Ballymena Borough Council
Industry: Government
Technology: Wireless

Background

Ballymena Borough Council's head quarters in Ballymena, Northern Ireland wanted to link all of its eight regional council offices together via one single platform network. The Council previously had 9 separate LANs in each of the office locations which were proving problematic in a number of ways.

Administration, back-up and security were difficult and expensive to manage. IT support had to visit each site individually for administration and back-up arrangements which meant there were nine separate back-up drives and tapes. Security also needed to be tighter; each individual end-user had a separate email account which could be open to virus attack.

The council wanted to ensure that by putting everything on to one network and administering it from the HQ they would have much more control over the network infrastructure.

Ballymena B.C. invited a number of companies to talk to them about their requirements. One of those companies was Black Box Network Services who conducted a multi-site visit looking at the parameters the council required. One of the considerations that Black Box had to take into account was the distances between the buildings. The borough layout made it impossible for cable to be run between buildings and leased line costs would spiral out of control. As line-of-site was

On more than one occasion this proved fruitful. In the original design plan it called for a 3 Megabyte link to the network from three of the buildings to connect into the HQ; the Museum, Tourist Office and the 'Wellington' building but through changes to the technical design it was possible for the team to achieve an 11 Megabyte connection. A huge enhancement for bandwidth and speed.

Shane continued, "Black Box are very keen to keep the customer happy, we were constantly in contact with all members of the team all the time. Even if they were off-site we were given mobile numbers of where they could be reached."

When asked if he thought Black Box and Ballymena Borough Council had worked effectively as a team Shane Moore responded, "Without a shadow of a doubt, I think of them as my colleagues. Since the project Ballymena Borough Council and Black Box have been working together on a regular basis and we know that the work Black Box does with us will be done to an exceptional standard."

Dale Turner, Network Support at Black Box Network Services said, "I'd agree with Shane; we were one big happy family working together, each learning different technical skills from each other. If there were any faults during the installation the team was able to contact us quickly enabling us to fault find and rectify problems speedily."

Solution

good Black Box put forward a proposal for a wireless networking solution. The council agreed with the plans and the project began in September 2002.

Following a couple of delays since project commencement Shane Moore, Senior IT Officer, Ballymena Borough Council picks up the story, "We thought Black Box had come up with the best proposal and were excited about getting on with the job. The solution required planning permission for masts, one of them was 20 metres tall, a satellite to be placed on the Town Hall, which is a listed building and a number of base units. Some of the other buildings in the borough are also listed so planning permission had to be obtained for everything. This did slow the project down as even though the team is part of the council we have to go through the same process as someone in the borough who wished to build an extension to their property."

Teamwork

"Black Box is 100% customer focused. They really listened to what we wanted and were constantly thinking of ways to make things better for us. If they thought a new piece of technology would be better than the original plan they would come back to us for the revisions to be discussed,"said Shane Moore, Senior IT Officer, Ballymena Borough Council.

Ballymena Borough Council now has a wireless LAN installation across the nine borough offices. All run from the headquarters in Ballymena. A single platform, ADSL links and one domain means that all applications and administration can be controlled from one location. "For security and back-up purposes the solution cuts down on back-up tapes and devices - only one tape and one device is now needed. All files and email can now be controlled centrally so virus detection and protection is easier and the users have much more protection of their files and internet connection speeds are quicker," concluded Moore.

The installation also saves administration costs and travel by relieving the IT support department from travelling to the nine sites throughout the borough.

This project saw 200 PCs and 20 notebooks connected to the wireless LAN in future Ballymena Borough Council hopes to add wireless notebooks and look to build on bandwidth.