

Unified Communications Delivers Unity

The Challenge

Sovereign Housing Association has evolved by the amalgamation of four housing associations. In 2011 the Association became a single legal entity. It is now one of the largest housing associations in England. From 14 locations across the south, Sovereign's 950 staff manage over 36,000 homes on behalf of 70,000 residents. With plans to develop 1,000 new homes every year for the next 3 years, Sovereign is set to grow even further.

The amalgamation of the original housing associations into one organisation was a challenge on many levels. Each of the original associations had their own telephone and IT infrastructure as well as their own corporate identity. The challenge was:

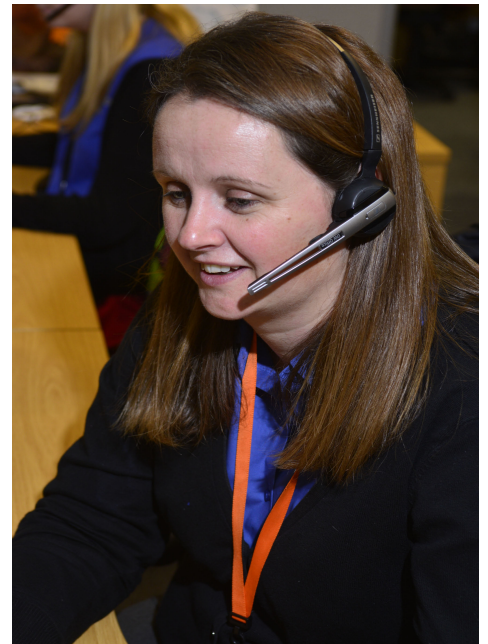
- to unite the company by providing staff with a common infrastructure
- to give a corporate identity to enable staff to feel part of a bigger team
- to improve resilience
- to increase productivity
- to save money

The Solution

Following an extensive consultation and evaluation process, Sovereign Housing selected Microsoft Lync as their preferred route to achieve a corporate cultural change, to increase efficiency, reduce costs and to enable the organisation to move to a more flexible style of working.

As a Unified Communications platform, Microsoft Lync provides the communications backbone integrating telephony, IT, presence, video conferencing and desktop sharing. Whilst the resilience and functionality of the software platform was critical, it was only half the story. The final link in the system was to be vital to the success of the project. This is where Communications Solutions UK (CSUK) came in.

With the top level of certification from Jabra, Sennheiser and



The Solution cont'd

Plantronics, CSUK are product experts in the headset market. This meant that they were ideally placed to help with profiling users according to their needs and recommending products for each use case. User profiling is a fundamental part of CSUK's service on these types of projects.



Not all users have the same requirements, so a one-size-fits-all approach will never provide the right solution across the board. CSUK recognises this and was able to profile every users needs at Sovereign, classify each of their roles and suggest the best options. Users were given a choice of headset styles. This increased employee engagement with the project and ensured high adoption rates. A subsequent employee survey has revealed a 75% positive response to the Lync rollout qualifying the deployment as a success.

CSUK not only provided guidance to Sovereign on the selection of headsets, worked with the headset manufacturers and Sovereign's system integrators to ensure successful installations, but they also shared the knowledge they had gained from previous Lync deployments. Leigh commented, "CSUK's advice on user adoption and engagement has been key to the success of the project... We couldn't have done it without you!"

The adoption of Lync has brought a range of benefits to Sovereign Housing. First and foremost is that many staff can now work flexibly from different locations. For example, all laptop users take their phone with them wherever they go. This means that a more flexible style of working is possible. Staff can carry on working even when bad weather or family commitments stop them from getting to the office. In addition, staff that need to go 'out and about' now redirect calls to their mobiles when they are out on site visits so are more readily available.

In terms of savings made, mileage claims have already fallen and productivity has increased as staff use the Lync conferencing facility in preference to driving to meetings around the country. Many phone calls that were previously 'external' and therefore chargeable are now internal, so phone bills have fallen.

The successful completion of the Lync rollout is only the start of the CSUK and Sovereign relationship. Sovereign are taking advantage of a custom web portal that CSUK provide to order their preferred headsets and spares on an ongoing basis. Thus the integrity of their installation is assured. Sovereign Housing also know that they can count on CSUK's experts to provide help and support as they continue to grow and expand.

"CSUK were able to offer us fantastic impartial advice about all the products. The expertise they offered us far outweighed the value that any of the other organisations we were looking at could give us."

Leigh, one of Sovereign's Infrastructure Engineers