

From Theory to Practice: How Carlisle's Innovation Lab is Operationalising FM Innovation

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The Innovation Lab is [Carlisle Support Services](#)' flagship industry event, taking place on 5 March at ACC Liverpool. This sector-leading forum brings together senior leaders, innovators, and expert speakers across different industries including FM, security, cleaning, and wider support services, to explore the ideas shaping the future of service delivery.



Designed to move beyond theory, the Lab focuses on practical innovation across both soft and

hard facilities management operations. From advanced cleaning technologies and data-led maintenance to sustainable practices and people-centred workforce strategies, it offers a clear and evidence-based view of how FM is evolving. With sustainability, efficiency, and resilience now central to FM decision-making, the Innovation Lab provides a collaborative platform to explore future-ready, operationally proven solutions that enhance performance, reduce environmental impact, and strengthen the role of FM within complex-built environments.

As this year's Innovation Lab approaches, we spoke to Richard Jenkins, Managing Director of Cleaning and FM at Carlisle Support Services, about why the event matters for the strategic improvement and future direction of FM.

Making Innovation Operational

Richard explained that the Innovation Lab exists to turn innovation from talking points into something operationally real, solutions that can be tested, measured, and implemented on live estates.

"I think in cleaning and FM, we probably don't need any more theory. There's plenty of theory in the industry already. We need to see solutions that work on live estates under pressure that have been stress tested and have met real life constraints on sites and constraints around cost and compliance," he said.

Carlisle's Innovation Lab differs from other industry events through cross industry collaboration, live demonstrations, talking stages, real case studies, and a clear emphasis on measurable outcomes. Delegates would see robotics, autonomous equipment, and IoT in action, backed by data showing how they have been used in complex environments including healthcare, public infrastructure, and rail.

Technologies Transforming FM

For Richard, the most immediate transformation will come from technologies that improve productivity and consistency without increasing labour demand. Robotic and autonomous cleaning equipment is proving particularly effective in high-footfall areas.

"We are moving into a market now where labour costs continue to rise. Robotics and autonomous cleaning solutions are already proving highly effective in high footfall, large scale environments," he explained.

Richard emphasised that technology is not about replacing people, but about making them more productive. Alongside robotics, IoT-enabled sensors support cleaners with real-time footfall data, driving on-demand cleaning and moving away from fixed schedules.

"We are seeing a rapid progress in AI-supported planning and quality assurance systems," Richard added.

"These technologies represent a shift from what used to be a reactive cleaning model to a predictive, intelligence-led service delivery."

Sustainability and Data

The Innovation Lab embeds sustainability throughout, with the event itself being carbon-neutral. However, Richard was keen to emphasise that sustainability is not just about purchasing decisions.

“I think one of the things to emphasise is how significantly sustainability can be improved through better use of data. For example, a site that traditionally required weekly deliveries may, move to monthly delivery cycles instead, reducing carbon output and NOx emissions. It’s about really planting that seed in people’s minds,” he said.

Data is now the foundation of modern FM operations. The Innovation Lab demonstrates how IoT sensors, CAFM platforms and live dashboards monitor performance in real time and predict demand and evidence compliance.

“These systems inform what we do and provide assurance on what we deliver,” Richard said.

People at the Core

On balancing innovation with frontline team engagement, Richard was emphatic: the most successful innovation programmes are delivered with frontline teams, not imposed on them.

“We need to get our frontline operators on board with what we’re doing and why. Technology should remove annoyance, frustration, and repetition, while preserving the core skills of experience or operators’ judgement that define high quality FM delivery,” he said.

When introduced effectively, technology frees up time for higher-value work and meaningful customer interactions, improving both outcome and job satisfaction.

“Technology, when deployed to support people, creates new skill pathways and reinforces why people are at the core of FM,” Richard explained.

Richard observed a clear shift in sector mindset, with peer-to-peer collaboration playing a crucial role in accelerating adoption. There is growing recognition that digital literacy, data awareness, and technology integration are now core FM competencies rather than optional enhancement.

“A key element of the Lab is assurance. It provides confidence that others are progressing in the same direction and these innovative solutions can be implemented safely and at scale,” he added.

Shaping the Future

For Carlisle, the Innovation Lab reinforces a long-term strategic shift towards evidence-led FM. Over the next few years, this means improved productivity, stronger sustainability outcomes, more resilient service models, and a workforce equipped with modern, transferable skills.

“The days where people turn up to work and follow a tick sheet on the cleaning cupboard door are gone. Data-first, evidence-led FM approaches are the future of service strategy,” he said.

“We’re a great stepping stone for individuals, opening visibility into broader career pathways while strengthening its role as a real strategic partner in complex-built environments. We drive performance, safety, and value – and that’s what the Innovation Lab 2026 would support,” he concluded.

Tap the link to register and be part of the conversation shaping the future of sustainable innovation across FM sector – <https://innovationlab.carlisesupportservices.com/delegates/>

