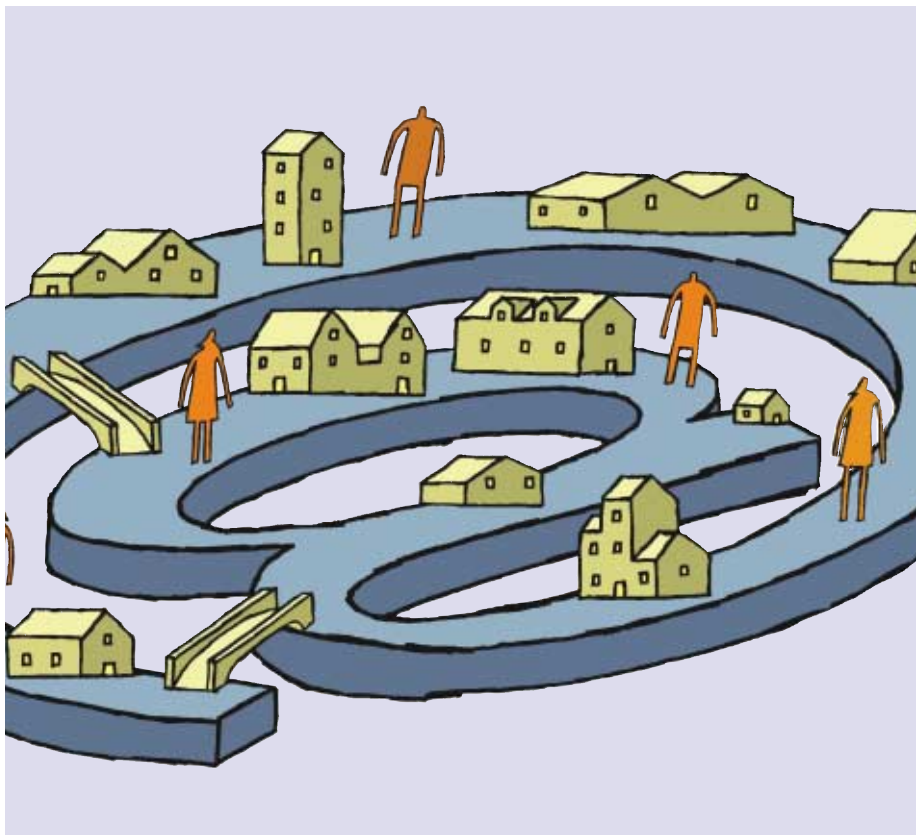


Cambridgeshire County Council

Putting Cambridgeshire on the map for e-Government excellence



ntl puts Cambridgeshire on the map for e-Government excellence and wins Computing magazine's 'Best Broadband Project of the Year'.

The 2005 deadline for e-Government compliance placed increasing pressure on local authorities to offer enhanced public services electronically. Cambridgeshire's challenge as a low-tax authority was to deliver this cost effectively through partnerships,

effective procurement and exploiting its resources to the full.

An additional challenge was posed by Cambridgeshire's economy and demography. While world-renowned as a centre of excellence for academic activity, IT and telecommunications research in the south of the county, the north of the county has suffered problems of rural isolation, difficult communications and lower educational expectations and standards.

Cambridgeshire County Council has been targeting these issues, already with a significant measure of success. Now, a new and highly sophisticated

Name:

Cambridgeshire County Council

Industry sector:

Public Sector

Location:

Cambridgeshire

Business challenge:

To provide a community with instant access to a range of services online and achieve 2005 e-Government targets.

Solution:

A fully managed broadband network service to span the county of Cambridgeshire, with secure managed gateways to partners such as the NHS, regional Education networks (E2BN) and suppliers.

Products:

- A fully managed, bespoke, easily scalable broadband network service based upon a resilient Gigabit backbone with multiple capacity access links, supported by a wireless link for added resilience.
- A dedicated help desk, dedicated service management and managed LAN.
- Internet services utilising 3rd party providers.

Business benefits:

The Council has a high capacity infrastructure underpinning its drive towards meeting e-Government targets and allowing information exchange between partners.

community network, part funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister through PFI (Private Finance Initiative Credits) and partly through efficient amalgamation of other initiatives (National Grid for Learning and People's Network) is making a substantial contribution to addressing Cambridgeshire's issues of social exclusion. Thus bringing skills development, training and Internet access to rural areas. The 100 community outlets together with the Community Portal and Contact Centre all contribute to a strategy whereby the Council uses a variety of channels to reach its citizens and vice versa.

Calling in the experts

Because of the intended reach and functionality of the new network, it was heralded as the UK's most ambitious and inclusive countywide broadband community network. To ensure the success of the network, Cambridgeshire County Council needed a communications partner of superior standing, yet one that would provide local support. The contract to install and manage the network was substantial – worth £35 million over eight years.

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John Little,
Head of IT Cambridgeshire County Council

An exemplary public-private partnership

The reasons that ntl won the contract were varied; ntl was the supplier that scored highest on a long checklist of criteria. These included special PFI-related conditions, which were essential if the project was to attract Government



funding. “ntl was prepared to fulfil these conditions, which require such things as open-book accounting,” John Little, Head of IT explains. Also critical to securing PFI status was the requirement for the network to be managed entirely by ntl. “ntl owns all the assets and runs the network as a complete, managed service,” he says.

“ntl's technology gave us the scalability, resilience and reliability we were looking for.”

John Little,
Head of IT Cambridgeshire County Council

The Council already had great confidence in ntl as a supplier, because of the company's longevity in the market. Keith Walters, Leader of the Council, notes, “ntl has a proven track

record of delivering on time and on budget. With this pedigree, they were the natural choice to build our broadband community network in Cambridgeshire.”

The technical solution proposed for the contract was particularly strong. “We were keen to see the network have a fibre-optic core so that we would have plenty of capacity on the backbone,” Little says. “ntl could deliver this. What's more, this backbone would be available for our exclusive use. We wouldn't have to share it with anyone else, so there was no risk that performance could be compromised. ntl's technology gave us the scalability, resilience and reliability we were looking for.”

The Cambridgeshire Community Network, driven by state-of-the-art Cisco routers, is based on a highly resilient Gigabit backbone, which contains redundant links that connect

four major council sites: Cambridge, Ely, Huntingdon and March.

The network is supported by a 155 Mbps wireless link for added resilience. Other sites are linked into the four main hubs with 2-8 Mbps connections.

A few sites use faster or slower links, depending on their bandwidth demands.

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Keith Walters,
Leader of the Council

Going the extra mile

Because of the scope and importance of the project and the requirements of the PFI regime, ntl is held to a strict performance related payment mechanism and strict Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for network-related problem resolution. ntl is committed to helping the Council reach its targets, and hence is only paid for the availability actually delivered, and a whole basket of other performance indicators also impact on the payment.

The original contract specified that 250 sites needed to be connected to the new broadband countywide network, but since then, the number has grown to over 400. “Our strong, flexible relationship with ntl has made it possible to add more sites as we’ve been able to secure additional funding,” Little says.

The programme as a whole is running to schedule and has already achieved a number of major milestones.

A true community resource

A core part of the project was to roll out broadband to the region’s 256 schools initially providing 2 Mbps links to all

primary schools and 8 Mbps links to all secondary schools. This connectivity was completed on schedule by the end of 2004.

There are three further strands to Cambridgeshire’s network. One is to extend broadband communications to all the Council’s offices, at a district as well as a county level. In Cambridgeshire, the county council looks after social services, education, roads, libraries and strategic planning. The District Council offices handle issues such as housing, council-tax collection and environmental health. All four Districts now connect to the network, one of which shares the Council’s Contact Centre. Already all 60 County Council offices are connected.

The second subsection of the project focuses on connecting libraries to the network, to provide improved learning and technology resources to local citizens.

The final and most innovative part of the plan was to provide 100 public access points to the network right across the wider community. This means providing PCs and free network access at community meeting points, such as pubs and post offices, so that anyone – no matter where they live – can access public information, public services, lifelong learning resources and communicate online with the Council.

“The important point is that the network is very much a resource for the community,” Little says. “While a lot of other councils around the country are working on large contracts to provide broadband connectivity, ours covers the whole spectrum of services and customers. We are leading the way.”

The future

The availability of broadband communications for the entire community paves the way for new and modernised public information services to be introduced across Cambridgeshire in the future, enabling such innovations as the introduction of an Internet-based community portal

and smart cards for accessing services, such as transport and leisure. Video-conferencing and electronic government transactions are further possibilities.

Eventually, it is expected that more than 700 sites will be connected to the Cambridgeshire Community Network. This poses no problem for ntl or the Council, since the network has been designed from the outset to provide seamless scalability, allowing the network to grow easily as demand dictates.

A job well done

The council not only met, but exceeded the Government’s 2005 deadline for providing public information services online. Cambridgeshire County Council has been awarded Beacon status for social inclusion through information and communication technology (ICT), which means other councils will now look to it for best practice and advice. As if these accolades weren’t enough, Computing magazine also awarded the Cambridge-shire Community Network programme Best Broadband Project of the Year in 2003. Says John Little. “We are absolutely delighted that the Council and ntl have won this award.” More information on the Council’s community projects can be found at the Web link: <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/sub/resources/ccn/ccnow.htm>

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To find out more:

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