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HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2024

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HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™
2024 CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

See page 04

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

How do you do it?
What goes wrong?
How do you get it right?



Housing management

Housing management systems, net zero, maximising revenues and data management

Customer management

Low-code development, self-service portals, connectivity & integration and omni-channels

Mobile working

Video diagnostics, digital repairs and asset management analytics

Infrastructure

Next-generation IT service desks, ransomware, tenant safety and smart devices

General news

Behavioural science, staff retention, mergers & acquisitions and fixed-price projects

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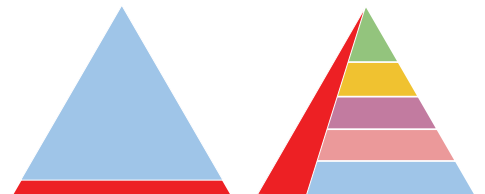
Forthcoming events



What's inside



38 Damp, mould and digital transformation



48 Is digital transformation a misnomer?

TECHNOLOGY SHOWCASE

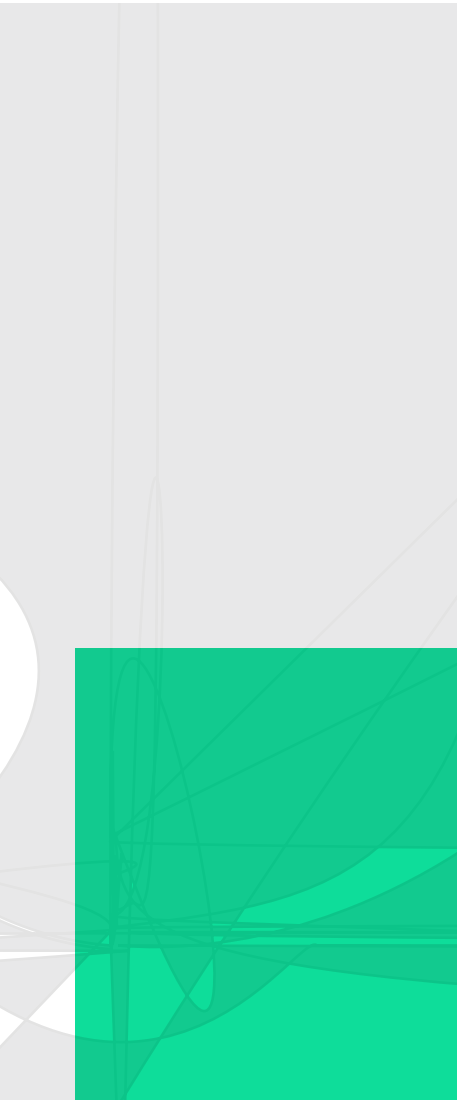
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HOU

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2024





Cyngor Gwynedd is implementing Civica's Abrisas Housing Needs software in a new three-year contract.

The council manages the housing register and works with several social housing providers to ensure tenants are housed in the most suitable properties for their needs. One key partner is North Wales Housing which is currently implementing Civica's Cx Housing platform. This will provide improved integration for the two organisations to match void properties with housing needs.

With a growing problem of homelessness and residents in temporary accommodation, the software will help the council and its partners ensure that the people of Gwynedd are allocated the appropriate home in a timely

manner. With the council currently operating two separate systems for housing and homelessness, the new Civica platform will unify the data across both, allowing a single view of people and available properties.

Carys Fon Williams, head of housing & property, Cyngor Gwynedd, said, "We chose this new Civica solution because it's easy to use and will unify all our data on one simple platform. Having a more robust and automated system will provide a better service for the residents of Gwynedd because it will cut the time we need to spend on back-end administration."

*NEC Software Solutions
has agreed a seven-year
partnership with Swindon
Borough Council to replace*



Connectivity - Finding the right solutions for your ecosystem

Alek Legosteva, Head of Product, Aareon

Conduct an internal process audit

This is the most important part of your procurement process. Think about your different teams and how they carry out each function of your organisation. What technology is used at each stage, and how effective is it? Are resources being used efficiently or could things be streamlined?

You may want to improve a specific area, such as resident services, or upgrade several parts at once. Whatever your decision, it's important to view all your technology solutions as a single ecosystem in which each part connects with the other.

With those thoughts in mind, map out your current processes on a piece of paper. How does data flow? Are there bottlenecks or inefficiencies where processes are slowed down or repeated? This is where new technology could help, for example if your solutions all feed from one central management system that functions as a single source of truth.

Don't forget to include staff across all areas and levels of your organisation in your audit. A staff member on the

that limit expandability and won't play well with the rest of your ecosystem.

Calculate the total cost of ownership, including subscription fees, training, customisation, and ongoing support, and factor in your budget constraints.

Demos – see before you buy

Once you've built your shortlist, book some demos to get a better idea of what solutions meet your needs. Use your specification sheet to discuss what you're looking for and how potential solutions could provide this.

Include stakeholders from across your organisation in these demos because they can provide a different perspective and may have needs you haven't thought of. This will also offer them the opportunity to ask their own questions to the technology provider's representatives and help them feel involved in the procurement process. Consider the benefits of best-in-class solutions that are focused on configurability rather than customisation; this could make the difference between a solution that fits now and a future-proofed ecosystem.

Compromise with a view to the future

Sometimes you will face two solutions, both of which are promising you a bright future. Learn about how these products are built, what the processes are for future development and what initiatives are on the roadmap. Ensure that the technology provider is transparent and honest about how they will involve you as a customer in the continuous development of that solution, such as feedback channels, focus groups and user-acceptance testing. It is also worth thinking about which functionalities will give value to your teams tomorrow and which are nice to have,



IntoZetta's annual 'data in housing' survey results... *final instalment*

David Bamford, Delivery Director, IntoZetta

Welcome to the final instalment of our review of IntoZetta's 'Data in Housing Survey 2023'. If you missed the earlier articles, please see the last three editions of Housing Technology (available online).

In part three, we saw respondents identify that, while they had a good idea of how data was being created, used and stored, they had little in the way of a reliable single source. There was also an awareness that most organisations store too much data, often in unsuitable places such as within documents on shared drives.

While this is not unique to housing, it's still an area of major concern. Organisations need to trust their data to enable high-quality decisions to be made. Equally, they should store only the data they need to stay on the right side of GDPR and other legislation.

Transitioning to an architecture that supports these objectives isn't easy but the benefits far outweigh the

embedding of roles and responsibilities, governance will fail.

Leaders need to think about the priority they are giving to this kind of activity and if they are making space and time for conversations in this area.

My organisation manages its data compliance and regulatory obligations effectively

A new question for 2023, and the news is mostly positive. The good thing about regulatory compliance is the RoI doesn't need much work; either we do it or we don't do business. It doesn't get much clearer than that, but that doesn't mean we can't review and improve the way we comply.

The organisations IntoZetta works with are using data governance to reduce their burden of compliance reporting. By continually monitoring and improving the data that flows into these submissions, we can avoid those last-minute panics to manipulate data in spreadsheets before it goes to the regulator, and move towards a more 'push button' approach.

My organisation understands how data affects the tenants' experience

There is still a strong majority here who believe they understand the impact of data on outcomes for tenants. Data



Given the current economic environment, it's not surprising that rent arrears are increasing and taking their toll on housing providers' income.

Keeping people in their homes is a key priority for housing providers. Tenancies that go the distance provide the perfect win-win situation. They are better for the wellbeing of residents and maintain a steady income stream for housing providers. They also avoid a cost of around £8,000 to evict someone.

But how can housing providers' income officers know whom to help? Their workload is growing and they might have 500 cases to look at when they come into work. Housing providers need to find new ways to prioritise cases so that any help is focused on where it will have the greatest impact.

Joining up the dots

Housing providers can hold minefields of disjointed data. Separate tools will show customer relationship management, repairs and arrears. Income staff may not have access to all the systems and will need to look in many different areas to obtain a complete view of a customer's circumstances so that crucial details aren't missed. Poring over large spreadsheets, switching between systems and cross-checking data takes time which could be better spent dealing with customers.

With a consolidated approach to your data, you can check if a customer is up-to-date with their rent, service charges,



Types

RBKC moves to Capita One Housing

Daniel Rankine, Head of ICT & Digital, Royal Borough of
Kensington & Chelsea

End-to-end HMS

Before our migration, we were using two highly-customised housing systems. To better manage our property portfolio while meeting all our regulatory requirements, we transitioned to Capita's new cloud-based One Housing system.

It was a complicated undertaking of two very different phases, requiring close collaboration with Capita over the course of three years.

The first phase involved migrating our HMS from Academy Housing to Open Housing, a tried-and-tested Capita system that's been on the market for the past two decades. A year later, we were able to focus on the final migration to One Housing, which successfully went live in July 2023.

Data-driven results

As Capita's first customer to go live with One Housing, I'm happy to say that it's already showing signs of paying dividends.

One Housing is easy to use, with a modern, intuitive front-end which our staff have mastered very quickly. Handy alerts ensure we remain compliant, and high levels of automation are freeing up time, money and resources.

One Housing has already benefited our staff through 100 per



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PREVENTATIVE MEASURES.**





Can cloud help with net-zero goals?

Jeff Hewitt, Executive Director for Local Government, Civica

According to the World Economic Forum, digital technologies could deliver up to 20 per cent of the International Energy Agency's 2050 net-zero emissions target. With the Climate Change Committee assessing that local authorities will struggle to deliver on their net-zero ambitions, we've looked at how cloud software could help.

Digital technology is the powerhouse behind so many carbon-cutting initiatives today, from optimising transport and making supply chains more sustainable to managing green energy. In local government, the picture is no different. Cloud software is helping councils to monitor and manage their energy use and emissions, and to work smarter.

Tracking & recording energy use & emissions

The 2050 net-zero target has directly affected the public sector, making it essential for organisations first to identify and quantify their emissions and energy use, and then track

Create a Digital Ecosystem for the Future



Partner Marketplace

Find out

Pre-Built Connectors

▶ **Seamless Integration**

Introducing Aareon Connect, the social housing integration platform that gives you the flexibility to choose which solutions suit your business.

With a growing network of best in class partners and all the API hardwork done for you, we open the door for our customers to create a digital ecosystem of the future.



Let's delve into how housing providers can harness the full potential of Dataverse and Power Apps to achieve their goals and serve their communities more effectively.

What is Microsoft Dataverse?

Microsoft Dataverse, previously known as Common Data Service, is a secure and scalable cloud-based data storage and management platform. Tailored to empower organisations with data-driven decision-making capabilities, Microsoft Dataverse offers a unified environment where data from various sources can be consolidated, organised and accessed in a structured manner.

It serves as a central repository for different types of data, ranging from customer information and financial records to operational metrics. In short, if you have data that shouldn't be in your HMS or finance system, then it should live in Dataverse.

What is Power Platform?

Power Platform is a suite of Microsoft tools for creating custom applications, automating processes, analysing data and collaboration across departments. Comprising Power Apps, Power Automate, Power BI, Power Pages and Power Virtual Agents, Power Platform provides a comprehensive set of capabilities that enable housing providers to innovate and transform their operations.

More specifically, Power Apps enables non-developers to create custom apps. For example, housing providers can



Benefits of Cx Saas model

“Our Housing & Asset Management software uses half of our server space. Moving to the cloud subscription model will deliver several benefits, from predictable budgeting to cost and employee time savings. With security monitoring, disaster recovery and much more to be delivered by Civica, it will give us time back to work on other projects such as data integrity and business intelligence. Fundamentally, Cx uses a modern tech stack which future proofs our business for the next 10-15 years.”

Craig Manley,
Head of IT & Digital Transformation



providers can create apps that allow tenants to submit maintenance requests, complete with details and photos, via their smartphones. These requests can be seamlessly integrated into Dataverse, enabling maintenance teams to prioritise and address problems promptly, alongside providing real-time updates to tenants about the status of their maintenance requests.

Empowering staff productivity

Power Apps can also empower housing staff by streamlining their administrative tasks. Custom apps can be created to manage employee schedules, track project progress and automate routine processes. Power Apps also supports remote working and collaboration, allowing staff to access essential information and complete tasks from any location.

Dataverse and Power Apps present housing providers with a transformative opportunity to optimise operations, enhance tenant experiences and drive organisational success. Adopting a Microsoft-first approach gives you, your staff and your tenants a seamless experience with the apps you build.

Steven Osprey is the partnerships and alliances director at TSG.

CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT





CUSTOMER SELF-SERVICE APP AND PORTAL

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- ✓ App for Android /iOS and a Web Portal
- ✓ Integrates with any HMS
- ✓ Styled with your company branding
- ✓ Secure messaging to drive customer engagement
- ✓ Access to key information including documents
- ✓ View rent account and make payments
- ✓ Modern repairs booking experience
- ✓ Multi-language support
- ✓ A platform that evolves with you

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SCAN THE CODE
TO DISCOVER MORE



Yes, your customers probably tell you that they would like a simpler way to track outstanding repairs, and so developing a portal that gives them real-time updates on the status of their repairs may seem logical.

Frustrations often stem from underlying process inefficiencies that need to be resolved at the source, so why not spend time understanding why you're not achieving more 'first-time fixes' for repairs? Then consider redesigning those parts of your process which renders moot the need to provide updates before investing money, time and effort into new solutions.

- **Focusing on the frills** – while a visually-appealing design is undoubtedly nice to have, the usability and functionality of any portal should take priority. A beautifully-designed portal that's difficult to navigate or understand will lead to frustration among users. Prioritising an intuitive user interface and journey that is aligned in harmony with your business processes will ensure that users can easily access the information or services they need.
- **End-to-end dependencies** – introducing a self-service portal in isolation can often lead to disjointed systems and increased workloads for your staff. A portal that doesn't integrate with existing business processes can create more problems than it solves. It's imperative



rentsconnect

ARREARS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



PREDICTS

By analysing your HMS data to predict financial behaviour and determine how and why someone is in arrears.



PRIORITISES

An account using a series of formulas and algorithms to prioritise your workload.



INTEGRATES

The system extracts and writes back data to all HMS in real time.



SIMPLIFIES

Cases are presented to your staff in a simple and easy to use way via a task list.



ANALYTICS

The system has an inbuilt graphical analytics engine. Shows charges, payments and true arrears over time by organisation/patch/street/individual property.

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SCAN THE CODE
TO DISCOVER MORE

8x8 launches remote video repairs

8x8 has launched 8x8 Remote Fix so that housing providers' contact-centre agents can escalate tenant interactions to video using a real-time, secure video link to visually address and resolve problems.

By offering tenants the option for video escalation to show on-site problems, agents are better equipped to remotely assess repairs and maintenance requests for more first-time fixes and fewer unnecessary on-site visits.

Mohammed Zabir, director of technology and delivery, Platform Housing, said, "With winter approaching and the expected increase in tenant requests, being able to prioritise and assess what's needed for each request is vital.

"With 8x8, our agents can escalate tenant interactions to video support, allowing them to determine whether it's

a problem that can be fixed remotely or needs on-site support. Since deploying 8x8's video capabilities, we've been able to remotely fix or re-evaluate almost a third of reported problems quickly, saving time and money."

Jamie Snaddon, managing director for EMEA, 8x8, said, "Video escalation through 8x8 Remote Fix allows housing providers' agents to properly assess fixes that can be done remotely or, for issues that require on-site visits, to determine what exactly is required to fix an issue in terms of equipment, expertise and more."





Hull City Council (HCC) is rolling out Aico's Ei1000G gateway across its portfolio of 24,000 properties to improve compliance while creating safer homes for residents.

resident could potentially have been living in a non-compliant property for nearly a year before anything was noted as missing.

HCC wanted to ensure the integrity of its housing stock was not weakened by interference with alarms and to be notified of any potential problems within its properties. After consulting with its local Aico regional specification

As a landlord, gaining access to properties once they have been let is a challenge. Gas teams experience the best access rates due to the testing being enforceable, while electrical inspection and condition reports (EICRs) typically struggle to gain access.

Long-term compliance

Like many housing providers, HCC found it difficult to ensure their properties' fire detection systems were compliant for the duration of a tenancy. HCC operatives would regularly attend properties and note that key components of the fire detection system were missing. This caused concerns for HCC because it was investing in its properties and upgrading them to the latest standards (BS5839-6) only to have key elements go missing. Not knowing when the items were removed meant that the

HCC had already committed to a programme of smoke alarm upgrades, taking it from an LD3 system (covering circulation spaces and escape routes only) up to the latest standard of LD2 (covering circulation space and escape routes and high-risk areas such as kitchens and living rooms – the recommended minimum for BS5839-6).

HCC already has over 3,000 Aico gateways connected to its dashboard, meaning that around 12 per cent of its stock is now fully compliant with LD2 and is being monitored remotely to ensure residents' safety.

Gareth Iveson, regional specification manager, Aico, said, "Working with HCC on this project has been great. Having been involved from the initial development and seeing it through to the stage now where approximately 15 per cent of HCC's housing stock is now being monitored is a great achievement."

Expansion of environmental sensors

HCC is now looking at the possibility of expanding this further with the specification of HomeLink environmental sensors. These would link to HCC's existing gateways and allow HCC to proactively monitor the environmental conditions within its properties, identify problems and provide insights into risks such as damp and mould, fuel

Training for best practice

During the installation of the gateways, HCC received training from their local Aico RSM on the best way to use the HomeLink portal and how to get the best RoI from the product. The training covered: prioritising alerts; investigating problems; running reports; monitoring alarms' expiry dates; planning future capital replacement programmes; and setting up custom notifications and alerts.



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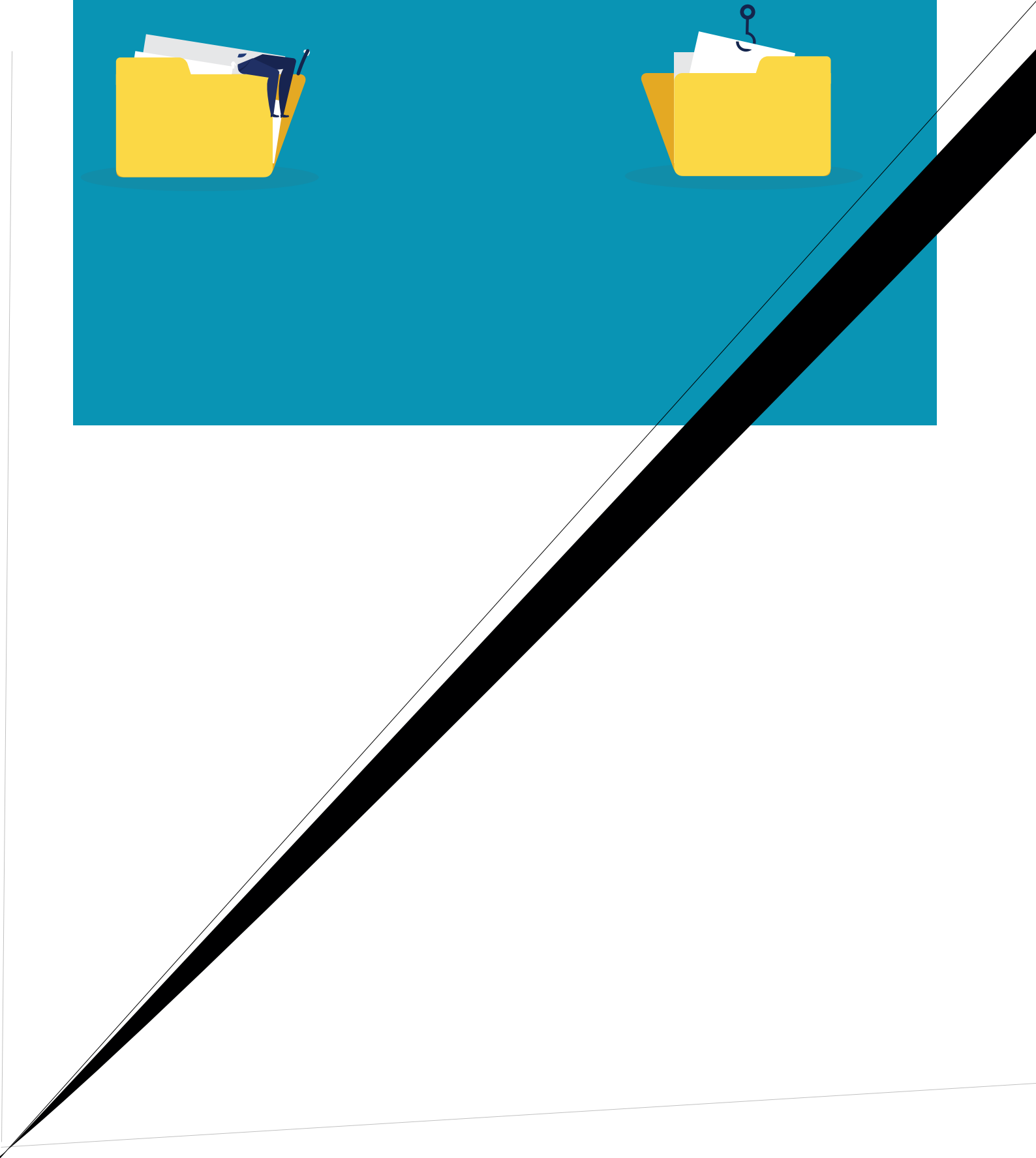
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Remote
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How can you protect your assets and data?

Start with training your staff about social engineering, and giving them tools to report suspected incidents and attempts to socially engineer them. It also pays to regularly scan your externally-facing infrastructure.

At Quorum Cyber, we've observed that housing providers often have the same shortcomings when it comes to data protection. Many comprise a number of smaller organisations glued together through mergers and acquisitions. Permissions in the IT systems don't reflect what people need access to. It's best to adhere to the three principles of zero trust:

- Verify explicitly;
- Use least-privileged access;
- Assume breach.

How to improve your security posture

Focus on the impact to your tenants and communities. Housing providers should treat information security in the same way as physical security. Your employees can be the frontline of your defence, so advise them of what they need to do to safeguard your organisation. Ask them to feed back their worries and any suspicions of information security weaknesses they have or any signs of a security

incident or breach. Then look at your external security posture, and finally at user permissions. And don't forget to monitor security logs of the IT infrastructure.

Cybersecurity and the threat landscape both move fast.

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Housing Technology asked digital transformation experts from 8x8, FLS – Fast Lean Smart, NEC Software Solutions, Pay360, Plentific, Sysmax and VerseOne about their definitions of digital transformation, why housing providers should do it, the mistakes to avoid and how to get it right.

What is digital transformation?

Trevor Hampton, director of housing solutions, NEC Software Solutions, said, "Digital transformation is about using all available technologies, including IoT devices and smartphones, to change the way housing providers deliver their services. The aim is to reduce human effort by maximising automation for the benefit of both tenants and the housing provider."

Chris Mounsey, chief product and compliance officer, VerseOne, said, "We define digital transformation as the combination of streamlined processes and integrated solutions to change the way organisations operate. It's not just automation, although that's a part of it. Integration is also crucial so that up-to-date and accurate information is available when needed."

and more transparent services, optimising value for the housing provider and better services for residents.”

Wayne Campbell, head of pre-sales, Pay360 (an Access Group company), said, “Behind all instances of innovation and digital transformation, you’re likely to find one, if not all, of these goals: a need to meet demand, a desire to improve customer experience, and a necessity to keep up with competitors.

“For housing providers, the most important consideration behind digital transformation is to improve customer experience. There are great opportunities to take advantage of new digital solutions that support customer engagement and loyalty while freeing up valuable time and resources.”

Peter McAteer, CEO, Sysmax, said, “That’s easy; digital transformation creates efficiency, and an efficient organisation is a safe organisation because staff and residents are more actively engaged and risk is reduced. It also brings other benefits such as reduced costs, downtime and waste and fewer errors and duplicated processes. Digital transformation also affects ‘softer’ considerations such as positive cultural change, more space for thinking and improved creativity.”

time, financial and staff resources preventing change but it needn't be that hard. In a few hours, we can have an organisation on the path to full compliance with a ready-built data set covering core roles and compliance data."

Plentific's Savas said, "Housing providers need a clear roadmap for their digital transformation programmes; a blueprint for change, including a definition of the required outputs from their chosen digital journey. Without a clear vision, housing providers risk getting tied into lengthy contracts with solutions that won't stand the test of time.

"Digital transformation isn't a choice but a necessity; replacing disconnected legacy systems with integrated solutions for real-time operations gives housing providers the efficiency and flexibility they need to navigate their obligations to residents and regulators."

Pay360's Campbell said, "One of the easiest mistakes to make during digital transformation is to focus too much on the internal adoption of new software at the expense of its impact on tenants. It's important to get your internal teams on-board, but new systems quickly drop in value if tenants are confused or can't navigate them.

"For example, if a tenant is redirected to a third-party page to complete a payment, this could cause confusion or lead to drop-offs. An embedded payment system enables housing providers to create a seamless customer experience, building trust that the payment process is secure."

NEC's Hampton said, "Housing providers can be too ambitious and doing too much too soon can send them

It involves comparing how much is available to spend on technology as well as processes, training and other related expenses versus how the digital platform has improved the bottom line."

Pay360's Campbell said, "Before embarking on digital transformation, it's important to reflect on your current systems and practices and see what roadblocks or inefficiencies have developed over time. If certain aspects of the business are a drain on time, resources or finances, business leaders should look for digital systems that can mitigate these challenges.

"Once a suitable system has been chosen, senior management teams should map the transitions step-by-step, considering areas such as training requirements,



"It's important to get your internal teams on-board, but new systems quickly drop in value if tenants are confused."

Wayne Campbell, head of pre-sales, Pay360
(an Access Group company)

"Incorporating the human element is key to achieving successful digital transformations, and undertaking digital transformation means taking a step back from how things have always been done and discovering how they could be optimised in the digital age."

How do you measure success?

VerseOne's Mounsey said, "Focus on the well-defined and measurable outcomes that you're trying to achieve. These could include reliable data, a single source of the truth, faster complaints' resolution, fewer contact centre calls and reductions in service costs. These outcomes need to be designed into the digital transformation programme and somebody in the project team should be responsible and therefore accountable for the benefits' realisation.

"Smart objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely) are common, and the before ('as is') and after ('to be') states should be designed-in too. Metrics should be 'hard' wherever possible, such as cost, throughput (e.g. transactions, tickets, repairs), revenue generation and tenant retention/churn. It's good to have some softer benefits as well, such as productivity and customer satisfaction, particularly if these can be measured.

"Crucially, you must benchmark your current position, establish a 'day zero' before the transformation goes live, and measure the KPIs closely from 'day one' to monitor





Tim Cowland, Leader of Digital Transformation, Red Kite
Community Housing

Like many organisations, we've ambitious plans for digital transformation, and we are tentatively but excitedly taking the next steps on that journey. There is an enthusiasm within our executive team to embrace the use of technology to transform the business and to make sure we continue to improve the way we work.

To follow the right path, we need a clear strategy to map our journey. Without this, it's far too easy to stray off course and grab the latest technology for short-term fixes without considering the bigger picture.

In my mind, our digital transformation is akin to a long road trip to a new and exciting place we've not visited before. To have a good trip, there are a few things we need to agree before we set off. Most obviously, we need to know where we are starting from so we can plan the best route. We obviously need to know where we're heading, any stops planned on the way and our mode of travel. Finally, we should really ask our passengers what we want to do when we get there.

To continue the analogy, once we've started our trip, we need to be prepared to change course if something unexpected gets in our way; do we have an alternative plan, and what's the impact of us changing course?

Many organisations will have been working on their digital transformation programmes for some years and most will have made great progress and are already seeing the benefits. However, I know from speaking to many peers



Considering the art of the possible

It helps to identify the lead person in the business to be our eyes and ears on potential opportunities. We need to understand what's available in the market to meet our current needs and to support the future direction of the business. It helps to speak to suppliers and other organisations who are further through their journey to learn from their experiences and avoid their mistakes. This part of the process will help us to decide the destination we want to reach.

Getting the data right

This step may be less exciting than putting in some shiny new systems but it's essential; the adage of 'rubbish in, rubbish out' is very valid. Many people are excited about implementing new technologies and are especially interested in the potential of AI, but when planning our journey, we need to be aware that the success of any system relies on accurate, complete and consistent data in order to provide valid results.

Effective change management

Carefully managing the whole start-to-finish process of implementing new systems is a crucial step to ensure any changes 'land well' within the business. In the many years I've worked in both local government and housing, I've frequently seen new systems that are poorly implemented, don't deliver the benefits expected or fail to achieve the changes the business needs. An effective change-management plan will involve users from the

start, discuss the plan and expected outcomes, and then embed the change. Too often, new systems are dropped into the business and moved on from without the outcomes being properly evaluated.

Review processes

Bethan Ford, Head of Marketing, FireAngel

providers to act promptly on reports of disrepair in their properties.

Tackling condensation, damp and mould

Current methods for dealing with damp, condensation and mould are usually expensive, time-consuming or even ineffective.

Anti-mould wall coatings and regular roof and gutter maintenance only go so far, and even installing cavity or external wall insulation (often necessary to meet energy efficiency regulations) isn't always effective in reducing or in their

Social tenants are complaining in record numbers about damp and mould, with the Housing Ombudsman recording a 77 per cent increase in complaints about damp, mould and water leaks over the past two years.

Following the roll out of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and latest government guidance, which strengthens tenants' powers to hold their landlord to account, housing providers are likely to face mounting pressure to take swift action against damp and mould.

In England alone, an estimated 6.5 million homes have damp and mould, an issue that is costing the NHS around £38 million per year to treat. And through the winter, alongside the strain of the current cost-of-living crisis, condensation-related problems are likely to worsen.

The health implications of mouldy or damp living conditions can be serious, with Awaab's Law, which was introduced following the death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak in 2020, presenting a stark reminder to housing

A smart approach to monitoring

By introducing IoT sensors, housing providers can access real-time data on a property's internal environment to support early interventions and pre-empt any problems.

Unobtrusive temperature, humidity and water-leak sensors can create a holistic view behind closed doors, capturing data and providing real-time information for housing providers to actively review and spot any environments where mould or damp could easily develop.

When used efficiently, data collected from these sensors allows housing providers to allocate resources more effectively and pinpoint residents who may need extra support. It can also enable housing providers to take a proactive and prioritised approach to addressing the causes of damp and mould where they exist across their housing stock, such as where ventilation may need to be improved.

Smart sensors can provide a clear audit trail, recording accurate and regular environmental readings specific to each property and room. And since the data captured can be analysed remotely, there's less need for intrusive onsite investigations. After any remedial work has been done, data can be monitored to ensure the work was successful.

Maintaining long-term digital transformation

FireAngel's Home Environment Gateway delivers a holistic resident safety solution, encompassing fire safety, AI-



CCaaS – The catalyst for digital transformation

Zaheer Gilani, Account Director UK Sales, Genesys

The experience of a leading UK housing provider offers some valuable insights into the transformative potential of CCaaS. By implementing a CCaaS platform, this innovative housing provider created a unified platform for service delivery across multiple local authorities.

CCaaS – a springboard for innovation

CCaaS platforms allow housing providers to transition their contact centres to the cloud. This enables the convenient integration of digital channels such as chat, social media and SMS, and flexible scaling to match variable tenant demand. Advanced analytics and automation further augment agents' capabilities and enhance productivity.

For this forward-thinking housing provider, moving to CCaaS allowed it to combine multiple contact centres onto a single platform. This eliminated duplicated costs and enabled omni-channel engagement.

CCaaS paves the path for digital innovation across three key dimensions:

1. Omni-channel tenant engagement

CCaaS facilitates omni-channel engagement by converging phone, email, live chat, SMS and other digital channels onto a single platform. This allows tenants to connect with their housing provider through their preferred medium. Switching between channels is also simplified for seamless communication.

The enabled omni-channel capabilities were previously unavailable with legacy systems, including email,



Once Genesys Cloud CX had been running for a while and we'd built up sufficient data, we started using Genesys Workforce Engagement Management. Having an all-in-one system is so much easier. For example, if you want to find a call recording or produce an accurate six-week forecast, it's quickly accessible.

Gill Miller, Project Manager for Corporate Change, BPHA

Integration with CRM data provides a holistic tenant view, allowing agents to deliver personalised services, and speech analytics applied to call recordings generate meaningful insights to continually refine tenant engagement.

By infusing intelligence into interactions, CCaaS platforms enable housing providers to deliver predictive, proactive and personalised tenant experiences.

3. Agile and scalable operations

The cloud-based infrastructure of CCaaS brings newfound agility and scalability to housing operations. Demands can be dynamically managed by flexing agent capacity, ensuring tenants get the proper assistance.

With CCaaS, one housing provider gained scalability to manage fluctuating service demands quickly. The platform also enabled remote working capabilities for a dispersed workforce.

The latest technologies can be rolled out via the cloud without extensive on-premise upgrades. CCaaS makes it faster for housing providers to implement AI chatbots, interactive voice response (IVR) systems, new integrations and more.

Significant savings are unlocked by reducing overhead costs associated with physical call-centre infrastructure.

Agents can also work remotely, expanding talent pools and improving staff retention.

Together, these benefits create a resilient operational framework able to rapidly adapt to evolving tenant expectations.

Driving transformational outcomes

Modern CCaaS platforms give housing providers the capabilities they need to enable digital experiences at scale, including:

- Native integrations with essential systems, such as CRM, ERP and billing;
- Omni-channel engagement via voice, digital and asynchronous channels;
- Conversational AI chatbots for instant query resolution;
- Speech analytics for customer insights;
- Workforce management tools for demand planning;
- Accessibility features to serve vulnerable communities;
- Personalised communication through segmentation;
- Auditable platform compliance to ensure data security.

For one pioneering housing provider, moving to CCaaS delivered impressive results:

- 50 per cent decrease in abandoned calls;
- 47 per cent faster routing to correct departments;
- 90 per cent bot success rate;
- Up to 94 per cent customer satisfaction;
- Reduced average waiting times to 7-12 seconds.

The road ahead

Digital transformation will be synonymous with simplifying the IT stack and leveraging AI to drive the CCaaS (incl. self-service portals and apps) to deliver highly personalised and empathetic tenant experiences.

AI-powered open CCaaS platforms continue to provide the fundamental capabilities required to launch new

channels and touchpoints rapidly, leverage emerging technologies and build intelligent and memorable tenant-centric experiences.

By embracing CCaaS, housing providers can unlock innovation and chart a future-proof roadmap for organisational success, driven by resilience, agility and continuous evolution.

The possibilities for enhancing communities through empathetic, technology-led tenant experiences are limitless.

How to implement CCaaS successfully

To successfully implement CCaaS, housing providers should follow these steps:

- Develop a clear strategy: what do you hope to achieve by implementing CCaaS? What are the key challenges you are facing? Once you understand your needs, you can develop a tailored implementation plan.
- Get buy-in from all stakeholders: it's essential to get the support of your employees, tenants and other stakeholders before implementing CCaaS; this will help to ensure a smooth transition.
- Choose the right CCaaS provider: not all CCaaS providers are equal. Choosing a provider with housing experience and offering you the features and functionality you need within a single platform is essential.

- Integrate CCaaS with your other systems: CCaaS should be integrated with other methods, such as your CRM and ERP systems. This will create a seamless experience for your tenants and make it easier for your agents to do their jobs.
- Invest in training: ensure your employees are adequately trained on how to use the CCaaS platform. This will help them to be more productive and efficient.
- Monitor your results: once you've implemented CCaaS, monitoring your results and adjusting as needed is essential. This will help ensure you get the most out of your CCaaS investment.

Conclusion

CCaaS is a powerful tool that can help housing providers accelerate their digital transformations and deliver superior tenant experiences. By following the best practices outlined above, housing providers can maximise the benefits of CCaaS and create more sustainable and future-proof organisations.

Zaheer Gilani is the account director for UKI sales at Genesys.



Why digital transformation programmes fail

Colin Sales, CEO, 3C Consultants

There is one relatively simple but nevertheless essential ingredient missing from most digital transformation programmes. Without it they will fail or at the very least fall far short of their goals. Leadership and culture change are, of course, essential to success but these aren't enough without this missing ingredient.

This ingredient, which is overlooked far too often, is knowledge and information management (KIM) and it sits at the very heart of successful digital transformations. Too many housing providers find themselves 'data rich but insight poor'.

Without access to accurate, data-led insights, how can you properly understand your true starting point or how

you're progressing? Almost all strategic objectives are reliant on swift access to accurate information, and this is particularly the case for digital initiatives such as online services, customer management, automation and artificial intelligence. KIM is fundamental to their success.



The business case for putting KIM at the heart of your digital transformation strategy is compelling; here are some examples:

Data quality and security is now the single highest priority on many housing providers' risk registers.

1

Approximately 80 per cent of governance downgrades are related to poor KIM.

2

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has stated that, "data quality is the cornerstone on which all compliance is based".

3

The RSH has also stated that housing providers require "error detection software" to safeguard compliance and reduce risk.

4

The Housing Ombudsman has been damning of our sector's data quality and has recently stated that KIM is the closest thing our sector has to a silver bullet.

5

Increased investment in business intelligence was recently cited as the single highest priority among local government leaders.

6

Data quality is an essential component in the achievement of most housing providers' strategic objectives.

7

Compliance with the Charter for Social Housing and the NHF Code of Governance can only be achieved with a focus on KIM.

8

With some compliance failures now becoming criminal, poor KIM in certain circumstances can ruin the careers and lives of housing executives, not to mention the lives of tenants.

9

A principle cause of executive stress is a lack of confidence in the information that they base strategic decisions, governance, risk and compliance on.

10

Fortunately, all of these challenges have proven, referenceable solutions which allow housing providers to demonstrate that they have KIM under control. Not only will they enable and empower digital transformation programmes, but they will underpin organisational security and be the catalyst for improving the lives of customers and staff.

If you ever get out of bed in the morning wondering what your job is all about, this should be central to it.

Colin Sales is the CEO of 3C Consultants.

Rewiring the housing sector

Julia Mixer, Director of Business Transformation, Raven Housing Trust
 Kate Doodson, Joint CEO, Cosmic
 Neville Brown, Managing Director, Itica



Many housing providers are at an experimental stage of their digital transformations, dipping a toe in the water, often in response to a business or regulatory imperative such as monitoring damp in properties or using chatbots for triaging customer interactions.

Digitising existing services and processes to enable better customer service, increase efficiency or ensure that compliance activities are done correctly is definitely valuable and can build confidence that 'digital' is achievable, but these should be considered as tactical rather than strategic considerations.

Being strategic considers the value transformation will deliver, in that digital technology de-couples resource use from front-line delivery; self-service and back-end automation break the relationship between increasing assets and increasing staff costs.

It should also mean there's a clear definition of what the organisation means by digital transformation, including what that transformation will achieve, what could/should be in scope, and what technology and staffing capabilities are needed to deliver the strategy.

Several key drivers and challenges are pushing organisations to adopt digital transformation strategies. These drivers and challenges are rooted in the need for greater service quality, transparency, efficiency and sustainability, all to be delivered against an uncertain funding and financial situation.

Drivers for change

1. **Customer-driven expectations:** customers are demanding increased transparency, accountability and faster responses from housing providers.
2. **Decarbonisation:** housing providers are facing mounting pressure to decarbonise not only their assets and estates but also their overall business operations.

3. **Evolving governance and legislation:** the sector is experiencing significant changes in governance and legislation.
4. **Data-driven decisions:** boards are increasingly seeking real-time, or near real-time, data instead of relying on traditional quarterly reports.
5. **Customer voice:** integrating customers' voices into decision-making is a recurring theme.

Capability to deliver

A great deal has been written recently on digital transformation: why you must do it; what it means; how to make it happen; and how not to fail.

From our experience, success will be determined more than anything by having myriad linked capabilities in place to deliver:

1. **Change management:** disruptions in the digital environment are constant and varied, and there are multiple dimensions of change that need to be addressed, such as culture, technology, business models, processes and capabilities. Having a robust change management process helps employees embrace and adapt to new digital technologies and processes and flourish in an environment of constant disruption.
2. **Customer-centric approach:** this puts customers at the centre of design thinking and development of products, processes and decisions.
3. **Collaboration:** this is necessary to break down silos and enable the free flow of information and ideas. However, this is much more than just informing or sharing; it



is deliberate and cooperative design across teams, functions, business units and beyond, allowing them to carry out common and/or complementary goals.

Challenges and solutions

Our experience on the ground shows that, notwithstanding the capability demands mentioned above, the greatest difficulties faced by housing providers when embarking on such transformations are due to:

1. **Misunderstanding transformation progress:** believing they've finished their journey when they've only taken the foundational steps. Organisations need to accurately map their digital transformation journey, focus on ROI as well as customer experience, and recognise that the journey is ongoing.
2. **Budget-centric approach:** organisations view digital transformation as a cost centre, leading to cost-effective but shortsighted solutions.
3. **Disconnect between business strategy and digital:** a failure to align the digital strategy with broader business objectives, including having a separate data strategy. Often there's little understanding of the strategic value of technology within leadership teams or understanding of the importance of data exploitation within the digital strategy, focusing only on data hygiene and governance.
4. **Lack of in-house technical skills:** neglecting staff training and development to support transformation and cultural change. Investment in technical skills and formalised training of staff is needed to support a culture of innovation and technological literacy. Democratising technology expertise through the empowerment of individuals from different departments also helps drive successful transformation.
5. **Cultural shift:** culture isn't a side project, it's the very essence of digital transformation. A culture of innovation, adaptability and continuous learning is a catalyst for success. It's the collective belief that change is an opportunity, not a threat.

Real-world reflections – Raven Housing Trust

Raven Housing Trust's transformation journey has been a wide-ranging undertaking, involving significant business, technology and cultural changes, moving from outdated systems and processes to a new core system, with an emphasis on automation, data integration and improved customer service.

Julia Mixer, director of business transformation, Raven Housing Trust, said, "Our journey demonstrates that without a culture that fosters digital dexterity (the ability of employees to fully exploit new tools), use of technology will be ineffective in delivering the business outcomes that are being pursued."

Raven recognised the vital importance of data within its transformation journey, especially data quality, integration and governance to ensure consistency across the organisation. This data-focused approach contributed to significant financial benefits, including cost savings and increased efficiency through automation and streamlined processes.

The key learnings from Raven Housing's journey:

- **Business transformation:** an in-depth, current-state analysis to identify issues related to data, integration, workarounds and spreadsheets that enabled a transformation strategy focused on accelerating outcomes, with clarity that 'transformation' would be an ongoing process of continuous improvement.
- **Technology transformation:** the transition to Microsoft Dynamics for housing, CRM and field service to replace multiple systems, overlaid with PowerBI for data analysis, automation and improved workflows to reduce manual work and improve efficiency.
- **Cultural transformation:** Raven Housing embraced the necessary cultural shift with training and support as well as partnering with external experts to help teams adapt to the new systems.



- **Customer-first approach:** the first transformation objective was to focus on enhancing customer services, with the simplicity and transparency of the integrated system resulting in higher staff productivity and better customer service.
- **Data transformation:** a recognition of the importance of data to systems working together by having a 'golden source' of consistent information available across teams, alongside data governance and staff training.
- **Financial benefits:** significant initial benefits accrued from productivity gains due to automation, such as call handling and automated invoicing.

Final thoughts

It's vital to understand that digital transformation isn't a programme with a start and end. It's an on-going, top-down and bottom-up journey. It isn't about adoption of a new technology or system but rather organising, operating and behaving effectively in a new world of work.

Digital transformation is a fundamental business change; it requires leadership and vision, a clear understanding of why it's being done and the benefits to be gained. It should start small, then grow in scope and impact.

Understanding the size and scale of the change is essential.

The inescapable truth is that success (or otherwise) is driven by capability; the capability of the people and, more broadly the organisation, to envision, embrace and exploit new ways of working to deliver better outcomes for customers, staff and the organisation itself.

This article was co-authored by Julia Mixter, director of business transformation at Raven Housing Trust, Kate Doodson, joint CEO of Cosmic, and Neville Brown, managing director of Itica.

Power Deeply Connected Experiences

“Once we met the Genesys team and saw what Genesys Cloud CX could do, we stopped looking.”

Tracy Thompson
Manager
Housing Direct

Allowing social housing organisations to embrace Artificial Intelligence (AI) to address critical challenges and improve the tenant experience. AI has the ability to revolutionise property management, streamline tenant communication and enhance decision-making processes, making the lives of both tenants and housing associations easier and more efficient.



Reduced IT faults

annually from 12,000 to three



Improved productivity
and collaboration



Reduced training time
for agents, from four weeks to days



Ability to innovate
and improve services

Is digital transformation a misnomer?



Aidan Dunphy, Chief Product Officer, Esuasive

Fact: 99.5 per cent of instances of the term 'digital transformation' are misnomers (source: me).



Don't get me wrong; digital transformation is a very good thing, **it's just very hard to do**. It requires **people to change** and the more senior they are, the harder it is. Joke: the first thing to do in any transformation is sack the leadership team. Unsurprisingly, this doesn't sell well.

McKinsey claims 70 per cent of transformations fail due to an under-ambitious vision, disengaged teams and a lack of investment in capabilities. In my experience, it's mainly due to failing to understand the 'transformation' bit and assuming that it's about adding digital technologies; 'digital paint', so to speak.

'Transformation' really means **changing the way you deliver value**, not simply updating the toolset. Digital technology is an enabler, not the transformation itself. In practice 'digital' means 'software', which is pervasive in our lives, whether or not we acknowledge it. It controls communications, power, commerce, logistics and pretty much everything we need daily.

Digital transformation implies agility

For decades, it's been standard practice in the software sector to use agile working practices. In essence, this

means the ability to respond rapidly to changes in your business environment. Software developers can do this relatively easily because they use modular platforms which enable changes to be broken down into small, swappable components. Changes can be made without affecting a large number of dependencies in the broader architecture.

Sadly, agile is often misinterpreted as a magic makeover that speeds up delivery teams. The senior leadership team embarks on a transformation programme, expecting **everyone else in the organisation** to do the same things as before, but faster, cheaper and cooler. They've heard about scrum, sprints, points and so on, which leads them to think of agility as something to be **delivered by the IT team**. The pyramid diagram on the next page illustrates this process; a red highlight shows the progression of agility through the organisation, because digital is blue, but transformation is red.

First of all, rebadge things with cool-sounding terms such as 'product approach', 'UX' or 'DevOps'. Secondly, select a technology platform and identify some 'quick win' processes to digitise. Despite these taking much



Not like this...



...like this!

longer than expected, eventually they go live. Thirdly, once all of the low-hanging fruit has been picked (and assuming some enthusiasm remains), grasp the nettle and try to engage the more intransigent business teams. Unfortunately, everyone is too busy doing things the way they've always done them, there's a deadline next week, everyone is on holiday and so on.

You keep your technology delivery team busy by delivering non-strategic 'nice to haves'. Soon, you find yourself supporting a new legacy IT system of your own making, and everyone wonders what all that transformation stuff was supposed to be about. The senior leadership becomes increasingly disengaged and moves onto other priorities, and the executive who was leading the charge leaves the organisation to try again somewhere else.

It's the organisation that transforms, not the 'digital'

It's easy to poke fun at the 'agile theatre' described above. Seriously, transforming an organisation is difficult because it's counter-intuitive. Most of us go to work motivated to deliver something worthwhile, and improving our performance means doing it faster, cheaper and with less waste. We can't visualise a completely different way of working. Consultants and transformation-enabling suppliers are needed because they bring an outside perspective, so here's mine.

Transformation is highly risky. Done badly, it could seriously damage your organisation's performance.

It's inadvisable to adopt a 'big bang' approach involving lots of change all at once. A classic trope of agility is to change things iteratively in small increments, to create short feedback loops and enable course correction should

you misstep. The mistake in the approach illustrated above is to see the iterations as incremental deliveries of new technologies to the business, but constrained by traditional project thinking (big scope and a deadline), now with added scrum meetings.

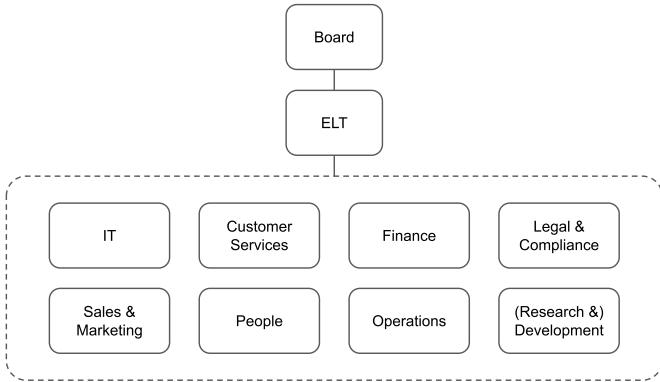
A practical approach to transformation requires incremental changes affecting the entire value chain. Inspired by Jussi Pasanen's famous illustration of how (and how not) to do an MVP, the diagram overleaf shows transformation as a vertical stripe through the business hierarchy, not simply a new technology platform.

Your mission will be unchanged, say, "to provide the people of Someshire with affordable, decent places to live in a safe, supportive community". However, you will need to create a new vision, an aspirational and inspirational statement of your 'North Star', an unattainable but alluring destination providing unwavering orientation. This describes a future that may look very unlike your existing operating model, acknowledging the changing needs and expectations of your customers and leveraging emerging resources and opportunities.

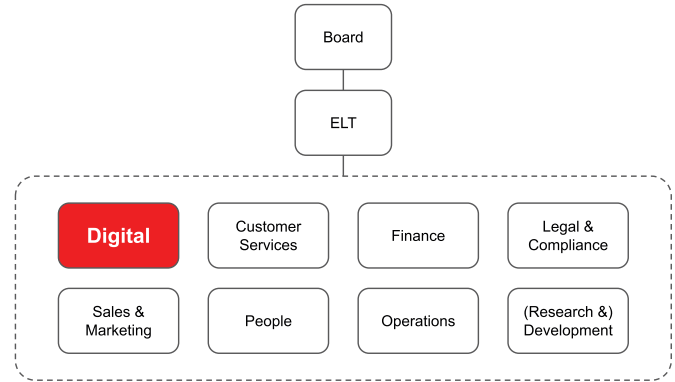
Your strategic goals may outline new ways of financing, developing and acquiring property, more flexible delivery models and customer-centric engagement patterns. However, this is as far as it should go. To avoid becoming yet another failed public-sector IT project, the details of the execution should be delegated to digital delivery teams, and measured against outcomes.

No idea of the challenges and risks

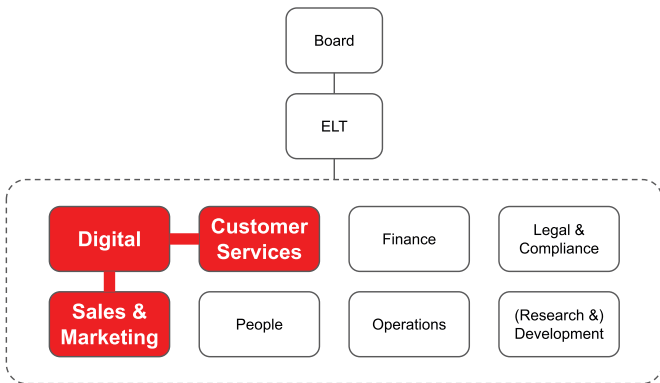
This is the bit that most housing providers struggle with. They fall back into demanding a timebound roadmap of delivery commitments (a.k.a. a project plan) despite



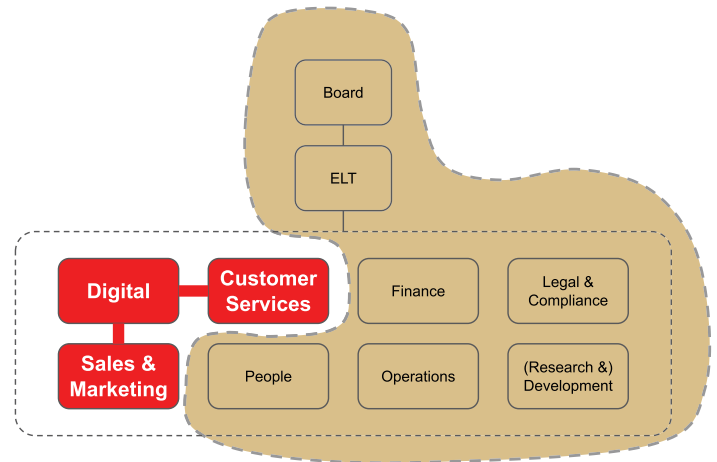
A typical corporate structure.



Stage 1: rename the IT department, so they know they have to be digital from now on. And transformed.



Stage 2: find some 'low-hanging fruit' - extrovert teams that will readily try out shiny new things.



Stage 3: Encounter the 'wall of too busy' that shields departments from having to change. Give up.

having no idea whatsoever of the challenges and risks involved. At Housing Technology's conference last March, a housing IT leader told me that their Dynamics supplier had promised a delivery from a one-month 'sprint', but that this was now in its tenth month. They had promised an outcome without actively managing the client's expectations and their role in the delivery; the scope didn't creep, it leapt.

This is what's behind my provocative joke at the start of this article. To transform an organisation, you need a vision of the future, clear but leaving room for strategic and tactical decisions on how to get there because no organisation ever knows precisely how it will do so. Commitments must be made only in terms of measurable

benefits, not specific deliverables (outcome, not output). Delivery requires participation from the whole value chain, with the ability to course-correct. Embracing this uncertainty requires strong, visionary leadership and a move away from top-down, command-and-control management towards leadership of empowered teams by vision, inspiration, example and outcomes.

Aidan Dunphy is the chief product officer at Esuasive.

Esuasive



Broadacres' digital transformation with Salesforce

Broadacres Housing has taken the next step in its Salesforce-based digital transformation, with the implementation of Salesforce's Service Cloud Voice in its customer contact centre, powered by Vonage Telephony.

Mark Birch, chief technology officer, Broadacres Housing, said, "We're excited to see the benefits this transformation brings to our contact centre and the consequent improvements in customer experience. Having tenants' records being automatically displayed when a known number calls our contact centre is a game changer.

"With our new 360-degree customer view, our agents can resolve tenants' queries much faster. New features such as callback offers more choice for customers, and call transcription enables our supervisors to see conversations as they happen."

Tom Lancefield, social housing lead (UK&I), Salesforce, said, "Having visited a number of housing providers' contact centres, I'm fully aware of the challenges for both tenants and housing staff.

"With the AI-powered automation that Service Cloud Voice provides and the holistic visibility of our Customer360 platform, Broadacres Housing is well placed to meet the ever-changing needs of tenants while enabling agents to focus on delivering personalised services."

GENERAL NEWS

iO Associates' fixed-price transformation projects

iO Associates has launched a fixed-price, full project delivery service covering all aspect of housing providers' business and technology transformation projects, from inception through to realisation, underpinned by an immediate return on investment.

The company's fixed-price model covers three stages, spanning an initial consultative phase, followed by staffing and project delivery, and concluding with end-user training. iO Associates said that the benefits of its

new model were cost predictability, strategic alignment, compliance assurance and customer-centric innovation.

John Ghader, CEO, Prima Group, said, "When it comes to IT transformation and implementation, given the complexity and scale involved, especially for larger housing providers, most projects suffer from creep and overspend. iO Associates' approach mitigates those risks and provides cost certainty, plus the model's flexibility addresses the cost challenges for smaller housing providers."



LHP's revolutionary IT support services

Frank Manoharan, Corporate Head of ICT & Digital,
Lincolnshire Housing Partnership

Lincolnshire Housing Partnership (LHP) is redefining the future of our support services across the organisation. With the unveiling of our Halo service hub, we're not just addressing the immediate needs of our stakeholders but also laying the foundation for a more integrated, efficient and user-centric IT future.

In today's agile world, IT support needs to transcend its traditional boundaries. It's not just about addressing problems, it's about anticipating them, integrating solutions seamlessly into our daily workflows and ensuring that every stakeholder, irrespective of their role, has access to consistent and top-tier services that aren't just restricted to traditional IT but embracing our other support services that can harness this technology.

Our IT landscape, like many housing providers, relied on conventional communication channels such as phone and email. While these methods have served their purpose, they come with inherent limitations, especially for our field-based staff who often find themselves tethered to the office for the simplest of tasks.

The challenges with our existing system were evident. Our vision was clear; to maintain an impressive customer satisfaction score above 90 per cent while revolutionising the way our colleagues interact with the other teams.

Multiple task streams

LHP's PR and communications manager, Jonathan Byrne, was one of the early adopters of the service for his team. He said, "As we moved to a more digital focus, the challenge of managing incoming tasks became more difficult. Departmental inboxes and Teams messages were added to the traditional methods of email and telephone, and it became a veritable pea soup for end-users and team members alike, an ever-revolving vicious circle of 'where should I go next?'.

"The move to Halo as a service hub solution had immediate benefits for us; the ability to assign tickets at the click of a button (so the right person receives the right task first-time around), being able to bring other

relevant colleagues into the mix in one conversation stream, and the simple approval system, make the role of our communications and marketing team much more streamlined."

Intuitive IT support

After a meticulous evaluation process, we decided against merely upgrading our existing system or maintaining the status quo ante. Instead, we decided to implement a new platform-based IT service desk solution. This innovative approach not only aligns with our strategies for business change but also significantly enhances our end-users' experience. A highlight of this transformation is the integration with Microsoft Teams, ensuring that IT support becomes an intuitive part of daily communications.

But this transformation isn't only about technology. At its core, it's about people; our colleagues are at the heart of everything we do, so this project is our commitment to ensuring that they have the tools and support they need, whenever and wherever they need them. That's why we've encouraged traditionally non-digital departments to adopt the service hub as their go-to portal for answering colleagues' queries.

LHP's services manager, Clare Wingate, said, "Having multiple streams to capture requests quickly becomes unmanageable, particularly when you're away from the office with limited access to systems such as Outlook and Teams.

"Moving everything into one place allows us to provide a better service to our colleagues, monitor where we need to improve, and spot where there are recurring requests that we can provide a proper business solution for."

Cross-department adoption

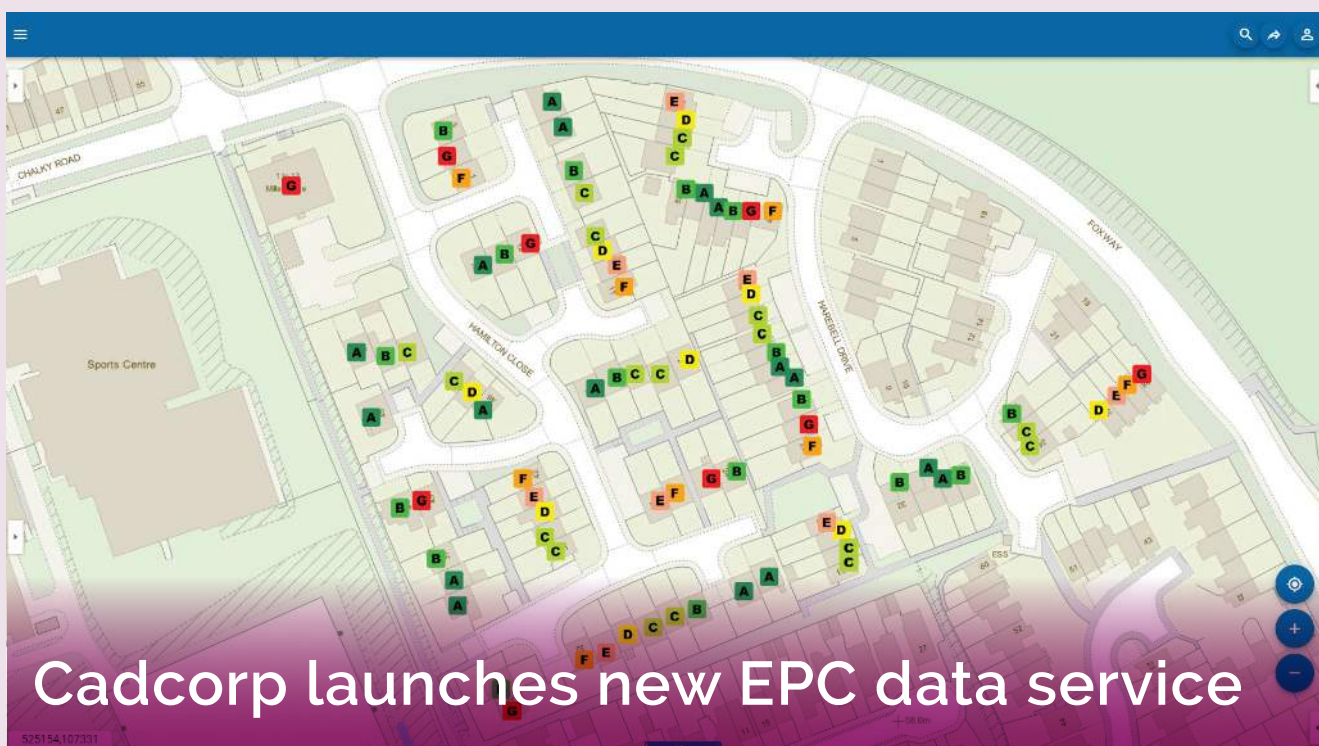
The take-up and feedback have been so positive that our health and safety department will soon be moving onto the Halo service hub. LHP's health and safety manager, Will Buxton, said, "Halo is the next logical step for us. Having all health and safety requests in one place will streamline how we work and means we can provide opportunities for colleagues to self-serve, taking the strain away from the team."

Budget considerations, environmental impact and return on investment are integral to this project. With a clearly defined budget for the next three years, we're also making a conscious effort to be environmentally responsible. By leveraging cloud infrastructure, we aim to reduce our carbon footprint, aligning with our other sustainability goals.

The expected benefits of this transformation are varied. From faster IT fix times and enhanced end-user experiences to the potential for future integrations and expansions, LHP is setting the stage for a digital revolution.

In conclusion, as housing providers across the country grapple with the challenges of modern IT, we believe our initiative serves as a beacon, highlighting the possibilities that lie ahead.

Frank Manoharan is the corporate head of ICT and digital at Lincolnshire Housing Partnership.



Cadcorp has launched a new cloud-hosted data service, providing EPC ratings for all residential properties in Great Britain.

Cadcorp's EPC service includes access to the latest EPC ratings for over 10 million residential properties in Great Britain, quarterly updates from Cadcorp, and spatial database access for running EPC-related queries and analytics.

Specific uses for Cadcorp's EPC data service include stock condition surveys, audits of housing providers' property portfolios and identification of discrepancies between actual EPC data readings and official/historic data.



IT automation, behavioural science & staff retention

Gary Haynes, Managing Director, Voicescape

Thirteen Group and Voicescape's Caseload Manager

In 2021, Thirteen Group wanted to incorporate behavioural science into its operations with a system that would learn and determine the optimal engagement method and message. Thirteen collaborated with our behavioural science and R&D team to develop a solution that would do just that – Voicescape Caseload Manager. Since its adoption, Thirteen has seen improvements in five core areas:

- **Caseload reduction** – the number of arrears cases requiring manual action has fallen by 65 per cent compared to Thirteen's previous income analytics product;
- **Resource management** – housing service coordinators save roughly two hours per week;
- **Increased collections** – Thirteen exceeded its annual target with a 16 per cent increase in collecting arrears from former tenants;
- **Improved engagement** – 86 per cent of Thirteen's users found that automated outbound calls make their job much simpler;
- **Improved job satisfaction** – 80 per cent of users said that Voicescape Caseload Manager has allowed them to do their job better and improved their overall wellbeing.

The screw has been turning on social housing providers and local authorities, as wave after wave of challenges have piled on the pressure; historical funding issues were exacerbated by the pandemic, with the ensuing cost-of-living crisis adding to the problems.

The reality is organisations are having to do far more with less in a bid to make the numbers tally. This juggling act is making employees' jobs even harder as resources are squeezed, leading to question marks around employee engagement and retention.

The cost of replacement

The cost of replacing an employee is around six to nine months' salary when you combine recruitment costs, training expenses for new employees, salary and downtime in productivity while people get up to speed in their new role. For high-turnover, low-paying jobs, it's estimated that this cost is around 16 per cent of an employee's salary; for mid-range positions, it's around 20 per cent, rising further for senior roles.

Recent research by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that UK workers are taking more sick days than at any point in the past decade. Changes in working culture since the pandemic, coupled with the cost-of-living crisis, have left some employees feeling disengaged and stressed, the CIPD reported.

Set against this backdrop, it's little wonder that so much emphasis is being placed on staff retention and employee engagement; after all, a happy workforce is a productive workforce.

Happy and motivated

How do you keep your team happy and motivated in the face of economic challenges? The answer is by harnessing the power of automation and behavioural science.

For example, using automation to streamline or replace inefficient manual processes gives housing teams more time to focus on the high value tasks that build relationships and lead to positive outcomes for both the housing provider and its tenants.

Introducing behavioural science

Of course, automation is far from new. What is different is the unique combination of automation and behavioural science, which primarily focuses on how people make decisions, process information and exhibit behaviour. This multi-disciplinary approach draws on decades of research to create a comprehensive framework for understanding how we behave. By realigning policies, programmes and products with how we actually behave, behavioural science is now being used across a variety of sectors to improve outcomes and help organisations make better decisions.

What are the direct benefits for staff using this combined approach? In the housing sector, numerous roles are dedicated to helping and supporting customers, which can be a key source of job satisfaction and overall wellbeing. Combining automation and behavioural science not only helps in supporting customers, it also enhances employee motivation by freeing them from monotonous manual tasks and gives them more time to engage with customers who need one-on-one support.

Simultaneously, the personalised and wide-reaching nature of this engagement helps to promote job satisfaction, as employees recognise their contribution in supporting customers. Consequently, this approach boosts productivity and preserves the psychological safety and wellbeing of housing staff.

The statistics say it all. In a survey of employees from income teams across a range of housing providers over the course of a three-month period, we assessed how individuals felt they were performing in a number of areas, from utilisation of technology to personal job satisfaction.

Workloads and staff satisfaction

In organisations not using automation and behavioural science, one in three employees felt their ability to manage their workload was below average or poor. When asked where they would like it to be, all employees selected either above average or exemplary.

Comparatively, two-thirds of employees in organisations that are using this combined method scored their ability to manage their workload as above average or exemplary. The data shows us that in organisations that have adopted this approach,

employees feel more capable of managing their workloads and rate their performance at a much higher standard.

When you turn your attention to tenants, two-thirds of employees not using automation and behavioural science felt their organisation currently scored below average or poor for tenant engagement.

When asked the same question, all employees in organisations that have embraced this kind of technology rated their performance as above average.

Lastly, in those organisations using automation and behavioural science, three-quarters of employees rated their job satisfaction and personal wellbeing as above average. But in the other group, employees were more likely to rate it as either average or below average.

These findings indicate an opportunity to create positive transformation within organisations not using this approach, and that employees themselves recognise this and are striving to become 'exemplary' in future.

Our research also shows that within these organisations, income teams want to improve how they engage with tenants, but their workloads and current ways of working are prohibiting them from being as effective as they would like to be.

This positive sentiment tells us that there's a willingness, rather than a reluctance, from employees to embrace the right technology solutions that will support them in their jobs and how they support their tenants. And by doing so, it's likely that organisations can retain valuable employees by enhancing their effectiveness and delivering better tenant engagement.

Gary Haynes is the managing director of Voicescape.





Good things come to those who wait



George Grant, CEO, Broadcaster & Publisher, Housing Technology

Over the past 15 years since Alastair Tweedie (co-founder and editor) and I started Housing Technology, it has been incredible to witness how Housing Technology's subscribers, guests, contributors and customers have all been integral to the evolution of social housing technology.



Since the establishment of Housing Technology in 2007, these key stakeholders have led the transition of housing providers' IT capabilities, moving from technology being a 'back-office service' to becoming the lifeblood that fuels all of their internal and external operations.



From our first edition of Housing Technology in January 2008, our mission has centred around providing our subscribers and clients with valuable IT and business insights, commentary and market intelligence for the social housing sector, mainly in the UK but increasingly worldwide. The Housing Technology community's commitment to deepening its understanding and actively contributing to the sector's technological growth has been nothing short of exemplary.



For our part, we're proud to think that we've thoroughly immersed ourselves in the sector and have actively contributed to its technological evolution, either directly through our magazines, reports, market intelligence and events or indirectly through facilitating meetings, collaborations, partnerships and informal networking.

Our readers, guests and clients have played a crucial role in creating a connected and innovative technology community within social housing. They've been instrumental as connectors between housing providers and technology suppliers, driving forward the revolution in technology adoption in our sector. These stakeholders have

stood out as visionary leaders, passionately addressing the housing crisis through innovative technology solutions.

This year, we're excited to announce the Housing Technology Awards 2023/24. This initiative, carefully considered and launched after 15 years, is a tribute to the entire Housing Technology community by recognising and celebrating the advances and achievements in our sector.

As we look to the future, the dedication of our clients and subscribers to integrating emerging technologies and acquiring valuable insights remains unwavering. They continue to be trusted sources for housing providers navigating an ever-changing digital landscape.

The introduction of the Housing Technology Awards marks a new milestone on our combined journey, one where we not only observe and report on change but also celebrate the achievements and innovations that are shaping the future of social housing.

Full details of our awards are on housing-technology.com now; please have a look and consider which of your recent projects, implementations and other IT-related programmes you'd like to enter into the awards.

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





MRI Social Housing – Three years later...

Deborah Matthews, Managing Director of Social Housing, MRI Software



Three years after MRI Software bought Orchard Systems, Castleton Technology and Housing Partners, Housing Technology interviewed Deborah Matthews, the company's managing director of social housing.

What have been the biggest changes at MRI Software over the past three years?

Since MRI's acquisitions all took place in a single year, we initially needed time to consider what product and people strategies we wanted to pursue with our newly-combined capabilities.

Joining one of the biggest 'proptech' providers in the world was a great place for us to land – we suddenly had access to extensive new technologies, knowledge and experience from a range of different sectors and territories.

Our social housing division is now the largest in EMEA, with more than 850 customers supported by an extensive team responsible for delivering our suite of end-to-end solutions. Not only have we continued to support our customers' existing solutions such as housing management, repairs and asset management, we've also accelerated the development of new solutions.

How has the inclusion of the social housing software portfolio impacted MRI?

As with many technology vendors, we want to transform the way people live, work and play, and that impact is felt more acutely in social housing than in any other sector.

As a company working closely with the commercial, private, build-to-rent and facilities management sectors, the sense of purpose and social benefit that social housing delivers is especially important, and we've been able to accelerate MRI's approach to community connection and promoting social good.

Innovations such as our Resident Voice Index (RVI), MRI's research into the sentiments of social housing residents (with over 28,000 responses so far) highlights tenants' real opinions on the topics that matter the most to them

(our RVI reports are freely available). The feedback we've received from residents has already led to the introduction of three community action plans.

The technology solutions we're developing in our social housing division are often applicable to the wider property sector. For example, our first-time resolution CRM solution was built with and for the social housing sector, with open design principles so that we can take it out to the private rental, residential markets and beyond.

How does MRI differ from other IT suppliers in social housing?

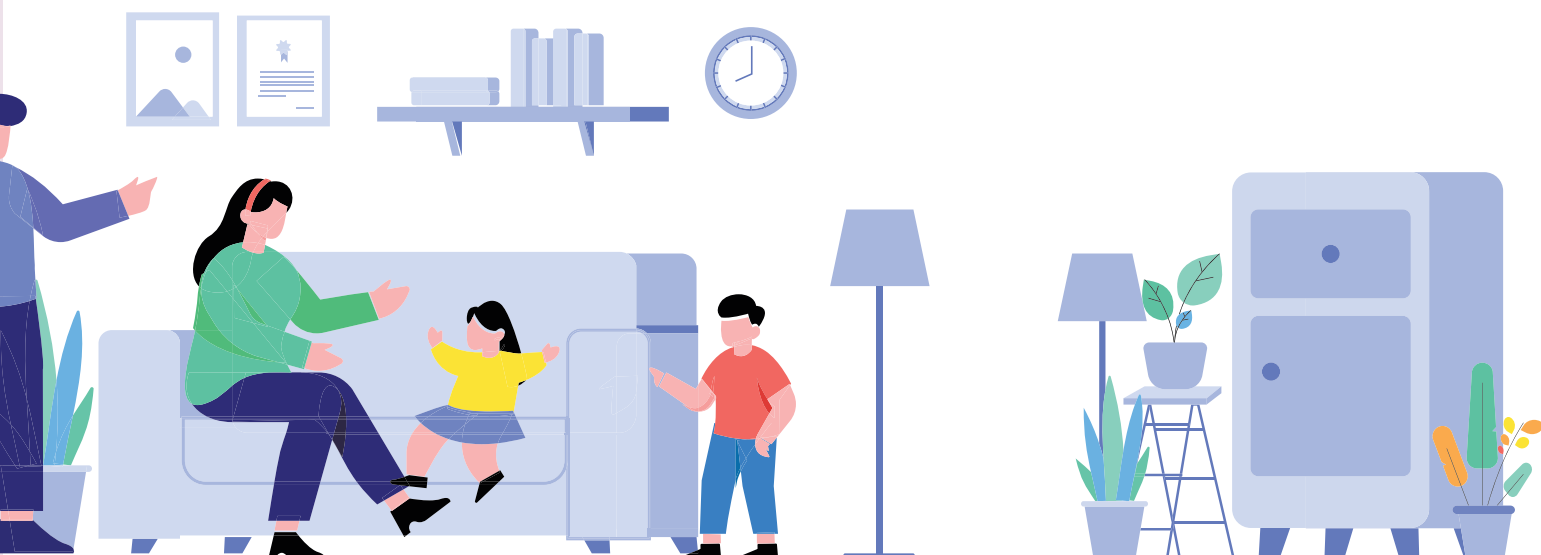
All we do at MRI is property management, so we can deliver a comprehensive suite of solutions and expertise that focuses on the property management sector.

Importantly, this offers us an unrivalled opportunity to gain experience from wider industries. We can access technology solutions and strategies from key MRI customers in the private and commercial markets and then integrate them into our social housing ecosystem.

For example, we're taking the IoT technologies used in facilities management and applying them to social housing to help tackle problems such as damp and mould.

We're also the first global organisation to develop a collaborative 'AI-first' proptech platform. We will soon be talking more about MRI Agora, a platform that will enable integration with partners, third parties and even competitors, giving housing providers a unified experience and access to multiple solutions through a single gateway to enable smarter decisions via our hyper-connected data platform, Agora Insights.

This is the sort of strategic development we can offer customers across the wider property management sector and one we're excited to leverage in social housing.



How is MRI supporting housing providers' current challenges?

While social landlords face many operational challenges, other priorities are about taking a resident-first approach, whether by enhancing customer services, improving the safety of residents or being more transparent.

We're working collaboratively with the sector to create innovative solutions that tackle some of the biggest challenges, including better data management, addressing compliance and dealing with new regulations.

Technology can play a pivotal role in ensuring fairness, transparency and better standards of housing and services, with tools for precise and transparent billing, autonomy-enabling tools for field operatives, and native-apps that encourage customers to self-serve.

Given the ongoing financial strains on households, adopting a proactive approach is essential, and leveraging AI-driven predictive analytics tools makes it possible to get a clear view of and prioritise those in greatest need.

In the face of escalating homelessness figures and domestic abuse, technology that helps reduce the challenge for outreach teams in managing mounting caseloads is imperative. Innovations such as built-in audio transcriptions and What3Words location services are examples of how AI can help to save time, reduce administration and record things accurately in real-time.

Which new technologies should housing providers be considering?

The biggest shift we're seeing is in organisations moving from a reactive approach to more proactive and pre-emptive strategies, and giving more information and autonomy to team members in the organisation.

For example, IoT technology can predict when repairs might be needed based on conditions within and around a property, instead of waiting for a repair to be reported, and solutions such as Income Analytics can flag people at risk of falling into arrears before they miss a payment.

Where does AI fit into MRI's product development?

MRI doesn't apply AI indiscriminately for its own sake; instead, we look for situations where AI could solve the problems our customers face.

We're using AI to free up time and enable people to focus more on complex cases, instead of being hampered by manual processes. For example, dictation software, such as the voice-to-text feature in our Safer Communities solutions, is a valuable tool that saves time while working onsite.

AI is a powerful technology but we're careful about its application. When designing solutions, we take an AI-first approach, asking if a process can be made more effective or efficient by adopting AI services. Where applicable, we don't just let AI make all the decisions without any oversight. We can set up specific parameters to flag more complex cases that need further investigation, making sure these decisions are people-driven, not just AI-generated.

Deborah Matthews is the managing director of social housing at MRI Software.



HOUSING
TECHNOLOGY
AWARDS 2024

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY AWARDS 2023/24

NOW OPEN FOR YOUR ENTRIES

We are delighted to announce The Housing Technology Awards 2023/24 are now open for entries! The awards are open to all housing providers, local authorities, ALMOs and any other ‘end-user’ organisations offering social housing. All entries are free for 2023/24, and close on 12th January 2024.

Pleased with your work, proud of your last project or keen to share your experiences with the wider housing sector? If any of those apply to you and/or your team, we'd love to receive your entries for the inaugural Housing Technology Awards 2023/24 – please visit **conference.housing-technology.com/awards**.

Based on a poll of the Housing Technology community, the categories (entrants may enter up to three categories) for the Housing Technology Awards 2023/2024 are:

- Customer/tenant services
- Cyber-security
- Data management
- IT team of the year
- Digital transformation
- Innovation

The purpose of our awards is twofold; the first is to celebrate the achievements of our sector's most innovative and ambitious individuals, teams and organisations; the second is to share those achievements with the rest of the social housing sector so that everyone can benefit from their knowledge.

All award entries will first be short-listed by the Housing Technology research team. The short-listed entries will then be judged by an external panel of senior housing professionals. The award winners will be announced live at the **Housing Technology 2024 conference** next March in Nottingham.

If you are interested in entering the awards, please visit conference.housing-technology.com/awards