



Chartered
Institute of
Housing

New approaches to housing management

March 2020



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About CIH

Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple – to provide housing professionals and their organisations with the advice, support and knowledge they need to be brilliant. CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation. This means that the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing sector. We have a diverse membership of people who work in both the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world.

Further information is available at: www.cih.org

Research leads: **Faye Greaves CIHCM and David Pipe CIHCM**

Report authors: **Faye Greaves CIHCM and Melanie Rees CIHCM FCIH**

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Setting the scene

New approaches to housing management flows from our 2018 [Rethinking social housing](#) research which explored what social housing is, the role it plays and who it is for. Our research highlighted how highly social housing is valued for, among other things, the good quality and well managed homes it provides. The research report went on to say:

Good quality housing management is central to providing homes and communities where people want to live... We think it's time to reflect on whether or not the way housing is managed now meets tenants' needs and expectations. What might a 21st century service look like and how are some social housing providers beginning to do things differently? What are the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to deliver the quality of service that tenants expect and deserve?

To explore this further, we identified several organisations which have changed, or are in the process of changing, their approaches to managing homes. They are quite different and include small and large housing associations, councils and arms-length management organisations. Drawn from England, Wales and Scotland, they operate in a range of settings including urban and rural, some covering a specific local authority area and others operating

across regions. As you would expect, they face quite different challenges, including varying degrees of financial constraint, and they operate in different ways, yet a number of common themes emerged as we'll see below.

Change, and responding to change, is a constant in the housing sector but particularly so in the last decade. This includes external factors such as changes in housing and welfare policy which have impacted both on people living in social housing and their landlords, wider changes in society and a proactive desire by landlords to work with their tenants to design and deliver services which reflect their priorities. At the time of writing (March 2020), we are waiting for the Westminster government to publish proposals which are expected to significantly change the way social housing is regulated in England - this too is likely to lead to further changes in practice.

We hope that the examples featured here and the learning they offer will be helpful to any organisation reviewing or considering changes to the way it manages its homes.

What is 'housing management'?

There isn't an up to date, universal definition of housing management but there is a range of services and functions that have traditionally been seen as 'housing management' which we would all recognise.

From a theoretical perspective, housing management is the activities required by a social landlord to meet their contractual obligations to rent-paying tenants (Franklin, 2000). Over time 'social' activity focused on addressing issues outside of this contractual relationship has become part of the wider housing management role, such as placemaking, community development, helping people to access employment, and tenancy sustainment work.

We've interpreted housing management as the wide range of activities carried out by a social landlord, including a range of both contractual and social functions as set out below. This was backed up by the case study organisations we looked at.

Contractual

- Rents and service charge collection
- Allocation and letting of properties
- Tenancy management
- Estate management
- Repairs and maintenance (including managing empty homes)

Social

- Meeting housing need
- Tenancy support (including money advice and 'coaching' activity)
- Housing and health
- Community development and regeneration
- Employment support

Every organisation included in this report provides all these services to some degree but what they each classify as 'housing management' varies, as does the language they use to describe activities and functions. Indeed, several of the organisations highlighted the importance of language when making a change that requires a cultural shift in both the organisation and how customers perceive the services provided by their landlord. For example, combining several distinct directorates with traditional housing management titles like 'income collection' or 'estates', into a single clearly defined function, like 'customer liaison' or 'tenant services'. Such changes can reframe how staff and customers view the landlord/tenant relationship and can drive more customer focused services.

It's also worth reflecting on the strong inter-connection between managing homes and repairing and maintaining them. A landlord might choose to organise its business in a way that treats them as two separate functions, but many tenants and residents won't see a distinction between the two. It's fair to say that, for most, their main interaction with their landlord will be about repairs. Organisational structure and what departments and job roles are called probably won't matter. What will matter is that, when they report a repair, it's easy to do so and handled well with the work done quickly, properly and with minimal fuss. A poor experience can affect the quality of the landlord/tenant relationship and undermine what the landlord is trying to achieve in managing its homes.

The way organisations are delivering housing management services is evolving as landlords aim to achieve a balance between delivering on their vision and purpose and responding effectively to a range of external factors. But while there are notable differences in approaches, five clear themes emerged from the case studies we looked at:

1. A range of drivers are changing how organisations deliver their housing management functions and these include external and internal factors.
2. All new approaches to housing management have overarching aims and new models of delivery which call for some form of cultural/ staff change and involve using digital technology to varying degrees.
3. Involving tenants in the process for deciding on a new approach and subsequent review arrangements is integral but looks different across all organisations.
4. The approach to review and monitoring/ assessing the outcomes and impact of new approaches varies depending on what the overarching aims are.
5. There are challenges to adopting/ implementing new approaches, and lessons have been learned by organisations along the way.

What are the drivers for change?

The organisations we looked at described a mix of external and internal drivers for change.

External

Over recent years social housing providers have needed to respond to some fundamental changes and challenges which have had an impact on their service users and the way they design and provide services. Some of these has been the result of government policy while others have emerged from wider social changes and events.

- **Changing customer needs**, largely as a result of welfare reform and the wider impact of austerity, is driving organisations to think about alternative ways of providing services so they can focus resources where they are most needed. Many organisations reported seeing increasing levels of hardship and/or vulnerability among their tenants. To respond to this, they needed to be better equipped to support them than ever before.
- **Evolving customer expectations**, including how and when people want to access services, which has led several landlords to work with them to proactively make changes to service design and delivery.
- **The fire at Grenfell Tower** in 2017 prompted reflection on how organisations pro-actively deal with building safety issues while continuing to prioritise customer relationships - placing customers at the centre of the landlord/tenant relationship emerged as a key principle in making this work.
- In the aftermath of the fire we also saw **government question the professionalism of housing management** in its August 2018 [social housing green paper](#). There was already discussion in the sector about whether, by focusing on building much-needed new homes, managing and maintaining existing homes well had taken something of a back seat. We can see that this, coupled with the questions raised by government, has stimulated what some would say is a renewed

focus on redressing that balance, getting the basics right and, importantly, restoring tenants' trust in their landlords which many in the sector feel has been lost.

- **Welfare reform, and universal credit (UC) in particular**, is causing hardship among many tenants while also presenting as a financial risk to organisations.
- **The one per cent rent reduction over four years since 2016** has created a need for organisations to work more efficiently, but equally there is a recognition of the need to absorb its impact without compromising either organisational purpose or service quality.
- **Cuts to local authority funding and wider third sector funding constraints** have caused a reduction in many local support services and several organisations feel they are increasingly having to step in to fill the gap.

Internal

Running in tandem with these external factors are a series of internal drivers.

- We found an overwhelming desire among most organisations we spoke with to become **more customer focused**. This included:
 - o Providing services that are person-centred
 - o Prioritising the standard of customer service
 - o Providing services that customers want – what's best for a customer rather than what's best for the organisation – with a strong focus on outcomes not processes
- Many organisations place significant value on **nurturing professionalism** in their approach to housing management. Some shared concerns that, over time, front-line housing management roles may have been de-skilled by an over-reliance on rigid policies and procedures. Some roles had become more process-orientated meaning that critical skills like relationship building, problem solving and the ability to exercise professional judgement had been lost from the frontline. Linked to this is a desire to motivate and engage colleagues and to create a culture in which everyone performs to their best.
- **An organisational change or new leadership** can prompt review of an organisation's approach to housing management. A new chief executive or a change in senior leadership can be a catalyst for reflecting on the direction of an organisation and several of the organisations we spoke to had been through a relatively recent merger. When merging, organisations often need to combine services that were previously part of distinct structures, with different cultures and working practices.
- Many organisations highlighted the importance of finding efficiencies by removing activity that has no value to the customer experience. This internal driver often accompanied lean review exercises where organisations carefully map their activity to identify where they can remove waste to ensure resources are focused where they have most value/impact.

What approaches have organisations taken?

The approaches taken were many and varied reflecting the drivers for making the change, the size and nature of the organisation, and their operating context. Some changes are more subtle than others, some focus on a particular element of the housing management function and others have made more sweeping changes that affect everything they do.

a) What were organisations aiming to achieve?

The organisations that took part in this project expressed a range of aims for their new approaches to housing management. Many made it clear they wanted to withstand external challenges without compromising their fundamental purpose and vision, for example, being a 'more than bricks and mortar' organisation, providing 'excellent' services, or being 'customer-centric'. As a result, some common themes stood out, including:

- Echoing the internal driver around **increasing customer focus**, many organisations referred to this when talking about the aims of their new approach. They wanted to drive person-centred services, with some focusing specifically on levels of satisfaction, trust and engagement, or addressing areas customers say they are most concerned about, and prioritising the standard of service delivery. Others wanted to provide services that are tailored to the individual, so building relationships and being out in the community more
- Some organisations we spoke to expressed a desire to **be more accessible to tenants**, borne out of concerns that services had become more difficult to access or that they had become 'difficult to do business with'. Some wanted to be more responsive to tenants' needs while simplifying interactions. For some this meant investing in a better digital self-service offer. For others it was about restoring the personal link between tenants and housing officers
- For many, there was a need to **work in a more joined-up way**, by breaking down internal silos and developing a more seamless and consistent customer experience. For example, some organisations said that over time their structures had become more complicated leading to concerns that the customer experience was being damaged by frequent handovers between teams. Some larger organisations with regional structures had found that inconsistencies existed across their teams and services
- Several organisations spoke of a desire to **be more 'local'** – wanting to take on a stronger responsibility for place-shaping and to be more explicit about their role as 'custodians' of individual estates or neighbourhoods. Others highlighted the need to spend more time in their communities, being more visible and accessible to their tenants, and so enabling them to develop stronger and more effective relationships with them
- A desire to **be less paternalistic** was a notable driver for several organisations which wanted to address a culture of doing things for, or to, tenants. Some wanted instead to act as an enabler for tenants, 'supporting them to support themselves' while others wanted to focus on their role as a landlord, proving excellent landlord services and offering a support element where needed, rather than as standard

b) What does this look like?

Almost all organisations had begun to shift the way their housing management services are delivered, some more radically than others. Models varied in nature and were influenced by individual organisations' driving factors, corporate aims and local context such as levels of deprivation, demographics, geographic location and so on.

The following highlights some common messages to emerge from the changes:

- The most common change was a move from a **specialist to a generic structure** for more front-facing roles. This was usually about wanting to restore the personal relationship between tenants and their local housing officer, greatly reducing the number of different people/teams that individual tenants need to deal with. Generic officers typically act as a first point of contact for most services, usually working remotely and/or flexibly to maximise time spent in their communities
- In almost all cases where the frontline function is generic, there is some form of **specialist back-up or support structure**, reflecting how specialism remains valued, and perhaps necessary, in effective housing management
- There was a **mix of 'contractual' and 'social' housing management functions** across all organisations' structures. An element of 'social' services existed to some degree in all organisations' approaches, but some made it clear that their support offer was integral to their services, while others wanted it as an 'add-on' to be offered only as and when needed. Tapping into the wider support offered in the community was seen, by some, as a way to find a balance between the two
- There was also a general trend towards policies and processes that are more flexible and that allow frontline officers to work with more autonomy and to **exercise professional judgement** when dealing with individual cases without relying too heavily on processes
- Some models have been driven by a need to shift the organisations' culture towards recognising the importance of providing services to customers, **changing the language** of directorates, roles and internal communication, for example.



Gentoo's neighbourhood co-ordinators

Gentoo is a housing association that owns and manages over 28,000 homes in Sunderland.

In 2015 it changed its delivery model by introducing generic neighbourhood co-ordinators (NCs). NCs are responsible for the core housing services on an average patch size of 330 homes. They are supported by specialist colleagues when they identify an issue needing more expert support or advice. NCs focus on allocations, tenancy management, rent collection, estate management, local partnerships and local tenant engagement.

NCs are closer to tenants and communities and so can identify issues and arrange intervention in a more proactive and informed way.

Specialist teams focus on:

Wellbeing providing independent living support to older people in general needs, sheltered and extra care schemes. The team also carries out assessments to inform decisions around adaptations in the home.

Property/grounds/estates with colleagues in Gentoo's repairs and maintenance service, asset management, grounds maintenance and estate services.

Anti-social behaviour with a team of enforcement officers which deals with the most serious tenancy breach issues, usually involving the police.

Young people which has two strands: Holmewood which provides homeless accommodation for young people leaving care; and outreach support to young people to enable and empower them to sustain their tenancy.

Money matters with a team providing customers with advice relating to benefits, budget management and debt. They also deal with all new universal credit cases until a regular payment pattern is established.

Community with a team coordinating all community engagement activity across the city which feeds into the wider tenant voice.

Support and safeguarding focusing on:

- Victim support – supporting tenants who are victims of crime, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse
- Positive engagement – providing key worker support to tenants who have issues with mental health, alcohol and substance misuse
- Safeguarding – supporting colleagues across the business who identify a vulnerable child or adult. The safeguarding team will liaise with other third parties to decide on the best pathway for each unique situation.

Contact: Michelle.Meldrum@gentoogroup.com

Stockport Homes - specialist support services

Stockport Homes is an arms-length management organisation managing 11,500 homes on behalf of Stockport Council. It reshaped its approach to housing management delivery to include specialist support services which includes its:

- Tenancy ready team
- Money advice service
- Support for refugees and young people
- Housing support services
- Block support services
- Positive engagement services for perpetrators of anti-social behaviour (ASB)
- Independent living service for older people
- Employment support team

It also provides a range of support-focused projects and schemes including:

- Community food stores (franchised nationally as Your Local Pantry)
- A furniture recycling project
- A digital inclusion project
- Several support groups focused on specific issues e.g. domestic abuse and social isolation
- Summer holiday and lunch clubs for children
- Youth volunteer programme for those in Year 6 and above
- A free customer counselling service
- Working with the Groundwork Trust to deliver the Blue Sky project, aimed at rehabilitating ex-offenders by giving them employment skills
- Community cafes run by the local community
- 114 units of temporary accommodation for homeless households, working on asset-based principles, offering:
 - o Cookery sessions
 - o Sport – snooker tournaments, Street Fit sessions, fishing
 - o Arts and crafts sessions
 - o Festival celebrations such as Christmas parties

These projects are all delivered or supported by Stockport Homes and are largely indistinguishable from its core housing management function. In the future it plans to super-charge development opportunities by establishing and consolidating services, which complement its core landlord function, under its newly created charitable arm, Foundations Stockport. This will ensure it is able to continue to support customers in all aspects of their lives to help them to reach their full potential and get engaged in their communities.

Feedback from residents has been positive and there are clear outcomes. Since 2018/19, 419 customers have been supported into work, including 32 people into apprenticeships, and 95 people have set up their own business through employment support training. It has also delivered a skills-for-life programme, sponsoring six customers to undertake other training and a further six to take external qualifications. Their plan is to continuously gather feedback and look at the outcomes of all projects and services they deliver.

Contact: jane.allen@stockporthomes.org





Fife Council – getting the basics right

Fife Council owns and manages just over 30,000 homes and is one of the largest stock-holding authorities in Scotland.

Its new housing management model was, in part, born out a desire to alleviate poverty and the need to get closer to people to do this. The approach focuses on:

- Professionalism and training: Fife is encouraging its teams to self-manage and take greater levels of responsibility. It is developing their skills and behaviours with the help of an in-house training academy, building resilience to face new challenges, developing self-awareness so staff can understand their personal impact, and developing their skills to drive and support change
- Customer contact: it has reduced housing officer patch sizes from 600 to 250 to improve customer contact and has developed frontline teams to take on some of the challenges of private sector housing
- Tenancy support: Fife has introduced a £1million rent allowance fund to help those impacted by universal credit. Ten officers were also appointed to support new tenants, those experiencing tenancy sustainment issues and

others facing complex universal credit issues. It is now conducting annual welfare checks for all tenants to ensure they have all the money they are entitled to

- Engagement: it has employed six tenant engagement officers and secured the TPAS Gold Standard in engagement with its rents consultation roadshow led by tenants
- Digital: the long-term approach is to be digital by choice, rather than by default
- Place: a new estate management budget of £1 million has been created to allow for 'just do it' capital improvement such as taking down garage sites and creating green spaces
- Service redesign: includes co-located working with other council services such as financial services and the fuel poverty team with access to health and care teams
- Culture change: a move away from admin to a focus on empowering people to make decisions and get things done

The Council is now working with its tenant scrutiny panel to develop key measures and evaluate impact.

Contact: Gavin.Smith@fife.gov.uk

Bromford's neighbourhood coaching model

Bromford has 44,000 homes situated mainly in the West Midlands and South West of England. It has been through two recent mergers with Merlin Housing Society and Severn Vale Housing.

Bromford moved to a neighbourhood coaching model in 2016 which is now a cornerstone of its approach. Neighbourhood coaches (NCs) work across all of Bromford's tenure types and have small patches of 175-200 homes (compared to 400-600 previously for Bromford and 800 for Merlin) allowing them to get to know their customers and the place.

NCs aim to get to know each customer – their strengths, aspirations and interests as well as any challenges they may face. NCs also get to know the range of community assets on their patch – the school, place of worship, police community support officer, corner shop, youth group, health centre, football club, toddler group, and so on. NCs will offer support (either directly or by signposting to services) but will also act as a community connector.

NCs are generic in their function and are the main point of contact for most things. They perform most traditional housing management functions as well as their wider coaching and connecting

role. They work closely with customer services, income advisors, lettings, employment support and community safety to do this.

Bromford can see already that customers who know their neighbourhood coach are more satisfied and are less likely to be in arrears or to cause ASB. Rent arrears have fallen and are currently around 1.6 per cent despite the rollout of universal credit. But these traditional housing management measures don't capture fully if people are 'thriving'. Bromford plans to ask customers to self-report their confidence in things like managing their money, their feeling of health and wellbeing and so on with the aim of enabling better mentoring and more informed conversations.

Contact: Paul.Coates@bromford.co.uk



Tower Hamlets Homes – safety first

Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) is the arm's length management organisation which manages 21,000 homes on behalf of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Most of the borough's housing is high density and it faces a number of wider socio-economic challenges. It has three of the most deprived wards in the country, 20 per cent of households have an income below £15,000, 40 per cent are below the poverty line, and 67 per cent receive housing benefit or universal credit. Crime and ASB, particularly in relation to drugs, are significant concerns.

The Grenfell Tower fire highlighted the need to address fire safety risks. THH manages 40 tower blocks, including 9 'significant risk' blocks, along with a much higher number of smaller, low rise blocks. Given the high number of leaseholders in these blocks – around 9,000 of the homes it manages are leasehold – managing works in these blocks is particularly problematic.

The new approach includes neighbourhood housing officers who each provide services to 1000 tenants and leaseholders. They are supported by specialist teams for income, leasehold, empty homes, fire safety and ASB. Investment in ASB has been substantial and includes funding two police teams each comprising a sergeant and six constables.

Early outcomes include:

- THH has partnered with others to open a financial health centre. In its first year of operation it helped 2,000 people, 25 per cent of whom were THH residents. The centre supported people to apply for £1.4million worth of benefits and to consolidate £450,000 worth of debt. 540 residents have received some form of training and 172 people have been supported into secure employment. These are important outcomes given the levels of poverty in the borough
- The fire safety team has successfully engaged with 4,700 residents so far and identified:
 - o 89 cases of hoarding behaviour and 700 people who are vulnerable in some way with referrals made to social services, local charities, or for aids and adaptations
 - o 400 leaseholders without working smoke detectors who have all been referred to the fire and rescue service which fits them free of charge. A further 400 works orders have been raised to install detectors in rented homes
 - o Tenancy fraud with five homes recovered so far.

Contact: sarah.pace@thh.org.uk



Thirteen - neighbourhoods at the heart

Thirteen manages 34,000 homes across the North East with the highest concentration of these being around Teesside.

Its primary aim is 'to put neighbourhoods at the heart of everything' with improved performance, a better customer experience and stronger focus on placemaking identified as enabling this to happen.

The previous structure was organisation-focused rather than customer-focused with a number of specialist teams, so customers dealt with many different people over the life of their tenancy. For instance, new tenants could have contact with up to eight teams or specialist officers during the pre- and post-lettings stages. Thirteen wanted to break down silos and focus much more strongly on placemaking. It also needed to build the kind of local knowledge that doesn't show up in data.

In an unusual but considered move, the new structure includes a combined neighbourhoods and development directorate - the rationale being that Thirteen wanted decisions about what to build to be made with some consideration of how those homes would be managed.

The structure now has neighbourhood co-ordinators in generic roles who own Thirteen's relationship with its tenants, each with a patch of 250 homes. They can draw on specialist services for tenancy support, serious ASB, universal credit and money advice, but they retain responsibility for the tenant throughout. Thirteen has invested in technology to enable neighbourhood co-ordinators to work more efficiently. It is also recruiting differently, looking for skills and behaviours rather than specialist knowledge.

Thirteen has also created a placemaking team to make more decisions at a neighbourhood level and in a more joined-up way, with colleagues from different parts of the organisation working together. All 98 neighbourhood areas have been rated as red, amber or green using a sustainability model which includes a suite of KPIs including arrears, levels of ASB and so on. It is now piloting a new, more joined-up way of working with the five worst scoring areas.

While the organisation remains firmly committed to its social purpose, it is also placing greater emphasis on commercialism and measuring and understanding profit and loss. Neighbourhood co-ordinators have access to live profit and loss information about their patches which includes costs associated with repairs, empty homes and staff salaries versus rent collected. Thirteen hopes that this will drive better, and more local, decision-making as decisions will be underpinned by a fuller understanding of costs.

It is still early days in terms of realising the full impact of this new way of working but improvements include evictions reducing by 30 per cent, tenancy turnover reduced from 11 per cent to 9.6 per cent, improved turnaround times for empty homes with a cumulative total of 31 days in 2019/20, and an increase in customer satisfaction from 87.4 per cent to 89.1 per cent in the latest Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR).

Contact: Kay.Glew@thirteengroup.co.uk

Sutton Housing Partnership - a New Deal for residents

Sutton Housing Partnership (SHP) is an arms-length management organisation managing around 8,000 homes on behalf of the London Borough of Sutton.

To deliver residents' requirements, as part of a 'New Deal', a new operating model was designed to realign services to a central point of contact, with the right sized patches based on patch demand and activity, a holistic approach to housing, health and wellbeing, and maximising the involvement of place based voluntary sector organisations.

The Every Visit Matters Programme ensures every resident will be visited over the next two years, to develop the relationship to support a person focused intervention and to support the sustainment of tenancies. SHP has introduced a direct dial contact with housing managers, which has increased first time resolution of issues.

Sutton's local population is older than the national average, and SHP has developed a strong focus on the relationship between health and housing. A health and wellbeing programme has been introduced for SHP's older residents, which includes a resident-led soup club each week, supporting healthy and nutritional eating, offering Tai Chi for older residents, gentle exercise programmes, therapeutic drumming sessions, and working with Homesight to promote good

eye health. Due to the success of this programme a general needs programme will be launched in April 2020. These programmes are supporting the reduction of the isolation and loneliness of residents, with the long term goal of SHP commissioning programmes for existing voluntary organisations.

To future proof the SHP service model, significant investment has been allocated for a three year programme for the next phase of the New Deal, including a new technology infrastructure to support more online self-service and reduce administration to release capacity and re-invest in services. A good example is the introduction of the weather feed alert into the housing management system which will trigger actions to support vulnerable residents in extreme weather, for example, boiler and wellbeing checks. Further technology improvements include process redesign, analytics, predictive behaviour models, and reducing reactive interventions. This phase of the New Deal is also including SHP colleagues in the 'People and Culture' programme, to invest in colleague engagement, skills and learning to support investment in services.

Contact: catherine.charlton@suttonhousingpartnership.org.uk

c) A change in culture

In 2014 CIH published the research report [Frontline Futures - new era, changing roles for housing officers](#) which highlighted trends and changes in frontline housing roles. It suggested that, in future, roles were likely to be:

- **Differentiated**, using data intelligence to guide how officer time is used
- **Relational**, doing things with residents not to and for them
- **Interactive**, working with professionals from other disciplines to achieve a broader range of outcomes for residents
- **Varied and creative** in the way that they find solutions
- **Engaged and impactful** aiming to have a positive impact on people's lives and the organisation's bottom line
- **Novel and anticipatory**, doing something now to avoid later negative consequences

The research also identified that process would become less important with greater focus on outcomes instead, and that people at the frontline would be increasingly filling gaps left by the withdrawal of other services, bringing new skills of resilience, creativity and adaptability to the fore.

There are several parallels between the Frontline Futures research findings and what the case studies featured in this work revealed.

For many organisations a shift towards more autonomous working, with more day-to-day decision-making devolved to the frontline also needed a substantial investment in staff. There was a strong sense of needing to 're-professionalise' these roles, with more emphasis placed on ensuring officers have the skills to build relationships with tenants, solve problems, exercise their professional judgement and make decisions in line with broader policy and direction without being rigidly constrained by procedure.

For some, this meant substantial changes to the way that they both recruit and manage front-line staff:

- o **Recruitment** - some organisations told us they are now primarily recruiting for these skills (rather than for technical knowledge)
- o **Management** - organisations need to operate in a less hierarchical manner, with line managers exerting much less control and operating more as coaches who support their staff

Many of the organisations we spoke to were keen to stress that this wasn't merely a change in structures, systems and processes - they also needed officers to adopt a different mindset and a different set of behaviours. Broadly speaking, these organisations generally wanted to be:

- **Less hierarchical** - with more of a culture of trust, where frontline officers are enabled to resolve problems without constantly needing to seek approval from more senior people
- **More customer focused** - with a stronger focus on the things that matter most to tenants and more scope for tenants to shape services. On an individual level, there should also be more emphasis on treating people as individuals, as opposed to following 'one-size-fits all' processes
- **Less paternalistic** - with less of an emphasis on doing things for tenants and more of a focus on supporting and enabling them to do things for themselves. For some officers who are used to 'going the extra mile' for their tenants, this is a substantial shift in mindset
- **More evidence-led/data-driven** - some of the organisations we talked to are likely to be much more data-rich in the future, as a result of the decisions that they are making now



Sovereign - case and place

Sovereign's vision is to become a leader in customer service, while providing quality homes for 140,000 people across the south of England.

Following a successful 'case management' pilot across 9,000 of its homes in Berkshire in 2017, Sovereign is now rolling this new approach out to all its 59,000 homes. The new structure includes:

- A housing response team of office-based, experienced housing professionals. They deal with 'one-and-done' type queries that do not require a physical visit. The team also co-ordinates some case work such as tenancy fraud, succession, and tenancy changes
- A mobile team of housing officers who specialise in housing management issues and work remotely across a wider geographical area. While some work is transactional, much of the work involves working with households over a period of time. For this, officers adopt a casework approach with the same officer retaining ownership of a 'case' until it's closed, if that is best for the customer
- Case work being balanced across the team, so officers have similar caseloads. The team is able to proactively manage cover for sickness, annual leave and vacancies. This has enabled them to offer more flexible and part time working hours to the housing team

- Risk assessment of all cases at the start with the risk monitored throughout the case, ensuring the service is able to support customers to manage their tenancy and proactively intervening if the risk increases or doesn't reduce. This enables them to demonstrate clear outcomes for customers and the business
- Following learning from the pilot, a 'case and place' approach, which means that, in addition to their tenancy management caseload, housing officers will make time for more place-based work, such as walkabouts, and estate improvements
- Specialist teams focusing on high risk ASB, income, financial inclusion/universal credit, employment and training, community investment and lettings.

To properly manage and resolve cases, officers need to build relationships, work autonomously and exercise their professional judgement rather than just following processes. Sovereign is therefore investing in 're-professionalising' its staff. Having seen a decline in the number of people who have a CIH qualification, it now aims for two-thirds to become professionally qualified. Sovereign has worked with CIH to develop a bespoke, tailored programme, with a second cohort of officers currently taking part. It has also invested in bespoke leadership development programmes for managers.

Contact: Stuart.Davies@sovereign.org.uk



Hull City Council - developing professionalism

Hull City Council, which owns and manages 24,000 homes, is committed to developing its housing services staff as professionals.

A dedicated professional practice officer ensures all frontline staff have training in place, which includes:

- A structured induction programme for new starters
- Technical skills including IT skills, knowledge of relevant systems, and customer service skills
- Professional skills gained through CIH qualifications
- Behaviour - it used CIH's code of conduct to develop a competency framework setting out the types of behaviours it expects to see in frontline officers

Behaviours and values such as emotional intelligence, collaboration and proactivity are now valued more highly by Hull City Council when it recruits to its housing services. Technical and specialist knowledge is addressed post-recruitment through individual training plans.

Communication during the change process which began in 2015/16 was a specific challenge - reaching the right people, with the right information at the right time. However, the direction of travel and momentum are now firmly in place and the frontline service is growing at pace.

Contact: mark.mcegan@hullcc.gov.uk



Hull City Council

Derby Homes - embedding the importance of prevention and support

Derby Homes is the arms-length management organisation which manages almost 13,000 homes on behalf of Derby City Council.

Over the last few years the organisation has become more strongly focused on supporting tenants who need it. This has been linked in large part to taking over responsibility for dealing with homelessness from the Council, housing people through that route who are more vulnerable and recognising the role of intensive housing management and tailored support in making sure that people don't become homeless again.

The housing management function includes both housing services and tenancy sustainability teams. Estate officers carry out accompanied viewings, home visits, sign-ups and estate inspections with more complex issues referred to patch managers. Specialist teams, which work collaboratively with housing management teams, focus on income management and ASB.

The tenancy sustainability team includes:

- A tenancy sustainment team which deals with introductory tenancies, works with new tenants for 12 months, provides initial resettlement support, budgeting and financial support, accesses additional specialist support and employment education and training

- An intensive housing management team which works with tenants who have breached tenancy conditions. This includes support to resolve rent arrears, ASB and hoarding behaviour
- Complex needs officers who support tenants who are experiencing mental illness and/or domestic abuse
- Intensive intervention officers who work with high level complex cases including child protection and safeguarding issues, or other serious breaches of tenancies

This shift in focus has needed a significant change in culture. A huge awareness-raising exercise has embedded the importance of homelessness prevention and support and an integrated approach across the organisation. This is supported by a recruitment process that values skills and behaviours over technical knowledge.

Tenancy sustainment levels remain extremely high, with 97.9 per cent of tenancies sustained where tenants have received the tenancy sustainment service. In addition, the number of evictions have fallen significantly, from 52 in 2018/19 to a year end forecast for 2019/20 of 27.

Contact: Clare.Mehrbani@derbyhomes.org

Nottingham City Homes - growing its own talent

Nottingham City Homes is a group which manages homes on behalf of Nottingham City Council, as well as its own homes and homes owned by other landlords. Around 27,500 homes are under the group's management housing a fifth of Nottingham's households.

It changed the structure of its housing management team in 2018/19 and found it was having some difficulty attracting people with the right attributes and values when vacancies arose for frontline roles. To address this, it placed a stronger focus on 'growing its own' by recruiting several apprentices to support the reduced number of housing patch managers (HPMs). Eight housing management apprentices support HPMs by taking on some of their more routine work, freeing them up to focus on more complex cases. Each apprentice supports up to five patch managers.

Apprentices are recruited on a two-year programme. They were given a fixed term employment contract and study for a level two CIH qualification while working. Some examples of their job role included tenancy audits, settling in visits and estate walkabouts.

A full evaluation will take place towards the end of the two-year programme, but Nottingham City Homes finds that it is working well and it is very likely to repeat it by recruiting another cohort of apprentices. A key test of the approach will be how many apprentices go on to take up permanent posts with the organisation. One has already taken up a permanent post in the lettings team and two HPM vacancies area expected to be filled by existing apprentices.

Contact: kathy.sheldon@nottinghamcityhomes.org.uk

d) Digital opportunities

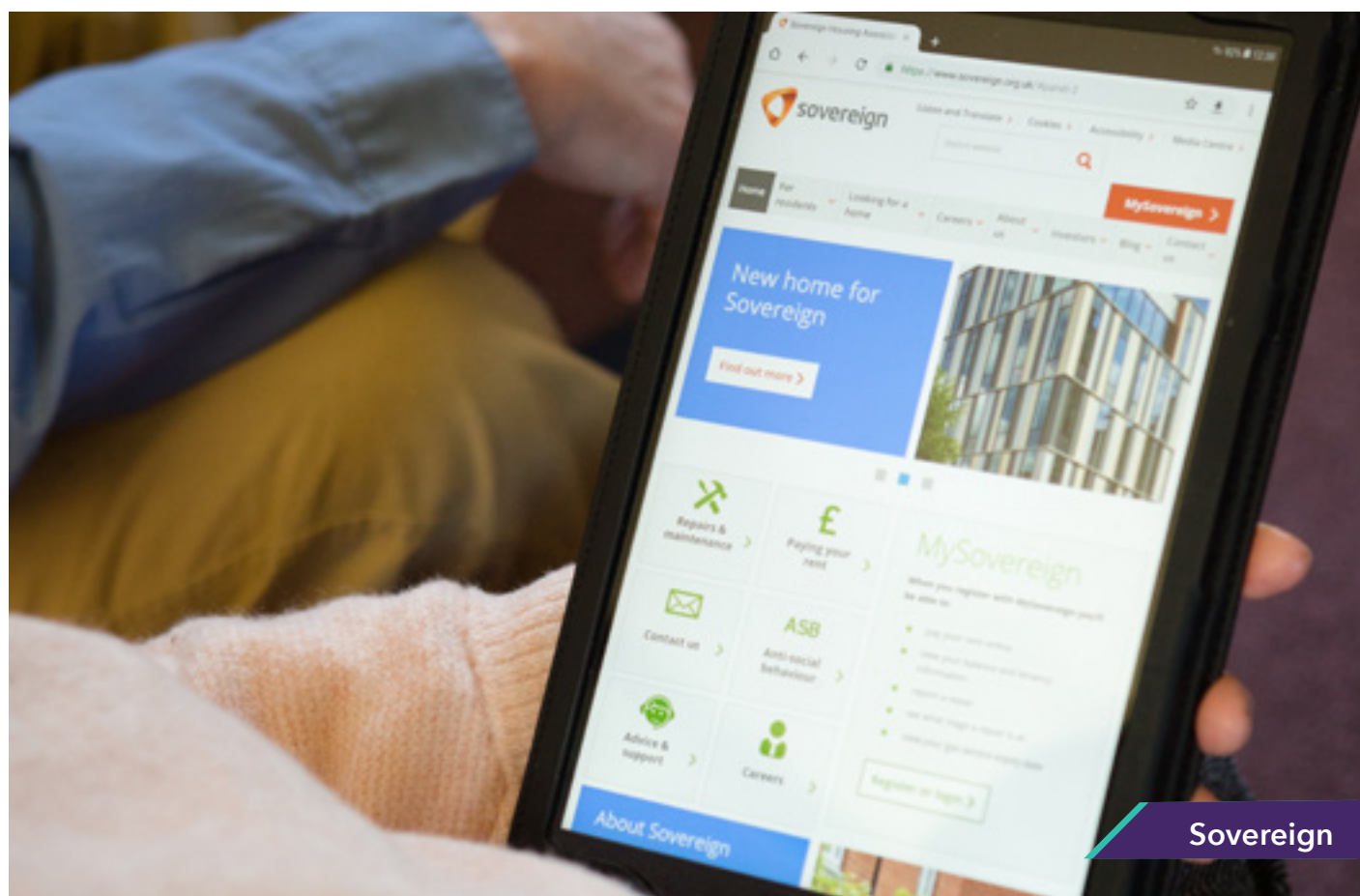
The rise of new technology has given landlords opportunities to work more effectively and efficiently than they could have done in the past. Many organisations were looking at which interactions with tenants could be automated. Similarly, for many organisations new technology has enabled a shift towards more remote and more flexible working practices, which has allowed them to substantially change the way services are delivered by frontline officers.

Several organisations also cited changes in tenants' expectations of services, driven by their experiences of, for example, companies like Amazon and Uber, and were seeking to reshape their services accordingly.

Most organisations are adopting a 'channel of choice' rather than 'digital by default' approach

to their development of digital technology – so service users have choice about how they access services. Providing digital options for those who can and choose to use them can free up resources to focus on those who need and engage with more one-to-one interaction.

Investment in technology is seen as a vital commitment to make sure the move to digital platforms is not at the expense of service quality and customer satisfaction. Investing in digital technology also supports professionalism by giving officers more autonomy and flexibility. Agile/flexible working has become a fundamental requirement for organisations wishing to be closer to their communities and more visible. Greater remote working means staff can spend more time with tenants and take a more person-centred approach to their work.



Notting Hill Genesis - Workwise online portal

Notting Hill Genesis (NHG) was formed by the merger of Notting Hill Housing Group with Genesis in 2018 creating an organisation which manages 55,000 homes across London and the South East.

NHG is rolling out a structure which is focused on meeting resident priorities. It combines a local focus with more resident choice through better digital services. The model is designed in tandem with a new design for the repairs and maintenance service. NHG's approach is based on the resident repairs experience being the primary driver for the overall service experience. Changes recently made have given housing officers more authority around contractor selection and job sign off based on resident experience.

NHG's housing officers have patches of around 180 homes, help residents to access any support services they need and are expected to take

ownership of issues rather than simply following a process. The focus is on ensuring they are visible on their patches and that they know, and have good relationships with, their residents. A customer service centre provides support to get more residents on to self-service, manages webchat, out of hours, social media and handles calls when the housing officer is otherwise busy.

NHG has developed its own customer and staff portal called 'Workwise'. This platform provides self-service options and automated notifications to residents about their rent and repairs. The platform also enables housing officers to carry out all their housing management work while out and about visiting residents in their homes

Contact: Carl.Byrne@nhg.org.uk



Notting Hill Genesis



Hull City Council – smarter working with improved outcomes

Hull's frontline staff are all equipped to work remotely with smartphones and tablets which can access the Council's systems. The Council has invested in new IT systems to support this including Mobysort Rent Sense to manage rent arrears cases and the 'entitledto' benefit calculator. Other systems such as HouseMark's Photobook to record estate management issues and Northgate modules to record a routine tenant visit programme are also being introduced. This has complemented the full re-procurement of the housing management system.

Tenancy files are being pruned and digitised with over 20 tonnes of unnecessary paper disposed of and a digital workflow programme is being

explored. Take-up of self-service options is increasing with tenants and officers acting as champions.

The Council's change plans are ongoing, but its new structure has been in place since 2016/17 with clear improvements delivered including:

- Empty homes falling from a peak of around 360 to a low of 178
- Homes without a valid gas safety certificate falling from a high of 130 to zero
- Rent arrears were £100,000 lower at the end of 2018/19 compared with the previous year

Contact: mark.mcegan@hullcc.gov.uk

Monmouthshire Housing Association - Snap-app

Monmouthshire Housing Association (MHA) owns and manages around 3,600 homes in rural South East Wales.

MHA is aiming to become paperless and agile, with the aim of delivering better services to tenants. To support this, all housing officers have tablets, mobile broadband dongles and digital pens for tenant signatures. In 2019 housing officers were each given Snap-app licences on devices, to enable increased remote working.

A Snap-app survey has replaced numerous traditional paper forms that can be completed on tablets, even in more rural 'not-spot' areas. The survey auto-generates emails to various colleagues and partner agencies using data collected at the visit, saving substantially on follow-up administrative tasks and ensuring important information (such as updates on emergency alarm information) is sent off right away. The reduced admin time means colleagues can spend more

time out on site with tenants and complete additional visits. Staff are positive about these tools which are helping them to achieve more on their patches and reduce unnecessary trips to the office to drop off paperwork.

MHA has also focused on developing digital services for tenants. It has introduced live webchat and is now working on a self-service portal. While it still has a contact centre, which is seen as a core service delivery option, it expects the volume of calls to reduce as digital options become available.

Understanding that older and some younger people might not engage with digital services, the aim is to move as many people as possible who can manage, onto self-service options, freeing up staff to deal with more complex cases or those with additional needs.

Contact: Julie.Nicholas@monmouthshirehousing.co.uk

Homes in Sedgemoor - Voicescape, a digital contact function

Homes in Sedgemoor (HIS) is an arms-length management organisation in Somerset managing 4,200 homes on behalf of the local council.

HIS has introduced Voicescape, a digital arrears function, to support customer engagement and rent collection. Working alongside the existing housing management system, the system calls customers with an option to transfer direct to an income officer to discuss their account rather than the customer call centre or it will leave a message/text, with a function to call back.

Voicescape has already replaced letters in the early stages of the arrears process. Where customers would previously not speak to an income officer until they owed around £500, customers are now contacted via Voicescape as soon as they fall into arrears.

HIS also uses Voicescape when it needs to prompt engagement, for example, identifying support needs at point of a universal credit claim, chasing former tenant arrears and when Direct Debits fail. It is also investigating the use of the system for satisfaction surveys and community involvement.

Evaluation of Voicescape found that around 70 per cent of tenants listen to messages and 40 per cent of those use the call back function. This is a much better engagement rate than letters and much more efficient than making manual calls.

Contact: Darren.Clayton@homesinsedgemoor.org

RHP - digital first

RHP is a housing association which owns and manages over 10,000 homes in West London.

In line with its dynamic and innovative culture, RHP has moved away from a 'traditional' patch-based housing management structure to a customer service centre managing customer queries and digital services. This is backed up by specialist officers dealing with tenancy breaches, high level ASB cases, taking enforcement action and supporting tenants who need it. RHP has also set out a clearer contract in terms of the expectations of both tenants and landlord. Through its digital strategy, it aims to be less paternalistic, trying to establish a more grown up relationship with customers and, in doing so, tackling the stigma attached to social housing and its tenants.

It piloted the approach with new tenants first as

they would have no previous experience of RHP's services. During the pilot, it ran a major six-month consultation process with existing tenants to explore plans to change the approach to repairs and moving towards more digital-based approach.

RHP has invested heavily in digital delivery. This has meant training and upskilling staff to create a culture with the right behaviours and mindset. Recruitment has been based more on behaviour and skills with staff drawn from a range of backgrounds and sectors. Many of them are used to digital delivery and transformation and this has been helpful in achieving change quickly.

Since introducing the new approach, RHP have reduced its operating costs by 12 per cent and increased tenant satisfaction by around 5 per cent.

Contact: David.done@rhp.org.uk

Involving tenants

The desire to improve the quality of housing management services and focus on the things that matter most to tenants and residents – and to do this in partnership with them – came through as a strong driver for change in all the organisations we looked at.

Not surprisingly, the levels of consultation, collaboration and involvement to inform service reviews and new approaches were as varied as the organisations and the contexts they are working in but included:

- Adopting a wide-ranging strategy to make sure that engagement is genuine and meaningful
- Understanding the way people access and use services to inform reviews to remove waste and increase effectiveness
- Working with existing and new tenant groups and forums
- Surveys
- Door-knocking exercises
- Continuing to involve tenants in ongoing evaluation as new approaches bed in
- Commitments to work closely with tenants to co-create future housing management services



Hull City Council's tenant and resident academy

The Ateb Group - if it matters to you, it matters to us

The Ateb Group manages around 2,800 homes in West Wales.

Its values and leadership – described as its ‘DNA’ – focus on trust, togetherness and empowerment with tenants being the focus of everything they do. This is embodied in its E2i – engage to improve – approach which has the strapline “if it matters to you, it matters to us” and is supported by commitments to listen, understand, improve and learn.

The tenant-led E2i coordination group focuses on improvement themes, based on feedback from tenants, and reviews outcomes. Recent reviews

have focused on ASB and the out-of-hours service, which have led to improvements such as creating a risk assessment which clearly shows the call handler when to deal with an ASB case themselves and when to refer it on, better recording of ASB reports by initial call handlers, improving website information about emergency repairs and making sure that call handlers are aware of tenants’ needs and vulnerabilities when prioritising emergency repairs.

Contact: mark.lewis@atebgroup.co.uk

Salix Homes - co-creation of My Salix portal

Salix Homes owns and manages around 8,000 homes in Salford, Greater Manchester.

Together with its customers, it has co-created the My Salix portal. Features include:

- Customers being able to report a repair using chatbot
- Gylmpse real-time location sharing which notifies customers of repairs appointments and enables them to track the time of arrival on the day
- Integrated webchat – enabling the call centre to provide help where a customer is struggling without the customer having to call them
- Customers being able to change their contact details, add household members, report ASB

and other issues, make a complaint, apply for a mutual exchange, tenancy change or the Right to Buy

Customers have helped to create the customer-facing aspects of My Salix and tested it during development.

The portal is delivering a range of improvements for customers including allowing them to cancel repairs, change appointments and give feedback, meaning more repairs done right first time, decreasing avoidable contact such as customers chasing repairs, and improving access with an aim of 70 per cent of transactions being self-service.

Contact: jonathan.drake@salixhomes.co.uk

Twenty11 - co-creating a new organisation with a different approach

Twenty11 is an innovative charitable housing company and is a subsidiary of Red Kite Community Housing. Twenty11 was formed using the new freedoms provided by the Government through the Housing and Planning Act 2017 and currently manages around 100 homes in High Wycombe.

The organisation is clear that it would not have been formed without feedback from, and the involvement of, Red Kite tenants. They had raised affordability and ASB as particular areas of concern and felt that many existing housing management services did not match what tenants now expect. They were keen to see a more innovative approach.

All aspects of the design of the new organisation, its policies, procedures and overall approach have been developed in collaboration with Red Kite tenants, board members and staff over the course of a year. This included community consultation events at the outset and task and finish groups to work on particular aspects of the Twenty11 offer.

Twenty11's approach includes:

- **Tenancy sustainment licences** where tenants can see how they are contributing to their tenancy and their community. New tenants begin with a base level 'tenancy sustainment licence score' of 100 points with points being added for positive behaviours and deducted for negative ones, for example, persistent arrears and complaints about ASB
- Fixed term terms tenancies that work alongside the incentive of the licence so that families are supported with the major milestones in their journey such as needing to move to nearer to work

- **Personalised rents** linked to a household's ability to pay. During the tenancy, rents increase annually in line with the consumer price index and there is some scope to reduce it if a household experiences a significant change in its finances. Rents are reassessed when tenancies come up for renewal and a new tenancy term granted
- **Community potential specialists** who work with customers and support them through a solutions-focused approach to develop personal success plans and achieve their aspirations

Whilst it is still early days for Twenty11, an independent evaluation by Sheffield Hallam University during the initial pilot stage noted that:

- The proportion of tenants not working fell from 41 per cent to 32 per cent, with signs that tenants' socioeconomic status was improving
- The proportion of tenants' income made up of benefits had reduced
- Tenants saw an improvement in their physical health as well as in their confidence regarding their future prospects and potential

Early indications that tenants have travelled some distance in realising their own potential, as well as bettering their prospects in terms of both their economic position and wellbeing, have been very promising.

Contact: Sarah Mei Ying North at Sarah@twenty11.co.uk

Reviewing and evaluating impact

So, do the organisations we talked to know if their changes are delivering what they set out to do? For most organisations, the approach to reviewing and evaluating the impact is still taking shape and, in some cases, it is still too soon to see significant or full outcomes or results. Some, however, are already seeing improvements in performance and outcomes in areas that matter most to tenants along with overall savings and efficiencies too. We found several common themes:

- The process of review appears to be ongoing for most organisations. There is always the original review that sparked change and then there is ongoing review to assess impact and make further changes if needed
- Many organisations adopted lean or similar approaches to reviewing their services. This focuses on mapping activity to remove waste, which means stopping doing things that do not add value to the customer experience
- Evaluation plans are varied and depend in large part on the overarching aims of an organisation's new approach, for example, an aim to improve customer satisfaction will lead to performance indicators to measure this
- Quantifiable measures are easier to monitor and review, for example rent arrears, complaints and customer satisfaction. However, non-quantifiable things like improved wellbeing are not always as easy to measure to demonstrate improvement. Some organisations have adopted a 'wellbeing model' approach to evaluation where tenants report their own views on how they are doing against a range of indicators
- It takes time to develop a good evaluation framework and the organisations that are still in the early stages of change are less likely to have a confirmed their framework. Those with key performance indicators are often reluctant to link changes in performance directly to changes in their housing management approach as they often don't adequately measure the wider-ranging aspects of what they are trying to achieve
- Feedback from tenants and residents should feature strongly in any process of evaluation and we can see the results of this in many of the examples included in this report.

Sovereign - outcome-focused

The 'case and place' pilot has delivered a 33 per cent drop in complaints as well as improvements to staff working practices. All customer contacts are responded to within two working days, the majority within one. Sovereign aims to improve this to one working day shortly.

With more effective scheduling and a significant reduction in emails, officers now spend more time understanding and resolving cases and less time on travelling and admin. Cases are closed more quickly and with better outcomes for customers. Managers can also more effectively manage their team with far greater visibility of workloads. Workloads are balanced across the team from a difference of +/- 55 per cent to less than 10 per cent so officers know the workload is fairly distributed across the team.

Case management has been developed so all cases are risk assessed against a set of criteria – this will enable the organisation to review and evidence a reduction in the risk of a tenancy failing as a result of its intervention. Being able to measure and evidence tenancy sustainment in a tangible way will enable the team to prioritise customer contact and urgency of response based on the risk level.

To further improve the measurement of case outcomes, Sovereign is rolling out a new customer relationship management (CRM) system. By summer 2020 every contact will go through this system and housing officers will have a 360-degree view of the customer while on the go via an app.

Contact: Stuart.Davies@sovereign.org.uk



Monmouthshire Housing Association – For Starters

Monmouthshire Housing Association (MHA) has been using wellbeing self-assessments with starter tenants since 2016, when a dedicated 'new homes' service commenced, alongside an improved void standard that now includes full decoration and carpets to all properties. Tenants are asked to identify tenancy risks, and self-score different areas of their lives at their pre-tenancy visit and to self-score again at their nine-month home visit with their dedicated new homes officer. This helps MHA to identify the tenancy risk rating with the incoming tenant, to agree how it will work with them in their first year (including additional home visits for red/amber risk ratings), as well as helping to measure the distance travelled by the tenant on their housing journey, an indicator of the impact of the property and housing services, in a visual and quantifiable way for both parties.

New tenants are also asked to score their satisfaction with their new home and asked specifically about the quality of the void standard and starter tenant service. Results are impressive,

with 90 per cent of new tenants 'very satisfied' and 10 per cent 'satisfied'. Almost 60 per cent of new tenants state in the survey that they could not have afforded flooring for their new home, evidencing the need for continuing with the current MHA void standard.

Having built strong, positive relationships with tenants through this new homes service, levels of engagement are high during the first year. Home visits are seldom missed and the association saw a dramatic reduction in starter tenancy arrears in the first two years of the service (a 1.8 per cent reduction from June 2016 to June 2018) and 97 per cent conversion rate for starter tenancies to assured. Following the introduction of universal credit (UC) in June 2018 starter tenants continue to have lower levels of arrears than other tenants on UC; in 2019 starter tenants on UC are on average 2 per cent below the general UC arrears level.

Contact: Julie.Nicholas@monmouthshirehousing.co.uk



Monmouthshire Housing Association

What are the main challenges and learning points?

Change management emerged as a major challenge for most organisations with a small number telling us that the change process was made simpler by them already having the culture required to make their shift. Resistance to change or a belief that 'it will never work' among some staff was something many had to invest a lot of time in overcoming. Several organisations also highlighted a lack of expertise in this area as a challenge. Changing the culture and mindset of an organisation and its people takes time.

Some organisations experienced high staff turnover, in some cases because they needed a completely different skill set on the frontline for their new approach to be successful. Some people were able to make this transition and others were not.

Linked to this, as we've seen in examples throughout this report, changing the way staff are recruited and trained was a key learning point for many organisations. Recognising that skills and behaviour are more important in the recruitment process allows organisations to plan for training once people are in post.

Other learning points include:

- Investment in training, while costly in terms of time and money, is worth it in achieving the changes in culture, delivery and performance needed
- Achieving a balance between property and people is a key consideration for some
- Staff having too many things that are seen as a priority may be a challenge for those moving over to more generic models of working. Involving staff in service design and supporting them before, during and after the change process was identified by some as an important factor in delivering the outcomes desired

- Many experienced a short-term dip in performance or staff morale while the changes were implemented but there is an expectation that these will subside and that improvements will emerge
- It's important to get the balance right - there's potential for frontline staff to become overloaded and so support around resilience and wellbeing coupled with careful workload management need to be factored in
- It is vital to get investment in IT right to enable generic, mobile and remote working, self-service options for service users and overall efficiency in working practices. Many had invested in this area but recognised that more would be needed

At this point it is also worth reflecting on the risks and challenges that lie ahead. Impending changes to social housing regulation in England; the need to identify, carry out and fund fire safety work; the likely further erosion of local services; and supporting people who are digitally excluded, will all place demands on resources, services and staff making further changes in service design and delivery a possibility. Standing still is no longer an option.



Summing it all up

In assessing what's happening in housing management right now, we've looked at 18 quite different organisations. They vary in size, nature, location and history but, as we've seen, they have much in common – a strong desire to give tenants and residents the very best services they can and to design those services in partnership with them, a drive to empower, equip and professionalise staff, and a keenness to make the most of the opportunities that new technology brings in delivering high quality, customer focused services.

Given that CIH is housing's professional body, it's heartening to see organisations which are so committed to equipping and professionalising their people. Knowledge, skills, behaviours and values are fundamental to what it means to be a professional and to be performing to the highest standard. CIH is developing a

professional standards framework, supported by a new learning platform, which focuses on helping people to acquire the skills and knowledge they need backed up by positive values and behaviours. As well as promoting ongoing learning and development, we want to see housing recognised as a skilled profession, a career of choice, and an important partner to benefit local people, places and communities.

The social housing sector's commitment to social purpose has been called into question in recent years. While it's true that organisations, out of necessity, are having to be more commercially minded, it's clear to us that the organisations we focused on show a true sense of social value and purpose rooted in a strong desire to support and serve people and communities to the very best of their ability.



Chartered
Institute of
Housing

Suites 5 and 6,
First Floor,
Rowan House,
Westwood Way,
Coventry CV4 8LE

T: 024 7685 1700
E: policy.practice@cih.org

www.cih.org

