

Housing association improves employee experience and security with Citrix

Southern Housing uses Citrix Cloud services to enable its digital transformation

Not everyone lives and breathes technology. When Southern Housing Group developed its digital strategy, it was careful to cater for all colleagues, regardless of their technical expertise.

“The digital strategy is all about user experience; making sure information is accessible in a user-friendly way both for customers and for colleagues,” explains Head of IT Infrastructure Operations, David King. “We want to support different ways of working and move from pen and paper towards email and digital platforms.

“Most people’s focus really isn’t on technology. It’s on caring for residents or looking after their homes,” he continues. “Many worry about ‘breaking the computer system’. Our job in IT is to make sure they can get on with their day jobs and support them in their roles.”

Founded in 1901, Southern Housing provides more than 30,000 homes for 77,000 people across southern England. The group relied on many older, on-premises applications and, to underpin its digital strategy, it needed to upgrade its IT environment. It chose [Citrix Specialist Partner HTG](#) to support its cloud migration and upgrade an outdated, on-premises Citrix VDI environment to a cloud-hosted desktop as a service (DaaS) deployment with [Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops](#) service on Microsoft Azure.

“We wanted to move away from on-premises dependencies and make the environment more agile and secure,” King explains.

“With Citrix, people can simply get on with their jobs.”

“By upgrading our Citrix environment to Citrix Cloud, and providing most of our colleagues with corporate devices, we have consolidated the user experience,” King says. “Providing a consistent user interface has really helped with productivity.



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Citrix products
• Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops Service

Key Benefits
• [Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops](#) service provides a secure, consistent desktop experience for 1,000 office and field-based staff whether working from home or on location

“It means people can simply get on with their job and not worry about which device they’re using - how it looks, how it feels, where to find the files or applications they need. It’s like jumping forward a decade for many of them. The feedback has been fantastic.”

King also notes that such consistency simplifies training, “People can be taught on one platform and it will work and look the same on any other. That also brings the benefit of flexibility. If a device breaks or isn’t available, people can access the environment securely from another device, either corporate or personal.”

With DaaS capabilities provided by Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops, Southern Housing can provide its users with a full desktop or publish individual applications on demand. It does both.

For colleagues using corporate, Windows 10 laptops, King and his team use Citrix to make available their older, legacy applications.

“With Citrix, we can ring-fence and support legacy, business-critical applications while we transition away from them. It means we can maintain a high level of security and maintainability of all systems connected to the Citrix environment.”

For those on personal devices – and, importantly, for third party contractors and partners – Southern Housing can offer a full desktop as a service experience.

The virtual desktop solution proved vital during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“When the pandemic hit, we were able to act very quickly to ensure people could work from home seamlessly and in a secure manner. And, that included the contact center, which was no small feat,” King says. “With Citrix, people could go and work from home at short notice and have access to all their business-critical systems and applications from day one. Provided they had a personal device, they could access the business information that they needed to facilitate their roles.”

The pandemic also accelerated Southern Housing’s move away from paper-based communication. Microsoft Teams, delivered through the Citrix virtual desktop, has become enormously popular, helping colleagues stay in contact even while working from home.

Organizational agility from disaster response to future working

Housing associations need to be ready for major incidents, from flooding to fire.

As King says, “We have to respond quickly and at scale, with lots of boots on the ground. Using Citrix means we can be more flexible as an organization, so if we need to scale up or down, we can do that very rapidly.”

Citrix Cloud services make it simple to scale – the IT team can quickly add additional DaaS instances to provide secure access to partners or contractors working on any particular incident.

The same flexibility is helping Southern Housing to plan for future growth and manage its post-COVID-19 return to work. The association is planning to provide 7,000 additional homes over the next nine years.

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David King
Head of IT Infrastructure
Operations
Southern Housing Group

As people begin to return to the office, Southern Housing anticipates that many colleagues will adopt an agile working pattern, ensuring teams can work effectively while away from the office and basing themselves within an office for collaborative working as needed. It is re-configuring its office space to accommodate hot-desking, while the consistent user experience enabled by Citrix ensures that people can stay productive wherever they choose to work.

Secure access for contractors, partners and remote-working staff

“Citrix is a huge boost when it comes to security as it allows us to give partners, colleagues and contractors access to our environment without the risk of data loss,” says King. ?

The Citrix zero-trust approach to security means King and his team can create contextual access policies, configuring access based on factors such as role, location, network, device type and data sensitivity. In this way, they can balance user convenience with security.

“Allowing third parties access to your system is a significant risk to any organization,” King continues, “but with Citrix we can implement group-wide security controls fairly easily, so that when people are accessing our environment it prevents them from downloading data or connecting portable devices such as USB memory sticks. With Citrix Cloud, we can implement risk-based controls and closely monitor the groups of people we’ve provided with access. That’s absolutely key.”

Overall, King says, “The most significant change, from an IT perspective, is that Citrix has supported our move towards a cloud majority state. We can continue to support legacy applications while we transition away from them, and we benefit from the security and flexibility of a modern, cloud environment that underpins our digital strategy.”

Of the project, Kevin Howell, Founder and CTO and HTG said, “It is great to work with Southern Housing Group, a forward-thinking organization with an ambitious IT roadmap and an excellent team. We were delighted to help in its cloud transformation, leveraging best-in-class solutions from Citrix and Azure to deliver a massive improvement to user experience, security, operational simplicity and prepare the business for a subsequent transition of applications and services towards a true modern IT environment.”

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