

ON SITE DESTRUCTION OF SENSITIVE DATA GIVES EXTRA REASSURANCE

The public sector's data handling practices, from storage through to destruction, has come under intense scrutiny as an increasing number of data security breaches have been reported in the media. Philip Elliott, Head of Accommodation and Finance, Home Office Pay and Pensions Service (HOPPS) explains how the data destruction service provided by Shred-it Limited is of such a high standard that he became a key advocate in adding Shred-it onto the Home Office North's approved supplier list.

The Home Office Pay and Pensions Service (HOPPS) process the wages for 85,000 staff each month and administer the Civil Service Pension Scheme for 81,000 members. This large operation generates a great deal of confidential waste as personal information, such as banking and salary details, is handled.

When data losses from public sector organisations began appearing in the news on a regular basis, the Civil Service, including my team, began to reassess our systems and scrutinise how our confidential waste was handled and disposed.

My team is responsible for the physical security of the building, which includes responsibility for confidential waste. We produce large quantities of confidential waste and it is my job to ensure that it is disposed of responsibly.

Before the current waste disposal contract with Shred-it, we had a contract with a supplier who removed the waste

from our site before destroying it. There were several issues with this arrangement: once the waste left our site we had no proof of what happened to it, such as a certificate of destruction, and no data trail to give us peace of mind that the waste had been destroyed securely. Although we had no reason to distrust our approved

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supplier, we did not have peace of mind that the data had been disposed of securely after it left our premises.

The other issue with our incumbent supplier was that they only disposed of paper waste; we had to dispose of cardboard and media material separately. This meant that we had to stockpile disks containing sensitive data and destroy them periodically at a special facility, adding a considerable cost to our

confidential waste disposal system.

In February 2007, HOPPS relocated to a new building, which created a need to clear out and dispose of out of date personal information.

We conducted a mini procurement exercise to source a company who could help us dispose of this confidential waste securely. This is when we discovered Shred-it.

Shred-it provided references from other government agencies, which gave us peace of mind that other offices with sensitive material were happy with Shred-it's services. More importantly, Shred-it destroys the confidential data on site, which our contractor at the time did not. We could witness the data being destroyed and receive a Certificate of Destruction after each visit, providing us with an audit trail for our confidential material.

In 2008, with data lapses appearing in the press regularly, we began to focus on the issue, reassessing where





our confidential waste was going. We decided that we wanted an on site shredding company such as Shred-it, which had already impressed us with the level of service offered, to take over the destruction and removal of all the department's confidential waste.

While undertaking another one-off job for the department, Shred-it submitted a speculative bid for the weekly removal contract. The bid was of a similar cost to our regular supplier, however we knew through experience that the service was far superior. The contract value was not significant; we had attempted a proper procurement process to gain three bids for the contract, however were informed that we could go single tender.

Then, in June 2008, the Home Office changed its facilities management suppliers and this placed an emphasis on using central services rather than local contracts. Shred-it was not on the approved list, although the company had a contract with the Home Office South supplier. We had therefore reached a farcical situation where I had found a contractor with a superior service to our current arrangement but could not employ it.

It took me around six months to get Shred-it added to the Home Office



North approved suppliers list – I knew that the company could do the job well and I wanted the contract in place. In November 2008 Shred-it signed the contract with the facilities management company for the Home Office North.

The switch between suppliers has been very smooth. We had 17 receptacles (consoles) for office waste with our previous contractor, which Shred-it replaced with their own locked security consoles. We agreed with Shred-it that we would start with these 17 consoles but that Shred-it would monitor our usage and adjust the number of consoles if needed. After two months we'll get a clearer picture of how much waste is going through the consoles and be able to determine the best pricing structure.

Staff use the consoles in the same way that they did with our previous contractor, however Shred-it will accept treasury tags and digital media as well as cardboard.

We are gradually working through the stockpile of disks that we had stored for destruction and staff are now able to dispose of entire files without having to remove the cardboard covers.

Currently Shred-it services our department weekly; however we have the option to call for extra collections whenever we need to.

We have established a relationship with our Shred-it Customer Service Representative and the company keeps in touch regularly via a dedicated Account Manager. All Shred-it staff are security

cleared and we are able to check the records at any time. They wear distinct uniforms and are extremely professional when servicing our offices. This contrasts to the service provided by our previous contractor who sent different staff at varying times, which prevented us from building a relationship with them over the two years we worked with them.

From my research, there seems to be a lack of on site shredding companies with Shred-it's scope. Shred-it has countrywide coverage and will undertake the entire process of shredding and removal itself to ensure the highest level of security, rather than sub-contract the work, which means that the bare minimum of personnel come into contact with the waste.

Put simply, Shred-it provides us with reassurance. Reassurance that all of our confidential waste is being destroyed responsibly, on site, and by a company that is reliable and accountable. ■



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