

## **Delivering Two Years of Change in Two Weeks -**

*How Strategic Decisions Helped the Shared IT Service for Kingston and Sutton Councils Respond to the Covid-19 Crisis and Climate Emergency*



### **Background**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, in response to the rising death toll and infection rate from Coronavirus, the UK Prime Minister advised against all non-essential travel and urged everyone who could work from home to do so.

For many organisations the shift was significant. Changing mostly centralised, office-based working to an almost fully decentralised model was an operational, HR, logistical and commercial challenge. In addition to radically new ways of working, additional devices, licenses, bandwidth and support were often required. And some items were suddenly in very short supply.

In the Spring of 2020 laptop and Chromebook sales were up significantly on the same period the previous year, with some large organisations ordering thousands of units, leaving the supply chain struggling to cope.

For two UK local authorities, the Royal Borough of Kingston and Sutton Council, things were slightly different. Jointly covering nearly 400,000 citizens and employing around 5,000 staff, the councils had set up a shared IT service in 2014. When the crisis hit in 2020 strategic decisions taken after a review of End User Computing in 2017 put them in an enviable position.

### **The Solution**

Following the review the councils had invested in a solution which replaced legacy Windows desktops and laptops with Acer Chromebooks and Chromeboxes accessing a Citrix Virtual Desktop.

Interviewed as part of the Deskflix series of webinars for Computing, David Grasty, Corporate Head of Digital Transformation, Kingston and Sutton Councils said the solution *“enabled us to move*

*seamlessly to more than 95% of our staff working remotely without any changes to our infrastructure which was fantastic. We didn't have any issues at all or worries about the majority of the staff. The only things we had to work out were edge use cases – people that were using CAD technologies etc. The majority of our staff just took kit home and worked from home, or worked at home on their own kit until we could provision out a Council Chromebook for them”.*

David reported that the shared service strategy was to work towards having devices that could be used anywhere *“We were looking for a thin client device because we didn't need a full Windows implementation anymore because we weren't installing anything locally. And we were looking for something that would work away from the office. The whole strategy behind our infrastructure for the past six years has been to enable our users to access all of their services from any device, anywhere”.* The combination of Acer Chromebooks and Citrix *“met that very nicely”* he concluded.

*“We are excited to work with Kingston and Sutton London Borough Councils to provide modern technology to 5,000 council workers across 114 sites who keep local services operating for a combined 400,000 residents. As David and his team searched for new, cost-effective solutions to replace their legacy systems, Chrome Enterprise devices and Google Workspace were best positioned to help his organisation operate more efficiently, while giving his workers a more modern work experience, fully integrated with the tools delivered by their Citrix solution. Most importantly, these solutions helped them stay productive during the challenging times this year.”* Matt Stevens, UK Chrome Enterprise Sales Lead

### **The Crisis Response**

When Covid-19 struck the councils had to support a change in the percentage of people working from home from 10 to 20% up to 98%. Fortunately the combination of centrally-managed Chromebooks and Citrix-delivered virtual desktops was up to the task. David Grasty recognised the ability of the solution to adapt swiftly to the changes *“the biggest kudos to us has been that it has just worked we haven't had to do anything differently, we haven't changed our infrastructure in any massive way at all, to support going from maybe 10 – 20% of people working remotely at any one point in time to 98%”.*

*“Being able to support Kingston & Sutton Borough Council back in 2017 and now through the Coronavirus has highlighted the importance of partnership and being able to evolve together. This has been a truly exciting partnership. Seeing how Acer devices have made an impact across the Borough through this challenging time and across all different user cases has been fantastic. The depth of the Acer Chromebook portfolio and our Chrome roadmap has enabled Acer to provide solutions at the start of the project and with a view on the future needs of the evolving user cases within the Borough.”* Nick Walter - Head Commercial Channel, ACER UK

In terms of the operational benefits, David noted that the change in device strategy had also simplified the on-boarding of new staff and reduced support costs *“there's no more patching or virus updates – the Chromebooks look after themselves and we look after the users”.*

There was also one additional benefit. In June 2019 Kingston Council declared a climate emergency, triggering a range of projects and initiatives with the aim of making the borough carbon neutral by 2038.

To look at this initiative from an IT perspective the Council worked with Citrix and environmental consultancy Px3 to undertake an audit of the power saved by moving from the old desktop devices to the new, more energy efficient Acer Chromebooks and Citrix VDI. The study also looked at the

carbon emissions saved by the huge reduction in commuting and from the likely extended usage of the Chromebooks over an additional two years.

Ewen Anderson of Px3, lead consultant on the exercise noted: *“We benchmarked a 32% reduction in energy from the move to Citrix and Acer Chromebooks. If you combine this with the reduced commuting from more than 95% working remotely you would need 3,700 acres of mature forest, roughly one and a half times the size of the local Richmond Park, to remove the equivalent amount of pollution from the atmosphere.”*

Jason Sam-Fat, Commercial Manager for the Shared Digital Service at Kingston and Sutton commented *“We presented the findings at our last climate emergency meeting. It was the first time we’d had such detailed information about our carbon footprint and it was really good that IT had significantly more information about emissions than any other department and a clear roadmap for the future”.*

Confirming that the benefits apply to the economy as well as the environment David Grasty also reported an immediate and direct cost saving *“we estimate about a £40k reduction in our annual electricity bill just going from those old devices to “state of the art” ones”.*

Planning is now underway for the new ways of working post-Covid-19, including investigating the use of Chromebases, which combine devices and screens, to improve the health and safety of the 90% of staff who may continue to work from home.

## **Conclusion**

The UK public sector is currently under a unique set of pressures and it’s hard to imagine a strategy or planning session that would have come up with the current scenario. Investing in a flexible and scalable solution, however, has left Kingston and Sutton Council well-placed to respond to both immediate and longer-term pressures.

*“The strategic decision by Kingston and Sutton Councils to use a Citrix solution to separate their business applications from the client devices is an important one. Not only has it enabled staff to work from any location during the current crisis, it has also greatly simplified their move to Chromebooks. This combination of technologies is a compelling one for customers, as it enables true flexible working without compromising user experience or security. The fact that the councils also have a proven reduction in their energy bills and IT related carbon emissions is clearly an added and important benefit.”* Darren Fields, VP Cloud Networking, EMEA, Citrix.

The last word on the solution goes to David Grasty in his interview *“Our colleagues have actually taken it for granted that it’s just worked. They’ve gone home and have been worrying about how they deliver their service, not about the IT that’s supporting it. That’s been the biggest kudos to us – that it has just worked we haven’t had to do anything differently, we haven’t changed our infrastructure in any massive way at all, to support going from maybe 10 – 20% of people working remotely at any one point in time to 98%. In effect (remote working) became essential for everybody, so we’ve probably delivered two years’ worth of change in a couple of weeks.”*