



# HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

HOUSING | IT | TELECOMS | BUSINESS | ECOLOGY

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IT STRATEGY | BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE | COMMUNITY NETWORKING

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Oxfordshire  
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## EDITOR'S NOTES

TEN YEARS  
IN HOUSING

George Grant, Publisher,  
Housing Technology

Welcome to the January 2017 edition of Housing Technology which celebrates our tenth year at the heart of technology in the housing sector.

Our aim has always been to publish unbiased and straightforward news and information. We have built the magazine, conference and events around the valuable feedback and encouragement given by our readers. This is as much your celebration as ours.

I would like to thank the Housing Technology team, especially our esteemed editor Alastair Tweedie and our brilliant designer Jo Euston-Moore, as well as the support of my wife, Heather. Their efforts have enabled us to become the trusted and respected publication over the last 10 years.

Since starting the magazine, I have had the opportunity to meet some inspirational people working in the sector who constantly amaze me with their dedication and enthusiasm for running the best IT systems possible.

Thanks to them, housing providers across the UK are constantly improving their efficiency and services. Our conference has provided the ideal backdrop for our readers to meet, debate and discuss technology innovations; Housing Technology 2017, once again at the

popular Belfry in Oxford, promises to be our best yet.

The conference will launch Housing Technology's 'Internet of Things in Housing 2017' report, in collaboration with Dr Etienne Roesch of The University of Reading (see page 28). We are very excited about the conference this year and very much hope that you can join us to celebrate our tenth anniversary.

## TRANSFORMATION AND INTEGRATION

As we move into the tenth year of Housing Technology, it is interesting to note that while in the past if housing providers had a particular problem to solve, they would deploy a specific line-of-business application to address that problem.

Skip forward almost a decade, and we're now seeing a plethora of housing providers taking a more 'helicopter' view of their IT estates with respect to how they support their organisation's wider objectives, particularly around business transformation.

If you skip through the past few years of Housing Technology, it becomes very apparent that housing providers have already readily accepted that mobile working, dynamic scheduling, document management, virtualisation, CRM, portals and self-service (to name but a few specific areas) all work perfectly well. The recent change is around making them all work together to serve wider organisational objectives. Or to put it another way, it is accepted that technology works; it's now a question of making it all work together, than as a series of siloed, piecemeal applications.

This approach is best encapsulated in Sanctuary Housing's SAP-based OneSanctuary implementation (see page four), with the software providing

a common platform for almost all of its day-to-day activities. That's not to say that ERP-type systems are necessarily now the only way forward (and certainly not for small- and medium-sized housing providers), yet OneSanctuary is a good example of a housing provider taking an holistic, long-term look at what it does, why it does it and then creating an integrated technology platform to support those objectives.



recruitment

HOUSING  
TECHNOLOGY  
RECRUITMENT

Our new fee-free online recruitment

service is now live (albeit behind a hidden part of Housing Technology's website) and is being trialled by around 40 housing providers and technology suppliers with their live job vacancies.

We expect the service to be fully live by the time printed copies of Housing Technology are available towards the end of January.

In the meantime, anyone wishing to post their job vacancies on the site can do so immediately at [www.housing-technology.com/recruitment](http://www.housing-technology.com/recruitment) (you'll need to be logged in as a subscriber first; then there are full instructions online). Housing Technology Recruitment will be officially launched at the start of February; look out for your email.

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

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

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

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

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# AmicusHorizon takes Manifest's Universal Adapter

*AmicusHorizon is introducing Manifest Software Solutions' Universal Adapter software to support the management of more than 28,000 homes across London, Kent and Sussex by reducing the need for multiple applications and duplicated manual data-entry processes.*

Manifest developed the Universal Adapter last year after finding that many housing providers were frustrated by the complexity of integrating software from different suppliers.

The introduction of the Universal Adapter enables AmicusHorizon to access minute-by-minute updates on faults and repairs, ensuring its properties are compliant with guidelines and regulations.

Robert Stewart, business solutions manager, AmicusHorizon, said, "We chose Manifest's Universal Adapter alongside a BPM system from Orchard because it gives the right combination of integration capability and core systems 'know-how'."

The Universal Adapter also enables tenants to select and book online a particular repair time-slot and to complete tenancy agreements and associated documentation online (reducing the need for face-to-face meetings with AmicusHorizon's housing officers), as well as enabling repair contractors to upload information into a centralised system for compliance monitoring.

## MUIR GOES LIVE WITH CIVICA HOUSING CX

*Muir Group Housing Association has implemented Civica's web-based Housing Cx software to digitise its services and improve communications with tenants.*

Ian Whitwell, assistant director of ICT, Muir Group Housing Association, said, "With more than 72,000 calls to our customer service team every year, we need to ensure a fast and efficient response and also to pre-empt enquiries.

"Cx will enable us to streamline internal processes and to move more services online, giving us more time to focus on our tenants, including more home visits supported by the system's mobile capabilities."

Later this year, Muir is planning to implement a Cx-based self-service portal to allow tenants to access services and enable them to communicate directly, on the spot and in real-time. By the end of 2017, Muir expects to have a single integrated solution to completely manage its tenants and assets with

Cx alongside Civica's Keystone asset management software.

*Civica acquires Abritas  
Civica has bought software provider Abritas in order to strengthen its capabilities around delivering more efficient tenant services and helping address homelessness.*

Based in Reading, Abritas's software-as-a-service solutions are used by more than 170 housing providers and local authorities to provide social housing needs, options and lettings services for tenants, including the SwapandMove mutual exchange portal.

Simon Reynolds, sales director, Abritas, said, "This is the next stage in the development of our business and is a very positive step for employees, customers and partners. Our specialist expertise and Civica's breadth of capability creates an exciting combination at an important time for the social housing sector."

*Civica signs new customers for Cx and Keystone*

*Civica reported that it took on 16 new customers within its housing and asset management division during 2016, based on its Cx housing management and Keystone asset management software.*

Mark Holdsworth, housing sales director, Civica, said, "Housing management systems have traditionally been focused on the management of properties, often to the detriment of the tenant. Cx is the industry's first full HTML5 web housing management solution that delivers a significant change in outlook.

"As the system is accessible at any time, from any device and at any location, and inherently delivering channel shift and digitisation, this improves the tenant experience and delivers more efficient ways of working, ultimately saving money and supporting better services."

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# INTERVIEW – SANCTUARY GROUP'S SAP-BASED TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

*Housing Technology interviewed Sanctuary Group's director of technology, Kevin Heslop, about the organisation's massive change programme and the introduction of the SAP-based OneSanctuary system to standardise business processes across the group.*

## What were the drivers behind Sanctuary's programme for change?

Sanctuary is a large and complex organisation. We have £5 billion of assets and a turnover of £669 million. We've grown generically and through mergers and acquisitions over the past 25 years and we're ambitious to grow further. In order to do that, we needed technology that would work at scale and would be a driver to standardise processes across the group.

At first, we were considering a finance system, but it quickly became obvious that the biggest advantage would be if we also looked at our operations and front-line customer service. Enabling our workforce to be genuinely mobile was also a key driver for change.

Our SAP programme, OneSanctuary, enables us to standardise and consolidate business processes thereby streamlining and improving the way that we work in order to ensure excellent customer service and increased operational efficiency.

## Can you describe the size and infrastructural complexity of the Group, and its impact on the programme?

Sanctuary manages around 100,000 homes across England and Scotland, and has over 11,000 employees. Our business streams range from general needs social housing to student accommodation, telecare, care homes and supported housing schemes. These business streams are separated into four operating divisions: housing, care, development and commercial, with a small staff working in central services. While these divisions operate separately, we recognise that there are shared processes where a standardised approach enables greater operational efficiency.



Our large development programme to build 30,000 homes by 2026 also requires us to work, quickly at scale, using reliable, well-organised data.

From an IT perspective, we support the group with systems which are mostly hosted in-house in our datacentre, based at our Worcester campus. We provision access to systems using Citrix. We have over 5,000 network users who use a combination of Microsoft, SAP and other technologies and do so through a combination of Wyse terminals, laptops, tablets and smart phones. It was essential to the success of the OneSanctuary programme that we understood its impact on how and where the system would be used as well as what its features were to be.



**Kevin Heslop, Director of Technology, Sanctuary Group**

## How did you go about designing OneSanctuary, including working with Sanctuary's various business units?

The team involved in the implementation of OneSanctuary put a strong emphasis on the design phase of the project to ensure as much of the platform was as simple as possible. Prior to the roll-out

of the system, the design element took a third of the project's time; that might seem like an indulgent use of time but it was essential to the programme's success.

We were involved in design workshops with all business areas represented in order to assess how SAP might be used for each. The opening question in each workshop was 'why wouldn't we use standard SAP here?' and so, taking each business area into account, we had to look at ways we could standardise our processes using SAP, rather than using different operating models for different parts of the business.

For some areas there were differences, which are where we've done some enhancements, but predominantly it's standard out-of-the-box SAP.

We were very well supported by our operations. We seconded many people from their day jobs onto OneSanctuary in order to get a team of business process owners, data owners, change managers and testers to ensure that the programme was business led, while the IT teams made sure aspects such as the infrastructure, non-functional requirements and technical deliverables were delivered. The combination of IT staff, secondees from the operations and part-time assistance from others (planning for training, communication, user acceptance, design, etc) resulted in over 200 members of staff from Sanctuary working on OneSanctuary at one time or another.

## Why did you choose SAP instead of, say, software from the usual housing-specific IT suppliers?

We considered all options open to us and the usual housing IT suppliers as well as other big players such as Microsoft and Oracle. We wanted our enterprise platform to go beyond the usual housing systems out there. We wanted to achieve common processes across multiple business areas rather than business processes defined by best-of-breed systems used for each operation. We needed a platform that could cope



## INTERVIEW – SANCTUARY GROUP'S SAP-BASED TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

*Continued from previous page*



with the diversity of its business needs and we believed that SAP fitted these requirements.

At the end of the systems assessment, it was clear that many systems could cope with the core requirements but when you considered staff mobility, customer self-service and management of our master data, it was SAP which provided the all-round best fit.

### Can you describe the implementation and what's been delivered so far?

Following the launch of the programme in 2013, Sanctuary took a phased approach implementing new releases over two years. Finance, procurement, HR, service charges, learning and development, and housing and assets are already live, with more releases to follow shortly. There are now 5,000 networked staff using OneSanctuary every day and we use our own support teams for any trouble-shooting.

We ran the programme through many releases from 2015 to the present, and for each release we went through a number of stages, such as planning, design, building and testing the system, implementation (cutover, communications, training) and post-implementation support. A key decision was that we held a single consolidated design stage which we felt important so that we could prove that 'end to end' processing was fully and properly considered. Following this, we deployed the systems with different releases for each business area.

### What is the current status of OneSanctuary?

The plan is to launch OneSanctuary within the maintenance arm of the organisation before the end of January 2017. Most importantly, now that OneSanctuary is up and running, we're really keen to share what we've learned throughout the process with other technology and housing professionals, as well as learn more from those also using SAP.



### What have been the qualitative and quantitative benefits of OneSanctuary?

The benefits we are seeing fall into three areas – costs, removing barriers to growth and customer service.

There are cost savings over a period of time. Our benefits case has an eight-year return on investment, which includes more efficient and more effective ways of working.

We've removed the barrier to growth that technology could have been for us. We had to create a new platform to enable our ambition to grow further and we've done that.

From a customer point of view, we are continually analysing the outcomes, in order to achieve shorter, more effective calls that record more information, with clearer follow up actions.

Further benefits include the creation of a corporate shared service centre, which is very much enabled by SAP and common processing and a new tiered operating model for our housing business, enabled by SAP contact and case management features.

### What have you learned from the programme's planning, delivery and adoption?

We recognised early on that going live with every element at one time would compromise the success of the programme and potentially our customer service. We decided to break the programme down into manageable parts and go live over a two-year period. That, along with effective communications owned by the operations, rather than the IT directorate, has been the key learning point. Making sure that the programme was business-led and not seen simply as an IT project was a constant priority and helped the idea of keeping adoption and buy-in to the system as positive as possible.

### What are Sanctuary's next SAP-based plans?

The plan is to launch OneSanctuary for maintenance during January 2017 and then we will go into a period of optimisation, improving the system to ensure we're getting maximum use from it.

This involves looking at areas for improvement, business cases for a greater number of uses for SAP in Sanctuary, moving onto challenges such as making SAP more mobile for front-line workers and being aware of the SAP roadmap and the new technologies available to us.

Most importantly, now that OneSanctuary is up and running, we're really keen to share what we've learned throughout the process with other technology and housing professionals, as well as learn more from others.

*Kevin Heslop is director of technology at Sanctuary Group. He will be talking about OneSanctuary during the Housing Technology 2017 conference in March (see website for details).*

# MEARS' ONLINE PROCUREMENT WITH MERCATO KNOWLEDGEBUS

*Mears Group is using an online procurement tool from Mercato to make it easier and faster to buy new technologies with greater cost transparency and better certainty of the final prices.*

Mears Group has grown rapidly through acquisitions, and every time a new company is brought into the group, the IT team needs to react quickly to bring the business on board. To meet this requirement, Mears wanted to be able to buy IT equipment at a moment's notice, but at the same time ensure that the group was getting the best price.

John Brett, IT director, Mears Group, said, "We often have the situation where we have numerous contract mobilisations starting in the same week. For example, in April 2016 we had 18 new mobilisations. We can't just sit back and wait for the quotes to come in, and we also need to be confident that we are getting value."

"As we get bigger, the scrutiny from shareholders is growing and I don't want to be asked why we bought at X when we could have bought at Y. When external auditors carry out their reviews of our department, I can't turn around and say 'well, we have a really good relationship with a local supplier'. We need a better response."

Mears' IT team also found that when they discovered a good price on the internet,

suppliers would often not have enough stock to fulfil the requirements.

Brett said, "If we need 1,000 Android phones, we don't want to be sourcing them from different channels, at different prices and with different return policies. That's what we call 'dirty procurement'. We just want to know the product is available and that we are not compromising on cost."

Mears decided to deploy Mercato Solutions' KnowledgeBus, a benchmarking application for IT procurers that automates the comparison of purchases against daily trade guide-prices and stock-levels on over 150,000 'live' products from more than 2,500 manufacturers.

Users simply input supplier product lists or conduct spot-checks to see what margin their supplier is proposing. A range of spend-analysis tools also help users identify, track and forecast market developments for more strategic procurement.

Within the first month of using KnowledgeBus, Mears' IT team saved £40,000 on just one purchase of 2,000 smartphones.

Brett said, "We achieved our RoI immediately. There was scepticism at first, but after just one purchase, everyone was a convert. We quickly saw that we could buy 90 per cent of

products cheaper using KnowledgeBus. When we reviewed past purchases, we also saw that one supplier had charged us a 45 per cent margin on an order of BlackBerrys. We took this up with them and received a retrospective credit note.

"We now don't buy anything unless it has gone through the portal. The admin team were concerned this would add an extra step in the process but in reality, it saves them time because they can request suppliers' quotes through the portal.

"We initially thought we would have to negotiate hard to get the prices displayed but the fact that the price is actually guaranteed has made a big difference. It means we no longer have to deal with rogue suppliers charging huge margins."

Mears is now taking advantage of KnowledgeBus' ability to identify price trends to determine when, and when not, to buy.

Brett said, "Product prices change all the time. We now know, for example, the price of an Android phone is likely to go up and down by 3 per cent in a fortnight and, furthermore, that the cost of a new mobile will plummet after six months. If we need something we won't hang around forever, but KnowledgeBus allows us to ride out interim price increases. And for the day-to-day stuff, that's great."

## Bolton at Home transforms finances with Orchard



*Orchard is set to implement a new finance management and procurement system for Bolton at Home, with the objective of delivering business change and efficiencies across the organisation.*

Based on OpenAccounts, Orchard Financials combines an award-winning finance system with Orchard's housing-sector expertise and knowledge.

Orchard reported that Orchard Financials is a fully integrated finance solution that not only has the flexibility and scalability to grow and evolve with Bolton at Home but also addresses real day-to-day concerns while still delivering against the housing provider's value-for-money agenda.

Edward Mellor, director of finance, Bolton at Home, said, "Our staff are looking forward to implementing the OpenAccounts solution alongside experts from Orchard. We expect the system to make a significant difference to the way we work and to the quality of information we receive from our finance system. We can't wait to get going with implementation of the system in time for our 2017/18 financial year."





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## Regenda cuts arrears with Mobysoft

*Regenda Homes has reduced its rent arrears with Mobysoft's Rentsense software.*

Before its use of Rentsense, Regenda's income officers had to manage their weekly caseload manually because its housing management system was either missing arrears cases or recommending cases that required no action. This meant staff were only getting through around 50% of their caseload.

Kelly Farrell, regional financial inclusion manager, Regenda Homes, said, "We work with 23 different local authorities, each of whom pays on different days of the month. This makes managing our rent arrears very difficult when we only want to see the cases that need action."

Since the introduction of Rentsense, there has been a 36 per cent caseload reduction and income officers are now completing their weekly caseloads. Regenda's arrears have fallen to 2.4 per cent, a reduction of £72,000 in the first year alone.

Steve Blackburn, regional director, Regenda Homes, said, "Operationally, we have seen real benefits in terms of Rentsense's ability to create capacity



within the team and ensure that capacity is then directed towards the most urgent accounts.

"Our views have been supported via a rent collection audit from our auditors KPMG who commented on the value of Rentsense and its sophistication compared with other arrears collection tools they have come across in the housing sector."

### **Sovereign's best-ever arrears with Rentsense**

Mobysoft's Rentsense software has helped Sovereign Housing Association to achieve its lowest-ever arrears figures of 1.7 per cent, resulting in more than £500,000 of additional rental income.

Rentsense is an analytical tool that predicts which tenants are most likely to fall behind with their rent. This helped Sovereign focus its efforts where they would have the most impact, reducing its arrears from 1.99 per cent to a record low of 1.71 per cent.

Luke Bingham, regional director, Sovereign Housing Association, said, "Rentsense has supported our income teams and allowed them to focus time and resources on case management rather than processes. It has also helped improve the speed and consistency of our case management which in turn supports the resource pressures on our income teams."

*Mobysoft appoints Glen Lewis  
Mobysoft has appointed Glen Lewis as an account director to work with the company's housing customers.*

Lewis, who is a member of the Institute of Housing, has spent over 25 years in the housing sector working both for landlords and technology providers. Most recently, he has held senior positions at Civica and Northgate Information Systems. He is also currently deputy chairman of Pierhead Housing.

## Places for People deploys SDS ProVal

*SDS is celebrating over 20 years of its ProVal software with a major order from Places for People.*

The deal involves 180 licences for ProVal, SDS's viability software, and Sequel, its project monitoring tool, following a review of the housing provider's existing system. The deal is the largest in SDS's 22-year history and follows Places for People's implementation of SDS's Stock Profiler asset appraisal software.

Paul Walmsley, development and reporting accountant, Places for People, said, "Working with ProVal and Sequel will improve our project management efficiency and the speed with which we can assess the viability of new building projects."



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# DATA FUTURISTS' 360-DEGREE VIEW OF PROPERTY INTERESTS

*New software to manage the ownership and asset information of housing providers' property portfolios has been launched by Data Futurists in a project involving Family Mosaic's 25,000 homes.*

The new company has developed data management software to process one million pieces of data, ensuring that complicated ownership details relating to leasehold and freehold titles are captured in detail.

The model provides a 360-degree view of all property ownership issues arising from complex arrangements with multiple landlords. This enables an effective analysis of data for properties whose leases are about to expire, and ensures efficient and timely lease renewals.



**Neil Topping, Director, Data Futurists**

Neil Topping, director, Data Futurists, said, "Accurate and detailed knowledge of all housing stock is essential to ensure that every home in the country's social housing stock is utilised to the full."

The scheme at Family Mosaic has involved a six-month roll-out to catalogue and map all of the property data into a more manageable format.

Peter Mannering, head of treasury, Family Mosaic, said, "Data Futurists' new software allows us to meet the property element of regulatory requirements. Housing providers like ours look after thousands of homes and millions of pounds of assets, and we need to ensure we have rigorous and accurate data management systems for good governance."

MOBILE WORKING

## Magenta Living partners with Housing Support Pro

*Magenta Living is working with Housing Support Pro to pilot Client Connect, a mobile working system that provides access to personalised forms and tenant and property details while on the move.*

Before the introduction of Client Connect, Magenta's neighbourhood officers had to log into a housing management system and extract the information they needed through printed reports to take them off site to tenant appointments. They would then complete actions from those reports and laboriously retype the information when they returned to head office.

While the housing management system generated appointments and documentation, the officers were unable to access additional reports offsite, which meant they couldn't add information or record details about new issues identified while with tenants.

Magenta began designing forms and collating data for Client Connect ready for the initial pilot to begin in January 2016. During this time, Magenta went through some internal changes, with the restructuring of some of its teams resulting in neighbourhood and tenancy enforcement officers being given control of individual neighbourhood patches. This change meant that staff could easily use Client Connect as part of their day-to-day roles and help them monitor their individual patches while out and about.

Dominique Blundell, head of tenants and environmental services, Magenta Living said, "We have looked at mobile systems before but they have never progressed beyond the investigation and trialling stages. We wanted something that would integrate well with our other applications and really benefit those using it, making their job easier and ultimately providing a better service to our tenants.

"Having spent time working with Housing Support Pro to design forms and processes fit-for-purpose, we have now given iPads to the relevant staff, allowing them to familiarise themselves with using a mobile device while on a job."

Colin Arnold, head of ICT, Magenta Living, said, "Client Connect is also enabling our staff to record their contacts and interactions automatically into our Civa CRM system. Now when we get a call into our contact centre, we can see when a tenant has been seen by a member of staff and view what was recorded; this total visibility is a huge benefit."



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# BIG DATA IN SOCIAL HOUSING – WHAT'S THE QUESTION & WHO'S ASKING?

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch

*2017 will be a significant year for 'big data', with more organisations gathering, processing, storing and deriving value from all forms and sources of data. The number and size of systems that support significant volumes of both structured and unstructured data will rise inexorably too.*

To many, this momentum is powered by the belief that the effective management of big data is the driving force behind sound and responsible best practice. However, it is not always the IT stalwarts that are the greatest protagonists of big data's impact. For example, Aberdeen Group recently reported that, "organisations with big data are 70 per cent more likely than others to have business intelligence projects that are driven primarily by business users, not by IT."

By studying the benefits of big data technology, we can understand why this business-led prerogative is in the ascendancy. Some of the main pay-offs are that big data can:

- Accelerate business analytics and reduce the time to decision insights and competitive analysis;
- Share computer resources to optimise collaboration and utilisation and therein reduce costs;
- Deliver a better balance between cost and performance and therein drive efficiency;
- Reduce systems complexity and simplify management.

These are all good business motivations. As Geoffrey Moore, author of 'Crossing the Chasm' and 'Inside the Tornado' said recently, "Without big data analytics, companies are blind and deaf, wandering out onto the web like deer on a freeway."

The clear implication here is that C-level management needs big data to drive strategic direction effectively. However, it is the sheer scale of the data sources

that concern them most, or rather how best to use the data that they have gathered or could gather.

It's a valid concern as the use of the technology continues to expand to hitherto unimaginable levels. And you can forget the principals of data warehouses or mountains and interrogating the data with pre-defined questions. Now, it's all about 'data lakes' and finding the answer even before you knew what the question was. And this volume of data will continue to expand; where there were once terabytes, there are now zetabytes.

Certainly, in the mainstream business world, I can see more and more examples of the benefits that big data delivers when managed successfully. For example, Experian can identify those most likely to need financial support in the future. This has led to a more supportive and caring attitude to credit.

While such data analysis can be used effectively across all market sectors, social housing is one of the areas where I feel passionately that the potential of the 'art of big data' has not been fully realised. Yet it is perhaps one of those areas where big data offers the greatest potential. It's certainly fascinating to see the data from different sources combine and to contemplate what this might tell us.

For any single property, there's data about the property itself, data about the type of tenancy, the background of the tenant and historic data from across the different housing providers' departments including housing, income, repairs, care and estate management. There's probably a whole load of tangential data too, such as nearby traffic management, ASBO issues or even policing statistics. To this external data, one could add data about regional demographics, cultural characteristics, education and health.

In the future, IoT data from inside the property will also count – all provided by sensors that detect effective heating levels or water usage and which can even optimise boiler replacement times.

In fact, it's quite mind-blowing that you can find correlations in the data that you didn't know were there. Recently, I came across some research proving a close correlation between cancelled gas certificate inspections and late rent payments. This kind of information gives housing providers the ability to potentially tackle issues before they become problematic.

Indeed, by using big data management, one can already deliver all the relevant data in a refined and accessible format (ref. both the tenant and a property) to the smartphone or tablet of a visiting operative. For example, within 1st Touch, field workers and mobile operatives now have comprehensive 360-degree access to all relevant data available online, in a refined format, through their devices. This allows them to handle all outstanding issues in a single visit. Thus, a housing officer can take a rent payment and book a repair or gas inspection. They can also discuss care issues or the need for a discretionary housing payment. By the same token, a gas engineer servicing a boiler could also report an ASBO issue or report on estate conditions. By being able to solve multiple cross-function issues in a single visit, it frequently means that the right outcomes are delivered far faster to an even happier customer. It also means that the costly requirement for a second or third, fourth or fifth visit is eliminated.

This is a wholesale change in the customer interface and the satisfaction ratings will leap as a result. However, there is also a real chance here to dramatically slash costs; by solving all the issues in just one multi-function visit,

## BIG DATA IN SOCIAL HOUSING – WHAT'S THE QUESTION & WHO'S ASKING?

*Continued from previous page*

a housing provider can do more with less. This potentially means that they can reduce the recruitment bill for the same function. And if there are fewer staff involved, then there's every chance that other fixed costs such as office rental costs could also be reduced.

This 'do more for less' opportunity explains why the driver in social housing is more a business issue than an IT one. It also explains why housing providers'

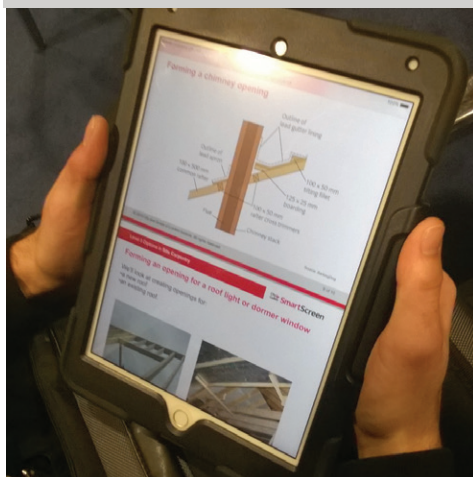
senior management are keen to get into the data to see exactly what's in there, as opposed to looking for pre-defined answers.

As a consequence, one can see that it is the holy grail of 'predictive big data analytics' that will continue to drive future development. We have already found that many of the more customer-focused and efficient housing providers are keen to work with us to exploit our 2020 vision

of the market. In doing so, they aim to identify the trends within the data they have collected and to understand ways in which they can translate these into positive actions. While they are aware that both the data and the task ahead are big, they are motivated by the fact that the opportunities for their customers are even bigger.

*Greg Johns is CEO of 1st Touch.*

## SOVEREIGN TAKES CONTROL WITH ROCC



*Sovereign Housing Association has selected ROCC's Uniclass system to optimise its repairs and maintenance service while driving down costs by over £500,000 per year.*

The new system is part of Spine, Sovereign's Property Information Network Environment, which is a five-year project to rebuild and refine the complexity of Sovereign's property services' IT system, processes and data, resulting from a number of inherited repairs systems with multiple tools across different regions.

The new solution comprises Uniclass as the core system for all works orders and job-costing information alongside Kirona DRS and Mobile for dynamic scheduling, and mobile working.

Designing and building a new diagnostic tool for Sovereign comprised nearly one million lines of data. Spine also entailed the housing provider having to review over 50 operational processes and

streamlining them via an efficient one-system platform. As well as large data stock, Sovereign has a physical stock of 221 vans, with individual operatives and varying tools, all of which need to be recorded and stored.

Steve Barford, executive director for property services, Sovereign Housing Association, said, "We had an explicit set of requirements to create a flexible system with better job costing management, which ROCC has delivered. We're already seeing the impact, through better job scheduling, on the business and the services we provide. The projected cost savings are impressive, contributing significantly to Sovereign's strategic aim to build new affordable homes."

## Melin Homes wins IT innovation award

*Melin Homes has won the 'workplace transformation project of the year' award at the UK IT Industry Awards in London. Shortlisted against companies such as BT, Heathrow Airport, HMRC, Lloyds Bank and Virgin Media, the Pontypool-based housing provider won for its innovative agile working project over the last two years.*

The project was based around enabling Melin's staff to work smarter and be able to do their jobs from anywhere. Front-line staff now work from tablets, using integrated software to remove the need



to visit the office every day, its board has gone completely paperless, and staff can work from home or any other agile site.

Melin's agile working project was based on Capita's Open suite of products including OpenHousing, OpenFinancials and Totalmobile, alongside business intelligence and reporting from Advantage Intelligence.

Helen Rogers, head of housing products, Capita, said, "This is a fantastic result for Melin Homes and demonstrates what a transformative impact technology can have on a business, especially when backed by the commitment to an agile working culture that Melin's team has achieved."





# ASRA HOUSING'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Suzanne Ralphson, Head of Programme Delivery, Asra Housing Group

*In February 2016, Asra Housing Group started a three-year, £1.3 million revolution of the way it does business. The challenge? To get the majority of our services online by March 2017 and an ambitious target of 65 per cent online-only customer contact by 2019. The opportunity? Improved customer satisfaction and annual savings of close to half a million pounds.*

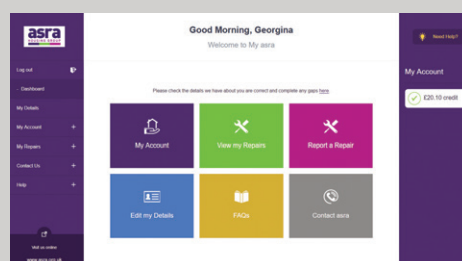
The major programme of work includes a consolidated self-service portal, a new-look website, an end-to-end repairs service, a new CRM solution and a true 'contact centre' with calls, SMS, web chat and email given equal priority. We have also embarked on a programme of customer engagement and enablement, and developed the sector's first fully digital sales and lettings system to feature Live Chat and integration with social media feeds.

Our starting point for digital was a simple question: if we wanted to improve our business model, what would we want to do? We soon decided that reducing the number of calls into our contact centre was imperative, which we could achieve by allowing customers to serve themselves and find an immediate answer 95 per cent of the time.

There are currently only a handful of 'bleeding edge' housing providers who have implemented a truly integrated self-service offering. Most do offer self-service, but these are usually predicated on a forms-based approach which still requires manual inputting. We recognised that significant savings would only be achieved through integration with our back-office systems.

We also asked our heads of service what would have the most impact on their team's work if tenants were able to do it themselves. This gave us a top 20 'hit list' of processes for which we needed to deliver end-to-end self-service through

the portal with no need for human interaction and therefore no need to wait for a response.



To say 'no need for human interaction' might seem bleak, but in reality it isn't. End-to-end digital self-service is about providing information that's easy for customers to find and digest, as well as processes that are easy for them to follow. Taking the human element out removes the need to wait for a response, meaning every process is quicker than it would be otherwise, which in turn means better value for money for our customers. It also frees up staff members that would otherwise have been dealing with routine customer queries and services.

We recently surveyed all our 14,000 customers about their internet use and the results we got back didn't bear out the common concerns about moving to digital.

In fact, the majority of our general needs tenants have online access, the technology skills they need and a desire to self-serve. It's 24/7, there's no queue and it's free. Naturally, there will be people who can't or don't want to use digital services so we're not taking away their option to call us, but they have a choice.

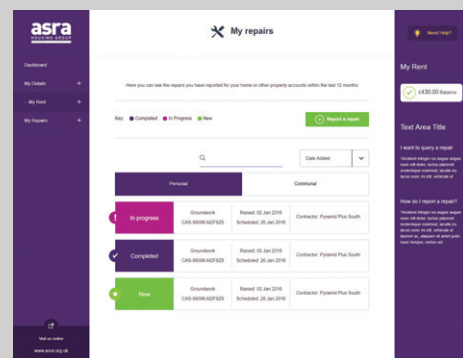
We also wanted to find out where our customers sat in relation to digital, and the survey split our work across four different types of customer: those who use the portal; those who have registered but never used it; people who are digitally able but need encouragement;

and a very small number who can't access the internet at all.

At this early stage, we aren't targeting the latter group; if someone says they can't access the portal, they don't have to. But in future, we will be partnering with Reaching People in Leicester to provide digital skills education for this group of people.

We've also been engaging customers in every part of our digital journey. We're checking everything with them - the look, feel and user experience, even down to, 'we've called this section of the portal this - does that make sense to you?' and 'we've put that button on the left as we think it's where it should go - do you agree?'

Ultimately, we're going to be judged by our results but even though we are still in the early stages, I think that they are encouraging. We currently have almost 2,000 users of the My Asra portal, with a very healthy take-up since it went live in June 2016. At the start of the programme, we had just 800 users of the old portal, so that represents nearly a 150 per cent increase.



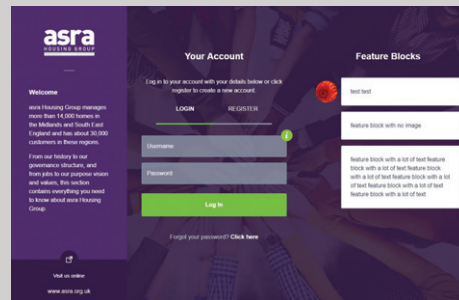
Despite minimal marketing activities, we were surprised to have seen consistent growth in registrations since day one, suggesting there is a strong demand for this from customers who are willing and able to access the internet and have a real appetite for the service.

## ASRA HOUSING'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

*Continued from previous page*

Meanwhile, early analysis suggests that portal users still call our customer contact centre for various things, but that is to be expected because not all of our self-service processes are live yet. It is also encouraging to see that this contact on the phone is now once every other month, whereas before it was one or two times each month.

From board level to staff, our digital transformation programme is seen as the number-one priority in the business beyond staying financially afloat and meeting our KPIs. It is really embedded in colleague culture as well. Everybody understands that they are part of this journey, it's not just seen as a project that the IT department is doing and overall staff feedback has been incredibly positive.



If I could give one piece of advice to other organisations, it would be that this is not just a project; it's the future. At some point, everyone will have to move in this direction but it has to be part of your organisation's strategy and values; it can't be a bolt-on.

Don't go for a 'big bang'; an agile approach to delivering a viable product and getting real feedback from real users is the most effective way of developing a great user experience.

There can be barriers. For example, some of the complex systems integration has taken longer than we expect. We are also developing guidance around 'keeping safe online' so customers are reassured and have confidence when using the portal.

In the future, we are planning to set up an arrangement for arrears and processing refunds, demonstrating that this project will never really end. There will be development, continuous improvement and new services that come on board. We have embedded digital into our normal way of working. It can't just be an extra and at Asra Housing, it isn't.

*Suzanne Ralphson is head of programme delivery at Asra Housing Group.*



*Jane Burgin, Assistant Marketing Manager, Lloyds Banking Group, with volunteers from Lloyds Banking Group.*

Together Housing Group and Lloyds Banking Group have set up a joint project to improve the digital literacy of the housing provider's tenants.

Digital inclusion workers from Pennine Housing, part of Together Housing, and volunteers from Lloyds Banking Group's marketing team met tenants in December 2016 to talk about technology and how it can help them in day-to-day life.

Joanne Glynn, digital inclusion officer, Together Housing Group, said, "Partnerships with digitally-skilled professionals are one of the most effective tools for helping tenants to understand and address the challenges of digital living."

Jane Burgin, assistant marketing manager, Lloyds Banking Group, said, "When our team spoke to tenants, it was clear that the priority was to help them understand the basics of how a tablet device works and how they can access the internet safely, so we're planning a series of training sessions and producing some resources to help them."







# GOING LIVE – UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS AT FUTURES HOUSING

Gavin Hitchcock, Head of ICT, Futures Housing Group

*Having taken the project from conception to implementation, the unified communications and multi-channel contact centre solution is now up and running at Futures Housing Group and the organisation is already seeing results. In the final piece of his four article mini-series (see Housing Technology, July, September & November 2016 issues, for the previous articles), Gavin Hitchcock, head of ICT at Futures Housing, explains how the business has adopted the changes and looks at what impact the new systems have had.*

## Back to the start

Now that Futures Housing has been migrated to Microsoft Skype for Business and Enghouse EICC is in place, it's a great time to reflect on what has been a milestone project for us. Looking back at when we made the business case, the vision for the project was clear – improve internal business operations and communications while offering more choice for customers.

Having reached the point where we are now, where the systems are actually in use, it's fascinating to think of the journey we've been on.

Of course, the project is far from over and we're already looking at the next phase, but to have persuaded more than 300 people that they don't need to use their handsets anymore, showed staff how to use new, immersive desktop collaboration tools, introduced instant messaging as a genuine alternative to email, and upgraded our entire communications offering both internally and externally is quite a feat.

Chris Cheetham, Futures Housing's project lead, said, "This has been a long time coming but in terms of what we've done versus what we planned to do, it's remarkable how focused we've been. Only two elements of the whole project were delayed; everything else we completed on time and within budget, which can be considered unusual for a project of this size.



"Over the past year, we've ripped out an entire phone system and contact centre to replace it with brand new equipment, and it's quite satisfying to actually see what we've done and watch staff using it successfully with all the benefits it offers – which was basically what the business case was based on."

## Customer benefits

The impact on customers has already been felt as we've started to introduce them to some of the alternative ways they can deal with us because we capture everything through the new customer contact centre, EICC.

Web chat in particular is snowballing, with around 300 customer enquiries (at the time of writing) having been dealt with through this channel alone since early November 2016 – an encouraging start for an organisation where the phone call was king.

Opening up new channels such as this, and very soon social media, is a huge part of what we're trying to do in streamlining our services based on what our customers need.

Peter Seaman, Futures Housing's customer experience manager, said, "Delivering effortless customer experiences is central to our strategy. While it's still early days, we're already seeing how that's possible through the new contact centre system.

"EICC is adding fresh impetus to how we deal with queries across different channels. Traditionally, phone calls have dominated our contact channels, but we've already seen that customers are open to alternative methods such as web chat. This is allowing us to handle more interactions and reduce waiting times. We'll soon be switching on our social media support accounts so we can offer an even broader network of support and customer choice."

Adoption of EICC by staff on the front line has been superb, with no interruption of service reported for the customer. Already, the team have dealt with 24,000 phone calls and nearly 1,500 emails since the launch of the contact centre, on top of those 300 or so web chats.

Looking ahead, the new contact centre will also enhance the customer experience even further, allowing us to learn more about the people that live in our homes.

With the help of our housing management and CRM partner, Orchard, we've made sure that our systems are fully integrated with EICC to enable us to gather data effectively. We've been able to make the CRM grab data from the customer at any point so when a customer gets in touch, the Orchard system will begin capturing customer information such as an email address, phone number and social media information and update records as it



## GOING LIVE – UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS AT FUTURES HOUSING

*Continued from previous page*

goes. This allows us to find out more about our customers. Web chats will also soon be pre-authenticated for customers using Futures Housing's self-service web portal.

### Accessibility

A challenge for the project came when looking at the specialist requirements for our own people. An example of this could be seen for a staff member who is hard of hearing which potentially could have been a major roadblock in making sure his experience of using Skype for Business and EICC was consistent with the rest of the organisation.

Jonathan Tomalin is a key part of our procurement team who has a cochlear implant to help with his hearing. For him to do his job, it's vital that he is able to speak clearly to partners in our supply chain. He said, "The old telephone system was difficult for me to use and it didn't matter what adjustments I made to the phone or my hearing aids, it was difficult to pick out what was being said."

"About two years ago, I had a cochlear implant fitted in one of my ears to help improve my hearing but that still didn't improve the sound quality through the old phone."

After working with our ICT team and Amillan, Jonathan found the new system a breath of fresh air. He said, "I could immediately tell the difference the first time I put the new headphones on with my cochlear implant – it was like the person on the other end of the phone was in the next-door room. Even with my hearing difficulties, it gives me the opportunity to communicate just like everyone else."

"I am very happy with the new system. It has given me back my confidence to talk to others via phone internally and externally without trying too hard to hear the conversation by letting the system do the hard work."

Patrick Daly from Amillan said, "We've developed a great working relationship with Futures, and part of that is getting to know them and understanding exactly what requirements they have in order for everyone to be able to see the advantages that this project offers."

"Taking this example, it was important that we worked through the challenges together to make sure that their



experience of the new system was the same as everyone else's, help them to gain the benefits of increased collaboration tools with their colleagues, and help them work to their full potential.

### Laying the foundations

Now that unified communications are alive and well, we've had time to pilot the next stage of its evolution. A group of around 15 staff, including our transformation team who carefully analyse all change at Futures Housing, has been testing the technology that will help us to create a truly flexible and 'remote-ready' organisation.

Darren Sanderson-Turner, Futures Housing's business transformation manager, said, "We've been working with a new laptop-tablet hybrid and docking station which allow us to maintain IT sessions wherever we are."

"It takes a bit of getting used to, but the ability to just take your whole desktop session around with you is a major time-saver, and with more people using a similar system, it will make collaboration a lot more efficient."

With a project of this scale, it's important to have the backing of a senior figure in the organisation. Fortunately for us, our chief executive, Lindsey Williams, has been a supporter of the project from day one.

Lindsey said, "When looking at any major project like this, we always ensure that it will help us achieve our objectives and fits with our core 'MORE' values. With unified communications, we felt it matched them perfectly."

"Better technology helps us to make a positive impression (M), everyone using it to collaborate helps us to operate

as one organisation (O), more effective communication will help us to reach our potential (R), and it's clear to see how we're embracing innovation (E).

"The system we now have provides us with the momentum to deliver against these values and be ready for the future. This has been an excellent investment which has been expertly delivered by our ICT and internal project teams and by our partners at Amillan and Orchard."

The telephone and contact centre legacy systems have now been decommissioned and replaced with Skype for Business and EICC for more than 300 staff across the group.

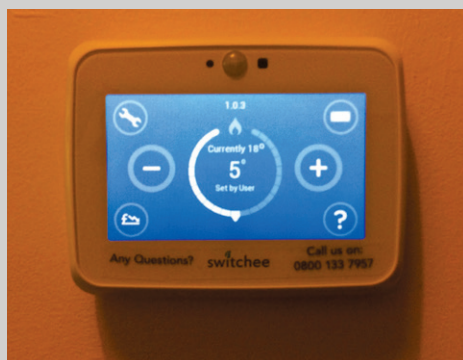
The project has taken just over a year and in that time, we rigorously tested more than 100 individual features of the solution, completed 104 training and engagement sessions, and have rolled out 250 new headsets.

Now we are live, we are handling 26,000 contacts via the new multi-channel contact centre, and staff are actively using Skype for Business video conferencing, virtual meetings, desktop collaboration and advanced presence and availability features to revolutionise how we work, improve customer services and deliver organisational efficiencies.

Looking ahead to the second phase of the project, we're excited to be bringing in IVR, meeting room equipment upgrades and those brand new laptop-tablet hybrid devices that will help make us a truly flexible and mobile organisation.

*Gavin Hitchcock is head of ICT at Futures Housing Group.*

# IoT & smart technology pilot at Flagship



*Flagship Group, in partnership with a number of local companies, has launched a pilot project to understand more about how smart technology and the internet of things could help improve the management of its properties, improve tenants' lives and increase the mobility of its staff.*

Flagship's project involves free wi-fi and smart technologies installed in a block of flats in Ipswich. Norwich-based WiSpire is enabling connectivity by providing

wi-fi for the properties, Dereham-based DoorsPlus has provided smart locks so that tenants and Flagship staff can use their mobile phones to access the building, and Switcher has contributed its IoT-based smart thermostats.

Marie-Claire Delbrouque, director of housing and customer insight, Flagship Group, said, "This is about creating an improved service for our tenants. The use of iPads and smart phones allows them to communicate more efficiently because they can pay their rent and log a repair online immediately, which also reduces the number of calls made to our contact centre.

"The tenants we are using for the trial have been very receptive and are looking forward to seeing how the new technology will make their lives easier. We hope the next few months will be a success, with the prospect of rolling it out across the company in the near future."

Matt Brazier, head of IT, Flagship Group, said, "There are lots of benefits, including the use of a smart thermostat which can learn habits automatically, optimising heating settings while providing alerts for potential issues, so in the long run saving both tenants and our maintenance teams money."



## INFRASTRUCTURE

# Pulsant's managed network for Argyll Community Housing



*Pulsant, a UK hybrid cloud services provider, has completed the installation of a managed network for Argyll Community Housing Association. The network was deployed across ACHA's eight offices and 10 sheltered housing sites.*

Pulsant won the contract in 2015 to supply the housing association's network infrastructure, which covers a wide area across Argyll and Bute in the west of Scotland. The project was staged over a year, bringing all of the housing provider's sites onto a single wide area network (WAN).



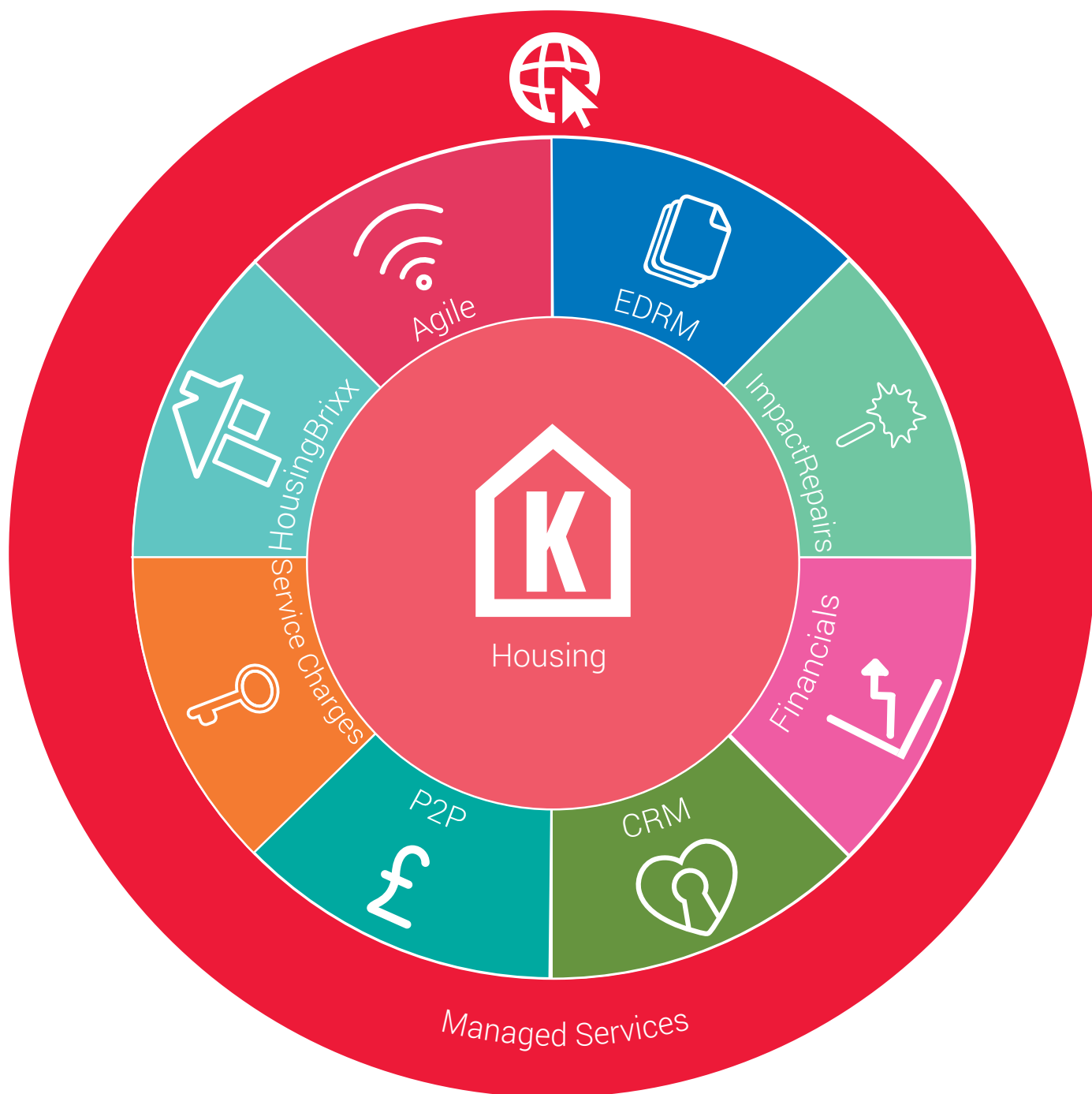
Vivienne Kerr, IT manager, Argyll Community Housing Association, said, "We needed all of our sites to be connected, with our staff having access to all the systems and applications they need to make sure operations run smoothly. This wasn't easy because our offices and housing sites are so widely

spread across the region, some very rural and others in more populated areas, so we had some challenges with finding telecommunications providers.

"Pulsant was appointed to deliver the leased lines and ADSL circuits, along with a number of routers based on differing requirements for each site. The project was completed successfully and within our incredibly tight timescales. The benefit is that we have our own network, which is managed by one provider, Pulsant, with a dedicated account manager and excellent service and support."

Ian Appleyard, business development executive, Pulsant, said, "Due to our carrier neutrality, we were able to select different methods, telecommunications providers and underlying infrastructure to deploy the WAN. Our key differentiator was that we could pick which provider was best suited to each area and then bring them all together in a single solution."





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# INTERVIEW – SOVEREIGN BUSINESS INTEGRATION ON COST REDUCTIONS AND SECURITY

Joanna Sedley-Burke, Managing Director, Sovereign Business Integration Group

*Housing Technology interviewed Joanna Sedley-Burke, the managing director of Sovereign Business Integration Group, about the company's focus on cost reductions and security for its social housing customers and its introduction of new 'as a service' options.*

## **What is Sovereign's involvement and experience in the social housing sector?**

Sovereign is an independent technology company providing a broad range of services and solutions for over 15 years to the social housing sector. The services we offer range from management and technical consultancy through to managed IT services and hosting. We are passionate about delivering quality services to the sector and have a policy of employing our consultants from within the sector so that they are steeped in relevant knowledge and experience.

## **Sovereign is currently focusing on cost reduction and security strategies for housing providers – why these areas in particular?**

In terms of cost reductions, government spending cuts and the loss of revenue from rental income has led to the sector identifying ways in which they can significantly reduce their cost base. As a result, we are working closely with many of our housing customers to support them in the more effective deployment of technology. Most organisations have made significant investment in technology but in many cases, they have not leveraged the maximum return on their investment.

It is pretty common for technology to have automated and streamlined back-office processes but engagement with the customer is generally very traditional and is either conducted over the phone or face-to-face. However, many routine transactions, such as paying rent, checking a rent balance, reporting a repair and arranging an appointment, can be automated fairly easily with the right technology. Likewise, field-based officers can be much more effective and efficient

if they are provided with the right type of mobile technology. A robust and highly functional tenant portal can support channel shift and will see a massive reduction in costs per transaction and will lead to greater efficiency.

We are therefore helping several of our customers to identify how they could make better use of their existing business applications and whether in fact they should consider the implementation of complementary applications or the reconfiguration of existing systems. Our consultancy team has developed a digital toolkit to support our customers on their digital journey by providing a framework in which they can evaluate and measure the effectiveness of their digital initiatives.

Each customer's requirements are different, but examples of the work we have been involved in has ranged from supporting the procurement and implementation of CRM, mobile working solutions and digital portals through to large-scale transformational programmes which have significantly changed the operating model and led to large-scale efficiency savings.

For example, we have recently been working with Tower Hamlets Community Housing on implementing new systems, particularly for purchase-order processing and document management. At the beginning of the project, a number of financial objectives were set out for cost savings and all of these were achieved and more. In addition all staff received security awareness training which has substantially reduced the risk to the business from cyber security breaches.

In terms of security, as well as our 'as a service' offerings (see below), we have developed a ten-point plan to improve an organisation's approach to cyber security and have carried out this review with a number of customers over the past six months. The outputs have proven invaluable in not only identifying risks to the business, but also in helping

to prioritise spending plans for IT projects over the coming years.

## **How important are shared IT services for the housing sector?**

Shared services have been discussed for as long as Sovereign has worked in housing but we have seen a shift in the desire to commit to actually using the various offerings available.

In our experience, the benefits of shared services include moving to opex from capex to reduce the pressure on budgets, risk reductions, less need (and therefore associated costs) for very technical skills in-house, true economies of scale giving access to enterprise functionality, and responsibility for maintaining the technology moving to the shared-services supplier.

Sovereign is now offering a number of shared services to the housing sector. These include back-up as a service for greater efficiencies, DR as a service for faster recovery times, a next-generation firewall for 'zero day' protection, and infrastructure as a service to provide flexibility without the need for substantial capital investment.

## **What should housing providers be thinking about in terms of future IT and business developments?**

One of the most important things to hit the sector will be the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) which come into force in 2018. Housing providers will need to evaluate the personal data they retain and fully understand the flow and ownership of this data throughout the organisation. GDPR focuses on understanding risk and therefore regular risk assessments will be needed in order to understand the degree of threat posed when processing data and recognise the impact of any loss, misuse, theft or any other compromises of customer data.

*Joanna Sedley-Burke is managing director of Sovereign Business Integration Group.*



# CAPITA

We previewed our new look, user-centric housing management software to a range of social housing individuals

And here is what they said...

“It looks like we’ll need  
**minimal retraining**

Fresh, clear and **modern**

Validation and warning messages  
make it **so much easier** for users  
to understand and get things  
right first time

I love the fact I can **use it on my  
tablet** during meetings to answer  
questions there and then

How **intuitive**; very **new yet familiar**

When can I have  
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# HOUSING HEADS FOR THE CLOUD

Mark Lyons, Head of Service Strategy & Portfolio, Southern Housing Group

*One of the things I think our sector suffers from is the belief that it is inherently different from all other sectors. But from my point of view, all sectors need to adopt technologies that allow and facilitate growth. In a commercial world, businesses are driven by profit and the need to deliver returns for shareholders. For the housing sector, it's just as much about returns but for our customers.*

When we look carefully, we see that housing providers are similar to any other businesses of the same scale with as large a customer-facing workforce. We have back-office, CRM and mobile technologies; the main difference is our need for specialist tenancy and housing asset management systems. Having said that, I've previously worked for two other asset-heavy organisations, BAA (a big property company which happens to provide parking space for aeroplanes) and UK Power Networks (a company that looks after a lot of assets that happen to need cyclical and responsive repairs). So, again I ask myself, why do we in the housing sector think we are so different from the rest of the commercial world?

## What does this have to do with the cloud?

As a business under pressure to transform and adopt more commercial practices, deliver technology improvements with greater agility and a desire to modernise its technology, the idea of leveraging commoditised services is a no-brainer. Why would we want to run our own datacentres? Why do we want infrastructure staff spending their time lugging back-up tapes around, replacing broken disks or replacing hardware on a rolling cycle? Yes, all of these things undoubtedly offer value to our business, but to what end? Surely greater value is gained by freeing up our expertise to work with our colleagues to identify and deliver perhaps the new mobile working technology they need or work out how we can protect our data better. We must focus on how we can help the business deliver its objectives

through the use of new technologies and how we can bring an element of consumerisation driven by the choice of the business.

Our aim is not about reducing headcount. More, it's about making the most of our resources as an organisation and ensuring that we have the appropriate skills to support a 'cloud first' business. From the perspective of a technology department, it's more granular. We need to implement a departmental culture that supports innovation and is driven by the need to deliver business outcomes. For us, it's about delivering real business value for both our internal and external customers and enhancing both the internal and external customer experience.

The strategic use of and proliferation of cloud services allows us to get from our as-is state to our target state faster, more securely and with more innovative technology. It enhances our ability to work anywhere and collaborate more effectively. Simple things such as the ability to edit a document online can make a huge difference. This is crucial for a business like ours which has recently transformed its operating model to ensure colleagues who are customer-facing are indeed truly customer-centric. This community of colleagues, making up a large percentage of our overall staff base, doesn't use all of the expensive kit installed in our datacentres. Accordingly, we know that our technology delivery model must change. Our colleagues need to access the data essential to do their jobs from wherever they are and over whichever network connectivity they have access to, whether that's 3 or 4G, public wi-fi or a coffee shop's network. We have an absolute commitment to move to a model that supports this. We believe this should be delivered via cloud services.

Furthermore, a major challenge for any modern business is disaster recovery. It's vital to have a clear plan for how to

keep operating in such a scenario. The move to cloud-provisioned services, particularly from large-scale trusted organisations such as Microsoft, goes a long way towards mitigating the risks for any business. We feel confident that our services are replicated many more times than we can manage across geographies, knowing that our staff can access services from wherever they are.

## Are there any problems with cloud?

Cloud undoubtedly has some perceived risks. Security and the financial nature of 'as a service' are the two major issues that seem to drive the most analysis.

In my opinion, the security question is a red herring, particularly when it comes to comparing the physical security we can offer vs. that offered by the Microsofts of the world. Access to data hosted in the cloud is arguably more problematic, but we feel that this would still be an issue whether our content was hosted by us or by a third party. The real issue is the mobilisation of colleagues and the human nature of people leaving laptops, tablets and phones on buses and trains, but we're confident that we can address these concerns through procedural and technical controls.

We aim to align to the ISO27000 set of standards. More specifically, we will be initiating a programme to deliver this. An important early deliverable of this programme will be identity and access management to support a larger-scale mobilisation of staff. On a more specific technical note, we've seen massive improvements in the security capabilities of Microsoft Azure-based services. This gives us comfort that we can restrict access to our data as needed and on many levels of authentication.

Financially, we know the business model changes; it moves us away from capex to opex, but we don't see this as holding us back. We are fortunate in having an understanding and cooperative finance team who want us to deliver solutions for the business based on a value rather



## HOUSING HEADS FOR THE CLOUD

*Continued from previous page*

than cost model. We will work closely with them to ensure we are apportioning costs appropriately during the delivery phase of this programme.

### What is our target?

We've already started some of our move by delivering Microsoft Dynamics 2016 Online. This allows us to become more customer centric, together with Dell's Boomi integration platform as a service which integrates our on- and off-premise solutions. By 2018, our target is to move all on-premise services to a mixture of Microsoft Office 365 for end-user productivity solutions and Microsoft Azure infrastructure and/or platform as a service for everything else. We intend to

shut down our datacentres completely. To support our target, we intend to select a preferred cloud delivery partner, a trusted organisation with experience of doing this many times before, to help us make the right decisions about our applications and to work with our internal teams to move us as rapidly and safely as practical. We're very confident this is the right move for the group.

That move will also help us to replace our core finance and HR solutions, with the intention of deploying software as a service solutions. It's unlikely we'll make a wholesale move to ERP until we are satisfied it has settled down in the sector, but we are looking closely at the merits

of integrating the Microsoft Dynamics 365 stack into our housing management and asset management solutions. When ERP matures, we may look again.

Our number one technology principle is now cloud first: we will adopt cloud service providers when responding to new requests and leverage the benefits of 'as a service' solutions.

Cloud should not be feared; it should be embraced and we are not so different after all.

*Mark Lyons is head of service strategy & portfolio for Southern Housing Group.*

## Housing CCTV images too poor – Cloudview report

*New research from Cloudview has found that a third of housing providers are worried that their CCTV images are too low quality to identify criminals or intruders, even though this is why most of them installed CCTV in the first place.*

These organisations could also find themselves in breach of the Data Protection Act (DPA), which states that data recorded with the purpose of identifying individuals performing criminal activities must be of sufficient quality to do so, otherwise its capture is unjustified.

The 'Video in UK Social Housing' report, which was commissioned by cloud-based video surveillance company Cloudview, looked at why housing providers invest in CCTV and their main concerns about its performance.

Cloudview's report found that image quality was a major concern, as an even higher percentage of housing providers that didn't have a CCTV system had decided against installing one due to poor image quality.

Data security and DPA compliance were the next most important concerns, showing that data protection legislation is a big issue for housing providers using CCTV. The areas of least concern included the time-stamping of images,

firmware updates and adding additional CCTV cameras.

However, the report pointed out that there was no point in having a high-quality image if the time it was recorded is inaccurate; as well as being unusable for many purposes such as evidence in criminal investigations, this is another potential breach of the DPA. Similarly, and also a DPA requirement, a lack of concern for firmware updates shows that users don't understand the security risks of not implementing updates and patches, leaving systems open to potential hacking.

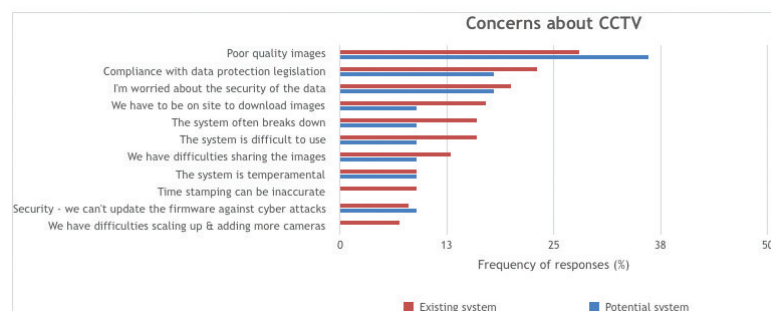
James Wickes, co-founder and CEO, Cloudview, said, "For a CCTV system to serve its purpose, the recordings should be of sufficient quality to identify individuals performing criminal activity and be easily accessible by the police, with the right credentials to be

used as evidence, such as accurate timestamping. It appears that many systems used to protect property, staff or tenants may not be fit for purpose and are breaching data protection legislation, putting companies at risk of fines, bad publicity and even criminal sanctions.

"If organisations are worried about their CCTV, they can address many of their concerns without the need to 'rip and replace' by simply adding a Cloudview adapter and connecting their current CCTV systems to Cloudview via the internet of things.

"This will give them secure, encrypted storage for high-quality images, accurate time- and date-stamping and immediate access to their data if it's needed by the police, helping to ensure that even older analogue systems comply with the DPA."

The report can be downloaded from: [www.howtocloudview.com](http://www.howtocloudview.com).





# 2017'S TOP IT SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

Paul Oggelsby, Managing Director, Riverlite

*IT security isn't news, it's business critical. Protecting your IT system and the data within it is essential.*

For any organisation operating in today's digital landscape, IT security is a very real concern. With stories of high-profile hacks, breaches and data leaks continually making headlines, it's tempting to think that it's just the major players in international business whose data centres are at risk. However, that couldn't be further from the truth. Any business with a presence on the internet, including housing providers, is at constant risk.

Ransomware has rapidly emerged as one of the most serious threats facing housing providers over the past year, as it has for all manner of UK organisations. Research last year from Trend Micro showed that 44 per cent of UK businesses had been infected by ransomware at least once in the past two years. Of those, 65 per cent paid the ransom, with 20 per cent of them not getting their data back despite paying up. In a business where operating margins are already tight, a security problem can easily wipe out a company's profits completely.

It's almost inconceivable to think what damage could be done in the event of an attack on your IT system and the long-term negative impact that could come from it. It goes without saying that housing providers can't risk the loss of important data such as tenant details and confidential company documents. However, the damage a cyber-attack can do isn't just limited to your IT systems. If an attack is successful, not only can those with malicious intentions instantly get control of your systems and sensitive data, they can cause significant reputational damage and financial losses too.

It is clear that hackers are getting more and more sophisticated with their attacks on UK organisations, with almost every week in 2016 spreading news of another organisation that had been hit. We exhibited at the UK Security Expo at the

end of last year and it was evident from talking to many delegates, that while awareness of IT security hacks was high, the increasing sophistication being used and the high risk to an individual business was not appreciated or understood.

## Remember how valuable your data is

It's inevitable that you'll need to store personal and potentially sensitive information in at least one location. Even the most basic IT network is likely to contain sensitive data, whether in the form of payroll information, medical records, customer data, tenant data or simply personal data stored on a workstation or laptop with access to the internet. Unfortunately, where systems do not facilitate remote operation, the practice of downloading data and documents to laptops, USB sticks and other devices is common. At that point, the organisation can lose control of the data.

## Education is key

Your organisation will have a number of people working across your systems to do their day-to-day jobs, but careless or uninformed individuals can put your sensitive information at risk. We know that cyber criminals often exploit a lack of security awareness from staff to gain access to sensitive information. According to the 2016 Information Security Breaches Survey, 52 per cent of small businesses suffered staff-related security breaches. It is everyone's responsibility to know how to help protect your organisation and your systems; even the most robust IT security strategy is worth little if the people within your organisation aren't working to best practice. If you're managing your IT in-house, make sure every member of your organisation understands what constitutes an IT security risk, and be sure to continually monitor your environment.

## Don't assume you're already protected

Severe malware usually morphs and has a very low detection score, so antivirus solutions can't detect it. Our advice? Your organisation may need a proactive solution that can complement your

existing anti-virus software, scanning internet traffic and issuing a warning when potential threats appear, while also blocking access to hacker-controlled servers and keeping your data secure.

## Understand your vulnerabilities

How confident do you feel that your IT system is fully protected from a cyber-attack? Riverlite has developed a bespoke scanning solution to fully assess a company's IT infrastructure and website. Riverlite Sentry Scans can identify any vulnerabilities that may currently exist in a system and offer professional recommendations on how to protect that system to reduce the risk of being hit with a cyber-attack.

## Review your wider IT framework

Is your current IT system fit for purpose? Many organisations are reluctant to upgrade their IT assets because of the perceived cost of doing so. However, what most fail to realise is that the overall cost, from both financial and IT perspectives, of using outdated hardware and software can be far higher. Not only does using outdated equipment mean you have less resources to battle potential threats, it's also inevitable that updates and patches to software will eventually stop supporting your hardware and their underlying operating systems.

## Make the most of tools that can help

We know that housing providers are under increasing pressure to be smart with their budgets, but we strongly believe that a proactive approach to IT security is an investment worth making. A free IT diagnostic benchmarking tool from Riverlite can help to evaluate how your IT infrastructure supports your operations and identify the areas of IT that may need improvement.

## Safeguard your business with external support

IT security is a very real consideration for any business in the 21st century, and it's important to know that you're making the right choice when it comes to the way you're protecting your data. While managing your IT assets in-house gives



## 2017'S TOP IT SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

*Continued from previous page*

you full control over them, an increasingly viable option is to invest in outsourced IT management. By handing control of the more time-consuming, technical tasks to a dedicated IT company, you have the comfort of knowing that experts are handling your data, and can provide any information you need on demand.

What will 2017 bring to the UK's housing providers? We're sure you already have plans in place for your organisation that will see you develop over the year ahead. We know that 2017 is set to bring challenges across the sector, and we hope opportunities too. From an IT

perspective, protecting your organisation with a strong IT security solution is certainly something that should be on your to-do list.

*Paul Oggelsby is managing director of Riverlite.*



## APPURA'S VIEW OF THE CLOUD

Julian Painter, CEO, Appura

*Elon Musk on a housing estate. That's not a place you expect to find the billionaire owner of PayPal, Tesla and Space X, to name just a few of his pastimes. However, this is no ordinary housing estate. It's a presentation set constructed for the purpose of launching his latest world-changing product called Tesla Solar Roof. Simply put, these are roof tiles that convert the full area of your roof into a single large solar panel that powers your home more efficiently than panels. He claims that it's also cheaper to re-roof your house with these tiles than traditional slate or Tuscan tiles. Revolution meets evolution.*

So what does this have to do with the arguments for cloud computing versus on-premise server hardware and software? That will be explained later. For now, most people know that cloud is simply applications or services that are stored and managed on the servers of a global company, such as Apple or Google, whereby the end user just accesses the service without having to install anything on their own computers. It's argued that, particularly for small businesses, having someone else remove the need for you to maintain your own security, update your own software and configure your own hardware is a dream come true. Others argue that you lose control and ask whether you can trust the 'cloud' when companies like TalkTalk and Three can't even manage customer data.

It comes down to risk and control versus capability. If you don't have the time,

skills or budget as a small or medium business to install and manage multiple technologies then you'll never have access to the tools that your larger industry peers use to beat you every day.

Cloud can break this cycle. If all you need to do is be a user of the world's best customer database, accounting, quotation, site management, HR, document workflow, email, or ecommerce software without having to install, manage, upgrade and secure it, then you're as mighty as the biggest of your competitors.

Putting it another way, let's say that you want to rent or buy commercial property. It's doubtful that as part of the buying process you would consider building an electricity generation plant, water treatment and supply infrastructure, plus a drilled gas extraction plant. It's assumed you would just consume electricity, gas and water through the grids; your considerations go as far thinking about how to get connected up. However, you may decide to have some smart technologies on-premise to control the timings and way that you use the energy.

This combination of on-premise light controls and use of cloud infrastructure (existing services that you get connected to) is known to the IT industry as hybrid IT or hybrid cloud. In reality, there will be a period of this hybrid state before businesses are fully cloud consumption-based. Getting rid of existing technology in the business is as much a cultural shift as it is a practical one. It takes

time to migrate data from on-premise systems into cloud, dispose of existing IT equipment and existing IT contracts.

So, back to Elon Musk. The solar roof technology simply taps you into the existing electricity grid. It mirrors the benefits of cloud computing because it is far more efficient than existing ways of doing things, just like cloud versus 'traditional IT', and can turn electricity from a cost into a profit maker for the user. However, a solar roof does use some of your existing technology in that it needs to be installed on-premise, hence it could more accurately be defined as a hybrid technology in line with the hybrid IT definition above. Ultimately, solar communities may emerge that allow others to consume solar generation or become co-operative participants in selling solar power to the grid even though they have no solar technology of their own. This would then take solar into the realm of true consumption-only cloud.

Companies like Appura, a cloud-based start-up that makes the use of cloud applications simpler, safer and cheaper, and all from one place, believe that 100 per cent cloud is the place that businesses really want to live. The business owners that we talk to want a place where you don't pay to install IT tools, freeing you up to run your business; a place where you only pay for what you use and what you use is best in class. It's called cloud and is a very tough place for on-premise IT to compete with.

*Julian Painter is CEO of Appura.*



# THE INTERNET OF THREATS - WHY SECURITY HAS TO BE A PRIORITY

Ken Munro, Partner, Pen Test Partners

*They say everything comes with a price. When it comes to the internet of things (IoT), the cost of convenience promised by these smart devices could be more than many users bargained for. The home network, router, online accounts and passwords... all are potentially vulnerable due to the lax security measures employed by many devices. Added to that, many of these devices are now being compromised and used to carry out large-scale web attacks. And yet if IoT manufacturers adopted better security practices, there's no reason why the 'internet of threats' couldn't be substantially reduced.*

There are a number of ways these devices can be compromised. A common issue is poor configuration. Many vendors' security designs rely on the assumption that the user will change the default security settings on their device. But often the user won't bother at all. It's here where the attacker has the advantage and can use the device to hop onto the home network. Products like the wi-fi kettle and coffee machine which can 'leak' the wi-fi pre-shared key (PSK), allowing the attacker to potentially take over the local network and access user data such as email addresses and account log-ins.

Then there's the mobile app itself used to control the device. Mobile app problems include no SSL encryption, passwords hardcoded within the app, or insecure storage in the app, any of which can enable the IoT device to be compromised. If that mobile app talks to the manufacturer's web service and the connection is not properly secured, an attacker can intercept user data. For example, it's common for manufacturers to deploy encryption to make it harder to access their database but if the key for the encryption is included in plain text within the app, this security mechanism can be bypassed and the traffic decrypted.

When it comes to web services, IoT devices can also be targeted using cross-site forgery requests (CSRF); these make the device do something by

making the user's browser do something because both the browser and the device are sitting on the same local network. This might be changing a setting on the device if it's sitting on the LAN or running some code on that device if there's a code-injection vulnerability. A number of webcams, CCTV and DVR devices have been shown to be vulnerable to this attack, in some cases allowing cyber-criminals to harvest real-time images from inside the home.

When it comes to the hardware and firmware itself, there are often functions left in place that users will never use such as Telnet or hidden functionality in a web interface, and malware such as Mirai has been written to exploit these. Such ports offer a convenient stepping point onto the device as they are often available to anyone on the LAN (which is why flaws in web interfaces can be exploited with CSRF because the browser is simultaneously on the internet and the LAN). Firmware is often not encrypted or signed so the attacker can simply download it, unpack the firmware and repack it enabling the attacker to compel the device to download their evil firmware.

Within the confines of the home, IoT devices communicate over radio-frequency protocols such as wi-fi, Bluetooth, Zigbee and Z-Wave, all of which, while secure, can be abused if poorly implemented. If the device uses Bluetooth and has a default PIN (or no PIN at all), it's possible to gain access and control of the device. For example, both the My Friend Freddy Bear and My Friend Cayla interactive toys have no pairing PIN, making them susceptible to attack.

At this point, we've largely confined ourselves to consumer goods but other smart systems are also vulnerable. For example, smart thermostats that allow heating and cooling appliances to be activated remotely by the user can also be taken over. A recent proof-of-concept showed how a smart thermostat could be loaded with ransomware, effectively forcing the user to pay up a

bitcoin ransom or see their heating bill soar. Another smart thermostat has an insecure update mechanism that allows an attack to be carried out remotely, with over 300,000 of that particular brand deployed.

Large IoT deployments are attracting the interest of cyber-criminals intent on harnessing that collective power. Several large-scale DoS attacks identified in the latter part of 2016 were traced to IoT-powered botnet cannons which had become infected through exposed Telnet ports, which used the devices' default credentials. These were used to carry out DDoS attacks on websites and internet companies, from Krebs Security to OVH and Dyn, resulting in some web services such as Amazon and Twitter becoming inaccessible. These attacks were unprecedented, with over one terabit per second (1Tbps) of data being used to bombard the targets at their peak; power that came from an army of IoT devices harvested using Mirai malware.

It doesn't take a great stretch of the imagination to conceive how IoT devices could be used to carry out widespread attacks in the future, with the end-game no longer being user credentials but mass extortion using ransomware or perhaps orchestrated blackouts using thermostats to ramp up power consumption. Addressing these security issues is therefore of the utmost urgency and yet the rollout of IoT devices continues unabated.

There is a complacency within the industry which is under the misguided assumption that any anomalies can be fixed through over-the-air (OTA) updates. This assumes the user will either comply and download the update or that an automatic update mechanism is in place. It doesn't allow for the 'fit and forget' devices such as lightbulbs, thermostats and burglar alarms which will either be deemed too low cost to warrant support or remain unpatched due to inertia.

Neglect could see IoT manufacturers held to account by consumer groups



## THE INTERNET OF THREATS - WHY SECURITY HAS TO BE A PRIORITY

*Continued from previous page*

and even sued. Lobbyists in several countries across Europe are criticising the My Friend Cayla doll, which is alleged to have compromised children's privacy, for example. The question is whether culpability will stop there. How far down the chain will responsibility go for breaches of user privacy and user data? Could housing providers that

rollout smart home-heating systems, for example, also be seen as culpable and be held to account? The only way to safeguard against this is to ensure cyber-liability insurance is in place to covers these contingencies and to demonstrate that due diligence was undertaken before the deployment of these technologies. Otherwise, that roll

out of smart IoT systems could cost you in the long run.

*Ken Munro is a partner in Pen Test Partners.*



# HOUSING PLUS AND THE INTERNET OF THINGS

Ian Pritchard, IT Manager Housing Plus Group

*Ian Pritchard, IT manager at Housing Plus Group, explains the benefits of the internet of things to housing providers and their tenants and how to go about implementing an IoT programme.*

### Why is the internet of things important?

The internet of things (IoT) allows us to harness the mass of data we collect as individuals and businesses and use it to make informed and automated decisions via the technologies we already use. Used properly, this could, in certain circumstances, change people's lives.

### What are the benefits of IoT to housing providers?

The ability to drive forward the concept of smart homes and deliver savings and efficiencies to the business, while taking tailored customer services to the next level. Potentially, we can use the data we collect to drive better business decisions and deliver both VFM and high levels of customer satisfaction.

### What are the benefits of IoT to tenants?

Through the smarter use of wearables, mobile devices and built-in sensors, we could see improved alerting of events around safety in the home, better customer service as the data that can be collected by providers can be used to pre-empt person and tenancy issues, and cost savings across the board with home utilities being used in a much smarter way.

### How should housing providers go about implementing an IoT programme?

With great care and planning! This is not a technology to simply throw in and reap the rewards. You need to be able to identify the real winners in this very wide and very complex world. How many tenants will accept a home full of sensors? Can you sell the benefits to them without the 'big brother' accusations? Can you guarantee the cyber-security of the solutions you may be promoting and using?

### Is there a distinction between using IoT-based data for monitoring specific properties vs. using it for larger-scale data-mining applications?

Very much so. Vulnerable or at-risk individuals or families can benefit hugely from wearables and inter-connected sensor-based systems. Blocks of flats could be monitored for lift/lighting outages or even unexpected amounts of human footfall after dark and trigger a relevant response.

Large-scale IoT programmes could collect and deliver information as a single business entity in order to identify hot-spots and trends and take appropriate action, especially when cross-referenced with data from local authorities, constabularies and fire services.

### What about the possible plethora of IoT devices from different suppliers?

For me, the main issue here is secure and reliable interoperability. We have seen in other areas of technology the impact of multiple suppliers each doing 'their own thing' and the issues that can bring. A universal coding language or protocol, such as Thread, needs to be implemented before we can truly say that we can bring standardisation.

### What will IoT-based properties look like in, say, five years time?

Will all standard home devices be built with IoT capabilities? As IoT develops then we will see more practical uses for it rather than forcing it to do things right now 'because we can'. At the most basic level, a property will be standardised to be more technically pre-emptive and things such as home equipment faults will be identified by the provider before they become an issue and automatically dealt with.

However, will a home where specific actions occur based entirely on the time, temperature and who has just walked through door be something that we are ready to embrace? We shall see...

*Ian Pritchard is the IT manager at Housing Plus Group. He will be talking more about the internet of things during the Housing Technology 2017 conference in March (see website for details).*



# PSYCHOLOGY AND IOT SECURITY

Dr Etienne Roesch, Associate Professor of Cognitive Science, University of Reading

*An Englishman's home is his castle. To what extent an Englishman's smart home is his smart castle, we don't yet know. Where tentative IoT devices are already available, promises and expectations paint a future where technology "merges physical and virtual worlds, creating smart environments to improve lives and enhance wellbeing" (European Commission H2020 Digital Agenda). As the distance between our physical and virtual worlds shrinks, concerns for security, privacy and trust in these technologies grow in similar measures. Successfully addressing these concerns not only demands specific technological dispositions but also targeted interventions at the level of the individual, the user, at the heart of this system.*

A phishing email or a piece of malware may cause the inconvenience of having to change one's passwords or restore lost data. However, recent events depict a much bleaker and intimate picture; one such example has been the hijacking of baby monitors that allowed cyber-attackers to watch and verbally abuse toddlers in what is meant to be their safest place. Most wireless technologies used to control smart locks, sensors, smart meters, smart appliances and other smart home components have been shown to be vulnerable to abuse via cyber means. Some more than others, especially where the home wi-fi router and the occupants' insecure smartphones are part of the equation. Yet, as cyber incidents are still relatively uncommon in this context, manufacturers of smart home devices don't typically deploy security measures beyond the bare minimum (usually lightweight encryption). Nor do they evaluate the impact that a cyber breach could have on the occupants, or even empower users to take charge of their own security.

Foreseeing the growing prevalence of IoT technology, the European Commission is taking these issues seriously, and has allocated funding to inform tomorrow's standards and legislations. One such funded project is the Cocoon project, "emotion psychology meets cyber-physical security in IoT smart homes", led by the University of Reading, which is a €1.2m project gathering researchers from the University of Greenwich, Ghent University (Belgium), ETH Zürich (Switzerland) and Eindhoven Technical University (The Netherlands). Starting in January 2017, we interweave innovations in two distinctly different disciplines to understand and improve the security of home IoT technology: emotional psychology and cyber security. We aim to produce an understanding of the psychology of IoT users, assess risks in current and future IoT systems, and formulate provisions for the design and integration of user-centric IoT in tomorrow's homes. We put the user at the centre of the IoT landscape of technology; by combining expertise in emotional psychology, value-sensitive design, cyber security, network communication and real-time big data analytics, we will create a framework that adapts to user profiles, empowering them to make the right decisions for a safe IoT environment.

Broadly, IoT technology empowers both housing providers and tenants, and there is no doubt it will very soon play a central role in the housing sector. Housing providers will be able to monitor the status of their properties in real time, predict demand and repair needs, as well as forecast their financial commitments and those of their tenants. Ultimately, IoT technology increases flexibility and supports agile practices in social housing. Core to the sustainability of this multi-faceted and dynamic system are the tenants, who provide the drive

and support the entire system. They are guardians of the entire system's integrity, because their own knowledge and trouble-shooting skills will determine their resilience in the event of cyber-attacks. They will be the first in line to suffer the consequences of such attacks, and the first to be able to respond appropriately. To secure the integrity of such a complex network of technology, it is thus very important to understand how users behave and how best to empower them to take ownership of their smart homes. New tools need to be developed, new procedures put in place, and users need to be more in tune with the technology.

The objectives of the Cocoon project are twofold:

1. To examine the emotional investment of IoT users who are in the comfort of their own home, which will not only condition their usage of the technology but also drive their reactions when security is breached, and will determine their ability to recover.
2. To put mainstream IoT technology to the test, and explore the opportunity to create a network-wide intrusion detection system (IDS), based on real-time analytics of data from such a heterogeneous set of technologies, and which users can actually use.

Throughout the duration of the project, our consortium, in partnership with Housing Technology, will provide the community of housing providers with opportunities to influence this research agenda, take part and be in the front line of the field. We will also publish dedicated reports to help the housing sector understand this fast-moving field, and make the right decisions.

*Doctor Etienne Roesch is associate professor of cognitive science at the University of Reading.*





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# CLOUD SERVICES VS. ON-PREMISE IT

*With cloud-based services now being widely used among UK social housing providers alongside or even supplanting traditional on-premise IT services, Housing Technology asked senior executives from Civica, IT Lab, Kykloud and Riverlite for their views on the merits of these two technology models.*

## Advantages and disadvantages of on-premise IT

Civica's executive director of outsourcing, Gary Bell, said, "The advantages of on-premise IT services include predictable costs, utilisation of owned resources, in-house skills and resources to manage those (familiar) services and environments, and a known data location/residency. However, the disadvantages include a capex requirement as well as ongoing running and support costs. What's more, there's often a lack of flexibility and agility in terms of responding to demands for new or evolving services from business users."



*"The full operational costs need to be taken into account when pricing an in-house solution, as well as infrastructure costs, not to mention capital investment if additional investment is needed upfront."*

Gary Bell, Executive Director of Outsourcing, Civica

Mark Summers, head of business development at IT Lab, said, "Traditional on premise IT services provide guaranteed resources, normally for a fixed capital cost, to provide applications and data across a defined network infrastructure. Many client/server applications that require high data transits or quality of service can be more suited to an on-premise architecture, certainly against public cloud services where data transits can't usually be controlled. On-premise IT services often also benefit from a defined perimeter, meaning that network and data security can be more easily defined and controlled.

## Advantages and disadvantages of cloud services

Summers continued, "It's important to clarify the different types of 'cloud'. Public clouds, such as Microsoft Azure or Amazon Web Services, provide an easily accessible, shared IT infrastructure that can be scaled on demand, and offer many benefits around procurement, systems management, reporting, compliance and support for mobile working. However, public clouds aren't well suited to applications that require high quality of service to operate successfully.

"On the other hand, private cloud services typically offer all of the scalability, provisioning simplicity, procurement and administration benefits of public cloud, but in a defined environment that can be connected to either via the internet or a private business connection to ensure quality of service and management for sensitive applications.

"Finally, and often the most relevant variant for many organisations, there is hybrid cloud. As the term suggests, this approach is client-centric, changing the focus away from a single 'platform' to the delivery of user-facing services from their most appropriate delivery model."

Paul Oggelsby, managing director of Riverlite, added, "We are certainly seeing a growing number of housing providers commit to cloud-based solutions as they gain a better understanding of the benefits they can offer, greater trust in the solutions available and the high levels of overall security.

"The primary advantages of a cloud based solution are cost of ownership savings, an increase in IT agility, reduced upfront costs, a reduced risk of failure and the ability to scale up or down on demand."

Kykloud's chief technology officer, Nick Graham, said, "There really are very few disadvantages when using a reputable

cloud-based solution. Gone are the days when your bespoke IT system gave you an edge over your competitors, and instead there is an increasing realisation among housing providers that cloud based SaaS products outperform their on-premise counterparts."



*"It's a misunderstanding that cloud services aren't as secure as on-premise IT. Sure, if you lock your server and data in a room that no-one ever accesses, then you might be right, but that's not the world in which we live."*

Mark Summers, Head of Business Development, IT Lab

## Cost considerations

Civica's Bell said, "The full operational costs, including staff and security, need to be taken into account when pricing an in-house solution, as well as infrastructure costs, not to mention capital investment if additional investment is required upfront. However, if you consider deploying a solution from scratch and its costs span 3-5 years, the cloud service will deliver cost savings.

"The predictability of costs is also a factor; while cloud services can be a fixed price, they can also be extremely variable, with different commercial models offered by a wide range of suppliers. But it's also worth noting that new investments to support improved security, licensing cost increases and technology advances are usually absorbed by a cloud provider."

Oggelsby from Riverlite added, "The best way to compare cloud services versus on-premise IT in terms of cost is to define a cloud solution as a day-to-day operating cost (opex) and on-premise IT being a capital expenditure (capex). While outsourcing your IT to a cloud platform might seem the more expensive option at first glance, with subscription costs and payments for server space that might never be used, the costs associated with



managing your on-premise IT can quickly eclipse those of cloud solutions."

### Security matters

IT Lab's Summers said, "One of the perceived benefits of on-premise IT is that it provides a defined network infrastructure, so that network and data security can be more easily defined and controlled. Yet it's a misunderstanding that cloud services aren't as secure as on-premise IT. Sure, if you lock your server and data in a room that no-one ever accesses, then you might be right, but that is not the world in which we live.

"A properly-provisioned cloud architecture from a reputable provider can provide security protection far in advance of most organisations' individual reach. Enterprise-grade, highly-available and tiered security, yet easily managed through consolidated administration, is one of the most underestimated benefits of a well-provisioned cloud platform."



*"There is just no comparison between on-premise and cloud-based services. Instead of waiting months to develop a very basic and untested on-premise solution, you could opt for a cloud-based product and be ready to go within days."*

Nick Graham, Chief Technology Officer, Kykcloud

Kykcloud's Graham added, "There was once a time when organisations feared the cloud and were probably quite rightly apprehensive about the security of their data and information. Most cloud providers now offer a far better level of security than any in-house team could ever provide.

"And when it comes to disaster recovery, the cloud wins hands-down. Kykcloud provides an eight-hour recovery time objective and a 15-minute recovery point, and we are definitely not alone. This means, in the event of a critical disaster, fire or explosion at our primary

datacentre, our secondary site will be up and running within eight hours with a maximum data loss of just 15 minutes."

### Deployment decisions

Civica's Bell said, "The cloud is quicker and easier to deploy than on-premise services; cloud resources can be deployed within hours, assuming the customer has the resources available to do so in terms of either in-house expertise or a technology partner who can deploy and manage those resources for them."

Summers from IT Lab said, "On-premise IT services need to be designed and deployed – usually a lengthy process of resource scoping, headroom planning, procurement, installation into a suitable location with power protection, bench-testing, test deployment and migration, live deployment, the configuration of management tools and once installed, maintained, patched and monitored.

"With a cloud solution, planning, diligence of scoping, integration and accessibility are still key. But the provisioning of new resources, from whole platforms, additional servers or even just new applications or resources to run a large report, can be almost immediate, and then tried, tested, adjusted and even just turned off and then started again on demand, all for low 'as consumed' costs."

Kykcloud's Graham added, "There is just no comparison between on-premise and cloud-based services. Instead of waiting months to develop a very basic and untested on-premise solution, you could opt for a cloud-based product and be set up and ready to go within days."

### User access and mobility

Oggelsby continued, "Users with multiple desktop computers, laptops and an increasing number of tablets and smartphones all having constant access to data can prove very challenging for internal staff to maintain and protect. A



*"The primary advantages of a cloud based solution are cost of ownership savings, an increase in IT agility, reduced upfront costs, a reduced risk of failure and the ability to scale up or down on demand."*

Paul Oggelsby, Managing Director, Riverlite

private cloud solution saves one file in one place in the cloud (just think of it as a remote server) so it can be easily accessed from any machine or device that has an internet connection."

Civica's Bell said, "The cloud is built for remote, secure access by users and hence supports the mobility of users. It is also supported around the clock so it additionally enables flexible working and geographically-dispersed workforces."

### Scalability perspectives

Graham continued, "Cloud-based products are normally metered on usage and it's quick and easy to add extra capacity. If your needs fluctuate or you take on a big project requiring extra usage, it's easy to flex up and down. With on-premise IT, by contrast, that's not quite as easy when you have a solution developed specifically to meet a 50-strong team's needs but you find that by the time the product is eventually available, your users have increased significantly."

Riverlite's Oggelsby said, "The cloud model is designed and architected for scale. It's relatively easy for cloud providers to scale from one server to hundreds of servers. Customers don't have to worry about large upfront capital expenditures and at the same time, customers can increase resources for peak demand then scale down quickly if necessary."

*Housing Technology would like to thank Gary Bell (Civica), Mark Summers (IT Lab), Nick Graham (Kykcloud) and Paul Oggelsby (Riverlite) for contributing to this article.*



# HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

## 2017 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

# HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2017

*Our ninth annual Housing Technology conference and executive forum is taking place on 7-9 March 2017 once again at The Oxford Belfry.*

Past guests have overwhelmingly reported how good our conference & executive forum is for networking with senior, like-minded peers from other housing providers and for keeping you up-to-date with the latest technologies

and business developments in our sector. You can be assured that coming to Housing Technology 2017 will be a very good use of your time.

The our annual conference always 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.

7-9  
March

**BOOK  
NOW!**



## KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH 2017 **BENNETT ARRON**



When Bennett Arron had his identity stolen, the consequences were devastating. He spent two years trying to clear his name during which time he became penniless and homeless and had to live with family and friends.

Years later, Bennett wrote a comedy show about his experience.

He performed the show 'It wasn't me, it was Bennett Arron' at the Edinburgh Festival. As a result of the show, Bennett was asked by Channel 4 to direct and present a documentary on fraud and identity theft.

In the documentary, 'How to steal an identity', Bennett proved through a series of stunts how easy the crime of ID theft is to carry out. He first stole the identities of the general public and then went on to steal the identity of the Home Secretary. This action resulted in Bennett being arrested in a dawn raid by Scotland Yard under the codename Operation Hydrogen.

Bennett now tours around the world, telling his disturbingly true yet funny account of what it's like to have your identity stolen and revealing the devastating consequences of making a documentary 'in the public interest'.

Bennett has been called 'A Welsh Seinfeld' by The Guardian, 'Genuinely original and funny' by The Times and 'Case Number 2477419' by The Metropolitan Police.

THURSDAY 9 MARCH 2017 **ALEXIS CONRAN**



Alexis Conran, TV presenter and LAMDA-trained actor, is best known known as the man who identifies, uncovers and helps us to protect our businesses and ourselves against scams. As writer and presenter of the highly-acclaimed BBC TV show 'The Real Hustle', he is in the rare position of being able to advise and

educate, even the most foolhardy, on issues surrounding security and risk (in the real and virtual worlds), and identify the human behaviour, communication skills and confidence tricks that the world's top scammers rely on to achieve their unscrupulous aims.

Alexis employs his knowledge of the dark and deceptive world of hustling, pickpockets and con-artists to speak candidly on the risks and security threats constantly faced by businesses, and to deliver important messages on the shrewdest ways to protect against the ever increasing number of scams. His recent clients include IBM, the RSA Security Conference, Experian, RBS, Halifax, Aviva, Facebook, Porsche, VISA, The Metropolitan Police and the City of London Police Fraud in Action Unit.

### ALEXIS'S TOPICS WILL INCLUDE:

- The psychology of deception - how the brain can be fooled by assumption.
- The anatomy of a scam - how a handful of scams that have existed for 1000s of years still catch people out.
- The necessary credentials to become the best salesman in your team/the world.
- Why systems fail - the human face of security.
- Trust and transparency - how to stay safe in an uncertain world.
- The illusion(s) of trust and the secrets behind it.

## BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY FOCUS

### HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2017 WILL FOCUS ON:



IT STRATEGIES FOR BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION, VALUE FOR MONEY AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES



OMNI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS WITH TENANTS, CONTRACTORS AND SUPPLIERS



CORE BUSINESS APPLICATIONS, INCL. HOUSING, FINANCE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT



UNIVERSAL CREDIT, RENT REDUCTIONS, PAY TO STAY, AND OTHER FINANCIAL/REGULATORY AREAS



EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, INCL. THE INTERNET OF THINGS, BIG DATA, SOCIAL MEDIA, GIS AND CONNECTED HOMES



MOBILE WORKING AND DYNAMIC SCHEDULING



IT INFRASTRUCTURE, INCL. SOFTWARE LICENSING, CLOUD, SAAS AND SECURITY

## WIDEST CHOICE OF PRESENTATIONS & TOPICS

- **AAREON:** Why you can't afford to ignore channel shift
- **ACCENT GROUP:** Connecting it all together
- **AMICUSHORIZON:** How infrastructure decisions are influenced by corporate objectives
- **BLACKWOOD GROUP:** CleverCogs for more independent tenants
- **BOURNEMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL:** Mobile working, dynamic scheduling and new commercial approaches
- **CHG:** Responding to cyber security incidents
- **CHS GROUP:** Low-cost wireless connectivity
- **CIRCLE HOUSING & SOVEREIGN BUSINESS INTEGRATION GROUP:** Business transformation - Successfully delivering during change
- **ENGAGE PROPERTY TECHNOLOGY:** Expect more
- **FAMILY MOSAIC:** User experience and service delivery
- **FIRST WESSEX:** Business transformation with cloud, mobile and digital
- **FOOTPRINT SOLUTIONS:** Presentation title and synopsis to be confirmed
- **HOUSING PLUS GROUP:** IT strategies for partnerships and mergers
- **ISLINGTON & SHOREDITCH HOUSING:** Microsoft's Power BI applications in housing
- **ISOS HOUSING:** Don't throw the baby out with the housing system
- **ORBIT GROUP:** Customised web mapping
- **ORCHARD:** Data-driven housing - Connections to projections
- **SANCTUARY HOUSING:** OneSanctuary - SAP in housing
- **SHROPSHIRE HOUSING:** The internet of things - 21st-century Trojan horse or possible data revolution?
- **SOHA HOUSING:** Voice analytics in housing CRM
- **SOUTHERN HOUSING GROUP:** Achieving business integration through service management
- **SOVEREIGN HOUSING ASSOCIATION:** The benefits of an enterprise GIS
- **TORUS:** Transformation in turbulent times
- **VIRIDIAN HOUSING:** Digital adventures at Viridian Housing
- **WAKEFIELD & DISTRICT HOUSING:** Transforming business with hosted services
- **WALES & WEST:** Creating bespoke software
- **WELLINGBOROUGH HOMES:** Mobilisation and transformation
- **WHEATLEY GROUP:** Connecting the unconnected - A look back over three years and a look ahead to the next ten
- **WREKIN HOUSING TRUST:** Creating your own housing solution - the only limit is your imagination!
- **YOUR HOMES NEWCASTLE:** How Agile delivers more, builds bridges, and turns IT critics into IT champions

As well as the above presentations, Housing Technology 2017 will also feature presentations from 1st Touch, BT, Capita, Castleton Technology, HCL, Mobyssoft and RHP (presentation topics to be confirmed in early February).

## EVENING EVENTS

As part of the overall conference, Housing Technology 2017 will also have three subsidiary evening events, to which all delegates, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors are invited.

- **PRE-EVENT DRINKS RECEPTION (Tuesday 7th March)**
- **DRINKS RECEPTION (Wednesday 8th March)**
- **INFORMAL SUPPER (Wednesday 8th March)**

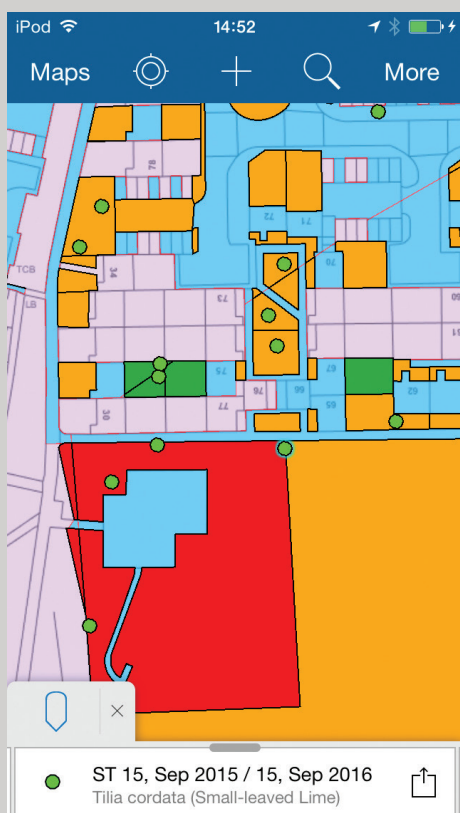


# ESRI GIS AT BRACKNELL FOREST HOMES

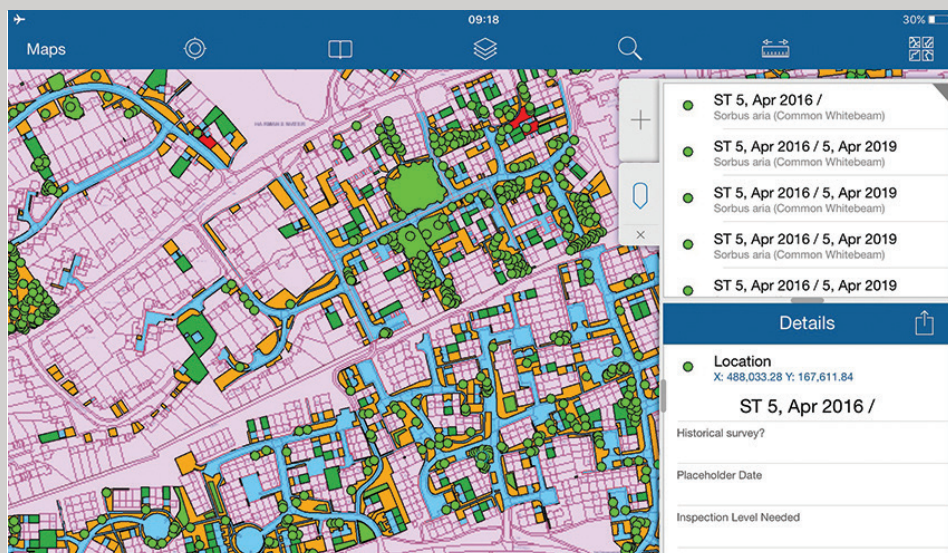
Andrew Keljarrett, Business Improvement Manager, Bracknell Forest Homes

*Bracknell Forest Homes is using a GIS system from Esri as part of our digital transformation strategy to create new streamlined processes.*

We are always looking at new areas of the business where GIS can make a difference, from reducing under-occupancy rates to minimising our exposure to tree risks; it now underpins a growing number of operational processes.



To make this possible, we introduced a mix of Esri's mobile, cloud and web-based GIS, integrated into a single mapping system, to create 'one version of the truth' that our staff can depend on. This platform approach allows us to achieve a great deal of what we need using out-of-the-box tools, avoiding expensive development costs and giving us more control. Generating new mapping apps quickly and making them



available to all of our 240 staff is now a reality. They are also easy to use, so our staff don't need any special training to get up and running and start achieving results.

## Reducing the risk of litigation

Our journey with GIS began by giving us a better method of managing our trees, reducing the risk of potential litigation. Trees are of particular importance to us because we have 10,000 to look after, in addition to our 6,000 homes and 1,000 leasehold properties. This presents us with a much larger risk from trees compared with the average housing provider. This ranges from potential damage to properties and roads to personal injury, which could potentially lead to unlimited fines or imprisonment for those involved. We needed to create the most efficient approach to tree management as possible, so risk was minimised.

And this is where GIS has excelled, helping our 'tree team' take a measured approach. Using a mobile GIS app, the team can now manage all 10,000 trees with just two members of staff, carrying out double the amount of tree surveys in a day on handheld devices, compared with the old paper-based method, which is saving us around £50,000 a year.

Out in the field, any ambiguity is eliminated because our staff can see exactly which trees belong to us and avoid any misunderstandings around which trees still belong to the council, following the stock transfer. In terms of the tree surveys themselves, operatives go out with handheld devices and can instantly see what has been done and what action needs to be taken.

**Under Occupancy Survey**

**Occupancy Level**

How many bedrooms does the property have?  
3

How many *current* spare rooms does the property have?  
1

How many *potential* spare rooms does the property have?  
2  
See Shelters info on bedroom tax for info on how 'spare' rooms are calculated.

**Interest**

Is the Main Tenant currently interested in moving?  
☐ Yes ☒ No

Why not?  
(tick all that apply)  
Likes their current neighbours, Near to family, Worried about packing up

Can BFH do anything to alleviate or remove these concerns?  
☒ Yes ☐ No

Is the Main Tenant currently on the Housing Register?  
☒ Yes ☐ No



## ESRI GIS AT BRACKNELL FOREST HOMES

*Continued from previous page*



Once any necessary work has been completed, staff update the live system, so there is no duplication of effort once they return to base. Similar, adjacent trees can also be surveyed in groups which saves a lot of time, considering that dealing with a single tree can take up to 40 minutes. The central record of all tree data is held in the GIS, which means it is quicker for staff to respond to any queries residents might have about tree condition or pruning because it's all easily accessible.

The GIS approach has also allowed staff to prioritise trees for inspection, depending on their potential danger level to the public or properties. Using red, amber and green codes for different locations, we have created a more intelligent way of working, which further reduces risk. We're also looking at enhancing the mobile application to allow tree officers to create work requests for contractors within the GIS while out in the field so they don't have to wait until they are back at their desks and log-in to another disparate system.

### Reducing under-occupancy

With the introduction of new online mapping tools, we've also been able to solve other problems. We recently moved almost our entire under-occupancy process onto GIS, which is now helping to reduce under-occupancy rates.

A new mobile GIS survey app first helps staff assess the needs of tenants out in the field, with the resulting data feeding directly into the GIS. The project officer can then use various filters to examine this information using the map interface, helping to make decisions that drive the process forward.

The new method helps staff understand who might be under-occupying, assess their willingness to move and quickly examine any void properties when they become available, to see if there are tenants nearby who match the criteria. The whole process is executed within the GIS by one officer, who has no GIS expertise and didn't need any training because it's so easy to use. This significantly speeds up the process of matching candidates to more appropriately-sized properties. Overall, it is helping us to find more suitable homes for tenants and minimising the conversion costs usually involved in making larger homes more suitable for elderly residents.

### Better use of assets

We have started looking at how GIS can help make strategic, VFM-led decisions. One example is loading data about the stock condition of garages into a map application, then analysing it using variables such as location, condition, repair costs and rent revenues. This will help us make strategic decisions about how to use these garage sites better. Some examples include further investment in stock, alternative uses such as brightly-lit parking spaces or even redevelopment. This should lead to reduced long-term maintenance costs, improved facilities for tenants and create new revenue opportunities.

### Improved customer service

Other streamlined services are also based on mobile GIS, which make internal processes more efficient and reduce response times to tenants' complaints. For example, when we receive an inbound complaint about graffiti or fly-tipping, office staff drop a pin on the map with the details and assign staff in the field to carry out any necessary work. Using handheld devices, they in turn confirm tasks are complete, attach photos and then update the status. Using GIS means that not only are we fulfilling our requirements to act on complaints but we are also making use of the trends and hotspots it reveals. This allows us to modify our processes, thereby decreasing the number of requests or complaints in the future and thus reduce costs.

There's certainly a lot more we can achieve with mapping. Our plans for the future include placing more of our internal processes into the GIS to increase automation, speed up workflows and gain more strategic insights. Projects will range from looking at our assets in more depth so we can determine possible alternative uses, to adopting a more proactive stance on land sales. By continuing to examine the business to see where mapping can act as a catalyst for change, we are set to achieve yet more efficiencies and value for money.

*Andrew Keljarrett is business improvement manager at Bracknell Forest Homes.*



Dean Dickinson, CEO, Castleton Technology

## CASTLETON'S NEW CEO

*Castleton Technology has announced that it has appointed Dean Dickinson as its new chief executive officer.*

Dickinson was previously managing director of Advanced Business Solutions, part of Advanced Computer Software Group (ACS), and he was on the senior management team that sold ACS to Vista Private Equity for £725 million in March 2015.

Dean Dickinson, CEO, Castleton Technology, said, "I want to continue to collaborate with customers and make Castleton the partner of choice for social housing providers. We will continue to develop innovative solutions based on new technologies and the feedback we receive from our customers."



## ORCHARD LAUNCHES DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME

*Orchard Information Systems has reported that it is investing heavily in recruitment and staff development, including recently joining forces with Northumbria University to kick start its Degree Apprenticeship Scheme.*

Orchard has already offered two apprentices (pictured) four-year degree apprenticeships within its development team, giving them as aspiring developers the opportunity to gain key knowledge and experience.

The company said that it is looking for ambitious, talented and highly-motivated people to join its team. If you want to join an innovative and customer-focused team at Orchard, then they would love to discuss the opportunities they have for you.

If you would like to know more, please call Orchard on 0191 203 2500 or visit [www.orchard-systems.co.uk/news-views](http://www.orchard-systems.co.uk/news-views) to find out about how Orchard is working with Northumbria University.

## Engage Property Technology's JV with Qube Global Software

*Qube Global Software has entered into a partnership with Engage Property Technology to deliver self-service portals to tenants in the growing build-to-rent sector.*

The Engage portal is fully integrated with Qube's own software and is designed to meet the needs of today's tenants while delivering substantial efficiencies to property managers.

The portal acts as a hub for landlords and tenants, managing tenancy applications, payments and referencing and property

maintenance, as well as engaging direct with tenants and delivering perks such as targeted offers from local businesses. The combined offering is an end-to-end solution across the entire property lifecycle.

Mitesh Patel, managing director, Engage Property Technology, said, "Engage's partnership with Qube is pivotal in meeting the growing expectations of renters through innovative customer-focused technology designed specifically for the property sector. As a result, the

communication between landlords and tenants is empowered, time-consuming administrative processes are automated, and tenants are provided with all the information and support relevant to their property and neighbourhood.

"This ultimately gives tenants what they demand, ensures a long-lasting relationship between tenant and landlord, and reduces the costs and complexities associated with managing properties."

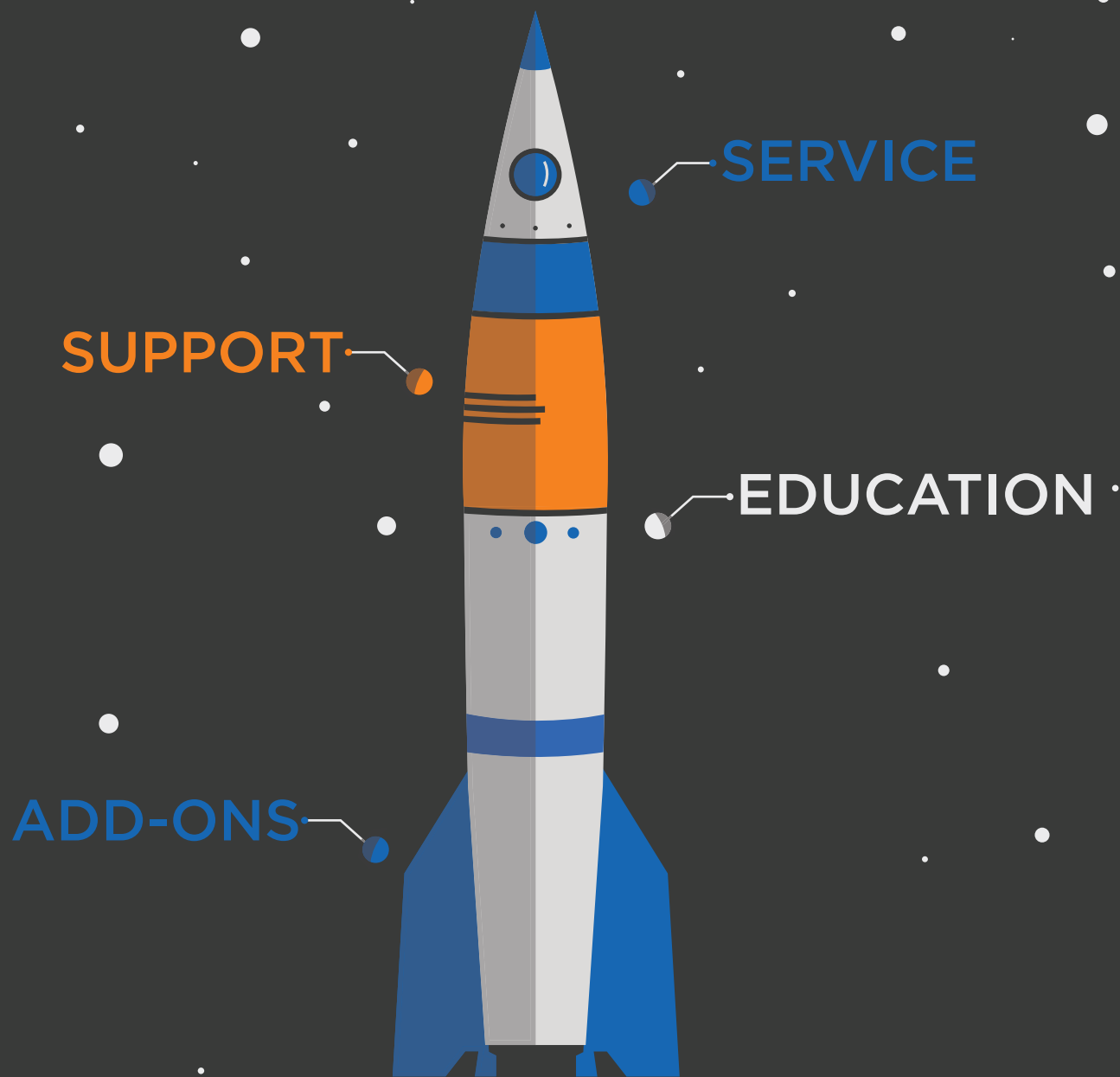
## SOUTHERN IT FORUM MEETINGS



*The Southern IT Forum met in November 2016 at GreenSquare Group's offices in Swindon. The meeting covered Microsoft's enterprise licensing, IT budgets, mobile phone contracts and cloud-based monitoring, alongside a presentation from GreenSquare's IT infrastructure team on their*

*implementation of Microsoft's StorSimple.*

The next meeting will be on 8th February at Paragon Community Housing's offices in Walton-on-Thames, followed by a meeting in May at Microsoft's campus near Reading.



## PowerObjects, an HCL Company

Delivering Dynamics 365 Solutions for Housing to the United Kingdom

[PowerObjects.com/UK](https://PowerObjects.com/UK)



An **HCL** Company





# #HTTOP5

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

*Welcome to #HTtop5. A quick yet strangely satisfying portion of technology news, served hot with a sweet creativity dip and a side order of housing sector potential. A bit like the chicken strips in McDonald's... but with more housing.*



## Kwikset's smartlock

You may have heard of smartlocks already. They don't use regular physical

keys but rather work via Bluetooth. Very handy if you're always losing keys or just like Bluetooth things. Housing providers might have been put off the idea of changing large amounts of doors over to smartlocks in the past because of the perceived expense and hassle of doing so, but now a company called Kwikset has a conversion kit available for pre-order.

For the very reasonable price of \$149, you can keep your existing door and just convert the lock to a smartlock. That might still sound expensive compared with traditional locks but think about how much it's costing larger landlords to change hundreds of keys every year; smartlocks could actually be a great way to save money in the long run.

Also when your husband doesn't come home from a night out with the boys, you could change the code and he won't be able to get back in. Perfect. Sorry husbands everywhere, cancel Friday and tell the boys that the 'fishing trip' will have to be rescheduled.



## Amazon go

What on earth is a shop doing in the #HTtop5. I hear you ask? Well,

just hang on a second and you'll find out.

The mighty (and increasingly innovative) Amazon has just announced a store that doesn't bother with checkouts or even self-service machines. The concept works like this: the customer scans an app as

they enter the store, clever sensors then track what items you put in your basket, and then when you leave the store, your account is charged accordingly.

Although this is an Amazon concept, consider how this could be used in the housing sector. Imagine if tenants were charged rent on a daily basis, every time they entered their home. It would help with fraud prevention and enable housing providers to measure how their properties are being used. Okay, there may be some people who object to that idea but it's an interesting and different way to charge tenants.

Or how about using it in communal, open-to-all rental garages, where a customer or tenant only pays when they park in the garage. There are some obvious issues to overcome for this to be of use in the housing sector, but there are potentially some really interesting efficiencies to explore.



## Youtube 4k streaming

Have you ever streamed a live event on YouTube? Of

course you have. I bet you didn't do it in ultra, ultra, ultra, ultra-high definition though, did you? That's four ultra's. Hold on to your HD socks because you can now stream live on YouTube in 4K. Exciting times, I know. Even better, you can broadcast in 360-degree as well as standard video.

Okay, so the viewer will need a 4K-enabled device at the other end and you will need a 4K-capable camera, but just imagine your tenants watching company announcements and live events in glorious ultra, ultra, ultra, ultra-high definition. That's better than your eyes. How can your eyes see something that is better than what they can see? Just enjoy the picture's crispness and don't think about how it works.

## M1 Electric skateboard

When I was a small boy (well, a slightly-overweight boy), I often dreamed of a skateboard with an engine. I also dreamed of a house made from sweets.



The Inboard M1 brings one of my dreams very close. It's a skateboard that you can use just like a normal

skateboard but it also has motors in the back wheels, batteries and wires and other cool engineering hidden away so you won't even notice it, and it can travel at up to 20mph.

Imagine housing officers across the land whizzing around on skateboards instead of those noisy, polluting cars they currently use. Or imagine a rack-style rental scheme for tenants.



## Marriott hotel virtual tours

Have you ever stayed in a Marriott Hotel? No, me neither. However, this might tempt you to in the future; Marriott Hotels have announced a partnership with London-based tech start-up Oculus Rift to give website visitors a virtual tour of their facilities.

Although the hotel chain hasn't yet clarified exactly how this will work, it will have something to do with a live one-way video stream, two-way audio and augmented reality to allow potential guests to look around its hotels.

It's easy to imagine how this concept could be used in housing; for customer viewings, void inspections or tenancy visits. Who needs to actually go somewhere in real life anymore?

If you do decide to leave your chair, use an electric skateboard. Then stream the journey live on YouTube in 4K. Then use your phone to unlock a communal skateboard garage that charges your account as you enter. One day, we will all have homes made from sweets. Until that day, keep pushing those tech boundaries and make the housing sector a leader in innovation.

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



## Improve your outcome-led services management with OSKA

Go digital with our iPad  
and tablet-ready solution



Tenancy sustainment, care and support, and back to work skills are just some of the outcome-led services that our customers are using the OSKA Suite to manage.

Octavia provides the software and dedicated services to help you achieve positive outcomes through monitoring performance against contract, using up-to-the minute operational management data wherever you are.

### What our clients say...

*"Capturing visits on an iPad or tablet using digital forms gives staff more time to spend with their clients. It is actually getting them back to what they do best, supporting the people that need them."*

*"Saving money is a given but the other benefits are delivering so much more than financial savings."*

If you need a quick to deploy, effective solution that is available on any device and integrates to other business systems, please get in touch.

Email [OSKA@octaviasoftware.com](mailto:OSKA@octaviasoftware.com) or call our team on 0203 397 8312.





# Bridging the gap between technology & business success

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

**Consultancy | IT Services | Managed IT Services | Data Centre**

Contact us on 020 8216 3333  
or at [housing@sovereign-plc.co.uk](mailto:housing@sovereign-plc.co.uk).  
Alternatively, visit us at [www.sovereign-plc.co.uk](http://www.sovereign-plc.co.uk)



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