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+44 345 094 0945
www.waterstons.com

Case study

Sector Housing & Social Care
Service Managed Services

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The value of close collaboration, through thick and thin

Changing Managed Services provider can often be a difficult and daunting decision. Is it better to stick with who or what you know, or take the plunge into something new? For forward thinking Cartrefi, they realised that improving their IT was a key driver to improving their organisation and wanted to make an investment in their future over the longer term. No-one at the time however could have envisaged actually how soon their critical IT infrastructure and strategy would be tested and one month after our engagement, whilst still in transition, the pandemic struck...

Steve White
Senior Technology Consultant

Email steve.white@waterstons.com

Results at a glance

- Creating a roadmap for strategically enabled IT
- Providing a scalable and secure infrastructure to enable flexible working with a user-friendly experience
- Updating outdated infrastructure whilst providing significant cost savings.

When Cartrefi Conwy Housing Association re-tendered their IT Managed Service provision little did any of us know that a global pandemic was on the horizon. Yet just as we started to onboard Cartrefi and get to know each other – the pandemic hit. However, with a huge amount of trust and great collaboration our new partnership was born, allowing Cartrefi to smoothly transition their IT from their previous supplier. We shared with them a roadmap as to how their IT could help shape, improve and support their organisation in the 'new normal', providing a secure, pragmatic and user-friendly experience to their colleagues working flexibly and remotely. An additional benefit was that it provided significant cost savings too.

Onboarding continued remotely mostly via Teams. At handover we were confident that we could take over and had already identified critical areas for improvement. Honesty was definitely the best policy; we knew there were things we didn't know, but Cartrefi accepted this. By this time, we had built up a level of trust such that Cartrefi knew we'd be straight onto it if something cropped up, and have the skills to find a resolution quickly.

In all honesty, we don't see Waterstons as just being our "Managed Service Provider" – over the last 18 months, we've built up a great working relationship with them, and we genuinely see Adam (Servicedesk Champion) and Steve (Service Delivery Manager) as being an extension of our internal ICT Team here at Cartrefi. What's been the most refreshing part of the relationship is knowing we have a team behind us that we can have an open and honest conversation with, a team we can bounce ideas off and a team where it feels like nothing is ever too much trouble.

Jason Webster
Business Systems Manager

We implemented the ITSM tool Freshservice, providing Cartrefi with a central location for all support tickets, whether this be for the in-house teams on infrastructure or business systems, or escalation to our service desk. To complement the reactive support for users' issues, we also implemented comprehensive monitoring managed by our Network Operation Centre (NOC) and Backup teams.

To help cement the relationship between Cartrefi and Waterstons, we identified two key roles. Firstly, the service desk client champion, a key member of the team working closely with Cartrefi's primary support analyst. This is a useful route for technical escalation and also provides a general sounding board for potential fixes or improvements. The other key role is our service delivery manager. You name it, and this role fits; it's the glue that holds everything together. Liaising between technical delivery teams, on-site IT, end users and service desk. The role requires a proactive approach too, contributing to risk management and continuous improvement. Really getting to know the business and the people, beyond the technology.

As well as helping support business as usual operations, we also engaged on a project to upgrade Cartrefi's server and network infrastructure to ensure it was fit for purpose and secure. Across the IT estate there are a number of areas where programs of continuous improvement are in place to ensure that Cartrefi's IT becomes a value add, not a cost centre, and forms part of a wider IT strategy.

From a technical point of view, Waterstons have taken what was an outdated and costly infrastructure and now provided us with a scalable, reliant and efficient environment which has allowed us to ensure we can provide the best possible services to our colleagues and customers. And even in this relative short period of time, and on multiple occasions, Waterstons have proven to have our best interests at the forefront of their mind when suggesting and implementing new solutions – it's never once been about how they could benefit from the situation, but always about doing "what's right" – which is one of Cartrefi's core values.

Jason Webster
Business Systems Manager

We're looking forward to getting back to normal and visiting their offices again soon (and the microbrewery next door). But, in some ways, Teams has helped build relationships. Rather than sitting in a "random" meeting room, we've been able to peak into people's homes and see their guitar collections!

In the short term, remote working will continue, but having got this far there's no reason to think that distance will be a barrier. It will be strange when we eventually meet again face to face, but we know it will be like greeting a long-lost friend.