

Disruptive  
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# DIN their words

## Colin McCulloch

**Director of Customer Services  
Barrhead Housing Association**

**A DIN seminar about artificial intelligence (AI) and chatbots led to a new approach for applying for housing with Barrhead Housing Association in East Renfrewshire.**

Just a few weeks after the launch of its website chatbot, Barrhead had already started to look at how it could enhance the customer experience even further with the use of AI.



## What was the problem you wanted/needed to solve or improvement you wanted to make?

One of the problems we've had is with the amount of people applying for our homes. We had so much demand and we simply had issues with getting through the applications, talking to everyone and determining how we might best meet their needs.

I'd attended a DIN seminar about AI and in particular, about chatbots and an organisation called Humley was there. It showed us how much it had helped a local authority's bin teams with their collections and reducing calls, and we thought it might help our customers.

At the time, we hadn't been looking at AI or a chatbot, we were thinking more about extra appointments or what else we could do.

## What made you decide this was a priority area to take on?

Letting houses is what we do so this needed to be a priority area – and our CEO is very keen that we look at doing things differently and make a difference to our customers.



## How did you go about it?

I like to challenge the norm and our CEO is really keen to do that too. We knew the financial cost was going to be a small capital outlay of a few thousand pounds, so we considered that negligible, especially when you think of the staff saving.

We've agreed with the board and the executive team that we're a risk-taking organisation. We discuss the worst thing that could happen in situations and in this case, it was that it didn't work, so it was worth the punt. We had a back-up plan, so we decided to give it a go.

The team bought into it and they led on it, so it was their project and they rose to the challenge.

We went live with the chatbot in the 'apply for housing' section of the website. It asks people questions about their housing needs and at the end, they get an email about what they are likely to be awarded, so they know quickly and don't have to wait for an appointment with us.





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