



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

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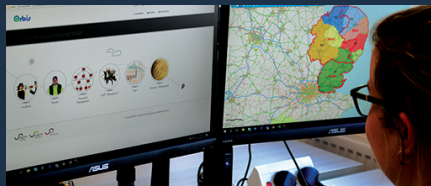
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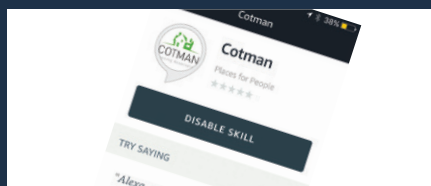


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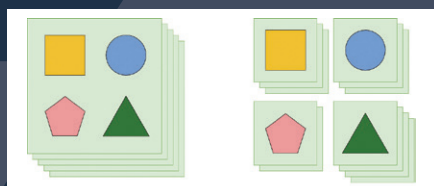
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We are delighted to announce that the next annual Housing Technology conference and executive forum will take place on 6-8 March 2018 at the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry.

- **WHO** - No other event brings together so many influential and senior IT/business practitioners in one place.
- **WHAT** - Housing Technology 2018 is a two-day event, combining thought-provoking presentations from housing providers and IT suppliers, informal networking with senior housing professionals, and a dedicated sponsor and exhibitor area at the heart of the event.
- **WHY** - You need to be at Housing Technology 2018. No other event in UK social housing offers the scope for fantastic networking opportunities.
- **HOW** - Housing Technology 2018 offers you so many ways to meet fellow housing professionals, including presentations, informal networking and evening receptions.

To take advantage of early discounts, registration is now open at: www.housing-technology.com/events/ht18/register.

If you are interested in being involved in Housing Technology 2018, please get in touch:

- Speaker, delegate & production enquiries: alastair@housing-technology.com
- Sponsor, exhibitor & commercial enquiries: george.grant@housing-technology.com

Since our launch in March this year, our new specialist job board has already begun to support housing providers and technology vendors across the UK. We are delighted that our free service is achieving its purpose: to provide a targeted and effective way for organisations to find skilled and experienced candidates within our sector.

With 12,000+ online subscribers and a much larger overall readership, Housing Technology is in a prime position to communicate with an audience of specialists and leaders.

If you are looking for candidates, we think that Housing Technology's job board could become an invaluable part of your strategy. Our job board helps your job adverts be seen by a large audience, but unlike other more general job boards, you can be sure that you are reaching the right people with technology and leadership skills in the housing sector.

Posting to our board is a quick and easy process, with no payment gateways. All you need to do is be a signed-up subscriber (free of charge) and you can upload jobs within a matter of minutes.

Here are some of the organisations who have already been taking advantage of Housing Technology Recruitment:

Aareon, Accent, Aldwyck Housing, Alliance Homes, B3Living, Bromford, Civica, Code Red Associates, Golding Homes, GreenSquare, HACT, Hastoe Housing, Hillcrest Housing, Knightstone Housing, Magenta Living, Metropolitan, Midland Heart, Northgate Public Services, Notting Hill Housing, Nottingham City Homes, One Manchester, Plymouth Community Homes, Salix Homes, St. Leger Homes of Doncaster, Taff Housing, Town and Country Housing, Weaver Vale Housing Trust, West Kent Housing and Westward Housing.

We would be delighted to answer any questions and guide you through the process. Please call 0208 336 2293 or email recruitment@housing-technology.com. You can also now follow us on Twitter @housingtechjobs.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY
– THE INTERNET OF THINGS 2017
10 October 2017, BT Tower, London
housing-technology.com/events/iot2017



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY
CONFERENCE &
EXECUTIVE FORUM 2018
6-8 March 2018, Q Hotels'
Oxford Belfry, Oxford
housing-technology.com/events/ht18



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY
– EVENING RECEPTION
22 November 2017, Pizza Express, London
housing-technology.com/events/reception2017



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Soha Housing's 'Systems Revolution Team' (L-R): Nigel Frape, Catherine Major, Steve Bromley, Nikki Qureshi, Ruth Byrne, Chris Lyon, Teresa Gowers, Chad Bowers, Robin Butler and Nicola Hansen

SOHA HOUSING SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS WITH AAREON

Soha has opted for Aareon QL to support its business in all aspects of tenant and property information. In addition to providing better housing and asset management functionality, Aareon QL will improve Soha's CRM abilities, enable the creation of a new self-service portal, and support more advanced mobile working.

The QL implementation project began in February 2016, with input from the IT department. In August 2016, a business-wide dedicated implementation group, the 'systems revolution team', was established to review business processes and configure the system to meet future business needs.

Nasreen Hussain, director of finance and resources, Soha Housing, said, "IT is a vital element in managing our business and can be seen as one of the key factors of production. So any new system had to meet tough criteria and the whole procurement process involved staff from across the organisation.

"We felt that Aareon and its QL housing management system offered the best solution as it's a fully-integrated system. Looking ahead, we will be using QL for every possible business process."

From the initial project kick-off, Aareon allocated Soha a dedicated project manager, Steve Bromley from Bromley Consulting, who had previously worked in the social housing field and was responsible for managing resources, planning and delivering the project on time, within budget and to quality standards.



Nasreen Hussain,
Director of Finance
& Resources, Soha
Housing

As part of every Aareon implementation, a dedicated project website was set up for both project teams to use as a central project management facility. Meetings and key milestones could be added, to-do lists created and allocated to team members, and workshop notes and actions arising from all meeting stored on the site.

The project website was used on a daily basis as the main communication method because all emails could be sent, stored and tracked, giving

both teams complete transparency throughout the project.

Stephen Bromley, director, Bromley Consulting, said, "Having worked on a number of implementation projects, I must say that the go-live period at Soha was the smoothest that I have been involved with.

Soha set a challenging target in terms of when the system was to be live, but I was pleased that they recognised the scale of the resources that were needed and seconded staff where necessary to work full time on the project."

As an addendum, Aareon has reported that Nasreen Hussain, Soha Housing's director of finance and resources, has recently taken on the role of chair of the Aareon QL user group.

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BUILDING YOUR OWN HOUSING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Lawrence Gardner, Head of ICT, Wrekin Housing Trust

There's an old saying, attributed to Oscar Wilde, that, "we may all be lying in the gutter but some of us are gazing at the stars".

It makes me think of the incongruity between, on the one hand, the lack of real choice and the diversity of options when it comes to the housing systems that are vital to our day-to-day operations, and on the other hand, us exercising ourselves over the latest and greatest technological trends and treats, and marvelling at how we might fully avail ourselves of the emerging 21st-century dream! Of course, there is absolutely nothing wrong with the latter, but much for us to trouble over with the former.

Economic theory and the bitter experience of consumers over the ages tells us that limitations of consumer choice distort the relationship between supplier and consumer. The supplier can take more liberties than it would in a fiercely competitive market, devaluing the customer – 'take it or leave it' pricing, and the customer falling over backwards to get service, rather than the supplier having to do so in order to secure and retain vital business.

We have seen that in our own dealings; I was once told by a supplier whom I had just told that I would not be renewing with, that he "will gladly pillage your business" in levying exceptional support charges during the run-down period as punishment for the abject betrayal that, in his eyes, our exercising of consumer choice represented. That quote (the original words were actually more graphic!) has been seared into my memory; it doesn't get much worse than that, does it?

That despicable moment sowed the seeds of a resolve that, as a consumer faced with such impositions, we had a

duty to be bold and brave by creating our own opportunities rather than allowing ourselves to be led by the nose within a shrunken marketplace.

When I say "creating our own opportunities", I mean "hang the marketplace" and write our own bespoke comprehensive housing management system from scratch. It took many years of us developing and honing our skills, building muscle, on a step-by-step fitness programme, starting with the brisk walk of creating a few data-conversion utilities a decade or so ago, right through to the 50 press-ups in five minutes league of a complete mobile repairs and contractor solution. We were then ready to make a start.

I was lucky on two counts at least; first, I had a background in this, having previously led a team who created the comprehensive range of systems that ran a small rural local authority in Shropshire and, secondly, having gained an unbelievable level of support within Wrekin Housing, who agreed to bankroll it all, indulge our fantasies and allow us to deliver on that vision. There is a third lucky charm though – a fantastic technical team, hard won and built over time, with each of them obsessed with getting it as right as possible, unsparing on themselves and unstinting in their labours. They are the most enthusiastic, generous-spirited, open-minded and creative group of people I have had the pleasure of working with. It's them who put in the hard graft, turning the vision into reality.

I should also mention the most important ingredient of all – our front-line colleagues, who would ultimately become the users of this new-born system. They were the ones who had to find that new vision, that 'something' that wouldn't lead to just another souped-up anachronism.

The challenges were plentiful. For us, as the providers of the technical and scientific expertise, it was finding, keeping and developing the talent to not only excel in the technicalities but also develop the keenest eye for understanding the purpose and functions of the business. For our users, perhaps a less obvious but no less daunting challenge – the terror of a blank sheet of paper. Imagine yourself going into a clothes shop with nothing on display, or a restaurant with no menu whatsoever, and the sales assistant or maitre-d' asks you one simple question, "what would you like us to create for you today?".

A world of limitless possibilities but with nothing before your eyes in order to tickle your fancy. If you ask them to make one like you saw last week, then you would just be reinventing the wheel in a slightly different form, wouldn't you? The same old tune, but with a different fiddle.

To best serve such a rare moment of opportunity, you need liberated, unchained thinking. You no longer have to have it done following the same old well-trodden path, a slave to convention, and hemmed in by committee consensus. Indeed, it might be a sin to let what you are familiar with guide you, playing safe with a little black dress, or bangers and mash; you might as well have kept the old one and saved all the hassle.

Having said that, they proved to be as excited by the challenge as us, wanting to liberate their thoughts and use newly-won 'systems thinking' techniques, an outlook promoted within the business to encourage the fullest understanding of demand and the capacity of the business to meet it effectively, shaping services against customer needs.

Together we forged a partnership and beavered away for over five years.

BUILDING YOUR OWN HOUSING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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There were growing pains. Early on, we threw stuff away when it became clear we had lost the point and were unwittingly designing by committee and trying to please all of the people all of the time, rather than being bold with a clean and simple design firmly linked to customer demand and the nature of their service requests.

So, was five years of graft worth it? We think it was. For example, we have broken free from the fortnightly debit convention and its correlating payment plan, that famously produces the biggest failure demand of all, 'technical arrears' – an instalment plan that will never be adhered to because local authority benefits are paid retrospectively and debits raised in advance. That then

meant expending time and resources constantly suppressing the natural instincts of the system, trying to isolate the real reds from the red-herrings.

We could only imagine this in our old system, but we are completely unfettered now, with plans aligned to practical payment dates, not only to suit benefit cycles but also in the wider sense that customers can choose payment frequencies and dates to suit their pay days. There are innumerable other examples.

I'll leave you with a final provocative point to stir you. After eleven and a half man years and with all the staff costs taken into account, it still came in £10,000 cheaper than just the initial licensing

costs of our old bought-in system! It's not for the faint-hearted, for sure, but I heartily recommend it.

Lawrence Gardner is head of ICT at Wrekin Housing Trust.

ORCHARD WINS FIVE-YEAR EXTENSION WITH CATALYST HOUSING



**Catalyst
Housing**



Catalyst Housing has just signed a five-year agreement with Orchard to continue its use of Orchard Housing, Promaster and Wisdom Document Management. As part of the deal, the housing provider has also added Orchard Messaging to its existing package of applications in order to manage SMS exchanges with its tenants relating to rents and arrears.

Bromley's five-year contract with Orchard

The London Borough of Bromley has chosen Orchard as its supplier for housing and case management, multi-channel CRM and digital services. As part of the five-year contract, Orchard will also provide a fully-managed hosted service.

In addition, Bromley is the choice-based lettings provider for a number of housing providers, so it is also planning to use Orchard's digital lettings software to enable them to manage their own respective housing applications and advertise properties online.

Record-breaking year for Orchard

Orchard Information Systems has announced record revenues of £16 million for the past financial year (FY2016-17).

The company reported that reinvestment of profits in its people, products and expertise had been rewarded with strong organic growth from both existing and new customers across housing, finance and asset management.



Orchard's Board (from L-R): Ian Shard (Managing Director), John Doughty (Director), Lucy Armstrong (Chair), John Hunt (Director) & Danny Tobin (COO)

Orchard's FY2017 annual revenues of £16 million are a five per cent increase on the previous year, alongside an increase in the group's profitability of over £700,000 and a healthy cash balance at 30 April 2017.

Orchard's asset management division, In4Systems (acquired in 2013) reported its first profit since acquisition, following four years' substantial investment by the group.



E-RP 2.0: THIS IS NOT THE MS YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

Aidan Dunphy, Head of Product Strategy, Orchard

Definition of an ERP project manager: someone who thinks nine women can deliver a baby in one month.

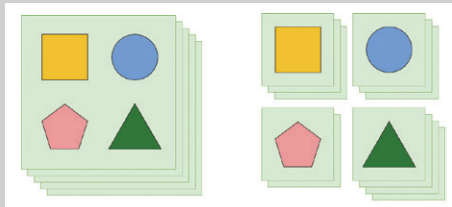
At Housing Technology's annual conference back in 2013, I gave a presentation titled "E-RP?" to a packed room in which I restated the case for specialised packaged housing solutions (well, I would, wouldn't I?). I followed this up with an article in this magazine, questioning the economic viability of the high-profile ERP projects in the sector. My argument was that despite the obvious problems presented by some of the established packaged housing management solutions, they do perform many essential tasks adequately which keep a housing business alive; rewriting this stuff in another technology was unlikely to improve things, and would ultimately be cost-prohibitive as a bespoke project or using top-end ERP platforms designed for richer markets. In short, don't throw the baby out with the bath water.

Four years on, how has this panned out? It's fair to say that any expectations that ERP would take over the housing sector, or that everyone would be using their finance system to manage rents and Dynamics CRM for everything else were wide of the mark (at least, so far). The high-profile ERP projects rumble on with mixed success, but there's no sign that they will deliver solutions for the mid-market in the foreseeable future. Many Dynamics projects have delivered benefits, but to date no housing provider has managed to transition completely. Mistakes have inevitably been made, and, shock horror, it turns out that writing software is easy, but supporting it and keeping it moving forward are difficult and ever-more costly. Nonetheless, dissatisfaction with old-school housing management systems has grown and aspirations for a truly integrated and agile platform remain undimmed.

So if DIY and ERP are too expensive, how can a housing provider free itself from legacy, frozen IT systems to support the fast-changing business environment?

Your core housing management modules are humming away in the background doing their jobs well enough, but you need to rapidly transform customer-facing services at the same time as extending your business operations. What's needed, as has always been the case, is cost-effective and robust integration. ERP promises this by moving everything onto (apparently) the same platform, but this is simply swapping one monolith for another. In truth, it never has been technology that causes the problems; it's the failure of suppliers to update it, play ball and generally do the right things. Being locked into SAP is no different to being locked into any of the traditional HMS platforms.

Warning: the next section gets a bit techy, but I will come back to ERP, honest.



L: Monolithic application architecture
R: Micro-service application architecture

If monolithic systems represent lock-in, then the emerging concept of 'micro-services' promises to break down the walls. There's no official definition of the term, but the idea is to build applications from succinct, self-described and self-sufficient services which don't rely on external business logic. Instead of having to deploy the entire application every time, each service can be deployed independently, enabling faster and less disruptive updates.

Some would say that this was the original intention of service-oriented architectures (SOA), and web services have been around for ever. Unfortunately, these often resemble the database 'barfed' into an API, and building logic into ESB or other

middleware to cope with this just adds yet more agility-impeding baggage. By contrast, micro-services follow the paradigm of "dumb pipes, smart endpoints". They are designed from the outside-in, using a product-led approach which starts with the business need rather than with the existing capability. They enable a loosely-coupled architecture and are highly scalable, supported by a DevOps approach.

So what has this to do with ERP? The days of the 'one platform to rule them all' are coming to an end, and businesses now require solutions that can be quickly adopted with low time-to-value and implementation cost. If things don't work out, they can be just as quickly dropped. The 2016 Enterprise Solutions Study by US-based ERP consultancy Mint Jutras surveyed over 500 businesses of all sizes and in various industries. Recommendations were to avoid "best fit" and instead look for "maximum agility". You should also ensure that the platform is moving forward, integrates easily and can be customised easily without sacrificing support.

If software vendors truly embrace agility, and micro-services are arguably the best way to do this, then they will be able to respond to emerging market needs faster. They will be able to produce new solutions at a lower cost and with fewer dependencies. Furthermore, they can provide public APIs which can be much more easily used while still giving high flexibility. The risk to platform vendors is that they open themselves up to smaller but speedier and potentially disruptive competitors, but this is going to happen anyway; in the long run, it's better to be 'sticky' and please your customer than to try to force them to stay with you by closing the shop. If you find your key suppliers getting in the way of integration, ask yourself what are the longer-term consequences of this, both for them and you?

Aidan Dunphy is head of product strategy at Orchard.



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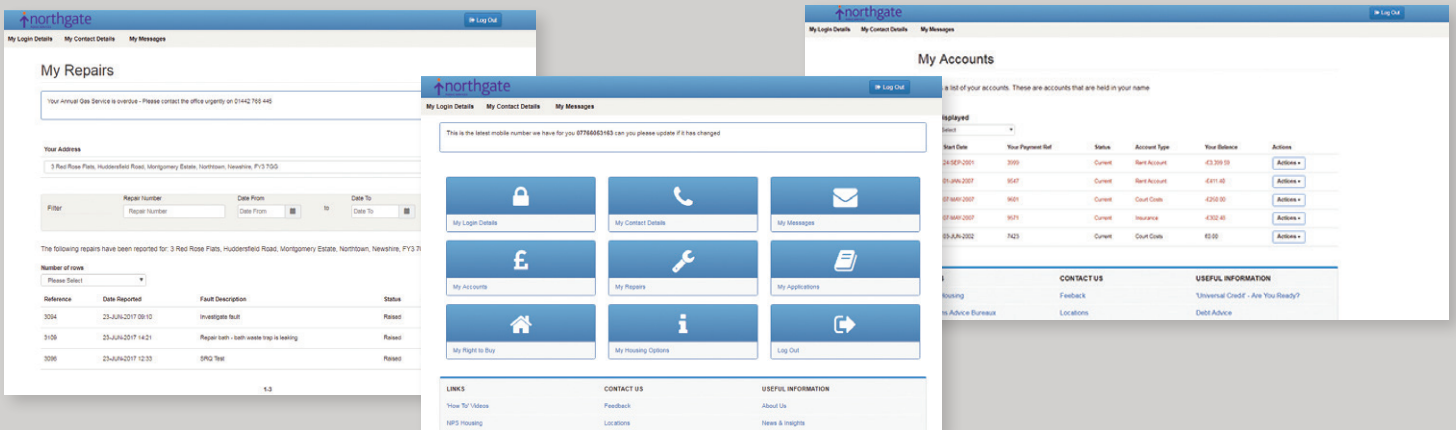
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NORTHGATE MOVES TO SAAS



The latest generation of Northgate Public Services' housing management system is now based on software-as-a-service (SaaS), enabling its customers' tenants and housing staff to access the same software and perform any relevant housing operation from any device.

Tenants will be able to use self-service to pay rent, report repairs and apply for housing online via a tablet or smartphone. Northgate said that the change will also mean that housing staff will instantly become a mobile workforce because all their key tasks could be performed remotely just as easily via a tablet as on a desktop computer.

The new cloud-based software also supports open integration with external services. If a housing provider wants to use PayPal so that tenants can pay for services then that element can simply be added to the platform and can be accessed easily

via Northgate Housing. Likewise, if a charity creates an app for reporting on the health and welfare of elderly tenants, then that can be added too through a system of open APIs.

Roger Birkinshaw, director of housing, Northgate Public Services, said, "This is a sector that has changed beyond recognition in the past 10 years and we can't expect that pace of change to slow down, so our goal was to create a housing solution without boundaries.

"Northgate Housing offers full self-service for tenants, mobile working where it's needed and an open infrastructure that allows for plug-and-play development, and is available in the cloud as a fully-managed service."

Solihull Community Housing upgrades its HMS to Capita OPEN

Solihull Community Housing has upgraded its Capita housing management solution to the software provider's integrated OPEN suite.

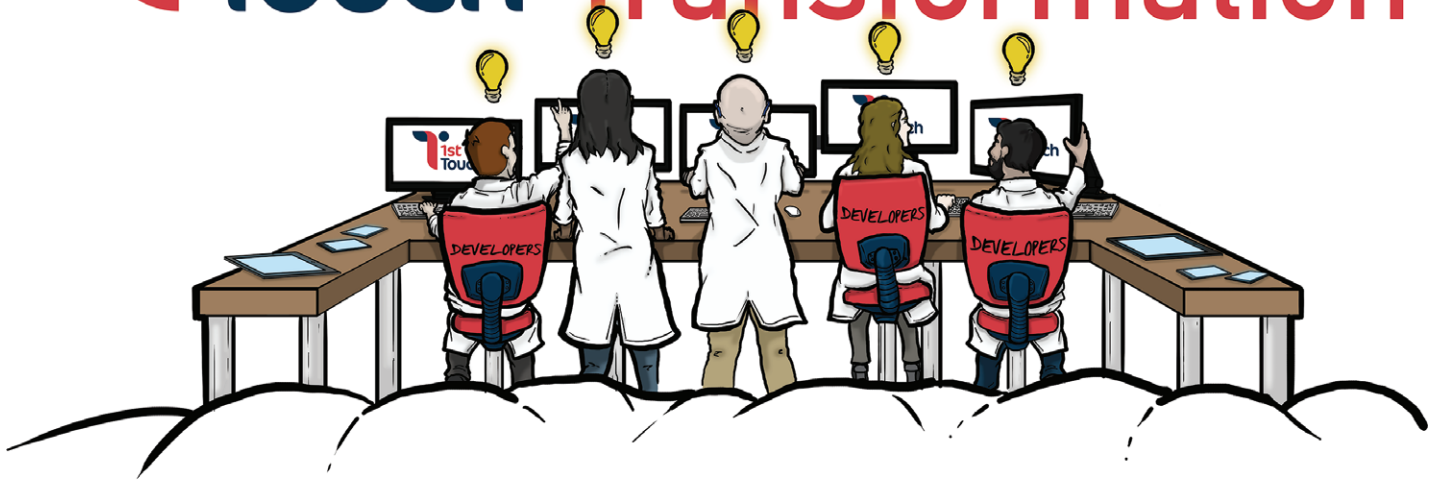
Having previously been using Capita's housing management software as well as OPENContractor, SCH identified a range of efficiency and service improvement opportunities that it could achieve by joining all services up via a single IT platform. As a result, SCH can now deliver its complete range of services across housing, tenants (including a self-service portal) and contractor management all under one roof and from a single supplier.

Chris Deery, head of housing IT, Solihull Community Housing, said, "Moving to OPEN was definitely the right decision for us. We've been a Capita customer for over 10 years and going live

on one central system will allow us to achieve much greater efficiencies and service improvements for our tenants. We will have more flexibility around when we start and end tenancies, we'll be able to support any-day direct debits and we'll be able to introduce much more efficient ways of managing rent accounts.

"We're also really keen to reap the benefits of OPEN's digital capabilities when it comes to supporting channel shift, particularly now that residents can log both rent and repair requests via a single portal, with the same log-in, whereas before these were accessed via different systems."

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CIVICA



Jeff Hewitt, Executive Director,
Housing & Asset Management, Civica

A DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR TODAY'S HOUSING SECTOR

Civica's executive director for housing and asset management, Jeff Hewitt, looks at future housing trends and discusses the evolution of Civica's housing portfolio for tenants.

What are your views on the future of digital in social housing today? Have you seen any particular trends?

Advances in technology and automation, the proliferation of devices and communications and the greater

availability of data for a 24/7 on-demand public are changing everything for us all. One key area for housing organisations is the continued move to mobile; solutions which enable employees to visit, sometimes vulnerable, tenants in their homes and then collect, transfer, access and update information direct from a mobile device straight to a back-end housing solution inherently within the system (rather than via any secondary software which then has to synchronise). This information at the fingertips will only improve customer experience, minimise errors and boost security and efficiencies.

The second trend, of course, is self-service; our customers are wanting more and more sophisticated and instant engagement with tenants. For example, our web-based Cx Housing product is fully integrated with Twitter, allowing housing associations to quickly notify tenants of emergency situations such as flooding in their area. The majority of citizens now use the internet via a mobile device and solutions must be delivered in a format that citizens find easy to access and use – coming up with these types of solutions is what will ultimately help organisations engage more effectively with their customers and tenants.

How have Civica's housing solutions evolved to meet these changing needs?

Looking back at the housing management systems that we delivered in the past, they were mainly focused on managing properties and rent collection from tenants. The real revolution in the last decade has been the move from a property-centric approach to a much more customer-centric view. Therefore we offer products today which are wholly customer-focused, allowing our partners in housing associations to have a true single-view of all tenant interactions and the ability to communicate in the most effective manner. It's all about quality of service delivery; today's tenants are much more likely to vote with their feet or take to social media to put pressure on providers to deliver an excellent service. This is now evolving further into systems that are truly digital, offering a single application that can interact via mobile, face-to-face, online and in the office with back-office and customer-facing employees; automating communications, delivering efficiencies and driving productivity.

How does the recent integration with Abrisas strengthen your position within the housing sector?

Our traditional position for solutions in the housing sector has focused on citizens already receiving social housing services, so predominantly existing tenants and managing housing tenancy accounts. Our integration with Abrisas now means we've incorporated many pre-tenancy services such as housing needs and options and homelessness issues, and ensure that these flow through to our housing management solution. The integration with Abrisas now enables us to show the complete journey of a citizen making contact with an organisation, starting at the initial engagement rather than the contractual engagement. This is a key part of Civica's digital strategy, offering systems that can help citizens access a broad range of information, in the way that best suits them, and then make informed decisions about the services they wish to access.

How does this make Civica different?

Our portfolio of key housing products – Abrisas Housing, Cx, Servitor Repairs Management and Keystone Asset Management – means we hold a unique position in the market with the ability to provide a full end-to-end service. Integrated CRM, housing and asset management technology allows housing managers and directors to have that single-view of both citizens and properties within an organisation. It's also important that rather than building add-on products, such as an asset management tool, we've gone to the market to look for the best products and made strategic acquisitions to bring together a full integrated solution. We've brought in their natural synergies and sector knowledge which results in a far superior service for our customers. Beyond this, the company also provides a broader capability, ranging from IT managed services to business process services, which means we can respond to evolving customer needs for technology-based transformation.

What's your vision for the future of Civica Housing?

We've invested heavily over the past few years in building our housing proposition, both via acquisition and product development, demonstrating our huge commitment to the social housing sector. Our vision is to work with our 380+ customers to evolve our

A DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR TODAY'S HOUSING SECTOR

Continued from previous page

products and services to meet their future development needs. Today's social housing tenants demand the same digital and mobile-focused services they receive from their bank or online retailers so the next wave of development will be for tenancy and contractual relationships to become fully digital – that's where we see Civica Housing moving forward. Digital means much more for Civica than just online; it encompasses a complete platform that allows communication in the way that tenants want and facilitates flexible digital data collection and interactions via agile working and communications. We're also looking at the huge issue of rent collection and developing innovative and mobile payment mechanisms, such as our new CivicaPay product for the housing sector.

What do you enjoy most about working in the housing sector?

The sector is never dull and constantly changing! Social housing sits squarely between the public and private sectors which allows for great innovation. I also value working in an industry with a strong social conscience and therefore any innovation or commercial avenues explored will always be based around making lives better for citizens. All of our customers are at the sharp end of delivering services to people and communities, and if together we do a great job through technology and automation, then it really does make a difference to people's lives and for those who serve them.

You've been part of Civica for 15 years – what was your journey like to get where you are?

I joined Civica from the corporate banking sector and I've never looked back. The company makes a

considerable investment in supporting and developing our people and values, including building a team of inspirational leaders. I've worked across various departments and it's been a very enjoyable journey, made all the better by the people who work here and our distinctive culture which really does set the company apart. There's always innovation and room to grow at Civica, as well as a truly collaborative spirit, both internally and with our customers around the world.

Jeff Hewitt is executive director for housing and asset management at Civica.



Hastoe Housing chooses MIS AMS

Hastoe Housing has chosen MIS AMS's ActiveH housing management software to manage 7,400 homes across its predominantly rural portfolio of properties, including 250 villages with varying degrees of mobile phone signal. The new software is scheduled to go live in March 2018.

Hastoe has bought all ActiveH modules, including desktop, rents, assets, lettings, planned maintenance, CRM, repairs, debt management, mobile and tenant portal.

Amanda Harris, head of customer services, Hastoe Housing, said, "We are an operationally-lean organisation, so our housing officers sometimes travel a long way to meet tenants face-to-face. They therefore need a system that can keep pace and deliver the services they want while on the road.

"In very rural locations, ActiveH will provide the ability for housing officers to access the full housing management system remotely and provide the opportunity to change the way we deliver those services and increase the efficiency of doing so.

"Officers will have access to data irrespective of where they are, and anything that is changed in the field can be uploaded to the main ActiveH system remotely, removing the need for duplication or rekeying on return to the office.

"Ultimately ActiveH will mean that our officers can visit tenants and not need to worry about a mountain of paperwork on their return to the office – it's done on the road instead."



CIVICA'S KEYSTONE ASSET MANAGEMENT AT CCG

Following the roll-out of Civica's Keystone integrated asset management software, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd's front-line staff can now answer tenants' queries at the first point of contact across a range of areas including planned works, stock-condition data and servicing due dates. Furthermore, CCG surveyors are actively collecting and validating stock condition data out in the field while its in-house responsive repairs team can access asbestos risk-related information before carrying out repairs.

Mathew Gosset, assets and investment manager, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd, said, "Keystone has become integral to our business. We are currently managing over 40 planned work schemes using Keystone Planned Maintenance and around 450 land management and fire risk assessments using Keystone Risk Management.

"We now have up-to-date data at our fingertips and can make strategic business decisions, such as using the sustainability and forecasting model to identify poorly-performing properties, and by using the energy module we have generated additional rental revenue from improved energy efficiency data."

Mark Holdsworth, sales director, Civica, said, "The ability to deliver compliance for gas safety, fire risk, electrical, asbestos and legionella is driving the need to have a comprehensive asset management system in place, providing a single view in order to minimise compliance risks. Our Keystone asset management solution is now used by over 200 social housing providers, including the recent additions of Weaver Vale, Muir Group, Havebury Housing and three of the largest social housing groups in the UK."

Home Group and Newlon choose Integrator and Notus

Home Group has chosen Integrator Housing Solutions' asset management software for its 6,000 leasehold properties alongside the software provider's Notus Pocket Surveyor software to be used by its contractors.

Philip Wragg, project manager, Home Group, said, "We've used this system for many years with some of our properties and now that we're embarking on a new programme with our leasehold properties, it was the obvious fit."

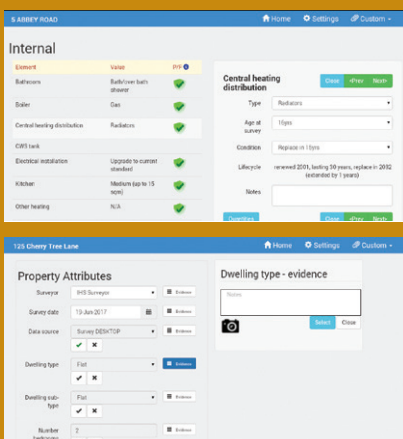
Newlon Housing Trust has commissioned Ridge Property & Construction Consultants to carry out a stock condition survey using the Integrator and Notus pocket surveying system which gives them a totally mobile stock condition management system.

Integrator provides housing associations with a fully-configurable reporting suite which also gives contractors access to

in-depth analysis after completion of a stock condition survey to help with their final report.

Vic Harrison, managing director, Integrator Housing Solutions, said, "We've always wanted to provide a comprehensive asset management system like Integrator to the very small housing associations, something that has eluded them due to their relatively high cost. After all, small housing associations with between just a handful and a few hundred properties have to comply with the same legislation as the larger housing providers.

"Integrator has been used by many of the large providers for the past 16 years and we feel that we can now offer the smallest providers a very competitive price for the same powerful asset management system."





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CIVICA



SMALL-SCALE, YET ENTERPRISE-CLASS

Chris Potter, Managing Director, ROCC

Many small housing providers are struggling to source a repairs software solution that can deliver the key benefits of an enterprise system yet at an affordable price.

Most housing providers are looking to fulfil their business objectives to improve efficiency and provide digital inclusion by introducing technologies such as repair diagnostics, self-service portals, mobile working and other back-office functions.

They want a system that's not only quick to implement and intuitive to use but also doesn't need an army of specialist IT staff to get up and running. The system must have plug-and-play connectivity with other business applications to enable trouble-free integration and support automated data transfer.

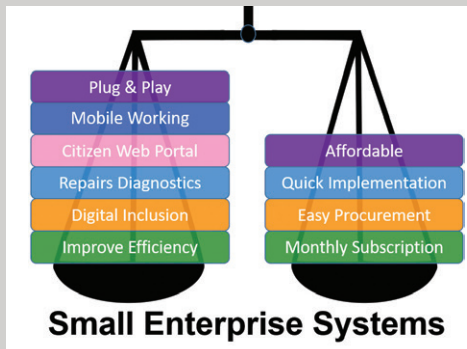
Lastly, it must be affordable and easy to buy, usually on a monthly subscription, without needing to go through a time-consuming tender process.

The key questions that need to be answered fall into three main areas:

1. Business objectives and functional 'hotspots';
2. Project delivery;
3. Procurement.

Business objectives

What are the ambitions of the organisation – is it general efficiency gains, driving increases in productivity, doing more jobs in less time, and how do these balance with achieving high levels



of customer satisfaction and achieving softer objectives such as community engagement and helping the homeless?

It's important to map the functional hotspots that drive the business objectives, such as mobile working, resource scheduling, job costing and the ability, at a technical level, to share services with other housing providers and how they help achieve key deliverables such as:

- Completing more jobs 'right first-time';
- Having the right information to make better decisions;
- Meeting appointments when expected by the tenant;
- Providing more responsive and convenient services to tenants;
- Full and accurate end-to-end visibility of a repair across the organisation.

Project delivery

Project delivery needs to cause the least disruption to the business and to be cost effective and use best practice where

appropriate. Agile is the new way forward, and by combining this with using standard templates, training videos and fast feedback loops means you can demonstrate progress to the end-users sooner. It's then about continuous improvement using retrospectives as the way of finding out what's working and what's not and ensure the maximum RoIT is obtained.

Procurement

When procuring a small system, organisations don't want to go through a costly and time-consuming tender process but need to ensure due diligence and value-for-money. Using e-procurement takes less time than traditional procurement. Having your records stored electronically makes it easier to submit reusable tenders. Meanwhile, use of templates means paperwork can be filled out faster.

E-procurement asks suppliers what they can offer, rather than how they can meet a brief. The use of templates ensures pricing and solution templates are standard across all suppliers, which means it's easy to compare suppliers across categories. Pricing is transparent and provided up-front.

For the last few years ROCC, has been working to resolve these issues and wants to engage with smaller housing providers to work with them to realise this vision.

Chris Potter is managing director of ROCC.

SDS launches new asset management consultancy

Shelton Development Services has just launched a new asset consultancy to help the housing sector.

Born out of SDS, one of the UK's leading suppliers of project appraisal, control and profiling software, SDS Asset Consultancy reported that it will be using 'active asset management' to deliver the necessary business intelligence to understand its customers' current stock performance, and to help plan for future investments and asset disposals. It also aims to help to make better use of housing providers' financial capital as part of integrated asset and business planning solutions.

Rowley Maggs, international business development director at SDS, is leading SDS Asset Consultancy after two years at the company, helping European housing professionals, consultants and service providers develop and manage property portfolios. His previous experience includes work in oil and gas, construction and senior care housing.

Maggs said, "This is a great opportunity to build on SDS's 23 years in the housing sector and on our consultants' experience, and to leverage our Stock Profiler software to help our customers formulate and deliver their asset strategies."



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PROCUREMENT IS MUCH MORE THAN JUST OJEU...

Chris Cliffe, Director, CJC Procurement

Housing Technology interviewed CJC Procurement about the opportunities and pitfalls of the IT and business procurement processes.

What is 'value for money' in IT procurement?

Well, for starters, value for money is not simply savings; it's far more complex and yet far simpler. Value for money in IT procurement is the demonstrable improvement made in the delivery of the organisation's objectives which is another way of saying don't count the percentage discount or the pennies 'saved' in choosing supplier X over supplier Y. Instead, measure the improvement in business processes, the amount of resource released from manual processes now automated, the amount of time the supplier now spends directly supporting your digital skills initiatives, and the contribution your new IT is making to your overall business objectives.

Does OJEU actually apply to IT procurement in the housing sector or can you 'work around' it to save costs?

Let's put this point to bed once and for all. Yes. 100 per cent. Absolutely. The social housing sector is covered by the Public Contracts Regulations. This has been the case since the 2006 regulations and nothing changed under the 2015 regime.

Working around OJEU is one of the most common procurement questions I've ever been asked. It's like asking an accountant whether you really must file your accounts? We all need to get over this. OJEU is not the big and scary thing it's painted to be. Yes, there are rules and processes and you need professional support from procurement, just as you enjoy from your finance team at year end.

The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (the OJEU rules) prescribe rules and procedures. They are tools and there are ways and means to apply them and

practice makes perfect. You have to have a few under your belt to know how they work. Frameworks are 'OJEU compliant' as they themselves have been procured via OJEU. G-Cloud is compliant because it is ultimately a Framework Agreement. The spirit of the rules apply below the threshold, but are less onerous.

When I hear the question 'how do we avoid OJEU?', in my head I tend to hear 'I don't really know what I want so I don't want to go through a process to highlight that to everyone'. Don't worry, good procurement folk will help you every step of the way; don't fight it, embrace it. No one saves any cost by short-changing a procurement process; the benefits are in delivering an appropriate contract with the right supplier based on the right relationship, managed through to delivery and conclusion. Consider this – the OJEU timescales are as much about you preparing to manage the outcome as they are in acquiring the contract.

How well served is the housing sector with IT procurement resources?

In my view, poorly. Some housing providers have reasonable teams and some have IT-focused category managers which is great, but many more have small 'procurement' teams of two or three people and yet more still have no in-house procurement support at all.

It's now 2017. Procurement is not about shopping. It's not about the tender process. Modern procurement is increasingly about the facilitation of end-to-end business value. Procurement needs to continue to modernise, but this sector needs to wake-up to procurement and demand more from it.

Do IT suppliers exploit their customers because they know their switching costs are so high?

Some do, and I don't blame them. Let's not forget that suppliers are in business to make money. They are legally obliged to do so for their shareholders. There's

nothing wrong with that, it's just the way it is.

Proper procurement will arm the buyer with information to deal with this, an awareness of the market and the market conditions, an awareness of the respective powers of the supplier and the buyer, and the options and opportunities to change the factors in play to the buyer's advantage.

Every buy/supply relationship has an appropriate mix of tactics to make the best of it for all parties concerned – as I said, procurement isn't just shopping.

During these time of cost cutting, are IT suppliers offering the best VfM and/or sharing the pain of cost cutting?

At the moment, cutting IT budgets is the last thing I would do. I would use technology to reduce the overall operating costs of the business.

The sector is awash with digital transformation, mainly targeted at this outcome, but some are also trying to shave a few pounds from their IT bills while not focusing on reducing operating costs by millions through investment. Sometimes you need an 'invest to save' strategy and a strategic view is required – one of the reasons I champion the CIOs on every executive team!

That said, I would encourage everyone to open their next meeting with their key suppliers with the question 'how can we help you reduce your costs and/or your cost of supporting us?'. Even more interesting would be whether or not the feedback you received was genuinely welcomed and acted on by your management teams.

When acquiring new IT services, what should you consider to ensure they remain future proof?

Don't worry about the future. Far too many times I've seen so much focus on protecting against the future that in reality no progress is made because

PROCUREMENT IS MUCH MORE THAN JUST OJEU...

Continued from previous page

you're constantly waiting for the next step along the roadmap of the chosen technology.

Pick a sensible point in time, make the best decisions you can at that point, and execute those decisions as quickly as you can. Then sweat that decision for a couple of years, reassess and adjust, and focus on the business improvements delivered during those years, and not on the risk (well, certainty) that technology might move on during that period.

When do you need a dedicated procurement system or are Excel and Word sufficient?

No procurement function should still be reliant on Excel. Mandating e-sourcing and e-procurement was originally tabled

many years ago, but in recognition that so much of the public sector is so far behind, this has been postponed time and time again. There are cost-effective solutions and they should be used.

Nor should this be limited to simply e-tendering. We should all be aspiring to have P2P and automated spend analysis tools, not just a fancy tender box! However, I suspect even where ERP has been fully deployed, Excel will always have a place though!

What about bulk or joint procurement opportunities with similar organisations?

Collaboration is a huge opportunity for this sector. In my view, there should be much more joint working and collaboration because the housing

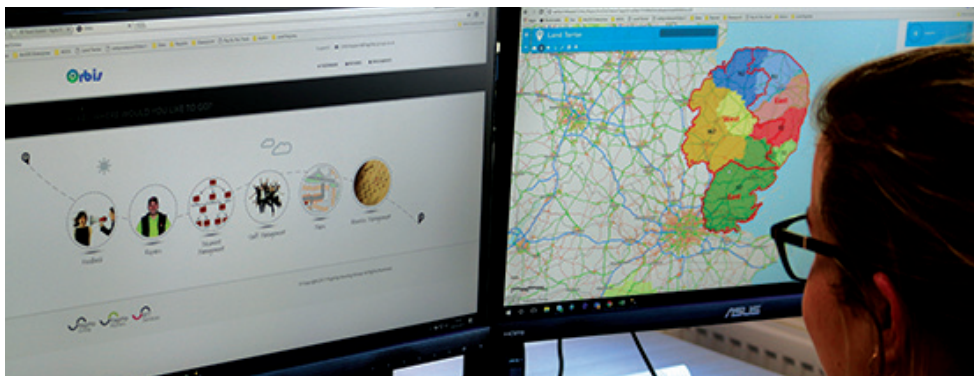
sector doesn't have competition in its conventional sense. I agree this is challenging and there are always politics involved, internally as much as with prospective partners, but the sector is missing a trick, especially with regard to the cost of switching suppliers, as mentioned above.

In one sentence, what advice would you give Housing Technology's readers to immediately improve their value from IT procurement?

Establish who your critical, strategic suppliers really are and talk to them today about your business objectives and ask them to tell you all about theirs too, as relationships really matter.

Chris Cliffe is director of CJC Procurement.

MOBILE WORKING



FLAGSHIP BUILDS IN-HOUSE REPAIRS SYSTEMS

Flagship Group has transformed its repairs operations using software created by its in-house development team. Since the introduction of the 'Orbis' software in 2015, calls to Flagship's contact centre have fallen by 70,000.

Flagship's Orbis, which is the only system of its kind, enables staff to work more efficiently and effectively because it provides a single online location to carry out daily tasks such as organising operatives' workloads and ordering materials.

Orbis enables Flagship's operatives to find details of their daily repairs and maintenance jobs without having to call into the housing provider's call centre. As a result, the average number of calls per day has fallen from more than 750 (April 2015/March 2016) to around 500 (April 2016/March 2017).



Matt Brazier,
Director of IT,
Flagship Group

Matt Brazier, director of IT, Flagship Group, said, "Everything we do supports doing what's right for our tenants, and this includes our technology and internal systems. Orbis is a system that gives the customer the best value and service because it's been specifically designed around them. We are unique in that we have the in-house technological expertise to be able to create a system like this.

"Orbis has changed the way the business operates enormously, leading to an increase in productivity and a reduction in costs. And because it's our own design, we can continue to adapt it to meet our future needs."

Flagship has halved the amount of time operatives spend on hold when calling the call centre due to the integrated mapping function within the system. This allows users to geographically see where repair works need to be carried out and allocate the nearest operative. It also means an operative can complete multiple repairs, rather than individual ones, when in a particular area.

Since the launch of Orbis, the average number of jobs completed by Flagship's carpenters, plumbers and electricians has risen from eight per day (April 2015) to 15 per day (March 2017).

Brazier said, "Orbis has changed the way we work because we now have the flexibility to deal with repairs faster and more easily, leading to an increase in the number of jobs we can complete each day."

1st Touch unveils V6 digital & mobile platform

1st Touch is due to release its new V6 digital and mobile platform during the fourth quarter of 2017 following a multimillion-pound investment in its development by parent company Aareon.

The company said that the new system will deliver a complete digital transformation and mobile workforce ecosystem for the housing sector. With full SaaS functionality, V6 will allow housing providers of all sizes to access commonly-used modules and forms in the cloud, so that the latest best-practice modules and apps can be shared by customers. It will also provide a marketplace for users, partners and third-party vendors to trade and exchange apps.

In preparation for the launch of V6 and expansion into Europe, 1st Touch is now aligning itself more closely within Aareon's

group structure to give customers a unified contact centre and administrative organisation.

As a result, 1st Touch customers will be able to plug in a range of digital solutions from Aareon including CRM, contractor systems, ASB and asset management, while integrating only once with their Aareon housing management system.

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch, said, "V6 is an exciting development for both companies because it recognises the market momentum of the 1st Touch brand to date and provides a catalyst for sharing a strong management team in the future. It also gives us access to highly-skilled resources from the well-funded Aareon group, part of Aareal Bank."



PARADIGM OPTS FOR LANSA'S LOW-CODE DEVELOPMENT PLATFORM

Paradigm Housing has delivered the next phase of its digital transformation programme, a tenant portal and mobile workforce solution, using LANSA's 'low-code' development platform. These latest additions integrate with Paradigm's existing LANSA-built housing management system.

By choosing to build in-house, using LANSA's single-language solution, Paradigm said that it had created the specific business applications it needed in a fraction of the time and cost of using packaged applications or of building with traditional development methods. Using only two developers, Paradigm's IT department has delivered back-office, mobile and web-based applications.

Mike Silk, head of IT, Paradigm Housing, said, "I've tried lots of third-party app-development tools for mobile and they're fine for simple apps, but if you really want to build anything reasonably complex, they tend to fall apart. You very soon have to drop out of the tool and start coding. With LANSA, we could do it all with one skillset."

Paradigm's tenant portal was built in just 20 days. Tenants can now review their account balances, pay their rent (the LANSA-based solution is integrated with Capita's payment system), provide feedback to Paradigm, and request property repairs. The portal uses LANSA's 'responsive design' capabilities, so that whichever device the portal is accessed on, the app presents appropriately for the screen size.

The mobile solution, built in only 15 days, delivers fully-optimised job schedules to 100 mobile workers. They can log

completed jobs, either online or offline, and report back to Paradigm's back-office systems using LANSA's out-of-the box integration modules. Other integrations include those with a customer text-messaging system, bank account verification software, postcode look-up software and an out-of-hours support system run by Mears.

Paradigm's core systems, comprising full property management, from building and acquisition, through to property rental and accounts, are all written using LANSA.

Silk said, "To deliver the cost savings and efficiencies promised by digital transformation, the solution had to be end-to-end, and with no smoke and mirrors. Relying on email communication to plug gaps between systems would significantly degrade the benefits. We needed to break down silos and streamline processes between ourselves, our customers, and our supply-chain partners.

"As for the LANSA development environment, we initially chose the product to improve developer productivity and to provide a development environment that would enable us to easily migrate to other back-office databases, should the need arise. Not only has it achieved that, but it has kept pace with new technologies, allowing us to deliver business solutions and integrate with third parties without having to re-skill in the different technologies, particularly for web and mobile applications."



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What our clients say...

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

"Having all of the data relating to the young people we support in one database is already delivering benefits and generating savings."

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"ALEXA, HOW ARE OUR TENANTS?"

John Shipman, Digital Services Manager, Places for People

I've recently bought a new toy. Amazon's Echo Dot is a voice interface that enables me to ask my Alexa digital assistant questions about the weather, Wikipedia and the ongoing misfortunes of my football team. You may have seen Alexa at the Housing Technology 2017 conference in March during Capita's inspiring presentation.

Alexa comes with an app to download new 'skills' (think of them as apps) from the skill store to make Alexa cleverer. Having spent time developing a skill with the sole purpose of annoying my son – "Alexa, tell Dan to do his homework" – my thoughts turned to housing. I quickly produced a demo to provide a fictitious customer with a rent balance and to remind them of an upcoming repair.

In reality, there are hurdles to overcome before we can do this; for example, linking our tenancy accounts, security and understanding the flow of an Alexa conversation. I think it's telling that some of the major early-adopting sectors, such as banks and bookmakers, haven't yet launched account skills themselves. I look forward to the day when I can

lose money by asking Alexa to "put £2 on England to win" shortly before they snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. This lack of obvious skills implies that these are stumbling blocks for all, although far from insurmountable and no doubt being looked at.

While we're not yet in a position to give tenants their balance, let's focus on what we could do so that we can start learning.

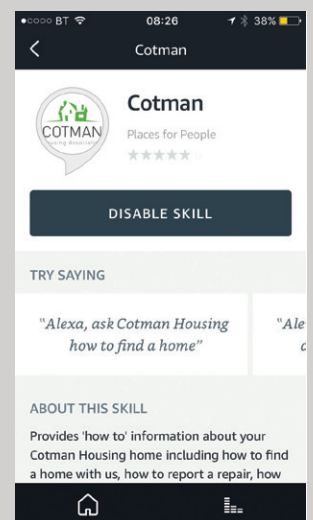
We've produced a simple skill to provide Cotman (part of the Places for People group) tenants with overview and signposting information. We can think of this in terms of an early website, providing information about a company before we were clever enough to make it functional. In our case, tenants can ask Alexa "how do I find a home?", "how do I make a payment?", "how do I report a repair?", "what is universal credit?", and "how do I register for online services?".

In common with many people, I see this type of voice/screenless technology as being a future disruptor in computing so I'm keen to start experimenting early. By launching this skill, we can not only

provide useful information to Cotman tenants but also start to understand the expertise required to build effective voice interfaces and to get skills certified, which was a challenge in itself. We will also gauge usage levels and interest so that we can determine future development ambitions, timelines and platforms, such as Google Home.

If in the near future I can ask my bank the state of my current account, there's no reason the housing sector shouldn't provide this information to its tenants too. Next stop chat bots..

John Shipman is the digital services manager at Places for People.



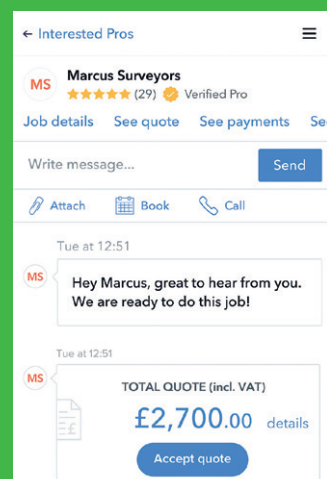
Notting Hill Housing partners with Plentific

Home-services marketplace Plentific has signed a deal with Notting Hill Housing to create a new property management solution and self-service platform. Initially, this will support maintenance and repair work for 2,000 temporary properties spread across London.

Andy Belton, chief operating officer, Notting Hill Housing, said, "When I saw Plentific's presentation, I was impressed and immediately thought we could use the platform and instant booking system for some areas of our business.

Having done further work with them, we can see the potential that Plentific offers to create a streamlined digital approach for maintaining properties that will save a great deal of time and resources."

Notting Hill managers and tenants will be able to use 'Plentific Instant', an on-demand service which lets them instantly book trade professionals. This will simplify repairs and maintenance processes while also cutting down on the number of calls between property managers and tenants.



PA Housing channel shifts 3,000 tenants online

PA Housing, the result of the merger of Asra Housing and Paragon Community Housing earlier this year, has reported that over 3,000 tenants are now using its self-service portal on a regular basis.

The My Asra portal, which initially took 12 weeks to build, allows users to log in and manage their homes securely, giving them their rent balance, a summary of recent transactions and a printable record of their rent charges. It also lets them check on individual and communal repairs for their property.

Help and live chat features, payment options and the ability to request repairs, add pictures and select time slots to schedule repair work have all been incorporated into the system as additional features during its first year.

1,700 tenants are accessing the portal every month, around 10,000 self-service processes are typically completed and around 275 new users are registering each month.



Amit Patel,
Director of
Corporate Services,
PA Housing

Amit Patel, director of corporate services, PA Housing, said, "The digital transformation programme is a great achievement in the timescales in which

it has been accomplished, given the complexity of the project.

"Thanks to a good working relationship with Prodo Housing, aligned to our vision and an agile approach, we've produced a successful solution and a great customer experience."

Ivo Kerkhof, head of Prodo Housing, said, "Since the portal launched a year ago, there's been a 14 per cent reduction in call volumes. Features such as self-service repairs proved immediately popular – we saw 160 tenants taking advantage of this function alone in its first month."

NOURISH TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTIONISING OPTIVO CARE HOMES

Optivo is revolutionising services at its care homes with a new digital care management tool that hooks up to computers and smartphones. Called Nourish, the technology allows staff to record every aspect of each resident's care plan at their residences in Ealing, London.

Data regarding everything from activities and interactions to food and fluid intake can be inputted, and alerts are generated if there are any changes, such as weight loss.

Keith Comley, care training and quality assurance manager, Optivo, said: "This system replaces almost 300 ring binders, one for each resident, which used to record care plans and daily routines.

"It enables colleagues to input all checks digitally, which allows

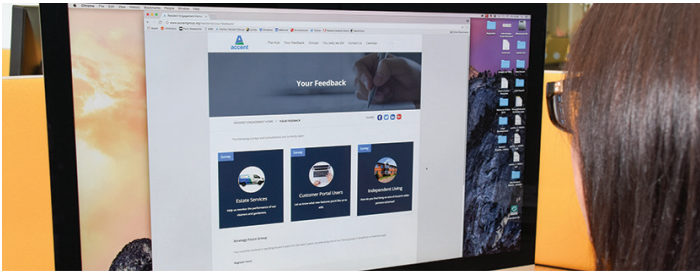
significantly more information to be recorded than the old-fashioned, paper-based system. We can input what activities a resident has been doing, through to what they have been eating and drinking. Every aspect of their care plan can be fully documented."

All the data is automatically sent to cloud-based servers where it can be securely accessed by nurses, seniors and managers.

To access the information during visits, staff simply tap their smartphone on a sticker on the resident's door and all of their details are retrieved on the device.

They can use the information to update family members, who may be visiting, on the day's activities, and they can also raise alarms that remain active until the issue or concern has been resolved.





Accent 'Hub' for tenant engagement

In order to better understand its tenants' needs, priorities and preferences, Accent Group has created an online engagement hub as part of its website.

Tenant engagement at Accent had previously been very traditional, based around meetings and events. The housing provider found that these types of engagements tended to restrict the

tenants who could get involved, meaning that the views of its overall tenant population were not being captured.

The Accent Hub enables tenants to take part in surveys and consultations and submit feedback at their convenience, at any time of day. They are then kept informed about the service improvements made as a direct result of

their engagement via a 'you said it, we did it' page as well as real-time results of tenants' polls.

Accent aims to eventually form a collective of around 500 tenants spread across its five regions to take part in online polls and consultations on a regular basis.

HOUSING PARTNERS AND NPSS TACKLE HOMELESSNESS WITH IT

Housing Partners and the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) have jointly developed a new case management system to help housing providers and local authorities meet the requirements for the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act.

With a pilot project starting in September 2017, Housing Jigsaw is an online tool created to gather data on homelessness direct from local authorities.

Under the Act, local authorities must assess and provide meaningful assistance, including a personalised housing plan, to anyone in their district who is homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

Housing Jigsaw is a full case management system which combines practical support and advice covering all aspects of housing options including homelessness and accommodation options. The partnership is also giving all local authorities in England and Wales access to a free communications portal to support their compliance with the new regulation.

Tracy Hendren, service lead, National Practitioner Support Service, said, "Housing Jigsaw will support local authorities nationally to gather consistent data on a customer's housing journey while also identifying early indicators that can lead to a household becoming homeless.

"We wanted the ability to develop a bespoke IT system that would support local authorities and their partners to deliver the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act. This partnership brings together Housing Partners' IT experience with NPSS' practitioner expertise to deliver an innovative approach to the early intervention and prevention of homelessness."

The pilot phase of Housing Jigsaw will run from September 2017 to March 2018.

Together Housing partners with Rant & Rave for real-time feedback

Together Housing Association has signed up with Rant & Rave in order to gain better customer insights.

Together Housing has introduced Rant & Rave's Fast Feedback solution which uses text messages to generate faster customer feedback and insights that can be acted on immediately. By sending a text message to every Together Housing tenant after a service has been provided or transaction completed, tenants now have the opportunity to explain what really matters to them, in their own words.

The instant feedback is then accessed by Together Housing's staff and managers through an easy-to-understand online dashboard, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities

and threats across business and staff performance.

Stephen Batley, head of business improvement, Together Housing Group, said, "One of the driving factors behind our new approach was the need to provide more immediate operational feedback so that our managers and staff can improve their performance. By contrast, all of our previous customer insights were from strategic research, following a customer-service interaction via telephone surveys.

"Rant & Rave will give us daily feedback, as near to 'in the moment' as possible, enabling us to respond to specific issues faster and to improve our strategic customer insights."



Making strategic property investments **isn't easy** when the social housing sector is constantly changing

We don't need to tell you about the increasing pressure to stress test business plans against risks and actively manage assets.

This is something that the HCA now expects from organisations, together with the requirement to work at a more granular level.

To comply with these requirements and to reflect the current focus on Active Asset Management, our customers are turning to us for help.

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CUTTING-EDGE DIGITAL AT GREENSQUARE

Rob Fletcher, Group Head of ICT, GreenSquare Group

Earlier this year, GreenSquare held a 'digital visioning' day with a large group of staff and colleagues as we get ready for digital transformation. This transformation is due to our need to increase customer satisfaction and find new ways to deliver services on a more flexible and cost-effective basis.

We are currently in the middle of digitising services for customers and staff by developing mobile working and workforce-scheduling technologies. This has included moving to Microsoft Office 365, Power BI and Azure to provide online backups and 'hot' disaster recovery, while improving our use of informatics (information management practices) to drive improved decision-making.

We reached a tipping point because of the impact of the autumn 2015 budget on our income. The loss of revenue needs to be made up by efficiencies and productivity gains generated through digital advancements. We also need to substantially increase the number of homes we produce as a sector. So basically, we need to do more for less and simply rearranging the furniture won't do! Going digital will allow us to respond to an increasingly challenging environment while creating a genuine and unprecedented opportunity for transformation and organisational renewal.

Our digital strategy is about looking at what GreenSquare will be like in the future, and how we can use current technologies to help us achieve our aspirations. It's also about working out how we can change the way we work to make the most of the benefits while avoiding possible pitfalls. As a result, we are implementing a digital strategy that comprises five projects:



1. Field service management and mobile working;
2. Digital construction methods;
3. Purchase-to-pay;
4. Information management to drive actionable insights;
5. Office 365 and SharePoint rollout for GDPR.

One of our most exciting developments is our new self-service portal, which includes 100 per cent end-to-end, fully-automated repairs processing with a range of appointments offered to customers, and sourced from the dynamic scheduling engine with the ability to rebook appointments.

However, the key thing when it comes to successfully implementing any change is involving the people who will be involved in that change from an early stage. That way everyone understands what's going on and, more importantly, those people will have the opportunity to shape the change based on their own perspectives and expertise.

We gathered around 60 colleagues from across the organisation for a 'digital vision' workshop where we heard more about what 'going digital' was all about, and in particular that digital isn't an end in itself but a way to achieve our wider objectives and aspirations, what others were already doing, and also a bit about some of the developments we have in

the pipeline at GreenSquare. Colleagues then had some fun creating newspaper front-page stories describing how we might be in 2020 and 2025.

In order to capture everything that was discussed, we used a graphic facilitator to create a picture of the day.

We will be using the output from this session, alongside other information and activities, to develop our digital road map for 2018 and beyond. This will look at:

- Where we are now, considering skills gaps, training requirements, the kit we have and the systems we use;
- Where we want to be, but being clear about our aims – how 'digital' do we want to be and what outcomes do we want to achieve;
- How we are going to get there, including the projects, training, software, hardware and so on.



David Done, CEO, Richmond Housing Partnership (via Skype)

We invited David Done, Richmond Housing Partnership's CEO, to join the digital workshop via Skype for Business. He explained the digital transformation journey that RHP has been on, and how

CUTTING-EDGE DIGITAL AT GREENSQUARE

Continued from previous page

he has led the development of a new business model that exploits digital opportunities as a service delivery platform.

David Done, CEO, Richmond Housing Partnership, said, "It seemed only right that a talk about developing a digital-first culture should be delivered via Skype – a first for me! This has actually been a year of many firsts for RHP, most notably launching the UK's first all-digital housing service, RHPi. Since going live in April 2016, we've welcomed 272 RHPi customers to their new homes. The setup of the service is simple, new customers get a good quality home on a five-year, fixed-term tenancy, are entitled to essential and emergency repairs, and 24/7 access to online services including the opportunity to receive digital employment advice and support.

"So a year on, how has it gone? The thing we're proudest of is the overall satisfaction rate of RHPi customers, which is currently 94 per cent. RHPi



bottom line has also benefitted from this new way of doing business because we've had a 30 per cent reduction in customer contact costs.

"The launch has in fact gone so well that, after a successful consultation last year, as of last month all customers now benefit from receiving our RHPi services (apart from the small majority who have been identified as non-digital, in which case they can still call us). This means that they contact us in a digital way rather than over the phone, access services via our website and have an essential and emergency repairs service. Although this sounds like a massive leap, we've spent

customers have pinpointed that they find our online services easy and convenient and that it fits in with their lifestyle, which is music to our ears. Our

a number of years getting our customers ready for this move. It's still early days but the first signs have been positive. In the first week alone calls reduced by 7% and webchats increased by 50%, and feedback from customers has been optimistic. We're also running ongoing digital sessions for any of our customers who're not confident online to keep supporting them with the transition."

To paraphrase RHP's Done's remarks, the best advice for any organisation aiming to progress their digital offering is to be brave and bold; your customers will be more ready for the move than you might expect. Make sure your employees understand why you're making the changes (after all, they'll need to be your biggest advocates in nudging customers online) and focus on the accessibility of your services.

Rob Fletcher is group head of ICT at GreenSquare Group.



Capita's impact on WDH's independent living schemes

Following the introduction of Capita's Advantage Impact web-based system, WDH's services for vulnerable tenants at its 42 independent living schemes across Wakefield have now been fully digitalised, with all customer and scheme information stored electronically. Until the end of 2015, the schemes were all managed via paper and basic spreadsheets.

WDH and Capita reported that some of the benefits of the Advantage Impact system included improved record keeping and better access to customer information, faster resolution of problems, automated allocation of assessments to a dispersed workforce using workflows, reduced administration, and improved staff satisfaction.

Louise Smith, community support worker, WDH, said, "Since the Advantage Impact implementation began, our head-office

team has been able to access information about tenants, their properties and schemes, without needing to travel or request it from the people at our independent living schemes."

Darren Portman, care and health manager, WDH, said, "We have progressed from using paper records and having to travel around the district to access them, to using a completely paperless system accessible online. This is an excellent example of how digital working can improve efficiency and customer satisfaction."

Keirron Goffe, head of business development for Advantage Impact, Capita, said, "Because the system can be used for any 'people services' and contract management and monitoring arrangements, WDH is now planning to deploy it in other areas beyond its independent living schemes."



GDPR – WHAT IT IS AND WHY THE HOUSING SECTOR SHOULD CARE

Brad Semp, Director of PCI Services, GCI

Along with every other organisation holding customer and employee personal data, the housing sector will need to comply with stringent new laws which come into force on the 25th May 2018. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is EU legislation designed to beef up data protection regulations and replaces the existing Data Protection Act (DPA). It's far more rigorous than the DPA and comes with much more stringent penalties of up to €20m or four per cent of annual turnover for noncompliance. Compare this with the current maximum fine that the Information Commissioner's Office can levy of £500,000 and one can see it's a big leap. It's important to note that GDPR applies regardless of the UK's decision to leave the EU.

GDPR applies to all organisations that handle personal data. If we apply that to a housing provider, we can see that could constitute many forms. Tenants' personal information, their bank details and copies of land registry information would all fall within this remit and if compromised could be highly damaging in the wrong hands. GDPR will also apply to a housing provider's employees – again their contact details, tax records and salary information (for example) all constitute valuable data that must be protected in order to comply with GDPR.

What are the differences between GDPR and the Data Protection Act?

GDPR takes the Data Protection Act but applies a lot more rigour. The key difference is accountability. Essentially, organisations must ensure that personal data is only collected for valid reasons, stored securely, and accessed 'only by those who need it' for valid data-processing reasons. There is also a requirement to delete the personal data once it is no longer needed for the processing activity. Data controllers also must comply with the 'right to be forgotten' when an individual asks for their data to be erased if it's no longer required for processing or if the individual no longer has an ongoing commercial agreement with the data controller.

Proof of GDPR adherence could be requested at any stage. This means organisations will need to provide evidence of their policies on data handling and prove they are processing the data lawfully and provide evidence that they have consent. It also mandates special considerations for children's personal data. Additionally, public organisations and enterprises processing a certain number of data records will need to appoint a data protection officer (DPO).

Payments come with extra regulations

Most housing providers will have their tenants on direct debit but there will still be occasions when one-off payments still need to be taken by credit or debit card. It's not commonly understood but existing Payment Card Industry (PCI) regulations are very tight on how card payments can be taken. For example, if the cardholder is not present, unless there is an approved, documented process and policy to do so, then it shouldn't be possible for the housing provider's employee (if speaking to the tenant over the phone) to write down card details. They should also not repeat the card number back to the customer (since sensitive cardholder details can be captured using a recording device). Instead a housing provider should look to de-scope their call-centre environment. The best way to do so is to use a payment application which allows the caller to anonymously key in their payment information over the phone without having to share the data with the agent on the other end of the call. These requirements are in place today with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) but under GDPR it will mean that enforcement is stepped up and penalties for non-compliance will fall within the tougher fine structure.

What does the housing sector need to do?

It's important to remember that while technology can help, the main challenge is around people and processes. It's more of 'what we've always needed to do'. The first step is to formulate a plan. Housing providers should think about all the areas where personal data is stored. Storing

anyone's data constitutes a risk for them so organisations should think about how that can be mitigated. Is access restricted to only those that need it as a specific part of their job function? Is data encrypted so if there is a breach from a cybercriminal, there is less chance of them being able to access it? Housing providers should ask if they actually need to capture the data in the first place; if data doesn't exist, it can't be breached so think carefully about the amount of personal data you hold on individuals.

It should be remembered that a key difference between GDPR and the DPA is that the former is more up-to-date with modern technology; for example, it means that IP logs of tenants looking at their housing provider's website would constitute personal data and fall within GDPR. Similarly, if personal data has been collected for marketing purposes but to some extent anonymised and 'tagged' according to certain group characteristics, it can still fall within the scope of the GDPR depending on how difficult it is to unravel this and isolate it to a particular individual.

The housing sector needs to act now (if it hasn't already)

GDPR is the biggest upheaval in how data is handled in 20 years and there's only just over a year for the housing sector to become compliant. Many will see it as a burden but much of this is good business practice that should be embraced.

The process will give reassurance to employees and customers that their data is being securely stored and accessed in accordance with the new law. In particular, we have seen in other sectors over the past few years the damage and angst that can be caused by cyber-attacks when personal data has been exposed. Had some of these organisations been GDPR compliant, their customers would have been spared a lot of anxiety and firms wouldn't have suffered such damage to their reputations. While getting GDPR compliant will be a lawful requirement, it makes sense to do this in any case.

Brad Semp is director of PCI services at GCI.



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HALFWAY TO AMAZON

Steve Dungworth, Head of Corporate Services, Accent Group

Along with my colleague Andrew Kidds, who manages our fabulous contact centre, I presented the story of Accent's ICT journey at Housing Technology's conference in March 2017.

'Halfway to Amazon' was a phrase coined by our critical friend, Frances Hipple from HACT, who had led a digital maturity review for us late last year which helped us focus on what we need to do next to improve our digital services to residents. Whilst we were slightly "glass half empty" with our score of 2.5 out of 5 on the digital maturity index, Frances kindly turned things around by mentioning all the great things we had already done and that if we kept the same pace we would soon be matching Amazon for digital delivery! Well that remains to be seen...

Actually, Amazon is not where we want to be! In a world where our customers' expectations are being influenced by digital consumer services such as Google, Amazon, Asos and Uber, the temptation might be to try and mimic them. However, the social housing sector is not driven by either commercial rewards or slick marketing and we certainly wouldn't want some of the 'people values' of some of those brands. People feature heavily in our ICT strategy; we call them 'digital people' who have the depth of skills and expertise and the ability to communicate and collaborate with others from different disciplines.

Digital people

The digital world presents us with fantastic opportunities, but we won't maximise these without customer-centric people who are digitally enabled. We need all our Accent people to buy into the digital strategy and see it as a key enabler to achieving our aspiration to be the UK's best housing association.

We need to attract and retain the best staff. Our colleagues are no different to our customers, consuming goods and services online. Instant results and seamless platforms are expected. Why should work be any different from the other aspects of our lives? We need to harbour the passion, commitment and creativity of our existing staff, but this needs to be set against the context of a fast-changing, technologically-advancing world.

It is unimaginable that we wouldn't listen to customer opinion, so why should we see colleagues' opinion as anything different? This drives a very different culture where hardware, software and lean and agile working practices are used to design customer and staff experience alike. We can create internal social networks which will improve staff engagement and satisfaction.

Building a strong digital culture will not happen without strong leaders. This is about all leaders and managers having responsibility for driving a vibrant and dynamic digital culture. Leaders who don't display a strong digital capability have limited hopes of successfully driving a digital culture. Our digital change programme will be an important enhancement to our recruitment strategy. The jobs market will be increasingly inhabited by younger generations who have very different aspirations to their predecessors. The most talented 'millennials' and 'generation Y' will be attracted to forwarding-thinking, dynamic employers who are as digitally enabled as they are.

Digital strategy

Strategy is an overused term. At its simplest, we have three initiatives which we hope will improve services: improve our website; replace our contact centre

telephone system; and improve our mobile working technology.

Contact centre

Our contact centre is already providing a great service for our tenants. Four years ago, Accent had three different subsidiaries, each with its own governance arrangements and service structure. We've since consolidated our organisational structure and just over a year ago, we brought together six different mini-contact centres into one central contact centre, achieving savings and improving consistency of services.

Our next steps are to create more capacity by replacing our outdated telephone system, introducing Skype for Business and integrating our housing management system with modern contact centre software. We have called this project 'Accent Connect' because this will connect us better with our tenants and with each other across the group.

Self-service website

Many people are talking about channel shift and moving telephone enquiries to website services. In Accent, 75 per cent of incoming contacts are through telephone calls. Another 20 per cent comes via email enquiries. Fewer than two per cent of enquiries are currently dealt with through our self-service website portal.

Our aim is to have a website that supports our contact centre and that each service should provide a fantastic experience for the customer. We want those who can and want to access services via the website to be able to do so, but those who still wish to use the telephone are welcome to do so.

So the next stage of our website development will focus on making the

HALFWAY TO AMAZON

Continued from previous page

high-volume transactions easier to do online:

- Responsive repairs: residents will be able to report a repair online and book and change an appointment. An integrated diagnostic tool will help residents describe the issue and ensure contractors send the right resources.
- Income collection: we will provide a range of online payment tools including direct payments and setting up direct debits. Rent statements are already available on our portal and we will provide more online benefits advice.
- Lettings and allocations: last year, we set out our aspirations for how we let our properties. We set the bar high, seeking an online service to match the Rightmove consumer website. Prospective tenants will have their own application portal where we collect information only when we need it (known as progressive on-boarding).

Mobile working

Having a consistent service delivered through the contact centre and self-service website will free up our field staff from administrative and low-level workflow tasks. This will allow them to focus on helping those in most need.

We provided staff with portable technology and systems two years ago to enable them to be out of the office. We are still learning about the best combinations of equipment and user-friendly screens, especially for tablets. Our aim is that users should have a similar experience to tenants using the self-service website, and that forms, letters and paper documents will be eliminated from our processes. This enabling technology will give more freedom to housing, contract and tenancy sustainability staff. With freedom comes more opportunity to add value and/or help our tenants.

Which brings us back to digital people and the journey to... well, Accent as a great provider of services in its own right, not Amazon!

I appreciate that each organisation is different and that you will have a strategy that is driven by different factors. If you want to find out more about our strategy, please feel free to contact me at steve.dungworth@accentgroup.org.

Steve Dungworth is head of corporate services at Accent Group.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The Internet of Things in Housing 2017



Housing Technology's CxO-level event, 'The Internet of Things 2017', will take place at the BT Tower in central London on Tuesday 10th October 2017.

The event will comprise a series of IoT presentations and demonstrations in the morning, followed by lunch at the top of the BT Tower.

Sponsored by BT, Capita and RHP, our Internet of Things 2017 event is being run in parallel with our forthcoming report on the same topic.

At the time of going to press, we have IoT experts from BT, Capita, Flagship Housing, RHP and The University of Reading (for the EU's Cocoon project) confirmed as the keynote speakers.

WHY ATTEND?

- Learn more about IoT and be inspired by powerful speakers;
- Increase your understanding of what others are doing with these important technologies;
- Connect with other key influencers and CxOs;
- Have fun and enjoy incredible views from one of the world's most iconic buildings.

Registration is now open at: www.housing-technology.com/events/iot2017.





SANCTUARY'S ONGOING SAP PROGRAMME

Kevin Heslop, Director of Technology, Sanctuary Group

Six months ago, Housing Technology interviewed Sanctuary Group's director of technology, Kevin Heslop, about the organisation's implementation of the SAP-based OneSanctuary system (see Housing Technology, January 2017). We can now find out how the business is managing the new system and what the future holds for one of the housing sector's largest SAP implementations.

Six months have passed, what stage is OneSanctuary at now?

Sanctuary has now delivered its final big SAP release, namely for the maintenance arm of the organisation, seeing 6,000 of our networked staff using OneSanctuary every day. This completed our move to SAP for our entire housing customer service operations.

Furthermore, we have integrated SAP with Kirona so that our mobile workforce of 1,000 repairs operatives can attend appointments with electronic job tickets



originated from SAP and managed with Kirona Job Manager and DRS.

All of our customer interactions in our customer service centres now take place through OneSanctuary. By consolidating our business processes in this way, we've been able to improve the way that we work in order to ensure excellent customer service and increased operational efficiency.

While cutting over to new systems can be disruptive, from a customer perspective it has been seamless and we are confident that our service levels



have not been adversely impacted. Now we've gone through that change, we can really focus on realising the benefits to the group; that's what OneSanctuary is all about.

What has Sanctuary achieved with its implementation of OneSanctuary and how will this be managed in the future?

The major headlines for us are that we have consolidated all of our master-data objects onto a single core system. With challenges such as the General Data Protection Regulation, we've made the investment to prioritise data and the controls to keep the master-data objects, such as customer, employee and asset data, at the highest possible levels of data quality.

OneSanctuary has also positively influenced the way we work as a group. We now have a shared corporate services centre, based at our head office in Worcester, providing all staff across the business with IS, HR, finance and procurement support. These teams now all use SAP as the main basis for the work they do and the processes they support, allowing them to work together in ways that were simply not possible before we introduced OneSanctuary. Similarly, we restructured our housing services division to coincide with last summer's housing-based release of SAP. The aim was to maximise the time spent with customers by our front-line teams.

The implementation of OneSanctuary has taken place over two years; can you describe why you used this phased approach?

Initially, we had a preference for a big-bang approach which would have meant fewer releases. However, we changed

the approach because we wanted the programme to have momentum and demonstrate progress more regularly. Also, by creating smaller releases we were able to fine tune the programme and ensure less overall disruption to the group.

Working in this way allowed us to manage many more parallel work streams, meaning we could have one business area being released with another in testing, while also supporting the areas already using SAP. We learned lessons from each release, which meant later releases benefited from improved ways of working.

How did you manage the implementation of OneSanctuary and were there any challenges?

The biggest challenge was about managing the implementation and wasn't technology related.

While staff from the IT teams were seconded to an in-house data team to manage data migration, a large number of business change managers focused on elements ranging from user acceptance testing to ensuring each business area using SAP had a network of local champions.

During the programme, over 200 members of staff from Sanctuary worked on OneSanctuary at one time or another; it has definitely been a team effort.

You previously spoke about sharing what you've learned with other technology and housing professionals – how is this progressing?

We've met a number of providers who are also thinking about their data and technology platforms. We've learned that everyone has pretty much the same sorts of challenges, priorities and pain points and, while SAP was the right answer for Sanctuary, there are many other ways that organisations can address these challenges. Collaborating and discussing these decisions has been useful all round

SANCTUARY'S ONGOING SAP PROGRAMME

Continued from previous page

and we intend to continue sharing what we've done and being involved in these exciting changes in the sector.

What are Sanctuary's next SAP-based plans?

Although we have now closed the OneSanctuary programme, we still have some exciting SAP-related projects on the horizon. We're currently in the early stages of designing a solution for van stock and materials management processes for Sanctuary Maintenance.

We also want to further develop the ways we support customer services processes using SAP. There are a number of self-service options we want to explore and this will take us into exciting new territory with SAP, with us exploring new systems such as Hybris.

The newest SAP technologies in S/4HANA also provide a wealth of opportunity for Sanctuary to explore. I fully expect this to turn into a new phase for OneSanctuary, focusing on our digital

services being hooked into our new core SAP platform. But for me, despite these great opportunities, the most exciting development is further evolving our in-house SAP team so that we can continue to provide excellent service from IT into our operations and group services.

Kevin Heslop is director of technology at Sanctuary Group.

Aster streamlines with ROCC

ROCC has completed the implementation of a dashboard reporting and workflow tool for Aster Group. Based on the housing provider's desire to improve productivity around its repairs and maintenance processes, ROCC developed new workflows in order to reduce job times via dashboard notifications.

Peter Luck, technical director, ROCC, said, "The dashboard streamlines communication and removes the need

for unnecessary emails between team members, making sure important information is delivered to the right Aster staff without them needing to look for it.

"The workflows provide up-to-date, real-time information about the status of tasks and directs them to role-specific 'work buckets' that focus the users into prompt action and ensures that information is not lost between teams and departments."



Richard Brownhill, finance business partner, Aster Group, said, "The new dashboard reduces the time it takes for purchase orders to be processed, which in turn speeds up the lead time to commission works and is of course a big plus to our tenants."



Patrick McAliskey (L), Managing Director, Novosco and Andrew Muir, Group Director of Corporate Services, Notting Hill Housing

NOTTING HILL HOUSING AWARDS £10M CONTRACT TO NOVOSCO

Cloud-services provider Novosco has secured a five-year deal worth over £10 million with Notting Hill Housing to provide a range of IT services, including service support and delivery, application management, ICT commodity services and strategic planning.

Other Novosco customers in the social housing sector include Swan Housing, Northwards Housing and Radius Group.

Andrew Muir, group director of corporate services, Notting Hill Housing, said, "With so many tenants relying on us every day, it's absolutely vital that our IT systems

are efficient, stable and secure. For that reason, we're looking forward to working with Novosco, who have a proven track record in providing a high-quality service to the housing sector and beyond."



FIVE KEY IT CHALLENGES IN HOUSING

Marco Amoedo, EMEA CTO, PowerObjects, an HCL Technologies Company

Cloud technologies and digital transformation are undoubtedly shaping the world around us. In the last few years, we have seen industries radically disrupted by these trends. Social housing is not immune to this, but housing providers can successfully navigate this sea of changes by keeping a few things in mind.

Technical debt

The social housing sector has traditionally lacked a long-term strategy and vision for technology, resulting in IT estates with a patchwork of disjointed, task-centric applications. One of the most significant consequences of this issue is the complexity of integration between systems, often resulting in siloed data and costly, time-consuming reporting practices.

Another critical impact on organisations using legacy technology is the effects on productivity and staff retention. Given the current financial context, it's critical that organisations become more productive so they can achieve more and rationalise staff costs.

However, the most overlooked impact of technical debt is innovation. IT departments are often too busy keeping legacy systems and integrations running and can't focus on delivering innovative technologies. Therefore, the focus needs to be on creating a roadmap to replace disjointed legacy solutions with modern business platforms that deliver a seamless experience for users and business processes.

Commercial technology

It's not new that the housing sector has to work hard to find new revenue sources to make up for the drop in public funding. Organisations are striving to "think commercially, but act socially." Over the last few years, we have seen increased efforts to introduce or expand commercial operations in the sector. This is particularly true for private sales and rentals, but also for schools, social care, leisure centres and others.

Yet, in many cases, commercial ventures have not been accompanied by adequate technology solutions to support them.

With new systems in place, organisations can perform better in client-facing, revenue-generating activities. Housing organisations should look at the commercial sector (such as real estate, utilities, retail and financial services) and the technologies used there if they want to transform and deliver value from their commercial operations.

Thanks to cloud-based offerings, the sector has easier and cheaper access to fully-featured commercial sales, marketing and intelligence systems that can quickly transform operations and deliver increased revenue for social purposes. Modern commercial management software helps to bolster the growing development opportunities in the sector to drive revenue for social housing.

Omni-channel services

Offering exceptional service for individuals and communities is a key driver for the sector. However, many organisations struggle to optimise their front-line operations to deliver a consistent level of service across different channels. This isn't just about offering access via multiple channels, but about optimising the delivery of services and empowering staff and customers to solve problems. The faster staff and customers can deal with a request or problem without having to rely on middle-office operations, the lower the cost and better customer experience you will provide.

There is also an increased demand for self-service capabilities and new channels. Customer experience in the consumer sectors sets the expectations that we now take as normal. This is even more acute for those organisations trying to start or expand their commercial activities. It's critical to evaluate your front-office solutions from the perspective of their capability for delivering outstanding omni-channel customer experiences as well as their capability to support efficiencies and service optimisation, rather than focusing on the housing-specific processes.

Functions that enable a multi-skilled staff to resolve issues at the first point

of contact should be a key driver. In this regard, modern cloud-based CRM platforms deliver ready-made solutions that can be quickly adopted by housing providers to radically transform their front-office operations.

Repairs and maintenance

We often see organisations focusing on achieving a 'single customer view'. Yet, many often neglect the 'single asset view,' which should be a key driver for any asset-intensive business such as housing. Offering a great customer experience while delivering value also involves having a thorough understanding of your assets as well as long-term visibility into maintenance requirements and planning. Planned maintenance and major projects are usually the single most expensive expenditure a housing organisation faces; having the tools and systems to optimise these costs and investments should be paramount.

The second most expensive cost in housing is responsive repairs and voids. Yet, many organisations still don't have a clear strategy to manage these costs and rationalise their internal and external providers. If we consider that many customer issues and complaints arise from these areas, it should be clear that housing organisations need to look at tools and systems to improve the coordination and delivery of repairs and maintenance.

The good news is that organisations now have access to low-cost, enterprise-ready solutions to improve asset management and manage repairs and maintenance. Traditionally, this software needed a substantial capital investment, but today, it's possible to deploy field- and project-service automation solutions at a fraction of the cost. Organisations can now deliver customer-centric services while optimising their repairs and maintenance operations and have options for bringing outsourced services back in-house.

IoT, machine learning and innovation
The internet of things (IoT) and machine learning offer benefits such

FIVE KEY IT CHALLENGES IN HOUSING

Continued from previous page

as environmental property monitoring, remote diagnostics, and usage monitoring, thereby reducing service costs due to a shift from reactive to predictive maintenance. It also extends to other offerings such as telecare or services which could offer new revenue streams. We have already started seeing the benefits of machine learning and IoT, and now we are also seeing success with robotic process automation (RPA) where automating back- and middle-office processes can reduce staff efforts by up to 80 per cent.

It's essential that housing organisations start defining technology strategies that have clear paths to benefit from innovations. When assessing new business applications, housing organisations should have a vision for the capabilities they offer for future aspirations and be mindful of opportunities to introduce innovation at scale. Cloud platforms enable organisations to quickly test innovative technologies with proof of concept solutions and scale them up if successful.

In summary, technical debt causes frustration for the organisation and can be

perceived as a cost centre without sufficient added value. Housing organisations should consider using cloud-based technologies to transform their operations at scale. The focus should be to reinvent your IT department into a strategic and innovative part of your organisation. This can only be achieved by eliminating technical debt and focusing on delivering innovation that will be an asset to the business with the introduction of modern technology platforms.

Marco Amoedo is CTO of EMEA for PowerObjects, an HCL Technologies Company.



WHY UX IS THE NEW BRICKS AND MORTAR OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT

Ewan MacLarty, Product Manager, Capita

User experience (UX) is fast becoming a unique selling point in the selection of software products. As well as the need to provide tangible benefits and rich functionality, a strong user focus and a fresh look and feel are increasingly recognised as important requirements of IT solutions in determining how effective or well adopted they will be. In fact, it's suggested that by 2020, organisations will see UX overtaking price and functionality as the key differentiator when choosing new solutions.

Meeting this requirement is important in the social housing sector as providers strive to deliver a high-quality service to their tenants in a market where demand outstrips supply. As such, it's up to housing providers to streamline their own back-office processes, and one way to achieve this is by looking at improving the efficiency and productivity of staff through user-friendly and intuitive systems.

The challenge

There is now an expectation that software used during the working day should adhere to the same principles found within other walks of life. We expect the same kind of simplicity, powerful search tools, ease of access and approaches found in our day-to-day use of banking apps, online shopping and news sites, as well as the most popular smartphone and tablet user interfaces.

Housing management software providers have developed and evolved their products over many years and therefore, although

functionally rich and very capable, they are often unintuitive and hard to navigate. The risk, therefore, is that key processes are well hidden and could be overlooked by the user or provided inconsistently. The result is that a poorly-designed or inconsistent user interface can potentially hinder, rather than help, a user's day-to-day workload.

The business case for UX in social housing

When it comes to weighing up the benefits of improved UX in social housing software, there are significant efficiencies up for grabs. Let's consider the return on investment potential of reducing staff training and empowering staff to diversify.

A well-designed, intuitive solution improves usability and reduces the need for training and support. Using system-wide, familiar design principles offers staff instant familiarity and confidence in using the solution, regardless of the system area they are in. This results in quicker cross-skilling and diversification of existing staff, as one process will be recognisably mirrored and as easy to use as another, helping staff easily move throughout the solution, undertaking a wider variety of tasks as needed.

This easy diversification is more important than ever, not only from operational efficiency and cost saving perspectives, but also in supporting social housing communities; housing officers who can multi-task when helping a tenant or when out in the field can offer more

comprehensive, customer-focused support where it's needed most.

UX best practice for housing providers

There are some key principles to consider when creating a modern UX:

- Avoid auto-generated screen development because it can reduce the overall quality of an otherwise well-designed user experience. If auto-generated screens are needed, ensure that sufficient effort is spent on the design process and testing to ensure a smooth transition.
- Poor use and placement of icons can cause confusion, so make optimal use of common, well-known icons.
- Avoid using different technologies to create the user interface in different areas of the product because the user could experience a jarring affect when moving from screen to screen.
- Don't overwhelm the user with data overload; use progressive disclosure to display what is needed when it's needed, rather than all at once.
- Always consider the task the user is trying to carry out; a user goal-focused system can streamline the process, providing a targeted approach and increasing productivity.

The more these principles are adhered to, the more effective and efficient the solution can be in delivering your objectives and supporting both staff and tenants.

Ewan MacLarty is a product manager at Capita.

KEVIN ALFRED HIDER – OBITUARY



Kevin Hider, previous chair of the SIT Forum with the current chair, Kevin Darby



Kevin was born on 10 July 1958 and very sadly passed away on 12 June 2017. I was privileged to know Kevin professionally through the

Southern IT Forum (both of us being early organisers of the group) and also to experience the incredibly moving and inspiring presentation that Kevin gave on 18 May. Please do read Rob Fletcher's retelling of the event (below); no-one who was there can forget it.

Late 2014 brought the first diagnosis of cancer and after two major operations, three rounds of chemotherapy and much other treatment, it spread to his brain with the inevitable terminal prognosis.

Brought up in London, Kevin went to Battersea Grammar School, followed by Imperial College obtaining a First in Chemistry. His career started with Racal, then British Aerospace and into social housing with Wandle Housing Association for five years, followed by a quite formative time of 16 years as assistant director with Origin Housing. There were a number of short-term posts during his illness in recent years, the most notable being 21 months with Sutton Council and he was still on the payroll when he died.

Turning to the man, Kevin had two brothers, one sister and sadly is out-lived by his parents. He married Norah and they had two sons, Steven and Matthew of whom he was immensely proud. He couldn't be idle and was continually buzzing with ideas; in the final years, he joined two charities, VOICE - Implementing improvements to cancer services at St George's Hospital and as a disabled representative on the Fan's Forum with Chelsea Football Club.

My description of Kevin from the funeral item on the SIT Forum was: "A fun,

generous, ungrudging, problem-solving man and a great asset to our group". A life-long Chelsea fan, this was one theme of the funeral; others were love of family, stout, wine and (no surprise here) more Chelsea. I also wrote "It's not often that I can say I've enjoyed a funeral; however this one certainly made the grade. There was humour, good music, poems, memories, sadness but mostly a celebration of Kevin's life."

The last song of the funeral really summed up Kevin to a tee, "Bring me sunshine". I will remember his humour, incredibly positive attitude under great adversity, someone who cared about life and really lived it. If you had known him, you would feel exactly the same.

Barry Alford, Head of ICT, Paragon Community Housing – 18 July 2017

Charitable donations in memory of Kevin

If you would like to make a gift, Kevin's family have nominated St George's Hospital Charity, Tooting (Registered Charity Number 241527), Cancer Research or Trinity Hospice (Registered Charity Number 1013945).

Having known Kevin as an ICT professional in housing for many years, I was extremely fortunate to hear Kevin make an incredibly inspirational presentation to a group of housing ICT leaders at a recent Southern IT Forum event at the Microsoft campus in Reading just a few weeks before his death. Kevin's final presentation was awe-inspiringly humorous and extremely positive. In-fact, the presentation was titled "Death 'I.T.' Happens" which was very apt given the audience!

In his presentation, Kevin described his rollercoaster of a journey from the original cancer symptoms all the way through to his palliative care. He also

spoke about how hard he found it to tell his family about his diagnosis. Kevin kept very active throughout his treatment through his involvement with the VOICE cancer group and his association with Chelsea Football Club as a disabled rep. Kevin was his usual light-hearted self, on fine form and a delight to listen to.

Kevin encouraged the whole room to stop for a moment and reflect on the fast pace of life and how relentless the passage of time can be. He delivered a very strong message about enjoying each moment, living life to the full and loving the people around you, including friends, family, colleagues and professional associates. Kevin reminded us of the vital importance of our relationships with others and above all else how we need to stop from time-to-time to realise how lucky we are that we have health and love in our lives. Kevin also spoke about how he had prepared himself and his family around him for his passing and how he much he had relied on the people close to him to support him.

Everyone was profoundly struck by what Kevin had to say in his presentation and I know many people reflected deeply about Kevin's key messages. Kevin was a truly remarkable person and his bravery, fight and humour set a level for us all to aspire to. During his presentation, his love for his family and friends was clear to see and he will be sorely missed as an IT leader in the housing sector. His trip to Microsoft was a special moment as it reminded us about how fragile life is and how we all need to stop moaning about life and start enjoying it more. We will miss him but will remember him always.

Kevin reminded us to celebrate every day you are here and that life is too short to worry only about work. Also, life is too short to hold grudges, to lose friendships, to hide who you are, to live with regrets, to be scared, to shed tears, to waste time and to not be you.

Rob Fletcher, Group Head of ICT, GreenSquare Group – 14 July 2017

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