



Social Care Data and Cyber Security Programme Case Study

The Avalon Group

Protecting sensitive and personal data by supplying and locking down staff mobile phones

As we use more technology in care services, both to support care delivery and to improve digital connectivity with partner organisations, it is vital that people's information is kept secure, and that the systems we use are reliable. As part of the National Cyber Security Programme, the Local Government Association, Care Provider Alliance and Department of Health and Social Care commissioned the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University to undertake a research programme to support the adult social care provider sector to manage the business risks associated with data and cyber security.

The research took place from October 2018 until March 2019 in three local authority areas: North Yorkshire, Central Bedfordshire and the Royal Borough of Greenwich. A representative sample of seventy care providers operating in these areas took part, including the Avalon Group, which is a social care charity providing flexible care, support and companionship to adults with learning difficulties or physical difficulties living within the community within the North East. The charity also offers a pioneering, live-in care service, called Shared Lives, where people are supported in a family's home on a day-to-day basis. The charity employs around 350 people and around 250 self-employed carers, who provide services to 650 beneficiaries, and has its Head Office in Harrogate. In order to provide an efficient and accountable service, outreach workers need regular secure communications with clients, families, other workers and Head Office.

As part of its communications strategy, the Avalon Group provides around 70 android mobile phones, the Samsung Galaxy Core Prime model, to outreach workers. Until recently, these phones were primarily for daily use for phone and text. Approximately three years ago, the charity was looking to integrate a secure email system into this communications package. At this time, the charity researched a new provider which could deliver a more comprehensive, efficient and secure platform for staff mobile phones.

The charity uses a communications specialist called Challenger Mobile Communications as an independent advisor and third party reseller. It uses O2 as its

network provider. It was Challenger's technology department that recommended a mobile solution called SOTI, as the team recognised that this interface would fulfil Avalon's needs. SOTI could simplify the management of the charity's mobile phones, eliminate mobile downtime and secure 'end points', that's the mobile phones themselves. The service could be tailored to suit the charity's needs and would be sufficiently flexible to evolve alongside developments in the service and in communications technology.

"The key to our successful implementation of SOTI was the development stage," comments ICT Manager Mark Wheatley. *"With any systems change, there needs to be a comprehensive exploratory stage to ensure the software can be customised and controlled to meet the requirements of the organisation. For Avalon, there was a four-to-six week development period prior to rolling out the new interface. In fact, installing SOTI on our phones was much the quickest part of the process!"*

Using SOTI simplifies the security, management and support of business-critical mobile phones.

Mark Wheatley continues, *"This system gives us the ability to share files more efficiently and more securely via electronic means. For example, it's a much safer method than simply sharing paper files, as care providers have done traditionally."*

The SOTI platform can be used on any mobile device, including tablets. In terms of security, sensitive information travels via secure email, as attachments, and these attachments are password protected. For a short time after documents are accessed, information stays in the phone's cached memory, however this is soon erased automatically. Nothing is stored directly on the phone.



SOTI gives a great deal of reassurance and security if devices are misplaced or

stolen. All mobile phones have a four-digit pin number access mechanism that cannot be turned off. The screen time is limited to 30 seconds, so the phone quickly locks when not in use. In addition, devices can be tracked whilst the mobile is turned on. They can also be wiped of all data remotely and restored to factory settings. However, this action cannot be undone if the phone is later recovered.

A key benefit of the system is a greater degree of control over the phones and phone-use. Using SOTI, Avalon's IT team have remotely set up blocks on international phone calls and ensured that only word based text messages, technically called SMS (short message service) messages are sent, as opposed to MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service) messages, which are for images and emojis. This helps to ensure the phones are used entirely for business purposes.

SOTI is also used to monitor and manage applications on the phone and prevent access to non business-relevant interfaces such as YouTube and Facebook; with android phones these usually come as standard. SOTI gives the IT team access to remove and uninstall non-business apps and block non-business email accounts, for example. In addition, if a phone is connected to a computer, the only permitted function SOTI allows is charging, which prevents copying of data. A 'jailbreak' alert will run if someone tries to disable the security settings on the phone.

Each employee has 1GB of data per month for business use and the control measures ensure the data provided is used only for charity business. In addition, low data warnings are sent to the central IT team when data is two-thirds depleted and this can then be managed. The IT team can also access an online platform that gives detailed granular information about the mobile phone, for example indicating signal strength or battery life.

SOTI allows for two levels of permissions, which means directors and managers can have the relevant authorisation, whilst more junior staff can access what's appropriate for them.

This ability to control the mobile phones is incredibly helpful not just in ensuring security and compliance but to help fulfill the charity's goals. The Avalon Group is predominantly local authority funded, with some private payments taken for services provided. More recently the charity has embraced community fundraising, for example through sponsored challenges and cake sales, to supplement the non-essential extras it would like to provide, such as gifts at Christmas time. As part of this policy change, Avalon introduced the use of online fundraising platform, JustGiving. To facilitate use of this platform, the central IT team pushed out the app to all staff mobile phones simultaneously. Equally, when a colleague requested a torch application for their mobile phone, the benefits were recognised for all staff and the team were quickly able to explore and install the most appropriate app to all staff mobile phones.

This ability to manage and maintain the charity's mobile phones remotely, minimises the need for the central IT team to travel long distances across North Yorkshire and Teeside in order to fulfil their role, which brings vast time saving efficiencies.

Key benefits and outcomes

- **A high level of data security** with features such as PIN access and remote data wiping configured as standard
- **Efficiencies of central control** including benefits of using identical software on all devices
- **Time efficiencies for the IT team** maximising time spent in managing the phones and apps through remote access and reducing travel time
- **Limiting operational down time** through central management and control, for example, ensuring software is appropriately updated to keep mobiles operational
- **Cost efficiencies** through ensuring data and phone use is business relevant only, and by blocking multimedia messaging and international calls, for example.
- **A professional approach** that limits inappropriate use of non-business-relevant platforms and applications and prevents the use of non-business style communications, such as emojis
- **Professional care support documents** accessed online, rather than using well-travelled paper copy files
- **A responsive, flexible system** that allows the IT team to quickly respond to a changing environment, for example, rolling out new charity-critical apps such as JustGiving

Overview of investment

- **A 'per device' cost** of around £2-4 to install the software
- **Time to explore and develop the system** to ensure it meets the business requirements of the charity

Commented ICT Manager, Mark Wheatley, *“As with any system, there was a cost element to begin with, however the efficiency savings have been substantial. The Avalon Group also recognises that peace of mind around security and data is invaluable and comes with an investment cost.”*