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*power to you*



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**Seren Group is a collaborative collection of agencies that provides housing and support services to vulnerable people across south-east Wales and Swindon, in Wiltshire. The group owns and manages more than 5,000 homes with an asset value of approximately £200 million and is investing in building hundreds of new affordable homes for local people.**

Since it was founded in 2004, the group has seen demand for its services grow significantly, and expects this trend to continue in the future as the UK population ages.

Many of its 700 staff members often need to collaborate with other employees before they can resolve an issue or answer an enquiry, so it's crucial for them to be able to track down colleagues easily. Unfortunately, the existing phone system didn't provide the support that was required because the technology was old and prone to failures.

The group also wanted employees to work more closely and cost-effectively, while delivering a better service to customers. Contact with colleagues, to and from any location, needed to be simple, flexible and reliable to help resolve questions and share ideas.

To achieve its objectives it decided to deploy an Avaya Unified Communications solution to deliver fixed-to-mobile convergence, unified messaging, presence and skills-based call routing.

### Ageing technology

People who contact Seren Group often need urgent support, so the organisation puts great emphasis on responding to people quickly. The nature of the work means that staff usually have to confer with other employees before they can resolve an issue or answer an enquiry – this makes it all the more important for them to be able to track down colleagues easily.

However, staff sometimes found it difficult to reach one another as quickly as they needed to. They often lost time hunting for a colleague's office and mobile numbers and trying them both, to find there was no answer and no message indicating when that person would be available.

This had a real impact on services, particularly if someone in the call centre was trying to put an urgent enquiry through to an employee. At the heart of the problem was the ageing technology behind the phone system and call centre, which supports a customer base of more than 5,000 households.

The systems were out-of-date and prone to technical failures. What's more, the call centre was spread across two sites, making management difficult; and there was no provision for disaster recovery in the event of emergencies.

The group's IT team began to research potential solutions and focused attention on finding a centralised call management system based on IP technology. It invited Vodafone to look at potential solutions based around Avaya communications systems.

Vodafone put forward a Unified Communications solution that delivered the latest functionality in networking and telephony. The package included fixed-to-mobile convergence, unified messaging, presence, softphones for making calls over the internet and skills-based call routing for 12 call centre staff. The team at Seren Group quickly saw the benefits of implementing such an end-to-end unified communications solution and gave Vodafone the go ahead.



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Mike Phillips, Head of ICT, Seren Group

## Delivering the latest functionality

Vodafone engineers implemented a solution, which comprised Avaya Aura™ Communication Manager to provide the software backbone and Avaya one-X® Portal to access web-based telephony, messaging, conferencing, presence and mobility services.

Avaya Modular Messaging delivers voice, fax and email messaging services while Avaya one-X Communicator operates as the client software.

The group opted for a staged rollout and provided training and support to ensure a smooth transition, with employees helped to make the most of the new system.

The roll out was made easier by Vodafone's Computer Based Training solution, with e-learning tools that help end users familiarise themselves with the technology before using it on a daily basis.

The results have been inspiring. Employees have increased productivity and deliver a better service to customers. The organisation has reduced costs and cut back on management workload for its IT team, so that they can focus on more valuable tasks. The group will increasingly gain value from its investment over time as it rolls out additional services, such as presence, to improve collaboration.

Communication costs have been cut by consolidating multiple infrastructures into just one. The technology also helped the group make the most of its existing network infrastructure, cutting costs further. A significant reduction in the use of paper has delivered additional savings and boosted the organisations' green credentials.

Employees can complete simple tasks – such as routing calls to their desk phones – themselves. In addition, the IT team can add and remove phone users across the organisation more easily, saving time.

Mike Phillips, Head of ICT at Seren Group, says: "We have reduced workloads on IT technicians by enabling staff to log on to phones wherever they are working. The directory search function on the handsets has freed us from the need to update and distribute paper copies of telephone lists."

## Productive and inspired employees

Field workers have laptops offering telephony, video conferencing, messaging and access to company directories. Staff in offices can also work effectively from any desk because they have the freedom to log on to any of the IP-based desk phones.

Staff no longer waste time checking different devices for messages. Instead, they access email, voicemail and fax messages through their inboxes. "We have significantly improved communication thanks to features such as call logging and voicemail in Outlook, which makes accessing and storing voicemails simple," explains Mike.

Soon, staff will be able to check the availability and whereabouts of people in the organisation using presence. Call centre agents will be able to see the whereabouts of colleagues and determine the best person to transfer a caller to – improving response times and customer satisfaction.

Employees in remote locations also feel more connected because they now have access to corporate systems. This promotes both productivity and motivation making remote working staff feel like they're part of a team, inspiring them to be more effective.

The organisation now has a system that's far more resilient than before enabling it to function normally even in the event of an emergency.

## Significant benefits

- Employees have increased productivity and deliver a better service to customers through the use of the latest technology
- Communication costs have been significantly reduced by replacing different infrastructures with a single unified communications solution
- Costs and management workload for the IT team have been reduced, allowing staff to focus on more valuable tasks
- Employees now have much more flexibility and can communicate and work effectively from any location
- Employees can complete simple IT tasks themselves – such as routing calls to their desk phones – without needing to divert IT technicians
- Call centre staff will soon be able to locate colleagues in the field who are best placed to take calls and answer important enquiries
- The new system is far more resilient enabling the organisation to continue to function in the event of an emergency
- Employees in remote locations feel more connected to the company because they now have access to corporate systems.

