

CASE STUDY

**ALLPAY
SUCCESS:**

**MUIR GROUP'S
8X8 JOURNEY.**

WE'RE MUIR



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muir.org.uk



Region: North West England & Wales



Products/Services: Contact Centre, UCaaS, PfH, Cisco Call Manager & UCCX



Primary Reason for Choice:

- Innovative integration with AllPay,
- Operational Efficiencies & Cost Savings



Muir Group Housing Association embarked on a transformative journey with the implementation of 8x8's Contact Centre and UCaaS services, setting a new standard for communication and customer service in the UK housing sector. This strategic move was driven by the need to modernise their legacy systems, which despite years of good service, were inflexible, costly, and unable to meet the evolving demands of their customers and staff.

The deployment of 8x8's solutions brought about significant operational efficiencies, cost savings, and enhanced payment security through the integration with AllPay. The omnichannel service capabilities provided by 8x8 allowed Muir Group to offer a seamless customer service experience across various communication channels, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.



WE'RE **MUIR**

BACKGROUND.

Muir Group, a prominent housing provider with communities across NW England and North Wales, faced several communication challenges that necessitated a robust and innovative solution. Muir required a system that could integrate seamlessly with its existing operational practices, particularly for online payments through AllPay, and offer a comprehensive omnichannel customer service experience.

The decision to implement 8x8 Contact Centre and UCaaS services was driven by the need for a flexible, scalable, and integrated communication platform that could enhance both employee and customer experiences. The 8x8 services promised to deliver a unified communication solution that would not only streamline internal collaboration with features like Microsoft Teams integration but also elevate the customer service standards with advanced contact centre capabilities.

They were particularly impressed with the potential of 8x8's services to provide a seamless transition for its 160 users, including 17 contact centre agents, to a modern cloud-based telephony system. The promise of improved operational efficiencies, cost savings, and enhanced payment security through PCI Pal & AllPay integration played a significant role in its choice.

The deployment of 8x8's services marked a significant step forward in Muir Group Housing Association's digital transformation journey, setting a new benchmark for customer service excellence in the housing sector.

CHALLENGES.

Prior to the implementation of 8x8 services, Muir Group grappled with several significant challenges that stemmed from their existing communication systems. The legacy product they used, Cisco's Call Manager with UCCX, was proving to be inflexible and unresponsive to the evolving needs of the organisation. Integrating essential functions such as email into call queues was a persistent issue, often requiring 3rd party consultancy services, which would come at a financial cost to the organisation.

The system's responsiveness was another major concern. Described as clunky and cumbersome, it failed to meet the quick-paced demands of modern customer service. Moreover, the on-premises nature of the system, coupled with SIP lines from Virgin, added layers of complexity and risk. During lockdowns, VPN connections were employed to facilitate remote work, and whilst they worked effectively, but this solution was far from ideal.



These challenges highlighted the need for a more robust, flexible, and integrated communication system that could streamline operations, enhance customer service, and reduce the reliance on outdated infrastructure. The move to 8x8 services was seen as a strategic step to overcome these obstacles and position Muir Group Housing Association for future growth and innovation.



ABOUT CISCO CALL MANAGER AND UCCX IN SOCIAL HOUSING.

Cisco Call Manager has been the integral components in the telecommunication infrastructure of many organisations, including those in the social housing sector. However, their application has not been without challenges.

Despite its rich features, Cisco Call Manager, is heavily reliant on software updates and licensing. This has led to a lack of agility in responding to business changes and introduced unexpected costs. The system's modular nature and administration through various consoles relating to different feature sets (contact centre, voicemail, call recording, call manager) posed a steep learning curve for new IT staff. Furthermore, the system often necessitated hardware upgrades and lacked the flexibility to quickly scale in response to demand fluctuations. This inflexibility presented significant challenges in administering billing and contracts associated with the system.

UCCX, standing for Unified Contact Centre Express, is a customer contact solution from Cisco. It provides a secure and sophisticated customer interaction management solution for up to 400 agents. Designed to be deployed on Cisco Unified Computing Systems, it offers advanced call routing and comprehensive contact management capabilities. However, the legacy system has been described as inflexible and unresponsive to the evolving needs of some housing providers, with issues integrating email into call queues and an overall cumbersome responsiveness.

Moving forward, it is essential for organisations in the social housing sector to consider these challenges when implementing or upgrading their telecommunication systems. Solutions that offer greater flexibility, ease of use, and integration with other communication channels may provide a more effective and cost-efficient approach.

PROCUREMENT PROCESS.

The process began at Housing Technology Conference in 2022, where Social Telecoms, a sponsor of the event, gave a demonstration of the 8x8 Contact Centre service to Muir Group. From then it was about building interest from other key stakeholders within the organisation.

The procurement process for the 8x8 Contact Centre and UCaaS services at Muir Group was a strategic decision aimed at modernising its communication systems. The association leveraged the framework provided by Procurement for Housing (PfH) to streamline the procurement process, ensuring compliance with government spending regulations and demonstrating value for money.

Social Telecoms played a pivotal role as the service provider, guiding Muir Group through the procurement journey. The decision to use a direct award approach via the PfH framework, allowed for a swift and efficient procurement process, avoiding the complexities and challenges of public sector procurement which can often be cumbersome and time-consuming.

Ian Whitwell, Head of ICT highlights the benefits of this approach, stating, *“The PfH framework significantly simplified our procurement process, enabling us to directly award the contract to Social Telecoms and avoid the pitfalls of traditional procurement.*

SOLUTION DEPLOYMENT.

The deployment of the 8x8 Contact Centre and UCaaS services at Muir Group Housing Association was characterised by a smooth and well-orchestrated process, thanks to the meticulous initial planning and the comprehensive gathering of requirements upfront. The project team on Muir's side, and their counterparts at 8x8 and Social Telecoms, invested significant effort in the early weeks to ensure a clear understanding of the current setup and user information. This investment paid off, as it paved the way for a deployment that proceeded with minimal technical challenges.

The deployment included the setup of UCaaS for 160 users, with a focus on integrating seamlessly with Microsoft Teams. Users were already familiar with many of the aspects of MS Teams, so the need for in-depth training was avoided, but the inclusion of voice telephony into Teams was new to the organisation.

For the contact centre operations, the deployment enhanced the capabilities for 17 agents with full omnichannel services, and the addition of call and screen recording, which were essential for quality assurance and compliance. The significance of the AllPay integration was particularly noteworthy, as it played a vital role in streamlining payment processing and enhancing payment security.



CONTACT CENTRE OPERATIONS.

The deployment of 8x8's Contact Centre and UCaaS services has brought about a significant transformation in the operations of Muir Group. The setup for the 17 agents now includes omnichannel services, which allows for a unified and streamlined customer service experience across various communication channels. Currently, the agents have access to SMS, WhatsApp, and Facebook, with plans to add live chat to the array of services offered in the future.

Post-implementation, the organisation has seen specific examples of operational efficiencies. The call flow analysis allows agents to see what buttons customers press during their interactions, providing valuable insights into customer behaviors and needs. The general dashboard, which has replaced the previous wallboard, offers a much-improved overview of key performance indicators like time on hold, enhancing the ability to monitor and manage performance.

ALLPAY INTEGRATION

The integration with AllPay was a significant milestone for housing organisations, marking a shift towards a more innovative and flexible payment processing system. AllPay is the prevalent payment merchant in the housing sector, offering residents a variety of payment options, including online, telephone, Post Office, PayPoint locations, and a mobile app.

This integration was particularly important as AllPay had, until recently, an exclusive tie to a payment gateway. In 2023, AllPay began working with other payment gateways, including Secure Pay from 8x8.

Before this integration, Muir Group used a system that routed incoming calls through a call forwarding number for PCI compliant payments. The agents would sign into the previous system to take payments. With the integration of 8x8 Secure Pay, the process has been significantly streamlined. This service enables agents to take secure payments while staying in contact with the customer to guide them through the process, providing increased security for credit card handling and minimising agent effort.

The challenges due to legal constraints were significant, as the previous exclusive tie limited options for payment processing with AllPay as the merchant. However, Muir overcame these challenges by adopting 8x8 Secure Pay, which not only met but exceeded the standards set by the previous system, ensuring that Muir could confidently maintain PCI compliance when taking payments.

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RESULTS.

The implementation of 8x8's Contact Centre and UCaaS services has yielded significant benefits for Muir Group, reflecting the organisation's commitment to operational excellence and customer satisfaction. The results of this transformative project include:

- **Operational Efficiencies:** The new system has streamlined various processes within the contact centre, allowing for more efficient call flow management and improved performance metrics. Agents now have access to dashboards providing real-time insights into key performance indicators, improving performance management.
- **Customer Service Improvement:** Muir Group's customer service has been improved by providing a unified experience across all communication channels, leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty.
- **Future-Proofing:** Muir Group is future-ready, offering the adaptability and scalability needed for ongoing growth and innovation, aligning with evolving technologies and customer expectations in the housing sector.
- **IT Team Empowerment:** The transition to 8x8's solutions has empowered Muir Group's IT team by liberating them from maintaining the old Cisco system. This shift has enabled the team to focus on strategic initiatives, fostering innovation and maintaining a competitive edge in the digital realm. The change has boosted operational efficiency and established a proactive, future-oriented IT department.