

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

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HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

2019 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

Housing Technology 2019
Full agenda now available

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HOUSING TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM 2019

6-7 MARCH 2019
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Delivering shared IT services
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Kirona launches housing workflow solution
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What uniquely connects Sir Clive Woodward OBE, Simon Weston OBE, George Clarke, Baron Bird, Rev. Giles Fraser, Dr Sue Black OBE and Maggie Philbin OBE?

They have all been just some of the keynote speakers from our past annual Housing Technology conferences and executive forums, illustrating the diverse nature of each event and how social housing can gain useful, compelling and sometimes surprising insights from very different areas of human, business, entertainment and sporting endeavour.

We believe that everyone gains something slightly different and unique to them from each conference. And during the past decade of the conference, each event has always notable for the deals struck, problems solved, discounts negotiated, intelligence gained, bugs fixed, introductions made, tenders discussed, pitfalls avoided, partnerships formed, best practices shared, innovations discovered, procurements

started, alliances strengthened, and friendships made.

Characterised by a very friendly and relaxed atmosphere, Housing Technology 2019 is simply a brilliant way of meeting your peers, sharing your ideas and problems, and finding out about the latest business and technology developments and innovations. The sheer variety of presentations, sponsors, exhibitors and other guests mean that your time at Housing Technology 2019 will definitely be well-spent, whether for both days or just one day of the event.

There are full details about the Housing Technology 2019 conference on pages 12-13 - we look forward to seeing you there!



Each Housing Technology conference is notable for the deals struck, problems solved, discounts negotiated, intelligence gained, bugs fixed, introductions made, tenders discussed, partnerships formed, innovations discovered, alliances strengthened, and friendships made.







FORTHCOMING EVENTS

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2019

6-7 March 2019 | Oxford

www.housing-technology.com/events/htc19

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2019 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

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Robin Middleton (L), Head of Digital & Campaign Communications and Sam Dart, Head of Digital Technology Services, Sovereign Housing

Sovereign's £1.3m Dynamics project with HCL PowerObjects

Sovereign Housing Association has chosen HCL PowerObjects for a £1.3 million Microsoft Dynamics 365 project to link its customer contact, tenancy management and home ownership teams together on a single system. Dynamics will be rolled out incrementally across Sovereign during the next two years.

At the moment, Sovereign's various teams each need to use a number of systems to manage their information workloads and data processes, including MIS AMS' ActiveH, ROCC's Uniclass and

Civica's Keystone. As a result of this lack of integration and shared data, customer contact staff in particular have to toggle between many different applications and screens when responding to enquiries.

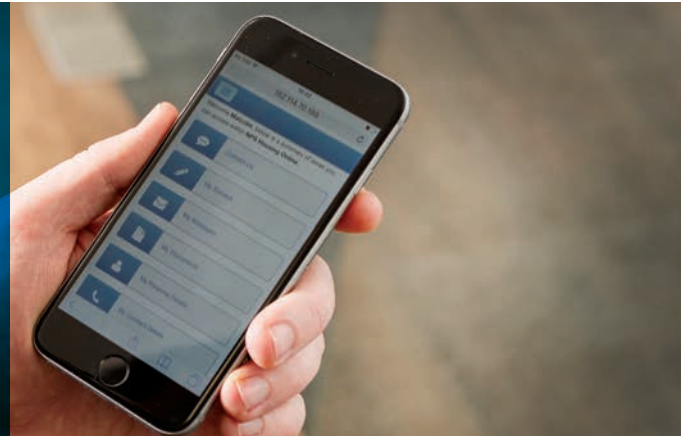
Sam Dart, head of digital technology services, Sovereign Housing, said, "Dynamics 365 will help us to manage our customer relationships more efficiently, both within the business and externally. Once we are all looking at the same system, we will all be responding to the same information, coming up with the answers and therefore giving the same advice. Furthermore, we'll be able to see natural links between seemingly unrelated situations and be able to respond accordingly.

"Our home owners, affordable renters, private renters and shared-ownership

customers are all equally important to us. If we can gather all of the knowledge and data that we need to support them in one place, then we can ensure that they enjoy a modern, connected experience, whether that's when we're doing work on their properties, helping them move to a new home or supporting them in their day-to-day lives."

Nicole Sharp, housing integration director, Sovereign Housing, said, "We have just announced the creation of a CIO position on our executive board, emphasising the importance we place on data management and IT infrastructure. Our decision to implement Dynamics 365 isn't just about systems – this is about placing people at the heart of what we do. We want to make life easier for our employees and our residents, saving them both time and effort."

Northgate's £1m deal with Northumberland County Council



Northumberland County Council has upgraded its IT systems to NPS Housing from Northgate Public Services. The £1 million upgrade is aimed at making it easier for the council's tenants to manage their rental payments and improve the council's management of its 8,500 homes.

Philip Soderquest, head of housing and public protection, Northumberland County Council, said, "By giving tenants the option to request rent payments to be made on particular days, receive reminders and even stagger payments if they need to, we can help tenants manage their finances in a way that best suits them and help with the transition to universal credit when it comes."

The new software is also speeding up the process of reporting repairs to properties. NPS Housing is integrated with the council's housing maintenance and repairs system so that call-centre staff can raise repair requests while on a call with a tenant, rather than having to create separate requests or issue paper-based repair reports.

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Capability models and 'black swan' moments

Martin Joy, Director, Itica

In the housing sector, the past few years have seen some significant 'black swan' moments, causing many to radically rethink how they do what they do and change their strategic direction. Rent reductions, Grenfell, regulation, digitisation, new technologies and so on – each of these is disruptive in its own right but when concurrent, they create a massively complex environment where organisations must adapt to survive and thrive, often requiring new approaches.

With all this change going on, generating so much instability and uncertainty, how do we ensure that we focus on what matters most to our organisations and crucially makes us fit and ready, not only to react to those challenges, but also to actively harness and exploit the opportunities presented?

People, process & technology

When it comes to business change, three words typically dominate: people, process and technology, and in many ways, rightly so because these elements must work as one to ensure that any major change programme delivers the expected results and is ultimately successful. We all know this and confidently recite the mantra (after all, it's never just about the technology, is it?), but still we get caught out, projects fail, benefits aren't realised and customers suffer.

Why is this? There are many reasons but during times of dramatic change, people, processes and technology are precisely the areas subject to the greatest turbulence. They are fluid; organisational structures are 'streamlined', processes

are optimised and new 'silver bullet' technologies are deployed, each time simply a precursor for more of the same in the next iteration of change. Yet, this is where many organisations wrongly jump straight in, building on very shaky ground before really understanding what the business actually needs in order to be successful.

Trips & missed steps

Today the stakes are higher than ever (often personally) and without doubt technology has a crucial role to play in business change, from clever analytics and forecasting, building information management, GRC dashboards, artificial intelligence, machine learning and the internet of things, through to process automation and so on. These all represent huge complexity with considerable opportunities for trips and missed steps.

With all that flux, how do we create much needed stability, a solid foundation and certainty on which to execute our strategy? Enter business capability modelling, a technique derived from developments in enterprise architecture that we have been successfully using now for some time to deliver valuable, actionable business and IT insights for our customers.

The capability model is the most important artefact in enterprise architecture and in its simplest and most effective form, it can be defined as the alignment of business design, people design and technology design.

It describes the complete set of capabilities an organisation needs to execute its business strategy or fulfil its mission. New strategies might require the development of new capabilities that would show up on the capability model before they were fully developed. Some capabilities might be outsourced to different organisations to gain efficiencies or to take advantage of unique knowledge and skills while others are retained in-house because they provide critical competitive advantage.

Jargon-free language

All of this is captured in language that the business understands and not abstract technology terms; as the CEO of one of our housing customers excitedly described it, "That's a health check of my entire business on one page."

The primary value of modelling capabilities lies in their ability to create new insights and perspectives for anyone who wants to understand the "what?" before embarking on any change exercise. Analogous to 'current state' and 'future state' analysis, it can drive development of the target operating model. Secondly, capabilities are versatile, easily applied to high-level strategic activities, such as scenario planning or outsourcing investigations as well as lower-level operational analysis. Finally, capabilities can be linked to other elements in the planning process such as people, processes, technology, information, projects and investment.

Business capability modelling deliberately ignores how something is done (that's the preserve of business process models) or who does it (that being the responsibility of the organisation's structure).

How something is done inevitably changes frequently, such as through continuous improvement initiatives, and who does things changes even more so with organisational restructuring happening at regular intervals.

However, what an organisation does is typically very stable and for any given business, well-defined capabilities rarely change over time. They provide a much more robust view of an organisation than projects, processes, applications, or even strategies. Capabilities only change when there's a significant shift in the underlying business model or mission, such as through a business transformation initiative or in conjunction with a new merger or acquisition.

The right capabilities

Not all capabilities are equal in their

Capability models and 'black swan' moments

Continued from previous page

value to the customer and/or financial performance of the organisation. This so-called value contribution is a vital part of understanding which capabilities support competitive advantage and when combined with an assessment of current performance, clearly identifies those capabilities that require attention in support of the strategic intent.

From this baseline, many other views of organisational and technology design can be related and assessed – IT aspects such as data and infrastructure architectures but also business design through business process models and organisation structures.

Additional contextually relevant heat maps can be overlaid to look at any aspect of

interest to business. Doing so creates a visually compelling view of where focus is needed to yield the greatest strategic or competitive advantage, for example through resource allocation or redistribution, project spend or system development.

Optimised customer experience

Capability modelling provides a very effective and efficient basis for optimising the quality of customer experience, such as when offering multi-channel digital products and services. Overlaying the business picture in terms of capabilities, projects, applications and metrics allows you to identify where focus is required by whom in order to optimise the experience across all touch points through all available channels.

So, in a world of uncertainty where stability and a solid foundation are critical for success, capability modelling and diagnostics can be powerful tools for enabling strategic and operational dialogue, creating a foundation for objective analysis, generating an understanding of how and where value is created and ultimately ensuring that organisational resources and investment are applied where they will have the greatest impact.

Martin Joy is a director of Itica.

North & East Housing's Civica Cx deal



North & East Housing has signed a four-year contract for Civica's cloud-based Cx Housing platform.

Cx Housing and Civica's Keystone asset management platform will be used to create a single view of North & East Housing's tenant and property information, including inventory breakdowns, repairs management and maintenance programme scheduling. The software will also streamline the data for better management reporting, more intelligent insights and external regulatory compliance.

Vincent Keenan, CEO, North & East Housing, said, "Civica Cx Housing will be our key tool in driving productivity and efficiency within North & East. It will enable us to consolidate and automate our processes and procedures, allow the tracking and achievement of operational objectives and, ultimately, help us achieve the core goals within our strategic plan."

Civica's master data management with VisionWare

Civica has completed its integration and re-branding of VisionWare's master data management (MDM) software following its acquisition of the company in May 2018.

Civica said that it now has a stronger capability to help housing customers extract maximum business value from their data, with the opportunity to expand this further in areas such as digital services, cloud software, data analytics and insight, and machine learning.

As part of its new integrated capabilities, Civica's re-branded MultiVue provides a comprehensive master data management (MDM) platform to support a single-view of customers, tenants and locations for modern, data-driven services.

MultiVue includes modules for improved data integration, enrichment and synchronisation, with added CRM tools and Microsoft Dynamics functionality to integrate with multiple lines of business.

Jeff Hewitt, executive director, Civica, said, "Master data management has a key role to play in enabling housing providers to capitalise on the enormous value locked away in their fragmented data assets, delivering both an enhanced customer experience and greater efficiency."



New or better? How to use what you already have

Jenny Shorter, Senior Consultant - Housing IT Services, Sovereign Business Integration Group

The housing sector is grappling with a range of new technologies, from chat-bots, digital transformation, cloud and off-premise hosting to the internet of things, machine learning and advanced reality modelling. Against a background of competing business priorities, deciding which of those might be applicable to your organisation is difficult in itself, aside from the related requirement for sufficient skills to ensure their effective implementation.

Keeping pace with business priorities

As business priorities and processes change, your systems won't necessarily be revised to take those changes into account. While your staff will be aware that the systems aren't working for them, the reasons why won't always be clear or straightforward.

There's also a reluctance to start again with systems – there will inevitably be costs attached to doing so. Not least, the

first question is usually around budget availability, and then there's the time and need for available and capable staff resources.

No need to start from scratch

In our experience, the appetite for new technologies can lead to a 'throw the baby out with the bath water' attitude as some take a gung-ho approach, in the mistaken belief that this is the only way forward.

On many occasions, we've been asked to help housing providers who are convinced that the technology they already have – be it a housing management system, CRM system or a host of other solutions – is not fit for purpose.

What do you already have?

Before looking to bring in new capabilities, it's worth reviewing what systems you already have and how these are performing against your business objectives. We've worked with a number of housing providers and reviewed their existing systems to ensure that they are actually being used properly before resorting to investing in new kit.

Optimise existing systems

In many instances, on closer inspection (and once we've established the business' needs and future goals), we've been able to advise that there's little sense in changing the core components; often the answer lies instead in exploiting existing

systems to meet the overall objectives. This can mean re-training staff to use core systems, to reinforce functionality and capitalise on efficiencies, such as speeding up or streamlining work processes.

Also, in some instances, it's been necessary to exploit more of the functionality that's already available in the existing systems that have, so far, been overlooked. And, on other occasions, by liaising with the original technology providers, we've managed to find solutions.

Take care of the basics

New technologies in the early stages of being introduced into housing, such as AI, will definitely have a positive role to play and we're excited about the prospects of these sorts of implementations. However, sometimes just taking care of more fundamental, 'everyday' IT systems is what housing providers are crying out for.

There's also the bonus of being in the know. One thing that helps us to advise our clients is our collective experience of not only the pressures of working in a housing environment but also the systems that are out there, how they work and how well they integrate with other systems.

Jenny Shorter is a senior consultant for housing IT services at Sovereign Business Integration Group.

Tamil Community Housing live with OmniLedger

Tamil Community Housing is now using a hosted version of OmniLedger's Pyramid housing management system.

The OmniLedger system replaces two separate applications for managing rents and repairs, removing the need for TCH's staff to constantly refer to both systems or enter tenant and property data multiple times.

The hosted version of Pyramid is fully managed by OmniLedger, so that no upfront hardware investment was needed nor does TCH need to maintain or backup the system. The implementation took 11 weeks, including customisation of the housing management system to TCH's requirements. TCH's future plans include the launch of a self-service tenant portal and an intelligent text-messaging service, both based on OmniLedger's hosted platform.



Moat chooses ActiveH from MIS-AMS



As part of a digital transformation programme, Moat has chosen MIS Active Management Systems' ActiveH as the underlying housing management system for its 20,000 properties.

Mark Rogers, director of business transformation and insight, Moat, said, "We spent time focusing on getting the overall strategy behind our digital transformation right from the start. On meeting the team from MIS AMS and learning the capabilities of ActiveH, we knew we'd made the right choice.

"MIS AMS's technology is underpinned with a real level of professionalism that has given us a great deal of confidence. We looked at the options on the market and chose the ActiveH platform because it would easily integrate with our existing systems, including Microsoft Dynamics, and our plans for the future."

Reside Housing's IT overhaul with MIS AMS



Reside Housing has chosen MIS AMS' ActiveH as its first dedicated housing application, at last giving the housing provider's 35 staff access to modern IT and business capabilities

way beyond its very dated legacy procedures and processes. The implementation includes all of ActiveH's core modules for tenant, staff, supplier and property management operations.

Gavin Rendall, director, Reside Housing, said, "We have grown steadily in the last 14 years but our technology infrastructure has remained underdeveloped and it was time for us to bring it into the digital age.

"Our ultimate goal is to provide a better quality and more proactive service. Implementing ActiveH as a totally integrated solution will give us a single view of our customers and provide us with the power to solve issues before they even become problems."

CCG's digital transformation with MIS AMS

Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd is using software from MIS AMS to underpin its digital transformation strategy. The housing provider has chosen ActiveH as its core business system to streamline its internal processes and the Customer Portal for digital services.

Llŷr Aled Hughes, business transformation project manager, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd, said, "We knew a digital makeover would sit hand-in-hand with our wider business transformation activities. Our aim is to become more accessible to tenants and give them the ability to do what they can themselves without needing to call us.

"MIS AMS's ActiveH will change the way we operate. A 360-degree view of each tenant will enable us to follow their journeys all the way through and allow greater interaction from all of our teams with our tenants."

Torus and Aareon collaborate on housing and asset management



Torus Group has selected Aareon's QL software to underpin its business. As well as the Aareon software resulting in a reduction in the number of separate business applications in use across the group from 27 to seven, the asset management module has reduced the housing provider's annual maintenance costs by 60 per cent.

Once chosen as the preferred supplier, Aareon and Torus worked in partnership, along with some existing Aareon customers, to further develop the HMS software. The collaboration resulted in enhancements to the QL software's asset management functionality, particularly around creating a 'single version of the truth' for the housing provider's tenant, property and asset data.

Gary Howard, asset data intelligence manager, Torus, said, "The collaborative workshop hosted by Aareon has played a key part in the development of our asset management solution. Adopting this approach going forward will ensure that the product continues to be developed for the benefit of all Aareon users."

Managed services for VFM and operational efficiency

Tim Birkett, Professional Services Manager for Digital Solutions, Aareon UK

If there's a key element that ensures success when developing IT systems in housing, it's listening to clients' needs. Consequently, Aareon is always exploring different models of fulfilling clients' expectations. This means identifying detailed system requirements and assessing the processes involved. One of the technology trends that delivers the flexibility to achieve this is managed services, a concept centred on IT process outsourcing. This speeds operations, while cutting fixed costs such as recruitment and related 'on costs' such as office space. In doing so, this model drives operational efficiency extremely well. There are numerous benefits from using the managed services model; these include:

1. Internal skills & resources

Housing providers' IT teams are often at full capacity and their IT staff can sometimes lack the skills and expertise needed to add solutions. These organisations appreciate the value of external technicians who can perform key functions on their behalf using process outsourcing. There's also on-hand, best-practice advice from a virtual CIO.

2. Cost

The best news is that by using opex managed services, organisations achieve significant cost savings and agility. Additional capex hardware/infrastructure costs are non-existent, as are software licence expenses. Service costs too, such



as support, maintenance and back-up, also fall. Users don't need to recruit/employ additional staff and are therefore free of related 'on costs', such as office space. Users can also readily budget ongoing IT costs, allowing management to assess Rol.

3. Security

Managed service providers use modern AV software and constantly penetration test to prevent cybercrime. This is more robust than anything individual users deploy. Thus, users feel safer knowing that their data is secure.

4. Reassurance

With someone else taking care of their systems, users needn't worry about many IT issues. And, by electing to work with the vendor's experts, they learn about potential downtime issues in advance through predictive analytics.

Aareon looked at the benefits of this model and saw the potential of providing managed services that, while stopping short of full hosting, take the pressure off tasks such as support and upgrades. The services that Aareon customers can now pre-book include:

- Aareon QL (ERP) back-office finance and administration;
- System reviews and health checks;
- Management reporting and correspondence;
- Designing landlord-branded electronic forms;
- Workflow configuration;
- Training;
- Module integration.

By using our new managed service options, housing providers can now access high-performance, cost-effective

housing IT faster than deploying modules internally; this is particularly popular where timescales and/or budgets are tight. In addition, these services use only the latest versions of our technology, provided by a highly professional team with considerable housing experience.

Aareon managed services are popular, particularly because trust is a crucial factor; the last thing users need is to hand systems over to someone who is financially insecure. With its integrated IT solutions, Aareon provides support for property-sector processes in the digital age, with staff in Kenilworth, Swansea and Southampton.

As well as being a substantial UK company, Aareon is also part of the widely-respected European group, Aareon AG, Europe's leading property systems company. Currently, the group has 2,800 customers with over 10 million residential units. Beyond this, Aareon Group is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Aareal Bank Group, with headquarters in Germany and subsidiaries in France, The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

A good example of the difference that managed services can make is WHG, one of The Midlands' most successful housing providers. Our managed services enabled them to add numerous additional housing IT modules faster and to drive VFM.

At first, having conducted an extensive review of the market, traditional multi-platform Aareon systems were chosen by WHG because they allowed the housing provider to write its own forms, deliver better audits and to easily update its

Managed services for VFM and operational efficiency

Continued from previous page

mainframe in real time. However, WHG was always keen to explore the potential to achieve more.

Having seen the significant benefits available through these first stages of investment, WHG realised the advantages of developing the system further by adding additional modules through managed services, including:

- Doorstep appointments;
- Stock condition surveys;
- Pre- & post-assessments;
- Voids management;
- Van-stock replenishment.

After just a few months of going down the managed services route, Aareon had deployed all the modules that WHG wanted. Additionally, they had been fully integrated with WHG's back-office mainframe. Aareon's managed services are now used by many of the 250 operatives who maintain WHG's stock of over 21,000 homes.

Nigel Harris, director of home maintenance services, WHG, said, "The initial phases of our technology investment had been very successful. Our repairs processes are now more efficient and there are significant savings too, such as no longer having to pay £70,000 to generate gas or electrical certificates or using the existing Contractor module, which saved us a further £50,000.

"From this very positive experience, we could see the efficiency and customer benefits of adding further modules. The doorstep appointments module lets us make follow-on appointments while still with tenants in their homes. With the pre- and post-inspections module, operatives no longer need to take photographs and then return to the office because this is now done on site before moving straight on to the next property, having already created a schedule of works. The voids module enables us to become much more cost-effective and efficient, and the van-stock management module reduces materials' wastage and saves time."

An increase in demand for managed services might also spur the

development of other apps and solutions specifically designed for the housing sector. With this in mind, housing providers such as WHG may well be in the vanguard of where the housing sector is ultimately heading. In time, this will lead to a host of new best practices, standards and KPIs. The best news, though, is that it's likely to mean even better services for housing providers' tenants and extra resources for those most in need.

This article is an extract from a forthcoming supplement from Aareon UK and Housing Technology on managed services in housing; please email news@housing-technology.com if you like a copy of the supplement.

Tim Birkett is the professional services manager for digital solutions at Aareon UK.

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Housing Technology 2019

– Full agenda now available

**HOUSING™
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2019 | CONFERENCE AND
EXECUTIVE FORUM

We have just published the full agenda and running order for the Housing Technology 2019 conference and executive forum (6-7 March, Oxford); please visit www.housing-technology.com/events/htc19 for full details and to reserve your place if you've not already done so – our 10th annual conference promises to be our best one yet.



REVEREND RICHARD COLES
– Pop Star Turned Curate



JAN MEEK FRGS
– Polar Maiden



NILUFAR ANWAR
– Chair of the Techmums Board & Legal Counsel

6TH MARCH (WEDNESDAY) – IT & BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS

- **Keynote #1: Rev. Rev. Richard Coles:** Pop star turned curate
- **Aareon:** Chatbots & drone - The future of technology for social housing
- **Acutance Consulting:** Managing suppliers in the 'deer park' of integration
- **Amazon Web Services:** Housing in the clouds
- **CDW:** Delivering with the cloud - Are you doing it wrong?
- **Civica:** Assessing the cloud - Crucial, costly or chancy?
- **Cloud Dialogs & R3 Repairs:** Towards zero admin
- **ESRI:** How spatial analysis is helping leading housing providers gain new insights
- **Housing & Care 21:** Rethinking core systems for new ways of working, improved workflows & streamlined operations
- **Itica:** Never mind the KPIs, feel the experience!
- **Midland Heart:** Low-code, digital transformation & the customer experience
- **Mobysoft & Torus:** The transformation treadmill
- **Northgate Public Services:** COTS vs. ERP vs. DIY vs. Hybrid
- **Nottingham City Homes:** Hold fire on procurement! Making the most of what you already have
- **Orchard:** Unlocking value through data insight
- **Rackspace:** "The future is already here - It's just not evenly distributed yet"
- **Radian Group:** The pain of becoming Agile
- **RHP:** Re-imagining housing - The creation of the housing provider of the future
- **Smartline (Coastline Housing & Univ. of Exeter):** Using data to improve services & better serve communities
- **Solihull Community Housing:** Should your IT strategy ever drive your business strategy?
- **Sovereign Business Integration:** Mergers & partnerships - The role of IT in successful integrations

7TH MARCH (THURSDAY) – IT & BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS

- **Keynote #2: Jan Meek, Polar Maiden:** Don't ask why, ask why not?
- **Keynote #3: Techmums:** Why mums are the missing link in the 'women in tech' debate
- **Accent Group:** Do your projects use colourful language?
- **Adur & Worthing Councils:** Building DIY systems with low code - A pragmatic alternative?
- **Castleton & Cluid Housing:** An integrated technology partnership built for the future
- **CHP:** Focusing scarce IT resources to enable future performance
- **ForViva Housing:** Form follows function
- **HAC Housing Consultancy:** Is IT a catalyst or an enabler?
- **Hitachi Solutions:** Reimagining housing - IoT ready or not?
- **K2:** Presentation title to be confirmed.
- **MobileIron:** Delivering secure mobile solutions in housing
- **Natural History Museum:** Creating the technology vision
- **Optivo:** The digital tenant - On-boarding by default
- **Pobl Group:** Data beats software hands down!
- **PowerObjects & Sovereign Housing:** Limitless delivery - Beyond the boundaries of housing
- **Salix Homes:** Rethinking Housing with Salix Homes
- **TSG:** Hidden treasure - Uncovering the real value of Office 365
- **Wandle Housing:** The 'wow' factor - From traditional HMS to Dynamics

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New for 2019, our IT accelerator sessions at the end of the first day of Housing Technology 2019 will comprise a series of 'Dragon's Den'-style presentations from smaller IT start-ups focusing on the UK social housing sector.

The IT accelerator sessions will include:

- **Brainnwave:** Presentation topic to be confirmed
- **Gas Tag:** Putting IoT on the housing agenda
- **Rapid Information Systems:** Low-code - One tool to join them all
- **Redkite CRM:** Dynamics for rents, service charges, payments & analytics

INFORMAL EVENING NETWORKING EVENTS

As part of the overall 2019 conference, we have three subsidiary networking events:

- **Pre-event drinks reception**
6-7pm, Tuesday 5th March;
- **Champagne reception**
5.30-6.30pm, Wednesday 6th March;
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7.30pm, Wednesday 6th March.



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Tips for trouble-free HMS implementations

Roger Birkinshaw, Housing Director, Northgate Public Services

Implementing a new housing management system can be a challenge, even for the best prepared housing provider. Northgate Public Services' housing director, Roger Birkinshaw, explores some of the common pitfalls and offers his tips for a trouble-free implementation.

A new IT system is a major investment for any housing provider, and the ultimate goal is to get a system that meets your needs and can take your organisation into the future. It's important to get it right, so the stakes are high.

Implementing a new system can be a complex undertaking, involving large numbers of people, painstaking detail and extensive planning. So how can you overcome any issues that arise along the way and achieve a smooth implementation from start to finish?

1. Make a good start

A key priority for any implementation is to establish a positive working dialogue with your IT suppliers from the outset.

Begin with a kick-off meeting which brings your IT team together with your supplier's consultants and any other third-party suppliers. Make sure that everyone understands their remit, and decide who has responsibility for signing off which decisions. It's your opportunity to scope out the project with all concerned.

Create a detailed agenda which covers methodology, solution design and expectations of process; that way you will find that everyone is working from the same page.

2. Ensure you have the correct mix of experience allocated to the project

The implementation is your one key opportunity in five or even ten years to get the processes, system configuration and

data right for your organisation. Allocating the right level of experience from within your business and your supplier is essential.

However, many consultants have a limited housing background and their experience is mainly focused on IT.

Gavin Pugh, a housing consultant at Northgate Public Services, supports this view. He said, "It's really important to choose a housing management supplier which ensures all its consultants have a significant understanding of the housing sector, processes and best practice as well as skills in digital, data and mobility."

3. Maintain a positive dialogue

If lines of communication remain open throughout the project, it's easier to meet any challenges you may come up against during the implementation.

Ensure that everyone involved meets on a regular basis to discuss progress, set goals and get questions answered. When issues arise, it's important to address them swiftly, and this will be much easier in the context of a positive business relationship.

Keep everyone in the loop with any changes that may affect the project along the way. This is critical to the success of your implementation, and it will help ensure that all the suppliers involved will work well together.

4. Set out your requirements

No one knows your business as well as you. While IT suppliers are experts in their field, they will need to learn about the way your organisation operates in order to deliver a solution that works for you.

Communicate your organisation's aims, values and direction of travel, and discuss with your supplier how this will affect the way your IT system is set up and implemented.

For instance, if you are a charitable organisation providing accommodation for vulnerable people, you probably don't want your system to automatically

generate eviction notices in the event of arrears; instead, a more conciliatory approach might be appropriate.

Similarly, if you provide sheltered housing for the elderly, you won't need a system that schedules visits around traditional working hours or calls that avoid the school run and so on.

5. Don't replicate old imperfections

Just because everyone knows the foibles of your current system doesn't mean that you need to build these into the new one. It's a good opportunity to iron out any anachronisms and improve the way your system works. After all, it's your chance to gain a better system for the future.

Think about whether a new starter in your company would find it easy to access and use the system. Your current workforce may be experts in the old system, but that doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement. It's important to plan for a new system that is as future-proof as possible.

Everyone may know that the code for 'plumbing' has always been '28', and the code for 'carpentry', '29', but that doesn't mean it has to stay that way. Calling them 'plumbing' and 'carpentry' will make more sense to new employees and could help with getting them up and running on the system quicker.

6. Firm up your policies and procedures

Your policies and procedures are the backbone of your organisation, and any new system needs to be aligned to the way your business works.

Ensure that your documentation is up-to-date at the start of the project. Take ownership of the solution design document and maintain that document for the life of the project. This document will contain all the configurations you request and the decisions you make.

Take your arrears policy, for instance. It's important to decide which actions you want to take when a certain amount of

Tips for trouble-free HMS implementations

Continued from previous page

money is owed or a set amount of time has elapsed with no payment. Then you can build this into your system and test it, so that by the time it goes live, your system is ready to support the way you run your organisation.

7. Travel at your own pace

A key factor in getting the implementation right for your organisation is to make sure that everyone is happy with each element of the system as it is put together.

Ask your supplier to talk your team through each individual system process. For example, make sure everyone from your organisation who needs to use the rents has seen exactly how it works and understands how to create a rent account and amend it, but don't forget the customer journey.

Put together a session timetable so you can invite the right people from your organisation to be involved at the building, design and testing stage for each module. If you need to go back and make a change, communicate this clearly to your supplier.

Sometimes a housing provider's needs change as their understanding of the new technology grows. Encourage your supplier to be flexible to any changes you may need to make, and make sure your organisation's decision-makers are involved throughout the process.

8. Keep the end goal in sight

During the implementation, your supplier should be on hand to answer questions and support your team. However, the goal is for your organisation to have a thorough understanding of the new system in order

to be self-sufficient as quickly as possible.

Make sure your team is fully trained on all aspects of the system they will be using before the implementation comes to an end, or during the follow-up consultancy period.

Build on your staff members' basic skills, so that when the suppliers have left you with a brand new system, everyone knows how to insert a new job code or add a new property type without needing to ask every time.

Focus on what you want to achieve and retain that focus throughout the project, and you will be up and running as soon as the new system is in place.

Roger Birkinshaw is the Housing Director for Northgate Public Services.



Allpay's secure payments for Newydd Housing



Allpay has completed the roll-out of 'call masking' software at Newydd Housing for its 6,000 tenants' rental payments.

Developed by PCI payments specialist Eckoh and implemented by Allpay, the call-masking software enables PCI DSS compliance by enabling tenants to key their card details into their phones without the need for Newydd's contact centre staff having to pause and resume their call recordings.

Bill Barker, customer services officer, Newydd Housing, said, "We have used Allpay's Callpay solution to take rental payments for some years. However, with changes to the data protection regulations, we wanted more protection for our tenants and staff and needed to

upgrade to a more compliant solution. "For an organisation the size of Newydd Housing, the cost and complexity of becoming a 'level one' PCI service provider would be prohibitive. However, the call-masking module from Allpay and Eckoh has been an economical and efficient answer, with Eckoh taking all responsibility for PCI DSS compliance.

"Previously, callers would read out the 'long card number' on their credit or debit cards while staff paused and resumed call recordings. This was secure up to a point, but we also wanted to remove any risk of tenants being overheard if they were in a public place or the possibility of human error when staff entered the card details.

"As well as masking the card numbers, the new system enables our staff and tenants to stay in contact for the duration of the call. Calls are still recorded while users key in their card details, but their card information is not captured so the entire call can be recorded, resulting in a

better overall customer experience and reduced call handling times."

Tony Porter, head of global marketing, Eckoh, said, "Crime targeting 'card not present' transactions is growing fast and criminals are increasingly turning their attention to contact centres. With our system, only the first six and last four digits of the card number and expiry date are displayed to the agent, while all other numbers are masked on the screen.

"The DTMF (dual-tone multi-frequency) tones entered by the customer on their phone are replaced by flat tones before they enter the contact centre environment, so that calls can still be recorded with no data protection issues. We have supplied our solution through Allpay for more than two years and it now securely processes hundreds of thousands of calls a year on behalf of housing providers across the UK."

Leeds Federated Housing takes Mobysoft's RentSense for UC



Leeds Federated Housing is now using Mobysoft's RentSense software to reduce the impact of universal credit on its rental income.

Claudia Walsh, head of customer services, Leeds Federated Housing, said, "We've been working on getting our arrears to the best possible position before the roll out of universal credit in the areas where we have the majority of our stock. There is also the risk that universal credit will mean additional resources will be needed in the longer term to cope with the expected increase in work for our income officers.

"While we have a well-developed arrears management system and have been reasonably successful in reducing

our overall arrears, we have bought RentSense to see whether this approach to arrears management will provide us with an additional tool to nudge our arrears level down even further before the full impact of universal credit takes effect."

RHP cuts arrears with RentSense



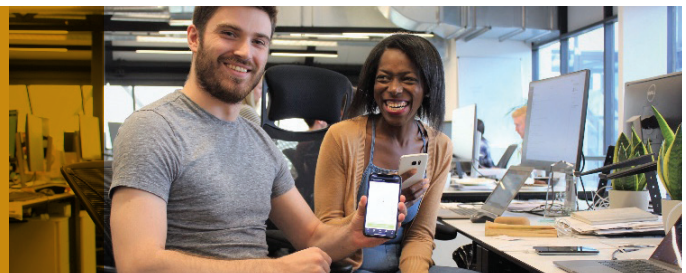
RHP has bolstered its income collection function with the implementation of Mobysoft's RentSense software.

Sharon Kirby-Harris, rents manager, RHP, said, "Although we generally perform well as an organisation, we do need to carefully manage the uncertainty resulting from the full roll-out of universal credit. This means focusing on efficiencies and financial liquidity management.

"Universal credit will stretch our resources and if we want to maintain our performance then we need solutions that not only create efficiencies but also enable us to work smarter. RentSense will help us to support those tenants that need our help, when they need it.

"We received good feedback from other housing providers that are already using RentSense. It's apparent that RentSense is the most used 'off the shelf' arrears management product that not only helps with the collection of arrears but also offers preventative arrears management."

LandInsight Go for mobile development assessments



Proptech pioneer LandInsight has expanded its development site sourcing platform with the launch of a mobile app to make it easier to find and assess property development opportunities.

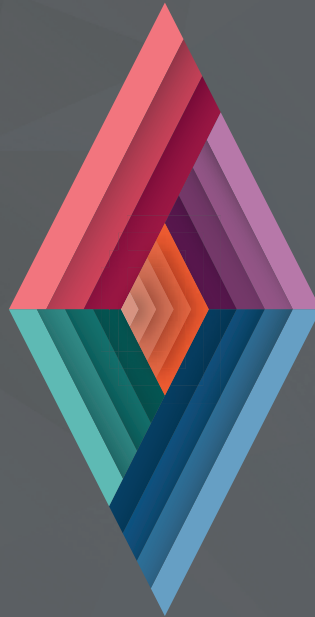
The LandInsight Go allows users to save potential sites in under three seconds, check ownership and parcel area information for any site wherever they are, and initiate an assessment immediately rather than having to return to the office.

Jonny Britton, co-founder and CEO, LandInsight, said, "LandInsight Go is tailor-made for housing developers and agents who spend more time out of the office than in. Property professionals can use their phone to save potential development sites, collect on the ground intelligence and make snap decisions on the feasibility of a site.

"LandInsight Go instantly syncs all of your on-the-ground research with your back-office teams. You can have tens of runners feeding one person in the office with sites, including pictures and personal comments. Using the power of our desktop application, in-depth analysis can then be conducted in minutes, with that analysis immediately fed back to the people on the ground.

"Our pilot users have been very successful using the app – in just the past few weeks, our limited test group has found over 1,500 development opportunities."

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Housing mergers & managing customer data

Chris Shaw, Managing Director, Shaw Consulting

The merger of Two Castles Housing and Derwent & Solway Housing to form the 7,000-home Castles & Coasts Housing in July 2017 involved a range of IT challenges; some specific to the project and others that all M&A programmes will face.

Shaw Consulting was engaged to manage the IT workstream of the merger on behalf of TCHA, a role which involved close liaison with the IT teams at both TCHA and D&S. With the merger date fixed there was no scope for any delay in the integration of the IT systems and the associated data transfers; a working system had to be ready for day one of Castles & Coasts' existence.

Managing the data transfer

One of the major challenges, both in terms of the tight deadline and the complexity of the work, was the transfer of the data from the D&S systems into the equivalent TCHA systems in a way that ensured they operated smoothly following the changeover date. The scope of work encompassed 20 applications, including such business-critical areas as the housing management, document management and finance systems.

The transfer was complicated by the fact that the corresponding TCHA and D&S systems were different, making the implementation of effective data conversions key to the successful delivery of the project. This is a problem that anyone managing the IT stream of a housing merger is likely to encounter and is one that can be solved by bringing in expert resources.

We introduced a specialist data company to the project in order to build and execute the data conversion routines. This proved to be a hugely effective choice, particularly

in dealing with the large volumes of data extracted from the D&S housing management system and transferred to the TCHA set-up.

One less technical aspect of the data-transfer element was communication between the various parties involved. On top of the strict timescales, the large team of internal staff, external suppliers and consultants added to the complexity of the project.

It was essential that strong working relationships were established with both the team responsible for extracting the data and with the suppliers of the D&S systems, making certain that the THCA team had a thorough understanding of the data that would need to be imported.

This kind of teamwork was a key feature of all aspects of the project, with the TCHA and D&S IT staff and external consultants all appreciating the importance of sharing information, coordinating schedules and working efficiently to deliver on deadline.

Infrastructure

The management of the transfer of crucial data such as customer records and asset registers was only one element of the project to create a functioning IT set-up for Castles & Coasts. There was also the infrastructure to consider; the things that staff almost take for granted, but without which they would struggle to carry out even the most basic of day-to-day tasks.

The preparation needed to guarantee a working service on day one included increasing server capacity to accommodate the new users transferring from D&S, and coordinating the installation of new data lines in the D&S offices and connecting them to the TCHA infrastructure. Another practical step was to ensure that all staff members had the PCs and desktop devices they needed to do their jobs on day one, along with access to adequate multi-function devices.

Changes to the provision of phones were also an important consideration in Castles

& Coasts' plans to deliver an uninterrupted service to its customers. We had to ensure that the phone system had sufficient capacity to accommodate the D&S staff, while mobile contracts and sim cards had to be organised for the members of the D&S team who needed them.

With all of the infrastructure changes, the key was to identify the requirements and which teams needed to do each task as early as possible, before drawing up a timeline for the work to be completed.

Day one essential processes

Part of the brief we were given by TCHA was to ensure that a minimum day one functionality was achieved to allow Castles & Coasts to provide acceptable service levels to customers of the merged businesses. The potential for reputational damage from not having systems ready for the opening day was substantial, with the possibility of customers' first interaction with the new housing provider seeming chaotic due to staff not having the equipment and systems available to deal with enquiries or problems.

In order to avoid that scenario, one of the first things we did was to draw up a list of essential processes that had to be in place for day one to provide at least the minimum functionality needed for the business to operate. This fed into the scheduling, with focus placed on the tasks that would guarantee the essential processes were in place on the cut-over date.

We worked closely with the D&S team to make certain they understood exactly what was required, and also produced a checklist for the TCHA team that emphasised the important jobs to be completed in order to achieve all of the essential processes. These early steps were backed by an ongoing communication plan for the duration of the project, which saw a comprehensive highlight report created and shared each week to ensure that all parties were

Housing mergers & managing customer data

Continued from previous page

clear on progress and their next steps, responsibilities and deadlines.

We reviewed the report with TCHA's senior management team each week, to keep them fully informed of the state of the workstream and allow them to make priority calls where needed.

Project completion

The end result was that the systems were up and running from the merger date and staff were able to perform their duties without disruption. The data was safely converted from the D&S systems and

imported into the TCHA systems, while the required infrastructure and desktop systems were operational.

As a final step of what the Castles & Coasts management team regarded as a successful project, we held a number of post-merger feedback sessions that allowed incoming staff to document any minor issues they were experiencing. This information was used to create a prioritised issue list for the new business's IT function to resolve.

Planning and communication

The successful delivery of this project on time was due largely to careful planning, a willingness to bring in third-party specialists to undertake critical tasks where appropriate and, perhaps most importantly, the time invested in developing communications channels with all stakeholders. That ensured everyone was kept informed and had a clear idea of what they had to do to ensure Castles & Coasts had functioning systems from day one.

Chris Shaw is the managing director of Shaw Consulting

Pobl's mobile repairs from Vantage & Cloud Dialogs



As part of its post-merger transformation programme, Pobl Group commissioned performance specialists Vantage to re-design its assets team's structure and repairs and maintenance operating model.

As a result of the merger, Pobl found itself running two repairs teams spread over a wide area, each with its own IT systems and ways of working. Pobl appointed Vantage as its strategic

advisors just before Morgan Sindall, its previous repairs and maintenance provider, pulled out of the West Wales region.

Working with Pobl's operational teams, Vantage defined the systems and processes required so that all of Pobl's teams were 'playing in the right positions'. Following advice from Vantage, Pobl introduced Cloud Dialogs' service management software for appointment booking, dynamic scheduling and mobile working. The introduction of Cloud Dialogs considerably improved Pobl's repairs service, with customer satisfaction ratings reaching 94 per cent.

Wayne Harris, director of assets, Pobl Group, said, "Without Vantage's help in redesigning our service approach, the Cloud Dialogs implementation would have been extremely difficult."

Following the Cloud Dialogs implementation, Pobl's call-centre staff can now instantly book tenants' repairs and assign new jobs at the touch of a button, operatives can easily upload photographs of their work to a central system, removing the requirement for on-site checks, and electronic updates and reordering of van stock levels has reduced waiting times and minimised unnecessary journeys to builders' merchants.

Guinness signs up for 221Group's Holmes

The Guinness Partnership will be using 221Group's asset management and intelligence software, Holmes, for its 66,000 properties and associated assets over the next five years.

Chris Jones, asset optimisation manager, The Guinness Partnership, said, "We were very impressed by the Holmes product and it was clear from the outset that the platform would become a crucial tool in helping to deliver our asset strategy.

"Holmes will let us model the impact of changes at both a portfolio and an individual property level, giving us real-time information on the value and performance of our assets, which is crucial in enabling us to make informed decisions, delivering maximum value for money for our customers."



Digital Unite at Clarion Housing



Digital Unite has won a new three-year contract with Clarion Futures, the charitable foundation of Clarion Housing Group, for the continuation of its tenant digital inclusion programmes.

Digital Unite's programme for Clarion Futures comprises its digital champions' network (DCN), which provides a strong central foundation for the programme for digital champions themselves and Clarion's digital inclusion team, and its digital champion co-ordinators who provide mentoring support and work with Clarion Futures' digital inclusion officers to deliver the programme. In the past year, over 230 trained digital champions have helped more than 1,100 people across the UK.

Over the next few years, Digital Unite will extend the reach of the digital inclusion project. This will include identifying and supporting new digital champion communities, enhancing the online learning experience and developing the role of 'super champions' who will provide valuable peer-to-peer support for existing and new champions.

Stephanie Noyce, head of money and digital, Clarion Futures, said, "We're very proud of our digital champions' network and the difference it's making in our communities; it's an integral part of our commitment to transform thousands

of lives every year. Digital Unite's high-quality service and structured approach to delivery provide a strong framework for our regional digital inclusion activities."

Hitachi and Microsoft's DI support for Clarion

In November 2018, Clarion Futures, Hitachi Solutions and Microsoft hosted a networking event for the housing provider's digital champions, and demonstrated some of the project's key successes.

Hilary Sutton, from Aylsham in Norfolk, is one of Clarion Futures' digital champions who gives up their time to help residents use computers and make the most of the internet. Having joined the digital champions' network over a year ago, she now hosts weekly computer sessions for residents from two sheltered housing schemes in the local area.

Hilary Sutton said, "I help residents to learn the basic skills needed to be online, whether it's simply setting up an email account, paying a bill online or comparing electricity prices. Another benefit of the scheme for our residents is that learning basic online skills can help them to feel less isolated.

"For example, one lady who was previously unable to use a computer, has now joined Facebook. She has found that joining a social network has been a great way of helping her to keep in contact with her family."

Ciara McMillan, industry director for housing, Hitachi Solutions, said, "We're very supportive of digital champions and the role they play in communities. As a technology provider we provide solutions that deliver transformation underpinned by technology, but we also understand that the new digital world

can be challenging for some and the role of people like Hilary is vital.

"Digital champions are the key to unlocking technology to those who most need it and we are committed to our partnership with Clarion to continue to grow and develop digital champions so that they can reach more people."



Kenne Amissah, digital inclusion manager, Clarion Futures, said, "Digital champions like Hilary have a vital role to play in giving residents the confidence and skills needed to get by online. Since establishing our digital champions' network, we've heard countless examples of how residents' lives have been transformed thanks to the champions' work."



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Hafod Housing's Aareon self-service app

Hafod Housing has introduced a new self-service tenant app from Aareon, chosen because of the housing provider's existing use of Aareon's QL housing management system.



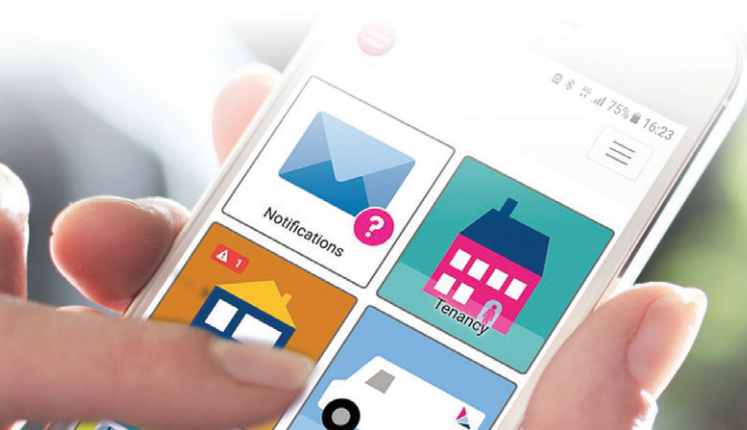
Chris Davies, performance manager, Hafod Housing, said, "We already had a very successful relationship with Aareon and its QL software for many years. By staying with Aareon for the self-service app, it removed any potential integration problems of introducing another third-party provider."

The initial version of the self-service app gives Hafod's tenants access to repairs reporting and history, forms for viewing and updating their contact details, rent payment and income management, feedback tools and tenant engagement opportunities.

Commenting on the large number of tenants who contributed their views during the implementation of the Aareon app, Davies said, "As a housing provider, we don't assume that we know best and we don't feel that we should just make all the decisions without listening to the opinions of our tenants."

Following the widespread use of the app and in particular its facility for tenants to email photographs of the repair work needed, Hafod reported that it no longer needed to send out a surveyor as often as before and it could just order the relevant parts and book the appointment.

Davies said, "Our tenants really like the new system. After all, why wait in a queue on the phone to report a repair when you can do it from the comfort of your own home using your smartphone or tablet? This makes things a great deal easier for us too because it reduces the number of calls we need to handle."



Queen's Cross & Valleys to Coast sign up for Housing Insight's PanConnect

Valleys to Coast Housing is implementing Housing Insight's PanConnect during the first quarter of 2019 to give its tenants a self-service portal and app.

Polly Thompson, head of IT, Valleys to Coast Housing, said, "The self-service portal and app will help us engage more with our tenants, and introducing the repairs diagnostics tool will reduce call volumes and encourage our tenants to use self-help before reporting small repairs."

After having been given a proof-of-concept of PanConnect Mobile Workforce, Queen's Cross Housing successfully implemented the full PanConnect solution, including mobile

working, and integrated it with its existing Aareon software in just one week. Queen's Cross also plans to implement the self-service portal and app.

David Dick, ICT manager, Queen's Cross Housing, said, "We are very excited about the opportunities PanConnect opens up. Being able to provide live information and complete processes on site offers so many opportunities for innovation, efficiency savings and service quality improvements."



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Past, present and what the future could be...

Andrew McCormick, Managing Director, Redkite CRM

It's been 17 years since Microsoft Dynamics was first introduced and many people, me included, missed the launch of Microsoft CRM (as it was then called) v1.0 because it singularly failed to grab anyone's attention.

Fast forward to Microsoft CRM v3.0, which was the first version people started to take seriously. This version was also the one that started to turn the heads of Housing Providers. All of a sudden, they could see the potential of a solution that could replace those costly off-the-shelf packages which managed one or two areas of the business or the complex spreadsheets used to run key processes. It looked like Microsoft CRM had arrived.

Remember charity pricing?

Early trail blazers in the housing sector were keen to adopt a Microsoft solution for a number of reasons. The licences were very cheap (remember those golden days of charity pricing for registered social landlords?). It also fitted into a 'Microsoft first' IT strategy and, most importantly, the product offered a flexibility that few other applications had, with its configurable interface and extremely flexible SDK.

Those early trail-blazers in housing who dared to try something new often became advocates for Microsoft CRM, but not every implementation was successful. Despite this, more and more housing providers started to take note and considered whether Microsoft CRM could benefit their business and be introduced into their IT ecosystem.

Initially, the business applications for Microsoft CRM were primarily to manage customer interactions in the call-centre. It was also used to manage more complex processes such as complaints or ASB but by and large, this was the extent of

the processes it managed. The more complex processes, such as repairs, rent management and remote working, remained with the housing providers' 'traditional' systems; the appetite to change simply wasn't there. Data, always the key part of any project, was more often than not passed from the housing management system into Microsoft CRM, with only any amended contact details being passed back to any of the other systems.

Multi-tenancy databases

Things took a leap forward when Microsoft CRM v4.0 was released. Microsoft introduced a number of new features into the application but the most important of these was support for multi-tenancy databases; this new feature paved the way for how Microsoft CRM was deployed in the cloud in later versions. This meant that multiple instances of CRM could be configured on the same SQL server, meaning that environments could be set-up relatively easily for development, testing and training. Suddenly housing providers had the means to quickly rollout functionality at a fraction of the cost and time it previously took.

Over the next few releases Microsoft introduced more enhancements to the user interface and to the development tools available but the biggest advance was to move Microsoft Dynamics (as it had been renamed) into the cloud and enable easy integration to other Microsoft cloud services including SharePoint, Exchange and Office365.

At the same time, Microsoft was also releasing add-ons to Microsoft Dynamics, with some being highly relevant to housing such as 'field service' which turned Dynamics into a powerful scheduling engine. Others included 'customer engagement' which enabled Survey Monkey-style functionality direct from Dynamics. But it wasn't just Microsoft who was adding modules and functionality at a rapid rate. Microsoft partners were also

engaged in the Dynamics functionality 'arms race', with the most popular solutions extending CRM to be available on external portals and hand-held devices.

Avoiding complexity

However, implementing Dynamics had its challenges, with the application's greatest strength, flexibility, also being its biggest weakness. Sometimes the initial requirements were too complex which inevitably led to an overly-complex user interface and low user adoption. In other cases, the reverse was true, with too little thought given to the initial design, resulting in the development of application 'cul-de-sacs' where the existing design stymied any future developments.

In both cases, the only options were either to unpick certain elements of the initial implementation and re-configure or, if this wasn't possible, a complete re-development. These early mistakes, although painful, made both the housing organisations who were implementing Dynamics and the partners assisting them far more knowledgeable concerning future enhancements and implementations.

As the first wave of Dynamics was being rolled out within housing providers, there was a huge growth in Dynamics customers around the world which meant that Microsoft carried on investing massively in development, with more versions and more functionality being rolled out faster and faster.

Microsoft partners kept in step with Microsoft, producing applications and solutions that not only extended the overall functionality of Microsoft Dynamics but provided specific industry solutions. At about the same time Microsoft stepped up their cloud based strategy resulting in Microsoft Dynamics customers not only having to decide what processes Microsoft Dynamics was to be used for but also where the Microsoft Dynamics implementation was to be hosted.

Past, present and what the future could be...

Continued from previous page

Cloud-based deployment as standard

Skipping forward to today, all new Dynamics deployments are now cloud-based and the shiny new add-ons, such as tenant portals and mobile working, are commonplace. Trail-blazing housing providers who have implemented Dynamics to its fullest extent are now looking at where to take Dynamics next. The obvious area is to fully replace traditional housing management systems, but is that a step too far?

Not really. The evolution of the early Microsoft CRM application into a highly configurable and powerful system means that it can certainly be used to manage much more complex processes than in the early days. Some larger housing providers are already taking tentative steps (at

considerable cost) to replace their housing management systems with Dynamics.

But is this next step only for larger, cash-rich housing providers? Not necessarily – Microsoft partners are creating off-the-shelf additions to Dynamics that allow the product to be tailored for more complex processes. Combine this with Microsoft's commitment to tighter and tighter integration with Microsoft Business Central (a cloud-based financial management application, formerly an on-premise package known as Microsoft NAV) and suddenly all the necessary pieces are in place for Dynamics to replace some, if not all, of the processes previously only the preserve of housing management systems.

What does all this mean for the future?

I predict that over the next year or so there will be a change in attitudes toward existing housing management systems, with housing providers giving serious consideration to Dynamics replacing many of the processes that are the bastions of more traditional systems. This will be partly driven by the cost effectiveness of Dynamics over traditional housing applications and partly by the transparency and flexibility of Dynamics. And as in the early days of Dynamics usage, there will be a few innovators and advocates who will lead the way and where they lead, others are bound to follow.

Andrew McCormick is the managing director of Redkite CRM.

Nottingham City Homes' new unified communications platform

Enghouse Interactive and Voyager Networks have completed the installation of a new call-centre platform for Nottingham City Homes.



Nottingham City Homes handles over 400,000 calls through its contact centre each year relating

to the 27,000 it manages on behalf of Nottingham City Council. Most calls are repair related, but they also cover rent accounts and other tenancy and estate management issues such as anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse.

Catherine Elliott, head of customer experience, Nottingham City Homes, said, "At the moment, 90 per cent of our interactions are phone based but we want to drive uptake of other interaction

methods over time, so we needed to ensure that the chosen platform offered a future migration path.

"We had no pre-conceptions about any particular solutions, and the tendering and selection process gave us the opportunity to benchmark products and suppliers. It soon became clear that the combination of Voyager Networks as the solution provider and the Enghouse Interactive Communications Center (EICC) as the contact centre solution was the right choice."

One of the key priorities for NCH when it came to installation was that it had to be completed with minimal downtime. Thanks to the expertise of the Voyager team and the intuitive nature of EICC, the system was only down for 17 minutes in total and was being actively used within a day of installation.

NCH now uses EICC to quickly and efficiently handle calls coming into the contact centre from tenants as well as for reporting purposes. Elliott said, "We have already got more data out of the system than ever before – now we need to start drilling into that data to achieve enhanced insights."

Contact centre staff have needed little external support to use the system and

have already used its functionality to find faster, more intuitive ways to carry out their day-to-day tasks. Elliott said, "For example, our agents can monitor and manage their own breaks better, and we have seen a real increase in schedule adherence as a result."

Since EICC's introduction, call coding has improved, both in terms of the detail agents provide and also the ability of NCH's management to drill down and gain a better understanding of the status, preferences and needs of tenants.

The new implementation has fostered a more flexible approach to scaling the workforce up and down. With the Cisco unified communications platform as the foundation, the combination of EICC and Enghouse Interactive's TouchPoint application allows users working in one NCH office to pick up calls from another quickly and easily. The Cisco platform also helps agents to route calls faster to experts in NCH's middle- and back-offices.

Elliott said, "The continuity of service we received during this project has been very important. The Voyager team we were introduced to at the outset has remained the same throughout, and that continuity has been increasingly important as the project has rolled out."

The lottery of exposure to tech - Why are we excluding parents from the conversation?



Techmums' (#techmums) head of operations, Isabel Chapman, explains the importance of getting parents involved in digital inclusion programmes and how Techmums are helping parents to get online and learn more about the opportunities the internet offers, particularly around their children's futures.

When the new school year began in September last year, many parents posted filtered photos of their little ones going off to school for their first day. The excitement, anticipation and nervousness from everyone involved was obvious. However, with most people focusing on new schools, new teachers and brand new uniforms, I spoke to one friend whose child kept persistently asking, "why exactly do I have to go to school?"

My friend admitted being rather flummoxed by this unexpected cross-examination. On further enquiry, she explained to me that, rather than opening up a complicated can of worms while running late to the school gate, it seemed the quickest answer was the standard response of, "to prepare you for your future career, I guess."

Jobs that don't yet exist

On the surface, a seemingly swift and acceptable response to satisfy the child; however, research suggests that 65 per cent of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that don't yet exist. Therefore, the idea of simply sending your children off to start school to complete their primary and secondary education and to be prepared for the working world might not be that straightforward after all.

As the working world adapts to new technologies, many of us have experienced increasingly flexible working,

video conferencing, CRM systems and multiple inboxes on our phones. However, with such advances in technology, it makes it difficult to predict what the future working world will actually look like in 10 or 20 years' time. Despite there being many hypothetical conversations around driverless cars and some of us apparently relocating to nearby planets, one thing that is inevitable is that the future is going to be increasingly digitally-enabled. The workplace will continue to embrace this shift, but to what extent are we embracing these developments in our education system, and what about in our homes?

2.7 million disconnected households...

It can be easy to forget in today's society, where people supposedly check their phones every 12 minutes and where adults now spend more than 40 hours a week online, that not all of us are on Instagram and delving deep into our inboxes until the early hours. Before we start celebrating the UK's connectivity, it's important to consider that 10 per cent of UK households don't have internet access, this equates to 2.7 million disconnected households. And of those without internet access, 64 per cent feel that they don't need the internet because they think that it's not useful or interesting, and a further 20 per cent lack internet skills; those figures mean that there are currently 1.7 million households where the internet is seen as irrelevant and nearly half a million households needing additional skills to get them confident enough to get online.

For a child on a practical level, if internet access isn't available at home, it poses a number of key disadvantages, from the difficulty of completing everyday tasks such as homework, disconnection from their peers or the stigma of their family not being able to afford the internet, through to the limiting of future prospects, given that almost every job or career now requires at least a basic knowledge of IT. Living in a household that is sceptical, wary or even negative about advances in technology further restricts development, social mobility and potential career aspirations. Plainly speaking, without increased access and a transformation in perceptions, those

families will get left behind; not in the future, but unfortunately now, where the digitally-connected world ends at your very own front door.

Mind the digital skills gap

The reality of families who don't embrace technology or those who have limited access to it results in an alarming knowledge and skills gap that will continue to widen between parents and their children as they grow up. Children with limited digital access often find ways to use technology, be it a school iPad or a friend's phone. Despite inconsistent access at home, children are often aware of digital advances and have a sound understanding of how to use it when it is available to them. Children and young people who have inconsistent access to technology may use it with a limited understanding of its dangers, as well as restricted exposure resulting in them using technology in a limited capacity, potentially not really understanding its full value or the important role it is likely play in their future careers. When this does happen, it decreases and undermines parents' ability to protect and guide their children through the digital world.

Parents often fall into two categories in relation to technology and their children. Some parents restrict all access to social media and screens. They are wary and apprehensive, almost scared of digital technologies, often only allowing their children to use the internet for homework. Some parents with adolescent children create social media accounts and follow their children on Snapchat and Instagram. In these cases, apart from it being social suicide to have your parents following your every move, their children usually always have other accounts or simply go to friends' houses and use their devices and 'real' accounts, so remain undetected. These parents, although very well-intentioned, often take away all forms of trust regarding their children and technology, and on a practical level, it is a full-time job policing, especially if you have more than one child.

The other extreme approach is where

The lottery of exposure to tech - Why are we excluding parents from the conversation?

Continued from previous page

parents attempt to remain completely unaware of what their children are accessing. They remain in the dark about which platforms and technologies their children use and are reluctant to learn anything more about digital safety than is absolutely necessary. This approach is also not ideal and if something does need addressing, or children need support with technology, the parents often feel far too out of their depth to even begin. Eventually, this might result in the child ceasing to ask for parental support and look for answers elsewhere, including notoriously unreliable online sources.

Constant connectivity

Some parents have tried to strike a more realistic balance and understand that this new integration of technology into our family lives is a learning curve. The knowledge gap between parents and children might be the largest it has ever been due to vast and fast developments in technology over the past decade. Complex issues require ongoing, open discussions with our children, and it's not about parents stating that they always have the right answers. It's important that children and young people know who they can speak to when the inevitable online issues do happen, or equally as important for them to be able to verbalise how they are coping with constant connectivity in their daily lives. There is great value in children and parents figuring things out together, where possible treating children as the experts that they often are, especially as adolescents.

Opportunities around technology are becoming increasingly visible, with technology apprenticeships being offered by most large companies and also by many housing providers. In some cases, they are exciting, practical opportunities with experience and desirable career prospects. However, on the whole, parental influence still holds the vast amount of weight on young people's further education choices and early career decisions.

Finding the missing link

The missing link between raising awareness of the opportunities available, changing attitudes and seeing more young people actively embrace careers in the technology sector is to include parents in a more meaningful way. Parents are often the missing piece of the puzzle. They might get excluded from conversations or included only as an afterthought and

largely remain uninvited to impressive school talks with role models from emerging industries and leading figures in technology. If we want to support more young people to take advantage of everything technology has to offer and make technology roles accessible to everyone, we must educate and include parents too. Without the genuine engagement of parents, they can at best remain fearful about future possibilities, or at worst become blockers due to a lack of understanding.

Organisations such as Techmums (#techmums) are attempting to support more parents to be a part of the conversation around children, technology and future opportunities. Techmums, a social enterprise founded by technology evangelist Dr Sue Black, supports mothers to upskill in all things digital, from understanding email and the office in the cloud, right through to how to keep themselves and their families safe online, how to manage their finances digitally, as well as providing mums with an introduction to web design, app design and coding.

Techmums has partnered with Hyde Housing to offer a 10-week 'digital skills club' for mums in Hyde's community in Stockwell, London. Working with housing providers makes sense for organisations such as Techmums to reach parents who are harder to reach and in need of flexible employment.

Some of the young mothers I met through Techmums talked about struggling to complete homework tasks with their children because it's presumed every household now has multiple iPads floating around and endless super-fast broadband, when in reality their only access to the internet is through the limited data on their phones or, if they are lucky, at the local library. For some families, heating their homes or putting food on the table is a more crucial component of their weekly budgeting than an expensive monthly broadband bill. If the primary-school children of today are going to go into tomorrow's unknown careers, we must empower parents to embrace continuing advances in technology, rather than be hesitant, negative or scared. Ultimately, these attitudes detrimentally affect their own children's aspirations and life chances. Let's include parents in these exciting conversations; the ones that blow minds, ignite interests and result in us all feeling fired up rather than fearful about the future.

Local digital-inclusion schemes

We must seriously support families who can't get online with the skills and resources to do so. Support for families struggling to bring technology into their homes is inconsistent and, unsurprisingly, a postcode lottery. One amazing example is through an iPad-lending scheme led by Leeds Council in partnership with 02. Leeds Council have invested in 150 iPads with 5Gb data allowances available for people to borrow for up to a month at a time.

Another option could be to offer reduced broadband rates for single-parent families or in hollowed-out neighbourhoods where the richest are living alongside the poorest in the same communities, there could be a sponsored router scheme. Richer families could pay their internet provider to support a family living nearby to have similar broadband access as themselves or contribute towards a local, communal internet-access fund.

Not everyone needs a digital detox...

The next time you find yourself at the centre of the inevitably competitive discussion about the relentless 'always on' internet culture, make sure you mention that not everyone is in need of an urgent 'digital detox'; unfortunately, in many cases, it's quite the opposite.

The 'digital divide' is real and unless we change our approach, it will continue to reduce social integration and future generations' aspirations. Let's not leave behind the 2.7 million households and estimated 750,000 children who still have only limited access to the internet in the UK today.

Parents just want the best for their children and where possible want to be an active part of their lives and futures. Let's include parents to ensure they positively influence their children and allow everyone to actively understand and embrace the evolving digital world.

And although there are entire sectors yet to be created, fear not, you can tell your children that they still must keep going to school, even if it's just to use the computers. On second thoughts, maybe just until the neighbours agree to sponsor a wi-fi router...

Isabel Chapman is head of operations at Techmums (#techmums).



What does digital inclusion 2.0 look like?

Jeremy Chelot, CEO, Community Fibre

The internet has undoubtedly revolutionised, and in most cases, improved the way people live, work and play; from the creation of work opportunities to how people and businesses interact with each other. This includes transforming how individuals interact with government, since it allows for greater access to public services and transparency of information, through free and open government data.

That said, while the internet has indeed improved the lives of many, it's unfortunately the case that many still live without access to good quality digital infrastructure or the fundamental skills to take full advantage of the internet. To address this issue, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has focused on promoting 'digital inclusion' in recent years, through the development of schemes aimed at improving the digital skills of the UK. However, as technology continues to develop at an increasing rate, the UK must consider what the next steps are for digital inclusion.

The issue of digital inclusion first came into the spotlight when Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, appeared at the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony. His message, that the internet was created for everyone, was broadcast across the globe. Since then, the UK government has been actively committed to ensuring that the benefits of the internet are available to all British people.

Access, skills, motivation & trust

The government's Digital Inclusion Strategy paper, published in 2014, was significant in raising awareness around

internet accessibility in the UK and set out how the government planned to tackle the growing digital divide. The report identified access, skills, motivation and trust as the four key challenges that people are most often faced with when using the internet and outlined a number of steps which the government would take to reduce these barriers. Since the publication of the report, the government has been successful in its promotion of digital inclusivity, with a primary focus on improving people's digital skills, most notably through the introduction of the Digital Skills partnership. This scheme, spearheaded by Matt Hancock, former Minister for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, was set up to encourage people to develop better digital skills from programmes established through collaboration between the public, private and charity sectors.

In a similar vein to the ambitions of the Digital Skills partnership, it is important for businesses to consider how they can also enhance the digital skills of local residents. Through our own digital champions programme, we sponsor individuals through a digital training course provided by the not-for-profit organisation Digital Unite. Indeed, our digital champions have already had a huge impact on people's lives, from reducing loneliness to improving interactions for people for whom English is not their first language.

New digital skills

A good example of this was demonstrated by one of our champions, who is a carer for elderly people. The new digital skills that he acquired from the programme helped to reduce time and effort spent doing various administrative tasks, for instance, by being able to use online forms instead of paper forms. Our digital champion was also able to use and share their new skills using internet-based technology (in this case, using a KNFB Reader app that converts text to speech) to communicate effectively, for the first time in two years, with one elderly patient who spoke

very little English. It is hoped that the skills learnt from these programmes will continue to be shared with older people and other digitally disenfranchised groups, so that more people can benefit fully from the internet.

Marginalised tenants

Looking to the future, another point of consideration for digital inclusion schemes will be the emergence of smart technologies and smart homes. The internet of things (IoT) has the potential to greatly benefit more marginalised tenants, in particular. Social housing tenants, for example, could benefit from interconnected sensors and cameras, which would make buildings safer for them to live in. Elderly tenants could also benefit from IoT technology that can monitor their health or remotely connect them to healthcare providers.

However, it's important to note that these potentially life-changing smart technologies can only be made possible through true full-fibre networks. Not only are true full-fibre networks more cost-effective and reliable in the long run compared with their inferior copper-based alternatives, it is also the network that will lay the foundation for IoT devices and smart buildings. With the IoT developing at such speed, it's clear that digital skills will also need to develop so that use of this technology can benefit more people.

Although improved digital skills can ensure that more people can benefit from the internet, the foundation of this is greater accessibility to fast and reliable, full-fibre broadband networks, either at home or in community spaces.

Broadband access is key

Having been raised in social housing in Paris myself, I strongly believe that it was access to reliable and affordable broadband that helped me to progress into further education and work. Indeed, we see that the rollout of full-fibre

What does digital inclusion 2.0 look like?

Continued from previous page

broadband in social housing is a positive step in improving people's professional and educational potential.

Therefore, while improving digital skills should remain a priority for the UK, it is also important that everyone, irrespective

of income or age, has access to affordable internet services so that they can fully harness the benefits.

Jeremy Chelot is the CEO of Community Fibre.

Grand Union's Active Housing portal

Grand Union Housing has completed the development and launch of its Active Housing-based tenant portal. The new portal replaces three previous separate sites from before the merger of Aragon Housing, Rockingham Forest Housing and South Northants Homes.

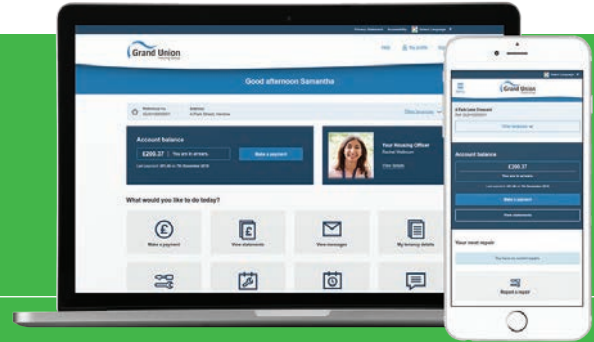
Grand Union Housing uses Capita's Open Housing as its main back-office system so Active Housing used its experience on other Capita integrations to connect with Capita's web services to read and write data to and from Open Housing in real time and measure API performance early on in the project. Active Housing was also integrated with Capita's Pay360 secure card portal for payments.

Both organisations agreed to take an Agile approach to the project. This involved fortnightly 'sprints' and made full use of Favro project management

software to manage the delivery and backlog refinements.

Martin Stillwell, project manager, Active Housing, said, "This was an excellent collaboration between Grand Union Housing and us – our joint Agile approach was absolutely the cornerstone of the project's overall success."

Following a beta release, Grand Union's portal went live in October 2018. Within ten weeks, the housing provider received around 2,000 registrations (approx. 20 per cent of its tenants), 14,500 logins and 14,000 online payments.



MOBILE WORKING

Arches Housing's digital trip with MIS AMS

Arches Housing has enabled mobile working for the first time for its housing and income officers following the implementation of the Mobile CRM module of its ActiveH housing management system from MIS AMS.

Seamus Harkins, data services manager, Arches Housing, said, "As part of our 'Better Ways Of Working' plan, we're focusing on how IT can improve services and processes across the business and ultimately deliver more cohesive services to our tenants."

ActiveH's Mobile CRM module will improve communication with tenants as well as providing Arches' housing and income officers with a mobile solution to give them access to tenant and property information while on the move and allow

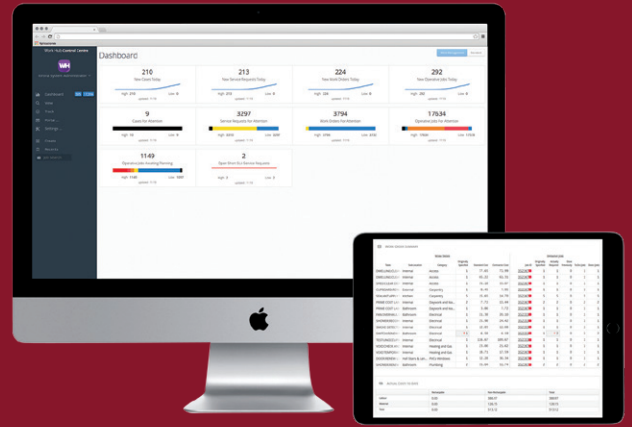
them to deal with tenants' queries at the first point of contact.

Harkins said, "It was essential that our CRM could be used in the field, so with minimal effort, our housing officers could access essential customer information as well as gain tenancy intelligence and contact engagement history from their remote devices – ActiveH does just that. The solution will make us more efficient, enabling our staff to spend more time with tenants rather than having to rush back to the office."

Kirona launches housing workflow solution

Kirona has just brought out its new Work Hub software for housing providers to unite their back-office teams with their mobile staff and tenants.

Created to manage the workflow between a housing provider's central functions and its field-based operatives, Work Hub pulls together disparate back-office data and systems to enable reliable, seamless data-flows throughout an organisation.



Neil Harvey, CTO, Kirona, said, "Created as part of a collaboration with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's asset management and maintenance teams, Work Hub extends our portfolio of mobile workforce software by providing housing providers with a stable and integrated work management solution.

"The council's implementation of Work Hub now links with its housing management system and Kirona's Dynamic Resource Scheduling (DRS) and Job Manager software, enabling housing repairs and asset data in one system. The potential scope of Work Hub goes beyond just the housing repairs team to other departments within the council, connecting different departments with one another and with mobile workers in real-time."

INFRASTRUCTURE



Wellingborough Homes takes on ANS cloud transformation

Wellingborough Homes has partnered with cloud and managed service provider ANS Group to transform its internal operations and lay the foundations for agile working and improved digital communications.

As part of its four-year corporate plan and transformation strategy, the housing provider is migrating all of its on-site hardware to the cloud. ANS is implementing Microsoft Office365 and Azure across Wellingborough Homes' key systems, with the aim of cutting the costs of managing on-site hardware, as well as boosting the flexibility and efficiency of its operations.

After the initial cloud migration and implementation of Office365 and Azure, ANS will then roll out a back-up service as well as provide ongoing technical support.

Wellingborough Homes was helped by S.Tel Consultants during its options appraisal, requirements specification and tender evaluation process.



Brighter Thinking for Housing



The housing sector is calling out for a fresh approach to managing their customers, processes and people.

That's why we've drawn a new blueprint for the technology that's shaping the future.

A new open technology for housing.

COTS versus ERP versus DIY versus Hybrid - panel debate

ERP systems are highly configurable but come at a cost. COTS solutions offer rich functionality, but historically lack good digital services and open integration. Then the Open Source community enables a range of DIY and hybrid solutions. But which platform can best support the long term needs of the sector? In this panel debate, experts from Housing Providers will share their views on the best IT model for meeting complex needs and ensuring affordable delivery.

Wednesday 6th March:
12:15pm in the University Room

NPSHousing@northgateps.com



Delivering shared IT services

From L-R: Ian Cresswell, Director of Risk & Technology and David Chatterton, Head of ICT, South Liverpool Homes

Cobalt Housing decided in 2016 to de-merge from Onward Group in order to become an independent housing provider. As a consequence, Cobalt Housing went through a competitive tendering exercise for back-office IT services which South Liverpool Homes then won.

Following the signing of a 10-year contract in November 2016, the go-live date for the project was set to coincide with Cobalt Housing's immovable de-merger date in early October 2017. The project team was set up immediately, with separate work streams for the housing management, finance, HR and payroll, and asset management systems.

Cobalt Housing also wanted a completely new IT infrastructure and new telephony, CRM and integrated document management systems. During the project, South Liverpool Homes engaged with its existing IT providers – Britannic Technologies, Cascade HR, Orchard Information Systems, Phoenix Software and PIMSS Data Systems – to help with the implementation.



Shared successes

- All of the systems went live as planned on 2 October 2017.
- Cobalt Housing adopted Cisco Meraki Wireless throughout its premises very early on in the project providing high-speed internet for staff, a quick win for all.
- As part of the implementation, South Liverpool Homes provided automated solutions for rent statements, job tickets, monetary imports, remittances, compliance processes, no-access letters and notices for seeking possession (NOSPs).

- Both South Liverpool Homes and Cobalt Housing now benefit from failover to either site with the Mitel telephony system. In the event of either organisation losing their on-premise Mitel controller, the system would utilise the other controller at the opposing site.
- Both organisations now benefit from reduced consultancy and development costs from external suppliers.
- Both organisations used the opportunity to move to Office365 and SharePoint.



Cobalt Housing's new ICT strategy, aligned to its five

year corporate plan, was approved by its board in 2017. Progress against actions is monitored quarterly at project board meetings and reported back to Cobalt Housing's board every year.

What we learned...

- The initial specification assumed that the infrastructure and business applications would be shared. This would avoid the need to have separate instances of each database and separate interfaces, of which there are many. This multi-tenanted, single-licence model initially posed a problem with some of the technology providers because it had never been implemented before, but in each case a solution was found that was acceptable to all parties.
- There is never enough time for testing when you have an immovable go-live date; you just have to do as much as you can, then go with what you have, and then fix any problems once live.
- The pace of the implementation and the amount of change staff had to cope with was huge; by the start of year two, we had found the middle ground that staff in both organisations were comfortable with.
- It's important to engage with the software suppliers at the very outset of the project; in hindsight, it would actually have been

better to have started certain elements of the project 'at risk' before the contract was awarded.

- The resources required from South Liverpool Homes to deliver the contract almost doubled during the course of the implementation, while also being mindful to not dilute the existing support services that South Liverpool's staff needed.
- There were times during the project when a single, common solution couldn't be found; for example, there are separate instances of the PIMSS asset management system due to the need to have different surveys.
- The concept of the various systems' ownership and administration has been the subject of some negotiation at times.

Shared future

The shared services contract is attractive to both organisations. Cobalt Housing has access to a highly-skilled, innovative IT team that can deliver on its aspirations for the future, while South Liverpool Homes can use its additional income from Cobalt Housing to deliver more services for its tenants.

To continuously monitor and improve the IT support delivered to Cobalt Housing, satisfaction surveys are being sent from closed helpdesk request tickets as the contract moves into its second year. These are reviewed at quarterly project board meetings, where new products, future directions and progress against strategy are also discussed.

South Liverpool Homes and Cobalt Housing are now jointly implementing some further innovative solutions, such as Orchard's Income Analytics and Tenancy Services products.

Ian Cresswell is director of risk and technology and David Chatterton is head of ICT at South Liverpool Homes.



A private journey to the cloud

Paul Sexton, Managing Director, Castleton Technology

According to Castleton's managing director, Paul Sexton, on-premise IT infrastructure will be obsolete within five years and every business will be operating in the cloud. If correct, this has clear implications for housing providers not currently considering moving to the Cloud, yet in a recent survey only 50 per cent of respondents said that they had a clear cloud strategy and were on track to delivering it.

Most people are familiar with public cloud services, hosted by 'hyper-scale' providers such as Microsoft and Amazon Web Services, and many already use it for applications such as Office 365. However, although the public cloud is massively scalable, it's not particularly flexible in accommodating individual business needs, doesn't cater to SLA agreements, is US-based and presents an attractive target for hackers (making it less secure than on premise infrastructure).

Opex, not capex

A better option for housing providers is a private cloud service which offers large-scale infrastructure with high availability in terms of internet service, much greater data security and the same benefits of being scalable and cost-effective – the opex model means no capital outlay on equipment is needed, and an agreed regular spend based on per user per month helps with building budgets. The private cloud is also very flexible, allowing you to shrink or grow the service according to your needs, paying only for what you use.

For example, Castleton's private cloud, designed for and dedicated to the housing sector, hosts customers' data, as well the software applications we provide, safely and securely on our own equipment within

UK-based data centres. It allows housing providers to set their own service level agreements, provides more flexibility and control and makes data recovery much simpler.

We can either host your entire infrastructure in our cloud, or in most cases, we provide a hybrid solution whereby applications such as Office365 remain in the public cloud and sit alongside managed services in the Castleton Cloud. For example, it makes sense to store email in the public cloud rather than eating up valuable storage space with large mailboxes, but use our cloud for key applications such as housing management, CRM, HR and finance.

Benefits for housing providers

By outsourcing management of your underlying infrastructure to a managed service provider such as Castleton, you can liberate the valuable resources within your in-house IT department to focus on your business applications.

In our recent survey, 90 per cent of respondents in the housing sector reported that their IT departments only had a little or moderate amount of time to focus on strategy and new technology, and this is the crux of the matter. Housing providers with on-premise servers find that their IT departments spend half their time managing the infrastructure and the other half developing business systems. As a result, they can't roll out business transformation as fast as they should because they are spending time on areas they don't need to. Moving to the cloud takes away that pain and removes the limitation on business development.

Digital transformation is a key priority, with housing providers trying to bring more services online to meet tenants' needs, such as paying their rent or booking repairs from the comfort of their own home on their mobile device. Being in cloud enables you to support those services with the latest software-as-a-service (SaaS) applications which are hosted in the cloud

by default. It also gives your remote and mobile workers visiting tenants the ability to access your systems and data from anywhere.

Don't get left behind!

Fears about data security and the cost of moving to the cloud are misplaced. Data is more secure on a private cloud than a public cloud and is safer on a data recovery basis too. The data remains yours and can be accessed whenever and wherever required. And while there is a cost to migrating to the cloud, moving to an opex model makes it affordable, transparent, easy to manage and cost-effective.

Alongside the accelerating adoption of cloud services by housing providers, most technology developers are increasingly focusing their software strategy on delivering cloud-first applications. By embracing the cloud, housing providers can future-proof their technology, deliver digital services and achieve real business transformation.

Paul Sexton is the managing director of Castleton Technology.



A day in the life of... Hyperoptic

David Walker, Head of Property, Hyperoptic

I wake up in 'the project,' which is the pet name for my flat in Notting Hill, currently being subjected to extension and refurbishment. The first priority is a strong black coffee and I am quickly on my regular walking commute to my company headquarters, which are close to Hammersmith station.

Hyperoptic is the UK's largest gigabit broadband provider and delivers the country's fastest broadband speeds, of up to 1Gbps (1,000 megabits per second), which is at least 20 times faster than the UK average. We work with property owners, developers and professionals, designing and installing our dedicated fibre infrastructure to new buildings and existing developments.

We work with 150+ developers and are a trusted partner of many housing providers, including AzDominion, Hyde Group, Catalyst, Genesis Housing and Notting Hill Housing Trust. We're also working with 50 councils across the UK to supply connectivity to their social housing stock.

During my 25-minute walk, I always keep an eye out for new hoardings and cranes along the way. It's always good to get in early so spotting a new development can become a good opportunity for my sales colleagues.

I am in the office by 9am and I head straight to the coffee counter at the local WeWork office, which is next to my company headquarters. The sales and marketing team have recently relocated here as we've outgrown the office space next door. Once I have had my second caffeine fix, I plug in my laptop at one of the hot-desks and quickly scan my emails, being sure to highlight any urgent enquiries or client/team support that needs addressing.

My first meeting is with our new chief technology and information officer, Pascal

Koster. He is part of a new executive team, which our CEO appointed to ensure that we are all well supported as the company grows. The meeting went well – Pascal was particularly impressed with the smart home projects we're working on and the future-proofing that we can enable for clients in the 5G arena for new builds and regeneration areas.

I then head out for a light lunch with a key developer client of mine. We've been working together for over three years and have built an excellent relationship. He offers some insights into both the UK and Spanish markets where he is active. The conversation is on a wide range of topics from Led Zeppelin and schooling through to an Openreach deployment of new ducting infrastructure and the opportunities arising from Brexit. He is genuinely excited by the dampening of market sentiment and the prospect of securing more sites to feed his business.

The penny has finally dropped for developers; they simply can't build units without day-one connectivity and still maintain customer satisfaction. Developers want to protect their five-star ratings for customer satisfaction, and if a customer has broadband straight away they're less likely to go around looking at any scuff marks on ceilings or squeaky hinges.

We're the only broadband provider in the country that measures itself on day-one connectivity; we have achieved over 96 per cent success over the last three years.

After my meeting with Pascal, I head to a new client meeting in the City. It looks good – there are three new projects which, although relatively small, can offer Hyperoptic an opportunity to work with a new AV consultant and a world-class architect, in particular because we thrive on expanding our knowledge of the day-two systems (i.e. what gets connected onto our infrastructure).

The 'proptech' market has changed hugely since we started in 2011 – most people now understand the language of 'smart buildings' and 'smart homes'. The pace of technology continues unabated and at the heart is our new infrastructure, which will serve it in its many future guises. I am seeing developers, owners and managers to find some new and cutting-edge integrated systems and apps that have the power to revolutionise lives, such as remote monitoring for dementia patients.

I head back to the office for the regular weekly sales and marketing meeting. There is exciting news for the planning of the next financial year with more team members, more marketing and the hybrid vigour that three new board members are already bringing to the Hyperoptic brand.

2018 was a very busy year and we grew massively. We now power over half a million homes and businesses across the UK with our full-fibre service, and we are on track to pass two million homes by 2021. Over 160,000 social housing properties have access, or are about to be connected, to our full-fibre network.

David Walker is head of property at Hyperoptic.



Castleton's expansion in India

From L-R: Sushil Tasgaonkar (CTO & Managing Director) & Mukesh Patel (Non-Executive Chairman), Castleton India, and Dean Dickinson (CEO) & Ian Niblock (Director of Development & Product Strategy), Castleton Technology

Castleton Technology has expanded its operations with new offices in India. Operating from Bangalore in the south and Baroda in the north, Castleton India will support the development and testing of the company's new housing software, with a team of 16 people across the two offices.

Dean Dickinson, CEO, Castleton Technology, said, "This move represents a strategic alliance that will add reliable scalability to our UK-based organisation. The development team at Castleton UK

has been working with the team in India under a collaboration agreement since March 2018 and together produced our latest offering, Castleton.Digital."

As experienced and well-respected figures in the Indian software sector, Mukesh Patel and Sushil Tasgaonkar will be non-executive chairman, and CTO and managing director, respectively, of Castleton India, both having worked with Dickinson before he joined Castleton.

Dickinson said, "What sets us apart is our integrated technology to empower our housing providers. Where others provide either managed IT services or software solutions, Castleton delivers the most comprehensive set of solutions and services that interface with customers' existing systems. That's what we're known for and that's what we're investing in with Castleton India."

Castleton's desktop-as-a-service at CVH

Castleton Managed Services is in the middle of a project with Circle Voluntary Housing for a new hosted desktop managed IT infrastructure supported with mobile working software.

The implementation's foundation is a cloud-based 'desktop-as-a-service' solution hosted in Castleton's tier-3 data centres complete with business continuity via Castleton's backup and disaster recovery service and a managed service desk.

The five-year contract is an extension of the housing provider's existing use of six of Castleton's housing software products.



Devon Council opts for low-code OutSystems

Following a lengthy tender process, Devon County Council has awarded a three-year contract to OutSystems for a low-code application development platform.

The council said, "We want to take advantage of the added simplicity, speed and functionality offered by the latest low-code application infrastructure technologies to develop better services for both citizens, staff and partners."

The council chose OutSystems, which allows end-users to build applications using a drag-and-drop graphical interface, rather than via complex text-based coding in order to create and launch new services quicker.

The council said, "A properly configured, highly functional and well-integrated low-code development platform will enable the much faster delivery of new services by a wider range of staff.

"By enabling the integration of various third-party and legacy systems, together with any new capabilities that are needed, we want to provide an environment that allows us to redesign, transform and deliver existing and new services."



Bite-sized shared services

Chris Bartlett, Public Sector Director, Comparex

Housing Technology interviewed Comparex's public sector director, Chris Bartlett, on why housing providers should consider adopting shared IT and business services for some of their operations and how to go about it.

Why adopt shared services?

Digital transformation has been a huge driver of change across the housing sector, and while transformation is not new, many of the benefits and challenges experienced along the way are, so many housing executives will have already travelled along the same path. This means housing organisations are working together to a greater extent and being far more open to sharing their experiences and challenges by providing advice and work-arounds to their peers. And as cuts to funding continue, we can expect the popularity of shared services to continue to grow.

Housing providers are leaning towards a shared model because it results in cost benefits and allows for more collaboration between public and private organisations – offering greater mobility, modernisation, and the sharing of knowledge and data.

Housing providers are already taking their first steps in shared services, bringing

together their respective talents and specialisms to drive reduced costs, improved integration, and forge stronger working relationships, resulting in a more refined and valuable experience for their staff and their tenants.

Critical success factors

So far, we've seen the greatest success when housing providers can demonstrate the challenges and benefits to each other via tangible, real-world scenarios. In addition, the success of any project begins at the planning and discovery stage; as a result, we're seeing housing providers benefit most from shared services and development when they engage with peers and partners at the very start of their journey to ask for that crucial advice and support.

Technology, business & cultural alignment

Clear and concise project planning will help to align and make the transition much smoother, allowing stakeholders to properly visualise and map their internal needs and requirements, and those of the partner organisation.

While it's easy to say that resources can be shared because housing units and departments have the same functional names, the processes, knowledge and experience are what makes them unique. Understanding those differences, and being complementary to the skillsets and overall visions of both organisations

provides far greater opportunity for integration and collaboration.

Bringing multiple services and resources together will result in a mix of working practices, cultures and knowledge, so accepting that and playing to each other's strengths over time will result in much better and deeper integrations. Having that full knowledge in advance will make project management, timelines and the eventual alignment significantly more rewarding.

Monitoring performance

Housing organisations should always take the approach that if it's not measured, it can't be demonstrably improved. So define targeted and relevant metrics that matter to your area of the business.

For example, measuring the number of answered job tickets within an IT department may be a useful metric but it only shows half of the story; the ticket may have been closed but is it really a success if the customer's problem hasn't been resolved to their satisfaction? Organisations should define KPIs and SLAs that reflect the role each department plays in the organisation, and use those metrics to improve customer service and service management.

Chris Bartlett is the public sector director for Comparex.

GENERAL NEWS



Housing Technology's CPD accreditation

The CPD Standards Office
CPD PROVIDER: 41135
2019
www.cpdstandards.com



Housing Technology is very pleased to announce that we have just received CPD endorsement and accreditation for the Housing Technology 2019 conference and executive forum (6-7 March, nr. Oxford).

Our CPD accreditation (CPD standards office/provider no. 41135) means that attending the 40+ seminars and talks during Housing Technology 2019 can count towards your CPD points. Each hour of attendance at the seminars equals one CPD point (both days of the event = up to 11 hours of CPD).

It is also our intention to make all future Housing Technology events CPD accredited. **Please visit housing-technology.com/events/htc19 or email news@housing-technology.com for further information.**

Halton Housing hires new COO

Halton Housing has appointed Nicole Kershaw as its new chief operating officer.



Kershaw joined Halton Housing on an interim basis in June 2018 to help with a service review. She has previously worked in the private sector and in social housing at several organisations including The Guinness Partnership.

Ingrid Fife, group board chair, Halton Housing, said, "We are delighted that Nicole will be joining us on a permanent basis. This newly-created role will ensure the continued successful delivery of our strategic plan and the priorities that underpin it. And in addition to overseeing the delivery of our customer-facing services, she will also lead the delivery of our transformational 'customers project'."

MHR's iTrent at Stafford & Rural Homes

Stafford and Rural Homes (SARH) is in the middle of implementing MHR's cloud-based iTrent software in order to provide a single platform for the HR and payroll operations of its 200 employees. The new HR system is scheduled to be live by April 2019.

Investing in iTrent is part of a wider SARH digital transformation project, 'making every contact count', which SARH began in 2015 to drive engagement with tenants and enhance the work experience, wellbeing and personal growth of its staff.



Jo Hough, director of organisational development, Stafford and Rural Homes, said, "By consolidating our HR processes onto a single system, iTrent will improve the efficiency of data recording and speed up core tasks for payroll, recruitment, and performance management while giving us the insight we need to support the continuous professional development of our staff."

Capita opens cyber-security centre in Belfast

Capita IT Services has expanded the scope of its managed services with the launch of a new security operations centre (SOC) in Belfast, adding to the company's existing provision of end-to-end security services across the UK and Ireland.

The company said that the proliferation of connected personal devices in workplaces, increased use of cloud and online services, and new IoT technologies mean that businesses are increasingly at risk of cyber-attacks.

The SOC is a purpose-built, secure facility within the Capita IT Services centre of excellence in Belfast. The SOC joins the three centres Capita already operates in the UK and India, and provides a substantial service spread across Capita's key locations. The new centre is a significant investment by Capita IT Services in Northern Ireland, reflecting the increasing demand for IT security and data governance across

Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Capita will be providing a range of managed security services including security information and event monitoring (SIEM), security infrastructure management, continuous vulnerability assessment and managed incident response. Through existing managed IT expertise and with enhanced threat intelligence from membership of the National Cyber Security Centre, the SOC will be able to detect sophisticated and multi-faceted cyber-attacks, including early-stage reconnaissance efforts.



Is IT really transforming lives?

Peter Luck, Director of Operations (Uniclass), ROCC

Having worked within the IT side of housing for 20 years and witnessed massive developments in technology, the advances are now at a rate many could never have imagined beyond the realms of science fiction.

In housing, the primary focus for IT systems so far has been to improve organisational processes and trying to do more with less. Housing IT systems were initially developed to migrate from paper to digital, and then the focus moved onto process improvements and, more recently, towards channel shift. Digital advances have undoubtedly been made, but can we do more?

Are we really improving lives?

A common theme of the past few years has been channel shift, accompanied by bold claims about how the deployment of, for example, self-service portals for tenants are "transforming the lives of our tenants" (sound familiar?), but are they really transforming lives?

Let's look at some of the wider issues that housing providers need to consider: millions of people classified as fuel poor; an ageing population; growing numbers of mental health problems; and crime and anti-social behaviour. The current infrastructure is simply not equipped to cater for all these diverse demands.

I have written before in Housing Technology on how technology can be used to tackle fuel poverty and crime so for this article I'm looking at the wellbeing of our tenants and considering how some existing and emerging technologies can help tenants to actually improve their lives.

How do we help the growing number of older people living alone and those suffering from mental illness?

Monitoring

We're already using 'wearable tech' in its most simplistic form by providing panic buttons that can be worn by vulnerable people. Using smart devices coupled with smart home technology means we can start to monitor the wellbeing of vulnerable people and therefore reduce the need for them to be taken into care or become totally reliant on home visits.

Sensors can be used to monitor movement of vulnerable people around their home. We can track their normal routes through their properties and the time they spend in different rooms.

Obviously monitoring people is a delicate subject. However, this could help us track and build predictive models of how people move around and forecast what they would normally do and then compare that to their current activity. For example, if they haven't got out of bed within their usual timeframe then there may be a problem. Combine this with data from other monitoring or wearable systems that are tracking breathing or heart rates, systems can then determine if we need to intervene and check to see if everything is OK. The first line of intervention can come from AI and conversational technology through the form of a phone call, text message or chat via a smart device. We only need to hand off to a human once the AI has determined that we really do have a problem.

Uber care

I can imagine a future where we are talking about Uber-style services for anything and everything; will care and support be any different?

The NHS has partnered with a start-up called Cera to offer Uber-style care to the elderly in their homes. This is focused on matching patients with carers in an efficient way to minimise costs for the provider and maximise the quality of care.

Like them or loathe them, Uber-style or 'gig economy' services will increase and become more commonplace as demands for

efficiency gains continue to drive us all.

Predictive analytics

At ROCC, we're investing heavily in predictive analytics and researching the benefits housing organisations might be able to gain from being able to accurately predict what is likely to happen in various situations. Being reactive and responsive is expensive, so the more we can predict events, the more efficient we can become.

If we want to provide good care for tenants, we can use predictive analytics to determine when they might need our help. Predictive analytics can also enable better property management by forecasting what is likely to happen and adjusting maintenance plans accordingly, instead of just having a routine maintenance schedule. If we can prevent problems, then we save money. And by being less reactive, we are improving the lives of our tenants because they'll suffer less disruption and inconvenience.

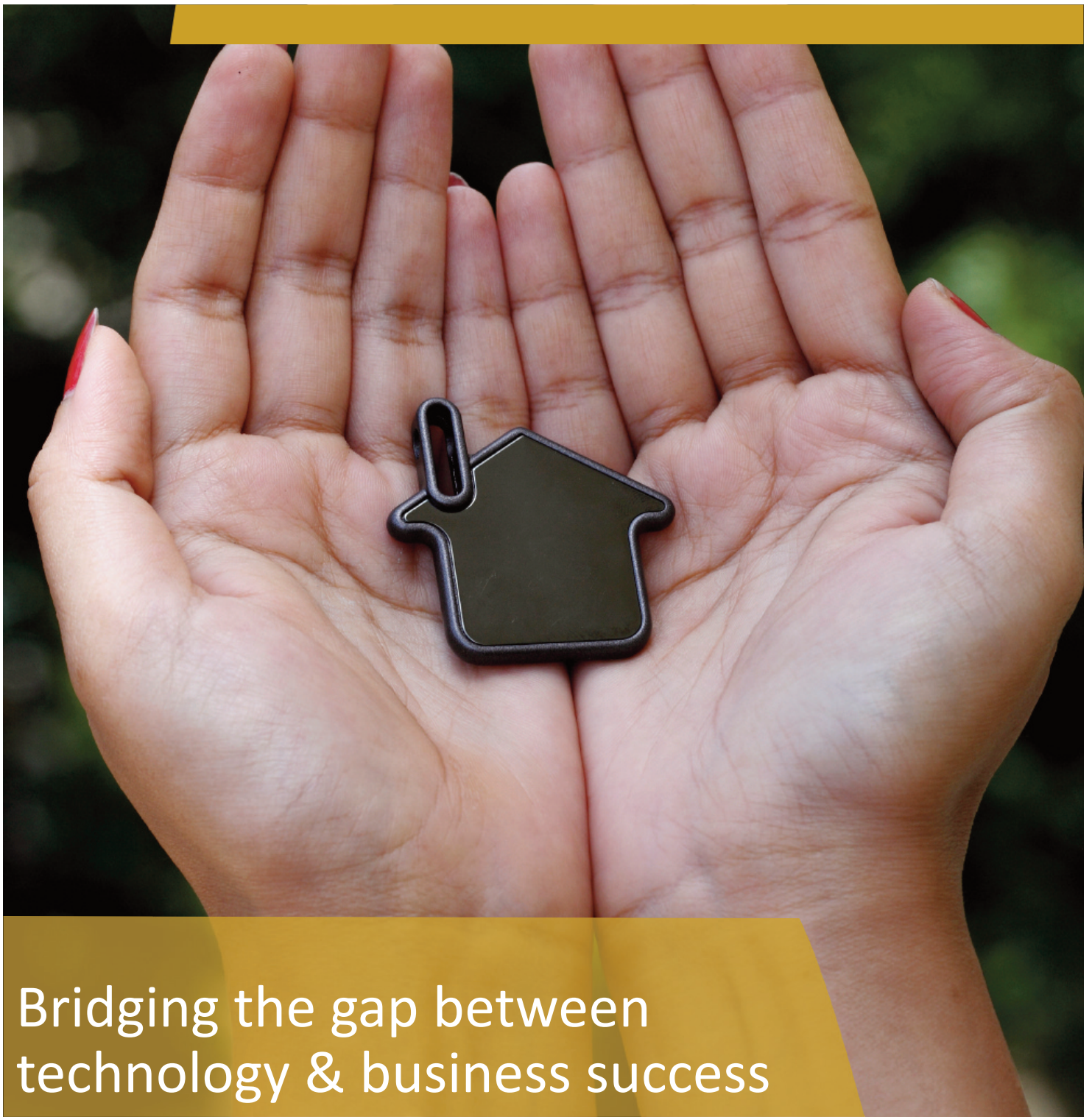
AI and wellbeing

In a future with more elderly tenants living alone and with more of the population becoming aware of their own mental and physical wellbeing, coupled with increasing pressures to save money, we can think about how AI might keep people happier and healthier.

The NHS already offers services such as CBT via an instant message-based online portal and there are many smartphone apps to help with overall wellbeing. It's not a huge leap to imagine a future where we've replaced the therapist with AI for individuals that have minor wellbeing issues.

It's an exciting but confusing time for anyone looking into what these technologies can do for our businesses and the world. Collaboration between technology providers and housing organisations is key to determine the best-use cases to couple improved services and better lives without infringing privacy and human rights.

Peter Luck is the director of operations (Uniclass) at ROCC.



Bridging the gap between technology & business success

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

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