RingCentral

Virtual public service

How the rise of video meetings is revolutionising
public services in the UK

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Foreword

The year 2020 should be a watershed moment. A wake-up call. We no longer need to be **physically** present to be **productively** present. Even in areas where presence is really important.

In this eBook, we aim to review instances where traditional presence has been substituted with virtual presence. This includes examples in which public service agencies in the UK have transformed their delivery models against a backdrop of a global pandemic, followed by cost cutting to survive the economic impacts of COVID-19. Has it made a difference? Read on to find out.

The bottom line is that remote working has ultimately proved itself these last 12 months, and it's not going away. For those encounters where we'd usually be face-to-face—in a courtroom, for example, or for doctor-patient conversations—video conferencing has stepped in and made it possible over distance.

In a time of economic distress, tools like video meetings will prove indispensable to public sector agencies when considered in terms of the thousands of taxpayer pounds they save in reducing travel expenses, talent acquisition costs, and property investments made to meet the evolving expectations of policy makers and constituents.

This eBook focuses on four applications in which the use of video has kept services running throughout lockdown and has opened up a new landscape of possibility for public service delivery in the future. Remote interactions are shaping the world of life and work, and video plays a major part in bringing about that reality.

Future-fit
patient care
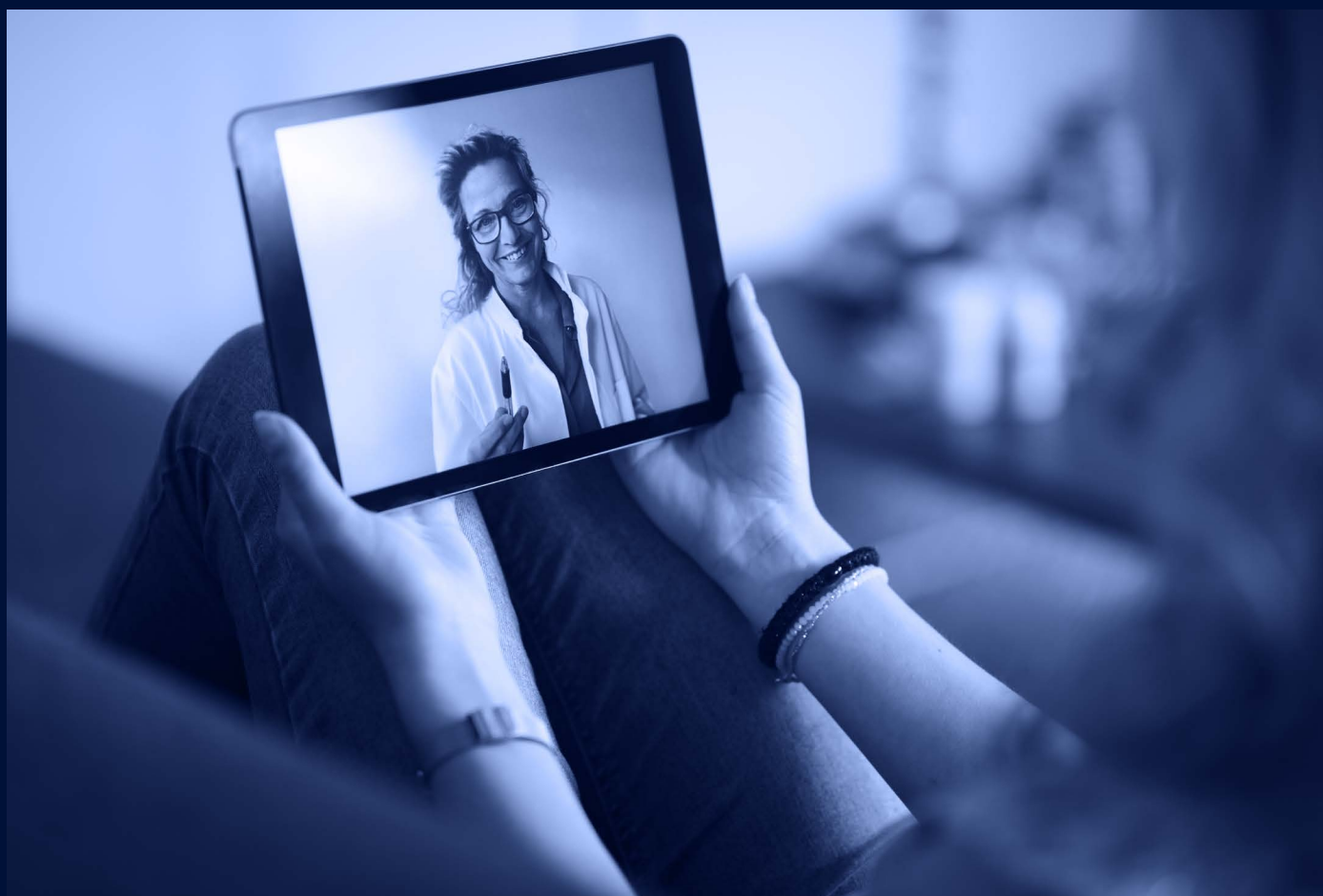
Telehealth and cloud communications in the wake of a pandemic
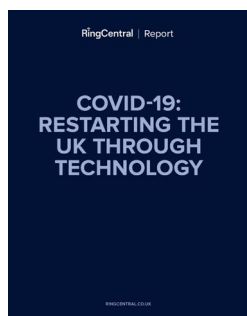

Read: Restarting the UK through technology

Throughout the pandemic, the healthcare sector has been even more in the spotlight. The NHS, already crippled by funding cuts, tied up in bureaucracy, and held back by ill-fitting administrative and communications technology, endured greater strain under the weight of the global pandemic.

Care workers—overworked, underpaid, and even under*fed*—were at greater risk than ever. Instead of cash, we gave them claps; instead of providing PPE, we put them on pedestals. In July 2020, Amnesty International reported the UK had among the highest COVID-19 health worker deaths in the world. With the technology available, it could have, and should have, been a different story.

The situation, however, did yield some positive outcomes. As in industries such as media, ecommerce, and education, healthcare benefited from the digital tools at its disposal. Through technology, healthcare practitioners were able to mitigate some of the problems brought on by the need to physically distance. The experience highlighted ways in which the healthcare sector can operate in a safer and more efficient way post-pandemic.

A new approach

Facing the COVID-19 pandemic, UK healthcare providers and practitioners had to find a way to migrate the classic healthcare "bedside manner" away from the bedside and into a more virtual environment without compromising patient care.

Telehealth played a key role in this, offering a combination of visual and aural exchange while maintaining the required minimised risk of exposure to infection for all parties. The use of **video conferencing** tools wasn't new to healthcare in 2020, but its reliance on third-party carriers had restricted widespread uptake of the promising technology.

Historically, **user adoption** and **data security** were among the key roadblocks for healthcare providers regarding cloud-first migration. However, during the weeks leading up to the UK's nationwide lockdown, telehealth went from being a progressive but controversial approach to an absolutely indispensable model for healthcare providers.

Fast-tracking progress in telehealth

71%

of routine consultations were being delivered remotely in April 2020.

25%

of routine consultations were delivered remotely last year.

Amid rising infection rates, reducing person-to-person contact became a key concern. Finding ways to ensure patients could see a doctor without leaving home were paramount to easing some of the overwhelming demand placed on healthcare services.

In April 2020, when the Royal College of General Practitioners reported that 71% of routine consultations were being delivered remotely through video meeting software, compared with a 25% rate from the same period last year, the uptake in telehealth accelerated.

Freeing up already stretched NHS resources and time through more innovative uses of technologies drove massive adoption of telehealth platforms such as the Babylon Health app and Pando.

Using video meetings and unified communications technology for consultations

While misconceptions regarding the security risks of cloud communications lingered, these were eventually alleviated as tools proved their value. Cloud communications security has come a long way in the past decade, including the installation of multiple layers of built-in application security and encryption in addition to stringent physical security protocols to protect all customer data.

Such measures mean that this level of enterprise-grade security is trusted by banks, governmental bodies, and healthcare providers. Indeed, cloud security architecture on average is much more secure than the measures or services that individual government agencies are able to budget for.

This created the opportunity for practitioners to use cloud conferencing solutions to reduce person-to-person contact through one-to-one video consultations without compromising patient data.

US-based medical practice Liquid Networx is one of many organisations who made use of unified communications to move to a telehealth model. Deploying RingCentral software as a reaction to patient needs during the pandemic, Liquid Networx helped partners to deliver fully encrypted, secure video consultations and telemedicine appointments on a one-to-one basis with their patients.

Effective collaboration between practitioners

The emergence of temporary hospitals or field hospitals to keep up with patient demand meant that keeping staff securely connected across multiple sites, via multiple devices, was also vital. Avoiding multi-layered technologies that don't integrate was a key security consideration for healthcare providers wanting to connect multiple departments and institutions instantly.

Leading dentistry firm Pacific Dental Services (PDS) was one of many healthcare organisations to take advantage of cloud communications software to streamline their cloud solutions and fine-tune their patient experience during the lockdown. PDS improved its day-to-day operations, integrating business-critical apps to improve workflow productivity, to remain compliant, and to simplify collaboration and communication across an employee base of over 10,000 people.

"Our doctors are even using RingCentral Video to do face-to-face follow-ups with patients. I think that's key to helping us improve that personal relationship between our dentists and their patients."

– Michael Brown, IT Enterprise Operations Manager at PDS

Next step: Omnichannel communications for a more streamlined patient experience

Video meetings and cloud communication tools have quietly become a powerful force in how central and local healthcare agencies serve our communities. Once considered experimental and expensive, the technology for video conferencing has advanced in recent years to accommodate the health system's security and data privacy needs, making it a straightforward and cost-efficient replacement for the end-of-life systems that no longer do the job.

In responding to present conditions and preparing for the future, GP surgeries and healthcare institutions are not only looking to adhere to the

government's Cloud First policy; the essential driver is that cloud solutions allow patients more freedom and choice in terms of how to receive healthcare services. Adopting an omnichannel communications solution means healthcare providers can meet those expectations and deliver a streamlined consultation experience. The ultimate result is a better level of care along with the freeing up of invaluable time and NHS resources as providers seek to reduce the risk of future resurgence.

CHAPTER 2

Pupils of
a pandemic

What we've learned from online learning

The education sector was among the hardest-hit industries during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. With exams cancelled and students and teachers in limbo, a nationwide closing of school doors took place for the first time.

The official lockdown brought about physical distancing measures that meant educators had to find a way to migrate the bricks-and-mortar classroom into an easily accessible, collaborative online environment.

The rise of the virtual classroom

Read: RingCentral's remote classrooms white paper

Early on, the eLearning industry predicted that the predominant use of virtual classrooms would increase by a 16.2% compounded annual growth rate by 2023. With many schools having embraced the technologies to enable virtual learning, that number is likely to increase.

While school closures initially caused much controversy among parents, educators, and industry leaders, teachers and guardians had to form a united front to continue the education process from pupils' homes. Teachers and school IT managers looked to video meeting technologies to help them pivot their teaching strategy and continue with the syllabus until the end of the school year.

The pitfalls and roadblocks of online learning

In April 2020 the United Nations Education Agency (UNESCO) estimated that 91% of the world's students had been affected by school closures.

Historically, roadblocks included security concerns and fears that the socioeconomic gap may be widened, with some families unable to provide the necessary devices for their children to learn online.

Pupil engagement was also a key factor that teachers had to work around during the initial stages of the lockdown. Home-schooling proved difficult for many parents as they juggled family life, working from home, and their children's learning schedules. As a result, expectations had to be lowered in terms of the hours of online learning feasible in the space of a day.

91%
of the world's students had been affected by school closures.

The advantages of online learning

The experience has demonstrated how virtual classrooms offer an alternative platform for teaching that can both supplement and complement traditional classroom learning. Those with the best results have taken advantage of the interactive elements of virtual classroom tools, creating an immersive experience as opposed to the passive reception of a prerecorded lesson.

Physical restrictions meant learning resources had to be made easily accessible for pupils in an online format, with teachers and educators learning from well-established distance learning institutions such as the Open University.

Headteacher Mark Johns from St. Bartholomew's Church of England Primary School in Bolton instantly became an ambassador, embracing online learning not just for pupils, but for the entire school community.

"We wanted to have our teachers make regular check-in calls from home to students and their families. We also wanted to have virtual staff meetings—not only strictly for work but also to keep each other's morale up."

– Mark Johns from St. Bartholomew's Church of England Primary School in Bolton

The morale-boosting activities included a virtual quiz night for staff over the school's cloud communications system. The staff quiz night proved such a success that it was also rolled out to pupils' families as well, helping to bring the entire school community closer as a result.

St. Bartholomew's key focus was on the mental health and well-being of their pupils during lockdown, and Mark found that online learning gave his teachers the tools to monitor their pupils. With features such as instant messaging, file sharing, and phone functionality as well as video technology for delivering live and recorded classrooms, pupils and teachers were able to continue to connect and collaborate throughout lockdown.

A higher level of syllabus delivery

The virtual learning environment has played a growing role in higher education programmes and offers a viable alternative to in-person education. The primary benefits of adopting digital learning platforms revolve around flexibility and connectivity.

The lingering effects of the coronavirus pandemic force institutions to adapt accordingly. Campuses need reliable tools, with a low adoption threshold, that facilitate flexible curriculum delivery while keeping students connected and engaged. That's an ideal use case for cloud-based communications platforms.

The adoption of video tools could prove invaluable to higher education institutions offering tuition to overseas students, allowing curricula to be delivered beyond borders.

Fears of overseas students deferring entry were relieved somewhat by a Times Higher Education article. The article points out, however, that "applicants from outside the European Union did appear to be more likely to defer, with the cohort of international deferrers increasing from 940 to 1,140 (21.3%)."

Video conferencing capabilities enhance the offer of higher education institutions to keep students safe, deliver a full-quality curriculum, and even save families money on potential relocation costs. The prospect of online learning is a preferable option particularly during this time of transition.

An appropriate platform

Virtual classrooms must include vital functions such as live interactive elements, learner-centred instruction, and the ability to record and review. Teachers have also found useful functions such as "mute all," screen sharing, and calendar integrations—simple elements that provide greater control over the virtual experience.

The best virtual learning platforms include the following features:

- **Enterprise-grade security** to keep personal data protected
- **Market-leading reliability** to guarantee lessons always run on schedule
- **Live video streaming** to facilitate that version of face-to-face contact

More info: RingCentral's remote classrooms brief

- **Live recording** to make lessons available on demand and to revisit for future analysis

- **Collaboration and moderation tools** to facilitate interactivity and enable students to reach out for support and to work together on group projects

- **Analytics** to provide insight into engagement and performance figures

Though many institutions rushed out to install the first freemium platform available, they've found they got what they paid for. To make online learning a viable component of an institution's syllabus, it's critical to base delivery on a secure, reliable, and multi-functional platform.

The future of distance learning in education

Regardless of the industry's initial reservations, schools, colleges, and higher education institutions across the nation are embracing online learning and, with an awareness that virtual classrooms are set to become mainstream, are establishing the infrastructure for an ongoing cloud-first learning environment.

As infection rates continue to pose a serious threat, schools and education centres are becoming more mindful of the risks. In a recent National Union of Students survey, university students flagged fears for their own health and well-being, with a third of student respondents saying that they would feel "not at all safe" if conventional classroom structures were to return in September.

In May 2020, Scotland announced measures to move towards a "blended learning" model, ready for when the school term resumed in August. This will see pupils splitting their time between the classroom and their homes and with the government injecting £30M in order to provide laptops for disadvantaged children.

Scotland's plan for education among many others suggests online learning is certainly set to play a major role in the future of education in the UK.

Making the case for virtual hearings
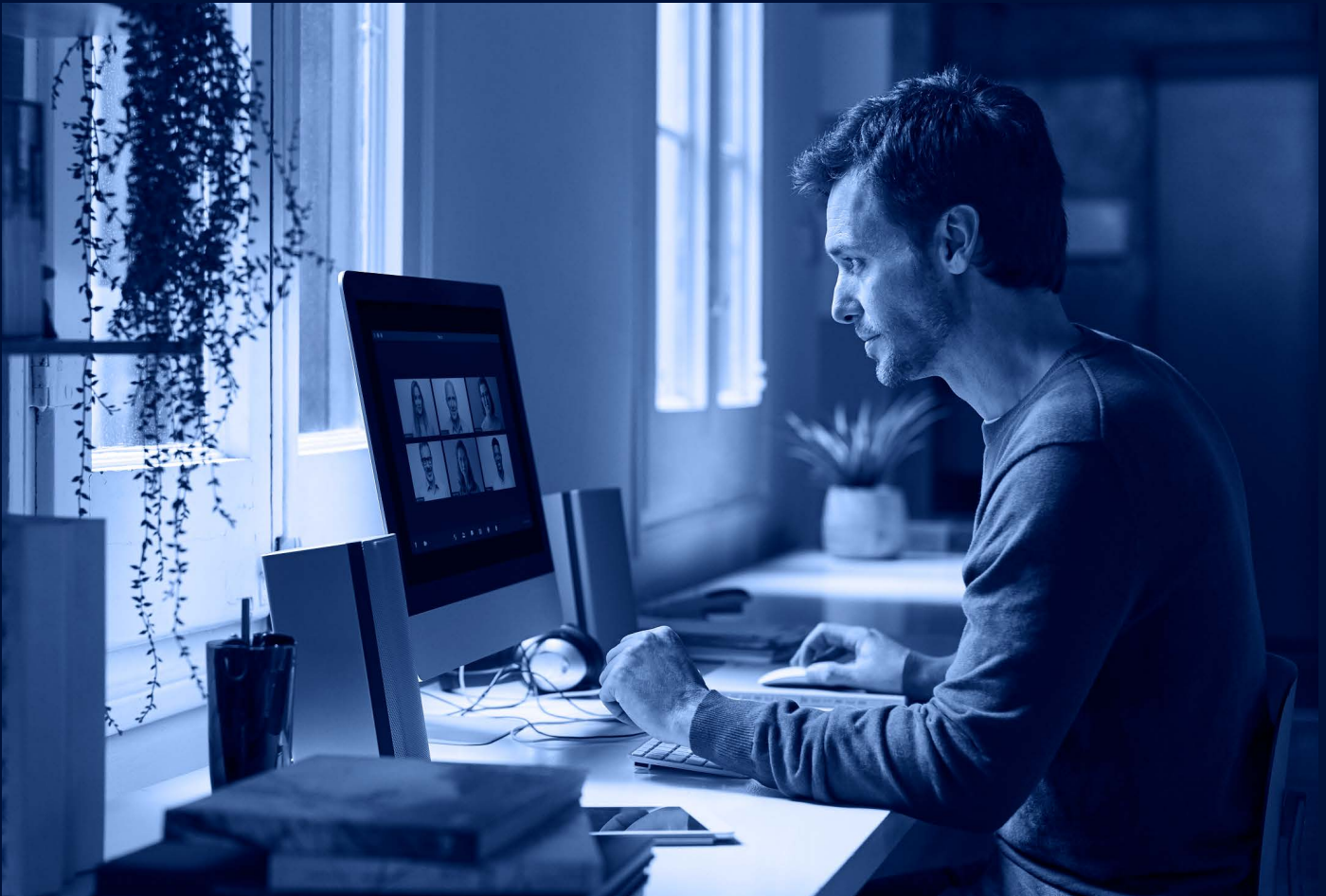
Video conferencing in the justice system

As the Supreme Court closed its doors at the end of March 2020, justice was seemingly on standby as courts had to find a new, more efficient way to proceed during the global pandemic.

During the initial weeks of the lockdown, many trials and court meetings had to be postponed. Risks to public health and the well-being of court users were high, meaning that courtrooms across the UK had to suspend operations.

Even before the virus hit, the delaying of court cases was already par for the course when it comes to the state of the justice system, with court cases often taking an average of 511 days to complete. With the COVID-19 pandemic hitting traditional justice systems hard, and social distancing measures making customary proceedings impossible, many court cases such as the high-profile trial over the death of Police Officer PC Harper along with thousands of others had to be delayed to protect the health and well-being of court users.

Already plagued with a huge backlog of cases—37,000 cases waiting to be heard in crown courts and 400,000 in magistrates courts—the postponement simply added to the pile-up, leaving even more claimants, victims, and their families distraught, highly stressed, and completely in limbo.

With a number of highly sensitive and urgent cases waiting in the wings, courts had to find a way to pivot the traditional systems amid fears that vigilantism and mob justice may rise if proceedings continue to be adjourned.

The case for a new approach

Video conferencing technology has historically been used in some capacity during court proceedings. Enabling witnesses to give evidence from remote locations, allowing children or vulnerable parties to avoid the distressing environment of the courtroom, or easing the pressure on expert witnesses (particularly medical professionals) are some of the benefits video conferencing has brought into courtrooms.

Video technology has come a long way since the first virtual court case took place in 2018. When courts closed their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic, video technology was ready to play a pivotal role in the

continuity of the justice system. Virtual hearings became the solution, not just for the UK, but across France, Germany, the USA, and the UAE among others, and a new protocol was issued in the UK with regards to mass uptake in virtual hearings.

Virtual hearings began in earnest, supporting the justice system in working through the backlog of urgent cases. Video communications proved particularly helpful in bringing forward conclusions in the case of child protection and custody cases that required critical resolution.

The advantages of video conferencing in the justice system

Aside from improved efficiency and helping some tribunals to get through the backlog of cases, it looks as though virtual hearings might not just be a temporary fix for the courts. With many recognising the benefits of increasing accessibility and transforming a system steeped in tradition, there is hope the antiquated customs of the justice system might be moved into the 21st century.

For the most part, with processes in place to ensure sufficient connectivity and resilience, virtual courtrooms seem to have run smoothly.

An appeal case over the alleged defamation of independence blogger Stuart Campbell took place in Scotland as a virtual hearing. Commenting on the online appeal case, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service Chief Executive Eric McQueen said:

"While this is an immediate response to coronavirus, there is no doubt that the learning will inform our thinking to make virtual courts a permanent addition to our Scottish courts."

Converts to video include barrister Oliver Kirk, who discovered that the increasing use of video technology meant he could cut down his travel time considerably. Providing comment for the Financial Times, Kirk said:

"I realised it saved me around two and a half to three hours of travelling, getting to court, and waiting around," he says. "I think we have all realised the vast amount of time we spend schlepping around the country for a five-minute hearing."

Online Courts and the Future of Justice writer Richard Susskind also argues the case that online and hybrid hearings may help to shape the future of the justice system and even revolutionise the ways in which we resolve disputes, claiming that "cultural obstacles disappear and we innovate."

Security on trial

One key roadblock for video conferencing in the justice system has been the challenge of security. The disruption of a high-profile online court hearing in Florida brought security concerns to light. However, the human element plays as big a role as any in such circumstances. Simple measures such as requiring a password to join a hearing and using a virtual waiting room to vet participants before allowing them to join are essential elements users can control in keeping their meetings secure.

The Twitter hacking hearing shows us the education and awareness gap regarding effective video conferencing. As security reporter Brian Krebs puts it, "How the judge in charge of the proceeding didn't think to enable settings that would prevent people from taking over the screen is beyond me."

Providers, of course, go much deeper in terms of security measures. Multiple layers, extensive redundancy, advanced encryption, and rigorous third-party auditing all contribute to critical security and reliability of video conferencing platforms.

While video conferencing provides huge benefits to the

legal system in terms of time and cost savings, it's critical that those in the driving seat invest in video technology with extensive in-built security measures to mitigate cyber attacks. Security and reliability are paramount in implementing a viable platform over which to conduct legal proceedings. That technology is certainly available and can be accessed by service users proceeding cautiously through the vendor selection process.

In short, the technology is tried and tested and is up to the task. It's up to users to take the necessary precautions to safeguard their own video interactions.

The local government transformation
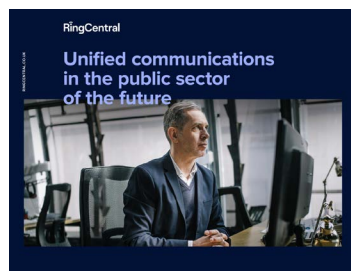
Paving the way for cloud-based councils

While many public sector organisations rally to overcome the complexity and financial strain imposed by the global pandemic, local councils have been no exception. Local authorities are working to find ways to overcome budget restraints amid continued operational restrictions and, ultimately, to do a lot more with less.

Already struggling with budget cuts before the virus hit, many local authorities turned to cloud communications to help mitigate the costs of conducting in-person meetings. Faced with lockdown, those in-person meetings moved to video and phone calls to minimise the risks of exposure. While some organisations took to technology to help them with continuity in difficult times, many were let down or found flaws in the security measures of free solutions.

Read: The modern council: cloud benefits for UK local governments

Now as communities across the UK try to adapt to a "new normal" way of life, local authorities face an uphill battle to keep their communities engaged and their constituents safe. Local authorities across the country are coming to realise that future-proofing council services and processes is imperative and ensuring this level of continuity moving forward means fully adopting new cloud-based and unified technologies.

Adaption and adoption

Where councils sought "sticking plaster" solutions in the early days of the pandemic, this led to challenges arising from using a patchwork of different platforms and a tech overload for council staff.

While budget restrictions were rife, many councils have come to terms with the benefits of more unified services that encompass multiple communications means including video technology, which has proven to enable both councillors and the constituents they serve.

Read: Unified communications in the public sector of the future

One council that recognised the benefits of video conferencing early in the pandemic was North East Derbyshire District Council, setting up the infrastructure for video conferencing to replace face-to-face meetings. With the technology in place, the council was able to also live stream its Annual Council Meeting, which was conducted via video so that the public could also tune in. Commenting on the success of the new video-first meetings, Councillor Martin Thacker, MBE, said:

"Holding a virtual Full Council meeting online is a historic moment and enables us all to be together to make decisions and constantly keep on top of the fast-evolving situation of this pandemic.

These new ways of working during the pandemic have enabled staff to keep in regular contact and work on incredible initiatives, successfully, such as the Community Support Team who have helped over 4,000 residents since it was set up."

Making a smarter cloud communications investment also means supporting your councillors in the day-to-day adoption of a new tech solution; ideally, one selected for its longer-term merits and designed for flexibility as teams grow.

Basingstoke council cited an awareness that different age demographics approached the adoption of technology differently. The council offered extra support for councillors with lower confidence levels towards adopting new communications technology.

Birmingham City Council also recognised the importance of testing and training their members on new cloud-based solutions, offering members "drop-in" sessions to help them test their connectivity and practice using different functions and new voting forms.

Forward-thinking councils have also begun to use video technology for more than just internal use. Handling high volumes of public-facing communications, councils

30%

of customers claim that not reaching a real person is the most frustrating thing about poor customer service.

are increasingly adopting video technologies for their demanding contact centre needs. With 30% of customers claiming that not reaching a real person is the most frustrating thing about poor customer service, councils are opening up to the possibilities of using video conferencing in their contact centres.

Durham County Council piloted a video contact centre initiative, Durham Talk, which offers face-to-face support to customers. The video link solution has significantly improved the efficiency of the council, not only in delivering a more personable and accessible service but also in reducing strain on customer service agents. Video technology means that contact centre agents can work from one centralised location and don't have to travel to and from meetings. Video link technology also means they don't have to wait for the next drop-in customer and can eliminate wait times between meetings.

Why 2021 will see a majority vote in favour of video technology

Mass adoption of software as a service (SaaS) technology has already begun to take place across the UK, with many organisations who previously boasted legacy technologies now having to move to the cloud and enable remote working. For many, this required a "quick fix," often procuring the cheapest and quickest solution to deploy.

But councils should be thinking carefully about how to truly achieve more with less by adopting a consolidated service incorporating multiple tools and channels. A reliable, unified platform improves rates of internal adoption and supports long-term continuity in the face of a threatening second wave of the virus.

Resilience and security should also be key considerations. While freemium products appeal in terms of keeping costs low, the adage that "you get what you pay for" is all too true when it comes to security and service. It's wiser to make investment decisions based on total cost of ownership.

By adopting unified communications as a service (UCaaS), local authorities can enjoy savings by reducing the number of platforms used for communications and by streamlining processes with a more robust and fully secure cloud system that can scale up or down in tandem with organisational growth.

Read: RingCentral for local government and UK cities

Video technology supports councils in several ways, helping to reduce costs of internal meetings and make staff more productive but also making council proceedings much more accessible to their constituents. Video streaming important meetings and providing face-to-face support can truly drive community engagement, and empowering staff with the right technology encourages employee engagement, meaning councils support and reassure stakeholders in times of tumultuous change.

Facing
the future

RingCentral

We typically associate video conferencing with executives in boardrooms, but that's almost become a corner case. As humans, we've adopted video for a multitude of uses from the personal to the professional. In many areas of work, it's no longer a "nice to have"; it provides a vital function.

With the country facing another recession, and the pressure on public services to keep performing in extraordinary circumstances with dwindling resources, service providers need solutions. Video is not a catch-all, but we've seen how it brings value to service delivery as a viable alternative.

There are clear benefits of choosing video calls over in-person meetings in certain circumstances. It can reduce travel time and cost. It can keep people physically safe. It can record encounters for future reference.

As part of a thought-out strategic approach to digital adoption, video plays a pivotal role in the public sector's response to the new world of work. Internal and external communications need to be consolidated, cloud-based, and carefully integrated with other business applications to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery.

It's crucial that public sector bodies are prepared to face the rise of remote working along with the evolving expectations of employees, service users, and policy makers. The technology to support this is available and affordable; it's up to leaders to reach out and grasp the opportunity.

Read: The role of video in the new world of work

For more information, please contact a sales representative. 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.

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