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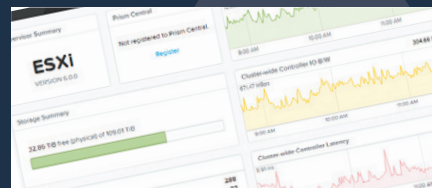GENTOO'S STREETWISE COMBATS DOMESTIC ABUSE WITH CHELMER HOUSING
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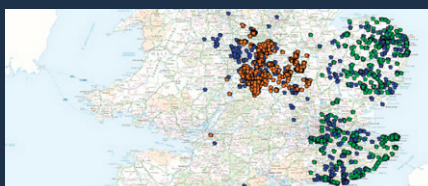FASTER AND CHEAPER BY GOING IT ALONE
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EDITOR'S NOTES

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY internet of things

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Preview of the Internet of Things in Housing 2017

As many of you will know, Housing Technology is in the middle of producing its pioneering report and event at the BT Tower on the use of the internet of things in the social housing sector. An online survey on attitudes to IoT is at the heart of the report; the online survey was launched around a week before this issue of Housing Technology went to press.

While the full Internet of Things in Housing 2017 report will be published in early November, kindly sponsored by BT, Capita, Civica and RHP, we thought it would be interesting to have a quick preview of the first survey results.

- IoT device deployment is low at the moment (av. 50 devices per housing provider), but the immediate expectations are for 100-1,000 devices to be deployed per housing provider, with emphasis on the higher end of the spectrum.
- The main barriers to entry and objections to deploying IoT devices and adopting IoT projects are cost and resources, uncertainty about the technology (too new, unproven, etc), integration with existing software, and the current lack of widespread IoT standards.
- The main focus areas for IoT devices and their data integration are housing management, asset management, repairs and maintenance, and building (new developments).
- Over 80 per cent of housing providers have specific concerns around IoT and its potential impact on data privacy, security and liability.
- The common IoT devices deployed so far are boiler sensors and temperature/humidity sensors.

- Housing providers are, in general, not involving tenants in their IoT planning at the moment; perhaps, not surprisingly given the current small numbers of IoT devices deployed.
- Most planned IoT implementations are scheduled for within the next 6-18 months, alongside over half of housing providers already having a defined IoT strategy, although IoT features in only one-third of their data management strategies.
- Utility providers, contractors/DLOs and local authorities are cited as being the most important external agencies with which housing providers plan to integrate their IoT projects.
- Most housing providers plan to use cloud-based services to store their IoT-derived data in preference to in-house servers.
- The push for IoT is mostly coming from housing providers' IT departments, as opposed their business teams.
- The property priorities for IoT planning are, in descending order new builds, existing housing stock (retrofit) and commercial premises.

If you haven't already taken part in our IoT survey, there's still time, and in return for spending five minutes completing the survey, you will be sent a complimentary copy of the final report in November, comprising our detailed analysis of responses from hundreds of housing providers, as well as articles, advice and resources around IoT in the social housing sector.

Please complete the survey now at: **www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/housingtechnology_IoT**.

FORCHCOMING EVENTS

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

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY
internet of things

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

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

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2018 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

SECTIONS

CIVICA SOLD FOR £1 BILLION

CIVICA

Civica has been sold for £1,055 million by Omers Private Equity to Partners Group. Omers, the pension provider for municipal employees in Ontario, bought Civica in 2013 for around £400 million.

Since its acquisition of Civica, Omers has invested in key organic growth initiatives as well as mergers, where Civica has acquired and integrated 12 highly complementary businesses.

Martin le Huray, European Co-Head, Omers Private Equity, said, "Since 2013, we have supported Civica in its ambitious growth strategy with great results, as the company has expanded

both the breadth and quality of its products and services to its customers. Civica moves on from our period of ownership significantly enhanced in scale and capability and well placed to further deliver critical services to its customers around the world."

Simon Downing, executive chairman, Civica said, "We have enjoyed a very good relationship with Omers over the last four years. They shared our vision for the company and have fully supported us with their differentiated approach and unconstrained capital."

CORDERY CASTLE PARTNERS WITH BRENTWOOD HOUSING

Cordery Castle has signed Brentwood Housing Trust as a 'pathfinder partner' for its Castle Management System (CMS), a housing and asset management platform specifically designed for housing providers with up to 6,000 properties.

Cordery Castle said that CMS covers everything smaller housing providers need, from tenant management to rent collection, and maintenance scheduling through to strategic asset management.

Val Fulcher, chief executive, Brentwood Housing Trust, said, "With almost 200 homes and hundreds of tenants to care for, we are always looking for ways to make a difference. When Cordery Castle approached us to be one of their pathfinder projects we jumped at the chance."

Richard Cordery, managing director, Cordery Castle, said, "Having worked in the social housing sector throughout my career, I have seen at first-hand how difficult it can be to keep on top of compliance audits, stock condition reviews, budget forecasting, contractor vetting and so on.

"Of course, there are software systems already available but we felt that these were

aimed at the 'mega trusts' who can afford to employ teams of specialists to operate them. There didn't seem to be an affordable, easy-to-use solution for small- and medium-sized organisations who are trying to get by with just a few members of staff. That's why we developed the Castle Management System."

Aareon and 1st Touch combine operations

Following the acquisition of 1st Touch by Aareon in 2012, the two companies finally merged their operations in July 2017.

Nigel Rees, Managing Director, Aareon

1st Touch remains as a legal entity and is solely focused on the development and support

of mobile technologies, while its consulting, sales, marketing and administrative operations have been integrated into Aareon UK.

At the same time, Aareon has appointed former Home Office finance director Nigel Rees

as one of its joint managing directors, alongside Stephen Makin. Greg Johns, the former managing director of 1st Touch, is now group product portfolio manager.

COMPANIES IN THIS ISSUE

GETTING READY FOR GDPR

Paul Sandersfield, Head of Data Governance, Gentoo Group

If someone isn't already working on GDPR readiness in your organisation, they should be. The aim of this article is to cover the tasks every housing provider should undertake in order to be as ready as possible for the new regulation in May 2018. This article doesn't cover what GDPR is or why it's coming as that's already been done to death in the media, but just be aware that there seems to be as much fake news as there is fact.

So where do you start?

Awareness and buy-in
GDPR readiness will require efforts from all areas of your business, alongside business as usual, so getting suitable buy-in from your senior management is critical. With nine months to go, GDPR should be flagged as a corporate risk so there is also a need for board-level awareness.

Research and gap analysis
How compliant are you with the current data protection act, and how far away are you from GDPR? Understanding what the requirements are may require significant research, followed by a gap analysis exercise (the Information Commissioner's Office website provides online assessments to help with this).

Data protection officers (DPO)
Not every company needs a data protection officer (the function can be outsourced or shared) but as a housing provider processing thousands of tenant records, you will need one. While the DPO must be independent of an operational team, responsibility for managing your GDPR project can sit elsewhere within your business.

Information register
Possibly the largest piece of work for GDPR compliance is the creation of an 'information register' to understand the information you process. You will need

subject matter experts in all areas of the business to facilitate this; they know their part of the organisation and what is stored where, why, and for how long, etc (the Isle of Man ICO website provides an excellent template for the 5 Ws to help with this activity).

Once completed, and it will take some time, it will not only detail the information you store, where it is stored including archives, retention timeframes, and who the information is shared with (important for supplier/third-party risk), but also the touch points with any 'data subjects' which will identify where consent may be required.

Knowing where information is stored will also help identify if data is stored outside an EU state, which will require research and understanding on 'territorial reach'. Ensuring activity is process mapped will also be helpful to validate the audit results and will help enforce consistency across similar teams.

Consent
There are various reasons why you can lawfully process an individual's data, and this will be documented in your information register. No further consent is required over and above a tenancy agreement unless you are using that individual's data for something outside that context. You will only need to revisit existing consent if something changes, such as you collect additional information or decide to use existing information for another purpose.

Where consent is required, the wording in the consent notice is likely to need updating. Consent notices need to be clear to understand, unambiguous and with a positive 'opt-in' approach, and the consent itself must be kept as a record and this generally includes any form of direct marketing. If services are provided directly to children, then further

guidelines are in place, and the consent notice must be written so it can be easily understood by the reader.

Individuals' rights
There are two new rights under GDPR; the 'right to portability' and the 'right to be forgotten', the latter being the one that the media are picking up on. You will need a documented process to ensure these (and the others) are carried out consistently and within an appropriate timescale.

The right to access (subject access requests) is changing from the current £10 charge and 40 calendar days' turnaround, to be provided free of charge and within 30 days. Staff also need to understand how to recognise an individual exercising one of their rights, as many won't understand the jargon involved.

Privacy policy
Your website should already include a privacy policy summarising your commitment to data protection. This may need revising for GDPR for the same reasons as consent notices; making them unambiguous and easy to understand.

Breach
Under GDPR, there are certain circumstances whereby the ICO needs to be notified of a breach. There are also circumstances whereby the individuals affected need to be notified. You will need a documented process in order to confirm that there has been a breach, who you will involve in the investigation, whether the ICO and affected individuals need to be informed, and how and when you will communicate the breach. If the breach is reportable, it needs to be reported to the ICO within 72 hours of you being made aware, so organisations need to act quickly to carry out their initial investigations.

GETTING READY FOR GDPR

Continued from previous page

Data protection impact assessment (DPIA)

Current best practice is to carry out a privacy impact assessment (PIA) for any project that will process large volumes of personal data in order reduce privacy risks. Under GDPR, a 'DPIA' is mandatory under certain circumstances, such as a change to an IT system or implementing CCTV in a building, with the results of the assessment evidenced and revisited if the project scope changes. The outcome of each DPIA will help enable continuous improvement of the information register.

Privacy by design

The security of the information you process is a large part of GDPR compliance. As such, accrediting to a standard such as Cyber Essentials or better still, ISO27001, would be of great benefit. Depending on your starting point, this may be out of reach in the timescales remaining, but reviewing your security practices aligned with one of the standards would be hugely beneficial.

Third parties & suppliers

The information register will help identify where data is shared with third parties and suppliers. There are new guidelines for data processors under GDPR, including increased legal liability if they are responsible for a breach. You as data controller have an obligation to ensure your subcontractors comply with GDPR.

Generally...

Don't be panicked by the scaremongering. Act now, seek senior level buy-in, create a project team and focus on the activities required. There is no silver bullet despite what some resellers are claiming, although there are an increasing number of products that can help with some of the specific requirements. Join the 'housing privacy and security' LinkedIn forum where many of your peers are networking and sharing progress and ideas.

To return to my first point, I can't urge you strongly enough to make sure you have GDPR covered; in addition to the legal and reputational implications, ignoring it also leads to the risk of a downgrade from the regulator.

Paul Sandersfield is head of data governance at Gentoo Group.

BOOK NOW FOR THE HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2018 CONFERENCE & EXECUTIVE FORUM

HOUSING™ TECHNOLOGY 2018 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

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

Running every year since 2009, our annual event is now widely-regarded as simply the best event for senior IT influencers and business decision-makers in the UK social housing sector.

Housing Technology 2018 will cover the foundations of housing providers' operations within which technology plays a fundamental role, with emphasis in 2018 on:

· Disruptive technologies and processes to transform housing providers' operations;
· Core business applications: mobile working, housing, finance & asset management, IoT, infrastructure, DR & security;
· GDPR and other regulatory developments;
· Digital inclusion and 'digital by default';
· CRM, channel shift and tenant communications;
· Business/digital transformation;
· Housing as a business: comparing ideas from within and beyond the housing sector.

As well as two days of keynote talks and thought-provoking presentations from leading housing providers and technology companies, our annual conference has a strong emphasis on networking (including several informal evening events) and enabling guests to compare their IT and business experiences with their peers from other housing providers.

Housing Technology 2018 is the pre-eminent IT event in social housing. No other event brings together so many influential and senior IT practitioners in one place.

If you are interested in speaking, sponsoring or exhibiting at Housing Technology 2018, please either visit **www.housing-technology.com/events/ht18** or email **conference@housing-technology.com**.

SUITED TO YOUR NEEDS

Vic Harrison, Managing Director, Integrator Housing Solutions

Planned maintenance systems have been used by many of the largest housing providers in the UK for over 20 years but have been left out by the smaller ones.

Cost has been the main barrier in the past for these smaller housing providers, but we believe that future cloud-based systems will change this and allow any size of housing provider to use the very latest technologies the cloud can offer.

The future of the sector is becoming more digital, and the internet and cloud technologies will reduce the dependency of IT departments to look after systems on their own servers. Maintenance and updates will be carried out instantly by their suppliers. Another main advantage for surveyors, managers, directors and executives will be instant access to records of their housing stock, anywhere, and on any device they prefer to use.

Is your software driving you?
In the social housing sector, there are a reasonable number of software providers that offer various applications to the market. It's not uncommon for a housing or asset management system to be sold to an organisation, followed by the organisation then adjusting its own processes and workflows to meet the paradigms set by that software package. This is 'the tail wagging the dog', as they say, and is ultimately not best for customers.

When an organisation buys into a software provider's ecosystem, the organisation shouldn't be subject to requirements prescribed by the system. IT suppliers shouldn't think of themselves as software companies as much as providers of solutions. The organisation has the requirements, and the software should meet them with as little friction as possible.

While there will always be common needs within a market sector (due to government legislation, for example), individual organisations will also have their own ways of working, and it's a problem if this is impeded by the tools used. So, what are the signs that a software system is limiting in this way?

- Does the client need to change their internal terminology to use the system?
- Does the client need to rethink their concepts of asset hierarchy to make it 'fit' with the package?
- Does the client need to modify their team structure to fit with various permission limitations?
- Does the client need to modify the way they report on information, to match supplied formats?

How can asset management solution providers avoid these limitations?
- Allow clients to rename or create new terms in the system to match their existing nomenclature.
- Allow clients to configure the user structure themselves to follow their existing workflows.

- Design systems that can be used differently by different users 'out-of-the-box'.
- Design systems that can respond to changing requirements without redeveloping fundamental areas.

This can be achieved in the real world by bringing user customisation to the forefront of the product. The client uses the term 'asset ID' instead of 'UPRN'? Fine, let them rename it themselves. They have an idiosyncratic way of categorising their stock? Okay, let them design their own hierarchical structure for assets. Taking this kind of approach from the ground up means less work for the provider later, and makes the users feel more like they have a tool at their disposal, rather than a new set of rules to follow.

Additionally, designing systems with a modular approach means that when, for example, the government comes up with a new requirement for clients, development can respond faster, without affecting other areas of the system. Clients can purchase the modules that are relevant to them, and aren't weighed down by a bloated system full of options that are just taking up space for them.

'One size fits all' is not true in the world of software solutions; we should aim for 'suited to your needs (whatever they may be)'.

Vic Harrison is managing director of Integrator Housing Solutions.

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING IRELAND CHOOSES CASTLETON

Co-operative Housing Ireland has chosen to implement Castleton Technology's housing management, EDRM, agile and reporting solutions. These solutions will also be hosted by Castleton's managed services division over a 10-year partnership. The project is now under way and is due to be completed with all solutions live in 2018.

Pat Moyne, head of corporate services, Co-operative Housing Ireland, said, "Having gone through an extensive phase of research of the housing systems available and a very rigorous procurement process we were delighted to appoint Castleton as our technology partner for a 10-year period."

Paudie O'Shea, new business manager, Castleton Technology, said, "Using our technologies, Co-operative Housing Ireland will embark on a major channel shift, which will help both its staff and tenants. Employees will be able to access information anytime, anywhere, and tenants will be able to communicate with their housing provider in a number of ways on their choice of device."

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FASTER AND CHEAPER BY GOING IT ALONE

Mike Silk, Head of IT, Paradigm Housing

Paradigm is one of the leading housing providers in the South East of England, managing over 14,000 homes across 33 UK local authorities. When we started over 20 years ago, we already knew that we would have to build a number of systems in-house because, as the first large-scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) in the country, there just weren't the commercial packages available to support our business model.

In planning our IT development strategy, we realised that in-house development could be an expensive and potentially risky approach, so we looked around for a development toolset that would allow our IT department to focus on the business objectives, while reducing the technical complexities of delivering large, multi-user applications. After careful evaluation, we selected LANSA's 'low-code' platform as our preferred toolset.

Today, all our systems, from building and acquisition through to property rental and management of the rental accounts, have been developed in-house using Visual LANSA, delivering a fully-integrated system across all business areas. While the development team has grown and shrunk over the years to meet changing demands, this has largely been delivered by a single developer.

The repository-based model at the heart of the LANSA toolset meant that we had a clear understanding of the business rules implemented across all systems, ensuring system maintenance was kept to a minimum and allowing us to spend more time on developing new functionalities.

The real beauty for Paradigm is that the LANSA product has kept ahead of the technology curve, so that we have always been able to take advantage of emerging technologies, while still using a single skillset. This has meant that we have extended our systems to provide seamless integration with third-party suppliers via web services, and have developed feature-rich, responsive web portals for both our tenants and other stakeholders.

Like every other housing provider, Paradigm faces financial challenges and we are planning to adopt a 'digital first' approach to drive down costs and improve tenant services. Fortunately, the LANSA toolset allows us to deliver these services easily, while continuing to provide close back-end integration. This means we can deliver a true end-to-end digital solution, not a 'smoke and mirrors' system where significant user intervention is required within the back-office systems.

As part of our digital transformation exercise, we have used LANSA to support our technicians in the field with offline web applications to allow our workforce to receive and update repair requests quickly and easily. Because this information is fully integrated with our back-office systems, it also means that office-based staff have a real-time view of technicians' activities, allowing them to increase productivity by scheduling work more efficiently.

Of course, as I wrote at the start, our decision to develop in-house was largely forced upon us, so the question is whether we would still choose this route today, given that a whole host of packages are now available for the social housing sector. However, for me it's not a question of 'build vs. buy'; in most IT departments today, there should be the capacity to 'build and buy'.

If we were starting again today, we would almost certainly choose to buy packages for some areas of the business, rather than develop them ourselves, but there are still a number of solutions that are better done in-house because of the specific functionality required, or simply because we can do it cheaper than buying a package (and its ongoing licence costs).

Just as important is the need to deliver business solutions when they are needed. Selecting and implementing a packaged solution can be time consuming, and you'll often end up with a solution that provides much more than you'll actually use (but you'll still probably pay for it!). Ultimately, an agile development environment will ensure business buy-in, and reduce the potential for them to by-pass the IT department and implement 'shadow' IT solutions.

I would argue that this agile development environment is just as important in small organisations as in large organisations. However, for small organisations the overhead of maintaining a development resource could be significant. This is where low-code solutions, such as Visual LANSA, are important.

Ensuring that the development toolset is business focused, and in part 'insulates' the developer from the plethora of technologies that would be needed for other development products is important in ensuring that in-house developments are successful. Attempting to deliver web solutions where your team will need skills such as HTML5, PHP, JavaScript, Java, C++, AJAX, and so on, is just too difficult when your development team may be only one or two individuals.

LANSA's low-code platform means that a single coding language can be used to deliver fully-featured web and windows applications. The additional LANSA productivity tools, such as the Visual LANSA Framework, allow you to quickly develop fully-featured applications, but the toolset also allows you to refine the code to meet complex business requirements that can be difficult to do using other products.

Finally, any development environment must allow you to integrate with packaged solutions and other third-party systems. The integrator facilities within LANSA provide a complete set of tools, whether that's the ability to consume and deliver web services, transfer data via secure FTP, or just send emails and texts, it's all possible using the single toolset.

Mike Silk is head of IT at Paradigm Housing.

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Housing Partners empowers Welsh housing providers for UC

Cadwyn, Hafod and Cardiff Community housing associations have signed with Housing Partners in order to protect their combined 9,000 households from the effects of universal credit and welfare reform.

Housing Partner's Insight solution, which collates information from the landlord's housing management system and combines it with external data gathered from hundreds of third-party sources, is helping to address any gaps between the services landlords provide and what their tenants need. The Insight software gathers data in a secure way from a number of sources, including Experian, and the intuitive visual segmentation of the results allows the housing providers to quickly see which tenants need extra support.

Andrew Bateson, director of operations, Cadwyn Housing Association, said, "Insight can help us to better understand how we tailor our services for the benefit of tenants. With Insight, we will now be able to make proactive, more informed decisions which will drive efficiencies and focus our resources more effectively."

The three housing providers have changed their approach to rent collection, with a shift from enforcement to doing their utmost to support sustainable tenancies, alongside the business case that evictions lose on average eight weeks of rent per tenant.

Richard McQuillan, head of housing services, Hafod Housing Association, said, "Insight exactly fits with our philosophy of tenant sustainability and helping us to learn more about our tenants. Insight is being used by a number of our teams and it's already been embedded into their day jobs. We can also now run pre-tenancy financial assessments on all new tenants, something which was almost impossible to do before."

Deborah Harrington, community and support services manager, Cardiff Community Housing Association, said, "Part of our strategy is to move away from a reactive arrears process to one that is far more proactive and preventative. Insight allows us to identify cases of high financial distress so that we can offer support and interventions at the earliest opportunity, even before the first rental payment is missed."

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE CUTS ARREARS TO ONE PER CENT WITH MOBYSOFT

In 2016/17, South Staffordshire Housing Association achieved its lowest ever arrears in spite of ongoing welfare reforms and the one per cent rent cut, after its deployment of Mobysoft's RentSense software.

Samantha Allcott, income manager, South Staffordshire Housing, said, "Rather than waste extra resources and money on working through an inaccurate caseload, we decided to invest in RentSense. It has reduced our income officers' weekly caseload by over 80 per cent and has created the capacity of four FTEs within the team."

Alongside RentSense, South Staffordshire has also completed a pilot project focused on less 'hand holding' of tenants; this saw a reduction in arrears across the pilot group and created the capacity to deal with an additional 95 cases each week.

Jan Goode, director of customer services and communications, South Staffordshire Housing, said, "We invested in RentSense instead of deploying additional resources and our arrears have reduced year-on-year to just above one per cent now; the risks have been higher, the resources have been static and yet arrears have come down."

HOW ANALYTICS CAN HELP WITH UC AND MAINTAIN YOUR INCOME

Glenn Allan, Product Manager for Housing InSight, Capita Software Services

It doesn't seem so long ago that universal credit (UC) was first introduced in pilot schemes around the country but we're now just over halfway to full implementation, according to a House of Commons blog. The progressive UC roll-out to specific groups and geographic areas means that although an increasing proportion of claimants now receive UC, as a housing provider or local authority you may be just starting to develop your strategy in terms of how this may affect your organisation.

It seems a good time to reflect on the potential impact of UC on housing providers, and how they can adjust how arrears are managed to both protect their income as well to protect the interests of their tenants in light of the new arrangements.

Set up an early warning system
Universal credit replaces a number of means-tested social security benefits and tax credits, including child and working tax credits, income support and housing benefit, to name just a few.

This means that, if eligible, your tenants are paid their housing allowance as part of a single larger benefits payment and have the freedom (and responsibility) of managing their budget accordingly. But what happens when tenants misjudge a month, perhaps because they have an unexpectedly large bill to cover?

Most housing providers would normally only know that one of their tenants was in difficulty after a rent payment had been missed, with the crucial setback that this represents in terms of the tenant having already braced themselves to miss a payment. It's well established that it's far better to be able to offer the tenant the opportunity to make a smaller

contribution for that month, rather than break the cycle of regular payments. But how does the housing officer know to offer this before the rent collection day?

The technology exists for income teams to see early if a tenant is facing an increase in financial stress. With links between your housing management database and the scoring system used by credit reference agencies, you can predict and be presented with a 'propensity to pay' score. This is automatically adjusted according to the very latest information, such as whether any loans, including those from sub-prime lenders, have recently been taken out or any credit payments missed.

This form of predictive analytics can unlock the potential of proactive arrears management so you can determine the best course of action to mitigate the risk of arrears while supporting the tenant through the difficult period.

If you can see the tenant is experiencing a temporary blip following a large bill, you may be able to mitigate their situation with a reduced rent payment for that month, followed by a manageable payment plan while things get back to normal. If the indicators are that the tenant is in more serious difficulty, perhaps if several loans have been taken out recently, you can intervene with the provision of support, such as referring them to a debt counselling service.

Protect homes by curbing sub-letting
The same technology, with the link to third-party agencies, can also help you ensure that your tenants are those people most in need of a home. It's estimated that as many as one in 10 rental homes are illegally sub-let. This figure includes private rentals too, but

the government estimates that at least 100,000 social housing properties are the subject of housing fraud.

Residency checks via credit reference agencies can alert you if the named tenant isn't actually based at the address, either because they're mostly using a different address for services, or perhaps if they're party to a mortgage. In this way, you know much more quickly that the situation needs investigating, ultimately freeing up any illegally sub-let properties sooner to provide a home for the next eligible individual or family.

Identify the highest-priority cases
For those times when tenants do miss a payment, you can increase your level of collection with an understanding of where to focus efforts first. Again, technology exists which automatically prioritises arrears cases immediately after the rent roll, so you have the full picture of tenants' financial hardship and can first follow up those most able to pay, as well as those tenants with increasing amounts of arrears.

With automated, tailored arrears progressions, housing staff can start taking follow-up action straight away, because they're free to focus immediately on the collection of arrears following the rent roll, rather than having to crunch their way through large amounts of data before they can take action.

And, of course, with staff able to respond so quickly, they can minimise the risk of the payment being forgotten and the tenant ultimately feeling less committed to pay.

Understand your audience
Being able to communicate with tenants

HOW ANALYTICS CAN HELP WITH UC AND MAINTAIN YOUR INCOME
Continued from previous page

CAPITA

in the way they prefer, and in a way which is sympathetic to their needs, offers a much better chance of being able to resolve the non-payment of rent quickly, while minimising the stress placed on the tenant.

Technology can group or 'segment' tenants to help you communicate with them more successfully, whether it's sending an SMS reminder to a 20-year old student, a phonecall to a 40-year old mum, or a letter to an older resident. You can choose for these actions to be automated within the arrears progression rules to make the process even faster. Visual alerts on-screen tell you whether

the adult has particular needs and might need to receive their reminder in a different way in order to protect the tenant from possible distress, an important factor for all, but particularly so for vulnerable adults.

Prevention is better than cure
Ultimately, although you need to be able to prioritise arrears cases quickly, the main aim will always be to prevent arrears happening in the first place. Predictive analytics and reporting open up opportunities for housing providers to offer this early help before tenants reach crisis point, with the link to the credit

reference agencies helping tenants to build up a stronger credit score with each regular rent payment they make.

Anticipating tough times ahead for your tenants and supporting them through this not only ensures a steady flow of income for your organisation as you minimise your arrears profile, but helps encourage those living in social housing to remain in control of their finances, contributing to a better quality of life overall.

Glenn Allan is the Housing InSight product manager for Capita Software Services.

MIDLAND HEART DEPLOYS ORCHARD OPENACCOUNTS

Midland Heart has replaced its previous finance system with OpenAccounts from Orchard, based on the software's asset processing capabilities, ease of integration and overall simplicity.

Martin Temple, finance operations manager, Midland Heart, said, "We needed a straightforward, easy-to-maintain system that would be simple to administer and could control costs.

"During the procurement process, our team had a 'blue sky' vision of their functional objectives. Those objectives were then ranked in importance and mapped to solutions in the market, with OpenAccounts becoming the clear winner.

"And although some people initially saw the new finance system as a threat, what actually unfolded to the benefit of both staff and the organisation as a whole was that job roles changed from data processing to genuine analytical work."

Midland Heart reported that automating business processes with OpenAccounts has enabled its users to spend more time doing analytical work rather than data processing. Staff now spend time working with suppliers to maximise value, and tenants to minimise debt, which are undoubtedly significant business benefits."

Temple said, "In the first year alone, bad debt provision has fallen from £482,000 to around £50,000, with accrued debt halved; achieved via the clarity of business reporting through OpenAccounts."

Commenting on what had been learned from the OpenAccounts implementation, Temple said, "Know your chart of accounts and set it in stone. Changes down the line can have a knock-on effect with other documents, such as purchase orders raised with one set of codes that are invalid by the time accruals are done or they are actualised.

"Give yourself time to think through processes and identify the benefits. Such as who is raising the orders for asset purchases, and do they understand how to get the order correct such that the component accounting team can correctly create the appropriate fixed assets? If they do, then the assets will be correctly created, full transparency will be available, and retrospective corrections will be eliminated."

GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT E-PROCUREMENT & SPENDING ANALYTICS

Richard Porter, Business Development Manager, Science Warehouse

As is very frequently cited, the housing sector needs to deliver more with less, yet without impacting the quality of services to tenants. One's thoughts therefore turn to the back office and how can you drive both bottom line and efficiency savings while still delivering a quality service.

Enabling controlled and accountable buying, removing paper and manual processes, and having the ability to forensically analyse your spending will enable the quick wins that the housing sector needs to be focused on until 2020.

So what have you been waiting for?

Technology
The majority of e-procurement and e-marketplace solutions are cloud-based, so that the reliance on ICT resources or knowledge to implement or support such a solution is minimised. And being cloud-based means you can embrace both centralised and field-based working by those that need to access the solution via just a simple internet connection.

Integration with the main ERP solutions for the sector generally comes as standard either for an e-marketplace or a wider e-procurement solution, meaning that you don't need to spend money on creating or maintaining bespoke integrations and can leverage the solutions you already have.

Suppliers
Having a supplier engagement model that allows you to engage with suppliers of all sizes and complexity is now something that can be achieved with the right support from your provider.

Supplier on-boarding is a key factor and having technology that supports you through this process to make it as painless as possible for both buyers and suppliers now accelerates the time to value for housing providers.

Being able to trade with your suppliers, large and small, via the same platform also gives efficiencies around areas such as electronic trading with e-invoicing and solutions to suit all sizes and technology capabilities (XML, PO Flip, PDF/XML, etc).

Ease of use
Ideally, you want to be able to roll something out that requires very little (if any) end-user training and encourages your users to purchase via the contracted route, giving you more visibility over spending on categories, contracts and suppliers as well as driving compliance.

An easy-to-use search facility is key but features, such as the ability to very quickly filter by price, pack size, category and supplier, will also help users navigate quickly to what they need and not source via alternative methods. Advanced e-marketplace solutions offering the ability to easily compare products is also a feature to look out for so you can help users make informed buying decisions.

Not everything fits in a catalogue
There are some things that your users will need to order that just don't fit well in a traditional catalogue. Advanced solutions can now offer you the ability to capture more complex areas of spending, such as plant/skip hire and estate services, as well as all of the standard catalogue items, such as furniture, office supplies, equipment hire and electrical. Now you can capture more spending information and again realise more value and savings from an integrated solution.

To punchout or not punchout?
There are some very good reasons for having 'punchout' facilities directly from the e-marketplace (typically using the .cif data format). For example, where items are highly configurable (e.g. IT equipment) or where real-time stock updates are needed.

When e-marketplaces just become a series of punchouts, then their ease-of-use suffers because end-users have to navigate different websites and the ability to compare across suppliers becomes much more difficult, so that end-users tend to go for what they find first rather than looking across the available suppliers.

An e-marketplace that can provide the right mix of supplier- and buyer-managed catalogues and provide punchout where needed can accelerate both the initial savings and drive longer-term efficiencies.

Analyse that spend!
The use of artificial intelligence (AI) is now becoming mainstream and integrated into spending analytics solutions to help you organise, validate and categorise large volumes of potentially disparate data sets. This would allow a housing provider, in as little as six weeks, to have a forensic view of their supplier profiles and spending, thereby identifying potential areas of spending consolidation, immediate savings and also alerting them to potential risks around supplier engagements.

Richard Porter is the business development manager for Science Warehouse.

Need help spotting customers heading into arrears?

INVESTING IN NEW TECHNOLOGY?

Jo Goodworth, Legal Director with Wright Hassall LLP

Rooftop Housing's investment in a technologically-innovative, customer-focused IT system proved to be the perfect opportunity to review procurement best practice, before negotiations had even begun. Having been instructed to advise them on their contract with their IT supplier, we started the process by considering which key issues needed to be resolved before the contract discussions began in earnest and which would ultimately help to ensure the successful implementation of the system.

From many years' experience of carrying out contract negotiations, we are only too aware how insufficient preparation can negatively impact the process and, sometimes, the final outcome.

Transformation and integration assistance

The transition from an old system to a new one is a major undertaking and often overlooked in the desire to crack on with the project. With your IT supplier's help, you should consider how to introduce the new system into the business with minimal disruption. Transferring tenant data (if relevant) is a good example of a particularly sensitive issue which must be handled carefully under data protection legislation. An implementation or transformation project plan, with timescales and milestones, is a convenient way to track progress.

Project plans – milestones and delays

Both you and your supplier should agree a comprehensive project plan at the start, with timescales for each stage; this considerably improves your chances of hitting the 'go live' date. Even if all the details cannot be included at the beginning of the project, an outline plan will suffice, with a commitment to review and update at regular intervals.

Remedies for missing the milestone dates in the project plan should be included in the contract. Although bringing a claim for damages is rarely practical, including liquidated damages is advisable. This enables you to require the supplier to pay the specified amount or to deduct it from the next invoice payable. Likewise, if the system does not 'go live' by the 'long-stop' date, you should be able to terminate the contract and be refunded any charges paid.

Acceptance tests

You should ensure that acceptance tests are performed on the system prior to 'go live' and that you are involved in both the tests and the criteria governing them. Furthermore, you should consider withholding a percentage of the system cost until you have issued an acceptance certificate confirming their satisfactory completion.

Service levels

At the beginning of the process, you should consider what standards you need for the performance of any services. Regardless of who, if anyone, provided the services before the new contract, it's important that current service standards are maintained, although this is also a good opportunity to increase performance levels.

Consider applying service credits which can incentivise your supplier to meet your specified service levels, but these credits should be fairly set and not risk being unenforceable.

Transfer of undertakings (TUPE)

It's unlikely that the procurement of an IT system will involve the application of TUPE to the services but it is something you need to be aware of. The contract should expressly include the position and obligations/indemnities of each party in the event that it does apply, as TUPE is a regulation which, if applicable, will apply regardless of what the contract actually states.

Data protection and GDPR

As you will probably need to provide your supplier with various forms of personal data as part of the performance of the services, the contract must include sufficient and appropriate data protection clauses.

In particular the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), due to come into force in May 2018, places various obligations on both data controllers and data processors in respect of the protection of personal data; the fines for a GDPR breach will be substantially higher than those under the current legislation.

Warranties

Your contract should include suitable warranties in relation to the goods or services being procured. This may include warranties that the goods and services comply with a 'specification' which details their various requirements.

The contract should also include any agreed warranty periods and an obligation for the supplier to remedy any breach of the warranties, which may include replacement of goods and/or re- performance of services.

Indemnities and liability

Indemnities and liability are usually the subject of intense negotiation and thus are often the final clauses to be agreed. It is strongly recommended that you seek legal advice to understand the risks and implications of these clauses. The supplier should provide appropriate indemnities for the services to be

INVESTING IN NEW TECHNOLOGY?
Continued from previous page

performed and you must ensure that they are not limiting their liability so that should a breach occur, the amount of liability and the types of losses you are able recover are minimal. In short, consider your financial risks if things go wrong.

Termination
Termination clauses should specify when and how the contract can be terminated and under what notice period. It should include standard circumstances including material breach, insolvency and liquidation as well as where there is a change in the control of the supplier, breaches of critical service levels and possibly also for convenience.

The consequences of termination should also be addressed, including the supplier's obligations to provide termination assistance services for a certain period, transfer and ownership of data and intellectual property rights and licences which should continue post-termination.

Change control procedure
The contract should include a 'change control procedure' which addresses how required changes should be handled over its lifetime. This sets out the procedure for requesting changes, the timescales for considering the changes, and the effects of the changes.

Governance
Both you and your supplier need to consider how, and by whom, the contract should be managed for its duration, including details of meetings and service reviews. This helps to manage expectations and improve communications, thus reducing the risk of disputes.

Disaster recovery
Depending on the nature of the goods and services being provided, it may be appropriate for the supplier to prepare a disaster recovery plan so that the services can be performed in the event of a disaster. The supplier may already have such a plan in place but you should consider any particular requirements, in particular security.

This is only a brief look at the pre-preparation work that can help to ease the path of a major technology implementation project. Each customer will obviously have specific requirements which will need to be factored into the detailed contract negotiations. Advance planning will help to avoid potential pitfalls as you progress through the process as well as saving considerable time and cost.

Jo Goodworth is a legal director for Wright Hassall LLP.

MOBILE WORKING

Futures Housing on the move with Skype and Facebook

Futures Housing Group closed the doors to its base in Daventry at the end of August because its agile workforce no longer needs an office. The move is part of Futures Housing's plan to have flexible teams who use mobile technology to do their jobs in tenants' homes and other locations.

Lindsey Williams, group chief executive, Futures Housing Group, said, "We're making it easier for customers to work with us through self-service software, web chat and social media channels.

"We know that by investing in better technology, our teams can do everything they need for tenants in their communities instead of having to travel back to an office."

Agile staff, from housing officers to surveyors and managers, will work across the Daventry district in tenants' homes thanks to Skype for Business, Facebook Workplace and high-speed laptops. Touchdown points for staff to work from between appointments have also been created, although these will not be open to the public.

MOBILISATION AND CHANGE – SEPARATE VENTURES OR INHERENTLY LINKED?

Loreen Herzig, Head of IT and Business Improvement, Wellingborough Homes

In November 2016, Wellingborough Homes launched its mobile working solution to frontline staff, using Housing Insight's PanConnect mobile app on tablet devices.

Like a lot of housing providers, we had tried mobilisation before... Actually, we had tried twice before, each time unsuccessfully.

Why was it different this time? Why did the business suddenly embrace this new way of working whereas previously it didn't gain any traction?

Lead from within the business
To start with, the project was not run by corporate services. Of course, IT was heavily involved, as was the communications team, but they did not lead on the delivery of the project. They were support and advisory functions, implementing the solution wanted by users and needed by the organisation.

The lead for mobilisation came from within the business, a front-line services manager who liaised across the organisation and managed the overall project.

Ownership therefore came from within the business to identify and implement a solution that would meet their needs. Rather than feeling that they were 'being told', our staff actually felt they owned the project.

User involvement
What users wanted and what the business needed had to be identified and aligned to ensure that buy-in was gained from across the organisation to successfully launch mobilisation. Workshops were held involving a quarter of the workforce to identify the specification for a new solution.

Our staff decided that they needed to be able to access their emails, have property and tenant information to hand, write notes back to the housing management system, and complete a number of forms which incorporated the most commonly-used processes and tasks carried out when working in the community.

Users trialled different devices and, with guidance from IT, ultimately decided on the mobile device they wanted to use, again putting ownership in their hands.

> *"Don't make a change too complicated, just begin."*
> - Anonymous

The solution that could provide all of their requirements at a reasonable cost was Housing Insight's PanConnect. We worked closely with them throughout the project and they were happy to support us until we had the solution that would work for us.

Carrying on from the success of involving users early on, staff have since been involved in and shaped the baseline of Wellingborough's IT strategy for 2017-19, with consultations carried across senior management, middle management and front-line staff. They have identified their priorities aligned to our overall objectives and a clear two-year action plan has been created to deliver the necessary IT developments.

Milestones
At the beginning of the PanConnect project, staff clearly identified their requirements which included the creation of 15 forms , two tasks and two

system extracts to be set up, and five data write-backs to be implemented.

Issues arose during the form design stage which was very labour intensive, with many iterations of some of the forms. There was also little prioritisation of tasks, leading to conflicts of interest and slightly delaying the final delivery of the project.

Milestones are important to measure the successful delivery of a project and to show clear progress, but they are also good motivational tools for the staff involved and to gain further buy-in from across the organisation. Being able to show tangible outputs throughout the project delivery keeps the momentum going.

User acceptance testing is the other area that can really make a difference in gaining buy-in. It's where users see the benefits of their involvement and continue to feel that they make a difference. They are the ones who sign off the outputs and vet what the final solution will look like, again putting ownership into the hands of the business.

SMART benefits
At the time, project management was only just being embedded within Wellingborough Homes and Housing Insight provided the initial Project Initiation Document. While high-level benefits were identified, such as allowing staff to work much more flexibly, minimising preparation time before going on site, and having all the information at hand to deal with more than just an isolated customer query, many of the benefits were only discovered during our review of the lessons learnt.

While there is no doubt that mobilisation is beneficial to both staff and the organisation, defining SMART benefits at

MOBILISATION AND CHANGE – SEPARATE VENTURES OR INHERENTLY LINKED?
Continued from previous page

the beginning ensures that everybody is clear about why mobilisation is being done in the first place and what to expect once it's in place.

Every organisation has different reasons and there are many levels to mobilisation; our implementation using PanConnect is only the start of the journey. There are two major projects on the horizon for Wellingborough Homes – channel and culture shift, which will shape the next level of mobilisation.

During this project, we never actually used the word 'change', or 'mobilisation' for that matter. Even though, having involved users early and throughout the delivery, we could have done. Staff were prepared for what was coming; they led the change.

> *"People, even children, aren't afraid of change. They're afraid of not being prepared for change"*
>
> - Paul Smith

Can mobilisation be done without change? The simple answer is 'no'. Processes have to change, staff have to change and the organisation has to change for mobilisation to be successful. It's a way of working which involves much more than just providing people with the right technology. It's more of a cultural shift but that doesn't mean it needs to be overwhelming.

We simply asked our staff to begin. There was no 'big bang' approach. Wellingborough Homes is implementing lots of different parts of our channel-shift agenda, with mobilisation merely being one of them. And it's only the first stage of the PanConnect project. The second phase will see us review some of the forms and implement additional functionality.

Did we get it right first time? Of course not. We probably didn't get it completely right the third time but it doesn't matter as long as we learn from the experience, review and continue to look for improvements. Change will continue; it just becomes part of business as usual.

Loreen Herzig is head of IT and business improvement at Wellingborough Homes.

Castle's PanConnect app mobilises Coastal Housing

Coastal Housing Group has introduced the PanConnect app from Castle Computer Services to support mobile working.

Rhian Waygood, IT systems business partner, Coastal Housing, said, "Our gas team is the first to use PanConnect for capturing data and creating CP12 certificates. The next phase of the programme will see it introduced into voids and lettings, and then rolled out to other functions across the organisation.

"We've already seen immediate benefits since PanConnect was introduced. The CP12 arrives much more quickly into the back office and the quality and consistency of tenant data,

such as mobile numbers and email addresses, has improved significantly. The system allows the team to complete more gas checks in a day so it has improved efficiency as well as the quality of data.

"The gas engineers love using the PanConnect app and find it much simpler to use than filling out the previous paper forms. It also lets them to do more ad-hoc jobs during each day without having to fill out extra paperwork, and they appreciate how PanConnect's merge function fills in most of the information for them."

ACIS SIGNS NEW FIVE-YEAR AGREEMENT WITH ORCHARD

As part of a new five-year contract with Orchard, Acis is now using the software provider's CRM and digital platforms.

Orchard is also helping Acis to process and manage antisocial behaviour cases, customer compliments and complaints, and surveys. Orchard's CRM and digital platforms are supported by electronic document management, single sign on and integration to Microsoft Exchange.

Greg Bacon, chief executive, Acis, said, "Our customers are our main priority so it's important we invest in the right tools to help us provide better services to them. We have worked with Orchard for some time and have recognised them as a trusted provider to the housing sector for many years."

Housing Contact boosts Johnnie Johnson's tenant engagement

Johnnie Johnson Housing Trust is now using Housing Contact's automated customer contact services as part of an ongoing transformation programme, with particular emphasis on rental arrears and tenant feedback.

Following a pilot project last year, Johnnie Johnson Housing will now embed Housing Contact's technology as part of its income collection strategy, helping to increase engagement with tenants facing difficulties with rental payments.

The housing provider is also using Housing Contact's insight software to gather immediate tenant feedback on a raft of services to help measure value for money. These will include the performance of repairs and maintenance services, monitoring how ASB complaints are handled, and tenant satisfaction with the early stages of each letting process.

Kathryn Bradbury, assistant director of homes and services, Johnnie Johnson Housing, said, "We were impressed by how Housing Contact's automated technology has delivered instant results. The technology has been easy to implement and has improved efficiency and performance."

GENTOO'S STREETWISE COMBATS DOMESTIC ABUSE WITH CHELMER HOUSING

Gentoo has signed a three-year contract with Chelmer Housing on behalf of the Essex Housing Officers Group to provide its Streetwise software to log instances of domestic abuse and provide early interventions for victims and families across Essex.

Streetwise is a case management system that helps protect communities and improve lives by using existing data to provide a comprehensive view of a customer's circumstances, so the most appropriate person-centred support and interventions can be put in place.

Designed in-house by Gentoo, Streetwise has two modules, an anti-social behaviour module for people on the front-line to manage ASB and pinpoint where support is needed, and a domestic abuse module to support staff when dealing with cases of domestic abuse. Both modules provide a controlled way to record incidents, actions, interventions and the measures taken to support victims and deal with perpetrators.

Over 20 providers in Essex are using the Streetwise domestic abuse module to share information across multiple providers. During the first six months of the project, more than 1,000 serious cases of domestic abuse have been logged.

For example, when a customer presented herself as homeless to the reception of one housing provider with her partner, the staff member noticed that she looked shaken and was bruised. When staff checked the Essex-wide Streetwise system, they found information from another provider advising that there was an ongoing support case open.

Seeing this information allowed the member of staff to check the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) notes in a just a few minutes. As a result of this quick action, the housing process was stopped and further support offered to the victim.

Terri Cochrane, assistant director of housing management, Chelmer Housing Partnership, said, "We are one year into the project and although getting everyone on board has not been without its teething problems, the case management system has provided us with the opportunity to improve the safety of our tenants and others in the county. Sharing information can be a tricky issue but by having a common goal and clear outcomes, our partners have developed different ways of working to assist victims of domestic abuse."

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USING IT TO GAIN VALUE FROM TENANT COMMUNICATIONS

James Shand, Managing Director, TriPartum

In most markets, there is an increasing focus on the customer journey and experience. Housing providers are no different; their tenants need to be kept informed as well as invited to respond to a call for action – for example, a rent payment.

In trying to deliver a better customer experience, housing providers face two key challenges:

- Do they have the back-office systems that manage data efficiently to allocate necessary costs and other information for specific customers?
- Do these systems have the ability to generate customised and meaningful communications such as letters, statements, demands and emails that are not simply personal Word merge templates to help tenants clearly understand what is being communicated?

For example, take a rent and service charge statement, which is a statutory requirement with a level of financial detail that explains annual charges to the recipient. The actual charges are also compared to the previous year's estimate, highlighting the variances which then need to be explained.

Many of the communications sent to tenants report the financial facts, with various table formats, typically built around templates merging in the financial data. If there are no charges then the table still shows the charge title, but no financial data, which simply creates 'noise' among the valuable information. The templates contain other information which is typically generic in content and style. Supplementary information is often provided by enclosing a generic leaflet or brochure which aims to cover all eventualities for the estates the housing provider is responsible for.

Why do they do this? Well, it's seen as a low-cost option for something viewed as a necessary method of doing business. However, if viewed as an opportunity to improve the bottom-line by delivering an effective communications strategy, then such communications can start to become valuable assets.

Digital technology

With today's digital technology, it's possible to generate a document (physical or electronic) which is totally customised for each recipient. You can make it easy to understand, with good navigation using fonts, colours and layout containing only the information that is relevant to the tenant. It will conform to brand guidelines as well as providing the opportunity to inform tenants of activities related to them or their estate. The financial line-items are only displayed if there are relevant numbers, therefore any zeros and the associated descriptions are suppressed. Where there are variances for actuals against estimates, these are not only displayed numerically but can have associated explanations designed to be close to the numerical variance.

Any staff who are assigned to tenants or estates can have their photographs with biographies supported by contact details to help create some empathy with tenants. Developing documents in this way can change the dynamic of the tenants/housing provider relationship by demonstrating that you are delivering information specific to them; it's not just a mass mailing information dump where

they have to work hard to understand the contents or, worse still, they have to call you to explain it.

How is this done? First, there needs to be an assessment that the content information and associated data is available and in an accessible format to be used for building the content with business rules and logic. There then needs to be:

- A clear understanding from the various stakeholders across the business of what must be available to meet any regulatory requirements;
- Information which supports the financial data;
- Marketing communications as well as any informational content.

Document framework

Having gathered the content requirements, the variations need to be understood so that the document framework is robust enough to consider the potential extremes of content as it ebbs and flows across pages. Once the content requirements are complete then the design of the document can take place while considering the cost implications for the various formats, such

USING IT TO GAIN VALUE FROM TENANT COMMUNICATIONS
Continued from previous page

as A5 or A4, landscape or portrait, loose pages or booklet, bound long or short edge, print quality, and so on.

Inevitably, there is a process where the designs go through a number of iterations as clients start to see the documents shape up and the information becomes alive. Stakeholders start to have a common understanding of how customers will be communicated to, with the various elements effectively presented as a 'story'. At all times in this process, there is a dialogue taking place with the development team to ensure that the design requirements can technically be reflected when building the system with business rules and logic.

Once the designs and variations in content are agreed, the development build can take place. One key aspect of this is to have a reasonable data 'test pack' which can test the variations in content – simple through to worst case scenarios. Again, a number of iterations and checks are carried out to ensure the rules and logic are applied as the business intended. A final end-to-end

test plan is carried out from receipt of data through to output channel delivery. Final sign-off makes the system ready for deployment with live data.

Typically, the results manifest themselves in a number of ways:

- More cost-effective when considering the comparison of the total end-to-end costs and not just the cost of printing;
- An improved customer experience, reflected in a reduction in calls questioning the information being sent;
- Improvements in the business processes from the generation of data through to delivery to the tenants;
- An ongoing business process which provides the business with audit controls and the ability to be agile with the implementation of future changes in content.

Getting IT on board
What stops organisations from implementing such improvements? Sadly, the most common reason for not doing anything is that the business considers printed communications as a

'necessary evil'. Often there is no single point of responsibility because there are various stakeholders for the content with different expectations. Costs for the end-to-end delivery are often dissipated across a number of budget holders, and therefore not identified as a single figure. One of the more significant and historic points is getting internal IT functions to deal with document changes. Quite often, these sort of requests take a lower priority in the world of IT, which frustrates the other parts of the business where the changes are regarded as more significant.

So, with a short-term focus by the business working with an external supplier that can bridge the gap between the various internal stakeholders, while working with IT to obtain the necessary data feeds, a long-term solution can be found which enhances the customer journey and experience, and delivers real bottom-line benefits.

James Shand is managing director of TriPartum.

Virtual College gets tenants online

To help new tenants settle into their homes and support their pre-tenancy requirements, online learning provider Virtual College has created a range of online resources.

Fiona Sheen, online learning advisor, Virtual College, said, "We were aware of the issues surrounding tenancy agreement failures widely expressed by the social housing sector. There is a need

to help tenants become self-sustaining by developing their financial awareness and general ability to manage their tenancy successfully.

"Our investment in helping our social housing customers to provide a proactive approach to these issues recognises their current budget constraints and the limited financial resources at their disposal."

The six short online pre-tenancy courses provide learners with the knowledge they need for a tenancy agreement, explore the basics of finding and viewing a property and the practicalities involved in occupying a new home, including paying rent, opening a bank account and getting advice on the services and support available.

MONITORING THE POTENTIAL OF ASSISTED LIVING

Gill Atkey, Head of Monitoring & Client Services, Appello

In an article earlier this year, England's chief nursing officer, Professor Jane Cummings, wrote about the move from self-care to supported self-care. Self-care can mean a variety of things to different people of varying ages and with disparate needs and challenges, whether you are monitoring your fitness and diet or, at the other end of the scale, managing multiple conditions or illnesses. As a result, Cummings is keen to expand the term to 'supported self-care', to create a nation of supported self-managers, enabling people to be much more confident in managing their health and wellbeing.

While self-care might be the buzzword for today's mobile-savvy generation, providers of housing for older people and the residents themselves have been at the forefront of self-care for decades, whether they knew it or not. Life-safety monitoring services outdate most of the issues self-care services are now trying to tackle; they have been around for over 30 years.

Most of us are familiar with personal alarm technology for older people – either directly or through older family members. Like every other part of the housing sector, the technology has moved on and so have the services being offered. At a time when the sector is changing, driven by our ageing population and the need to find efficiencies and meet rising customer expectations, now is the time for providers to look carefully at the monitoring services they supply to their residents and ask themselves, "are we really meeting the changing needs of our customers today and in the future?".

A monitoring centre is just like a call centre, right?

Imagine walking into a room with hundreds of ambulance dispatchers, local authority building maintenance service desk staff, house managers, family members and carers, all talking to older people at once and you will begin to understand what a monitoring centre feels like. Staffed by people of all ages and backgrounds, monitoring centres provide a lifeline for many millions of older people today.

While similar to an emergency dispatch centre in some respects, telecare monitoring centres are unique in that they are in contact with the resident from the start of a call until the situation or incident is resolved and take full responsibility for making sure that the resident receives the necessary care and assistance. Make no mistake, this is a skilled job that not everyone is able to do. For instance, we have had previous staff members join the emergency services and reflect on the fact that life as a telecare monitoring centre operative is as challenging and yet more rewarding than their current role due to the support they provide direct to the resident from initial call to resolution.

Telecare monitoring centres handle activations from telecare equipment, including personal emergency alarms, grouped warden call systems, fire detection such as smoke detectors, and door-entry systems. As proactive self-care becomes more prevalent, services such as telehealth and activity monitoring are increasingly included. These give customers, that housing providers support, peace of mind to live independently, improve the quality of life, reduce social isolation and even save lives.

This complex ecosystem is usually, and in our case always, handled by skilled operators with the specialist training to be able to safely handle and process the alarm activations and the numerous other types of calls we deal with daily. Last year alone, our 180 staff in our monitoring centre processed over five million calls across each of our functions; from emergency telecare calls relating to activities of daily living to lone worker and reassurance calls through to non-critical calls to next of kin and property managers, out-of-hours calls ranging from anti-social behaviour to domestic repairs and lost children, as well as fault logging and engineer dispatch.

In the emergency telecare function, we dialled the emergency services 62,000 times, equating to four per cent of the operator-handled calls. Outside emergency telecare, call numbers are increasing every year, especially relating to door traffic from retirement properties due to an ageing population and carers requiring access. The average age of those we support has risen from 79 to 84 years old, and continues to rise. Supported self-care is increasingly seen as a way to help this demographic to live independent, healthy lives for as long as possible.

Monitoring as a key differentiator
Resident monitoring technology is a key area where housing providers can increase their value to residents. It's a potentially life-saving system that residents use on a daily basis and engagement will only increase as video-enabled calling and digital technologies

MONITORING THE POTENTIAL OF ASSISTED LIVING
Continued from previous page

are adopted. As a result, selecting the correct monitoring partner is not something that housing providers should think about lightly – it really could prove to be a powerful differentiator, if done well.

It's a fact of modern life that multi-generational living is rare and caring for older family members on a daily basis is not always as easy as we would all like. Technology on its own cannot always fill the void, but digitally-enabled supported self-care using proactive, innovative and accredited monitoring services can allow older people and their families to feel reassured. For housing providers, offering services that are proven to save people's lives in the worst circumstances, but also give reassurance and improve quality of life on a daily basis, is key.

But as our population ages and housing providers continue to support people to live independently, the challenges

will intensify. Remote monitoring is increasingly important as housing providers consolidate and reduce the numbers of housing managers on site. Introducing great monitoring services to provide 24/7 remote support via traditional and digital routes will create scalable efficiencies almost overnight. In turn, the pressures on local health authority budgets and social care will continue to bite and housing providers will be challenged to alleviate the strain and help residents to self-care and stay healthy.

The future is digitally-supported self-care

From health and wellness devices, such as Fitbit, to the internet of things (IoT), we can now collect all that data onto one platform and see a true picture of the person, allowing early interventions and treatments. The monitoring centre then

plays a part in proactively reaching out to residents who might be developing early signs of illness before an emergency situation arises.

But the full potential of these services will only be realised with the right infrastructure, a digital solution rather than analogue. Only with digital technology will providers be able to introduce the proactive monitoring that has greater speed, flexibility, scalability and resilience than traditional analogue systems.

Being able to offer these services will enable housing providers to truly differentiate themselves and future proof for a next generation of older people well versed in self-supported care and support.

Gill Atkey is head of monitoring and client services at Appello.

Switchee wins Ashden Award for its innovative smart thermostat

Switchee has won the 2017 Impax Ashden Award for Energy Innovation. Switchee's smart thermostat, designed specifically for the social housing sector, is intended to cut fuel bills for tenants and help housing providers to maintain the quality of their stock.

The Ashden Awards are given to pioneers in sustainable energy and are a globally recognised measure of excellence.

Adam Fudakowski, CEO, Switchee, said, "We're absolutely thrilled to have won the Ashden Award. To be recognised by such an established sustainability champion is huge for us. We are passionate about saving residents money and giving landlords the insights they need to make better energy efficiency improvements to their housing stock."

Ian Simm, chief executive, Impax Asset Management and sponsor of the energy innovation award for the past five years, said, "Switchee provides social housing providers with an innovative tool to monitor and maintain their housing stock, while ensuring the comfort of their tenants and reduced

energy bills. This is a sophisticated integration of the very latest technologies, all wrapped up in one simple package – a smart thermostat."

By gathering data on temperature, humidity, light levels, motion and air pressure, Switchee thermostats can learn a household's weekly routine. They use this data to anticipate when the house will be empty and automatically turn the heating off when no one's home, turning it back on again when it knows the house will be occupied.

Switchee not only helps cut energy use, its dashboard also provides housing providers with data insights that indicate the performance of their housing stock. Data from Switchee is used to rank properties by a range of performance and welfare indicators, including insulation quality, mould risk and fuel poverty risk. Switchee can detect homes that are slow to heat, too quick to cool, or are at risk of mould growth. These insights prompt landlords to make proactive maintenance improvements such as boiler upgrades, mould washes or fitting insulation.

PENETRATION TESTING IN HOUSING

Toby Reynolds, Security Consultant, Insomnia Security

Housing Technology interviewed Toby Reynolds, a security consultant and penetration tester for Insomnia Security, about what housing providers should be considering in the context of cyber-security and data protection.

What are the cyber-security and data protection aspects specific to social housing?

There are lots of similarities with social housing and other companies. This can be seen through the use of corporate laptops, tablets, remote working and so on.

The important part is looking at 'personally identifiable information'. This takes the form of date of birth and names as well as associated information. Many other types of companies also hold this type of information, but social housing has many vulnerable people so it's even more important to protect their information.

What does the ideal CS/DP set up look like?

There are different parts that need to be looked at for this question, but in general all computer systems should be tested regularly, by a third party security testing firm that specialises in penetration testing.

- **Mobile working:** Everything mobile should be encrypted. This will help to protect data at rest (not in use). People with mobile devices shouldn't use public wi-fi; this will open them up to attacks. The best approach is to use VPN connections to form secure channels between staff's devices and the organisation's servers.
- Internet/online: Regular penetration testing of common attacks using a security company will help to identify vulnerabilities. For example, SQL injection is a common, high-severity vulnerability issue, which can lead to the disclosure of vast amounts of

information, stored within the web application's database. This could provide the attacker with access to internal staff-only material as well as personally identifiable information.
- **Payments:** There are vast amounts of security-related regulations which apply to the handling of credit-card data, such as PCI compliance. Adhering to these standards could involve a lot of changes to the way an organisation operates; however, services such as PayPal have these already setup, but there are extra security rules and regulations that need to be followed.
- **Passwords:** I don't actually recommend having passwords, at least not passwords which you have to remember. Personally, I use a password manager, called KeePass, which generates and saves secure passwords for me, which can be considered secure when compared with most of today's password management policies.
- **Phishing:** With the rise of ransomware, it's more important than ever to separate your different computing environments, alongside adequate user-awareness training. Something as simple as disabling macros within untested Microsoft Office documents should be standard, and not opening unexpected email attachments.

What percentage of housing providers' IT budgets should be spent on CS/DP?

From a consultant's perspective, as much as possible! It is important to invest heavily in general staff awareness training. This should cover points such as why you should regularly change your password and why you shouldn't click on email links you're not sure of.

In the context of cloud and hosted services, can you outsource your CS/DP too?

You can, but I recommend that you only do this in part. Cloud storage facilities should have lots of security and multiple

layers of authorisation in place, but from a DPA angle, you should identify personal identifiable information and protect this yourself. Nothing really compares to knowing exactly how secure you data is when you consider self-hosted, but there is the data management perspective you need to be aware of.

How can you protect against deliberate or accidental internal data breaches?

Everyone should have the minimum permissions to do their job, meaning everything should be denied by default. You should use a whitelist instead of a blacklist.

Everything should be encrypted with comprehensive audit trails and data retention available. Just because something is printed, doesn't mean it can be traced back to the originator, and the recent NSA leaks proved this.

In the event of a data-breach, turn everything offline. Take a clone or a snapshot of your systems and possibly ask a professional third party to investigate the breach. They will be looking through the log files to build up information.

What is the balance between technology and internal training to enforce CS/DP?

Phishing is a people-led breach. This kind of attack requires lots of training for people to understand exactly how modern day attackers operate. There have been cases of hackers/testers dropping USB sticks containing malicious programs onto a company's premises; there is then the potential that these devices could be plugged into a corporate machine (if there is something like an enticing file called 'salary info', people will most likely attempt to see the information). From an attacker's perspective, merely placing a malicious file on external media generally only yields unfortunate results for the affected company.

PENETRATION TESTING IN HOUSING

Continued from previous page

That is why external storage shouldn't be used, and again denied by a company default policy.

Generally, security professionals say 70 per cent technology and 30 per cent people, but what I recommend is actually 60 per cent people and 40 per cent technology. People are unaware of how much of a risk they pose to an organisation, even when you only have good intentions.

How does the growth of the internet of things in housing affect CS/DP?

The internet of things has a very bad reputation within the security community because the devices are aimed purely at convenience and often security is not built into the product's development. As a result, many of these IoT devices are vulnerable to attack, especially when first powered on.

Simple things like changing the device's password on the first setup are not enforced. The Mirai IoT botnet used these default usernames and passwords to launch attacks, such as DDoS.

Toby Reynolds is a security consultant for Insomnia Security.

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY - LEADING THE WAY WITH THE INTERNET OF THINGS

HOUSING™ TECHNOLOGY
internet of things

Housing Technology's pioneering focus on the internet of things (IoT) in housing continues with our forthcoming event at the BT Tower in London on 10 October and the recent launch of an online survey covering how housing providers expect to adopt IoT over the next few years, both kindly supported by BT, Capita, Civica and RHP.

Online survey for the Internet of Things in Housing 2017

All housing providers are invited to take part in the survey; in return for spending five minutes completing the survey, you will be sent a complimentary copy of the final report in November, comprising our detailed analysis of responses from hundreds of housing providers, as well as articles, advice and resources around IoT in the social housing sector.

Please complete the survey now at:
www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ housingtechnology_IoT.

Last chance to register

There are still places available if you would like to join Housing Technology at the iconic BT Tower in central London for a morning of compelling presentations (see below) on IoT, followed by lunch at the top of the BT Tower, with truly breath-taking views over the whole of London and its surrounding counties. Please go to **www.housing-technology.com/ events/iot2017** to reserve one of the last few places.

BT - Mark Harrop, Strategy & Business Development Director
What is IoT and how can it help housing providers address their business issues?

Civica - Hellen Bowey, Managing Director of Alcove (a Civica partner)
Enriching lives through smart devices, smart decisions and smarter data

RHP - Tom Way, Innovation Manager and Jonathan Creaser, ICT Director
'If I only had a brain': How connectivity is enabling business transformation and why the housing sector should be next

Capita - Stewart Davison, Head of Business Development
Show me the money: housing, IoT and achieving ROI

Flagship Group - Matt Brazier, Director of IT
Taking a risk on innovative technologies

The University of Reading - Dr Etienne Roesch, Associate Professor of Cognitive Science
Emotional psychology meets cyber-physical security in IoT smart homes

FORVIVA'S 60% INFRASTRUCTURE COST CUTS WITH QUADRIS

ForViva's investment in a Dell XC hyper-converged Nutanix platform supplied and supported by Quadris has been a key enabler of their significant recent growth and transformed application performance.

CUSTOMER PROFILE

Established in June 2015, ForViva has brought together City West Housing Trust, Villages Housing Association and construction company ForWorks under a group structure. The group owns and manages over 24,000 homes across the North West, delivering high-quality services for local communities.

THE BRIEF

ForViva's IT infrastructure had evolved over the years, resulting in a complex, multi-platform, multi-vendor environment, siloed by function and requiring numerous management consoles. Bottlenecks in the infrastructure were causing latency and performance issues for their 350+ desktop users.

ForViva had experienced rapid growth and with this trend set to continue, they required reliable, robust and scalable IT. They also wanted to add functionality to their desktops, such as video broadcasting and utilising screensavers, but this wasn't possible with their existing set up.

Their IT infrastructure was difficult and costly to manage and performance was continually falling short of users' expectations. Planned enhancements, designed to accommodate expansion, regulation and faster decision-support, were being delayed by their infrastructure.

A particular frustration for the organisation and its users was a frequent drop in performance at peak times. A key industry application would refresh every morning, placing considerable strain on ForViva's infrastructure and causing everyone's desktop to run slow. The ICT team had limited visibility of the issue, which was impacting staff productivity.

ForViva considered upgrading their current infrastructure, but realised this wouldn't resolve operational inefficiencies, deliver the scalability they required or deliver value for money. In parallel, Quadris highlighted risks relating to infrastructure weaknesses, disaster recovery limitations and the potential for data loss within the organisation, which clearly demonstrated the need and value of a technology refresh.

THE SOLUTION

Following a rigorous tender process, ForViva chose Quadris as their provider, based on Quadris' expertise, sector-specific experience and end-to-end delivery capability. Quadris proposed a hyper-converged infrastructure solution, ideally suited to ForViva's requirements and capable of resolving the shortcomings of ForViva's traditional three-tier SAN environment. Quadris designed and deployed an eight-node Dell XC hyper-converged cluster to replace the entire production environment.

A hyper-converged platform is a model architecture for ForViva, delivering the perfect blend of performance, capacity and operational simplicity. 'Rapid deployment' is another key attribute of hyper-convergence; this enabled Quadris to install the new environment in just 48 hours, with all production VMs migrated within three weeks.

Quadris provided full training and documentation, including valuable skills-transfer to equip the ForViva ICT team with the requisite knowledge to manage and operate the new environment.

Quadris also proposed re-purposing some of the existing equipment, relocating this to a secondary site to be used for disaster recovery. This was a unique feature of the Quadris proposal which helped ForViva realise even bigger savings (through the cost deferral of replacement new equipment).

The new hyper-converged platform incorporated VMware replication for non-critical workloads and the use of 'Zerto' to achieve the stated RTO and RPO's required for ForViva's mission-critical workloads.

ForViva also bought Quadris' Prevensys monitoring and diagnostics service to provide a holistic, correlated view of ForViva's entire infrastructure. Prevensys enables ForViva's ICT team to proactively monitor and diagnose problems from within a single management console. The same service also reports to Quadris' operations hub for round-the-clock monitoring and remediation.

WHY QUADRIS?

Quadris was chosen as the preferred partner due to their expert knowledge of hyper-converged technology and the quality of their support services, backed up by their Prevensys network monitoring system. Quadris consultants also possess the highest levels of accreditation with complementary technologies (VMware, Microsoft and Citrix), which formed an essential part of the VDI re-design and deployment exercise. Most importantly, Quadris delivered the whole project using in-house resources only, something that no other providers were able to offer.
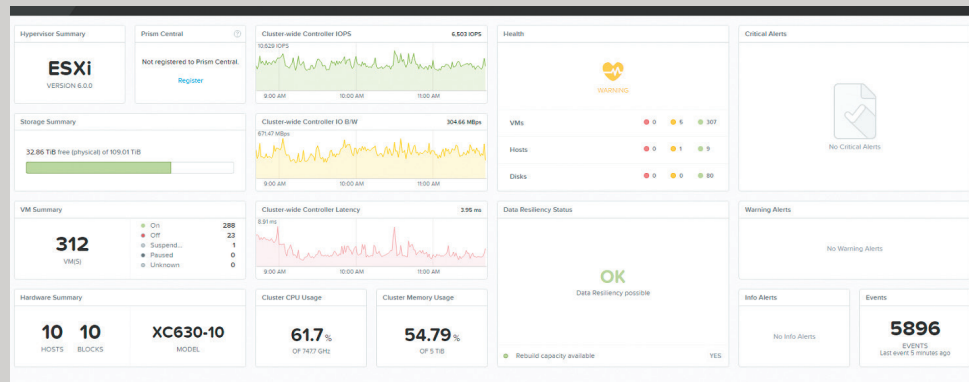
CAPACITY AND SCALABILITY

Since implementing the new infrastructure, ForViva has acquired a large company, which increased the number of users by over 50 per cent. Due to the 'plug and play' nature of the Nutanix solution, Quadris has easily expanded the hyper-converged cluster, adding additional nodes completely non-disruptively (during business hours). This has provided ForViva with the additional capacity required, without any service disruption or operational impact.

60 PER CENT COST REDUCTION

A critical success metric for ForViva has been the ability to drive significant savings from deploying a hyper-converged solution. ForViva efficiency gains can be summarised as follows:
- 60 per cent reduction in annual datacentre costs;
- 8:1 rack-density increase;
- 72 per cent reduction in power consumption;
- 50 per cent reduction in management overhead.

RPO (RECOVERY POINT OBJECTIVE)

One of ForViva's more challenging requirements was to move to a sub-10 seconds recovery point objective (RPO) for critical workloads to minimise the risk of data loss in the event of various disaster recovery scenarios. Quadris' experience with a wide range of disaster recovery solutions enabled them to identify and implement a solution using VMware replication and Zerto to achieve this.

QUICK AND SIMPLE MANAGEMENT

The new environment has been hugely simplified. ForViva has collapsed several discrete layers of the infrastructure (numerous separate components) into a single, unified platform. Disparate management tools have been consolidated into a fully-integrated management console ('a single pane of glass'). Provisioning resources is just a few simple mouse clicks within the UI, which has reduced the need for expensive specialist domain expertise.

EFFICIENT IT SUPPORT

The hyper-converged solution has also streamlined ForViva's support and reduced total administration time. Sophisticated self-healing capabilities mean that problems within the Nutanix cluster are detected and resolved automatically, providing faster mean time to resolution (MTTR), for any issues that arise. The Prevensys monitoring solution provides an additional layer of proactive diagnostics and alerting, all of which has helped to achieve new levels of performance and reliability.

SUMMARY

Mark Sullivan, assistant director of ICT, ForViva, said, "Quadris proved themselves highly capable and are a great asset to our organisation. Their solution has improved the performance of our business applications, reliability has been transformed and our data centre costs have fallen by 60 per cent. Crucial to our strategy, we have unlimited scalability that is easy to install and this has already been put in place. We recently added 25 per cent additional capacity to compute and storage to support an acquisition which was implemented within hours with zero downtime."

Quadris designs, installs and supports mission-critical infrastructure for housing providers that need enterprise performance levels of security, availability and an ability to scale with ease.

We have a highly-experienced team of hyper-converged infrastructure and Citrix specialists that are helping future-focused organisations operate mission-critical IT services around the clock.

If you want to know more about these solutions and want to speak to people with real implementation experience, feel free to get in touch with us at **www.quadris.co.uk.**

Partick Housing gets 'desktop as a service' from Castleton

Partick Housing Association has appointed Castleton Managed Services to deliver a cloud-based, fully-hosted 'desktop as a service', built on a Citrix XenApp architecture hosted in one of Castleton's 'tier III+' UK datacentres. The project began in June 2017 and the new service is scheduled to go live later this year.

Elaine Lewty, ICT business services manager, Partick Housing Association, said, "We pride ourselves on being a forward-thinking organisation, committed to continuous improvement, growth and diversification, and Partick is consistently rated as one of the best performing housing associations in Scotland.

"As an existing Castleton customer, we are confident that our investment in this new hosted IT infrastructure will enhance the day-to-day running of the business and support innovative automation and business intelligence across the organisation."

SYSTEMSUP HELPS GREENSQUARE REDUCE DR COSTS WITH AZURE SITE RECOVERY

GreenSquare Group has slashed its annual disaster recovery budget by almost two-thirds after moving to Microsoft Azure Site Recovery (ASR) with the help of Iomart cloud consultancy SystemsUp. The move to a public cloud has enabled GreenSquare to close its secondary data centre and improve its recovery processes.

Rob Fletcher, group head of ICT, GreenSquare, said, "We had decided to re-orient our ICT strategy around hybrid-cloud adoption to be more efficient, and a move to the public cloud made real financial sense.

"Microsoft put us in touch with the team at SystemsUp who showed us the potential of Azure Site Recovery and then worked with us to get us there. They planned it incredibly thoroughly and there was a huge transfer of knowledge to our engineers on site."

GreenSquare reported that its key indicators for restoring data have dramatically improved; the recovery time objective has been reduced from weeks to hours, while the recovery point objective is now down from 24 hours to just 15 minutes.

Fletcher said, "Although we have a very capable on-site technical resource, this was very much new territory for us," Rob Fletcher says. "SystemsUp brought its skills, knowledge and expertise and helped prove to us that ASR would bring GreenSquare sizeable benefits."

Genesis Housing's £1.7m deal with Insite Energy

Insite Energy has been chosen by Genesis Housing to manage metering, credit billing and prepayments for its 4,500 heat network-connected properties across London and the South East of England. The four-year contract is reported to be worth £1.7 million.

Genesis Housing's de-centralised energy and heat-metering framework contract will see around 75 per cent of its properties transferred to Insite Energy's heat-metering and billing service over a four-phase, nine-month handover period, with the remainder being considered for retro-

fitting with an Insite Energy-operated pay-as-you-go metering system within a similar timescale. The first credit billing service will go live in July 2017 in Hackney, London.

John Carey, head of corporate and professional services, Genesis Housing, said, "Some of the key priorities for us when running the tender and selecting a metering and billing provider were resident communication and education, a wide range of simple payment methods, flexible partnership working and, of course, remote meter reading and billing accuracy."

Anthony Coates-Smith, business development director, Insite Energy, said, "This is the first major OJEU contract win for Insite Energy so we're delighted to come out on top, against stiff competition from market leaders.

"Having gone through the OJEU process means that other housing associations can see our responses to the priorities of one of their peers; they can then leverage the same attractive commercial terms direct with us, without the need to repeat the tender process."

A digital platform for today's housing sector

Our innovative end-to-end housing solutions offer housing providers a single view of all tenant interactions, enabling them to effectively engage and deliver focussed tenant services.

Our solutions include:
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Housing Repairs Management | Payments | Housing Register
Housing Advice & Homelessness | Choice Based Lettings
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SECURED BY DESIGN

Jon Cole, Chief Operating Officer, Secured by Design

In this article, Jon Cole, chief operating officer of Secured by Design, the national police crime prevention initiative, looks at how visitor and access control systems can keep tenants safe in blocks of flats while providing landlords and the police with an unprecedented opportunity to investigate system misuse.

Having a way of controlling who can enter blocks of flats is of crucial importance to the safety of the residents who live there, especially those who are elderly and vulnerable.

Access by unwanted intruders gaining entry by simply pressing the trade or residents' buttons until a trusting or exasperated occupant buzzes them in significantly increases the risk of burglary, arson, criminal damage, drug dealing and use, and all kinds of anti-social behaviour. Such crimes can be difficult to investigate due to the lack of evidence.

The modern twist to this problem is the hiring of privately-owned luxury apartments for short city breaks via online companies which has resulted in press reports of them being misused for parties, resulting in criminal damage and anti-social behaviour.

Technology, in the form of visitor and access control systems, incorporating video monitoring, can play a significant part in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. The police can now work with the housing provider to gather data and images that could be vital in bringing those responsible before the courts.

Secured by Design (SBD) looked at many of London's toughest estates when drawing up recommendations to protect flats and apartment blocks, which are contained in 'SBD Homes 2016' standards (www.securedbydesign.com/industry-advice-and-guides).

The main focus for the police was the front door or the communal entrance doorset and restricting unlawful movement within the block, known as compartmentalisation. The objective

Courtesy of Entrotec

was to allow residents and their visitors unrestricted access to those areas they have permission to be in, while keeping the opportunist criminals and undesirable callers outside the building.

How systems work

Access-control and door-entry systems have two connecting, but different, functions. The door-entry call panel mounted at the building's communal entrance manages the visitors to a multiple dwelling premises. The visitor calls the flat for the resident to permit or decline access. The resident will use an audio or video phone, the latter allowing the resident to see who is calling before they speak to them. The access-control reader, usually mounted within a call panel, manages the residents' entry. The resident would offer a key fob to a reader and may also have to enter a code to gain entrance to the building. Until recently, key fobs will have been programmed at the access control unit in the building by a key management company. However, the most sophisticated access control systems are now cloud based so that key fob management and reporting may be done remotely via PC, tablet or mobile phone.

SBD Police Preferred Specification requirements

• **5-25 dwellings/bedrooms:** a visitor door-entry system with access to the building using a restricted electronic key fob, card or key, remote release of the primary-entrance doorset from the dwelling or bedroom, and audio and visual communication between

the occupant and visitor (with colour monitors recommended over black/white to help the occupier describe the caller and their clothing to police, if needed).

• **More than 25 dwellings/bedrooms:** as above, but also a vandal-resistant external door-entry panel with an integral camera, being able to record images in colour of people using the door-entry panel, battery back-up of the resident entry features of the system in the event of a power failure for up to six hours, unrestricted egress from the building in the event of an emergency or power failure, entry-system events for both visitors and residents stored for 30 days.

• Tradesperson release mechanisms are not permitted.

• The above systems are not normally required for developments of four dwellings or fewer.

Courtesy of Entrotec

SBD and UL 293 standard

Installers of door-entry and access-control systems should be aware of standard UL 293; 'Outline of Investigation for Access Control Units intended for use in the UK', which was produced by UL, a global standards and certification body, after a three-year collaboration. This allows access- and door-control units to be tested to the same level of attack as the door, but supplied separately to the door, allowing greater choice of system without compromising security. The standard was born out of US version UL 294, which looked at the electrical safety

SECURED BY DESIGN

Continued from previous page

of access control systems. SBD added security, attack testing, such as keypad resilience, and the need for management information.

Movement within the building (compartmentalisation)

Access-control systems can also be used to curtail unlawful free movement through the building. This could be achieved by a combination of access controls and dedicated doorsets using a proximity reader, swipe card or key. These measures will prevent unauthorised access from the lift, from the stairwell and fire egress stairwell to communal corridors while providing residents with access to the floors they require.

Fire service access

It is vital to enable the fire service to have unrestricted access to all floors in an emergency. To facilitate such access, the police and fire services have collaborated to create a secure emergency-access protocol. This involved the siting of

Courtesy of Entrotec

a secure external box near the main entrance of the building (and other locations in larger developments) with a fire-fighters' switch inside. The box is accessed via a secure restricted lock (with the keys carried on the fire tender). Once the switch is operated, the access- or door-control system is rendered safe (open). This includes all internal compartmental doorsets within the system. The box itself should be certificated to a minimum of STS 202 BR2.

Activity/alarm monitoring and management data

One of our member companies, Entrotec, specialists in door-entry solutions, reports that there is huge scope for obtaining management data. When a system is scaled up over a number of doors, it is often linked to a computer-based or web-based programme to allow greater control over the system and for extra information. Usage reports should be available to show which flats are called, or which fobs are used, frequently or infrequently, and even show the 'state' of any given door (e.g. whether it has been forced open or wedged open), and who has entered or exited the building. It should be possible to send alarms for both user and system events, which may be reported with the option of predetermined alerts being sent out using SMS or email.

Jon Cole is chief operating officer of Secured by Design.

GAS TAG LAUNCHES APP FOR GAS SAFE REGISTERED ENGINEERS

Gas Tag, a new 'prop-tech' company specialising in cloud-based gas safety monitoring, has launched a new gas safety app for iOS and Android devices.

The Gas Tag app is free to download for all Gas Safe Registered engineers and can be used when carrying out work in any property with a Gas Tag subscription.

The user-friendly system guides engineers through data fields, which

automatically populate LGSRs, saving them hours of paperwork.

An automatic engineer verification feature prevents unregistered gas fitters from recording any work through the system, with the aim of thwarting rogue gas fitters and creating more jobs for qualified engineers.

Engineers can access the history of each Gas Tag property via the app. This helps identify and troubleshoot issues with appliances more quickly. All of the information is uploaded to a centralised portal where landlords, homeowners and housing associations can monitor the data through a cockpit-style dashboard.

Gas Tag does away with the current method of locally-stored records and replaces it with an independent UK database of geo-tagged, time-stamped and photo-verified evidence of all work carried out.

Designed with the help of Gas Safe Registered engineers, industry leaders and user experience experts, Gas Tag has
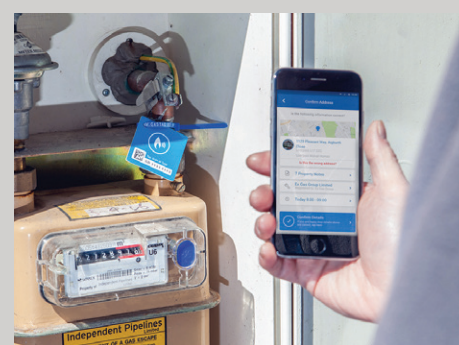
been described as "the most significant leap in domestic gas safety compliance in 20 years" by Barry Sheerman, MP and chair of the government's All Party Parliamentary Group on Carbon Monoxide.

Paul Durose, CEO, Gas Tag, said, "After two years of development, we now have the technology that will revolutionise gas safety and combat one of the biggest issues in our sector – rogue installers. Our mission is to drive illegal fitters out of business before they can put anybody else at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning, or worse."

THE CHANGING FACE OF TECHNOLOGY IN HOUSING

David Leach, Digital Services Director, Orbit Housing

As part of its 50th year anniversary, Orbit Housing has delved into its archives to draw out a timeline of the changing face of technology; from the first PC arriving in the office to offering real-time feedback to its customers.

March 1985 – Orbit's emergency response unit

In 1985, the Orbit emergency response unit (ERU) was set up to respond to Lifeline calls from older tenants living in sheltered housing schemes. At the time, six staff monitored three Orbit schemes with 50 Lifeline alarms.

25 years later, the team was still monitoring Lifelines but the system was now available to non-Orbit customers and was linked to telecare technology, helping people to live safely and independently at home. Telecare has sensors which remotely monitor homes linked directly to the ERU. 18 staff still monitored 141 schemes with 2,340 Lifeline alarms. The monitoring element of the ERU was outsourced to Appello CarelineUK in 2013, but the Lifeline alarms are still in use.

July 1985 – Backing up information in the 1980s

"I used to carry out the 'back up' of systems daily. I remember it being a large machine with two large spools which I had to change to complete the back up of all the information. It would take three, four or more spools depending how much information was there and then these were stored in big cabinets." – Housing Assistant, Orbit.

March 1990 – Changing technology

Lesley Mason, procurement compliance manager at Orbit, said, "One of the reasons I chose Orbit as my first 'employer of choice' was that at least I wasn't going to have to manage with a manual typewriter. We had electric versions.

"Note: electric, not electronic. These old Olivettis were not the precursors of the word processors that would enable you to type a few lines of text and edit before committing it to paper. However, they were quicker and less clunky than the piece of engineering that I'd typed my dissertation on two years earlier.

"It wouldn't be long before we had the magnificence of 'auto-correct', which was the wizardry of being able to lift the newly-applied piece of carbon back off the paper if you spotted it quickly enough, but for now, we were impressed (genuinely so!) with Tippex paper for top copies and coloured Tippex for making sure the pinks, blues and yellows remained legible in the file.

"So what have I seen change in this area? Compare that with what we have now and I'm sure you can work out the differences. There are, though, a few stand-out memories for me.

"I remember the first PC arriving in our Norwich office, fax machines had moved away from heat-roll paper onto plain paper (I remember ours was loaded with pink paper because you needed to know it was a fax rather than incoming post, apparently), and cell phones had been invented but they were large, clunky and gimmicky. PCs were the coming thing and plain-paper printing was the marvel of the age.

"And then someone sent our chief executive at the time (David Hucker) to

Harvard. Suddenly the technology we'd been told we didn't really need was top of the agenda. Not only would every office be wired up, computers on every desk, direct information available to everyone that wanted it, Microsoft Office, this new-fangled thing called email... but the biggest shock of all; we were going to have a centralised call centre. This was going to revolutionise the way we worked.

"Not everyone approved and quite a few believed it would never happen, but it was a genuine revolution and we joined the modern world."

March 2010 – GIS mapping

In 2010, we started using a geographic information system (GIS) to map our properties and estates accurately, and in 2015 we created customised versions of GIS for all staff in the form of a platform named 'myM@ps'. Recognised at the time as sector-leading technology, myM@ps enables staff to view and map our properties, providing instant answers to ownership and boundary queries.


March 2010 – New mobile devices

Staff started to use mobile devices to improve service for our tenants in 2010. The handheld devices allowed housing officers and surveyors to have information at their fingertips so they could answer questions quickly, using the most up-to-date information. Previously, they would have had to go back to the office and find the answers.

THE CHANGING FACE OF TECHNOLOGY IN HOUSING
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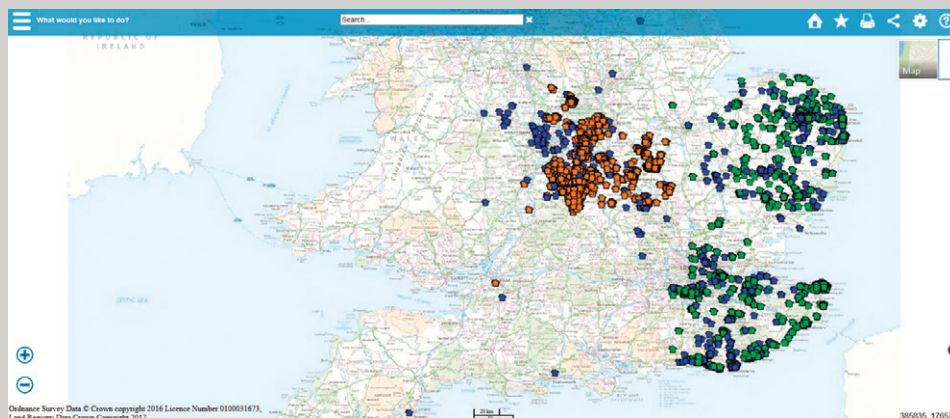
2011 – My Account online portal
We were one of the first housing providers to create an online portal providing tenants with 24-hour access to their accounts.

The portal enables tenants to make a payment, view their account, report a repair, view outstanding repairs as well as a range of other options such as report incidents, sign up for paperless communications and provide feedback.

September 2012 – Getting online
In order to help to get our tenants online, we provided wi-fi access in 20 of our sheltered and supported schemes in 2012. With our partner, CommunityUK, we offered over 650 tenants the opportunity to access the internet free of charge.

April 2015 – Real-time feedback
We were the first housing provider to use real-time feedback, allowing tenants to let us know how we are doing. They can text us, email us or tell us over the phone how they feel about the services we provide.

We ask them to rate our services on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). We then ask them why they gave that score. That's it. No big survey, no long list of questions. Just the customer, their experience and how they felt about it.

The scores and comments are then analysed in real-time and presented back to staff using specially designed dashboards. Customer service advisors

can then identify an issue, contact the tenant and resolve any problems within 48 hours of receiving feedback.

The platform, developed by customer engagement specialists Rant & Rave, is our principal method for listening to what tenants are saying and it was shortlisted in the UK CX awards in 2016.

January 2016 – Orbit Move
Since its launch in January 2016, over 90 per cent of our tenancy applications have been completed online using 'Orbit Move', an innovative digital way of signing up for a new tenancy. Orbit Move has since helped us win several prestigious awards and it's helping us achieve our goal of getting 75 per cent of our tenant contacts online by 2020.

March 2017 – Changing communications
To put our technology progress in a wider perspective, one of our longer-serving members of staff said, "When I started, there was this mythical land in Queens Road, Coventry, known as 'the computer room'. Few had seen it, and even fewer understood the mysteries of its operations."

David Leach is the digital services director for Orbit Housing.

New dedicated site for Housing Technology Recruitment

To continue our goal of supporting the housing sector with the recruitment of technology professionals and leaders, Housing Technology is pleased to announce that we are launching a new side to our website which is focused fully on supporting our subscribers with their careers and providing housing providers with an effective way to communicate with experienced IT professionals, analysts and senior managers in our sector.

Please have a look at: jobs.housing-technology.com.

After launching several months ago, many housing providers and local authorities

have used our job board. We have been very pleased with the response and we've also listened to feedback on how we can improve the service for your HR teams.

With this new job board, the service remains completely free and the process of uploading jobs and tracking applicants is even simpler. The new address of the site is **jobs.housing-technology.com**.

If you or your team are currently recruiting, please see jobs.housing-technology.com or send our details to your HR team. If you have any questions at all, please call us on **0208 336 2293** or email **recruitment@ housing-technology.com**.

MAKING BETTER USE OF DATA – IT STARTS WITH DESIGN

Paul Clarke, Director, Develin Consulting

As new technology keeps flooding into the housing sector and new sources of data emerge, imaginative ways to put them to good use are surfacing on a daily basis. You only have to read the pages of Housing Technology to see what's possible.

And it's also clear that the way in which housing providers are using data is starting to change. As a result, teams embracing new technology, such as housing and asset management departments, are becoming increasingly confident in their use of data. Local pockets of expertise are springing up as new data is being used to hone the efficiency and effectiveness with which local services are delivered.

Those people in roles such as performance reporting or strategic insight are therefore adapting what they do. They can find themselves involved in providing information to the business and in supporting those working with data across the business.

As specialists in data analytics and visualisation, we joined a panel of experts in May on a webinar titled 'Making better use of data for smarter decisions'.

It was clear from the answers to questions such as 'what data will we need in the future?' and 'what are the future challenges that will demand better use of data?' that there are critical decisions ahead which may demand an as-yet-unseen level of coordinated and carefully-planned engagement with data.

The examples offered included reducing costs in line with falling rent levels, preventing homelessness and supporting communities of residents as they get older.

From our experience, somewhat counter-intuitively, for decisions such as these, the first step is to put all questions about data to one side, and focus instead on the people whose job it is to make the decision-making process work – made ever more challenging by the increasing quantities of data available and the complexity of the issues to resolve.

These are the people with the deepest knowledge of the business. They might be operations managers, management accountants, repairs supervisors or HR managers. And alongside them are, of course, the information professionals within the CIO's and IT director's teams as well as those involved in performance reporting and strategic insight.

Collaboration is crucial

The decision process starts with them collaborating in the design of the information required to support the decisions ahead.

Crucially, this collaboration extends to the decision makers themselves. Whether they are the executive team or the board of trustees, they will have information needs that relate directly to the decisions to be made and to the way in which they, as a group, will work most effectively.

For example, imagine being the operations manager for, say, a supported housing service. You are tasked with proposing how the business will maintain its communities of elderly residents over the next 10 years in the face of increasingly complex support needs, rising service costs and zero-growth levels of income.

A series of decisions will be needed, from both the executive team and the board of trustees, probably comprising a large number of people with infrequent involvement in day-to-day business

operations and hailing from a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds.

The information they receive must make the issues, choices and options immediately understandable, and ensure that everyone understands them in the same way. This information will almost certainly need to be highly visual in nature.

Make it visual

It's not just that a picture is worth a thousand words. But among any group of people tasked with making a decision, some may want to see a detailed spreadsheet, others may want a three-page report, and some may be dyslexic and struggle with both. Simple and highly-effective infographics can bring everyone literally onto the same page.

The design process is therefore critical. What information is needed? How should it be presented? What supporting evidence is needed? How can it be laid out such that the eye is drawn naturally to the points at issue and the choices and options available?

In tackling these questions, the design process will make it easier and faster for those involved to reach a common understanding of the issues at hand. It will also clarify exactly what data is needed.

In the case of our operations manager in the supported housing service, the

MAKING BETTER USE OF DATA – IT STARTS WITH DESIGN
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design effort centred on an infographic capturing the likely benefits if community volunteers and family members took over some of the tasks currently performed by the professional caring staff, aided and abetted by the latest assistive technologies.

The data needed for the infographic related to the activities performed by the professional staff and how these would change under different scenarios. Although there were significant data quality issues, thanks to the inclusive nature of the information design process, they didn't stand in the way of the debate or slow the decision-making process.

The result of the design effort is shown below. It only takes a moment to see how the story unfolds from information about the costs of care today, to how much they are likely to rise in the next 10 years, and then how much will be saved by engaging volunteers in care provision and making better use of technology.

It's all about the people in the process
For the big decisions ahead, our recommendation for the best way to get the greatest value from all the data with us today, and from the large volumes starting to materialise as IoT projects gather pace, is to focus on the key people in the process.

Our recommendation is also to worry less about whether the business has the right data for the decisions ahead and to focus instead on designing the information needed for the right decisions to be made. Even if the right data is missing, it will be clear what's needed, and it might be possible to source enough for progress to be made.

It's the ability of those in the process to build a consensus relating to the most pressing issues facing the business, and then design information to make the right decisions happen, that will help the business to realise full value from its data.

Paul Clarke is a director of Develin Consulting.

DOES YOUR PRIVACY POLICY MEASURE UP?

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

Civica's executive director for housing and asset management, Jeff Hewitt, looks at the results of a recent survey into privacy policies for housing providers ahead of the 2018 GDPR legislation.

When it comes to the collection and storage of extremely sensitive data, housing providers often hold vast amounts of records about both their tenants and the communities they support. As well as general contact, tenancy and financial information, this data can include details on people living with a disability as well as information on elderly or vulnerable people.

In addition, housing providers mostly provide various services to tenants, and use external contractors as well as collecting information digitally. This can mean that it's far too easy to share sensitive data across different organisations and departments without recognising the legal implications and increase the risk of sensitive data being lost or hacked.

Therefore before GDPR comes into play next May, there are practical and important steps that housing providers should take;

one of the first is a thorough review of your organisation's privacy policy.

In partnership with MyLife Digital, Civica compiled a report to help housing providers identify gaps in their privacy policies to better prepare for GDPR. We've analysed the privacy policies of 100 housing providers across England, Scotland and Wales, while researching the requirements of GDPR and reading the guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) regarding its findings against organisations that have breached the current Data Protection Act 1998.

Our research looked at a number of key measures of how the current privacy policies of the studied housing providers measured up:
- Around 18 per cent of housing providers don't have a privacy policy, which is substantially higher than the top 100 UK charities (eight per cent) or local authorities (four per cent).
- A staggering 99 per cent of housing providers do not mention profiling in their policies, while under the GDPR, it should clearly state how collected data is used to create profiles.

- 52 per cent of privacy policies scrutinised showed a clear reference to sharing of data; a practice which is highly likely to occur in housing associations.
- Looking at how long data is kept, the majority (96 per cent) do not mention details; but under GDPR it will be essential to consider how long we retain data and verify that this period has been considered and documented.
- One of the most significant changes under GDPR is for housing providers (and all public bodies) to have a named data controller or processor, but only 12 per cent clearly state a named person in their current privacy policy.

Complying with GDPR will inevitably involve increased work, time and cost in implementing strategies and processes to comply. Yet, if done in the right way, the opportunity it creates to build or strengthen trust could well outweigh these issues. Now is the time to not only protect your organisation, but also go a step further; to build and deepen trust with your tenants.

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

THE CHALLENGES OF A DIGITAL WORLD

Ken Fox, Head of ICT & Digital, Link Group

Hardly a day goes by without someone on the news telling me advances in artificial intelligence will result in job losses among humans, how digital automation will do the same, and warnings about the possibility of another cyber attack. It's all enough to put you off your Coco Pops!

The days of ICT simply keeping the infrastructure lights on have passed. The function is no longer purely operational, but instead it needs to work with the business to build a technology and information platform that supports the delivery of the best possible services. It's a move away from providing a reactive response to a more proactive one. An approach that encompasses traditional operational ICT tasks with wider business responsibilities, centred on a customer-focused service delivery model. That's no small task, but it is extremely interesting, and one that I encourage ICT professionals to embrace.

The Link Group offers a wide range of services to over 10,000 tenants across 26 local authorities, making us one of the largest social landlords in Scotland. Our services include welfare/money advice, employability, repairs, digital and financial inclusion, as well as building new high-quality affordable homes for rent and sale.

The delivery of such services means that Link's ICT & digital services (ICT&D) team is considered a key business partner. It is a fully integrated business function involved in the end-to-end design of the wide portfolio of services that Link provides. To achieve this status, it's essential that the ICT&D team demonstrates visible leadership, is accountable for the quality of the services delivered, takes responsibility when things go wrong, and ensures the continual development of the function to support Link's strategic aims.

These are exciting times at Link. We have embarked on an ambitious programme of change by developing a new ICT&D strategy. Implementing the strategy will see us modernising our technology platforms, preparing for new data protection legislation, achieving Cyber Essentials accreditation and digitising our tenant services.

Innovation will be driven through our new ICT&D forum, where staff will have the opportunity to contribute to the design of new or improved services. Notably, Link has taken this opportunity to answer the question of "what do we need to do to position Link's technology to support our business plan?".

We all have opinions on how to implement digital changes and an understanding of why projects fail, but the challenge is to build a team with the ability to bring together and apply best practice in a number of disciplines, with a clear vision and strategy for change that aligns with our business plan.

Taking into account our national digital strategy and procurement regulations, we now have a complex mix of requirements and procedures to address. We can't allow ourselves to be accused of throwing IT over the wall, with staff not feeling ready or skilled enough for the new functionality. Doing so could result in a damaged relationship between our IT function and the rest of the business, and perhaps more worryingly, a failed attempt to achieve the expected benefits of the business case.

To avoid this, we have asked Link's project managers to take great care when introducing change by ensuring the people, process and technology aspects are ready.

It was recognised that this new approach to ICT&D services should not focus on technology, but on our tenants and business drivers. Working in ICT can sometimes mean only seeing the world through ICT eyes; encouraging tenants and the business to change to fit the technology and systems, rather than the technology fitting the requirements of our tenants and the business.

You may have noticed that we now include digital as part of our ICT function. The move from analogue to digital is a long path, one which is filled with unknowns, both for our business and for our tenants. Digital at Link also means digital participation, and we need to take our tenants on this journey with us. To strengthen this position, our digital participation programme will reinforce ICT&D functions and continue to provide valuable services and projects.

Charles Darwin said that it's not the strongest species which survive, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change; the world is changing and our ICT&D will continue to evolve in response.

Ken Fox is head of ICT and digital at Link Group.

GI4Housing meeting in October

The GIS-focused GI4Housing forum has confirmed that its next meeting will be at The Life Centre in Manchester, courtesy of Oxford Data Consultancy, on 19 October from 10am.

GI4Housing said that anybody in the housing sector who is already using geographic information in their business or who are thinking of implementing GIS is welcome to attend.

Please see goo.gl/SCUyTf for further information.

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