaction rather than speakerphone, increasing social interaction and the personal experience.
- The smart TV experience: The TV becomes a community access point in the retirement property. Group activities can be booked, meal plans viewed, video chats with family and friends enabled, and property repairs booked with a video-call to your service provider. A person to talk to, face-to-face, via your tv screen, becomes 24/7 accessible, and normal.
- The digital smart key: House keys will become intelligent key cards, which contain community currency, secure entry to communal rooms and facilities, and are swiped at meal times or for access to essential medication, so that, for example, a diabetic can be remotely monitored. The cards collect data which can be analysed and all the information on the card is stored centrally to ensure security.

For an industry to remain competitive, adapting to technology innovation is a logical path. For those designing retirement living property, and properties to last a lifetime, it's going to become an essential path. The internet of things' golden years are on the next page of the calendar.

Carl Atkey is chief technology officer at Appello.

NOISE NUISANCE APP FROM PINNACLE PSG

Pinnacle PSG's quality and performance manager, Tarequl Islam, explains how they have introduced their 'noise app' from RH Environmental to their housing management contracts in London.

Pinnacle PSG's London contracts serve over 15,000 social housing properties and a further 4,000 leasehold properties. One of the key aspects of our service is dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB). We believe ASB is something that can be controlled and managed through mediation. Most of the time, tenants are unaware of the nuisance they are causing their neighbours and the noise app is the perfect tool to help mediate with their neighbours.

We knew that the response of the various London councils' noise teams to investigate nuisances can vary on a case by case basis so we wanted to empower tenants by giving them the app so that there were no delays when keeping a diary of noise nuisances.

The app instantly records noise nuisances on a tenant's smartphone and by using GPS, all recordings are time, date and location stamped. This is great because it adds authenticity to the recordings. It also helps us to identify cases of false allegations; for example, we'd know if the tenant was standing outside a pub on a Friday night instead of in their home.

With the app, we can now acknowledge all noise nuisance cases instantly, update the status of the case and respond direct to the tenant.
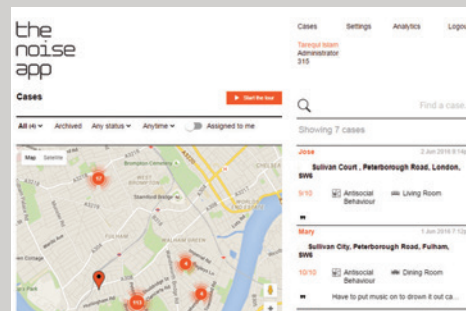

The screenshot above is the first page the service provider will see once logged in. The areas marked in orange are areas of reported nuisances, and the "Showing 7 cases" alert lets us know that we have seven cases to investigate or assign to an investigator.

The app's reporting functionality is really useful for month-end reporting and for gaining an overall picture of the types of
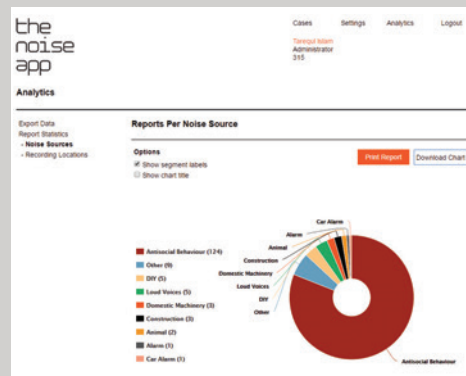
nuisances reported by tenants. As can be seen from the screenshot, anti-social behaviour is the predominant nuisance experienced by tenants. Furthermore, the app has already been used successfully in court to gain an eviction.

The app is free for our tenants; Pinnacle is the service provider and we pay RH Environmental an annual fee for the service. The app is available on Android and iOS and can be downloaded from Google Play or Apple's App Store.
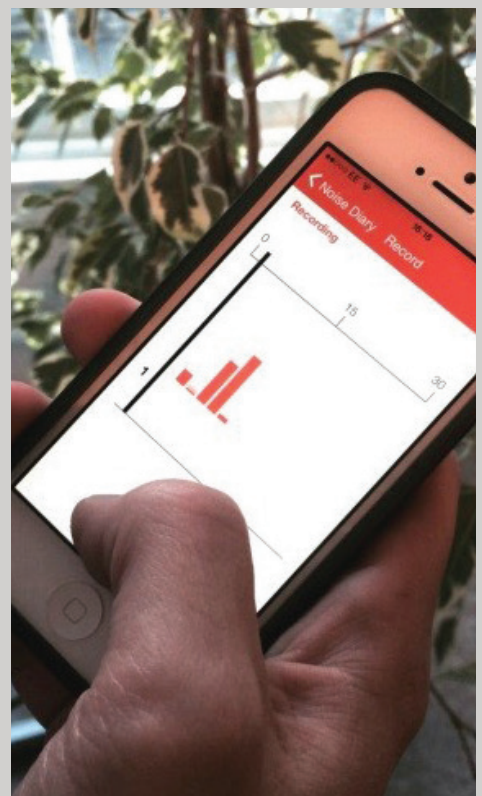
RCT cuts ASB with Locality Solutions

RCT Homes has replaced its antiquated ASB case management software with a new system from Locality Solutions.

Jonathan Tumelty, community safety manager, RCT Homes, said, "We had previously managed a growing ASB workload using an internal housing management system, but data was duplicated, insecure and regularly lost."

Locality Solutions' ASB software implemented at RCT Homes includes configurable workflows, collaboration with key agencies and partners, in real time, with intuitive and mobile

technology, improved customer satisfaction and reduced administrative time, due to automated communication methods such as two-way SMS, and improved reporting.

The software has also removed a massive number of workarounds and other wasted tasks, such as three days per year inputting customer satisfaction scores into an ASB performance template, 74 days per year as a result of reduced administrative tasks and double entries, and 75 days per year of administrative time directly related to ASB cases.

Smarter solutions
that are rewriting the rules
of the housing industry.

We're focused on dealing with ongoing and
emerging sector challenges, constantly innovating
to explore new opportunities such as the income,
digital and commercial spaces.
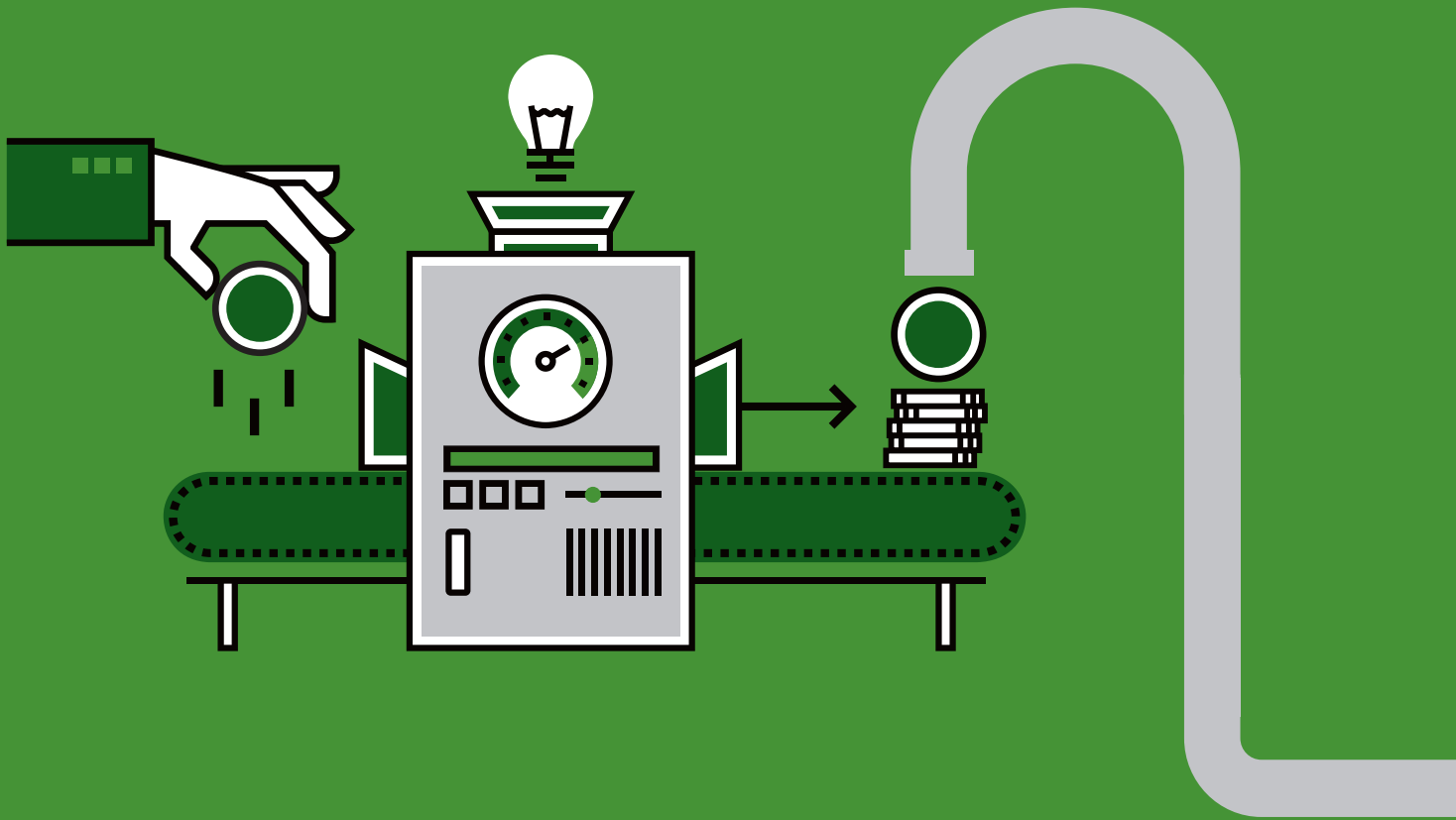
Our solutions empower you with unparalleled flexibility,
removing pain and enabling opportunities. When you
speak to us at CIH 2016 you'll find us knowledgeable
and personable. Or give us a call on 0191 255 1931.

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Hampshire Home Choice's web revamp with Abritas

Hampshire Home Choice has recently overhauled its tenant-facing website with Abritas' Customer Housing Portal and upgraded to version 8.2 of the Abritas system.

Elizabeth Wallington, Hampshire Home Choice manager, Test Valley Borough Council, said, "The Customer Housing Portal is a significant improvement on our previous 'property shop' web interface. There is now more flexibility to redesign the layout of the website.

"And the main benefit of the Abritas 8.2 upgrade is that updates and renewals can now be completed online, which improves the administrative process and will save money."

Abritas texting service for lettings
Abritas has developed new functionality that sends automated text messages to lettings applicants at specified stages of an advertising cycle, to help with the promotion of property lettings.

The text messages are sent using bespoke rules built to meet housing providers' own criteria to help target specific segments of applicants. The rules could include targeting applicants who have not bid in a number of weeks, detailing how many properties they could bid on, or texting applicants towards the end of the cycle to alert those in a certain band about properties that are currently being advertised but have fewer than a certain number of bids.

INFRASTRUCTURE

FILEHOUND REDUCES PAPER MOUNTAIN AT HAVEBURY HOUSING

With an increasing number of filing cabinets taking up valuable office space, Havebury Housing Partnership has reduced the amount of documents being stored, as well as streamlined existing business processes, by deploying a document management system from FileHound.

Filehound's browser-based interface enables users to access stored information and documents via any PC, laptop, tablet or smartphone. Havebury is also integrating Filehound with its current business processes to provide workflows for post-room facilities and more streamlined operations, with data look-ups and APIs to instantly link Filehound with Havebury's property and tenancy data.

Paul Rowley, head of information services, Havebury Housing Partnership, said, "FileHound did exactly what we were looking for with features and functionality available straight out of the box. This made deployment easy and kept the cost of implementing it very reasonable."

CC2I CROWDFUNDING PLATFORM FOR PUBLIC-SECTOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

CC2i (Co-fund and Collaborate to Innovate) recently went live with the aim of supporting public-sector organisations to co-fund their digital service developments. Based on similar principles to crowdfunding websites such as Kickstarter and Indigogo, CC2i describes itself as crowdfunding for the public sector on a corporate scale.

The platform is based on the premise that many public-sector organisations face similar challenges and could therefore benefit from the same technology, but are rarely in a position to design, commission and develop worthwhile solutions on their own. CC2i is designed to enable proper digital collaboration via a mechanism to elicit co-funding and co-design and development to deliver more sustainable digital services.

The platform is open to teams across the public sector who want to develop a digital solution or take something they have developed in-house to the next stage. Ideas can come from any service or department; CC2i said that it had already attracted pitches around mental health, adult social services, crowdsourcing content for customer services, and personal data protection.

Once pitched, CC2i then promotes the ideas to relevant organisations in the sector to raise awareness and encourage co-funding and collaboration. By pledging money, each partner organisation is then directly involved in the development of the project as well as the subsequent local rollout. Each idea will have a clear business case, along with the usual contracts and service level agreements that an organisation would expect.

Guy Giles, founder, CC2i, said, "I have seen some of the best and some of the worst examples of 'how to do it' when it comes to all things digital. So this is our call to arms. CC2i provides a platform for co-funding great ideas, collaborating on their development and enabling digital innovation to actually happen. We're a new business, looking to disrupt, and ultimately transform the way in which digital gets done in the public sector across the UK."

ENSURE YOUR CCTV DOESN'T BREACH DATA PROTECTION LEGISLATION

James Wickes, CEO & Co-founder, Cloudview

Complying with data protection legislation is a fundamental requirement for all housing providers, who hold large amounts of personal and often sensitive information relating to their tenants. If you breach this legislation, you face fines, bad publicity and even criminal sanctions.

What many housing providers may not realise is that data protection legislation also covers CCTV recordings, commonly used to track crime and anti-social behaviour and monitor communal areas, and the same penalties apply.

As we're frequently asked about this topic, we wanted to be clear on exactly what CCTV systems need to do to comply with current and forthcoming legislation, so we commissioned a briefing note[1] from independent solicitors Wright Hassall. They first clarified how the Data Protection Act (DPA) relates to CCTV systems in use at housing providers, and this is the standard you have to meet now. They then considered the even tighter General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which comes into effect in 2018, with fines of up to €20 million or 4 per cent of global turnover (whichever is higher) for a serious breach of regulations.

The note sets out five key requirements for DPA compliance:

1. A legitimate reason for collecting the data: the use of CCTV must be a "necessary and proportionate response to a real and pressing problem".
2. CCTV data must be used and kept only to fulfil its purpose, so if recordings are used for identification, the quality must be high enough to enable this. This includes the ability to switch the CCTV on and off so that recording is not continuous.
3. Recordings must be stored securely to prevent unauthorised access and hacking; this means using encryption wherever possible.
4. Individuals have the right to request access and if their request is valid, footage must be provided within 40 days.
5. Individuals must be informed that recording is taking place with, for example, notices that CCTV is in use.

These may sound, and in fact are, perfectly reasonable, but they have significant implications for every housing provider using CCTV. Poor image quality, inaccuracy in the time/date stamp and being unable to access recordings easily when requested are problems we hear about frequently when we visit housing providers, and they are all potential DPA breaches.

Some of the housing providers we speak to don't even know how many CCTV systems they use or whether they are actually working because they're not managed centrally. But ignorance is no excuse for breaking the law. All your staff who manage, operate or are responsible for maintenance of your CCTV systems need to understand their responsibilities under the DPA, and you should have a documented information-retention policy which they understand and adhere to.

As the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) points out, if data is to be recorded then it must be done securely and accurately in order to be used properly, otherwise its capture is unjustified. As a housing provider, if you don't store your CCTV footage securely to prevent unauthorised access and hacking, you're at risk of a fine or a more serious penalty. It's worth noting that in order for data to be considered secure, you should also change the usernames and passwords used to access the information from the default settings and make sure that they're of a sufficient strength to prevent unauthorised access.

The key to compliance is to treat CCTV footage in exactly the same way as all the other personal data you hold. There are a number of simple steps you can take, starting with a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) to identify the most effective way to comply with your data protection obligations and meet individuals' expectations of privacy. An effective PIA will enable you to identify and fix any problems in how you obtain and store data and ensure you avoid any breaches. For more information on PIAs, the ICO has produced a useful guide[2].

For many CCTV systems, adding security to ensure DPA compliance can make them less accessible and usable. Another solution is to use cloud-based CCTV systems, as these by their nature retain data securely offsite. Some also have all the necessary security and encryption features 'baked' into them. Cloudview's cloud-based service works with existing CCTV hardware and can be used to provide control of CCTV systems across multiple sites, with a unified view of all video feeds. Police forces and utility companies are already beginning to use this type of system, and Cloudview has been awarded the 'Police Preferred Specification' status, the only CCTV product of any description to have received this accolade.

References
1. Wright Hassall: Is your use of CCTV compliant with data protection legislation?
howtocloudview.com/papers/2016_DPA-briefing-note.pdf
2. ICO: Conducting privacy impact ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1595/pia-code-of-practice.pdf

James Wickes is CEO and co-founder of Cloudview.

For more information about Cloudview, visit www.howtocloudview.co.

ORWELL HOUSING SELECTS GIGASET FOR DECT AND WARDEN CALL UPGRADE

Gigaset and Comms Supply have upgraded Orwell Housing's telephony systems while seamlessly integrating with the warden-call communication system used to connect tenants with staff.

The project was carried out by Comms Supply, a certified Gigaset partner, that also provides its SIP-based cloud telephony platform YourUCP to Orwell Housing's head office and many extra care housing schemes throughout Suffolk.

Based on the need for better coverage, seamless call handover between cells and integration with both the warden system and Orwell's SIP-based telephony platform, Comms Supply designed a new system based on Gigaset Multicell base stations and DECT handsets.

Jamie Hopkins, head of ICT, Orwell Housing, said, "Our existing warden-call system was starting to show its age in terms of reliability and features and the growth of our extra care schemes over the years had led to coverage issues. Our concern was that there was a small chance that a call might not get through to the right person in a timely fashion.

"The new Gigaset DECT system offers great coverage, call quality and the handsets have proven easy to use, and our plan is to upgrade the majority of our sites over the next few years."

ORBIT AND COMMUNITYUK.NET EXTEND FREE WI-FI

Orbit Living and CommunityUK.net are extending their free wi-fi service to more of the housing provider's sheltered housing schemes, marking the transition from a two-year pilot project to a sustainable and core infrastructure service.

From February 2014 to March 2016, Orbit partnered with CommunityUK.net to deliver open wi-fi services in shared areas of over 25 sheltered and supported schemes. The pilot project was set up in order to explore whether cost-effective internet access could be delivered for Orbit's tenants and the wider community, how much it would cost to provide a service that included internet access, shared PC support and tenant engagement, and to establish a business model that could be commercially sustainable for both Orbit and CommunityUK.net.

So far, the project has had over 1,500 user registrations and 80,000 internet sessions logged through the network. Orbit's evaluation estimated a social return on investment ratio of £2.90 for every £1 spent.

Michael Wilby, head of IT, Orbit, said, "The pilot project gave us the opportunity

to evaluate the customer and business benefits of the service, and provided a strong case for integrating wi-fi provision into our ICT offer to bring internet access to even more people."

EkkoSense wins renewables software deal at Nottingham City Homes

EkkoSense, an energy management specialist, has won a contract from Nottingham City Council, on behalf of Nottingham City Homes, to supply monitoring software for over 3,000 solar installations.

EkkoSense's web-based monitoring system will check each solar installation daily, providing all of the information needed to claim any income generated by the solar panels along with detailed performance data analytics.

The system will also ensure that Nottingham City Homes' tenants can get the maximum amount of free electricity from the system, thus reducing their energy bills.

EkkoSense supplied a combination of pre-configured smart meters with the company's enterprise-grade GPRS SIM software for the new PV installations. The company also carried out a full audit of the housing provider's existing PV and meter installations.
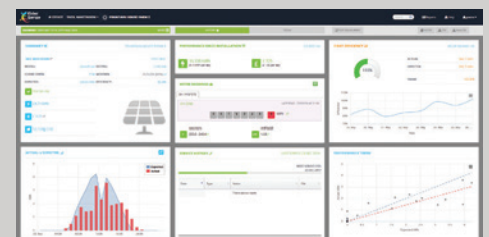
IS YOUR CLOUD REALLY NECESSARY?

Chris McLaughlin, Managing Director, MIS-AMS

It's easy to find companies and people to wax lyrical about the benefits of cloud computing, but it's not often that anyone highlights the disadvantages. It's true that cloud has become an industry and ecosystem in its own right and has demonstrated its value time and again in user situations, so much so that industry analysts IDC considers it to be one of four key 'pillars' driving modern computing today, along with social media, big data and mobility (c.f. Housing Technology's feature article on the subject back in May 2014).

But is there ever an argument against moving an organisation to the cloud? Housing providers must consider all the options and ultimately find the most cost effective, secure and efficient route for their tenants.

The first and possibly most risky consideration is the need for the use of a cloud provider, which essentially introduces a middleman into the mix. This creates a number of issues, the largest of which is that the housing provider becomes dependent on the managed IT service provider to make sure that the cloud server is 'up' so that the organisation isn't 'down'. Even the best cloud service providers can have downtime, and that essentially means the housing provider can too. Back-up and contingency planning are essential for obvious reasons, but all too often they're forgotten or untested until the 11th hour, when they're actually needed. The risk is further exacerbated when an entire infrastructure is run across one provider; what happens if they increase their prices overnight or worse, they're out of business tomorrow? Even where reliance is on multiple providers to spread the risk, the infrastructure is still in the hands of someone else and still at the mercy of their decision-making. The only way to eliminate this risk entirely is to manage your own infrastructure and take it out of the hands of the cloud providers or, at the very least, spread your risk.

Security issues follow much the same argument, and have been the centre of the debate since cloud first started. Actually, there are gains to be made for small organisations who can't afford the same level of security as their managed service provider delivers to them, but when housing providers are putting tenant data online, it should be top of the list to make sure that the cloud provider has the latest encryption and security technology. Larger providers could be putting their data at risk, especially if they have sensitive financial or personal data to protect.

Long-term cost of the cloud

Cloud undoubtedly provides benefits in terms of being able to scale costs up and down inline with computing demand, as well as much less capital costs to get started. But scalability can come at a price; on a small scale and for short-term projects, the cloud can be expensive. The cost per hour of a cloud server can be much more than the cost of a server as an asset over many years of use and for some housing providers with larger computational workloads, it makes more sense to run those workloads internally rather than putting them in the cloud. Those housing providers that need to be up and running on full power 24/7, which many more are doing as they put more of their services online, will probably find that cost-wise, it's much more effective to own your own servers. Plus it's often the case that organisations have already made the outlay in terms of expense that cloud helps to avoid, such as hardware and people. The costs of in-house solutions decline in the long run and so buying more hardware can help spread the fixed costs, thereby reducing the overall expense. By contrast, moving to the cloud would increase those costs.

The technology

Often entrusting the housing provider's network to a third-party cloud provider means that it trusts its work to a company using proprietary software (i.e. technology that the cloud provider owns). This isn't a major issue unless the provider becomes locked into a price structure, which then means much less freedom and possibly less long-term innovation. However, it pays for housing providers to take control over the long-term to ensure that innovation isn't stifled.

Cloud computing from a technological standpoint is also network hungry. The housing provider's infrastructure must be able to cope with handling heavy server loads because everything it does will be online. It must also be able to deal with the surges at peak times of day, such as during lunchtime when users' devices are likely to be used in conjunction with the network. Using traditional software significantly reduces the load on the network and requires less Internet usage. There is a trade-off between losing some of the functionality found in on-premise software in order to provide everything via a web browser. Undeniably, as we move towards the digital tenant where all services are provisioned online for them, any web-based system must be able to cope sufficiently to deliver those services in line with tenants' expectations or risk the non-adoption of self-service facilities.

Cloud isn't a utopia, but it is the way the technology industry is moving and we take it very seriously in terms of looking to the future. But, the downsides must be taken into account before systems are 'ripped and replaced', by which time it's too late to do anything. Cloud adoption has disadvantages that must be planned for and managed along the process, and an understanding that there may be lasting disadvantages in terms of the pressure on the housing provider's network infrastructure and some loss of functionality.

Chris McLaughlin is managing director of MIS-AMS.

LOOKING AHEAD WITH HOUSING TECHNOLOGY

Over the next nine months, Housing Technology is hosting a number of events and the production of a new market intelligence report; we will be keeping you informed by email in due course.

BOARDROOM PERSPECTIVES 2016

Housing Technology and BT are hosting our annual event at the BT Tower in London on **21 September**, with the 2016 event focusing on a board-level view of technology and its role at a strategic level.

EVENING RECEPTION 2016

Housing Technology's annual evening reception at Pizza Express in London's Olympia has become an annual institution as an amazing informal networking event. The 2016 reception will take place on **16th November from 5.30pm**. There is no charge to attend the reception; we are pleased to provide an informal networking arena for IT in social housing as a thank you to our readers, speakers, advertisers and sponsors.

MARKET INTELLIGENCE 2017

We will be formulating the focus and structure of our annual Market Intelligence report over the next month or so, and then inviting readers to contribute to our online survey during September/October.

CONFERENCE & EXECUTIVE FORUM 2017

The next Housing Technology conference and executive forum will take place during **7-9 March 2017** at the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry.

Housing Technology 2017 is widely regarded as quite simply the leading event for senior IT influencers and decision-makers in the UK social housing sector, exclusively organised with a personal touch by the founders of Housing Technology.

Our annual conference brings together masses of senior IT and business people from all sizes of housing providers and always delivers an eclectic mixture of presentations and discussions, alongside a brilliant technology showcase in the exhibition area.

Registration for all of the above events will open on Monday 1 August 2016. If you are interested in speaking at all/any of the events, please email alastair@housing-technology.com. If you are interested in sponsoring or exhibiting at all/any of the eventsor the Market Intelligence 2017 report, please email george@housing-technology.com.

Top 10 housing providers to work for

Employee engagement specialists Best Companies, the driving force behind The Sunday Times' 'Best Companies to Work For' lists has used its latest data to highlight the top 10 housing providers to work for.

In descending order, they are SLH Group, Wales & West Housing, B3Living, Dale & Valley Homes, Weaver Vale Housing Trust, Newydd Housing Association, CHS Group, Calico, Havebury Housing Partnership and Ongo Partnership. Jonathan Austin, founder and chief executive, Best Companies, said, "By featuring in the 'Best Not for Profit Organisations to Work For' list, these housing providers have been identified as the very best places to work this year. These are the housing providers that you should be looking to for inspiration and using them as a benchmark to measure yourself against in the coming years."

ARUN MIGRATES TO CADCORP GIS

Arun District Council has migrated to GIS and web mapping technology from Cadcorp for a range of geospatial applications for its staff and residents.

Peter Marsh, systems development manager, Arun District Council, said, "The procurement exercise was initiated by the pressing need to replace our internal and external web-based GIS software. However, we weren't simply looking for like-for-like replacements. We wanted to enhance the editing capabilities of our internal web GIS, and retire some of our desktop GIS licences.

"We also wanted to replace an existing spatial data warehouse and data loader with one based on our preferred Microsoft SQL Server database, and it had to be easy for us to load all Ordnance Survey PSMA and OpenData layers into that spatial database."

Cadcorp's Web Map Layers is being used for the council's 'My Arun' self-service portal, choice-based lettings, and housing and economic land availability assessments (HELAA).

Regarding the land assessments, Marsh said, "Our planning department needed a simple map that it could publish quickly and easily. Since Web Map Layers is an out-of-the box product, building an application such as the HELAA viewer was a case of customisation rather than development. It was straightforward to specify the map layers in SQL Server to populate the application, and a simple matter to link to our local land and property
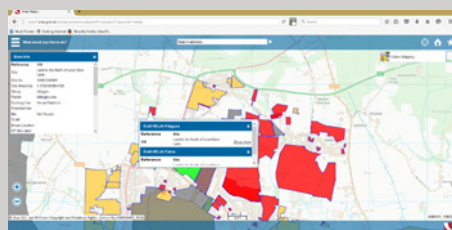
gazetteer to provide address-searching."

Cadcorp supports latest Ordnance Survey mapping products
Cadcorp is providing software support for three free-to-use data products from Ordnance Survey, comprising OS Open Map - Local, OS Open Roads and OS Open Rivers.

Support for the new data products was added in a recent service release of the Cadcorp Spatial Information System (SIS) suite. The three vector-based datasets provide a nationally-consistent and high-level cartographic view of buildings, road networks and rivers and waterways throughout Great Britain.

OS OpenData products are free to view or download for use in both personal and commercial applications and are used by many Cadcorp customers to provide a background against which to view their own business data.

However, the recently-supported data sets offer more than a static graphic backcloth because they describe identifiable landscape features. Cadcorp said that this would open up extensive possibilities to its customers, allowing, for example, users of Cadcorp Map Modeller to run network analyses on the OS Open Roads data.

Martin McGarry, managing director, Cadcorp, said, "We are an active member of the Ordnance Survey Insight programme so we get early access to new product developments. We have used this position to make it as easy as possible for customers to read OS data formats and to import this data into Cadcorp SIS.

"As we have done with all data formats, we have enabled our users to access OS OpenData products using simple user interfaces such as drag-and-drop. Our users don't have to use data conversion packages, don't have to restructure geometry, and don't have to implement complex styling rules themselves."

IT LAB GAINS NEW INVESTOR FOR INNOVATION

ECI, a private equity firm, has bought a majority shareholding in managed services provider IT Lab. IT Lab said that the investment from ECI provides them with the financial support needed to innovate in response to customer needs.

IT Lab provides infrastructure, cloud, security, technology transformation and change projects, strategic consulting, ERP, mobility and user support, helping its housing customers to navigate the incre asingly complex technology landscape.

Peter Sweetbaum, CEO, IT Lab, said, "As strategic partners to many housing providers, IT Lab has helped them to address the financial challenges of areas such as universal credit. ECI's investment will ensure that we remain critical to these housing providers as they continue to undertake further reductions in costs and diversifications in income."

THE HOUSING PROVIDER OF THE FUTURE

The Hyde Group's ICT director, Tim Linsdell, and Northgate Public Services' director for housing solutions, Trevor Hampton, discuss the future of IT in the housing sector.

How will the current pressures on social housing impact housing providers over the next ten years?

Trevor Hampton, director for housing solutions, Northgate Public Services, said, "There's a clear trend away from pure social tenure management, and from life tenures, to instead using social housing as a support mechanism for people at specific points in their lives, particularly when they are under financial pressures.

"Government policies are likely to continue reducing the amount of social housing. Housing providers will be raising their own capital by selling part of their stock, but the amount of social housing they can build as a result will be much fewer. Pay to Stay will also have an impact by asking people to subsidise their rent and further diminishing the concept of social housing as a 'right for life'.

Trevor Hampton, Director for Housing Solutions, Northgate Public Services

"In terms of technology, when you start to look at the management of short-term tenancies and more complicated rental calculations, you need much more data. You need better integrated, holistic systems and big-data analytics which can, for example, look at who should be paying enhanced rents and who is over-staying their tenure. Additionally, the pressure to keep IT costs down is likely to drive housing providers to buy into cloud computing to a greater extent.

"Tenants will be demanding much higher levels of service as a result of changes to the makeup of a provider's housing. Today, a typical housing provider's stock might still be 90 per cent social, but in future it will fall to much less in some cases. Those residents paying market rents are likely to demand a very high level of service."

The Hyde Group has recently announced plans for a large merger; how will these trends affect other mergers?

Tim Linsdell, ICT director, The Hyde Group, said, "We have a very fragmented housing sector, comprising more than 1,500 separate housing providers, with the largest still representing less than three per cent of the sector. Alongside recent political redirections, a series of mergers have been announced, although those mainly affect the larger housing providers who want to leverage the scale to increase their housing development pipelines.

"With a typical merger taking between two and four years to deliver the expected integration goals and with business-critical applications often being the most difficult to rationalise, as a sector this could be a long process of consolidation. Even now, there is little natural pressure for smaller, non-developing housing providers to seek a merger partner. This means considerable financial resources will remain locked up in subscale operations."

How will customer and workforce interactions change through the use of technology?

Linsdell said, "The government is driving a shift to 'digital by default' and with people being increasingly comfortable with digital access, brought about by the consumer shift to online shopping and accessing services through social media, digital is part of the fabric of many people's lives. They have an expectation that this channel is always available.

"The current demographic reinforces this, with new generations having grown up entirely in a digital world and consequently having different expectations to older generations. We can already see the early adopters in the housing sector and, over the next few years, there will be even more transition, as long as the right investments are made and our businesses change how our teams work together and with our residents to streamline interactions, increase effectiveness and improve standards.

"The basic channels are already in place through call centres and, increasingly, online services for areas such as repair logging and ASB reporting. However, this has the potential to stretch much further and beyond human interaction. The internet of things (IoT), for example, provides the opportunity for the proactive detection of maintenance needs and service failures, which in turn will improve responsiveness, reduce observable service failures and drive up standards without increasing costs."

Tim Linsdell, ICT Director, The Hyde Group

Northgate's Hampton said, "Interactions will become much more digital and online. People will fulfil their service requirements, without human interaction, via digital means. They will be able to pay their rent online, deal with problems without engaging in a series of phone calls, and they'll want to do that at any time of the day or night as digital self-service becomes the norm."

Is there any kind of customer or demographic shift we need to be aware of over the next ten years?

Hampton said, "The old tradition was 2.4 children, three-bedroom properties with five people living there. Now we are seeing more single parents, with one parent and one child in two bedrooms. Young people will be getting ten-year tenures, so they'll be moving on. Older people have lifetime tenures and will be able to stay, which will influence the demographics for the next 30 years or so."

If left unchecked, what will be housing providers' biggest IT problems in 5-10 years' time, and how should they be fixed?

Hyde's Linsdell said, "The Hyde Group increasingly provides seamless integration with our supply chain to reduce the cost to serve and remove unnecessary time-delaying activities. More and more, we are looking to software partners to deliver the systems we need, that have sufficient flexibility to meet the differing needs of housing associations working at different levels

THE HOUSING PROVIDER OF THE FUTURE
Continued from previous page

of scale and help us to keep one step ahead of the needs of our tenants and customers.

"The future is where customers can link seamlessly and quickly to service providers, removing the necessity for human intervention and the likelihood of failure. This will lead to improved customer experience and faster fulfilment of customers' needs.

"If similar developments in other sectors are mirrored, within 10 years we can expect a similar scale of technology to be used as we currently see among media and utility companies. This will deliver increased financial efficiency which in

turn will enable the much larger scale development of houses and will help to keep social rents affordable."

Hampton said, "Right now, there is pressure on housing providers to react very, very quickly to all of the government's legislative and policy changes. There is consequently a temptation for them to buy short-term, niche solutions to immediate problems that they intend to integrate with their main IT solutions over time, but rarely do. This creates more complexity. The data doesn't flow into the system and the quality of the information falls. It creates a barrier to using cloud computing in the future because it creates too complex an IT estate.

"Housing providers need a longer term IT strategy, with a roadmap for how they're going to bring all of this information and technology together. A key strategy is to give the IT director control of the budget and of the final decisions. If housing providers let individual departments make their own decisions then there will be a proliferation of disjointed IT systems. Build a strategic partnership with key IT suppliers, and definitely don't work at arms-length from them."

Tim Linsdell is the ICT director at The Hyde Group, and Trevor Hampton is the director for housing solutions at Northgate Public Services.

CRACKING DOWN ON ROGUE LANDLORDS

Roger Birkinshaw, Housing Director, Capita Software Services

In recent editions, Housing Technology has highlighted how the Housing and Planning Bill has major repercussions for how the social housing sector deals with its rogue landlords.

What concerns me is the numbers; 16 per cent of privately rented homes are unsafe*. That's around 740,000 people in the UK living in properties which may have been identified as illegal conversions, being overcrowded or where the landlord has disregarded fire safety regulations. Compounding the problem of identifying and tracking the perpetrators is the fact that current enforcement and prosecution information is often being stored within disparate systems and left untracked, meaning it easily becomes too unwieldy to manage.

We therefore applaud the provision within the Housing and Planning Bill that directs local authorities to establish and

maintain a database of rogue landlords and property agents, and requires them to submit this intelligence at a national level. Rogue landlords need to be alerted to an authority at the earliest opportunity. Taking it a step further though, why not have a joined-up central service for all authorities to access? A shared resource to provide early alerts to local authorities of rogue landlords, enable the promotion of good practice among private landlords, identify the best providers and make it all public.

You won't be surprised to hear it from a software provider but technology can make it happen. However, it does rely on the total being greater than the sum of its parts, meaning that local authorities need to see the value, buy into the concept and actively participate.

It is therefore encouraging to see some councils already taking a proactive approach. We're very pleased with

how Capita's web-based application, Advantage Impact, has been received. It allows organisations to share and track full investigation and case management details, multiple-accommodation information and appeals information, as well as the recording and management of bans, sanctions and complaints. 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. It's one solution where, when many local authorities get involved, a real benefit can be realised by the housing sector.

Roger Birkinshaw is the housing director for Capita Software Services.

* According to research by the Citizens Advice Bureau.

BE BULLISH WITH DRONE TECHNOLOGY

Armin Talic, Commercial Director, Komodo Digital

Interest in unmanned aerial vehicles, more commonly referred to as drones, has grown significantly over the past few years. This increase in popularity has prompted an influx of publicity, both wanted and unwanted, most notably the reported collision between a drone and a British Airways flight at Heathrow airport.

However, although this recent peak in interest has made the technology seem new, drone technology has in fact been quietly gaining momentum over the past decade. Recent advances in drone hardware and software in the commercial space has seen the technology rapidly adopted across a number of key markets. Now with a thriving ecosystem of suppliers, developers and certified pilots, drones represent a viable solution for a number of sectors.

Over the years, commercial drone use has begun to have a profound impact in traditionally slow-moving, resistant-to-change organisations such as agriculture, construction and offshore services. In many ways, the opportunity for early success and long-term growth in these sectors is not dissimilar to the challenges facing housing providers, namely operational efficiency and revenue generation. Let's look at some emerging use cases.

Roof inspections

Traditional methods of roof inspection often involve the construction of scaffolding over the course of a few days to support working at a height across a number of homes. This process is both expensive and involves a degree of risk for the inspection team.

Now, imagine being able to inspect a group of properties, accurately and safely, in under an hour.

With a high-quality drone, a pilot can record stable and clear footage at 4K resolution. So weather permitting, a five-minute flight can yield suitable images and video for a detailed roof inspection on the ground.

By offering an improved safety profile and a dramatic reduction in time-to-completion, using drones for roof inspections has become an established service offering from drone operators around the world.

Energy efficiency surveys

Often overlooked as an 'edge-case', thermal imaging has seen a spike in adoption in recent months, particularly by fire and rescue services. The ability to accurately scan a building's thermal properties from a safe height and distance provides invaluable real-time data to the people on the ground.

In a housing context, this enables thermal efficiency surveys for doors, windows and roofs. Using a modular drone platform, a pilot can replace the standard 4K camera with a thermal-imaging camera, for detailed thermal profiles on a large scale.

The rich data produced from aerial thermal inspections can provide accurate insight into the key factors contributing to the energy efficiency of a property. Knowing a particular property has a large gap in the roofing insulation or that the back windows are exhausting a high amount of heat can lead to inexpensive changes for a property.

As a social housing organisation, this kind of information can help you make quantifiable, cost-effective decisions on the improvements required for a property. Ultimately, this kind of inspection can lead to reduced heating bills for tenants which, in many cases, could have a dramatic impact on their personal circumstances.

3D mapping

A recent survey by estate agents in the US found that including aerial footage and 3D models with a property listing dramatically improved the number of leads generated.


Digital surface model showing relative surface elevation, generated by DroneDeploy

As more social housing organisations start to slowly shift to listing available properties in a more conventional 'Zoopla'-style property search, providing a unique customer journey is key to the experience. Showcasing available properties with aerial video footage and 3D models offers a distinctive search and discovery experience over traditional property portals.

Service provision

If your organisation is ready to make the move to deploying drones for key use cases, then you'll soon be in a position where a portion of the existing workforce is skilled as certified commercial pilots.
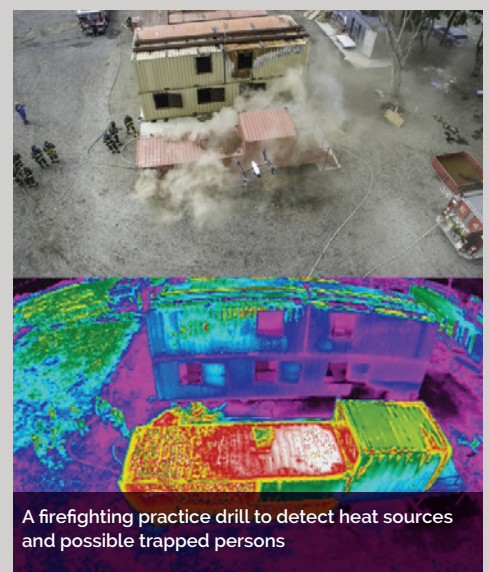
A firefighting practice drill to detect heat sources and possible trapped persons

A small workforce trained and certified in a unique skillset creates new opportunities for outsourced service provision. Not only would your team be

BE BULLISH WITH DRONE TECHNOLOGY
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well placed to produce cost-effective and safe roof inspections, thermal surveys and 3D models for your organisation, but their skills would be well-suited as a revenue-generating service offering to other businesses not suited to managing a full time 'drone' team.

By using drones, these existing jobs will become less costly, be completed in less time and potentially create the opportunity to generate revenue as a B2B service.

Integration
Beyond the standard set of scenarios for social housing, there is an underlying need for integrated ecosystems that can support the adoption of drone technology. Generating a large amount of image, video and model data requires suitable end-to-end integration with your housing management system. At present, there are no viable solutions offering an integrated toolkit for social housing platforms.

Working with Orchard Information Systems, our R&D team is in the early stages of the development process for building a robust integration toolkit for incorporating drone data into the asset management data set.

Aidan Dunphy, head of product strategy at Orchard, said, "Proven in the construction, energy, transport and logistics sectors, drones are a viable technology platform for real solutions in social housing."

Certification and training
If you're considering running a trial drone programme, you'll need to be aware of and prepared to follow the CAA guidelines. As the UK's specialist aviation regulator, the Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for setting the guidance and safety rules that apply when flying unmanned and model aircraft.

To operate a small unmanned aircraft system (SUAS) commercially, pilots must first show an acceptable degree of competence. Certification for commercial drone operations can be obtained from a number of national qualified entities across the UK, such as Heliguy with its training centres in Newcastle, Manchester and Farnborough.

Cost
One of the most common barriers to the adoption of drone technology by businesses is the perceived costs. Of course, the efficiency and cost-saving benefits have been touched upon, but how much does it really cost to get started and which drone manufacturers are highly regarded?

Compared to traditional methods, businesses can expect to pay between £3,000 to £6,000 for a complete solution, including the drone hardware, software, certified training and the liability insurance required to start operating.

Widely recognised as the leaders in the commercial drone space, companies like DJI and 3DR are bringing drone technology to the mainstream. The Phantom and Solo ranges respectively offer cost-effective hardware solutions capable of operating in a wide variety of use cases.

Looking ahead
As the CAA reviews its guidelines over the coming year, businesses ready for a more forward-thinking approach will see success with deploying drones as a fundamental part of their operations.

The journey won't be without its challenges, as drones face an uphill battle with public perception, but every new market faces these before a phase of explosive growth.

My advice would be to start small, with a single unit and one trained operator, trial the use cases right for your team and evaluate its impact on your business over time. In the not-too-distant future, tenants will come to expect their housing provider to operate with drones. Will you be left behind?

Armin Talic is the commercial director at Komodo Digital.

CIPFA & CIVICA REPORT – HOUSING PROVIDERS & COUNCILS' COMMERCIALISATION PLANS

A recent report commissioned by Civica from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) has found that while the commercialisation of their services is expected to play an important part in their future business strategies, only four per cent of public-sector CEOs and CFOs said that they had significant commercial experience.

The report also found that positive progress is being held back by a lack of understanding of what the market needs (36 per cent), concerns about the risks involved (56 per cent) and a restrictive culture in the public sector (40 per cent).

Of the organisations surveyed for the report, 65 per cent planned to implement larger, more radical projects to generate greater income streams, and 35 per cent were looking for smaller, less risky projects to do so. CIPFA and Civica's 'The Commercial Imperative' report explores the role of commercialisation as a way for housing providers and local authorities to close the funding gap and become more self-sufficient, and provides guidance on how to find the right path to achieve a sustainable commercial model.

Rob Whiteman, chief executive, CIPFA, said, "Commercialisation will be one of the most important priorities for local authorities and housing providers over the next decade. If they haven't already done so, CFOs should start thinking about short, medium and long-term strategies for generating their own income. Reappraising their appetite for risk is vital to making these endeavours successful."

THE FUTURE IS BOTS...

Jay Saggar, Connected Home Consortium Coordinator

Last month, at a tech meet up in London, a group of developers, entrepreneurs and the generally 'tech curious' got together to get their heads around all the excitement and hype surrounding the forthcoming 'rise of the bots'. "Bots", one excited digital engagement manager informed me, "will be everywhere by the end of the year." But what are 'bots' and how will they be everywhere if even techy people know very little about them?

Bots are software robots and they help you do many of the things you are used to doing on your laptop, phone or tablet but more easily. For example, a software bot might be used to simplify ordering a pizza by allowing you to WhatsApp your order in the form of a conversation:
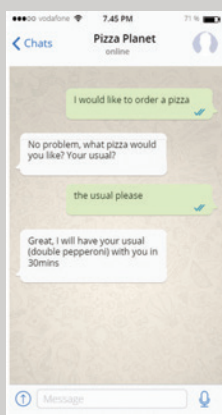
In some respects, this looks like a step back; why am I engaging with Pizza Planet via text on WhatApp?

The key development here is accessing a service through an app you already have on your phone. No need to find and download Pizza Planet's app, just make contact in an interface you are familiar with. In some ways, this is a natural progression from apps. We are now app overloaded; there are millions of apps on the App Store and Google Play yet most of us use only a handful of them. Removing the need to access a dedicated app is removing a barrier to engagement and adoption.

Speaking like a machine
And removing barriers to adoption is the key area of innovation that makes the bot space really exciting. Remember the 'Ask Jeeves' search engine? Its unique feature was asking a question using the same natural language that you would use to ask a person a question.

'Ask Jeeves' didn't (in theory) require us to learn the way a search engine understands information, except it turned out that Jeeves wasn't all that clever so we resorted to learning how Google understands information – Google doesn't like full sentences, it prefers keywords. This technology has now massively improved so that machines are much more capable of understanding what we mean when we ask questions and make statements in our language. This is a massive step forward because it means that humans will increasingly not need to think like machines in order to engage with computers.

What does this mean for UK housing?
Bots are about to make technology accessible to anyone who can articulate a question or a request. Most of your residents can say "my boiler is broken" but fewer can navigate to your website, find your app, download it, and request a maintenance job. Bots let people use natural language to engage with you.

They also allow people to communicate and receive services from within an interface they are familiar with. Sending a text, WhatsApp or Facebook message is an everyday occurrence but using a housing provider's self-service app isn't.

So what does the future look like?
Maybe something like this:

Tenant: Can you tell me how much rent I owe this month?
Housing provider: You owe £450. You can pay by clicking here or if you need any help or advice with your finances, just ask.
Tenant: I will have trouble making that amount this month. Is there anything I can do?
Housing provider: I have slot tomorrow afternoon if you would like to come in and discuss a payment plan.

While this looks like a conversation with a human customer support agent, it's actually a conversation with a computer.

Bots will be able to access data about your residents stored in your housing management system to provide answers to common questions and action work when requests are made. What's more, the bots will be able to learn about your tenants through their engagement and through insights gleaned from previous interactions.

Moving beyond text
Apple's Siri has brought the idea of a voice-controlled assistant to the mainstream but its take-up has remained limited because users found that anything beyond a basic repertoire of commands led to a Google keyword search.

The principle behind Siri, i.e. one platform that can understand context and help you with anything, is a powerful one but it's only recently that a critical mass of service providers have opened up their APIs to allow bots to connect with third parties and become really useful. A new arrival to the voice-controlled intelligent assistant world is Viv. Viv can handle complex spoken requests such as "Was it raining in Norwich three Thursdays ago?" as well as handle payments. From a housing perspective, you can imagine a future where all a tenants needs to do to access a housing provider's services is to ask their smart device.

If you want to find out more about bots and other 'bleeding edge' technologies, check out HACT's new Innovation Launch Pad (www.innovationlaunchpad.org).

Jay Saggar is the Connected Home Consortium's coordinator.
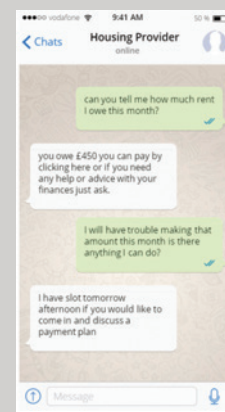
HOUSING TECHNOLOGY & MICROSOFT PARTNER EVENTS

Housing Technology and Microsoft hosted two very well-attended 'In-Depth 2016' events in July at the Emirates Stadium in London and Old Trafford in Manchester.

Each event began with presentations from Moat Housing and Town and Country Housing, followed by a showcase of Microsoft's solutions for the housing sector, including a very impressive demo created by Microsoft's team of housing specialists.

After lunch, Microsoft's partners CPS, Esuasive, HCL, Optevia hosted a series of presentations on their respective Microsoft Dynamics CRM, Office 365 and SharePoint-based solutions.

More joint events from Housing Technology and Microsoft, and its partners, are expected in the near future.

Bridging the gap between technology & business success

IT is at the heart of every business – equally, our clients are at the heart of our business. This is why our goal is to align technology with organisational strategy and objectives to ensure IT best supports you.

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