



## Enterprise Case Management Solutions for Social Housing



## Housing on the agenda

*The face of social housing provision is changing apace: the Government has pledged to make 'Decent Homes' widely available to vulnerable groups by 2010, and there are now fewer homeless people than at any time in the past thirty years or so. While the legal responsibility for the provision of social housing continues to rest with local authorities, its supply and maintenance is passing increasingly to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). At the same time, tenant choice is becoming more important. Just as the Decent Homes initiative focuses on the quality of accommodation provided, the Audit Commission's inspections in England, and the Government's Star Rating system, are placing emphasis on the quality of customer service. So how are these multiple challenges being met? In this paper, Lagan highlights how it is helping the social housing sector operate more effectively and efficiently to meet the needs both of local authorities and of social housing occupants.*

### Decent Homes

Communities and Local Government's aim is:

To bring all social housing into decent condition, with most of the improvement taking place in deprived areas, and to increase the proportion of private housing in decent condition occupied by vulnerable groups.

Since 2001, the number of non-decent homes in the social housing sector has been reduced by over 50 per cent. Communities and Local Government is determined to build on this success to improve the living conditions of social tenants across the country.

By 2010, 95 per cent of all social housing is expected to meet a decent standard. Negotiations are ongoing with some social landlords to set dates for delivery beyond 2010, where it is necessary to achieve better value for money, or higher standards of housing.

[www.communities.gov.uk/housing/decenthomes](http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/decenthomes)

## A history of social housing - setting the context

Social Housing in the UK really began with the Housing of the Working Classes Act in 1890 which encouraged local authorities to improve housing in their area. Large-scale council housing was heralded with the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act under which Councils were subsidised to build in areas of high housing need. The Housing Act of 1930 saw many of the slums that had grown up cleared and poor quality housing demolished to make way for new-builds.

It was the 1942 Beveridge Report, however, that resulted in inner city areas expanding outwards as part of mass social housing programmes. Post-second world war housing shortages, coupled with a rapidly expanding population, brought their own problems - which were addressed with cheap, pre-fabricated houses and flats, a building practice which persisted into the sixties and has since been widely criticised for delivering poor quality accommodation on densely populated estates. The size and volume of independent, non-profit making Voluntary Housing Associations increased in the 1970s, while the Conservative government in the eighties saw the sell-off of council stock at low cost to their occupants. In the mid-1990s, Councils were offering what proved to be popular Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (LSVT).

In 2000, Councils began to create Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and in 2001, Central Government launched its Decent Homes initiative (see boxed text). The Government's Housing Green Paper (July 2007) set clear direction for more and greener homes to be provided in mixed and sustainable communities. Other reports, such as the Cave Review of Social Housing Regulation, the Hills Report into Social Housing and the recent Housing and Regeneration Bill all indicate that further transformation is required.



## Decent Homes for all

The social housing sector is facing some major business issues currently, including new investment required in stock, a greater need for monitoring (which necessitates broader IT provision), realignment within the housing association/RSL sector, and a general increase in political focus on the availability of housing for rent. RSLs will need to borrow to invest in construction; there will be continued merger and acquisition activity within the housing associations sector; and ALMOs will be accorded greater independence as RSLs.

A key factor among the changes afoot, however, is the need to provide tenant customers with good quality housing and facilities. The Government's Decent Homes programme sets about addressing these changing needs and is to be lauded for its aim of providing high quality housing to society's most needy and vulnerable. The programme has nevertheless left some local authorities facing specific challenges in meeting its objectives.

And one thing is clear: local authorities will not be able to achieve Decent Homes targets without transforming their internal processes and systems.

This will demand sophisticated tools to manage process flows and drive efficiency. As housing authorities look to manage greater volumes of stock across wider areas, their need for clever insight into their business is expanding.

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-Lynne Bann, Head of Customer Service, Hounslow Homes

## Enterprise Case Management driving efficiencies

A constant message in social housing transformation is the need to improve the way in which social housing providers communicate with their tenants. The need for a 'customer first' approach is driving housing providers to re-engineer their processes to ensure relevant, accurate and consistent services are provided to their tenants.

Existing back office housing systems were not necessarily designed with customer service in mind however, and often fall short of delivering the required functionality. Lagan Enterprise Case Management (ECM) overcomes this issue and provides full customer interaction management between a housing provider and its tenants. Lagan ECM has been integrated with a number of the leading back office housing systems, including Anite and Northgate Housing, as well as a wide range of telephony, email, document management and graphical information systems (GIS).

Lagan Enterprise Case Management focuses on improved ways of managing service provision through a single user interface. This is underpinned by deep integration to the back office which allows housing providers to "put their customer first". This ensures customers can contact their housing provider how and when they choose, and that promises to customers are met. Lagan supports multi-channel access to services, with a powerful self-service option for extended hours of service provision. ECM also promises reduced operation costs and improved business intelligence.

Lagan's Enterprise Case Management solution enables front-end management of each interaction via a single point of access. It is designed to provide housing providers with a holistic view of each 'case' - which could be defined as a service request, a need for information or a complaint, and which could concern an individual, a family or the property itself. Each stakeholder's view of the case they are handling is relevant to them (with secure and controlled access to information); different case perspectives can be linked to provide a complete overview. ECM supports staff in carrying out their tasks more effectively by integrating front and back office applications and also creating relationships between different cases.



## The benefits of Lagan ECM in the social housing sector

The benefits of Lagan ECM in the social housing sector are perhaps best highlighted with some examples.

### Scenario 1

A tenant calls an agent with a query but the agent has no details of the tenant's personal circumstances or of the property.

Lagan ECM is configured and integrated to provide the agent with a holistic view which displays essential information about the tenant, their family, the property, the property's assets and the rent account, enabling the agent to provide a speedy and accurate response.

### Scenario 2

The tenant calls an incorrect number to request a form or service with which the agent is not familiar.

In Enterprise Case Management, a URL links to the housing association's intranet so that the agent can retrieve the necessary information. This can also be integrated to Outlook, allowing the application to be e-mailed and categorised automatically. Reminders to complete the form can be configured and e-mailed to the tenant.

### Scenario 3

The tenant's property requires some repairs, but the tenant is in debt.

The danger is that the agent, unaware of the tenant's severe arrears and the fact that similar repairs have been a common occurrence at the property, may schedule the work to be completed at the housing association's cost. With Lagan's Holistic View screen, the agent sees immediately that the tenant is in arrears and refuses the repair. An 'in arrears' flash warning can also be set to trigger above a set amount.

### Scenario 4

The elevator in an apartment block is not working and the agent is inundated with multiple tenants reporting the same problem. Each call generates a new case and the repair contractor is overwhelmed by repair requests.

ECM works from scripts which would direct the agent to first search against the property. Once the reported defect is recorded as a duplicate, the interaction is linked to the existing case and new callers are informed that the fault has already been reported. E-mails can be generated automatically to confirm when the repair is complete.

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- Ken Smith, Systems Manager, Sheffield Homes

## A case of success

Lagan is establishing a strong reputation in the social housing sector where its Enterprise Case Management solution has earned Hounslow Homes a Government top star rating, and leading Social Housing providers such as Sheffield Homes and Sanctuary Housing Group are also implementing the solution.

*Hounslow Homes* - is responsible for managing over 16,500 homes for the London Borough of Hounslow. Hounslow Homes was one of the first ALMOs in the country. Hounslow Homes aims to deliver excellent housing services and encourage the development of sustainable local communities. By implementing Lagan's Enterprise Case Management solution, Hounslow Homes has:

- reduced the average time for logging a repair by one third
- improved customer satisfaction levels by 13% to 80%
- halved the number of front-office staff, leading to significant annual savings
- achieved a top Government three star rating.

Lynne Bann, Head of Customer Service, says, "The Lagan system makes it really easy and quick for staff to find the correct response which makes a huge difference to our ability to resolve customers' questions at the first point of contact."

*Sheffield Homes*, South Yorkshire - is working in partnership with Anite Public Sector and Lagan on a solution which is expected to yield annual cost savings of £100,000 by streamlining and adding value to customer interactions with tenants and other stakeholders. The number of enquiries resolved at first point of enquiry is forecast to improve from 75% to 90%.

Ken Smith, Systems Manager, comments, "Our relationship with Lagan has been extremely positive. We were very impressed with the software's ease of implementation and use and the clear potential for tangible cost savings."

*Sanctuary Housing Group (SHG)* - one of the UK's largest housing associations, has become the latest to adopt Lagan's Enterprise Case Management solution. Significant benefits are expected such as speedier call handling and savings from automating business processes. These will be of value to both SHG and to its stakeholders across various services including social housing, home care, care homes, key worker and student accommodation and private rental property.

### The benefits of Lagan Enterprise Case Management (ECM)

- Tenants can contact the housing association as and how they choose
- Housing associations have a holistic view of their tenants
- Promises to tenants can be met
- Improved performance criteria
- Cost savings can be generated through process efficiencies and duplication is eliminated
- Further cost savings are possible as the result of better contractor management
- Tenants enjoy a better quality of life so that the housing association improves its image and popularity.

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