

IT MANAGED SERVICES

A HOUSING ASSOCIATION GUIDE TO IT



INTRODUCTION

IT and communications technology sits at the very heart of most housing associations; powering a diverse range of workflows and enabling your organisation to operate effectively in an increasingly connected, automated and digitised world.

With the majority of IT spend originating outside the IT department, an IT discussion today involves stakeholders from across the business, especially the customer service team. These business users expect business outcomes from their IT spend and frequently place user experience, efficiency and productivity above integration and management considerations.

The rise of mobility, BYOD, cloud services and the consumerisation of IT all contribute towards an excellent user experience. However, they also add complexity, risk and administrative overhead.

There is a rising expectation that IT departments should be able to deliver more services, quicker and with less resource, whilst headcount is typically kept to the minimum required to deliver against the agreed SLAs.

The knock-on effect of growing complexity and limited resource is that IT departments spend an increasing amount of time fighting fires or simply “keeping the lights on” and not enough time planning for future innovation or delivering value.

If technology is to fulfil its role as a business enabler, IT departments need to be able to prioritise workloads and free up valuable internal resource to develop and implement a more strategic approach to systems development. Increasingly, housing associations are turning to managed service providers as the solution to this problem.

Outsourcing the day-to-day monitoring and management of systems can help organisations realise significant cost benefits whilst improving flexibility, agility, security and performance. This approach enables IT departments to focus on what matters most; delivering additional value to the organisation.

A well-managed infrastructure enables IT to have greater control over their technology estate, provides access to expertise they may not have in-house and allows them to shape future developments in line with long-term objectives.

IT – AN EVOLVING LANDSCAPE

The traditional 5-year technology cycle of planning, implementation, maintenance and obsolescence is no longer relevant for the majority of housing associations. What has become increasingly important, is that IT departments have the ability to deliver against a broader set of strategic business objectives.

Rather than simply managing day to day infrastructure operations, IT is expected to provide secure, reliable and scalable services that the whole of the organisation can benefit from. The net effect is that IT comes under even more pressure to perform.

Lines of business (non-IT) are demanding more business outcomes from their IT investment. If the organisation perceives IT to be under-performing or costing too much, there will be pressure to outsource the entire IT function.

Whilst outsourcing can offer significant cost and quality advantages, it may come at a price – the potential loss of internal expertise or control. So, if outsourcing introduces an element of risk and keeping IT in-house doesn't help the organisation move forward, what is the answer?

It is true that Cloud computing has seen an increasing number of essential services moved off-premise, but this isn't where it ends. A hybrid IT model provides the opportunity for housing associations to make the most of an outsourced partner's economies of scale – both in terms of technical expertise and scalable technology.

At the same time, internal IT resource can retain control over the mission critical elements of the organisation's infrastructure and re-focus their attentions on applications-based projects that have a direct impact on process improvement, user experience and strategic objectives.

Although there still appears to be a disconnect between business objectives and IT infrastructure for many organisations, the gap is getting smaller.

Housing associations are under increasing pressure to reduce operating costs whilst maintaining the efficiency and productivity needed to deliver on the country's housing needs. IT has an important role to play in this evolving marketplace. Implemented and managed properly, IT is a powerful business enabler.

IS YOUR IT FIT FOR PURPOSE?

Business as usual for many IT departments means juggling the day to day management of an increasingly complex infrastructure and meeting the needs of a wide range of stakeholders. However, this leaves little time to focus on the strategic direction for IT and making sure it remains aligned to overall objectives.

This is something that should not be ignored, as a misaligned IT strategy can impact on the organisation as a whole. Here are some key signs that your IT might not be fit for purpose:

	<p>1. YOU'RE NOT REALISING THE FULL POTENTIAL OF YOUR TECHNOLOGY</p> <p>As your IT estate continues to experience organic growth, you are experiencing diminishing returns on your investment in technology. System sprawl, changing user demands and a lack of cohesion across the estate means some components are under-utilised and others are stretched to breaking point.</p>
	<p>2. SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT HAS BECOME A BURDEN</p> <p>There is an art to managing an IT estate that is more than simply keeping the lights on. If your management tools and processes are inefficient and don't provide you with the diagnostics you need then it will have a negative impact on your organisation.</p>
	<p>3 YOUR COSTS ARE SPIRALLING OUT OF CONTROL</p> <p>The modern mantra for IT departments is "more for less". If you're struggling to keep costs under control, not only are you failing to achieve this objective but it might also be a sign that something is broken. Maintaining an expensive in-house resource that spends most of its time doing low-end services simply doesn't make sense.</p>
	<p>4. YOU'RE STRUGGLING TO MAINTAIN SERVICE LEVELS</p> <p>If you are managing on the borders of chaos every month you will be spending all your time doing short-term fixes, with no time to work on a longer-term strategy for service innovation and improvement. As a result, you see an increase in downtime and extended change management timelines.</p>
	<p>5. YOU ARE BEING CUT OUT OF THE LOOP</p> <p>As line-of-business users demand business outcomes, they are turning to outsource and cloud service providers to deliver more responsive "as-a- service" solutions.</p>
	<p>6. YOUR USERS ARE COMPLAINING MORE OFTEN</p> <p>With the consumerisation of IT, employees have become accustomed to a slick user experience across multiple devices. This places an additional burden on IT departments to deliver intuitive, user-centric technologies that are always available on any device.</p>

ALIGNING IT TO BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES



Reduce
Fixed Costs



Increase
Business Agility



Optimise IT
Environment



Improve
Workforce Productivity



Digital
Inclusion

It is important to recognise that your ICT has an integral role to play in helping your organisation realise its long-term objectives. Although “optimise IT” may be the stated objective, the knock-on effects of good (or bad) IT can be felt throughout the organisation.

A shift from capital-intensive, in-house managed, on-premise hardware to utility-based managed cloud services can provide significant savings over the lifetime of your IT. Secondary cost benefits can be realised as a result of a reduced on-premise estate and enabling remote or mobile working.

Business agility is dependent upon scalability and flexibility. The ability to react quickly to changing market conditions could mean the difference between exploiting a new opportunity or missing out on one.

In a digital marketplace, housing associations are increasingly expected to be able to provide services to users, customers and suppliers, 24 hours a day. The ability to provide “real-time” services places an additional demand on IT service levels.

Resilience and availability are also essential to workforce productivity; minimising downtime and providing ubiquitous access to data and applications anywhere, on any device. Technology has also made effective collaboration between remote workers a reality, with hi-definition audio and video and secure file sharing eliminating the need to travel.

Technology permeates every aspect of users’ lives so it should be simple and intuitive to use. Putting the user at the heart of your infrastructure boosts adoption rates and overall satisfaction. The gamification or consumerisation of corporate IT has helped create an environment that users are familiar with and eliminate resistance to change.

The bottom line for housing associations is to ensure income generation and sustainable operation and can be achieved by effectively delivering on the other stated objectives: reducing costs, enhancing agility, improving productivity and making the most of any legacy investment in technology.

HYBRID IT ADOPTION ON THE INCREASE

Across the UK, housing associations of all types are opting to outsource elements of their ICT; in the form of cloud, hosted or managed services. It is easy to see why, as the appeal of reliable access to enterprise-class technologies and services at a predictable cost is strong.

As users demand improvements in performance, availability, security and reliability you might ask why organisations are choosing to outsource such critical services. Rather than seeing these as internal issues, more and more organisations are turning to managed service contracts to help improve service levels whilst maintaining financial and strategic control over their infrastructure, investments and applications.

- The pay-as-you-grow model of cloud and hybrid IT services means your ICT comes at a predictable monthly cost
- The inherent scalability and flexibility of managed services means they are always the right size for your organisation
- Outsourcing elements of your infrastructure allows you to realise cost savings on systems maintenance, monitoring and training
- Free up your valuable IT resources to spend time on long-term strategic development rather than day-to-day maintenance
- Leverage best-in-class technologies that may have been beyond your budget for an on-premise solution
- Access detailed network performance data and diagnostics to support management decision making and continuous improvement
- Streamline the process of on-boarding new users, services or solutions and guarantee compatibility with legacy systems
- Enhance systems security for big data, essential applications, digital transactions and business continuity

Outsourcing hybrid IT systems management to a service provider shouldn't represent a significant investment for most organisations. The most significant elements of operational costs will be spent on maintaining an in-house technical resource.

As an IT estate grows, it impacts on the efficiency of an in-house department. Systems sprawl adds to complexity and keeping your techs trained on all the latest technologies takes both time and money.

Take a look at what you're delivering in-house and what might be more cost-effectively delivered by a third party service provider. Through hybrid IT you could release some capital and free up some human resource that can be re-directed to achieve the overriding strategic business objectives.

WHAT SHOULD YOU OUTSOURCE?

With a finite technical resource maintained in-house, the chances are their talents are being wasted on the basic, day-to-day tasks associated with infrastructure management. Why not outsource these to a trusted service provider who will offer a guaranteed service level at a predictable cost?

Do you really need to be doing everything yourself? Some things, those with more strategic relevance, you may want to retain in-house. However, you might decide it makes sense to outsource the lower-value tasks, such as break-fix and systems monitoring. Alternatively, you might want to extend your service levels by providing out-of-hours support or specialist support services that fall outside your in-house skill set.

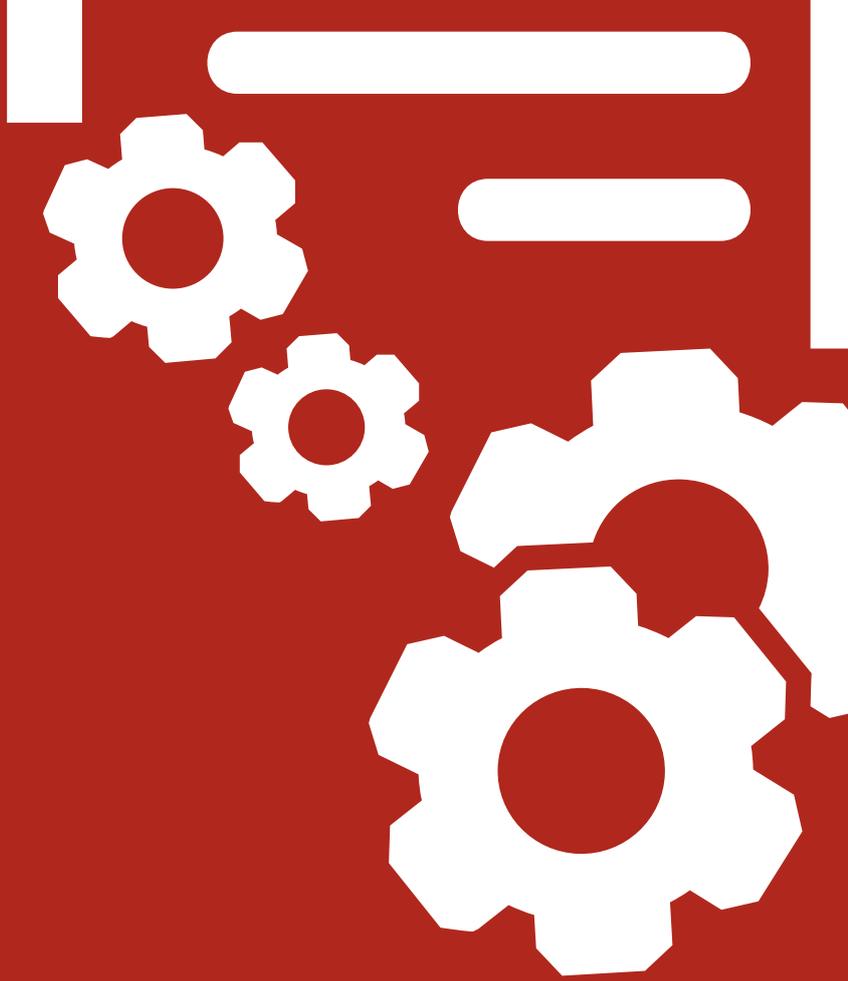
Handing over operational control to a third party is not the same as handing over the keys to your car; it's more like hiring a chauffeur. The right partner will help you on your journey to business transformation by providing a range of value-add services:

- Helpdesk / Technical Support
- Device and Application Configuration
- Software and Hardware Upgrades
- Vendor Liaison
- Hardware Break/Fix
- Systems Monitoring, Reporting and Analysis

WHAT SHOULD YOU ASK YOUR SERVICE PROVIDER?

If you are thinking about outsourcing, here are a few useful questions to ask a potential managed service provider.

1. **What service elements do you offer?**
2. **Which technologies and vendors do you support?**
3. **What level of certification or expertise do you maintain in house?**
4. **What SLA's do you offer?**
5. **Can you offer a custom service agreement, tailored to my needs?**
6. **What physical and virtual security do you have in place?**
7. **What monitoring tools do you use and how is network performance measured?**
8. **What reports and analysis do you offer?**



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- Managed Services & Support
- Hosting & Colocation
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- Back-Up & Disaster Recovery
- Cybersecurity Solutions
- Contact Centre Solutions
- Mobility & Collaboration
- Unified Communications



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