

TRANSFORM

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**SPECIAL
EDITION**
focused on:
**District
Councils**

No place for cyber complacency

How districts can help protect themselves against cyber risks

South Staffordshire District Council share their success

We speak to South Staffordshire about being crowned iESE Council of the Year 2022



Also inside:

- Ransomware Attack Simulation Service launched
- South Hams and West Devon Councils share their experience with low-code
- How Sevenoaks became self-sufficient
- South Cambridgeshire 'punching above its weight' on green agenda

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transformation partner

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*Views expressed within are those of the iESE editorial team.
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A focus on district councils

In this issue of Transform we focus on district councils, highlighting the innovation happening across this section of local government.

Hit hard by austerity measures, districts have worked hard in the past decade to plug the funding gap – transforming services and finding innovative ways to increase revenue.

In this issue we present several inspiring examples of districts at the forefront of innovation. We look at how our iESE Council of the Year Award 2022 winner South Staffordshire District Council has secured its financial future and how it is using data and working collaboratively across parish, district, and county to achieve the best outcomes for residents (see pages 4 and 5).

We also look at how South Hams and West Devon Councils are paving the way for further innovation using the Netcall low-code program Liberty Create (pages and 6 and 7), while South Cambridgeshire are recognised for their work on the green agenda (see page 7). Sevenoaks Leader Cllr Peter Fleming also gives a whistlestop guide on 'How to do a Sevenoaks' (page 8).

With the recent hit on Gloucester City Council reminding us that district councils are equally at risk of a cyber attack, we outline a new Ransomware Attack Simulation Service offered at a discounted rate in conjunction with our cyber security partners (page 2), and we also look at how the product AppGuard could help protect local authorities from the devastation of a zero-day attack (page 3).

Please send any feedback or news and views for a future edition to annabelle.spencer@iese.org.uk



Dr Andrew Lerner,
Chief Executive

 @LaverdaJota

iESE offers reduced rate cyber-attack simulation

NEWS

iESE HAS TEAMED UP WITH CYBER SECURITY EXPERTS AT ASSURITY SYSTEMS TO OFFER A RANSOMWARE ATTACK SIMULATION SERVICE DESIGNED TO TEST HOW EFFECTIVE YOUR CURRENT SYSTEMS ARE AGAINST THE LATEST MALWARE.

Cyber security attacks can be devastating with the rebuild costs running into millions and huge disruption to public services. To help local authorities identify their weak spots, iESE is offering access to a staged simulated attack which will test the readiness of defences.

Undertaken by a team of expert cyber professionals, the service tests your IT defences and incident response capabilities by issuing a real-time 'benign' ransomware attack. Deployed safely and under the visibility of your own team, the simulated ransomware software will mimic

an attack on your IT services and demonstrate what would happen to your IT systems if a real-life incident took place.

iESE has negotiated a special rate for councils of £3995 + VAT. There are a limited number of places available at this price and one unitary authority in the UK has already secured a space.

"If you have ever wondered how your systems would cope against a sophisticated cyber security attack you can now find out and take steps to increase your defences if necessary. We have teamed up with consultants who have a deep pedigree in cyber security having worked in offensive and defensive capacity for the UK Government and who are UK security cleared," explained Dr Andrew Lerner, Chief Executive at iESE. Colin Jupe, Director of Strategy at Assurity Systems,

the European distributor of zero-trust endpoint protection software AppGuard and the organisation offering the service, explained that the test would be unable to cause real harm: *"Our cyber experts will work with you to identify a small number of representative machines on which they will run a benign malware attack to test the readiness of defences. The service includes a pre-deployment consultation, the ransomware attack simulation test and a report detailing your results. Following the benign attack, they will be able to assess where any vulnerabilities lie, should there be any, and make recommendations on corrective actions and solutions to help strengthen your IT defences for the future,"* Jupe explained.

• **To book a Ransomware Attack Simulation Service contact:** annabelle.spencer@iese.org.uk

Local authorities 'risk being caught in cyber warfare'

LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE BEING WARNED THAT THEY AT GREATER RISK THAN EVER FROM POTENTIALLY DEVASTATING CYBER-ATTACKS DUE TO AN INCREASE IN CYBER WARFARE.

Recently released malware designed to harm Ukrainian organisations would have had "devastating consequences" if it had made it into the system of a UK council, warned Colin Jupe, Director of Strategy at Assurity Systems, the European distributor of zero-trust endpoint protection software AppGuard.

Attacks of this nature are becoming more common, Jupe explained, with different state actors wanting to achieve different goals. While UK organisations, such as local authorities may not always be the main target, once malware or ransomware is released and spreads through supply chains it is "indiscriminate".

Recently released malware known as HermeticWiper, targeted at Ukrainian organisations and believed to have

come from a state actor – hackers acting on behalf of a government – was designed to infiltrate systems, steal data and prevent rebooting. According to Jupe, VirusTotal, an organisation which inspects suspicious files, found only 16 of the 70 products sold by major cyber security vendors were able to recognise the malware as being suspicious/malicious at the point of release, while AppGuard was able to stop the malware "straight out of the box".

"AppGuard is able to stop what others don't recognise, whereas other products need to detect it in order to stop it," Jupe explains. In this case, the malware was sufficiently sophisticated to bypass many detection systems – even possessing a seemingly authentic security certificate.

While all vendors reacted quickly to release a patch, not being able to block a threat like HermeticWiper immediately could be extremely damaging.

"There are around half a million new pieces of malware released daily. While many of these are not very sophisticated and can be beaten by common protection systems, more and more are evading defences with devastating results. HermeticWiper was one such malware. Had it come to a local authority which was relying on one of the 54 systems that did not recognise it on day one, they could have been in deep trouble. Not only would their systems have gone down, they'd have had extreme difficulty rebuilding because one of the features of the malware was to corrupt the master boot record of every device. Even without this extra complication, we know a council rebuild following an attack can cost tens of millions of pounds," said Jupe.

• **To read more about how AppGuard works and about the preferential deal iESE has secured with Assurity for local councils, see page 3.**

No place for cyber complacency

Cyber security is growing in urgency and while district councils are smaller in scale, they cannot afford to be complacent as shown by the recent attack which hit Gloucester City Council.

The launch of the UK's first Government Cyber Security Strategy suggests cyber security in local authority is soon to come under greater scrutiny. Announcing the strategy, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Steve Barclay, said his priority was to ensure UK government at all levels was more resilient to cyber-attacks.

"Our core government functions from the delivery of public services to the operation of National Security apparatus must be more resilient than ever before to cyber-attacks. This aim accounts for all public service organisations – including across local government, and the health and education sectors – which in many cases are starting from a very low level of maturity," he said, "By the very nature of their activities, some of these organisations regularly face more sustained, determined, and well-resourced attacks on them."

A new Government Cyber Coordination Centre – a joint venture between the Government Security Group, the Central Digital and Data Office and the National Cyber Security Centre – will be created and £85m has been pledged to tackle the challenges facing councils, helping them build their cyber resilience and protect vital services and data.

A report by managed security services company Redscan, Disjointed and under-resourced: cyber security across UK councils, found county councils experienced three times (4.6 per organisation) more reportable data breaches in 2020 than their district counterparts (1.45 per organisation) but this does not mean smaller councils can relax. While larger councils may appear at greater risk, the recent hit on Gloucester City Council reinforces that districts are far from immune.

The good news is district councils can take actions to protect themselves, starting with layered protection and looking at supply chain risks. *"Districts have scarce resources,"* said Colin Jupe, Director of Strategy at Assurity Systems, the European distributor of zero-trust endpoint protection software AppGuard, *"In an ideal world they would have multiple layers in their defense, but often budget constraints mean they cannot have all the layers they'd ideally like, so the advice is 'don't pick multiple solutions of the same type'. The important thing is not to keep getting more of the same, having yet another detection-based system provides only a minor incremental improvement, what you need is something different, something not detection-based – that is what gives you the step change in defense."*

AppGuard is an innovative zero-trust cyber security

software which iESE, alongside Assurity Systems, brings to the UK's local government environment. iESE has secured highly preferential rates (discounts exceeding 50 per cent) allowing local authorities to benefit from the technology for around £45 per annum per endpoint for a fully-managed solution: *"A key thing with our managed service is that councils don't have to add to their already stretched team, they are getting expert cyber security systems management 24/7, 365 days per year, added to which, councils' IT teams often benefit from the skills transfer of specialist cyber knowledge our team is able to offer,"* Jupe explained.

AppGuard works differently to traditional cyber security software because it does not have to know the signature of an attack to block it. *"AppGuard's superpower is that it is able to stop what others don't recognise, almost all other cyber solutions need to recognise or detect malware in order to stop it,"* Jupe explained. This was the case with some recently released malware, known as HermeticWiper, aimed at harming organisations in the Ukraine by infiltrating systems, stealing data and preventing rebooting. While a UK local authority may not have been the intended victim in this case, malware and ransomware are indiscriminate once circulating. According to Jupe, VirusTotal, an organisation which inspects suspicious files, found only 16 of the 70 products sold by major cyber security vendors were able to detect the malware on first encounter, while AppGuard was able to stop it *"straight out of the box"*. While all major cyber software vendors quickly released a patch, new attacks emerge daily, with Jupe warning of an increase in sophisticated cyber warfare attacks backed by state actors – hackers operating on behalf of governments.

"HermeticWiper had devastating effects when it was launched. Had it come to a local authority and they'd have relied on one of the 54 systems that did not recognise it on day one, they could have been in deep trouble. Not only would their systems have gone down, they'd have had extreme difficulty rebuilding because one of the features of the malware was to corrupt the master boot record. Even without this added

complication, we already know rebuild costs for councils after a successful attack can run to tens of millions of pounds," he explained.

One forward-thinking council already using AppGuard is South Staffordshire District Council. Data is at the heart of the way South Staffordshire operates and sharing and collaborating with people and organisations who sit outside the traditional boundaries of the council's network. Understanding the desire to move to a digital-first business model, iESE and Assurity worked closely with the Council's ICT team to establish a proof of concept. The ongoing impact on the ICT team, however, is minimal as it opted to use Assurity's fully-managed service.

"AppGuard is incredibly forensic, providing an extremely high level of security which provides us with real peace of mind as we look to transform the organisation into a digital-first council," explained Lea Monckton, Senior Infrastructure & Communications Officer, ICT at South Staffordshire District Council.

Andy Hoare, Assistant Director, Business Transformation at South Staffordshire Council, said the support and responsiveness of iESE and Assurity was fantastic during the proof of concept and staged rollout of AppGuard: *"Staff are unaware of the work going on behind the scenes to give them this extra protection. This is exactly how cyber defences should be, effective but unintrusive to day-to-day operations,"* he said.

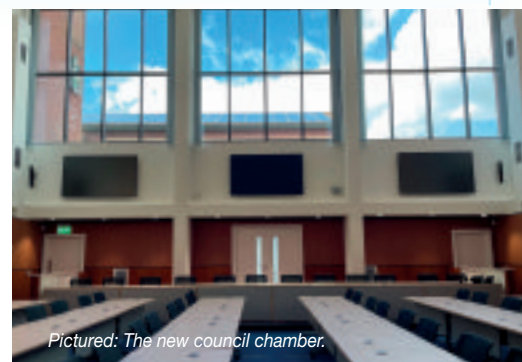
Eileen Buck, Director of Sales at Assurity Systems, added: *"I have been involved in providing cyber security software for over 30 years to Public Sector, NHS and large corporates and I have never seen anything as powerful as AppGuard. We are delighted to be able to offer this preferential deal via iESE to protect critical infrastructure."*

- To read the full South Staffordshire case study visit: www.iese.org.uk/project/appguard
- To find out more or see AppGuard in action contact: craig.white@iese.org.uk



South Staffordshire named iESE Council of the Year

South Staffordshire District Council won iESE UK Council of the Year, alongside two other Gold wins and two Certificates of Excellence. It has been recognised by judges as a council taking entrepreneurial steps to secure a stable financial future, through measures including an ambitious cost-neutral redevelopment of its headquarters, and for its pioneering and continuing work on localities, collaborative three-tier working and data utilisation.



Pictured: The new council chamber.

Dave Heywood took over as Chief Executive of South Staffordshire District Council in 2017 having already served as Deputy Chief Executive for seven years. He acknowledges that he inherited a good starting point, but that he had ambitions to elevate the Council to the next level. Leading his 300-strong team alongside the elected members he has achieved this goal, turning the organisation into what they are now proud to call iESE Council of the Year 2022.

The work that has been ongoing for the last five years amid Brexit and Covid has seen the Council work hard to change its internal culture with impressive outcomes. This includes securing a five-year balanced budget against a backdrop of financial uncertainty, improving its financial position by £5.7m and increasing operational income by £316,000 per annum.

Heywood inherited an organisation which had led on the development of a localities model in 2008 – five separate areas within the district – and had a rich history of working closely across the three tiers of District, Parish, and County and of collecting and sharing data between the partners to help inform services in the localities – something he and his current team have continued to take from strength to strength.

One of the first things Heywood did was to introduce a new mantra: One Team, One Council, and to undertake the first restructure in twelve years, taking out traditional service departments. He introduced three Corporate Director roles and then six Assistant Directors who were moved from singular offices to a shared space: *“The move was to encourage a richer conversation and increase the opportunities to link services more effectively. They weren’t happy about it to start with but six months later they all said it had enhanced their understanding of each other’s service areas and led to stronger collaborative working,”* Heywood recalls. This restructure led to new ways of working and transformational savings of £1.5m over the medium-term financial strategy.

It was important to create the right environment within the senior leadership team to build trust and relationships and a newfound energy that would be cascaded throughout the organisation. It wasn’t about hierarchical structures, it was about the workforce and how they worked together. Five values were introduced that would complement the Council’s new ways of working. The three corporate director roles introduced by Heywood were: Governance (to keep the council safe), Commercial (to make the council money) and

Resource (to save the council money).

The financial ambitions of South Staffordshire are to be self-sufficient, maintaining a balanced budget for five years and beyond whilst maintaining the 5th lowest Council Tax for district councils and continuing to achieve above 90 per cent or above in resident satisfaction.

Part of the plan for financial stability has been about investment in property. More than £40m has been set aside, with assets which include 160 industrial units, and which is generating a gross income of £2.8m per annum. One key project helping secure the Council’s aim of being financially self-sufficient is the redevelopment of its headquarters, the Codsall Community Hub. The project cost £10m but has been cost-neutral to the taxpayer and will generate £6m over ten years through tenant income.

Back in 2013 when austerity measures were being felt across the public sector the Council was shrinking as an organisation and so started to lease space in its building to generate a new source of income. In 2015 the Council applied to the Cabinet Office One Public Estate Programme and secured £125,000 funding which helped them scope out a wider project. *“At that point we knew we had a prime site with excellent facilities, but it was an ageing building,”* explains Jackie Smith, former

Corporate Director Commercial who is now Corporate Director Communities and Wellbeing. *"The structure was sound, but it needed that investment to make it far more of this century and beyond. The approach was to generate income and reduce costs, providing a true community hub that not only could it wash its face but hopefully generate income as well and stand the community in good stead for the next fifty years."*

The work on the building was recently completed and there are now 25 partners leasing space in the hub, ranging from a GP and the police to a podiatrist and children's nursery. Despite the pandemic, the Council pushed ahead with the project and came in on budget and on time. *"We had to consider whether to push on because of Covid but having reviewed the position we knew it was the right thing to do. It was a matter of holding our nerve and being bold, which is exactly what Members did and the outcome is fabulous,"* Heywood says.

The onsite café has gone from being subsidised to generating income and the library, which was at the rear of the building, has been positioned in a new glass extension at the front, acting as a community facility with access to IT and activities for children as well as books.

The Council has always been fortunate to have good relationships with Members, Smith says, but this has been strengthened under Heywood's leadership, with them showing particular support around property investment. *"It was a big change for us to start acquiring properties and we worked with the Leader and a panel of Members who were selected because they had prior business experience to check and challenge us in the decisions we proposed. For me as an Officer that was invaluable knowing that you were going to go into a meeting and be tested but in a positive way,"* Smith explains.

Staffordshire is using facilities in the neighboring district of Cannock. Partnership meetings were held to check the data held by partners. They found certain family commissioned projects in Huntington were not being well utilised, with the data revealing families were accessing those services but across the border. This has led to further discussions with commissioners and funding being realigned to meet community needs.

"This is about stronger three-tier working," Heywood explained, *"It is about early conversations and local solutions. One of our roles is about facilitating opportunities and the Leader is strong on recognising who is best placed to deliver. The relationships across the three tiers are strong with a common understanding from a resident point of view we deliver as one. It is about how we can fine tune what we offer to ensure we are providing those services to the residents, businesses and wider community and we are continually changing things and moving things forward."*

Smith will be further developing what is now known as Localities+ alongside Locality Enablers in each location to work more closely with the communities, supporting them in making decisions for themselves. *"The Locality Enablers and I meet with the Leader and a County Member monthly. We have broken down some of the barriers. It stops being about whose role is it. In a Unitary authority the function sits within one organisation, and although we aren't a Unitary, we want to create that unity across the three tiers of local government and this approach leads to the ability to do more,"* she explains.

This year, aided by the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, is one of celebration after Covid and Brexit, with each tier playing its part in the planned events alongside partners. Another thing to celebrate is the impressive haul of wins from the iESE Transformation Awards 2022, which both

Which awards did South Staffs win?

iESE UK COUNCIL OF THE YEAR 2022

The judges were impressed with South Staffordshire's community enablement, giving communities the right tools and amenities to grow and develop themselves. The new Codsall Community Hub has been imperative to creating a hive for activity, a place for the Council and its partners across all sectors to integrate into a modern, energy efficient working environment fit for the future. Localities+ has created the roles of Locality Enablers and continued to develop the way the Council connects more effectively across the organisation and into their communities. The early adoption of data insight is truly embedded in the design and delivery of their services.

WORKING TOGETHER: GOLD WINNER

Nearly 15 years ago South Staffordshire District Council led on the development of a localities model, developed primarily with the intention of getting closer to communities through the use of better intelligence and engagement. More recently the Council rebranded the model to Localities+, introducing new governance arrangements, creating the roles of Locality Enablers, and have continued to develop and improve their ways of working to connect more effectively across the organisation and into their communities.

ASSET MANAGEMENT AND REGENERATION: GOLD WINNER

The Council redeveloped its headquarters taking a commercial approach which was cost-neutral to the taxpayer with new revenue income offsetting the £10 million construction cost. The Codsall Community Hub is now a modern, energy-efficient working environment, with 25 partners creating a hive of activity, ranging from the café to library, nursery, GP surgery plus a plethora of voluntary sector organisations and businesses.

TWO CERTIFICATES OF EXCELLENCE:

1) Local Plan Consultation

South Staffordshire Council is rightly proud of its one team, one council, customer-focused approach. The delivery of its recent Local Plan consultation embodies this and has seen elected members and officers working together to provide a multi-service, multi-platform (both digital and in person) customer-focused approach. This entry demonstrated its commitment to working together to develop and build on skills, enabling the delivery of a successful communications campaign.

2) Workplace Health and Wellbeing Programme

Few organisations will have seen a global pandemic as an opportunity, but a need to support team members as they moved to homeworking led to a transformation in people strategy at South Staffordshire Council, which took the opportunity to take their staff workforce and wellbeing support to the next level. This saw investment in a new dynamic evidence-based people and wellbeing strategy and innovative employment practices to support the workforce, while laying the foundation for a permanent hybrid agile/office-based workforce.



Pictured: South Staffordshire staff with Dave Heywood (front centre).

One of the elements of the awards submissions praised by the iESE judges was the long and continuing history South Staffordshire has of working closely across the three tiers of County, District and Parish to deliver outcomes for residents. Locality profiles, splitting the district into five geographical areas, have been in place since 2008 and intelligence and data is gathered and shared by partners to shape and inform services. In 2014, discussions began on how the partners could collectively address some of the big issues for the district. By using the data and partner intelligence from the localities, five key priority areas were identified, and the Locality Commissioning Partnership was formed.

"We decided to break the district into five localities based around the parliamentary and County boundaries, so it complemented existing structures, but also stayed true to the Ward and Parish boundaries," Heywood explained, *"We did it to improve communication and relationships and start to build up data and intelligence that would inform how we deliver. It took some time to bed in but has now become part of the council's DNA."*

One recent example is how South Staffordshire has been working with Cannock Chase District Council to understand how the community of Huntington in South

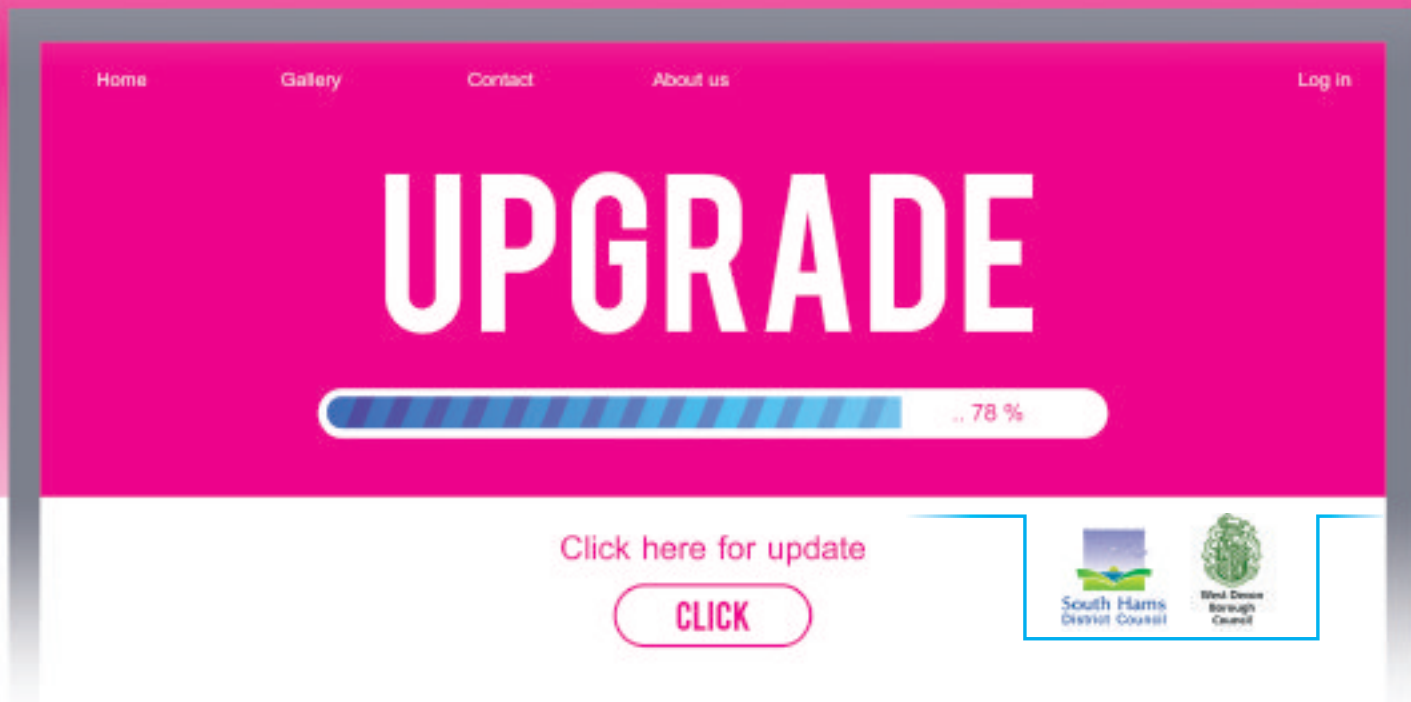
Heywood and Smith are clearly overjoyed by: *"It was a fabulous surprise to win UK Council of the Year, we didn't see it coming so it was a fantastic recognition,"* says Heywood. The staff had a cake made and gathered in the Hub to say thank you to Heywood for being the Chief Executive who got the council into the winner's books, but he's modest about this: *"It is everyone's win, and we are all extremely proud,"* he concludes.

• For more information about the iESE Awards, please go to: www.iESE.org.uk/project/the-public-sector-transformation-awards/



About South Staffordshire

- South Staffordshire is a local government district in Staffordshire. The district lies to the North and West of the West Midlands County, bordering Shropshire to the West and Worcestershire to the South.
- South Staffordshire is a rural district with a population of 111,900.
- It consists of 27 villages and there is no central town.
- South Staffordshire District Council runs 16 frontline services.
- It has 49 Elected Members and a workforce of 306 employees (159 full-time).
- The Chief Executive is Dave Heywood, and the Leader is Councillor Roger Lees, who took over as Leader in August 2021 following the death of long-standing Leader Brian Edwards MBE.



Software creates backdrop for further innovation at SHWD

Investment in Netcall's Liberty Create platform has paid dividends for South Hams and West Devon with 90 processes already brought into the system, creating monetary savings and the backdrop for further innovation. Here we look at the ongoing project which saw the organisations crowned Best Transformation Team at the iESE Transformation awards 2022.

South Hams District and West Devon Borough (SHWD) have been shared service partners since 2007 and are no strangers to innovation. Ever-increasing financial challenges saw them embark on a £7.8m transformational change programme in 2014, known as Transform 2018 (T18), designed to enable the two organisations to become financially sustainable with a payback period of just under three years.

At this point, the organisations realised it was no longer efficient to have separate ICT systems, administration teams and their own management structures, or the best way to serve their customers efficiently. Under the new model, locality managers were recruited and given the training and resources required to undertake 30-plus tasks previously undertaken by specialist officers. In addition, SHWD created a behavioural framework with iESE to allow them to recruit according to behaviours rather than experience. This process, according to Steve Mullineaux, Director, Customer Service Delivery at SHWD, is the bedrock of where the councils are

today with a change culture of "always looking to improve and do things better".

Until recently there were still some issues caused by different back-end systems and siloed processes being managed differently which continued to impact efficiency, resulting in system delays and manual workarounds. Software procured at the start of T18 "talked a good talk" but did not match the organisations ambitions: "Our ideas were three-to-four years ahead of what we were finding the market would support," explained Jim Davis, Customer Improvement Manager at SHWD.

"When we did T18 there was an element that was IT related but the systems available at the time were not customer focused and were essentially either back-office systems for functions like revs and bens that providers were adapting into front-end systems, or you had website providers trying to make their system do a bit more on the back-end, but they were all trying to adapt their existing technology," Mullineaux added.

As a result, SHWD started to imagine what utopia

might look like, including asking services what they needed to become fully digital and identifying pain points and barriers. It found technology transformation would be essential to drive change forward. After a process of scrutiny, SHWD invested in Netcall's Liberty Create low-code platform, which has already allowed it to transform 90 customer contact processes in 18 months – such as making a graffiti, lost dog or public toilet report – as well as creating new processes for burden's arising out of the pandemic.

The first thing the team did when Liberty Create was rolled out on 21 May 2020 was to build an application for the discretionary grant for small and micro businesses affected by the pandemic. This was live and taking submissions by 27 May, which it estimates saved more than £450,000 alone. "It is quick to develop processes but it is also quick to iterate processes so you can be bolder in what you roll out, knowing if there are things that need correcting the following day you can just update the process," explained Mike Ward, Head of IT at SHWD.

Since then, processes for additional new requirements have been developed, including for issuing payments to hosts of Ukrainian refugees and to distribute one-off fuel payments. "If we went to a traditional provider of these services they would give you a quote and so on, but we have a team skilled up and you give them the requirements and they can have a prototype in a few days which we can see and test. It gives us miles more flexibility and saves us money, I would recommend Liberty Create to other councils without a doubt," added Mullineaux. Importantly, it also enables tweaks to be rapidly made to reflect any differences between the two Councils' services, which are not all identical.

SHWD had already undertaken process redesign when undergoing earlier transformation work. Although they process mapped each task to take advantage of the new functionality the software provided, Davis explained that the aim is not to save a few minutes here and there by making processes leaner, what they are aiming to do is make the whole system more efficient. "Officers in the past have tried to solve problems by developing different ways to manage and prioritise tasks, like using Outlook inboxes. It means wasting time, double handling, and more time spent managing work than doing work. We now keep all the management within Liberty for processes. This saves far more time than a theoretical few minutes on a process map somewhere," he explained.

SHWD is moving away from unsolicited email or email as a first point of contact, since if a customer can email, they can fill out a web form. The system now automatically indexes email replies too, minimising delays and failure demands, with advisors getting instant visibility of an enquiry. This has removed the work of two full-time equivalent roles, with further savings expected in the future.

An online general enquiry process is also in place, aimed at cutting the numbers of phone and email enquiries by routing customers to the right option. This means a non-completed process is a good

thing, with 75 per cent being able to self-serve. Customers are also able to say how they found the service – giving both a rating and written feedback. "When you are trying to design the best processes, it is from a certain point of view and it is not until it meets the customer that you get that feedback," said Davis, "We had someone who said it would be handy to have a copy of their application for their records. The system creates a PDF so all we had to do was create an extra action which emailed that PDF automatically back to the customer if they checked a box."

While they have made great progress, Davis and Ward stress this is just the start: "This is step one and us laying the groundwork. There is a lot of untapped potential in the system. We have bigger plans that are less Netcall-orientated and less dependent on the system, but the system is the enabler for it, it gives us the data we need to do the smart stuff we have planned," said Davis.

This includes bringing revenue and benefits into the system, creating a legal case management system, and rolling out the system so locality officers can access the platform outside. They will continue to focus on transformation needs, both for customer-facing and back-office activities, prioritising areas where failure demand of any type is high. One of the reasons SHWD chose Liberty Create over other

platforms is because it gives access to real-time management data. "You can constantly see how the system is performing, the throughput of the service requests and transactions and the individual performance and it all falls out the back of the system without a great deal of effort as real time information. The potential it gives us for informed decision making is enormous," explained Ward.

The main benefits of low-code, they say, are speed and cost-savings coupled with being able to design a solution to fit your service, rather than changing your service to fit a system. It has developed a Customer Relationship Management system, for example, which automatically de-duplicates records: "What we can do is ask services, what do you need in a system to deliver, rather than saying we have a system that could do that if we move this around," Davis added.

They are converts, with Ward explaining that they plan to train more staff to do more complex things such as integrations and to make Liberty Create the development platform of choice: "I have worked in local authority since the nineties and I haven't seen anything as good as this in the speed of development," he concluded.

• **Read a case study of SHWD here:**
<https://iese.org.uk/downloads/case-study-behavioural-framework-for-change/>

GREEN AGENDA



District 'punches above weight' in green credentials

South Cambridgeshire District Council has received a stamp of recognition for its green credentials with a Silver win in the Green Public Service category at the iESE Transformation Awards 2022.

As a small district council, South Cambridgeshire was recognised as punching above its weight on climate. Its initiative 'Being Green to our Core' is one of the Council's four priority areas in its business plan, which highlights ten high-level green actions to be delivered across its operations. Being Green to our Core is guided by the South Cambridgeshire's Zero Carbon Strategy and the Doubling Nature Strategy, both of which take a three-fold approach of: leading by example in the Council's own estate and operations, using the Council's direct influence through policies and, lastly, working with partners both within the district and in the wider

geography, including developers, businesses, communities and central government to urge and support them to play their part.

The Silver-winning submission impressed the judges with its wide-ranging approaches to tackling climate change. Highlights of the Council's green approach, include:

- **Greening South Cambridgeshire Hall** - the Council's headquarters is nearing completion of a £1.8M energy efficiency retrofit to include a ground source heat pump, solar carport, upgraded lighting and other elements. The package will reduce the

building's primary energy demand by at least 56 per cent and halve carbon emissions. As electricity is decarbonised, the building's emissions should drop by 75 per cent of previous levels by 2030 and 90 per cent by 2050.

- **Pioneering electric bin lorries** - as lead authority for the Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service, the Council was one of the first in the UK to adopt a fully electric refuse collection vehicle in 2020. Two more are due to come into service shortly, and the Council is also developing a solar farm to power the lorries. Its shared waste depot is already partly powered by solar.
- **Zero Carbon Communities Grant** - since launching in 2019, £314,415 has been allocated to 51 different community groups to support carbon reduction projects, including setting up E-Bike schemes, installing infra-red heating panels in community buildings, holding sustainable food festivals, tree planting, energy efficient lighting and waste reduction. The programme also provides free energy surveys for community buildings and holds monthly community networking sessions and an annual Climate and Environment fortnight of events.
- **Energy efficiency in housing** - the Council has installed solar PV on 1,110 of its 5,300 homes and was an early adopter of heat pumps, installing them to 293 houses in off-gas areas and providing external insulation to 870 solid wall properties.

Commenting on the win, Councillor Pippa Heylings, Chair of South Cambridgeshire District Council's Climate and Environment Advisory Committee, said: "We're very honoured to receive this recognition for our work in building a greener public service for our residents. Like many councils, we are transforming our operations to meet the challenges of the climate and nature emergency, both nationally and locally. Our 'Being Green to our Core' strategy is at the heart of this transformation and is driving a radical restructure of our Council and how we deliver its services."



Pictured: Cllr Lesley Dyball, Cllr Diane Esler, Eliza Ecclestone and Cllr Peter Fleming.

How 'to do a Sevenoaks'



Sevenoaks District Council has been engaged in a programme of change for the last ten years, making changes to services and staff culture in a bid to keep balancing its books in the absence of central government funding. Here we look at how it has achieved this transformation and at its most recent iESE award win.

When Sevenoaks Leader Councillor Peter Fleming talks through a whistlestop tour of the last ten years he describes it as: *"How they got from point A to point B without imploding"*. The journey started when the organisation realised it was facing cuts in direct Government support and took measures to become self-sufficient: *"When I got elected in 1999, that year our net revenue spend was £16m and about half came from the Government and half from the Council Tax payer. Fast forward to last year, our revenue budget was £15m and none was in direct Government support,"* Cllr Fleming explains.

When other local government leaders and officers seek advice on 'how to do a Sevenoaks' Cllr Fleming confesses nobody really wants to know the truth of how the organisation cut a third of its net revenue spend between 2010 and 2011: *"I get the sense they have put their fingers in their ears and are waiting for the magic bit,"* he says.

There was no magic, however, just a hard look at the Council's services over the course of two years, which cut spending but also sought to improve the service offered. Taking the example of a minibus service for the elderly, which had been costing £500,000 a year to run, the Council asked users what they thought of the service. *"It transpired that it picked people up on a day they didn't want to be picked up, at a time that was inconvenient for them, took them to a place they didn't really want to go to and they either had too long or too little time to do what they needed to do,"* Cllr Fleming explains. After a year, the service was stopped with no complaints and users were redirected into other local services and those offered by the voluntary sector: *"That gave us the confidence to look at how you don't just stop services but reshape and re-provision them,"* he adds.

After this came the introduction of a ten-year rolling budget and twenty-year financial plan which allowed the Council to stop taking short-term decisions. They also removed departments holding onto money at year end, changing inter-departmental relationships. A hike in diesel one year left a hole in the budget for in-house services like refuse collections but the housing department manager offered unneeded budget to meet the shortfall: *"I don't think there are many councils where that would happen. We have a mature model where departments ask for the money when they need it, rather than asking in advance of need,"* he explains.

Additionally, the Council started investing in property, and set about making a cultural change of how members and officers worked together, with Sevenoaks District Council being the first public sector organisation to be awarded the prestigious Platinum Investors in People Award in 2016 – an accolade it has retained since. *"It is about challenging people but also investing in people, listening to them and taking them on the journey with us. I don't think we would have been able to do what we have done if we hadn't taken members and officers with us and changed our attitude to risk as an organisation,"* he adds.

A win for the community

Sevenoaks District Council received a Bronze award at the iESE Transformation Awards 2022 in the Community Focus category, recognising the innovative way it supported a new voluntary organisation called Care For Our Community, started by Sevenoaks resident Eliza Ecclestone at the start of the pandemic.

Ecclestone had the idea for Care For Our Community, a matching service to link volunteers with those needing help, just before the first lockdown. She approached Cllr Fleming who gave encouragement and put a team in place to assist. Ecclestone set up a social media page and started to spread the word. Within 30 minutes there were 200 volunteers, in 24-hours there were 1,000 volunteers and 1,500 by day two. These were divided by parish with a lead volunteer for each parish and they quickly set about putting leaflets through every door in the district about Care For Our Community.

"Cllr Fleming is a very innovative leader and so I knew he would be interested in helping and the Council Chief Executive, Pav Rameval, leads with a can-do approach. The fact that we were busy finding out who needed help and who was prepared to help meant the Council could focus on what the help might look like from its perspective," Ecclestone explained.

She added that the Council's involvement was essential due to the volume of volunteers and safeguarding and health and safety issues. Since 1,500 volunteers could not be DBS checked quickly, and because volunteers were not entering homes and children were not involved, Sevenoaks set up a system to check volunteers against the electoral register before posting them a numbered badge. It also spoke with organisations such as the police

and supermarkets to gain recognition of the badge.

Ecclestone was awarded the special Chairman's award at the recent iESE Awards but said she saw herself as a representative of people across the country who had set up similar schemes: *"Although I felt able to set this up and run it for the short term, it was never something I could maintain. Nobody knew who I was or what Care For Our Community was so having the Council putting their name to it and supporting it was huge and clearing the way of difficulties and being innovative was key really,"* she adds.

The initiative expanded to include the charities West Kent Mind and Age UK (Sevenoaks & Tonbridge) which helped deliver a telephone briefing service called Telepal for people who were lonely and suffering from the effects of isolation. Although the Council is no longer involved in Care For Our Community the initiative is still running and is currently matching hosts and other offers of help to Ukrainian refugees. Other initiatives such as the Sevenoaks Larder, for those struggling to access Food Banks, also born out of Care For Our Community are still in existence. The Council is keen to keep links with new voluntary organisations and build on the community empowerment Covid has fostered.

Jenny Godfrey, Community Projects and Funding Officer at Sevenoaks District Council who worked on the team linking with Care For Our Community, says: *"We have always been good at partnering with the voluntary sector but this was on a whole new level because it is wasn't just with the more established groups but also with new community groups that have emerged and grown from the pandemic. We don't want to lose that because they have met a need and the need, although in some cases evolved, is still there."*

Godfrey explained the Council is now looking to emphasise community empowerment in its Community Plan. It has also appointed a Community Mobilisation Officer, a new post with a remit of developing the Community Plan and enriching residents' lives through community work. *"We don't want to lose this energy and spirit of the volunteers and the fact that we are working so well together. One of the things we have taken from the pandemic is that we are a Council with a difference – we have a can-do attitude but for us to respond in the way we did we had to do things you would never normally do. That has carried on and it has inspired more innovation,"* Godfrey concludes.