

RingCentral

Unified communications in the public sector of the future

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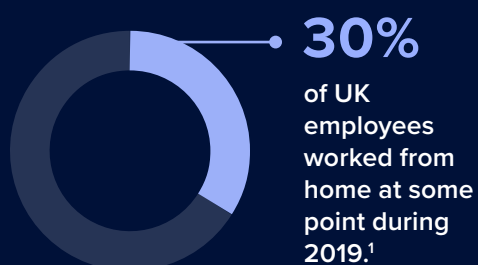
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Introduction

The workplace reset: How digital is shaping the government of tomorrow

COVID-19 has shown how digital services are pivotal to how society adapts to sudden and unexpected changes. For public sector organisations in particular, modern information systems allow quick, decisive action while increasing resilience against further crises. As a result, public sectors across the globe are accelerating their digital transformation initiatives to better support employees and citizens alike.

WHAT WILL THE OFFICE OF THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?



¹employeebenefits.co.uk

²yougov.co.uk

Alongside the worldwide cost of coronavirus, its effect on our working habits might seem less important. But as the lockdown took hold and millions of private and public sector organisations were forced to confront the vulnerability of on-premises communications systems, it seems many woke up to the idea of an alternative way of working.

Remote working, of course, has been steadily changing the nature of employment for many years. Thirty percent of UK employees worked from home at some point during 2019, according to the latest research by the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

With the events of 2020, however, the reality was brought home to more people than ever before. Yes, there were problems as employees had to improvise with home IT that fell far short of enterprise standards. Yet the advantages were there for all to see: The flexible, family-friendly work patterns. The increased productivity. The savings in time and money when face-to-face meetings and the daily commute were off the agenda.

As a result, it's unlikely that we will ever go back to working the way we did. Instead, it's predicted by many that remote and flexible working will become the norm, driven by new cultural attitudes and the power of technology to allow employees to work anywhere.

Now the workplace can be any place

In a connected world, the way citizens deal with public sector services is changing, driven by the possibilities opened up by new technology.

The opportunity is not only to deliver services better, faster, and with improved outcomes. It's also to reduce costs when budgets are under constant review. With more than £250 million in central government transactions still completed offline every year, at a cost of £14.70 per hour to the taxpayer,³ the opportunities for cost savings as well as a reduction in errors and fraud are considerable.

Advances have already been made with the opening of standards and data and the creation of the Digital Marketplace, driven by the Government Digital Service (GDS) and the Crown Commercial Service (CCS). Procurement policy has also evolved, aided by the government's targets for one-third of public spending to be with small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) suppliers along with a shift to more openness.

The next challenge is for public sector organisations to consider how they can deliver essential services remotely in a way that:



Enables easier access to secure public services on demand, when and where they are needed



Services citizens at scale via highly secure and compliant intelligent tools



Delivers programmes with faster response times and quicker issue resolution from the field through cloud data analytics

³www.gov.uk

The benefits of cloud unified communications for UK public services

Unified communications (UC) is a huge step up from web-based small business collaboration. It's a whole ecosystem that combines fixed-line and internet telephone channels, data, video, call management, and other tools in a "single pane of glass" interface.



The agility of cloud UC allows the UK public sector to scale and adapt services based on growth, connecting any device from anywhere and without adding additional hardware. It makes communications between individuals and teams quicker, easier, and more efficient. And it offers citizens more ways to get in touch with public service providers and get a better customer experience when they do.

How will unified communications change the public sector customer experience?

For the first time for many public sector organisations, the economic and social disruption of COVID-19 has brought the need for remote governance to the forefront. Social services that have always been delivered face-to-face are now being delivered online. Administration tasks are also moving into the virtual environment. Just as vital, governments are shifting to allow remote workers to deliver higher standards of service to those who use public services.

Ultimately, unified communications can strengthen the link between government and the public sector, small businesses, and the citizen and allow for greater collaboration, problem solving, and benefit sharing between all three.

Not that long ago, contacting your local council or GP clinic meant picking up the telephone during office hours, visiting in person, or putting a request in writing.

With the advent of the internet and mobile communications, those options mushroomed into a wealth of alternatives: messaging, email, website booking systems, voicemail, and social media messaging platforms. Used to doing their banking and shopping over whatever channel suited them, citizens came to expect the same from their public services. The public sector had to respond accordingly or risk losing the faith and support of those it served.

Providing multiple contact channels is only the beginning, however. Unless calls, voicemail, messages, and customer data are linked in a coherent single view, it's hard for public services to provide a co-ordinated response.

That's what unified communications brings to the office of the future: a cloud-based environment where all the threads in a benefit claim or social care case review are combined so callers can be directed to the right people immediately and where case workers can consult and collaborate with colleagues and other agencies seamlessly and effortlessly.



The benefits to public sector organisations

The combined benefits of unified communications in the public sector—each one building on the next to deliver huge operating advantages—aren't difficult to see.

Organisations still playing catch-up after years of austerity and reliance on outdated on-premises telephony systems now have a way to rationalise all those work silos and unite teams in a **frictionless communication** and collaboration environment.

That in itself brings greater **speed, flexibility, and accuracy** and more efficient management of the thousands of functions public sector bodies are called on to dispense daily. It also **drives down costs** by dispensing with traditional landline call charges and the maintenance of ageing on-premises telephony systems.

Remote governance through cloud-based communications facilitates secure collaboration and remote working for all, with built-in accessibility features.

Easier collaboration at distance means substantial savings in travel time and costs. The reliability and stability of cloud-based architecture delivers continuity of service and ensures the latest software versions are always in use because new iterations are automatically pushed to the cloud.

In the NHS, linking data analytics to patients' calls, messages, and records makes for more informed and **effective decision making**. Connecting first responders via technology that allows chat, calls, video, and photo imaging means potentially life-saving decisions can be made and passed on to clinical teams much more quickly.

The benefits aren't limited to efficiency, economy, and productivity, however. They have an equally important part to play in providing a **better working environment** for employees by giving them the tools they need to do their job and making them feel more valued and fulfilled in their role.

The remote working afforded by unified systems contributes significantly to a better work-life balance—an important consideration for today's workforce. It can also empower those on the fringes of the labour market who would struggle in a conventional 9-to-5 office-based role, such as carers, single parents, or the less-abled.

Beyond that are the **expectations of a younger workforce** to be able to work wherever and however they want. To these people, a fixed-line workplace telephone is as outdated a piece of technology as the flying shuttle and the factory loom that kept previous generations firmly tied to the workplace.

Unified communications offers the means to work flexibly and effectively, shaping the office of the future and acting as a powerful tool to recruit brighter, better employees to meet the future challenges of the public sector.



MOBILITY: THE KEY TO BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND MODERN PRODUCTIVITY

One of the most important features of unified communications systems is their capacity to integrate mobile devices into an organisation's exchange network.

Mobility has always enabled flexibility in the workplace. But by bringing not just voice but a host of other integrated communication channels and functions to mobile phones and tablets, their capacity to aid communication and collaboration on the go is hugely amplified.

Of course, organisations approaching remote working for the first time are bound to have questions: How will employees connect securely? Is video conferencing feasible and secure? What about working in productivity software like Word, PowerPoint, or Excel? Can employees embed applications within each other to limit toggling between applications and wasted time?

The answers lie in a cloud phone system supporting any number of powerful call management and productivity features such as presence display, local/national

and international calling, team meetings, and video conferencing—all through an easy-to-use mobile app.

Call switch features allow users to answer a call on a softphone or desktop and carry it on using their mobile if they have to leave the office. File-access functions allow mobile users to share, edit, and collaborate on documents. And one number calling means every linked device assigned to a user—their landline, their desktop, their softphone, their tablet, and their mobile—can be reached on just one number.

Smartphone technology has been with us long enough now that many people in the public sector, even at senior levels, take the ability to switch effortlessly between applications and devices for granted. That's as true in their professional lives as it is in their private lives, and it's this blurring of lines between home and work—and particularly the part mobility has to play—that will be central in shaping the office of the future.



CONTINUITY ON CALL

The coronavirus pandemic showed how quickly and how completely unexpected events can overwhelm conventional business operations.

But as all-encompassing as it was, there are plenty of other examples of much smaller scale crises closing down businesses that rely on fixed-line, fixed-workstation infrastructures: [A flood in the server room](#). Fire and smoke damage that make the office unusable. A road repair crew drilling through the broadband cable outside.

When such events affect public services, the disruption goes far beyond day-to-day operations. It can have a serious impact on the lives and well-being of thousands of citizens until service can be resumed.

Governments need to ensure continuity of operations for their parliaments, cabinets, and councils in all events so that decisions can be made collaboratively and securely while enabling citizens to watch and participate remotely.

One vital aspect of unified communications is that they make governance more resilient by locating all critical architecture, applications, and data in the cloud, where robust physical and cyber security practically guarantees their safety and continued operation.

Just a few years ago, the main reasons organisations were holding back from migrating essential IT to the cloud were their worries over security and reliability. Today, security and reliability are the chief reasons given for adopting cloud-based technology.

So, if the worst does happen and the office is out of action for days or even weeks, staff using unified communications tools can stay in contact and collaborate freely from their homes or alternative office accommodation. Meanwhile, for citizens accessing services or calling in for advice, there will be absolutely no disruption or break in service.

Unified communications in the public sector: Use cases

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS IN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

An organisation as large and complex as the Whitehall Civil Service has always presented communication challenges. Getting government departments to talk to one another and co-operate efficiently is notoriously difficult while problems like duplication and lost or misplaced data abound.

Unified communications is one technology that has potential to improve collaboration and teamwork by building better connections between offices, between teams, and between people.

In fact, its role in the central government workplace of the future could be huge. It seems likely long-term working practices will have to change in light of the recent pandemic, with conventional office layouts replaced by open-air seating, smaller hub spaces, off-site working, and collaboration at distance.

Unified communications is the perfect enabler for these new ways of working because it decouples the employee from a fixed workstation while aiding closer collaboration and teamwork.

It may also have a part to play in shrinking the central government property estate at a time when the need for office space is likely to reduce markedly.

Key benefits and outcomes for central government



Increased ability to govern remotely



Delivery of citizen benefits remotely and at scale



Coordinating crisis and first response



Managing virtual courts and hearings

In March 2019, the total size of the central government estate⁴ stood at 7,460,152 square metres.⁵ As the “new normal” is likely to see more employees working remotely for reasons of safety as much as flexibility, estates managers will be looking to release as much of that space as possible to save in rent and

building-running costs. Inevitably, unified communications will be called on in more and more cases to bridge the gap between the physical and virtual workspace by keeping teams connected and collaborating.

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS FOR CHARITIES LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In many ways, the challenges for local government around communication, collaboration, and changing attitudes to work mirror those of central government.

They are brought closer to home, however, for their more immediate and visible effect on citizens and communities. We interact almost daily with local government services in a way we don't with policymakers and strategists at a national level, so expectations for multichannel communication are higher.

Aligned with Smarter Working practices and trends towards a more flexible approach to the work life balance, unified communications will help transform the local government office from a static, permanent place of work to a series of dynamic virtual networks built around changing service needs.

This has implications for the way councils manage their estate, too. The increase in online citizen self-service and the ongoing One Public Estate (OPE) programme to integrate services into fewer buildings are already driving the need for office space down. The increased adoption of remote working tools can only accelerate this process.

As a result, local authorities can look forward to savings in office rent, maintenance, heating, lighting and building services that can be redirected into improved services and greater value for money for council tax payers.

Key benefits and outcomes for local government



Coordinating cross-agency collaboration



Outreach and support for citizens



Monitoring virus outbreaks



Easing budget pressures through cloud economies of scale

⁴The State of the Estate 2018-2019. Cabinet Office. © Crown Copyright 2019

⁵Local Government Association Improvement and Innovation Board. One Public Estate and Land Release Fund report – 22nd March 2018

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS FOR HEALTHCARE

The Digital First agenda for the NHS reaches into every corner of a hugely complex institution, Although just a part of that transformation, unified communications can nevertheless make an important contribution.

One of its greatest effects so far has been to transform the way patients get in touch with clinics, hospitals and community care services. A wider choice of contact channels means an end to long, anxious waits on the phone and allows patients to book appointments instantly by text or online as easily as they order their groceries.

Key benefits and outcomes for healthcare



Monitoring virus outbreaks



Providing virtual visits



Accelerating research and development



Outreach and support for patients



Contact tracing efforts



Improving patient experience

At the other end of the line, this information is aggregated into a single view for receptionists, practice nurses, and GPs without a time-consuming search of appointment diaries and patient records.

Unified communications is the perfect tool for the growing proportion of consultations that take place at distance, either by phone or video conferencing. Telemedicine delivers savings in time and travel costs for community healthcare workers and, in specialist cases, allows experts to be consulted from elsewhere in the NHS, or even from the other side of the world.

Closer collaboration between hospitals and community care services can ease bed-blocking by making discharge decisions quicker and easier. Often, these can be held up by the simple matter of a consultant being unavailable to sign off discharge papers. But with multiple contact channels, and many ways for consultants to respond wherever they are in the hospital, decisions can be made and acted on much more quickly.

“

Traditionally software technology innovations have focused on more tools for the desk-based worker. But the real opportunity is to bring desk-based and front-line workers (in critical UK services like the NHS) together on one platform to empower hospitals, clinics, and our local communities. That's what we're doing at RingCentral.”

Gareth Johns, Industry Principal, Public Sector,
RingCentral UK



UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

Technology has always been a force for change in education. Think of the transition from blackboards and rote learning to graphics-enabled whiteboards, or the growth in distance learning through massive open online courses (MOOCs) and other forms of online learning delivery. It's the schools and colleges that embrace such changes that see the results in better student outcomes and improved financial performance.

When school managers must account for every penny of expenditure, unified communications can be integral to more effective teaching and administration.

For example, at further education and higher education enrolment time, engagement with prospective students is critical. Multichannel communications have been part of everyday life for the students applying to college and university today. They expect to contact admissions staff and monitor the progress of applications on any number of platforms and to receive updates the same way. Unified communications systems mean admissions teams can offer this ability while improving their management of student data and making the enrolment process quicker, easier, and more cost-effective.

“

For any educator during a time like this, there's nothing better than being able to see that your students are happy, healthy, and engaged. RingCentral lets us do that, and it's been brilliant for our school.”

Mark Johns, Head Teacher



Communications between parents and schools can be improved wholesale, too. News and information about the school can be delivered through any number of channels or social media platforms, replacing the traditional letter home. While parents have the reassurance of knowing they can contact a teacher or support worker whenever they need to thanks to features like one-number calling on any device.

Key benefits and outcomes for education



Develop remote learning



Respond to employment and skills needs



Ease budget pressures on schools

And at those key times of the year for peak enquiries like exam results, open days, and parents' evenings, unified communications systems can be quickly scaled to meet call demand.

When the pandemic forced St. Bartholomew's Church of England Primary School in Bolton to close its doors, unified communications allowed the whole school community to stay connected. You can read how [here](#).



Modernise learning platforms to match future state



Help higher education in developing new learning channels and income sources

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS FOR CHARITIES

Efficient communications are essential for charities. Without them, they simply cannot compete with other fundraising organisations or for the goodwill of the public.

Today, donations are routinely processed through a range of channels, including telephone, messaging, social media, and online platforms like JustGiving. The ability to centralise these channels and present donor information in a single view gives charities a clear view of their income sources and offers an easier way for people to give however and whenever they like.

A unified communications network makes it easier for charities to co-ordinate efforts between volunteers, fundraisers, funding bodies, and other NGOs. Collaboration via video puts managers, advisors, and field workers

in the same room, wherever they are, which is especially important during international relief efforts when other forms of communication may be disrupted.

And it unlocks the potential of an army of volunteers with "work anywhere" technology that can be used to mobilise their services and co-ordinate their efforts locally and nationally.

Under unified communications, the charity office of the future will be flexible, dispersed, and responsive. It will allow networks to be expanded in times of crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic. And it will be more cost-effective, allowing more funds to be released for the all-important services charities provide.

The vital work of the Fairtrade Foundation went on even after lockdown because unified communications meant its volunteers could continue to advocate for farmers' rights in developing countries from home. You can read how [here](#).

“

Now that we have this communications app that works anywhere, we're able to keep Fairtrade Foundation's employees and volunteers connected from home and continuing to do the work that changes people's lives.”

Jacob Cunningham, IT Analyst



Key benefits and outcomes for charities



Increase fundraising opportunities



Ease budget pressures



Collaborate and volunteer anywhere



Protect and grow contributions to the cause

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS FOR BLUE LIGHT SERVICES

The effectiveness of emergency services is driven by the effectiveness of their communications.

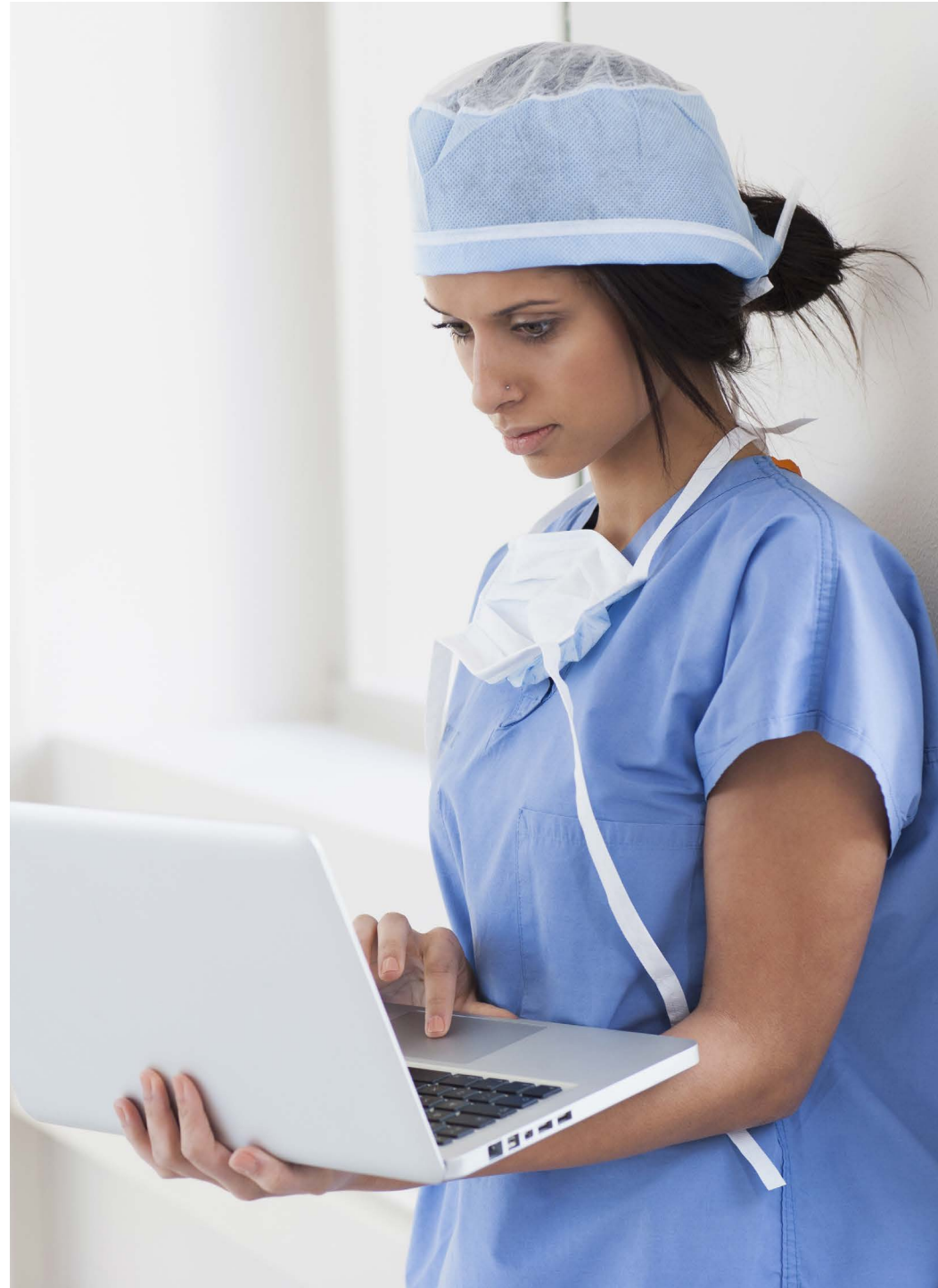
The government's Emergency Services Network provision is aimed at improving voice and data communications between control centres and mobile units. But beyond this, there is a place for agile and scalable communications networks that can respond to incidents and emergencies as they arise.

For instance, a unified communications system can be used to quickly establish a temporary critical incident centre at the scene of a road traffic accident or terrorist attack. It can be used to co-ordinate responses from multiple agencies and to share information between an incident epicentre and the hospitals preparing to receive victims.

Improved communication between the many institutions that make up the justice service can be integral to delivering better outcomes, too. Joined up management of services from frontline policing to courts and sentencing to prisoner rehabilitation and release depend on all the agencies concerned being able to communicate and collaborate seamlessly.

Access to crime reports, case histories, psychological evaluations, and the like are critical to decision making, and unified communications can bring these together in a single view, whatever their source, for discussion by those involved.

And of course, offering the public more ways to contact blue light services will inevitably have a positive effect on crime reporting and levels of confidence in community policing. Reporting by phone, text, online, and social media not only reflects the experiences of citizens in wider walks of life but makes sense from an operational point of view by reducing the burden on call centre staff.



UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS FOR HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

For social landlords, unified communications present a golden opportunity to move away from office-based, siloed administration services and into a much more dynamic, flexible way to communicate with staff and tenants.

When tenants expect to be able to contact their landlord in the same way they deal with retailers, financial services providers, and other businesses, a 9-to-5 phone line supported by an out-of-hours answering machine simply isn't up to standard.

In their place, text messaging, email, social platforms, and chat services provide numerous self-service options for vital functions like paying the rent or reporting problems. At the same time, this reduces dependence on manual call handling while facilitating faster processing of housing applications, visits for essential repairs, and the like.

With one number calling whatever device they're using, maintenance teams can be contacted for emergency calls wherever they are—a critical advantage when vulnerable or housebound tenants may otherwise be left without heat or power.

Plus, with so much information for housing associations to process from so many different sources, including benefits offices, local and national government housing authorities, contractors, and tenants' groups, a single-view system that allows teams to draw on the data they need during calls and online meetings is a huge advantage.

With offices in London, Bristol, and Manchester, and 40% of staff working remotely, the National Housing Federation chose a unified communications system to link every element of its operations. Read more [here](#).

“

As a nonprofit, we are always looking for ways to save money so we can reinvest our revenue into providing more value for our members; cost savings is another important victory we're enjoying thanks to RingCentral.”

Kalpesh Sonecha, Head of ICT, National Housing Federation



Summary

Looking at how the UK has handled the pandemic, we can see major changes in how our society operates. The behaviour of individuals, households, and companies has all changed significantly. Digital communication software has played a major role in the UK's fight against COVID-19 and can foreshadow how our society will rely on technology to help with future times of crisis and adaptation.

Our expertise is more than just cloud. RingCentral can strengthen the link between public services, small businesses, and citizens to allow for greater collaboration, problem solving, and benefit sharing between all three.

We have over 20 years' experience implementing, managing, and improving mission-critical cloud communications for customers across all sectors, while our customer onboarding and end-to-end migration support has been hugely well received in the UK.

RingCentral has the cloud migration expertise to help define a viable path to the cloud for your applications and data. We are on the G-Cloud framework and RM3808 (Network Services 2) certified and can offer UK data residency as well.

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ABOUT RINGCENTRAL

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.

For more information, please contact a sales representative. Visit ringcentral.co.uk or call **0800 098 8136**.