ACCESS TO THE LATEST TELEPHONY FACILITIES FOR COUNCIL STAFF THROUGHOUT LEICESTERSHIRE

Leicestershire County Council has developed a ground-breaking strategy to bring the benefits of IP communications to its staff and the public. With the central system in place, the council, with the help of its supplier, NextiraOne is now concentrating on an exciting phase of expansion to hundreds of its satellite offices.

THE CLIENT

Leicestershire County Council (LCC) delivers a range of public services to the citizens of this area of Central England such as Highways, Transportation, Social Services, Education, Trading Standards, Libraries and Museums.

Its County Hall headquarters is located just outside Leicester and is predominantly an administrative site. Delivery of services is managed through a network of hundreds of satellite offices and facilities around the county. LCC employs around 15,000 people, of which 1900 work at County Hall.

THE CHALLENGE

Due to the imminent withdrawal of technical support for its ageing Siemens ISLX PABX at its County Hall site, LCC needed to make plans for its replacement. Departmental offices, located around the county were not an issue at this stage as they had their own individual PABXs and were not interconnected with the main site.

In November 2002, consultants 4C Strategies proposed a radical 5-year strategy, based on a new VoIP platform and utilising the council's existing LAN infrastructure. One of the crucial components of the strategy was that the new telephony system at County Hall would, over time, provide telephony services to all council sites. This would enable departments to be more flexible and responsive in the way that they deliver their services thereby helping towards delivery of the council's "Better Access to Better Services" strategic initiative.

LCC's tender document attracted interest from 30 suppliers, of which 13 were invited to submit a bid. After final competition with three other vendors, NextiraOne was selected as the chosen supplier in December 2003. Technical Services Manager, Tony Collier, says that, in addition to meeting all of the technological and commercial requirements; "NextiraOne demonstrated a good understanding of local government culture and methodologies and there seemed to be an excellent fit between the two organisations."

WORKING WITH NEXTIRAONE

Andy Roberts, Head of ICT, Leicestershire CC

"This has been an exemplary project, delivered on time and on budget. The professionalism and commitment of the LCC team was matched with positive, innovative action by NextiraOne and Alcatel – right from the top of both organisations. The completion of Phase 3 will mark us as a leader in public sector communications and e-government."

THE SOLUTION

NextiraOne proposed an Alcatel OmniPCX Enterprise solution residing on two IBM Appliance servers, supplemented by the OTUC MyMessaging voicemail application.

Initially an audit of the council's existing LAN was carried out by NextiraOne to ensure its suitability to carry VoIP traffic. The initial audit recommendations were implemented before the first phase of the project commenced.

Implementation was deliberately split into two phases. Initially a 3 month, limited rollout to 100 users within three different departments at County Hall was undertaken. This provided an opportunity to fully test the technology and features, to rectify any issues or problems, to train internal technical staff and to introduce processes and procedures required to maintain and administer the system. Both NextiraOne and Alcatel cooperated fully in trying to ensure that project timescales did not slip. At the end of this phase the latest IP Phones with an XML interface became available and it was decided to switch to these for the main rollout.

An upgrade to LCC's LAN switches was carried out in August 2004, in order to deliver power to the telephones through the use of the recently ratified 802.3af "Power over Ethernet" standard. The second phase of the project began in mid-October following a brief testing period for the new telephones and the latest version of the system's operating system. This was an ambitious 9-week rollout plan to the council's remaining 1800 users. With professional transition support from Siemens, the installation, configuration and implementation of the system together with the on-site user training went "remarkably trouble-free", according to Tony Collier. "The project kept on track through a combination of excellent teamwork between our staff, NextiraOne and Alcatel together with a willingness and commitment from all parties to resolve problems as soon as they arose."

According to Mr Collier, a structured approach to project management was key to the overall success of the project. There was a dedicated full-time Project Manager, Kathleen Gasson who reported to a small Project Board which provided overall control and direction of the project and comprised Tony Collier, two departmental representatives and NextiraOne. This was augmented by a Customer Liaison Group with representatives from all departments within the council which helped with coordination, data gathering and internal publicity. Senior level support was provided through monthly meetings with the Head of ICT, Andy Roberts, Director of Resources, Alan Youd and two members of the council's Cabinet, Kevin Feltham and Roger Miller. This provided a structured mechanism to ensure that decisions could be made quickly by the right people at the right time and prevent any delays occurring.

CUSTOMER REFERENCE

VOICE & CONVERGENCE - DATA SOLUTIONS - BUSINESS PROTECTION - CONTACT CENTRES - MANAGED SERVICES - PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

WORKING WITH LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Julian Anderson, Account Manager, NextiraOne

"The decision to go IPTelephony is the only one in today's market so the combination of 4C, the ICT team and NextiraOne, with Alcatel, has produced a flagship customer that I am very proud to have been involved with. A great team effort by one and all."

Within County Hall, user reaction has been very positive to the new system, particularly to the full staff directory which is available via the phone's LCD screen, eliminating the need for printed lists. Moves and changes are now more straightforward as people and equipment are easier to relocate.

NextiraOne, Alcatel and the council's WAN provider, Logicalis Network Solutions, are already assisting LCC on detailed prioritisation and implementation plans for Phase 3 which will concentrate on integrating remote offices with County Hall. Telephone systems at external sites are being progressively replaced with Alcatel equipment designed to integrate fully with the main system. When completed, applications such as voice mail, unified communications, accounting, performance monitoring and potentially contact centre working will be available to all staff, regardless of location. Future centralisation of external voice network facilities will reduce fixed line rentals and call costs (including mobile costs). The move towards one telephony system will reduce the overall costs involved in configuration, maintenance and support.

Kevin Feltham, Cabinet ICT Member points out that the system will tie into the e-government agenda, delivering faster, more effective public services. "There are so many things we can start to do with this technology in place, it's only bound by the scope of our imagination. It's going to be a really exciting time over the next 2 years exploiting the features and possibilities of this system."

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