

Nottingham Community Housing Association

Spring clean for housing association's comms



Nottingham Community Housing Association (NCHA) is the largest locally-based provider of social housing in the East Midlands. With three key centres and over 70 satellite offices that use different comms solutions and suppliers, NCHA was keen to put its own house in order.

“Our key goals were to consolidate our infrastructure, reduce costs and get a better, more reliable managed service”

Not an easy task considering NCHA's 650 staff manage nearly 7,000 properties and house over 10,000 tenants across Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, Lincolnshire, and Northamptonshire. However, NCHA is known for its “fix it” culture. It is one of just two preferred investment partners of the Housing Corporation in the East Midlands and currently manages a £22.5 million development programme which aims to build 638 homes in 49 schemes over the next two years.

NCHA already used ntl:Telewest's Centrex at a number of its sites, but a real turning point came with the

introduction of their own ntl:Telewest account manager, 18 months ago. It was ‘a stroke of genius’ according to Bob. ‘Working with ntl:Telewest's account manager has been like a breath of fresh air. With other vendors you talk to one account manager and never hear from them again. Our ntl:Telewest account manager provides a single, constant point of contact and he knows our history.’

ntl:Telewest matched NCHA's ‘fix it’ culture with its own ‘can-do’ attitude and a three phase solution was designed. Phase 1 is the provision of a call centre using ntl:Telewest's Mitel IP PBX at the housing association's maintenance centre at Bulwell. Phase 2 is the delivery of a new Wide Area Network incorporating 50 ADSL sites, 3 leased lines and a resilient Virtual Private Network (VPN) comprising DIA Plus and Ethernet. This VPN will provide a robust internet access to NCHA's head office and its 24hr monitoring and management ‘SMaRT’ centre. The third stage is the roll-out of the Mitel IP PBX to all other sites to complete the migration to VoIP together with the implementation of Special Rate Services 0800 (free) business numbers. Currently, the housing association has a multitude of different contact numbers for various services and sites.

Name:

Nottingham Community Housing Association

Industry sector:

Corporate

Location:

Head office in Nottingham

Business challenge:

Combining voice and data systems across a single managed network

Solution:

Migration to Voice over IP (VoIP)

Products:

Mitel IP PBX, 50 x ADSL sites, 3 x leased lines, 2 x DIA, 2 x Ethernet connections, Special Rate Services (SRS)

Business benefits:

Reduce operational costs, improve efficiencies, add resilience, enhance customer experience, futureproofing

NCHA hopes to reduce this to a few key numbers so that their customers can more easily contact them.

“Working with a dedicated account manager has been like a breath of fresh air”

Bob Moorey,
NCHA's IT Manager

VoIP is fundamental to the whole solution, but what is it? And what can it offer organisations like NCHA? Voice over IP (also called VoIP, IP Telephony, and Internet Telephony) routes voice conversations over the internet or any other IP network. It works alongside an organisation's existing infrastructure, providing a cost effective and low risk migration path. Users can simply plug their telephone in at a remote location and experience the same functionality as they would at their own desk. Its exceptional flexibility delivers increased productivity, reduces relocation costs and protects business continuity. Key benefits include reduced costs through convergence of voice and data over the same network and a range of advanced applications such as messaging, collaboration, conference and remote access for homeworkers. ntl:Telewest is spearheading the use of VoIP over ADSL. 'We were planning to implement VoIP, albeit a few years down the line. However, the push for it really came from within,' explains Bob. 'Our maintenance centre demanded high level functionality such as call recording straight away and was going to look elsewhere. We wanted one complete infrastructure. Everything pointed to VoIP.'

The purchasing process itself was seamless as ntl:Telewest is an approved

supplier on the National Housing Federation's Procurement for Housing (PfH) initiative. 'PfH means that we don't have to go through lengthy EEC tendering and are guaranteed competitive rates through collective procurement,' says Bob. 'It confirmed our hopes, rather than our fears.'

Eight weeks after the contract was signed, Phase 1, the call centre at Bulwell, was fully operational. 'In some respects we were expecting some resistance internally but feedback from the call centre has been very encouraging. Call centres have had a 'big brother' reputation but for us it simply showed that people are working as they should.' Bob adds, 'Employees in other areas now want to get their hands on the call centre's IP phones!'

Another benefit is that NCHA's maintenance call centre, with its new monitoring and record facilities, is now better able to reach the housing sector's own benchmarks. These Key Lines of Enquiry or KLOEs are designed to provide inspectors with a framework to assess and measure the effectiveness of services, particularly tenant/client satisfaction.

NCHA is looking forward to the completion of Phase 2 and 3 which, together with improving efficiencies and delivering a better, more personal customer experience, will establish a consolidated presence and cohesive public face for the housing association.

The housing association is assessing the ntl:Telewest solution to ensure that it does what it says on the packet, as Bob explains: 'To assess return on investment we have implemented a like-for-like replacement, we've also put some money aside, earmarked for enhancements. Retro looking at the project towards the end, we will see if

we have any funds left to make further improvements.' With the new infrastructure capable of unlimited growth, including multi-media, IP CCTV and other advanced applications, NCHA will be spoilt for choice when it comes to making improvements.

By exploiting emerging technologies, NCHA is improving the efficiency of its business, which can only help it to further realise its mission, 'to provide quality housing for people in need throughout the East Midlands'.

To find out more:

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