

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY™

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-  **Housing management**
-  **Finance management**
-  **Repairs & mobile working**
-  **Feature - Value for money & procurement**
-  **Customer management**
-  **Infrastructure**
-  **Feature - The internet of things in housing**
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Technology
2020
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2020 | CONFERENCE AND
EXECUTIVE FORUM

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blockchain
technology to
housing
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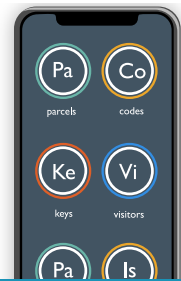
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AAREON SMART WORLD

... AND YOUR SUPPLIERS

STREAMLINE CONTRACTOR INTERACTIONS

Managing the relationship between landlords and housing providers and their business partners is key to efficiency.

After all, the business success of a housing company is directly dependent on trouble-free collaboration with tradespeople, utilities and other service providers. With the help of the digital solutions from the Aareon Smart World portfolio, social housing providers are able to coordinate the work of tradespeople efficiently and provide them, via mobile devices, with all the information they need to do their jobs.

For more information visit www.aareon.co.uk or contact your account manager.

SHARED INTELLIGENCE

One of the joys of the lack of direct competition in the social housing sector is the willingness and openness of IT teams within housing providers of all sizes to share their experiences of implementing different types of software and of providing the enabling technologies that underpin their wider organisation's business aspirations and support the introduction of new services or even new revenue streams.

That spirit of cooperation, information sharing and mutual understanding is central to our annual conferences. Those of you who have been to any of Housing Technology's previous conferences (see page 42) will know how important the informal networking and 'mingling' is to the value they gained from the event, as well as the plethora of more formal presentations and opportunity to meet all of the IT suppliers under one roof.

If you'd like to share your IT experiences, learn from your peers who have perhaps already just done what you're about to do and can pass on their informal advice, as well as pool your combined knowledge and expertise, we'd definitely encourage you have a

look at the **Housing Technology 2020 conference (4-5 March, Oxford)**. Full details at www.housing-technology.com/event/housing-technology-2020-conference.

CALLING FOR IT START-UPS IN HOUSING



The next edition of Housing Technology will feature a round-up and profiles of some of the newest and most exciting IT start-ups in the housing sector.

If you have come across or are aware of any interesting start-ups or have perhaps started working with some/any of them, we would really appreciate it if you could get in touch with us via email at alastair@housing-technology.com just with the start-up's name and website details and we'll endeavour to add them to our feature in the next issue (the same applies if you're an IT start-up yourself).

FORTHCOMING EVENTS



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY IN CONJUNCTION WITH AAREON - The Future of Customer Interaction

Breakfast Briefing: 28 November 2019
The Crystal, London

Register online:
www.housing-technology.com



HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2020
4-5 March 2020

The Doubletree by Hilton Oxford Belfry

www.housing-technology.com/events/htc20

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Tackling diverse housing challenges with IT

Jeff Hewitt, Executive Director Housing & Communities, Civica

How can housing providers better connect their staff and tenants to deliver better outcomes for their communities? Let's look at data management, compliance risk and digital agendas as three ways of doing so.



Creating a single view for better outcomes

Inconsistencies occur when data is not consolidated, affecting an organisation's ability to make informed decisions. By creating a single view of critical data, housing providers can gain a better understanding of tenants and their homes. For example, this single view, enabled by the cloud, supports tenants and streamlines their service experience by allowing housing providers to quickly understand factors such as the number of people on housing waiting lists and the value of rent arrears.

And having a single view of your data will also improve your internal processes. Having all of your data in one place, via a scalable platform using cloud-based software, allows social housing providers to understand the financial consequence of every decision to inform future customer actions. It also enables organisations to identify in real time where spending inefficiencies occur, meaning internal processes can be streamlined and decisions can be driven by live data, on the ground, on the spot. Furthermore, software such as Civica's cloud-based Cx housing and financial management system provides a real-time view on rent payments and arrears. This enables housing providers to work smarter through automation and streamlining processes.

Reduce costs by minimising compliance risk

Predictive technologies such as AI and robotic process automation can help organisations spot potential problems before they occur, reducing risk and supporting the regulatory compliance of data and assets. Implementing cloud software will give organisations a complete view of how much each property costs to maintain so they can effectively plan, manage and control assets' repair and maintenance budgets.

While many housing providers might not think they're in a position just yet to implement these predictive technologies, there are financial solutions that many providers use today that offer live management information, giving you the ability to study costs and profitability based on real-time data.

Unitas, the housing repairs and maintenance arm of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, recently integrated their repairs and maintenance software with Civica's cloud-based financial software to deliver real-time management information, streamline invoice management and quickly monitor and analyse their costs and profitability.

Driving a digital agenda

The rise in self-service in retail and banking has developed a consumer expectation of 24-hour contact and delivery at any location, a flexibility in the

variety of channels that people can use to interact with organisations.

These expectations have spilled over into the housing sector; tenants want to be able to contact and speak to their housing provider through the means and channels of their choice, and they expect instant responses. That's why housing providers need software that can help them deliver efficient, connected and responsive services to tenants, enabling them to self-serve at any time and through their preferred channel.

Technology is helping to expand the lines of communication across the board. For example, cloud software facilitates mobile working so that housing staff can work in their communities to securely share live information with tenants and partners while also encouraging a paperless agenda. For example, Prospect Community Housing has improved communications and increased channel shift, with 35 per cent of its tenants switching to self-service within three months.

Through access to a single view of data and greater insights into where money and time is spent, housing providers can overcome market challenges and deliver better outcomes for people and communities.

Jeff Hewitt is the executive director for housing and communities at Civica.



Bernicia goes live with new Aareon HMS

Bernicia Group has gone live with a completely new housing management system from Aareon, following its earlier merger with Four Housing Group and subsequent need for a single, up-to-date suite of software.

Dave Pickard, executive director of customer services, Bernicia, said, "Our overall aims were to acquire a new housing management system that would reduce the risk of operating with obsolete software and, ultimately, make it easier for our staff to work remotely and enable our customers to interact with us digitally.



Dave Pickard,
Executive Director
of Customer
Services,
Bernicia

"Our previous system was out of date, presented many risks, particularly in terms of the number of complex interfaces, and didn't support our ambition to increase our use of self-service digital channels nor support mobile working. Aareon QL will provide this and more, with additional increased security and compliance with GDPR."

Bernicia's new implementation went live in September 2019 with Aareon QL Housing, 1st Touch Core Mobile, EDRM and DRS.



Cheltenham Borough Homes completes large-scale Aareon project

Cheltenham Borough Homes has gone live with Aareon's QL Housing Management, Mobile, EDRM and DRS software packages. These will be followed very shortly by Aareon's 360 Customer Portal and 1st Touch Self-Service app.

Steve Slater, executive director of finances and resources, Cheltenham Borough Homes, said, "We had a clear idea of where we wanted to get to, and for me, the biggest point has been about the people involved. We knew this would be a long journey and that the project would struggle if we didn't get on with the people with whom we were working. The combined Aareon/CBH project team has worked as one company; there was never a blame culture and we all worked very well together.



"We are very excited about Aareon QL and 1st Touch Core Mobile and the resulting efficiencies and service improvements. And instead of everyone going back to their day jobs, we have kept on three people from the project team to deliver future improvements to Aareon QL."

Lou Foster, corporate project manager, Cheltenham Borough Homes, said, "We needed dedicated resources so we ran an internal recruitment drive for CBH staff to put themselves forward to be involved in the Aareon project, with each bringing their own skills from repairs, IT, housing, property and finance.

"Data is everything and is at the heart of this project. We can now use that data to make smarter decisions regarding our services, making our tenants' lives better – that's why we've done this."

4th & 5th March 2020

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BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE



COMMUNITY NETWORKING



IT STRATEGY

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Business intelligence is not predictive analytics...

Rebecca Jenkins, BI & Predictive Analytics Consultant, ROCC



Business intelligence (BI) and predictive analytics are common phrases you hear thrown around the office. People often think that predictive analytics are part of BI, but this isn't the case. Sometimes you might hear BI and predictive analytics used interchangeably when in reality they are very different tools. Most organisations are very data-driven these days, and if you are using a simple BI tool, you are just not using your data as much as you could be. In fact, BI allows you to only assess the tip of the iceberg of your data. In our office, we call predictive analytics 'BI 2.0' because they give you deeper insights from your data than BI.

What is business intelligence?

When people talk about BI, they are talking about the process that uses technology, applications, tools and various methods to collect and analyse a company's data. BI allows you to create reports and run queries against the collected data, and many BI tools will showcase this on dashboards with visual data such as charts or graphs. The analytics involved in BI are often described as 'predictive analytics' when in fact they are 'descriptive analytics'. Descriptive analytics is the analysis of historic data to see what has happened in the past.



Whether something has happened in the past week or the past ten years, a good BI tool would be able to give you these insights easily. Descriptive analytics may give you an answer to your business problems, but this does take more human input and guesswork. Business intelligence is a great place to start if you are just beginning to rely on data, but if you want a deep data-dive, you need to start implementing predictive analytics.

BI vs. predictive analytics

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

- Uses historic data to show what has happened in the past.
- Can use large amounts of data, but this data is limited to just historic data.
- It is reactive.
- With human input, guesswork, and time, predictions can be made.
- Examples of what information can be gathered: how many open jobs are in an area, number of no-access visits, invoice details.

PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS

- Analyses historic and current data to predict what is likely to happen in the future.
- Can use large amounts of data and uses machine learning to predict possible future outcomes.
- It is proactive.
- Predictions can be made with the click of a mouse.
- Examples of what information can be gathered: what causes a no-access visit and why, predicting which tenants are likely to fall into debt, whether a job is likely to be completed first time or require more work.

What are predictive analytics?

If they aren't BI, then what are predictive analytics? Predictive analytics are what comes after business intelligence and this is the tool that is going to make your data live up to its full potential. Predictive analytics are key to seeing what is likely to happen in your organisation. By using data mining, predictive modelling, machine learning and other analytical practices, users can identify future risks or even opportunities in their businesses. With the machine-learning aspect, this means that the algorithms will constantly change and assess and inform you of the most relevant points. This means that your data is no longer static; it will constantly be explored in different ways and the results will change depending on whether the system has discovered something new. Predictive analytics uses statistics, probability and forecasting to answer queries. It can even fill out missing data and tell you what the missing field is likely to be.

Why should you use predictive analytics?

Everyone has competitors and a great way to stay ahead is to know what is happening in your organisation. By accessing more data insights, your data will become more valuable and you will be able to make strategic, data-driven business decisions rather than basing them on intuitions. Predictive analytics are not only going to

answer your questions but also tell you why it has happened and what might happen next. You can use this information to your advantage and use it to improve areas of your business that you probably didn't even know needed improving. Predictive analytics are the way of the future and are becoming increasingly popular across all sectors.

It is true that BI tools will give you valid information and will give you insights about your business, but those insights will be limited to historic ones. The answers to most of our questions lie in the future and with predictive analytics we can get our answers in the present.

If you are interested in taking the first steps into predictive analytics, the best way to do this would be through a tool that combines both BI and predictive analytics. Do your research and look at all the available software, and make sure that the predictive analytics modules use machine learning to help forecast and predict potential future outcomes. A good predictive analytics tool will allow non-technical users to set up and use the software and provide answers with the click of a button.

Rebecca Jenkins is a business intelligence and predictive analytics consultant at ROCC.



A day in the life at Coastal Housing

Rhian Waygood, IT Business Partner Team Leader, Coastal Housing

I've worked at Coastal Housing for over seven years and over six of them I've spent in the IT department. Back in July this year, I was promoted to be team leader of our business partner team which had just been expanded to include two others – the 'team' had been just me for a while. I contacted Housing Technology to see if they'd be interested in an article about a newly-appointed female manager in IT and I'll also be doing a talk at the Housing Technology 2020 conference with my colleague Amy Kelly, our lead IT support analyst so if you enjoy this article, please come and have a listen, although our presentation will be slightly different to this as I'll explain later.

The idea for this article arose after I read an article on wisecampaign.org.uk about how only 16 per cent of IT professionals are female and how the number of female IT technicians has decreased from 19 per cent in 2017 to 17 per cent in 2018. I'm happy to say that I love my job, the work I do really excites me and the team I work with is brilliant.

I know that I'm lucky to work in a team which has a 50/50 gender split and we have a female director, but I just don't like that I have to feel I'm lucky. I'm hoping from this article that my passion for this role will shine through and it'll encourage the few females within the IT part of the housing sector to stay to further their careers and encourage others to join.

So, what do I actually do each day as a newly-appointed IT business partner team leader?

When I arrive in the office each morning, the first thing I do is make a cup of tea, search for a space to sit and retrieve my laptop from my locker. Last year we had an office refurbishment so instead of each having our own desk in our own department, we now work in the area most

suited to our needs at that time – project, team, quiet or drop-in.

I tend to start my day in the project area because we have stand-up desks there which I love, and it also allows my team and the rest of the organisation know that they can approach me – which they all do rather often. I have three meetings arranged today, one is a phone call with a consultant checking in on a project they are developing, the second is with our maintenance team about a new piece of software they've seen and the third is with Amy to finalise what we need to do for the Housing Technology 2020 conference and its looming presentation deadline.

After finishing my tea, I take a wander to find my team and check if they need anything from me and to discuss what their plans for the day are, normally answering questions from other staff as I make my way over to them. It's also usually around this time of day that I start to get hungry and consider eating my lunch even though I know I'll regret it later in the day.

As an IT team, we use the Asana project management tool to keep track of where we are with everything; it's great for a quick overview of what's happening in the other areas of IT and significantly cuts down on emails which can only be a good thing. It also frees up our team meetings from too many work updates and more about discussions around new ideas or problems that we need to sort out. So after a quick look through Asana and answering a few questions, it's time for a phone call with a consultant.

Happily everything is going to plan on this latest exciting development and it's on course to be finished by the deadline. I'm keeping it under wraps at the moment because I don't want to jinx it but I'll definitely talk about it in a future Housing Technology article. I update Asana with the latest conversations and inform the relevant people who need to know.

Amy and I get together to take a look at our talk for Housing Technology 2020 which will be about how the technology sector is starting to change with the increase of females taking up roles and how a stronger workplace can be gained from this. Before we can agree on a title, we come up with three questions:

1. What do we want the audience to learn from our presentation?
2. What do we want to make sure we say?
3. What do we want to make sure we don't say?

From these three questions, we come up with our title – "Can I speak to someone in IT please?" We're hoping we'll be able to entice as many of you as possible along to see us – we promise to keep our talk as entertaining and witty as we can!

The last item on my list is to have a chat with our maintenance team about a new piece of software that they've come across which checks and stores CP12s and electrical certificates. We use PanConnect to do our CP12s and are currently developing an electrical certificate task with them. This new piece of software would enhance what we already do and allow the gas and electrical team leaders more time to concentrate on the great work that they do. It's agreed that we'll write a business case and make a few enquires.

So that's it, I've had some lunch and a few more cups of tea in the middle of it all. A chat about holidays because it's my favourite topic to talk about and answered many questions in between what I've talked about here, from the simple, "Can Wrapp [our HMS] do this?" (most probably, yes), to the more complicated, "Can you tell me how many of my UC claimants have co-habitants under the age of 16?"

Rhian Waygood is the IT business partner team leader at Coastal Housing.



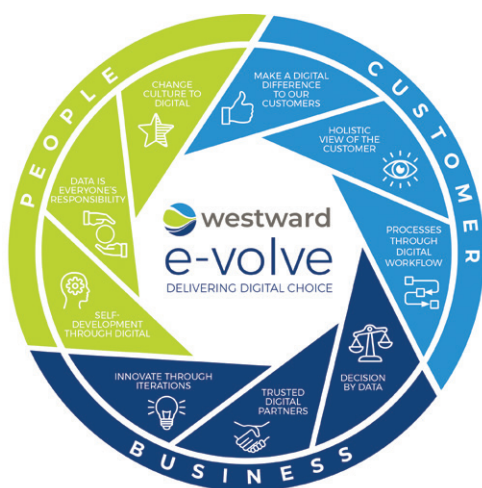
Go Westward for digital transformation

Barbara Shaw, Chief Executive, Westward Housing

Like many housing providers, Westward Housing has been reviewing and re-planning its digital transformation programme. We believe that digital transformation is a much wider concept than merely 'channel shift' or 'digital by default'; it should be all encompassing, applying digital to everything we do.

With the help of 3C Consultants, our digital journey began in 2018 when we created our two-stage 'e-volve' programme spanning 2019/20 and 2021/25, covering:

- Digital culture
- Project management approach (Agile)
- Services
- Operating module
- Staff
- Organisation
- Data



We see technology not as the outcome, but as the enabling factor of the programme and to support this, we developed nine key principles. These provide focus to the programme and are underpinned by a clear rationale and strategic statement. Our principles span three categories:

- Customers
- People (our workforce)
- Business

Customers

For our customers, it's about delivering a choice of high-quality services. If we provide a consistent approach to our customers, they will naturally migrate to choosing the easiest and most appropriate way of accessing our services. This can be via many routes, such as online, face-to-face, phone, automated telephony, social media and web chat. To ensure all of these provide a consistent approach, we need to ensure we have a holistic view of the customer and effective digital workflows.

People (our workforce)

Like any change, digital transformation can be daunting for staff, particularly because digital transformation carries with it the perceived double threat of our staff not understanding it and their fears of being replaced by it.

We want to take our staff with us on this exciting journey. When they understand this, embracing the difference technology can make to how they work and the services they can provide by having the right tools and access to the right data, they feel empowered and valued. In addition, what they can provide that technology can't, are the human traits; empathy, experience and the interpersonal skills which some of our customers require.

However, self-service is not just for our customers, it also applies to our staff to access the information they need and to self-serve internal services such as HR, finance and IT support using online services and apps on their smartphones.



Customer

- Making a Digital Difference to Our Customer
- Holistic View of the Customer
- Processes through Digital Workflow.



People (Workforce)

- Self-Development Through Digital
- Data is Everyone's Responsibility
- Changing Culture to Digital



Business

- Decision by Data
- Trusted Digital Partners
- Innovation Through Iterations

In addition, we have invested in e-learning software to help with staff development, and our plan over the next two or three years is to develop a Westward Housing e-academy. This will also help in developing the skills and requirements for the jobs of the future as our business evolves.

Business

Image: westward_enterprise

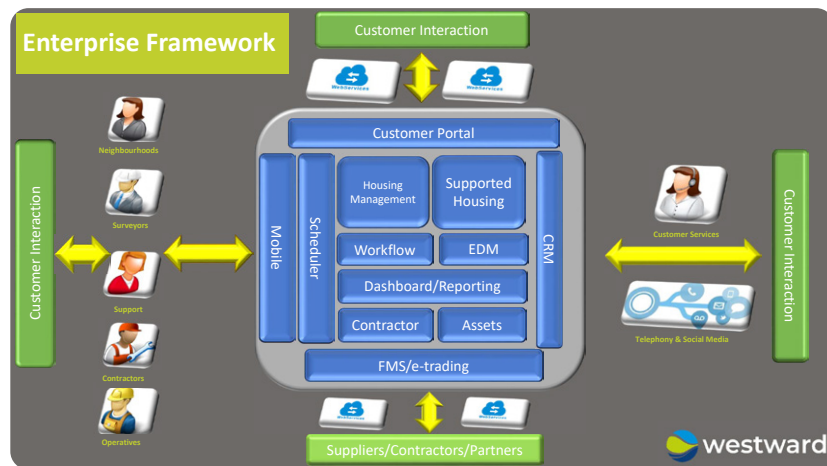
In terms of the underlying technology, this wasn't about 'out with the old and in with the new'. It was about consolidating what we had and investing in what we need to develop our enterprise framework.

To do this, we needed to review our existing systems and, more importantly, our suppliers – our eighth principle is 'trusted digital partners'. Capita is Westward Housing's largest IT provider with its Open Housing, Open Accounts and Total Mobile software. As part of the programme initiation stage, we needed to consider whether these systems would be suitable in future and, perhaps more importantly, whether Capita could be a trusted digital partner.

For some people, the obvious answer would be to go to the market through a tender or a soft market test. However, as

Go Westward for digital transformation

Continued from previous page



our relationship with Capita was already tenable, we decided to give them the opportunity to prove their worth in terms of their systems, services and client engagement.

Many people in the housing sector will have, at one time or another, experienced

of these providers have rested on their laurels for too long and are now being challenged by the likes of Microsoft Dynamics and other disruptive influences. However, we didn't want to tender for and implement new systems without giving Capita this chance. Therefore, over

poor services and systems from some of the sector's main IT suppliers. At times, it can often feel like the "tail's wagging the dog" – many

the past eight months we have been engaging with Capita at every level and have completed a full valuation of their new Capita One offering, which from the feedback from staff has been very positive. However, for me it was about creating a new relationship, which was built on trust and sharing of our vision and their development road map.

We have now signed a new partnership contract with Capita, the first of its kind, to help us deliver our enterprise framework for digital transformation. Working with 3C Consultants, in the form of Mick Capern, their programme manager assigned to us, I believe we have the right components to make a digital difference to our customers, staff and business in an ever-evolving world.

Barbara Shaw is the chief executive of Westward Housing.

Homes for Haringey to save £1 million with Northgate



Homes for Haringey

Homes for Haringey has bought a new housing management system from Northgate Public Services to help it revamp its housing services and reduce costs by £1 million over the next seven years.

Pete Davey, head of IT, Homes for Haringey, said, "Northgate Housing will increase our efficiency so we can spend more time with tenants – you can't overestimate the positive impact and the increased trust you gain when customers can see staff dealing with their issues in real time."

The new system will allow the housing provider to measure staff workloads and prioritise cases that need an urgent response. Homes for Haringey also plans to use the software to measure the social value of what they do by recording whether they have helped a tenant back into education, training or employment

or preventing anti-social behaviour by running youth diversion activities.

Davey said, "A key requirement was to find an HMS that wouldn't need a great deal of time to set up or require lots of training. Many systems come with huge training overheads or massive user manuals that staff don't have time to read. Northgate's system is intuitive and doesn't need lots of training, making it a huge plus for us."

Roger Birkinshaw, housing director, Northgate Public Services, said, "Housing management goes beyond bricks and mortar; it's about forming a complete picture of individuals and having a system which allows housing staff to spend more time helping their tenants. The only way to do this is to release people from their daily routine tasks and give them the time to offer premium support to their communities."

Bro Myrddin Housing goes mobile with PanConnect

Bro Myrddin Housing is set to mobilise its staff with Housing Insight's PanConnect software.

Samantha Fell, operations manager, Bro Myrddin, said, "PanConnect links directly into our CRM system and uses

Microsoft Azure in line with our 'cloud first' approach. The initial set-up of the PanConnect app has been very speedy and effortless, with regular communications and updates from our assigned project lead at Housing Insight.

"PanConnect has the particular

functionalities that we need in order to introduce our new agile way of working with our staff. For example, given that we're based in West Wales and many of our tenants and housing are in remote areas, the app has the flexibility to work both on- and offline."

Uncertainty and opportunity

Chris Cliffe, Director, CJC Procurement



I'm sure I don't need to set out the political and economic issues we currently operate within. I certainly have no intention of commenting on them, except to highlight that uncertainty seems to be everywhere. In an uncertain world, certainty is exceptionally valuable and there are opportunities here.

One of those opportunities is to review your existing software portfolio and assess your relationships with software vendors. In my experience, the social housing sector has long-standing relationships with key software providers to the sector. Many of these relationships still operate on an annual renewal basis and on old terms and conditions dating back to original investments many years ago. I suspect that there are those among you who are also keen to not rock any boats here in case 'procurement' demands a lengthy procurement process.

I won't mention OJEU here, but I am thinking about this from a supplier relationship management perspective. Software suppliers are as uncertain as any other supplier and might value an

opportunity to shore up their customer base in order to gain some certainty over the short to medium term. I suggest that there is quite likely to be value to both parties in considering your positions with your software suppliers. If you consider that your HMS provider is a critical supplier to your business, then perhaps this is a good moment to reflect that in a commercial agreement and support them through commitment; in my experience, certainty of your commitment as a customer is likely to be rewarded financially or via other benefits.

I also know that many housing providers transact their software licences through resellers and consider that they are getting good value via that channel. While there are some excellent resellers, there is no substitute for a direct relationship with the software vendor itself. Even software giants who trade their licences via partners are open to a direct relationship and are quite often prepared to support their partners in agreeing terms or additional value, such as social value, roadmap and/or strategy sessions, executive-level engagement or purely financial terms.

I've discussed that 'relationships really matter' many times before. And at this time, when the balance of power is arguably more skewed to the customer who controls certainty with their suppliers,

I would encourage all CIOs, IT directors and finance executives to consider taking action now to ensure that their IT supplier relationships are right and that both parties have suitable terms based on appropriate levels of certainty; all very valuable commodities in this uncertain world. Some final tips to help you gain from the current economic and political uncertainty:

- If you need help, reach out to your procurement teams and ask them for their support.
- Use portfolio analysis to consider the relationships you should be targeting in consideration of your organisation and IT strategies.
- Develop a priority action plan and invest the time into your key IT supplier relationships.
- Identify the certainty you need, and therefore the certainty you can offer, and make sure the value of it is recognised by your IT supplier(s).

Chris Cliffe is a director of CJC Procurement.

Kirona rebrands as Advanced

Kirona has rebranded itself as Advanced following its acquisition in April 2019.

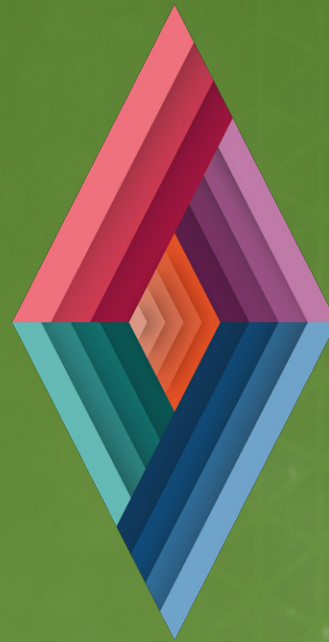
Nathan Ollier, general manager for field services, Advanced, said, "We have made great progress in moving the Kirona business into Advanced over the past few months. We can now mark the conclusion of the integration activity with Kirona adopting the Advanced brand."

Amanda Grant, group product strategy director, Advanced, said, "We will continue to develop and support the solutions that Kirona is known for including Dynamic Resource Scheduler (DRS), Job Manager as well as the recently-launched work management system, Work Hub."

Universal Credit

Increasing your Rent Arrears?

Let's talk
Effective Forecast,
Management &
Payment Recovery



Following Housing Technology's successful Rent Arrears webinar

We are showcasing our solutions to demonstrate exactly how you can use your existing data to identify tenants at risk of falling into arrears before it happens.

We can build-in automated and targeted digital communications to remind and request rent payment, with easy payment links for instant rent collections.

Solutions Demonstration:
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CASTLETON



A bird's eye view of the future

Paul Harrison, Managing Director, Integrator Drone Services

Drone surveying is the latest technology to empower stock condition assessments and support both surveyors and asset managers in their day-to-day work.

Scaffolding, ladders, cherry pickers – these are all bits of kit which instil fear into the minds of health and safety managers. But they're necessary pieces of equipment for completing full maintenance and repair schedules on buildings and property portfolios, or are they? What if you could assess the state of a property's roof from the comfort of your own desk? Drone surveying is arguably the most exciting, efficient and effective technology to hit the housing sector this decade.

How could you integrate drone technology into your day-to-day work?



Roof inspections

Drone photography and videography is the safest and most cost-effective way to inspect the condition of a property or building's roof. The latest drones use high-definition 4K cameras to provide clear and detailed, bird's eye view photographs and enable them to pin-point specific areas in need of repair. They can spot cracked and missing tiles, broken or clogged guttering, damaged chimneys, disintegrating slates and storm damage. And with excellent

zoom qualities, they can reach areas which are often otherwise inaccessible.

When these photographs are combined with aerial measurements, you can not only see the problem but also know exactly where it is. That means, for example, if you do need scaffolding to fix the damage, it only needs to be erected in a small area, saving you more money and time.

Thermal surveying

But it's not only photographic cameras that can be carried by a drone. You can also attach thermal-imaging cameras in order to reveal insulation deficiencies, damp and water ingress, air leakage and electrical defects. The cutting-edge technology provides critical insights into areas of damage and energy inefficiencies within roofs and high walls to detect even the most subtle inefficiencies or indications of moisture intrusion. Combined with a handheld thermal camera, the two can provide an incredibly in-depth survey of an entire building, providing up-to-date, practical and constructive data to work with.

3D modelling

A 3D model of a property provides a powerful marketing tool. They are stunning to look at and incredibly revealing, giving visitors or prospective buyers a greater understanding of a site as well as informing decision-making and helping to visualise any changes and improvements.

Our top tips when thinking about employing a drone pilot:

Is your drone pilot fully qualified and insured?

Your drone survey process should be managed from start to finish, following strict and detailed planning and preparation guidelines which ensure everything your pilot does adheres to current legal requirements, while also maintaining the privacy and safety of your clients. Look for the PFCO (Permission for Commercial Operations) qualification and the CAA (Civil Aviation Authority) certification before employing anyone. And

always ask for proof of insurance to ensure the company you use is covered for any eventuality.

Understand the process

Drone surveying is more than just flying a drone. Pilots must perform a number of pre-flight surveys and assessments to ensure that where and when they are flying is safe, legal and ethical. This needs to be done both before the flight day and on the day itself. Using a drone company enables you to handover this process and reduce your administrative load.



Whether the weather

Rain and snow can stop play when it comes to drone surveying. Your drone pilot should work with you to assess long-range weather conditions and attempt to pick a day when there is more certainty over weather conditions. But you will have to remain flexible and know that the flight day could change at the last minute, particularly if there are high winds. Any drone pilot will understand this and work to a flexible schedule to enable your survey to be done as quickly as possible, providing new dates and being as accommodating as possible to your schedules.

A bird's eye view on the future

Continued from previous page

Alert property owners

We have all heard the negative news surrounding drones. They can cause huge problems, particularly close to airports, and therefore people are wary of them. The right drone company will know exactly whose permission you will need in order to fly legally. Therefore make sure whoever

you choose for your drone survey works with you to ensure, no matter how many households you look after, everyone is kept informed and stays comfortable about your decision to use drone technology.

Look for expertise in housing

A lot of people have turned to drone flying

as a quick way to make money. Look for a drone pilot with experience and expertise in housing to ensure they understand your requirements and needs.

Paul Harrison is the managing director of Integrator Drone Services.



WCH cuts arrears with Orchard Income Analytics

Having used Orchard software for over a decade, Watford Community Housing is now also using Orchard Income Analytics to manage its tenants' rent arrears.

WCH's previous BI platform for managing arrears didn't integrate with Orchard Housing so that income officers had to constantly switch between different applications to get the data they needed to manage their caseloads. They also struggled because their existing software didn't update frequently enough, causing them to unnecessarily follow up with tenants who had already made payments.

WCH also wanted to streamline its approach to contacting tenants, particularly those who were transitioning to universal credit, so that any new platform should make it easier for WCH's income officers to contact tenants via a range of different contact methods, particularly text messaging, which at that point was only possible via a cumbersome manual process.

WCH chose Income Analytics due to its ability to integrate seamlessly with its existing Orchard HMS, removing the need to switch between applications all the time. Daily data updates within Income Analytics also means that the income officers are now working with the latest revenue data, saving them from inadvertently chasing payments which have already been made.

Mike McDonald, income and tenancy support manager, Watford Community Housing, said, "Income Analytics gives us a current list of tenants we need to look at, and ranks them with a risk rating so we know which are the highest value case. In our previous solution, we didn't have daily processing so the cases our income officers were looking at were often out of date."

WCH can now communicate more easily with ITS tenants, reducing the time it takes to get in contact with the high-risk cases. By allowing income officers to easily communicate with



tenants via text messages, the team has noticed significant improvements in engagement.

McDonald said, "We've found tenants are quick to respond to a text message, and this seems to be their preferred method of receiving communications. This saves us money compared with the cost of sending a letter and reduces the time to engage with tenants and resolve any issues they may be facing."

Income Analytics' predictive analytics makes it easy to prioritise WCH's highest impact cases, while the customisable case management options have enabled the income team to quickly adapt the software to fit their working processes.

Romana Lawson, senior income officer, Watford Community Housing, said, "It was very quick for us to start using Income Analytics. Training only took half a day, so as a busy team we were amazed at how quickly we could start using the programme."



Why you need a digital system of record

Matt Hodges-Long, CEO & Co-Founder, TrackMyRisks

The Hackitt report and recent Grenfell Inquiry report have given some clarity and direction to the housing sector regarding fire and life safety. However, the findings of these reports, while perhaps revelatory to non-housing sector readers, will be a reflection of business-as-usual for most people reading this article.

It is my strong belief that technology will play a large part in fixing the endemic fire and life safety issues within the housing sector. Furthermore, technology will be the 'glue' that brings together all of the stakeholders in the delivery of safe and secure housing.

What's wrong with Hackitt's golden thread?

The Hackitt report talks at length about the establishment of a 'golden thread' of building information created from detailed BIM models and offering full data portability between design, construction and management.

I fully endorse the idea of a golden thread but have significant short- to medium-term concerns about its viability as a concept:

1. The delivery of an effective golden thread, as outlined in the Hackitt report, will take years to achieve. The need to

substantively raise fire and life safety standards is long overdue. Residents should not be made to wait any longer.

2. The golden thread could be achievable in new-builds but this overlooks the 10,000+ legacy high-rise residential buildings (HRRB) that need to be more effectively regulated.
3. The technology underpinning the golden thread is likely to be complex, niche and expensive. The immediate focus should be on low-cost solutions that are readily accessible and affordable.
4. Detailed modelling does very little to engage and reassure residents that their homes are safe. Clearly evidenced policies, procedures and maintenance achieve this aim.

There is a long overdue need to improve the quality, availability, effectiveness and communication of fire and life safety information across HRRBs. Multiple stakeholders, including housing providers, managing agents, maintenance companies, residents' associations, emergency services and regulators need to be kept informed and in sync regarding fire and life safety.

How big is the problem with information sharing?

For the purposes of this article, let's look at some of the information-sharing issues identified by the Grenfell Inquiry that could and should have been addressed:

PROBLEM (as per Grenfell Inquiry report)

- There was no contingency plan for the evacuation of Grenfell Tower.
- Although the London Fire Brigade (LFB) purports to maintain an operational risk database (ORD) for buildings in London and has a risk assessment policy (PN800) accessible by all operational firefighters at an incident, the entry on the ORD for Grenfell Tower contained almost no information of any use to an incident commander called to a fire.
- Such information as was contained in the ORD was many years out of date and did not reflect the changes made by the refurbishment.
- The TMO had its own emergency plan, but it was not activated and was, in any case, 15 years out of date.
- The delay in obtaining plans of the building, which were not on site, not on the LFB's ORD and not available to the LFB until around 08.00hrs.

SOLUTION

- The Fire Emergency Evacuation Plan (FEPP) should have been in place as part of compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. This document and its associated renewal/expiry date should be held in a digital format.
- As Grenfell was deemed to be high risk and included in the LFB operational risk database, the associated digital assets should have been subject to data-quality audits. Deficiencies should have been further identified through operational training and activity/inactivity measurement of the ORD.
- Digital assets should be date-stamped on upload to the ORD and formal reviews should be triggered based on agreed maximum (backstop) dates.
- Emergency plans should be held digitally, securely shared with stakeholders and subject to internal/external audits. It's apparent that the TMO didn't have a process for the effective management of documentation.
- Digital assets should be shared with stakeholders on an enduring basis. Relying on reactive sharing in the middle of an emergency is dangerous (as evidenced by this eight-hour delay).

Why you need a digital system of record

Continued from previous page

How do we solve this problem?

The Grenfell Inquiry clearly identifies multiple failings regarding record-keeping, management and communication within and between stakeholders. At some point, yet to be determined, the new Building Safety Regulator (led by Dame Judith Hackitt) will be launched. At that point, all HRRB landlords will be subject to a far higher degree of regulatory oversight than they experience right now.

“There really is no reason to wait for the regulation before the behaviour change starts to happen.”

Dame Judith Hackitt

The simple and effective solution, in my view, is to establish a digital system of record (DSoR) for every HRRB. Think of the DSoR as a curated and evidential data management system built around a building. The DSoR should be cloud-based, with built-in expiry date tracking, version control, secure granular permissions for stakeholders and all activity within the DSoR evidentially logged and tracked.



Once the basic DSoR is embedded, HRRB landlords should have the opportunity to interface with other digital systems and build toward Hackitt's 'golden thread' vision of the future.

The time to act on fire and life safety is now. The good news is that a DSoR solution is ready and in operation now with over 4,000 DSoRs deployed (see trackmyrisks.com) – we have even offered this solution to the government's Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government in the form of the Building Safety Register.

Matt Hodges-Long is the CEO & co-founder of TrackMyRisks.

Rotherham Council collects £1m arrears with RentSense

Faced with a rental income collection rate of 96 per cent, Rotherham Council is now using Mobysoft's RentSense software to prioritise its arrears case.

Paul Elliot, business and commercial manager, Rotherham Council, said, "Before choosing RentSense, we completed a thorough review of our income collection processes. We benchmarked our performance against 72 other organisations and found we were in the lower quartile."

Nicholas Beasley, the council's income recovery team leader, said, "I hadn't used RentSense before, but straight away I could see the value. When you start to use RentSense, the information and detail it gives you is invaluable, and the reporting identifies where to allocate your time and resources whereas before there was a lack of prioritisation."

The council is also working towards switching tenants away from direct debits to recurring card payments. Beasley said, "When a direct debit bounces, it can cost the tenant around a week's rent in additional charges, whereas if a card payment is declined there's no charge. Furthermore, RentSense flags any declined payments immediately so we can speak to the tenant to help them avoid any potential budget issues or disruption to their tenancy."

Elliot said, "We originally expected to recoup our investment in RentSense within three years but our investment has already been paid back twice during the first twelve months and we are now upper quartile performers when compared with our peers."

"Our target collection rate for 2018/19 was 98.3 per cent but we actually achieved 99.7 per cent, meaning that we collected over £1.1 million more in rent than budgeted and also reduced our bad debt provision by around £500,000."

Onward Homes selects RentSense

Onward Homes has selected Mobysoft's RentSense software to help its income



teams manage their arrears workloads and support tenants in their transition to universal credit.

Robert Davies, income and financial inclusion manager, Onward Homes, said, "We decided to buy RentSense due to an increase in our rent arrears due to the impact of welfare reform and the expansion of universal credit."

"We spoke to a number of RentSense users who provided positive testimonies and data to illustrate the impact they experienced when RentSense was used to combat arrears. What's more, the early analysis work that Mobysoft did with us clearly demonstrated the effect that it will have on our performance and capacity."

Coadjute brings blockchain technology to housing



Bromford, L&Q, Notting Hill Genesis and Origin Housing are working in conjunction with Coadjute, a blockchain-style platform for decentralised workflow and data sharing, to improve safety, quality and accountability in housing projects.

The group's Quality Chain project is currently at a proof-of-concept stage, with the aim of creating a market-ready product by March 2020.

Based on R3's Corda distributed-ledger technology, the Coadjute platform is designed to unify the various organisations involved in the development of housing projects from inception through to construction and occupation. Quality Chain captures and tracks a single version of key decisions, documentation and information, creating a 'golden thread' of accountability and transparency identified as necessary by the Hackitt Report.

At the moment, each of the parties involved in the construction and occupation of houses, such as architects, developers, clients, subcontractors and housing providers, operates their own separate systems, with gaps in information, inefficiencies and fragmented communication being the inevitable results. Quality Chain, a decentralised system based on blockchain technology, removes these problems by enabling each party to share a single source of the truth as a foundation for trust while also retaining their own technology and data, the latter being a key regulatory requirement.

Matthew Gardiner, head of ideation, L&Q, said, "Quality Chain provides a method for all organisations involved in housing development to come to an agreement on any obligation, statement of work, deliverable or document, providing a 'single source of the truth' as the basis for improving workflows and efficiency."



Quality Chain is intended to provide an immutable history of decisions made throughout a project and the provenance of all documents and specifications iterated and agreed in the process. Not only is this expected to reduce costs for the different organisations involved, it will also mitigate the risk of potentially dangerous decisions being made or unsuitable components being used.

John Reynolds, CEO and founder, Coadjute, said, "The UK's housing building targets can't be achieved without a thorough overhaul of the technology underpinning construction. We believe blockchain provides the opportunity to unify, simplify and validate every stage in an otherwise complex process and create a trusted, immutable record, to which all parties contribute and agree."



REPAIRS & MOBILE WORKING

Gas Tag launches X-Tag and Portal 2.0

Gas Tag has announced that it is making it even easier for housing providers to monitor their gas safety and compliance with the launch of its new Portal 2.0.

Gas Tag's Portal 2.0 development has been focused on navigation, splitting the product into six main task areas – compliance, management, jobs, issues, audit and administration. The new navigation areas allow housing providers to view at a glance their overall compliance and easily resolve issues, including access problems and unsent LGSRs. Other benefits of the portal include the management of housing stock and contractors, job allocations and an area for auditing LGSRs.

The company has also just released its X-Tag product and associated workflows. These include workflows for solid fuel, oil, solar, unvented and air-source

heating methods, meaning that Gas Tag customers can ensure compliance across a wider range of properties and fuels.



Brighter Thinking for Housing

Great user experience

Simple, fresh interface designed for any device and any browser, giving you access to information wherever, whenever.

Truly open integration

Open connections to other systems to streamline how you work and transform how you deliver.

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Built-in CRM and self-service makes every interaction faster and better, freeing you up to get proactive.

Powerful insight

Aggregate, visualise and interrogate data with ease so you can make the right decision every time.

FLEXIBLE. SCALABLE. INNOVATIVE.

An open technology for housing

The housing sector is calling out for a fresh approach to managing their customers, processes and people. That's why we've drawn a new blueprint for the technology that's shaping the future.



Handling delays and uncertainty in housing repairs

Louise Robertson, Global Marketing Director, Localz

We are part of a tech-savvy nation who have become accustomed to instant connected services such as Uber, Amazon Prime and Deliveroo. Expectations for 'everything now' has become the standard and consumers are benchmarking customer experiences from every sector against one another. We are in the radical age of 'uberization' and the housing sector is under pressure to transform customer experiences, in particular about how the integration of better communications can enable us to better plan for and handle delays and uncertainty and deliver better experiences to tenants.

We often come across housing organisations who are struggling with tenants' expectations of the services they provide and this is usually due to a discrepancy between what the tenant expects and what's actually then delivered.

Lessons from the leaky loo

A typical complaint might be, "The downstairs loo started leaking so we went online on a Saturday and they offer us a Sunday appointment. Fantastic, because they don't usually come out over a weekend. Sunday comes and we stayed

at home for most of the day, and then we received a text saying, 'we will be there on Monday'. Someone arrives on the Monday but only to do a quote. We then book someone to come and fix the toilet, wait all day and then get a call to say that the job before ours is over-running so they are going to have to re-book..."

Now we understand that a plumber might not work on a Sunday and that you need to give a quote first, but this was never communicated. What's going on here is poorly-set expectations, setting promises for things that are probably impossible (or least, highly unlikely), bad internal communication and uncertainty on the day. We need to aim for certainty; when designing something, we need to think about not just how the experience will be when everything works but also consider how things might go wrong and then make plans to mitigate that impact.

Examples like the one above are all too common – a lack of communication, no clear expectations which led to feelings of uncertainty and, in the end, a total lack of trust in the service when they didn't deliver. It's vital to build in verification steps at each stage of your service delivery model in order to demonstrate that you are fulfilling the promises you make to your tenants. A text message confirming the appointment, a push notification the day before to remind the tenant of the appointment and then a live-tracking link of the location of the service engineer of the day.

These verification steps aren't only important for tenants but also to your bottom line. Increasing first-time access rates is fast becoming one of the top priorities among many housing providers that we are talking to, particularly given an average call-out cost of £85.

Dealing with complaints

Services will never be perfect all of the

time so you therefore need to be ready to handle complaints, although this is becoming more difficult to manage as more consumers are using social media as their channel of choice to voice their opinions.

Localz' latest research, 'The Radical Age of Uberization' found that "70 per cent of consumers raise complaints on social media because they want to inform other consumers about the problem and raise awareness."

In the realm of social media, the smallest issues handled badly can be magnified quickly to an audience of millions. This instant opportunity for tenants to voice their opinions can be an excellent tool to gain further understandings of potential improvements but, as everyone knows, the flip side is that social media is a two-way street; this incredibly powerful tool can easily be wielded by disgruntled tenants in the full glare of the public. It takes a skilled and responsive approach to nullify the danger to your image such service-related complaints can cause – hand the login details to your social media account to your intern at your peril...

You don't have to be perfect, and in fact if you handle something really well when it goes wrong then customers will often have more appreciation for the experience than getting it right.

Louise Robertson is the global marketing director at Localz.



Stick or Twist?

Do your current housing technology solutions meet the needs of your business strategy and support your digital ambitions and compliance objectives?

Do you know what your “stick or twist” options are and do you have the expertise and resources to fully evaluate these?

Did you know there are emerging technology options available, for example low code, that provide lower cost and high value improvements to front line services and back end processes?

Are you aware that, according to industry analysts, only 20% of the cost of business change is related to technology?

Many social housing providers are facing this digital “stick or twist” dilemma because of the risk and cost of change versus the pressure to modernise service delivery.

itica is working with housing organisations to tackle the “stick or twist” dilemma by delivering an informed, objective and accurate analysis of the value, time, cost and risk of all available options.

We're offering a free high level assessment to housing providers that contact us before 16 December 2019

For more information, please contact Neville Brown on +44 (0) 7771 810 621 or email neville.brown@itica.com or visit www.itica.com/stickortwist



Technology procurement - Cheaper isn't always better

Housing Technology asked a panel of finance and procurement experts from Aareon, Ark Consultancy, CJC Procurement and Itica for their views around the idea that 'cheaper isn't always best' when it comes to IT procurement and the subtleties of balancing quality versus price.

The risks of low cost

Commenting on the key risk factors associated with opting for a low-cost product or supplier, CJC Procurement's founder and director, Chris Cliffe, said, "The 'real' costs are often hidden because the 'proposed' price doesn't fully take into account vital considerations such as full lifecycle costing, full transparency of implementation or support costs, or extra module costs.

"The lowest cost has its place, but not in the same sentence as 'partnership approach', which stems from a misalignment of objectives with the evaluation strategy. Furthermore, a common failing is to not do enough market research in order to establish an anticipated market price against which to assess if any low-cost options are within a sensible range."

Ark Consultancy's digital/ICT services director, Ian Lever, said, "In the housing sector, low cost has often been associated with high risk, with suppliers being seen as trying to 'buy the business'. Historically, this approach has compromised the quality of the relationship (although not necessarily the solution itself) because the supplier can't resource the project properly, resulting in delays, increased costs and excessive demands on the customer's own resources.

"Equally, the poor quality of some housing providers' specifications of requirements can result in IT suppliers offering the minimum solution to keep costs down, with the consequence that the customer doesn't actually receive a fully operational system and has to find additional monies after the award of the contract to make the system work fully – integration, training, resourcing and data management are the most common omissions we've seen."



"You need to be assured that your supplier will continue to support and maintain the product, invest in its ongoing development and work with you in a spirit of true partnership."

Ian Lockwood, Head of Business Development, Aareon UK

Aareon's head of business development, Ian Lockwood, added, "While it doesn't always follow that higher cost means higher quality, there is some truth in the mantra that you get what you pay for. When the procurement of your new IT system is going to tie your organisation into a relationship with the supplier far beyond the initial purchase, you need to be assured that the supplier will continue to support and maintain the product, reinvest in its ongoing development and work with you in a spirit of true partnership."

Mitigating procurement risks

How can housing providers mitigate their risks, before, during and after procurement? Aareon's Lockwood continued, "Do your homework! While a good contract will mitigate against some risks, there can still be areas open to interpretation, and once underway, the contract is often filed and forgotten. However, we are lucky to work in a sector where people will readily share their experiences so use that openness to your advantage.

"Talk to your supplier and to other housing providers to find out if similar projects came in under budget, what were the real internal costs of the project, were the supplier estimates of the time you would need to allocate to the project realistic, what savings have other organisations made as a result of their similar projects, what extras needed to be bought from the supplier, and were there any areas of unexpected extra value?"

Ark's Lever said, "The real issue is that housing providers will generally only undertake a sizeable system procurement once every few years and to minimise risks, it's sensible to invest in support from organisations that undertake procurements regularly and know the marketplace and developments within it much more. This support will generally be less than five per cent of the overall costs but it ensures that the reason for a low price is quickly identified and this approach will avoid the 'cost creep' associated with a poor selection process.

"Before procurement, housing providers must understand the objectives that they want to achieve and how those objectives will be measured. Those objectives should be stated as tangible business improvements and as such, there should be significant input from the business rather than expecting the IT team to do it all. The appropriate elements of the business case (in particular the anticipated benefits) should be included in the tender documentation so the supplier knows what they are expected to deliver."



"Our view is that the old 'spec and select' method that has often been used to buy housing solutions for the last 20 years has had its day."

Martin Joy, Director, Itica

Itica's director, Martin Joy, said, "Pre-engage with suppliers and their customers – try to identify customers who are not on the normal case study/reference list to get a good balance. How easy is the solution to implement, what is the supplier like to 'live with', particularly when the going gets tough, and talk to recent new customers – what was their experience like once the honeymoon period was over?"

"Having said that, consider if there is a way you can get the relationship with your existing supplier on a different footing – is the grass actually greener on the other side of the fence or would you in fact be better off investing with your current supplier or buying in complementary technologies that will help you leverage more from your existing solutions?"

"Enlist the help of housing-specific consultants to run the process for you or just act as an advisor or critical friend, plus they will be able to point you in the direction of a wider range of solutions and suppliers beyond the 'usual suspects'. And at the end of the day, prepare for the worst and try to understand how 'tied in' you might be to the technology and what effort would be needed to extract yourself."

Capex vs. opex

All procurement projects must strike a balance between the risks and benefits of high up-front costs with lower ongoing costs, and vice versa, but how should housing providers find their procurement 'sweet spot'?

Aareon's Lockwood said, "The questions that organisations must ask and reassure themselves on are: will a cheap supplier try to extract more revenue throughout the implementation process, with each request being queried as a potential chargeable extra; will post-tender prices for additional functionality be higher to recoup revenues; and what is the content of annual upgrades – are these all included or are some elements chargeable?"

CJC Procurement's Cliffe's said, "You need to be engaged with your finance team to gain a good understanding of the value of cash to your business, and equally to the supplier – only then can you assess the relative weighting of upfront costs versus ongoing costs. For example, enterprise-wide solutions (such as a new HMS) are very likely to be long-term decisions so a longer-term attitude to pricing can be adopted. Furthermore, gaining clarity on contractual break points, extension options and exit scenarios are vitally important and should be part of your risk-based decisions regarding long-term solutions."

Itica's Joy added, "You need to carry out a five-year TCO calculation to flush out the 'low-ball' submissions, including the one-off cost of business transition and the ongoing involvement of IT and the business in the usual maintenance and upgrade cycles. Those calculations should also factor in the cost of change at the end; how much will it cost to exit and re-

establish operations with another vendor? In addition, the contract should stipulate the processes and costing mechanisms for contractual variations."

Untangling the intangibles

How do you factor in the likely tangible and intangible benefits, such as financial savings, innovation, support, trust and cultural fit, when comparing products and services with significantly differing prices?



"Low cost has often been associated with high risk, with IT suppliers being seen as trying to 'buy the business.'
Ian Lever, Digital/ICT Consultancy Services Director, Ark Consultancy

Ark's Lever said, "Housing providers should look for two key elements – growth in efficiency and improvement in customer service. If you can achieve those two benefits and save money, then you've done very well. The procurement process will give you the opportunity to speak to the supplier's other customers. Use this opportunity wisely – let the supplier suggest which customers to visit but select some of your own too, choosing those who are still in the implementation stage and learn from their insights."

CJC Procurement's Cliffe commented, "Investment decisions are very rarely, if ever, made on price alone and the more strategic the product, the more the tangible and intangible benefits need to be balanced. Consideration of a wide range of issues should be part of your overall procurement strategy and should be addressed in most procurements, with the relative weightings 'flexing' against the outcomes established in your business case. Related to this, technology roadmaps are increasingly important for 'big ticket' IT investments, and a clear long-term commitment by the supplier to the product should give some comfort regarding the longevity of the solution."

Itica's Joy said, "Price is never the only issue. Our view is that the old 'spec and select' method that has often been used to buy housing solutions for the last 20 years has had its day. That methodology has too much focus on functionality and sometimes misses the other important factors. These include: the value and outcomes that the solution needs to deliver across the contract duration and how these will be measured; the ease and flexibility with which future business-model changes can be supported; and a governance framework around the kind of relationship you want to have with the

supplier – a business partnership or merely a supplier-customer relationship?"

Price vs. quality

Do housing providers' tender processes provide suitable weightings to price versus quality, and what can be done to mitigate this potential discrepancy?

Aareon's Lockwood said, "Tenders are often weighted at around 40 per cent on price versus quality, with scores being awarded proportionally to cost. This means a bid that is twice the price of another will receive half the available price marks. This might be a suitable criterion when one bid is £1 million and another is £500,000, but should we really apply the same score differential when there is only a difference of £100,000 (e.g. Bid A is £200,000 and Bid B is £100,000)? This relatively small differential (often spread over 6-7 years) may well be easily outweighed by the potential benefits of the more expensive system."

"The bulk of scored tender requirements for housing management systems still focus on the essential but very common 'traditional functionality' that most solutions can now easily provide. Therefore, there is a relatively small percentage of the quality score allocated to the innovative value-added functionalities, such as workforce mobility, digital engagement and channel shift, that can really add value and generate significant savings."



"The lowest cost has its place, but not in the same sentence as 'partnership approach.'
Chris Cliffe, Director, CJC Procurement

"Furthermore, tender evaluations typically focus on the upfront cost and a quality evaluation. There is rarely any allowance for factoring in the potential cashable savings that could be made or have been achieved by other organisations, despite this often having been a key objective in the decision to review the existing system."

Itica's Joy added, "Some housing providers have been increasing the ratio of price versus quality towards 50 per cent and beyond, believing that they will get the best possible deal as a result. This is fine for commodity procurements but not when the outcome is so critical to core business operations and where mistakes are so hard to rectify."

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The internet of things in housing

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Reaching for the contract and its penalty clauses isn't a good position to be in if the supplier fails to support your business strategy or technology ambitions.

"Normal scoring mechanisms, where the lowest-priced tender gets 100 per cent of the marks and the rest are scored based on an offset from the lowest, mean that a supplier low-balling its price can pretty much overcome any weaknesses it has in its functionality and completely impair other organisations from winning the business. It's also important to note that any supplier who low-balls its price in this way will obviously need to find a way of getting a return on investment from that customer later over the course of the contract."

Commenting on the role of value for money in procurement decisions, CJC Procurement's Cliffe said, "VFM is essential to measure, yet it is far too often mistaken with price and a nebulous cost saving. First and foremost, VFM has to be assessed against whether the aims of the original business case have been delivered, which can't be assessed until the resultant contract is being performed or the product being used. Measures of VFM should also be considered in the business case ahead of a procurement process and monitored throughout the commercial lifecycle."

Aareon's Lockwood said, "VFM is perfectly acceptable as a criterion, but how we measure it needs work. Too often, VFM focuses on upfront costs and obvious ongoing costs such as annual support and maintenance, but without regard to additional future expenditure as things change or to the real-world benefits and

cost savings that are expected to be achieved."

Ark's Lever added, "VFM is very hard to calculate when buying a solution that may take over a year to be implemented and is expected to be used for the next 5-7 years. Over that time, the business will change and transform, extra services will be introduced, new partnerships may be formed and technology will foster unexpected opportunities.

"An enterprise solution procurement of this nature should therefore be seen as a necessary 'enabler' that supports, and in some cases, drives change within the business – procuring a solution that has a defined and predictable cost model should be the focus. Service improvements and the ability to deliver new services as a result of the procurement are the measures of success because this is where costs will be saved and new revenues generated, not within the IT solution itself."

Closing remarks

Ark's Lever said, "In today's world, cheap doesn't always equate to poor quality. With the growing availability of cost-effective cloud services and pricing models focused on consumption rather than traditional licencing, cheap may well become cost-effective.

"We need to adopt an approach where integration is the key to success, avoiding the need to buy an expensive enterprise solution that seeks to do everything but has its limits. A matrix of cheaper solutions which have been built to provide a specific service and do it well, that integrate and

coexist in their own ecosystem, is the way to deliver quality and manage costs."

CJC Procurement's Cliffe said, "Value is usually lost in the rush to complete a procurement process. Spending some time and effort truly thinking things through and doing research before going to market will pay long-term dividends. The most critical part of a procurement is before the supplier invitations are even issued, with the cost versus quality considerations tied to the market research and overall strategy at this early point."

Itica's Joy said, "Most suppliers are working hard to protect and retain their existing customers, and in some cases, have manufactured a position where the cost of change is enough to put anyone off. However, winning new-named customers is still one of the biggest and most important health indicators for any IT business and some of the bigger suppliers can afford to 'buy' a couple of bits of business to give the perception that their products are still a plausible option.

"When suppliers low-ball their tender submissions, they are genuinely risking their own future viability and that of their solutions. They are businesses and need to make money to thrive; squeeze them too tightly and nobody wins."

Housing Technology would like to thank Aareon UK (Ian Lockwood), Ark Consultancy (Ian Lever), CJC Procurement (Chris Cliffe) and Itica (Martin Joy) for their editorial contributions to this article.



CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT



Chatbots – AI hype vs. reality

Andrew Webb, CEO, Alysium Consulting

Most of the AI that we currently see has been in passive technology in retail-driven areas where there is a wealth of available data and where pattern recognition and predictive models have been deployed, often around your next purchase or preference on Netflix, Amazon and the like.

These systems deploy cutting-edge models and there is no doubt that they, along with improvements in hand-held devices and home-based technologies, have changed the way we live our lives, embracing

Chatbots – AI hype vs. reality

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health and wellbeing, shopping, dining, finance and entertainment. Social housing can't ignore this trend in consumer-driven technology, but how can AI and machine learning be deployed effectively in the sector?

This article looks at the conversational agents or 'chatbots' which have proliferated over the past two or three years. Despite chatbots having been developed by commercial businesses, it is widely accepted that few businesses are currently getting any real value from their attempts to enhance conversational interfaces with AI, or at least what they describe as AI. This lack of current success is attributed to a combination of poor deployment (esp. a lack of thought about the customer journey), the quality of the conversation supported, and user expectations.

Where are chatbots currently deployed?

Customer support is the most common starting point as a use case. In the housing sector, this might be internal customers (e.g. contact centre agents dealing with requests raised by their colleagues) or external (e.g. tenants). The efficiency gains and cost savings associated with shifting enquiries from face-to-face and telephone enquiries into other channels have been successfully demonstrated by many of Alysium's clients, although the behavioural shifts that come with this achievement are generally hard-won and require a clear strategy, detailed planning, and sustained effort.

To date, most of the automation has been around allowing human contact centre agents to work more effectively and to ensure efficient escalation where necessary, while simultaneously allowing customers to contact the agents using the multiple digital channels that they are already using in their personal lives. Clearly, the deployment of a chatbot which can adequately respond to a meaningful number of enquiries which would otherwise require agent intervention will enable the contact centre staff to focus their efforts on other enquiries and getting things right first time.

When it comes to the quality of interactions with a chatbot (which is closely tied with user expectations), there have been significant advances in natural language processing and the ability to

integrate with other information sources (such as information already available from a website).

Chatbot conversations

However, no-one should expect to be able to have a 'normal' conversation with a machine. The key challenge continues to revolve around just how hard it is to recognise the different ways that people say the same thing. Future advances may allow a bot to develop context in a conversation and recall and reference issues already discussed but typical chatbot interaction currently involves around three utterances leading to completion of the task or provision of information. For voice interactions, a single turn remains the norm. At present, it would be more accurate to re-state the rationale above as "a desire to provide a more satisfying experience for the target users **with simple enquiries.**"

To deliver real efficiencies, the chatbot has both to recognise the customer's intent and then either deliver an adequate summarisation of information or complete a task. If a chatbot when asked "What do I do about my noisy neighbour?" simply provides the email address for the ASB team then, although it may save the customer a little time by not having to call the contact centre, the subsequent email enquiry will still go through the existing channels.

Automation and application integration

To gain the benefit of customer-facing automation, an intelligent chatbot must be truly integrated with systems including the housing management, CRM and repairs systems and these systems (and the organisation's work practices, including authorisation for work) must be able to act on automated requests. Achieving this business process re-engineering is part of the digital transformation journey and represents an opportunity to strengthen processes and improve customer satisfaction.

A chatbot which undertakes tasks for tenants, akin to the functionality delivered through the portals and apps that a number of housing providers have bought, is achievable and developers such as FuzzLab have been drawing on their repairs and maintenance expertise with housing providers and local authorities to develop and deploy chatbots which allow

residents to diagnose repairs and make direct bookings.

Common questions and tasks

Rather than investing in the development of new models and neural networks for deep learning to give the bot the ability to devise responses to new questions, with the development investment and delivery risk that this entails, many organisations are choosing to focus on common enquiries and provide their chatbot with a bank of answers based on templates used in the pre-AI CRM. This can offer good value, with limited development costs and lower risk. A simple chatbot capable of answering a bank of common questions and even completing tasks such as booking appointments is now an achievable and relatively inexpensive project, and a number of housing providers are engaging in trials of resident-facing chatbots.

Most bots are initially designed for text and messaging only. The choice of development platform is an important factor to consider; for example, the larger platforms make it relatively straightforward to add functionality such as a voice interface through speaker technology such as Amazon Echo, Alexa and Google Home, computer services such as Cortana or mobile phone technologies such as Siri.

The speech recognition software used by these systems is fairly impressive but each has its limits and harnessing these with emotion and sentiment recognition requires a more complex integration project. The investment case for commercial off-the-shelf interfaces does not rely on the development of incremental AI beyond the technology already embedded in these assistants, but will for now be based on the cost savings and customer service improvements associated with the channel shift to chatbot interaction versus the cost of device deployment and maintenance.

Andrew Webb is the CEO of Alysium Consulting.



How CRM is the new 'core system' for social housing

James Massey, COO, Castleton Technology

Digital enablement solutions are already delivering tangible business advantages in social housing, from enhancing customer communications and services to improving organisational efficiency and managing the impact of universal credit. The sector is starting to see real benefits from the data and intelligence it's gathering, as more and better data is helping drive business transformation based on well-informed decisions.

A key part of this digital revolution is putting the customer at the centre of everything, whether that's improving resident interactions, providing more tailored self-service options or modernising processes to enable a flexible, mobile workforce to manage customers in real time.

It's also true that as part of this drive, housing providers need to make cost savings wherever they can and automating the engagement process will help towards achieving this. To enable real digital transformation, housing providers must look at the power of data and how effective customer relationship and customer experience management will help set them on their business transformation journey.

Historically, many people have considered CRM as simply being a 'records management tool' for recording telephone calls and customer interactions. However, as the housing sector moves away from traditional call-handling, paper processes, letters, paper forms

and onsite visits towards online chat, unified communications interactions such as WhatsApp for Business, Facebook Messenger and other social media channels, CRM will come into its own, but with far less paper and much more digital recording.

This evolution is giving CRM a new lease of life, and with all the additional information gathering, housing providers will have the opportunity to build better relationships with their residents; CRM will provide a 360-degree view of each one, enabling faster call-handling, first-time resolution of issues, on-time payments and mobile working.

With such an important decision, how can housing providers be sure about choosing the right CRM system for them, one that integrates with their existing software and delivers their business goals cost-effectively?

Sector-specific CRM vs off-the-shelf

With a number of great CRM platforms on the market, it's important to consider the outcomes you want to achieve and how each solution differs.

A good CRM system should bring together all of the disconnected solutions and communication methods that a housing provider uses into a 'single pane of glass' dashboard; it's the glue that holds them all together and is the key enabler for the quick entry of contacts, tenant records, the exporting of records and notices for any legal matters such as eviction notices.

On the one hand, generic CRM platforms such as Microsoft Dynamics 365 provide a blank canvas on which housing providers can build a bespoke CRM platform.

On the other hand, housing-specific products such as our CRM system have been developed specifically for housing providers in conjunction with others in the sector. It's an out-of-the-box CRM solution that puts your residents at the core of your operations and provides complete 360-degree visibility of your residents,

properties and services on a single screen.

Designed to bring together historically-disconnected systems and put them into a single, clean and clear user interface (UI), it simplifies and updates information that's relevant to the user, quickly and efficiently. Its speed combined with the ability to orient specific data very quickly to relevant job roles within the housing provider make a significant difference to the user, providing instant access to all the information they need for successful and efficient customer interactions.

It's this UI, designed specifically for housing providers, that makes Castleton CRM different. Our collaborative approach to its development, working with organisations such as Connect Housing, has ensured that sector-specific features are integrated into our CRM system, such as campaign management for targeted customer interactions and validation checks to ensure the security of sensitive data.

Residents' interactions and updates are also shown in real-time, and when combined with our Castleton .Digital solution and Alexa platform, it allows residents to perform a wide variety of self-service tasks such as accessing and updating their personal details online, viewing rent statements, making payments, reporting a repair and checking on its progress. The latest version of CRM also allows housing providers' end-users to build their own digital dashboards from any of the information that is available, whether that's resident engagement channel uptake, resident details or account information.

What about the data?

The bigger questions might then be, "how and where do you store all of that data while remaining GDPR compliant?", "how can you ensure that the information held in the system is up-to-date?", and that the data you have gathered in your CRM system feeds and integrates into other systems, and ultimately, "what are you going to use that data for?"

How CRM is the new 'core system' for social housing

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It's not just about information gathering in order to simply to put a tick in the box, but to apply business intelligence to the data to help housing providers become more efficient and more closely relate to their residents by enhancing their service offerings.

The real cost of moving to a new CRM

Transitioning costs to a new CRM depend on an organisation's size and complexity and, in our view, a sector-specific solution will always deliver the best value.

How long a CRM implementation will take and ultimately cost depends on a number of factors including: how many apps are you implementing; how many users do you have; is it an upgrade or a completely new solution; are you moving from on-premise to the cloud; how much legacy data needs to be migrated; and how much integration work is needed to make the solution meet the users' needs?

As with many solutions, integration is often the biggest challenge. It's important to check how easily your new CRM solution integrates with other systems and what the anticipated cost to do this would be. Our CRM ensures easy integration by using customisable 'data-driven services' and fully open and documented web

services, whereas the project timescales for Dynamics 365, Salesforce and other 'vanilla' solutions can be difficult to predict and often take much longer to implement than initially forecast.

We would always recommend organisations compare what's included with an out-of-the-box solution and how much a more bespoke solution will cost, and whether the business case stacks up.

Of course, there's a bigger challenge than cost alone, and that's managing the organisation's business transformation; the CRM software is simply part of this and is an enabler to driving this transformation. We know from experience that technology definitely isn't the biggest challenge, it's usually changing the culture of the organisation.

What are the risks?

There are risks in all IT projects, but the biggest risk is the non-adoption by staff and that all they see is a new system that has been imposed on them rather than a system they want to use that will deliver greater benefits to them and their residents.

Connect Housing is in the process of driving a digital-by-choice, customer-centric strategy using Castleton solutions.

To mitigate risk, we created a joint roadmap from April 2019 to July 2020 to cover a phased introduction of their new systems so that they are seamlessly integrated and interface with Connect Housing's legacy systems until they are retired.

Where do I start?

The direction you take with your new CRM systems depends on what you want to achieve. For example, do you want to facilitate customer self-service, improve customer service and interaction, will you want to drive targeted marketing from it, develop more robust service improvement methodologies, and/or better tenant sustainment because you understand your residents better?

Collaboration is key; understand your organisation's pain points and why you want to undertake a CRM project. Then decide what your 'future state' looks like, how CRM will impact the business, and be very clear on your project goals.

James Massey is the COO of Castleton Technology.

Scottish Borders' tenant app from Castleton



(L-R): Julia Mulloy (Chief Executive, SBHA), Dean Dickinson (Chief Executive, Castleton), Maria Lyle (Director of Business Support Director, SBHA) & Mark Wood (Sales Director, Castleton)

Scottish Borders Housing has gone live with a new Agile customer app. Supported by Castleton Technology, the MySBHA app enables tenants to carry out simple transactions themselves such as raising repairs, paying their rent and changing their account or personal details.

Julia Mulloy, chief executive, Scottish Borders Housing, said, "The launch of MySBHA is part of our commitment to ensuring that we offer accessible services for all. Along with our CRM system which enables us to track the customer journey and diagnose issues more accurately, and our Agile working solutions which maximise efficiency by allowing our teams to access our systems while out and about with our tenants, we are modernising the way we work and transforming how it feels to interact with us."

Dean Dickinson, CEO, Castleton Technology, said, "Integration is key to what Castleton does and we are pleased to see Scottish Borders Housing go live with an integrated set of back-office and mobilisation solutions – for example, our CRM and Agile customer and staff app solutions are now fully integrated with SBHA's existing Northgate HMS."



Delivering on-demand, seamless tenant services

Mark Cable, General Manager, Squiz

Any housing provider that isn't focused on delivering a superior digital experience for tenants is going to come unstuck in the near future. But providing that seamless experience is challenging when your business systems don't support it.

Evolution is certainly vital to the longevity of any successful organisation. But the unfortunate by-product can be a mess of disparate and often incompatible technology systems.

The housing sector isn't alone with this challenge. New software, apps, programmes and digital divisions are commonly bolted on as needs arise. This organic growth often leads to an unwieldy legacy tech stack that isolates data sets and creates silos of information across the organisation.

It's at this point that your tenant experience starts to reflect your company structure rather than their needs. It's a classic case of viewing a process from within the organisation and not from the outside in, which is where you need to position your viewpoint if you want to make progressive changes. Tenants will quickly grow frustrated with a disjointed experience which in no way supports the drive for improved engagement and relationships.

In some cases, it seems like the only solution is to rip and replace your standalone legacy systems with new ones; an expensive and, in many cases, near impossible task.

Join the dots with a digital experience platform (DXP)

Those unfamiliar with DXP (it is still a relatively new term) can think of it, in its most simple form, as the evolution of content management systems (CMS). Where your organisation uses a CMS to deliver a

corporate website, it's becoming increasingly difficult to deliver more complicated digital demands in the same way.

In today's world, tenants need to search, pay, book and communicate with your organisation digitally. They may do this via a number of devices and the expectation will be that things will work seamlessly. These expectations stretch management systems and so the evolution is a DXP - a collection of integrated tools that enable organisations to deliver complex digital services.

A DXP works silently in the background to provide a joined-up digital journey for users. It draws in data from across your business, allowing you to repurpose it in new ways that provide value for tenants and employees. With this digital layer in place, you can integrate your services and redesign the digital experience for your tenants without having to replace legacy systems.

Where to begin?

Where once a great tenant experience was a nice-to-have (and rare) attribute, it is now expected and the absence of it is increasingly conspicuous. The housing sector has a long way to go before it can change the general perceptions that exist within resident communities but there is momentum and determination to act.

Using digital services to support a tenant experience is commonplace, yet the maturity, effectiveness and usability of those services often falls woefully short of modern expectations. Other sectors can be looked at for inspiration to learn from successful digital service provision, where value is placed on customer experience.

Improving customer experience (CX) involves looking at operational processes across the entire customer journey, and digital typically plays a key role in many of those processes. Assessment of the effectiveness of current digital services should be carried out without bias; for example, if a portal has been developed for tenants to enable them to pay their rent, then have the number of people using the portal been at the

levels expected? Does the portal provide a smooth, hassle-free alternative or is it a slow and problematic solution that fuels further frustration?

We're encouraging housing providers to look at the challenging touchpoints within the customer journey and consider where digital services can support or automate the experience.

Tenant expectations aren't easy to manage

People want to interact with companies as seamlessly as their experience with digital leaders such as Uber, Spotify, Netflix, Instagram and WhatsApp. Yet most daily interactions still remain in legacy systems and complex bureaucracy. This results in poor service and a gritty, difficult and often resentful relationship with the tenants.

Rapidly changing expectations means continuous improvement and innovation, and as a minimum, tenants expect:

- **Easy access at all times on all devices** – Personalised, mobile-responsive information so that tenants can view and manage their payments, book repairs, look for a home or find information at any time.
- **Speed** – People find that it's no longer acceptable to wait for a taxi to arrive "as soon as possible" or to wait in line to check in for a flight. Tenants demand more and more convenience, or we complain loudly and share our experiences through social media.
- **Connectedness** – Tenants want their lives, their devices and your services to be seamless.
- **A retail experience** – Tenants want to feel wanted and be served in the same way as they are by online retailers.
- **Transparency of their data and your operations**; good examples are seeing their payment histories, paying rent securely, and automated reminders for rent payments and repairs appointments.
- **Online self-service** – Picking up the phone and calling is dead for younger generations.

Delivering on-demand, seamless tenant services

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User-focused solutions

You must focus on aligning the touch points that exist between an experience provided to tenants, and the operations and systems that enable that experience to be delivered. It's therefore about making sure the 'front stage' (the tenant) and the 'back stage' (your people, processes and platforms) are both aligned to deliver the best possible digital experience.

There is nothing new about designing the front stage to maximise the tenant experience but it's often performed in isolation from what's going on behind the scenes, and it's usually the same with the back stage, done in isolation by different departments with individual budgets.

Service design principles look at the entire ecosystem and seek to design for the best possible experience at every step while

marrying the two together. Service design is how you harness innovation against a tenant experience, by aligning your organisation and the people, processes and technology that exist within it to best deliver that experience.

Mark Cable is the general manager of Squiz.



Ready for the next generation of telecare?

Adrian Scaife, Business Development Manager, Alcuris

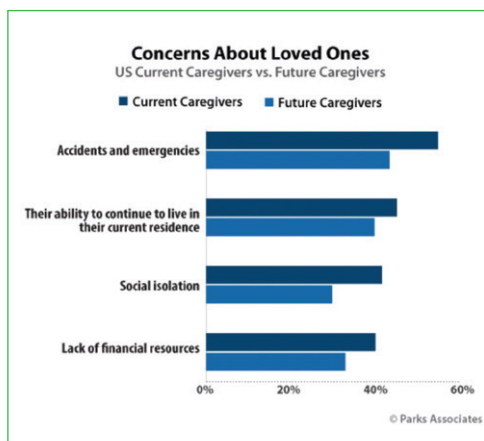


Our analysis is that the telecare market will be in considerable flux over the next five years due to:

- Digital switchover.
- Market consolidation of monitoring centres.
- Uncertainty regarding which of the digital telecare suppliers will be able to achieve scale.
- How quickly the telecare market will achieve open interoperability with health and social care data.
- The potential for gaining significant insights from the available data.
- The consumer technology and 'smart home' market is rapidly crossing over into the care technology sector.

These are some of the conclusions of the recent Care Technology Landscape Review report commissioned by Essex County Council and produced by SOCITM Advisory. The report doesn't pull any punches and goes on to note about the current market environment:

- The uptake of telecare has been static over the last 10 years at 1.7 million users nationally.
- Community alarms are still predominantly based on analogue, reactive services.
- Many telecare services have evolved from housing community alarm services and may have seen little or no service development during the past 10-15 years.
- The sector has tended to focus on the technology instead of the best outcomes for end-users.



- There hasn't been enough attention paid to 'design and delight' in the way the solutions function.
- Equipment manufacturers, operating in a B2B context, have been slow to change and adapt to emerging telecare requirements.
- Care providers and commissioners should avoid any further investments in legacy telecare.
- A key hurdle is often the wider system and its data-access limitations, rather than the technology itself.

Last year's briefing paper for the housing sector, "Future Assisted Living Technology" produced by HACT and supported by Anchor, Curo, Hanover and Riverside Housing, made it clear that the future use of data was essential.

The briefing paper stated, "For some residents, the quality and effectiveness of the support and care offered could be considerably improved through the use

of data. Sensor data, for example, can be analysed to look for deviations from normal behavioural patterns, which would then generate an alert for family, support worker or health worker." The paper also noted that treating data as an asset also provides evidence of outcomes for third parties and insights for improved service design.

The aforementioned SOCITM report also noted that consumer choice and 'co-pay' factors are shaping the telecare market, with more widespread consumer access to emerging technologies creating new expectations for services and a willingness to pay. It also proposes some helpful goals for care providers and commissioners:

- Care technology is recognised as an enabler for promoting independence, especially at the start of a person's care journey, giving reassurance to families and carers.
- Care technology is helping to defer the need for or avoid more intensive forms of care.
- Use lifestyle monitoring to support informed decision making; 'just enough' support instead of 'just in case' support.
- Offer care technology as an alternative or complement to other forms of care, including reablement, medication checks and well-being calls.

Adrian Scaife is the business development manager at Alcuris.



Why wi-fi in residential care matters

Carl Atkey, CTO, Appello

It's strange to think that for those born after the turn of the century, a life before the Internet will be completely unknown, and for those of us who weren't or still remember the screeching sound of dial-up connections, it's difficult to imagine a time where you couldn't pay your bills online, shop at home, or video chat at the touch of a button.

Internet access has become a basic requirement, much like heating or shelter. Within the wider context of global access to the Internet, the United Nations declared in 2016 that online freedom is a human right and must be protected. While their focus is on the condemnation of countries that intentionally take away or disrupt its citizens' internet access, their reaction demonstrates the importance placed on digital inclusivity.

Yet there is still a largely ignored demographic in the UK who don't have access to internet services – older people living in retirement or extra-care housing.

Why are older people digitally excluded?

It's difficult to say exactly why this is. It could be the belief that there simply isn't the demand for internet services within this demographic because older people are considered less likely to use them. However, this idea is simply unfounded; a recent survey by Anchor found that 64 per cent of its residents listed broadband as an important requirement when selecting a retirement property.

Another factor is cost, with many housing providers putting off becoming an internet service provider because they believe replacing their infrastructure will require huge investments.

Nevertheless, we must address this issue if we are to meet the expectations and needs of our older people. In group developments, residents don't have access to broadband unless they have their own landline. Historically, that decision has been left to residents to decide if they want it and to pay for it as a separate service that they've organised themselves.

The problem is that this then becomes a rather piecemeal process for housing providers because some residents have wifi and some don't, so the provider has to facilitate the installation of lines from a plethora of different network providers.

Some housing providers install wifi for communal areas, but it doesn't reach residents' personal living spaces – the place where they are more likely to want to access health and lifestyle services. As the demographic of older people shifts towards a more tech-savvy generation, it's time that a lack of access to the internet became unacceptable.

How can it benefit residents?

Wellbeing, social isolation and loneliness are prominent issues for older people and housing providers are fully aware of the responsibility they have regarding the health and happiness of the residents in their properties. The impact of ignoring these issues over a long period of time is also well understood not only from the residents' perspective but also the consequent impact these issues have on stretched health and care services.

Having access to online services can help interaction with residents' immediate and wider community, be that events, video chat, or up to date notifications on the bus timetable to visit a friend. There are also great outcomes for housing providers because they can bring more of their services online, from enabling residents to access universal credit from a laptop or smartphone, to reporting repairs or antisocial behaviour.

One of the other great advantages is that it will open up the possibility of IoT devices and smart home technologies being connected at a property. If everyone is on the same ISP's network and there is one point of call, either to the house manager or the telecare monitoring centre, then this equipment, such as blinds and heating that can be controlled at the touch of a button without having to leave your armchair, can be installed and housing providers won't face barriers from dealing with multiple wifi routers or ISPs.

The challenge is that housing providers need to be inclusive. The government has been widely criticised for its 'digital by default' policy because not all older people have access to the internet. If housing providers are putting their own services online, they need to ensure everybody has access to them if they are to avoid the same criticism.

How can it help housing providers?

Many housing providers are embracing the power of online services, from repairs portals and payment gateways to communications and news. Providing these services digitally creates efficiencies, savings, improved customer service and better resident engagement. However, there is an acceptance that not all residents are online, and therefore currently most also provide these services online, by phone and even post.

The true benefits won't be realised until more residents are using these services online, but with many residents still not having access, housing providers need to drive residents online. Wifi via telecare services is a straightforward, manageable and resident-friendly way to meet this need.

Digital homes are key

The key is having a digital infrastructure. Housing providers are starting to take note of the benefits of digital telecare equipment and the possibilities it opens for modern housing and care.

Why wi-fi in residential care matters

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Digital telecare providers are addressing this issue by turning their equipment into wifi hotspots. This means that it's now easier than ever to supply all residents at a residential property with internet access.

The equipment will look and operate in the same way, but there will be wifi access from the hub device. It's very simple for the resident to connect to the wifi-enabled telecare hub – it's no different to popping

into a café and using their customer wifi.

For housing providers, all of the cost and disruption of installing wifi is removed, leaving them the advantage of offering every resident the chance to use wifi in their apartment as part of the telecare system.

Thinking ahead to the next demographic of residents moving into retirement properties, many will have used

technology in both their personal and work lives every day, and will expect digital solutions and the internet. It's vital that housing providers plan to meet this modern demand, but also address the potential of the internet for today's residents.

Carl Atkey is the CTO of Appello.

INFRASTRUCTURE



MTV's 'data fluency' with NGData

NGData has been working with Metropolitan Thames Valley (MTV) on 'data fluency' to optimise systems integration and improve operational efficiency.

This follows the housing provider's formation from the merger of Thames Valley Housing and Metropolitan Housing Trust last year which resulted in over 300 business applications needing to be either integrated or mothballed.

MTV chose NGData based on the strength of its initial project proposal and holistic view to the adoption of technology. The focus of NGData's engagement was not only which business applications to integrate and/or keep and which new software to implement, but also how to leverage the capabilities of MTV's existing team of developers.

A key challenge identified during the consulting process was that each developer would apply their own method and choice of coding language to each integration; a shift towards a more consistent approach enabled the development team to

quickly and easily understand integrations when optimisation or updating was needed. Implementing standard integration approaches also removed the need for developers to build integrations from scratch each time and allowed them to understand the underlying build of each integration across the different business systems.

Douglas Silverstone, head of data, Metropolitan Thames Valley, said, "One of our developers has reported being able to complete 70 integration jobs in half a day, whereas before this project our staff would require half a day for each integration. Other business teams have found that they are able to focus their time on key tasks rather than data-related admin, such as cross-referencing information and gathering reports from multiple systems."

Wheatley supports vulnerable tenants with Civica's MultiVue



Civica's MultiVue master data management software is now being used by Wheatley Group to join the dots between its disparate data sources to provide a complete, accurate and shareable view of their tenant data.

Wheatley Group decided to implement MultiVue to merge and match data, eliminating duplicates and creating a 'golden view' of each tenant.

As a result, the Civica software provides pro-active alerts relating to tenant and property safety in almost 80,000 homes,

streamlined service delivery to over 200,000 customers, earlier interventions for vulnerable tenants and a 'golden record' for each tenant through real-time sharing and updating information across departments and third-party organisations.



It's time to think small – Grassroots innovation in housing

Tom Lodge, Research Fellow at Nottingham University and Co-Founder of Buttonkit

Harry is a consultant working in London, and on most Thursday evenings, up until a few weeks ago, he'd go to bed hungry. Thursdays are when his company's senior directors are in the office and he, along with his colleagues, is careful to ensure he shuffles home at least five minutes after the last director has left. Harry is no fan of microwave meals, but by the time he arrives home, it's too late to cook from scratch and too late to wait for a delivery of chilli chicken ramen.

hungry on Thursdays and has even started to look forward to leaving late.

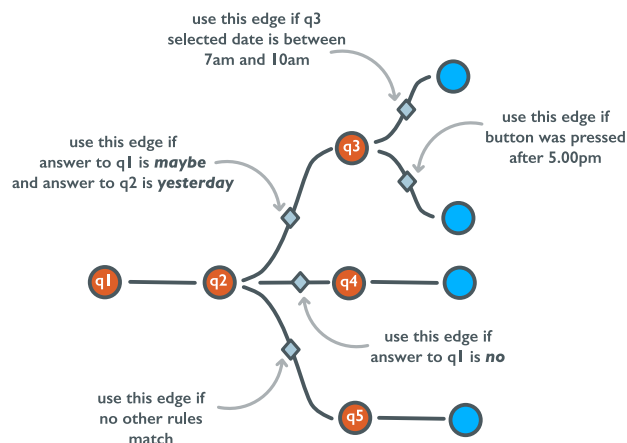
Now your first thoughts might be, "So what?" or, "That isn't an especially exciting innovation" or even, "That's not solving a particularly interesting problem", and I'd agree. But it is Harry's problem, and it's a solution that is very particular to him. After all, the number of people who commute from Waterloo who like the food Harry likes and who return late on Thursdays to an empty apartment are vanishingly small.

The brilliance of IFTTT is how it provides a richness of expression that operates over a plethora of online services such as communication, calendaring, smart-home tech, social media and online retail. There is also a beauty in its simplicity. It encourages its users to build solutions that may be short-lived, or to modify them regularly in line with changing needs and circumstances. IFTTT lets users scratch all sorts of itches, however mundane.

When it comes to housing, and in particular apartment living, there are many itches that need to be scratched. So far, all of the scratching is performed by the systems and services built by housing professionals. Many of these are very innovative, such as low code, digital agents, big data, machine learning and robotics. But there is also a whole world of discomfort that big-vision (big budget) projects will never be able to soothe.

Like IFTTT, many solutions will only ever apply to one or two developments, groups or even individuals. They may need to change (profoundly) over time and will

buttonkit rules



be best understood and adapted by the people who use them. And those people are not just residents, but landlords, on-site staff (concierges, cleaners, gardeners), contractors (plumbers, electricians), service providers (estate agents, local takeaways, couriers) and management. This wide array of actors, coupled with significant variations in the ways that buildings operate, means that there is not only a whole variety of problems to be solved, but that each solution will be subtly or not-so-subtly different from building to building and from community to community.

So what are examples of grassroots problem-solving? How about a 'rebuke' service that lets security staff quickly send a pre-written text to anyone with a messy balcony or badly-parked car? Or a display in a concierge office that shows where the staff are whenever they leave the office? Or a smart key system that releases keys to estate agents when they arrive on site? Or a snagging app that advises new owners on how to snag a new apartment? Or a diagnostics app that walks a user through a path to fix a common problem? Or an app that helps vulnerable residents send alerts to neighbours or staff? Or an app that allows residents borrow or hire tools? The list goes on and on...

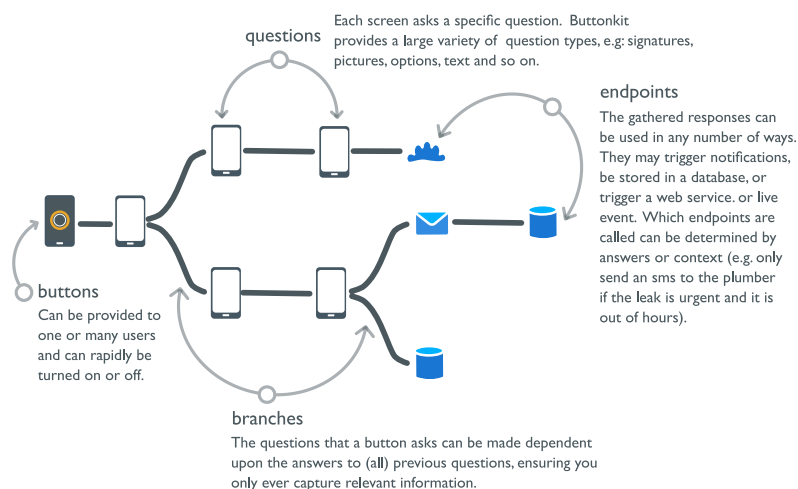


Three weeks ago, however, Harry became aware of an internet platform, 'if this then that' (IFTTT) - the poster child of grassroots innovation. It lets users build and run neat little automations that knit together apps and services to perform tasks, such as, "If I am at Waterloo station between 18.45 and 20.00 on Thursday then in one hour order any one of my favourite meals from Deliveroo." So now Harry doesn't go to bed

It's time to think small – Grassroots innovation in housing

Continued from previous page

A buttonkit button



We can't expect to build an app for every new itch. Instead, we need an innovation platform for housing. As with IFTTT, it must be expressive enough to support all sorts of possibilities, yet simple to use. And by use, I mean consume and create solutions. Unlike IFTTT, the platform must support multiple actors and provide a base-level set of abstractions that are specific to housing (not least the idea of occupancy and ownership). It must also provide carefully controlled access to data, communications and services. Unlike the low-code solutions in operation in the housing sector today, in the spirit of innovation, it should be possible to build and deploy new production-level functionality in hours or even minutes, not weeks or months. It should also be possible to adapt and extend solutions continuously with no downtime or adverse impact on users.

Over the past few years, in part inspired by academic research and in part from learning from trial deployments, we have designed and built what we believe to be the first grassroots housing innovation platform of its kind: Buttonkit (www.buttonkit.com). This can be thought of as a remote control for developments; buttons sit on a screen (in an app or on the web) and, when pressed, do something. That something might be logging a noise report, notifying a resident that a parcel has arrived, recording the details of a property inspection, unlocking a door, displaying the temperature reading from the pool and so on.

Buttons themselves are very easy to use, though they often mask rich functionality; all of which is created using a web-based, no-code interface. We model buttons as decision trees, where each node in the tree is either a question (e.g. a set of

options, a picture, a signature, text and so on) or an endpoint (i.e. something that is done once questions have been answered such as storing data, notifying users, calling a webhook, emitting a real-time event). When answering questions or transitioning between endpoints, the decision to move from one node to the next is determined by a set of rules whose conditions include the answers to previous questions.

With these relatively simple concepts, we have created an expressive environment that can be used to create a wide range of functionality. Smart solutions can be built by simply connecting nodes together in different ways. Moreover, the services that emerge are production-ready out of the box. They use the same management infrastructure operated by Google and other large enterprises (Kubernetes), containerised microservices, replicated autoscaling databases and a real-time engine built to sync data across millions of devices.

So is this the future? We think it is one of them. It's early days, but we are convinced that standing between grassroots innovation and the housing sector is a platform that supports rapid experimentation and innovation. Such a platform will free us up to start thinking small; we think we'll be surprised where it takes us.

Tom Lodge is a research fellow at Nottingham University and co-founder of Buttonkit, www.buttonkit.com.

Hyperoptic broadband rollout in Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes Council is using Hyperoptic to deliver 'hyperfast' broadband to over 4,500 properties in its social housing portfolio.

Hyperoptic installs fibre directly into a property (fibre to the home), enabling symmetric broadband speeds of

1,000Mbps, which the company says is over 18 times faster than the national average.

Nigel Long, councillor for housing and regeneration, Milton Keynes Council, said, "This new partnership with Hyperoptic will open the doors for our residents to thrive. It will improve access to training and give people the means to apply for jobs and so much more."

David Walker, head of property, Hyperoptic, said, "The issues that typically compound digital exclusion are the provision and quality of broadband services. Having access to a connection over full fibre gives social housing residents the best possible internet experience so that they can take advantage of everything that the internet has to offer."



Housing Plus – Unleashing IT for service transformation

Andrew Dale, Assistant Director of IT, Housing Plus Group

Housing Plus has been working with Rainmaker Solutions, Littlefish and Incline-IT to transform its delivery of IT services.

The delivery of IT change and operational performance to meet business objectives has been a challenge for Housing Plus throughout our post-merger integration and wider business transformation projects. This hasn't been due to the lack of an IT strategy, a lack of IT alignment to business objectives or a lack of overall programme and project governance. Instead, challenges were fundamental, arising out of the overall rate of change, ever-growing business expectations of IT and increasing staff expectations to work in an agile way.

We began by undertaking a review, with the assistance of Rainmaker Solutions, to better understand the demands on IT and the issues in IT service and change delivery. This resulted in the definition of

key service areas that could be delivered as distinct components, either through our internal IT team or through external 'subject matter expert' service providers. The aim of these service components was to enable us to retain our IT strategy, governance and performance management, irrespective of service delivery.

Following the procurement process, four key service components were awarded to two main suppliers; service desk and end-user compute were awarded to Littlefish, and hosting and network management awarded to Incline-IT.

With these components being delivered externally, we've retained our strategy and governance management as intended, as well as the management of application transformation and support. That objective would then be core to a review of our future application needs following a second merger completed in October 2019.

Littlefish is providing high levels of expertise to our service desk provision which is enabling 24/7 support, high-quality help for remote workers and the transformation of services starting with device management

and deployment to enhance our agile and mobile working capabilities.

Incline-IT is providing quality management for our legacy hosting and network setups, while planning and then deploying a cloud-first approach to hosting and network management; this will result in Amazon Web Services hosting and SDWAN deployment.

What has been achieved relatively quickly by clearly defining our service categories, engaging with the market and selecting specialist suppliers is a complement to all parties involved.

There will be many challenges ahead as we continue to develop and extend our cloud-first approach to technology delivery, but the short-term benefits regarding the quality of IT services and assurance of operational availability will make our future plans for business and technology change more achievable and in shorter timescales.

Andrew Dale is the assistant director of IT at Housing Plus Group.

4net Technologies expands its CCS offerings

4net Technologies has expanded the range of services it can offer to the public sector via Crown Commercial Service (CCS) frameworks, now covering services relating to data access, local connectivity, telephony, video conferencing, contact centres and unified communications.

4net has been providing cloud and managed services to the public sector for the past four years as part of the first network services framework (RM1045) from CCS.

Ben Ryland, head of public sector, 4net, said, "We can now offer an even broader range of services to the public sector, and we're proud that our solutions were recognised with full marks for every service submitted.

"We are already providing services to a range of public sector organisations including the Cabinet Office, HM Treasury and the Bank of England, numerous ambulance and police services, and a variety of public sector organisations in the local government, health and education sectors."

What can IoT do for me?

Bernard Cook, Managing Director, Vericon Systems



The internet of things (IoT) is a term that is recognised widely and understood across a variety of industries and sectors. In simple terms, IoT refers to a network of connected, internet-enabled devices that facilitate the collection of data for subsequent analysis and sharing.

Within the social housing market, although mass adoption will continue to be a gradual process, IoT is beginning to find its place. Not only can it help housing providers to solve a number of challenges, but it can also help them to demonstrate compliance in meeting their regulatory obligations.

At its most fundamental, the IoT can be used to make buildings safer as well as protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of residents. It can also create greater efficiencies when it comes to life-critical devices and systems such as boilers, lighting and fire alarms.

Performance management

Boilers are an essential part of any household or building's heating and hot water systems. They are expensive items that can also be costly to run. Making sure a boiler is working efficiently and to its optimum capacity can be difficult. Predicting when a boiler may fail is also a challenge, and yet the impact of a broken boiler in a domestic property, residential home or indeed any building that requires the constant availability of hot water can be more than an inconvenience, it may also be a risk to health.

Smart devices, such as Vericon's BCM Connect, can monitor a boiler's health and status in real time. Intelligent performance data can be recorded and sent to cloud or on-premise data management systems where it can be interrogated and analysed.

These devices use algorithms to analyse the information from individual boilers as well as collating data from all devices within the system or hub to predict potential hazards or issues with the boiler before they even occur. This, in turn, allows preventative maintenance to be scheduled before reaching the point of a costly emergency call-out.

Future scope

As the amount of data collected and interrogated increases, perhaps from multiple sites, the machine-learning algorithms will start to highlight correlations between boiler sensor fluctuations and previous faults. These correlations can then be flagged by the system, allowing engineers in the area to attend and effect the repairs before the boiler fails. Similarly, it will identify common issues that could be managed and fixed without the need for tools or removing the boiler case.

Managing risk

Boilers are not the only essential element within a building that needs regular attention. Emergency lighting is similarly critical and requires regular testing. This can also be a challenge, especially in large buildings. The risk of non-compliance, however, is not measured in a court case and a fine, or in a lack of hot water or light; it can be measured in lives saved or lost.

Testing emergency lighting equipment is a time-consuming and therefore expensive job, and one that is often left to the facilities or building manager who hasn't always been given the training needed to take on such an important responsibility.

There are other drawbacks to manual testing. It makes record-keeping particularly irksome; standardised records and management processes are often lacking and require intensive back-office resources. It makes forward maintenance planning difficult because the fault and repair history of the light fittings are also often missing. And there are the practical issues to consider, such as manual testing

disrupts normal building use and takes the facilities manager away from other tasks.

Automated testing

Using intelligent connected devices, such as Vericon's EmeRed, to automate emergency lighting testing regimes has a range of advantages over manual testing. Such devices support better compliance because they can be programmed to conduct tests at different times on different days to ensure buildings are not left at risk in accordance with your regulatory obligations (so you can guarantee 100 per cent compliance). They support greater reliability, since the life outstanding in each battery can be measured to ensure they are replaced before an emergency occurs. It also automatically notifies you if there is a problem. And they can greatly simplify reporting – because the reporting is online via the cloud, individual lights, buildings or indeed whole estates can be controlled from your desk.

Smarter future

Using IoT and smart devices to reduce emergency call-outs and maintenance repairs offer housing providers obvious cost efficiencies and remove unwanted costly expenditure because any faults or issues don't have to be manually reported, replaced instead with automatic alerts and notifications before an issue occurs.

As with any data-related technologies, some doubts remain around IoT devices and data protection, and this is something that should not be overlooked by housing providers.

However, the use of connected devices in social housing will provide a number of benefits for tenants, maintenance teams and housing providers, creating smarter, more efficient and better-connected environments.

Bernard Cook is the managing director of Vericon Systems.



Dynamics and third-party integration

Trevor Helps, Technical Director, Omfax

Omfax Systems and Touch-Base have been working together to provide housing customers with repairs and enquiries diagnostics software for over 20 years. The two companies became one this summer, and the first thing we did was to address a slight change in the market that we've been noticing over the past two years.

Keyfax as a repairs diagnostic and general enquiries 'pop-up' has been integrated with all of the major housing management systems (to date over 14 of them) including many flavours of online portals for customer self-service. But an increasing number of our customers have been looking at Keyfax integrated with Microsoft Dynamics CRM.

The first two customers who asked about Dynamics integration were working with third-party Dynamics consultants who built their integrations using Keyfax Web Services. As part of any integration project, we ask for documentation: what is the data that gets passed to launch Keyfax, what gets passed back, and what CRM fields are they mapped back into? Perhaps unsurprisingly, we are still waiting for the documentation, and the consultants are long gone.

Why Dynamics CRM?

Whether Dynamics is seen as a more 'standard' offering than the major housing management systems or it offers cost savings in some areas is not clear. However, what is clear is that some customers have plans to migrate their housing systems to Dynamics. There seem to be more Dynamics suppliers establishing their positions in social housing too - just google 'Dynamics for social housing'.

The market seems to be changing; about 9 per cent of our customers have migrated to Dynamics or are in the process of doing so. Two of them are recently-merged housing groups, incorporating several smaller housing providers, so they represent a large number of end-users.

Why not let the suppliers integrate?

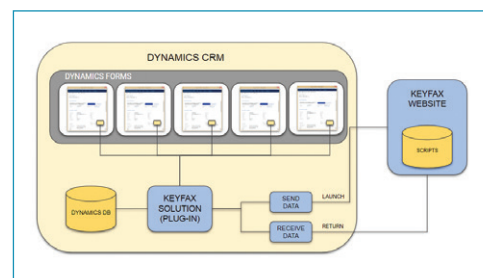
When we work with third-party consultants, we often find that their approach is to produce a minimum viable product (MVP) or a proof-of-concept (POC). The MVP rarely harnesses the real power of Keyfax and the POC is often used as-is, without really looking to expand what the integration could do. When technical support calls come in to resolve an issue between the systems, the Omfax support team often has little to go on, without the requested documentation.

But all this disappears now that we have a standard integration for Dynamics that is fully documented. This means that we don't have to understand and support different integrations from multiple suppliers.

With this new integration, because it is our own development, if we meet any issues then they are ours to fix and will always be our highest priority. And since we deeply understand Keyfax, this development goes well beyond MVP, to give users the power to make their own changes.

For existing integrations with the big housing management systems, if a customer wants to change what data is sent into or out of Keyfax, they have to talk to their HMS provider and to Omfax, agree what's needed, and then book time and spend money getting small changes done at each end. But with this Dynamics integration customers can:

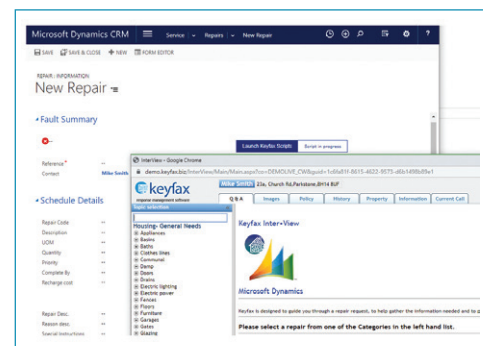
- Alter data into or out of Keyfax on launch and completion;
- Choose which version of Keyfax to launch;
- Instantly adjust how data is mapped back into Dynamics.



Dynamics launching Keyfax

The Dynamics integration to Keyfax currently supports Web Legacy and Unified Interface modes and will shortly support Dynamics Unified Interface within the Dynamics 365 App.

Using Plugin technology, a Keyfax 'launch' button can be easily added to any Dynamics form.



Imagine that a contact-centre user has identified an individual tenant in Dynamics. The user chooses a new repair and then hits 'Launch Keyfax Scripts' which pops up the Keyfax browser window on top of Dynamics.

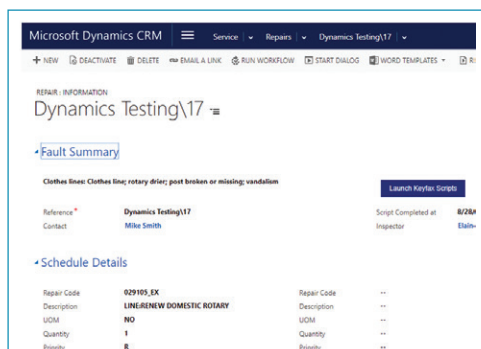
Keyfax is passed the name and address details, but can also be configured to receive any other data held in Dynamics.

When the script completes, data elements are mapped from the Keyfax 'export' data back into the individual fields of the Dynamics form, as shown in the repair summary top right.

All basic Dynamics datatypes are supported along with Lookups, Option Sets and Option Pairs. You can set default values to be used where data elements

Dynamics and third-party integration

Continued from previous page



The screenshot shows the Microsoft Dynamics CRM interface. The top navigation bar includes 'Service' and 'Repairs'. The main content area displays a 'Fault Summary' for a repair record titled 'Dynamics Testing\17'. The summary includes a 'Launch Keyfax Script' button. Below this, there is a 'Schedule Details' section with a table of repair information.

Repair Code	Description	UOM	Quantity	Priority
029195_EX	LINEARENEW DOMESTIC ROTARY	NO	1	8

are missing, and these can be set in the Mappings.

Logging & mapping

For general troubleshooting and to help with building Mappings, a 'Logging' mechanism is provided. This shows all data sent and received from Keyfax.

The Mappings define which data elements are sent to Keyfax on start-up. These mapped data elements are available to Keyfax scripts and greatly enhance the script's power and capabilities, often reducing the number of question and answer steps required.

If you need more data to use in your Keyfax scripts, like the housing officer for this tenant or their heating type, then you can simply include that in the start-up data. For really tech-savvy people, FetchXML can also be used within Dynamics to construct a query to provide any additional data elements, such as parental account/contact details.

With the configurability that the Dynamics/Keyfax integration provides,

the possibilities of harnessing the power of Keyfax scripts by a variety of Dynamics business areas is now something that customers can control and further develop themselves. With an increasing proportion of the social housing sector looking at Dynamics as their next CRM system, we're pleased to offer a standard integration which puts integration changes and mappings where it belongs, back in the customer's hands.

Trevor Helps is the technical director of Omfex.



Thirteen's Synapse360 storage & DR infrastructure

Thirteen Housing Group has completed the installation of a new storage and disaster recovery infrastructure from Synapse360, based on Dell EMC and Zerto software and hardware.

Hassan Bahrani, senior network & infrastructure manager, Thirteen Group, said, "When our core storage infrastructure started to show its age, with diminishing performance and increasing maintenance costs, it was time for us to look at refreshing our storage area network. After being introduced by Dell, Synapse360's bid won the tender to replace our core infrastructure.



Hassan Bahrani,
Senior Network
& Infrastructure
Manager,
Thirteen Group

"The deployment went very smoothly and the performance improvements from our new Dell EMC Unity All-Flash storage area network are seriously impressive. With Unity, we've decreased our rack-space usage by 70 per cent which in turn has reduced our aircon costs by at least £4,000 per year. The performance is fantastic – our IT team is really impressed by the system's response times and servers that start up almost instantaneously."

Thirteen then looked at its disaster recovery facilities after a number of mergers meant

that the housing provider's previous DR facilities would either need to be rehoused or a cloud-based alternative found.

Bahrani said, "Within a week, Synapse360 produced a proposal that described the proposed DR solution in detail. Its cloud-based solution uses continuous data protection technology from Zerto, with the replication target being Synapse360's own ISO27001-accredited data centre, protecting 170 virtual machines.

"Now we don't have the expense of another site to house our DR operations or even the capital cost of buying the infrastructure; these overheads are now absorbed by Synapse360 and we just pay a monthly fee. The replication is fast and working really well, plus Synapse360 is creating a dedicated DR 'runbook' so we can look forward to near-instantaneous recovery."

The internet of things in housing



Housing Technology interviewed experts on the internet of things (IoT) from BT Enterprise, Comms365, iOpt, Northgate Public Services and Shaw Consulting on the ways in which IoT could help housing providers and their tenants, how to go about introducing an IoT programme and deriving useful data from it, and dealing with a plethora of different IoT devices.

Relevance to housing

Commenting on the relevance of IoT to housing providers' overall operations, Comms365's head of IoT, Nick Sacke, said, "From improving day-to-day property management and the wellbeing of tenants, to enhancing the safety and security of both, IoT offers substantial benefits. And as demand for social housing continues to grow and greater operational efficiencies are sought, IoT could be a 'secret weapon' in housing providers' arsenals."

BT Enterprise's IoT consultant, Mark Frost, added, "At a headline level, IoT will help housing providers increase their operational efficiencies while reducing costs. IoT will also help to ensure more consistent regulatory compliance for the social housing sector while reducing complexity and costs."



"As long as common standards are adopted, the interoperability and management of multiple devices shouldn't be too complex or demanding."

Mark Frost, IoT Consultant, BT Enterprise

Scaling IoT for growth

During the past few years, Housing Technology has reported on numerous pilot projects involving IoT devices and analytics but there have been few, if any, large IoT projects so far.

iOpt's founder and managing director, Dane Ralston, said, "In terms of larger IoT projects in the housing sector, I believe things will change very soon. The reason is that while the technology has been around

for a while, the costs have been such that a scaled roll-out of IoT pilot projects hasn't been feasible. New technologies, such as LoRaWAN, have now made this much more viable.

"For example, by working with forward-thinking organisations such as Places for People, Leeds City Council and Renfrewshire Council, we've built business cases that show our IoT technology provides a good return on investment. As a result, we expect to see scaled up projects in the near future."

Northgate Public Services' housing director, Roger Birkinshaw, said, "The IoT trailblazers have been few and far between and one of the reasons for this is the lack of standardisation. If a housing provider has 60,000 appliances, all of the same age, make and model, large-scale pilots are much easier to manage and will be more likely to happen.

"The commercial sector is currently leading the way in getting consumer buy-in and once the right infrastructure is more widely available, housing providers will be encouraged to join the party. But we're still talking about a five to 10-year timescale before IoT becomes more mainstream in social housing."

Shaw Consulting's managing director, Chris Shaw, said, "The challenge to date has been that many of the IoT solutions have been built to solve a specific issue by suppliers who provide the sensor, the hub and the management platform – rather like the Betamax and VHS video-wars in the 1980s. At the same time, the pilot IoT



"In five years' time, IoT-based services will be much more agile, responsive and tailored to tenants' needs."

Nick Sacke, Head of IoT and Products, Comms365

projects have usually been started by a specific team in the business and have rarely considered the wider enterprise nature of IoT and how it could change the operational practices of the entire organisation."

Benefits to housing providers

In terms of the likely benefits to housing providers and therefore the reasons to consider IoT, BT Enterprise's Frost said, "At a strategic level, IoT needs to be viewed as a long-term investment by key stakeholders for the business case to stack up. By adopting IoT as part of their overall business and technology strategy, housing providers can use the efficiencies and cost savings derived from IoT elsewhere in their operations."

iOpt's Ralston said, "IoT helps housing providers protect their tenants' health, their assets and themselves through remote, real-time monitoring of their properties. This predictive maintenance identifies tenants vulnerable to fuel poverty and health problems, enabling housing providers to deal with potential problems before they really take hold, significantly cutting down on the amount of time spent on repairs and property visits."

Chris Shaw from Shaw Consulting added, "IoT gives housing providers an opportunity to gain greater insights into the

performance and reliability of their assets, with those insights then used to inform future investment decisions and their long-term maintenance and repair cycles. And as well as the long-term benefits, IoT can help with day-to-day operations such as augmented reality for field-based workers, better customer services, and remote sensing for specific properties."

Benefits to tenants

Comms365's Sacke said, "Inside properties, IoT can help with the early identification of rises in carbon dioxide, risk of damp and heating problems. In communal areas, IoT devices can alert to incorrect parking across emergency exits, bin fill levels, lighting loss etc. In summary, IoT provides overall improvements to tenants' homes as well as to the quality of their domestic lives."

Northgate's Birkinshaw said, "IoT can help tenants' budgets go further by enabling homes to be run more efficiently by spotting and rectifying damp or cold spots, setting thermostats to optimise heating costs and ensuring boilers are running economically. At the same time, wellbeing checks monitoring the routines of vulnerable or elderly tenants could be done by tracking water and electricity usage as well as movement in the property."



"We will see the mass adoption of IoT in the housing sector within a decade, largely driven by refurbishment programmes and new builds, increasing the number of 'IoT ready' properties."

Roger Birkinshaw, Housing Director, Northgate Public Services

BT Enterprise's Frost added, "Improved asset management will ultimately provide better living environments for tenants as well as faster responses to property-related issues affecting tenants' daily lives and wellbeing. While most of the initial IoT use cases for housing providers will be focused on asset management in the properties themselves, tenant-focused activities should follow soon after."

Starting out with IoT

When thinking about how housing providers could go about adopting some form of IoT deployment, iOpt's Ralston said, "Don't overcomplicate it – our advice is to keep it simple to start with, go for the low-hanging fruit and 'bank' those benefits. There's no need to roll out a massive project in one go; get people working with it and they will then begin to understand the role IoT can play and its benefits. After that, you can develop more sophisticated systems that create more strategic value."



"Don't overcomplicate it – our advice is to keep it simple to start with, go for the low-hanging fruit and 'bank' those IoT benefits."

Dane Ralston, Founder & MD, iOpt

Comms365's Sacke said, "Like most technology-related projects, an IoT programme should follow a staged process model, with emphasis on talking to other housing providers about their experiences with this relatively new technology, assigning a project leader as the 'lynch-pin' for all stakeholders, prioritising the plethora of potential IoT use cases and their related suppliers, opting for a phased deployment with full audit trails and actively involving some of the interested and/or involved tenants."

Northgate's Birkinshaw said, "A good starting point would be to make it a contractual obligation within the tenders for all new builds for the developers to put IoT into the fabric of the buildings, and appliances could be chosen with IoT devices such as heat sensors already installed. But it's vital that these appliances also have the capability to provide diagnostic information on their performance and live data feeds installed at source."

IoT, data mining and predictive analytics

In many cases, housing providers testing IoT deployments have made a rough distinction between using IoT-based data for monitoring specific properties versus using it for larger-scale data-mining and predictive analytics applications. Comms365's Sacke explained, "The first is



a precursor to the second. The greater the volume of data harvested from individual properties, the more trending and predictive analysis can be done based on data, leading to enhanced accuracy and new ways of viewing that data."

BT Enterprise's Frost said, "IoT data from an individual property is important for managing standalone properties, but it's also possible to use the same data as a subset of a larger pool of data for large-scale data mining and predictive analytics. A possible use of the larger data sets is to identify common and recurring issues across the housing assets that could be addressed in a proactive and predictive manner."



"New IoT devices will need to comply with open standards so that enterprise IT can receive, consume and act on the data, irrespective of the IoT devices themselves."

Chris Shaw, Managing Director, Shaw Consulting

Chris Shaw said, "The key reasons for deploying IoT devices is to collect data and then, based on a combination of rules, thresholds and trends, do something about it. Most of the IoT devices and platforms work on the basis of 'if this, then that' (IFTTT), that is to say, if the data tells me this then do something about it. Different systems and platforms will have different degrees of automation; some will use a basic setup of rules and thresholds whereas others will encompass AI and machine learning for increased automation."

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Housing Technology would like to thank BT Enterprise (Mark Frost), Comms365 (Nick Sacke), iOpt (Dane Ralston), Northgate Public Services (Roger Birkinshaw) and Shaw Consulting (Chris Shaw) for their editorial contributions to this article.



Alcuris and Radius Connect24 to deliver next-generation telecare

Alcuris and Radius Connect24 have teamed up to deliver next-generation telecare based on a proactive, data-driven preventative focus using Alcuris's Memo Hub devices. An initial project by the two companies has already been planned with 100 families.

With a focus on expanding the circle of care and prevention, the Memo Hub devices can help people remain independent and reduce demand for formal health and social care. By putting relevant information into the hands of carers and families of people needing support Memo Hub can reduce carer anxiety and increase the opportunities to ensure a minor event does not become a crisis.

Alex Nash, CEO, Alcuris, said, "We are delighted to be working with a major telecare provider and pleased that Radius Connect24 has recognised the innovative nature of our services. We share a common agenda to prolong independence for users, provide positive reassurance for families and data-driven insights for care providers and commissioners."

Kevin McSorley, head of Radius Connect24, said, "The Memo Hub is the most advanced hub on the market and has been designed from the outset with consumers in mind, in terms of both design and user experience. There are thousands of families who could benefit from this new service."



Is your transformation programme inconvenient?

Peter Lunio, Managing Director, Insights With Purpose

It was Abraham Lincoln who said, “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all the time.”

I've been doing some research for a social housing client which has meant reading a lot of corporate strategies and VFM statements from housing associations. The word that crops up time and time again is “transformation”, and it is usually preceded by the word “digital”.

It made me think about whether all these transformations were reality or fantasy, just like the rise of so-called ‘fake news’. I'm conscious that lots of things you read online, especially in your social media feeds, may appear to be true but often they might not be as they first appear. For the most part, they're intended to influence you to the writer's noble position (just like this article) but they can also cause confusion.

How do you test whether an initiative is transformative? Here is my attempt to explain what is, what isn't, and how to spot the difference. I have leant heavily on the work of Emma Stace, chief digital officer at the Department for Education, and her article, “Transformation is not a programme”.

Misconceptions

Many housing providers claim to be undertaking or are about to embark on some form of transformation. However, there are several misconceptions often surrounding business transformation in social housing. These relate to the role of technology and the role of process in achieving meaningful change. Both are required to deliver better customer experience, but neither addresses

everything that is necessary to provide real value to customers.

The first major misconception is that transformation is about technology. There's no doubt that many transformations include the use of new technologies. This is because isolated technology initiatives are not enough on their own to deliver better customer experiences. We leverage technology in conjunction with other strategies and shifts in thinking to satisfy customer needs.

The second major misconception is that transformation is about getting lean or going agile. While changing underlying processes is a necessary aspect of transformation, it shouldn't be viewed as the primary reason for transforming. Investing in new technologies and improving process efficiency are important aspects of change, but they are not ends in themselves. How often do you hear that a housing provider has gone digital by giving its staff a tablet or smartphone and then claim to be agile as well? At a high level, it takes changing a mindset, people, processes, technology, and measurement.

Five tests of transformation

So, if those misconceptions tell you what digital transformation is not, how can you tell what it is? Here's my reality checklist for you:

- **Is it a positive view of the future?**
Will it be engaging to your staff and welcomed by your customers? Or will they just see it as a cover story for some form of cost-cutting? If it is, then why not say so?
- **Is it irreversible?**
To use a housing analogy, is this a repainting and repairing exercise or is it a complete overhaul through remodelling? If/when your Grand Design is finished, could you return to your old home?
- **Is it inconvenient?**
If you've watched Grand Designs (to continue the analogy) then you know

that for the next two years, you'll have no heating, no carpets and dust everywhere. So, if it's not messy or uncomfortable and everything appears straightforward then it's probably not transformational.

• Is it cultural?

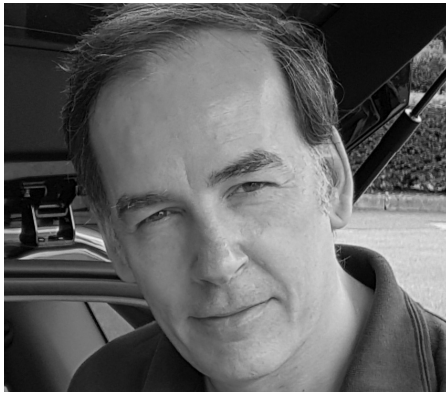
It's not just the infrastructure that changes; it's mainly about your people and their skills and behaviours, from your executive team to the customer service advisors.

• Is it personal?

Ask yourself: what will I be doing differently?

If you've read this article because your organisation is going through some change or transformation initiative, I wonder how many of the five tests you mentally ticked and whether you still feel your organisational initiative is transformational?

Peter Lunio is the managing director of Insights With Purpose.



Proptech start-up?... The status quo says no

Steve Reice, CEO, Rent-Hub (CB Solutions)

Over the past 20 years, I've designed many digital products across a range of businesses. In each instance, we entered the sector with fresh eyes, which is actually helpful as it provides the ability to examine the sector and its problems without any preconceptions. Of course, there are challenges, and it's a slow process, on average taking around 18 months of working with and listening to various stakeholders from across the sector.

In the case of Rent-Hub, three years down the line and I can honestly say that we completely underestimated the size of the challenge. The housing sector is unlike any other sector I have previously encountered; if you don't have a highly credible commercial director with a wealth of existing housing-sector relationships that can be leveraged or enough money to create the illusion of credibility, you will struggle to speak with anyone or gain any traction.

I don't blame those people within the housing sector because there's been a glut of 'proptech' start-ups offering badly engineered 'part' solutions, often based on a poor understanding of the sector and the challenges it faces.

Combine this with shrinking budgets and it's no surprise that senior housing executives are taking the stance of 'better the devil you know' rather than taking a chance on implementing an exciting new system with the concomitant risk that down the line, the system might be poorly supported or the company goes out of business.



The above, of course, doesn't deal with the larger problem of what we can do to make the sector fit for purpose.

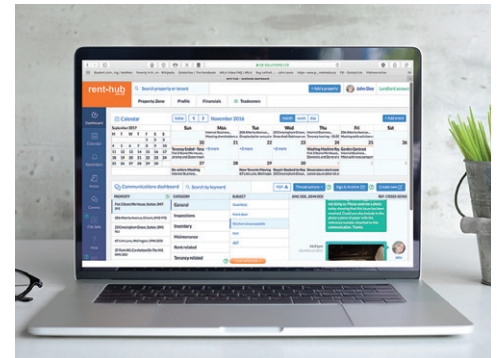
The housing sector is already recognised as being in crisis and this will only get worse; it's predicted that by 2039, the UK will be officially classified a country of renters. Even the most optimistic voices accept that our 'build to rent' programme will not produce the volume of housing stock needed to meet demand, and therefore it's vitally important that housing providers, local authorities and the government understand that the only way we will avert an even bigger crisis is to fundamentally evolve the way the sector works.

The current government (as of November 2019...) needs to stop removing stock through the 'right to buy' initiative and the opposition party needs to drop its crazy plan to give private renters the right to buy their landlord's property. Even with an optimistic building programme, we can't afford to lose any further rental stock from the market.

The government must recognise that almost 90 per cent of the private-rented sector is controlled by individual landlords and that this group now plays a pivotal role in providing housing stock to both the private and social sector. We need to incentivise this group through fair and progressive legislation and taxation while also introducing a free IT system to help them run their businesses more cost-effectively and profitably, removing the need for constant Housing Benefit-impacting rent increases.

We need to switch to a universal IT system focused on uniting all stakeholders so that they can work together as one functional body. The current system of having multiple solutions isn't viable and, in many instances, simply encourages fraudulent activities because local authorities are unable to easily track those claiming housing benefits across multiple local authorities.

Lastly, the solution must recognise and genuinely involve the tenant in the process. Initiatives such as the National Housing Federation's 'Together with Tenants' are a good start but based on our attempts to engage with the NHF, all of which were ignored, it seems like more of a PR exercise than a genuine attempt to find a solution.



I don't think any system should be developed or supplied by one company; it should be a combined effort by the best forward-looking companies that are embracing innovation and digital transformation... not just the established players, but all proptech companies that can bring value to the table. The problems faced by the sector can be easily resolved, but it will take a willingness by all those involved to do so. Sadly, based on our experience, I'm not sure it will happen. In today's culture, people seem to be more focused on protecting their position rather than engaging with others to come up with a solution that could provide widespread benefits and sector stabilisation.

PropTech start-up?... The status quo says no

Continued from previous page

We experienced this personally just 23 days before the Grenfell Tower fire when we contacted Anne Baxendale from housing charity Shelter, offering to work with them to provide free support to their clients. Ms Baxendale's response was, "I agree it's good to have tools to help aid better communication between landlords and tenants, but this isn't an area we are looking at ourselves at the moment, so I don't think we have much to add." We resubmitted our offer, but Shelter refused to engage further.

A similar example relates to Emma Dent Coad, the MP for Kensington and Chelsea, who made headlines in January 2019 when she said, "The government is ignoring

warnings, our constituents are going to be afraid and current measures are not working." Ms Dent Coad went on to say that the housing minister (at the time) Kit Malthouse was treating the issue "like some sort of theoretical exercise."

Moved by this impassioned plea, we contacted Ms Dent Coad to see if we could meet her or her team to explore how we might help those that she clearly felt so passionate about. A member of her team responded, "Emma has asked me to pass on her best wishes; unfortunately, she is unable to organise a meeting as she is incredibly busy." While I would not suggest someone was being disingenuous, it does seem to reflect a political theme of saying

one thing publicly, while doing another behind the scenes.

Despite popular belief, Brexit and climate change are not the biggest challenges facing the UK today; it's a fragmented and dysfunctional housing system that is impacting millions and failing the most vulnerable.

There really isn't any more time; those in charge need to evolve their thinking and start an urgent programme of roundtable discussions that are genuinely open-minded and open to all.

The opinions expressed in this article are those of Steve Reice, CEO of Rent-Hub (CB Solutions).



Bringing the best tech to the workplace

Steve Thorn, Executive Director, Civica

As in other sectors, public service employees are continually being asked to do more with less each day. A need to manage costs, combined with the rapid advancement of technologies that increase citizens' service expectations, is pushing workers to put in longer hours to produce better outcomes.

Yet this hasn't led to a magical uptick in performance. In fact, recent research from Deloitte found that 80 per cent of organisations believe their employees are overwhelmed with information and activity at work, and this can potentially lead to disengaged employees.

Conversely, inspired people are 125 per cent more productive than merely satisfied employees, according to Bain & Company.

There's clearly an opportunity to have highly engaged employees. However, with reports of public sector productivity being down last year, something needs to be done to ensure employees remain engaged and motivated to deliver the high

level of services and overall experience that UK citizens expect.

Home tech vs. office tech

Today's employees often have access to much more powerful and engaging technologies at home than at work, and their level of understanding and expectations have increased in tandem. Advances in technology have provided them with flexibility and agility in every aspect of their personal lives; they can shop, absorb media and entertainment from anywhere at any time. What's needed is to find a way of implementing that sort of experience in the workplace, not only to provide an improved work-life balance, but also to manage costs and ensure systems and devices remain secure and compliant.

The cloud as enabler

Rather than being a barrier, cloud computing is freeing workforces to focus on delivering engaging services and better outcomes for the people and communities they serve.

As discussed in our new report, 'Better, Faster & More Innovative Public Services' (available from civica.com/cloud), by using cloud-based technologies and services, housing providers can enable mobile, remote and flexible working, support employees' own devices and even speed

up the on-boarding process. It also allows for the centralised management of access to systems and files, securing sensitive data without hampering ways of working.

Cardiff & Vale University Health Board

It was this opportunity that led Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (CVUHB) to deploy a cloud platform with Civica to support the roll out of mobile technology to its staff. In doing so, teams at CVUHB can now handle 1.75 million case notes every year and deliver integrated community and mental health care based on a single electronic patient record. This ultimately means patients are less likely to need hospital admissions and can more easily access the service that's right for them. This is a great example of technology being deployed as an enabler to support public services employees to do their day-to-day jobs more effectively.

It's only through using cloud computing that public sector employers can empower workers in such a way. If they can deploy more intuitive and automated services, employees will be able to work more effectively, in turn being better able to meet the increasing demands of UK citizens.

Steve Thorn is an executive director of Civica.

Book now - Housing Technology 2020 Conference



BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE



COMMUNITY NETWORKING



IT STRATEGY

Housing Technology's annual conference (4-5 March 2020, Oxford) is the social housing sector's leading and longest-running technology event.

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY
2020 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

Around 300 people are expected to attend each day of our 2020 event to hear 40+ compelling presentations covering the complete gamut of business and IT hot topics pertinent to housing providers, lots of informal networking and mingling with your peers and the opportunity to talk to all of the main housing IT suppliers under one roof – it's certainly promises to be busy but also an excellent use of your time.

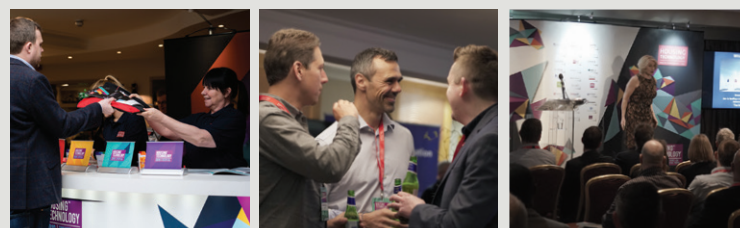
We would encourage you to register soon; in order to allow our guests to make the most of the event, each day of the event will be limited to a maximum of 300 people.

COMPELLING THEMES

For 2020, our conference's main themes are covering:

- **Business imperatives** – Using technology for cost reductions, business change and innovation.
- **Solid foundations** – Making the most of your core business applications (housing, asset, finance, mobile, CRM, etc, and incl. legacy integration).
- **Digital transformation** – From tenant portals, self service and UX to data management, automation and collaboration.
- **Seriously mobile** – Moving towards 'mobile first' now that smartphones are almost ubiquitous.
- **Small but perfectly formed** – IT strategies, software (incl. COTS) and services for smaller housing providers.
- **Refreshing your infrastructure** – Cloud migration, unified communications, PaaS, cyber security and DR/business continuity.
- **What's next?** Low code, AI, machine learning, STP, robotic process automation, 'digital twins' and other innovations.

Further information about Housing Technology 2020, please visit: www.housing-technology.com/event/housing-technology-2020-conference.



OUTLINE AGENDA

TUESDAY 03 MARCH 2020

1800 – Informal pre-event drinks reception (optional)

WEDNESDAY 04 MARCH 2020

0830 – Registration & breakfast

1000 – Keynote presentation: Sabrina Cohen-Hatton

1100 – IT & business presentations

1300 – Lunch

1430 – IT & business presentations

1630 – 'IT accelerator' sessions

1730 – Evening drinks reception (optional)

1930 – Informal dinner (optional)

THURSDAY 05 MARCH 2020

0830 – Registration & breakfast

0930 – Keynote presentation: Dr Kevin Fong, OBE

1045 – IT & business presentations

1245 – Lunch

1345 – IT & business presentations

1600 – Close



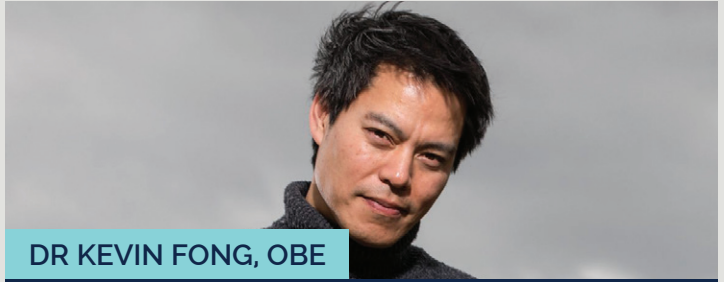
CAPTIVATING KEYNOTE PRESENTERS



SABRINA COHEN-HATTON

Dr Sabrina Cohen-Hatton has been a firefighter since she was 18 years old and is now one of the most senior female firefighters in the UK. After becoming homeless at the age of 15, Sabrina started selling *The Big Issue* and slept on the streets of Newport, Wales. She has since become an ambassador of *The Big Issue*.

Sabrina joined the fire service in South Wales in 2001 and was the first woman firefighter at the station. While serving as a firefighter, she completed a bachelor's degree in psychology at the Open University and completed a PhD in behavioural neuroscience at Cardiff University. Her subsequent research into incident command in the emergency services has not only won awards but has also influenced policy at a global level. Sabrina was recently conferred as an Honorary Fellow at Cardiff University. Her first book, *The Heat of the Moment*, was published by Penguin in 2019 and has been optioned for TV.



DR KEVIN FONG, OBE

Dr Kevin Fong has worked as a doctor with NASA and currently flies as part of a helicopter emergency medical service (HEMS) crew in the UK. As a front-line emergency physician, his expertise lies in understanding teamwork, risk management and decision-making under extreme pressure.

With degrees in astrophysics, medicine and engineering, he is also something of a renaissance man. Having worked with NASA's human space flight programme in Houston, Dr Fong also has a unique perspective on science, technology, exploration and the limits of the human body which he has brought to life in his incredible talks inspiring a global audience at both public and corporate events. In 2015, he delivered the prestigious Royal Institution Christmas Lectures, and in 2019 he was awarded an OBE for services to science, medicine and healthcare in H.M. The Queen's birthday honours.

TOPICAL IT AND BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS

Aareon: Delivering a digital ecosystem to connect communities

AccuServ (InterNETalia): Bringing quality & consistency to in-house repairs at Trent & Dove Housing

Adra (Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd): Developing low-code solutions for corporate HR & finance processes

Amazon Web Services: Presentation details to be confirmed

Britannic Technologies: How digital transformation reduces costs, improves CX & grows value

Cadcorp: Your geospatial strategy

Capita: Capita One introduces One Housing

Castleton Technology: Panel discussion – Achieving accelerated business transformation with customer-centric, data-driven solutions

CDW: Presentation details to be confirmed

Civica: 'Chat-a-boosting' tenant satisfaction & productivity when booking repairs

Cloud Dialogs (Total Mobile): Beyond repairs – Integrating planned & programmed work into your maintenance systems

Coastal Housing: "Can I speak to someone in IT?" – Fostering diversity in IT departments

Connectology: Transforming ICT teams

Fuzzlab: Chatbots and AI for customer self-service

Grand Union Housing: Going full throttle to drive change

Housing Plus: Unleashing Housing Plus Group's information & technologies to empower our people & customers

iOpt: Presentation details to be confirmed

Itica: Presentation details to be confirmed

Kingdom Housing: Chrome killed my desktop

L&Q: IoT and connected places

London Borough of Waltham Forest: The low-code chatbot challenge

MobileIron: Achieving mobile-centric, zero-trust enterprise security

Mobysoft: Presentation details to be confirmed

Nestclo: Simplified cloud-based property management

Northgate: Smart Tech Showcase – Housing providers pushing the IT boundaries

Orchard: Presentation details to be confirmed

Paradigm Housing: Getting the 'data basics' right

PowerObjects: Presentation details to be confirmed

Regenda Group: A connected data landscape

Sanctuary Group: A 90-day plan for technology change

Silva Homes: Would you like a receipt for that? Handing digital control back to the customer

Simpson Associates: Service management simplified – How to save time and reduce risk

Sovereign Business Integration: Implementing new technology? Make sure it integrates with your current environment!

Sovereign Housing: Unlocking digital transformation

Thrive Homes: Data security & integrity

TSG: Presentation details to be confirmed

Valleys to Coast Housing: Enabling the modern workplace

Wandle Housing: Innovations in housing repairs with Microsoft Dynamics

Watford Community Housing: Transforming and future-proofing IT services for your organisation



Bridging the gap between technology & business success

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

Consultancy | IT Services | Managed IT Services | Data Centre

Contact us on 020 8216 3333
or at housing@sovereign-plc.co.uk.
Alternatively, visit us at www.sovereign-plc.co.uk



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