



“With Vodafone’s insight and expertise, we are on the road to achieving the triple win we hoped for - better services for clients, delivered at a lower cost, by staff with increased job satisfaction.”

Nick Carter, Chief Executive, West Berkshire Council

power to you



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West Berkshire Council

West Berkshire Council serves a predominantly rural population of around 150,000 people in the Kennet Valley, south of the M4 motorway between London and Bristol.

From its headquarters in Newbury the Council employs 6,500 staff, the majority based in schools. Given the size of the territory the Council covers, it's not unusual for some members of staff to travel up to 50 miles to deliver services or attend meetings with partners such as the NHS, police, or with local businesses.

Although away from their offices for much of the day, keeping in touch with colleagues and other contacts is vital to maintain service quality and continuity.

In the past, employees relied on desktop computers to check emails and access various Council systems, requiring them to travel to and from offices in between meetings. As a result contact was intermittent at best with important email messages often inaccessible for a number of hours.

Unoccupied desks

The Council also calculated that desk space - costing an average of £15,000 a year to maintain - was unoccupied for up to 70% of the working day by those employees whose jobs required them to travel on a regular basis.

In common with all local authorities, West Berkshire was keen to deliver the maximum possible value from its stretched budgets. In assessing the communications challenges for staff on the road – and the inefficient use of desk space – Council officials saw an opportunity to deal with a range of issues in one go.

This was supported by the findings of a staff survey in which there was widespread enthusiasm for the adoption of flexible working arrangements, including home and mobile working. The Council resolved to increase its use of mobile technologies to improve communications with employees, local residents and businesses and help rationalise its property portfolio.

Nick Carter, Chief Executive, West Berkshire Council, explains: “Our vision was to use time and space more effectively, maximise the use of technology and gain threefold benefits, for staff, the organisation and the people of West Berkshire.”

The vision was called the Timelord Programme. To bring it to reality, the Council sought a strong partnership with a single solution provider.

“We trusted Vodafone to help us establish a different working culture that would generate immediate and long-term value, while improving the experience of staff and residents.”

**Councillor Pamela Bale, Deputy Leader,
West Berkshire Council**

Long term value

Jackie Jordan, Timelord Programme Co-ordinator at West Berkshire Council, says: “We wanted an innovative partner with local knowledge and first-hand experience of flexible working. As a member of our Local Strategic Partnership and a major supplier for the Council for six years, Vodafone ticked all the boxes.”

Vodafone has worked with the Council for many years and knew how to apply its experience of flexible working to the public sector. Councillor Pamela Bale, Deputy Leader, West Berkshire Council, says: “We trusted Vodafone to help us establish a different working culture that would generate immediate and long-term value, while improving the experience of staff and residents.”

As part of a feasibility study, Vodafone Business Services shadowed employees to establish ‘day-in-the-life’ scenarios, understand working practices and processes and identify cultural, technical and training needs.

Interviews followed with more than 100 employees from five service units; Housing and Performance, Planning and Trading Standards, Older People Services, Children’s Services and Finance.

Robust business case

Using this information, Vodafone created user profiles and worked with officers to build a robust business case and cost model, which demonstrated the economic strength and viability of the project to elected members of the Council. “Vodafone brought a rigour to the business case that we would have struggled to achieve on our own,” Nick says.

Vodafone’s proposal included defining three working styles:

- Fixed: For staff in customer-facing office and helpdesk roles
- Home Flex: For staff who can work from home for a percentage of their working week
- Free: For staff operating primarily in the field.

Vodafone recommended technology packages for each group and developed workshops to help managers create new methods for monitoring and supporting remote teams.

The Timelord Programme began with the consolidation of two offices into one new building in the east of the district. This has standard-sized desks for fixed employees, and smaller desks for Home Flex and Free workers, who use them when they need to.

Managers allocated a workstyle for each of the roles in their teams – with 100 per cent of staff adopting the workstyle allocated to their role. The technology rollout then followed, with each employee receiving the equipment most suited to their role.

Unique selling point

To ensure maximum return on the investment in laptops, tablets and Blackberry® devices, the staff received 'just-in-time' training in the use of their equipment and ongoing support during and after the move to the new office. Flexible staff now access email and applications from schools, healthcare centres, homes and offices via any secure wireless network or via Vodafone's telecommunications network.

In subsequent phases of the programme, another four offices will be reduced to two, with around 85% of the Council's staff working flexibly, enabling the council to reduce its office space by approximately 40%.

"With Vodafone's insight and expertise, we are on the road to achieving the triple win we hoped for - better services for clients, delivered at a lower cost, by staff with increased job satisfaction. The Timelord Programme has captured the imagination of employees and given us a unique selling point in terms of staff recruitment and retention," says Nick.

Improved data access and reduced travel help staff provide high-quality services and make well-informed decisions. Employees have more freedom to balance work and private commitments, without the potential stress of the rush-hour commute. By consolidating its office space, the Council is accommodating its employees more cost effectively.

Positive feedback

Feedback from staff is very positive too. Karen Pottinger, a Principal Education Welfare Officer reports: "Sometimes parents and teachers prefer to contact us by email. With mobile email, we're more in tune with the way they want to communicate. Employees feel more connected because they can contact colleagues by email in situations where a telephone call is not possible or appropriate. Working from home gives us a calmer, more productive start to the day than tackling the morning commute."

Adds Nichola Fox, a Family Support Worker: "With my BlackBerry® device, I pick up emails throughout the day and feel more connected with colleagues and clients. The teachers I work with say that we respond to messages much faster.

"With my laptop, I can look up information during meetings, so I can react on the spot rather than having to return to the office. Flexible working has made my day more productive. I work at home in the morning and then travel between meetings without having to go back to the office. I don't know how I would manage without the technology now."

Significant benefits

- Services have improved and are delivered cost effectively by staff who are working flexibly and are in constant touch with colleagues
- The Council is set to achieve its target of a 40% reduction in floor space, with a corresponding fall in running costs
- Commuter miles are expected to drop by approximately 30%, with staff gaining up to one hour a day to spend delivering services
- Reduced travel and rationalised use of office space is cutting carbon emissions
- Staff are more responsive to developing situations as they can pick up emails in real time from anywhere and can instantly access Council systems
- Flexible working enables the Council to work with employees to shape working patterns around service needs, especially valuable in the field of community care
- Gaps between meetings are not wasted because employees can carry out administration work wherever they are
- Job satisfaction increases as staff find work more fulfilling and less stressful as they spend less time driving and more time delivering services
- Flexible working options are attracting candidates to hard-to-fill vacancies and is improving staff retention and reducing absenteeism

