

It takes an outstanding FM provider to make an impact on the high-profile, demanding world of the Cabinet Office

Organised labour

When the Queen Mother died in March 2002, it was a mournful period for many. But it was a hectic time for the FM department of the Cabinet Office, charged as they were with the state funeral arrangements. But such tasks are just part of the department's remit in helping the prime minister and the government and achieve coordination of policy and operations throughout the Cabinet Office.

State funerals are tense enough, says Christine Zammit, head of FM at the Cabinet Office. But the day of the Queen Mother's funeral was also the first day that Zammit's new, single FM service provider officially came on stream after a nine-week mobilisation period.

Luckily the day went without a hitch, she says. It was then that she and her team of six knew they were not only managing an FM contract but that they had a solid FM partner as well.

"It became clear to me that here was a service provider who wanted this contract and wanted to work with us."

Professional focus

Since then the partnership with Ecover FM has led to savings of around £6 million annually, through improved service delivery and better management. Where the previous accommodation team was 23-strong, Zammit now has only seven, including herself.

To make such savings in the high-profile, demanding atmosphere of the Cabinet Office requires a professional focus second to none. When something is needed, from the PM down, it is needed right now.

The estate covers around 592,000 sq ft. Buildings range from newly refurbished structures to Grade I listed offices between Trafalgar Square and the Houses of Parliament. In many buildings the contrasts between the old and new are striking. Modern glass and stone architecture dovetails into well-worn marble and rich smelling oak floorboards. >



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THE CABINET OFFICE

CASE STUDY

« Ecovert FM took over staff from six external service providers, including Mitie, Serco and DTZ, as well as from the in-house provision – around 200 people in all. Their work included the more standard tasks such as helpdesk, portering, catering, cleaning and plant provision. But it also included contracts for antique-clock winding and antique-furniture care and upholstery. Items include the original four-foot model statue of Nelson from which the larger iconic statue in Trafalgar Square was fashioned.

Zammit had done a hand-over before, which involved 100 people when she worked at the London Borough of Redbridge. But it was not as intense as this, and there had never before been such a hand-over within the Cabinet Office. A total of 48 subcontractors had to be rolled into one contract management deal.

Two into one

Since day one, she says, the emphasis of the contract has been on partnership. The modest offices of Zammit's Intelligent Client Team and that of Ecovert FM's senior people are on the same floor, with little to tell them apart: "We're almost one organisation."

"That's very important," says Adam Burden, general manager of the Ecovert FM team. "The common theme in everything we do is partnership. For example, we will give joint presentations to people so they see us working together. We won't have people talk only to us and then have us telling them to go talk to the FM client team."

The Ecovert FM staff now numbers just over 315. Around 30 security people have just moved over as well as 21 mail and messenger staff last April. The contract is without doubt the flagship of Ecovert FM, says Burden who himself started at Ecovert FM and the Cabinet Office only in January.

The partnering aspect of the relationship runs deep. Zammit was even consulted by Ecovert FM about what she believed were the essential skills Ecovert FM should be looking for when they hire a new general manager. "Essentially, it's the ability to deliver on the ground," she explains. "The key is to have tight control over day-to-day activities. But also, because it is a partnership, the person needs to be able to take a long-term strategic view of what value for money the Cabinet Office will need in the future."

Strategic thinking

Two examples of strategic thinking are estate management and strategy energy conservation, neither of which was in the original contract but which have now become very important issues.

Ecovert FM is helping on the accommodation and leasing strategy that will see the Cabinet Office move from its current estate of 14 buildings into seven, though still in the Whitehall area.

Around 18 months ago, discussions between Ecovert FM and Zammit's team led to the hire of a full-time energy manager to reduce the department's carbon footprint. In June the Cabinet Office became the government's first department to be given a certificate by the Carbon Trust's energy efficiency accreditation scheme (EEAS), acknowledging its effort to significantly reduce energy consumption. The savings are shared between Ecovert FM and the Cabinet Office.



Partnership is everything, is the message from the Cabinet Office's Christine Zammit and Adam Burden of Ecovert FM

Risk sharing

Such incentives are essential. In general, value for money for one side of the partnership is value for money for the other, explains Zammit. Equally, risk sharing was "carefully negotiated" when the contract was being drawn up in 2001. "We could have had Ecovert FM take a lot more risk from the start, but that would have cost us as a client and would not always have been value for money for us."

Instead, both parties continually and openly discuss risk. It is not something that was frozen in the original contract back in 2001. Examples are how smoking legislation affects workplace habits, new European Union rules on fluorinated greenhouse gases (f-gases) from air-conditioning systems and security arrangements since the 11 September terrorist attacks. The risks, costs and impact were not totally understood back in 2001.

Underpinning the risk management is a gainshare mechanism whereby each party gets back the same percentage of savings as their initial and required investment in a project.

Visible trail

But despite the seamless working environment and continual, open communication, both Zammit and Burden believe that there needs to be a formal and regular set of meetings to discuss key performance indicators (KPIs). "There has to be an auditable monthly trail to assess performance," says Zammit.

Burden agrees: "It's probably one of the few times that we actually sit opposite at a table with our respective teams, facing each other for a discussion. But there has to be a very formal and healthy debate about KPIs. Otherwise, how do you know how well you are doing?"



“The partnership with Ecovert FM has led to savings of around £6 million annually.”

The KPI mechanism measures Ecovert FM’s performance across all disciplines. Performance to date has been of the highest level.

Partnerships are often criticised for being a wishy-washy and politically correct way of working with a major supplier. Even if huge savings can be found, how do the people involved know that they actually have a true partnership?

For Burden it is about people management: “It’s when the client shows willingness to manage in a partnering fashion, rather than managing a piece of paper, a contract.”

That was put to the test during last summer’s floods. A week before parts of Britain were inundated, Burden and Zammit were talking about how to set up an annual test scenario to see how well the FM department could cope in the event of an environmental incident in Whitehall. Both teams were able to successfully test their respective departments on this issue.

Zammit, who works a four-day flexible pattern, believes partnership comes through faith in those you work with: “I need to know that I can be away for a few days and the job will still be done. It’s a win-win situation for everybody.” **FM**

David Arminas is a freelance journalist specialising in facilities management and supply chain issues

FM QUICK FACTS

- **Services provided:** fabric and grounds maintenance; utilities and environment management; reception, cleaning, portering, security, mail and messaging; waste and pest control; legal and property management.
- **Number of Ecovert staff:** 315-plus
- **Ground floor area:** 592,000 sq ft
- **Certifications:** ISO 14001:2000, OHSAS 18001, IIP, EEAS



THE PARTNERS

Adam Burden

- 1998 – Finance manager, housing trust, also looking after building and contract management
- 2000 – Finance manager, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital then finance and operations manager
- 2003 – Area facilities manager, managing a three-school PFI project in east London
- 2004 – General manager for three southeast London police stations PFI projects of Sutton, Bromley and Lewisham
- 2006 – Regional contracts manager for the south of England for the support services division of a large construction company
- 2007 – Ecovert FM, general manager of the Cabinet Office contract

Christine Zammit

- BSc in institutional management from the then London Polytechnic
- Schools catering manager at the north London Borough of Redbridge (Ilford, Wanstead and Woodford);
- Head of FM in charge of 250 staff with a mix of inhouse FM teams and outsourced contracts, “everything from portering and cleaning of public toilets, management of parking enforcement to maintenance of swimming pools and golf courses”, along the way.
- 2001 – joined the Cabinet Office in at start of the contract with Ecovert FM to become FM Intelligent Client Team