

Novell and **Mid Bedfordshire** District Council help to deliver joined-up Government

**A CASE STUDY FOR THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR FEATURING NETWARE®, NDS®, ZENWORKS™**

Reducing systems administration time by a third has been a successful by-product of the IT strategy devised by Mid Bedfordshire District Council. "Our initial aims were simply to improve availability and increase network performance," states Niall Perry, Computing and Information Systems Manager. "But our strategy has resulted in a number of other benefits, the major one being a significant reduction in the time we spend administering our network devices and users."

Mid Bedfordshire District Council covers a population of over 116,000 and is spread over seven large towns and 50 rural parishes, with its two main offices based in Ampthill and Biggleswade. Created back in 1974, it was the result of a merger between five smaller urban and rural councils. Its main functions include social housing, development control, refuse collection, council tax collection, environmental health, managing elections as well as leisure and economic development. Additionally the Council manages a number of industrial and business units in the area. "Local authorities are complicated beasts and our IT systems reflect that," says Perry. "We have systems for council tax

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**Niall Perry,**  
**Computing and Information Systems Manager,**  
**Mid Bedfordshire Council**

benefit payments, housing payments, general ledgers and then of course all the environment systems such as environmental health planning, administration and building control. And then there are all the other usual business process systems - human resources, general business

applications, email and browsing facilities. All in all it's quite a mixture to support and manage, not forgetting that users today also want interoperability between the diverse applications."

All of the business systems run on a mixture of Sun\* and Motorola\* based Unix servers, while the 350 users access their applications from desktop PCs. The main site at Biggleswade is connected via megastream links with ISDN backup lines to four other main sites, while all the smaller satellite sites have ISDN on-demand links into the centre. "Connectivity is really important and having a network operating system that could cope with our distributed environment was

essential. Novell® was found to have the most suitable selection of products to provide us with the sophisticated level of network management - making the whole job of managing the Council's network much easier and quicker," says Perry.



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The Council has chosen NetWare® 4.11, NDS® and ZENworks™ to increase network performance as well as ensure year 2000 compliancy. "NetWare runs over everything here and the

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implementation of NDS has virtually saved our lives - we can manage the network as a single entity. Before we were struggling simply to cope and the burden of managing servers individually was just getting too much," explains Perry. "With NDS everything is so much more controllable - instead of four networks we now have one."

ZENworks has also added another dimension to the way Perry and his staff of nine manage the IT resources. "ZENworks has brought us administration tools that from the support person's view make administration of the network so much simpler. Ease of management has time saving benefits too, and that means that we can increase the amount of proactive work we do and deliver a much better service to our customers. We are now doing significantly more with our IT support resources, thanks to the time savings Novell products have brought us," says Perry. ZENworks was used exclusively to assist a recent rollout of Windows 98\* across the Council desktops. "We don't use leading edge technology here, but tried and tested products. For example our standard office applications include WordPerfect\* for Windows, Microsoft Excel\* and Lotus cc:mail\* - quite an assortment. We did contemplate migrating to an office suite, but to be honest the cost not only of licensing but also the associated training was simply outside the scope of the budget. Supporting the mixture we have does complicate our lives, but not really as much as you might imagine."

Managing desktops in a geographically distributed environment has always been a problem for support staff, the task of physically visiting desktops is time consuming and actually locating the problematic one can sometimes be a challenge. "We don't visit desktops any more," says Perry. "The only time they need a visit is if they physically break down and then we send in the maintenance company. We now use the remote control features provided by ZENworks to manage all our desktops. The main problems really fall into the category of user error - lost passwords, or they have forgotten how to do something - all of which can be handled remotely." Network sign-on following which the users' applications are loaded onto the desktop using ZENworks has been implemented to assist with roving users. Single sign-on relying on NDS and the tight security already built into the directory hasn't yet been implemented, but Perry and his team are watching Novell developments with this technology with interest. "Single sign-on appeals to us as one way of minimising the problems of lost and forgotten passwords," says Perry.

NDS checks whether a user is authenticated to access an application. If the user is

authenticated, then the application continues loading as normal without requesting a further password, if the user isn't authenticated then a password prompt is displayed.

Issues that support services can't eradicate or deal with remotely are the ongoing requests for PCs to be moved, or appeals for enhancements like extra memory and faster processors.

Due to the geographically dispersed nature of the Council's offices, supporting a visiting and mobile workforce has always been an issue. "With ZENworks we can now support roaming desktops, which is a great advantage, and has quite a big savings implication for administration. Our staff do move around, they do visit other offices and now we can offer them the facility to take their desktop and applications wherever they go. We use the application launcher to distribute all our applications and to deliver roaming desktops. In addition it plays an important part in desktop configuration and in implementing software updates and upgrades."

New initiatives have evolved from the strategy leading to a number of projects planned for later this year. Migration of all the servers to NetWare 5 has just been completed in the last week, ahead of its planned end of year implementation. There is also a growing demand for fuller Internet access to complement the comprehensive intranet service already established throughout the Council. "Getting browsers to the desktop was a project in itself, and the workload greatly minimised by the use of ZENworks to distribute and configure the browser software," says Perry. "But the big issues with wide scale Internet access are the firewall and authentication services. BorderManager™ Enterprise Edition will provide us with the necessary upgrade and extensions to our existing capabilities and allow us to give all our 53 councillors access to the intranet from their homes. This is quite an ambitious project that is already running successfully as a very limited pilot scheme but we hope that all the infrastructure as well as BorderManager Enterprise Edition will be in place and configured ready to complete the rollout by next April."

Mid Bedfordshire is fortunate in its newly elected leader who has a solid IT background and is championing the extensive use of IT throughout the Council. "Funds tend to appear and we should get another member of support staff to help manage," admits Perry. "It's good to have someone in charge who understands what technology can do."

**"ZENworks has brought us tools that make the administration of the network so much simpler. This ease of management provides time-saving benefits so we can increase the amount of proactive work we do and deliver a much better service to our customers."**

**Niall Perry,  
Computing and Information  
Systems Manager,  
Mid Bedfordshire Council**

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Novell wishes to express its thanks to Mid Bedfordshire District Council for helping to produce this case study.

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