Build **IT** together

IT Services for
Housing Associations

The housing industry has undergone significant changes in recent years, and technology has played a crucial role in this transition. From managing sensitive data to digital transformation, the IT landscape for housing associations is becoming increasingly complex and hard to manage and support. This eBook will detail the key challenges currently faced by housing associations and discuss how they can be overcome.

Introduction

The housing industry is undergoing rapid digital transformation, with increasing reliance on technology to streamline operations, improve tenant services, and reduce costs. However, managing IT systems and infrastructure can be challenging, especially for smaller housing associations with limited resources and expertise.

For this reason, housing associations are increasingly turning towards outsourcing their IT to a trusted third party or Managed Service Provider (MSP).

By outsourcing IT services, housing associations can gain access to a team of experts with specialised knowledge and experience in managing IT infrastructure and applications. This allows them to focus on their core business while leaving IT management to the experts. In addition, outsourcing IT can help housing associations reduce costs, improve uptime and reliability, and enhance security.

In this eBook, we will explore the benefits of IT outsourcing for housing associations and how it can support their business objectives. We will also discuss the key IT challenges facing housing associations and how outsourcing can help address them. Whether you are a CIO, IT Manager, or a housing association executive, this eBook will provide you with valuable insights and practical guidance on how to leverage IT outsourcing to drive business success.

According to a survey by Housing Technology,

84%

of UK housing associations use cloud-based solutions

State of IT for Housing Associations

The housing industry has undergone significant changes in recent years, and technology has played a crucial role in this transformation. According to a survey by Housing Technology, 84% of UK housing associations use cloud-based solutions, and 90% of these have seen cost savings as a result of this technology adoption. Additionally, the same survey found that 52% of UK housing associations use artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning in their operations.

However, despite these positive indications of modern technology adoption, many housing associations still use legacy IT systems that are outdated and difficult to maintain. Upgrading to modern systems can be expensive and time-consuming without an expert to guide you through, and the rush to support remote working during the pandemic might have shifted the priority away from this over the past few years.

Cybersecurity is also a big concern in the industry, with 71% of UK housing associations reporting that they are concerned about cybersecurity, and 62% of these organisations have experienced a cyber-attack in the past 12 months – potentially heightened due to the rise of hybrid working and BYOD policies. This clearly shows a need for a modern, robust, round-the-clock security solution.

"Housing associations generate a vast amount of data, including tenant information, financial data, and property maintenance records."

IT Challenges for Housing Associations

As an IT Leader in a housing association, you face a unique set of challenges that require your attention and expertise. From managing sensitive data to digital transformation, the IT landscape for housing associations is becoming increasingly complex. Here are some of the challenges you may be facing:

1 **Cybersecurity:** Housing associations are responsible for handling sensitive information such as tenant data and financial information. This makes them a prime target for cyber-attacks. CIOs need to ensure that their IT systems are secure, and they have appropriate cybersecurity measures in place to protect their data. With the rising threat of cybercrime, keeping your systems and data secure is a constant battle.

2 **Legacy systems:** Many housing associations use legacy IT systems that are outdated and difficult to maintain. These systems can be prone to failures, difficult to integrate with modern systems, inefficient and at higher risk of attack. However, internal IT teams may not have the time or skillsets to update these.

3 **Data management:** Housing associations generate a vast amount of data, including tenant information, financial data, and property maintenance records. Managing this data can be a challenge, so IT Leaders need to ensure that they have robust data management processes in place to maintain the accuracy and integrity of their data. With data breaches becoming increasingly common, it's more important than ever to ensure that your data is protected and managed properly. Furthermore, data is an extremely powerful asset that can be used to make intelligent decisions with the proper systems in place, so organisations should be ensuring that they capture and make use of this.

4 **Remote working:** The rush to support remote and hybrid working has presented IT challenges for housing associations. IT Leaders need to ensure they are providing seamless access to systems and applications from multiple devices and locations, however they must balance the need for flexibility with the need for security and ensure that their systems are robust enough to handle remote working.

71%
of UK housing associations

reporting that they are concerned about cybersecurity,

and 62%
of these organisations

have experienced a cyber-attack in the past 12 months

5 Compliance: Housing associations need to comply with various regulations, including data protection laws and accessibility regulations. IT systems need to be designed to comply with these regulations, and housing associations need to ensure that their IT systems are audited and regularly reviewed to maintain compliance. CIOs need to be aware of changes to regulations and ensure that their systems are always compliant.

6 Digital transformation: Housing associations are increasingly relying on digital technology to improve their operations, reduce costs, and provide better services to their tenants. CIOs need to lead the digital transformation process and ensure that their IT systems are aligned with the overall business strategy. This requires a deep understanding of both technology and the business objectives.

7 Data analytics: Housing associations generate a large amount of data, which can be used to improve decision-making and optimise operations. IT Leaders need to ensure that their IT systems are capable of capturing and analysing data effectively and provide meaningful insights to stakeholders. This requires a combination of technical expertise and business acumen.

8 Cloud computing: Many housing associations are moving their IT systems to the cloud to reduce costs and improve flexibility. CIOs need to ensure that their IT systems are securely integrated with cloud-based platforms and that data is protected when stored on cloud-based servers. This requires a careful balance between the benefits of the cloud and the need for security.

9 Collaboration: Housing associations often work in partnership with other organisations to deliver services to their tenants. CIOs need to ensure that their IT systems are capable of collaborating with external systems and that data is securely shared between them.

10 Talent management: Housing associations need to attract and retain IT talent to manage their complex IT systems, which can be difficult with the current tech skills shortage. Leaders need to ensure that their teams have access to regular training, technical expertise and support.

Benefits of IT Outsourcing for Housing Associations

Housing associations are increasingly outsourcing IT to Managed Service Providers (MSPs) due to the benefits it can give them, which can include:

1 **Cost Savings:** MSPs can save organisations money because they are generally more cost-effective than upskilling and hiring an internal IT team. Hiring an IT professional is expensive, and it can take a significant amount of time and resources to fully train and onboard them. MSPs, on the other hand, already have the expertise and experience needed to manage IT operations effectively.

You will also have a pre-agreed contract with your selected partner, providing predictable, flat-rate pricing with no unexpected IT expenses. This can help housing associations free up their budget to invest in other areas of their business. Furthermore, by leveraging cloud and automation technologies, MSPs can also increase efficiency and productivity.

2 **Access to Expertise:** Because MSPs specialise in IT services, they have a deep understanding of the latest technologies, industry best practices governing IT, and the latest trends that are shaping the industry. This high level of expertise allows MSPs to offer clients access to a multidisciplinary team of experts, including specialists in cybersecurity, cloud computing, network architecture, application development, and more. These experts work together to provide customised, strategic IT solutions that are tailored to the unique needs of the housing associations.

By leveraging MSPs' expertise, housing associations can stay ahead of the curve when it comes to technology, ensuring that they remain competitive in an ever-changing digital landscape.

"**MSPs can help identify cost-cutting opportunities, such as optimising cloud resources or consolidating hardware, allowing Housing Associations to maximise their IT investments.**"

3 Improved Uptime and Reliability: MSPs can help housing associations increase uptime and reliability by providing proactive monitoring and maintenance services. They can set up monitoring tools that constantly check the status of hardware and software, including network devices, servers, applications, and databases. This allows them to detect and resolve issues before they become bigger problems that could cause downtime or potential data loss.

Additionally, MSPs can ensure that there are back-up systems, disaster recovery plans and continuity procedures in place in case of any unexpected issues. They can also provide regular maintenance and updates, ensuring that systems are always up to date, secure and functioning optimally. With their expertise and experience, MSPs can ensure that housing associations maintain a high level of uptime and increased reliability, which is especially critical when organisations rely heavily on technology to carry out day-to-day business operations.

4 Predictable IT Costs: MSPs can help housing associations have predictable IT costs through a managed services agreement that includes service level agreements (SLAs) and fixed fees. These agreements mean that housing associations know exactly what their IT costs will be over time, which allows them to plan and budget more effectively.

The MSP can set up an IT infrastructure, running it smoothly and securely, with regular maintenance and updates included. This also ensures that the latest security measures are put in place, protecting the company from data breaches, cyber-attacks, and data loss.

Additionally, MSPs can help identify cost-cutting opportunities, such as optimising cloud resources or consolidating hardware, allowing housing associations to maximise their IT investments. By providing reliable, ongoing IT support at a predictable cost, MSPs give housing associations the peace of mind and stability they need to focus on other critical aspects of their business.

5 **Improved Security:** MSPs provide a variety of services that can help protect against cyber threats, such as monitoring networks for suspicious activity and providing access to the latest security tools and techniques. They can also provide training to staff on how to recognise potential threats and respond appropriately. Additionally, MSPs can help organisations develop policies and procedures to ensure that all systems are up-to-date with the latest security patches and updates. By utilising the services of an MSP, housing associations can ensure their systems are secure and protected from potential cyber-attacks.

By outsourcing IT to an MSP, housing associations can focus on their core competencies, while also leveraging the expertise and experience of the MSP to enhance their IT operations. With this approach, organisations can save resources, reduce costs, reduce risk, and improve their overall IT performance, ultimately leading to better outcomes for their customers, employees, and stakeholders.

"By outsourcing IT to an MSP, housing associations can focus on their core competencies, while also leveraging the expertise and experience of the MSP to enhance their IT operations."

Use Cases

One example of how a housing association might outsource its IT to an MSP is by making use of cloud computing services. By partnering with an MSP, the housing association can move their data to the cloud and access it anytime, anywhere. This ensures that employees are able to work remotely while still having access to the documents they need. Cloud computing also allows for faster deployment of new applications and services, improved collaboration among staff members, better scalability, and increased security.

Another example is through managed hosting services. With managed hosting services provided by an MSP, a housing association can have a dedicated team monitoring its servers around the clock and providing maintenance when necessary. This eliminates the need for additional staffing expenses associated with managing a server in-house, allowing the housing association to allocate more resources towards productive activities instead of IT support tasks.

By outsourcing their IT requirements to an experienced MSP, housing associations can benefit from cost savings as well as gain access to advanced technology that would otherwise not be available in-house.

Key Considerations When Choosing a Partner

1 **Expertise and Experience:** When evaluating potential IT outsourcers, housing associations should look for providers with experience working with similar organisations and industry-specific knowledge. The provider should have a deep understanding of the housing association's IT needs and challenges and be able to offer tailored solutions to address them.

2 **Scalability:** Housing associations should consider the provider's ability to scale its services as the organisation grows or its IT needs change. The provider should have the resources and expertise to handle a growing user base, increased data storage requirements, and other changes that may occur over time.

3 **Service Level Agreements (SLAs):** The SLAs offered by the IT outsourcer should align with the housing association's needs and expectations. Housing associations should look for providers that offer clear SLAs with specific performance metrics, such as uptime guarantees, response times, and resolution times.

4 **Security and Compliance:** The IT outsourcer should have strong security measures in place to protect the housing association's data and systems. The provider should be able to demonstrate compliance with relevant regulations and standards, such as GDPR.

5 **Communication and Collaboration:** Effective communication and collaboration between the housing association and the IT outsourcer are essential for a successful partnership. Housing associations should look for providers with a proactive approach to communication, such as regular status updates, performance reports, and strategic planning sessions.

70% of organisations in the UK

experienced cost savings after outsourcing their IT services

62% of UK businesses saw an improvement

in service quality after outsourcing IT services – Deloitte Global Outsourcing Survey

6 **Pricing and Contract Terms:** Housing associations should consider the provider's pricing model and contract terms, ensuring that they align with their budget and IT needs. The provider should be transparent about pricing and contract terms, and there should be no hidden fees or unexpected costs.

7 **Cultural Fit:** One often overlooked factor in choosing an IT outsourcer is cultural fit. The culture of the outsourcer should align with that of the housing association to ensure a successful partnership. This is particularly important when it comes to communication and collaboration.

8 **Collaboration:** The outsourcer should be able to work collaboratively with the housing association's team and be open to feedback and suggestions. They should be able to adapt to the housing association's workflows and processes and work in tandem with the in-house team.

Choosing the right IT outsourcer is a critical decision for any organisation, as it can have a significant impact on their operations, security, and bottom line. By considering these key factors, housing associations can select an IT outsourcer that offers the expertise, scalability, security, and communication they need to succeed in today's technology-driven landscape.

"By leveraging the expertise of an experienced MSP with specialist knowledge in this field, housing associations are able make informed decisions about how best to utilise technology within their organisation"

Conclusion

Outsourcing IT services to a Managed Service Provider (MSP) is an effective way for housing associations to benefit from cost savings, access expert knowledge and experience, improved uptime and reliability, predictable costs, and increased security. By carefully evaluating potential MSPs on their expertise and experience, scalability options, service level agreements (SLAs), security compliance measures as well as cultural fit; housing associations can find the right partner that meets all their needs at a competitive price. With the right partner in place to manage their technology operations effectively and efficiently, organisations can focus more of their resources towards delivering value to tenants through innovative solutions.

The key takeaway here is that by leveraging the expertise of an experienced MSP with specialist knowledge in this field; housing associations are able make informed decisions about how best to utilise technology within their organisation – ultimately leading them closer towards success.

> Get in touch

Make IT work

More Information

w oneadvanced.com
t 0330 343 4000
e hello@oneadvanced.com

The Mailbox, 101 Wharfside Street, Birmingham, B1 1RF

Advanced Computer Software Group Limited is a company registered in England and Wales under company number 05965280, whose registered office is The Mailbox, 101 Wharfside Street, Birmingham, B1 1RF.
A full list of its trading subsidiaries is available at www.oneadvanced.com/legal-pr

Advanced

IT Powered Possibility