

Centre for the New Midlands

# The Data Dilemma in Housing

Insights from a Roundtable  
Hosted by the Centre for the New Midlands



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Housing providers today sit on a vast reservoir of information about homes, communities and services. Yet across the sector, many organisations are still grappling with how to translate this data into the insight needed to guide better decisions.

As a Midlands-based think tank focused on the region's long-term prosperity, the Centre for the New Midlands convened this roundtable to bring together voices from across housing, policy, technology and professional services. Our aim was simple: to create a space for an open, practical discussion about the challenges organisations face when trying to make better use of the data they already hold.

What emerged was a shared recognition that the sector's "data dilemma" is not simply about systems or technology. It reflects deeper questions about governance, organisational culture and leadership. The insights in this report capture that conversation and, we hope, contribute to a broader discussion about how the housing sector can unlock the value of its data to support better services and stronger communities.



**Chris Smith**  
Founder and CEO,  
Centre for the New Midlands

For many organisations, the ambition to become more data-driven is clear. Yet the journey from fragmented information to meaningful insight often requires significant organisational change.

The discussion highlighted how challenges around data quality, ownership and governance are rarely purely technical problems. They often stem from processes, culture and the way organisations manage change. Without clear responsibility for data and the right structures in place, even the best systems struggle to deliver the value they promise.

What was particularly encouraging from this roundtable was the willingness of participants to share their experiences openly. Those insights reinforce the importance of treating data as a strategic asset and supporting organisations through the change management needed to embed better practices across teams.



**Eman Al-Hillawi**  
CEO, Entec Si

Good data is fundamental to good communication.

Housing providers are increasingly expected to demonstrate transparency, communicate clearly with tenants and show the impact of their services. None of this is possible without reliable information and the confidence that the data organisations rely on is accurate and accessible.

The roundtable discussion highlighted how closely data, trust and communication are connected.

When data systems are fragmented or unreliable, it becomes harder to communicate effectively with residents, partners and regulators. Conversely, when organisations invest in better data practices, they strengthen their ability to tell their story, demonstrate impact and build trust with the communities they serve.

This report captures a valuable conversation about how the sector can move forward together.



**Alia Al-Doori**  
CEO, Pearl Comms

# The Data Dilemma: Context for the Housing Sector

Across the sector, organisations are collecting more data than ever before. However, this increase in volume has not always translated into better decision-making.

Participants highlighted several structural issues driving the dilemma:

- **Legacy IT systems** that limit interoperability and create fragmented datasets.
- **Skills gaps**, particularly the absence of dedicated data analytics roles in many organisations.
- **Unclear governance**, meaning no single team is responsible for maintaining data quality.
- **Cultural challenges**, where data is often seen as an IT issue rather than an organisational asset.

The result is a paradox. Housing providers often have large quantities of information, yet still lack the confidence to rely on it when making strategic or operational decisions.

At the same time, expectations are rising. Regulators, tenants and policymakers increasingly expect organisations to demonstrate evidence-based decision-making, better service outcomes and improved transparency.



# Key Data Challenges Identified

## Data Quality

Poor data quality was one of the most widely recognised problems.

Many organisations rely on legacy systems where information has been entered inconsistently over time. Placeholder values, incomplete records and duplicated data can undermine confidence in reports and analysis.

When frontline teams do not trust the data, they often create their own spreadsheets or local tracking systems, which can make fragmentation worse.

Improving data quality therefore requires both technical fixes and changes in working practices.

## Data Governance and Ownership

Another recurring issue was the lack of clear responsibility for data.

In many organisations, it is unclear who owns different datasets or who is accountable for maintaining them. Without defined ownership, errors persist and systems become harder to manage.

Participants emphasised the importance of assigning responsibility to specific teams for particular types of data – such as asset information, tenancy records or repairs data. This creates accountability and helps build a culture of data stewardship across the organisation.

## Skills and Capacity

Several organisations reported limited capacity to manage and analyse data effectively.

Smaller housing providers in particular may not have dedicated data analysts or digital specialists. This makes it difficult to select the right tools, implement data strategies or develop predictive insights.

Participants noted that improving data capability will require both recruitment and partnerships with external specialists.

## Too Much Data, Not Enough Insight

A number of organisations reported producing large volumes of reports, dashboards and performance metrics.

However, this can sometimes create confusion rather than clarity.

Without clear questions or decision-making frameworks, teams may struggle to identify which insights actually matter. Participants emphasised the importance of focusing on **relevant, actionable data** rather than generating more reports.

## Data Provenance and Trust

Another emerging concern was **data provenance** – understanding where data originates and how it moves through systems.

This is particularly important as organisations begin to explore AI tools and automated analysis. If the underlying data cannot be traced or verified, there are risks around reliability, compliance and privacy.

Participants highlighted the need for clearer documentation of data sources and stronger governance around how information is shared and reused.

## Data Sharing and Interoperability

Housing organisations often work alongside local authorities, health services and support providers.

However, systems are rarely designed to share information easily or securely between organisations.

Participants discussed the need for **trusted, ring-fenced data sharing environments** that allow collaboration while protecting commercial interests and tenant privacy.

Improving interoperability could unlock better service coordination and more effective early intervention for vulnerable tenants.

## The Most Important Data Problem to Solve

Participants were asked to identify the single most important data challenge the sector should address.

# Several Priorities Emerged

## Predicting Future Housing Demand

Many participants emphasised the need for better **long-term forecasting**.

Housing providers must anticipate demographic changes, population growth and shifting tenant needs. Accurate predictions are essential for planning the right mix of housing over the next 20 years.

## Data Lineage and Risk Management

Understanding how data is created, stored and used is critical for compliance and operational reliability.

Participants called for stronger frameworks to track data lineage and manage risks related to data quality.

## Building Trusted Data Systems

There was strong support for creating systems that allow organisations to share insights securely while maintaining accountability and protecting sensitive information.

## Improving Tenant Confidence

Reliable data also plays an important role in building trust with tenants.

When communication, repairs or services rely on incorrect information, confidence in the organisation can quickly erode.

Improving data accuracy therefore directly affects the relationship between housing providers and residents.

## Early-Warning Systems for Tenant Support

Participants also highlighted the potential to integrate different datasets to identify emerging problems earlier.

For example, combining information on repairs, missed appointments, or repeated service requests could help identify households that may need additional support before issues escalate.

## Building Data Capability in the Next 12 Months

Looking ahead, participants discussed what improved data capability could look like within the next year.



# Several Themes Emerged

## Treating Data as a Core Asset

Organisations need to recognise data as a foundational asset that underpins services, rather than as a technical function managed solely by IT departments.

This requires leadership commitment and investment.

## Making Data Useful for Frontline Staff

Housing officers, surveyors and communications teams all rely on accurate information.

Participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that data is accessible, understandable and relevant for everyday operational decisions.

## Measuring Real-World Impact

Many government programmes – such as net zero initiatives or social value frameworks – are designed with clear policy goals.

However, organisations often struggle to measure their real impact on tenants' lives.

Better data collection and analysis could help close this gap by linking policy interventions to measurable outcomes.

## Strengthening Partnerships

Consultancies, technology providers and legal advisors can support housing organisations in developing stronger data governance and analytical capabilities.

Participants suggested that collaborative partnerships could accelerate progress across the sector.

## Communicating Effectively During Data Issues

Even with robust systems, data errors or inconsistencies are inevitable. How organisations communicate in these situations can make a significant difference to trust, engagement, and decision-making. Participants highlighted several best practices:

1. Transparency and Honesty – Clearly acknowledge when data may be incomplete, inaccurate, or delayed. Avoid overpromising and provide realistic explanations of the limitations.
2. Timely Updates – Inform internal teams, tenants, and external partners as soon as issues are identified, and provide regular progress updates on resolutions.
3. Accountability and Ownership – Designate specific teams or individuals responsible for correcting errors and communicating changes. This ensures messages are consistent and credible.
4. Context and Actionable Guidance – Explain how the issue affects decisions or services, and provide clear instructions on any steps stakeholders should take.
5. Learning and Prevention – Use communications as an opportunity to reinforce the organisation's commitment to improving data quality, demonstrating that errors are being addressed and systems strengthened for the future.

By combining transparency with clear accountability, housing organisations can maintain confidence in their data, minimise confusion, and ensure that even in the face of errors, communications remain effective and trusted.

With this example in mind and from learnings within your own organisations, what single housing challenge would you solve with data tomorrow, if you could?



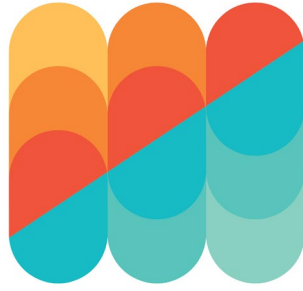
# Conclusion

The housing sector's data dilemma is not primarily a technology problem. Instead, it reflects deeper issues around governance, culture and organisational capacity.

While tools such as AI and predictive analytics offer significant potential, participants agreed that the sector must first focus on the fundamentals: data quality, clear ownership and strong governance.

By treating data as a strategic asset and embedding responsibility across organisations, housing providers can begin to unlock the insights needed to improve services, strengthen tenant relationships and plan effectively for the future.





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