

CISCO HELPS STOCKTON COUNCIL DELIVER E-GOVERNMENT SERVICES A YEAR AHEAD OF TARGET

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has used an integrated Cisco IP voice and data network to transform the provision of e-government services and in doing so have identified notional savings of £350,000 a year.

Robust network infrastructure is key to e-government provision

There has been a form of local government in Stockton as far back as 1310 when the Bishop of Durham granted Stockton a Market Charter. Today Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council – an all-purpose "unitary" Council - is one of the UK's best performing local governments. In 2003, the borough was awarded an 'excellent' rating – the highest achievable - in the CPA local government service performance audit.

Stockton Council continues to strive to improve services for the community through innovative schemes like Stockton Renaissance - a Local Strategic Partnership to promote economic, environmental and social well being in the area - and improving core service delivery for the community. Stockton Council recognised the critical role that IT would play in helping to improve the way services are delivered and it has committed to deliver e-government services in December 2004, a year ahead of the government's target of 2005.

The region is a mix of both high and low income residents with 11 wards in the borough being some of the most deprived areas in the UK. The council's vision is to make access to services, particularly for the needy and less well-off, much simpler and easier.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CUSTOMER NAME

- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

INDUSTRY

- Local government

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Improve the quality of service delivery and advance the introduction of e-government facilities
- Ensure continuing high service levels are maintained
- Replace a series of disconnected voice and data networks

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Cisco integrated IP voice and data network supporting the provision of e-government services now and in the future

BUSINESS VALUE

- Notional savings of £350,000 a year
- Creates an efficient, low-cost foundation for introducing new IT applications
- Borough residents get more efficient and fast service delivery
- Future applications and innovations are less costly and much easier to implement

But to be able to deliver service improvement and new initiatives, the council needed to address its IT infrastructure. There were a number of different networks operating within the council – three data and one voice network. Most of the networks were not integrated.

With an increase in e-government services such as document management, graphical information systems and customer relationship management the need for greater network performance and capacity became essential. Stockton Council was relying more and more on its networks to deliver services to the community.

“Our aim throughout this project has been about laying down the foundation to deliver future benefits so that introducing new applications and innovative features that help the community happen simply and easily. The Cisco network is a vital element in enabling us to do this. It means future projects cost less to bring into operation and they don't hit obstacles such as poor network communications or the high cost infrastructure development.”

Ian Miles, Head of Information and Communication Technology,
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Cisco provides the best foundation for future innovation

The need to change and improve the network infrastructure was also an opportunity to introduce new and advanced technology that would both reduce costs and simplify service provision. The council opted for an IP solution which could bring benefits such as a single network for all communications and simplified management and support.

“We were looking for the best value integrated solution. Obviously, we were aware of Cisco as a market leader, but we deliberately didn't include this as a specific requirement in our tender process” says Ian Miles, Head of Information and Communication Technology, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. “Integration was the key driver and other vendors appeared to offer mix and match solutions while Cisco was tried and tested and it was the leading standard in true integration. We felt we couldn't go wrong with Cisco and that's been born out in practice.”

The Cisco data and voice solution also provided the best foundation for future integrated solutions such as customer relationship management which relies on seamless integration to operate effectively

The Stockton solution comprises Cisco's architecture for voice, video and integrated data (AVVID), Cisco routers, Cisco IPCC Express Contact Centre and Call Manager software supporting 2500 PCs and printers and 2500 Cisco IP telephones. The network links up around 100 different locations of between five and 500 users around the borough comprising council offices, libraries, leisure centres, council tax and housing administration offices. Stockton Council worked with NextiraOne, a Cisco reseller to develop and implement the network solution.

The council is using the network for a number of standard operational, administrative and communications functions. It has also helped the council introduce a raft of online services which improve the way borough residents contact, communicate and receive council services. These services include the ability to pay council taxes, apply for planning permission, report anti-social behaviour and even report if rubbish bins have not been emptied on-line.

Cisco IP network saves £350,000 a year

Since implementing the Cisco network, Stockton Council has started to see a major financial saving. It estimates that in IT costs alone it is saving up to £350,000 a year.

One of the most significant benefits of the Cisco network is the fact that it provides a foundation for current and future developments. In addition, it has had a major role in enabling the council to achieve its goal of delivering e-government a year ahead of the 2005 national target.

“Our aim throughout this project has been about laying down the foundation to deliver future benefits so that introducing new applications and innovative features that help the community happen simply and easily,” says Miles. “The Cisco network is a vital element in enabling us to do this. It means future projects cost less to bring into operation and they don’t hit obstacles such as poor network communications or the high cost infrastructure development.”

An example of this is the current project to implement a call centre system within the Council. Because of the combined data and voice features of the Cisco network, the council will be able to set up a virtual call centre which means that from any location in the council, specific staff can take calls from residents and resolve most of the queries in one call.

Miles says, “We anticipate some significant service improvements with our virtual call centre which relies on Cisco’s IP data and voice network. Calls will be handled more effectively with problems being resolved much faster and more experienced, back office staff have more time to concentrate on addressing more complex issues.”

The call centre operations, along with a full customer relationship management solution, will use Cisco’s integrated IP data and voice network to create more efficient processes. For example, council staff will be able to manage all communications from their PCs, incoming calls from residents will be automatically routed to the appropriate service and staff will be able to use instant access to information to execute services faster.

Network performance and resilience has become a differentiating feature of the Cisco network. The council has found that, because of the quality and flexibility of the modern Cisco equipment, it is possible to squeeze more performance out of the network in terms of speed and reliability. In addition, the fact that the Cisco voice and data network operates over a single cable is saving money because physical installation is simpler and less costly and adding new devices and applications uses the same network infrastructure.

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“Managed correctly, the Cisco network has the potential to realise financial savings. The resilience and quality of Cisco equipment means we get even more for our money and the infrastructure foundation means new applications are so much easier to implement,” says Miles.

The council is starting to link up smaller, more remote locations that used to have slow performing access, with always-on high performance networking facilities. This is helping to make administration and provision of services at those locations faster and more efficient.

Cisco IP telephony is proving to be very useful to council staff who have been used to a basic PABX system. They now have features such as voicemail, updated directories on the handsets and caller display. These facilities can be used both for the benefit of residents as well as colleagues.

Additional applications that Stockton Council is planning to implement in the future over the Cisco network include financial and HR systems which can be accessed by council staff via an intranet to action features such as expenses forms and personal detail changes. The Cisco network also means that the council can consider implementing IP CCTV systems across the borough for monitoring and managing crime, traffic and security.



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