

Data management in housing – Better analytics, intelligence and access

Steve Coates, CEO, Brainnwave

In February 2019 and for the first time in history, there were more people in the world over the age of 65 than under five.

An ageing population raises the question; how can data and new technologies help housing providers to deal with some of society's most vulnerable people and complex needs? Keeping track of both properties and people is a genuine and growing challenge.

By having access to technology, which can dramatically enhance and support the outputs of those working in this field, it would be a reasonable assumption to think that monitoring geospatial, financial or logistical data and staying on top of pressure points would be far easier now than, say, 10 years ago. But you'd be wrong.

Goodbye, ZX Spectrum...

Many housing providers are still working with technology that is based on system architectures designed in the 1980s. These can come with expensive maintenance contracts and may be regarded as no longer fit for purpose.

And as much as we loved the ZX Spectrum when it first arrived, there came a point when we had to leave it behind and move on.

Through research and exposure to the housing sector, it is apparent where the main pain points lie:

- Complex systems needing expensive licences and costly upgrades;
- Not cloud-based and therefore requiring hefty infrastructure to support them;
- Poor data governance, with multiple users duplicating information in different places;
- Low trust in the data and its source(s);
- Inflexibility, leading to an overwhelming use of spreadsheets.

Housing officers are having to work with time-consuming, resource-draining,

ineffective systems instead of being able to focus on providing help and support to those who need it most.

Better data access

Having recently attended the Housing Technology 2019 conference, it was energising to see the breadth and scope of what businesses dealing with data had to offer. The message that kept coming across was that, "there is value and benefit from giving employees greater access to better data".

Brainnwave was established with this belief at its core. How could we help businesses to reach far beyond their existing parameters by providing them with a single, 'true' source of intelligence? How could technology and data access create significantly improved efficiencies and outputs, leading to more effective, more confident and, ultimately, quicker business decisions?

It is this single source of truth, delivered through our Ossian platform, which has enabled us to unlock opportunities which businesses had previously considered to be out of their reach.

Case study: Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing

Brainnwave was approached by Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH) to help it identify where our service could address the complex challenges it faced. MTVH had three main objectives:

- Keep rents affordable;
- Ensure a high quality of service and housing;
- Seek out opportunities to expand in the face of uncertainty.

As experts in data engineering and applying new technologies, our approach was simple but strategic. We used a combination of the latest software, data and analytics to produce a dynamic, complete, single intelligence platform, which delivered a range of benefits to MTVH, including:

- Accurate rent management;
- Improved efficiency;
- Optimised customer engagement;
- Ability to respond to emerging trends;
- Gaining a competitive edge;
- Building trust.

We kickstarted the process by building an interactive data map to understand the complexity of data through the organisation. This identified existing risks in data process and provided a complete picture of the data available for analysis, and where it sat. We then connected this information to Ossian and created detailed intelligence which allowed MTVH to:

- Expose data to the right people at the right time;
- Enable people in the business to discover new insights;
- Have confidence in their decisions due to the improved reliability of the data.

Making spatial analytics easy

We made spatial analytics easy and incorporated open-source data such as OS Vector maps and demographic statistics to build the layers of information, creating a clear picture of insights such as age, marital/civil status, number of dependents, country of birth, living arrangements and so on. We also connected into local sources of social media and used 'sentiment' algorithms to understand the 'temperature' of the wider environment.

Building these modules of functionality that support strategic decision-making and enabling people to extract insights and intelligence from data delivers a number of real values – on investment, on time, on resources and on business efficiencies.

New insights from data

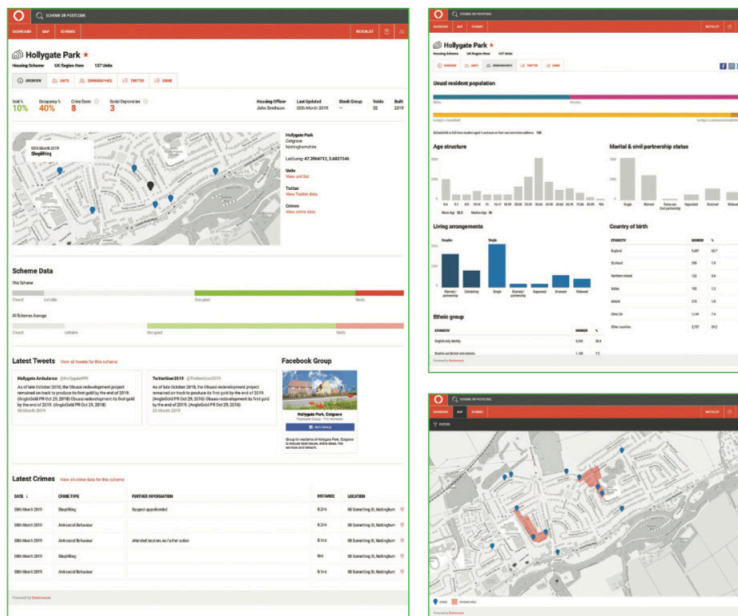
This process is not expensive, particularly when compared with some of the systems currently in place. As a result, MTVH is operating more efficiently than ever before and reaping the benefits of having access to data and insights that it simply didn't have access to before.

Hands up, we're relative newcomers to the housing sector, but we learn fast and we want to make a difference. We recognise that this is a sector that looks after vulnerable people and we will always be mindful of that, ensuring that the technology we deliver has a genuine, positive impact on the lives of those that society can often leave behind.

This isn't rocket science but to those working in the housing industry, the potential that data technology can unlock in terms of business opportunities is of far greater value.

By providing a deep understanding of all the factors that influence the behaviour of tenants, enabling head-office staff and housing officers to address issues before they become problems and delivering an improved all-round customer service experience, well, that's worth going to work for each day.

Steve Coates is the CEO of Brainwave.



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