

# Making the Most of Technology in Housing and Care – *Pushing the Boundaries*

Housing providers are not currently making the most of technology and digital solutions in their services. This is the view of some of the UK's leading housing providers, specialist housing knowledge hub, and the Housing LIN (Learning and Improvement Network) and has been our experience whilst providing digital telecare solutions to many housing providers across the UK.

While there are pockets of digital brilliance, we need to see this replicated at scale so that technology meets its potential and ultimately improves the lives of many more residents.

We recently held a roundtable with the Housing LIN to bring together housing associations and organisational bodies, including representatives from Anchor, Hanover Group, Housing 21, Orbit, Sanctuary, FirstPort, the Chartered Institute of Housing, ExtraCare Charitable Trust, and Central and Cecil, who exemplify these pockets of change in the industry, to discuss how to inspire a shift in culture in order to drive much needed transformation. Here are some of the key takeaways.

## **A culture change is needed across all levels**

A culture shift in housing is urgently needed. The outdated approach to the adoption of technology has become a roadblock to change and innovation in the industry, with too much focus on the perceived risks, rather than the benefits that digital can provide. It's argued that every business is now a tech company at its core. So why is there a fundamental fear of digital innovation in the boardrooms of the housing industry?

It was the opinion of the group that IT and technology experience and expertise at board level was influential in the successful implementation of a new digital transformation strategy. It was evident at the roundtable that those housing providers who had a strong level of knowledge on their board were in a stronger position to leverage and implement new technologies. Furthermore, other board members felt it reassuring to know that this expertise was present.

When it comes to selling a new digital transformation strategy, buy-in from the board is critical, but difficulty at this stage can arise when the senior management is solely evidence-focused or has an outdated attitude to the benefits of technology-based care.

Having a board representative with a strong level of experience and knowledge of technology can remedy this as they act as the vanguard or advocate for digital innovation, helping push

the investment where needed and freeing up time for the rest of the team to work on successfully implementing the technology underpinning the change.

It's then the role of this vanguard to drive that culture change for the rest of the business, including the workforce. Housing providers admitted at the event that a lack of staff buy-in to adopt new digital processes has the greatest impact on adoption, over residents or management.

The creation of a modern housing workforce, one that fully understands the benefits of technology for residents, could go a long way towards resolving this. In order to move the needle, your senior staff should try to involve their wider teams in accessing the benefits of technologies, innovations and service before they are implemented.

## **Enhancing the technology that's already available**

It was agreed amongst those in attendance that the technology needed to make real improvements to the lives of residents is already in existence. There are pockets of great success and it is the group recommendation that the industry moves faster to implement these on a wider scale.

It was recommended that the industry should not delay transformation because they are waiting for the next big thing in technology, but should embrace the technology available today, as long as it's future-proofed. For example, AI and Robotics have unbelievable potential, and we should be thinking about their use, but not at the expense of today's residents.

## **Collaboration**

There was an appetite amongst attendees to create focus groups for housing associations working on similar technology projects, to share knowledge on the advancement of new products and services. When attendees began to discuss their transformations, they quickly realised that there was a synergy in the projects they are currently working on and a huge opportunity for collaboration and knowledge sharing.

As an industry, we need to break down the barriers and the siloes we currently work in. We all have the shared goal of providing a better service to our residents, and we can and should pool our combined knowledge to innovate where possible.

## Procurement is a barrier to new technology

There was general sentiment amongst the housing providers present that overcomplicated procurement processes have driven the industry backwards.

Some at the table said that it can take between six to eight months to procure, which leads to a new project losing momentum. A balance needs to be found that ensures all stakeholders are aware of projects to guarantee acceptance, without creating an overly complicated approval process that stifles innovation.

Additionally, it was felt that those organisations who had a stronger level of knowledge on technology within the procurement teams, were better placed to make sure that the latest technologies were being implemented. If you're finding procurement to be the main barrier to technology adoption in your organisation, it's worth assessing your current approval process to see if it can be simplified with clear points of sign off internally.

## How can we continue to push boundaries?

There's a great deal of opportunity to create innovation in our industry, but we mustn't try to 'boil the ocean'. We already have the technology that can make a demonstrable difference to resident care and support, so right now it's about improving the culture around technology adoption, ensuring we have the right level of technology knowledge in our organisations and building on the solutions we already have.

It's clear that having the right expertise on our board, with a level-headed vision and strategy, is key to keeping a digital plan on track, as well as the continued collaboration between associations to inspire growth and development.

But above all else, we need to nurture these pockets of exemplification within the housing industry, recognising their successes and encouraging others to adopt a similar approach, in order to focus on our ultimate goal, improving resident experience through digital technology.

## About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 25,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population.

## About Appello

Appello are the market leader in two important Technology Enabled Care Services (TECS) markets. We run the UK's largest telecare monitoring centre and have the most advanced call handling platform in the industry. Additionally we are the market leader in Digital Emergency Call Systems (ECS) and have developed a service, Smart Living Solutions (SLS) which provides elderly and vulnerable residents with material improvements in safety, security and wellbeing.



Housing LIN

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