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Swansea Council

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Serving a population in excess of 220,000 people, Swansea Council have tasked themselves with becoming a digital business by 2020.

What this means is delivering services differently and more efficiently through a total transformation enabled by technology. This strategic approach to supporting people, businesses and organisations will ultimately ensure that all digital and non-digital approaches are connected, and that the entire eco-system can deliver a wide range of benefits for everyone across their region.

Cyngor **Abertawe**
Swansea Council

Swansea's Strategy

This transformation enabled by technology was planned to completely align with and support their corporate priorities and key policies including safeguarding vulnerable people, improving pupil attainment, creating a vibrant and viable city centre, tackling poverty and building sustainable communities.

To do this they were looking to implement ways to improve communications, mobile working, use of social and digital channels for information sharing, and efficient and secure use of cloud solutions, amongst other digital approaches.

The entire strategic business plan focuses on delivering the right platforms and interfaces based upon the best infrastructure and technology to meet Swansea's needs.

The Challenge

Of the numerous factors driving this plan, one of the primary objectives to ensure its success was enabling workforce mobilisation, regardless of geographical location.

To support employee mobility, Swansea Council had already started an agile working initiative, where each employee was provided with a laptop, USB headset, mobile phone, and the Microsoft Skype for Business client. Working towards this initiative over the last 2 years has already resulted in creating a more modern office environment and has had a significantly positive impact on the numbers of people embracing flexible working. The next focus is to extend mobile working to contact centre workers and enhance the mobile working experience for everyone.

However, Swansea operated a number of different, unconnected communication tools including Cisco telephony, Microsoft instant messaging and presence, and Mitel contact centre (which was in a critical state and failing). The three individual products had been bought at different times; as a result, they were separated off from one another, either due to different deployment designs and needs, platform incompatibility issues, or simply down to product age.

Why Forfusion?

Swansea Council needed to find an independent consultant with the relevant technical expertise, certification and sector knowledge who could advise strategically on best fit options to support their digital transformation. This would include market and cost analysis, as well as high-level systems review to help determine both short-term tactical changes, as well as longer term strategic alignment.

It was essential that the chosen supplier had vast experience developing strategies and technology road-maps in alignment with desired business outcomes. Importantly, the supplier needed to understand the intricacies and pitfalls for integrating applications from the market leading unified communications vendors.

As well as the technical requirements and capabilities, it was imperative that the supplier understood implications regarding Microsoft Office 365 licensing, critically, the most cost-effective way to phase in and phase out vendor technologies, considering sweating of assets and user education.

"Feedback from the team regarding Forfusion's capability and approach has been fantastic. It's refreshing to work with a supplier that has the best interests of the Council at heart and appear to leave no stone un-turned when imparting advice"

Matthew Knott
Enterprise Digital Solutions Architect
Swansea Council

Deliverables

Forfusion worked with Swansea Council across several project phases, assisting with pre-qualification queries, prior to embarking on vendor and market analysis, as well as environment analysis, which led to firm tactical and strategic recommendations being made. Emphasis was placed on finding balance between short-term and long-term goals, working as an extension to the Swansea team throughout all project phases.

→ Phase One – Market Analysis

In order to take a measured approach and garner an objective viewpoint, Forfusion started building the process by investigating strengths and weaknesses of the three vendors in use at Swansea; namely Mitel, Cisco, and Microsoft. Due consideration was given to where these vendors and their associated applications could fit, and perhaps more importantly, how Swansea's specific requirements and goals could be overlaid with one or more of the current vendors.

→ Phase Two – Environment Analysis

Through analysis and detailed workshops between Forfusion and Swansea's technical/ business strategy personnel, it soon became evident that issues with the current council environment would not be addressed quickly, or simply by making application upgrades, applying patches, or by the introduction of middleware. Furthermore, the only realistic and reliable way to address design, configuration and platform mis-match shortfalls, would be to secure budget in favour of long-term ROI and avoid any regrettable spend.

→ Phase Three – The Recommendation

Forfusion proposed that challenges be tackled as two separate deliverables; firstly, a tactical fix, required for addressing the currently unreliable or failing systems, secondly, by instigating a longer-term strategic plan to promote mobility and platform integration, as well as align with agile working and digital business transformation initiatives.

The recommended course of action was summarised as follows:

- **Immediate tactical plan** – remove the Mitel Solidus Contact Centre and replace it with a Cisco Unified Contact Centre Express solution. Cisco Unified Contact Centre Express would be designed for seamless integration with the existing council Cisco telephony platform, and closely align with existing vendor support for the on-premise telephony solution.

- **Long-term strategic plan** – integrate the on-premise Cisco Unified Communications estate with Microsoft Skype for Business in Office 365. By removing the barrier between Microsoft and Cisco solutions and tying cloud to on-premises resources, a more seamless collaboration experience would be achieved, delivering in-line with the required agile working initiative for council users.

In order to reduce the risk of executing the long-term strategic plan, it was also recommended that Swansea conduct an in-production pilot deployment whereby vendor platforms and applications would be soak tested to verify

performance. This approach would later provide a baseline to support and encourage user adoption via means of workshops, test beds, and by aligning the solution against council specific requirements – essentially before any heavy operational and financial investment is made.

"We received clear direction, which was fully documented and explained, in order that we could present a robust business case to our board. We also later prepared and published an RFP document to invite bidding parties to deliver the recommended works."

Matthew Knott
Enterprise Digital Solutions Architect
Swansea Council

Trusted Partner

A relationship based on trust grew quickly, during which time Forfusion demonstrated sound commercial and technical knowledge, spanning multiple vendors. This partnership, married with Forfusion's capability and experience in delivering via G-Cloud as well as other Public Sector procurement frameworks, resulted in Forfusion delivering a comprehensive consultancy led review and recommendations exercise.

Very early on in the engagement, Forfusion identified common challenges experienced by many organisations planning to operate in a vendor hybrid topology. The ability to understand complex

multi-vendor environments, particularly Cisco contact centre and Microsoft Office 365, as well as Audio Codes platforms to facilitate phase-in and phase-out of technologies, provided Swansea with the confidence to make informed decisions.

Outcome

A comprehensive review and recommendations document that closely examined existing and available unified communications solutions from Cisco, Mitel and Microsoft. This was supported by a vendor assessment in context of Swansea, where market leading research body information was referenced, and vendor strengths and weaknesses evaluated, dissected and explained.

As a result of work undertaken, six different solution options were considered in-line with Swansea's short-term and long-term goals, as well as available capital and operational budgets. A recommendation was made to move forward with a Cisco, Microsoft and Audio Codes hybrid solution, and the necessary information was provided to Swansea, in order that a Request for Proposal (RFP) could be drafted and published on a Public Sector framework.

Digital Transformation Journey

In working with Swansea Council, Forfusion have been able to facilitate planning for a digital environment where the benefits of mobile working continue to be embraced and enhanced and the goal to enable all workers to become agile workers becomes possible. The next steps will commence from a sound basis of research and recommendation with Swansea Council best placed to implement the most effective changes towards becoming a digital business.

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