

# **Making the Net work for residents and their landlords**



# **Making the Net work for residents and their landlords**

**A guide to using information and communication  
technologies in housing associations**

**David Wilcox with David Greenop and Drew Mackie**

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# Introduction and guided tour

This publication summarises a longer online report and guide that aims to provide housing associations and their residents with a 'thinking kit' to help them plan how to introduce the Internet and other new technologies to their work and homes. It concentrates on use of the Net in three main areas, which can be seen as levels of provision:

- 1 Delivery of services online: reporting repairs, negotiating exchanges, general assistance.
- 2 Support for resident-related activities online: integrating with resident participation programmes.
- 3 Enabling residents to use the Net to pursue their learning, work or personal interests.

At present a few housing associations are offering level 1, and very few any more than that. This report investigates why that might be, and whether it is realistic to expect associations to do much more on their own.

## Who the guide is for

We hope that the report and guide will be useful to:

- housing association staff and board members trying to understand where the Net may be relevant and planning developments
- residents who want to press their landlords for services or support in this field, or develop their own projects
- policy makers and funders trying to promote and support use of the Net in social housing.

## **The online guide**

The full version online of the guide offers the following material, which is summarised in this printed version. It is available at <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/housing>.

## **The story**

Most housing associations haven't reached the first of the three 'levels' of online presence. But just saying 'try harder' won't work. There may be few benefits in going it alone and partnerships will probably be necessary to achieve more.

## **Why bother with the Internet?**

Interviews, workshops and a review of other research revealed many barriers to progress, and showed that most are human and organisational rather than technical. We also identified the benefits.

## **Future trends**

Some insights into the way people are likely to be using technology in five to ten years, including the emergence of 'smart homes', 'media rich homes' and 'dumb homes'.

## **Key ideas**

A summary of some of the key ideas that inform the research and guide.

## **What's likely to work where?**

We developed a model for thinking about where technology is most likely to be adopted based on two dimensions: how responsive a landlord is to residents' interests, and how weak or strong are community ties.

## **Project ideas**

A long list of possible projects for local initiatives, ranging from cables and equipment to websites, email newsletters, online forums and centres providing access and training.

## **A workshop game**

Project cards and planning sheets that enable housing associations and residents to 'play through' plans for their systems.

## **Checklists and other tools**

More help in deciding what to do when, with links to other resources.

## **Our brief and approach**

Our project brief, developed with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, was to 'explore how social landlords can best use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to deliver services to residents, and to ensure that residents can benefit from the opportunities of the online world'.

We reviewed other research, established an online forum of practitioners, developed and ran workshop 'games', and worked directly with several projects. We ran a telephone conference with residents and Quest Trust.

As we report later, we found that relatively few housing associations are engaged in significant ICT projects. Nor were associations – or residents – that we met particularly keen to start developing substantial projects.

This could be seen as a problem – or an opportunity to think through the complex issues involved. All too often ICT projects are funding-led and technology-driven, so a chance to reflect on 'why do it – what are the benefits' is welcome. For that reason our emphasis is on a thinking kit rather than a toolkit.

In addition, during the project we heard that the Housing Corporation was planning toolkit development as a second stage of its Remote Control research, led by Martyn Pearl. We hope that our work will contribute to that kit, where there will be more scope for testing and development.

### **Acknowledgements**

The main research and writing was carried out by David Wilcox. Drew Mackie designed our game and ran workshops; David Greenop provided the futures section; David Brake undertook additional research. Our US colleague Terry Grunwald provided insights and advice on the general applications of community technology, and original work on the framework section. Martyn Pearl was generous in contributing material from his Remote Control research for the Housing Corporation. All provided insights and helped develop our conclusions. We benefited substantially from an advisory group and wider online forum of practitioners.

Particular thanks to Peter Marcus and Judi Watkinson of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust for their support throughout, and for helping to maintain a balance between the techno enthusiasts and techno sceptics.

# 1 What's the story?

This report and guide offers a 'health warning' to those promoting the use of the Internet in social housing – and aims to provide help for those planning new developments.

- Few housing associations and residents see technology as a priority.
- Attempts to introduce new technology are likely to fail unless users are involved in designing systems.
- New technologies should not at this stage replace existing services.
- We offer some prototype tools to help involve users and plan effective services, and suggest 'communities of practice' for those developing projects to share experience.

There is pressure from government and commerce for people to use the Net for public services, entertainment, learning, shopping and a host of other activities. Enthusiasts argue that the Net is also an essential tool for non-profit organisations and community activists – as important as the phone, and rapidly replacing fax. Those who don't have access to the Net could be at a severe disadvantage.

## **Housing associations are well placed – in theory**

Housing associations are taking over from councils as the main providers of homes for people on low incomes or with special needs. They are well placed to help those most likely to lose out. They could provide connections into homes, offer housing services online and provide training and support.

They could help to ensure that children in poorer families have Net access; that community centres become online learning centres; that residents can more easily work from home; and that older people, single mothers, refugees and others who may be isolated can find useful information and build new relationships.

Housing associations could, in theory, be in the lead in helping to bridge what is known as the 'digital divide' – the gap between those who are using technology to improve their lives and their communities and those who lack the money, skills or confidence to do so.

However, few housing associations are doing anything significant in this field. A few pioneers like London and Quadrant, Swan and Peabody are showing what is possible, but most do not see it as a priority. Where they are doing something, it is generally limited to putting their existing services online: repairs, home exchanges, basic information. Most are thinking about their own housing operations – but not about the wider needs of their residents. They are doing less than local government and other non-profit organisations to adopt new technologies.

And while there are some outstanding examples of residents' groups – like Redbricks in Manchester – creating their own estate-wide systems, this isn't realistic for most. Individuals and families will have to make their own arrangements, and may find this more difficult or costly than owner-occupiers. Where residents do seek extra space to use a computer out of the busy living room, for learning or work, regulations about space standards or working from home may stand in the way.

The major government-backed project in the field planned to use digital TV to provide people with home access. While this can deliver high quality services – and in some projects enable residents to develop their own content – it depends on wider take-up of digital TV. This does part of the job of a computer connected to the Net, but not all. The main initiative is currently stalled because the company developing the programme, DKTV, ran into financial problems. They couldn't interest enough housing associations in their service.

Many residents that we talked to were cautious about online initiatives. Apart from people's difficulties in using computers and the Net, and the costs, many residents were sceptical about the benefits for them and concerned that new online services will lead to cuts in face-to-face and telephone services.

## **'Try harder' won't work**

In this situation toolkits and calls to 'try harder' won't work. There are strong arguments for making sure housing association residents don't lose out in the 'networked society'. There are major benefits in being connected – and many barriers of cost, complexity and attitudes which need to be tackled. But in housing – and many other areas – there is a growing sense that we aren't using the right maps or even pointing in the right direction to achieve those benefits.

This report and guide suggests:

- Current plans usually focus on putting housing services online. This will be necessary, but won't be a compelling reason for residents to go online. Use may be limited in the short term, and so should not substitute for other provision.
- New communication systems are most likely to work if the people using them are involved in designing them. The focus should be on making sure the system meets people's real needs, and that it is designed for simplicity of use.
- Overall what is needed is better information and communication using a range of methods, and a more 'resident-friendly' approach to developing systems.
- Attempts to introduce new technology are likely to raise a host of issues, including existing service provision and communication systems, resident participation, organisational cultures and administrative systems. Unless these are addressed new systems are unlikely to work.
- Projects to provide residents and groups with access, learning and work opportunities may be best developed in partnership with other interests – as is the case with many non-tech community development and regeneration initiatives.

In the report we offer some insights into future technology developments, including scenarios for 'smart homes', 'dumb homes' and 'media rich homes'. Technology trends should not dictate policy – but anyone planning a project should look at the trends toward personal, mobile use of technology. We are used to thinking of the desk at home or in the office, or the TV, as the point of access to the Internet. In future much access may be on our person.

The biggest problem we found is that very few people in the field have the background, training or peer support to understand these issues. It simply hasn't been their business.

We suggest that the first step for national organisations in the field should be to establish networks to increase understanding, develop models for thinking and action, and share the lessons learned. These 'communities of practice' could use a mixture of communication methods, but should certainly be online, with the necessary support for that. We think that networks for both residents and housing associations will be needed.

The networks will need a well-organised knowledge base that draws on experience outside the housing field. We have organised the guide into sections, online and in print, so that it might make a contribution to this.

# 2 Why bother with the Internet?

The Government has set targets for all public services to be available online within five years, and has committed about £300 million pounds of capital and revenue to establishing or rebranding 6,000 UK online centres – places where people can learn about how to use computers and the Internet. This is in addition to the billions invested in public services and commercial development – e-government and e-commerce. But will it really matter if residents are not using the Internet, and housing associations lag behind other organisations?

- Online facilities could be important in delivering services, improving resident participation, supporting community development and offering personal learning opportunities to residents.
- Possible benefits have to be set against costs, difficulties in setting up systems and questions of how far housing associations should be in the technology business.
- The challenge is to find where residents and landlord agendas overlap – and ensure that residents are not disadvantaged through restrictions on Internet use or withdrawal of other services.

We looked at the issue of ‘why’ from two perspectives with Martyn Pearl, who has conducted research in the field, most recently for the Housing Corporation’s Remote Control project. We looked at what is happening generally in civic and community use of the Internet, and we built on Martyn’s research through workshops with residents and housing association staff. Fuller reports are available on our website.

## **Civic and community technology**

David Wilcox and Martyn Pearl’s research into community and civic technology has been published in the *Journal of the Communications Network*, which serves the telecommunications industry.

From our research we suggest that this non-profit use of the Internet is important to government because of its desire to improve access to

services and cut costs; enhance democracy through online voting and participation; improve the effectiveness of community and voluntary sector organisations; and generally increase skill levels so that our workforce can compete internationally. Government, as part of its social inclusion agenda, also wants to avoid a 'digital divide' whereby some people, through lack of access, skills or confidence, are unable to enjoy the benefits of online facilities.

We also suggest that non-profit use of the Internet – with family and friends, for hobbies or community activity – may be important commercially because it reflects the diversity of people's lives. Technology and content companies will be better able to tailor their products to people's changing interests and lifestyles if they have a better understanding of use of the Internet beyond entertainment and the office.

But what are the personal benefits? Kevin Harris, Information Manager at the government-funded Community Development Foundation (CDF), suggests that when people use ICTs (information and communication technologies) they:

- acquire and develop technical, communication, learning, social and other skills
- learn formally and informally, together or alone, by design and through serendipity
- develop confidence and self-esteem
- pursue leisure interests and opportunities
- publish and broadcast their opinions and ideas.

Community and civic use of the Internet is being fostered by a wide range of programmes and organisations. As well as the UK online centres mentioned above, there are voluntary community networks providing local content online, training and support, community media

centres and government-backed Wired Up Communities, as well as thousands of online communities hosted by BBC Online, independent media companies or newspapers, or developed by enthusiasts using free or low-cost systems.

## **Residents' and landlords' use of the Internet**

From the above we can argue that ICTs are important on many fronts ranging from personal opportunities to community building. We suggest that housing association use of ICTs could develop at three levels:

- 1 Delivery of services online: reporting repairs, negotiating exchanges, general assistance.
- 2 Support for resident-related activities online: integrating with resident participation programmes.
- 3 Enabling tenants to use the Net to pursue their learning, work or personal interests.

As we report elsewhere, a limited number of housing associations are undertaking level 1. Even fewer are attempting 2 or 3.

Two research projects undertaken for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggest that residents may be disadvantaged in various ways because of the low priority given to home-based communication systems. On the one hand residents may lose out because of restrictions if they do want to use the Internet; on the other hand they may find traditional services being withdrawn and suffer if they are not online.

Tim Dwelly (2002) highlights the problems that residents are likely to have in making full use of the Internet for learning or working from home. He identified that the overall take-up of Internet use – now in over 40 per cent of homes – has enabled one in four of the workforce to carry out some of their work from home. However, allocation policies and tenancy agreements usually mean that tenants have no spare room for themselves or their children to use a PC quietly, and are discouraged or

forbidden to run a business from home. From a survey of housing associations and housing policy and practice he concluded:

- Housing association and local authority allocation policies generally take no account of a household's need to work or study from home.
- Social tenants are rarely allocated a home with a spare room.
- Most social landlords' tenancy agreements discourage or forbid use of the home for business.
- A survey of 25 housing associations found that few had ever granted tenants permission to work from home. However, one in 20 council tenants and one in 14 working housing association tenants are already mainly working at home.

Nicholas Pleace, of the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York, has carried out research with Deborah Quilgars into the early implementation of electronic service delivery by social landlords, social services and charities (Pleace and Quilgars, 2002). He says:

The challenges are around ensuring accessibility and preserving choice. Every effort needs to be made to ensure that electronic service delivery is accessible to people who would find it difficult to use a website via a PC. For those who cannot, or do not wish to, use electronic service delivery, an ongoing effort to provide alternative routes to services that provide support and assistance, rather than expecting individuals to 'self-serve' using interactive services, is required. Without this, there will be a risk that electronic service delivery increases marginalisation and exclusion for some elements within the population.

(Cited in Wilcox and Pearl, 2002, p. 52)

Nicholas identifies costs to users and organisations as barriers to developing online service – plus the nature of the services: 'Adaptation of public services is costly and complex. It is much more difficult to automate social housing management than sell books over the Internet.'

## Why isn't much happening?

One possible conclusion from the above is that housing associations should 'try harder' and take the lead in helping get their tenants connected. However, this may be simplistic.

On the one hand, blundering into new technology without a clear strategy and planning for change could produce more problems and expense than it saves in benefits. Training and support to help landlords and tenants avoid this will be needed. In order to reap the benefits of the Net, housing associations will need to address some or all of:

- working closely with residents
- becoming less secretive and generally changing attitudes
- training staff and boards
- recruiting specialists
- reorganising information and communication systems.

On the other hand, it may be that housing associations and residents are not enthusiastic about the technology because it doesn't very evidently offer major benefits in their roles as landlords and tenants. It may offer benefits to organisations internally – and may offer benefits to residents with particular interests, or at particular times of life. However, introducing the technology is likely to be costly in time and money and may lead to other forms of communication being neglected. To bring benefits it must be relevant, integrated and maintained. Landlords and tenants may have other priorities.

## The balance of benefits and barriers

The benefits and barriers identified from workshop discussions and research covered the three areas or levels above: services; tenant-related activities; and personal benefits. They included the following.

### **Potential benefits for residents**

- Services will be more readily available for those online.
- The Net provides groups and individuals with additional access to information and the means of communicating, collaborating and lobbying online. This could be important in partnership working.
- Those who learn to use computers and the Net can find this gives a general boost to confidence. The Net offers both young and old new opportunities for learning.
- Online networks could help build a stronger sense of community.

### **Potential barriers for residents**

- Residents may not understand – or be confident about – the technology and find it difficult to see benefits for themselves or others in their household.
- Development of online services may mean reduction of other services. Solutions may be imposed with little or no consultation.
- Getting connected is likely to be costly if computers are used. Services may be relatively limited if digital TV is used. Computers and the Net simply may not be a priority for residents on low incomes.
- Residents may have given up fixed phones in favour of mobiles, which may mean neither computers nor interactive digital TV can be used (since this requires a return path via the phone).
- Where systems are developed to help tenants' associations and similar groups, the housing association may be unwilling to allow tenants fully to control development and content.

### **Possible benefits for associations**

- Enhanced delivery of services and/or reduced costs in the long term.
- Additional means of consultation and communication as part of tenant participation.
- Computers and the Net can make a contribution to wider objectives of community development and capacity building.

### **The barriers for associations**

- Most senior managers don't understand the technology and so find it difficult to see the possible benefits and to develop technology plans.
- There are concerns about the security and possible misuse of electronic data. In many cases, housing associations haven't developed effective information management systems.
- Introducing technology requires changes in organisational culture. There generally does not appear to be the will to do this.
- Front-line staff do not believe technology can help significantly, and/or are worried that data collected may be used against them.
- There is a perception that the majority of tenants are currently not interested in using new technology.
- The benefits in efficiency or effectiveness are in any case uncertain in the short term, while the additional staffing needed will cost money and require organisational change.

### **Comments from workshops that we ran**

How far is a housing association responsible for more than housing anyway?

Whichever route you go, it is all very difficult. Because technology is changing at such a pace long-term planning becomes difficult.

There is a government agenda, and a gadget maker agenda – but what is the agenda for poorer housing association tenants?

In considering options such as digital TV, it may be that, for example, local authorities develop a service that we could tap into which might be far more cost effective than doing something (smaller scale) ourselves.

How can tenants know what they may want until they have seen it?  
How can housing associations involve tenants in any meaningful way?

If it's free, what's the catch?

Does everyone get access (if not why not)?

Will a housing association give tenants real power to 'own' a system and use it the way that they want to?

An online system might, for example, increase the speed of repairs, but personal contact between housing staff and residents might be lost if as a consequence there were job cuts. On the other hand, some organisations might use the opportunity to free up staff time and increase personal contact with residents.

Will it be safe – particularly for children?

What happens when it doesn't work?

Why aren't you doing something essential with the money?

### **The challenge – developing overlapping agendas**

From the above analysis of potential benefits and barriers, the challenge is to find the common ground for residents and housing associations, and develop a shared agenda.

Our workshop with the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT) showed that both residents and staff were sceptical about 'technology for technology's sake'. The general feeling was that there might be some potential in the use of new technologies, but that benefits would have to be very clear for both residents and JRHT for any developments to be considered.

Residents would need to feel that the technology added to the existing over-the-counter, print or telephone-based services.

The following scenarios emerge from our own and other research:

- Housing associations may generally decide that they are not in the technology and online content business. They develop some online services, but leave it to residents to arrange access, and local authorities and other agencies to develop local content, services and signposting.
- Some housing associations decide to invest substantially in online services, and begin to reduce telephone, face-to-face and print services.
- Residents who want to make substantial use of opportunities provided by the Internet find that they cannot do so because of the costs and difficulty of gaining access, and/or restrictions on use of their home for work.

It may well be that the most realistic route to achieving overall benefits is to aim for partnerships between housing associations and other interests to provide access, equipment, training and support. There is still, of course, the issue of who will take the lead.

We explore in another section where developments are most likely to take place. The main point is that decisions on *what* to do – if anything – should follow discussion on *why* action may be needed. The 'why' will be different for residents and housing associations, and for people at different stages of their life. Residents and housing associations need some common ground on which to explore these issues.

# 3 What developments are likely by 2007?

Futurist David Greenop presented one of our workshops with some insights into the way that personal and home-based communication technologies are likely to develop by 2007. He concluded:

- Social trends of more 'individualistic' lifestyles, flexible working and dispersed social networks will provide the context for new technology.
- Information and communication will be available through a wider range of fixed and mobile devices that can be networked together.
- We can expect to see smart homes, media rich homes and dumb homes, depending upon people's preferences and what they can afford.

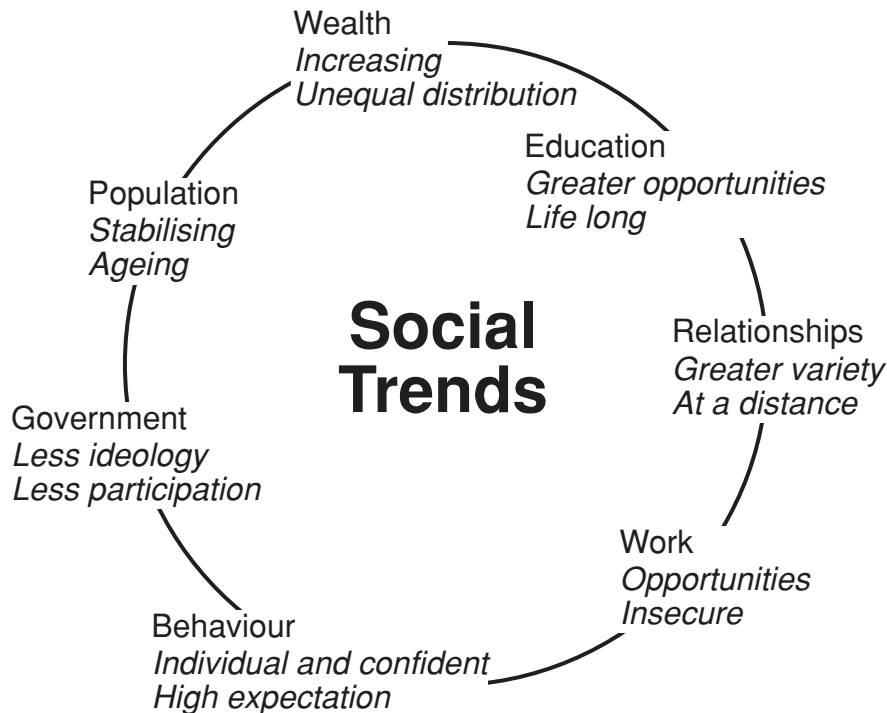
The Internet will change to become many networks usually accessed through portals designed around work, the home and the individual.

He set his vision of personal networks, smart and dumb homes in the context of social as well as technology trends, because these will inform development and marketing by both private and public organisations. His presentation does not represent desirable or undesirable scenarios for the future, but offers a reflection of the way that the technology industry sees things developing. A fuller version is available on our website.

## **Social and technology trends**

On the social front, David envisages a population with a higher proportion of older people, increased wealth but a continuing and perhaps growing gap between rich and poor.

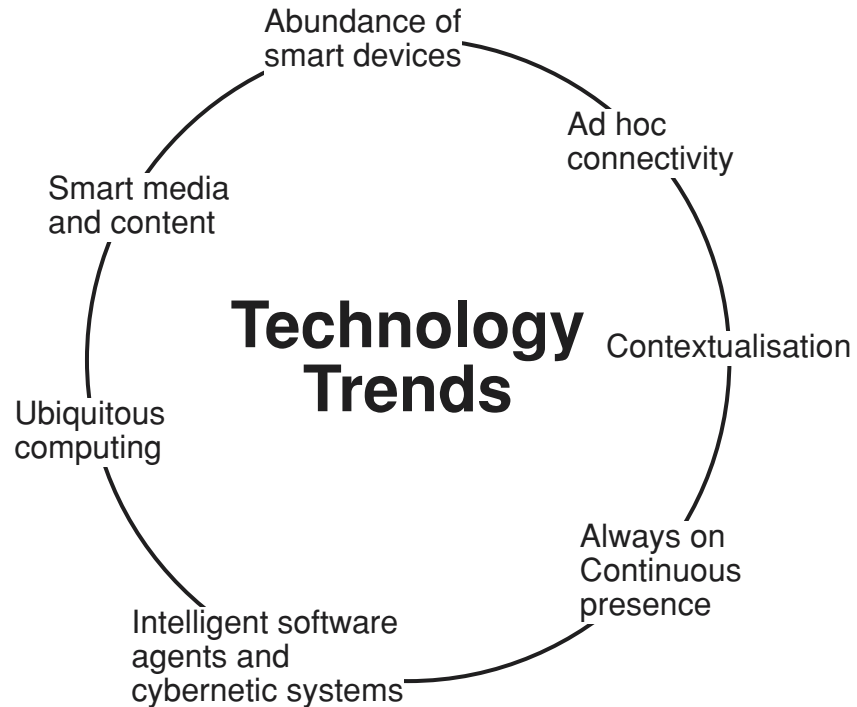
**Figure 1 Society trends**



- People are likely to spend more time in education. They may work for many different employers across a spectrum of different job types, perhaps on a casual or contractual basis. There will be greater opportunity for some – and less security.
- On current trends, people will be more individualistic, confident to assert their personal needs, and less involved in communal activities. There will be less interest in ideologies, and people will increasingly see government as principally a deliverer of public services.
- More people will be in relationships outside marriage, and networks of friends may replace the importance of the family for many. More people live alone. Better transport and communication lead to more dispersed social networks.

Technology trends over the next five years will be mainly a reflection of products already in production or in the labs – so they are not particularly speculative.

Figure 2 Technology trends



- For those that can afford it there will be lots more communication devices, greater and more flexible connectivity, intelligent agents to help us find content, and an increased tailoring of technology to our personal needs and situations.
- In addition to abundant personal and hand-held computers, mobile phones and set-top boxes, smart devices will make their way into a host of personal equipment, from cars to one-off disposables. Many will be embedded into the everyday objects we encounter in the physical world around us.
- There will be localised broadband networks at work, around our homes, at schools and in shops, as well as in public places. There will be less distinction between wired and wireless network infrastructures.
- Content will be available through a range of different devices, presented in different formats, raising complex issues of copyright and control. Online artificial entities will appear as personal helpers,

roaming agents, intelligent knowledge-based systems and domestic robots. 'With the addition of personalities and avatar representations, they can be expected to provide individuals with personal friendship and support,' says David, perhaps not tongue in cheek, and thinking of the singles living alone with dispersed networks of friends.

- Personal communication and information systems could adapt to people's different life situations and different roles, responding to what you are doing, who you are with and where you are. David says: 'Devices housed physically on the individual will create a personal area network or "personal bubble". This bubble could become "aware" of its owner's individuality, its needs and preferences, and negotiate on its owner's behalf with the outside world.'

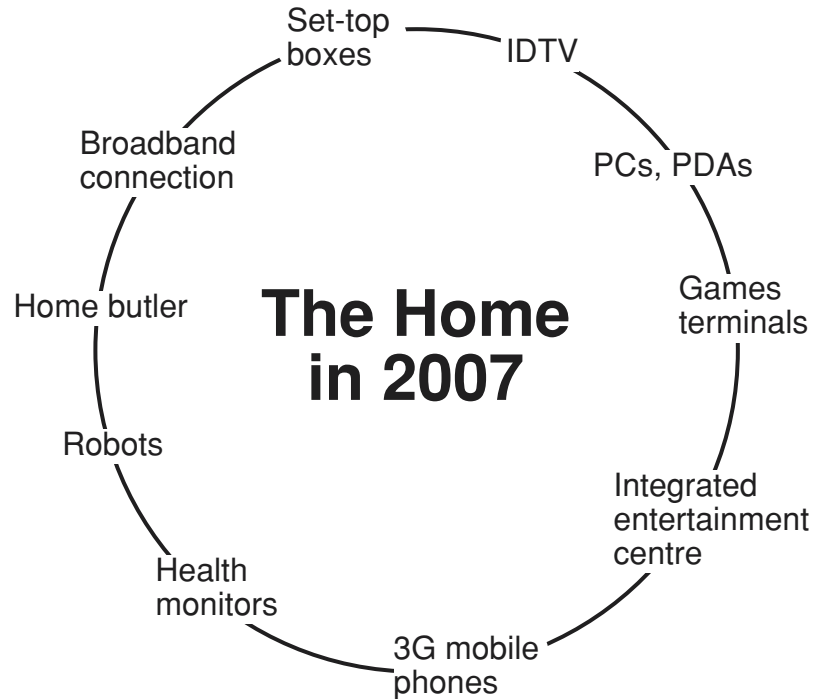
### The home in 2007

David Greenop presented three possible types of home, reflecting different lifestyles, wealth and use of technologies.

Basing our picture of the future on trends outlined earlier, residents will *potentially* have a wide variety of electronic devices that can be networked together, and a wide choice of communication channels into their home. Many homes will have a number of suppliers. Mobile devices will be able to switch between being in the home network or outside it. We will be able to buy content and applications 'boxed' or over the Net. Commercial Internet portals will provide home information and communication gateways that can be integrated into other networks such as a mobile or work network. Most entertainment channels will be interactive irrespective of how they are supplied.

Some people will want – and be able to afford – all the latest kit. Others may invest in technology – but focus on entertainment rather than sophisticated communication. Another group may not be able to afford more than the basics, or may be happy with things much as they are today. David called the different types of homes created 'smart homes', 'media rich homes' and 'dumb homes'.

Figure 3 The home in 2007



The smart home is characterised by:

- high degree of home automation via a localised cable or wireless network and controlled by a home server
- abundance of personal electronic devices networked together to share information and run applications across different areas of the home
- connection to the outside world by an 'always on' broadband communication channel
- variety of media feeds into the home, i.e. terrestrial, satellite and cable
- smart places for activities like family entertainment and teleworking
- acting as a communications and processing hub for residents when they are away from the home.

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## What developments are likely by 2007?

The media rich home is characterised by:

- little or no automation
- integrated home entertainment, computing and communication centre based upon either a set-top box or proprietary entertainment centre
- most applications provided on pay-per-use basis through a home portal
- some electronic devices networked when necessary via this centre using wireless or cables
- many personal devices not networked
- broadband connection to the outside world provided as part of a media package.

The dumb home is characterised by:

- no automation
- assortment of personal electronic devices but not networked together
- communication via telephone and Internet via dial-up modem
- entertainment primarily focused on free-to-air TV channels and rented material.

## People and their needs

David concluded his presentation with three fictionalised personal stories from 2007, developed for a European research project. You can find 'The Caring Butler', 'My Survival Guide', and 'Mother Taken III' on our website.

The context for these stories was strong emphasis on the individual as the focus of networking. Rather than simply connecting to 'the Internet' we will be able to develop and be members of a wide range of different networks. These networks will be designed to make our life easier, keep in touch and provide security and trusted services, and to serve broadly six categories or degrees of interaction. This will be our information and communication ecology.

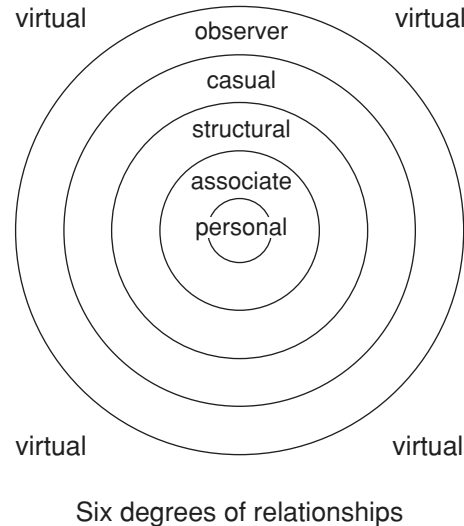
- *personal*: close bonds with family and friends
- *associational*: relationships with people we encounter regularly – friends, neighbours, work colleagues, shopkeepers – where our interaction usually derives from particular roles or circumstances
- *organisational*: interactions with organisations rather than particular individuals
- *casual*: interactions between unconnected persons or groups, often the stuff of lasting acquaintance
- *observational*: interactions at a distance, sometimes between observed and anonymous observer
- *virtual*: interactions with artificial entities. In the future, contacts with virtual agents, artificial guides, home-helpers and medical assistants may produce significant relationships.

The technology is expected to develop in two distinct communication sectors – mobile and fixed networks. By 2007 the cost of third generation mobile handsets will have decreased. Many people will use them for both business and personal use, including accessing media content and the web. The big drawback with mobile will be the cost and availability of broadband radio bandwidth and consequently the mobile will be slower than fixed network access at home. However for the mobile the most popular application will be the new universal messaging services by which people will be able to send and receive text, voice and video images.

**Figure 4 Information and communication ecology**

Human relationships are seen as a key factor in understanding lifestyle technology use:

- *Personal*: close bonds with family and friends
- *Associational*: relationships with people we encounter
- *Organisational*: interactions with organisations rather than particular individuals
- *Casual*: interactions between unconnected persons or groups, often the stuff of lasting acquaintance
- *Observational*: interactions at a distance, sometimes between observed and anonymous observer
- *Virtual*: interactions with artificial entities which are the natural mediator for relations with virtual others



For many people, particularly the young and those away from their home or office, the mobile will be their prime communication device.

David concluded:

The Internet that we know today is changing. Whilst the old World Wide Web will not totally disappear there will appear many more sub-webs that are constructed for specific purposes and people.

Many of these webs or closed networks are to protect commercial information and applications, but many are there to act as gateways or portals through which services can be delivered securely and reliably to customers.

Looking to the future it is highly likely that the personal portal will for some people develop into a network in its own right. This is called a Personal Net and puts people on an equal level with business networks. In the timeframe we are looking at these Personal Nets will be starting to appear.

# 4 Key ideas

In order to help crystallise issues in this guide, we have developed some propositions as points for discussion and reflection among practitioners. There are further links and references on our website.

## ***Communities are networks. Systems should reflect this.***

Communities have always been made up of groups and individuals with many interests, whose relationships depend on family, friendship, work, shopping, leisure, personal passions and much else. New technologies make it easier for people to 'mix and match' these interests and relationships both locally and globally. It follows that if communication systems are to be useful, they should be designed to enable individuals to enhance their networking – where possible with the users.

## ***Technology is not a substitute. You need a mix of media.***

The power of new technologies combined with political commitment to widespread access can lead us to think that everyone should have it and use it – and that the Internet can then become the main channel for communication. But the phone didn't replace face-to-face meeting, nor did television replace radio. Computers haven't led to paperless offices. Different communication tools suit different circumstances, and in addition people prefer different methods.

## ***Technology is not enough to get connected.***

Because you can't use the Net without a device (whether computer, mobile phone, TV or games machine) and a connection (phone line, cable, wireless), and this is all complicated, we can easily think that getting over the device-connection problem is enough. It isn't. We need confidence and skills. We need to have a compelling reason – perhaps content we can't get any other way, a person we can't easily reach otherwise. The experience needs to be good, and costs reasonable in the circumstances.

## ***It all takes time – even with the Net.***

On the one hand, the Internet makes for instant communication and access to enormous amounts of information. On the other hand, it can

take a long time to become a confident and competent user online – and even longer for groups and organisations to make the Net a seamless part of their systems and not just an add-on. Individuals can go on courses, and then experiment (if they have the time). Organisations need to plan how to introduce technology and deal with the changes it will bring.

***One-way service delivery isn't a compelling reason for connection.***

Organisations like housing associations that provide services over the counter, by phone and printed form, can rightly see the Internet as an additional way of reaching people that may be more efficient in some circumstances and will increasingly be expected. However, online services are seldom a substitute for other methods – see above. One-way online information systems are unlikely to save the organisation money in the short term; building in a good response system involves more cost, training and integration of systems. Customer-users are unlikely to see housing services online as a reason to get connected.

***The Net won't make insensitive organisations people-friendly.***

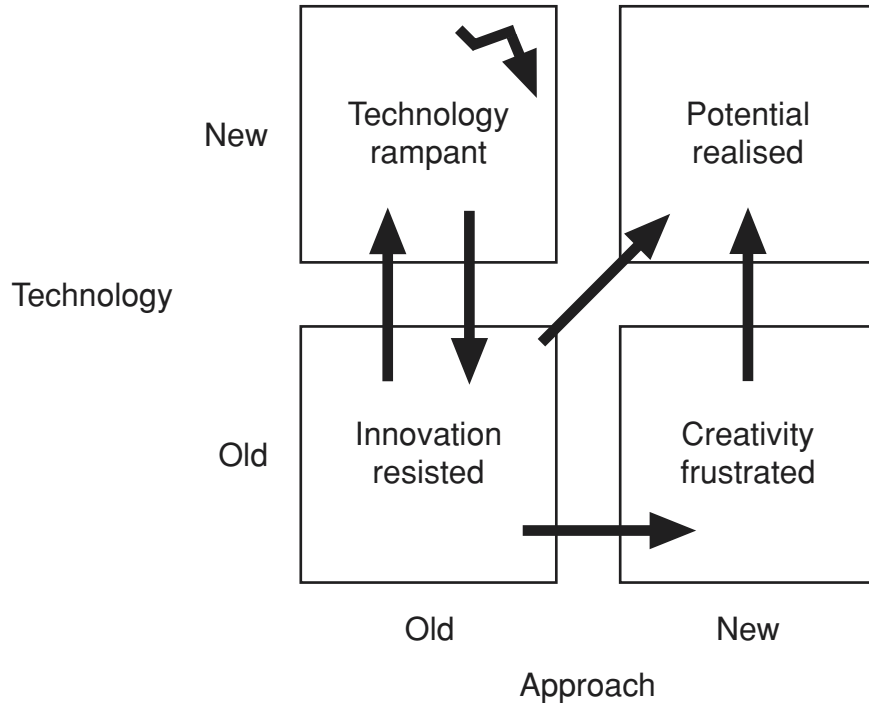
The Net can give individuals and groups more influence through email and a web presence. It can provide organisations with fast new ways to respond to their customers, clients – and citizens. But only if they want to. If an organisation is not 'people-friendly' the Net is unlikely to make it so. Communication systems will be designed to reflect the existing culture of the organisation.

See also the section on what is likely to work where.

***In making things happen, people are usually the problem and the solution.***

When there is a commitment to introduce new technology, it should be matched by a commitment to change attitudes and ways of working. Otherwise technology may bring more problems than it solves. One challenge is, of course, that people need training and support just to get to grips with the technology. It takes time (see above). An additional challenge is that the way the group or organisation works will reflect existing cultures and ways of communicating.

Figure 5 The technology trap



Note: In order to introduce technology successfully to an organisation, change is needed along two dimensions – technical and cultural. Attempts to move from ‘old, old’ ways of working simply by installing technology may lead to technical chaos and staff resistance.

***Different Net tools yield different Net benefits.***

Those who don't use the Net much can easily jump to the wrong conclusions about Internet tools, with the most frequent assumption being that creating a website is the first task. There are five main benefits for non-profit organisations using the Net – finding information; communicating with individuals and networks; collaborating online; achieving visibility; and managing more effectively. These require email, forums, websites and more.

***Tomorrow is likely to be personal and mobile.***

Mobile phone usage is increasing even where the use of fixed lines is dropping – perhaps because the costs of pay-as-you-go mobiles are easier to control. The next generation of mobile phones will give enhanced email, web and text messages, together with video.

As with other tools, mobiles are just part of the communications mix – but it may be that we should think about personal, mobile networks as well as community networks. Simply wiring up homes and centres is not going to connect with the active networkers.

***Smart homes, media homes, dumb homes.***

Although there is a strong trend towards mobile connection, homes will change too. Futurist David Greenop suggests we should broadly think about three types of homes. Smart homes will give their owners access to the Net and interactive TV and ensure that all home and personal devices link with each other. The home will be a communications hub. Media rich homes may not have sophisticated Net connections, but will have interactive digital TV and home cinema facilities. Their owners will value high quality entertainment. Dumb homes may have neither the Net nor interactive TV. They may not even have a phone – although those who live there may have a mobile. The issue for residents is whether they will be able to choose to have a smart or media rich home if they wish: will the connections be available? The issue for housing associations is what should they plan for.

See the section on What developments are likely by 2007?

***‘Why bother’ depends upon the context and what’s already available.***

This report and guide suggests that housing associations and tenants who do not wish to adopt new technologies should not be labelled as backward; they may simply be reflecting the realistic priorities of their circumstances. They may have asked themselves ‘why bother?’ and failed to get a convincing answer. We may be able to understand who will – or will not – bother if we think along two dimensions: one of community (or network) strength; and one of commitment to participation. In situations where there is as strong community spirit – with good links between neighbours – and a landlord providing ‘resident-friendly’ services, the Internet may not add much to the quality of housing services. On the other hand a ‘resident-friendly’ landlord with dispersed tenants may wish to use every available tool to improve

communication. Disgruntled tenants with an unfriendly landlord may turn to the Net to communicate and campaign for improvements.

See the section on what is likely to work where.

### ***Real access to Net benefits involves ownership and control.***

While people can use the Web and an email account through a computer in a centre or library, gaining the full benefits of the Net is likely to involve owning not just equipment but a bit of 'cyberspace' – the online environment. Participation in email discussions or other forums requires frequent access to a computer or other device, and the confidence that content is secure from other users. Creating forums or websites requires control over 'your' space and the ability to publish content without interference beyond a respect for libel, obscenity etc. This can prove challenging where, for example, a housing association has given or loaned computers to tenants. Prior agreement on acceptable use will be important.

### ***The only way to find what works online is to try it.***

Quite often things that you think will work really well online don't – and other things you may not have thought about do. Beware, in particular, of people who don't have much (or any) experience online suggesting what's needed. The Net is littered with derelict websites and unused discussion forums. This guide aims to provide some 'what works and what doesn't' advice, and the game described later is one way of exploring what Net tools are likely to be appropriate in what situation.

# 5 What's likely to work where?

The section on 'Why bother with the Internet?' raises many issues about the different agendas for residents and housing associations, and the benefits and barriers to making things happen in different situations. In part, what works will depend upon individual and household needs. We suggest it may also depend upon the attitude of the housing association and the nature of the communities they serve. David Wilcox and David Greenop develop a framework for thinking about these issues. It is intended to be an idea for further discussion and perhaps research, rather than a firm proposition. They suggest that:

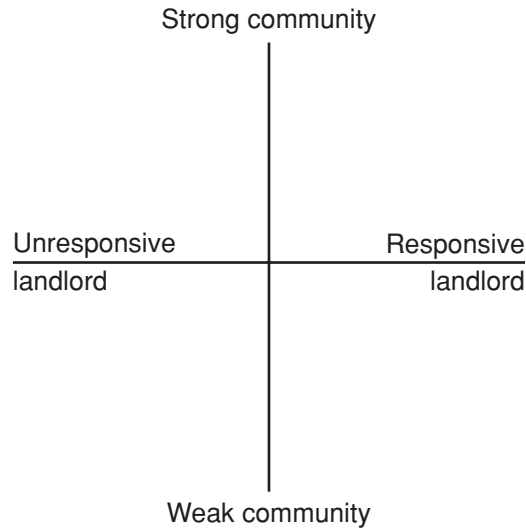
- Demand for use of the Internet related to housing, and what action is taken, is likely to depend on both the general responsiveness of the landlord and the strength of relationships within the resident community.
- Landlords and residents will, in part, have different agendas for use of the Internet.
- Residents with responsive landlords may be generally happy with existing services. On the other hand, strong resident groups dissatisfied with their landlord might use the Net to get improvements.

## The model

Our model suggests thinking about what may work along two dimensions – weak or strong community, and responsive or unresponsive landlord.

- 'Strong community' might apply where through locality (an estate) people know each other and have good links with neighbours and other interests. Or it might apply where tenants have built good associations, forums or other networks even when they don't live near each other.

**Figure 6 The model**



- ‘Weak community’ would apply where residents don’t know each other and/or have weak networks or organisations. This can be the case on estates, and is likely to be the case where property is dispersed.
- ‘Responsive landlord’ means that the landlord is thinking beyond narrowly defined housing service delivery and is committed to resident participation and empowerment.
- ‘Unresponsive landlord’ doesn’t mean they are doing a bad job – just that residents get what they are given.

### **What landlords and residents may be saying**

Below are some comments (many real ones) offered by landlords and residents. We’ll use the model to try and tease out the implications.

Landlords might variously say some or all of:

It’s the responsibility of individual residents to get Internet access via normal commercial channels.

Current communication channels between residents and ourselves work well and the Internet doesn't offer any additional benefit.

The Internet could offer us potential cost savings in managing resident services.

Residents are not interested in the Internet.

A community Internet could upset the current forms of consultation and dialogue with and between residents.

The Tenants' Forum only meet every few months, and they can't give us feedback fast enough. Let's give them computers and Internet access to speed things up.

We should have more for and about residents on our website.

We can't justify putting rents up to pay for the work needed to give people Internet access. We may go for projects if there is special funding available.

Residents and their representatives may be saying some or all of:

I am happy with the way things are. I don't need the Internet. Why should I pay for something in my rent that I don't want?

My children are really losing out at school because other kids have computers and Internet access at home.

We live on an isolated estate. I think the Internet could be useful to get information and keep in touch with people. I'd like to find out if I could learn how to use a computer and do some work from home.

We need to liven up the tenants' association and make some links with other groups around the country. The Net could be useful to do that and get information on funding and other problems.

I've heard that on some estates residents have set up their own Internet projects, and it has really brought people together and given people something to talk about.

I'm online already and I do not think local communities are particularly relevant to me. I already have access to other communities that share the same interests as myself.

I already use the Internet and I think our landlord should give us information and services online.

### **The underlying issues or concerns**

Behind these comments are some issues of policy and practice, for example:

- The UK government wants to get everybody online in some way within the next few years, through work, home, community or public access. People in social housing are less likely to have computers or be able to afford access. They may not have had the opportunity to acquire technology skills.
- Many government services will become available online and people will be encouraged to use these rather than traditional methods. Tenants of housing associations are more likely to need government services and help and may become disadvantaged through no access.
- Commercial organisations and national organisations including the media are offering new types of services through the Internet. For example, banks are offering better interest rates and there are increasingly discounts on Internet shopping. People in social housing are at a financial disadvantage.

These – and the issues in the section 'Why bother with the Internet?' – raise questions including:

- 1 How far is it the responsibility of housing associations to provide or encourage Internet access for residents?

- 2 Does Internet access across a local community encourage improved community interactions? That is, does it help build 'social capital'?
- 3 If the government is concerned about this sector, will it use measures to encourage housing associations to provide online access for their tenants?
- 4 Will the falling costs of Internet access mean that – like other communication services – most people will eventually get them without major policy and funding programmes?
- 5 If people prefer not to use online services, should they expect alternatives to continue to be available?
- 6 If the Internet is important – and housing associations don't make provision – is it realistic to expect residents' organisations to develop projects themselves?

To help think through some of the above issues we developed a simple scenario model based upon a four-quadrant grid. The grid represents typical attitudes of both residents and landlords.

The vertical grid line indicates how strong the sense of community is in housing association tenants, and the likelihood that tenants may take the initiative collectively.

The horizontal grid line indicates how committed the landlord is to tenant participation, and that people are not socially excluded from society as a whole.

The characteristics shown in the quadrants on the grid are the situation and attitudes today. Different types of strategies, actions and involvement may be necessary for each of these situations – one solution or approach does not fit all.

**Figure 7 Scenario: attitudes of residents and landlords**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Strong community</b>  |  |
| <p><b><i>We know what we want</i></b><br/>                 Landlord and resident relationships are poor<br/>                 There are few participation processes and most interactions are on a one-to-one basis<br/>                 Residents may see that online community activity could be useful<br/>                 Landlord doesn't take the initiative and may discourage online community activism</p>  | <p><b><i>We are alright</i></b><br/>                 Landlord and residents have good relationships<br/>                 There are already participation processes<br/>                 Online community access would not improve upon current situation<br/>                 Landlord would have to take initiative</p>   |
| <p><b>Unresponsive landlord</b></p> <p><b><i>What's this all about?</i></b><br/>                 Neither landlord or residents see a problem<br/>                 The landlord will introduce online services to make their organisation work more effectively internally<br/>                 Residents may be forced to make their own individual online provisions<br/>                 Online access does not engender any improved community activity</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Responsive landlord</b></p> <p><b><i>We have a problem</i></b><br/>                 The landlord knows they have a communications problem and wants to do something about it using the Net<br/>                 Housing may be dispersed<br/>                 Landlord would have to take initiative, but would closely consult with residents<br/>                 May need to find some community tech champions among residents</p> |
| <b>Weak community</b>  |  |

# 6 The main Internet benefits and tools

We suggested earlier that benefits for residents and housing associations might come in three areas: online services, increased resident participation and community development, and personal learning and work opportunities.

- Different Internet benefits for individuals and organisations (e.g. information, communication, operational effectiveness) need different Internet tools (email, web – and more).
- Achieving the benefits requires far more than access and equipment – it may involve training, support, development and management of content.
- Some benefits can be realised through public or community access, through digital TV or mobile phones. Others require home access to Internet-enabled computers.

## Types of benefits

The type of specific benefit achieved by the use of ICTs by individuals, groups and non-profit organisations usually falls within the five categories below. For a more substantial discussion of benefits see <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/tools/bene.htm>. In summary:

- *Information*: finding information by searching the web and online forums, participating in forums and email discussion lists, receiving email newsletters, using portal sites.
- *Communication*. One-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many forms of communication by email and other tools. This may be within an organisation, between organisations, and/or between individuals.
- *Collaboration*. Using email, the web and other tools to work with others. Best done in association with other methods (phone, meeting).

- *Visibility.* The web and email can provide even small organisations and individuals with a substantial presence and increased influence. This may be through creation of a website, but also through participation in online forums.
- *Managing efficiently.* Email, group working tools and the web can all be used by individuals and organisations to improve the way they do things.

### Tools

Most people using the Net are familiar with one-to-one email and finding information by searching the web. Some may be creating websites. Often, however, the most useful tools like email lists are overlooked or used inefficiently. In this study we have reviewed:

- *Email.* Basic one-to-one communication.
- *Email newsletters.* Emails with news items which may include links to websites, sent by one person to many but without a facility for subscribers to respond to each other.
- *Email lists.* Systems which enable subscribers to send an email to an email postbox which then 'starbursts' their message to all other subscribers, creating the potential for an online forum.
- *Text messaging.* One-to-one and one-to-many by mobile phone, and computer to phone.
- *Chat.* Real-time 'me-you-them-me-you' etc. text exchanges on a website with a number of people, which may or may not be moderated.
- *Instant messaging.* One-to-one real-time chat with the ability to see whether nominated users are online and available for exchanges.

- *Online forums on websites*, also called message boards. These can work if there is a lot of traffic on the website and keen interest in issues. Otherwise email alerts may be useful to remind people of the opportunity for discussion.
- *Intranets – in effect private Internet*. Systems which provide users with a range of integrated tools for publishing and retrieving information, communicating, collaborating and carrying out other online activities. These are increasingly deployed within large organisations and – with appropriate development and management – become an integral part of the organisation’s day-to-day operations. They provide organisations with enormous internal benefits, and are sometimes extended as extranets to include clients and suppliers (with differing degrees of access).
- *Enhanced email lists*. A number of commercial suppliers (e.g. <http://www.yahogroups.com>, <http://www.smartgroups.com>) offer email list facilities together with a website for the list which archives messages, and also offers calendars, polls, file libraries and other facilities for subscribers. These services are free to subscribers, supported by advertisements. They allow subscribers to create a communications platform which has some of the characteristics of an intranet or extranet. However, added features require registration which can be complex. If technical expertise is available, an alternative is to assemble the tools from different free or ad-support sources.
- *Audio and video files*. Given access to an appropriate server (computer permanently connected to and accessible on the Net) and audio/video equipment, it is possible to publish files which users can download and play or ‘stream’ (that is, play as soon as they are accessed online). A number of community technology projects and media centres are showing the way, and UK online centres are increasingly likely to develop these capabilities.

- *Websites.* Because websites are easy to understand for non-users of the Net, or those with limited experience, they may be cited together with one-to-one email as 'the solution' rather than as part of the mix. It is rather as if all print communication were seen as letters and magazines. Websites are relatively easy to publish, but require careful planning to be effective and considerable maintenance if they are to be more than static brochures or snapshots of information. They can at one level be a simple collection of pages (which might otherwise appear in print), or a portal or gateway to a wide range of other communication tools.
- *Search engines.* While search engines don't index everything on the Net (and may give prominence to those who pay for the privilege) they do allow those seeking information to find an incredible array of content and contacts.
- *Video conferencing and Net meetings.* Private and public sector organisations are increasingly using a mix of video, audio, graphic and text environments to hold virtual meetings. Most tools are available free, and usable with a fast connection.

There is more about basic tools at <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/tools/nettools.htm>.

### **Achieving the benefits**

Net tools – and content associated with them – can only be brought into play when a number of other things are in place, either within the home or office.

- *Appropriate infrastructure – the pipes and boxes.* This may be the public Internet or specific local systems – for example, cabling on an estate, a wireless network – together with the permanently connected computers needed to handle local content or route other material.
- *Private access.* Home users have to be able to connect to the Internet or local system through their computer, TV set-top box or

mobile device. They may use a slow telephone line connection or faster 'broadband' link is that is available by cable or other means. Faster generally means more expensive.

- *Equipment:* the computers or other device must be capable of running the necessary software to deploy the tools. Today's mobile phones handle email, text messages and some web. Most computers bought within the last two years will run or can access the tools listed. Digital TV can be used for web and email, but there are limitations.
- *Confidence and competence.* Even with the necessary equipment and access many people find computers daunting and a completely new and challenging experience. They will often need training and support.
- *Public or community access.* Online centres can offer free or low-cost access and equipment for people and the support of staff or other users, and as such are an enormously important bridge to the online world. However, they are not necessarily a substitute for home access if people wish to make extensive use of the Net. There's a big difference between public access – Internet-enabled computers for use in public places – and community access with others around to help.
- *Content.* If landlords and residents are to use the Net for housing-related benefits, they will need to develop new content and services. This may range from putting information currently in print on to the web – perhaps without much benefit – to repairs-reporting, exchanges, community information, discussions, self-publishing.
- *Information moderators and managers.* While many of the tools can be used on an individual basis, many-to-many communication and collaborative working depends upon someone in the online community having some skills in facilitating interactions. In addition, at the organisational level, information will rapidly become unusable unless there is a management strategy which integrates online with print and other information.

# 7 A framework for project and system planning

These checklists should help you plan an online project or system. Don't be daunted – they are a 'long list' aiming to cover everything from getting started through to long-term management. Just pick out some prompts for what you are doing. They can be used in conjunction with our planning game.

The checklists look at (and mix in) things from several different perspectives:

- A phased process. We've divided things up into four sections: getting started; planning and development; delivering; keeping going. Within that we have also aimed to cover:
  - helping people understand, getting them involved, providing support
  - choosing appropriate technology
  - building a partnership
  - planning for sustainability.

## Summary of the checklists

- 1 Getting started
  - Understanding the context. What's happening now. What of the future.
  - Understanding the Net. The main benefits and Net tools.
  - Defining the scope. Who is the system for, who will 'own' it. What resources.
  - Checking reality. What works, what doesn't.
- 2 Planning and developing
  - Developing a shared vision. Making sure everyone has a similar picture of the future.
  - Getting people connected. What technology may be appropriate.
  - Building awareness and involvement. Helping people understand and engage.

- Providing training and support. Basics and more advanced use of the Net.
- Building partnerships. Finding collaborators and working with them.
- Business planning. Funding, staffing, management structures, procedures.

### 3 Delivering

- Installing and supporting technical systems. Supporting users.
- Developing content. What type of material. What media. How controlled.
- Supporting personal interests and development. Focusing on users.
- Building online communities. Related to existing networks, or new.
- Delivering services online. Enhancing existing, developing new.
- Meeting special interests and needs. Key groups – age, gender, ethnicity.
- Enhancing community-wide strategies. Models for regeneration, community development.

### 4 Keeping going

- Maintaining systems and user commitment.
- Managing organisation.

## The checklists in full

### 1 Getting started

As well as getting up to speed on the technology, it is important to take stock of what is already happening locally and elsewhere, and what lessons other people can offer. Most important, address the ‘why’ questions: who will benefit and in what way. That should determine the type of system or project you develop.

### ***Understanding the context***

- What is already happening? Audit local activities, organisations, resources.
- What is happening elsewhere? What models are people following?
- What future technology developments are likely to be important?

### ***Understanding the Net***

- What are the main non-profit benefits of the Net? Information, communication, collaboration, visibility, management, services.
- What are the main tools? Email, web, and much else. Each provides particular benefits and has specific requirements.
- What are the different connectivity options? Dial-up, ADSL, cable, TV, satellite, wireless.

### ***Defining the scope of your project***

- Are you, and others involved in the project, using the Net? Get the core group online and using some of the technology you plan to offer to others.
- What will be the main focus? Local community, community of interest, organisational, personal.
- Where will the benefits lie for those involved and how will they be evaluated? Reducing service delivery costs, enabling users, supporting community-wide initiatives.
- Who will develop and control the different elements of the systems described below? Access, training, content etc. Where will 'ownership' lie?

- What resources are available? How will any system be maintained in the longer term?
- How will online communication be designed into overall local communication systems? What is in use now? What do users prefer?

### ***Phase 1 reality check***

- Do you really know why you are doing this – and for whom?
- Is the core group up to speed on the Net – if not how can you expect others to be?
- Have you found out who else is doing what? Do you want to collaborate or not?
- Are you thinking about the whole communication mix – not just tech stuff?

## **2 Planning and developing**

What is involved in planning and developing projects? Not just technology but user involvement, partnerships, management, sustainability. There has to be a shared vision – or picture of the future – among those involved.

### ***Developing a shared vision***

- Run demonstrations and workshops, including one with the game in this guide.
- Prioritise activities (including those in these checklists).
- Identify champions for different activities and form project teams.
- Set up an interim management system to carry the project through.

### ***Getting people connected***

- How will people be connected from the options you have investigated? Dial-up, broadband (ADSL or cable), digital TV, wireless, satellite.
- Who will provide Internet services, and how extensive will these be? Basic services or special applications.
- What equipment will be used? PCs, laptops, TVs, mobiles. New or recycled. Free, loaned or purchased.
- Where will there be access? Personal/mobile, home, work, community or public facilities. Free, subsidised or paid for.
- What identity will users have? Email addresses for all, opt in.
- How will connectivity and access be organised? DIY or planned provision.
- What consideration is being given to disabilities and user preferences? How far will the system be accessible to all?

### ***Building awareness and involvement***

- How will benefits be promoted? Awareness campaigns, demonstrations.
- How will user needs be researched? Surveys, workshops.
- How will systems be developed to involve users? Centres, personal options, group options.

### ***Providing training and support***

- What training will be provided? Computer basics, Internet basics, advanced.

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## A framework for project and system planning

- How will training be offered? Formal courses, informal and exploratory; centres or mobile.
- What support will be offered? Technical only; personal and organisational; online, phone, face to face.
- Free or paid for? Staff or volunteers.

### ***Building partnerships***

- Where will there be centres for access and shared learning? Community centres, schools, libraries.
- What existing networks might use the system and benefit from it?
- Who will be the champions? How will you support them?
- How will you make sure that partners have a shared understanding of what is involved – and what is expected?

### ***Business planning***

- What business model do you have in mind? Subscriptions, selling services, continual fund-raising, volunteers – or a mix?
- Do you have funding for capital and revenue – and for how long?
- What organisational structure may be appropriate? Within existing organisation, community enterprise, charitable company, non-profit company, co-op.
- What management procedures will be needed for the technology, user support, content development, finance?

### ***Phase 2 reality check***

- Is there a shared vision for the project – or does everyone have a different picture?

- Are you getting users involved to find out what they need, and gain their commitment?
- Are you developing good relationships with your partners?
- Do you have a business strategy?

### **3 Delivering**

Making the project happen, or setting up the system, involves continuing with the development work above, installing the technology, supporting the users and then developing content and services.

#### ***Installing and supporting technical systems and users***

- Continuing development work.
- Setting up administrative and support systems centrally and for users.

#### ***Developing content***

- What range of content is relevant to those using the system? Who decides?
- Who develops and controls the content? How is content managed? What is acceptable?
- What is the best way of delivering content? Email or web, audio or video – or all of these?
- How will online content relate to other content?

#### ***Supporting personal interests and development***

- Will there be formal or informal learning opportunities?
- Will there be signposts to relevant material?

***Building online communities***

- Will the project or system help develop an online community or network?
- Are you familiar with online communities?
- Can the system offer relevant tools (email and web)?
- How can online communities enhance democracy or participation?
- Will the online community 'map onto' existing networks?

***Delivering services online***

- How will online services relate to other (non-online) service delivery systems?
- Can costs be justified?
- Will this contribute to meeting targets the government is setting for online services?
- Will provision be accessible to all who need it? Will alternatives be available?

***Meeting special interests and needs***

- Will the project or system meet the interests and needs of any specific groups?
  - age or gender
  - arts, literacy
  - immigrant, ethnic groups?

***Enhancing community-wide strategies***

- Does the project aim to support wider regeneration and/or community development?

- Look at models for Wired Up Communities and local community networks.
- Plan how online working can support other means of networking and communication.

### ***Phase 3 reality check***

- Do your plans for content and other services match your vision?
- Do you have the technical expertise?
- Do you have the other systems necessary to deliver to your users?

## **4 Keeping going**

The general experience of non-profit projects (and many for-profit ones) is that it seems difficult to get started, but it proves even more difficult to keep going. For example:

- It can be relatively easy to raise funds to create a website, but much more difficult to pay the staff costs of maintaining the content – and keep the commitment of others to contribute.
- The idea of online communities participating through email lists or web forums is attractive – but only works well if the users are relatively confident and skilled online – and/or there are paid or voluntary facilitators to manage the community.
- Technical management will, of course, be needed centrally – but also to support individuals and groups who may not be confident users.
- As well as the users, content and technology, you will also need to nurture the partnership you may have formed.
- Technology does not dispose of the need to manage the organisation running the system.

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## A framework for project and system planning

- Somewhere in the mix there should be a business plan which lays out how you will continue to develop. That may be through continued fund-raising, generating some income, recruiting volunteers – or probably all of those.

Of course it may be that your project doesn't need to keep going – or perhaps needs to reinvent itself within a few years. Technology is going to change fast, so what seems an overriding need one year may be much less relevant the next.

### **Final reality check**

Are you prepared to close down – or redefine the project – if needs change?

# 8 Possible ICT projects for housing areas

This is a long list of the types of projects that might be considered by housing associations or – in some instances – partnerships in neighbourhoods. It reflects what is happening in the UK, and elsewhere, in different locations. Some of these project ideas are featured in the online game that we developed for workshops.

Many of the projects further down the list would rely on development of appropriate infrastructure and access. Similarly, there is little point in installing the technology unless it is clear for what purpose it will be used. Different projects require different types of technology.

## Technology infrastructure

- *Broadband connections* by cable or wireless to homes, centres and offices.
- *Local Internet or Applications Service provider*. Agencies use their collective purchasing power to create and resell connectivity and online service.

## Infrastructure access and equipment

- *Laptop lending* to residents.
- *Home access* by providing connectivity with computers or set-top boxes for digital TVs.
- *Public and community access*. Public access points within easy walking distance of all homes, and community access with supervision and support.

## Awareness and involvement

- *Planning workshops* with key interests and residents to help to design systems.

- *Demonstrations* and other events to show what is possible.

## Technical training and support

- *Training and support for staff* who will develop and/or run online services.
- *Non-profit support.* Funding, services and support for community groups and non-profit organisations.
- *Support for disabilities.* Special software and adapted hardware.
- *Volunteer mentors* to work with young people, community groups and others.

## Community infrastructure and learning

- *Digital champions.* A network of people prepared to champion the use of ICTs.
- *Local centres.* Access, training and support in community centres, libraries and other locations.
- *E-learning programmes.* Schools, colleges and universities create access and training for students.

## Content development

- *Community content.* Local centres work with residents to help them develop content which reflects their interests. It could be published on the local portal.
- *Multi-media.* Video, audio and other digital content that may be broadcast on a local network.

## **Online community building**

- *Participation online.* Discussion lists/forums for different interests in the community.
- *E-democracy.* Projects to enable residents to engage online with elected representatives and others in positions of influence.

## **Service delivery projects**

- *Housing services online.* Repairs, exchanges and other services provided by the landlord are available online.
- *Other public services.* Agencies provide information and opportunities for transactions online.

## **Community-wide strategies**

- *Local portal.* A website of local information with links to all key local projects which acts as a portal to forums and other applications.
- *Community intranet.* Homes with computers or digital TV are able to use an internal system for newsletters, discussions, online services, and personal Home Pages.

# 9 Workshop game and planning tools

Drew Mackie and David Wilcox developed a workshop game and planning tools to help residents and housing association staff to think through possible projects – even though they might be unfamiliar with new technologies.

During a half-day workshop participants were able to develop a scenario reflecting the key issues for individuals and groups in the neighbourhood; use a set of project cards to assess what technology might be appropriate to meet those needs; prioritise activities; and reflect on how they could take things forward.

If more time were available – or at a subsequent event – participants could then think through in more detail what would be needed to develop specific projects and an overall programme.

## The scenario

If we were playing ‘for real’, as we did with the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, those participating would outline the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the area and those living there. They would also describe what projects were already running. Where we used the game at a conference or other awareness-raising event, participants invented a fictitious scenario.

After doing that they filled in one of the diagrams on the priorities sheet, showing the strengths or weaknesses of the situation.

## The cards

Participants divided into groups of about seven, and each group was given a set of cards drawn from the long list of possible projects we had developed (see Chapter 8).

Each card has:

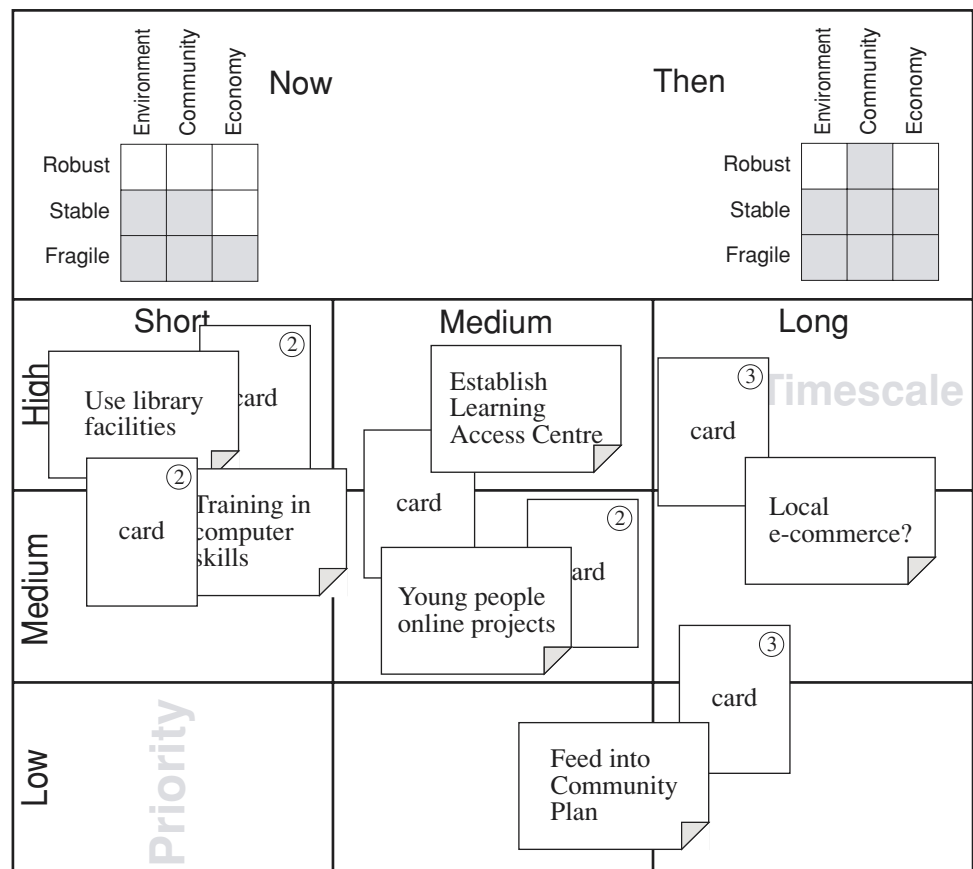
## Making the Net work for residents and their landlords

- a simple graphic to distinguish it
- a brief description of the activity or project
- a number of points roughly representing resource costs
- an indication of what resources will be needed to implement the project.

### The priorities sheet

The priorities sheet helps a planning group decide what activities are most important, and when they should be undertaken, in the context of their current situation. There are three elements to the sheet:

**Figure 8 The priorities sheet**



- a current situation matrix in the top left corner
- a main matrix of timescale – short, medium, long – against importance – high, medium, low
- a future situation matrix in the top right corner.

After brainstorming the strengths and weaknesses of the current situation (see above) the group fills in the current situation matrix. This shows different ‘stocks’; the example sheet shows environment, community, economy. The question for the group is how far is each of these fragile, stable or robust. After discussion, the group fills in the matrix to show how high the stock is in each instance. (Other stocks could be substituted: for example, degree of active citizenship, lifelong learning or social inclusion in an area.)

Participants are asked to choose those cards most relevant to the needs that they identified, and then place them on the priorities sheet. Additional ideas can be added on sticky notes.

**Figure 9 The current situation matrix**

|         | Environment | Community | Economy |
|---------|-------------|-----------|---------|
| Robust  | ↑           | ↕         |         |
| Stable  |             |           | ↓       |
| Fragile |             |           |         |

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So that not all cards are chosen, the groups work within a budget of, say, ten or twelve points. Each card has a number of points attached. Groups consider the 'costs' of adding further ideas, and how costs might be cut by sharing resources.

The group then fills in the top right matrix showing how far the situation would be improved if citizens and other key interests engaged in the activities and projects chosen.

Finally the group then reviews the implications of choosing the cards. Each card has a resource implication: for example, staff, volunteers or resources needed. What do these add up to? How can resources be shared?

The session ends with feedback from all groups taking part. The results can be analysed to show:

- the degree of agreement across all groups on both timescale and priority
- the spread of suggested supporting projects that might be needed to make the programme happen.

After the priorities exercise the group could turn to more detailed planning, using the planning sheet.

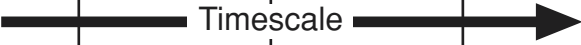

### **The planning sheet**

The planning sheet is designed to help those developing and running initiatives think through the range of issues that they will face during the process.

The sheet has two dimensions:

- 1 Time
  - Getting started. How and when the initiative got started. Initial planning.

Figure 10 The planning sheet

|                                   | Getting started  | Developing | Delivering | Keeping going |
|-----------------------------------|--|------------|------------|---------------|
| Planning/<br>resources            |            |            |            |               |
| Community/<br>user<br>involvement | <br>Issues |            |            |               |
| Partnerships                      |  |            |            |               |
| Management                        |  |            |            |               |
| Technology                        |  |            |            |               |
| Project<br>development            |  |            |            |               |

- Developing. Getting funds, getting going.
- Delivering. Running the initiative.
- Keeping going. Ensuring sustainability.

2 Issues

- Planning/resources. What are the key tasks? Who makes decisions? What funds, volunteers, help in kind, will be needed at different stages?
- Community/user involvement. How will partners and citizens be involved at different stages? Market research, marketing, feedback, consultation, involvement in major projects.
- Partnerships. With whom? How will they be developed?
- Management. What staff and volunteers will be needed? What operating procedures? Where will responsibilities lie? What governance?
- Technology. Connectivity, equipment, maintenance etc. How will this be planned and managed?
- Project development. What will the initiative do? How will projects be developed?

The purpose of having discussion slots on the sheet for longer-term issues is that they should prompt thinking about initial planning – particularly where funding will come from.

The purpose of the issues dimension is to remind planners that, for example, technological planning must be undertaken in association with organisational development and community participation.

The checklist section in this guide expands on the planning issues.

### **Cards to play the game**

A set of cards that includes illustrations is available in the toolkit section of our website <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/housing>. An illustration of card content is provided overleaf.

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: right;"><b>3</b></p> <p><b>Access for all</b></p> <p>The initiative commits to creating community, work or home access for all who want it.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Centres, outreach staff/ volunteers, equipment, support.</p>  | <p style="text-align: right;"><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Families online</b></p> <p>Parents, children – and grandparents – can learn about ways in which the Net can be used by different members of the family.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Access, curricula, tutor/volunteers.</p>  | <p style="text-align: right;"><b>3</b></p> <p><b>Broadband</b></p> <p>All homes, centres and offices have access to broadband and connections enabling video as well as email and web application when these are developed.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Tech team and systems, cable or other service provider.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: right;"><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Support for disabilities</b></p> <p>Special software, and adapted hardware, is designed to provide people who have disabilities with easy access and a supportive environment.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Access, appropriate hardware, software and tutor.</p>                         | <p style="text-align: right;"><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Fee-based ICT services</b></p> <p>The initiative sells a variety of online services to residents, organisations, and businesses in order to engage local interests and earn income.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Local needs survey and business plan. Staff and services.</p> | <p style="text-align: right;"><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Superchannel</b></p> <p>A studio and broadcast facilities enable residents to create their own programmes.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Facilities, project manager, training.</p>  |
| <p style="text-align: right;"><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Participation online</b></p> <p>Discussion lists/forums are created so that different interest in the community can air their views. Volunteers learn new skills by facilitating.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Confident users, committed agencies, facilitators, appropriate system.</p> | <p style="text-align: right;"><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Planning workshops</b></p> <p>The development team runs a series of workshops with key interests and citizens to engage them in development of the system.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Commitment to participative process and relevant skills.</p>                           | <p style="text-align: right;"><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Local centres</b></p> <p>The initiative develops and supports local centres – in community centres, libraries and other places – providing access and training for residents and business.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Premises, staff, long-term funding.</p>     |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: right;">②</p> <p><b>Local gateway website</b></p> <p>The initiative develops a website of local information with links to all key local projects. It acts as a portal to forums and other applications.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Technical and content skills, systems, maintenance.</p> | <p style="text-align: right;">②</p> <p><b>Housing services online</b></p> <p>Repairs, exchanges and other services provided by the landlord are available online.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Systems, access, staff training.</p>  | <p style="text-align: right;">①</p> <p><b>Residents info services</b></p> <p>The initiative subscribes to a national service providing email, web, paper-based and telephone conferencing services relevant to tenants and community activists.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Subscription, access.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: right;">②</p> <p><b>E-learning</b></p> <p>Schools, colleges and universities create access and training for students and develop online learning programmes.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Major development programme and commitment from institutions.</p>                                  | <p style="text-align: right;">①</p> <p><b>Staff online</b></p> <p>The initiative works with the landlord and other agencies to train and support staff who will develop online services.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Agency commitment, training and support programme.</p>   | <p style="text-align: right;">①</p> <p><b>Digital champions</b></p> <p>The initiative recruits, trains and supports a network of people prepared to champion the use of ICTs in their neighbourhoods and organisations.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Training and support programme, equipment.</p>    |
| <p style="text-align: right;">②</p> <p><b>Community intranet</b></p> <p>Homes with computers or digital TV are able to use an internal system for newsletters, discussions, online services and personal home pages.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Tech and content team. Access provision.</p>                     | <p style="text-align: right;">①</p> <p><b>Volunteers/mentors</b></p> <p>Volunteers mentor young people, do technology projects for voluntary groups, bring people interested in careers together with experienced professionals</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Co-ordinators, affiliated online mentoring programme.</p> | <p style="text-align: right;">②</p> <p><b>Non-profit support</b></p> <p>The initiative provides funding, services and support to enable community groups and non-profits to get online and serve their clients.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Online services, support programme.</p>                   |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: right;">②</p> <p><b>Laptop lending</b></p> <p>Residents who complete a basic computer literacy course qualify for laptops on loan, so they can develop computer and online projects at home.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Laptops and maintenance plan, ISP accounts.</p> | <p style="text-align: right;">③</p> <p><b>Local ISP/ASP</b></p> <p>The landlord and other agencies use their collective purchasing power to create and resell connectivity and online services to residents, organisations and businesses.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Technical and business development staff.</p> | <p style="text-align: right;">①</p> <p><b>Community content</b></p> <p>Local centres work with residents to develop 'fun' activities and content relevant to people's lives.</p> <p><i>Needs:</i> Staff, volunteers, facilities.</p> |
|   |   |  |
|   |   |  |

# Resources for *Making the Net work*

## Publications

The following publications were used in developing general conclusions for the report, and also provide additional references in the field.

### Remote Control

Pearl, M. and Scanlon, M. (2002) *Remote Control: Housing associations and e-governance*. Policy Press

This study for the Housing Corporation concluded that as a whole the sector has underperformed in its exploitation of information and communication technology; despite a small number of exemplars there is a widespread lack of vision; landlords need to recognise the need for cultural change to fully engage with IT. More engagement with residents is needed, with training for residents and board members. Housing associations need to recognise the potential of technology to both create and/or bridge the digital divide, that is, the potential exclusion from services of those without access to technology.

### Civic and community technology

David Wilcox and Martyn Pearl researched and wrote an article on 'Civic and community technology' for the *Journal of the Communications Network*, Vol. 1, Part 1, April–June 2002, pp. 47–55.

In summary they found:

Civic and community use of the Internet is important to the UK Government because of its targets for moving services online, and to commerce because of the insights it provides into user styles and preferences. It is also crucial in the development and re-energising of our social and civic institutions. This article explores the potential of civic Internet use – but concludes that many of our institutions are failing to rise to the challenge.

Additional references and interviews are available at <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/docs/journal.htm>

### **Social housing and electronic service delivery**

'Social care, social housing and electronic service delivery' JRF *Findings*, March 2002 – Ref 342

Research by Nicholas Pleace and Deborah Quilgars of the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York, indicates mixed progress in developing electronic service delivery, uncertainty about the concept among service users and front-line staff and a need for increased consultation.

### **Social tenants' access to homeworking opportunities**

'Social tenants' access to homeworking opportunities', JRF *Findings*, April 2002 – Ref 452

Tim Dwelly highlights the problems that residents are likely to have in making full use of the Internet for learning or working from home. He identified that the overall take-up of Internet use – now in over 40 per cent of homes – has enabled one in four of the workforce to carry out some of their work from home. However, allocation policies and tenancy agreements usually means that tenants have no spare room for themselves or children to use a PC quietly, and are discouraged or forbidden to run a business from home.

This and the other JRF Findings are available at <http://www.jrf.org.uk>.

### **Internet sites**

An expanded version of this report and guide, other material and links are available at <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/housing>. The site includes more about the activities of housing associations and residents' groups. The following are mentioned in the text of this report:

## Making the Net work for residents and their landlords

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London and Quadrant: <http://www.residentsonline.org.uk/>

L&Q pioneered online services including report-a-repair and complaints. They also offer advice on benefits online, and ICT training courses for residents.

Swan: <http://www.tenants-online.co.uk/>

Swan Housing Group has online services including repairs reporting and a secure facility to review and pay rent online, as well as an online learning zone. Tenants who sign up for free ICT training can get a free set-top box enabling Internet access through their TV.

Peabody Trust: <http://www.peabody.org.uk/>

Peabody provides information online for tenants, and also computer and Internet training.

Redbricks: <http://www.redbricks.org.uk>

Residents on this Manchester estate have low-cost Internet access, websites and a sophisticated internal communication system (intranet) developed on a DIY basis by their technology volunteers.

Housit: <http://www.housit.org.uk/>

This site, funded by the Housing Corporation, has articles from 2000 to 2001 detailing some early housing technology initiatives.

# References

Dwelly, T. (2002) 'Social tenants' access to homeworking opportunities', *JRF Findings* (April) Ref 452

Pleace, N. and Quilgars, D. (2002) 'Social care, social housing and electronic service delivery', *JRF Findings* (March) Ref 342

Wilcox, D. and Pearl, M. (2002) 'Civic and community technology', *Journal of the Communications Network*, Vol. 1, Part 1, pp. 47–55

