

Smart Buildings Roundtable

Organiser: TLA Smart Cities (In association with the UK Launchpad run by Arora Digital) | 17th March 2022

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Trevor Miles
UK Manager
R8 Technologies



Eric Woods
Director
Guidehouse Insights



Anakha Nambiar
Smart City Manager
Westminster Council



Wayne Siggers
Digital Innovation Manager
Southend Council



Ashley Bateup
Director,
Chess UK



Gary Sharkey
Head of Smart and
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Big 6 Consultancy



Sandeep Arora
Co-Chair (TLA Smart Cities) & CEO
(The UK Launchpad by Arora Digital)

The purpose of the roundtable was to understand how the smart buildings agenda had progressed, particularly considering recent changes in social, political and economic factors such as the pandemic, COP26 and the recent surge in energy prices.

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Summary of the key points

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Social, political and economic drivers

The roundtable started by discussing the social, political and economic drivers. Gary noted that the pandemic had accelerated the adaption of use cases for making buildings smart. This included a discussion on the change in use of buildings and security measures. Trevor noted that R8 had seen a spike in interest for their building efficiency solutions as a result of the COP26 agenda and more recently due to the surge in energy prices. Wayne noted that Southend Council were taking steps to understand how residents could be supported on energy costs during this time.

Council priorities

The discussion moved onto what were currently the priority areas for councils in relation to the smart buildings agenda. Eric noted that they were seeing more people in council digital roles which was providing a pathway between the innovation and IT teams. Wayne, stressed that the base infrastructure needed to be in place before they could make effective use of smart technologies and that the priority currently was to focus on addressing the legacy

infrastructure and moving to the cloud. Wayne highlighted that a key area of concern was digital exclusion, as more and more council services were moving online. Anakha stressed that Westminster was still early in the smart city agenda and that at this stage culture change was a huge aspect of this. Eric added that it was very important that we better understand the interaction of the building with its role in the broader built environment to make the right prioritisation.

It was noted that the key areas that councils were looking at included the change in building usage as a result of hybrid working, accessibility and security, use of predictive maintenance technologies and monitoring of vulnerable people in their own homes.

Engaging with Tech vendors

The discussion moved on to the broader engagement model with technology vendors. Gary stressed that tech companies needed to be more nimble and to adapt their technology to broader use cases and not



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focus on the silo use case perspective. It was also noted that different buildings have different drivers and that the technology needs to be aligned to the driver. Ashley added that the ROI becomes clearer when you integrate different technologies. He also stressed that champions from business were needed for any business case to be successful.

Data

Data was raised as a key area of focus. Gary stated that the data produced by buildings was key also for the wider community, such as for aligning with retail and transport requirements and that data benefits really occur when user data from the buildings is pooled to change the behavior of people in a region. Anakha noted that data usage was a concern for residents and that Westminster focus groups are in place to understand their concerns around aspects such as data usage. Wayne added that one of the first things Southend Council do when they speak to vendors is to understand the potential data issues, including ownership. Eric concluded by stating that it was imperative to sort out the data governance issues, as it was either a key enabler or barrier for the smart city agenda.

Financing

The roundtable concluded with a look at the approach to financing smart building projects. Wayne highlighted that funding was always the challenge, he noted there were many government competitions but that it could be hard to identify the relevant ones and, even then, to identify these in a timely manner. Ashley added that councils could make use of zero interest rate government loans available through Salix. Gary stated that outside of the UK he was seeing more nimble seeding of city funds with public and private capital and that some of the large tech companies seemed to be very keen to help invest in such funds.

Eric added that they had seen examples of energy service companies, which look to fund programmes and make a profit from the savings, but that these were not currently so popular in the UK. Trevor mentioned that there are financial incentives in place for buildings to support the utilities in balancing the energy grid.

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