

Collaborative Connection

Steve Rawson, Chief Operations Officer, Beyond Housing

Steve Rawson, Chief Operations Officer at Beyond Housing shares how its newly launched Reach & Respond service was designed in collaboration with colleagues and customers, and the opportunities presented by the UK's move to a digital communications network.

Every Monday night, I visit my parents who are in their eighties. Recently I walked in to find them arguing about which was better; the laptop or the tablet. Two years ago they could barely have switched either of them on, yet now they play a major role in keeping them connected to family and accessing information and services. This really brought home to me how much the pandemic has changed our relationship with technology, and how this, along with the current upgrade of our telephone lines from analogue to digital, means we have a once in an era opportunity to transform our services.

The pandemic has also proven just how quickly we can make changes if the will and the need is there. I joined Beyond Housing just two weeks before the first national lockdown and saw the way colleagues worked to adapt, virtually overnight. It was proof that not all projects need a timescale of months to be implemented effectively.

Beyond Housing was born out of a merger in 2018, and as a result, was operating three different Technology Enabled Care Services (TECS) when I joined the organisation. Part of my remit was to bring these services together into a single entity under a new brand, and also to ensure that the new service was prepared for the impact of the digital switchover. Reach & Respond was established on Wednesday 1 December 2021, following an extensive period of collaboration with colleagues and many of the service's 8,800 customers to help us plan our five-year strategy for investment and service development.

Beyond Housing is fortunate to have a highly motivated team of colleagues who are passionate about what we do. We were able to harness their experience and talents to inform our plans for the new service. We've also started to take a new approach to customer engagement, focusing on co-production. We involved hundreds of customers during the process of designing Reach & Respond, asking them, their carers and relatives what they valued and what they wanted the service to deliver.

Their views were clear; they wanted unobtrusive, reliable technology and to feel safe in the knowledge that our operators and responders could be trusted to give them help and support when they needed it. And so these are the principles upon which we have designed Reach & Respond. The process also gave us insight into how many of our customers have internet access in their home, a surprising 93%, which clearly presents us with opportunities to enhance our offer to them and make what we do more personalised and preventative.

Reach & Respond is integral to Beyond Housing's strategy for the future, and the decisions we make now will have a significant impact on how we deliver future technology gains and customise what we do to meet individuals' needs, enabling them to maintain their tenancies with us for longer.

As someone who is now over 55, I feel privileged to be playing a small part in trying to use technology to continuously improve the lives of the people we support, and create a better future for us all (whether we prefer a laptop or a tablet).