

PSS overhaul IT to meet the increased challenges of the social care sector

CLIENT:	PSS
SECTOR:	Charity & Social Enterprise Headquartered
COST CATEGORIES	Communications, Office Cost, Utilities, IT Infrastructure

Expense Reduction Analysts (ERA) delivered a result that saw PSS increase the resilience and availability of systems and improving service levels, but one that also saved 29% on the budget for such service.

THE CLIENT

PSS is a national charity and social enterprise headquartered in Liverpool that supports people in need. Since its foundation in 1919 it has developed some of the best known names in community support including Age Concern, the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Legal Aid. Today, with over 400 staff in teams spread across 28 locations in the UK, PSS sits alongside Local Government and NHS services plugging the gaps and providing 'on the ground' support for a wide array of people.

THE CHALLENGE

ERA Consultant, Andrew Robertson, had been working with the Finance Director, Sharon Edwards, and the PSS team across several cost areas including communications, utilities, office costs and property, when an important new need arose. As part of its strategic planning, PSS identified that it needed to upgrade and update their IT systems and services as a key enabler to improving their operational effectiveness and efficiency.

"With NHS and Local Government budgets being squeezed it is essential that PSS is highly efficient and seen to deliver clear value for money to our clients. Making best use of IT is critical to achieving these objectives and we identified that an overhaul of current systems was essential," said Lesley Dixon, Chief Executive.

The first phase of change was to upgrade and update current ICT platforms, network operating systems, and hardware to secure and improve current service provision and also to reduce current exposure and risks of system or equipment failure.



"We were also keen to make sure that we shaped our IT staffing appropriately to the new environment, with the right mix of IT staff and skills delivered appropriately from internal staff and external IT service providers. We felt that ERA would be able to help us in this regard. The financial results were also very exceptionally good, not only had ERA delivered a result that would see us increase the resilience and availability of our systems and service levels, but one that would save us 29% on our budget for these services."

SHARON EDWARDS
FINANCE DIRECTOR, PSS

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THE SOLUTION

An initial study undertaken by a recommended IT Solutions vendor had identified a couple of potential options and budgets for replacing existing IT infrastructures, including moving to a fully 'cloud hosted' service and a hybrid of on-premise and cloud hosted IT infrastructures and solutions. PSS felt it was essential to bring in independent expertise to sense check that initial study and run a competitive procurement exercise to ensure value for money and to help PSS select the best fit option. They asked ERA to assist them.

"As a registered charity it is important that PSS follows best practice in procurement and makes sure that it achieves the best possible value. We felt that using ITSS would provide us with the necessary mix of procurement best practice, independent IT expertise and market knowledge," said Sharon Edwards, Finance Director at PSS.

Once the scope, objectives, expected outcomes, timeframes and project management processes were agreed, Michael Hully from ITSS reviewed the initial study on IT infrastructure and worked with PSS and its current IT providers to produce a detailed Situation Report. This report helped PSS confirm the direction of travel, which was to move to a fully outsourced, cloud hosted platform with Microsoft 365 email and provided the detail needed to take the PSS requirements to tender. It also identified a number of important omissions from the previous work and existing IT risks that were previously hidden.

"The Situation Report was itself an important deliverable for us. We were able to use it to provide the Board of Trustees with a clear view of where we were going and why, how much it might cost and how long it might take," said Lesley. Using their procurement expertise and market knowledge, ITSS ran a formal procurement exercise for Hosted IT infrastructure, Wired Network and peripheral refresh, Microsoft Exchange to Microsoft 365 transition services, IT management and support services and MPLS Wide Area network replacement.

The bid evaluations and recommendations for shortlisted suppliers were then presented in a Recommendations Report to the PSS Steering Group. "The Recommendations Report delivered a detailed analysis that clearly showed how the potential providers had scored against the weighted scorecard we had agreed with ERA and delivered clear analysis of supplier capability, solution profiles and solution costs.

The rigor of the procurement process was extremely high and we would not have been able to achieve anything as professional with our own resources," said Lesley Dixon. "The financial results were also exceptionally good, not only

had ERA delivered a result that would see us increase the resilience and availability of our systems and improving service levels, but one that would save us 29% on our budget for these services," noted Sharon Edwards.

"Michael Hully is also assisting us to analyse the IT staffing function and realign it to become more business focused, transferring some support functions to the new vendor," continued Sharon.

Following references and a presentation by the preferred supplier, PSS agreed to move to contract. The contractual process was completed with the assistance of a specialist IT solicitor, but during that process ITSS was able to offer commercial advice and practical support to the directors of PSS.

"The contractual process was complex and during that time Michael's grounded real-world experience, diplomacy and negotiating skills proved invaluable to achieving a final agreement that worked for us and our chosen supplier. We also asked ERA to help project manage the implementation," concluded Lesley.

ITSS is continuing to assist PSS with on going IT supplier management, project audit and strategic CIO services.

