

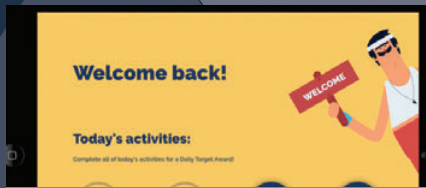


# HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

HOUSING | IT | TELECOMS | BUSINESS | ECOLOGY



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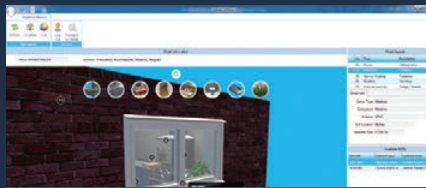
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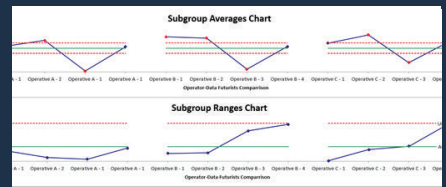
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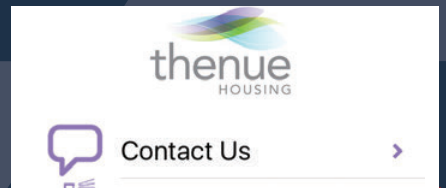
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## EDITOR'S NOTES

**Who's afraid of digital transformation**

From the Housing Technology 2017 conference and executive forum at the beginning of March, it's become abundantly clear that digital transformation is the number one, over-arching priority for most housing providers. And for those housing providers not considering digital transformation, they should probably be asking themselves why they aren't.

As we've covered in previous Editor's Notes, housing providers' boards and executive teams are recognising that their IT capabilities, in the widest sense, are now effectively the single most important factor in determining how well (or otherwise) they can cope with the annual one per cent limit on rent increases, universal credit and arrears, the commercialisation of their services and diversification of their income streams, mergers and acquisitions, and future growth and financial performance.

And alongside those big areas are the (arguably) 'easy wins' of using technology to transform specific areas of housing providers' activities, such as repairs, maintenance, CRM, mobile working, tenant communications and finance.

How different housing providers go about their own digital transformations will vary depending on their size, resources, circumstances and appetite for risk, but one thing is certain; digital transformation can't be ignored.

**Research & procurement**

Housing Technology's online archive of over 2,500 news stories, case studies, feature articles and comment/opinion pieces on all aspects of IT in social housing, spanning almost 10 years, is an invaluable and unique resource if you are involved in any IT procurement projects or researching either potential IT suppliers or prospective customers (in the case of IT suppliers).

Simply visit [www.housing-technology.com](http://www.housing-technology.com) and use the filters on the right-hand side of the homepage to filter your intended research or procurement area by topic, housing provider, IT supplier and/or content type.

**Housing Technology's 2017 Internet of Things report**

Launched at the aforementioned Housing Technology 2017 event, we are about to begin work on our first internet of things report, with the help of Dr Etienne Roesch from the University of Reading.

Based on the EU's Cocoon project on cyber security and emotional psychology in the context of the internet of things, the report will feature brand-new, exclusive research and a survey of how housing providers anticipate incorporating the internet of things into their operations, as well as case studies and articles from housing providers and IT suppliers who are already ahead of the curve with the internet of things.

If you would like to know more about the report and/or be directly involved in contributing to the report, please email [alastair@housing-technology.com](mailto:alastair@housing-technology.com).

**Housing Technology Recruitment**

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 during April 2017.

As part of the introduction of this new service, we are offering all Housing Technology readers (and their respective HR/recruitment teams) the opportunity to post their job vacancies on the site at no charge and with no 'finder's fees'.

If you have any current job vacancies (however senior or junior) or expect to have vacancies in the next few months, please let us know by emailing [alastair@housing-technology.com](mailto:alastair@housing-technology.com). We will then send you a link so that you can submit your vacancies online to the site.

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# MIS AMS supports Warwick Council's 20-year plans

*Having completed a comprehensive 12-month audit of its entire property portfolio, Warwick District Council is now using MIS AMS's ActiveH software to manage its projected stock repairs and voids.*

Amanda Bennett, service improvement manager, Warwick District Council, said, "We've audited all of our 5,600 properties from the roofs down to the bathrooms and kitchens. This gives us visibility on when we need to do planned work over the next 20 years of each asset.

"For example, we can see when properties need rewiring and when windows are ready for replacement. We can also see where those properties are in relation to each other, which means we can be more efficient in terms of hiring contractors to undertake the work in a specific area.

"The software provides us with the visibility of projected costs in terms of repairs and voids. We can therefore better manage our costs and forecasts against our projected rental income. We may have 40 new bathrooms to fit at any one time, and that gives us greater buying power if we can buy in bulk. Everything from guttering, windows, electrics, bathrooms and kitchens means we can negotiate better deals based on the knowledge we now have at our fingertips."

Chris McLaughlin, managing director, MIS AMS, said, "Driving costs down and creating efficiencies is only possible if you have the right information readily available. Warwick District Council has put in the leg-work of auditing its estate and now it can reap those efficiencies over the next 25 years by being better able to manage its estate and the projected costs."

## PARTICK HOUSING AUTOMATES WITH AAREON'S TASKCENTRE



*Partick Housing Association has successfully automated many of its processes using Aareon's TaskCentre software, alongside its Aareon QL housing management system that it has been using since 2007.*

Elaine Lewty, ICT manager, Partick Housing Association, said, "We knew we wanted to introduce some form of automation in order to replace time-consuming data checking and generally work more efficiently. Instead of performing tasks manually, we now use TaskCentre to see if we can make our processes smarter.

"TaskCentre is always in the background, monitoring what is going on. With TaskCentre installed, we're not relying on someone to manually check the system. It has saved a massive amount of time and means we can be proactive, instead of reacting to things after the event."

In the two years that Partick Housing has been using TaskCentre, it has automated a wide range of business processes and extended the capabilities of Aareon QL.

Lewty said, "We perform a routine Direct Debit review and use TaskCentre to query the database and notify us if a tenant needs to adjust their payment. Likewise with arrears - TaskCentre is set up to automatically send a letter or SMS to a tenant if they are more than £250 or £500 in arrears, and if the amount is more than this, it will notify us to take appropriate action.

"Probably the biggest task we addressed was managing and reviewing our

housing waiting list. Initially, we had around 4,500 people on our waiting list and it used to take two of our staff two days per month to go through the list, cross-reference applications and issue letters. That is now handled by TaskCentre via SSRS Reporting. Since we've been doing this, our waiting list has fallen from 4,500 people to just 393 active applications."

TaskCentre has also been set up to generate a letter or SMS for when a gas check is due, along with a date and time that an engineer will visit. To date, this has completely removed the need for Partick Housing to carry out any forced entries.

Lewty said, "TaskCentre is all about making sure any given process is running as it should. It changes the way that we work across the entire business. It takes pressure off the IT team, puts more information into the business and improves staff processes. I'm surprised that we managed without it for so long."

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# BUILDING INFORMATION MODELLING - RETHINKING STOCK CONDITION SURVEYS

Justin Fisher, Housing Product Specialist, Capita

*For the uninitiated, building information modelling (BIM) is a technology platform predicted to revolutionise how we visualise and use data within the built environment. Consisting of broadly two elements, BIM can be summarised as:*

- *3D representations of buildings or infrastructure;*
- *Interoperable data to support digital models and collaborative working practices.*

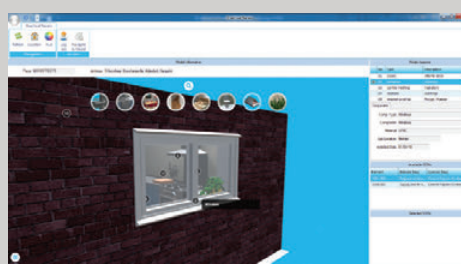
In April 2016, housing providers were mandated to use BIM technologies for their new-build developments where the government provided funding for those schemes. A year after the introduction of BIM level 2, what has been its impact on the sector? From an asset management perspective, where BIM arguably delivers the most benefit, very little.

With new-build completions accounting for less than one per cent of social homes, what is the driver to embed this technology and the visual enrichment that it promises in the operational lifecycle of our assets? The usefulness of BIM in managing assets is unambiguous. From providing a deluge of data at the handover of new developments to the facility to allow tenants to interact with a model of their home to self-serve repair reports, the benefits are tangible. But with so little coverage of housing stock currently integrated, BIM's value will not be fully realised in the delivery of operational efficiency and data accuracy. So, what opportunity exists for housing providers to bridge this data-gap and to baseline their requirements? My answer, and the central theme of this article, is the stock condition survey.

Stock condition surveying is a mature practice in collecting information to assess the performance of buildings and assets. They are carried out by all housing providers and are therefore the perfect intervention to collect the relevant asset data to extend the practice and coverage of BIM. However, aside from increased surveying costs,

which I feel are offset by the resulting enhanced data and 3D representation of the building, the biggest barriers to align current stock condition practices with those required to support BIM are information depth and reach.

In my experience, building elements are captured at a generic level, revealing a disconnect between characteristics held in a database and the asset physicality. For example, housing providers are likely to record 'windows' collectively for the dwelling as a single asset, along with the installation date, quantity, condition, unit cost and life expectancy. This is perhaps a legacy from the Decent Homes standard and other national standards which focused on monitoring these elements at this high level. Still, this recording method prevents us from correlating repairs, servicing and replacement events with the actual assets and 3D model.



**An example of how BIM enables windows to be separated out as individual assets alongside contextual and correlating data.**

Against the backdrop of a real-term cut of 15 per cent from rental income, housing boards are stress-testing their business plans with a greater emphasis on exactitude so that their asset and development investment plans are 'sustainable'. To achieve this, organisations use net present value (NPV) or variants of NPV when appraising the sustainability of their existing and future stock. However NPV on its own is a blunt tool for making this assessment because it doesn't take into account social factors; after all, social homes are not simply financial assets. But it also

hides the relative paucity of data used for asset spending over the lifespan of the business because it may not contain sufficient information to factor in repair, refurbishment and servicing costs into its calculations. The data provided by BIM could increase the precision so that bad decisions are avoided when considering the divestment of housing stock.

As part of the process to broaden the reach of BIM, the same techniques organisations use to extrapolate their sample survey data can be engaged. Using archetypes, the housing provider can extend this more detailed data to those like-typed buildings and blend this information into the existing data for those dwellings not surveyed. Though not to the depth of a 100 per cent BIM survey, this approach would enhance the prevailing data to form a more semantic picture of the asset performance and condition, while keeping costs down. Likewise, models and floorplans constructed as part of the survey can be mapped using the same techniques.

By its nature, BIM, along with its near-horizon siblings the internet of things and big data, requires granularity. Granularity provides nuance, semantics and accuracy. I would argue that surveys should be collecting the level of data commissioned at the development handover. This provides synergies with these other technologies to unlock data possibilities to better inform day-to-day decision-making. With manufacturers getting on board with BIM representations of their products, the management of this wealth of data becomes more automated as the supply chain collaborates. 'Right first-time' repairs are delivered more frequently as the contractor is armed with the parts information ahead of their visit to the tenant's home. Your offices may never hear the question, "do you know where your stop tap is?" again.

Not so long ago, we planned road journeys with the ubiquitous 'map of

## BUILDING INFORMATION MODELLING - RETHINKING STOCK CONDITION SURVEYS

*Continued from previous page*

Britain', supported by the city A-Zs that clogged up our car boots to get us to our destination. Nowadays we think nothing of using Google Maps on our smartphones and tablets to direct us from A to B, pinching to zoom to focus on the fine detail provided by Street View.

I'm hopeful that this analogy will extend to how we communicate with our tenants, contractors and other stakeholders in the coming years when reporting reactive maintenance and planning major repairs to our housing stock, using BIM as the platform for that

collaboration. If we recast how we think about commissioning stock condition surveys, we might just get there sooner.

*Justin Fisher is a housing product specialist at Capita.*

## Castleton wins at Cluid and Arcon Housing

*Castleton Technology has secured two new contracts worth £1.8 million, with a 10-year contract at Cluid Housing Association and a five-year contract with Arcon Housing Association.*

The two contracts are the second and third successive housing management system wins since Castleton's acquisition of Kypera in January 2016. Cluid Housing is Castleton's first customer to buy the full suite of software, providing support for the company's claim to be a 'one-stop shop' for the housing sector.

Anne Southern, finance director, Arcon Housing Association, said, "With the right information available and accessible, Arcon staff can interact more efficiently and effectively with our customers, anytime and anywhere. This strategy will

reduce cost, improve efficiencies and reshape how our front-line services will be delivered. Castleton's Kypera Housing and Documotive Agile in particular will facilitate our move to channel shift and will enhance our customers' ability to initiate, receive and update communications with Arcon on their choice of device.

Dean Dickinson, CEO, Castleton Technology, said, "These new contracts, in particular the one with Cluid, who is our first customer to take the full suite of our products, are proof of our business model. This, combined with a healthy pipeline, means that we are well positioned to maintain our growth while increasing profitability by providing more of our customers with our range of complementary products and services."

## LAUNCH OF RENT-HUB WEB PLATFORM

*CB Solutions has announced its secure tenancy management and communications platform, Rent-Hub. Designed in partnership with housing providers and tenants, Rent-Hub is a secure, protected platform focused on the requirements of tenancy partners across social, private, commercial and student housing.*

Rent-Hub's aim is to create a united movement of honest, hardworking landlords, tenants and agents working together for the best interest of all. The company said that while Rent-Hub can't stop those who wish to operate dishonestly, the level of protection and clarity provided makes Rent-Hub an unattractive option for this element, effectively creating a 'gated community' for honest rental partners.

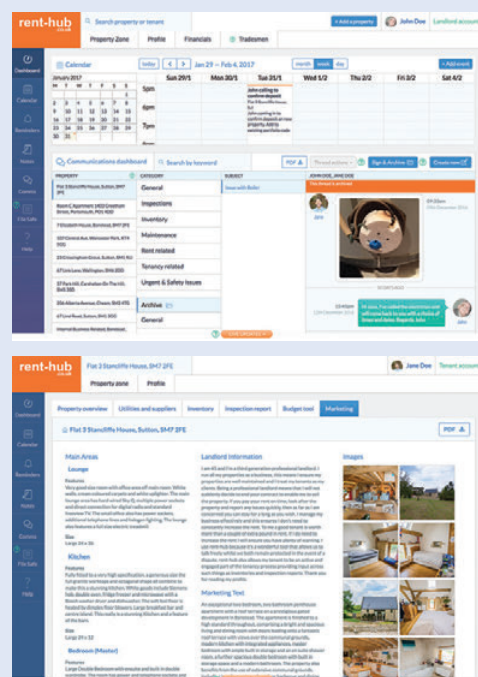
Steve Reice, CEO, Rent-Hub, said, "The government's white paper [on housing] is a step in the right direction, but there seems to be a lack of understanding about what's genuinely needed. It's not about helping one group and demonising

another; landlords, tenants and agents are all valuable pieces within the housing jigsaw.

"A good example of this is the social housing sector. Social housing stock is at an all-time low, and as a result, providers now need to access stock via the private sector. Despite this clear and growing reliance on private landlords, the government has still heavily penalised this group during the last two budgets.

"A sustained building programme is important from a stock basis, but if the foundations aren't solid then you will achieve little. You need to provide landlords, agents and tenants with the tools they need to help them unite and work honestly together.

"Rent-Hub reduces management costs, promotes open communications, deters fraudulent activities and ultimately helps ensure tenancies stay on track. If we can help housing providers run their businesses more profitably, it will slow



the rate of rent increases, begin to take people out of housing poverty and have a positive impact on the housing benefit bill."

# PROSPECT IMPROVES COMMUNICATIONS & CHANNEL SHIFT WITH HOUSING CX



## *Prospect Community Housing has completed its implementation of Civica's Housing Cx web-based HMS.*

Since it went live last April, the housing provider has saved £30,000 in staff costs and 'channel shifted' 35 per cent of its tenants to its online services. PCH also now has a 360-degree view of all tenant interactions within a single system and nine members of staff are delivering real-time services in their communities through mobile working.

Brendan Fowler, director, Prospect Community Housing, said, "Implementing Cx has been a key part of investing in our IT systems. We wanted to streamline our packages into one main database, enable additional functionality such as mobile working, improve our communication with tenants, and reduce costs. We have achieved all of these and more."

### **Havebury now live with Civica Cx Housing**

Havebury Housing has implemented Civica's web-based housing management system as part of its strategy to simplify and deliver better services for its tenants.

Marie McCleary, director of resources, Havebury Housing, said, "After evaluating a number of options, we took a strategic decision to implement both the Civica Cx and Keystone Asset Management systems to simplify and standardise our housing applications."

### **Civica Digital to transform essential services**

With Civica Digital, Civica has launched a new brand with the capability to help housing providers digitally-transform housing services, following the acquisition of digital specialists WTG, IPL and SFW.

Civica Digital combines the digital expertise and experience of recent strategic acquisitions by the company, including Asidua, Web Technology Group (WTG), IPL and SFW. The combined business, which comprises almost 900 employees, provides a complete capability to deliver a new generation of digital services from concept to implementation.

Wayne Story, chief executive, Civica, said, "All organisations are looking to transform the way they work and to make savings, and there is increasing recognition that improvement is dependent on digital technology and automation."

The business has an expert team of digital specialists including security-cleared analysts, engineers and developers, with 415 employees cleared for work on secure government projects.

George Maybury, BT account director for the NI Direct programme, said "Civica Digital has brought a wealth of technical and professional skills to bear, which have been key to the successful launch of a large number of significant digital services for the public sector which in turn positively impact on millions of citizens."

### **Civica's £2 million deal with Leeds City Council**

Leeds City Council has signed a ten-year deal with Civica for the implementation of its housing management system serving its 57,000 properties. The software provider reported that the contract was valued in the region of £2 million over its lifespan.

The new deal is the first since Civica bought the specialist housing software provider Abritas and includes Abritas Housing Needs software.

The seamless integration of Civica Housing Cx, Keystone and Abritas Housing Needs software will give the council better tools to advertise and allocate properties, empower employees with more control over day-to-day property management and provide a central information point for suppliers.

Debra Coupar, executive member for communities, Leeds City Council, said, "We wanted a single supplier to provide a functionally rich, fully integrated, end-to-end housing management solution that will transform services to our tenants via enhancing mobile and remote working, better data quality and integration, and increased functionality and efficiency."

# 1st Touch Digital Transformation



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# CHP take full Capita Open suite

*As part of extensive business transformation plans across the company, Chelmer Housing Partnership has signed with Capita to migrate to the company's complete Open suite of products as well as implementing additional functionality to further boost its efficiencies and customer services.*

CHP has been using Capita Housing to manage its operations since 1994. It is now looking to transform its housing management operations through the implementation of efficient, streamlined business processes via workflow and automation, streamlining the ongoing technical requirements of IT solutions, and supporting large-scale channel shift and digitisation strategies.

Included within the Capita's Open suite's implementation will be functionality across mobile working, advanced reporting and financial, asset and property management. Alongside the migration, CHP is also implementing several new solutions to enhance its digital and channel shift strategies, including OpenEDM for integrated electronic document management, and online self-service with OpenAccess.

Kevin Darby, ICT manager, Chelmer Housing Partnership, said, "We're really pleased to be moving to Capita Open. The breadth of the functionality available and continued investment in its development gives us confidence it's the best solution to support us in delivering our objectives. Digital and channel-shift initiatives are particularly important to us, so we plan to broaden these out further following our go-live, implementing new areas for online services such as self-service repairs bookings."

Michelle Tyler, director of Capita's housing business, said, "CHP is moving



to the Open suite at a very exciting time, and they're in good company, with 12 other Capita Housing customers also registered to migrate."

## Capita to provide better outcomes for Denbighshire Council

Denbighshire County Council has recently gone live with Capita's Advantage Impact case management software.

Last year, the council identified a range of business aims to be met, including the need for consistency and digitisation across its range of referral assessment and support planning services. One of Denbighshire's challenges to overcome in achieving true digital working was the area's rural nature which, in places, is subject to limited or no internet connectivity.

Another challenge was around reporting, having identified the need to meet its regular reporting requirements to the Welsh Assembly more efficiently and to prove the impact and results of its services.

Now live using Advantage Impact, Denbighshire is reaping a range of

benefits from its newly-digitised and joined-up case management system, from improved internal and external communications to a range of operational efficiencies. The system's dedicated Welsh Assembly report uses the exact template provided by the government, allowing Denbighshire's monthly reporting to be generated quickly and easily, in the correct format, with very little staff input.

Angela Hesford, supporting independent living manager, Denbighshire County Council, said, "With Advantage Impact, we are more efficient than ever, providing better services and outcomes for the vulnerable people we serve, and empowering our staff with all the information and tools they need, out in the community.

"The time we now save in managing and delivering reports is fantastic. At the touch of a button we can quickly and easily produce the official statistic reports required by the Welsh Assembly, and the data available allows us to really justify and improve the services we offer."

# CAPITA

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# AXIS REPAIRS 400,000 HOMES WITH ROCC SOLUTION



*ROCC is helping one of housing's largest contractors, Axis Europe, cut costs and improve its repairs delivery across 400,000 homes.*

Around 450,000 repairs are raised every year via Axis' clients, which means it's vital the company has a unified system that's capable of processing and managing the number of jobs and orders that are continually raised, as well as the vast amount of data that entails.

Through staff engagement, Axis communicated the benefits of PDAs replacing paper to its repairs operatives. The company chose to implement the ROCC solution after it had outgrown its previous system.

Neil Betton, director of digital and IT, Axis Europe, said: "Many of our long-lasting relationships have been built on transparency and that's something that the ROCC solution allows. With access to the Uniclass system, our customers can see true costs and job status. This has helped us build a unique level of trust."

Mark Oscroft, systems manager for digital and IT, Axis Europe, said, "The ROCC system allows us to take different client information and translate it to an Axis standard to allow standard reporting across all contracts. This translation layer

also allows Axis to configure some client requests for interface changes without the need for extra development. When new customers have software that we can integrate with the ROCC software, turnaround times and costs are vastly reduced because they are able to make use of previous developments.

"Anything we ask of ROCC, it delivers. Most recently, this has included many interface changes to fit with new processes. ROCC supported us in creating a new commercial screen designed to show if jobs are commercially viable. It's great to know that if we have a new business idea or are attracting new clients, they can be realised.

"The software has most definitely boosted the efficiency of our repairs service. Less time is wasted, thanks to better scheduling and our operatives being equipped with PDAs. Less time being wasted means less money is too.

"In terms of our clients, we've had some great feedback. The experiences of tenants have improved, with more guaranteed appointments and specific times being allocated through the system. This means tenants aren't waiting around at home unnecessarily."

## Thirteen Group selects ROCC for repairs and maintenance



**thirteen**  
Managing and building homes

**Russell Thompson, Director of property services, Thirteen Group**

ROCC has also announced that Thirteen Group will be implementing its Uniclass housing repairs and maintenance software.

Russell Thompson, director of property services, Thirteen Group, said, "As a caring landlord and housing developer, one of our priorities is to deliver great customer service.

"Our work with ROCC will enhance our repairs system, helping us to improve our service even further and support our commitment to growing our business."

## FINANCE MANAGEMENT

# Rural Housing's component accounting with Real Asset Management



*Rural Housing has implemented Real Asset Management's component accounting software to improve*

*its fixed asset management processes, replacing its previous Excel-based reporting.*

Elaine McGonigle, finance manager, Rural Housing, said, "RAM's software encompasses all of the component

accounting rules, including FRS 102 and SORP 2014. The integration with our finance system is a huge benefit and being able to automatically post journal entries to our accounts software will save us a significant amount of time.

"Previously, all components were recorded and depreciated using spreadsheets. As we've grown, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain the amount of detail that we needed. Producing reports on the properties was also difficult, and when it came

to calculating depreciation using spreadsheets, it was a very manual process that was subject to human error.

"RAM's software will eradicate the risk of such issues whilst also providing us with a user-friendly reporting mechanism. Being able to immediately run in-depth depreciation reports is going to prove immensely beneficial because our finance team will no longer have to compile the required information manually and will be able to focus on other tasks."



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# FLEXIBLE PAYMENT OPTIONS FOR UC ARREARS

Ross Macmillan, head of Research & Intelligence, Allpay

*Research conducted by the National Federation of ALMOS (NFA) and the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) recently found that 86 per cent of universal credit claimants living in social housing are in arrears. For 59 per cent of claimants, this equates to more than one month's rent, with the problem steadily getting worse since the implementation of universal credit two years ago. Alarming, the average value of arrears these tenants owe has nearly doubled to £615 since March 2016, when the sum was £321.*

Not only is this putting tenancies at risk, but it's having a significant impact on housing providers and local authorities' rental income streams and the long-term ability for them to provide essential services to their communities.

What's the solution? While the NFA and ARCH research points to a mixture of tenant behaviour, administrative problems and issues with some specific elements of UC's design, we would argue that ensuring landlords offer their tenants a wide range of flexible payment options can help combat arrears, reduce manual administration and provide assurance for tenants.

While few people in the social housing sector would argue against the central premise of universal credit – bringing together in and out of work benefits into one system to make work pay – alarm bells are ringing about the administration of the roll-out and the black and white nature of its application to social housing tenants.

The NFA and ARCH research brings all of this to the fore in its latest survey results of ALMOs and stock-holding councils. However, while the sector continues to lobby government over the administration of the scheme, there are some very practical steps housing providers can implement now to make it easier for their tenants to pay their rent and set up automated payment schedules, thereby reducing arrears and staff time.

## Automated payments

One of the biggest impacts is making your preferred payment option (often

direct debit) easy for a tenant to set up, allowing them to choose a collection date and frequency that suits them and their circumstances. Last year, Allpay's own research found that fewer than 30 per cent of ALMOs offer a paperless sign-up for direct debits and fewer still offer their tenants collection dates on any day of the month, thereby significantly hampering take-up and risking arrears under universal credit. The figure is more concerning for stock-holding local authorities, with less than 20 per cent offering a paperless facility and just 4 per cent offering collection dates on any day of the month.

It's staggering because the effects of offering this flexibility are two-fold. According to the Housing Quality Network's Rent and Income Excellence Network (RIEN), housing providers moving to any-day direct debits have increased take-up by up to 20 per cent, while two ALMOs Allpay has worked with to facilitate paperless, any-day direct debits (Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing and Your Homes Newcastle) have increased take-up by more than 100 per cent over a two-year period.

With more tenants signed up to an automated payment schedule, even if they are just small, weekly collections, the number of ad-hoc payments being made by more expensive payment channels, such as card and cash, is reduced, and so is the risk of arrears. Importantly, because universal credit can be paid on any day of the month, depending on when the claim is first made by the tenant, being able to offer a facility to collect the payments close to when they receive their universal credit is vitally important because it minimises the risk of it being spent on other things.

Having also recently launched the ability for housing providers to automatically re-attempt a failed direct debit when it occurs – and witnessing the subsequent success rate – it's clear that this option should also be assessed. All banks are now required to offer basic bank accounts that don't penalise customers for failed direct debits, thus automatically collecting a failed payment five days

after the original failure should be an option for housing providers to look at.

Where we have implemented this, up to 33 per cent of failed payments are being collected, saving resources and staff time from needing to manually chase the arrears. With average income officer costs at approximately £7.20 per contact, the ability to automatically reattempt the collection for a few pence per transaction is much more cost effective.

We know from our own research that having control of the payment is a significant factor for households budgeting on low incomes. We also know that up to 20 per cent of customers can phone into the office to make the same weekly or monthly payment. As such, landlords should look at whether a recurring card payment option can be offered to tenants that delivers both automation and control. Our own service puts the tenant in full control to cancel the instruction at any time, with no fees for insufficient funds, a choice of frequencies, and with email notifications on set-up, amendment and cancellation. With the ability to set the first payment in advance, this could be set up ahead of a tenant's first universal credit payment, so they are already on a schedule in advance.

## Mobile payments

How many housing providers offer a mobile payment facility for tenants to pay their rent? We know from our own data that mobile app transactions now typically represent up to 12 per cent of a landlord's debit/credit card payment mix, with the average transaction value often more than a direct debit or cash transaction, showing tenants have confidence in mobile as a payment channel.

In a post-universal credit world, the NFA and ARCH research shows that there are a myriad of factors leading to the high level of arrears, but housing providers should ensure that their payment options aren't also a contributory factor.

*Ross Macmillan is head of research and intelligence at Allpay.*

# NEW CUSTOMERS FOR ORCHARD'S FINANCE SOFTWARE

*Orchard has reported that Bolton at Home, Langley Housing Trust and Orwell Housing are planning to implement its OpenAccounts financial management solution. Orchard has also secured a new five-year contract with Orbit Group to continue supporting OpenAccounts.*

Orchard said that with Orchard Financials, the value of the solution is delivered through a combination of an award-winning finance system and Orchard's specialist sector expertise and knowledge, as shown by the company being awarded the best ABS (now Advanced) OpenAccounts business partner for the 10th consecutive year.

John Doughty, director, Orchard, said, "It's the capability of a fully-integrated finance solution offering functionality specific to the housing sector and flexibility and scalability to evolve, coupled with our ability to deliver a finance solution that exceeds expectations and addresses real day-to-day concerns while still delivering against the value for money agenda, which is why Orchard Financials continues to achieve high levels of adoption."

## Orchard gains new Promaster customers



Gentoo Group, St Albans City and District Council and Regenda Group have all recently signed up to use Orchard's Promaster asset management software, including on- and offline mobile working

and full reporting capabilities for the Decent Homes, Scottish Housing Quality and Welsh Housing Quality standards.

**Bolton  
at Home**

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Doughty said, "As housing providers look to save time and money, it's essential that there is tight and efficient integration between all key business systems, including property and asset management, housing, finance, direct workforce management, scheduling, and CRM systems. We have therefore invested significant effort into enhancing Promaster's integration capabilities with the other applications used by housing providers."



## Digital evolution from Orchard

Orchard has reported that following the launch of its next-generation digital platform last October, it has received commitments from Kingdom Housing, Saxon Weald, Severn Vale, South Liverpool Homes and Yorkshire Housing to deploy the software.

Tenancy services and self-appointing repairs are the first elements in Orchard's digital platform, and were developed in collaboration with First Wessex (soon to become Vivid), Futures Housing and Greensquare.

Danny Tobin, chief operating officer, Orchard, "While our customers are finding that tenancy services is a great place to start, they are also quickly seeing the value in building their digital investment in us through our self-appointing repairs and online lettings offerings too."

# Qube Global partners with Fidelity Payment

*Qube Global Software has partnered with electronic payment provider Fidelity Payment in order to make payment processes easier for housing providers and local authorities.*

Through its partnership with Fidelity Payment, Qube Global has negotiated a preferential rate for payments processing for its customers, enabling them to

reduce the costs of over-the-phone payments, cut card processing fees and remove terminal costs, resulting in typical savings of around 30 per cent.

Qube Global said that Fidelity's payment gateway works seamlessly with its systems and processes, with dedicated representatives for sales and technical

support, making the set up and ongoing management of online payments simpler and easier.



# IS THE LHA CAP WORKING?

Pascale Mezac, Consultant, SDS

*Is the local housing allowance (LHA) cap creating a postcode lottery for the most vulnerable in our society? Where rents are at their lowest in the poorer areas of the UK, the development of new homes is often being redirected to less needy areas in order to gain higher returns.*

With various freezes and cuts in its rate, the cap is now more distant from reality, despite being branded as a panacea for the setting of all rents. It is not sensitive enough to local nuances and therefore not fit for purpose.

The NHF's policy officer, Nick Yandle, said, "The impact of the LHA cap has a very strong regional element, because of the variations in headroom between existing rents and the local housing allowance across the country. The cap will prompt important questions about how best to deliver an organisation's mission, the type of housing developed and the people allocated to new homes."

The hunger for new homes is such that demand for all property types is usually there anyway but tenants with the most pressing social needs may be disregarded from the equation. Despite more social housing being needed, we may find that because of the LHA, developments will have to include more sub-market rents, shared ownerships, market rents and homes for outright sale.

Balancing the long-term investment is overshadowed by immediate concerns around the capacity of people to pay for their homes and services. With above-inflation building cost increases, are housing providers taking greater risks or finding opportunities in a less regulated market?

Donna Johnston, CEO of South Western Housing Society, said, "The LHA cap has inevitably led to us assessing where we can develop in order to meet viability criteria. Growth becomes concentrated in higher-value areas where the LHA cap yields higher returns. This has the potential for communities in lower-value areas to miss out on new affordable housing. To redress this, we are working

very closely with our relevant local authorities to secure alternative subsidy revenues to support the building of new homes where they're needed."

The need for greater development efficiency is increasing; Savills predicts residential-rent growth of 15 per cent during the next five years while LHA rates are frozen for four years and social rents are being reduced by one per cent for four years.

## Mind the gap

If you apply those percentages to the affordable rents in relation to market rents, this would mean that the affordable rents cap should decrease from 80 per cent to 67 per cent of market rents by 2020 to maintain affordability (and from 65 per cent to 54 per cent in London).

Financial plans are scrutinised regularly but I am always surprised by how little development appraisals and assumptions are challenged during that cycle. There is still a disconnect between development and finance, with development assumptions uplifted by inflation annually, but the real challenge of whether or not those assumptions mean anything isn't always there. The financial plan may be challenged in 'perfect storm' scenarios but are the development assumptions in appraisals still valid? Only retain those that are relevant to your business.

Development risk should be assessed against the changing environment and we need to avoid inventing KPIs to reassure ourselves, defining top performance for our organisation and having a golden thread between assumption parameters and KPIs. The complexity of development appraisals is growing in line with the number of factors being brought into consideration and the company structures set up to mitigate risks, making appraisals difficult to understand for our customers and our boards. Furthermore, the deal-based rent approach for future rent settlements will only serve to muddy the waters.

Housing providers have lowered their expectations in terms of their return on investment in the past 10 years, from 25 to 40+ year payback programmes for scheme appraisals, often after significant internal subsidies. If we don't want to pay loans back to the bankers, merely to reach a borrowing equilibrium, why measure it?

We should be clear on our appetite for risk. With a lower internal rate of return (IRR) than in the past, linked with lower interest rates, the need to incur a higher level of debt implies an increase in development risk. Timing is key; the net present value (NPV) discount and period need to relate to the business we are in.

Quality and sustainability in appraisals need to be factored in to reconcile development efficiency with efficient building management. In our drive to create capacity to develop more, we need to assess which part of the business is paying for the internal subsidy and the long-term impact of our actions.

## More homes by 2021

How many homes and the path to get there is not clear, with opportunities and stumbling blocks along the way. There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer and, because housing needs are high no matter what, the potential rental income (with its impact on return on investment) drives the development type, sometimes to the detriment of the more vulnerable.

We should check who the real beneficiaries of the schemes are and question whether social housing tenants are shareholders, customers or merely one source of our income.

Using the LHA cap as a yardstick for rents in social housing is not helpful, especially not for supported housing. Not only does it exacerbate local differences with its geographical lottery, but it's relevant to neither the tenant nor the housing provider.

The LHA cap is benchmarking apples against pears; it's time for a rethink.

*Pascale Mezac is a consultant at SDS.*



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# BUDGET TIME - ARE YOU SPENDING WISELY?

## TOP TIPS FOR REDUCING IT COSTS AND INCREASING EFFICIENCY

Paul Oggelsby, Managing Director, Riverlite.

*As organisations across the country approach the end of another financial year, all eyes are on budgets. Assessing spending over the last year and crunching the numbers for the year ahead is the name of the game right now.*

For housing providers, sensitivity to cost is crucial and it always has been. We know from our work in the sector that housing providers continue to be challenged by budgets; needing to cut costs. However, making sure there isn't a negative impact on the delivery of day-to-day operations from any cost cutting is just as important. And as the sector starts to plan for the next financial year, those pressures are a talking point once more. We look at two key topics that are on the minds of many across the sector at this time of the year.

### Spending wisely

Organisations of all shapes and sizes are increasingly shifting their focus to an operational expenditure model and reducing their capital expenditure. Compared to an on-premise IT solution, a cloud-based IT solution can offer the perfect opportunity to do just that, with no costly up-front costs for on-site infrastructure, instead working to a subscription-based model for the service you are using.

This approach gives housing providers in particular the opportunity to demonstrate their sensitivity and commitment to cost reductions, by seriously considering the avoidance of capital expenditure from an IT perspective. We all know that buying IT kit is expensive; moving to a subscription-based model with access to a cloud-based system to store and access data spreads the cost, with no upgrade costs as technology evolves.

But it's more than that. Moving to the cloud is not and should not be a decision based only on shifting IT costs around the budget. What if we were to tell you that by moving to a cloud-based IT

model, you could not only reduce those IT budget line-items but potentially increase productivity too?

The right technology can enhance the business on a wider scale; improving both end-users and customers' experiences as well as the organisation's bottom line. Lower costs for IT operations, convenience for employees and a greater agility make cloud solutions an all-round viable option for a housing association.

### Increasing operational efficiency

Last year, the NHF and HouseMark published a report exploring housing associations' efficiency between 2008 and 2015. In it, they suggested that housing providers have maintained high service standards in their core operations while reducing many key costs. This is a positive picture for the sector and highlights that keeping an eye on costs is important, but not at the sacrifice of doing the job itself.

However, we know that the cost of operational expenses versus their wider impact is always on the agenda for housing associations. The technology you use can have a significant effect on both capital and operational expenditure. It is for this very reason that the introduction of fully-outsourced IT solutions and cloud economics are gaining popularity, helping housing associations to be cost efficient and operationally efficient too.

While outsourcing your IT might seem to be the more expensive option at first glance (due to ongoing subscription costs and paying for server space), the costs associated with managing your IT in-house can quickly eclipse those of third-party IT or cloud solutions. That's because the most significant contributor to costs in in-house IT is often the purchase, maintenance and upgrading of hardware, which is of course completely removed by opting for a cloud service instead.

That's not all. The costs of IT staff salaries, equipment repairs, increases to the electricity bill and the inevitable cost of system failure (both in terms of budget and efficiency) quickly add up. Outsourced IT solutions, by contrast, can provide an all-encompassing service at an up-front cost. Should your data needs change with time, you can adjust your cloud subscription accordingly, without the need to completely replace your hardware.

Of course, outsourcing the management of your IT assets still comes with operational expenses, but without the additional burden of capital expense in the form of new equipment. With technology continuing to evolve, IT solutions are no longer a one-off cost; upgrades are a necessity, and often at a high cost where an on-premise system is involved. By contrast, upgrades are usually included and absorbed within a cloud-based subscription package.

More than ever, housing associations are working across multiple locations too – and these sites need to be managed and with a seamless approach. It's not always an easy process, and can certainly be hampered by an IT solution that's not up to scratch. There are lots of value considerations that come into play, such as the speed, accessibility and scalability of an IT system to name a few. Even if your organisation works from just one central office, it's likely that your staff will log in remotely from time to time. Is your system able to fully deliver on the challenge?

It's perhaps no surprise that more and more housing associations are using an outsourced IT solutions provider to reduce risk and capital expense. This transition has a clear, positive effect on their budgets and overall organisational efficiency. That's certainly what we saw in our work at Action Housing, who were sensitive to an ageing infrastructure and with a desire to increase workforce

## BUDGET TIME - ARE YOU SPENDING WISELY?

*Continued from previous page*

flexibility. Our cloud-based solution led to a 36 per cent reduction in IT infrastructure operating costs and a heightened user experience.

Good budget management in a challenging climate isn't just about

reducing spending, it's about the best result for the business from that spending.

As English biologist Thomas Huxley said, "Economy does not lie in sparing money, but in spending it wisely".

*Paul Oggelsby is managing director of Riverlite.*

## Poplar HARCA drives down arrears with RentSense



*Poplar HARCA has reduced arrears and prepared itself for universal credit with Mobysoft's RentSense software.*

Before implementing RentSense, Poplar HARCA was using its housing management system to flag arrears cases to its income team. However, the performance and effectiveness of the team was being compromised because the system was flagging cases that required no action and missing cases that did need action.

Dawn Box, rents manager, Poplar HARCA, said, "The missing cases that the HMS was not picking up were hugely important, because they were simply going into oblivion as no one was looking at them."

Poplar HARCA deployed RentSense towards the end of 2015; at the time their arrears were 4.5 per cent and the income team was being presented with almost 3,000 cases per week by the HMS.

Box said, "I wanted the team to work the cases they needed to look at and in the correct priority, rather than working aimlessly through a list and not knowing which ones to look at first. They needed some structure."

RentSense has helped Poplar HARCA reduce arrears by £340,000 in twelve months, down to less than four per cent in the first year and are now at 3.5 per cent, as of February 2017, and income



officers' caseloads have decreased by 42 per cent.

### **Alliance Homes adopts Rentsense for universal credit**

Alliance Homes is set to go live with Mobysoft's RentSense software to help it mitigate the effects of universal credit. The Somerset-based housing provider will begin to deal with the full effects of universal credit in June 2017 when it is introduced at Weston-super-Mare's Job Centre Plus.

Until now, the impact of universal credit has been limited due to the relatively small numbers of claimants, but from June Alliance Homes is expecting to see a surge in claimants as the full service is introduced.

Matt Hines, housing service manager, Alliance Homes, said, "We carried out due diligence by researching and visiting organisations that were successfully

using RentSense. We needed to be sure that we were buying a product that had demonstrable outcomes and mitigated against the impact of welfare reform.

"With limited internal resources, we expect that RentSense will improve capacity within our income team to reduce rent arrears and increase our income officers' productivity."

### **Waltham Forest Council now live with Mobysoft's predictive analytics software**

The London Borough of Waltham Forest has gone live with Mobysoft's predictive analytics tool RentSense. The London Borough, with over 10,000 properties, was keen to mitigate the on-going effects of welfare reform as well as reducing its rent arrears.

Shayem Pervez, income services manager, London Borough of Waltham Forest, said, "Full-service universal credit goes live in Waltham Forest in November 2017 and we need to create capacity within the team in order to mitigate its effects.

"On the day Rentsense went live, some of our staff weren't sure what to expect, but from the start they could see it was doing the time-consuming work so they didn't have to, which is the beauty of RentSense."



# RELATIONSHIPS REALLY MATTER

Chris Cliffe, Director, CJC Procurement

*The world around us is changing and you can't turn anywhere these days without hearing the phrase 'digital transformation'. Everyone seems to be writing about technology and the race to automate and use augmented intelligence in business. While IBM's 'Watson' is now in daily use by IBM's procurement teams around the world and some early customers are in the pipeline to buy it too, the reality is that the majority of organisations, whether in the private, public or not-for-profit sectors, are only at the start of this adventure.*

Of course, it is crucial that our organisations do focus on adopting technology. The role of the CIO is at least equally important as that of the CPO. Yet the technology focus can't be at the expense of the human focus. Relationships really matter. Relationships will increasingly be the differentiator as 'process' and 'transactions' are automated and 'value-adding' activities become the sole human focus over the next decade or so.

## Buyer-supplier relationships

An obvious place to start, yet it's well worth remembering because it's so often overlooked. Now, there's a separate debate to be had about where 'procurement' starts and ends, but I think we can generally agree that a tender process in itself delivers zero value whatsoever. Value for money can only be obtained from good performance of the resultant contract.

I spoke last year about 'outcome-focused engagements' at the Procurious Big Ideas Summit. I believe that it is far more positive to focus on the objectives and outcomes required than it is to focus on the minutiae of problems and who's to blame for them. Indeed, putting aside 'procurement' theory for a moment, if we look at the ITIL service management text book, it clearly states that, "good people

can make a bad contract work; equally, bad people can make a great contract fail".

Having the right relationships, between the right people, on both sides of a contract is how you get the best value. Investing time and effort into building, nurturing and maintaining good relationships between buyer and supplier teams will facilitate far more value from contracts rather than letting and forgetting. Indeed, when those difficult conversations are needed for when things don't go as planned, trust me, you'll be glad you know the person you've got to call before you pick up the phone.

For example, let's assume a big problem happened last week.

- Scenario one: you call your account manager to complain, having not spoken to them in months, because 'someone' messed up.
- Scenario two: you call your account manager whom you spoke to recently and you know they've just returned from their first family holiday for five years having had an awful couple of years for various personal reasons and in fact, they'd booked a restaurant you'd recommended. While they were away, a junior member of their team was covering for them and they may have dropped the ball.

In both scenarios, the same problem has happened and it needs fixing, but I suspect the majority of us would approach those two calls differently and the outcomes from those calls would also be different. Think also about whether you would start that call with the phrase, "How can I help you fix this problem?".

## Stakeholders

Stakeholders. An increasingly over-used, catch-all term to dehumanise people

whom we go to work with day in, day out. During the Procurious event I mentioned earlier, 50 top procurement influencers got together and there was a real appetite to avoid any more whingeing about procurement 'not having a seat at the table'. The almost unanimous sentiment was: stop whingeing and start listening to your business. Investing time and effort in establishing relationships with the key individuals in our businesses will pay you back in spades.

Ask questions. Be interested. Get under the skin of the challenges your colleagues face. Don't be constrained by the perception of silos. For example, if you're an IT category manager, it's just as important to be interested in what's happening in every area of the business and what customers' challenges are as it is to know the cost of a SaaS licence.

We must always remember why we do what we do. The purpose of procurement is not to further the cause of procurement. Of course, a very happy side effect of an effective, modern, highly-engaged and enabling procurement team is that the reputation of the profession will improve to everyone's benefit, but that can't be the motivation. The role of procurement is simple; it exists to facilitate and enable the organisation(s) it supports in achieving its vision, mission and goals.

In human terms, we are there to help our colleagues enjoy work through enabling their success and in achieving their objectives. In my opinion, this is a differentiator between good and bad procurement. Establishing relationships with stakeholders based on a genuine interest in understanding their challenges and seeking to help them overcome obstacles proactively will lead to game-changing relationships rather than relationships based on reactively promoting procurement process, policy and procedures.

## RELATIONSHIPS REALLY MATTER

*Continued from previous page*

### Career development and credibility

Relationships really matter for professional development, career development and credibility. If you look at the Deloitte 2017 CPO survey or any recent recruitment agency survey, there will be analysis pointing out that the procurement profession is dogged by a lack of 'soft' skills and there is a real talent shortage in respect of interpersonal capabilities. IT departments too, who are increasingly brokering services from suppliers, are not traditionally the source of interpersonal expertise. However, both procurement and IT teams must step up here, or the 'bots' really will take our jobs.

I believe we all need to take personal responsibility for our own learning and development. Our organisations will usually provide training to help us do the

jobs our employers need us to do, better. However, it is up to us individually to take ownership of our preparation for our longer term career aspirations.

I have spent years hearing how important networking is, yet I've really struggled to do it. I still struggle, it's not a natural activity, yet the more I do it, the more I agree how important it is. Relationships really matter with those in your network. The aim isn't to collect as many LinkedIn connections as you can, but to connect to as many people as you can. Connect in this sense means to talk, ask, listen, learn, impart knowledge and, most importantly, follow up on conversations.

If I learnt one thing last year, it's that you never know where your next opportunity may come from. I've found that networking has opened doors to

some interesting conversations and opportunities. Those might be long-term, far-off ideas, yet in the short term, I have found that networking also has immediate pay-offs in terms of the points above. Being market aware and having your finger on the pulse is incredibly powerful in being a credible professional in managing contracts and suppliers and with developing productive relationships with colleagues.

Investing time and effort into building, nurturing and maintaining productive relationships really matters.

*Chris Cliffe is the director of CJC Procurement.*



## Insight into arrears at North Devon Homes

*North Devon Homes is using Housing Partners' Insight software for early debt interventions.*

The Insight software highlights tenants' financial vulnerabilities so that the housing provider can offer better support and secure vital income, while ensuring tenants can maintain their tenancies.

Insight collates information from North Devon Homes' housing management system and combines it with external

data gathered from hundreds of third-party sources.

Equipped with valuable tenant data, housing officers and local authority staff can now make more informed decisions concerning their tenants and identify financial and social risks, making first visits to tenants count.

Marc Rostock, director of neighbourhoods, North Devon Homes, said, "Insight is supporting our financial

inclusion campaign, allowing targeted assistance. In one project, we engaged with four tenants with problems that might have otherwise not been noticed as quickly.

"Insight has allowed our teams to ask simple but powerful questions, going beyond our traditional data. The information lets us target staff visits more effectively, meaning our assistance can be directed to those who need it most."



# LOOKING BEYOND HOUSING FOR IT PROCUREMENT

Rob Bryan, Operations Director & Transformation Specialist, Vantage Business Solutions

*Housing providers need to adopt a more commercial approach to IT procurement and a proven approach to IT implementation that is commonplace in many other sectors, according to Rob Bryan, operations director and transformation specialist at Vantage Business Solutions.*

My experience of procurement in other sectors is that an approach of 'outputs first' must be embedded in the process. All too often, housing associations are trying to shoehorn old processes into new systems, and when they write an IT specification, they approach it from a view that it must fit how the service works currently. Purchasing offers a great opportunity to rethink how you deliver services, especially in repairs and maintenance.

By putting outputs and performance reporting requirements at the top of the wish-list for any specification, housing providers will wrap the technologies

around service needs, not just the layers of processes that sit behind them. For example, we helped the team at Broadacres Housing Association to design, procure and implement new mobile working and scheduling solutions that go beyond the usual functionality. Broadacres now use the tools, including software from 1st Touch and DRS, to generate productivity improvements. By going beyond the simple appointment scheduling tool, they created smarter systems to intelligently schedule jobs, saving time and money and delivering a more effective service to tenants.

Broadacres' business support director, Chris Fawcett, said, "We underwent a large technology change when we set up an internal maintenance service, and operatives who were 'tuped' over were used to working on paper-based services and we had to get them on-board from the beginning. We now benefit from digital solutions that have

helped us mobilise over 60 operatives by taking a root and branch approach to transformation."

Truly engaging service users in the design process can really bring a fresh perspective and help embed the required change.

How many organisations are mapping out the stages of their future services and getting service user input to improve the process before they begin a re-procurement exercise? This is where other sectors such as the automotive industry excel, with continuous improvement points and truly engaging service users. Now that's how you achieve true innovation.

*Rob Bryan is the operations director and a transformation specialist at Vantage Business Solutions.*

## Aspire Housing uses Manifest's Universal Adapter to launch new Handepay payment platform



*As one of the first users of Manifest's Universal Adapter for a mobile working project, Aspire Housing knew that a payment solution with functional APIs could be integrated using the Manifest Universal Adapter Toolkit. As a result, the housing provider selected the Handepay payments platform that's widely used beyond the housing sector.*

Aspire Housing's original vision was to build a more efficient payment solution for taking phone payments in its contact centre and then using that as the basis for building further payment channels through its customer portal and mobile payments. Some of the project's success criteria included the use of tenants' standard debit

and credit cards, the removal of a proprietary payment card, a reduction in the cost of collecting payments without affecting the amount collected and integration with Aspire's existing housing management system.

The project comprised three critical streams of work to ensure successful delivery: the configuration of Manifest's Universal Adapter Connector that links direct to Handepay APIs to download and process payment data; the audited import process into the housing management system; and the customisation of housing management screens to allow contact-centre staff to take payments seamlessly, without needing to jump between screens and applications.

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# FIVE STEPS TO EXPLOIT YOUR ASSETS' BIG DATA

Stewart Little, CEO, IRT Surveys

*We live in a world obsessed with data and, thanks to the internet, we can track, monitor and report on just about everything. The more data, the better, and big data is now big business. The danger is that data gets misunderstood, becomes overwhelming and then detrimental to your business.*

Information overload is very real and can have a paralysing effect. Faced with almost infinite quantities of data, the choices and decisions themselves can become infinite. Getting your hands on good quality data starts, funnily enough, at the beginning, but also at the end.

## Step 1 - Acknowledge the need for data

As a housing stock portfolio & asset manager, you have a task list as long as your arm, targets and KPIs to keep you focused, a finite budget and yet still only 24 hours in a day. So, how will you hit those targets with the resources at your disposal? Data would be great, wouldn't it? It could help you focus your efforts and optimise your budget. That's an excellent starting point; just understanding the need for accurate data itself means you're serious about the challenge. The next step is to decide on what it is you want to measure.

## Step 2 - Agree why you need the data

Now you have decided, "wouldn't it be great if...", it's important that you review and agree on the "why". Why gather all this data? To start a successful data management programme, you have to start at the end; what's your overall objective and what do you want to achieve?

If you have a stock of 1,000 houses and 10 per cent of them are not meeting the government's energy standard, you'll most likely want to identify those homes and tenants in most need of help and support. In parallel to that objective, you'll probably want to know if there is a subset of those homes with tenants in

fuel poverty and, in turn, which of that subset are eligible for grant funding, and for what. Once you have that data, you might also want to cross reference those homes with your maintenance budget and see if the items you wish to implement tie in with any scheduled maintenance programmes that may be already planned but are beyond your direct remit.

Today's economic climate and variables in the energy sector mean that understanding your data and optimising your budget are no longer luxuries – they are essentials.

## Step 3 - Decide on data collection

The next thing is to decide what data you will collect, who will be collecting it, what you will do with it, and how you will store and maintain it.

It's fine to collect all this data, but there are data maintenance decisions attached. Do you know what you want to do with it once you have it? Have you agreed a format for keeping it up to date and for ensuring the accuracy of what you have? Let's assume you have; assumptions are dangerous, but let's move along.

How will you collate the data? To whom do you trust it? What's the most economical way to get information on your 1,000 homes or the buildings you manage? Building surveying is one of the options.

Do you already employ an ICT manager who can help you integrate, cleanse and augment what you already hold? After all, you may already have most of what you need.

Businesses grow organically or through mergers and acquisitions. Many great housing associations have grown this way. That can mean several things. On the positive side, with everybody on

board, change can be embraced quickly and the best of both parties taken for the benefit of the newly-formed organisation. On the negative side, organic growth can be slow and poor practices are likely to become culturally ingrained. Rapid funded growth can result in growth at all costs, with poor systems and processes, leading to a mash-up of two or more systems vying for attention. This in turn will create conflicts, both in terms of the data itself and the team tasked with managing the stock.

Exploiting and understanding your assets' big data is imperative if you want to make wise decisions on their future improvement. You should therefore set out: what you need to know; what you would like to know; and what you do actually know. Once you have established those points, it will make asset management much easier.

## Step 4 - Decide about exploitation

We are very fortunate that software exists to help. Technology is evolving rapidly, both how it's designed and how we consume it.

Yet today, many housing providers are still perfectly happy to manage their stock using Excel via a series of linked (or not) spreadsheets. Others have designed and implemented extremely expensive software solutions, bespoke to their needs.

In life, there will always be extremes; managing your stock for free on Excel or paying vast fees for a bespoke solution is a case in point. Extremes can be extremely cheap or expensive, extremely good or bad, and the outputs can vary just as wildly.

The same problems exist when it comes to data. Too much data and you are paralysed into inaction. Not enough data and you have no choice apart from

## FIVE STEPS TO EXPLOIT YOUR ASSETS' BIG DATA

*Continued from previous page*

inaction (how can you - you don't know enough).

Neither solution helps improve your assets, get people out of fuel poverty, save money or reduce the carbon footprint of your organisation.

However, there is a middle ground, a solution which can exploit your data meaningfully. Our approach to data with our customers is rather like starting a journey. We establish where you are today, where you want to go, then use our software and algorithms to help you work out the shortest route to that destination, much like your car's sat-nav.

The process begins with understanding what records you currently hold on your

portfolio. We take that data, knowing there will be blank fields (no-one has perfect data, by the way), augment it with rational, intelligent assumptions, essentially backfilling the holes, and then run the new dataset against the latest iteration of SAP.

### Step 5 - to exploit your assets' big data: Take action

The next bit is the most important. What do you do with the data, and can you interact with it easily? Knowing you have a problem and being able to pinpoint it is only the start of the solution.

Much like an appointment with a doctor, they can only recommend that you take the prescribed medicine; actually taking the next step is harder and invariably

costs more. But go to your board armed with accurate data, in an understandable format, and able to demonstrate a robust, impartial decision-making process, you'll secure the funding and consent you need to make those improvements and meet those targets.

In summary, data can be both good and bad, but two things are certain – bad data definitely leads to bad decisions and no data equals no decisions. Only good data can enable meaningful progress

*Stewart Little is CEO of IRT Surveys.*

## MOBILE WORKING

# Viridian gets 1st Touch mobile app



*Viridian Housing is now using a mobile working app from 1st Touch to make its housing officers' lives easier by reducing administration and cutting out the use of paper. The introduction of the app is part of the housing provider's Digital First initiative being run by its IT, research and innovation teams.*

Viridian said that the aim of the initiative is to create beautifully designed, easy-to-use online services that people want to use and come back to. One of the first projects to go live with the 1st Touch app is based around a new tenancy visit, and enables housing officers to check household details and any vulnerabilities, check rent balances, check repairs history and report a repair, report anti-social behaviour, and run through early tenancy questions.

Dominic Rogers, head of IT, Viridian Housing, said, "Through our Digital First

initiative, we can shape the way our staff and customers engage with us, and we see getting mobile right as key to that experience. The 1st Touch app plays an important role here and we look forward to working closely on this and other areas where mobile might make a difference."

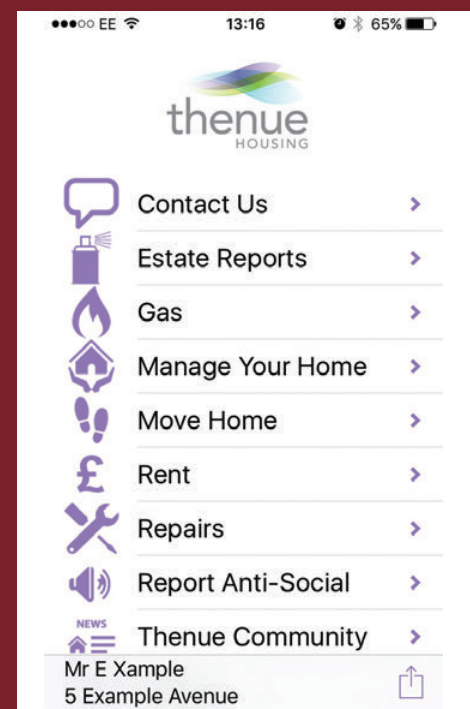
### Thenue Housing launches self-service app with 1st Touch

Thenue Housing has launched a free self-service app for its tenants, using software from 1st Touch to offer a range of services previously unavailable on phones or tablets.

Brian Gannon, head of housing and community regeneration, Thenue Housing, said, "We have been developing our digital strategy which details how we will maximise our residents' access to the internet by supporting and encouraging them to go online. We also want to operate as efficiently as we can and the app is a brilliant way of moving forward digitally."

The app links to Thenue's housing management system so that means tenants can view up-to-date transactions

on their rent account and their repair history. Tenants can also report a repair, make a neighbour complaint and submit a wide variety of service requests, all of which immediately appear on Thenue's system for action by staff.



## PanConnect puts Coastal Housing on the move

*Coastal Housing Group is set to deploy PanConnect from Castle Computer Services for mobile working.*

The introduction of PanConnect is part of a wider IT transformation strategy, and will give Coastal Housing staff a modern, access anywhere system. The system is being implemented by Castle's dedicated Housing Solutions Division.

Shane Griffiths, head of IT, Coastal Housing Group, said, "We know that PanConnect will have enough

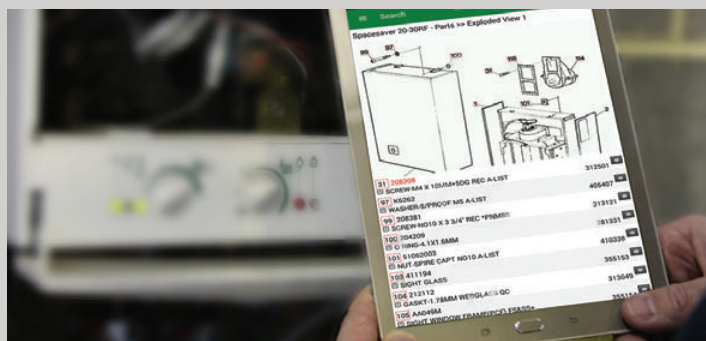
functionality to satisfy the needs of many of our users. We intend to introduce it to those roles that have a heavy reliance on form filling, where duplication occurs, or where data is difficult to capture. The aim is to identify and transfer to PanConnect those tasks which can be entirely carried out on a tablet.

"We plan to use PanConnect initially for automating our gas safety checks, automatically capturing the data, creating the certificate and mailing it to the tenant.

"After that, we will integrate PanConnect into the workflow for our voids and letting processes to collect data at the point of entry. This will include stock condition data, raising job tickets for void repairs and moving information between teams and individuals automatically.

"We are also looking at the potential to include home visit reports from housing applications, again saved directly back to source rather than staff having to return to an office to complete the data."

## INFOMILL'S PARTSARENA PRO FOR REDUCED GAS SERVICING COSTS



*Infomill, creators of the PartsArena Pro software for heating engineers, has reported how the integration of its software can deliver much-needed cost reductions to housing providers when managing their gas servicing obligations and meeting their KPIs.*

Jonathan Ralphs, CEO, Infomill, said, "The current HCA Value for Money (VfM) framework has prompted the re-evaluation of housing repair systems and maintenance costs across the housing sector. Gas operations managers are challenged to

deliver against strict KPIs and that is where the optimum choice of software becomes paramount."

Used by many large household names and around 20,000 heating engineers across the UK, PartsArena can be accessed via field management software, enabling the engineer to add parts direct into the work order. This in turn, reduces telephone calls made by engineers to back office staff.

Becky Salter from Wrekin Housing Trust said, "PartsArena Pro has given our engineers the tools to provide more accurate diagnosis of parts through having the boiler manual to hand. It has made manufacturer part numbers quick and easy to find. This has resulted in better service for our tenants because there is less chance for error from our parts supplier getting the wrong part and the tenant having to wait for longer to get their heating fixed."

PartsArena gives access to technical manuals, parts codes and interactive exploded diagrams, allowing accurate identification of the fault or part required on-site. The mobile Pro version works offline, reducing the number of re-visits due to errors and helping to meet targets on job completion time. The overall cost of each repair is reduced while, where housing providers are concerned, a better tenant service is delivered due to the fault being fixed faster.

Infomill said that it has already facilitated many PartsArena Pro integration projects with DLO housing associations, in addition to the field-service management companies and gas servicing companies often contracted by non-DLO housing providers.



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# SELF-SERVICE IN HOUSING

Peter Watson, Director, Engage Property Technology

*The UK housing market crisis has left millions of Britons unable to buy a home. The cost of the average house rose by a further 7.2 per cent last year, and while market predictions foresee some stabilisation in the coming years, it will do little to mend a sector which the government calls "broken".*

The housing white paper, unveiled in February, announced the government's intention to continue creating affordable housing in a bid to provide some relief. Such measures certainly help, but meanwhile, the number of people living in rented accommodation is growing year on year, with 4.1 million people across England and Wales now living in social housing.

As the number of tenants rise, so too do the expectations of renters, whether in social housing or the private rented sector. However, as customer demands grow so do the opportunities to disappoint. This presents a key challenge for housing providers in adapting to take on this challenge.

## The frustrations of tenants

Engage's own research on the rental market found that half (49 per cent) of renters living in properties across the UK have cited poor landlord communications, not being treated as a customer, and the time it takes to get property issues resolved as their top irritations.

In any sector, the main fear in such a scenario would be a loss of custom and this concern is important to the rental market too. After all, unhappy tenants are quicker to move on, which heightens the chances of a property becoming empty, leaving the housing provider out of pocket.

However for the rental sector, there are even more consequences, as frustrated tenants can potentially become less likely to pay on time, or even report problems with the property, leading them to become bigger issues (and therefore more expensive to fix).

For any organisation, customer service is paramount, but this is an area in which the rental sector is lagging behind almost every other sector. One key reason for this is the lack of self-service provision, which has become an integral offering in many other sectors.

## Customer-focused technology

Statistics from Forrester show 70 per cent of consumers prefer to use a company's website to find answers to their questions themselves. It's therefore perhaps no wonder research analysts herald self-service as the future of customer service; Gartner predicts that by 2020, 85 per cent of a customer's relationship with a business will not involve interacting with a human.

In today's digitally-connected age, consumers are used to accessing the services they want when they want them. Customer-facing sectors, such as retailers and banks, are therefore quickly adopting user-centric technology to meet the ever-growing demands of their customers. The housing market should be no exception. In the midst of the property crisis, renters demand high levels of customer service, not another reason to complain.

Serving the needs of the consumer is not the sole driver for the integration of self-service technology; it also enables organisations to support customers in the most time- and cost-efficient manner. Fundamentally, online self-service makes sense for all parties in any sector, and the housing sector is no different.

## A shift in communication

Using self-service technology to create a shift in communication has the ability to enable housing providers to add value while improving service delivery. Simply put, self-service allows the communication between landlords and tenants to be empowered by providing them with all the information and support relevant to their home and neighbourhood.

A move to a new way of communicating doesn't only serve the needs of tenants

in terms of how they want to access services, but also enables significant efficiencies to be made for the organisation.

Meeting the needs and expectations of residents requires a lot of back-office work. As well as maintenance requests, time spent handling payments and payment enquiries can be a drain on customer-service resources. Yet the ever-increasing stress and pressure on in-house teams means the requirement to become more efficient is more important than ever before.

By automating time-consuming administrative processes and encouraging tenants to make rent payments and report repairs online, alongside many other transactions, housing providers can deliver faster, more efficient services. The end result is more satisfied tenants and time and money saved for the organisation.

## A case in point

Soho Housing, which was set up in the early 1970s to improve local housing conditions, is an example of an organisation which integrated self-service technology to transform customer engagement. The housing provider, which today looks after over 800 homes, wanted to modernise its service offering and engage customers online.

After having seen many housing providers fail to deliver a successful self-service capability, the organisation conducted a series of workshops with managers, staff and customers to help to better understand incumbent practices.

While revealing that staff were very customer-focused, the research also uncovered a reliance on manual processes. As a result, a self-service portal was introduced as part of a digital modernisation strategy to provide key services online.

The portal now enables tenants to view and manage their rent payments

## SELF-SERVICE IN HOUSING

*Continued from previous page*

and send repair and maintenance requests, while also creating targeted communications and resident-centric content to promote community engagement. Meanwhile Soho Housing can quickly and efficiently view information on its entire property portfolio, with data on everything from maintenance requests to rent arrears.

Take up on the self-service offering has been quick; 28 per cent of maintenance requests were made through the portal in the first six months of its launch, and this is forecast to increase.

### Spotlight on the rental sector

The rental market is at a crossroads which has been fuelled by the housing crisis. As the number of tenants increases, so does their voice. That voice is already used to demanding more of the services they use in other parts of their daily lives, so it's hardly surprising that the spotlight has also been turned to the rental sector.

It's time for the housing sector to put customer service as their number one priority and the use of technology that

will create a shift in communication channels with tenants is key to this.

Such a step change for service delivery is a fundamental part of the modernisation strategy of any housing association. Those who fail to adapt will be the ones who will continue to waste both time and money in the long run.

*Peter Watson is a director of Engage Property Technology.*

# Sigma strengthens its housing portfolio with Your Housing

*Digital user experience (UX) agency Sigma has added Your Housing Group to its portfolio of housing clients.*

Your Housing was looking for an experienced UX partner to aid its ambitious project to deliver a user-focused, online self-service solution. The self-service portal will support existing customer service channels by encouraging tenants

to access information and request services digitally.

Sigma will assist with all aspects of the experience design through joint application development workshops, rapid prototyping, usability testing, prototype refinement, specification definition and front-end development.

The UX specialist already has a number of housing clients, including Peaks and Plains and Trafford Housing Trust. Ben Walker, product owner, Your Housing Group, said, "Throughout the project, we have consistently put the needs of our tenants at the heart of our processes and Sigma's experience has helped us achieve exceptional results during testing.

"Our vision has been to design and deliver sector-leading products to enhance our existing customer service offerings. Sigma's assistance across the project has helped to make this vision become a reality and we look forward to our customers being able to enjoy the benefits of accessing Your Housing Group's services online."

# ASPIRE HOUSING PLANS DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION WITH VERSEONE



*VerseOne has been chosen as the digital transformation partner for Aspire Housing.*

Using VerseOne CMS and Autevo, VerseOne's data integration and normalisation platform, VerseOne will work with Aspire to deliver a portal that gives Aspire Housing's tenants an area to view and request services via a secure online portal, with 24/7 mobile-first access and on any device, and a simple repairs diagnostic, reporting and appointment solution (communicating direct with Aspire's existing back-office systems).

Ian Robertson, group head of information systems, Aspire Housing, said, "VerseOne showed us during our bidding process that its approach fits with our core values of being ambitious, creative and collaborative. VerseOne technology, thought leadership and exemplary track record in the area of integrated online portals are the right fit for what Aspire Housing wants to do in the digital transformation arena."



# PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

Peter Graddon, Director, Omfax Systems

*Social housing is in the midst of a customer service revolution. We have seen it in many ways already, with the development of customer service centres, web sites, online payments and social media. As a consequence, over recent years we have seen the loss of rent collectors, repairs inspectors, local offices and resident wardens. More recently, there has been the growth of online self-service, which is likely to have the most dramatic impact on services over the next five years. That's why the development and introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) in customer services is significant. It moves things forward, providing a system to empower tenants to deal with their own queries or service requests.*

The application of AI for customer services results from improvements in automated voice recognition. AI can help customer service providers to more fully exploit the power that can be derived from sets of data. AI does not degrade over time, unlike other facets of production, but rather assists societies to operate and enhances how data about people is collated and interrogated. Moreover, with developments in AI, computers have the ability to learn from their interactions.

So, are we seeing the beginning of the end of human domination? It was forecast that by 2025, the computer would be able to out-perform a human. That now looks like being well over-taken. Writing in The Guardian, Ian Sample explained how deep learning via artificial general intelligence is a step closer, with Google's DeepMind programme which can develop skills to achieve one task after another. Uniquely, DeepMind does not forget how it solved past problems and can use this acquired knowledge to tackle new issues. Sequential learning and the ability to

remember old skills and apply them to tasks comes naturally to humans.

DeepMind is still not capable of the general intelligence that humans use when facing new challenges. Writing in the Financial Times, John Thornhill said, "If we ever reach the point of a technological singularity, when computers outsmart humans, productivity growth will accelerate exponentially. From that moment, a computer superintelligence will rapidly discover everything left to discover. This 'master algorithm' will be the last invention that man makes. It will be able to derive all knowledge in the world - past, present and future - from data." The ultimate aim is for AI machines which match human intelligence and we are not too far away from this.

A study by McKinsey suggested that 45 per cent of US employees' work time is spent on tasks that could be automated with existing technologies. A recent report from Accenture and Frontier Economics suggested that AI-enabled technologies could double the economic growth rates of many advanced countries by 2035. There can be no doubt therefore that AI will enable many roles in housing, especially in customer services, to be automated.

Last year, a computer using AI beat the world champion at the incredibly complex game of Go. What was significant, and possibly worrying, was that the computer made unpredictable moves that 'surprised' its developers. This betrays a lack of control inherent in the design, which may be OK with a game such as Go, but raises important ethical and governance issues.

How do we make sure the machines we 'train' don't perpetuate and amplify the

same human biases that plague society? In a utilitarian way, do we programme machines to maximise the happiness of the greatest number of people? How does this affect those who don't fit the mould? How do we control what we have started?

In the final analysis, an expert is required to initially give the system the knowledge and design the flow pathways.

Interestingly, that is exactly how Omfax's Keyfax works; scripts are developed to initially reflect the known and repetitive pathways for a range of enquiries.

They are then refined and extended, based on feedback. Experts are called in to contribute their knowledge and understanding to help design the scripts' pathways. Data sets relating to the tenant, their property, their relationship with the organisation and their history are then added to create intelligent, personalised responses.

There is power in the Keyfax system, which is so much more than a repairs diagnostic tool, just as AI aims to fully exploit the power of data sets. Keyfax assists and trains customers to self-diagnose in an aspirational way, much akin to artificial intelligence. AI is pushing at the boundaries of customer services in social housing and may, in the not too distant future, make current technologies obsolete, as the sector continues to innovate. Keyfax has already made strides in that direction.

*Peter Graddon is a director of Omfax Systems.*



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## BROMFORD GETS SOCIAL WITH SOCIALSIGNIN

*Housing provider Bromford has registered a 560 per cent increase in link clicks, 130 per cent greater social reach and 200 per cent growth in followers following its engagement with SocialSignIn.*

Bromford needed to keep ahead of the evolving needs of its customers, making the transition from providing simple customer service via social media to making the best use of digital to build strong two-way relationships.

Bromford's communications team had been using social media to broadcast ad-hoc communications for some time, but it was only during the UK riots of 2011 that social media really demonstrated how, when used correctly, it could provide an engaging platform to communicate with tenants and quickly answer incoming queries.

When it started to consider embedding social media firmly into its customer service practices and across multiple teams, some of Bromford's key considerations included maintaining clear audit trails and compliance across multiple accounts. Ultimately, it needed a solution that could deliver high volume customer service, in a managed way, while still maintaining a personal approach.

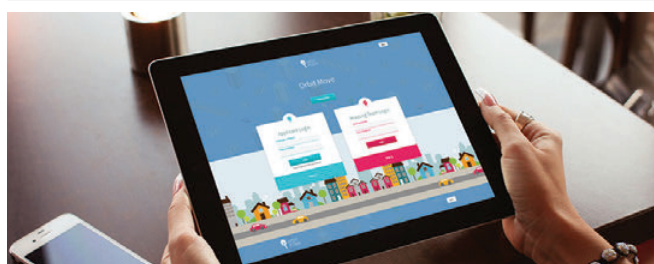
Jarrod Williams, communications manager, Bromford, said, "When we were looking at social media management platforms, we initially struggled to find one that suited our particular needs. While we had used other platforms before, we often found they were behind digital trends and didn't give us that 'something else'. With SocialSignIn, we knew we had found a true partner who was responsive to our needs and the changing face of social

media. Working with the SocialSignIn team, we can continue to streamline and embed social media into customer services and across the wider business."

From a communications perspective, Bromford now knows which content really resonates with its tenants, as well as the optimum time to post for maximum engagement. With SocialSignIn's built-in social CRM, Bromford can see detailed social profiles of its audience, with a complete log of past interactions, enabling it to respond to incoming messages in a more personalised way. Bromford's teams also have the ability to add internal notes and tags to allow other users to see the progress of a query, record important details or detect multiple messages relating to the same issue. With all of this functionality available, Bromford has been able to move away from transactional customer service to providing value and having human conversations.

Bromford has now built an active social community, providing valuable content which helps inspire tenants 'to be the best they can be', while SocialSignIn helps them remain protected from potential social crises. With SocialSignIn, each user has their own account, encompassing a full audit trail, approval processes and comprehensive user and team permissions.

Williams said, "SocialSignIn has helped us to start bringing our social customer service vision to life. We have bold plans for the future and believe that we have found a platform that will keep up with our rate of change and that of our audience. We are no longer just 'managing' our social activities, but building meaningful relationships with our tenants."



## PRODO HOUSING'S TENANCY TECHNOLOGY FOR ORBIT

*A website and mobile app created by Chester-based Prodo Housing, part of marketing agency Prodo Digital, has been recognised as 'Most Innovative Housing App or Online Tool' at the Housing Innovation Awards 2017.*

Orbit Move, built for housing association Orbit, was recognised at the national awards ceremony thanks to the ease and efficiencies it has brought to Orbit's tenancy sign-up process.

Prodo worked alongside Orbit to develop a responsive digital sign-up platform that's unique in the housing sector. The innovative e-tenancy service covers sign-

up from start to finish in five simple steps, simplifying administration and involving prospective tenants fully in the process. The time-saving Orbit Move app produces electronic documentation, including digitally-signed tenancy agreements, and adds the information to the existing housing management system. With the help of the app, Orbit aims to achieve 75 per cent of tenant transactions online by 2020.

Eamon McGoldrick, one of the award's judges, said, "What Orbit Move did was allow tenants to take things away online and then do them all offline. It was a learning tool for them as residents; it gave them time to breathe and to do it in a

more relaxed environment at home.

"It also set the tone for the future relationship between landlord and tenant, which will very much be about online digital services and not just about going through a pile of papers and a checklist."

Kevin Hornsby, head of housing, Orbit, said, "We're pioneering the use of technology to enhance and streamline our customer experience and improve ways of working for our staff. A lot of hard work and cross-team working has enabled us to deliver a successful product, and we're already seeing the difference it's making to our staff and customers."



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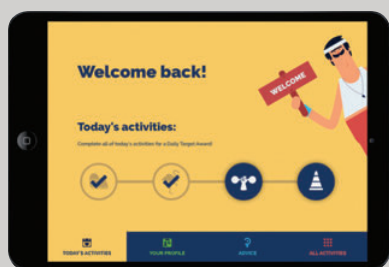
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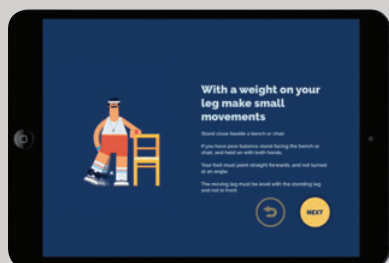
# THE GAMIFICATION OF SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

David Hoyle, Business Impact and Innovation Lead, New Charter Group

*New Charter Group, the University of Manchester (Manchester Institute of Innovation Research, Alliance Manchester Business School and Division of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work) and Reason Digital have been collaborating on an innovative approach to the growing problem of slips, trips and falls among older people, and how digital interventions can help.*



The first digital health intervention being developed by the team is an application using 'gamification' to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls amongst older people. Gamification describes the ways in which 'game thinking' can be used to engage people and change behaviours in real-world, non-game situations. There is growing evidence from a number of fields that game thinking can transform learning and the modification of behaviours.



Slips, trips and falls are a principle cause of accidental death in older people in the UK. Around one in three people over 65 and half of people over 80 fall at least once a year, with devastating effects, such as chronic mobility problems and social isolation. Furthermore, health inequalities and disadvantage mean the

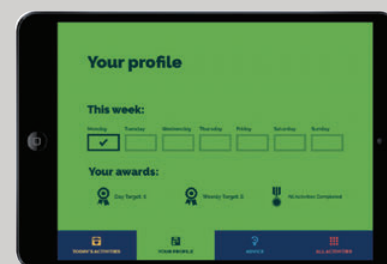
tenants of social landlords are much more likely to suffer health challenges that increase their risk of slips, trips and falls than people in the general population.

The multi-disciplinary approach by the team has been made possible by Impact Acceleration Account funding from the Economic and Social Research Council. The award has funded the creation of a 'skinny prototype', produced using an agile development approach.

Game thinking has been incorporated into the prototype app, which is intended to offer a catalyst for change in the situations, circumstances and behaviours of older people that increase their risk of a slip, trip or fall. For example:

- Goal setting: the app provides an abstract challenge in a straightforward scenario, maintaining a strong connection between cause (exercise to improve strength, balance and co-ordination, and increased awareness of trip hazards) and effect (reduced incidences and fear of slips, trips and falls, and improved healthy life expectancy).
- Rewards are provided through the use of digital badges, which are awarded for self-reporting the completion of exercises or correctly spotting hazards around a virtual home.
- Visual reinforcement of progress against personalised goals is developed within the design (for example, changing colour of a virtual character's clothes) and by leader-boards of other users' performance and achievements.

New Charter's older customers have been actively involved in testing the prototype. The testing has confirmed findings from a range of research, which has identified that touch is a natural method of user-device interaction among older people. Overall, user



satisfaction with the look, feel and usability of the prototype has been high. Some of the issues emerging during testing of the prototype reaffirmed Apple's guidelines for human-machine interfaces; and have included:

- Interface design because some older customers struggled with certain aspects of the iconography.
- Navigation presented occasional challenges. For example, users did not recognise the bottom tab bar as a navigation tool, even after they had accidentally clicked on it. Others did not realise that more content was available beneath 'the fold' in the application. Some of the terminology used on the navigation bar appeared confusing for some participants, leading to them going into the wrong tab when trying to complete specific tasks.
- Almost all of the older customers involved in the testing struggled to read the smallest font size used in the prototype.

A digital intervention for health that uses game thinking with the goal of improving the quality of older people's lives isn't straightforward, but then, ground-breaking innovation rarely is!

The research in this field provides examples of some key challenges that must be overcome, such as: the complexity in older people's situations, circumstances and behaviours; the reach and impact of an application among older people (including levels of digital literacy); and the fundamental importance of user-shaped co-

## THE GAMIFICATION OF SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

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creation in the development of digital interventions for health.

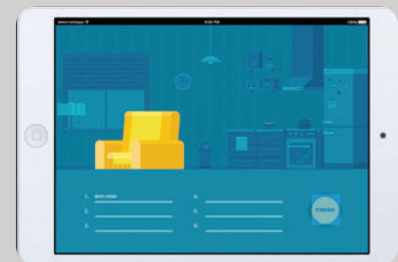
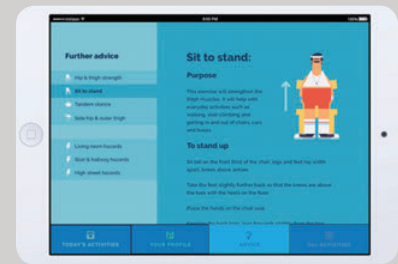
The success in the agile way of working developed by the multi-disciplinary team will continue, subject to further funding, until a near-complete version of the application is available for more formal, extensive testing.

The award of funding by the Economic and Social Research Council has enabled the team to realise a proof of concept and develop a skinny prototype of an app that shows significant promise. The intention is that by the end of 2017, the team will be ready to apply for funding to enable cost-effective testing of the

prototype in a full randomised and controlled trial.

Digital interventions for health based on game thinking are likely to grow in importance over the next few years; they offer an innovative, inexpensive and accessible approach that is readily adaptable and scalable to the range of contexts, situations, circumstances and behaviours of individuals and groups facing different challenges to their health and well-being.

*David Hoyle is the business impact and innovation lead at New Charter Group.*



# Peaks and Plains's projects with Tunstall Healthcare

*Peaks and Plains Housing Trust's TrustLink service has carried out a series of projects with Tunstall Healthcare to address health inequalities, by providing a range of services to meet individual needs.*

## The Falls Project

Launched to combat winter pressures and partly funded by the NHS Eastern Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group Systems Resilience Fund, the falls project has seen TrustLink successfully forge partnerships with health, social care and third-sector organisations.

The service is aimed at patients who have fallen and require an ambulance response. Whereas often these patients would be referred to hospital for observation only, they can now remain at home and be referred, following a clinical assessment, to TrustLink following a falls pathway.

Following a referral, a TrustLink falls advisor will visit the client to undertake a falls risk assessment, identifying and addressing issues that might be contributing to the risk of falling. They will also signpost to other services that may help the patient to live safely.

From April 2015 to March 2016, TrustLink helped 2,176 patients; of these, 1,941 were able to stay at home, with only 235 taken to hospital (11 per cent).

Assuming a cost of £110 per A&E visit (not taking into account any further assistance required), this has saved around £214,000. Assuming the average cost of a stay for an

emergency admission is £1,179, if only half these users had been admitted (970), the saving could be as much as £1.1 million over 12 months.

## Life Links: Early Intervention and Prevention

Commissioned through the Better Care Fund and delivered through Peaks and Plains and Age UK Cheshire East, Life Links is a free service designed to help people in the community live life and stay well. A team of eight wellbeing co-ordinators work in the community to reduce the need for statutory healthcare services by co-ordinating support packages and signposting to appropriate agencies. Advice is offered over the phone, or home visits can be arranged if needed.

Life Links provide information on home adaptations and equipment, such as telecare, to help people live independently at home and works with them to prevent minor health conditions from becoming major problems. The team is also tackling social isolation by helping people get involved in local groups and activities in the community.

Long term, the aim is to support behavioural and cultural change; giving people the information and tools to make good choices about their own health and help commissioners deliver interconnected and sustainable services which meet the needs of individuals.



# TRANSFORMING LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Rob Coyne, General Manager for EMEA, Hootsuite

*In times of economic uncertainty, overpopulation and Brexit, the housing sector is under increasing pressure to provide high quality and affordable accommodation as quickly as possible. Only last month, the UK government announced its ambitious plans to build the homes that Britain needs. In this current climate, it's more important than ever for housing associations to provide effective means of communication. Having the right tools in place to do so can free up resources and time to focus on providing the homes and services Britain's communities need.*

## The social opportunity

Social media is fundamentally changing the way we communicate and is now often the primary conduit for sharing information. In the UK, 77 per cent of people have a social media account, and the housing sector needs to understand that social media provides the means to engage, build relationships with, and listen to their communities.

It's a powerful tool for connecting the housing sector to the people and communities it services, especially those who aren't contactable via traditional methods; such as those with mobility issues or who work long hours. Social media often has a reputation for solely being the platform to connect with digital natives, but it's not just digital natives who are on social media. Demographic data shows that lifelong learners have also adopted the internet and social media. Of the 42 million Facebook users in the UK, 7.5 million are 55 and above and four million of these are 65 and above.

With the majority of UK consumers on social media, people are increasingly turning to it to interact with organisations. Over a third (34 per cent) of UK adults with a social media account said that they would prefer to engage with a brand on social media rather than visit a physical location. Important

conversations are happening on social media, whether a company is a part of them or not. Rather than ignore social media, the housing sector must embrace these interactions because they provide an incredible opportunity to build relationships with their entire communities.

Of course, it's not enough to just be on social media. To build meaningful relationships and engagement, housing providers must listen and respond to the needs of their tenants and communities. Residential communities are not dissimilar to social communities, in that they both need open, two-way conversations to be successful.

*"The difference between a community and an audience is which way the chairs are facing"*

Chris Brogan, CEO, Owner Media Group

## Research, relate and real estate

As a result of digital transformation and the proliferation of social media, customer expectations have been raised to new levels. Nearly two thirds of people (60 per cent) who complain on Twitter expect a response within an hour. Social media provides the channel for real-time communication and a quick resolution of an issue. When faced with a housing issue or crisis, being on social media will help spot key conversations and bring them to attention before they escalate, enabling an efficient response to limit any damage. If you're not a part of the conversation, you can't effectively manage your digital risk.

Currently the housing sector relies on email and postal questionnaires to survey their community regarding their opinions on services. As a result, by the time the feedback is received, analysed and reviewed, it's already out of date.

Social listening and the wider digital landscape is a chance for housing providers to gather insights on the

market and community in real time, and the monitoring of public situations. It's a great way to identify trends around issues and services which communities are facing, such as broken lifts, suspicious people and refuse collection. This information can inform the strategy for service improvements and community development.

Boston City used social listening in a clever way to fix their problem of potholes. The city encouraged residents to report potholes by tweeting @notifyboston with the hashtag #spotholes. During the two-week campaign, Boston's public works department fixed more than 2,000 potholes with the help of social media and citizen reporting. The campaign generated a 300+ per cent increase in the number of citizen-generated reports compared with the same time period the previous year.

## Customer relationships always come first

Putting customer services on social media can also reduce costs within the housing sector, as it's cheaper than phone and email. Integration of social media with existing systems will also bring a new service delivery capability. Specifically, integrating customer services with social CRM tools offers access to a comprehensive database that has relevant information on customers or potential customers. The advantage of the integration is that every touch-point is captured, and recording social interactions will bolster the intelligence available to all teams, providing a complete view of the community. Ultimately, this will help teams gather research more efficiently, and so reducing costs and freeing up resources for more human tasks. In a digital age, that person-to-person contact is cherished by consumers and is something housing providers should strive for.

## TRANSFORMING LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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Just as social media isn't only for digital natives, it also isn't merely a tool for marketing and customer services. Over half of citizens (52 per cent) see employees as credible sources of information. Connecting your workforce not only builds trust with customers, but it can help reduce costs and save time. Rather than spending huge budgets promoting social media posts, an organisation can rely on their employees to amplify the message. Employee advocacy can increase the reach of social media activity by over 2,000 per cent, which can be particularly helpful during a crisis when updates need to reach as far and wide as possible into the communities.

The West Midlands Police is using their social media network to help solve time-sensitive crimes. As England's second largest police force, they engaged their officers on their 260 social media accounts to spread awareness through

communities, allowing them to quickly solve crimes. It built trust with the communities and, amazingly, they found a missing person within 12 minutes of sharing the appeal on Facebook after a local community member saw the post and reported a sighting.

### Getting over the threshold

Finally, social media is an effective channel to support those involved in selling houses. However, it isn't just about advertising or promoting a property on social media platforms. This is an evolutionary step for sales agents. Social media becomes another way to gather intelligence on, and reach potential customers, supplementing tools such as email, calls and face-to-face meetings. If anything, using social media can improve the success rates on those other platforms.

According to sales industry researcher Professor Neil Rackham, it's estimated

that the average company has access to 20 times as much information about people than they could access just five years ago. That data, when used to gain insights to relate to the buyer's needs, will establish visibility, authenticity and credibility; ultimately trust with a prospect, resulting in more regular and successful sales.

Ultimately, humans interact with humans. Recognising that social media provides a powerful human touch will empower all housing providers to be better connected with the citizens, tenants, and communities, helping you to drive success on delivering on the promises and vision to build a better Britain.

*Rob Coyne is general manager for EMEA at Hootsuite.*



## CONNECTING THE UNCONNECTED

### A LOOK BACK AT DIGITAL INCLUSION INITIATIVES IN SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING

Graeme Hamilton, Innovation & Online Services Manager, Wheatley Group

*Five years ago, at the height of the summer of sport in the UK, the Wheatley Group published its first digital strategy, having just appointed a new role to drive forward both digital connectivity for and with tenants, and to provide a focus for excellence and new approaches to the practical application of new technologies across the business.*

Our digital strategy had four key strands:

- The provision of affordable internet access in every rented home;
- Ensuring that every employee and customer was digitally enabled;
- That services were digitally accessible to all - customers, suppliers and partners;
- And that those online services would be

easy to use and defined and developed by and with our customers.

In time, Wheatley's head of business support became the lead on one of the strands of Digital Glasgow - digital participation, reflecting the recognition given to the organisation's drive to encourage and support inclusivity and remove the barriers that prevented citizens from engaging in this modern, transactional world.

### Digital demonstrator

With capital support from the Scottish government, and putting in our own revenue and staff resources, we set up a pilot study for digital connectivity in a single tower block in the north

west of Glasgow. At that time, Glasgow experienced a lower than average take-up of digital connectivity as outlined in a number of reports, most critically 'Across the Digital Divide' (Carnegie UK Trust, 2013). This study allowed the group to explore technical solutions as well as the impact of providing customers with low (no) cost digital access. As expected, the technical solution worked and could be replicated across similar multi-person dwellings but the business case for doing so proved more challenging and the costs to an individual association outweighed the benefits, many of which accrued to other public bodies as well as local and national governments.

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## CONNECTING THE UNCONNECTED

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Of significant interest though were the social benefits gained by the participating households. For example, before the trial 59 per cent of the tenants had never accessed the internet before, but by the end 66 per cent were accessing the internet daily, 75 per cent of the tenants saved money from being online, 82 per cent felt confident in requesting a housing service online, 41 per cent sent and received emails for the first time, and 62 per cent searched for a job online.

Anecdotally, we identified tenants who became socially less isolated, such as the former drug user who reconnected through Skype with her family abroad, and the double amputee who was supported in his learning by his neighbours so he didn't have to go across to the tutor in the community flat. Success is epitomised by the tenant who is now a Glasgow bus driver, having tackled and passed his theory driving test online.

### Developing skills

Building on a successful local idea, Wheatley established a strategic partnership with Glasgow Kelvin College and formed the John Wheatley Learning Network, the objectives of which were to provide access to community learning opportunities for citizens, especially in the east of Glasgow. Five years later, this network of local learning centres has grown to 38 and has now stretched right across Glasgow and out to West Dunbartonshire. One of these 'click & connect'-branded centres is situated in a centre that supports offenders preparing for release and those on community service orders. Early feedback is hugely positive.

A 2015 survey of all these learning centres showed that 31 per cent of first time visitors sought help to write a CV and 51 per cent to improve their computer skills. For repeat visitors, these ratings increased to 65 per cent and 74 per cent respectively. Other indicators were equally impressive.

Throughout these five years, I have always spoken about the need for collaboration and partnership. No single housing association in Scotland (nor I believe elsewhere in the UK) can fulfil

the digital needs of tenants on its own. Wheatley has been extremely proactive at working with others, from engaging with the Scottish government and BT in the demonstrator study, with Glasgow Kelvin College and local partners in the 'click & connect' centres to organising and running digital showcase events across the country with many others active in the field, including housing associations, council departments and colleagues from the health and care sectors.

More recently, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Wheatley have partnered to support the development of staff who lack digital skills. Both organisations are early signatories to the Scottish government's digital charter. SQA staff are encouraged to volunteer 21 hours each year and many are now becoming digital buddies for environmental staff who largely have no or very limited digital skills. This has proven so successful that four workers have now embarked on a National Progression Award (NPA) level 3 course - their first ever venture into the world of formal qualifications. Underpinning the buddy sessions are the SQA's home-grown digital learning guides, which offer bite-sized video clips on using digital tools in everyday situations.

Wheatley's strategy has recently been updated and there is now less emphasis on connecting homes. Annual surveys since 2013 have shown a steady increase in Glasgow social housing tenants who are now online. Although still low, the trend is moving in the right direction. There is still a need for multi-partner commitments to fund the capital elements of connectivity across communities and into homes and returns on any such investment will accrue to many more agencies and not just a housing association.

Wheatley's attention in 2017 is therefore increasingly focused on closing the skills gap of its staff and customers. A new concept 'digi-know' has just been launched, providing fun engagement for all in digital technology, from digi-fit using silent discos and fitbit-type wearable technology, to digi-save, helping staff to identify how to save

money by shopping and transacting online, digi-care (understanding gadgets and technologies that will allow tenants to stay in their homes longer), and technology for executives (ensuring that our leaders all know how to use technology and encourage their teams from a position of strength).

Finally, we have been working with two universities in Glasgow to develop digital games and gamification. With Glasgow Caledonian University, we have supported multi-disciplinary teams of third-year students (including artists, programmers, developers and designers) to scope and prototype a game that can help tenants. In 2017, the four themes on offer to the students included poverty, sight-loss, staff development and supporting mental health issues. I call this our 'game of homes' and it has proved hugely popular. Modern apprentices take part in play-testing at week nine, and not only is there a potentially commercially-viable product, but the students have a more rounded business experience that supports them in their academic submission.

With new websites for each company being constructed, a re-launch of online services to all customers across Scotland, more way-leave opportunities being opened up to potential contractors and service suppliers, a renewed focus on digital specification for our many new homes over the next four years and a re-focus of the work of Digital Glasgow, the next five years, in digital terms, look to be as exciting as the last five.

*Graeme Hamilton is the innovation and online services manager at the Wheatley Group.*



# HOME OR AWAY - ON-PREMISE VS. CLOUD

David Thomas, Enterprise Business Development Manager, Virso

*Following our feature article on cloud computing vs. on-premise IT in the January 2017 issue of Housing Technology, Virso's enterprise business development manager, David Thomas, has contributed his views on the subject.*

Move to the cloud vs stay on-premise? You should be asking yourself, "what does our business need to meet its goals?". The answer is likely to include cloud, but what type of cloud?

## On-premise

Traditional IT infrastructure uses servers, switches and storage to provide data processing and storage facilities. This style of infrastructure is used by most companies and many will continue to invest in more of the same. It is evolving though, with converged infrastructure (CI) or hyper-converged infrastructure (HCI) systems; it's the same stuff, just more efficient. HCI/CI are the technologies that most clouds are built on.

## Public cloud

For starters, there's more than one type of cloud and many different commercial models available. Most commercial models have options but you can't tailor them to suit.

The general cloud model is an attractive one. Cloud has redefined how an IT department provides services back to its parent organisation and those it connects to and works with. The easy consumption of IT to enable rapid deployment of new applications, provide short-term development and testing, and turn on-use-turn off capability while providing a much-improved means for non-IT staff to access and utilise IT resources, has undoubtedly changed the IT landscape and user expectations.

Public cloud services, such as Amazon Web services and Microsoft Azure, work on the basis of provisioning compute (processing power) and storage (somewhere to put your data) while enabling a high degree of elasticity (the ability to grow/shrink) to cater for

business fluctuations due to peaks in demand or business changes.

Using a standardised platform and methodology to enable clients to migrate applications and data into their cloud environments and using a standardised (for each provider, not industry standard) sizing model to facilitate client systems and data, they offer a variety of services. This is comparable to the 'T-shirt' model. You chose which one is the right fit, contract for that and pay accordingly. If you know exactly what you want and are sure that it fits one of the standardised sizes, proceeding with that is relatively straightforward, and so long as there is very little fluctuation then costs are predictable. Custom cloud options tend to be far more expensive.

Charges vary significantly and recently there has been an indication of these providers 'turning-the-screw' somewhat to recover their investment costs. 2016 saw significant cost increases from Amazon Web Services (as high as 63 per cent), Microsoft Azure (20+ per cent) and others, depending on the contractual model and scale of commitment. High levels of unexpected costs are also reported by clients when migrating their data into and out of those public-cloud providers. Maybe that helps explain in part why Amazon Web Services' revenues jumped by 69 per cent but profits by 300 per cent in 2016.

There's a lot of evidence that companies that have 'moved to the cloud' have not done so universally and many tend to be repatriating data, applications and workloads into their on-premise estate as improved economics and the availability of a cloud-like experience for on-premise technology, plus the need for more controllable costs, control and security inform an evolving executive mindset.

## Private or hybrid cloud

Private cloud technology has been developed by manufacturers to deliver cloud capabilities and experience on-premise. Most have multiple offerings,

based on a generic cloud model of easy access and consumption, switch-on/off usage, scalability and elasticity, operationally efficient with an uptime of 99.9999 per cent. They offer connection to, and enable burst-out to, public cloud providers in times of extreme demand or to support disaster recovery, data migration or archiving.

They're pre-designed to scale out of the box to suit any size of organisation and workload; to quote Dell EMC, "crate-to-cloud in under three hours". Investment costs are comparable with existing infrastructure and some are supported by innovative financing that ensures you only pay for extra capacity or performance when you use it but operational costs can be much lower. Just like public cloud, but cheaper.

The major benefits are centred on a cloud-like capability and experience but one under your control that you can tailor to suit your specific business needs.

## Which is right?

That depends on what you are trying to achieve. If you don't understand what problem you're trying to solve, then you almost certainly won't find the right answer.

If you're a new company, starting with the cloud makes perfect sense, allowing you to focus on your actual business. Everything from marketing to invoicing, recruitment to HR, and much more, is readily available with little or no outlay. For established businesses, it's more complicated. Only by knowing what your business needs can you make the right decision. Migrating to a cloud takes time, careful planning and considerable cost (such as parallel running). Once you're there, you can potentially make savings but expect higher costs for a period of time.

As well as cost, security and compliance are key concerns when moving to the cloud.

While you can outsource your infrastructure, you cannot outsource

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## HOME OR AWAY - ON-PREMISE VS. CLOUD

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your responsibility or duty of care to your employees, customers and others. Your cloud will only be safe if you operate good security practices, just as with on-premise systems; perhaps consider the Cyber Essentials program, designed by GCHQ to better protect British business and now being imposed on all government contractors ([www.cyberaware.gov.uk/cyberessentials](http://www.cyberaware.gov.uk/cyberessentials)). Compliance in the cloud is more complex and varies with business

processes and customer types. It can determine what you can put in the cloud and with which cloud provider. For example, in our opinion, BT leads the way on GDPR compliance at the moment while everyone else is playing catch-up.

The point is simple. Cloud offers new opportunity and options, but it is not a panacea. Know what your business needs and wants, and plan from there. For the majority of companies, it's likely that a hybrid model will emerge as the

best option; some stuff in the cloud, some on-premise. But what, where and how depends on your business, your challenges, your aspirations and your priorities.

Take advice from suppliers that are not tied to one particular choice, conduct research among your peers, query everything and always get a second opinion. As the saying goes, "measure twice and cut once".

*David Thomas is the enterprise business development manager for Virso.*

## £35 per year or £500k fine from ICO for CCTV

*According to Yorkshire-based CCTV.co.uk, registration is only £35 per year, yet housing providers are still failing to register their CCTV systems with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and risking fines of up to £500,000.*

Jonathan Ratcliffe from CCTV.co.uk said, "Some housing providers think they can skip their Data Protection

Act responsibilities. But the sad fact is that their lack of compliance will almost certainly come to light the moment they try to use camera footage for a prosecution, and that evidence could even be thrown out of court.

"When your system is 'evidence-ready', with well-serviced cameras in the right locations providing date-

stamped footage, it's almost impossible for a suspect to evade identification.

"It's very simple. If you record images of people as part of your business activities, then you must register. And claiming ignorance of the law is no defence; we advise all of our commercial clients to get their registration in order before they even switch on their cameras."

Ratcliffe said that in a society where we are recorded more than ever, the law exists to ensure that your legal day-to-day comings and goings remain private. He said, "CCTV is a beneficial tool for any company, but you have to play by the rules. So, if your business collects CCTV data, make sure you're onside. Don't think you can dodge the law."



## SWITCHEE RAISES £480,000 SEED FUNDING

Ian Napier, Switchchee commercial director, and (R) Adam Fudakowski, Switchchee managing director

*Clean-tech start-up Switchchee has raised a further £480,000 in seed funding to drive forward its roll-out of the first smart thermostat for large social housing providers.*

The latest investment brings the company's funding to more than £1 million following the £600,000 secured in April last year. The capital will be used to expand the reach of Switchchee's innovative smart thermostat technology, which saves residents money by detecting occupancy and turning heating off when a property is empty, helping combat fuel poverty, and provides

aggregated, remote data analytics for housing providers, allowing them to better manage large-scale property portfolios, drive down the cost of service delivery and enhance tenants' well-being.

The latest investment round was supported by Mustard Seed Ventures, InseadAlum Ventures, ClearlySo, and Ian Peters, the chairman of Family Mosaic and former managing director of British Gas where he played a lead role in shaping the Connected Home and Hive business.

Adam Fudakowski, managing director, Switchchee, said, "The support for our second over-subscribed seed round affirms the need for technological innovation in the UK's social housing sector. We can now build on the success of our pilots with 15 housing providers and local authorities to further develop our analytics platform and deliver a significant return on investment for the landlords who use Switchchee, while delivering greater energy and cost savings for tenants."



# 12 GOLDEN RULES FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Colin Sales, managing director, 3C Consultants

*Smartphones are now out-selling toothbrushes, and a number of digitally-focused businesses that didn't even exist a decade ago are now among the most successful in the world.*

Move to the cloud vs stay on-premise?

In today's digital age, it has become a necessity for organisations to embrace the benefits that a digitally-focused business strategy can provide. The recent 'Vision of Housing in 2025' report demonstrates that almost all housing providers have started or are intending to adopt a business transformation strategy that will facilitate a customer-focused, leaner and more digital operating model.

While most housing providers are still in the early stages of this process, those who are advanced, both inside and outside the sector, tend to display the same characteristics and follow a similar methodology.

Below are the 12 golden rules that we believe can help you in your journey towards digital transformation. You will note that the first and last rules are focused on cultural change, but I would emphasise that the management of cultural change and how to achieve it is the 'golden thread' that runs throughout every rule. After all, cultural transformation sits at the heart of any business transformation strategy.

## Lead from the top

In addition to a clear leadership vision, cultural change will be critical to the transformational process. Change needs to occur across the business, transcending departmental silos, so leadership from the top is critical. The CEO doesn't need to directly manage the transformation process, but if not, they need to guide and provide their full support to those who do, assisting and challenging all stakeholders throughout the journey.

## Benchmark

In order to measure and celebrate achievement, you need to understand

and quantify your current position. Targets and objectives can then be agreed and their success measured. Interview management, staff, customers and stakeholders as part of this process; this will provide insights into the challenges and how processes can be improved. It is not uncommon for early, unexpected and valuable improvements to be achieved as part of this process.

## Don't recreate the wheel

Many mistakes have already been made by your predecessors. Achievable targets and milestones can be set once you have established what successful transformation looks like. Interviewing consultants who have worked with other housing providers that are more advanced in their transformation processes might not provide you with specific detail, but they can provide a relatively quick and simple way of discovering who the successful pioneers are and what cost-effective, proven and reliable solutions are available. In some cases, particularly around initiatives that create social return on investment (SRoI), you can relatively easily raise grant funding that will significantly improve the financial return on investment.

## Create the digital vision

Once you have an understanding of what you want to achieve, produce and publish your digital strategy. Specific objectives are not necessarily needed at this stage, but the strategy will help ensure that stakeholders understand your vision and appreciate what is ultimately to be achieved.

## Return on investment and prioritise

Identify transformation projects and develop an implementation plan, considering the return on investment from each project in terms of economies, improving services and solving current challenges. Once this is understood, prioritise the order in which to address them for greatest short- and medium-term gains. Quick wins will often be identified and these in themselves can often fund any investment made in

creating and implementing the digital strategy. The output of this phase should be a defined list of projects along with their expected outcomes, providing the foundation for the project plan.

## Digital by choice

If a tenant feels that digital services provide a quicker and easier method of achieving their goal, they will select digital channels by choice. Solutions and processes must have tenants in mind and promote online, 24/7 self-service, while ensuring that non-digital channels still remain available for those who need them.

## Automate

Ensure where possible that all processes involve truly automated self-service; the necessity for manual involvement should be removed. Digital services can be carried out manually, but it doesn't work the other way around. Manual involvement at just one point in the process can completely defeat the object of what is trying to be achieved.

## Smartphone first

As mentioned earlier, smartphones now outsell toothbrushes. Experience indicates that the majority of your tenant engagements will be via their smartphone so ensure that anything designed for tenants' use assumes this medium first.

## Incentivise, motivate & assist

Never assume that if you develop something it will be used, regardless of how wonderful you think it might be. To achieve adoption, it needs to be promoted and the motivations considered of those targeted. Both a carrot and stick approach is usually needed. Financial incentives and penalties are often introduced and other channels of communication are commonly made less attractive. Channel-shifting services online will liberate staff for other duties and they can then help and train those who need support to use digital services.

*Continued overleaf*

## 12 GOLDEN RULES FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

*Continued from previous page*

Many who struggle initially will embrace digital channels with time; they just need help and encouragement.

### Analytics

Use online tools, such as Google Analytics, to quantify what is being achieved. If the analytics show that specific services or web pages are not being used, then change or dispose of them. If changes are made or digital initiatives are promoted, use analytics to provide evidence of what improvements have been achieved. Analytics can also provide a wealth of information about those that engage with you; their demographic; the device they use; how long they take to perform tasks and any key search words that they use.

### Data is king

To succeed, it is essential that your data is accurate, available and secure. This is not only a fundamental component of

digital engagement, but will also help provide both the information you need to run your business and ensure that you are compliant with security legislation.

1. Ensure your data is complete and accurate; data cleansing support and tools are available for this.
2. Ensure data held in multiple systems is consistent so that there is just one version of the truth; map the data and gather it into a single location if you need to.
3. Ensure that data is held in the right place and in the right format; review your data, complete an audit of data sources, provide data definitions and standards, and create a data management strategy.
4. Ensure that you have reports that give you valuable information; carefully consider and specify your reporting

requirements and only then develop the reports.

### Cultural transformation

For the introduction of digital services to achieve their true potential, cultural change will be needed. Make sure that you involve those people that are important to the success of projects, particularly if there is a fear that they will resist change. Celebrate success wherever possible as this will counter the challenges you will inevitably encounter, promoting what is being achieved and recognising and rewarding those that have been fundamental to its success.

*Colin Sales is managing director of 3C Consultants.*

## GENERAL NEWS

# Revenue boost for Alysium Consulting

*Housing specialist Alysium Consulting has completed its second year of trading, with revenues up by 50 per cent. Since the company was started in 2015, it has delivered more than 100 projects for over 70 social housing and local government customers.*

Ian Lever, managing director, Alysium Consulting, said, "Our growth reflects the significant change that the sector is experiencing. We started promoting the

need for a digital shift in the corporate boardrooms of housing organisations over eight years ago and have stuck to this belief ever since.

"Many of our customers are replacing systems that can't respond quickly enough to the need for digital shift, both in the back office and from a customer access viewpoint. This, coupled with lean process reviews, has been the thrust

of our efficiency support in the housing sector during 2016."

Alysium has also introduced a graduate recruitment scheme, with its first 'millennial' already recruited, to bring fresh perspectives and new ideas about commercialisation.

# NEW APPOINTMENTS FOR CAPITA'S ADVANTAGE

*Capita's software services business has appointed three new members to its Advantage software senior management team. All three of the appointments are coming to Capita from Northgate.*

Andrew Blanchard joins as sales director for overall business growth, and has extensive experience in managing

specialist sales, with a focus on the public sector.

Andy Jones has been appointed as sales manager to grow the housing business in particular, and has 17 years' experience in sales and business development, primarily selling software, hardware and complex solutions into the public sector.

Peter Banahan joins as Advantage's new business manager, with broad experience in the managed services and ICT sector, with an emphasis on local and central government.

# HOUSING<sup>TM</sup> TECHNOLOGY

## 2017 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

# HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2017 - BIGGER AND BETTER THAN EVER!

The Housing Technology 2017 conference and executive forum took place at the beginning of March at the Oxford Belfry Hotel. It was our busiest conference yet, with almost 400 guests, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors.

Please have a look at [www.housing-technology.com/videos](http://www.housing-technology.com/videos) to see some highlights from the event.



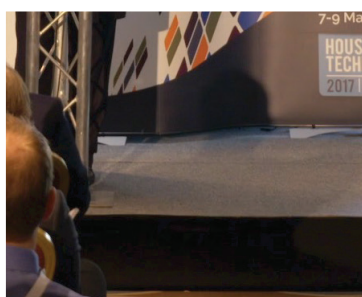
"Just keep doing what you are doing – it's the only conference relevant to the sector and the only one worth attending."

**SENTINEL HOUSING**



"The conference was fantastic, really great content and very slick and professional – the best conference I've ever attended, without doubt, so congratulations."

**GREENSQUARE GROUP**



"The event went very well for us and we identified plenty of new opportunities as a result – a resounding success!"

**1ST TOUCH**



"It was standing room only in our seminar and the delegates were really galvanised."

**CAPITA**

"Many thanks for the event – I thoroughly enjoyed it."

**WHEATLEY GROUP**



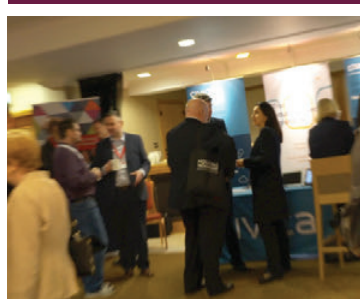
"We were very pleased with the event and are already looking forward to participating next year."

**POWEROBJECTS,  
AN HCL COMPANY**



"May I just say how much we enjoyed the conference this year? The speakers were excellent, the topics diverse and we got a lot out of it."

**WELLINGBOROUGH  
HOMES**



"The conference has cemented our commitment to the housing sector – congratulations on another successful conference."

**RIVERLITE**





# GIZMOS, GADGETS AND GOOD DESIGN

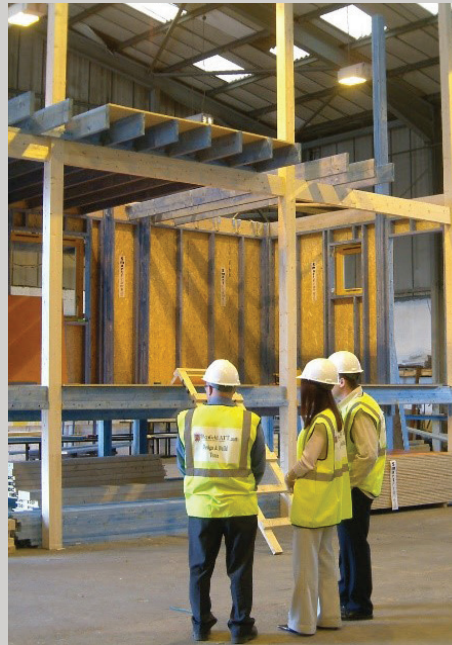
Professor Dr Michael Benfield, Chairman, Benfield ATT

*In the early 'noughties', I ran a seminar for 'constructing excellence' on 'safety by design', followed a few years later by one on 'designing out waste'. The purpose in mentioning them is to emphasise the fact that, despite new products and new and updated regulations, such as those dealing with high-speed electronic communications networks, the house-building industry has made little progress so far this century.*

Back then, I argued for buildings to be designed via 'partnerships' that embraced site constraints, programmed out risk, and ensured good immediate and ongoing communications with present and future stakeholders. I pointed out that to do so required 'design teams' who not only knew their legal duties and responsibilities, but who also understood how the job would be done. In turn, this meant grasping the logistics, getting to grips with handling and 'temporary' works, as well as embracing snagging and maintenance along with the lifetime risks of the building both in construction, in use and decommissioning. Stressing that 'good design' is SAFE, I also urged participants to accept their responsibility for making others aware of all of these risks.

While today it's pretty easy to specify IT-related products for any building, like visual or fingerprint recognition access, remote video surveillance, cell-phone heat and light control and so on, doing so efficiently remains a major challenge. Indeed, arguably this is more important than these 'nice to have' gizmos and gadgets themselves. Home buyers and renters alike remain more concerned about the cost and speed efficiency of new home construction, their comfort, running, and maintenance costs.

In several respects 'designing out waste' was an extension of the earlier attempt to introduce business innovations from outside the construction industry. Techniques and disciplines such as Six Sigma and Kaizen were applied across



the whole design and build process to cut out waste in design time, scheduling delays and prototyping errors, as well as material waste.

Once again, an important element of this was the acceptance that building design needed to become a collaborative exercise, rather than the God-given domain of any one person. As in the automotive, aircraft and ship-building industries, for example, recognition of the complex nature of the building enterprise was seen as increasingly important.

Designing with partnering in mind emphasises communications, the importance of avoiding delays, and the need to programme out errors. It also recognises the need to really know what stocks and other 'industry standard' materials are readily available, how jobs will be done in practice, and the need for a better and fuller understanding of the building and manufacturing tasks involved.

Grasping the totality of the logistics involved was seen then, and remains today, of major importance. Getting to grips with transport, 'right first-time' and 'continuous improvement' processes were and are obvious candidates for

expanding the horizons of the design team. Equating the notion of 'lifetime costs' with the avoidance of delays and the need to programme out errors, along with a sound knowledge of materials, processes and procedures remains vital. Although accepting that good design avoids waste, then and now many 'professionals' - used to a more relaxed regime - found and find this an unpopular constraint. Few, it seems, are ready even now to accept responsibility for, and bear the cost of, any waste caused by them.

As we move further toward factory-built homes, customers, their professional advisors and consultants must understand that, to produce a building in the factory requires all elements to be determined in detail before work commences, rather than muddling through trying to resolve complicated design issues as a project progresses. While this is possible using sloppy 'wet' trade building techniques, where adjustments can be made in-situ, complex off-site manufactured elements are much more difficult to alter. Failure to understand this is both prejudicing MMC and costing clients and builders small fortunes to correct. Partnering for the whole design, supply and construction chain is a vital process that must be developed to correct this.

Consequently, while moving with the times to incorporate all that is best and wonderful and time-saving and comfortable, and desirable in any building design we undertake, manufacture or build, I still find myself shouting at the wind for fundamental shifts in professional attitudes. However, the winds of change are blowing and I do detect small shifts. As construction moves off-site into the factory, these will greatly improve efficiency, quality, and affordable delivery of all levels of social and private housing.

*Prof. Dr. Michael Benfield is a chartered environmentalist and is chairman of Benfield ATT.*



# HOUSING TECHNOLOGY – A 10-YEAR STORY

Tony Smith, an independent housing IT consultant at Acutance Consulting.



*This is a slightly-abridged version of a blog-post written by Tony Smith, an independent housing IT consultant at Acutance Consulting, on his 'Tony Smith: That Housing IT Guy' blog ([tonysmiththathousingitguy.blogspot.co.uk](http://tonysmiththathousingitguy.blogspot.co.uk)), following the Housing Technology 2017 conference in March.*

I remember in my days at MIS-AMS, at an NHF IT Conference at Olympia (remember those?), a man in tweed, spookily-named Tweedie too, visited my stand. He explained he was starting a new social housing ICT magazine and was I interested, as a supplier, in getting involved?

I was, and for many years we sponsored the bottom inch of page one, a very specific piece of magazine real estate. There had been different attempts at bringing out a social housing ICT magazine before, with varying degrees of success.

Who would have thought that, ten years on, Housing Technology would still appear every other month and grow to around 40 pages per edition. Also that, what started from small conference beginnings, would end up as probably the 'one' for anyone interested in social housing ICT. What an achievement for Alastair, George and their wider team.

This year's event was the largest yet, with nearly 500 attendees. More than one attendee commented to me that the

event was on the verge of being bigger than the Oxford Belfry venue that it's been anchored in for the last few years.

If you were elsewhere last week, you missed a cracker. The opening keynote presentations on both days were very good. Comedian and comedy writer Bennett Arron (or Arron Bennett, as some call him), author of the Channel 4 documentary 'How Not To Lose Your Identity' was an outstanding start.

The sessions had a great mix of the new and what's just a wee bit over the horizon. It highlights that at last 'big data' might be just about becoming truly useful for UK social housing providers. Suppliers who can exploit it properly and RSLs/RPs who can successfully make it work for tenants and customers will be truly ahead of the curve. Those bog-standard, out-of-the-box resident portals 'going digital' look pretty last century compared with Alexa (or similar) answering your queries or verifying you are safe in your supported accommodation via your 'headless' device.

It was great to hear how some housing providers (Soha Housing, for example) are pushing ahead with voice analytics for CRM because many still haven't properly leveraged standard CRM yet. Full marks to the former and 'could do better' to the latter. Transformation

featured in many sessions, which is quite apt considering the pressures all housing organisations are experiencing with LHA caps, rent reductions, housing benefit cuts and universal credit rollout. There are many ways to tackle it, depending on your budget and how long you want it to take, as was evident in a number of sessions.

My favourite session on transformation had a touch of the 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' from Torus Housing. I was part of the transformation of getting nearly 30 ICT and service applications, boiled down to a core sourced from just three main suppliers. Transformation takes a certain belief and lots of imagination, as you dive down the 'rabbit hole' into the unknown. Make the wrong transformation choices and you may well encounter 'the pool of tears'. I was involved in that project and acted as a critical friend.

Well, it was a roller-coaster conference and I met and chatted to so many friends, people I have worked with, suppliers, business-change managers and a number of directors. A great pinnacle of a decade for Housing Technology and I for one will be looking forward to #housingtech2018.

*Tony Smith is an independent housing IT consultant at Acutance Consulting.*

## GDPR training from the Southern IT Forum



*The Southern IT Forum has contracted Data Protection People to run a series of training sessions for its members to prepare them for the implementation of GDPR (general data protection regulation) within their respective organisations.*

January's session at Greensquare's offices in Oxford focused on how to approach suppliers to understand how their systems will support GDPR compliance, as well as data processing and

sharing agreements with third parties. A key point was that if housing providers have a sharing agreement in place, they can transfer the liability for a data breach to the data processor if it's their fault, the agreement is robust and they did the due diligence.

Training materials and templates from the sessions are available to all SIT members via the forum's Yammer site. To find out more about the SIT Forum, please email: [jonathan.creaser@rhp.org.uk](mailto:jonathan.creaser@rhp.org.uk).



# BEING DATA DRIVEN – LEAN MANUFACTURING VS. SYSTEMS THINKING

Neil Topping, Director, Datafuturists

*Many housing providers' IT and business teams are now talking about 'systems thinking' in terms of their data-driven processes, often as a complement to 'lean manufacturing' practices. I have had the privilege of working with both approaches in service and manufacturing environments and the purpose of this article is to detail my findings of these and some of my own experiences.*

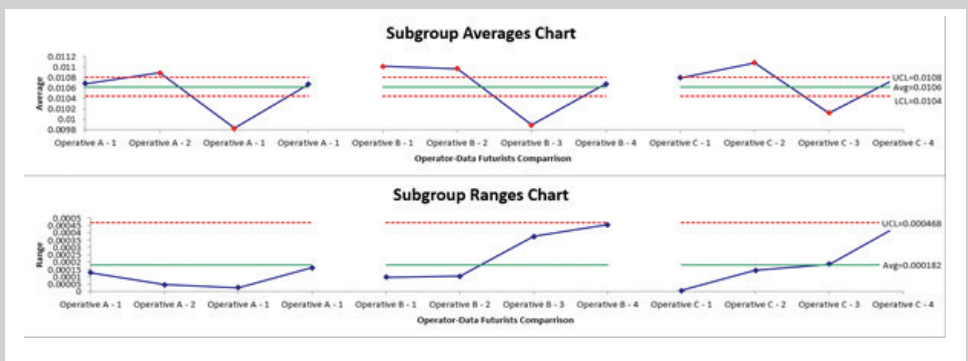
My career started as a customer service advisor in an area housing office. As I progressed, I found that I had a natural affinity with delivering sustainable business improvement. While working at two housing providers I was fortunate to be trained in and delivered projects using systems thinking techniques, and I was particularly impressed by the level of focus on the customer, demand analysis and control charts.

By applying demand analysis techniques to call centre calls, it was straightforward to identify where improvements could be made, and by using control charts when looking at performance, we could statistically identify if a process was 'in control' or 'out of control' (do we need to intervene?). Then by looking down from a 'helicopter' perspective and identifying strategic partnerships where customers are shared, waste could be reduced across collaborative enterprises.

Now, having spent most of my career in housing, I then thought that I needed to broaden my horizons. With a view to develop myself, I started working in a manufacturing environment.

It was a bit of a culture shock...

Actually being able to see people working (i.e. physically making things) was different. The base level of lean knowledge in the company was significantly higher than in housing. I shouldn't have been surprised; lean



came to manufacturing in the 1980s but it has never really stopped getting better.

For example, a handful of people in a housing organisation might know about statistical process control (control charts) but it seemed that almost everyone did in manufacturing. Moreover, there were statistical techniques (Anova, T-Test) I learned during my psychology degree masquerading as 'between-operator reliability' and 'attribute agreement analysis'. This was data-driven business improvement at a level that I hadn't seen before.

I also found the approach to visual management and 5S (workplace organisation) remarkable. Every area had a very large visual management board, there were daily stand-ups updating the board with the relevant team and it actually enabled decisions to be made that were timely and effective. It was impressive for both the discipline applied and its simplicity.

I know there are a number of housing providers going the 5S and visual management routes, but before you go too far, get yourself into a factory and see how it works in practice at the highest level.

Having analysed both of these methods, a hybrid of both approaches makes the most sense. 5S (tidying up and gridding everywhere) doesn't add the same value to a service organisation as it does to a

manufacturing one because the former is limited to electronic files and databases.

Manufacturers don't use their databases anywhere near as well as service companies do. What was interesting was that the manufacturers I saw were very inward looking in terms of their internal efficiencies. This meant that systems thinking approaches such as demand analysis and strategic partnerships were not as developed.

The common themes are using data to inform improvements and developing people to be able to sustain changes (so organisations don't need to rely on endless days of consultancy).

At Data Futurists, we have been lucky enough to find consultants from both systems thinking and lean manufacturing and we have tried to fuse their expertise together into what we call data-driven business improvement.

*Neil Topping is a director of Datafuturists.*



# START-UP THE INNOVATION

David Done, Chief Executive, RHP

*2016/17 has been RHP's 'year of innovation', the foundation of which was rolling out last April the UK's first all-digital housing service, RHPi. The service, which is designed to lower costs while also improving service, will help us to invest £250 million over the next eight years in providing more affordable homes. For us, a key part of successful innovation is looking 'outside in' for inspiration which is why we became one of the first hosts of HouseMark's start-up accelerator programme 'Evolve' (run in partnership with LMarks).*

It's now been three months since we kicked off our involvement with the initiative and six start-up organisations have moved into our offices in south-west London. In partnership with other housing providers and local authorities, we handpicked the six companies based on what we thought they could bring to our businesses and, likewise, what we could share with them. The 'super six' are: Illumr, SkenarioLabs, Coheat, Standard Access, Plentific and Rapid Information Systems.

It's been brilliant having them share our offices and the really exciting bit is that we're starting to see potential avenues for collaboration, particularly in relation to our repairs, maintenance, development and digital services.

With reference to the importance of effective partnership working and supporting relevant start-ups, our innovation manager, Tom Way, said, "We're about to take delivery of a modular home 'pod' which will sit in our office premises. As the first housing association to announce that they'll be using the modular method, this pod will give people the opportunity to see what one of these homes will look like, including the latest technology from sector-leading innovation companies."

So how are the start-ups doing? We've chosen three to focus on:

## Skenario Labs

We've made excellent progress working with this Finnish company specialising in building-data analytics. Skenario Labs have produced a map-style interface which shows every RHP property; we can then click into each property to find out more about performance indicators and building upgrade requirements.

This programme isn't just a channel to promote products and services to the housing sector but also an opportunity for the businesses involved to learn from the sector. Through engaging with and learning from RHP, Skenario Labs have been able to develop and adapt their model to better fit the requirements of the UK housing market.

## Illumr

Illumr is an analytic tool like no other, producing 3D images by grouping data units together based on how much they have in common. There's even the potential to literally 'get inside' your data with virtual reality.

As we prepare to launch our all-digital RHPi service for all customers, we've invited Illumr to work their magic on our repairs and building data. We're confident that this will give us the required business intelligence to understand the relationship between buildings and repairs. We're waiting for the results of the dataset we've sent so that we can start implementing the lessons learned.

## Coheat

Coheat specialises in smart heat networks for retrofit and new-build housing, which are more reliable, efficient and affordable than installing individual boilers in every home. Coheat now has a trial that's up and running at one of RHP's

extra-care schemes, with the first results of the proof of concept to be delivered this March.

RHP focuses on driving innovation from every level of the organisation and I'm pleased to say that there has been opportunities for our staff to learn too, not just in terms of their business ideas but also about the start-up mentality and innovative ways of working. The start-ups have been open to meeting with different teams, service areas and individuals relevant to the work they do so that we can all learn from each other.

Four of the start-ups even joined us for a special version of '4 in 4', our internal innovation programme where employees pitch ideas for business improvements. This time the tables were turned and instead of employees pitching, the start-ups sold their business ideas and what they could offer RHP. At the end of the programme, there will be a 'demo day' where the start-ups will share their more informed business pitches and seek investment and support from us.

It's exciting to say we've been part of the journey of all six of these start-ups and we can't wait to see the benefits gleaned from not just our customers but also other housing associations and beyond. To find out more about the progress of the projects, please check out my 'An eye on RHPi' blog at [www.rhp.org.uk](http://www.rhp.org.uk).

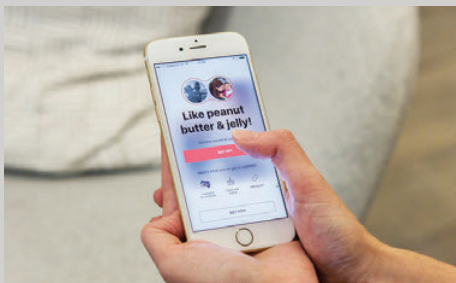
*David Done is chief executive of RHP. Consultants.*



# #HTTOP5

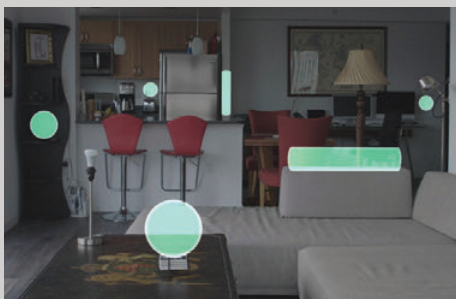
Adam Rigg, New Media & Channel Specialist, Red Kite Community Housing

*Welcome to #HTtop5. A place where exciting technological innovations hang about, taunting us to use them in the housing sector. You want flying cars, robot chefs and virtual reality tenancies? You've come to the right place. Shut the door and pull up a seat. It's about to get very #HTtop5...*



## Peanut

New friendship app Peanut is becoming very popular. It's basically a bit like a dating app but for new mothers who want to meet other new mothers. Think Tinder meets Mothercare. Imagine if new tenants had a friendship app where they could hook up with and have conversations with other new tenants, so not exactly Peanut but along those lines. Sharing experiences and offering tenancy related advice. Perhaps such an app could span the whole of housing. There is certainly some opportunity for tenancy friendships in the digital world.



## Hayo

I am always losing my TV remote control. Imagine if you didn't need one, though. Imagine if you could turn on your TV by just tapping the side of your chair. In fact, imagine if you could turn on any item in your home by just tapping any

old random object, a chair, coffee table, ornament or dog asleep in his basket. Well, soon that will be possible. A new product that is currently raising funds on Indiegogo called Hayo promises just that. It's basically a cool-looking black tube device that hooks up to your wifi, scans your room and allows you to create various touchpoints around your room to do select tasks, such as turning things off and on. Now imagine that in a social housing context; how could it make tenant's lives better? Stroke the wall and it reports a repair, poke your chair and it pays your rent, shake your fruit bowl and it starts a videochat with your landlord. The possibilities are actually quite exciting.



## WeChat

While not a household name here in the UK, in China WeChat is massive. It started life a bit like Whatsapp, a basic-ish mobile messaging service but quickly grew into a much bigger beast, offering e-commerce style payments, Uber-style taxi hailing and other useful features not usually associated with a messaging app. Now those clever people at WeChat have hooked up with Starbucks to offer a way to send your mates a free coffee through the app. Actually, you can use it to send them any drink from Starbucks. So, imagine if tenants across the country could pay their landlords for various things in a super-quick, trusted and friendly way. Rent payments perhaps, additional services, broadband provision, parking and actually a very long list of other things. Likewise, landlords could also use this as a quick and potentially cost-saving way of refunding customers

or even paying contractors. WeChat. Maybe we can.



## Passenger drones

Yes, you read that correctly. Massive drones that can carry passengers are being developed and actually tested right now in Dubai. Admittedly, they haven't gone to human trials yet but the machine itself exists and has had test flights. The plan is that these big drones, which look a little like smart cars with propellers, will be automated and fly people to their selected destination. Of course, there will be a few minor legal issues to overcome but why sweat the detail? It's a flying passenger drone for Pete's sake, forget about silly thing like laws and safety. How will they impact housing, I hear you shout? Well, how about aerial viewings of neighbourhoods for prospective tenants? How about housing officers carrying out estate inspections from on high? How about free Uber-style drone rides for all tenants with mobility issues? It's only a matter of time. Don't worry about the law. And safety. Honestly, don't worry. It will be fine...



## Amazon Chime

They just can't stop coming out with new things, can they? Just deliver my

## #HTTOP5

*Continued from previous page*

packages on time. Oh, and stop using massive boxes for little things. Amazon Chime doesn't sound particularly revolutionary on the surface - videochat, screenshare and all the usual online meeting type functionality. However, this is a platform area that hasn't really captured loyalty from the meeting masses. Gotomeeting and some other platforms are popular but that is more because there is a lack of choice for quality online meeting platforms. If Amazon get a hold in this market, they can then really expand and develop the

possibilities around online meetings. I'm sure they've already thought about the future but how about virtual and/or augmented reality tenancy sign ups and customer viewings using Chime? More uses than just boring business meetings.

Technology is rapidly evolving in the housing sector and these are just a few nuggets that could be of use in our sector. Of course, I get carried away and suggest things that are purposely controversial but that's kind of the point of innovation in technology, isn't

it? Taking thoughts and concepts and twisting them, shaping them in unusual ways to get new and different outcomes.

You probably laughed when you read about prospective tenants taking aerial neighbourhood viewings but it's a technological place as a sector we could get to in the near future. We've just got to bend the rules a little to get there.

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

## Bluesky launches new online flood-risk map



*A groundwater flood-risk map of the UK is being made widely available for the first time. Created by JBA Consulting and available online from aerial mapping company Bluesky, the map is designed to help housing providers, local authorities and risk-management organisations understand the threat of groundwater flooding. The new colour-coded hazard map is easy to use and complements other flood maps and geographic datasets already available from the Bluesky Mapshop.*

Rachel Tidmarsh, managing director, Bluesky, said, "Groundwater flooding tends to be more persistent than surface-water flooding and can result in significant damage to properties. As weather events become more severe and rainfall levels rise, so, therefore, does the threat of groundwater flooding."

The new groundwater flood map was created by JBA Consulting and provides comprehensive coverage of all aquifers in England, Wales and Scotland. Created using a range of data, including known locations of past groundwater flooding events, rainfall measurements and aquifer properties, the new map provides a classification of hazards on a 50-metre grid using a simple traffic-light system. The three tiered methodology used to create the map allows for quick and efficient updates and refining of the map for local areas of particular interest.

Dr Maxine Zaidman, technical director for hydrology and hydrometry, JBA Consulting, said, "These maps will support flood risk management activities at a national or local scale, and will help risk management authorities in meeting their responsibilities under the Flood and Water Management Act."

## NEW APPOINTMENTS AT DTL CREATIVE



*DTL Creative has added Civica's Jim Walker to its consultancy team, alongside Paul Aitken from South Lakes Housing as an associate consultant.*

David Loudon, founder of DTL Creative, said, "We have also just launched a new data analytics offering in partnership with Aquila Insight. Together, we use data, advanced

analytical techniques and cutting-edge technology to create insight and ideas that help you make the perfect connection with each and every one of your tenants."



# 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**

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Alternatively, visit us at [www.sovereign-plc.co.uk](http://www.sovereign-plc.co.uk)



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