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How to successfully Implement a Housing Management System

In this short article we will highlight 9 key points that decision makers should be aware of for a successful housing management system implementation. As anyone who works in the social housing sector is aware, every organisation has unique practices and it's vital that your chosen system works for you and not against you.

1) Integration capabilities

Is the system fully developed by the vendor? It's quite common to find solutions that look like one seamless package, but underneath it's a mix of different applications.

So, what does this mean for the registered provider? It means that data integration between the systems may not flow as easy or as transparently as it first appears. Information and data integrity can therefore become compromised, with users having to look in multiple areas to get the true picture.

Unfortunately, this kind of compromise is accepted by many organisations when it doesn't have to be the case. A truly integrated system will be able to provide your team with live information as soon as data is processed. For example, when a new repair/works order is processed, the information is reflected against the property, tenant and committed expenditure reports instantly.

Another consideration is third party applications and data integration. Many organisations adopt specialist software to meet the specific needs of individual departments. So, to ensure data integrity and provide seamless links between systems, it is essential that the core housing management system includes a library of Application Programming Interface (API) tools.

A system that has been entirely developed by a single vendor would be flexible enough to achieve most integration requirements. For example, one of OmniLedger's customers uses an external contractor to manage repairs, whereby the PyramidG2 Housing Management system pushes information to the supplier at the point that the order is raised. Bi-directional links then seamlessly allow PyramidG2 to communicate with the contractor's system automatically, which allows updates and completion details to be processed immediately.

2) Financial Value

The bottom-line figure to implement a new system is a major factor in the buying decision. However, it is also important to identify the hidden costs and savings to determine overall value, as well as your ROI.

For example, how easy is it to generate reports in a variety of different formats? Some Housing Management Systems have little or no standard reports, and the vendor will charge for writing/developing reports. A system that doesn't have comprehensive reporting or data extraction tools, could mean that there are significant hidden development costs, e.g. for creating new reports or providing the appropriate data extraction tools for meeting legislative and audit requirements.

3) Achieving Your Objectives

When considering a new solution, you should identify a list of high-level objectives you wish to achieve. These can range from monetary and time savings, staff efficiency, data accuracy, automation and meeting regulatory requirements.

Objectives will vary with every organisation, but from a system perspective it always boils down to data integrity and availability. Ask yourself if the system allows you to record the information you need, can the data be extracted in a meaningful way, reported on, or pushed into applications such as PowerBI to create visualisations?

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Identifying objectives is a comprehensive topic and annual performance audits will help you address this. There are numerous external consultants experienced in social housing that can help, but this can be an expensive option.

4) Does your supplier understand the sector?

You're not just buying a new system; you need to develop a long-term partnership with the vendor. Therefore, it is vital that your vendor has an extensive knowledge of the sector, the legislation, audit requirements and an established customer base. This way you are safe in the knowledge that they understand your business process, the day-to-day challenges and comfort in the knowledge that the system will remain fit for purpose in the long-term.

The vendor should have an established user group to allow their customers to voice their needs/requirements, receive development updates from the vendor and to be able to influence the vendor's development roadmap. This indicates there is forethought to the housing management system and that your investment is futureproofed.

5) Users buy in

It is imperative that frontline users buy into the solution from day one and have a positive approach in adopting a new system. If there is discontent and frustration from the outset, this will lead to challenges later down the line. For example, staff retaining old working habits instead of adopting the system, will mean that data will become fragmented and spread across disparate system.

Start by listening to all your staff and examine their needs and requirements, outlining the current challenges they face to achieve their tasks. Do not be hesitant about running through important scenarios that you have identified during a product demonstration.

If the system achieves the tasks you've outlined in the least number of steps in an easy-to-understand framework then it's an indication that the system has good User Experience Design, (UXD), which is key to your team adopting any new solutions in a positive manner.

Users will primarily buy into a system that looks and feels easy to use, has the functionality they need and will make their lives easier.

Regardless of solution, you will only get out what you put in, and its frontline staff who will be responsible for collecting and processing most of it.

Managers are also key to motivating positive change. Those who are involved with the procurement process can create a positive frame of mind by proactively informing their team about the benefits and savings any new solution would make. The new solution is there to make their lives easier.

6) Ongoing Support

What happens if something goes wrong? When deciding to work with a Housing Management System provider, it is essential that they have the right support systems in place. It's all great when things are working fine, but what matters is how the provider handles the situation when things do go wrong. You need a vendor that provides a service level agreement where they measure their resolution times, not their response time. It's no good if you can log a problem, which is acknowledged immediately, but not resolved for days or weeks.

Identify what the Service Level Agreement (SLA) is and ask for references from existing clients, as well as their own performance reports. If such reports aren't available, then alarm bells should be ringing.

7) Network Infrastructure considerations

Network infrastructure and user distribution are key factors in deploying a system in a cost effective and efficient way. You may have dispersed offices, mobile operatives, hybrid workers, and any



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new system will need to take this into account, along with complying with your IT policies and procedures.

With on premise systems, the solution will be contained within your own network and easily controlled, but your team will be responsible for all the maintenance associated with it. What training and skill sets will they require to do this?

With software as a service (SaaS), all the networking requirements will be taken care of for you, it is essentially a completely managed service.

Typically, the system will be available 24/7/365, but ask the vendor for uptime statistics and identify where the datacentre is located to ensure it complies with your data security and processing requirements. In addition, identify how subscription fees are levied and if there are any inflationary uplifts in subsequent years, to avoid unnecessary budgetary surprises in the future.

8) Training system

Ensure that you have a training environment available and that it is a copy of your live system. This will enable colleagues to explore the system, expand their knowledge and can be used to train new starters, without the risk of amending or compromising your live system.

9) Training resources

Examine your initial and ongoing training requirements, and if possible, identify one or two system champions, to help and support your users. Most vendors will have a training team, so let them know in advance so that you can secure the training resources you require. For example, if your organisation is recruiting, you will want any new starters up and running as soon as possible. Inform your vendor during the recruitment process so they can accommodate your training requirements.

Ask what self-service options are available. Vendors should provide an online training and support portal. Whilst some are just a repository of training manuals or videos, some of the more advanced ones include interactive courses that allow new starters to learn the system in a structured manner, without the need to purchase additional training.

If you'd like to learn more on how to make your housing management system implementation successful then please contact us at sales@omniledger.co.uk.

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