



Summary

iomart modernises the workplace and transforms the user experience for Harrow Council.

Benefits:

- 2100 staff able to work remotely using new devices
- Key workers can continue to deliver vital public services
- Councillors able to collaborate and meet virtually
- IT department viewed as an enabler



Transformation Plans

Harrow Council provides a range of vital local authority services to more than a quarter of a million people across North West London.

Traditionally Harrow relied on outsourcing suppliers to support the technology infrastructure behind the delivery of its public services. The council had an ageing Citrix estate, a Windows 7 compute environment and was reliant on-premise Exchange, SharePoint and Lync platforms. This had become complex to manage and did not support the local authority's ambition to provide a more modern user experience for its staff and citizens.

In 2019, iomart's consultancy team (formerly known as SystemsUp) was engaged to carry out a discovery and design exercise to modernise and transform the way Harrow delivered IT. The team had assessed the client and server infrastructure, applications, management tools and security to create a technology roadmap for a move to Windows 10 and a complete refresh of the devices and collaboration systems used by council staff.

A set of high level discovery documents, including full costings and detailed roadmaps were developed for the following:

- Design and build of a Microsoft 365 environment
- Deployment of Microsoft 365, including Surface devices and migration
- Design and build of an Azure cloud environment

Harrow approved budget for the transformation to go ahead and iomart was selected to deliver it following a procurement exercise. Planning was underway for the pilot project when the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

An Unprecedented Situation

It was this dual challenge, of helping the council adapt to the government-enforced lockdown with an IT estate that could not yet support the urgent need for staff to work remotely, that Ben Goward faced when he arrived to take up the post of Director of Information Communication Technology at the beginning of April 2020. The majority of employees were still having to travel to the civic centre and work from physical desktop machines connected to the corporate network.

The reliance on these older systems was also affecting the ability of the council's key workers such as care staff, legal advisers and planners, to deliver critical public services. As case conferences for vulnerable children, court cases involving the borough's citizens, and the council's own meetings had to move online, there was a feeling that Harrow was behind the curve. The inability to be fully mobile and agile in the way they were working left staff feeling that the IT was creating an extra barrier in what was already an incredibly challenging situation.

"It was a perfect storm," Ben Goward reflects. "We had to change direction quickly to stem the tide."

Deploying New Technology Fast

He decided that the transformation project needed to become a reality, and fast, so the iomart consultancy team was brought back in to help.

"We had to be completely agile and tactical," says Ben. "We set ourselves an incredibly ambitious target of deploying a new Surface device for every member of staff within six months which is unprecedented in my experience."

The council was using approximately 300 different applications to deliver its services across a variety of use cases and Ben was just getting to know a completely new and very small but capable in-house team.

iomart's consultants became part of the crisis strategy team. They packaged every application, and supplied and built the Microsoft Surface devices, installing Windows 10 and Microsoft 365 on each one. The council's email was migrated to Exchange Online, Teams was introduced as the collaboration platform, with SharePoint Online, Skype for Business and OneDrive for Business implemented across the IT estate. Intune and Systems Center Configuration Manager (SCCM) gave Ben and his team the ability to manage and secure everything centrally.

Emergency deployment clinics were set up in the civic offices, manned by iomart consultants wearing PPE and working under full social distancing rules. Week by week, all 2100 members of staff, as well as the elected members of the council, were invited in to pick up their new device and spend over an hour being taught how to use it properly.

Positive Outcomes

This dramatic change had immediate and positive consequences. "Staff had a pretty indifferent attitude to IT until we did this," says Ben. "What they got from us and iomart was a real hands-on, caring experience. It was a massively successful project and has changed the perception of IT within Harrow. Whereas before IT was seen as a thorn in everyone's side, it's now seen as a positive force and a key enabler for the delivery of our vital public services."

There were Covid outbreaks during the deployment, which led to further tightening of procedures but every challenge faced was met by working in partnership. "We still had our insourcing deadline to meet and the team from iomart helped create such a knowledge base within my team that meant we could meet it," Ben explains.

Through the work that has been done, Harrow Council has been able to transform the way it delivers technology and its users are enjoying a much better experience through enhanced mobility, productivity and collaboration.

"We had a number of challenges during the deployment, as you always expect, but I felt that the iomart team were standing right by me and that meant a lot," says Ben. "It would have been completely impossible to have delivered what we delivered with Covid and everything else, without the support we had from them."

