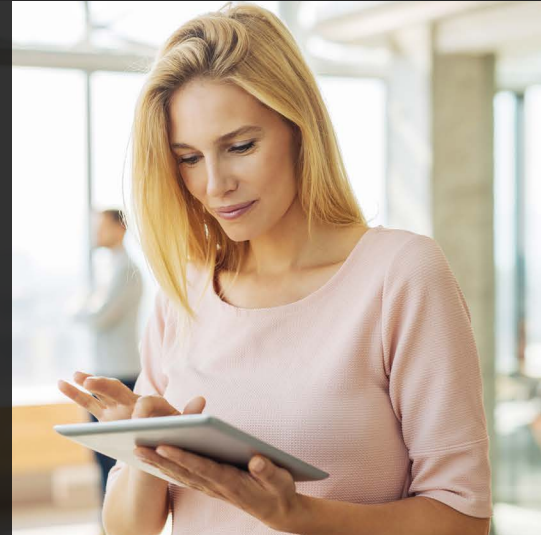**WHITEPAPER**

LEVERAGING THE POWER OF MICROSOFT UC IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

How unified communications can bring today's 'consumer experience' to residents and staff.

It's a challenging time for local government. Thanks to changes in technology, people have developed high expectations of service providers – including local councils. Communities want higher quality, timely services. Ratepayers want to see their rates being spent effectively and they want to see transparency in decision-making.

Running alongside these heightened expectations are major financial constraints. Ratepayers might want a whole lot more from local government, but they don't want to pay higher rates to enable those expectations to be met. Similarly, federal and state funding for local government is also scarce. So, increasingly, local governments have to do more with less.

And that's not easy given the local government sector is responsible for a huge range of services. According to the AON Australian Local Government Risk Report[1], these diverse services include planning and building permits, child care, sport and recreational facilities, the provision of parks and gardens, as well as dealing with rates and resident concerns.

This means councils need solutions that will help them engage with the local community while helping them be more productive and efficient in the process.

To this end, many councils have begun investing in digital capabilities. Local government leaders recognise that for communication to improve, disparate phone systems need to be replaced with user-friendly, interactive platforms that bring together voice, email, audio, instant chat and social media, so that residents can engage with local councils in their preferred way.

In this whitepaper, we explore challenges faced by councils today and consider how the right unified communications (UC) solution is key to helping local government do more with less.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING COUNCILS TODAY IS FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

According to the Australian Government Productivity Commission's[2] most recent Productivity Review, there are more than 560 local governments operating in Australia. Over the past 30 years, the role of local government has changed from being simply providers of property-related services to increased involvement in the provision of social services, including health awareness, recreational and sporting facilities, and tourism.

But while local government today needs to provide more by way of services, they don't necessarily have the an increased revenue by which to provide them. The Productivity Review points out that local government has three sources of revenue: property rates; fees and charges on the goods and services local governments provide; and grants from state and federal government or the private sector.

Local government can't just raise the rates every year to bring in more money – especially in those areas populated by ageing residents – and they can no longer rely on state and federal government for funding. For example, the indexation of Financial Assistance Grants (federal government funding for local government) was frozen for three financial years up till 2017-18, and, according to the AON Risk Report, this had significant impact on local governments in rural and regional areas of Australia.

1   AON Australian Local Government Risk Report, 2018 - http://www.aon.com.au/australia/insights/articles/2018/2018-risk-report-australian-local-government.jsp
2   Australian Government Productivity Commission, 5 Year Productivity Review, 2017 - https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/productivity-review/report/productivity-review-supporting16.pdf

I.T. FOR THE DYNAMIC BUSINESS

IT'S NOT JUST RATEPAYERS, EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS ARE CHANGING TOO

And it's not just the expectations of residents that local government needs to think about. According to the Productivity Review, local government accounts for approximately 10 percent of public sector employment. This equates to approximately 187,000 people employed by local government in Australia.

Like other sectors, local governments have multi-generations of staff, including Babyboomers, Gen X, Gen Y and the start of Gen Z. These generations have preferred ways of working that employers, including local councils, need to meet.

Millennials, in particular, have different expectations of the workplace, including the ability to work remotely or from home. To attract and keep the best talent, local councils need to meet those expectations. No one wants to spend time administering systems – they want simplified processes so that they can focus on more valuable work.

HOW RAPID TECHNOLOGY CHANGES AND CULTURAL SHIFTS HAVE AFFECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The last few years have seen rapid advances in technology. Local government, like every other organisation, has had to make a decision on digital transformation, the shift to the cloud, and the Internet of Things, among many other changes. This speed of change is unlikely to stop anytime soon.

Councils need to keep up with technological changes, but face specific problems:

- **The difficulty of integrating** recent technology innovations with legacy systems

- **Getting funding for significant technology CAPEX** investments that can support operations into the future while delivering immediate productivity gains.

- **Delivering on the mobility promise** through the cloud, while struggling to find the right technical capability in-house to manage this.

For many councils, this is a whole new way of working. According to the Local Government Digital Maturity Index[3], only 43 percent of the 100 local government authorities surveyed across Australia and New Zealand stated that they have implemented technology for secure collaboration and information-sharing outside the organisation.

GREAT COMMUNICATION IS THE FOUNDATION OF DOING MORE WITH LESS – BUT WHICH SOLUTION IS BEST?

Technology is a key enabler to help councils to do more with less enabling enhanced communication. Where in the past councils have grappled with the complexity of managing different platforms, they can now benefit from simpler, streamlined systems.

For example, a hosted voice solution offers the benefits of flexibility and cost-saving while also providing more timely, personalised experiences to residents.

The challenge for local government is: Which UC solution will best meet their needs?

Most councils are looking to flexible IT models to gain efficiency and enable simpler, faster and engaging community interactions. This means many councils have adopted – or are in the process of adopting – Microsoft 365, a subscription service, leveraging the Office suite and products like Skype for Business, Teams and SharePoint.

If a council has already invested in Microsoft 365, then moving to Microsoft UC seems 'natural'. But there are still important decisions to be made and begin to question;

Which Microsoft UC solution is best for your council?

How will you integrate a contact centre?

Which Microsoft UC solution is best for engaging with your local community?

Most councils beginning their UC transformation journey are looking for flexible IT models which give them the simplicity and flexibility they need for community interaction.

Selecting the right Microsoft UC solutions; whether it be Skype for Business or Microsoft Teams can also be challenging. Councils need to think about the time and resources involved in transforming their current infrastructure, developing a complete UC environment, and then supporting it. They also have to think about the future. For example, an integrated Skype for Business environment might meet a council's UC requirements right now, but down the track Teams might be a better fit. However, having invested in Skype for Business, a local council may not be able to afford to change to Teams.

Unfortunately, with most UC delivery models, councils will need to take that risk. And in a fast changing technology landscape, it's impossible to be 100 percent confident of making the right decision today for tomorrow's needs.

That's where an alternative consumption model comes in.

HOW UC MET A LOCAL COUNCIL'S NEEDS

When Noosa Shire Council de-amalgamated from the Sunshine Coast in 2014, it faced a major challenge. The council had to build and manage a complete network and communications environment for its multiple locations and mobile workforce.

As with other local government bodies, financial sustainability was an issue for Noosa Shire Council. Council leaders wanted something agile and brought Nexon on board to provide and manage a hosted Unified Communications platform with Nexon Absolute, which was at the time based on the Microsoft Lync platform.

The council, with Nexon's assistance, has since migrated from Exchange 2013 to Microsoft Office 365 for email and is now leveraging the power of Microsoft Skype for Business as part of their managed service, at no additional cost. With 407 users on the platform, the council can scale up or down to meet resident and community needs, while accessing new collaboration features as the Microsoft product suite evolves.

"We trusted Nexon's expertise in this space and knew that they were focused on what was important to us," said Justin Thomas, ICT Manager, Corporate Services, Noosa Shire Council. "Nexon takes care of it all for us. They have PABX experience. Unlike some of the others, they are not just an IT company trying to do telephony – they have a much more specific skillset" added Justin Thomas.

'UC AS A SERVICE' – AN ALTERNATIVE CONSUMPTION MODEL

So councils need to invest in digital technology to transform their operations to meet the needs of employees and residents. But they have to do it on a conservative budget, which means investing in the wrong UC solution can be costly, not only in terms of money, but time-consuming as well. So how does a council move forward?

The good news is that these days you don't need to make large CAPEX investments when introducing new technology. UC as a service is a viable option for local councils at this crossroads.

The right managed service partner can help councils implement a UC solution that support their business outcomes - manage, monitor and optimise the UC environment, and integrate the hardware, software, phones, gateways etc – today and well into the future.

By partnering with Nexon, councils don't have to take all the financial risk, we share it. Councils pay for what they use, have the flexibility to scale up or down and can access the evolving benefits of new Microsoft UC solutions as they are released to market.

NEXON ABSOLUTE. THE SHARED FINANCIAL-RISK SOLUTION.

Nexon's aim is to make IT as simple and flexible as possible for customers via Nexon Absolute.

Nexon Absolute is a suite of Microsoft Office 365 complementary services delivered through a managed service. This solution integrates core communication capabilities into a single, easy-to-use platform that includes voicemail, instant messaging, SMS, social media, video, audio and web-conferencing.

It enables councils to increase productivity by leveraging Skype for Business or Microsoft Teams with Office 365 integration to replace existing phone systems. The Virtual Contact Centre is seamlessly integrated into Microsoft UC, offering residents new ways of collaborating with councils via email, web chat and social media, while offering a better end user experience to the staff.

Plus, HD and universal conferencing enables effortless collaboration between geographically dispersed teams, council stakeholders, partners and suppliers.

Delivered on a monthly per-user cost, Nexon's services are set in a disaster recovery framework and built in the cloud. Each customer solution has bespoke configurations and Nexon offers regular reviews to ensure Nexon Absolute continues to meet a customer's evolving needs. As such, Nexon works with clients to determine if the organisation is using all the relevant features and getting the most out of it.

With Nexon, no council needs to be stuck with the same technology. In most instances, there are no major upfront costs or infrastructure investments. And the shared-risk solution offers the flexibility and scalability essential in today's digital economy.

The benefits of partnering with Nexon include:

Flexibility and scalability. A hosted UC solution offers local councils the ability to simply add or change services, while also enabling new locations to be set up quickly, with numbers being ported across.

Agility. There is no end in sight for digital transformation. But as technology advances, local councils can access new UC releases by Microsoft as part of the Nexon offering.

Enhanced productivity and flexibility. Councils can engage with residents and staff wherever they are. Staff can use mobile devices to access the system, so people are no longer office-bound.

A better (internal and external) customer experience. With a hosted UC solution, council employees and residents can communicate and interact with ease through one inbox, which offers email, voice message, instant chat and conference calling. This means increased visibility, so colleagues no longer have to call and wait. And residents do not get passed several times between council staff.

Zero-touch. By partnering with Nexon, there's no need for councils to allocate government resources to manage and maintain infrastructure. Nexon offers full maintenance and training in addition to an easy transition to a completely hosted environment.

Simplified support and management. By moving to a partner who owns the communications platform, councils will eliminate the need to support and maintain ageing infrastructure. This helps councils manage costs, while ensuring ongoing access to skilled and experienced staff.

WHY NEXON?

Technology is driving a change in resident's expectations. Local government must meet those expectations and do more with less. The right unified communications solution is just one part of the answer.

With Nexon, we are by your side to implement, manage and scale, based on your needs. Nexon believes in the power of partnerships. As a strategic partner, we work with local governments to transform their way of interacting with technology so staff can concentrate on what they do best – providing residents with excellent service.

Our shared financial-risk solution – pay-as-you-go and grow – means councils can enjoy the benefits of a flexible solution with no upfront costs.

TRY NEXON ABSOLUTE TODAY

Find out more about how Nexon Absolute can deliver a fully featured UC environment wrapped up in a managed service, shared risk model. Get in touch today or register for a **free, 30-day trial**.

To find out more about Nexon Absolute, call us at **1300 800 000,** email us at **enquiries@nexon.com.au**, or visit **nexon.com.au/nexon-absolute**

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