TSA special case study

Realising the potential of TEC in social housing
Worcestershire Telecare

Overview

Earlier this year, The Community Housing Group changed how its supported living and extra care housing operates. The Group's telecare service now manages these homes, alongside its care and support service; a move that puts technology and prevention at the heart of provision for vulnerable tenants.

Enabling someone to maintain their independence while ensuring they're safe can be a tricky balancing act.

Take Malcolm from Evesham. He has dementia and is prone to getting confused – and lost – on trips to the shops. He's even been known to hop on-board a random train.

The unpredictability of Malcolm's behaviour meant stress and anxiety for his family who were worried he may come to harm.

Geo-fencing

That was until they received help from Worcestershire Telecare in the shape of geo-fencing. GPS is used to track Malcolm's movements and if he strays outside the 'fence' – which includes entering the train station – both the telecare team and his family are alerted.

It's a great example of Worcestershire Telecare's overall approach, says Rupert Lawrence, who heads up the team.

"What we've done is assess Malcolm's individual requirements and enabled him to live with his dementia rather than be restricted. His family also find the situation much easier to deal with, as they know Malcolm is safe and that his care is specifically tailored for his own situation."

"If Malcolm goes beyond the 'fence' then his brother – who works near the station - gets an alert to his phone. Before this was set up, Malcolm actually got on the train and ended up miles away."

Rupert describes it as "smart use of TEC to help someone live independently", adding: "Malcolm doesn't need someone chaperoning or restricting him. Without this technology he would probably be in residential care."

Linking care with housing management

Worcestershire Telecare is part of the independent living directorate within The Community Housing Group, the largest social landlord in north Worcestershire.

What makes this telecare service unusual is that it not only provides a range of care and support equipment to vulnerable people; it also directly manages thousands of homes by working alongside the housing association's Care & Support24 team.

Since taking over the management of supported living and extra care services in 2018, Worcestershire Telecare has become responsible for developing a technology enabled care approach for more than 2,000 of The Community Housing Group's 5,500 homes.

From being "quite traditional" when Rupert Lawrence first took over, the service has embraced the latest digital technology over the last three years. Taking on a housing management role has nurtured both this innovation and the organisation's focus on prevention.

For example, fire and fall detection devices have been installed throughout supported housing sites, regardless of whether residents require care packages.

This has prevented major damage to properties (avoiding £0.5m in costs) and possible loss of life, 110 times over in the last 12 months. More than 200 falls have been responded to quickly, avoiding the risks associated with long lies.

"We're much more proactive now in terms of the monitoring centre, performing outgoing calls and providing pre-emptive support," Rupert Lawrence explains. "We're using preventative, proactive technologies as well as traditional, reactionary call technologies."

Examples of devices used by tenants include GPS pendants that enable users to get help when they are out and smart watches that can detect and predict epileptic seizures and heightened stress.

Rupert believes The Community Housing Group recognised the opportunity to make the most of the latest technology by handing responsibility for managing supported and extra care housing to its independent living services – Worcestershire Telecare and Care & Support24. And it's already having an impact.

"It's early days but we've seen an increase in technology uptake with our tenants – including mobile GPS technology to support independence, a significant rise in home automation technologies to increase wellbeing and make efficiency savings on care packages, as well as much improved satisfaction for residents as they benefit from the enabling digital technologies we provide," says Rupert.

Leading by example

The Community Housing Group is ahead of the curve in a sector that has been slow to respond to both the opportunities digital technology offers and the risks of not prioritising the analogue to digital shift.

Some 1.7 million vulnerable people rely on telecare in the UK, but many receive services that use analogue connections. By 2025, all analogue telephone services will be switched off as the UK's telecoms infrastructure is upgraded to digital connectivity.

Worcestershire Telecare is doing its bit to spread the word, not only to ensure organisations are aware of the urgent need to make the digital transition but also to demonstrate the opportunity to redesign services.

Rupert Lawrence asked The Community Housing Group to set aside an apartment at its new flagship extra care scheme – Berrington Court in Kidderminster – so it could be used to showcase the latest technology to residents and professionals and provide a training facility for staff.

The two-bedroom home includes everything from fall sensors to a telehealth system linked to onsite triage manager software. It also uses mainstream technology like Amazon Echo to open doors and curtains.

An 'activities of daily living' system demonstrates how a person's everyday movements, from opening the fridge to getting out of bed, can be detected and used to build a picture of their lifestyle and needs.

More than 800 people have visited from social care, health and housing across the UK and overseas, says Rupert, and it's helping to get across the way digital technology can shift the emphasis towards prevention.

"Organisations need to realise the potential of digital technology and the data-rich environment TEC provides. The information at your fingertips can be so powerful and help to detect a decline in a tenant, whether in their physical or mental health, and prevent it from escalating."

The demonstration flat has also influenced the way technology is viewed and used across the housing association, he says.

"As an organisation we're looking at how we use technology to manage the maintenance of our properties, such as condensation build-up. We're interested in how it can improve communication with our residents to help them interact with us and inform us about what's going on."

"If they are admitted to hospital – how does that affect their housing situation, rent account or gas service that is due next week? There are huge opportunities to use assistive technology more effectively."

About TSA

TSA is the industry body for technology enabled care (TEC) services, representing organisations including telecare and telehealth service providers and suppliers, commissioners, digital health businesses, housing associations, emergency services, academics, charities and government bodies.

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