

Clicks and Mortar: Network Defence Develops Festival Housing's IT Ready for Further Growth

Major social housing provider makes comprehensive upgrades to multi-site network

"Network Defence's consultative approach to the project has delivered a solution that will meet our evolving needs."

Neil Bullock, Head of IT, Risk and Support Services, Festival Housing

Key Benefits:

- Strengthened network security
- Flexible working
- Improved systems performance
- Enhanced efficiency

The Challenge:

The Festival Housing Group, a leading provider of social housing in the West Midlands, managing over 8,000 homes in Worcestershire, Herefordshire and beyond. It has an annual turnover over £20 million, making it the third largest provider of social housing in the region. The Group provides a number of low cost home ownership schemes, including shared ownership, DIYSO (Do It Yourself Shared Ownership) and HomeBuy.

The Group wanted a total upgrade of its multi-site network, Web access and office systems, with the core of the project focused on upgrading the Group's Local and Wide Area Network infrastructure for improved performance and security in addition to support a future move to IP-based telephony.

The Solution:

Network Defence was chosen by Festival Housing Group for its network upgrade project after a tender process in summer 2003. According to the Group, Network Defence offered the best overall package of proven solutions

and delivery and support services.

In a 9-month project planned and executed by systems integrator Network Defence, the Group's LAN infrastructure was upgraded to a 1000BaseT (Gigabit Ethernet) backbone for fileserver connectivity and switched 100BaseT (Fast Ethernet) for workstations.

All of the Group's main servers were relocated to its central Malvern office for better support and management of upgrades and backups. To ensure business continuity, the main servers are mirrored at Festival Housing's Droitwich office. Connectivity to these systems for remote sites and users is done via Citrix thin-client software, which centralises and simplifies application management and maximises system availability. Network Defence also upgraded the Group's office applications to current-generation Microsoft products.

For secure Internet connectivity, protection against viruses and spam and web access management, Network Defence deployed Clearswift's WEBSweeper and MAILsweeper solutions and WebSense content filtering. The combined solution ensures Group staff are not interrupted by Web and email-based threats.

The Benefits:

The upgrade implemented by Network Defence has improved systems performance, availability and manageability for the Housing Group. It has also strengthened network security while enabling more flexible working for Group staff, with remote access and virtual private network (VPN) capability.

With the deployment of a client VPN solution, key staff can now work more flexibly using a SecurID token-based authentication. In addition, staff have remote dial-up access to their email when they are out of the office.

The combined solution for secure Internet connectivity ensures the Group staff are not interrupted by Web and email-based threats.

Neil Bullock, Head of IT, Risk and Support Services for Festival Housing Group said: “This project has modernised our network, making it secure and scalable. The VPN solution enhances efficiency, giving remote access users a familiar interface and making management easier. A recent audit of network security by our external consultants has provided the highest level of assurance that the network is adequately managed, secure and resilient.”

Festival Housing’s IT staff are supported by Network Defence with managed service covering the Group’s wide-area network and helpdesk support.

Technologies Used:

- Network Infrastructure
- Citrix
- Perimeter Security
- Web & Email Security
- Mobile Working & VPN