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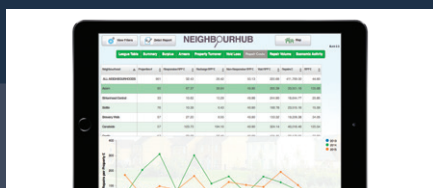
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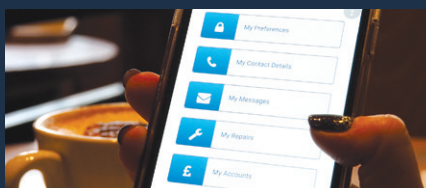
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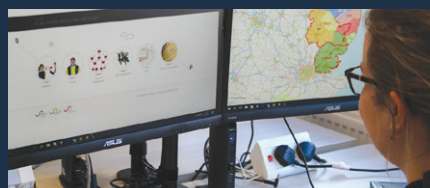
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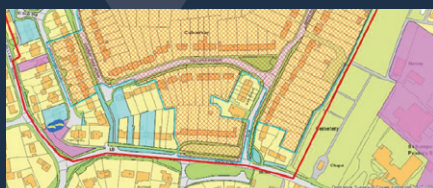
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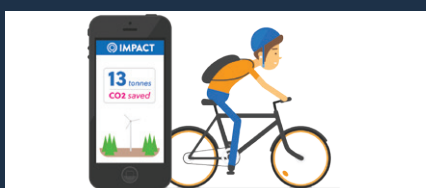
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THE INTERNET OF THINGS IN HOUSING 2017/18

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internet of things

Housing Technology's brand new market intelligence report – The Internet of Things in Housing 2017/18 – will be published at the end of November and you can pre-order your copy of the report now at www.housing-technology.com/iot17report.

The Internet of Things in Housing 2017/18 report is free to all housing providers, local authorities, government agencies and other end-user organisations, and just £95 (plus VAT) for IT companies, consultancies and

business service providers ordering the report before 31 December 2017.

Sponsored by Aareon, BT, Capita, Civica and RHP, the report will feature the UK's first in-depth research into housing providers' plans to incorporate the internet of things into their properties and daily operations.

Pre-order your copy of The Internet of Things in Housing 2017/18 now.

www.housing-technology.com/iot17report



EDITOR'S NOTES



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THE INTERNET OF THINGS IN HOUSING

To coincide with the 60th edition and ten years of Housing Technology magazine, we are very pleased to give you a preview of our 'Internet of Things in Housing 2017/18' report which will be published at the end of this month. Please see www.housing-technology.com/iot17report to pre-order your copy.



Our new report comprises the UK's first in-depth, primary research into housing providers' existing and future plans to incorporate IoT into both tenants' properties and their day-to-day business operations, as well as examples from housing providers, such as RHP and Flagship, and IT suppliers in the vanguard of IoT in housing, such as Aareon, BT Capita and Civica, about how housing providers will be using IoT both in the short and long terms.

We've said it before; the internet of things will be part of almost all housing providers' operations within the next five years.

Please pre-order the report (free to HAs/RSLs) from www.housing-technology.com/iot17report, but in the meantime, some of the key findings from our research include:

- IoT is either very important or important to almost half (46 per cent) of housing providers;

- The main barriers to IoT adoption are 'newness' (34 per cent) and questions about integration (18 per cent);
- The majority of housing providers are each planning to deploy over 1,000 IoT devices within the next few years;
- The most popular IoT devices will cover temperature, motion, humidity, boiler and dangerous gases;
- IoT costs are generally expected to be budgeted on the basis of two-thirds capital costs and one-third operational cost;
- Integration of IoT devices and data with housing providers' existing business applications is widely recognised as being very important;
- And in terms of the specific business applications, asset management, repairs and maintenance, and housing management are the most common areas cited for IoT to make difference;
- For housing providers, IoT is most important for reducing costs and providing real-time data;
- For tenants, IoT is most important for better customer service and speedier maintenance;
- The privacy, security and liability of IoT devices is a major concern for most housing providers.

To read the full report, please pre-order your copy from www.housing-technology.com/iot17report. The 'Internet of Things in Housing 2017/18' report will be published and distributed at the end of November 2017.

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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

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HOUSING TECHNOLOGY IS PRINTED ON ERA SILK MADE FROM 50 PER CENT UK-RECYCLED WASTE PULP, AND THE BALANCE OF PULPS FROM CERTIFIED FORESTS.

MANIFEST'S UNIVERSAL ADAPTER SUPPORTS CASTLES & COASTS' DATA MIGRATION

During the merger in July 2017 of Two Castles Housing and Derwent & Solway Housing, the newly-formed Castles and Coasts Housing Association used Manifest Software's Universal Adaptor during the migration and merging of data between the two organisations' housing management systems.

Castles and Coasts reported that by using the Universal Adaptor, it was possible to augment the output files from the source housing management system to fit the requirements of the destination housing management system and allow the import routings to be run in a matter of minutes. The process, although iterative, using the Universal Adapter interface,

allowed the re-mapping of data when required, rapidly allowing the housing providers to move quickly between datasets with multiple test imports without the need for additional consultancy resources.

Chris Sowiak, assistant IT manager, Castles & Coasts Housing Association, said, "Without the help of Manifest and its Universal Adaptor, we wouldn't have been able to deliver this project on time. We worked closely with them in understanding the requirements and tailoring the data we had, so we could import it from one housing system into another."

ROCC's Uniclass rolled out across Thirteen

ROCC has completed the first phase of the rollout of its Uniclass repairs and maintenance software at Thirteen Group, initially covering responsive repairs for the housing provider's 34,000 properties. The second phase of the project, due to be completed by March 2018, will see Uniclass used for day-to-day cyclical works.

With the aim of fostering a consistent approach to repairs and maintenance, the deployment of Uniclass follows

Russell Thompson,
Executive Director
of Property Services,
Thirteen



Thirteen's consolidation of its group structure from Emirus Housing, Housing Hartlepool, Tees Valley Housing, Tristar Homes and Thirteen Care and Support in July 2017. Uniclass will eventually be used by all of Thirteen's 450+ operatives.

Russell Thompson, executive director of property services, Thirteen, said, "This has been a really strong implementation with ROCC, who have heavily resourced our partnership, to enhance our repairs system.

"We are keen to expand our systems to support internal and external growth, so we can deliver a one stop-shop for bringing in new services. We hope this will be a seamless approach we can use for other contracts in the future."

CAPITA ONE BRINGS HOUSING & LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNDER ONE ROOF

Capita has moved its local government and social housing software businesses under a single division of its business, Capita One, with the aim of providing a single view of citizens and tenants across different public services.

Capita reported that its One range of local government and housing software

will help housing providers understand their tenants better and deliver the right homes, spot at-risk and vulnerable children to ensure they receive suitable levels of support, and identify the multi-agency needs of elderly residents.

Anthony Singleton, managing director, Capita One, said, "By bringing our

housing and local government software under one umbrella, we can provide local authorities and housing providers with a more holistic view of their communities and help 'connect the dots', ensuring they make better-informed decisions and provide the right support to citizens and tenants."



HAS THE DAWN OF IOT FINALLY BROKEN?

Stewart Davison, Head of Business Development, Capita One

The internet of things (IoT) and its relationship with social housing has been labelled by some people as "a technology looking for an application". I have been looking at IoT and engaging with the sector for over four years now, educating, informing and learning with the sector on how IoT can be used for the benefit of housing providers and their tenants.

I still remember my first presentation to a room full of incredulous housing professionals who looked at me as if I was announcing plans to land on Mars. While they could grasp the overall concept, the majority of comments were along the lines of "interesting technology, can't see how it would be of any use though".

The time spent between then and now has seen the housing team at Capita test the concept of sensors via our very own sensor-enabled house. For those of you familiar with my presentations at recent Housing Technology events, you will know what sort of 'house' I refer to. We embarked on a real-world proof-of-concept with one of our customers, Two Castles (now Castles & Coasts), which provided us with a wealth of information about how IoT enabled devices could function in a social housing context. This led us to begin refining how we could produce a product that was capable, scalable and secure.

Fast forward from that seminar several years ago to the morning of 10 October 2017 and a rather misty BT Tower. We had agreed to be part of Housing Technology's IoT event, which provided the opportunity to join a select number of housing organisations and other technology providers to present on all things IoT flavoured.

My session was focused very much on positioning in the minds of the audience that IoT was now ready to be seriously considered in housing organisations'

short-term technology strategies. I looked at how Capita had approached the issue of delivering a return on investment (RoI) through the adoption of a multi-sensor package, based on a platform approach that provided the capability to scale up and potentially plug in other types of sensors and IoT-capable devices.

We have invested a lot of time understanding how IoT-enabled devices can fit into a smarter asset management strategy, as well as how sensor-enabled homes can provide insight into how people live in their properties, all with the aim of how social housing-based services can be delivered more effectively, ultimately for the benefit of the tenants themselves.

Multi-use sensors plugged into a secure, stable and scalable platform seem to offer the best opportunity to derive real return for housing organisations, and the call to action was very much to engage with suppliers and to open up meaningful dialogue where conversations can move on from "nice technology, what can we do...?" to "show me what you've got, this is what we want to get from it, what will it cost, and how long will it take?".

IoT has the potential to not only unlock the world of big data for housing organisations, but could also provide opportunities for real innovation in service delivery. Capita has looked at proactive maintenance services, driven by connected devices, providing constant data on performance and condition, a connected tenant engaging digitally via a range of devices, be it smartphone, headless user interfaces, such as Amazon's Echo and its Alexa smart assistant, or touchscreens that connect the tenant in a face-to-face engagement remotely with their housing provider.

It was gratifying to see this vision echoed in the topics put forward by other

contributors, most notably RHP who posited the vision of a 'frictionless' service delivery model driven by the information and capability of IoT-enabled devices and harnessing the very processes and innovations that we have been discussing in the sector for the past few years.

The opportunity for innovation was picked up and put forward powerfully by Matt Brazier from Flagship Group with his adoption of 'no fear to fail' and it definitely acted as a rallying cry for the audience to look at how they approach innovation and what more they could do in assessing technologies which could add value to the services and operations of today's housing providers.

The theme of my session and the engagement of the audience (plus the raft of questions afterwards) all pointed to housing organisations beginning to seriously consider how they could adopt IoT. They could begin to understand the potential cost implications and how they themselves could capture and quantify the information provided from an IoT-capable product set, as well as how IoT-enabled technologies could be harnessed in the day-to-day operational running of their businesses.

The world of tomorrow is beginning to look a lot like today and if we are serious about harnessing the potential of the so called 'fourth industrial revolution' and moving from the dawn of this emerging technology into a brighter day, the sector needs to be engaging now with suppliers such as Capita, opening up dialogs on what can really be delivered, moving away from the art of the possible, to the delivery of the now.

Stewart Davison is head of business development at Capita One.



BUILDING GDPR INTO SOCIAL HOUSING

Helena Brown, Data Protection Partner, Addleshaw Goddard

As most housing professionals are (or should be) aware, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will come into force from May 2018, and housing providers should be paying particular attention to what it is and what it could mean for them.

Housing providers hold a great deal of personal tenant data. From name, date of birth and address, through to household composition, gender and number of dependants; any single provider could be carrying tens of thousands, if not more, of sensitive data points, especially if it's involved in providing assisted housing for the elderly, vulnerable people or those with a disability. It may also share tenant data with building contractors and other external agencies. In both cases, housing officials are always responsible for the protection and privacy of tenant data.

It has been said that housing associations could begin to rival major housebuilders in construction output. However, as new 'super-associations' (such as last year's merger of London & Quadrant and East Thames) emerge, what should they take into consideration? To begin with, their cyber security and data protection strategies should be at the very heart of all their decision-making.

When two companies join, for better or for worse, so too must their data. There are several factors to consider to ensure that it's a seamless integration. It can often be an unwieldy process, but it all comes down to very careful strategizing and planning. Before merging, housing providers must map each other's IT infrastructure and perform due diligence. GDPR will undoubtedly make M&A more of a challenge, and increase risks if careful examination of data is not carried out. GDPR must be clearly adhered to by both parties to ensure data mergers are executed quickly and cleanly.

GDPR will introduce a requirement for organisations to ensure that data protection is at the forefront of all

managerial decisions. Compliance with its requests must be evidenced through policies, procedures, technical measures and training. Housing providers will be required to significantly update practices to reflect the changes between the current Data Protection Act (1998) and GDPR next year.

With larger housing providers comes much more tenant data, and some are already looking into ways of streamlining processes by turning to digital. As a recent KPMG report highlighted, data analytics and software tools could help them manage areas such as fraud, error and debt. But where any new systems are deployed, whether manual or automated, GDPR states that organisations must design them with data protection in mind from the outset and ensure they adopt a 'privacy by design' approach.

An important first step in compliance is to appoint a data protection officer (DPO) who will act as the first point of contact for staff with any queries on how to comply. GDPR centres on responsible and accountable dealings with data. It's therefore vital that housing providers identify individuals who can lead the charge in GDPR compliance in addition to being able to shoulder the blame if something goes wrong.

Another important step is to perform a data audit outlining where data comes from, why it's being collected, where it's held and where it goes. Tenants must be kept front of mind, and transparency and openness when communicating with them should be promoted. Housing officers must be prepared to explain exactly what they are using their data for, how it might be shared, the legal basis for processing it, and how long it will be kept for.

One of GDPR's main goals is to make sure organisations clearly outline requirements for consent in the provision of information. Housing officers will need

to ensure their contracts for obtaining and using tenant data are up-to-date, clear and accessible to all, without unnecessary jargon.

Tenants should be made aware of their rights, which include the ability to complain about the way in which their data is being used or handled, and the right to be 'forgotten', allowing an individual to request the erasure of personal data when they see no reason for its continued storage.

Individuals are also able to withdraw consent for their data to be used at any time, and have a right to data portability, allowing tenants to obtain and reuse their personal data for their own purposes across different services.

A tenant must be able to access their own information on request, meaning housing officers should know exactly where and how their data is held at any one time. Housing providers must ensure they negotiate with IT suppliers to build additional functionalities into their systems allowing for the above tenant rights to be executed.

The security of tenant data is critical, and housing providers must also review their data security ahead of GDPR coming into force. Is there adequate firewall and virus protection? Is there a clear password policy? Is there a procedure for data breach management and do staff understand it?

Every data breach likely to have an impact on individuals must be reported to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) within 72 hours of a housing provider becoming aware of it. Under GDPR, organisations can provide information in phases as investigations progress, but this requirement will precipitate a change to internal reporting processes and requirements that should be imposed on suppliers.

If a breach is serious enough to warrant notification to the public, the housing

BUILDING GDPR INTO SOCIAL HOUSING

Continued from previous page

provider responsible must do so without delay. Failing to notify a breach when required to do so can result in a significant fine of up to €10 million, or two per cent of a housing provider's turnover.

Looking ahead at the housing market, we can expect to see further consolidation between housing providers, but one thing they must ensure is that when it comes to data

protection, all parties are on the same page. In every case, those at executive management and board level are accountable for compliance, requiring them to produce and maintain documents that demonstrate the actions undertaken to adhere to GDPR. The changes put in place will require new and updated measures, and will potentially result in budgetary, personnel, governance and communications procedures having to be altered.

There are substantial differences between GDPR compared with the original Data Protection Act. With the scrutiny and penalties dramatically intensifying for non-adherence, the time to start acting and planning for the changes coming into force in eight months' time is now.

Helena Brown is a data protection partner at Addleshaw Goddard.

GDPR CHECKLIST

- Assemble a cross-functional GDPR response team, including legal compliance, IT and a data protection officer;
- Complete a data protection survey to map a housing provider's existing data;
- Carefully obtain board-level endorsement;
- Train staff on data protection;
- Check supplier contracts;
- Review existing data protection notices, statements and forms;
- Implement a data breach management policy to contain the impact of any data breach;
- Limit access to personal data, use encrypted email for communication of personal data and monitor the network to minimise the risk of data loss;
- Plan arrangements for compulsory breach notification to data protection authorities and to affected individuals;
- Consider cyber insurance, which offers protection from some of the financial consequences of a data protection breach.



MERGING? DON'T LEAVE YOUR DATA UP TO IT

Neil Topping, Director, Data Futurists

If you have just started on the path or already crossed the bridge to merge, then your data may be at risk.

There are lots of critical and important activities in the merging process ranging from the companies' legal structures and senior management appointments to extensive dialogue with customers, lenders and suppliers, and much more besides.

It can be very tempting to determine which systems will be used then step back and let IT sort it out.

Most IT teams that I've encountered are highly skilled and competent, but also very stretched. However, they are not the ones who create the business data and use it every day for operational and strategic decisions.

This combination means that they will get

the job done, but being stretched and out of touch with what the data means will lead to mistakes. These errors will be encountered later down the road.

It's the local agreements, that extra care scheme, those few shops or an area office that has never put their properties on the systems (because they just know them) that cause the business risk through your data.

IT probably won't know about the spreadsheets that various departments run their operations from and these may get lost along the way.

Imagine one of these spreadsheets is used for land-banking. In May 2017 the average house price was £221,000 so even if just 0.5 per cent of a 10,000 unit organisation is at risk, that equates to roughly £11 million.

That would immediately pose a compliance and income risk if the properties were not recorded properly. In the longer term these assets may be at risk of adverse possession.

You are probably thinking that the solicitors will have done all of this during due diligence, but it's worth considering where they got their asset list from in the first place...

By ensuring that you get all of the right people round the table you can sort your data out to give the new organisation the best chance of success.

Don't leave your data up to IT, but do make sure you involve them early!

Neil Topping is a director of Data Futurists.



JUMPING THE FENCE – FROM GAMEKEEPER TO POACHER

Keith Saunders, Customer Support Leader, MIS Active Management Systems

Housing Technology interviewed Keith Saunders, MIS-AMS' new leader of customer support after, as gamekeeper turned poacher, he joined the software supplier in April 2017 after 30 years of working in-house at different housing providers.

Have you always been interested in IT?

Like a lot of people, I fell into IT almost by accident. Until April 2017, I had worked in housing associations for 30 years, starting as a fresh-faced 16 year-old trainee at Phoenix Housing in Stockton-on-Tees.

In the 1980s, when IT systems were just starting to become more common in the housing sector, I used to sit alongside the programmer from the software house we used because I was interested in what he was doing. I was one of only 10 people at my school who did computer studies, so it was a natural route for me to follow, even if unplanned. It wasn't until the mid-90s that my role, in the newly-merged Tees Valley Housing Association, became purely IT-focused and I played a leading role in the implementation of the new organisation's housing management system.

What is your new role?

I'm customer support team leader for MIS-AMS, based in Cheshire. Managing a team of ten first-, second- and third-line support staff, we provide full support, advice and guidance on all ActiveH desktop, web and mobile products for all customers, from the smallest to the largest with 56,000 properties.

How did you find your job?

It was almost by accident that I found my role at MIS-AMS. I'd applied for a role somewhere else via an agency that then tipped me off about this job. Within the hour, I had an interview arranged for the following day. I had an offer just over an hour after the interview and I started here the following week.

I remember a colleague during my days at Tees Valley Housing often talked about 'good times being just around

the corner' and 'it's all in the timing'. He certainly wasn't wrong on this occasion about the timing, although it's a long corner from Teesside to Cheshire.

What's the main difference moving from in-house to supplier-side?

I think the main difference is the variety of issues that you see coming through. As an IT manager, you are very focused on the issues that are affecting you, and while you might appreciate that others will be having different issues with the same supplier, you are only bothered about yours being resolved. As customer support leader, I have to understand that every customer is individual and that they are all as important as each other.

It's a plate-spinning exercise at times, but one that is made much easier by having such a strong, customer-focused team around me. Also working for an IT supplier requires that extra bit of forward thinking. For example, we are all aware that GDPR is going to affect us in May 2018, but as the supplier of a housing management system to so many organisations, we must be one step ahead in preparing our systems for that.

For me, the main difference is the flexibility afforded to me to get involved in different things and influence what is going on within the organisation, as well as being able to manage the resources I have available to me in the way I see as most appropriate. I'm just 16 weeks in to the role and I love the challenges being presented to me both internally and by our customers.

What do you bring to the role that someone who hasn't worked in housing can't?

None of the members within the MIS-AMS customer support team has been employed within a housing association; that's where my 30 years' experience really comes in to play. I understand what our customers are trying to achieve when they raise a query or if they want the system to work in a particular way.

I'm able to work through issues with members of the team and explain to them how a process works within the sector, and how customers might be trying to carry out a process on our systems. I'm also able to translate many of the acronyms and phrases used within the sector (and often used in the logging of support calls) into plain English.

What do you hope for the future?

We are working on our new ActiveH Web system. I'm hoping that this will give our customers even greater power to use our systems in the way that they want to, giving them extra flexibility to meet the demands of their tenants.

I'm also hoping to continually improve the support we offer to our customers, both in terms of performance and quality. I've joined a very high-performing organisation, but I want to move this on to the next level, and I know I have the full support of the management team here to enable me to do that.

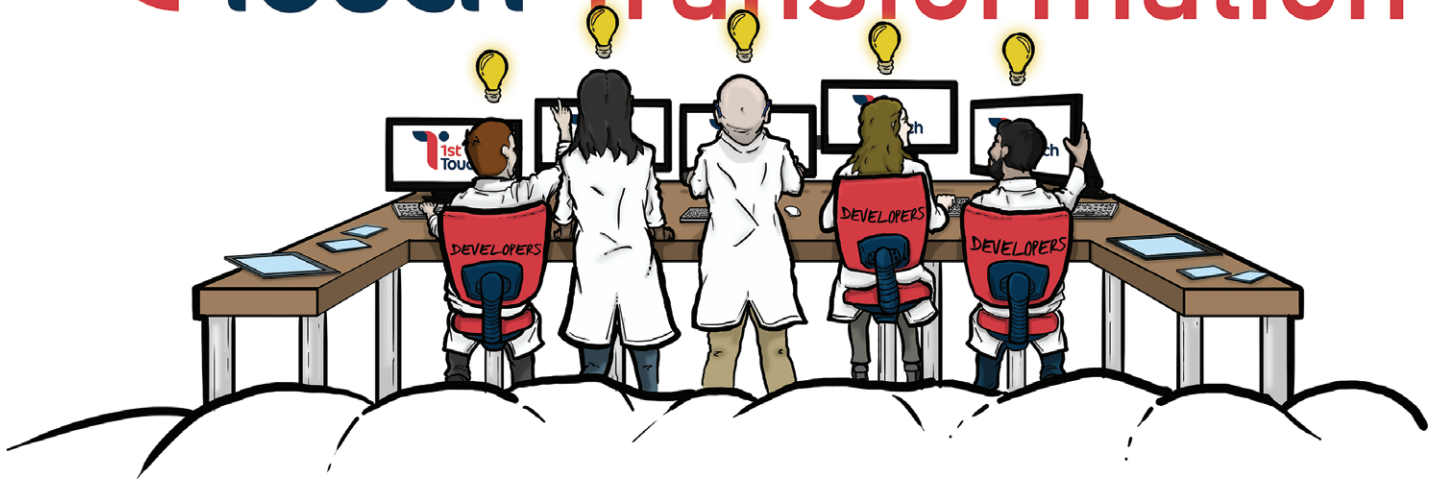
How can customers work more closely with suppliers to benefit each other?

As a previous customer of many of the main suppliers in the sector, over the years I've seen the good and the not-so-good in terms of customer engagement.

From a support point of view on our ActiveH product, I can see real benefits arising from more conversations between customers and our support team, allowing us to resolve issues raised more efficiently through the understanding of the issue, and the details behind it. Support issues are often raised through email or web portals and not enough detail is given. This isn't necessarily the fault of the customer, but also the supplier for not requesting it in the first place. I want to work with our customers to let them know what they can do to help me help them.

Keith Saunders is the customer support leader at MIS Active Management Systems.

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Civica Cx at South Lakes Housing

South Lakes Housing has completed the implementation of a broad suite of Civica software, including Cx for CRM and housing management and Keystone for asset management.

When South Lakes Housing (SLH) took over management of more than 3,000 homes from South Lakeland District Council, it promised to bring all of them up to the Decent Homes Standard, and did so by March 2017 following a £54m improvement programme.

Paul Aitken, IT manager, South Lakes Housing, said, "As well as improving homes, we promised to improve customer service for our tenants. When tenants rang up, they were often passed around departments or had to wait for a call back; it was frustrating for them and inefficient for us."

SLH decided to set up a customer services team to answer more enquiries at the first point of contact, based on the use of a new CRM system integrated with its existing housing management system.

However, after realising that integrating SLH's housing management system with a CRM system would be difficult and expensive, SLH's project team changed tack and started looking for a replacement housing management system with built-in CRM capability.

Aitken said, "Civica Cx fitted the bill perfectly. It gives our customer service staff the all-round view of tenant and property information that enables them to handle most requests and enquiries during the initial call.

"Doing everything in Cx saves a couple of minutes per call, so we can handle more requests. And because staff can see each tenant's full history, they can cover other topics during each call, such as rent arrears."

SLH's 20 tenancy management officers, income officers and customer service staff can also review tenant and property data on their mobile devices during inspections, and add new information and photos on the spot.

Although implementing Civica Cx had delivered significant benefits, SLH wanted to go further. As well as being dissatisfied with the data reliability of SLH's previous asset management system, they knew it was inefficient to continue using separate systems for tasks such as boiler service scheduling.

As a next step, SLH implemented Civica Keystone, an asset management system with modules ranging from equipment servicing and inspections to fire risk management. Keystone was integrated with Cx; information in Keystone, such as

scheduled servicing dates, can now be accessed directly from Cx.

Aitken said, "Now that we've integrated Keystone with Cx, our customer service team can see and do more using fewer systems, and be confident they're giving tenants accurate, up-to-date information."

SLH is now increasing its use of digital communications, aiming to save around half of its £50,000 annual spending on print and post. Using Cx's interactive tenant portal, it is publishing rent statements, arrears notices and repair appointments online, and alerting tenants by email or text.

Civica Cx works seamlessly with a range of other applications at SLH, including finance systems and payment platforms. It's also integrated with Civica Abritas, the choice-based lettings system, so information applicants enter into Abritas transfers automatically to Cx when they become SLH tenants.

SLH is now trialling Cx's predictive analytics to reduce rent arrears, with the aim of increasing its collection rates to 100 per cent, while saving almost £30,000 from the annual licensing fees for its current predictive rent arrears software.

FINANCE MANAGEMENT

Real Asset Management bought by MRI Software

US-based MRI Software has announced that it has bought Real Asset Management, well-known in the housing sector for its asset management and component accounting software.

Patrick Ghilani, chief executive officer, MRI Software, said, "Housing providers face the same challenges as other sectors around compliance and regulations related to asset management. By acquiring Real Asset Management, with whom we've enjoyed a close partnership for many years, we can leverage innovation

in asset management and deliver a comprehensive, integrated solution for our existing customers at the same time as expanding into new markets."

MRI said that its existing integration with RAM will be enhanced to deliver a comprehensive fixed-asset accounting solution for the overall property sector that enables MRI's affordable housing, commercial property and residential customers to better manage accounting, maximise tax benefits, improve compliance and increase the financial return on their assets.

George Snelgrove, chairman, Real Asset Management, said, "There is an enormous amount of synergy between MRI and RAM, as evidenced by the success of our long-standing partnership. Our team will be joining a fantastic organisation with tremendous talent, insight and reach while bringing its own capabilities for serving any major market sector that requires an asset or facilities management solution."



ASSET MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS – A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Graeme Reid, Director, Hub Asset Management

The most common complaint we hear from customers is that they don't use their asset management (AM) software because it's too complicated and doesn't actually provide them with the information they need anyway. Too many of the systems out there are developed by large IT companies with highly-skilled developers but with no understanding of the actual needs of their end-users. Their systems are overly complex and, very often, are a bolt-on as part of a larger housing management system and so come as part of the 'package'.

AM providers need to understand what it is their end-users actually want, they need to know how they will use the system, and which data is important to them and which isn't, so a background in housing and property rather than IT is key.

At Hub, we are unusual in that we have come into the sector from a surveying background and initially developed Hub for our own purposes to meet the demand we were receiving from our RSL customers. It soon became clear that many of our clients were unhappy with their existing AM systems because they didn't provide them with the information they needed to meet ever-changing regulatory requirements in a simple and accessible way. Hub evolved to address this need and many of our customers now run Hub alongside their main housing systems.

There are a number of key issues that have come out of our increased knowledge and presence in the market:

- The AM system is only as good as the data that informs it and so it's essential to know where your source data comes from and be confident that it is robust, up-to-date and accessible. There should be a clear audit trail from out-

turn reports back to the source data and this audit trail should be accessible to users and external audit bodies so when the regulator comes calling and says 'prove it!', users can simply point them in the direction of their AM system, confident that it will tell them all they need to know.

- The AM system should link to a compatible data collection method to allow property data to be kept up-to-date, either by internally-resourced surveys or via externally-appointed organisations using a stipulated data collection platform. This keeps costs down, ensures end-users have control over what data is being collected, and keeps the AM outputs current.
- The AM provider needs to understand the whole process, from data capture to AM outputs. Developers have a tendency to over-engineer processes, adding in more bells and whistles than are needed or that the end-user understands. The AM system is not a demonstration of how clever the provider's developers are; it's a tool that should address the end-users' specific needs and ease much of the burden of delivering them.
- Simple doesn't mean unsophisticated. In our case, Hub grew from a simple database designed to provide 30-year cost projections and we added functionality and processes that we were being asked for by our clients but kept true to the core purpose for which it was created. End-users don't tend to be IT professionals and so keeping the user interface as easy and intuitive as possible while ensuring the appropriate processes were being carried out 'under the bonnet' was key to our progress. For example, during a demonstration to a recent new customer of ours, at the end of the session they said, "Don't take this the wrong way, but it seems very simple"; that is exactly what you should be

aiming for, as that customer is now happily logging in and using Hub on a daily basis.

- In a similar vein, a customer was keen to implement Hub Mobile, our data capture tool for Android smartphones. Their intention was to use one of their maintenance inspectors to carry out surveys when he was visiting properties during the normal course of his duties. When initially presented with a smartphone app, his face drained of colour and he expressed concern over his ability to use technology. By keeping the app simple, clear and very user friendly, he is now confidently carrying out surveys every day.
- Communication is key. Development of any AM system should be guided by what the end-users need, not what the AM provider thinks they want. In order to do this, it's essential that AM providers talk to all of their end-users on a regular basis in order to better understand how they use the AM system and what they need from it.

I'm not suggesting that there is no room or requirement for complex and elaborate systems but the key factor should always remain that they should meet the specific needs of the end-user and be appropriate for the size and complexity of the organisation for whom it is provided. After all, you don't always need to buy a Ferrari when all you need is a Mondeo!

Graeme Reid is a director of Hub Asset Management.

JUST HOUSING NUDGES TAFF HOUSING'S ARREARS

Taff Housing has been trialling the use of behavioural insights, commonly known as 'nudge', in order to improve the performance of its rent collections and reduce arrears, following consultancy advice from Just Housing Group.

Behavioural insights, frequently used by the public sector, HMRC, DVLA and energy suppliers, are intended to take advantage of how people really behave to enable positive changes in behaviour. Since Just Housing's workshop, Taff Housing has successfully completed its first live behavioural insights trial which has seen an increase in tenant engagement from 46 per cent to 82 per cent.

Rhodri Thomas, customer services manager, Taff Housing, said, "The subject of behavioural insights was completely new to us. During Just Housing's workshop we decided to look at how we communicate during the first stage of our arrears procedure; this gave us a great springboard to go away and implement the theory ourselves.

"At the end of our first trial, we compared our normal stage-one letter response rate against the new letter, text message and phone call and we were astounded by the results. We are delighted to have worked with Just Housing to implement this new approach, which we believe will significantly improve our performance, ultimately resulting in cost savings."

CCG's asset management with Civica Keystone



Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd (CCG), North Wales's largest housing provider, is using Civica's Keystone asset management software to manage its property assets, maintenance schedules and compliance requirements.

When CCG was set up in 2010, around 6,300 council homes in towns and villages throughout Gwynedd came under its management. To get a clear picture of the condition of its housing stock, CCG engaged a specialist firm to carry out a comprehensive survey.

Geraint Jones, head of ICT, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd, said, "We knew that our housing management system wasn't suitable for storing and managing all the data from the survey, so one of the first things we did was implement Civica's Keystone asset management software."

Using Keystone, CCG went on to plan a five-year improvement and refurbishment programme for its housing stock. With a budget of £136 million, CCG brought homes up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by 2015. Details of all the improvements, from roofing and insulation to kitchens and bathrooms, were recorded in Keystone.

CCG now employs its own surveyors to inspect properties and

assess requirements on a five-year cycle, using the mobile Keystone Foundation software on their mobile devices to record information and upload photos while they're on site.

Jones said, "Being able to use and update Keystone in the field speeds up each stock condition survey by about 45 minutes. Adopting a mobile working approach helps surveyors reach our target of completing 1,200 surveys per year."

Regular Keystone users include the finance team, for reporting on planned maintenance, and call-centre staff. The stock condition and planned maintenance data held in Keystone is always up to date, so agents can respond quickly and accurately to tenants' enquiries.

Before CCG added the Keystone planned maintenance module, it managed the schedules in a separate system. Mismatches in information sometimes led to unnecessary expenditure, such as paying for a repair on a boiler that was still under warranty.

Jones said, "There was always a time lag, so we didn't all have access to the same information at the same time. Now that all our data is consolidated in Keystone, issues like that are a thing of the past."



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FIXED ASSETS AND COMPONENT ACCOUNTING

John Buckland, Director, Orchard Information Systems

Let's step back a bit and have a look at what we are trying to achieve. For those who are uncertain (probably the asset managers), there is a difference between component accounting and the wider management of fixed assets, although both may affect your day-to-day lives. Component accounting tracks individual capital components (such as kitchens, bathrooms and boilers), depreciating their installation cost over their individual lives and writing them off when they are replaced. Fixed assets cover not only component accounting but also the separate treatment of land, buildings and other fixed assets.

This means that if you concentrate only on component accounting, then you need other tools to manage the acquisition, updating and disposal of land and property, including grants, impairments, shared ownerships, valuations, depreciations and grant amortisations. Ideally, the solution you adopt should be able to handle all of these.

So why take the opportunity to discuss this now, when organisations should already have solutions in place? Well, it's because the practicalities of operating those solutions may make the processes difficult to manage and I thought it was worth opening up the debate on where the most practical solutions lie.

One thing I have learned is that to operate an effective fixed assets regime, you need understanding and buy-in from both finance and asset management who have to start working more closely together. Asset managers will need to appreciate that the work they do affects the net-book value of the components and properties their organisation owns and that this is important in the context of active asset management. At the same time, finance managers will need to ensure that their requirements can be implemented in such a way that does not unduly restrict what asset managers can do.

There are four main ways in which you can implement a fixed assets solution. Whichever way you go, you will need to ensure that the solution is compliant

with the current SORP / FRS102 regulations and is able to handle the volume of transactions associated with components:

1. Spreadsheets

These require manual updating and, although they are manageable for very small organisations, the volume of transactions and the risk of error makes them an unattractive option.

2. Finance systems

Many organisations use their finance systems for fixed assets and component accounting and these systems have modules for the purpose. They are strong in ensuring transactions are posted correctly but sometimes suffer from:

- The fact that they are separated from the asset management systems which hold records with dates and costs for replacements. Finance systems are often populated initially based on assumptions as to the existence and age of components. For example, I have often come across an assumption that every property has a boiler and a heating distribution system whereas, in reality, electrically-heated properties don't have boilers. Another point to note is that asset management systems hold component records at block or sub-block levels as well as at a property level (such as roofs) and this is difficult to handle, allowing for individual property disposals, without integration with the asset management system.
- Issues with volumes of data. If you have an organisation with 20,000 properties and each has only five capital components, each with a unique installation date and life then there are 100,000 individual depreciations to undertake and record every period. For monthly depreciations, that's over one million records to depreciate per year when, in reality, the ledgers may only require a debit and credit for each combination of account and analysis codes per month.
- Batch event handling and batch data import such as revaluations, additions or disposals are sometimes limited.

3. Stand-alone fixed assets systems

These systems are popular because they are designed specifically for the job of dealing with fixed assets and can be integrated with finance systems for journal creation. However, they tend not to be integrated with the housing or asset management systems and require maintenance and reconciliation to ensure that their property records are up-to-date and that component replacements are recorded accurately. In short, although they can handle the volumes of transactions, they have the same issues as finance systems over the accuracy of component data.

4. Asset management systems

These systems are usually integrated or interfaced with the housing management system so the requirement for property reconciliation is removed. They are also the prime source of component data, containing records of replacements, with dates, costs, etc. The downside with asset management systems is in ensuring that the cost data loaded against component replacements is reconciled with the finance data. Integration with finance systems is also a key area to get right, ensuring that all relevant transactions are accurately interfaced to the finance system in detailed and summary journals. Providers of asset management systems, such as ourselves, have put in a lot of effort to ensure that the required integration is as seamless as possible. The fixed assets modules of asset management systems should be able to handle and report on all fixed assets, not just components. Property and land acquisitions and disposals, including shared ownership sales, can often be handled through their integration with housing management systems and the recording of completed component replacements will automatically write off/add the corresponding fixed asset records. This means that although manual or batch/data-loaded updates by finance are possible, they can be kept to a minimum. When making the decision to implement a fixed assets software solution, it is

FIXED ASSETS AND COMPONENT ACCOUNTING

Continued from previous page

important to consider not only the objectives and requirements of the business, but also the ease of use and effect on different departments, all with the aim of having one version of the truth.

So while the decision to use your current solution may, on the surface, have seemed an attractive, cost effective and easy option, it may be time to reconsider your options and take action.

John Buckland is a director of Orchard Information Systems.

Your Housing invests in RentSense

Your Housing Group has invested in Mobysoft's predictive analytics software RentSense. The decision to implement Rentsense was based on the housing provider's income team's increased workload due to welfare reform and the inability of its previous system being able to prioritise arrears cases based on risk.

Paul Warburton, director of property operations, Your Housing Group, said, "As a result of not being able to prioritise cases effectively, our income team was spending a significant amount of time looking at low-risk or non-priority accounts, or accounts with 'technical arrears'. In turn, this was putting pressure on the team and creating a quantity versus quality culture.

"What's more, we want to be more proactive, catch cases earlier on and be able to plan for future changes and the full roll out of universal credit. By working smarter, RentSense will help to free up resources so that we have the time to

Derek Steele, Founder & Chief Executive, Mobysoft



get the best outcome from every contact with each tenant and mitigate possible future losses of income."

Mobysoft gains PE funding

Mobysoft has secured a substantial, undisclosed investment from private equity firm Livingbridge. Mobysoft's RentSense predictive analytics software helps housing providers to protect their revenues and mitigate bad debt by predicting which tenants will and won't pay their rent.

Mobysoft reported that Livingbridge's investment will be used to develop other predictive software solutions for the social housing sector. In 2015/16, RentSense helped Mobysoft's customers

reduce their combined rent arrears by around £29 million.

Derek Steele, founder and chief executive, Mobysoft, said, "Mobysoft has grown rapidly over the past few years as more housing providers chose to deploy RentSense. This investment will enable us to bring to market other complementary software based on predictive analytics that can help social landlords deliver further efficiencies. It will also enable us to scale rapidly in terms of development and bring to market other solutions to a sector that we are already recognised within."

Nick Holder, director of new investments, Livingbridge, said, "Mobysoft already has a strong market presence and great growth potential in a sector Livingbridge knows well. With the perfect combination of sector-leading software, an entrepreneurial management team and the capital to pursue its growth ambitions, this is a very exciting opportunity."

ORCHARD LAUNCHES INCOME ANALYTICS

Orchard has just launched its Income Analytics solution, developed in partnership with Coast & Country Housing, First Ark, Livin Housing, and Phoenix Community Housing. The software has been designed to mitigate the growing volume of arrears resulting from universal credit and welfare reform.

Income Analytics uses the latest analytical techniques to help housing providers' income teams to focus their efforts on the tenants that need the most help in avoiding or reducing arrears. The analysis of rent payment patterns and other risk factors provide early prediction and identification of potential arrears cases, allowing teams to take targeted, preventative action.

John Hunt, director, Orchard, said, "This is the first step on an important journey for both Orchard and our customers. We have long felt that the data that our customers hold could be very valuable and help improve tenants' daily lives, while at the same time dramatically improving business efficiency and insight."

Angela Grant, income manager, Phoenix Community Housing, said, "I have found the Income Analytics team to be very professional and enthusiastic. They have listened to our ideas and taken into account the needs of Phoenix Community Housing which will hopefully result in an excellent tool which will enable us to improve our income collection."

In order to deliver the project, Orchard built a dedicated data sciences team, partnering with Newcastle University, and including research into machine-learning techniques to deliver additional predictive insights on rent arrears.

Dr Shirley Coleman, technical director and principal research associate, Newcastle University, said, "Working on this data analytics project with Orchard Software is very exciting. The company has great vision and is open and receptive to new ideas. The results so far are extremely promising."

ORCHARD OPENACCOUNTS AT WYTHENSHAWE



Housing Technology interviewed Wythenshawe Community Housing Group's assistant director of finance, Julie Booker, on their decision to adopt Orchard OpenAccounts following a merger of two housing providers.

Wythenshawe Community Housing Group was formed by the merger of Parkway Green Housing Trust and Willow Park Housing Trust in 2013. This group structure has a combined stock of 14,000 properties, providing homes to more than 20,000 people across Wythenshawe, Manchester and a turnover of £61 million.

What was the background to your adoption of Orchard OpenAccounts?

Following the merger, Wythenshawe went through a systems appraisal process and decided to adopt Orchard OpenAccounts, including the eBIS module, as the finance system for the new organisation, with the overwhelming factor that eBIS facilitated the devolution of financial responsibility to where it should be, the budget managers. With the ethos at Wythenshawe being that budget managers should own their budgets and are responsible for the coding of financial documents, thereby giving visibility of their financial position, this solution fitted perfectly.

Orchard's senior implementation consultant, Andrew Eves, helped with both the OpenAccounts Core set up as well as the eBIS implementation. He worked closely with a member of our team whose sole responsibility at that time was the implementation of the system.

During the implementation process, eBIS was rebranded to ePower (electronic POs [for] Wythenshawe enquiries [and] reporting), bringing together users from both Willow Park and Parkway Green into a single system that was universally adopted.

What has been done with ePower?

It was apparent that there were a lot of paper forms in the business that could be built into ePower. The benefits of putting these forms into ePower being

the elimination of duplicated effort and enabling an approval process to be built with full audit trails. Previously, paper forms needed to be filled out but they were then re-keyed into the finance system.

When we spoke to Orchard's Eves, he always offered options from which we would choose the best one for us. Considerations such as licensing and deriving the best value for each process were always something we thought about.

One thing we knew we needed to do was consider the prevention of fraud. We wanted to lock everything down as much as possible without bringing day-to-day operations to a halt. One way to do this was to use ePower for the creation and approval of change requests such as petty cash payments, credit card payments, supplier changes and supplier bank changes, all of which are now done in ePower.

Once all this was done, we thought about the other forms that come into the finance department, including customer change requests, sales invoice requests as well as general financial enquiries. All of these were then taken care of by ePower. We now push out as much access as possible via ePower so that non-finance people can self-serve. The result of this is that we have a small but very efficient finance team. We then looked at rent refunds and other rent adjustments and adopted split authorisations, ensuring a well-implemented 'segregation of duties', which is something our auditors monitor closely.

Finally, we implemented an approval process of our payment runs through ePower so that I can drill into any payment and check for any anomalies. All journals are now raised and approved through ePower, largely by finance people but around year-end also by budget managers.

Where have you pushed the boundaries of the system's capabilities?

We have added intelligence to processes. For example, if someone raises a PO for training, it will automatically be checked by HR, or if a PO is raised for IT equipment or software, it will be reviewed by the IT manager.

What have you learned from the implementation?

An iterative approach worked very well. From the outset, we had clear ideas of what to do in order to deliver a purchase-to-pay system but as the process went on, we built on that with other ideas. Another lesson was we now know that we need to make more notes about the forms we have developed so that future upgrade processes are easier to manage.

How did you manage the adoption of the new system?

There was some resistance initially to the new system by some staff, but we engaged with budget managers at an early stage and got them to 'buy-in'. We delivered extensive training and gave them great support. In short, we took them on a journey but we were in charge of the controls!

Following the 'go-live', we had regular budget monitoring meetings where the budget managers appreciated they had not only sight but also control over their budgets. We continue to run refresher training on a drop-in basis every two weeks but this is a great tool and staff now recognise it as such.

What other factors have made this a success?

We have no invoice approval process. We have a 'no PO, no pay' policy with our suppliers. When we were implementing this, there were objections by our staff, but we asked them to bring examples of invoices they thought might be problematic and we showed them how the system would work. We have always delivered a positive and consistent message to our users that the system would work and we always take the approach that we should sit down and talk to users and always be approachable.

Does your income collection feel like a roller coaster ride?



Everything related to income and arrears has been flipped on its head.

As your customers navigate Universal Credit and benefit caps, the normal rules of behaviour are being torn up and payment patterns are changing - with even some of your most reliable tenants facing arrears.

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USWITCH FOR HOUSING SOFTWARE?

Dave Carr, Director, Manifest Software Solutions

The thought of changing one of your legacy IT systems for new cutting-edge technology might well get the average business user excited but at the same time also fills the average IT team with dread at the thought of migrating years of data or integrating it with existing solutions. While there have been great strides to make it easier for you to look at alternative energy suppliers or banking services, how does this compare to changing or adding a software supplier?

Housing IT suppliers are unlikely to all agree a standard data format for the applications widely used in our sector and nor should we expect them to. The sector needs to drive innovation from vendors to meet the changing needs of organisations, whether the driver is to incorporate new digital channels or to comply with legislative changes. Designing a common platform for a data dictionary for the housing sector is not just unlikely, it would probably have a negative long-term impact. However, there is the counter argument that a defined data-set could help new vendors' technologies enter the sector.

So, what are the barriers you face if you do decide to go down the route of replacing a whole solution or even a module within your product portfolio with regards to the dreaded data migration?

Getting your data out

- What data do we need, especially in light of GDPR?
- Do we understand the database structure?
- Is there an export tool available?
- Do we have the skills and/or resources to export the data?
- Is there documentation for exporting the data?
- Is the cost (and risk) of exporting the

data proportional to the likely benefits of the new solution?

Getting your data in

The process of getting your data in to your new solution has similar challenges but with the added complexities of:

- Different data definitions;
- Different data formats;
- Complex labour-intensive import routines.

With the barriers for your data migration now laid out, does it still make sense to continue down the route of deploying a new solution?

The answer should be 'yes', but it may be that the process is considered just too complicated and not sufficiently cost effective so projects do not come to fruition. If there is a reluctance to change because of the perception of added complexities as well as real costs associated with the process then surely this isn't helping to drive competition between existing vendors and is actively discouraging new players from making the investments needed to break into the social housing sector.

If your business has done its due diligence and strategically reviewed the installed solutions stack and identified where it requires an alternative system to meet the demands of the business, how can the pain of ripping out a legacy system be numbed?

Many procurement processes recently have used a methodology called 'competitive dialogue' which allows you to engage sensibly with prospective suppliers before the tender drawbridge is pulled up from a communications point of view and the formal procedures begin; this is a process some organisations have

found more rewarding than the standard tender process.

However, if there is the opportunity to actively encourage your prospective suppliers to offer a 'try before you buy' service, often known as a proof-of-concept (PoC) and to make this an even more attractive offering, why can't it be done with your data?

Unfortunately, this brings us back to the aforementioned barriers to changing a solution, but there are steps you can take to reduce the barriers in your way. For any PoC, the challenges can be categorised into infrastructure, application and data.

From an infrastructure point of view, there have been numerous articles in this publication regarding virtualisation and cloud-based services, so spinning up a server or two doesn't have the implications or costs that it used to. The application installation and configuration will be an area where you can challenge your supplier regarding its ease of use and customisation. While it's unlikely you'll be able to get a supplier to configure an end-to-end solution, why not concentrate on the reason why you are looking for a new solution in the first place and identify a piece of functionality which is a real crowd-pleaser and ask them to build it for you?

This then leaves you with the data migration, or in some cases just a simple initial data load, to see what your data will look like in the new solution; again there are options for you to enable a meaningful PoC without all of the headaches.

Use technology and experience

There are tools available to allow you to extract your data from most commonly-

USWITCH FOR HOUSING SOFTWARE?

Continued from previous page

used databases but normally the biggest problem is understanding the data structure you have. In order to cost-effectively provide a starting point for the data load of your new application, you will need a combination of technology and expertise and there are vendors in housing who can offer such services. It may be that you actually have the skills in your own teams to understand the data structure but they don't have the technology to perform the process; again there are options available to you for tools specifically used within the sector. Most prospective vendors will be keen to help as part of any PoC facilitating the data load into their solution.

The same solutions and experience can be used if you are adding or replacing a software model to an existing stack by providing the integration layer to help you overcome the two-way flow of data required if your PoC must also prove integration capabilities.

This approach may add an additional layer of up-front costs, perhaps even before a procurement exercise, but why not challenge your current methods of selecting IT suppliers because it should demonstrate at a very early stage the benefits of an alternative solution choice, allow your business to make much more informed choices and widen the choice

of applications available, in contrast to where all too often the emphasis is on a referenceable track record.

By challenging current suppliers and embracing new suppliers, combined with technology and experience, a new approach may save you costs in the long term.

Dave Carr is a director of Manifest Software Solutions.

Rhondda gains £500,000 surplus with Neighbourhub

Rhondda Housing Association has deployed Visualmetrics' Neighbourhub Cloud performance management software to drive transformation, ensure sustainable service delivery and achieve a £500,000 (140 per cent) increase in surpluses during its first year of operation.

Before its implementation of Neighbourhub Cloud, Rhondda Housing was facing reduced incomes due to welfare reform, universal credit and the local housing allowance cap, combined with significant costs for void losses and refurbishments, and limited financial resources to maintain a portfolio of ageing property assets.

From a technology perspective, Rhondda Housing had no trusted source of performance information and mixed data quality, spread across a number of siloed business applications and spreadsheets, and an inconsistent set of business terms and definitions (KPIs).

In order to mitigate these problems, the housing provider implemented Neighbourhub Cloud as a SaaS solution, providing a single version of performance data from board-level to front-line operations, across housing, asset management, finance and repairs teams.

After 12 months, Rhondda Housing has used Neighbourhub Cloud to generate over £500,000 in additional financial



surpluses (an increase of 140 per cent on the previous year) and significant returns on its investment.

Luke Takeuchi, housing services director, Rhondda Housing Association, said, "The vital performance insights that Neighbourhub Cloud has given us has enabled us to tackle some of our biggest challenges. In doing so, we've increased surpluses by 140 per cent across our 1,650 properties.

We're in the best position to collaborate as a team and with stakeholders, to focus our investment where it will have the greatest impact on tenants' lives and to track results with confidence."

Thirteen selects Kirona's field service management software



Thirteen Group has selected field service management software from Kirona to improve its repairs and maintenance service for its 70,000 tenants.

Thirteen is implementing Kirona's Job Manager and Dynamic Resource Scheduling software to improve its visibility of appointments and communication with field-based operatives.

Dynamic Resource Scheduling allows operatives to see calendars in greater detail to ensure all repair or maintenance tasks are completed within the allocated time slot. It also enables tenants to select the best appointment available for them and receive email or text alerts for confirmation or updates. Job Manager is intended to improve cooperation between office-based and remote workers to streamline processes and improve productivity.

Russell Thompson, executive director of property services, Thirteen Group, said, "Our priority is to deliver a service that benefits our tenants and enables them to have the control to book repairs appointments that suit them. By working with Kirona, we've been able to create a service that minimises disruption for both tenants and our trade operatives."

Anchor's dynamic scheduling with Kirona

Sheltered housing provider Anchor is now using Kirona's online scheduling and workforce management software to improve its inspections and health and safety reporting.

Anchor has replaced its previous paper-based processes and records with digital schedules for inspections and mobile working across its workforce of 780 field-based operatives.

During a successful pilot project, Kirona's Job Manager was used to hold the programme of inspections, generating checks on a periodic basis for field-based staff, with real-time reporting of jobs to Anchor's managers and mobile officers. Job Manager guides Anchor's staff through the full lifecycle of specific inspections, from generation and allocation through to completion. Inspections drop onto officers' devices with specific details of what should be included in the inspection and when it should be completed by.

Kirona's InfoSuite software provides Anchor's senior management with real-time actionable insights into operations in each scheme and visibility of key

analytics. When an inspection has been completed, managers can immediately see that the job has been completed and what the results are. InfoSuite also gives Anchor access to regular reports showing what jobs are due over a certain period and their progress.



Howard Nankivell, housing operations director, Anchor, said, "Our inspection schedules and reports were traditionally

all paper-based and stored locally. If an incident occurred, we had to manually search for the relevant forms to identify the most recent safety checks. By introducing innovative mobile scheduling and reporting solutions from Kirona, we can monitor scheme inspections in more detail and ensure that they are completed accurately and on time."

ASHFORD'S MOBILE WORKING WITH HOUSING SUPPORT PRO'S CLIENT 360



Ashford Borough Council has completed the installation of Housing Support Pro's Client 360 mobile working software, integrated with its existing Orchard housing management system.

Delivering all information in real-time, Client 360 includes search facilities, customisable watch lists, calendar and reminder alerts, and pre-designed templates for new tenant sign-up and arrears management. Void, tenant

and property surveys are also available via a mobile app.

The council's mobile support workers can now operate with greater flexibility, enabling them to spend more time with tenants and less time on administration. Tenant data is collected faster and instantly transmitted to the management team, while housing officers feel empowered by being given more freedom to manage their workload via their mobile device.

The council can also respond to issues such as fly tipping due to real-time alerts from housing officers on-site. Furthermore, tenant records such as payment history can be instantly recalled via Client 360 to resolve potential disputes.

John Young, housing property and technology manager, Ashford Borough Council, said, "Client 360 has unlocked the door for us. Other solutions require a

very large amount of internal support, which is not the case with this because it's all hosted and managed by Housing Support Pro. The system has been fantastic – since we introduced it, the solution has worked flawlessly. Its operation is much more efficient and, most importantly, we get to see more tenants that need our help faster."

We believe technology can empower housing providers to make a difference to tenants' lives

Capita is leading the way in the research and development of how smart homes in social housing can improve tenants' lives whilst making it easier, and more cost-effective, to manage these homes.

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ENHANCING TENANT COMMUNICATIONS

James Shand, Managing Director, TriPartum

There is increasing pressure on housing associations to deliver value for money in their regular communications with tenants and leaseholders.

Communications, such as rent and service charge statements, are often complex and costly documents to produce.

Many still rely on laborious manual processes, as well as staff goodwill, in their regular communications processes. So how can they make the transition to digital, personalise their communications and deliver them efficiently via tenants' channels of choice?

Here are five ways to enhance your regular tenant and leaseholder communications.

Review statements and other correspondence

By carefully analysing what is being sent out today, a housing provider can improve its tenant communications tomorrow. In meetings with housing providers, we often find a 'that's the way we have always done it' approach to tenant communications. But with the focus today on enhancing the tenant experience, housing providers need to find new ways of looking at their existing statements and correspondence, and deliver these communications more efficiently and cost-effectively. Often, it's just a case of 'not seeing the wood for the trees', which is why it pays to have an external, unbiased view.

Ensure clarity of message across all communications

With day-to-day tenant documents, housing providers have a great opportunity to extend their brand

attributes, and their commitment to customer service and experience. Clear presentation of information and brand to tenants across all communications is essential.

An 'information design' approach is recommended, essentially taking information apart and re-presenting it in a clear, coherent and easily accessible way. It's important to help recipients understand the information, with clear navigation techniques which really help to 'tell a story'. In addition, the tone of voice needs to be consistent across all documents, providing reassurance to tenants.

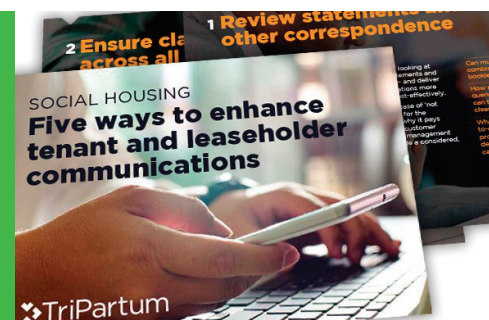
Understand and leverage data

Many housing providers have multiple data sources, including line-of-business systems, CRM, spreadsheets and legacy applications. Bringing all that data together to enable personalised tenant communications can be a major challenge.

Successful tenant communications rely on being able to not only extract but also analyse and leverage data, from the creation of the document itself, all the way through to production and delivery. This requires a significant investment in software, hardware and people with data integration and development skills. Most housing providers don't have those resources in-house, but external help can take the hassle out of the whole process.

Personalise to improve experience and response

A recipient of any communication wants to feel it's aimed solely at them. Personalisation is the 'gold standard' that housing providers should be aiming for.



When putting documents together, it's important to anticipate the different audiences and personas and provide information that is relevant to each recipient.

Clear information, presented well and personalised will contribute to a good response and help minimise queries. Linking relative content to information being provided (such as explaining variances in service charges), adding colour and images or other design features to identify key elements can help the recipient find information easily.

Communicate via tenants' channels of choice

With digital transition being a key driver for housing providers, the 'fly in the ointment' is that not all tenants are willing to go digital. That means organisations must have the full range of communication channels available to them, from traditional print and mail to electronic delivery.

But providing customers with regular communications via their channel of choice is far from straightforward. Housing providers need to be able to leverage data and then format and deliver it in the way the tenant wants to receive it.

Not all housing providers have the technology skills and infrastructure in-house to deliver a multi-channel tenant communications strategy. Which is why many outsource to experts who can manage the whole process.

James Shand is the managing director of TriPartum.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How many tenant queries do we receive and can they be reduced with clearer communications?
- What are the true end-to-end costs of current processes to create and deliver mailings – and where can savings be made?
- Are our personalised tenant documents written in-line with brand guidelines and our 'tone-of-voice'?
- Is the information well-presented and structured, with a clear 'call to action'?
- How hard does the tenant need to work to understand the information we send them?
- Is the data readily available in a format that enables fast and effective communications?
- Is there an avalanche of queries because communications are not precisely targeted?
- What is the cost to our brand and reputation if communications are not tailored accurately to individual recipients?
- Are we able to send communications to the channels demanded by our tenants?



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MAKING BIGGER BETTER FOR TENANTS

Roger Birkinshaw, Housing Director, Northgate Public Services

The growing number of housing mergers has caused concern about their impact on tenants but Northgate Public Services' housing director, Roger Birkinshaw, believes bigger can be better for tenants.

Continued pressures on the housing sector to be more efficient mean we can expect to see more mergers in the future. However, it's my belief that following a merger, housing officers can still deliver a reliable and personal service. Here's how.

One of the main fears cited about the increasing number of mergers is that they will end local governance and the focus on local communities will disappear.

It's often the case that smaller housing providers will have close relationships with their tenants so there's always the worry that these relationships will be lost following a merger with a larger organisation. Housing officers working with a smaller number of tenants may have been previously able to keep detailed information in their heads about their tenants, but with more tenants to support this is no longer a viable option.

When two organisations come together, one of the biggest challenges is streamlining different cultures, communication methods and IT systems, while supporting more tenants.

However, it's possible to keep tenants at the heart of your business. Let's examine the IT elements in detail as this is the area I have the most experience in. Both housing provider's IT systems will be reviewed to see which solution will meet the new organisation's needs going forward. The temptation during a merger is to implement a temporary solution that will join up systems as quickly as possible.

It's worth considering whether this is the best option in the long term. Think about

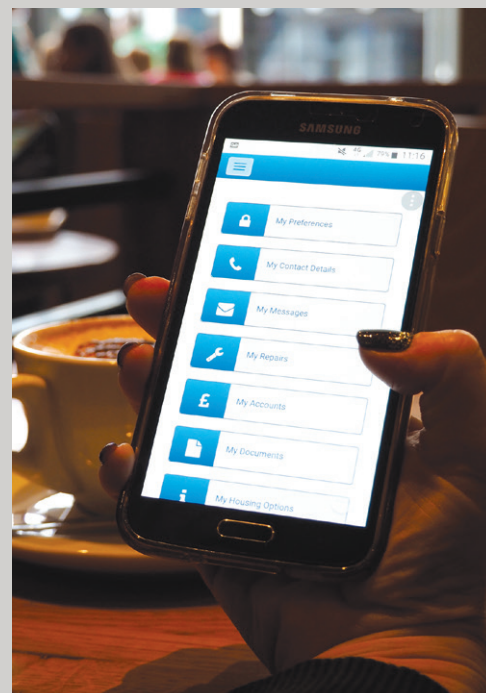
both organisation's future strategy and examine whether a work-around will simply mean you are constantly sticking plasters on systems that should really be updated.

Before any system is chosen, it's imperative too that the tenant, and just as importantly, the staff experience is evaluated. Getting the technology right from the start is key to keeping tenants happy. By not using IT to drive the change can result in inefficiency and loss of corporate compliance.

I know you've heard it before, but training should be high on the agenda following a merger. Too often, I've seen staff having to navigate new systems without proper guidance; this leads to unnecessary frustrations. Putting in the time to train your staff is prioritising customer experience and is essential for better engagement with your tenants.

The next priority for achieving customer satisfaction is to ensure a better flow of information between departments. Employees need instant access to data that they can trust to enable them to make quick decisions that benefit tenants. Working with more customers, it's essential that the intelligence available is reliable and current; to ensure your housing officers are fully on board, they need to be completely confident in the information available to them.

Having better data to hand about an individual's current situation, as well as their past situation, will enable staff to influence better outcomes for tenants. Having a single view of a tenant gives staff the ability to have a deep understanding of properties and customers. One of the most common challenges facing housing providers is that they have data duplicated across many different systems, and as a result are wasting time re-keying information. By integrating all the data, employees are



able to respond to change faster, reduce costs and provide improved support for tenants. It's a win-win situation for all, as employees will spend less time dealing with complaints and more time helping tenants.

The holy grail following a merger is to be able to resolve more queries at the first point of contact and offer an enhanced service for customers at a lower cost. For example, a sophisticated CRM system will support employees to recognise and manage the diversity of a customer's needs and will help them to build better relationships with tenants.

What about the tenants who don't contact you? It's critical that these tenants don't fall through the net. 'Push' technology is key here. For those tenants that may need help but don't make contact, it is possible to target communications to groups of customers defined by a range of variables, such as where they live, their arrears status, their type of property and so on. These harder to reach tenants can receive

Continued on page 26



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MAKING BIGGER BETTER FOR TENANTS

Continued from page 24

communications relevant to their situation and then by tracking the response, better support can be given. For example, personalised information pushed to the tenant might include information on a holiday play-scheme to a working mother or budgeting advice when data highlights potential rent arrears.

By doing this, you can see the level of response you receive and then can gain a better understanding of how to shape your future communications. A

large amount of time is often wasted on employees having to chase responses, so to improve on efficiency it's vital that systems are automated to be able to quickly prioritise the tasks that need to be focused on.

Many of us shop, save and socialise online so it makes sense to make the most of digital communications. Enabling tenants to choose how they communicate with you, whether by SMS or Facebook is key. By adopting this

approach, it will help to reduce help desk and face-to-face contact, which in turn, frees up time for employees to be able to help more customers and support those who are not currently online.

There's no doubt that there are benefits to be had from a merger and with the right tools and approach, bigger doesn't have to mean a less personal service.

Roger Birkinshaw is housing director for Northgate Public Services.



GAS TAG TO PROTECT HOUSING PLUS TENANTS

Stephen Collins, Director of Property, Housing Plus Group

Housing Plus Group has become one of the first housing providers to deploy Gas Tag's gas safety technology throughout its 12,000 properties in Shropshire and Staffordshire.

Instead of the current 'locally stored' method of managing gas-safety checks and certificates, Gas Tag enables these checks to be captured on-site using an app on a smartphone. This enables the checks to be monitored in real time, protects tenants from illegal gas-fitters and enforces gas-safety regulations.

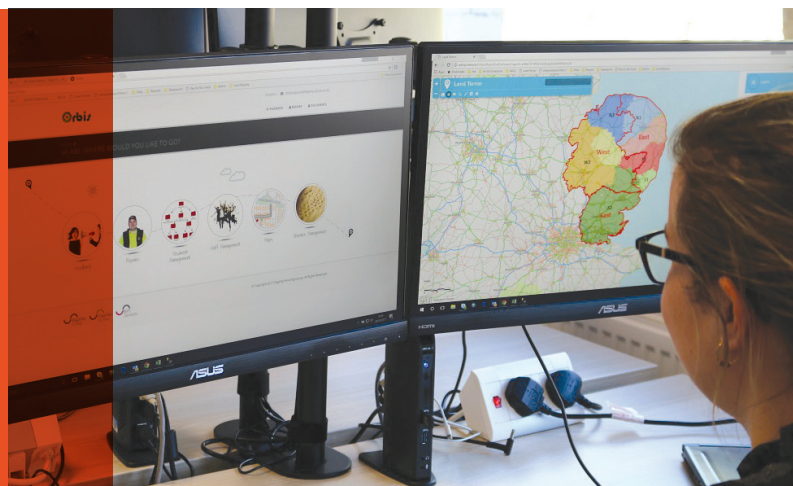
Stephen Collins, director of property, Housing Plus Group, said, "Keeping track of the paper trail for annual gas certificates, replacement boilers and new appliances presents a serious challenge for housing providers.

"The beauty of Gas Tag is that it's a single system. There's nothing in the market that provides a holistic application. Currently our seven or eight compliance obligations are managed separately and then we bring them together."



A physical Gas Tag is placed in each property and tracks that all of the gas appliances, services and installations are carried out by Gas Safe Registered engineers. Each engineer can evidence their competency and their completed job gets uploaded to a centralised portal where the data can be monitored. Illegal gas fitters are unable to access the Gas Tag app and can't carry out any work through the Gas Tag portal.

FLAGSHIP USES ESRI GIS FOR GROUNDS MAINTENANCE



In order to in-source its grounds maintenance activities for over 22,000 homes, Flagship Group has developed an automated management system based on Esri's ArcGIS platform.

With around 22,500 properties, Flagship Group comprises Flagship Homes and repairs and maintenance company RFT Services. Since its inception, the organisation had relied on two or more subcontractors to carry out its grounds maintenance tasks, but Flagship had little visibility of when and whether specific tasks were taking place and which areas were being routinely maintained.

Flagship decided to bring its grounds maintenance activities in-house, by expanding the remit of RFT Services and creating a new digital process for planning, implementing and managing the entire process. The first priority was to create a centralised source of accurate, up-to-date information on all aspects of the grounds maintenance service and make it accessible to employees across multiple departments.

Having recently acquired Esri's ArcGIS Enterprise software, Flagship developed a fully integrated and automated grounds maintenance solution, based on ArcGIS Server integrated with its existing Windows 365 applications, SQL Server and a bespoke intranet platform. Flagship's new solution was launched on the same day that its external suppliers' contracts terminated.

Abi Tassie, GIS developer, Flagship Group, said, "Now, we don't just have a picture of a strip of grass that needs to be cut; we can click on the map to immediately see when it was last cut, when its next cut is due, what it costs to cut and which customers pay for it."

Around 180 employees have access to the interactive grounds maintenance map while in the office and PDF map

booklets (derived from ArcGIS) while in the field. Grounds maintenance operatives use the solution to see which areas are and aren't owned by Flagship and when they need to attend each site. The field management team uses the software to plan visits, reduce driving times and increase productivity. The finance team accesses cost information via automated reports, embedded within the interactive map, to calculate the grounds maintenance charge per property. Meanwhile, call handlers and housing officers access the system to resolve queries at point-of-contact, for example, when lawns will be mown or what is included in service charges.

Since bringing the service in-house, Flagship now receives 50 per cent fewer calls into its contact centre relating to failures in the grounds maintenance service, as well as a projected 10 per cent annual reduction in grounds maintenance costs.

Matt Brazier, director of IT at Flagship Group, said, "In the development of our ArcGIS-based solutions, we either removed or automated 68 per cent of individual steps, creating a far more efficient and streamlined process.

"Having great people, using great software with great data makes life a lot easier. If we hadn't deployed ArcGIS before in-sourcing our grounds maintenance, I'd hate to think how much time and money we would have wasted."

Flagship is now considering tendering for other grounds maintenance contracts from other nearby organisations. Tassie said, "Our automated approach based on ArcGIS allows us to do more things in the time we have available. It therefore allows us to consider innovative new business ventures that otherwise wouldn't have been possible."

Flagship launches digital start-up programme

Flagship Group and TechVelocity have created the first not-for-profit incubator of digital talent in Norfolk.



Supported by UEA, Barclays Eagle Labs and NUA, the digital accelerator programme is designed to find local start-up companies and equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, work on their weaknesses, and provide support to make them more attractive to potential investors. The programme lasts between three and six months, after which the start-ups will be able to pitch for investment.

Sam Greenacre, head of communication, Flagship Group, said, "This is a fantastic opportunity for Flagship and we can't wait to see the type of businesses wanting to be part of the programme. Not only are we proud to support local start-ups, but we hope that we'll find innovative companies that we can work with that have the potential to help us save money and make our customer service even better."

Start-up companies are invited to apply for the programme via whitespacenorwich.com/tech-velocity.

SPATIAL ANALYTICS WITH ESRI GIS

Following its recent customer conference, Esri has reported how three of its customers, Aster, GreenSquare and Thirteen, are using GIS and spatial analytics in their housing operations.

Aster's asset register

Aster Group is making use of GIS to manage and comply with asset register regulations. By loading the necessary data into a GIS app from eleven different business areas, including acquisitions, development costs and land registry, Aster has created a highly efficient way of stress testing the business at any given time and making the audit process easier.

GreenSquare's enterprise platform

GreenSquare has been using GIS for the past six years and having used GIS in over 24 different programmes and initiatives, from maintenance to neighbourhood projects, customer satisfaction to welfare reform, the system is allowing GreenSquare to deliver operational and strategic benefits and is available to every member of staff.

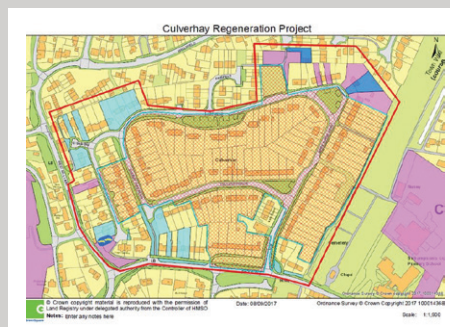
GreenSquare highlighted how GIS is being used for strategic asset management for all development and regeneration schemes. By providing the digital framework to visualise, query and share the spatial analysis, teams including strategic asset management, development, neighbourhoods and property services can work together more easily and make faster decisions about future developments. This shared operational picture has also improved collaboration with local authorities when working on joint development projects.

One example was a regeneration project in Cricklade, which included the demolition of 65 non-traditionally constructed properties and replacing them with 109 new energy efficient homes for shared ownership, affordable rent and outright sale. GreenSquare was able to share the project maps which fostered better joint working with Cricklade Town Council.

Another example was in Corsham, showing how the GIS identified where



garage sites could be demolished and redeveloped, simultaneously generating higher income and providing access to affordable housing for families. The team at GreenSquare is also using GIS to manage strategic voids, disposals, garden licences and high-value properties.



Thirteen's sustainable neighbourhoods

By making its sustainability model spatially aware, Thirteen can examine its business geographically, using multiple financial, social and environmental factors. This has revealed new insights about asset health, where investment is needed and where staff should focus, helping to make decisions which create more sustainable neighbourhoods.

Every piece of data within the organisation is spatially referenced, resulting in over 2.5 million lines of data feeding into the system. By drilling down

Chris Jackson, Head of Commercial Markets, Esri UK



and investigating any issues or hotspots, internal discussions are sparked which lead to more efficient ways of working.

Chris Jackson, head of commercial markets, Esri UK, said, "During our customer conference, some of the challenges of rolling-out GIS projects were highlighted, such as how best to determine who should be involved and the need to identify quick wins. Many attendees agreed that trying to bring together an often diverse group of colleagues can hinder a project.

"Attendees also heard about new technology developments within 3D mapping, processing drone data and how the emergence of real-time spatial data feeds, such as traffic or smart meter data, can further enhance the understanding of a housing business."



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY RECRUITMENT

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Plus Dane's GIS asset management with Emapsite

Plus Dane Housing has been working with geographic data provider Emapsite in the creation of a new asset management data product.

Emapsite explained that gaining instant visibility of a housing provider's assets can sometimes be difficult. A chequered history of organisational mergers, stock acquisitions and disposals, combined with inconsistent methods of recording information, means that there is often a lack of clarity about the exact asset holdings at any given time. Endeavouring to fill the gaps, most housing providers buy regular supplies of land-ownership data, including land title polygons from HM Land Registry, but this is both time-consuming and expensive.

By combining Ordnance Survey Mastermap and AddressBase data with HM Land Registry's land parcel polygons and commercial and corporate ownership datasets, Emapsite has created an all-in-one bundled product for use direct in a housing provider's GIS or database. An app-based service is also available for organisations without a GIS.

Using this solution, Emapsite can query for ownership data based on a combination of a housing provider's geographic area of interest, company registration number(s) and organisation name(s), allowing for 'fuzzy' searching of HMLR's often difficult-to-query ownership lists.

Emapsite's service has now been made accessible to all Plus Dane staff, allowing users to analyse the data on their own properties as well as discover ownership information for neighbouring properties, which previously required individual payments to HMLR.

Alex Hill, GIS manager, Plus Dane Housing, said, "This new service is hugely efficient, saving us both time and fees now that Emapsite is doing the intelligent querying. More importantly, we are getting more data that we can really use because Emapsite's querying is pulling out not only our own assets but those in our areas of interest for other housing providers in our areas. This increased visibility of our and others' asset holdings means we can look forward to closer collaboration with our housing neighbours."

GENERAL NEWS

Reason Digital makes impact with SRoI tool



Reason Digital has developed its Impact software to help housing providers to measure, manage and report on the social return on investment (SRoI) of their projects.

Anton Schultz, social investment manager, One Manchester, said, "It's simple to use, flexible and adaptable to our business. Impact provides a centrally-accessible place to log, store and view all of our outcomes and impact data. It also solves One Manchester's problems with the inaccessible and inconsistent data across the organisation on social outcomes and SRoI."

The cloud-based tool helps housing providers to save time, prevents the need to scour old spreadsheets and PDFs for data, and ensures that no social value is missed out in their annual reports by systematically delegating, collecting and grouping the input of social impact data into a single central depository.

The software also enables housing providers to convert 'units', meaning that they can automatically turn business tasks, such as insulating properties or providing 'back to work' schemes for tenants, into meaningful report-level SRoI data (e.g. CO2 saved or the financial worth of the social value created).





BENCHMARKING – THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFICIENCY

Phil Shelton, CEO, SDS

Benchmarking is important to compare performance and review efficiency; it enables comparisons to be drawn between you and similar organisations. Using benchmarking to drill into the strengths and weaknesses of your organisation enables smarter decision making, improved efficiency and enhances lean processes by reducing anything that is not adding value.

Within the social housing sector, competitive advantage is not the key driving force; however, the intelligence gathered from benchmarking should be used to identify gaps in processes where the organisation is not performing as well as its peers (for example, comparing large, southern-based G15 organisations with small northern housing providers wouldn't give an appropriate comparison as they wouldn't be facing the same challenges).

To effectively benchmark, regardless of metrics, the organisations you are comparing your results with should have similar characteristics: a similar number of units, region, rent prices, and so on to ensure a fair comparison.

Before 2015, entities regulated by the HCA had to demonstrate efficiency and found their benchmarking club reports very

handy for this purpose. In the absence of that requirement, these practices should not be neglected, as significant insights can be gained from these reports and efficiency should always be a key objective for housing organisations.

The key benefits from benchmarking include:

- Self-assess performance;
- Identify opportunities to develop and adopt best practice;
- Review potential reasons for differences in performance within your peer group;
- Drive investigations into new processes to improve efficiency;
- Set new standards;
- Provide evidence for implementing strategic change.

The club must compare you with similar organisations that have similar development programmes because the conclusions drawn from the comparison will be used to give insight into business intelligence.

When making your choice, consider the method of data collection and input as some clubs offer online integrated solutions to remove some of the manual tasks, saving you time and reducing the risk of human error.

There is always the challenge of getting up-to-date data; you have to enter the data to be able to create reports, and there needs to be enough of the relevant information submitted to get a valid benchmark.

To reduce anomalies, most benchmarking clubs offer some form of data validation; without this, any human errors or unusual numbers can dramatically alter the results, creating unreliable data which can't be used to benchmark. The data would be submitted and checked by a validator for any irregularities; once these are resolved, this is marked as validated and becomes part of the benchmark. The more data submitted, the more reliable and credible the benchmark.

Finally, the delivery of all this information needs to be in a usable format. These reports often end up in the boardroom, so all data should be relevant and easily understood without any additional leg work from you.

Remember, it's in your organisation's best interest to be efficient, enable growth and sustainability, all of which can be maintained and improved through benchmarking.

Phil Shelton is CEO of SDS.

Sunrise ITSM at Castleton Technology

Castleton Technology has announced that it is using Sunrise Software's IT service management (ITSM) solution to enhance the IT support and managed services provided to its customers. Replacing four different helpdesk systems, Sunrise is now also used as the engineering service desk, scheduling time, workload, stock levels and project deliveries.

Paul Rogers, professional services director, Castleton Technology, said, "Sunrise ITSM has replaced what had previously been in people's heads. Since implementation, it has evolved from the original service desk tool to now managing vital flow-control processes for us. Sunrise ticked all the right

boxes from the start, with its scalability and the ability to be tailored easily to our developing needs."

Castleton customers opting for a fully-managed service use an outsourced service desk to manage their own job tickets through the Sunrise online customer portal, with further escalation to the central desk when required. Castleton manages around 3,000 calls a month, via self-service, phone, email and internal sources from customers, including those who have Castleton's IT embedded on site.

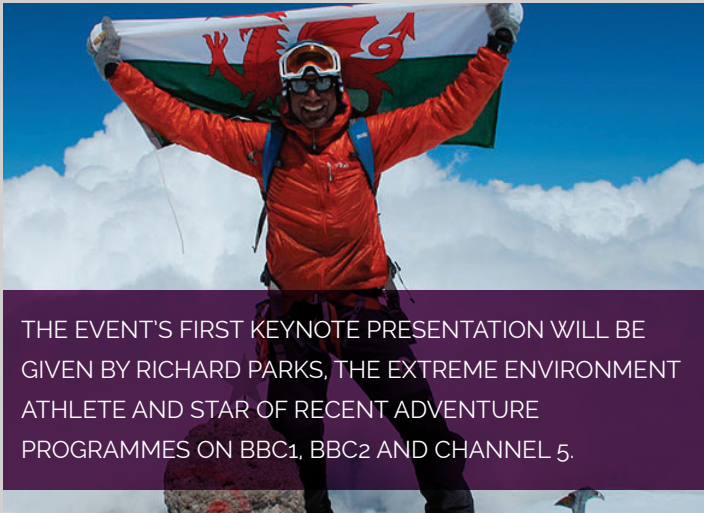
Faye Harley, hosted services and support manager, Castleton Technology, said, "We

have to manage multiple locations with Sunrise and it just does that so easily. The interface is really good and it's easy to use; it's so simple to make functional changes, often at the click of a button. It just works perfectly and people pick it up really quickly, helping productivity."

Rogers said, "It's now much more of a business driver than just a helpdesk. People know what they're accountable for and managers use the system-generated information, whether in sales, finance or contracts, to tell us what needs to be done. It's a lifeline, giving key information on our customer base across the business."

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2018 - SPEAKERS CONFIRMED

We have now confirmed the majority of the speakers for the Housing Technology 2018 conference and executive forum on 7-8 March at Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry. Registration is now open (including advance-booking discounts) at: www.housing-technology.com/events/ht18.



THE EVENT'S FIRST KEYNOTE PRESENTATION WILL BE GIVEN BY RICHARD PARKS, THE EXTREME ENVIRONMENT ATHLETE AND STAR OF RECENT ADVENTURE PROGRAMMES ON BBC1, BBC2 AND CHANNEL 5.

We have a wealth of excellent speakers now confirmed for the event, covering topics such as disruptive technologies for housing, GDPR, digital by default, cyber security, core business applications, business/digital transformation, CRM and channel shift. As well as presentations from the event's corporate sponsors, the speakers (and provisional presentation topics) from housing providers include:

- **Accent** - Digital people and digital transformation
- **Acutance Consulting** - Blue sky ideas vs. practical technology solutions
- **Brighton & Hove** - The results for an IoT pilot project
- **Bromford** - Strategy & business transformation & ICT's direction of travel
- **CHG** - GDPR in housing
- **CHS** - Engaging tenants for digital inclusion/learning
- **Clarion Housing** - Data governance: a framework for housing
- **Coastal Housing** - A tale of two networks: getting staff engagement for change
- **Colne Housing** - Managing your managed service provider
- **Flagship Housing** - Taking a risk on innovative technologies
- **Futures Housing** - Agile working with Skype for Business
- **Gateway Housing** - Transformation through mobile working, workflow and document management
- **Gentoo** - Next-generation intranets and social media
- **GreenSquare** - Next-generation disaster recovery
- **Hightown Housing** - Present imperfect: implementing system change in the real world
- **Leonard Cheshire Disability** - Business transformation
- **Link Housing** - Link's business/digital transformation programme
- **RHP** - Our digital journey so far



- **Soha Housing** - Procurement & implementation of a new system & board-level influence
- **Trafford Housing** - Emerging technologies, incl. AI, VR, intelligent materials & digital currencies
- **United Welsh** - The tenant, house and housing association of the future
- **Wales & West** - Keeping the plates spinning: the impact of the move towards greater IaaS and SaaS
- **Wrekin Housing** - Developing and nurturing IT skills

And in Housing Technology 2018's main networking and exhibition area, we have already confirmed that 1st Touch, Aareon, Castleon Technology, Engage Property Technology, InterNETalia, Kirona, MIS Active Management Systems, Mobysoft, Orchard, PowerObjects - an HCL Company, Prodo, Simpson Associates, Sovereign Business Integration Group, TSG and Upstream Works will be showcasing their very latest software and services.

Housing Technology 2018, our ninth annual conference and executive forum, is widely regarded as simply the best event for senior IT influencers and decision-makers in the UK social housing sector. No other event combines the breadth of IT topics with the depth of presentations, alongside fantastic networking opportunities.

Registration is now open (including advance-booking discounts) at: www.housing-technology.com/events/ht18.

There are still a limited number of sponsor and exhibitor positions available; please email conference@housing-technology.com for further details.



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

2018 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM



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

SENTINEL HOUSING

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

GREENSQUARE GROUP



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

1ST TOUCH



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

CAPITA

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

WHEATLEY GROUP



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

POWEROBJECTS, AN HCL COMPANY



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

WELLINGBOROUGH HOMES



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

RIVERLITE



NEW SYSTEMS PLEASE!

Norman Vickery, Director, Windfall Consultancy

Reading the last issue of Housing Technology, a few items caught my attention: Orbit with its timeline; Futures Housing with its tenant engagement apps; along with the articles with 'digital' in the headline. Those articles made me think of what 'wonder pills' the IT industry has prescribed, and what 'lotions & potions' the software providers have developed over my personal timeline in IT, and in particular, in the social housing sector.

I've worked with the full spectrum of IT hardware: mainframes, minis, PCs, laptops, and tablets. In 1972, I took my first IT role in the construction industry, working for both end-user organisations and IT suppliers, until 1994 when I took my first IT role in housing.

The late 60s and early 70s saw the first computers being employed and in 1972 I worked with my first visual display unit. Through the 80s and early 90s, I moved from mainframe to mini, from manufacturer-specific operating systems to Unix, to PCs just starting to run Word and Excel, and dedicated data links.

In 1994 I took a role at Thamesmead with a brief to procure and implement a new housing management system. At that time, Thamesmead had a 'rent ledger' that dealt solely with raising the debit and posting cash, but all other processes were manual. By 1996, the system was live for all modules, and I remember reviewing the data that was now available on the system to help with strategy decisions. You could see "what is the most common repair call?", "which is the preferred method of payment?", "what is the profile of our tenants?" and so on. The only problem was that there was no reporting vehicle.

Since then, my subsequent consultative roles for some 20 housing providers have included a mixture of application support, business analytics, project management, system procurement and data migration. These have allowed me to see how the social housing sector has embraced the use of IT, and, more importantly, what the housing-specific software suppliers have put on the table.

1. Finance systems have been around since the 1980s, housing management systems surfaced in the early 1990s and asset management systems popped up in the 2000s. Integration between these systems has been adequate but improved with the use of web-services and proprietary interface engines.
2. The housing management systems were originally designed to cover the scope of a housing provider's main departments - repairs, rents and lettings. This coverage has extended to include CRM, service charges, ASB, complaints, homelessness and choice-based lettings, but the extensions have often been grafted onto the system, almost as stand-alone systems.
3. A number of the larger housing providers would like to escape the stranglehold of the all-encompassing HMS by going 'best of breed', but the problem is the big one in the middle - rents.
4. The housing sector is served by a small number of software providers alongside a growing number of peripheral software houses offering 'bolt-ons'. However, the mainstream systems still only offer much the same functionality as 20 years ago.

5. Mobile technology has greatly improved the repairs process but why do repair complaints continue to account for a high percentage of all complaint statistics?
6. The housing sector has bent over backwards to accommodate tenants (in the IT sense) with choice based-lettings, multiple payment methods, tenant portals, complaint systems, CRM, tenant tracker systems, and online surveys but tenant satisfaction levels remain under target.

Social housing has only embraced IT for the past 25 years. While the wider IT industry has allowed for the enhancement of IT in those years, the mainstream housing software products have not advanced at the same rate. New systems, please!

Norman Vickery is a director of Windfall Consultancy.

Alysium Consulting gains Sovereign staff

Alysium Consulting, set up by Ian Lever, Lesley Buckels and Phil Smith two years ago, has recently made two new senior appointments with the addition of Jacqueline Stoggall and Tim Cowland from Sovereign Business Integration Group's housing division.

closely with Sovereign to manage this transition and establish a valuable and viable working relationship going forward. This approach supports the business objectives of both organisations and gives all of us access to a broader set of services."

working with Alysium on this transition. While we will miss Jacqui and Tim, we look forward to our continued working relationship with them and the rest of the Alysium team, delivering business IT services to our housing clients."

Ian Lever, managing director, Alysium Consulting, said, "We are pleased to have Jacqui and Tim on board. We have worked

Joanna Sedley-Burke, managing director, Sovereign Business Integration Group, said, "It has been an absolute pleasure

VIRTUAL THIN-CLIENTS AT LEWISHAM HOMES



Lewisham Homes has completed a project to install cloud, virtualisation and VDI technologies from VMware and Citrix and thin-clients from IGEL throughout its head office as part of a 'ground up' investment in class-leading enterprise IT.

Manni Etsetowaghan, head of IT, Lewisham Homes, said, "New IT infrastructure was needed as we consolidated office space to improve collaboration and separate out housing services from the council's own IT systems. It meant starting from scratch so we've bought IT that is flexible, future-proof, supports the green agenda and allows us to deliver services efficiently to offer value for money."

To achieve this, Lewisham Homes chose VMware for server virtualisation, Citrix's XenApp for VDI, created a private cloud solution for application and data storage, and then linked everything together using a secure MPLS network. Furthermore, it is using VoIP telephony and installed a SIP server so it can run Skype for Business. Staff access a range of applications through Citrix, including housing, asset and finance management systems as well as Microsoft Office and SharePoint.

Lewisham Homes bought 250 IGEL terminals, optimised for voice and video and support the use of IP telephony and video-based training over the desktop. IGEL's Universal Desktop Converter software was also installed to convert existing x86-based Intel devices into universally-deployable IGEL Linux-based thin clients.

Odina Ifeoma, service desk manager, Lewisham Homes, said, "We've been able to recycle and transform about 20 older laptops for use in meeting rooms and reception areas rather than throwing them away. Clearly this saves money which can be used for front line services.

"As for the IGEL thin clients themselves, the ease of rollout is what I'm most proud of. It's much easier to do compared to traditional PCs and we've been able to adjust settings per user, remotely deliver updates and set the devices to power up and down at certain times of the day to reduce electricity consumption."

In order to achieve its goal of installing end-to-end solutions, Lewisham Homes worked with Citrix specialists CloudDNA. Etsetowaghan said, "CloudDNA helped with our requirements gathering and analysis, offered consultancy about Citrix and how best to deploy it, advised about the thin client selection, as well as audited our environment at the end.

"Overall, IGEL, Citrix and VMware support our strategy of the three 'anys' – access to systems from anywhere, on any device and at any time."



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

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