



Supporting Housing Plus Group to facilitate growth, enable seamless mobile working and optimise productivity

Incline IT designed and implemented HPG's IT transformation, migrating their technology platform to the cloud to support the organisation's growth strategy, boost productivity with seamless mobile working and provide a solid platform for further innovations.

Housing Plus Group

- A Charitable Community Benefit Society providing homes and care services across Shropshire and Staffordshire
- Manages 18,000 homes
- 800 employees
- One of the largest providers of homes in the Midlands

Our solution

Transformation design, Hybrid cloud creation and proactive monitoring, AWS cloud migration and management, SDWAN and network management, VOIP telephony and migration of VOIP to cloud, Cloud-based desktop as a service, Wi-Fi management and refresh for sites and schemes.

The challenges they faced

Following extensive merger and acquisition (M&A) activity, Housing Plus Group's IT systems had become an amalgamation of the components from each estate, rather than a coherent, fully integrated environment. It was complex to change, making implementation of their growth strategy and service transformation challenging. User experience, productivity and resilience to incidents were also being negatively impacted.

The outcomes

- 100% uptime (representative of 1st quarter at the time of writing)
- Cost reduction
- Vastly improved system availability and performance
- Enhanced user experience and productivity
- Fully mobile workforce
- A tried and tested framework to roll out change management and absorb acquisitions efficiently

“The rate of growth and change within the business was unsupported by our existing infrastructure. We needed a new IT system which enabled an environment that can accommodate merger integration, on-going group expansion and service transformation.”

Andrew Dale, Director of IT, Housing Plus Group.

Supporting growth with cloud technology

Housing Plus Group is a Charitable Community Benefit Society providing homes and care services across Shropshire and Staffordshire.

As one of the largest housing providers in the Midlands, the Housing Plus Group manages 18,000 homes, employs 800 staff and provides a range of care services across Staffordshire and Shropshire.

Having engaged in extensive merger and acquisition (M&A) activity, the group now consists of six subsidiaries operating across three main sites and 45 schemes.

With ambitions to grow further by M&A, they plan to build another 300 homes per year and invest heavily in their staff and communities.

Following extensive M&A activity, Housing Plus were operating across three main sites with on-premise legacy infrastructure, and 37 schemes with ageing networking all talking to on premise networks and servers.

As with most organisations that have grown by M&A, their IT system was an amalgamation of the components from each estate, rather than a coherent and fully integrated environment.

As a result, the IT system was inflexible and complex to change with multiple unknowns. The group’s approach to absorbing acquisitions had largely been to patch the IT systems together. However the inconsistent application of processes for change management, problem management and patch management resulted in delays to the delivery of support or change. It was clear that IT no longer aligned with the needs of this dynamic organisation, and absorbing acquisitions was becoming increasingly challenging.

On a day-to-day basis, productivity was impacted across the board due to sub-optimal service grades. Resilience to incidents was limited, the risk of outages and unsecured or out-of-date security profiles was becoming progressively worse and adversely affecting the user experience.

Housing Plus Group began their evaluation of the market using a procurement framework, and it quickly became obvious that Incline-IT was their partner of choice.

"Incline-IT was competitive and transparent on price and their flexible solutions represented excellent value for money. Their innovative approach integrates the best of breed SaaS solutions from industry-leading partners such as AWS, meaning they could offer something truly bespoke for our unique requirements. Their transparent approach means we can be confident they will deliver what we need now and into the future, no matter how the business transforms".

A unified infrastructure and network capability within a true cloud environment

From the beginning, it was clear that cloud technology and SaaS would meet the objectives of Housing Plus Group's digital strategy by enabling a sound foundation from which other services can be built. However with such a vast array of services and solutions to choose from, they teamed up with Incline-IT to architect and manage their

digital transformation.

To inform the new IT system's design, Incline-IT took over management and analysis of Housing Plus Group's existing infrastructure, monitoring systems and usage over a 6-week period. Using the intelligence gathered, a unified infrastructure and software-defined wide area network (SD-WAN) capability was designed, which supported the cloud-first strategy and removed the need for costly multi-protocol label switching (MPLS) networks.

Critically, this approach created a standardised project framework for rolling out the new systems to existing and new branch sites and schemes; unifying the existing subsidiaries and removing many of the challenges they had previously experienced when absorbing acquisitions.

A flexible platform for business needs of today and tomorrow

Rather than investing heavily in new on-premise hardware, Housing Plus Group opted to migrate to AWS, favouring the platform for the flexibility and stability it provides. As users of Office 365, opting for AWS also served as a means to manage IT related risk by splitting services across providers.

"Using partners to deliver services, we get the right skills at the right time. Keeping up with the phenomenal rate of change in IT is a challenge for the best of teams. We now have expanded capabilities coupled with increased agility that would have been difficult to match internally without significantly increasing the size of the team."

Andrew Dale, Director of IT, Housing Plus Group.

"The migration roadmap that was created by Incline-IT's methodical approach gives Housing Plus Group the confidence to move quickly and the ability to limit the risk of operating at speed when merging newly acquired organisations into the group's infrastructure."

Andrew Dale, Director of IT, Housing Plus Group.



With a complex system and a large amount of data to migrate to cloud, a phased migration approach was favoured as it posed much lower risk than a big bang approach. Incline-IT designed a migration journey which resulted in an uncomplicated cloud migration with no incidents or data loss. Their project management focused approach to the migration also resulted in the creation of a tried and tested migration roadmap, which can be applied to any future mergers or acquisitions.

"Although the completion timeline may be longer than with big bang, a phased

approach delivers greater value for the business. The migration roadmap that was created by Incline-IT's methodical approach gives Housing Plus Group the confidence to move quickly and the ability to limit the risk of operating at speed when merging newly acquired organisations into the group's infrastructure."

A seamless migration

To carry out a successful migration, Incline-IT created a hybrid cloud which bridged AWS and on-premise servers, after having carried out several remedial projects which were guided

by intelligence gathered during the monitoring period.

New services were built within AWS within a matter of weeks which allowed migration of Housing Plus Group's services to be carefully managed over time. Incline-IT and Housing Plus Group teams worked collaboratively to migrate non-critical systems and test servers within two-hour outage windows. Following each migration phase user feedback was gathered to refine the process and progressively increase the pace, resulting in an efficient process which could be replicated time and again.

Following the migration, Incline-IT continue to manage the AWS platform, and provide Housing Plus Group with weekly unmodified SLA reports on service, application and server uptime. With first quarter uptime of 100% for AWS services and all Housing Plus Group apps built on top, the results of the digital transformation have been excellent, including vastly improved user experience, security and resilience.

Connecting people and places

After taking over management of Housing Plus Group's existing network, including management of a 3rd party network provider, Incline-IT immediately identified significant areas of improvement.

As part of the hybrid cloud design, cloud based SDWAN was introduced, removing the requirement for MPLS or other costly site to site networks. As well as producing significant cost savings, the ongoing flexibility of cloud based SDWAN enables Housing Plus Group to easily and swiftly update schemes and sites with a range of connectivity options. Meaning no matter how the business grows and what devices and services they wish to incorporate, such as IoT devices, the IT team can manage the change and facilitate the services with ease.

Sites and schemes were primarily updated to communicate via robust cloud networks with multiple connection paths. Failover to 4G was incorporated to further enhance business continuity by allowing Housing Plus Group to maintain connectivity and decrease disruption

in the event of outages. Incline-IT also refreshed the Wi-Fi at the three main sites and provided a cost effective framework for Housing Plus Group to scale out Wi-Fi at schemes to support the various new use cases.

Within their new cloud environment, Housing Plus Group opted to manage out the legacy Citrix solution and make use of desktop as a service (DaaS). The company's DaaS enables them to deploy virtual desktops quickly and efficiently as the business grows. And it provides the flexibility to enable staff and contractors to access their desktops from anywhere, keeping them productive no matter where they work. Based on a pay as you go model, Housing Plus Group are now able to scale their DaaS up and down as required, making this a cost-effective solution.

As DaaS is hosted in the cloud, Incline-IT now take care of the backend virtual desktop infrastructure, including maintenance, security, upgrades, data backup and storage. Leaving Housing Plus Group to manage the system at a strategic level. And as with all Incline-IT services, Housing Plus Group's DaaS is tagged with individual business departments. This enables Housing





Plus Group to identify which business unit is consuming the resources inside the cloud, meaning they can easily make data-driven decisions on how to evolve the IT systems to meet the ever-changing needs of the business or allocate the costs based on consumption.

To further enhance Housing Plus Group's connectivity, Incline-IT provided a cloud based transition approach for the existing telephony. The result is a cost effective and resilient telephony service available to staff across all of Housing Plus Group's subsidiaries and their remote workers. The versatility and mobility of VOIP made it the perfect choice for Housing Plus Group; they can now scale their telecommunications easily to meet demand, provide staff with enhanced features such as video and conferencing, and adding in new organisations following further M&A activity will be simple and more cost effective.

Success fuelled by partnership

Housing Plus Group saw that Incline-IT was aligned to its own core values: in how it treats employees, its

customers and in its culture. Their inherent knowledge of the social housing sector developed and shared by Incline-IT's sister company MIS Active Management Systems, gave them a head start on developing a detailed understanding of how Housing Plus Group operates. This has enabled a productive and collaborative relationship between the teams from day one.

The expertise and guidance of Incline-IT has been key to supporting Housing Plus Group through its digital transformation. For Housing Plus Group, the success of this project has meant taking the entire business on the journey with them, from sustaining buy-in from the Board, right through delivering training and process change through the organisation's staffing structure.

Housing Plus Group's aspirations were clear from the outset, and they looked to Incline-IT to provide the solution. Fundamental to project team was to sustain the Board's confidence in IT services enabling and supporting the business. With the help of Incline-IT, this was achieved by providing Housing Plus Group with the means to build awareness of outcome delivery by quantifying the returns of the

transformation across the business' various departments throughout the journey.

Incline-IT's truly transparent approach to service delivery married perfectly with Housing Plus Group's vision for the future; to optimise Housing Plus Group's technical capabilities by delivering services through an expert whilst maintaining control of the strategic direction of IT and governing how the services are delivered.

"Unlike any other service provider, Incline-IT provides us with access to the proactive monitoring tooling used to support the on premise and AWS based services. Not only does this cement our relationship as a partnership, it also provides us with the means to validate SLA reports, creating true visibility and transparency of service delivery against SLAs. Although they manage the AWS services, their approach enables us to effectively contract manage the services, helps us to rationalise the way technology and devices are being consumed within the business and supports intelligent evolution in our strategic direction."

Andrew Dale, Director of IT, Housing Plus Group.

About Incline-IT

Incline-IT provides IT services built around you. We maximise the value of your IT investments and keep your business up to speed with cutting edge technology and services designed with scalability in mind. With a focus on high skilled resources and the use of innovative technologies to deliver automation in services, we get it right first time.

Passionate about customer service, your outcomes are our main priority. More than just a supplier, we are a trusted partner, designing and delivering the best and most relevant services, tailored to your specific requirements and challenges.

Our promise is to be honest and transparent – always. And as the only supplier of managed IT services to provide true transparency of costs and service levels, we are the best choice to help you close the gap between the challenges of today and your strategic vision of tomorrow. We'll take you on the journey from legacy technologies and architecture into the cutting edge of infrastructure and network capabilities only available under a true cloud first strategy.

InclineIT

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GROUP

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