

Robust Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity for CHS Group



CHS was founded more than eighty years ago, in response to a desperate need for affordable homes in Cambridge. Alarmed by the squalid housing conditions many of the town's poorest families lived in and the growing council waiting lists in the period following the First World War, it was decided to form a Housing Society.

In 2010, to reflect its diverse activities and changing times the Cambridge Housing Society rebranded to the CHS Group. The Group incorporates CHS Homes (which manages properties) and CHS People (which provides personal care, support and community investment services).

A subsidiary, Cambridge and County Developments, builds new affordable homes for the Group and provides additional opportunities to create social benefits for residents. CHS Group is a charitable housing association operating under Industrial and Provident Society charitable rules.

CHS Homes provides and manages about 2500 homes for affordable rent, and about 280 shared ownership or fixed equity homes for purchase, covering 6 Local authority areas across Cambridgeshire and north Essex.

Investing for the future

About a year ago, an internal audit flagged up the need for a more robust disaster recovery and business continuity solution. Coincidentally, the Group's internal IT department had also raised its concerns over the Group's existing data backup processes which were limited to overnight backups, stored at the same centralised location.

Recognising that these outmoded procedures could seriously affect the Group's ability to continue operations in the event of a catastrophic failure, the Group Board sanctioned the implementation of a fully resilient disaster recovery and business continuity solution.

"We approached a number of organisations that had specialised expertise in the design, development and implementation of disaster recovery and business continuity solutions, and decided to partner with EACS," explained Michael Cloete, CHS Groups' ICT Manager.

"Although several companies appeared capable of meeting our requirements, we felt that EACS fully understood the unique requirements and budget limitations of a registered charity. EACS didn't try and sell us solutions and services that we didn't need; they put together a cost-effective proposal that would achieve both our immediate and long term objectives."

The required expertise

Founded in 1994, Cambridgeshire based EACS provides a valued IT partnership to organisations of all sizes throughout the UK. Services range from ad-hoc consultancy, support and training through to fully managed or hosted IT systems but EACS has particular expertise in the design, development, implementation and support of complex disaster recovery and business continuity solutions based around virtualisation technologies.

EACS' proposal was based around 2 NetApp virtual storage solutions with mirrored disaster recovery at a separate location. EACS has been providing the NetApp range of storage and data management solutions since 2007 and has trained and accredited consultants with experience of deploying NetApp in a variety of industries. These capabilities were further enhanced in 2010 when EACS was recognised as a NetApp Authorised Professional Services Partner

"EACS has worked with us to design, develop, implement and support a solution that ensures we can continue to provide our customers with the services that they need."

Michael Cloete
ICT Manager
CHS Group

“EACS’s superb relationships with the solution manufacturers means that if we ever encounter major issues, they have the resources to keep our operations up and running.”

Michael Cloete
ICT Manager
CHS Group



(APSP) – the highest level of competency in professional service delivery for NetApp technologies.

Improved utilisation and reduced costs

The original proposal originally included VMware virtualisation software but, following further discussions with CHS Group, this was replaced with Microsoft Hyper-V Server 2008 R2 - a stand-alone product that provides a reliable and optimised virtualisation solution that would allow CHS Group to improve server utilisation and reduce costs. “Microsoft offers preferred pricing to registered charities and we were anxious to maximise our IT investment,” continued Michael Cloete. “Additionally, our internal IT team has in-depth Microsoft knowledge and it made sense to build on our existing skill sets.”

Taking the opportunity to further upgrade and enhance its existing infrastructure, CHS Group also asked EACS to include proposals to upgrade the Active Directory 2003 to 2008, upgrade the Group to Microsoft Exchange 2010, rebuild the existing Citrix farm, assist with necessary file migrations and phase out the existing Cisco security solution by replacing it with Microsoft’s Threat Management Gateway.

Sound financial sense

“We could certainly have undertaken some of this work internally,” said Michael Cloete. “However, we recognised that we did not have the internal expertise to address the core elements of the project and it simply made sound financial and technical

sense to partner with the experts”.

Close Cooperation

Working closely with CHS Group’s ICT team, EACS established a remote mirror site in one of the Group’s other locations to provide the required disaster recovery and business continuity capabilities. “As a group, we were keen to maintain and improve our carbon footprint,” continued Michael Cloete. “Virtualisation would reduce our power consumption and give us greatly improved storage and archive capabilities.”

Of the 21 servers from the original server farm, several had reached the end of their useful life and were retired. Three were redeployed to the new disaster recovery site and the remainder are currently being phased out, eventually either to be used within the Group or donated to other charitable organisations.

Another factor in CHS Group’s decision to partner with EACS was the need for ongoing support and help desk services. “Support was a core consideration for us, as we required sufficient levels of knowledge transfer to enable us to become self-managing in some aspects of the system,” said Michael Cloete.

Substantial benefits and peace of mind

“EACS has provided the precise levels of knowledge transfer and training that we need so that we can address some routine issues internally, safe in the knowledge that the EACS support and help desk team are just a phone call away. EACS’s superb relationships with

the solution manufacturers also mean that if we ever encounter major issues, they have the resources to keep our operations up and running.”

The entire project is now virtually completed and CHS Group is already realising substantial benefits. Peace of mind comes from the knowledge that the Group now has an efficient and effective disaster recovery and business continuity solution in place which ensures little or no data loss, even in the event of a complete system failure.

“In such an event, our solution will allow key staff and stakeholders to carry on working,” added Michael Cloete. “With the 7,000 people living in our affordable homes and a further 2,000 who rely on our community care, support and investment services, it is vital for the community that we are always available. EACS has worked with us to design, develop, implement and support a solution that ensures we can continue to provide our customers with the services that they need.”



Platinum Partner
Professional Services Certified



Microsoft Partner
Gold Virtualization

For more information, please contact our sales team:

EACS Limited
7 Ramsay Court
Hinchingbrooke Business Park
HUNTINGDON
Cambridgeshire PE29 6FY

T: 0845 3379 146
F: 0845 3379 147
E: information@eacs.com



www.eacs.com