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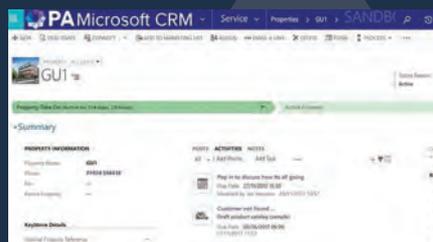


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**HOUSING
TECHNOLOGY**

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THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO IT IN HOUSING

We are about to start work on our brand new report – Market Insights | The E-State of the Nation – which will be the most in-depth assessment (since our last technology review in 2015; copies available from the Housing Technology website) of not only how UK housing providers are using technology across all areas of their operations at the moment but also what the housing provider of the future looks like in terms of its use of technology. In addition, the report will benchmark the quality of the main housing IT suppliers' software, services and delivery models.

We hope our new report will be useful for any senior IT and business executives contemplating new technology investments and/or to benchmark their own existing IT estate with those of their peers.

To that end, we would very much like to hear from Housing Technology's readers to tell us which areas of business and technology within social housing you'd like us to cover in the new report.

At the time of going to press, the main areas the report is likely to cover comprise business and technology goals, IT innovation, core business applications, infrastructure services, implementation and delivery models, IT budgets and value for money.

Please email alastair@housing-technology.com with your suggestions regarding what you'd like the Housing Technology 2018 report to cover.



Aareon UK

Housing Management, Mobile & Digital Solutions

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**HOUSING TECHNOLOGY
BREAKFAST BRIEFINGS 2018**
In association with Aareon

Dates & locations to be confirmed
www.housing-technology.com/events/breakfast2018

**HOUSING TECHNOLOGY |
IN-DEPTH 2018**

11 September 2018,
BT Tower, London
www.housing-technology.com/events/id2018

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2019

6-7 March 2019, Q Hotels'
Oxford Belfry, Oxford
www.housing-technology.com/events/ht19

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SUBSCRIPTIONS
Subscribe at www.housing-technology.com
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PRINTED IN THE UK BY
The Magazine Printing Company
www.magprint.co.uk

THE INTELLIGENT BUSINESS COMPANY LTD
Hoppingwood Farm
Robin Hood Way
London, SW20 0AB
United Kingdom
Head Office: 0208 336 2293





MYRAVEN PORTAL TAKES OFF WITH AAREON

Raven Housing is implementing an online tenant portal from Aareon, alongside its existing Aareon QL housing management system. The MyRaven portal, which will offer a range of online services to over 6,500 tenants across Surrey and Sussex, will free-up Raven's call-centre staff to spend more time with those in greater need.

Once fully operational, the services available through the MyRaven portal will include making payments, viewing statements, balances and arrears, reporting ASB and other nuisances, requesting and scheduling repairs, and generating electrical and gas certificates after inspections.

Raven Housing has already signed up 1,500 tenants to the service, thereby meeting its short-term goal of having 20 per cent of rent payments (excluding direct debits) made through the portal, and aiming eventually for 50 per cent of rent payments to be made via the portal.

Joanne Silner, customer services manager, Raven Housing Trust, said, "The MyRaven portal has already proved very

popular with tenants. We're confident that as the range of services offered expands, MyRaven will become the main channel of choice for many of our residents who appreciate its convenience."

Geraint Griffiths,
Joint Managing
Director, Aareon UK



Aareon appoints new MD

Aareon has announced that it has appointed Geraint Griffiths as its new joint managing director, alongside

the recently-arrived Nigel Rees. Griffiths replaces Stephen Makin who is leaving to pursue new challenges.

Griffiths joined Aareon in 1993 and has been the company's chief operating officer for the past 15 years, including managing the recent merger of mobile working software provider 1st Touch into the Aareon group.

GRŴP CYNEFIN TAKES MIS AMS HOUSING SOFTWARE

Grŵp Cynefin has gone live with new ActiveH housing management software from MIS AMS to manage its rents, repairs, resident communications, planned maintenance, business intelligence reporting and CRM in a single integrated system.

Following its creation from the merger of two smaller housing providers, Grŵp Cynefin began evaluating how to integrate the new organisation's housing management systems and processes in February 2015, with MIS AMS chosen one year later from a list of six potential suppliers.

Data can be captured and stored in ActiveH to provide a single view of Grŵp Cynefin's assets and tenant data, making it easier to manage maintenance and repairs across its estate of 4,500 houses and easier to communicate with tenants.

Roy Carroll, project manager, Grŵp Cynefin, said, "It's important for us to have one system to manage all of our tenancies, a system that enables us to provide an efficient and effective service to customers. We are pleased that ActiveH allows us to

achieve these objectives, and would like to thank the team at MIS AMS for their support."

Chris McLaughlin, managing director, MIS AMS, said, "When mergers take place between housing providers, it's necessary to bring together legacy systems and deliver a single view across the merged estate. ActiveH provides a totally integrated and flexible system that can support the processes right across the new organisation and scale with that organisation well into the future."

Grwp Cynefin has also implemented MIS's Contractor Portal, enabling its contractors to view and complete their works orders online to ensure faster payments and less administrative time by Grŵp Cynefin's staff. In the second phase of the project, Grŵp Cynefin plans to implement MIS's tenant and staff portal, with a view to ensuring more effective communication with its tenants and more efficient working.

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MERGERS & IT INTEGRATION

Dr Ruth Murray-Webster, Senior Associate, BTD

When two housing providers decide to join together, whether through merger or acquisition, the goal is to become a provider that's better than the two could be working alone. There is a 'one plus one equals three' aspiration that should be good news for the providers and their residents.

Ensuring the right technology solutions are in place post-merger is absolutely vital in achieving this. Investments in technology have driven improvements in service delivery and cost efficiency across the social housing sector, and that direction of travel can continue through mergers.

Finding value in technology

There are broadly three types of technology a housing provider needs to consider in its merger activities. Back-office systems which provide the essential financial and administrative tools, and outward-facing systems used by both tenants and staff are two of these. A third category of technology, often based around the internet of things, and possibly not even in place at the time of merger, also needs to be in the mix. This fast-developing area has huge potential for housing providers, not least in supporting independent living. Those without a solution now may well have ideas on their three to five year plans.

It is crucial that the relative value each organisations' technologies could bring to the new entity is properly understood so that right selections are made between using existing solutions or acquiring new ones. The requirements around this are complex because the value in technology doesn't just come from net book value. It's also found in less quantifiable areas such as individual expertise and, where technologies are used by tenants, from their judgements about usability, scope and relevance.

Value can also come from the newly-merged organisation's aspirations for its future self. Technology, particularly in

the form of tenant-facing and IoT-based possibilities, can be significant even where it is not yet tangible. So, calculating best value is about much more than doing the sums, and not all of the work can be completed pre-merger.

There's a very significant risk that failure to explore the full value of technology can lead to a merged organisation which doesn't live up to expectations, and this can have serious financial consequences.

Post-merger integration – a game of two halves

The pre-merger due diligence process doesn't always allow the true value of technology to emerge. It's particularly difficult to drill into the value that users (both staff and tenants) create and contribute. For clear and understandable business reasons, organisations such as BTD, which help housing providers and others complete successful mergers, only have access to a subset of staff and data during the due diligence process.

It is vital though, that a post-merger integration plan is created ahead of doing the deal. The same data that the lawyers and finance specialists use for their part of the due diligence process can contribute to this, but the starting point is different. Data is examined not only from the point of view of raw value, but also for the clues it provides about what is seen as important about technology systems pre-merger, and the expectations of life post-merger.

For example, one of the merging organisations might highly value its tenant management system's user-friendly interface. It might resist other systems, even if they are less expensive to maintain, because they are not as easy for tenants to use. If a range of bespoke add-ins has been developed, the issue is exacerbated. However, our experience tells us this kind of value can be lost in the due diligence process. It's not unusual for top-line analysis to simply conclude

that the less expensive option delivers greater value.

Relying only on standard financial and legal due diligence can lead to 'delusional optimism' about the value of the merger in the eyes of the decision-making team. It is why those clues and pointers gained from pre-deal analysis need to be explored further after the merger. Indeed, the second, post-merger half of the process, is arguably the more important one. With full access to staff, it is possible to use workshops, interviews and other techniques to understand the cultural value in technology systems and to come to a more rounded understanding of where the best value lies.

Slow and steady wins the race

There is no need to rush technology integration. While some aspects of an organisation's working need to be addressed immediately post-merger, such as branding and communication strategies, it is possible for others to run in tandem. There are some scenarios where BTD has advised clients to run technology systems in tandem for over a year or more.

This allows a deeper understanding of how systems really function to be developed, and to understand their cultural as well as financial value. It is only now that we can really see the value of those bespoke add-ins, for example.

There is another element of value in technology that may only show itself post-merger, and it aligns very well with IoT applications. Let's call this 'aspirational technology'. We know there are some very exciting applications of IoT for housing providers, for example to help with health and wellbeing by checking that residents are moving around their homes. But at the moment these are relatively rare in situ.

While many housing providers are excited at the prospect of what IoT offers, there are plenty of reasons they might

MERGERS & IT INTEGRATION

Continued from previous page

hold back on its implementation. Lack of technical expertise, a wish to see successful examples up and running to learn from others' experience before taking the plunge, and a lack of certainty over costs are just three. A merger is the ideal opportunity to make time and space for thinking about a future that can truly take the housing provider to the next level. Identifying skills across both organisations could be a great way to foster cultural integration too.

One plus one can equal three

The need to improve housing supply and affordability will drive ever-greater consolidation across the sector. To get the best outcomes for both providers and their residents, it's vital to ensure that best value is obtained. That's not just about minimising costs – indeed best value might actually cost more – it's about cultural value too.

A well-developed post-merger integration plan, which has its roots in due diligence and its branches and leaves in post-merger work, will identify the true value of technology, and help the new organisation make the right long-term decisions.

Dr Ruth Murray-Webster is a senior associate at BTD.

AAREON WINS AT CHELTENHAM BOROUGH HOMES

Cheltenham Borough Homes has chosen Aareon for its new housing management, asset management, mobile and self-service software.



CBH began its procurement process in April 2017 to look for a replacement system to consolidate its core housing and asset management systems into a single integrated system. As the company has grown, its core business processes and the supporting IT systems have evolved with little control over their impact on other processes and systems.

The implementation of the Aareon software is a core component of CBH's service improvement programme, covering properties, people and communities. The software comprises integrated functionality across interactive access for tenants and contractors, electronic document management, mobile working and end-to-end workflows.

Steve Slater, executive director of finances and resources, Cheltenham Borough Homes, said, "We were very impressed with Aareon's fully-integrated solution which was demonstrated to us during a comprehensive tender process. They gave us confidence in their products by not only demonstrating the functionality that met our essential and desirable requirements, but also their knowledge and understanding from working in the housing sector for many years.

"We had always wanted to work in partnership with a new supplier, both during the implementation and into the future 'post go-live'. We have had great experiences so far both up to and since the award of the contract, and everyone we have worked with at Aareon has been very knowledgeable in their fields of expertise."

CBH's chosen suite of Aareon software includes QL Housing Management, CRM, Contractor, Asset Management, Mobile, Tenant Portal, Self Service Apps, iAppoint, EDRM and DRS. The implementation began in January 2018 and is scheduled to go live in May 2019.

A2DOMINION SELECTS POWEROBJECTS FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

A2Dominion has chosen PowerObjects, an HCL Technologies company, as a partner in the delivery of its multi-million pound business change programme.

The multi-year agreement will see PowerObjects roll-out Microsoft Dynamics 365 during a two-year implementation phase, followed by a five-year support period and possible five-year extension. Dynamics 365 is expected to be used across A2Dominion's

core business areas, including finance and procurement, asset and housing management, HR and payroll, customer service and contact centres, and property development and sales.

Andrew Boyes, executive director for change & IT, A2Dominion Group, said, "Our 'Fit for the Future' programme is vital to our ongoing success and achieving our strategic objectives. It has taken us two years to reach this point of selecting our

change partner, which shows how vitally important it is to get this transformation programme right.

"PowerObjects has the specialist skills we need to enable the delivery of the 'Fit for the Future' programme. They have an impressive track record of designing and building systems across private, public and third sectors and will become a valuable extension of our own teams."



TACKLING MAINTENANCE COSTS THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Andrew Moore, Property Maintenance Specialist, Causeway Technologies

Tenant expectations continue to put significant cost pressures on property maintenance and are forcing housing providers to reconsider how they control costs while delivering enhanced service levels. Andrew Moore, a property maintenance specialist at Causeway Technologies, explores how digital transformation provides an opportunity for housing providers to improve their operational efficiency in order to reduce costs.

In this article, he explains how creating and leveraging new connections between otherwise disparate functions, isolated data, and disconnected point solutions can help housing providers optimise property maintenance and tenant services for less.

Whether driven by government spending cuts, fluctuating incomes or changing service level agreements (SLAs), many of the sector's adoptions of new technologies and innovative ways of working have been the result of survival instinct and cautious future-proofing.

Consider today's connected environment. Constantly exposed to superior customer experiences delivered through social media, mobile apps, live chats, and a wide range of other digital channels, today's tenants see no distinction between the standard of service they expect from the retail and entertainment sectors, and from their housing providers.

As a result, housing providers have increasingly adopted customer-centric models built around the empowerment of tenants. Whether it's self-service portals, self-diagnostic maintenance capabilities, omni-channel communications or dedicated mobile apps for tenants, evolving expectations have been one of the critical triggers for

transforming the way housing providers deliver their services.

But shrinking budgets and income pressures have always shaped how organisations operate and influenced how executives make decisions. What makes today so special is that the substantial pressures currently felt by housing providers present a unique opportunity for them to become 'connected', to deliver more value into every area of the organisation, and to ultimately transform the standard of tenant services, operational efficiency, and in-house property maintenance.

Joining the dots

Although it's common for housing providers to use applications and other best-of-breed solutions to maximise performance in specific areas, these solutions often operate independently of each other, limiting their ability to scale and deliver holistic gains.

More precisely, this disaggregated approach can prevent housing providers from seizing opportunities to automate and standardise shared processes between functions, reduce administrative workloads, increase jobs per operative, and transform the standard and productivity of their maintenance services.

For example, when disparate data points and siloed functions such as procurement, payroll, and scheduling are connected, managing the timesheets and payroll for a mobile workforce can be largely automated and the managerial time taken to oversee and check the validity of claims significantly reduced. At the same time, this improves the working efficiency of the engineers themselves and also the company's ability to spot fraudulent or erroneous time claims.

Similarly, in accounts, procurement and supplier management, administrative time is often spent on data entry, queries and invoice matching that could be completed in a paperless exchange community. This would give staff more time and resources to engage in more rewarding value-adding work. Just as electronic timesheets and mobile requisitions empower mobile engineers to spend more time focused on delivering quality maintenance and repair jobs, joining these dots improves the lives of back-office staff, allowing them to move away from mundane, repetitive tasks in favour of work that actively adds value and requires a human touch.

There are also significant benefits possible in job scheduling and management; when integrating business processes and connecting different data sources to dynamic scheduling and job management systems, housing providers can more effectively manage emergency call-outs, accidents and over-runs while optimising jobs per day and maximising first-time fixes. Automatically notifying tenants of appointments via email or SMS at the point of booking and when an engineer is on their way ensures that the customer is there when an engineer calls, greatly reducing the number of 'no-access' jobs.

Engineers carrying and assigning stock to jobs also ensures more first-time fixes, especially when stock can be profiled correctly. The ability for engineers to do trade-counter purchasing removes the need for an engineer to leave the job and wait for parts to be ordered from the office. A connected mobile workflow means he can raise a purchase order himself at the site of an approved supplier, and if engineers can be notified in advance about the 'asset' they are being called out to service, they can

TACKLING MAINTENANCE COSTS THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Continued from previous page

ensure they have any specialised tools and parts prior to arriving at the job; the possibilities are almost endless.

Thinking connected

At the heart of any digital transformation project is joined-up data, and although this is clearly a critical factor in improving operational productivity, organisations don't necessarily need to do wholesale replacements of existing systems with a single proprietary unified system and common data strategy. What makes now such an exciting time for future-facing housing providers is that they can continue to use the existing systems they trust while introducing new ways to join up existing applications without friction and without spending large sums with major ERP vendors or compromising business-as-usual.

I believe this shift away from wholesale integration offers housing providers the best of both worlds, enabling them to be more nimble with their roll-outs of

improved services, more frugal with their budgets, and to offer their IT and business teams the chance to deploy services that match the way they work best. This modular approach allows them to reap the operational benefits of a connected system that is tailored to their exact needs and the nuances of the social housing sector, while maintaining the agility and cash-flow to respond to new challenges, pressures, and requirements.

The connected housing provider

The more we explore the value that connections can contribute to specific functions, and the wider we cast the net within housing providers themselves, the clearer it is that the connected approach can enhance every part of a housing provider's operations, from supplier management and property maintenance through to the way data is presented to senior stakeholders. And as IoT and smart housing become increasingly viable routes to improved property

maintenance and tenant services in the future, I've never been more confident that these connections are the next logical step in digital transformation.

This process of joining up all the different practices and delivering digital services to tenants is what Causeway calls the 'connected housing association', and although the pressure to reduce costs around property maintenance might be the initial trigger, this is an approach that looks to promise something much greater.

Andrew Moore is a property maintenance expert at Causeway Technologies.

CORGI LAUNCHES COMPLIANCE SOFTWARE



Launched a year ago, Corgi Technical Services has reported on the success of its Compliance Document Management System (CDMS), developed to seamlessly link into housing providers' gas and electrical compliance workflow processes.

CDMS reads any electronic documents produced by any third-party data-capture or certificating software without the need for direct integration. Using artificial intelligence (AI), the engine behind CDMS understands and maps compliance documents and then performs calculations to validate and verify compliance (green/compliant, amber/compliant with warnings, or red/non-compliant).

Lee Woods, compliance hub manager, Your Housing Group, said, "With CDMS and as the overall team manager, I now deploy these highly-skilled members of staff towards actually administering the gas contracts."

CDMS includes a client-configurable tagging system that enables the extraction of keywords direct from the client's documents, resulting in the ability to run more advanced queries, such as showing all documents created by one particular engineer, those with a dangerous installation, makes, models, locations of appliances, smoke or CO alarms installed and any documents without appropriate signatures.

Corgi reported that most users of the CDMS software had also used it to cleanse and validate their historic asset data, compliance benchmarks and engineering performance.

Martin Simmonds, senior services officer, Dudley Council, said, "The Corgi software has significantly simplified the process for checking documents and has helped streamline resources. Some of the main benefits of the system for us include the capability to run tailored compliance reports, drilling down into individual records, and the ability to check certification quickly."

INPROVA BUYS VALUEWORKS

Valueworks, a spending control software provider, has been bought by Inprova, the managing agent for Procurement for Housing (PfH).

The Valueworks software gives housing providers real-time, collaborative views across all of their spending data as an alternative to the siloed finance and asset management spreadsheets that many still rely on.

PfH said that the increased spending visibility provided by Valueworks will give housing providers greater levels of compliance, transparency and control. It said that contractors and suppliers would also benefit, with closer contract management improving supplier performance and reducing the number of disputes.



Steve Malone, managing director, Procurement for Housing, said, "50-60 per cent of a housing provider's cost base is with external supply chain partners. A large proportion of this is focused on planned and cyclical maintenance, and control and understanding of this cost base will improve bottom-line performance considerably – that's why we're so excited about our acquisition of Valueworks."

Weaver Vale's collaborative planning with Orchard



of budgeting and forecasting are optimised and timescales and costs are significantly reduced.

Alan Maddock, specialist finance advisor, Weaver Vale Housing Trust, said, "We needed something

Weaver Vale Housing Trust has extended its use of Orchard's software with the implementation of the company's new Collaborative Planning module in order to automate its budget planning.

Weaver Vale's budget process was previously managed using a series of Excel spreadsheets which had to be completed and collated in order to move the budget process forward and for sign off. The housing provider recognised that for all of Excel's strengths, it's not designed to be a collaborative or sharing tool and it doesn't necessarily have the controls needed to ensure good data governance.

By removing the reliance on Excel and replacing the spreadsheets with an online tool purpose-built for preparing and building budgets on a collaborative basis, Orchard's Collaborative Planning software offers a solution for both the creation and subsequent monitoring of financial plans and forecasts. By enabling collaboration, the key financial processes

that would remove a lot of the manual processes involved in our spreadsheet-based method of managing the budget preparation. We're confident that Orchard's Collaborative Planning will not only give everyone involved the ability to input directly in to the budget process, but also monitor and plan more effectively."

Danny Tobin, chief operating officer, Orchard, said, "We are delighted that Weaver Vale continue to invest in our relationship and in Orchard's financial solutions. By working with Weaver Vale as a trusted advisor, we've been able to help in significantly enhancing the overall budgeting process through the implementation of our Collaborative Planning software. This should drive measurable efficiencies for Weaver Vale and deliver a strong return on their investment."

New Promaster interface

Orchard has been working with web-design specialists Komodo to refresh

the user interface of its Promaster asset management software.

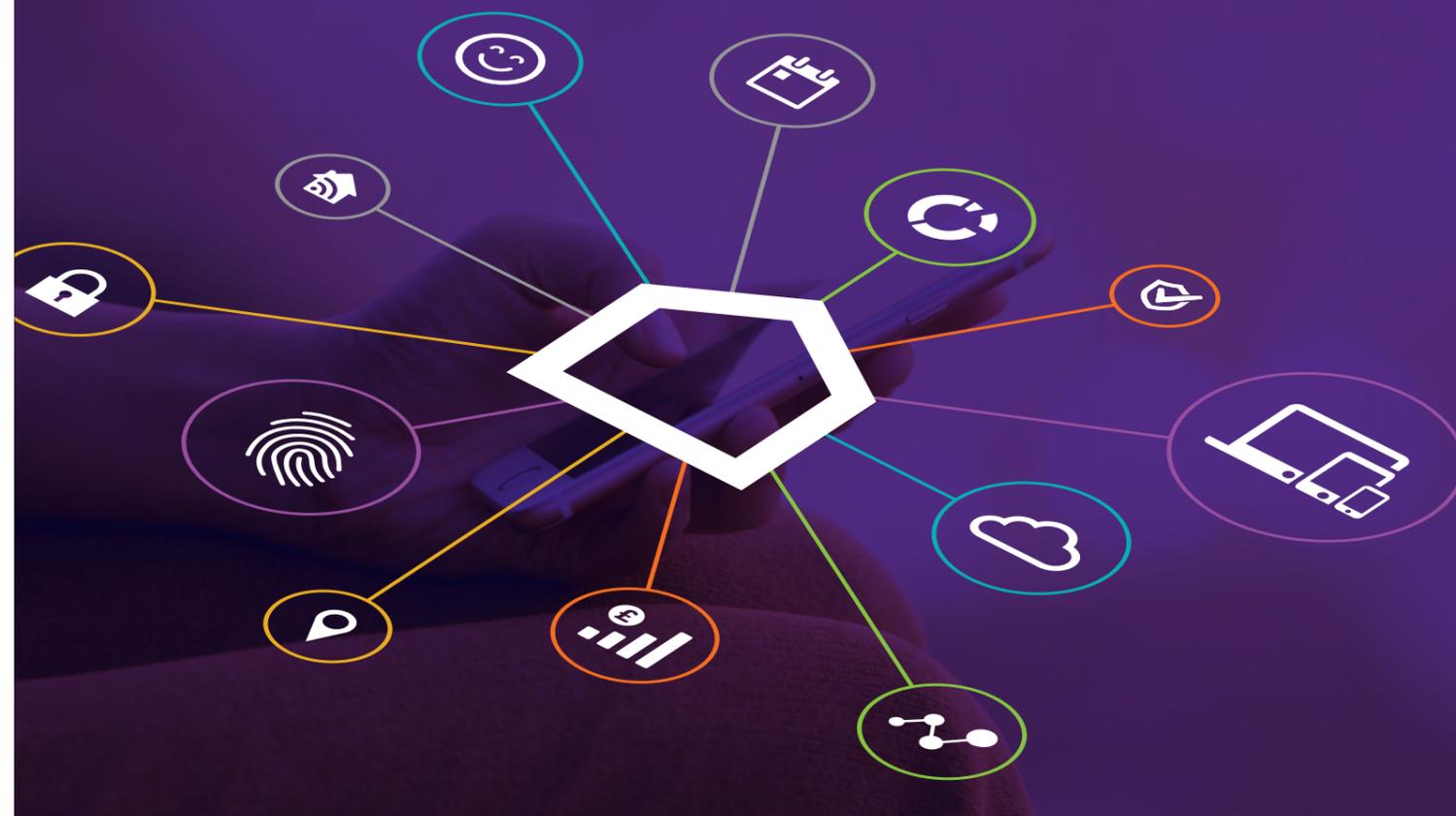
Given the widespread use of Promaster in the housing sector, the aim of Orchard's project was to modernise the user interface (UI) while retaining the user experience (UX).

Komodo began by collating a styles art board with key stakeholders for the project, organised through Google Groups. This allowed them to produce examples of interface themes early in the project.

Using Conjure as their preferred method for design collaboration, they provided Orchard's team with a single tool, enabling them to review individual design elements, leave specific feedback and look back across previous versions of a particular design.

After Komodo delivered the final designs for key elements of Promaster, they then worked with Orchard's internal development team to implement the front-end 'reskin'. Orchard also reported that following the release of the new UI to its customers, Komodo would be working with Orchard to ensure that the new UI design is consistent across its portfolio of housing software.

Brighter Thinking for Housing



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ASSET DATA AND THE VFM STANDARD

Mike Victory Rowe, Asset Consultant, SDS

Homes England has a revised value for money standard that requires you to make the best returns on your assets: Does it feel like you could be going in the right direction at last? As ever, the devil is in the detail, as Mike Victory Rowe explains...

The Homes England consultation to strengthen the Vfm standard ended in December 2017 and Homes England are currently analysing feedback around the new standard. The proposed standard would move their regulatory approach away from the existing, primarily narrative, self-assessment to a more focused reporting approach. Homes England continues to place value for money at the heart of the business, moving away from self-assessment to more outcome-based reporting on targets, including a suite of metrics and new associated code of practice.

Julian Ashby's (chair of the HCA regulation committee) opening sentence at the consultation on the Vfm standard was that housing providers making the best use of every pound and every property is the key to achieving more new homes, improvements to the existing housing stock and better services to tenants without placing an additional burden on the taxpayer. The revised Vfm standard strengthens the requirements for board-level accountability and enhances transparency through a focused, outcome-based approach to measuring and reporting the Vfm gains.

It will be essential to ensure that your board has both an understanding of and confidence in the data and business intelligence associated with your property portfolio performance, investment and appraisal decisions. The revised standard explores in more detail some of the factors that boards should consider when undertaking a 'rigorous

appraisal' of all potential options for improving performance and delivering their strategic objectives. Boards will need to consider how to make the best use of their assets in contributing to an organisation's broad business objectives through retention in their existing use, conversion to another tenure, or outright disposal.

Providers will be expected to set targets to measure and evidence performance in achieving Vfm to ensure the best value is derived from assets in the delivery of strategic asset management. One of the required outcomes for providers will be to demonstrate that they have a full understanding of the return generated from their assets compared with the costs of maintaining those assets. They will have to show how this return varies across their asset base, according to tenure, stock type or geographical location. There is a requirement in the proposed standard to invest in your existing homes but also evidence for your possible decision to retain assets that don't maximise their return for your business.

So, what next?

"I don't need to know everything; I just need to know where to find it when I need it."

ATTRIBUTED TO ALBERT EINSTEIN

In terms of achieving the Vfm standard, knowing where to find your asset data is essential if you want to truly understand your asset performance and deliver Vfm solutions. Accessible and relevant data on how your assets perform and the ability to complete rigorous appraisal is critical.

What if your data was meticulously cleansed to ensure it was accurate and accessible, giving you all the information and data needed at the touch of a button? That would give your board the confidence in knowledge and evidence to set strategic goals that are right, both for now and for the longer term.

What can you do to address this?

What if every member of your team had access to the data they needed, when they needed it, across function and level in the organisation? Imagine the greater transparency if it was immediately available how much a property cost to maintain, what should happen to it in the future and what factors were causing it to perform as it does? Then you could model alternative options to either improve the worth of performing assets or realise its value by disposal to build new homes.

SDS Asset Consultancy can support this process using our active asset management methodology to know your stock, investigate anomalies and act to deliver value to your organisation. We can support the change required in your business to improve your Vfm strategy and make good strategic decisions regarding future investments, obsolescence, disposals and growth.

Mike Victory Rowe is an asset consultant at SDS.

Does your income collection feel like a roller coaster ride?



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UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND THE POWER OF DATA

Louise Coulson, Product Manager, Orchard

There is still considerable uncertainty across the housing sector as many organisations wait to see what the impact of the full roll-out of universal credit will be for their organisation. Therefore, we wanted to speak to organisations all over the country to find out what they thought the impact would be and how they are attempting to mitigate the impact of universal credit.

As a result, we have spoken to over 30 organisations from across the UK as part of our 'impact of universal credit research' which took place in January and February 2018.

Universal credit impact is the 'known unknown'

When it comes to the full roll-out of universal credit, many organisations are planning, preparing and testing for worse case (or as one interviewee described it, 'black swan') scenarios in their business plans. Unsurprisingly, over 75 per cent of respondents stated they are expecting significant or huge increases in the number of arrears cases, with rent arrears going up to 10-15 per cent and unprecedented increases in 'bad debt'. Similarly, 82 per cent of respondents stated that they are expecting to experience a significant or huge increase in their workload - not just in income teams but also particularly across finance, ICT and customer services teams. Indeed, many of the organisations we have spoken to have undergone significant restructures, retraining, and increased investment in both headcount and digital technologies to deal with the expected increase in workload, with further changes due once the areas in which they operate in go to full service.

However, one executive we interviewed described the feeling in the sector best when he stated that the impact of universal credit is a 'known unknown'. Many of the executives involved in our research have stated that a lack

of visibility of timely, meaningful and relevant data makes it very difficult to know what the true impact will be with any degree of accuracy, or how long it will last.

Many have found the level of arrears experienced as part of live service to be less severe than they had feared, while still believing that when it comes to full roll-out, arrears will be much worse. One such example comes from Jackie Bishop, a neighbourhoods manager at SLH Group, who noted that although arrears increases experienced as part of live-service are not as bad as they predicted, the feedback that they are getting from external partners forecast 'dramatic week-on-week increases in cases'. Amid this uncertainty, most organisations continue to predict that universal credit is going to have a significant impact (and perhaps the biggest impact in recent years). The question is: how do you respond to a problem when you don't know how bad it will be?

A key issue that is repeatedly cited is that tenants don't want to know about universal credit until it affects them. This makes preparing for and predicting the impacts in advance of the switch over to universal credit, at least, very difficult.

There also appear to be a lot of variables when it comes to the likelihood of those tenants receiving universal credit paying their rent on time (or not paying it at all), with key factors ranging from tenant vulnerabilities and employment history through to the range and availability of partner support agencies. Combining this with an expected increase in the number of arrears cases and previous payment histories being largely flipped on their heads, it seems there is a perfect storm brewing for generating a lot of 'white noise'.

Putting the increased workload and team restructures aside, this makes it a lot harder for income teams to be able to know who is going to pay their rent on

time, who is going to pay it a little bit later but without intervention and who needs a lot more attention and support. As resources become even more stretched, it is vitally important that these questions are answered to ensure efforts are not being wasted unnecessarily, while simultaneously making sure targeted help is given to those who need it most.

The power of using data

Many organisations highlighted the importance of data, intelligence, prediction and reporting in being able to navigate rent arrears. While organisations wait to see how their businesses are affected, they are turning to the data that they already have to provide insights and predictions of their new reality and where they need to focus their attention and efforts.

The most obvious place to start is separating out 'true arrears' from false ones. With stretched resources, organisations don't have the ability to take a scattergun approach. Therefore, the key is predicting and identifying which tenants will eventually settle their rent arrears and make regular payments without the need for action and those that need more attention and support. This might sound easy, but with one northern housing association estimating that it takes two or three cycles of universal credit payments before tenants start falling into a payment pattern even when they are receiving intensive UC support, this may not be as easy as it sounds. You also need to consider other factors, such as whether an arrangement has been met or broken. On top of this, the days of being able to analyse this data and manage arrears on a weekly basis have gone. With so many variables at play and the importance of addressing arrears issues as early as possible before they snowball, it is key that analysis happens on a daily basis.

We have established a data-science function here at Orchard that has

UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND THE POWER OF DATA

Continued from previous page

enabled us to develop the predictive capability of our new arrears management solution, Income Analytics. This predicts and then removes technical arrears from case lists and enables housing providers to target resources on accounts in arrears that need their attention.

Working with leading experts from Newcastle University, we now have the capability to incorporate advanced techniques such as machine learning into our products, and we hope to use this in the future by developing new

features in Income Analytics that deliver insights for both income teams and senior management.

Going digital

Income Analytics is a cloud-based, mobile-first solution, which is offered to customers as a subscription service. Our aim is to help organisations to assess where they are and where they want to be, mapping the digital journey, engaging with customers or staff, defining what success looks like, or looking at how organisations can push

their digital services forward and evolve their offer for their tenants.

This new suite of transformation services reflects a fundamental change in our working philosophy. An effective digital transformation approach underpins any housing provider's remit to deliver a value for money strategy, and we now have access to proven expertise from outside the sector that can accelerate the path to benefit for all parties.

Louise Coulson is a product manager at Orchard.

GDPR IN HOUSING



THE HIDDEN SIDE OF GDPR

Lee James, CTO EMEA, Rackspace

Few sectors in the UK hold as much personal data as the housing sector, from information on pay and benefits to details on religion and criminal history. The possession of such data means the sector is likely to be seen as a lucrative target by cyber criminals.

The principal punitive costs of GDPR are well documented both here in Housing Technology and also in the wider media, but the fall out might not end with an EU-levied fine, consequent reputational damage and costs related to an actual breach; class-action lawsuits are a lesser-known threat.

GDPR makes it much easier for individuals to bring private claims against data controllers and processors. According to its terms, data subjects can lodge complaints to consumer protection bodies, pushing them to bring claims on their behalf, which will inevitably increase the rate of group privacy claims against businesses.

As per Article 82, any individual has the right to claim compensation from the controller or processor for either 'material or non-material damage' as a result of GDPR infringement. The

phrasing 'non-material' is poignant here, indicating that even if individuals haven't suffered tangible financial losses, they are nevertheless entitled to make claims against controllers and processors to secure compensation. Also, where a controller or processor has paid full compensation for the damage suffered, they are also entitled to claim back from the other controllers or processors.

GDPR defines 'personal data' in very broad terms: 'Any information concerning an identified or identifiable natural person'. Taking an equally-broad interpretation, this includes basic identity information such as names and addresses, but it also covers a broader scope. Web data and location data may also all be covered if it can be indirectly linked to a living person. Given the physical nature of housing, all of these data types and more - including the details of children, which are paid special attention by GDPR - are likely to be in the possession of housing providers.

Given that GDPR imposes such a high bar for compliance, other sectors are sometimes being told the most effective approach may simply be to

avoid processing personal data in the first place. This simply isn't an option for housing providers. Instead, thought should be paid to whether data that doesn't need to be kept is deleted, or information that does is anonymised or encrypted.

Either way, data in its entirety will become incredibly important for the housing sector under GDPR and it is up to organisations to determine how to handle it. The regulation does have its challenges and complexities but being prepared should be viewed as a positive by the housing sector. It presents an opportunity for organisations to assess the state of the data they hold, ensure they are only holding what is necessary and put in place the appropriate technical and organisational measures required to protect their data subjects.

Compliance is more than achievable, and it's certainly not too late for unprepared organisations to act. Support is available, and for businesses with complex data and IT systems, managed service providers can be a helping hand.

Lee James is the chief technology officer for EMEA at Rackspace

TECHNOLOGY & PROCESSES FOR GDPR IN HOUSING

As part of our focus on GDPR in this issue, Housing Technology interviewed seven GDPR experts from Aareon, BT, Clearview, Data Protection People, Hitachi Solutions and Impact Reporting on how housing providers should approach the impending legislation.

Urgent GDPR issues

Regarding which aspects of GDPR housing providers should address most urgently (i.e. the 'quick wins'), Hitachi Solutions' senior GDPR project manager, Andy Gill, said, "Based on the excellent 12 step guide from the ICO, the most urgent aspects should be people awareness and buy-in, and how they will respond with subject access requests within the time allowed, especially given the number of IT systems they will have to search."



"It's really important to understand that GDPR compliance is a business project supported by IT, rather than an IT project that brings GDPR compliance."

Geraint Griffiths, Joint Managing Director, Aareon UK

Geraint Griffiths, joint managing director of Aareon UK, added, "The most important thing is to ensure your residents (and other relevant parties) understand why data is being collected and for what purpose."

BT's CIO for regional government and health, Phil Brunkard, said, "The ICO published a report, 'Findings from ICO advisory visits to social housing organisations', which set out some of the most important data protection issues for housing provider to address. They included proper encryption of portable electronic devices and locking down the use of external storage devices such as USBs and CD/DVD drives; secure printing controls; data security policies for home-working staff; role-based access to records; monitoring and managing of security policies and procedures; and staff training regarding their obligations for the protection of personal data."

GDPR in housing

While GDPR covers organisations of all

types, the nature of the data that housing providers hold concerning their tenants means that some parts of GDPR are particularly pertinent.

Mark Hobart, managing director of Clearview, said, "Many organisations see GDPR as a 'tick box exercise' to gain compliance, but it's much more than that, and is possibly an opportunity to create processes for improving the value for money equation. Data within a housing provider is constantly changing and therefore organisations need systems to manage their data on an ongoing basis to ensure compliance is achieved and then maintained."

Liam Fitzpatrick, a data protection consultant with Data Protection People, said, "Transparency is an area in which housing providers should strive to excel. Having easy to understand but thorough (layered) privacy notices will reinforce trust with tenants who will be given a better understanding as to what actually happens with their personal data and who it is shared with."

Impact Reporting's product manager, Chris Farrell, added, "The essence of GDPR is to ensure that personal information trusted to a business is used appropriately. Therefore, the need for a contract between tenants and housing associations puts the sector in a stronger position for holding data than others (for example, a travel company just looking for people to add to a promotional mailing list) but with this comes more responsibility to use it sensibly."

GDPR for business improvement

As with the introduction of any new regulatory framework, organisations can decide between basic compliance or using compliance as the springboard for business improvements.

BT's CTO for cyber and secure systems within the public sector, Mike Pannell, said, "GDPR planning is a good opportunity for an organisation to review the historic data they may have collected but is no longer needed. A data-cleansing exercise can enable an organisation to



"There is always a trade-off in the cost, benefits, effort and risk mitigations when considering the extent to which processes are automated."

Phil Brunkard, CIO for Regional Government & Health, BT

operate more efficiently through easier data retrieval. In addition, compliance with GDPR can differentiate one organisation from another; reputational damage to anybody from losing personal data can be irreparable."

Data Protection People's Fitzpatrick said, "While running a number of GDPR transformation projects, one thing that has struck me is how much they lead to an improvement in both governance and business processes. Assigning responsibilities, understanding data flows, having rigorous policies and procedures and being accountable for the personal data in your possession all help elsewhere in the day-to-day business."

"Certain housing providers I worked with had staff who had never questioned the 'why?' behind certain processes; taking a step back and having a critical look at things has led many to identify personal data which was being collected unnecessarily and thus identified an inefficiency. Better retention schedules could also lead to a reduction in the huge amounts of personal data which is collected by most housing associations; and this means lower storage costs, a happier IT department and greater compliance."



"GDPR should be used as a catalyst to purge old, redundant data and to instil a cultural change regarding how personal data is treated and retained."

Andy Gill, Senior GDPR Project Manager, Hitachi Solutions

Hitachi Solutions' Gill said, "GDPR should be used as a catalyst to purge old, redundant data and to instil a cultural change regarding how personal data is treated and retained. There is also an opportunity to build customer confidence



"Assigning responsibilities, understanding data flows, having rigorous policies and procedures and being accountable for the personal data in your possession all help elsewhere in the day-to-day business."

Liam Fitzpatrick, Data Protection Consultant, Data Protection People

support a housing provider's GDPR processes and procedures.

and loyalty by showing customers how well you take care of their data, such as proactively issuing privacy notices and not just reacting to a SAR."

Difficulties with GDPR

Aareon UK's Griffiths said, "One of the most difficult things about GDPR is convincing the business that it is more than just an IT issue and that software can't just make the organisation instantly compliant."

Clearview's Hobart added, "We see a number of challenges from an IT perspective: where do I keep personal data across my vast IT infrastructure; how can I catalogue data across multiple structured, semi-structured and unstructured data sources; how can I create a single view of information to easily identify all data belonging to any particular data subject; how do I maintain readiness after the introduction of GDPR, and will my systems cope with the new rights of data subjects; finding the resources to do it; and, finally, being able to quickly cascade awareness training across the organisation."



"Housing providers need to assess their current software to ensure it enables GDPR compliance and doesn't in fact create masses of extra administrative work."

Chris Farrell, product manager, Impact Reporting

Gill from Hitachi Solutions said, "For many organisations, the biggest challenge will be the sheer number of systems which they may have to trawl to respond to a SAR. Much of this data may be badly indexed, in poorly structured file stores and therefore not easily discoverable. As a result, undertaking data privacy impact assessments (DPIAs) to build clear data maps and a data dictionary of personal data items across many disparate systems will be challenging for many."

IT help with GDPR compliance

IT is merely an enabler for GDPR compliance, by providing the underlying technology and data framework to

should take the opportunity to move the data they want to retain to a more manageable environment, such as a cloud solution hosted in Microsoft Azure."

Impact Reporting's Farrell said, "Housing providers need to assess their current software to ensure it enables GDPR compliance and doesn't in fact create masses of extra administrative work. "If your current software needs updating, it would be a good idea to look at options that have been specifically designed to make GDPR as easy as possible. In particular, 'the right to be forgotten' means that if you're contacted by someone who doesn't want you to hold their information any longer, you will have 30 days to delete all traces of their data from your systems. This can be quite a substantial task if the software you're using isn't streamlined; it needs to be easy to pull all information you hold on an individual and delete it."

Balancing process changes with IT changes

Brunkard from BT said, "There is always a trade-off in the cost, benefits, effort and risk mitigations when considering the extent to which processes are automated. The business may need to consider short-term manual measures to meet the GDPR deadline but ultimately such interim steps will need to be reassessed against dealing with longer-term complexities and further data-handling risks downstream."



"There is no 'silver bullet' for GDPR. Every solution will only work with enterprise-wide adoption and conformity, with each and every employee educated on their responsibilities in regards to GDPR and what they can and can't do."

Mark Hobart, Managing Director, Clearview

Aareon UK's Griffiths concluded, "The priority is that your IT systems need to be able to support the business processes being implemented to ensure the rights under the act are respected. It's really important to understand that GDPR compliance is a business project supported by IT, rather than an IT project that brings GDPR compliance."

Housing Technology would like to thank Geraint Griffiths (Aareon UK), Phil Brunkard and Mike Pannell (BT), Mark Hobart (Clearview), Liam Fitzpatrick (Data Protection People), Andy Gill (Hitachi Solutions) and Chris Farrell (Impact Reporting) for taking part in this interview.



GDPR IS NOT JUST ABOUT DATA... IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE AND REPUTATION

Karen Cheeseman, GDPR & Data Consultant, Privacy Trust

If you are tired of reading articles about GDPR as the new onerous regulation or burden that's going to be the downfall of your organisation if you don't comply because you will suffer huge fines, then this is the one for you.

GDPR is about people; your tenants, suppliers and employees. It's about data; your data, my data and their data. And it's about how you communicate your privacy practices – it's this that helps to build the reputation of your brand and your organisation.

GDPR is the biggest shake-up to data protection in over 20 years and, in my opinion, it's well overdue. We now live in an age where we are all happy to give out our personal data when asked without question. GDPR will cover both the private and public sector; it is helping us safeguard data in the digital age.

GDPR is an opportunity

Yes, really it is – it's an opportunity to build and strengthen trust between you and your tenants, employees and suppliers. GDPR brings in accountability and transparency, and it's about being honest about why and how you process data. It is putting privacy at the top of the agenda, and treating the data of others in the same way you would want your own data to be treated.

GDPR is about embedding a privacy culture within your organisation, training your team, building a privacy culture, but how do you do this?

The first step to compliance is to carry out a GAP analysis; this will give you an overview of where you are now, an assessment of your organisation's current level of compliance with GDPR. It will highlight the gaps, and help you identify and prioritise the key areas that you must address prior to May 2018, thus using your resources in the best possible way.

Conduct a data audit – know the data that you have, how did you obtain it, what



do you use it for, what are the retention periods, is your data fully consented, can you really say that everyone in your database said 'yes', and how are you obtaining consent?

Let's think about your legal basis for processing. Are you using 'consent'? If so, you need to be able to show how that consent was obtained. Was it clear and unambiguous? Do you process 'sensitive data'? Then this consent must be explicit.

Did you know that as the data controller, you have new responsibilities under GDPR. The burden of proof is now on the controller to show why the data is being processed. And of course, there is the data processor – as the data controller, you must ensure that the processor you use is compliant with GDPR.

Do you work with third-party organisations? This could be a marketing agency, a call centre or a data-cleansing agency. As the data controller, you need to check those contracts and you need to carry out due diligence on your third-party contractors. Remember – it's your data and therefore your responsibility.

If you don't already know them, take time to get to know the seven data-protection principles of GDPR.

GDPR states that all of your policies and procedures must be written using clear and easy to understand language – i.e. you shouldn't need a dictionary for

obscure language or a degree in law to understand your rights! With this in mind, do you need to rewrite your policies and notices?

Data breach... okay, so the worst has happened and your entire database has been hacked. If you know your data, you will know instantly how serious this is. Ensure you have a clear procedure to deal with it, a procedure that everyone knows about and is clear and knowledgeable about what they have to do. You already have fire drills, so have a data breach drill. Know what to do – after all, you only have 72 hours from the breach being found to notify the regulator and, if needs be, the individuals whose data is involved.

Where is all this leading to? Well, it leads straight to your reputation. No matter how large or small an organisation you are, you can rise or fall on your reputation, and GDPR encourages you to be open and honest.

GDPR can build brand value

An organisation that can define the customer experience and find engaging ways to talk to customers about their data will build trust in their brand. Trust can equal increased rates of customer retention and acquisition which results in increased revenue and growth. A company that is uncaring about their customers' data will be seen as untrustworthy by today's

GDPR IS NOT JUST ABOUT DATA... IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE AND REPUTATION

Continued from previous page

savvy consumers; this could cause catastrophic damage to their reputation.

GDPR can add business value

Use GDPR as an opportunity to spring clean your data management systems and processes. GDPR requires a review of your end-to-end data processing, giving the business the opportunity to ensure that all processes are aligned with GDPR, it enables you as a business to ensure that for tenants, access and control of their data is simple and easy. By streamlining your business processes, this should improve efficiency and possibly offer savings for the business.

Building and maintaining a privacy culture needs to come from the top. The senior leadership team needs to be involved from day one, there needs to be constant monitoring of policies and procedures, a well-defined staff training programme and a communications structure that constantly reminds and updates staff regarding data privacy.

Nearly there...

Do you know where your data travels to? You need to know. You need to be able to prove that you are doing everything you can to be GDPR-compliant, so make sure you have an audit trail, log all training, changes to policies, notices

and procedures and if anyone comes knocking, you can show them.

Don't panic. GDPR is not something to be scared of; instead see it as an opportunity to spring clean your organisation and showcase your organisation in the very best light, use it to build trust and enhance your reputation, so take it as great opportunity.

Karen Cheeseman is a GDPR and data consultant at Privacy Trust.



GDPR AND YOUR CONTACT CENTRE

Andy McDonald, SVP for Worldwide Sales, Upstream Works

As the hub of every customer touch point, your contact centre is certain to be handling, changing and processing personal data, warranting careful assessment of the GDPR regulations. It's critical that housing providers continue to deliver exceptional customer experiences to their tenants as they implement the changes required for compliance. So what are the elements of tenant engagement excellence in the contact centre?

Consistency

Beyond simply ensuring as little disruption as possible to existing services while implementing GDPR-related changes, it's important to offer consistent service levels and capabilities across channels, business units, and agents. For example, GDPR regulation includes the 'right to erasure', meaning individuals will have the right to have all of their personal data erased when being processed using the legal basis of consent, legitimate or public interests. Organisations have to comply without undue delay if such a request is made. This capability, and indeed all services offered, should be

available across all contact methods for a consistent tenant experience.

Tracking all interactions

To be more certain of GDPR compliance, contact centres should have the capability to capture and analyse every customer interaction. This will provide a total picture of a customer's contact history which is vital to evaluating GDPR compliance in cases where customers choose to exercise their rights. Having a platform that allows for easy capture and tracking of disposition codes for each interaction is critical, along with the ability to include multiple reason codes per contact.

Personalisation

Although GDPR is about privacy of information, this doesn't negate the contact centre's ability to provide personalised, informed service. Personalisation can include understanding and leveraging the customer journey, the context of previous discussions with the business, and even preferences in terms of channels and agents. It also includes the consistency

and consolidation of information shared, as contacts are transferred within the organisation.

Visibility and reporting

One of the GDPR requirements is quick access to an individual's information and history to allow them to exercise their rights, and with the right contact centre platform, it is possible to have an immediate and holistic view. Seamless integration to all systems storing a customer's personal data can provide all of the information required to perform an action.

Build trust with GDPR

As you prepare for GDPR, it's important to look beyond the minimum viable compliance. The enforcement of these regulations can be viewed as an opportunity for organisations to make trust and service excellence their key competitive differentiators while also updating current systems and processes.

Andy McDonald is senior vice-president for worldwide sales at Upstream Works.



KEY STEPS FOR GDPR

Fiona Sheen, Learning Technology Consultant, Virtual College

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

On May 25 2018, the Data Protection Act 1998 will be replaced by the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), making changes to how your organisation should process data.

Organisations will now be required to:

1. Give clear notification of each purpose for which they may use data.
2. Notify the data subject of organisations with whom they may need to share their data.
3. Get explicit consent to process data.
4. Obtain consent from parents or guardians to process children's data.
5. Evidence how they got consent, what was agreed and what the data would be used for.
6. Allow data subjects to be forgotten.
7. Remove the subject access fee and respond to requests within 30 days.
8. Put measures in place so their systems respect the privacy of the data subject.
9. Pay €20 million or 4% of global turnover for a breach of the GDPR.
10. Report more breaches to the ICO.

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Although many of the main principles of GDPR are the same as the current Data Protection Act and even if you are already complying with this, there are new elements and significant changes which mean organisations will need to rethink their current procedures and practices.

There are a variety of ways in which housing organisations can prepare for this significant regulatory change. Below is an overview of the key actions you may wish to consider in preparation:

Data auditing

Although a data audit is not specifically required under GDPR, it's essential that you have a comprehensive understanding of the data your organisation already holds. Audits are a great way of outlining whether or not your existing data will be GDPR compliant. By auditing your existing practices, you will gain a clear picture of the areas you may need to look into and improve.

Governance & accountability

It is essential to establish the key people or employees within your organisation and their direct responsibilities around GDPR. Who will be responsible for implementing the GDPR policy? Who is required to follow those policies as part of their job? Is your executive team on board? You may need a designated data protection officer or a GDPR consultant. As part of the accountability requirement, you will also need to make sure that everyone across the organisation is aware of what they need to do.

Staff training

It's essential that all employees know about GDPR. Depending on the individual roles within your organisation, formal training may also be needed. As well as understanding

GDPR, your staff will also need to be knowledgeable of how your specific internal processes will be affected by the forthcoming changes.

Lawful processing

This is one of the biggest elements of GDPR. You now must have what is known as a lawful basis for collecting and processing an individual's data. The full details of what constitutes lawful basis can be found in official EU guidelines but, for example, includes regulation around complying with other laws – they include things such as it being a necessity to comply with other laws, it being a necessity to carry out the service requested by the individual, or that you have their explicit consent. As a result, you will now need to consider whether your organisation has a legal basis for collecting the information that you currently request.

Consent

A major aspect of lawfully processing data is consent. It is critical that your organisation has a comprehensive policy and procedure in place, for both gaining consent in the first place and storing a record of it afterwards. It is expected that the majority of GDPR fines will first be directed at organisations which fail to gain consent for their information processing activities, so planning ahead now in anticipation of the GDPR should be of utmost importance. It is also important to note that children are covered by the GDPR. As they cannot legally give their own consent to having their data collected or processed themselves, you must receive consent from their parent or guardian instead.

Fiona Sheen is a learning technology consultant at Virtual College.



GDPR AND HOUSING

Chris Burridge, Business Development Manager, CFH Docmail

Cutting straight to the point about GDPR, the central sentiment is that data belongs to the individual and not to you.

Depending on the letters you are planning to send then different rules apply. Housing providers would be unlikely to send marketing letters (which would mean that if you have built your database yourself then you should have acquired the relevant permissions). Equally, if you have purchased your data then you need to make sure that the data provider has obtained consent.

When you are processing transactional letters, such as invoices or legitimate service information, you can usually rely on the legal basis of 'legitimate interest'. Just make sure you keep appropriate records to show that you are relying on that legal basis for processing this data and that your privacy notices are clear and up to date.

'Controllers' and 'processors' of data need to abide by GDPR legislation. A controller is responsible for how and why the data is processed, while the processor acts on the controller's behalf.

You will need to develop technical and organisational measures to demonstrate compliance with GDPR. If you are working with an outsourced data processor, you must ensure that you have updated contractual terms.

Get to grips with data protection impact assessments (DPIAs) which help identify, assess and mitigate or minimise privacy risks with data processing activities. They're particularly relevant when a new data-processing process, system or technology is being introduced and are a handy weapon in the war against cyber-crime.

DPIAs also support the accountability principle, because they help

organisations comply with the requirements of GDPR and demonstrate that appropriate measures have been taken to ensure compliance.

The GDPR mandates that a DPIA should be conducted where data processing "is likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of natural persons".

Finally, you will need an understanding of the changes to data retention and to explore the likely legal grounds for the retention of particular data types that housing providers commonly require. An ongoing, regular review will keep everyone on their toes, identify any glitches and help you sleep at night.

Chris Burridge is the business development manager at CFH Docmail.

CIVICA RESEARCH SUGGESTS LACK OF TRUST OVER DATA

UK citizens are "blind to how their data is used by organisations", according to research from Civica, which found that only 11 per cent of the UK public trusted their local authority or the government to handle their data appropriately.

Furthermore, as of March 2018, only 12 per cent of UK citizens were aware of GDPR, despite the imminent May deadline for its imposition, with that figure rising to only 18 per cent in the case of 16-24 year-olds, although they are typically the most prolific internet users and generators of personal data.

30 per cent think that they always own their data, even if they give it away and only half (51 per cent) of UK citizens know that they can ask for the data that a company holds on them at any time (subject to access requests). 65 per cent believe that their personal information is being shared without their knowledge.

Civica's research found that 53 per cent of people are more likely to ask for the information a company holds on them once it becomes free to do so when the GDPR comes into

force. Civica added that while this would be a positive step for consumers, organisations should prepare for the impact this would have on them regarding their ability to respond in time and efficiently.

More than half (53 per cent) would trust organisations more if they were clear what personal data they stored on them and how they use it, and 48 per cent agreed that data sharing would lead to better services.

Chris Doughty, executive director for digital services, Civica, said, "GDPR aims to give control of data back to citizens, so it's worrying that most don't know what GDPR is. If the UK public doesn't understand how their data is being used, or the power they will now hold to stop unwanted use of personal data, then it's a huge opportunity missed."



LAUNCH OF SAAS GDPR FROM ICONFIRM

The iConfirm platform is designed to make GDPR compliance easier by giving businesses the opportunity to obtain and document consent for processing personal data, authenticate consent-givers, restrict data processing until consent is obtained, inform individuals of the purpose of data gathering, manage access controls and generate reports, and provide an end-user portal where the user can manage their rights beyond consent, effectively communicating between the data controller and the data subject.

Mike McEwan, UK director, iConfirm, said, "On the face of it, GDPR looks like a logistical nightmare for companies. However, that doesn't have to be the case. We believe that GDPR should be

considered an opportunity, not just to secure adherence to the regulation, but actually to ensure you're talking to data subjects that want to interact, enabling you to clean up databases and as a result increase customer loyalty and reduce churn.

"The amount of confusing and often contradictory noise in the market is causing companies real headaches. For example, much of the commentary is surrounding the 'consent' part of GDPR. However, in the regulation there is as much emphasis on the 'communication' aspect, giving data subjects the chance to retract permission and manage their rights."

Christian Butenschon, founder and CEO, iConfirm, said, "We originally set up

the platform to meet the strict privacy requirements and practices for processing personal medical data between health insurance, clinics and patients. We knew therefore, that we had the skeleton of a product that could very easily help organisations become GDPR compliant, without too much fuss or time, or having a big impact on their existing systems.

"We are looking at the UK market because we believe that there is a real opportunity to help organisations struggling with GDPR. The UK will soon be similar to the Norwegian market. It will be outside EU membership, but still very much under the obligation of being GDPR compliant."

Clearview launches GDPR software

Clearview has launched a new range of products and services to help organisations to attain and maintain GDPR compliance.

Clearview said that its intelligent data discovery and management solution (DDAM)

will help organisations to create an inventory of their information, assess compliance with the regulation and monitor and maintain GDPR compliance.

Mark Hobart, managing director, Clearview, said, "There's no doubt

that some businesses are hitting the panic button because we're only a few weeks away from the GDPR deadline, seemingly with no clear solution in sight that will solve the multiple business challenges created or exacerbated by GDPR."

Clearview's new software is being released in conjunction with e-learning provider E3 who are offering a suite of web- and app-based gaming techniques for compliance training across entire workforces.

CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT

Housing & Care 21 goes digital with Appello



Housing & Care 21 is expanding its provision of digital care at 100 of its supported housing developments based on technology from Appello. Following the introduction of the first Appello digital care system in 2015, 60 developments are already live, with a further 40 developments planned for installation by April 2018.

The retirement housing and extra care developments will all have a digital call system that replaces a traditional analogue system. Residents will have faster call connection times to Appello's 24/7 emergency Careline services, reduced from around 90 seconds to four seconds.

Housing & Care 21 has partnered with Appello to design and develop a modern tablet that replaces the traditional alarm units. This joint development has many advantages over the

digital system, including the improvement of social inclusion with video-enabled room-to-room calling, better security and a less intrusive lifestyle monitoring of residents.

Tony Tench, chief operating officer, Housing & Care 21, said, "In our partnership with Appello there has been a willingness on both sides to push for a digital solution to address the growing challenge of caring for older people in their homes.

"Currently, a retirement housing environment can seem quite intrusive, particularly because part of our service typically includes contacting residents to make sure they are okay. A digital system will allow us to provide a lifestyle monitoring arrangement where people's normal routines are understood and supported discreetly, with an absent-until-needed service."

COMING SOON....





BLACKLIGHT CRM AT PA HOUSING

Barry Alford, Head of ICT, PA Housing

Many of you will be familiar with customer relationship management (CRM) systems, either as a module of a housing management system or as a separate system interfacing, or better still, integrating with your HMS.

This story is how two housing providers came together and embarked on a project to procure and implement a new CRM for use in their two main office sites. The two RPs were Asra Housing, based in Leicester, and Surrey-based Paragon Housing. The new organisation of PA Housing was formed in 2017, with 24,000 homes split roughly 50/50 between the two main geographic areas.

The need to change and invest was well recognised at an executive level with our corporate plan affirming "this will mean investing more in digital technology..." and "making major investments in IT, including bringing in a new CRM system" in the fundamental aim of improving customer service.

Savings were to be made by the concentration of support services in Leicester which would become the 'engine room' of the organisation. A three-year integration programme would see most, if not all, IT services based in Leicester, although the CRM project was not strictly part of the integration.

The need to change

The Leicester system had been in use for eight years and was showing its age. It therefore came as no surprise when it was made 'end-of-life' from 1 April 2018. The Leicester team had been planning to replace it but a previous abortive merger caused the project to be put on a back burner. A simple contact system was in use in Surrey and while the CRM would certainly be brought into use there, it could be done at a later date.

So, Leicester became phase one with a live date ideally no later than 1 April 2018 while Surrey would follow as phase two in October 2018 (when a number of other

corporate systems were due to go live) but I'm getting ahead of myself.

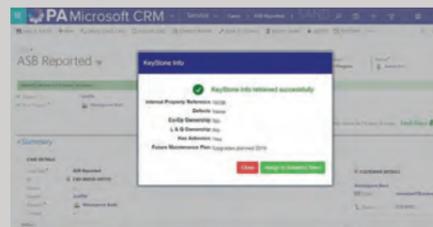


The search for a new system – request for information

I need to rewind to early 2017, when an RFI was issued on behalf of Asra by 3C Consultants to ten known CRM suppliers to get some ideas about potential solutions, approximate costs and likely delivery timescales.

The RFI resulted in eight responses, of which seven were judged to be viable and would meet the needs of Asra and subsequently PA Housing. The next step was to engage in a full procurement process with the interested suppliers.

It was at this stage (a few months after the merger) that I became involved, initially for the procurement and then going on to the implementation stage. This involved working with Charles Brooks (one of the C's of 3C) with whom I had worked previously on some Paragon procurements.



The procurement

A requirements document was prepared, based on an original Paragon CRM specification that had been prepared working with 3C. This was further developed by Asra with its requirements and was eventually issued as an invitation

to tender (ITT) to the seven interested companies, five of whom responded.

In July 2017, we issued the contract notice and also held an information day for suppliers, while August saw our evaluation of the tenders. We carried out telephone reference calls, detailed demonstrations, five open webinars (for all staff) plus a series of final presentations during September and October. Our award criteria were heavily weighted (70 per cent) to functional and user aspects with cost thus being only 30 per cent.

We had planned to make a preferred supplier recommendation to our executive team in October 2017 but due to the closeness of the leading suppliers' scores, further due diligence was necessary. It became clear that we needed to hold a 'play-off' day in the hope that a clear lead would emerge although there could be no guarantee of that, of course. The day was held in late November and given the importance of the decision, we involved a lot more staff from all interested departments.

A decent lead emerged from the day and Blacklight Software from Wakefield was awarded preferred supplier status to implement our requirements on Microsoft's Dynamics platform. The project would start in December and go-live in July 2018. This live date was, of course, four months after support on the CRM system ended; however given the stability and reliability of the old system, this was considered a low risk worth taking.

We had specified a four-year contract term, resulting in a cost of £1.6 million including Microsoft licencing and employing two Dynamics developers. If there was one lesson learned from the procurement, it was the need to involve all potential users of the CRM system.

Why Blacklight?

Well, obviously they were the winner

BLACKLIGHT CRM AT PA HOUSING

Continued from previous page

of our procurement but there are also always factors beyond what you can measure during a procurement project.

Our evaluation team members felt at ease with the half-dozen Blacklight staff we saw during the procurement. Questions were answered directly, leading to a feeling of honesty and integrity. There's always an emotional element in any sale situation; can I deal with this company and these people?

We felt more than confident in our choice of supplier, with Blacklight's staff proving credible and trustworthy throughout the process.

In large procurements, I've always visited the head office of the leading company before the deal is struck. You can tell a lot by the demeanour of staff – engaged or disinterested? Does the salesman greet you in a polite and business-like way rather than effusively (and probably insincerely)? We are going to visit Blacklight but I had enough confidence to leave it until after contract signing.

By the way, you may be asking the same question that we did – what on earth is 'blacklight', which seems a bit of a contradiction. Well, if you look it up, it's just ultraviolet light of a long wavelength (like infrared but at the other end of the visible range in the electro-magnetic spectrum).

As we've gone through the first workshop sessions, the technical strengths that we detected during the procurement have been well confirmed.

The solution

Dynamics is a line of ERP software from Microsoft and the CRM variant was of interest to us, enabling the building of a custom system for the whole of PA Housing. Dynamics can be very easily used with other Microsoft products such as SharePoint, Yammer, Office 365 and Azure.

Dynamics is best described as a toolkit of parts (such as tasks, users and letters) that need to be bolted together by means of a workflow engine to perform a business process. It's essential that the business process and the workflow to support it in Dynamics are well understood and ideally mapped.



There are a number of Dynamics sites in the housing sector who could be regarded as trail-blazers, having developed their own CRM in Dynamics. Some of these have also gradually replaced parts of the traditional HMS to leave just a core of rent accounting. Significant cost savings start to accumulate at this point from saved HMS licence fees, although it has to be said that Dynamics licencing is almost on a cost par with other leading CRM systems.

This bespoke Dynamics solution marks a bright future for us in that we'll be able to customise Dynamics to match how customers want their services provided. We'll be able to improve customer self-service portals using new technology, allowing tenants to be able to log and track their own cases in an efficient and user friendly way. Integration between the CRM and telephony system will allow our customer advisors to provide tailored advice to individual customers (with Dynamics automatically 'screen popping' the customer's details and history during the incoming call).

The incumbent loop

No, not a new Olympics gymnastic manoeuvre.

The supplier of our current HMS and CRM didn't bid for the new CRM system because, while they were developing a new CRM module, they considered that it was not sufficiently developed to meet our needs. However when we eventually saw it, it superficially appeared to meet a fair number of our requirements. This would not be the full-blown system that we had specified but the cost was much, much cheaper.

Given that, we had to seriously consider this as an option and so we asked them to complete key sections of our

functional requirements document. This would enable us to make a fair comparison against the submitted tenders. The result was a 61 per cent match against requirements with delivery of some features spreading out over 18 months.

There was a genuine disappointment that this option did not have, at this time, sufficient features to be a viable solution for us (apart from the considerable cost savings, there would have been much less interfacing and integration work).

Implementation

A steering group consisting mainly of heads of our different departments and Blacklight representatives has been set up to monitor, control and guide the implementation.

After Christmas 2017, we got seriously into implementation with a series of workshops in January and February 2018 to develop a technical system specification. A core team of four PA Housing staff would work on the system with Blacklight, calling in other colleagues as necessary.

We are aiming for standardised business processes across the organisation, although local operating practices and policies will doubtless mean some (minimal) variation.

Once we have the full system, testing will easily run to two months' duration (apart from the many workflows, we have a complex matrix of interfaces and integration across many systems). As with testing, training is not an activity to be neglected and we can see logistical issues with the sheer amount of staff training needed during summer 2018 for the many large systems we have going live at the same time.

The PA Housing project team will get some early training, enabling them to be productive in designing workflows and get the most out of Dynamics. A pilot build of a small number of our workflows will give us early exposure to prove the concept and pave the way for the brave new world.

Barry Alford is head of ICT at PA Housing.



HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AT THE HEART OF HOUSING

Roger Birkinshaw, Housing Director, Northgate Public Services

With the Homelessness Reduction Act coming into force from April 2018, local authorities in England are gearing up to meet the new requirements. All social landlords have a critical role to play, but compliance with the new laws should be only part of the story. Roger Birkinshaw, housing director at Northgate Public Services, emphasises the importance of addressing homelessness not in isolation, but as part of an overall housing strategy.

The individuals and families that are at risk of homelessness are as varied as the financial or personal circumstances that have led them to this point. Homelessness is an issue that can affect society right across the age and demographic spectrum.

As the new Homelessness Reduction Act comes into force from April 2018, local authorities are preparing to extend the support they offer to people at risk of homelessness, placing greater emphasis on preventative activities, while continuing to secure alternative accommodation for those who have become homeless. Many housing associations would argue they already provide such a service.

To ensure a lasting impact, it is vital that homelessness is not compartmentalised or viewed as an isolated issue, but that it is regarded as part of a long-term, wider housing strategy. At the heart of this is the ability to find tailored housing solutions that meet the specific needs of individuals and families.

The bigger picture

The new legislation encourages councils to work closely with people to gain a better understanding of their housing requirements, so that the advice and support they receive is relevant and effective. Citizens are often faced with wide-ranging and complex situations, so it is essential for housing officers to access up-to-date information, quickly and easily, to help ensure they have a clear picture of the circumstances.

Imagine the scenario of a young adult presenting to the local authority who has been thrown out of their family home.

Rather than simply placing them on a waiting list, with the right information to hand, a housing officer can see all the available options. When they are talking to the parents to ascertain whether there is scope to resolve issues, they can also involve and record notes from other agencies. This will ensure that the most up-to-date information is available when determining the right option for the young person, whether that is to return home or relocate to temporary accommodation, until a long-term solution can be found.

Housing issues can develop as a result of mental health challenges, domestic abuse or financial hardship, and there are also citizens who need accommodation when they leave hospital or prison. In each case, the individual concerned will require a different package of guidance and support to get them safely re-housed, or to resolve issues with their current accommodation.

Information can provide housing officers with the insight they need to make informed decisions about what action to take when an individual or family is in difficulty. But it can also support housing staff in intervening earlier to prevent situations from escalating.

Prevention rather than cure

While most housing providers already have strategies to prevent homelessness, the new legislation sharpens the focus on this approach with the requirement for councils to work proactively with anyone who is threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

This places homelessness prevention at the heart of housing strategy. And staff with the appropriate authorisation will need to be able to use the information available to them, such as details of people, tenancies and properties, to identify and provide support for individuals and families at risk of losing their homes much sooner than they may have done previously.

Some organisations have already started using data analytics tools to overlay key information on households in order to get

the right help in place earlier. This might be a tenant who has started paying their rent late or a family that has missed a payment, for whatever reason.

With the bigger picture, a housing provider could work with their tenants, either directly or in partnership with another agency, to create a tailored package of support and prevent those at risk from becoming homeless. Some household budgeting advice or specialist guidance on finding a new job could be all that is needed to get them back on track.

Steps such as these can help individuals and families avoid a crisis and stay in their homes which, in turn, can save public money by reducing the time and cost associated with property turnover.

Looking ahead

Having access to a wealth of centrally-stored housing information opens up opportunities for the use of predictive analytics on a much larger scale, helping to build an effective housing strategy for the future.

With such great strides being taken in the use of machine learning in the business world, the public sector is increasingly considering how data can be analysed from multiple sources to help spot trends and anticipate where the risk of homelessness exists before it escalates.

And in an era of greater personalisation, why not engage residents in the way that works best for them too, be that by telephone, email, text or social media – all tracked and logged in your housing management software. If the dialogue is already there, it will be much easier to intervene early and help people avoid the experience of becoming homeless.

Data will be central in helping to ensure tailored and timely interventions are successful in preventing vulnerable people from losing their homes. And as the sector embraces change, social landlords can equip themselves with the right tools to tackle this increasing problem proactively.

Roger Birkinshaw is housing director at Northgate Public Services.



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY RECRUITMENT

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY

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THE APP DEBATE

Rob Simmonds, Technical Manager, Engage Property Technology

Having a cross-sector focus here at Engage, we're lucky enough to speak to a large mix of clients looking to provide online services to their customers. Whether a housing association, block management, an estate agency, build to rent or PRS, there's always a common theme and that's to deliver the best customer experience that they can.

Ten years ago, Apple launched the first iPhone and catapulted smartphones into the mainstream. The way we access the internet has changed and these devices have become intrinsically integrated into our daily lives. Pair this with the rapid expansion of technology within the property sector and it inevitably leads to one question when speaking to clients about Engage: "Does it come as an app?"

The short answer is "Yes!"... but that's not the question you should be asking.

These days, users want fast access, a great user experience, and convenience. You can get apps for your bank, apps to monitor health, even apps to tell you when to drink water. These apps are great and are well designed but most importantly, they are fit for purpose because they are self-contained. On the other hand, there are some apps that are gimmicks, provide a subpar user experience or they take up far too much space and usually get deleted very quickly!

A gimmick app can't be the result if you're looking to deliver the ultimate customer experience.

For most people, the question "Is it an app?" means:

1. Can our customers install it on their phone?
2. Can they download it from the App Store?

Instead, the questions they should be asking are:

1. Can our customers access all their data quickly and securely?
2. Do our customers get any additional value from our app?

3. Can our customers upgrade their phones and still get the access they need?
4. Am I prepared to put in significant money for high development costs and support costs for the future?

If the answer to any of the above four questions is "No", then your app is likely to be installed, tried, and deleted before you can say "Steve Jobs"!

In general, there are two types of apps:

- **Native apps** – These are what we usually think of when thinking of 'an app'. You download them from the App Store or Google Play onto your smartphone. They deliver rich experiences and high performance, but at a cost of storage space, lack of real-time updates, cost of development, cost of ongoing support, and low search engine visibility.
- **Web apps** – These are what you may have experienced when going to a mobile website through your internet browser. These are optimised for the user experience regardless of which phone model they are using but you can't download them from the App Store or Google Play, and you can't use advanced app features such as notifications.

Both native apps and web apps have advantages and disadvantages, and what might be suitable for one app is not suitable for another.

A quick search on Google Play for housing apps show companies who have chosen the wrong solution rather than looking at the problem they are trying to solve. The result? Poor reviews, badly designed and out-of-date applications, low uptake, and frustrated customers.

So, what's the answer? How can we deliver the best customer experience?

Progressive web apps

Here at Engage, we've been monitoring the technology very closely and are very excited about the development of progressive web apps (PWAs) and the

capability that they can bring. PWAs provide native-app qualities in web applications that are reliable, fast, and engaging for your customers.

PWAs are Google-backed and allow developers to build mobile sites that load quickly like a native app. They allow offline access to cached content, connect securely, allow native app user interfaces (think swiping, zooming, etc), and are not device-specific so no lengthy or costly redeployments when new hardware or software is released.

Most importantly for PWAs though, are the use of 'service workers' which enable applications to be not just 'mobile-first', but 'offline-first'.

PWAs also provide the starting point for features such as on-screen notifications, push notifications, background synchronising, and user-interaction messaging. A PWA can access your phone, your contacts, your calendar, and your location to give you a richer experience.

In a nutshell, a PWA can do everything a native app can do, but without the downsides. The proof?

- Forbes reported a 43 per cent increase in user sessions with their PWA;
- Lancome has a 53 per cent increase in mobile sessions, with a 17 per cent increase in conversions;
- Twitter Lite has a 65 per cent increase in pages per session and a 75 per cent increase in Tweets sent;
- BookMyShow, India's largest ticketing firm with 50+ million monthly visitors, delivered an 80 per cent increase in conversions, which means more users buying tickets.

In summary, don't ask "Does it come as an app?", instead ask "Which app type is better suited for my customers - a native app or a progressive web app?"

We think that most people will say the latter.

Rob Simmonds is the technical manager at Engage Property Technology.

L&Q wins CQC award with Alcove



L&Q has upgraded its telecare services using remote monitoring technologies from Alcove, replacing its previous Tunstall devices, and has now been upgraded from 'needs improvement' to 'outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) across four supported living schemes.

One 'outstanding' scheme is now fitted with over 50 devices including movement, heat, light and eating sensors, as well as Amazon Alexas and Alcove's video-calling devices.

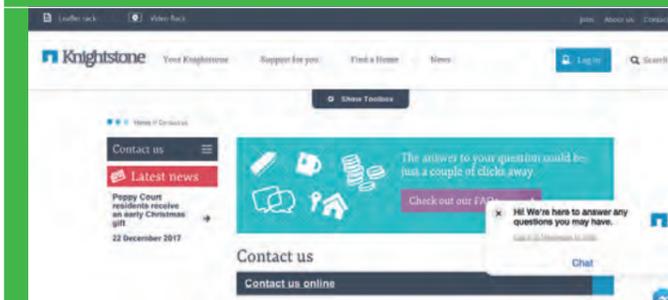
Hellen Bowey, CEO and co-founder, Alcove, said, "This is a huge first for any housing provider or care facility across the country. It offers digital inclusion to all of the residents whom can now make free video calls at the touch of a button, contact wardens via a single touch, and receive notifications and texts from their family. Alcove has also built a check-in 'skill' for the Alexa devices so that if the carer is late or forgets, Alcove will text a manager, neighbour or family member so that safeguarding is enhanced."

CQC reported, "L&Q's services worked with Alcove to provide assistive

technology with 'light-touch' monitoring for people. This technology has enabled people to become more independent while managing the risk to that person. The scheme had installed a range of sensors which gave insight into people's behaviours and promoted positive risk taking.

"For example, one person was receiving 24-hour support. However, with the sensors, this person had allocated hours each week where they were independent while being lightly monitored from an adjoining location. By monitoring from an adjoining location, it gave the person freedom to move about their home safely and with privacy. The service monitored the behaviours of this person and over time this showed they were becoming more independent."

Knightstone pioneers Facebook Messenger



As part of Knightstone Housing's 'digital first' approach to make tenants' lives easier and services more accessible, it has become one of the first adopters of Facebook's integrated Messenger 'widget'.

In November 2017, Facebook launched Customer Chat, a Messenger plugin that lets organisations have conversations

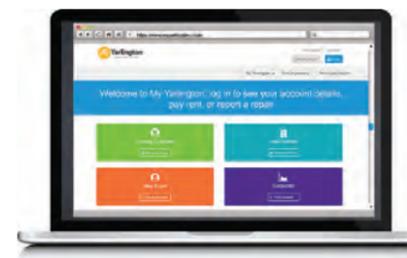
with customers via their own website. In February 2018, Knightstone became one of the early businesses to use the plugin on its website.

Melissa Barber, head of communications, Knightstone Housing, said, "We want our customers to experience a brilliant digital service when they interact with us, and for us that starts with Messenger."

"We want our customer contact to be seamless. The tool enables people to start conversations with us on our website and then be able to continue to chat with us via their Messenger app."

In the first few weeks since launching Messenger on its website, Knightstone's instant messaging conversations have more than tripled.

MY YARLINGTON GAINS 5,000 SIGN-UPS



Yarlinton Housing has had more than 5,000 customers sign up to its online customer portal, My Yarlinton, since its launch in September 2017.

Sam Leigh, executive director of service and transformation, Yarlinton Housing, said, "We are thrilled that more than 5,000 of our customers have signed up to My Yarlinton and are using the online self-service facilities. The number of sign-ups marks a significant milestone for Yarlinton

as we digitise our services to provide a more efficient, effective and economic service."

My Yarlinton is used by a range of customers across various tenures, from general needs to independent living. So far this year, 49 per cent of all repairs reported to Yarlinton have been logged through My Yarlinton and the payments service has been accessed more than 3,000 times as residents view their statements, check their balances and make payments.



TAKING YOUR ORGANISATION TO THE AZURE CLOUD

Rob Driver, Sales Director, Sovereign

The new financial year is very nearly here (depending on when you're reading this) and budget planning is well underway. If you're contemplating IT efficiencies for your organisation, it's a good time to consider migrating to the cloud. Working with organisations across a number of sectors, Sovereign has seen many of its customers successfully exploit the cloud, but this has always started with developing a business-driven decision framework. Rob Driver, sales director at Sovereign, shares some observations that can be used when organisations are contemplating the move to a hosted solution.

There are a few questions you need to ask when it comes to the cloud:

1. Why are we thinking about doing this?
2. What resources do we need?
3. What are the costs and how will it affect the organisation?
4. When is the right time to migrate, and why?

Having recently supported a migration to Microsoft Azure, I can assure you that this is not as simple as many people assume. To deliver a successful migration, a significant amount of due diligence must be done at the start. As a registered provider, if you are planning a move to the cloud, you are a pioneer. While a great message to employees, tenants and stakeholders, this comes with factors you need to be aware of.

Consideration needs to be made for:

- Is your existing infrastructure reaching its 'end of life' yet?
- What business applications does your organisation use and are they compatible with your preferred cloud option?
- Do you have the resources needed to support the solution post-installation?
- Do you have access to the necessary experience and expertise to deliver a successful migration? If not, do you have access to a managed service provider or a contractor(s)?



Who to choose?

There are a number of choices when it comes to public cloud providers, with the main players being Amazon Web Services (AWS), Microsoft Azure, IBM Cloud and Google Cloud Platform. While everyone will have their personal preference, we are finding Azure to be a natural business fit for most housing providers (as well as for non-housing customers). Separate from the core housing systems, the next most-used applications are typically within the Microsoft Office Suite, such as Outlook, Word, Excel and PowerPoint, all of which most employees are very familiar with. With Azure being part of the Microsoft family, there is an ease of compatibility, user adoption and overall, a positive user experience.

Gaining cost efficiencies

Operating costs have been the subject of much focus in recent years (especially since July 2015). With this focus in mind, a move to the cloud can help your organisation achieve more for less. Migrating to the public cloud is a fantastic solution to realise many of the business objectives housing providers are currently looking to achieve:

- Support mobile working - with more time being spent away from the office, employees can work more closely with the local community and spend more time with tenants without limiting their access to central systems;
- Give the organisation flexibility - to

reduce workspace, work smarter and reduce IT costs;

- Improve collaboration and relationships among employees (multiple offices and those working away from the office) and tenants;
- Achieve compliance requirements without the 'hassle' of managing it;
- Scale the organisation as it needs to without having to plan for significant costs such as technology refreshes (this solution also removes the capacity constraints around mail, data storage and compute power);
- Give the organisation the agility for changing customer journeys.

IT to enable, not hinder

Technology continues to advance and create efficiencies for organisations but, as always, it's important to plan these things first within the whole IT strategy for the organisation. You need to make sure that any concerns are addressed, the delivery model is well thought out and resources with the correct skills and experience are in place to support a successful delivery. Addressing these points will mean that your organisation is best placed to migrate all business systems and ancillary server-based systems to a public cloud such as Microsoft Azure.

Whether you do this internally or engage a supplier to help with this project, if you currently have an on-premise IT estate then a move to the cloud should result in a more secure solution that is easier to use. Through the web portal, you can manage services quickly and efficiently based on your organisational needs at any point. As with any cloud offering, you only pay for what you use.

Keeping your IT secure

In the cloud, your data is your own and you have complete control over it. The security of your organisation, both physically and technically is vital. Of course, all cloud providers recognise the importance of this. Azure, for example, has 24/7/365 surveillance,

TAKING YOUR ORGANISATION TO THE AZURE CLOUD

Continued from previous page

environmental protections and extensive secure access policies. While it has data centres across the world, you can choose which region hosts your resources (a 'must' with the imminent introduction of GDPR). Microsoft also already works with many organisations and governments and is therefore well positioned for industry-specific compliance standards. As well as making sure your cloud provider ticks all the boxes, we also recommend that you implement a DR site in a secondary location.

Making the cloud move

While timing is important, based on our experience to date we really feel that migrating to the cloud is an affordable and savvy move for any housing provider.

It helps to future proof the organisation:

- Always having the latest infrastructure;
- Always having the correct level of maintenance and patching;
- Always having access to the latest technology, services and products;
- Reducing dependency on infrastructure;
- Reducing maintenance and support needs and costs.

As mentioned above, it's imperative that you engage your application providers in the process and understand their position on migrating their applications to the cloud. For example, we know a number of application providers in the sector who have introduced hard-code into their software, something which has impacted

several migrations to the cloud. The good news is, with every successful migration in the sector, the less challenging future migrations will be.

What does the future of public cloud hold?

What next? When your organisation is ready for it... there is also a Microsoft AI platform which seamlessly integrates with your other applications; allowing you to create the next generation of applications with its AI services. The possibilities are endless, but let's get the migration underway first!

Rob Driver is the sales director at Sovereign Business Integration Group.



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY IN CONVERSATION WITH RACKSPACE – IT INFRASTRUCTURE IN HOUSING

Lee James, CTO EMEA, Rackspace

Housing Technology interviewed Rackspace's chief technology officer, Lee James, during the recent Housing Technology 2018 conference.

How are you finding Housing Technology 2018?

It's been brilliant. It's our first year at the event, so thank you for having us. Lots of our customers had recommended it and there is a great buzz here! Apparently there are around 450 people here and we've had so many people asking us questions.

I've just done a presentation on the scalability and feasibility of cloud. It wasn't a technology presentation, more about the impacts of people and skills, and how to move forward. We've already had really good feedback.

Who are Rackspace?

We started in 1998 and now service over 300,000 customers globally, not just for space in [server] racks, but also managing their IT and their infrastructure services. We're the leading cloud provider, meaning that we provide services and support around Amazon Web Services, Google, Microsoft Azure, and private

cloud vendors such as VMware and OpenStack (we even helped build OpenStack with NASA back in the early 2000s). We call ourselves the number-one services company for the cloud.

And you're worldwide?

We are a worldwide organisation; we're big enough to cope because we have the scale, but we class ourselves as being small enough to care. The biggest thing about Rackspace is not the services that we provide, it's the people.

We have a culture; we call ourselves 'rackers' and we expect you to be the same at work as at home. We want you to be you, we're very results driven and that culture is what makes us special and makes us connect with our customers. Each of those customers is individual to us and we have the lowest churn rate, and what that really means is that customers leaving you to go somewhere else for something different, yet our churn rate is just over one per cent.

How should housing providers approach cloud vs. on-premise?

In housing, there's a huge amount of cloud already being used. We've found that the sector is quite mature, in that it's familiar with software being delivered to them to use but in a service-type model. We see a lot of requests saying, "I would like to transform" but it's not necessarily an infrastructure question, such as "do I go from private cloud to public cloud?"

The questions we ask are: what are the applications that you're running today; how can we make those applications cloud-ready; what are your business requirements on top of that; are you looking to drive operational efficiency; can part of your business scale up and scale down?

We find many people stay in private clouds because their businesses are always-on, whether its servicing the needs of their customers on a day-to-day basis or for data or regulatory components. One important thing is that we are unbiased; we have a portfolio of around seven or eight cloud providers, and we help you make the choice based on your applications and your business requirements.

RACKSPACE – IT INFRASTRUCTURE IN HOUSING

Continued from previous page

Why move to the cloud?

There are many different ways that the business operates. We've worked with some customers that have private tenants and social housing customers, and we've worked with companies that are looking to build up new sites in new locations with new management.

It's like any decision; how can I align my people, processes and technology better for the business? What the business wants is a clear understanding of: what does it cost me to serve; what does it cost me to deliver; and how can I cost-optimize that in the best way? We feel that cloud can align technology, people and processes directly in line with the business requirements.

For example, for a new housing development, lots of different partners need to work on it, so we can fire that up in the cloud and everybody can connect to it rather than having to wait for certain pieces of infrastructure to be delivered. And we can turn it off afterwards. The key is that we're aligning how IT delivers its services directly to how the business delivers its services.

If a housing provider wanted to do something without the expense of infrastructure and actual implementation, you can help them?

Absolutely, we call it incubation. There's a great deal of testing and proving: is this going to work; we've a new model that we'd like to take to the market, would it work; will a new system to manage our customers work?

If you are firing up a new development, then you need to understand the analytics and all of the different pieces that need to be taken into consideration, then test them and try it. We ask our customers what their requirements are and then best align the right cloud to their requirements.

Certain clouds are more suited to gathering data from different centres, understanding analytics and how to analyse them and provide reporting and data in an easily accessible place. We suggest customers incubate first, understand what's right, fit the requirements, and then scale outwards from there. The benefit of Rackspace is that we can do this instantaneously for you. And security and governance is absolutely key from the start.

How has housing providers' use of IT changed over the past five years and how will it change in the next five years?

In short – information and analytics. We're now gathering so much information, whether it's sensor information from particular sites, my personal credit profile or information about optimising environments and customers in terms of temperature control, to give just a few examples.

That can also have a big impact on understanding the profile of the customer which can then be the new profile for new housing. You are best fitting the housing to the requirements. We are seeing streams of data coming through and what's important is to make sense of that data, and use it to solve the questions asked.

In future, I see more housing providers using machine learning, analytics and even AI to model what the future could be, becoming more prescriptive about the services offered, and becoming more cost optimised. The whole raft of information and analytics will revolutionise and change the housing sector.

Can you think of any private-sector companies whose use of IT could be mirrored in housing?

One of our customers is Metro Bank. While other banks are moving away from the high street, Metro Bank is opening more stores and really focusing on its customers. It understands that customers want to interact with them in different ways, they want a personal touch, but they want mobile capabilities as well, to provide a huge portfolio of services around the loans and various other pieces, not just savings and standard banking.

Sometimes you'll see a cloud first mentality – "I will push everything to a public cloud because it will be my panacea". With Metro Bank, we made sure that we analysed each of its applications to understand the commercial impact, the operability impact, who was using that application on a day-to-day basis, if it was going to be more cost effective and what the right solution would be.

We host the whole of Metro Bank today. If Metro Bank goes down in any way,

it has to report itself to parliamentary committees, for example. And in the housing sector, they're under similar scrutiny and regulatory controls in terms of what they do. So Metro Bank is a perfect example in the private sector and what we're seeing mirrored by the housing sector is that we pick the right solution but take everything into consideration, not just the infrastructure.

How have you helped companies create their own 'customer centricity'?

'Customer centricity' is in Metro Bank's own strategy. We're showing that we're a partner that thinks the same way. Come to Rackspace headquarters, see how we operate on a day-to-day basis and what we do in terms of how we look after our staff.

We have our own internal customer centricity, known as a technical career track. A number of our experts are technical, so our highest grade within that technical career track is the same level as a director within Rackspace.

We want you to be the best technical person you can be, without having to manage different people, and we'll reward you for that because we think that's amazing.

Have you always had that ethos?

Yes, from day one. We call it a fanatical experience. We want to give you the best support experience you could ever have, we give dedicated people to dedicated accounts, and we make sure that you speak to a 'racker' that understands you.

We have something called 'Fanatic of the Month', and we stand up and tell everybody how things are coming on. It's about transparency, and then we celebrate successes. We also highlight where we've areas to improve, and take both customer feedback and all the 'racker' feedback and make sure that we act on that.

Rackspace is more than just a job; it feels like a home. We have passionate people that love coming to work and actually solving problems but, more importantly, love working with the people that they work with.

Lee James is the chief technology officer for EMEA at Rackspace

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THINKING SMARTER ABOUT VOIDS

Neil Harvey, CTO, Kirona

Neil Harvey, CTO of Kirona, explores how housing providers can turn periods between tenants around more effectively and use IoT technology to minimise void periods.

Void. It's an unpopular word in most sectors and settings, and the housing industry is no exception. Empty properties equate to immediate lost revenues since no rent is collected, but they can also be costly over time, with empty homes even depreciating the value of entire neighbourhoods. According to the latest government figures, there are approximately 200,000 long-term vacant homes across England, which means those that have been empty for over six months. This is an undeniable waste of real estate in light of the ongoing demand for new housing.

However, void properties are also prime targets for regeneration. Without tenants in situ, changes and improvements can be made far more efficiently – it's the ideal time to carry out renovations and installations. Furthermore, if these enhancements are made in a strategic way, the property can be made far more attractive to tenants, so as to reduce void time in the future.

A holistic approach, drawing on the internet of things and automated technologies, and thinking from the tenants' perspective, is key.

Effective repairs and maintenance

One of the most common complaints from those living in rented accommodation, whether privately or through a housing association, is that landlords take too long to carry out requested repairs or that repairs and maintenance tasks are carried out to a poor standard, and sometimes not at all. As such, running an effective repairs and maintenance programme is a powerful way for landlords to attract tenants and position themselves as proactive leaders in their field.

By carrying out comprehensive programmes of improvements during void periods, landlords can complete multiple jobs in a short amount of time, reducing the chance of further works being needed once there are tenants in place. Indeed, messy or disruptive jobs may only be possible during voids.

However, it's vital that such works are carried out as efficiently as possible so that the property isn't forced into a longer void period than necessary – and in turn, this requires extremely tight project management. Works can easily spread beyond one or two properties too; after all, if a particular specialist tradesman has been called out, it makes sense to cover as many properties in one go as possible. The same rules regarding efficiency apply, of course, once tenants are in place.



Better energy management

The internet of things is powering a drive towards smarter homes, whereby tenants can better understand how their home is performing and what it costs to run. By introducing such technologies, landlords can actively respond to market demands, and empower and therefore attract future tenants.

Smart meters, which intelligently analyse the energy use in a property, are one of the most commonly-reported aspects of the IoT. Yet smart meters have had a slower than anticipated take-up in the housing sector because there is no direct onus on housing providers to install them, although doing so can enable their properties to run more efficiently and

attract tenants who want to manage their energy costs more closely.

There are numerous advantages of using void periods to install smart meters – there's no risk of the tenant being out at the appointed time, so installation is more effective, the move-in process for the new tenant is smoother because the utilities are up and running straight away, and electricity is available for other maintenance and repairs during that void period. It really is win, win – and win again. In short, as with repairs and maintenance work, void periods are the ideal opportunity to install smart meters.

Improving the insulation throughout properties is another powerful way in which landlords can make their properties run more cost-effectively both for themselves and their tenants and, once again, this is an ideal job for carrying out during void periods.

Automating enhancements

These suggestions might sound compelling, but they also result in a long list of tasks to be managed precisely when landlords are hurriedly searching for new tenants to move in. Certainly, void periods might be the most efficient time to carry out certain jobs but if those tasks take too long or interrupt each other, then the whole thing becomes wildly inefficient, cumbersome and costly.

If void periods are to be truly optimised, then it's not enough to simply choose a list of proactive improvement works; those works also need to be undertaken in a logical and time-sensitive manner; decorators after electricians and joiners, for example. This approach not only keeps that specific void period to a minimum, but it also makes it easier to manage the multiple trades that take a property to peak condition, thereby reducing the likelihood of future void periods.

This is where field service automation technologies can be a powerful ally, enabling housing providers to optimise

THINKING SMARTER ABOUT VOIDS

Continued from previous page

the planning and scheduling of complex projects and logically sequence resources. Throughout void periods, work can be completed as efficiently as possible, while also providing a single top-line view of all works. In this way, bottlenecks on specific projects can be

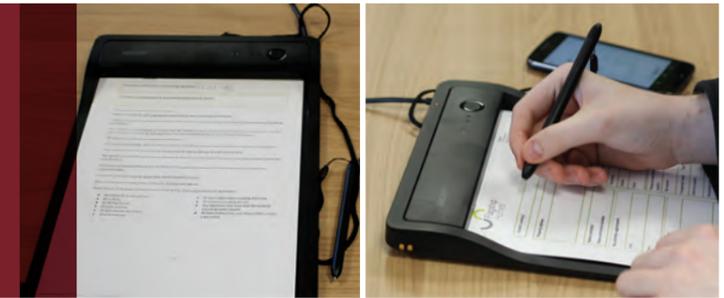
identified and fixed, and performance against different project targets can be tracked clearly.

Maximising productivity during void periods is about first understanding the enhancements and installations that can make a significant difference to tenants,

but which are best introduced when the property is empty. And secondly about managing those enhancements in a logical sequence, best achieved through field service automation software.

Neil Harvey is CTO of Kirona.

DIGITAL CLIPBOARD TRIAL AT FLAGSHIP



Flagship Group has just started a pilot project to use Wacom Clipboards among its housing teams in Norfolk and Suffolk. The electronic clipboards combine paper form-filling with real-time data capture and are connected to the housing officers' mobile phones and from there to Flagship's back-office systems.

The three-month trial is expected to demonstrate a variety of benefits of using the Wacom devices, including a reduction in paper and printed forms, less duplication of work, better and faster document access and longer-term cost reductions.

Yogesh Gohil, head of technology, Flagship Group, said, "The use of the Wacom Clipboard is really exciting because we believe it can support and improve the way we work. We're

always looking for better ways to deliver our services which includes being innovative and cost effective at the same time.

"This digital solution will hopefully make a huge difference because we'll be able to provide a quicker and more efficient service for our customers."

Marie-Claire Delbrouque, director of housing and customer insight, Flagship Group, said, "We're really pleased to be trialling the clipboard and intend to roll it out more widely if it's a success. One of the key purposes of the Wacom devices is to free up the time of our housing officers so they can work more efficiently."

STAYSAFE APP FOR ASPIRE'S LONE WORKERS

Aspire Housing replaces its dedicated safety devices with a smartphone 'StaySafe' app to protect and monitor its lone workers.



- Easy to use
- All you need is a phone or tablet
- Check-in, Panic and Duress alerts
- Pair with discreet wearable tech

don't check-in within a specified time. The app works on iOS and Android and offers a wide range of functions including a panic button, working session expiry and low battery warnings, GPS tracking, inactivity and duress alerts. If a worker activates the app's panic button or fails to check in, alerts are automatically

StaySafe is an app and surrounding cloud-based monitoring service which tracks a lone worker's locations on a real-time map and alerts their manager if they

triggered on screen and via text and email, allowing Aspire to take immediate action.

Clare Godbold, HR business partner, Aspire Housing, said, "StaySafe has been very well received. Most of our workers already carry smartphones or tablets for work, so they've found the app easy and convenient to use. StaySafe appealed to us because the app has a huge range of features and offers all the functionality we need in one place.

"As we have multiple workers visiting many properties and tenants' homes, being able to see their location on a live map is imperative. The ability to prompt staff to check in safely at regular intervals means we get positive affirmation they are safe throughout the day."

Don Cameron, CEO, StaySafe, said, "Employees in the housing sector can be extremely vulnerable because they need to visit empty properties, carry out maintenance work and meet with tenants, often by themselves. StaySafe helps to ensure that any employees who find themselves in danger can discreetly signal for help and be found quickly, before a situation has the chance to escalate."



CUT OUT THE GUESSWORK BY MAPPING YOUR DATA

Rick Thompson, GIS Consultant, Oxford Data Consultancy

Geographic information systems (GIS) are now being taken up by many innovative housing providers to create efficiencies, transform their businesses and provide strategic insights.

99 per cent of housing data has some form of spatial element, such as property location, street furniture, communal grounds, estates, commercial buildings and development sites. By taking housing data and visualising and analysing it within a GIS gives you a strategic overview of your organisation by providing you with accurate information and helping you with improving processes, visualising data, potentially saving you money along with many other benefits such as enabling mobile working.

We all want to save money when we can and having your grounds maintenance information in a GIS offers the most tangible saving. Housing providers who have gone down this route have reported savings of 10-15 per cent on their grounds maintenance contracts.

The traditional way is to give potential contractors a pile of maps, let them work out the area of grass then add a bit on for contingencies and give you a price. Using GIS, your grounds maintenance data is captured over OS Mastermap giving an accurate record of the area of grass allowing your contractor to price on an accurate record without adding 'extras'. Capturing this information in a digital format allows an organisation to truly see their responsibilities and assists with upcoming tenders to reduce costs as well as helping to produce accurate service charges and providing information to those that need it.

Other cost savings may not be as obvious, but if a task can be done more efficiently then there is a saving in man hours, or it could be a situation where strategic decisions need to be made and the more information that can be



brought to bear, the more informed your decision. All departments stand to benefit from using GIS corporately. The following examples demonstrate this.

Asset management

Programmes of work - does the rest of the organisation know where and when you are working on improvement works? Having a programme of works is one thing but what about sharing this with the rest of the organisation? Sharing this information through web mapping can help housing officers when dealing with queries on the ground from tenants rather than wasting staff and customer time in finding the information or the right person who has the information. Also by having this information in a GIS allows for more efficient and effective planning of these works.

NPV thematic maps - making best use of your NPV data for more informed decisions. If you have a net present value for your stock then you are in a great position to start thinking strategically about your stock going forward and whether you invest, maintain or release; visualising this data spatially can give more information and insight than any spreadsheet or database. Combining NPV data with other information can help you to view this information in a completely different way.

Repairs analysis - where are the true hotspots? Producing reports on the number or type of repairs for a particular estate or patch is achievable but this only shows you themes or issues at these pre-designed geographical areas. Visualising this data and analysis within a GIS allows you to look past these boundaries from your housing management system and allows you to see the data overlaid on real-world geographies / groups of properties. GIS also allows for simple data filtering without the need to request a new report or build one from your housing management system.



Housing services

Vulnerable tenant mapping - spot where you have concentrations of vulnerable tenants and see how close they are to the particular services you offer. This can help to coordinate particular initiatives or new services which you are offering and also links to community investment.

CUT OUT THE GUESSWORK BY MAPPING YOUR DATA

Continued from previous page

Location profiling of your properties to help with lettings - to help you 'sell' to a prospective tenant, a location profile, specific to each property, will give them information about local services, school catchment areas, public transport, post offices, community centres, doctors surgeries, etc.

Business improvement

Service charge setting - analyse which properties are paying service charges and clearly define what they should be paying. Using a GIS and the grounds maintenance data you have had captured, you can establish an exact amount of land which is maintained and divide this up equally by properties within the area, resulting in service charges that are more accurate, fair and transparent for your tenants.

Create new housing / repairs patches based on service demand and geography - are you looking to reshape your workforce, or do you think your mobile teams could have fairer, more

effective patches? By analysing your demand, you can create new patches or estates based on the result, and building in geographical considerations to minimise travelling in order to increase productivity.

Development & sales

Development site feasibility - where are we building and what should we be building? GIS can be used to look at potential development sites and establish information about a site without extensive site visits or consultants by looking at flood risk, radon risk, local services and infrastructure to name just a few criteria.

These are merely a small selection of tasks that can be done using GIS. As a tool to capture information, GIS allows you to compare your property list with land ownership and property boundaries and find out exactly what you own.

Nowadays, GIS is very flexible and can run on desktops, tablets or mobile phones. Costs are much more realistic



and can be adapted to suit most budgets. With the amount of data now available (not just your own but also open-source data), to make the most of it requires an innovative approach and GIS, although having been around for a long time, is now proving to be the ideal vehicle for housing providers to develop for the future.

Rick Thompson is a GIS consultant at Oxford Data Consultancy.

SMART-VENTILATION LAUNCHES IOT HOUSING APP

Smart-Ventilation has developed an IoT-enabled, low-energy ventilation system that provides an intelligent means to control indoor air quality and reduce condensation and moisture problems, particularly for modern airtight properties.

Smart-Vent is connected to the cloud via LoRaWAN, removing the need for a broadband router in each property. Remote data access provides real-time monitoring and environmental data for each room, enabling diagnostics and predictive maintenance for large users such as social housing providers.

Sensors in the Smart-Vent system detect indoor environmental problems such as low temperatures and high humidity, providing early warnings of aspects such as damp and fuel poverty before they become major health issues. The Smart-Vent service also includes an app for residents to use.

Clarion creates CIO role



Clarion Housing Group has appointed Ian Woosey to its newly-created role of chief information officer. Before joining Clarion, Woosey was CIO of, respectively, food distributor Brakes and Carpetright.

Woosey's role will focus on IT, business solutions, data and business intelligence functions, as well as preparations for the initial roll-out of Clarion's ERP platform later this year.

He said, "I look forward to applying my experience of customer-facing businesses to help Clarion take a strategic role within the sector. There are huge opportunities for housing providers to benefit from further digitisation and the internet of things, and these will both be key focus areas for us."

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE 2018

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY
2018 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

The Housing Technology 2018 conference and executive forum took place at the beginning of March at the Q Hotels' Oxford Belfry, with over 450 senior attendees from housing providers and IT suppliers during the course of the two-day event.

Housing Technology would like to thank to all of the speakers, guests, sponsors and exhibitors who made this year's conference such an excellent forum for sharing information on IT in housing and for networking with like-minded peers.

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY
2019 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

Based on the success of this year's event, we have already confirmed the dates (6-7 March 2019) for Housing Technology 2019; please see www.housing-technology.com/events/ht19 for outline details.

"The keynote presentations were exciting, radical and transformational. Many thanks for organising such a fabulous conference."

BARNET HOMES



"Housing Technology is a great conference to attend."

ACCORD HOUSING



"Thanks for making this year's conference the best yet. You keep setting the bar very high, then raising it again!"

MUIR GROUP



"The event was highly organised, well attended and thought provoking across an invaluable range of highly pertinent topics."

CENTRAL NETWORKS & TECHNOLOGIES



"Difficult to improve – genuinely a great event with great content."

CIVICA



"This was my first Housing Technology conference and it was a goldmine of information."

EQUITY HOUSING

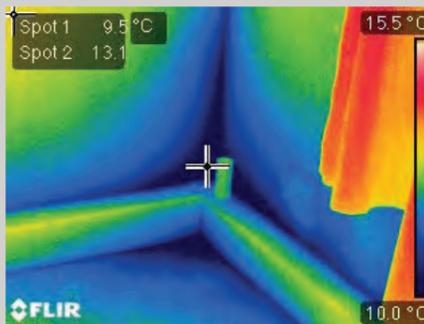


"Congratulations on another successful conference. Really enjoyed it, great atmosphere, great talks and keynotes.."

COASTAL HOUSING

Renfrewshire's IoT trial with iOpt Assets

An internet of things (IoT) initiative in Renfrewshire is helping to tackle fuel poverty in social housing and could save local authorities millions of pounds on property management and repair bills.



Working with Renfrewshire Council, smart asset management company iOpt Assets has been detecting temperature, humidity, and carbon dioxide levels at 50 social homes around Paisley over the course of the project. The pilot scheme, which has been running since July 2016, is monitoring a range of property types including high-rise flats, cottages and terraced housing.

Capturing this data in near real-time is allowing the local authority to identify anomalies in housing and take preventative action to protect tenants and its property assets. Consistently high humidity and low temperatures, for example, could indicate a tenant is living in fuel poverty; while high carbon-dioxide levels suggest there might be problems with ventilation and air quality.

The IoT network was deployed last year by a consortium of organisations,

including the Scottish Innovation Centre for Sensor and Imaging Systems (CENSIS), Stream Technologies and Boston Networks.

So far, the project has helped the local authority to spot a number of potential issues at its properties, including homes that have impending damp, tenants who needed help with their heating system, and several occupants living in fuel poverty. All of the residents at the properties being monitored have opted into the project.

David Amos, head of policy and commissioning, Renfrewshire Council, said, "iOpt Assets' easy-to-install technology enables us to spot problems our tenants might have with energy or any issues with their housing that might affect their health. It also helps us take preventative action to protect or even improve our homes, from damp and moisture detection, to issues with air quality."

By the end of 2018, iOpt Assets hopes to have rolled out its sensing technology to 2,000 homes in Scotland, spread across a variety of local authorities and housing providers. The Renfrewshire project has delivered an estimated 600 per cent return on investment to the council, by preventing the costs that would have arisen from damage to properties over the next two years.

iOpt Assets is also going through a funding round to secure investment for the development of low-cost, battery-powered sensors with a five-year life, supported by a robust IT and data

management system that can handle all the data from hundreds of thousands of homes. iOpt Assets will be working with CENSIS, with the aim of installing the technology in up to 400,000 rented homes over the next six years.

Dane Ralston, director, iOpt Assets, said, "The results of the project have proven the business case for this service; it's delivering significant returns by allowing Renfrewshire Council to predict issues and be proactive with maintenance, which is invariably more cost effective than having to deal with them after the fact. It also reduces the need for regular property visits and administration, while also leading to reduced premiums in large property portfolios."

Dane Ralston, Director, iOpt Assets



Stephen Milne, business development manager, CENSIS, said, "This is an excellent example of the IoT in action, delivering significant benefits to society and business."

"With six LoRa networks [used for the project's data transmissions] in operation, stretching from Orkney to Paisley, there are a broad range of trials going on across the country that could have a serious impact on how we use technology in the future, from flood prevention to monitoring emissions in cities."

EMH CONNECTS WITH CLOUD DIALOGS

The amalgamation of four housing providers into EMH Group has led to the organisation completely revamping its IT systems, including the implementation of Cloud Dialog's Service Connect for repairs reporting, scheduling and mobile working.

Helen Bradford, group head of ICT, EMH Group, said, "We recognised early on that we needed completely new IT systems to support the business transformation. As a result, we widened our original focus from just our internal maintenance service to all maintenance including

our externally-contracted work. We also looked at how we could improve customer engagement – we wanted something that was more AA and Tesco than a traditional housing IT system."

Dave Shaw, commercial head of responsive operations, EMH Group, said, "The message from tenants was clear; when they reported a repair, they want it to be quick and easy and for us to turn up with the right kit at the right time. We focused on creating processes that worked for us and could be easily extended to customers via self-service options."

EMH chose Service Connect from Cloud Dialogs, and while the technology was not weighted as high as the fit to the business requirements, the SaaS nature of the system and its modern technology platform were seen as delivering significant value. Service Connect is now embedded in EMH's Orchard housing management system, giving customer services staff direct access to Service Connect's appointment booking and scheduling as well as a live view of job history and status.





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