

Great Places Housing

One of England’s Largest Housing Associations Uses RingCentral to Serve Customers Through the Lockdowns

greatplaces.org.uk



INDUSTRY:
Public Sector

YEAR FOUNDED:
1972

HQ:
Manchester, UK

EMPLOYEES:
600

Great Places Housing Group is a profit-for-purpose housing association committed to providing affordable homes for rent or purchase throughout the north of England. The organisation uses innovative methods to make its business operations more efficient—and then returns a great deal of the profits to add more services for customers, improve their neighbourhoods, and improve their lives.

With ever-increasing prices for homes and flats in the north of England, many working-class households find it more difficult each year to provide a decent quality of life for their families. That’s why Great Places Housing Group was founded.

A profit-for-purpose housing association, Great Places Housing Group provides more than 20,000 high-quality, affordable homes to residents across the North West and Yorkshire. The organisation provides home rentals and tenancy services, as well as assisted-living care to promote independence and wellbeing, for some of society’s most vulnerable people.

Far more than a landlord, Great Places partners with many socially conscious and charitable organisations to provide needed services to

its customers, such as financial advice and job-skills training. In fact, many Great Places customers turn to the association for emergency services—from a health crisis to a financial emergency.

So, when the COVID lockdowns forced Great Places to close its offices and transition its entire staff to work from home, all of the association's important work—and the lifeline they offer to customers—was put in jeopardy. The organisation needed a mobile solution for business communications, and they needed it right away.

Spinning up a mobile telecom solution immediately

Prior to RingCentral, Great Places' telecom infrastructure consisted of an on-premises phone system, with physical phones on every desk, and a separate contact center management system. The two solutions worked relatively well together, but they did not provide mobility. Employees had to be in the office to dial out from their business numbers, and contact center agents had to be at their desks to receive customer service calls.

Stuart Shepherd, Head of IT Operations, explains that the company was actually prepared for most disaster recovery scenarios. If something went wrong in the Manchester headquarters, the contact center team would transition to the company's secondary location in Oldham, where they had a redundant contact management system and physical phones to continue operations.

"Unfortunately, with COVID, we didn't have the option of relocating everyone to our disaster-recovery site," he says. "We had to send all employees home, and that meant we needed a mobile solution for our general telecom needs and our contact center."

As Great Places discovered in the first days of the lockdowns, their telephony provider's mobile option fell short of the organisation's needs in several ways—from quality of service, to the fact that it didn't work well with their contact center solution. "We needed a full-service cloud communications platform, straightaway," says Stuart.

"The proactiveness and speed of the RingCentral team was a breath of fresh air. Within four days of me calling the company, we had a mobile telecom solution up and running, supporting all of our contact center agents at home."

– Stuart Shepherd, Head of IT Operations

A smooth, painless implementation and onboarding

When Stuart and his team decided to roll out RingCentral's cloud-based communications solution, they found the implementation process quick and relatively seamless. "We had video training sessions for our contact center agents and made those video recordings available to them afterward, and that was about it," he recalls.

To make the transition to RingCentral, Stuart points out, all the Great Places contact center agents had to do was download the RingCentral app on their mobile phones and the softphone app on their laptops. Then they could log in, join the appropriate call queues, and start taking customer calls.

And because this migration to an entirely different communications platform had the potential to be so disruptive—particularly with everyone working from home—Stuart was relieved that RingCentral offered 24-hour support. "Both RingCentral's implementation team and tech support staff were available to us on a follow-the-sun basis," he says. "That gave us peace of mind."

As it turned out, though, the Great Places team didn't run into problems and didn't have much need for help with their new solution. "This was a significant and sudden shift in how we operated... from working in the office to being at home, and from our old phone system to RingCentral. Yet the transition had only minimal impact on our business operations."

Discovering operational benefits of cloud communications

Since they moved their remote staff to RingCentral, Stuart and his team have found many reasons to feel vindicated about switching to the cloud communications platform.

"Our contact center managers use RingCentral's wallboard feature to display the call-reporting dashboard on their screens, so they can see which agents are online, how quickly they're answering calls, and other stats. This is helpful not just for operational reasons but also to make sure we're meeting our SLAs for government contracts, particularly those with local councils."

Another benefit: Great Places is seeing a downward trend in its telecom capital costs. "We've had a big drop-off in users contacting us about phones and handsets that need to be fixed or replaced," Stuart says. "With RingCentral, everyone is using a laptop and mobile phone, so there's less hardware to worry about buying and repairing. I can see this lowering our overall telecom costs over time."

**Using RingCentral
to continue serving
communities in need**

What makes the Great Places team truly grateful for their new cloud communications solution is how well it enabled them to continue serving their customers at the time they needed the organisation most.

As Stuart explains: "Our customers often view us as an emergency service. Sometimes when they're not sure where to go for help, even for something unrelated to housing, they call us. Having our team able to take those calls during the lockdowns was very important. It helped us help some of the most vulnerable members of our communities during a very difficult time."

"We're very proud of the fact that we were able to be there for our customers during COVID, when we knew they needed us more than ever. And we have RingCentral in part to thank for it."

– Stuart Shepherd, Head of IT Operations

For more information, please contact one of our solution experts. Visit ringcentral.co.uk or call 0800 098 8136.

RingCentral, Inc. (NYSE: RNG) is a leading provider of business cloud communications and contact centre based on its Message Video Phone™ (MVP™) global platform. More flexible and cost effective than the on-premises PBX and video conferencing systems it replaces, RingCentral helps employees communicate across devices from wherever they are. RingCentral offers three key products. RingCentral MVP™ combines team messaging, video meetings, internet phone and other functionalities in a single interface. RingCentral Video™, along with its team messaging feature, enables Smart Video Meetings™. RingCentral Contact Centre™ gives companies the tools they need to connect with customers across channels. These are available on an open platform that integrates with hundreds of third-party apps and makes it simple to customise workflows. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, USA, and has offices around the world.



RingCentral UK Ltd. 85 Uxbridge Road, 4th Floor, Ealing, London, W5 5TH, UK

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