



Managed Network Services

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is undergoing one of the most exciting periods in its history, with an expansive modernisation and reform programme that includes a 10-year programme of ICT-enabled investment. The NICS chose eir Business Northern Ireland to deliver its mission-critical, managed wide area network, Network NI, the powerful new communications platform for the successful delivery of shared services across the public service.

Public Service Reform

Key role of ITC

Like governments across the world, the regional government serving Northern Ireland faces the challenge of how to improve the quality and convenience of citizen interaction while controlling its costs, both for service delivery and for its own operations.

In Northern Ireland, a 10-year modernisation and reform programme designed to achieve these objectives has always had ICT at its heart. Key aspects of the programme include citizen-facing activities like a reorganisation of how health, education and local government services are managed and delivered. But inside agencies and departments is another fundamental change: the rollout of comprehensive business improvement programmes designed to transform the efficiency of activities like human resources, accounting and records management.

It's an efficiency programme that needs powerful and flexible ICT services underpinning it, and the government has created the region's first-ever IT shared services environment, IT Assist, to support the programme. Given the root and branch changes involved, it's also not surprising that, in the words of the region's CIO, "a blank sheet of paper" approach was needed to create the communications network on which public service business will rest.

"The previous Public Service Network had a whole series of protocols and technologies, with different

point-to-point links and frame activities right across Northern Ireland," said Bill McCluggage, Director of the Delivery and Innovation Division at the Department of Finance and Personnel. "We're moving into a new era of e-services now from the bottom up, from the introduction of IP telephony to the delivery of a range of shared services. We needed a common network capability: without it, if we were to introduce those services, we would be multiplying the complexity of the task."

eir Business Northern Ireland
Delivering communications to support better Government

To deliver a common network capability, the NICS decided to create a new wide area network. Following an extensive public tendering process eir Business Northern Ireland was chosen as its partner in 2007. The STG-70 million Network NI contract includes the provision of comprehensive managed communications services to monitor and maintain the performance, availability and responsiveness of applications on the network and offer solid business assurance.

- eir Business Northern Ireland is providing a managed IP MPLS network service to 280 NICS sites as part of a 6-year contract extendable to 10 years
- NICS sites can connect securely into Network NI at a range of speeds to suit their requirements: 2Mbps, 4Mbps, 10Mbps, 100Mbps, 200Mbps and 1Gbps

- Full Quality of Services (QoS) is available at the WAN level, extendable to the LAN level, to prioritise delay-sensitive traffic over delay-tolerant streams like e-mail and web browsing.
- eir Business NI has created a dedicated Service Operations Centre to be a one-stop shop for all service related queries including moves, additions and changes; fault reporting and tracking; and bandwidth adjustments
- At eir Business NI's dedicated Network Operations Centre, engineers monitor performance of the underlying core fibre optic network and the Network NI IP-MPLS network, and proactively measure NICS circuit utilisation and application performance against predefined Key Performance Indicators specified by NICS. Strict Service Level Agreements also offer extensive business assurance.
- This proactivity and attention to NICS's business requirements ensures its investment stays at the proper levels, with the right amount of bandwidth to deliver reliable, responsive application performance for end users.
- The QoS-capable network gives the NICS a platform to rollout its business improvement programmes including Account NI, Records NI, HR Connect and NI Direct, and the NICS is examining the potential to deliver IP telephony and unified communications capabilities for civil service staff.

Collaboration

Delivering World class infrastructure

The partnership has proven to be very beneficial to the NICS, McCluggage says, pointing in particular to eir Business Northern Ireland's responsiveness, flexibility and willingness to work in true collaboration with his internal team.

"We're now on the cusp of being able to say that we have one of the best infrastructures of a regional Government anywhere in Europe. And we're running 2 to 3 months ahead of schedule, because we worked exceptionally well with eir Business Northern Ireland. A significant amount of planning with them and with our teams was done in advance, and that has really paid off. The working relationship is extremely good."

He also points to the rapid evolution in eir Business NI's engineering and technical capability, and praises their clear processes and clear thinking in regards to issue resolution. He also notes that the company, down to individual level, shows a significant level of personal engagement with the NICS organisation - an approach that makes them very easy to do business with.

"Last summer we hosted a corporate social responsibility event and fully half of the staff from eir Business Northern Ireland showed up to help," he notes. "That level of participation just blew me away: they are willing to get involved and help us achieve our objectives not just in terms of our infrastructure, but also in terms of corporate social responsibility." In terms of the NICS organisational objectives, he says they're well on track to deliver the vision that he and his colleagues have for communications across Northern Ireland.



To find out how eir Business Managed Network Services can benefit your business, please contact your eir Business account manager.