Our responsibility is to safeguard the critical information that is shared into and out of the organisation. Clearswift enables us to do this without impacting on the effectiveness of our essential daily operations.

Overview
Covering an area of 283 square kilometres, Warwick District Council (WDC) serves a population of 134,000 residents from its headquarters in Leamington Spa. A further ten key satellite sites are covered by the WDC IT network. Within the organisation itself, the IT infrastructure serves around 600 employees who send and receive millions of emails each year in an environment that calls for both sensitivity and visibility.

Desktop Services Manager, Lee Millest says that finding the right balance between securing critical information and maintaining an open, transparent public service can be challenging. “Although about 90 per cent of the business we transact is in the public domain, we still have to be extremely careful about how we handle and manage information,” he says. “As a District Council, we don’t deal with social services or education, for example, but we do nonetheless handle personal information and we do now have to ensure that all that we do is compliant with the Public Services Network (PSN).”

The PSN is a programme designed by the Government to create one network for all UK public sector organisations. Millest comments: “PSN compliance is one of the biggest challenges that we face right now combined with agility of services. We have to ensure PSN compliance in all that they do with our IT operations including security.”

Like all other UK local authorities, WDC has to abide by the Government Connect Secure Extranet (GCSx) Code of Compliance (CoCo), which defines the minimum security standards and procedures with which authorities must comply. Millest says that Clearswift’s solutions, which WDC has been using since 1998, form part of the Council’s submissions to demonstrate that appropriate action is being taken to secure networks and information flow. “Clearswift’s products are very RFC compliant,” says Millest, “that helps us to demonstrate that we’re adhering to Government security standards.” In addition, Millest says that routing options on Clearswift’s SECURE Email Gateway has helped solve some issues with GCSx routing as well as protecting the organisation’s Exchange infrastructure. “It gives us a lot of flexibility,” he says.
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About Clearswift
Clearswift is trusted by organizations globally to protect their critical information, giving them the freedom to securely collaborate and drive business growth. Our unique technology supports a straightforward and ‘adaptive’ data loss prevention solution, avoiding the risk of business interruption and enabling organizations to have 100% visibility of their critical information 100% of the time.

Clearswift operates world-wide, having regional headquarters in Europe, Asia Pacific and the United States. Clearswift has a partner network of more than 900 resellers across the globe.

More information is available at www.clearswift.com

Along with other public sector organisations, cost-cutting and ensuring the effectiveness of operations remains a high priority. WDC recently announced that over the next two to three years it will be moving to a smaller head office in Leamington Spa. They are planning to have a smaller building to cut costs and there will be a demand for increased agility across the workforce.

Millest says “WDC, like other businesses today is not a 9 – 5 organisation. We have a lot of people out and about in the community, some are home-based and others are out and about on an ad-hoc basis. We have a policy in place to deal with this agile workforce and it includes critical information protection using Clearswift solutions across both web & email.”

Email and web applications are used widely throughout the WDC, with many departments offering online transactional services to the public. “We would struggle to function without email and web these days,” says Millest.

“Not only do we receive mails from the public via our web site, but we also rely on it to communicate with contractors and other organisations.” Millest says that, for many areas of the council, such as the Housing Department, email is absolutely critical.

“If our email system ever went down, all of our services would be severely affected. We need to be sure we have a robust solution in place to safeguard the interfaces and mitigate risk, otherwise we’d be in big trouble.”

We would be naive as an organisation to ignore social media as a communication channel. The evolution of web applications and services plus ubiquitous use of social media has injected new risks into the mix. “A lot of our systems have become web-based, they’re similar to hosted systems so we have to be absolutely certain we’re providing appropriate and secure access to users.” WDC runs two Clearswift SECURE Web Gateways, which Millest says ensures web performance stays at a high level. To ensure control over appropriate use of social media they set limits on amount of time employees can use social networks for personal reasons via Clearswift’s SECURE Web Gateway.

Millest remarks: “And this works well for us. We are able to adapt these controls as we need to, as there are certain departments who need to use social channels for Council business, e.g. the media team.” Millest continues: “We would be naive as an organisation to ignore social media as a communication channel.”

Internal threats across the organisation, whether malicious or down to human error are also concerns for the WDC IT team. Millest admits:

“It is an issue and I am more worried about accidental breaches than a malicious attack. Anything that we can do to prevent the accidental incidents is essential as it is tremendously difficult to manage against that – again it comes back to the balance of operational effectiveness, continuous collaboration and security.” However it is not their biggest risk factor, as Millest attests:

“We have a .Gov domain and there is a tremendous responsibility that comes with that, and keeping that secure is of critical importance. We are focused on securing the perimeter and keeping threats out at source so that they cannot get in to start with.”

Flexible, granular policies and ease of administration have been key elements of WDC’s ongoing choice of Clearswift solutions. “As a public body, we don’t have massive resources,” says Millest, “we need a solution that’s both easy to implement and robust.”

Granular solutions allow WDC to serve its diverse business needs. “The Planning department has different needs to Environmental Health, which in turn has different needs to other departments, so we need to apply different rules to different departments where necessary. But we need it to be quick and easy; we work in a continually collaborative environment, we can’t slow people down,” says Millest.

Millest says that while many organisations of a similar size would turn to outsourced, hosted solutions to meet these requirements, Clearswift’s software allows WDC to keep everything in house. “We have total control over what we can access, but because it’s quick and easy to implement and maintain, it really helps us to keep admin costs down.” Millest says the Web and Email solutions allow granular administration, which means different functions within the IT department can access level-appropriate administration features. “Users can pick up the phone and the first person they talk to will be able to deal with their day-to-day email issues right away in 99 per cent of cases,” says Millest. “Clearswift’s solutions are easy to manage and they largely look after themselves, which is a big plus for us; so we as an IT department can focus on being a strategic asset to the organisation, rather than simply the day to day maintenance of systems.”

Lee concludes; “Our business is running the district, in order to do this we connect and collaborate with central government, local government and the public. And we are constantly looking at how we get the balance right between operational effectiveness vs value for money vs compliance. Our responsibility is to safeguard the critical information that is shared into and out of the organisation. Clearswift enables us to do this without impacting on the effectiveness of our essential daily operations.”