

Social telecoms

be social, stay connected

CONTACT CENTRE GUIDE

FOR HOUSING



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INTRODUCTIONS.

INTRO TO SOCIAL TELECOMS.

Welcome to the essential guide for modernising contact centre services within the social housing and local authority sectors. This guide is designed to navigate you through the myriad of options available, helping you understand and evaluate the best solutions to meet your unique organisational needs.

In an era where communication technology evolves rapidly, it's crucial for service providers to stay ahead of the curve. This guide aims to demystify the complex landscape of contact centre services, offering insights into the latest advancements and how they can enhance your operations.

From **Beyond Housing's** implementation of a complete 8x8 omnichannel Contact Centre with AI-driven digital assistant, to **Muir Group's** strategic initiative to benefit from the brand new AllPay integration, we'll explore the transformative journeys of organisations that have successfully modernised their communication systems.

You'll learn how **Havebury Housing Partnership** improved operational efficiency and customer service whilst gaining social value, and how **Housing Solutions** aligned their new robust communication system with corporate objectives of safety, satisfaction, and sustainability, and evolving it with digital assistants later.

Whether you're grappling with the limitations of your current system or exploring new ways to improve customer engagement, this guide will provide you with a comprehensive overview of the leading services offered by providers such as 8x8 and Logicdialog. We'll delve into the transformative power of AI-driven features like digital assistants, quality management, speech analytics, and intelligent IVR systems, as well as the tried-and-true functionalities that form the backbone of effective telecommunications services.

Our goal is to empower you with knowledge, enabling informed decision-making that aligns with your strategic goals and delivers exceptional service to your community. Let's embark on this journey together to explore the future of contact centre solutions

INTRODUCTIONS.

LIKE-MINDED VALUES.

As both a social enterprise and a Community Interest Company, Social Telecoms operates with a mission that resonates deeply with the ethos of social housing providers and local authorities.



Our structure as a CIC means that we reinvest our surplus into community projects, mirroring the community-focused objectives of the housing and local authority sectors we serve. This alignment in values and goals enhances our partnership with our customers, as we share a common commitment to improving and enriching the lives of residents and communities.



At Social Telecoms, we are dedicated to building lasting relationships, working as an integral part of your team to foster community development and empowerment. Our focus extends beyond mere service provision; we strive to be a partner in achieving your social objectives, continuously innovating to keep you at the forefront of the ever-evolving digital landscape.

EXCLUSIVITY TO THE HOUSING SECTOR.

At Social Telecoms, our exclusivity to the housing and local authority sectors is underpinned by a strategic focus on meeting the specific needs of these organisations.

Our Customer Experience services, including advanced contact centre solutions and digital assistants, are prime examples of this tailored approach. These services are designed to enhance the way housing providers interact with their residents, ensuring a seamless, responsive, and effective communication experience.

Contact centre services have significantly evolved to include key requirements of the housing sector, such as PCI compliant payments from AllPay, and video triaging of repairs. These integrations have been crucial in enhancing tenant engagement and operational efficiency. For instance, AllPay's secure and compliant payment processes streamline payment collection and instill trust among tenants regarding the safety of their financial data. Additionally, video triaging allows for a more effective assessment and prioritisation of repair work, leading to improved response times and resource allocation.

Shortly after incorporation, we quickly adapted to the evolving needs of the housing sector by diversifying into digital inclusion services. This strategic move reflects our dedication to meeting the wider needs of housing communities, particularly in ensuring digital accessibility.

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PROCUREMENT FRAMEWORK HOLDER.



Our number one ranking on the Procurement for Housing telecommunications framework is a significant accolade for Social Telecoms, reflecting our commitment to excellence and compliance.

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This top-ranked status brings substantial benefits to PfH members. Notably, it allows for a direct award of the framework, providing a streamlined procurement process. This facility saves time but also instils confidence in the quality and reliability of the telecommunications services provided.

Furthermore, all the advanced contact centre solutions and digital assistants mentioned in this guide are available to PfH members via the framework. This ensures that members have access to a comprehensive suite of solutions that are not only tailored to the unique challenges of the housing sector but also adhere to the high standards of procurement efficiency and compliance.

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WE'RE MUIR

Muir Group Housing Association, serving over 5,000 homes in communities widespread across NW England and North Wales, has been at the forefront of addressing communication challenges within the housing sector.

Havebury

Housing Partnership

Havebury Housing Partnership (HHP) stands out as a beacon of affordable housing in the East of England, particularly in Suffolk. With a portfolio exceeding 7,500 properties, HHP's reach goes beyond conventional housing management, offering a range of sheltered accommodation and a local-homeless accommodation unit, Tayfen House, in Bury St Edmunds.



Beyond Housing

Established in 2018, Beyond Housing has rapidly become one of the leading housing organisations in the North East region of the UK. Managing over 15,000 homes and serving more than 30,000 customers in the Tees Valley and North Yorkshire areas, Beyond Housing is committed to providing services that customers value, homes they desire, and places they are proud of.



Housing Solutions

Housing Solutions, a community-focused association with over 7,500 homes in the south of England, has distinguished itself as a leader in leveraging technology to enhance tenant engagement and operational efficiency.

THE LANDSCAPE OF CONTACT CENTRE.

THE LANDSCAPE OF CONTACT CENTRE COMMUNICATIONS IN HOUSING.

The contact centre industry is undergoing a transformation, driven by technological advancements and evolving customer expectations. Today's landscape is marked by a shift towards integrated, omnichannel communication solutions that promise to redefine customer engagement and operational efficiency.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND AUTOMATION.

AI is at the forefront of contact centre innovation, offering tools like digital assistants and intelligent IVR systems that streamline operations and enhance customer service. The use of AI enables contact centres to handle routine inquiries with ease, allowing human agents to focus on more complex tasks. For instance, **Beyond Housing** leveraged Logicialog's digital assistant to improve their customer service operations, showcasing the practical application of AI in real-world scenarios, and **Housing Solutions** have been equipped with 8x8's Intelligent Customer Assistant (ICA).

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OMNICHANNEL COMMUNICATION AND INTEGRATION.

The modern contact centre is characterised by its ability to offer seamless communication across various channels.

Omnichannel communication is the strategic integration of multiple interaction channels into a single, harmonious customer experience. It ensures that whether a customer connects through phone, email, social media, live chat, or SMS, the service they receive is consistently excellent and unified. This approach is essential in today's digital landscape, where customers expect fluid interactions with organisations across various platforms.

Beyond Housing identified better communication as something it needed to strengthen to improve customer satisfaction following its merger. By adopting an omnichannel strategy, **Beyond Housing** can interact using digital assistant, SMS, email and social media, providing a seamless transition between channels and enhancing overall customer satisfaction.

Housing Solutions adopted 8x8 four years ago to use cloud services, and integrated it with Microsoft Teams for its customer contact centre. It also added web chat, chatbot and social media to their omnichannel experiences which helped them with their digital transformation journey.

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MICROSOFT TEAMS INTEGRATION.

The integration of Microsoft Teams with contact centre solutions is a pivotal development in the housing sector's contact centre landscape. This synergy harnesses the collaborative prowess of Microsoft Teams and the robust calling capabilities of an enterprise-grade contact centre service, delivering a comprehensive communication solution.

Housing Solutions, under the guidance of Richard Harvey, is optimising their Microsoft Licensing to increase the use of Teams across the organisation. The integration with Teams enables staff to collaborate more effectively and address customer inquiries with greater efficiency.

New in 2024, the introduction of 8x8 Operator Connect for Microsoft Teams exemplifies this trend, providing the most unified experience yet. This service ensures that organisations can manage their customer interactions directly within Teams, fostering a more connected and efficient environment.

What is Operator Connect?

Operator Connect is a Microsoft program designed for certified third-party providers to enable PSTN calling through Microsoft Teams Phone. It allows organisations to leverage the familiar Teams interface for reliable, enterprise-grade calling capabilities. Microsoft-Certified 8x8 Operator Connect for Microsoft Teams is purpose-built and Microsoft-certified, ensuring a fast deployment that is fully compliant with the Operator Connect Program.

THE LANDSCAPE OF CONTACT CENTRE.

DATA ANALYTICS AND PERSONALISATION.

With advanced analytics, contact centres can now delve into customer interactions to extract actionable insights. This data-driven approach not only personalises the customer experience but also informs strategic decisions, enabling housing providers to tailor their services to the evolving needs of their customers.

Beyond Housing has effectively utilised the quality management tool to analyse customer interactions deeply, identifying specific training needs for its advisors. This strategic use of analytics has been instrumental in developing its employees to deliver an improved first contact resolution service. The insights gained from analysing call flows have also led to a significant decision to rebuild its Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, ensuring that customers are directed to the right person from the outset, thereby enhancing the overall customer experience.

Housing Solutions has embraced speech analytics and call coaching to maintain regular contact and training with their agents. By analysing call trends through their CRM, they have been able to inform the content on their website and the development of their Chatbot. This proactive use of analytics helps to manage call volumes, especially during peak times, and provides a 24/7 service to residents through their customer portal, app, and Chatbot, even when phone lines are busy or closed.

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THE LANDSCAPE OF CONTACT CENTRE.

**CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS.**

Cloud-based contact centre solutions offer a range of benefits that are particularly advantageous for housing providers and similar organisations.

Scalability and Flexibility:

Cloud-based systems provide improved scalability, allowing organisations to easily adjust their services based on demand. This flexibility is crucial for housing providers that may experience fluctuating call volumes and need to adapt quickly.

Enhanced Security: Moving to a cloud-based system can reduce security risks associated with continuous connections to the company's network, as required by traditional VPN setups. Cloud systems can be accessed from anywhere without this need, offering a more secure solution.

Cost-Effectiveness:

Cloud solutions often result in cost savings due to their pay-as-you-go pricing models and reduced need for on-premises hardware and maintenance. This can be a significant advantage for organisations looking to optimise their budgets.

Operational Efficiency: Cloud-based contact centres can lead to operational efficiencies, with tools like digital assistants that answer repetitive questions, execute core processes, and generally return time and money to the business.

Improved Customer Service: With features like 8x8's video interaction solution, customers can start a live video chat with agents to get real-time personalized service, which enhances the customer experience and can lead to faster issue resolution.

Innovation and Integration: Cloud platforms like 8x8 offer a single platform for communication and collaboration, driving more efficient employee and customer engagement. They also provide a clear path for future needs, protecting today's investment and strengthening business resilience.

Strategic Alignment: For **Havebury Housing Partnership**, shifting to a cloud-based system aligned with their strategic objective of investing in cloud-based solutions and deploying new services into Microsoft Azure, demonstrating a forward-thinking approach to technology adoption.

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AGENT BENEFITS



UNDERSTANDING YOUR NEEDS: AGENT BENEFITS.

Understanding the needs of housing providers and local authorities for contact centre solutions is crucial for delivering effective and efficient services. This section will cover both the innovative services addressed by the four organisations and the everyday common aspects of a contact centre solution that may be taken for granted but are essential for operations.

Customer Identification and Pop-up Tenant Details.

The integration of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, such as the one implemented by **Beyond Housing** with MRI Housing & 8x8, is a cornerstone of modern contact centres. Agents are equipped with instant access to tenant details as soon as a call is received, streamlining the identification process. With built in integrations with several popular housing management systems already, plus CRMs like Salesforce, Dynamics and alike, these integrations are not just about efficiency; but personalising the interaction. This allows your agents to address tenants by name and understand their history and needs without delay, leading to a more tailored and satisfying customer experience.

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Call Transfer and Recording.

A Contact Centre and UCaaS service as a single platform can offer a seamless experience where call transfers from the Contact Centre to the back-office (or vice versa) do not interrupt the call recording. This ensures that the entire customer interaction is captured, providing a complete picture for quality assurance and compliance purposes. It's a crucial feature that enhances both the agent's ability to provide uninterrupted service and the organisation's ability to maintain thorough records.

Alternative Payment Methods & Call Masking.

Payment processing tools such as 8x8 Secure Pay allow contact centres to handle payment authorisations securely, moving toward overall compliance needs. Unlike systems with limited authorisation features, unsecured payment support, or complex navigation, Secure Pay offers increased security and PCI compliance for credit card handling. It often replaces manual processes while minimising agent effort, streamlining the payment experience for both the agent and the customer. The integration with Muir Group's AllPay system is a prime example of how Secure Pay can be utilised to enhance payment processes within a contact centre environment.

Availability Check.

The ability to quickly check the availability of colleagues across the organisation, such as income officers, is essential for efficient operations. Agents can engage in a voice call or chat and transfer the calls if necessary, ensuring that customers are connected to the right person without delay. This feature not only improves the customer's experience by reducing wait times but also streamlines internal communication, making it easier for agents to collaborate and resolve issues promptly.

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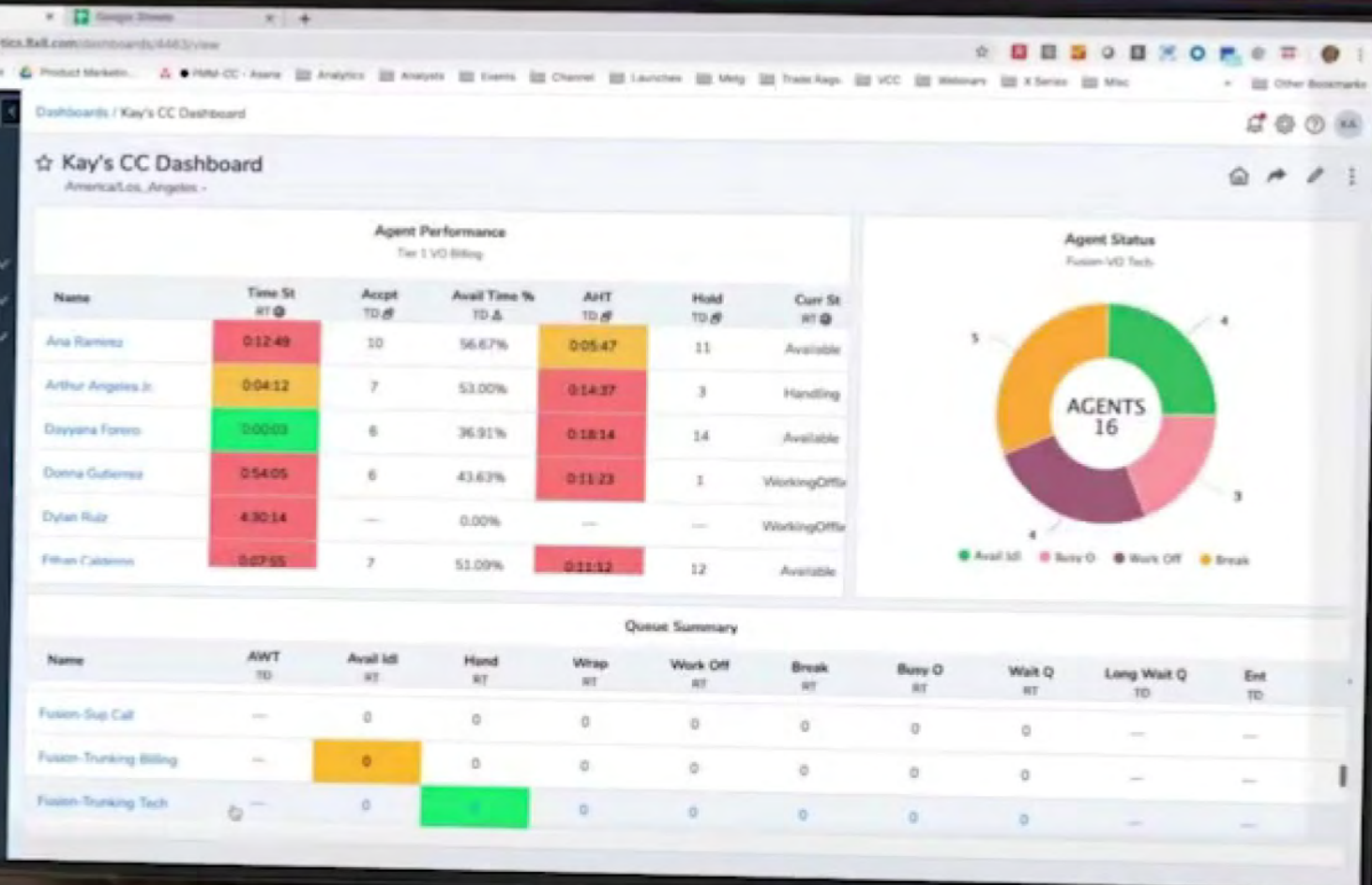
SUPERVISOR BENEFITS.

Call Direction Based on Skill Set or Geographical Patch.

Skills-based routing is a feature that directs calls, emails, webchats, and voicemail messages to an available agent with the highest skill level to handle that interaction. This ensures that customers are interacting with someone who has the skills to help them, thereby reducing the instances where customers need to be transferred, escalated, or called back.

Each skill set can be assigned a sufficiently weighted priority, for example, priority 10 = high, 1 = low. In addition to this, each agent can be prioritised in terms of capability for each skill set to enable highly skilled staff to be the preference over newer or lower-skilled agents. This approach optimises the customer experience by connecting them with the most qualified agent right from the start.

SUPERVISOR BENEFITS



Performance Management.

Dashboards are highly visual and intuitive, providing an instant understanding of your contact centre performance. Powerful tools show you what is going well and where to focus resources to improve your CX. You can create data charts tailored to your business needs using custom widgets and track the effectiveness of your queues or agents. Whether you use the pre-defined dashboard with pre-defined widgets or create your dashboard from scratch, you have the flexibility to monitor the metrics that matter most to your operation. Real-time widgets allow you to access key performance indicators for queues and agents in real-time or short time intervals, giving you the data you need when you need it.

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Supervisor Tools.

Supervisor tools are designed to help you plan, monitor, react, and control every important metric in your contact centre. We've already mentioned Wallboards providing up-to-the-minute statistical information that can be displayed everywhere; Other features like 'listen and barge' help you coach agents in real-time, either by following up later using recordings or by saving the day immediately by interrupting the call. Or, direct the agent behind the scenes in a chat session. Track historical performance with a powerful wizard that lets supervisors customise each report for at-a-glance reports on the information they need most. Intelligent scheduling features help you adjust schedules quickly and easily as real-world changes happen—without tedious rework. Voice and screen recording is a native feature, providing managers with the ability to play and pause the screen and voice capture, enhancing the training and quality assurance processes.

Scorecards.

Agent scorecards are a performance management feature in contact centres. They provide real-time and historical data on agent performance, allowing for goal setting and immediate feedback. Scorecards can track various KPIs, such as call handling time and customer satisfaction, and can be customised to prioritise different skill sets. This helps supervisors identify training needs and areas for improvement, ensuring agents are well-equipped to handle customer interactions effectively.

ANALYTICS, REPORTING + AI.

ANALYTICS, REPORTING + AI.

In the era of digital transformation, contact centres are not just about answering calls. They have evolved into strategic business units that leverage technology to deliver exceptional customer service. The integration of AI and analytics into contact centre operations has revolutionised the way social housing providers and local authorities interact with their tenants.

The following section on Analytics and Reporting will delve into how these technologies are being utilised by our case study organisations to enhance their service delivery. These organisations have harnessed the power of contact centre solutions to transform their customer service operations.

From speech recognition and call transcription to AI-driven analytics, these tools provide a wealth of data that can be analysed to gain insights into tenant interactions.



As we delve into the specifics of these technologies and their applications in the following sections, you'll see how they are not just improving the way these organisations operate, but also how they are shaping the future of customer service in the social housing sector. Let's explore how these organisations are leveraging technology to turn their contact centres into strategic assets.

ANALYTICS, REPORTING + AI.

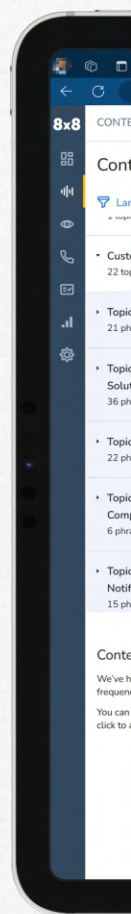
SPEECH RECOGNITION & CALL TRANSCRIPTION.

Speech analytics identifies major speech factors such as over-talk, clarity, and sentiment analysis with five levels for overall and positive and negative sentiment during the call.

The system can come pre-configured with common housing sector contact centre categories of speech analysis and within them, multiple topics, identifying upwards of thousands of phrases that typify positive or negative interactions. This unique pre-configuration provides immediate intelligence from the speech analytics solution.

Managers can add their own categories, topics, and phrases easily. The solution also includes a discovery section that identifies trending words and potential topics to monitor. Analysts, supervisors, or agents can review calls and label them with additional specific information as needed.

The Search tool uses natural phrase features for an easy-to-use interface, allowing for fast creation of analysis searches comparing agent and caller behaviour. Searches can be saved as tabs for reuse, automatically updating the information in the query at that time

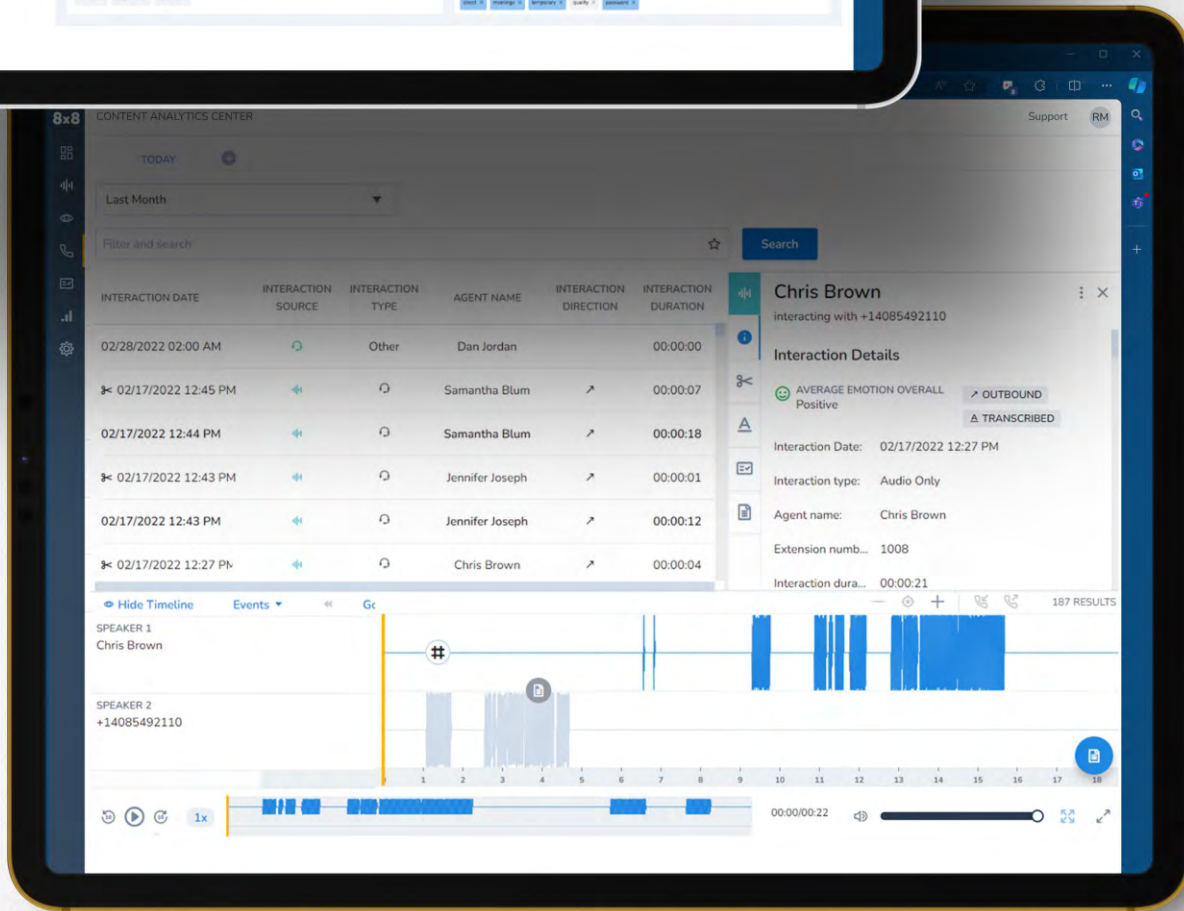
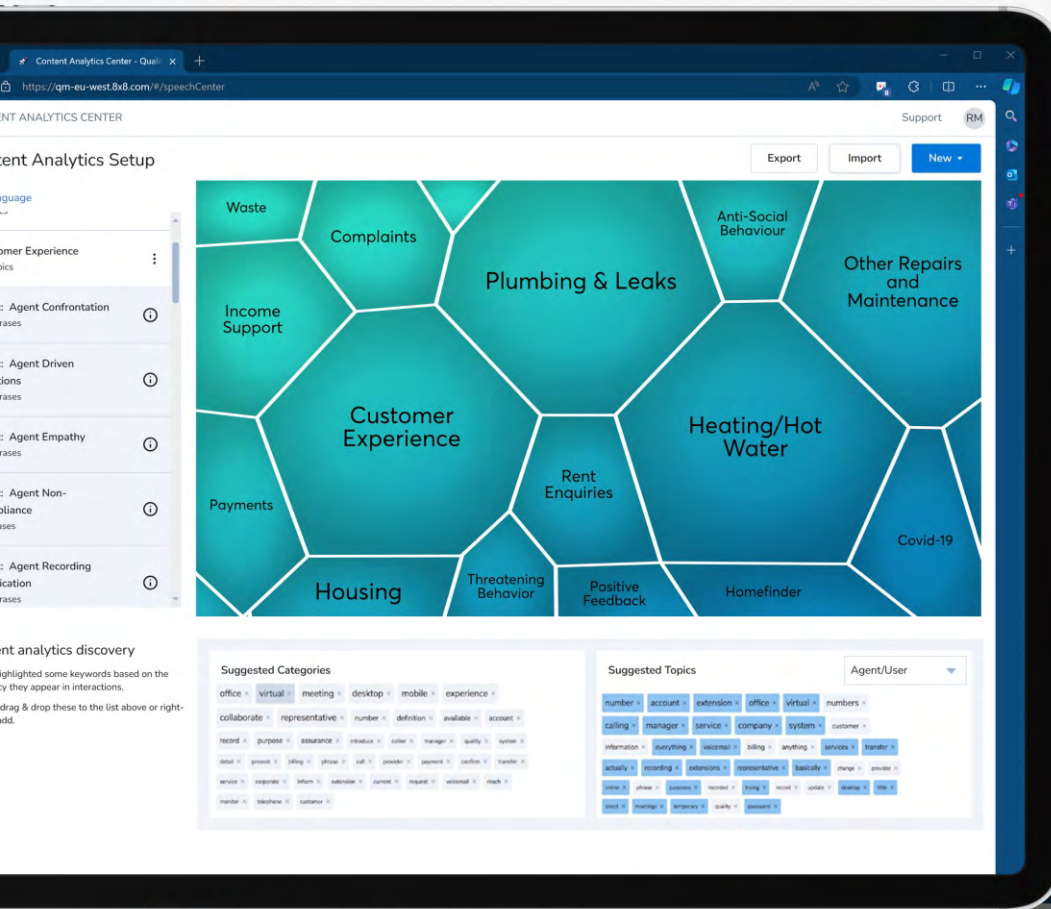


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AI-DRIVEN ANALYTICS.

Housing Solutions and **Beyond Housing** are utilising AI-Driven Analytics to gain deeper insights into customer interactions and improve service delivery.

For example, Housing Solutions use the analytics around boiler and heating failures, especially during cold weather. When it noticed an influx of calls about frozen condenser pipes, they proactively republished information on their website to guide customer on defrosting their condenser pipes, reducing the need for responsive repairs.

This proactive approach exemplifies how AI-Driven Analytics can be used to anticipate customer needs and provide self-help resources, ultimately improving the customer experience and operational efficiency. The AI tools within the Quality Management portal can identify speech factors such as over-talk, clarity, and sentiment analysis, which is pre-configured with contact centre categories and topics to immediately provide actionable intelligence. This system allows for the identification of trending issues, like radiator problems in winter, enabling the organisation to prepare and respond more effectively.



Moreover, the AI-driven tool is not limited to identifying problems but also captures positive interactions, which can be used as an agent training tool to reinforce successful behaviours. The ability to add custom categories, topics, and phrases, along with a discovery section for trending words, ensures that the analytics remain relevant and tailored to the organisation's specific needs

IMPROVING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.

Improving customer experience is a key focus for contact centres, and it's clear that **Beyond Housing** is taking proactive steps in this direction. The insights gained from analysing call flows have informed the need to rebuild the IVR system, ensuring that customers reach the right person on their first call.

Additionally, improvements to chatbot services have been made, which likely enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of digital interactions. By focusing on getting tenants to the right person the first time and enhancing self-service options, Beyond Housing is likely to see increased customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. These efforts contribute to a more responsive and customer-centric service model, which is essential in today's customer service landscape.





DIGITAL ASSISTANTS + AI.

DIGITAL ASSISTANTS + AI.

Digital assistants are advanced AI-driven tools designed to streamline customer service operations. On your website or app, they resemble a live chat, but can be used for some much more – including SMS, instant messaging and your IVR. They are capable of handling routine enquiries, executing core processes, and providing quick, automated responses across various communication channels. By integrating with CRM systems, digital assistants offer personalised experiences, ensuring that each customer interaction is tailored to their specific needs and history.

Digital assistants have transformed contact centre operations by significantly reducing agent workload and improving customer interaction management. For social housing providers, digital assistants bring operational efficiencies and improved access to information and services for residents. They are especially effective in reducing repetitive enquiries, streamlining services such as rent balance checks, and simplifying payment processes through various platforms.

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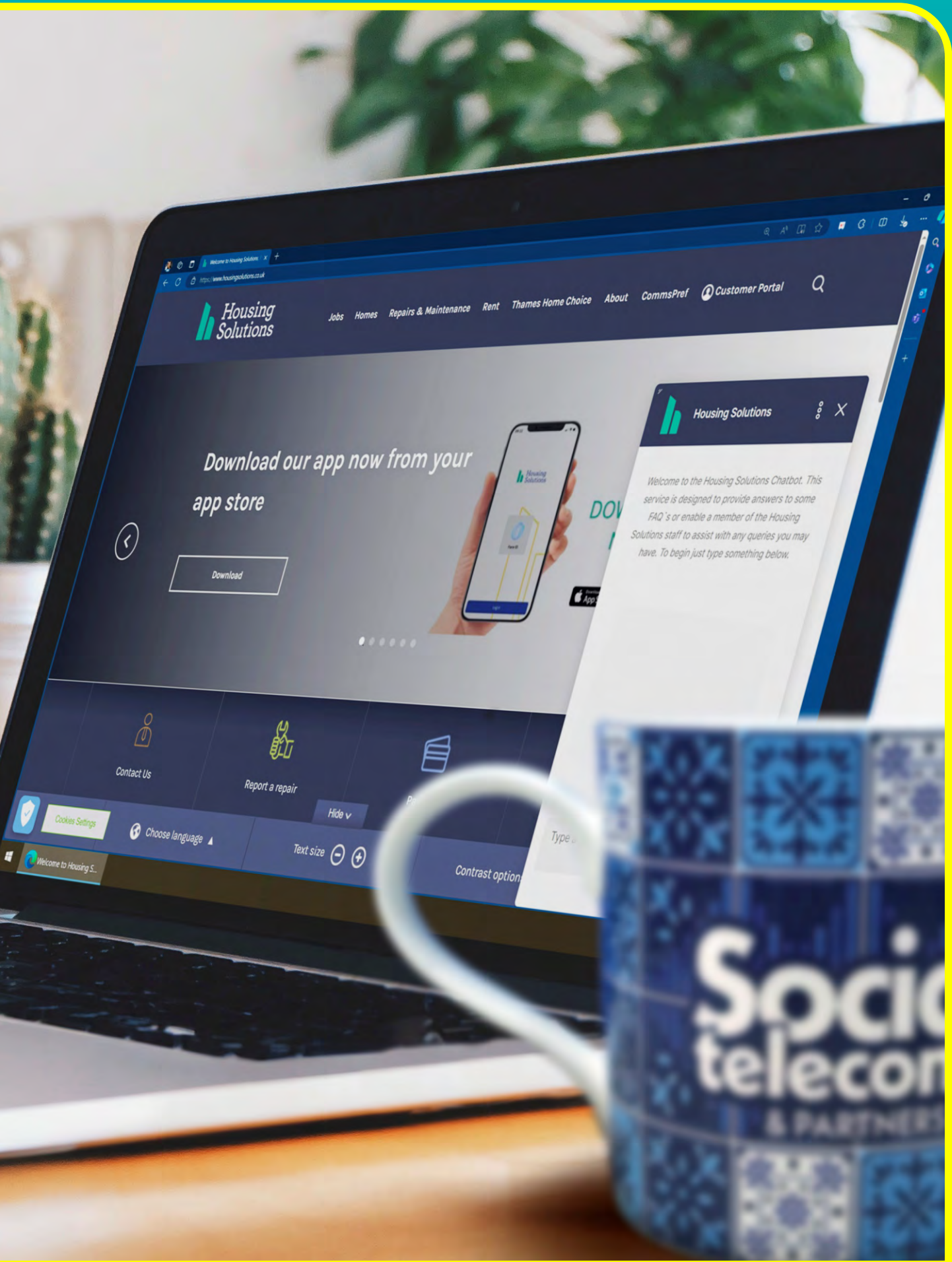
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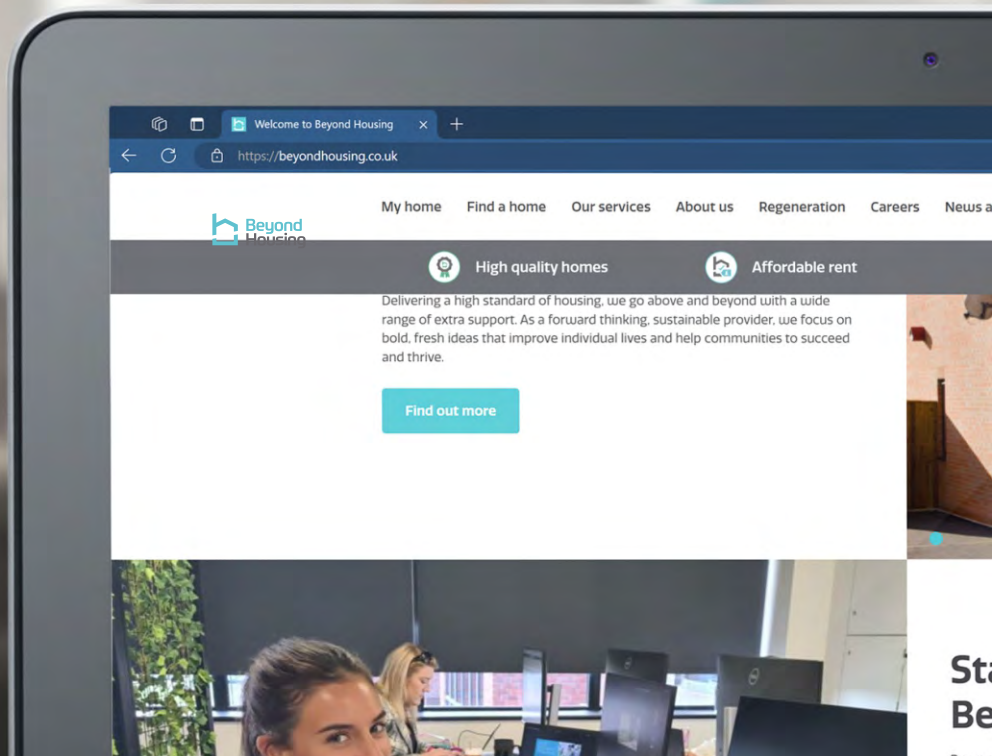
DIGITAL ASSISTANTS + AI.

Housing Solutions, for instance has utilised 8x8 Intelligent Customer Assistant (ICA) and been leveraging AI to enhance tenant engagement. Their journey began with the development of an Alexa skill in collaboration with MRI and Castleton, which laid the groundwork for their digital assistant. Initially using a livechat service via HubSpot and then 8x8, the decision was made to reduce repeat calls or questions to their customer contact centre, particularly during closed hours or peak times. Despite the availability of a search option on their website, residents showed a preference for the live chat feature, prompting Housing Solutions to transition their live chat facility to a digital assistant, powered by 8x8's ICA capabilities.

Housing Solutions has harnessed analytics to expand their Digital Assistant's capabilities, adding more questions and answers based on call trends, thus enabling residents to self-serve effectively. This aligns with the growing consumer preference for self-service technologies, a trend bolstered by the residents' familiarity with similar technologies from companies like Amazon and Sky. Housing Solutions' approach has not only driven up the quality of customer service but has also been instrumental in rebuilding consumer trust in self-service, as evidenced by the increased usage of the digital assistant and web chat facilities. Tenants value the convenience of having a transcript of the chat emailed to them, and agents are trained to efficiently handle multiple web chats simultaneously, ensuring a high standard of customer service.

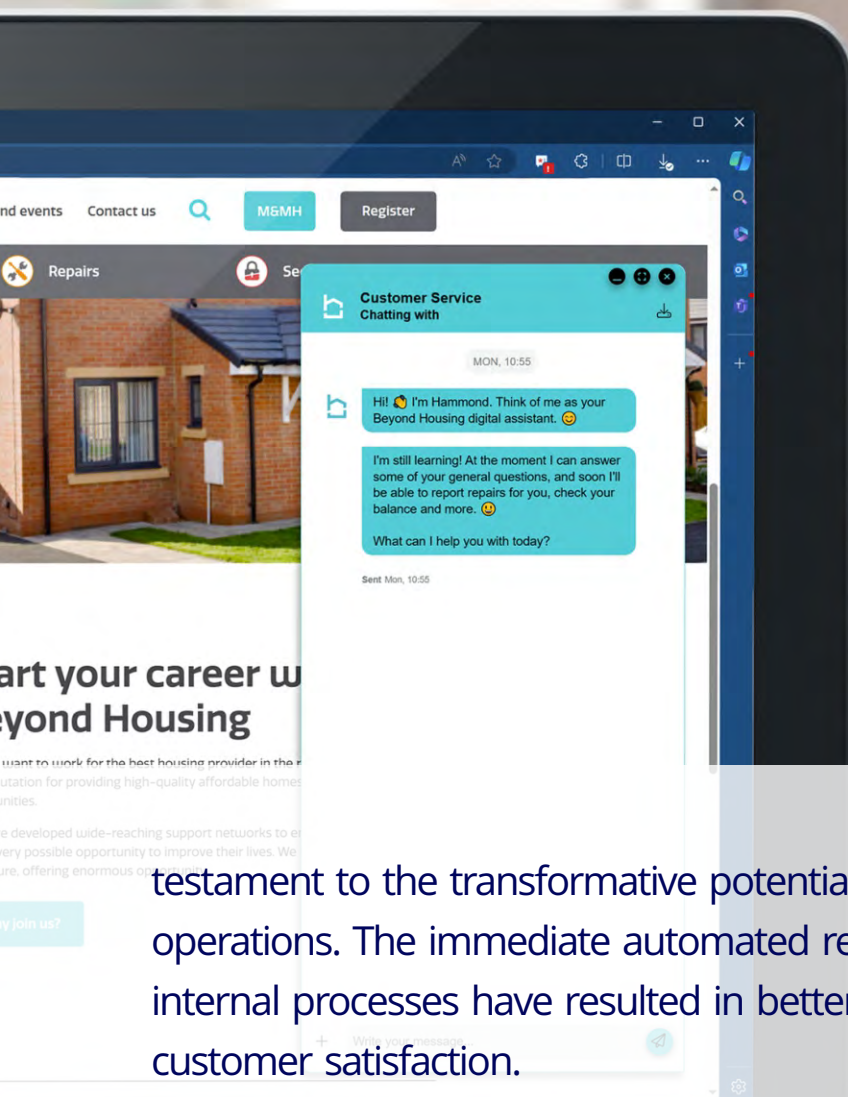


DIGITAL ASSISTANTS + AI.



Beyond Housing has been a pioneer in enhancing customer service through the strategic use of Logicdialog's AI chatbot technology. This digital assistant has been instrumental in managing routine inquiries, significantly reducing the burden on customer service advisors. With an impressive average of 75% NLP success, the chatbot has effectively reduced the number of live chats requiring advisor intervention, leading to a 20% reduction in live chat volume. This efficiency has allowed Beyond Housing to reallocate customer service resources more effectively, ensuring that customer service remains accessible and responsive.

The digital assistant's flexibility is a key feature, offering customers the option to speak with an advisor if they prefer, which maintains the human touch in customer service while the assistant continues to develop. Beyond Housing's commitment to this technology is a



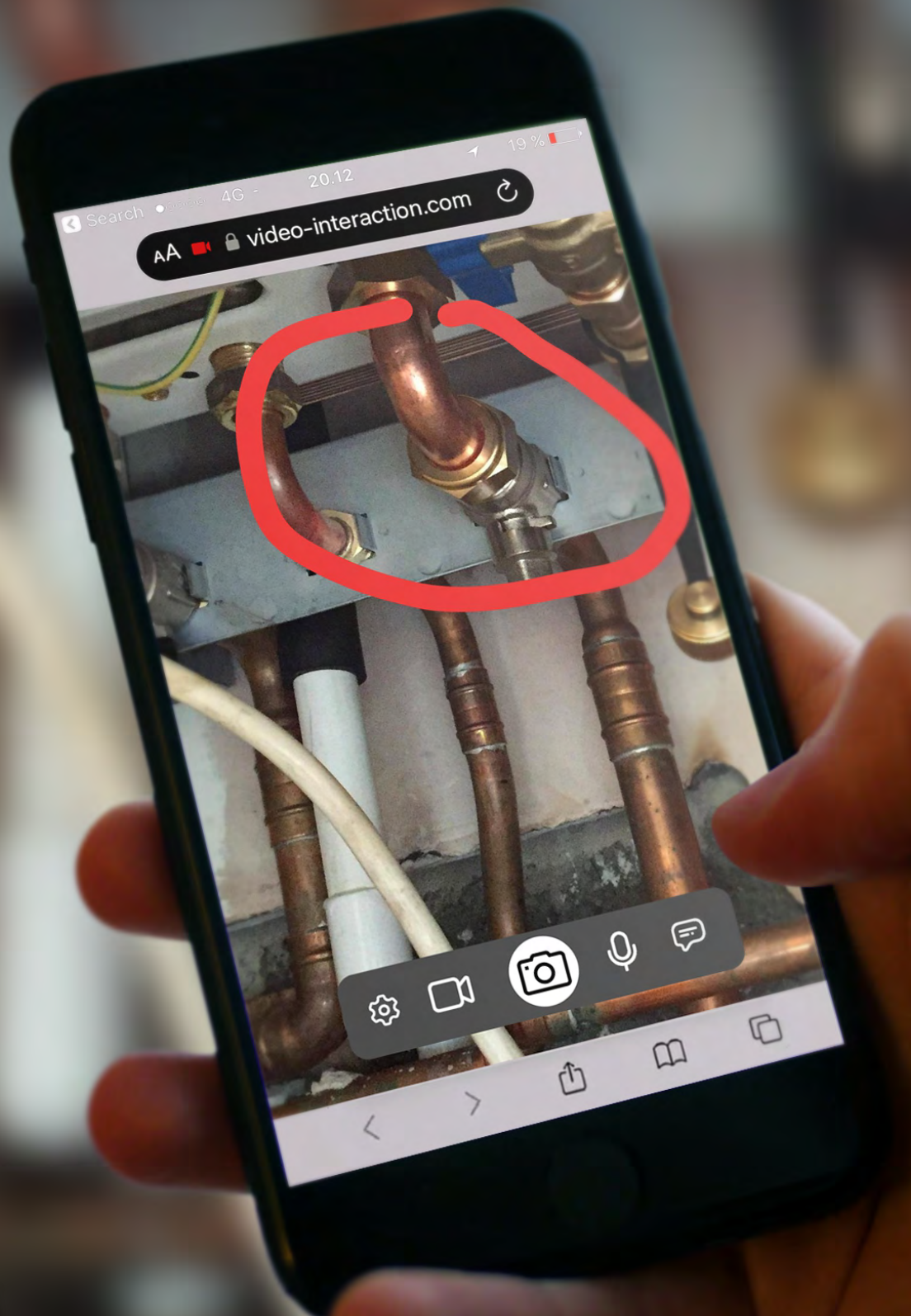
testament to the transformative potential of AI in customer service operations. The immediate automated responses and streamlined internal processes have resulted in better efficiency and heightened customer satisfaction.

Looking ahead, Beyond Housing aims to integrate the assistant with their Housing Management System/CRM from MRI Housing, which will enable automatic access to customer account information, further enhancing the customer experience. Additionally, the development of new features such as appointment scheduling via the assistant is anticipated to boost efficiency and customer satisfaction even further.

Beyond Housing's journey with Logicdialog's AI digital assistant is a clear indication of their dedication to innovation and service quality.



AUTOMATING REPAIRS.



AUTOMATING REPAIRS WITH VIDEO INTERACTION.

In the realm of social housing and local authority property management, the advent of video technology has ushered in a new era of service delivery. At the heart of this revolution is **8x8 Remote Fix**, a cutting-edge solution designed to automate the repair process, delivering swift, precise, and cost-effective results.

INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO MAINTENANCE:

8x8 Remote Fix transcends traditional repair methods by harnessing the power of video interactions. This approach not only accelerates the diagnosis and resolution of maintenance issues but also fosters a collaborative environment between customers, advisors and engineers. The result is a streamlined process that enhances efficiency and reduces operational costs.

One of the standout features of Remote Fix is its ability to significantly diminish maintenance expenses. By enabling remote resolutions of common repair scenarios, the system minimises the frequency of on-site visits, leading to substantial savings. This is evidenced by pilot programs where a notable percentage of repairs were resolved without the need for physical intervention.

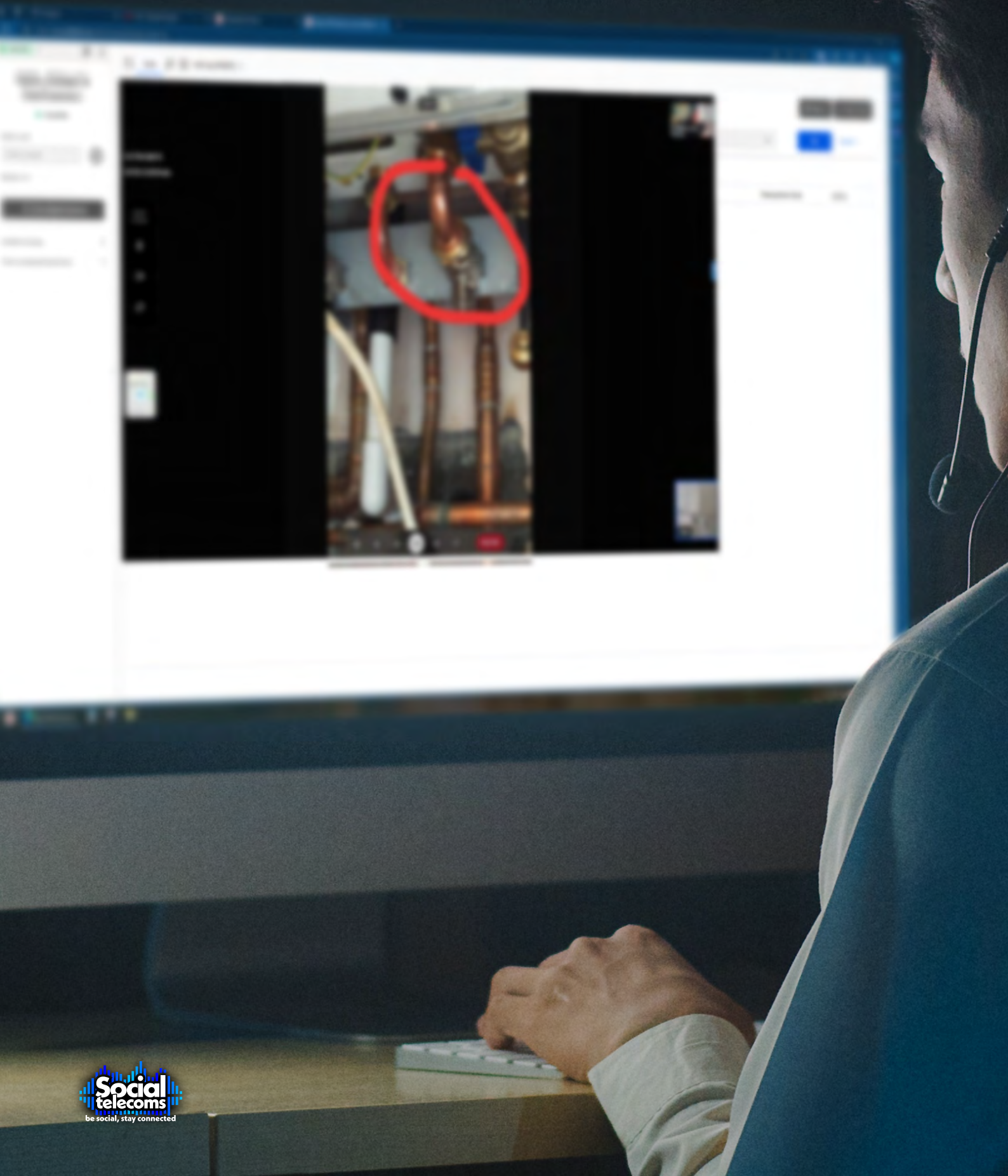
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ENHANCING ADVISOR PRODUCTIVITY:

The integration of Remote Fix within the contact centre workflow empowers agents to perform their duties with greater efficiency. With the simple dispatch of an SMS link, agents can establish a video connection with tenants without the need to install an app, allowing for real-time visual assessment of issues. The capability to take pictures using the caller's camera and annotate the photos not only expedites the repair process but also ensures that resources are allocated judiciously, avoiding unnecessary appointments and follow-up calls.

ELEVATING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES:

At its core, Remote Fix is about placing tenants at the forefront of the repair journey. By guiding them through simple maintenance tasks via video, tenants gain the knowledge and confidence to address minor issues independently. This not only leads to quicker resolutions but also instills a sense of empowerment and satisfaction, as customers appreciate the immediate attention and support.

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND FIRST-TIME FIXES:

The synergy between 8x8 Contact Centre and Remote Fix creates an environment of operational excellence. By automating key processes and facilitating remote engagements, the system enhances the efficiency of contact centres. Moreover, it increases the probability of first-time fixes, as agents and engineers are equipped with accurate information to resolve issues promptly, without the need for subsequent visits.

CASE STUDIES

OUR CASE STUDIES.

WE'RE **MUIR**

CONTACT CENTRE.	UCAAS.	DIGITAL ASSISTANT.
✓	✓	

ALLPAY INTEGRATION.	PFH FRAMEWORK.	SOCIAL VALUE.	HOUSING MANAGEMENT INTEGRATION.
✓	✓		



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✓	✓		

PFH FRAMEWORK.	SOCIAL VALUE.	HOUSING MANAGEMENT
✓	✓	



WE'RE **MUIR**



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✓	✓	✓	✓

PFH FRAMEWORK.	SOCIAL VALUE.	HOUSING MANAGEMENT INTEGRATION.
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CONTACT CENTRE.	UCAAS.	DIGITAL ASSISTANT.
✓	✓	✓

ALLPAY INTEGRATION.	PFH FRAMEWORK.	SOCIAL VALUE.	HOUSING MANAGEMENT INTEGRATION.
	✓		

CASE STUDY



housingsolutions.co.uk



Region: South England



Products/Services: Contact Centre, UCaaS,
Digital Assistant, PfH



Primary Reason for Choice:

- Desire to move to the cloud,
- Unify Communications,
- Maximise Microsoft Investment.

A FOUR-YEAR ODYSSEY OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION.

A CASE STUDY ABOUT HOUSING SOLUTIONS' JOURNEY OF ENHANCING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT USING AI.

In the ever-evolving landscape of customer service within the housing sector, **Housing Solutions** has stood out as a forward-thinking organisation dedicated to leveraging technology to enhance customer engagement and operational efficiency. This case study delves into the transformative journey Housing Solutions embarked upon, when it decided to deploy the 8x8 Contact Centre and Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) across its business operations.

Faced with the challenges of an aging legacy telephony system that could no longer keep pace with the demands of modern communication, Housing Solutions recognised the need for a robust and scalable solution. The objective was clear: to implement a system that not only addressed the immediate communication inefficiencies but also laid the groundwork for a future-proof digital strategy that aligned with its corporate objectives of being safe, satisfied, and sustainable.

CASE STUDY

The decision to partner with Social Telecoms was a strategic move that promised to revolutionise the way Housing Solutions interacted with its customers. With a commitment to providing more than just a roof and four walls, Housing Solutions set out to create an environment where technology facilitated a seamless, intuitive, and responsive service experience for every customer.

This case study will explore the initial challenges, the strategic decisions that led to the adoption of 8x8's innovative solutions, and the subsequent evolution of services that have since become a benchmark for excellence in the housing sector. From AI-driven speech analytics to proactive digital assistants, we will uncover the layers of digital transformation that have not only met but exceeded the expectations set forth by Housing Solutions' ambitious digital strategy.

PROJECT GENESIS

The genesis of Housing Solutions' project to revolutionise its communication systems was rooted in the strategic objectives outlined in its Digital Strategy.

Written by Richard Harvey, this strategy emphasised mobile and flexible working to enhance productivity, collaboration, and staff engagement, with a strong focus on data accuracy, GDPR compliance, and customer visibility and control over its information. As a community-focused association managing over 7,500 homes in the south of England, Housing Solutions was committed to



simplifying processes and encouraging customers to embrace digital offerings. The legacy telephony system, however, was a significant barrier to this vision, unable to support the flexibility and efficiency required for modern communication demands.

The contact centre team, responsible for handling a high volume of calls every month, was hindered by the outdated system. The need for a unified communications solution that could integrate seamlessly with Microsoft Teams and provide the agility for employees to work from anywhere was evident.

In response to these challenges, Housing Solutions conducted a Soft Market Test. The objective was to explore the market for solutions that could meet its business requirements. The Soft Market Test was crucial in validating the budget and ensuring that the chosen solution would align with the strategic goals of enhancing customer service and operational efficiency.

CASE STUDY

The successful response to the Soft Market Test, resulted in Social Telecoms being awarded a direct award via the PfH telecommunications framework, sidestepping the need for a tender exercise. This direct award was facilitated by Social Telecoms' top-ranked status on the Procurement for Housing (PfH) telecommunications framework, which is a testament to their compliance with stringent quality and service standards, as well as EU procurement standards. The PfH framework allows its members to benefit from combined purchasing power and ensures that suppliers like Social Telecoms meet the high standards required for public sector procurement.

This project was not merely a technological upgrade but a strategic move towards a digital-first approach that was brave and bold, designed around its customers' needs and expectations. It marked the beginning of a transformative journey for Housing Solutions, aligning with its ethos that "Housing is more than just a roof and four walls" and paving the way for a future of digital empowerment and enhanced customer engagement.

IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY:

The implementation of 8x8's Experience Communications as a Service (XCaaS) at Housing Solutions was a pivotal step in its digital transformation journey. With a pressing deadline, as the provider's on-premises telephony server was scheduled to go offline in just four months, the project required swift and decisive action.



"Integration with our Microsoft stack was key, but we could also see that 8x8 is a company that launches new features ahead of others, which was hugely attractive to us, going forward. Plus, Social Telecoms have shown our sector, and us especially, that they fit in with our own values as a community first company."

RICHARD HARVEY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION & ORG. DESIGN

RAPID ROLL-OUT

The roll-out of the 8x8 solutions was rapid yet smooth, thanks to the collaborative efforts of Housing Solutions and its digital transformation partner, C Davidson Consultancy. Utilising the compliant procurement framework from PfH, it was able to expedite the process. Social Telecoms, a Community Interest Company and a key partner of 8x8 in the UK, was instrumental in this transition, ensuring that Housing Solutions could swiftly move to a cloud-based system that unified contact centre, voice, video, and chat functionalities.

OVERCOMING INITIAL HURDLES

One of the initial challenges was replicating the familiarity and functionality of the legacy system while introducing the advanced capabilities of the 8x8 platform. Training and support were critical during this phase, with dedicated sessions to ensure employees were comfortable and proficient with the new system.

The Managed Deployment Service provided by 8x8 was key to a

CASE STUDY

successful handover into in-life support, ensuring that Housing Solutions' employees were well-equipped to utilise the new system to its full potential.

TANGIBLE BENEFITS

The implementation of 8x8's solutions brought about significant benefits, including operational efficiencies, cost savings, and an enhanced customer service experience. The omnichannel service capabilities allowed Housing Solutions to offer a seamless customer service experience across various communication channels, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.

AI-DRIVEN INNOVATIONS

Housing Solutions' deployment of 8x8 Contact Centre service has been instrumental in enhancing customer engagement. Solutions such as speech analytics and digital assistants have transformed the way Housing Solutions interacts with its customers providing a more streamlined and responsive service experience.

SPEECH ANALYTICS

The AI-driven speech analytics feature has enabled Housing Solutions to gain deeper insights into customer interactions. By analysing the content of voice communications as well as text-based ones such as SMS and WhatsApp, Housing Solutions can identify common concerns and trends, allowing them to proactively address issues and improve service delivery.



This technology has been particularly useful in understanding the reasons behind customer calls, whether they relate to repairs, complaints, or positive feedback, and has served as a valuable tool for advisor training and improving customer satisfaction.

CHATBOTS

The implementation of AI-driven chatbots on Housing Solutions' website has significantly reduced the volume of repeat calls and inquiries to the contact centre. These chatbots provide customers with instant access to information and assistance, especially during busy times or when the contact centre is closed. The chatbots have been continuously improved over the years, incorporating call trends and analytics to provide more accurate and helpful responses to customers. This has not only driven customer service efficiency but also encouraged customers to self-serve, aligning with the growing trend of digital interaction.

RICHARD HARVEY CONTINUES:

"It's more than just a Q&A; it's about building a comprehensive knowledge base that evolves with tenant interactions. Over the years, we've enriched the chatbot with data and analytics, allowing us to address common queries like rent increases and maintenance issues effectively. This has significantly uplifted our customer service, empowering tenants to find answers independently, which is a growing trend."

CASE STUDY**OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY**

The AI-driven innovations have also contributed to operational efficiency within Housing Solutions. The 8x8 Analytics for Contact Centre allows team leaders and managers to monitor performance in real-time, set thresholds, and take immediate action to optimise customer experiences. The Supervisor Workspace provides a performance-centric dashboard for proactive management, offering insights and guidance to ensure optimal operational efficiency.

On the operational front, the 8x8 solutions have reduced call volumes, freeing up customer service representatives to handle more complex inquiries. Agent productivity has improved due to the streamlined workflow and unified communication interface, which reduces system-switching and allows for more efficient inquiry resolution.

FUTURE OUTLOOK.

Housing Solutions is poised for a promising future, with a clear vision to scale and expand their digital initiatives through the deployment of 8x8 solutions via Social Telecoms. Its Digital & Data Strategy underscores the importance of fostering an environment where employees, residents, and the Board can flourish, backed by technology that transcends traditional housing services.

The plan is to further harness the power of 8x8's XCaaS to boost customer engagement and operational efficiency. This involves



broadening the application of AI-driven analytics to delve deeper into customer needs and preferences, while also exploring the innovative features that 8x8 continues to roll out.

In alignment with its Digital & Data Strategy, Housing Solutions is investigating a range of digital initiatives that will bolster its corporate goals of safety, satisfaction, and sustainability. These initiatives could encompass the launch of new digital communication channels, the incorporation of advanced data analytics for strategic decision-making, and the ongoing enhancement of the customer experience through technology.

The strategy also emphasises the significance of embracing change and investigating the potential of digital solutions. Housing Solutions is dedicated to remaining at the cutting edge of digital innovation in the housing sector, aiming to not just meet, but surpass the expectations of its customers and stakeholders.

Richard Harvey shares the excitement for the future:

“As we look ahead, we are eager to elevate the 8x8 solutions, integrating more AI-driven technologies to improve our tenant services. Our new Digital & Data Strategy is more than just a roadmap; it's a pledge to innovation, efficiency, and most importantly, our community. We will persist in exploring and implementing state-of-the-art solutions that align with our strategic objectives, positioning Housing Solutions as a leader in the housing sector.”

CASE STUDY

PIONEERING BEYOND HOUSING'S FUTURE.



beyondhousing.co.uk



Region: North East England



Products/Services: Contact Centre, UCaaS, Digital Assistant, PfH



Primary Reason for Choice:

- Revolutionise customer experience capabilities,
- Address inadequacies of the legacy phone system,
- Leverage Artificial Intelligence.



Beyond Housing, a leading housing provider in the North East of England, embarked on a transformative project to overhaul its customer service operations by implementing the 8x8 Contact Centre and Logicdialog digital assistant.

This initiative was driven by the need to address the inadequacies of the legacy telephony system and to meet the growing demand for modern, digital communication methods.

In partnership with Social Telecoms, the no. 1 ranked supplier on the PfH telecommunications framework agreement, Beyond Housing leveraged 8x8's omnichannel Contact Centre and Logicdialog's advanced digital assistant features. The integration of these solutions has revolutionised Beyond Housing's customer service capabilities, providing a scalable and efficient system that enhances the customer experience and operational productivity.

The implementation has resulted in a significant reduction in call and email volumes, increased agent productivity, and improved first contact resolution service. Early analytics from the 8x8 platform have informed strategic decisions, such as the need to rebuild the IVR system and enhance chatbot services, with further insights expected from the ongoing development of speech analytics.

CASE STUDY**INTRODUCTION.**

Beyond Housing, established in 2018, is one of the largest housing organisations in the North East. With a mission to provide services that customers value, homes they desire, and places they are proud of, Beyond Housing manages over 15,000 homes and serves more than 30,000 customers in the Tees Valley and North Yorkshire areas. The organisation values its commitment to customer satisfaction and community well-being, and has nearly 800 devoted colleagues.

However, Beyond Housing faced major challenges in its customer service operations. The old telephony system was not able to cope with the number of customer inquiries and the increasing desire for modern, digital communication methods. This resulted in long wait times, a pressure on resources, and a customer service experience that did not match the high standards of Beyond Housing.

Knowing the need for a flexible, future-ready solution, and with a clear strategy to streamline its systems and suppliers, started a journey to transform its customer service operations. The aim was to put in place systems that could not only enhance current operations but also adjust to future changes in technology and customer service demands.

In pursuit of this goal, Beyond Housing engaged with Procurement for Housing (PfH) to initiate a mini-competition among suppliers on its telecommunications framework agreement. This strategic move aimed to find a partner



capable of delivering a comprehensive solution that would elevate their customer service to new heights.

“We made a conscious decision to consolidate all of our systems to make sure that we had a long-term strategic plan around how those systems would work for the benefit of our customers” says Rosemary Du Rose, Chief Executive of Beyond Housing.

CHALLENGE.

Beyond Housing was at a crossroads with its customer service operations. The existing legacy telephony system was increasingly unable to cope with the high volume of customer inquiries, leading to longer wait times and a decline in service quality. The system's limitations were becoming more apparent, with a lack of advanced technological features that

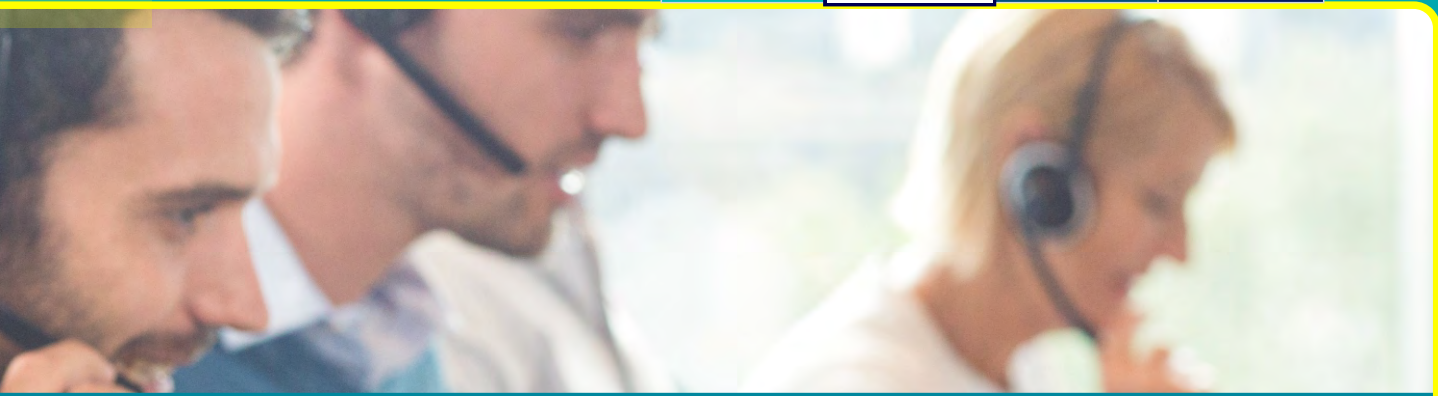
CASE STUDY



modern digital communication platforms offer, such as real-time data analytics, omnichannel support, and AI-driven customer service tools.

The organisation's commitment to providing exceptional service to its customers and communities was at stake. Beyond Housing needed a solution that could not only address the immediate inefficiencies but also align with its strategic vision for a digital-first approach. The new system had to be scalable, flexible, and capable of integrating with the latest technologies to ensure that Beyond Housing could continue to deliver services that met and exceeded customer expectations.

The challenge was to find a solution that could provide a seamless transition from the old system, minimise disruption to the service during the implementation, and deliver a significant improvement in customer service metrics. Beyond Housing was looking for a partner who could understand its unique needs and offer a tailored solution that would set a new standard for customer service in the housing sector.



THE SOLUTION.

Social Telecoms, as the lead supplier and the top-ranked provider in the PfH framework, presented a solution that was both innovative and comprehensive, meeting the mandatory and added value requirements specified by Beyond Housing. The collaboration with 8x8 and Logicdialog was instrumental in delivering a state-of-the-art Contact Centre system that was tailored to the unique needs of Beyond Housing.

The solution offered a seamless integration of services, providing a unified platform that combined the strengths of 8x8's omnichannel capabilities with the advanced AI functionalities of Logicdialog's digital assistant. This integration ensured that customers could engage with Beyond Housing through their preferred communication channels, enhancing the overall customer experience.

A key feature of the new system was the Intelligent IVR with voice commands, which allowed callers to navigate the system and find solutions through simple voice prompts. This technology improved the efficiency of call handling and provided a more intuitive experience for customers.

C A S E S T U D Y

The 8x8 system is an incredible feature-rich service and whereas it's common to focus on the latest features that place it ahead of rivals, it's important to address more common functions which may go amiss. Some of these which were mandatory for Beyond Housing include:

- **Wrap-up Times:** The ability to control wrap-up times, giving agents the flexibility to manage their post-call work and ensuring that they were ready to assist the next customer promptly.
- **Queues and Call Back Function:** Queues were managed more effectively with the new system, and a call back function was introduced to reduce wait times and improve customer satisfaction. This feature allowed customers to request a call back instead of waiting on hold, ensuring that their time was respected.
- **MS Teams and Active Directory Integration:** The solution was designed to integrate seamlessly with Microsoft Teams and Active Directory, providing a cohesive environment that leveraged Beyond Housing's existing ICT infrastructure.
- **User-Friendly Seamless Contact Experience:** The focus was to create a smooth and easy contact experience where customers could switch between different communication channels without losing the context of their inquiries and avoiding repeating information. This was especially valuable for Beyond Housing, as it enabled its to offer a more customised and efficient service, predict customer needs, and solve problems faster.

- **The Integration with MRI Housing:** The 8x8 system's integration with MRI Housing was a critical component in creating a seamless and efficient customer service experience. This integration allowed for real-time data synchronisation between the 8x8 Contact Centre and MRI Housing's property management software. As a result, customer service agents had immediate access to a customer's history and current situation, eliminating the need for manual searches and allowing it to focus on addressing the customer's needs more effectively.

AI FUNCTIONALITY.

The inclusion of AI across the package, including a Digital Assistant from Logicdialog, and intelligent IVR, Quality Management, and Speech Analytics from 8x8, was a key innovation and a mandatory requirement for the Beyond Housing project. Social Telecoms' bid successfully incorporated this sophisticated approach to customer service, enhancing the overall customer experience.

The AI-driven Digital Assistant provided by Logicdialog offered an intuitive and responsive interface for customers, allowing for natural language interactions and quick access to information. This not only improved the efficiency of customer service but also increased customer satisfaction by providing immediate, relevant responses.

CASE STUDY

The intelligent IVR system from 8x8 utilised AI to understand and process voice commands, directing customers to the appropriate services and information swiftly. This reduced the need for live agent intervention for routine inquiries, freeing up valuable resources for more complex customer needs.

Quality Management and Speech Analytics further leveraged AI to analyse speech patterns and sentiments during customer interactions. This provided Beyond Housing with actionable insights, enabling them to identify areas for improvement and implement changes that would lead to better service outcomes.

Overall, the AI functionality across these systems played a crucial role in driving continuous improvement and ensuring that Beyond Housing could deliver exceptional service to their customers. It showcased Social Telecoms' commitment to providing innovative solutions that meet the evolving needs of their clients.

THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS:

The procurement process for Beyond Housing's new system was facilitated by Procurement for Housing (PfH) through a mini-competition on the telecommunications framework agreement. This approach allowed for a faster and more efficient selection process compared to a full tender, bypassing the need to advertise the requirement in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). It also permitted further refinement of exact requirements while retaining the benefits

offered under the original framework agreement.

Social Telecoms, as a key partner of Logicdialog and a top-ranked supplier on the PfH framework, submitted a comprehensive proposal that addressed Beyond Housing's need for a modern and scalable contact centre solution. The proposal included 8x8 omnichannel Contact Centre licenses and promised to revolutionise Beyond Housing's customer service capabilities.

The proposal from Social Telecoms stood out for its alignment with Beyond Housing's strategic objectives, including the integration with MRI Housing and the inclusion of AI functionality across various service aspects. This alignment was crucial in meeting Beyond Housing's requirements for a solution that could improve current operations and adapt to future advancements in technology and customer service expectations.

"Procurement for Housing telecommunications framework gives housing providers a special chance. Our relationships allows 8x8 and Logicdialog's advanced solutions leading services to come together for a mutually beneficial situation that improves efficiency and tenant satisfaction."

– Rob Mottram, Social Telecoms.

CASE STUDY**IMPLEMENTATION**

The implementation plan for Beyond Housing's 8x8 Contact Centre and Logicdialog digital assistant was meticulously designed to ensure a seamless transition and integration with Beyond Housing's existing infrastructure.

The initial phase involved a comprehensive analysis of Beyond Housing's current telephony and customer service processes to identify key areas for improvement. This was followed by the configuration of the 8x8 Contact Centre to align with Beyond Housing's specific requirements, ensuring that all mandatory specifications were met as detailed in the Telephony Specification document.

A critical component of the implementation was the integration of the Logicdialog digital assistant, which was designed to provide an intuitive and responsive interface for customer interactions. The digital assistant was programmed to handle a wide range of queries, providing immediate assistance and routing complex issues to the appropriate service agents.

Throughout the implementation, key stakeholders from Social Telecoms, 8x8 and Logicdialog maintained a close collaboration with Beyond Housing's ICT team, facilitating a smooth integration with existing systems such as Microsoft Teams and MRI CRM. Regular training sessions were conducted to familiarise Beyond Housing's employees with the new system's features and capabilities, ensuring a high level of competence and confidence in using the new services.

THE RESULT:

The implementation of the 8x8 Contact Centre and Logicdialog digital assistant has led to transformative changes in Beyond Housing's customer service operations. The quality management tool has been utilised extensively to identify training needs, thereby enhancing the first contact resolution service. The ongoing development of speech analytics promises to provide even deeper insights into customer interactions.

Some immediate outcomes from the call flows have indicated the necessity to rebuild the IVR system to ensure customers reach the right service representative on their first call. Improvements have also been made to the digital assistant services, with Logicdialog's role in Beyond Housing's digital strategy being significant. The platform's ability to reduce calls and emails by nearly 60% and increase agent productivity by nearly 30% is a testament to its impact. The future will see a continued focus on harnessing machine learning and AI to automate services, fulfilling resident requests without agent involvement, and driving operational efficiencies.

The early results are promising, with improvements in call routing and service delivery already being observed. Beyond Housing is poised to see further enhancements in operational efficiency and customer engagement as the full potential of the 8x8 and Logicdialog solutions are realised.

CASE STUDY**ENHANCING PAYMENT SECURITY AND CONVENIENCE WITH ALLPAY AND 8X8 SECURE PAY.**

Beyond Housing has taken a significant step in enhancing payment security and convenience for its customers by integrating AllPay with 8x8 Secure Pay. This integration represents a commitment to providing customers with a secure and efficient payment experience.

A Leader in Payment Solutions **AllPay** is a leading payment solutions provider, renowned for its widespread adoption by 75% of the largest 400 housing providers. Their expertise in the sector makes them a trusted partner for handling transactions with the utmost security and reliability. This integration was particularly important as AllPay had, until recently, an exclusive tie to another payment gateway. In 2023, AllPay began working with other payment gateways, including Secure Pay from 8x8 and Beyond Housing were swift to add the service to their contract.

The Importance of PCI Compliance PCI compliance is critical for any organisation that processes, stores, or transmits credit card information. It involves a set of security standards that ensure all transactions are conducted in a secure environment, protecting cardholder data and reducing the risk of fraud.

8x8 Secure Pay, in collaboration with PCI Pal, offers a secure method for processing bank card information. It allows customer service agents to remain in contact with customers during transactions while ensuring that sensitive card details are not exposed, and crucially, maintains call recording throughout. This system integrates seamlessly with CRM, Housing Management and billing systems, and supports secure payment processing through the customer's payment gateway.

For Beyond Housing, the integration with AllPay and 8x8 Secure Pay means providing customers with a payment system that is not only convenient but also adheres to the highest standards of security. It reflects Beyond Housing's dedication to leveraging technology to enhance service delivery and customer satisfaction.



CASE STUDY

ALLPAY SUCCESS: MUIR GROUP'S 8X8 JOURNEY.

WE'RE MUIR

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 its legacy systems, which despite years of good service, were inflexible, costly, and unable to meet the evolving demands of its 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.

CASE STUDY

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 its 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.

Call recording, a critical feature for quality assurance and compliance, was notably unreliable. Recordings often did not work when needed, which posed a significant challenge for the organisation. Additionally, the wallboards, used for displaying important information and metrics, frequently broke, disrupting the flow of operations and requiring constant technical support.

CASE STUDY

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.

CASE STUDY

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 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 employees 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 advisors 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.

CASE STUDY

**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.

CASE STUDY



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. Advisors 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.

CASE STUDY

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: THE POWER OF SOCIAL VALUE.

Havebury

Housing Partnership

havebury.com



Region: East of England



Products/Services: Contact Centre, UCaaS, PfH

Primary Reason for Choice:



- End-to-end Cloud Capabilities,
- Enabling Remote Working,
- Social Value

In an era where connectivity is key, the Havebury Housing Partnership's (HHP) implementation of the 8x8 Contact Centre and Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) stands as a beacon of innovation and social responsibility. This case study delves into the transformative journey of HHP, a prominent provider of affordable housing in Suffolk, as they embarked on a strategic initiative to not only enhance operational efficiency and customer service but also to weave a strong fabric of social value into the community they serve.

At the heart of this narrative is the Community WiFi network at Tayfen House, a testament to HHP's commitment to digital inclusion and the betterment of resident's lives. As we explore the challenges, solutions, and triumphs of the 8x8 project, we uncover the profound impact of integrating technological projects of a housing provider with with ones to benefit their community, and how HHP is setting a new standard for social value in the housing sector.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

HHP's 2021-2025 ICT and Digital Strategy builds on the previous strategy, focusing on systems and infrastructure.

It seeks to reduce and simplify the number of applications, invest in cloud-based solutions, and deploy new services into Microsoft Azure.

C A S E S T U D Y

The strategy outlines six clearly defined objectives:

- Responding to increasing cyber-security threats
- Ensuring quality, single source data that can be made available to all users
- Providing resilient tools for work, communication, and collaboration
- Supporting the quality ICT service offer for all users
- Preparing for smart technologies for leveraging AI to offer improved compliance, digital services, and automate tasks
- Robust processes and controls for system implementation and changes

The implementation of a new Unified Communications platform directly supports several of these objectives, demonstrating a strong alignment between the project and HHP's strategic goals. This alignment is particularly evident in the areas of providing resilient tools for work, communication, and collaboration, supporting the quality ICT service offer for all users, and ensuring robust processes and controls for system implementation and changes.

In addition to these strategic objectives, HHP also had specific requirements for the new system. They desired the ability to block numbers as per requests from users and have the ability to listen in on calls for training purposes.

They also needed tools to diagnose any issues with call quality, such as poor mobile signal, jitter, or device issues.

Underpinning HHP's values and objectives is a strong focus on customer service. Data and reporting are key to the business measuring its performance and are particularly relevant to communication systems. The implementation of the new system across the whole organisation, including the Contact Centre, supports this focus by providing robust, integrated communication tools that enhance customer service.

This strategic alignment ensures that the project not only addresses immediate operational needs but also contributes to the long-term strategic goals of HHP. The subsequent sections will delve deeper into the legacy systems, the need for change, agile working practices, procurement process, and the implementation process.

LEGACY SYSTEMS AND THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Before the implementation of the 8x8 Contact Centre and Unified Communications project, HHP was using Cisco Call Manager on-premises system that had been in place since summer 2013. While this system was rich in features, it was also based around software updates and was licensed based, which led to an inability to promptly respond to business changes and introduced unbudgeted costs. The system was modular and administered through various consoles relating to feature set (contact centre, voicemail, call recording, call manager), making it challenging to introduce new ICT staff to supporting the system.

HHP had two voice-only contact centres and as part of this project, they planned to expand to four contact centres.

CASE STUDY

They also had a monthly subscription in place for an online IVR service and their main '0300 3300 900' number. However, the overhead in administering billing and contracts associated with the system presented challenges.

The impending need for hardware upgrades, coupled with the limitations of the on-premises system, presented an opportunity for HHP to transition to a cloud-based system and begin a procurement project.

On-premises systems often come with high upfront costs for hardware and software, require regular maintenance and updates, and can lack the flexibility to scale up or down quickly in response to changes in demand. They also pose challenges in terms of disaster recovery, as data loss can be catastrophic if the physical servers are damaged. This decision was driven by the desire to move away from these limitations and maintain a cloud system, which offered numerous benefits from an IT perspective.

It knew this would allow it to leverage the benefits of a cloud-based system, including improved scalability, flexibility, and cost-efficiency. It also aligned with HHP's strategic objective of investing in cloud-based solutions and deploying new services into Microsoft Azure.

AGILE WORKING PRACTICES

In 2019, well before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, HHP began investing heavily in agile working practices. This strategic move proved invaluable when the pandemic hit, as it allowed HHP to smoothly transition to a remote working model, demonstrating the agility and resilience of HHP's ICT operations.

The investment primarily involved rolling out mobile devices, such as laptops and Surface Pros, to most of its employees. This significant shift away from the traditional use of desktop PCs added the flexibility to work from anywhere, enhancing their ability to work remotely.

By the end of 2019, HHP had completed the rollout of laptops and Surface Pros, as well as tablets and smartphones, further enhancing their ability to work remotely.

One of the key features of this agile working model was the ability to work using a soft phone at home over VPN.

Although this feature was not initially set up for all employees the infrastructure was already in place. It took a couple of days to set everyone up, but once it was done, everyone could work remotely. However, VPNs can sometimes be slow, unreliable, and difficult to manage, especially when used by a large number of remote workers. They also require a continuous connection to the company's network, which can be a security risk.

CASE STUDY

As HHP continued to evolve its agile working practices, there was a growing recognition of the benefits of cloud-based communications over VPN. Shifting to a cloud-based system was seen as a natural progression that would further enhance the flexibility and efficiency of HHP's operations.

Cloud-based systems offer improved scalability, allowing the organisation to easily adjust its services based on demand. They also provide more robust solutions, with better reliability and performance than VPNs. Furthermore, cloud-based systems can be accessed from anywhere without the need for a continuous connection to the company's network, reducing security risks. The cloud-based system would not only address these issues but also align with HHP's strategic objective of investing in cloud-based solutions and deploying new services into Microsoft Azure.

PROCUREMENT PROCESS

The procurement process for the new system was run by Procurement for Housing as a mini competition on the telecoms framework agreement. This approach is much faster and less labourious than a full tender process and there is no need to advertise the requirement in the Official Journal of the European Union. The process also allows for further refinement of requirements whilst retaining the benefits offered under the original framework agreement.

At the time, HHP had a Cisco on-premises system in place since Summer 2013, two voice-only contact centres, and 130 users outside of the contact centres.

There was a longer-term aspiration of exploring omnichannel options for HHP such as webchat and email but these would be subsequent phases after the initial go live.

PfH asked suppliers to propose a cloud-based telephony solution which enables HHP to transition all lines including call recording, call listening and voicemail to a single cloud-based solution. The proposal should also include the transfer and management of the HHP '0300' mainline number and contact centre solution, in addition to expanding the Contact Centre to incorporate two additional teams within the business.

Additionally, a key part of the solution was to ensure that through the design and implementation, the solution must ensure PCI compliance within both automatic and manual stop/start processes. The new solution must allow for an integration solution for HHP's housing management System via the current Google Chrome extension.

In the end, Social Telecoms was selected as the preferred supplier for HHP's telecommunications, marking the successful conclusion of the procurement process.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The implementation process for the new system at HHP was managed by 8x8's Deployment Team, which took full responsibility for ensuring the successful delivery of the project from inception through successful handover into in-life support.

CASE STUDY

A dedicated Project Manager was assigned to act as the primary point of contact for HHP, ensuring the requirements and deliverables of the project were fully understood and that the delivery team was managed and directed to make certain the project was successfully implemented.

8x8's extensive experience delivering a wide range of cloud-based projects to housing providers meant they were flexible in its design and deployment of the solution, incorporating HHP's requirements within its robust implementation process. This involved the deployment and training teams working together with HHP to ensure a smooth and trouble-free implementation.

The Deployment Team used Project Management Institute (PMI) methodology and adhered to the principles of PRINCE2 (PProjects IN Controlled Environments). Also, 8x8 used various tools to help with project management of HHP's implementation. HHP's requirements and design elements were identified in the Build Capture Document, the main technical document during the deployment activities. It also used the Statement of Work that was mutually developed and agreed upon by 8x8 and HHP.

As part of the implementation process, the Deployment Team conducted a soft launch, releasing the 8x8 solution to a targeted group within the HHP company as planned "rehearsals" for the subsequent full launch.

"Implementing the 8x8 system at HHP was a smooth and efficient process. The integration with our existing platforms improved our workflow significantly, and we've seen a positive impact on our operations. The transition to a cloud-based system has not only enhanced our communication capabilities but also aligned with our strategic objectives. I'm proud of our team's efforts and the successful outcome of this project."

Kerriane McSherry, ICT Security & Communications
Senior Analyst at HHP

BENEFITS REALISED

The transition from the Cisco on-premises system and various third-party services to the 8x8 Contact Centre and UCaaS brought about several significant benefits for HHP:

- **Unified Communications:** The 8x8 system provided a unified platform for all communication needs, eliminating the need for multiple separate systems. This led to improved efficiency and ease of use for employees.
- **Scalability and Flexibility:** The cloud-based nature of the 8x8 system offered greater scalability and flexibility compared to the previous on-premises system. This allowed HHP to easily adjust its system according to their needs.

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- **Cost Efficiency:** By consolidating its communication systems into one cloud-based solution, HHP was able to reduce the overhead associated with administering billing and contracts for multiple systems.
- **Improved Customer Service:** The 8x8 system provided robust, integrated communication tools that enhanced customer service. Features such as skill-based routing, custom ready/not ready codes, and pre-recorded 'close' messages improved the efficiency of the contact centres.
- **Enhanced Reporting Capabilities:** The 8x8 system offered comprehensive reporting capabilities, allowing HHP to measure performance across a wide range of metrics. This provided valuable insights that could be used to further improve operations and customer service.
- **Remote Working Capabilities:** The 8x8 system supported HHP's agile working practices by enabling employees to work remotely. This proved particularly beneficial since the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing HHP to maintain operations with an effective working from anywhere policy.
- **Strategic Alignment:** The implementation of the 8x8 system aligned with HHP's strategic objective of investing in cloud-based solutions and deploying new services into Microsoft Azure. This ensured that the project not only addressed immediate operational needs but also contributed to the long-term strategic goals of HHP.

ANALYTICS AND REPORTING

One of the significant improvements that came with the transition to the 8x8 system was the robust suite of analytics and reporting tools. Unlike the previous Cisco system, which had no inbuilt reporting and would incur additional costs for add-ons, 8x8 offered built-in, enterprise-level analytics that could be used to make highly informed business decisions.

8x8 Analytics provided easy-to-use, customisable, and rapid insights into both historical and real-time information associated with all extensions and devices in the organisation. It allowed access to user-friendly dashboards with company-wide, department, or extension user-level call metrics. It also enabled the generation of scheduled and ad-hoc reports on both desktop and mobile devices, application of custom filters to extract desired data, and export of report data to CSV or Excel for further evaluation and archiving.

For non-contact centre employees, 8x8 Analytics offered features such as the ability for workgroup managers to monitor call traffic and adjust resources, settings, and staffing levels, and for managers to monitor agents' performance. It also provided the ability to retrieve call quality trends and call quality detail information and get individual end-point device status around the globe in real-time and take corrective measures in the event of service interruption.

For contact centre analytics, 8x8 provided industry-leading insight into the performance of the contact centre in a real-

CASE STUDY

-time display status by volume, queue/skillset, duration, channels, and service levels. Supervisors could observe agent and queue performance in real time, access data for different intervals or for the day, and share this data on wallboards. This allowed for highly customisable real-time displays within the contact centre.

The solution provided call centre managers with the information they needed to make smart business decisions. They could access reports online, customise reports to show only the data they needed, view reports by agent, agent groups, queues, date range, and channel type, and spot trends fast for quicker response.

SOCIAL VALUE REALISED

The implementation of the 8x8 Contact Centre and UCaaS by HHP was not just a technological upgrade, but also a project with significant social value.

“As a Community Interest Company and registered social enterprise, Social Telecoms were in a strong position to meet HHP’s requirements for social value. Like HHP, Social Telecoms is a business with primarily social objectives, and its surplus is principally reinvested for that purpose in the community.”

Rob Mottram, Social Telecoms

Social Telecoms' mission is to reduce the digital divide in social housing communities. Their digital inclusion products, which are often popular as separate projects, were offered to HHP as social value with the contact centre contract. One such product is **Community WiFi**, a service that has become a popular method for social housing providers to enable their communities with affordable connectivity.

In line with this, HHP chose to have Social Telecoms' Community WiFi service installed at Tayfen House in Bury St Edmunds. This decision not only provided a valuable service to the residents of Tayfen House but also demonstrated HHP's commitment to improving the quality of life for their customers and contributing to the wider community.



CASE STUDY

Tayfen House, based in Bury St Edmunds, is a remarkable institution that has been providing emergency and long-term accommodation for single homeless people aged between 18 and 65 since September 1998. The facility offers two dormitory rooms for emergency shelter, housing up to six people for up to 21 days at a time. For longer-term residents, there are 19 ensuite bedrooms where individuals can stay for 18 months until they regain stability in their lives. In addition, Tayfen House manages 32 units of supported accommodation in the community, with funding provided by Suffolk County Council.

The friendly engineers from Social Telecoms are on hand to install and support the customers. They install a network of high-speed WiFi access points around the site, providing the strongest possible signal for users to connect all manner of devices, from phones to TVs, computers to smart home tech. The engineers worked across the whole site, concealing network cables into trunking, above suspended ceilings, and using riser cupboards.

Many ceiling-mounted access points were installed inside properties to maximise signal strength, and a friendly rapport was created between the engineers and the residents and staff.

The impact of the Community WiFi service at Tayfen House has been transformative. The residents now have access to a reliable and high-speed internet connection, which has opened up a world of opportunities for them. They can now search for jobs, access online learning resources, stay

connected with their loved ones, and much more. This has significantly improved their quality of life and has empowered them to take steps towards a brighter future.

Moreover, the Community WiFi service has also enhanced the operations at Tayfen House. The staff can now conduct support meetings that require internet access in all support rooms. They can also hold team meetings and meetings with other agencies in private rooms, which was a challenge before. This has streamlined their workflow and made their operations more efficient.

"Our experience with the Community WiFi service has been overwhelmingly positive. The residents have given lots of thumbs-ups and have praised the installation team for their accommodating nature and understanding of our complexities. The transition of passcodes during occupancy changes continues to go very smoothly, and we were impressed by the speed and response of the team. The installation team was helpful and provided numbers for follow-up if there were any ongoing issues. Their service has truly been commendable."

Rebecca Lee, The Havebury Housing Partnership

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE.

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE.

In today's digital age, internet access has become a necessity rather than a luxury. It plays a pivotal role in various aspects of modern society, including education, employment, healthcare, and social activities. However, a significant gap, known as the digital divide, exists between those who have easy, reliable internet access, and those who do not. This divide often affects the most vulnerable populations, including those in social housing communities.

Community WiFi projects, such as the one undertaken by Social Telecoms, aim to reduce this digital divide by providing free or low-cost internet access, thereby enabling these communities to participate fully in the digital world.

DIGITAL ASSISTANTS
+AI.

AUTOMATING
REPAIRS.

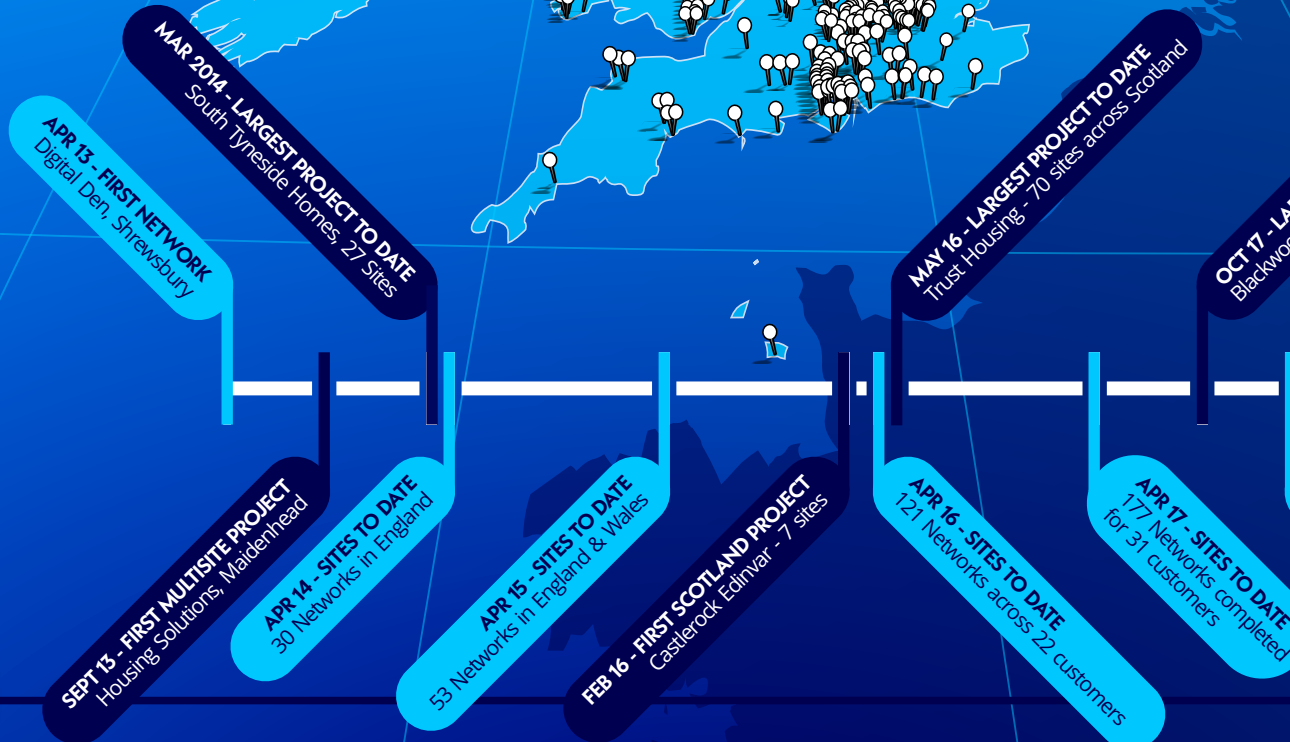
CASE
STUDIES.

DON'T STOP AT
CONTACT CENTRE.



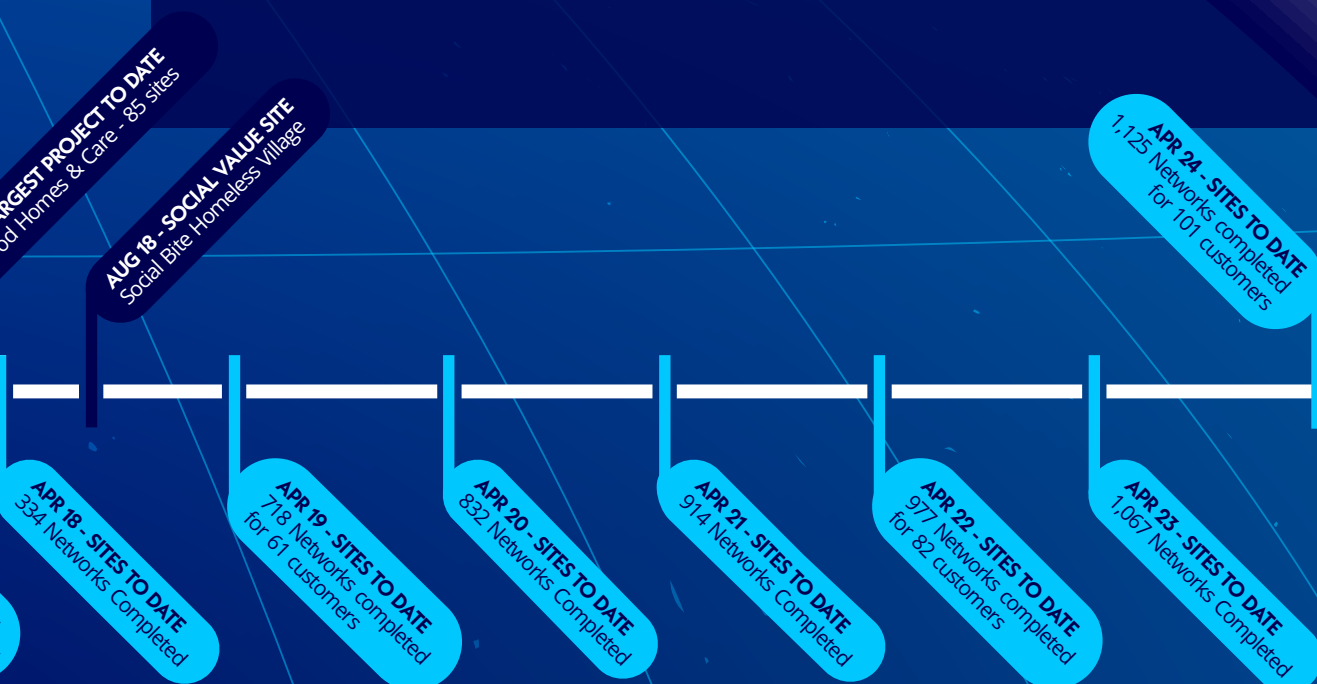
OUR WIFI JOURNEY.

OUR WIFI JOURNEY.



Social Telecoms has supplied, installed, and maintain over 1,100 WiFi networks at sites belonging to over 100 social housing and local authorities. Located across the UK, from the Outer Hebrides to Jersey and everywhere in between, these communities have been benefitting from access to speedy, reliable Community WiFi since 2013.

We employ our own engineers, with teams based in Scotland, the Midlands, and the South. This ensures that the same engineers and project managers who deploy your project will also support and maintain the networks going forward.



[SEE THE EGUIDE.](#)

SEE THE COMMUNITY WIFI EGUIDE.

The Community WiFi eGuide provides a comprehensive overview of Social Telecoms' initiatives in implementing Community WiFi networks. It showcases the company's commitment to digital inclusion, particularly in social housing and local authorities.

The eGuide includes impactful case studies from Blackwood Homes & Care and Havebury Housing Partnership, illustrating the social value and enhanced care achieved through these installations. Blackwood Homes & Care's case study highlights their mission to support people with disabilities in living independently, serving a wide range of clients across Scotland. The case study of Havebury Housing Partnership details their strategic initiative to improve operational efficiency and customer service, which included the installation of a Community WiFi network at Tayfen House.

The eGuide also reflects on the outcomes of Social Telecoms' installations and their approach to aligning technology with the needs of housing providers, demonstrating the transformative power of digital inclusion and the potential of technology to improve lives.

