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**HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™**  
**2023** CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

**HOUSING TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE 2023**  
 08-09 March 2023  
 Nottingham

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# Following the golden thread

Stitching accuracy, consistency and safety through housing providers' operations

## Housing management

Continuous improvement, disruptive software, asset management, digital twins and building communities

## Finance management

Cost-of-living crisis, rent arrears and corporate governance

## Customer management

Tenant satisfaction measures, tenant support services, self-service and remote diagnostics

## Infrastructure

Portfolio-wide IoT, cyber security, technology standards and decarbonisation & retrofits

## General

Proptechs & IT start-ups, project management, IT agility, data management and tech dinosaurs



### The E-State of Housing 2022/23

Housing Technology's 'The E-State of Housing 2022/23' report is now available from [housing-technology.com/research](https://housing-technology.com/research).

Based on primary research across the Housing Technology community, the report covers the unmediated views of UK housing providers' senior IT and business executives on their business plans and IT activities over the next few years.



#### Business goals & IT plans

Housing providers' future strategic plans are most strongly focused on data management and, to a slightly lesser extent, digital transformation. BI & analytics and cloud computing, followed by CRM & ERP, the internet of things and process automation are main technologies that housing providers expect to use to achieve their business goals. Furthermore, the report splits housing providers' likely technologies into 'steady state' (large installed base, low future growth), 'solid growth' (widespread usage, moderate future growth) and 'emerging markets' (almost-zero installed base, strong future growth).

#### Data, integration & compliance

Housing providers' corporate culture and staff behaviour are their greatest data management obstacles. Housing providers' long-standing difficulties with inter-application integration and data management are illustrated by their significant difficulties around legacy systems, siloed applications, data formats and lack of APIs. Data management (again!) is the greatest obstacle to regulatory compliance, closely followed by corporate culture and staff behaviour.

#### IT delivery, spending & new projects

There is a very strong trend for housing providers to move their IT functions to the cloud; almost all of them expect to use cloud-based services as the future basis for their IT delivery. Technology budgets are looking healthy despite the wider UK economy, with a clear trend towards increased IT spending over the next few years, with that spending skewed towards new IT projects at the expense of 'business as usual'.

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**'The E-State of Housing 2022/23' is available now from [housing-technology.com/research](https://housing-technology.com/research).**



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Stitching accuracy, consistency and safety through housing providers' operations



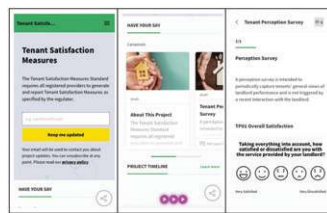
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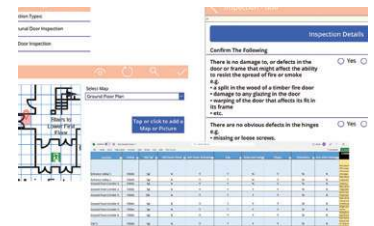
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## Housing Technology's market intelligence report

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

ARE YOU A HOUSING PROVIDER WANTING TO ASSESS YOUR IT ESTATE AND PLANS AGAINST YOUR PEERS?

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85+

HOUSING PROVIDERS



100+ RESPONDENTS



ANNUAL TURNOVER APPROX £7 BILLION

2 MILLION+ TENANTS



# HOUSING TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE 2023

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# Lean and continuous improvement

Danny Nicklen, Senior Continuous Improvement Manager & Roch Ottaway-Schollj, Continuous Improvement Manager, One Housing



*In December 2021, One Housing joined Riverside Group as a subsidiary, making it one of the largest housing providers in the UK. Danny Nicklen and Roch Ottaway-Schollj share some tools and techniques they used to successfully support organisational change.*

When we talk about digital change and transformation, we often label activities as IT, business or change, focusing on costs and solutions. However, we believe that every project is a change project, and any change, if it's to be successful, is driven by and adopted by people. Like so many sectors in recent years, housing providers have had to become smarter, leaner and more willing to embrace change. For many, mergers have become a key driver of change, combining people and resources in an effort to scale and deliver more for our residents. Whether in a merger context or not, it can be all too easy to get lost in a busy, pressurised change landscape. How do we keep our focus on the 'why', rather than getting swept up in the 'how'?

At the centre of our decisions is the question: how can we simultaneously make good choices, focus on our customers, achieve value for money and drive a positive organisational culture?

Lean and continuous improvement (CI) puts our customers and staff at the centre of our work. It answers the 'why' question by championing a data-driven and people-centred approach to how we design and deliver change, improving the change-delivery experience and how we'll function as an organisation in future. Lean and CI are a particularly powerful toolkit, enabling an organisation to both listen to the views of those who know a service best while providing frameworks to deliver small-, medium- and large-scale process and IT improvements for customers.

We've outlined three tools that we've used to successfully support our change activities, with a focus on how these can support both people and choices around digital solutions.

## **A day in the life...**

A 'day in the life of' (DILo) tool is great to build an understanding of the roles and responsibilities across teams, particularly across teams where colleagues don't know one another and may work in different ways. The focus is on collaboration and providing the opportunity to ask and answer questions.

We've successfully used this tool to assess the type of activity undertaken by our property services administration team to assess task and cycle times, improving how we use team resources to deliver better services. DILOs are helpful in providing a basis for where systems, people, processes and technology can potentially address the 'top hurts'. They provide a clear foundation for using digital tools to standardise, automate and address daily challenges in the work we do.

## **'Five whys' – Creating a problem-solving culture**

Knowledge is the key to understanding, and understanding is the key to achieving. A lack of understanding in teams may lead to feelings of insecurity which undermine trust, team motivation and the ability to effectively collaborate in the longer term.

A successful team is underpinned by a high-performance culture, built on psychological safety, openness and a problem-solving attitude. 'Five whys' is a lean tool used to explore a problem, using root-cause analysis to help understand the real problem needing to be solved. 'Five whys' asks us to state a problem, asking 'why' at least five times to explore and develop a full understanding of why something is the way it is.

We recently used 'five whys' to improve how we manage property disposals. Using team meetings and workshops, we drilled down into our data-sharing process to better

understand where and why blockers existed. As a result, we uncovered a cause that was different to what was previously assumed, highlighting how this tool can support better problem-solving conversations.

### '5S' – Spatial and digital integration

'5S' describes the five elements of spatial organisation. As a method, it can be used to ensure we set up a fit-for-purpose workspace. The 5 Ss comprise: sort, set, shine, standardise and sustain.

Why does it matter? Working together drives teamwork, and we know that the simplest, everyday tasks can sometimes be the biggest time wasters, such as looking for documents. Taking an extra two minutes for a task repeated several times a day quickly adds up.

'5S' can also be used in a digital context, such as agreeing and organising file structures, how and where to save documents and manage cases. We believe in this so much that we've applied it to our own team. This exercise can be extended to standardising templates and tools regularly used to reduce the time wasted on repetitive tasks and can support the better adoption of digital collaboration tools.

In summary, we aim to put people at the heart of any change we deliver. As the name suggests, CI is continuous

and shouldn't be an afterthought; it should be considered as a core set of tools and techniques that can be leveraged to drive meaningful results from day one if your organisation wants to thrive and not just survive.

What does this mean in practice?

- **Keep your eye on the 'why'.** Ensure customers, staff, value for money and customer benefits are part of your strategic vocabulary when considering plans and decisions; define transformation roadmaps by value, not just timelines and costs.
- **Embed lean and CI from the start.** Embed CI in business cases, project plans and project teams. Give appropriate weight to both cashable and non-cashable benefits to ensure that your customer and staff experiences remain high priorities.
- **Do 'with', not 'to'.** Involve people and teams who will adopt the change to leverage the collective expertise of our most valuable resource. Ensure that we enable the people with the best knowledge of what we do to define what 'good' looks like.

*Danny Nicklen and Roch Ottaway-Schollij are continuous improvement managers at One Housing.*



*Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust is implementing Civica's Cx Housing Management, Cx Asset Management, Civica Involve and FinancialsLive in a new five-year agreement.*

Civica's cloud-based software and customer portal will be used by the housing provider to engage with residents better, improve asset management and extend its digital transformation.

FinancialsLive provides a seamless experience across the Civica software, enabling JRH staff to switch between the Civica systems and access records without needing to log in each time. The self-service platform will allow budget holders to manage their own budgets better and the integrated Power BI reporting solution will streamline the housing provider's financial reporting.



Becky Farrell, transformation programme manager, Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, said, "Our partnership with Civica will mean we can offer the most accessible services to residents and meet the government's new tenant satisfaction measures.

"Joining our housing and finance needs into a single integrated system will give us fast and accurate real-time information, allowing us to help our residents faster and more effectively with any problems, while keeping an eye on our costs."



Cx connects housing and people, all the time.

# [ Make change happen with Cx

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Contractor workforce | Housing choice & needs

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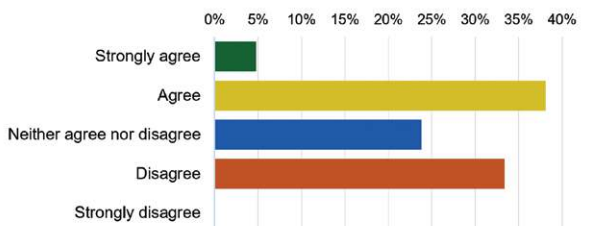
# IntoZetta's final 'Data in Housing' survey results

Dan Yarnold, Director, IntoZetta

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

This final instalment looks at data ownership and governance, and also examines the ways in which data assets affect tenants' experiences and key business processes, plus the respondents' views on their biggest data challenges.

## In my organisation, key data assets have owners who understand their data management responsibilities



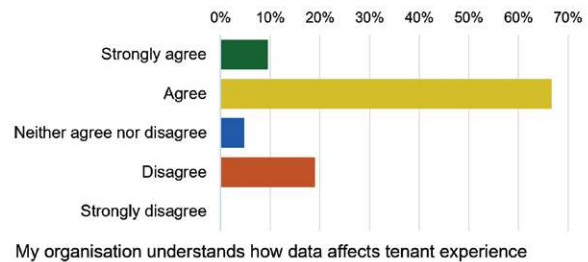
In my organisation key data assets have owners who understand their data management responsibilities

41 per cent agreed that owners of key data assets understand their data management responsibilities and 32 per cent disagreed. This picture was summarised by one respondent who said, "Carrying out responsibilities and enthusiasm for data management varies considerably across the organisation."

The key to improving standards of data governance and data ownership is to ensure that the relevant teams and individuals appreciate the value of data assets to their roles and responsibilities. If the connection can be made between high-quality data and improved operational performance, increased interest from data owners and improvements in data management are natural outcomes.

After all, it is much easier to talk to the CFO about improving the ability to collect money than it is to discuss improving customer contact data.

## My organisation understands how data affects tenant experience

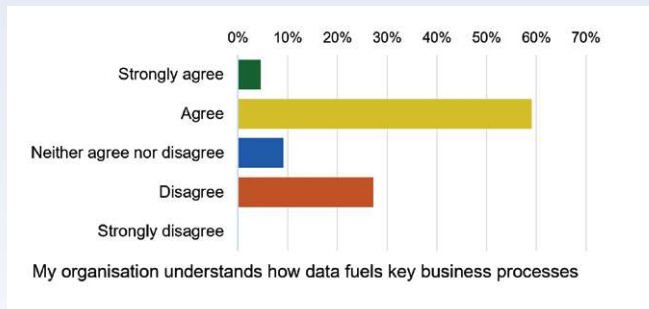


77 per cent agreed that the connection between data and tenant experience was made by their organisation. It's clear that the majority of housing providers understand that poor data quality can have a negative impact on tenant experience.

However, it's also clear from talking to IntoZetta's data consultants that understanding which data is impacting tenant experience is often less clear. With infinite resources, it might be possible to achieve close-to-perfect data across all systems and data entities but the reality of stretched data teams makes it more likely that data management and cleansing activities will need to be prioritised. Only by understanding which data matters most can finite resources provide 'the biggest bang for their buck'.



## My organisation understands how data fuels key business processes



64 per cent of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organisation understands how data fuels their key business processes. There's a recognition that bad data can cause a business process to fail, causing additional costs, delays, and poor experience for tenants.

IntoZetta consultants spend considerable time helping to provide actionable detail to underpin the understanding of how good and bad data affects business processes. One IntoZetta colleague describes data as, "the fuel that helps or hinders every business process within an organisation." Only by understanding which data causes specific processes to break, and the consequent cost and disruption, can you make the right choices and prioritise the management of key data items.

### The biggest data challenge is...

Finally, we asked respondents to comment on the biggest data challenge faced by the sector. A cross section of responses is collated below:

*"Golden threads and the Building Safety Act."*

*"Getting a single source of truth in key data sets."*

*"Customer data quality is a huge challenge – it can become out-of-date very quickly."*

*"Hackers and IT security in general."*

*"Recruitment and retention of the right staff resources."*

*"Consistency across the organisation – multiple versions of the truth."*

*"Lack of focus on data governance and ownership."*

*"Understanding the importance of data quality and continuously monitoring issues at their sources."*

*"Lack of understanding around what drives meaningful insights – i.e. collecting too much data, with no plan for what it will be used for"*

*"There is an often-misplaced assumption that information in a spreadsheet is right rather than testing its validity or accuracy."*

### Conclusion

Data management in our sector is a rapidly-changing landscape. The data requirements of legislative compliance, and the need for improved efficiency and tenant experience, are leading many within our sector to address fundamental problems that have been overlooked for too long.

Data quality and, more broadly, data governance both now have the attention of housing providers' senior leadership teams. Some have created data workstreams within large transformation programmes and system implementations. Others are taking a more gradual approach by selecting a trusted consultancy partner and software solution.

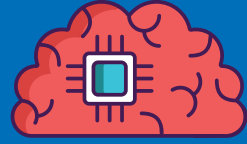
Overall, the key is to create meaningful measurement and reporting that will allow stakeholders to understand the fundamental data issues so they can be prioritised and resolved based on analysis and proven business benefits.

Housing providers face common challenges and many of these challenges are significant and hard to resolve. However, as a sector, housing shares best practice much more widely than any other sector in which IntoZetta consultants operate. In short, the answers to many of the data challenges that an individual housing provider might face will have already been found by their housing peers.

IntoZetta's 'Data in Housing' survey will be repeated in early 2023; if you would like to be included, please contact [jackie.green@intozetta.com](mailto:jackie.green@intozetta.com).

Dan Yarnold is a director of IntoZetta.





# Digital twins – when, not if...

Helen Rogers, Housing Product Director, Civica

*Helen Rogers, housing product director at Civica, looks at the potential of digital twins to deliver better, safer, greener social housing across the UK.*

Every sector knows the importance of digital transformation. From aerospace to construction, automated processes and digitally-enabled collaboration tools have gone from being 'nice to have' to 'can't do without'.

For the wider construction and housing sector, digital twins (virtual representations of physical spaces) have been recognised as a key part of that digital journey for some time now. But what about our social housing sector, with its over four million houses? Towards the end of 2021, Civica brought together experts from leading housing providers and technology firms to examine the potential of digital twins to deliver better outcomes for both housing providers and residents. While it was agreed that getting started is a major challenge, digital twins have huge potential to make homes safer and greener, deliver savings and improve the overall resident experience.

## Setting the standard

Above all, digital twins depend on high-quality, reliable data. Housing providers have endless possible data points that need to feed into a digital twin, but this data is all too often held in legacy systems ranging from hard drives to ring binders, with no defined standards. Unless data is collected and managed effectively, it is of little practical use. This is as true for housing as for any other sector.

If you want to see what good data management looks like, then look no further than leading manufacturing sectors such as aerospace and defence. The social housing sector is however not yet anywhere near this level of

standardisation; while some attempts have been made (by HACT, for example), legislation has a vital role in building a consistent set of standards in our sector.

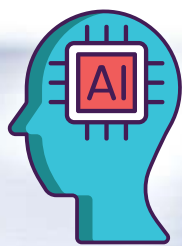
## Better, safer, greener homes

What benefits could digital twins deliver for our sector? At a strategic level, digital twins will help housing providers meet and exceed new regulatory requirements. Compliance can be expensive, but an accurate digital twin will give detailed insights into where attention is needed.

At a more practical level, digital twins also have the potential to reduce bills and improve environmental outcomes. Real-time data could allow residents to understand the effect a few degrees on the thermostat would have on their heating bills, carbon footprint and on the comfort of other residents in the building. 'Nudge theory' has the potential to drive strong behavioural changes in residents thanks to the information available through digital twins.

## Beginning the journey

How should housing providers begin their journey towards using digital twins? One of Civica's roundtable participants explained how they had started trials by gathering data with a 3D camera. While not as accurate as a laser survey, it is much cheaper and a good way of starting to collect data. Other participants are starting geographically, focusing efforts in one area, rather than sending people out to a large number of locations at once. Collecting data during a routine visit (for example, a boiler service) could make this even more cost-effective.



## DIGITAL TWIN



Some aspects of data collection can't, for now, be left to machines alone. For example, when safety teams walk around a site, they might notice fly-tipping or other dangers that current technologies wouldn't pick up. Building the datasets for a digital twin will take many staff hours, so starting small is the best way to get going, adding more data streams when budgets, resources and time allow.

### **Towards standardisation of data - tools and techniques**

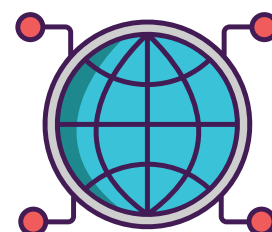
As well as managing housing, many of these same organisations are involved in care, some have commercial properties and some manage properties for other organisations. Each area of the business typically uses a different suite of software to manage its assets and information, making the standardisation of data even more complicated.

What simple steps can housing providers take to get their data in order? Many organisations favour a 'back-to-basics' approach, by partnering with a strong technology supplier and standardising and consolidating information, rather than adding new layers of complexity. The solutions are already available; organisations just need to evaluate the best solution for their needs and be open to new standards that may emerge.

### **Digital twins – when, not if**

Digital twins will be transformative for our sector. The question therefore is not whether to start the journey towards digital twins, but how and when.

As a starting point, housing providers must have a clear purpose; think about the wider outcomes you want to achieve and how digital twins will help you get there. Crucially, this will require getting buy-in from across your organisation and from residents in particular.



The move towards digital twins isn't straightforward, but the current challenges facing housing providers have been successfully overcome by other sectors. Housing providers should draw on those experiences and embrace the technologies which can help them towards a digital future.

*Helen Rogers is the product director for housing at Civica.*

## CIVICA



# Setting the standard for carbon-monoxide protection

Ian Ballinger, Director of Compliance, FireAngel

*With UK legislation surrounding carbon-monoxide (CO) alarms for social properties changing rapidly, Ian Ballinger, FireAngel's director of compliance, explores how housing providers can achieve the maximum level of protection.*



Following changes to home-safety laws across the UK, housing providers in England and Scotland must now install a CO alarm in every room which has a fuel-burning appliance. New legislation in Wales (from December 2022) also requires that a working CO alarm is present in any room which has a gas, oil or solid fuel-burning appliance installed.

Carbon monoxide continues to present a dangerous risk, with NHS data showing over 200 people are hospitalised with suspected carbon-monoxide poisoning each year, leading to around 50 deaths. As a tasteless, odourless and colourless gas, carbon monoxide is undetectable by the human senses. A third-party-certified audible CO alarm that meets European Standard EN 50291-1:2018 is the only way to alert residents to rising levels of carbon monoxide.

## Ensuring protection for all

Recent revisions to building regulations stipulate CO alarms need to be installed in every room which is used as living accommodation containing a fixed combustion appliance. Devices should be positioned either on a wall or shelf, at least 150mm away from the ceiling and approximately 1-3 metres away from a potential CO source.

Housing providers are responsible for repairing or replacing any faulty alarms, and any provider found in breach of the legislation could be fined up to £5,000.

Steve Boggis, trade business unit director, FireAngel, said, "Although significant changes have been made to legislation surrounding CO alarms in domestic properties, there still remains concerning disparities regarding the minimum level of protection required throughout each country and property type.

"With four million households living in rented social housing in England, the new regulations are definitely a step in the right direction. If the same level of regulation regarding CO alarms in Scotland had been introduced, it would have been a significant achievement.

"However, data can soon be analysed to see how effective these changes have been and to influence any future improvements in regulations to keep householders in any type of accommodation safer."

## Protecting the most vulnerable

Any detection measures that can provide an early warning for residents from carbon monoxide is a step towards saving more lives from a very preventable source of harm.



However, with the current cost of living crisis and fuel price increases, we could see the most vulnerable people looking at alternative ways to heat and cook in their homes, which may present potential fire and CO risks.

The National Fire Chiefs' Council home safety committee has formed a cost of living crisis working group to identify safety issues and form partnerships with fuel providers, local authorities and safety-product manufacturers.

### Providing the highest possible standard of CO protection

FireAngel is supporting housing providers in achieving the highest levels of CO protection with its new range of battery-powered CO alarms, designed for installers, which comply with the latest EN 50291-1:2018 standard.

Installers should always look for proof of third-party accreditation such as the BSI kitemark to EN 50291-1:2018 before they buy or install CO alarms.

Featuring 10-year, sealed-for-life lithium batteries and supplied with a five-year warranty, the FireAngel FA3328 and FA3820 battery-powered CO alarms contain electrochemical sensing technology which provides an accurate and proven method of sensing carbon monoxide, in line with the latest requirements.

The alarms' low-level monitoring function contains an intelligent sensor which increases its sensing rate for detection of low levels of CO, in line with the new informative annex in EN 50291-1:2018.

This reduces the health risks of CO poisoning from constant low CO concentrations, while simultaneously



preventing the build-up of dangerous levels of CO, by detecting levels as low as 10ppm. The cost-effective and efficient alarms also provide rapid alerts to dangerous CO levels.

The FA3328 CO alarm with Sync-IT (NFC technology) features advanced data extraction capabilities; the NFC capability syncs via the cloud to provide all alarm data and maintenance information as a PDF report. This allows housing providers to see all data on CO levels, activations and testing events, providing a holistic view of protection.

To find out more information on FireAngel's comprehensive portfolio of CO safety solutions, contact your local specification manager by visiting [fireangel.co.uk/specification-manager](https://fireangel.co.uk/specification-manager).

*Ian Ballinger is the director of compliance at FireAngel.*

**FireAngel.**



# Using data to build communities

Helen MacMillan, Head of Business Consulting, Waterstons

*Whether we like it or not, data is everywhere. When you fill in a form, that's data. When asked in job interviews, "how would your friends describe you?", that's data. When you buy something online, that's data. In fact, it's this digital data that can prove invaluable to housing providers.*

Every online transaction creates a digital trail. Data is captured from our browsing history, buying habits and social media posts, forming a digital version of our behaviour. When we interact online, we add data to our unique profile, and this can then start to anticipate future behaviours.

## Digital twins of us

This is a simplistic view of what is termed digital twin technology; an online version of us that continues to build up and change over time.

If every resident has an online profile of any kind, they have a digital twin, and that's the data which can be used to understand, support, use and sometimes even anticipate behaviours for the benefit of the analyst.

Is using data bad? Absolutely not. Never before have housing providers, local councils, charities or indeed organisations of any kind been able to understand their customers more and use data to better serve them.

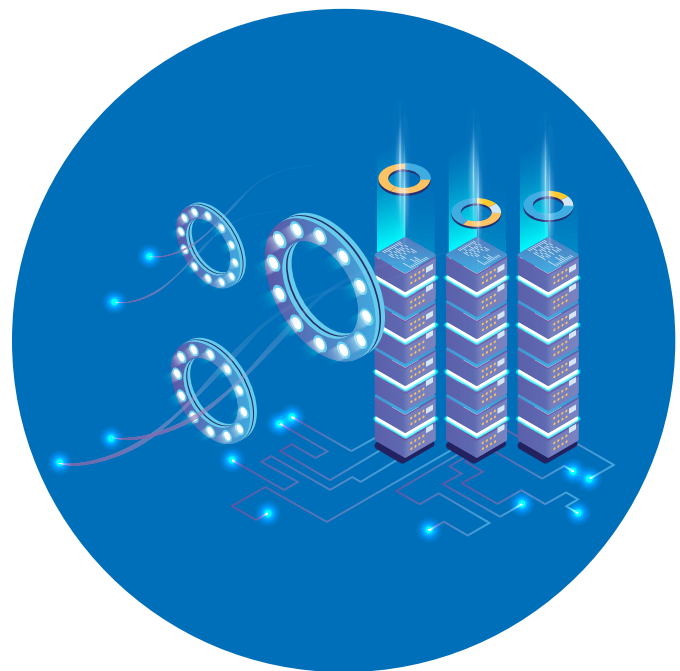
## Aggregating data

A simple example of this is Google Maps. Anyone who is signed into Google on a mobile device with active location services is contributing to Google Maps' traffic data. That's how it knows where the heavy (red) and free-flowing (green) traffic is and gives accurate journey times. It also collects data on your commonly-used routes, suggesting destinations by how regularly you travel there. This not only forms part of your digital twin, but also helps others.

How is this relevant to housing providers? A good example is the regulator asking all housing providers to improve their EPC ratings by 2025; to do this, they need data.

## Capturing the right data

However, being a green landlord isn't just about measuring how energy efficient your properties are and



sticking some figures in a box. It's about capturing the right data that shows a lot more: how people use buildings; where supply-chain failures could be; the impacts on and from the wider environment; and what behaviours we can learn from.

This data can then be used to create a picture of where, for example, there are pockets of fuel poverty, where there are external impacts you hadn't considered and perhaps where you need to be more sustainable.

## Avoid 'green washing'

We need to turn to data-driven sustainability to make purposeful decisions. Using data in the right way means not falling into the trap of 'green washing', where data isn't quite telling the full picture.

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For example, Volkswagen admitted to cheating emissions tests by fitting various vehicles with defective devices, and Starbucks released a 'straw-less lid' as part of its sustainability drive, without sharing that it contained more plastic than the old lid and straw combined.

If we need to think differently about how we use data in social housing to define and drive sustainability, how do we do it? How can we get smarter at measuring our progress towards reducing our energy consumption? We have so much data at our fingertips that it can be overwhelming, plus we also have an inherent weakness towards relying on past events to tell us what might happen in future.

**Your most valuable asset**

But what else? Data, its collection and availability are constantly changing, and it's arguably the most valuable asset of any organisation. This doesn't have to be difficult because significant amounts of data are already available; data simply needs to be harnessed.

Satellite data can be used to understand many of the things housing providers need to know – access to transport, energy usage, movement patterns, capacity, employment, dependents and more. It's out there and available, it just needs analysing.

For example, monitoring wide-scale energy usage could generate specific advice to residents about the most economical ways to run their homes. And by understanding tenants through their interests and digital-twin data, stronger, more supportive communities could be created.

Data is powerful in that it can be used to save money, but it is even more influential where it matters – supporting the people who mean the most and giving them the tools they need to thrive.

*Helen MacMillan is head of business consulting at Waterstons.*

# Saha signs with Rubixx for housing, asset & compliance software



*Saha has announced a new partnership with software provider Rubixx for its web-based housing, asset and compliance management systems as well as a tenant portal. Saha aims to have its new Rubixx system live by July 2023, with Saha's project team being led by external consultant Claire Davidson (C Davidson Consultancy).*

Lynne Shea, interim CEO, Saha, said, "This is a significant moment for Saha – our new Rubixx system is something colleagues have been asking for so that we can provide more inclusive services to our customers. We've been impressed by Rubixx and we're optimistic that we will have the new system live next summer."

Simon Reay, managing director, Rubixx, said, "There's a real buzz about the Saha project for us because we know what it has planned, and Saha's staff are overflowing with enthusiasm and drive to deliver the efficiencies and services our platform can enable. By

this time next year, Saha will have expanded services, cut costs and reduced carbon emissions through this exciting project."

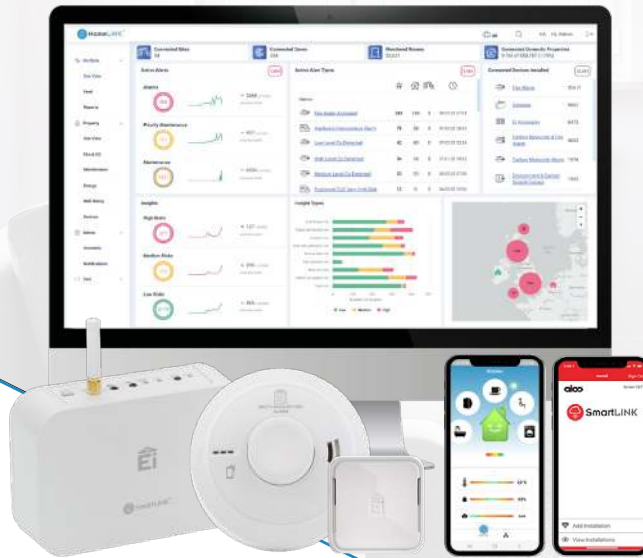
David Dashwood, chair of Saha's customer panel (T4R), said, "This project has been talked about for some time, so it's great that the team is making this happen. I'm looking forward to the workshops with Rubixx – the results will be real service improvements and exciting for us tenants."





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*Broadacres Housing has opted for Salesforce to improve its money advice service, with the aim of helping to maintain its tenancies and supporting tenants with the current cost of living crisis.*

Mark Birch, head of ICT, Broadacres Housing, said, "Many of our residents are working, but given the current economy, some of them may still need and be eligible for extra financial support from a variety of agencies, but accessing those benefits can be confusing and time-consuming. That's where our money advice service team comes in; they work with people to support them with budgeting and navigating the system to find out about possible financial benefits.

"As part of our selection of Salesforce, we knew that we needed a technology platform that was global and used by different industries, and we wanted something 'low code/no code' that we could actually use ourselves, shape to our needs, and turn around quite quickly. In addition, the non-profit licensing from Salesforce was a big plus."

Working with implementation specialists Alscient, the Salesforce implementation project for Broadacres began in March 2022 and took just a few months to complete.

With Salesforce, tenants can now make referrals to the money advice service via the housing provider's website, which then creates a new case management record. The solution is integrated with Broadacres' existing housing management system so that all service information is still kept in one central location.

Birch said, "We now have built-in dashboards covering income,

tenancies and repairs so our staff can see their own performance, the team's performance and the manager can see the overall service performance, which is something she used to spend a few days a month working on."

Broadacres' team of money advisors is also creating a seamless digital experience for its customers by using WhatsApp and SMS via the Salesforce platform, thereby moving from siloed information to having a bird's eye view of all text-based communications with each customer.

Birch said, "We are now so much more efficient. If all of these time-savings were costed, they would pay for a significant part of the project, if not all of it."

Salesforce's Trailhead online learning platform was another factor in Broadacres' choice of technology. By using Trailhead, Broadacres' IT team has been able to make changes and improvements without the need for third-party resources.

Birch said, "Our Trailhead-based training really paid off when we were working out how to move our systems over to Salesforce. We've only added one custom object to our Salesforce platform – everything else we wanted to do, we could do straight away, such as putting in some custom fields."

Broadacres' other departments and teams are now enthusiastic about moving to Salesforce, with the money advice service's implementation being used as a blueprint for future implementations.



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Sovereign Housing has used Mobysoft's RentSense software for eight years and, more recently, Intelligent Automation for RentSense. Sovereign Housing's head of income, Lizzie Aston-Long, discusses the current environment for housing providers and tenants and how RentSense and Intelligent Automation have helped Sovereign Housing's income team and tenants.

### How do your income officers like RentSense?

RentSense helps them to prioritise their caseloads and make earlier interventions. It also helps them identify tenants who are in credit yet at risk of falling into arrears. Overall, Mobysoft's tools help us to reduce the number of tenants in debt and arrears and offer the right help much earlier.

### How has it helped your financial performance?

RentSense has helped us to improve our collection rates and target our interventions better. For example, in our last financial year our arrears target was 4.5 per cent but we actually achieved 2.6 per cent, within which our target for Universal Credit tenants was 7 per cent but we achieved 4.5 per cent.

### Why did you add the Intelligent Automation module?

We wanted to maximise our productivity, especially around repetitive functions which should be automated. We knew we needed more capacity within the team so our income officers could focus on more in-depth conversations. RentSense and Intelligent Automation has increased capacity and removed 20-30 per cent of each income officer's caseload.

### How has automation helped your income team?

Automation has really made us appreciate the importance of data quality and the need to have the correct contact information. Having now been through that exercise, our data quality has hugely improved.

It is important to keep in mind that automation doesn't replace our income officers, it complements them. It relieves them of repetitive, low-risk arrears cases and gives them more time. We can see that since automation has been rolled out, the quality of their interventions has improved because they can treat the causes rather than the symptoms.

### What has automation done to help Sovereign Housing and its tenants?

It's given officers more time. It has helped us take a supportive approach and really focus on tenants' wellbeing and being able to sustain longer tenancies. Furthermore, the insights we get from the Power BI dashboard in RentSense are helping us to look at where we can improve.

*Lizzie Aston-Long is the head of income at Sovereign Housing.*

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# TSMs – Data meets engagement

David Janner-Klausner, Co-Founder,  
Commonplace Digital

*Housing data often originates from fundamental processes, such as tenancies, payments and repairs. As they occur, these processes generate transactions which create lots of data that's crucial for housing providers to collect and analyse.*

However, 'big housing data' isn't just generated from transactions. There is also a longstanding commitment by the sector to understand how residents feel. While there are many different ways to gather and address tenants' views, the methodology is about to be overhauled with the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) from April next year. In turn, how TSM data is collected will be an important part of how our sector adopts and potentially gains from the new regulation.

### TSMs are coming

The Regulator of Social Housing's TSMs require housing providers to gather information about tenants' satisfaction across:

- Keeping properties in good repair;
- Maintaining building safety;
- Effective handling of complaints;
- Respectful and helpful engagement;
- Responsible neighbourhood management.

These will be collated to compute an overall satisfaction score.

While the questions in each category are specified, the method of obtaining this data from tenants is not. The way in which housing providers go about gathering the data will itself have an impact on the scores, especially in the 'respectful and helpful engagement' category.

### More than just revised questionnaires

It is fair to say that the TSMs require a lot more than just revised questionnaires. They have the potential to leverage a change towards far more tenant- and

community-focused attitudes by housing providers. Now there will be a set of very specific and consistent yardsticks that will allow for easy comparisons and drive tenant-focused data even further.

Alongside the opportunities they present, we are also aware of concerns about TSMs. For example, there are omissions from a resident's perspective: there is no direct mention of wellbeing, community cohesion or decarbonisation. Value for money doesn't feature nor does access to amenities such as local shops.

### It's how you ask...

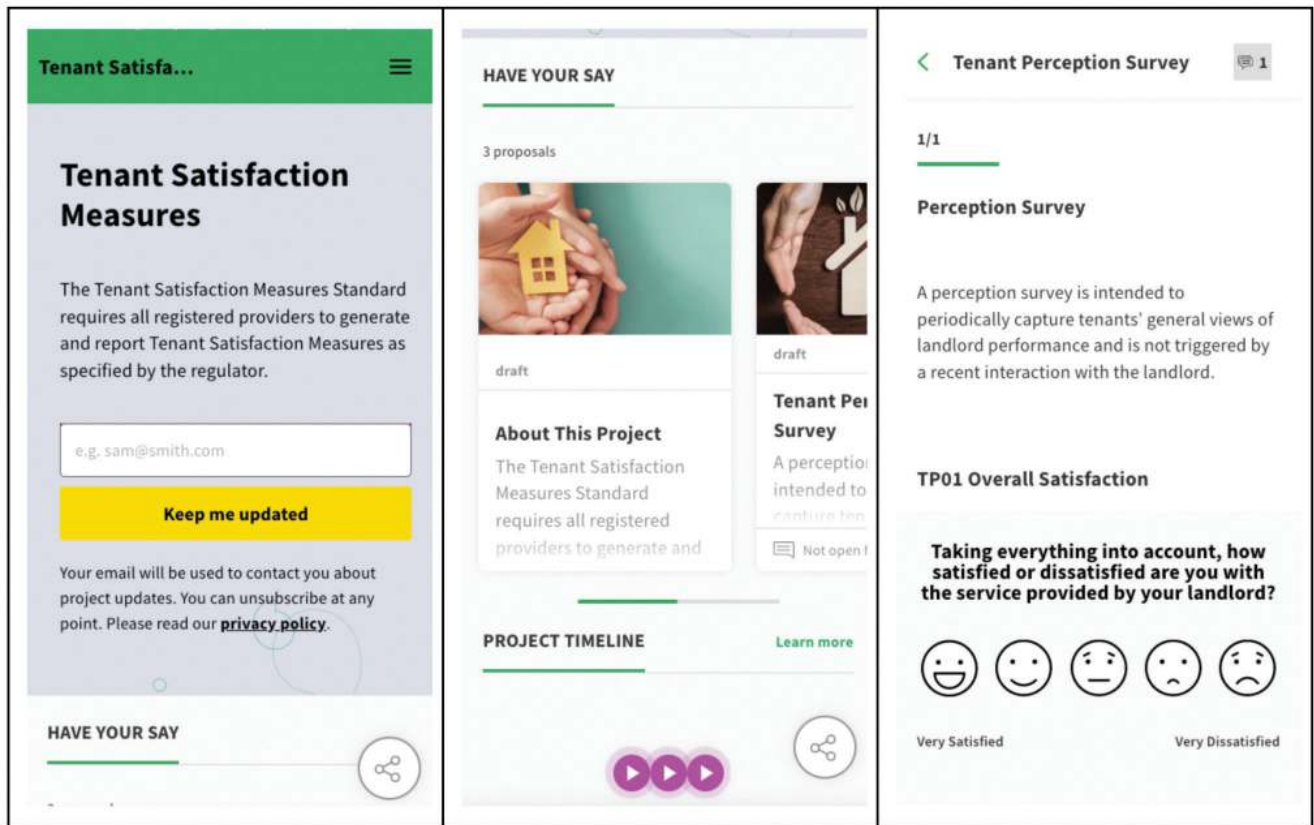
TSMs are a means to hold housing providers to account. They can seize this accountability as an opportunity to be more open and to build trust and momentum for positive change. To seize the opportunity means maximising engagement, for a start. That can be achieved through a mix of online and face-to-face engagement strategies and possibly providing incentives for tenants to take part.

Getting a wider audience is likely to provide a more balanced view as well as a more positive one – the people most likely to be the initial respondents are those who are angry and hold a long-term negative view of their housing provider and neighbourhood; it's always harder to get the people who are happy to participate.

### Transparency and trust

Our experience suggests that transparency can play a big part in resetting relationships that require greater trust and accountability. For example, Commonplace provides digital platforms for public engagement that are highly transparent because everyone can see everybody else's contributions.





Over the long term, these transparent conversations create a visible provenance for local decisions. It is this accountability that the TSMs want to develop and embed, not just as a one-off survey but into a process of continuous local engagement and improvement.

If a housing provider is cautious (understandable, with TSMs being new), it's also possible to start with comments being hidden on our platform and gradually shift towards a more transparent operation. Importantly, tenants may be reticent about their comments being visible out of concerns that they might be identified through what they've said.

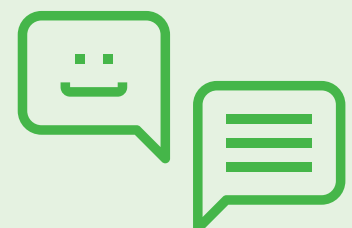
As an example, Dacorum Borough Council used Commonplace for its survey of tenants and residents and opted for a 'closed' version. This meant that the survey was on an open website but the responses weren't visible publicly.

### Next steps

Over the next few months, housing providers will need to define their approach to TSMs. We would suggest the following considerations:

- Develop a digital-first approach that can accommodate input from multiple channels (incl. on- and offline).
- A digital-first approach offers excellent value. It enables online responses from residents who are happy to use the web, as well as freeing staff time to chase offline responses, with all data secured in a single database for simple and quick analysis.
- Create a communication strategy that covers maximising participation as well as developing a feedback loop so that there is continuous engagement with tenants over a cycle of at least two annual surveys.

*David Janner-Klausner is the co-founder of Commonplace Digital.*





# Tips for improving care and support

Stuart Thomas, Head of Property & Estate Services & Robert Needham, Systems & Performance Development Manager, Caredig



*Caredig, a Swansea-based housing provider whose name means 'kind', offers some tips for using technology in a way that keeps people and relationships at the heart of their work.*

## Help staff transition away from pen and paper

When we first started working with Housing Insight (our software consultants) three years ago, we were looking for a product that would give our staff, and particularly our dispersed teams, a viable alternative to paper records. PanConnect gave us an efficient way to digitise staff case and support notes, made either with the tenant during a visit or in the office afterwards.

There was previously lots of 'double-handling' of paper. Now, by reducing the amount of time that staff spend on digital 'paperwork', we can increase the time available for tenant care. And it's easier for us to share the information that we hold with tenants when they want to view their own support notes and tenancy details.

## Facilitate offline access

In the past, we tried other digital products that proved problematic when an internet connection wasn't available (which can happen when working in certain housing schemes, for example). PanConnect functions as an offline product, so it can still be used when wifi isn't available. It simply syncs when a connection is restored, without any loss of data and therefore without becoming a source of frustration for our staff.

## Give tenants 24/7 access to support

In addition to team efficiencies, we wanted to make it easier for our tenants to contact us and find the support that they needed outside office hours and also using their preferred means. A digital solution that tenants can

access using their mobile, tablet or PC opens up plenty of options, wherever and whenever suits them best.

## Design your own forms

We wanted to replace Word documents stored on SharePoint with something that would make it easier for us to create our own forms. Using PanConnect, we now have a better database with a logical format that allows us to choose the fields we use so that we can generate bespoke forms and customised reports. We use these internally, but they also let us share relevant tenant records with other agencies as well.

## Grow capacity using a modular approach

Once we had our staff app and tenant portal, adding an applicant portal was the natural next step for us. It means that would-be tenants can now start their journey with us by applying online, and they don't have to wait to call us during office hours.

## Look for unexpected benefits

We quickly realised that we could use the staff app to help us build a bigger picture of the business, gathering inspection data not just for a single scheduled visit but also for adjacent properties and the surrounding area. This gives us a better overview of a particular patch and it also provides useful insights into which tenants to visit next and how to plan further work. For example, it might be possible to combine a gas service visit at one property with a rent arrears visit to their neighbour.

We knew that the staff app would be useful in the field but we hadn't anticipated how helpful it would be in the office (when looking up detailed information for contractors, for example) and in providing emergency contacts for on-call team members as well.

### Involve end-users wherever possible

We've learnt the importance of scoping new projects, to examine them from all angles before starting. We involve end-users as much as possible, often in focus groups with Housing Insight, to try to ensure that the end-results turn out as expected.

We tend to develop the first iteration of a project and then improve it during a second phase. For example, we wanted to ensure safe working practices for our estate staff by recording tool vibration values so we asked for their input to make the relevant form as easy as possible for them to use.

To improve the tenant app, we look at feedback from individuals as well as data about how the app is actually being used. In other scenarios, we put together cross-party teams to ensure that an app is working efficiently for everyone who needs it.

### Choose a supplier who understands housing

We've known members of the Housing Insight team for about ten years now thanks to a connection that began in other projects. They are known to our sector and are held in high regard because of their knowledge about the housing sector and its requirements.

Our project manager is in touch by email every week, and we have regular catch-ups with Housing Insight's executive team. We view Housing Insight as a strategic partner and we enjoy a close relationship with them.

### Keep evolving

For us, digital will always be a work-in-progress. Since taking on the form-designer module, for example, we've devised a support plan that will give us a 360-degree view of each tenant, including key psychological information.

We also intend to strengthen the maintenance element of the staff app around pre-/post-inspections and void works, partly in preparation

for the Renting Homes (Wales) Act which comes into force this December, making it a requirement to record repairs and communications with tenants.

### Think processes first, technology second

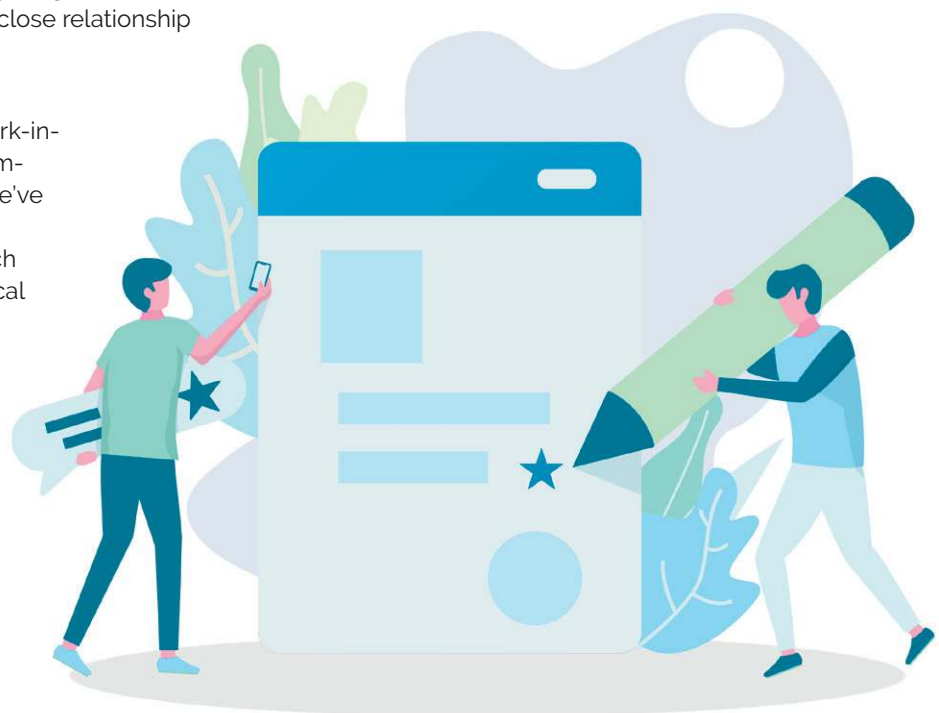
Finally, although digital is a key tool for us, we aren't led by technology. We choose to review processes first and then apply PanConnect in the way that will best suit our business, staff and tenants.

Technology makes us agile but only after we have decided what we need it to deliver for us. That way, care and support remains front and centre.

*Stuart Thomas is head of property and estate services and Robert Needham is the systems and performance development manager at Caredig.*

## Housing Insight's new customers

Housing Insight has announced that Teign Housing and Soha Housing have started using the company's self-service app and tenant portal, alongside ForHousing using Housing Insight's RentsConnect Analytics Module for arrears, integrated with the housing provider's current Aareon QL system. And in Wales, Housing Insight is helping several customers prepare for the new Renting Homes (Wales) Act.





# If you build it, will they come?

Simon Wilkes, Head of Sales & Marketing, Active Housing (Hallnet)



*You may consider the most challenging part of implementing and managing a resident portal is securing the initial funds to implement it in the first place. In reality, funding is only half the battle. Once in place, there will be a huge amount of attention on the platform as pressure grows to justify its expense and long-term success.*

The key metrics for most housing providers' portal will be:

- Are people using it?
- Are we seeing efficiencies in other areas, such as the contact centre or repairs teams?
- Are we maintaining or improving customer satisfaction?

Making an online platform available is just the first step on the journey to successful implementation. While you'll find some 'early adopter' tenants who jump in with both

feet, it takes a concerted, ongoing effort to change most tenants' long-standing habits and create a groundswell of enthusiasm for your platform. Where do you start?

## Prime the pump

You will have hopefully begun initial communications about your portal before its launch, making use of the regular touch points you have with customers to ensure they know that change is coming and that the change in question is positive.

This might be simple things, such as including a leaflet in posted communications, posters on notice boards or mentions in tenant newsletters, but it gives you the opportunity to start generating some early interest. In our experience, 30-40 per cent of residents will adopt an online solution naturally, so simple promotional steps like this can make a big difference.

Another great way of generating early interest is engaging your customers during the implementation process. Not only will they provide invaluable insights about how your portal might be received, but in our experience those involved often become great champions for the portals they helped shape, and we all know the value of independent endorsement.

Similarly, running a 'beta' or closed launch to selected users is also a great way of assessing tenants' early perceptions of the portal.

## Natural, nudge and pull

The most effective way to really generate engagement is with a blend of 'push' (persuading tenants to come to the portal) and 'pull' (incentivising them to come). In our experience, a perfect blend of this would span three main areas:

### 1. Natural contact points

Using those channels through which you already naturally interact with your customers is a reliable means of generating interest. Using soft messaging about the availability and benefits of your new platform is a great

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starting point. This could include promotion in existing postal communications, placing posters in communal areas and promoting the portal on your main website.

### 2. Nudging customers to your portal

Ask any marketer and they'll tell you that the average consumer needs to see or hear at least eight advertisements before trying a new product; the same applies to portal adoption. In fact, the same applies when encouraging adoption of any new digital channel.

This may mean making all new customers 'digital-first tenants', making some services only available through the portal or offering more repair appointments through the portal than over the phone.

In addition, targeted email and text messages highlighting drop-in sessions, coffee mornings and virtual webinars with incentives such as competitions and prizes can increase portal registrations enormously.

### 3. Pull techniques

In order to make the most of your online portal and ensure it delivers the expected return on investment, it's likely you'll need to employ some pull tactics. At this stage, the aim is to demonstrate that using the portal really does have significant benefits over traditional channels.

The best time to do this is when onboarding new customers. By making the application and onboarding process online-first, customers can be opted-in and

persuaded of the value of the portal from their very first interactions with your organisation. In such cases, it's rare for customers to then seek out non-digital means.

Some organisations have also tried methods such as increasing the waiting times for traditional channels, call-queuing systems based on customer type and reduced phone-based services. While these methods have been successful in some instances, we would advise caution because without a strong communication plan, customer satisfaction can start to decline.

### Where are you in your journey?

Serious consideration needs to be given to how you encourage adoption of your portal long before its launch date. Failing to do so will dramatically extend the amount of time needed to deliver your RoI and generate a critical mass of adoptees, with consequent delays in retiring old systems and reallocating resources from outdated channels; time really is of the essence.

*Simon Wilkes is head of sales and marketing at Active Housing (Hallnet).*



## Cobalt Housing takes XMReality for first-line support

*XMReality is now being used by Cobalt Housing for first-line support and diagnosis for the 70,000 calls and emails the housing provider receives each year, mostly concerning repairs.*

Call-centre staff log each repair with Cobalt Housing's external contractors and then use XMReality's Remote Guidance tool to further diagnose the problems. Remote Guidance uses augmented reality to remotely see the tenants' problems and repairs through the tenants' own mobile devices.

By Remote Guidance, Cobalt Housing's call-centre agents can gather more information about the problem to make sure that the correct contractor is sent with the

correct equipment to fix the problem during the first visit.

The agent uses XMReality to inspect the problem and document the findings using screenshots and notes that can be shared with the external contractor.

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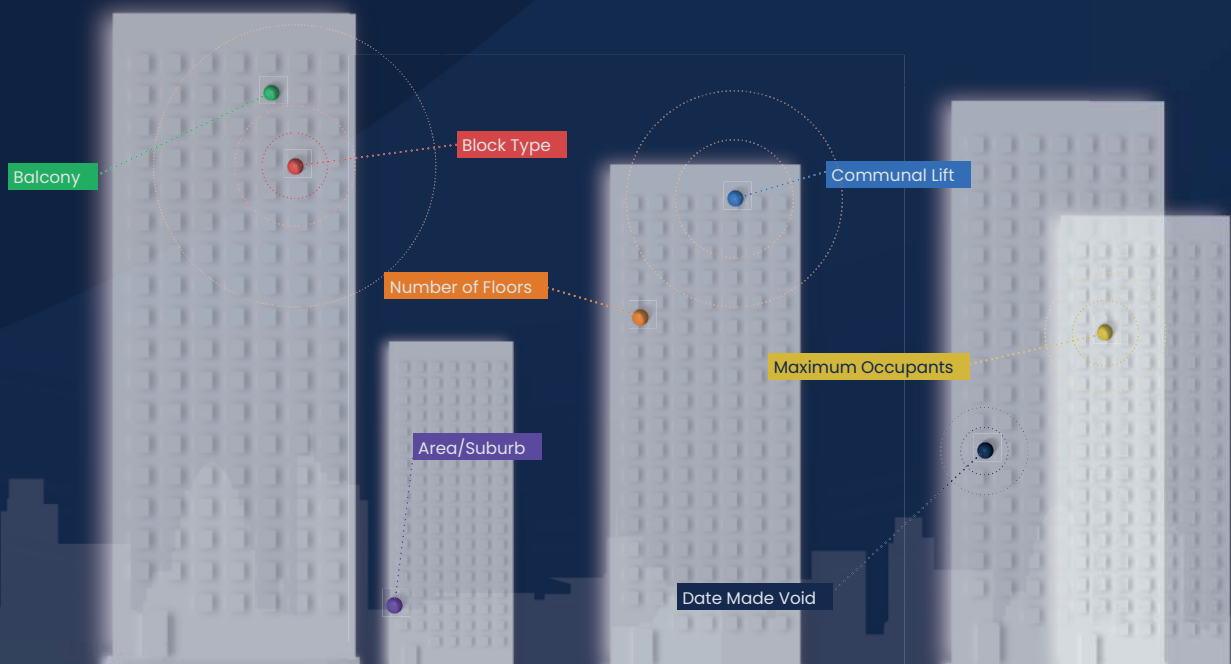


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# Meaningful resident engagement

Trevor Hampton, Director of Housing Solutions,  
NEC Software Solutions

*Trevor Hampton, director of housing solutions at NEC Software Solutions, explores the power of finding out what people don't like.*

Do you dread phoning your energy, phone or broadband provider to ask a question, make a complaint or raise a concern? Is your expectation that you will be stuck waiting for your call to be answered or worse, your email or message will be ignored? Does it prevent you from reaching out in the first place?

If you've answered 'no' to any of the above questions then I'm jealous that you have been blessed with outstanding customer service and I'm interested to know which suppliers you use.

However, this is a big issue if tenants feel the same reticence about contacting their housing providers. It could result in people not receiving the right support and even falling into unnecessary hardship.

To create housing support that is human focused, it's imperative we put ourselves in other people's shoes and ask if we're doing things they dislike.

## Are you listening?

Technology has made it very easy for residents to choose their preferred way to communicate with their housing provider. But opening up multiple communication channels means that these all need to be monitored and actioned.

We've all read the disgruntled tweet or Facebook post where someone has turned to social media in frustration. Often people resort to public communication because they've emailed and called a company but their issue

remains ignored or unresolved. A study from Shelter revealed that one in ten social housing tenants had reported an issue with their home more than ten times.

It's obvious, but missing messages or asking residents to repeat their complaint a number of times to different housing staff are just some of the things people dislike. And with the technology available today, it's completely unnecessary.

## Joining the dots

It's now fairly easy to link all relevant interactions with a tenant so that a housing officer has instant access to up-to-date information on past and current communications with a resident.

A unified communication platform can help you understand the barriers to good communication in your organisation by putting any residents' concerns, questions or repair requests into context.

For example, if a resident contacts their housing provider and explains they're having problems with their boiler, all the messages are connected and linked so a housing officer can see that there have been a number of call-outs to the same property and a new boiler is required. A connected communication platform ensures there are no missing pieces of the puzzle.

In the same way that you can keep track of any communications with individual tenants, it's also useful to do this on a more global scale across your organisation.





Are there any trends of consistent breakdowns in communication with residents? Is there one channel that is frustrating people more than another? This information will allow you to address any areas that could be improved.

### A personalised approach

As humans, we're often looking for the easy option. It's why we may choose to park in a more expensive car park because it's close to the shops rather than park in a cheaper one that involves a longer walk.

By getting to grips with the things your residents don't like, you can make things easier for them. For example, you might be trying to call a resident during the day but they're at work so an email or text message would be more convenient for them.

Many housing management systems now have the capability to highlight things such as residents' communication preferences. They can flag things such as 'this resident doesn't respond to calls but will reply to SMS messages or emails', making it easy to choose the best way to engage with your residents.

If you're not currently using this function, it's worth checking with your HMS provider that you're using the full capability of your system because there could be some useful tools to help improve relationships with your residents.

### Make change happen

The truth is most housing providers are sitting on a goldmine of valuable insights. However, information on its own isn't enough to offer effective support. As Theodore Roosevelt said, "People don't care what you know, until they know how much you care."

Another innovation that could help is harnessing the power of predictive analytics.

Predictive analytics looks at your data, spots trends and then alerts you to things that you might want to take action on. You might already run an automated check to

get a good idea of who is most likely to pay or those who might be late with their rent this month. But what if the list could be segmented further? What if you had the ability to dive deeper into the information to get a clearer idea of each tenant's situation.

If you can cross-reference information then you'll be able to see that a tenant might have been late in paying their rent only in the last month or two but before that they had a fairly good payment record. If this is the case, it might be that recent late payments are the result of the cost of living crisis or maybe they've changed jobs and their new employer pays on a different day of the month.

Now let's imagine that rather than repeatedly chasing for late payment, a housing officer can use the information to make proactive contact with the resident to see if they need budgeting support or a repayment plan before their arrears mount up.

Or how about if a resident calls about making a rental payment and because the housing officer has all the information about the person in front of them, they can check whether, say, a boiler problem has now been fixed or whether further help is needed – what's not to like about that?

Finding out what your residents hate alongside the right technology enables you to focus on the individual, creating happier residents who are more likely to want to speak with you.

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

**NEC**



# Improving tenants' experience with Microsoft Customer Voice

Kirsty Marsden, Head of Housing, TSG

*In England, over 20 new tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) will be used by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) from April 2023 to gather data on how satisfied tenants are with the performance of their housing providers.*

The TSMs will address five primary topics, including maintenance, building safety, effective complaint handling, tenant interactions and neighbourhood management. The data for the TSMs will be gathered via tenant surveys and landlord statistics.

To meet these requirements, we suggest the use of the Microsoft Customer Voice (MSCV) platform; a platform that makes it easier for housing providers to meet these requirements.

Gaining real-time insights into tenants' sentiment toward your organisation and the quality of your services can have a significant effect on the quality of your tenants' experiences, and you can achieve this with the help of MSCV.

At TSG, we've supported many housing providers; in this article, we'll look at how we've worked with MHS Homes and how MSCV helped it to enhance its tenants' experiences.

## How does MSCV help housing providers?

MSCV gives you the opportunity to future proof your systems and make significant cost savings by automating surveys, emails, SMS and more.

Feedback can be categorised and collected using MSCV depending on triggers from multiple systems. This lets you focus on what really matters to your customers by automating what are normally very time-consuming processes.

MSCV also collects a wide range of data that can help you to understand:

- What tenants think about your organisation;
- What tenants think about specific interactions with your staff;
- How easy it is to deal with your organisation.

Automated workflows will also make your teams more productive by sending feedback direct to the right people,

allowing them to then address any areas of concern via automated email alerts. The data you gather can be quickly examined through MSCV for compliance and reporting or exported to Excel or other reporting platforms such as Microsoft Power BI.

## MHS Homes, TSG and Microsoft Customer Voice

MHS Homes wanted to improve its customer engagement via more efficient processes and better data analysis/ insights. The housing provider was previously conducting telephone-based tenant surveys but this was time-consuming, involved restricted numbers of respondents, lacked scalability and provided only limited insights.

TSG helped MHS Homes to improve the quality and quantity of its customer engagement, support easier regulatory compliance, expand the housing provider's capabilities around Microsoft 365 technologies and achieve integrated data analysis and insights. The overall solution provided by TSG to MHS Homes was:

- Microsoft Dynamics 365 Customer Voice;
- Microsoft Dataverse for data storage;
- Integration with MHS Homes' on-premise data warehouse to trigger surveys;
- Integration with Capita OpenHousing to record survey sends and unsubscribes;
- All survey data available for integration into MHS Homes' data.

Since the recent implementation of this, MHS Homes has not only already seen a higher percentage (22 per cent response rate) of tenants completing surveys but it can also now dive deeper into the surveys' data. For example, with all of the data linking up and telling a larger story, MHS Homes can now see statistics regarding what tenants are most satisfied and dissatisfied with, right down to the operations and satisfaction of individuals within the organisation.

## Automating and future-proofing your organisation

Moving from legacy systems or manual processes doesn't need to be difficult; TSG has supported and continues to support many housing providers with their move to modern cloud technologies, including MSCV.

*Kirsty Marsden is the head of housing at TSG.*

# AT HOME WITH LITTLEFISH

A **FRESH APPROACH** TO MANAGED IT

**littlefish**  
managed IT services

## WELCOME TO OUR WORLD OF SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Littlefish do things a little differently. Our focus is always customer experience, and we deliver services in a personalised, people-centric, and authentic way.

Working with many public sector organisations already, we know you face tough economic challenges and that a tailored, sustainable IT environment is vital to your organisation's success.

At Littlefish, we're here to tangibly help your organisation navigate the ever-evolving IT landscape. We can facilitate digital transformation where you need it most, working collaboratively with your in-house teams to implement the reliable, efficient, and innovative IT solutions you need to get the job done.



### Service Desk

Industry-leading support whenever you need us.



### Cloud Services

We're here for your digital transformation journey.



### Infrastructure

Boost efficiency, refresh programs, and save on cost.



### Cyber Security

Effective cyber protection, done your way.



### Integration

Let Littlefish take the strain and manage your infrastructure for you.



**SCAN TO SEE HOW  
OUR MANAGED IT  
SERVICES CAN HELP  
YOUR BUSINESS  
GROW**

*"Littlefish demonstrated that they were really focused on the end-users and treated themselves as part of our team. They empathise and care about what it was that people needed, making the transition to the new service really smooth.*

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



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



*Following Stirling Council's original IoT trial with Aico (see the September 2022 edition of Housing Technology), the council has now embarked on the UK's first full roll-out of a multi-technology and multi-sensor connected-home solution across its entire housing portfolio. 50,000 IoT devices will be installed over the next 8-10 years in homes managed by Stirling Council's housing service.*



Aico's IoT sensors in the council's properties will collect data on temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide alongside smoke-detection sensors. The council's tenants will have access to the sensors' data via a mobile app. The sensors will also alert the council in real-time with early warnings of damp, mould, ventilation and other problems. All of the council's homes will be upgraded with connected smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms.

The Aico sensors will support the council's long-term planning; by identifying the least thermally-efficient homes, Stirling Council will be able to make better decisions around its capital investment programmes. And by connecting its entire housing portfolio, the council's planning teams will be able to identify trends earlier and plan budgets better, based on empirical data from tenants' homes.

One of Stirling Council's tenants, Robert Cairney, said, "I was sceptical at first about what financial or health benefits the sensors in my home would offer. However, by recording humidity levels, I'll be alerted to the risk of damp and mould, and rather than having to keep an eye

out for these things myself, the council will know when it's time for repairs or maintenance work.

"This new IoT technology for homes like mine is fantastic because it helps me to feel safer, live in a healthier environment and reduce costs. I'm now more aware of how my home is behaving and the ways in which I can save money via this free, cutting-edge connected-home kit."

A spokesperson for Stirling Council said, "The data from the IoT devices will help us to identify the least energy-efficient homes and take action. It will also provide insights into the performance of recently-retrofitted properties; we've seen some interesting insights from homes in our original IoT trial, with several high-risk indications of damp and mould caused by condensation.

"This technology is all about reliable, data-driven intelligence for better investment decisions and higher customer satisfaction."



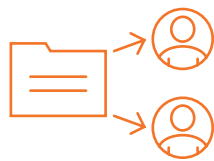
NEC Housing

# UNLOCK BETTER SERVICES FOR EVERYONE WITH NEC ENGAGE

It's your collaboration platform for listening closely, sharing openly, responding quickly and doing things well. It creates communities in communities to keep everyone involved, bringing residents closer to you and to each other.



**Hear the residents voice**  
Easy to ask, listen and take the right action, however residents get in touch



**Share openly**  
Communication is constant and updates happen as they progress



**Respond immediately**  
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



# Cyber-security challenges in housing

Rowan Troy, Senior Cyber Security Consultant, Littlefish

*Housing providers have suffered a spate of cyber-attacks in recent years, some of which have been high-profile, headline-making cases. Cyber criminals target our sector attempting to pillage the vast amounts of personal data held by housing providers and, in some cases, have held the housing provider to ransom.*

## The most common cyber attacks

Since June 2022, when the UK's largest housing provider was hit by a cyber-attack, security has been a huge concern for housing providers. Sadly, the public sector has taken constant beatings of late; years of austerity and the pandemic have drained scarce resources and made building cyber-resilience and cyber-defences an uphill battle for many housing providers.

Compared with organisations with larger security budgets, less-stretched IT teams and modern, well-constructed cyber-security systems, some housing providers may be considered easy targets by cyber-criminals. With that in mind, the common threats to housing providers include:

### 1. Viruses & malware from third-party devices

Unfortunately, housing providers' networks are notoriously complex and often outdated (esp. lack of collaboration and/or integration) so the prevalence of mobile storage devices used to share data across platforms continues to be a problem for IT security teams to keep track of. As a

result, housing providers must consider endpoint security as one of their biggest threats.

Every device connected to the network creates another potential entry point or point of origin for security threats. Sadly, it doesn't matter how well-secured email and web channels are against malware; if there is an open back door in the form of a third-party device, the entire organisation could be compromised.

### 2. Employees sharing information

Although most likely due to human error rather than malicious intent, many security breaches within the public sector arise from employees sharing sensitive data with unauthorised recipients, such as third-party suppliers.

This illustrates how easy it is to risk organisational compliance and break GDPR directives. Under GDPR, sending client data to a person without proper authorisation can put the organisation at risk of receiving a fine of up to €20m (or four per cent of turnover, whichever is larger).

Remember, user awareness training sits at the very core of data protection and information security; it is crucial that all employees are educated about and understand how to handle data securely.

### 3. The need to remotely access data

Especially since the pandemic, it is likely that many people needing to access information will often be working remotely and from a variety of devices.

However, remote connections to a network can be risky because not all devices will be secure and up-to-date when it comes to security and software. Remember, it only takes a single hacked or infected device to compromise an entire network, infecting hundreds of machines and potentially enabling access to sensitive tenant records.



Furthermore, once criminals breach a system, they can encrypt data to prevent the organisation from accessing it, usually unless a ransom fee is paid. This is why software asset management (SAM) is so important because it helps to ensure patches are installed and that unwanted, potentially risky, applications such as browser plug-ins or extensions are removed.

#### 4. Outdated technology

Limited budgets, legacy software and a hesitancy to install and learn new systems often mean that 'everyday IT' at housing providers is outdated, overly complex, and non-collaborative. The housing sector can also suffer from 'supplier sprawl', when organisations attempt to juggle too many IT solutions, vendors and services at once. Not only does this compromise security but it also means that a lot of IT staff resources are needed just to keep things ticking over.

To this end, housing providers might benefit from a service integration and management (SIAM) solution, designed to free individuals from the responsibility of managing resources and suppliers and offering single-contact accountability to ensure all suppliers work together seamlessly. Where it's not feasible to upgrade to more secure software or where staff don't want the hassle, it's possible to minimise the risk of cyber-attacks by adding extra layers of security. If one system is compromised, then a managed detection and response (MDR) service can help contain and remove the threat.

#### 5. Accessibility

It's vital for housing providers that confidential tenant data is easily accessible by staff, both onsite and remotely. Combine this with the urgent help that housing providers sometimes need to give (incl. information sharing), often

without time to pause to consider the cyber-security implications, and the risk of a breach increases.

The worry for security professionals is that the devices used to share information aren't always protected. In a time-critical environment, it doesn't make sense to have IT teams or information security officers checking or granting access rights. Bear in mind that users accessing data remotely will only need access privileges for the tasks they need to perform. So, if they're checking their emails, they won't need to have full admin account privileges; precautions like this limit the chance of admin accounts becoming compromised. Additionally, multi-factor authentication (MFA) solutions can also help prevent attacks from compromised credentials or unauthorised users.

In order to enhance housing providers' cyber-maturity quickly as well as offering expert risk mitigation tactics and reporting capabilities, many will benefit from the insights of a vCISO (a virtual chief information security officer). Always on hand to share strategic insights, meet compliance requirements and manage cyber policies, employing a vCISO is a cost-effective way for housing providers to access invaluable cyber resources and expertise right off the bat.

*Rowan Troy is a senior cyber security consultant at Littlefish.*

**littlefish**  
managed IT services



# Office 365 for fire-safety compliance

An example of how to do it...

Craig Edwards, Director & Gary Watts, Director, Corporate Cover

*This article provides an overview of Microsoft Office 365 and describes how Microsoft Apps and SharePoint can support the golden thread of information required by the Fire Safety bill, notably fire-risk assessments, fire-door management and fire-safety logbooks. We will also look at the requirements of the draft 'Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 Fire Doors: Routine Checks & Information to Residents' and place them in the context of an Office 365 solution.*

## What is Office 365?

Office 365 is a subscription-based service and a suite of various apps and tools. It includes traditional software programmes such as Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook plus various online services and apps. The important aspect is that by using tools such as Office 365's Teams, SharePoint and PowerApps, a housing provider has complete control of its own data, workflows and compliance.

## What about specialists?

If a housing provider uses third-party fire-safety inspection and assessment companies, they will often want to use their own software. We believe that has many downsides:

- The housing provider won't own its own data;
- What happens to any future unsupported software;
- What happens if the housing provider changes supplier, and how do you retrieve your data?

In contrast, by using Office 365, you can switch contractors 'on' to your assessment and inspection PowerApps, not theirs.

## In-house checks

Simple recurring checks can also be undertaken in-house using PowerApps. All material fire-safety data is in one place and can be linked to the housing provider's own asset-management systems.

## Closing-out findings

Owning the apps and data workflows directly would enable housing providers' staff and/or external users to close-out findings and associate evidence of remedial actions. It would enable reports to be run using tools such as PowerBI, and Microsoft Outlook could be used to support workflows.

Using off-the-shelf Office applications has many advantages:

- Ownership of data – you meet the golden thread requirements because the data is in your own instance of Office 365;
- Most of your staff will have access to PowerApps using their existing Office 365 accounts (i.e. you're already paying for the licences);
- Reporting options include Word documents, Excel reports and HTML;
- Guest access to PowerApps;
- Information governance – it's Microsoft;
- You can align the data with your existing asset-management software;
- You don't have to use Azure (this can be expensive when handling images) – SharePoint has significant cost advantages.

## A case study – Fire doors: routine checks & information to residents

The easiest way to illustrate the use of Office 365 is to solve a forthcoming challenge. The Home Office has recently invited comment on its new draft guide, 'Fire Doors: Routine Checks & Information to Residents'.



Select Inspection Type

Please Select Inspection Types:

Asset Communal Door Inspection

Asset Front Door Inspection

Location

Select Map  
Ground Floor Plan

Tap or click to add a Map or Picture

Location	Rating	SM2 Sgt	Self-Closer Fitted	Self-Closer Activated	Gap	Stripes and Sealings	Hinges	Obstructions	Any other Damage	COMPL
Entrance Lobby 1	FD00	Sgt	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	
Entrance Lobby 2	FD00	Sgt	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	
Ground Floor Corridor 1	FD00	Sgt	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	

Inspection - G06

Inspection Details

Confirm The Following

There is no damage to, or defects in the door or frame that might affect the ability to resist the spread of fire or smoke  
e.g.  
• a split in the wood of a timber fire door  
• damage to any glazing in the door  
• warping of the door that affects its fit in its frame  
• etc.

Yes  No

There are no obvious defects in the hinges  
e.g.  
• missing or loose screws.

Yes  No

**DRAFT FIRE SAFETY (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2022**  
**FIRE DOORS: ROUTINE CHECKS AND INFORMATION TO RESIDENTS**  
**A SIMPLE GUIDE FOR RESPONSIBLE PERSONS**

- The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022**
  - The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 were placed on the statute book on 18 May 2022, but do not come into force until 23 January 2023. The Regulations implement many of the recommendations of the Phase 1 Report of the Public Inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire.
  - Responsible Persons (e.g. freeholders) and other persons having control over blocks of flats (e.g. managing agents) should ensure that they have taken appropriate steps to comply with the Regulations by 23 January 2023; any breach of the Regulations is a criminal offence if the breach places one or more relevant persons (e.g. residents, staff or visitors) at risk of death or serious injury in the event of fire.
- About this Guide**
  - This short Guide is intended to assist those with duties under the Fire Safety (England) Regulations to comply with Regulation 10. This Regulation makes requirements about fire doors in all buildings that contain two or more domestic premises and that contain common parts, through which residents would need to evacuate in a fire.

What we will do is set out how we would address the guide's requirements, aligned to specific sections of the regulations.

**Part 1 – Communication (reg #5 – information to residents)**

- A QR code is issued via a fire-safety information card given to residents.
- The QR code would be incorporated into the premises/building's fire action notices.
- Residents would be asked to keep the fire information card in their property, and if not available, use the QR code on the nearest fire action notice.

**Part 2 – Resident (reg #10 - reporting)**

Regulation 10 of the draft requirements requires that residents be given information to the effect that: fire doors be kept shut when not in use; residents or their guests should not tamper with self-closing devices; and residents should report any fault or damage immediately to the responsible person.

- A Microsoft Sway webpage could be prepared, accessible via a QR code on residents' fire safety information cards and fire action notices. This would contain guidance on the importance of fire doors,

building evacuation procedures, fire safety rules and so on.

- The Sway webpage would open and render on a mobile device.
- The webpage would contain an embedded Microsoft Form; the form would enable residents to report a non-conformity via their mobile device.
- The form would move the data to Excel online.
- Microsoft PowerAutomate would trigger an automated workflow in Outlook and move the data to a SharePoint site.
- Outlook would drive internal workflows to alert a member of staff to the reported concern.
- A PowerApp associated with a group calendar would support an inspection of the relevant fire door by a responsible person.
- The door could be inspected using a PowerApp.
- Corrective action could be recorded and closed out using a 'maintenance' PowerApp.
- Aggregated data across SharePoint sites could be rolled up and interrogated using PowerQuery exporting to Excel or PowerBI, with the output flows via PowerAutomate.

**Part 3 – Responsible person (reg #6 - routing checking of fire doors)**

- Responsible persons or carers in sheltered accommodation could be trained in basic fire door inspections using a PowerApp to report concerns.
- The PowerApp would record the geo-location and require photo evidence of the defective door.
- PowerAutomate would generate outputs with workflow to HTML reports.

*Gary Watts and Craig Edwards are directors of Corporate Cover.*



# A 21st-century approach to digital transformation

Alistair McLeod, Director, Gray Fox Consulting

*The recent political turmoil has brought into focus the debate on how to achieve sustainable economic growth, balancing fairness for individuals and provision for future generations without wrecking the planet – no easy task!*

Addressing these challenges isn't just the domain of politicians; it's also the responsibility of business leaders. We must build organisations that are socially responsible, sustainable and generate wealth for everyone. The problem is that most business strategies tend to take a narrow view – they focus on how to improve services and products while maintaining happy customers and consistent growth, but sustainability, diversity and equality are often only adjuncts to the wider aims.

## Doughnut economics

The work of Kate Raworth, from the University of Oxford, who has developed 'Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist', is a great source of inspiration. Her work hypothesises that it's possible to achieve economic growth without overshooting Earth's ecological ceiling or suppressing social mobility opportunities for everyone. The principles are inspired by the United Nations' sustainable development goals of food security, health, education, social and gender equality, energy and water.

As technology is a key enabler for growth, we decided to build some of these principles into our own approach to digital transformation. IT strategies have traditionally tended to focus on two dimensions: how the customer experience can be improved; and how the business can work more efficiently. This has spawned an entire industry

rooted in service design techniques and agile digital transformation, where value creation is focused on the customer experience. While this is a good approach, other factors are sometimes overlooked.

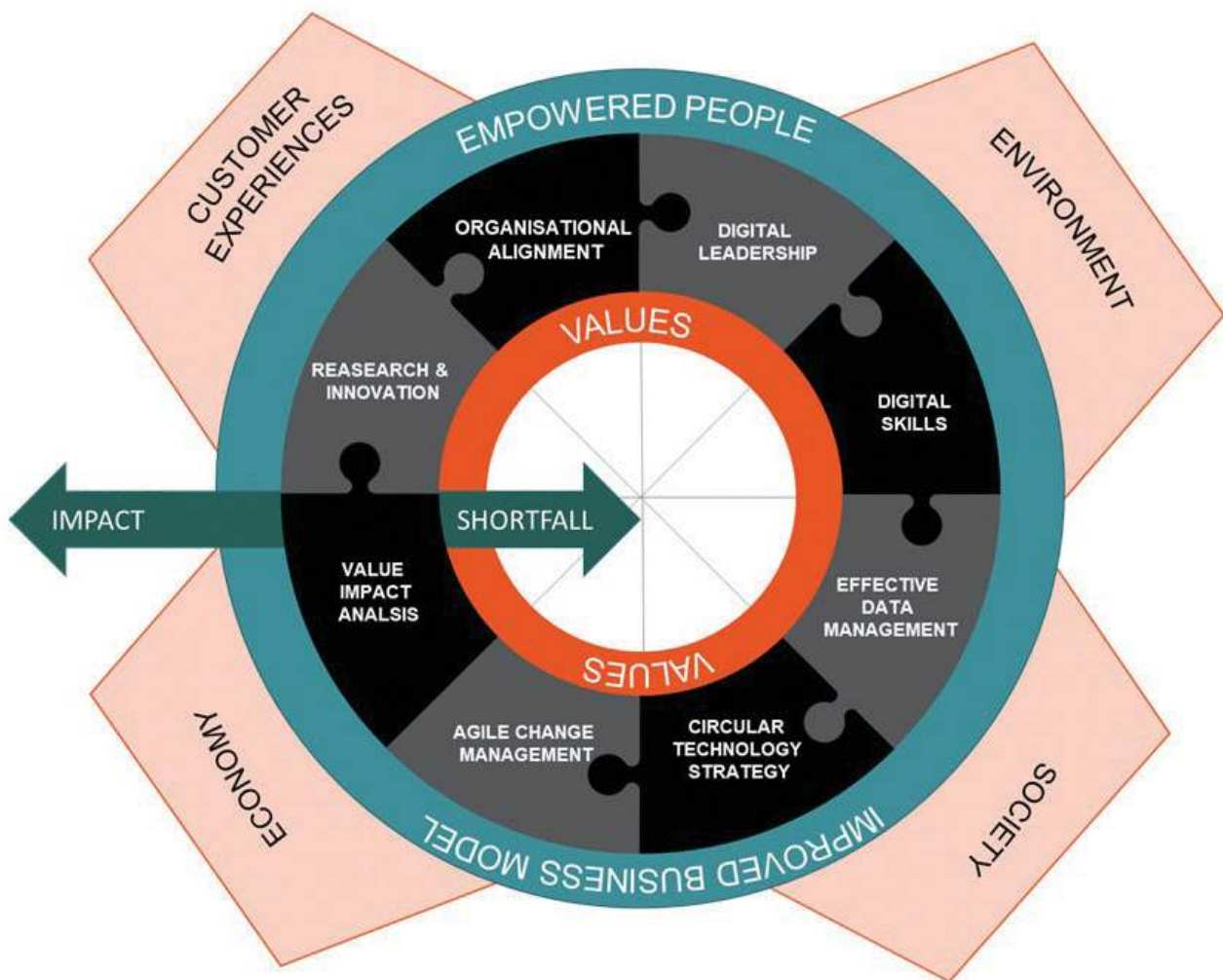
## Sustainable transformation

What does a sustainable digital transformation strategy look like? The figure above/opposite illustrates this. The basic principle is that your digital strategy seeks to support the organisation's objectives, but considers its impact on external factors, namely the customer experience, the environment, the sociological impact of your products and services and, of course, the contribution your organisation makes to economic growth.

At the boundaries are empowered people, who can make fast decisions enabled through data and technology, and the business model, which is efficient at the core, but flexible enough to adapt quickly. At the centre are your values; if you don't have values aligned with the social aims highlighted by the UN then this approach won't work.

The value drivers, in the middle, are the focus areas for the strategy. The principles of the value drivers are:

1. Aligning your digital strategy to your core objectives and making sure the business case for investment includes social and ecological goals.



2. Having advocacy from your senior leaders for digital investments and upholding the values of the business.
3. Developing the digital skills and mindset needed to support the business now and in future. This should include ongoing training to ensure people are using tools competently and efficiently.
4. Ensuring data is managed effectively and inexpensively and is available promptly to your people and customers. Efficient data flow and data management use less energy and enable faster decision-making.
5. Building a sustainable approach to the adoption and management of technology. It's key to ensure you adopt a circular economic approach that incorporates recycling, reusing and disposing of equipment and considers the carbon footprint of all digital assets.
6. Ensuring the business can adapt to change. Agile change can help businesses in maintaining a sustainable pace of change while leveraging the value of investments quickly.
7. Being clear on the value you are creating and measuring its impact over a greater period. It's the adage of 'what gets measured gets done'. If you are serious about making a difference, you should measure the impact.
8. Investing time in the research and development of new and emerging technologies. You want to make sure

the business proactively invests in innovation that will improve the business objectives and meet your social aims.

A shortfall in one or more of these drivers could have a detrimental effect on the impact you have on external factors. For example, data proliferation can lead to increased energy costs and expand your technology footprint; both can have a negative impact on the environment. It's important to stress that this is a collection of principles that can influence external factors and it doesn't negate the need for a sustainable business strategy. As I've already said, technology is just an enabler.

Finally, it's worth noting that across 150 countries, not a single country currently satisfies its citizens' basic needs while maintaining a globally sustainable level of resource use. As leaders, if we each make the smallest impact on our organisation's sustainability then it can go a long way towards ensuring we leave a positive legacy for future generations.

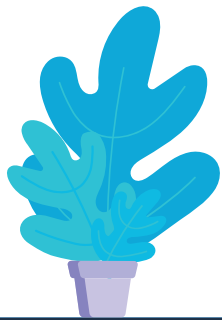
*Alistair McLeod is a director of Gray Fox Consulting.*



## The cyber-security jigsaw's missing piece –

# Managed detection & response

Jonathan Lee, Director of Public Sector Relations, Sophos



*Like most other organisations, you've probably spent money on cyber-security products in the hope of being better protected against today's complex threats. However, you may have realised that it's not just about buying tools but having the time and skills to use them, and you wouldn't be alone in thinking this. What is that missing piece of the jigsaw that would make your organisation more secure?*

In my previous articles, I wrote about how the threat landscape is now incredibly complex for housing providers (and others) to understand. Gone are the days when investing in superior endpoint solutions and keeping up-to-date with new virus identities was enough to avoid most attacks.

### Hands-on cyber-crime

In this new 'hands-on' era of cyber-crime, threat actors access organisations' IT systems by stealth, often using legitimate tools and tactics to move around networks undetected. By the time IT staff detect a breach, it's often too late to avoid severe disruption and loss of data. This is

especially worrying for smaller technology teams juggling many aspects of IT.

In the case of housing providers, implementing and supporting digital transformation initiatives is likely to occupy considerable staff time. And because cyber-security is now a 24/7/365 concern, it's unlikely that your staff want to be monitoring your network overnight or at weekends. These are the times when astute cyber-criminals, who may have been lying low in your network, often choose to unleash their attack – a bit like thieves waiting until you go on holiday to burgle your house. It's a big ask to expect over-stretched IT generalists to cope with complex cyber-security issues. As a consequence, housing providers of all sizes are increasingly turning to managed detection and response (MDR) services to bolster their IT teams.

### Neutralise threats

When you buy an MDR service, you are hiring the expertise of a remote team of cyber-security specialists to help you search for, analyse, monitor and neutralise threats that technology alone can't prevent. Instead of reacting to a breach, these teams are proactive in detecting malicious behaviour that could remain undetected and cause a disruptive, costly and reputation-damaging cyber-attack.

For example, at the time of writing, Clarion Housing's cyber-attack that began in June 2022 continues to attract negative media attention. Tenants report that they can't communicate with the organisation by telephone and Clarion's website says it is still restoring its systems.



### Technology agnostic

From Sophos's perspective, we can work with you to provide an MDR solution adapted to your needs, regardless of the technologies you've chosen for your endpoints, servers and firewalls. Our service now integrates seamlessly with your existing security environment, whether you're using a variety of solutions from different vendors or exclusively our own solutions.

Our skilled threat hunters can help you to find the real threats which need to be dealt with among all the noise because they're very familiar with cyber-criminals' tactics, techniques and procedures.

And threat notification isn't the end of the engagement; it's the starting point. Our team works with you to take action to resolve the issue by identifying the root causes. We do the legwork but you own the decisions; you control how and when potential incidents are escalated, what responses and actions (if any) you want us to take and who to include in communications.

### Staffing and resources

When considering whether to buy an MDR service like ours, you need to ask whether your organisation can employ sufficient skilled cyber-security staff to proactively monitor threats around the clock. One of our customers in Scotland said recently that our MDR solution, "saves us the expense of recruiting up to five new employees to take on this work. Sophos also frees up our IT teams to undertake more proactive tasks instead of being drawn into managing security challenges."

With Sophos MDR, you'll be in good hands. More organisations (over 12,000 and counting) trust Sophos for MDR than any other vendor, and we're rated 4.8/5 by Gartner's 'Peer Insights'. In addition, cyber-insurance companies now often require organisations to have numerous cyber-controls in place to issue policies; hiring an MDR service can help you tick all their boxes as well.

At Sophos, we can provide a bespoke MDR service for any housing provider's environment to deliver superior security outcomes and give you peace of mind. For more information about how we've worked with other housing providers, please contact our team at [publicsectoruksales@sophos.com](mailto:publicsectoruksales@sophos.com).

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

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# Digitalising retrofits with SHDF & HomeLink

Sam Collier, Sustainability & Ethics Lead, HomeLink (Aico)

*Housing Technology interviewed Sam Collier, sustainability and ethics lead at HomeLink (Aico), to find out about the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) and how the inclusion of digitisation can support decarbonisation.*

The SHDF is a £3.8bn fund for improving the energy efficiency of social homes in England. All applicable homes with an EPC rating of D or below are eligible for funding to enhance the rating to EPC-C. The latest round of funding offers £800m for housing providers to improve their housing stock.

## **SHDF's 'wave 2.1' was recently opened for applications; how important is this funding for the social housing sector?**

It's very important to housing providers as well as their tenants. Our homes produce at least a fifth of the nation's carbon emissions so we need to find ways to shrink our residential energy demand.

Until now, the energy performance of homes has been driven by minimum standards, with housing providers generally having to foot the bill. They've been given a target of achieving EPC-C across all their stock by 2030, with around a third of these homes still below this level. To retrofit around 1.5 million homes over the next eight years translates into 500 retrofits completed daily – that



underlines the scale of the challenge.

Other funds are available such as the Home Upgrade Grant, the Energy Company Obligation and the Sustainable Warmth Competition, and can all be used alongside the SHDF to improve social homes.

## **Beyond funding, what is holding back the decarbonisation of social homes?**

There are a host of challenges which the sector is working hard to overcome. A significant limitation at the moment is the under-skilled, under-developed, and under-supported retrofit sector and supply chain. These stakeholders need clear signals in terms of both policy and funding to give them the confidence to scale up, and one of the key



objectives of the SHDF is to support this growth. Another blocker is the lack of information we have about our properties, both in terms of their current condition and also in ensuring the improvement works have actually been effective.

Measured building performance provides in-use data on how properties are performing. This data can be used to identify the properties most in need of upgrades as well as measuring their performance over time to assess the effect of interventions.

#### How will the SHDF help to overcome this data challenge?

The latest round of the SHDF includes funding for digital tools to help with retrofit decision-making and monitoring. Two per cent of each bid can be assigned to digitisation, up to a total of £600k with matched funding.

This includes the use of sensors and monitoring platforms to collect and analyse real-world data for property assessment, monitoring and evaluation. Projects must also comply with PAS 2035, a specification for whole-house retrofits, which has specific requirements for internal condition monitoring, dependent on project outcomes.

#### How can HomeLink (Aico) help housing providers with their retrofits?

HomeLink environmental sensors, which have been developed specifically with housing providers in mind, enable the monitoring of temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide in their properties. This data is then used to produce compliance- and retrofit-specific insights around damp and mould, heat loss and excess heat/cold. These



are calculated across the entire connected portfolio, providing a rich source of information for targeting retrofit decisions and a method of tracking progress during the retrofit process.

We are already working with housing providers on SHDF 'wave 1' projects and we have been developing 'wave 2.1' bids with several others over recent months.

The SHDF not only enables housing providers to take advantage of digital tools to improve their data but also offers a platform for technology providers to develop their products to meet the needs of housing providers and their residents.

The final deadline for submitting SHDF bids is 18 November 2022, with successful projects starting in March 2023.

*Sam Collier is the sustainability and ethics lead for HomeLink (Aico).*



# Following the golden thread

*Housing Technology interviewed data experts from Aareon, Civica, FLS (Fast Lean Smart), Incline-IT, Mobyssoft, NEC Software Solutions, Riskhub and Socitm Advisory about how housing providers can implement a 'golden thread of data' within their extended operations.*

## What is a golden thread of data?

Aareon UK's solution manager, Jack McLean, said, "Critical core data that acts as a central source of the truth is paramount for any organisation in any sector. The golden thread of data is an uncompromised, singular dataset attributed to all buildings, people and operations from their dependent systems and processes. Without a golden thread of data, it becomes almost impossible to get a clear and concise picture or analysis of the viewpoint associated with the specific dataset, regardless of whether it's to get a 360-degree view of tenants or buildings."

Socitm Advisory's client services director for housing, Tim Cowland, said, "Good data, used well, provides a single version of the truth regarding an organisation and its customers. It means that every decision and every outcome can be linked back to the organisation's mission and values, and performance can be measured accurately. Data acts as a compass to help individuals, teams and leaders know they are heading for the same destination."

Mobyssoft's CTO, James Davison, said, "The whole idea of a 'golden thread' is really about the intelligent use of data because it can shine a light on hidden trends and answer many of an organisation's questions. Defining a golden thread is merely a case of identifying which strands of data are the most pertinent and valuable."

Jeremy Squire, UK managing director of FLS – Fast Lean Smart, said, "The real nuggets in the data are when wider information is held regarding, say, the repairs history and rent payments for a property, resulting in more complete pictures of tenants' end-to-end journeys. Growing numbers of housing providers are becoming fully data-



*A golden thread of data is an uncompromised, single dataset attributed to all buildings, people & operations from their dependent systems & processes.*

Jack McLean, Solution Manager, Aareon UK

driven, where technology can be used to manage their assets proactively, such as providing 'home MOTs', and helping to tackle the widely-publicised, post-pandemic backlogs."

## From building & construction data to all housing operations...

Trevor Hampton, director of Housing Solutions at NEC Software Solutions UK, said, "Golden threads should definitely go beyond building and construction data. Incorporating data to include who is occupying the property and how they are occupying it into the golden thread could raise the safety bar even higher. It would strengthen the chain and give housing providers the total visibility they need to make better safety decisions."

"You might have the most perfectly-maintained asset but if, for example, it is occupied by a frail tenant with dementia and they are in a block without an easy fire escape then we need to know that; the asset may be safe, but it might not be safe for a particular tenant."

Civica's client relationship manager, Alex Oldman, said, "To understand the building as-is, you need up-to-date, preferably real-time information, with the ability to act on that information. A more holistic view is that of the building as a wider system comprising the structure and fabric, its residents and the community who interact with the site."





"Tenant concerns must be taken on board, and this is where the building safety manager is vital to the overall 'golden thread' process. They have specific knowledge about the whole building system and can be flexible. Workflows will support 80 per cent of operations, but oversight is needed on the remaining 20 per cent."

Sarah Herbison, CEO of Riskhub, said, "We must remind ourselves that data means postcodes, door numbers and floor plans, and that the documents needed as part of your golden thread are individual accounts of the safety of the families living in your properties. This audit trail must be more than just a compliance checkbox; it's about raising the bar for the whole housing sector and ensuring tenants are sleeping safely in their beds."

Socitm Advisory's Cowland said, "The golden thread of well-managed data touches all parts of an organisation, and the government and the regulator are demanding we go beyond using data to understand how our buildings are working."



*Any IT system should offer a single source of the truth, but a single system won't hold all the information.*

Alex Oldman, Client Relationship Manager, Civica

"The forthcoming tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) mean housing providers will need to be able to easily access data to show how their services and staff are performing and how tenants feel about the homes and communities they live in. That can only happen with good data architectures, allowing us to capture, store and analyse information in the right way and enabling all of a housing provider's different teams to work with the same information."

Aareon's McLean said, "The golden thread shouldn't just be about the features, condition and maintenance of physical assets. It must also include the relationship with the customer, financial histories, complaints' handling, feedback and other considerations, giving housing staff a clear overview of all aspects of their tenants."



*Systems integration is the key to achieving golden threads of data.*

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

### Helping with business operations

Mobysoft's Davison said, "Housing providers have access to huge amounts of data about their assets and customers. However, the sheer volume of data can make it difficult to determine the potential value of specific datasets. By implementing a golden thread, they can join the dots for more reliable and informed insights, leading to better outcomes for tenants."

"For example, tenants' behaviour can inform housing providers about the optimal time to replace a boiler rather than after a set period. A young family of five will use more central heating and hot water than a single elderly resident, so measuring boiler usage is arguably a better metric than elapsed time when considering replacement lifecycles."

Andy McLaughlin, managing director of Incline-IT, said, "Following the Grenfell tragedy, housing providers would have needed access to information about the cladding used in their buildings because cladding was cited as the main cause of the rapid spread of flames. The use of a building information management (BIM) system would have helped housing providers to find this



*The biggest threats to achieving a golden thread are when employees don't disclose data or duplicate it.*

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

information faster because they would be able to access all information about their buildings and assets, including their manufacturing specifications. The team responsible for the physical assets would then be able to see all of the essential information in one place, enabling them to identify safety information quickly.

"Adding BIM references within a housing management system will enable housing providers to improve the monitoring and maintenance of their assets and therefore the safety of their tenants, make better decisions, streamline compliance, boost productivity and collaboration, and save money overall."

NEC's Hampton said, "Scheduled repairs and cyclical maintenance form part of every housing provider's operations. The golden thread provides the backbone because it contains all the information needed to drive the scheduling to guarantee the assets are safely maintained.



*How can housing providers function to the highest possible standard without clear insights from good data?*

Andy McLaughlin, Managing Director, Incline-IT

"For example, if a manufacturer issues an alert about concerns with a specific boiler, it's important that housing providers can act immediately to inspect, service and potentially recall them. Having a golden thread makes it easier to do this because housing providers can immediately pull up a list of all the properties with those particular boilers and arrange for emergency inspections and servicing."

Socitm Advisory's Cowland said, "Housing providers have traditionally used the data at their disposal to look backwards; we might look at performance data from the last week, quarter or year and then base decisions about how we adapt services from them.

"But data doesn't have to point backwards. By being smarter with the information we capture, we can look into the future, so that we're predicting and adapting to trends and issues rather than reacting to them."

### Improving tenants' lives

Aareon's McLean said, "With new and emerging legislation associated with tenant satisfaction, disrepair and building safety, it will be absolutely vital to collect, manage and use the right actionable data. That golden thread of data can be used to create complete views of housing providers' tenants and then as an efficient means of managing all aspects of an individual tenant's situation."

Civica's Oldman said, "Who doesn't expect their home to be safe? Tenants rightly demand easy access to clear information about their home. They need to know about emergency plans, they deserve to know how their home will be kept safe and they want to know what preventative measures are in place. A properly executed golden thread will accommodate tenants' needs, furnish them with the right information on initial occupation and then refresh that information over time."

FLS's Squire said, "A golden thread of data provides a single source of truth, enabling service delivery to be prioritised and personalised to tenants' needs. Repairs and maintenance operatives visiting a home won't just know everything about the property but also be aware of any specific needs of the tenant. The power of data combines tenants' behavioural patterns or the asset's performance with analytics to provide a holistic view of the tenancy or asset, enabling proactive maintenance or interventions."

Incline-IT's McLaughlin said, "How can housing providers support tenants or manage assets to the highest possible standard without the clear insights that come from good data? It is in-depth insights that open the door to greater tenant satisfaction. For example, a golden thread of data will help to make housing providers' repairs processes as effective as possible, reducing tenant health and safety concerns."

Riskhub's Herbison said, "A golden thread is only useful to tenants if that thread is stored and accessed in such a way that it can be used to for greater communication and transparency. Data needs to be democratised at a housing provider level so that the sector understands that data is everyone's responsibility, not just that of the IT team. And in turn, the ease of information transfer to tenants will have less friction; the dream is one click of a button that pulls it all together."



*Local solutions and working in silos are the main obstacles to achieving gold threads of data.*

James Davison, CTO, Mobysoft

### Data management requirements

Socitm Advisory's Cowland said, "We are each ultimately aiming to create a single version of the truth across our own organisations. We need systems and processes that are joined up and designed around the strategic needs of the organisation, not dictated by temporary trends and ad-hoc workarounds. Good data governance structures are absolutely vital and these need to be developed by skilled people who understand the process in collaboration with the data owners, alongside very clear housekeeping rules on how to manage data.

"Built into all of this is the absolute need for training and education right across an organisation. You can't have a golden thread of data if people don't understand why it's important and what that means for them individually."



*Data needs to be democratised so that the sector understands that data is everyone's responsibility.*

Sarah Herbison, CEO, Riskhub

NEC's Hampton said, "It's important to think beyond having a robust and secure database when considering the data management requirements for a golden thread – that should be a given. When we consider the data relating to tenants, there is a strong argument for building a level of automation and notification into the golden thread to bring it alive.

"How much automation, intelligence and AI is built in is what sets one golden thread from another. It turns the golden thread into an intelligent source of data with the capability to constantly check if safety and compliance requirements are being met and issue alerts if not. This is the golden thread at its most valuable because it enables housing providers to be proactive and preventative in their approaches."

Civica's Oldman said, "Data management is the biggest challenge, beginning with data quality. After all, if you have poor-quality data, you have bad information and can only make bad decisions. Data shouldn't be too specific – to have value, data should have multiple uses – but data must be unique because duplication frequently leads to data conflicts.

"This is when a 'golden key' comes into play, to uniquely identify the master record for all information, using technologies such as blockchain to ensure that data conflicts are avoided. In an ideal world, all information would be timestamped with an effective 'valid for' period."

FLS's Squire said, "The seamless, friction-free integration of software partners is one of the keys to good data management. The result is accurate, reliable and streamlined processes, leading to cost savings and core activities being able to be moved online, freeing up staff for more value-adding activities."

### Barriers to golden threads

NEC's Hampton said, "The main barrier is cultural rather than technological. Siloed working is still widespread, with not all employees understanding the benefits of sharing data across departments.

"The biggest threat to achieving a golden thread is when employees make duplicate copies or don't disclose data because this breaks the chain and compromises the overall integrity of the data; it is the exact opposite of what the golden thread concept is all about."

Mobysoft's Davison said, "Local solutions and working in silos, where information is not efficiently shared, are the two biggest obstacles to overcome when instigating a golden thread. Adopting a cloud-based central system, with open APIs for best-of-breed systems, is the key to achieving this."

### Application and system requirements

Civica's Oldman said, "Any IT system should offer a single source of the truth, although it's unrealistic to say that a single system will hold all the information; the data will be in numerous systems and in varied formats, including non-machine-readable formats such as PDF. The different systems should offer real-time information exchange, such as web service integration, in order to keep the information current and prevent duplication."

Aareon's McLean said, "You need access controls so the right people always have access to the right data wherever they are, sitting on a flexible iPaaS-based platform to allow data distribution into a central source of truth data."

FLS's Squire said, "Systems integration is the key to achieving golden threads of data. Integration provides transparency – removing the walls between datasets will greatly help housing providers' overall preparation for the forthcoming tenant satisfaction measures."

NEC's Hampton said, "Openness and the ability to collaborate are key IT application and system requirements for golden threads. In any golden thread, there are multiple stakeholders and suppliers so it can't operate with only one solution.

"A good database and a fully joined-up system are prerequisites. Having an open architecture platform that prevents supplier lock-in and enables collaboration so data can be shared more easily is the way forward."



*You can't have a golden thread of data if people don't understand why it's important.*

Tim Cowland, Client Services Director (Housing), Socitm Advisory

Mobysoft's Davison said, "A cloud infrastructure is the biggest enabler for golden threads, followed by the ability to retain structured and unstructured data in storage such as a data lake. The final piece is having the right business intelligence tools so that housing providers can make sense of their data."

*Housing Technology would like to thank Jack McLean (Aareon UK), Alex Oldman (Civica), Jeremy Squire (FLS – Fast Lean Smart), Andy McLaughlin (Incline-IT), James Davison (Mobysoft), Trevor Hampton (NEC Software Solutions UK), Sarah Herbison (Riskhub) and Tim Cowland (Socitm Advisory) for their comments and editorial contributions to this article.*



# Golden threads and joined-up governance

David Braziel, Director, Decision Time

*A joined-up approach to governance is essential for housing providers to achieve better operational performance and regulatory compliance.*

Most housing providers understand the importance of good governance and how it is necessary for them to operate. Every organisation is gathering increasing amounts of information about their goals, risks, actions and performance but they need a more joined-up approach to get the most from that data.

Most housing providers have the key ingredients of good governance but they need to connect it all in a more holistic way or risk being caught out by emerging threats, miss vital opportunities or fall short in their regulatory compliance.

### **The right focus**

At the centre of any governance framework should be your objectives, and everything should link back to them. For example, if you're spending time and energy managing risks that don't affect your objectives then you're focusing on the wrong things and you might be missing other threats and opportunities. Your objectives must also be well-defined and communicated clearly so that everyone understands them.

A layered set of objectives is essential but very difficult to manage using traditional centralised and disconnected tools. You must be able to track the thread through your data and this requires a different approach, using a more connected, modern and integrated set of tools.

### **Accountability culture**

By mapping connections and relationships across separate governance areas, performance can be improved, threats and opportunities controlled, and a culture of accountability and assurance embedded across the whole organisation. This is key to ensuring that governance and risk management support your operational resilience and that housing providers can continue to serve their tenants.

As in any regulated sector such as housing, there are well-defined external compliance requirements that must be met. These activities need to be scheduled, actioned, tracked and linked back to your risks and objectives to demonstrate assurance and compliance. Many quality and compliance models are moving to a risk-based approach, aiming to ensure that specific quality objectives link to risks and those risks link to appropriate managed responses.

While building a connected governance framework is not, in itself, complex or difficult to do, it does demand a move away from the isolated applications, spreadsheets, documents, folders and email chains that many housing providers still base their governance processes on. Moving to a more joined-up governance framework requires a modern, integrated governance tool.

### **Visual dashboards**

A well-designed, visual dashboard gives your board and senior management team a clear view of your risks, objectives and results from the highest level down to specific departments and teams. A good dashboard will let you see an overview of the current status, spot any warning signs or problems, and drill down into the details when needed, enabling the board to actively use the framework to underpin their decisions.

Engagement and collaboration is a crucial element to making this holistic approach work. Mapping a clear path between objectives, risks and actions fosters a greater sense of ownership between the board and the senior management team, especially those in the risk management function.

*David Braziel is a director of Decision Time.*

# Embracing agility for business change

Nick Hill, Director, Esuasive



*Most of us will be familiar with the situation where, in any business change project, the focus shifts from delivering the benefits on which the business case was built to figuring out how to implement the selected software. This is a perilous moment. When emphasis switches from thinking about desired outcomes to the nuts and bolts of managing suppliers, budgets, tasks and timelines, project teams can easily lose sight of what they are trying to achieve, often with disappointing results.*

This shift is to some extent an inevitable consequence of the way software solutions are selected, supplier contracts written and projects delivered. These factors can surreptitiously combine to commit projects to a fixed path, even when it becomes apparent that the original destination will be difficult to reach without applying more resources or committing to higher spend; or perhaps when it becomes clear, in the light of changing circumstances, that the project objectives should be revised.

The challenge is how to build sufficient flexibility into change programmes, supplier contracts and software delivery to ensure a successful outcome.

## Focus on value

Organisations generally have well-considered, long-term plans, with good instincts for how they will deliver value to stakeholders over time. However, in reality, strategy is realised through programmes and projects that are constrained by how much money the business is willing to commit, resource availability, competing priorities and risk appetite.

While there are tools available to manage an organisation's portfolio of business change programmes

and software projects, in practice they tend to focus on the management of risk by building a detailed picture of how solutions will be delivered, when they will be delivered and who is accountable for delivery. Conversely, the benefits often remain high-level, with insufficient attention paid to understanding exactly how the solution will create the desired outcomes and how success will be measured.

To avoid disappointing results in software projects, it therefore makes good sense to balance the focus given to defining what will be built, when it will be built, how much it will cost and who will build it, with an equal focus on how the value of desired outcomes will be realised.

The key is to spend time up-front determining how success will be measured in business terms, who will be accountable for realising the benefits, defining appropriate KPIs and targets and understanding the relationship between deliverables and benefits. We consistently see improvements in satisfaction with project outcomes when significant effort goes into removing ambiguity and having clearly-defined metrics and responsibilities in these areas.

## The problem with software contracts

Software selection often still relies on a procurement process that compares candidate suppliers or solutions against predefined criteria, a process designed to weed out solutions not compliant with specified requirements or to evaluate competence against a set of core capabilities. Understandably, selection is weighted towards suppliers and solutions that perform best in these tests.

Although this is the way software procurement has worked for decades, such contracts subtly and unintentionally move businesses away from focusing on desirable outcomes and towards managing implementation, from the strategic to the tactical. In this process, desired outcomes tend to take a back seat while the parties focus on agreeing what, when, who and how much. The primary concern becomes safeguarding commercial positions rather than how the customer's desired outcomes will be achieved and benefits realised.



Decoupling outcomes and benefits from delivery almost guarantees future tension between the customer (“I thought we would be able to do X”) and the supplier (“Y is the way the software works”). Regrettably, the customer often discovers that the contract described how Y will be delivered, not how capability X will be created.

This conventional approach makes it easy for packaged software suppliers to hide behind the limitations of the software in question. This is mainly down to the fact, prior demonstrations notwithstanding, that the first proper opportunity the customer has to truly understand how the software works is usually at the acceptance testing stage; by then, it is often too late to make changes.

### Embracing agility & empowering stakeholders

The answer lies in engaging with a supplier willing to embrace a more agile approach, to ensure that each project focuses on delivering desired business outcomes rather than just implementing software. This requires a different attitude to contracts on both sides so that the project team can maintain a strong focus on desired outcomes and delivering anticipated benefits, while being flexible on the delivery side, reversing the subtle priority-shift inherent in traditional procurement processes.

A more flexible contract, in combination with agile project delivery methods, puts the customer in the driving seat and ensures they retain the ability to direct the supplier towards delivering benefits rather than just software.

This can be transformative. In our experience, working with customers to understand how success will be measured and where accountability sits in the organisation is a very effective way of empowering and encouraging stakeholders to actively focus on prioritising desired outcomes rather than passively tracking the delivery of predefined (and not always well-specified) software functionality.

This outcomes-driven approach centres on putting working software in the hands of the customer early on, typically within days of project initiation. This allows customers to engage with the solution from the outset so they can gain experience of how the new system works and provide feedback. Provided the solution is built on an open platform, such as the Microsoft Dynamics 365 / Power Apps platform, working through customer feedback to optimise and align system functionality and business processes, data and KPIs is a simple, quick and low-cost process.

In this scenario, working together to achieve desired outcomes becomes second nature to the project team and a powerful catalyst for successful business transformation.

### Conclusion

In the real world, if the weather forecast says that it's going to be fine but you step out into the rain, you go back inside for an umbrella.

In the world of software projects, that behaviour has in the past often been seen as an admission of failure, with the customer's senior leadership team wanting to know what went wrong and why the plan is not being followed, despite the fact that the plan is obviously flawed.

Organisations need to be more flexible. An outcomes-focused engagement model that allows customers to avoid being constrained by contract terms, the limitations of packaged software and a rigid approach to delivery can create the flexibility that enables customers and partners to work together to focus on accelerating delivery and shortening time to business value.

*Nick Hill is a director of Esuasive.*



## Esuasive





# Big brother, dinosaurs and tech in housing



George Grant, CEO, Broadcaster & Publisher, Housing Technology

*I know someone who simply refuses to get a smartphone. She insists that she doesn't need such a device and is deaf to the argument that she is missing out on some very beneficial technology, not to mention the fact that many of our everyday transactions, such as banking and GPs' services, are migrating fast to apps.*

Curiously, she has no objection to owning a laptop and a smart TV, and she is a big fan of email, so she is not a complete dinosaur. Her stand against smartphones seems irrational but, if there is a reason, it seems to be based on a fear of 'big brother' in the guise of Google or Apple.

However, when it comes to the advance of technology, history shows that resistance is futile. If the benefits are clearly demonstrable, most people will adopt whatever new gadget or system is offered. The ones that don't work so well get binned; it's an evolutionary process.

And when it comes to corporations and organisations, who are (or should be) quick to identify any innovations that could streamline their processes, make efficiencies and save costs, new technologies have eager customers. Unlike 'ornery' humans, they do not put up barriers to progress.

Our sector has been quick to catch on to the fact that its unique challenges can be much more easily addressed by the application of specially developed suites of software and, increasingly, hardware units that are connected by the internet of things (IoT).

This latest development takes the management of properties and tenancies to a proactive level, the benefits of which are proving themselves rapidly. The installation within individual properties of sensors that can monitor temperature, humidity, smoke, leaks and physical movement can provide data to maintenance teams

without waiting for reports from tenants who may or may not realise there is a problem brewing.

The resulting data can be interrogated by artificial intelligence (AI) to see whether there is an evolving trend and, if so, automatically schedule action, which is a more efficient approach than reacting to random requests. It's no wonder this type of system is gaining ground fast.

Of course, it's not without its problems. The IoT allows devices, software and people to connect and communicate wherever they are, which means there's a lot more data to handle. Consequently, back-office servers will need beefing up and cyber-security must be constantly upgraded to address the new threats that will appear.

The continuous refinement of systems is what the march of technology is all about, and IoT is proving its value daily and in all sorts of ways. If there is a credible business case for resisting such technology in our sector, I would like to hear it.

There may well be someone out there who, like my luddite acquaintance, raises the spectre of 'big brother' but even so, this is a view to be considered, not dismissed out of hand.

Whenever we talk about AI, people want reassurance, understandably, that there is a human face to the system, someone who will mediate between the data on the spreadsheets and the people who are meant to benefit from it.

Data might be sorted algorithmically but individuals are not so predictably rational in their decisions. The only thing we can be sure of is that they all want a safe, secure, warm and dry home and that should be the point of the technology.

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



# It's all about your data...

Jon Gould, Head of Client Solutions, Illumar



## *The importance of accurate and reliable data is, once again, a key message from the Regulator of Social Housing's latest sector risk profile (SRP).*

The focus for 2022 has shifted slightly. When it comes to data integrity, the RSH isn't just looking for up-to-date information that gives assurance on stock safety or helps boards to retrofit homes, set rents or drive financial efficiencies.

### **Better data quality**

This year, the SRP has greater emphasis on the role good quality data plays in meeting tenants' needs and expectations. Put simply, the RSH wants housing providers to get better at using data to improve people's lives. With effect from April next year, the RSH will require housing providers to report against a number of new tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) around repairs, building safety, complaint handling, tenant engagement and responsible neighbourhood management.

Most housing providers and local authorities already collect large amounts of data on these areas but it's often spread across different systems and formats, with numerous workarounds and resources needed to transform the data into meaningful reports.

As a consequence, the detailed data needed to measure tenant satisfaction is, in many cases, of dubious consistency and completeness. Its provenance and journey can be hard to track because not enough work has been done on quality control.

### **Do you trust your data?**

This failure to maintain a clear, reliable data position can weaken board control and undermine decision-making. In light of new consumer regulation, it means that some housing providers can't be sure they are dealing well with complaints, for example, or that they have responded to repair requests quickly.

But there is another piece of the tenant experience puzzle missing when data management is poor. Opportunities to

meet the needs of residents and improve their wellbeing and health may be lost if a housing provider fails to either maintain the integrity of its data or to harness its potential.

A recurring theme from the 2021 social care reform white paper was the need to ensure that 'every decision about care is a decision about housing'. The link between home, health and happiness was repeated throughout these proposals and is backed up by research. We know that housing conditions have a big impact on mental and physical health.

We also know that around a quarter of this country's working-age disabled people and 16 per cent of people aged 65+ live in social housing. These figures underline how housing providers must do everything in their powers to identify, prevent and, where possible, meet the care and support needs of their residents.

During the pandemic, that's something many housing providers tried to do. Extensive resources went into trying to access the right data to make decisions and support residents. Some positive outcomes were achieved, but the rush to present data in new ways also highlighted gaping holes.

Today, the challenges around cost of living, energy and disrepairs mean that housing providers want data that gives them answers to fresh questions. The question is whether they can find these answers on their own. It might be time for a more collaborative approach, where housing providers join with others to build a 'big data' picture.

### **Data collaboration**

Let's take energy usage as an example. Every house in Great Britain has a UPRN – a unique data number that can be linked to its energy meter (among other things). Housing providers could collaborate with energy providers, combining different data sets to identify





residents at risk of fuel poverty. If a household is in arrears on fuel bills or has drastically cut energy consumption then housing officers could investigate and support.

This data could also be joined with EPC records and those homes with the lowest thermal efficiency, whose residents have the greatest need, could be prioritised for insulation works or renewable energy systems.

### Aggregation & collaboration

If housing providers aggregate their data, they can look at these results not just by street, by housing estate or even by housing provider. Instead, they can create a broader view, enabling them to procure work packages together, by region.

But this level of inter-organisational data aggregation can only be achieved if data formats and processes are consistent. Training to improve data 'hygiene' is crucial as well, as is the recruitment of staff with strong data competencies.

Nurturing the right culture around data is vital. The right information strategy, governance and infrastructure

must be in place, with leaders across the organisation communicating how fundamental good data management is to business operations.

### Automation & data tools

Automating the flow of information to provide standardised, auditable data in a unified manner is essential. This is about using the right IT tools to surface key information in an accurate way, so boards have confidence in the answers being presented and can make well-informed decisions.

We know that warm, dry, suitable homes give tenants a sense of security and belonging, linking them to their community and boosting independence and good health. If housing providers can unify the millions of data points they gather, this new 'single version of the truth' will improve tenants' wellbeing at scale.

*Jon Gould is the head of client solutions at Illumar.*

## Housing Technology's proptechs & IT start-ups

As regular readers of Housing Technology might know, every year we publish a round-up of some of the new proptech companies and IT start-ups that are focusing in full or in part on our sector.

If you know of or are considering using any new and interesting IT companies for any of your operations, could you please let us know and we'll add them to our 2023 review in the January 2023 edition of Housing Technology?

You can submit your suggested companies (anonymously, of course) at [housingtech.typeform.com/proptech2023](https://housingtech.typeform.com/proptech2023).

Our previous proptech and IT start-up reviews are available from [housing-technology.com/magazine/past-issues](https://www.housing-technology.com/magazine/past-issues) (see the January 2020, 2021 and 2022 editions).





# The business case for data

Colin Sales, CEO, 3C Consultants

*At a recent conference I was surprised to find that many people in the audience no longer liked using the term 'transformation'. Their justification was that too many transformation projects had failed so staff had become disillusioned and started to expect failure before a change programme had even begun.*

In my experience, poor data is one of the primary culprits and unless data management transformation precedes business transformation, transformation is doomed to fail or at the very least not achieve its true potential.

Within the social housing sector there are three primary reasons why this issue of better data management is not addressed:

1. Software, systems and patchworks of spreadsheets too often provide barriers to getting data under control and getting a single version of the truth.
2. Executive teams lack the skills and understanding to resolve these problems and, despite there being a strong feeling or even knowledge that there is a problem, the solution appears to be too much of a challenge so it doesn't get addressed.
3. There is a concern that in solving the problem, 'uncomfortable truths' may be discovered.

So why haven't we addressed these? You may find my conclusion controversial.

## The business case

Talk to any sales expert and they will tell you that the most powerful business case tends to address not organisational desires, but personal desires. You need to consider those you are trying to convince and ask, "what's in it for them?" and "what are the consequences if they don't conform?". This may appear odious but it should be central to creating the business case and indeed then achieving adoption across the entire organisation; ignore this advice at your peril!

On the basis that for change to succeed, it needs to be 'led from the top', how do we appeal to the personal desires of senior executives in order to convince them that best-practice data management must be a top priority if they want to achieve their objectives?

## What's in it for me?

Data quality and integrity is fundamental to the achievement of the hottest topics currently troubling boards and senior executives. These include:

- How do we put the customer at the heart of everything we do?
- The Social Housing White Paper 2020;
- The NHF Code of Governance 2020;
- Post-pandemic working;
- The new draft Safety Bill;
- Data/cyber security.

Good data, along with the insights it provides, is fundamental to all of these. It is crucial to protecting your income streams; creating efficiencies; empowering staff; measuring and demonstrating value; and improving the lives of your customers and colleagues; and importantly, making the job of management easier. Basing decisions on reliable information reduces mistakes and lessens workload and stress. Ask yourself if you would rather make an important decision on gut feel or reliable information that will stand the test of scrutiny? The answer should be simple.



### What are the consequences if I don't conform?

Poor data and insight can ruin reputations and careers. In the worst cases, it can cost lives and there should be no greater motivation to get things right than this. For me, the most stressful moments of my career have involved sitting around a boardroom table trying to get agreement on a decision that is substantiated by data that not only am I not confident in, but neither are those that I am trying to convince.

Poor data and insight causes wasted time, stress and inefficiency, leading to poor working conditions and substandard customer service. From the Regulator for Social Housing's perspective, a quick review of downgrade judgements will tell you that almost all downgrades are related to poor or inaccurate information. Indeed the Regulator has stated that, "good quality data forms the cornerstone on which all other assurance of compliance is based" (Consumer Regulation Review 2020, Para 2.7, Page 9).

The Regulator also states that, "we consider failure to manage data integrity to be indicative of a poor internal controls assurance framework. Failure to provide accurate and timely data that meets regulatory requirements will be reflected in the judgements" (Sector Risk Profile 2021, section 3.29). In short, senior executives need to address data integrity as a matter of urgency.

### Automated tools

One of the challenges I raised was that the solution often appears too much of a challenge so it simply doesn't get addressed. This may have been true a few years ago but a new breed of automated data management tools that never sleep and constantly alert you to data quality issues are now available. I believe their use will swiftly become commonplace rather than the exception.

Indeed, again quoting the Regulator, "Boards must have assurance that data integrity is appropriately managed, including ensuring adequate quality controls and robust

audit trails are in place, identifying critical data and information asset owners, establishing process maps, and implementing appropriate software solutions such as error detection" (Sector Risk Profile 2021, section 3.28).

### Data integrity

The business case for better data management is compelling. If a housing provider is serious about achieving its objectives, and if it is intent on looking after its customers and ensuring they are safe; then it must address data integrity.

Data management and the ability to make decisions based on reliable data and insights must be at the heart of strategic thinking. Those that practice this will flourish and demonstrate the highest levels of efficiency, not to mention be great places to work. These organisations should be able to provide immense social value, swiftly recognising and prioritising those that need their help most.

My thoughts on pitching the business case based on personal desires and insecurities may be controversial, but just ask yourself what motivates you to make a decision?

With access to the right information, you will be able to maximise what you achieve and minimise mistakes for the benefit of yourself and others. If you have ever wondered why you come to work in the morning, then this should be it.

*Colin Sales is the CEO of 3C Consultants.*

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