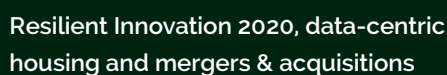


HOUSING | IT | TELECOMS | BUSINESS | ECOLOGY

03-04 March 2021
The Oxford Belfry

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY

2021 | CONFERENCE AND
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Editor's welcome

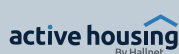
September 2020

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2021 – TWO DATES FOR YOUR DIARY!



In the wake of the pandemic, we are very pleased to announce that the Housing Technology 2021 annual conference and executive forum will now be taking place on either **03-04 March** or **15-16 September 2021** at The Oxford Belfry in Oxfordshire.

If the continuing pandemic is likely to prevent the March dates being possible (based on government advice/rules, social distancing and other coronavirus-related factors) then we will immediately announce a switch to the September dates. All aspects of the event will simply be migrated to the later dates, including all delegate, speaker and sponsor bookings and all overnight hotel bookings made at The Belfry.



As you can imagine, the rationale behind having two sets of dates booked and confirmed for our twelfth annual conference is to give all participants as much certainty and confidence as possible and to ensure that we can continue to provide our sector with a single event to bring together housing professionals and IT suppliers for two days of informal networking, 40+ business/IT presentations, technology demonstrations and business meetings.

For further information about Housing Technology 2021, please see:

housing-technology.com

LAST CHANCE FOR RESILIENT INNOVATION 2020



As many of you will know, instead of making our annual visit to the BT Tower in London, we are running **Resilient Innovation 2020** on **Tuesday 22 September** as our first truly 'digital only' event.

In the current circumstances, Resilient Innovation 2020 will focus on how housing providers can use technology as the underlying basis for delivering inspiration, confidence and security in everything from their current day-to-day operations through to their longer-term strategic goals.

Kindly sponsored by Aareon, BT and FireAngel, the event will comprise a series of short interactive presentations from one of BT's 'futurologists', Coastline Housing, Johnnie Johnson Housing, Kingdom Housing, Orbit Group and RHP.

Full information about Resilient Innovation can be found at:

housing-technology.com/event/resilient-innovation-2020.

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Forthcoming events

BT HOUSING TECHNOLOGY  **RESILIENT INNOVATION 2020** *Inspiration Confidence Security*

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY Resilient Innovation 2020 

22 September 2020 | ONLINE EVENT

housing-technology.com/event/resilient-innovation-2020

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2021 03-04 March 2021 The Oxford Belfry

housing-technology.com/event/housing-technology-2021-conference

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2021 CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM 

Resources

Housing Technology's IT Finance & Procurement 2020 report

housing-technology.com/research

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FireAngel SAFETY TECHNOLOGY

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housinginsight

Housing Insight - A success story



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accelerating the use of
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Digital, Aareon



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Would you like to find out more?

For a demonstration or further information on QL Next Generation, please
visit us at qlnextgeneration.aareon.co.uk or via our contact details below.

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Aareon



Great Places signs up for Aareon's software suite

Great Places Housing has chosen Aareon for its new suite of housing management software and digital solutions.

Great Places has bought Aareon QL ERP, 1st Touch Mobile for remote working, 1st Touch Self-Service App and 360 Customer Portal for tenant engagement, and 360 Contractor Portal for contractor management.

Sharon Hayes, director of technology services, Great Places Housing, said, "Following the merger of Great Places and Equity Housing, we decided to implement Aareon's suite of products for our housing management, mobile and digital solutions. This builds on the work and investment already made by Equity in its recent Aareon QL implementation."

Curo selects M-Files for information management

Curo Group has selected M-Files as its core information management system, mainly around tenancy and property management, HR and back-office operations.



Tom Battersby,
Director of ICT,
Curo Group

Curo and M-Files have designed a new, metadata-driven solution to manage documents, automate compliance and optimise business processes. About 20 document classes have been defined with automated metadata and access controls to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements. This metadata approach will also enable the contextual presentation of content by relating documents to each other as well as to additional information such as tenants, properties or projects.

Tom Battersby, director of ICT, Curo Group, "Managing large amounts of documents under strict compliance with regulatory controls is core to our business. Our old document management solution could no longer keep

pace so we were looking for a much more intelligent and flexible way to manage information.

"M-Files impressed us with its rich out-of-the box functions. Also, the ease of integration and flexibility to meet our specific needs were very appealing. With M-Files, we expect to reach new levels of efficiency and user satisfaction."

M-Files will integrate with Curo's existing file-sharing services, Aareon QL (Curo's housing management system) and the M-Files repository itself to create a unified user experience for around 600 users with access to over two million documents.

Manifest's Tower Hamlets contract

Manifest, an IT and business consultancy for the housing sector, has been awarded a two-year contract to support and manage Tower Hamlets Community Housing's line-of-business applications.

Manifest's contract includes business-as-usual support across a portfolio of at least nine business applications, leading improvement and implementation projects, and providing bespoke solutions. The consultancy will also be analysing trends, measuring THCH's performance data and providing advice to the housing provider on IT developments within and outside the housing sector.

David Sheehan, head of IT, Tower Hamlets Community Housing, said, "Finding a provider that's capable of providing support for our niche business systems wasn't an easy task. We appointed Manifest due to its strong understanding of the housing sector and assurance of delivering an agile and innovative service."

Are business analysts under-appreciated?



Susan Cornish, Senior Business Analyst, BPHA

With its ever-increasing reliance on technology to automate mundane processes and free up people to do the things that technology can't do, the housing sector faces a big challenge in terms of keeping up with the pace of change and ensuring that what it delivers adds value.

As a practising business analyst in the housing sector, I find that organisations are all facing similar challenges:

- What changes should we make to align our processes and business systems to our corporate strategies and objectives?
- How do we plan and prioritise those changes?
- How do we ensure that we are taking a holistic view and aren't missing any key dependencies?
- How do we start the process of understanding all of our processes and what changes need to be made?
- What technologies are available to us and what options do we have?
- How do we ensure benefits realisation and business acceptance?
- How can we ensure that we remain flexible to change?

These are all challenges where having a strong business analysis function is key. Good business analysts are highly skilled in areas that, when combined with willing subject matter experts and skilled developers, can bring about the implementation of solutions that offer genuine value to both internal and external stakeholders alike.

So, what does a good business analysis function in a housing association look like? For me, it's a team of business analysts who possess the following attributes:

- **Attention to detail** – the quality of a business analyst's outputs must be high; there's no place for sloppy work;
- **Influencing skills** – sometimes you know it's the right thing to do and you just need to convince the others;
- **Resilience** – it can be tough and you need to be able to bounce back after a set-back;
- **Commercial awareness** – knowing what is going on in the wider world as well as in the context of housing;
- **Housing domain experience** – while a business analyst doesn't need to know every detail of a particular area, they certainly need to understand the area they are working in and how it fits within the wider context. They also need a good degree of technical knowledge; no one wants to sit in a discussion with IT developers and not have a clue what they are talking about when they mention APIs;
- **Team working** – the ability to work well as part of a team goes a long way towards sharing the load and getting value delivered at pace;
- **Agile mindset** – this doesn't mean stressing about working precisely to an agile framework, it is about working towards delivering value at pace while remaining flexible and accepting of change;
- **CPD** – a dedication towards continual professional development.

It's then about setting out clearly what the business analysis function is responsible for in terms of deliverables:

- Analysing and understanding the situation or problem area;
- Process improvement;
- Inputting into the business case, with options for change;
- Defining and managing the requirements;
- Managing the benefits and business acceptance of the new solution;
- Business acceptance and testing;
- Implementation of the change;
- Continual improvement of the solution.

And then working with the business to facilitate:

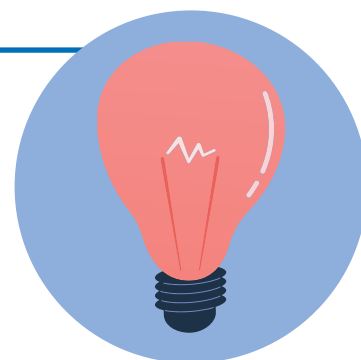
- A deep understanding of the area of focus and the value to be delivered.
- The delivery of requirements that help to tell a story as well as provide the right level of detail for the solution to be developed. This is a delicate balance and one where the use of 'user stories' is very helpful; a user story is good because it allows the requirement to be very end-user focused, with the right acceptance criteria providing the right level of technical detail yet also allowing for a good degree of flexibility for the developers.
- Process improvement – recognising areas where efficiency or customer experience can be improved, removing duplicates, reducing workload and bottle necks.
- Benefits management and business acceptance – working with key stakeholders to define and review benefits and use them to ensure the resulting solution delivers value as well as helping to get the business through the change curve smoothly.
- Implementation – working closely with the business and development teams to ensure smooth implementation and post-live support; we don't simply put the solution in and then let people 'get on with it' – we are there to support the business at all stages.

- Continual improvement – thinking that you can just put a solution in and leave it is a one-way trip to disaster.

Having a robust and effective business analysis function really does get you a long way towards delivering solutions that add value, are delivered at pace and facilitate a continual improvement approach. What is not to love about that?

My recommendation to any organisations who either don't have a business analysis function or have one (but aren't quite sure what it's doing) is to review it against the points above. I promise you the investment will be worth it and will certainly give you a good return as you start to see your ideas and strategies come to life and your operations become more efficient.

Susan Cornish is a senior business analyst at BPHA.



Remote alarm monitoring combats 'no access'

A proactive approach to Fire and CO risk management

Nick Rutter, Chief Product Officer, FireAngel



The Regulator of Social Housing's third temporary monthly survey found that gaining physical access to properties remained a concern for housing providers across the UK due to the risks posed by the pandemic.

Nick Rutter, FireAngel's chief product officer, explores how connected and cost-effective fire safety solutions that facilitate remote real-time monitoring can not only overcome the potential issues posed by failing to gain physical access to a property, but also provide a compliant and future-proofed approach to asset and risk management across an entire housing portfolio that safeguards every resident.

As essential works recommence after five months' disruption, housing providers face the challenge of understanding the level of risk each resident and property now poses, particularly regarding to fire safety.

Since March 2020, contractors' ability to gain access to a property to conduct necessary maintenance checks and repairs was significantly reduced while many vulnerable and elderly residents shielded from the virus and refused other people into their homes.

Repairs' backlog

As contractors now work to overcome the backlog of repairs and complete a build-up of necessary maintenance checks, concerns are focused on ensuring the safety and wellbeing of both them and residents to mitigate any potential spread of the virus.

This is combined with the ever-present threat of the rate of infection rising, which would once again place an immediate and substantial halt on essential maintenance due to the inability for contractors to gain physical access to a property and potentially increase the fire risk level for some residents.

So, how can housing providers think ahead to overcome access and maintenance issues, successfully future-proof installations and gain a better understanding of the levels of fire risk in their portfolio?

In short, remote real-time monitoring.

Remote monitoring capabilities are not only offering a wide range of benefits for existing housing portfolios, they are also transforming the future of fire safety and paving the way for a new generation of digital developments in housing that place IoT at the core of their construction.

Real-time monitoring

The activation of a connected cloud-based gateway allows instant remote real-time monitoring of Smart RF smoke, heat and carbon-monoxide (CO) alarms, enabling housing providers to achieve full traceability, audit and compliance across their entire housing portfolios by simplifying the monitoring of alarm networks across every property.

Through a connected system, such as FireAngel Predict technology, providers can further futureproof and enhance their fire and CO protection by receiving an overview of fire risk across the entire property portfolio to help pinpoint increasing risk levels and enhance overall efficiency. This subsequently supports a long-term reduction in overheads as assets are applied in the most efficient way.



Connected gateways

Through the use of a connected gateway, providers can also activate instant access to vital information including alarm diagnostics for every alarm across the network to ensure 24/7 legislative compliance, whilst FireAngel's patented Predict technology automatically provides the ability to pinpoint and manage risk remotely. Properties are also future-proofed against potential regulatory changes as the system offers the ability to be adapted at a later date to meet changes in resident risk.

The ability to view the performance of each alarm in real time also aids proactive asset maintenance as housing providers can adopt a targeted approach to the application of resources, subsequently simplifying fire risk management. Providers have instant access to vital information from every alarm across each property, including current status, history, replacement dates and network health.

Hybrid networks and IoT

The system also delivers complete freedom to accommodate a hybrid network, which supports the specification of mains- and battery-powered alarms in the same property. This optimises the use of existing wiring for mains alarms, while the ease of installation of battery-powered alarms offers cost and resource savings by reducing the amount of time a contractor spends inside the property.

As connected technology continues to pave the way for fire safety, housing providers can benefit from IoT and connected fire-safety technologies such as Predict, which uses artificial intelligence to bridge the gap in communication between a property and its residents.

The social housing sector has the opportunity to take an alternative approach to the fire safety installed in future properties by procuring intelligent connected solutions that offer the ability to be cost-effectively upgraded and adapted at a later date to meet the individual needs of

each resident. This can be achieved by using a connected fire safety system that features our Predict technology.

Artificial intelligence

This AI-driven approach can provide an automatic stratification of risk across an entire housing portfolio, saving providers valuable time and money, while also ensuring compliance with current and future legislation to deliver residents with the highest levels of fire and CO protection.

As the pandemic continues to have a significant impact, social housing providers should take an alternative approach to the provision of fire-safety solutions to successfully streamline their asset management through the facilitation of remote real-time monitoring.

Nick Rutter is the chief product officer for FireAngel.



For more information on how FireAngel's extensive range of connected fire-safety solutions can suit your housing portfolio, please visit fireangel.co.uk/connect.



Gravesham's future digital transformation with Castleton

Gravesham Borough Council has chosen Castleton Technology (now part of MRI Software) to provide the core business applications for its full digital transformation by 2023.

When the council's previous Capita housing management system was coming to the end of its life, it decided to use the opportunity for a complete refresh of its core business applications in order to deliver an innovative and transformative platform for customer insights and a high-quality digital experience.

Daniel Killian, assistant director for housing, Gravesham Borough Council, said, "Change at this scale is important to get right first time. Castleton offered us a modular and flexible housing management system that was not only easy to use but ticked the box for integration with our existing solutions.

"A traditional housing management system will always deliver a traditional service. What we've encountered is housing management suppliers layering improvements onto their systems and developing great-looking interfaces, yet often the underlying functional issues haven't been fixed, which then affect the system's flexibility and effectiveness."

Castleton's three-year contract with Gravesham Borough Council includes the provision of the full suite of business applications spanning housing, CRM, self-service, mobile working, asset management, service charges, dashboards and arrears forecasting, all of which will be hosted in Castleton's own datacentre.

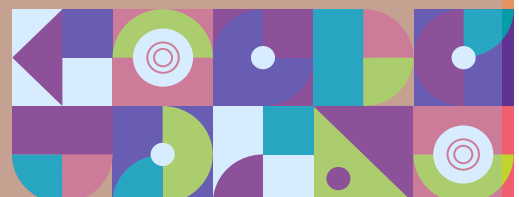
Killian said, "During the procurement process, Castleton set-up a number of webinars with their existing customers who gave us a no-holds barred view of the solutions and the support they get from Castleton. This was an important factor for us because we weren't getting a sales pitch, but valuable working knowledge of the solutions in real working scenarios."

Gravesham's IT team wanted to ensure that any new systems were sufficiently flexible to let them maintain, configure and expand so they could completely control the direction of travel.

Killian said, "This is exactly what Castleton can provide us with. We were attracted to this level of flexibility within the solutions because our in-house IT team is agile enough to make these configurations without needing to go back to Castleton and adding extra development cost.






"We found other suppliers' solutions to be more rigid and locked-down, which can suit some housing providers' IT departments but for us, Castleton's modular and flexible approach was what we were looking for."

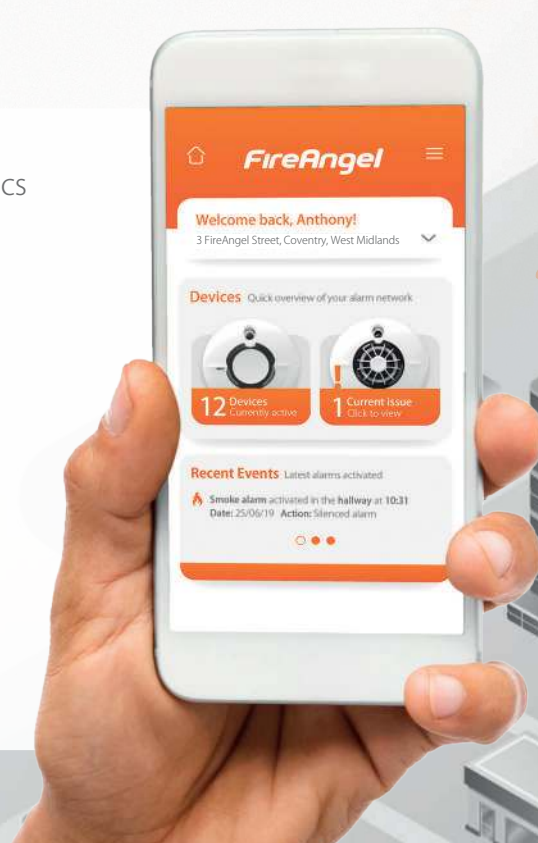
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50M Over 50 million alarms sold worldwide **100+** Registered technology patents **UK** based Research and Development team

* Calculations based on smoke and heat alarms

Housing Insight – A success story

Established in 2011, PanConnect by Housing Insight was developed from a vision to provide the housing sector with an adaptable holistic set of software tools and business-focused solutions to enhance housing management processes.

By 2013, product development was directed alongside strategic partnerships in the housing sector, including United Welsh Housing and Trivallis Housing. 2015 saw Housing Insight successfully launch its core systems, Tenant Self Service and Mobile Staff App. Later that year, having won a competitive tender, Housing Insight partnered with the customer Solas (now part of Pobl Group) to build a platform for their supporting people team.

This was the start of the PanConnect suite of solutions.

The wins keep coming

With another successful tender win at Bron Afon Community Housing to provide our Mobile Staff App for its compliance, neighbourhoods and general needs housing teams, complemented by our Customer Self Service Portal and App, the housing provider continues to work closely with us, amending the solutions to meet its changing needs.

Rise to fame

With a growing and established presence in Wales, new customers continued to join us, with our PanConnect Mobile Staff App and the Self-Service Portal and App becoming the go-to solution for South Wales. Following successful integrations with multiple housing management and other third-party systems, we then began to grow in the north of the country.



“We have invested in a product that we see being used in all areas of the business. The dedication from both companies means that we see this as being an integral piece of software at Caledonia and we look forward to working with Housing Insight to deliver technology for today and tomorrow.”

As the company grew, in terms of both our customer base and our internal teams (support, technical and sales), our core values of maintaining strong customer relationships and understanding clients' requirements remained a key focus for the business. With a clear road map for planning future growth, we continued to align our resources to meet our customers' needs. Our strategy has always been to build solutions to improve business processes in partnership with our customers.

Here comes the lockdown...

In March 2020, the country was put into lockdown, a situation that impacted the housing sector dramatically, but with changing customer priorities, we were able to adapt. Our commitment and support gave them added confidence in our ability and the solutions we had in place enabled our customers to continue their day-to-day activities. Our Customer Self-Service Portal and App enabled customers to increase engagement with their tenants, pushing out bespoke messages and updates, allowing them to fully self-serve without the need to call.

Tenant communication improved with the addition of our two-way SMS communications hub. Our Mobile Staff App enabled our customers to continue to have staff working in the field, ensuring that compliance deadlines were still met.

Alongside additional solutions such as our Applicant Portal and Tenancy Sign-up, we were able to offer organisations the ability to complete virtual sign-ups online, thereby reducing their voids and waiting lists.

At the start of 2020, Housing Insight was set to have a record year; the pandemic didn't change this, we just needed to adapt to achieve this. We chose to not take on any new customers from the start of lockdown until June, allowing all of our resources to be committed to our current customers.

We had no reason to furlough any staff members, and our sales team committed their resources to account management and ensuring that all customers knew what was available to them.



As lockdown lifted, we opened our doors and began taking on new customers. Our Self-Service Portal and App proved to be the most popular, with three new customers coming on board, immediately allowing them to deploy an out-of-the-box solution with limited need for internal development resources, enabling them to truly achieve customer engagement through self-service.

The future is bright

Housing Insight continues to grow while remaining independent and offering flexible solutions to the housing sector. We have embraced the work from home ethic and believe that this sector can use the challenges of this year to change and improve their processes with the use of technology.

"What has pleased us the most is that we have found Housing Insight to be a very competent supplier and an excellent partner. It is keen to understand our business and ensure the solution meets the needs of our internal users and their external customers. We are very optimistic about our relationship with Housing Insight and looking forward to developing the platform alongside them."

The
Regenda
Group

"What has pleased us the most is that we have found Housing Insight to be a very competent supplier and an excellent partner. It is keen to understand our business and ensure the solution meets the needs of our internal users and their external customers. We are very optimistic about our relationship with Housing Insight and looking forward to developing the platform alongside them."



"Our focus is on creating outstanding customer experience at every touch point. Digital engagement is critical to this. The future will be defined by a mobile workforce with the ability to access, capture and store information on the go. PanConnect will enable us to mobilise our support services, taking our brand and service out into our communities. This will be transformational to customer relationships while making our staff experience more rewarding."

Nick Taylor,
Director of Operations,
Solus

We have launched multiple modules to provide specific solutions to complement business processes including a Rents solution to combat arrears and a Voids solution to complete pre- and post-voids processes which then align with our other digital solutions such as our Applicant Portal and Tenancy Sign-Up, giving users improvements across the business, allowing them to continue to do their work in the field or at home.

The future is truly bright for our customers and our team.





Driving the digital agenda

Tina Kennedy, Head of Digital, Aareon UK

No more 'business as usual'?

We have all had to adapt to working remotely over the last few months, but what about the future reality of the virtual office? Google has announced that it has no plans to return to the office until July 2021 at the earliest. How can you continue to support your people, your contractors and your tenants in a world where there is no physical office? The simple fact is this will drive a need for faster, cheaper, more dynamic digitisation of processes. The need to manage tenants and contractors and buildings from a remote environment is critical. Providing access to services for tenants without pushing up contact centre costs; managing the work lists for contractors without being able to provide a physical list of jobs and properties. Allowing tenants and contractors to access this information via apps and portals to enable self-service and seamless integration into your ERP means significantly fewer admin tasks and much more time to support customers who can't self-serve.

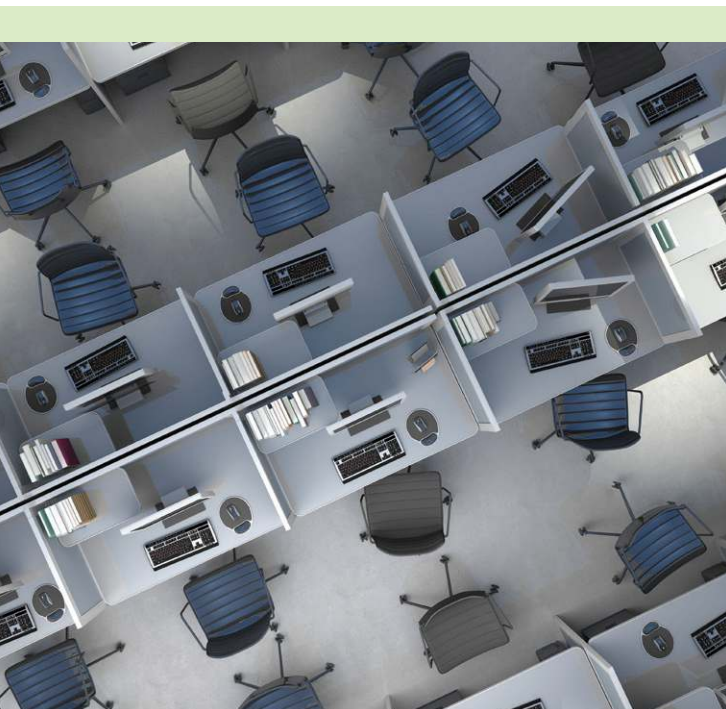
Tenants' digital expectations

Your customers will continue to expect more from you too. They already want to access services 24/7 across a choice of methods. The aim should be to provide services in as cost-effective a way as possible, being able to reduce the amount of people focused on administration and increase the amount of people focused on front line services, specifically to support the vulnerable. One of your key financial KPIs should be to reduce rent collection and arrears, with payments via app or portal, plus the ability to agree a financial payment plan to suit them. These digital tools will help you to deliver your KPIs.

Tenants will also want you to recognise their individual needs and provide flexibility around appointments – scheduling their own to suit their availability is definitely their preference. Digital communities will become more and more important to enable rapid and effective communication with your tenant community, but advances in technology mean these communities can now be integrated into your ERP to drive outcomes such as reporting an issue in the communal area. This can trigger a chain of events including assigning a work task, approving a budget and a contractor completing the work and invoicing, all without any need for the process to have any human intervention. Digital solutions can also be used to support people to be able to live independently, so increasing their satisfaction while reducing the strain on the housing provider to offer more hands-on support for these individuals.

Changing your relationship with tenants

These new ways of working also provide the opportunity to re-examine the relationship between the housing sector and its tenants. If a contractor can't go on-site to a customer's property, how about the tenants providing some services? For example, they could do a first-stage assessment of a repair and, with guidance, they even might be able to complete the repair themselves. There could be a new value exchange where the tenant could receive a discounted rent in exchange for providing some of the first inspections or fixes.





Voids and smart buildings

Maintenance of your asset base during these times is also critical – being able to access properties to assess and schedule repairs is more challenging. This could drive up the number of void properties or extend void periods. There are such advances in technology to provide 'smart buildings' where the devices in the property can remotely monitor, identify repair needs and raise fixes directly into your back-office ERP system. There is a future where these devices could support a 'no-inspection' check out, saving a huge amount of time and money while reducing a property's void time.

Data, analytics and AI in housing

The importance of the use of data, analytics and AI to support more intelligent processes will continue to grow. How about virtually pre-matching tenants to properties? Using data and analytics to segment and define specific types of tenants to help understand how they need to be serviced differently, especially those who are more vulnerable. Or using AI to identify repairs that are at the same property and bundle them into work packages? Add to this the ability to pre-empt repairs through using data, analytics and smart devices in properties to remotely monitor and report condition and do first-line fault resolutions. This could raise fixes in the ERP automatically, and even predict future breakages and schedule maintenance tasks before the breakages occur.

End-to-end integration

The choice of technology is critical, requiring an open platform to enable simple end-to-end integration across

your IT estate, with limited need to spend time and money on integration or customisation. This enables you to deliver new digital capabilities and realign your resources faster to support any ongoing changes. This end-to-end technology enables you to manage your tenants' whole lifecycles effectively and with the highest customer satisfaction while reducing operational costs and freeing up resources to provide more support to those who need it.

Embrace rapid digitalisation

Ensure your organisation is ready for the changes we are seeing – embrace new ways of working to optimise your current solutions and build new capabilities aligned to your strategic plan to enable rapid digitisation and ongoing support for your people, your tenants, your contractors and your buildings. Use the best of technology to support the delivery of front-line services, helping you to improve the lives of your tenants and free your people to deliver the most valuable interventions.

Tina Kennedy is head of digital at Aareon UK.

Can digital twins revolutionise housing?

Alistair McLeod, Director, Gray Fox Consulting



Imagine having a complete real-time digital replica of all your building assets... one that provides performance data, specification information and the ability to walk through the building using immersive technology, all while sitting at your desk?

Any housing provider currently undertaking business planning who is trying to balance the competing pressures of providing new homes, managing existing stock sustainably, and meeting building safety requirements post-Grenfell would benefit from this type of interaction with their physical assets. Could the adoption of 'digital twins' be the answer?

What is a digital twin?

Digital twins are not new. The term was first conceived over 30 years ago. As technology has advanced, with better visualisation software and the advent of the internet of things (IoT), they have gained prominence in asset management. In a recent Gartner survey, while only 13 per cent of respondents claimed to already use digital twins, 62 per cent were either in the process of establishing the technology or planned to do so in the next year. For example, in manufacturing, they are considered vital in driving operational cost-effectiveness, insight and innovation.

In simple terms, a digital twin is a virtual representation of the elements and dynamics of a physical object. It is not just a blueprint, a schematic or a picture. A complete digital twin will be in perfect synchronization with its physical counterpart and can be visualised with analytics and performance intelligence.

You can even use the twin to predict future asset states and performance by changing the external factors or dynamics. For example, environmental changes or the impact of using different types of materials. The digital twin is a logical model, meaning it potentially draws data from multiple sources to make the digital representation.

How complex does a digital twin need to be?

The short answer is that digital twins don't need to be complex. Most housing providers already capture a significant amount of data about assets and use that to report performance and carry out maintenance activities – this is a form of a digital twin.

The sophistication of your digital twin depends on the quantity and type of data you want to capture about your asset, whether during design, build or management. We have identified five types of digital twins, each building on the previous one to provide a more complex representation of the asset.

The five types are:

- **Asset performance:** Capturing and reporting asset performance to inform reactive maintenance and proactively help plan future investments.
- **Asset forecasting and planning:** The ability to carry out 'what if' scenario planning using a virtual environment that can go through an infinite number of repetitions and scenarios – this is very useful for determining asset performance under different conditions or with different configurations.
- **Real-time asset monitoring:** Sensors are deployed on the asset to not only capture information on the asset's current state, but also to capture dynamic information such as the environment or current capacity – this is also known as the internet of things (IoT).
- **Intelligent assets:** By capitalising on real-time monitoring, together with the scenario planning data, machine learning can be applied to anticipate problems through analysis of trends and patterns of data.



The golden thread of data

Digital twins are all about data, and in particular a golden thread of asset information from multiple sources. The more real-time and realistic your twin needs to be, the more data you need to capture and the more visualisation tools you need. For example, new build, decarbonisation and building safety are underpinned by common and interlinked data requirements, and digital

twins can be used to make these challenges more coherent and manageable.

Also, thinking about your data in terms of a digital twin is a useful way of visualising the purpose of that information, and this in turn can help to shape your technology strategy and how your organisation coherently captures and interprets information.

For example, the following questions might help you to frame the adoption of digital twins in your organisation:

- What assets require a digital twin and what type do you need?
- How does your IT strategy align with the concept of a digital twin, and are there additional investments in technology you need to make?
- How mature is your data governance and what is the quality of your data – do you have one version of the truth that is available to decisions makers at the right time?
- Can you capitalise on existing ways of working, such as BIM, to create better data?
- How will digital twins inform your strategy – for example, is your focus on operational efficiency or to improve the quality of your housing stock?

Digital twins will continue to evolve as the physical and virtual worlds are increasingly blending. Now is the time to consider your long-term data strategy and how that helps to provide higher quality and more sustainable housing stock.

Alistair McLeod is a director of Gray Fox Consulting.

- **Asset visualisation:** An exact 3D model representing the asset – all of the other data can be overlaid onto this model and when used with virtual reality technology, remote users can immerse themselves in or next to the digital twin in real-time.

Digital twins in the built environment

Building information modelling (BIM) started the revolution of capturing information about a physical object during design, build and operational phases. BIM is a key data input for any digital twin, but BIM alone can't answer the operational questions facility managers may have about optimising operations. Digital twins are a logical solution for this and for large commercial and municipal buildings in particular, the investment in complex digital twins makes sense. Over the lifetime of the product, the value created is enormous, with some surveys citing productivity gains of up to 25 per cent.

What about housing?

Digital twins have their place in housing because the benefits (as outlined above) are clear. However, there needs to be a balance. Certainly, for large apartment blocks with shared spaces, additional infrastructure and tighter health and safety regulations, there is a strong argument for 'asset visualisation' digital twins, but for smaller, standalone properties, the value of creating a detailed 3D visualisation doesn't add up.

A blended approach is needed, where 'asset visualisation' digital twins are created for larger, multi-purpose assets whereas 'real-time asset monitoring' and 'intelligent asset' twins are used for multiple, smaller assets.

For example, deploying real-time monitoring for security, heating and cooling across multiple assets will still provide enormous insight on their performance, and you can still take advantage of machine learning to provide predictive analysis, but you just don't need the full 3D model.



Lockdown, compliance and business automation

Shobha Mahtey, Account Executive, M-Files

When lockdown hit, it immobilised the entire housing sector; staff had to move to working from home, tenants and clients could only be supported online or over the phone and all repairs and maintenance work was brought to a sharp halt.

Fast forward to now, after months of moving operations online and trying to digitise processes, several industry challenges have been put under the magnifying glass. Straight away, many organisations realised that having remote teams presents collaboration and information-sharing challenges. Manual processes put compliance and customer experience at risk and a backlog of compliance checks and repairs could not be avoided.

Repairs and maintenance teams experienced reduced access to properties due to people shielding or self-isolating; a survey from the Regulator of Social Housing stated, "The number of properties with an expired gas safety check has generally increased and likely to continue to rise."

With the recent easing of restrictions, how can housing providers ensure they are remaining compliant while managing the accumulation of safety checks and maintenance work?

Connecting your content

When 93 per cent of staff can't find documents because they are badly named or tagged when filed, it poses a significant risk to tenants' safety. With a backlog of safety checks and maintenance, the paperwork and risk become even greater. Sharing information and collaborating efficiently is going to be key as teams work towards managing the backlog, but unless the relevant files and information are processed accurately, it will be a much bigger hurdle.

Some housing providers have seen the benefits of combining optical character recognition (OCR) and metadata technologies to empower teams with the tools

to manage safety checks and documents intelligently, ensuring everyone has the right access to the relevant information instantly. Key information is picked up from documents automatically through OCR which then populates the metadata tags. This information not only determines how it is stored, managed and who has access to it, but also ensures it is tagged to the relevant property and tenant.

The time savings and information visibility have taken the sector's efficiencies to the next level while minimising the risks of information being misplaced, lost or requests being overlooked.

Automate and track compliance

Once the burden of processing paperwork manually has been lifted and your information is organised, easily searchable and managed correctly, you can take it further and automate complex processes such as compliance.

Let's take handling the backlog of gas safety checks as an example. You will need to prioritise safety checks and assign the work. With the information from metadata tags, you will be able to create views based on criteria you set to aid prioritisation. These could be based on expiry date, address or tenant status. Once the most urgent properties are identified, automated workflows can create jobs to assign the safety check to your maintenance teams and field agents who can then record any necessary information during their visits in real time. In this case, the safety check carried out is a pass so the relevant information will be updated against the property and tenant record. Reminders are then automatically set to notify the right team of the next check for that property to ensure it meets the 12-month obligation.

Automating standardised processes such as safety checks saves your teams time and gives them a full overview of the compliance status of your properties. Alerting the right teams when safety checks are raised or needed, assigning tasks to relevant people, and having one place with all the required documentation are essential in case a tenant, client or regulatory body requests this information.

Ensure transparency

Tenants have higher digital expectations and are more informed than ever. As already mentioned, it is vital to have a full audit trail of information relating to a tenant or property and even more so when it comes to safety checks, maintenance or repairs. Maintaining accurate, up-to-date information is the first step to achieving transparency. It enables you to respond to tenant queries quicker with correct documentation and information and you can quickly evidence compliance, for example, for a disrepair claim or a GDPR subject matter request.

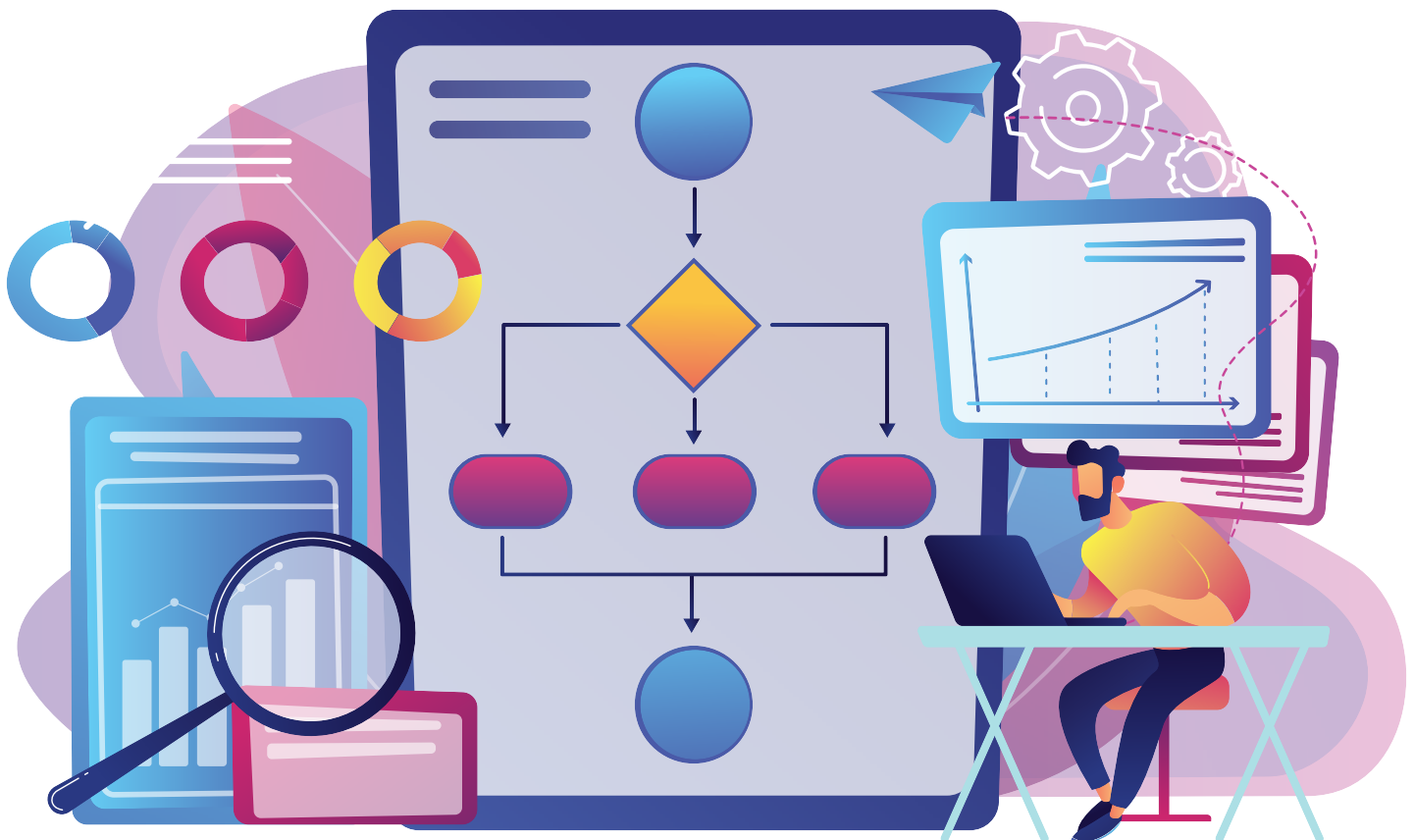
The next step that many housing providers are taking is a more 'digital consumer' approach to how they share information. One way they are achieving this is by using a platform that tenants can access 24/7, is personalised, secure and allows two-way communication. A client portal, for example, can be used to automatically share

documents that need signing, documents that have been finalised, important updates on repairs or maintenance, active safety certificates, important contact information or tenancy agreements.

This doesn't mean extra work if you integrate your information management platform with a client portal and automate what information needs to be visible in the portal, so you can get information to tenants faster and exceed their expectations.

Lockdown has brought about many challenges for the housing sector, but difficult times can also be the catalyst for innovation. We have seen it drive digital thinking in the industry, improve processes and have realised that a lot can be achieved remotely. Compliance will forever need to be addressed by housing providers and letting technology help with the manual and mundane can be truly transformative.

Shobha Mahtey is an account executive at M-Files.



IDS live with Cx Housing

The Industrial Dwellings Society has gone live with Civica's Cx Housing in just nine months, with support from housing consultancy Campbell Tickell.

The Industrial Dwellings Society has been building homes to help ease London's housing problems since long before municipal housing programmes began, changing their working practices and systems incrementally over the past 130 years. Despite this, the housing provider's IT systems had become outdated and its attempts to fix them were both problematic and expensive.

This marked the start of a two-year project to transform its technology infrastructure. IDS decided to break the typical cycle of a highly detailed specification, followed by four years of increasing dissatisfaction with a new IT system that 'doesn't do what we specified we wanted', followed by re-procurement.

Suzanne Wolfe, CEO, Industrial Dwellings Society, said, "Nobody said it would be easy, but by tackling the project holistically, planning both system and structural team changes in parallel, we've been able to use

our implementation of a new housing management system as a key tool in the delivery of our corporate transformation. We've also already achieved savings of around 25 per cent on our service delivery costs."

In collaboration with Campbell Tickell, IDS carried out a 'fast track' implementation of Civica's web-based Cx Housing in just nine months, with the housing provider's existing business processes adapted to align with the best-practice workflows already embedded in Cx Housing.

IDS is also using Cx Housing as the basis for delivering an end-to-end digital solution, including customer and contractor portals to eliminate masses of spreadsheets and manual processes.

Cardiff Community Housing takes PanConnect

Cardiff Community Housing is implementing Housing Insight's PanConnect software to improve its ability to create new functionality across its staff- and tenant-facing IT services and applications. The housing provider's plan is to deploy PanConnect across its entire operations over the next couple of years.

Nigel Lee, head of ICT and procurement, Cardiff Community Housing, said, "Getting Housing Insight's PanConnect software was a strategic decision for us, allowing us to become more agile in our approach to rolling out new functionality for our staff and tenants.

"During the lockdown, it was important that we gave our staff tools that they could use beyond the office and provided our tenants with the right online functionality to allow them to be more autonomous, in line with our 'customer first' ethos, while still being able to contact us, especially when our offices were closed.

"PanConnect will allow us to roll out a robust system that can extract and write back to our housing management system, giving our staff an efficient system to complete their day-to-day roles. For tenants, the portal will give them a true 24/7 self-service offering, available as both an app and an online portal.

"With coronavirus currently part of our daily lives, taking on PanConnect is enabling us to create a digital strategy that's more inclusive for tenants and staff alike."



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Clarion Housing appoints Matterlab for digital vision

Clarion Housing Group appointed London-based Matterlab as its partner to develop its digital vision.

Matterlab will lead the implementation of some of Clarion's new digital technologies (including building information management), workflows and tools throughout the housing provider's operations, starting with its development function.

Clarion is currently developing digital strategies to revolutionise how its customers engage with their properties across those buildings' lifetimes. The housing provider is placing particular emphasis on the buildings' initial design stages so that construction and maintenance costs are lower later on in order to achieve long-term revenue growth.

Dave Lee, director of digital design and offsite manufacturing, Clarion Housing Group, said, "We are embarking on a new era of using digital technologies to enhance our products, increase efficiencies and deliver good quality, affordable housing to those failed by the market. We believe that, in Matterlab, we have found the appropriate technology delivery partner to execute our shared innovations with cutting-edge tools and processes."

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Ongo's 'rent first' model with Mobyssoft

Ongo Homes has reduced its arrears by around £500,000 during the last two years thanks to introducing a 'rent first' approach alongside Mobyssoft's RentSense software.

Ongo initially introduced RentSense to provide an accurate caseload for their income officers so that they could be more efficient in addressing the right cases at the right time.

Matt Kelly, income manager, Ongo Homes, said, "Before the introduction of RentSense, we struggled to get an accurate caseload from our housing management system, so our income officers spent too much time trying to work out which tenants they needed to speak with. RentSense has since helped us to identify tenancies at the earliest stages of debt and intervene before it becomes a problem."

The introduction of RentSense coincided with a 'rent first' approach across the organisation. Ongo was keen to eradicate siloed working and wanted to engender a united ethos around rent collection. This was central to Ongo's risk-mitigation plan for universal credit, and part of the solution was to get tenants to pay their rent in advance and thus eliminate 'technical arrears'.

The 'rent first' culture also meant that when tenants contacted Ongo, if their account was in arrears then that was raised on the call and non-urgent repairs wouldn't be booked until the issues with rent payments had been addressed.

Kelly said, "In terms of universal credit, RentSense has given us

back the time at the start and at the point of the UC claim. We can have in-depth conversations and set expectations regarding how important paying the rent is – as a result, we have a decreasing number of tenants on alternative payment arrangements (APAs).

"We have around 2,500 tenancies on UC at the moment but our average UC arrears is just £70 due to a combination of 'rent first' and RentSense. Furthermore, the pandemic has affected 485 of our tenancies, of which 286 are now claiming UC but the average arrears across this group is only £40.

"From a management perspective, RentSense has really helped during the lockdown. It helps me provide in-depth reports to our executive team, which I'm now doing weekly rather than just monthly. I can also check our patch configuration in RentSense to monitor the number of UC claimants alongside tenant profiles so we can match the right income officers with the right tenant profiles. Any changes made can be tested first to see what the outcome will be, to ensure parity across the team."

RentSense eases YHN's lockdown

Your Homes Newcastle is using Mobyssoft's RentSense software to

reduce arrears and help it deal with the remote-working aspects of the pandemic as well as cope with a surge of new benefits claimants.

Christopher Todd, senior manager for income advice and collection, Your Homes Newcastle, said, "RentSense has helped us mitigate the effects of universal credit and welfare reform – it's the simplicity and the accuracy of RentSense that's so important.

"Our cases are prioritised in the most relevant order and presented to our staff as a really clear 'work tray' so they know exactly where they need to focus their time and efforts. In the past, when using our housing management system for collections and arrears, our staff would have to review each case and then decide whether the tenant needed contact.

"During the pandemic, we were able to get our team mobile and working from home straight away, while RentSense's reporting function lets me see how everyone is performing. It has also really helped me keep our board informed, whether that's providing up-to-the minute collection data, how we are performing on UC case or what percentage of tenants are paying or not paying – since lockdown our collection rates have regularly been at 100 per cent."

GREENING YOUR IT PROCUREMENT

Can you do it and do you want to?

Andrew Millross, Partner, Emma Watt, Associate, and Richard More, Associate,
Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP



Environmental issues don't usually feature in a housing provider's top considerations when procuring IT. This may be a missed opportunity as well as potentially overlooking compliance with legal requirements.

Policy objectives and the Social Value Act

Housing providers, including registered providers, local authorities and ALMOs, are contracting authorities under the public procurement rules (as set out in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015). The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 also applies when they procure services, including IT services, valued above the tendering threshold (currently £189,330 ex VAT).

Before procuring a services contract, a housing provider must consider how those services "might improve... the environmental well-being" of the area they operate in and how to secure that improvement through the procurement.

Not all IT contracts are contracts for services; some (e.g. off-the-shelf software licensing) are supply contracts. It is still good practice, though, and in line with many housing providers' corporate objectives and procurement strategies, to consider environmental issues. Large companies (which some housing providers or their subsidiaries are) must also report on environmental matters, including greenhouse gas emissions, in their annual reports.

Environmental issues & procurement

Environmental considerations can be factored into a procurement:

- As contractual obligations – to be delivered by the supplier, otherwise they will be in breach of contract;
- As selection criteria – through which each potential tenderer's environmental track record, policies and processes are evaluated either: to exclude suppliers that do not meet minimum standards; or (except in the open procedure) to score suppliers on their environmental track record and credentials and use this to help select which suppliers to invite to tender;
- As award criteria – through which each tenderer's proposals for delivering specific environmental objectives are evaluated and scored.

Contractual obligations

This is where housing providers can usually make the most environmental impact in their procurements.

Specifying an "energy hungry" IT solution will increase the environmental and corresponding financial costs of a contract. Cloud-based solutions may be environmentally beneficial by combining the energy requirements for processing for many clients, but some cloud providers may have a smaller environmental footprint than others. Some solutions may allow a housing provider to reuse the heat generated by servers to heat their buildings. Housing providers can recycle obsolete IT equipment to charities in the UK or abroad.

Any contractual requirements must be "objectively verifiable". Environmental requirements should be specified only where a housing provider has the resources, commitment and technical knowledge to monitor whether they are delivered. This means considering contractual remedies. A housing provider will be reluctant to terminate an otherwise well-performing IT contract for breaches of environmental requirements. Damages are generally payable only for financial losses, although they can be linked to other contractual requirements if they are commercially reasonable or drafted as incentive payments (e.g. for achieving environmental KPI targets).

The Chancery Lane Project has developed template environmental clauses, available online. Housing providers using these should tailor them to the requirements, language and style of their contracts into which they are inserted.

Selection criteria

These "looking back" items involve the housing provider evaluating the supplier's track record and environmental processes. The procurement regulations specifically permit consideration of a supplier's "environmental management measures". Suppliers that have broken environmental laws can be excluded (but only after giving them a chance to demonstrate that they have subsequently improved their environmental performance).



This does not apply to contracts called off from frameworks. Here the framework provider ran this stage when setting up the framework, so the housing provider cannot repeat it.

Under the open procurement procedure, these are limited to "pass/fail" questions. Other procedures allow a potential supplier's environmental policies and processes to be considered when deciding which suppliers to invite to tender.

Award criteria

Award criteria evaluate a tenderer's proposals for providing the IT services or supplies required. Permitted award criteria specifically include:

- Price or cost, with "cost" here including "client side" costs, and "lifecycle costs" (e.g. increased power usage) provided these can be quantified and evaluated;
- Quality, including "environmental characteristics".

In *Concordia Buses, Finland* (Case C-513/99), the court upheld award criteria giving bidders extra marks for proposing to use buses meeting specific noise and pollution levels. These were objectively quantifiable environmental benefits of those tenders. Similarly, a housing provider procuring cloud computing may want to evaluate the environmental footprint from the cloud provider's server warehouse(s).

Having these as award criteria contrasts with specifying mandatory environmental requirements which, if not met, will lead to the rejection of a tender as non-compliant.

The award criteria must be "linked to the subject matter of the contract". This can be to the "supplies or services to be provided at any stage of their lifecycle". However, housing providers may not always have the knowledge (nor desire) to undertake the detailed due diligence into an IT supplier's supply chain that evaluating this requires.

Environmental award criteria must also be measurable and verifiable. In *EVN* (Case C-448/01), a criterion measuring the proportion of renewable energy supplied to all customers was successfully challenged because it was neither measurable nor linked to the subject matter of the contract.

There is a role here for the buying clubs, such as the Crown Commercial Service, to incorporate environmental factors more fully into both the competition for places on their frameworks and call-off arrangements from them.

Conclusion

In summary, there are both opportunities and tools for housing providers to consider environmental factors in their IT procurements. The question is whether housing providers will regard it as sufficiently important to spend the extra time and effort needed to do so.

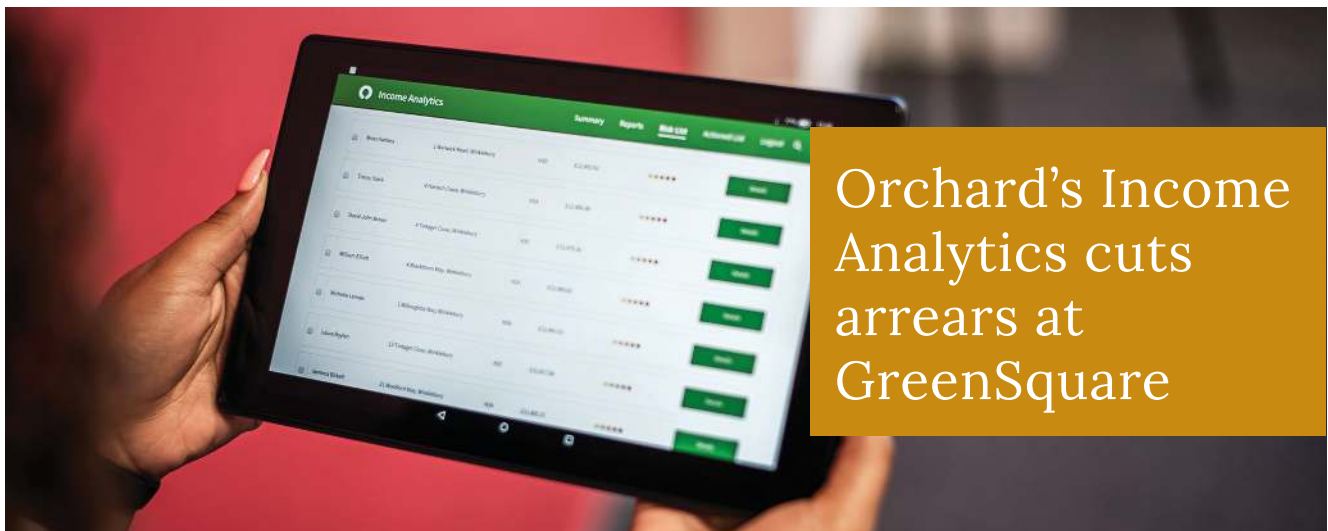
Richard More and Emma Watt are associates and Andrew Millross is a partner at Anthony Collins Solicitors LLP.

Rotherham Council boosts rental collections

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has appointed Voicescape to help boost its collections of former tenant arrears (FTA) and current tenant arrears (CTA).

The council is using Voicescape's software to analyse and measure tenant data, profile the financial risk that it faces from universal credit, as well as using Voicescape's tools to understand tenants' behaviours and make evidence-based recommendations on how to build and maintain engagement.

Paul Elliott, business and commercial programme manager for adult care, housing and public health, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, said, "Since rolling out Voicescape's solution to our FTA team, we have seen an increase in collection rates and improved the productivity of our staff chasing FTAs. We are so pleased with the results that we will be rolling out the system to our wider income collection team later this year."



GreenSquare has reported how it is using Orchard's Income Analytics software to identify tenants failing into arrears earlier and take quick steps to work with them to manage their rent balance.

Each day, the housing provider sends a newly updated three-year history of rent balances to cloud-based Income Analytics which then presents the most relevant accounts, based on risk-based scoring, to its income recovery team.

Rob Fletcher, head of ICT, GreenSquare, said, "This project delivered a great outcome for our tenants because we can now support them earlier with rent arrears and help them manage the situation before it becomes serious. This is particularly critical with the continued roll out of universal credit and the anticipated 'Move to UC' where customers on legacy benefits will migrate over and housing costs will go to them rather than to us as their housing provider.

"The delivery of this project is a major accomplishment for us and directly supports two of the four pillars of our 'simply brilliant corporate plan' – simply brilliant services and simply brilliant value – because it achieves sizeable benefits to our tenants through the avoidance and management of rent arrears and improvements to our own efficiency and productivity."

Charlie Hall, customer accounts officer, GreenSquare, added, "Income Analytics is amazing – it analyses all of our rent accounts' trends and highlights any risks at the earliest possible stage. We can then contact our tenants and resolve any issues before they escalate."

Introducing Active Portal

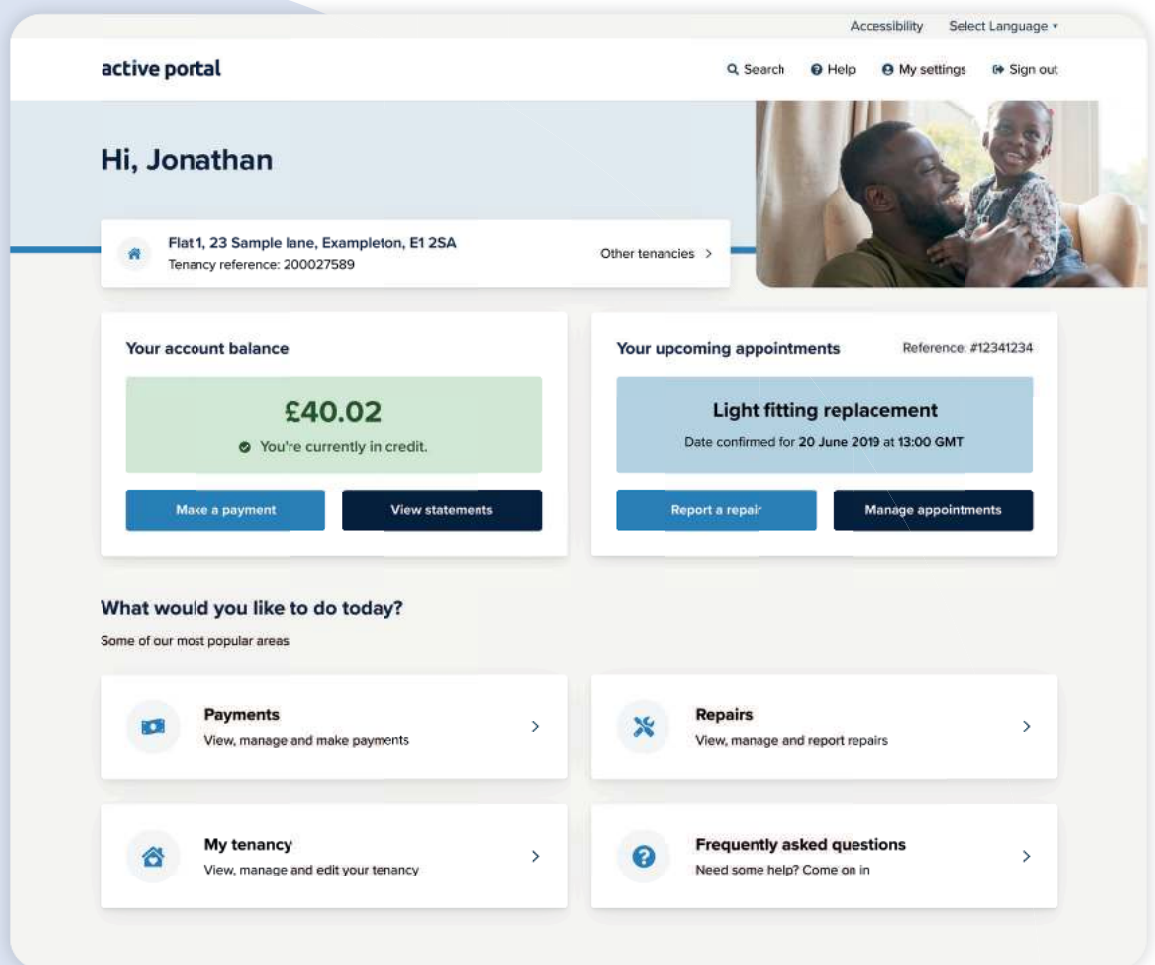
Active Portal is a self-service customer portal brimming with features and integration options, designed to help tenants manage vital aspects of their tenancy.

Options galore

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- And much more

Implemented
in as little as
67 days

400%
increase in
tenant logins





IT finance & procurement 2020 – More progress needed

Chris Cliffe, Director, CJC Procurement

I was delighted to support the Housing Technology research team in advising on its recent 'IT Finance and Procurement in Housing 2020' market intelligence report, sponsored by Aareon (see housing-technology.com/research). I've read the report with keen interest and wonder whether it tells the story of a decade of progress or not.

I joined the housing sector in 2011 from the Civil Service and the agency which today is known as Crown Commercial Service (CCS) where I'd been part of the team that interpreted the EU Procurement Directive ahead of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006, rewriting the rule book on framework agreements. We'd also introduced Category Management and I'd led the procurement of a £6 billion national IT hardware and software framework, including successful defence of a legal challenge, before being tempted by Circle Housing Group to be part of a greenfield, step-change procurement function, initially as Circle's IT and telecoms category manager.

Back then Circle, like many housing providers today, had a small procurement team of three people, with responsibility, at least on paper, for all third-party spending (around £300 million) whereas in reality the team was, at best, providing a sporadic advice and guidance service and managing the occasional OJEU process. The new CFO recognised this really wasn't best practice and Circle spent £1 million on a new team of 20 procurement professionals.

I implemented category management and led a central team of category managers working with the locally-deployed regional procurement managers based at each member of the group. Over a three-year period, we introduced proper procurement policies, processes and procedures.

We provided dedicated resources to work directly with Circle's business stakeholders and the maturity of supplier relationships, contract management and development of longer-term category plans bore real fruit. Prior to the merger with Affinity Sutton to form Clarion, the Circle

procurement team had delivered savings of around £50 million, all independently verified by finance colleagues, and had in many respects reset the sector benchmark for procurement, except we'd kept it a secret!

I've remained loyal to the sector since those Circle days because I, like many others, am really motivated by the impact the sector can have on people's lives. Now as an independent consultant, I've supported others including Southern Housing, Orbit and Midland Heart, as well as supporting Housing Technology with procurement-specific articles and with the IT Finance & Procurement 2020 report, and several of the sector's IT suppliers in navigating through housing providers' procurement processes.

It really bothers me that in 2020, 30 per cent of the sector's IT teams report having no access to either internal or external procurement support. On average, 12 per cent of a housing provider's budget is now focused on IT and technology, a figure which I reflect is gradually increasing, and yet only 20 per cent of housing providers support this through an internal IT procurement specialist and fewer than 40 per cent provide access to an internal generalist! This is compounded by the reported fact that IT teams are frequently initiating projects requiring procurement action.

There are several points I wish I could make to all social housing professionals:

- As far as procurement is concerned in social housing, the Public Contracts Regulations apply and public procurement is complex and nuanced and requires skill and you're obliged to take it seriously;

- Resourcing internal generalists is a good start, but can only really achieve tick box compliance and sporadic support;
- Each market, or spend category has its own characteristics and different tactics need to be applied (marketing versus IT, for example) to achieve value for money;
- Good procurement delivers good contracts which have to be managed end-to-end to ensure value is delivered;
- Best-practice procurement teams typically deliver seven times more value than their cost on a sustainable basis.

IT teams across the sector are delivering significant transformation programmes. Larger associations are making significant leaps into new technologies and ERP platforms. Mid-sized associations are wrestling with a constrained vendor market and need support with supplier relationship management. Technology is a key area of strategy and spending, so market research, appropriate procurement tactics, contract management and supplier relationship management are all important differentiators.

I would encourage all IT directors, CIOs, finance directors and chief executives to educate themselves about modern professional procurement and ensure that they can genuinely look the regulator in the eye and confirm they are ensuring "that optimal benefit is derived from resources and assets and optimise economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of their strategic objectives" and invest in their procurement capabilities; after all, you owe it to your teams, your residents and the communities you serve. This report shows me there has

been some progress in the last decade, but significantly more progress is needed.

Chris Cliffe is a director of CJC Procurement.

The Housing Technology IT Finance & Procurement 2020 report is available now for download from housing-technology.com/research.



A data-led approach to housing delivery



Dave Mann, Managing Director, DXW

We know there is a critical problem with housing provision, with many urban areas in particular facing a chronic shortage of high-quality, affordable homes. What was already a huge challenge before the pandemic will only get worse as economic uncertainty and unemployment will accelerate that need.

The government announcement that it would be ploughing £12 billion into a new affordable homes programme over the next eight years should, on the face of it, make some difference but we also need to focus on how data can help change the way we approach affordable housing provision in the UK.

The need for a digital-first approach to the planning system, driven by data rather than documents, is an important part of the government's recent proposals for reform.

Understanding the challenge

There is a significant, yet largely hidden, problem in affordable housing provision; many local authorities simply don't know how many affordable homes they have, so it's therefore impossible to quantify the size of the issue. There has been no automatic way of tracking an individual affordable home through its lifecycle, from planning, to build and occupancy. None of the systems that councils use throughout their planning processes are able to reliably track exactly which housing 'unit' is affordable.

According to the government, 460,000 affordable homes have been delivered in the last decade, but how many of those remain affordable today?

When a development is planned, it exists as a plot description and a series of coordinates. If there are many developments on a site, they inherit coordinates from the plot. But it isn't until after a build is completed that it receives its own street address.

In practice, this means that a developer might promise to deliver 50 affordable units on a development of 200 homes. When these homes are built, the council will add

50 units to its running total of affordable housing stock. However, they won't actually link the addresses of the affordable homes to the original planning permission where they agreed them.

Once a 'section 106' agreement has been signed off and an application approved, local authorities trust developers to deliver what's been promised. If a developer or, at some point later, a person occupying or managing one of the affordable homes chooses to abuse the system, the chances are that the council would never know. After all, it's difficult to monitor a property if you don't even know its address.

Be guided by the data...

Many councils are doing their best with outdated paper-based systems and non-standardised data. But there is another way. Southwark Council is driving this change with a digital service that creates a single view of available affordable housing. For the first time, the digital service will allow it to track affordable housing across its lifecycle while also making that information publicly available.

By connecting the built world to the planning world, Southwark Council is ensuring that when an affordable home has been agreed, it gets built, it knows how many homes it has, where, and can make sure the property remains affordable.

A national picture of affordable housing

While it's great that affordable housing tracking systems are beginning to be developed at a local level, there needs to be an accurate national picture of affordable housing supply. If we can create a cross-authority service, with consistent local, regional and nationwide monitoring data on homes, then we have the opportunity for local authorities to protect social and affordable housing stock, and for national policy to respond to what's actually happening in our towns, wards, boroughs and cities.

Only then can the government be confident that it is delivering against its £12 billion investment and citizens can hold them to account for it.

Dave Mann is the managing director of DXW.



North Tyneside's experience with Orchard Repairs & Maintenance

North Tyneside Council is now seeing measurable improvements to its business processes since implementing Orchard's AccuServ repairs and maintenance software last year.

In April 2019, North Tyneside Council completed a two-year project to bring their construction and responsive repairs services back in house after previously outsourcing them. The council was primarily looking for a cloud-based system that would offer flexibility in the long term. As many processes were being created from scratch, selecting a system which could operate effectively out of the box was a priority.

Adam Hagg, customer interface and service improvement manager, North Tyneside Council, said, "We shortlisted a number of suppliers and carried out on-site demonstrations to get a better understanding of their products. We felt that Orchard offered the best combination off the shelf suitability and the ability to be configured to meet local demands.

"One size doesn't fit all anymore, and we needed to be able to personalise the service we offered to reflect the needs of the area and the community. We felt that Orchard was the best choice because the other options came with fixed sets of features and no options for us to tailor the platform to our own needs over time."

After selecting Orchard as the successful supplier in September 2018, the council immediately moved into a rapid implementation, taking just six months to get the new system up and running in time for its launch in April 2019.

“One size doesn't fit anymore...”

Hagg said, "Working with Orchard's development staff, our small in-house implementation team not only developed and deployed the repairs and maintenance system but also carried out the necessary training across the 400 employees who'd be using the new system.

"We've been able to automate many processes that we did manually before, such as risk assessments and allowing sub-contractors to sign off work. The automation processes are helping us improve the way we share information with our customers too – rather than letters and emails, we've introduced a system of auto-generated text messages, so tenants receive confirmation when a repair is registered, a reminder and then an alert when our team is on their way to the repair.

"This has made a massive difference to the customer journey, reduced no-access appointments and allowed us to really listen to what our customers want and reflect that in the service we give them."



Notting Hill Genesis & Peabody's digital marketplace

Notting Hill Genesis and Peabody have jointly appointed Plentific to deliver an innovative dynamic purchasing system and digital marketplace for repairs and maintenance.

Plentific's online portal is intended to provide a complete work-order and supply-chain management system across all job sizes, based around a pool of locally sourced, pre-vetted repairs and maintenance operatives.

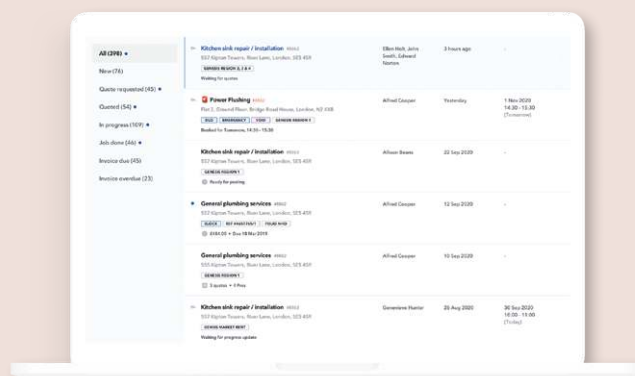
The two housing providers have already completed a trial of around 44,000 jobs by 500 contractors, with overall satisfaction levels of almost 90 per cent. Notting Hill Genesis and Peabody completed over 10,000 jobs during lockdown using the system, with an average seven-day turnaround of jobs.

Plentific's solution will be available to all housing providers, local authorities and ALMOs from September 2020. Access to the DPS Marketplace for both housing providers and contractors is free and no additional OJEU compliance is needed.

Ashling Fox, chief operating officer, Peabody, said, "The idea is to provide choice and control to tenants, enabling them to rate and select contractors themselves using the Plentific platform. Self-employed, skilled residents can bid for work themselves, and we've already seen hundreds of local tradespeople and businesses delivering responsive repairs in and around our homes.

"The system has already enabled us to carry out thousands of jobs during lockdown to a high standard and we think this will be an excellent part of the mix in delivering modern, high quality repairs services quickly and efficiently."

Initial use of the marketplace will extend to the 100,000 properties in the London and Essex regions covered by Peabody and Notting Hill Genesis.



Elly Hoult, group director of assets, Notting Hill Genesis, said, "The digital marketplace is the cornerstone of our pledge to improve our repairs service and provide better opportunities for residents to self-serve. This will give them greater choice and control over who carries out work on their home and when that happens, as well as supporting the economy by helping smaller and independent contractors work with us to deliver better local services."

Plentific will be responsible for the digital marketplace, from vetting new contractors to issuing responsive repair tasks and voids work through to monitoring and reporting operational KPIs.

Cem Savas, CEO and co-founder, Plentific, said, "Our expertise in 'proptech' underpins the dynamic DPS Marketplace. The trials with Peabody and Notting Hill Genesis have shown that our system brings substantial benefits. It can dramatically improve customer satisfaction levels, speed up repairs, lower costs for clients, and help support small- and medium-sized businesses."

Thirteen boosts repairs & maintenance with BigChange

Thirteen Group has implemented new mobile workforce management software from BigChange. The system, which incorporates CRM, job scheduling, a customer portal, vehicle tracking and a mobile app, is intended to improve services, reduce costs and boost productivity.



Michael Hall, senior facilities manager, Thirteen Group, said, "We previously relied on a combination of paper records and spreadsheets but with the volume of work we had, it was clear we needed to replace what was a cumbersome, largely manual system. BigChange has transformed the way we work by eliminating paper and providing complete visibility of our work."

Thirteen's mobile teams carry out planned and reactive maintenance. Equipped with tablets running the 5-in-1 JobWatch mobile app linked to real-time vehicle tracking, the devices are used for everything from vehicle inspections, coronavirus safety checks and electronic job sheets linked to on-site photos.

Hall said, "JobWatch gives us a live 24/7 view of all our scheduled and reactive work. It's the data that the system collects and processes that is really useful – we have real insight into our actual costs and performance which is something we simply didn't have before."

"We've already been able to halve daily mileage, reducing wasted travelling time and costs and we expect we will be able to improve our productivity through better resource planning, allocation and coordination."

"We're always busy, so we expected the implementation of BigChange to be a challenge, but remarkably just one person was able to set up and manage the

implementation, although one factor we didn't anticipate was coronavirus."

"We continued to provide services to tenants during the lockdown and that meant introducing safety procedures for our colleagues. We were immediately able to introduce coronavirus-safe working procedures using JobWatch so the app was embraced by everyone straight away."

For Thirteen's mobile workforce, tablets quickly became the accepted way of working, but as a cloud solution, the BigChange system itself also allowed major operational changes to be made quickly. This included working from home and negated the need for teams to come into the office at the start of the day.

Hall said, "Suddenly we switched to full mobile working, with our teams working from home and saving at lot of time and mileage. We can track departure and arrival times and without the depot visits, productivity is much better."

Radian's self-service with Active Housing

Radian Group has launched a new tenant portal, MyRadian, based on Hallnet's Active Housing software.



Who is Radian Group?

Radian Group is one of the largest housing providers in the South of England. In November 2019, it formed a new partnership with Yarlington Housing Group with the aim to deliver even more for its customers by providing more homes, building stronger communities and transforming its services.

The partnership between Radian and Yarlington Housing created a new organisation with over 39,000 homes and assets, 1,350 staff members, 79,000 customers and a combined asset register worth £6 billion.

Project background

Prior to the partnership, Radian was already a digitally-minded organisation, with strong in-house IT and web development capabilities, having built its own tenant portal and integration middleware layer.

In recent years, Yarlington has been considered one of the UK's leading digital landlords after its successful MyYarlington portal project was awarded 'Digital Landlord of the Year' at the UK Housing Awards in 2019. It is therefore no surprise that online self-service functionality was high on the agenda during partnership talks between the two organisations.

As an existing partner to Yarlington Housing, Active Housing was invited to discussions between the two housing providers early in the process. Active Housing helped to establish a strong digital roadmap by leveraging Radian's in-house capabilities alongside Yarlington Housing's highly successful digital strategy and the latest Active Housing products.

The approach

It was decided that the two organisations' vision around customer self-service would be delivered in a number of phases, so that certain areas could be addressed quickly and changes could be easily accommodated as the partnership talks progressed.

Staged approach

The first phase of the project was to replace the in-house MyRadian portal, which covered Radian's 25,000 properties, with Active Housing's Active Portal in addition to Active Housing's repairs reporting and permission request modules.

Agile methodology

Both organisations wanted to use an agile delivery methodology so that both organisations had full visibility of the project delivery and allowed for changing requirements. The portal was delivered in fortnightly sprints, giving Radian the ability to test and perform engagement throughout the delivery with key stakeholders and end-users. Daily stand-ups and show-and-tells were also used to ensure good communications between the project teams.

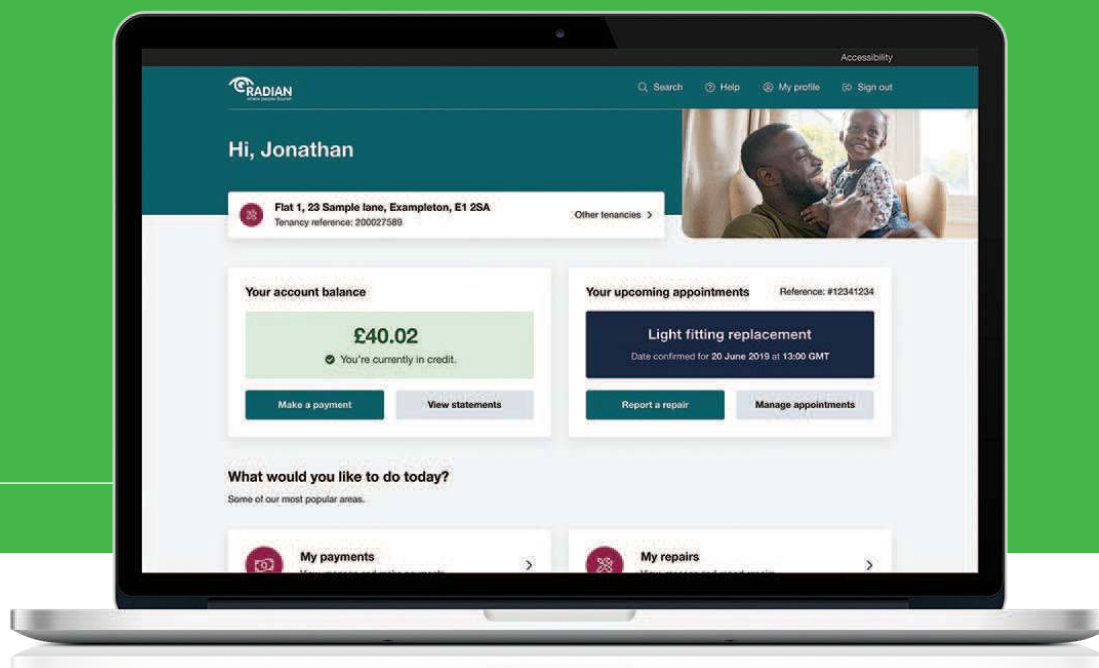
Challenges to be overcome

Rapid delivery

The main aim of replacing the MyRadian portal was to bring the Radian offering more in line with the MyYarlington portal as fast as possible. This presented some challenges because the MyYarlington portal was developed and continually improved over a number of years and had functionality and logic very specific to Yarlington.

This challenge was overcome by using Active Housing's flexible customer portal product, Active Portal, in conjunction with its Active Diagnostics module for repairs reporting and the Active Requests module for permission requests.

Given the success of MyYarlington, a number of features in it had already been added to newer versions of Active Portal. This provided a solid foundation for the first phase of the project. Any features that hadn't already been accommodated were analysed through the data available and either implemented or placed in a backlog for a future phase.



Coronavirus and the lockdown

When project discussions began, a worldwide pandemic was obviously not expected. As the first phase started amid growing concerns about coronavirus, an onsite kick-off meeting took place in late March 2020, and the next day the UK was thrust into lockdown.

With both organisations' project teams working from home, the pandemic was immediately top of the project risk register. Although a pandemic might have allowed leeway with delivery deadlines, the MyRadian portal was instead increasingly seen as an absolute priority because it offered Radian an enhanced way to communicate with tenants without the need for face-to-face contact. As the delivery deadlines remained unchanged, this posed a challenge to all teams.

Video conferencing and messaging technologies such as Teams, Hangouts and Zoom were used and strengthened by an agile delivery methodology. Aside from a few teething issues with remote working and a challenging few weeks before the launch, Active Housing and the housing providers' teams pulled together to perform incredibly well under exceptional circumstances in order to deliver on time.

Key features

The new MyRadian portal is a significant leap in online self-service functionality for Radian tenants. Some of the key features tenants benefit from include the ability to:

- Register and login;
- Select and manage privacy settings;
- Manage multiple tenancies from one account;
- View account balance and statements;
- View and update tenancy and household information;
- View and update personal and contact information;
- Make a payment (including guest payments);

- Diagnose a repair and select an appointment;
- Track upcoming repairs, with the ability to cancel and reschedule;
- Review completed repairs and provide feedback;
- Request permissions (e.g. pets) with instant outcomes;
- Review permission requests;
- Use accessibility features via BrowseAloud;
- Chat to Radian staff member via live chat.

Staff and administrators have also benefited greatly from the new portal; the portal's powerful content management system enables them to:

- Manage registered users;
- Add, edit and manage on-page content;
- Add, edit and manage repairs diagnostics scripts;
- Manage repairs reporting logic and business rules;
- Add, edit and manage permission request scripts;
- Set global and page notifications.

Success so far...

MyRadian launched on 01 July 2020, just 67 days after the project started. The portal gained over 5,000 registered users in just the first four weeks of live operation, with over 40,000 logins and almost 50 per cent of total repairs reported online.

For further information, please call
Active Housing (Hallnet) on 0800 023 9024
or visit www.activehousing.co.uk.

Harrow Council selects Civica's cloud software for tenant services

Civica has won a five-year contract worth over £500,000 with Harrow Council to implement its cloud-based Cx Housing and Keystone asset management software.

Civica's software will support the council's ambition to adopt cloud technology and create a single view of tenants across its 5,000 properties. A customer portal will support repairs and service requests, rent payments and online tenancy applications.

Mark Fosh, programme manager, Harrow Council, said, "We wanted a partner who could not only provide the right technology for our business, but who could also demonstrate strong social values and a willingness to give something back to our local community. Civica's

cloud-enabled Cx Housing and Keystone Asset Management software will give us better insights so that we can deliver the best service to our tenants."

In support of its social value partnership with Harrow Council, Civica has sought help from its internal staff to plant trees, help with park restoration and clear fly-tipping alongside the council's employees as well as providing an annual training day for the council's residents and staff.

DIY internet services for tenants from Curve IT

Curve IT has launched MDU Connect which enables housing providers to deliver their own internet services to tenants in shared buildings. Curve IT's package comprises a combination of hardware and specially designed software, including a cloud-based portal, to manage the full network within their buildings.



The housing provider-owned network can be used to deliver multiple services, including internet connectivity and smart metering capabilities to tenants without the need for third party involvement.

Technology from MikroTik is used alongside access points from wireless specialist Ruckus in order to establish the converged network. Software developed by the Curve team, including the access portal, is then used by those managing the building to deliver internet services to tenants. It also provides key information relating to the building's management, such as utility consumption.

MDU Connect was developed as part of Curve's work with build-to-rent provider Essential Living, who wanted to

feel comfortable in taking full responsibility for the quality of internet services for tenants at its four sites in London.

Simon O'Hare, CEO, Curve IT, said, "Keeping tenants in a shared building connected to fast internet services is up there among the most important requirements of building owners or managers, not least with the growing move towards working from home.

"However, many building owners have to rely entirely on a third-party provider for their internet services. As well as losing control over this important aspect of tenant satisfaction, it also means building owners or managers miss out on the ability to package and sell connectivity services directly to tenants, and this can be a significant new revenue stream."

MRI Software acquires Housing Partners

MRI Software has bought Housing Partners to augment its capabilities in the housing sector. Housing Partners' Housing Jigsaw, Streetwise, TAIM and HomeSwapper products will now be part of MRI's software portfolio.

The acquisition of Housing Partners follows on closely from MRI's acquisitions of Castleton Technology and Orchard Information Systems earlier this year – see the full interview with MRI Software's managing director on page 08.

Patrick Ghilani, chief executive officer, MRI Software, said, "We are proud to welcome Housing Partners into the MRI family, adding an exciting and innovative range of digital solutions to our interoperable MRI Living portfolio. This acquisition expands our ability to enable the delivery of front-line services, helping housing providers bring increased flexibility, mobility, safety and security to their communities."

Jonathan Prew, chief executive officer, Housing Partners, said, "Becoming part of MRI Software brings the potential for far greater scalability. MRI's global experience and technology will allow us to bring the benefits of software

to many more people. It will also support our clients in their desire to speed up digital transformation, the need for which has been heightened by the pandemic as the housing sector strives to deliver services remotely."



INFRASTRUCTURE |

Horton Housing appoints CNT for strategic IT

Horton Housing has begun the complete upgrade of its IT systems with Central Networks and Technologies.

The housing provider's upgrade includes a full migration to Microsoft Office 365, backup and disaster recovery, and service-desk support. As part of its strategy, Horton Housing wanted to adopt better ways of working remotely; CNT recommended that the housing provider should move to Office 365

so that it could use tools such as PowerApps and Teams.

Mark Spencer, head of IT, Horton Housing, said, "We've set out a three-year strategy to make significant improvements to support Horton Housing's staff, volunteers and clients. As a business, we support people across

all communities during some of the most challenging times of their lives so the IT systems that we have implemented with help from CNT have not only made a huge difference during the pandemic but they will also make a difference to people for years to come."

Aico buys Homelync

(L-R) Neal Hooper, Managing Director, Aico, and Luke Loveridge, CEO, Homelync

Aico, a leader in fire and CO detection systems, has bought Homelync, an award-winning 'smart home' integration and analytics company, with the two companies heralding the acquisition as an important milestone for housing providers looking for IoT-based connected solutions.

Neal Hooper, managing director, Aico, said, "Aico and Homelync is a perfect partnership, with Aico being the UK market leader in fire and CO detection and Homelync complementing this with its advanced data insight and analytics across housing environmental sensors including temperature, humidity, energy usage and gas boilers.

"Complementing Aico's Gateway which provides real-time data insight into connected fire and CO alarms in



a property, Homelync's advanced machine learning and analytics of this consolidated data will provide our customers with state-of-the-art data insights across their connected properties."

Luke Loveridge, CEO, Homelync, said, "Our vision is to harness new technologies to make social housing smarter, safer and more efficient. The strategic investment by Ei (Aico's parent company) and the future close collaboration with Aico will help us accelerate that vision.

"The vendor-neutral, open sensor ecosystem we have developed is 100 per cent complementary to what Aico offers its customers today. Add to this our team with decades of experience in software, hardware, machine learning and local government, and we believe we have the ingredients for a successful partnership."



iOpt wins million-pound IoT housing deal

iOpt has won a tender worth up to £1 million with Renfrewshire Council to install real-time IoT devices in the council's housing stock. The initiative has £150,000 support from the Scottish government's 'CanDo' innovation fund.

The two-year project will begin when lockdown restrictions are eased, with IoT sensors being fitted in selected empty properties being prepared for new tenants. iOpt's IoT technology measures temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide levels in properties, providing early alerts on issues such as problems with ventilation and damp.

Dane Ralston, managing director, iOpt, said, "We believe our contract with Renfrewshire Council has made IoT history and shows that Scotland is a world leader in the field.

"The technology we have developed is cost-effective, will deliver savings for local authorities at a time of financial uncertainty and help some of the most vulnerable tenants

maintain a warm, healthy environment in their own homes. To date, our studies have shown savings of approximately £190 per year per property."

Ivan McKee, minister for trade, investment and innovation, Scottish Government, said, "It is hugely encouraging to see Scotland continue its proud tradition of world-leading innovation. iOpt's pioneering IoT technology, being delivered in partnership with Renfrewshire Council, is a fantastic example of how innovation and collaboration can help people live healthy lives at home, supported by remote monitoring."

The Renfrewshire deal was hotly contested, with iOpt beating competitors from Sweden, Holland and Ireland.



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Accelerating cloud-based transformation at Housing Plus

Dave Mason, Technical Director, Incline IT

One of the many impacts of the pandemic is certain to be an acceleration in changes that we have already witnessed in consumer behaviour and customer expectations over the past decade.

After a long period with very little choice other than to use self-serve, online and digital as default, it is not unreasonable to expect that the channel shift to digital will be expedited and with it, customer expectations of all the services they access, including those from their housing provider, will continue to rise.

This article mainly covers Housing Plus Group's recent investment in a cloud-first strategy, delivered in partnership with Incline IT, and how it is already paying dividends by driving service improvements and laying the foundations for the business to focus on value adding, innovative technologies such as IoT in its new builds.

Life before cloud

Prior to its digital transformation, Housing Plus was operating across dispersed locations following extensive M&A activity. The IT system comprised an amalgamation of components from each estate, rather than a coherent and fully integrated environment. As a result, it was inflexible and complex to change, with multiple unknowns.

Andrew Dale, director of IT, Housing Plus Group, said, "The rate of growth and change in the business couldn't be supported by our existing infrastructure. We knew we needed a new IT system which could accommodate future merger integrations, on-going group expansion and service transformation."

On a day-to-day basis, productivity was affected across all areas – resilience to incidents was limited, and the risk of outages and unsecured or out-of-date security profiles was becoming progressively worse and adversely affecting the users' experience.

Cloud migration was identified as the key enabler for a more agile working strategy. Such a diverse organisation as Housing Plus needs strong network connectivity and a flexible infrastructure to deliver critical services to customers and provide access that the service staff need to operate effectively.

Housing Plus chose to migrate to Amazon Web Services, favouring the platform for its flexibility and stability. As users of Office 365, the housing provider's choice of AWS also served as a means to manage its risk by splitting services across different IT providers.

Unified infrastructure and network capability

After monitoring the group's existing IT infrastructure over a six-week period, a unified infrastructure and software-defined wide area network (SD-WAN) capability was designed, which supported its 'cloud first' strategy and removed the need for costly multi-protocol label switching (MPLS) networks.

Importantly for Housing Plus Group, this approach created a standardised framework for rolling out the new systems to its new and existing branch sites and schemes, unifying the existing subsidiaries and removing many of the challenges previously experienced when absorbing acquisitions.

Migrating a complex system

With a complex system and a large amount of data to migrate to cloud, a phased migration approach was favoured because it posed a much lower risk than the alternative of a 'big bang' approach.

A migration journey was designed which resulted in an uncomplicated cloud migration with no incidents or data loss, as well as the creation of a tried and tested migration roadmap which can be applied to any future mergers or acquisitions.

Overall, given that a common piece of advice is that "housing management software doesn't work in the cloud", we've actually deployed a new SD-WAN and created a staggered migration path for the applications, as well as created over 400 Amazon Workspaces to replace a legacy Citrix farm. These were set up as pay-as-you-go and scale up and down as needed to optimise costs.

In conclusion, Andrew Dale said, "We devised a clear IT and digital strategy but needed the right services and partners to enable its delivery. Working in partnership with Incline IT has enabled us to realise our strategy and allow IT to become a true enabler of change. We now have sound foundations, and this allows us to focus more on the business and innovate with new technologies such as analytics and IoT."

Dave Mason is the technical director of Incline IT.

Connecting people and places

As well as resulting in significant cost savings, the inherent flexibility of its cloud-based SD-WAN enables Housing Plus to easily provision its schemes and sites with a range of connectivity options. This means that regardless of how the business grows and what devices and services it wants to incorporate, the IT team can easily do so.

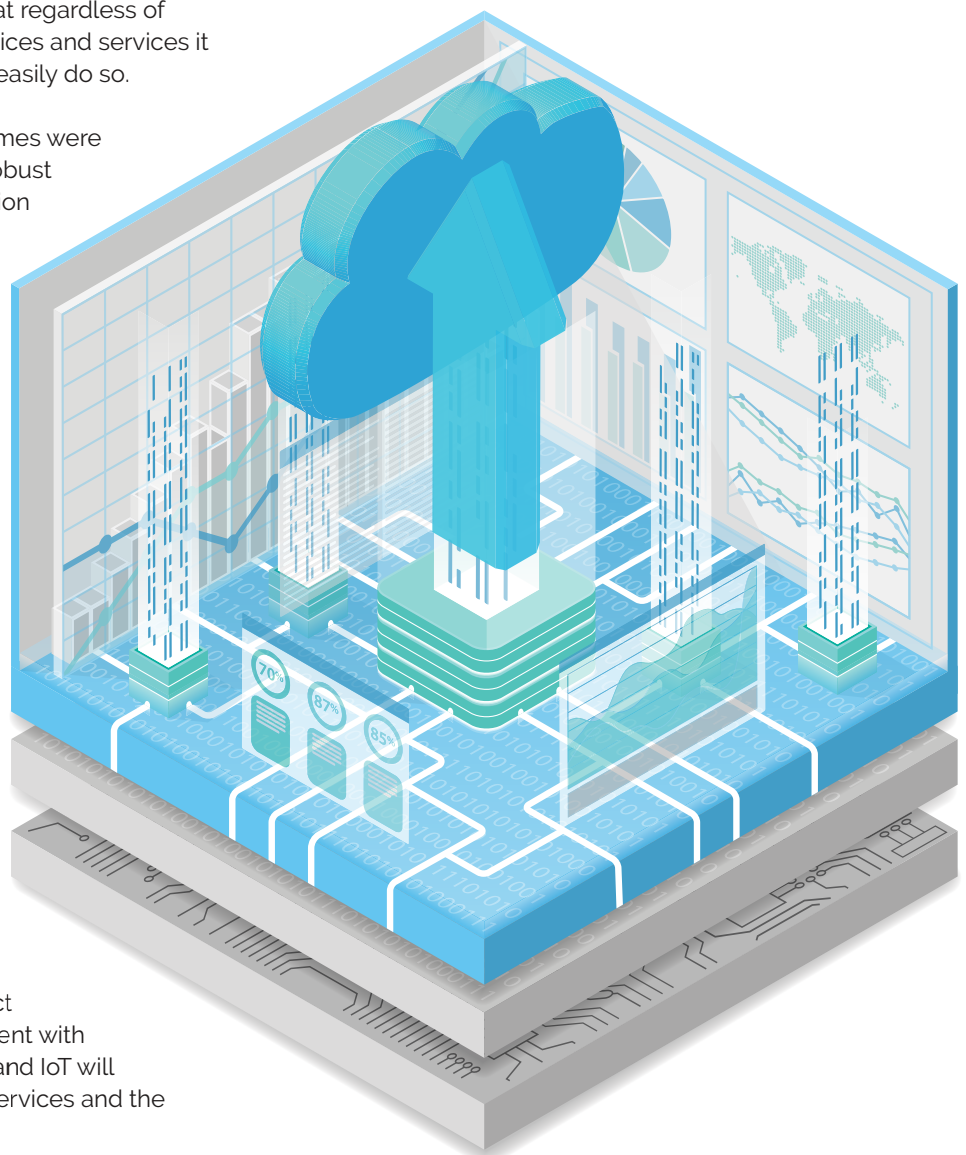
The housing provider's sites and schemes were updated to communicate mainly via robust cloud networks with multiple connection paths, with failover to 4G also incorporated to enhance business continuity.

Within its new cloud environment, Housing Plus chose desktop as a service (DaaS) for the efficient deployment of virtual desktops as its business grows. It also enables the Housing Plus staff and contractors to access their desktops from anywhere.

The results

With significant cost savings and Q1 2020 uptime of 100 per cent for AWS and all Housing Plus Group applications built on top of AWS, the results of the digital transformation have been excellent.

After the initial bedding-in phase, Housing Plus is now planning to extract further value from its new IT environment with a new wave of innovation where data and IoT will become key themes in transforming services and the customer experience.



A fresh perspective on IoT in housing

Steve Trafford, National Sales Manager, Aico, and
Chris Jones, Chief Operating Officer, Homelync



Why isn't the internet of things mainstream yet?

For years, it has felt as if the internet of things would revolutionise social housing. So many articles, case studies and great new use-cases have been published, yet years go by with the promise of mainstream adoption being 'just around the corner'. Housing providers have been running IoT trials for several years and the core uses and business cases are now well established and widely shared. So, if now is really the time for mainstream IoT adoption, what's different?

A platform perspective

There has clearly been greater adoption in specific technology areas such as environmental sensors (temperature and humidity), boilers and smoke alarms, and there are many additional start-up technology businesses that have entered the market. Coupled with innovations in technology and larger, well-established suppliers entering the market, this has led to a surge in IoT.

Aico bought Homelync in July 2020 because we believe that the answer to mainstream adoption lies partly in the economies associated with a platform approach that would enable a confluence of products and services that meet the practical needs of the 'early majority'.

We are frequently asked by housing providers whether we can connect additional non-fire safety-related sensors via our SmartLink gateway and our onboarding and visualisation software. This leads us to believe that the first major non-subsidised IoT rollouts will take a strategic view, of which there are several benefits:

- Simplifying the installation of future devices to an existing property;
- Ease of integration to data lakes and housing management systems;
- Ease of procuring new devices via existing buying frameworks;

- Leveraging existing connectivity infrastructure to reduce risk and cost;
- Providing tenants with a single view of their homes;
- Giving housing providers a single view of IoT data and the associated insights.



The benefits of collaborative innovation

In the years leading up to our acquisition, Homelync and Aico have worked with many housing providers on dozens of IoT innovation projects. We have seen that housing providers are increasingly taking a strategic platform view, and through collaboration with suppliers and landlords, we have demonstrated the benefits of joined-up IoT data. One of these benefits is simplifying the approach to tenant engagement.

As part of a GovTech project, we worked with local councils in Leeds and York on a project aimed at using the value of IoT data to improve the health and wellbeing of residents. Aside from demonstrating capabilities around improving fire safety, lowering the risk of fuel poverty and identifying mould, we also surveyed over 100 tenants to understand and identify specific needs and concerns they might have. Our research showed that tenants are likely to



be highly engaged with their data if they have pre-existing health conditions and/or have children living at home.

On a later project with Wolverhampton Homes, we explored this research and found that providing data to tenants helped improve ventilation by nearly 20 per cent, reduce the risk of mould by 30 per cent, save 10 per cent on energy bills and improve fire safety.

This empowerment of residents has strengthened an already strong business case for these technologies and has led us to develop a tenant app. The net results are healthier and safer tenants and a strong maintenance RoI for housing providers. Furthermore, by using a platform approach, we simplified our integration with Wolverhampton Homes' existing housing management system (from Northgate Public Services).

Our view of the future

While we have tested, deployed and integrated a wide range of IoT devices for housing providers, from leak detectors and smart meters to thermostats, assisted living push-button sensors, and fire-door safety devices, there are three key IoT technologies requested time and time again – connected smoke alarms, environmental sensors and smart boilers.

We would surmise that our SmartLink gateway provides a logical foundation for the mainstream rollout of IoT technologies in social housing; the integration of this sector-leading technology with environmental sensors and smart boilers will fundamentally revolutionise social housing and the connected home.

IoT has a promising future in social housing; it can be safely predicted that through a web of IoT devices, there will be transformative effects across departments, including those for repairs, asset management, social care, money advice, energy and call centres. Furthermore, revenue-generating applications, such as assisted living services to tenants or in-home patient monitoring for the NHS, become possible once a housing provider has invested in the underlying IoT infrastructure.

Through working with housing providers, we have identified five main challenges that need to be overcome in order for mainstream adoption of IoT to be achieved:

1. Business case

A killer app needs to have a very compelling business case that has been empirically proven to provide cost savings as well as social value. It needs to be demonstrated as part of a large deployment of devices that have been in place for a significant period of time.

2. Investment risk

This is particularly true for environmental sensors. At the moment, these devices offer one of the most compelling business cases but are also provided by relatively new and small technology businesses, so there is a procurement and ongoing support risk to housing providers. To solve this, these companies need more time to mature and develop their operational support and prove their business models. Alternatively, it's likely that pre-existing OEMs could provide these devices and guarantee future support.

3. Future proofed

Housing providers are increasingly taking a strategic view and the first IoT technology to go mainstream will have to mirror it. Although this collective view is still being formulated in some ways, it is becoming clearer that it needs to include integration into current systems and processes with a view of how future technologies will be integrated.

4. Resident buy-in

There is a need to bring tenants along on the IoT journey. These technologies have the power to improve the lives of tenants in many ways, including saving them money, improving their living environment and, ultimately, their health. We've seen that providing tenants with their data can improve the business case and eliminate any GDPR concerns. Our research into IoT ethics has identified that the best course of action is a win-win approach.

5. Operational integration

For IoT to go mainstream, there needs to be a clear plan for how to transform services to deliver the benefits of this technology at scale. This means mapping how the data and insights will be used in the day-to-day teams, processes and systems throughout the organisation. In order to move from a reactive service to a preventative and proactive one, there needs to be buy-in at an organisational level.

Steve Trafford is the national sales manager for Aico, and Chris Jones is the chief operating officer for Homelync.

Social value and hyperfast broadband



Liam McAvoy, Senior Director of Business Development, Hyperoptic

What does social value mean?

Social value is widely embedded into project calculations, not just within housing providers but also in local authorities, central government and devolved governments across the UK. Many procurement exercises now include social value weightings in their tender documents, and boards increasingly want to demonstrate how their organisation contributes to creating social value as well as financial value.

The government thinks of 'social value' in the context of economic, social and environmental wellbeing through public services contracts and is best expressed via the 2013 Public Services Act which mandates those commissioning public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental services when making purchasing decisions.

The Act does appear to be making a difference; research last year from Social Enterprise UK found that 82 per cent of local councils believe social value drives higher levels of growth, while 42 per cent of councils have found that it has reduced social inequalities.

How broadband relates to social value

Defining social value means thinking widely about the effect that gigabit broadband can have on transforming an entire area or community. For housing providers, it is a methodology that means they can demonstrate a wider vision to their stakeholders and has relevance both for new developments but also retrofitting existing ones with better, faster and more reliable broadband. Calculating social value typically splits into two categories – the economic impact on businesses, consumers and their finances, and then its social impact on communities and the wellbeing of individuals within those communities.

Working with us, Simetrica Jacobs, a research consultancy specialising in social impact measurement, has found that

having access to superfast broadband is associated with an increase in wellbeing worth £222.25 per household per year. The study suggested several channels through which this could occur. One of the most notable is educational opportunities.

As we have already seen with home schooling during the lockdown, broadband with higher bandwidth allows users to access information with less disruption. But even before the pandemic, there had already been a proliferation of massive open online courses (MOOCs) unlocked by wider access to fast broadband.

As we all know, faster broadband simply makes the existing services we use for work and play more reliable. Zoom calls for remote working become more reliable. Netflix and iPlayer become more immersive since it means we can enjoy higher definition content. Online gaming services work much better.

Reliability also helps reduce isolation and loneliness since it means we are more likely to connect with others through the internet via social media and other platforms. We are also more likely to be willing to seek out better deals online and wade through price comparison websites and attempt an online shop when sites load faster. And as homes become increasingly 'smart', the underlying technology that makes homes greener, safer and more enjoyable works better the faster the connection.

Pandemic is making social value more obvious

If we weren't aware of social value before, then arguably the pandemic has brought everything into a sharper focus. Remote working is now firmly part of everyday working for many and some of us will never return to a five-day per week commute. This potentially means more time for other, more fulfilling activities and financial benefits through a reduction in travel costs and less pollution on the roads.

Broadband companies are also actively involved in ensuring economic benefits accrue to all. When a subsidised connection (either an affordable or a complimentary connection) is provided, there's often an economic transfer from a high-speed broadband provider to the disadvantaged households. Local authorities can administer the distribution of affordable-connection vouchers, ensuring the discounts reach the individuals who would benefit most from them.

Transformative benefits

In a world that increasingly relies on digital connectivity, over 11 million people in the UK lack essential digital skills and 19 per cent don't have the core digital skills needed to use the internet. Many of these people live in social housing communities. This is why much greater benefit from enhanced digital infrastructure occurs over a longer period. For instance, better broadband tends to mean people use the internet more and enhance their computer skills which can increase wellbeing by around £1,400 per person per year. And of course, gaining computer skills may also affect the likelihood of becoming employed, with Simetrica Jacobs calculating the wellbeing uplift experienced by individuals who receive employment training to be worth around £800.

High-speed broadband can also bring communities together physically via hubs such as community centres. These can be hugely beneficial and act as a lifeline for many people; we believe community hubs are essential to reaching and spreading digital inclusion to all sections of society.

Many of the factors we have highlighted are now available via a social value calculator to show how much value hyperfast broadband can bring to communities.



Social value calculator

Developed with Simetrica Jacobs, the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT) and Hyperoptic, our social value calculator makes it simple for housing providers to put input key factors affecting their community and get instant access to independent data. In doing so, we hope to break new ground in understanding, communicating and delivering social value in relation to high-speed broadband and digital skills.

Liam McAvoy is the senior director of business development at Hyperoptic.



"Under normal circumstances, there's an immediate benefit in reduced travel time and emissions. Since the start of the lockdown, it's been a game-changer for many of our customers. Their ability to continue to meet service levels and compliance requirements, despite being off the road and out of the office, was partly to do with their use of our cloud-based systems."

Node4's Denby said, "The financial benefits of implementing green IT are mainly around IoT and how, as buildings' infrastructure is upgraded, smart devices can be introduced that control energy consumption.

Northgate Public Services' Hampton said, "In many instances, green IT initiatives aren't originally adopted for their environmental benefits but for the potential cost savings."

efficient and can provide advice to residents on how they can run their house more affordably.

"A greener IT strategy could be as simple as adopting power management tools to put devices on standby or using digital channels to reduce the travel costs associated with face-to-face visits."

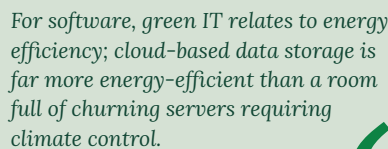
Civica's Rogers said, "There are definitely financial benefits because, for example, 'smart' homes make attractive homes, meaning less time between voids. Providers can carry out maintenance proactively, reducing time between tenancies."



There can be extra costs and time involved in implementing green IT but done correctly, it can really drive quality and efficiency.

Steve Denby, Head of Sales Enablement,
Node4

www.housing-technology.com



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What are the qualitative and intangible benefits of green IT?

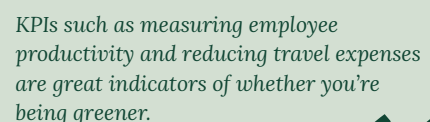
"When the introduction of a green IT initiative such as mobile working makes people's lives easier, the happiness and productivity of the workforce often improves at the same time."

Does green IT help or hinder your IT operations?

Rogers said, "Green IT helps improve operations. This technology can capture huge amount of data to feed your business intelligence and analytics capabilities in order to drive improved customer service and increase operational efficiency."

Civica's Rogers said, "In the long term, we're dedicated to using strategies such as building information modelling to help with proactive asset management tracking and maintenance. For example, by using 3D modelling, housing providers can understand their properties and the assets within those properties better, rather than relying on stock-condition surveys to predict when assets such as kitchens or bathrooms should be replaced."

Node4's Denby said, "There can be extra costs and time involved in implementing green IT practices but done correctly, it can really drive quality and efficiency. Replacing your old, power-hungry IT hardware with newer green technologies in the cloud or with lightweight devices lowers your TCO and improves productivity."



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Housing Technology would like to thank Helen Rogers (Civica), Steve Denby (Node4), Trevor Hampton (Northgate Public Services) and Deborah Boden (Propeller Powered) for their editorial contributions to this article.



We hope you have been keeping up with Housing Technology's new Wellbeing platform (www.jobs.housing-technology.com/wellbeing) that we launched a few months ago.

We have since published a range of features including articles and interviews with housing providers such as Home Group, Melin Homes and Gentoo Group.

Housing Technology Wellbeing aims to give our community the opportunity to share and learn how other organisations are approaching the creation of healthier work cultures.

If you have any thoughts, experiences, news or advice on workplace wellbeing, you can share your views with our large audience which spans the entire UK housing sector.



Please find out how you can contribute at www.jobs.housing-technology.com/wellbeing.

Halton Housing's senior IT appointments

Halton Housing has appointed Debbie Trust-Dickinson as its chief transformation officer and Paul Croston as its director of technology, digital and data.

Before her permanent appointment as CTO, Trust-Dickinson had been at Halton Housing since January 2020 on an interim basis. She will oversee the next iteration of Halton Housing's digital services, creating the IT infrastructure required to support the future needs of the business, developing and strengthening brand and reputation, and driving the organisation's HR strategy.

Croston has over 20 years' experience in leading technology projects to delivery transformation, growth and profitability while controlling costs. More recently,



he worked in outsourced marketing services delivering IT to some of the best-known UK high-street and global brands. He will lead the delivery of a refreshed IT strategy for Halton Housing, focusing on ensuring core systems are fit for the future, optimising the digital experience for customers and staff, managing data as a strategic asset, and enabling intelligence-led decision making and a pre-emptive service model.

Interview

MRI Software's post-acquisition plans



Dermot Briody, Executive Managing Director for Europe, MRI Software

Over the past few months, MRI Software has bought Castleton Technology, Orchard Information Systems and, most recently, Housing Partners. Housing Technology interviewed Dermot Briody, MRI Software's executive managing director for Europe, about the impact of the company's acquisitions on the UK housing sector.

What's the background to MRI Software?

MRI Software has been built up over five decades, with our expertise, innovation and experience firmly rooted in hosted software for the property sector. We've become a global company yet maintain local presence and regional knowledge bases in all our sectors. Before our recent acquisitions in the social housing sector, we already had 400 staff in the UK. Throughout this growth, our mission has remained the same – we give organisations freedom to transform the way their communities live, work and play while elevating their businesses by delivering greater efficiencies.

Our innovation is completely aligned to our customers' needs, always keeping their end-users in mind, and thanks to the diversity and depth in our solutions, we have built a strong customer base around the world. We have a deep understanding of the particular needs of property businesses, and we are no strangers to social housing; with a significant footprint in the wider UK residential market, we already serve some major housing providers and local authorities. Added to this is our vast experience delivering technology solutions to affordable and public housing in the US, and the strategic expansion of our social housing capabilities across the UK, Ireland and Australia is a natural next step for us.

Why is MRI moving into the UK housing sector?

There is the trend of social housing converging with wider residential and commercial sectors. Related to this, many housing providers have growing aspirations to become multi-faceted in the way they develop, manage and support communities – for example, expanding their operations into build-to-rent, co-living, student living and assisted living.

With our experience in the wider housing sector and, as mentioned before, our international expertise, growing and developing our proposition for UK social housing makes sense for us, for our existing customers and for the wider market. MRI has so much value to offer – for example, taking our success stories from outside the sector and looking at how we can deliver those approaches or new innovations to social housing providers.

I believe that there has never been a more vital time for social housing in this country and for the work that housing providers do. We are here to support that and support it at scale. Our infrastructure means that we can bring accelerated innovation, integration, servicing and delivery to social housing.

We will be building on the fantastic work that Orchard, Castleton and Housing Partners have already done, leveraging the deep domain knowledge these teams have to offer as part of MRI Social Housing. Our people are MRI's greatest asset, and these existing local teams will continue to develop solutions for this market. They fully understand it and have lived and breathed the sector for decades; we see this expertise as a crucial part of our value proposition.

Finally, we believe there is a strong alignment of our own values and goals with social housing. In all areas of our operations, we strive to positively impact communities and enrich tenants' lives through the power of technology – a core component of our vision for this sector.

What are MRI's ambitions?

There are so many ambitions for a company this size! If I had to narrow it down to MRI Social Housing, it would

mri social housing

housingpartners
An MRI Software Company

Orchard
An MRI Software Company

CASTLETON
An MRI Software Company

Real Asset Management
An MRI Software Company

be the drive to become the trusted technology partner of choice for social housing providers. We are intent on transforming tenants' lives and experiences, and that extends beyond just software and into the deeper value we provide and difference we believe we can make. Of course, it's easy to talk about being the partner of choice, and we are very conscious that we need to earn that right and earn that trust. It will come from continuously delivering, being open and transparent and from partnering effectively together, consciously keeping tenant experience at the forefront.

MRI's portfolio of products seems to comprise overlapping solutions – how will these be consolidated in the future?

We have done a lot of work to-date on analysing our product portfolio and how we can create the best combined solution sets to match market needs while providing continuity of service to existing customers.

What we will do is bring more solution choice, more innovation and more integration across our products. Every provider has individual requirements and every business is unique, and our whole ethos is about offering the choice and the flexibility to create a technology platform that works best for each customer.

Will these acquisitions lead to less choice for housing providers?

There will always be choice in what is a diverse sector. We place tremendous value on integration in parallel with our partners, hence our solutions are built on an interoperable, open technology stack. That means we can work with customers' existing systems while facilitating greater flexibility and freedom.

We also understand that some housing providers and local authorities don't feel that they're getting true value by dealing with multiple legacy solutions from multiple suppliers. For housing providers who want to work with a trusted supplier for their comprehensive IT needs, we certainly want to earn that position and become a go-to business partner.

What's happening in the next 12 months?

In short, we will be relentless in our focus! Right now, that focus is communicating to our existing customers and we're using the first few months to get to know them, both in one-to-one sessions and through a series of 'Meet MRI' webinars.

Over the coming months, we will align our teams and processes and our customers will continue to see the same familiar faces across Orchard, Castleton and Housing Partners; it's certainly business as usual in that sense. The team is planning a number of events to launch our combined offering of MRI Social Housing – these will be open to all housing providers in the sector and more information on these is to come very soon.

We are very proud to serve the housing sector across the UK and Ireland; it's such a fundamental part of our society and we are committed to serving its community to the best of our abilities with a deep, innovative and accessible technology platform.

Dermot Briody is the executive managing director for Europe at MRI Software.





Flood risk

– Are you data-ready?

Tom Telford, Account Director, Landmark Information

With rainfall patterns changing and sea levels rising, the possible effects of climate change are now an important consideration in any long-term planning. For housing providers, having access to data insights that provide a clear picture of the potential risks associated with flooding is essential to proactively protecting property assets and communities from the threat of flooding.

You only have to look back to the start of 2020 to consider the aftermath created by storms Ciara, Dennis and Jorge, which displaced many people from their homes in just a matter of weeks. In fact, February was the wettest recorded in the UK and with it came an estimated clean-up bill of around £360 million (source: Association of British Insurers).

With future predictions suggesting that we will witness hotter, drier summers and wetter winters, the issue of flooding will only become more prominent. The difficulty is that flooding can occur at any time and in almost any location. A common misconception is that flooding only happens if the site is near to a tidal or flowing water source, such as the sea or a river, or alternatively is situated on low-lying ground; this unfortunately isn't the case.

As it stands, the Environment Agency estimates that around five million properties in England are at risk of flooding. The type of flood risk varies but most common threats include:

- **Fluvial flooding** – floods that occur when a river, stream or watercourse is unable to cope with water levels from surrounding land and typically occurs after prolonged rain that has waterlogged the land.
- **Pluvial flooding** – surface water flooding that results from heavy rain that overwhelms drainage and creates flash floods.
- **Coastal flooding** – typically results from wet and stormy conditions, high tides or, in the longer term, rising sea levels.
- **Groundwater flooding** – results from an accumulation of water sources, which leads to water levels rising above natural water-table levels.

- **Reservoir flooding** – occurs when volumes of water increase to the extent that a reservoir fails, flooding into neighbouring land.

Of these, surface water flooding presents a significant risk. In fact, the Environment Agency suggests that three million properties are at risk of surface water floods, and this is likely to grow, particularly when new housing developments are built. It not only creates further demands on existing drainage systems but also means there is potentially less green space where water can naturally drain to, compounding the issue.

At a time when housing providers are being encouraged to build more homes, it's important that they not only assess their existing assets to determine their changing environmental risk profiles, but also undertake assessments to understand their future flood risks.

How can you determine your flood risk?

We are fortunate that we have a wealth of data sources that provide accurate insights and intelligence. Importantly, this data doesn't just provide a view of today's risks but also gives us credible modelled data on future flood risks.

The starting point should be to access Environment Agency data (or the Scottish Environment Protection Agency) because this provides a high-level view on current risks relating to river, coastal, surface, groundwater and reservoir flood risks for any given area.

For a more specific, address-based analysis, flood reports are available that provide more targeted analysis and allow you to zoom in on highlighted risks to determine



type, scale and probabilities. They also provide a view on whether further onsite investigations are needed. If more detailed investigations are required, a physical flood risk assessment should be undertaken by an environmental consultant who can offer practical solutions on what steps should be taken to either make existing properties resilient or factor in mitigation measures when designing or creating plans for new housing developments, if flooding can't be ruled out at the address in question.

Predicting risks over time

The UK Climate Projections (UKCP09) indicate that the country is likely to receive increases in rainfall frequency and intensity through climate change. Based on these predictions, it's expected that the risk posed by flooding will increase, with more severe flood events occurring with greater frequency.

In light of this, flood risk modelling is continuing to evolve. At Landmark, in partnership with Ambiental Risk Analytics and Wales & West Utilities, we have introduced a national GB dataset that incorporates UKCP09 climate projections to enable housing providers, asset managers, local government, utility providers, property developers and others to identify the potential impacts of climate change from a flooding perspective.

By way of background, Ambiental's data was created using probabilistic climate predictions to generate flood models, which are provided as a range of climate change datasets that can be interrogated. Ambiental's dataset includes layers for baseline and future scenario flood maps, erosion risk potential and risk to transport for the 2020s, 2050s and 2080s, ultimately supporting the



analysis of future flood risks to property across multiple emission circumstances.

The aim is to provide the tools that enable all stakeholders to correctly plan for long-term flood risks with greater clarity and understanding of how risk profiles will change over time.

Having access to such future-facing data not only supports climate change risk assessments and adaptation reporting requirements now, but ultimately also future-proofs the asset and property investments of all involved.

Forewarned is forearmed

It has already been reported that Fairbourne in Wales has the potential to become one of the first places to succumb to the vulnerability of climate change due to rising sea levels. The true physical impact of climate change is something we are only really beginning to fully understand, and to accurately address this risk a data-driven narrative can inform stakeholders of the risks.

Flood risk is one of the greatest environmental threats facing the UK. It therefore pays to do your research to determine exactly what risks are present today and in future to ensure tenants don't have to deal with the appalling consequences that flood waters bring. In our view, forewarned is most certainly forearmed.

Tom Telford is an account director at Landmark Information.



The 'D' word

Gary Clark, Data Services Director, 3C Consultants

Today's data operating environment

As Housing Technology's focus in September is on the green agenda within IT (see the feature article on page 46), it's worth thinking about the impact of poor data management on your organisation's carbon footprint.

For example, your servers will generally be operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. That's probably well over double the operational time of the most heavily-used business laptop while drawing far more power than a laptop. The more disparate types of software you use, the more server power you will need, with many software manufacturers demanding more computer power than their software needs to ensure there is sufficient for the occasional peak demand.

It also stands to reason that the more data storage you need, the more power you will need, even if you are not accessing it regularly. In summary, reducing the number of software applications you use and ensuring you don't keep data for longer than you need to will reduce your organisation's carbon footprint, as well as ensuring that you are compliant and keeping the regulator happy.

Many housing providers have operated with a myriad IT applications and infrastructure over the years, all of which at the time of purchase seemed to make sense and perhaps fulfilled an immediate need, but without possibly much consideration of the longer term effect on their wider IT ecosystem and their business as a whole. As a result, many of today's housing providers will have legacy systems that remain essential to the business yet hinder all areas of the business working as one.

Myriad applications

These systems can sometimes be surrounded by unconnected, ad-hoc bolt-ons, half-used modules, workarounds or completely separate systems that have been created to fulfil a specific requirement that were intended to be used at some point in the future. In addition, in many cases these systems are accompanied by a labyrinth of local spreadsheets. This model couldn't be further from a unified data environment and a 'one source of the truth' strategy.

This is an area of frustration for a great many organisations and often acts as a barrier to moving to more efficient and effective business models. It creates challenges around integration, agility and data flow that can affect the integrity of the data and therefore lead to shaky decision-making and inaccurate performance reporting, which in themselves can weaken sound governance.

Data is growing exponentially. Many more organisations have transformation at (or near) the top of their corporate to-do lists, but there appears to be far fewer examples of housing providers who have undertaken a significant corporate-wide project that has transformed the way data is used and that substantially improves how services are provided, decisions are made or indeed how internal business processes operate.

This could be down to a number of things including:

- A lack of compelling data vision, strategy and a burning platform to act as leverage for change;
- No dedicated senior roles with relevant wider direct experience in how data can drive a better business;
- Data, digital and transformation lacking strategic profile and support (this seems to be changing);
- Transformation programmes that have been started before the data is ready;
- Decision-making that continues to be based on instinct and 'experience' rather than science;
- Silo working and internal power dynamics getting in the way of collaborative success;
- Poor data quality, governance and monitoring.

Data and the regulator

The regulator has increasingly been taking notice of how important data is to housing providers. However, reporting is often a source of difficulty for organisations when it comes to financial returns, health and safety compliance and, more recently, issues around rent setting. Looking back over the last seven years' worth of the sector's annual risk profiles and counting the number of times the word 'data' was used in the narrative, it's interesting to see how much more profile data seems to have:



- 2013 – 18 pages / 6 mentions of the word data;
- 2014 – 16 pages / 5 mentions of the word data;
- 2015 – 18 pages / 5 mentions of the word data;
- 2016 – 28 pages / 4 mentions of the word data;
- 2017 – 40 pages / 11 mentions of the word data;
- 2018 – 32 pages / 30 mentions of the word data;
- 2019 – 28 pages / 38 mentions of the word data.

More noteworthy is how prominent data and technology have become in these documents. In both the 2018 and 2019 sector risk profiles, 'data' was actually listed as part of the top strategic risks:

- 2018 – Strategic risk / data and safety monitoring, covering GDPR, cyber-attacks, health and safety, and statistical returns;
- 2019 – Strategic risk / data integrity and technological risks, covering data integrity, rents, asset management and KPIs, and IT security/GDPR.

The regulator has a clear view on the impact poor technology and data management have on the reputation and the performance of a provider. Section 18 of the 2019 sector risk profile states:

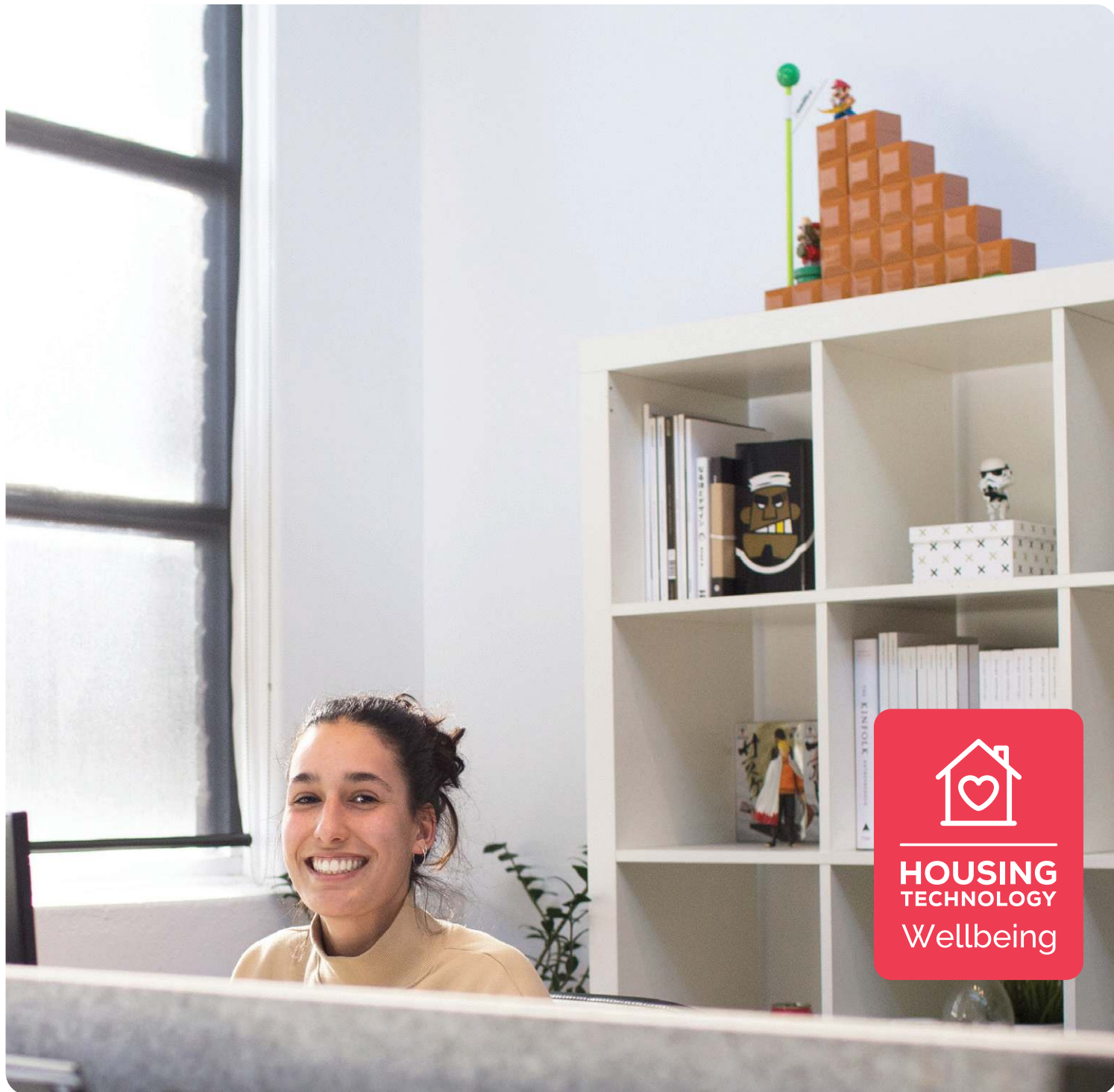
“Integrity of data is fundamental and permits good board decision-making. Failure to manage data integrity risk is indicative of a poor control framework. Integrity can be lost due to poor technology or when data is processed incorrectly. Erroneous data can be costly to fix and can damage the reputation of an individual provider. Accurate data and up-to-date information will assist in areas such as compliance with rent setting, maintenance of providers’ asset management strategies and in the preparation of KPIs.”

Through their checks, in-depth assessments and engagements with the sector, it's becoming clear that data (management, use and quality) is becoming a key area for regulatory attention, so there's never been a better time to get your data into great shape. More importantly perhaps, accurate, available and secure data allows an organisation to make the right decisions, empowers staff, enhances online digital self-service, and provides the insight and ability to improve operational effectiveness and demonstrate value for money.

Managing data properly has the power to propel organisations to become more efficient, better governed and, more importantly, customer-centric. It could be argued that without a strategy to transform your use of data, more general business transformation is doomed to failure. It is those that recognise and respond to this who will flourish... keeping customers, staff and the regulator happy in the process.

Gary Clark is the data services director at 3C Consultants.





Housing Technology Wellbeing is a free community resource on our recruitment website where we will be posting regular insights into workplace wellbeing, careers and skills.

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