# Claranet's network services bring Norfolk Councils together

## Norfolks Councils

A group of local authorities in Norfolk is showing the way towards a more efficient and cost-effective public sector, by implementing a shared high-performance network service from Claranet. Broadland District Council, Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk, South Norfolk Council and North Norfolk District Council are now connected by a private MPLS network which enables them to share critical council services such as Building Control and Revenue & Benefits. The results are more cost-effective services for the residents of all four local authorities, greater flexibility and collaboration, and significant cost-savings.
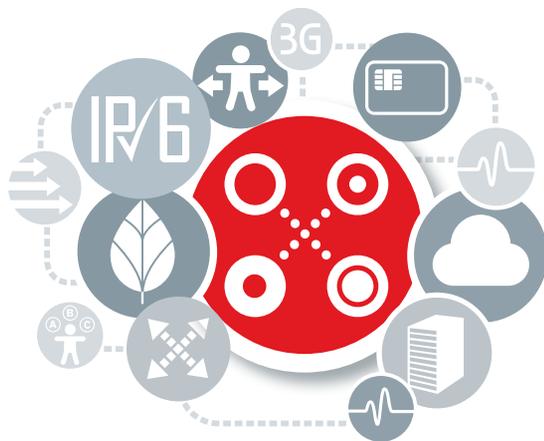
## The challenge

Throughout much of Norfolk, the built environment is regulated by a single body, CNC Building Control, a collaboration between the Borough Council of Broadland District Council, Norwich City Council and South Norfolk Council. Previously, the various council departments that made up CNC Building Control were linked by a low-bandwidth network which had been reasonably adequate for the organisation's needs.

In autumn 2010 Broadland District Council, which hosts CNC Building Control, had proposed a shared MPLS Wide Area Network (WAN) with its technology partner Claranet, that could extend to the other participants. At the same time, the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk was poised to join CNC Building Control in autumn 2010. Providentially, King's Lynn was also an existing Claranet customer.

The addition of King's Lynn added a powerful voice advocating a shared high-performance WAN linking all the councils and based on Claranet's own network. "The organisation of CNC Building Control was spread over several sites across Norfolk, and the legacy connection between them was suitable only for very basic communications," said John Wickens, IT Technical Architect and Compliance Officer at South Norfolk Council.

"Bandwidth, speed and security limited what we could achieve on the old infrastructure and, although each council had its own external network, there was no easy way to link these into a single, cohesive private network where everyone could access email, share information and work collaboratively. "While we wanted to improve communications among the various departments and premises that made up CNC Building Control, we realised that this was an opportunity to implement a platform that would help us achieve something much more significant and strategic," he continued. "A robust, resilient and secure network between council sites would improve collaboration between councils, allow us to share infrastructure costs, add new services that would benefit our operational efficiency, and improve the services we provide to residents."

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## The solution

The consortium of councils turned to Claranet to design, implement and manage a new high-performance network to replace the existing point-to-point infrastructure. Instead of meshing King's Lynn into the existing dedicated leased line network, Broadland and South Norfolk Councils proposed a fully-managed MPLS network to connect the council sites, which would also integrate with the councils' own existing internal and external networks. The new Claranet network would connect these different council hubs, and provide a single resilient and secure link through which the participating councils could communicate and add new shared services. The network was implemented throughout the autumn of 2011 and went live at Christmas.

The new service comprises a Virtual Private Network (VPN) which runs exclusively across Claranet's core MPLS network and does not touch the public internet. Claranet takes full responsibility for managing the network, ensuring high availability and performance, while also managing the process of allocating network resources to each party depending on their current needs. The new Norfolk network runs over Claranet's core network, which is comprised of enterprise-grade infrastructure components. The network supports speeds of up to 100Mb/s, while Claranet staff can constantly monitor and manage the network.

## The result

The new Norfolk network from Claranet creates, for the first time, a fast, high-bandwidth and secure link between the participating councils, and provides them with a robust platform on which they can add new services. In addition to providing the infrastructure for the CNC Building Control departments, the network has enabled the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk and North Norfolk to share a common Revenue & Benefits service, and also provides them with the potential to add more shared services in the future. A key feature of the Claranet network is that resources can quickly be allocated to different councils and types of traffic, depending on priority. This has enabled the consortium to launch a hosted internet telephony (VoIP) service on the network, where they can ensure high quality of service by giving priority to voice traffic.

"Because this project involved multiple councils, it added a layer of complexity," said Richard Godfrey, IT Manager at the Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk Council, who was one of the chief advocates of the project. "Shared services require shared governance, and Claranet needed to prove to the various participants that the service would be reliable, and that the network would survive even if one of the parties pulled out of the project."

The key to the Norfolk network is that it requires no new physical infrastructure between the sites. Instead, the whole service runs over Claranet's own network. The result is that no single council need own nor depend on the service, so anyone can withdraw from the project without affecting the project's overall success. It also enables local authorities to configure the network differently for their own needs; for example, if they want to prioritise traffic, allocate network resources or make individual arrangements over how resilient they want their connectivity to be.

## The benefits

Claranet's managed network has delivered benefits for the council consortium that far outstrip the original aim of improving communications within CNC Building Control. "With a single network hosted in one data centre and available to multiple councils, we can achieve fantastic efficiencies," explained John Wickens. "We have already moved Building Control and Revenue & Benefits onto the platform, and are looking at other services that we can add."

> *Without Claranet, we would be duplicating the time, effort and expenditure - both capital and operational, spent on running individual services. In today's world, and today's public sector, that kind of unnecessary overspend is increasingly unacceptable..."*
>
> **John Wickens** - IT Technical Architect and Compliance Officer at South Norfolk Council

Other benefits abound, including the fact that the councils have gained an operational dividend from greater operational resilience, as the network enables workers to access critical services from other premises should a business continuity event occur. The councils also no longer have to undertake time-consuming maintenance and management on the old point-to-point infrastructure.

"Throughout, Claranet has been the perfect partner," said Wickens. "We came to them with a whole host of ideas and they had the vision to see the advantages of our proposals right away. They took the time listen to us, understand our needs and accommodate our ideas into the final service. It was very refreshing not to be given the 'big sell'; they did not force a pre-packed solution on us, but instead designed and delivered a service that will bring benefits to Norfolk and its taxpayers for many years to come," he concluded. ■

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