

Working in the Digital Age

Chris Potter considers how software can help to improve housing associations' repairs and maintenance services.

Working within tight financial constraints, housing associations have to ensure that the needs of existing communities are balanced against the pressure to increase supply. This needs to be matched by a greater flexibility, embracing new requirements and greater opportunities for community ownership.

IT software is a key enabler in improving the repairs service and there are several key benefits anyone procuring a housing repairs system should seek to achieve. These benefits are centred around the core principles of offering tenants a flexible, quicker and more responsive housing repairs service and, at the same time, offering the housing association the tools to increase efficiency, save money and provide exceptional management information in order to aid effective decision-making.

Meeting the digital inclusion agenda by allowing the tenant to report and enquire on repair requests 24/7/365 using self-service customer web portals is convenient and flexible for the tenant. Furnishing the tenant with an easy-to-use system ensures that both the tenant and the housing association is armed with up-to-date information, while it also saves time and money in processing repairs by reducing staff costs and eliminating costly telephone calls.

Deploying mobile technologies to repair operative's increases productivity because more jobs can be scheduled in – reducing travelling costs and improving skills matching. Frontline operatives are deployed quickly using mobile technologies, their skills are matched to the most appropriate jobs and the system ensures they are equipped with the correct materials for the job in hand. Knowing both operationally and financially how trade operatives are performing in real-time gives the tools for better performance management.

Consistently good service

Using IT software systems to manage resource and provide digital options to sub-contract work during peaks means that the tenant receives a consistently high service and the housing organisation can manage staffing levels accurately and efficiently without over resourcing. In addition, a self-service subcontractor portal allows the subcontractor to allocate, commence and complete work electronically, giving the tenant and the housing organisation up-to-date information on the status of work.



Another example of where IT is able to give real benefits and reduce costs is in employing customer satisfaction modules. These allow surveys to be created, delivered and stored against properties, tenants and jobs, so that hotspots can be identified and resolved.

The gathering of data on the physical condition of properties, the aspirations of tenants and how that matches up with standards will offer opportunities for housing associations to increase their offer to many tenants. For example, this could mean fast-tracking the improvement of environmental performance of homes and the sharing of benefits gained from lower energy bills among both tenants and landlords.



Using computer technology in the form of management reporting dashboard to present accurate, appropriate and timely management information to the user pro-actively allows timely decisions to be made on the best possible basis. If the system is fully integrated, there is no data entry duplication and the minimum of data is manually keyed. This improves accuracy, saves time and allows for consistent analysis and reporting. Automated job costing also enables a detailed analysis of profitability and what resources are used on each job. This allows inefficiencies to be pin-pointed and dealt with.

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