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HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™
2023 CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE 2023
08-09 March 2023
Nottingham

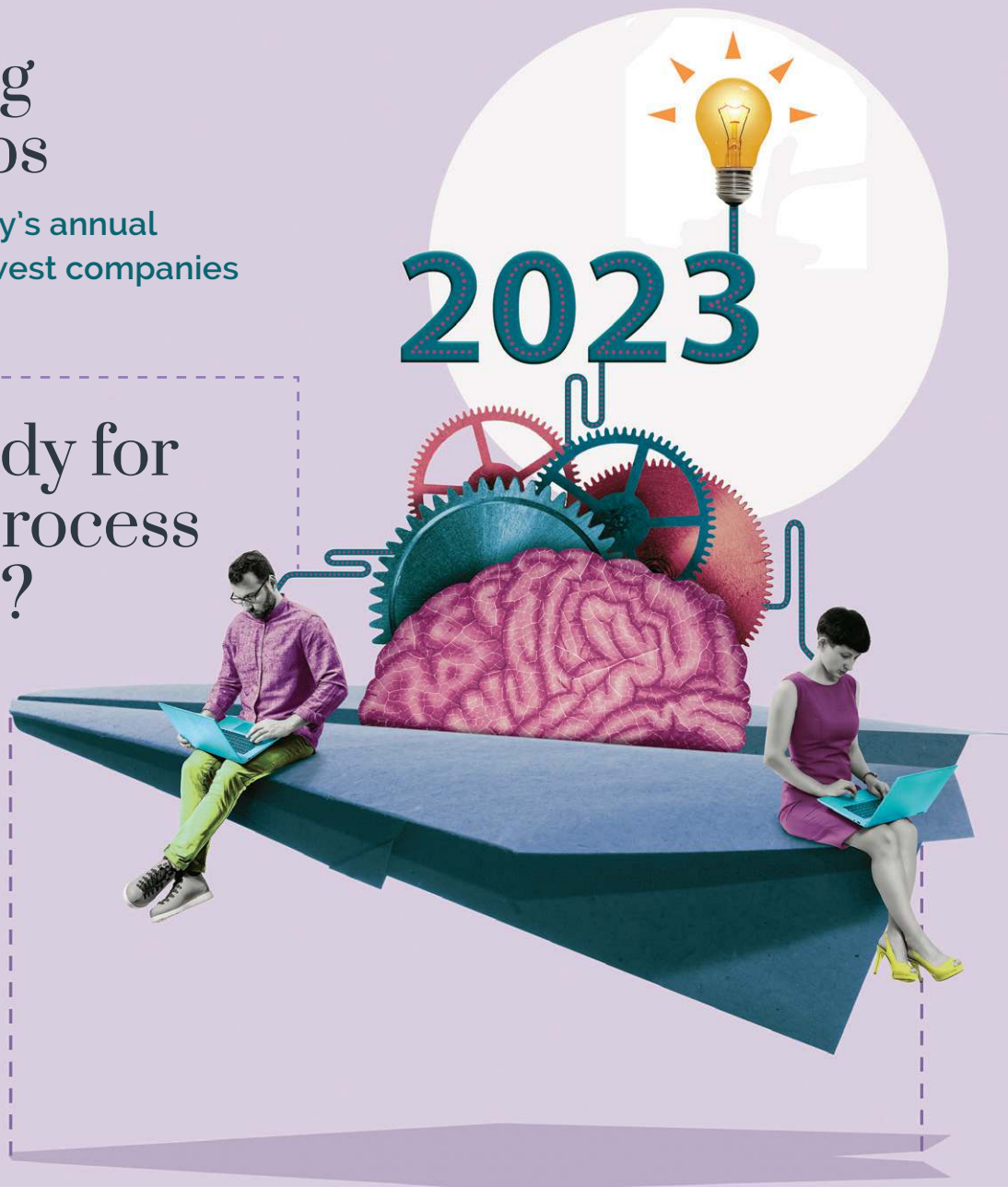
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Proptechs & housing IT start-ups

Housing Technology's annual overview of the newest companies to watch in 2023

Are you ready for business process automation?

How to use business process automation, data integration, artificial intelligence, robots, machine learning and workflow



Housing management
Finance management
Customer management

Mobile working
Infrastructure
General news

Looking in the right direction for 2023 and beyond

As we begin 2023, the topics chosen by our speakers for their keynote presentations at the Housing Technology 2023 conference (08-09 March, Nottingham) are great indicators to where people should be directing their attentions over the next 12-24 months.

Business intelligence & automation

Covered by Broadacres Housing, Gentoo, Peabody and Stockport Homes alongside Crimson, Salesforce and TechLabs London, the topics include Microsoft's suite of BI applications, CRM, process automation, dynamic resource & asset allocation and workflow.

Customer service & communications

Featuring speakers from Lincoln Council, Newark & Sherwood Council and Thenue Housing accompanied by Housing Insight and Social Telecoms, the themes span real-time online repairs, CX, omni-channel communications, self-service and tenant support.

Cyber security

As well as a panel discussion on cyber security from ForHousing, L&Q, National Cyber Security Centre and Notting Hill Genesis, CDW, Lima and Sophos's talks will also emphasise the importance of the technical, business and human aspects of IT security.

Data management, golden threads & systems integration

With the current sector-wide focus on 'golden threads of data', the presentations from HACT, Halton Housing, Karbon Homes, Paradigm Housing, Platform Housing and Rooftop Housing cover the

importance of data quality, standards and governance, with analytics, systems integration, machine learning and metrics covered by Manifest Software Solutions, Mobysoft, NEC and Socitm Advisory.

Digital & business transformation

Alongside a panel discussion on 'the IT-powered housing provider' from Halton Housing, Home Group, Platform Housing, Riverside Group & Vivid Homes, digital transformation insights will come from Karbon Homes, Kingdom Housing, Raven Housing and Sovini Group spanning cloud, SaaS and digital cultures, with further intelligence from Aareon, Active Housing, Esuasive and TSG on connected housing and business change.

Regulatory compliance & tenants' safety

Accent Group, Coastline Housing, Poplar HARCA and Univ. of Exeter are joined by Aico (HomeLink), Civica and FireAngel to provide a very timely focus on mould detection/prevention, fire safety, IoT and smart sensors, and regulatory compliance.

If those topics and speakers have whetted your appetite, you can join us at Housing Technology 2023 via conference.housing-technology.com.

Furthermore, if you've not yet done so, you can still download Housing Technology's 'The E-State of Housing' report; it's our best report yet on the state of technology in the UK social housing sector. In summary, the report covers: housing providers' IT and business goals/plans; current & future technologies; data management & integration; regulatory compliance; IT delivery models; BaU vs. new projects; and IT spending. Order your copy from housing-technology.com/research.

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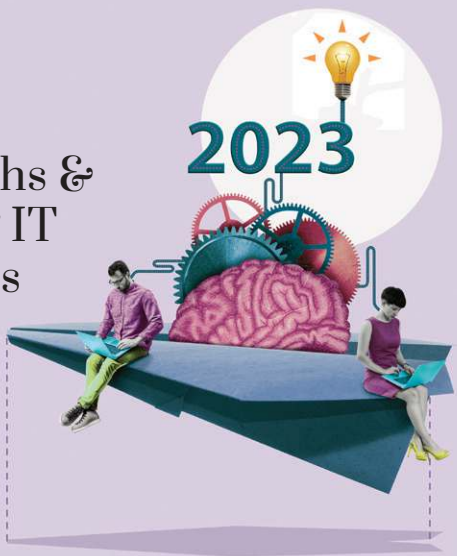
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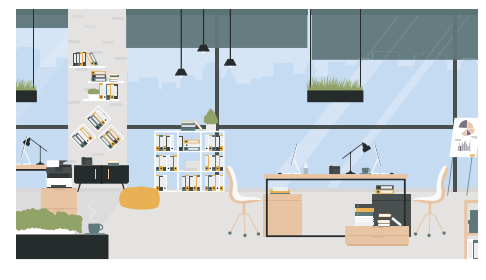
How to use business process automation, data integration, artificial intelligence, robots, machine learning and workflow

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Fuelling high performance automation



David Bamford, Delivery Director, IntoZetta

Like a high-performance engine relies on high-quality fuel, a high-performance automated process relies on high-quality data. How good is yours?

The first printed use of the term, "garbage in, garbage out" was from a US Army specialist, William Mellin in 1957. Writing of the early work of Army mathematicians with computers, he explained that computers cannot think for themselves, and that "sloppily programmed" inputs inevitably lead to incorrect outputs. In the intervening 66 years, that hasn't changed.

The opportunities presented by automating business processes shouldn't be ignored. In fact, beyond a certain point, automation isn't just desirable, it's absolutely necessary.

Small margins for error

However, even the best automated processes are far from flawless. In comparison to the manual alternatives, the tolerance for error in automation is tiny and, while we can engineer out issues with processes themselves, taking care of their inputs is often overlooked.

When an automated process fails, we can assume one of two things: either the process is flawed or the data that passed through it was incorrect.

Data as fuel

It's that second factor, the data, the fuel of the process, which is the often-overlooked element. Across the housing sector, whether it's customer, asset or financial data, quality issues are holding back seamless, automated processes from delivering the benefits they promise.

Let's imagine a scenario... A customer raises a request for maintenance via an app. That request creates a job in our system, which in turn categorises it and sends it to the correct maintenance team's system. Their system then adds that job to the work list and assigns it to an engineer. It then sends a message to the tenant advising the date and time of the visit. So far, so automated.

Now let's imagine that not all of the information passed across was correct. The job is created, the engineer is assigned, but the contact details of the tenant are wrong so the message can't be sent with the appointment details. A few days later, the engineer attends as planned but the customer isn't at home. The engineer can't get access, the job has failed, and it's just cost us £80.



It's not just obvious data issues such as the above example that cause process failures. Subtle errors in your asset hierarchy, issues with classifications and assets' factual data can lead to mis-calculated service charges, lost rent and regulatory issues. Not to mention the inconvenience and, in some cases, harms that can affect your customers.

Financial exposure

While writing this article, I was reminded of a client who had 80 properties with data quality issues in their automated process for electrical safety compliance. That didn't seem so bad, against a total stock of around 10,000 properties, until you applied the potential regulatory fine of £30,000 per property.

£2.4 million... that was their exposure. On only 80 properties, just because of the data.

Today, thanks to taking proactive steps to manage their data better, that client's exposure is closer to £180,000, or six properties, and fixes for those six are all in hand.

By getting a firm grasp of the data which fuels your processes, and the quality thereof, it's possible to mitigate the risk of process failure with targeted, efficient data cleansing and enrichment.

By getting a firm grasp of the cost of failure in your processes, you can prioritise your resources in the right way and cut through the noise created by complex

systems and huge databases to find the data that really matters.

Treat the problem, not the symptom

Think of it another way – we want to treat the problem, not the symptom. If a colleague can solve a customer's issue soon after it occurs, that's great. However, if we can stop the issue from occurring in the first place, we not only save time and money, we also definitely improve the outcome for our customer.

Proactively measuring and monitoring the data that fuels your organisation, and acting on that intelligence with targeted data cleansing, is the single biggest improvement any organisation can make in process automation.

Back to basics

Much of our recent work has focused on automating the generation of SDR submissions. In most cases, that has involved a 'back to basics' approach which has encompassed data quality measurement and ground-up process re-engineering.

What has been fascinating is seeing at first-hand the layers of complexity weaved into the existing processes to make up for the all-too-predictable shortfalls in the data. Hours and hours of often complex, lengthy and hard to decode workarounds (almost inevitably in a series of Excel workbooks built by highly-skilled colleagues) become hard-wired into critical business processes.

Yet with a rigorous data management process, all that could have been easily avoided by eliminating the root causes. Not only that, but those skilled resources could have been adding real value elsewhere.

Aim for automation

What's the final thought here? Automate your processes as far as possible. The benefits, not just to you as a business but to your customers and suppliers, are clear and achievable.

If your customers want to interact with you at 4am, an automated process will support that. If you want your suppliers to be paid on time with their invoices correctly matched, an automated process will support that.

However, don't forget the data... "garbage in, garbage out." It's still as relevant now as it was in 1957.

I will leave you with this quote from one of the fathers of modern computing, Charles Babbage: "On two occasions I have been asked, 'Pray, Mr. Babbage, if you put into the machine wrong figures, will the right answers come out?'. I am not able rightly to apprehend the kind of confusion of ideas that could provoke such a question."

David Bamford is the delivery director at IntoZetta.



Flagship and Ebrik launch augmented reality app

Flagship Group has teamed up with construction software company Ebrik to launch See It First, an augmented-reality (AR) app that aims to bring tenants and stakeholders closer to new housing developments.

The Ebrik platform is intended to increase transparency and communication by involving stakeholders in the construction process in a more engaging manner than traditional methods.

Flagship and Ebrik's app allows users to visualise proposed new developments before construction begins. This gives tenants and local residents the opportunity to engage more actively with projects by helping them to see what new homes could look like in three-dimensional space.

James Payne, director of regeneration, Flagship Group, said, "Our app is a great opportunity to extend the boundaries of what's possible with technology and get our tenants more involved. The app marks a fundamental change in the way that we consult on projects. Our hope is that by using the app, people will be able to see what the changes look like in their communities."

Ana Moutinho, founder, Ebrik, said, "The main purpose of Ebrik is to bring transparency to the construction sector and focus on the stakeholders who aren't normally very involved. We can already see from community consultations how open, willing and interested residents can be in engaging with these new technologies."

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Supporting residents with home safety risks

Nick Rutter, Co-Founder & Chief Product Officer, FireAngel

More than seven million households are facing fuel poverty this winter despite the government's Autumn Statement, according to campaigners. As temperatures fall, residents may increase their gas-appliance use, from boilers and heaters to cookers and fires. However, the very appliances sought for comfort and safety can place lives at risk.



It's essential that gas appliances are correctly installed and maintained to reduce the dangers of leaks, fires, explosions and carbon monoxide poisoning. As millions of Britons face higher gas bills, there's a danger that reductions in housing providers' incomes will push regular appliance servicing further down their priority lists, increasing the risks.

Another concern is that fuel-poor households will cut back on fuel to ease their finances, leaving them vulnerable to cold homes and the growth of damp and mould. Cold homes can have devastating consequences, taking thousands of lives each winter, and people living with mould are more likely to suffer from respiratory illnesses,

infections, allergies or asthma, increasing the risks of ill-health, sometimes with fatal consequences.

A changing legislative landscape

As it becomes evident that fundamental changes are needed to ensure that people are safe in their homes, legislation is being overhauled across the UK. Changes to the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 came into force in December 2022 to ensure that both private- and social-rented properties in Wales are fit for human habitation.

This includes regulations on condensation, damp and mould, and fire and carbon monoxide safety. However, industry experts have expressed concern that the traditional solutions for addressing damp and mould are often ineffective, time-consuming and expensive; anti-mould wall coatings and regular roof and gutter maintenance only go so far, and cavity/external wall insulation can increase problems if installed incorrectly.

This is particularly problematic for housing providers. As waiting lists and placement times get longer, there's more pressure on housing providers to fix problems quickly and move new tenants in. This, along with poor advice and limited access to specialist knowledge, can lead to only superficial problems being treated.

A smart approach to residents' safety

The internet of things (IoT) offers an alternative means for housing providers to monitor humidity and temperature levels in their properties. Carefully-placed IoT sensors can provide specific data in real-time, enabling much



earlier interventions. Furthermore, installing IoT sensors in properties allows housing providers to deliver advice to relevant tenants and provide accurate information about where and when they might need to adopt different ventilation or heating practices.

Smart sensors can also provide a clear audit trail, recording accurate and regular environmental readings specific to each property and room, and because the data can be analysed remotely, there is less need for intrusive on-site investigations.

As the laws on home safety continue to tighten, data collected from IoT sensors may also play a role in future regeneration projects. Analysing data for trends and patterns can show housing providers which regions or properties are particularly prone to damp, and ensure those properties have the right insulation and ventilation installed.

IoT technologies now enable housing providers to deploy a host of sensors in their properties. This includes smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, enabling them to monitor fire risks as well as the onset of condensation, damp and mould.

FireAngel's Home Environment Gateway delivers a holistic resident safety solution, encompassing fire safety, AI-driven risk stratification and background environmental monitoring. Through additional Zigbee sensors, the solution takes resident safety and wellbeing to previously

unachievable levels, enabling housing providers to prioritise condensation, damp and mould interventions and increase fire prevention measures for residents who need it most.

By tapping into IoT, we can create smarter, healthier homes that protect residents today, tomorrow and in the future.

For more information on FireAngel's Home Environment Gateway, please visit fireangel.co.uk.

Nick Rutter is the co-founder and chief product officer at FireAngel.

FireAngel.



Housing and the ever-evolving workplace

Richard Hutchings, Chief Technology Officer, Littlefish

There's a difference between what we might call contemporary or trendy workplaces (perhaps the sorts with casual, open-plan offices, games rooms and nap pods) and what we mean when we refer to the modern workplace, although, of course, the two aren't mutually exclusive.

The term 'modern workplace' refers more to a set of technological, physical and psychological conditions which aim to improve the overall employee experience while simultaneously optimising the productivity and efficiency of the organisation.

In many ways, this new way of thinking about the workplace has paved the way for new and emerging technologies, the sort which support automation, collaboration and hybrid working (remember, a recent survey of the housing sector revealed that almost every housing provider in the UK plans to move, or has moved, to a hybrid-working approach).

In turn, this has meant that the modern workplace has become a highly digital environment; a place that needs robust infrastructure to facilitate the technologies, applications, data, tools and collaboration features required by employees with important work to do, and which enables them to access their workspace from anywhere.

People-centric organisations

Still, while highly digital by necessity, it's important to remember that the modern workplace isn't just about using new and advanced technologies. What the modern workplace really speaks to most of all is people.

The modern workplace is about transforming internal systems and processes to make them more user-friendly and efficient; it's about future-proofing and adding scalability to organisations to secure and upskill the jobs held within; and it's about improving the working experience significantly for busy end-users by offering flexibility and reliability.

The term 'modern workplace', then, is a lens through which we consider the fundamental role technology will play in shaping and enhancing housing providers as they strain to meet our changing human needs.

How the modern workplace helps housing providers

The modern workplace is about transforming the user experience through changes to internal systems and processes to make them more user-friendly and efficient. It also facilitates housing providers as they create infrastructures that respond to the goals of the organisation, namely, to help more of those in need.

Having implemented a modern workplace strategy, most housing associations will benefit from:

- Faster, more reliable communications;
- Enhanced productivity;
- Lower operating costs;
- More efficient processes;
- Higher employee productivity;
- Reliable backup and disaster recovery;
- Interconnected and transparent operations;
- Improved cyber security;
- Higher staff satisfaction and engagement;
- Increased flexibility and scalability;
- Attracting skilled talent;
- Improved customer experiences.

How will the modern workplace evolve?

Ever since the first lockdowns of 2020, we've seen a shift to more flexible ways of working; what does the modern workplace look like two years later and how will it evolve?

1. Use of physical office space

While it's true that modern workplaces facilitate remote



working (and that many employees prefer their improved work/life balance), physical offices didn't exactly become redundant despite many people's predictions a year or two ago.

Instead, the way we use office space continues to evolve, with many employees reporting that they prefer to go into the office occasionally to collaborate with colleagues and benefit from social interaction. In other words, the modern workplace offers a 'best of both worlds' approach, wherein organisations can retain the wellbeing benefits of working from home while still promoting strong professional and social environments.

This trend is also changing the layout and design of offices because more space is needed for, say, monthly team meetings, occasional one-on-ones and even quiet, concentration rooms (for staff who visit the office now and then to escape hectic home lives). In future, housing providers may find that what they need are smaller, quieter meeting rooms set up for video conferencing and phone calls rather than larger, open-plan offices.

2. Business analytics

Modern housing providers are never merely 'places of work' but centres of collaboration and innovation. This means they are focusing more on supporting employees' work, productivity and experiences.

To achieve this, housing providers need to bridge the gap between one of their most important assets, data, and their decision making. After all, data (or business intelligence) is a key component in any organisation's ability to remain agile, strategic and transformative.

Housing providers might therefore want use of tools such as Microsoft Power BI to increase their business intelligence efforts. With this, users can connect to, model, visualise and securely share data, turning insights into intelligent, evidence-driven action points.

3. Personal & professional development

Once upon a time, workers simply went to work to... well, work. People who were deemed 'driven' and 'devoted' enough were promoted into higher positions while those thought to be less skilled usually remained in their current positions, ad infinitum.

However, in the modern workplace, organisations have recognised the importance of upskilling and empowering their workforces in order to retain their staff and achieve better results.

In the modern workplace, learning is made accessible and user-friendly, and is often available through self-service or online portals. Without this, housing providers risk blocking the learning process and increasing their dependence on outside expertise.

4. Investment in employees' wellbeing

As the focus shifts to employee experience in the modern workplace, many housing providers realise that unhappy employees are also unproductive, demotivated and disengaged employees.

The modern workplace will prioritise and continue to destigmatise mental health alongside elevating digital employee experience (DEX) and overall employee experience (EX) in order to reap the benefits in terms of productivity and staff retention.

Of course, keeping your employees happy is also the right thing to do and leads to a far better, more collaborative and positive working environment for everyone.

5. Focus on communication

The modern workplace depends on the free flow of ideas, information and instruction. In order to be successful, housing providers will need to facilitate constant communication and collaboration through multiple channels. Users will require the ability to communicate through face-to-face conversations, large group meetings, email, video and phone calls, project management software and impromptu instant messaging.

To this end, your managed service provider should be transparent about the software and devices your organisation uses and the ways they can promote and simplify communication and collaboration digitally.

Richard Hutchings is the chief technology officer at Littlefish.

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City of Lincoln Council is set to move all of its housing services to the cloud in a bid to improve services for its 8,000 tenants. The five-year, £1m deal with Civica will see the council implement Civica’s Cx Housing Management, Cx Asset Management and Cx Contractor software.

The full Civica Cx platform will allow the council's tenants to manage their complete housing journeys, from searching and applying for a home through to sustaining their tenancies and booking repairs and maintenance, all in one place.

For the council's staff, the Civica software will reduce errors and duplicated work by consolidating all of the council's current internal systems into one fully-integrated platform. Operating in the cloud, the council's staff will have full access to council data at all times, whether they're out and about, in the office or working from home.

Frances Jelly, housing business support manager, City of Lincoln Council, said, "We are working with our tenants' panel to ensure we create a system which suits everyone, offering a single point of contact for tenants to interact with us and solve any queries quickly and easily."

Michelle Tyler, managing director for social housing, Civica, said, "Increased automation will save the council time, and the integrated Cx platform will give the council's staff a single view of each tenant and their property."



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The silences in the system

Predicting and preventing damp and mould

Trevor Hampton, Director of Housing Solutions,
NEC Software Solutions



The combination of our mild, drizzly climate and aging housing stock comprises the perfect breeding ground for damp and mould. It will continue to exist even after the pre-1970s tower blocks and maisonettes have been replaced by modern designs. Even an energy-efficient modern home can suffer from damp and mould if it's over-occupied, under-heated and poorly-ventilated. In short, damp and mould problems won't be disappearing anytime soon.

The recent spate of tragic headlines has been a stark and sorrowful reminder that it's not a problem to be side-lined. Fuel poverty is likely to exacerbate the problem as more

tenants choose between heating and eating. However, as the Housing Ombudsman has stated, damp and mould are not lifestyle problems.

While there isn't one quick-fix solution to preventing and managing damp and mould, housing providers can make more use of the repairs and complaints data already in their systems to get ahead of the problem by identifying higher risk properties.

Finding the 'silences in the system'

Sometimes despite best practices, tenants' expectations aren't met. Human errors or a lack of a 'whole system' approach can mean calls can inadvertently get closed before being resolved. The "general sense of frustration" felt by tenants that landlords aren't listening or taking "repair requests or complaints seriously" was highlighted by the Housing Ombudsman in 2021.

Consider the following scenario... A tenant calls to report a damp and mould problem from a leak in the roof. The call is logged and then subsequently cancelled because there is a maintenance programme to replace the roof next month. However, the day after the call is closed, the planned maintenance programme is postponed until next

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year and the roof doesn't get replaced after all. So, while the problem appears resolved, in fact it's unaddressed. The damp and mould continue to spread, so the tenant calls again or uses another channel but because it's not linked to the original call, it's not actioned as a priority repair. Three months or more go by without the tenant's concern being addressed. The tenant feels ignored and stops complaining and the damp and mould escalates.

The good news is that it's possible to find 'silences' like these in the system. Improving analytics in the housing management system can help housing providers uncover less obvious information and trigger alerts when calls are closed too quickly or a tenant suddenly stops complaining and there isn't a record of any repairs taking place.

Artificial intelligence makes it easier to spot patterns and trends by picking up the same problem reported in other calls, messages or social media posts. The silences are more likely to be found in unstructured data such as note pad entries or inspection reports, rather than in the structured data such as the call reference, date, time or address.

The data gives the housing team a fuller picture so they can act faster than if a report or comment was seen as an isolated concern, thereby supporting housing providers to fulfil the Housing Ombudsman's recommendation to be on the front foot in finding 'their silence'.

Understanding the root causes

Drilling into the data will help determine what's causing the damp and mould in the property. Is the asset structurally failing in its design because it's a 1950s block of flats or is the property over-occupied or incorrectly-ventilated?

Analysing both tenant and asset data will give a more rounded picture and enable housing providers to identify higher risk categories, in much the same way that data is now used to improve income management by predicting those more at risk of debt. Overlaying both sets of data means providers can build a list and rank properties according to risk; they can then take pre-emptive action and contact tenants in higher risk homes to see if they have a damp and mould problem.

As data quality continues to improve in our sector, better insights are becoming more achievable and will help housing providers proactively tackle damp and mould. When visiting the property or talking with the tenants about other problems, housing staff will be aware that the asset is at higher risk so they can check for damp and mould and support the tenant in managing it.

The current decarbonisation and net-zero retrofit programmes are giving housing providers both the insights and opportunities to be more proactive. While the properties are being retrofitted with cladding, insulation, ventilation, new window glazing and new doors, problems with damp and mould can also be addressed. This approach will help shift the dial towards the whole system working together to tackle the systemic problem of damp and mould.

Prediction and prevention

IoT sensors are also worth putting higher on the agenda because they can be a very useful tool in helping both housing providers and tenants stay on top of damp and mould. Their key advantage is that the sensors bring a combined view of both the tenant and the asset.

Using data from the IoT sensors allows housing providers to actively engage tenants in maintaining healthier and more efficiently-run homes. For example, if moisture levels compared to the square-footage of the asset start to increase disproportionately and are outside an acceptable threshold then an alert can be automatically triggered to ensure a property inspection takes place.

However, for many tenants to feel happy about the installation of IoT sensors, they need to be part of the journey so they can trust and understand the technology. Running a pilot scheme is one way to do this because tenants can be shown the data to prove how other tenants in similar homes were able to ventilate and reduce humidity without suffering significant heat losses.

Demonstrating change

The presence of damp and mould in properties isn't a short-term problem. Neither is it a problem that can be tackled alone. What is needed is a more strategic response that gives both tenants and housing providers the insights and understandings they both need to tackle the problem together.

We are working with several large housing providers to develop a joint and more data-driven approach to tackling damp and mould. Everybody has a part to play to minimise the risk of damp and mould, and education through shared learning and analysis will go a long way in supporting this.

Trevor Hampton is the director of housing solutions at NEC Software Solutions.

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Govtech trends for 2023

Harold De Neef, Group Director for Product & Innovation, Civica

2022 brought several new challenges that affected our daily lives. Civica's Harold de Neef shares seven key trends to help housing providers and public sector organisations prepare and adapt to these challenges.

1. Survival mode switch 'on'

This year, UK inflation reached levels not seen in 40 years. With significant increases in living costs around the world, the UN confirmed that 71 million people have been pushed into poverty. We have moved into survival mode.

Public service organisations will have to focus on supporting those most vulnerable, while also combating their own rising costs and reducing budgets, so more efforts are needed to drive productivity. That said, we don't believe it is sustainable to continuously do more with less, so greater adaptability and more technology-enabled innovation will be paramount.

More can be done with what is available, whether through better use of assistive technologies or modernising existing applications. Public services will also need to look at increasing self-service, reducing red tape and improving data sharing and interoperability for better insights and faster actions.

2. On-demand living

People's expectations of personalised services have increased. It is now the norm in the consumer space, and we expect the same round the clock self-service and a personalised approach in how we interact with public services. This will require more data and system sharing between public service organisations.

Done well, personalisation offers great opportunities to improve the citizen experience and technology will be paramount in making this possible in a safe, secure and transparent manner. Personalisation, by essence, requires some form of identification to verify and offer a tailored

approach, so identity management technologies will become increasingly relevant in 2023.

3. Insight into greater actions

The public sector has access to enormous amounts of valuable data. Yet that data is often not used to its full potential. Data needs to be turned into actionable insights, starting where automation can deliver better and faster results than humans.

While the desire is there to do more, one of the main barriers to overcome is poor levels of data sharing and interoperability between systems and organisations, and we need to focus more on the predictive value of data. Higher priority should be given to improving our standards, skills and sharing of this vital resource.

4. To trust or not to trust

Many of us share personal information with Uber, JustEat, Google or our bank. We accept and trust them with our data, and in return get access to valuable services that make our lives easier. But here lies the crux: without our data, these companies can't deliver these smart services. In other words, trusting an organisation with your data helps them deliver better services to you. But when it comes to public services, the same level of trust is not always there.

As published by the ONS, only 35 per cent of the UK population trust their government. It's a figure that varies across the world; 61 per cent of Australians trust their public services, while in USA the figure falls to 20 per cent.

To counter this fear, the public sector needs to better explain why they need our data, how it will be used, that



it is secure, and clearly explain the value we will get in return.

5. COPing with green

Recently, the cost of fuel and energy has increased people's willingness to be more environmentally conscious. Most governments have made carbon-neutrality commitments (e.g. Paris agreements, COP) and many public sector organisations have made their own. So, change is expected.

With every commitment comes a plan. Yet many organisations don't know how to calculate the extent of their carbon footprint or other environmental impacts, let alone make a credible plan to neutrality. To add to the complexity, citizens are more sensitive to 'greenwashing' and vague commitments. The sector needs to build on initial progress and start converting their ideas into green actions.

6. Social media altering democracy

Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok and Twitter have changed how we interact with each other, consume media, are entertained or informed. There's no denying that social media has impacted political engagement. It has been a key channel to reach new demographics, especially younger people.

Social media has also increased polarisation, populism and distrust in institutions. From the Arab Spring to the US Capitol riots, or even elections and referendums, social platforms have played a significant role in shaping civic opinion. In times of crisis, it can also disseminate key information across wide groups very quickly, as we saw during the pandemic.

Social media's influence on our democracy and public institutions will continue to grow. It will be important for public sector organisations to not only be more present on these platforms, but also take the lead to ensure they are safe and add more value to everyone in our society.

7. Redefining our working patterns

Many of us now blur our professional lives between home and the workplace. We don't expect a massive return to the workplace to happen this year or the next. Office days are more focused on interactions, meetings and workshops, affecting both usage and the layout of facilities. And, for many organisations, this has also meant offices are less busy and raises the question of what to do with the available space.

As we spend more time at home, social media is likely to have an increasing impact on how we interact with others. It also gets us wondering if 'web3' will become a relevant part of our lives or merely the latest buzzword. As we continue to adapt to this hybrid world, the sector needs to balance work flexibility with the cybersecurity threats of remote working.

As we share our seven trends for the year ahead, one area we need to pay close attention to is the risk of a bigger digital divide. Whether linked to finance, digital literacy, disability or data infrastructure, it's a topic that we all can and should work together to address. Civica's NorthStar lab will spend more time and effort trying to understand digital inclusion.

Civica's Perspectives series (civica.com/en-gb/perspectives) will explore our govttech trends in more detail and the potential fit of assistive technologies for the sector. After another year of global disruption, we believe that it will be our collective innovation spirit that will help us adapt and create a better society for everyone.

Harold De Neef is the group director for product and innovation at Civica.

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An ethical approach to arrears

Ann Foy, Business Development Manager, Housing Insight

I was queuing in my local shop last week when I noticed an elderly gentleman topping up his meter credit. He was worried that the cost of fuel had become shockingly high, to the point where it was cheaper for him to go and sit in the pub nursing a single pint than to return home.

How can we best look after the most vulnerable during this cost-of-living crisis, leaving aside my own ideological concerns about pre-payment meters? I believe that technology can play an important role not only in maximising rental income and creating efficiencies but also in treating people with respect.

Rent arrears are only likely to increase during the months ahead. People who have paid rent all their lives now find themselves having to choose between paying rent, heating their home or eating properly because they simply can't afford all three. How can we address arrears in ways that deliver genuine wins for landlords, housing officers and residents alike?

Creating a smarter priority list

Traditional housing management systems rely on a weekly priority list for rent arrears. This usually comes out on a Monday and housing officers work down the list as the week progresses. However, there are limitations to this approach. The housing officer may make an arrears visit to a tenant on a Thursday only to discover that they paid their account the day before, simply because their housing benefit arrived late. Not only does this visit waste the housing officer's time, it also potentially embarrasses the resident.

RentsConnect, the arrears module within Housing Insight's PanConnect software, offers a new approach. It uses a near-real-time priority list that updates as the week progresses, so if someone makes a payment in the morning, it's visible on the system that afternoon, just a few hours later.

Supporting early interventions

But there's more to arrears than just income analytics or a number in a spreadsheet. Understanding an individual tenant's situation often requires additional information, and this is stored in the wider PanConnect system so that it's available to housing officers at the touch of a button. Taking a holistic view of an individual can help to create a positive resolution that minimises arrears and promotes tenancy sustainment.

For example, consider the elderly gentleman I mentioned at the beginning of this article. He might be entitled to the government's Winter Fuel Payment or other missed benefits that would then enable him to pay his rent. Or he might have been recently bereaved and signposting him to other agencies might help him find coping strategies that include making sure his rent payments don't get overlooked. PanConnect allows housing officers to understand the root cause of the arrears, taking them one step closer to an early fix.

To use another example, a family might choose to withhold rent because of issues with damp in an unheated home, as we've seen in the news. Our system can show the housing officer that a repair request was lodged three weeks before, giving the officer an opportunity to message the repairs staff for an update at any point before, during or after a visit. This progresses the issue faster, potentially resolves the arrears issue, and also helps the resident to feel heard.

Recovering missed rent

The more we can empower tenants to take ownership of their arrears, the more likely they are to repay it. That's why PanConnect can lead the customer and/or their housing



panconnect

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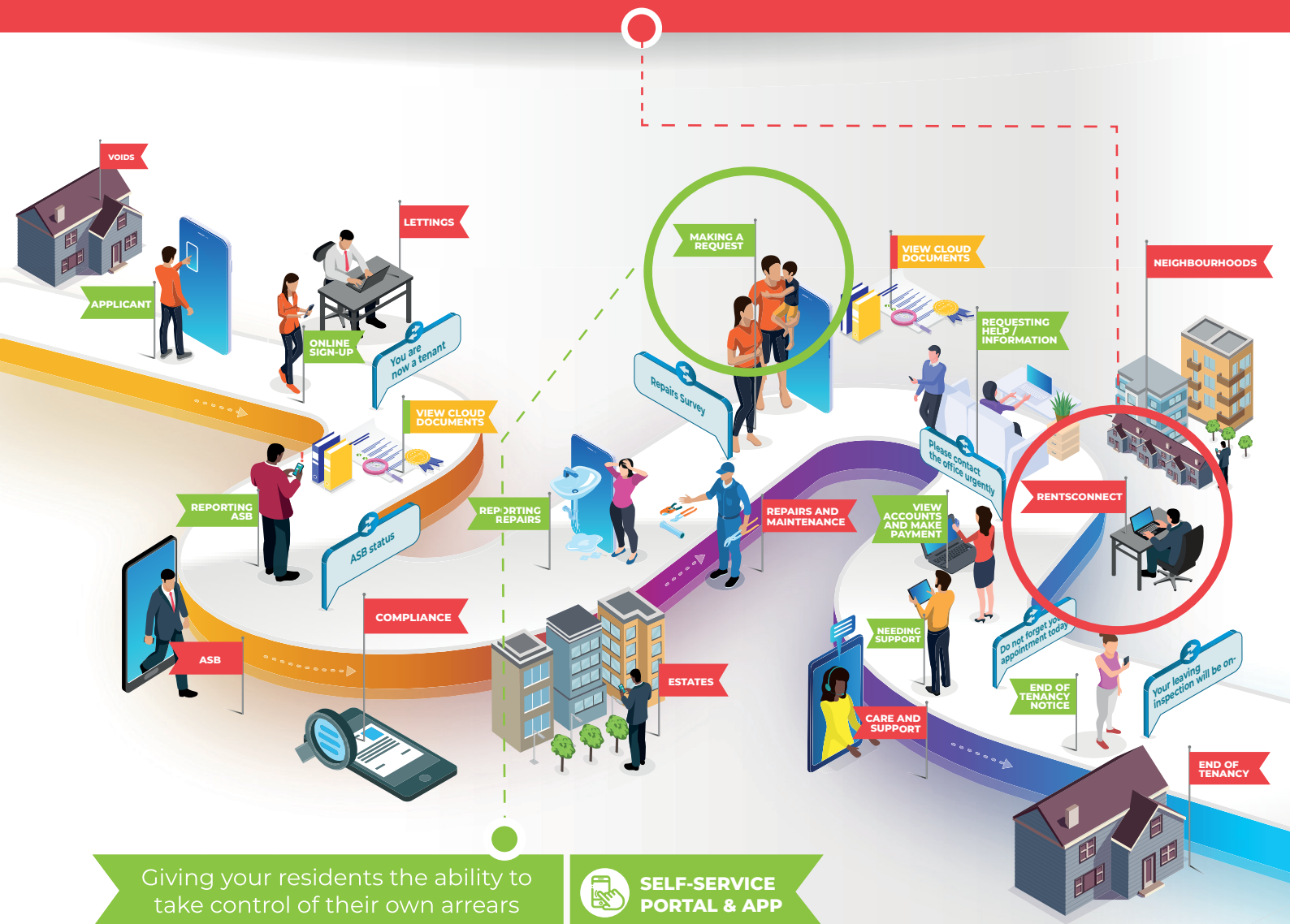
MODULE SPOTLIGHT

RentsConnect



STAFF
APP

A fully integrated module that manages all aspects of customer arrears. The module analyses customers payment behaviours to identify which customers need to be contacted and prioritise these customers for you in a list that can be further sorted and filtered even when no internet signal is available. Real-time updates mean that your list is always up to date and using our workflow tasks engine, the process of speaking to the customer and helping them manage their arrears can all be organised through PanConnect.



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officer through a budget calculator and debt repayment plan. It also offers money advice functionality that can be used to signpost customers and/or housing officers to a specialist in-house money advice team or external agencies such as Citizen's Advice. This is particularly useful when the tenant has further debts in addition to their rent arrears.

Creating efficiencies for housing providers

Landlords are also under financial pressures. At a time when, due to the exorbitant price of fuel, many housing providers are paying staff expenses fortnightly instead of monthly, it's very important to use multi-tasking to make each tenant visit as productive as possible.

If a housing officer is visiting a property to discuss arrears with the tenant, they can also be asked to do a quick visual check while they're there (e.g. to make sure there isn't any damp in the bedrooms). They log the result on our system during the visit, either eliminating the need for a housing officer to schedule a separate visit or escalating a potential problem to a more specialised operative.

Or perhaps there are gaps in the tenant's records. If so, any member of staff, from the repairs operative to the arrears officer, can see this within PanConnect and complete the missing data during a visit. They can record information directly onto the system without any duplication, paper notes or needing to return to the office. Wi-fi isn't even needed because each module in PanConnect will automatically synchronise as soon as an internet connection is available. The entire team can then access the updates, whether they are out on visits, working from home or in the office.

Reducing officer stress

The majority of housing officers are both people-oriented and performance-focused. Whether individual and team performance are tracked according to the level of arrears, number of payments plans created or number of visits/contacts made, this data is available on demand as an integral part of PanConnect.

Housing officers will feel more effective when using a near-real-time priority list because they won't be contacting residents who didn't actually need to be contacted. Nor will they need to spend time calling a colleague to say, 'can you please just check this for me?' because the information gaps are clearly visible on the system for all staff to see.

And by default, cases in RentsConnect are listed in order of geographical distance, enabling housing officers to optimise time and fuel, twin efficiencies which are further enhanced because they no longer need to go to the office to print or collect documentation.

Minimising rent arrears

Digital technologies can free up both your staff and your finances while delivering an arrears service that prioritises people. These are ethical efficiencies, now available in near-real-time.

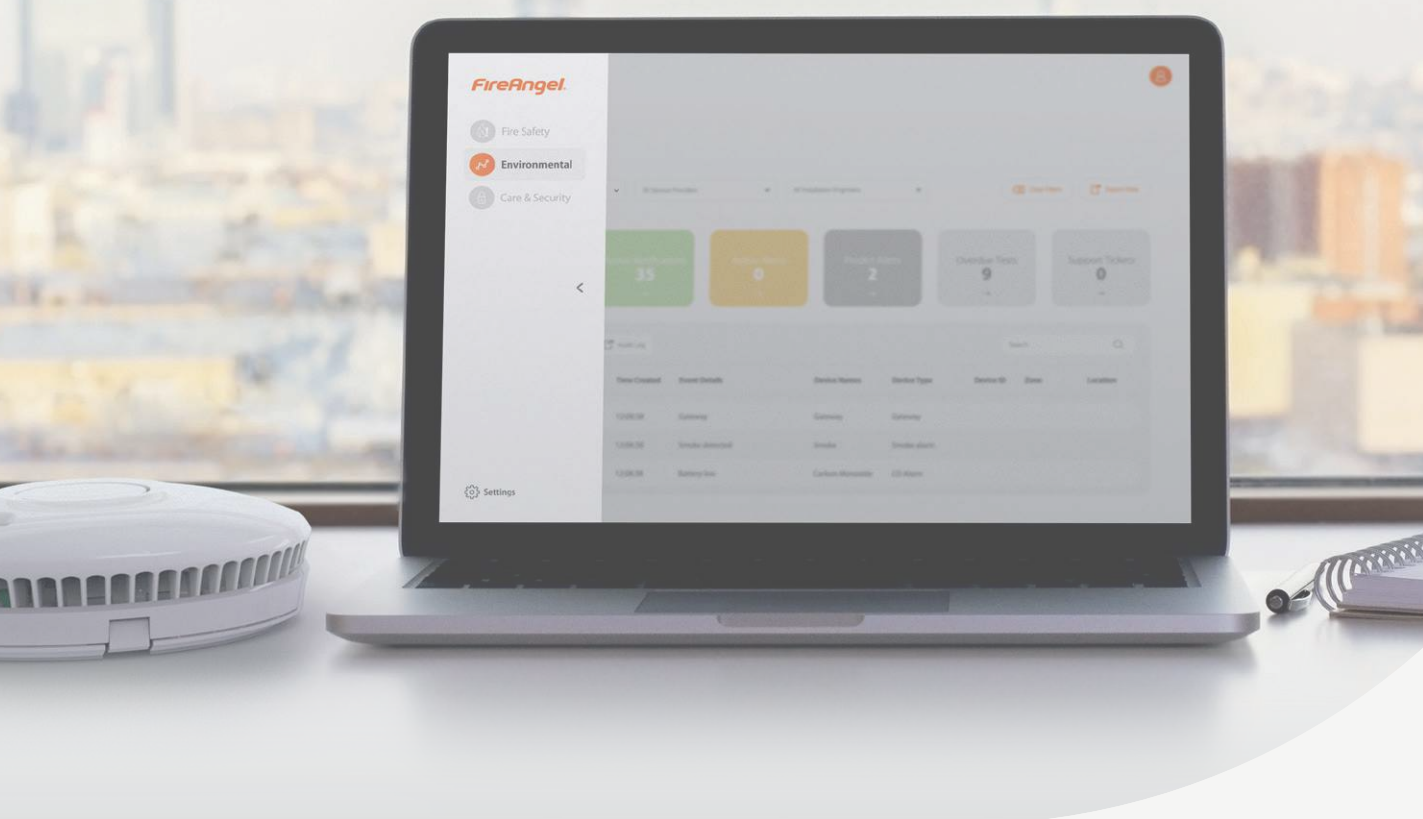
Ann Foy is the business development manager at Housing Insight.



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Less innovation & more service design at RHP

David Done, Chief Executive, RHP

Innovation is a word we hear a lot across our sector. Whether at a conference, in discussions over Twitter or in our own boardrooms, the 'I' word still reigns supreme. I believe that if we're to work together to solve the housing crisis, doing things differently is key.

Like most of the housing sector, RHP has spent the best part of ten years talking a great deal about innovation. The 2015 rent cuts meant that we all had to adapt quickly to reduce costs while maintaining excellent services. And we've made good progress along the way, with the launch of our fully-digital housing service (RHPI), experimenting with modular construction and delivering various enhancements to our employees' experience.

Over the past decade, we've successfully adapted how we deliver our services, including the transition of our core services online. However, we're now facing the reality that the things that helped us get to where we are today won't take us any further; some of our solutions we've implemented in the past have made our technology and processes quite complex.

Feedback to reality

How do we know? Many employees and customers have contributed through interviews to build a picture of where we're brilliant and where things get stuck. Additionally, we know that customers' needs and expectations are increasing rapidly, and if we're to thrive we need to change the way we do things.

Finally, we have a 'burning platform' in the fact that our contract with our repairs partner ends this summer. We see this as a perfect opportunity to improve how we work internally and with our new repairs partners to deliver a seamless service.

Of course, we want to push the boundaries to improve what we do, which after all is what innovation is all about,

but over the past couple of years we've realised that our customer perspective got a little lost along the way.

We've therefore decided to shift our approach from innovation to service design. At first glance, they might sound like the same thing, but there are some subtle and crucial differences.

Firstly, service design always starts from the end-users' needs. We've realised that service developments, particularly around technology, can too often be built from an internal perspective rather than starting from what the customers' requirements are.

Secondly, our people were telling us that while innovation was useful for establishing new products and services, it wasn't necessarily helping to crack the daily, real-life problems that our customers and employees were facing. The methodology behind service design can work at a micro- as well as a macro-level.

A design for life

In the same way that 'innovation' can be open to interpretation, so too can 'service design'. For the sake of clarity, here's our definition: service design is all about taking a service and making it meet the users and customers' needs; it can either be used to improve an existing service or to create a new service from scratch.

The Interaction Design Foundation has a service definition that I really like: "Service design is a process where designers create sustainable solutions and optimal experiences for both customers in unique contexts and any service providers involved. Designers break services



into sections and adapt fine-tuned solutions to suit all users' needs in context, based on actors, location and other factors."

The foundation also uses an analogy which gives the definition a real-world perspective: "Imagine two coffee shops right next to each other, and each sells the exact same coffee at the exact same price; service design is what makes you walk into one and not the other."

These key reasons led to why we've developed our 'Rewire' transformation programme. Rewire is designed to bring people, processes and technology together to make it easier for employees to deliver services and, in turn, easier for customers to access them.

As I mentioned earlier, we're using the start of our new repairs contracts in June 2023 as the catalyst to look at how we can do things differently. This is about getting our systems and processes right but most importantly it's about ways of working and creating a seamless customer experience between different teams within the business.

The primary benefit Rewire will give us is having an integrated system so that we have a single view of the customer, with all of the information about them and their home in one place (previously we had separate asset and CRM systems). This will mean that whoever speaks to a customer will have all the information about them at their fingertips to resolve their query at first contact.

The foundation of this is getting our data right, so we're concurrently working on a big project to transform how we structure and manage our data.

Rewire will also help us meet the challenges coming down the road around building safety and energy efficiency.

In relation to building safety, this will mean having a golden thread of data to hold a record of all the activities and records relating to our high-rise buildings and fire-risk components. And when it comes to energy efficiency, we will be able to analyse our buildings' energy data to direct our investment decisions better and bring our buildings up to 2030 standard, including the use of smart technology in our customers' homes.

We've established a variety of projects to get deeper customer insights, particularly around offering more inclusive services. For example, in our 'In your shoes' project, we've been asking customers from all walks of life to record their life stories; these audio storybooks are then shared with our colleagues so they can hear about new cultures and perspectives. We also plan to have our new starters listen to these stories as part of their inductions to RHP.

What I've learned is that service design and technology can work hand in hand. We're excited to see what's next and how both can help our customers and their communities, our employees and the services we deliver as well as help create a brighter and greener planet.

David Done is the chief executive of RHP.



Learning from history



George Grant, CEO, Broadcaster & Publisher, Housing Technology

In November 2022, the coroner concluded that the death in 2020 of two-year-old Awaab Ishak was caused by prolonged exposure to mould in the family’s home. The problem had been reported to the family’s housing provider on many occasions but no action had been taken. No doubt, this has given all of us cause for reflection; how did this happen and what should be the response?

Social housing’s origins

I’ve been looking back at the origins of social housing, reminding myself about the ideas of one of its most renowned pioneers, Octavia Hill. She believed that a responsible landlord should provide not only decent housing but also a socially-inclusive environment. She disparaged municipal housing as being too bureaucratic and impersonal to make this possible. She also believed that public funds should not be squandered on people who made no effort to improve their own situations. Her aim wasn’t just to provide housing but also to encourage self-respect and self-sufficiency among tenants.

To this end, all tenants were known to her personally and she insisted that rents be collected weekly, that maintenance issues be reported at the same time, then acted on straight away. Communication was the key to the success of the operation. Although there was an element of philanthropy in her model, the enterprise was run as a business, with regular returns made to the investors who funded the buildings.

Contact with tenants

If in these origins we see the growth of modern housing associations, it is apparent that one aspect has been especially problematic in the subsequent scaling up – face-to-face contact with tenants.

Octavia Hill’s operation relied on employing rent collectors (and volunteers) to visit every property, regularly and frequently; an ideal technique but not one that can be realistically achieved across the large housing portfolios of today’s providers. It’s too labour-intensive to be viable, which is why alternative methods have been developed and adopted. I’m talking about the internet of things (IoT), the introduction into homes of smart sensors that connect and report to a central hub information relating to almost anything, from the presence of smoke to the probable presence of mould, for example. If all this is possible, then it follows that we need to develop responsive systems to deal with documented problems before they escalate.

Tenants’ health and safety

Without wishing to delve into the politics of how best to fund and operate social housing, it seems clear that the health and safety of tenants sometimes comes lower on housing providers’ list of priorities than it should.

The issue is one that needs to be addressed constantly, which is a thread that runs through Housing Technology. The take-up of IoT is increasing fast, itself a sector-wide endorsement of the benefits it confers. But it’s a fast-moving field and keeping on top of new developments is key to making the most of what’s on offer. That and understanding how best to capitalise on the volume and complexity of data collected.

As each of us knows, our work in the housing sector is never done; there’s always room for improvement. We’ll be showcasing and discussing all of this and more at our next annual conference on 08-09 March.

George Grant is the CEO, publisher and co-founder of Housing Technology.



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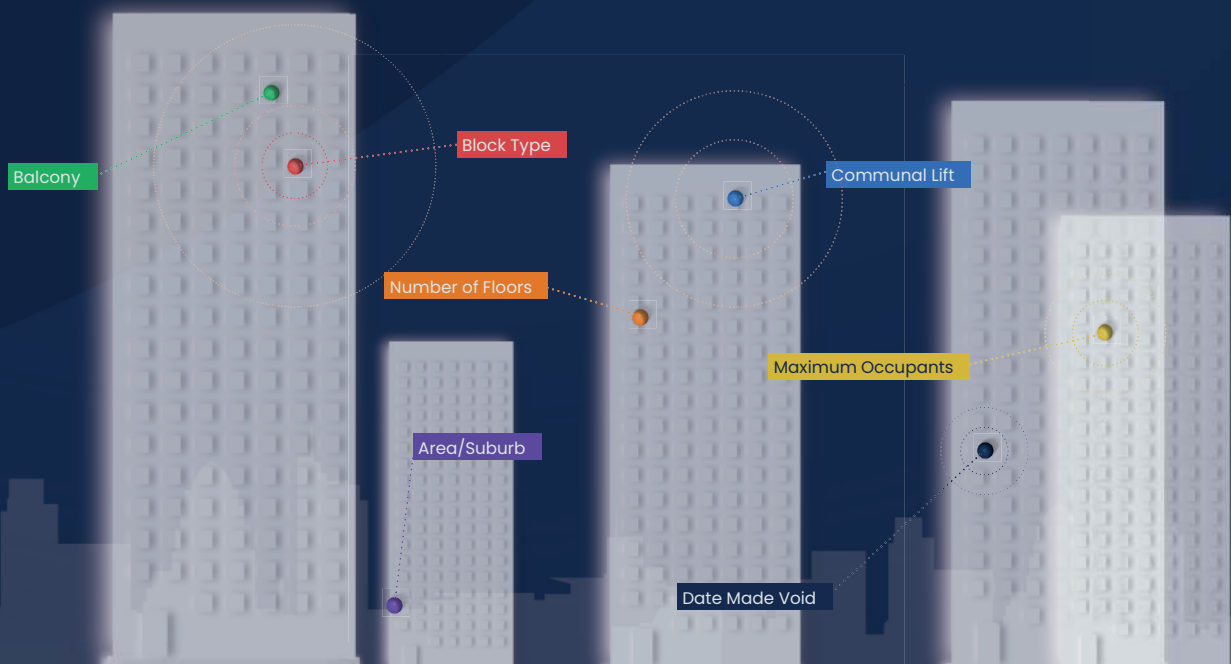


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24/7 care requires 24/7 technology

Sue Gershenson, Evaluation & Quality Assurance Manager, Llamau

Welsh charity Llamau uses Housing Insight's technology to help it reduce homelessness among young people and vulnerable women.

A person may come to us during the night in an emergency and say, "I need help." They may have found the courage to walk away from a situation of domestic abuse and they urgently need to find somewhere safe for themselves and their children.

Our support workers start putting actions into place immediately, responding to the situation while using Housing Insight's PanConnect app to log information on their tablet or mobile phone.

Obviously, completing forms is not the highest priority in a crisis for the person who needs support, but having this technology in the background enables us to share information in real time with other team members. Then, when support workers log in at the start of the day, they can see an immediate update on what has been happening overnight – the handover is instantaneous.

Before we used PanConnect, support workers would have had to return to the office to retrieve the relevant paper file, taking them away from the very people who needed their support and adding an extra layer of processing as well.

Similarly, if a vulnerable person already known to us needs our services at 4am, the support worker can log in and immediately see exactly what their situation is.

It's all about people

Housing Insight understands our focus on caring for people. It recognises that our skillset lies in supporting people, not in software or technology. Its developers are amazing at listening to our needs and hearing our struggles with data, and then working with us to find effective solutions.

For example, we wanted to improve our process for 'quick contacts', when people come in for one-off support that is needed 'right now'. We were using pen, paper and a Microsoft Access database to take notes so we sat down with our Housing Insight project manager and the developers and said, "This is what happens – can you help us record that?" and they did.

I speak with Coral, our Housing Insight project manager, every week. She is great at understanding what we need, accepts the issues we have with workloads and appreciates that our own reports and deadlines must come first.

Stories of change

PanConnect enables us to translate the real-life, often traumatic experiences of the people we support into the reports required by our funders and commissioners. It facilitates communications between team members, translating them into goals and outcomes that promote the empowerment and independence of the people we work with. We can see in real time what's happening across our different projects and services, what's going well, what needs improvement and what difference we're making.

There is great value in our ability to extract real-time data from the system so we can see exactly what is happening on any given day, in any area. I can then feed all of this into our service planning; it allows us to demonstrate the positive impact we're making and can be used to support new funding bids and services.

Empowering our staff

Training staff on PanConnect has been a revelation. We have support workers who've been with us for anything

from 15 days to 15 years, and we thought that those who had been using paper for years might resist the shift to an electronic system, but there were more 'wows' from this group than any other. They felt it changed their ways of working for the better; no more asking people again and again to repeat their name, date of birth and National Insurance number for multiple paper forms.



The repetition of name, DoB and NI number might sound trivial, but this is important when we are working with people who come into our services while experiencing difficult times. They need a seamless, joined-up approach from our services while they might also have to navigate systems and processes in other organisations, filling out numerous forms to access, for example, healthcare and training. Our support workers can now focus their attentions on the individuals they are supporting, after asking only once for someone's key details.

We recognise that our support workers' priority skills must be people and delivering support, not necessarily IT or software systems, so we've taken our time to train the organisation, region by region. Although recording support has proved very straightforward and easy to learn, there's definitely been a transition period where we have all learnt lessons. To that end, we have been very deliberate about building a routine so that people can reinforce their learning over time.

Making it personal

Recording details can feel like a very official process for the person being supported. We know that telling their story again and again to lots of different people can be difficult for them, which is why we have reserved part of PanConnect so that people can write their own biography on the system. They choose what to write; it might be as simple as telling us how much they love their pet or it might provide an opportunity for them to share difficult information that they would prefer not to verbalise.

Our own journey

We originally began working with Housing Insight in 2017. At the time, like lots of small charities, we were using paper-based records but our growth meant that paper files were no longer fit for purpose. We had tried an

electronic case study management system before but it didn't suit our needs because we're very much a face-to-face, person-centred service with real people and real situations. We would never say to someone in crisis, "Hang on, the computer's just lagging a bit," and nor did we want the ongoing barrier of a pen and paper in front of us.

PanConnect showed us that technology doesn't need to be limiting. We started with the bare bones of a system and began customising it to fit our processes, the questions we ask and the forms we use.

We went live in 2018, gradually migrating all our files until we had a complete system by 2019, and when the pandemic happened in 2020, we felt like the luckiest organisation ever to have an electronic system! Our care would never have stopped but, thanks to PanConnect, our monitoring, data collection and positive outcomes didn't stop either. We distributed tablets to our support workers, who could also access the system on their phones. It was our saving grace.

Software always comes second

With the variety of services we provide, this could never be a one-size-fits-all system. Housing Insight has been very responsive to this. It understands that we can't change our services to fit the software, and Housing Insight listens and is willing to learn. We are working together to develop a system that reflects what we need as an organisation, and we are as excited about the future potential of the system as we were from the very start.

Sue Gershenson is the evaluation and quality assurance manager at Llamau.



Hyde signs repairs contract with Totalmobile

Totalmobile has won a three-year contract with Hyde Group to extend the use of its field-service and dynamic scheduling software across the housing provider's wider operations, including asset management, building safety, neighbourhoods and safer homes.

Mark Batchelor, director of property services, Hyde Group, said, "When we first contracted with Totalmobile, we wanted a unified solution that would interact smoothly between us, our customers, our contractors and other third-party organisations.

"By using a single system, we eliminated the need for multiple systems and licences and transferred our entire

team to a single solution that had all the necessary information. The impact on our customers is also huge because they can now use just one portal to report any problems or follow the progress of a job, in the same way that we do."

Capital Letters partners with Evo Digital to tackle homelessness

Capital Letters is moving its repairs, maintenance and compliance services to an online, tenant-driven platform from Evo Digital to improve how the company tackles homelessness in London.

Capital Letters was established in 2019 in response to London's homelessness crisis and is funded by the government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

Evo comprises a fusion of housing professionals, skilled tradespeople and technology that transforms the way housing, maintenance and repair problems are reported and resolved. Its digital platform connects tenants and

landlords with skilled tradespeople in a convenient and transparent manner.

By automating a large amount of the administrative work related to repairs through Evo's digital platform, Capital Letters expects that its tenants will gain faster and more responsive services while freeing up its staff's time and resources to find more homes for homeless families in London.

Sue Coulson, CEO, Capital Letters, said, "Our partnership with Evo Digital adds breadth and depth to our range of services as well supporting our core objective of finding good quality, affordable and secure homes so families can move out of temporary accommodation or avoid becoming homeless."

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Following your security assessment, we'll be on hand to provide ongoing advice and expertise, particularly when it comes to keeping abreast of the constant changes and innovations taking place within your Microsoft environment.

Grand Union Housing gets connected with Aico HomeLink

Grand Union Housing has begun the installation of Aico's HomeLink Connected Home solution across its 12,500 properties.



The HomeLink IoT-based solution, from alarms to environmental sensors, has a secure 2G network to the HomeLink portal, constantly monitoring fire and carbon monoxide events and indoor environmental conditions such as humidity, temperature and carbon dioxide.

The real-time data from the HomeLink devices also ensures that Grand Union's properties remain legally compliant and fit for human habitation, avoiding expensive remedial works, disrepair claims and large-scale repairs.

Martyn Cheesman, electrical delivery manager, Grand Union Housing, said, "Within just days of using the HomeLink environmental sensors and gateway, we can validate the effectiveness of the new ventilation

systems that we're installing to solve condensation, damp and mould problems. For example, the real-time insights we get from the HomeLink portal make it very easy for us to decide which fans are the most effective when dealing with humid and damp living conditions."

As part of Grand Union's environmental sustainability strategy, Aico's HomeLink environmental sensors will be used to target the housing provider's worst-performing homes in terms of heat loss, potential excess heat and indoor air quality.



Morgan Sindall's Carbon Zero decarbonisation tool

Morgan Sindall Property Services has launched Carbon Zero, a new software platform designed to support housing providers in achieving their net-zero targets.

Carbon Zero gives housing providers a detailed understanding of the carbon impact of their properties and the steps that can be taken to reduce it. By aggregating and analysing data from a housing provider's asset management systems, surveys, maintenance programmes and other sources, Carbon Zero creates improvement models for the housing provider's stock portfolio, with a net-zero route map on each property and a schedule of proposed improvement works.

The improvement models provide a breakdown of the costs involved with the proposed works, details of the labour, key components required and a timeline for completion. Housing providers can then optimise the

model based on factors such as available funding, carbon reduction, tenant bills, prioritising tenants in fuel poverty, supply-chain capacity, location or the volume of work needed.

Alan Hayward, managing director, Morgan Sindall Property Services, said, "Some of our housing customers are responsible for up to 60,000 properties; ensuring that each of these is compliant, safe and efficient is a huge task. Carbon Zero supports housing providers by providing a clear understanding of the steps that need to be taken to ensure their portfolios are on-track to meet the EPC-C and net-zero targets."

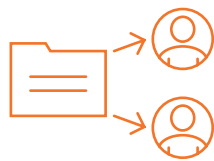
NEC Housing

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Give every resident access to personalised information and deliver instant customer service without the admin



Let people manage their homes
It puts housing management into residents' hands. It offers smart tools for managing properties

Calico appoints M247 for digital transformation

Calico Group has appointed connectivity and cloud provider M247 to redesign its network, optimise operations and enhance security.

M247 worked with Calico's ICT team to assess the housing provider's current operations, resulting in Calico's move from a traditional MPLS network to SD-WAN; this allows Calico's staff to access information direct from their cloud applications instead of via the corporate network. It also means security is incorporated into the SD-WAN fabric itself via virtual firewalls.

David Palmer, product manager for network and security, M247, said, "It is common for public-facing organisations that work closely with their communities to operate from multiple sites through remote and/or mobile workforces, even more so since the pandemic. However, companies haven't always ensured that their IT operations are optimised for this way of working; this can affect areas such as ease and speed of access, data security, back-up and disaster recovery.

"The introduction of SD-WAN not only helps to solve these problems but also means that Calico is better equipped

for future growth because it can now easily add new users and new sites. Zero-touch provisioning and segmentation also mean that policies can be added, amended and automatically distributed to all devices, reducing the risk of human error."

Rob Hayes, ICT project manager, Calico Group, said, "Given that we have a distributed and hybrid workforce, we wanted to deliver secure access to our business-critical applications in the cloud and on-premise. The solution needed to handle connectivity across over 50 sites as well as the increased demands of homeworking.

"M247 provided the insight and technical skills for Calico's transition from MPLS to Cisco SD-WAN. M247 has given us the confidence to grow the business by delivering an agile SD-WAN solution that offers the performance, security and visibility needed to provide our staff and customers with the best real-time, connected experiences."

Ateb Group outsources IT help desks to Central Networks

Ateb Group has appointed Central Networks to support its in-house IT department, comprising an outsourced help desk function and strategic consultancy.

Central Networks is now managing Ateb's IT help desk for its 130-strong workforce, receiving around 1,200 IT requests per year, leaving the housing provider's in-house digital team to focus on the future of its technology infrastructure.

Alex Jenkins, executive director for finance, Ateb Group, said, "Against a backdrop of IT resourcing challenges and economic uncertainty following the pandemic, we needed to bolster the support offered by our IT department.

"Working with Central Networks gives us complete peace of mind that the daily tickets are being resolved, affording our digital team the time and scope to focus on our more strategic activities."

The contract covers first-, second-, and third-line support services, encompassing everything from general help desk support, such as troubleshooting and solving users' technology issues, through to device management and tactical decision-making.

John Blackburn, operations director and social housing specialist, Central Networks, said, "Many of our housing clients are asking for outsourced help desk support to reduce their overheads and maximise their internal resources. We know flexibility is vital, so it's available as short-term cover or as a permanent part of each contract."

Jenkins said, "The Central Networks team is a great sounding board and critical friend for us. From penetration testing to cloud migration, the team advises our in-house digital team on key technology decisions and also supports our IT recruitment process with interview participation."

The best kind of threat management is the kind you don't have to manage.

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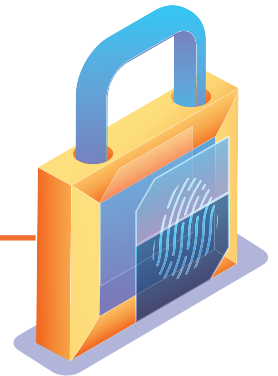
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SOPHOS



Looking back and to the future



Jonathan Lee, Director of Public Sector Relations, Sophos

I recently celebrated my 25th work anniversary at Sophos and so I have spent some time reflecting on how much the cyberthreat landscape has changed over the past 25 years.

In 1997, after responding to an advert in the Oxford Times and joining Sophos as employee number 49, I initially worked at our global HQ in Oxfordshire for six years before relocating to Nottinghamshire. I began to specialise in helping the company's public sector clients (incl. housing providers) stay secure against the ever-increasing number of cybersecurity threats. Little would we know at the end of 1997 just how huge the volume and complexity of threats would become. At this point, there were only around 13,000 viruses in existence, macro viruses were beginning to make their mark and the first native Windows NT virus, Cabanas, emerged. Headlines reported a 40 per cent increase in the number of viruses year on year.

25 years later...

Fast-forward a quarter of a century and many things have changed but many others have stayed the same. We no longer log on to the internet via dial-up and hear that oh-so-distinctive handshake sound, and smartphones, tablets and all types of devices now connect to the internet and make everyday life more productive in so many ways.

At Sophos, where tens of millions of malicious 'binaries' are seen daily, we employ over 4,000 people and protect over

half a million organisations across the world, including a large and growing number of UK housing providers.

This period of momentous change in the scale and complexity of cyberthreats has been matched by the rapid adoption of digital transformation technologies in the housing sector.

Husbanding your resources

It's an oft-quoted truism that it's vital for housing providers to focus on how efficiently and intelligently they can use their limited resources, whether people, technology or money, to achieve tenant satisfaction. It's common sense to embrace new technologies such as AI and machine learning to automate tasks if they can be handled successfully (and sometimes better) without human involvement (e.g. the reporting, coordination and monitoring of repair services).

With cyberattacks, such as ransomware, becoming increasingly prevalent and complex, housing providers' IT teams are under constant pressure to monitor every aspect of their organisation. Today's threat landscape requires them to monitor threat activity and high volumes of security alerts and false positives around the clock. This can feel overwhelming if you don't have a large team of cyber analysts – something that very few, if any, housing providers have the luxury of. Cybersecurity requires an active defence strategy to prevent incursions from doing damage, and the burden of defence is too high for many housing providers to manage themselves.

Thankfully, this is where today's solutions differ from those that were prevalent when I started working at Sophos. An active cyber defence is no longer just about making sure



that you've deployed the latest antivirus identity files. True active defence requires threat hunting to stop incidents before they do real damage and incident response capabilities if you're hit. Subscribing to 'cybersecurity as a service' now gives you a way out of trying to cope with 'alert fatigue' and the lack of visibility that plagues smaller IT teams; it allows you to extend the capabilities of your own IT staff with a team of experts.

Managed detection & response

Many housing providers have already realised that teaming up with Sophos's Managed Detection and Response (MDR) specialists provides the protection and peace of mind that they are missing in their cybersecurity strategy. Sophos MDR is a fully-managed service delivered by our experts who detect and respond to cyberattacks targeting your computers, servers, networks, cloud workloads, email accounts and more.

One of our public sector clients using our MDR service said, "The resources and capacity in our team of ten staff is limited, and the Sophos MDR service delivers cybersecurity protection that we can't provide in-house. With round-the-clock cover, we've peace of mind and are confident that we have the best protection."

To make use of the service, you don't have to just use Sophos' integrated security tools, you can also continue using any other vendors' solutions or a combination.

As growing numbers of housing providers subscribe to the MDR service, the 'community immunity' increases. As we spot a threat in one organisation, we can then proactively search others to see if they are also being targeted. Thanks to the vast amount of telemetry that

we gather from all those customers, we are much better placed than a third-party security operations centre (SOC) to keep you secure.

As we've discussed, we've come a long way from the days when I started out in cybersecurity. As a result, things are becoming ever more challenging to manage without outside help.

Cybercrime as a business...

But what will the future bring? Well, the cybercriminal economy has transformed into an industry. As organisations such as Sophos have moved to 'as a service' offerings, the cybercrime ecosystem has done the same. Access brokers, ransomware, information-stealing malware and other elements of cybercrime operations have lowered their barriers to entry for would-be cybercriminals. All of this means that as we start 2023, one thing that we can be sure of is that the threats you face will keep coming thick and fast, and you are likely to need the help of a third-party expert service such as Sophos MDR.

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

SOPHOS
Cybersecurity evolved.

Free cyber-defence tools from NCSC

All UK social housing providers have been offered free cybersecurity services from the government's National Cyber Security Centre, supported by Housemark. UK-registered housing providers and ALMOs can now sign up for a range of tools as part of the NCSC's 'Active Cyber Defence' programme.

Housemark's information security forum worked with the NCSC (part of GCHQ) in developing this package for housing providers. This has coincided with several high-profile cyber incidents affecting housing providers during 2022 where significant disruption was caused by hackers gaining access to the housing providers' systems.

Sarah Lyons, deputy director for economy and society resilience, NCSC, said, "We are pleased to offer a range of pioneering services to the social housing sector to help providers boost their existing resilience to online threats. We strongly encourage organisations to sign up for the tools to reduce their risk of becoming victims of the majority of common cyber-attacks."

Arturo Dell, associate director, Housemark, said, "This is an important and welcome step by the NCSC. Members of the Housemark information security forum worked with the NCSC, and we're delighted that every UK social housing provider can now benefit from these free cybersecurity services."

Housing providers can access the tools from the Active Cyber Defence programme through the NCSC website.

Housing Technology's market intelligence report

'The E-State of Housing 2022/23' available now

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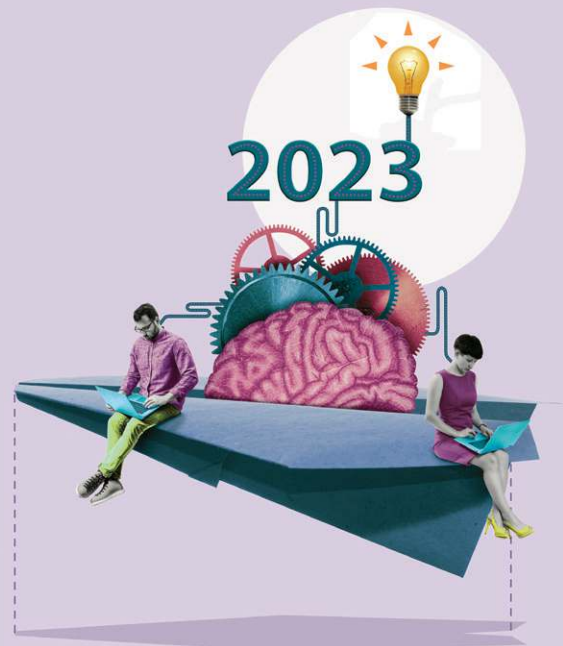


ANNUAL TURNOVER APPROX £7 BILLION



Proptechs and IT start-ups in housing

Following our three previous overviews of the new IT companies in our sector (see [Housing Technology, January 2020](#), [2021](#) & [2022](#)), we return again with a selection of proptechs and IT start-ups that are focused on developing new technologies for social housing. Our 2023 companies are all based on recommendations we received from housing providers at the end of 2022.



345 TECHNOLOGY

345 Technology is a boutique software engineering consultancy, custom-built to solve your toughest cloud-based data and integration challenges. 100 per cent UK-based, collaborative by design and on a mission to make software projects deeply rewarding for everyone, we're a fully-fledged Microsoft Solutions Partner for Digital and App Innovation in Azure.

We help housing providers to increase their operational and technological agility and improve their data governance, quality and insights. We do this by designing, building and supporting flexible, future-proofed data platforms and system integrations in both hybrid and cloud environments.

345.technology

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ASKHOMIEY

AskHomey is a property management 'super app'. Via a single login, users can: centralise all property information; store and search all property documentation and images; manage key contractors' contacts; manage utility accounts; create neighbourhood chat groups; and connect with an extensive property ecosystem through AskHomey's app marketplace.

Housing providers are using AskHomey to provide digital handovers to tenants and buyers – produce digital handover packs in minutes rather than days using our handover portal, and keep better track of your inventories.

askhomey.com/innova

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BUILDING SAFETY REGISTER

The Building Safety Register is the definitive register of high-rise residential buildings in England. The BSR supports the implementation of key post-Grenfell reforms including the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 and the Building Safety Act. Responsible persons are encouraged to claim and then maintain their property information on the register. Claimed listings on the register share evidential information with the local fire service and Building Safety Regulator.

The BSR lists both social and private high-rise blocks with full supporting compliance documentation. Due to the greater amount of social housing information in the public domain, over 60 per cent of the blocks currently listed are owned by social housing providers including Peabody, Vivid, Sanctuary, Southern Housing, Southwark Council, RBKC, Notting Hill Genesis and Tower Hamlets Homes. See if your blocks are listed via our interactive map: buildingsafetyregister.org.

buildingsafetyregister.org

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CLIXIFIX

Clixifix reduces the time spent on administration of defects, with lower costs and higher customer satisfaction. Clixifix is one of the first accredited partners of the New Homes Quality Board (NHQB) and will be working with the NHQB to bring its experience within defect software and construction to developers.

Clixifix is the complete aftercare and quality management platform for the delivery of new homes in the housing sector. Clixifix customers include Sage Homes, MTVHA, Pobl, Gentoo, Thirteen Group and One Manchester. MTVHA said, "We definitely have more time because of Clixifix."

clixifix.com

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CM.COM

CM.com delivers end-to-end customer communication for housing providers.

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cm.com

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COMMONPLACE DIGITAL

Commonplace is the UK's leading online platform for public engagement in the built environment. We have powered 2,000 conversations about placemaking, regeneration, housing, energy transport and other local issues. Our online projects have attracted over six million unique UK visitors.

Commonplace works with housing providers to provide an engagement platform for new builds, regeneration, major repairs, post-occupancy and tenant satisfaction measures. Our platforms can gather information from online and face-to-face contacts, provide excellent analytics and support two-way communications that help build trust. Commonplace is also being used for retrofitting, social value and communications strategies.

commonplace.is

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COMPLETE TECHNOLOGY GROUP

Complete Technology Group partners with housing providers and local authorities responsible for multi-dwelling units (MDUs), helping to deliver digital infrastructure strategies. Keeping people and buildings safe is the core of our role; we're the bridge between housing providers and telcos, enabling residents to access reliable, ultra-fast digital connectivity.

CTG reduces cost, drives digital inclusion, maximises building safety and reduces environmental impact.

completetechnologygroup.com

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CONTACT BUILDER

Established in 2008 and designed for the UK property sector, ContactBuilder is the leading and longest-established software package that offers you seamlessly integrated control. It is a full-blown PM & ERP solution, allowing housebuilders to document everything from pre-build through marketing and sales progression to completion and aftersales.

As a housing organisation, you need to communicate with potential and current tenants. Enter ContactBuilder – our cloud-based system offers every feature and function you need in one place.

contact-builder.co.uk

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CONVERSE360

Converse360's Assist Me service automation platform enables housing providers to serve customers with better, faster and more effortless digital experiences than ever before. Empowering customers to self-serve through conversational speech and visual interfaces that offer instant and personalised responses, Assist Me integrates with all common housing management and CRM systems.

Designed for the housing sector and backed by many customer references, our software comes with 100s of housing templates, connectors to core housing applications and CRM systems and a 'no code' portal for customer-facing teams to create and edit flows without needing any technical knowledge.

converse360.co.uk

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CORPORATE COVER

Corporate Cover is a Microsoft PowerApps developer, leveraging Microsoft Office 365 technologies to the full. We support existing systems and compliance methodologies and transform data gathering. PowerApps enables housing providers to own their own apps, data and workflows and integrate PowerApps with existing systems; it enables your staff and contractors to work smarter.

Our apps cover audits and inspections, fire assessments and fire door and compartment inspections, PEEPS, log books and construction, PTW and refurbishment.

corporatecover.com

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CYSOL

Cysol makes your business more efficient with new applications, digital processes and workflows. We enable you to continuously improve your business with digital transformations while protecting your existing IT investments. We significantly reduce the running costs of your projects and keep maintenance costs to a minimum.

Thanks to our social housing management application, we replace any part or all your existing systems that are underperforming. You will be able to focus and invest your money on your tenants and your properties, not on systems or on inefficient processes.

cysol.co.uk

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DOUBLE DIAMOND DELIVERY

We provide consultancy services and resources to support the delivery of IT-based business improvement projects. Double Diamond Delivery provides experienced resources supported by a proven framework and tools to deliver successful outcomes. We sit opposite technology partners, ensuring clients' requirements and outcomes are clearly understood and translated for technical delivery; we are the bridge that is commonly missing.

Our team of resources has considerable experience of the housing sector, working for numerous UK housing providers. Our unique offer is resources with both business and technical knowledge and expertise, specifically around Microsoft Dynamics. Many IT programmes in housing have encountered problems; we have the experience to deliver successful outcomes.

doublediamond.info

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ENGAGE-ME

Engage-Me uses AI and machine learning to predict, measure and improve tenant-perception scores and reduce rent arrears through an engagement-led, empathetic approach. Our core focuses are in leveraging the power of digital to increase engagement rates and leveraging tenant engagement to take a preventative approach to arrears management.

Engage-Me's solution has a strong emphasis on embedding tenants at the heart of community decision-making and service design, with inclusivity being built-in.

engage-me.io

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EVO DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Evo is a modern digital solution bringing convenience and transparency to the property maintenance sector for both tenants and landlords. Evo is a fusion of property professionals, skilled tradespeople and simple technology that transforms the way property management, maintenance and repairs are reported and delivered.

Evo works with housing providers to digitally transform how they report, manage and deliver repairs, maintenance and compliance. We aim to improve tenant engagement and satisfaction, ensure that all properties meet the Decent Homes standard, cut operating costs and reduce tenant churn. Evo provides a single source of truth, giving housing providers access to data that empowers them to meet their regulatory and housing goals.

evo-pm.com

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FLIKO

Fliko aims to be an important part of the digital transformation of the European housing market and bring it to a new dimension.

Fliko is an ecosystem of integrated solutions supporting efficient and effective property management. It introduces new standards and a professional approach to user service for property managers, housing communities and cooperatives. Fliko provides a comprehensive, end-to-end tenant service path and builds a positive user experience. In collaboration with our partners, we provide a platform that combines services from building automation, IoT and smart homes.

fliko.pl

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GOLDENI

Goldeni is the data analytics division of Morgan Sindall Property Services, a maintenance provider with over 30 years' experience in the housing sector. Goldeni empowers our service and maintenance teams to deliver preventative building and asset maintenance services to reduce property disrepairs and improve the energy efficiency of homes.

Goldeni provides housing providers with real-time data about their properties' performance. We help to prevent and support property disrepair issues by monitoring and alerting on undesirable domestic environmental conditions that could be hazardous to tenants' health. Goldeni also enables pre-emptive repairs, improved maintenance routines and delivers evidence for compliance with the Habitation Act.

goldeni.com

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HALO SMART IOT

Halo Smart IoT provides a range of solutions to monitor and control buildings. Our products can protect people's well-being, improve comfort and help save energy. Various sensor bundles address specific use-cases in social housing and other sectors. Our wireless devices are very easy to install and are linked to a cloud-based application for monitoring and reporting.

In social housing, we offer retrofittable temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide and water-leak monitoring, with the option to also control the home heating. Our cloud connectivity enables remote alarms and alerts to address fuel poverty, mould growth and flood damage problems.

halosmartiot.com

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HOUSING ONLINE REPAIRS

Housing Online Repairs is a new online repairs appointment booking service (launched in 2022). The open-source code integrates with a range of scheduling and housing management systems to support logging, amending and cancelling appointments for tenant, leaseholder and communal repairs.

Housing Online Repairs began as a collaboration between several local councils for reporting repairs online, reducing call volumes and increasing the number of channels for resident choice. Funded by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, we are now moving to the long-term path of self-sustainability and cooperative working.

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HUUME

Huume is an innovative SaaS-based housing solutions developer, providing housing professionals with intuitive and flexible cloud-based, integrated Housing Register, Choice-Based Lettings and Homeless solutions that effectively manage and personalise Housing Needs software for UK housing providers. With over 15 years' experience of designing, building and delivering housing systems, Huume

recognises what organisations need from an IT solution, to allow better use of resources and to improve efficiencies.

Formed in 2019, Huume's ethos is to change the way that Housing Needs software is delivered. By regularly collaborating with housing professionals and leveraging new technologies, Huume provides valuable solutions that constantly adapt and evolve to simplify Housing Needs management and

offers local authorities and housing providers the control they require.

huume.co.uk

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INCOAX NETWORKS

InCoax Networks is reinventing connectivity in existing property coaxial networks for high-performance broadband access by solving the 'last-mile challenge' in fibre-to-the-home deployments. The technology is a future-proof, reliable, cost-effective and non-intrusive complement to fibre. It reduces installation times and improves take-up rates to boost digital inclusion and internet access for all.

With our solution, social housing residents can get gigabit broadband access earlier and at lower operator cost than waiting for fibre to be installed. We simply reuse the in-MDU already installed TV or satellite TV coaxial cabling and connect to the operators' fibre networks.

incoax.com

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IOPT

iOpt is a remote asset monitoring company which uses IoT sensors to enable housing providers to protect their homes, tenants and the planet. iOpt monitors a plethora of assets in a property to allow housing providers to make better informed decisions about managing their stock and taking care of their tenants.

iOpt's end-to-end solution delivers actionable insights that: detect damp & mould; identify abandonments & occupancy issues; highlight fuel poverty; recognise poor air quality and sub-standard property conditions; identify poorly-performing properties; and accurately measure retrofitting work.

ioptassets.com

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IOT SOLUTIONS GROUP

Our tailored end-to-end packages make powerful IoT technologies accessible to everyone. Designed and manufactured in the UK, our IoT monitoring solutions give housing providers the confidence that they are providing warm, healthy and efficient homes through intelligent monitoring.

Our discreet home sensors monitor environmental conditions and energy use to deliver property performance data and early notification of potential issues. For vulnerable residents, our sensors can also detect changes in activity patterns.

iotsg.co.uk

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LIVLET

Livlet is the intelligent home management platform that gives you unprecedented transparency into your properties, helping to navigate the complex and expensive decisions involved in maintaining, improving and repairing them.

Livlet connects homes to the digital world, optimising the interaction between housing providers and tenants, and separating landlord and tenant responsibilities. Tenants can store records, budget costs and schedule repairs and maintenance. Housing providers gain better visibility, with a digital history of each property and greater efficiency in their communications with tenants.

livlet.com

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MORE IQ

More IQ offers a true cloud-based scheduling and optimisation service for field-based activities. The More IQ team has 40+ years' experience in the design, development, support and implementation of dynamic scheduling solutions. Our aim is to provide the best scheduling experience in the sector, enabling housing providers to give their residents the service they deserve.

The More IQ team has developed a unique optimisation algorithm that provides a truly innovative solution for customer-focused service. Our solution offers real-time optimisation for appointments, planned works, cyclical servicing and projects. More IQ is scalable, resilient and fast, offering affordable dynamic scheduling for any size of organisation – true cloud, simple and straightforward.

moreiq.com

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MYGLOBALHOME

MyGlobalHome offers AI-powered building intelligence that helps people and organisations invest in, design, construct and occupy green buildings that are environmentally-responsible, profitable and healthy places to live and work.

MyGlobalHome provides the technologies and funding access to retrofit social housing with ESG-accredited sustainable systems tailored to each home. Each home accredited by MyGlobalHome provides occupants with a better and more affordable living experience, with the costs being covered through building and maintenance savings over a 10-year period.

myglobalhome.co

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NEO TECHNOLOGY

Neo Technology is a digital solutions and consultancy services provider. Our 'start-up thinking' and Agile/DevOps culture ensure that our clients are hyper-relevant in an ever-changing world of technology. We bring the skills and resources needed to deliver integrated, innovative and appropriate technologies that disrupt your sector, drive efficiency and scale your organisation.

Neo Technology works closely with housing providers. Our projects have included cloud-based platform migration, online portals, data migration and integration into legacy systems and end-to-end UX design.

neotechnologiesolutions.com

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NEXBOTIX

Nexbotix automates business processes. Our software bots extract, process and move data from any source to any destination so your employees don't have to. Our mission is to make automation technology accessible, affordable and easy to implement for businesses of any size.

The most popular use-cases we see at housing providers are invoice processing and social housing applications. Both processes are labour-intensive and repetitive, making them ideal targets for intelligent automation projects. They can cut costs, reduce errors and improve employees' experience while facilitating better relationships with suppliers and tenants.

nexbotix.com

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NOLIJWORK

NolijWork makes complex work simple to define, manage and optimise. Everyone recognises that work is changing, yet how we design work and services has stubbornly remained unchanged for far too long. NolijWork provides technology and a methodology to support a new outcome-oriented discovery & design approach to work.

In social housing, our primary focus is on mining (discovery) and design (work mapping) for complex work and services within housing. Mining can help to reveal latent patterns of operation and bottlenecks, which are not readily visible through traditional metrics or business analysis techniques. Work mapping provides a simple 'paint by numbers' approach to work and service design.

nolijwork.com

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ONE CONSULTING

One Consulting is an innovative management and digital advisory organisation, collaborating with social housing clients to deliver change and improvement programmes and projects that underpin service-delivery excellence.

We aim to disrupt the traditional consultancy landscape by providing quality outcomes through an 'as a service' approach, providing skilled consultants with business analysis, programme and project management, PMO and change leadership expertise.

oneconsulting.uk

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OPTUSAPP

One of the most disruptive technology developments of the 21st century has been the ubiquity and power of the smartphone. It's in everyone's pocket, it gets more powerful every year, and it drives self-service. OptusApp is unique in social housing – we provide the only native mobile app for tenant-landlord engagement. Unlike traditional tenant portals, native apps can use handset features including push-notifications,

fingerprint or facial log-in and geotagging.

OptusApp has a 'mobile first' approach and we are exclusively dedicated to social housing, delivering the most powerful and efficient tenant-landlord solution. Our tenant app is system agnostic and integrates with every major HMS, CRM and repairs scheduling system. We offer a free-of-charge demo version of the app for any landlord to evaluate.

optusapp.com

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PLANRADAR

PlanRadar is a digital platform for documentation, task management and communication in housing projects. The platform enables teams to increase quality, reduce costs and complete work faster. By improving collaboration and providing access to real-time data, PlanRadar's easy-to-use platform adds value to every person involved in a building's lifecycle. PlanRadar currently serves more than 120,000 users globally.

PlanRadar digitises your property portfolio, keeping operations on time and on budget. It saves time and reduces operating costs by centralising your buildings' information with a tamper-proof, single source of information. Digitise your own golden thread for your individual assets and future-proof your buildings.

planradar.com

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PLENTIFIC

Plentific is transforming property management by providing housing providers with a single platform and marketplace to source and manage a network of contractors and service providers, ranging from repairs to compliance.

Plentific's platform centralises communication between tenants, property managers and contractors while offering SaaS tools for the end-to-end management of the repairs and maintenance workflow. While Plentific doesn't have a specific focus on social housing, it is currently used by some of the UK's largest social housing providers.

plentific.com

Contact:

See plentific.com



PROJECT ARK

Project Ark helps large housing providers build better communities.

With Project Ark, you can increase efficiency, streamline reporting, support ESG initiatives and establish new communities, and tenants can forge connections with their neighbours through Project Ark's Resident Hub.

communities.projectark.co.uk

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PROPERTY TECTONICS (HOMELIFE)

Property Tectonics has worked with housing providers for 35+ years, providing state-of-the-art software and surveys.

Some of the largest housing providers in the UK trust our Lifespan software to help them ensure that their homes are compliant, safe and superbly managed. Our new Homelife product is a dynamic, real-time collaborative platform for all PAS 2035 roles, including assessors, coordinators and installers.

property-tectonics.co.uk

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REALYSE

Realyse enables faster and more accurate site-sourcing, benchmarking, valuation and rent-setting using Realyse's 800+ datasets covering open market and affordable rents, demographic and economic data, planning applications, construction pipelines, local policies, land ownership and more.

London & Quadrant, Grainger, PfP and even the UK Home Office have used Realyse to get better and faster answers about where housing is most needed, what housing to build, where the opportunities are and what those properties are worth.

realyse.com

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RISKHUB

Riskhub is a leading compliance data management system, combining clarity, simplicity and accountability from end-to-end. Our cloud-based, API-driven system is a single source of truth across the entire data cycle, from assessments and reporting to action management and back again. Built by risk experts at the forefront of the sector, our clients' compliance data is clear, visible and auditable; it's powerfully simple.

Riskhub works with some of the UK's largest housing providers and local authorities. We manage huge amounts of property data for organisations with large property portfolios, helping them revolutionise how they store, view, report, collect and audit their compliance and risk management data.

riskhub.co.uk

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SENSYQO

Sensyqo is an environmental IoT start-up that helps people to live more healthily in their homes by providing environmental intelligence and advice.

Sensyqo is still at the R&D stage, but the potential benefits for social Housing are monitoring building conditions, early detection of fuel poverty, indoor air quality and residents' well-being.

sensyqo.com

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SPINVIEW

Spinview creates accurate volumetric digital twins of buildings and infrastructure to deliver insights on both the health and structure of any building or space. Combining IoT, BIM, scanning and advanced visualisation, data is processed into a single, easy-to-use visual model of the asset, with AI translating and automating this data into usable information for all stakeholders and employees.

Spinview is a leader in delivering visual intelligence from digital twins, working with property clients across the globe to advance and improve understanding, communication and collaboration of data in the built environment. Spinview supports clients in digitising their property portfolios, navigating the path to net-zero, boosting efficiencies and reducing costs.

spinview.io

Contact:

xxxxxx



SWIRB

Swirb captures the whole of the UK property market on a daily basis to provide highly accurate valuations, vital insights and custom-built reports in real time that enable better-informed investment decisions. We believe in the democratisation of good data; unlike other providers of valuations, our metrics are not weighted to benefit certain parts of the property sector.

Swirb works directly with developers and planners to build boutique solutions for mitigating project risk, ensuring build viability and enabling data-driven decisions. Our APIs can illustrate hypothetical property developments and investment plans by combining accurate valuations with analyses of yields and values over time.

swirb.com

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SWITCHEE

Switchee enables social landlords to hit challenging financial and environmental targets with real-time, remote data analytics. A personalised platform identifies condensation, damp or mould risk and flags fuel poverty. We transform resident engagement and appointment scheduling via a two-way, in-house communication display.

With a Switchee smart thermostat installed, residents optimise energy use, lower heating bills by 17 per cent and reduce energy consumption.

switchee.com

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TRADE INNOVATIONS

Trade Innovations develops software for the property and construction sectors to improve maintenance processes. Our Help Me Fix platform connects residents to qualified and experienced tradespeople via video so that simple maintenance issues can be resolved remotely, and more complicated ones can be triaged and parts recommend to prevent a double visit.

Help Me Fix improves the time-to-repair and first-time-fix rates for housing providers as well as reducing delivery costs by remotely resolving 20 per cent of all issues and successfully triaging a further 40-60 per cent, thereby preventing double visits.

helpmefix.io

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UNLOC

Unloc is a Norwegian technology company, based in Oslo, Stockholm, Copenhagen and London. Unloc connects any smart locks or access systems into an innovative software platform for administration and use of keys through our app. Since 2017, Unloc has established itself as a standard in mobile keys through collaboration with some of the Nordic region's largest players in real estate, logistics and welfare technology.

Unloc is helping social landlords to address the numerous 'no access' challenges they experience in communal areas, voids and with their tenants. Unloc helps social landlords to make their existing access systems and locks 'smart' and connects everything back into their existing management platforms where access to their buildings can be granted remotely and instantly.

unloc.app

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VERICON SYSTEMS

We are forward-thinking experts in intelligent, remote data-driven technologies that provide solutions for our customers through collaborative working across a range of challenges. We support our customers to become more efficient, reduce cost and remain compliant, while improving service, relationships and customer welfare.

Vericon provides intelligent control, analysis and management of critical building systems for the UK's largest housing providers. With Vericon Connect, we enable clients to carry out all three elements remotely; reducing costs, person-to-person contacts and carbon footprints while improving efficiencies and remaining compliant.

vericonsystems.com

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WORDNERDS

Wordnerds is a text analytics tool that helps large B2C organisations genuinely understand their customers and employees by bridging the gap between what AI can deliver and the information insights professionals actually need.

By aggregating customer communication across your organisation, such as surveys, social, CRM notes, live chat and contact-centre transcripts, we help insight professionals to turn qualitative feedback into actions with quantitative results. Working with housing providers such as Sovereign, we use AI and corpus linguistics to highlight the root causes impacting tenant satisfaction and give management teams data-backed insights.

wordnerds.ai

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YOKERU

Housing is too reactive, and vulnerable people who need help sometimes don't get it. Yokeru is a proactive support platform that makes it easy to deliver proactive services at a low cost. Yokeru's AI-powered phone calls identify hidden needs while creating efficiencies.

Yokeru helps scheme managers (including floating teams) better support tenants. Housing providers across the UK use Yokeru to automate the delivery of essential proactive services. According to Radius Housing, "Yokeru gives scheme managers the freedom to focus on the people who need them. We're getting to people much quicker."

yokeru.io

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Are you ready for business process automation?

Housing Technology interviewed business process automation (BPA), data integration and workflow experts from Active Housing by Hallnet, CGI, Manifest Software Solutions, MIS Active Management Systems, NEC Software Solutions, Neo Technology and One Consulting on the role of BPA in housing providers' internal- and external-facing operations.

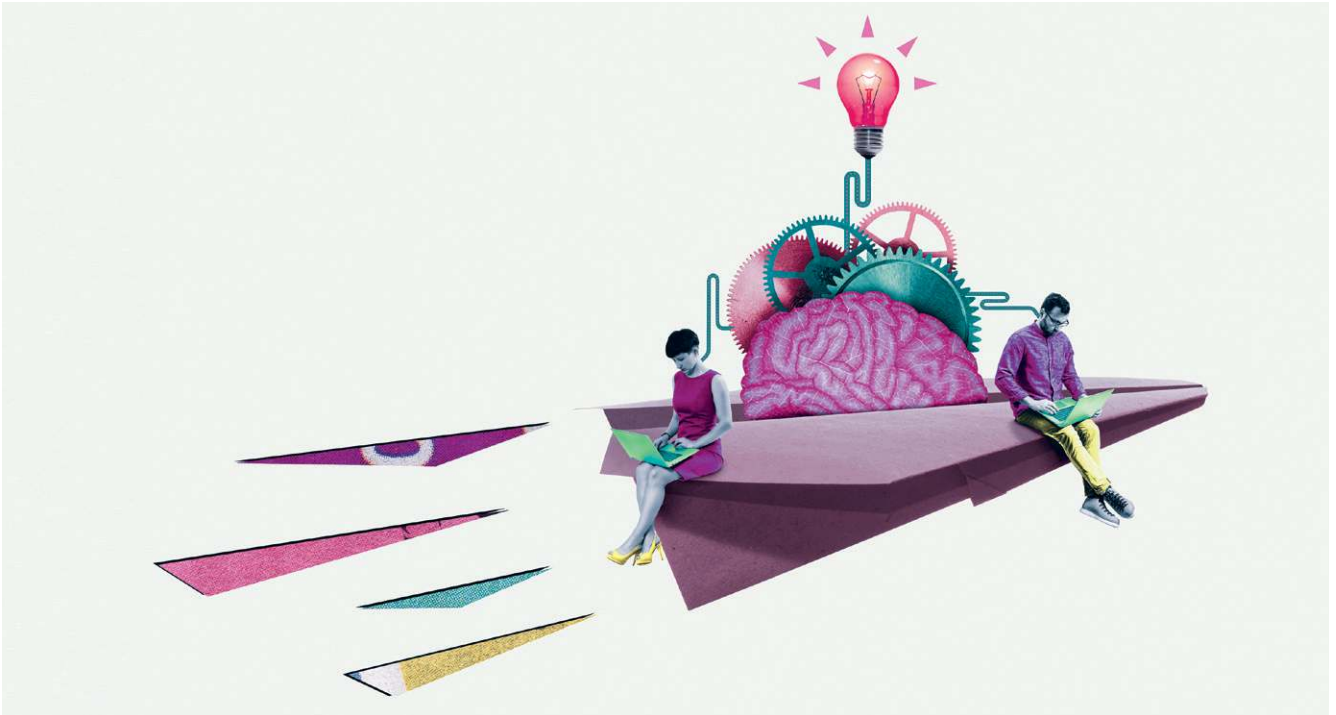
What is BPA in social housing?

Alan Swift, technical director at Manifest Software Solutions, said, "BPA is the IT-enabled simplification of complex business processes, helping the integration of a variety of processes across numerous housing services – in short, housing providers want to use BPA so they can do more for less.

"BPA allows housing providers to automate their many of their resource-heavy, time-consuming processes. Without the need for manual interventions, they can run 24/7, not only improving efficiency but also enabling services to be delivered at any time of day or night."

Chris McLaughlin, managing director of MIS Active Management Systems, said, "The goal of BPA is to increase efficiency and reduce the risk of manual errors; housing providers can use BPA to automate repeatable, multi-step tasks without human interventions."

Trevor Hampton, director of housing solutions at NEC Software Solutions, said, "BPA is all about automating repetitive tasks, in particular those that happen again and again and follow the same series of steps. For example, housing applications and the processing of rents and repairs are all high-volume, repetitive tasks, which is why many housing providers, especially those managing very



large portfolios, already have some degree of BPA built into their systems."

Steve Repton, CEO of One Consulting, said, "Housing providers should bear in mind that introducing BPA into broken processes is a sub-optimal improvement. Care must be taken to review, redesign and reconstruct processes before any BPA activity; don't make BPA the final answer but consider it instead as the icing on the cake."



By using BPA for repairs, housing providers have cut their call times while improving their 'no access' and 'right first time' KPIs.

Stephen Hall, Director, Active Housing by Hallnet

Choosing the right processes

Stephen Hall, director of Active Housing by Hallnet, said, "Our research shows that over 60 per cent of calls to housing providers are repairs-related. By using BPA and digital transformation for the repairs reporting process, we've found that housing providers have cut their call times while improving their 'no access' and 'right first time' KPIs.

"Less complex processes that are in high demand or are most resource-intensive can benefit from BPA. For example, we digitised Southern Housing's 'add a new household member' process, reducing the transactional cost from £19 to just £2.50, an 87 per cent saving."

Ben Nduva, director of consulting services at CGI, said, "Operations involving repetitive, complex processes are the best candidates for BPA. However, to really deliver value to tenants, we should look beyond the automation of existing tasks and try to improve and expand housing services.

"For example, conversational AI is a form of automation which understands variation so the inputs are less constrained regarding input and format, and acts as a connector to access and update disparate systems. We recently worked with a housing provider to automate its HR processes; by collecting, evaluating and managing referrals from previous employers for prospective staff, we reduced the time staff spent per week from 25 hours to just 30 minutes."

Stuart Payne, strategy director at Neo Technology, said, "BPA is best suited to large-scale housing providers who must deal with thousands of tenants and, under legacy systems, mountains of paperwork and tortuous manual processes.

"BPA makes life much easier for housing staff and brings enormous cost benefits to the housing providers themselves. Smaller housing providers will benefit from BPA and suffer without it, but not to the same degree."



Case processing, voids, repairs and maintenance are the main areas that gain the most from BPA.

Chris McLaughlin, Managing Director, MIS Active Management Systems

MIS-AMS's McLaughlin said, "In our experience, case processing, voids, repairs and maintenance are the main areas that gain the most from BPA. For case processing, BPA is ideally suited to cover areas such as anti-social behaviour, complaints, on-boarding, changes of tenancy and aids/adaptations, to name just a few.

"For repairs and maintenance, BPA can be used to create a highly-tailored solution in which tasks and actions can be

run automatically in response to events or timing triggers. BPA can also be proactive, highlighting likely repairs and maintenance problems before they happen. With voids, some housing providers might have 10,000 properties, with 1,000 empty at a similar time; BPA can automate repetitive tasks to reduce turnaround times."



Don't try to fit every process into BPA – some processes might simply not be suitable for automation.

Ben Nduva, Director of Consulting Services, CGI

The business imperatives of BPA

Manifest's Swift said, "The effective integration of BPA with housing providers' existing systems is the key to delivering 24/7 services. Although many housing tasks are boring and repetitive, they still need to be done to a high standard; BPA not only allows tasks to be done more efficiently but also to consistently-high standards."

CGI's Nduva said, "BPA saves staff time and improves job satisfaction by reducing repetitive work, along with cutting response times. For example, by using a combination of authentication, containment and intelligent routing to reduce by 30 per cent the time spent on calls by contact-centre staff, a £4 average cost per call (CPC) could be slashed to £2.80."

NEC's Hampton said, "The big advantages of BPA are cost reduction, faster processes and greater customer satisfaction. For example, it can speed up the voids process by automating the workflow and removing the need for manual inputs."

Neo Technology's Payne said, "BPA delivers cost savings, scalability and increased efficiency. With automated systems, housing providers can expand without overwhelming their existing workforces; an automated case management system (CMS) allows most tenants to manage their own cases while enabling housing staff to devote more time to priority cases."



Identify which process has very repeatable tasks that are similar in structure, steps and complexity and then automate that single process.

Trevor Hampton, Director of Housing Solutions, NEC Software Solutions

Benefits to tenants

One Consulting's Repton said, "I've yet to meet a housing provider's customer or tenant who prefers their landlord to have complicated and hard-to-access services. As such, properly implementing BPA leads to simpler interactions, happier tenants and an organisation which then has the time and resources to help those most in need."

Manifest's Swift said, "Self-service portals and virtual assistants deliver cost-effective 24/7 customer services. We are working with housing providers to enable their tenants to access housing services via any method at any time of day or night by scripting BPA processes so that processes are done exactly as they would be by a member of staff."

"Furthermore, BPA enables new services to be created because those additional services don't always require additional staff. For example, the processes that monitor heating and the conditions of homes using IoT devices would have previously required people to visit every property; now these IoT devices can automatically trigger responsive repairs or the creation of cases in CRM systems."

MIS-AMS's McLaughlin said, "With BPA, housing staff no longer need to spend valuable time on manual administrative tasks; this reduces the risk of manual errors and boosts productivity. With fewer processes holding them back, housing providers can get more done, with a tighter focus on improving the customer experience."



Many housing tasks are boring and repetitive but they still need to be done to a high standard.

Alan Swift, Technical Director, Manifest Software Solutions

A roadmap for BPA

CGI's Nduva said, "When considering BPA, we usually start by looking for processes that scale, although that's not the whole story. Depending on how they choose to tackle BPA, housing providers with healthy IT operations and/or modern CRM, finance and telephony systems might be best placed for automation but the process will still be unique for each of them."

"However, don't try to fit every process into BPA – some processes may simply not be suitable for automation and these should be identified as you review and build your process catalogue."

Active Housing's Hall said, "BPA adoption needs to be mapped out to see what fits in a structured and process-driven way. This should be part of your end-to-end workflows to avoid over-complicating your processes from a customer's perspective."

NEC's Hampton said, "Adopting any new technology is always about trialling, testing and proving it meets the intended business need before implementing it at scale; BPA is no exception. Housing providers considering BPA should therefore start small and build up."

"The first step is to identify which operational area has highly repeatable tasks that are similar in structure, steps and complexity and then automate that single process."

Once several areas have been identified and automated, they can be combined later."

One Consulting's Repton said, "BPA should be used as part of a wider organisational transformation methodology, one that uses the 'best product and the most knowledgeable people' to solve the right problems and to maximise the outcomes. Above all, make sure you pick the right processes for automation because automating a broken process simply gives you bad outcomes faster."



BPA is best suited to larger housing providers dealing with thousands of tenants, mountains of paperwork and tortuous manual processes.

Stuart Payne, Strategy Director,
Neo Technology

Robotic process automation, AI & business process management

MIS-AMS's McLaughlin said, "Business process management is a methodology used to standardise processes and eliminate human error through constant analysis and optimisation. BPA only plays an important part in driving efficiency, consistency and stability once housing providers understand all aspects of their current processes because those make it easier to identify areas where automation can fit in.

"All housing providers have masses of data in their core business applications; with optimised processes in place, overlaying this data with AI opens the door to achieve advanced pattern analysis and predictability. Combine this with RPA and you can achieve advanced machine-learning capabilities that take away the guesswork inherent today."



Make sure you pick the right processes for automation because automating a broken process simply gives you bad outcomes faster.

Steve Repton, CEO, One Consulting

Neo Technology's Payne said, "AI automation is when you combine AI with your integrated software tools for faster, smarter decision-making. The system can then make choices on your behalf using the data it's presented with. Add in machine learning and it will grow the 'intelligence' of the AI system as it learns and analyses more information. As a result, AI automation can help you spot patterns and trends that you wouldn't otherwise be able to see."

One Consulting's Repton said, "Too many housing providers want to be seen as innovators and often turn to technology to solve their problems. This approach is flawed and often ends with failed projects because

the housing providers didn't have the right technology foundations to start with.

"It's important to have a stable technology environment before you start innovating. Once you have that stability, BPA can help with the deployment of RPA and AI but the key thing is to never lose sight of what the customers want and what the workforce needs to deliver great service. Get the basics right and innovation will follow."

Examples of BPA

CGI's Nduva said, "We used BPA recently to support a housing provider's internal customers. By automating a repetitive reset process (typically generating over 100 cases each week) for the housing provider's IT service desk, IT staff time was reduced from 12 hours to just half an hour through a combination of RPA and conversational AI."

Neo Technology's Payne said, "When we deployed BPA for Notting Hill Genesis, we automated 50 per cent of its processes, which led to time savings of 50 per cent and a 38 per cent reduction in project delivery costs. In total, around 70 per cent of NHG tenants use our self-service portal, with 50,000 cases going through the portal each month."

NEC's Hampton said, "Although the use of BPA is now becoming relatively widespread in social housing, our sector still has a long way to go before we see its blanket adoption. Where it is most evident is in the automation of voids management, housing applications, work-order processing, repair scheduling and the triggering of alerts and events."

Housing Technology would like to thank Stephen Hall (Active Housing by Hallnet), Ben Nduva (CGI), Alan Swift (Manifest Software Solutions), Chris McLaughlin (MIS Active Management Systems), Trevor Hampton (NEC Software Solutions), Stuart Payne (Neo Technology) and Steve Repton (One Consulting) for their editorial contributions to this article.

Why do IT business improvement projects fail?



Oliver Lock, Director, Double Diamond Delivery

Why are so many IT business improvement projects proving difficult to deliver or failing completely? Oliver Lock of consultancy Double Diamond Delivery explores this question and discusses what can be done to build the right foundations.

Projects fail when they have shaky foundations, with a lack of an overall vision, unclear outcomes and poorly-defined requirements and processes as major factors. The desire to jump straight to solutions, often interim or tactical, without fully understanding either future business needs or the technology roadmap can mean a project is doomed from the start.

Sustainable returns

In the current economic climate, organisations want to embark on business change and transformation programmes as vehicles to achieve efficiencies. In the housing sector, this is a significant issue, where funding for such projects is in short supply and streamlined ways of working are essential in delivering cost savings. Housing providers therefore need to ensure that their investments deliver returns in reasonable timescales and any changes introduced are sustainable and future-proof; after all, few organisations embark on a transformation programme twice.

Double Diamond Delivery has a methodology built over the past decade, with consultants specialising in Microsoft Dynamics but also able to leverage any new technologies to achieve business improvements. Our approach means we can look at the desired end-state of an organisation and produce the right technology roadmap to support business goals.

In our experience, the common complaints during projects are:

- The requirement wasn't clear;
- The solution doesn't meet my requirements;
- The users don't like or won't use the system because it doesn't align with the business process;

- The build of the solution is bigger than expected;
- The project plan needs to change because milestones haven't been met;
- The business process is complicated;
- The solution is complicated;
- Business decision-making is slow;
- The project's 'health status' has rapidly gone from 'green' to 'red' or from 'on track' to 'behind schedule';
- Multiple change-requests have been logged by the technology partner against the agreed contract;
- Some or all of the project's scope, time and cost have increased;
- The project's benefits haven't been realised or aren't being tracked at all.

Delivering 'as is' processes on new technologies, not new business benefits

A common mistake many organisations make is to develop, almost by accident, their current processes with new technology; it's hard to step away from the way we work now to develop a future business model. Many hours are lost navigating current users away from their 'as is' world into new ways of thinking. There is a skill to facilitating workshops that challenge the status quo and encourages the art of the possible. A robust set of design principles is invaluable in helping users to create something new.

Mobilising a business team for success

Successful projects are able to harness the skills and knowledge of subject matter experts and use other organisational knowledge; the ideal team needs a mix of skills. Always include people grounded in the subject in question but don't be afraid to include a disruptive

influence who will provide challenge and innovation. Add in a skilled business analyst and a solution architect and you have all the right ingredients.

Projects can't be done 'to' people or imposed on business areas. There must be collaboration and cooperation because the implementation team will depend on engagement and buy-in, resources in the form of subject matter experts (or product owners who look after elements of an end-solution) and, above all, a high level of take-up.

Setting the right foundations

Here is a sample of our methodology; they might appear to be obvious but if you're currently involved in a project, you might want to check you have these in place:

1. Business vision & case for change

- A clear business vision – can this be explained in a few sentences?
- Target operating model – do you know what your business will look like in its transformed state?
- Clear business benefits defined (and perhaps quantified) – can you describe the benefits to customers and users?
- Definition of business outcomes and scope of change landscape – do you know what will be new and the change interventions needed?
- True 'as is' business, technology and data landscapes – have you just mapped the technology?
- Priority decisions logged, with the assumptions and dependencies understood – are you clear on the big decisions ahead?
- Scope and delivery plan – can you lock down the scope and at least plot some key milestones?

2. Defining a target operating model

Transformation programmes are most successful when they are designed to achieve a new target operating model; this acts as a blueprint for how the organisation will run in the future and helps to identify any knock-on effects of your decisions. There are some standard approaches to creating a target operating model, but the real art is being able to define the initiatives needed and keeping the business roadmap in lock-step with the technology roadmap.

3. Defining the future state

Working together, with a blend of skills and capabilities, the future state can be achieved through:

- Driving forward the implementation of your target operating model;
- Organisational design considerations as you determine the impact of any changes and the shape/size of new organisational structures;
- Future business-process definition and ways of working to deliver new outcomes;
- The logical design of business outcomes to your

technology capabilities, which in turn can limit customisation;

- Business requirements' definition, including user-story production aligned to real processes and experiences;
- Process and requirement delivery backlog (e.g. via Azure DevOps);
- Solution design blueprints at business, functional and technical levels;
- Business impact assessment of future ways of working which can then align to change management interventions;
- Change and communication plans to keep everyone informed;
- Detailed planning to find the critical path and therefore the path to success.

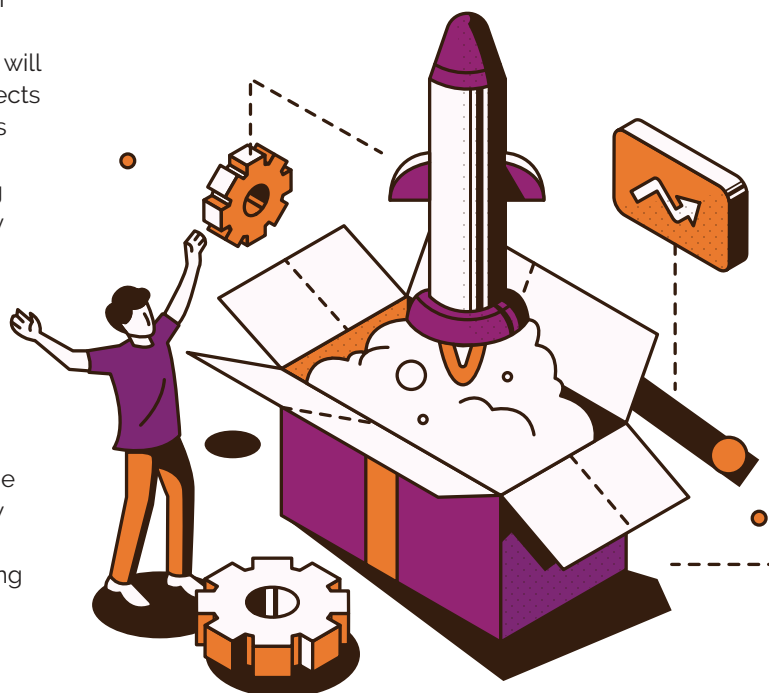
4. Shared understanding between business & technology teams

The term 'shared understanding' is crucial in the earlier phases. All parties must be aligned to ensure that what is designed and planned is actually what is going to be built and delivered. Business and technology teams often don't speak the same language; there should be an experienced party in between translating their respective languages and ensuring alignment.

Conclusion

We can offer a start-up guide to get your programmes up and running with all the right elements and identify the gaps you need to fill. Our experienced teams have seen and heard it all; nothing will surprise us!

Oliver Lock is a director of Double Diamond Delivery.



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