

The UK Property Responsiveness Report

Telephone answering rates across the UK property sector outside office hours
A study of 3,047 property businesses · May-July 2026

93.8%

of calls placed to UK property businesses between 6pm and 9pm on weekday evenings were not answered.

Research conducted by InStep AI. Methodology published in full. No individual business is identified.

Foreword

This report presents the results of a study conducted in May-July 2026 into the telephone responsiveness of the UK property sector during evening hours. Rather than relying on survey responses or self-reported data, the study measured responsiveness directly: 3,047 property businesses across the United Kingdom were telephoned by Ella, InStep's AI agent, on their main published number between 6pm and 9pm on weekday evenings, and the outcome of each call was recorded.

The headline finding is that 93.8% of these calls were not answered. This figure was checked and re-verified before publication.

The full methodology is set out in Section 1 so that readers can assess the findings for themselves, and every individual result has been anonymised. The purpose of this report is to establish a measured baseline for evening responsiveness across the sector: a picture of the industry as a whole, not an assessment of any individual business.

A note on interest: InStep AI provides call-answering software to the property sector. This is stated plainly here, and again in the limitations, so that readers can weigh the findings accordingly. The methodology has been published in full for the same reason.

Reid Cockrell

Co-founder, InStep AI

1. Methodology

The findings in this report depend entirely on how the data was gathered, so the methodology is set out first.

Study design

Between 6pm and 9pm on weekday evenings in May-July 2026, calls were placed to the main published telephone number of 3,047 UK property businesses. Calls were placed by Ella, InStep AI's assistant. Where a person answered, the assistant identified itself immediately as calling from InStep AI. Where nobody answered, a voicemail was left. Each call was assigned exactly one outcome.

The calling window

The 6pm-9pm window was chosen because it is the period in which a person who works during the day is realistically able to make a personal call: after the close of standard office hours, but within normal social calling hours. It represents the window in which a motivated buyer, seller, landlord or tenant is most likely to attempt contact.

Ring duration

No call was terminated early by the study. Every call was allowed to ring until the receiving line ended it - whether by diverting to voicemail, playing an automated message, or disconnecting. This removes the observer's patience as a variable: the results measure the responsiveness of the line called, not the persistence of the caller.

Number selection

Calls were placed to the main telephone number published by each business, as a member of the public would find it, not a direct dial or a separate out-of-hours line. Where a business publishes an alternative evening contact, a caller would need to locate it separately; this study measured the primary published route only.

Deduplication

The underlying database holds records at branch level, and several branches within the same group publish the same central telephone number. Two numbers in the sample were shared by 28 and 19 branch records respectively. Each unique telephone number was counted once. The record count before deduplication was 3,169; after deduplication, and after excluding nine numbers outside the United Kingdom, the study covers 3,047 unique telephone numbers. Deduplication did not change the headline figure to one decimal place.

Outcome classification

OUTCOME	MEANING
Voicemail or no answer	The line rang out, or diverted to a recorded message
Automated message	A recording played, with no way to leave a message
Human answered	A person answered the call
Voice AI	An AI assistant answered
Not in service	The number did not connect

For the headline figure, voicemail and no answer are treated as a single category, since both represent the same experience from the caller's perspective: the call is not answered by anyone.

The study records only that a person answered, without attempting to establish whether that person was located in the branch or at a third-party answering service. From the caller's perspective the distinction is not observable, and there was no reliable way to determine it from the call alone, so no attempt was made to do so.

Scope and interpretation

This study does not assess how well any business is run, and it does not suggest that businesses are ignoring their customers. Most estate agencies close at 6pm because that is when the working day ends. What the study measures is narrower: what happens to a telephone enquiry that arrives after the office has closed.

Limitations

The following limitations should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

Single observation. Each business was called once during the May-July period, not repeatedly. An outcome therefore reflects a single evening's attempt on a single number, not that number's behaviour over time. An individual business might answer more, or less, reliably on other evenings. The study is designed to measure the pattern across the sector at scale, where thousands of single observations produce a stable aggregate, rather than to characterise any individual business. It is a snapshot, not a trend, and we intend to repeat it.

Out-of-hours lines. Businesses that publish a dedicated out-of-hours number, and whose customers know to use it, will appear less responsive in this study than they are in practice.

Sampling. The sample is drawn from InStep AI's own prospect database. It is not a randomised sample of the entire UK market, and it skews toward sales and lettings agencies.

External figures. The voicemail abandonment rates cited in Section 3 are external estimates that have not been independently verified. Published figures vary widely, and the full range is reported rather than a selected figure.

Interest. InStep AI is not a neutral party: it sells software that answers telephone calls. The methodology is published in enough detail for a sceptical reader to assess whether the findings hold.

2. Findings

Of the 3,047 property businesses telephoned during the evening window:

OUTCOME	BUSINESSES	SHARE
Voicemail or no answer	2,857	93.8%
Human answered	125	4.1%
Automated message, no voicemail	32	1.1%
Voice AI answered	22	0.7%
Not in service	10	0.3%

Estate agencies specifically

Narrowing the sample to sales and lettings agencies only (1,879 businesses), 94.1% of calls went unanswered and 3.9% were answered by a person. The figure is closely in line with the full sample, indicating that the headline result is not driven by the inclusion of surveyors, developers or other property businesses.

Results by business size

It might be expected that larger organisations, with more branches and staff, would answer more reliably. In this sample they did not, though the differences between segments are modest.

SEGMENT	SAMPLE (n)	UNANSWERED
Independent	1,399	93.6%
Mid-size	401	96.0%
Enterprise	64	92.2%

Mid-size agencies were the least reachable segment in the sample. The study did not investigate causes, but one plausible explanation is structural: in independent agencies, the office telephone is often diverted to the owner's personal mobile, while the largest networks are more likely to operate formal out-of-hours arrangements. Mid-size groups may have outgrown the informal approach without yet having adopted a formal one.

3. Supplementary operating data

The calling study above measures the size of the evening answering gap. The data in this section, drawn from live InStep AI client deployments in June & July 2026, offers an indication of what passes through it. Because this data comes from the company's own customer base, it should be read as indicative rather than representative of the market as a whole.

Missed call volumes

BRANCH TYPE	AVG MISSED CALLS PER BRANCH PER MONTH
Independent branch	262
Group branch	687

These are calls the business did not take, and they are not confined to out-of-hours periods: calls are also missed during the day when staff are on other calls, in meetings, at viewings or with clients.

Outcomes when missed calls are answered

Across the client base in June & July 2026, 66.2% of missed-call conversations handled by an assistant produced enough information for the branch to act on: a captured viewing request, valuation enquiry, applicant registration, maintenance report, appointment change or other actionable next step.

Comparison with voicemail

The natural comparison is with voicemail, the sector's default fallback. Here the evidence base is weaker, and the uncertainty should be stated clearly.

No reliable, property-specific figure exists for how many callers leave a voicemail. Published estimates of voicemail abandonment across business generally range from roughly 67% to 86% of callers hanging up without leaving a message. The most methodologically transparent of these, a UK study by the answering service Moneypenny covering call data from 10,000 businesses, found that 69% of callers who reached voicemail declined to leave a message. These figures have not been independently verified, and most of the organisations publishing them - including Moneypenny, and including InStep AI - sell products that answer telephone calls. Readers should weigh them accordingly.

What can be said without qualification is narrower: a voicemail box cannot ask a question. It cannot establish which property a caller is interested in, whether they are a buyer or a tenant, or when they are available to view. It records whatever the caller volunteers, and the published estimates suggest most callers volunteer little. Whatever the true voicemail capture rate is, the mechanism that produced the 66.2% figure above, the ability to ask follow-up questions, is absent from it.

Measurement

A further observation from client deployments is that, prior to deployment, most agencies had no data on their missed calls: how many calls were missed, how many callers left a message, how many of those messages were returned, or what became of the enquiry. In most branches this data does not exist in any form. This may help explain why the gap persists: a call that rings out leaves no trace in any system the branch reviews, so the cost of a missed call is not visible to the business incurring it.

When enquiries arrive

Across the client base in June & July 2026, 27% of captured leads arrived outside office hours.

LEAD TYPE	SHARE CAPTURED OUTSIDE OFFICE HOURS
Viewing requests	31%
Applicant registrations	31%
Valuation enquiries	9%

Viewing requests and applicant registrations cluster in the evening. Valuation enquiries, typically the highest-value enquiry an agency receives, arrive predominantly during the working day, but show meaningful evening volume, almost all of it after 5pm on weekdays.

4. Case study: one evening enquiry

The figures in this report are aggregates. The following example, included with the agency's knowledge, illustrates a single call.

At 17:50 on a weekday - shortly after standard closing time - a valuation enquiry arrived at Motis Estates. The call was answered, the enquiry was qualified, and the details were passed to the team. It became a listing: a four-bedroom property at £450,000. At the UK average agency fee of 1.42%, the enquiry represents approximately £6,390 in commission.

Applied to the findings above: a call placed to a UK property business in the evening had a 93.8% probability of reaching nobody, and published estimates suggest that 67–86% of callers who reach voicemail leave no message. It cannot be said with certainty that this instruction would otherwise have been lost: the caller might have telephoned again in the morning. On the evidence in this report, however, the probability of the inquiry being captured that evening through a standard unanswered line was low.

5. Conclusions

The evening answering gap is close to total. More than nine in ten UK property businesses in the sample could not be reached by telephone between 6pm and 9pm on weekday evenings.

The sector's principal fallback is largely unmeasured. Published estimates suggest most callers who reach voicemail leave no message, though the figures vary widely and none are property-specific. Within InStep AI's client base, assistants able to ask follow-up questions captured an actionable next step from 66.2% of missed calls.

Missed-call outcomes are rarely measured. Among agencies later deploying call-answering software, few had any prior data on missed call volumes or outcomes. The absence of measurement may itself be a significant factor in the persistence of the gap.

The gap is widest in the mid-market. Mid-size agencies, with more branches and enquiries than independents but without the infrastructure of the largest networks, were the least reachable segment measured.

Evening enquiries are substantive. Nearly a third of viewing requests and applicant registrations in the client dataset arrived outside office hours, from consumers acting at the time of day available to them.

Disclosure of interest: InStep AI builds software that answers telephone calls, and readers should weigh the findings in that light. The gap measured in this report, however, exists independently of any product: the contribution this study aims to make is to have counted it.

Note for journalists and researchers

The anonymised, aggregated dataset is available to any journalist, academic or industry body on request. Individual company results will not be shared with anyone, including the companies themselves, unless a company asks directly about its own record. The study is intended to be repeated, so that this baseline can be measured against over time.

Reid Cockrell, InStep AI

All calling data collected May-July 2026 across 3,047 unique UK property business telephone numbers. Client operating data drawn from live InStep AI deployments, June-July 2026. No individual business is identified in this report without its knowledge.