

SOCIAL HOUSING SUCCESS STORY

Severn Vale Housing Society roll out UC solution

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Severn Vale Housing (SVH) Society which is headquartered in Tewkesbury, came into existence on the 27th April 1998 following a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) from Tewkesbury Borough Council. It quickly established a reputation as a fair and considerate provider of social housing. Initially, over 3000 homes were transferred to Severn Vale Housing’s ownership and an extensive programme of refurbishment and improvement was put into place.

SVH is non-profit making and is regulated by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) and Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). At present, SVH owns and manages around 4,000 properties and provides services to over 5,000 customers. It has developed into an extremely professional organisation employing over 100 people. Their business estate now comprises thirteen sheltered home schemes in addition to the Tewkesbury headquarters.

Recent economic events have impacted the Housing Association sector and although there is still caution investment for the future remains an important driver and the business climate is improving when compared to 3 years ago. Lending of funds by banks has been a constraining factor and the cost of borrowing has increased which has had an impact. However, SVH challenges remain the same; demand for affordable housing outstrips availability, tackling Government regulations and policy changes and dealing with funding uncertainty.

The customer still comes first and IT and Telephone Systems play a critical role. Customers must be able to speak with the right person, the first time they call, and that person must have the information in front of them to be able to effectively and satisfactorily deal with that customers enquiry.

Previously, SVH had poor internal communication and manual recording systems were prevalent. The telephone system offered little functionality and severely impacted customer service. There was no opportunity to deliver any ‘intelligence’ behind call handling and manual intervention was required to provide call flow and divert functionality, critical to the smooth operation of the business. Individual’s availability and location were managed manually using a whiteboard and call forwarding to individuals who were working off-site was extremely difficult. To compound matters further the system was obsolete and support and maintenance was difficult and expensive to obtain.

CHALLENGE:

- Current system lacked functionality and required features.
- Lack of ‘call handling intelligence’ impacted effective internal communication.
- System was old, maintenance and support was difficult and expensive to obtain.
- Lack of ‘presence’ information made identifying the location of individuals difficult, a reliance upon manual systems.

SOLUTION:

- ShoreTel Unified Communications telephone system.
- Cost and complexity was reduced.

- Users were able to simply use and exploit built-in system features and functionality.
- Configuration and management of the system was simplified.

BENEFITS:

- Improved levels of customer and employee satisfaction.
- Presence information made identifying the location of individuals simple.
- Ability to implement workgroup functionality improved customer interaction.
- The collaboration and communication between teams was significantly improved through use of call handling and workgroup functionality.

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It was clear that SVH needed a system that:

- Improved efficiency.
- Ensured service delivery in compliance with regulatory requirements.
- Allowed workgroups to be created.
- Indicated presence and availability information.
- Was intuitive and easy to use.
- Delivered business continuity.
- Enabled office based, mobile and remote workers to collaborate and share knowledge.
- Provided management reporting and metrics.
- Met the needs of customers and improved customer service.

A systems specification was outlined and it was clear that a Unified Communications (UC) solution would meet the requirements. By sharing the same Local Area Network (LAN) connection for voice and data a number of benefits could be realised. Telephones and computers could be closely integrated; cabling costs and complexity could be reduced saving money and easing management. New functionality could be delivered that could significantly improve customer interaction and service including ‘workgroups’ and ‘call flows’ that encouraged collaboration and maximised people’s availability. Simple, intuitive to use telephones and computer based applications would help users be more effective and productive. Web Browser based user and management application interfaces would deliver flexibility, visibility and reporting capabilities. Call costs would be reduced and the quality of delivered services improved.

UC solutions from Mitel, Avaya, Alcatel and ShoreTel were identified and potential partners were shortlisted. When investigating the ShoreTel product range it was apparent that Solar had a proven track record of delivering UC solutions and were an award winning ShoreTel partner.

Selection criteria was defined for the system included:

- Hardware/technical capabilities.
- Handset functionality and ergonomics.
- Simple system administration.
- Call recording.
- Front and back office reporting.
- Office presence indication.
- Value for Money.
- Functionality and benefits could be demonstrated.

ShoreTel and Solar were chosen for the following reasons:

- Solar were the only company out of 6 shortlisted partners that had fully read and understood the specification. In addition, they made recommendations about how the system could help SVH deliver features and services they had not originally considered.

SVH said:

- “One of the best technical demonstrations we had ever seen”
- “Solar were able to comprehensively demonstrate simple system administration.”
- “The system hardware and design philosophy was considered excellent”.
- “Functionality was easy to use and very useful”
- “Full office presence and availability was demonstrated.”

“excellent attention to detail and outstanding customer care. Throughout the project they were thorough and efficient”

Darren Knight
Customer Service Manager,
Severn Vale Housing Society Limited

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- “It was clear that the System could scale and adapt to meet SVH needs today and for the future with flexible functionality that could meet the needs of all parts of the business.”
- “Full unified communications was included as standard, no costly upgrades were required.”
- “The reporting system delivered a full range of reports which covered every part of the business and included; costs, statistics, performance, line usage etc.”
- “Call recording included electronic assessment and allows us to create our own assessment criteria.”

During the project design and implementation Solar worked with key stakeholders in the business. Feedback has been extremely positive:

- “Project implementation was completed on time to the agreed specification.”
- “Trainer was excellent.”
- “Great attitude and hardworking ethic.”
- “Very competent.”
- “Superb customer care from start to finish.”
- “After sales has been equally as good.”

There have been many benefits to SVH as a result of them deploying the ShoreTel UC solution. They can now easily monitor call volumes and ensure that they have the appropriate resources in place. They can measure and report performance against targets and metrics. The availability of ‘presence’ information has had a “massive impact”, improving internal communications significantly. The implementation of workgroups ensures the customer speaks to the person or group that have the skills and capabilities to deal with their enquiry or problem. The system will shortly be expanded to accommodate a further 25 independent tradesmen who will interface to the system via PDA’s. The close integration with Outlook has been “brilliant”, enabling calendar and contact information to be easily accessed and shared. In summary SVH describe the system as “brilliantly simple and easy to use.”

Solar have exceeded SVH’s expectations and are very proud of our close partnership and working relationship.

Solar demonstrated “excellent attention to detail and outstanding customer care.” “Throughout the project they were thorough and efficient” – Darren Knight, Customer Service Manager.

ABOUT SOLAR COMMUNICATIONS LTD

Established in 1988, Solar Communications is an award winning trusted communications partner for SME and enterprise businesses throughout the UK and Europe. With offices in Chippenham and London, Solar Communications has been “ShoreTel European Partner of the Year” for the past four years and is first and only European Partner to join the “ShoreTel Circle of Excellence.” Solar’s

knowledge and experience allows bespoke solutions tailored to business requirements that enable customers to improve productivity, reduce costs and increase profitability. Solar has a reputation for excellent customer support consistently scoring over 97% Customer satisfaction through independent analysis. For more information, visit solar.co.uk

ShoreTel European Partner of the Year 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011

Outstanding Customer Service Award 2009, 2010 and 2011

ShoreTel Circle of Excellence 2010 and 2011



London

Quantum House,
22-24 Red Lion Court,
Fleet Street, London,
EC4A 3EB

Chippenham

Rowan House,
Sheldon Business Park,
Chippenham, Wiltshire,
SN14 0SQ

Contact Us

T: +44 (0) 845 073 0001
F: +44 (0) 845 073 0002
E: info@solar.co.uk
W: www.solar.co.uk