

**HOUSING  
TECHNOLOGY**  
2017 | CONFERENCE AND  
EXECUTIVE FORUM

**HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2017**

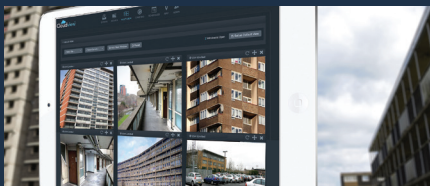
**7-9 MARCH 2017**

**Q HOTELS OXFORD BELFRY**

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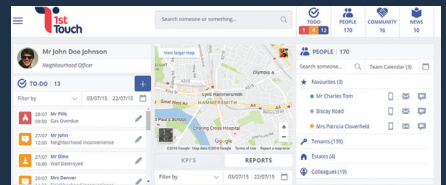
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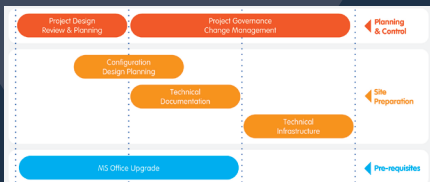
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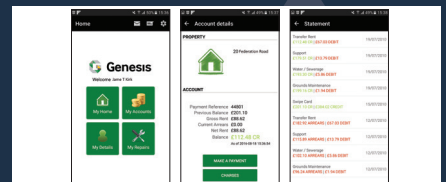
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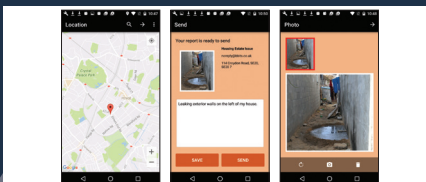
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## HOUSING TECHNOLOGY EVENING RECEPTION

16 November 2016 | Pizza Express | Olympia, London



# HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

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## EDITOR'S NOTES

### Paying to stay

We've covered the government's pay-to-stay programme in three separate pieces in this issue of Housing Technology, including how Canada's version of pay-to-stay is being handled in Ottawa. In short, the pay-to-stay programme will mean higher rents for higher-earning tenants (£40,000+ in London and £31,000+ outside London) living in social housing.

While the underlying reasons behind the planned introduction of pay-to-stay are sensible, collecting the data necessary to implement the programme is likely to tax most housing providers. This is for three reasons.

The first is that while most housing providers have reasonably accurate records of their tenants and are used to communicating with them (and vice versa) about a variety of topics, very few will have ever needed to track the other members of those tenants' households, much less those other members' incomes.

The second is that many tenants and other members of their households may have very variable earning, making it harder to place an exact figure on the household's income for the purposes of assessing them for pay-to-stay.

And finally, enforcing the disclosure of household income (which few households, as opposed to just the named tenants, will have had to do before) will add yet another administrative burden for housing providers, and that's before they've even started to consider the effect of the pay-to-stay appeals process.

So, unlike other areas of housing providers' operations that can be streamlined through process automation (such as booking repairs appointments or reporting ASB incidents), the main burden of pay-to-stay will be collecting the fundamental data in the first place.

Therefore, it's vitally important that housing providers start thinking now about how they can use technology to automate as much of the earnings data collection process as possible, and preferably using their existing channels to avoid both 'siloing' pay-to-stay as well as reducing data duplication.

### Housing Technology 2016 evening reception

If you've not already done so, registration is now open for Housing Technology's annual evening reception on 16th November at Pizza Express in London's Olympia. The complimentary reception is open to all Housing Technology readers and their colleagues, so please book your place now at: [www.housing-technology.com/events/reception2016](http://www.housing-technology.com/events/reception2016).

### Housing Technology 2017 presentations



We have just confirmed the first tranche of speakers for the Housing Technology 2017 conference and executive forum (7-9 March 2017, Oxford).

If you or your colleagues are interested in speaking at the conference, please see page 38 or email [alastair@housing-technology.com](mailto:alastair@housing-technology.com) for further details.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**HOUSING TECHNOLOGY – BOARDROOM PERSPECTIVES 2016**  
21 September 2016, BT Tower, London  
[www.housing-technology.com/events/perspectives2016](http://www.housing-technology.com/events/perspectives2016)



**HOUSING TECHNOLOGY – EVENING RECEPTION**  
16 November 2016, Pizza Express, Olympia, London  
[www.housing-technology.com/events/reception2016](http://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](http://www.housing-technology.com/events/ht17)



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**EDITOR**  
Alastair Tweedie  
[alastair@housing-technology.com](mailto:alastair@housing-technology.com)  
Twitter [housingtech](#)

**DESIGN & PRODUCTION**  
Jo Euston-Moore  
[design@housing-technology.com](mailto:design@housing-technology.com)

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**  
Subscribe at [www.housing-technology.com](http://www.housing-technology.com)  
or email: [subs@housing-technology.com](mailto:subs@housing-technology.com)

**THE INTELLIGENT BUSINESS COMPANY LTD**  
Hoppingwood Farm  
Robin Hood Way  
London, SW20 0AB  
United Kingdom  
Head Office: 0208 336 2293



**PUBLISHER**  
George Grant  
[george.grant@housing-technology.com](mailto:george.grant@housing-technology.com)  
Twitter [tibcomp](#)

**EDITORIAL AND NEWS**  
[news@housing-technology.com](mailto:news@housing-technology.com)

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# Enfield's £1m contract for Civica Housing Cx

*The London Borough of Enfield has chosen Civica and its web-based Housing Cx solution to support the digital transformation of its housing services by extending online self-service for tenants and enabling mobile working for its staff.*

In line with Enfield's overall corporate strategy, Housing Cx will be delivered under a software as a service (SaaS) agreement worth around £1 million.

The Housing Cx solution is fully integrated with OpenRevenues, Civica's council tax and benefits system, which is also provided via a managed service.

## Civica Housing Cx at South Lakes and Prospect Community Housing

South Lakes Housing and Prospect Community Housing have both gone live with Civica's new Housing Cx solution in order to have all of their housing management information in one place.

Paul Aitken, IT manager, South Lakes Housing, said, "We have gone live and are now operational with Civica Housing Cx. It's already proving to be a breath of fresh air because, prior to



Cx, our customer services team used multiple systems when dealing with enquiries. Now they only use Cx, which integrates housing and CRM activities, improving the customer experience.

"In the next couple of months, we will integrate Keystone asset management so that we can manage our property-based assets better, from data management and reporting to integrated compliance tools such as asbestos."



Civica said that Cx is the first fully web-enabled, integrated housing management solution on the market, accessible at any time, from any device, at any location with an open integration approach.

# Another record year for Aareon

*Aareon has reported another record-breaking year, with the company saying that 67 per cent of housing providers looking for a new housing management solution during January to July 2016 chose Aareon QL.*

Aareon has taken on ten new customers during the first half of 2016, with each

new Aareon QL customer bringing new developments that benefit all of Aareon's existing users, from those with just a few hundred properties to over 35,000 properties.

The Aareon QL suite covers housing management, financials, CRM, asset management, reporting, HR and payroll, tenant portals, task centre alerts, EDRM,

CTI, care and support, visual mapping and mobile working.

The company said that with its recent move to v4, Aareon QL now offers increased flexibility and more powerful features, but without the risk and uncertainty of a brand new solution that isn't already being used in the UK market.

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## SPRING HOUSING IS FIRST USER OF MIS AMS ACTIVEH LITE

*Spring Housing has installed ActiveH Lite, the new entry-level version of MIS AMS's full-functionality ActiveH housing management software.*

As a relatively new charity working with people affected by homelessness, Spring Housing didn't have masses of data to migrate to its new system, so ActiveH Lite can scale and grow with the organisation from the outset. It will provide a hub of knowledge for Spring Housing's 25 staff as well as ensuring there is an audit trail to demonstrate that it's operating within the agreed terms of its contracted suppliers.

Raj Shergill, director of housing & corporate services, Spring Housing, said, "We had been using Excel spreadsheets to manage our properties, rents, repairs and other tenant services but we knew this wasn't sustainable in the long term. We are growing, so we needed a housing management system that could grow with us, yet we have no plans to become enormous, so we didn't feel we needed



the full functionality of some of the more expensive housing management systems.

"MIS AMS ActiveH Lite fits our requirements completely because it's flexible and provides scalability, and we still have the holistic suite encompassing CRM, rent accounting, reporting, repairs and in future, mobile working."

MIS AMS said that ActiveH Lite is a user-friendly solution which is easy to learn

and use, and compared with some of the other 'lite' options, has much more functionality.

Chris McLaughlin, chief executive, MIS AMS, said, "ActiveH Lite is all about starting as you mean to go on. It provides the best of our large-scale, full-functionality housing management system, but scaled down to suit smaller, growing housing providers."

## Orchard supports Trent & Dove Housing's DLO



*Trent & Dove Housing is now live with Orchard's Direct Works software for its direct labour organisation (DLO).*

Trent & Dove Housing is part of a growing band of housing providers managing their repairs and maintenance internally through a DLO, rather than outsourcing it to external

contractors as they had in the past. The added value to Trent & Dove Housing is projected savings of 15 per cent or £350,000 per year.

Derek Eaton, head of IT, Trent & Dove Housing, said, "There are a number of key software components needed to run a modern DLO. Orchard's Direct

Works provides the central repository around which other components, such as a scheduler, mobile working and finance system, must integrate and is able to hold very detailed information about each repair."

## FIXED IN A CLICK WITH ORBIT

*Orbit is piloting an online repairs service for its 13,000 tenants. The new service supports Orbit's ambition to have 75 per cent of its tenant contacts online by 2020. By accessing the tool through their online account, tenants can diagnose repairs, book appointments in real-time, track progress and cancel repairs.*

The service is built on the MIS AMS ActiveH housing management system and is integrated with Orbit's existing

online portal and mobile CRM tools.

The starting point is to determine who owns responsibility for the repair; this is done using a set of bespoke questions to identify the room, attribute and fault. The questions match those used by Orbit's customer service centre to ensure consistency.

Once the repair's responsibilities and diagnostics have been clarified, a repairs appointment is requested, with the tenant

given three options which best suit their location and required trades. Once selected, the appointment is automatically transferred to the relevant contractor's systems and the job transmitted to the operative's mobile device.

The ActiveH system is also integrated with Orbit's back-office systems, enabling Orbit to monitor tenant behaviour, contractor performance and manage risk in a transparent and responsive manner.



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

# It's great when everything fits together perfectly

**Software & Services for Social Housing Providers in the UK**

Aareon QL - everything you need for End to End Business Processing from One Supplier

Aareon QL is a complete solution that offers you Housing, Financials, HR, Reporting, Asset Management, Contact Management, Tenant Portal, TaskCentre Alerts, EDRMS and Mobile Working.

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WE MANAGE IT FOR YOU





# COLLABORATION, CONTROL AND COMPLIANCE WITH VALUEWORKS

*Housing Technology interviewed Valueworks' executive chairman, Matthew Trimming, on what the software company does, recent changes to the company, and how it's helping housing providers to achieve better collaboration with their contractors and external suppliers.*

## What does Valueworks do in the housing sector?

Valueworks is a software company that provides a collaboration platform to landlords, their maintenance contractors and builders' merchants for a fixed monthly cost. The software is provided as a service, enabling landlords to have effective, auditable control over the cost and quality of their maintenance works. For contractors and merchants, it ensures that they receive well-structured and clear programmes of work, helping to reduce the risk of commercial disputes and ensure they remain a supplier of choice.

## Can you describe the recent changes at Valueworks, and their relevance to your housing customers?

In February 2016, Valueworks' owners, the private-equity firm Hg Capital, decided to make a further investment in Valueworks to increase the pace of its software development. This was accompanied by a change in senior management at Valueworks.



I joined as executive chairman, having previously worked for SAP. Nick Southwell joined

as finance director and Phil Moss was promoted to become the company's new chief technology officer (CTO).



Matthew Trimming,  
Executive Chairman,  
Valueworks

Duane Jackson, the founder of Kashflow, one of the first software as a service companies, has joined to support Phil and the development team as Valueworks' first technology coach. Duane's wealth of experience helps to ensure that Valueworks' software is as modern and relevant to our customers as possible.

Since our new financial year in April 2016, we have increased the pace and focus of our software development, with two new releases planned for October and December this year. We have re-branded, moved our head office from Wigan to Manchester and re-structured our commercial model to deliver even more value to our customers.

We have introduced a two-day diagnostic, developed in concert with the Chartered Institute for Housing (CIH), to help landlords quantify the cost savings our modern, automated business process software can bring to their business; and we have developed a strategic partnership with Microsoft as one of its Independent Software Vendors (ISVs) focused on integrating with its Dynamics CRM and Accounting software.

All of this work is focused on offering our customers and prospects a modern, digital software platform that saves them money, increases their level of control over maintenance works and helps them comply with the requirements of the HCA.

## Please describe a 'typical' Valueworks customer.

A typical customer is a social landlord with 4,000 or more properties offered for rent or leasehold. Our focus is on the sector's top 300 landlords, their contractors (such as Mears) and their builders' merchants.

Our customers usually adopt our software as part of a digital transformation plan, replacing fragmented, spreadsheet-based business processes and expensive cost consultants with our easy-to-implement collaboration platform. The platform integrates with all of the major housing, asset and finance systems in the social housing sector, and a typical implementation takes no longer than five weeks.

Home Group, Flintshire County Council and Sutton Housing Partnership are three examples of customers working with Valueworks to deliver digital transformation programmes.

Our software has four distinct modules that can be purchased separately. PlanWorks focuses, as the name suggests, on planned maintenance. ServiceWorks helps our customers with their cyclical maintenance, ensuring they are compliant with their legal requirements such as boiler safety, something that the HCA takes a particularly keen interest in. Our third module is ReactWorks for a landlord's responsive repairs, and finally we offer BuildWorks, which supports landlords with their new-build programmes.

Can you explain Valueworks' focus on collaboration, control and compliance? Valueworks' software helps landlords, their contractors and builders' merchants overcome the problem of fragmented business processes between each of their businesses. By implementing our



## COLLABORATION, CONTROL AND COMPLIANCE WITH VALUEWORKS

*Continued from previous page*



collaboration platform, the landlord, contractor and builders' merchant have a single, shared view of what maintenance works need to be done when and at what price. This provides greater control for the landlord over the cost and quality of their maintenance programmes and allows them to work with a variety of maintenance contractors and builders' merchants on a single platform in a standardised and predictable way. This control is of increasing importance to landlords who operate with multiple contractors and merchants.

In terms of compliance, our customers value having all the relevant data on when a cyclical

piece of maintenance should be and was carried out in one easy-to-audit system. The HCA is increasingly clamping down on poor cyclical maintenance work. Our software helps landlords to stay the right side of the regulator's requirements, ensuring they remain a highly-rated organisation.

### How does Valueworks' focus on data fit with areas such as value for money?

The effective use of data to improve management insight and decision-making is at the heart of Valueworks' collaborative promise to our customers. As recent research by the HCA has demonstrated, the costs of maintenance vary widely between the top 330 landlords, with some of the most efficient being the smaller landlords.

With the HCA's continued focus on value for money, coupled with the need for landlords to make increasing savings due to the one per cent rent cut, our software



helps landlords gain greater control over the costs of their maintenance works. The software already provides a range of business intelligence reports to help landlords track, assess and maximise value for money. This reporting functionality is being enhanced through our partnership with Microsoft.

### Valueworks is a Microsoft ISV Partner – what does that mean for the company and your customers?

While Valueworks can integrate with any of the major housing, asset and finance systems prevalent in the sector, we have decided to form a strategic partnership with Microsoft. We have done this because our own software is based on .Net, Microsoft's development language. It also allows us to use Microsoft's Azure hosting platform and embed its latest data analysis and business intelligence functionality within our software.

Known as Microsoft Power BI, it will dramatically improve the business insight and decision-making opportunities for our customers, both during annual business planning processes as well as for day-to-day maintenance work.

Above all, our partnership with Microsoft is based on the belief that landlords will increasingly look to its Dynamics CRM and Accounting software to modernise their fragmented and siloed technology infrastructures. As landlords modernise their approach to customer and financial data with Microsoft Dynamics, Valueworks will be the natural partner for a landlord's property data by providing a single system for a landlord to manage its customer, financial and property data.

helps landlords gain greater control over the costs of their

### What are Valueworks' future plans?

As Valueworks looks to the future, we are focused on delivering market-leading software that's easy to integrate and delivers increasing levels of insight for landlords into the cost and quality of their maintenance work. We will be further deepening our strategic partnership with Microsoft and ensuring that our customers' voices are at the heart of the software we develop. To this end we will be establishing a customer advisory group in October.

I look forward to updating Housing Technology's readership on our progress over the coming months.





# ARE YOU PLANNING FOR PAY-TO-STAY?

Chris Deery, Head of ICT, Solihull Community Housing

*The government has recently announced a number of delays to high-profile projects such as Hinckley Point C, the roll-out of universal credit and the model for the future funding of supported housing. In this context, many people in the housing sector are wondering when the planned pay-to-stay initiative will be implemented. At the time of writing (August 2016), there has been no change from the proposed April 2017 start date. The government estimates that the scheme will generate significant revenue for the exchequer so, although it's not inconceivable that the implementation date could be delayed, it is very unlikely that the pay-to-stay scheme will be abandoned altogether.*

I would therefore like to suggest that housing IT providers and housing providers' IT directors should begin to actively plan and think about implementing the pay-to-stay scheme during the 2017/18 rent year. I had a workshop in July this year to look at the systems enhancements that would be needed to implement this new scheme and they are fairly major. We will need to hold earnings data at an individual person level and not just at a tenancy level. Because the definition of a household being used by the DCLG is the tenant and joint tenants plus their partners, this means that we will need to hold this earnings information for not just those people formally named on the tenancy agreement, but also for any other adults living in the household.

Each year, housing providers will be required to write to any tenants not receiving housing benefit asking them to provide details of who lives in the property along with their NI number, date of birth and taxable earnings.

Some housing professionals say that tenants simply won't provide the information needed. But if they don't do so, they will be expected to pay the full market rent from the point the scheme

becomes active. This means that in addition to gathering earnings data, housing providers will also need to agree a method for determining the market rent of all of their properties. I have been looking on the Rightmove website for ex-council properties for rent and have discovered that in Solihull, the market rent can be 55-85 per cent higher than the social rent that tenants are currently paying. This would mean that in some parts of Solihull, if tenants don't provide the information as requested, they could see their rent increase by as much as £100 per week.

Housing providers who want to avoid unnecessary hardship and stress for their tenants need to begin actively planning now how they will capture the necessary data and how they will ensure that vulnerable tenants are supported.

After the rent increase letter goes out, the tenant will have 28 days to appeal. They can appeal on one of three grounds. If they believe their landlord has made a mistake in calculating their household income, they can write to them with evidence of their correct income. If the tenant believes the landlord has incorrectly applied the taper, they can appeal on those ground too. Or if they believe that the market rent the landlord has calculated for their property is too high, they can appeal against this.

However, if their earnings are just above a £31,000 threshold, it's unlikely that this will make much difference to the rent they pay. Tenants also need to be aware that if they appeal the market rent, their rent can go up as well as down as a result of the appeal and that if they ask for an impartial assessment to be made by the Property Chamber then they may be charged an administrative cost for the appeal.

Section 83 of the Housing and Planning Act states: "HMRC may disclose information for the purpose of enabling a registered provider of social housing to

determine whether it is obliged by rent regulations to charge a tenant a specific level of rent and what that level is".

The DCLG and HMRC are now working with local authorities to understand how the data-sharing powers of HMRC could be used to support income collection and verification.

At this point, there is also a big question mark over whether the major IT systems providers will have made the necessary changes to their systems in time for the implementation of the scheme. I therefore have the following three pieces of advice for senior housing and IT managers.

**Begin planning now** – You will probably need to contact around 30-40 per cent of your tenants (i.e. those who don't receive housing benefit). If people don't respond with the required information, they could see dramatic rent increases and suffer unnecessary hardship, so begin planning now how you're going to contact those tenants.

**Develop temporary solutions** – Assume that your systems providers won't have developed fully-working solutions to help you manage this scheme in time for you to begin recording the information. So you're going to have to think about using Access databases or spreadsheets!

**Keep it as simple as possible** – In time, systems and interfaces will be developed to validate the earnings information that tenants provide. Best-practice methods for determining the market rent of properties are also likely to evolve over time. However in the short term, the best advice is to try not to 'over-think' things, such as using proportionate common sense approaches to determine your market rents.

*Chris Deery is head of ICT at Solihull Community Housing.*

# 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.**



# GETTING READY FOR PAY-TO-STAY

*What will the impact of pay-to-stay be on housing providers and how can they prepare for this new legislation?*

Helen Rogers, Head of Housing Products, Capita Software Services

*Plans to make pay-to-stay compulsory for local authorities have proved somewhat controversial and have been beset by delays through parliament as a result of the changing political landscape. However despite these delays, from April 2017 local authorities will be required to charge pay-to-stay rents to their tenants in higher income brackets. It will remain discretionary for housing associations.*

Under the new legislation, tenants with household incomes of £40,000 and above in London, and £31,000 and above in the rest of England, will be required to pay higher rents for their accommodation if their rent is being subsidised below market rent levels.

## Pay-to-stay: the concerns

A government consultation highlighted some key concerns for local authorities. Councils seem resigned to the fact they'll have to adhere to the new legislation, but it will involve a significant culture change for both staff and tenants. The process of capturing and maintaining accurate data on tenants affected will be hard to manage with the resources they have, and they are unsure of how tenants will react to such a large change.

The administrative burden on local authorities to enforce these additional charges, via letters, handling appeals, handling enquiries, chasing missing payments and so on, alongside the potential set up and administrative costs of the associated software being implemented or updated, are significant concerns.

Furthermore, working tenants are traditionally those the local authority has had the least to do with, due to them having fewer reasons for contact and it is unknown how these tenants will respond

to the new information requests and payment demands that will be coming into force. It's also possible that they could be disincentivised to work and some could face substantial rent increases that they might not necessarily be able to afford, despite being in a higher income bracket. There are also concerns around occupancy fraud, which is already the biggest area of fraud in social housing.

So what should local authorities be doing now to make sure they are ready for the significant pay-to-stay changes?

It is vital for authorities to start collecting as much income and financial information as possible now. To be able to successfully deliver pay-to-stay, councils need to understand who is in their social households, who is currently receiving housing benefit or universal credit and who isn't (as each of these will be exempt from pay-to-stay) and the relationships of their tenants and properties.

Managing this in conjunction with existing or scheduled contact with tenants will prove essential in ensuring this data is captured and ready for use. Because this capability is already present within local authorities' housing management systems, it means organisations needn't wait for the new legislation to come into force, and can be proactive in reducing the additional administrative burden it will create.

Understanding how to establish household income, and training staff in how to identify what income is and isn't included in pay-to-stay cases, should also be a priority, so that when tenant enquiries start coming in, staff are equipped to deal with them.

## Technology is key

Initial conversations with councils have identified one key area of focus; they can't meet this legislation without suitable software to support it. Capita, alongside other IT providers, has been working with the DCLG to consult about what a pay-to-stay solution would need to include and should offer.

This consultation has identified necessary features for any successful solution and the desire of local authorities to automate as much as possible in order to reduce the administrative burden.

For the solution to be efficient, it will need to capture the very basics first, such as household income information, and whether or not benefits including universal credit and housing benefits are being claimed. Just because one person's income drops in the household doesn't necessarily mean the rent drops. Therefore, local authorities will need to capture income data for all household members.

From this basic information, the software will be able to identify the affected tenants and communicate information about the new legislation and the details requested. This would be through letters, emails or house visits.

A solution which supports numerous points of contact will increase the opportunities for tenants to provide household and income information, whether that's via customer services staff, housing officers or online self-service portals. This online element is important because self-service will streamline much of the data collection. Digitising the process, including online forms to collect information, accepting supporting evidence such as digital payslips, and



## GETTING READY FOR PAY-TO-STAY

*Continued from previous page*

incorporating a declaration from tenants that the information is accurate, will encourage tenants to self-serve and reduce the need for staff to manually input data.

Using this income data, the software must accurately calculate and store a pay-to-stay element which can be included with existing rent collection and review processes. This will allow authorities to maintain control and audit information held without increasing their administrative burden.

All software solutions being developed for pay-to-stay need to be well designed and as effective as possible to reduce

manual interventions and costs incurred by outcomes such as tenant appeals, letters being sent to households that are not applicable, and the administration of handling National Insurance or income verification.

### Making pay-to-stay a success

It is clear that pay-to-stay represents a real overhaul of social housing rents, and it will have a significant impact on both tenants and local authorities. While it's possible that the full impact will not be known until the new requirements are in force, local authorities cannot wait until then to start putting measures in place to be prepared.

Steps are already being made in housing units in authorities up and down the country and with the right software solutions in place to help them collect and analyse the data they need, these legislative changes could help generate revenue for the public purse while preserving discounted rents for those who need the most support.

*Helen Rogers is head of housing products at Capita Software Services.*

## Civica's real-time asset management dashboard



*Civica has launched a new Keystone-based compliance dashboard for asset management. The dashboard presents customised KPIs to alert housing staff to any compliance issues or overdue actions in real time.*

Authorised members of staff can create and customise dashboard views to provide a visual representation of their high-level KPIs, such as contracts over budget vs. current spending or managing asbestos actions grouped by levels of risk.

## LONGHURST DEPLOYS SAAS-BASED RENTSENSE FOR WELFARE REFORM

*Longhurst Group has invested in Mobysoft's Rentsense to help it mitigate the effects of welfare reform as well as create efficiencies to help it deal with the government-imposed one per cent rent cuts.*

As part of a review across its whole organisation, Longhurst Group, comprising Friendship Care and Housing, Spire Homes and L&H Homes as well as a funding and development arm, is standardising its systems in an aim to improve services and provide consistency while demonstrating value for money. Spire Homes has been using Rentsense, a SaaS-based solution, since 2014 and has reduced arrears from around four per cent to less than three per cent.



Darren Ryland,  
Director of ICT,  
Longhurst Group

Paul Manning, corporate income manager, Longhurst Group, said, "UK housing providers are facing many challenges, not least of which are a one per cent social rent cut each year for the next four years and the likely impacts of welfare reform.

"When Rentsense was introduced, Spire Homes' income teams' combined caseload was reduced by around 50 per cent, and this reduction gave staff more time to contact tenants in high-risk categories."

Looking to the future, Longhurst Group was keen to mitigate the effects of welfare reform and in particular universal credit.

Manning said, "Rentsense supports our preparation for the rollout of universal credit, allowing us to be in the best possible place to deal with income recovery more effectively and prioritising the high risk cases."

Darren Ryland, director of ICT, Longhurst Group, said, "The implementation process was straightforward when it was deployed at Spire Homes in 2014, so we are looking forward to the same being true later this year when Rentsense is deployed across the entire Longhurst Group."



# CALCULATING PAY-TO-STAY RENTS IN CANADA

Trevor Hampton, Head of Housing, Northgate Public Services

*Canada has linked household income to social housing rents since the 1970s and along the way, the country's housing providers have negotiated many of the same problems that face the UK's housing providers as they implement the government's planned pay-to-stay programme.*

Social housing providers in Canada are required to capture the same financial information as UK providers will for pay-to-stay. Under the Canadian Rent Geared to Income (RGI) scheme, housing providers obtain pay slips, income tax forms and benefits information from tenants in order to charge a social housing rent of around 30 per cent of household income.

To make the scheme work, the housing provider's IT system needs to calculate not only the RGI but also create annual income check reminders and determine eligibility for the scheme. The system not only calculates social rents but also looks at any additional charges caused if tenants go beyond the income threshold. If tenants breach their income thresholds, their rents can be raised to 'market levels', which are calculated by Northgate Public Services' housing platform.

In short, the system needs to be able to cope with greater complexity.

Over the last few years, Northgate has worked closely with Ottawa Community Housing to implement RGI.

Michael Wilson, director of operational effectiveness, Ottawa Community Housing, said, "Raising the rent to 'market levels' can happen with a change in income or a change in household composition. Typically, this could occur to 'empty nesters' who no longer qualify for the size of home they previously had, or when people gain higher-paid employment.



"While we give them a grace period, if they don't move and the grace period expires, the rental charge goes to the market level regardless of income."



Michael Wilson,  
Director of Operational  
Effectiveness, Ottawa  
Community Housing

It's necessary to check household incomes on an annual basis to ensure that tenants are paying the correct rents. The IT platform generates the reminder notices and also helps create the calendar entry for tenant contact; it's potentially a multi-stage process.

First, the Northgate platform automatically generates a letter letting tenants know it's time for their annual review and requests financial and household information. If necessary, this escalates into telephone calls, followed by Ottawa Community's staff actually

visiting the property to get the necessary information.

Ottawa Community starts the process five months in advance because, as Wilson said, "To not have the information from tenants results in them becoming ineligible and losing their subsidy. In challenging situations, it often needs a hands-on approach to go and talk directly with tenants or help them to find the required information."

In Canada, supplying financial information is mandatory; this is a key part of the scheme's success. In practice, tenants' rents can be raised to several times what they were before if the information isn't supplied, creating a strong incentive to supply the information.

A key benefit of implementing RGI (and pay-to-stay) is the far greater understanding that housing providers gain about their tenants' financial and living arrangements. It opens up a much greater opportunity for dialogue and opportunities to help tenants ensure they are getting the right benefits than would otherwise be possible.

In preparation for pay-to-stay, we are taking what we have learned from our work in Canada (and others, such as Ireland and Australia, where there are similar programmes) and used that to inform our software solutions and also to offer a pay-to-stay service for UK housing providers.

*Trevor Hampton is head of housing at Northgate Public Services.*



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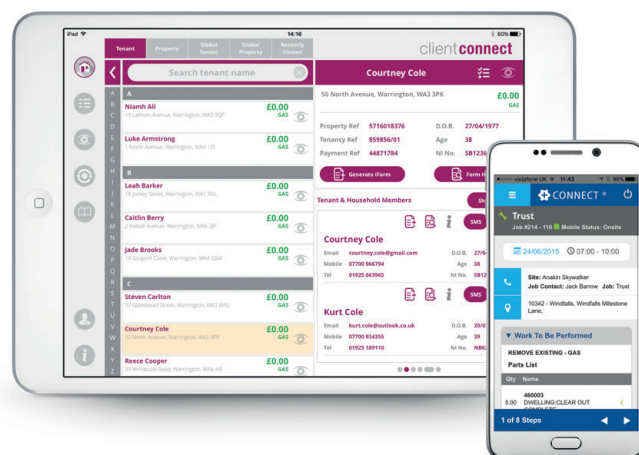
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# New Charter transforms with 1st Touch's 360° tenant portal

*A 360° tenant portal system from 1st Touch is being used by New Charter Group to transform its mobile workforce processes and tenant support strategy. The new system delivers a single-view of all key data, both for field operatives through their handheld devices and to tenants through an online portal-based customer hub.*

Following a review of its people, processes and technologies, New Charter determined that investments were needed in mobile workforce systems and online tenant self-service.

The new system needed to be an automated digital solution that empowered New Charter's tenants to self-serve wherever possible, allowing them to make payments, request repairs, report anti-social behaviour and carry out a host of other useful tasks. It also needed to be 'right first time' and ultimately be enterprise wide, giving all staff, field workers and New Charter's management a single-view of all key data.

New Charter chose 1st Touch's 360° tenant portal, which also includes the iAppoint automatic appointments system. This is a doorstep appointments system which simplifies appointment scheduling through enabling live tenant interactions. This allows tenants to schedule their own confirmed appointments with multiple departments, either online 24/7 via the customer hub or through field operatives using handheld devices when visiting tenants.

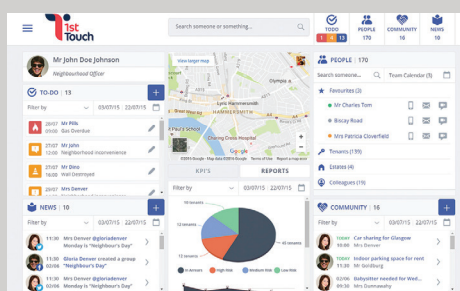
Yvonne Campbell, business transformation change manager, New Charter Group, said, "A significant increase in tenant transactions and the introduction of mobile working technology were the primary drivers behind introducing 1st Touch 360°."

"Once we have fully deployed 1st Touch, our staff will have the digital 'single-view' technology they need wherever they are. Our tenants will have easy 24/7 digital

access to our services through our new online customer hub, thereby reducing the transactional demand on our staff."

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch, said, "You can't fail to be impressed by the professionalism of New Charter's change strategy or the scale of the investment it has made in transforming mobile working and tenants' access to services. The fact that tenants can now resolve their own issues online through the customer hub, or have them automated by front line staff using handheld devices, is a major step forward."

## 1st Touch extends 360° technology for big data & real-time tenant services



By using big-data algorithms, predictive analytics and real-time access, the extended version of 1st Touch's 360° range is now available to transform housing processes while boosting tenant services.

The company said that the latest version of its dashboard and collaboration tool could streamline processes by delivering a single, 360° degree-view of all key metrics and tenant data access points across a wide range of modules.

By using 1st Touch's 360° big-data technology and predictive analytics, housing providers can anticipate a wide range of issues even before they become a problem. The data used for this is collected from other housing providers, tenants, partners and other credible industry sources. The system is also capable of accepting data from IoT-

type sensors for heating, lighting, water supply and security.

By combining all this smart data, 1st Touch 360° enables housing providers to anticipate which tenants are likely to face arrears problems or those that might require urgent care in the future. The system can also anticipate the need for preventative maintenance issues such as replacing boilers, by recognising tell-tale signs of trouble, well before the equipment becomes inefficient and unreliable.

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch, said, "We have studied which areas of technology and social media have worked well in other sectors and in doing so, we have identified those that can transform the way things are done in the social housing sector.

"We have also looked towards 2020 and taken a view on which developments are likely to deliver most in a housing management context. We have then incorporated this vision into the latest evolution of our own 360° systems."

The new 360° technology also ensures real-time customer interaction. Customers who have arranged an appointment online through the 360° self-service portal can see the name and picture of the operative due to visit them, know their route and expected arrival time and even have details of their vehicle registration. This is expected to boost customer engagement and dramatically reduce the costs and frustrations of 'no access' visits.

All the information needed for tenant visits by mobile and field workers is collated in 1st Touch 360° within a single central and easily-navigable online location. With such cross-functional on-screen visibility, tasks which would previously have required numerous tenant visits by different teams can now be covered in one visit from a single person operating in a multi-functional role through their handheld device.

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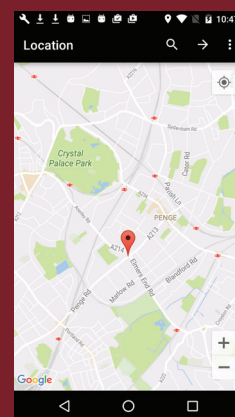
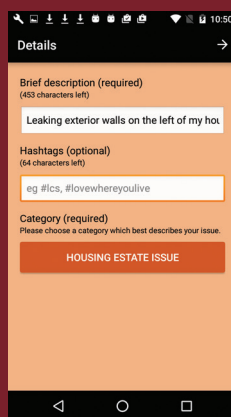
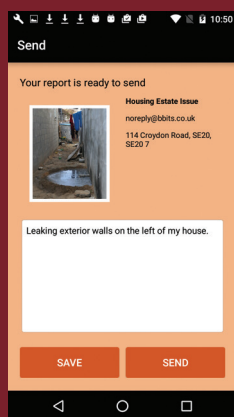
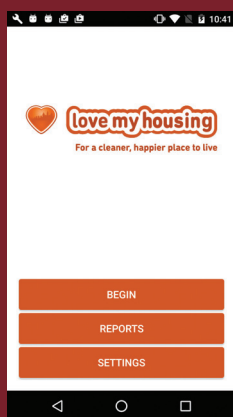


*Castle Computer Services has just set up a partnership with Housing Insight to bring the latter's PanConnect mobile working and customer self-service solution to the housing sector.*

Paul Sutherland, director of housing solutions, Castle Computer Services, said, "We're thrilled to be enhancing our offering by partnering with Housing Insight. We recognise the challenges faced by many housing providers in delivering a truly mobile workforce and PanConnect offers the perfect solution to help them stay productive on the go and engage with tenants in a more efficient and cost-effective way."

Nas Hayat, director, Housing Insight, said, "PanConnect Mobile provides access to back-office data from multiple systems to housing operatives on-site, while our tenant self-service solution is a secure way to give tenants access to important information that can help resolve issues efficiently and professionally."

## Love My Housing app launched for estate officers



*The business behind the award-winning Love Clean Streets app has launched an app to support housing providers' estate officers in managing and reporting issues across all of the properties within their remits.*

Already in use by Homes for Haringey, Love My Housing is a smart app and cloud service for managing and reporting on environmental issues, repairs and renewals. The app enables issues to be quickly and accurately reported, including detecting and providing the location, a description and pictures or videos of the issues.

Homes for Haringey began using Love My Housing in 2014 so that their staff could report issues more efficiently on their estates, and is now available to other housing providers and local authorities.

Pete Davey, head of IT, Homes for Haringey, said, "Using the app internally has been a huge success with our estate service officers and customers. We have seen customer satisfaction increase and our credibility as an organisation soar, particularly in relation to leaseholders who see it as a more efficient way of reporting issues.

"Duplication of work is avoided because of the speed of the system. Previous paper-based reports could have taken a week or so before being attended to and in the meantime other reports regarding the same issue could have been made.

"At the back end, things have improved too. The accuracy of the data is invaluable, particularly the picture which is used to identify faults because this system avoids the potential problem of an incorrect object being repaired over and over again."



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# ORCHARD & CIVICA ON THE FUTURE OF FINANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

*Housing Technology interviewed Civica's managing director for housing and asset management, Jeff Hewitt, and Orchard's marketing officer, Craig Tither, about recent changes to housing providers' financial management systems, ERP systems vs. dedicated housing applications, and the move towards web- and app-based systems.*

## How do today's financial management systems (FMS) differ to those from five years' ago?

Jeff Hewitt, managing director for housing and asset Management, Civica, said, "Over the past five years, financial management solutions have progressed from back-office solutions focused on inputting and processing financial data to become much more intuitive, enabling a wider range of users to access the information. This is crucial today because critical business decisions are made daily through the analysis of readily available and real-time data. In light of this, although data input still remains important, there is more emphasis on the ability to analyse data quickly, effectively and accurately."



*"The choice is limited because there aren't as many good FMS suppliers as you might think; nearly everyone has an FMS but that doesn't mean that they're any good."*

Craig Tither, Marketing Officer, Orchard

Craig Tither, marketing officer, Orchard, said, "Financial management systems have evolved; due to changes in technology and working practices, they are now cloud-based and can be accessed anywhere and on any device. Today's FMS enhances reporting flexibility and efficiency, streamlines business processes, offers a more complete suite of modules for more extensive

functionality, and provides better integration with other systems."

## What should housing providers look for when selecting a new FMS?

Tither said, "Selecting an efficient and knowledgeable delivery partner should be at the heart of any business-critical decision-making process. For example, with Orchard, you don't just get a finance system, we also have a team of sector-specific specialists who understand housing providers' key business requirements. And part of the selection process should also take into account the product roadmap and financial stability of the proposed partner."

Hewitt said, "Housing providers need to look for a system that's easy to use, manage and maintain and is quick to deploy. Decision makers shouldn't be constrained by the tried and tested suppliers and should embrace new solutions from any supplier with a track record in other areas of the housing sector. If there is a compelling reason to change, then decision makers should be clear on their objectives and seek partners to deliver results, even where exact fits don't exist."

## What are the advantages and disadvantages of an FMS vs. an ERP system and/or a housing management system with integrated finance functionalities?

Hewitt continued, "While an ERP system can provide a single platform for managing a business, fitting a generic ERP within a specialist sector such as social housing has proven to be inefficient and expensive. To meet the complexity of the housing market, business leaders should look at specialist platforms with joined-up housing, finance, HR and payroll functions, therefore providing all the features of an

ERP but within a cost-effective, specialist platform.



*"You should be looking at specialist platforms with joined-up housing, finance, HR and payroll functions, therefore providing all the features of an ERP but within a cost-effective, specialist platform."*

Jeff Hewitt, Managing Director for Housing & Asset Management, Civica

"Housing management systems with integrated finance functionalities can be an excellent choice in terms of the level of inherent integration but decision makers need to be sure that the breadth of functionality is not compromised with a bolt-on FMS."

Tither added, "You just don't need to compromise, with best-of-breed housing and financial solutions, delivered by a dedicated housing IT supplier to ensure joined-up working practices."

## What is the likely impact on FMS resulting from things such as universal credit, welfare reform and pay-to-stay?

Hewitt said, "Housing providers will want to identify where they can best direct their resources, so an FMS will need to collect costs more accurately and effectively, allowing housing providers to make business decisions based on real facts around expenditure. Income collection is becoming more important and while this is traditionally driven by the housing management system, the FMS will play a key role in ensuring that organisations are acting on the most up-to-date information."

Tither added, "In our view, developments such as universal credit and pay-to-stay will affect housing management systems much more than the finance



function. Housing providers can certainly expect more tenants in arrears, more complicated cases to manage and more uncertainty around revenues. Combine this with the new pay-to-stay legislation and all of this means one thing from a systems point of view; more data has to be managed and more processing activity has to happen to achieve the same outcomes as before. The level of customer engagement and associated customer data has to increase and this ultimately falls within the remit of housing management systems to support."

#### How volatile/liquid is the market for FMS, given the long replacement lifecycles?

Tither said, "The choice is limited because there aren't as many good FMS suppliers

as you might think; nearly everyone has an FMS but that doesn't mean that they're any good. At the same time, the historic stagnation of the FMS market is being challenged by more forward-thinking organisations."

Hewitt added, "We expect to see more churn in the market due to rising expectations around app-driven systems, meaning that many organisations will be taking advantage of the opportunities that new web-based systems offer"

#### What will FMS look like in five years' time?

Hewitt concluded, "The market is now moving towards more convenient and easy-to-use app-style FMS which will be available as cloud-based services. These

apps will allow data to be accessed at any time and from anywhere. What's more, this data will become much more integrated; for example, stock and personnel data will combine with financial information to give a much richer single set of data, allowing greater and deeper overall analysis."

*Housing Technology would like to thank Civica and Orchard for taking part in this interview.*





## PEAKS AND PLAINS CONNECTS WITH TENANTS

*Peaks and Plains Housing Trust has just gone live with two new web enhancements to support its 'simply connect' programme to improve its self-service capabilities for its tenants.*

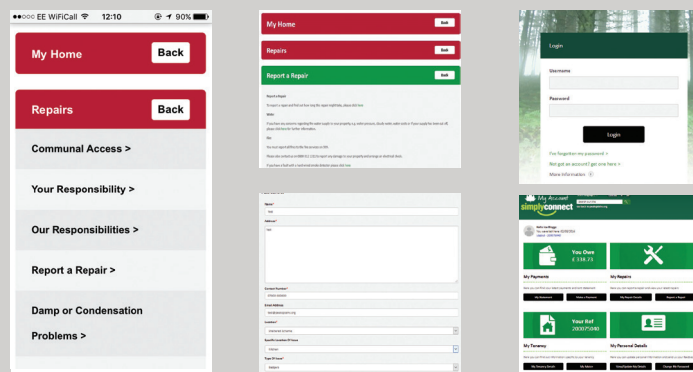
The enhancements are the result of six months' project work, where tenants have helped Peaks and Plains to develop its new 'my advice' and 'my account' areas, with the support of Sigma Consulting Solutions who carried out user experience testing and developed the new features.

The 'my advice' area offers tenants easy access to information on all of Peaks and Plains' services, based on the knowledge of its customer advisors, such as applying for a pet or permission to alter a property.

The 'my account' section has been re-vamped to give tenants an improved user experience and enable them to get up-to-date rent statements, check their balance, make payments online and make repair requests.

Neil Bancroft, service improvement manager, Peaks and Plains Housing Trust, said, "We have an ambitious digital plan to revolutionise how we serve our tenants and how they interact with us.

"In the past, our arrears management tool won an award for the most innovative system, and we were also one of the first housing providers to have our own app for both iOS and Android devices."



## North Star now live with Documotive



*In July 2016, North Star went live with Documotive CRM within its customer services team, the latest in a number of Castleon Technology (Documotive's parent organisation) systems over a two-year period. The CRM deployment follows the implementation of Castleon's Agile Customer app, Agile Staff app and initial testing of Agile Forms.*

Keith Saunders, group ICT Manager, North Star, said, "We're delighted to have gone live with Documotive CRM. It's been part of an ongoing partnership with Castleon to deliver systems to our end-users that enhance the tenants' experience. There has been some really positive feedback internally, and we plan to roll out CRM to other areas in the coming months, particularly technical services, housing services and supported housing.

"The big benefit that our customer services team has found is being able to access so much information from a single screen, and then being able to link to other systems directly from CRM if needed."

## NB Housing launches texting service

*NB Housing is now the first housing provider in Northern Ireland to provide a text messaging service for tenants, based on a combined solution from Deeplake Communications and Omniledger.*

Launched this summer, the integration of Deeplake's Communications Manager

with Omniledger's Pyramid housing management system gives tenants a quick and easy method of communicating with NB Housing and promotes self-service in areas such as rent accounts, repairs, payments and satisfaction surveys.



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**David Wright, Finance Director, ForViva Group.**



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# GENESIS BEAMS UP TENANT APP

Richard Holland, Head of Business Solutions, Genesis Housing Association

*I am a Star Trek fan and my friends at school were also fans. I grew up watching repeats of James T Kirk and Spock exploring the universe, meeting aliens and 'boldly going where no man has gone before'.*

One of the things I remember about growing up with Star Trek was that you either wanted to be the Captain outwitting the Klingons and meeting dishy green aliens, or you wanted to be the science officer using cool devices and saving the day with, well, 'science' and tech. I wanted to be Spock or Data. Also, I really wanted one of those pads – the ones that everyone carried around and used to report on the general running of the Starship. Didn't everyone pretend to have one of those, alongside the Communicator device?

Most of us have one of those pads now. In fact, it can run things like the Starship and make calls like the Communicator. I use it to run my life as well as a method of communicating with everyone in the world using various mediums (Facebook Messenger). A smart mobile device truly has that power, and the world is switching towards this method. It's far easier to sit on the train and update my Facebook status, check my bank account, read a book or take part in a simulation game or even watch last night's episode of '8 out of 10 Cats' rather than waiting until I get home to log on to a website using my laptop.

And when was the last time you watched a scheduled television programme? I'm now using my smartphone to broadcast onto a smart HD screen at home rather than using a TV box. And I watch television according to my own schedule and not one dictated to me (I've started to watch reruns of Voyager on Netflix – how cool is that?).

All of this is now achieved through the power of smart devices.

As a housing provider, Genesis believes that data is the key to a digitally-driven business and the winners will be those

who use information to their advantage, whether to automate services or provide innovative smart homes for our tenants. As part of Genesis' drive towards 'digital', we have recently implemented an app which allows our tenants to make payments and book a repair without having to make a phone call. Although this is a small change, it's the start of releasing the power of digital to our tenants.

The journey started with Castleton Technology and 365Agile, with whom we wanted to:

- Provide an e-commerce service to allow our tenants to transact online;
- Reduce call volumes into the call centre;
- Provide a better service and improve our overall customer satisfaction ratings.

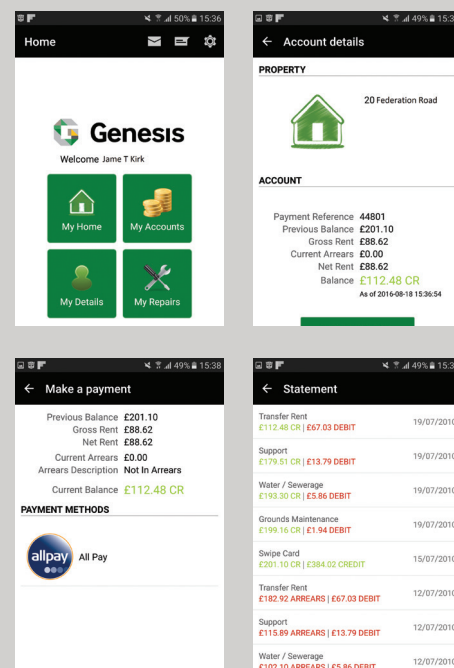
We also wanted to have an e-commerce service which could plug into our back-end systems without disruption, so we used an 'extract, transform and load' tool from Informatica to send and receive data, to achieve the following from the e-commerce service:

- Process near-real time transactions quickly and efficiently;
- Allow it to operate and not lose any data if the back-end system fails;
- Be able to unplug it with minimal disruption.

We developed a 'proof of concept' in 2015 to show what is possible with the customer app as well as establishing that the strategic IT design and vision was correct. We then delivered a viable product within four months, despite having only minimal resources, which was good enough for our customers to see for the first time. A product that:

- Shows customers' personal information;
- Allows editing of some of their personal information;
- Displays rent statements and balances;
- Allows customers to make payments;
- Can be used to raise a repair and track its progress.

The feedback from our resident engagement group and overall first impressions were eye-openers and we received lots of interesting and differing opinions to help us improve the solution. We went back to the drawing board for six weeks for final tweaks, retesting, re-checks and then release. The app now looks like this:



So far, the app is on target to achieve the take-up rate we set the project and the quality of data is improving as a result of the app, as well as better two way engagement with customers.

We are continuing to assess the success of the app and we're focusing on adding further functionality over the next few months.

So, I can finally realise one of dreams of my younger self, It's (digital) life Jim, but not as we know it. One to beam up.

*Richard Holland is head of business solutions at Genesis Housing Association.*





# HOME, SMART HOME... THE FUTURE OF INDEPENDENCE AND CARE

David Soto, Managing Director, Green Access

*David Soto, managing director of Green Access, looks at how the internet of things (IoT) will enable the connected home of the future and empower individuals to take greater control of their health and independence.*

When it comes to the care sector, two things are certain. First, the elderly population will continue to grow, as more so-called 'baby boomers' retire and advances in healthcare drive longer expectancies. Secondly, the role of the internet of things will become increasingly important, as housing providers come under greater pressure to help this growing population retain their independence in their familiar home environment for as long as possible.

Discussions about the ecosystem of connected devices that makes up the IoT have tended to focus on headline-friendly topics such as driverless cars and fridges that automatically update your online shopping basket when you're running low on milk. However, with the market for telecare, telehealth and related applications predicted to be £700 million per year by 2018, this is a key area for innovation in developing smarter, connected devices.



## Connected care

Where the IoT has great potential in the care sector is in its ability to deliver unobtrusive, yet supportive monitoring and alerting services that help people to live independently for longer. Analysts Berg Insight estimated that there were almost five million telecare users in the EU and over two million in North America by the end of 2015, with those figures expected to grow by around 40 per cent each year.

Essentially, the same identification, location, sensing and communication abilities that power those driverless cars and intelligent fridges can also enable assisted living, making tasks from climate control to turning on the lights available to everyone. Heating and lighting systems can be unified and managed at the touch of a button on a smartphone or tablet, rather than demanding multiple laborious journeys to the light switches and the boiler.



Telecare systems can even collect and transmit information about a person's living environment and health profile, making it quick and easy to identify when somebody needs help, but leaving them to live independently when they are able. In turn, these systems simultaneously drive efficiencies for housing providers and improve the quality of life for service users, who can follow their daily routines independently and safely.

## Different kinds of efficiency

Looking at the bottom line, there is an obvious financial benefit attached to such telecare systems. The more independently people are able to live, the less time- and cost-intensive support they need. It's clearly faster and cheaper if an individual can turn on and adjust their heating system themselves, rather than requiring a carer or warden's assistance.

So far, so straightforward. But efficiency comes in different forms, and telecare systems can enable more than simply 'doing more with less'. They can also dramatically speed up processes as and when additional support is required, making it more likely for users to receive expert or even emergency support in a timely manner.

For example, IoT-enabled sensors can track the typical patterns by which an individual turns their lights on and off, or runs water from the kitchen or bathroom taps. If these patterns are disrupted (such as no water is run for a set number of hours), then an alert is triggered and the monitoring centre decides on an appropriate response. This is far more efficient than waiting for set 'visiting hours'.

A smarter, more connected home is also a more efficient home in its own right. With individuals better able to control their environment, they are also more able to consume only the energy they need, and turn off systems when they are not needed.

## Making it personal

It's easy to associate an increasing reliance on automatic sensors and digital technologies with a shift away from personal service, yet in terms of telecare, the opposite is the case. Telecare systems can actually be part of a drive towards more personalisation.

Does a particular individual suffer from dementia or Alzheimer's? Bespoke reminders or alerts for particular tasks can be sent to their phone. Do they have poor eyesight? The apps controlling their home environment can be tailored to offer larger, brighter interfaces.

Each individual receives a truly personalised package of services and options and, of course, these change as that individual's needs change too. Meanwhile, the data collected by sensors and monitoring systems can be used to analyse behaviour and ensure that each individual is receiving the precise care they need.

Above all, telecare systems focus on fostering greater independence of living which is, in a sense, the most personal, individual-centred approach possible. They enable individuals with even complex care requirements to follow their own daily routines and continue to live in the environment they choose, with independence to maximise quality of life.

*David Soto is managing director of Green Access.*



# USING CCTV TO MANAGE YOUR PROPERTIES

James Wickes, CEO & Co-founder, Cloudview

*For most housing providers, CCTV is used to protect people, property and assets by providing visual surveillance. However, if you connect it to the internet - the so-called internet of things (IoT) - it can do so much more. MHS Homes has been trying out the technology and has identified many applications which neither they nor we expected.*

As Gary Clark, operations director at MHS Homes, points out, traditional models of property management are quite HR-intensive, which is essential but expensive. After taking part in the trial, he believes IoT-based systems can help housing providers become more proactive and allocate resources more efficiently. So what did he and his colleagues learn?

The trial began through the Connected Homes Consortium (CHC) which has been looking at how IoT can help housing providers. Jay Saggat from the consortium said, "We were excited that Cloudview had an IoT CCTV product which was ready to use, so we wanted to try it out in order to provide an honest assessment for our members."



MHS Homes volunteered for the trial. It is the largest independent landlord in Kent, owning and managing more than 8,500 homes, and historically puts

in CCTV when there has been an anti-social behaviour issue as well as in all of its sheltered housing schemes and high-rise blocks. The Cloudview system was installed at its Saxon Shore site in Gillingham.



## The benefits of IoT-based CCTV

The first benefit MHS Homes identified, perhaps unsurprisingly, was ease of use – enabling staff to look up CCTV footage on a mobile phone or tablet at any time and quickly check what has happened on site. If footage is needed by the police, for example, there is no need for a subcontractor to go on site, retrieve the footage and put it onto a memory stick. Providing a live feed that can be accessed anywhere means that an authorised member of staff can obtain footage from any location in a few minutes. If there is an incident, housing officers can respond immediately, saving time and money.

Secondly, using the IoT ensures that footage is always available – there is an immediate alert if a camera is down – and usable. For example, by looking at the footage online, MHS Homes quickly realised that the video from one camera was not viewable at night because a nearby light was in the wrong place. They moved the light and now have clear images at all times.

Thirdly, using the IoT can solve the problem of accessing CCTV equipment in difficult to access locations. For example, MHS Homes has four large tower blocks in which the CCTV equipment is housed in the lift equipment space in the roof. If they need any footage, they have to use a specialist contractor to visit the site, climb down a ladder, burn a DVD and deliver it to their offices. Using the IoT, CCTV is much cheaper and faster.

But beyond these obvious benefits, MHS Homes found a number of additional applications:

- Providing evidence of serious anti-social behaviour, damage, fly tipping and graffiti;
- Enabling staff to check the maintenance of communal areas;
- Briefing subcontractors on repairs; for example, cameras can be used to zoom in on a broken light fitting and footage sent to the supplier so repairs can be carried out quickly;
- As a reference for attendance by contractors whose services are required for safety compliance, such as electrical and gas checks, lift maintenance and legionella testing;
- Staff in MHS Homes' contact centre can use the technology to check on urgent communal repairs reported by residents while those residents are on the phone, and a video grab can be sent instantly to the relevant contractor to increase the likelihood of a 'first-time fix'.

*James Wickes is CEO and co-founder of Cloudview. For more information visit [www.cloudview.co](http://www.cloudview.co).*



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# FUTURES HOUSING'S MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS - PREPARING TO EXECUTE

Gavin Hitchcock, Head of ICT, Futures Housing Group

*As part of a major shift towards creating effortless customer experiences, Futures Housing Group is rolling out brand new systems across its operations to help staff work with greater flexibility and give tenants more ways to interact with them. In order to achieve this objective, Futures Housing is implementing Microsoft Skype for Business (SfB) and Enghouse Interactive Contact Centre (EICC) with 'tight' integration to its Orchard housing management system.*

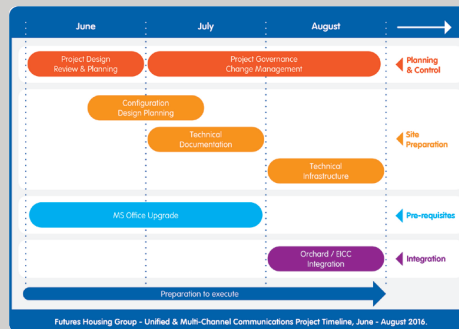
In the first article in this series (see Housing Technology, July 2016), we described how we investigated the business case, then specified, procured and carried out a proof of concept for the solution to replace the group's legacy telephone and contact centre systems. In this article, we explain how we have been 'preparing to execute' during June to August 2016.



## Project governance

After rigorous testing of all aspects of the new system, we were able to assure the business that the solution we identified was the right fit for Futures Housing. Following that major milestone, we quickly moved on to the design, review and planning stage of the project, scoping out what was to be delivered and when.

Systems integrator Amillan worked with our internal project team to consider the overall project design and approach, and took the lead in developing and driving the execution of the project's delivery.



Amillan's director, Richard Reid, said, "In a business transformation project of this type, meticulous project planning and change management are critical to the project's success, and ownership of delivering this to precisely meet Futures' particular requirements is something that we take very seriously."

During June, July and August, the technical aspects of the project progressed as system configurations were designed, challenged and then refined to enable system builds that were 'right first time' and ready for user testing. A series of high- and low-level design workshops were run by Amillan to design the overall topology, technical requirements, call flows, contact centre queues and other important aspects of the system.

Chris Cheetham, Futures Housing's project and change manager, said, "The time we invested in the design and configuration workshops with Amillan and Enghouse Interactive was essential; it's the old adage of 'if you fail to prepare, you're preparing to fail.'"

## Culture and change management

We worked out very early on that, while offering major improvements to the customer experience, introducing significant changes to the systems currently in place would present a big challenge to traditional work practices and engrained culture.

The proof of concept had already identified the requirement to upgrade Microsoft Office and at this point we decided to move to Office 365.

Additionally, to gain the maximum benefit from Skype for Business, most staff would be migrated from traditional desk-based telephone handsets to headsets, and from thin-client terminals to laptops to enable flexible working practices. Skype integration with mobile devices such as tablets, smartphones and laptops would also be deployed to make mobile working a genuine option for the workforce.

Significant time and effort is being spent on the 'change' aspect of this project, but sometimes it's the little things that can make or break a project. Having to take a new version of Microsoft Office, a new laptop with new software to learn, and then adapting to use a headset instead of a traditional telephone handset can be intimidating and a bit scary.

For those reasons, we have a clear communication, engagement and training plan to not only deliver the new 'stuff', but also to ensure that all staff understand why it's being done, how it supports our corporate objectives and, most importantly, to 'sell the benefits' of the project to get them on-board and positive about the changes.



Mike Underwood, Futures Housing's head of communications, said, "We are working hard to support the communication aspect of this project for all group staff and planning ongoing

## FUTURES HOUSING'S MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS - PREPARING TO EXECUTE

*Continued from previous page*

activities such as personalised emails, event days, updates on screen displays and noticeboards, and blogs and vlogs. We are also planning to create tailored information packs based on a staff member's specific 'persona', such as a 'road warrior', 'flexible worker', 'home worker' or 'desk worker'. All of this will be highly visual and with as little 'geek speak' as possible."

### Orchard/EICC integration

To streamline customer contact and enable them to communicate with us easily via telephone, email, SMS, web chat or social media, integration with our Orchard housing management system was fundamental to the success of this project.

We wanted the inbound 'contact' to be automatically identified and matched to the customer record held in Orchard, with the contact centre agent then being automatically routed to the correct Orchard screen and the contact history being automatically collected and stored at the end of the communication. Options to efficiently update customer information and add unrecognised contact details also needed development to help with maintaining accurate customer information.



We have engaged with Orchard's development team and the integration process is currently underway, with all the communication channels and data capture targeted for delivery in November 2016 and web chat (integrated with Orchard's self-service portal) following in February 2017.

### Clarity of purpose and 'tales of the unexpected'

Over the next few months, the project will move from 'preparation to execute' into the deployment and live roll-out stages.

With projects like this that take place over a fairly long period of time, from initial conception, through procurement, contract award and project delivery, it is important to keep a check on the

purpose and expected benefits of the project, to make any necessary adjustments and to accommodate those unexpected 'curves in the road'.

We identified both financial and non-financial benefits during the business case phase of this project and these are allocated to 'benefit owners' and monitored throughout. However, we have had to manage various unexpected factors due to the 'cutting edge' nature of this project, some technical (as you would expect in a project like this) but also some organisational such as the group redesigning its operating model, with a consequent knock-on effect to the project.

September to November this year will be very exciting; we'll bring you updates on the project in the next issue of Housing Technology.

*Gavin Hitchcock is head of ICT at Futures Housing Group (gavin.hitchcock@futureshg.co.uk).*



## ROCHDALE BOROUGHWIDE HOUSING TRANSFORMS CARE SCHEME WITH TUNSTALL

*Rochdale Boroughwide Housing has partnered with Tunstall Healthcare to transform how it cares for residents in its first purpose-built extra-care facility in Rochdale.*

RBH wanted to move away from a more traditional care home setup at its Hare Hill scheme. They are future-proofing the homes by providing residents with tailored digital solutions designed to give them the opportunity to live safely and securely while retaining their independence.

RBH is rolling out Tunstall's Communicall Vi to all of the extra-care apartments within the Hare Hill scheme. Tunstall said that its digital platform

is designed to support the concept of safe and independent living by providing residents with access to on-site services, advanced TV door-entry systems and 24-hour care and support, in addition to personal iVi intelligent pendants and improved carer-resident communications.

Iftikhar Ahmed, cabinet member for adult care, Rochdale Borough Council, said, "This is a defining moment in the way we care for our older residents. They can maintain their independence but still have the reassurance of 24-hour care. As a result of the success of the Hare Hill scheme, full occupancy was achieved within two months of completion."







# SETTING UP HOUSE

*How technology can help housing providers overcome their challenges.*

Jeremy Payne, International VP Marketing, Enghouse Interactive

*The introduction of legislation such as the welfare reform and work bill, the bedroom tax and universal credit has put huge pressure on housing providers' finances and those of their tenants. That in turn has placed a premium on effective communication between the two groups in order to openly discuss the problems and find efficient ways of resolving them. Get this right and housing providers will drive up tenant satisfaction and ensure a regular inflow of rental income. As this article demonstrates, the latest customer experience and interaction management technology will be key in making this happen.*

The recent introduction of the housing benefit size criteria, also known as the 'bedroom tax', seriously affected tenants, who saw their housing benefit limited by the government if their housing provider decided that they had a spare bedroom. But as public-sector cuts continue to bite, housing providers have also felt the pinch.

A recent blog from Cavan Doyle, product manager at information services company Experian, highlights the problems with the welfare reform and work bill. This bill will decrease rents in social housing in England by one per cent per year for four years from 2016, which is in turn expected to reduce average rents in the social housing sector by around 12 per cent by 2020 (based on current forecasts). This is a financial blow to housing providers, compounded by the complex challenges set in train by universal credit.

These changes put the relationship between housing providers and their tenants under increasing pressure, and that's especially true of universal credit. Many tenants already find it difficult to pay their rent on time, but the onus is now on housing providers to start chasing them for payments. Rent arrears are likely to rise, leading to an increase

in contact centre staff and the volume of associated resources providers need to deal with the issues.



## Opening up new channels

At the same time, the pressure tenants are under is already leading to an increase in the volume of calls into contact centres and a growing push for face-to-face meetings to discuss problems. It's a situation that is unsustainable financially for most housing providers. They need to find a more efficient approach that maintains channels of communications but that also enables them to keep their tenants happy.

One of the ways they can do this is by broadening the range of communications, and in particular the self-service channels that they offer tenants. Broadacres Housing, an Enghouse Interactive customer, understands that giving tenants choice, convenience and control in the way that they contact them is vital.

Rebecca Welburn, communications manager, Broadacres Housing, said, "We were aware that tenants were choosing various channels to contact us and this trend has been accelerating over time. New digital communications methods like email and social media are becoming more popular and increasingly rivalling the more traditional use of fixed line telephony."

Another customer, EMH Group, has added multi-channel capabilities. Inbound and outbound voice calls and emails are all widely used and texting is also used to communicate updates, relevant news or details about upcoming events.

It is certainly true that following the introduction of universal credit in particular, outbound texts can be invaluable in alerting tenants as to when their next rent payment is due. It is also fair to say that most housing providers appreciate that good practice in this area often comes down to offering as wide a range of communications channels as possible.



## Self-service to the fore

In line with this openness to tenant preferences, housing providers should, where possible, be encouraging their tenants to self-serve through everything from intelligent voice-based IVR to mobile apps and online forums. Using a blend of speech recognition and touch-tone techniques, the best IVR systems can expedite both simple and complex requests quickly and cost-effectively without using up any agent time. In the social housing context, they can be linked to online payment portals to facilitate payment over the internet rather than over the phone, if that's the tenant's preferred option. And with growing numbers of tenants now having smartphones and tablets, housing



## SETTING UP HOUSE

*Continued from previous page*

providers also need to consider offering mobile IVR applications.

But a word of caution here – housing providers need to be cautious about moving too far down the self-service route. The government has been pushing the 'digital by default' message for some years and universal credit is reportedly the first digital by default service (the government is aiming for 80 per cent of applications for the benefit to be made online by 2017). However, recent figures indicate that some 4.1 million UK adults in social housing have never been online.

Given these challenges, it's clear that housing providers need to offer their tenants a choice of interaction methods. They need to encourage those customers who are digitally-savvy to communicate online and through self-service methods but they also need to put resources behind traditional voice-based communications for tenants who are more familiar with this approach.

### Building a connected organisation

Of course, in order to ensure they can deliver all of this multi-channel capability, housing providers need to have the right infrastructure. At the front end, that means they need to provide contact centre agents with a consistent user interface capable of handling all aspects of omni-channel communications while ensuring they have visibility into all of their interactions.

Having the tools they need on a single desktop means that agents can manage all tenants' interactions as if they were the same; for example, there should be no need to switch to a different interface for call handling, emails or webchat. It's easy for agents to use, and the whole process is more streamlined and efficient, and agent productivity goes up.

However, this kind of approach also needs to provide a connection with back-office systems to ensure tenants' queries are resolved efficiently. Housing providers should provide one simple contact centre number and back that up with streamlined contact centre routing to subject matter experts who are equipped with the knowledge to deal with queries, no matter what means of contact has been used. The 'presence'

capabilities of unified communications technologies, such as Skype for Business, can be critical here, in enabling these cross-organisation connections to bring in expert resources on demand.

Delivering seamless cross-organisation connectivity is also important when it comes to bringing in CRM systems to improve productivity and reduce call times and costs. Ultimately, it's another example of the benefits that the closer integration of technology can bring to housing providers. The set-up of the tenant-facing technology infrastructure at EMH Group is a case in point. Here, the Enghouse Interactive Communications Center (EICC) features complete computer-telephony integration (CTI) to the CRM solution that the group has in place. Agents using EICC can view relevant pop-ups of information about the caller's previous contact history during the call-handling process.

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

### Focus on quality to deliver results

But, however efficient and effective the systems and solutions are, housing providers won't be able to deliver the level of customer interaction needed without closely monitoring agent performance.

Part of this is about collecting relevant information and turning it into intelligence to help inform the future customer engagement process. As David Morris and his colleague, Helen Bradford, head of ICT at EMH Group, said recently, "It's a good idea to develop a dedicated customer experience team that can act as a central intelligence hub and manage all types of feedback coming into the organisation, such as compliments, complaints, or general feedback through surveys. With a customer experience team, you can use the captured

information to learn lessons from your mistakes and make sure you don't repeat them. Having a central resource in place also makes it easier for you to create an escalation process in the event that issues or problems require urgent attention or need rapid resolution."

Delivering quality must, however, also be about measuring agent performance not only in terms of ensuring compliance with industry regulations but also for tracking and maintaining the quality of agent interactions.

Historically, much of this analysis has been done after the fact. The introduction of real-time speech analytics has changed this and brought some specific benefits for housing providers. The game changer is the ability to deliver instant feedback to agents and improve the quality of the experience for tenants there and then.

In the current environment, the use of soft evaluators (in effect, assessing the emotion in any interaction) is also invaluable. With debt levels on the rise and the new universal credit arrangements adding to the pressure on tenants, housing providers can benefit from using soft evaluators, when chasing payments, to identify which questions cause stress levels to soar most and to ensure that they treat tenants fairly and are always sensitive to their needs.

Implementing all of the above solutions has the potential to bring significant benefits but housing providers are also increasingly seeing the benefits of moving from a purely on-premise approach to one more focused on the cloud.

### Positive future ahead

As this article demonstrates, technology can be brought to bear in delivering a best practice approach for housing providers that enables them to overcome their financial and regulatory challenges, build more positive relationships with tenants and face the future with confidence.

*Jeremy Payne is the international VP of marketing at Enghouse Interactive.*



# CAN CUSTOMER SERVICES SAVE SOCIAL HOUSING?

Peter Graddon, Director, Omfax Systems

*The future of housing is unclear. Peter Graddon, director of Omfax Systems, providers of dynamic scripting solutions for the social housing sector, talks about how enhanced levels of customer service can help to save social housing.*

## The issue

We are facing a housing crisis with a huge lack of availability of affordable homes. According to The Guardian, since its peak in 2006, home ownership has fallen across every part of the UK. On the other side, the Chartered Institute of Housing has estimated that, due to the imposition on housing providers of the right-to-buy, there will be a net loss of more than 400,000 social rent homes by 2020. This is a staggering figure given the increasing demand, yet too many are allowing this to happen.

Social housing is at a crossroads and the future is unclear. It is under threat from government policies, such as the one per cent rent cut, the impact of government budget cuts and from forces within. Housing providers have been left to plug the gap as other services have been cut. In response, some housing providers are seeking to merge and create new 'mega providers' in order to find efficiencies. However, as these mega providers are created, they become more commercial which leads to a danger that housing providers could lose their social purpose and connection with their communities. I believe there is a real threat to the future of social housing, especially the ethos that underpins it – the commitment to upholding strong social values. Added to this mix, customer expectations have never been higher and are becoming more complex, meaning more housing providers are seeing an increase in their overall volume of contacts.

## The role of customer service in housing

The reputation of social housing has become tarnished over the years; one side of the argument paints a picture that tenants don't get a good service, despite

the many plaudits and awards given to housing providers' customer services teams in recent years.

The fact is that good customer service is now expected. It's not a 'nice to have', it's a minimum and for many people, it's a clear indication of how an organisation is performing more widely. It's about assigning the same commitment and importance to measuring your performance on social values as you do to measuring against other business objectives.

With this in mind, tenant engagement and the way housing providers engage with their tenants has never been more important. Most providers have recognised the scale of the housing challenge and present it as an opportunity to be more, not less, customer focused; the 'human touch' and having a unique relationship is a part of this. There is now a shift to smarter solutions and new ways of thinking so that effective customer service delivers value for money.

## Traditional model

Customer service should be in the DNA of a housing provider and has to be implicit in every interaction with customers, irrespective of the channel being used. In short, it's about the combination of behaviour, skill, process and technology, but most importantly, it's about leadership.

The traditional model focuses on telecommunication and face-to-face tenant communication. This now needs to go hand-in-hand with a unified communications approach that incorporates digital technology. Though turning intent into reality in a sector with a business model that doesn't rely on brand loyalty is no easy task and delivering customer-focused services has to start with the overall leadership culture.

Housing providers need to focus more on the total customer experience. Some

are already ahead of the curve, bringing in new skills and looking at how they manage each customer journey face-to-face, by phone and online. Others are still at the starting blocks, looking at technology and behaviour rather than taking a more holistic view. A handful are still looking at siloed access channels.

## Digital model

Housing providers haven't always been quick to embrace advances in technology. Ofcom research identifies that nearly three quarters of internet users have a social media profile, compared to 22 per cent in 2007 and 66 per cent in 2013 and it's not just the younger generation who are onboard. Half of those aged 55 to 64 now have at least one social media profile, the most popular being Facebook. While relatively small numbers of tenants have access to the internet in their homes, or live in areas where internet connections are poor, much larger numbers of tenants have smartphones and access to social media. These changes are having a real impact on how housing providers choose to interact with customers and because of the public nature of the interaction, poor service is readily exposed and given a huge audience. When done well, social media offers a great opportunity to improve service efficiency, to position housing providers as trusted and transparent service providers, and to nip emerging issues and complaints in the bud.

The progression of technology clearly shows no sign of slowing down, so providers must adapt their customer service tools in order to communicate with their tenants in new ways that match their needs. It also can give tenants more autonomy through self-service tools. A few organisations I have spoken to about implementing their digital strategy have mentioned their use of social media channels, web chats and apps and have seen the benefits of these. However, all agreed that a digital strategy requires a commitment from the top in order to

## CAN CUSTOMER SERVICES SAVE SOCIAL HOUSING?

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implement it effectively. The fact is that it really does depend on the customer focus of the housing provider for it to be effective and contribute towards efficiencies within the business.

### New model

Tenants themselves need to be front and centre and they need to be integral to the governance of the estates and properties. Every housing provider should have tenants in significant numbers on their boards and involved in tenant committees for operational decisions where possible. Perhaps the sector needs to go further and commit to real tenant democracy, as illustrated by the Danish model; where residents have the majority vote on the housing organisation's board and every tenant

can be a part of the democratic process which runs individual housing estates.

### The solution

The social housing crisis that the UK faces today isn't just about the chronic shortage of council and housing association homes. It's about people. It's about people worrying about their future, as more and more households are unable to rent or buy without help. Housing associations play a vital customer services role; they have a unique relationship with all customers, founded in their traditional model, which is being advanced as digital innovations make headway.

For me, social housing is worth fighting for; it's the mark of a civilised country to ensure good housing and supportive

services for its people. Personally, I don't believe that social housing will be saved by housing professionals; public services are only saved when people value what they provide and are prepared to get out and object to any threat to the future of that service. Social housing will only be saved by the opinion formers - the tenants themselves, especially those engaged tenants on the committees or boards of housing associations. Tenants will only fight if they value the service, or in other words, if the customer service is worth fighting for. So yes, customer service can save social housing by building and expanding relationships, and is potentially a powerful force in the fight that should not be underestimated.

*Peter Graddon is a director of Omfax Systems.*

## Caltech joins G-Cloud

*Caltech IT, a leading supplier of Microsoft Dynamics CRM, has been added to the government's 'G-Cloud 8' framework as a provider of software as a service (SaaS) solutions.*

The G-Cloud initiative was launched in 2012 to help public-sector organisations procure cloud-based services. Overall G-Cloud-based sales (across all suppliers) passed £50 million in

February 2014, with total sales of almost £700 million since the start of the initiative.

Phil Callaghan, managing director, Caltech IT, said, "We are delighted to be listed as an evaluated supplier on the G-Cloud 8 framework, allowing us to engage with public-sector organisations across the UK."

## INFRASTRUCTURE

## TunTum Housing signs with Riverlite for IT infrastructure



*TunTum Housing has signed a three-year contract with IT service provider Riverlite to fully manage its technology infrastructure from September 2016.*

Riverlite will replace TunTum's servers and provide centralised storage, deployed as virtual servers for flexibility and high availability. Riverlite's Sentry system will be used to provide security to protect TunTum's infrastructure.

Rafik Ghumra, director of resources and risk, TunTum Housing, said, "We are very impressed with Riverlite's expertise and know that our entire IT system is in safe hands with their

support. Our very name 'TunTum' symbolises people working together and that's exactly what we are looking forward to doing alongside the Riverlite team."

After the 8-10 week implementation process, the entire system will be proactively managed and supported by Riverlite's network operations centre (NOC). This fully-customisable network monitoring system ensures key systems are available and performing at optimum levels, with the ability for every server or network device to be examined individually when needed.





# FIT FOR THE FUTURE AT LONGHURST GROUP

Darren Ryland, Director of ICT, Longhurst Group

*Fit for the future. That's been the phrase on everybody's lips at Longhurst Group over the last year. We're confident that we're fit-for-purpose but the challenge we've faced as an ICT team is how to also ensure that we're ready for what is yet to come.*

So how can you prepare for the unknown? In this instance, the right systems and telephony infrastructure will provide us with the flexible foundation we need to become the organisation we want to be. That's why we started looking for telephony technology to make managing communications easier and give us options so that we can choose how we want to develop in the future.

We operate from across more than 15 sites throughout the Midlands and until this year, we managed our communications through a traditional ISDN architecture at each location. However, with an increasingly mobile workforce, a developing culture of total integration, and an ambition to increase the size of our group, we needed to make a change.

Since August 2016, we've been working through a session initiation protocol (SIP) configuration, with a single trunk now processing all communications for the whole group. This approach supports enhanced functionality and has enabled us to consolidate our communications service provider. The next stage is to migrate to Skype for Business, having already switched to Office 365 earlier this year.

Recognising our need for some specialist technical support, we put the contract out to tender. We are now working with Modality Systems to support the integration process which we hope to have completed by November. Over the coming weeks, we'll start to replace our traditional telephony software and work with teams across the organisation to embed new ways of working.

Taking this approach to telephony gives us many benefits because the shift supports high-level organisational aims as well as providing increased day-to-day functionality for our staff. The new system supports far better DR processes

as well as contributing to our eco-friendly targets. We're also expecting to see significant reductions in the amount of ICT time spent setting-up new staff and supporting transfers between office locations. Quite simply, the whole project will reduce cost and increase efficiency, tipping the balance of value-for-money in the right direction.

Perhaps more importantly though, we're now in a position where technology doesn't have to sit at the heart of discussions around cultural development; instead those debates can focus on people, as they always should. We won't have to define ourselves by the limitations of what our systems support because what we have now is the flexibility and the scope to support widespread, rapid change.

*Darren Ryland is director of ICT at Longhurst Group.*

## Kensa & Coastline partner on 'micro district ground source heat network'

*Kensa Heat Pumps has partnered with Coastline Housing to deliver Cornwall's first 'micro ground-source heat network' project, attracting income via the Non Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive and slashing tenants' heating bills.*

The project also featured the first 'micro district ground-source heat network' in Cornwall. Pioneered by Kensa, Coastline's heat network comprises an individual ground-source heat pump in twelve bungalows on one of Coastline's estates, linked to a communal ground array. This communal approach reduced drilling costs and made the project eligible for the Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI), giving Coastline Housing the opportunity to receive quarterly payments from the government for 20 years.

It also ensured that the tenant of each property can use their own preferred energy supplier and pay only for the heat they use, rather than more common district heating systems where it becomes necessary to meter for payment, which is more complicated for both the landlord and tenant.

The ground source heat pumps provide 100 per cent of each property's heating and hot water needs and are expected to save each tenant around £300 per year compared to the previous electric Economy 7 systems.

Ralph Retallack, energy efficiency manager, Coastline Housing, said, "We are the first housing provider in Cornwall to install this type of micro district ground-source heat network system. It

allows our tenants to retain control of their individual electric bills, which is more convenient for them and saves Coastline having to become involved in any billing.

"This was very much a 'hands off' project for Coastline once work commenced. We have been impressed with the level of care and consideration for our tenants' needs; the swift and professional delivery of the physical work; and importantly the careful restoration of areas where the borehole drilling took place. In addition, it has been great to be working with and supporting a fellow Cornish company."



## PROBING SECURITY FLAWS IN TENANTS' ENERGY CONSUMPTION

Peter Westwood, Managing Director, Insite Energy

*The Heat Networks (Metering and Billing) Regulations 2014 were introduced with the objective of empowering the end-users of communal heating systems to better manage their energy use through the installation of individual heat energy meters and free access to consumption data. Two years further on, district heating specialist Insite Energy's managing director, Peter Westwood, explains how the regulations could pose a data security challenge to housing providers, with customer and consumption data possibly being shared unwittingly with companies that shouldn't have access to it.*



want our sector to become embroiled in a row about data security, and we believe that education is a key factor in addressing this issue.

We are talking about data that belongs to the customer as it's 'their heat' but the heat supplier obviously needs to have that data in order to know what should be billed. Meter readings will be done by third parties who will also have access to this data. The role of heat supplier may be performed by a managing agent which means still more people have access. With any communal heating system, there needs to be a clear understanding of who is using the data, for what purpose, and how it is being properly controlled.

One of the major concerns is that, ultimately, if you have more advanced systems, you can tell if people are at

home or perhaps on holiday, and the type of lifestyle they lead. Increasingly, this kind of data has a market value.

It is the accidental leaking of information that is the main concern at the moment. We have no evidence of data being shared maliciously, but we are aware of several instances of data being shared without full consideration of the implications. We are convinced that not everyone operating these systems may be aware of the obligations when handling heat data. This lack of understanding could trigger significant legal and reputational repercussions.

The important thing is to ensure compliance. Contracts must state specifically who is allowed to see the data and the analysis and billing purposes it can be used for. Data protection is a very important issue and people need to understand their obligations in connection with it. Housing providers have a duty of care to the people whose data they collect. With only housing providers and appointed heating and billing specialists, such as Insite Energy, needing access to data, there should be no excuse for it falling into the wrong hands.

*Peter Westwood is managing director of Insite Energy.*

The introduction of these new regulations has brought with them a challenge that won't previously have been a concern to housing providers. We're concerned that all this data, which in some cases will include minute detail, such as what time tenants are taking a shower, is not always being safeguarded in the way that it should be.

It is vital that housing providers and heat suppliers get to grips with the important issue of data protection. If they fail to do so, we can expect scenarios such as tenants being plagued by calls from marketing companies who may have gained access to personal data. This isn't a 'scaremongering story' but we don't

## Alysium makes new appointment

*Alysium Consulting is continuing its focus on the housing sector with the appointment of Julian Freeman as a senior consultant.*

Ian Lever, managing director, Alysium Consulting, said, "This is the first of a number of strategic appointments that we will be making this year after having had a very strong start to 2016.

"We hope to make three more appointments before the end of 2016, demonstrating that more housing providers are now taking their investment in IT infrastructures and systems much

more seriously and are recognising that the need to deliver more effective and efficient communication channels for staff and customers is pivotal to their future success."



# #HTTOP5

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

*As a new media and channel specialist at Red Kite Community housing, welcome to the first ever #HTtop5... A bitesize chunk of technology news goodness, wrapped up in a delicious layer of creative possibilities, kind of like a tech-news sausage roll. So sit back, prepare your taste buds and take a housing-size bite of the top five latest tech tips...*

## Google Duo

The most exciting thing to happen in the world of Google for quite some time was the announcement of Google Duo, a one-on-one video-calling app that works on both iOS and Android. What's so new about that? Well, the cool headlines on Duo are that it has some clever technology behind it that switches from cellular to wi-fi and moves from lower to higher speed service very smoothly, so users should be able to use



it without worrying about where they are and what speed connection they have. Also, you don't need a Google account to use it, just a phone number.

There are lots of companies vying to be top dog in the video-calling market, such as Skype, Facetime, Facebook and Google Hangouts, and all of these offer a browser-based version which Duo does not. But there is space for someone to steal the video-calling crown if they can develop it and get it right. How long before the housing sector embraces video calling on a large scale?

## Aero drone

Intel has made a new ready-to-fly drone called the Aero. It comes preloaded with Air-map which basically helps drone



pilots fly where it's safe and legal, thereby taking the headache out of the very unclear legal issues around drone flying. The Aero is a quadcopter and will be available by

the end of the year. With some housing providers already using drones, pre-loaded safer drones may encourage more to try them.

## Ford self-driving car

Ford has announced that it will mass-produce autonomous cars by 2021. It is doubling its spending on its research centre

and making big investments into automobile automation technologies. The car-maker envisages it to be more of a car-sharing, Uber-style world, rather than individually-owned autonomous vehicles. Ford appears to be positioning itself more and more as a technology company as opposed to just a giant in the motor vehicle world. Of course, it has to compete against the likes of Google who currently leads the pack in this field. Can you imagine your communities sharing rides?



## Intel getting involved in merged reality

Intel has unveiled a VR headset called Project Alloy that it describes as 'merged reality', basically allowing real-world objects to merge with computer-generated views. Project Alloy's selling point is that users will be able to see their own hands, although Intel is a little late coming to the VR/AR party as Facebook, HTC, Microsoft and Playstation are all gearing up for the virtual reality revolution. Virtual viewings, anyone?



## Wallbot lets you see through walls

A company called Wallbot has released the stud finder of the future. Working via USB to an Android device, it lets you see



plastic and metal pipes, electrical wires and studs inside the wall, using 3D imaging sensors. The hefty \$200 price tag may put some

people off but it's certainly an improvement on the old-fashioned stud finder.

*Adam Rigg (@riggadam) is a new media and channel specialist at Red Kite Community Housing.*



# Warmth on prescription from robots at Islington Council

*The serious health effects of cold homes have led London's Islington Council to trial a 'warmth on prescription' programme aimed at improving the homes of those with serious health conditions, using robots from Q-Bot to insulate floors.*



The Q-Bot devices crawl under suspended timber floors and insulate them from below, making the property not only warmer but also much less draughty. After running initial trials at six properties, the council performed EPC assessments of the test houses to check the improvements. It turned out that insulating the floors using robots was the most cost-effective energy improvement, at around £1,000 per each EPC point gained compared to £2,000 when externally insulating the wall and £12,000 when replacing the windows.

Q-Bot's SprayBots can access a building through an external opening, perform a visual analysis, and build up a 3D map of the

space. It then sprays the insulation before finally inspecting the job done, thus facilitating quality control and validating energy savings. Because the robot can fold and deploy through small openings, access can be through an air vent in an outside wall or through a small opening in the floor within the property.

Following the test results as well as feedback from its tenants, the council is working with BEIS (the department taking over from DECC) to expand the programme later this year.

John Kolm-Murray, affordable energy manager, Islington Council, said, "Using Q-Bot's devices allowed us to bring our older homes to a higher standard with less disruption to our tenants than other insulation measures, and at a reasonable cost. Our assessment of the trials has been positive and we are looking at ways we can roll this out across more of our homes."



## CLEARVIEW PERFORMS FOR CHELTENHAM BOROUGH HOMES

*Cheltenham Borough Homes is now using Clearview's performance management reporting software to get closer to and make better use of the data spread across its organisation.*

Adam Waller, business support manager, Cheltenham Borough Homes, said, "We needed a more robust, accessible and flexible way of using of our data and a way to link that to our broader strategic plans. We also wanted to reduce our reliance on standard software packages to manage and monitor our business data because they were taking too long to administer and didn't lend themselves to a more strategic or thematic way of managing our data.

At first, CBH used Clearview's standard performance scorecard reports for a variety of management meetings, but quickly moved on to more tailored reporting. Waller said, "Getting to grips with the reporting module has enabled

us to generate very accessible, low-maintenance reports that are shaped by how the data is interrogated during the different management meetings. It is 'live' and gives the viewers the opportunity to dig down from an overview into more detailed views. It works well on tablets and users can navigate reports independently around the meeting table to suit their needs."

### Scotland's Housing Network benchmarks with Clearview

Scotland's Housing Network is the latest organisation to implement Clearview Business Intelligence and Reporting.

Scotland's Housing Network is the largest housing benchmarking and practice exchange organisation in Scotland, with over 120 local authorities and housing providers as members, representing almost 90 per cent of the sector by stock in Scotland. The purpose of the network is to promote the standard

of housing services across the sector through sharing good practice, cost and performance benchmarking, and self-assessments.

Elaine Byrne, managing director, Scotland's Housing Network, said, "Our members asked us for more flexible ways of reporting on the data we hold. The Clearview tools support not only our traditional reporting services, but have also enabled us to add new ways of visualising data, including external data sets which we believe will add significant value to our members.

"The tools are so easy to use and this has opened up a number of new service opportunities for our members. Our work with Clearview has given me a fresh perspective on what an IT company can deliver when it is focused on project delivery and the customer."



# WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL ORGANISATION IN THE HOUSING SECTOR?

Luke Stewart, Geo Practice Manager, Ancoris

*Digital transformation, a source of confusion and worry for leaders in the housing sector, is nothing to be afraid of. It more or less refers to getting a business ready to operate in a changing digital environment.*

Uncertainty surrounding the impact that Brexit will have on the market has, for at least the short term, slowed national home building. As a result, pressure is likely to increase on social housing to ensure as many people as possible have a safe and suitable home. Being able to cope with these changes is critical for any housing provider, so having the right digital infrastructure to deliver more for less and manage pressure is essential.

No organisation or market sector can view itself as immune from the disruptive impact of digital and mobile technologies. Changing consumer expectations have increased the demand for being able to make contact across mobile and via digital tools such as social media.

Embracing digital technology isn't just about buying and installing it though. The real benefit of new technology is its transformative nature. Organisations can become more productive and analytical in their approaches. According to the consultants McKinsey & Co, a successful digital enterprise has a number of character traits:

- They're ambitious in their targets, and measure the value they get out of digital initiatives, not the volume.
- They extend their capabilities by hiring in new skills from other sectors.
- They ring-fence digital talent, so it doesn't get distracted by 'business as usual'.
- They challenge everything, across every function, process, product and location.
- They move quickly and are prepared to constantly reinvent themselves.
- They take a focused approach to investment, concentrating on high-value areas and scaling up successes quickly.
- They put customers at the heart of their digital transformation, learning from every interaction in order to improve the customer experience.

Interestingly, none of these traits involves actual technology. McKinsey argues that digital transformation is about culture first, taking a more productive and efficient approach to work.

Focusing on developing these seven characteristics will help an organisation to adopt new technology which will in turn improve productivity and services. Taking such an approach will enable innovations and the identification of potential areas where technology can assist and improve processes.

For example, in the housing sector, one provider we worked with spotted a need to better manage productivity and staff when in the field. We developed a map-based application that draws together information from all areas of its operations to help it manage properties and make smarter decisions. Housing officers and maintenance workers can now be assigned to optimised geographic areas to allow more visits to be made each day; tenants can be more quickly and easily allocated to the right properties with suitable facilities; and rent arrears officers can be more proactive in spotting trends and running campaigns in hotspots to reduce rent arrears. Altogether, this transformation project is delivering more than £100,000 in savings each year.

## Producing a cultural change

Often, the major stumbling blocks in implementing digital transformation are not the technology but the cultural impact and encouraging buy-in; investing in technology itself is relatively simple. The best tools are selected by a group of leaders, but these must be effectively implemented, introduced and used to develop productivity.

Digitally-mature organisations are more innovative and more collaborative than their peers, as well as more willing to innovate with digital technologies. That means that organisations in the housing sector that are starting out on their journey to digital maturity need to deliver a culture shift as they mature. Yet, as a recent report on Digital Transformation from Raconteur points out, you can't just issue a decree that the culture will be

different; you need to visibly change the prevailing conditions in the workplace.

The Raconteur report sets out a number of factors that must be addressed to achieve culture change, with several falling under the banner of how employees collaborate and take decisions together. First, organisations must move away from traditional, slow, layered bureaucracy and become more agile in how they analyse and act on data. Secondly, they need to work more efficiently across traditional functional boundaries to achieve common goals. Finally, they need to move towards a culture based on constant low-level evolution rather than major upheavals every few years, and learn to value occasional failure as a chance to learn to 'fail better'.

The other side of the coin involves creating a physical and technical environment that supports this collaborative, agile approach. This can mean redesigning office spaces or a call centre to encourage collaborative working, perhaps following the lead of Google by including a range of social spaces in its offices alongside traditional desks and meeting rooms. It also means giving employees tools that help them share, innovate and work effectively, such as collaborative office suites, video-conferencing and mobile devices that let them work when and where they need to. This can be particularly beneficial in the housing sector, with so many employees required in the field.

What makes a successful digital transformation in the housing sector is a culture that formulates an environment where innovation and the development of ideas is encouraged. Implementing technology is the simple bit, and should not be a source of heavy concern for leaders. The focus needs to be moved from what technology can do for an organisation to what people can do for an organisation with the right technology.

*Luke Stewart is the geo practice manager at Ancoris.*





## SDS TEAM CONQUERS THREE PEAKS & RAISES THOUSANDS FOR SHOOTING STAR CHASE

L to R: Phil Shelton, James Laird, Andrew Markham and Ben Tordoff from SDS

*A team of housing experts from SDS has raised over £2,200 for Shooting Star Chase, the children's hospice charity.*

Over an intense, energy-sapping 24 hours Phil Shelton, CEO of Cranleigh-based SDS, led his colleagues to the top of Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Mount Snowdon after weeks of training.

They scaled Ben Nevis in three and a half hours, finding thick snow at the top, Scafell Pike in two and half hours and Snowdon in the same time.

Phil Shelton, CEO, SDS, said, "It was exhausting and

exhilarating, but everyone rose to the challenge and I'm delighted we did all three mountains in 24 hours, which we couldn't have done without a vital fifth member of the team, our colleague Paul Kristiansen who drove us everywhere.

"The expedition was in memory of my father, David, who founded SDS in 1994 and sadly died last year. He was a great supporter of Shooting Star Chase and the wonderful work it does for children with life-limiting conditions. So it's an honour to raise this money for them."



## Origin Housing apprentice wins Microsoft award

*Origin Housing's Ben Daniels has scooped an award at Microsoft's annual Apprenticeship of the Year competition, winning in the 'support role' category. This is the second year running that Origin Housing has featured in the awards, with the housing provider's apprentice Ismail Mulla picking up an award in 2015.*

Mark Lordon assistant director of IT and office services, Origin Housing, said, "The majority of the awards went to IT companies so we are very pleased to have flown the flag for the social housing sector."

The Microsoft apprenticeship programme, alongside a network of training providers such as QA Apprenticeships, aims to provide training and skills to young people in the UK to help them succeed in the workplace. The programme has resulted in over 11,000 young people placed with around 7,500 companies over the last six years.

James Berger, service Desk and IT training manager, Origin Housing, said, "Since his first day at Origin, Ben has shown great potential. His success and recognition from Microsoft at this year's Apprentice of the Year awards is well deserved and the result of a lot of hard work, determination and commitment."





# Housing Technology Evening Reception 2016

*Housing Technology's annual evening reception at Pizza Express in London's Olympia (W14 8UX) 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. Please visit [www.housing-technology.com/events/reception2016](http://www.housing-technology.com/events/reception2016) to reserve your place.



## HOUSING TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE & EXECUTIVE FORUM 2017

**HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™**  
**2017** | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

*The next Housing Technology conference and executive forum will take place on 7-9 March 2017 at the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry. Registration is now open at: [www.housing-technology.com/events/ht17/register](http://www.housing-technology.com/events/ht17/register).*

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

### Housing Technology 2017 will focus on:

- IT strategies for business transformation, value for money and operational efficiencies;
- Core business applications, incl. housing, finance and asset management;

- Emerging technologies, incl. the internet of things, big data, social media, GIS and connected homes;
- Omni-channel communications with tenants, contractors and suppliers;
- Universal credit, rent reductions, pay to stay, and other financial/regulatory areas;
- Mobile working and dynamic scheduling
- IT infrastructure, incl. software licensing, cloud, SaaS and security.

### FOR THE 2017 CONFERENCE, PLEASE CONTACT:

SPEAKER, DELEGATE & PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES:  
[alastair@housing-technology.com](mailto:alastair@housing-technology.com)

SPONSOR, EXHIBITOR & COMMERCIAL ENQUIRIES:  
[george.grant@housing-technology.com](mailto:george.grant@housing-technology.com)



# FIVE WAYS WEARABLE TECHNOLOGY WILL CHANGE OUR LIVES

*The internet of things (IoT) is the networking of the physical world and nothing epitomises this more than wearable technology. Everyone has become used to objects such as the Fitbit activity tracker and the Apple Watch but many people don't appreciate the limitless potential of how wearable technology could affect their lives in the future.*

Personal assistant (PA) wearable devices are aimed at making us more productive by taking away mundane time-burning tasks. For example, doing something as simple as posting a tweet can take a minute if you take into account finding your phone, unlocking the phone, launching the Twitter app, posting the tweet, locking the phone and putting it back in your pocket. With a PA wearable device, such as MYLE, clipped to your top and operated using your voice, you can post the tweet in a few seconds. These small amounts of time saved over the course of the day and across many mundane activities such as emailing or calling someone can result in an hour or more being freed up.

The healthcare industry is investing heavily in wearable technologies and the potential benefits to patients and clinicians are enormous. Health monitoring wearables such as

[illegible]

Devices have already been launched that are focused on ensuring personal safety. For example, Artemis provides smart jewellery so that when you feel threatened, you simply tap the bracelet or necklace and it immediately starts audio recording what is happening and calls your emergency contact numbers. Other companies are producing products such as hair clips that actually monitor

Improving the human body is where wearable tech really shines. If you watched the 2014 World Cup opening ceremony, a paraplegic man named Juliano Pinto kicked the first ball of the tournament wearing a mind-controlled exoskeleton and it's developments like this that could truly change our lives. Devices that can improve our hearing and help us focus on only what we want to hear are already being produced as well as devices to help us keep our hands steady, lift heavier weights through perfect form, or even simply help us draw a perfect circle.

*Peter Luck is the technical director at ROCC.*

# Gi4 Housing's October meeting

Guest speakers Ordnance Survey will be discussing the complex issue of derived data, while the Land Registry will be covering the services and products it can offer to the housing sector.

Gi4 Housing said that anybody in the housing sector who is either already using GIS or thinking about implementing it is welcome to attend. Please email [gi4housing@gmail.com](mailto:gi4housing@gmail.com) for further information.





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