



Housing Association CX

A study of the pre-agent calling experience for residents





Introduction

With the public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire still ongoing, UK Housing Associations have never been more in the spotlight. In this study, we aimed to explore how committed a selection of the UK's largest Housing Associations are in delivering a great pre-agent caller experience.

We called 30 of the largest Housing Associations in the UK, with a range of caller scenarios typically experienced by Housing Associations.

We assessed the pre-agent caller journey focusing on the IVR from welcome messages to routing, in-queue content, scripting and caller waiting times; we scored every Housing Association at each point based on our extensive knowledge of best practice to achieve a great Customer Experience.

Over the course of our research, we found that most housing associations do well in certain aspects of the journey, but overall most offer a poor pre-agent caller experience. Of those that addressed each of the key parts of the journey the differences in comparison with other Housing Associations were dramatic. This report details our methods, our analysis, and our insights. Here are just a few of our top-level findings.....

- 90% of Housing Associations called had an IVR
- Only 48% of those had professionally recorded IVR messaging
- All Housing Associations surveyed had some level of in-queue experience (where we were placed in a queue)
- 37% had scripting that we felt was conversational and "human sounding"
- Only 13% avoided common telephony clichés in their scripting

Methodology

For our study sample, we selected 30 of the largest Housing Associations across the UK based on publicly available social housing stock figures:

- A2Dominion
- Aster Group
- Bromford
- Clarion Housing Group
- Derwent Living
- Gentoo Group
- Glasgow Housing Association
- Home Group
- Liverty
- London & Quadrant (L&Q)
- Metropolitan
- Midland Heart
- Notting Hill Genesis
- Optivo
- Orbit Group
- Peabody Housing Association
- Places for People
- Sanctuary Housing Association
- Southern Housing Group
- Sovereign Housing Association
- Stonewater
- The Guinness Partnership
- The Hyde Group
- The Riverside Group
- Thirteen Group
- VIVID
- Wakefield and District Housing
- Waterloo Housing Group
- WM Housing Group
- Your Housing Group



The map shows the approximate location of the registered office address for each Housing Association.

Our study focuses on the 3 key components of a call...

IVR Routing

The Interactive Voice Response system (IVR) is the gatekeeper for incoming calls – it matches each customer with the right agent. But if designed poorly, it obstructs and frustrates callers.

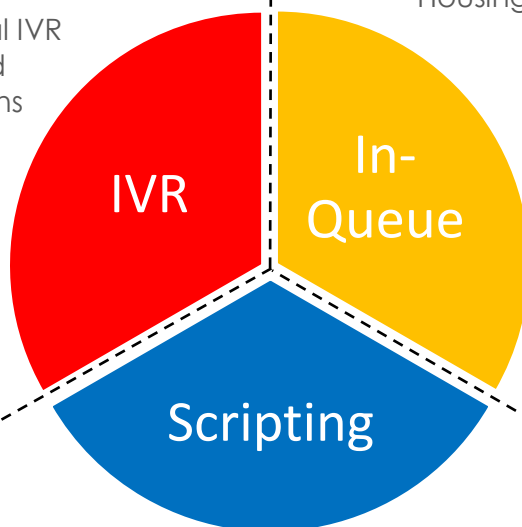
Guided by our Best Practice principles, we graded IVR menus across 11 different categories. These included the number of initial menu options and subsequent layers, audio quality and overall design.

Where there was no initial IVR menu, we have removed those Housing Associations from this section of the study. This was to avoid unfairly skewing the results against Housing Associations without IVRs, as we were still able to get through to an agent.

In-Queue Experience

The “in-queue” space is one of the most difficult parts of a call to get right. Do a good job here, and the caller is kept calm and entertained while they wait to speak to someone. Get it wrong, and the experience can be intensely irritating creating a bad first impression and leading to costly call drop-outs.

We've been telephony specialists for over two decades. So, to judge each Housing Association, we assessed criteria including volume consistency and appropriateness, message variety, music quality (e.g. default “system music” or inappropriate genres) and abrupt messages that cut in without any fades... or even worse: silences, engaged tones, or no queue facility at all!



Audio Scripting

Knowing *how* we speak to our customers is just as important as *what* we say to them. But we're not just talking about agent responses. The need for precise, well positioned and scripted wording in IVR menu, and in-queue messages is often totally overlooked... and this means that aggravating clichés such as “your call is important to us” are still far too common.

To assess the quality and effectiveness of each Housing Association's scripting, we looked for adherence to best practice (e.g. removing “www.” from web addresses), the number of topics per message, tone of voice, the avoidance of clichés, and unnecessary repetition.



Summary of key findings from our study...

IVR Routing

The good news is that all the Housing Associations audited had a welcome message and that 90% had an IVR menu. Welcome messages provide the immediate reassurance that a caller has contacted the desired organisation. IVR menus are not appropriate for every organisation but represent opportunities for more efficient call handling and the deployment of deflection and informational messaging.

Less than half of the IVR messages were professionally recorded. Whilst in-house options are functional, they are very rarely on-brand and generally have poor audio quality. At best this can impact brand credibility and at worst, poor quality audio can leave callers confused and frustrated about which option to choose. This can often be the first impression of the organisation for a caller and poor audio quality and confusing badly scripted options that are off brand can have a detrimental effect on the caller's perception.

Less than a quarter included a navigational option to take the caller back to the main menu if they needed to. This can cause frustration if there are lots of layers to the IVR tree.

In-Queue

Two-thirds of the Housing Associations we looked at had a consistent and appropriate queue call volume. Lack of attention to this can often result in large rates of call abandonment due to the caller not wanting to listen to something so loud or so quiet for what could be a reasonably long amount of time.

Of the Housing Associations using in-queue music 57% were brand appropriate while only 38% had professionally recorded messages. Of the messages we heard, three-quarters of Housing Associations used deflection messages directing their callers to self-serve on their websites and two-thirds had comfort messages. However, only 10% featured a fully mixed production.

Audio Scripting

We looked at the use of scripting in the IVR and in-queue. The stand out result of this section was that only 13% of Housing Associations managed to avoid all the telephony clichés. While 60% managed to keep to one topic per message, only 20% of the messages were varied. Finally, in our opinion only 37% of messages sounded authentically conversational.

The combination of these factors weighs heavily towards potentially damaging call abandonment or to callers reaching agents in a frustrated or hostile state of mind. Scripting is a lot harder to get right than most people think. A lot of what we heard had been scripted and recorded in house, and unless you have a professional contact centre script writer, then you are only going to achieve a low-quality recording of confusing IVR options.

IVR Routing

The chart below shows the overall scores for IVR routing.

All the Housing Associations with IVRs scored well for their IVR. Scoring was based on:

- The presence of a welcome message
- The number of options in the initial IVR menu
- How many layers there were in the IVR tree
- IVR messaging content
- Audio quality

One Housing Association – Home Group – scored 100% while none scored lower than 64%.

Three of the 30 Housing Associations that we called – Thirteen Group, Stonewater and Bromford – only had a welcome message with no subsequent IVR menu, so have been excluded from the IVR analysis.

A2Dominion	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠		
Aster Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠				
Clarion Housing Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	
Derwent Living	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠			
Gentoo Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠		
Glasgow Housing Association	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠			
Home Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠
Liverty	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠		
London and Quadrant (L&Q)	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	
Metropolitan	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	
Midland Heart	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠				
Notting Hill Genesis	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠			
Optivo	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	
Orbit Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠			
Peabody Housing Association	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	
Places for People	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	
Sanctuary Housing Association	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠			
Southern Housing Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠			
Sovereign Housing Association	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠			
The Guinness Partnership	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠		
The Hyde Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠		
The Riverside Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	
Vivid	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠					
Wakefield and District Housing	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	
Waterloo Housing Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠		
WM Housing Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠				
Your Housing Group	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠			

Highest score: 100%
 Lowest score: 64%
Average score: 80%

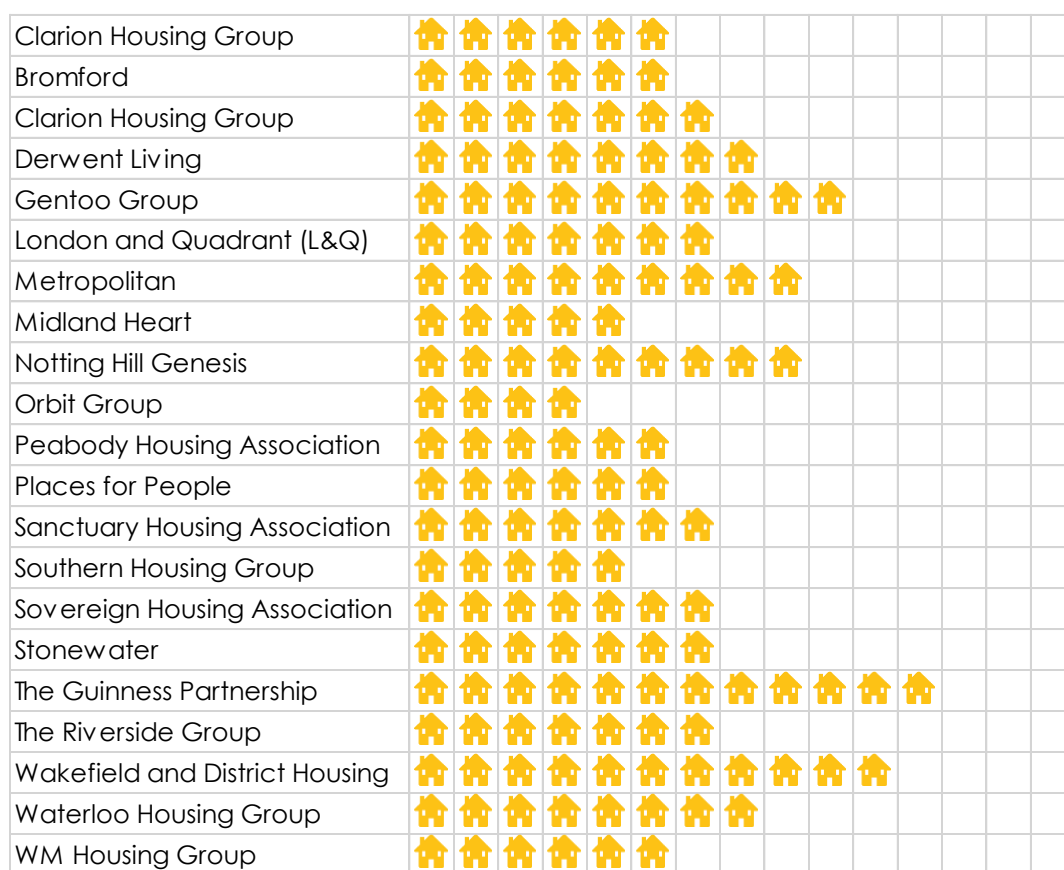
In-Queue

The chart below shows the overall scores for in-queue experience.

When calling 9 of the 30 Housing Associations, we experienced a queuing time of less than 12 seconds. These have been excluded from this analysis as it was impossible to fairly assess the in-queue experience.

Of the remaining 21 Housing Associations: all had an in-queue experience. The majority include music and/or messaging (86% and 90% respectively), but only 10% had a fully mixed production.

Two-thirds of the Housing Associations audited scored less than half for their queues.



<p>Highest score: 80%</p> <p>Lowest score: 27%</p> <p>Average score: 49%</p>

Audio Scripting

The chart shows the overall scores for scripting.

Calls were scored based on use of language contractions, avoidance of clichés, compliance of scripting rules and humanisation of script.

Here we see that an overwhelming majority of Housing Associations are scoring 50% or below. This suggests that scripting is poor and fails to engage callers. This can frustrate the customer which can decrease satisfaction levels and can often be a cause of abandonment.

This means that nearly all Housing Associations are not getting the value that a well scripted IVR and In-queue messaging implementation has to offer.

A2Dominion	🏠	🏠	🏠			
Aster Group						
Bromford	🏠	🏠				
Clarion Housing Group	🏠	🏠				
Derwent Living	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠		
Gentoo Group	🏠	🏠	🏠			
Glasgow Housing Association	🏠	🏠	🏠			
Home Group	🏠	🏠	🏠			
Liverty						
London and Quadrant (L&Q)	🏠					
Metropolitan	🏠	🏠				
Midland Heart	🏠					
Notting Hill Genesis	🏠	🏠				
Optivo	🏠	🏠				
Orbit Group	🏠					
Peabody Housing Association	🏠	🏠				
Places for People	🏠	🏠				
Sanctuary Housing Association	🏠					
Southern Housing Group						
Sovereign Housing Association	🏠					
Stonewater	🏠					
The Guinness Partnership	🏠	🏠	🏠			
The Hyde Group	🏠	🏠	🏠			
The Riverside Group	🏠					
Thirteen Group						
Vivid	🏠	🏠				
Wakefield and District Housing	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	🏠	
Waterloo Housing Group	🏠	🏠				
WM Housing Group	🏠					
Your Housing Group						

Highest score: 83%
 Lowest score: 0%
Average score: 29%

Further statistics highlighted by our study...

IVR Routing

- Housing Associations that use a branded welcome message: 100%
- Housing Associations that have an IVR menu: 90%

Of which:

- Proportion of professionally recorded IVRs: 48%
- Percentage of IVRs containing a single voice artist: 93%
- Proportion that presented high quality audio: 63%
- Percentage that did not include navigation options in the menu: 78%
- Average number of layers of options before getting through to an agent: 2
- Average time in IVR: 47 seconds

In-Queue*

- Housing Associations with an in-queue experience: 100%
- In-Queue experiences that included music: 86%
 - 67% of these were brand appropriate
- In-Queue experiences that included messaging: 90%
 - 42% of these were professionally recorded
- Proportion of mixed productions used in-queue (i.e. messaging and music in the same file, with no cutting in or out): 10%
- Average time in-queue: 2 minutes 15 seconds

Audio Scripting

- Housing Associations that avoided repetition in their menus and messaging: 23%
- Proportion that failed to avoid cliché phrases: 87%
- Percentage that had 'humanised' their messages: 37%
- Proportion that kept to a single topic per message: 60%

* where we queued for more than 12 seconds

Housing Associations: League Table

Our top scorers display stronger scores across the metrics, reflecting a holistic approach to their pre-agent caller experience. By contrast, mid-ranked Housing Associations can score highly on the basic structure of their IVR but have neglected the in-queue experience and overall scripting. Scripting was a notable weak point for the majority of Housing Associations. Repetition of language and messages added to tired clichés are key drivers of caller frustration. These lead to increases in the negative results of undesirable call abandonment and fractious caller-agent interactions.

Rank	Total	Supplier	IVR	IN-QUEUE	SCRIPTING
1	81%	Wakefield and District Housing	91%	73%	83%
2	75%	The Guinness Partnership	82%	80%	50%
3	69%	Gentoo Group	82%	67%	50%
4	66%	Metropolitan	91%	60%	33%
5	63%	Derwent Living	73%	53%	67%
6=	59%	Clarion Housing Group	91%	47%	33%
6=	59%	Waterloo Housing Group	82%	53%	33%
6=	59%	Notting Hill Genesis	73%	60%	33%
9=	56%	London and Quadrant (L&Q)	91%	47%	17%
9=	56%	The Riverside Group	91%	47%	17%
9=	56%	Peabody Housing Association	91%	40%	33%
9=	56%	Places for People	91%	40%	33%
9=	56%	A2Dominion	82%	40%	50%
14=	50%	Sanctuary Housing Association	73%	47%	17%
14=	50%	Sovereign Housing Association	73%	47%	17%
16=	44%	Home Group	100%	0%^	50%
16=	44%	WM Housing Group	64%	40%	17%
18=	41%	Southern Housing Group	73%	33%	0%
18=	41%	Your Housing Group	73%	33%^	0%
18=	41%	Orbit Group	73%	27%	17%
18=	41%	Glasgow Housing Association	73%	13%^	50%
18=	41%	Midland Heart	64%	33%	17%
23=	38%	Optivo	91%	0%^	33%
23=	38%	The Hyde Group	82%	0%^	50%
25	34%	Stonewater	27%*	47%	17%
26=	30%	Aster Group	64%	20%^	0%
26=	30%	Bromford	18%*	40%	33%
28	28%	Liverty	82%	0%^	0%
29	25%	Vivid	55%	0%^	33%
30	16%	Thirteen Group	9%*	27%^	0%

* No IVR after welcome message – rating is for welcome message only

^ Queueing time of <12 seconds – rating is based on anything we heard during this period



Further information about this report

Metadata

The conclusions of this study were compiled using over 1,000 individual data points. We recorded over 5.5 hours of raw audio during the auditing process.

Our Approach

All numbers dialled were customer service numbers most apparent on each Housing Association's website, as we believe callers will call the first customer service number they come across.

The study was designed as per Premier CX's Best Practice principles, which form the basis of our consultancy services.

Every call was individually audited by a Senior Consultant.

All calls were audited from the original, unedited audio as recorded during the calling process.

All calls were made over a 2-week period in July/August 2018.

Best-In-Class

We define a Best-In-Class telephony offering as one that gives equal focus to all aspects of a call and puts the needs of the customer at the heart of every design decision. This means that the scripting of the option menus is just as important as having those menus professionally recorded and calls routed correctly to the agents.



More on Premier CX

At Premier, we've spent over 20 years specialising in customer contact experience.

We are an independent creative consultancy specialising in helping contact centres optimise their customer experience across all channels. We work across all contact centre touchpoints to reduce user effort, create brand consistency and improve customer satisfaction.

Trusted by over 350 of the UK's biggest brands; our award-winning strategic approach seeks to streamline communication, creating a seamless and positive experience that is at once creative, clear and on-brand.

Our work has a direct, tangible impact on contact centre performance, customer experience and brand reputation enhancing interactions.

Our CX services

- Audio Branding / Marketing
- IVR Design
- FAQ Videos
- CX Consultancy



Find out more...

Kevin O'Connor

Director of Contact Centre Sales

Kevin.OConnor@premiercx.co.uk

Kirsty Ferguson

Executive Assistant to Sales Director

Kirsty.ferguson@premiercx.co.uk

Premier CX

Laverstoke Grange

Whitchurch

RG28 7PF

info@premiercx.co.uk

+44 (0)345 071 1359

premiercx.co.uk

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