



IT SERVICES



## Case Study – Stroud District Council

Stroud District Council turns to Virtualisation to underpin citizen services and help manage escalating IT storage costs.

IT reseller, Commercial IT Services guides the implementation

### RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

The Challenge: Stroud District Council needed to stem escalating storage and IT management costs to underpin services to just under 110,000 residents.

#### The Solution:

- Successful execution of virtualisation strategy reversed 50% year on year increase of storage & IT management costs.
- Guidance on strategic development of virtualisation.
- Multi-vendor portfolio, enabling a best of breed solution including: VMware ESX servers; Platespin & PowerRecon workload analysis tools; HP Storage Area Network.

#### The Benefits:

- Virtualisation has reduced Stroud District Council's servers from 36 down to 5 – a reduction of 640%.
- Saving over £150,000 over 4 years.
- Reducing annual electricity costs by over £8,000 that will form an integral part of the Council's carbon footprint reduction target.

### The Challenge

Stroud District Council provides services to nearly 110,000 residents in a largely rural area spread over 175 square miles in the south of Gloucestershire.

Technology is integral to supporting these services ensuring they are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week - particularly for operations such as revenues and benefits. IT is the driver to enable operations to meet statutory requirements as they come into force.

During the last few years, Stroud District Council has seen the growth of storage and IT servers to support these services grow at an alarming rate – to the point that drastic action needed to be taken. "We needed to find a different solution to stem costs which have risen year on year by 50% over three years," said the Council's Head of Modernisation and ICT, Nick Watkins. Nick looked to new virtualisation technology to solve the problem with the help of IT reseller, Commercial IT Services.

### The Solution



Back in 2006, Nick and his team started to examine the possibility of implementing the emerging technology of 'virtualisation' as a solution to the problem of 'server sprawl' with the associated increase in support costs.

Virtualisation is the concept of transforming single application servers and storage devices by sharing them with multiple users and providing access to multiple applications and operating systems. Although virtualisation was heralded as a revolution in better utilisation and management of IT resources, Nick and the team wanted to explore the options further before committing the Council to this path. They undertook over 12 months of research before confirming that it was the appropriate course of action. The process included seeing numerous supplier demonstrations, visiting industry exhibitions and reading the IT press. "Our research gave us invaluable knowledge but also the opportunity of learning from others," said Nick.

By April 2007, Stroud District Council developed a detailed tender for the design and implementation of server virtualisation for core external services relied upon by residents. Following a selection process with three companies lasting six months, local IT reseller and specialist, Commercial IT Services, was selected. Nick explains why,



Stroud District Council's headquarters at Ebley Mill

*"We liked their approach as they gave us open, honest advice based on a great deal of knowledge and experience of virtualisation implementations for other organisations," Nick added, "Most of all – they provided clear direction on how to implement virtualisation which gave us the reassurance we were looking for."*

## Implementation – Getting It Right First Time

Commercial undertook three months of meticulous planning and analysis to avoid any disruption that could affect council services.

Mark Freeman, Head of IT Sales at Commercial IT Services said,...

*“We have significant experience in the public sector of dealing with vital consumer services such as revenues and benefits. This area has a big impact on people’s lives and if you don’t get it right, residents can end up not receiving income benefit on which they depend.”*

The planning phase included one month of workload analysis with specialist software from Platespin and PowerRecon. This simulated likely traffic from email and management systems through to the Council website from which services to residents are channelled. This provided a clear and concise picture of the application services running on the servers and how their resources were being used. Also, it enabled a system planning report to be produced with different options and a recommended consolidation ratio of 6:1.

This process allowed Commercial IT Services to consolidate and fine tune the amount of processing power and memory needed. Above all, this phase gave important information on which to base decisions – critically, to determine how many servers could be virtualised.

By October, a new storage area network was installed in tandem with VMware ESX servers before careful migration during a weekend to prevent any disruption to residents. Integral to the migration was the confirmation that the system running on the previous physical environment was identical in the new virtual environment, albeit on fewer servers. Following this phase, the next step in the migration strategy was to virtualise 36 servers for a diverse range of applications - from revenues and benefits through to waste.

*“The consultative approach coupled with excellent project management from Commercial IT Services with complete commitment from my team, helped to deliver the smooth implementation of virtualisation at Stroud District Council. This gave us the seamless handover from the old system to the new one. None of the residents even noticed that there was a change!”*

– Nick Watkins.

## The Future

Building on the success of virtualising servers for external applications, Nick and his team have successfully virtualised their remaining internal servers.

## The Benefits



Virtualisation was the natural choice for Stroud as the Council could consolidate the number of its servers rather than having one for each individual service.

The result was that Stroud District Council was able to reduce its number of servers from 36 down to 5 – a reduction of 640%. It is estimated that this drastically reduced number of servers and the associated education in maintenance and management costs will save more than £150,000 over the next four years.

Also, there are significant energy savings through virtualising the servers too. The Council estimates it will reduce its annual electricity costs by more than £8,000. This will form an integral part of the plan to reduce its carbon footprint.

*“This strategic IT project has opened up a huge opportunity to share resources and increase server utilisation while saving taxpayer’s money from the reduced IT budget,” said Nick. “Not only was this server consolidation beneficial in terms of cost reduction with fewer servers, but also in terms of simplified IT management avoiding the need for more IT staff. This was the reality that we were facing before exploring virtualisation.”*



### THE COMMERCIAL CONSULTATIVE APPROACH

#### Consultative Approach:

Listening and asking questions, understanding each customer’s aims then offering a combination of technical, market and business development knowledge.

#### Strategic Business Planning:

Working with customers to define specific business objectives and develop business plans to achieve them.

Other divisions of The Commercial Group:



OFFICE SUPPLIES



INTERIORS



PRINT



RECRUITMENT

For more information please contact: Commercial IT Services, Commercial House, Old Station Drive, Liddington Park, Leckhampton, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. GL53 0DL  
Tel: +44 (0) 1242 703434

[www.commercial.co.uk](http://www.commercial.co.uk)