

DELIVERING FUTURE-PROOF NETWORKING TO COPE WITH FUTURE DEMANDS

Networking & security



Datacentre



172,000

residents

Increasing demand

for IT services

600

internal users

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (B&DBC), located in North Hampshire, serves a population of 172,000, with the majority living in the town of Basingstoke. Strategically located amongst excellent road, rail and airport networks, its growing population is expected to reach 200,000 by 2029. With more and more residents to serve, ever-increasing demands are being placed on the council's IT infrastructure. Ensuring it's both efficient and fit-for-purpose is absolutely critical when it comes to effectively delivering a wide range of essential services.

The Challenge

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council's core IT infrastructure was beginning to creak under the strain of delivering essential services to a growing population. Its current technology was approaching the natural end of its lifecycle and a radical network infrastructure overhaul was needed for it to confidently face the expected rise in demand for essential IT services.

The Council operates a five-year technology refresh cycle and initially approached its current network infrastructure provider to investigate upgrading the system to achieve the increased performance it needed. It learned that upgrading the current system would have been prohibitively expensive, so it decided to investigate offerings from alternative providers using, where appropriate, the Crown Commercial Services pre-tendered framework (RM1054) to run a mini-competition.

Softcat, as one of the suppliers on the framework, was approached with a view to investigating alternative technology providers and recommending a solution that would deliver on both cost and functionality. Armed with a clear understanding of the Council's requirements, Softcat approached multiple providers, assessed the suitability of individual solutions and then submitted a tender that met all of the Council's requirements.

Critical Success Factors

- Identify cost-effective alternative technology providers
- Ensure suitability of replacement technologies
- Guarantee improved performance characteristics of recommended solutions

The Solution

As with any other engagement, Softcat took the time to clearly understand the technology needed to fulfill B&DBC's specific requirements: namely an increase in performance, the capacity to scale the solution to cope with an expected rise in demand for IT services and, of course, a significant reduction in ongoing cost. Ian Southwell, B&DBC IT Support Manager, said, "Through the tender process, Softcat provided a wealth of support information to illustrate the proposed solutions' suitability for the task. This helped ensure that we had a clear understanding of what technologies were on offer, which helped underpin the business case for individual elements of the solution."

B&DBC have performed implementations of a range of HPE technologies that would deliver both improved functionality and capacity in critical areas, as well as significant cost savings:

- Replacement of the existing storage area network (SAN) infrastructure with HPE 3PAR technology, at both the main and disaster recovery (DR) sites – which would help to protect existing IT assets while the overall solution was being implemented.
- A full network refresh to replace the existing Edge Switching infrastructure.
- A complete swap out of the Core Switching technology, which was nearing the end of its support phase. Replaced with HPE 5900s, utilising Intelligent Resilient Framework (IRF) stacking technology.
- The installation of an improved Network Management solution in the form of HPE's Intelligent Management Center (IMC) and server upgrade delivering 10 Gigabit capacity.
- Replacement of the existing Wireless infrastructure with Aruba.

Throughout the implementations, Softcat collaborated closely with the Infrastructure Team to ensure every phase ran smoothly, with certain elements, such as the Core Switching swap out, being completed ahead of schedule. B&DBC now has in place a network infrastructure that's significantly more powerful, yet will deliver extensive cost savings and simpler network management on an ongoing basis. And that close collaboration continues, with Softcat delivering consultancy services around effective Mobile Device Management (MDM) solutions to enable secure peripheral device access and ongoing software licensing advice.

Solution Highlights

- Thorough appraisal of customer's specific requirements
- Identification of suitable technologies and providers
- Demonstration of improved functionality and capacity to reduce cost
- Extensive network refresh achieved with minimal disruption

The Benefits

The decision to switch providers and transform its network infrastructure has paid significant dividends for B&DBC. Of course, a reduction in costs was a much-desired outcome of the project, but it wasn't the only driving factor. The Infrastructure Team primarily wanted a solution that would deliver the capacity and functionality it required to effectively deliver IT services, yet with Softcat's help it has achieved the extended capabilities it needed and made savings across the board.

Replacing the Network Management solution to a system benefitting from an easy-to-use Graphical User Interface (GUI) has simplified network performance monitoring, achieved operational improvements and eliminated the need for further training within the Infrastructure Team, as the existing skillset was more than adequate.

Storage and network capacity have been significantly improved and performance enhanced with Software Defined Networking (SDN) capabilities simplifying much of the complexity associated with managing the previous system. The new future-proof solution is more reliable, delivers higher performance and can easily scale to cope with expected increases in demand for IT services. The introduction of SDN technologies has also reduced running costs in the long term, as it will largely remove the need for hardware upgrades in the future.

The HPE Edge Switching element of the solution comes with a lifetime warranty, which negates the need for an ongoing maintenance contract, and the whole system is now easier and cheaper to manage. As Ian Southwell was keen to point out, "We've seen a massive improvement in performance with a subsequent

decrease in the management complexity required to operate the system. Our back up facilities are much more robust and backing up essential data can now be achieved much more easily, saving the team time and limiting the impact on our resources."

More secure and reliable access to more users has been achieved through replacing the existing wireless technology and the new Aruba system benefits from the capacity to scale up to meet increased demand further down the line. The 10 gigabit server upgrade has contributed to the overall improvements in the core environment, for the equivalent cost of upgrading the existing system, and delivered performance improvements that were unachievable with a simple upgrade.

Network infrastructure improvements are having a positive impact across the business and externally. B&DBC manages Hart District Council contact centre resources and the new network has facilitated the introduction of a range of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) enhancements. The new telephone system's more secure, numbers can be changed or re-directed almost instantaneously and flexibility has improved across both sites.

"We're confident now that we have a future-proofed network that will continue to deliver performance benefits throughout its lifecycle," said Ian Southwell. "It's scalable, secure and flexible, but most importantly it will help us cope with future demands from more users."

At a Glance

- Network infrastructure refresh delivering increased capacity and functionality
- Reduced operational cost
- More secure wireless access for more users
- Improved SAN and Disaster Recovery capabilities

Why Softcat?

An extensive track record of effective public sector IT procurement, thorough knowledge of the technology landscape and ability to negotiate best value on behalf of its customers were significant factors in B&DBC's decision to bring Softcat on board.

Through carrying out extensive groundwork, Softcat ensured that it had a clear understanding of the customer's unique requirements. It subsequently provided comprehensive technical information and allowed the customer to see for itself the performance that could be achieved with the proposed solution before any decision was made.

Summary

The B&DBC Infrastructure Team needed to transform its existing network if it was to confidently face the challenge of delivering better IT services in the face of increasing demand. Softcat leveraged its wide industry experience to fully understand the customer's needs, source and demonstrate suitable solutions, and ensure long-term cost savings could be achieved alongside significant improvements in the core network environment.