

RingCentral

Crystallising Council Communications:

How innovative communications technology is helping local authorities define strategic responses for uncertain times



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The coming challenge



As the primary interface between citizens and the state, the role played by local government is vital to the continued success of the country. From cradle to grave, the services its organisations provide touch the lives of every single individual in the UK.



With a remit that encompasses everything from road maintenance to social care and planning to waste management, its estimated 2 million workers¹ have played an important part in enabling a rapid period of digitalisation both during and after the pandemic.

Driven by necessity and demand, local government organisations have transformed both their internal workplace environments and how services are delivered. Rapid advances in technology have been swiftly adopted, powering different approaches and helping to redefine the possible. Forward-thinking leaders have recognised this potential, reimagining their departments and teams to unleash the power of innovation. Their achievements have been numerous. By adopting smarter and more efficient methods, working conditions have been improved and citizens are experiencing significantly better outcomes as they access their services.

However, local authorities now face new challenges as inflationary pressures are being felt across the entire country. As we continue to battle difficult economic headwinds, the need to increase productivity becomes ever more apparent. Yet more fiscal difficulties lie in the future, with some predictions suggesting councils will face a funding gap of up to £3Bn ahead of 2025².



Communications technology will be crucial to delivering further gains. A recent survey carried out by GovNews, in partnership with leading unified communications provider RingCentral, demonstrated the progress that local authorities have already made. This paper will expand on those findings, highlighting areas for improvement and signalling ways in which excellence can be achieved.

Local government digitalisation: So far, so good?




Society is becoming ever more connected. According to the Office for National Statistics, almost all adults between the ages of 16 and 44 are regular internet users, with all other groups increasing in numbers, including more than half of those aged 75 and over³. As citizens have become used to shopping, paying bills or booking reservations online, the expectation that government services should be accessible at a time and place of their convenience has grown.

Across all four nations of the UK, governments and administrations of all political colourings have long been united in the desire to promote a “digital first” agenda, with strategies and roadmaps such as the landmark *Organising for Digital Delivery*⁴ and *Transforming for a Digital Future*⁵ aiming to build strong foundations for digital transformation across the public sector.

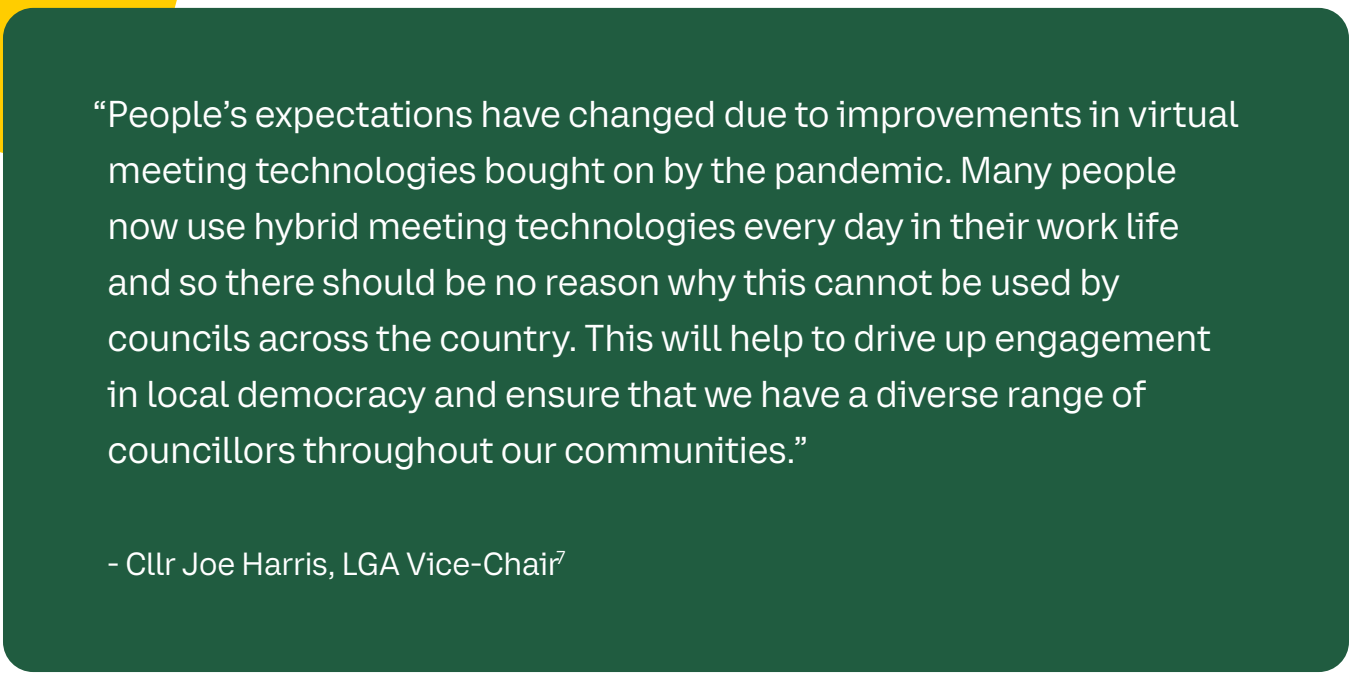
“Digital and data are the essential building blocks of all successful organisations. It’s only possible to make effective decisions, meet customer needs and respond to new challenges and opportunities when you have modern technology, real-time access to high quality data, a cadre of skilled digital talent and the right conditions for innovation to thrive.”

- Paul Willmott, Executive Chair, Central Digital and Data Office⁶

Local government, very much on the front line of public service provision, has been leading the way in terms of digital transformation.




New ideas were tried and tested during the pandemic. Demonstrating admirable resilience and agility, councils and local authorities led the way for the public sector, making use of the latest innovative technologies to ensure their workforce remained both safe and able to do their jobs. For citizen users, the resulting efficiencies led to enhanced outcomes, with streamlined transactions and virtually on-demand service provision.



“People’s expectations have changed due to improvements in virtual meeting technologies bought on by the pandemic. Many people now use hybrid meeting technologies every day in their work life and so there should be no reason why this cannot be used by councils across the country. This will help to drive up engagement in local democracy and ensure that we have a diverse range of councillors throughout our communities.”

- Cllr Joe Harris, LGA Vice-Chair⁷



The pandemic was undoubtedly a catalyst for change, and the demand for digital services in turn accelerated innovation, allowing organisations to make the necessary changes to their infrastructure. However, to face the challenges of a world that sometimes seems very different, the response must now shift from tactical to strategic.

In 2023, the Local Government Association (LGA) launched a guide to help councillors and officers progress their digital journeys. Building on frameworks agreed in collaboration with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace) and the Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation (Society), the Local Government Digitalisation Almanac⁸ provides guidance and resources to support councils in meeting the following strategic outcomes:



Connectivity



Data



Democracy and participation



Economic productivity and growth



Ethics and sustainability



Inclusion



Leadership



Organisational capability



Security and resilience



Services



Value



Progressive leaders have already recognised the potential of the latest advancements. With today's communications technologies handing control back to their teams, efficiency is improved, costs lowered and access to services democratised to help build fairer communities.

However, while there have been many successes, outcomes have sometimes been inconsistent. Not all local authorities and councils have progressed at the same rate. Not all are at the same stage on their journey to digitalisation. Now is the time for all organisations to move forward together.

Given the inherent complexity of the public sector IT estate, adopting innovative technology has sometimes led to unavoidable consequences, such as technological siloing. To meet the challenges ahead, these silos must be bridged. Organisations must “unlearn” the processes that have created them and embrace solutions which enable streamlined collaboration, promoting smarter working practices and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Data from the [RingCentral/GovNews survey](#) shows that throughout local government there is a clear ambition to embrace the right communications solutions. The number of local government workers who collaborate via channels such as [Microsoft Teams](#) is above the public sector average across the board. Furthermore, substantially above average numbers rate their organisation as excellent when it comes to hardware and workspace provision in pursuit of smarter working methodologies.

It is also evident that change is as necessary as it is desirable. In a 2023 speech at the Centre for Policy Studies, the Chancellor stated that public sector growth was down 5.7% on pre-pandemic levels. Announcing what he called, “The most ambitious public sector productivity review ever undertaken by a government”⁹, he called for a renewed focus on reform. For local government, the need to ensure the right communications strategies are in place is becoming mission critical.

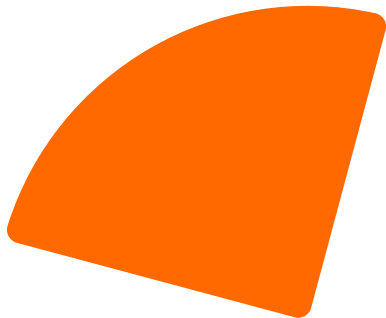
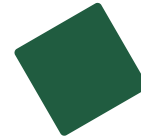




The looming problem of Section 114

Following the issuance of a Section 114 notice at Woking Borough Council¹⁰, its interim director of finance and Section 151 officer warned that more councils would find themselves facing effective bankruptcy. The view has been echoed by the LGA¹¹, with fears growing that a £3bn funding deficit is forcing many local authorities into an “endgame” as they struggle to maintain services.

From good to excellent

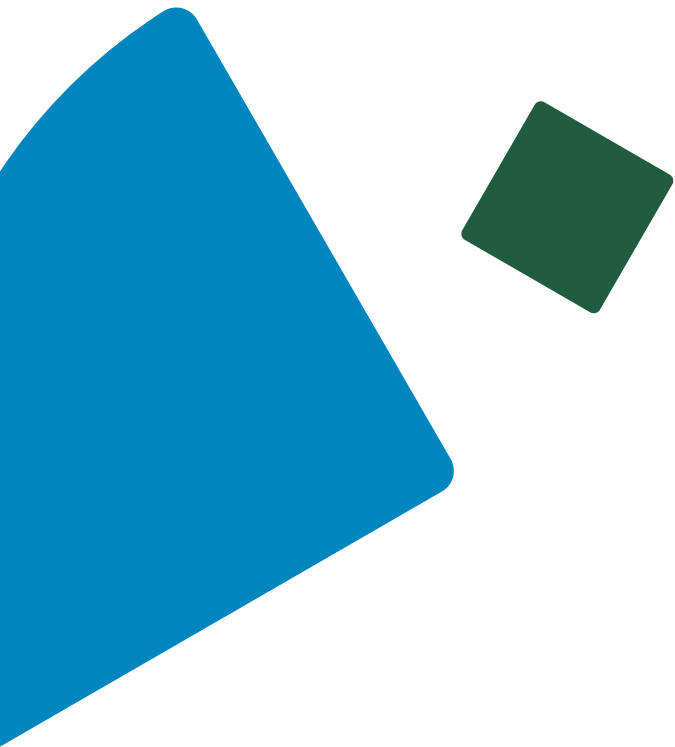


There is cause for optimism. Though local government organisations across the land are undoubtedly navigating turbulent economic seas, they are doing so from a position of strength. We are in the midst of an innovation revolution, with new technologies constantly allowing the art of the possible to be reimaged. Making the most of their potential will require considerable effort, but the rewards on offer are many. Now is the time to grasp the opportunities presented.

Results from the survey indicate that there is scope for improvement in many areas. In rating their communications, participants frequently gave “good” as their response. With ambition very much in evidence, many organisations have the potential to aim for excellence.

It is also apparent that teams have often taken a two-pronged approach, utilising the latest communications channels when collaborating with colleagues but falling back on legacy solutions for external user groups. As we have seen, public acceptance – and expectation – of using technology such as chatbots or instant messaging is increasing. The public is onside with digitalisation. By adopting a holistic perspective, organisations can improve accessibility across the full spectrum, from the colleague at the next desk conducting a video call to the citizen using a mobile device to make contact via social media.

Adopting cloud-based telephony, for example, can deliver immediate results. Legacy systems are a drain on valuable resources. Expensive to maintain, they were never designed to handle the volumes of traffic being placed on them today and are prone to failure through overloading. Modern cloud-based platforms can be quickly scaled up or down to meet the needs of the business, leveraging benefits throughout the organisation. Reporting and analytics provide teams with the



information they need to react to changes in usage, streamlining communications both internally and externally. Choosing reputable partners who offer 99.999% uptime SLAs means organisations embed the right levels of reliability and security. It also means smoother workflows are enabled, increasing productivity and reducing ongoing maintenance costs. For a multi-functional organisation such as a council, the benefits are incomparable.

The right cloud platforms provide a strong foundation to underpin an IT infrastructure that can grow with the organisation, making it possible to capitalise on innovation as it happens. New applications and devices are supported, enabling the free flow of data which will ultimately lead to enhanced service delivery. Councils are at the heart of initiatives to drive fairness and growth. By increasing connections across entire communities, they can work towards closing the digital divide and driving social and economic benefits for all.

“Given the right funding and opportunity to work in partnership with government and providers, councils can play a far greater role targeting communities most in need, driving up demand and providing digital upskilling...

...Tackling the digital divide will be important to levelling up in every community, ensuring everyone has the connectivity they need to thrive.”

- Cllr Mark Hawthorne, LGA digital connectivity spokesperson¹²

In conclusion



Local government stands at the edge of a new era. Many hard lessons were learned during and after the pandemic. The response, necessarily tactical, gave local authorities the chance to experiment, rethink what could be done and trial new processes and methodologies.



Now is the time to consolidate the gains that were made and to capitalise on the knowledge that has been acquired. The appetite for change is strong, among both a workforce that has proved itself ready and able to adapt and a public that increasingly demands modernisation.

Forward-thinking leaders have recognised the need for more and better connectivity. They understand that streamlining communication between their teams, their partner organisations and the people accessing their services is the first step towards greater collaboration.

The technology underpinning these communications is advancing at an almost unimaginable pace. By thinking strategically and implementing solutions to meet the organisational needs of today and tomorrow, local government can rise to meet the myriad challenges that lie ahead.

Right across the country, local government organisations have already delivered so much for their communities. They have the appetite and the ability. Today, with the right technology at their disposal, they will be able to demonstrate excellence and usher in the era of digital citizen services.



Case study

How three Lincolnshire local authorities solved their communications conundrum.



PSPS
Public Sector Partnership Services Ltd



As providers of council services to residents across Lincolnshire, three local authorities decided to pool resources under a single trading company to manage costs and encourage smarter working. Public Sector Partnership Services (PSPS) was formed in 2010 by South Holland District Council, East Lindsey District Council and Boston Borough Council and has since saved more than £23m for taxpayers in the county.

With three centres handling around half a million contacts each year via phone, social media and email, the need to consistently deliver exemplary service is crucial.

Reliant on an aging on-premises telephone system and soon-to-become obsolete ISDN lines, PSPS was becoming limited by its communications tech. Without data insights, PSPS was struggling to analyse call volumes and trends, making it difficult to effectively plan staffing and service levels. The company turned to RingCentral.

PSPS has embraced smarter working principles, and one of its corporate values is to work as “One Team”. With staff based in different locations, sometimes remotely, solving the communications conundrum is imperative. RingCentral was able to ensure consistently high quality connections with its cloud-based RingCentral Contact Centre platform. Calls can be taken wherever a member of staff is working, maintaining customer service levels and helping the team achieve a good work/life balance.

With RingCentral Contact Centre, advanced analytics across multiple channels provide PSPS with accurate real-time reporting, allowing call queues to be managed and staffing levels to be planned. Services are shaped according to need.

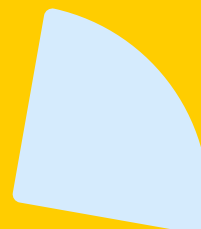
“The ability to run reports and analyse that data absolutely means more effective and efficient business... And let's be honest, we are all struggling with increased costs, therefore any opportunity that we have to analyse and identify and become more efficient and effective has to be a win-win.”

- Public Sector Partnership Services.

Thanks to the success of the RingCentral implementation, PSPS is now looking to integrate key company systems including its ITSM and CRM into contact centre. This will simplify workflows to drive further efficiency savings for the residents of Lincolnshire.

About RingCentral

RingCentral, is a leading provider of unified communications (message, video, phone), customer engagement, and contact centre solutions for businesses worldwide.



More flexible and cost-effective than legacy on-premises PBX and video conferencing systems that it replaces, RingCentral empowers modern mobile and distributed workforces to communicate, collaborate and connect via any mode, any device, and any location.

In the UK Public Sector and education space, RingCentral is leading the market with a cloud native business communications platform that works with existing technologies such as Microsoft Teams to deliver on smarter and hybrid working strategies.



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