

# Digital Communications for Local Councils

Strengthen service resilience while driving cost improvement

## Top Stories

Ensure Reliable Cloud Communications with a Platform-Level SLA

The Value of One Platform, One Roadmap for Your Communications Technology

Administer the Entire Estate from One Chair

AI-Powered Automation Delivers Cost Improvement

How Three Councils are Digitally Transforming with Cloud Communications

Five Topics Required for a CFO-Worthy Cloud Communications Business Case





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# A Note from the Editor



The mission of implementing new normal strategies, ensuring support for new ways of working and enabling increased use of digital channels, all within tight budgets is the inspiration for this issue of Digital Communications for Local Councils.

Apparently, austerity will remain a universal constant for governments as 74% indicated that their funding is the same now versus pre pandemic. That statistic is from the 2021 Gartner CIO Survey of 1,877 CIOs in 74 countries. It includes 227 government respondents that were aggregated into an industry specific analysis.<sup>1</sup> This government perspective provides comparative measures that U.K. Local Councils can use to assess their progress with digital transformations and post pandemic readiness. Key findings for the government group include:

**11%**

have implemented their new normal strategy, 29% are in the process of implementing their new normal strategy, and 41% are planning their new normal strategy. The remaining 20% are still in the process of stabilizing operations.

**82%**

report an increase in the use of digital channels to reach citizens in 2020 and expect that increase to be sustained in 2021.

**85%**

indicate that demand for new digital products and services increased in 2020 and expect demand to continue throughout 2021. This demand creates issues with demand management for government CIOs as they try to simultaneously maintain legacy environments and support this additional demand.

**49%**

expect work from home for business staff to continue to increase in 2021.

To build on the Gartner research, this issue contains examples of how local councils are using cloud communications to strengthen service delivery resilience while lowering costs.

The intent is to provide insights and examples that generate ideas and excitement for the possibilities modern cloud communications can deliver – quickly and affordably.

Thank you for reading through this issue. We look forward to building the way forward with you.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Russell Tilsed', written in a cursive style.

**Russell Tilsed**

<sup>1</sup>2021 CIO Agenda: Government CIOs Step Up to Action for Digital Acceleration, published 10 December 2020





# Ensure Reliable Cloud Communications with a Platform- Level SLA

Dave Bibby



Recent events have made it clear that organisational and service delivery resilience depends on having reliable, secure cloud communications that enable connecting and collaborating from anywhere, using any channel (e.g. phone, chat, video, contact centre, SMS messaging) on any device.

As local councils implement their long-term strategies, selecting a cloud communications provider that ensures a reliable platform is a daunting challenge. Today, every vendor claims that they have one. How can IT leaders in local councils filter out the marketing noise and quickly identify the real, reliable platforms? Ask for a highly available, fully redundant solution, supported by a financially-backed 99.99% uptime SLA across BOTH contact centre and business communications.

8x8 offers a consistent 99.99% SLA across its platform, including both Contact Centre and business communications. 8x8 has made significant investments to ensure all platform components are fully redundant delivering true high availability.

**Ask for a highly available, fully redundant solution, supported by a financially-backed 99.99% uptime SLA across BOTH contact centre and business communications.**





Our proprietary platform is designed from the ground up to assure the highest possible uptime by providing four levels of redundancy:

<p><b>Infrastructure</b></p> <p>Fully redundant infrastructure provides the foundation for high availability</p>	<p><b>Platform</b></p> <p>Fully redundant application platform means no downtime for upgrades and high availability of the service</p>	<p><b>Data</b></p> <p>Fully mirrored data sources means high availability and full consistency of data across redundant platforms</p>	<p><b>Geographic</b></p> <p>All three layers above also fully replicated across geographically diverse locations in each region</p>
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**The DNA of 8x8's platform:**

- Engineering culture thinking beyond 99.99%
- Cloud agnostic
- Full Kubernetes support with self healing
- Highly available active-active out-of-the-box
- All production deployments fully auditable
- Auto scaling - provisioning scales dynamically
- Real-time, 24x7 observability, alerting and escalation process to the NOC level
- Four levels of redundancy
- Unified security model

**8x8 Regions**

The 8x8 architecture uses redundant servers, databases, and storage resources to deliver high availability across the platform. Each region is serviced by multiple Tier 1 ISPs. Additionally, each region has multiple top-tier PSTN carriers. The data centres are located in 35 geographically redundant global public cloud and private regions, providing seamless connectivity and high availability. In the case of U.K.-based local authorities, 8x8 will ensure U.K. data sovereignty and adherence.







8x8 even takes a unique approach to system upgrades — your platform can be upgraded and maintained without downtime.

That's possible because every cluster consists of fully redundant "A/B" sides of the platform. At the time of an upgrade, all tenants are rolled to one side of the platform while 8x8 performs the upgrade.

Once the upgrade is complete for one side, it's allowed to run for a few days before leveraging the same process on the other side. This approach ensures the ability to seamlessly roll back any tenant to the previous version in the unlikely case there's an issue.

After both sides have been upgraded, the tenants are distributed to normal load balancing across the A/B platform sides with the upgraded functionality.

To ensure complete transparency, the status of your service is always available on the public [Service Status](#) site.

This architecture and approach provides the reliability your organisation requires, so you can ensure service delivery resilience. To provide additional peace of mind, it's supported by a financial commitment in the contract.

### **Blue-Green Deployments — upgrading without downtime:**

1. Tenants are load balanced between A/B platform sides prior to upgrade taking place.
2. At time of upgrade, the tenant is rolled entirely to their side A of the platform.
3. 8x8 upgrades the B side of the platform while the customer is fully functioning on side A.
4. 8x8 rolls customer to B side once upgrade is complete.
5. After a few days, while the customer is on B side of the platform, 8x8 performs an upgrade for side A.
6. Once both sides (A & B) of the platform have been upgraded, the customer is fully operational with now both redundant sides completely up to date.

**To learn more about the industry's only platform SLA, please visit our [Service Status site](#) or [8x8.com](#).**



A photograph of three business professionals walking outdoors. In the foreground, a woman in a grey blazer and light-colored trousers is looking at her smartphone. Behind her, a man in a dark suit and tie is also looking at his phone while carrying a tan briefcase. Further back, another man in a blue blazer and brown trousers is walking with a black suitcase, also looking at his phone. The scene is set on a paved area with long shadows cast across it, suggesting late afternoon or early morning light.

# The Value of One Platform, One Roadmap for Your Communications Technology

Spencer Wood



Have you ever stopped to think about all the maintenance areas of a car and how they require updates at different times? The tyres need to be changed at a different rate than the oil. Windscreen wipers are updated at a different rate than brake pads. Given all the areas that require regular maintenance at different times, car upkeep is a constant time and money consuming process. Interestingly, traditional communications solutions operate in a similar way, with different elements delivered by different vendors and manufacturers. This is where cloud communications can help, especially 8x8's single technology stack approach.

Recent events have caused local councils to quickly deploy solutions that enable remote working where appropriate. They may have procured an application for contact centre, an application for collaboration, an application for business communications, and another application for video meetings. Take a quick communications application inventory of your organisation. How complicated is it? Now, like cars, all of those applications (parts) need updating and maintenance, along with scheduled maintenance windows out of operational hours for new feature deployment and the related training and adoption support for end-users – all at different times and degrees of complexity.

If you've made a recent change to your cloud communications, maybe the vendor was able to create the perception of a platform with a single contract. But, all those applications from different providers, even if under a single contract, create the same problems you faced with your on-premise solution. They just live in someone else's data-centre and are still costing your organisation more in terms of resources and risk caused by four main factors:

1. Separate administration
2. Separate user training and adoption
3. Multiple roadmaps evolving at different rates
4. Constant presence of risk from dissolving relationships

Let's look at each of these in more detail, so you can start assessing the impact that managing all of those communications applications is having on your organisation.

## How many do you have?

Jot down the number of applications you know of for each type of communications to understand the complexity of your roadmap management.

Video Meetings (8x8, Zoom, WebEx, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Team chat (8x8, Chatter, Teams, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Business phone (8x8, Avaya, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Centre (8x8, Five9s, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

SMS messaging (8x8, Twilio, Vonage, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_







## Separate administration

With limited and precious IT resources, is managing the phone system the best use of their time? Think about all of those applications you counted above. Our research, conducted before the pandemic, found that 70% of companies have somewhere between two to five communications providers and 22% have six or more. Recent events have most likely increased this number as organisations scrambled to enable remote work. Each application requires IT resources to administer and maintain it. How much time is consumed with the addition of a new staff member? How about when a staff member leaves the organisation?

## Separate user training and adoption

Each application will have a unique user interface and way of working. Staff need to learn how each of these work. They also need to learn, and then remember, how they work together (if at all). IT needs to ensure that everyone is proficient on all the applications and has to take that tsunami of support calls that come in, both when applications are initially rolled out and if something changes. With multiple applications, IT can be in constant training mode to ensure that users are taking full advantage of each technology investment. How much IT time is being consumed just to train users on the communications capabilities?

## Multiple roadmaps evolving at different rates

Many communications applications are integrated with other systems of record to provide contact centre agents, receptionists, and service teams with all the relevant information they need to quickly address the caller's questions and requests. What happens when those applications are updated at different speeds? Integration points are constantly being challenged and often broken. Managing all of the different contracts with their various terms and conditions, as well as durations, adds administrative overhead. All the roadmaps with their product updates have to be constantly managed to ensure that all the connections continue functioning. And then, what happens when you call for support?

## Constant presence of risk from dissolving relationships

Vendors are forming alliances as a way to bundle together applications that create the perception of a "platform." These applications are owned by different companies who agree to jointly go to market as a way to gain access to each other's customers and distribution channels. It's also a faster way to address an immediate market opportunity versus buying or building new products and services.

In these cases, success is usually a harbinger of relationship destruction. With the opportunity addressed by the bundle in the short term, companies evaluate their strategic options. When there is clear market opportunity, companies will look to set themselves up for longer term success, which usually includes buying or building the solution they were bundling



from another company. The result is typically a messy divorce with customers caught in the middle and forced to scramble to find a new way forward, even if the bundle was working well. It may be as simple as having to sign another contract. But now you have an additional application to manage and support with different contractual terms and conditions, support processes, and rates and degrees of roadmap evolution that may break any integrations that have been in place due to the bundle. There are [high profile examples](#) of this type of situation today. Is it worth putting your organisation at risk due to the eventual dissolution of a joint go-to-market, or even OEM, partnership?

What would the impact be if all of those applications could be consolidated down to just one that IT had to administer and maintain?

With 8x8's X Series, all of these issues go away. Administration can be done for the entire estate from a central location. There's only one contract, one roadmap to keep track of. And unique to X Series, there is only one integration for both business communications and contact centre!

**To learn more about how X Series can reduce the management of all of those communication apps down to just one, visit us at [8x8.com](https://8x8.com).**





A woman with curly hair, wearing a dark green top, is smiling and looking at the camera while working on a laptop. The background is a blurred office environment.

# Administer the Entire Estate from One Chair

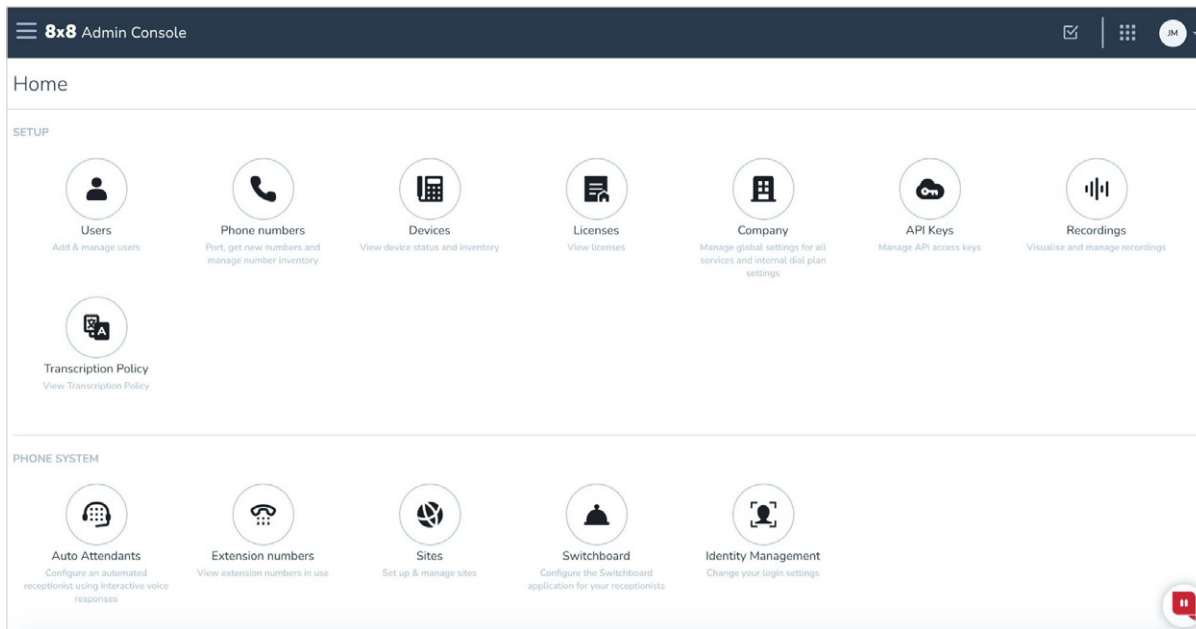
Steve Edmonds



The National Audit Office report, [Digital and transformation; Guidance for audit committees on cloud services](#), includes excellent information designed to aid organisations with transitioning to cloud services and Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) applications. A key theme throughout their guidance is having the resources and skill sets to do the work. With extra costs from the rapid adjustment to the pandemic combined with reduced revenues, local councils are experiencing **severe budget constraints**. Transitioning communications to the cloud has a number of benefits, including cost reductions. Those lower costs are created by a number of variables that include simplified administration. As cloud communications providers tell their story, they usually say something like: “our simple, intuitive interface and automatic updates reduce the time IT administrators have to invest in maintaining the application.”

This point is usually valid for one application. But what if you have several? Then, it’s not so easy. When a new staff member joins the team, IT now has to update several cloud applications, which eliminates any time savings and may even cause delays with the onboarding process.

This issue is eliminated with a cloud communications platform like 8x8 X Series. With phone, team chat, video meetings, and contact centre integrated into a single platform, the entire communications environment can be managed from a single administration portal. Being a Solution Engineering leader, that last sentence might look like I’m succumbing to marketing hyperbole. To defend my honour, let’s walk through what the experience is like, so you can see it first hand.



## 8x8 Admin Console

It starts by logging into your 8x8 services from a web browser. Once logged in, the administrator is greeted with, well... a simple, intuitive interface. The design approach has been to create a simple way for phone system administrators to manage an organisation’s 8x8 business phone and contact centre systems from any desktop with an internet connection. This point is important - that’s any desktop no matter where it’s located. As long as it has an internet connection, the administrator can manage the entire set of communications capabilities for all sites and users. At the risk of appearing to use marketing hyperbole again, the self-service configuration and administration capabilities are so easy to use, they allow changes on-the-fly without the support of a full-time IT professional.



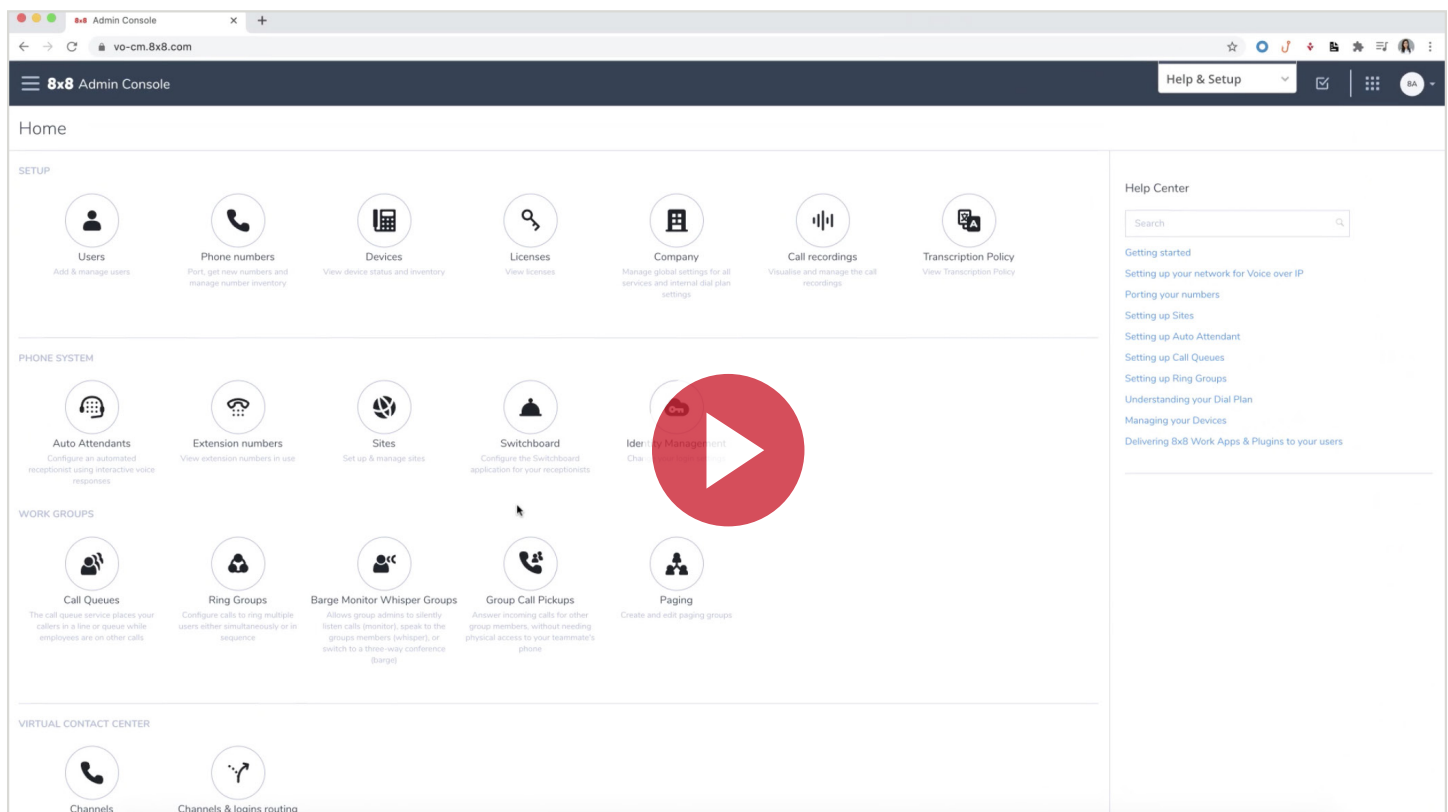
Using the 8x8 Admin Console, phone system administrators can:

- Claim and manage numbers.
- Manage **8x8 Work** (desktop and mobile app) and **Contact Centre** users and admins.
- Manage the phone system features, such as automatic call handling, call queue, ring groups, and music on hold.
- Assign active phone numbers to 8x8 services.
- Check device inventory.
- Manage sites and phone systems.

<b>Control</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Self-service administration of your UCaaS and CCaaS system</li> <li>■ Make changes to configurations as required</li> <li>■ Manage users, agents, auto attendants, ring groups and call queues</li> </ul>
<b>Access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 24/7 access when you need it</li> <li>■ Browser based</li> </ul>
<b>Simple</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Easily create users business phone users and contact center agents</li> <li>■ Self-explanatory wizards walkthrough key features</li> <li>■ Easy to understand knowledge base and help sections with FAQs</li> </ul>

## Get started

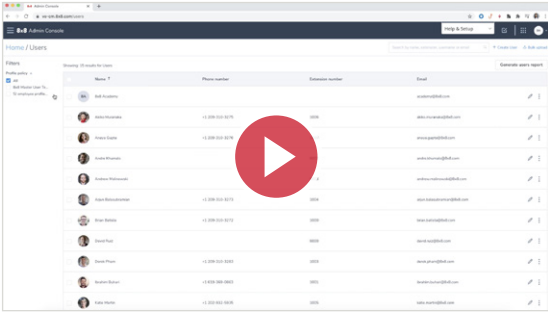
To get started, all an administrator has to do is create sites, select the service plans, claim phone numbers, and select authentication preferences. This quick video demonstrates how to get started.





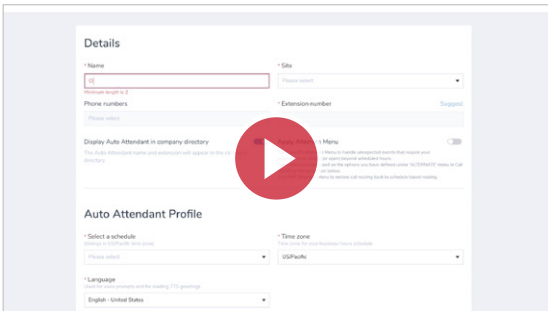
There are a few features that are frequently used. Here's a quick look at each of them to get more familiar with Admin Console:

## Manage users



Easily add each employee that will use the phone/contact centre system. Set up their profile, including phone number and service plan. Associate the phone number with a physical phone. Set up voicemail, external caller ID, internal caller ID, and call forwarding. Select the music played when you put a caller on hold. Configure call recording settings and external calling permissions.

## Create auto attendants

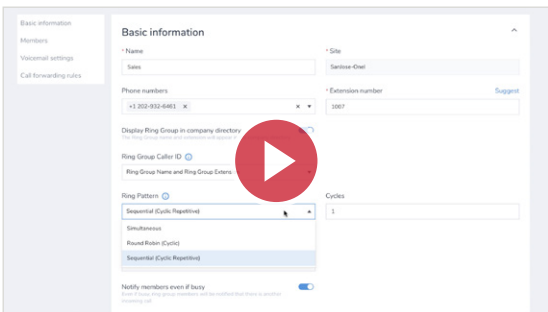


Implement the ability to efficiently handle calls by automatically routing them to:

- A specific person
- A ring group
- An external number
- A specific device
- A call queue

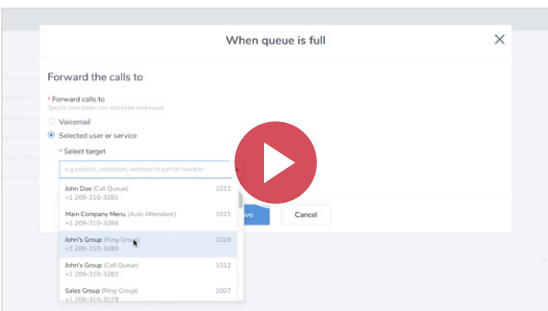
The auto attendant makes it easy to create responses. Merely type in the message and it will convert it to speech or upload a recorded message.

## Manage ring groups



This capability allows multiple extensions to be joined together, so they ring at the same time, or in a sequence, when a call comes in. This capability is designed for those environments, such as a specific department, where you want to ensure someone answers each call.

## Manage call queues



Call queues work much like ring groups except that calls are distributed as they come in to the next available agent. You may have experienced this feature when you called into customer support, were put on hold, and heard a message playing at intervals informing you that you'll be connected with the next available agent.



## Microsoft Teams

For local councils that have adopted, or are considering the adoption of, Microsoft Teams, 8x8 integrates directly with it using a simple three-step process:

1. Authorise
2. Connect
3. Match

That's it. This brief video demonstrates these three easy steps.

8x8 can also connect your contact centre to the rest of the organisations through a Microsoft certified Teams integration. This brief video demonstrates the possibilities for local councils.



## Role-based access

Another key capability of the Admin Console is role-based access that empowers multiple people across the organisation with varying levels of administrator controls. In addition to the IT administrators, the following are additional roles and abilities:

- **Support Team Leaders** – add people to ring groups during busy times
- **Contact Centre Managers** – create agent profiles
- **HR** – ensure the right details are configured for the system, such as Instant Messaging policing

Giving users the ability to perform routine activities like managing users and ring groups delivers additional efficiency that frees up IT time to focus on more important activities.

The key is that all of your applications for phone, chat, video conferencing, and contact centre are managed in a single portal by that simple, intuitive interface. The platform ensures that each employee receives the complete range of communications capabilities they need, but instead of increasing administrative complexity with each additional capability, all of that complexity is managed by the Admin Console.

**To learn more about how you can reduce the administrative overhead burden on IT with a communications platform, visit us at [8x8.com](https://8x8.com).**



# AI-Powered Automation Delivers Cost Improvement

James Barrett





# “To be effective, automation needs to be informed by those closest to the problem.”

Devaki Raj, CrowdAI

Arvind Krishna, CEO of IBM, **recently compared** artificial Intelligence to electrification at the turn of the last century while also providing a prognostication: “AI is going to infuse every business and enterprise in this century.”

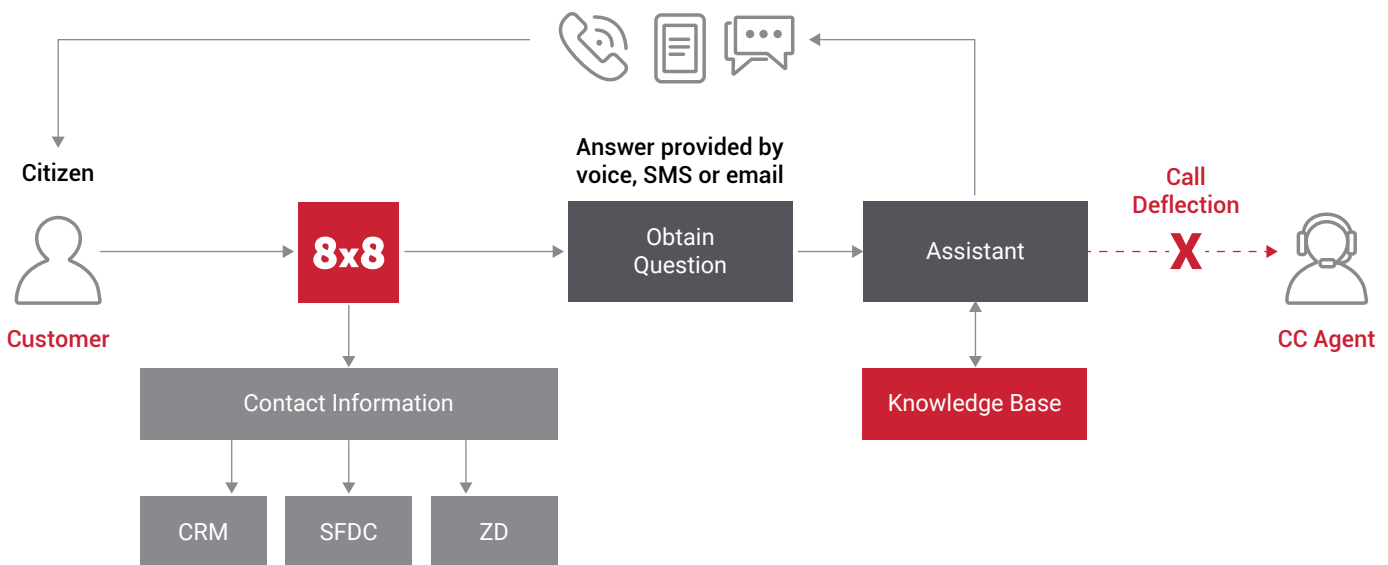
During the CNN interview, Krishna makes a point by asking, “how do you improve customer service or increase employee productivity to demonstrate areas where AI can have a positive impact?” These two topics, and how AI can be used, are very relevant to local councils as they work through the pandemic’s financial impact and ensure service delivery resilience. Based on our experience of working with companies and local councils, the key to using AI to drive operational efficiency is the ability to be pragmatic. Although this point may seem obvious, there are three components to it that deserve rigorous attention to ensure that local councils can realise the expected operational benefits:

1. Select a very specific workflow that has a clear and well defined outcome.
2. Ensure data is available to support the precision required for AI engagement.
3. Start with the intent to increase human capacity, not replace humans.

There are many areas where local councils can pragmatically apply AI-powered automation. For example, parking fines. How many calls come in wanting to complain or appeal over the phone? What if you could provide an automated script that explains to callers that “responses to complaints or appeals are only allowed in writing.” Then, the 8x8 Virtual Agent looks up the status of an appeal, provides the caller with an update, and advises new appellants of the email/postal address of the appeals process. How many calls would that divert away from human agents?







**Example of an automated call flow using the 8x8 Virtual Agent.**

In another example, how could a council automate the handling of routine calls that ask, “What day is bin collection?” This workflow meets the first criteria above, it’s a specific workflow with a reasonably well defined outcome: provide the accurate bin collection day information to the caller. To automate this scenario, 8x8 provides an AI-based Virtual Agent. Here’s how the 8x8 Virtual Agent can be used for this scenario:

1. The call comes into your contact centre through the 8x8 phone system.
2. The Virtual Agent answers the call and asks the caller for their question.
3. The caller requests information on bin collection days.
4. The Virtual Agent obtains the question and acquires the information from the appropriate data source.
5. The Virtual Agent presents the caller with the information and offers to send it using available channels.
6. The Virtual Agent asks the caller if they have additional questions.
7. If the caller answers “No,” then the call is disposed.
8. If the caller answers “Yes,” then the Virtual Agent will connect the caller with a human agent.

Although that sounds straightforward, there are three details worth further discussion that make the complexity of this example seem simple.

Firstly, the Virtual Agent must be able to understand the caller’s question. The caller may have an accent or use broken English, they may use colloquialisms, speak softly, have a poor connection with lots of static. Given all of these variables, how does the Virtual Agent know that a question related to bin collection days is being asked versus a different type of question about bins?

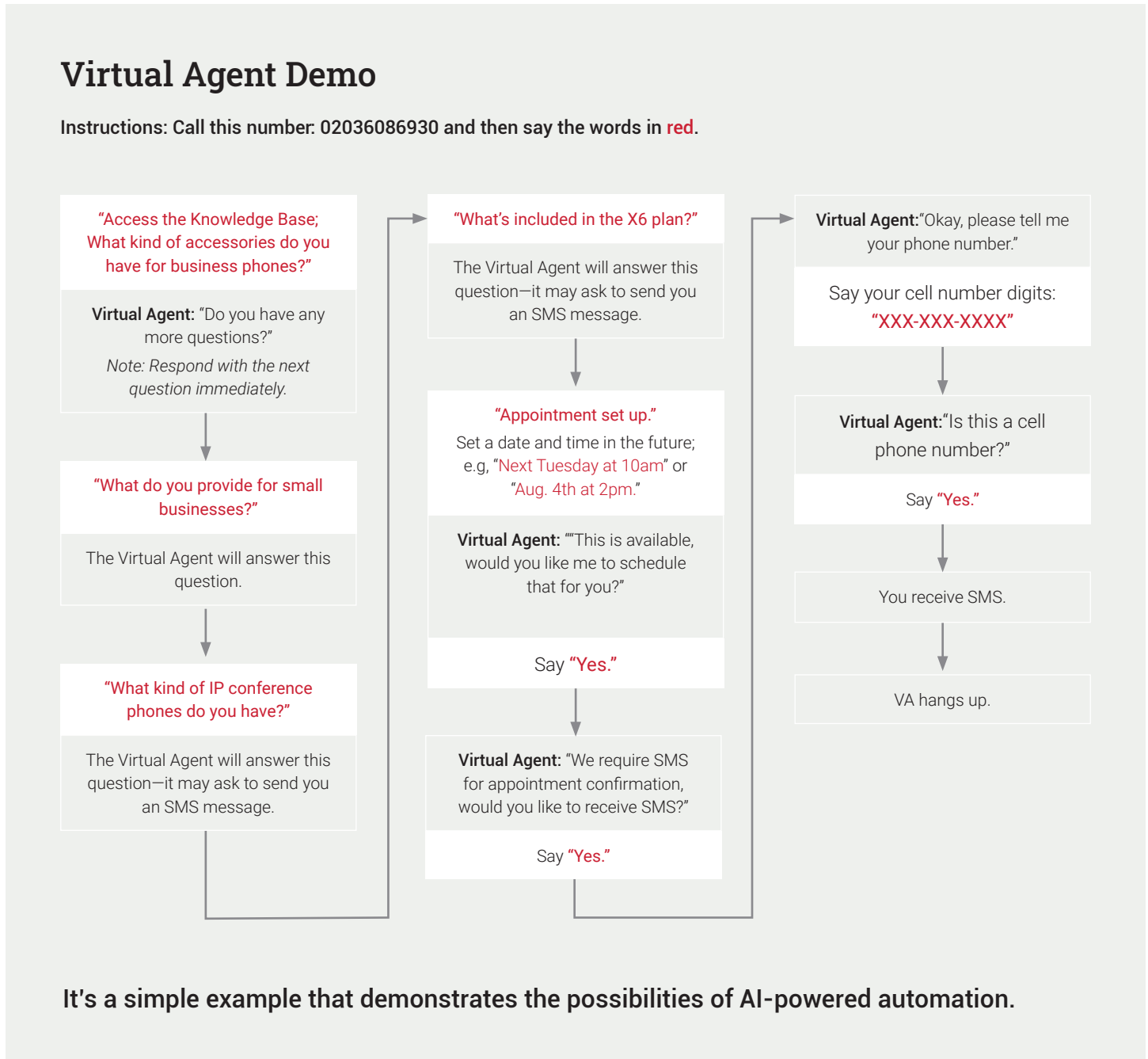
The 8x8 Virtual Agent uses Natural Language Processing (NLP) along with its sub components, Natural Language Understanding (NLU) and Natural Language Generation (NLG), to accurately filter out the bin collection questions. The 8x8 Virtual Agent is faster to deploy, at a lower cost, because it’s based on templates that can be customised at a low or high level, enabling quick deployment that doesn’t require an expensive professional services engagement.

Secondly, the Virtual Agent must be able to execute the request by accessing the appropriate information. Making these connections typically involves expensive professional services. To remove those costs, 8x8 has created templates that enable rapid, inexpensive deployment for this, and many other, specific use cases.

The final step is being able to handle the call seamlessly if the caller needs to speak with an agent. The 8x8 Virtual Agent is able to manage any transfers elegantly because it is a seamless part of the 8x8 platform.

There is a sensitive component to an AI-powered automation discussion: will it replace people? The reality is, making agent roles redundant is one possible outcome. Fortunately, the more productive approach is to use automation to handle increasing activity with the same number of people. This approach means that virtual agents can handle the routine transactions, so people are more available to manage the more in-depth interactions.

What do you say to giving it a test drive?



**To learn more about how AI-powered automation drives cost improvement, visit us at [8x8.com](http://8x8.com).**





# How Three Councils are Digitally Transforming with Cloud Communications

Ian Taylor

Pablo Picasso said, "I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it." The spirit of his statement is noble, but in today's environment, we have the luxury of vastly more information that is easily accessible. Which means that we learn from YouTube.

Unfortunately, local councils are not chronicling their digital transformations and migrations to the cloud on YouTube. I'll fill in that gap with examples that demonstrate an array of challenges and how they were addressed. Hopefully, they provide sufficient insight into how cloud communications can help your organisation strengthen service delivery resilience at a lower cost, so you can learn how to do it faster.





# Accelerate digital transformation to bolster contact centre performance

“Customers live in a digital world where they bank and shop online,” explains Alison Hughes, Assistant Director for ICT, Digital & Customer at Liverpool City Council. “And there’s an expectation we’ll deliver our services the same way. With a digital approach, we can also use our resources more effectively, whilst ensuring that those people who require more help and support to interact with us are not left behind.”

With this in mind, the local authority set out on a digital transformation journey to better understand its residents, tailor their experiences, and ultimately provide the best possible service to them.

## The challenge: legacy system proves inflexible

The council’s contact centre is its “voice,” but the legacy system delivering it was ready for replacement. “It was clunky,” says Hughes. “We’d have to log into different modules for aspects like quality monitoring, while important customer information was siloed. We had no upgrade path and the changes we wanted were either costly or impossible to deploy.”

Problems became more evident during the coronavirus pandemic. The workload soared as the contact centre team and their colleagues from public-facing council offices and drop-in centres needed to manage business grants, support vulnerable people, manage food hubs, and run a host of other critical services.

Staff needed to work from home, but the legacy system required a Virtual Private Network to be installed on each employee’s computers — which proved a huge drain on resources. “This underlined our need for a new platform built for agility,” says Hughes.

## The solution: 8x8 Contact Centre

8x8 worked with the council to go from user acceptance testing to launching the solution successfully for 190 employees within 33 days, alongside a robust business continuity plan. “It was a huge challenge, but the deployment team were brilliant,” says Laura Jones, ICT Programme Manager, Liverpool City Council.

**“With 8x8, we’ve got so much more for our investment — far beyond telephony.”**

Laura Jones, ICT Programme Manager,  
Liverpool City Council

## The results: everything on a single platform

Now, the council has a single contact centre platform for all customer communications, including voice, emails, and social media, and residents can access council services via a single portal.

“Our contact centre performance has been seamlessly meeting our key performance measures during this transition — and we’re bringing residents on our digital journey, which has led to their feedback improving too,” says Hughes.

The council plans to add secure phone payments, introduce live video calls with residents, and explore artificial intelligence and chatbots. Hughes adds, “A digital approach massively reduces costs for us because meeting in-person might cost £15, but dealing digitally or via telephony might just be pennies. Traditionally, data hasn’t been a priority for the public sector, but we’re excited about adding value through analytics to improve the customer experience.”

[Read the complete case study.](#)



# Fast-track transition to a cloud contact centre

Sefton Council employs over 3,000 staff and provides essential services to 275,000 citizens across its metropolitan borough of Sefton in Merseyside, north-western England.

## The challenge: reacting quickly to maintain vital services

The local authority was planning to replace its ageing contact centre platform, but the sudden arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic made this an imperative. The council had to act swiftly to enable more staff to work from home while maintaining vital services to the community.

Within hours, the council assessed the market, found the right solution, and got a deal together which fully met its commercial and service requirements. Sefton Council was on its way to delivering one of the fastest IT projects of its type ever seen in local government.

**“I remember arriving at 7 am to an email that said we needed to create a virtual contact centre, immediately.”**

James Aldred, Procurement Manager, Sefton Council

## The solution: taking advantage of the flexibility of cloud communications

Working with Agilisys, the council selected the cloud-based, omnichannel Contact Centre from 8x8.

“Moving to this technology meant we could get our team working from home taking calls right away, with chat, email, and secure payment capabilities to follow,” explains Mark Quillan, Customer Service Manager.

A contract was agreed within just 48 hours – and less than 10 days later, 40 cloud contact centre agents went “live” with the ability to work from home.

**“COVID-19 has created huge challenges for the public sector. But it’s also presented a moment to rethink and transform specific services. The ‘new normal’ calls for extra safety, greater agility and enhanced services for citizens – which we’ve achieved with 8x8”**

Paulette Lappin Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services, Sefton Council

## The results: getting home-workers set up quickly

With 40 work-from-home contact centre agents taking and making calls, Sefton Council’s services continued seamlessly, and importantly, the team were able to continue to support people who were shielding.

Additionally, supervisors can now easily access extra functionality, such as being able to change the IVR, workflows, and call routing options, as the council’s hours and recorded greetings have changed frequently during the pandemic.

With 8x8, Sefton Council isn’t just responding to COVID-19 – it’s transforming communications to increase first-time contact resolution and give its citizens the best-possible experience.

“We’ve got a robust and reliable contact centre platform with 8x8,” comments Quillan. “8x8 was responsive and focused on us as a customer and our outcome. They did all they could to make this a positive experience for us – and we achieved our objectives exceptionally quick.”

[Read the complete case study.](#)

# Enhance delivery of essential services

As one of London's 32 borough councils, Harrow Council embarked on an ambitious digital transformation plan to improve the services provided to residents, businesses, and visitors.

## The challenge: struggling to transition to remote work

The council was hampered by legacy on-premises systems that were unreliable, costly to maintain, and offered limited functionality. These technology shortcomings were further exacerbated when the council's mission-critical "Access Harrow" contact centre and telephony system struggled to support employees and contact centre agents transitioning to remote work.

## The solution: a unified, cloud-based communications system

With the decision to replace their legacy systems, Harrow Council selected 8x8's integrated cloud contact centre and communications platform to improve manageability and reliability, ensure business resiliency, enable an operate-from-anywhere workforce, and lower costs. Working with 8x8, the council quickly equipped their 160 "Access Harrow" operators – who handle everything from missed garbage collection to helping residents pay their council tax – with the ability to engage customers across voice and digital channels while having a 360-degree view of customer needs and interactions. 8x8's intuitive user experience and enhanced functionality helped make the deployment and adoption easy and seamless even as most employees were trained remotely.

**“Working with 8x8 has enabled us to adopt a nimble, hybrid approach, allowing our staff to work from anywhere while providing residents, businesses and visitors with the essential services they require.”**

Ben Goward, ICT Director, Harrow Council

## The results: improving customer service while reducing costs

The result was a streamlined employee and customer experience with advanced analytics and reporting, allowing operators to consult and collaborate with colleagues to resolve customer issues through immediate access to relevant information.

Ben Goward, ICT Director at Harrow Council said, “As we made a smooth transition into the cloud, the 8x8 delivery team was with us every step of the way, ensuring we were ready to make the switch. The level of support they provided those initial weeks made what felt like a mammoth task more manageable. Working with 8x8 has enabled us to adopt a nimble, hybrid approach, allowing our staff to work from anywhere while providing residents, businesses and visitors with the essential services they require.”

[Read the complete press release.](#)



# Five Topics Required for a CFO-Worthy Cloud Communications Business Case

Russell Tilsed

Business cases are a vast, complex topic, but they all start with preparation. Like any team sport, good preparation typically leads to a winning outcome. The same is true for building a business case for investing in cloud communications. To help you get started, here are five topics to consider when creating a business case for cloud communications that wins the day with your CFO:

1. Improve the citizen experience
2. Enable the transition to cloud communications
3. Provide a consistent “work anywhere” experience
4. Integrate with key ICT platforms
5. Deliver a single security model

# 1 Improve the citizen experience

Improving the citizen experience starts with the assumptions that you understand what the experience is today. Do you have visibility into all the communication touch points, as well as the citizen experience at each one? Are you able to quantify the impact of improving the experience? The research consistently shows that improving the experience has a positive impact — but by how much? This is where the details underpinning the business case can get fuzzy. Here are a few questions to consider when thinking through this topic:

1. Would providing the switchboard and contact centre agents with instant visibility of a complete staff directory increase call handling capacity and reduce wait times without adding more staff?
2. Does having citizen sentiment analysis across all the contact centre calls enhance the experience and lower costs by focusing resources on those topics that deliver outcomes most relevant to citizens?
3. What value does the ability to instantly produce reports showing results for key metrics have on IT resource utilisation?
4. How does the ability to provide specific and relevant coaching to agents using annotated recordings from their calls impact the citizen experience?
5. Would analytics and reporting that support balancing resources with activity levels drive efficiency gains, cost improvements, and enhanced citizen experiences?
6. What is the impact of automating high volume, routine calls?



## 2 Simplify management of the estate

Often, local councils are operating multiple communications systems and related applications to provide staff with all of the tools they need to appropriately engage citizens and collaborate with each other. Managing this portfolio consumes a great deal of staff and IT team time, as people need to learn, stay current on, use, and maintain these systems. What would the impact be of consolidating all of those applications down to just one that all staff could use, regardless of their role? Additionally, a SaaS application should not require extensive training before users can be up and using it. Here are some considerations for these deployment, training, and adoption topics:

1. Are new desk phones required or can existing models be used?
2. Are softphones with a mobile app eliminating the need for physical phones?
3. Can staff safely and securely use their personal mobile devices?
4. How much time needs to be invested into onboarding a user to the point of adoption?
5. What's the expected impact on the IT help desk to roll out the new cloud communications apps?
6. Would a single application to deploy, train, use, and maintain reduce the demands on IT staff?
7. Would having one application that included all communications channels increase staff productivity?
8. What would be the impact to monthly outlays by consolidating all of those subscription costs down to just one plan?

## 3 Enable transition to “work anywhere” experience

The **research** is clear, organisations are implementing hybrid working models. Organisations should look for solutions that work on any device with a consistent experience across softphone, PC/Mac, iOS and Android mobile applications, and IP handsets for “ward” phone use cases. These applications must also be able to work over both secure internet, public internet, home broadband, 3G, 4G, and 5G, as well as make use of GSM mobile minutes for staff working in rural areas. Include an assessment of:

1. What is the impact of adding cloud communications to the network? Will this over-the-top (OTT) service require additional network capacity?
2. What's the current video meetings solution and does it enable staff to quickly engage with citizens and other staff? Can they do so spontaneously?
3. What messaging capabilities are in place today to support digital channels and how can using them deliver better citizen experiences?
4. Can all staff work remotely, if needed, using their personal devices, yet always present their professional phone number? What impact would that have on staff productivity?
5. How are communications for common areas handled today?
6. What level of international calling is needed for each role?
7. How long will you need to run both systems in parallel to enable a smooth transition? What are those “overlap” costs?

# 4 Integrate with key ICT platforms

Many local councils effectively leveraged Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Teams to quickly adjust to remote working, which has kept staff and citizens safer. Councils using Teams also need additional capabilities to enable collaboration with external parties, such as citizens and service provider partners. Switchboard, contact centre, and external digital communication channels, such as SMS and chat apps, must be able to integrate with Microsoft Teams to ensure that it remains at the centre of collaboration. Note that all integrations are not equal. Using a true cloud-to-cloud integration with Microsoft should be favoured over more basic direct routing, where traditional SIP trunking and potentially on-premises SBC's would be required.

1. What are your licensing costs to provide voice services for Microsoft Teams users?
2. What are the cost implications of being able to use a Microsoft Teams certified integration partner?
3. Would a platform with the ability to include both business communications and contact centre in a single integration save time and money from the outset and over time?

# 5 Deliver a single security model

Cloud communication platform providers must be able to evidence Tier 1 U.K. data centres (more than one) where geographically redundant data traffic routing is used to provide at least 99.99% uptime as part of a contractual SLA for both business communications and contact centre. Call quality SLA's should also be provided at a MOS level of 3.0 or greater. Of course, GDPR, ISO 27001/9001, and Cyber Essentials+ accreditations must be in place to ensure that local government standards around data privacy and security are met.

1. What's the cost of having to conduct multiple security audits to cover different applications?
2. Does managing the security and compliance of a single provider deliver cost savings vs managing multiple suppliers?

Many of the questions in these topic areas are often left out or not given sufficient attention as part of the evaluation. The result is a business case that only looks at infrastructure and related costs. There are also additional topics that may be relevant, depending on the ICT maturity of a council, that include:

1. Activity and Service Level Agreement implications
2. Physical handset rationalisation
3. Environmental Impact

Going through the thought process ensures that you will produce a comprehensive evaluation of your current communications situation. It will give you confidence that, regardless of the specific number, the business case decision has a solid analytical foundation.



I've called out 25 possible questions in these five areas. They are not exhaustive, but illustrative. It's a large number of topics to think about. To make it less daunting and focus in on the data needed to start pulling together the business case, here's an easy way to structure the information:

## Seat total: Business communications + contact centre

Contract term: in months

	Provider / Model	Total Monthly Cost
<b>Calls &amp; Lines</b>		
Analogue lines	_____	£ _____
ISDN lines	_____	£ _____
SIP channels	_____	£ _____
UK landline and mobile calls	_____	£ _____
Mobile call divers	_____	£ _____
International calls	_____	£ _____
Care packages	_____	£ _____
DDI rentals	_____	£ _____
<b>Phone System</b>		
CPE (On-Premise Equipment)	_____	£ _____
PBX maintenance contract	_____	£ _____
PBX support / Moves / Adds / Changes	_____	£ _____
<b>Contact Centre / Switchboard</b>		
Contact Centre licenses	_____	£ _____
Call recording	_____	£ _____
Reporting / analytics	_____	£ _____
WFM	_____	_____
<b>Collaboration Tools / Other</b>		
IM / chat	_____	£ _____
Conferencing audio / video	_____	£ _____
Presence	_____	£ _____
Video conferencing (on-premise)	_____	£ _____
MS Teams E3 - E5 savings	_____	£ _____
CRM licencing (if adopting 8x8 CRM)	_____	_____
<b>Total cost per month</b>	_____	£ _____
<b>Current cost per seat</b>	_____	£ _____
<b>Total cost of term</b>	_____	£ _____

## Efficiency / Productivity

Type	Assumption	Monthly Cost
<b>Calls &amp; Lines</b>		
Employee redeployment	£50k / yr / employee	£
IT employee time to manage @£40k	25% reallocation is typical	£
Procurement time to manage @£40k	25% reallocation is typical	£
Efficiency increase in contact centre	25% increase	£
Property rationalisation cost per desk	£5k per annum	£
<b>Total cost per month</b>		£
<b>Current cost per seat</b>		£
<b>Total cost of term</b>		£

Business cases can be excruciatingly detailed, often with little incremental value. As long as the key areas are covered, the result is usually a directionally correct recommendation. That said, no one will typically go back and check on how you did anyway. Especially if the solution is working well.

8x8 will partner with you and leverage our experience and expertise gained from working with other councils to create the appropriate evaluation and business case. Here's a brief checklist providing key questions to consider as you think through the transition to cloud communication.

**We look forward to working with you to empower your staff with cloud communications that strengthen service delivery while driving cost improvements. To learn more, visit us at [8x8.com](https://www.8x8.com).**







# Taking the Next Step

Whatever your precise needs, 8x8 can help you tailor a flexible, powerful, cloud-based solution to revolutionise your communications, streamline costs and make your operations more connected than ever. 8x8 is the only complete communications platform that uses the collective power of your organisation to improve citizen outcomes and experiences and boost the productivity of hardworking local government staff.

Talk to one of our experts now. Visit [8x8.com](https://www.8x8.com).

**8x8**

8x8, Inc. (NYSE: EGHT) is transforming the future of business communications as a leading Software-as-a-Service provider of voice, video, chat, contact centre and enterprise-class API solutions powered by one global cloud communications platform. 8x8 empowers workforces worldwide to connect individuals and teams so they can collaborate faster and work smarter. Real-time analytics and intelligence provide businesses unique insights across all interactions and channels so they can delight end-customers and accelerate their business. For additional information, visit [www.8x8.com](https://www.8x8.com), or follow 8x8 on LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

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