



Knowsl@ Council

Knowsley adopts a managed service approach to better protect and serve its citizens

Knowsley Council has 3,000 IT users located across 167 sites. A continued drive for efficiency led the Council to review its options for the delivery of its Unix environment and, as a result, it moved this element of its IT delivery to a managed service, allowing the Council to focus its internal resources on the support and development of its Microsoft based estate.



Having implemented a new Unix IT infrastructure and a managed service from Esteem Systems, the Council has secured guaranteed savings of £1 million over the five year contract and has refocused its IT Division on delivering strategic IT services. Working with Esteem ensures Knowsley has:

- Retained control over the strategic direction of its Unix IT infrastructure
- Increased the levels of support available for its Unix IT infrastructure
- Simple and secure data storage with fast, effective disaster recovery
- 99.9% system availability per annum
- 24x7 specialist Solaris support

About Knowsley

Knowsley is at the heart of the North West region and is one of the five metropolitan districts that make up Merseyside. The borough spans nearly 90 square kilometres and incorporates 150,000 residents. Knowsley is a regeneration area in Britain and the Council prides itself in providing forward thinking services to citizens.

Knowsley Council has a mixed Information Technology environment with Unix servers hosting Oracle based line-of-business applications such as Revenues and Benefits, Social Services, Libraries, Payroll/HR and Financials; while Windows servers host the corporate email system and intranet, along with SQL based applications including CRM.

Facing the challenge

To address the targets set by the Transformational Government Agenda (t-Gov), Knowsley was keen to make significant changes to elements of its IT infrastructure. Norman Keats, Cabinet Member for IT at Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, explains, "The t-Gov programme is about delivering transformational change for the benefit of citizens, communities and business, yet the challenge comes when local authorities must meet these targets with often limited resources. We needed a suitable platform that would help move us forward and secure us for the future."

Knowsley appreciated that technology could help improve access to its services and better support Council workers, elected members and the local community. The Government requirement to extend council office opening hours and work towards a round the clock online service also meant Knowsley needed an IT infrastructure with 24x7 support.

Sam Maiden, Technical Solutions Manager at Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council comments, "Any IT infrastructure that we implemented had to reduce the risks of data loss and downtime to our 3,000 IT users which of course translates to the protection of service levels to our citizens' and their data. We had to better deploy our existing resources within the IT division to meet cost saving targets and also plan technology requirements for the next five years to enable us to accommodate the desired outcomes of the t-Gov agenda."

The Council recognised the need to make a significant change to its physical IT infrastructure and also how it was managed going forward. "An important element of our strategy moving forward was to enable our staff to use their skills to enhance and improve our service instead of focusing on day to day routine administration tasks and fire-fighting problems just to stay where we are," explains Maiden. "We had to ensure our IT aligned with our internal strategic agenda to help move the organisation forward and a managed service approach for the Unix platforms and Oracle database administration was the right route to help us achieve this."

Knowsley is no exception as a council when it comes to the challenge of recruiting and retaining skilled IT staff, especially to cover the extended office hours set by t-Gov. The Council realised it needed to work with an experienced partner that could offer the right balance of managed services, hardware and software expertise to share the risk of its infrastructure. The partner they selected would also need to deliver against a comprehensive service level agreement (SLA) and work to incredibly tight project timescales.

Selecting the expertise

Although Knowsley wanted to adopt a managed service approach for this element of their IT infrastructure going forward, they still wanted to retain ownership and remain in control. "It was important that we procured a managed service with an SLA for the specified elements of the IT infrastructure, while still providing us with overall control and flexibility in our management of the Council's IT service provision," continues Maiden.

With this in mind, Knowsley chose a selective managed service solution offered by Esteem Systems which enabled the Council to be more rigorous with resources and better placed to control best practice.

"Esteem had taken into consideration the challenges surrounding the Solaris and Oracle administrator skills that our infrastructure requires and built these into a flexible managed service" states Maiden.



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System Details:

Services

- Design and installation of Sun Corporate platform and disaster recovery/cluster platform
- Migration of all business line applications from old Sun platform to new Sun platform within 13 week timeframe
- 5 year managed service of Sun and Oracle platform to provide 24x7 cover

Hardware

- 23 Sun servers
- 2 Sun SANs
- 2 Sun tape libraries

Software

- Solaris
- Symantec Netbackup
- SunSAN replication software
- High Availability RSF-1 cluster software

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Sam Maiden
Technical Solutions Manager

case study



Choosing the right approach

Esteem Systems offered Knowsley more than 20 years experience of providing solutions to local government customers and the highest level of technical knowledge.

Before commencing the delivery of a managed service to the Council, Esteem first designed and built a new IT infrastructure based on 23 Sun servers providing both production and disaster recovery environments. The Sun platform now runs core line of business applications such as Council Tax, Payroll and HR, Revenues and Benefits, Financial Management & Procurement Education Management System, Libraries, and the administration system for Social Services.

The all-important data from these applications is held in one place on a storage area network (SAN), which Esteem upgraded as part of the new infrastructure. The upgraded SAN simplifies the Council's storage administration and uses Symantec Netbackup and High Availability RSF technology to ensure a more effective disaster recovery process which, in the event of a faulty server, enables quick and easy replacement.

Once the new infrastructure was in place, Esteem then migrated all of the line of business applications and commenced delivery of its managed service.

As part of the managed service SLA with Knowsley, Esteem now provides both onsite and secure remote support to ensure 99.9 per cent availability is achieved. This means that only three hours of unscheduled downtime per year is allowed for servicing, so all systems are closely monitored and changes are carefully assessed by Esteem for risk before taking action.

In consultation with the Council, Esteem has also agreed a technology upgrade in the middle of the five year managed service contract to increase performance yet again, giving a boost to end users at an important stage in the IT plan. Maiden says, “Users see a marked improvement in performance when you introduce a new system. However, over a five year period things move on, application upgrades are required and as a result, systems need more processing power, therefore a planned increase in performance is essential to maintain expected service levels.”

Seeing the benefit

Knowsley's new IT infrastructure was up and running just 16 weeks from the date of order. Esteem built the bespoke infrastructure across more than ten racks, including production and DR (disaster recovery) environments and then migrated and tested eight business critical applications to the new platform. By working out of hours, Esteem achieved all of this with virtually no downtime to the 3000 users.

“It was essential that we migrated all the line of business applications out of hours to ensure no disruptions to Council services, while still delivering the project on time”, explains Maiden. “Esteem understood these needs and our systems. We knew that the timescales were aggressive and Esteem really delivered.”

After implementation, Knowsley noticed a massive increase in IT performance, as Maiden explains, “The performance boost from the new infrastructure went down really well internally, with processing times of certain system transactions reducing dramatically from 25 minutes to just two minutes. This has helped to significantly improve staff productivity and enables us to continue improving services to our citizens.”

Knowsley's guaranteed savings on fixed costs currently stand at £1million over the five years of the contract. This means that the Council's aim of achieving efficiencies has been met. Knowsley can now better manage this element of its IT costs as all upgrades are included in the fixed managed service fee, providing a more stable financial picture for the Council. With efficiencies already being achieved from the new infrastructure, there is potential for further savings when increased productivity and reduced overtime for example, are taken into account.

“Earlier attempts to satisfy our resource requirements through re-allocating or recruitment had failed to provide the Council with a robust and sustainable support model for this vital part of our infrastructure,” highlights Maiden. “The contract with Esteem now allows us to pay one known annual fee which provides 24x7 support of our Unix/Oracle platforms”.

With a clear SLA in place between Esteem and Knowsley, the Council's in-house IT division can focus on developing added value services without the burden of day-to-day Unix and Oracle systems management. Maiden comments, “the managed service approach provides an efficient, cost effective and sustainable solution for our Unix and Oracle environments and allows us to still have control over the IT strategy and infrastructure, whilst providing the best possible support for the Council's employees, elected members and citizens.”

With the Esteem managed service now handling the more routine tasks, Knowsley has also been able to create a specialist role focusing on IT security to ensure that citizen data and Council systems are appropriately protected. “It is a very important job and one that requires dedicated expertise,” states Maiden. “Without the managed service in place from Esteem it would have been much more difficult to dedicate this kind of focus on protecting council data and information.”

Working for the future

In addition to the ongoing managed service from Esteem, Knowsley is also working with Esteem's team of strategic consultants to assess other areas, such as its Microsoft and desktop infrastructure, in order to help develop a strategy for the future.