

Giving a new voice to local government

As local councils turn their focus from creating e-government to meeting the targets of the new e-efficiency agenda, many are beginning to realise the significant savings and benefits from Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP).

Public sector communication networks running technologies such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) are set to play a major role in helping councils become much more e-efficient in the future. VoIP has been a hot IT topic for blue chip organisations and small businesses alike, but local governments can also benefit from the increased efficiency and cost savings of transferring voice calls over a broadband network.

VoIP is made possible over a next generation network (NGN) – a single fibre line that converges voice, data and broadcast traffic. With a huge variety of disparate services, expansive infrastructures and communications networks, councils can have all their services, including voice, delivered in one reduced-cost network, instead of having to pay for three separate networks – embracing the very essence of efficiency.

VoIP helps councils to become leaner and much more fluid, allowing them to respond quickly to the need for increased space and resources. For example, it is imperative that council employees have a fixed telephone number and email address so that they are easy to contact. With traditional telephony networks, communications processes are very much tied to desks. Employees need a physical space in which their communications tools (be it a PC or telephone) are fixed.

The demands of the job, however, mean many council employees have to be mobile. Whether they work in healthcare or planning permission they have to immerse themselves in the community they serve, and this means leaving their desks. From the perspective of running an efficient organisation, this causes problems. Desks are left empty and telephones unanswered. Space is left redundant.

With a modern VoIP telephony system these inefficiencies are reduced. Today an office is anywhere a broadband connection is available – a library, a home or even a coffee shop – because VoIP provides the ability to route calls to a direct dial number, regardless of location.

As VoIP calls are running alongside the data stream, council workers can be contacted by telephone no matter where they are. The efficiencies are, therefore, twofold: time is saved as calls are answered quickly and dealt with immediately, and space, which was once wasted on seldom-used desks, can be freed up and utilised more effectively.

VoIP services can also provide councils with an array of other features such as conference calling, video conferencing, call routing (to off-site workers and between offices) and unified communications. For councils, which have more than one site, VoIP is a particularly important application for improving communication. Together these functions can lead to a more mobile, collaborative workforce.

In addition, one of the most important points of contact between citizens and its council is the call centre. With traditional telephony technologies in place the costs involved in expanding a call centre function can be hugely prohibitive. With an IP-based call centre, additional capacity can be added to a call centre almost instantly, improving one of the key local services, but without further cost.

VoIP, installed by forward thinking councils, is not only helping to enhance services and introduce new levels of flexibility but also cut call spend while improving efficiency.

For more information please see www.thus.net or contact THUS on 0800 027 0571.