A New Clerk's Story by Caroline Ramsey

Following the excitement of landing a dream job comes the reality of actually doing it.

When I first arrived at Carterton Town Council it was obvious very early on that the IT systems were lacking to say the least. There were several different machines with different operating systems, different software versions, no server connectivity and a very poor back-up regime.

One of my first priorities was obviously to address this issue – having come from a very IT savvy environment with 'State of the Art' kit I knew the council wasn't working as well as it should be! The first thing I did was to carry out an efficiency audit, which included a complete review of the IT systems, and identified a number of options that would help upgrade our IT infrastructure and meet our needs both now and as the council began to grow.

What I needed was flexibility which would allow the council to expand its functions, ensure safe, secure and easy back-up and enable all staff to access the same versions of software as each other. I needed the entire system to be functional within a matter of minutes and to be accessed from any time zone or geographical location. I also needed to be able to handpick the services and software applications that we needed to run the council and not be bogged down in customizing and integrating applications that were probably of no use to us!

The capital cost to purchase new computers, new software, install an in-house server and provide future flexibility was prohibitive – the town's taxpayers wouldn't really want me to spend all their money on computer equipment! There was another option available. The Microshade VSM sector specific off-site hosting option addresses all my IT needs. It is a far more cost effective option; it

doesn't require any immediate capital investment for hardware or software but does guarantee document back-up and business continuity. More importantly it does provide me with the flexibility to have the latest technology with plenty of room to expand my requirements as needed.

The council operates a reception area on the ground floor with the main offices on the first floor. Hosting allows each member of staff to access their own areas no matter which computer terminal they find themselves behind, purely by inputting their individual log-in. The council has been going through significant changes over the past eleven months, the town is growing and the area has been identified as a prime site for a substantial amount of new residential development. The off-site hosting option has enabled the council to get on with the job in hand, it allows remote working for all staff and it has improved communication no end.

At the same time as allowing us to work smarter, it provides me with peace of mind. I know that every file created by Carterton Town Council is backed up safely on a daily basis. Should disaster strike and the Town Hall go up in a puff of smoke, the Town Council could continue to function uninterrupted from an alternative location within a very short space of time.

The Clerk's Toolbox provides all the staff with access to relevant software to enable them to carry out their roles, from finance to word processing, spread sheets to document collation.

All things considered, I think we made a smart move!

Caroline Ramsey
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