Cohesity Helps Extinguish Legacy Backup and Recovery Issues

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

INDUSTRY
Public Sector / Emergency Services

USE CASE
Backup and Recovery, Long-Term Retention and Archival

SOLUTION PARTNERS
Nutanix

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1974, West Midlands Fire Service is the UK's second largest metropolitan fire brigade, covering the whole of the county with a team of 1,887 employees. Comprised of 15 councillors from seven different councils, it encompasses 38 fire stations, one headquarters location, and a central command control centre providing services for 2.8 million people.

CHALLENGES

West Midlands Fire Service needed to update its IT strategy and identify a solution partner that embraced next-generation backup and recovery technology to guarantee future scalability. One of the biggest challenges for the Service was strict constraints on IT spending. As a government-funded service, budgets had been further slashed and it was seeking a backup solution to fit within narrow limitations.

Backups were a long process. As the legacy system was so old, the IT teams would need to regularly check to verify data had been backed up – and the process took hours or even days to complete. The unreliability was putting unnecessary strain on the team and affecting team morale. West Midlands Fire Service managed data in numerous locations across multiple storage platforms, including on-premises, and on tape in its disaster recovery centre located 11 miles from its headquarters.

"The ease-of-use in implementing Cohesity's software-defined solution demonstrated we had made the best choice for modern backup and recovery. Once we were up and running, Cohesity changed my entire perception of data management, and we realised we could leverage Cohesity for much more than just backup and recovery. Now we see Cohesity is the solution we need to drive our digital transformation process and deliver a better service in the West Midlands for years to come."

ADRIAN SCOYNE,
Principal Infrastructure Engineer

The Service is required to retain and archive data for long periods of time. Protecting data used by response vehicles was crucial, since it would be considered mission-critical to the Service in order to respond and mobilise staff for call-outs, as well as leveraging data for future call-outs and education. The requirement to meet GDPR mandates was particularly important, as was the ability to demonstrate how secondary data is managed at the organisation to meet further in-house compliance standards. One of the non-negotiable aspects for the new solution was the speed of data recovery in light of an

outage. As such, the IT team needed to ensure all data from all sources would be backed up and protected with a verified backup on every occasion.

West Midlands Fire Service looked for the following requirements in a secondary data solution:

- Hyperconverged solution with seamless AHV integration to the cloud
- Mutable backups, with crypto-virus protection
- Immutable snapshots with protection and ransomware defence
- Automated global indexing for instant search to locate any VM, file, or object

SOLUTION

As the model and management for each fire service is unique depending on its local government, the team turned to West Sussex NHS services who were already using Cohesity and understood similar pressures and challenges with regard to budget and management of volumes of sensitive data.

The Service had already purchased Nutanix to replace its existing virtualised primary storage environment with hyperconverged infrastructure. It now required a backup and recovery solution to seamlessly integrate with its existing primary storage strategy and yield similar benefits. After evaluating several providers, the Service chose Cohesity for its data management capabilities that extend beyond just backup and recovery, and its existing support for Nutanix's AHV environment that runs its enterprise applications.

RESULTS

Since deployment, the speed of backup and recovery has been one of the most significant changes for the Service, freeing up much of the day-to-day administration burden. "A server backup took five minutes with Cohesity, which fundamentally changed the way the team approached backups. In fact, my team didn't believe it was possible at first, and ran the backup again as we were sure there'd been some mistake. But there hadn't – it really was that fast," explains Adrian Scoyne.

West Midlands Fire Service is still in the process of migrating data from its on-premises sites, but the benefits of Cohesity have been immediate. Its former legacy environment involved a laborious cycle of work. Team members would physically collect 48 backup tapes, drive to the off-site data centre where the tapes are stored, and exchange them for recycled tapes to store the next round of backup data. By selecting Cohesity, the Service has completely transformed its secondary data management, eliminating this outdated process, saving both time and money, and delivering a more agile and immediate level of data recovery.

Cohesity's ability for automated global indexing to power Google-like search, and the sheer speed of backups and recovery times transformed operations. "It does feel a bit like a weight has been lifted off our shoulders," admits Scoyne. "Cohesity's indexing engine, which allows the team to search and identify the necessary files more quickly than the legacy provider, created tremendous efficiency. It's enabled a file level restore, rather than requiring a whole backup to be restored, allowing the Service to overcome issues like file deletion, corruption, and overwrite problems immediately."

The Service will soon investigate additional Cohesity capabilities, including test/dev. The ROI from deploying backup and recovery alone is significant and the organisation looks forward to gaining additional value from other Cohesity use cases.

West Midlands Fire Service achieved the following benefits with Cohesity:

- Savings of 360 staff-hours per year, equivalent to over nine weeks of a full-time engineer
- Mission-critical data is now protected on an hourly basis, reducing risk exposure and improving internal SLAs
- An intuitive hyperconverged data management platform to manage global backup and recovery from one location
- Global variable length deduplication provides significant storage savings