



Embracing technology can help improve operating efficiencies and business continuity within the Social Housing sector

## Introduction


We all know the environment in which housing associations operate can be complicated. The sheer existence of a housing association is to ensure they provide decent homes for tenants to live in and ensure the customer service they provide to those tenants is second to none.

The pressure on the UK social housing sector continues to grow, fuelled by rising homelessness and social inequality. In England, the latest figures show that 68,680 households approached councils for support between July and September 2020. Providers find themselves under pressure from all sides, regulation has decreased rental rates and tenant expectations are rising.

A graphic consisting of a dark blue triangle pointing to the right, with the text "47%" in white inside it. The triangle is set against a light blue background with geometric shapes.

47%

**Of company leaders plan to allow employees to continue to work remotely all of the time.**

A photograph showing a person in a yellow shirt working at a desk. They are looking at a tablet, and there are various office supplies like pens, a coffee cup, and a small model of a building on the desk.

The pandemic has heavily impacted the social housing sector. Providers have been forced to move to a remote working model and have successfully used technology to allow employees to work from home. There has also been an increased focus on improving tenant engagement via digital service delivery, using innovative and emerging technologies. According to Gartner, 47% of company leaders plan to allow employees to continue to work remotely all of the time.

As many other organisations, Housing Associations are on a Digital Transformation journey. Self-service, mobile apps and social interactions are deemed to be the quickest way to engage with tenants ultimately delivering a better digital experience.

Digital workplace technologies create a more mobile and agile workforce delivering efficiency gains and an enhanced customer service.

Innovation and automation have a place in this transformation journey as long as you know your tenants well enough to allow such technology shift from an agent being first point of resolution. Digital transactions such as routing to webforms, Self-service IVR's (interactive voice response) or chat bots booking a repair is shifting organisations to be data driven not data led to ensure they deliver the best possible tenant experience they possibly can.

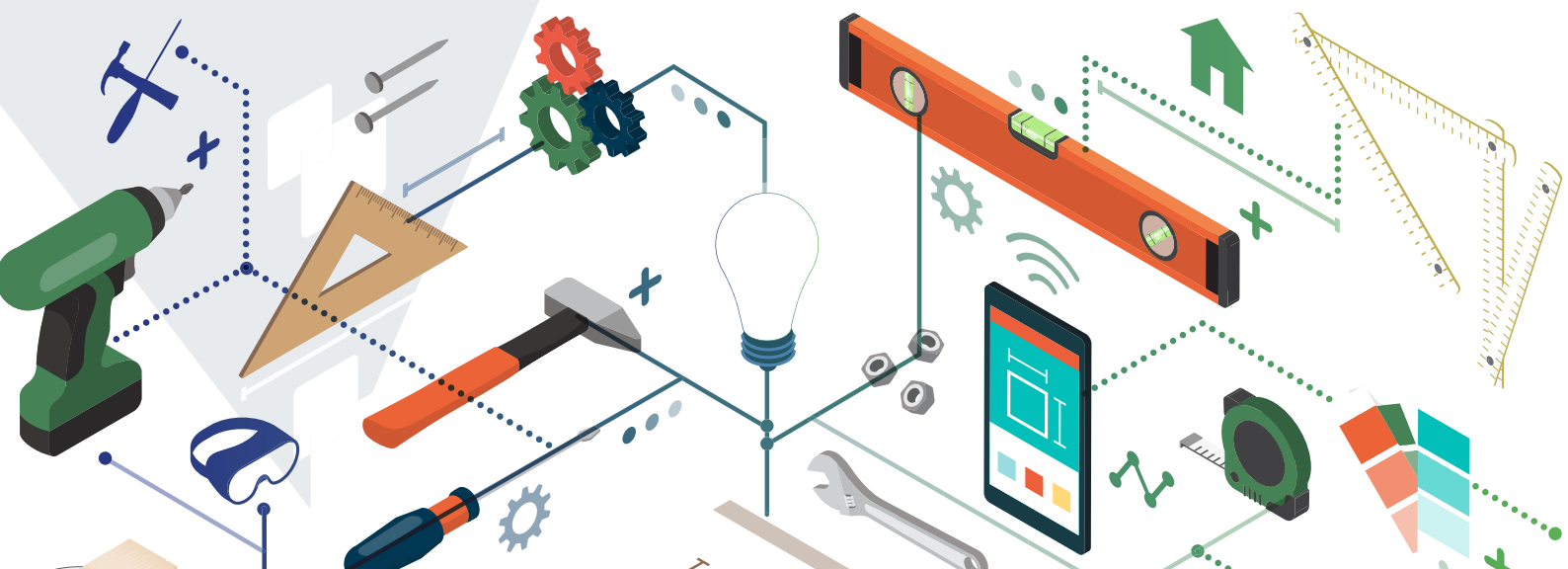
## The rising expectations of the digital tenant

Seeking ways to harness digital technology, driven by greater financial pressure and rising tenant expectations, digitally serving residents offers cost efficiencies and better utilises resources.

Technology can also be used to keep organisations one step ahead of tenant issues. Smart devices can enable the remote monitoring of key facilities in homes and communal areas. Future breakdowns can be predicted and fixed before they cause inconvenience or risk a tenant's wellbeing. This includes smart testing for legionella in water facilities and automated emergency lighting testing to ensure fire safety compliance. It can even extend to remote lift monitoring and boiler testing.

Having fast and reliable Internet connectivity also supports customers in their personal and working lives. By installing high-speed, secure, wireless technology, housing providers can help close the digital divide by ensuring that tenants always have access to the information and to the people they need in their everyday lives.

Maintel has over 20 years' experience working with the social housing sector, delivering solutions to numerous authorities. We have partnered with Mitel to provide a digital tenant solution. This is comprised of cloud-based hosted voice, unified communications and collaboration tools for organisations of all sizes, wherever they are on their digital transformation journey.



## Increasing productivity through employee engagement

Social housing organisations are typically highly distributed within their region and dependent on good communications to operate efficiently. Providers often collaborate with many different agencies and rely on effective communications to provide a quality public service. In addition, making sure that employees are engaged, flexible, and digitally enabled is key to maximising their productivity.

The latest technology can help to improve staff morale, increase motivation, and enhance productivity by relieving employees from repetitive tasks and automating processes.

Paperless systems, automated reminders and online payments all give social housing staff more time to focus on the important parts of their job. Resolving basic enquiries using AI chatbots and prioritising urgent calls, ensures that non-urgent customer requests can be handled without human intervention. Scale communications with large numbers of tenants can also be handled efficiently by automated systems, meaning that the employees are not overwhelmed by a high volume of enquiries.

Field-based individuals can also be equipped with either mobile phones or tablets loaded with soft clients, to allow them to more easily access important information and collaborate with their colleagues. This includes the ability to know the whereabouts and availability of team members, making them more contactable and improving enquiry resolution time.

Attracting the right staff is also becoming increasingly difficult, providers need to be mindful that they are selling themselves to prospective employees. Ensuring that your communications technology is modern and effective creates an important first impression. Similarly, for existing staff, giving easy access to information and collaboration tools can significantly improve the workplace experience and improve retention rates.

Maintel are well positioned to help improve employee engagement by designing and implementing communications and collaboration technology from a range of trusted partners. For example, Maintel have worked with Mitel to develop a suite of integrated productivity tools including real-time instant messaging, collaborative team workspaces and video conferencing. These allow teams to transform the way they work, enabling them to be more productive and collaborative, whether they're in the office or in the field.





## Driving community regeneration

The provision of quality social housing is a key first step in the regeneration of any community. However, it must come with a strong, sustainable local economy and the ability to engage in fulfilling work. The local availability of places which combine living, working and social interaction is also important.

Digital exclusion is an inhibitor for progress which runs through the social fabric of the UK and is more widespread than many people realise. According to the Office for National Statistics the likelihood of having access to the Internet from home increases with income. Only 51% of households earning less than £10,000 have home internet access, compared with 99% of households with an income of over £40,001. The link between poverty and digital exclusion is clear; if you are poor, you have less chance of being online. It has also highlighted the lack of digital literacy, in the UK today 22% of the population do not have basic digital skills.

The recent pandemic has also changed where people work. More than ever before it will not be conducted in a centralised location. So, it's going to be essential to have a place to work that is professional,

but may not be on your employers' premises. For some this will be possible using Wi-Fi in their home, but others will need to find local digitally enabled spaces.

The establishment of localised hubs, which combine community facilities, meeting places and workspaces to help social housing residents work, will be an important element of regeneration in our post-pandemic society.

Underpinning these initiatives is the availability of digital infrastructure that enables communication and collaboration to bridge the digital divide. Ubiquitous Wi-Fi and local workspaces will help tenants to be effective in their jobs and will enable positive community regeneration.

Maintel have extensive experience of working with social housing and local authorities to create cost effective technology solutions that address the key challenges facing community regeneration projects. Maintel can deliver solutions with positive community benefits by bringing together WAN technology and Wi-Fi with the ability to install, maintain and manage devices including CCTV, secure networking and contact centre systems.



## Conclusion and recommendations

The social housing environment is complex with many stakeholders and competing priorities. However, the need for affordable housing has never been greater. Innovative digital technology can add value throughout the provision of social housing, from the tenant experience, to improving employee engagement and in driving the regeneration of communities. Organisations wishing to increase innovation in these areas should investigate the benefits that

next generation contact centres and cloud-based collaboration solutions have to offer. These technologies combined with state-of-the-art connectivity solutions can improve the flow of information throughout the whole social housing ecosystem. Whatever stage you are at in your communications infrastructure planning, the time is right to consider the advantages of next generation communications and collaboration solutions from Maintel and Mitel.



For further information about how Maintel can help you [click here](#) or reach out to us direct below:

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