

Places for People saved over £730,000 in capital costs and £101,000 p.a. in recurring costs, proving the business case for a Citrix Virtual Desktop Environment



- **Increased employee efficiency has boosted customer service excellence, meeting core business objective**
- **Carbon footprint reduced by nearly 400 CO2 tonnes, delivering on Government drive**

Places for People Group is one of the largest property management, development and regeneration companies in the UK. It employs over 5,000 people and has assets worth more than £3 billion.

A nationwide organisation, it umbrellas 16 companies, which together own or manage over 143,000 homes across the country. It also builds and manages socially and commercially driven shopping centres, leisure facilities and schools.

Much of its business is the provision of social housing. Additionally, it offers maintenance and specialist care and support services to enable people to live independently in their own home.

The challenge: Supporting an increasingly mobile workforce

Since 2000, Places for People has grown rapidly through a combination of acquisition and organic growth. This expansion has introduced significant challenges for the IT department.

At the point of growth, the IT team was supporting 1,500 desktop PCs, in multiple locations across the country.

It now supports over 3,000 employees, who sit in four distinct mobile workforces: head office, housing management, skilled labour and care work; each with different IT provision and support needs.

With a 100% desktop-based IT infrastructure, staff had no option but to travel to a Places for People office each time they needed to access data or update information.

This periphery need to travel impacted productivity and efficiency given the transitory nature of their roles. It also led to potential delays in service and the possibility of lost information.

Aging PC infrastructure

However, this was not the only issue. The aging PC infrastructure required a lot of time, resource and budget to monitor, manage and minimise downtime.

Therefore, when the decision was made to rationalise from 35 to 21 office sites, it was seen as the natural time to review the IT infrastructure and look at technologies that could better support the evolving way that the business and its employees were – or could work.

“It was imperative that we had an IT system that would support our mobile workforce. With over a quarter of a million customers and nearly 143,000 properties to support around the country, they don’t have the time, nor, with the advent of virtual desktops, should they have the need to travel to use technology.”

Jon Thomson, Head of IM&T at Places for People

Satellite sites

There were also over 200 smaller ‘scheme’ sites to be factored into the build. This would not be a simple process.

The new IT infrastructure had to comply with stringent industry regulations. It also had to ensure that everyone within Places for People could meet the number one business objective – the delivery of outstanding customer service.

With these criteria in mind, Places for People recognised that a virtual desktop environment would best meet the business, operational and employee needs of the company.

“We worked with our IT partner, Open Reality* to establish the best virtual environment for us and it was, and has long since proven to be, a solution based on Citrix XenDesktop and XenApp,”

Jon Thomson, Head of IM&T at Places for People

(*BrightCloud is the services division of Open Reality)

The solution: a fully virtual Citrix XenDesktop environment with BYOD policy

Places for People worked with us as its long-term IT partner to draw up a proof of concept.

A pilot proved the feasibility and a full Citrix XenDesktop and XenApp infrastructure, based on Citrix XenDesktop 4.0, was designed and delivered.

Due to its success, this environment was subsequently upgraded to XenDesktop 5.6 with XenApp 6.5.

Citrix XenDesktop allows the IT team to manage the desktop provision to its employees in a very controlled, quick and efficient manner. Citrix XenApp 6.5 enables the IT team to provision additional virtual desktops and virtual applications for its employees quickly, flexibly and securely across the organisations 200 sites.

Recognising the different needs of each business unit, BrightCloud ensured that the virtual desktop was tailored specifically to meet the needs of each.

Results: £730,000 capital and support costs saved, CO2 emissions cut by 396 tonnes



The delivered environment was made up of 3,000 seats and saw the physical estate of 1,200 PCs replaced with 1,200 Thin Clients, with 70% of staff accessing a Virtual Desktop.

This natural migration resulted in an initial capital cost saving of £552,565 and will deliver significant annual savings moving forward.

The annual reduction in power and cooling costs will be over £123,600, increasing as energy prices continue to soar. Annual support costs have been slashed by nearly £55,000 a year to £5,600 and there is also likely to be significant tax relief based on an annual carbon reduction of 370 tonnes.

Results: Customer service excellence delivered by a more efficient and satisfied workforce

The Citrix XenDesktop solution provides enhanced IT capabilities to each of Places for People's employees, enabling them to be more efficient and productive and therefore delivering the best possible service to tenants and customers.

“The initial Citrix XenDesktop pilot delivered a clear business case for Places for People to implement a virtual desktop strategy. It demonstrated the benefits that mobile technology can deliver to customer-facing employees.”

Jon Thomson, Head of IM&T at Places for People

Major benefits for staff and customers

One major change is the ability the operations and service staff now have to log issues whilst on the go, increasing the number of visits they can make and the speed at which follow-up actions can be made.

The skilled labour teams can focus on maintenance and repairs, accessing the Places for People servers through a netbook device, logging enquiries and hours, as required.

Disaster recovery

Implementing Citrix XenDesktop technologies has also improved business continuity and disaster recovery capabilities. In the case that there is an outage, the IT team can quickly redirect virtual machines to a back-up, ensuring almost seamless disaster recovery.

“The feedback from the field makes it clear that technology was now aiding and not hindering employees ability to work efficiently. In the two years since introducing the initial virtual IT infrastructure, customer satisfaction levels have never been higher.”

Jon Thomson, Head of IM&T at Places for People

Result: Ensuring regulatory compliance and corporate social responsibility

Places for People operates in a very tightly regulated industry. The mobile devices carried by the operational teams carry highly confidential information relating to each tenant. This needs to be kept secure under the stipulations of the Data Protection Act.

Citrix XenDesktop technology ensures that all data remains secure when on the access device and as it is transferred from device to server.

Social responsibility

Places for People sets corporate responsibility (CR) high on its agenda and Citrix helps it meet its objectives.

The Citrix infrastructure has dramatically reduced its overall carbon footprint and energy consumption by nearly 400 tonnes per year, a significant saving for an organisation that is accountable to regulatory bodies and a corporate responsibility policy.

As a result of its diligence, Places for People has BITC Platinum status.

“The Citrix Virtual Desktop environment has dramatically reduced the amount of energy needed to host, manage and maintain our IT infrastructure. This time and money can now be ploughed into the development of the services we deliver and the quality of service that supports these.”

The Citrix VDI platform has been well received across the organisation and the entire project with BrightCloud has been an outstanding success.”

Jon Thomson, Head of IM&T at Places for People

For Further Information

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