Making every contact count

17 October 2024



NATIONAL HOUSING FEDERATION

A message from the chair of the advisory group

As Chair of the Knowing our Homes advisory group, I'm pleased to support this report.

Good quality data is a key tool for social landlords, to make sure we understand residents' needs and the condition of their homes.

Given the wide range of competing demands on our resources, it's important that we find the most efficient and effective ways of gathering and updating the information we need.

Making every contact with residents count is vital for all social landlords – we already use it to shape our work at Peabody.

I hope this report is useful for social landlords and would encourage them to consider how the information in here could work for them, and how data can be used to shape and improve outcomes.

Good data can make a huge difference to the work we do and have a positive impact on residents' health and wellbeing.

Elly Hoult, Chief Operating Officer/Deputy Chief Executive at Peabody Group and Chair of the Knowing our Homes Advisory Group



Foreword

In June 2022, the National Housing Federation (NHF) and Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) commissioned an independent panel, called the Better Social Housing Review (BSHR), to look into issues of poor quality in social housing. The panel's report made several recommendations for social landlords, all focused on improving the quality of homes and the experience of residents.

One of the recommendations focused on data. The BSHR panel found that social landlords could do more to improve how they collect and use data about the condition of homes and the needs of residents, to ensure they deliver good quality homes and services tailored to residents' individual needs.

Structural inequalities and the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people were a key focus throughout the report, and the BSHR panel recommended that social landlords improve how they use data to assess how equitably services are delivered to different groups of residents. This is hugely important, given that, regardless of the type of housing they live in, Black and Asian households are around three times more likely to live in damp homes than their white British counterparts.

The NHF has led a major programme of work in response to this recommendation, called Knowing our Homes, with engagement and input from landlords and stakeholders from across the social housing sector.

Reflecting on changes in the sector over the last two years, I am now even more convinced that the better we know our homes, and the better we know and understand our residents, while respecting their right to privacy, the better the homes and services are for residents.

Since the publication of the BSHR panel's report, the proactive consumer regulation regime has come into force. The new consumer standards make it clear that the Regulator of Social Housing expects social landlords to have good, up to date information about the condition of each of their homes, as well as a clear understanding of the needs of individual residents. The Regulator expects all social landlords to assess how outcomes and experiences differ across different groups of residents.

In addition, the Housing Ombudsman has stressed the importance of 'finding your silence' – identifying where a lack of complaints or other engagement with residents suggests potential issues. To do this effectively, landlords need data to show how and when they have engaged with residents.

Most recently, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Report laid out in stark terms the risks that can emerge if landlords don't have sufficient understanding of the safety of their homes. It also shows how important it is for landlords to build a trusting relationship with residents, and that the responsibility for building and maintaining trust lies with the landlord.

From all of these changes, a clear theme emerges: the importance of knowing our homes and knowing our residents.

I believe this report, particularly the case studies from a diverse set of landlords, will provide useful tools and insight for people across the social housing sector to help them develop a better understanding of their homes and their residents. It adds to the resources already shared following the Better Social Housing review, including the CIH's work on Rethinking Repairs and Maintenance and broader work by both the NHF and CIH to share examples of good practice.

By making every contact with residents count, our sector can be confident that we are taking every opportunity to ensure that our core offer of a good, safe and affordable home with good services is working well. And by growing our understanding of the needs of both our homes and residents, it will also stand us in good stead for the future.

Alistair Smyth Director of Policy and Research at National Housing Federation

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Executive summary

The Better Social Housing Review (BSHR) recommended that social landlords do more to improve how they collect and use data about the condition of homes and the needs of residents, to improve the quality of homes and of services delivered to residents. This information can also be used to assess how equitably services are delivered to different groups of residents, which is particularly important given the racial and other structural inequalities that persist in wider society as well as in the social housing sector. The National Housing Federation (NHF) has taken this recommendation forward through a project called Knowing our Homes.

This report sets out how social landlords of different types and sizes can use the 'make every contact count' approach to effectively and efficiently gather information about the condition of homes and the needs of residents. For social landlords, making every contact count means using routine and planned interactions with residents as opportunities to gather information about the condition of their homes, and their needs.

Drawing from a series of case studies from a range of different social landlords, in addition to broader insight from across the sector, this report presents best practice that can help social landlords make every contact with residents count. This includes:

- Taking appropriate steps to ensure that warning signs of poor quality homes or residents at risk of harm are not missed. Many social landlords do this by introducing a policy or expectation that staff should never ignore a problem, and in fact should report it.
- Making every contact count, along with identifying which residents landlords have not been in contact with, will help landlords to 'find their silence' and identify residents and homes which may have issues that have not yet been addressed.
- Making the most of all types of interactions with residents, from face-to-face meetings to effective use of digital communication channels.
- When gathering information, aiming to develop actionable insight – meaningful information produced by analysing data that can be used to improve services for individuals, groups or all residents.
- When staff ask residents for personal information, they must be trained to do so confidently, effectively and respectfully. Staff may benefit from cultural awareness training, so that they have the cultural competence to effectively and compassionately communicate with residents with different backgrounds from themselves.
- Proactively seeking to make every contact count will likely create increased demand on resources, as landlords may become aware of more issues in residents' homes that should be addressed. However, additional resource committed to this will deliver good value. Landlords will need to plan effectively so that they can handle an increase in repair requests and safeguarding reports.
- Effective, joined up IT systems can support insightful data analysis. However, many social landlords are still in the process of improving their IT systems. It is therefore important to note that it is possible to effectively make every contact count before IT systems enable automation.
- Landlords of different sizes may benefit more from different approaches to making every contact count. Larger size can mean more resources available for technical and systems-driven solutions. Being a smaller landlord means organisation-wide change is a smaller exercise.
- Once sufficient data about residents is gathered, it is important that social landlords take steps to assess how equitably they are delivering services to residents.
- Social landlords must ensure their culture promotes making every contact count. Every staff member must see it as a core part of their role and understand that they have a responsibility to update the data the organisation holds about the condition of homes and the wellbeing of residents.
- Residents can have legitimate concerns about data security. Social landlords must clearly explain to residents how they keep personal data safe and secure.
- Landlords can help residents feel more comfortable sharing information by explaining what it will be used for. Trust is vital, and trust is built when residents feel seen and heard, and treated with respect by all staff.
- Making every contact count can require a cultural shift. Contractors need to be included and must proactively take responsibility for identifying and flagging any major concerns when they visit residents' homes.

The case studies show how eleven different social landlords aim to make every contact with residents count. These examples range from a small, rural housing association with fewer than 500 homes to a housing association with over 240,000 homes spread all over England and Scotland. They also include an ALMO and a local authority. Each has different approaches, some more focused on direct, personal interactions with residents and some combining this with technical, systems-driven work. Collectively, they show that social landlords of all different types, sizes and geographies can make every contact with residents count.

Drawing on insights from the case studies and broader Knowing our Homes work, the following principles can help social landlords decide how to make every contact count:

- **Trust** is absolutely crucial to residents' preparedness to share data with their landlord.
- **Ease** matters to residents. It's important not to ask for too much of their time when asking for information, whatever the channel. Landlords may need to adapt how they communicate with residents who have communication barriers.
- **Staff must be trained, supported, enabled and empowered** to play their part in making every contact count.
- More and better **actionable insight** is the key objective, rather than collecting more data without a plan for how that data will be used.
- It's important to describe and **publicise how data will be used** to improve and tailor services to individual residents and to improve services for all residents.
- Setting out clearly **how data is kept safe** is essential.
- Security checks must be in place to **verify the identity of a resident** before any data is requested.
- **More automation** of data requests and processing will improve the **balance of cost and benefit**.
- **More data may initially increase demand on housing services** and this must be prepared for. It's important to remember that proactive spending should help to reduce reactive (often more expensive) problems further down the line.
- Interactions between staff and residents can be more effective and efficient when staff **have residents' pre-existing data to hand**.
- **Different data collection methods have different costs**. Automated digital data collection is the most cost-efficient, followed by digital (not automated) data collection, then manual data collection.
- **Seek opportunities** where personal data can be checked and refreshed as a legitimate part of interactions with residents.
- **Ensure compliance** with all relevant laws and regulations.

Making every contact count can make a real difference to both landlords and residents. All staff must buy into the approach, from housing officers and contractors', repairs staff to the chief executive. It requires organisational effort and most likely resource, but the result is worthwhile. By making every contact with residents count, landlords can be assured that they are both effectively maintaining the condition of their homes and meeting the needs of their residents.



Introduction

The Better Social Housing Review (2022) set out a number of recommendations to achieve better outcomes for social housing residents. It highlighted how important good quality data collection is to understand the quality of homes, the support residents need, and how fairly services are delivered to different groups of residents.

To help social landlords deliver on this recommendation, the National Housing Federation started a project called Knowing our Homes.

The first stage of Knowing our Homes was to understand what the sector is already doing to collect data, and how residents feel about their landlord asking them for personal information. This involved input from several organisations that had begun to develop an approach that is already in use across different sectors called 'making every contact count'.

For social landlords, making every contact count means using routine and planned interactions with residents as opportunities to gather information about the condition of their homes, and their needs. This information can be used to proactively identify residents with issues in their homes that the landlord should address, and other support needs that the landlord could help with.

This report sets out case studies based on interviews about how social landlords of all different types and sizes can use or further develop the 'making every contact count' approach. A key benefit of the approach is that it is not prescriptive – landlords can adapt it as needed so that it works for their particular organisation.

Methodology

The NHF identified a number of potential case studies, based on information about current data collection practice among social landlords gathered through Knowing our Homes. This included information about local authorities and ALMOs collated by the National Federation of ALMOs. These were shortlisted to ensure a mix of organisations by size, location and type.

A brief was provided to each organisation, including an overview of the project and questions to be answered in an interview. A semi-structured interview was then conducted by Campbell Tickell with one or more staff about their efforts to make every contact count. The interviews covered topics such as:

- Which routine interactions with residents are used as opportunities to gather additional data.
- Residents' views on how their data is collected.
- How the data is stored, managed and used.
- Lessons learned and plans for the future.

It was important to listen to and incorporate the views of residents in this project. The NHF conducted a focus group with the NHF Tenant Advisory Panel and would like to thank contributors for their valuable input and insight. Every interview included a question about how a diverse set of residents' views were sought on making every contact count, and what impact these views had.



Insights were drawn from across all the interviews and broader Knowing our Homes work to inform this report's main findings. In addition to writing up the case studies, Campbell Tickell contributed to the overall commentary and findings in this report.

How social landlords are making every contact count

A number of lessons and themes emerge from the case studies and other insights from Knowing our Homes. These will be helpful for social landlords seeking to understand how they can best make every contact count.

Don't miss the warning signs

There has been a change in outlook among social landlords since the fire at Grenfell Tower and the death of Awaab Ishak.

The shock of these tragic incidents, together with more proactive consumer regulation, shows that landlords cannot simply assume that residents are ok until they say there are not. Social landlords need to proactively look for warning signs that residents are not ok or that repairs are needed in their home.

The interviews revealed commonalities to how landlords go about this. Every organisation has a policy or expectation that staff never ignore a problem, and in fact should report it. Some organisations have gone further, giving staff handheld devices and making it compulsory to answer safeguarding questions and questions about damp, mould and condensation when they visit residents at home. Organisations say making it mandatory helps to change culture. This means that all staff should be on the lookout for safeguarding risks, damp or mould, regardless of their role.

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The increased awareness of – and focus on – resident wellbeing across property teams was noticeable in interviews. There is evidence of a significant shift in corporate focus and organisational culture across the sector.

Landlords should aim to use all interactions with residents as an opportunity to check they are ok. These checks can be spoken or unspoken, e.g. staff might ask a resident whether they are ok, or flag concerns to colleagues in the knowledge that this will be acted upon.

More face-to-face than digital

Most of the case studies focus on opportunities to gather more data face-to-face. This could be because that is an easier way to implement a new way of working. Some organisations are also making strong early steps using digital channels.

It is important to consider how other sectors deal with data in digital channels. Generally, in commercial sectors it is only at the point of sale that data is required from customers. It is rare to log in on a website and immediately be asked to check or refresh one's personal data. If this question is asked it is normally at the point of completing a transaction.
The lesson for housing organisations is to seek opportunities where personal data can be checked and refreshed as a legitimate part of interactions with residents.

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Find your silences

This phrase has been made popular by the Housing Ombudsman, including in Spotlight on: Damp and mould (2021), which states that 'landlords need to 'find their silences' where complaints are not being raised when all indicators suggest there may be issues.'

Finding your silence is a really good place to start when bringing data together. Principally, it is a data analysis exercise to bring together information about residents and their homes. It helps social landlords to understand which residents and properties they have had no dealings with, and then to prioritise those most at risk.

This is critical, as it helps social landlords understand where they may have residents with unknown vulnerabilities. These residents may need support not currently provided, or be living in homes with issues or defects not yet reported.

Language is important here. Many residents may not like being classed as 'vulnerable' and it is not a term that should be used indiscriminately for broad groups of residents. For example, not all residents who have disabilities will be vulnerable in a way that their landlord needs to know about. It is always important for landlords to focus on residents' support needs, and how services may need to be tailored to protect the health and safety of individual residents. Vulnerability can be a useful term for staff to use, for example to identify households where staff have safeguarding concerns, but it should not be used as a label for broad groups of residents.

More triggers than data

This report defines data as specific, discrete pieces of information. So a question like 'who lives in the home?' gathers data. Whereas a 'trigger' is a question designed to raise a concern and initiate action, such as 'are there any safeguarding concerns?'

Triggers are an important part of making every contact count as they help to produce actionable insight. Triggers are particularly important when a member of staff is in a resident's home, where staff may be able to identify issues not yet reported by residents. The two most frequent triggers mentioned in interviews related to safeguarding, and damp, mould and condensation. Both were specifically used by staff when visiting residents at home.

This report defines 'actionable insight' as meaningful information, produced by analysing data, that can be used to improve services for individuals, groups or all residents.

Questions must be appropriate to the setting

Lots of organisations want to improve the quality of potentially sensitive data on, for example, residents' protected characteristics. They want this data, in part, to understand whether there are inequalities of experience between groups of residents. But, while it may be reasonable to ask a gas engineer to look for damp on their visit, it may not always be appropriate for the gas engineer to ask a resident about their ethnicity or sexuality.

When staff are expected to ask residents more personal questions, **they need training to do so confidently, effectively and respectfully.**

When staff are expected to ask residents more personal questions, they need training to do so confidently, effectively and respectfully. Staff may benefit from cultural awareness training, so that they have the cultural competence to effectively and compassionately communicate with residents from different backgrounds. It should always be made clear that residents can also choose not to share personal details with their landlord, including their protected characteristics.

Organisations interviewed for case studies reported little or no resistance from residents on the extra data asked for. It is important to note that trigger questions are discreet. For example, a resident may not know that their gas engineer is answering a question on their handheld device about whether there are any safeguarding concerns. It is therefore an unobtrusive way of recording information about properties and residents.



Demand on resources will increase – but it's worth it

Every organisation regarded the financial cost of making every contact count as marginal, but the impact on staff time as noticeable. If a busy staff member is asked to extend every visit to a resident's home by three minutes, the overall impact on their workload must be considered.

Similarly, every organisation also referred to the increase in service demand as noticeable. If landlords identify an issue in a resident's home, they will need to resolve it. Social landlords need to plan for this and consider how to handle an increase in repair requests and safeguarding reports.

Every organisation said the extra cost and demand on resources represent good value. **All thought they were in a better place for making the effort.**

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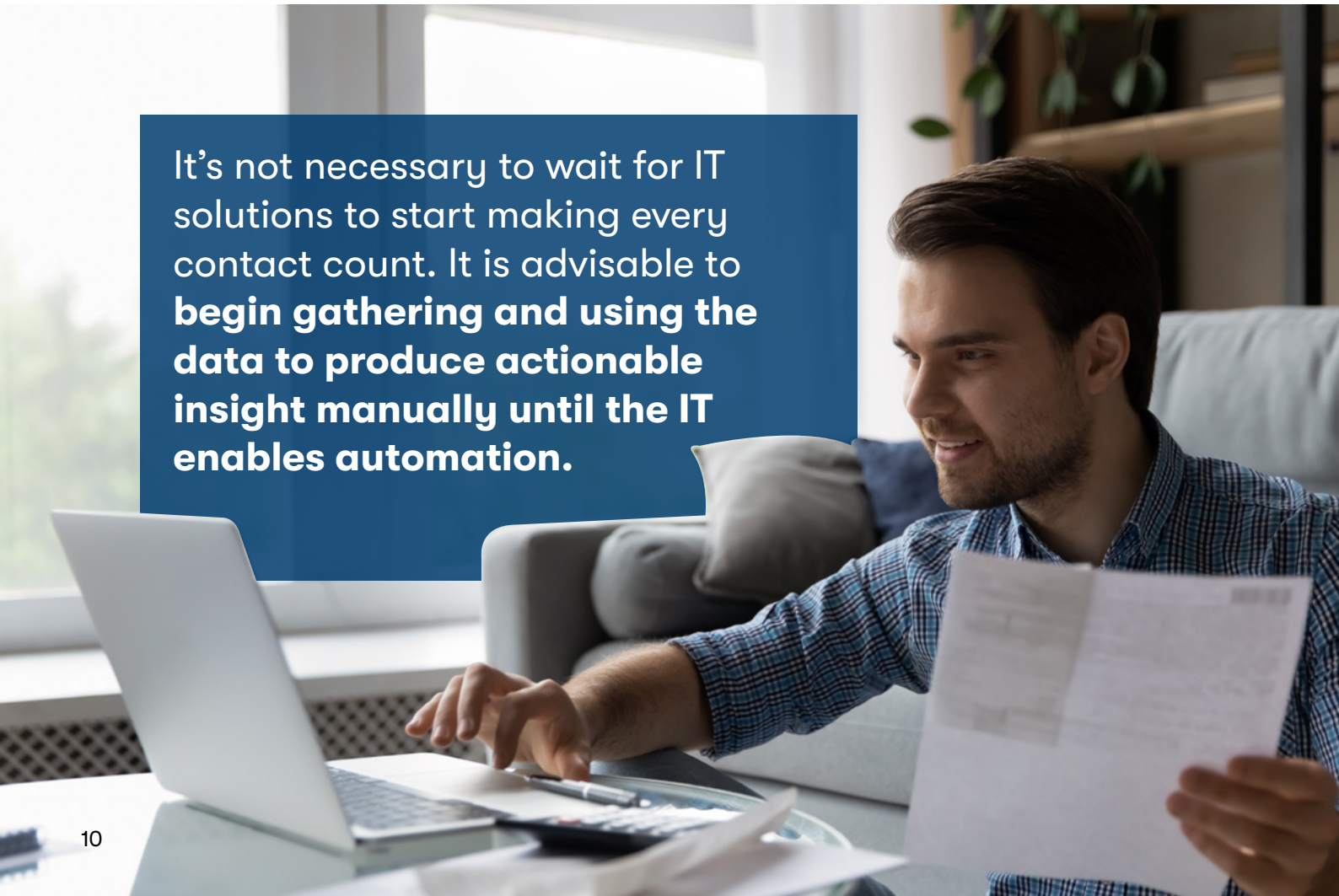
IT can be a challenge, but it need not be a barrier

The case studies demonstrate that significant and successful digital system-change and high levels of automation are possible. But there are also examples of social landlords making changes regardless of IT complexity. What is clear is that it's not necessary to wait for IT solutions to start making every contact count. It is advisable to begin gathering and using the data to produce actionable insight manually until the IT enables automation.

Actionable insight is the goal

Lots of case studies discuss data warehouses which pull together data from a number of different systems. A data analysis tool such as Microsoft's Power BI or Qlik is then used to analyse the data. The value is released as multiple data sets are brought together allowing cross-cutting questions to be answered. Are all residents of all ages similarly satisfied with a service? Are disabled residents as satisfied as residents who have not reported a disability? It's important to remember that data is only a building block. What matters is analysis that produces actionable insight.

To decide which data is needed, start from the actionable insight desired, and work backwards.



It's not necessary to wait for IT solutions to start making every contact count. It is advisable to **begin gathering and using the data to produce actionable insight manually until the IT enables automation.**

Size matters

The smallest landlord interviewed for a case study prides itself on personal service and collects a significant amount of data on its annual visit to every resident. The biggest landlord has its gas engineers answer just three questions. Both approaches have advantages. Larger size can mean more resources available for technical and systems-driven solutions. Being a smaller landlord means organisation-wide change is a smaller exercise. The best approach for each organisation will depend on size, as well as other factors.

Smaller landlords have reported particular challenges in acquiring the IT systems and technical expertise necessary for complex data analysis, given the pressure on their financial resources. They can, however, take steps to make every contact with residents count without this, and they may benefit from collaborating with other local landlords in collectively procuring new systems or developing joint resources for data analysis.

Data is only one piece of the jigsaw

Making every contact count is primarily about using the full range of interactions with residents to gather data about whether they are ok.

The first step is to gather good data. However, data is only one piece of the jigsaw. To make the most of data, social landlords need to be able to bring multiple data sets together and analyse them to produce actionable insight. It is clear from the case studies that there are lots of different ways to produce actionable insight, regardless of size or available technology.

Assessing equity

The Regulator of Social Housing is directing landlords to analyse data to examine service outcomes across different groups of residents. This means assessing whether services are being delivered equitably to different groups of residents. For example, when breaking down satisfaction scores relating to repairs, do residents from different ethnic groups report the same levels of satisfaction? The interviews suggested this is an area that most social landlords are in the process of developing.

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Sentiment analysis

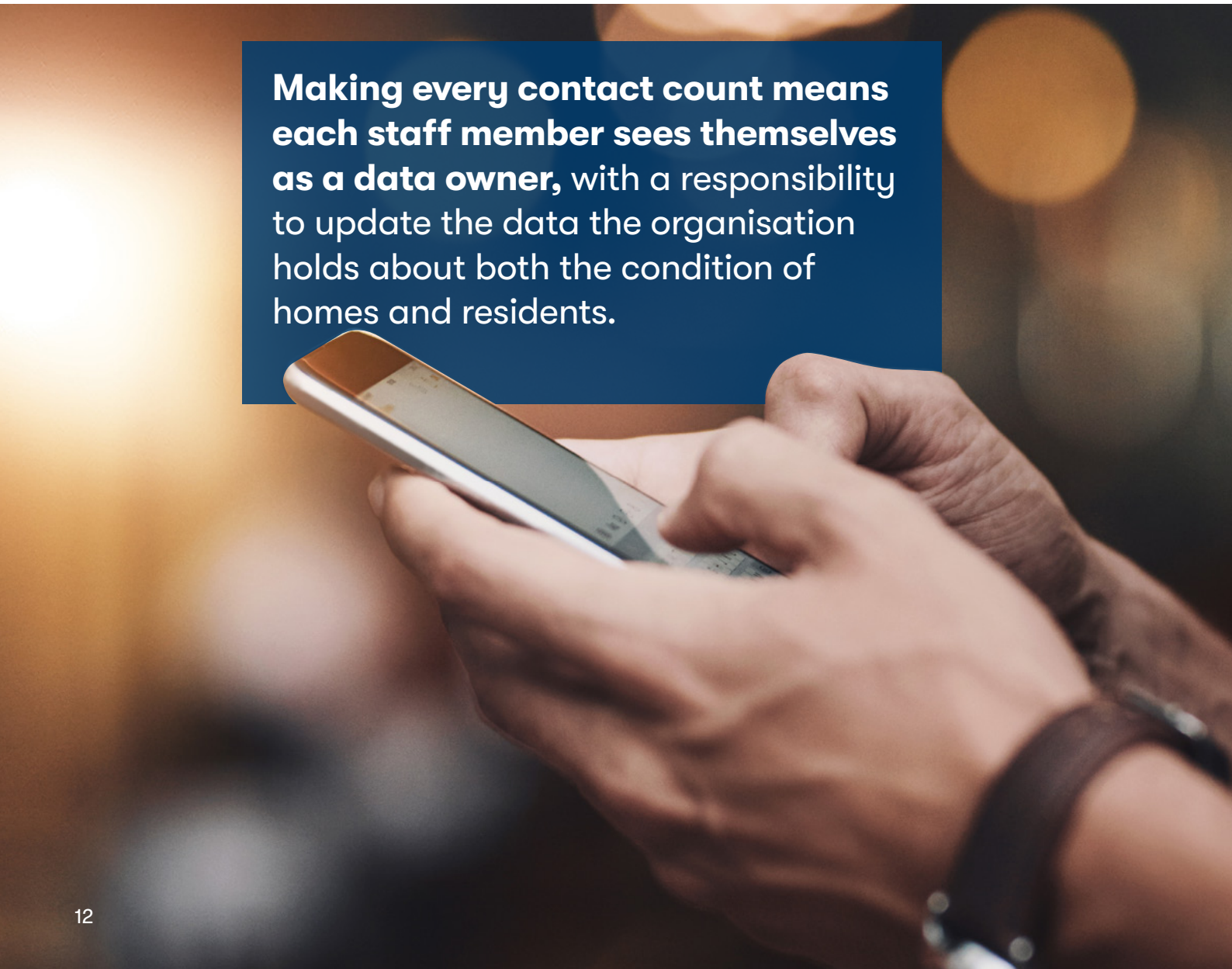
One organisation interviewed is using sentiment analysis. This is an AI or automation-based tool that scans large data sets such as emails and CRM records to deduce trends in how residents are feeling about something. Sentiment analysis can enable landlords to understand what residents like and dislike and what makes them happy or unhappy. For example, if a landlord changes the way it books appointments, fixed data points will offer only limited insight on what residents think about the change. But sentiment analysis can scan large sets of online data and voice data to enable the landlord to understand reactions in greater detail. It can also help to track how that changes over time. Sentiment analysis is a tool that may be beneficial for other social landlords to use as well.

If social landlords choose to use AI tools, it is important to consider the ethics, particularly given that AI can reproduce bias depending on how it is designed. Landlords may wish to refer to Mobysoft's guidance on using AI in social housing, or guidance from elsewhere.

Data ownership matters

Two housing associations that have made great strides on ICT systems both mentioned that fostering strong data ownership by service delivery teams is an important goal.

For full organisation changes in both culture and behaviour to be realised, it is important that each individual staff member recognises the role they must play. Making every contact count means each staff member sees themselves as a data owner, with a responsibility to update the data the organisation holds about both the condition of homes and residents. To help this, landlords must help staff to understand why this is important and the benefits for residents of collecting and using this data.



Data security is important

It is important to residents that they understand how social landlords are keeping their personal data safe and secure.

Social landlords must always ensure they are compliant with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) when collecting, storing and using residents' personal data. It will help to have a clear policy that is easily accessible to residents, and sets out how their personal data is protected in compliance with GDPR. Each organisation must take adequate measures individually to ensure that they are compliant with GDPR.

Contractors are critical

Every landlord interviewed said they instruct their contractors to think about and report safeguarding issues. In each case, contractors must proactively take responsibility. No organisation requires a mandatory safeguarding question on contractors' handheld devices, in the way that some do with staff.

The most significant change the case studies highlight is the shift in outlook and practice in property teams. Social landlords procure huge multi-million pound repairs contracts. They could further embed this cultural shift by ensuring new procurement exercises and contracts require contractors to make every contact count, requiring mandatory data input following visits to residents' homes.



The voices and views of residents

This report is about landlords using data to understand residents better and to deliver services tailored to the needs of individual residents. It was therefore important to consider the views of residents.

Preparation for this report included a consultation with residents on the National Housing Federation's Tenant Advisory Panel (TAP) and their views helped to shape this work. The TAP is independent of the NHF and plays a crucial role in guiding and shaping work on resident consultation, engagement and scrutiny. Members of TAP represent diverse groups of housing association tenants and bring with them wide-ranging lived experiences and skills.

The group was supportive of the making every contact count approach and made a number of useful points, such as:

- Some residents will not want to share personal information and this is a reasonable position for a resident to take.
- Trust matters. And trust is built when residents feel seen and heard, and treated with respect by all staff, from housing officers and repairs staff to the chief executive. Residents will be sensitive to staff behaviour that stigmatises them.
- It is vital to make the case for collecting and using data to make residents' lives better, so they understand why they are being asked to provide personal information.
- Some residents have legitimate concerns about data security. Landlords must provide residents with a clear explanation of how the organisation keeps data safe and secure.
- All staff must be competent and motivated to handle discussions with residents sensitively. Some of this will require training, and cultural awareness – particularly for staff engaging with residents from different racial and cultural backgrounds to their own.
- Contractors have significant impact on the resident experience. If contractors are involved in discussions about data, then it is crucial that they have the same motivation and responsibility to residents as staff.

Interviewees were asked about how residents' views were sought about their approach to making every contact count. In every case, issues relevant to the initiative may have been consulted on. For example, organisations may well have consulted on their safeguarding policy and/or their vulnerability policy during visits to residents' homes, but may not have consulted on the enactment of that policy. It is often the case that policies are more likely to be consulted on than detailed operational issues.

Trust matters. And trust is built when residents feel seen and heard, and treated with respect by all staff, from housing officers and repairs staff to the chief executive.

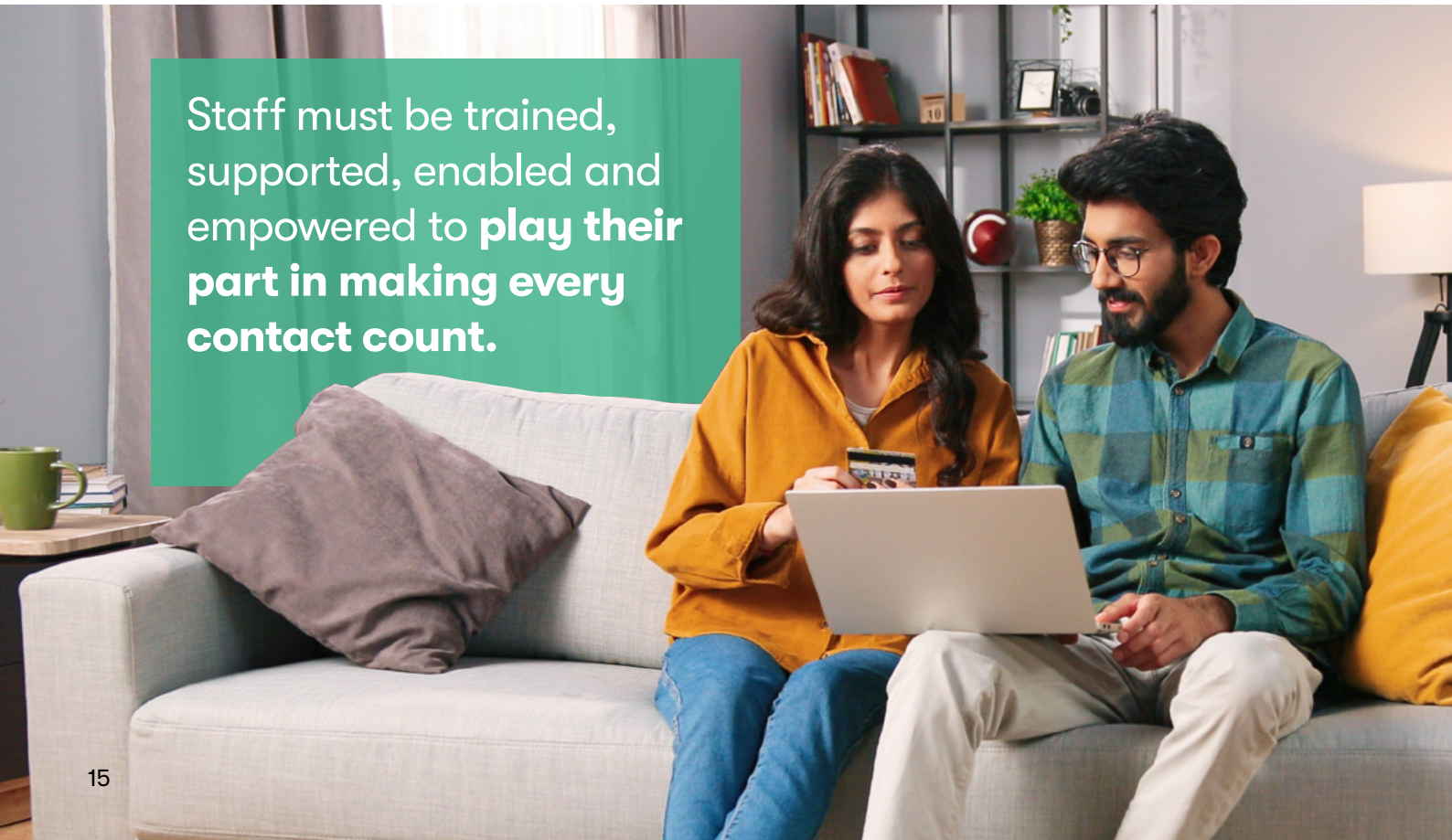
Largely, interviewees said they heard few if any concerns from residents about making every contact count. In their view, (similarly to the feedback shared by TAP members) most residents will generally be willing to share information requested by their landlord if they understand what it will be used for.



Principles for making every contact count

The following principles can help social landlords decide how to make every contact count.

- **Trust** is absolutely crucial to residents' preparedness to share data with their landlord.
- **Ease** matters to residents. It's important not to ask for too much of their time when asking for information, whatever the channel. Landlords may need to adapt how they communicate with residents who have communication barriers.
- **Staff must be trained, supported, enabled and empowered** to play their part in making every contact count.
- More and better **actionable insight** is the key objective, rather than collecting more data without a plan for how that data will be used.
- It's important to describe and **publicise how data will be used** to improve and tailor services to individual residents and to improve services for all residents.
- Setting out clearly **how data is kept safe** is essential.
- Security checks must be in place to **verify the identity of a resident** before any data is requested.
- **More automation** of data requests and processing will improve the **balance of cost and benefit**.
- **More data may initially increase demand on housing services** and this must be prepared for. It's important to remember that proactive spending should help to reduce reactive (often more expensive) problems further down the line.
- Interactions between staff and residents can be more effective and efficient when staff **have residents' pre-existing data to hand**.
- **Different data collection methods have different costs**. Automated digital data collection is the most cost-efficient, followed by digital (not automated) data collection, then manual data collection.
- **Seek opportunities** where personal data can be checked and refreshed as a legitimate part of interactions with residents.
- **Ensure compliance** with all relevant laws and regulations.



Where are the opportunities?

Landlords can most effectively make every contact count by combining a range of different opportunities for gathering data and checking on both the condition of properties and the needs of residents. This table sets out the key opportunities for social landlords.

Channel	Opportunities
Social media, online instant messaging	Long-winded, long-handed way to acquire forensic data, which may then require re-keying. Good source of raw data for sentiment analysis.
Point of sale online or phone (e.g. when a repair is ordered)	Residents are used to being asked for relevant personal data to complete a transaction. This must be relevant to the matter at hand. It will typically not be appropriate to ask residents to share personal data, for example, if they have reported an emergency repair.
In the home	Excellent opportunity to check triggers such as safeguarding or damp, mould and condensation.
Post/email/online survey	Good ways to make the case for, request and gather personal data. It must be made as easy and quick as possible for the resident – excessively long surveys put residents off.
Self-service resident portals/apps	Residents are familiar with the idea of an online account, protected by a password (and sometimes two factor authentication). It is usual that in online accounts, they can update their personal data as well as carry out various transactions. Once the upfront development costs are covered, this is a quick and cost-effective approach that allows residents, for example, to report repairs and update their own data.

Make data collection secure, quick, easy and appropriate to the situation.



What data should be collected?

This report does not set out a list of proposed data for social landlords to collect about the condition of residents' homes. There will be significant variation in which datapoints are useful and important for landlords across different types of homes, and depending on which components landlords are responsible for maintaining in each home. Each organisation should determine what is needed in order to understand its residents' experiences, the condition of their homes, and how services could be tailored and improved.

As a minimum, landlords will require sufficient data on the condition of residents' homes for assurance in these key areas:

- Compliance with the Decent Home Standard.
- Repairs, maintenance and planned improvement works are completed effectively.
- All other regulatory requirements are met to ensure that residents are living in decent and safe homes.

Separately to this report, the NHF has shared recommendations for the key information landlords should aim to collect about their residents, to support them to deliver effective services that meet the diverse needs of their residents. The key datapoints recommended for collection are:

- Ethnicity
- Age
- Gender
- Disability and long-term health conditions
- Support needs
- Language barriers
- Contact details

Landlords may also choose to collect additional information to better understand the characteristics and needs of their residents. It is important that landlords meet the requirements of GDPR when collecting, storing and using resident data.



Case studies

Collated here are eleven case studies, from a range of different social landlords. They include large and small organisations, providers of general needs and specialist housing, housing associations, an ALMO and a local authority, with homes in different areas of the country.

These case studies provide examples of how social landlords are currently using and developing the 'make every contact count' approach. Some landlords have been using this approach for years, others have begun introducing it more recently.

The case studies highlight good practice and the benefits each landlord derives from making every contact count. They also flag the challenges organisations have faced in developing their approach, and where they recognise there is still room to improve.

No individual case study showcases every single element of making every contact count. Each landlord has invested in the elements they think will most benefit them and their residents, given their individual circumstances.

The case studies refer to 'costs' and 'resources'.

- Costs refers to the additional cash investment needed to turn the idea into reality. For example, if an organisation already provides every tradesperson with a handheld device and the tradesperson already has a workflow process on the device that they follow when carrying out a repair in a resident's home, then 'cost' would refer to the cost of adding a safeguarding question to that workflow, and of training staff so that they are competent to answer the question.
- Resources refers to three things. Firstly, to the staff time needed to deliver the initiative. If every repair visit is going to be three minutes longer this will impact on productivity. Secondly, to the staff time needed to manage any extra service demand resulting from additional questions. Finally, 'resources' refers to cost incurred due to extra service demand such as repair or improvement or adaptation costs.

Broadacres

About Broadacres

Broadacres is a proudly rural housing association based in North Yorkshire. Most Broadacres homes were transferred from North Yorkshire council in 1993.

Broadacres has a strong focus on developing services to best serve customers spread across towns and villages from the coast and across the North Yorkshire moors.

How Broadacres is making every contact count

There are several layers to how Broadacres seeks to make every contact count. As with all the case studies in this report, Broadacres has an initiative focused on making sure that no colleague ever walks past a problem without reporting it. The Broadacres initiative is called SOS – short for 'safe and sound'.

Broadacres has made great efforts with tradespeople to encourage them to consider the people aspects of Broadacres' service as well as the property aspects. The SOS initiative started in the Support Worker Team and then extended outwards.

One way it keeps the issue fresh in the minds of tradespeople is that every team meeting has a safeguarding item, and a rolling programme of other matters raised in these meetings.

Broadacres makes it clear that colleagues will never get in trouble for raising an issue, whatever it is. There is no downside to reporting but there could be a downside to not reporting if it means an issue is overlooked.

There is a mandatory yes/no question on every tradesperson's handheld device asking whether there is an SOS issue to raise. A 'Yes' response prompts a follow up question.

The follow up SOS question is an open-ended trigger question rather than a closed question to enrich a single data-field. This encourages tradespeople to report issues, include details and explain what they are concerned about, rather than simply answering 'yes' or 'no'.

Broadacres makes it clear that **colleagues will never get in trouble for raising an issue, whatever it is.**



Observations

While the SOS question is mandatory for tradespeople directly employed by Broadacres, it is voluntary for contractors. Contractors are encouraged, enabled and supported to report safeguarding concerns, but SOS is not included as a compulsory question in a workflow.

Each issue raised is evaluated by housing management colleagues and appropriate actions put in place. In planning their response to each report Broadacres takes care to be as sensitive as possible. For example, if Broadacres is managing a hoarding case it may be more sensitive for a tradesperson to provide an update to housing management colleagues on any outstanding concerns following a repairs visit than it would be to organise a specific visit from a Housing Officer solely to discuss the hoarding issue.

Broadacres takes care to track each issue from report to conclusion and also to consider lessons learned at a summary level. This analysis of all reports enables patterns to be identified (for example if reports come from a particular place or property type or if they relate to a particular type of issue). These trends then inform service planning.

Broadacres has been using this approach for over 10 years – more than long enough for it to become simply part of the day job, rather than new or unusual. The costs are marginal. Demand on resources is noticeable. Colleague visits take slightly longer and there is additional demand on resources when issues are reported through SOS. But the Broadacres view is that the approach improves the consistency of their service and brings forward service demand that they want to know about and deal with.

Technology plays an important part. The SOS question has to be answered on a handheld device and the answer is automatically sent to the housing management team for them to consider and move



forwards. But the people aspect is more important and this is why Broadacres has focused so much on that. Broadacres takes care to close the loop by going back to tradespeople with examples of good news stories illustrating how matters raised under SOS have been moved forwards. This helps tradespeople to understand the benefits of reporting issues they see.

This approach has had significant impact in moving the property team from a team chiefly focused on properties to a team that focuses on people. There has been a noticeable cultural shift, with a clear recognition that every colleague entering a home has a part to play in ensuring every Broadacres household is ok.

This approach has had significant impact in moving the property team from a team chiefly focused on properties to a team that focuses on people. There has been a noticeable cultural shift, with a clear recognition that every colleague entering a home has a part to play in ensuring every Broadacres household is ok.

Golden Lane

About Golden Lane

Golden Lane Housing manages approximately 1,500 homes across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Golden Lane provides specialist supported housing for people with a learning disability and autistic people.

Golden Lane faces particular operational challenges due to the relatively small number of homes managed and its national dispersal, though there is the advantage that most Golden Lane homes have tenant employed support staff on site.

How Golden Lane Housing is making every contact count

Golden Lane Housing has a digital survey which is used principally by housing officers and property surveyors, though it is available to all staff when they visit a home. The aim of the survey is to ensure tenant wellbeing and housing needs, health and safety, and repairs are checked by a Golden Lane Housing colleague:. Should any concerns arise from the survey, the relevant team is notified and will act to resolve the issue. There is a particular emphasis on suitability, given the wide range of support needs that people with a learning disability and autistic people can have, and the potential for their property needs to change over time.

Golden Lane Housing colleagues are required to complete the survey each time they visit a resident at home. The survey is not pre-populated with existing data.

Data collection is on a handheld device and uploaded automatically.

The data collected can be split into 'trigger' data (e.g. 'Do the residents appear happy, safe and well?') and 'specific' data points (e.g. 'Are all fire exits free from obstacles?')

Golden Lane staff have experienced little or no resistance from residents while completing the survey.

Data is uploaded automatically to Golden Lane's core housing management system, Active H, and can be downloaded from there to a spreadsheet or report viewer for further analysis.

Golden Lane Housing has had to adapt to the quantity of data and the need to initiate and track activities identified by the survey. In common with other case studies, Golden Lane is of the view that this initiative enables better understanding of residents' needs. It increases service demand, which is welcome because it helps Golden Lane to improve services and properties for residents.

This initiative enables better understanding of residents' needs. **It increases service demand, which is welcome because it helps Golden Lane to improve services and properties for residents.**

Data collection and analysis is done on a case by case basis. Staff check data held about residents, update it where necessary, and identify any follow-up tasks related either to the home or the resident.

Golden Lane intends to extend use of the survey to directly employed tradespeople and then later to contractors.

Golden Lane has used a postal survey and specific colleague training has been delivered to enhance the resident data they hold.

Observations

This initiative is chiefly focused on the safety and wellbeing of households. It seeks to achieve a consistent level of risk management when a certain type of interaction with a resident happens (a visit).

Taking a structured approach converts the intention to check these things into a clear requirement to do so. The use of mobile devices provides further structure. On paper it is easy to skip a question or to record an invalid answer but on a mobile device it is possible to make asking and answering a question mandatory.

Golden Lane Housing acknowledges that there is a greater demand on staff time in order to carry out and analyse the surveys, but it is clear that the extra time delivers good value. It also ensures that due to the extensive travel involved in reaching many Golden Lane's properties, the time spent in the tenant's home is then maximised by collating as much useful information as possible regarding them and their home.

The most important value added is that Golden Lane can be sure that a colleague has checked every resident is ok, every year. Also, beyond 'everything is ok' the organisation is checking and picking up on changes to residents' circumstances in order to better tailor and/or future-proof housing and services to their needs.

The most important value added is that **Golden Lane can be sure that they have checked every resident is ok, every year.**

Homes in Sedgemoor

About Homes in Sedgemoor

Homes in Sedgemoor is an arms-length management organisation that manages 4,000 properties on behalf of Somerset council.

These homes are spread predominantly across the towns and villages of Somerset North and include sheltered and extra care housing, as well as general needs.

How Homes in Sedgemoor are making every contact count

Homes in Sedgemoor has a great story to tell about how it converted a strong corporate level intention to gain assurance that all tenants are ok into consistent actions within service delivery.

In 2022 it re-structured its service delivery around four locality teams, with relevant specialists in each. When out and about, officers complete forms on handheld devices. The data collected includes a mixture of fixed data points, such as updating who lives in a property, and flags that include vulnerability. For example, contractors have access to a 'concern' button, which they can use to raise a concern about a household member or the property.

The intention of the four area teams was to increase joined-up thinking and local knowledge across all team disciplines without the need to duplicate resource, and at the same time support customers to receive a more joined-up service. Staff from all levels in the organisation show a strong belief in the mission and report that the structure and the methods are working.

IT and data systems present some challenges but deliver enough useful automation that the approach works. Improvements are underway.

Homes in Sedgemoor is also involved in Transform Data View. This is a web-based data sharing portal, owned by Somerset Council, which enables Homes in Sedgemoor to understand which residents with children may be open to agencies and receiving social care support. The aim is to enable and support joined-up thinking and partnership-working to achieve better outcomes for residents with children through access to a professionals network.

Observations

By bringing together specialists previously from different teams into one geographically-focused team, Homes in Sedgemoor has restructured in a way that encourages joined-up thinking.

The Homes in Sedgemoor IT system makes sure that relevant issues are considered (although there is still room for this system to become more efficient). Homes in Sedgemoor describes the current IT hardware and software as 'somewhat clunky' but it has progressed the evolution of the service despite this. It aspires to better workflows on mobile devices to better support and enable their staff.

Homes in Sedgemoor is deeply committed to delivering an excellent and caring service for all residents. It has created a team structure designed to enable consistent service for everyone.

Formalising the intention by changing team structures and the use of forms on handheld devices helped to create a clear direction of travel. Crucially, Homes in Sedgemoor did not wait for a flawless IT solution to begin making the more cultural and behavioural changes needed.

The data sharing portal is an excellent example of extending outwards the use of data to secure better outcomes for residents. It shows the benefits that can be achieved when joined-up thinking is supported by joined-up systems.

Homes in Sedgemoor is **deeply committed to delivering an excellent and caring service for all residents.**

L&Q

About L&Q

L&Q is one of the sector's biggest landlords. Managing over 100,000 homes, they face a range of challenges and opportunities when it comes to delivering services to their residents.

How L&Q is making every contact count

L&Q has lots of formal, planned methods to gather data. In addition to estate inspections, an externally delivered stock condition survey and the full range of compliance and required safety checks, these include:

- A programme of tenancy audits and additional visits with residents (as required). These visits fulfil two key functions: a check on resident wellbeing and an audit/fraud detection check. L&Q has a target to audit 20% of tenancies per year.
- 'Healthy homes' visits are visits triggered by reports of, or a data-driven identification of, a home at higher risk of damp, mould or condensation.
- Vulnerability audits are visits triggered by reports of, or a data-driven identification of potential vulnerability issues in the household.

Every officer on every visit is instructed to consider whether the household is ok and raise concerns if not. Collectively, these visits provide L&Q with assurance that staff are proactively checking on residents' wellbeing.

L&Q has developed digital self-service methods. Residents can provide information and update their own data via an online portal.

L&Q is in the midst of changing the core housing management system used across the organisation. In an organisation the size of L&Q this is a huge undertaking. When such a change is underway it often means that existing ways of working remain in place while the new system and more modern approach is gradually established.



Observations

L&Q has a data science team focused on improving the quality of data and making the most of existing data. This team combines and layers data sets (for example disrepair claims and property archetypes) to provide actionable insight.

L&Q has experienced challenges in effectively managing the extra work identified when data analysis leads to develop actionable insight. The large number of homes managed by L&Q multiplies the scale of such challenges. Partly in response to this, L&Q has reviewed their repairs service from top to bottom. Through this, L&Q has established a dedicated technical surveying resource and minor works team to pick up larger jobs to ensure that the responsive repairs service can concentrate on day to day repairs. In addition, L&Q has reviewed processes to ensure that residents' vulnerabilities and support needs are taken into account when works are identified and ordered.

L&Q is employing a variety of data-gathering methods and has some good approaches for using that data. Once the new core IT system is fully established L&Q should be able to take full advantage of the data stored through better analysis and a more digital and automated approach.



L&Q has a data science team focused on improving the quality of data and making the most of existing data.

Lincolnshire Rural

About Lincs Rural

Lincs Rural is a small housing association with a particular focus on providing excellent housing services to small groups of homes in villages across Lincolnshire.

Lincs Rural proudly sets out to deliver a highly personal service to each household, which makes the most of the advantages offered by their small size, although there are also plenty of challenges that arise from being a small organisation.

How Lincs Rural is making every contact count

Every household is visited every year to check on the wellbeing of residents and the condition of their home.

To ensure consistency of approach on these visits, Lincs Rural implemented handheld devices using a form in iAuditor (mobile software used by staff) to provide a structured approach to the annual visit. The form guides the staff member through a series of questions ranging from specific data points (such as who lives in the property) to trigger questions (such as 'Are there any safeguarding concerns?').

A key reason for the approach is to make sure that Lincs Rural has assurance that all of their residents are ok. The handheld device and software then ensure consistency. Lincs Rural has a total staff of 17 people. This makes it easier to take a whole team approach to customer service and to make joined-up thinking a reality.

Every repair job results in a RAG (red/amber/green) rating for the home, recorded on a handheld device in order that work to the home and/or support for the residents can be prioritised where necessary.

Lincs Rural uses a combined data set to determine eligibility for their Rural Goldstar award. This is a twice yearly draw where four eligible residents (those who meet a set of criteria relating to their home, tenancy and rent account) win £250. Currently 63% of households aim to be in the draw. This is a good example of using a combined data set to incentivise residents to comply with a range of tenancy requirements.

Lincs Rural proudly sets out to deliver a highly personal service to each household, which makes the most of the advantages offered by their small size, although there are also plenty of challenges that arise from being a small organisation.

Observations

Lincs Rural shows a striking commitment to delivering a personal service for all residents. There is a strongly held intention and motivation to support residents to sustain their tenancies, rather than taking an enforcement-focused approach.

Lincs Rural then turned commitment into action by changing the way staff work, to ensure that all customers are ok, to find (and eliminate) their silence and, to clearly signpost the organisation's culture to colleagues.

The housing association has confidence in its approach, and has worked hard to ensure all staff fully understand and support the organisational culture.

Lincs Rural has good examples of analysing combined data sets, for example overlaying heat maps of voids and repairs to understand whether particular property archetypes or locations coincide with higher numbers of voids and/or repairs.

One of the advantages of being a smaller housing association is that it is easier to make organisation-wide change happen. Lincs Rural has impressively turned intention into action and used technology to support the journey.

LiveWest

About LiveWest

LiveWest is the largest housing association in the south west of England with properties from Cornwall to Gloucestershire.

It has general needs, social housing, supported housing, market rented, sheltered housing and shared ownership homes. LiveWest is large enough that consistency of service depends on systems and processes.

How LiveWest is making every contact count

LiveWest has a way of working, called 'Don't Walk By', which makes every colleague responsible for identifying and reporting issues of concern about customers and their homes. Trade operatives are able to log any issues directly through their tablet as part of their repair process, which automatically uploads data to the repairs system.

LiveWest uses a range of opportunities to gather more data, including customer visits by neighbourhood teams, repairs visits, surveyor visits, gas safety and compliance visits, scrutiny by their customer group, InFocus, and reports from their customer estate champions.

LiveWest is putting data to good use. Examples of this include monitoring the colleague reports coming in from 'Don't Walk By' to identify patterns (such as increases in the need for cost of living advice) and using this to influence service planning.

LiveWest is in the process of analysing additional data about customers, including information about customers' support needs, 'slice of life' surveys, and data about diversity, to tailor services for customers who have a specific need. For example, LiveWest aims to identify customers who prefer non-digital communication or who require assistance for a specific issue.

LiveWest has established data-driven methods to increase consistency of service. It measures and analyses data on safeguarding and uses a 'clutter scale' to understand not only the number of cases of hoarding but the seriousness of each case.

LiveWest has also introduced 'you and your home' visits. This takes a structured approach to a home visit and is used in a range of situations, including a visit to every customer at least once every five years. During these visits, colleagues will check on the condition of the home and whether the customer is in need of any support. Often a housing officer and a gas engineer will team up to undertake a combined gas service and a 'you and your home' visit, reducing the number of appointments needed.

Using data, LiveWest has proactively contacted all customers who did not have contact in the last year and arranged a 'you and your home' visit. These visits are also used to understand why a customer has refused a kitchen or bathroom, or has not given access for colleagues to complete a compliance check or a repair.

LiveWest trade operatives capture a range of data on their handheld devices and this is automatically uploaded. The same is true of 'you and your home' data. Data cubes from a variety of sources are held in a data warehouse and are reported and analysed using Microsoft Power BI. A data cube is the name given to a combined data set (for example, property data and people data combined). With these building blocks in place, LiveWest is focused on how to make use of combined data sets to produce actionable insight.

LiveWest takes steps to refresh personal data when a customer calls the customer services centre. Work has also begun to automate requests to refresh personal data online. For example, LiveWest intends that when a customer logs in to the LiveWest portal the system will check their personal data for completeness and age and, if necessary, ask the customer to check and amend the data.

LiveWest also has a remote diagnostics team able to video call customers for a remote survey or emergency repair. The team are able to obtain and check data on components such as kitchens, bathrooms and boilers remotely and update systems accordingly.

Observations

LiveWest is moving towards greater use of data to influence thinking and decision-making. LiveWest has a dedicated Customer Insight team to interrogate data across customer groups and help adapt the service to meet customer needs. For example, the team categorises the reasons customers give for refusing a repair and analyses this data at the level of individual households, as well as across all refusals on all homes, to identify if there is a pattern that suggests a need for support of some kind.

LiveWest emphasised the way in which digital data helps to better run the business. For example, previously, the reason a customer refused a new kitchen would have been recorded on paper and one needed physical access to that record to know the reason. But when the details are held electronically it is much easier for colleagues to review. However, it is critical that this data is analysed, and that colleagues ask the right questions. Colleagues at LiveWest evidence a practical and cultural shift, from the passivity of just crossing the address off the kitchen replacement programme to the proactivity of asking what can be learnt from the refusal and whether anything more can be done to support the customer.

LiveWest is also using data to flex and adapt their customer offer for the future.

LiveWest is a good example of a larger landlord making sure they consistently check important triggers relating to whether customers and homes are ok. LiveWest is in the early stages of broadening this work to enable customers to update data themselves.

LiveWest is a good example of a larger landlord making sure they consistently check important triggers relating to whether customers and homes are ok.

Onward Homes

About Onward

Onward is a housing association in northwest England established in 2018 through a series of mergers from five different housing associations. Onward owns and manages around 35,000 homes. This includes multiple tenures such as, general needs, supported housing, sheltered accommodation, leasehold and shared ownership. In addition to the different tenures its homes are varied in age, size, archetype and location from city living to rural locations.

How Onward is making every contact count

Onward has evolved its ways of working and customer engagement to help gather data and intelligence to support informed decision-making. Data is widely used to monitor the performance of Onward homes and to support customers. Services are tailored and developed around customers' diverse needs.

Onward ensures it makes the most of every interaction with its customers. A 'Don't Walk By' approach ensures all staff are alert to issues at all times. All staff and contractors are empowered to report issues via their handheld devices when they are out and about, in realtime and the Customer Service Team uses appropriate questioning and listening skills to ensure the right service and support for customers

Each time Onward receives an inbound enquiry, its teams check that the information held for the household is accurate and up to date. New and existing customer needs are confirmed and records updated appropriately.

Onward has run significant training programmes for staff on gathering and handling personal data and has issued detailed guidance on this to help staff identify and report on information that could impact how it delivers its services.

In order to make every contact count, Onward has methods with different touch points (with varying degrees of automation) to gather data digitally, on the phone, WhatsApp, face-to-face, and in residents' homes. Customers also have the ability to check their information online and provide any updates.

Data is widely used to monitor the performance of Onward homes and to support customers. **Services are tailored and developed around customers' diverse needs.**

To ensure it can make informed decisions, Onward has carried out a data maturity assessment and is carrying out targeted work to improve where data is missing, old or of poor quality. Onward is also working to replace its core housing management system and has completed a significant data cleansing exercise which involved checking 1.5 million records over an 18-month period.



Observations

When it comes to collecting personal data, Onward has noticed a difference in expectations between general needs residents and shared owners, and has received more enquiries from shared owners about why their personal data is being collected.

Onward brings various data sets together in a data warehouse and uses a business intelligence tool called 'Qlik' to process queries, produce reports and dashboards, and provide intelligence to inform business decisions.

There has been a culture shift across Onward to embed ownership of data across operational teams. Part of this shift has been driven by demonstrating the benefits of data to individual teams and how the insight can be used to drive demonstrable action that enables the delivery of better services.

To support the evolution of this work Onward will continue to improve the ownership of data across the business. Some efforts are practical, such as identifying specific roles as data owners. Others relate to cultural change, for example ensuring data health and use is seen as part of business as usual.

A helpful method to support the culture change is Onward's Customer Data Forum, which has helped focus efforts on improving data quality. This forum brings together people from across the business to work on how to achieve more and better actionable insight, to enable staff to achieve better outcomes for residents.

One key benefit of capturing data and updating data as part of business as usual means that staff can see the direct impact on their workload.



The cost of change relating to making every contact count is described as marginal but the demand on staff time has been reduced significantly now that capturing and updating data has become part of business as usual. This work provides significant benefit in terms of better outcomes for residents and better levels of assurance across the business.

There has been a culture shift across Onward to embed ownership of data across operational teams. **Part of this shift has been driven by demonstrating the benefits of data to individual teams**

Places for People

About Places for People

Places for People is the UK's leading Social Enterprise, building homes and communities where everyone is welcome, and everyone can thrive. It provides and manages a range of housing types, delivers new developments and manages leisure facilities.

It manages over 240,000 homes from Cornwall up to Scotland. It faces many of the same challenges as other social landlords, supporting communities to thrive, making sure every customer is safe and well. But some of their challenges differ. Size has its advantages when it comes to resources but providing consistency across so many properties is a complex task.

Making every contact count at Places for People

Over three quarters of Places for People homes are powered by gas. This means that annual gas safety checks are an important opportunity for Places for People to check that things are working as they should.

Directly employed gas engineers work using handheld devices with forms that provide structure to what an engineer does during an annual gas inspection. In addition to the gas servicing workflow, the engineer has to answer three questions:

- Is there any damp, mould or condensation?
- Are there any safeguarding concerns?
- Is there anything else that the gas engineer needs to report back?

Places for People arrived at this approach by finding a balance between what the landlord needs to know (that things are working as they should), what and how much is a reasonable ask of a gas engineer in terms of additional work and the type and complexity of enquiry. The role of the gas engineer is only to report incidents. These reports are then pursued by trained colleagues elsewhere in the organisation, who were able to triage cases and ensure appropriate responses.

Places for People took care to keep the work of gas engineers straightforward and provided training and resources to support them in carrying out their new responsibilities. The approach was piloted in two regions from February to July 2023 before being rolled out nationally. Feedback from gas engineers during the trial was that the level of engagement from customers was high, with some customers telling engineers they liked the face-to-face interaction, and felt reassured by this proactive approach.

Where Places for People have been unable to access homes to undertake stock condition surveys, Places for People has trialled 'customer condition surveys' which are sent electronically, where the customer answers a range of questions about their home. The survey includes questions about the customer's views of the condition of things like kitchens and bathrooms. Customers' opinions are supported by photographs, which customers can upload as part of the survey. This has provided new insight about how customers feel about their homes and the components within them. Where possible images and feedback are used to validate and update asset condition information. Customers are incentivised to provide their feedback and images.



Observations

Gas engineers were generally happy to provide additional information, however a small minority were more uneasy assuming some responsibility for damp and mould. But Places for People was satisfied that the ask of the gas engineers was reasonable and that the shift in focus from a mainly technical task to a task that covers people and technical issues was appropriate.

While reports received from the gas engineers about damp, mould and condensation were closely aligned to the numbers previously reported, it has helped identify new cases and provided an increased level of assurance in damp and mould reports. The number of safeguarding concerns reported has been low but impactful when identified.

Making the questions compulsory confirms the shift in the gas engineer role **from a primarily technical role, to one with both technical and customer care responsibilities.**

Places for People has observed a clear cultural shift as a result of this new approach, focused on ensuring colleagues 'do the right thing'. By automating the three questions on the gas engineers' handheld devices, gas engineers who may prefer not to ask the questions cannot opt out. Making the questions compulsory confirms the shift in the gas engineer role from a primarily technical role, to one with both technical and customer care responsibilities.

Within Places for People customer condition surveys are considered a particular success, providing new ways to gain information to understand customer perception and actual condition regarding the quality of components and homes. This information provides insight which will be used to review and improve investment in homes and communities. There has been no resistance from customers about the new approach and this approach will be expanded further in the coming months.



Places for People is currently making key changes to ICT platforms, implementing Google Cloud Platform and Salesforce to drive better insight on homes and customers. It is looking forward to making data more central to how the business operates and building on a successful new approach to data collection.

It is looking forward to **making data more central to how the business operates and building on a successful new approach to data collection.**

Progress Housing

About Progress

Progress manages an unusual combination of homes. Its journey started in 1994 with the transfer of 3,500 homes from South Ribble Borough Council in Lancashire. Today Progress has over 7,000 affordable homes in the north west of England, 4,000 specialist supported housing homes throughout the UK, and other types such as over 500 key worker homes.

Making every contact count at Progress

Bringing data sets together and analysing them to produce actionable insight is a particular focus and strength for Progress. They produce actionable insight to help:

- Find their silence. Progress reviews which tenants it has not had contact with and which properties it has not had access to. That list is analysed and cases prioritised according to risk.
- Manage damp mould and condensation. Progress brings together data about properties (type, age, design, repairs reporting) and data about people who might be at greater risk (including data about hoarding, overcrowding and fuel poverty). This again enables Progress to produce a risk-based list and prioritise the highest risk households through their Healthy Homes programme.

Progress uses segmentation to better understand tenant demographics and experience. Segmentation means grouping people together based on shared characteristics, e.g. household composition, age, location, employment status, or health. This helps to understand whether particular groups of people experience services differently to the majority. If all tenant engagement opportunities are in standard working hours then people in employment may be less likely or unable to engage than retired people.

Progress uses data to identify tenants who may need more support. Capped off gas supplies were once seen primarily as a technical issue which made it difficult for Progress to complete annual gas safety checks. Now data on gas capped properties is also seen as a trigger for potential support delivered through its tenancy sustainability service, as it can be a sign of fuel poverty.



Observations

Progress' first work on intersecting data sets was its tenancy fraud initiative. This has since grown to an organisation-wide way of working.

Progress makes good use of hardware and software. Employees use handheld devices when visiting tenants in their homes, and forms that provide structure to each visit and improve the consistency of service.

Every tenant in supported housing is visited every year. The data gathered helps shape and improve services for that tenant individually and more generally.

Progress found it challenging to decide where the boundaries are with this approach to data collection. They have needed to decide how many additional questions should be asked to gather or update personal data when a tenant is on the phone (answer: not many). Additionally, Progress is concerned about holding too much personal information about tenants. The preference is a slim set of personal data and conversations about reasonable adjustments are held at each point of contact.

Progress noted that using a large number of systems makes the task of collecting and managing data harder, even though they make good of tools such as Microsoft PowerBI.

Progress has ambitions to improve tenant self-service in managing their own data through the use of their tenant web app, which is already well established with over 4,000 registered users.



Every tenant in supported housing is visited every year.
The data gathered helps shape and improve services for that tenant individually and more generally.

Raven

About Raven

Raven Housing Trust is a social housing provider based in Redhill, Surrey. It owns or manages around 7,000 rented and shared ownership homes in Surrey and Sussex.

Raven's purpose is 'Building homes, Changing lives'. It exists to provide high quality, affordable homes and services that customers value and trust.

How Raven is making every contact count

Raven recently completed a three-year digital transformation programme, 'Better Connected', which has revolutionised the way it does business by improving customer experience, operational efficiency and cost effectiveness while reducing risk. Replacing its multiple IT systems with a single platform has enabled the organisation to streamline processes and create a single source of accurate, reliable, up-to-date data.

Raven is now building on this technological transformation by harnessing its data to enable and empower staff so they can improve customer experience and deliver the best outcomes for residents – with a focus on knowing their customers better and understanding what really matters to them.

With over 80,000 calls and work orders per year, Raven is determined to use every opportunity it can to collect, record and share customer data through its enhanced IT systems.

Sentiment analysis tools have been introduced to assess how customers feel about services and really shine a light on their experiences. This technology, which is now being rolled out to the customer contact centre, analyses large volumes of data from a range of sources to spot key themes and pinpoint where Raven needs to improve. For example, data analysis identified high levels of dissatisfaction with the gas repairs service. Deeper investigation of the issues led to Raven changing its contractor, resulting in improved customer satisfaction.

Raven has a dashboard of data health, which enables staff to understand the quantity and quality (such as age) of information. This, in turn, enables the development of targeted campaigns to improve the completeness and quality of data held.

Structures are in place to enable systematic data improvement. For example, the software system used by staff answering incoming phone calls checks the age and quality of defined personal data. If existing data is below the quality threshold, the system flags this so staff can raise the issue during the call.

A significant communications drive has been delivered to ensure customers understand which data they might be asked for and how it will be stored and used, with a focus on building trust – and residents can opt out of providing such information.



Raven is committed to delivering on the Housing Ombudsman's recommendation to 'find their silence'. As such, Raven uses combined data sets to identify residents with whom there has been no contact.

Considerable effort has gone into formalising Raven's approach to reasonable adjustments, whereby changes can be made to how services are offered or delivered to remove or reduce disadvantages for individual residents. For example, Raven aims to keep accurate, up-to-date records on different residents' communication preferences and to respect those preferences in its communications.

This tailoring of services to meet customers' varying needs has focused on neurodiversity. As with other aspects of Raven's work, the practical changes have taken place alongside work to ensure residents and staff understand these changes and the positive outcomes they can achieve.

Observations

Key to Raven's success is its focus on cultural change, to embed its shift in approach to data-led decision-making across the business. This new culture recognises that every interaction matters and never ignores a problem. It is built on three key principles – putting customers first, being curious about who they are, then making it happen.

The organisation is clear on its desired outcomes, the data needed, how to acquire that data and how to use it to make a real difference.

Raven has various plans for the next steps on its journey. It is currently running a training programme for all staff to clarify its culture change and the colleague behaviours that underpin it. This will assess the roles of customer-facing teams to ensure staff have the right tools, training and time to truly understand who is behind the door of each of Raven's homes and how well they are living in it.

Work is also under way to raise awareness across operational teams of the importance of data and to develop a sense of ownership among all colleagues. This helps them understand why questions about refreshing data appear in their workflows and the crucial role of accurate data in good service delivery.

Raven is already using combined data sets to understand the consistency of service delivery and of residents' experience. Building on this, it intends to analyse satisfaction across different groups of residents to establish whether levels are consistent or there are outliers of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction.

The business has built-in mechanisms to focus on turning data into insight, such as its Insights Action Panel. This group brings together staff from across the organisation, with the purpose of raising the profile of insight-driven decision-making and to build competence and confidence in using combined data sets to achieve actionable insight. Raven is confident this will bring more colleagues on board, resulting in staff making more use of combined data sets.

The business has a team focused on building and maintaining partnerships with other organisations to ensure the best breadth and depth of support for residents, either in-house or by signposting to partner agencies. This goes some way to providing a solution to meet the increased service demand arising from a better understanding of residents.

Raven's is an excellent example of corporate, digital and cultural transformation which centres on a shift to data-led decision-making. Ultimately, this will improve customer experience by enabling Raven to understand its residents better, improve its services and tailor them to its customers' different and changing needs.

Particularly impressive is the joined-up, holistic nature of Raven's approach. There is also great clarity in its thinking. The organisation is clear on its desired outcomes, the data needed, how to acquire that data and how to use it to make a real difference.



South Holland District Council

About South Holland

South Holland is a district council in Lincolnshire with 3,800 homes in urban and rural areas. Over 1,000 South Holland homes are sheltered housing.

How South Holland is making every contact count

The current focus at South Holland is evolving a strongly resident-focused service and progressing from an enforcement culture (i.e. telling people to stop doing things they should not be doing) to a person-centred culture.

A recent change of leadership within the housing service has brought fresh eyes and new perspectives. The longstanding service approach described aspirations to deliver excellent customer service, but service delivery tended to be framed in terms of enforcement, and the approach had been overly paternalistic.

To make meaningful change happen South Holland first focused in on how staff interact with residents. The new approach is person-centred and trauma-informed. These approaches both focus on the individual and their unique experiences, feelings, and perspectives, recognising that residents may have experienced trauma with a range of long-lasting effects contributing to health, outlook and behaviours. Both approaches support seeing the whole person and represent a change in culture around how staff communicate and deliver support to residents.



Observations

South Holland staff have been trained in both person-centred and trauma-informed approaches and the new service delivery method is monitored using one-to-one and in team meetings. A new training matrix is being introduced, in which staff will be trained in tone of voice and strength-based approaches to supporting residents (identifying their strengths and abilities).

It is early days for the new approach, but South Holland anticipates three things:

- An increase in the range and quantity of services delivered.
- An ongoing shift in culture from enforcement to person-centred.
- A need to work through the implications for how services are structured and delivered, based on lessons learnt.

South Holland will monitor and assess how these approaches are embedded across the organisation, to support continuous improvement in service delivery.



Conclusion

By seeking to make every contact with residents count, social landlords can develop a comprehensive, up to date set of information about the condition of their homes and the needs and personal characteristics of their residents. This data can then be used to improve the quality of homes and to tailor services so that they are both equitable and shaped to meet individual needs.

This report provides insight and examples that should help any social landlord which wishes to introduce or improve their approach to making every contact count.

The National Housing Federation, alongside other sector bodies, will share the learnings from this report and continue to develop other resources that will help the sector to continue improving the condition of homes for social residents across the country.



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NHF member advisory groups

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Case study organisations

Broadacres

Golden Lane

Homes in Sedgemoor

L&Q

Lincolnshire Rural

LiveWest

Onward Homes

Places for People

Progress Housing

Raven

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