

# How whg Boosted Engagement Rates

## How whg boosted engagement to help more customers, and prepared for the end of support due to COVID-19 and Universal Credit



Voicescape began developing a partnership with Midlands-based social housing landlord whg in 2019, with the aim of increasing operational efficiency and boosting team engagement. A few months later, when COVID-19 hit, whg saw seven months of Universal Credit claims by customers in just two weeks.

Voicescape became instrumental in managing this increased workload, and ensured the customers most in need of support were identified quickly and efficiently. Consequently, while rent arrears have risen across the sector, since August, whg's arrears have fallen.

Since implementing Voicescape Collections, whg is now able to provide a choice to customers on how they want to manage their rent account. This transformation has brought much-needed capacity to the organisation, enabling colleagues to support some of the most vulnerable in society who need assistance in managing their finances.

As a result, they've drastically increased both collection rates and engagement levels

## The challenge

Walsall – whg's core area of operation – includes some of the UK's most deprived areas. It was particularly badly hit by both COVID-19 and the economic downturn. Unemployment rocketed, and many customers suddenly found themselves furloughed, made redundant, or thrown out of zero-hours contract work.

Because of this, whg saw seven months of Universal Credit claims within the first two weeks of lockdown in March 2020.

Where previously, households may have had one or two working incomes, they now had to manage

severely reduced budgets on relatively low, fixed incomes determined by Universal Credit (UC).

whg eventually saw over an 85% increase in UC claims, which came with a whole host of challenges. Thankfully, due to whg's preparation for the 'move to UC' and the difficulties this would bring, the income team was already on the verge of a large-scale transformation

Little did they know that this transformation would also ensure they had the technology to cope with the demand caused by the pandemic, and enabled them to support a significant number of customers facing financial hardship. whg recognised that engagement on the scale required managing customers who were moving from legacy benefits to UC (originally planned for 2020), and would be a challenge. Therefore, reducing the number of manual calls was vital to be able to sustain colleague levels and performance.

The level of arrears increased from 2.65% in March to 3.65% just six months later – a significant and unprecedented rise due to the severe impacts of the pandemic. whg predicted an end-of-year position of 5%, which would have financial implications for the housing association's ability to deliver much-needed services to their communities, especially in such challenging times.

One element in meeting their ambition 'to not evict anyone into homelessness', was to increase capacity, so they could support more customers in need and in low-level arrears.

## The solution

In light of the pandemic, whg knew they had to offer more personalised support to their customers to try and ease any fear and apprehension. As a result, they stopped all letters containing legal terminology and switched to phone contact only.

whg places customers at the heart of everything they do and want their services to be as user-friendly as possible. So, while the housing association wanted to use automation to facilitate engagement, they needed a way to ensure their customers had complete control over how and when they respond. Voicescape Collections was that solution.

## How it works

Voicescape Collections is a powerful technology that allows social landlords to engage with customers in arrears, simplify the rent collection process, and collect with care. It works to maximise the effective use of officers' time by eliminating the inefficient tasks associated with outbound calling. Officers can concentrate on having more meaningful conversations with tenants who have opted to speak with them – driving positive outcomes for both landlord and tenant.

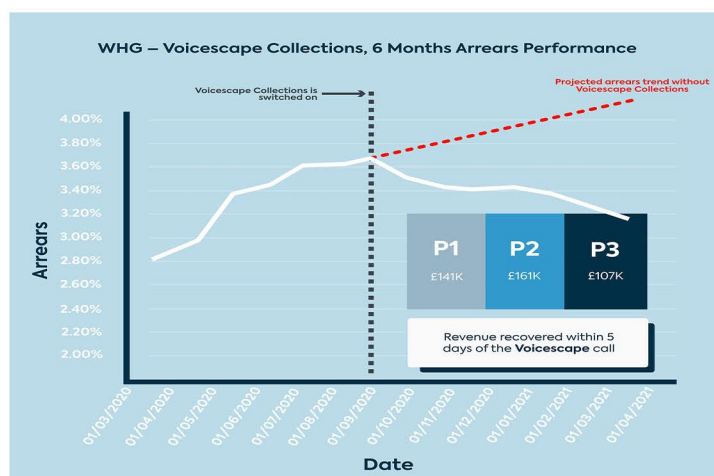
By automating outbound engagement to drive inbound calls from customers who need to engage, whg are now able to streamline the rent collection process while putting their customers in control. Using our solution, whg's income team can have more meaningful conversations with tenants who have opted to speak about their arrears, driving positive outcomes.

## The results

whg saw the benefits of Voicescape Collections within the first few weeks of implementation.

***“This technology, along with a change of mindset in the team, has created capacity for us to have that human approach to those that really need us.”***

**Tansy Crowley - Sweet, Income and Residential Property at whg**



They were able to almost immediately facilitate quality conversations with customers who require more in-depth engagement, which stemmed the increasing arrears and ultimately prevented that anticipated 5% end-of-year position.

Using our bespoke technology complementing new ways of working, whg was able to forecast that additional colleague resource should not be required to mitigate 'move to UC', which was estimated at 7.5 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

They've also seen colleague engagement and job satisfaction rates remain high, despite frontline services experiencing a challenging time throughout the pandemic. What's more, since their officers now have the capacity to focus on having more engaged conversations, they're able to drive positive outcomes for both them and their customers.

**Any questions? Get in touch**

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