

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

HOUSING | IT | TELECOMS | BUSINESS | ECOLOGY

HOUSING
TECHNOLOGY™
2023 | CONFERENCE AND
EXECUTIVE FORUM



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY
CONFERENCE 2023

08-09 March 2023
Nottingham

See page
04 & 52

2023 & beyond

What's next?

Blockchains, crowdsourcing,
self-service, business process
automation and servitisation

Housing management

Development methodologies, arrears, 'plug & go' delivery and data quality

Customer management

Connected communities, money advice services, older residents' IT services and AI

Mobile Working

Planned & responsive repairs, dynamic scheduling and field-service software

Infrastructure

Outsourcing, 'the great resignation', domestic sensors & IoT, decarbonisation and cyber-attacks

General

Gen-Z, homelessness and digital transformation & skills

Building compassion

One of the things that troubles me during the small hours of the night is knowing that housing – a basic human need – is in short supply. And I don't just mean in the UK, where the problem is endemic within our socio-economic system, but globally, where the causes are even more complex.

According to the UN, there are around three billion people in the world without a place to call home, variously because they are victims of wars, repressive political systems, bungled economic policies, climate-related disasters or plain, old-fashioned poverty. As a fellow human, I can't help but feel compassion for them and, as a housing professional, I can't help but feel bound to do what I can to alleviate the situation.

But in case you haven't already guessed it, I've not managed to concoct a panacea during those sleepless spells before dawn. The causes are too numerous and too varied for any single solution to be applied, even if there existed a universal will to do so.

Undaunted, however, I am keen to do what I can. The question is, what? Well, taking inspiration from Confucian philosophy (I think), a long journey begins with the first step. Massive problems are not resolved by walking around them so, beginning on home ground, my first steps were taken 15 years ago, when Alastair Tweedie (editor) and I first started our business, Housing Technology.

The UK has a large (although some would say not large enough) stock of social housing, all of which requires managing in respect of rental and maintenance. Until recently, the management processes have been piecemeal, personnel-heavy, inefficient and, therefore, costly. The introduction of digitised data and dedicated software to these processes is vital to introducing efficiencies and cost-savings to the sector and leaving it with more resources to devote to improving and increasing stock.

Housing Technology's aim is to bring together the providers and potential users of such technology by establishing a trusted, central resource of information and an online library of video recorded events, talks and discussions relating to relevant topics. In doing so, we hope to expedite the transition of the sector from the 19th to the 21st century; so far, progress is promising.

I am grateful to be in a position to contribute something to the solution and to do so in a way that reflects a couple of my core values, honesty and integrity, qualities that are good for businesses and good for customers. Not that I expect to sleep any better by resting on my laurels, mind you; there's all those other problems to sort out yet.

George Grant is the CEO, broadcaster and publisher of Housing Technology.

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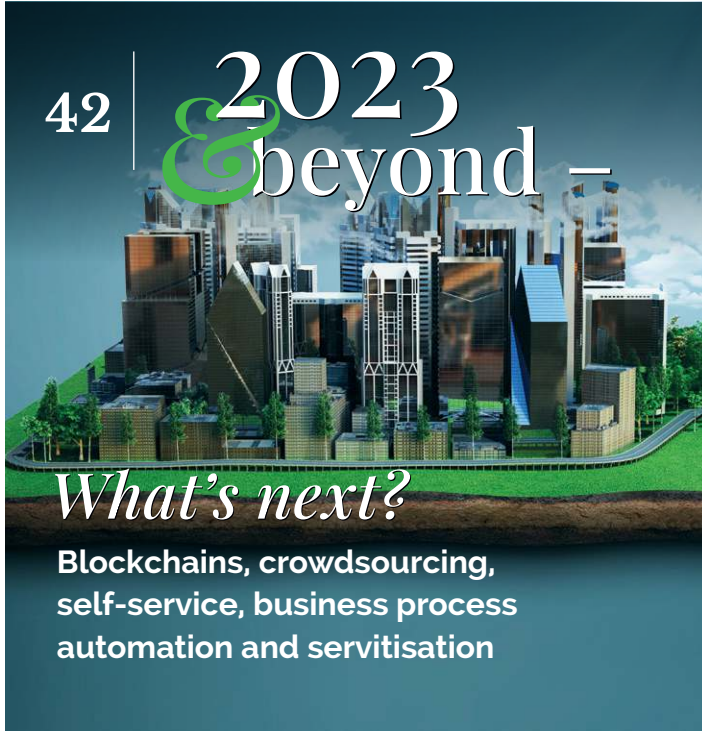
THE INTELLIGENT BUSINESS

COMPANY LTD
Hoppingwood Farm
Robin Hood Way
London, SW20 0AB, UK

Head Office: 0208 336 2293

PRINTED IN THE UK BY
The Magazine Printing Company
magprint.co.uk

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Blockchains, crowdsourcing, self-service, business process automation and servitisation

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Taking a 'plug and go' approach to digital transformation

TECHNOLOGY SHOWCASE

Please see housing-technology.com/showcase for more information



Housing Technology - In the know...

Available now...

Housing Technology Guide to Connected Homes

Housing Technology Guide to Connected Homes is now available, published with support from FireAngel.

The focus of this **free guide** is around how housing providers can use networks of IoT devices across their property portfolios to gather data to support their ongoing operations and strategic planning.

FireAngel

**DOWNLOAD
FOR FREE**



Have your say! Take part in Housing Technology's report:

The E-State of Housing 2022/23

Housing Technology's market intelligence report on the state of IT in social housing is back, with the aim of giving you wide-ranging insights into your peers' business and technology plans over the next 2-5 years.

In return for completing the survey, you'll be entered into a draw to win **one of 10 two-day tickets to the Housing Technology 2023 conference** next March (each ticket worth approx. £550)! We'll also send you a copy of the final report as soon as it is published in October.



**TAKE THE
SURVEY**

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE 2023

Introducing our modern new venue for our 13th consecutive Housing Technology conference and executive forum: The East Midlands Conference Centre in Nottingham! Taking place on **08-09 March 2023**, ticket registrations are now open for you to book your place.

GET INVOLVED!

We are excited to launch ticket registrations on **Monday 03 October**.

**SECURE YOUR REDUCED RATE
TICKET PRICE**

For a limited time offer, book your tickets **before 24 December 2022** to secure the best rate. You can book an in-person ticket, or online.

Please visit our website for more details: **conference.housing-technology.com**.

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CONTACT US FOR ENQUIRIES ABOUT BEING A POTENTIAL SPEAKER, SPONSOR, AND/OR EXHIBITOR.

Housing provider and local authorities' **speaker and presentation opportunities**, please contact Alastair Tweedie, editor and co-founder of Housing Technology at alastair@housing-technology.com.

Sponsorship and exhibitor enquiries from **technology suppliers and IT/business consultancies**, please email George Grant, CEO and co-founder of Housing Technology at george.grant@housing-technology.com.



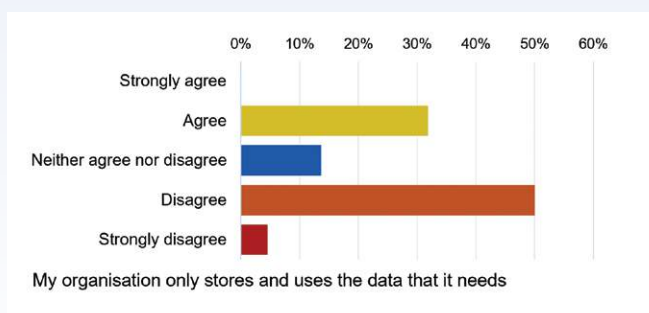
IntoZetta's data in housing annual survey results – Part three

Dan Yarnold, Director, IntoZetta

Earlier this year, IntoZetta contacted many of its software and services customers and organisations from the broader social housing sector, asking them to complete a survey regarding the use of data within housing providers. The first sets of results were published in the previous two editions of Housing Technology.

In this edition, we're looking at the results of another group of questions which asked about data quality management and data storage practices within the housing sector and the value that housing providers place on their data assets.

"My organisation only stores and uses the data that it needs"



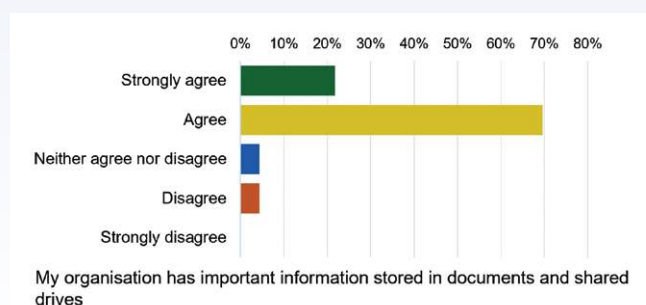
55 per cent of respondents disagreed with this statement and felt that their organisation stores and uses more data than is necessary. Data is often collected and retained because it has 'always been gathered', and sometimes there is a lack of clarity in terms of the data that is and isn't necessary.

Only by analysing and documenting the data that is used to fuel business processes can you effectively separate valuable data from data that should be deleted or archived and no longer captured.

Systems and business processes consume data as a fuel, and when the quality of that fuel is high, employees can complete activities effectively, leading to business

efficiencies and happier tenants. Understanding where high quality data is essential and where data is being gathered unnecessarily can help to focus your data management investment and avoid wasted time, effort and expenditure. As one respondent said, "we need to stop retaining information just in case we might need it one day."

"My organisation has important information stored in documents and shared drives"



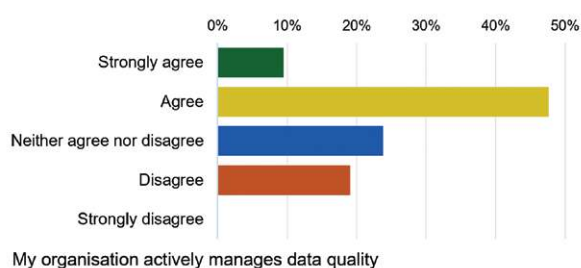
95 per cent agreed that their organisation has important information stored in documents and shared drives; this issue is common to almost all large organisations regardless of sector. As well as making the data less structured and harder to access, it can lead to parallel business processes and pockets of contradictory data emerging.

At a time when data security has become a board-level issue, the additional risks associated with data that's stored and managed outside the organisation's information security defences creates a significant info-

sec and compliance risk. However, reducing the volume of information stored and used outside housing providers' core systems remains a complex issue without an obvious single solution.

And in a sector where many are undertaking major transformation programmes and replacing core applications, it's essential that those programmes' solution design phase fully engages with operational teams and seeks to understand where and why current solutions have failed to prevent this issue historically.

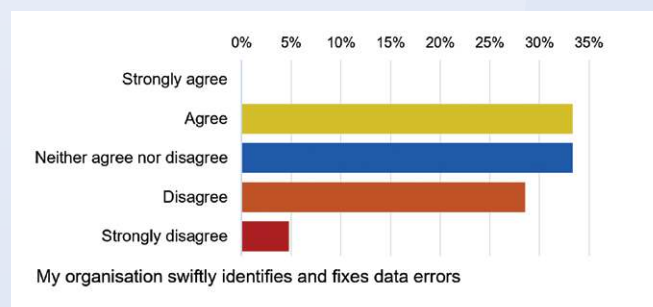
"My organisation actively manages data quality"



Based on the survey's responses, 55 per cent of housing providers actively manage their data quality. The sheer volume and complexity of data within areas such as assets and components makes the active management of data quality a significant challenge, so it is encouraging to see data quality management being prioritised.

It's not unusual to find asset and component data fragmented across many systems, creating an environment where duplicate and contradictory data develops insidiously. Those organisations that have historically neglected the quality of asset data will now be grappling with significant challenges as they attempt to achieve compliance with new building safety laws.

"My organisation swiftly identifies and fixes data errors"



This question prompted a response with an equal split between those people who thought that their organisation did fix data quality issues quickly, those who thought it didn't and those who were unsure.

The result indicates that data cleansing efforts vary by organisation and also by data type. Some data quality issues are time-consuming and expensive to fix, including those that require a property site survey or tenant engagement, and other issues where existing trusted sources can be cleansed more swiftly.

Measurement and ownership are the key building blocks for improving data cleansing results within any organisation. Measurement can be achieved through a wide variety of data quality tools on the market, which if used correctly, will swiftly allow you to create extensive data quality reporting across all key data entities. Ownership of data can be a more complex issue for some organisations, but it's usually the teams that use data assets every day to carry out their work who are best placed to understand how data quality affects the business and how good data quality can be maintained.

In the next issue of Housing Technology, we will release and discuss the remaining questions from IntoZetta's 'Data in Housing 2022' annual survey.

Dan Yarnold is a director of IntoZetta.



Is Your Data Holding You Back?

IntoZetta's unique combination of software and expert professional services is providing organisations across the housing sector with solutions to their data problems.

Trusted by:

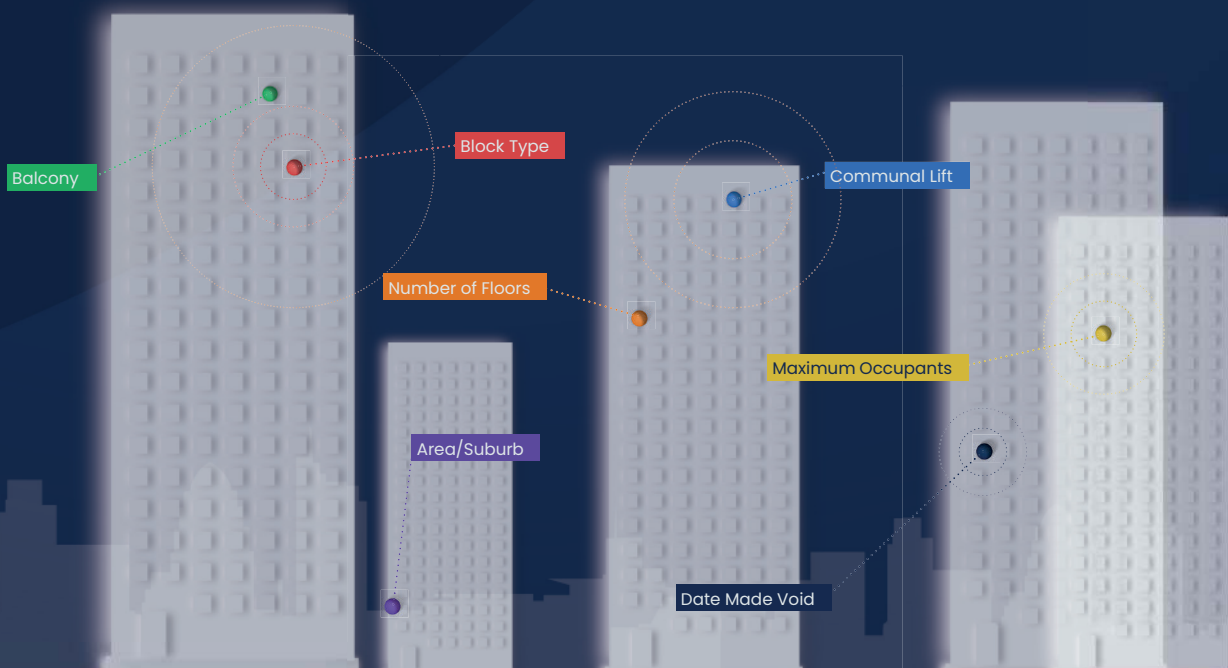


INTOZETTA QUALITY FOR HOUSING

With over 1000 pre-configured housing data quality rules, we can create a complete picture of your organisation's data quality within a few weeks. The Rules Library contains housing specific rules for Asset, Tenant, and Finance data as well as specific data reporting requirements for NROSH. The software allows rules to be grouped into business processes so that you can measure your ability to Maintain Assets, Collect Rent, Communicate with Tenants, and all other key processes.

INTOZETTA GOVERNANCE FOR HOUSING

Pre-configured with 100s of common housing data definitions that you can Accept or Modify to create your organisation's Data Catalogue. The software allows you to build a comprehensive picture of where data exists, how it moves between systems, and where the Master source is held. You can manage data ownership, data policies, and provide your employees with an intuitive Data Search capability that democratises data and drives a wider appreciation of good data governance.





Cambridge City Council's 25 years with MRI Software

Cambridge City Council's new digital portal is its latest MRI Software implementation after over two decades as a customer.

Starting from the council's earliest Unix solution, which ran via DOS-style command prompts, the team at Cambridge City Council now uses MRI Software's Housing Enterprise (formerly Orchard Housing) alongside Accuserv for repairs, asset management and income analytics. The most recent addition is MRI's digital self-service portal.

Jon Staff, senior application support engineer, Cambridge City Council, said, "MRI Software has always fitted what the business needed; when we looked at upgrading our entire MRI system, we went out to tender and again MRI came up trumps."

Housing

Staff said, "We're very keen to use MRI's Housing Enterprise Web. We use servers running Remote Desktop Services at the moment – we don't have Housing Enterprise installed on laptops as local clients so our staff access Housing Enterprise via RDS. Housing Enterprise Web means that we'd be able to get rid of most of our RDS overheads, plus it would be much faster as well."

The upgrade to the web-based HMS will include MRI's 360-degree dashboard feature to give the council's customer service teams a panoramic view of tenancies.

Staff said, "In the past, if you were in a repair job and you needed to find the tenant's personal details, you'd end up with a plethora of screens everywhere. All of that is now contained in a single view within Housing Enterprise Web."

Digital self-service

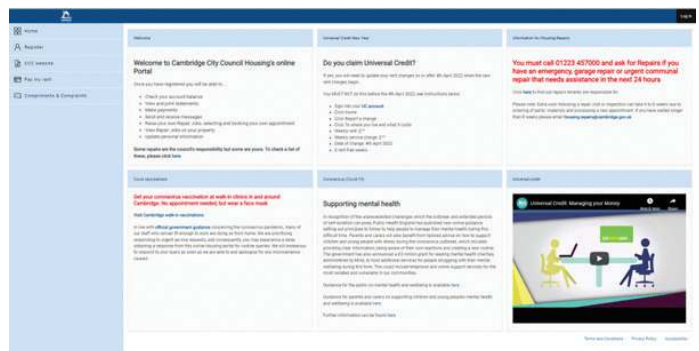
Cambridge City Council implemented MRI's digital self-service portal covering rent and tenancy management capabilities. Five months after the portal's launch, it has around 1,600 registrations, accounting for a fifth of the council's tenants.

Staff said, "I've seen many self-service offerings and the MRI Portal offering is one of the better ones. It's not as clunky as others; it does pretty much what it says on the tin and it doesn't look too bad either."

Rent arrears

Cambridge City Council uses MRI Income Analytics as an early preventative measure against tenants falling into serious arrears.

Staff said, "This was a fairly seamless implementation, and it has produced a lot of value. The income team



rely on Income Analytics a lot when they're making their recommendations about which arrears cases to prioritise."

Property and repairs management

To manage programmes of work and stock condition surveys for planned repairs within its housing portfolio, the council is about to implement MRI Asset Management, which will manage location, HHRS, energy, servicing, asbestos and planned projects.

The council's previous solution had no integration with MRI Housing Enterprise which meant that repairs data had to be exported into spreadsheets, leading to fragmented workflows, data duplication and errors, and problems with GDPR compliance. In contrast, MRI Asset Management is fully integrated with Housing Enterprise.

For the management of cyclical repairs and maintenance, the council will use MRI's contractor interface, removing the need for manual interventions because it will work from live data.

Reporting

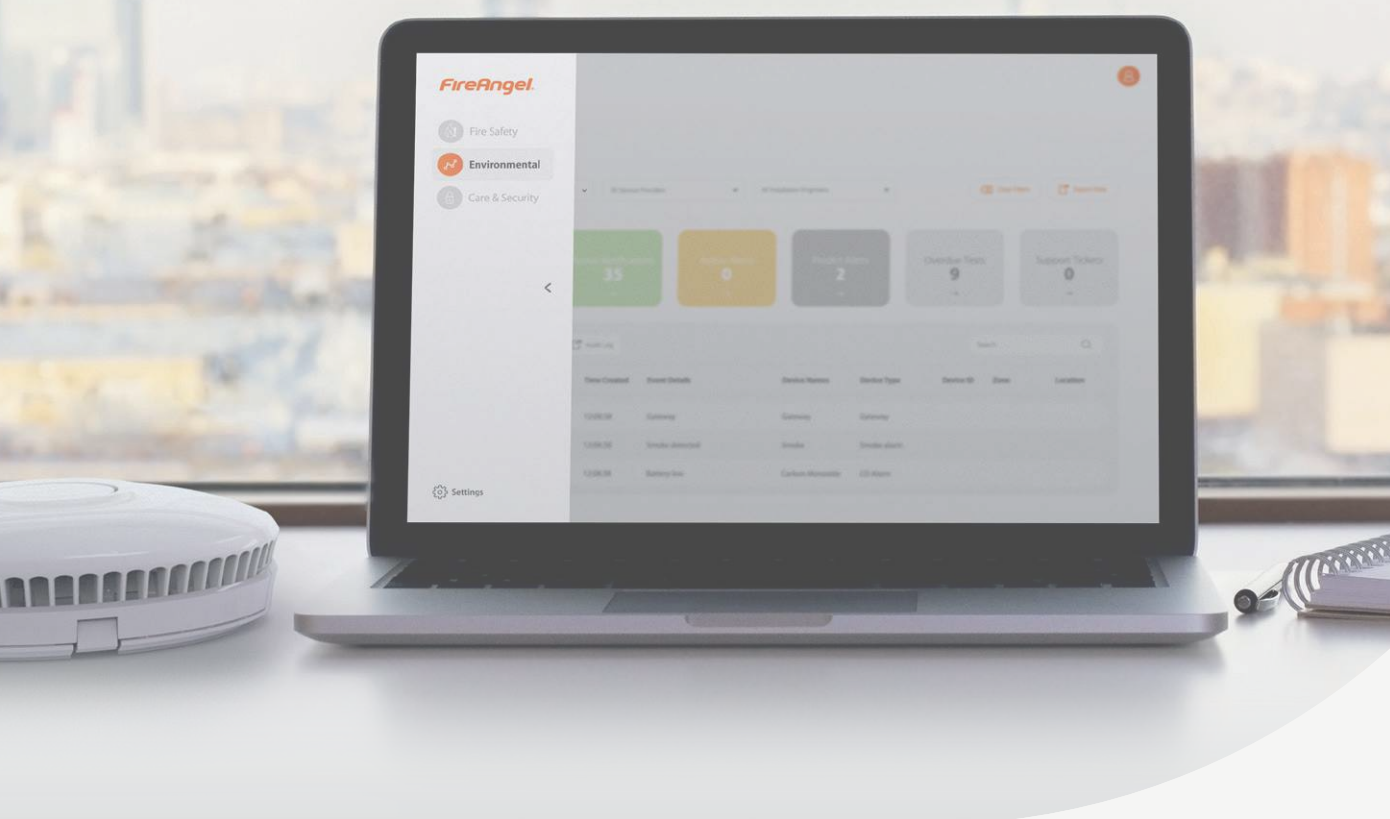
For custom reporting, the council relies on Accuserv's customisable tiled report dashboard to identify any outstanding issues or tasks from a repairs and maintenance perspective. For in-depth data interrogation, the council uses BusinessObjects, supplied by MRI, and a data warehouse from IMS for deep analysis of data.

Staff said, "Every consultant and engineer that I've dealt with from MRI has been brilliant, friendly and helpful. As a local authority, we're always looking for the best value, and we've never had an inkling that we'd want to move away."

IoT powered resident protection

Proactive environmental monitoring

A network of FireAngel's discreet devices provides visibility of previously hidden trends within a property. Temperature and humidity levels can be monitored to allow housing providers to identify environments that could lead to damp and mould, enabling early interventions to pre-empt a problem getting any worse.



Security

Environmental

Safety

FireAngel CONNECTED

Find out how we can help protect your residents at fireangel.co.uk/connected



Driving down disrepairs with data

Jeff Gascoigne, Specification Manager, FireAngel

As the colder months creep closer, how can housing providers use sensor technology to target disrepairs and establish healthier homes?



In 2018, 17,000 people died because they couldn't afford to heat their homes. And the following year, four million properties were found to fall short of the minimum requirements of the Decent Homes Standard. Sadly, this year with the cost-of-living crisis and energy prices skyrocketing, these numbers are expected to be much higher.

The Decent Homes Standard currently covers all social housing, excluding leasehold and shared ownership properties. The standard aims to "bring health benefits to tenants and reduce health inequalities", although it is currently under review until autumn 2022 to "understand if it is right for the social housing sector today".

Currently, a property is considered a safe and decent home if it meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing, is in a reasonable state of repair, has reasonably modern facilities and services, and provides a 'reasonable degree' of thermal comfort such as effective insulation and efficient heating.

Future-proofing properties with technology

However, millions of people live in homes that don't provide their most basic needs; homes that are too cold or too hot, that are unsafe, that are too expensive to heat, that are overcrowded and homes that have poor or unaffordable digital connections. According to Ageing Better, those properties are most often occupied by older people, those with existing health conditions, people on lower incomes and those from ethnic minority groups.

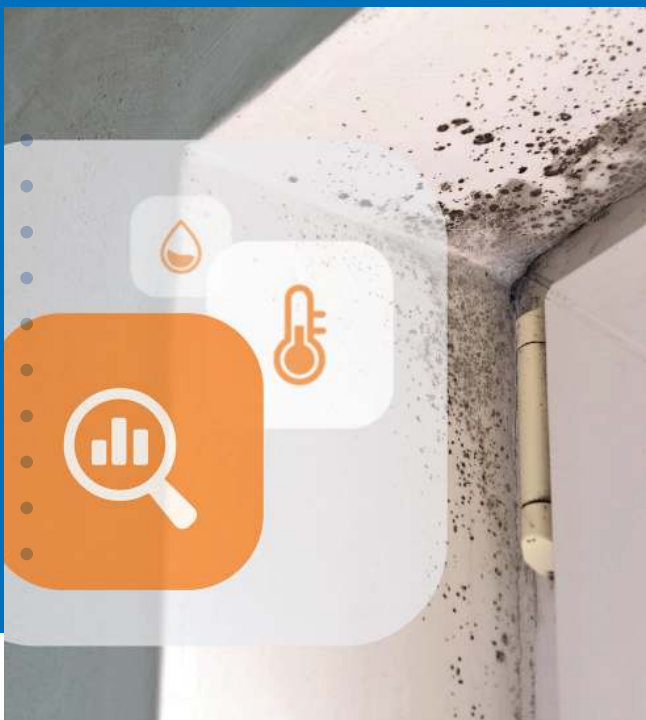
With the majority (80 per cent) of the UK's housing stock built before 1990 and only 4,700 properties having an 'insulation age' of 2013, the age of the UK's housing stock is one of the key drivers for disrepairs. Subsequently, there has been a 90 per cent increase in disrepair cases brought against housing providers by their tenants, and likely to increase even more if further regulation is enforced.

But when one in five excess winter deaths can be attributed to cold homes, and with exposure to damp and mould for extended periods exacerbating or inducing respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, it's vital that steps are taken today to not only support short-term solutions but also to future-proof properties to create healthier homes.

Identifying hidden disrepairs

The Housing Ombudsman's 2021 report, 'Spotlight on damp and mould – It's not lifestyle' encourages housing providers to take a "data-driven, risk-based approach to damp and mould" to identify and anticipate interventions before a disrepair claim is made.

The report recognises the challenges for housing providers in tackling the issues, such as overcrowding, poverty and the age and design of homes, but it says they need to "find their silences" where complaints aren't being



raised despite other indicators suggesting that there might be problems.

Data is the key to giving these silences a voice, equipping housing teams with the insights needed to identify current or potential disrepair problems in properties. Unobtrusive IoT sensors (capable of detecting factors such as temperature, humidity, movement or water leaks) can be installed in tenants' homes to provide real-time data.

Installing intelligent IoT technology is also a key step to supporting 'net zero' targets and is already required for the PAS2035 retrofit standard to provide continuous data on internal temperature, relative humidity and fuel usage in properties.

Proactive protection and prevention

The next generation FireAngel gateway enables housing providers to offer a level of protection and preventative measures never seen before in home safety. The gateway is ceiling mounted, occupying the same footprint of a smoke alarm, and it can be integrated with grade D1 alarms so no extra wiring is needed.

This gateway incorporates temperature and humidity sensors as standard to monitor the two main indicators of damp and mould. The gateway also caters for the inclusion of third-party Zigbee-enabled devices, allowing housing providers to create bespoke networks. All of the data gathered is uploaded to FireAngel's Connected cloud platform to generate insights around the most vulnerable tenants and properties.

Potential environment-related problems can be identified before a repair becomes expensive while simultaneously pinpointing tenants who may need further help.



FireAngel Connected offers substantial insights via its own dashboard yet it also deploys open-source APIs which allow full integration with housing providers' existing databases and business applications. Combining real-time data from property environments with other systems, such as maintenance team schedules, enables housing providers to actively review property environments and allocate resources more effectively.

Jeff Gascoigne is a specification manager at FireAngel.

FireAngel.



Agile vs. waterfall – A choice between flexibility and control?

Nick Hill, CEO, Esuasive

Traditional waterfall-based projects promise successful outcomes through meticulous planning and tight control of the scope and risks, but it's a promise that isn't always fulfilled. The famous quote that, "No battle plan survives first contact with the enemy" neatly sums up the problem with waterfall in situations where the detail of requirements isn't entirely clear or where there are likely to be many externalities not easy to control along the way. Nevertheless, many software buyers still yearn for the certainty of a fixed-price waterfall project.

Conversely, an agile methodology acknowledges the fact that often we don't have a full understanding of the requirements at the start or know the best way to achieve our desired outcomes before we start. Agile believes that it's better to figure things out as we go along but this too can lead to disappointing results, especially when agile teams lose sight of non-negotiable deadlines or ignore expectations that even though the project is agile, its scope is fixed; as the famous quote has it, "Blessed are the flexible, for they can tie themselves in knots."

Both approaches work, in different circumstances: waterfall when requirements are very well understood and the deadline is set in stone; agile if service innovation is a desired outcome and requirements can evolve, as is often the case with business transformation programmes.

But what if that same business transformation programme encompasses both challenges?

- A clear need to move from one system to another at a given point in the future;
- An objective to create innovative processes spanning different business functions.

We faced exactly this challenge while working with a leading housing provider in Wales that needed to replace its core finance system but recognising that this would be a 'once in a generation' opportunity to innovate. To meet the challenge, we adopted a hybrid approach, implementing a new finance system (Microsoft Business Central) using waterfall, while simultaneously taking an agile approach to the innovation programme. This approach enabled our client to control its costs and plan

with certainty in the critical accounting areas (waterfall) while shaping business change through continuous review and feedback (agile).

The project tradition

The 'iron triangle of project management', understood since the 1950s, lays out the inescapable fact that the outcome of any project will depend on:

- How much you want to achieve (scope);
- How quickly you want it delivered (time);
- How much you want to spend on resources (cost).

Setting objectives for any two of these inexorably determines what you will get for the third. This has been expressed succinctly as, "Quick, cheap, good – pick two!" Waterfall methodologies seek to maximise the probability of successful outcomes by creating frameworks to make sure that the three choices are in equilibrium before any significant effort or expense is committed to a project.

Waterfall therefore seeks to manage risk and uncertainty from the start, tracking progress through a series of stages (such as analysis, design, build, test and go live) towards a predefined goal. This approach delivers projects as a sequential set of activities. However, despite the emergence of sophisticated project management methodologies such as Prince2, waterfall has a chequered history and after each high-profile failure, organisations have sought ever more control in an attempt to avoid similar fates. Eventually, projects became scary things, shrouded in a mysterious set of rituals that could only be understood by ordained members of the Prince2 priesthood.



The project reformation

An alternative approach emerged following the publication of the 'Manifesto for Agile Software Development' in 2001. In contrast to waterfall, agile prides itself on being a flexible approach that tackles planning, design, implementation and testing through a series of short iterative cycles. The manifesto opens with a declaration of its values:

- Individuals and interactions are more valuable than processes and tools;
- Working software is more valuable than comprehensive documentation;
- Customer collaboration is more valuable than contract negotiation;
- Responding to change is more valuable than following a plan.

The second half of each of these statements is anathema to the risk-averse methodologies associated with waterfall. Nevertheless, the prospect of speed, freedom and rapid progress has seen agile gain significant traction in the project community. Indeed, in the UK, agile has gained sufficient momentum to displace Prince2 as the default project methodology in many organisations over the past 20 years, particularly when delivering bespoke line-of-business systems.

The counter-reformation

Although Agile was principally formulated with software development in mind, its evangelists recognised the need for additional tools and techniques if it was going to become mainstream. These were needed to maintain focus, sustain collaboration over an extended period and create checks and balances to safeguard the project team and its stakeholders. The desire for credibility in these areas led to the emergence of agile methodologies such as Scrum, Kanban and Lean.

Die-hards in the waterfall camp, though, still yearned for the certainty of fixed-scope, fixed-term, and fixed-

price projects. Eventually, sequential and iterative methodologies were synthesised in the 2015 publication of Prince2 Agile, a methodology that seeks to combine Prince2 management controls with a broad toolset of agile delivery techniques and frameworks. For some, this is the best of both worlds; for others, an incoherent and illusory mishmash of fundamentally-opposed attitudes.

The dilemma

How do you approach a project when some aspects lend themselves to waterfall, some to agile? Where some requirements are fixed and clear, but there is also a strong desire to innovate? Choosing one methodology over the other can't be the answer and despite its promise, Prince2 Agile still requires proficiency in a baffling array of processes and frameworks that remains the preserve of an anointed few.

We recently encountered this situation with a large Welsh housing provider that was looking to replace its accounting system while simultaneously exploring opportunities to redesign cross-functional processes between finance and operations. The accounting system was, in effect, an important part of a wider finance transformation programme. This gave us the following dilemma:

- Waterfall was the natural choice for the accounting system due to the pressure to maintain control, support monthly accounting deadlines, handle a mid-year cutover, satisfy external auditors and meet non-negotiable deadlines.
- Agile was more appropriate where the objective was to revolutionise performance across functional boundaries through service innovation and end-to-end process transformation.

The answer

Focusing only on the replacement of finance processes on a like-for-like basis would squander the innovation opportunity. The transformation programme would then

require 'digging the road up twice' and lose momentum, so we needed a more fluid approach.

After ruling out Prince2 Agile, we knew we had to find a way to achieve the desired outcome without compromising either the rigour required for the accounting system replacement or the flexibility required for process innovation. The approach we chose was to incorporate both agile and waterfall work packages, clearly identifiable as such, nested within fixed deliverables.

In practice, this involved the rapid implementation of a baseline version of Business Central pre-integrated with the client's HMS (Microsoft Dynamics CRM) which, in turn, enabled the finance team to go hands-on in the very early stages of the project.

In a radical departure from the conventional approach to finance systems implementations, this allowed members of the finance team to take an active role in the configuration and design of core accounting processes through a series of 'learning sprints', with the benefits quickly becoming apparent.

Firstly, the team was able to understand the transformational potential of moving to a single, unified data architecture as something real and tangible, rather than as something abstract and conceptual.

Secondly, the team could confidently decide which processes could be made cross-functional as part of the move to Business Central and which could be deferred. Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, much of the thinking has already been done before the next phase of the transformation programme starts and, almost subconsciously, the finance team has embraced cross-functional working as 'the new normal'.

This model has enabled us to implement Business Central as a well-defined and tightly-controlled project while simultaneously allowing the finance team space and time to rethink repairs, asset management and rent accounting as cross-functional processes within the client's broader transformation programme.

Nick Hill is the CEO of Esuasive.

Esuasive



Clanmil deploys RentSense

Clanmil Housing has gone live with Mobysoft's RentSense software in order to reduce its arrears and mitigate the effects of the cost of living crisis.

Richard Donaghy, income recovery manager, Clanmil Housing, said, "We faced a number of issues, including rising arrears plus further potential arrears owing to welfare reform. There was also uncertainty about the accuracy of our arrears reporting, leaving us worried that we might overlook some accounts that needed attention.

"We knew that RentSense was a proven solution from other customers in Northern Ireland. The 'go live' phase

went very smoothly and we didn't experience any problems. Our team was very positive and couldn't wait to get going. The follow-up support from the Mobysoft team has been excellent.

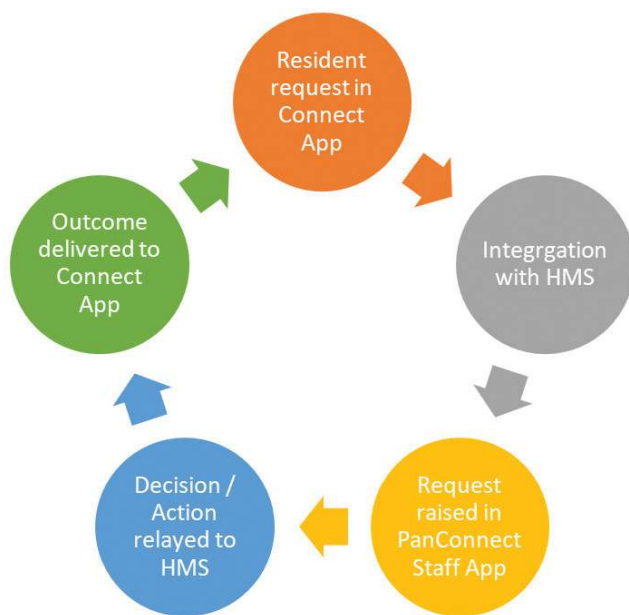
"RentSense has enabled us to focus our efforts on our highest risk cases. It promotes early interventions and the overall prevention of arrears."



A unique digital approach

Katrina Heyworth, Head of Sales, Housing Insight

Here at Housing Insight, we've seen our 'plug and go' solutions trigger digital journeys across the UK as the housing sector has sought out better ways to improve customer experience and streamline their internal operations.



Our approach to digital was formed around our PanConnect offering in these two key areas, using a flexible approach which involves modules that operate independently, allowing for swift uptake, but which can also be combined and refined for bespoke use.

Understanding the journey

We know that no two digital journeys are the same. The overall processes may be similar from one organisation to another but every customer is different. For this reason, the 'journey to digital' doesn't need to have a specific start or end point. Instead, the first stepping-stone usually involves us working with a customer to identify where we could deliver the greatest results, such as the largest cost-saving, biggest response, maximum engagement or most significant deliverable resource.

For example, while we were working with Caledonia Housing in Scotland, the journey began with the theme of 'connect'; we jointly recognised that engaging with residents more effectively offered the biggest potential upside for all concerned.

Giving residents the ability to engage digitally has enabled the organisation to offer a 24/7 solution for residents, 365 days a year, in a way that remains cost-effective. We provided Caledonia with our Connect app and portal, with integration to its existing housing management software. The housing provider also added our PanConnect mobile staff app, and this combined approach has ensured a seamless journey along the road to digital.

Ongoing digital updates

At Housing insight, we regularly provide new releases for each module within PanConnect. And we're proactive in sourcing feedback to make sure that these ongoing improvements are tailored as closely as possible to the needs of the sector.

An analogy might be the annual service on a car: regular tuning and maintenance makes it run more smoothly; it reduces the chance of breakdowns and emergency repairs; and decreases the overall running costs.

United Welsh has adopted all of our PanConnect modules and so it benefits from all of our new releases, keeping its solutions right up-to-date. Specifically, United Welsh's journey to digital has centred around increasing engagement and enhancing communication.

Our communications platform allows United Welsh to target its customer communications more effectively, reaching everyone with blanket messages when necessary and selecting smaller groups for more nuanced communications when needed. This transformation of its two-way SMS and email will prove invaluable, for

example, when the new Renting Homes Wales Act comes into operation later this year, allowing it to deliver new occupation contracts for signature and notifications, all within the self-service app. The housing provider will also retain its existing digital workflows for automation, a key priority.

Using multi-channel communications has a huge impact on the success rates for digital delivery. Those residents connecting digitally via their preferred channel are more likely to continue to use that method, so the more channels on offer the greater the likelihood of that initial engagement taking place. Once trust has been established, this then encourages the digital journey to continue in other areas, such as help and advice, debt recovery and repairs.

Staff and customer digital experiences

Many so-called 'mobile' systems or web-based solutions provide access for staff while working away from the office. However, some still don't offer offline working, which is problematic when the UK target for 4G coverage is still three years away from 95 per cent saturation. Furthermore, not every area or building allows housing staff to use web-based systems; many of our customers' staff work in tower blocks where it can be difficult to get a good data signal on a mobile device.

In addition to access issues, as a society we face a future of hybrid working, with many millions of us now working from home, either full-time or at least part-time.

Thenue Housing in Scotland realised that its staff wanted to work smarter and with greater flexibility while making better use of technology in their roles. Like many other housing providers, it also faced an increase in arrears following the pandemic. To address both issues, Thenue Housing rolled out the RentsConnect (Income Analytics) module of the PanConnect Staff App because it not only gives housing officers the 'who?' and 'why?', but also the 'so what?' contextual data. All information from a visit is collected and uploaded to the back-office systems automatically, without duplication.

The next step in the digital journey for Thenue Housing will involve incorporating our self-service solution within the RentsConnect module to improve the user experience for residents as well as staff. This means that residents in arrears can set up payment plans, contact their housing officer using secure messaging and request appointments without having to phone. This will not only create a better overall experience for residents, but it will also generate efficiencies for the business – particularly around early interventions and ensuring that key actions aren't overlooked.

Continuous digital improvement

All businesses must embrace change in order to survive, but data drives informed change. True digital journeys aim to keep all users engaged on the way and data is a hidden tool that allows a business to achieve this goal and keep evolving. Whether it's analysing the data from our cloud reporting solution or establishing staff feedback groups, bespoke data is a vital component in any programme for change.

The project team at Greatwell Homes in Wellingborough uses a strategy of continuous improvement to deliver results. Alongside its Housing Insight account manager, Greatwell Homes has refined its PanConnect solution in all areas, from staff access in day-to-day usage to care and support and tenancy sign-ups.

Using data from the reporting database, Greatwell Homes monitors how its residents are using the self-service solution and this informs a change program that continually improves engagement. Some amends are minor while others have a significant impact, such as the creation of a true self-appointing repairs solution, made possible by adding our diagnostic repairs wizard and integrating it with the scheduling system. On average, each resident spends around four minutes logged into the repairs solution – just enough time to complete the actions required. Collecting data for improvement purposes gives the team at Greatwell Homes an edge in responding to and even pre-empting residents' needs.

Dare to be digitally different

We understand that change can be scary for both staff and customers. To minimise this discomfort and uncertainty, many companies opt to follow what others are doing. This is often a useful starting point, particularly where there are proven successes, but we genuinely believe that while the 'processes' can be remarkably similar from one organisation to the next, every company is different.

Change offers an exciting opportunity to re-evaluate. Are these processes really working for us? Is there a better way of doing this in our organisation? Is this who we are? Is this what our customers want? The answers to these questions and more can be discovered while undertaking the 'journey to digital'. And the end result will often have a larger impact than was initially believed possible.

Katrina Heyworth is head of sales at Housing Insight.



INTRODUCING



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Aareon's QL Yuneo customer collaboration programme

Neil Ward, QL Yuneo Solution Manager, Aareon

Our customers have been collaborating with us from the start of QL Yuneo's development journey, using our senior leaders' strategic workshops as part of a pioneering programme to give our UX/UI experts and product owners an insight into our customers' aspirations.

The strategic workshops involve CEOs and directors as well as expert users, enabling strategic and operational alignment to future-proof our housing management system by considering exactly what customers need. In particular, we were keen to involve housing providers of all sizes to give us a broad view of the market during the development of our QL Yuneo SaaS-based housing management system.

Collaborative development

QL Yuneo's collaborative engagement began early on with a presentation of internal reviews and wireframes. Gathering feedback from stakeholders and collating evidence from other projects and experts in the business ensured we involved all the right people from the start.

Features and improvements were then reviewed with customers so that we could tweak the designs and prioritise the backlog to aid the development process.

This continuous delivery model, using an agile methodology, ensures that QL Yuneo can be developed, delivered and maintained more efficiently. By involving customers in the development process, software suppliers like us maximise overall customer value. Customers are more involved in the future roadmap of the solution as well as getting more immediate value than with more traditional approaches.

The introduction of agile working is by no means a quick transition, requiring a cultural change and the involvement of all stakeholders from the start. Teams permanently collaborate to define, validate and introduce new services as the need arises, in turn also helping housing providers to be more agile and digital themselves.

New look and feel

One of the most noticeable outcomes from the engagement workshops was a completely new user interface. It was clear to our UX/UI experts that it was time to bring QL into the modern world of SaaS-based user

interfaces by focusing on users' journeys to ensure long-term benefits for the staff using the software day in, day out.

While UI changes can make some users feel nervous at first, it's a positive cultural change. With the more intuitive, modern screens, users can navigate and complete daily tasks with minimal effort and training.

Offering better value

We are driven to deliver solutions that customers truly need and that can add real value from day one.

Customer engagement is key to ensuring that what is developed is right for the market, so working closely together with customers is important in ensuring the next generation of housing management systems is right for customers today and scalable for a sustainable future tomorrow.

The importance of customer engagement workshops and programmes like these is to ensure they are not just a one-off event but ingrained into the day-to-day development process of our product portfolio. To that end, that's exactly what we have also been doing with our other developments this year, the Aareon Versaa Platform and Versaa Mobile Worker Modules.

If you are interested in finding out more about how our customers are directly involved in developing solutions to meet their own needs, please visit aareon.co.uk/solutions.

Neil Ward is the QL Yuneo solution manager at Aareon.



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Housing Technology Guide to Connected Homes

Housing Technology Guide to Connected Homes is now available, published with support from FireAngel. You can download your free copy from housing-technology.com/research.

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The focus of this free guide is around how housing providers can use networks of IoT devices across their property portfolios to gather data to support their ongoing operations and strategic planning. Moving beyond the 'tactical' use of IoT device data by individual tenants (e.g. smart meters and reduced energy consumption), the guide covers how housing providers and local authorities can aggregate torrents of IoT data and turn it into meaningful insights while ensuring their tenants and properties remain secure and protected.

Some of the IoT-aggregated solutions and insights covered in our Connected Homes guide include:

- **Building tenant-focused dashboards to monitor tenants' wellbeing;**
- **Creating BI dashboards for senior executives and departmental teams;**
- **Risk stratification using predictive technologies;**
- **Protecting vulnerable tenants;**
- **Using the IoT data to populate/augment big data for analytics;**
- **Removing housing providers' reliance on standalone spreadsheets;**
- **The security risks of IoT- and AI-based domestic devices;**
- **Coordinating day-to-day repairs with predicted breakdowns/replacements;**
- **Identifying properties at increased risk of fire.**



You can download your free copy of the Housing Technology Guide to Connected Homes from housing-technology.com/research.



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The HomeLINK App

With the HomeLINK App, residents are provided with a healthy home rating, handy advice on how to improve the quality of their home, and Fire and CO alarm testing reminders.



Crucial connections

Michelle Tyler, Managing Director for Social Housing, Civica

Better connected homes and communities, enabled by smart technology, are the key to tackling the major challenges ahead for social housing.

If we've learnt anything from the past two years, it's the power of collective action during a crisis. The way communities, housing providers and local authorities pulled together during the pandemic showed the real impact of working collaboratively for the collective good.

Technology played a crucial role in this. And not just long-established technologies such as web, mobile apps and video conferencing; new and emerging technologies from artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality to connected devices and machine learning now play a vital role in moving our public services forward in 2022 and beyond.

A boost for collective intelligence

In the light of the social housing sector's challenges, such as building safety, waiting lists, net zero demands and the cost of living crisis, digital technologies can make a real difference.

In a recent Civica survey, as part of our latest 'Greener Homes, Connected Communities, Changing Landscape' report, over 90 per cent of housing leaders agreed that AI technologies, connected devices and machine learning would become more relevant in the future.

There's no doubt that AI and smart devices will be vital to help the housing sector. From spotting opportunities for earlier intervention and identifying variations in service use to optimise costs, these technologies will ultimately free up front-line workers to focus on services that require more personal contact.

Data is the crucial component for how we connect the dots and build better housing services. The good news is housing providers have all this data to hand, with 78 per cent of housing leaders confirming in our recent survey



that the quality of their data and processing is good. It's through better sharing of this asset that we'll be able to prevent more issues before they become a problem.

Connect to the future

We are on the cusp of how connected devices can give us insights to make better decisions. In Civica's latest Perspectives* report, 'Connect to the Future', we uncovered some positive ways this is already helping. For example, to support vulnerable residents, sensors around a property can send information about patterns of activity or if medication is being taken, helping older adults to live independently.

When it comes to home safety, the technology is being used to monitor temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide levels in homes to help improve the welfare and safety of residents. They can help us make firmer predictions for future housing needs by using information to provide early alerts and optimise maintenance.



In housing management, connected home appliances such as boilers can send data which, combined with analytics, predict their need for maintenance, avoiding expensive routine and invasive inspections. These can also help residents and landlords predict the cost of energy use and take steps to improve efficiency and reduce fuel costs. While in Australia, where two thirds of homes have smart devices, they are helping to manage and reduce water demand.

In time, we will gain more control by interacting with new technologies better to help us control our surroundings. For example, smart locks can be operated remotely using a smart phone to grant access for repairs or if a resident loses their keys, they can get into their home via remote access.

For crucial areas such as leak detection, sensors placed on pipes or in bathrooms can detect water escape or overflowing baths and activate stopcocks before major damage is caused. Smart smoke alarms and carbon

monoxide detectors can issue alerts and contact emergency services or landlords.

Connected devices will play a crucial role in better listening to residents' voices, improving the experience by adding smart technologies such as an Amazon Alexa to properties so residents can remain in contact and get 24/7 advice and information.

The internet of us

But despite so many use-cases in housing, we've still not yet realised the full potential of these connected devices. The catalyst for this will be connecting wider networks of devices from the individual, their home and the wider community to create an 'internet of us'. Much of this value will come from building citizens' trust in sharing their data more regularly for everyone's benefit.

The good news is that most current uses for connected devices focus on enhancing existing products and processes rather than rethinking them. There are numerous benefits for the housing sector in embracing these connections – for safer, greener and more resilient homes, and ultimately better engaged and empowered residents.

Michelle Tyler is the managing director for social housing at Civica.

CIVICA

Meaningful resident engagement



Brendan Sarsfield, Strategic Advisor (& ex-CEO, Peabody),
NEC Software Solutions UK

Brendan Sarsfield, the former CEO of Peabody and now a strategic advisor at NEC Software Solutions UK explores how technology can create a new type of shared ownership and drive resident engagement.

When you work in the complex and challenging world of social housing, you know it's about the property, the people and how they interact.

Over the years, I have witnessed the pendulum swinging back and forth between a focus on homes and a focus on tenants as priorities change. At the moment, the power of resident involvement and engagement is high on the agenda, but this will only add value if housing providers are listening and using the feedback to improve their homes and services; for this to happen, there needs to be the right culture and systems in place to support it.

For example, there should be mechanisms to create a circle of learning. A loop of listening to customers, improving processes, reflecting the changes back to residents and demonstrating providers are acting on any feedback or concerns. It is about people and property.

Improving collaboration

Genuine resident involvement must be widespread and representative, with a range of different voices captured.

Tempting though it can be to rely solely on the input of those more actively involved in formal engagement channels such as residents' panels, it will naturally only ever provide a snapshot of the opinions of those residents who have self-selected to engage, when what's needed is a range of opinions to reflect the diverse communities, subgroups and even different geographical parts of the estates so that everyone can have their say.

The future of our sector is all about improving collaboration on a larger scale so that more residents can join in the conversation at a time and place that fits around them. It's not always easy to have your say when, for example, you're a single parent of four and a residents'

meeting is being held in a community centre at night, but you might be able to join online.

Of course, if you are offering tenants multiple ways to contact you then the channels must be joined up to avoid the risk of messages being overlooked and perhaps a ceiling falling in. Quite literally.

Using AI to spot tenants' priorities

Artificial intelligence (AI) can help drive resident engagement because it makes it easier to spot patterns and trends.

For example, a tenant has called the contact centre because they think there is drug dealing on their estate but they don't specifically ask for a response. AI could spot that drug dealing has been reported in other calls or messages and even in comments on the housing provider's social media pages.

The AI-derived data then gives the housing team a fuller picture so they can act faster than if a report or comment was seen as an isolated concern. If this information is fed back to the right department and acted on, it can improve systems and processes, attitudes and culture and encourage more tenants to have an input.

Or AI could also pick up on multiple contacts from residents who need help finding out if they qualify for extra benefits as they struggle with the cost-of-living crisis. This could lead the organisation to consider that a more strategic response is needed rather than dealing with things on a case-by-case basis. In this instance, the solution might be signposting to another organisation but it would still show that the housing provider is listening and acting on the concerns tenants are flagging.



This is a quick win for housing providers because it helps improve engagement by aligning service delivery with tenants' day-to-day priorities. All contact with residents can then be treated as learning opportunities and a chance to engage. After all, it's often the smaller things that matter the most to tenants.

The landlord and tenant relationship

Ultimately, how residents think of their housing provider often boils down to the quality of the home they live in and how it is maintained.

Housing stock, like so much in life, goes through cycles. It is new and then it becomes old and in need of refurbishment and, of course, not all homes across an estate will need the same type of repairs at the same time.

A one-size-fits-all approach to engaging with tenants therefore won't work because the tenants' concerns and priorities will differ according to where their home is in the repair cycle and their personal circumstances.

For example, a couple with a new baby will feel more concerned about the timescale of a boiler replacement than perhaps a young single tenant would. A more nuanced and targeted approach to resident engagement helps providers make earlier interventions where needed.

We also know sustainable assets and sustainable tenancies go hand in hand. Having access to the data on one platform on the age of the property, when it was last refurbished and how many tenants are living there and if they are old, young, a couple or single is vital because it provides context and makes it easier to know why more repairs might be needed in one property compared with the one next door.

Housing providers can then engage better with their residents because they can see the bigger picture and can take appropriate pre-emptive action to reduce voids, arrears and disrepair.

A two-way process

IoT sensors have also opened a world of possibilities for resident engagement.

It's now possible to use the data fed back from sensors to determine, for example, if a house is thermally efficient by monitoring heat loss and areas of condensation. Being able to involve tenants in keeping their homes damp- and mould-free by showing them that it's possible to ventilate and not lose significant heat will help them maintain a healthier home environment.

This gives tenants the opportunity to be an integral part of the process and they can see the benefits active involvement brings. Achieving more meaningful resident engagement will create a more symbiotic relationship which will pay dividends for both housing providers and their tenants.

Brendan Sarsfield is the former CEO of Peabody and is now a strategic advisor at NEC Software Solutions UK.

NEC

£440,000 funding for older residents' IT services



Bield Housing, Haringey Council, Platform Housing, Pobl Group, Southend Care and Wiltshire Council will each receive around £70,000 in funding to involve their older residents in shaping new digital services.

The funding is part of the TAPPI project (Technology for our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) which aims to improve the way technology is used in housing and care for older people. The TAPPI project is led by the Housing Learning and Improvement Network and the TEC Services Association and funded by the Dunhill Medical Trust.

Dr Lynne Douglas, CEO, Bield Housing & Care, said, "We're very excited to be the testbed in Scotland. This project has huge potential to shift people's thinking on how housing can be integral to new models of delivery. Most

importantly, it will be delivered together with older people to improve the outcomes that matter most to them."

Residents from each housing organisation will be given shared responsibility, alongside housing staff, to decide which digital support services to develop.

Marion Duffy, chief operating officer, Platform Housing, said, "We are a proud partner in phase 2 of the TAPPI journey and are looking forward to playing a key role in driving innovation and digital change to improve the lives of older and vulnerable people."

MOBILE WORKING

Localz powers Ian Williams' responsive & planned repairs

Localz has been chosen by housing services provider Ian Williams to power its planned and responsive repair services.

The Localz platform enables automated customer updates, live operative tracking and real-time feedback around service appointments, all via a management dashboard connecting Ian Williams' field-based staff and office workers.

The housing services provider has chosen to implement Track My Appointment for real-time tracking of technicians combined with automated customer notifications and two-way communications, Chat My Way so that Ian Williams' contact centre staff can take part in group conversations with customers and the relevant mobile operatives, and Rate My Experience for real-time customer feedback.

With Ian Williams' customers more aware of an operative's arrival time and having the ability to communicate directly with their technician, 'no access' appointments and inbound calls to its call centres are expected to decrease and overall customer satisfaction increase.

Anthony Pycraft, response operations director, Ian Williams, said, "By partnering with Localz, we have the peace of mind that all appointments are tracked and communicated efficiently."



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"We wanted an integrated asset management solution that would give us a single source of data to access accurate information, at any time. We chose Cx Asset Management cloud software because it delivers what we want, i.e. asset tagging, BIM. It's secure, resilient and accessible on multiple devices and allows us to use API's which supports our wider digital agenda."

John Chambers,
Group Head of IT,
Stockport Homes

United Living signs with Totalmobile

United Living is set to implement a suite of field-service software from Totalmobile. The software covers job management, mobile working and lone-worker protection, with the overall aim of streamlining the property service provider's operations through faster response times and better value for money.



An integrated solution comprising Totalmobile's Connect, Mobilise, Protect and Utilise solutions will now become part of United Living's business model covering all current and future operations.

Conor Bray, chief operating officer, United Living, said, "Having looked for a solution that could accommodate a new contract win, we began to consider the possibility of an offering that could accommodate all of our

different business needs. Through discussions with Totalmobile, we realised that this was a real possibility.

"Not only will the immediate deployment of these products have a positive impact on our current business model, but Totalmobile offers the scalability for our operations to keep growing, empowering us with continuous deployment and new innovations."

INFRASTRUCTURE

Aico launches AudioLink+

Aico has launched the second version of its award-winning AudioLink technology to make it easier and faster to access real-time data from Aico's alarms via its free AudioLink+ app.

With the average time to take a report taking around five seconds, the Aico app generates a simple-to-read, colour-coded report on a range of alarm data including alarm activations, sensor status, alarm-testing information, battery and back-up status and carbon monoxide.

All of the alarm data can be emailed direct from a phone or tablet to one or multiple addresses, being sent as a PDF report for the property or exported as a .csv file for integration with housing management and maintenance systems. Additional information can be added to the

report to help link it to a specific alarm and to communicate important information.

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Cyber-attacks and reputation management

Jonathan Lee, Director of Public Sector Relations, Sophos

When cybercriminals strike, it's easy for housing providers to forget the impact a breach can have on their tenants as they focus their energies on restoring IT systems.

Housing providers might not seem to be obvious targets for cybercriminals, but they appeal to them for several reasons:

- They hold a treasure chest of personal data;
- They often lack the IT resources of other sectors;
- They rely heavily on digital solutions to manage tenancies.

The RSM's 'Health of the Social Housing Sector 2021' survey revealed that 25 per cent of housing providers had suffered a cyber-attack. Over the past couple of years, notable attacks include those on Flagship Group and on property service providers Liberty Group and Plentific.

Post-breach effects

More recently, in June 2022, the UK's largest housing provider, Clarion, was breached. While carrying out the necessary post-breach forensic investigations, Clarion disabled its online services that its tenants rely on to make payments, request repairs and report antisocial behaviour. Communications between the organisation and its tenants were limited to emergencies only and at the time of writing, most of its digital services still hadn't been reinstated.

And then in July 2022, Bromford Group discovered malicious attempts to access its systems. Although it reported that its data hadn't been compromised, its online systems were affected, with its customer service portal becoming temporarily unavailable.

With many services being digitised, tenants are frustrated when normal operations aren't resumed quickly. Without



adequate dialogue with their housing providers, they increasingly turn to social media and the press to express their frustration.

With the Clarion incident, tenants were particularly concerned about rent payment processing and whether their personal information had been exfiltrated, particularly as some tenants claimed that they'd seen an increase in phishing emails. During this ongoing investigation, Clarion confirmed that its CRM system hadn't been accessed but it was still investigating the impact on data stored elsewhere. The Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC)

group took up the tenants' cause and wrote to Marcus Jones, government minister for housing, and Fiona McGregor, chief executive of the Regulator of Social Housing, asking for Clarion's board to be replaced. In turn, this action made its way into the press.

Reputation and communication

It's important not to underestimate the reputational impact of breaches. Your IT team might be doing a brilliant job behind the scenes to re-establish normal operations, often working around the clock to reinstate services. Yet those efforts won't be appreciated unless you plan how to maintain services offline when tenant portals are down and how you'll communicate developments effectively to stakeholders.

Reducing the time to recovery is critical to maintaining smooth relationships with tenants, but this is one area where cyber insurance won't solve your problems. Yes, if you qualify, it will help with remediation costs but it won't help you get systems back online quicker. Sophos's recent ransomware report revealed that it took respondents an average of one month to recover from a breach.

What can you do to increase the chances of stopping a breach in the first place and be better prepared if you do get compromised?

Not just IT's responsibility

IT teams can't carry all the responsibility for managing cyber-attacks. Executive boards need to take an active role in incident response planning or potentially face legal action from tenants and investigation by the ICO. Lack of cyber resilience can also affect an organisation's credit rating; in a recent report, ratings agency Standard and Poor's said it could change a housing provider's management score based on its cyber-risk preparedness.

A 'whole organisation' approach is needed. As phishing attacks are often the entry point for cybercriminals, focus on your organisation's cyber hygiene and train staff to recognise malicious behaviour through mock phishing exercises. Create an incident response plan that addresses not only how you will communicate with employees when systems are taken offline but with your tenants too.

When a breach occurs, it can be overwhelming for small IT teams. Consider whether your staff will be able to respond quickly; do they have the skills and expertise to deal with sophisticated hands-on attacks or indeed hunt for them in the first place? Not all housing providers have the right products, people and processes in-house to effectively manage their security risks around the clock while proactively defending against new and emerging threats.



Managed detection and response

As a result, a growing number are using managed detection and response (MDR) services such as Sophos's solutions. According to Gartner, 50 per cent of organisations will be using MDR services by 2025 (up from fewer than five per cent in 2019).

Peter Firstbrook, a Gartner analyst, said, "We see a huge interest in managed security services because the whole security market is becoming far too complicated for the average organisation."

Sophos's MDR service provides 24/7 threat hunting, detection and response capabilities delivered by an expert team as a fully-managed service. Going beyond simply notifying you of attacks or suspicious behaviour, our team takes targeted actions on your behalf to neutralise even the most sophisticated and complex threats. They also provide actionable advice for addressing the root cause of recurring incidents, improving your security posture.

We have a very helpful document on our website entitled 'Effective Communications and Public Relations after a Cyber Security Incident' (sophos.com/en-us/medialibrary/pdfs/other/cyber-security-incident-communication-framework.pdf), which provides a framework for effective corporate communications.

Jonathan Lee is the director of public sector relations at Sophos.

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As part of its five-year plan to make more housing available, Stirling Council is using Aico's HomeLink IoT-based environmental sensors to get more data on the state of its properties with a view to moving towards proactive maintenance.

The data collected from the HomeLink sensors, including indoor temperature, relative humidity and carbon dioxide, is helping combat problems such as damp and mould and poor indoor air quality. Stirling Council's HomeLink sensors will also be used to identify which properties are likely to need repairs and to develop proactive maintenance schedules to solve problems before they arise.

The council involved its tenants from the earliest stages of the project after being advised by Aico about how prioritising tenants' benefits leads to greater acceptance of the IoT sensors. The HomeLink tenants' app is proving very important in keeping tenants informed by delivering data about their homes in an accessible and engaging way.

One of the council's tenants said, "Development came from tenants' feedback which really helped the project to evolve and progress. Stirling Council has made a significant investment in this technology and I feel like it's putting my safety first, plus it's encouraging to know that my opinion was valued. Furthermore, I think the HomeLink app is fantastic because it helps me easily understand what I need to do."

Alexa Scrivener, transformation lead, Stirling Council, said, "The future of our work with HomeLink is very exciting. Stirling Council intends to ensure a brighter future for our tenants with the full rollout of this smart-home technology across our entire housing stock, supported by our development officers engaging with tenants during each installation."

Aico helps with housing decarbonisation

Applications for the next wave of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) open in September 2022, with Aico offering to help housing providers with their bids for funding.



The SHDF is a £3.8 billion programme to help housing providers fund improvements to the energy performance of their property portfolios. This latest wave of funding includes the provision of digitisation, such as IoT-based sensors in properties, as part of housing providers' bids for funding.

The UK government's department for business, energy and industrial strategy (BEIS) identified, "The use of smart technology, sensors and monitoring platforms to collect relevant real-world data (from the properties being retrofitted) for the assessment of properties to enable retrofit, or after retrofit for monitoring and evaluation purposes."

Aico said that its HomeLink Portal can give housing providers an overview of the performance of their housing stock so they can compare their properties, identify the worst performing to target first, and monitor how installed measures have impacted their homes.

Please see aico.co.uk/social-housing-decarbonisation-fund for details of Aico's help with SHDF bids.



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They delivered training to our team, so we had a deep understanding of what they do as an organisation, making them feel like an extension of our team"



**Mark Sutton, Chief Digital Officer
Care Quality Commission**



Outsourcing and 'the great resignation'

Rich Hutchings, Chief Technology Officer, Littlefish

In the wake of the pandemic, a new phenomenon has manifested as people reassess their work/life balance, dubbed by the media as 'the great resignation'.

With many employees choosing to resign from their jobs, the great resignation means that businesses are experiencing a significant skills shortage. A recent survey suggested that almost a third of UK workers are considering moving to a new job, rising to over 40 per cent in the case of IT/telecoms staff. In general, the primary cause seems to be a reluctance to return to full-time, office-based work environments.

As a consequence, many housing providers are now struggling to meet their commitments while the lack of skilled workers is hampering their productivity, innovation, and growth. In such a scenario, outsourcing can be a viable option.

IT outsourcing

While managed service providers (MSPs) aren't entirely immune to the great resignation, it makes sense that as more organisations move away from the traditional 'full-time working in an office' model, outsourcing services such as IT to MSPs has become more common.

MSPs can attract more skilled experts because they make it a priority to find the right people for the job, often through industry connections and specialist head-hunters/recruiters.

Additionally, outsourcing allows housing providers to enter contracts and agree SLAs with third-party organisations, giving them greater ability to pull levers on performance in a more objective and compelling way compared with internal teams.

There are various IT services that can be outsourced, including:

- **Managed IT services:** common services might include IT service desks, systems and infrastructure management, service integration, monitoring and maintenance of equipment, and network monitoring.
- **Cloud services:** cloud MSPs take care of various cloud functions for housing providers, as well as offering consultancy on how best to digitally transform the business into the cloud, such as advice on design, planning, and supplier selection.
- **Cyber security:** this is a specialist area, requiring expert security knowledge and a contemporary understanding of the threat landscape. Many organisations choose to outsource their cyber-security needs in order to benefit from access to wider skillsets and better tools than might be available in-house.

MSPs can offer housing providers many additional benefits to increase resilience, productivity, and efficiency; these include cost effectiveness, better services and flexible workplaces.

Cost effectiveness

Hiring a full team to run any IT department in-house means high costs. For example, an in-house IT service desk requires full-time salaries and benefits as well as taking on higher operational costs.

Furthermore, in-house teams that need to scale up quickly are bound to run into candidate shortages, potentially even hiring under-experienced staff due to skills shortages and competitive salaries, as well as the months it typically takes to bring new staff on board. Training new staff also uses up time and resources, eating into budgets and potential revenues while affecting performance and productivity.

Working with an MSP allows housing providers to control their costs better because many MSPs offer pre-agreed, transparent pricing structures before work starts. Partnering with a provider in this way means housing providers only pay for the IT services they need, when they need them, plus resources can be easily scaled up or down when necessary.

Better service

Alongside the obvious cost benefits, outsourcing to an MSP makes it easier for housing providers to deliver much better end-user experiences.

After all, the right MSP should already have the experience and expertise from supporting other housing providers and can cross-pollinate intelligence from different fields and across a varied customer base. This means services such as IT service desks are more likely to have high first-contact resolution rates and higher levels of end-user satisfaction.

Flexible workplaces

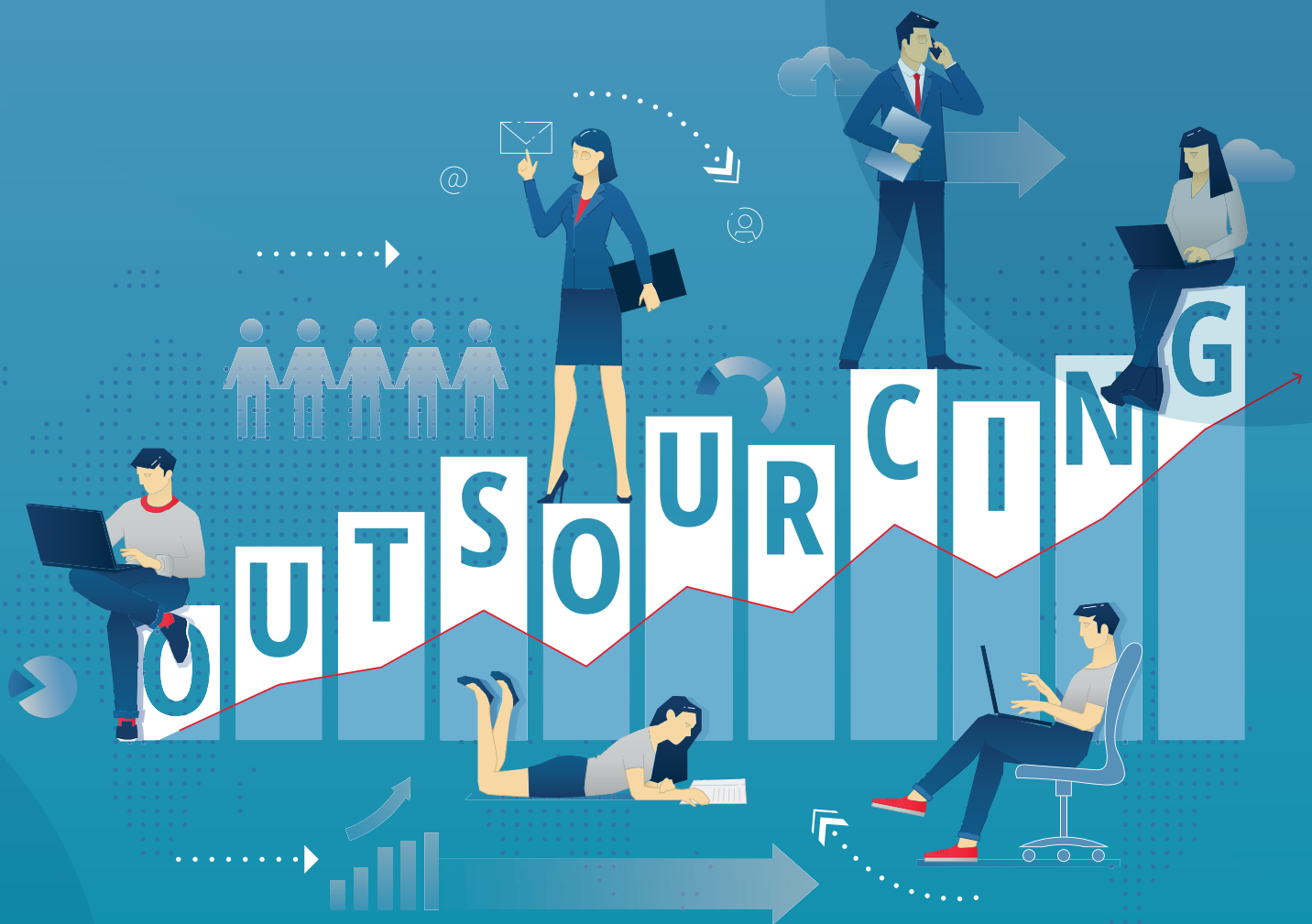
The great resignation is indicative of changing expectations from both employers and employees. Indeed, we have seen many housing providers shift towards more flexible, hybrid and technologically-reliant ways of working in order to compete in the talent market.

To attract and retain the best employees, workplaces must offer internal systems and processes that are user-friendly as well as digitally-efficient.

As much as modern workplaces rely on leveraging and protecting data and implementing efficient IT infrastructures, they're also vehicles for future-proofing in the sense that they help to attract skilled hybrid or remote workers.

Rich Hutchings is the chief technology officer at Littlefish.

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IoT and social housing

Phil Copperwheat, IS Director, Morgan Sindall Property Services

While IoT technology has been firmly established as an essential tool in commercial settings for some time, it's only more recently that its many benefits are being realised within domestic properties (incl. social housing). From reducing energy waste and managing internal air quality (IAQ) to enhancing security, IoT technology offers a way for tenants to take control of their properties and run a safer, healthier, and more efficient home.

The numerous benefits of IoT devices for housing providers are increasingly evident. However, managing multiple devices from various vendors has previously presented an insurmountable challenge, making the widescale deployment of IoT devices in our sector prohibitively complex and expensive.

IoT in domestic settings

The scope of IoT devices in domestic properties is continually evolving, and many of the available applications could help housing providers as well as their tenants. IoT devices and sensors can continually monitor the internal conditions of a property, such as temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide levels. These insights can then alert property teams to take action by arranging repairs or upgrading the fabric of the building. This same data can also prompt tenants to make behavioural changes to create a safer environment for themselves,

such as highlighting when more ventilation is needed to prevent mould-causing condensation.

IoT technology is also capable of alerting maintenance teams and tenants to more immediate issues. For example, leak detection sensors can alert teams to the escape of water, even when it occurs in areas that aren't visible to the tenant. This means that any repair work can be undertaken immediately to limit the damage.

Social housing and the challenges of IoT

However, one of the challenges for housing providers is the management and maintenance of multiple IoT devices across a multitude of properties.

While managing multiple devices, apps and software platforms from several different vendors may not pose a problem to individual homeowners, it's much more difficult when it comes to maintaining hundreds or thousands of properties.

Goldeni is addressing this problem and making the many benefits of IoT accessible to housing providers via a single software platform which takes data from multiple IoT devices (irrespective of IoT supplier) and delivers insights combined from numerous properties in one place. By bringing data from disparate devices into one ecosystem, Goldeni allows housing providers' staff to access all platforms through a single hub, streamlining how IoT systems are managed and maintained.

Multiple devices & one datastream

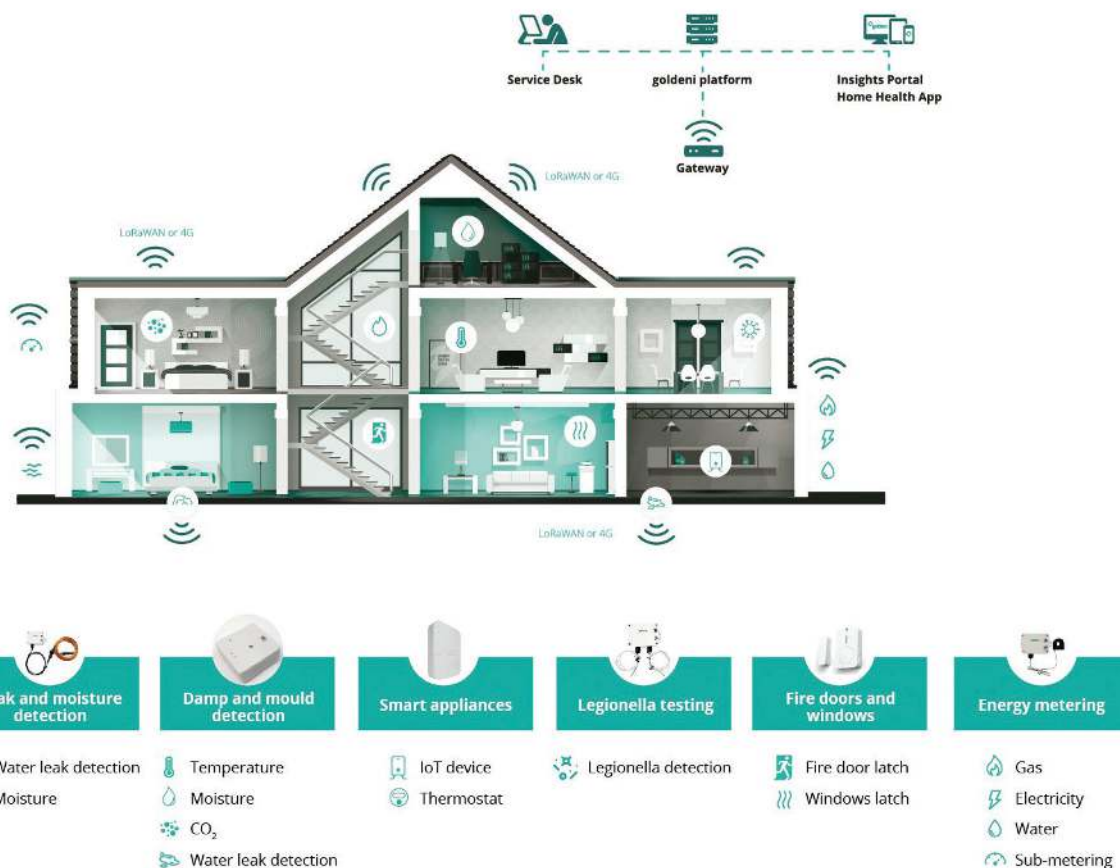
This single software interface combines data gathered by devices and sensors from various vendors to offer landlords a holistic view of all of their properties. This allows them to gain a deeper understanding of their overall portfolio while also allowing a granular look at individual properties, all from a single digital platform.

The second challenge is the installation of devices and the communication channels they operate on. While some require the availability of the tenant's wifi, others require an individual SIM card for each device. Both of these

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pose problems because there is either a dependency on the tenant's wifi or a substantial cost for numerous SIM contracts. This is where open, wireless communication channels such as LoRaWAN are paving the way for connected smart cities and providing a suitable, scalable and cost-effective platform for housing providers.

Long range & wide area

LoRa stands for 'long range' and this communication system can wirelessly send data from multiple IoT devices and sensors across large distances to a central wide area network (WAN) gateway. The gateway connects to the cloud, where the data can then be managed, analysed and interpreted before being delivered to the end-user through the hub. LoRaWAN gateways are central to streamlining the management and maintenance of multi-vendor IoT systems across large portfolios of properties.

For example, a single, centrally-located LoRaWAN gateway can collect data from IoT devices installed within several domestic properties. Depending on the number of sensors or devices in the vicinity and the data rate, a single gateway may be able to serve properties within five kilometres of the box. This means that multiple buildings can communicate with a single piece of hardware rather than each property needing its own hub. This offers a much more economical solution to gathering data and a less complicated and time-consuming installation process for housing teams managing several sites.

This integrated approach to data management and analysis also means that better insights can be achieved. When consolidating the data from around a property into

a single hub, it's possible to overlay different datasets to spot potential problems before they occur.

For example, an IoT system might detect that the boiler is using more energy than expected yet the temperature of the home is lower than normal. This information could then alert property management teams to send an engineer to carry out predictive maintenance on the boiler rather than having to arrange for an expensive repair when it fails. This scenario not only results in a cost-saving for the landlord but also ensures that the boiler remains operational for the tenant.

IoT and the future of social housing

As the scope and scale of IoT continue to advance, it seems inevitable that this cutting-edge technology has a central role in the future of social housing.

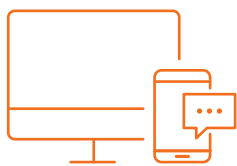
IoT devices, alongside platforms that unify the data gathered by them, offer tangible benefits for housing providers, asset management teams and tenants. In addition to enabling the remote management and monitoring of properties, the in-depth insights and analytics allow housing providers to ensure safe, healthy and compliant homes for their tenants while simultaneously reducing costs and progressing their portfolios' journey towards the sector's sustainability targets.

Phil Copperwheat is the IS director at Morgan Sindall Property Services.

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2023 & beyond –

Housing Technology asked housing experts from Civica, FLS – Fast Lean Smart, Manifest Software Solutions and NEC Software Solutions for some of their ideas and predictions for which new business and technology areas housing providers should be considering in the short- and medium-term.

Disruption and innovation

Helen Rogers, product director at Civica, said, "With the increasing cost and volume of disrepair cases, housing providers should be thinking about how to reduce the time, cost and overall fall in customer satisfaction and compliance risk arising from disrepairs. IoT sensors in homes are now so much more affordable, allowing proactive monitoring of domestic environments to trigger alerts and actions.

"In addition, crowd-sourcing technologies are now well established; these can be used to inform housing providers about the state of their properties without needing expensive surveyors in every instance. Furthermore, the use of digital twins coupled with rich asset data can also help with stock-condition processes to improve budgetary forecasting and reduce waste through 3D modelling and data standards."



The most important thing is integration; none of the technologies that housing providers are considering is possible without systems integration.

Alan Swift, Technical Director, Manifest Software Solutions

Alan Swift, technical director at Manifest Software Solutions, said, "Self-service and automation are the two key areas to consider. That said, self-service portals need to be continually enhanced to deliver new, value-adding services. For example, data from IoT-based sensors should be available to tenants via their self-service portal, as demonstrated by Optus Homes' app, and 'virtual

assistants' from companies such as Converse360 are providing new ways for tenants to interact at any time.

"The integration of IT systems should be the cornerstone of all business activities, with more systems moving to the cloud. For 2023 and beyond, as housing providers continue their business transformation journeys, the integration of new and legacy systems will be vital to meeting their VFM targets through improved process automation."

Game-changing technologies

Trevor Hampton, director of housing solutions at NEC Software Solutions UK, said, "When you are already busy dealing with compliance and the cost-of-living crisis, it can be tempting to see the implementation of IoT sensors as tomorrow's problem but it shouldn't be. IoT sensors have the potential to deliver the smarter, safer and more efficient social housing we all strive for.

"The future of social housing is about achieving greater collaboration and more meaningful engagement with tenants. For this reason, the second game-changing technology housing providers should consider is apps. The latest generation of apps allows housing providers to go beyond simple transactional activities, such as logging repairs or ASB, and move towards more collaboration and giving more of their tenants a voice, rather than just those who turn up at residents' meetings."

Jeremy Squire, UK managing director at FLS – Fast Lean Smart, said, "More comprehensive housing services require more predictive analytics and AI in order to provide better business intelligence, alongside augmented reality changing how some housing providers operate.

What's next?

For example, we're already seeing AR being used in BIM design, with further use of AR helping to improve service delivery and the customer experience."

Civica's Rogers said, "The most innovative technologies aren't necessarily the most complex or cutting-edge; it could be about relatively-simple technologies being applied to a specific problem that result in the most game-changing results because these solutions can help people or processes quickly, effectively and at low risk. For example, connecting devices and connecting communities can be achieved relatively quickly while providing value-adding insights into tenants' needs and the state of housing providers' properties."



IoT and asset monitoring have been around for over 20 years; Coca-Cola has been using IoT to monitor inventory and temperatures in its vending machines since 1982!

Helen Rogers, Product Director, Civica

Manifest's Swift said, "The most important thing is integration; none of the technologies that housing providers are considering is possible without systems integration – an integration layer enables any system to exchange data with any other system, simply and easily. However, integration is often seen as a barrier, with housing providers often needing to plead for APIs from their HMS provider, with complex discussions about aspects such as SOAP, REST and XML.



While housing providers are starting to catch up with, say, retailers' offers to their customers, the demand for 'servitisation' in the housing sector is just beginning.

Jeremy Squire, UK Managing Director, FLS – Fast Lean Smart

"It doesn't have to be that way. An integration layer is composed of microservices that don't care what format the data is in, and this is the path towards making everything happen. An effective integration layer lets housing providers trial new products and services from cutting-edge cloud companies, opening up thousands of possibilities for delivering new services to tenants and staff alike. The same integration layer can also be used to deliver automation, eliminating the boring, repetitive tasks staff do every day."

Learning from other business sectors

Civica's Rogers said, "IoT and asset monitoring has been around for over 20 years. Supermarkets and other food retailers use sensors on refrigerators to monitor food temperature and reduce wastage; for example, Coca-Cola has been using IoT to monitor inventory and temperatures in its vending machines since 1982! This technology is easily adaptable to the housing sector to help inform, predict and control."

NEC's Hampton said, "Consider blockchain... this isn't just about Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies. At its core blockchain creates an unbroken and unalterable audit trail of transactions. This could be used to build trust because it guarantees the fidelity of data records. Blockchain could be used when raising a repair or making a payment because it would give tenants absolute confidence in the accuracy and veracity of any data records generated between them and their housing provider."



Blockchain creates an unbroken and unalterable audit trail of transactions – this could be used to guarantee the accuracy and veracity of any data records generated between tenants and housing providers.

Trevor Hampton, Director of Housing Solutions,
NEC Software Solutions UK

FLS's Squire said, "While housing providers are starting to catch up with, say, retailers' offers to their customers, the demand for 'servitisation' in the housing sector is just beginning. Servitisation goes beyond good customer service, with many material products increasingly losing perceived value. For housing providers, software ownership is taking a back seat and they are instead looking for the most cost-effective and inclusive way to complete tasks and solve problems."

How to introduce new initiatives

NEC's Hampton said, "For housing providers to introduce any of these ideas (as outlined above) alongside their day-to-day operations, they fundamentally need strong buy-in and unequivocal support from their executive teams; this will set the direction for the rest of the organisation to follow."

"For example, housing teams need a clear strategy and vision to provide a solid foundation on which to start building. Income teams are likely to need to work with the repair teams, who in turn need to work with planned and cyclical maintenance, who then work with the safety teams and so on.

"With a clear strategy at the core, the technological change can then be tackled bit by bit, block by block, rather than all at once. You could start by refining the repairs process by improving the automation, then adding digital logging screens and finally augmented reality."

Housing Technology would like to thank Helen Rogers (Civica), Jeremy Squire (FLS - Fast Lean Smart), Alan Swift (Manifest Software Solutions) and Trevor Hampton (NEC Software Solutions UK) for their editorial contribution to this article.

GENERAL NEWS



Housing Technology's Data Matters 2022

Kindly supported by Aareon UK, Aico, Capita One, FireAngel and IntoZetta, Housing Technology hosted 'Data Matters 2022' at The British Museum in central London in mid-September, with a brilliant turn-out of around 100 guests for our new one-day event focused exclusively on all aspects of data within social housing.

Golding Homes (Anna Marie Lawrence-Lovell) opened the event with a talk on the importance of data quality followed by Aareon (Jack McLean) on zero-party data and One Housing (Tariq Bhatti) on 'fight club for data' relating to data governance.

Capita One (Glenn Allan) covered how to use data to automate building management and maintain regulatory compliance, with Optivo (Robert Stewart) on the vital role of data in its merger with Southern Housing and FireAngel (Nick Rutter) covering smart homes and IoT.

IntoZetta (Dan Yarnold and David Bamford) then co-hosted an interactive discussion with Southern Housing (Nicole Brosnan) and Shaw Consulting (Chris Shaw) on the consequences of poor housing data, followed by

Aico (Simon Flint) on the importance of APIs and data integration, and Sanctuary Housing (Priyanka Kakkar) on assessing your data management maturity.

Data Matters 2022 closed with a brilliant talk from Dr Sabrina Cohen-Hatton (author, firefighter and psychologist) on how to make better decisions under pressure, based on her life-threatening experiences in the emergency services.

Based on the success of our inaugural Data Matters event, we expect to run Data Matters 2023 next September (date and location tbc); please email alastair@housing-technology.com for further information.





Karbon Homes' digital transformation

Nathanial Ray, Assistant Director of ICT & Digital Transformation, Karbon Homes



What is digital transformation? It can mean everything to a company but if it's not broken down and made into something that both customers and colleagues can understand and get behind, it can become another meaningless buzz word that we merely pay lip service to.

When I joined Karbon Homes as assistant director of ICT and digital transformation in March 2020, we had just added 'digital transformation' to my title. We've made significant progress since then yet our journey towards digital transformation has still only just begun.

Getting the basics right

Digital transformation isn't about implementing the newest, most advanced and innovative systems; in fact, that would just send some of our colleagues and customers running in fear. Instead, it's about strengthening our digital foundations and getting the basics right, ensuring the needs of our colleagues and customers are met. We began with how we provide IT services for our colleagues.

The first stage of our digital transformation journey focused on hardware. That included a complete refresh of our end-user computing networks and planning our migration to cloud services.

Everyone needs to interact with some form of hardware in order to engage digitally, so ensuring our colleagues had the right devices for their jobs and that our systems behind the scenes were all up to date and fit for purpose was the obvious starting point.

Varied hardware requirements

In common with most housing providers, Karbon Homes' workforce comprises a variety of office- and field-based roles. This diversity forced us to focus on which technologies were right for different colleagues. A roll-out of laptops was never going to work for everyone; we also

needed large-screen phones for our trade colleagues, quality tablets for those doing servicing and checks, and mobile devices with high-quality cameras for housing officers who need to take photos regularly.

The handover process, albeit rather daunting because it involved the exchange of around 1,500 devices, was the perfect opportunity to take our colleagues on the journey with us and get them behind what we were trying to achieve. Self-service was prominent, with everyone encouraged to set up their own devices and work through back-to-basics study guides to ensure they were comfortable with the devices and apps' functionality.

At the same time, our day-to-day collaboration tools, such as email, chat and document sharing, needed to become more embedded in people's working practices so that collaboration via their new devices became a regular activity for everyone.

We already had the Microsoft Office365 suite so it was a case of raising our colleagues' awareness of its capabilities and making the most of the tools available to stimulate digital collaboration.

We did this via a digital champions education programme, providing 18 months' training on our Office365 and Power platforms for the digital champions and then empowering them to pass on their skills to colleagues. It quickly became clear that there were a few who really embraced this role and loved getting the badges to show progress but, as we expected, it didn't quite go far enough in ensuring all colleagues were getting the most from the tools.

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'Get back 30' programme

We are now in the second phase of extending our use of Office365 and have established a 'Get Back 30' project. Its aim is to help colleagues get back 30 minutes per week by digitising or automating their regular activities. We're approaching this department by department, asking them to suggest what could be digitised or automated within their teams.

We have now created a product backlog and we're delivering the 'Get Back 30' outputs through Agile sprints and releases, supporting our cultural shift towards product management and agile delivery.

Better digital habits

We're also running a series of 'digital habits' sessions to support our 'Get Back 30' campaign. Over a 10-month period, we'll deliver five themes where our colleagues can learn a simple digital habit to make them more efficient.

An example is our 'collaborate' theme. One habit is to avoid attaching files to emails and instead sharing them via OneDrive or SharePoint, meaning both parties can both work on the same file and no longer need to pass multiple versions back and forth. Habits like this might seem very straightforward but we need to encourage the adoption of these basic habits first before we can take our people further along our digital transformation process.

The last building block in our digital foundations was improving the hardware in our offices and networks. With docking stations, screens and a new gigabyte software-defined WAN, we're ready for hybrid ways of working. We're also trialling Microsoft Teams-specific meeting rooms, providing space away from the main desks for colleagues to join remote meetings.

Now we have these hardware foundations, we're looking at applying cloud migration to infrastructure-, platform- and software-as-a-service. We've just moved our telephony and contact centre solution to unified communications-as-a-service and contact centre-as-a-service with help from IT supplier 8x8.

Stronger foundations

It's an exciting time for us. Digital has become a key element of how we do things at Karbon Homes and it plays a key role in our 'stronger foundations strategy' over the next five years.

When it comes to successful digital transformation at an organisation like ours, it really is about playing the long game, starting strong and keeping our focus on the customer and colleague experience.

Nathanial Ray is the assistant director of ICT and digital transformation at Karbon Homes.



Tackling the digital skills gap

Tim Cowland, Senior Consultant, Socitm Advisory

Housing providers' digital transformation projects could be at risk due to the challenge of recruiting and retaining the right skills. Tim Cowland, a senior consultant at Socitm Advisory, looks at how the sector is responding.

Staffing, upskilling and retention

One issue that consistently comes up in the conversations that we have with senior housing professionals is the difficulty they have of attracting and retaining the right skills in their organisations to deliver digital transformation and change projects.

The market has become increasingly employee-led. Since the pandemic, staff have more flexibility and choice on where they work as geographical barriers are broken down. Furthermore, wages are rising for those who have the skills to deliver digital change and people can now choose to work for organisations who better understand the value of their role. Put simply, people with the right skills for digital transformation projects don't want to work for leaders who fail to understand the power of data and digital.

As skills become more in demand and wages increase, smaller organisations and digital teams find recruitment and retention particularly difficult. In response, many are turning to a policy of 'grow your own' to develop existing members of staff or those with limited skills, with the government's 'apprenticeship levy' becoming an increasingly attractive way of investing in team members.

Focusing on transformation

Housing providers have also told us that it's becoming more difficult to get team members to leave their day-to-day roles to work on change programmes. Many organisations have traditionally used this method so that staff seconded from within can bring additional contextual knowledge to a project team and provide continuity when a project closes. However, this approach also has its disadvantages; for example, when existing staff are brought into business change teams, it can leave gaps in other parts of the business and the quality of services offered to customers can suffer.

When there is pressure on staff resources, change is often rushed, resulting in long-standing, clumsy work-arounds or missing functionality. Change programmes can become fragmented and outcomes that might benefit one part of an organisation might have a negative impact on another part.

Implementing effective change takes time and this time isn't always readily available, especially in smaller organisations. A further risk is that these smaller teams often lack a project management office to provide effective governance on change projects.

Leaders and organisational structure

How an organisation's leadership team approaches the digital agenda is becoming increasingly important. We often find that there are legacy reasons for where IT and digital sit within an organisation and that they are rarely well-represented at the top.

Traditional structures are holding organisations back, and too often IT and digital teams aren't integrated into the wider running of the business. This can result in siloed ways of working and a focus on tactical, short-term matters rather than building a wider digital strategy and road map that will meet strategic business objectives.

This is nothing new. In all my years managing and advising in relation to digital, data and technology services, there have always been criticisms that "we're pulled this way and that" to respond to ever-changing users' demands, without there ever being a strategic roadmap in place. This needs to change, and it starts with developing a more detailed understanding of the technical issues and support within executive teams. Without this, we see organisations exposed to a variety of risks and missing out on innovation.

Adopting innovation and technology

It's clear that many leadership teams and boards want to adopt technology but often don't understand the detail and wider implications, including the strategic opportunities and risks. For this reason, there is a growing demand for at least one board member to have a digital portfolio. Many organisations are also now employing a chief information officer (even if only on a part-time basis) to bring digital skills to the boardroom.

This isn't always achievable for smaller organisations. As a consequence, we're now receiving a growing number of requests to provide this expertise 'as a service.' As a vendor-neutral partner, this involves us advising boards and executive teams on digital matters without the overhead of

retaining full-time members of staff or working alongside existing staff members in development roles to upskill them to create and shape a resilient future team.

As organisations wrestle with the problem of attracting and retaining staff in the current circumstances, the 'as a service' model is becoming increasingly popular. It enables boards and executive teams to implement the technical and change skills needed in a more cost-effective way while reducing risk and avoiding the mistakes that other housing providers have made before them.

Tim Cowland is a senior consultant at Socitm Advisory.

Collaborating with Gen Z

Richard McPhee, Solutions Director, Gamma



The way we work has changed. While calling this new reality a 'new normal' is a cliché, we can't ignore how the pandemic acted as a catalyst for change.

Flexible or hybrid working, once an added benefit, is now expected by most employees. In particular, the differing priorities of the younger generation of workers are shaping the way companies approach new technologies, benefits and processes.

For business leaders, this poses new challenges to ensure all are satisfied, productive and collaborative, regardless of location. However, this shift also offers new opportunities to create workplaces where any barriers to positive behavioural changes are removed and where the adoption of new technologies is fostered and encouraged.

Reshaping the future of work: Gen Z

Gen Z (also known as 'digital natives' and 'zoomers') will comprise almost a third of the workforce by 2025, bringing with them fresh perspectives on values and ways of working; for them, work is what you do, not where you do it. More than other earlier generations, Gen Z are looking

for a sense of purpose and achievement and are basing their career choices on 'purpose and principles', as well as work-life balance.

As the first digitally-native generation, Gen Z are thrilled by the prospect of flexible working options. Before the pandemic, just one in 70 jobs on LinkedIn offered the option to work remotely; that figure fell to one in seven by the start of 2022.

Business leaders must therefore re-evaluate the tools and solutions they have to cater for the needs of this new group of workers. While established employees might struggle to adapt to new technologies and be more resistant to change, Gen Z recognises the importance of technology to encourage collaboration and welcome new solutions that can help them establish better working relationships and better work-life balance.



Company culture

When remote working became the norm, it shook the foundations of most corporate cultures. It became clear that business leaders had been reluctant to change for no real reason; employees continued to do their work remotely with the same level of productivity.

Housing providers should foster a culture of change and flexibility, where staff feel empowered to embrace new ways of working that can increase productivity and foster a better work-life balance.

Fear of change

Humans are creatures of habit; when anything changes in our daily lives, we tend to be resistant to it and are scared it will complicate and disrupt our lives.

This is evident when new technology is adopted. Changing processes with new tools can often jeopardise that feeling of comfort in the 'old ways', with some people refusing to adopt new ways of working and defaulting to what they know.

To ensure new technology adoption is welcomed, business leaders must take the time to walk their staff through the benefits of new technologies; how they'll improve their day-to-day lives and why it will be important to the individual's work.

Confusion over choice

Adopting the right technology to enable collaboration is vital. With the right tools, employees are empowered to work from their location of choice, enjoying the benefits of flexible working hours and in turn, increasing productivity.

Yet the number and variety of collaboration tools can be overwhelming. Faced with this situation, business communication and productivity are often fragmented and left to end-users' own preferences. A lack of direction and messaging around what the business is working toward also threatens to hinder the adoption of collaboration tools, particularly without adequate training.

While Gen Z and millennials are more receptive than most people to hybrid working and the benefits of the latest collaboration tools, existing employees are still finding it hard to adapt to the sea of changes we've had to face in the past few years.

For now, it's all about finding a balance; a hybrid approach, clear direction and training will be vital. Co-creating the future of work can't be done with a divided workforce.

Richard McPhee is a solutions director at Gamma.

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