



High Peak Community Housing

Simplifying support for peak performance

Viewpoint

“High Peak Community Housing employs 175 staff and operates from three locations. Whilst the organisation operates as a separate entity, ICT support is provided by High Peak Borough Council.”

Bernadette Staden
ICT Support Manager



Based in the Derbyshire Peak District, High Peak Community Housing manages, maintains and improves over 4,000 homes owned by High Peak Borough Council. It has a well-established reputation for providing affordable homes that are designed to meet the needs of a diverse range of individuals. High Peak Community Housing employs 175 staff and operates from three locations. Whilst the organisation operates as a separate entity, ICT support is provided by High Peak Borough Council.

The adoption of a Citrix access infrastructure and Wyse thin computing solution with the guidance and support of Novus has transformed the organisation's IT infrastructure. It has enabled the IT team to provide a feature rich working environment to all users that has improved productivity, simplified day-to-day ICT support and achieved significant financial savings.

Taking action

As High Peak Borough Council's ICT Support Manager, Bernadette Staden is responsible for the management of the entire ICT infrastructure. “Our internal ICT team of 12 ensures that all of the Borough Council and High Peak Community Housing employees have appropriate and reliable access to the applications they require to deliver an efficient and high quality service to members of the community” she says. “We provide extensive server support to over 470 staff across multiple locations, including approximately 90 ICT users within High Peak Community Housing.”

“With applications installed on individual PCs that were themselves becoming dated, supporting users was becoming increasingly difficult and time consuming.”

Use of IT had grown steadily since Staden joined the organisation in 1979 and by 1999, the ICT infrastructure consisted of file and print servers on a Novell Platform and desktop PCs running Windows 3.1 and '95 at each office location. Prior to adopting Citrix and Wyse thin clients, users accessed numerous departmental applications running on their PCs. High Peak Community Housing uses a bespoke housing system called Anite.

Continued...

"With applications installed on individual PCs that were themselves becoming dated, supporting users was becoming increasingly difficult and time consuming" Staden comments. "Hardware repairs were consuming the majority of our time, with support staff on site for as much as a day. This prevented us from implementing necessary technology rollouts within our expanding organisation."

As the number of users continued to grow within the Borough Council, the management knew they needed a cost effective way of refreshing the Council's technology without spending too much money and using the old PCs. Staden says: "We were introduced to Novus Group (a Wyse Technology reseller) through another housing association. Novus helped us trial Citrix through our PCs with six users in one department for 6 months. The conclusion from the pilot was to extend Citrix wherever we needed any upgrades on a departmental basis." The extended implementation began in April 2000. "By the end of 2000, 30 staff were using Citrix" says Staden. "Over time we've increased that to about 180 users."

"Within a week, we had implemented and tested the system and it was ready for staff to use."

Conclusion

"We can now roll out new software for High Peak Community Housing staff once, instead of 90 times. Whilst before it could take weeks to implement new software, it now only takes a day."

In 2004 High Peak Community Housing became a separate entity from the Borough Council. Staden comments: "They had a requirement for new technology. We knew that the housing application, Anite, would run on Citrix, so it was a perfect opportunity to upgrade High Peak Community Housing's system entirely to Citrix and thin client devices. Based on our previous experience of implementing Citrix and Wyse thin clients, we knew that this was the best approach. It would have taken far too long to upgrade and replace with new PCs and we would have had all of the usual PC support issues going forward."

"The whole deployment was very quick, from consultation and installation of 3 new Citrix servers to the roll out of almost 80 Wyse 3000 series thin clients" says Staden. "Within a week, we had implemented and tested the system and it was ready for staff to use."

Achieving Objectives

The new infrastructure has created significant operational and financial benefits for High Peak Community Housing and since the initial implementation all employees have greeted it positively. Staden comments: "The key driver for adopting the technology had been the need to simplify our infrastructure, with low maintenance, low total cost of ownership and easy management priorities."

"Implementing the technology throughout High Peak Community Housing has had an incredibly positive impact on the way we can operate on a daily basis" comments Staden. "Prior to using Citrix and Wyse we typically received 70 support calls per month from High Peak Community Housing staff. Over the last three months we've had fewer than 10 per month." Dramatic cost savings have also been achieved. "We have estimated that implementing 15 thin clients each year instead of new PCs saves us £15,000 per annum. This is the saving in cost of outlay as well as reduced support and installation time. In addition, if we didn't have the infrastructure we would have had to take on another dedicated ICT support member that could cost up to £23,000 a year."

Since implementing the Citrix and Wyse thin clients, day-to-day demand by ICT users for first line technical support has diminished so much that the support staff are now able to concentrate on implementing application roll-out significantly more quickly. "We can now roll out new software for High Peak Community Housing staff once, instead of 90 times. Whilst before it could take weeks to implement new software, it now only takes a day."

"Whilst before it could take weeks to implement new software, it now only takes a day."

The High Peak Community Housing infrastructure now includes 3 Citrix servers, approximately 80 Wyse thin clients as well as the housing management, email and file and print servers. Novus has also helped Staden to install Citrix Gateway, enabling people to work from home. "65 High Peak Community Housing and Borough Council staff now access data from home, offering multiple benefits to both them and our team."