

CASE STUDY

Creating a firm foundation for a new permanent CIO

Taking the reins at a crucial time

Wessex Water needed an interim CIO to run their IT department while they looked for a new permanent IT director. We have a good track record of helping Wessex Water when the stakes are high, and this was one such moment. So they asked us to help and one of our partners took up the reins for nine months.

The business was undergoing a great deal of change during this time. They needed a safe pair of hands to make sure nothing went wrong. And a dynamic pair of hands too, for they were also looking to modernise their information services to meet their greater strategic needs for the future, whilst making sure that the IT department was connected to the business as well as possible.

“The challenge was to help both our internal IS colleagues and the wider business, through an internal transformation process, at the same time as developing a strategic investment programme. The Berkeley Partnership provided us with an almost unique blend of tactical capability, strategic vision and the ability to work seamlessly with our staff to prepare the business for a new direction in information services. It is this blend of skills, and deep knowledge of our business developed over time, that we keep coming back to.”

David Elliott, Director of Environment and Assets

A broad brief

Our brief was to hold the fort; make sure the IT department was doing the right things in terms of the transformational programmes in flight or about to be kicked off; and talk to the business to understand what they would like to see from an IT service of the future. We were to explore the options available that could deliver the robust and modern business processes that they wanted, while remaining low cost to serve. Finally, it was key to our role to help Wessex Water recruit the right person for the permanent position.

Focusing on supporting the business

We focused on reconnecting the IT function to the business. This took in the short and medium term requirements of Wessex Water and the longer term strategy. Our aim was to really understand how the IT department could help the core business of providing clean water and sewage services as well support transformation plans.

It was about making sure we understood what the directors and senior managers had on their plate and how the IT team could best provide a service to support the business. We looked at what made up a quality IT service for the internal customers – from user help through to the development and delivery of IT projects for the business.

Building the IT team’s enthusiasm

At the same time, we invested in building the IT team’s enthusiasm – running specific training/change days focused on what was going to make the IT department



“It was a real privilege for me to be asked by Wessex to step into one of their senior management positions at such an exciting time for the business. The passion the people have for the company is infectious, and this drives you to achieve the most you can alongside them, be that changes to the daily ways of working, or delivery of the complex programmes of change.”

Richard Marsden
Partner



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a great place to work and the IT team more customer-focused. We identified good changes to make and encouraged change champions to cascade this through the department. We wanted to get on the front foot in terms of harnessing energy, enthusiasm and ideas and then putting some of that into action.

Drawing on Wessex Water's internal expertise

We looked at the processes, defining new approaches and methodologies for how we should deliver the IT service. To help us, we combined Berkeley's project know-how and expertise with Wessex Water's internal excellence, notably the engineering department's experience in planning and managing big complex projects.

Building trust

Our aim was to move away from ad hoc approaches to a more systematic application of best practice – bringing greater rigour and consistency to IT projects and service delivery, to increase efficiency and effectiveness and above all, build trust with the business.

Trust lies at the heart of this story. We had to quickly gain the trust of the 65 people working in the IT department, to help them see and believe that they could make improvements. And we needed to gain the trust of the broader business, giving them good reasons to believe that the IT department was truly there to support their day-to-day activities and longer-term ambitions.

Planning and managing projects

Various major IT projects were underway or up and coming, for example work and asset management, e-billing and smart metering. As a result there were times when we were deeply involved in IT planning and project management.

Improving project governance

We put in place a much better governance process around how to plan and approve investment for the project portfolio, enabling greater control over scheduling and resourcing change in the right way.

Keeping things running smoothly

All the while, we were working with the team to ensure the day-to-day work of the IT department ran smoothly so that internal customers received a high quality service. This ranged from providing help and support to users through to renegotiating the company's contract with Microsoft for all of its software.

Recruiting the new CIO

We helped recruit the new head of IT. We shared our understanding of what the business and department needed, drawing on our nine-month stint at the helm, and worked with HR to recruit the right person for the job – someone, for example, who could work closely with people to further develop the IT team and build relationships with the business, while also having the necessary big-project experience.

Providing the bridge

Through the nine months that we headed up the IT department we provided an all-important bridge across to their new permanent CIO. During that time we kept things running smoothly. There were no major incidents, the environment was very stable. Moreover we worked with the IT team and the broader business to make improvements and introduce greater understanding and clarity, which in turn helped to increase trust.

Making improvements

We brought new ways of working into the IT team which were well received. And we introduced a lot of transparency for the business around what IT were capable of and what and how they would deliver their services. As a result this strengthened connections between IT and the business.

Preparing the ground

We also helped to select the right permanent head. Moreover, they were able to come into a department where stronger foundations and connections with the business had been laid.

We're proud to say we proved to be the safe and dynamic pair of hands Wessex Water were looking for at a crucial time for the business.