

Leading the way in community-focused systems.

More social housing stock is managed by Progress-based systems than any other technology platform.



For IT solutions to drive out more cost, improve efficiencies and be responsive to change, they have to be more flexible than ever before; satisfy the widest range of requirements from call centres to mobile working, enable workflow and provide greater access to information – in the office or out in the field. Two software houses, IBS OPENSystems and Orchard Information Systems, are meeting these demands and pulling ahead of the market. Together their systems now manage more of the social housing stock than any other suppliers.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that they both have chosen Progress OpenEdge® for developing, deploying and managing their specialist applications. They also both integrate their solutions seamlessly with the award-winning financial accounting suite from CedarOpenAccounts, which is also powered by Progress OpenEdge. Success comes from these companies' ability to offer expert solutions that require minimum IT support and the agility to respond to the ever-changing challenges which face the social housing sector.

Traditional systems can't cope

Tim Williams, managing director of Orchard Information Systems says: "Traditional systems struggle to keep up. They are just not flexible enough. There's a never-ending, changing programme of government legalisation and initiatives, such as Gershon and NROSH. On the one hand these demand greater efficiency and streamlined business processes, but on the other hand, they just add to the work load. Now social landlords' resources are being stretched even

further. Because they are at the front line and best-placed to deliver social policy and manage community services, they are being asked to become more community-centric. Progress OpenEdge provides us with a complete environment for adapting our solutions quickly to respond to new demands and provide software that truly fits the business needs and keeps ahead of the curve."

Bill Loughrey, sales director of IBS OPENSystems agrees: "Technology is also a driver for change and by using Progress we can continually improve our software, embrace mobile working, Internet accessibility, workflow and document management and provide access to a single comprehensive view of a person, property or account. That's vital for empowering housing officers with better information so they can resolve problems on the spot. In turn that helps to relieve some of the stress which is blamed for sick leave absences among housing officers running at 50 per cent higher than the national average."

One of the impacts of Gershon has been to raise the profile of the efficiency challenge not just among local authorities but among housing associations, too. According to Loughrey: "Savings are still available across the board in terms of providing quicker access to data and the ability to change processes to provide further efficiencies. Implementation of our applications enables customers to change and adapt the business to modern working practises, relatively easily, again enabling them to gain efficiencies and cost savings."

Working smarter is critical

Working smarter is critical and using systems such as workflow to re-define processes makes the throughput of information more efficient. Work can be channelled to specific members of staff, or to work teams, making many routine processes more targeted, and less paper-based. This results in significant reductions in turnaround times for void properties, in the level of tenant arrears, as well as increasing rental income.

"Our aim," says Williams, "is to help customers get on with doing what really matters, while our systems automate the routine and bring information to where it is needed. Mobile working is a good example of this. Progress's 'always on' technology enables us to provide remote access to our applications via PDAs or other mobile devices while people are out in the community or wherever they are – even when the bandwidth is low or not available."

A poll recently commissioned by IBS OPENSystems revealed that only 38 per cent of housing departments and associations have a mobile working strategy and yet 82 per cent state it as a priority. "Integration with other IT applications is the main bug bear faced by housing departments in developing a mobile working strategy," says Loughrey, "and a problem that using Progress helps us to overcome as we can provide innovative and practical mobile applications. One client for example, is already seeing immediate efficiency improvements from mobile devices."

Both Orchard Information Systems and IBS OPENSystems provide integrated CRM solutions, tailored to meet the growing demand for community-centric systems in the most cost-effective way. As Williams comments: "The priorities were collecting the rent, recovering debt, managing the finances and maintaining the housing stock. Now social landlords are not only the obvious contact point for tenants to report a broken roof tile, but for complaining about anything from abandoned vehicles, anti-social behaviour and over-grown gardens. They are also taking on delivery of social services such as meals on wheels and providing care for the elderly on behalf of local authorities."

The underlying Progress OpenEdge platform has also enabled CedarOpenAccounts to meet the sector's specific needs with OpenAccounts Financials in areas like commitment accounting, the construction industry scheme, fixed assets, non-recoverable VAT, procurement and provide seamless integration with IBS and Orchard.

Some 250 housing organisations have selected solutions from Progress Software's application partners. Today they are the winners in benefiting from software that can easily adapt to change – whenever and wherever it next comes from and without major disruption to the business.



Bill Loughrey, sales director IBS OPENSystems: "We choose to work with Progress, as it is one of very few rapid development environments to offer a truly open system, so we can offer choice and scalability to customers. We have found the system to be extremely robust."



Tim Williams, managing director Orchard Information Systems: "Progress is an incredibly powerful platform, enabling us to develop flexible and highly functional solutions. Our choice of Progress takes away a key worry for customers as the technology platform virtually runs itself without the need for managing the application or underlying database."



Mike Starkings, commercial sales director, CedarOpenAccounts: "The choice of Progress OpenEdge provides us with a scalable and flexible application development and deployment platform. This underpins our customer-focus philosophy to ensure that our software meets the changing demands of key business sectors."



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Progress Software, 210 Bath Road,
Slough SL1 3XE.
www.progress.com
or call Marketing on 01753 216300