

Making every contact count

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Executive summary

The Better Social Housing Review (BSHR) recommended that social landlords do more to improve how they collect and use data about the condition of homes and the needs of residents, to improve the quality of homes and of services delivered to residents. This information can also be used to assess how equitably services are delivered to different groups of residents, which is particularly important given the racial and other structural inequalities that persist in wider society as well as in the social housing sector. The National Housing Federation (NHF) has taken this recommendation forward through a project called [Knowing our Homes](#).

This report sets out how social landlords of different types and sizes can use the ‘making every contact count’ approach to effectively and efficiently gather information about the condition of homes and the needs of residents. For social landlords, making every contact count means using routine and planned interactions with residents as opportunities to gather information about the condition of their homes, and their needs.

Drawing from a series of case studies from a range of different social landlords, in addition to broader insight from across the sector, this report presents best practice that can help social landlords make every contact with residents count. This includes:

- Taking appropriate steps to ensure that warning signs of poor quality homes or residents at risk of harm are not missed. Many social landlords do this by introducing a policy or expectation that staff should never ignore a problem, and in fact should report it.
- Making every contact count, along with identifying which residents landlords have not been in contact with, will help landlords to ‘find their silence’ and identify residents and homes which may have issues that have not yet been addressed.
- Making the most of all types of interactions with residents, from face-to-face meetings to effective use of digital communication channels.
- When gathering information, aiming to develop actionable insight – meaningful information produced by analysing data that can be used to improve services for individuals, groups or all residents.
- When staff ask residents for personal information, they must be trained to do so confidently, effectively and respectfully. Staff may benefit from cultural awareness training, so that they have the cultural competence to effectively and compassionately communicate with residents with different backgrounds from themselves.
- Proactively seeking to make every contact count will likely create increased demand on resources, as landlords may become aware of more issues in residents’ homes that should be addressed. However, additional resource committed to this will deliver good value. Landlords will need to plan effectively so that they can handle an increase in repair requests and safeguarding reports.
- Effective, joined up IT systems can support insightful data analysis. However, many social landlords are still in the process of improving their IT systems. It is therefore important to note that it is possible to effectively make every contact count before IT systems enable automation.
- Landlords of different sizes may benefit more from different approaches to making every contact count. Larger size can mean more resources available for technical and systems-driven solutions. Being a smaller landlord means organisation-wide change is a smaller exercise.
- Once sufficient data about residents is gathered, it is important that social landlords take steps to assess how equitably they are delivering services to residents.
- Social landlords must ensure their culture promotes making every contact count. Every staff member must see it as a core part of their role and understand that they have a responsibility to update the data the organisation holds about the condition of homes and the wellbeing of residents.
- Residents can have legitimate concerns about data security. Social landlords must clearly explain to residents how they keep personal data safe and secure.
- Landlords can help residents feel more comfortable sharing information by explaining what it will be used for. Trust is vital, and trust is built when residents feel seen and heard, and treated with respect by all staff.
- Making every contact count can require a cultural shift. Contractors need to be included and must proactively take responsibility for identifying and flagging any major concerns when they visit residents’ homes.

The case studies show how 11 different social landlords aim to make every contact with residents count. These examples range from a small, rural housing association with fewer than 500 homes to a housing association with over 240,000 homes spread all over England and Scotland. They also include an ALMO and a local authority. Each has different approaches, some more focused on direct, personal interactions with residents and some combining this with technical, systems-driven work. Collectively, they show that social landlords of all different types, sizes and geographies can make every contact with residents count.

Drawing on insights from the case studies and broader Knowing our Homes work, the following principles can help social landlords decide how to make every contact count:

- **Trust** is absolutely crucial to residents' preparedness to share data with their landlord.
- **Ease** matters to residents. It's important not to ask for too much of their time when asking for information, whatever the channel. Landlords may need to adapt how they communicate with residents who have communication barriers.
- **Staff must be trained, supported, enabled and empowered** to play their part in making every contact count.
- More and better **actionable insight** is the key objective, rather than collecting more data without a plan for how that data will be used.
- It's important to describe and **publicise how data will be used** to improve and tailor services to individual residents and to improve services for all residents.
- Setting out clearly **how data is kept safe** is essential.
- Security checks must be in place to **verify the identity of a resident** before any data is requested.
- **More automation** of data requests and processing will improve the **balance of cost and benefit**.
- **More data may initially increase demand on housing services** and this must be prepared for. It's important to remember that proactive spending should help to reduce reactive (often more expensive) problems further down the line.
- Interactions between staff and residents can be more effective and efficient when staff **have residents' pre-existing data to hand**.
- **Different data collection methods have different costs**. Automated digital data collection is the most cost-efficient, followed by digital (not automated) data collection, then manual data collection.
- **Seek opportunities** where personal data can be checked and refreshed as a legitimate part of interactions with residents.
- **Ensure compliance** with all relevant laws and regulations.

Making every contact count can make a real difference to both landlords and residents. All staff must buy into the approach, from housing officers and contractors', repairs staff to the chief executive. It requires organisational effort and most likely resource, but the result is worthwhile. By making every contact with residents count, landlords can be assured that they are both effectively maintaining the condition of their homes and meeting the needs of their residents.



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