

November 2022

# CASE STUDY

GRAND UNION HOUSING GROUP  
EMBRACE DIGITALISATION  
WITHIN CORPORATE STRATEGY



TOGETHER WITH



GRAND UNION HOUSING GROUP  
EMBRACE DIGITALISATION WITHIN  
CORPORATE STRATEGY FOR DATA-  
DRIVEN COMPLIANCE AND  
IMPROVED RESIDENT SAFETY

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Grand Union Housing Group have commenced the rollout of Aico's HomeLINK Connected Home Solution across their housing portfolio of circa 12,500 properties to transform the way they deliver their services to meet the evolving and changing needs of their current and future customers.

Registered housing provider, Grand Union Housing Group, based in Milton Keynes, provides homes for approximately 27,000 people across Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire. The properties within their housing portfolio include general needs housing, supported housing accommodation, shared ownership, leasehold and market rental properties.

Grand Union's aim is to create more homes, stronger communities and better lives; they provide affordable homes, personal support, and help people to learn, work and be healthy via a team of nearly 400 employees.

## INTRODUCING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO CORPORATE STRATEGY

Prior to the pandemic, Grand Union set out its Corporate Strategy to reflect their response to the Grenfell disaster, the changing national picture and policy, as well as setting out the Group's future plan. The strategy focuses on their responsibilities as a landlord to be accountable for their actions and transparent in their dealings with their customers.

There are several drivers for change, prompting the need to refresh their strategy, commencing with the emphasis on the tenant voice following the Grenfell disaster. Over the last year, they have seen a continuation in growth of customer expectations in parallel with rapid developments in digital technology, such as those offered by Aico.

Grand Union aims to modernise its business by reviewing all aspects of service delivery, introducing new ways of working through a revised and updated business model, which maximises the use of digital technology.

Phase two of their 2020-2023 Vision puts the customer at the heart of everything they do – the initiative will see the creation of more homes, while improving the lives and experience of all their existing tenants and future customers.

To deliver this aim, key strategic objectives were set to ensure customer safety remains central to everything they do:

- Ensure their involvement and engagement mechanisms act upon their customers' voices and work with their residents to design services.
- To simplify the Group structure to better enable the Board to have a clear line of sight across the business.
- To enable the Group to deliver cost-effective, efficient, relevant and quality services, while ensuring their customers can access housing services in their preferred way to meet and exceed their expectations.
- To implement a revised New Business and Development Strategy considering government announcements, with a view to optimise their development capacity, to renew their focus on key delivery partners such as Aico, to deliver insights, data, efficiencies and savings across their property portfolio that is aligned with their strategy.

## THE SOLUTION PROPOSED BY AICO

With more than 30 years of experience as a solution provider for home life safety, Aico has been selected as the partner of choice to provide connected home life safety products and data insights to aid Grand Union's digital transformation.

The innovative HomeLINK Connected Home Solution, from alarms to Environmental Sensors, has a secure 2G network to the HomeLINK portal – monitoring Fire and Carbon Monoxide events and indoor environmental conditions such as humidity, temperature and Carbon Dioxide. Access to this data will save Grand Union precious time and resources while freeing them up to better support their customers.



The real-time insights and data information acquired from properties also ensure that properties remain legally compliant and fit for human habitation, avoiding costly remedial works or even, in some of the worst cases, disrepair and added cost for large scale repairs.



Real-time insights  
and data



Remain compliant  
with legislation



Cost-savings

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Maximising the power of technology is central to delivering Grand Union's corporate plan. Their use of technology will be based on strategic approaches developed in partnership with their customers.

These will be based on a clear ethical position, something Aico was able to demonstrate through the research they commissioned with Bristol University, but also through transparency via the use of the HomeLINK App for residents.

The pandemic has accelerated Grand Union's use of technology in order to adopt remote working. The HomeLINK Connected Home Solution along with the HomeLINK App for residents support this agile working approach.



# SCALING INTERNET OF THINGS TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCIES AND RESIDENT SAFETY

Grand Union has a long-standing relationship with Aico, and specify their technologically advanced 3000 Series of Smoke, Heat and Carbon Monoxide alarms to keep their residents safe.

However, Grand Union wanted to build upon their already excellent tenant safety record by deploying Aico's Internet of Things (IoT) technologies to ensure robust data and eradication of error through automation, data and actionable insights to further strengthen their safety ethos, while enhancing resident health and wellbeing.



"It's great to be working so closely with housing and asset management teams across Grand Union Housing Group. They recognise that the links between health and housing are long established and well known, and that housing can be a significant determinant to health and resident wellbeing. Utilising our HomeLINK sensors, data, alerts and insights, we are already providing value to the numerous teams across the organisation ensuring housing compliance, safer homes, enhanced resident wellbeing and communication. With 12,000 homes, housing 27,000 people, our sensor technology provides a scaleable and cost effective solution to deliver services to residents efficiently for Grand Union."

Ben Malton - Regional Specification Manager, Aico



# UTILISING ENVIRONMENTAL SENSORS TO TARGET AT-RISK HOMES

The housing provider has also developed a robust Environmental Sustainability Strategy, focused on the thermal efficiency of its housing portfolio. The new strategy will ensure their homes are well insulated, as well as offering a range of heating options to achieve efficiency and present cost benefits to their customers, transforming the way they manage and invest in their homes and estates, now and in the future.

## Accurately target worst-performing homes for retrofit

The deployment of Aico's HomeLINK Environmental Sensors will assist in targeting their worst-performing homes in terms of heat loss, potential excess heat and indoor air quality.

## Ensuring retrofit design intent is met and maintained

Post-installation monitoring will provide data insights, enabling Grand Union to make informed decisions on the performance and effectiveness of retrofit measures, as well as ensuring that the measures installed do not cause any adverse conditions such as damp, mould and poor indoor air quality.



"Within days of utilising the HomeLINK Environmental Sensors and Gateway, we can already validate the effectiveness of new ventilation systems we are installing to resolve condensation, damp and mould issues. Real-time data insights provided via the HomeLINK Portal make it very simple for us to make informed decisions on the future specification of fans that are proven to be effective in the treatment of humid and damp living conditions."

Martyn Cheeseman - Electrical Delivery Manager  
(Responsive), Grand Union



# DELIVERY OF EXPERT INSTALLER TRAINING FOR COMPLIANCE AND EFFICIENCY

Aico's local Regional Specification Manager, Ben Malton, has been fundamental in the successful deployment and for the seamless mobilisation stage of this IoT roll-out. Ben delivered Expert Installer Training to the Management team, Electrical Managers and Installers, designing the systems around customer journeys and ensuring that their inclusive approach empowers customers as well as achieving operational efficiencies, savings and compliance.



“We were impressed by the training, and ongoing support delivered by Aico both at our own offices in Milton Keynes, but also the training hosted within Aico’s Centre of Excellence in Oswestry. Aico is the market leader in home life safety. They offer excellent reliability, valuable insights, functionality and performance along with robust security at the heart of their design.”

Jenny Rogers - Electrical Services Manager, Grand Union





# THE FUTURE OF GRAND UNION'S INNOVATION STRATEGY

Grand Union's Innovation Strategy is intended to deliver a culture change that will be embedded beyond the life of their corporate plan. A Data Strategy that supports "data-driven activities", including enhanced decision-making, across the business will ensure:

- Effective data governance
- An efficient data architecture including efficient data exchange insights "single version of the truth"
- Improvements in data management e.g. data quality
- Exploiting Business Intelligence to move from reporting to complex analysis and artificial intelligence
- Strong data security
- A shift from responsive to planned maintenance
- Real-time view of property compliance

To find out more about Aico's HomeLINK Connected Home Solution, please visit: [www.aico.co.uk/homelink/](http://www.aico.co.uk/homelink/)