

## Social housing sector guide:

# 5 steps to getting started on your data transformation journey

Research by the Housing Ombudsman in May 2023 found that 82% of social landlords face issues accessing critical reports, while 75% face problems with their existing data storage systems.

The consequences of poor quality and badly organised data can be severe for providers – potentially masking issues around available housing stock, maintenance schedules and even the welfare of tenants.

But with the advent of the Social Housing Act and the reporting requirements of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard, it's never been more important for the sector to ensure that data is accurate, well managed and accessible.

With many landlords dealing with disparate and legacy data systems, the journey to transformation may appear insurmountable, but with new approaches to data management, it's possible to start accessing the reports you need within a matter of weeks.

In this article, we offer five recommendations to get started.

### Step 1.

Assess where you are on the data journey

### Step 2.

Identify your biggest challenges

### Step 3.

Review your data landscape

### Step 4.

Begin to pull your data together

### Step 5.

Begin to report more effectively

## Step 1

# Assess where you are on the data journey

### The data journey



BCN recently commissioned a research report with Dr Simon Williams of Service Insights, to get a better understanding of the data challenges facing social housing providers.

Poor data management was detectable across all housing management functions assessed in the study, with just 38.6% of respondents suggesting that they find it easy to access the data sources they need to perform their roles effectively. Meanwhile, only 45.5% said that they can currently trust the accuracy of their data – both statistics suggesting that many landlords sit somewhere between points 1 and 2 on the data journey.

There are of course, some exceptions, and those housing providers who are more advanced [some of which we'll touch on later in this article], are successfully embedding the importance of data into their organisational cultures. With many conflicting – and pressing – concerns, it is common for the issue to be sidelined, but these providers are prioritising solving their data challenges in the knowledge that their existing systems currently act as a barrier to good service.

## Step 2

# Identify your biggest challenges

In order to get on the pathway to an improved data profile, it's important first to identify your organisation's most urgent, or most significant data challenges in terms of service impact.

This can be any one, or combination of issues – a lack of clarity on the financial cost of maintenance and repairs, the accuracy of operational reporting, poor decision making around stock condition, or even poor tenant welfare outcomes for example.

During our research project we interviewed several social housing providers, uncovering a number of stories which may be familiar:

"Stock condition information – we have a big list on a spreadsheet rather than a housing management system. If we replace a kitchen ad hoc because it's falling apart and we didn't expect it to, that's not [always] updated on the spreadsheet because people have 110 things to do. Then we get to next year's planned schedule and it's still on there as being 25 years old and down for replacement. We send a surveyor to double check it and it turns out a new kitchen is already installed... having inaccurate data generates a whole lot of extra work. It's manual input and human error."



"A tenant had gone into a nursing home, but it was a year before we got to find out that the tenant had gone. Under certain circumstances tenants are allowed to receive housing benefit for up to a year, for instance if they go into hospital. In this instance the tenant had initially gone into hospital and it wasn't flagged to us in any way because the rent was still coming in through the housing benefit route."

"It then came to a stop so the rent began to accrue arrears. We went round and found an overgrown garden and no-one there... we effectively had a tenancy sat there for a year which could have been allocated to someone else."

[Examples taken from [Data Challenges in Social Housing](#), Report produced by Dr Simon Williams in partnership with BCN.]

When you've identified your most significant data-driven service issues, it's possible to map the root data problems.

It could be the disparate nature of your databases; unconsolidated data storage; a lack of processes or systems to maintain or manage your data; or incomplete or inaccurate data quality.

Once you understand the root data causes, it's possible to start to prioritise the elements to be fixed.



## Step 3

# Review your data landscape

Do you recognise this?



Source:  
**Excel**

Topic:  
**Asbestos Register**

Author:  
**Alice from Council**



Source:  
**SQL (on Prem)**

Topic:  
**Rent Data**

Author:  
**Charlie in Finance**



Source:  
**Access**

Topic:  
**Tenant Data**

Author:  
**Bob in IT**



Source:  
**3rd Party Solution**

Topic:  
**Estate Management**

Author:  
**Derek in Estates**

# 62%

of the respondents to our socials housing sector survey said 'multiple data storages' was their number one data challenge

For 62% of the respondents to our social housing sector survey, 'multiple data storages' was the number one data challenge, followed closely by 50% who said it was their databases not syncing.

A single, unified system that consolidates data from various sources and departments (both property and tenant-led), is the ambition of many providers, for whom data management could become more streamlined, more standardised, and provide the 'single version of truth' that can lead to more accurate reporting and a better tenant experience.

The starting point for a unified system is a detailed audit of where your data is currently housed.

List out everywhere that your data is currently held, which systems and platforms it is housed in, and from where it is supplied – legacy records in your housing and repair management systems, your customer communications, socials, finance etc.

## Step 4

# Begin to pull your data together



Believe it or not, once you know the sources of data that you wish to consolidate, it can take only a couple of weeks to start generating accurate reports using data flows within Microsoft Fabric.

Data flows allow the connection of various data sources, such as Excel files, Sharepoint lists, SQL databases or web services within a centralised and secure data lake or lake house. Data flows can then be built into semantic models with defined relationships, ensuring consistency and one version of the truth ready for analysis.

Data flows can be created and then managed via a graphical user interface in Power Apps or Power BI as a service. They can be scheduled to run automatically, or triggered on demand, and be shared and reused across other apps and solutions within the Power Platform as well as Azure services.

### How it works in practice

A large housing association managing 40,000 homes is currently running a data project with BCN, using data flows created within the Microsoft Fabric environment, to enable greater productivity and eliminate waste in its repairs and maintenance service.

Disparate data sources are being brought together in order to provide managers with a toolkit to identify where work orders are at risk of failure within a live setting, and to understand from tracker analysis where route setting and non-core travel are leading to increased costs.

### Why Microsoft Fabric?

Microsoft Fabric has been chosen for its agility over a data warehouse. The IT team is leveraging systems already used by the housing association within the Microsoft ecosystem – quickening the implementation process, reducing the cost overhead, and getting to the provider's critical insights faster. If the housing association chooses to change its core system and move away from a traditional housing management platform, Fabric has the agility to continue to work.

## Step 5

# Begin to report more effectively

Power BI is an analytics platform that can absorb and filter data from hundreds of data sources to provide powerful and meaningful insights.

Using Microsoft Fabric alongside built-in connectors and templates, data flows can be created in Power BI to produce impactful and timely reports and dashboards that empower teams to make more informed decisions.

By bringing disparate data sources together into a single version of truth, it's also possible to identify patterns, needs and preferences, that might otherwise be missed in segmented data platforms – the result; a better understanding of tenants to personalise service and improve satisfaction.

## A story of a data journey - Together Housing

"At this time, no one needs convincing about the power of data, phrases like "data-driven decisions" and "data is the new oil" are so well used they've almost become a cliché. Maybe the social housing sector has been slower than some to wake up to this reality but our eyes are now wide open and we're embracing data to give new insights in order that we can meet customer needs and build sustainable homes and communities."

Stephen Batley, Assistant Director of Business Improvement, Together Housing Group

together  
housing

Together Housing manages over 37,000 homes across the North of England. Over the past five years the organisation has been on a journey to resolve issues and restructure its data governance and management across its people, processes and technology.

By introducing a new data warehouse, consolidating its data sources into Power BI, and rolling out new reports and dashboards, Together Housing has been able to democratise access to data across its teams, access new and impactful data analytics to make more effective decisions, and build stronger links between its frontline and back office services.

A striking example of its achievements is its new capability to predict tenancy failures.

Reletting was costing the organisation around £12 million every year.

By building a model to predict which tenants are most likely to leave in the first 12 months, Together has been able to target these tenants with a range of interventions – from additional tenancy advice, to help and support from its tenancy sustainability, neighbourhood and income teams.

The model has reduced tenancy turnover from a peak of 15% to around 5-6%, saving significant time and money.

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# Get ready to explore what's possible

Good data fuels AI. And AI will deliver a new era of productivity for the housing sector, enabling landlords to automate tasks, enhance processes, and generate recommendations based on data patterns and tenant behaviours.

Are you ready to progress your data journey? Using data flows within Microsoft Fabric, alongside Microsoft's lakehouse architecture to unify data and get to the critical insights that can transform service delivery is a relatively simple way to get started.

**BCN helps social housing providers throughout the UK to make better use of their data and get ready for AI.**

Get in touch to discuss how we can help you.