

# Birmingham City Council

## Serving over one million citizens



With a population of over one million, Birmingham is the largest local authority in the country. The UK's second largest city, it is home to 39 electoral wards, each one having its own particular character and identity. To meet the challenge of running a city of this size and diversity, Birmingham City Council employs some 50,000 people across 750 locations. Over the last few years another sizeable challenge has been the organising of the Council's telecoms infrastructure.

In 1995, Dave Hall took over the role of Telecommunications Manager at Birmingham City Council and so began the mammoth task of increasing connectivity and efficiency throughout hundreds of locations.

"Back then, the Council's telecoms infrastructure consisted of a core network serving just 35 locations,

with the rest of the Council served by hundreds of small switches. Some locations had evolved along departmental lines, with each department owning its own hardware," says Dave Hall. "As a result, where several departments had moved into one location, each had its own switches. That meant that a huge number of unnecessary and costly external calls were being made by council staff and that anyone contacting the Council often had to be asked to redial when their calls were handed on to another section"

Adding to the problems, much of the Council's hardware was nearing the end of its useful life. A decision had to be made between committing to a large capital investment (and ongoing maintenance costs) or outsourcing. Following a detailed tender process,

### Name:

Birmingham City Council

### Industry sector:

Local Government

### Location:

Birmingham

### Business challenge:

To directly connect hundreds of locations through a unique voice network

### Solution:

A fully managed voice solution able to connect over 17,000 telephony lines and link all council locations across Birmingham

### Products:

ntl:Telewest Business Centrex

### Business benefits:

Centrex left Birmingham City Council with no PABX hardware to maintain thereby reducing revenue expenditure

in May 1997 the Council chose to award a five year contract to Telewest Business for a Centrex service, taking an option to extend by a further two years.

**“On the basis of cost savings and quality of service we received from Telewest Business, we took up that option”**

“Centrex left us with no PABX hardware to maintain, no equipment depreciation or running costs and allowed us to centralise our telephony traffic on to a single digital exchange owned and managed by Telewest. In effect, we have reduced revenue expenditure, yet still enjoy the very latest communication technology.”

Initially, Centrex was simply used to replace the Council’s standard voice communication system. As employees became more confident with its easy to use features they started to take advantage of more functions such as Call Distribution, a feature that distributes incoming calls between a group of extensions, Convenience Dialling and Voicemail. “Apart from saving costs on unnecessary external calls and providing added functionality, such as Direct Dial and Call Distribution, it has also hugely improved the quality of communication with residents and visitors to Birmingham,” adds Dave Hall. The key to the Council’s working relationship with Telewest Business was ‘partnership’ and, right from the beginning, Dave Hall stipulated that the only way the project was going to succeed was through both organisations working closely together.

**“There has been a seamless link between the Telewest and Council teams, in fact at times it was difficult to make out just who was working for who! This rapport was instrumental in the smooth roll-out of Centrex, and Telewest has been quick to respond to the few minor problems we have had”**

Dave Hall,  
Telecommunications Manager

The success of Centrex is borne out by the statistics. The original plan was to have 6,500 extensions running on Centrex but already there are more than 16,500 extensions across 480 locations including all the City’s administrative buildings as well as schools, depots, social services facilities, museums and libraries.

“There has been a good migration to the service,” explains Dave Hall. “Word of mouth has been important. Any initial fears a manager may have regarding Centrex are allayed when they talk to other departments where the service is up and running”.

The competitiveness of Centrex has been highlighted by the number of schools – 175 to date, that have opted to use the service. And the roll-out still continues, “When we started, I never imagined that we would be using not one but two 10,000 number blocks,” says Dave Hall, “And by the time the project is complete, we anticipate that around 17,000 extensions across 550 locations will be served by the network.”

**To find out more:**

**ntl: 0800 052 0800**  
[www.ntl.com/business](http://www.ntl.com/business)

**Telewest: 0800 953 1800**  
[www.telewest.co.uk/business](http://www.telewest.co.uk/business)