

Moving with the times

Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) isn't just saving lives, but improving them too. For its 900 staff, it hopes to build a healthier, happier and more productive place to work. That means having the right IT - and the right providers to support it.

NFRS was formed in 1976 and operates 24 fire stations across the county. Of its 900 employees, 700 are firefighters, (450 wholtime and 250 retained). In an average year, they can attend anything up to 10,000 incidents. Its proximity to the M1 means a large volume of work is spent on dealing with high speed road traffic accidents.

From its headquarters at Bestwood Country Park in Arnold, NFRS houses most of its support services. This includes an IT department of 16 and an IT service desk overseen by Gavin Harris, the organisation's Head of ICT.

"It's difficult to describe a typical day for us," says Gavin. "The size of our organisation means we can be dealing with any number of IT problems or fulfilment requests and our workload can be unpredictable. Apart from looking after the day-to-day maintenance of IT across 26 sites, including our HQ and training centre, we're also working on the planning and rollout of a number of large and small-scale IT projects and co-ordinating our IT suppliers. We have over 60 different contracts for IT, ranging from accounting software to custom-developed vehicle tracking, so there's quite a bit to keep on top of."



Gareth Harrison, Director at Cosurica, started a relationship with NFRS started 12 years ago, when he served as a consultant on one of their IT projects. At that time, he was working for a large supplier, which was subsequently acquired by BT. After a one year gap, Cosurica continued to support the organisation through the delivery of a number of IT projects and now also provides 3rd line support for Microsoft Exchange Server and associated infrastructure. Cosurica also provided their services to assist with implementation of Microsoft Intune to mobilise staff so they can work off-site more securely.

"The IT helpdesk staff at NFRS are peripatetic, often travelling to up to five different fire stations per day to deal with hardware issues, so we've had to become much more agile in how we work," says Gavin. "Last year we invested in 140 Microsoft Surface Pros, which are much lighter to carry than a laptop and can be used as a tablet, if the staff prefer."



Cosurica implemented the Remote Access and Virtual Private Network (VPN) solution, including 2-factor authentication, to reduce risk of fraud and data loss. Cosurica provided consultancy to ensure that Skype For Business was legally licensed by the organisation, so that it can be used by everyone as an alternative to holding on-site meetings. They also supported and co-ordinated the organisation-wide roll-out of Windows 10.



"As an organisation, our aim is to continually improve our service to the public whilst remaining as efficient as possible," says Gavin. "Budgets are tight and this can often put people and systems under strain. A priority for us is to look at how we can improve productivity by reducing stress in the workplace and providing healthier working environments. Shared offices are often noisy and there are a lot of distractions which affect concentration. In the last couple of years, we've started to see a real culture shift in the public sector. We know people can work much more effectively when they are given the freedom to work from home when they need to. Now we just need the right technologies in place to facilitate this."



NFRS are currently piloting Office 365 and One Drive for Business. This will eventually be rolled out across the organisation and Cosurica has been contracted to manage the migration.

Gavin speaks highly of the company's expertise:

"We continue to use Cosurica because of the personalised care we receive. They know the organisation really well and have gained the kind of background knowledge that would take another provider months or even years to learn. They're highly responsive and adaptable and that's just what we need, especially when it comes to making tactical changes that have to be implemented quickly."

Over the next few years, NFRS will be moving towards the cloud for most of its applications. "As a team we are looking to become more self-sufficient but we don't have the in-house skill set just yet to manage everything that comes with the cloud. Cosurica's knowledge will help us do that and they have agreed to help train our staff."

Gavin sees the next few years also taking NFRS towards more structure and automation. "The business world is changing because of technology and we need to keep pace with that. As a public sector organisation, we can't afford to get left behind."



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