



Network Homes transform their service for customers with Claranet and Teams Voice

The background

Network Homes is a medium-sized charitable housing association based in London and Hertfordshire. Managing around 23,000 properties that house more than 38,000 people, the company operates out of 30 sites and employs around 550 staff. The charity is committed to providing affordable housing to support as many people as possible, and as part of that commitment the company started looking at ways to improve its back-office operations.

www.networkhomes.org.uk

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Director of IT Transformation at **Network Homes**

The challenge

Christo Gouws Director of IT Transformation at Network Homes, explains:

“Providing our residents with a modern service experience when they deal with us is essential as we move forward. We also wanted to ensure our technology supported our hybrid workplace strategy, enabling our employees to do their best work whether in our head office, at one of our sites, or working remotely from home.”

Christo and his team initiated a wide-ranging digital transformation programme to bring this vision to life. This included migrating from Citrix to Windows Virtual Desktop, rolling out modern Windows 10 devices, implementing SharePoint, PowerBI, and a host of other projects. So, when a board member also expressed a wish to update the company’s PBX system, he knew it would be a challenge.

“We had so much going on, and updating the PBX felt like it might be the straw that broke the camel’s back,” he recalls. “It did need doing – our PBX was getting old, and it made it complicated for team members to take calls if they weren’t at their desks. But honestly, I had no idea how I was going to fit it in amongst everything else we had planned.”

The solution

Christo mentioned this challenge to Claranet, who were already providing several other services for Network Homes, including SaaS, a Virtual Private Network (SSL VPN), and Colocation. Recognising a solution to the challenge, the Claranet team suggested that they migrate Network Homes to Teams Voice to replace their existing PBX solution.

“Network Homes had already rolled out Teams to its employees,” comments Scott Baker, Senior Network



and Communications Specialist at Claranet, “so it was a logical solution to the challenge – maximising the value of their existing investment in Teams and simplifying the switchover process.”

Teams Voice combines the best features of Microsoft Teams with additional features from Claranet Hosted Voice Platform that allows users to make and receive external calls via Microsoft Teams, or from their mobile devices. Managed centrally by the IT team, Teams Voice provides users with a consistent experience whether talking to colleagues or customers, provides an auto-attendant to help route inbound calls, and enables employees to take calls wherever they are, freeing them from their desks. Claranet’s platform provides additional benefits including call recording and encrypted storage compliant with regulations including PCI DSS and MiFID II – vital for Network Homes, who often take payment from residents over the phone.

Christo recognised that Teams Voice would help Network Homes to facilitate more flexible working for employees, falling nicely in line with their wider digital journey.

“I was very impressed with the proactive solution Claranet proposed,” he recalls, “which turned the PBX project from a real pain point into another source of value that aligned with our wider digitisation goals.”

The rollout of the project was completed carefully, to ensure that everything was done properly and integrated with Network Homes’ existing infrastructure, with all 550 users moved to Teams Voice within five months.

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embrace flexible working, so no longer being reliant on a desk phone was a big relief for our people.”

All Network Homes employees can now be reached through one channel, whether they are in the office, at home, or on the move. The IT team can manage everything in-house, instead of putting in change requests with a supplier, making them more agile and better able to meet the needs of the business.

The introduction of Teams Voice has allowed all income officers to take payments from customers, which has improved their customer experience and has reduced the risk of ‘dropped’ payments while transferring/calling back tenants.

Christo has especially valued the collaborative nature of the relationship with Claranet. “We’re on a complex, multi-layered growth journey at Network Homes to improve the lives of our customers, and Claranet gets it,” he says. “They have a proactive approach that enables us to have grown-up conversations with them that keep our whole transformation initiative moving.”

That journey is set to continue for Network Homes, as they continue to evolve their networks. He is looking at ways of enabling residents to self-serve for some services, and is embarking on a rolling programme of refreshing, upgrading or updating the existing technology and software that employees use to ensure they are always benefitting from the latest advances in tech.

“Network Homes has ambitious targets for the year ahead, including building 5,000 new homes over five years, almost three quarters of which are affordable homes,” he concludes. “It’s all part of ensuring that we can continue to support our residents, and new residents across the London and Hertfordshire area.

“Our IT transformation journey has been integral to delivering that vision – and Claranet has made the transition smoother. For that, I’m very grateful.”

For more information about Claranet’s services, and the benefits these deliver, go to: www.claranet.co.uk

The results

“Network Homes’ employees are loving Teams Voice. Adoption really wasn’t an issue,” says Christo, “because everyone was already familiar with Teams. They were also really keen to